

# Working with DNG

The DNG format is, as previously noted, Adobe's proposed standard for a documented, open, non-proprietary raw format.

From a workflow standpoint, DNG files offer at least one major advantage: they're designed to be metadata-friendly, so if you use DNG files, you don't need sidecar .xmp files to hold your Camera Raw settings or other metadata. Instead, all these things get written directly into the DNG file, so they can't get lost or dissociated from the image.

## DNG Downsides

There are really only two downsides to the DNG format.

- ▶ You have to convert your proprietary raw files to DNG, which takes time.
- ▶ The DNG files can't be opened by your proprietary raw converter.

If, like me, you're perfectly happy with Camera Raw and don't plan on using your camera vendor's proprietary raw software, the second point is moot, but if you like to bounce back and forth between Camera Raw and the proprietary converter, DNG isn't well-suited to doing so. You can embed the original raw in a DNG, but you have to take the time to extract it before you can work with the proprietary raw, so DNG with original raw embedded is intended more

as an archival format than as one suited for everyday use.

That leaves the first point. The slow way to get to DNG is to run all your proprietary raws through the Adobe DNG Converter application before you start working on your images. That's not always an acceptable solution since it takes some time.

A better method, the one I favor, is to make selects and initial edits on the proprietary raw files, then to use Camera Raw hosted by either Bridge or Photoshop, depending on which application I want to continue using, to batch-save the raws to DNG. Once I've saved everything as DNG, I make an archive using DNG with the original raw images embedded. Then I simply discard the proprietary raw files.

## DNG Advantages

I do this to exploit the advantages of the DNG format. First and foremost, all the information in the proprietary raw files' sidecar .xmp files—Camera Raw settings, keywords, copyright and rights management notices—get saved directly into the DNG so I no longer need to worry about sidecar files.

A second benefit of DNG is that it can contain a full-size or medium-size JPEG preview that third-party asset managers can use instead of having to spend time parsing the raw data before it can

display the image. Photoshop and Bridge make use of the embedded preview in a very limited way—Photoshop displays the preview in the File>Open dialog box, and Bridge uses it to display the initial thumbnail before building its high-quality previews. One reason that Photoshop and Bridge don't make greater use of the embedded previews is that Camera Raw 3.0 doesn't update the preview when you edit a DNG in Camera Raw, although it does when you save a new, edited DNG. Obviously this is not an ideal situation for those who want to use DNG with third-party asset managers, so here's some late-breaking news.

## Camera Raw 3.1

By the time you read this, however, Camera Raw 3.1 will likely be available for download from Adobe's website. In addition to providing support for new cameras such as Nikon's D2X and Canon's EOS Digital Rebel XT, Camera Raw 3.1 introduces two new preferences that are relevant only in a DNG workflow—see Figure 7-1.

The first new preference item, Ignore sidecar “.xmp” files, addresses a relatively obscure situation that arises only when you have a DNG and a proprietary raw version of the same image in the same folder, and they're identically named except for the extension. If you edit the proprietary raw file, Camera Raw 3 also applies the ed-

its to the DNG, to maintain compatibility with Photoshop CS and Photoshop Elements 3, both of which write sidcar files for DNG. The preference setting lets you tell Camera Raw 3.1 to ignore sidcar files and leave the DNG alone in this situation.

The second preference item, Update embedded JPEG previews, lets you tell Camera Raw 3.1 to always update the preview when you edit a DNG. The penalty for doing so is that you take a speed hit because the previews take time to build and save. The advantage is that the embedded previews accurately reflect the current state of the image.

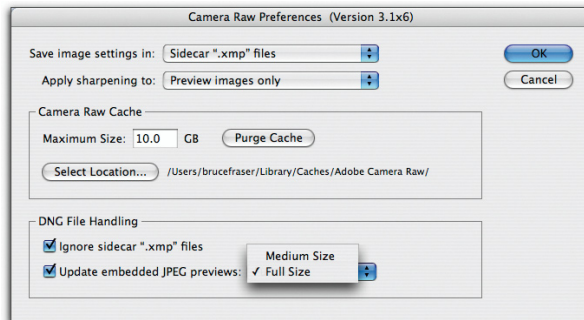
You can also defer the speed hit by working with this preference turned off. Then, when you want to update the previews, choose Export Settings from the Camera Raw menu. You'll see the dialog box shown in Figure 7-2, which allows you to update the Medium Size or Full Size preview.

You can skip the dialog box by pressing Option or Alt when you choose Export Settings, in which case Camera Raw will update the preview size you selected the last time you opened the dialog box.

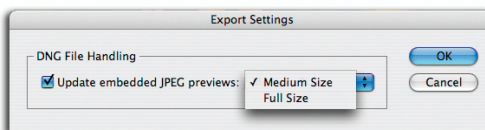
## Preview Size

When you choose Full Size preview, Camera Raw 3.1 actually embeds both Full Size and Medium Size previews, so smart applications can extract only the amount

**Figure 7-1**  
Camera Raw 3.1 Preferences



**Figure 7-2**  
Export Settings for DNG



of data they need for thumbnails while allowing you to zoom to see the actual pixels. The only downside to Full Size previews is that they take slightly longer to build. If you need only thumbnail support in a third-party application, you can save yourself a little time by using the Medium Size option, but the savings are small, and if you change your mind later and decide you need full-sized previews, any savings are wiped out.

Full Size gets you the best of both worlds, and since Camera Raw 3.1 offers total flexibility in when you choose to spend the time building the previews, it's the option I prefer.

Bear in mind too that you can choose which application, Bridge or Photoshop, gets tied up building the previews so that you can continue working in the other application while the one hosting Camera Raw builds the previews in the background. See "Who Hosts Camera Raw?" later in this chapter.

You may have noticed that all the screen shots in this book use images in DNG format. When I initially made the decision to use DNG in the book, I confess that I did so partly for political reasons. But now that I've come to enjoy the benefits of the DNG workflow, I'll never go back to proprietary raws.