Adding Images to Your Library

There are two primary ways to get your images into Aperture – either directly from your camera or memory card, or from an attached drive or folder on your Mac. We will cover cameras and memory cards here, and move on to internal and external drives in the following section.

Whatever your source, photos are always added to the Aperture Library using the Import dialog. This may appear automatically when you connect your camera – if you have Mac OS X set to do that – but if not, it can be activated using the Import button on the Toolbar.

The setting that controls whether or not it appears every time your Mac detects that a camera or card has been connected is found in Preferences (Preferences) or through Image Capture, the utility that manages cameras and scanners at the system level. This is found in the Applications folder (Figs 3.1 and 3.2).

The Import dialog is split into three key sections, and links your source media, which appears at the top of the Projects pane, with the Projects themselves, showing the flow of your images from your external sources into your established Library.
You can move either end of this workflow by clicking in the appropriate pane of the Inspector at the new origin or destination point. To switch from a memory card or camera to your internal hard drive, for example, simply click the drive. To change the Project into which your photos will be imported, click on an alternative, or create a new one using the New button on the Toolbar (Fig. 3.3).

**Importing from Your Camera**

Cameras organize their images into folders, usually defined by the number of photos they have captured since they were
Each folder is usually restricted to holding just 100 images and so a day-long shoot can often end up split across several folders. Even if you have taken less than 100 images, you can still sometimes find that they are split across more than one folder. This is because your camera may have taken, say, 3690 images in all time. If you then take a further 50, the first 10 will fall into one folder and the remaining 40 into another (Fig. 3.4).

Aperture’s Import From Camera dialog ignores these artificial subdivisions and instead presents you with a single grouping of all of your photos. Aperture is compatible with almost all current digital cameras, so it is unlikely that you will be unable to access your photos in this way, and even if you have trouble now, the chances are that in time your camera will eventually become compatible, as it draws its Raw processing tools from the operating system.
Raw format files are simply a dump of all of the data gathered by the sensor of your camera. These data have not been edited or refined in any way, and so although metadata such as your ISO setting, shutter speed and exposure compensation are also recorded, only physical attributes such as the length of time the shutter was open will have any affect on the image. This leaves you free to change the other settings once you get them into Aperture.

The simplest course of action when importing your pictures is to click the Import all Images button at the bottom of the interface, or the arrow pointing at the project into which you’re importing your photos. Alternatively, you can select a range of images by dragging a marquee around several pictures in the Import dialog’s Browser area, clicking one end of a range and Shift clicking the other, or holding Ctrl while clicking to pick several non-consecutive photos. You then use the same Import button to bring them into the Library, although by now it will indicate the number of images in the selection ready to be imported.

Although they are speedy fixes, neither of these actions should be considered your primary way of working, as they skip several key steps that will help to manage your assets later. The more work you do at the Import stage, the less you will have to do once your photos are inside your Library, and so the more time you will have for creative activities.

**Sort Your Images Before Import**

You may think that Aperture’s Import dialog looks similar to the Browser, and it does. That’s no mere coincidence. Although it
deals with images that don’t yet exist in your Library, it still gives you access to many of the same sorting and organizing tools as the Browser does for those you have already imported.

At the bottom of the dialog is a facsimile of the Browser toolbar, allowing you to switch between grid and list views and sort by name, date or file size in either ascending or descending order. A slider lets you vary the size of each thumbnail, while on the line immediately above you can rotate your images and create Stacks based on the interval between each shot. That interval is measured in seconds, and specified by dragging a slider from 0 to 1 minute. By default this is set to 0, effectively disabling stacking and graying out the Stack Control buttons (Fig. 3.5).

Stacks can also be created manually, on any basis that you like, and are not restricted to time-based controls. Selecting several images – either consecutive or disparate – and tapping \( \text{Ctrl} \), or clicking the Stack button, which looks like a roll of sticky tape, will gather the selected images into a Stack. Stacks can be opened and closed using the buttons to the left of the time slider, dismantled by using the Unstack all Stacks button at the far right of the Toolbar, and split by choosing the point at which the split should occur and tapping \( \text{Shift} \text{+} \text{K} \) or pressing the Split Stack button.

However, there are several things you can’t do that you can in the Browser, the most obvious being renaming files in their source location. All renaming should be done at the point of import, using the Image Information dialog to the right of the Image thumbnails.

**Organizing Your Images Before Importing Them**

The Image Information panel to the right of the import dialog is used to attach the first user-defined metadata to each photo added to your Library. This information is supplementary to the data written by your digital camera, such as Aperture size, shutter speed and shooting conditions, which are untouchable and uneditable.

You won’t apply any changes to your images at this stage, but simply define a range of attributes that will be added to Aperture’s extensive underlying database and help you organize,
sort and filter your assets once you start working with them inside the program system itself.

The first and most basic task is to decide where your images should be kept.

**Choosing Where to Store Your Images**

Whenever you import an image to the Library from another location on your Mac or network, you have the option of adding it to your local Aperture Library or leaving it in its original location. Your choice will largely depend on how the image is used. If you work alone, then there is no problem with moving it to your local drive, but users on a network should be careful here, as changing its location could make it unavailable to others on the network.

You can, however, change the location of your Aperture Library. By default it is stored on your local hard drive in the Pictures folder (~/Pictures/Aperture Library.aplibrary). To change this click Aperture > Preferences … and in the General section, click the Choose button and navigate to a new location. Note that if you do this, you’ll then have to re-launch the application.

The option to move your files or leave them where they are is found in the Sidebar. Your options are In the Aperture Library, In their Current Location, Pictures, Desktop and Choose…. The latter option is the most flexible, allowing you to store your images in a stand-alone format anywhere on your hard drive, rather than in the complex directory structure inside the Aperture Library package. Pictures and Desktop speak for themselves, although we would strongly advise against storing photos on the desktop. This part of the Mac OS X interface is intended only as a transport area, or for hosting a very small number of frequently used files, folders or links to applications. For maximum system efficiency – and maximum personal productivity – it should remain as clutter-free as possible (Fig. 3.6).

Images stored anywhere other than in your Aperture Library are called Referenced images (as opposed to Managed images inside the Library), because the application has to look elsewhere to get the full resolution photos to work on. When importing images, but leaving them in their original location or saving them anywhere other than inside the application itself, Aperture merely creates references to and thumbnails of the originals, and
so it’s imperative that the original is also available whenever you want to make edits.

You should also ensure that you have a suitable backup system in place to protect your referenced images, as they can’t be stored in Vaults, Aperture’s own internal backup spaces. As such, any serious system failure or a hardware fault that impacts on an external drive holding your referenced images will make them unavailable for use in Aperture. This is a serious issue, as they are used as the basis of Versions stored within your Library. As Versions don’t actually exist in image format but are, rather, data files telling the application what changes to apply to a Digital Master in order to render each one, they would effectively be lost at the same time as your originals, leaving you with no assets at all. For more information on implementing an effective backup routine, see p. 96.

Even if you choose to store the images in your Aperture Library, or in another folder on your Mac, the originals remain exactly as

Fig. 3.6 Although most users will want to keep their images within the Aperture Library, and hence benefit from the access this gives to backing up using Vaults, you can also store them elsewhere on your hard drive. Photos stored in this way are known as ‘referenced images’.
they are. Aperture will never delete them unless you specifically tell it to, with any originals simply copied – not moved – from one media or location to another.

**Saving Referenced Images**

Should you choose not to import your images into the Aperture Library but store them elsewhere on your system you will obviously need to specify where and how they should be filed. Even if you choose to place them in the Pictures folder, Apple doesn’t expect you to drop them there loose, and so the import dialog lets you specify a directory structure to keep them separate from your other assets, and help you manually navigate through them using the Finder.

This is done using the drop-down Sub-folders menu, which gives you a range of logical options that, if applied to every subsequent import, will build a logical filing system that will be immediately obvious not only to you, as the owner of the photos, but also anyone else who wants to work with them in the future, even if they haven’t been involved in taking or filing them themselves (Fig. 3.7).

By default the subdirectory used to store your images will be based on the name you give to the Project holding your imported photos, but the sub-folders drop-down gives you the option of defining a folder of your own based on, among other things, the current date or the date on which each image was created, or a custom name with an automatically incrementing filename. Picking None would drop them loose either onto the Desktop or into the Pictures folder (neither of which is recommended) while a flexible Edit … option lets you build your own directory structure using a wide range of metadata drawn from the image.

This takes you to the folder naming presets dialog, which lets you construct a multi-level structure by dragging and dropping various metadata variables into an input box, which will then be replaced by live data from your images.

**Creating Folder Naming Presets**

The rules for creating presets for Folder names are similar to those for creating names, covered below, although the metadata at your disposal differ slightly. Notable through their inclusion
are Folder names and Project names, which incorporate some of your manual filing measures into the resulting output and, perhaps most importantly, the forward slash. This cannot be used when specifying filenames.

It is used here as a separator for sub-folders. So, if you wanted to import (or later export) a batch of photos taken over the course of an extended journey through several countries, with each country batch stored in a separate Project, you might want to file them by both time and geographical location. Assuming that you are interested in telling a story in chronological order you might therefore create a nested folder structure by typing the words ‘Asia Tour’ into the Format bar and then dragging the relevant variables in to follow it (Fig. 3.8). You can type the forward slash rather than drag it in if you want to save time, but either way you’d end up with something along these lines:

Asia Tour / Image Year / Image Month / Image Day / Project Name / Sequence #
We have used the ISO standard reverse dating convention here, rather than European or North American for the very good reason that it is the most effective means of narrowing a large group of files sequentially. If we took one picture every day for a year and filed them using this structure we would end up with 365 files and 378 folders (one folder for the year, 12 for the months and 365 for the days). Reversing the order so that we had day/month/year would leave us with 761 folders and 365 files, adding a massive 1126 entries to the file system and greatly complicating the task of manually sorting through those files at a later date.

It works out to 31-day folders, inside 28 of which we would find February folders; folders for September, April, June and November in 30 of them; and folders for January, March, May, July, August, October and December in them all. Inside each month there would be a redundant folder given the number of the year – 2009, for example – and only then would we get to our files.

That’s logical enough, but why put Project Name so far down the list? Because you would probably cross any international borders you need to negotiate during the course of a day rather than overnight, and so you could easily be in two or more countries in one single day. As each country is stored in a separate Project, putting Project Name in advance of the other elements in the chain would see duplicate date entries further down the nested folder structure, which will become confusing when you return to it in the future.
You could drag the unified Image Date element into the chain, particularly if your travels all took place in a single month, but by separating it out by year, month and then day you will be able to more quickly, isolated groups of images taken with a specified timeframe in the Mac OS X Finder. You would know that all of the images taken in May, for example, are found in sub-folders within a single folder and that opening that folder isolates them all.
The alternative would be to select up to 31 individual folders to achieve the same thing if we had not separated them out.

**Creating Filename Presets**

Open the Naming Presets dialog and you’ll see that Aperture ships with nine filename presets in place, but you can create an almost unlimited number of variations by dragging 16 different elements into the Format box. The elements include Version and Master filenames, current time and date, creation time and date, counters and index numbers and, perhaps most useful of all, the option to create a custom name.

The custom name must be set at the point of creating the preset, or else Aperture will interpret it as incomplete, and it will not be available for use in the Export dialog. However, you can go back and change it at any time if you find that your needs change at a later point.

The other variable that accepts user input at the point of creation is Counter. In this instance the input isn’t compulsory, but it does let you specify an initial value and how many digits should be included in the Counter. Note that this digit length isn’t a maximum beyond which the numbers will be capped (so no more than 999 for a three-digit length or 9999 for four) but the number of digits will be included in every filename. So pick 6 and even your first digit will be assigned 000001, along with any other variables you specify (Fig. 3.9).

You can split your filename into more manageable parts by inserting spaces and other special characters such as hyphens between the constituent parts. However, there are a number of reserved characters that cannot be used in filenames. The forward slash (/) is one, as this is used as a directory separator, and you’ll not be able to enter it when creating your preset. However, you can enter a colon (:), although again this should be avoided as it is conventionally assigned to marking out drives.