

# PHOTOS FOR MAC

A TAKE CONTROL CRASH COURSE

## STAY TUNED!

Thanks for buying this early-bird release! We plan to publish a major update in May, after we've had a chance to work with Photos 1.0—we'll send email when it's ready, or look in [About This Book](#) for a link to download it.

by **JASON SNELL**

**\$10**

# Table of Contents

Read Me First .....	3
Introduction .....	4
Photos Quick Start .....	5
Photos vs. iPhoto and Aperture .....	6
Import from iPhoto into Photos .....	8
Import Your Files into Photos .....	11
Use Multiple Photos Libraries .....	14
Navigate the Photos Interface .....	16
Add Info about Your Photos .....	19
Make Albums in Photos .....	22
Define Smart Albums in Photos .....	24
About This Book .....	27
About the Author .....	28
About the Publisher .....	29
Copyright and Fine Print .....	30

# Read Me First

This ebook was published in April 2015 by TidBITS Publishing Inc. It was written by Jason Snell and edited by Kelly Turner.

This book helps you get started with Apple's Photos app, introduced in 2015 to replace iPhoto and Aperture.

*Photos for Mac: A Take Control Crash Course, version 1.0*

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Thanks for purchasing this early look at Apple's Photos app for Yosemite! We are planning a free update shortly, with expanded content. To check on our progress and get the update, see [Ebook Extras](#).

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# Introduction

In 2002 Apple introduced iPhoto as a way for us to save all our newfangled photos in a “digital shoebox.” At the time, I’d owned a digital camera for three months, and had only a few hundred digital images. Over the years, as my photo library grew, Apple revised iPhoto, always trying to stay in front of the onslaught of thousands of digital photos accumulated over a lifetime—at least the lifetime of my two children.

By 2014, enough was more than enough. Apple decided it needed to start from scratch and ditch both iPhoto and the professional-level photo tool it had introduced in 2005, Aperture. It chose to replace them both with a single application, which would be called—in the prosaic style favored by Apple for its iOS apps—Photos.

This book is about Photos, but the ghosts of iPhoto and Aperture hang over it. Mac users have spent years in those programs, cataloging priceless collections of images and videos accumulated over decades. Photos looks quite different from iPhoto, although its approach resembles its predecessor in many ways. And both are miles away—in both looks and capabilities—from Aperture.

In this book, I’ll describe how to perform most of the tasks you’ll want to do with Photos. No previous knowledge of iPhoto or Aperture is required, though I will walk you through the migration process from both apps and show you where the stuff in those programs ends up—if anywhere—in Photos.

One of the most exciting features of Photos is its embrace of cloud services. For the first time, you can keep your entire photo library in the cloud rather than on your drive. (It’s up to you to decide whether you want to embrace the cloud to that degree.) The connection between iOS and the Mac has also never been stronger.

But of course, there are also some changes that won’t be as welcome. Some features many people came to rely on in iPhoto and Aperture are gone. Hopefully some of them will come back one day—after all, this first version of Photos is just the beginning.

My daughter, born late in 2001, is about to enter high school. Her entire life has been chronicled with digital photos—tens of thousands of them at this point. I used iPhoto to catalog her childhood. Now that catalog resides in Photos. Photography is how we preserve the images of our lives; it’s important that we understand the software that allows us to organize, view, and share those images. That’s what this book tries to do.

This initial version of the book is a work in progress. I’ve tried to cover the most essential details you’ll need to get started with Photos, but there’s much more to come—another half of the book, in fact (see [Ebook Extras](#) for details).

Thanks for joining me on this journey. Let’s get started!

# Photos Quick Start

This book explores Apple's new Photos app by walking you through the most essential photo-management and editing tasks. You can read the chapters in any order. Click any link to jump to a chapter.

## Know Your Options

The new Photos app will feel familiar to iPhoto users. Aperture users, however, will likely feel less at home. See how Photos stacks up to both programs in [Photos vs. iPhoto and Aperture](#).

## Import Photos

- **From iPhoto:** Ensure your iPhoto library makes a smooth transition to Photos and discover the beauty of hard links in [Import from iPhoto into Photos](#).
- **From your Mac:** Photos can import files directly from your camera, but if you need to edit the files before handing them off to Photos, it may make sense to use Image Capture instead. Read [Import Your Files into Photos](#).
- **From multiple libraries:** You can easily switch between multiple libraries to keep different collections separate. See [Use Multiple Photos Libraries](#).

## Find Your Bearings

Learn how to quickly navigate a Photos library with the button bar. Or open the sidebar for a more iPhoto-like view. See [Navigate the Photos Interface](#).

## Get Organized

- **Add metadata:** No one knows your photos better than you do. Make them easier to find later by applying keywords, identifying faces, and marking Favorites. Read [Add Info about Your Photos](#).
- **Build albums:** Photos organizes your library by date. If you have other ideas, you can create collections in the Albums pane. See [Make Albums in Photos](#).
- **Create smart albums:** Want to quickly round up all the photos of your kids taken with your SLR within the last year? No problem. Learn how to take advantage of all your valuable metadata in [Define Smart Albums in Photos](#).

## Coming Soon

But wait, there's more! To help you start using Photos as quickly as possible, I've written the first version of the book to cover the most essential aspects of importing your photo library and finding your files. In an upcoming update, due out soon, I'll delve into other topics, including:

- ✦ Syncing with iCloud Photo Library
- ✦ Importing an Aperture library
- ✦ Editing photos
- ✦ Sharing with others
- ✦ Using your images in other projects

# Photos vs. iPhoto and Aperture

When you compare the features of Photos to those of iPhoto, it's easy to see that, in most ways, Photos is a reincarnation of iPhoto. A few organizational features have been lost, the interface is more refined, deep connections to iCloud have been added, and the entire app feels faster.

But not long after introducing Photos, Apple announced that it was ceasing development of its professional photography app, Aperture, and that Photos would be a suitable replacement ① (see my [Macworld article](#)). Based on the initial version of Photos, however, this doesn't seem to be the case. Photo hobbyists who used Aperture despite not needing most of its features might not mind the omissions, but professional users should probably start considering other options, such as Adobe's Lightroom.



① iPhoto and Aperture have been discontinued. Apple intends Photos to be their replacement.

## Coming from iPhoto

If you're used to iPhoto, Photos won't be that jarring. Photos can import your iPhoto library (see [Import from iPhoto into Photos](#)) and retains most, but not all, of the features of iPhoto. Star ratings have been demoted to keyword status, flagged items are now Favorites, and Events are now just another kind of photo album. But with the optional sidebar displayed in Photos, you'd think you were using a slick new version of iPhoto.

There are new features, to be sure, including a modified and expanded editing view and more direct integration with iCloud, but with a little time, iPhoto users should be able to settle in comfortably.

## Apps, We Hardly Knew Ye

Apple's announcement specified that iPhoto and Aperture would both be updated for compatibility with OS X Yosemite, but that's it.

Not to be a negative nelly, but you shouldn't hold out hope that Apple will reconsider its decision. Both apps will probably still work for a while, yet, but updates are extremely unlikely.

If Photos doesn't float your boat and you're an Aperture user, you might want to consider Adobe's Lightroom if you haven't before. It's tightly integrated with Photoshop and available as a part of [Adobe's Photography bundle](#), which as of this writing costs \$120 per year. You can download a free 30-day trial to give it a spin.

## Coming from Aperture

I'm not much of an Aperture user. I use it mostly to do tethered photo shoots with my Canon SLR. I've built an entire workflow around shooting Apple events: resizing the images to Web resolutions on the fly, applying a watermark, and saving the result out as JPEGs to be uploaded to a server.

Could I do that same task in Photos? It doesn't appear to support tethered shooting, exporting versions with different image quality levels, or watermarks.

And the differences certainly don't end there. Photos doesn't support the concept of separate projects inside a single library. Star ratings and color labels are imported as keywords.

Photos doesn't support plug-ins or editing in an external editor, both key features of Aperture. And Photos' editing features, while solid, don't match Aperture's. For example, Photos doesn't offer an adjustment brush to selectively apply an edit to the image.

If you use Aperture because it's more than iPhoto, but haven't availed yourself of most of Aperture's features, you may find Photos sufficient. But if you rely on one of the many Aperture features Photos doesn't support, be prepared for disappointment.

Now the good news: Some Aperture features (like the Split view, which I use all the time) are available in Photos [②](#). And Photos will import your Aperture libraries, though your projects will turn into folders in the Albums section.

If you try Photos and decide it's not for you, your Aperture libraries will still be there, unharmed. So there's no risk in giving Photos a spin.

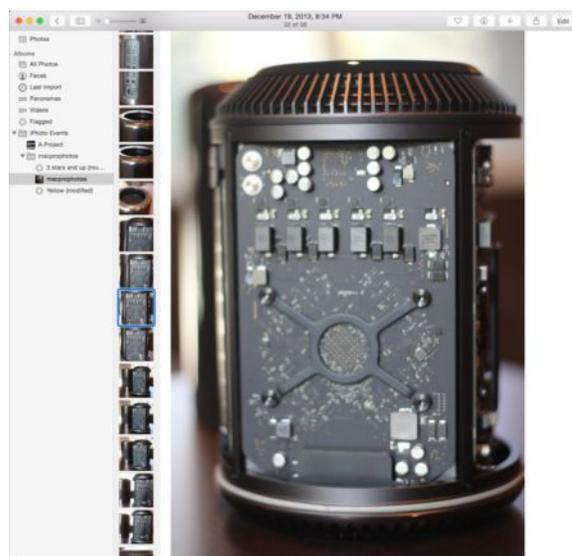
## The Optimistic View

Apple has a habit of killing its apps and replacing them with new ones that resemble the old only in passing. Perhaps most controversial was the radical re-design of Final Cut Pro X.

At the time, Final Cut Pro users were furious that the new version didn't offer numerous features that they relied on. Apple's response was to say that the old Final Cut Pro would continue to work for quite some time, and in the meantime the company would try to add as many of those features to Final Cut Pro X as possible.

Today, even the most ardent Final Cut Pro X critic would have to admit that Apple has added back a large number of key features that weren't present in the first version.

When Apple announced Photos, it strongly indicated that it would be able to serve Aperture users, too. Does that mean future updates will add Aperture features? There are no guarantees, but at least there's hope.



[②](#) Split view in Photos is different, but similar, to what you'd see in Aperture.

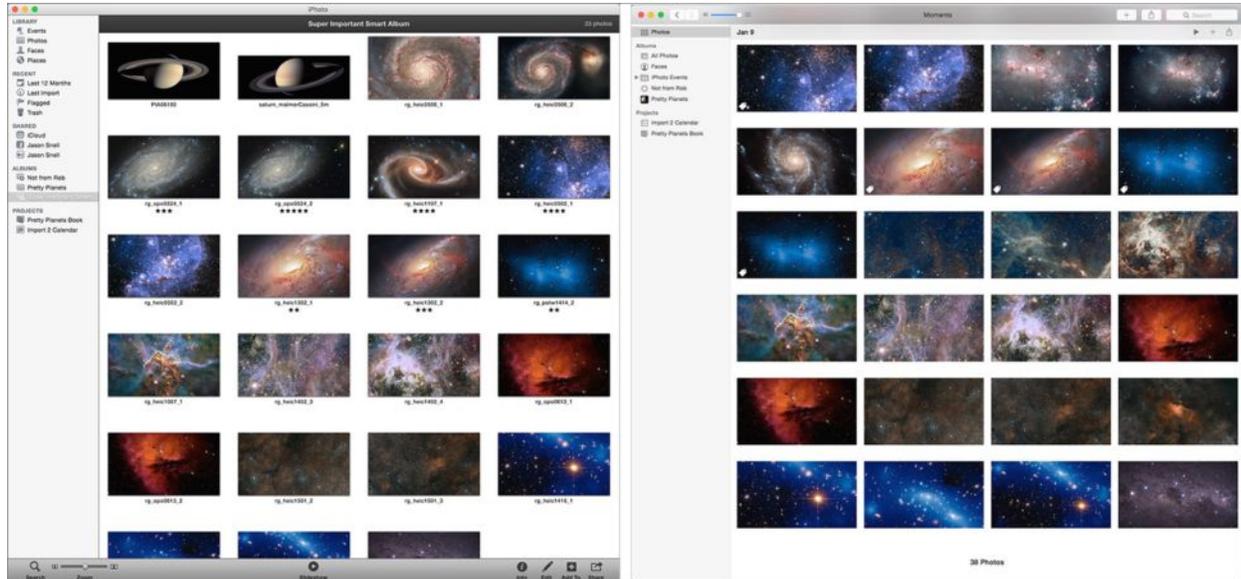
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**"Unfortunately, Photos for Mac has no spot-editing features in the style of Aperture's adjustment brush."**

Discuss "Photos vs. iPhoto and Aperture" via [Dribbble](#)

# Import from iPhoto into Photos

If Photos is the spiritual successor to iPhoto, it's only right that Photos can import your iPhoto library, and do so while keeping it intact—more or less ①. Because the features of Photos don't align precisely with those in iPhoto, some information from iPhoto ends up in unexpected locations.



① An iPhoto library (left) migrates to Photos (right).

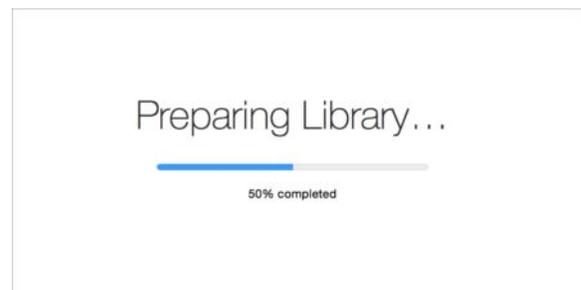
You'll need to get used to the changes in Photos—and be prepared to change your approach to organizing your media—but Apple has worked to make the migration process as painless as possible.

## First Time's the Charm

The first time you launch Photos, it searches your system for iPhoto and Aperture libraries. If only one library fits the bill, it imports that library. Otherwise, it opens the Choose Library dialog (see [Use Multiple Photos Libraries](#)). Choose a library from the list, and Photos prepares the library for import ②.

**Note:** One tester for this book reported that her iPhoto library was imported by default, before she'd launched Photos.

**Note:** On first launch, Photos asks if you'd like to use iCloud Photo Library. Unless you crave the bleeding edge, or have a small library, I recommend declining for now. The 1.1 version of this book will discuss iCloud Photo Library.



② Photos needs to prepare your iPhoto library before it imports it into a new Photos library.

## Import Any Time

Hold down Option when you launch Photos to bring up the Choose Library dialog. From that dialog, you can select any iPhoto or Aperture library to import.

## Behind the Scenes

When you import an iPhoto library into Photos, your existing library remains intact. The net result of the import is that you'll have two separate libraries on your Mac's drive: your old iPhoto library and a new Photos library ③.

They'll even have the same name—unless your library contained the word *iPhoto*, in which case you'll see it replaced with the word *Photos*. (So a library called *2010 iPhoto Library* will be imported to a library called *2010 Photos Library*.)

If you have a large library, you're probably worried that a second version of the same library will take up twice the space. But in fact, importing an iPhoto library into Photos uses almost no additional disk space. See the nearby sidebar, "Hard Facts about Hard Links," for the nerdy details.

**Note:** Once your iPhoto library has been imported into Photos, you can continue to use iPhoto as before. But if you edit an image or add a keyword in iPhoto post-import, those changes won't transfer to Photos. For all practical purposes, the libraries have become two completely separate sets of data.

## Making the Move

Photos is a very different app from iPhoto, but Apple has endeavored to transfer your data from iPhoto, even though several features (events, star ratings) no longer exist. Here's a guide to what gets imported, and what has changed during the transition.



③ Your iPhoto library remains intact (left), but a new Photos library (right) comes into being.

### Hard Facts about Hard Links

On import, Photos makes a *hard link* to all iPhoto media assets in its own library package, using the same directory structure as iPhoto ④. Think of hard links as a cousin of Finder aliases—rather than existing in one place with an alias in a different location, files that are hard linked appear to live in two places at once, but only take up the space of a single file.

Name	Size
Nondescript iPhoto Library	281.4 MB
Nondescript Photos Library	284.2 MB

④ The libraries say they're roughly the same size, but in fact, they're sharing disk space via hard links.

So what happens if you edit one of those files? Something clever, it turns out: if I edit a file from a migrated iPhoto library in Photoshop, that version is altered—but the version in the Photos library is untouched. Basically, the act of modifying a hard-linked file causes the link to break. Now there are two different files, both taking up disk space, living independently.

For Mac users accustomed to the a-file-is-a-file approach of the Finder, this one's a bit of a head-scratcher, but it's a smart move by Apple to allow us to migrate to Photos without duplicating an entire library and eating all of our free disk space—or worse, never bothering to upgrade to Photos because we don't have the room.

## What's Still There

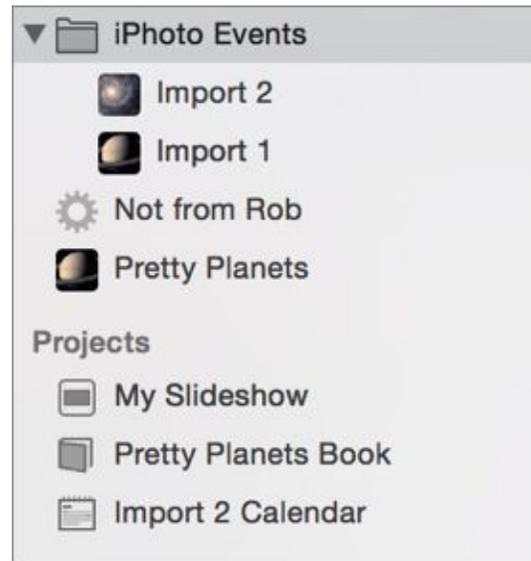
- **Albums:** All your iPhoto albums and smart albums should migrate seamlessly to Photos. You can access them via the Albums pane or, if the sidebar is visible, under the Albums section.
- **Projects:** Projects, including books, slideshows, and calendars, appear under the Projects pane (or section, if the sidebar is visible).
- **Faces:** If you used iPhoto's Faces feature, you'll find it at the top level of the Albums pane, next to All Photos. If the sidebar is visible, you'll see a Faces entry in the Albums list.
- **Keywords:** All keywords make the move.
- **Geotags:** All location data transfers to Photos.

## What's Missing

- **Events:** iPhoto's concept of Events is gone in Photos. Your events have been imported as albums, and placed in the iPhoto Events folder ⑤.
- **Five-star rating system:** Photos also abandons the five-star rating system used in iPhoto (see the nearby sidebar, "Catch a Falling Star Rating," for more).

Smart albums that rely on star ratings have been rewritten to search for the equivalent keywords.

**Note:** Instead of rating photos with stars, Photos wants you to think binary: photos are favorites, or they're not. Mark a photo as a Favorite by clicking the heart icon in the upper-left corner or pressing the Period (.) key.



⑤ Photos doesn't have a concept of Events, so iPhoto events are imported as albums.

## Catch a Falling Star Rating

Star ratings are gone from Photos, but if you used star ratings to organize your photos, that information hasn't been lost. Upon import, Photos transmogrifies every star rating into a special keyword. A photo you gave three stars in iPhoto will appear in Photos with the keyword **3 Star**.

If you have existing smart albums tagged to ranges of star ratings, Photos will update them to search for the proper set of star-based keywords. You can create new smart albums, too, that take advantage of those particular keywords.

As you add new photos, you can keep using these star-based keywords if you want, or switch to a different approach. (See [Add Info about Your Photos](#) for some ideas.)

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"Photos for Mac doesn't support star ratings or events, but they're imported as keywords and albums respectively."

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# About the Author



Jason Snell has been writing about Apple since it was doomed—1994, to be exact—and was the lead editor for *Macworld* for more than a decade. He also oversaw editorial operations for *PCWorld*, *TechHive*, and *Greenbot*.

He currently writes about technology at [sixcolors.com](http://sixcolors.com), and hosts the Upgrade and Clockwise podcasts at [relay.fm](http://relay.fm), and produces and hosts many other podcasts at [theincomparable.com](http://theincomparable.com).

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Adam and Tonya are known in the Apple world as writers, editors, and speakers. They have been creating Apple-related content since they started the online newsletter [TidBITS](#) in 1990.

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