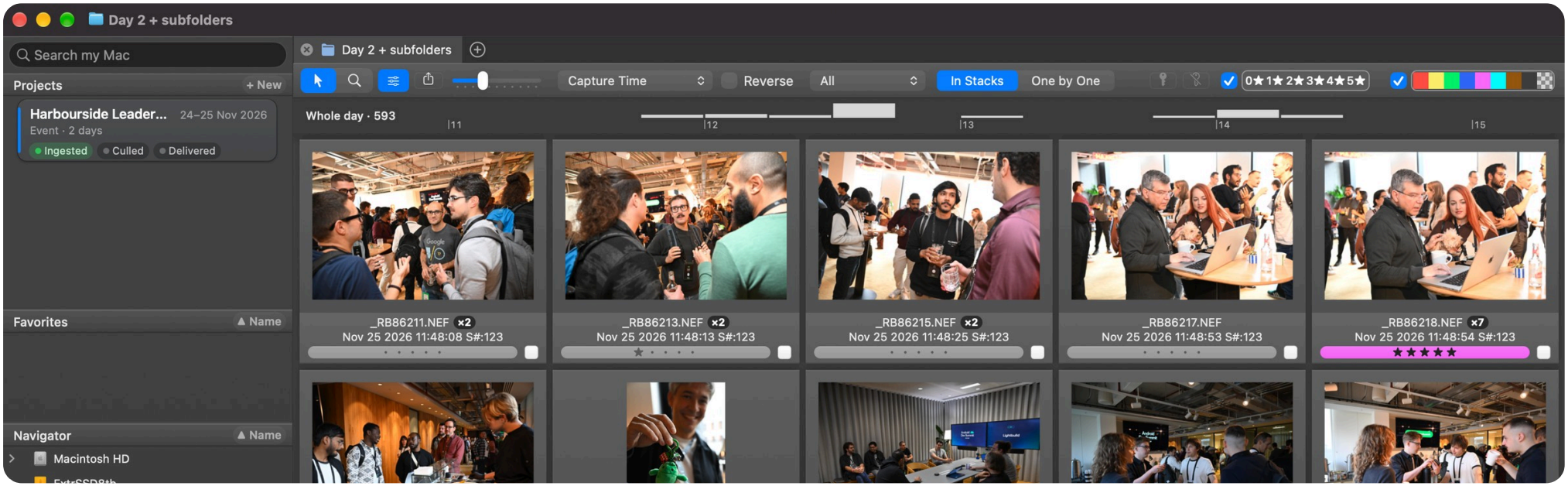
A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

Running an event with PhotoEngineer and Lightroom

Five steps, in the order you do them. Cards come in as batches; your picks go to Lightroom with one click; the client's categories are already there waiting for you.

1. **Setup** — Make the event
2. **Ingest** — Copy the cards
3. **Cull** — Rate as you go
4. **Selects** — Copy out the picks
5. **Lightroom** — Edit and deliver



Every picture comes from one test run of **Harbourside Leaders Summit** (24–25 Nov 2026): photographers Ana and Tom, four hand-ins, 499 RAWs, installed from the download like a new user. Space Saver and the extras are at the back.

GETTING STARTED

Install: drag it to Applications



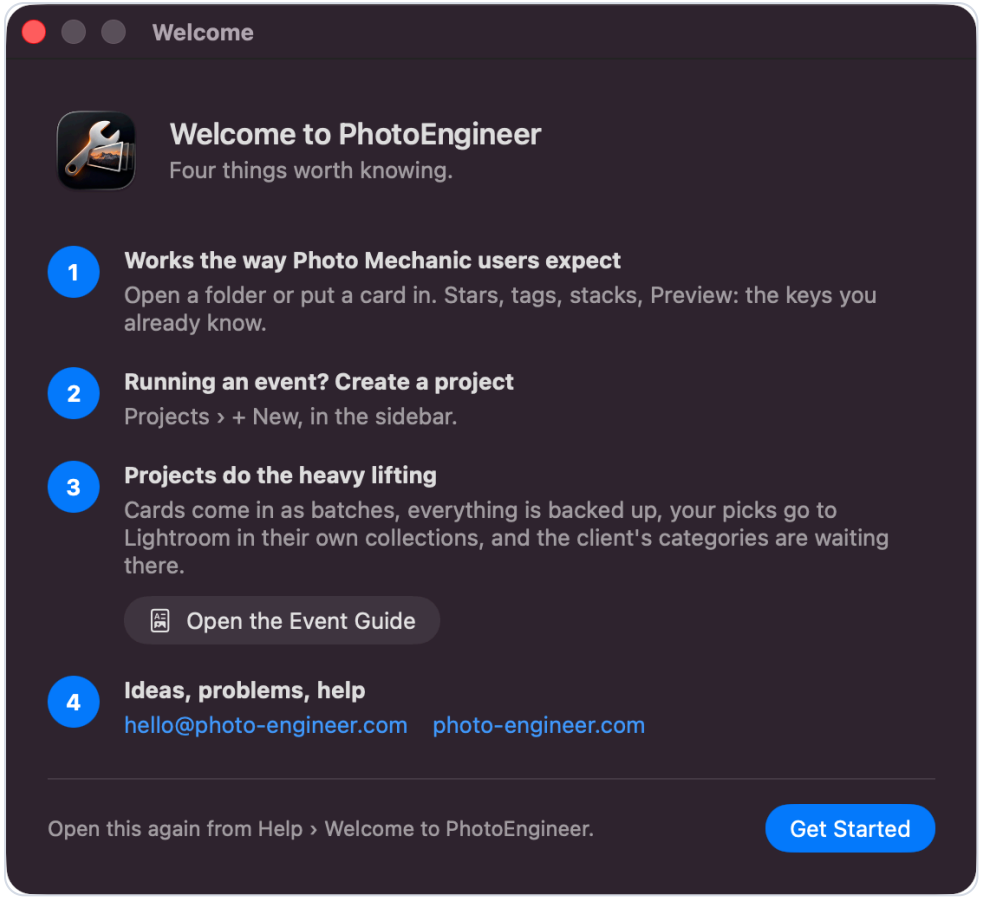
1. Open **PhotoEngineer.dmg** and drag PhotoEngineer onto **Applications**.
2. The first time, macOS checks it was downloaded on purpose: click **Open**. It's signed and checked by Apple, so it only asks once.



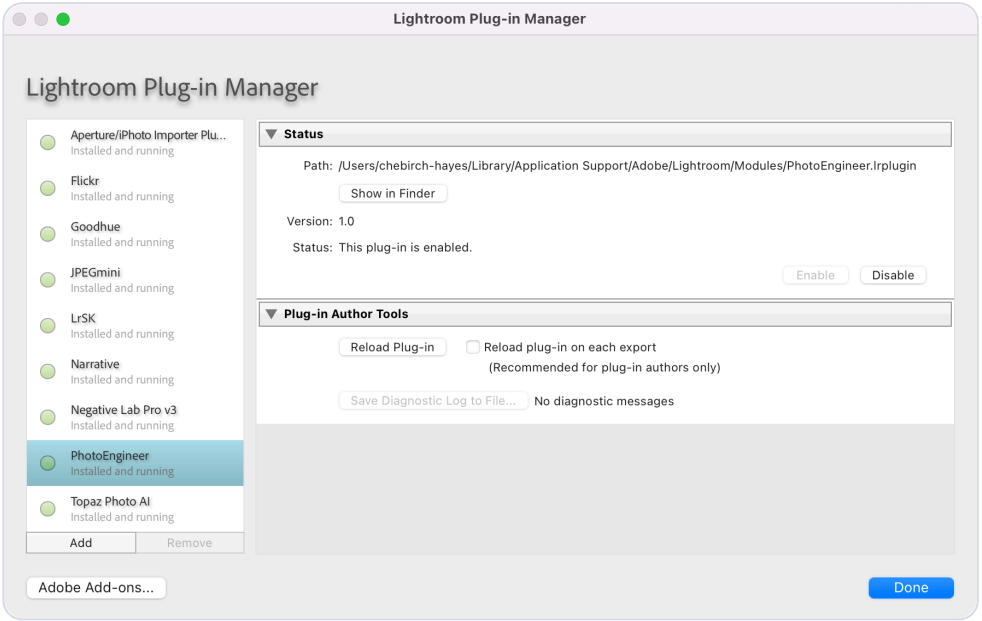
Needs a Mac with Apple silicon (M1 or later) and macOS 26.

GETTING STARTED

First open: welcome, and the Lightroom plug-in

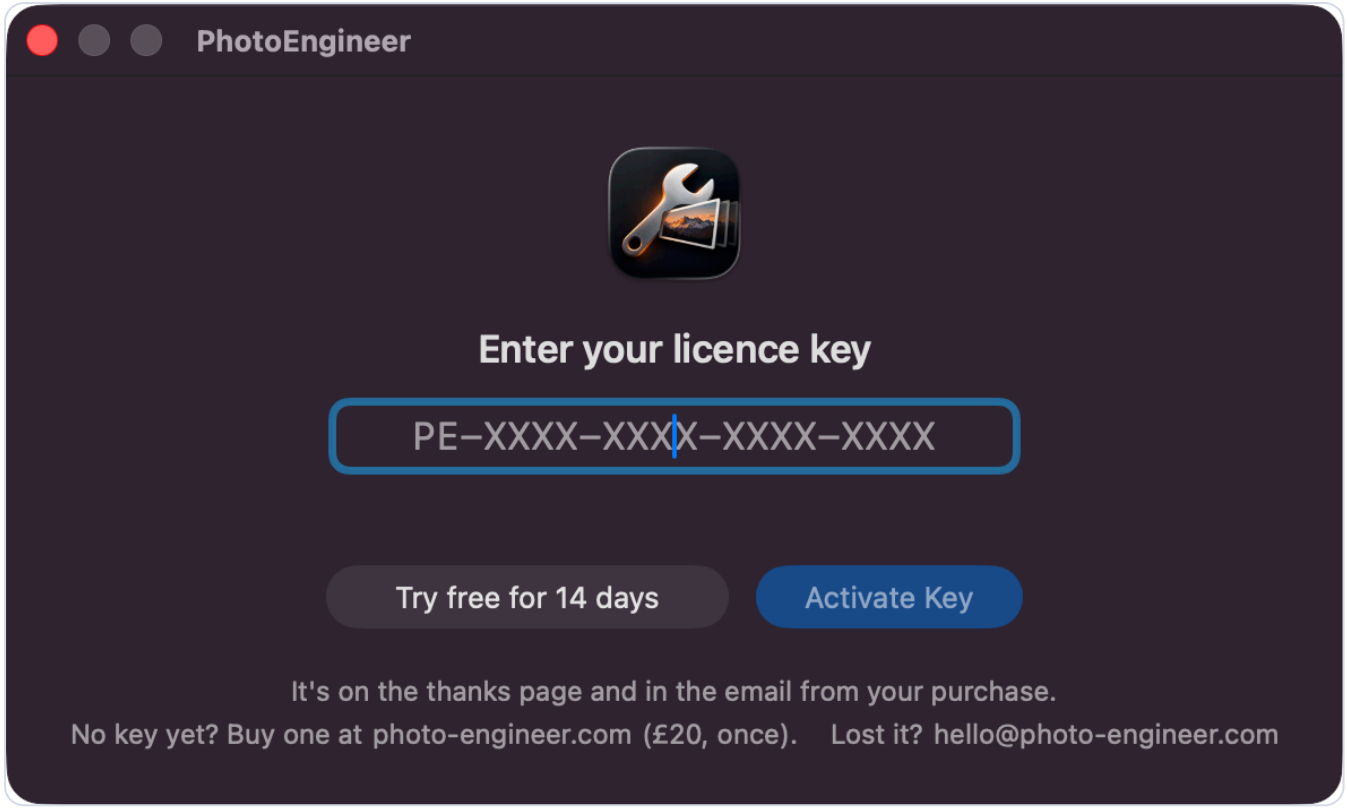


1. **Welcome**: four things worth knowing, and a link to this guide.
2. **The Lightroom plug-in installs itself.** Next time Lightroom opens it's there: File › Plug-in Manager shows it installed and running.
3. macOS may ask if PhotoEngineer can open files on your Desktop: **Allow**, if your events live there.

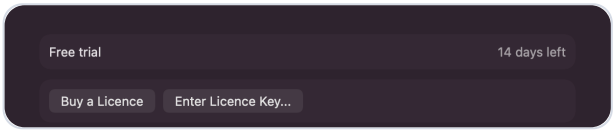


GETTING STARTED

Try it free, or enter your key



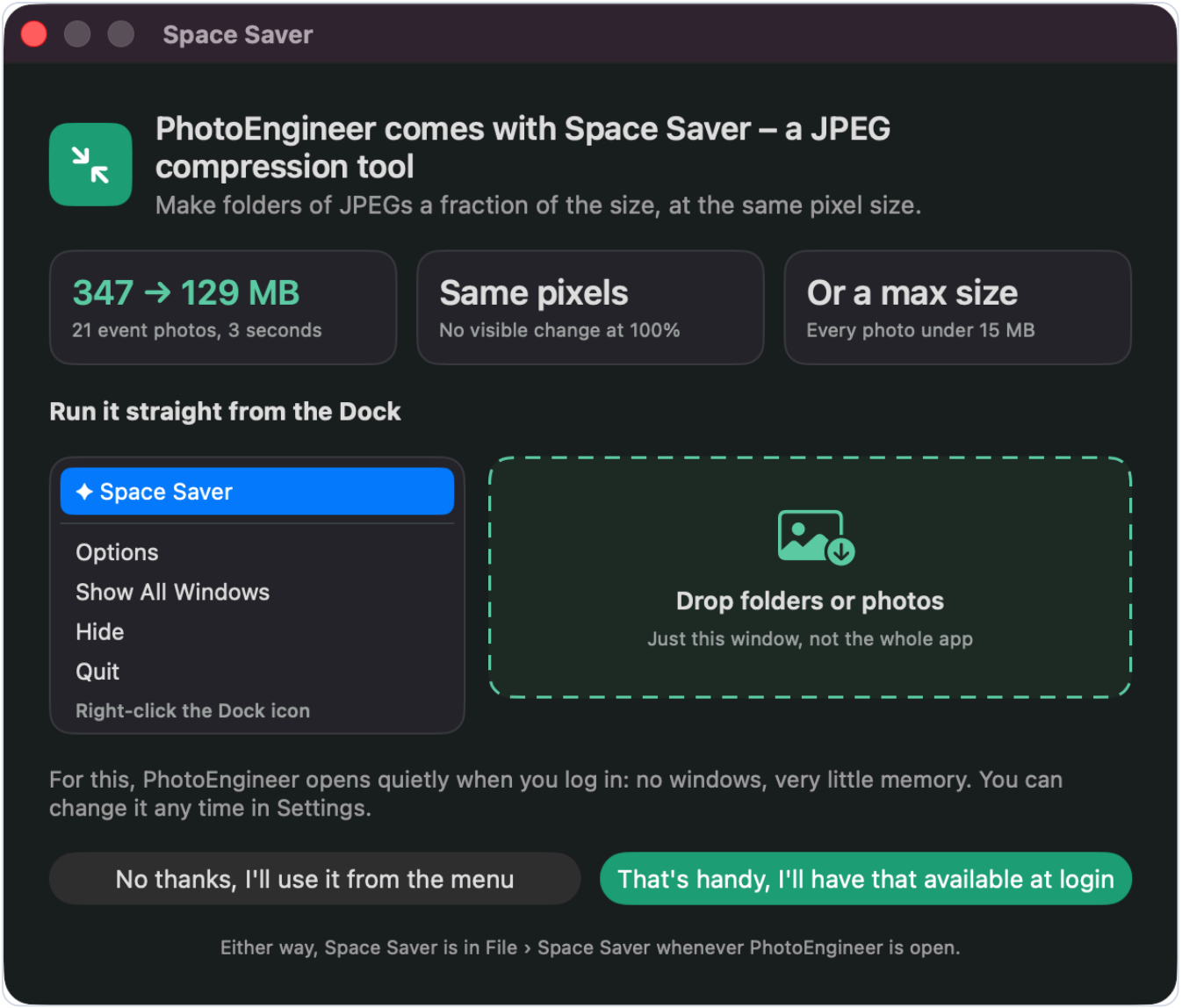
1. First open asks for your **licence key** (thanks page and purchase email). Paste it in any form.
2. No key yet? **Try free for 14 days**: everything works. Settings › Licence shows the days left, with Buy a Licence and Enter Licence Key.
3. Near the end it says how many days are left. Nothing is ever locked mid-job.



> One key works on two Macs. Moving to a new Mac? Settings › Licence › **Deactivate this Mac** frees its place.

GETTING STARTED

Space Saver, from the Dock



1. Straight after the welcome you're offered **Space Saver**, PhotoEngineer's JPEG compression tool.
2. **That's handy, I'll have that available at login**: PhotoEngineer opens quietly when you log in (no windows), so right-clicking its Dock icon gives ✦ **Space Saver**.
3. **No thanks**: it's always in File › Space Saver while PhotoEngineer is open.

> Change it any time: Settings › General › Open quietly at login.

Updates arrive by themselves

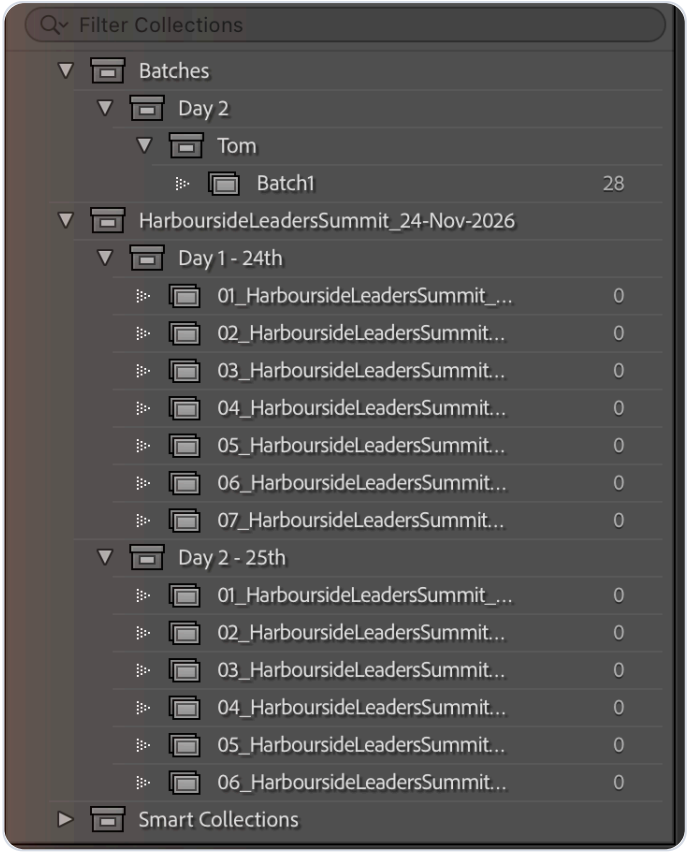


1. PhotoEngineer checks for a new version once a day. When there is one, it says what's new: **Install Update**, and it reopens a moment later with your settings, projects and licence just as they were.
2. Can't wait? **PhotoEngineer › Check for Updates…**
3. Every update is signed, so only a real PhotoEngineer update will ever install.

THE IDEA

Batches now, categories later

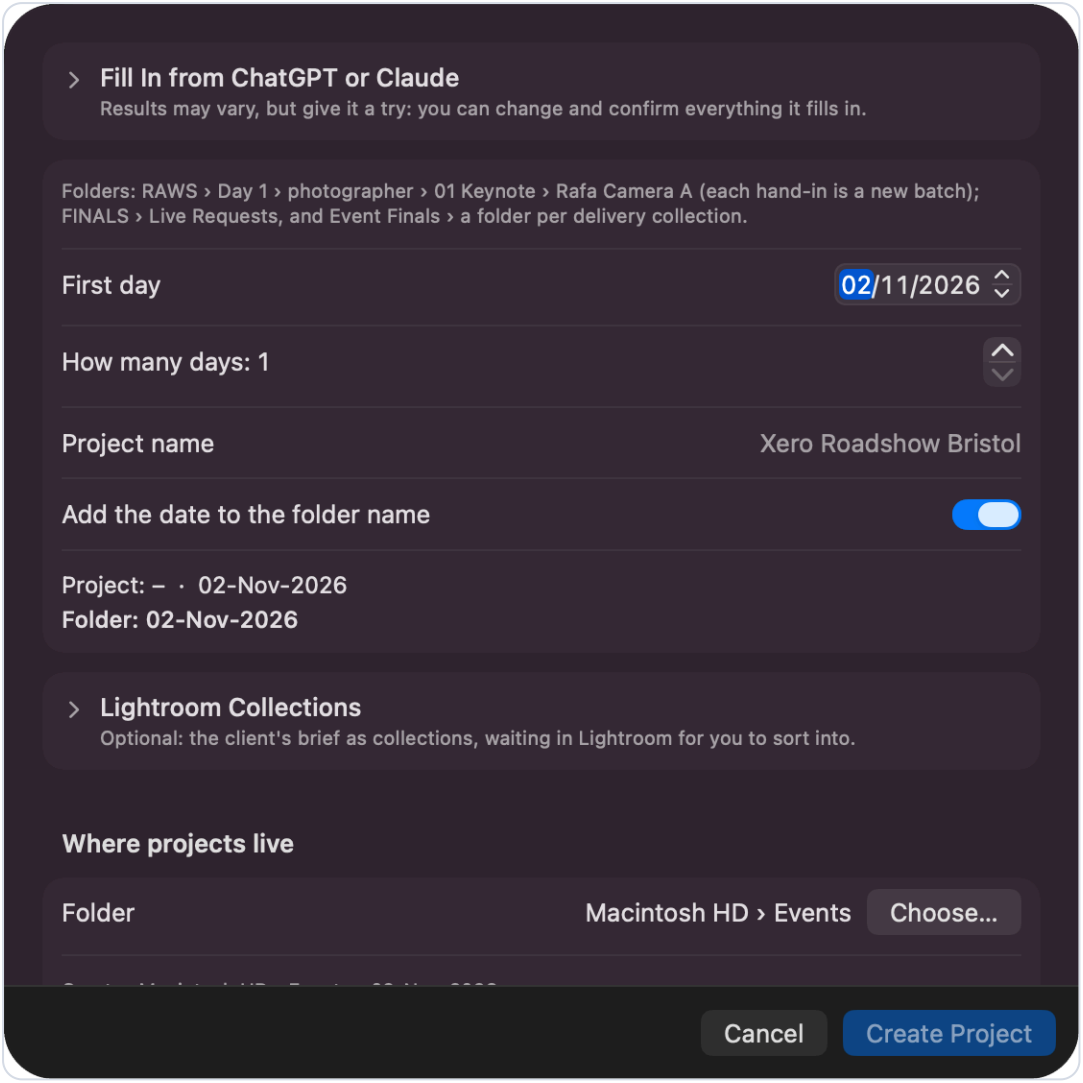
1. **You don't need to know what's on a card.** Tom hands you a card with workshops, the expo and the awards on it. It goes in as **a batch**: Day 2 › Tom › 01.
2. **Cull the batch**, pick the keepers.
3. **Lightroom gets the batch**: Import opens on it, one click, and it's its own collection, preset on: Batches › Day 2 › Tom › Batch1.
4. **The categories are already waiting**: the client's brief, set up once in Step 1 (Registration, Keynotes, Panels…). Sort the batch into them when you're ready.



PhotoEngineer never decides what a photo is. It files what came off the card; you sort it in Lightroom, where you're editing anyway.

STEP 1 · BEFORE THE EVENT

Setup: make the event

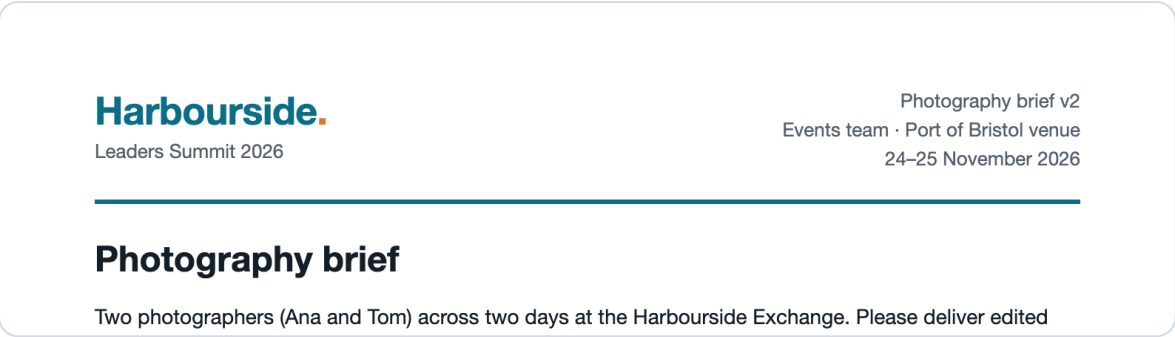


Projects › **+ New**

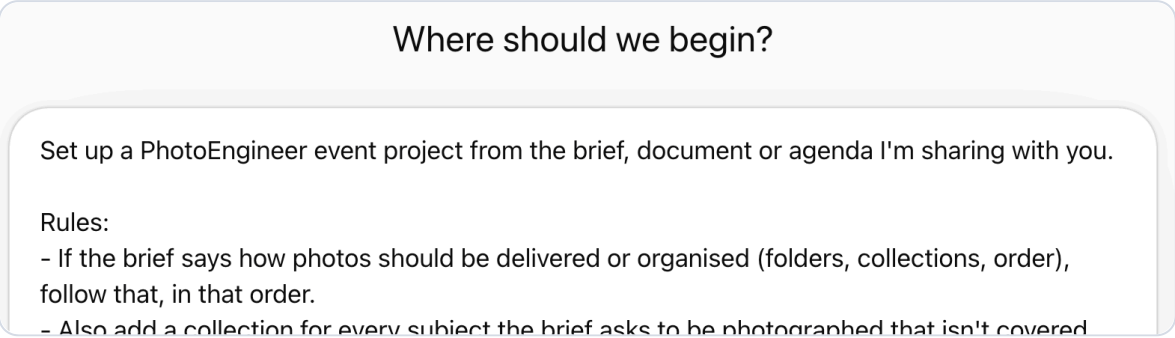
1. **First day** and **how many days**: photos are filed into Day 1, Day 2… by when they were taken.
2. **Project name**: Harbourside Leaders Summit. The folder gets the date: *HarboursideLeadersSummit_24-Nov-2026*, with RAWS and FINALS inside.
3. **Lightroom Collections**: the client's categories, typed in or filled in for you (next pages).
4. **Backup**: every photo goes to the backup drive as it comes off the card.

STEP 1 · THE QUICK WAY

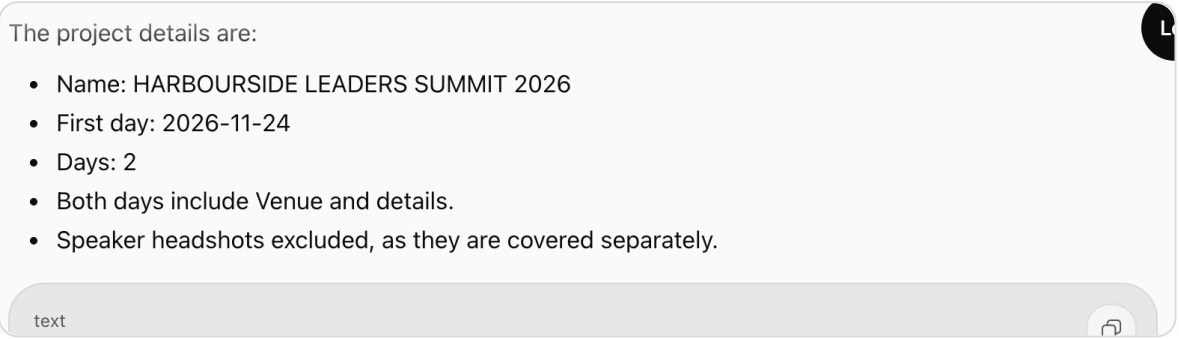
Let ChatGPT or Claude read the brief



1 The client's brief: a PDF, a Word file or the agenda's web page.



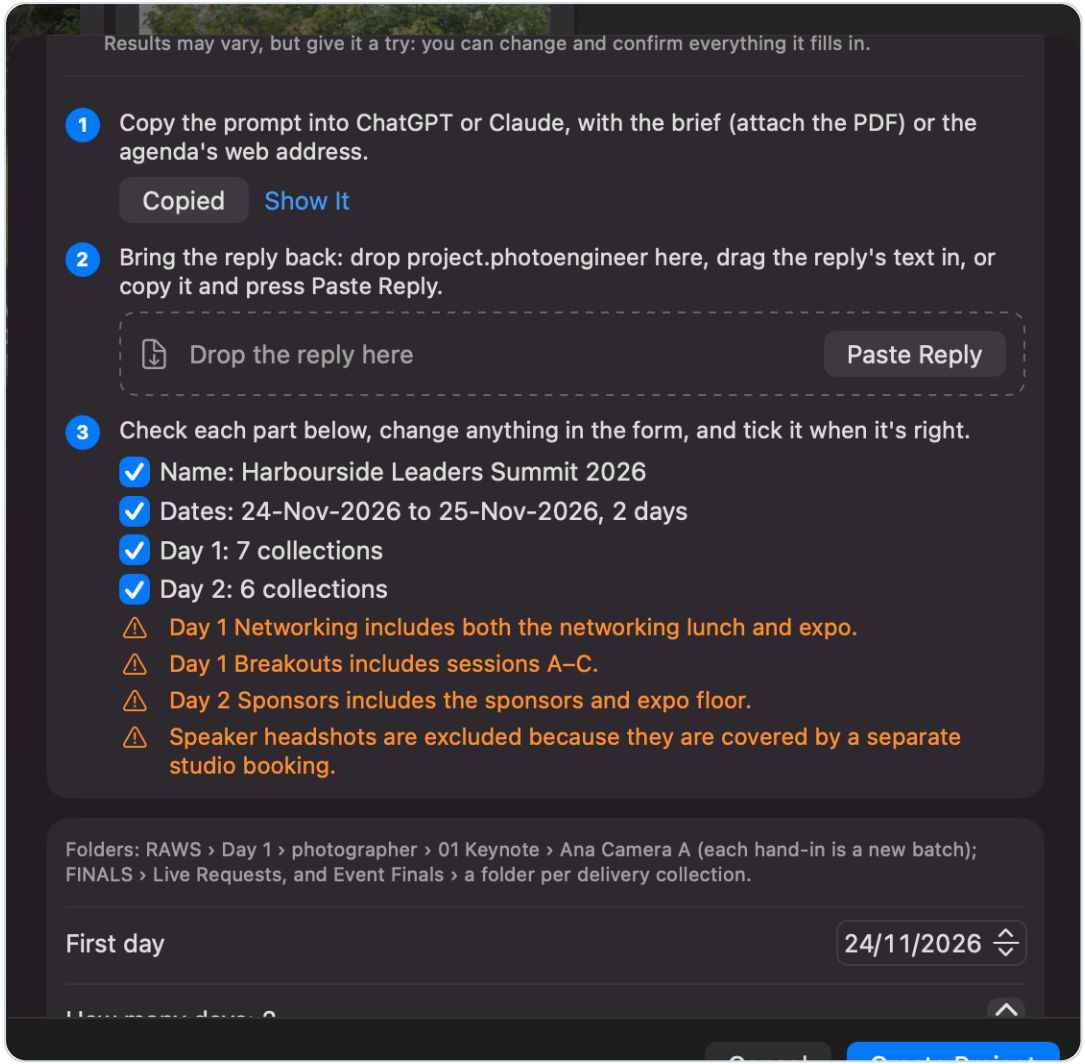
2 In New Project open **Fill In from ChatGPT or Claude › Copy Prompt**. Paste it into ChatGPT or Claude with the brief, and send.



3 It replies with a block. Copy it with its copy button (or download project.photoengineer).

STEP 1 · THE QUICK WAY

Bring the reply back and check it



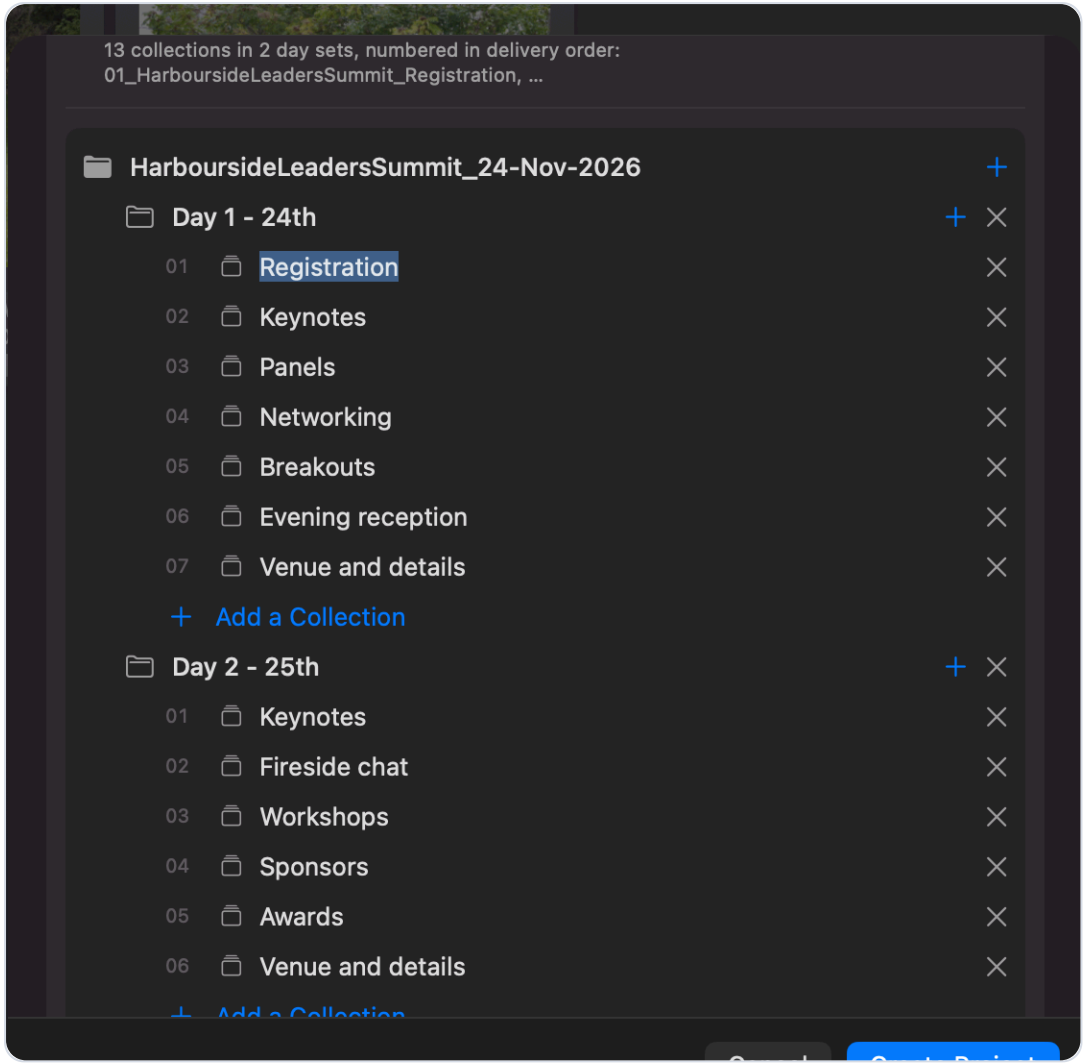
1. **Paste Reply** (or drop the file on the dashed box).
2. **Check each part and tick it**: the name, the dates, each day's collections. Change anything in the form below.
3. **Create Project** works once every part is ticked.

Results may vary. Here ChatGPT read all 11 sessions and added Venue and details to both days, as the brief asked.

A name with a year in it (like '…SUMMIT 2026')? PhotoEngineer warns that the folder would show the date twice.

STEP 1 · BEFORE THE EVENT

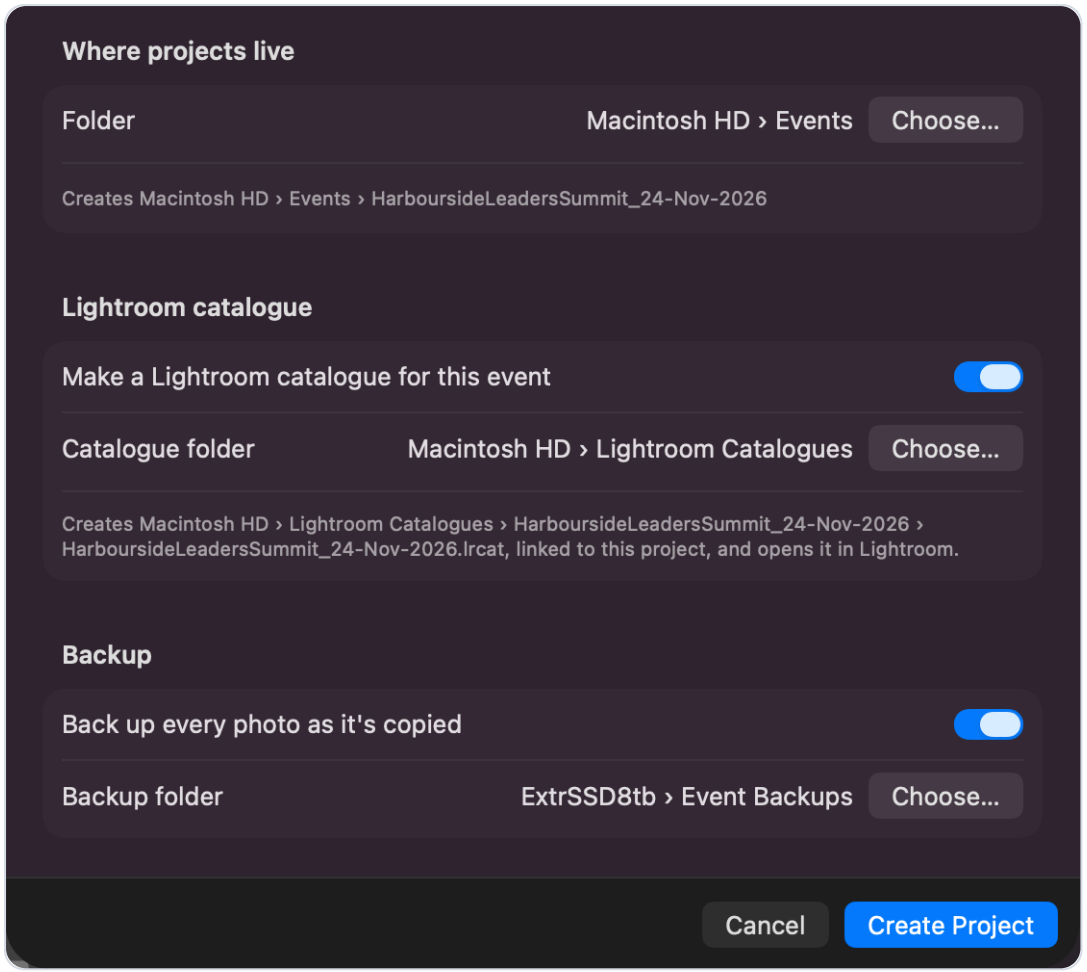
The client's categories, as a tree



1. A **day set** per day, the collections numbered **01, 02…** in delivery order.
2. **+ Add a Collection**, **×** to take one off, **+ Add a Day Set**.
3. Each becomes a Lightroom collection *and* a folder in FINALS › Event Finals, ready to export into.

STEP 1 · BEFORE THE EVENT

Setup: the Lightroom catalogue



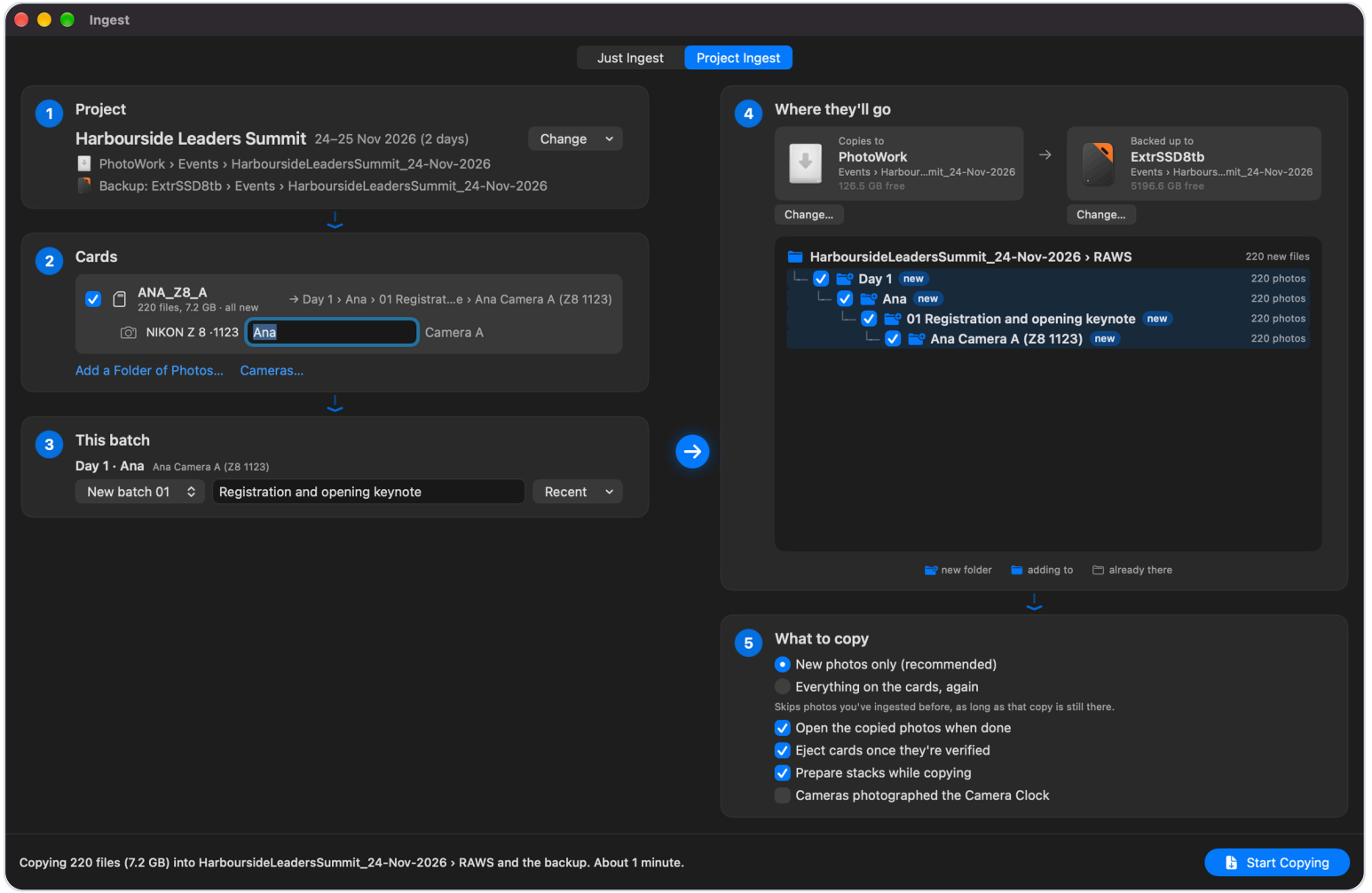
1. Leave **Make a Lightroom catalogue for this event** on, and choose where your catalogues live.
2. **Create Project**: the catalogue is made in its own folder, linked to the event, and opens in Lightroom.
3. The brief's collections are in it straight away, a set per day, empty and waiting.

> Already made one? Untick it, and in Lightroom choose Library › Plug-in Extras › **Link to a PhotoEngineer Project…**

> Lightroom closed? Nothing is lost: the jobs wait and run the next time the catalogue opens.

STEP 2 · EVERY HAND-IN

Ingest: copy the cards



1 Project
The event you're in, and its backup.

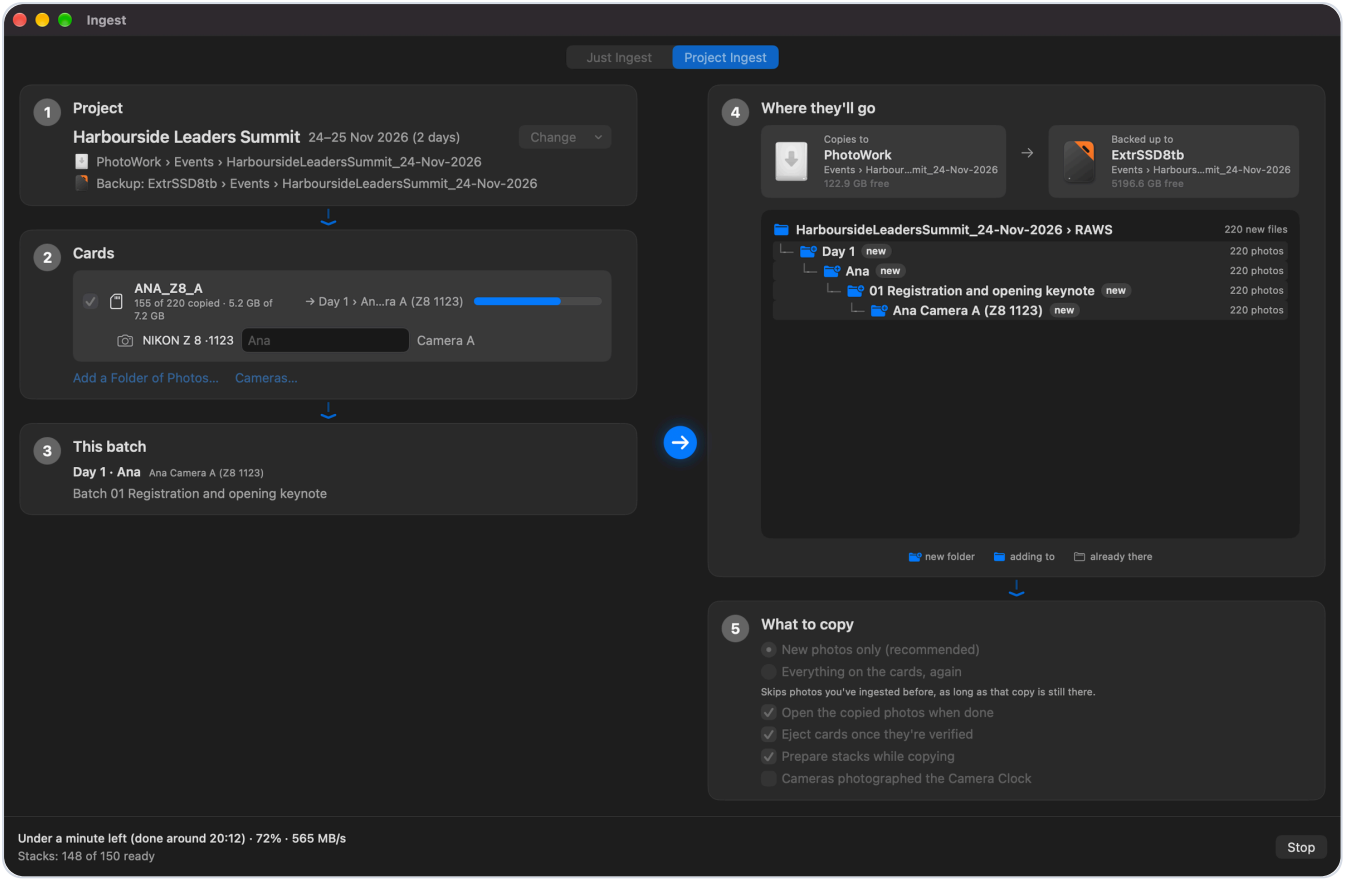
2 Cards
A camera it hasn't seen: type whose it is, once. It's known by serial number from then on.

3 This batch
A new numbered batch. A note is optional.

4–5
Where all 220 photos will land: RAWS › Day 1 › Ana › 01. Then **Start Copying**.

STEP 2 · EVERY HAND-IN

Fast, checked, and backed up

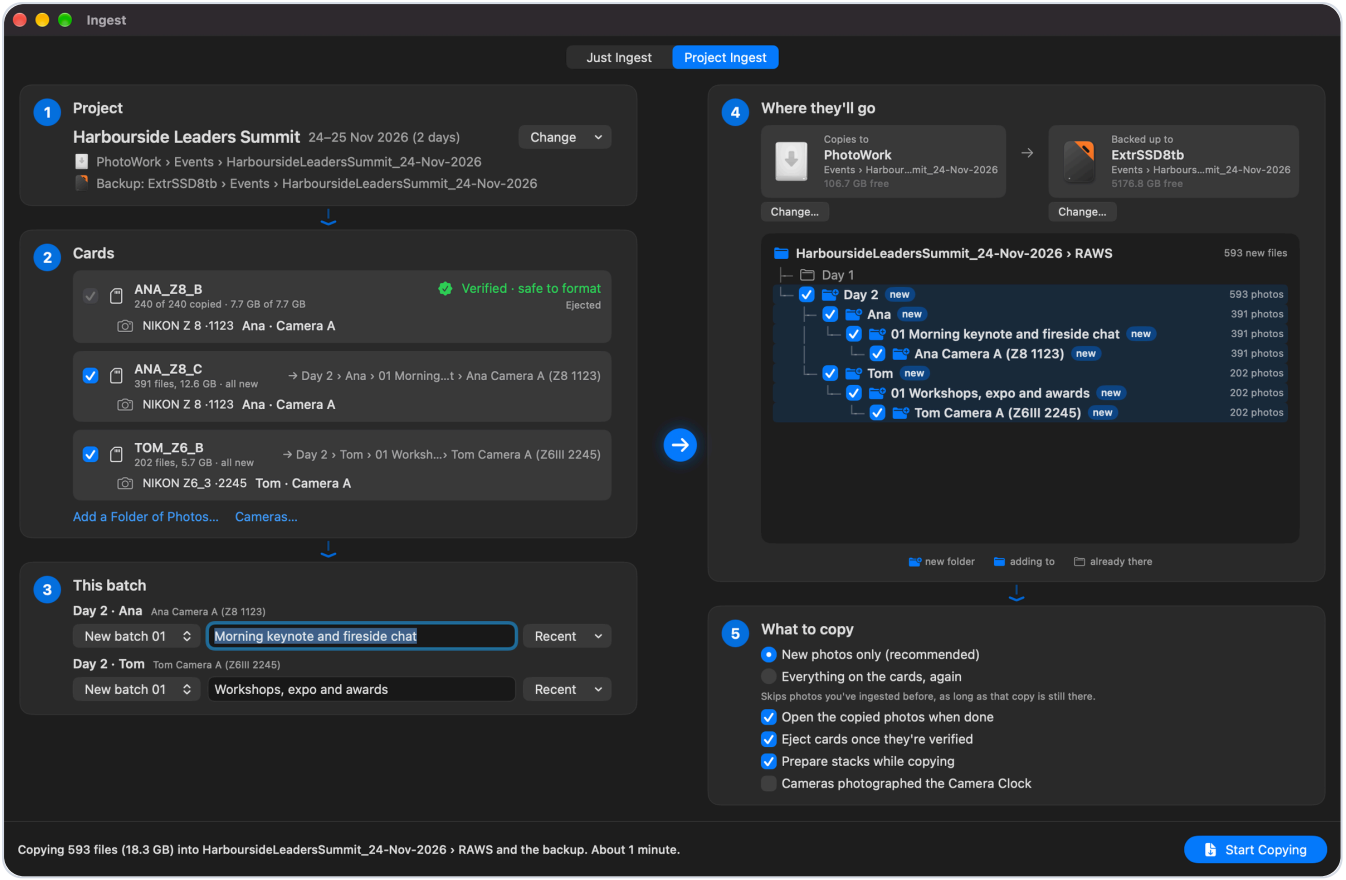


1. Copying at the card's full speed: 7.2 GB at nearly 600 MB/s here, about fifteen seconds.
2. Stacks are prepared while it copies, so the sheet opens already grouped.
3. Every photo is read back and checked, on the Mac *and* the backup drive. Then the card ejects by itself.
4. The photos open in a new tab, already stacked, ready to cull.

> Never format a card until it says **Verified**.

STEP 2 · EVERY HAND-IN

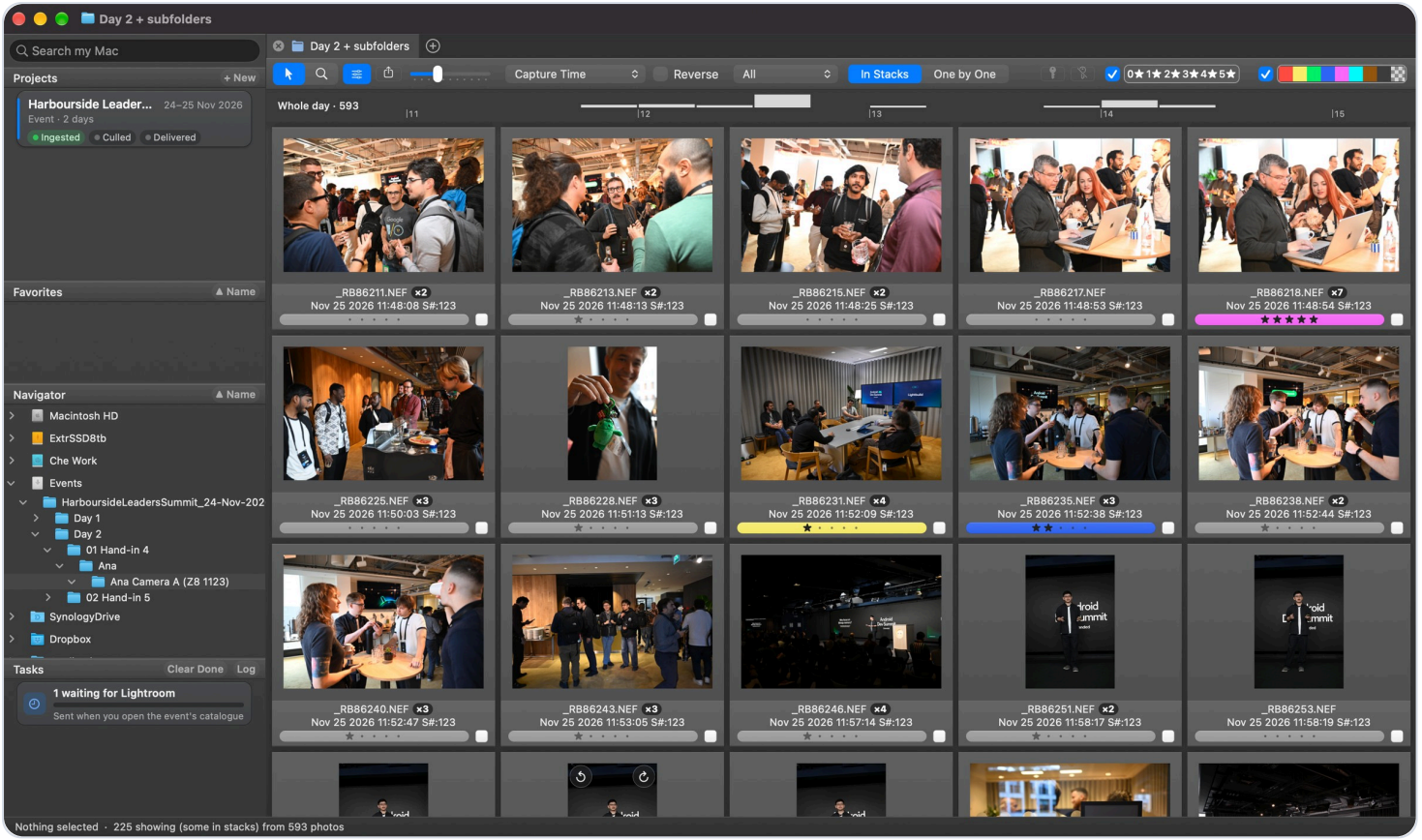
The next day, two cards at once



1. Both photographers' cards in together: each knows whose it is from the camera.
2. **Day 2** is worked out from when the photos were taken.
3. Each gets its own batch and note.

STEP 3 · EVERY HAND-IN

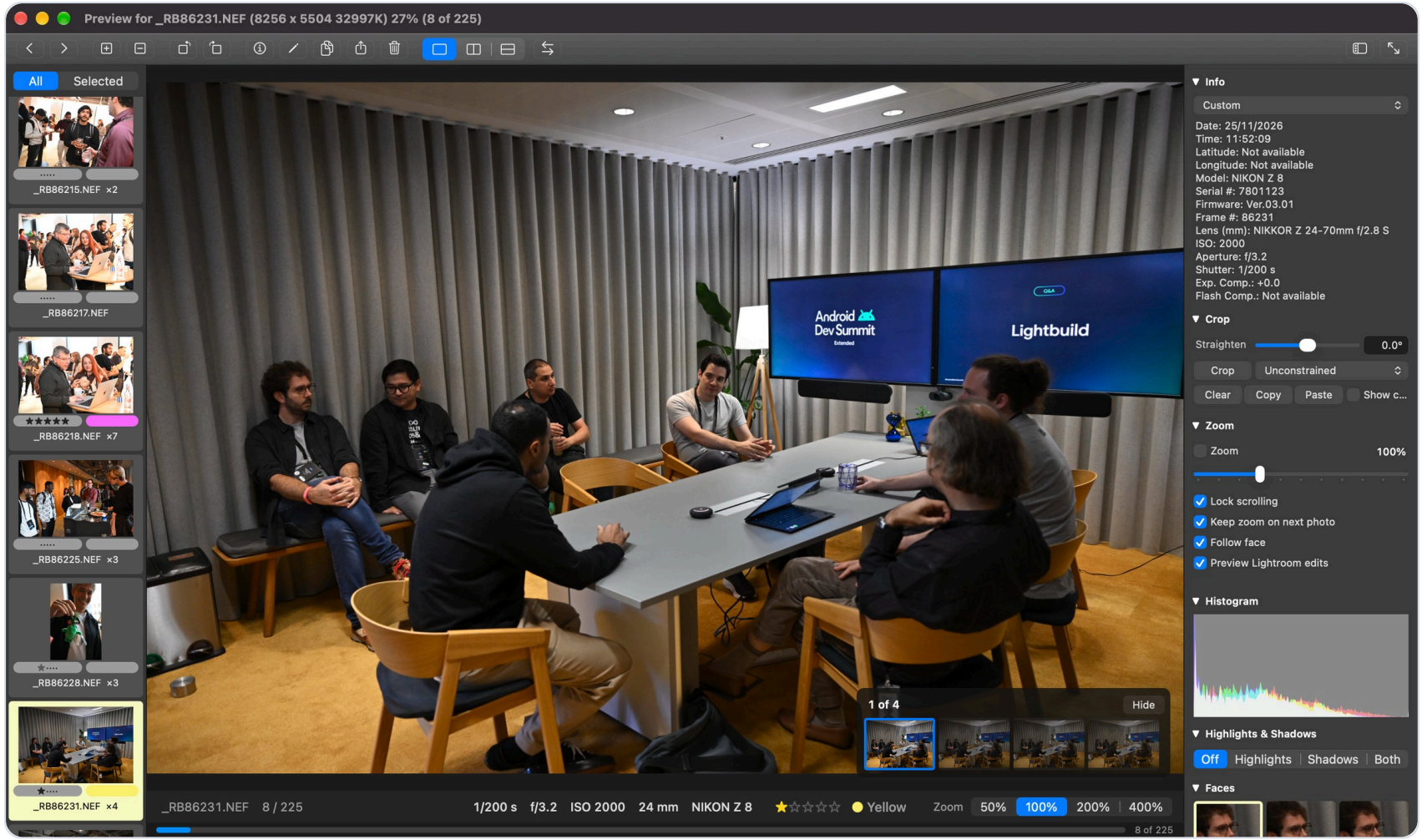
Cull: the contact sheet



1. **In Stacks**: bursts of one moment stacked, 593 photos as 225.
2. **Stars** (keys 1–5, 0 clears), **T** to tag; the colour bar is the colour class.
3. **×3, ×7**: a stack. Open it to choose the best. Closed, a stack counts as its top photo for everything you do to it.
4. The **Projects** card: the event's dates and its Ingested, Culled and Delivered ticks.
5. Ratings reach the backup within seconds.

STEP 3 · EVERY HAND-IN

Cull: the Preview



Space open · **Esc** back

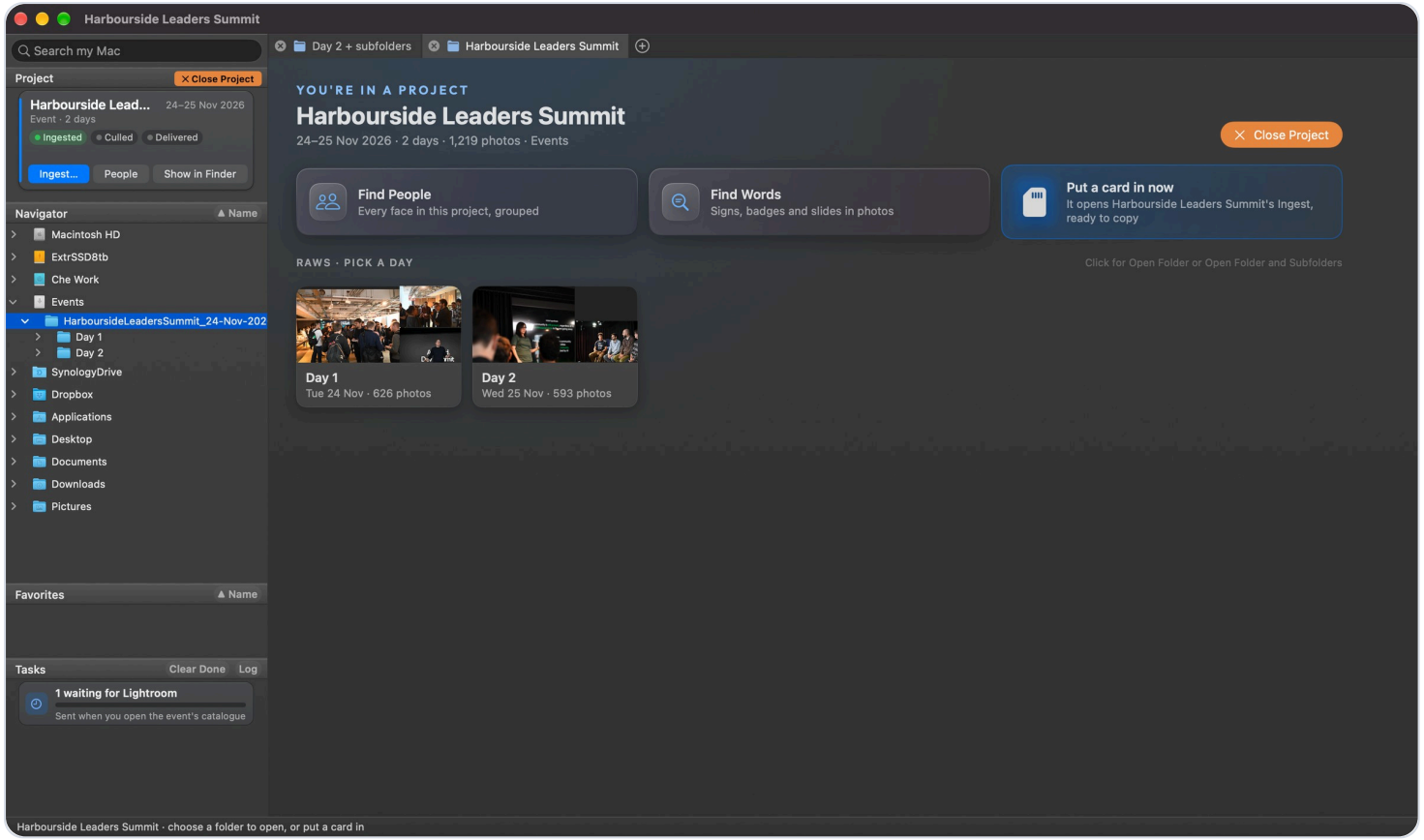
→ **←** next / previous · **↓** **↑** through a stack

1 – **5** stars · **T** tag · **Home** **End**

Info, crop, zoom and the histogram on the right

STEP 3 · ANY TIME

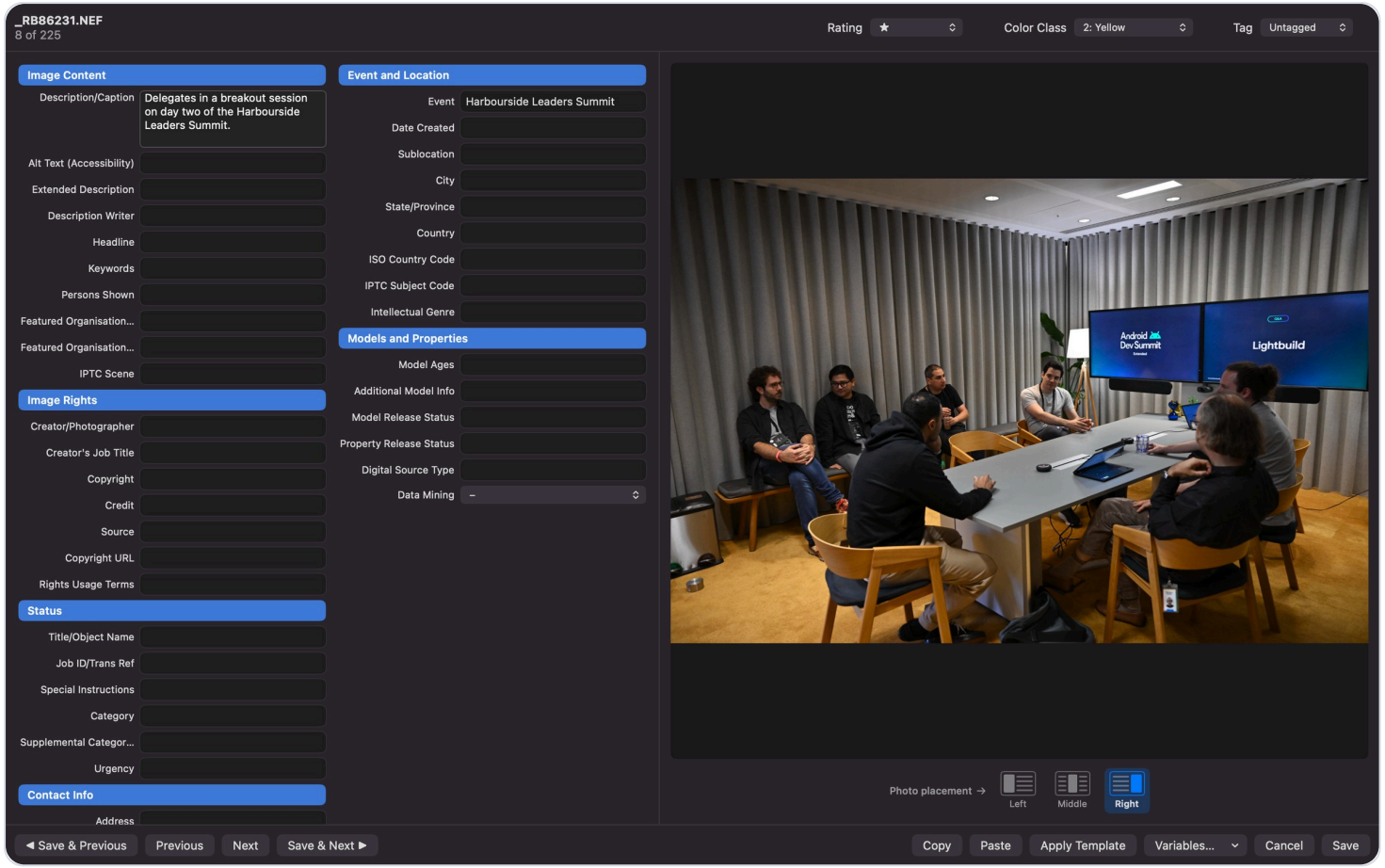
Step into the project



1. **Double-click** the event's card in Projects. The Navigator opens at its folder.
2. A tile for each **day**, with a few of its photos and the count. Click one: **Open Folder** or **Open Folder and Subfolders**.
3. **Find People** and **Find Words** for the whole event.
4. **Put a card in now** and this event's Ingest opens, already filled in.
5. **Close Project** (orange) takes you back to all your projects.

STEP 3 · ANY TIME

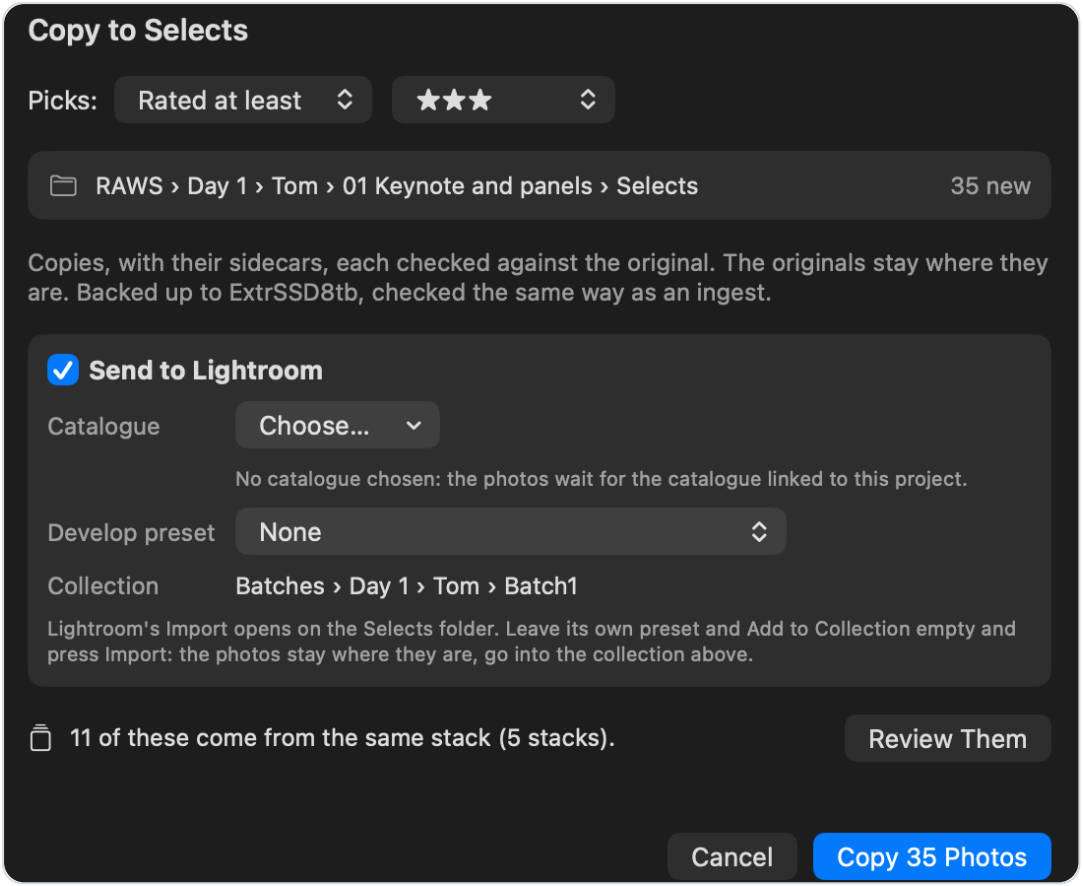
Captions with a big photo



1. Press **i** on a photo for Metadata (IPTC) Info.
2. Make the window bigger and the **photo grows with it**.
3. **Photo placement**: the photo to the left of the fields, the right, or in the middle.
4. **Save & Next** moves on to the next photo, just as big.

STEP 4 · EVERY HAND-IN

Selects: copy out the picks



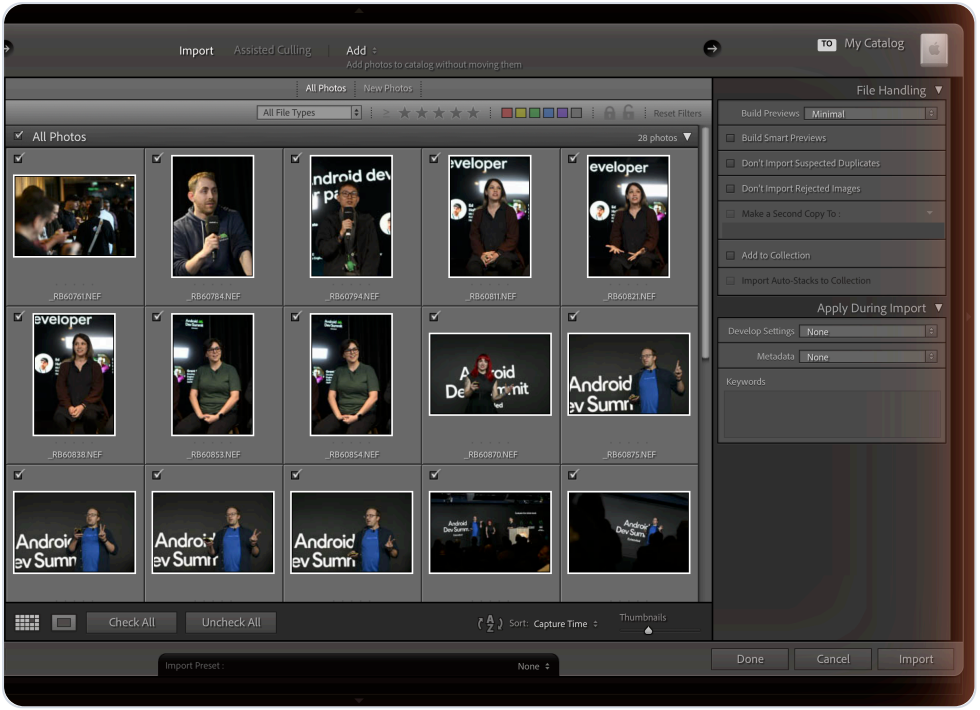
File › **Copy to Selects** (⇧⌘Y)

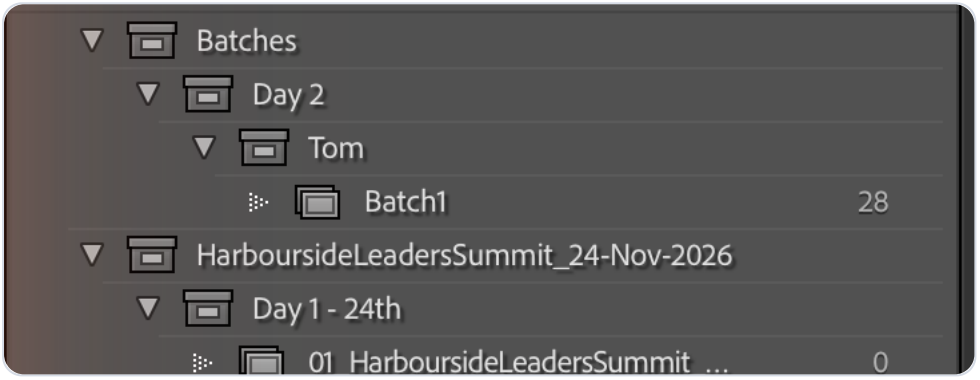
1. **Which are picks**: rated at least ★★★ here (or ★, or tagged, or a colour). It counts them as you change it: 35 of Tom's 166.
2. **Where they go**: this batch's own **Selects** folder. The originals stay put.
3. **Send to Lightroom**: the event's catalogue (green when it's open), a develop preset, and the collection the batch goes into.
4. **Copy**. Each copy is checked, then backed up.

> Lightroom's Import then opens on these Selects (Step 5).

STEP 5 · IN LIGHTROOM

Lightroom: one click, then sort and edit





1. **Import opens on the batch's Selects**, every pick ticked. Leave Develop Settings at None and Add to Collection off, and press **Import**.
2. **The batch gets its own collection**: Batches › Day 2 › Tom › Batch1, with the preset you chose.
3. **The brief's collections** are waiting in the event's set, a set per day.
4. Drag the keepers into the brief's collections, edit, then **export into FINALS › Event Finals**: the folders there have the same names.

> Lightroom only ever sees the Selects copies, never the RAWs you culled, so its stars and edits can't muddle your culling.

KEEP THIS BY THE LAPTOP

The whole day on one page

1 **Setup** Make the event › 2 **Ingest** Copy the cards › 3 **Cull** Rate as you go › 4 **Selects** Copy out the picks › 5 **Lightroom** Edit and deliver

1 Setup

Projects › + New. Name, dates, the client's categories (or Fill In from ChatGPT or Claude). Leave **Make a Lightroom catalogue** on.

2 Ingest

Cards in. Whose camera (once). Clock photos? Tick the Camera Clock box. Start Copying. Format only when **Verified**.

3 Cull

Space, then → ← · 1–5 stars · T tag · ↓ through stacks. People ⌥⌘P · words ⌥⌘F.

4 Selects

File › Copy to Selects (⇧⌘Y). Check the catalogue and preset.

5 Lightroom

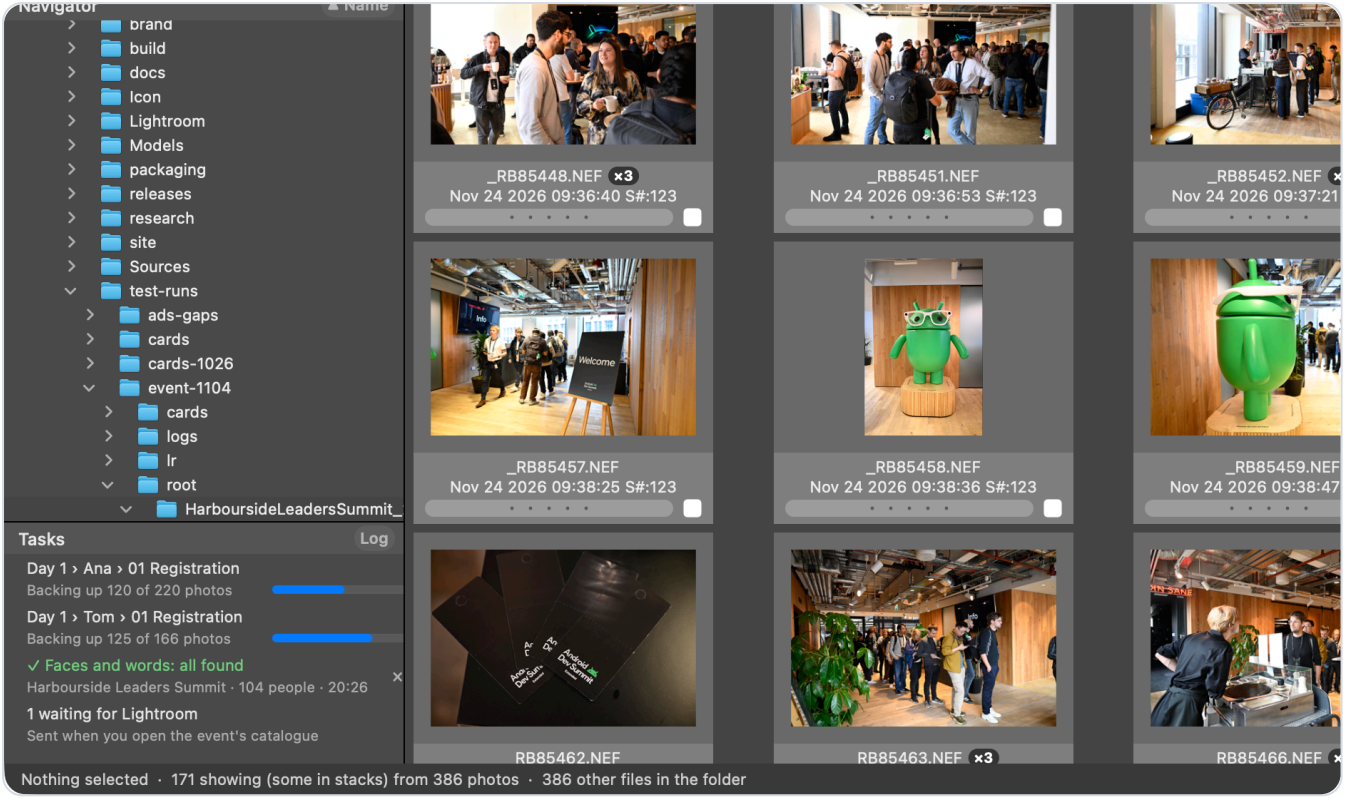
Import opens on the batch: click Import. Sort into the brief, edit, export to FINALS › Event Finals.

EVERY FACE AND EVERY WORD, FOUND WHILE YOU CULL

Find people and words

PEOPLE

Found in the background, as the cards come in



1. After each hand-in, PhotoEngineer looks at every photo for **faces** and for **words** (name badges, slides, signs, sponsors).
2. It runs while you cull: **Tasks** shows *Finding faces and words · 304 of 1,219 photos*. A 4,000-photo day takes a few minutes.
3. It all happens on your Mac. Nothing is uploaded, and there's no celebrity database: it only groups the faces in your event.

> Off for an event? Settings › Find faces and words in photos after a project ingest.

PEOPLE

Everyone at the event, most photographed first

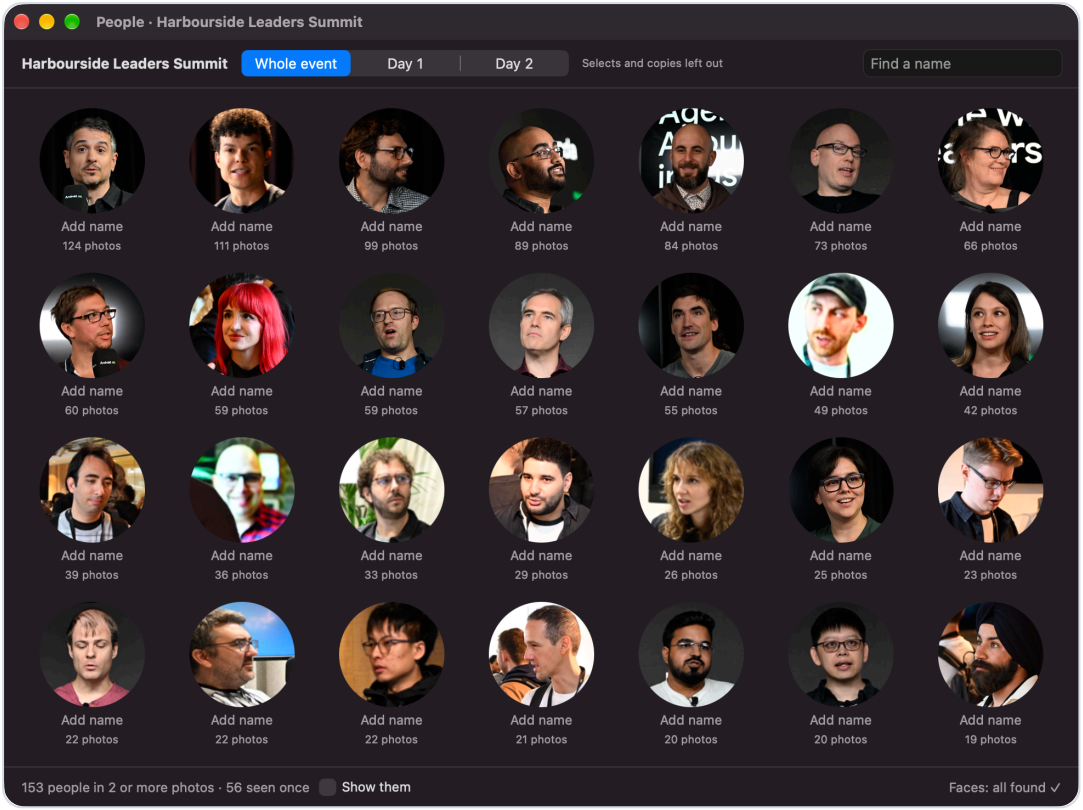


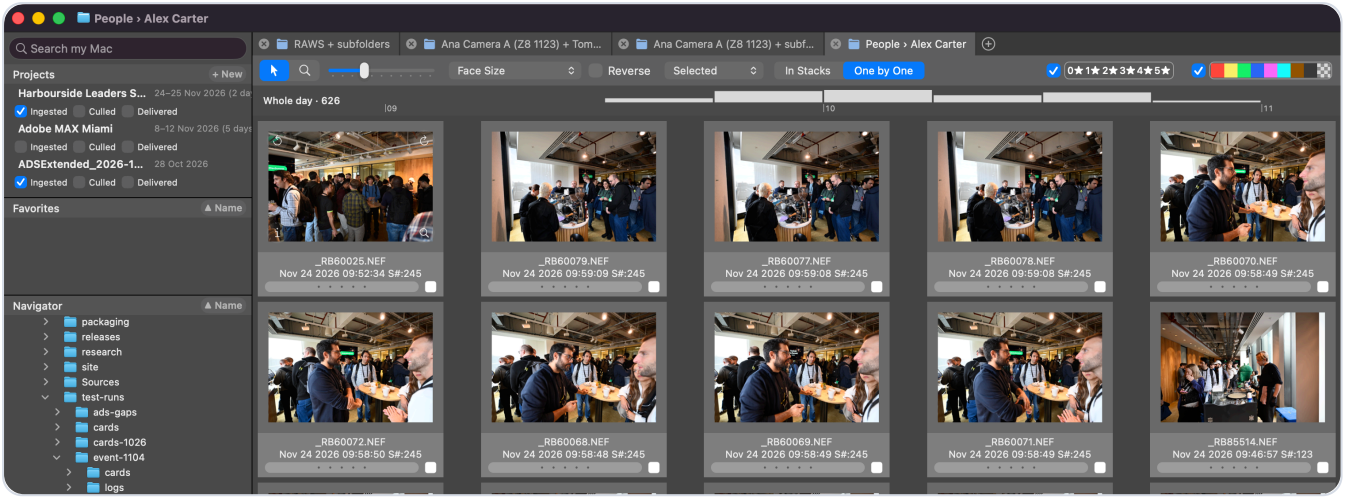
Image › **People…** (⌥⌘P)

1. One head per person, with how many photos they're in. **Whole event**, or one day.
2. **Add name**: click and type. Names stay with the event.
3. Same person twice? **Drag one head onto the other**.
4. **Click a head** for every photo of them.

> Selects and other copies are left out, so the counts are real.

PEOPLE

Every photo of one person, close-ups first

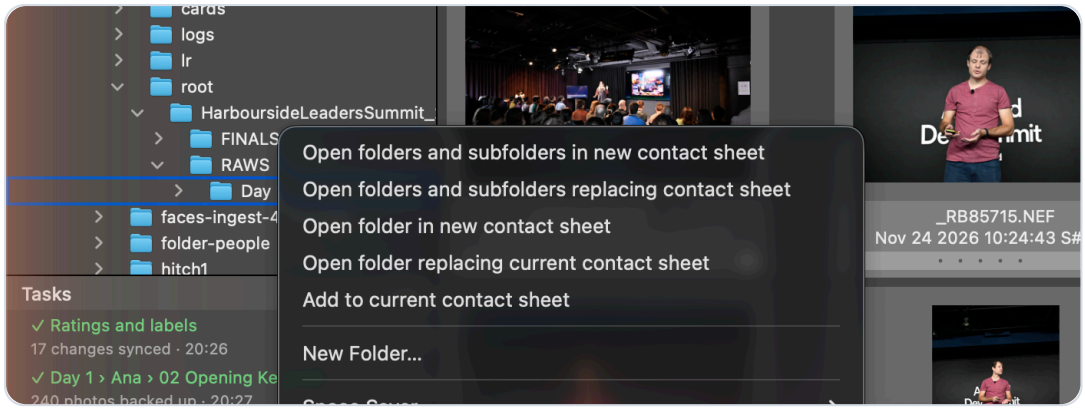


1. A tab of just their photos, sorted by **Face Size**: portraits and close-ups first, the photos where they're one face in a crowd last.
2. Not them? **Image › Not This Person** (⌥⌘X), or right-click.
3. In Preview, **zoom goes straight to their face**, photo after photo.
4. **Find** in this tab searches only their photos.



PEOPLE

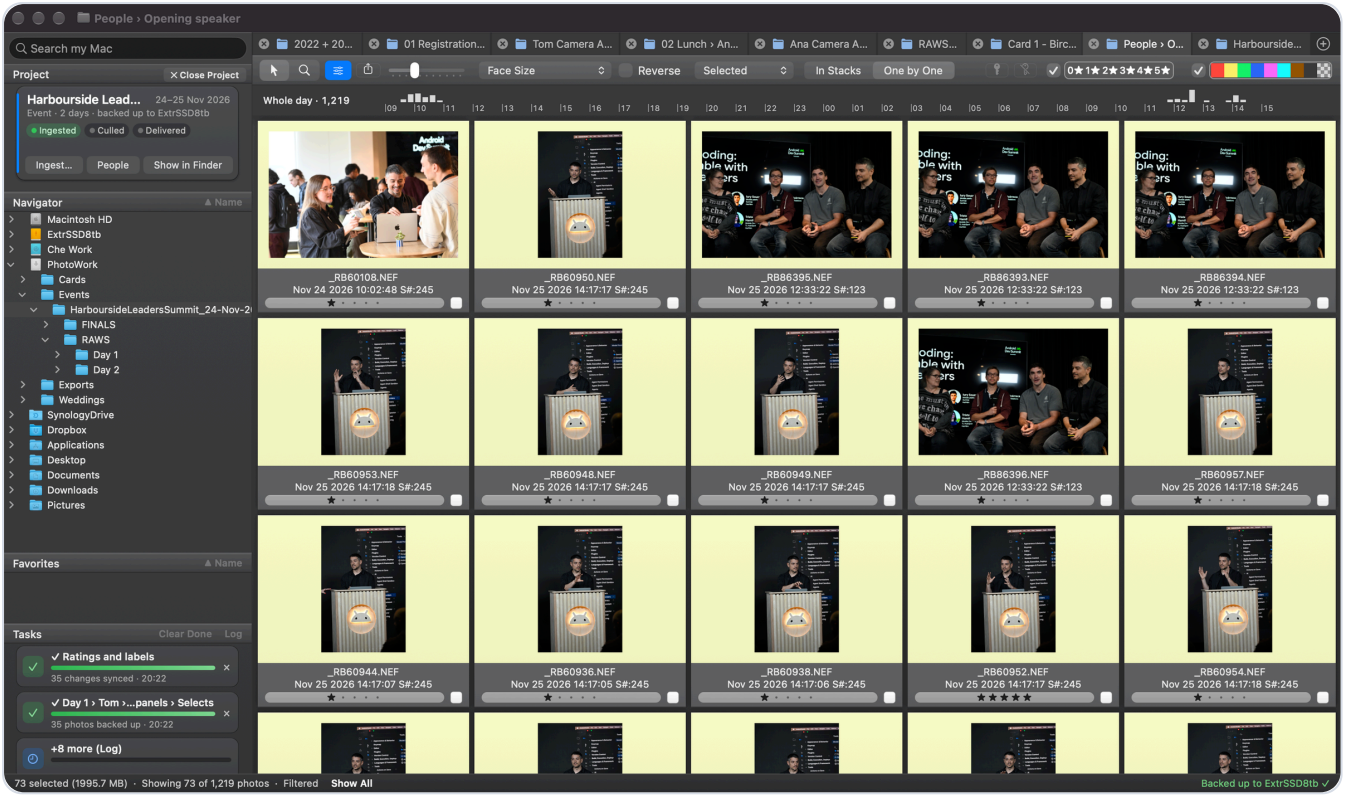
Just one batch



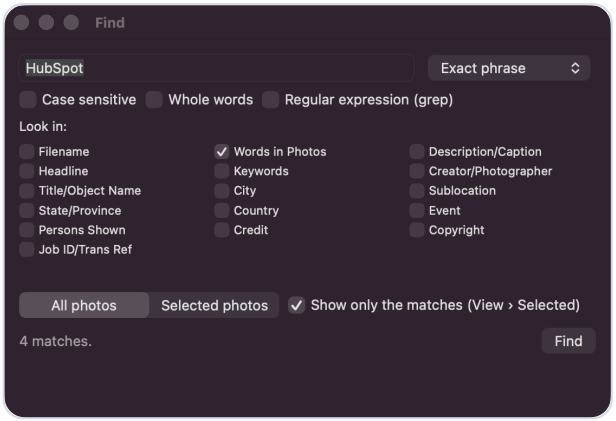
1. Right-click a folder in the **Navigator** › **People** › Folder Only… or Folder and Subfolders…
2. You see the people in that batch, and their photos from that batch.
3. Not looked at yet? It's done there and then, a few seconds a batch. Names are shared with the whole event.

WORDS IN PHOTOS

Find a badge, a sponsor or a slide



Edit › **Find Words in Photos…** (⌥⌘F)



1. Type what's written: a name off a badge, a sponsor, a session title. Here **Android** found the 73 photos with it on a slide or a badge, out of 1,219.
2. It allows for a letter or two misread (*lury* finds a badge read as *lury*).
3. Find (⌘F) looks in the words too, alongside captions and file names.

EVERY CAMERA ON THE SAME TIME, FROM ONE PHOTO EACH

Camera clocks

CAMERA CLOCKS

Photograph the Camera Clock



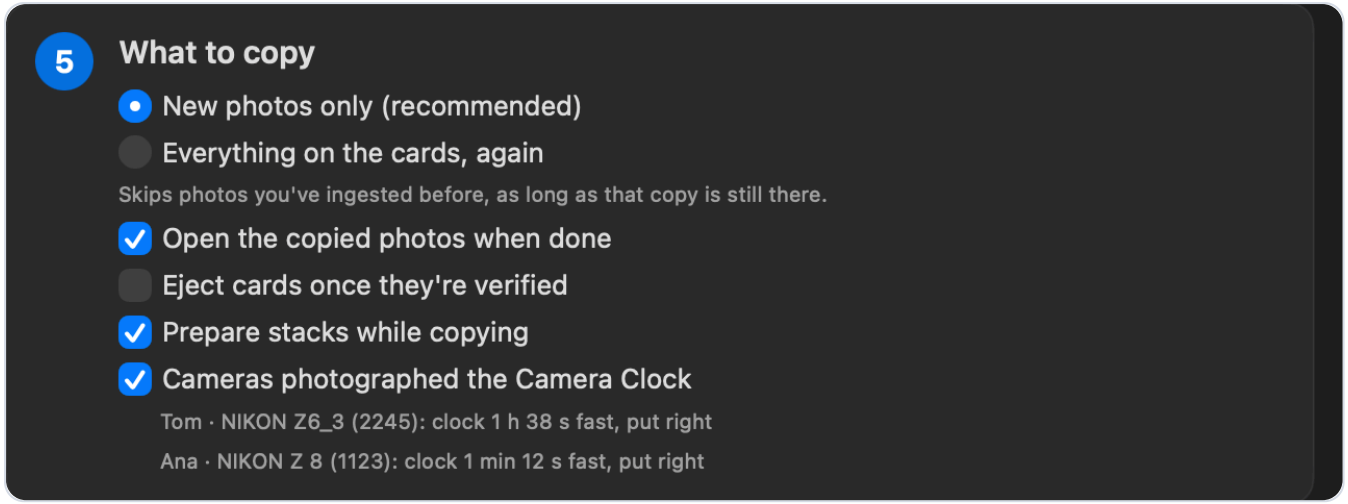
Tools › **Camera Clock (QR)…**

1. Two cameras never agree on the time. One is a minute out; the second shooter is still on summer time. Sorted by time, the day reads in the wrong order.
2. Open the Camera Clock on the laptop. **Every camera takes one photo of it**, ideally the last shot before the card is handed in.
3. Fill a quarter of the frame or more with the code, at 1/250 s or faster.
4. Shooting sport? Turn on **hundredths of a second**, so bursts from every camera interleave.



CAMERA CLOCKS

Tick one box at ingest

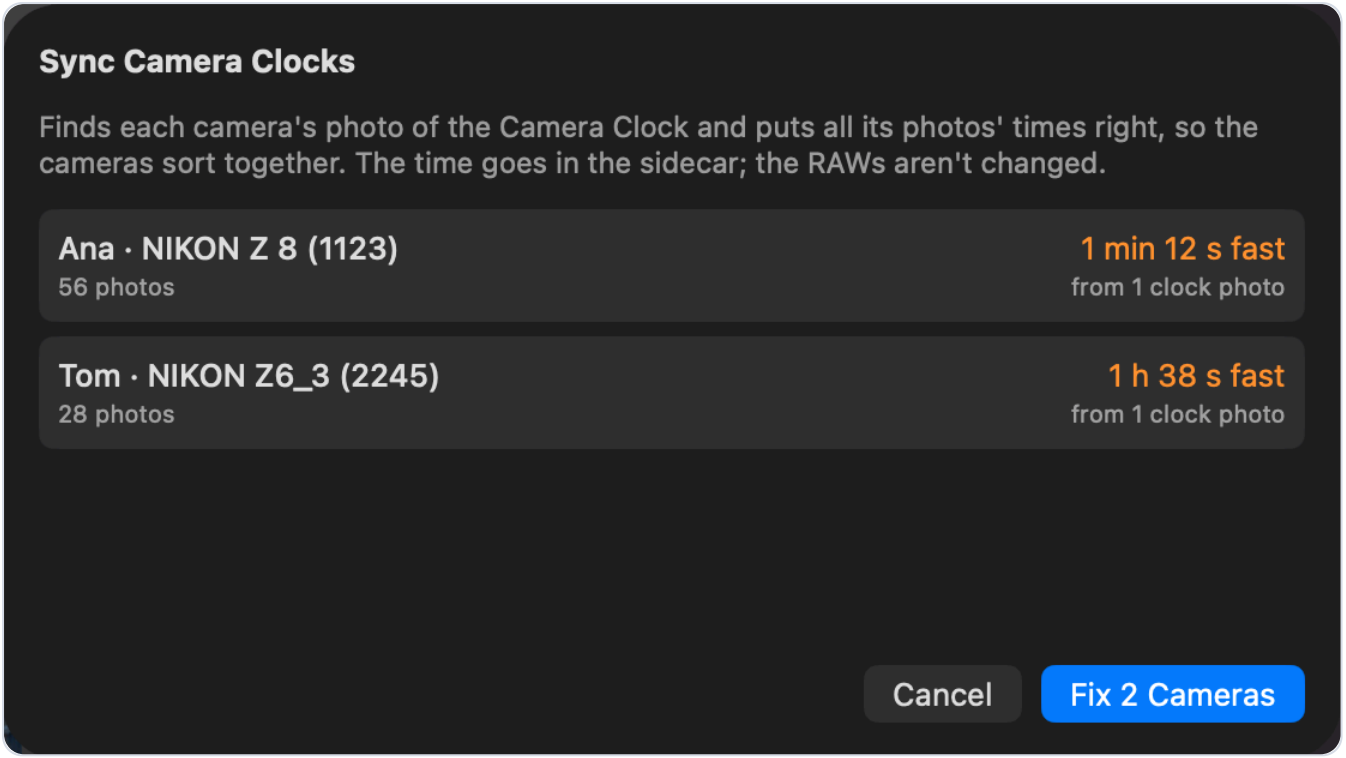


1. In Ingest, step 5: **Cameras photographed the Camera Clock**.
2. PhotoEngineer finds each camera's clock photo and reads the code: *Tom · NIKON Z6_3: clock 1 h 38 s fast, put right*.
3. The times are fixed before anything is copied, so day folders, batches and order are right first time.
4. A camera with no clock photo is named, with a button to look through every photo.

> The corrected time goes in the sidecar. The RAW files aren't changed.

CAMERA CLOCKS

Or put them right afterwards



Tools › **Sync Camera Clocks…**

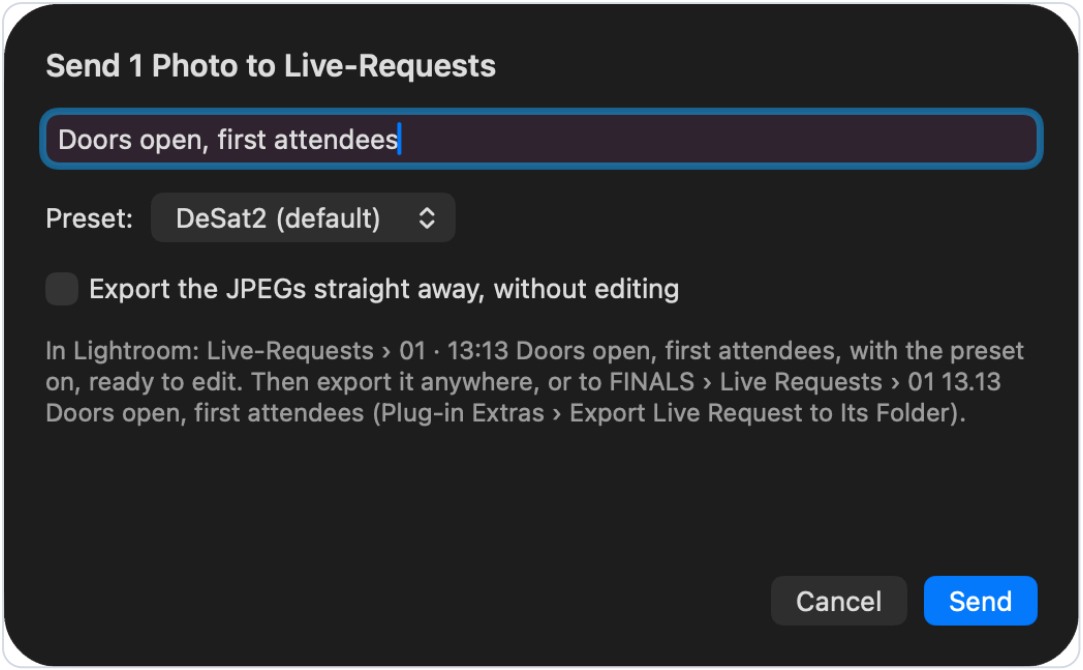
1. On any sheet: each camera's error, read from its clock photo. **Fix 2 Cameras** moves every photo from that camera by that much.
2. Run it again and each camera says **right**: there's nothing left to fix.
3. A different time zone, a summer-time change, a camera reset to 2020 after its battery died: the same one photo puts it right.

Nothing to read off a screen and nothing to type. In Lightroom or Photo Mechanic you read the clock and type the time in, camera by camera.

WHEN YOU'RE READY FOR MORE

Advanced

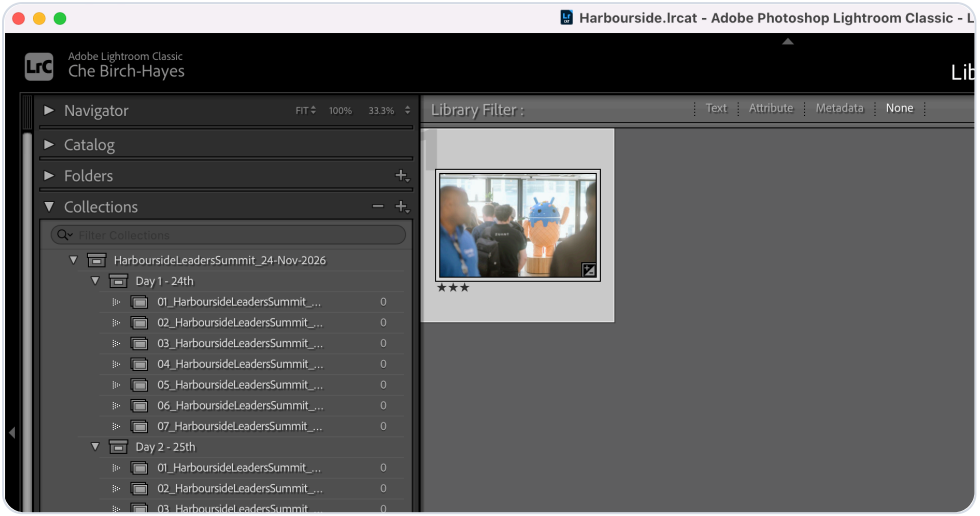
The client wants one now: send it



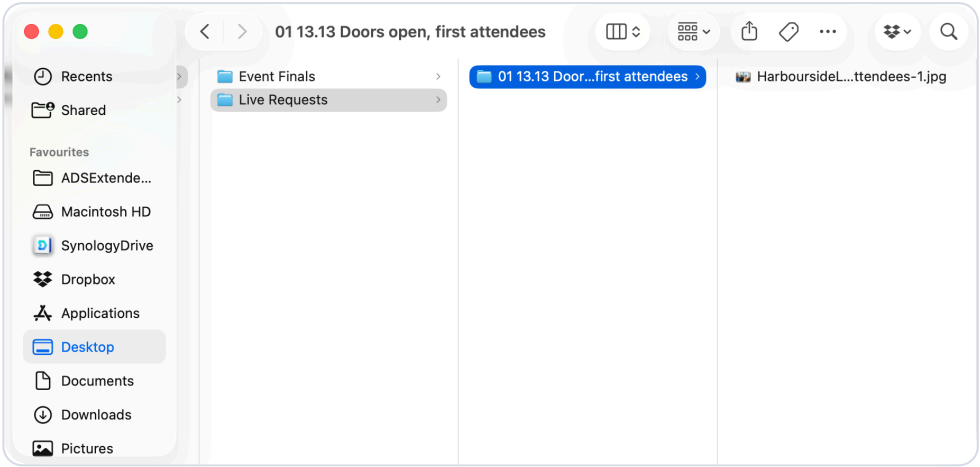
Right-click the photo › **Send to Live-Requests…**

1. **Name it** as the client asked: *Doors open, first attendees*. That name becomes its Lightroom collection *and* its folder.
2. The **preset** it lands with.
3. Leave **Export straight away** off: it goes to Lightroom **to be edited**.

Edit it, then export it to its own folder



1. It lands in its **own collection** in the Live-Requests set, preset on, ready to edit.
2. **Library › Plug-in Extras › Export Live Request to Its Folder** sends it to **FINALS › Live Requests › 01 13.13 Doors open, first attendees** and shows it in Finder.



ADVANCED · PEACE OF MIND

What's backed up, and when

What	When it reaches the backup drive	Checked?
RAWs off the cards	As they're copied (Step 2)	Yes, read back and compared
Stars, tags, colours	Within seconds of you setting them	Yes
Selects	As they're copied (Step 4)	Yes
Exports (Save As into FINALS › Exports)	As soon as each one lands in FINALS	Size and date
Live-request and Event Finals JPEGs	As soon as each one lands in FINALS	Size and date
Photoshop TIFFs / PSDs	As soon as Photoshop saves	Size and date

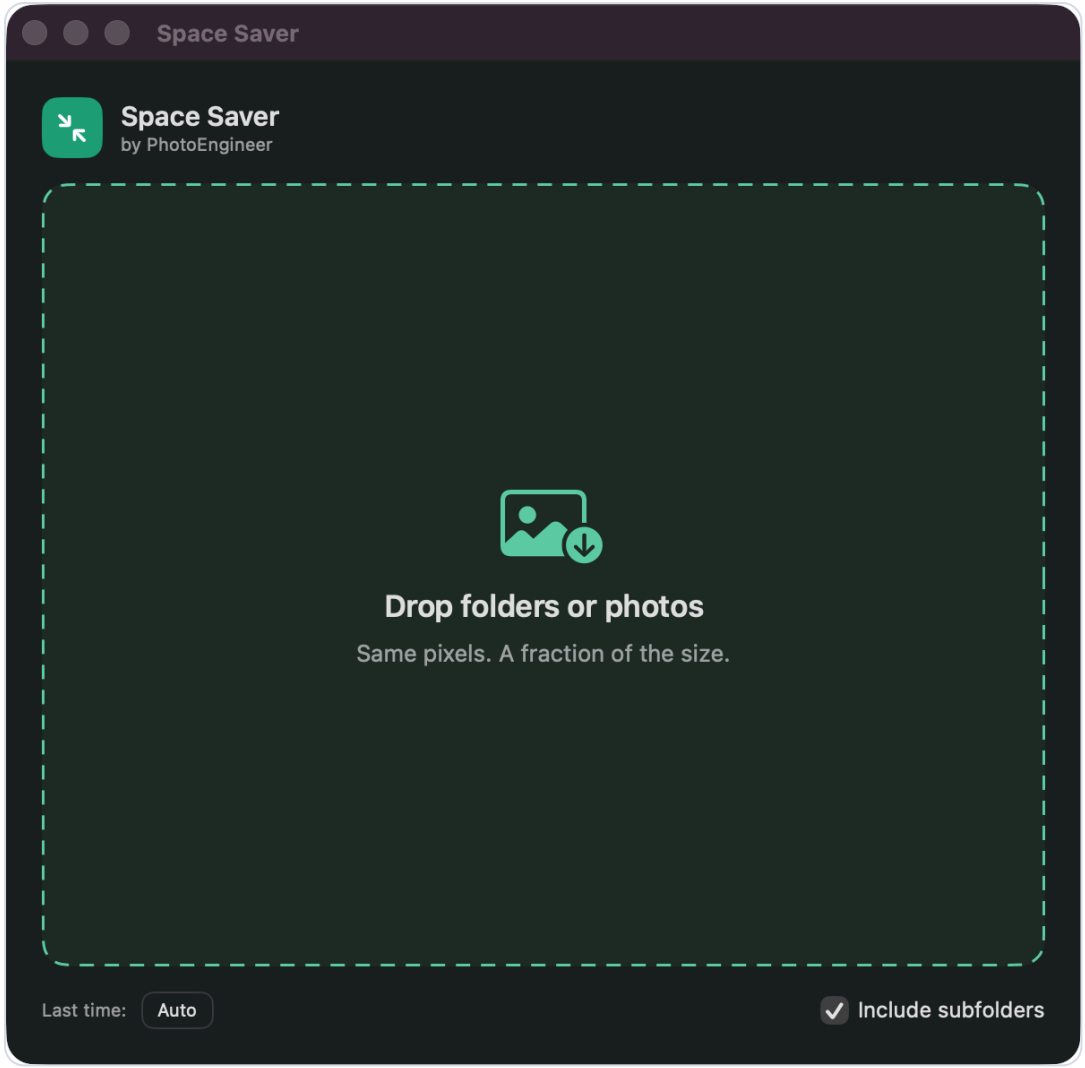
Backup drive unplugged? It waits and catches up when it's back. Tasks says what's left.

SMALLER JPEGS, SAME PIXELS

Space Saver

SPACE SAVER

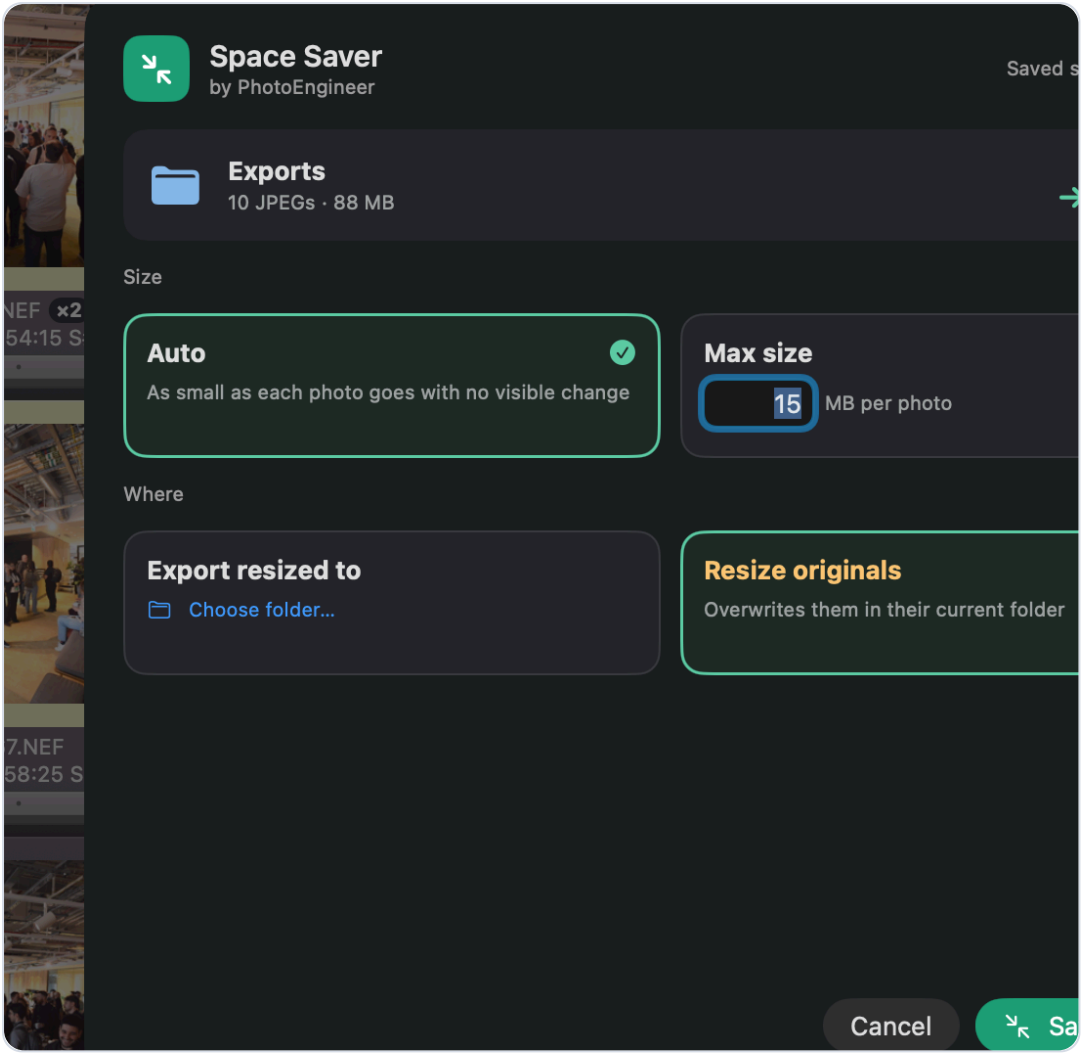
Drop a folder in



1. Right-click the Dock icon › ✦ **Space Saver**, or File › Space Saver, or right-click a folder or photos.
2. Drop folders or photos from Finder, the Desktop or a contact sheet. Subfolders are included unless you untick it.
3. Only JPEGs are touched. RAW, TIFF, PNG and HEIC are left alone.

SPACE SAVER

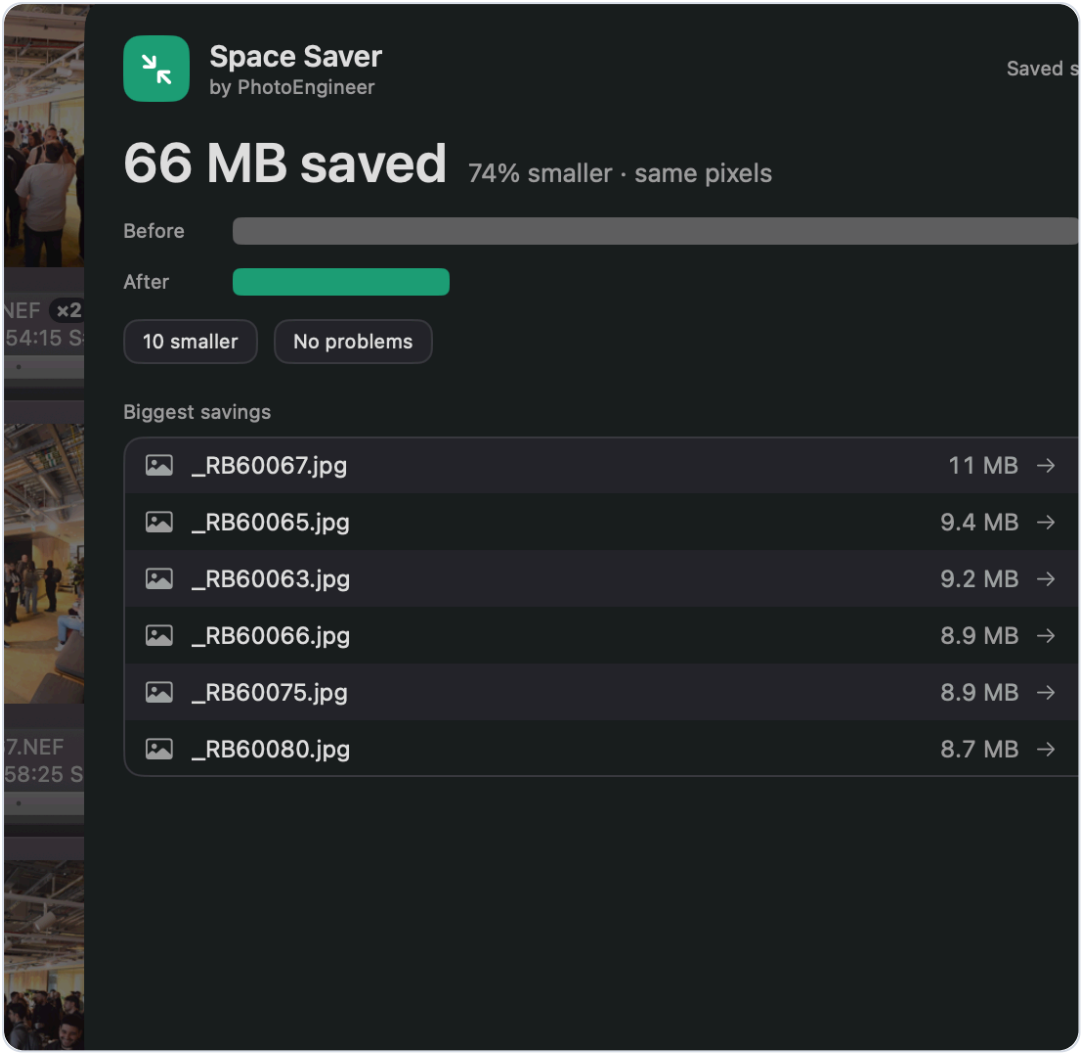
Choose a size and where



1. It works out the saving before you start: **10 JPEGs, 86 MB → about 23 MB**.
2. **Auto**: as small as each photo goes with no visible change. **Max size**: every photo under, say, 15 MB, with a warning if that would show.
3. **Export resized to** a folder you choose, or **Resize originals** in place (they're overwritten).

SPACE SAVER

Done in seconds, same pixels



1. Here, ten full-size exports: **86 MB → 23 MB, 74% smaller**, every one at the same pixel size. The biggest savings are listed.
2. The event's 257 full-size exports went the same way: **2.1 GB → 544 MB, 75% smaller**, in under a minute.
3. **Drop More** takes the next lot.

> Like JPEGmini, each photo is made as small as it can go before a difference would be visible. Against JPEGmini Pro on 21 event photos: the same total size, and better quality on the hardest photo.

BEYOND CULLING

More that's built in

Keyboard shortcuts PhotoEngineer menu

Any command, any keys; save sets.

A set for captioning, a set for culling.

`^⌘K`

{clipboardtext} in any template

Whatever text you copied, in a name or caption.

Copy the session title, rename the batch with it.

`Harbourside_20261125_0009`

Data Mining Metadata Template

Say whether the photos may be used to train AI.

No AI / machine-learning training.

`plus:DataMining`

Save As WebP ⌘S

WebP for the web, camera and date kept.

Small images for the client's site.

`_RB69857.webp`

Email from Gmail ⇧⌘E

Sign in with Google: no app password to make.

Send a few picks to the client.

`Sign in with Google`

Hide a drive right-click a card in Ingest

Your own SSD stops showing up as a card.

Show Hidden Drives brings it back.

`Hide This Drive from Ingest`

Find ⌘F

Search names, every caption field and the words in the photos.

Every photo of one speaker.

`RB6111 · 6 matches`

Slide Show Image › Slide Show

Full screen; rate and tag as it plays.

Show the client the picks.

`2 seconds · fade`

Metadata Template ⌘I

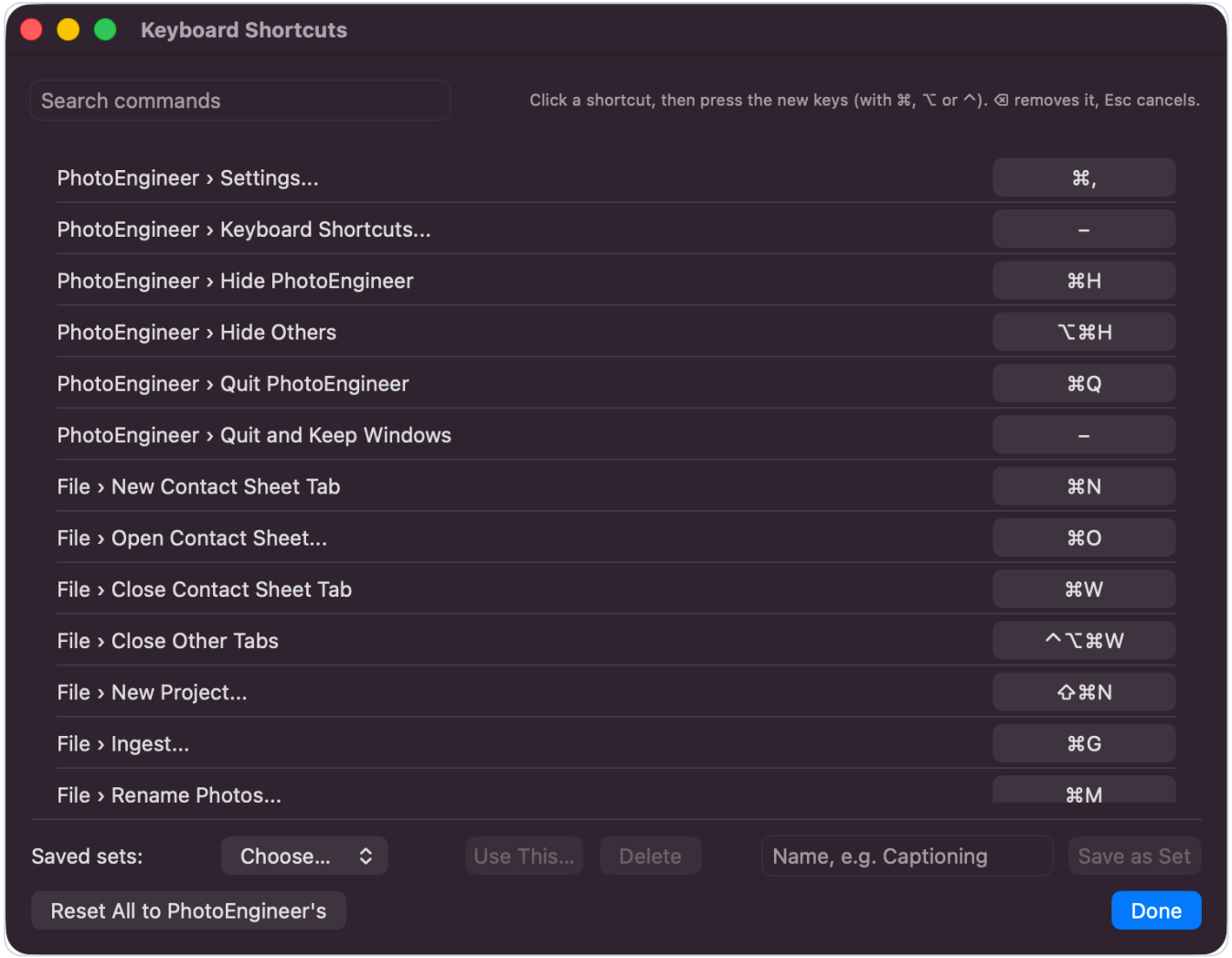
Credit, copyright and contact on every photo.

Agencies need the credit in the file.

`© 2026`

BEYOND CULLING

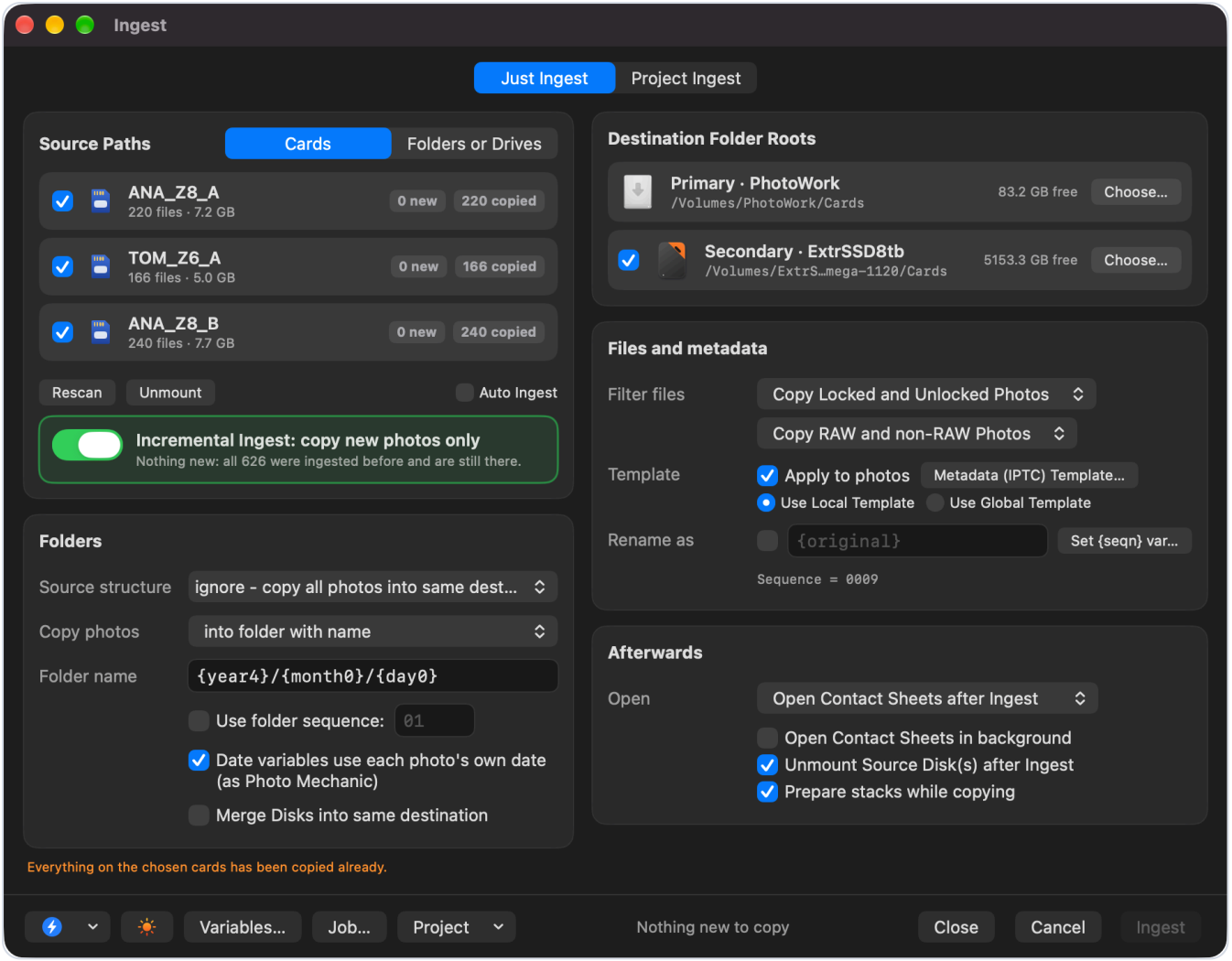
Your own keyboard shortcuts



1. **PhotoEngineer › Keyboard Shortcuts…**: every menu command with its keys.
2. Click a shortcut and press the new keys (with ⌘, ⌥ or ^). A key already in use moves over, and you're told.
3. **Save as Set**, switch sets any time, or reset to PhotoEngineer's own.

BEYOND CULLING

Ingest without a project



1. Not an event? **File › Ingest (⌘G)** opens the classic Ingest, laid out like Photo Mechanic's. Inside a project's folder, ⌘G opens that project's Ingest instead.
2. **Cards** lists every card that's in; **Folders or Drives** takes a second shooter's USB stick, a client's drive or a folder.
3. Each card says how many photos are **new** and how many were **copied** before.
4. **Incremental Ingest**, right under the cards, copies only what's new. Switched off it turns amber, so nobody copies a card twice by accident.