

## SO YOU WANNA BE A PHOTOSHOP EXPERT!

If you have considered altering a photographic image on your computer in the last decade or so, then you must have contemplated using Adobe Photoshop. Photoshop is the world's premiere application for manipulating bitmapped images. A bitmapped image can be described as a kind of mosaic. Think of each tile of the mosaic as being a different color. In the digital world, the tiles are called pixels. This type of image is different from a vector image, which is created in an illustration program like Illustrator or Freehand. Vector images are made up of mathematical computations, and are infinitely scalable. Indeed, Photoshop is the industry standard for bitmapped images, and every advertising company and service bureau relies on it. If you are a graphic designer, desktop publisher, or web designer, you will absolutely need to learn Photoshop to be taken seriously. Photographers too will find it indispensable. How many times have you taken that perfect vacation, where you expect you will shoot your best stock photos, only to experience a week long period of gray skies, and hazy sunsets? Well, no problem if you know how to use Photoshop! You can easily change that gray sky into a perfect one. Or, how about dropping in the sunset that never materialized. Of course, if all you want to do is print pictures of Grandma, Photoshop may be overkill. In that case, stay with a consumer level product like Photo Deluxe. But if you need to do color correction or retouching, there's nothing like the real thing.

Because Photoshop is such a powerful program, it does require a relatively powerful computer. You don't need the absolute latest computer to work effectively, but of course, the faster the processor, the less time you will spend waiting for things to happen. Buy as much RAM as you can afford, and make sure you also have a good amount of free disk space. Random Access Memory (RAM) is the kind of memory that Photoshop likes best. Photoshop will use all the RAM you can give it. If it runs out of RAM, it will then go to the scratch disk (which we will address in a minute) to make operations possible. Do not try to run Photoshop if you have less than 256 megabytes of RAM in your system. If you want to work as fast, and as efficiently as possible, you will want to assign approximately 3 to 5 times the amount of RAM

as the size of the file you are working on. In other words, if you are working on a 10 megabyte file, you would ideally want to have 30-50 mgs of RAM assigned to Photoshop. If you are using Mac OS 10, you will not have to assign memory to Photoshop. OS 10 assigns memory to a program based on how much free RAM you have. In Windows, Photoshop's default setting allocates 60% of available RAM (RAM not being used by the operating system, or anything else) for its own use. (50% of total physical RAM on Windows). You can change this amount in the Memory and Image Cache Preferences dialog box. Choose **File>Preferences>Memory** and **Image Cache**. In Windows, a RAM setting of 60% or lower may improve performance. Experiment with different RAM settings to see what works best for you. Photoshop will use the scratch disks to allow it to complete operations that cannot be performed completely in RAM. Photoshop's virtual memory technology lets you open and manipulate large images by swapping image data to a hard drive if there is not enough RAM to contain the data. Any hard drive can be designated as a scratch disk. Working from the scratch disk takes considerably longer than working in RAM. You can specify up to 4 scratch disks, and without getting too technical here, just make sure that your scratch disks are either empty drives or partitions, or that they are regularly defragmented and optimized with a disk utility such as Norton Speed Disk, or Tech Tool Pro.

Now that you have decided that Photoshop is going to help make your photographs sell better than Pokémon toys, how are you going to learn the program? You have a lot of choices, but it really depends on your style of learning as to how you go about it. Some people are extremely self-motivated and disciplined. These people can sit down with a manual and a few books, and teach themselves. Plan to devote a number of hours each day, and give yourself projects to work on. It definitely takes a commitment, but most people, once they experience what the program can do, can't drag themselves away. Start with the tutorials on your Photoshop CD, and move on to a book like the *Adobe Classroom in a Book*. By the time you have finished these, you should feel confident enough to work on your own projects.

If you don't feel like going it totally alone, and would like a little help, then an

on-line class might be the answer for you. On-line classes allow you to work pretty much at your own pace, but may give you some extra direction. It's kind of like having personal tech support. Students in these classes usually can ask the instructor any number of questions, and the instructor will respond within twenty-four hours. You, of course, have to take responsibility for reading the class notes and doing the assignments. On-line classes, if they are well written, can deliver the material in a more easily digestible fashion than the manual. On-line classes will also help you find other helpful Photoshop resources, and they are very inexpensive.

Sometimes, sitting in a classroom, and having an actual human being to talk to, can be less daunting. Community colleges all over the country have computer graphics classes. You can find anything from a two day introduction to a semester long course. These classes are taught by knowledgeable instructors, and may be lectures or hands-on, or a combination of the two. Community college classes tend to be quite large, and the students can range from the serious learner to Aunt Mary, who got a computer for Christmas. I recommend these classes as a good introduction to the program, giving a good overview, but perhaps a little thin on personal attention.

If you are really serious about digital imaging, check out one of the University Graphics Certificate programs. You can take the entire program, which will give you much more than Photoshop, or you can take just selected courses for no credit. If you decide to go for the complete program, be prepared to apply yourself. You will take classes in Graphic Design, Desktop Publishing, and Computer Graphics. UCLA's program, for instance, requires the successful completion of twenty two classes, and usually cannot be executed in less than three years. The students in these programs are serious about their digital careers, and when they graduate they can tackle almost any job. Each class you take will probably meet once a week for about three hours. The semesters are twelve weeks long. Obviously, this requires a commitment of time, and if you miss a class you will fall behind. You can learn a lot from other students, and homework assignments will be critiqued by the instructor. You will probably have to complete a final project as well.

What if you can't commit to twelve weeks? There are also a number of Corporate Training Centers that offer short classes. You can be sure you will find a Photoshop class, and there are usually three levels, so if you know the basics you can take a more advanced class. Be sure, before you take a class like this, that you are familiar with either the Macintosh or Window's working environment. You should know how to open files and create new files, since these classes are devoted to teaching software, and the instructors don't have the time to teach you how to use the computer. Classes are taught either by staff instructors, or graphics professionals who have extensive experience with real life situations. Many companies will pay for their employees to take a two day class, and it can be a nice break from your regular routine. Two days, however, is a very short time in which to absorb a lot of material. When I teach these courses, I am very aware that at about hour six, the level of comprehension goes way down, and the classes are anywhere from six to eight hours long. If you take a two day class, and you wait a week before you practice what you have learned, you might have to start all over. Go home, and work in the program right away, or you will lose it!

Another option is private instruction. Although it would seem that this would be a lot more expensive, it isn't really. The Corporate classes, and the University classes will run about \$800, and private instruction will cost anywhere from \$75 to \$150 an hour. When you work with an instructor one on one, you can work on your own projects, and tailor the class to your specific needs. This can be cost effective, and relate more closely to your individual interests. Be sure to check qualifications before you hire someone. It is one thing to be able to do incredible things in Photoshop, and quite another to be able to teach it effectively. Make sure your instructor has teaching experience, and has used Photoshop to do real jobs.

So now that you are a Photoshop expert, what are you going to do with your newfound knowledge? If you are a photographer, you will never run out of ideas! Almost every photograph will benefit from a bit of manipulation. Stock companies do have Photoshop experts on staff, but will often ask the photog-

raphers to do image correction themselves. The stock market is enormous, and you may find that a single photograph can be turned into several different versions using Photoshop's tools. If you want to work on other people's images, there are several ways you can do that. Be aware, however, that if you want to work at an Advertising company or a Service Bureau, that you will probably need a good level of proficiency in several other programs as well. Adobe's vector drawing program, Adobe Illustrator, or Macromedia Freehand are good adjuncts to Photoshop. Also, familiarity with a page layout program like Quark XPress or InDesign is usually required. You could also go the freelance route, but know that it can be feast or famine. Don't rely on one customer to provide you with all your work. Four or five years ago it was not difficult to demand \$75 to \$200 dollars an hour for good Photoshop skills, but times have changed. There are many young students graduating with University Computer Graphics Certification, and these students are well trained. They are willing to work for as little as \$20 an hour, and that has affected the rate basis for all of us. Of course, the real professionals are still making good money. It takes years to learn all the ins and outs of the program. I have been working in Photoshop for over seven years, since version 2.0, and I learn something new nearly every day. That's what I love about the program! It almost has a life of its own, and I continually find things buried deep down. There are many ways to get to the same place when you use Photoshop, and the longer you work in the program, the more you will develop your own style.

There are many good resources for Photoshop information on the web. In fact, there are so many, that it can be somewhat overwhelming! One of my favorites is on AOL. Use the keyword **Photoshop**, and you will be taken to a discussion forum where you can post any question. The people who frequent this forum are a mix of novices, and professionals. The professionals are people who know a tremendous amount about the program, and are more than willing to share information. You can post a question, and it will usually be answered in less than 24 hours. AOL also has a Photoshop Chat which meets every Monday night, from 10:00 to 11:00PM EST.

Adobe also has user forums which can be accessed at: [http://](http://www.adobe.com)

**[www.adobe.com/supportservice/custsupport/forums.html](http://www.adobe.com/supportservice/custsupport/forums.html)**. You access this forum by creating a user name and a password. Questions are answered very quickly here also, and of course this is a free service.

Following is a list of web sites that have good information, tutorials, and free stuff you can download. This is by no means a complete list, but these are some of my favorites:

Adobe Photoshop for Photographers at: **<http://www.bh.com/focalpress/evening/index.html>**

Tracy Mark's Photoshop Bookmarks at: **<http://www.geocities.com/~webwinds/classes/photshop.html>**

Graphx Design Tutorials at: **<http://www.grafx-design.com/phototut.html>**

Joseph Kling's Photoshop Workshop at: **<http://home.fuse.net/jjklng/>**

The Adobe Tips and Techniques site at: **<http://www.adobe.com/studio/tipstechniques/photoshop.html>**

DocOzone's Hands-on Tutorials at: **<http://www.ozones.com/~drozone/handson/>**

The Design & Publishing Center's Photoshop Tips & Tricks at: **<http://www.graphic-design.com/Photoshop/default.html>**

Also, a good site for a list of Photoshop Reference Sites can be found at: **<http://www.freefever.com/tphotoshop.html>**

Of course, you will also find good information right here, at **Zuga.net**

If you need a general Usenet Newsgroup, go to:

**[comp.graphics.apps.photoshop](mailto:comp.graphics.apps.photoshop)**

Books, of course are another way to learn Photoshop. There seem to be a million of them out there, and new ones appear every day! My advice is to go to a good bookstore and look at the different books carefully. Then you can usually get them cheaper by ordering from **Amazon.com** or **Booksamillion.com**.

Here are a few of my favorite books:

***Photoshop 7 Artistry*** by Barry Haynes, Wendy Crumpler / Paperback / Pub-

lished 1998

***Photoshop 7 for Windows and Macintosh*** (Visual Quickstart Guide Series)  
by Elaine Weinmann, Peter Lourekas / Paperback / Published 2002

***Professional Photoshop 7 : The Classic Guide to Color Correction*** by  
Dan Margulis / Paperback / Published 2002

***Real World Photoshop 7 : Industrial Strength Production Techniques***  
(Real World Series) by David Blatner, Bruce Fraser / Paperback / Published  
2002

***The Photoshop 7 Wow! Book*** (Wow! Series) by Linnea Dayton, Jack Davis /  
Paperback / Published 2002

Once you have mastered the basics, learning Photoshop should be a lot of fun!  
Don't forget to practice regularly, and use on-line help, the manual, and a book  
like ***The Visual Quickstart Guide*** to get you through those rough spots.