



## Thumbs up for thumbnails

**You know those nice graphics file icons on the Mac? Now you can get them under Windows 95. Hooray! says Gordon Laing.**

Before concluding last month's topic of making selections, here's the latest news in the world of graphics and DTP. Unbelievably, in the same month, here are solutions to perhaps the two most infuriating problems I've had in recent days — apart from my troublesome water boiler, of course.

### Thumbnail icons

For years I've been banging on about how fantastic the Macintosh platform is, particularly when it comes to graphics. But it takes two to tango. Apple has done a certain amount of work with its Macintosh operating system, but as much, or even more, has been achieved by the application and utility developers.

Adobe wrote an incredibly useful piece of code into Photoshop for Macintosh,

which created thumbnails of graphic files and used them as the icons for the files themselves.

When searching through windows full of graphics files, there's no longer any confusion in identifying them. The thumbnails may be small, but it's remarkable how easily you can spot the desired file at a glance. This was such a useful facility that virtually all Mac graphics apps offered the same, leading many to believe that the code was part of the Mac OS itself.

Great; but where does that leave us Windows users? Well, according to Microsoft and other developers, it leaves us up DOS creek without a resource fork to paddle. For it is the Mac file system with

its resource forks which allows cunning developers to attach handy extras such as thumbnail previews.

### Cunning plans, clever tricks

Fortunately, there's cunning and there's *real* cunning: winner of this month's really cunning plan is Inset, developer of the fluent graphics converter, HiJaak.

The latest version, HiJaak 95, now acquired by Quarterdeck and reviewed in this month's *First Impressions* section, does what we had virtually given up hope of: thumbnails for graphics files icons under Windows 95.

I believed this to be so improbable that in January's column I even mocked up a fake screenshot of what I desired — and that's not just an excuse for you to peruse my infamous Christmas card design once more. The screen you see before you today is not a fake — it is the real thing, and has absolutely made my day.

Post-installation, HiJaak 95 sets to work creating thumbnails for your existing files, then waits in the background for any newcomers to turn up.

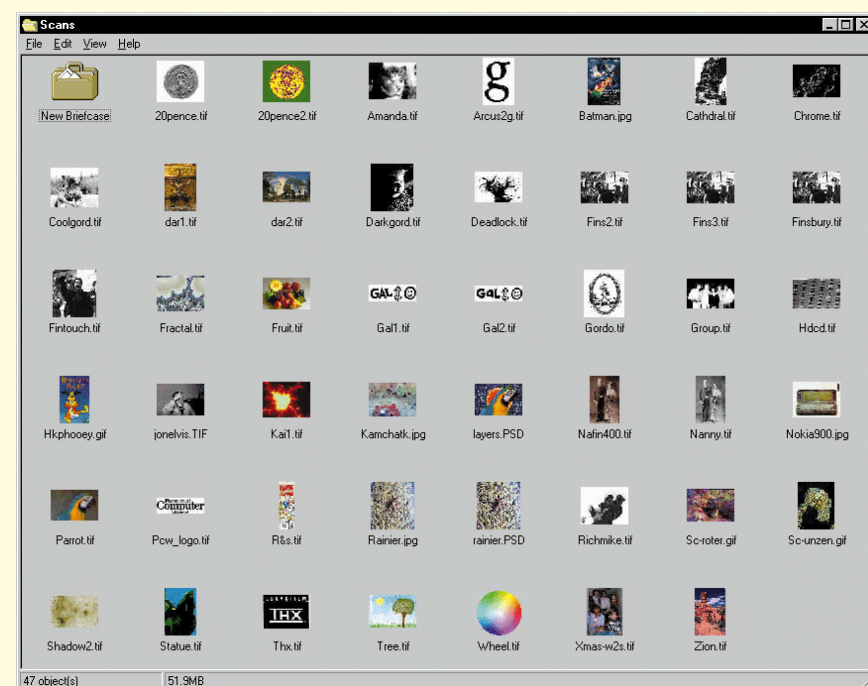
Full details, along with its other facilities, are described in the *First Impressions* review, but here are a couple of additional points.

HiJaak is not infallible. It did a good job recognising most EPS and TIFF formats, but failed on some of the more obscure flavours, such as Lab TIFFs. It didn't crash, fortunately, but instead created false-coloured or white boxes as preview thumbnails. In some cases there were a few dots or squiggles but all were sadly meaningless. To put this into perspective, these were mostly odd types of EPSs, and generally those created by CorelDraw, whose file filters I don't entirely trust.

One other slight concern crops up thanks to HiJaak's cunning cataloging system, which allows searches to be made on key words you've attached to properties of files.

The problem occurs when you've got more than one file of the same name in different locations. HiJaak assumes

**Left** *Not a fake, but genuine thumbnails for graphic file icons under Windows 95, courtesy of HiJaak 95. Above* *The Resedit cheeky chappie saved the day when Photoshop 3 for Macintosh played up*



they're identical on the basis of name and extension alone and uses the same thumbnail for all of them.

This cropped up when HiJaak was creating thumbnails on my disk and came across the results for last year's PCW scanner group test. I had five different sets of results for each scanner, separated into five folders.

Due to my choice of naming, I had five epson.tifs, agfa.tifs and hp.tifs. HiJaak created thumbnails for the first folder, then reused them for the other four folders. Unfortunately, when I updated the thumbnails for the second folder, HiJaak used these for the other folders as well.

A little annoying, but forgivable, and I thank the programmers at Inset for at last writing the Windows 95 utility for which I've been waiting. For those too engrossed to check out the review in *First Impressions*, HiJaak 95 costs £49.95.

### Ra-ra-ResEdit

A couple of months ago several graphics journalists, including myself, were invited to an Adobe press briefing where it was hinted that Illustrator for Windows 95 would be discussed. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this was not the case, and what was hoped would be a revealing morning turned out to be a big misunderstanding.

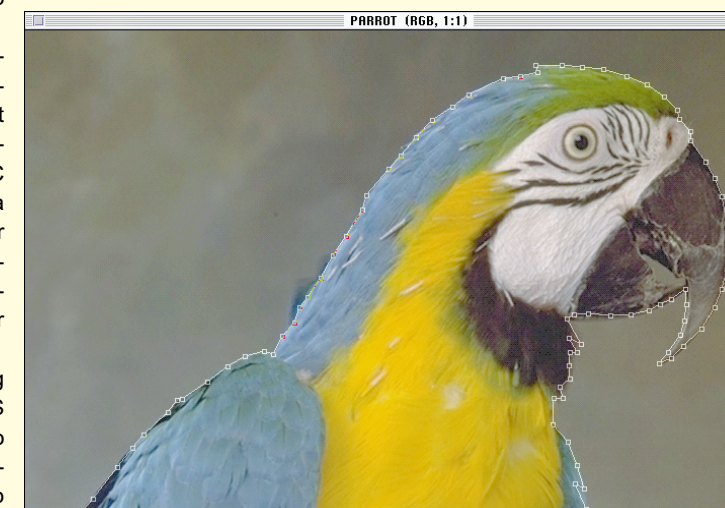
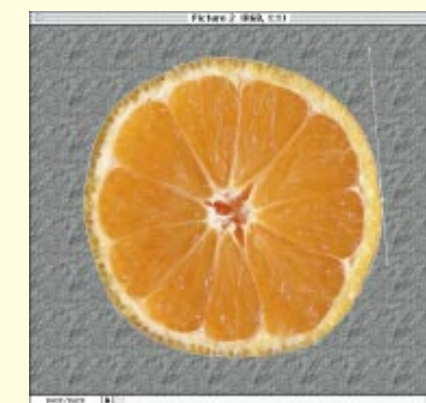
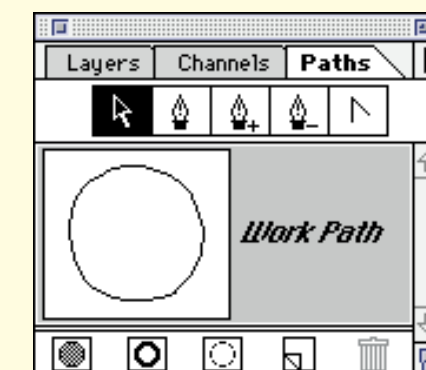
Rather than let it go to waste, and spotting Photoshop developer Doug Olson as one of our hosts, I tentatively turned the morning around into a full-blown technical support session. Not much fun for everyone else in the room, but I finally got the answers I was looking for.

The story starts a few weeks ago on Adobe's appallingly slow Web site, where I had spent hours downloading the update from Photoshop 3.0.4 to 3.0.5 for Macintosh. Why? Well, it didn't offer any big changes, but I had hoped it would fix a bug which reared its ugly head when I previously upgraded from 3.0 to 3.0.4.

Photoshop is an undeniably sophisticated application. One of the things we at PCW use it for most is converting hundreds of PC screenshots saved in a huge variety of colour depths, resolutions and formats, into standard Macintosh CMYK TIFFs, ready for the repro house.

It's really handy selecting a whole window full of DOS files, dragging them on to the Photoshop for Macintosh icon which darkens to

*Selections made with vector paths. From bottom, the Parrot selected by dropping plenty of points joined by straight lines, and its palette. Next, the Orange, selected more carefully with fewer points and a curved path; see palette directly below*



indicate recognition, then automatically launches and opens every one of them without ever having to go to File-Open. Until 3.0.4 that is, which resolutely failed to darken with DOS files and would only play ball with Mac files. Much to my disappointment, 3.0.5 failed to fix this.

However, after much discussion with Doug and several emails, I had my solution. Like all the best computer fixes it's not pretty, and it requires some deft handling with ResEdit, the third party Macintosh file resource editor. Anyone interested in the details and a fascinating insight into how the Mac operates at a low-ish level, should check out Chris Cain's Macintosh column on (page 326).

The good news is that Adobe is now aware of the problem and is currently shipping fixed versions. The bad news is that there's still no sign of Illustrator for Windows, nor the fabulous Adobe Dimensions which, to be fair to Adobe, ties in closely with Illustrator.

Some more good news, though, is the announcement of Fractal Designs' Poser and even Macromedia Fontographer 4.1 for Windows, to be reviewed as soon as I get my hands on them. Spookily, I had wished for both of these in the same "Dear Santa..." column (January issue) as the thumbnail icons for Windows plea. If I didn't know better, I'd think someone was looking out for me. Peace, goodwill and serious font handling for Windows must be just around the corner.

### Paths to success

Last month's Graphics & DTP described how to make a variety of selections in bitmapped photo-retouching packages such as Photoshop. The point about this is that any manipulations occur only to selected areas of the image, allowing you to leave other parts untouched. Rather than change the entire colour of an image,

you could, for instance, select the sky and alter this alone, without touching any other part of the image.

All the techniques explained last month work with pixels on the bitmapped image itself. Selections made in this manner, either by hand, marquee or magic wand, can be extended but not reshaped by dragging the outline. You have the dotted outline of a selection that may just be a tad off in places, but rather than tugging at corners, you have to change the tolerances and start again. At best you

## Font of the Month

Elli

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz ß € 1234567890

Red Onion &amp; Mushrooms

can add or subtract tiny portions of similar colours, but it's still infuriating.

One method would be to use the flexibility of vector outlines, which may be dragged about, reshaped and resized without any loss of resolution. Fortunately, many high-end packages offer this facility, in the form of Paths.

Paths are as easy to use as the description above. Simply choose the path tool, the pen icon in Photoshop, and draw a shape as you would in any drawing package such as CorelDraw, Freehand or Illustrator. Vector drawing consists of dropping points, which are joined up by the application.

After the initial shape has been drawn, each point may be dragged in any direction desired. Handles may be extracted from a point which adjusts the curviness and direction of the path as it passes through that point. Paths are fully described in the manuals for these applications, and were covered in detail in this column, *PCW* April '95.

The real beauty of paths is not just the fact that they're totally editable, but that they can be saved for future use. Being vector descriptions they're small, too. Selections, complex ones in particular, can take quite a while to create, so it's a real boon being able to save a path in case of a crash or other emergency. You can, of course, close down the application and reload the selection for additional work at a later date. Some applications such as Photoshop even allow you to convert conventional selections into fully editable and saveable paths.

Making selections of straight-edged shapes is a doddle with paths. Just drop a point at each corner and let the application join them up with perfectly straight lines. Even though it's possible to adjust paths so that they match curves perfectly, you

can still get great results just by dropping lots of points around the shape. They may be joined by straight lines, but they could be fine enough not to show.

Which leads us neatly on to the conclusion. Much of the time you'll be making selections to cut out and paste somewhere else. If you are pasting on to a new background, the hard edges of your selection make it stick out like a sore thumb. Two options to soften the blow are anti-aliasing and feathering.

Anti-aliasing surrounds the object with pixels of intermediate background and foreground shade. The result is a softer edge which blends in much better.

Feathering blurs the edges of a selection. The user defines the number of pixels the blurring should extend in to, and out of, the selection. Blurring too much loses detail but can be used for neat effects such as the white glow around my portrait in the "never-a-month-goes-by-without-a-mention" Christmas card.

## Font of the Month

What a beautiful typeface: FB Elli of the Font Bureau collection (*pictured above*), available from FontWorks, is just begging to be used in a cookery book or on a menu. Houghton Library commissioned calligrapher Jean Evans to design the typeface, which was presented to famed librarian Eleanor Garvey upon her retire-

## PCW Contacts

That's enough selections for now. Write to me at the *PCW* address on Broadwick Street or email me as [gordon\\_laing@pcw.ccmil.com](mailto:gordon_laing@pcw.ccmil.com)

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