

Helpdesk

We're awash with hardware queries this issue, so our technical expert reveals the best kit to complement your creativity **BY JULIE EASTON**



BEE ME UP: Good macro shots are harder to achieve than they look, but they can be used in a variety of ways

GET CLOSER

I really want to get some good macro shots of flowers with an abstract twist in order to use them in digital illustrations. I have tried many times to get the perfect shot, but I find that my shots lack texture, which is what I really need for this to work. I use a Nikon D50 with the 18-55mm kit lens.

Sarah Hamworthy, via email

It is easy to think that capturing something like a flower close-up is relatively simple, but in actual fact it is a real skill. First of all you need patience to find the right flower for your needs. Don't think you can just see one and start snapping! Lighting is key here, and as tempting as it might be to get out in the sunshine, try to avoid shooting in bright weather. In order for you to make the most of a flower's texture you will find it easier to capture detail on overcast days.

Using a flash is usually a big no-no, but occasionally a fill-in flash used from a distance can help counteract shadows. The biggest thing to bear in mind, though, is the composition. If you're using the image in digital artwork then you want to keep the shot as clean as possible and free from background distractions so that cutting out is a much simpler task.

BIG IT UP

I have recently started looking at getting a large-format printer and I was wondering if you have any suggestions on what models to look at? Ideally I would like a maximum of 22 inches. Hope you can help.

James Tucker, via email

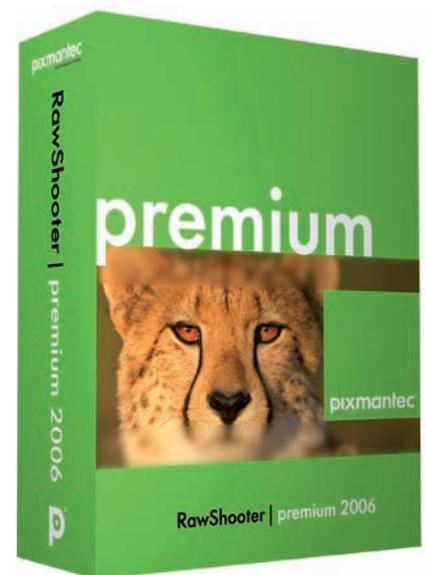
Epson does a wide range of large-format printers, which all offer superb printing quality. If price is a consideration then the Epson Pro 4000 is the lowest-priced model, available for around £1,500 online. However, this only supports up to 17 inches and may not be enough to suit your requirements.

The best of the range, balancing printing size and price, is probably the Epson 7800. This retails for around £2,400, but it does allow you to print up to 24 inches and images look so crisp and clear that it's worth every penny. Inks are expensive, but they have good life and you can print onto any media you want, including canvas.

You might want to have a look on eBay if you fancy this model but not the cost. When we looked there were a few 7800s going for just under £2,000, and some even better prices on inks.



PRO MODEL: The Epson 7800 is the pro choice for large-format printing



IN THE RAW: RawShooter Premium is a good standalone conversion option, but you could upgrade to CS2 instead

RAW DEALING

I have recently upgraded my film SLR to a digital model and I want to shoot in RAW to maintain more image detail. I have Photoshop CS and I wondered if it was worth upgrading to get the additional camera support in Camera RAW in CS2, or whether I am better off buying another RAW-editing program and sticking with CS.

John Logan, via email

More and more photographers are realising the benefits of shooting in RAW and as such there are dozens of programs out there offering conversion capabilities. The bonus of shooting in RAW is being able to select important camera settings in post-production rather than at the time, which is great if you need your image perfectly exposed and sharp to boot. All cameras that can shoot in RAW have their own conversion packages included. Some of these, such as Nikon Capture, are pretty good, but they don't stand up to the dedicated options. The best standalone option is probably Pixmanlec's RawShooter Premium, the pay-for version of RawShooter Essentials. This is a complete workflow solution and it's super-fast at processing your pictures. However, your best bet is to upgrade to Photoshop CS2, as the built-in Camera RAW does the job admirably, plus you'll reap the benefits of the other new additions to the software.



NICE BOD: Spend money on lenses and a good body rather than more megapixels when it comes to buying your first DSLR

WHICH SLR?

I have only just started to explore the possibilities of Photoshop, having been an illustrator for many years. I'm learning a lot about photography and want to get a new camera, but I have no idea what model to go for. I want a good SLR, but I don't know if there is much difference between six megapixels and ten megapixels, or whether the money is better spent on lenses and a better zoom.

Jane Doran, via email

It really depends what you are going to be using the camera for. If you are going to be taking shots for printing at no larger than A4, or using images within other forms of digital art, then there is not really much point spending out on massive megapixels. Once you get over six there's really not a great deal of difference in quality at that size.

If you are printing in larger formats, then your megapixel count will matter. If you fall into the former category then you would do better to invest in a good strong body and a selection of quality zoom lenses. The best way to start is to look for a camera that comes with a lens kit, as this will enable you to get a feel for the model and you'll soon find out the limitations of the included lenses and know what you need to invest in. The Olympus E-500 DSLR is a good starting camera and you can get it from www.digital-cameras.com for around £640 with two lenses.

COME A CROPPER

In order for my digital photos to print to a standard 7x5 borderless format, I have to slightly crop each one to a specific size (I am currently using an Olympus E500 with a 4/5 format). Is there a way in which I can preset a 'cropping mask' in Photoshop of the required specific size that can then be applied to each image for cropping?

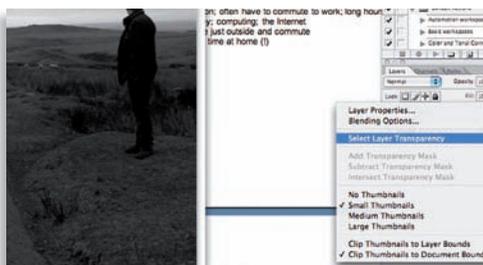


PHOTOSHOP SHORTCUTS

I have always worked with Photoshop Elements and have only recently made the trade up to Photoshop CS2. I work with layers every day and in Elements I could hold down Alt and click with the mouse on a layer thumbnail in order to select everything on that layer. I can't seem to do this in Photoshop. Is there a way to get around this? I am having trouble learning all the shortcuts!

Steven Mills, via email

The way shortcuts work do vary from Photoshop Elements to Photoshop CS2. The one that you're looking for is to right-click on the layer thumbnail and select Layer Transparency, which will neatly select everything on that layer. If you are working on a Mac and don't have a Mighty Mouse with right-click functionality then you will need to Ctrl+click to get the same menu up. You can certainly improve your speed and workflow by learning the shortcuts in Photoshop, and you can view a full list of available shortcuts at <http://user.fundy.net/morris/?photoshop01.shtml>, where you can also download a copy for future reference.



CLICK TRICK: Right-click or Ctrl+click on a layer thumbnail to select everything on that layer

image, check the image size and then recrop as often as is necessary until I get it right! I am using Photoshop CS2.

Graham, via email

The easiest way to make sure that your images are cropped at 7x5 is to use the options bar at the top of the screen when the Crop Tool is selected. Here you can enter a specific height and width and your crop box will be restricted to this aspect ratio, meaning that you always get a perfect-sized image.

DOWNIZING: Use the Crop Tool's options to fix the cropping box size for perfect proportions

FLAT OUT: The CanoScan LiDE 500F offers compact and stylish film scanning



WORKING FLAT OUT

I have been using an old Epson scanner that came with my computer when I bought it two years ago, and I really need to upgrade. I want to be able to scan a variety of objects and import them into Photoshop, some of which don't even fit into my scanner. I also want to be able to scan transparencies and film negatives.

Simon Costa, via email

There are some great scanners around at the moment that will suit your requirements. If you would like to stick with the Epson range, then why not take a look at the Perfection V700 Photo? You can scan almost anything, including 35mm, medium-format and large-format films. It's also one of the first scanners to offer 6400x9600dpi scanning for under £500. If you'd rather move away from Epson, however, then there are some other good options over in the Canon camp. The Canon CanoScan LiDE 500F, for example, is super-sleek and ultra-slim, yet offers a film adaptor and dedicated technologies to help you get the best from your scans.

HELPDESK

CALL FOR QUESTIONS

Want help with your Photoshop problems? Then let our team of experts sort you out.

Send your emails to us at:
advancedpshop@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Remember to specify whether you are using a PC or Mac and the version number of your edition of Photoshop.