



Gadgets: For the Photoshop artist who has everything

A Photoshop artist can only be as good as the tools of the trade allow, and with the Photoshop user-base perpetually extending, 2007's market is stocked at an all-time high with gadgets and gizmos ready for today's digital artists **BY NATALIE JOHNSON**

One of the most important 'tools' for a Photoshopper is the workstation they carve their designs on.

Industry pundits suggest that trends in the computer market show two large areas users are craving. One is the so-called 'super-computers', with higher capacity and built-to-order specs, for example the Mac Pro Dual-Core Intel Xeon (£2,239). The other being lightweight all-in-one notebook computers, said to be favoured by Photoshop users because of their high standard specs, affordable cost and portability. Apple's Macs have always been a popular

choice with creatives (www.apple.com), but the controversial problems with running Adobe's CS2 on Intel-based products have only been temporarily resolved with Rosetta. Nonetheless, Apple's reign is set to continue into 2007 as its 2006 introduction – the MacBook line-up (£1,349 to £1,899) – has just received a family wide Intel Core 2 Duo processor update.

One of the latest newcomers to the laptop arena is Widget UK Ltd (www.widget.co.uk), which has revealed a product called the new Flybook V33i HSDPA. It's a PC notebook pitched at £2,350, which

the company claims is to be the world's first sub-notebook to incorporate the new High-Speed Downlink Packet Access standard (HSDPA). HSDPA is a new mobile telephony protocol often referred to as 3.5G, that'll deliver download speeds up to 1.8mbps faster than most office internet connections – four times as fast as current 3G/UMTS data access.

With portability however, comes a potential for damage, so we can expect to see an increase in laptop and peripheral holdalls in 2007. One protection accessory set for curiosity is Tech air's Skinns (www.techair.co.uk), the latest in removable

PHOTOSHOP GADGETS



high-end largest MFP printers as well as new colour and monochrome laserjet printers. Two key lines pipped for popularity are the Color LaserJet CP4005 using HP ColorSphere Toner starting at £829, and the wide format LaserJet M5035/5025 MFP Printer series starting at £1,999.

At the other end of the scale, there'll also be an upsurge in products for the entry-level Photoshop enthusiasts. Canon (www.canon.co.uk) is hoping to lure more consumers in this bracket to its brand with the introduction of the Pixma 600, a £159 photo All-in-One with Easy-Scroll Wheel. Epson (www.epson.co.uk) is another well established brand that Photoshoppers are drawn to, rivalling both HP and Canon in the peripherals sector, and things won't change in 2007. The firm is hoping its Perfection V100 Photo will be one of the industry's slimmest scanning solutions, attracting fashion-savvy technology enthusiasts who'll want to team it with other lightweight metallic kit such as Apple's MacBook Pro.

The Photoshopper's Christmas list

Another company to publicly state that it has altered its product line to suit owners of Apple equipment is Wacom, the global market leaders of graphic tablets. The Graphire4 Classic White Edition is being heralded as 2006's Christmas must-have Photoshop accessory. The White special edition tablet comes in either A6 or A5 (£74.99 and £149.99), and features all the same assets of the Graphire4 collection. One of Wacom's most popular products is the Cintiq 21UX (£1,899), combining a large 21.3 inch flat screen with high UXGA resolution.

Bert Monroy claims this product has revolutionised the way he has worked in 2006. "One of the greatest changes in how I work was the introduction of the Wacom Cintiq. It brought me back

full cycle to how I applied a brush to canvas. To be able to work directly on the screen was a dramatic change."

Belkin (www.belkin.com) will be one of the manufacturers to watch in 2007 for Photoshop assisted gadgets, as its USB-Glo Mouse (£19.99) proved to be a popular seller due to its multicoloured LED lights that change colour as the operator works.

This autumn, Apple manufactured the wireless version of its Photoshop-friendly Mighty Mouse (£49), boasting up to 20 times more sensitivity than standard optical mice thanks to a new laser-tracking engine. "We cut the cord on our popular Mighty Mouse to give consumers even more flexibility when using a Mac," said David Moody, Apple's vice president of Worldwide Mac Product Marketing.

One sci-fi model made into reality is the Projector Keyboard touting a price tag of £119 (www.iwantoneofthose.com). Via infrared technology it projects a clear and crisp standard QWERTY-layout keyboard onto a flat opaque surface, and then transfers the keystrokes via wireless networking to the PDA, Pocket PC or smart phone. The 22nd



APPLESAC: For the fashion conscious notebook lovers. These funky bags have a soft fleece lining to protect against scratches

FLYBOOK: Giving Apple a run for its money and taking the laptop market by storm is this latest offering from Widget UK

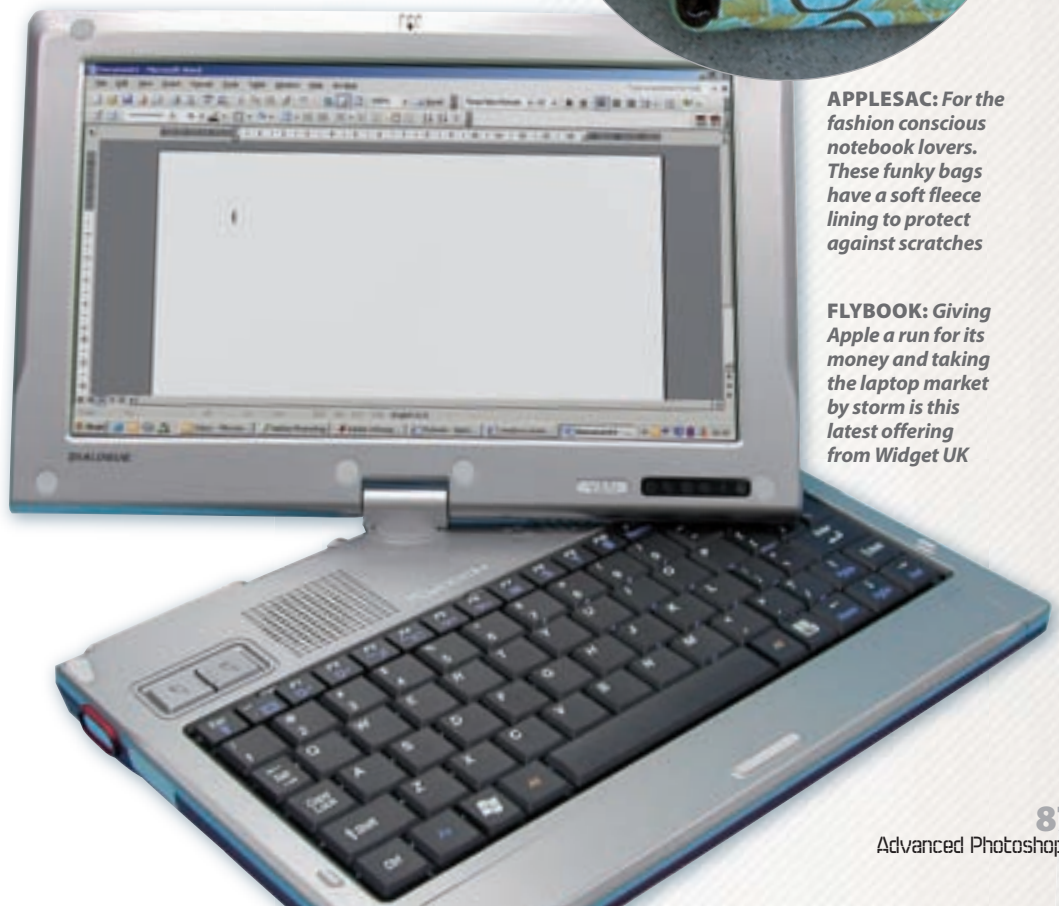
covers that enable users to personalise their bags to cope with any scenario. Wet Skinns are removable shower-proof sleeves, whereas Digital Skinns are removable sleeves with compartments to keep digital accessories.

Printing peripherals

In terms of peripherals, serious creative professionals will no doubt favour quality over novelty, and 2007 promises to bring many new products from well-established heavyweight manufacturers such as Canon, HP, Epson, Sony and Panasonic.

Bert Monroy is one of the industry's leading Photoshop artists – with years of experience under his belt, he's now seen as one of the art's most respected gurus. He explains just how important it is to get the right kit: "The printer market is the one I'm most interested in. Getting things out of the computer that look like what I produce in RGB is so important to me. In 2007 we can expect to see more 12-colour printers, so the colour ranges they offer will be able to produce a more accurate reproduction of what I create."

Market top-dogs, HP (www.hp.com), could be one of the bookies' favourites to succeed with Photoshoppers in 2007, as it prepares to roll out its



Feature

“A MAJOR CONCERN AMONG PHOTOSHOP USERS IS MEMORY”

Century-style gadget is about half the size of an average deck of cards. Using detection technology it 'watches' the fingers hit the key locations it has projected. For those who favour tangibility the company also peddles the Bendi Light Keyboard at a more affordable £29.99. Racking up kudos points the electric blue Bendi is a flexible waterproof pad, perfect for users who drop crumbs or spill coffee, because it's said to be a virtually indestructible waterproof gizmo and users can even roll it up and stuff it into their pockets.

Give me more!

One of the major concerns expressed among the Photoshop community is the growing demand for storage. In the gigabyte race manufacturers are continually launching products to satisfy users' growing requirements for more memory. The world's Photoshop elite will spend countless hours on projects racking up the layers, which gobble up the computer's hard disk space – a problem that professional photographer and Photoshop expert Lonna Tucker is all too familiar with. "I'm continually having to buy more storage systems. What I expect to see in 2007 is a three or four terabyte hard drive storage system with a Raid 5 setup for under \$1500, Blu-ray Burners and media that is finally affordable." Currently removable hard drives are the only answer. LaCie, Freecom, Maxtor, SmartDisk and Western

Digital are the market heavyweights in this game. The American corporation LaCie (www.lacie.com) recently offered consumers the F800 hosting a titanic 2TB worth of space. But high-capacity competent units like this are currently few and far between.

A separate display is becoming an increasingly popular device for Photoshop creatives seeking a larger visual workspace. NEC Display Solutions (www.nec.com) is launching the MultiSync LCD2690WUXi display which will boast 26 inches, allowing two A4 pages to be viewed side by side. "Our latest model offers Photoshop users a huge display area in addition to a resolution of 1920x1200," comments Alun Williams, marketing manager, NEC Display Solutions UK. He also leaked information on how the gadgets will be tailored in 2007: "Within the next few months we'll be adding a Photo Edition range to our MultiSync monitors that'll be supplied with a colorimeter and calibration software as standard. It'll be aimed at the increasing number of Photoshop users who demand the best colour reproduction they can afford."

The fast uptake of Skype, a proprietary peer-to-peer internet telephony (VoIP) network that allows computer users to take advantage of free voice and video conferencing, has meant the way creative professionals do business is changing. As a result, a handful of manufacturers will launch Skype phones in



- 1 : Wacom White: Wacom's latest offering is available in A6 or A5
- 2 : Projector Keyboard: This high-tec gadget is straight out of the future
- 3 : Skype Dialog: With this gizmo, you'll wonder why you ever paid for calls!
- 4 : Macpro: As with the rest of Apple's range, this remains ever popular
- 5 : Wacom Cintiq: This popular device combines size with high-res in its LCD
- 6 : Oilburner: Relax and unwind with the help of this aromatherapy wonder
- 7 : Massager: Combine the spa and your workspace with this device
- 8 : Glo-mouse: Belkin's wacky wireless mouse is a bestseller

PHOTOSHOP GADGETS



MACBOOK FAMILY: *The ever growing range of Apple Macbooks remain firm favourites with industry professionals and creatives alike*

2007, allowing customers to call clients, suppliers and contacts for free. Miglia (www.miglia.com) is introducing two such phones; the Dialog and Dialog+ (£41 and £51 plus VAT respectively). The gadgets are pitched as sleek wire-free phones featuring a nifty LCD screen, compatible with both Skype and iChat.

But all this work and no play will make us Photoshoppers big bores. The working world appears to be winding down, with a greater focus on 'flexi-time' and 'working from home' arrangements. Many creatives are seeing an increase in work productivity from the effect of a more relaxing workspace. Creativity can't be enforced, it has to be nurtured – and in 2007 we can expect to see many more products to remove work-generated stress.

A USB-powered oil burner (www.iwantoneofthose.com) for example, could be the thing that helps you unwind post-New Year. The device emits a customised phasing of coloured lights (random, warm or cool depending on your mood), and with a few drops of fragrant oil beneath the chirpy cactus top, the aroma will suffuse into your surroundings. The company also peddles a USB Massager (£9.99) and USB Flower Fan (£9.95) attempting to relieve the stress of cloning, cutting and smudging. "As Photoshop becomes more and more mainstream, the market for gadgets will become larger and larger," predicts Bert Monroy. Hmm... we know what will be on our Christmas wish-lists!

The important thing to remember is that in 2007 the consumer will continue to be king. As more and more gadgets flood the shelves, manufacturers will be forced to compete by improving their technology and lowering prices to attract more wallets. There are so many sites at internet users' disposal that'll happily check millions of sites for the best deal on the virtual store's shelves. So as well as trying the company's own website, have a look at sites like www.pricerunner.co.uk, www.kelkoo.com, www.dealtime.co.uk, www.ciao.co.uk, froogle.google.co.uk, shopping.lycos.co.uk and www.pricegrabber.co.uk in order to get a better deal and beat the system.

Although we can try and predict what will arrive on the Photoshop gadget and gizmo market in 2007 there are, of course, no guarantees. But what we can be sure of is that many manufacturers will view the dawn of Adobe's CS3 as the modern day equivalent of finding gold – a new creative suite – a new avenue for flogging design-based equipment, and as users in 2007 we'll never be short of an appliance or two.

RETAIL INSPIRATION: KEEP UP TO DATE WITH THE INDUSTRY'S LATEST GIZMOS AND ODDER GADGETS

WWW.GETDIGITAL.DE

This online store stocks everything any so-called 'geek' could want for their home or office setup. Focusing on novelty rather than functionality, this website is a nice distraction nonetheless.



WWW.APPLE.COM/STORE

The Mac producers' store is a well-laid out site stocked with its own brand of iconic computer and iPod products, as well as third-party peripherals and accessories.

WWW.W3SH.COM

A fantastic, fun site featuring the world's hottest gizmos. Showcasing everything from random patents to fully produced insane computer goodies, this site has it all.



WWW.IWANTONEOFTHOSE.COM

Aptly named, this site is a gadget-bod's heaven. If you're after an affordable, novel USB device or quirky but functional office toy, you can bet your bottom dollar you'll find it here.

WWW.ENGADGET.COM

If you want a site that'll bring you a no-nonsense insight into the market's current products in a comprehensive and informative style, then this site will please you no end.



galleries

Get cultured up and source some artistic inspiration at these top institutions

Manchester Art Gallery

Address: Manchester Art Gallery, Mosley Street, Manchester M2 3JL

Web: www.manchestergalleries.org

Phone: 0161 235 8893

Manchester is a beautiful city well worth a look for the architecture alone. The city boasts a range of galleries but the main one is the Manchester Art Gallery.

The current exhibitions range from iconic portraits to textiles; original sketches to designs. There are three floors and 21 rooms filled with masterpieces and designs spanning more than six centuries. Families are well catered for and the gallery holds a fully interactive environment for those pesky little hands. At present there are eight different exhibitions advertised on the website, so if you're planning a visit do some background research. The website is very neat and contains a wide range of information, with floor plans available in a pdf download. This



however, does mean that revenue is lost through the possible lack of brochure sales, so just remember to leave a donation. ■

Rating: **4/5**

Pompidou Centre

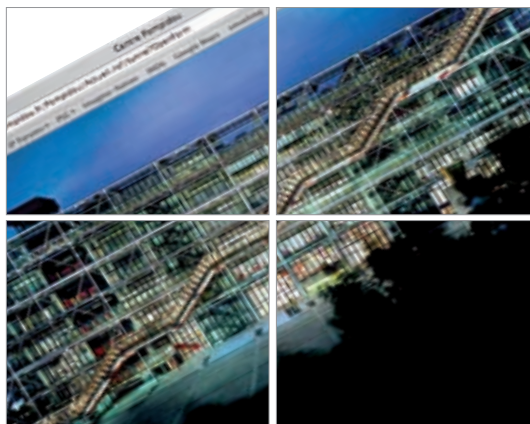
Address: Place Georges Pompidou 75004 Paris

Web: www.centrepompidou.fr

Phone: +33 (0)1 44 78 12 33

The Pompidou Centre is an artwork in itself. With its exoskeleton steel structure and escalators leading up to the roof on the outside of the building, it's worth going just to see and explore.

Unfortunately the website is quite shockingly bad, it doesn't do the centre justice. At times you feel unsure as to what area you're in and it seems that it is trying to be an art installation of its own. But all that aside, there's a huge amount of information contained within it. Current exhibitions include: *Art and Cinema*, which looks at 20th century art through the cinema. A photography exhibition showcasing some of the leading photographers of a generation and a fantastic hands-on children's gallery with thought-provoking artefacts. While some exhibitions are free, others you



have to pay for. This gallery is world renowned and a must-see – just don't expect anything from the website. ■

Rating: **4/5**

Lakeside Arts Gallery

Address: Lakeside Arts Centre, University Park Nottingham. NG7 2RD

Web: www.lakesidearts.org.uk

Phone: 0115 846 7777

Nottingham's Lakeside Centre is located in the University of Nottingham's campus grounds and sits on the edge of an idyllic boating lake. It's a unique public arts centre presenting an eclectic programme of music, dance, theatre, visual art and family events.

Since adding the Civic Trust award-winning D.H. Lawrence Pavilion to the existing portfolio of the Djanogly Art Gallery and Djanogly Recital Hall in autumn 2001, the Lakeside has rapidly established itself as a hugely successful multi-arts centre in the East Midlands. The Lakeside offers a year-round programme of high quality, diverse events. It's a very modern institution and can boast something to entertain everyone. Its website is clean,



modern and easily accessible and seamlessly fits in with the feel and intent of the gallery itself. ■

Rating: **5/5**

galleries

The Art Gallery

Address: On your computer, the internet, the world

Web: www.theartgallery.com.au

Phone: +61 3 5984 3283

This is an online gallery that aims to gather together a wide range of artists from the past and present.

Clicking on the Artist button unveils a long page full of artists as an indication as to how many people they feature. But the best bet is browsing through the categories section as that gives you the option to compare work much in the same way as it would be displayed in a 'real world' gallery. The site itself won't win any awards for design and, due to copyright, most of the established artists are omitted and the previews are too small. But, saying that, it's still well worth a look. ■

Rating: **3/5**

Art Promote

Address: On your browser, on your laptop, sat on your sofa

Web: www.artpromote.com

Phone: N/A

Not an art gallery as such, but this has got to be the number one resource for anyone who regularly looks for art on the internet.

It's Google for the art world! Everything on the site is laid out in an established, categorised fashion, so it's easy to navigate. A great commercial aspect of this site is that there are prints advertised for sale throughout, which is an excellent selling feature. This is a great tool with everything here for art lovers – although be warned – it's a search tool so doesn't actually display any art. ■

Rating: **4/5**

Red Rag Modern British Art Gallery

Address: Red Rag Gallery

5-7 Church Street

Stow-on-the-Wold

Gloucestershire. GL54 1BB

Web: www.redraggallery.co.uk/

Phone: 01451 832563

Red Rag Modern British Art Gallery specialises in fine contemporary art, sculpture and contemporary paintings from present day British and Scottish artists.

It claims to be one of the leading Gloucestershire art galleries based in the centre of the Cotswolds. Throughout the year the Gallery features a changing programme of art events from a wide range of British and Scottish artists. Artists featured range from those with international standing to young emerging artists. There's a good selection of art on the website, but again the preview is slightly too small – you can't help but think a big image with a watermark would be preferable to a small image that you can't take a closer look at. ■

Rating: **4/5**



galleries

Zero One Art

Address: Just one click away on the internet
Web: www.zerooneart.co.uk
Phone: N/A

For a site claiming to be: 'The place to buy art safely on the internet', there isn't that much in the way of contact details such as address, phone number or even an email address that isn't a form.

But saying all that, this is very much a commercial site that showcases a wide variety of work in a clean and functional website. Looking at some of the work available you get the feeling that some of the artists have been inspired by some fashionable Photoshop techniques. You need only check out the image of Ray Charles to see the influence that we Photoshoppers seem to be having on the art world. So why is it that there are plenty of sites out there where you can buy oil paintings but a distant lack of outlets – apart from *Advanced Photoshop* of course – for printed digital art? ■

Rating: **3/5**

Kings Road Gallery

Address: 436 Kings Road
 Chelsea, SW10 0LJ
Web: www.kingsroadartgallery.com
Phone: 020 7351 1367

The Kings Road Gallery is situated in the heart of Chelsea so you can expect the calibre of the work to have something in common with Stella Atois – they're both reassuringly expensive.

The gallery represents established artists from East and West with a strong leniency towards figurative works and this really shows with the work that's displayed on the website. Current exhibitions are displayed online and the majority of the works are, at present, accompanied by information on the artist and that all-important price tag. This gallery clearly chooses its displayed works carefully and as a consequence has an eclectic collection. ■

Rating: **3/5**

Patrick Heide

Address: Red Rag Gallery
 50A Church Street, London NW8 8EP
Web: www.patrickheide.com
Phone: +44-20-7724 5548

Patrick Heide art projects fosters a wide range of promising and established international artists.

From the first page of the website you know exactly what you're going to get: clean, high-end artwork aimed at the seasoned modern art lover. However, the website hasn't been updated in some time and shows the current exhibition to be from April to June 2006. The website has a gallery that is hidden away in the Artists section, the previews are big but the information on the artist is hidden away in an additional link. The website boasts good artworks and installations, but needs updating more often. ■

Rating: **3/5**

Art Gallery NSW

Address: Art Gallery Road, The Domain, Sydney NSW 2000, Australia
Web: www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au
Phone: +612 9225 1700

This gallery may be slightly further afield for some of us, but that doesn't mean to say that some of its treasures can't be enjoyed through the internet.

Current attractions include a major exhibition, which, according to the website, explores the 'myriad imaginative expressions of divine female power' entitled *Goddess: Divine Energy*. Other exhibitions include *A New Focus on Contemporary* and *Modern Chinese Prints*. There's a vast online collection of the art that is on display in the gallery. This feature is fantastic and will have you sat in front of your computer for hours. The one drawback to this well conceived system is that the large preview of a selected artwork is intended for screen resolution when all



you want to do is get the image in Photoshop and have a closer look. Saying that, the website is still a fantastic feature. ■

Rating: **5/5**

Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

Address: Plaça dels Angels, 108001 Barcelona, Spain
Web: www.macba.es
Phone: +34 93 412 46 02

With cheap return flights from under £100 from the UK, more and more of us are choosing to visit destinations like Barcelona for a weekend. As well as a chance to unwind it's also the perfect opportunity to swot up on some continental culture.

If a trip to Barcelona is on the cards, why not pop into one of the most exciting and contemporary-based galleries in Spain? It was built in 1959 when art critic Alexandre Cirici Pellicer thought about the idea of creating a museum of contemporary art in Barcelona. The building now houses some of the most distinctive modern art collections in the city. Events in December include an exhibition of photographer Jo Spence's work and Gego's *Defying Structures*. If you want to check out



what's on at the museum before you start your journey then you'll be pleased to know that the website can be translated. ■

Rating: **4/5**

Pump House Gallery

Address: Battersea Park, London, SW11 4NJ
Web: www.wandsworth.gov.uk
Phone: 020 7350 0523

If finding quirky, quiet galleries is your thing then we think we've found you the perfect choice for your next artistic outing.

Built in 1861 on the banks of Battersea Park lake, the Pump House was originally used to feed the Victorian lake cascades from a well beneath the building. Since it re-opened after an award-winning transformation in 1992, the Pump House Gallery has housed a wide variety of exhibitions and events. The gallery is completely free to all visitors and open Wednesday to Sunday and Bank Holidays from 11am–5pm. There are often free gallery talks and events taking place. Exhibitions aren't really planned well in advance and there isn't a published calendar of events so it's worth giving them a ring to find out what's on before you



head in that direction. You could also pay a visit to its website which holds exhibition info. ■

Rating: **4/5**

fonts

Grab some funky new fonts from these fantastic sites to complement your Photoshop designs

Comic book fonts

Web: www.comicbookfonts.com/

This has got to be the one-stop-shop for comic book fonts! The site caters for the latest season and event with scary fonts in October and festive fonts in December.

The site is very well designed and incorporates lots of clean, fun, funky graphics. Each font has a mini preview visible straight away, but once clicked a larger preview window is opened displaying the whole font case. The only downside – and unfortunately quite a big one – to this site is that it's 99.9 per cent commercial. The other 0.1 per cent is one free font which is nice but not enough to entice the casual browser in further. But all that aside, the fonts (if you can afford them) that are available here are truly amazing. It's well worth a browse, but beware, the quality of fonts may mean browsing turns into buying! ■

Rating: **4/5**



Advanced
Photoshop
Recommends

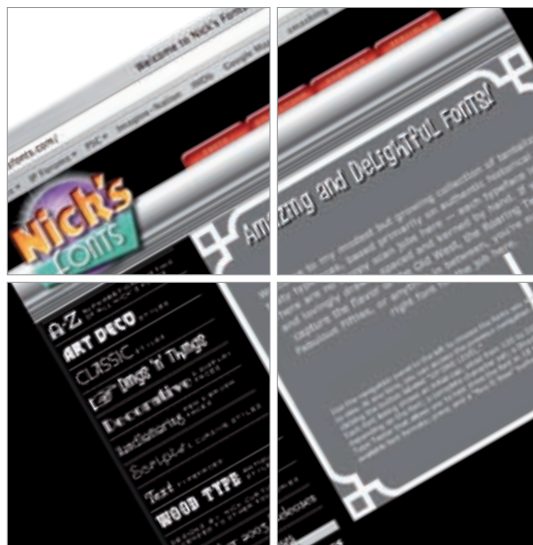
Nick's fonts

Web: www.nicksfonts.com/

If it's Fifties-style fonts you're after or a good collection of authentic historical fonts, then look no further than Nick's fonts.

This is once again a 100 per cent commercial site. You unfortunately won't find any freebies here, which is always disappointing. However, a quick search on myfonts.com, which a link is provided to, reveals several freeware fonts. A lovely big preview of the font is displayed with the added bonus of being able to preview the font in your own words, therefore making it easier to see the finished effect. The site is easy to navigate with clear tabs on the homepage. The one major drawback to this site is that it has never been tested on a Mac, which may cause problems for some users. ■

Rating: **4/5**



Cooltext.com

Web: cooltext.com/Fonts

Cooltext.com is a prime example of content over style. There are a whole host of fonts here and all are neatly categorised to help you locate a particular style of font quickly and easily.

There are over one thousand fonts at your disposal and all are free of charge. There's the obligatory font preview stating the name of the font, but nowadays the more modern font sites tend to use a handy applet that enables you to preview a font with whatever text you choose. The site itself is very functional and does its job well, if lacking in finesse slightly. A lack of frills on the site however, is a bonus in some cases as it means that you don't have to wait long for all of the font previews to load. ■

Rating: **3/5**



fonts

Tom 7

Web: fonts.tom7.com

There are lots of lovely free fonts here for you to get to grips with from the original styling of Tom Murphy the 7th.

From the looks of his main site Tom7.org, this guy loves being creative and this shows in several of his typefaces. As this site is just a portal for his creative streak and a place to take what you want and use it at will, there's only a small preview, but once installed they're lots of fun!

This is a brilliant resource for font lovers and Photoshop creatives, as the fact that the fonts are free means that you can try them out to your heart's content! This site is a definite must in our book. ■

Rating: **5/5**

Advanced
Photoshop
Recommends

Font face

Web: www.fontface.com

This font site is more of a database of other companies' fonts, so as you can imagine there are plenty to choose from.

The only font preview that is available is displayed in a small text box where you type in your own text; this is all well and good but you don't get a true feel for the typeface. The site is well designed and easily navigated. An excellent point to this site is a handy Font Tool section for those of you who want to make your own fonts. Designing your own fonts is a brilliant way to make your creations truly original. A quirky feature is the site's 'font of the day' and 'Top 10' recommendations. ■

Rating: **3/5**

The holiday spot

Web: www.theholidayspot.com

With the festive season almost upon us there'll most likely be the need for some Christmas designs.

To help you on your way this site has a small selection of freeware fonts to add that extra element to your seasonal work. Most of the fonts are just a typeface with snow on top, but there are a few others that will really bring your work to life. There's only a small preview, but to be honest you know what you're going to get. When you enter the site, it's a little overwhelming as it has lots of things going on – not just fonts! To find the free fonts there is a list on the left-hand side of the screen. Click on free downloads to be sent to a page where you are free to download festive fonts, toolbars, jokes – even recipes! ■

Rating: **2/5**

plug-ins

Power up your Photoshop application with a range of advanced plug-ins from the sites below

PhotoTune

Web: www.phototune.com/

The PhotoTune plug-in is aimed at making the everyday task of colour correcting photos as simple as a few mouse clicks.

There are two plug-ins available, one for skin tone and the other for colour correction. The user interface is simply laid out and everything is controlled through a series of presets and sliders. These are simple and useful plug-ins, but if you know what you're doing in Photoshop then you can probably achieve better results by doing it yourself. As for the everyday home user, this would be a welcome addition to the Photoshop application. Not exactly the most advanced plug-in available, but if you wish to speed through some tiresome colour correction then this is for you. ■

Rating: **3/5**



ArtMasterPro

Web: www.fo2pix.co.uk

ArtMasterPro is a powerful and advanced plug-in that enables you to create stunning fine art from any digital image.

Its 'highly advanced picture-engine' works from a library of 700 source styles and allows you to mix and match as many as you feel necessary. There are only 15 filter styles to choose from and working closely with Photoshop's other utilities and filters this should be more than enough. The styles are generated from established art theories and algorithms, ensuring that the end result will look stunning and ultimately take a fraction of the time if you were to produce the work from scratch. This plug-in comes with a very hefty price tag of over £580, so is obviously aimed at the high-end professional. ■

Rating: **4/5**



buZZ.X

Web: www.fo2pix.co.uk

buZZ.X gives you the ability to apply a style or effect over multiple digital images, in order to create an artistic video.

There are a total of eight fully adjustable filters on offer, each of which adjust the colour in the highlights, mid-tones and the shadows. The plug-in also comes with a series of 32 separate actions enabling you to apply predetermined effects or your own effects to as many images as you wish. The end results are very clean and stylish, but with any heavy colour change there will always be some distortion. At times however, this adds to the overall effect. A slightly lower price tag of £119 still seems quite a lot for something that you could set up your own actions to do, but give the trial a whirl to see if you think it's justified. ■

Rating: **2/5**



plug-ins

Filter Forge

Web: www.filterforge.com

Filter Forge is an online company that offers a huge range – 985 to be exact – of imaging filters to further boost the power of Photoshop.

Some of the filters which it has on offer look fantastic and would be an added bonus to any budding digital artist's arsenal. With Filter Forge you can build your own filters. The site is still in Beta mode and as such you can't actually purchase anything from it at present, but this is definitely one to bookmark, because the selection that it has to offer is truly staggering. ■

Rating: **4/5**

Blow Up

Web: www.alienskin.com/

When you think Photoshop filter, you automatically think Alien Skin because it seems these guys have been around forever.

And from the looks of it they're still coming up with bright ideas and pushing the boundaries of what can be achieved with our favourite digital imaging app. The latest offering is Blow Up, which claims to offer the highest quality in image resizing available, making advanced image scaling easy while preserving smooth, crisp edges and lines. It creates four times (1600% area) enlargements from any image without jagged artefacts or halos. Very impressive and a must-have plug-in. ■

Rating: **5/5**

Eye candy 5 bundle

Web: www.alienskin.com/

Staying with Alien Skin, it has bundled together three top titles: Texture, Nature and Impact.

Texture offers a wide variety of texture effects, including snake and lizard skin, fur, brick, stone and wood and contains ten texture generators. Nature offers a collection of ten Photoshop filters that beautifully render a wide variety of natural effects: fire, smoke, rust, snow, ice and more – while Impact offers beautifully rendered chrome, brushed metal, glass, bevels, shadows, reflections. All in all, the bundle includes 30 of the very best special effects. All very nice and with an undeniably fair price tag of \$199 to boot, which works out at less than \$7 per filter. These are everyday filters so well worth investing in. ■

Rating: **3/5**