

# Strata™ Foto 3D

*Is the power of 3D prevalent in Strata's recent software? We're about to find out...*



**S**trata™ has recently supplied the Photoshop community with Strata Foto 3D, an extended plug-in that affords users the ability to transform a photography series, modelling it into a real-world object.

The software's reputation precedes it, so we'd heard great things about this latest plug-in. For example, creations can be made from the use of a standard digital camera and it also offers users a quick and inexpensive creation method, requiring far less technical skill or expansive hardware than similar systems. Strata believes that "learning how to use your camera is more complicated than turning those photos into real 3D models". Here at *Advanced Photoshop*, we're only too happy to put this theory to the test.

We can honestly say that, from the onset, installation of Strata Foto 3D proved simple, with several useful options to help users familiarise themselves with the software's functions and effects. For instance, the 'Load the images' and 'Build the example' options demonstrate how to create a fully textured 3D model from the supplied example photographs. Alternatively, users who are slightly more familiar with previous similar software can select the Quick Start Guide option. This provides a swift step-by-step tutorial on how to get the best results from your photography and offers advice on the use of the most essential tools.

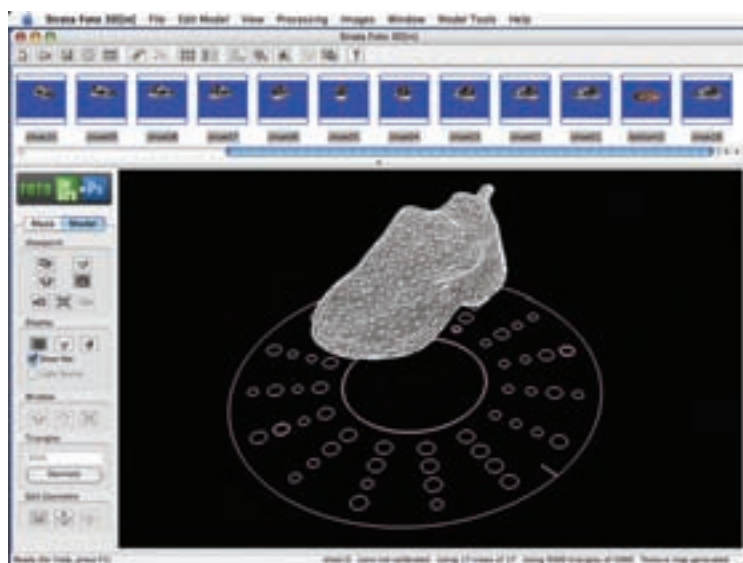
Admittedly, without any prior knowledge of such software, it may seem daunting to be faced with the Strata Foto 3D interface and difficult to understand which option does what. However, with the coherent helpful assistance simplifying essential working practice for quick, efficient results, users will feel more at ease with the software. Strata Foto 3D provides advice on preventing problematic photos from disrupting the effective use of the software. This is presented as a 'to do' list, explaining how to avoid using camera flash and preferred photo amounts, as well as preferential photo angles and shooting degrees, in the Quick Start Guide. The need for the specially designed mat, which you place your object on, is thoroughly explained and, with the Print Mat button, users can define a diameter that is suitable for a range of objects and items.

All users will find the Mask Application functions almost effortless, made easy with Strata Foto's intuitive application science. By selecting the Mask All Images button, this software uses Auto-masking wizards to help separate the object in question from its background. You can then use the practical Paint Mask Tools to edit the applied mask accordingly. This set of options function according to tools found in Photoshop, and so those familiar with this program will probably master them quickly. Users simply need to double-click on the

required thumbnail in the working area, then choose from a tool set suitable for all types of editing. There's the Brush Tool, with size increase/decrease slide bar, for quick application, the even quicker Fill Mask option, working much like the Paint Bucket Tool, and the Fill Polygon that works much like Photoshop's Polygonal Lasso Tool, allowing for a more detailed treatment. The only painstaking thing about this application process is that it can be time-consuming, but this is necessary to obtain the desired effects.

More advanced functions include the Regenerate Mask option. After using this, the threshold for the image can be varied interactively by adjusting the slider that appears below this button. There is also the Shrink-wrap Mask, which, unlike Regenerate Mask, uses the current mask as a starting point, then shrinks the unmasked region by selecting adjacent areas of similar colour. Again, moving the slider adjusts the mask tolerance.

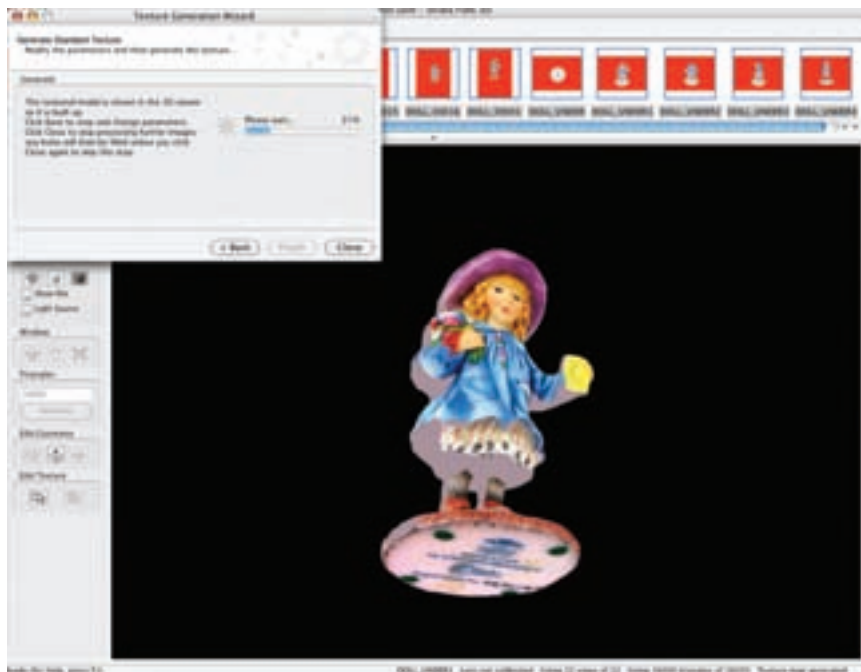
Generate Wireframe is the next step in creating your 3D object using Strata, and again, not surprisingly, the software provides application at the click of a button. Upon selection users are presented with an uncomplicated two-option dialog box. You can access the Generate Wireframe function to create a basic surface quickly, or the more advanced Optimize Surface option. This allows you to define Parameters of the applied



**CHANGE DIRECTION:** Exporting is, as always, a click away. The Use Current Orientation checkbox rotates the exported model so that it will initially appear to face the same direction as the current display in the Model window



**RELOCATION:** Transfer photos directly to Strata Foto and return a real-time 3D object to a 3D layer in Photoshop® CS3 Extended



**THERE AND BACK:** The texture-editing tools allow you to touch up the surface texture using your preferred 2D image editor. Simply click the Copy View button, paste into Photoshop, adding labels or restoration tools, then merge, returning to Foto 3D and clicking the Paste View button. Simple!

Wireframe. Here, you can set a maximum number of images to be optimised. Dependent on your number of images and the complexity of your silhouettes, this number can be increased or decreased to determine the speed of optimisation alone. You are also provided with a straightforward Quality Level slider. If you have an organically shaped object, you can set Smooth Approximation for a smooth mesh with fewer corners. Choose Exact Fit if you're confident that your masks are accurate, fitting the details of the silhouette, or Reasonable Accuracy as a standard default. Then just sit back and let Strata Foto 3D do the hard work.

As always, however, if further editing is required, Strata has supplied a few advanced tweaking tools. One constructive example, which makes creation even quicker, is the Clipping Plane option. This tool can be essential when the automatic Masking Tool may not identify where the object ends and the pedestal starts, which happens particularly if the object casts a shadow. Although these area masks can be refined using the Clipping Plane, from the Edit Geometry tool bar, you can drag the blue Clipping Plane to where you want to shave the bottom of the mesh corresponding to the pedestal. Once in position, simply click the Clip Model button to complete the process.

Generating your surface textures is the third stage of completing your model and it is as straightforward as the previous operations. Again, when clicking the Generate Texture Map button, users are presented with the Parameters dialog box. This time, you're supplied with a Texture map size value, which is editable to a maximum of 1600 pixels, working in a similar way to all resolution values; the more detail in the image the higher your pixel quantity.

Two check boxes are also present. Activating Tone Correct Textures will automatically enhance texture colour, compensating for any exposure discrepancy. Activating Texture Boosting will

allow Foto 3D to automatically select key images, according to project order when applying. This process can, again, be specified by deselecting this box and switching the Thumbnail window to Details mode, using Images>Image Order menu. Other advanced options include applying a bottom texture, editing surface texture and removing texture artefacts, all easy to fathom thanks to the extensive guides you'll find in the Help menu. ■

## Specifications

<b>Manufacturer:</b> Strata™
<b>Web:</b> <a href="http://www.store.strata.com">www.store.strata.com</a>
<b>Price:</b> \$149 / £74.50
<b>Spec:</b> Powered by 3DSOM's patented
model generation
Auto-masking wizards
UV mapped baked-on texture
Exported for display in a VRML-enabled web browser
Imported into Strata 3D CX/Strata Live 3D
Mac OS X v. 10.4
8512MB of RAM
300MB of available hard disk space (additional free space required during installation)
1024x768 monitor resolution with 16-bit video card
Microsoft® Windows XP with Service Pack 2 or Windows Vista™ Home Premium, Business,

**Summary:** After taking the time to work with this software, we've concluded that it's reasonable to describe Foto 3D as an efficient, cost-effective modelling system. We are inclined to agree that it does offer familiar tool functions and intuitive operation that lets you enjoy the creative experience at your leisure.

Rating: **4/5**

## Similar products

### Strata™ Design 3D CX

<b>Manufacturer:</b> Strata™
<b>Web:</b> <a href="http://www.strata.com">www.strata.com</a>
<b>Price:</b> \$149 / £74.50
<b>Spec:</b> Award winning Strata 3D CX application engine
Extrude, lathe and subdivision surface modelling tools
Full radiosity renderer with reflections, refractions, soft shadows, HDRI lighting, volumetric effects
Mac OS X v. 10.4.8
Microsoft® Windows XP with Service Pack 2 or Windows Vista™ Home Premium, Business, Ultimate or Enterprise

With three powerful tools, Match, Model and Render, synchronised to Strata's 3D CX application engine, users can perform efficient functions such as taking the real-time model and rendering it using a full radiosity renderer, with reflections and refractions. They can also match the perspective, modify existing objects or create new ones.

Rating: **4/5**

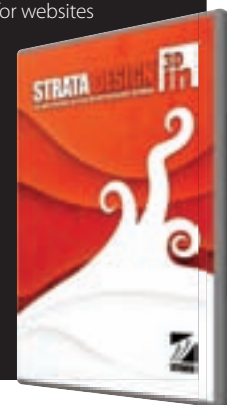


### Strata™ Live 3D

<b>Manufacturer:</b> Strata™
<b>Web:</b> <a href="http://www.strata.com">www.strata.com</a>
<b>Price:</b> \$149 / £74.50
<b>Spec:</b> Export real-time 3D PDF or web page
Based on Java™
Live 3D[in] content works on virtually any machine
Mac OS X v. 10.4.8
Microsoft® Windows XP with Service Pack 2 or Windows Vista™ Home Premium, Business, Ultimate or Enterprise

Live 3D[in] enables users to create real-time interactive 3D content for websites and PDF documents from Photoshop® CS3 Extended. It makes saving 3D content simple. Just select Strata Live 3D[in] Web or PDF from the Filters menu, choose what style of Navigation bar to use and then pick where to save the document.

Rating: **4/5**





# Photoshop CS3 Workflow

*Optimise a skilled workflow, whether you're an enthusiast or professional, and focus on your creative visions*

**Manufacturer:** Sybex®, Wiley Publishing, Inc

**Web:** [www.sybex.com/WileyCDA/](http://www.sybex.com/WileyCDA/)

**Price:** \$39.99 / £26.99

**Spec:** 327 pages

Four parts ordered by level of proficiency

14 deluxe chapters

Full colour print, images included

Detailed index

Order: [www.sybex.com/WileyCDA/](http://www.sybex.com/WileyCDA/)

**P**hotoshop CS3 Workflow: The Digital Photographer's Guide is another obliging piece of literature, part of Sybex's Tim Grey Guides series. Much like all other titles in the range, this instalment offers resources and helpful tips that give digital photographers the chance to explore methods at new levels of excellence. With Tim Grey being Microsoft's chief ambassador to professional photographers, his reputation precedes him, so it's no surprise to find that this title provides a more than adequate guide to the software.

The glossy, full colour, 328-page publication is easy to understand and all practices are explained clearly, with minimum fuss. More advanced issues, regarding complex practices or precise tool/option use, are often accompanied by detailed, full-colour reference images,

making the explanations that bit more coherent. There are also small yet insightful inside secrets revealed from page to page, such as hotkey functions and even author suggestions regarding practices.

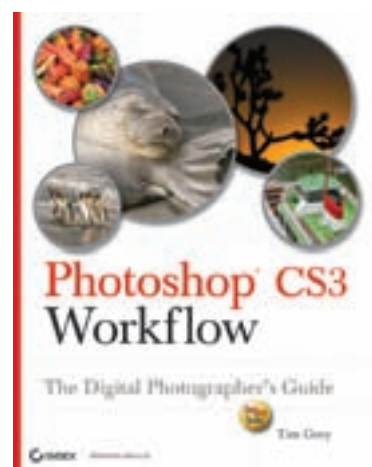
The topics covered in the book are split into four sections and subdivided into easy-to-find chapters, packed with a plethora of informative tips. But not in any old fashion; each section and chapter is introduced to allow readers to evolve their own skills, from understanding the basics to managing more advanced application. Topics for you to discover include understanding basic tone and colour, exploring advanced tonal adjustments and realising the output process. This is all knowledge that will ultimately guide you down the path to creating better imagery and also build your confidence.

Due to the range of topics covered within this title and the hassle-free presentation of them, this really is a great read for Photoshop users and photographers of all abilities. Beginners can build strong foundations, while experts can better understand how to optimise workflows and, more than likely, learn a few new tricks as well. ■

**A LOT TO LEARN:** Explore CS3 interfaces and updates, as well as learning how to process RAW captures to retain maximum detail. Get creative with colourisation, filters and more!

**Summary:** This simple yet well-presented publication is easy to follow and acquaints you with some essential practices in an enthusiastic and informative fashion. It will show you how correct procedures can in fact diminish repetitive errors and allow you to focus on your creative vision.

Rating: **4/5**



# Photoshop CS3 Channels and Masks Bible

*Mask your fears and channel your potential into a creative Photoshop masterpiece*

**Manufacturer:** Wiley Publishing, Ltd

**Web:** [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com)

**Price:** \$49.99 / £31.99

**Order:** [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com)

**Spec:** 510 pages packed with working practice

22 chapters

Full colour print, images included

Detailed index

**A**nother title from the Wiley Publishing, Inc family, Photoshop CS3 Channels and Masks Bible claims to be the title you need to succeed when you want to tap into the full potential of Photoshop's channels and masks.

At first glance, it certainly doesn't fail to deliver the goods. With over 500 pages packed with creative ways to utilise masking and colour functions, there's enough here to keep even the most ardent Photoshop fan hard at work. From a creative point of view, functions are as standard, but there are a few nice applications that arise and related practices that think outside the box. These include using specialised tools like Apply Image to reproduce colour images from black-and-white photography.

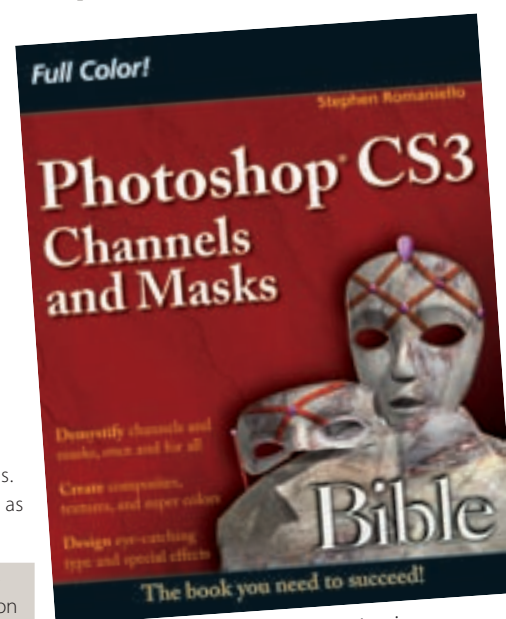
On closer inspection though, it was sometimes found that, although the book offers a good range of essential

practice overall, the more advanced Photoshop user might find it a little frustrating. However, enthusiasts willing to evolve their ability and methods to a proficient standard will find the book a real godsend. There are some particularly fun tasks to participate in, such as using the Type Mask to add an artistic touch to the text, unravelling the secrets of creating, mixing and converting digital colour, or simply reveal, conceal and refine imagery with Layer masks. That's not to say the book lacks more interesting tutorials on advanced application. Take Part three, Chapter nine, for example, where readers are introduced to the function of specifying Duotones.

The general layout of the book does not have the sophistication of other titles, and pages sometimes feel cluttered with imagery, with a few uninspiring examples. As an educational device, however, it delivers – just not as enthusiastically as the title suggests. ■

**Summary:** A steady educational read that leaves nothing to chance. Perhaps with an over-zealous title you expect more, on an aesthetic level at least. But serves well as a comprehensive reference that covers essential creative ground.

Rating: **3/5**



**CHANNEL YOUR SKILLS:** This comprehensive reference will teach you to use valuable tools to create efficient composites, speed up your workflow and get awesome colour results

## FujiFilm FinePix F40fd

**Another innovative product in FujiFilm's flagship range of compact digital cameras, but how does it compare to its predecessors?**

<b>Manufacturer:</b> Fujifilm
<b>Web:</b> www.fujifilm.co.uk
<b>Price:</b> £136 / \$274.24 (www.e4uelectrical.co.uk)
<b>Spec:</b> 8.3 million pixels
3.0x optical zoom
IR Communication (IR simple™)
VGA movie capture of 30 frames per second with sound
Built-in Face Detection Technology
PictBridge™ compatible for direct printing without PC
ISO 2000 sensitivity at full resolution (1600 selectable)
FinePixViewer

FujiFilm's FinePix F40fd is the latest in a long line of practical and proficient compact digital cameras. It has many features that make it one of the market's principal products.

The FinePix F40fd comes as standard with a stylish redesigned outer shell, available in three cool colours: silver, blue and 'gunmetal'. It also has an easy-to-understand Graphical User Interface (GUI) system. Much slimmer than its predecessor at 23.3mm deep, it fits easily into a slim pocket, ready to use in an instant.

Its 2.5" LCD screen complements the camera's 8.3 megapixel resolution, offering crisp viewing of all your images, with FujiFilm's wide-view filter expanding viewing

angles by up to 25°. However, forgetting the aesthetic pleasures of this product, there are also many features, old and new, that work in its favour. Practical features include the compact's dual memory card slots, supporting both a traditional xD Picture Card™ and the popular Secure Digital (SD) card format, as well as a 300-shot battery life, convenient for prolific photographers.

With its simple screen navigation and easily identifiable buttons, you can select specific options that add necessary effects for improved imagery. Fourteen Special Scene Positions account for many photographic environments, such as underwater, night and even museum, and make the FinePix F40fd suitable for any photo-specific situation. There's also the cool function of Natural Light and Flash mode, which allows the user to take snaps in quick succession (one with flash, one without), displaying both side by side to examine the effects.

Other features we mustn't leave out include the RP Processor II, featuring double noise reduction CCD HR VI with unique octangular shape, supplying faster shutter speed and thus combating image blur. Efficient Display modes at the touch of a button, offering you a rule of thirds grid for those perfect compositions, make this compact an appealing product for the enthusiastic photographer. ■



**INTUITIVE FUNCTIONS:** In Playback mode, Face Detection will automatically zoom in to subjects' faces and trim the shot



**LOW-LIGHT FUNCTION:** FujiFilm's Intelligent Flash system analyses the subject of the photo and sets power output accordingly

**Summary:** After a trial run with this compact camera, its capabilities were evident. Enthusiast photographers who need a high-performance take-anywhere digital camera can't go far wrong with the FujiFilm FinePix F40fd.

Rating: **4/5**

## Olympus E-510

**The E-510 is the new model targeted towards serious amateurs and semi-professionals. But is it worth the asking price?**

<b>Manufacturer:</b> Olympus
<b>Web:</b> www.olympus.co.uk
<b>Price:</b> £799.99
<b>Spec:</b> 10 effective megapixels
4/3" Live MOS sensor
2.5" TFT colour LCD
1/4000 – 60 sec shutter
ISO 100 – 1600

The new 10-megapixel E-510 is the successor to the popular E-500 camera. Housed in a new body, the E-510 is meant for the serious amateur and semi-pro market, but does it meet their requirements?

The specifications of the E-510 are great, with the 4/3" Live MOS sensor producing sharp, noise-free images. Colours are well saturated, even on Auto mode, and there is little evidence of chromatic aberration. There are some nice little touches, too, with features such as a double card cover that incorporates both Compact Flash and xD Picture card. However, this is heavily spoilt by the camera's

usability. We have to admit that we really didn't find this camera easy to use. For an asking price of £799, the kit includes two lenses, a 14-42mm and 40-150mm zoom lens. Despite this seemingly great deal at first glance, the camera and lenses aren't pleasant to hold, with a very 'plasticky' feel. Perhaps most disappointing is that the camera menus aren't intuitive at all, even to the most confident of photographers. Some of the unnecessary menu options are so tricky to control and led to a few lost shots in our test run.

One of the biggest selling points of the E-510 is the Live Preview function. This allows you to preview images, including the depth of field, on the LCD monitor. You can also view the images at magnifications of 6x and 10x, to check that the images are sharp and well exposed. This is a great feature in theory, but in bright, outdoor conditions, it's almost impossible to see the screen, rendering the Live Preview defunct. ■



**MENUS:** We found the menu system on the Olympus E-510 to be over-complicated and difficult to control during fast shoots

**Summary:** Overall, this is a good option if you want a lightweight DSLR camera. However, we think that the asking price is a little steep for the quality of camera body and usability.

Rating: **3/5**

## Dfine 2.0

*Eliminate noise from your digital photographs the easy way*

<b>Manufacturer:</b> Nik Software
<b>Web:</b> <a href="http://www.niksoftware.com">www.niksoftware.com</a>
<b>Price:</b> £80.41 / €118.94 + 19% VAT
<b>Spec:</b> Windows 2000 Professional, Windows XP or Windows Vista
Pentium III 1GHz or better
256MB RAM
Adobe Photoshop 7 through CS3, Adobe Photoshop Elements 2.0 through 5.0, or Adobe Photoshop plug-in compatible application*

**D**fine® 2.0 is one of the market's latest noise reduction software packages, available for both Photoshop and Photoshop Elements users, by Nik™ Software. Its main objective is to provide users with the ability to rectify the inherent unwanted imperfection known as 'noise' in most digital photographic images, through unprecedented control.

With its stylish and coherent workspace presented simply, navigation is leisurely with Dfine. The working area is straightforward, allowing you to get straight to work, selecting the Measure option that calculates the area and amount of noise present within your image. This can be done effortlessly and to a very high standard with Dfine's

built-in Automatic feature, with boxes appearing, pinpointing and relating the problem areas. There's also a Manual option, so detailed application can be specified at all times, the more familiar you become with practices.

Once contrast and colour noise has been profiled and measured, simply select the Reduce options to continue. You can easily treat your whole image directly, editing contrast and colour noise. However, Dfine's improved interface offers advanced options to manipulate noise effects, through pinpointing specific colour areas or by using the highly intuitive Control Points command. To activate this option, you just select Control Point from your Method menu, click the Add a Control Point to the Image button and apply to the necessary point on your image. With your Noise and Contrast bars, and a top bar allowing you to determine your adjustable area size, you can simply click and slide to edit treatment.

Other cool built-in features include useful Zoom functions and Mode options, which allow you to select Luminance or Chrominance effects that help determine on-screen changes when applying Control Points. There's also the Loupe screen that lets you see a simultaneous before-and-after shot of your image. ■



**MAXIMUM CONTROL:** The Control Point and Color Range methods, along with the Selective Tool, offer you the most advanced ways for selectively applying noise reduction to your images

**Summary:** With just the one concern that rendering is slightly slow, the options and functions that Dfine provides really do afford unprecedented control and prevent the loss of detail after the tool is introduced, therefore improving image quality.

Rating: **4/5**

## iPhoto '08

*With its newest upgrade, iPhoto is sure to make your photo organisation that little bit more interesting*

<b>Manufacturer:</b> Apple
<b>Web:</b> <a href="http://www.apple.com/ilife/iphoto/">www.apple.com/ilife/iphoto/</a>
<b>Price:</b> £39.50 / \$79, Family Pack £49.50 / £99 (iLife '08 package)
<b>Spec:</b> Automatic Event organisation
New powerful editing tools
New customisable book dust jackets and calendars
Unified search options
512MB of RAM; 1GB recommended
Mac OS X v10.4.9 or later

**I**Photo '08, the latest photo-organising software from Apple, has some inventive upgrades and it's been provoking excitement similar to that created by the original version, when it was launched more than half a decade ago.

So naturally we got our hands on a copy just to see what all the fuss was about – and were pleasantly surprised. First, for those who are unaccustomed to iPhoto or are flirting with the prospect of purchasing and using the latest edition, rest easy, as navigation is simple and quick. Importing imagery with Drag and Drop functions and sorting images into folders couldn't be easier.

Attaching Flag options allows you to make a visual note of all your favourite images, and there are some great creative options attached, too. You can produce calendars or picture books, with compelling, customisable layouts,

by selecting one of the easily identifiable options. Then there are the practical new features such as the Events option, which makes a cluttered workspace a thing of the past and establishes a new way of looking at your libraries. It automatically organises and condenses photos into Events that allow you to locate images quickly.

Another impressive updated feature comes in the form of the editing capabilities. You have a whole palette of retouching tools and an array of effects at your disposal, including a standard Red-eye Reduction Tool and a comprehensive Adjustment dialog box allowing you to manipulate exposure, temperature and sharpness, to mention just a few.

There's also a Crop command and a very cool Straightening Tool option, allowing you to manipulate the degrees of your image for that perfect horizon. This all adds up to provide you with a product that not only looks stylish and functional, but is also completely user-friendly. ■

**Summary:** iPhoto automatically organises your photo library and has some quirky new functions for very quick fixes. With the improved organising function, you can get the most out of your photo collections.

Rating: **5/5**



**NEW AND IMPROVED:** iPhoto organises your photo library and makes editing as easy as clicking your mouse – so even the biggest collections are easy to view