

Resource reviews

Even the pros need a little helping hand now and again, so take a look at this little lot

BenQ MP721c Digital Projector

Show off your Photoshop designs to an impressive size with this digital must-have

Manufacturer: BenQ
Web: www.benq.com
Price: £501
Video compatibility: NTSC/PAL/SECAM
Throw distance: Min 1.00m, Max 10.00m
Resolution support: 640x480 to 1280x1024
Display colour: Full 16.7 million-colour palette

For many, the leap from amateur digital artist to a pro or semi-pro inevitably involves some kind of promotional show somewhere along the line. Now, with more scope for low cost exhibitions and many new art spaces opening up here and there, the equipment needed to put on a good display has lowered considerably in price. BenQ's MP721c Digital Projector is one such affordable model and at £501 it is great value for money with good solid performance, in terms of both handling and image quality.

The body of the MP721c is stylish and fairly compact with a glossy, dark blue plastic casing that remains inconspicuous in a show setup. The Perspex-style casing, although very shiny and durable, did, however, attract a

lot of dust so would need to be packed away after every use.

Packaged with the MP721c is the MyScreen guide which walks you through the setup process, ensuring the projector is connected to your PC correctly and talking you through the settings to make sure that the image display is the best it can be. Large and easy to use buttons are positioned on the top of the casing for control over image setup, and the lens zoom controls are easily accessible through a peephole at the front of the casing.

Most importantly, the image quality of the MP721c is very good for a £500 model, with several display options for whiteboard, blackboard and theatre setup, as well as an sRGB option for accurate colour profiling. Design work looks accurate and impressive with black and white tones giving good contrast. Oh, and when you're not showing off your Photoshop work it's great to watch films on too! ■



VALUE FOR MONEY: This consumer-targeted model is a good option for those who want to showcase their work on a large scale with minimal cost

Summary: A great first projector model for under £500. Good colour results mean that graphics will project well onto most display surfaces. Easy to use and durable.

Rating: **5/5**

Software Cinema's Pro Studio Retouching

Software Cinema delivers yet again with a DVD that teaches you how to master retouching photos

Manufacturer: Software Cinema
Web: www.software-cinema.com
Price: \$125.00 (around £63)
Requirements: Windows 2000 or XP/ Mac OS X
 Minimum 1024x768 screen resolution

In the last issue we noted that visual training can be a tricky thing to do effectively, due to tutorial videos giving you too many unnecessary details, as if none of us have ever used a mouse before! However, there was one DVD, *Fundamental Techniques of Adobe Photoshop CS2* from Software Cinema, that found the balance of giving you all the information you need without being patronising. Gladly, we can tell you that this was no fluke, as yet again it delivers a well-presented and informative DVD.

This time, training duties are handled by Jane Conner-ziser, an accomplished photographer who specialises in retouching portraits in Photoshop. Breaking from form, this DVD begins with a PowerPoint-style presentation that covers the fundamental concepts connected with portraits, such as light sources and differences between portrait styles; retouching a fashion portrait is sufficiently different from how you should treat a family portrait. The DVD then returns to the established presentation style of

focusing our attention on the screen without needless cuts to the narrator or "trendy" segues. Each topic is covered in depth and in a comprehensive yet clear manner. The sessions are viewed in an easy to use customised player that is divided into 17 chapters, so you have the luxury of being able to view them in any order you choose. The running time is over five and a half hours and each session comes complete with project files provided on the DVD for you to work with. They include everything you need, even the custom brushes that Jane Conner-ziser personally uses! The topics cover everything from learning to use the Healing Brush, Blending Modes and Layer Masks to Burning, Dodging and Painting. It also teaches methods of skin smoothing, enhancing eyes, whitening teeth, fixing drooping skin, minimising wrinkles and enhancing make-up without making your work obvious. ■

Summary: The *Photoshop Pro Studio Retouching* DVD offers a comprehensive look at portrait retouching and would be invaluable for anyone looking to become a professional in the field.

Rating: **5/5**

GOOD VALUE: The DVD runs for over five and a half hours with each section including its own project files



Machine Wash Filters Vol. 1-3

A washing machine that makes things messy? Get dirty with the Machine Wash filters!

Manufacturer: Mr. Retro

Web: www.misterretro.com

Price: Individual volumes £34.95 each, £62 for two volumes and £92.95 for all three

Requirements: Mac OS 9.0 and above, Adobe Photoshop 6.0 – CS2 (does not currently run on CS3) and Photoshop Elements 1.0 and above, Windows 2000 and above, Adobe Photoshop 6.0 – CS3 and Photoshop Elements 1.0 and above

Although most people these days appreciate digital art, there are still a few critics out there bemoaning how “clean” digital art looks. Digital artists have responded by using all manner of texture brushes and overlay layers to make everything seem more gritty and “real”. Ironically, the Machine Wash filters from Mr Retro can help you make your crisp pixel based images look dirty and used, and not in a bad way!

The Machine Wash Filters create professional quality image ageing and weathering effects. The only component you'll need to install is the custom Photoshop plug-in that applies the effects. There's no need to install the files to your hard drive as they can run straight from the CD, which is great if you're worried about space on your computer. The GUI interface, located in the Filters menu lets you control all aspects of the wash effects. The Wash Selector gives you real-time previews for any of each volume's 60 built-in wash

effects via a drop-down menu. The wash names all make sense, which is a nice touch. For example, ‘orangepeel’ actually looks like orange peel, so you won't spend ages trying to find the effect you're after. There is a Heavy Cycle option that, instead of revealing layers below the image, creates a rust effect underneath the distressed design. You can even choose the colour of the rust to ensure it fits with your image. The effects can be applied up to a maximum live area of 18" x 18" at 300 dpi. While they can be used for larger sizes, there can be some reduction in the quality of the filter, but we doubt many people will be working on images larger than that too often. Sadly, although the filters work in Photoshop CS3 with Windows they are not currently supported by the Mac version of CS3, although a free fix is in the works. ■

TAKE IT EASY: With every volume of Machine Wash containing 60 wash effects, making your artwork look distressed has never been easier!

Summary: A large collection of easy to use, high-quality effects filters for Photoshop. Good stuff, as long as you're prepared to pay the price.

Rating: **3/5**



How to Cheat in Photoshop CS3

A book that shows cheating is fun, and isn't always a bad thing...

Manufacturer: Focal Press

Web: www.focalpress.com

Price: £24.99

How to Cheat in Photoshop CS3 isn't nearly as nefarious as its name implies. Instead, it's a valuable resource that helps you take advantage of Photoshop. (Take advantage of 'cheat' – see what they did there?)

Fully updated to include CS3 (although 'backwards compatible', it's relevant to any version of Photoshop), the book is authored by graphic artist and journalist, Steve Caplin. It features loads of time-saving techniques that will improve your workflow and help solve your creative problems much more efficiently. The goal of this book is to be useful when your deadlines are rapidly approaching, but you still need to produce top quality work. We'd say it succeeds nicely.

The step-by-step tutorials focus on giving you quicker solutions, avoiding the more long-winded way of tackling a problem. Each one is designed as a double-page spread so that you can see everything you need in one glance, as opposed to flicking through numerous pages. The early chapters deal with

the basics of photomontage before getting to the fun stuff of changing people's appearance or giving them facial hair! Each step is accompanied by a high quality image with keyboard shortcuts represented by red keys for the Mac and blue keys for Windows and a Hot Tip sidebar that elaborates on a key aspect of the tutorial. The layout is both aesthetically pleasing and easy to follow. The book is humorous in tone and features insightful interludes into an artist's life. Adding credence to the book, a large number of the tutorials use actual commissions as their basis, or show results of a lesson from the Reader's Forum on www.howtocheatinphotoshop.com (where you can even ask the author any questions you have).

The book comes complete with a DVD packed with hundreds of images, project files, not to mention 300 high-resolution AbleStock images plus over two hours of QuickTime movies of the projects. ■

Summary: Well written and easy to follow, this is a great resource for photographers and designers alike. It will help you work both smarter and faster. Recommended.

Rating: **5/5**



HOW TO: Want to know how to create every effect on this cover? All of the techniques are there in the book!

Photoshop for Video (Third edition)

Ignore the uninspiring title, this book proves learning can be great fun!

Manufacturer: Focal Press

Web: www.focalpress.com

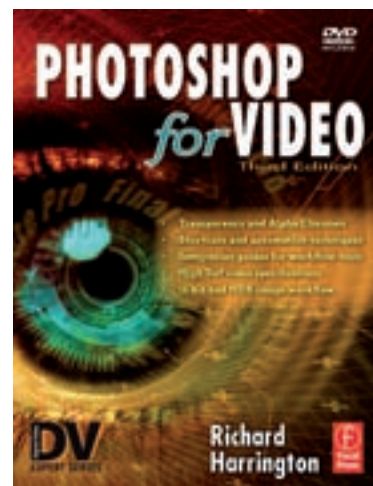
Price: £31.99

Photoshop for Video, like a lot of specialist Photoshop books, could have been a dry and tedious affair. Luckily, author Richard Harrington, a certified instructor for Adobe, Apple and Avid, has a fun writing style that keeps everything light-hearted and interesting. Anyone that can explain colour rules in video editing by saying 'light yellows will look like a dog used your TV as a fire hydrant' is okay by us.

The book's layout is varied and interesting, filled with images and helpful asides/footnotes. Explanations actually explain what things do and why, as opposed to giving you a dull list of commands to memorise. Each subject clearly labels where there's more information to be found on the DVD, which features hundreds of images to work on, tutorials to complete and two and a half hours of video training.

Chapters are separated by entertaining interviews with professionals who offer an insight on the industry and also let you in on their favourite tips and tricks.

Harrington's irreverent prose makes this book worth reading even if you aren't that interested in Photoshop's video options, and his overviews of Photoshop's other functions are highly entertaining. For example, the Mosaic filter is referred to as the 'Cop-blur' – a cheeky nod to criminals' faces on reality TV – and the Fragment filter is described as having 'the effect of an editor without coffee!'. Don't be fooled into thinking the light style reflects shallow content, as the information is loaded with resources to help video professionals make graphics for use in television, video, the Internet and DVD. Topics include how to combine still and moving images, transparency, pixel aspect ratio and alpha channels, and advanced techniques show you how to use Photoshop as a character generator, colour corrector and animation tool. Recent developments in High Definition video and 32-bit imaging are also addressed. ■



LOOK INSIDE: Don't judge a book by its cover; Photoshop for Video is an entertaining and informative read for any artist!

Summary: An excellent resource for anyone looking to expand their skills in video editing. Simultaneously humorous and informative, and highly recommended.

Rating: **5/5**

HP Photosmart Pro B9180 Photo Printer

Find space for a clever photo printer that delivers professional quality...

Manufacturer: HP

Web: www.hp.co.uk

Price: £600 inc VAT

Requirements: Windows 2000, XP Home, XP Professional, x64 Edition (x64 Edition only supports USB direct connect); Certified for Windows Vista; Mac OS X v10.2.8 (web download only), v10.3, v10.4 and higher

Like all A3 printers, the HP B9180 is a veritable monolith measuring 673 x 429 x 241mm, so you'll need some space to fit it, and weighing in at 17.1kg, a sturdy table too! At first, the seemingly lengthy installation and having to detach the output tray to simply load the paper may start to make you wonder whether the printer is worth the hassle, but fortunately all such worries are quickly dispelled when you run the HP Photosmart Premier Software.

Ingeniously acting as a plug-in within Photoshop, Photosmart Pro Print eliminates the need to alter several different menu boxes, giving you just one window with an accurate real-time preview panel to display precisely what will be printed. Its intuitive design lets you easily select paper format, quality and output, so your borderless prints will line up exactly where you want them to. You can simply drag and manipulate the image as if you were using the Free Transform Tool.

The HP B9180 boasts professional quality borderless printing up to A3 and we were impressed with not just the

speed of the prints, but how quiet the machine was while making them. The quality was impressive too; you could happily print your portfolio with the B9180 and the colours matched exactly what we saw on-screen. Although the ink cartridges don't come cheap, you get a surprising amount out of them, much more than some other A3 printers we've used in the past. The HP Photosmart Pro B9180 Photo Printer comes with display profiling and calibration software with HP Colorimeter plus ICC-profiles, HP 38 Pigment Ink Cartridges with Vivera Inks (eight individual ink cartridges), HP 70 Printheads (x4), HP ProPrint plug-in for Adobe Photoshop, HP Photosmart Premier Software on CD-ROM, quick start booklet, user's guide and power cord. Our only real gripe is that for the price you're paying, we hoped that the USB cable would have been included. ■

Summary: Professional quality A3 printer that's quick, quiet and couldn't be easier to use thanks to the Photosmart Pro Print software plug-in. It's worth finding the room for! Highly recommended.

Rating: **5/5**

TOP QUALITY: The HP Photosmart Pro B9180 may not be the sexiest printer out there, but its prints more than make up for it

