

An Introduction to Poser by Arena Reed

Learn about Poser while trying to ignore a fake background!

Manufacturer: Desktop Images

Web: www.desktopimages.com

Price: \$39.99 (approx £20)

Spec: n/a

Remember that fine line we talked about with visual training? It gets a tad wobblier here. This instructional DVD tries a bit too hard to look polished, it has animated intro's for each section and constantly focuses on it's narrator/lecturer Arena Reed, who presents the DVD in front of a very distracting background.

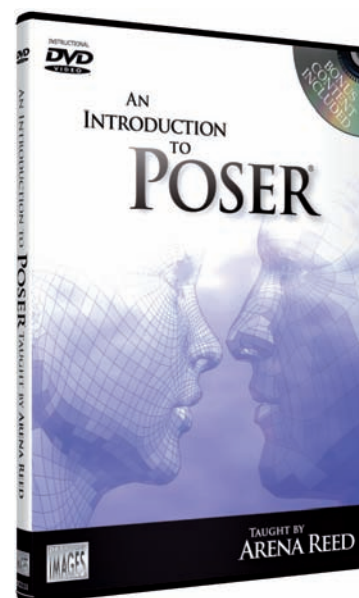
It never quite reaches its goals and would be better served by keeping the camera on the screen. The DVD itself isn't bad though and serves well as an introduction to Poser 6. It's not a comprehensive guide, but it doesn't set out to be. Poser has quite a unique interface that could seem daunting if you were only familiar with Photoshop, so the DVD offers a much-needed guided tour of Poser's interface, and informs you about many time-saving tips and techniques. Reed takes you through

navigating library menus to load models, clothing, hair and props. She continues, elaborating on a plethora of subjects from modifying facial characteristics and skin tone, to positioning and adjusting lighting and cameras to help set the scene. The information here is useful, but we couldn't help feeling it could have been a little more structured in it's approach.

For animators, keyframe animation, walk animation, facial expressions and strand hair attributes are also covered. At a manageable 80 minutes long, you could easily watch the entire DVD in one sitting. There are some added Bonus features where you get to see some animated videos of what Poser can do, including one of the characters spoofing the *Matrix* and the Hulk! The DVD comes complete with Poser demo software, plus free bonus figures from Content Paradise to get you started. ■

Summary: A good entry-level DVD that's a little rough around the edges, but works as an introduction to Poser with some good extras to get you started.

Rating: **3/5**



ColorVision Spyder2PRO

Don't worry, we promise not to make any arachnid-related jokes...

Manufacturer: ColorVision

Web: www.colorvision.com

Price: 229 euro (approx. £155)

Specs: Windows 2000 and XP or higher/Mac OSX 10.3 or higher

If you've ever got a piece of work printed and wondered why the piece of paper you're holding in your hand looks like a garish mockery of the masterpiece on your screen, chances are your monitor isn't calibrated properly.

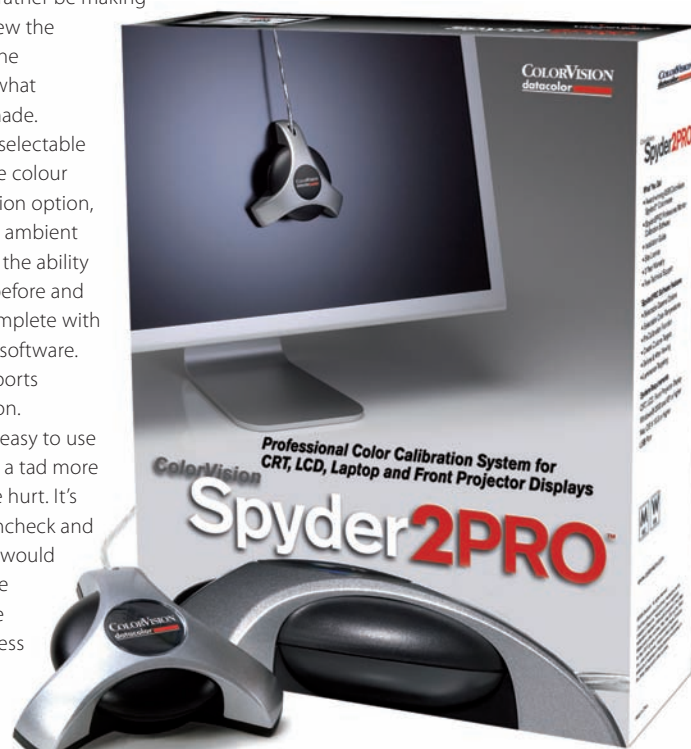
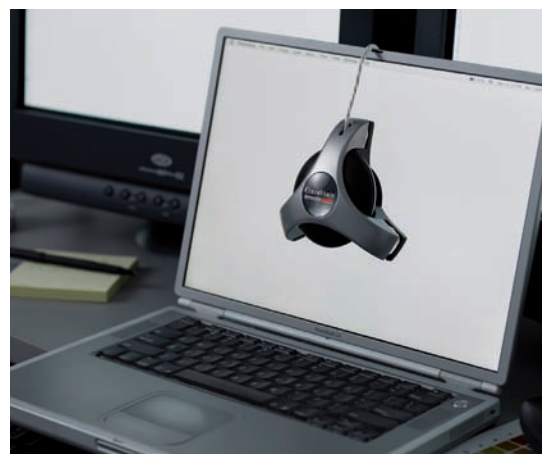
In days gone by, this meant you'd have to manually configure all of your settings, including gamma levels, brightness and contrast, which could often be a long tedious process. Fortunately, the good people at ColorVision can help solve your problems in a much easier way. Spyder2PRO is a professional colour calibration system for CRT, LCD, laptop and front projector displays. It rests flat against your screen with the aid of a counterweight and measures the monitor's colour output and ambient light in the room. You can either choose to let the Spyder automatically configure

your settings, or if you're a bit more hands on, you can make changes yourself, with guidance from the Spyder. Personally, we prefer to let the Spyder do the hard work for us, its results are very reliable and we'd rather be making images! You can always view the settings before and after the calibration to see exactly what changes the Spyder has made. Software features include selectable gamma options, selectable colour temperatures, pre-calibration option, front projector calibration, ambient precise-light function and the ability to create custom targets before and after viewing. It comes complete with ColorVision, PrintFIX PLUS software. The Spyder2PRO also supports multiple monitor calibration.

As included is the fairly easy to use Wizard software, although a tad more explanation wouldn't have hurt. It's easy to miss one box to uncheck and then run into problems. It would have been nice to have the option to tell it to calibrate immediately, but the process is fairly simple. All in all, however, this is a very solid piece of equipment.

Summary: A Professional quality monitor calibrator that you can configure to your heart's content or simply leave it to do the job for you. Either way, you'll get stunning results. The packaged software is a little confusing.

Rating: **4/5**



SECOND CHANCES:

One of the nicest things about the Spyder is the ability to see the changes it has made to your screen with the before/after option

Samsung NV10

Samsung fleshes out the 10MP digital compact race with another model from its popular NV series

Manufacturer: Samsung
Web: www.samsung.com
Price: £279
Spec: Resolution: 10.1MP Image size: 3648 x 2736 Max image size Focal length: 35-105mm equiv lens Zoom: 3x optical zoom, 5x Digital zoom ISO: 100, 200, 400, 800, 1000 ISO Dimensions: 96.5 x 60 x 18.5mm Weight: 148.7g

The NV10 has become one of Samsung's hottest-selling cameras from its NV range.

The series of cameras was developed following a two-year consumer research study to gain insight into the lifestyle of its consumers, the results of which accumulated to spur a design that offered optimum usability in a stylish mainframe.

One of the first things digital camera enthusiasts will note with the NV10 is the ability to control functionality and navigate the menu options via Smart Touch buttons. This distinctive UI enables the user to activate adjustments and compose shots in an intuitive style, which will favour those with a penchant for devices such as Wacom tablets, etc.

Turning over the model in our grasp, we're pleased to note the inclusion of the industry standard 2.5 inch LCD wide-view screen, which although has some issues in direct sunlight,

delivers clear and visible results in the majority of circumstances. Included in the 10.1MP camera's feature set is the brand's individual make of Advanced Shake Reduction technology. As with its contemporaries this provides the user with stability for shots prone to image blur, for example indoor, night time or action shots.

The image quality outputted from the device could be better for the price ballpark the unit falls into. Although the consistency is fair and the colour interpretation acceptable, the rendition of image detail was slightly under par. Furthermore, on several occasions we found the unit liable to over expose images. Unfortunately the ISO equivalent only staggers up to 1000, not the popular 1600 measurement many of its competitors deliver.

On the whole, the unit is an ideal solution for point-and-shoot photographers, but for the more heavyweight enthusiast there are many competitors possibly more worthy of the cash. However, originally priced at £279 during its launch, the NV10 can now be sought at a reduced price tag among the bevy of online retailers. ■

Summary: The NV10 is attractive in terms of its intuitive navigation assisted by the innovative Smart Touch buttons in a bid to win over the gadget-heads. However, there is a minor case of style-over-substance, as the camera navigation can be a little awkward during a shoot.

Rating: **3/5**



FRONT: The Samsung model is characteristic of the popular NV range in looks and technology. The pop-up flash, blue ring around the lens and its dark and small compact appearance offer the signature appeal



BACK: The company has engineered the use of Smart Touch buttons as shown here surrounding the LCD, to aid user navigation and selection

SpaceNavigator

We've had the keyboard, then came the mouse and then the tablet. Photoshop users now prepare themselves for the SpaceNavigator...

Manufacturer: 3D Connexion
Web: www.3dconnexion.com
Price: Starting at \$59
Specs: 6 degrees of freedom optical sensor speed adjustable to preference 2 programmable function keys 479g 2-year warranty Circular design Supports Google Earth 4.1 for the Mac Supports by Microsoft Live Search maps Supports CS3, NASA World Wind 1.4, AC3D 6.2

In principle, the SpaceNavigator is a mouse that enables digital artists to move the cursor in a three-dimensional way.

The device works by exploiting pressure-sensitive technology so that when the artist pushes, pulls, twists or tilts the cap, the result on screen will be that the user has the power to simultaneously pan, zoom, and rotate 3D imagery. The more pressure we applied in tests, the faster this process occurred. Likewise, when we applied less pressure, the rate of effect shown on the monitor slowed down. The beauty of the SpaceNavigator over a mouse is therefore the sovereignty to perform intricate adjustments to 3D views and designs without having to stop to switch between directional tools.

In addition, to aid users of Photoshop in their 3D pursuits, the SpaceNavigator is claimed to be an ideal peripheral for

over 100 contemporary 3D apps, including Google Earth vs4 and Google SketchUp. In actual fact, the support for Google Earth is built into this handheld device so users can circumnavigate the globe in a chopper-like effect. This is ultimately a cute, but perhaps not essential facet and may be grounds for unwanted distraction, although the added technology may sway some shoppers.

In theory, this product sounds like a relatively nice buy, particularly for those in the 3D creative montage business. However, the flexibility over movement is at times trying and cannot always be identified by the computer. Additionally, the shape of the mouse means that for the majority of the time your hand is locked into a claw-like grip, perhaps not a practical or comfortable solution.

The benefits of convenience are obviously paramount with this product, and although its innovativeness can't be knocked, its functionality may need some tweaking. It's going to take more for the majority of Photoshop users to ditch their perfectly adequate Wacom for the somewhat more awkward SpaceNavigator. ■

Summary: An interesting product, and with a few tweaks this could be a very tempting alternative for the digital designer. However, in its current form it lacks a feature set that could tempt a creative away from the traditional mouse or tablet.

Rating: **2/5**



TOO AWKWARD: The device is designed to be in control with pressure and twists, but the awkward circular model could cause discomfort over long periods of use

