

Fine-tune with PhotoTune 2.2

With the promise of an easy, intuitive application for improving your snaps, does this software live up to the hype?

Manufacturer: onOne Software

Web: www.ononesoftware.com

Price: \$129.95/£64.98

Spec: Adobe Photoshop CS2, CS3, Elements 4.0 (Mac), Elements 5.0 (PC) compatible

16-bit compatibility

Easy six-step process

Advanced skin colour correction

Unmatched saturation control

Fine-tune panel

Mac OS X or higher

Windows XP, Vista or higher

onOne Software's most recent release, PhotoTune 2.2, is an all-inclusive photo-editing package with high potential. When you buy PhotoTune you get two dynamic applications: ColorTune and SkinTune.

These twin modules allow you to colour correct your images using two separate methods, but both promise to perfect your shots without having to understand colour theory or the 'complex controls of Photoshop'.

onOne describes both packages enthusiastically. ColorTune is explained as working on a straightforward compare-and-image-click basis, correcting colour, contrast and brightness in one simple screen layout. SkinTune lets you click on skin tones in an image, and the colour is corrected based on years of research and thousands of samples of skin colours. We tested both programs to see if they'd live up to their claims.

ColorTune is a simple and intuitive application. Upon opening a photo, you're provided with two examples of your image. Select the one you prefer to start the correction process. Correction is effortless thanks to the Wizard slider, which increases or decreases the amount of alteration needed in each step, and the easy image-click function allows you to select your preferred adjustment. Once you've completed the six-step process, you can then fine-tune your image with the more advanced tools ColorTune has to offer.

Under the Basic options you can use the simple sliders to alter Brightness, Contrast and Saturation. Brightness is intuitively determined by the Wizard to within four to five per cent accuracy, but can be edited to your satisfaction. There are only two adjustable colours, but onOne claims that any more than that is counter-productive. The Highlight/Shadow Points slider serves to remap pixels, clipping the appropriate amount at each end of the spectrum to ensure correct results. Effects can be applied by simply selecting one of the five presets in the pop-up menu.

For those who like to tamper and have ultimate control over such applications, you can then choose the H&S (Highlights and Shadows) option in the Options bar. This is great for those photos that need special attention, encouraging more advanced users to work on their shots. These tools work with a simple premise – allowing the user to isolate tonal regions quite precisely, ensuring smooth, at times flawless, gradation. Reset options enable you to reconsider your applied choices.



BASIC OPERATION: Basic sliders contain adjustments for Color, Brightness, Contrast and Saturation. Color and Brightness are set to the amount determined by the intuitive Wizard technology

SkinTune is also easy to understand and apply changes with. Upon opening your image, use the colour picker to select skin tones within your image. The Ethnicity menu, a unique and innovative option, is presented, enabling you to determine a swatch of appropriate colour tones in accordance with your model. Each library consists of 120,000 skin colours, so colour correction is almost guaranteed. The 31-colour swatch samples are easy to apply, altering your image tones in real-time, and operate by correcting an image's hue levels.

There are also some of the more usual adjustment options available, and Equalize Color options are present so users can fine-tune their shots. SkinTune also works on the user's behalf by automatically recognising 8-bit or 16-bit images and processing them accordingly before your own corrections even begin. Users can reselect desired skin tones and swatches if the image looks bad, by simply re-clicking with the colour picker on the target image.

The accompanying PDF guide offers some helpful extras and advanced supervision when applying click-points, so be sure to check this out as well.

Summary: PhotoTune 2.2 delivers on its promise of easy-to-use functions and is specified to allow users to become familiar with what makes for good colour correction. It does lack the flexibility of Photoshop's numerous adjustment options, yet the essentials are all here, with some innovative extras. Overall, a very competent product.

Rating: **4/5**



SKIN UP... OR DOWN: The skin colour swatches contain different colour variations or hues, with warm colours to the left and cool to the right

Creative Photoshop – Digital Illustration and Art Techniques

Maximise your skill and creativity with the help of tutorial pro Derek Lea!

Manufacturer: Focal Press

Web: www.focalpress.com

Price: £22.99

Spec: n/a

Photoshop books have a tendency to be either very educational with little in the way of inspiration, or packed with impressive imagery but offering no insight into how to achieve such a look. Fortunately, thanks to Photoshop expert Derek Lea, we now have a book that fulfils both criteria. Its goal is to inspire and inform, and it succeeds effortlessly. Derek Lea has been writing creative tutorials on a number of subjects for years now, and brings his versatility with him here.

The book is divided into four sections: Drawing and Painting (including creating stencil art, colouring comic art and creating characters with shape layers); Unconventional Methods, which covers antique effects, using a photocopier with Photoshop and Urban Lowbrow Art; Illustrative Photography, which explores ageing effects and

realistic surrealism; and finally, Photoshop and Other Programs, which looks at using our favourite Adobe app with programs like Poser and Illustrator. Despite being laid out in sections, *Creative Photoshop* can be read in any order, because it's like a 'greatest hits' collection of Derek's tutorials with some new tips thrown in.

What's really enjoyable is the sheer range of ideas presented – everything from intricate Photoshop tricks to more unconventional methods such as using a hair dryer on thermal fax paper to get an aged paper effect. You can't help but be inspired.

The layout is pleasing. There are numerous photos and illustrations in the tutorials, along with interesting sidebars and icons to identify time-saving creative hints, as well as potential pitfalls. And then there's Derek's art itself, which constantly changes in style but always looks impressive.

The book comes with a CD packed with helpful images and you can even join the *Creative Photoshop* community at www.creativephotoshopthebook.com to discuss methods and showcase your work. ■



INSPIRATIONAL: *Creative Photoshop – Digital Illustration and Art Techniques is an informative read that will inspire you to great heights*

Summary: An excellent resource for intermediate and experienced Photoshop users that will inform you with its detailed knowledge, and inspire you with a plethora of varied and unique creative ideas. Highly recommended.

Rating: **5/5**

Portrait Photography for Everyone

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: \$140.00 (around £70)

Spec: Windows 2000 or XP/ Mac OS X

Minimum 1024 x 768 screen resolution

If you regularly read our reviews section, you'll know that we are fans of Software Cinema's range of training DVDs, because they get the right balance of providing detailed information without making it tedious. Presenting this time is professional photographer of over 50 years, Monte Zucker, who has a very amiable teaching style and is refreshingly easy to listen to.

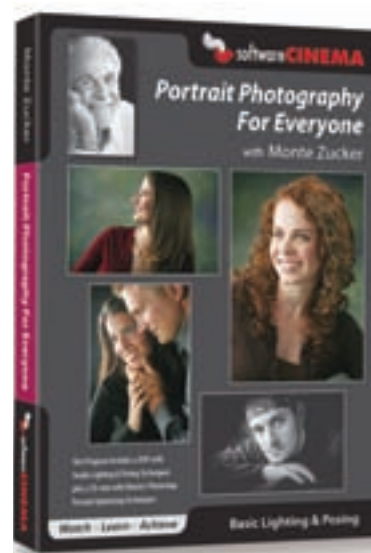
The set includes a DVD of Monte's Studio Lighting & Posing Techniques and also an interactive CD with Monte's Photoshop Portrait Optimizing Techniques. Monte teaches simple lighting patterns that help you to arrange portraits. He demonstrates with both studio and window light.

The training sessions are well presented and informative. Following the form of previous titles from Software Cinema, the focus is on the screen instead of the presenter, which is where it should be. Each topic is covered well, in a clear and often amusing manner (our favourite moment was Monte's reaction to a Spot Healing Brush quirk: "I don't know what happened there!"). The sessions are viewed in an easy-to-use customised player that's divided into

chapters, so you're able to view them in any order that you choose.

The running time for the DVD is 56 minutes, and the accompanying CD is an hour and three minutes, so the overall running-time isn't as long as previous training DVDs. There's also a tiny overlap in the teaching content, but what is here is very good and shows the methods work on any subject. Each session comes with the relevant project files on the DVD for you to work with as you follow the techniques.

As a sad footnote, Monte Zucker passed away on March 15 2007. It's a great loss, as he intended to create a new line of educational DVDs, which we would've loved to see. In memory of Monte, Software Cinema is donating a portion of the sales of this DVD to cancer research. ■



DONATION: In memory of the talented Monte Zucker, some of this DVD's proceeds will be going to charity

TRIED AND TESTED: *Portrait Photography for Everyone outlines a foolproof method to achieve a polished portrait*

Summary: If you're interested in portrait photography, this offers some truly useful advice for professional practices, both in the studio and in Photoshop.

Rating: **4/5**

The Adobe Photoshop Layers Book

Does exactly what it says on the tin. But is that a good thing?

Manufacturer: Focal Press

Web: www.focalpress.com

Price: £24.99

Spec: n/a

As the title suggests, *Adobe Photoshop Layers* focuses almost exclusively on layers. It's relevant to any version of Photoshop, because it doesn't have to concern itself with any new tools that Adobe develops in future versions. Written by photographer and designer Richard Lynch, the book discusses literally every aspect of layers, including layer types, layer-based workflows, advanced blending and collages. The book's goal is to give a complete approach to editing images by using layers.

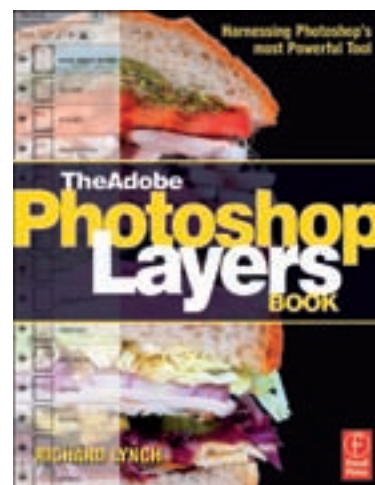
The benefit of such a narrow focus is that you can really examine the subject thoroughly. For the more experienced user, sometimes this can be a negative point, as layers aren't the most exciting topic in the world, and the examinations can feel excessively thorough in places. For example, there is a whole full page devoted to identifying layer icons. Despite being aimed at intermediate to advanced Photoshop users,

the second section contains a fair share of beginner to intermediate material. There are four and a half pages devoted to explaining the drop-down menus – for example, what File>Open does...

The step-by-step tutorials cover how to achieve a number of goals in great detail. The author wants you to understand why a method works, as opposed to just performing it. Sometimes the tutorials would greatly benefit from more frequent screenshots focusing on the action as opposed to just the Layers palette. It's worth noting that this doesn't occur throughout the book – the latter half has a lot more images and is much nicer to read.

The layout is aesthetically pleasing, albeit a tad uninspiring. Ultimately, this book is an admirable effort to educate people so they can understand Photoshop and use it to its full potential, but unless you share the author's enthusiasm for layers, it will come across as a bit dry.

The CD that accompanies the book contains images to work with, and actions to be installed to circumvent some of the more tedious steps required for the tutorials – which is a very welcome addition. ■



QUITE A MOUTHFUL: This book contains far more layers than the sandwich on its cover!

Summary: If you want to understand layers fully, this is the book for you. However, most people will find it a tad too limited in scope. A less formal delivery would've been more welcome.

Rating: **3/5**

Acrylic Pictures

A novel (albeit expensive) way to display your art...

Manufacturer: Rascal Print

Web: www.acrylic-pictures.com

Price: Varies, contact for details

Spec: n/a

Acrylic Pictures is an innovative method of displaying artwork and photos, offered by Welsh-based company Rascal Print. The service essentially lets you print your images directly onto acrylic. Light areas are lost to the clear acrylic, creating a semi-transparent 'canvas'. The pictures have a floating quality because the wall fixings keep the picture at a distance from the wall, allowing light to interact with the image, altering the picture depending on the time of day.

However, this can be a blessing or a curse depending on the picture itself, as certain light variations can actually detract from the image's impact. The wall you display the image on also has an effect: light walls work to the picture's advantage, adding a layer of depth, whereas stronger colours show through the clear areas of the acrylic and interfere with the overall appearance.

The process works best with monochrome or minimalist photographs, because the greater contrast makes the most of the effect. Images with less contrast can look a little washed out.

Uploading your image is a painless affair, and is a simple matter of FTP'ing the hi-res file; there is no need to edit your image for the printing process as all this is done for you. Service is prompt and efficient,

the delivery time is impressive and the packaging will guarantee that the items arrive safely.

Although the concept is appealing, a dynamic effect can only be achieved with the right subject matter and environment. If the white areas are in the foreground rather than the background, the effect can become confusing.

With prices ranging from £50 for a small 30 x 30cm 8mm thick print, to a whopping £1,007 for a 100 x 150cm 20mm version, you will want to be absolutely sure you have an image and setting that really takes full advantage of this unique style of presentation before you hand over your hard-earned cash. ■

Summary: A unique process that can yield some interesting effects, given the right sort of image, but perhaps a risky choice considering the hefty price tag and variable results.

Rating: **2/5**

