

Canon PIXMA Pro9500

Print your designs professionally at home on this large-format option

Manufacturer: Canon
Web: www.canon.co.uk
Price: £649
Spec: 660 x 354 x 19mm
14kg
Up to 4,800 x 2,400dpi
Print speed (A3 photo) = 10mins 20sec
USB 2.0 (Hi-Speed) and PictBridge
CD-R/DVD tray
10-ink FINE print head with 3pl Micro-Nozzles
Supports A3+, A3, B4, A4, B5, A5, Letter, Legal, 250 x 300mm, 200 x 250mm, 130 x 180mm and 100 x 150mm
Borderless printing
Acoustic noise levels = 34dBA

Install the software, ink cartridges and print head, connect to your Mac or PC with a USB cable (not included in the box) and you're all set. The set-up process is incredibly simple, with illustrated on-screen instructions guiding you through each step.

Once everything's installed, the printer performs automatic print head alignment that takes about ten minutes to complete, during which time you can have a quick look through the online manual, or perhaps pick out a few photos for test prints.

The design of the Pro9500 is pretty similar to that of the Pro9000, with sturdy fixtures made from thick plastic that should stand the test of time. Everything folds up neatly when it's not in use, but it still creates a pretty large footprint, particularly when you're using the front and back trays to print on rigid media. The design looks smart and professional – it even has two wheels on the back to make it easier to slide the unit back and forth in order to help you access the rear tray.

The large, tough, top-loading paper tray has a sliding guide to ensure your paper is aligned correctly, and can be adjusted to fit the whole range of paper and envelope sizes. A separate



SIMPLY THE BEST: You can be sure of getting exceptional-quality prints every time with the Canon PIXMA Pro9500 A3 printer

tray for printing on CDs is inserted from the front of the printer, and you can elect to load rigid media from the front, which the printer draws through so the paper protrudes from the back, then feeds it back onto the front tray during printing, ensuring it stays flat.

The Pro9500 is exceptionally quiet, although it goes through some kind of cleaning cycle every time it finishes printing, which is a little noisier than the normal printing process, but not to the extent that it becomes an irritant. There is a PictBridge port on the front of the printer, although we're not sure how likely it is that the target user of this printer would want to print directly from their camera.

It's not the fastest printer we've come across, but when you're after professional-quality prints, you don't mind waiting – particularly when you witness the quality of the results. Colours are unbelievably vibrant, thanks to the ten separate ink cartridges it uses, comprising Photo Magenta, Photo Black, Matte Black, Photo Cyan, Grey, Magenta, Yellow, Cyan, Green and Red. There's a huge choice of media to choose from to ensure your images look precisely how you want them to, with a wonderful range of Fine Art Media suitable for professional usage. ■

Summary: An excellent A3 printer that is available at a good price. Although it does take a little longer than competing models to get a print out, the quality is worth it.

Rating: **4/5**



ALL IN GOOD TIME: Printing is a little slow, but it's worth the wait



DIRECT ROUTE: If you're just printing images, direct connection is supported



Pentax K100D Super

How super is Pentax's new DSLR?

Manufacturer: Pentax
Web: www.pentax.co.uk
Price: £499
Spec: 92.5 x 129.5 x 70mm
570g (without battery)
6.1 megapixels
3,008 x 2,008 maximum resolution
Shutter speed = 30-1/4,000sec
ISO = A, 200, 400, 800, 1600, 3200
SD and SDHC
2.5" LCD screen

Pentax's K100D was one of the best-received new consumer DSLRs of last year. Spurred on by that success, Pentax has unveiled the K100D Super.

It takes an eagle-eyed consumer to spot the differences between the K100D Super and the original K100D. That's because there are really only two of them. This camera retains all the specifications of the K100D but throws in SDHC card compatibility and a new Dust Removal System. On its own terms, the K100D Super is a highly impressive camera, but as a new product it's uninspiring and its 6.1-megapixel sensor seems like old hat.

The original K100D was an exceptionally good-value product and the K100D Super is no different. Your decision will rest mainly on whether you want to pay a cut-down price for the older camera (as much as £100 less if you look online) or pay more for the Dust Reduction System. The regular changing of lenses makes the sensor particularly susceptible to dust particles, and it's a question of when, not if, they start to cause you difficulties.

As with the original K100D, the Shake Reduction facility is a key selling point. Unlike many DSLR anti-shake systems, which are lens based, Pentax beats the wobbles through minute shifting of the position of the image sensor to compensate

FROM THE FRONT: As an SLR you get versatility, but there are plenty of automated options too, making this a great step-up model if you've been using a compact

for shaky hands. It comes in particularly useful when you're using slow shutter speeds, as it allows you to capture much sharper shots than you could otherwise achieve.

When finding your way around the rear of the camera, you might just as easily be using a high-end digital compact rather than a DSLR. Pentax has gone out of its way to keep things simple, so the main controls are kept to the basic menu and playback buttons, plus a directional d-pad. More advanced controls are buried in the menu system, where bracketing and metering adjustment can be found.

The d-pad has more to it than meets the eye, however. Press the Function (Fn) button and you'll gain direct access to white balance, ISO, flash and burst modes via the arrow keys. Likewise, getting to grips with manual exposure is easy. Smartly, Pentax doesn't expect you to learn all the ropes at once, so provides an easy Auto mode and a selection of scene modes to help you out while you're getting used to it.

Image quality generally doesn't disappoint, and the 11-point autofocus results in some very speedy reactions in AF mode. Pictures are beautifully crisp, with real sharpness right to the edge of the frame. The camera does struggle slightly more with contrast levels, tending to err on the side of underexposure when faced with a challenging lighting situation. There are no problems with colour reproduction – tones are subtle and natural rather than dazzlingly bright, but that reflects the nature of the camera.

The K100D Super is a workhorse, and makes an outstanding choice for the first-time DSLR buyer who wants great pictures every time. ■

ROUND THE BACK: The 2.5-inch LCD is crisp and clear, enabling you to check your exposures with ease. It is easy to navigate the menu system too, so you can make the necessary changes as and when you need to



Summary: A good camera delivering quality results from a very user-friendly control set. Represents value for money and usability whatever your photographic needs.

Rating: **4/5**

ON TOP: Lightweight and compact despite its capabilities, this DSLR is well-balanced with the kit lens in place



Mastering Advanced Photoshop Techniques

Mike Crawford breaks down some essential Photoshop skills for professional photographers

Publisher: RotoVision

Editor: Mike Crawford

Web: www.rotovision.com

Price: £25

This soft-backed book has 170 pages of Photoshop techniques, all aimed at the professional photographer. Broken down into six logical sections, *Mastering Advanced Photoshop Techniques* follows through a logical workflow.

The introduction is a nice touch, giving a brief insight into the history of digital photography and its relationship with Photoshop. Editor Mike Crawford, himself a renowned photographer and author of a number of photography- and Photoshop-related titles, sticks to his informative and accessible style of writing throughout.

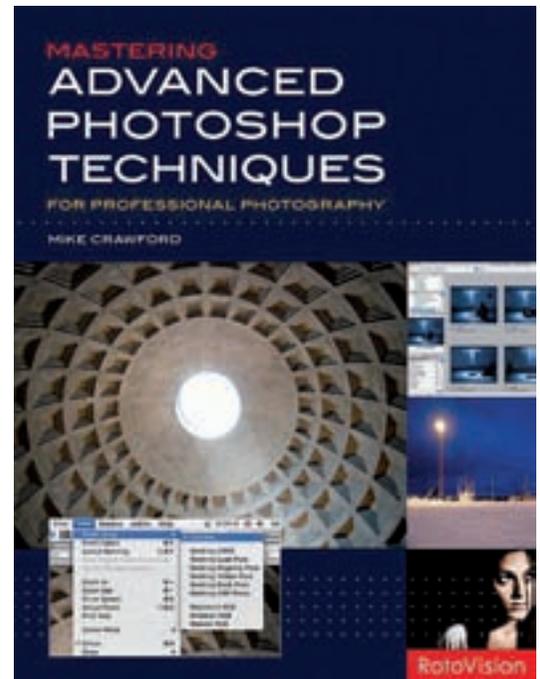
The first section of the book is perhaps a little too simplistic for advanced Photoshop users, explaining basic things such as the workspace, available tools and file formats for photographers new to digital post-processing. However, things do pick up further on, with an essential guide to all the tools you need to know when working with photographs, and some great

information on printing techniques and paper choices.

There are three professional profiles in among the technical information: the photographer, the retoucher and the printer. These profiles are great for breaking up the flow of text and are genuinely interesting to read.

Presentation is lovely – although a little text-heavy if you just want to dip in and out at will – and the images used show off Crawford's abilities as a photographer. The glossary and equipment guides at the back of the book give added value. However, it is likely you'll be more than familiar with all the terms used, and have far more advanced equipment needs.

And this is what it comes down to: while *Mastering Advanced Photoshop Techniques* is one of the best-designed and most well-written books we've come across on the subject, not everything is actually aimed at 'advanced Photoshop techniques', and chances are you'll find yourself flicking past most of the first part. ■



FOR PHOTOGRAPHERS: This book looks at the essential techniques that can be applied in Photoshop to improve and enhance images

Summary: A great book for photographers approaching Photoshop for the first time, but not a read for more advanced users.

Rating: **3/5**

Virtual Vixens: 3D Character Modelling and Scene Placement

For users of 3ds Max, Lightwave, Softimage XSI, Maya and CINEMA 4D

Publisher: Focal Press

Editor: Arndt von Koenigsmarck

Web: www.focalpress.com

Price: £26

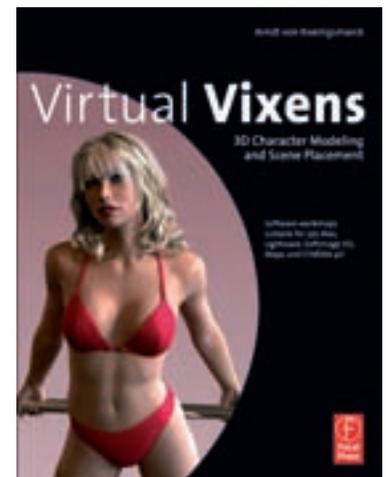
3D modelling in one program and then outputting the result to Photoshop is a fact of life for many designers, especially those who are involved in character design. *Virtual Vixens: 3D Character Modelling and Scene Placement* is a handbook dedicated to perfecting the female form in the key 3D programs used today.

First impressions of this book are that it is more about how 'hot' the women are that you're creating rather than the techniques used to mould them. However, overlook this and what you get is an extremely thorough book aimed at novice and intermediate designers, breaking down key techniques to create realistic female models. It's also written in a style that's accessible to both male and female readers.

There are essentially two main sections to the book. First you have well-known 3D artists presenting their work to you and explaining the skills behind them. You also get a profile of the artists, making this an interesting read as well as an essential guide.

Having professional artists involved means that the quality of the work included in the book is stunning. You could happily flick through without reading anything, just to take in the scenes presented. The artists write in an informal, first-person style, so it is as enjoyable to read as it is to browse through.

The second section of the book is a collection of seven workshops that look at modelling different parts of the female body and the workflow process in detail: preparing templates, the eye, the head, the hands, texture and lighting, clothing and hair and the body. The writing is simple yet informed and the images are sharp and large, making it easy to follow the tutorials even if you have limited 3D experience. ■



GOING 3D: All the major programs are covered here, so it's perfect for all 3D designers

Summary: A fantastic resource for anyone who uses 3D models in their Photoshop work, whatever 3D modelling program they use. The examples are of a good quality and the contributions from artists are worthy.

Rating: **4/5**

Adobe Photoshop And The Art of Photography: A Comprehensive Introduction

Photoshop explained from a photographic point of view

Publisher: Delmar Thomson Learning

Editor: Steven Weinrebe

Web: www.delmarlearning.com

Price: £22

Written by professional photographer, author and Adobe Certified Photoshop Instructor Steve Weinrebe, this book certainly has the on-paper credentials to make you take a second look. We all use photographs as source files and for photomontage projects, so having a book explain how to get the most out of these images is a great asset.

Weinrebe shows off both his photographic and written skills throughout this tome, as he uses his own original photography as well as other high-quality images to illustrate his points. The book also comes with a CD at the back that has sample images that the reader can reference and practise the techniques on.

Being a new book, it is CS3-based, so readers with older versions of the program may not have all the features discussed, but there is still plenty of relevant information.

Divided into 12 logical sections, as well as a glossary, the book takes you through light and shadow, curves, masking and compositing and even introduces readers to Bridge and Camera Raw. Step-by-step guides help to break down more complex techniques so that you can get to grips with them more easily, though these are of more interest to photographers than designers. Each section is littered with screenshots explaining the techniques, as well as handy hints, notes and digital darkroom suggestions within coloured boxes.

Always taking a very photography-led perspective, this book is a great resource if you use Photoshop with your photographs, but it is probably a bit too involved for those who just tweak images to use in digital projects. If your images rely on the best quality, however, then you will find yourself gaining perfection.

Exhibiting good value for money, *Adobe Photoshop And The Art of Photography* also includes interviews with a number of well-known shooters including John Paul Caponigro, Olivia Parker and Graham Nash, for a more informed read. ■

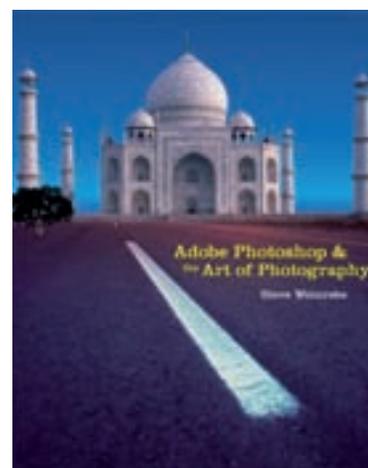


PHOTO RESOURCE: If you use Photoshop to work with photos, then this is a great resource

Summary: For photographers this is an excellent little book, but for designers there's less relevance. The book itself is nicely written and laid out, and the handy tip boxes make it easy to pull information out of.

Rating: **3/5**

Images: A Creative Digital Workflow For Graphic Designers

Everything you need to know about working with your images from start to finish

Publisher: RotoVision

Editor: Tony Seddon

Web: www.rotovision.com

Price: £35

This is a meaty hardback book that covers an entire digital workflow for when working with images. There are nine in-depth chapters devoted solely to sourcing and storing images in attractive colour-coded sections.

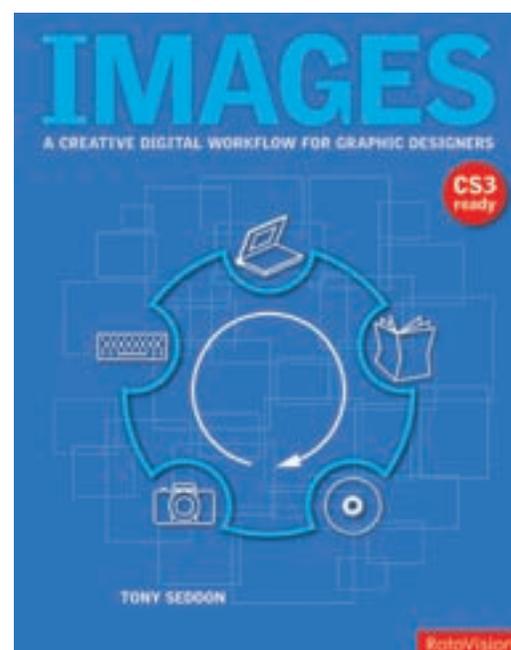
The book is not devoted to any one software package or platform, as the tips can be applied across the spectrum, but the screenshots used are from the Mac OS X system running Photoshop and the cover announces that it is 'CS3 ready'.

The book is fronted by an introduction from author Tony Seddon, a designer and art director with 20 years' experience in managing complex creative projects. *Images* then follows a logical structure from 'Establishing an image-preparation workflow' to 'Archiving & returns'. Along the way Seddon explores the planning part of projects, copyright issues, processing images and

preparing them for use in print and online. What we particularly like about this tome is the way that it uses large screenshots, boxouts and diagrams to explain the key points, meaning that you don't have to read through reams of text to find the information you need. It also means that you can dip in and out at will, finding the relevant sections with ease.

We also enjoyed 'The professionals' view' sections that are littered throughout, as these are an interesting read and give an insight into using the workflow solutions presented in the book in everyday life.

This book is clearly aimed at those that make a living from artwork, as the sections of 'Proofing methods' and 'FTP & transferring files' testify. However, that's not to say that there is nothing here for the enthusiast. The chapters on processing image files will be a godsend to designers that rely on high-quality source files for their work, demystifying some essential Photoshop techniques. ■



BIBLE: A 224-page hardcover bible to all things image-related, including CS3 integration

Summary: A colourful layout with great images, insightful interviews and in-depth technical advice make this a must-have.

Rating: **4/5**