Apple Aperture 2

Apple updates its popular image-management and editing software
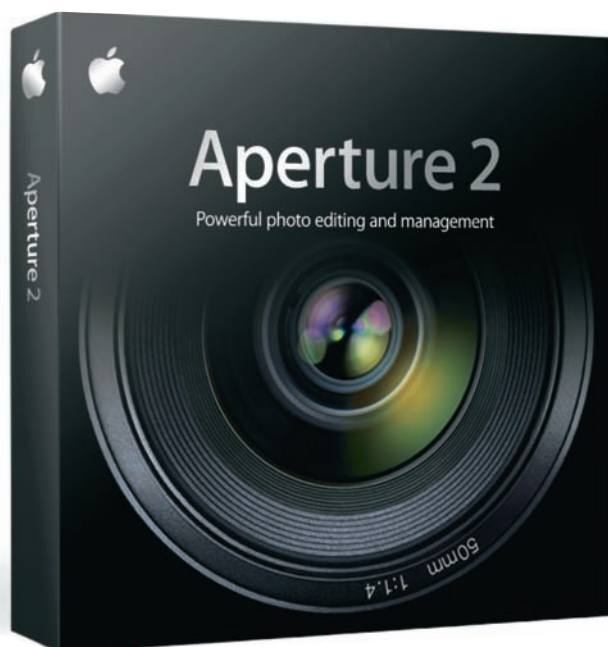
Apple's Aperture has made quite an impression among professional photographers. The first version had a few small problems to iron out and it wasn't quite enough to get us away from using the super-simple iPhoto or the bundled-with-Photoshop Bridge for image organisation.

But then Aperture 2 comes along with improved speed, a lower price and the promise of better integration with all the programs already on our Macs, and we started to get excited about how this could help to maintain our massive image libraries.

The first thing that should be noted is that at £129/$199 for the full package (and cheaper if you're upgrading), this software is now affordable for non-professional photographers, and perfectly suited to those of us who keep thousands of images for use as textures and for manipulation projects. There are enhanced editing tools too, which means that you can make quick adjustments to your images within Aperture, knowing that they are stored ready to come straight into Photoshop for projects.

We were lucky enough to see Aperture at the Focus On Imaging show in February, and saw how nippy the whole program is, but we still had our reservations as to whether the speed could be maintained on a more modest system than the Apple representative used for his demonstration. Installation takes its time, but this is because it installs Sample Projects alongside the main program, which is great for getting to grips with the software, but you could skip this.

When you first open Aperture, you are asked whether you want to import images from a digital camera, your iPhoto library or another folder on your disc. From this initial splash screen you can also view the tutorials, which is a great way of learning the program fast. Importing your files does take time, and certainly longer on our Macs than the super-fast system on show at Focus. Still, you can explore the program during the import process, which continues in the background.

When your images are imported, you can begin sorting them into Projects, using the main panel on the left of the screen. Those of

PRICE IS RIGHT: *Aperture has been reduced in price with this release to £129/$199, making it more affordable for anyone who needs to manage large collections of images*

"APERTURE 2 COMES ALONG WITH IMPROVED SPEED, A LOWER PRICE AND BETTER INTEGRATION WITH MAC PROGRAMS"

you who have used the first incarnation of Aperture, will now notice that Metadata and Adjustment tabs sit alongside the Projects tab, meaning that you can access them all with a swift click of the button, rather than having just one of the three services open at a time. You can rate your images using stars and add useful captions and keywords, meaning that you can find exactly the image you need for extra fast editing. The Search options have been vastly improved in this version of the software, and you can filter by the adjustments made (for example, you could see just the images that have been converted to black and white), or date added, etc.

To make browsing faster, you can hit Quick Preview, which means that a preview is loaded into the viewer rather than the full-sized image. You can't edit when using the preview mode, but you can quickly look for images.

The Loupe is present and correct as before, which displays a section of your image as you pass the magnifying glass over it at 100 per cent. This is a useful tool for checking the

LOUPE TOOL: *The Loupe enables you to check the quality of certain areas of an image so you can see how sharp they are, or whether your adjustments have been effective*

Similar products

Adobe Photoshop Lightroom

Manufacturer: Adobe	
Web: www.adobe.co.uk	
Price: £205.62 / $299	
Req:	Intel Pentium 4 processor; PowerPC G4, G5 or Intel-based Mac
	Windows XP with SP 2 or Vista; Mac OS X v.10.4
	768MB of RAM (1GB recommended) and 1GB of available hard-disk space
	1,024 x 768 screen resolution

This is Adobe's equivalent to Aperture, offering image organisation and editing from within one package, again targeted towards professional photographers. This product has better integration with Photoshop, which is a real bonus, but it is significantly more expensive. If you're looking at buying Photoshop CS3 and are interested in Lightroom, then you can save money by purchasing the two together. It is not quite as intuitive, but we're sure that there will be a response to Aperture's update soon enough, so don't discount it yet! One big advantage of this software is that PC and Mac users can take advantage.

Rating: **4/5**

Picasa

Manufacturer: Google	
Web: http://picasa.google.com/	
Price: Free	
Req:	300MHz Pentium processor and MMX technology
	64MB RAM (128MB recommended) and 50MB available hard disk space (100MB recommended)
	800 x 600 pixel, 16-bit colour monitor
	Windows 2000 or XP
	Internet Explorer 5.01 or better (6.0 recommended)
	Microsoft DirectX 7.0 or higher (8.1 ships with XP, 9.0b recommended)

This is a free application for organising your images and making simple adjustments. It is nowhere near as powerful as Aperture or Lightroom, and it is PC only, but it does have some advantages. First and foremost is the fact that it is free, which is great if you want to organise a smaller collection of images and don't need all the power of the pay-for applications. Second, it is incredibly simple to use, and relies on non-destructive editing as with the other two programs. You can rate and organise images quickly and simply, and you can sort through them in the effective manner you would expect from Google.

Rating: **3/5**

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quality of images, as well as making subtle adjustments.

There are over 100 new features in this version of Aperture, and we certainly don't have the room to go through all of them here. One of the biggest things that we love is the integration with other Apple products. (This is a Mac-only application, so apologies to PC users.) You can hit Email in the main screen to automatically open Mail and have the selected image attached ready to send. You can browse images in iPhoto, and chose to import them into Aperture, and also view an iPhoto browser from within Aperture. You can create web galleries and publish them in seconds with your .Mac account.

The other bonus is that it's faster, even on our older Macs and even on the new Mac Air. You still get the ticking clock while an image is loading, but there is a definite improvement. Timesaving keyboard shortcuts mean that you can work your way through images without using your mouse.

This product is still tailored for professional photographers in some areas, and as this is an area that many Photoshop users specialise in, we have to mention the ability to enjoy tethered shooting. Images are captured directly into a project in Aperture and they are there ready to work on in moments. If you need to keep track of a shoot, then this is a great way of going about it.

All in all, Aperture is a professional tool at an accessible price and works brilliantly as part of an organised workflow for dealing with digital images. ▥

MAC ONLY: *Aperture is a Mac-specific program and as such has excellent integration with other Mac programs, including the iLife suite*

Specifications

Manufacturer: Apple	
Web: www.apple.com/uk	
Price: £129 / $199 (£65 / $99 upgrade)	
Req:	Works with Mac Pro, MacBook Pro, MacBook, MacBook Air, Mac mini with an Intel Core Solo or Duo processor; iMac with a 1.8GHz or faster PowerPC G5 or Intel Core Duo processor; Power Mac G5 with a 1.6GHz or faster PowerPC G5 processor; 15- or 17-inch PowerBook G4 with a 1.25GHz or faster PowerPC G4 processor
	1GB of RAM (2GB for Mac Pro) and 5GB of hard drive space for the application and sample projects
	Full list of graphics cards compatible with Aperture on website
	Mac OS X v10.4.11 Tiger or Mac OS X v10.5.2 Leopard

Summary: The ultimate tool for image organisation. As digital artists, we collect photos more and more for use in our projects and this is great for keeping tabs on what images we have and where.

Rating: **5/5**

Specifications

Manufacturer: Plustek

Web: www.plustek.com

Price: £223 (excl VAT) / $400

Spec: 7,200 x 7,200dpi hardware resolution

36.8 x 25.4mm maximum scanning area for negatives

Dimensions: 272 x 120 x 119mm

Weight: 1.6kg

Holds up to four mounted slides and six frames on a filmstrip

Windows 2000, XP, Vista; Pentium III or faster

Mac OS X 10.3.9 or higher; PPC G4, PPC G5 or Intel

512MB free RAM; 500MB HDD space

Padded carry bag included

Summary: Fast and accurate scanning in a compact device, this package is let down only by the software that is included. Use Photoshop or third-party scanning software instead, and you get good-quality scans for importing into projects or for archiving.

Rating: **4/5**

SMALL FORM FACTOR:
The 7500i is a tiny scanner measuring just 272 x 120 x 119mm, but you do need to leave 40cm on either side for the film holder to move through the device

Plustek OpticFilm 7500i SE

Plustek launches a new dedicated negative and slide scanner for archiving your old image collections or importing new textures

The OpticFilm 7500i is one of two new releases from Plustek, which also includes the 7300, and is a dedicated negative and slide scanner. While this is targeted at professional photographers, there are many designers who also have a large collection of 35mm films with images that could be translated into new digital projects. Many scanners now offer a negative-scanning function, but the quality has always left a lot to be desired in these combi products.

There are two versions of this scanner – the 7500i SE and the 7500i AI – both of which feature a multi-exposure function and a multi-sampling feature for reducing noise. The AI model comes with a SilverFast 35mm IT8 Target calibration to generate ICC profiles, which weighs in at £395 (excluding VAT). We looked at the SE version, which will be more suited to those who want to just scan and go, priced at £223 (excluding VAT).

First impressions of the scanner are good. It is tiny, so it won't take up much room on your workstation. It's also incredibly easy to set up, with a Quick Start guide walking you through the correct order of connection and installation. It takes a few minutes to install all the available software, but it is worth the effort to make the most of the options available. NewSoftPresto! PageManager 7.10 and ImageFolio 4.5 are there to mange your images and process them respectively, while the real star of the show is SilverFastSEPlus 6.5 iSRD ME, which expands your scanning options and works as a Photoshop plug-in or standalone product.

Scanning is super-simple, too. You insert your negative into the film holder (or slide into the slide holder) and pop the holder into the slot on the side of the scanner. You then have two scanning options to choose from: QuickScan and IntelliScan, both selected from buttons on the

front of the scanner. QuickScan can be configured from the Windows System Tray if you are using a PC (the scanner can be used on Macs, too) to adjust the automatic scanning options and to enable/disable the preview function. When you hit QuickScan, the software will automatically save the imported file to the album and send them directly to PageManager for organising. IntelliScan launches SilverFast for more advanced scanning options such as Multi-Exposure, Auto Adjust, USM, SilverFast Basic, NegaFix, Selective Color Correction, iSRD and more. You can also use SilverFast from within Photoshop by going to File>Import>SilverFast. Previews are again available before scanning so you can see how your image will look.

All very well in theory, but what about in practice? We tried the QuickScan option first, hitting the button on the front of the device. It scanned our 35mm colour negative in seconds

"SILVERFAST EXPANDS YOUR SCANNING OPTIONS AND CAN WORK AS A PHOTOSHOP PLUG-IN"

Scan software

Hamrick VueScan

Manufacturer:	Hamrick Software
Web:	www.hamrick.com
Price:	Standard $39.95 (approx £20); Professional $79.95 (approx £40)
Spec:	Available for Mac OS X, Windows and Linux
	Includes options for scanning faded slides and prints, and automatically adjusting images to optimum colour balance Built-in IT8 colour calibration of scanners
	Batch scanning and PDF output features

While all scanners, including the Plustek 7500i, come with their own scanning software packages, there are plenty of third-party options available as well that promise to give you better results and speedier processing. We took a look at the latest version of Hamrick's VueScan, which is compatible with a huge number of popular scanners (around 750) including the Plustek, with a full list online.

The latest version of the software (version 8.4.62) was released in February and gives added compatibility with scanners, including support for variable exposure of the new Plustek models. A free trial is available from the website (images are watermarked), and it costs just under $40 (£20) to buy the standard package, working on both Windows and Mac.

Installation of the program takes only a few minutes and the program automatically launches. The main window is incredibly easy to get to grips with, working in a step-by-step format to scanning in your images, negatives or slides.

To get started, pop your media in the scanner, make sure that your scanner is selected in the Source drop-down (our scanner was recognised immediately) and hit Preview. When this is done, you can use the Crop, Filter, Color and Output options to enhance and restore your image. When you hit Scan, the image is imported and then any adjustments you made are applied.

It is extremely easy to get good results, and we found it to be more intuitive than many generic packages included with scanners as standard.
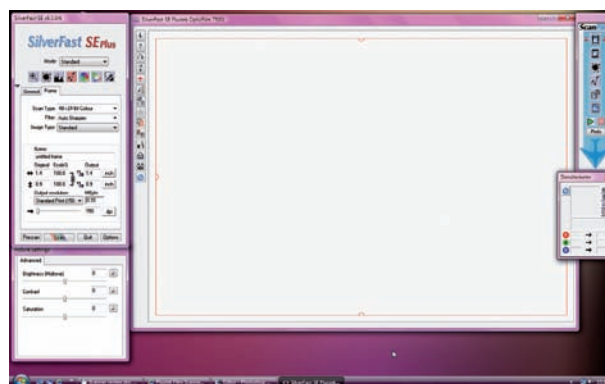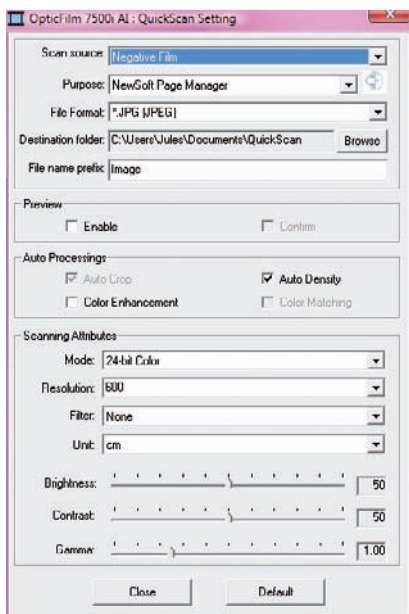
Rating: **4/5**
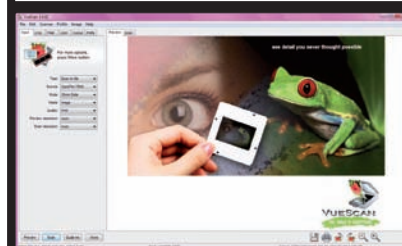
MAIN SCREEN: *VueScan has an easy-to-use interface, leading you through the scanning process*

START SCREEN (ABOVE): *Installing SilverFast means that you also get QuickTime movies and PDF help files to get you started with the program*

START SCREEN (LEFT): *You can bypass the SilverFast software and go straight to QuickScan*

SILVERFAST OPTIONS: *There are a number of palettes in SilverFast, which are used to adjust your scan settings and use the more advanced functions*

before launching PageManager with our scanned image already open. Double-clicking on the image enables you to work on it further. The options in Page Manager are very limited and rely on automatic adjustments that can be hit and miss. We tried scanning the same image with the Plustek scanner, but using Hamrick's VueScan software (see the side panel) and got much better results.

Next we tried the IntelliScan option, again by pressing the button on the front of the model, but we could have chosen to open it through Photoshop. When the software opens, hit Prescan to get a preview of the file that you wish to scan in. Make sure that under General you have Positive or Negative selected, or you will get some very odd results (as we found out when we scanned our negative with the Positive setting on!). We definitely recommend reading the

documentation or watching the QuickTime videos, as there are a lot of parameters and it is hard to get good results if you rush straight in. The software is not as intuitive as it first looks and you can sometimes get your image looking perfect on the Prescan preview, but the final image is then completely different.

As we tried scanning using both the included software and third-party software, we found that the image quality from the hardware is excellent, but you need the right software to get the best results in post-production. You are generally better off scanning, saving, reopening in Photoshop and using the tools there to enhance and adjust the images. Doing this we found that our scans looked much better than any other film scanner we have tried, so cannot fault the scanner itself in terms of quality and ease of use. ▦

Grids: Creative Solutions For Graphic Designers

An essential resource for layout designers in need of inspiration

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Manufacturer:	Rotovision
Web:	www.rotovision.com
Price:	£20 / $30
Spec:	Introduction by Lucienne Roberts
	CD including InDesign and Quark layouts
	Design grids and layouts for a wide range of media types

Grids **is a very specific book aimed at those who need precise layouts to inspire their target audience.** It is essentially a showcase of the best designs for a variety of different media: books, magazines, newspapers, catalogues, posters, websites and flyers. The book presents these designs in their original forms, with the layout grids overlaid so you can easily see how they were put together. Detailed captions are used to explain the technical specifications of each project, as well as the creative inspiration behind the designs.

To supplement the book is a CD full of templates that relate to the designs shown in the book. It is easy to find the grid that you are interested in as the file names match the page number of where the grid appears in the book. There are also some helpful tutorials available online at **www.rotovision.com/ gridstutorials**.

The design of the book itself is very technical rather than inspirational due to the serious nature of its contents, and as such it is likely to be passed over on the shelf with other design books unless you are looking for something of this exact nature. It's not a book to flick through at leisure either, waiting for something to catch your eye, as the images are mostly plain and crisp, rather than bright and creative.

The information provided on each grid is thorough, so if you are looking to emulate the design of a particular project, you will have a very in-depth understanding of what you can achieve and how. For us, though, the most exciting part of the book is the Introduction, which explains the history of layout design, proportions, layout and mathematics, giving an overview of a complex subject. ▦
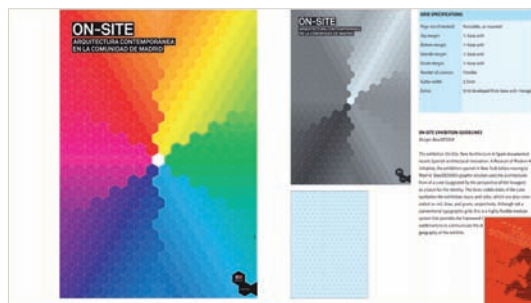
INSIDE VIEW: *While a little lacklustre in the design stakes, this is perfect for those with a passion and interest in layout theory. Definitely one for the technically minded*
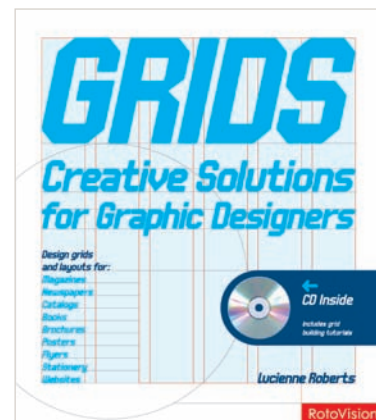
Summary: The information contained inside is highly useful, especially with the included CD, but it is very specialist and won't appeal to those with no interest in layout.

Rating: **3/5**

The Creative Digital Darkroom

This tome is not just for photographers, packed with essential Photoshop advice

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Manufacturer:	O'Reilly
Web:	www.oreilly.com
Price:	£30.99 / $49.99
Spec:	Katrin Eismann and Seán Duggan
	Forward by Stephen Johnson

This chunky book is aimed at photographers first **and foremost, but there are plenty of tips and tricks for anyone who works with photographs on a daily basis.** It works through logically, covering everything from advanced digital darkroom techniques and beginners' guides to digital toolsets.

There are ten in-depth and colourful chapters in total, ranging from Silver to Silicon, which covers the basics of taking images and preparing them for post-production, through to Enhancing Focus, a look at making your images more impactful by removing backgrounds, adding noise and removing unwanted distractions. Each chapter looks at Photoshop tools and techniques using screenshots to help make the point. It is a very practical read, so you can flick through while sat at your computer and try out the tips mentioned. The images used are of good quality thanks to the pedigree of the two authors.

Essential tips and techniques to try are pulled out in coloured boxes, which means that this is a volume that you can dip in and out of with ease. It is written in an authoritative manner, but uses numbered bullet points to ensure that even those new to digital post-production can work through the advice. This doesn't mean that more advanced users won't find plenty of information, and designers are not isolated either, with sections such as Creating Textures For Use In Photoshop. Overall, this is a good read, with enough content to keep you at your computer for months. ▦
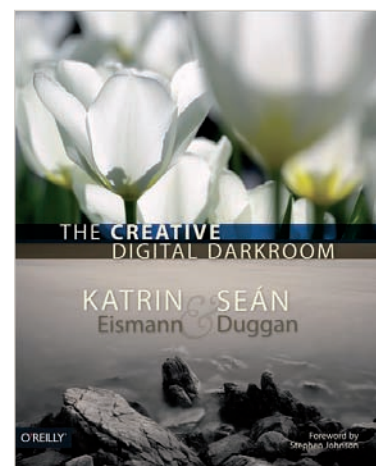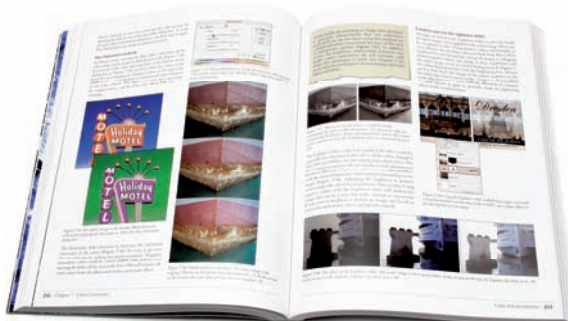
DIGITAL DARKROOM: *An in-depth volume that explores the photographic resources built into Photoshop*

Summary: An excellent resource that is essential for all digital artists that use photography in any way, shape or form.

Rating: **4/5**