● PHOTO EDITING

Adobe Photoshop Elements 3
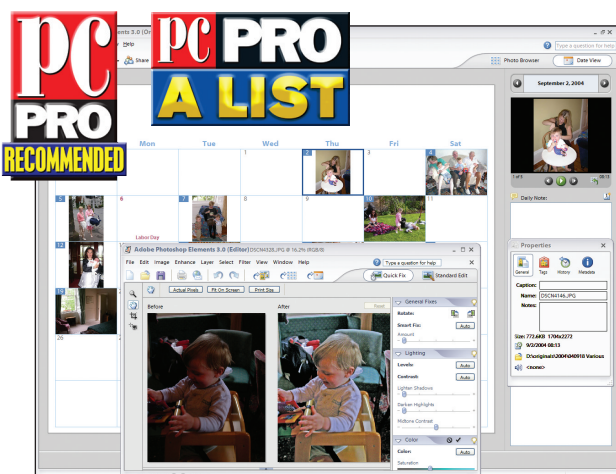
PRICE £65 (£76 inc VAT) **UPGRADE** N/A
INTERNET www.adobe.co.uk **SUPPLIER** Adobe via website
VERDICT Powerful, easy-to-use editing and effortless image management make this software a dream come true for the majority of digital camera users.

Photoshop Elements 3 integrates image management and editing.

Photoshop Elements has traditionally been a basic, cut-down version of the market-leading Photoshop packaged at a knockdown price. But with this latest release, Elements is no longer the poor relation.

The major change comes from the integration of the previously standalone Photoshop Album application as Elements' new Organizer window. Here, you load images from your hard disk, camera, monitored folders, or even from your mobile phone to create a single central catalogue of all your photos, represented in the main Photo Browser by instantly resizable thumbnails. You can then find the photos you're looking for by time, folder or import batch, through a simple keyword tagging system. Or you can use the excellent Date View, which mimics a wall calendar with thumbnails appearing on every day on which you took photos.

Getting your images under control is the Organizer's main task, but it also offers a number of other features. Click on the Print button and you can output your selected images or order prints online. Click on the Share button and you can upload your images to a web-sharing service, a Palm OS handheld or a mobile phone; or email them as separate attachments, a single PDF or within the body of your message as themed PhotoMail. Click on the Create button and you can produce projects such as album pages, calendars, cards and web galleries. Particularly impressive is the ability to quickly create dynamic slide shows complete with captions, narration, music, transitions and special effects – especially as these can then be used to create a VideoCD

for viewing on compatible DVD players.

Before doing anything though, you'll want to make sure your photos are looking their best. Using the excellent Auto Smart Fix command you can do all that you need to most images with a single click, right from within the Organizer. For slightly more control, you can also load the image into the Auto Smart Fix dialog, but you're better loading your photo into the dedicated Quick Fix workspace. This provides simple slider-based control over lighting, colour and sharpness, along with excellent one-click red-eye removal, freeform or preset-based cropping, and large before and after previews.

The first time you load the Quick Fix workspace it takes a little time because you're actually moving from Elements' Album-based Organizer window to Elements' other window – the Editor. At this stage you might be wondering where Elements' existing hands-on editing power has gone. It's all still there, you just have to click on the Standard Edit button and the familiar Elements interface appears – or rather a restyled version, offering new features such as collapsible Palette and Photo Bins at the bottom of the screen, each containing selectable thumbnails of all open images. Existing users will immediately feel at home, but the new environment is more attractive, modern, friendly, professional and productive.

Compared to its rivals, Elements' eight lighting and colour enhancements might seem mean, but all the main options – Levels, Hue/Saturation, Colour Cast – are included and additional power would probably confuse more users than it helped. Local retouching is also well covered with the same main tools that Photoshop offers, while more creative possibilities come via the collection of over 100 filters. And to turn your image into an advanced photocomposition, the central Layers palette supports bitmap, vector shape, text, adjustment-based layers and a range of preset layer styles.

All this power was already there in version 2, but version 3 takes things further. Unsurprisingly

most of the new features come direct from the latest Photoshop CS release – but what's surprising is just how much high-end power has made the cut. You might have thought that support for 16-bit images and the RAW format, were professional-only features, but they've been included. You'll also find Photoshop's excellent Healing Brush for removing flaws by intelligently sampling another area of the image; the Histogram palette for viewing the distribution of pixel values; the Filter Gallery for viewing and combining effects; and the Photo Filter adjustment layer for non-destructively applying coloured lens filter effects. The on-the-fly File Browser has also been updated to support favourite folders and metadata, though most people will still prefer the Organizer window.

Lastly, Photoshop Elements 3 adds some new editing power all of its own. The new Cookie Cutter tool, for example, lets you crop images and layers into preset shapes – less powerful than Photoshop's layer masks but much more straightforward. The Divide from Scan command automatically isolates multiple images scanned in a single pass, while the Import Frame from Video command lets you quickly navigate video files and grab multiple frames for standalone use. And the new Reduce Noise filter is ideal for clearing up both video and camera images taken in low light
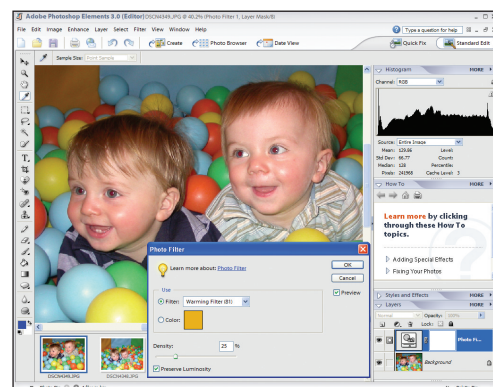
Drill down and the editing power is surprisingly powerful.

conditions. Best of all, and another feature that many Photoshop users would kill for, the Print Multiple command lets you choose from a range of preset image sizes and multi-image page layouts – you can even apply a frame to your photos as they're printed.

It's all pitched and implemented beautifully. Adobe has clearly seen the light, making Photoshop Elements 3 the program your digital camera has been crying out for.

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PC PRO RATINGS

EASE OF USE	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★☆
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★★

REQUIREMENTS Pentium III/800; 256MB RAM; 600MB hard disk space; Windows 2000 (SP 4) or XP (SP 1).