

Ulead PhotoImpact XL

Text and photos by Jack and Sue Drafa

Fifteen years ago three friends joined forces to start a software company that would address the needs of the emerging digital-imaging market. They wanted their product to be very affordable, but far-reaching in the scope of photographic tools it offered. The company was called Ulead which, in Chinese, means "Strength through Friendship." Ulead's software evolved from hardware companions like LaPalette, into image-editing programs like PhotoStyler, PhotoImpact, and, most recently, PhotoImpact XL.

The PhotoImpact XL package actually consists of five programs that are designed to cover just about every aspect of digital imaging. These include PhotoImpact XL, Photo Explorer 8, GIF Animator 5, Cool 360, and PhotoImpact Album. The combined power of these five programs provides today's digital photographer with full creative and technical image control.

The core of the group is the PhotoImpact XL image editor. At the input end of the digital process, PhotoImpact XL works with a variety of film scanners, digital cameras, memory card readers, and many other image storage devices. This image input manager can read more than 35 different file sources.

The XL editor itself includes hundreds of editing tools to correct image problems and add creative effects. Precise selections, text, paths, cropping, paintbrush, stamp, retouching, zoom, eyedropper, and Web design sliders are a small part of its very extensive toolbox. Many of the tools offer expanded options like the retouching tool which features 14 modes including burn and dodge, blur, sharpen, warping, red-eye reduction, scratch removal, noise reduction, and several pen tools.

The toolbox itself is unique in that you can have it float atop the editing screen or attach it to the side of the editing area.

At the top of the PhotoImpact XL editing screen you will find pull-down menus for setting up your input devices. The Edit menu is used to rotate, copy, paste, stitch panoramas, and change to the masking mode. The View menu enables you to set up your viewing area, zoom the image, add rulers, check image properties and

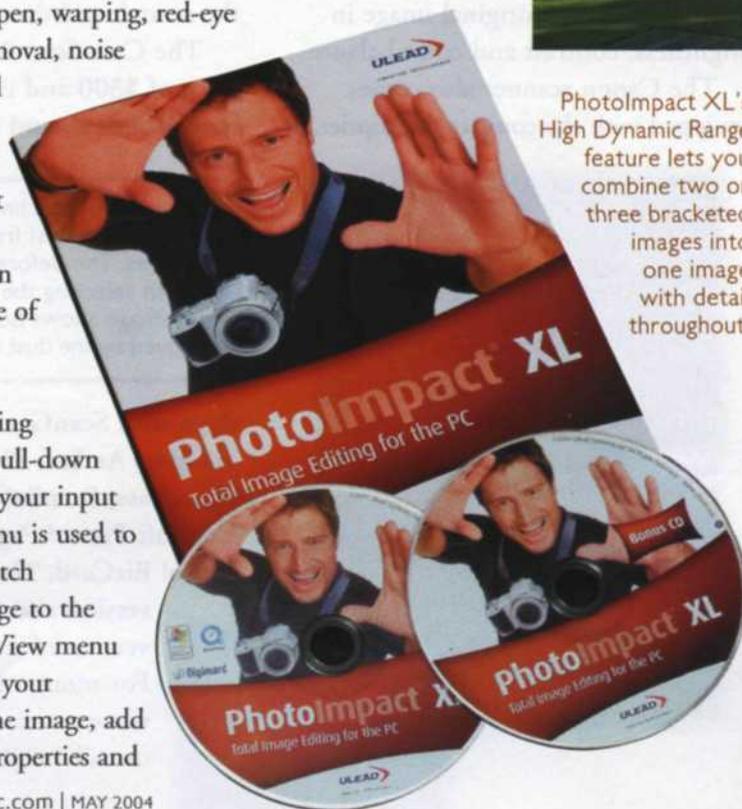
open various toolbars and panels for more editing functions.

Most of the power in PhotoImpact XL is located under the Format menu which offers a wide variety of functions which enable you to control everything from color correction to image resolution. You can either use an Auto setting or one of the 25 manual controls to adjust exposure, color, gamma, focus, and image properties. The ExpressFix, new to this version of PhotoImpact, takes all the guesswork out of fixing common photo problems, so you can sit back and let the Wizard provide the solutions.

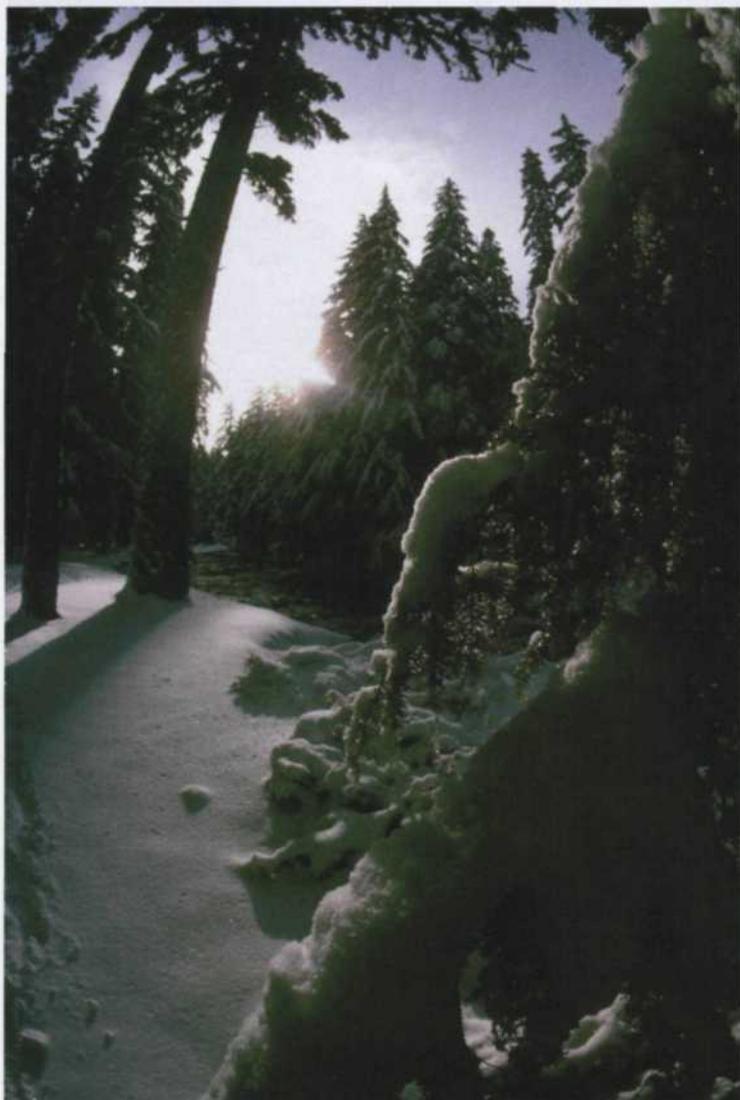
Also new to this version is the High Dynamic Range command which enables you to combine two or three bracket



PhotoImpact XL's High Dynamic Range feature lets you combine two or three bracketed images into one image with detail throughout.



The Fill Flash feature adds light to the shadow areas, much as shooting the picture with fill-flash does. But PhotoImpact's Fill Flash feature isn't range-limited like real fill-flash—it works on distant objects as well as nearby ones.



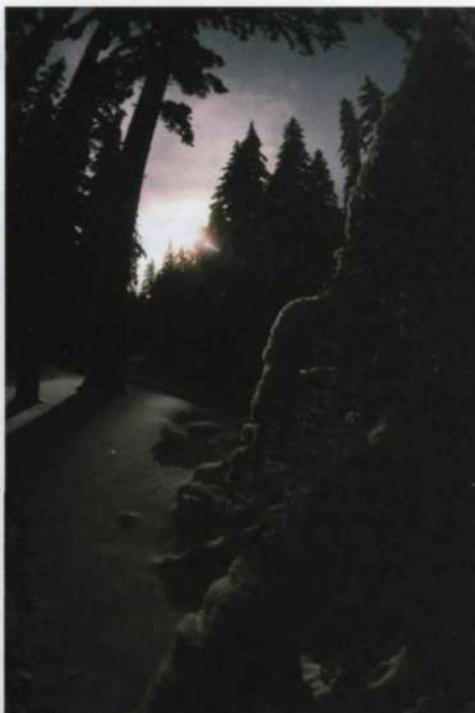
exposures into one image to produce an image with a very wide dynamic range. You can even hand-hold your digital camera as you shoot the bracket set, since XL's High Dynamic Range provides an Image Registration function for critical alignment.

The Selection menu features a full range of options that permit you to add, subtract, or pick a specific range of colors. The Object pull-down menu enables you to work with graphic objects that are imported from art libraries or objects that have been converted from photo selections.

The Effects menu is where you'll find all the plug-in effects that came installed with PhotoImpact XL, as well as any third-party Photoshop-compatible plug-ins that you install. The plug-in preference pointer in XL can point to eight different locations of Photoshop and Ulead plug-in filters. The internal plug-in set includes standard blur, sharpen, noise, distortion, and artistic plug-ins found in most high-end image editors today.

In addition, the creative group of plug-in filters provides full control over image gradients, animation effects, particle effects, moons, paint on edges, and type effects. The particle effect is unique in that it can create transparent bubbles, stars, fire, smoke, clouds, snow, rain, and fireflies as overlay effects.

The newest addition to the Impact plug-in selection is the Photographic Effects group which features 12 filters that mimic photographic effects typically achieved with camera lens filters



and darkroom techniques. You can create and fix lens distortion, remedy wrinkles, remove red-eye, add a diffraction grating, and enhance the lighting in the scene. Almost every plug-in features a before and after image, slider controls, and an Options menu to expand the plug-in's capabilities.

The Web menu is what makes PhotoImpact XL a complete editing solution for digital

photographers. Here you will find all the tools needed for creating professional-looking Web pages. Buttons, backgrounds, HTML text, object links, and Web output options are all part of the XL package. The best part is that you can work with your images in the image editor and drag them into your Web page, or convert the image itself into a Web page.

Much of the creative power in PhotoImpact XL is located within the EasyPalette menu. When you open this menu, all the XL image and effects libraries are listed by category and effect. You can visually choose your effect and then drag-and-drop it onto your image for instant results. The EasyPalette also gives you the option of creating your own custom galleries and dozens of controls for custom settings. Many of the effects even have a time line editor that allows you to create animation effects that can be exported to one of the many Ulead video editing programs.

PhotoImpact Album XL is a thumbnail database that can catalog your hard disk, CDs, DVDs or other storage devices and display them in a database format. Once the catalog is complete, you can add data to the image, use the search engine to look for photos in the album or create prints from images contained in the database. Digital camera files with EXIF data are automatically added to the database, so the program's search engine can



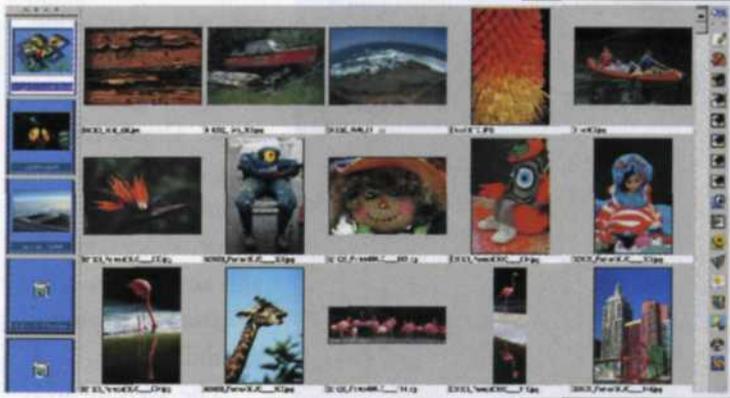
The editing program's ExpressFix feature makes it very simple to correct red-eye, as well as exposure, color casts, saturation, skin tones, and even focus, near-instantly.



Below: PhotoImpact Album XL is a photo database that can catalog your images and display them in thumbnail format or as a digital slide show.

Right: One of many easy effects: Meteor.

Bottom: A Cool 360 panorama.



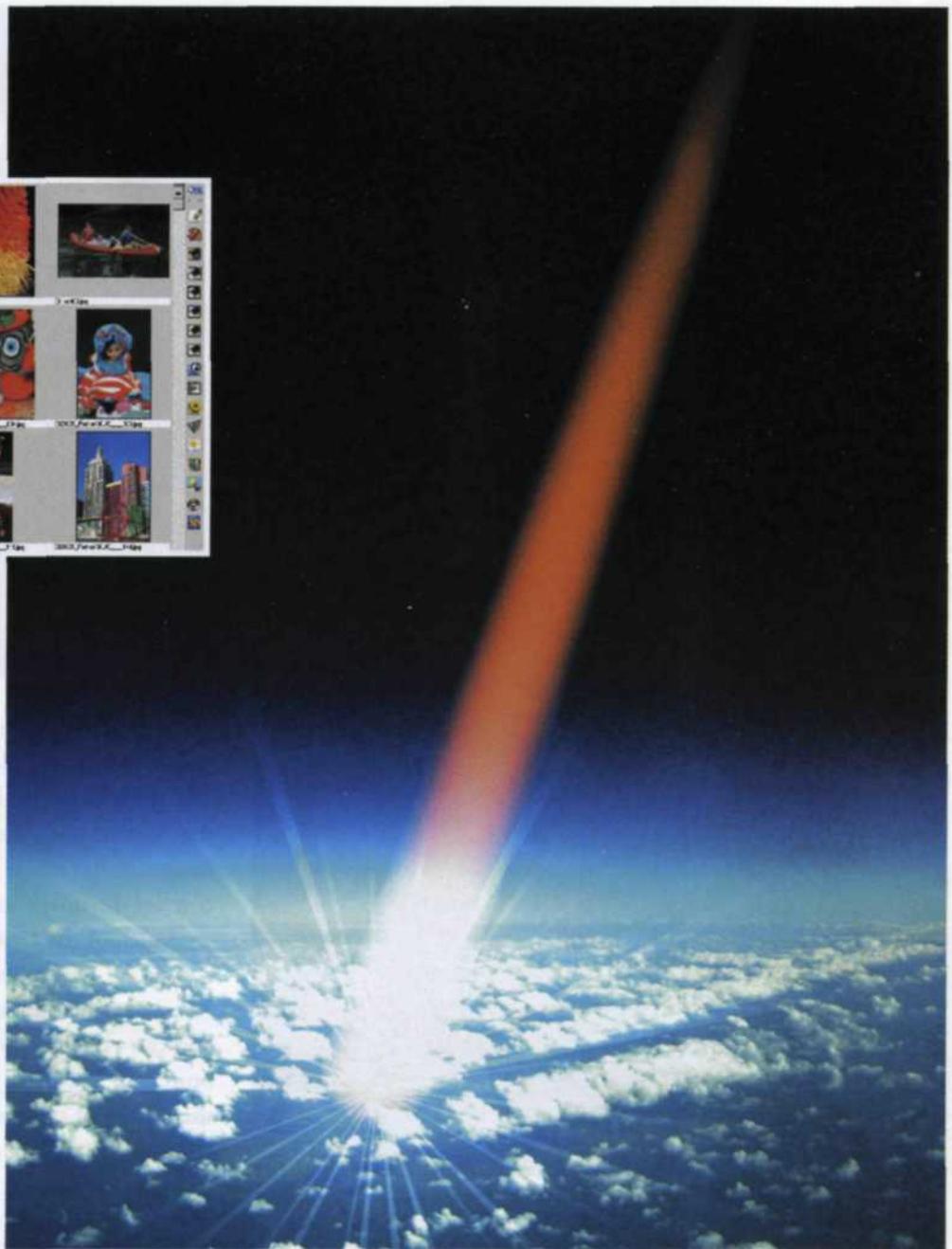
quickly locate a specific image for you. A menu on the left side of the screen provides a thumbnail view of your recent album selections.

Another nice feature of Album is that it also doubles as a slide show light box. You can arrange the images in the album the way you want to present them in your digital slide show, save the sequence, and then launch your presentation. The images in your predetermined order can then be displayed manually or automatically on your computer screen or video project. It is one of the fastest methods for creating lecture presentations that we have ever seen.

When you install PhotoImpact XL, a list of Ulead programs on your computer is added as a quick start thumbnail. Custom menus can then be added with all your favorite editing programs as shortcuts. To edit a specific image in the database, you merely grab it with the mouse button and drag it to one of the image editor icons. The program will open so you can edit the file, save it, and close the image. The thumbnail and adjusted image are then automatically updated in the album database.

Ulead Explorer 8 is another type of database program designed on the Windows Explorer format. The main difference is that the Ulead Explorer has the ability to create databases, slide shows, capture video, download digital camera files and share photos over the Internet. If you find the Windows Explorer somewhat limiting, you'll love this program.

Cool 360 is a small panorama program designed to import sections from scans or digital cameras and stitch them together



into a long panoramic picture or a full 360° image. GIF Animator 5.5 is a small animation editor that can create GIF animations from scratch or edit those which you import. This program offers editing tools, video special effects, frame control, time line viewer, brush and paint tools, object editors, and frame-by-frame editing control. This is one of the best GIF editors we have ever seen.

The best part of PhotoImpact XL is the price. You get a lot of bang for your buck with comprehensive solution. At a download price of \$89.95 (\$49.95 for an upgrade), PhotoImpact XL is one of the most powerful and versatile digital editing programs available. It's a PC-only program, compatible with Windows XP, 98, SE, NT 4.0, SP6 and above, 2000 and SE. For more information contact www.ulead.com or call 1-800-85-ULEAD. ■