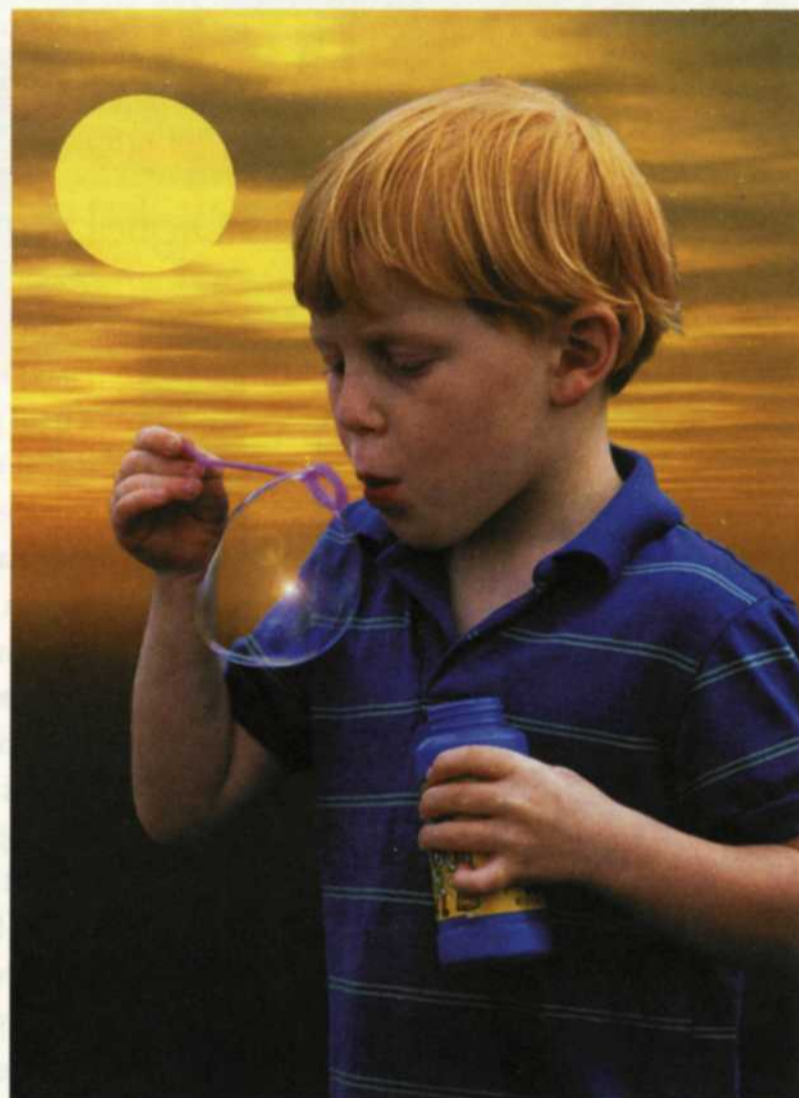


Original Scan



New background blended into image using new reversed mask image.

MAGIC MASKING

Jack & Sue Drafahl

Photo editing software has gone through an impressive evolution. Initially, the concept of digitally editing photos was not accepted by most labs. People felt that it was okay to dodge and burn or manipulate photos in the darkroom, but doing it in the daylight was unheard of.

IMAGE MANIPULATION with software is now as common as dodging and burning in the darkroom, and the new software tools make the process easier—and fun! The results are now more polished, and the public is familiar with the basic tools, and what they do.

The first of the older generation of image editing tools was called the magic wand. It was a great idea, but unfortunately, most image editors got frustrated using it.

The concept was simple. You touch an area with the mouse pointer, and the tool would select all adjoining pixels of similar color values up to a certain preselected numerical value. If the value was set low, the tool would select only those pixels close in value to the selection. If the value

was set high, then a broad base of pixels in various brightness levels and color values were selected.

The problem was determining the value that selected just the right amount of pixels. Those who finally figured out the tool realized that you initially select a small area, and then gradually add more.

Thankfully, newer editing programs have added some magic tools to make photo masking a dream. Proper use of these tools will help improve the quality of your image editing and drastically reduce your work time. Although we can't show you all of them, the following is a sampling of the ones we found to best represent these new smart editing tools.



Magnetic lasso in use (Photoshop 5)



Color selection tool in use (Corel Paint 9)



KEEP eyedropper used to select the lip color (Mask Pro)



DROP eyedropper used to select the lip color (Mask Pro)



Magic brush used to create mask near face and shirt (Mask Pro)



Magic brush in use, and close-up of eyebrow editing (Mask Pro)

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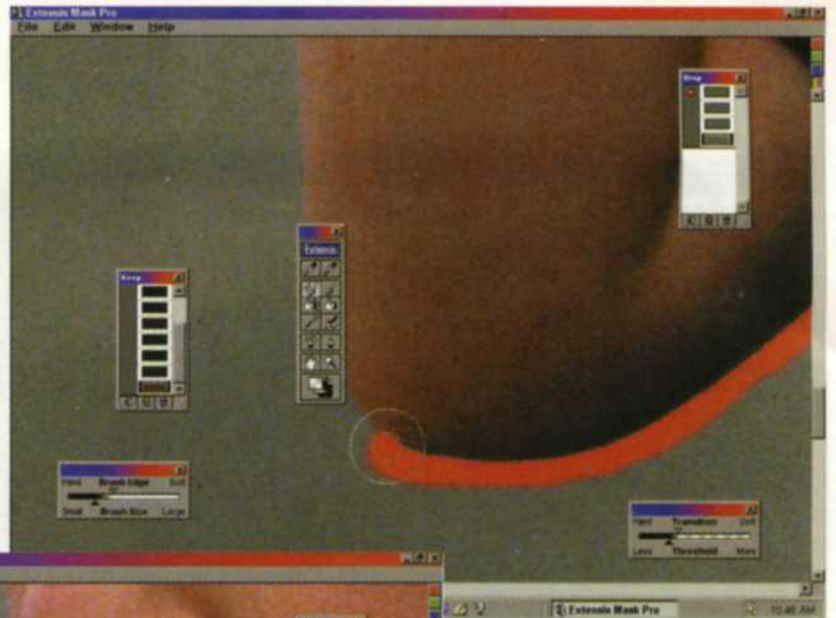
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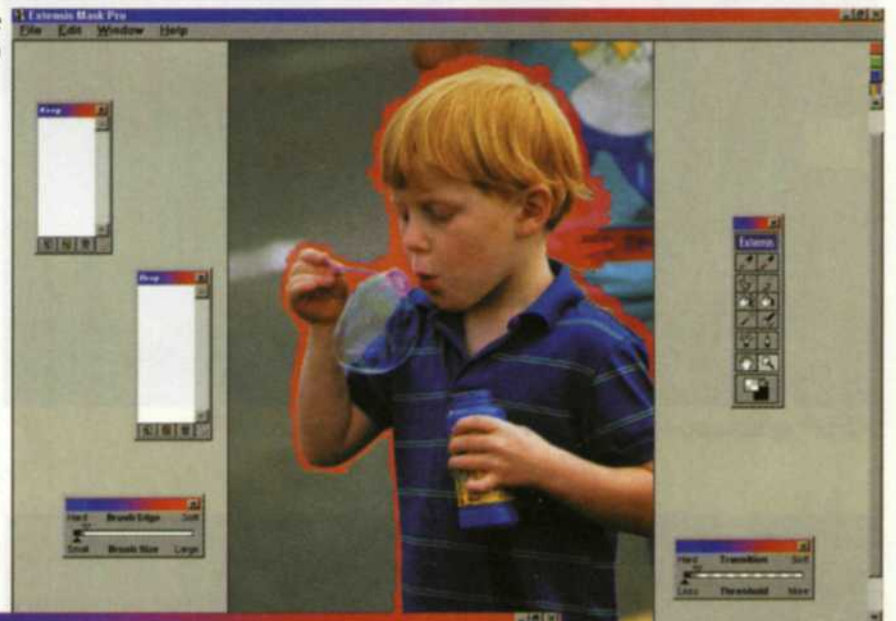
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Magic brush in use along elbow (Mask Pro)



Magic brush in use along bubble (Mask Pro)

Overall view of magic brush in use (Mask Pro)



Finished mask using magic brush. Additional fine tuning was done to inside of bubble.

Magnetic Lasso—Photoshop

This tool is a variation of the lasso tool found in the selection tool box. The original lasso tool was used to manually trace around a specific object. You had to have the image zoomed at extreme magnification so that the mask would be accurate. It was very time-consuming because there were hundreds of detailed edges to follow.

The magnetic lasso makes it easier, because as you trace along an edge the tool automatically senses a contrast or color different and pulls the line to that edge. You simply have to drag your mouse over the edge you want to select and the magic lasso automatically makes the selection for you.

Several controls help you fine-tune the magnetic lasso to handle specific problems.

The width of the lasso determines the size of tool that traces over the object. The larger the lasso, the more area that the tool will search looking for an edge. The frequency control determines how often the tool will anchor selection points as you drag the mouse along.

The contrast control determines the level of contrast to be selected. A high number looks for high levels of contrast while a lower number looks for low contrast levels.

The end result is that as you drag your mouse along an edge, the tool automatically anchors points along the selected area. If the selection wanders into an area you don't want, you can use the delete key to back up anchor points until you have removed the incorrect selection. You can then manually anchor a few points through the difficult area with the left mouse button, and then let the auto feature take over once you have passed the problem area.

The advantage of the magnetic lasso over the magic wand is that it concentrates on a very small area as you drag the mouse. You may start with light blue tones against red, and then move to green against black. No changes have to be made to the magnetic lasso as you move

through these areas. With the magic wand, changes would have to be made each time you added a selection.

Color Mask - Corel Paint 9

This tool collects colors to be selected with an eyedropper tool before you make a final selection. You can add as many

colors or variations of colors as you want.

You can also expand this tool to include different levels of hue, brightness, saturation, and white to black levels for each color selected. For example, you could select three variations of green, a red tone, and single yellow hue.

The list of colors and variations are displayed before you make the actual selec-

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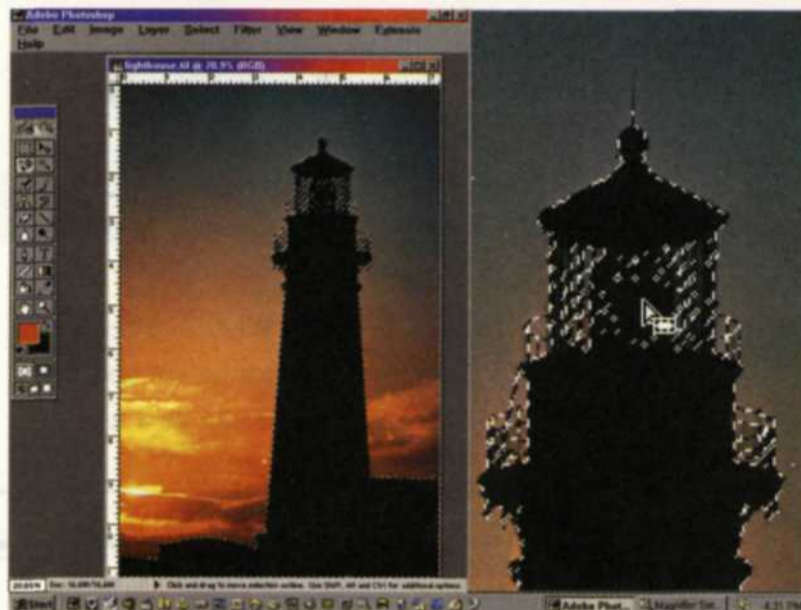
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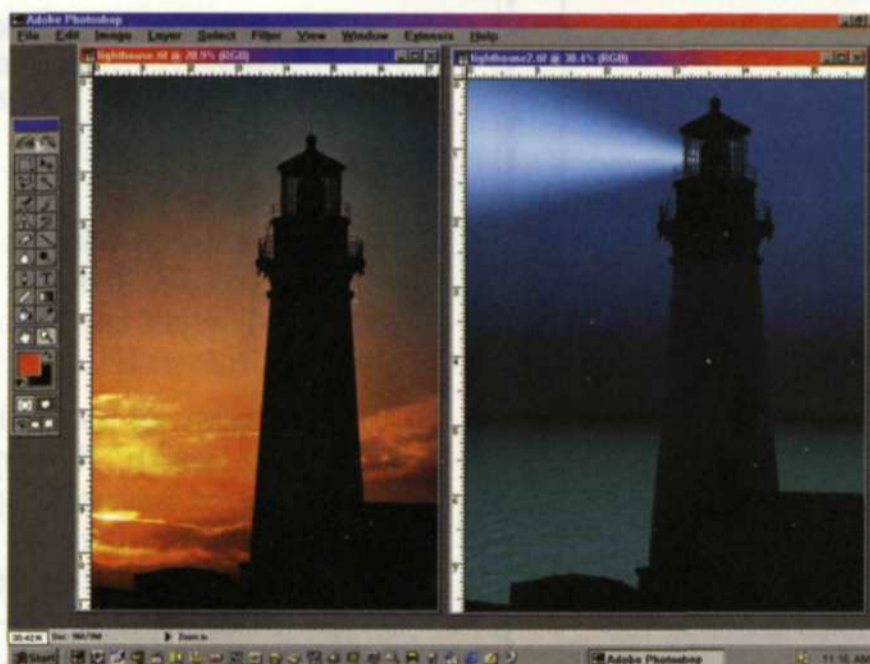
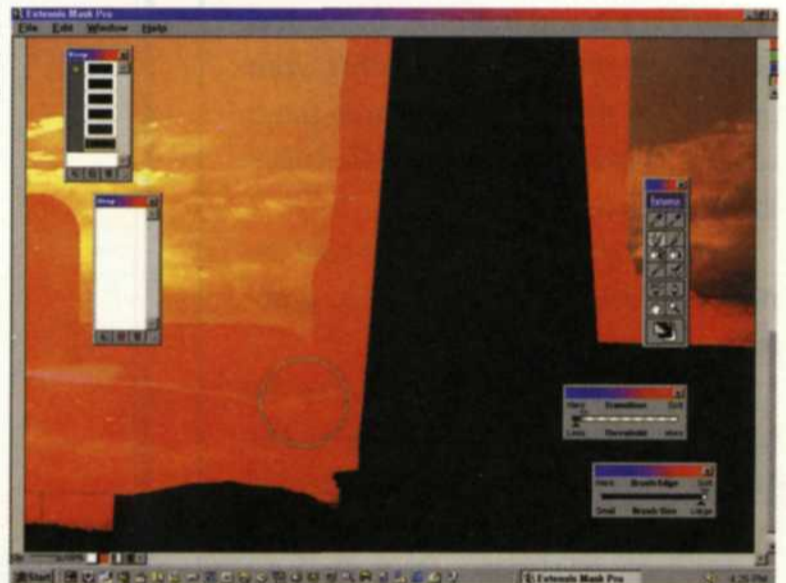
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Creating mask using magnetic lasso (Photoshop)

Using Magic brush to create mask around lighthouse



Before and after images using magic brush and blend

tion. If you try the selection and want to modify the results, no problem. Simply undo the selection, go back to the color mask menu which stores the entered data, and update it before you try the selection again.

Magic Brush - Mask Pro

This third-party Photoshop plug-in tool is very complex. It will take a little time to learn how to use, but when you do you

will be able to do some incredible masking. The magic brush has four control palettes that determine how it will make a selection. These palettes float on top of the edited image and can be moved out of the way as you are editing.

The Keep eyedropper palette allows you to select colors you would like to include in the mask and the Drop palette selects those that you don't. The Brush palette controls the size of the brush and just how

soft or hard the edge of the brush will be. The Threshold palette is used to set the level of similar pixels for a specific color.

The best way to use the magic brush is to select your keep and drop colors in a small area and mask that area. When you move into another area with different colors, simply reset the eyedropper palettes and select new colors. You will make mistakes along the way, but you can use the restore mode, or the standard brush in restore mode, to fix any variations in the mask.

Since the magic brush is so complex, we recommend that you start with an image with few colors and plenty of contrast, before moving to a complex image with few tonal variations. Experiment with all the controls, especially the threshold palette.

Mask Pro also includes three other magic tools that work with the four palettes. They are not used as much as the magic brush, but still play an important part in the mask pro program. The magic fill removes holes in a mask or specks outside the mask. The magic lasso is very much like the one in the Photoshop toolbox. The magic pen works much like the magnetic lasso except it has more control over selected colors.

Photoshop Select Functions

There are several additional functions under the Photoshop select pulldown menu to help improve the quality of your masks. Most of these functions are used in a post processing capacity, and refine how the mask edges blend with the adjoining areas.

If the edge of your mask is very ragged, you can use varying levels of the smooth function to level out the edges. You can also improve the blend of the mask edge using the border tool or the median filter to soften the blend.

You can expand the mask selection using the grow and expand functions, or shrink the selection with the contract function. Most of these functions are pretty straight-forward in their use, but we still recommend experimenting with a test image to see their effects.

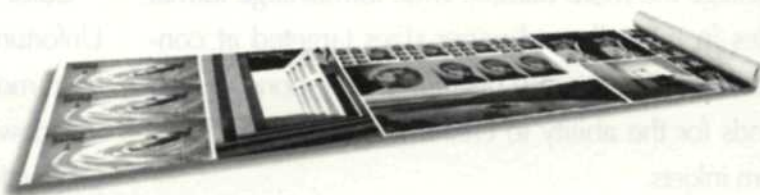
Image masking is a very important part

of the digital editing process. Your degree of expertise in this area generally determines the quality level of your digital lab. If your clients can't tell where an image mask starts and where it ends, then you've got magic in your masking techniques.

For further information contact:
Adobe Photoshop; www.adobe.com
Corel Paint 9; www.corel.com
Extensis Mask Pro; www.extensis.com

Jack and Sue Drafaul are freelance writers and professional photographers based outside Portland, Ore.

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