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Corel CorelDRAW 9 Graphics Suite

Jack and Sue Drafafl, August, 2000



CorelDRAW for Windows was first introduced in 1989 and has become so popular that it is now at Version 9. The CorelDRAW Graphics Suite product line includes a collection of more than a half-dozen programs designed to meet the needs of professional graphic designers. To fully expound on these programs' features would take up more space than we have allotted for this product review. Therefore,

we will recognize all the parts of the suite, but will mainly concentrate on the application that concerns photographers.

CorelDRAW 9 is a powerful vector illustration and page-layout application. It features a full range of tools and effects to make your job easy. It also includes 25,000 clip-art images, 1000 True Type and Type 1 fonts, and 1000 high-resolution photos. It is backwards compatible to let users exchange files from previous versions. The other smaller programs include texture editing, screen capture, image tracing, font management, media management, and a barcode creator. There is so much to these programs that it takes three full CDs to hold the full suite. Fortunately, you can pick and chose only the parts you want to install on your system.

We will now concentrate our review on the main application concerning photographers: PHOTO-PAINT 9. This is an extremely powerful photo-editing program with many of its competitors' best feature all in one package. Images can be imported into the program via TWAIN scanner drivers, digital camera drivers, or directly from the hard disk. Once an image is in the program, you can make color corrections, exposure compensation, contrast control, change saturation levels, and dozens of other image corrections only possible before with high-end editing programs.



One of the great things about digital imaging is that you can do whatever you want with it. Photo purists can do all the things they'd do in the darkroom and no more, while special-effects enthusiasts can go completely wild. Here's a Corel stock image (top), and a variation produced by applying the Find Edges filter in PHOTO-PAINT 9.

One of the best parts of this program is its gamma control function. With this control you can adjust highlight, shadow, and midtone values to give you maximum control over the gamma range of your photo. You can manually adjust each level or let the

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program make the adjustments automatically.

Another interesting control is the target balance control. When you select a midtone color value, it will be displayed on the edit screen. You can then go to the color palette, select a replacement color and when applied, the whole image is adjusted from highlights to shadows. This is a great tool for images that do not have a pure white, black, or gray tone enabling easy adjustment.

PHOTO-PAINT 9 has dozens of image filters that blur, sharpen, mask, feather, distort, and offer many other creative imaging tools. If you still want to expand your creative abilities, you can import Adobe Photoshop's plug-in filters. PHOTO-PAINT 9 is loaded with digital brushes for image editing, and if you're not happy with any of them, you can use the brush creator to add your own.

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One remarkable brush is called the Image Sprayer. This brush uses a collection of similar masked images and sprays them onto an image. For example, the butterfly sprayer will spray different types of small butterfly images across your screen as you apply the image sprayer. You can also create your own unique sprayer and add it to the extensive list of sprayers included with the program.



Want to add atmosphere? Try the Fog Filter. You can see on-screen exactly what the effect does—much quicker and less wasteful than doing it in the darkroom. And you can have a lot of fun experimenting with the various effects.

Another nice feature in the main program is its ability to display smart buttons when you select a specific edit function. Let's say you pick the rectangular select from the toolbox on the side of the image. As soon as you do, a row of buttons appears at the top of the screen for making adjustments to that tool. You now have the ability to hide or display the masked selection, feather it, align it with another mask, grow or shrink the mask, float the mask, or add more data. Each tool from the toolbox has its own unique set of button controls to speed up the editing process.

Speaking of toolboxes, there are more than two dozen types of specialized toolboxes. When you select the desired toolbox, it is displayed at the top of the screen, so you can select a specialized version of that tool. For example, the clone toolbox has a standard clone tool, impressionism, pointillism, clone from saved, and clone from fill. The dockers panel controls layers, channels, movie creation, automation controls, brush setting, and a special scrapbook control to access digital stock photos included with the initial CD installation.

When putting the final touches to an image, you may use the blur and/or sharpen filters on specific areas. When you use either of these controls, you have the luxury of picking a single filter variation or loading them all in for a visual comparison of the filter's effect on the image.

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Here, the Lighting Effects filter was used on a Corel stock image to add drama to the lighthouse shot. You can easily produce a wide range of effects with each effects filter, using on-screen controls and seeing in real-time just what is happening to the image.

The secret to discovering what all the controls do, is to work your way through all the toolboxes, pull-downs, and special menu tabs. Load in some copies of the same image and start pressing the buttons. You will be amazed at the quantity of controls packed into this program. Look at the small arrows in the corners of the control buttons and, in most cases, you don't have to use pull-downs to get where you want to go. There are a lot of hidden commands to speed up the editing process that are accessed using the right mouse key.

If you use a combination of commands and need to repeat them later, just use the "record script" command. As you press each key, you will see a text file compiling on the right hand side of the screen. When the procedure is finished, it can be saved and run again later to save you time.

Unfortunately, we have left out hundreds of other commands that perform a variety of tasks with photographic images. We have been using the CorelDRAW suite for years and are still discovering new, faster and better ways to image edit. That's what CorelDRAW Graphics Suite is all about.

For further information, check out Corel's Web site at www.corel.com