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RANGEFINDER PUBLISHING

HOME NETWORK MAGAZINE INTERACT MARKETPLACE ADVERTISERS CLASSIFIEDS SUBSCRIBE RESOURCE CENTER

Rangefinder Magazine September 2003

Plug Ins Page: by Jack and Sue Drafahl
Auto FX's Mystical Lighting



The latest Photoshop-compatible plug-in filter from Auto FX Software gives you powerful control over lighting. If you find the lighting for your photo session didn't come out as expected, Mystical Lighting steps in with 16 lighting solutions. To provide maximum flexibility, the program operates as both a stand-alone application and a Photoshop-compatible plug-in.

When you select the Mystical Lighting special effects button, you are presented with 16 specialized photo-realistic filters that address both lighting and shading. It is fairly easy to decide which one will work for you as their names generally describe how the filter will affect your image. Some of the visual effects include: Edge Highlights, Flare, Light Caster, Shader, Spotlight, Rainbow, Shading Brush, SurfaceLight, Mottled Background and Mist.

When you load a filter, an extensive set of filter controls appear on the left side of the screen. In order to reduce processing time, a lower resolution placeholder image is placed on the editing screen. With these slider controls, you can control the intensity of the effect, light fall-off, angle of the light, transparency, softness, color blending, light rotation, add additional lights, background control, and much more. Each effect change will be displayed as a new placeholder image in the center of the screen.



The original image (left) is altered using the Mottled Background control.

This program also has versatility which allows you to skip the preset menu. You can load a manual version of the filter and create your own preset filters.

A second menu on the right of the screen displays the filters you are using, which layer to which the effect is being applied, and the level of applied opacity.

When we first opened the Mystical Lighting plug-in filter, we were overwhelmed with the amount of lighting controls. We found the easiest way to see how these filters work was to download both the samples and the Mystical Lighting PDF file. The tutorial walked us through all the features, allowed us to try many of the filter presets, so then

we felt confident using these lighting filters.

The choice of directional or omnidirectional lights will depend on the effect you select for your image. The directional light is represented by a "T" icon, and the omnidirectional light is represented with an oval icon. Since the different variations of these filters can provide millions of possible lighting combinations, we'll briefly touch on those we found most useful for our applications.

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Stock Image taken on Portra 400UC color negative film and scanned into computer via Nikon 4000ED film scanner.



The highlight area in the image was selected with the Adobe Photoshop color range selection tool. The Ethereal Soft Cast preset was then selected and applied to that area. The main effect consisted of two warm lights feathering down from the upper right portion of the image.



Stock color slide image of carnival ride at night with "Fairy Dust" Filter applied. Since the original exposure was long, it was ideal for this filter.

One of our filter favorites was the Light Caster. Hollywood uses fog or smoke filled rooms to create those fantastic beams of light, but now you can create the same effect with Mystical Lighting. Simply drag the corners of the directional lighting "T" to direct and size the light source. When you are satisfied, just touch the center of the "T" to place the light. You can then change the intensity, adjust the light fall-off, and several other modifications until you are totally happy with the final results. We found this control invaluable for our underwater images as we could add beams of light to underwater flashlights and electronic flash systems.



Original interior shot was made at the J. Paul Getty Museum.



Light Caster filter was added to light coming through windows.

Another favorite filter of ours is the Flare filter. For years we have worked hard to reduce lens flare in our images, now we can use this filter to enhance the flare in an image. For this filter, we used the omnidirectional lighting represented by an oval icon and contorted the oval to fit the desired effect. The large assortment of flare presets cover all types of light sources, including the sun in clear skies, fog, or even from space. You can also adjust flare by controlling the number of spikes, halo density, intensity, softness, color and opacity.



Underwater stock image taken in Fiji with Sea & Sea YS120 flash systems.



Mystical Lighting Light Caster filter was applied to each flash head. Color, beam angle, softness, direction, falloff and distance were all controlled with the light caster effects sliders.

We also tried the Mist and Wispy Mist filters to create photo-realistic cloud layers and fog banks. With these filters you can control the height of the clouds or fog and the amount of image that is visible through the newly added layer.

Most of the rainbow plug-in filters we have seen looked contrived and not at all like the real thing...until now. The Mystical Lighting Rainbow can be placed wherever you want with intensity and opacity that parallels real world images.



Color slide image of Mt. Hood, Oregon.



Final image showing Wispy Mist applied to mountain.

Best of all, Mystical Lighting features and unlimited amount of Undo. This way you can go back as far as you need to achieve the desired effect. After all, the Mystical Lighting effects have been applied to the placeholder image, you can then click OK, and the program will close and jump back to Photoshop. All your lighting effects will now be applied to the full resolution image.

Mystical Lighting is available for both Windows and Mac for \$179, either as a download or physical CD. The release of German, Spanish, Italian and French versions are expected soon. For more information call (800) 839-2008 or order online at www.autofx.com.

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