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First Exposure: Ulead Photo Impact by Jack & Sue Drafahl



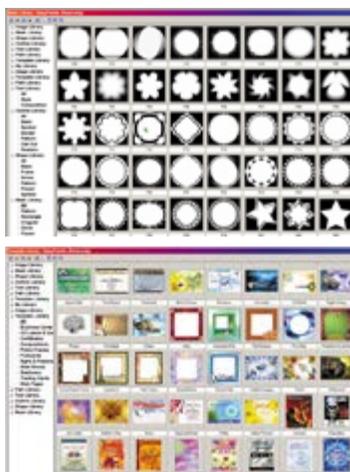
One of the most critical elements in the digital process is having a reliable photo-editing program. Most of them offer the basic exposure adjustments, gamma modification and color correction features, but a valuable program should offer more. It should have advanced editing controls for selection, layering, vector object editing, 3D graphics and a wide variety of special effects and creative features. The problem is when you start adding these more advanced features, the software price generally increases.

Ulead PhotoImpact Pro changes all that by offering a professional-level image editing program that goes beyond the norm. Its suite of programs includes the PhotoImpact Pro image editor and Web design, a PhotoImpact Album database program, a thumbnail Photo Explorer, COOL 360 panorama maker and GIF Animator 5 program. Best of all, you can buy it for less than \$100! That gives you a lot of bang for your buck.

The largest of the suite programs is the PhotoImpact Pro image editor. When you open this program, you are presented with a splash menu that can take you into the editing program or to one of the other programs within the suite. All the programs are connected together with thumbnail links that allow you to drag files between programs flawlessly.



Ulead Photoimpact Pro's various Easy Palettes that can add objects, masks, shapes, and frames to any image.



In the main editing program, the blank editing screen is surrounded by the Tool Panel on the left, pull-down menus at the top and a floating Easy Palette on the right, which all feature dozens of icons. The Tool Panel is similar to those found in other advanced editing programs in that many of the tools expand and include further tools via an arrow at the bottom right corner of the tool icon. Some of the tools have associated sliders and extended menus that open and close as you select the various tools. When you first open the program, the tool box is

attached to the left side of the editing menu, but you can select it and move it to any other location on the screen.

Under the pull-down menus at the top of the screen, you will find dozens of additional tools and image controls, so you can adjust just about every aspect of the image. You can easily customize the top part of the editing screen with a toolbar and panel editor to include the tools you want.

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Lab Profile: Full Color, Inc.

Digital Photography



If you want more control over any of the effects in the Easy Palette, you can right click on the icon, and a custom menu will appear. With this menu, you can tweak the effect and save it as a new custom effect in the palette.

For those just getting starting in image editing, PhotoImpact Pro features a special ExpressFix Wizard. It will take you step by step through the process of color correction, exposure balancing, saturation adjustment and sharpness modification. It uses thumbnails to give you a visual choice during each step in the editing process.

For seasoned image editors, the program offers many choices for correcting each type of image problems. For example, under the Format menu, color shifts can be corrected using the Color Balance, Color Shift, Color Cast, Color Adjustment or Levels editor. Each control attacks the problem in a different way, and your choice will depend on your editing style and preferences.

One of the most powerful correction tools is the High Dynamic Range function. This tool takes three bracketed exposures and combines them into one image, taking the best highlights, mid-tones and shadows from the three images. If the three images are taken by hand, holding the camera, a registration feature will help realign the three images as they are blended together. This is a great feature for digital shooters who want to achieve the extended exposure range found in color negative film.



Ulead PhotoImpact Pro has a group of photographic filters that deal with distortion, lighting, color balance and other traditional photographic effects. In this case we used a building shot where the building appears to fall over. The perspective angle is corrected with the lens distortion filter.

The creative side of PhotoImpact is even more impressive. The heart of the creative edge is the Easy Palette—located on the right side of the editing screen (but it can be temporarily moved or removed). It features galleries and object libraries divided into special groupings with presets. When you see an effect or object type you want, simply drag it onto the image you are editing or double-click on the thumbnail, and it performs its magic. The combined power of these galleries and libraries include more than 1000 creative tricks and effects that take the program's creativeness to new heights.

The galleries section includes image effects, styles, fills, painting options, a variety of brushes, stamps, particle effects, lighting, animation, materials, buttons, frames and unique borders. Each effect is represented by a small thumbnail of a generic image that illustrates the effect's results. You can compose your text right on the image and bend, deform, or warp it for spectacular effects. If you want to customize the effect, you can right click on the effect and an advanced slider menu opens to provide you full customized control. Once you make your changes, you can save it as a new effect that can be applied to images later. The powerful control found in the Easy Palette gives you millions of combinations of creative controls, more than you could use in a lifetime.

For the creative designer who prepares brochures, posters and other printed layouts, PhotoImpact Pro has all the tools to do the job. In the floating tool box, you will find a dozen clone paintbrushes, crayons, pencils, airbrushes, charcoals, chalk, markers, oil paints, bristle choices and more. The stamp tool creates an endless stream of similar objects such as candy, leaves or flowers. You can even create your own stamp brush by collecting a group of similar objects and saving them as a unique stamp brush.

There is also a 3D transform tool that allows you to size, distort, and rotate in the 3D environment. If you want to add vector drawings to your design, you can go to the object library in the Easy Palette or create one from scratch using the vector drawing tools. From there you can use the materials gallery to add bevels, lighting patterns, bump maps, shadows, refraction index, transparency effects or add texture effects.



Web page design is a snap with the full-featured Web design program built into the PhotoImpact image editor. The program includes backgrounds, rollovers, animations, slicing and posting to your Web page.

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PhotoImpact Album has the ability to store all the EXIF digital camera data that is stored with each digital camera file. You can then review, print, or search for images based on f/stop, shutter speed, ISO, etc.

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Dozens of text effects, fonts, bevels, reflections and drop shadows can be applied from the Easy Palette.

The stone filter effect from the Easy Palette takes a normal image such as this flower, converts it into basic color/exposure levels, and then applies bevels to each level.

The motion blur filter was dragged from the Easy Palette onto a stock image of a cyclist. The motion blur menu gives you control over direction, strength of blur and the area that is affected by the motion blur.

The third-party Adobe Photoshop-compatible plug-ins can be linked to PhotoImpact Pro using the preferences section. The next time you load the program, the plug-ins will be available. Most of the plug-ins that we have tried in Photoshop work in PhotoImpact Pro. The best part is you can add each of the plug-ins as a thumbnail image in the Easy Palette. This is the first editing program we have seen that makes third-party plug-ins available as thumbnail effects.

There's even more for Web designers since PhotoImpact Pro has a full Web page design program embedded directly in the main editing screen. You'll find slicing tools, HTML text, flash object, GIF animation, rollovers, button designers and Web backgrounds. You can preview your edited Web page in a simulated state before posting it directly to your Web page from PhotoImpact Pro.



The high dynamic range function is used to combine images from a bracket exposure and expand the dynamic range of the final image. These images were taken with a Fuji F700 digital camera in the Cayman Islands. The first image is the overexposed image, while the second is the underexposed image.



The third image is the combination of the two using the High Dynamic range function in the program.

The second largest program in the suite is the Album program. You can open it separately, or from the PhotoImpact Pro editor. With this program you can catalog any image storage device, and easily create a thumbnail database. You can then sort, search, or present the images from that database in a slide show or on CD or DVD. If you need to edit a thumbnail image, you merely drag it to the PhotoImpact Pro program icon located on the right, and the image is loaded and is ready for editing. You can also add icons for other editing programs. When you drag the thumbnail to those icons, those programs will open with your image choice.



Photographic lens flare filter is applied to the image. You have control over placement of flare, brightness, glow, and angle that it comes down in the image.

Cool 360 is a small panorama program that is part of the suite, and it makes panoramas easy to do. Images are first collected and arranged in the order that you decide, and then they are stitched, blended, and made into one long panorama. You can also make a circular 360° panorama that can be animated and viewed with the 360° viewer that comes with the suite.

But wait, there's more. The GIF Animator is a small utility that allows you to load, preview, and edit GIF animations so they can be used in the Web page you created using PhotoImpact Pro. If you like to use animations in your Web page, this is a great way to jazz them up even more.

PhotoImpact Pro offers all the functionality of PhotoImpact XL, but adds several key features and bonus software components. The three-CD set includes a bonus CD with over 5000 photo objects, some video tutorials and several hundred graphic art objects to help the creative process.

Ulead PhotoImpact Pro features just about everything you need to transfer, organize, and edit your digital images. It is only on the Window platform and supports Microsoft Windows 98 SE, 2000, ME and XP. PhotoImpact Pro is a powerful software program, so don't be scared off by its extremely



The PhotoImpact Album program can catalog any type of storage device and create a thumbnail database of the images. You can then sort, search, print,

affordable list price of \$99.95.

For more on Ulead's video and still products, you can go to www.ulead.com/.

Jack and Sue Drafahl are freelance journalists/photographers living in the Pacific Northwest. They have owned and operated a custom lab and service bureau, Image Concepts, for many years. They can be reached at: digitalduo@jackandsuedrafahl.com. The Drafahls' web site is: www.jackandsuedrafahl.com/.

or add additional information to each thumbnail image. You can also drag the thumbnails to the program icons on the right and that program will open ready to edit that image. When the image is saved it is updated in the album.

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