



plugs·n·pixels

IMAGE CREATION, MANIPULATION & EDUCATION



**PREMIERE
ISSUE!**



plugs·n·pixels

ISSUE #1

Created and produced for free distribution to the Photoshop plug-in community by Mike Bedford

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Text and images by Mike Bedford



welcome!

This is the Premiere issue of Plugs 'N Pixels, a free ezine dedicated to celebrating the plug-in, a marvelous technology designed to extend the functionality of Photoshop. As if Photoshop and other image editing applications aren't already fully capable of enabling you to fulfill your creative dreams! But throw in an endless selection of smartly engineered plug-ins, and there is no limit to what can be accomplished.

Each issue of Plugs 'N Pixels will offer you a great cover image created using a handful of plug-ins, as well as featured product pages to inform you about the currently available plug-ins and applications technology.



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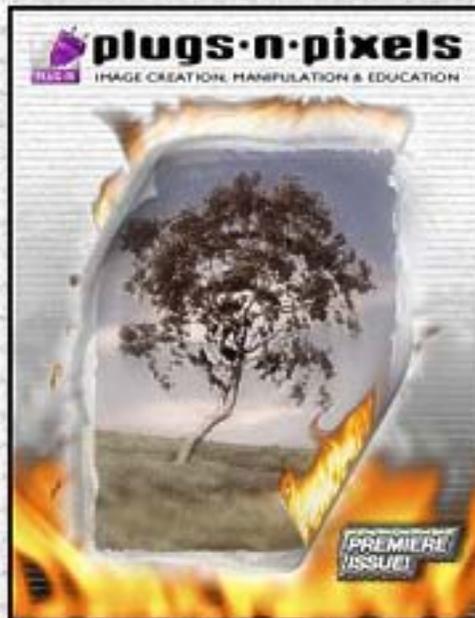
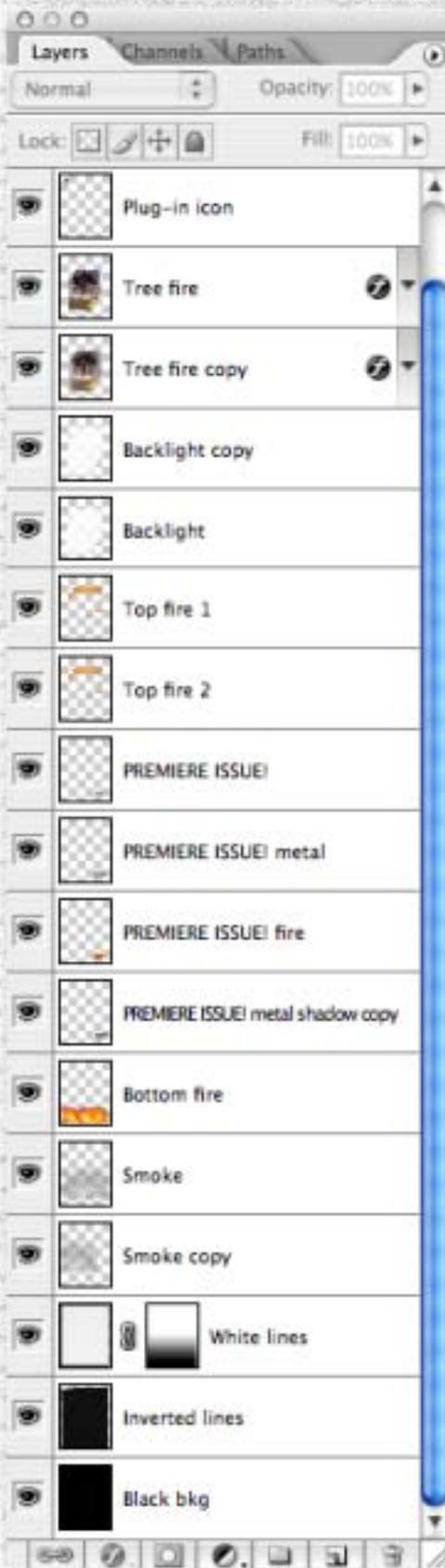
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behind the cover art

Using Photoshop-compatible plug-ins is an uncharted creative adventure. One can spend hours experimenting with different combinations of plug-ins. This issue's cover started with a single, simple photo of a tree and evolved into something entirely different! Here's how:



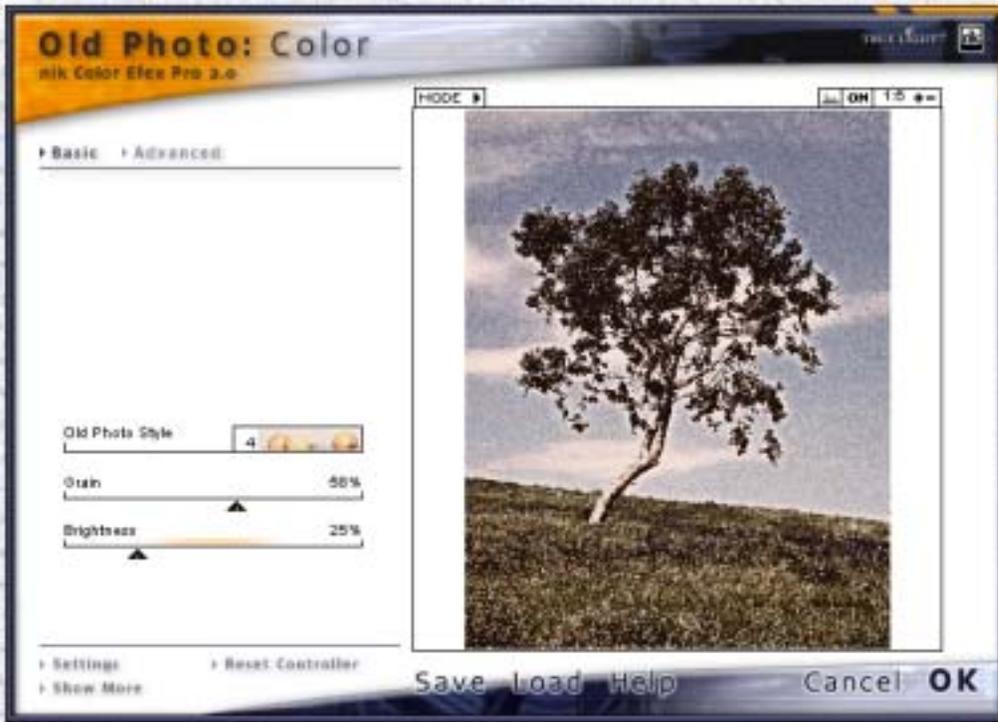
The cover image seems to be making some sort of environmental statement, but actually, it isn't. In the course of experimentation, the dominant fire element came from Alien Skin's [Eye Candy 5: Nature](#) set (more on that later). The tree image was shot in Chino Hills, California one beautiful spring morning. Nice photo of a great location, but that alone is not enough. Some preparation work was necessary before the various plug-ins could be applied.



The plain sky in the original image was crying out for something more appealing. I searched my archive and found this cloud photo from Hesperia, California. I selected the sky with the Magic Wand tool and pasted the cloud image into it. The result is a believable but much more interesting combination. When it comes to photo art, feel free to experiment.

The next order of business was to begin thinking about what plug-in effects would be appropriate to add to this base image to create further interest and mood.

< LEFT: The Layers palette for the finished cover image, showing the order of effects



nik Color Efex Pro 2 offers a filter called Old Photo Color which gave the tree photo a grainy, moody, otherworldly appearance.



Next, I extended the subdued mood using Center Spot, found in Digital Film Tools' 55mm suite of plug-ins. Center Spot added the soft-focus effect to the edges of the image while leaving the center in its original state. I adjusted the balance of focus until satisfied with the results.

Once you begin working with plug-in effects, you will look at your existing images differently and also approach your new shots with an eye toward adding digital effects. It's better to shoot clean and add any effects later.



At this point we are a long way from the original tree photo! Never content to leave well enough alone, I decided to add edge effects to the entire image. onOne's PhotoFrame is an excellent choice for rescuing your images from the ordinary and bringing them into the extreme.

Adding a frame or edge is a matter of looking through tens, hundreds or thousands of frame files until you find one that suits your image and the result you have in mind.

PhotoFrame allows you to not only apply the frame, but to change its size, orientation, focus and opacity, in addition to adding bump maps if desired.

Our tree photo is almost finished! But when there are more plug-ins on hand, there are naturally more effects waiting to be applied...



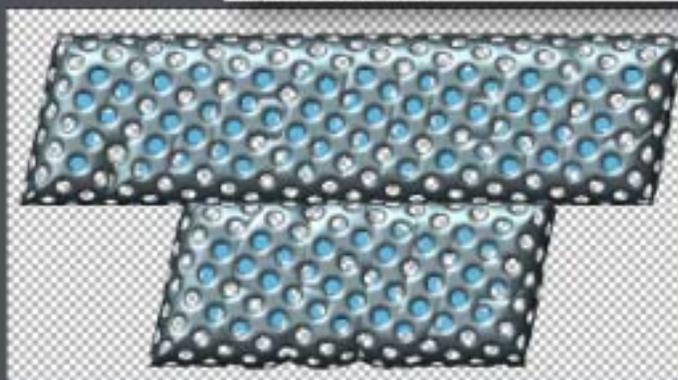
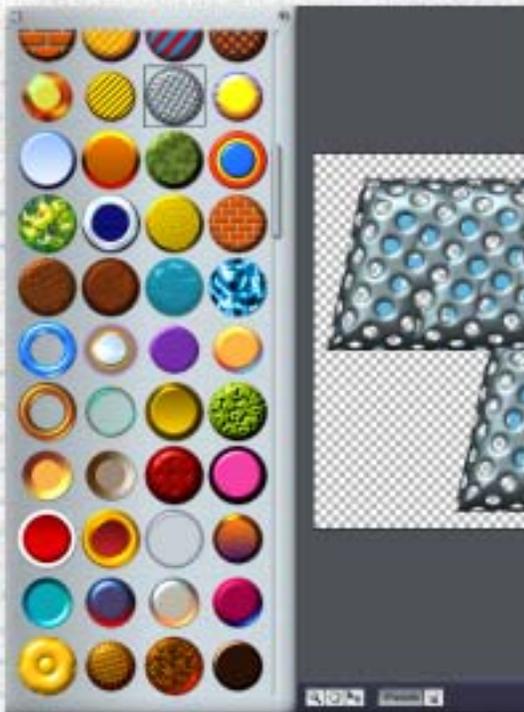
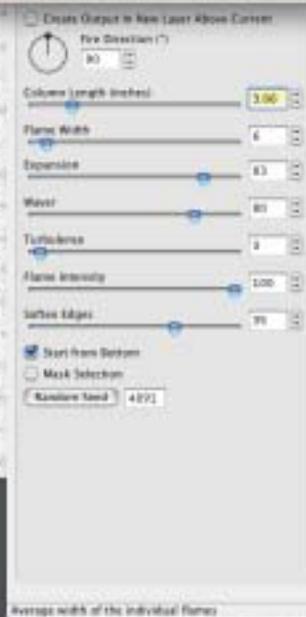
At this point we have the original tree image with a new background, a color effect, altered focus and artsy edges. What to do next? Take it into the third dimension with a page curl effect (after deleting the custom edge's white pixels)!

AV Bros. Page Curl Pro is the most advanced curling effect to be found. Not only can you do the classic curl in any direction and to any degree, but (among other things) you can add additional curls along with backing images! (See the masthead of the Plugs 'N Pixels website for another example of the curl effect.)

Our tree photo ended up with two separate curls on opposite ends of the image. But a simple curl is not enough for the plug-in artist! Not when there are still more plug-ins to explore. And this is where the fire suddenly began...

The plain white edge of the back of the page curl was an invitation to make a selection. And an active selection is an invitation to apply another plug-in! In this case I turned to the Alien Skin Eye Candy series, specifically, Nature: Fire.

With a little experimentation, you can create a simple flame or an entire firestorm in your image. At this point in my design, the flame had yet to spread, but spread it will, as we will see in the steps on the next page.



Let's take a moment to see how the "Premiere Issue!" text on the ezine cover was created.

I started with the text shown below and experimented with various Shinycore Path Styler Pro presets until I arrived at a combination of effects that comprise the text on the cover (from left to right: Stroked white text, metal effect, orange glow effect and drop shadow).



Now we will see how the effects all come together! Let's work our way from the background (bottom layers) up to the additional fire effects.

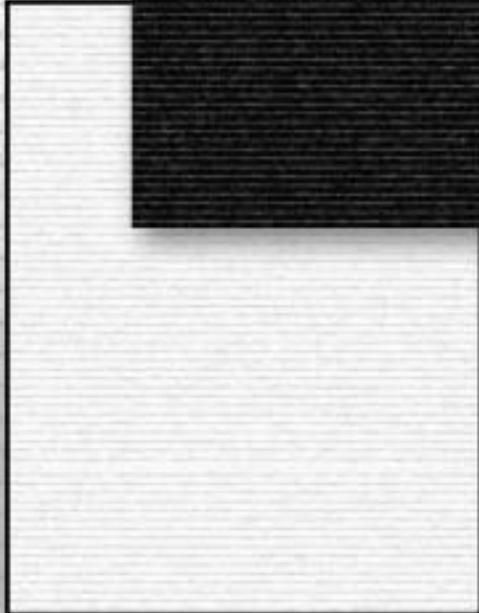
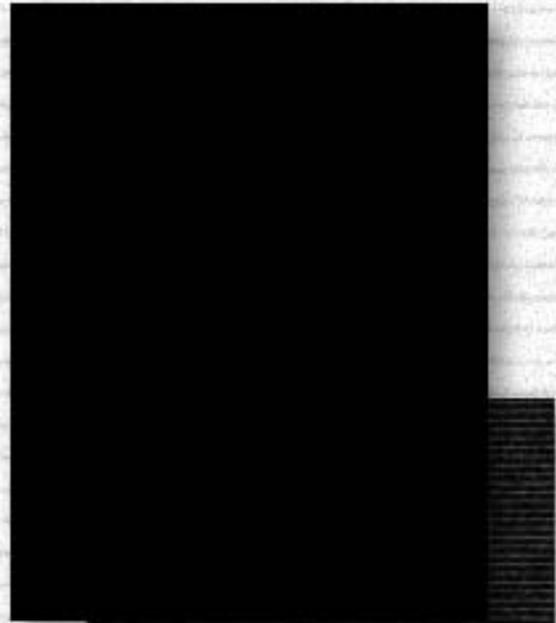
The background is composed of three separate images: A solid black (for the stroked edge), a white image filled with Alien Skin Xenofex 2 Television Lines with monochrome Noise added and the same white image inverted. (All layers were left unmerged for flexibility.)

The lined layers were blended into each other with a Gradient mask and offset slightly to create the raised line effect. On additional separate empty layers just above the background, I applied Alien Skin's Eye Candy 5: Nature (Fire and Smoke), arranging the layer positions against the background until satisfied with the overall juxtaposition of each layer element.

Meanwhile, back on the tree layer (complete with page curl and fire): I duplicated the layer and applied a radial blur to the copy (see below). The original layer was reduced to 55% opacity over the blurred one. Underneath the tree layers I added two copies of the

Eye Candy 5: Impact (Backlight) effect to create a white glow. A noisy drop shadow was applied to an independent fire layer, which was also duplicated to strengthen the opacity of the effect.

Finally, the plug-in icon and the title were added to finish off the design!



Working with plug-ins to produce creative imagery such as the cover of this ezine isn't hard! This tutorial sounded complicated—it was actually harder to remember and describe the various steps I took while I was experimenting in Photoshop than to create the image composite in the first place.

Once you understand the basics of your imaging program and the options offered by the various plug-ins, at that point it's only a matter of experimenting. Freely apply different variations and combinations of plug-ins. •



topaz adjust 3

HDR effects and image correction for only \$49.99



Topaz Labs products are taking the photo forums by storm as users around the world discover these inexpensive but excellent and highly versatile plug-ins.

Topaz Adjust, Simplify and DeNoise together make up a killer pack of creative and image-correction plug-ins that can be used individually or one after the other on your images.

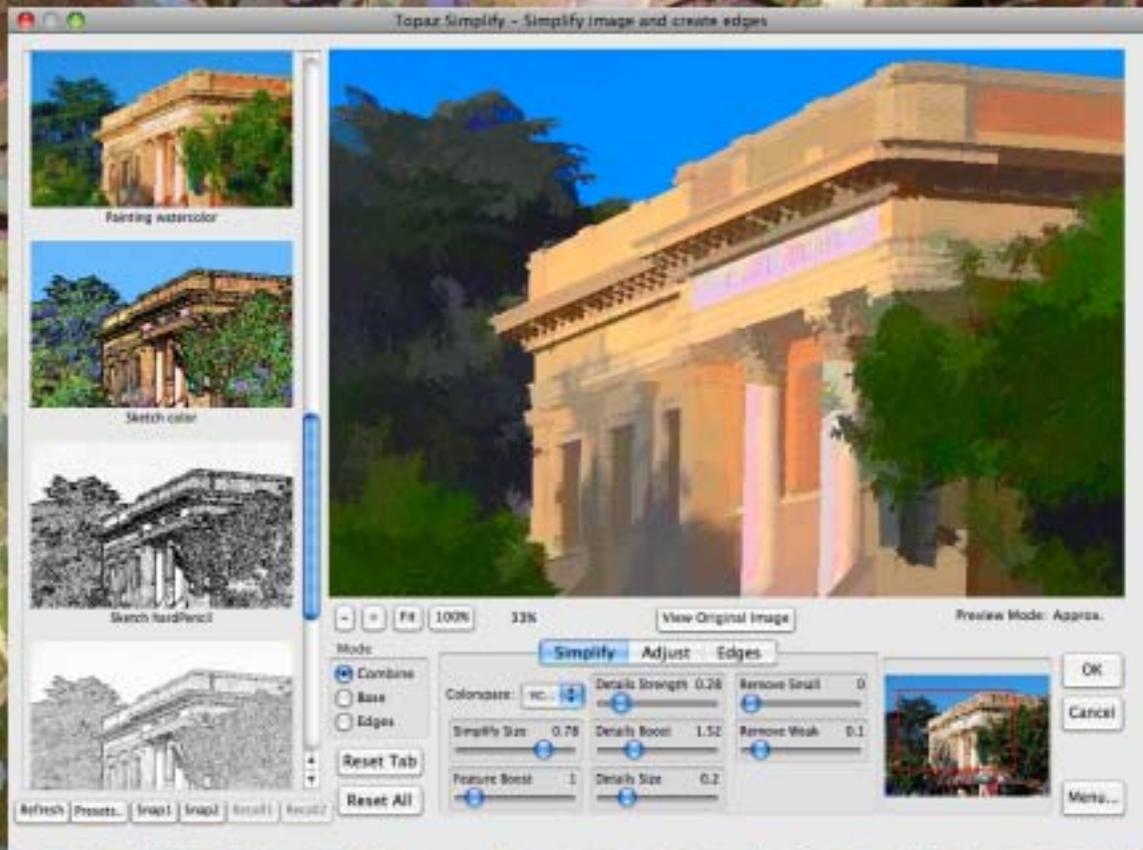
Adjust (shown at left) offers image enhancement and creative effects, such as small detail enhancement or image softening (both effects are reminiscent of a \$595 plug-in from another developer which used to rule this product niche, but no more).

Adjust offers you full control over image exposure, details, color and noise reduction. Version 3 recently underwent an interface redesign which includes visuals of each preset.

www.plugsandpixels.com/adjust.html



topaz simplify 2



There used to be a simplification product called buZZ Pro/buZZ.X, marketed by f02pix. Unfortunately, that developer went out of the plug-in business and for a long time there was no other product to fill the gap. Until now!

The folks at Topaz Labs not only reproduced the unique effects generated by the buZZ line, but have added more control and additional effects as well. Problem solved.

The new Simplify 2 interface now offers preset thumbnails. You can choose from a number of varied effects which range from “buzsim” (used on this page’s background image) through cartoons, oil painting and watercolor, color and pencil sketching, woodcarving and underpainting (the latter is shown in the screenshot above).

Of course you are free to further edit the results of each preset, including the size and strength of the simplification, level of brightness, contrast and saturation as well as edge type and strength (with isolated edge preview for fine-tuning the distinction).

Simplify makes it easy to experiment with applying different presets to duplicate layers of your image for unique results.

www.plugsandpixels.com/simplify.html

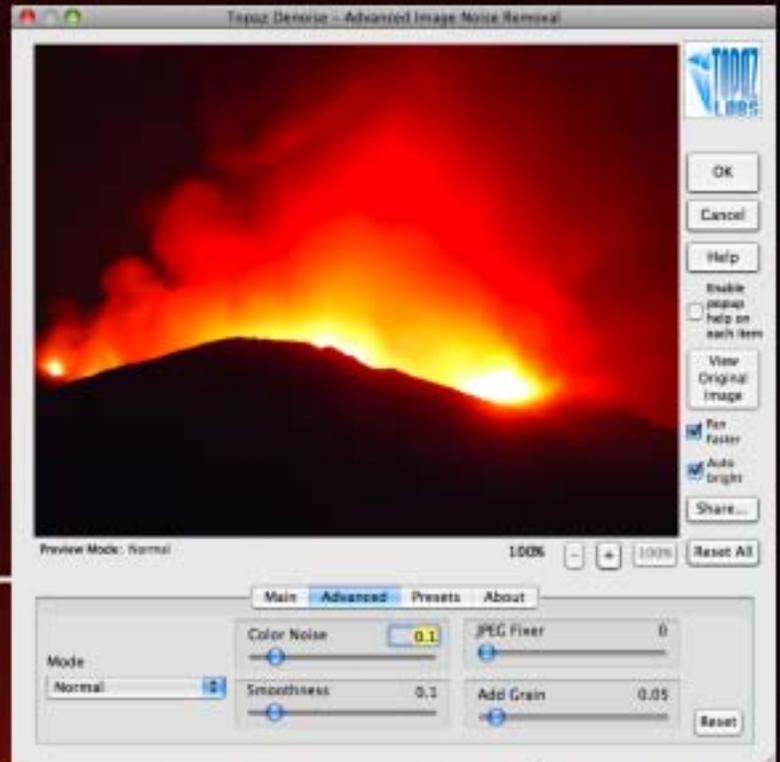
topaz denoise 2

www.plugsandpixels.com/denoise.html

Dead pixels and horrible digital noise abound in this long-exposure image of a California forest fire. The shot was taken in 2003 with a 4-megapixel consumer camera at night, so the odds were against getting a clean image from the start.

Topaz Labs' DeNoise 2 plug-in handled both problems with very little tweaking, resulting in a clean yet still-sharp final version of the image.

Topaz Adjust has a lite version of DeNoise built in, but this standalone version offers even more control over color noise, smoothness, JPEG artifact repair, amount of added grain, etc.



AFTER DeNoise

Buy all three featured Topaz plug-ins
(Adjust, Simplify and DeNoise)
PLUS the new Clean 2 in the
Topaz Photoshop Plug-in bundle
for only \$129.99 (save \$70)!

BEFORE DeNoise

Mystical Tint · Tone · Color

Auto FX recently released its 8th visual imaging solution offering, *Mystical Tint Tone and Color*. As with its other titles, *MTTC* works either as a standalone application or plug-in for maximum flexibility. Choose from among 38 useful visual effects that can be applied to your entire image at once, or manually brushed on as desired. An effects layers palette allows you to combine several effects at different opacities and experiment with the results.

For your convenience, AutoFX's software offers an autoupdate feature that updates your software while you work. Another feature to help you get up to speed with each feature is the Help on Demand system that activates pop-up instructions as you hover your mouse over a tool or control.



Original

After you adjust and are happy with an effect, you can save and replay it later. You can also store the current

image state using the Memory Dots, allowing you to experiment and quickly return to a previous incarnation of your work. Effect previews are optimized for speed.

The image below was taken on California's historic Route 66. *MTTC's* Antique effect was a perfect touch for transforming the modern color image into a nostalgic snapshot from yesteryear.

See the next page for a complete list of the 38 effects.



Original

The photo of the waterfall (above right) needed a bit of tonal adjustment. I first used *MTTC's* Levels option to adjust the exposure. Next I used the Tonal Soften effect to adjust the edges' depth of focus, followed by Warm adjustments to further set the mood. Finally, Hard Posterize wrapped up the applied effects, with the result shown above. You can turn the SmartLayer effects on and off, as well as adjust each effect's opacity for maximum control, as one does in Photoshop itself.



Antique effect

Original



• 38 Mystical color, handtinting & tonal effects!

For an image shot in Nevada's Virginia City, nothing but a Sepia effect would do. Notice how MTC turned this recent color digital photo into a believable 19th century time-faded image.



- Antique Photo
- Black and White
- Blue Sky
- Color Bleach
- Color Contrast
- Color Mixer
- Cool
- Dark Contrast
- Darken Colors
- Deepen Tones
- Enriched Black
- Gradient Tinting
- Green Foliage
- HSB Adjust
- Hand Tint
- Hard Posterize
- Harden Details
- Image Brush
- Levels
- Multiply Darks
- Over Exposed
- RGB Adjust
- Restore Details
- Saturate Colors
- Sepia
- Soft Posterize
- Soft Saturation
- Soften Details
- Tonal Contrast
- Tonal Detail
- Tonal Sharpen
- Tonal Smooth
- Tonal Soften
- Under Color
- Under Exposed
- Vitality
- Warm
- Washed Out

If you're using Mystical Tint Tone and Color from within Photoshop as a plug-in, you will enjoy support for Layers, transparency, Actions, Last filter and Fade filter. Below left is a screenshot of the controls area of the standard Auto FX interface, a futuristic 3D panel with pulldown options, buttons and a selection of relevant tools.



At right are more examples of image enhancement using Mystical Tint Tone and Color's various effects to liven up an ordinary image.

The top photo of the Queen Mary in Long Beach, CA is the original unaltered digital image. The center image was treated with Darken Colors as well as Hard Posterize. The bottom image is the original image treated only with the charming and warm nostalgia-invoking Antique colorization effect.



Original



<The 3D Auto FX controls



Auto FX Software

VISUAL IMAGING SOLUTIONS



The folks at Auto FX have come up with what I can only describe as a fantasy factory for images. Mystical Lighting operates as a plug-in or standalone app, enabling you to add dreamy lighting effects to your images. Apply either photo-

realistic or surrealistic light and shading effects at will. It no longer matters what lighting conditions existed at the time of the shoot.

Original



www.plugsandpixels.com/mysticallighting.html



Original



Starting with a couple of nice but simple scenic photos, I experimented with various Mystical Lighting effects such as Mist and Radial Light Caster to turn the sunny and dry landscape above into a moody, misty, windswept Scottish moor. The tree and hillside photo used in our earlier tutorial picked up a little bit of magic thanks to the FairyDust effect. Note the history-like palette which allows for multiple undos and editing of applied effects.

Never Do **SQUARE** Again!

Adding creative edge and frame effects to your favorite photos is one thing, but Auto FX's Photo/Graphic Edges

6.0 takes the process to a whole new level! Not only are you supplied with 3 CDs full of professionally prepared content, you can layer these effects using SmartLayers technology AND use the 230 artistic brushes to paint on edge effects, as I have done at upper left. The application runs as a plug-in or a standalone for maximum compatibility, and offers unlimited undos (the applied effects are not permanently written to your original file until you actually choose to save it).

Begin your work by choosing from among 14 overall photographic effects, within the confines of which you pick and choose edges to apply as you explore the endless possibilities: Acid Edge, Ambient Brush, Burned Edge, Distort Edge, Edge Brush, Edges, Frames, Montage, Photo Border, Photo Tabs, Putty Edges, Smudged Edge, Transfer and Vignette. Included in the screenshot at right are the Burned Edge Effect and Smart Layers in action while below I have multiple adjustable edges going on within one image for a beautiful and unique look.

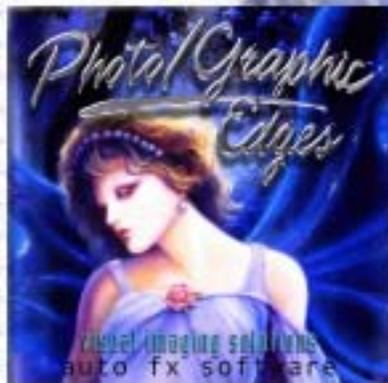
Photo/Graphic Edges version 6 is fully backward compatible with the previously released versions.

- 10,000 Edges
- 1000 Textures
- 175 Frames
- 230 Brushes
- 210 Light Tiles
- PDF Manual
- 300 presets

www.plugsandpixels.com/pge.html



Original



Auto FX Software
VISUAL IMAGING SOLUTIONS

Auto FX Software



When it comes to creative effects, Auto FX's own Dreamsuite Series One is a milestone in the industry, having won over 30 top industry awards for excellence. Dreamsuite transports you into its own beautiful full-screen, customizable creative environment, where you can apply any of 18 different visual effects to your image (or even combine various effects in one image).

The examples above only scratch (or ripple!) the surface of what can be done by applying 35mm slide frames, chisels, creases, bevels, liquid metal, photo borders, depth and tone (and several more beautiful effects) to your photos or artwork. Be sure to check out the entire Auto FX software line for more options.



Have you ever painted images with translucent, glossy, neon-colored toothpaste before? You can now!



It's a strange concept, but as the illustration above right shows, it's a whole new dimension in photographic creativity. Using the Gel Painter, Crystal Painter, Gel Mixer and Liquid Crystal paradigms, you can paint on top of existing images or create original artwork in a manner unmatched in traditional art (unless you count glassblowing, but this is much easier). The Gel Series does not do boring 2D. Gel effects of any color can be applied over type, graphics and photos using a paint brush or airbrush. You then add directional lighting and shading effects as desired to increase realism.

Cut out images with results you never thought possible!



vertus™

www.plugsandpixels.com/fluidmask.html

Fluid

Mask is a highly advanced software tool designed to make life easier for everyone who creates cutouts. Built as a plug-in for Adobe Photoshop, Fluid Mask is the new next-generation cut-out tool. Behind the product is breakthrough technology that mimics the way the eye, optic-nerve and brain perform visual processing. It offers an intuitive, accurate and fast approach to cutouts.

Using Fluid Mask you apply selections to a meta-data layer of image information called the Image Information Layer (IIL). This is made up of boundary, texture and color information pulled from your image.

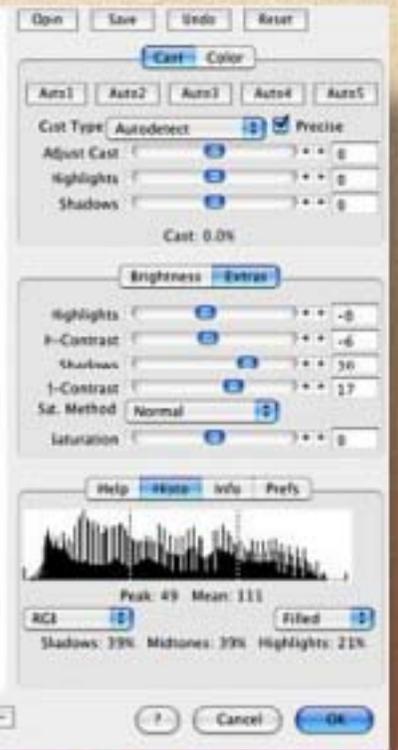
The screenshot at left shows the Fluid Mask working environment as the blue sky is dropped out of the flag photo.





The Plugin Site is now offering version 2 of Harald Heim's very popular ColorWasher plug-in for Mac and Windows. Shown at right, ColorWasher works with the user selecting a neutral portion of the image from which the plug-in calculates color correction. For best results, a second sampling area may be made. Improvements were made to the Highlight and Shadow adjustment sliders to enable more extreme adjustments while avoiding saturation changes.

Compare the adjustments with the original in a side by side view or as a test strip (right).

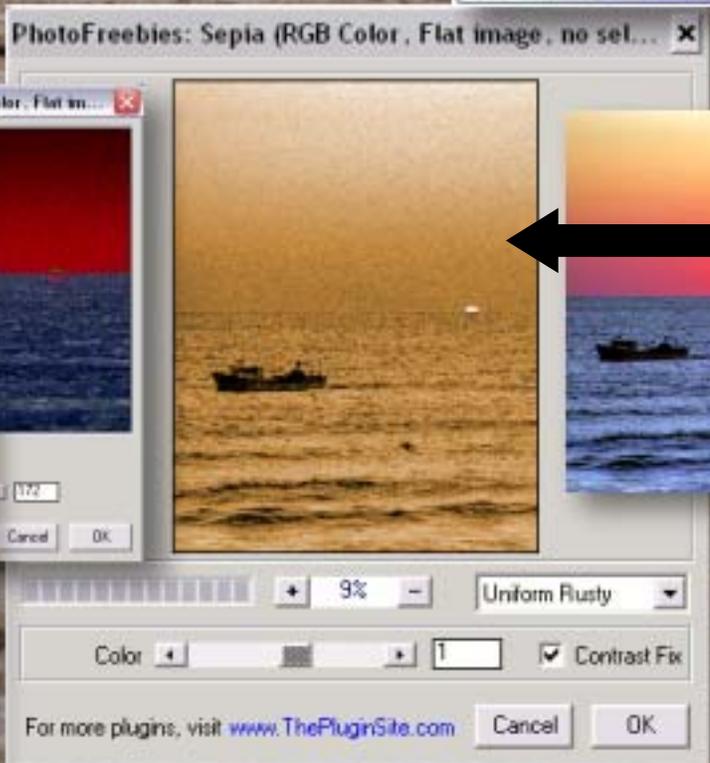
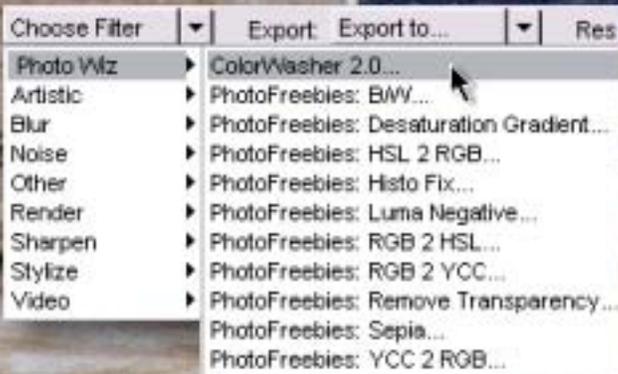


The Plugin Site
Your Guide to Image & Video Effects

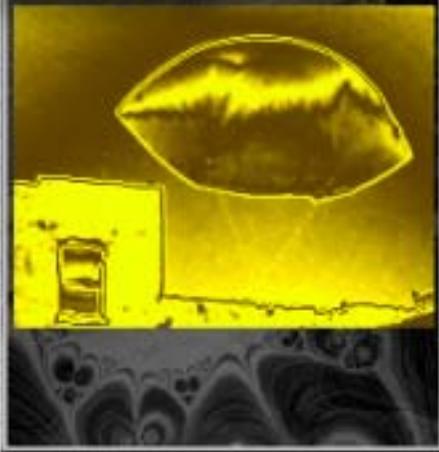
www.plugsandpixels.com/colorwasher.html



Photo Freebies
are FREE!



For more plugins, visit www.ThePluginSite.com



Fusion

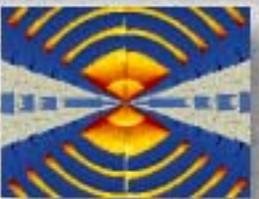
Effects

Intensity	<input type="range"/>	22
Fine	<input type="range"/>	20
Diffuse	<input type="range"/>	73
Softness	<input type="range"/>	92
Red	<input type="range"/>	226
Green	<input type="range"/>	199
Blue	<input type="range"/>	0
Brightness	<input type="range"/>	100

The Plugin Galaxy has come into close proximity with the Earth once again with an updated set of wild plug-ins for OS-X. These twenty-one examples display the wide variety of fun and interesting effects possible with this set. Fine-tune the results with several sliders, or try your luck with the Random option button.



Alpha Tool



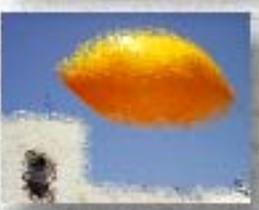
Feedback



Original



Bluur



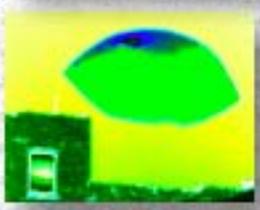
Glass



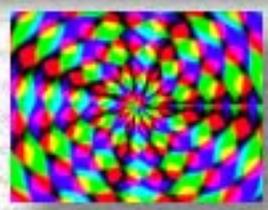
Breakfast



Grid



Pop Art



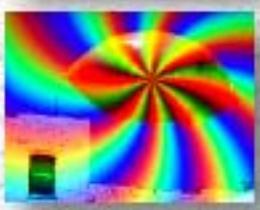
Synth



Colorize



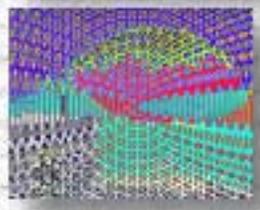
Instant Mirror



Rainbow



Warp1



Cryptology



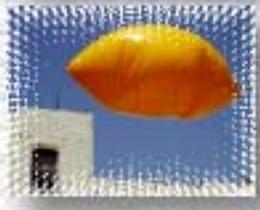
Noisee



Star



Warp2



Edge Tool



Page Curl



Sunshine



Zoom

AV Bros. Puzzle Pro 2.0: A very puzzling piece of software...

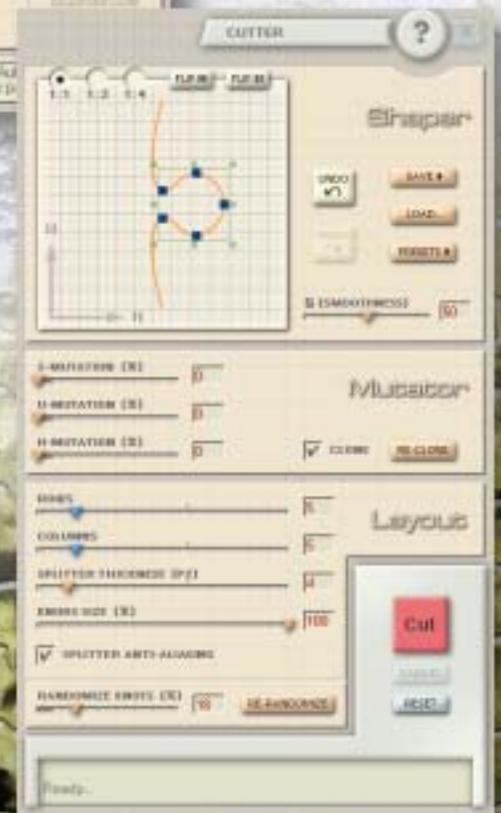
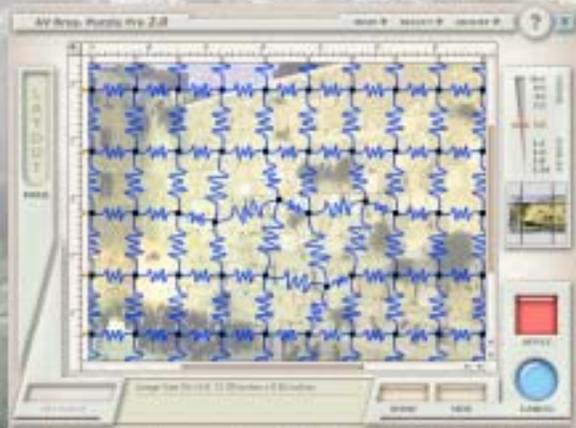
From Petah-Tiqwa, Israel comes the AV Bros. Puzzle Pro 2.0 plug-in, which has as its main purpose the creation of jigsaw and other puzzle piece effects in your images. A most powerful program, Puzzle Pro 2 offers you complete control over the shape, size and lighting of the pieces you create. In addition to puzzle pieces, you can create maze, honeycomb and engraved effects! Prepare to spend some extra time with the 51-page PDF Help document and their website in order to understand and get the most out of this plug-in.



- Sample features:
- Using a Splitter not only as a shape for cutting an image, but also as an object to be drawn
 - Saving the knife's shape as an .EPS, .AI or .AVPH (Puzzle Pro 2.0 format) files
 - Using the channels of the document (document's current selection, RGB, CMYK or Gray channels, alpha channels and layer transparency) as a source for selection
 - Bevel, Gaussian Blur, Motion Blur, Opacity, Color Overlay, Hue/Saturation and Brightness/Contrast effects
 - Saving the selected pieces as a multilayer .PSD file

Puzzle Pro 2.0 works its magic in two main windows (aside from the various other detailed adjustment and Preset palettes that appear from the depths of the application!): The Cutter panel (lower right) is where the actual puzzle piece shape is edited, and the Main window (above), which can take the form of Layout, Puzzle and Adjust modes, is where you select which actual puzzle pieces will be affected (or not) by the settings. Individual puzzle pieces can be selected and colored, as well as deleted or exported as separate pieces into their own Photoshop layers which can be accessed separately.

The screenshot below shows how you can manually edit the custom shape of each puzzle piece for full creative flexibility.



PowerRetouche

Photo-editing plugin

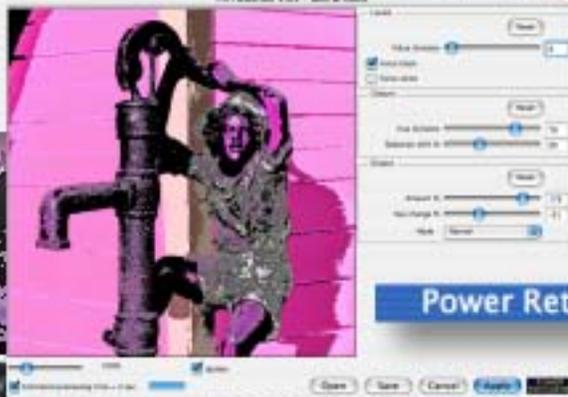
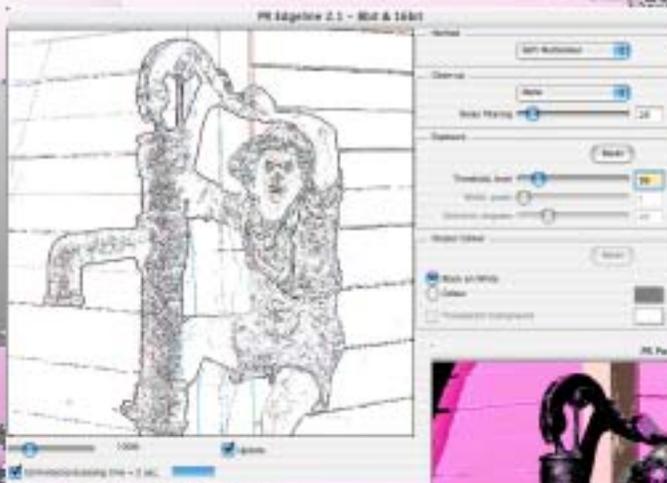
Original



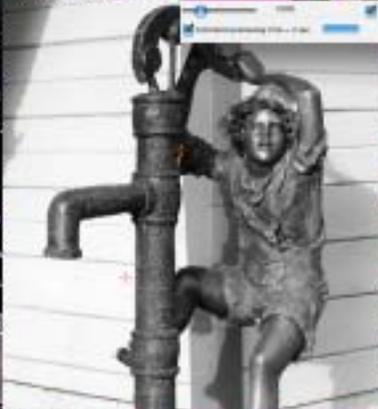
Jan Esmann, artist and software developer from Denmark, has updated his Power Retouche suite of Photoshop plug-ins so both the Mac and Windows versions are complete and identical. The suite offers a full range of image correction and enhancement options. For this example I used the Edgeline and Posterize plug-ins and a gradient mask to create the background image (see individual screenshots).

An example using the Studio B/W plug-in is shown at the bottom of the page.

www.plugsandpixels.com/powerretouche.html



- PR Anti-aliasing...
- PR Black Definition...
- PR Brightness...
- PR Color Correction...
- PR Contrast...
- PR Edgeline...
- PR Exposure...
- PR Lens Correction...
- PR Noise Filter...
- PR Posterize...
- PR Radial Density...
- PR Saturation...
- PR Sharpness...
- PR Soft-filter...
- PR Studio B/W...
- PR Toned Photos...
- PR Transparency...
- PR White-Balance...



closing artwork

Created with:
nik Color Efex Pro,
onOne PhotoFrame

Photo/artwork by: Mike Bedford

