



The Cursor

*Monthly Newsletter of the
Washington Area Computer User Group*



Meeting Location
OLLI, 4210 Roberts Road,
Fairfax, VA



Next Meeting:
March 21, 2009



Presidential Bits

by Paul Howard

Our February meeting was full of content, and we didn't get to finish a discussion of more Email issues - we'll try to include that in our next meeting.

Bob Rott and Geof Goodrum got a very enthusiastic reception for their presentations on the 2009 Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. From floating pool chairs with electronic connections for the ultimate couch potato, to trinkets that talk, cameras that record your every move, and flat panel TVs with screens a half inch thick, and wider than any room most of us could afford, our intrepid reporters convinced us they actually spent a few minutes at the show, and not, as rumored, the entire trip at the buffet and watching kicking chorus lines <grin>! These were two exciting presentations - and I heard more than one attendee ask where and when could they get one of the products Bob and Geof discussed!

I was able to show the amazing difference in live television pictures from a set of rabbit ears connected to an analog TV, to the same antenna connected to a digital converter box and the same TV. From

a snowy to almost non-existent picture with the analog connection, the digital transmission proved perfect in some cases. We were able to demonstrate the pixelation that will sometimes occur with digital reception, which deteriorates to a 'blue screen' if an adequate antenna can't be provided. Three different antennas, and two digital converter boxes were featured. More details will be on the "recent meetings" page of the web site.

March's meeting will be held jointly with OPCUG at 4210 Roberts Road in Fairfax, on Saturday, 3/21, from 12:30 to 3:30 PM. Some wags have been calling this location "Chuck's Road" - so, to solidify the connection, our intrepid editor Chuck Roberts will be presenting Adobe's Photoshop Elements 7 and Light Room image and photo manipulation software products.

Chuck will demonstrate and discuss Photoshop Elements 7 and Photoshop Lightroom 2. Both of these products were released as upgrades and Chuck will discuss and demonstrate some enhancements. He will also explain how they are different and show us how they are each used.

He will also give us an overview of High Dynamic Range (HDR) photography.

Table of Contents

Lloyd's Web Sites for March	2
GNU/Linux Sig.....	3
Photoshop CS4	6
Moving to a New Mac	8
.....	10
Plus Bonus Articles in the Download Edition	

Lloyd's Web Sites for February, 2009

by Lloyd Johnson, WACUG Member

<http://www.wacug.org/> is the URL for the Washington Area Computer User Group. Visit it for past issues of Web Sites with hyperlinks

Sites for March:

1. Frontline: Inside the Meltdown – www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/meltdown. “Investigating how the economy went so bad so fast and what Bernanke and Paulson didn’t see, couldn’t stop and weren’t able to fix. Web site companion to Frontline special produced by PBS.
2. Tiktikk keeps you on task and on-time when you post appointments www.tiktikk.com
3. Want to know how Walkable a city is? 40 USA Cities – www.walkscore.com
4. DIYNetwork – www.diynetwork.com – Learn how to ‘do it yourself’ on the DIY Network, with shows covering auto repair, crafts, gardening, hobbies, home building, home improvement, living tips, and woodworking.
5. Meaning of Names, ‘What does my name mean?’– www.meaning-of-names.com
6. CBS News: Disaster Links – www.cbsnews.com/digitaldan/disaster/disasters.shtml
7. Acronym Finder – www.acronymfinder.com
8. Want to know who’s contributing to members of the House and Senate? – www.fec.gov. Also – www.opensecrets.org
9. How Web Pages Work, Want to create your own Web page ? – <http://computer.howstuffworks.com/web-page.htm>
10. Annual Reports Service. The Annual Reports Service provides you with quick access to annual reports and other financial reports of companies – http://yahoo.ar.wilink.com/asp/YAH1_search_ENG.asp
11. American FactFinder – http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en. Your source for population, housing, economic, and geographic data including latest population estimates.



NCTCUG

Visit our “sister” user group. The National Capital Technology and Computer User’s Group meets the first and fourth Wednesday of the month. They meet in Carlin Hall in Arlington at 5711 South 4th Street. Visit their web site for more information, a map and directions:

<http://www.nctcug.org/>
Meetings start at 7:00 PM

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GNU/Linux SIG

By Geof Goodrum

Microsoft Alleges TomTom Patent Infringement

On February 25th, attorneys for Microsoft Corporation filed a lawsuit against TomTom, Inc. for alleged infringement of eight patents, particularly three regarding TomTom's use of the widely used FAT filesystem in its GPS navigation products (most off-the-shelf memory cards are preformatted with the FAT filesystem). While Microsoft claims this lawsuit is strictly limited to TomTom and not an attack on Linux and Open Source, the TomTom products in question are Linux-based devices with a mix of proprietary software and software under the GNU General Public License (GPL). Harald Welte posted in his blog (http://laforge.gnumonks.org/weblog/2009/02/27/#20090227-microsoft_patent_lawsuit) that TomTom's implementation of the FAT filesystem is "the plain fat/msdos/vfat file system like in every kernel.org kernel."

While some have urged restraint in the Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) community response, this has become an "I told you so" moment for many in the community who warned that Microsoft's overtures of support for Open Source

should not be trusted. There is also community support for TomTom, Inc. refusing to pay licensing fees demanded by Microsoft, which would violate terms of the GPL.

Groklaw, a web site that addresses legal issues for the FOSS community, posted a lengthy commentary on this developing story with updates at <http://www.groklaw.net/article.php?story=20090304114657350>. Groklaw also points to legal precedents that seriously weaken Microsoft's case for software patent infringement, including prior art such as the ISO filesystem with RockRidge extensions. Groklaw also suggests that the process of discovery during the lawsuit will allow TomTom to uncover companies that have paid license fees to Microsoft for software covered by GPL.

Linux at the 2009 International Consumer Electronics Show (CES)

These days, it's not easy to tell when a consumer device has Linux inside. However, several Linux-based devices at the 2009 International Consumer Electronics Show (CES, <http://www.cesweb.org/>) were particularly noticeable.

The new class of small, power efficient, wireless network enabled portable computers known as Netbooks had a strong presence at CES, with Lenovo, Dell, Sony, and others jumping on the trend started by ASUS with the Linux-based EeePC (<http://eeepc.asus.com/global/index.html>). ASUS continues to expand their model line, all of which run Xandros Linux (Microsoft Windows XP is an option for those who don't know better). ASUS also showed off their EeeBox (<http://event.asus.com/eeepc/microsites/eeebox/en/index.html>), a diminutive (roughly paperback book size)

and quiet mini desktop PC that is functionally similar to the EeePC (including 802.11b/g/n wireless), but connects to an external monitor and keyboard. The EeeBox also includes a kit to attach it to the back of a monitor.

Chumby (<http://www.chumby.com/>) also had a booth at the show, promoting their Internet appliance and cross-licensing agreements with other major companies. The basic Chumby unit (\$199.95 US) sold directly by the company is a wireless (802.11b/g) device that runs Linux and Flash applications ("widgets"), displaying output on a 3.5 inch touch screen. Owners register their units online and select from more than a thousand community developed widgets in 30 categories, including news, sports, entertainment, alarm clocks, weather, games, streaming music (stereo), and video. The widgets download to the user's Chumby and can be customized (for example, alarm clocks can have different alarms for multiple days and times, different widgets can activate at different times, etc.). Not only is the software Open Source, but the hardware is also fully-documented so hardware developers can customize as they wish.

Bug Labs (<http://www.buglabs.net/>) also drew a crowd at CES with their building block module approach to personal gadgets. Bug Labs sells a base module and add-on modules for digital camera, accelerometer (to detect motion), audio input/output, GPS, USB, and LCD display. An 802.11g WiFi module and a WiFi enabled base module are in development now. The owner can combine modules with Open Source software to experiment with and create custom devices and applications

See *Linux* page 4

Linux from page 3

(e.g. a GPS enabled digital camera to geotag photos automatically).

Speaking of digital cameras, Sony won CNET's Best in Category at CES for the new DSC-G3 10 megapixel digital camera (http://news.sony.com/en/press_room/consumer/digital_imaging/digital_cameras/cyber-shot/release/38265.html). The DSC-G3 features 4 GB of memory and a 3.5 inch touch screen. What really sets it apart from the competition is the built-in wireless networking, web browser, and e-mail notification support, which allows the user to upload photos and videos directly to web sites from any WiFi hot spot. The DSC-G3 is also a Linux-based device.

I don't use a "SmartPhone" (cell phone and information device) personally, but I was impressed by a couple of Linux-based entries. I spent a few minutes with T-Mobile's G1 phone running Google's Linux-based Android operating system (<http://www.t-mobileg1.com/>). This is the first Android phone on the market, though several others are on their way to market this year from different vendors (including an updated T-Mobile G2 phone). See my article about the G1 in the October 2008 issue of The Cursor (page 3).

However, the SmartPhone that drew most of the attention at CES (as well as CNET Best of Show & People's Choice Awards, <http://ces.cnet.com/best-of-ces/>) was the yet-to-be-released Palm Prē™ (<http://www.palm.com/us/products/phones/pre/index.html>). Palm built an innovative WebOS on top of Linux. While not compatible with earlier Palm Treo applications, Prē applications are quickly built us-

ing only basic web technologies Javascript, HTML and CSS. The applications are fully-multitasking and run off of the provider's server so they are always up to date. The multitouch gesture interface is elegant, responsive, and well-designed. I highly recommend checking out Palm's web site, particularly the "Meet Prē" video, to see the full list of features and the interface in action. This product is going to be a serious challenge to existing SmartPhones on the market, as long as Palm is able to market it effectively. Unfortunately, pricing was not available at CES.

GNU/Linux Distribution Releases

GNU/Linux distributions are complete GNU/Linux operating system and application software collections. Many are freely downloadable or can be ordered on CDs or DVD at low cost. DistroWatch.com lists the following distribution release announcements for the period February 2 – March 4, 2009.

Distribution
ALT Linux 4.1.0 "School Server"
antiX MEPIS 8
Arch Linux 2009.02
ArtistX 0.6
Astaro Security Gateway 7.4
Caos Linux 1.0.8
Debian GNU/Linux 5.0
Dreamlinux 3.5
Foresight Linux 2.1.0
iMagic OS 2009.3
K12Linux F10 "Live Server"
Kubuntu 8.04.2
Linux Mint 6 "x86_64"
Linux Mint 6 "Xfce"
Ojuba 2
PapugLinux 09.1
Parted Magic 3.7
PC/OS 2009v2
PelicanHPC 1.8
sidux 2009-01
SimplyMEPIS 8.0



Slamd64 Linux 12.2
StartCom Enterprise Linux 5.0.3
SystemRescueCd 1.1.6
trixbox 2.6.2.2
VectorLinux 6.0
ZevenOS 1.1

Linux Software of the Month

The software described below is downloadable at the links provided or may be requested on CD, or copied onto a USB flash drive at the WAC meeting. In addition, WAC can provide CD-R and DVD±R media for any downloadable GNU/Linux operating system distribution (e.g. Fedora, Mandriva, Ubuntu, Debian, Knoppix). Please note that download versions of commercial distributions do not include official technical support nor printed documentation.

Discs are available **only by pre-order**. Contact Geof Goodrum by e-mail (linux@wacug.org) at least 48 hours before meeting day to order or for more information. Single CD-R discs are available with a \$3 donation; GNU/Linux distributions on multiple CD-Rs or single DVD±R are available with a \$6 donation.

March 2009

M.A.X. Reloaded – v0.2.4. <http://www.maxthegame.de/>. Free GNU

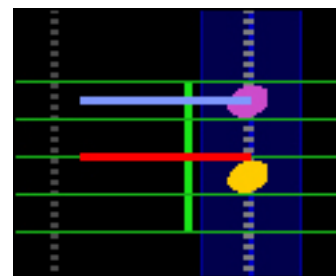
General Public License source code and executable packages for Fedora and Debian by Albert Ziegenhagel, Bernd Kosmahl, and Eiko Oltmanns. MAXR is a turn-based strategy game based on the 1996 M.A.X.(Mechanized Assault and Exploration) game by Interplay. This community developed clone adds TCP/IP (Internet) network multi-player in addition to games against the computer. Manage resources and build facilities on a new planet to outcompete and defeat your opponent.

Piano Booster – v0.5.1. <http://piano-booster.sourceforge.net/index.html>. Free GNU General Public License source code and executable by Louis James Barman. Piano Booster is a new way to learn the piano just by playing a game. It takes elements of the game Guitar Hero, but now it uses a real MIDI piano keyboard and the game has been turned sideways so the notes scroll along a musical stave. So instead of pressing buttons on a fake guitar you end up learning to play a real musical instrument - the piano. First choose a MIDI file then select the „left“ hand or the „right“ hand or if you are feeling really brave choose „both hands“ and try to play along. The „Follow You“ mode make it really easy to sight read the scrolling notes as the whole accompaniment will stop and wait for you to find and play the right notes. The accuracy bar monitors how well you are playing. The executable has been tested with Ubuntu 7.10, Ubuntu Studio, Xandros for the EeePC. The only dependency is QT4.

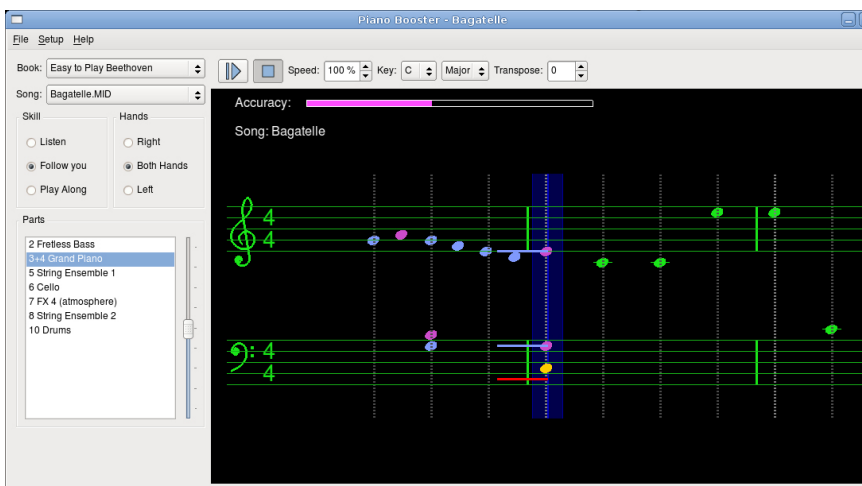
wview – v5.1.1. <http://www.wview-weather.com/>. Free GNU General Public License source code by Mark Teel. wview is a collection of linux/unix daemons that interface with a personal weather station to retrieve archive records (if generated by the station) and current conditions. The stations currently supported are: Davis

Vantage Pro/Pro2; Vaisala WXT510; La Crosse WS-2300/2308/2310/2315; Oregon Scientific WMR918/968; Station Simulator (included for demos and testing). If the station does not generate archive records internally, wview will auto-generate archive records based on the sensor readings collected for that interval. The archive records are stored in an SQLite3 database. At a configurable interval, wview will utilize the archive history and current conditions to generate weather images (buckets, dials and graphs) and HTML web pages based on user-configurable HTML templates. It supports serial and USB data loggers, as well as connectivity with a terminal server or serial server via TCP sockets.

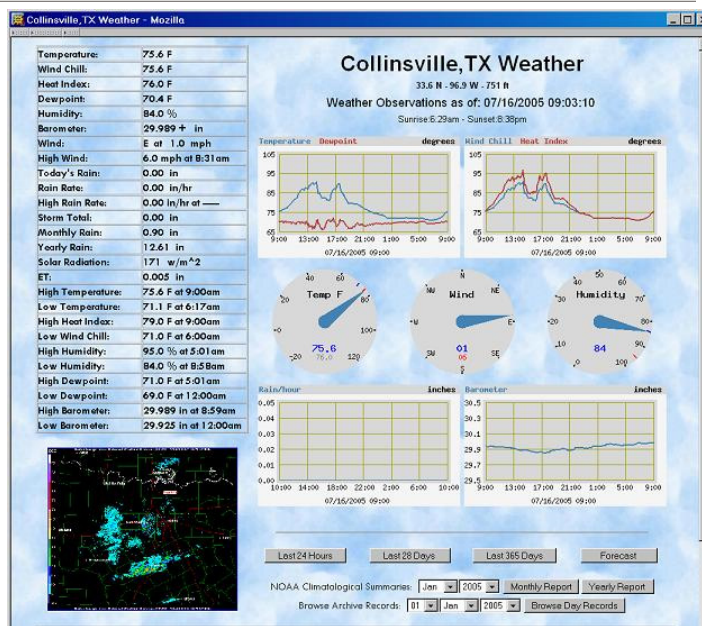
Kernel Source – <http://www.kernel.org/>. 2.6 kernel source code for all platforms (stable 2.6.28).



Piano Booster Screenshots



wview Screenshot



Photoshop CS4 Has Arrived

A review by Ron Hirsch,
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Actually this is Photoshop version 11, since Adobe still does keep a number ID for Photoshop. Adobe has been releasing new version about every 18 months, and they are right on track for this newest version. I've been reviewing Photoshop since version 2.5, and it really has come a long way. With each new version, I ask myself what they can possibly add in to warrant a new version. Adobe has always surprised and delighted me with the new features.

Most of my activities in Photoshop are related to image retouching and restoration. I closed my custom darkroom and switched to all digital about 5 years ago. Color processing in the complete dark, along with the smell of chemicals can't hold a candle to processing in Photoshop. It's like comparing the stone age to today's hi-tech world. And with all the digital tools in Photoshop, pure magic can be accomplished when compared to what could be done in the darkroom era.

I consider Photoshop to be the finest program ever written for the PC.

SOME OF THE NEW GREAT FEATURES

Adobe has been refining and improving the program's ability to work better, faster, and more smoothly, using new approaches for many of the tools and processes that Photoshop incorporates. There are a number of new capabilities that build upon existing tools to make using them better, and more flex-

ible. And, there a number of totally new features which allow users to improve their work flow. Many of these are described below.

ADJUSTMENTS PANEL

Up to CS3, the various tools such as curves, etc., were individually selected from a dropdown menu. Using them in an adjustment layer required that the user click on a different menu path to create a specific adjustment layer. Adjustment layers are the best route to take, as one can go back to that layer at any time, and change the adjustments made. Each adjustment layer had to be called up from the dropdown menu lists.

In CS4, there is a new Adjustment Panel with a choice of 15 icons, all representing the various adjustments that are possible, such as Levels, Hue/Saturation, Exposure, Channel Mixer, Color Balance, a revised version of Curves, and also a brand new Vibrance adjustment tool. All these adjustment layer capabilities can now be created from a central panel. With each choice, there are also a number of preset adjustments, along with the ability to create a custom "adjustment", and save it for future use. The user can readily turn off/on any adjustment, delete it, or reset that adjustment to the starting no change default.

There is enormous flexibility in the adjustments panel. You can resize it to take up more or less space than the default size. When any of the various buttons on it are selected, the display in that panel changes to what one would normally see for that adjustment. Having the ability to use the default presets, and custom user saved presets, make it all the more powerful

THE MASKS PANEL

Masks are an indispensable feature

of Photoshop. They allow the user to block/pass material from one layer as needed. Painting with white on a layer mask will allow the painted material in that layer to become visible. Black will block it. Gray will partially pass it. A mask is actually a selection that is created. The selection can be "adjusted" via the usual selection modifiers, to soften expand, contract, etc., the selection boundaries. And it can also use other selection tools to modify the actual selection mask. The Mask panel has a collection of all these tools in one place to make working with masks much more efficient. And this panel can handle both pixel and vector based masks.

An update color range feature is included in the Mask panel. "Density" and "Feather" sliders are also included. In the Mask panel, you can select the color range to apply the changes to, use a brush to change the mask, and adjust the mask edge to suit your needs. All in all, this panel makes using masks much easier, and more powerful.

ADOBE CONFIGURATOR

This is something totally new to Photoshop. Configurator is a utility that enables the user to create custom "panels" within Photoshop CS4. Running this utility brings up a window where you can create (drag to size) an empty panel. Then you can drag just about anything that Photoshop has in the way of commands, tools, actions, et al, to build a custom set of Photoshop activities, with all of them at your fingertips. Configurator provides you with a good-sized window on the left of the Configurator program window, where all the tools, menu items, et al are displayed. And, for

See *Photoshop CS4* page 7

those tools where there are multiple tools for a given tool choice, all the choices are displayed for one to choose from. The same goes for all the dropdown menu items in CS4. Every one is displayed.

Now, just drag the things you want to be available into the custom panel. You can position them where you like, and in any order you want. If you need more room in the new panel, just drag an edge to adjust the size. When you want to call up that custom panel, click on Window>Extensions, and select it from the menu. Then drag the panel to the desired location on your screen, and you can now click on any of the buttons in the panel to make things happen. Configurator does not give you any added activities that were not in CS4 to begin with. But it makes accessing them much quicker, much as the Adjustments and Mask panels do.

BRIDGE CS4

Bridge has been the “file manager” for Photoshop and other program in the “CS” suites since the suites started. Bridge is more than just a file manager however. It has a wide range of features and customization capabilities that make it the tool to use when browsing, selecting, rating, and editing the EXIF information in images.

Users can customize the display, set the thumbnail sizes, and the size of the individual right side image display for the image selected in the left side thumbnail area. It can mark images via a user set rating value, and of course sort images via the many choices of parameters. Any custom settings can be saved and recalled for specific tasks. Files can be renamed in batches, via a com-

prehensive set of rules which the user can customize. And contact sheets can be designed in Bridge, and saved as PDF files for printing and other uses.

CS4 does not appear to have any significant changes from CS3. But it is a powerful tool to use in viewing, ranking, selecting, evaluating, and ranking your images prior to opening them in Photoshop.

ADOBE CAMERA RAW 5.0

Adobe Camera Raw is the intermediate step for users to open RAW files from their digital cameras et al, and do some preliminary “processing” before then moving them to Photoshop for the final retouching. All the activities in Camera Raw are non destructive, that is the file in question is not permanently changed. And Camera Raw has the equivalent of a “Panel” of very comprehensive image adjustment features, some of which are not in Photoshop, such as color temperature.

Prior to version 5.0, adjustments made in Camera Raw covered the entire image. Now, however, the user has the ability to restrict the areas where adjustments are made, essentially functioning like a layer mask does. The “Adjustment brush” is the tool that does this job. One can paint onto and limit the affected areas. There is also a Graduated Filter that applies a selected effect using a gradient, which tapers the effect from full to none. This filter was previously only available in Lightroom, but has now been included in Photoshop CS4.

When CS3 was introduced, it included the ability to open a JPG file in camera raw, which was not possible earlier. So, that gave the user the ability to work with the “Panel”

of adjustments that camera raw offers, even if the file is not a RAW file. This became a usual route for me when working on JPEG images, as the clustering of tools in Camera Raw moved most retouching tasks along much faster.

DODGE & BURN IMPROVEMENT

The dodge and burn capability in CS4 has been improved considerably. In earlier version, when dodging and burning, the tone of the are being worked on suffered a shift in the actual color/tone. Now an option to “Protect Tones” has been added to the options for these tools. When dodging in CS3, without the “Protect Tones”, the area being dodged looks as if a whitish color is overlaying the dodged material. When “Protect Tones” is checked, this whitening is greatly reduced, and the tone/color seems more vibrant after being dodged. The same saving of the tonal quality is preserved when burning.

THE VIBRANCE TOOL

This was a tool only available in Camera Raw in CS3, but it is now available in Photoshop CS4. It appears to similar to the older Hue/Saturation tool. But Adobe has improved the results here, similarly to the way they improved the old Brightness/Contrast tool. Vibrance does add saturation to a color, but the more saturated it is, the less it gets changed. Avoiding the garish results when using the older Saturation tool.

SPRING LOADED KEYS

Photoshop has always had several keys that can switch to different tool functions while the key is held down. This feature allows you to ac-

See *Photoshop CS4* page 8

cess a tool temporarily by holding down the key for that tool, similar to using the spacebar for the hand tool - only for many more tools now. After learning the letter for the tools you use often, you can quickly invoke that tool temporarily, by holding down that letter key. This can be a great time saver.

IMPROVED GRAPHICS PERFORMANCE

Photoshop CS4 makes use of the power of a good graphics card to improve your screen display. Users with a graphics card with 256 Mb (or more) of card memory and a GPU can now do smoother scrolling, zooming, and panning. The capabilities of the “better” card in your system will now be recognized by CS4.

IN CONCLUSION

The new features in CS4 that I’ve presented are only a partial listing. I’ve concentrated mainly on those which I feel are most important to me, in my tasks of retouching and restoring images. Photoshop can of course do much more than that. It has creative capabilities far beyond what most people realize. The more I use it, the more things I discover. It is a bottomless pit of wonderful tools and capabilities.

To discover more of its wonders, sometimes I just open Photoshop and start browsing around in the many menus and command listings, and just “play”. And every time I do this I come away with more knowledge of it what it can achieve. It’s hard to imagine what CS5 will bring, but I can be sure that it will be more and greater tools and capabilities.

Here’s a number that I find amazing. I did a search for “Photoshop” on Barnes & Noble, probably the largest book vendor on the Internet. There were 1080 items found. That is a testament to the widespread popularity of Photoshop.

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Moving to a New Mac

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After work one evening, I tried hopping on to my iMac G5. It was unresponsive, and several attempts to reboot it got it to various stages. Sometimes no further than the familiar Mac boot chime to a black screen, sometimes all the way to a full desktop before the machine froze. It was past the three-year AppleCare period, and I’d long since grown tired of the fan noise it had developed over time. I had figured on keeping the iMac until next fall, by which time I expected Snow Leopard to be out. But, this behavior seemed to press the issue and accelerate my intended schedule. The Apple Store was just a few minutes away, and I’d already thought about what I wanted for my next Mac.

I couldn’t resist the temptation for immediate gratification, so I headed over to the Apple Store. Although I didn’t really need mobility within my own household, I thought it would be convenient if I could have a laptop this time that I could take

with me to the Macintosh SIG. I’d read about the sleek and solid aluminum unibody construction of the new MacBooks and MacBook Pros. The one thing that was holding me back a little was the smaller hard drive size of the laptop compared to my iMac. The 320 GB of the higher model 15.4” MacBook Pro is probably generous for most people, but I had ordered my iMac with a 400 GB drive, and used more than 300 GB in the Leopard partition. After a few questions and some hands-on time, I decided to go ahead with the MacBook Pro and brought it home.

The Apple Specialist had mentioned that when I first booted up, the Setup Assistant would offer me the option of transferring data and settings from a Time Machine backup. Fortunately, I had one on an external drive, since my iMac wouldn’t stay up long enough to expect a reliable direct transfer through the network or FireWire. I plugged in the external drive and the Setup Assistant recognized the available Time Machine backups. It took about 2 hours and I had just 8 GB left of my 320 GB. I had chosen to transfer the machine settings as well as the data and settings from my two home folders. (I find it useful to have an additional “admin” user in addition to my own normal logon.)

The next evening I started to settle in to the new machine. One of the first things I tried was starting iPhoto. It asked me if I wanted to automatically start iPhoto the next time I plugged in my digital camera. I said Yes, and continued on to verify that my photos were all showing up. The next time I started iPhoto I got the same question, and it started to become apparent that something was amiss. Talking to our Mac guy at work the next day gave me the idea that I needed to check the per-

See *New Mac* page 9

missions on the Preferences folder, which is located inside the Library folder of my home folder.

Indeed, that folder showed a small no access symbol superimposed over the folder icon, as did several other folders within my home folder Library. Doing a Get Info on the folder revealed that there was No Access to Everyone, which explained why preferences were not sticking. In the Get Info window I changed permissions to give myself read/write permission on the folders in question, and requested that the permission change be applied to any enclosed items. If I haven't lost you yet, I'll mention one more thing that may have been a factor in the wrong permissions. On my iMac I had recently changed the numeric user ID to 501, which is the default for the first account created, so I could access my own home folder when booted from the Mac installation on my external drive. If you understand UNIX, this might make some sense to you. Otherwise just ignore the last few sentences and enjoy the rest of the article.

That seemed to do the trick. iPhoto now remembered my answer, and I was on to iTunes to verify that my music was all there. Things seemed to go well until I started setting up MobileMe syncing on my new machine, going into the Sync tab of MobileMe preferences to initiate my first sync. It seemed to start but then stopped immediately with the status still saying Never Synchronized. Checking the Console available in the Application:Utilities folder, I found no messages between the sync start and stop that would give me a hint as to what was wrong. I expected to have to visit a Mac Genius at the Apple store, but a conversation with the Mac guy at work made me realize that I was going to have to start with a fresh

account and home folder. I canceled my Genius appointment.

When I got home I backed up my home folder to my external drive. (If you don't already have one, have I convinced you yet that you need an external drive for your Mac or PC?) Then logging into my other admin account I deleted my main account and home folder, and recreated a fresh account. I brought back my data one major folder at a time, Music, Pictures, Movies, etc. I did not however copy back my Library folder, except for the Mail and Mail Downloads folders. Folders inside the Library, such as Preferences and Application Support are presumably what were causing my sync problems. So I didn't want to bring back the bad karma. This means that preferences will have to be re-established for all your applications, although you could try copying back some individual preference files on a case-by-case basis. My new home folder was a success, because I could now sync with MobileMe. This allowed me to bring down my Mail account definitions, and then successfully start Mail.

I'd like to make a small plug here for the Mac OS design over Windows. The Windows equivalent to the individual Mac preference files is the monolithic Windows registry. If you've ever had to pick through the registry to try to eliminate traces of a failed application on Windows, you'll appreciate the ability to just delete a Mac preference file without fearing that you'll mess up some other application or part of the OS.

One issue that you may run into by starting with a clean home folder is that licensed software may require you to reenter the license key. If you installed from physical media, you'll need to go find the sleeve it came in. Much of my software was downloaded and a key was sent in an e-mail. I have a mail folder called Software Licenses to keep those im-

portant e-mails. I recommend that you use an IMAP e-mail account such as that which MobileMe offers. IMAP accounts keep mail on a server, so it doesn't matter if your hard drive crashes. You'll still have a copy of that e-mail. If you don't want to pay for MobileMe, then of course go for a free IMAP account such as AOL or AIM Mail (<http://mail.aim.com>), or second best, a Web mail account.

One other thing I wanted to mention is that I migrated from a PowerPC-based Mac to an Intel Mac, and one might wonder if any issues might arise. Many of my applications were already Universal, meaning they were compiled to run on either PowerPC or Intel architecture. On the other hand two PowerPC-only applications got two different results. Happily my Macromedia Dreamweaver (before they were bought by Adobe) runs without a hitch. Yet Adobe Reader 8, a PowerPC application from my old machine, gets an error message: You can't open the application because it is not supported on this architecture. I'm sure downloading the Intel Mac version of this will easily resolve this.

I'm still working through some issues with Spotlight and getting my first complete Time Machine backup, but so far I really like this new MacBook Pro. It's a beautiful machine. I may have an advantage over those used to a trackpad with a separate button, but this being my first Mac laptop, I'm having little trouble getting used to the trackpad.

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Screen shot on next page



New Mac

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