

SOFTWARE

Features and functions that fit demands for high end graphics — at long last

CorelDraw 8

BY JOHN KORCHOK

I HAVE A SECRET TEST FOR GRAPHICS SOFTWARE TO TELL IF IT IS designed for professional work or home hobbyists.

It's just a quick little test that shows me whether the software designers are really listening to their high-end customers, or just making the same authoritarian bonehead design decisions that most programmers make.

CorelDraw failed this test every time, year after year, version after version, until we had all concluded that they would never wake up as long as they were selling such mediocre software so successfully. Corel always remained bargain basement software for enthusiastic amateurs.

A prime example was *Draw* 6 for the Mac: it suffered from a bitmap editor that must have been some reworked shareware. *Draw* could not effectively use Mac memory to handle its embedded bitmaps, and would conk out after 3 or 4 large placed images. It was plagued by a Windows-inspired interface and lousy import/export filters. I couldn't figure out who was supposed to buy it, and it turned out nobody did.

Version 6 on the PC was no joy either; there were over 150 documented bugs. It was the crest of Corel's arrogance, when they thought they could sell any old trash as long as it had a long feature list. Sales began to suffer as users realized they didn't need all those new features and the defects that came with them. Corel is a humbler company today, and it has regained some of its early ability to listen to customers and improve its product accordingly.

CORELDRAW 8 PASSES MY SECRET TEST

CorelDraw 8 for the Mac shows the result of this feedback: version 8 finally passes my secret test.

It's not much of a test, really. I make a box filled with a CMYK combination of C80 M40 Y20 K10. Then I change it to RGB. Then I change it back to CMYK. That's all.

In earlier versions of *Draw*, the original color became C60 M20 Y0 K30. These numbers tell us that a mathematician rather than a visual professional was constructing the conversion algorithm. They assumed that C20 M20 Y20 was the visual equivalent of K20, but apparently never looked at a proof to see if it really was. Any color that had a value above zero in all four colors had the lowest value among C, M or Y reduced to zero, the other two colors were reduced by the same percentage, and then that same percentage was added in the black channel. Because of the relative weakness of cyan, blues come out too pale and reds come out

CORELDRAW 8

Recommended System Requirements:

Mac OS 7.6.1 or greater, Power Mac only, Windows 95 or NT 4, Pentium processor, SVGA video

Minimum required RAM:

Macintosh — 32 MB RAM with virtual memory enabled
PC — 16 MB RAM (32 MB highly recommended)

List Price:

\$695 (US) or \$249 (US) for an upgrade or competitive upgrade. Eligible packages for the competitive upgrade include Adobe Illustrator, Macromedia Freehand, Deneba Canvas, Metacreation Painter or Expression.



too dark. An unsophisticated and inaccurate approach, but who's going to argue with 80% market share on the Windows platform?

The news with *Draw* 8 is that this area among many others has been fixed. Since the nadir of *Draw* 6, Corel has spent much more time in beta testing and customer relations finding out what real people need. Scoff if you will, but *Draw* 8 for the Mac is a solid product that professionals can use to make money. Proof! You want proof?

FINALLY! FEATURES THAT MAKE SENSE

How about a high-end feature like image linking?

I know we take this one for granted, but it's really hard to do professional level work with software that embeds graphic files. It's just too hard to update the artwork when one of the placed elements changes, and your files soon get too large to transport and print. I ran screaming down the road when Adobe introduced embeddable graphics in *Illustrator* 6. It took a year to explain to my clients why they should never use it. Well, until *Draw* 8, embeddable graphics was all that Corel offered. Now we rejoice that *Draw*'s linked files offer us a simple way to update changes and to get the art to the service bureau without using an entire Jaz disk. The links can be resolved to embed a previously linked image. I imagine this was included for the masochists among us.

Draw offers a pack of excellent tools that are untouched by *Illustrator* and only approached by *FreeHand*. Among these are three interactive tools: Transparency, Blends and Fills. These three tools and the Properties toolbar are the most obvious inheritance from Corel *Xara*. *Xara* was written in England by an independent software house. It is PC only, lightning fast, and full of innovations. In the three

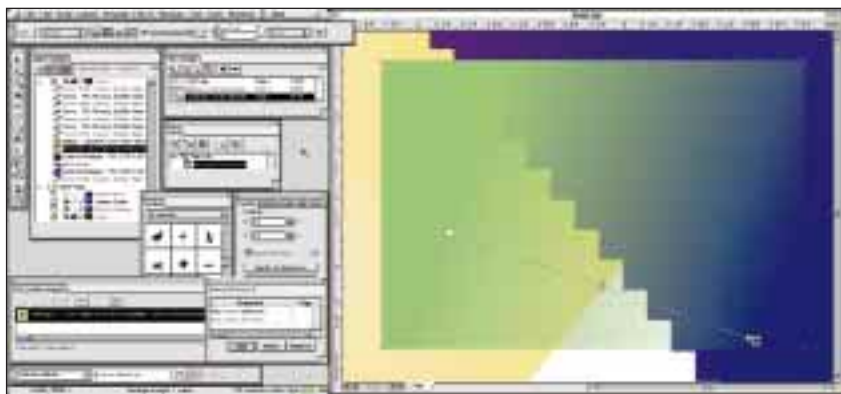
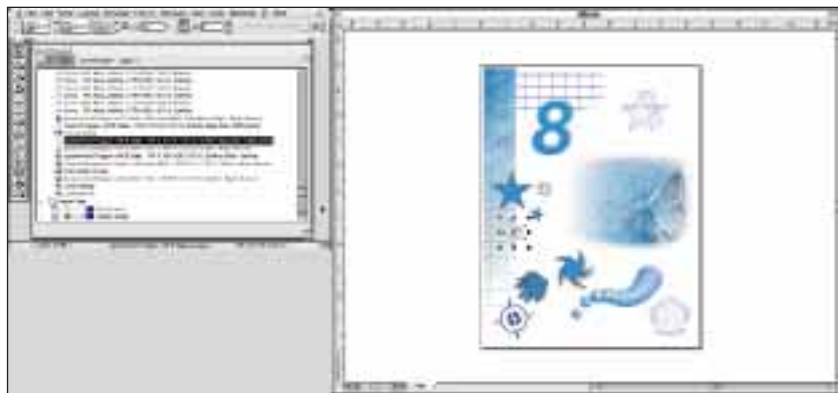
years that Corel licensed it, they used it as the source for some of the best interface ideas now found in *Draw*.

It's the Transparency tool that is very useful and very cool. You apply it to any shape and it blends the shape between its previous opaque fill and total transparency. It's rather like a fountain fill that has "Clear" as one of its colors. The non-transparent aspect of the fill can be any *Draw* effect, from flat color to texture fill to placed bitmap. The transparency is non-destructive so that it can be modified or updated easily — none of this bouncing between *Quark*, *Photoshop* and *Illustrator* all day every day. Five minutes with Transparency and you're turning out work that looks like you spent all day in *Photoshop*.

The downside? PostScript doesn't support transparency. To export to an EPS, *Draw* has to do some fancy tricks with masked areas and numerous blends. The resulting export is gigantic (82 megs with

effect fills is RGB only, but at least now they warn you of the fact. With earlier versions you had to figure out yourself why your texture colors came out differently than what you entered.

Object Manager. Here's a window I never close. On a complex drawing it's much easier to select objects by clicking on their names in the Object Manager. Instead of spending a half hour figuring out how a drawing is put together, I just click and update.



Transparency.

Applying transparency is simply a matter of dragging a line across an object. The object is also highlighted in the Object Manager window, where we can view all its attributes. This takes the concept of FreeHand's Object Inspector several steps further.

two texture fills and two transparent shapes, no placed bitmaps) and I would worry about the printability of such a monstrosity. Exporting as a TIFF will be more compact and probably quicker out of the imagesetter.

The common characteristic of most of the *Draw* tools is easy updating. You rarely get stuck with some effect you aren't really happy with, because everything is reversible. Even after you've applied the wildest distortion effects to your text, it is still editable and you can correct your spelling. You can apply drop shadows and then move them later. You can experience this with *Draw*'s Texture fills. The texture generator is right in the program, so you can keep the pattern and change the colors or vice versa without switching programs once. I'm not keen on the fact that the color model for the Texture generator and many other Corel

OBJECT MANAGER LEADS THE LIST

My nomination for most useful *Draw* tool, though, is not a drawing mode or a special fill. It is the Object Manager. There aren't any 2D Mac packages that offer anything like this. The closest analogy is the object hierarchy views that you find in some of the better 3D software. Object Manager shows you the state and relationships of every drawing object in your masterpiece, as well as information about Layers, Templates and Page Attributes.

This window is a lifesaver when confronted with a complex drawing that must be altered. Looking for all the unfilled curve segments with a hairline stroke of C75 M56 Y0 K0? It takes but a moment in *Draw*. How long does it take you in *Illustrator*?

There are some features in *Draw* that are so useful, I'm surprised they don't have billboards advertising their unique capabilities — and Color Styles is one of these.

At first glance Color Styles seems like a dopey idea: if you already have spot colors, what do you need a color style for? The answer is the parent-child relationship — and I'm not talking about your unhappy childhood. Once you set up a color style, that color becomes a parent color. Then you can create objects that are filled with child colors of this parent. The child colors are usually related variations on the parent: lighter, darker, more or less saturated, or a slightly different hue. When you go back and change the color of the parent, all the children are automatically updated. They retain the relationship to the parent that they had, such as being lighter, greener or whatever. Using color styles, you

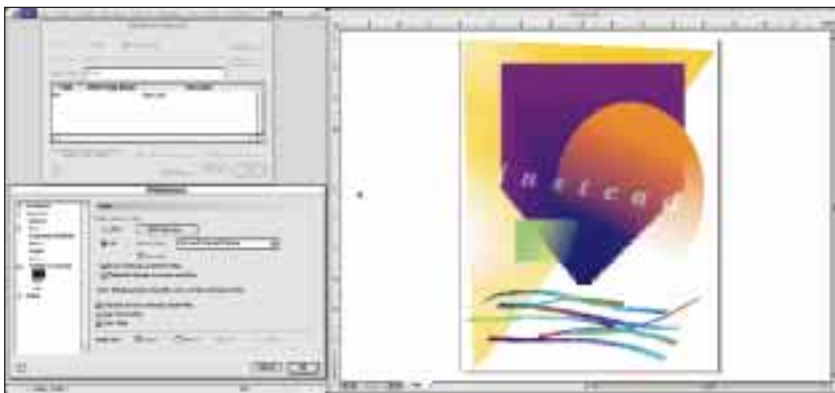
can make an original illustration and then revise the whole thing to a totally different color scheme in seconds. Some people call this increased productivity; I call it money in the bank.

FROM PAGE TO WEB PAGE

Another area where *Draw* is strong is in preparation of Internet graphics. In addition to the basic tools to assign URLs to graphics and then manage them, Corel provides an HTML conflict manager that helps in resolution of graphics that will lead to HTML errors. The HTML export wizard gives you



Search and Replace. Draw's Search and Replace works on nearly every available graphic attribute, making it simple to find and change nearly any object. This lets you easily change all your CMYK bits to RGB for more accurate Web display. You can also query by example.



HTML Export. Draw offers you good control over exports to HTML. Though the original image uses not a single bitmap or placed image, the HTML will require it for correct display. Draw handles the conversions with aplomb.

good control over the HTML layout and graphics export options. You couldn't do a whole web site with these tools, but it's great for dashing off a graphically rich page here and there.

If you are an *Illustrator* or *FreeHand* user adding *Corel-Draw* to your toolkit, you may feel more at home with *Draw's* interface emulations of these two programs. Nearly everything in the Corel user interface is customizable through the Preferences dialogue, and that includes the ability to arrange the *Draw* tools in a similar layout and menu arrangement as you would find in *Illustrator* or *FreeHand*. It's a good way to find the necessary capabilities of *Draw* when you don't have time to read the manual.

I'm not someone who gets wrought up over a Mac program that looks and feels like a Windows one, but the old *Draw 6* for the Mac was conspicuous in its adherence to the dictates of Redmond. It was the graphics equivalent of the ill-conceived *Word 6* for the Mac. *Draw 8*, on the other hand, gives Mac users the environment they are familiar with. Preferences in the Edit menu rather than Options under Tools, that sort of thing. (The PC interface is more like *Office 97* or *Internet Explorer*, with a multi-paned single window rather than the multiple windows used in the Mac version.) The Mac support that makes me feel all warm and fuzzy is in the AppleScript logo prominently dis-

played on the menu. *Draw* on the PC has had support for scripting for years, but who has the time to learn yet another proprietary scripting language?

With AppleScript on board, *Draw* for the Mac begins to look to me like a graphics processing powerhouse. If Adobe isn't going to provide scriptability in its products, then look for it here.

The combination of *Draw's* graphic prowess, HTML awareness and AppleScriptability has me thinking "Graphically rich on-demand web pages." Better database connections would make this a hot possibility. Corel has licensed Visual Basic for Applications from Microsoft for use in the next versions of *WordPerfect* and *CorelDraw*. VBA makes it much easier to link a supported app to external databases. It



PhotoPaint. Enough Toolbars for ya? There's a color picker that stays on screen, a good variety of natural brushes, an Image Sprayer as in Painter's Image Hose, easy-to-use transparency tools and well-developed Control-click menus.

remains to be seen whether this will be implemented on the Mac version, where VBA support is almost non-existent.

CORELDRAW EXTRAS BOOST VALUE

If all you got in the box was *CorelDraw*, you might think the \$249 competitive upgrade price a bit high. This is Corel, though. That means you get enough software to fill up your hard disk. Corel *PhotoPaint* is the bitmap editor, Corel *Trace* is an auto-trace utility. *Font Reserve* is included for font handling and Canto *Cumulus* for image asset management. Then there are the hundreds of fonts (mostly Bitstream) thousands of clipart files and a PhotoCD full of stock photos.

PhotoPaint is no poor cousin in this grouping. Corel has expanded this program into a rival powerful and sophisticated enough to take on *Photoshop*. *PhotoPaint* works with most of your favourite *Photoshop* plug-ins and it comes with Xaos Tools *Paint Alchemy* and *Terazzo* built-in. *PhotoPaint* is the only image editor I know of which is able to retouch QuickTime movies frame by frame. You can also retouch QuickTime VR panoramic scenes after they have been stitched. Animated GIFs are a piece of cake.

PhotoPaint takes scripting beyond the *Photoshop* level. With *Photoshop*, you have to decide to create an action, and then you record it. With *PhotoPaint*, your actions are recorded in an undo list, and they can be saved as a script after the fact. There are many small touches like this that show the Corel team has been picking the competition to little pieces and then figuring out how to outdo them: twice as many filters, double the number of image combination modes, image map creation. I was surprised by *PhotoPaint*'s ability to open files in less than half the time of *Photoshop* 5. Corel always had a tough time with memory management, and *PhotoPaint* always used to be a performance dog as a result. They must have new blood programming in Ottawa, because the improvements are really significant. Support for Hexachrome inks is built-in, *Draw* and *PhotoPaint* support OPI 1 and 2, DCS 1 and 2, PostScript 1, 2 and 3 and Color-Sync. The package comes with the Kodak CMS for color management

If you are a beginning artist, *Draw* for the Mac offers complete professional-level graphic capabilities for a budget price. You may never outgrow it.

So are you going to switch? I think not. But I hope you are seriously thinking about expanding your abilities. Life is too short to keep doing everything the hard way with the same old tools. It took Corel many years to get this far, but they really have come up with a superior product in a very tough market. Get *CorelDraw* for what it does better, and you may find yourself using it more than you thought.

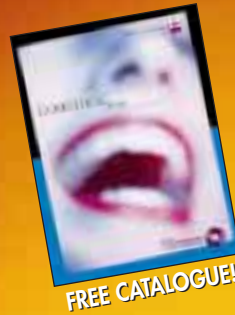
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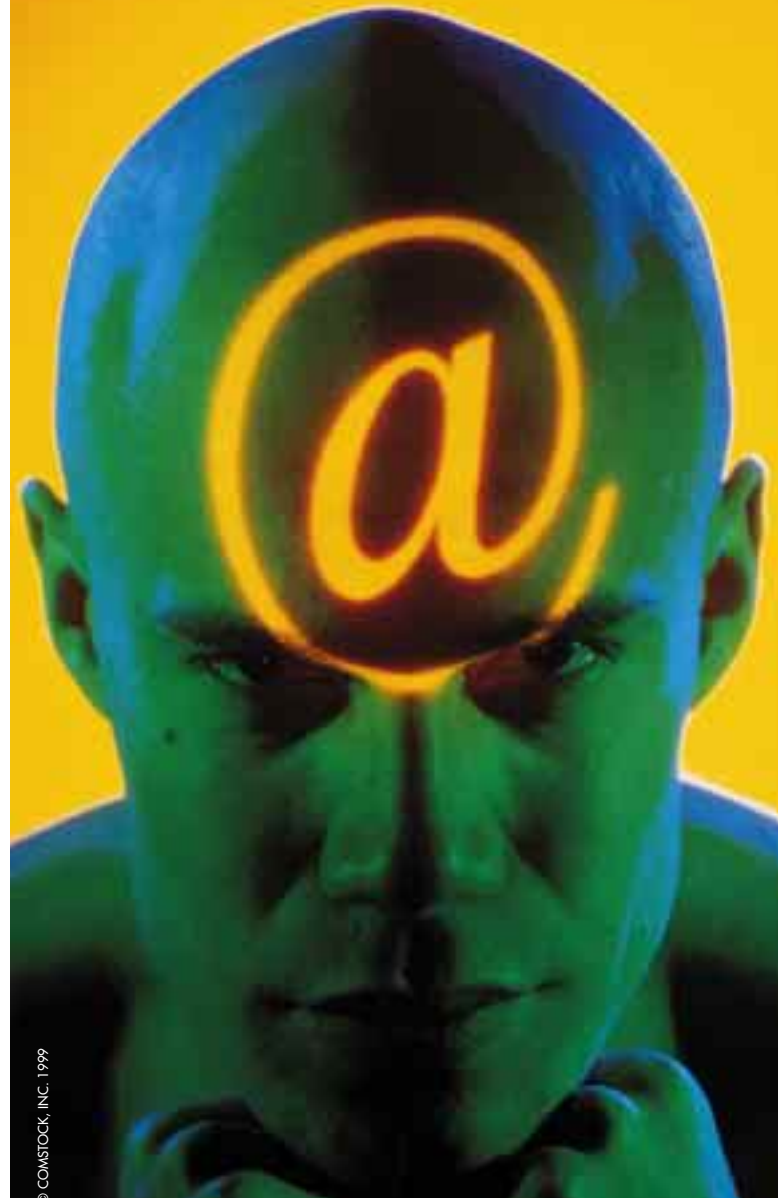
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