

A Step Closer to Perfection

Illustration Software Adobe Illustrator 9

by Lidka Schuch

Make no mistake: Adobe Illustrator 9 may be the best Illustrator upgrade since version 5.5.

When you really boil it down, there were no significant changes between versions 6 and 8 of Illustrator, aside from a couple of new tools, the annoying relocation of some pulldown commands, and some confusing changes (or elimination) to certain keyboard shortcuts.

So it's a relief to report that this upgrade is a major leap ahead for Adobe. From where we stand, Illustrator 9 puts the team from San Jose back in front of Macromedia in the battle of Illustrator versus Freehand.

MEMORY AND HARDWARE REQUIREMENTS

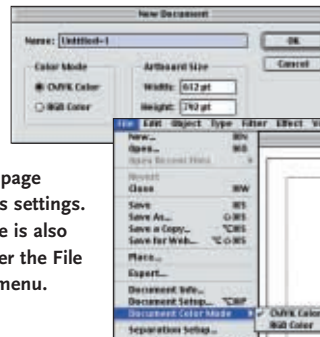
We tested a beta version of Illustrator 9 on a G4/450 with 192 MB of RAM installed. The program requires a minimum of 64 MB assigned memory (but of course it performs much better with more). Although this is more than twice as much as version 8, it must be pointed out that it can also do a lot more. And in any event, let's face it: these days almost any graphics application for print or Internet output needs that much memory to function.

AT THE BEGINNING: A NEW DOCUMENT

Let's start the way we usually do, by opening a new document. The first nice surprise comes when the dialog window opens, asking us to specify page dimensions and color mode. And if we need it, there is now an simple

way to change the color mode for an entire document by using the Document Color Mode command from the File pulldown menu.

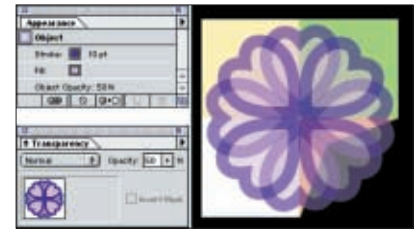
A new document dialog box now offers the choice of color mode and page dimensions settings. Color mode is also found under the File pulldown menu.



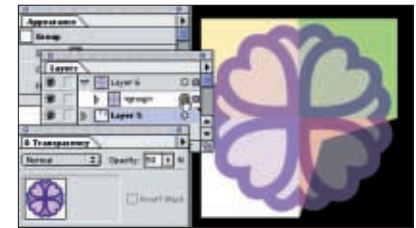
TRANSPARENCY AND APPEARANCE PALETTES

Probably the most anticipated improvements in Illustrator 9 are in its object and layer transparency controls. Not only are we now able to specify opacity for each object and placed image using the Transparency palette but also, much like with Photoshop, we can set opacity for each layer using the Layers palette.

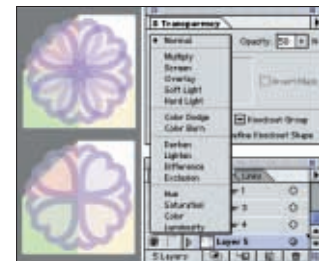
If objects are not grouped, opacity changes individually, object by object, and overlapping areas show their accumulated opacity settings.



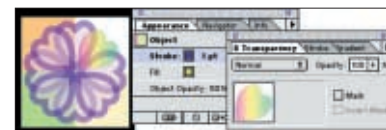
Object transparency



Targeted group transparency



Layer transparency



Fill and stroke transparency

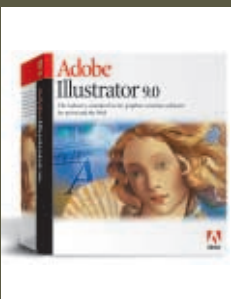
If objects are grouped and the group is selected with the targeting button on the Layers palette, objects do not interact and the overlapping areas remain opaque, but the entire group is transparent relative to objects outside the group.

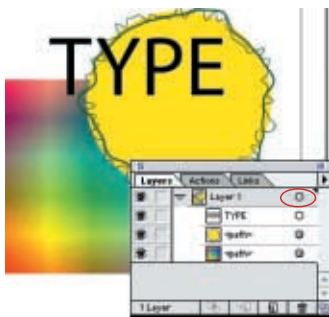
Photoshop's familiar blending modes are included and we find them on the Transparency palette. By default both an object's stroke and fill are affected by the transparency settings but if we wish to set them individually, we may do so by using the new and rather ingenious Appearance palette.

LAYERS AND SUBLAYERS

The Layers palette has undergone a major overhaul. Sublayers can be created within one layer and the new targeting allows us to select specific objects.

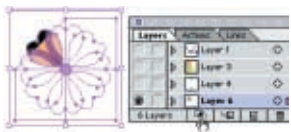
All of us who have used Lock and Hide

ADOBE ILLUSTRATOR 9 	SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS Macintosh OS 8.5 or later 64 MB RAM 105 MB disk space 800x600 or greater monitor resolution	105 MB disk space Video card that supports 800x600 or greater monitor resolution
	Windows Pentium or better processor Windows 98, NT 4.0, or 2000 64 MB RAM	PRICING AND AVAILABILITY Shipping Now US\$399 Upgrade from version 8 US\$149



To select specific objects, just click the targeting button.

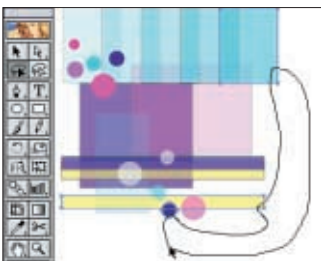
for years will now be happy to discover how easy object selection has become. And a very handy button on the Layers Palette for creating clipping masks works the same as the Object>Mask>Make pull-down menu command; from the selected



objects, the top-most one becomes a mask for the whole layer.

NEW SELECTION LASSO

Two new selection tools make object selection bordering on blissful. With the

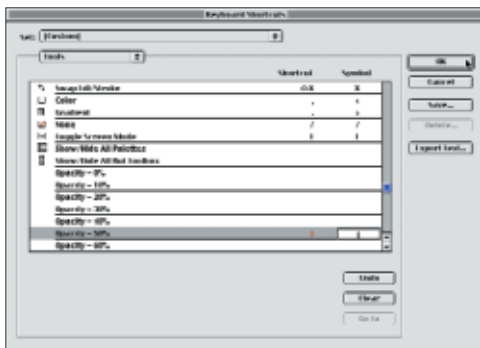


Use the Lasso selection tool to draw irregular shaped selection marquees.

Just as with the selection arrows, the Option key temporarily changes the Direct Selection Lasso into the Lasso.

CUSTOMIZABLE KEYBOARD SHORTCUTS

Another great addition to Illustrator 9 is



the ability to customize shortcuts for tools and menu commands, found under the Edit pulldown menu. And users on the same workstation can create personalized sets of shortcuts.

It's too bad that even the Customize Shortcuts dialog window doesn't permit creating a shortcut for moving locked guides — sadly, this utility (using Control, Shift and drag) was lost with Illustrator 7. Command-shift-double click now releases guides, but they still can't be moved.

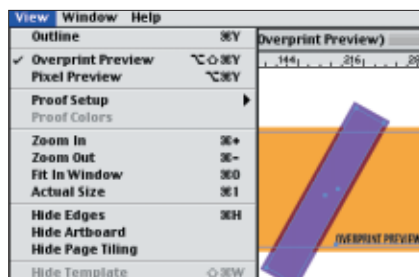
But at least the old shortcut (Command-Shift-M) to display the Move dialog box now works again!

Also, one other incredibly handy shortcut for changing measurement units (Command-Control-U) has been eradicated, likely for consistency with PCs.

OVERPRINT PREVIEW, PIXEL PREVIEW AND PROOF SETUP

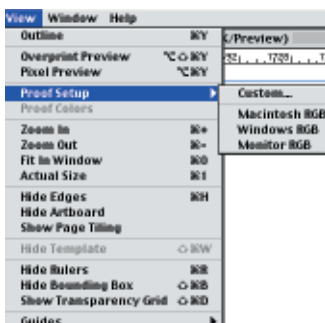
Under the View pulldown menu we now find some important new commands:

Overprint Preview. Finally Illustrator has the ability to check trapping visually!



Pixel Preview. This permits viewing artwork as a bitmap — an extremely welcome feature for use when creating web graphics.

Proof Setup. Illustrator 9 now includes a soft proofing tool (simulating displays on

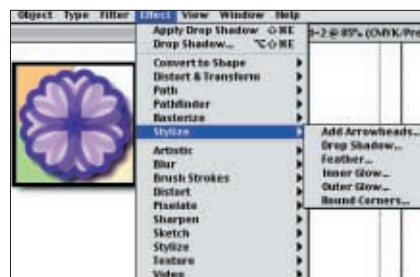


various platforms and monitors). Of course this is dependent on monitor quality, monitor profile and ambient lighting conditions. Unfortunately this function did not work in my beta version of the software.

GREAT NEW EFFECTS MENU

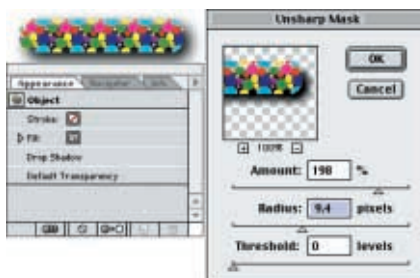
The Effects pulldown menu is a brand new feature; although some items previously located under the Filter menu can now be found under Effects, the most important additions are new to the program: real live effects from Photoshop which can be applied to vector objects without having to rasterize them first. The settings can be altered or discarded at any time through the Appearance palette. Just double-click the effect to change the settings or drag it to the Trash icon on the palette to discard it. And indeed, it is high time Adobe caught up with Macromedia: Fireworks has had these features for a while.

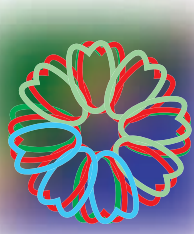
Drop (soft) shadow, feather, inner and outer glow. These effects — all familiar from Photoshop — can be found on the flyout menu under the Stylize pulldown



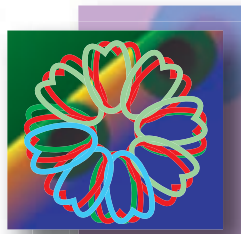
command. And yes, they can be applied to vector objects.

Unsharp Mask and Gaussian Blur. Stalwart Photoshop tools Unsharp Mask and Gaussian Blur can now also be applied to any vector object. And if you change your mind, the settings can be altered or dis-

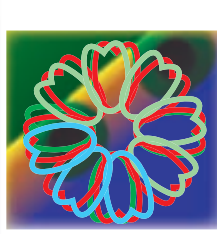




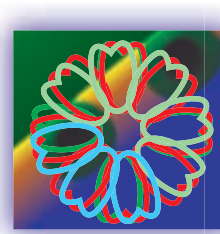
Gaussian Blur



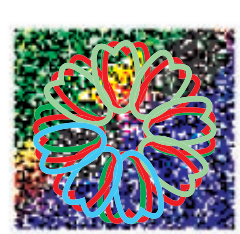
Drop Shadow



Inner Glow



Outer Glow



Mezzotint

Live Effects on vector objects are a fantastic addition to Illustrator 9. The background object in this illustration was filled with a gradient using the

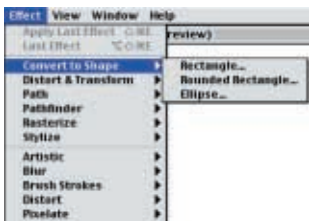
Color Burn blending mode. The five examples shown here are just a handful of the special effects Illustrator 9 has to offer.

carded using the amazing new Appearance palette.

Pixelate. Color Halftone, Crystalize, Mezzotint and Pointilize from the Pixelate flyout menu all work on vector objects without the need to rasterize objects first.

Convert to Shape. This is yet another handy command for converting the shapes

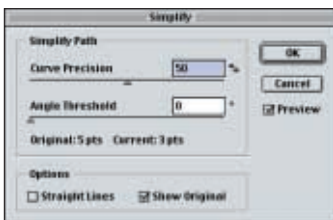
of objects, enabling, for instance, a rectangle to be easily changed into an oval without re-drawing it.



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NEW SIMPLIFY PATH COMMAND

Too many anchor points can make path editing very difficult or even generate a



PostScript error on output. Having a way to get rid of those redundant anchor points is a

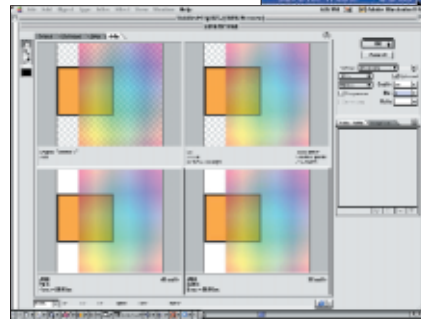
very welcome addition, found under the Object>Path pulldown menu.

WEB TOOLS

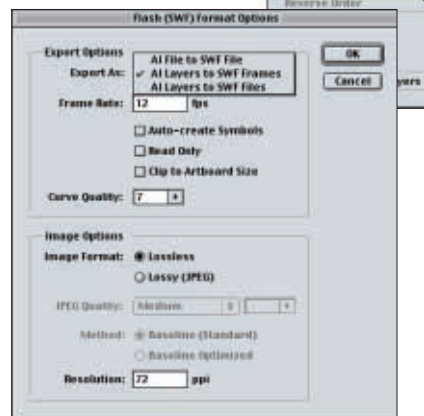
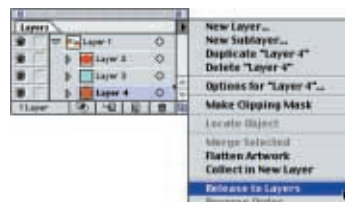
Whether we work on publications for print or for the screen, we still need a drawing program for line art, a painting program for photographic images and a page layout program to put them all together. It makes sense to use the same drawing and paint programs to create artwork for both print and screen, so the integration of web tools into Illustrator 9 is a key addition:

Save for Web. Anyone who has been using Photoshop 5.5 is familiar with the

Save for Web feature. It allows us to preview artwork in various file formats with various compression schemes before deciding how to save it.



Flash compatibility — Release to Layers. According to Macromedia, 90% of all web users have Macromedia's Flash plug-in installed with their browsers. This means that the SWF file format for vector-

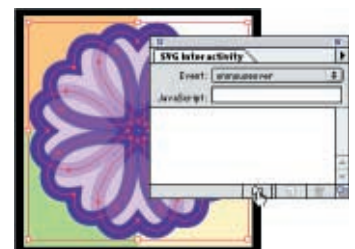


based animation is viewable by almost everyone. Making it easy to create SWF animations in Illustrator is a great idea. And I don't care if Adobe is piggybacking on Macromedia's plug-in distribution.

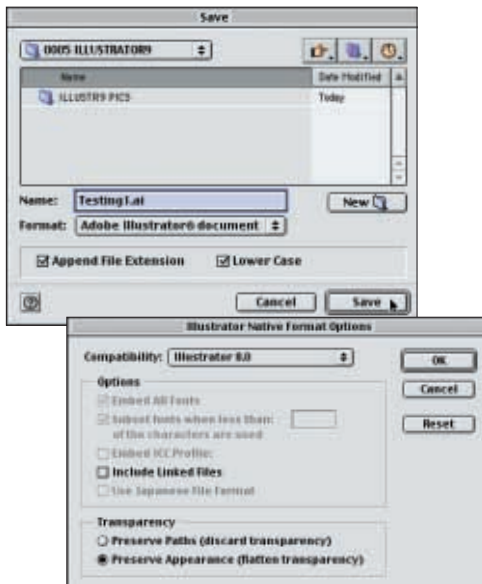
The Release to Layers command on the flyout menu of the Layers palette works directly with the Export as a Flash (SWF) dialog box. If in the latter we choose the All Layers to SWF Frames option, it does exactly what it says: it creates Flash frames ready to use for the Web or for further editing in Flash.

SVG File Format. SVG stands for Scalable Vector Graphics. It is an open standard written in XML (Extensible Markup Language) for vector-based, resolution-independent graphics supported by the Web.

Adobe distributes a free SVG plug-in, but the technology is still young, so not all viewers will have this plug-in with their browsers. However, the use of scalable vector graphics in the Web environment is a very exciting idea and one hopes that everybody will soon have the SVG plug-in for viewing them.



Having said that, we must admit disappointment with Adobe's first iteration of the SVG Activity Palette. We can only select an action assigned to the object; the actual script has to be written by hand. In contrast to Adobe ImageReady, Illustrator does not generate the code, leaving this part to the programmer constructing the website. Considering that more and more web designers are putting websites together

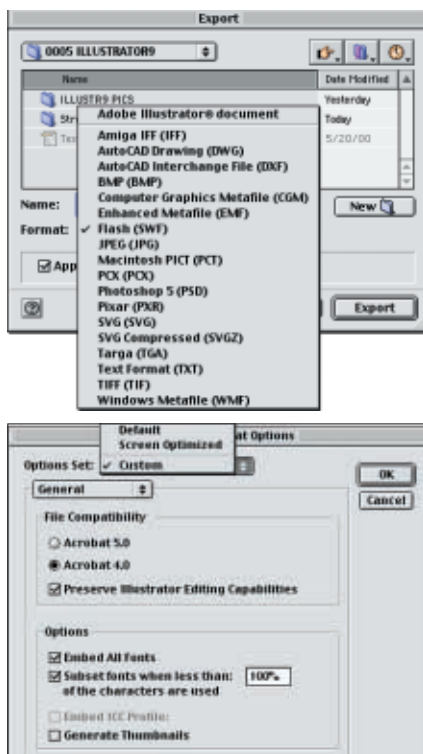


er by themselves, this represents a short-sighted attitude on Adobe's part that needs to be addressed in the next version.

EXTENDED UTILITY

Save As and Export. The Save dialog box now (at last!) offers the option to add a suffix (file extension) to the file name. It also allows us to discard or flatten transparency settings, if we need to save the document in the earlier versions of Illustrator, as EPS or as PDF.

The Export dialog box lets us choose from a multitude of file formats, and also



allows us to automatically add a proper suffix to the file name.

PDF Options. Save as PDF now offers a checkbox for preserving Illustrator editing capabilities, but other than that it is not much different than the previous version, with one exception: it has fewer presets and offers Acrobat 5 compatibility.

We thought the latter to be curious indeed, since as of yet there is no Acrobat 5 and no mention about its pending release.

REVIVED COMMANDS AND FIXES

Many thanks to Adobe for listening to its users and not only reviving a keyboard shortcut for the Move dialog box, but also for putting Pathfinder back under the pull-down menu (now it is under Effects). In fact there are several palettes that could logically end up there.

We all know that no matter how big our monitors are, they will always be far smaller than any table we worked on before computers. Clogging it with an increasing number of palettes in each consecutive version was never a good idea.

And remember how directional handles disappeared after using the Convert Direction Point tool?

We're happy to report that this has been fixed, too.

ILLUSTRATOR AND PAGE LAYOUT APPLICATIONS

We asked Diane Erlich, a Toronto graphic designer, to check Illustrator 9's output in a desktop prepress environment, using Adobe InDesign 1.5 and QuarkXPress 4.1. She used a Xerox N40 with 600 dpi resolution and 85 lpi screen and here is what she reports. [For our testing purposes we created an original Illustrator 9 file which was a simple drawing of tulips in three colors with a background containing one of the preset swatches from the Swatches palette and with Gaussian Blur plus Drop Shadow applied.]

Illustrator 9 and QuarkXPress. QuarkXPress seemed to create a finer dot with very little disbursement effect around the edges of the document; instead of spread-

ing further it stopped suddenly and created a box-like edge (i.e. flat). It also looked like the color printout was characterized by too much oversaturation.

As far as separations were concerned, colors separated beautifully with what seemed to be no problem.

Illustrator 9 and InDesign. Again there was no difficulty with separations. However, on the color printout there was a noticeable difference in the way InDesign handled the disbursement at the edges of the blur. There was an obvious fadeout (which was the desired effect in the original Illustrator file) and little to none of the box-like flat edging.

As well, the dots seemed to have spread better than in the Quark document.

A FULL FIVE STARS

Of course every upgrade has its failings, and Illustrator 9 is no exception. There are still at least two key missing features: we can't draw even the simplest 3D graphic, and we can't fit text into custom-made objects (called envelopes). This is surprising, considering that CorelDraw has been able to perform these relatively simple tasks for at least six years.

But in summary, we must say that this is a sterling upgrade for what has traditionally been one of Adobe's flagship products, and although the bulk of its improvements fall into the area of web page design, any illustrator or graphic designer will unquestionably appreciate the power of Illustrator's new features. It remains to be seen how well page layout programs and RIPs will handle these new features in a real workflow, outputting to film or plate.

Taking everything into consideration, we definitely have to rate Illustrator 9 a full five-star upgrade. ■

Special thanks to Diane Erlich for her help with this review.

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