

Not just a R.A.V.E. review

Page Layout Application CorelDraw 10 Graphics Suite

by Kirby Ferguson

Corel is heralding version 10 of its *CorelDraw Suite* as the best version ever. While this tag may be accurate, the upgrade as a whole is relatively modest, unless you're intrigued by its one entirely new application—R.A.V.E. (Real Animated Vector Effects) for Web animation.

DRAW 10—WHAT'S NEW?

CorelDraw 10, the centrepiece of the suite, epitomizes the reserved nature of this upgrade. It consists of many tweaks and a handful of nice (but hardly essential) new features.

Make no mistake, a lot of spit-and-polish has been done here, but it's not the type of thing most users will clamour for. Of the additions, the most immediately apparent—and problematic—is RealTime Preview, which renders objects in, um, real time, even as you drag them or apply changes. However, a complex file or RAM squeeze can cause redraw to get chunky. As well, when you move an item, the original item stays put. This makes it difficult to distinguish between where the item was and where it's going. *Draw*'s display is crisp and vibrant, but until RTP runs more smoothly, I've turned it off.

Other changes to *Draw 10* are easier to

applaud. Perfect Shapes, a feature drawn from *WordPerfect*, puts a variety of common shapes like arrows, starbursts and voice balloons a click away. Alas, you can't create your own.

A new view navigator, just like the one in *Photo-Paint*, makes finding your way around

the workspace easier. Page sorter view lets you shuffle thumbnails of your pages. A new undo docker gives you access to all your changes. Icons have been added to menu items, which sounds cutesy, but actually makes navigating them more intuitive. An intuitive color management interface also makes its debut in *Draw 10* (but I wasn't about to open that can of worms).

Unfortunately, these changes do little to address my old gripes about *Draw*—the program remains overstuffed. While this upgrade shows many nice tweaks to the GUI, Corel has yet to truly streamline the program. I also crave a simple means of panning and zooming, like the spacebar commands that have virtually become an institution in graphics apps.

As has been the case in the past, *Draw 10* is marred by some quirks. I couldn't get custom toolbars to stay in place, and the program hung on me a couple times.

PHOTO-PAINT LAGS BEHIND

Photo-Paint, *CorelDraw Suite*'s image editor, has now been rewritten and feels smoother and more responsive than previous versions. But like *Draw 10*, it doesn't offer much in the way of new features. While *CorelDraw* is powerful enough to

take a break from the feature race without being surpassed by the competition, *Photo-Paint*'s feature parity with *Photoshop* is clearly no more.

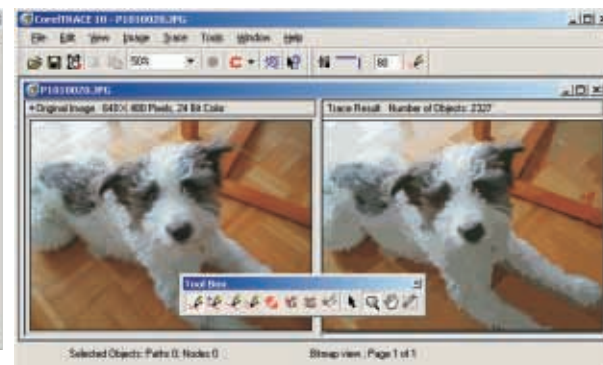
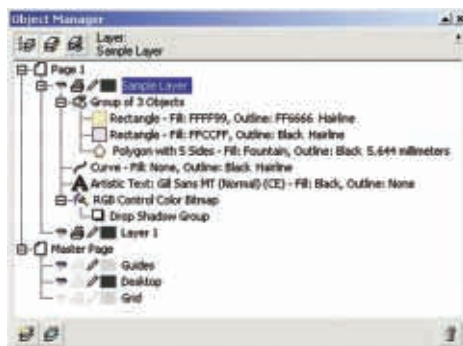
Still, *Photo-Paint* does almost everything *Photoshop* does, and, of course, will open PSDs, though layer effects get lost in translation. Version 10 now supports type on a path, but the program's text handling otherwise feels terribly antiquated.

But *Photo-Paint* has a few twists that *Photoshop* would do well to emulate. The clone tool, for instance, shows you exactly where you're cloning from. *Photo-Paint* offers a *Painter*-ly selection of brushes and loads of options for brush settings. And (perhaps most intriguingly) the program now has a componentized structure, meaning new features may just be a download away in the future.

Sadly, *Photo-Paint* has enough glitches to place it squarely behind *Photoshop*. Most confusingly, it uses two kinds of marquees: a regular "marching ant" one, which symbolizes a mask, then another that looks pretty much the same except with blue between the dashes, symbolizing a selected layer. This one's gotta go. The program is behind-the-times when it comes to Web graphics, and doesn't even offer any means of slicing images. While drop shadows are re-editable, opacity changes made with the transparency tool aren't. Type can be scaled without getting pixelly, but re-editing causes it to lose all its properties.

But my biggest caveat with *Photo-Paint* regards performance: it virtually gags on large files. *Photoshop*, meanwhile, han-

Draw's equivalent of a LAYER PALETTE is easy to use and very, very informative.



TRACE is one of the handy graphics utilities included in the CorelDraw Suite (but watch that Accuracy setting, unless you want to generate an obscene number of paths).



The **WEB CONNECTOR**, which displays live information from the Net in the workplace, is a nice idea that needs some fleshing out.

dled the same kinds of images without incident.

Photo-Paint is the best of the rest of the *Draw* suite, and a solid image editor, but it's no longer close to competing with the *Photoshop/ImageReady* duo.

R.A.V.E. ADDS NEW DIMENSION

Since *Draw* and *Photo-Paint 10* aren't exactly explosive upgrades, those who purchase the suite will probably do so for its new application—R.A.V.E., a Web animation program that exports in *Flash* format. I think *Draw* users will find R.A.V.E. worth the price of admission.

The program is exceptionally easy to use: tweening is click-and-drag; adding a keyframe is a double-click; rollover buttons behave like *Draw* pages. The basics are a breeze in R.A.V.E. While the drawing interfaces of *Flash* and *LiveMotion* are significantly different from *FreeHand* and *Illustrator*, R.A.V.E. works just like *Draw*. This strips the learning curve down to the

bare minimum.

Being a version 1.0, R.A.V.E. has its fair share of quirks. For instance, some objects can't be tweened, but the program didn't tell me this—it just didn't react when I tried to do it. I also experienced some problems with strokes distorting in animations. But R.A.V.E.'s biggest problem may be that you could outgrow it quickly. It's a fairly basic tool at the moment, really only suitable for straight animation and roll-overs. Personally, I find this simplicity befitting a new program and refreshing compared to the feature-itus most Corel apps suffer from, but if you want the industrial strength *Flash* solution, Macromedia *Flash* is still top of the heap.

While Corel has a checkered past when it comes to adding new apps to its repertoire, R.A.V.E. bucks the tradition. For *Draw* users, it is definitely the easiest way to start producing Web animations; and while R.A.V.E. won't make the users of other SWF programs jealous, it should please its own users.

While *Draw*, *Photo-Paint* and R.A.V.E. are the big apps in the suite, it also packs in some handy, but unheralded, graphics utilities. With some knowledgeable settings, *Corel Trace* works great; *Bitstream*

Font Navigator is an able font management program; the ever-reliable *Canto Cumulus* is included for cataloguing media. The *Photoshop*-compatible plug-ins include Human Software's dandy *Squizz* filter. And as usual, the suite ships with a mixed bag of fonts and clip art. Tutorials are ankle deep; this massive suite needs some hefty print manuals in the box.

IS THIS A MUST-BUY?

After a dreadful version 6, Corel has been producing solid upgrades. However, my old complaints persist—the suite is peppered



CORELDRAW 10 GRAPHICS SUITE

Minimum System Requirements

Pentium 200 processor or equivalent
Windows 98/2000/ME/NT
64 MB available RAM (128 MB recommended)
160 MB hard disk space

Pricing

Retail US\$549.99
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Corel Corporation
Telephone 800-772-6735
Web www.corel.com

with weird lingo, way too many palettes, too many bugs, and loads of ugly presets and artwork. Corel should also make it a priority to ship concurrent Windows and Mac versions.

Despite these flaws, *CorelDraw Suite* remains rugged but capable, and certainly a good value. There's enough here to keep you occupied—well, forever.

But despite Corel's promotion of this version as the suite's best upgrade yet, this probably isn't a mandatory purchase, unless R.A.V.E. appeals to you. I don't want to understate the value of version 10's numerous additions, but most users can probably live without them. Still, Corel veterans looking to get into *Flash* animation won't find a simpler way than R.A.V.E. 🍌

More on *CorelDraw 10* can be found in the two-part feature "Life Without Adobe" (*GX* Sep/Oct and Nov/Dec). You can find Kirby Ferguson on the Web at www.KirbyFerguson.com.

COREL R.A.V.E. makes quick work of *Flash* animation basics and sticks to the *CorelDraw* user interface.

