

The poor man's Photoshop

Imaging Application Jasc Paint Shop Pro 7

by Kirby Ferguson

Once a modest shareware program specializing in file conversion, Jasc's *Paint Shop Pro* has had a series of aggressive upgrades in recent years. The program now packs in most of the power of more expensive programs for about CDN\$150. This wealth of features has—deservedly or not—garnered *Paint Shop Pro* a reputation as “the poor man's *Photoshop*”.

While this draws unfair comparisons with what is, after all, a much more expensive program, it also encapsulates the appeal of *Paint Shop Pro*; it's a low-priced but powerful bitmap editor, plainly modeled after *Photoshop*. Indeed, the likeness is apparent from the first time you launch *Paint Shop Pro*; the program looks like a slightly cuter *Photoshop* (and I mean that as a compliment). The interface is lean and well organized. Menu items are logically located and grouped, and there's minimal use of palettes.

PACKED WITH FEATURES

But beyond cosmetics, *Paint Shop Pro* manages to pack in many of *Photoshop*'s famous features. Vectors, one of the latest major *Photoshop* additions, are present in *Paint Shop Pro* (albeit in a form even more



I went from a blank canvas to this in about a minute using *Paint Shop Pro*'s fun **PICTURE TUBE** paintbrush.

awkward than *Photoshop*'s). There are also layers, complete with opacity sliders and blending modes; a Navigator-like Overview window; a wide array of filters; and extensive export options.

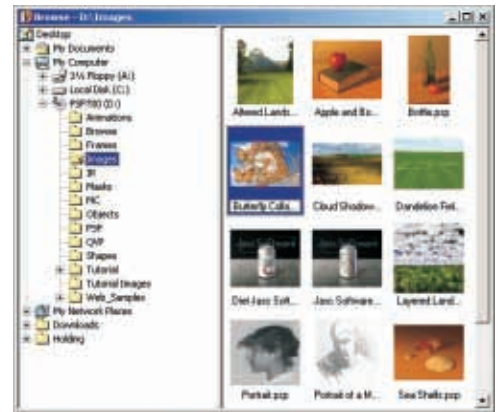
Paint Shop Pro opens native *Photoshop* files, but like most other programs capable of this feat, it doesn't retain layer effects. *Paint Shop Pro*'s Web export features are solid, even including image slicing, but the program doesn't incorporate the different formats into one preview window, like more specialized programs such as *Fireworks* and *ImageReady* do. Nonetheless, as a general purpose image editor for the Web, *Paint Shop Pro* is very capable. The package even includes Animation Shop, a modest animation program well-suited to Web tasks like banner creation.

In addition to its heavy duty features, *Paint Shop Pro* includes an array of user-friendly touches aimed at the more casual user. Different borders and frames ranging from simple solid-colored lines to 3D wood effects can be applied by typing a few digits into a dialog box. In addition to advanced color adjustment features like levels and curves, *Paint Shop Pro* includes simplified alternatives for beginners. An effects browser gives you a quick'n'dirty preview of what a filter will do. One of *Paint Shop Pro*'s most fun features is the oddly named Picture Tubes, which allows you to scatter a trail of images with a brush; the tool closely resembles the Image Hose which originated in *Painter*. You can even create your own presets. Unfortunately, Picture Tubes are raster images, so there are limits on how large they can be scaled.

Topping things off, *Paint Shop Pro*'s performance is good. The program is stable, with relatively modest system demands.

THE TRADE-OFFS

But of course, there are trade-offs. While I found *Paint Shop Pro*'s arrangement of palettes and menus intuitive, the tools



Paint Shop Pro's **BROWSER** makes finding and opening your files a breeze.

themselves are more difficult to manage than I would expect from a program like this. In particular, manipulating objects and making selections can be tedious.



JASC PAINT SHOP PRO 7

System Requirements

MINIMUM

Pentium processor or equivalent
Windows 95/98/2000/NT 4.0
32 MB available RAM,
75 MB hard disk space

RECOMMENDED

500MHz processor or better
128 MB available RAM

Pricing

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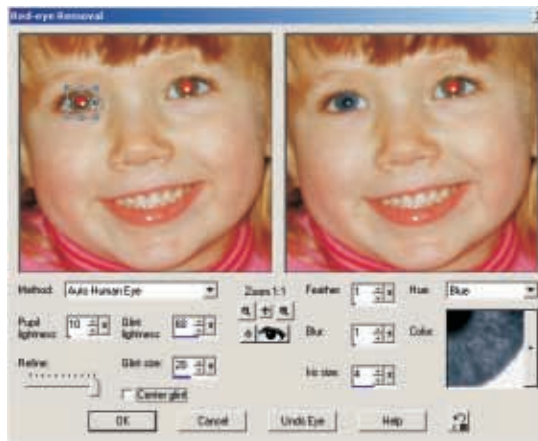
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RED-EYE REMOVAL is one of the semi-automated tools Paint Shop Pro offers.

Much of this is attributable to the program's lack of a single, consistent tool for performing most moving and scaling tasks. In most applications, this is the role of the pointer tool, but in *Paint Shop Pro* the pointer tool is used for panning. While the program sports a tool for moving and scaling objects, doing so with vectors or type necessitates selecting a separate tool. Needless to say, on complex, layered files, juggling different tools to do the same thing can get confusing. I also had trouble producing accurate masks and couldn't consistently distinguish the boundaries of the cropping tool.

Some regard *Paint Shop Pro's* lack of CMYK support as the program's most glaring oversight. However, I think Jasc is sensibly avoiding the complicated issue of color calibration for press, which most users of its software will not be prepared to tackle anyway. Most *Paint Shop Pro* users are better off having their images converted and prepared for film by their service bureau or printer.

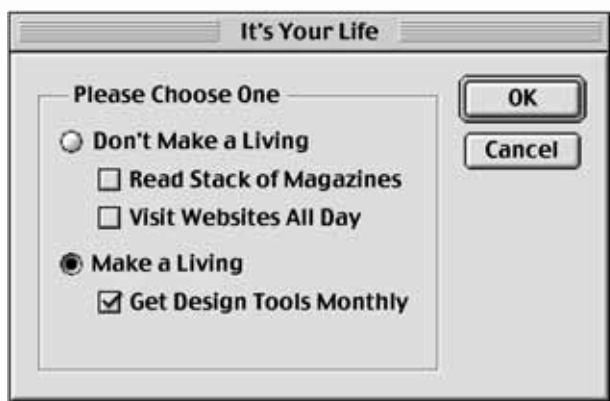
WORTH A LOOK

For those with no need for *Photoshop's* more advanced features, *Paint Shop Pro* should certainly be one of the first programs you investigate. Those intending to eventually upgrade to *Photoshop LE*, but feature-wise, it doesn't compare with *Paint Shop Pro*.

And don't let *Paint Shop Pro's* price fool you—it's not for casual users. *Paint Shop Pro* has more power than most users will ever need. In fact, some of its dialog boxes are every bit as arcane as the worst in *Photoshop*. You will need to read the manual to come to grips with this application. Fortunately, for those who still appreciate such antiquated things, *Paint Shop Pro* comes with a nice hefty printed manual.

Paint Shop Pro excels at the necessities, but when you want fine control you may feel cramped. It's a predictable—even acceptable—trade-off. Still, this is a lean, flexible and powerful package at an unusually low price. *Paint Shop Pro* would be a deal if it cost twice as much. 🍌

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