ArcSoft
PhotoStudio 2.0 and PhotoFantasy

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PhotoStudio 2.0 makes it easy to improve photos and add a variety of special effects.

In the early days of digital photography there were only two types of editing programs available. First, the basic paint program allowed you to draw basic shapes and fill them with colors or patterns. If you had the capability to put photos into these programs, you could only change the color palette, crop, add low-resolution text, or modify the file format. The second, more professional editing program was designed for art directors, professional photographers, and printing houses. These programs featured every possible control over the photographic image.

With the introduction of affordable digital cameras, scanners and video capture devices, a new level of digital editing programs surfaced. These programs offered many of the features found in the professional editing programs, but were easier to use. Many came bundled with the digital device, while some were sold as stand-alone programs.

ArcSoft manufactures the ZipShot video capture device and a variety of photo editing programs. In a previous article, we introduced you to ZipShot as well as several editing

programs that were included with it. Continuing our research of ArcSoft products, we now would like to introduce you to its stand-alone image editing program and one of its very specialized software programs.

PHOTOSTUDIO 2.0

ArcSoft PhotoStudio 2.0 was designed to give photographers maximum creative control of their digital photos, yet remained simple to use. This program is designed for use with Windows 3.1, 95, and NT. Using the "acquire" function in the pull-down file menu, you have the choice of downloading images from scanners, digital cameras, or video capture devices such as the ZipShot. You can also open images burned on CD or saved to your hard disk. Once the photo is loaded, you can begin your image editing with the "enhance" pull-down menu. Here you can correct color balance, brightness, contrast, and make any adjustments to the tonal curve of the photo.

For your editing pleasure, a movable tool bar includes select tools, zoom control, editing brushes, eyedroppers, paint

buckets, gradation controls, text tools, and the ever-popular clone tool. The select tools let you make specific shape selections or similar color selections with a "magic wand." These "masks" protect the remainder of the image from the editing procedures you perform on the selected area. Once a mask is created, you can modify it with the "mask" pull-down menu. You can expand the mask, smooth it, create a border with it, export it, or invert the mask so that you can work on the reverse area.

A great application using the "magic wand" is to create a sky mask. This is accomplished by touching the darkest area of the sky with the tool. If the sky has any type of gradation, you will notice that entire sky was not selected. To add sky selection, you hold down the shift key and touch the sky at the edge of the last selection. The "magic wand" will add the new selection. Continue this procedure until the entire sky is selected. If there are areas of sky trapped by tree branches, buildings, etc., you can add these selections with the shift and the "magic wand." Once this is accomplished, you can smooth the selection from the "mask" pull-down menu. When you have a complete sky mask, you can make it darker, change its hue, or reduce the grain that commonly appears in blue skies.

Grain reduction is accomplished with a variety of smoothing controls found under the "enhance" pull-down menu. Each of the smoothing controls operates differently to control the grain, so some experimenting is necessary before you make the final grain reduction. We've found that the fastest and most effective solution is the "despeckle" function.

The "transform" pull-down menu lets you flip the image from left to right or from top to bottom. This function is helpful if the scanned image is not oriented correctly or was scanned in backwards. The "transform" menu also lets you rotate, distort, and change the size of the image for output to larger or smaller file sizes.

The "convert" pull-down menu allows you to change your image to grayscale, RGB, CYMK, or to a 256-color palette. The CYMK menu even lets you create your own CYMK separation values. If you want to separate the picture into images representing each color, you can select the "separate to" and the program will create a black-and-white image for each color channel.

Most of the creative functions found in PhotoStudio are found under the "effects" menu. More than 20 special effects will allow you to dazzle viewers with embossing, fisheyes, spirals, sketching, oil painting, cone, whirlpool, and many other cool effects. Most of them are presented in a "before and after" presentation, so you can decide whether you want the effect and to what degree you want it to affect your image. The best way to understand how each effect works is by experimenting. Download the hot-air balloon image from the sample images and apply each effect to that image. After you see the effect, go to the "undo" function found under the "edit" menu, and reset the image. Try the next effect until you find the one you like. You may want to save each effect as a new file, and print the variations on your color printer for later reference.

Once you have completed your editing, you can save your image in any one of a half-dozen photo image formats including JPEG, which is used to compress images. You can also create a photo album that records thumbnail representations of each photo file on your hard disk. To use a specific image in the photo album, find the image, double-click on it and it will load into the photo editor. There is also a nice slide-show function that grabs images from a specific photo album and displays them full screen. As each image is loaded, a special effect is used to blend from one image to the next.

PHOTOFANTASY

ArcSoft PhotoFantasy is a very specialized image-editing program designed to place you or a willing friend in a fantasy scene. Think back to the last county fair you attended. Do you remember the funny full-size cardboard stockades with a cutout area where you used to put your face? Well, that is similar to ArcSoft's PhotoFantasy, but these humorous manipulations are done on the computer, using a three-step digital editing process.

When you begin the program you'll be presented with a large choice of fantasy scenes. These include images from art galleries, the White House, hard bodies, costumes, sports stars, and time warps. Once you have selected a fantasy scene, Step Two will ask you to pick the lucky (or unlucky) person who will have their face superimposed in the scene. These photos can come from scanner files, digital camera files, images of people on your hard disk, or from ArcSoft's Zipshot video capture device, using a camcorder, VCR or digital camera.

Once the second image is loaded, a special editing screen allows you to make your final adjustments. Special controls let you zoom the face to the correct size, move it, rotate it to match the body, and adjust color and brightness to match the rest of the scene. Coarse and fine adjustments are selected with either the tortoise or the hare controls (as you can see, this is not your normal image editing software!).

When you perfect the final image, you can print it or save it to a new image file. The key to getting a good match is learning how each of the editing controls operates, and working with the supplied sample is the fastest way to learn. When you get the hang of it, you can import images of your friends and place them in their own photo fantasies.

As you can see, ArcSoft is a very innovative software manufacturer. They are constantly creating products and software to make life easier—and if that doesn't work, they'll create a fantasy escape. For further information about PhotoStudio 2.0 or PhotoFantasy, contact ArcSoft, Inc. at 46601 Fremont Blvd., Fremont, CA 94538; 510/440-9901; on the Internet www.zipshot.com and www.arcsoft.com. ∎