Ulead PhotoImpact 7

by Jack and Sue Drafahl

O ver the past few years software has become a very powerful method of enhancing images in the digital darkroom. The technical and creative tools available to photographers seem to be improving almost daily.

Ulead PhotoImpact 7 is one of those software tools that takes creativity to new highs. This economical photo-editing program includes hundreds of valuable features to handle everything from basic to extremely complex problems. PhotoImpact 7 features everything you need for photo editing, creative design and Web page production.
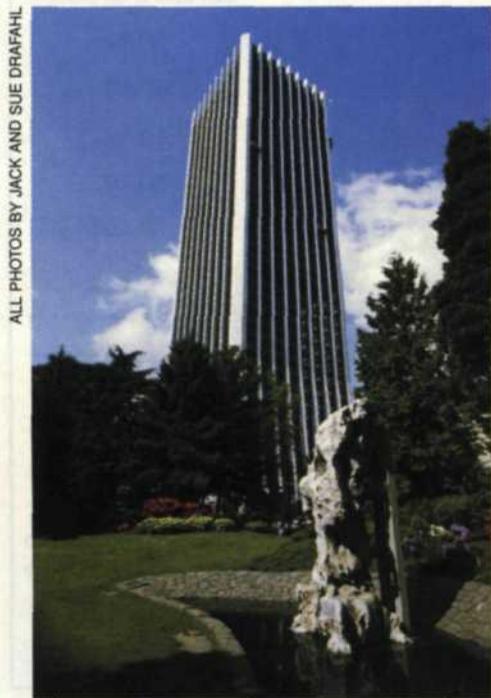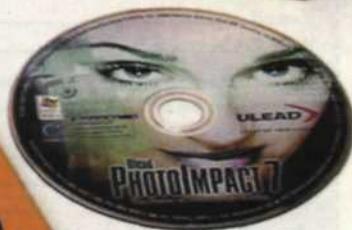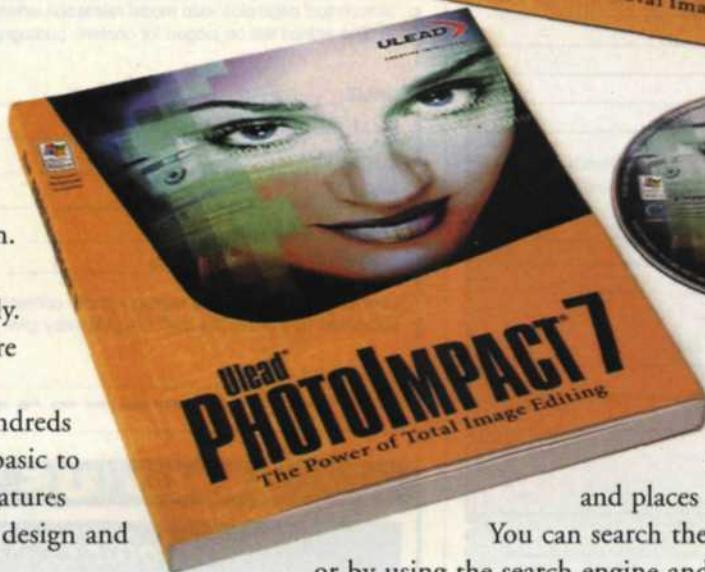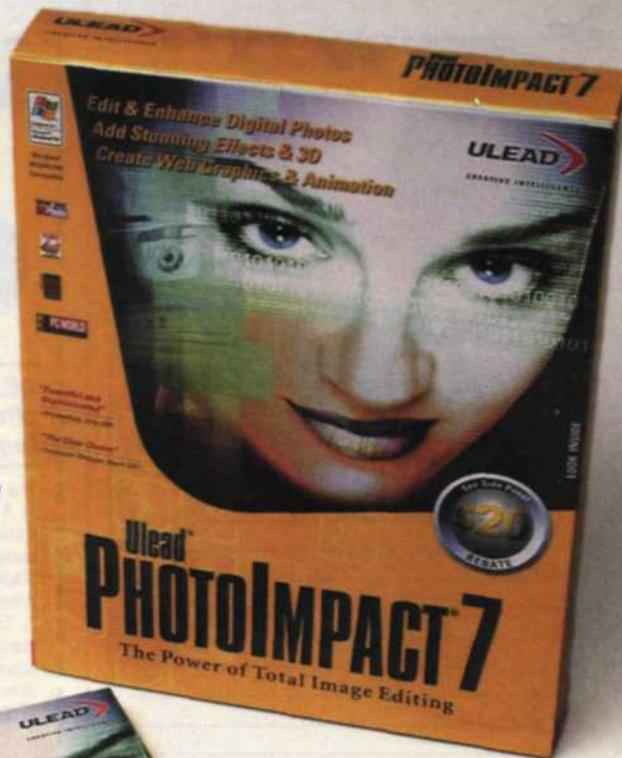
Starting at the input end of the digital process, images can be downloaded directly from digital cameras, card readers, film scanners, hard disks, CDs, and data DVDs. With the Album component of PhotoImpact 7 you can create photo databases with data fields, thumbnails, and search engines. Each album is assigned a name and/or number with as many data fields as you please. The program will then create thumbnails and places them in an album. You can search the database visually, or by using the search engine and key words.

When you import digital images, you will find that most files include EXIF digital camera data that is automatically placed in the appropriate data fields. This is a very convenient feature because it permits you to search for images based on specific data, image size, focal length or even by specifying the digital camera used to take the image.

As you become more proficient with the program, you will probably want to link other programs to your albums.
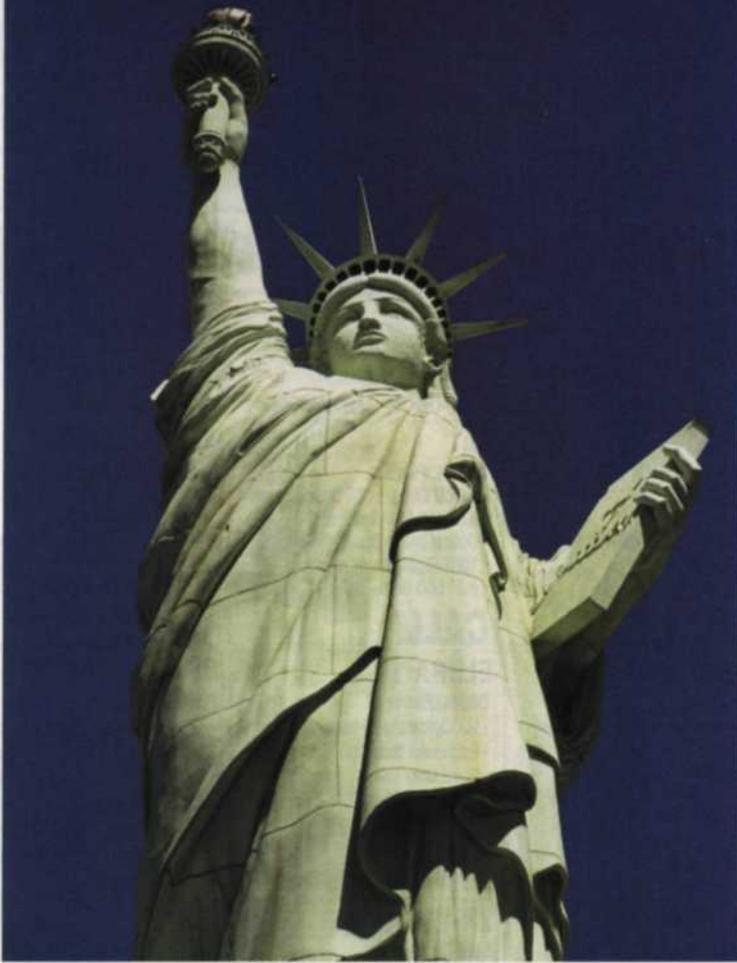
PhotoImpact 7 features a wide variety of image-editing tools that enable you to do everything from removing red-eye and scratches, to fine-tuning color balance, sharpness and contrast. You can even compensate for lens distortion.

ALL PHOTOS BY JACK AND SUE DRAFAHL

Virtually any program that uses digital files can be linked directly to the Album module. Once a custom list of programs is established, you can quickly select specific thumbnails and drop them directly into one of the linked programs. The program will immediately open, load the corresponding files and you are ready to go.

Once you have found the image you want to edit or manipulate, you can drop it into PhotoImpact 7 and the main photo image editor will open. Album moves to the background, and acts as a server ready to find new images when necessary.

The PhotoImpact 7 image editor features such a broad range of capabilities that it is difficult to find a place to start. The most logical place is with data input, since PhotoImpact 7 can import just about every type of digital file. When you first import files into the program, you have the option of using the standard file menu, or an optional thumbnail menu. Simply select the desired image, and you are ready for editing.

PhotoImpact 7 puts an extensive choice of tools at your fingertips with its expanding toolbox. Tools are logically grouped according to their action, so you can quickly find everything you need. Some icons represent stand-alone tools, while others, such as the retouching icon, expand into a dozen editing tools when selected. You will find tools that can burn, dodge, sharpen, blur, remove scratches, remove red-eye, and other digital darkroom tricks.

There are dozens of additional tools available that enable you to fix just about any image problem. You will find several pulldown menus along the top of the screen that allow you to fine-tune color balance, adjust gamma, resize,

The program offers a virtually limitless array of special-effects filters. They are logically grouped for easy access, and are accompanied by thumbnails that give you a good idea of how each effect will appear with your images. You can also add your existing Photoshop filters.

change contrast, align horizons, trace with onion skin, or stitch images together to create panoramas.

PhotoImpact 7 also features the largest groups of special-effects filters we have ever seen in one editing program. How many, you ask? Well, we stopped counting when we reached 1000 effects. If you bypass the default and modify the selected effect, we are talking millions and millions of potential special effects.
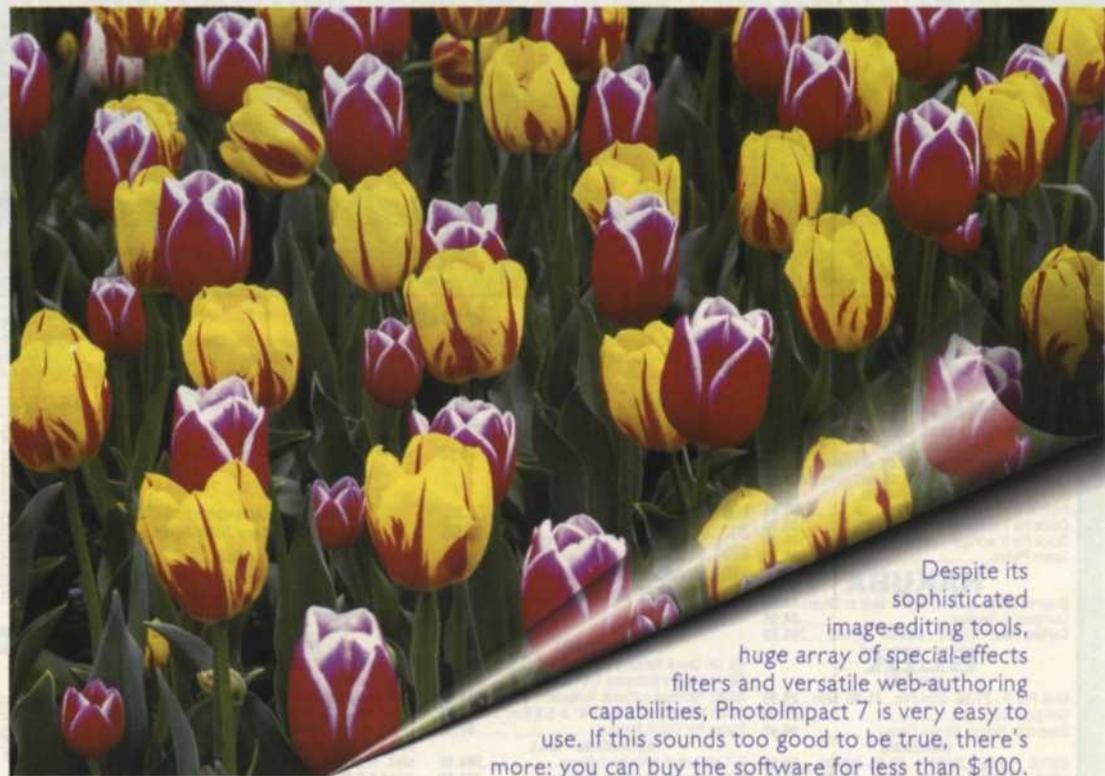
With such a huge array of effects, there needs to be some semblance of order. In PhotoImpact 7, the special-effects filters and plug-ins are grouped in Easy Palette according to the type of effect. A small thumbnail represents how each effect will work on your image. Some of the main special effects groups include fills, styles, brushes, stamp, particle, lighting, warping, animation, type, buttons, and frames. If you still desire some of your Photoshop plug-ins and filters, there is a special section where you can add them to those already in the program.

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PhotoImpact 7 also has Web-authoring capabilities. This portion of the application allows you to design graphic elements for an existing site or create a totally new Web page. The Background Designer, Component Designer and Button Designer provide a simple solution for creating state-of-the-art Web projects. PhotoImpact 7 includes Ulead GIF Animator 5 that enables you to produce animations that are sure to jazz up any Web page.

Auto Slice cuts your Web page image into rectangular cells so the image loads at the highest speed possible without overlapping errors. You also have the option of manual slicing for added control. PhotoImpact 7 allows you to add rollover images, JavaScript effects,

Despite its sophisticated image-editing tools, huge array of special-effects filters and versatile web-authoring capabilities, PhotoImpact 7 is very easy to use. If this sounds too good to be true, there's more: you can buy the software for less than $100.

image maps, animations, and Web page links. The Image Optimizer ensures that your graphics load quickly by using the latest image compression techniques.

Once you have completed your Web page, you can test it with a browser on your computer without logging on. When it meets you satisfaction, you can then upload the page to the Internet.

PhotoImpact 7 also has a batch processor that can apply a single command or several commands to groups of your images. The batch convert is used to change the file format to one of the dozens of file formats supported by the program.

Another utility allows you to take a screen shot and send it to the clipboard, printer, or image file on your hard disk. If you want to output multiple images on one print, there is a print utility offering just about every combination of print sizes. Once the images are loaded into the printing template, you can resize each image inside its specific printing area before the final print is made.

Is this program as good as it sounds? Well, our answer

might be best explained by telling you just how we use it. We use the Album module for cataloging all our images both for personal use and for magazine articles. All the images we send to magazines are burned to CD, cataloged and accompanied by thumbnails that we print using Album. We also take advantage of the slide presentation portion of Album when we present lectures and seminars.

We recently tried our hand at Web page production, and PhotoImpact 7 has become our software of choice for this purpose. It is extremely easy to use, and allowed us to get our first page up and running with very little effort. Check it out at www.jackandsuedrafahl.com (remember that we're still learning too!).

PhotoImpact 7 maximizes creative graphics design, enables you to enhance photos using endless tools and provides everything necessary for Web page design. In short, PhotoImpact 7 is the perfect software for today's digital darkroom. Best of all, you can buy it for less than $100. System requirements: Intel Pentium-compatible processors, Microsoft Windows 98, Windows NT 4.0, Windows 2000, Windows Me, Windows XP, 64 MB of RAM and 280 MB of available hard disk space.

For further information regarding PhotoImpact 7, visit Ulead's Web site at www.ulead.com. ∎