Keep (I)
Magic Brush (M)
Magic Fill (F)
Magic Wand (W)
Magic Pen (N)
Hand (H)
Erase (E)

(O) Drop
(B) Brush
(K) Bucket Fill
(J) Airbrush
(P) Pen
(Z) Zoom
(X) Xchange
(R) Restore

(D) Dual Erase/Restore

Keep Palette

Drop Palette

Color Sets

Green Light
(Active Keep Set)

New Set

New Color

Remove
Selected Color
from Palette

Dimmed Light
(Non-active Set)

Red Light
(Active Drop Set)

Undefined
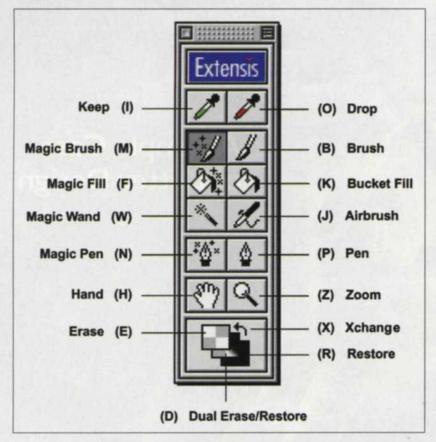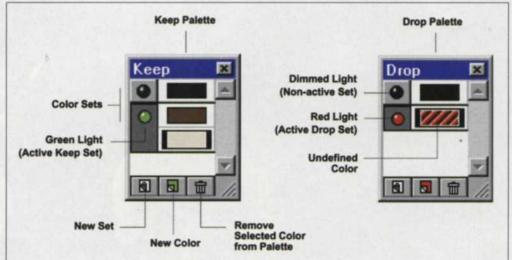Color

The Keep palette is indicated with a green light icon. The eyedropper is used to touch and collect those colors that you do not want to mask out. The red light icon indicates the Drop palette as the eyedropper is used to select those colors that will be masked out of the image.

The floating toolbox looks much like that in Adobe Photoshop, except that all the tools relate to image selection and masking.

Extensis Mask Pro

ONE OF THE MORE COMPLEX TASKS when editing images is creating an image mask. These masks can clearly separate out portions of an image (so you can replace backgrounds), repair damaged areas, or alter the image content. Both Photoshop and Elements from Adobe Systems have options like the lasso, magic wand and extract tools designed to accomplish the masking task. These tools work well as long as the required mask is not too complicated. Strands of hair or thin blades of grass can take considerable time and effort to mask out against a background using these tools.

Extensis Corporation has a solution to this masking problem in a plug-in filter for Adobe Photoshop called Mask Pro. It features its own arsenal of masking tools like edge detection, clean up, halo removal, clipping path generation and color-matching technology. Best of all, it is quick and easy to use.

Just load the image you want to mask in Photoshop and set your target destination. Extensis has its own pull-down menu at the top of the editing screen, so you would then select Mask Pro. This jumps you to

the Mask Pro editing screen with its own floating toolbox. These masking tools are readily available from the toolbox or with a keyboard shortcut. A viewing selector makes it easy to see your work in progress. It allows you to preview in quick mask view, solid view or cleanup view.
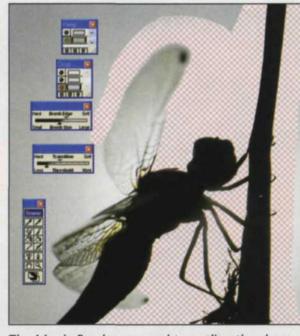
The Magic Brush defines the border of

The Magic Brush is dragged along the edges of the bird. The Keep and Drop palette determines the edges of the mask.

your mask and is used with Keep and Drop Eyedroppers. It masks away colors you don't want and keeps those you do. By holding down Shift while using the Keep eyedropper, you can select several different color variations you want to maintain in the mask. The Drop eyedropper works in the same way, except the mask will cover the colors you touch.

Once you have selected the colors to be kept or dropped, you can then use the Magic Brush along the edges to be masked. The Keep and Drop colors will determine which areas are masked and which are not. The Transition and Threshold sliders determine the size of the brush and its strength. If you find your masking cuts into the subject, just adjust the Threshold slider and move the Magic Brush over the same area to recover image area covered by the mask. There is also an Erase function in the toolbox to eradicate any incorrect masking.

Once you have created your mask, you can use the cleanup tools to fix any areas in the mask that were missed. In this mode, everything transparent is displayed as black, and

Original color negative image of a dragonfly on a horsetail plant.

The Magic Brush was used to outline the shape of the dragonfly. The Keep (green light) and Drop (red light) palettes are at the top of the screen. The lower two menus control the brushes working area, and the threshold level is derived from the Keep/Drop settings. The mask that is created can be set to a color (magenta in this case) and a checkered background (indicating the masked area).
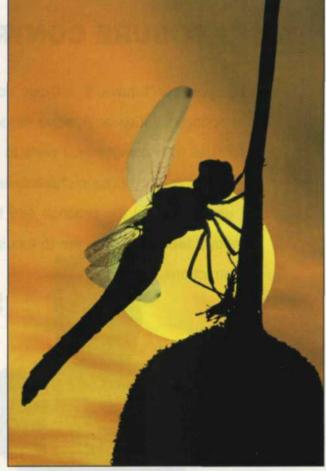

The completed masked area around the dragonfly. A second mask of the semi-transparent wing was made so that some of the background would pass through the wing.

You can also toggle the mask so that the masked and unmasked areas are in high contrast black and white. In this mode you can find any remaining pinhole or small areas missed during the masking process. You can then use the standard brush tool in the add or subtract mode to tweak the final mask.

Final image with new background placed behind the masked dragonfly.

everything opaque as white. Everything else is 50 percent gray, so you can easily see if your mask is complete. The Magic Fill and Bucket Fill tools can then be used to fill in tiny holes and specks or to fill large areas of background. You can also select and fill or erase large areas with the Pen tool, which creates working paths like the Pen tool in Photoshop does. The Magic Pen tool auto-matically follows along a path determined by the difference in brightness levels of colors and shapes in the image.

When you are satisfied with the mask you have created, you can apply and save it. You will then jump back into the Photoshop editing screen. To preview your mask, go to the Select menu, and load your mask selection along with its layer.

From the Extensis>Mask Pro menu, you can also select the Composite mode, which allows you to view the other layers as you create your mask. In the end, if you find the mask edges a little rough, you can use the Edge Blender to smooth out any jaggies that appear along the edges of your mask.

Mask Pro 2.0 is available for Windows,

Color negative of a clown with a very difficult masking problem around the yellow hair in the top of the image. Many fine strands of hair make manual selection tools and masking impossible. Image was imported into Mask Pro to create the mask.

The Keep/Drop eyedroppers were used to select the many yellow tonal color for the Keep eyedropper, and the darker background colors for the Drop eyedropper. Notice the fine masking lines around the yellow hair created by Mask Pro.

and Mask Pro 3.0 for the Macintosh platform. The price is $199.95 for a full copy and $99.95 for an upgrade.

Mask Pro is just one of many plug-in filters offered by Extensis. Others include Intellihance Pro, PhotoFrame and Photo-Tools for Photoshop. Extensis, recently acquired by Celartem Technology, USA, Inc., also has a font management program, called Suitcase, an asset management program, called Portfolio, and QuarkXPress.

For more information on Extensis products and trial downloads, you can log onto www.extensis.com.

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