

In late 1999, MetaCreations divested itself of a family of creative software. A short time later Kai dropped out of sight. Now Corel has revived Bryce

WHERE IS K

The end of the millennium panicked a lot of digital artists—not because of the Y2K bug, but because MetaCreations had announced it was dropping some of the most beloved creative software ever written. What was going to happen to *Painter*, *Bryce*, *Poser*, *Ray Dream* and *KPT*?

User lists were flooded with anguished speculation. After all, there was a huge cult following for these products. People wrote tutorials on how to make them work with each other in ways that MetaCreations never understood. And now it looked like they would no longer have any support.

Today we're happy to see that the torch has been passed to Corel through its acquisition of *Painter*, *Bryce* and *KPT*. The popular and always surprising *KPT* series of filters had been under the care of Ambient Software of New Zealand since *KPT 5*. Ambient

is now writing Corel's new *KPT Effects* filters, and shows a real understanding of what users are looking for in their *KPT* stuff. Its website (www.ambientdsn.com) provides users with a wealth of examples and tutorials.

I wrote Matt Fox-Wilson at Ambient to congratulate him on the new set of filters—but more to ask him the question that's been bothering me ever since the great MetaCremation...

WHERE THE HECK IS KAI KRAUSE?

I can remember how people raged against the interfaces Kai and his people created in the early days of desktop publishing. They were



e that included Kai Krause-inspired applications Bryce and KPT — and with a stunning revamp for version 5, but the mystery lingers...

KAI KRAUSE?

by Ron Giddings

horrified to see their desktops taken over by an entirely new workspace. Each control was a visual playground, because at heart all these products had a philosophy of experimentation.

“Cool stuff” was our primary product outline,” says Fox-Wilson of his tenure with Kai and MetaCreations, working on *KPT 5*, “encouraging innovation without the constant drive to be producing results for the next quarter.”

The surprising effect of this was the creation of a group of artists absolutely devoted to this way of working. I find it amusing to see that Apple and Microsoft have based their OS X and Windows XP interfaces on transparent glowing buttons and translucent pulldown menus. Take one look at *Bryce* and you’ll know where they got a lot of their ideas.

Kai’s meeting with Eric Wenger in France in the early 90s was particularly significant. Wenger had been writing graphics software for the Macintosh (like *Art Mixer*) and had created software in Fortran that could generate fractal landscapes. The interface which Kai created for Wenger’s application completely hid the mindboggling math necessary to produce ray-traced images. The user could use a trackball as well as image-based buttons to orient the landscape. Positioning of the sun, for example, was achieved by rotating a sphere. It was a lot more intuitive than typing in numbers.

It is primarily the lighting that gives *Bryce* its distinctive look, and it is the *Bryce* look that

has fostered such a loyal following among artists. *Bryce* employs ray-tracing. Imagine a camera that projects light onto an object, picks up its properties (such as transparency and color), then records that light reflected back, and you have an idea of what ray-tracing is. By its very nature, it is math-intensive.

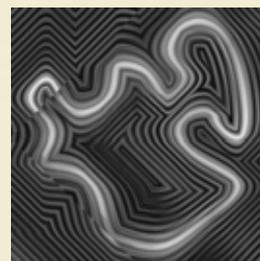
BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU ASK FOR

One of the challenges facing Corel in its handling of *Bryce 5* is the demand for faster rendering and better lighting effects, but apparently the two are mutually exclusive. Check www.renderosity.com for an interview with *Bryce* product manager Conan Hunter to get a better understanding of this.

Bryce 5 has opened a floodgate, with superfine anti-aliasing, depth of focus, internal reflections, and soft shadows, on top of atmospheric effects. I suspect it would be nearly impossible to do an image using all the effects *Bryce* is capable of. The cover of this issue employed transparency and atmospheric effects—and wound up taking thirty-six hours to render. This is not unusual for *Bryce* fanatics. I’ve seen posts on user lists mentioning weeks of rendering time!

Corel has come up with a brilliant solution. Called *Bryce Lightning*, it is network rendering software that allows an image to be divided among any number of computers—and across any network. This has the potential to cut rendering down to a fraction of the time.

Bryce’s brilliance becomes evident when one allows it to create a completely artificial environment. I used procreate’s KPT Effects in Photoshop to create the grey scale basis for the landscape at the left. KPT Effects has significantly improved its gradient filter to include concentric gradations that conform to the outline of the selection. Historically gradations in all graphics applications have been linear or circular only. Bringing the grey scale pattern shown to the right into Bryce’s Terrain Editor, I was able to texturize and shape a maze. The results are so evocative that the program invites one to experiment with all the magical features available. The results reminded me of some mediaeval town from a romantic fantasy.



A BRYCE PLACE TO VISIT

Bryce has never been considered a modelling program. But because of its excellent import-export capabilities, it has been used extensively by artists in conjunction with other software. Chief among these were programs for making trees—until now. *Bryce 5* introduces the Tree Lab—one can select from scores of pre-set trees, alter the trunks, the size and shape, the number and placing of branches, even the gravity affecting the branches.

A real treat is to be found in the leaf creation section. “User leaf” lets you dress the branches with scanned photos of real leaves—or anything else you might dream of. One of the best tutorials I’ve come across on the Tree Lab can be found at www.brycetech.com. Yet another Brycenik has started a resource of photographs of real trees that match the models in *Bryce*, as well as settings to help mimic them more closely. Users are invited to contribute at www.hinchu.com/tuts.

I am continually amazed at the ability of some long-time *Bryce* users to create absolutely astonishing buildings and objects in the Terrain Lab. Many of them are available either for free or for a modest fee on such sites as www.renderosity.com. Do yourself a favour and check out www.wappen3d.com. In addition to an incredible Gothic cathedral, this German artist offers a collection of mediaeval furniture and accessories. These were done entirely in *Bryce*, and work only in *Bryce*.

SPEAKING OF CASTLES

So why are these people so devoted to programs that present such an uncommon way of working?

Is it because the results are so evocative? Is it because we’re being invited to play with the tools? Is it simply because we’re in KaiLand now?

Yes, yes and yes again.

What I found was that *Bryce 5* was very difficult to “push” in a direction I wanted it to go. If, on the other hand, I provided it with

imaginative grey scale images and let it do its thing, it led me to a strange new place that just invited me to walk into it. It was so easy to imagine where I would place *Poser* figures, or how I would change the time of day, and start enhancing the textures that bring a picture to life.

But in the meantime, the question I started out with still remained: Where is Kai Krause?

I got as close as a website at www.byteburg.de, complete with pictures of an old German castle.

“We enjoyed our year of cone of silence and press embargo” reads the unsigned message posted there, continuing on with, “All we want to do over here is to be left alone for a while, to do real work, and let the results stand on their own later.”

Judging from the tone of the note, we may see artistic tools from Kai Krause in a few years that are even more intriguing than anything we ever saw from MetaCreations. In the interim, I have *Bryce 5* to create the settings where I love to play. Somewhere *unfassbar*—somewhere *inconceivable*. 🍷

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Eric Wenger (left, circa 1992) wrote his original fractal terrain-making software in Fortran on a Mac about ten years ago. He codenamed it D3 and didn't pay much attention to the user interface, not expecting it to be a commercial product. Back then it took a Quadra 700 three to four hours to render a 640 x 480 pixel image. Speedwise, not much has changed since then. But the user interface took a dramatic change when Eric met Kai Krause, and Bryce was born.





An exciting addition to Corel's Bryce 5 is a Lab for creating trees. Previously, people had to import 3D trees created in other programs or settle for 2D "cutouts". When I discovered that the Lab was capable of utilizing my own photos for leaves, I couldn't resist the obvious opportunity to make a Money Tree. The flying fifty-dollar bills above were scattered about using the Scatter filter from procreate's new KPT Effects. I've read warnings that duplicating trees to create a forest can drastically increase rendering time, but then again, most Bryce users are accustomed to overnight renders.