

Coloring inside the lines

Imaging Software
binuscan PhotoRetouch
Pro 1.0.6

by Ron Giddings

Parlez-vous Français? Or Spanish? or Swedish? When you open binuscan's PhotoRetouch Pro box and pull out the slick black fabric case of your software and calibration tools, you might not recognize that you've wandered into First Class. But you'll definitely figure it out on installation when you're asked to choose one of six languages for your new software. It's a fact that anyone who doesn't feel entirely comfortable working in English has to wait at least a year for even the biggest software titles to get translated. But we're on the international flight here!

Well, let's look out the window and see where we are. As the third of our three little instruction manuals suggests, we set our Color Management Preferences for binuscan RGB and binuscan Generic CMYK (that was easy) and open a file...

Oh, wait a minute, PhotoRetouch Pro won't recognize Photoshop files. Okay, then, a TIFF or JPEG will do...

THE VIEW FROM HERE

Boy, is this an uncluttered view! binuscan has managed to present tool icons that may be easily identified, a very complete info box, and a contextual options box—without burying the image area. For instance, when you're ready to use the brush tool, PRP changes the options box to brush size and opacity settings.

So, what is it that PhotoRetouch Pro does? It doesn't have layers. It won't open anything that has an alpha channel. Collage continues to be Photoshop's domain.

What PhotoRetouch Pro does so well can be found in its 'Process' menu.

Let's pick something simple, like Grayscale Conversion. A good-sized box opens with before and after images and eight different ways to convert! The manual

explains what Luma and Median are supposed to be, but who cares? You can see the effects right away and choose which black and white version matches your vision of the image.

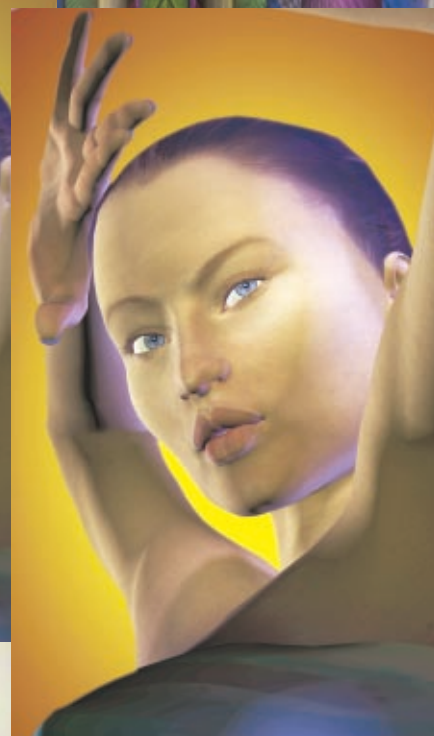
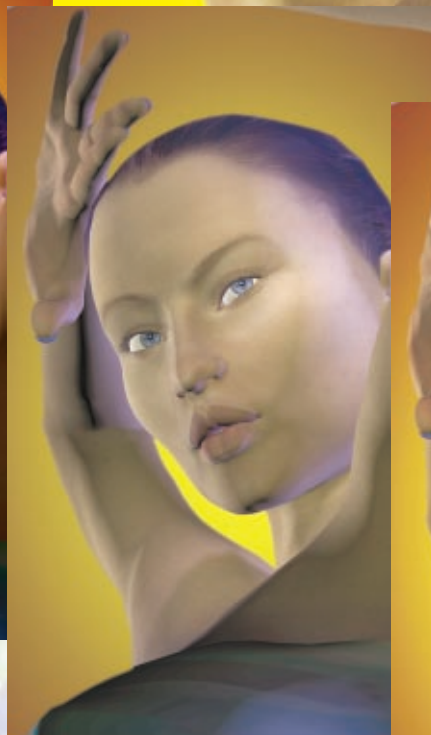
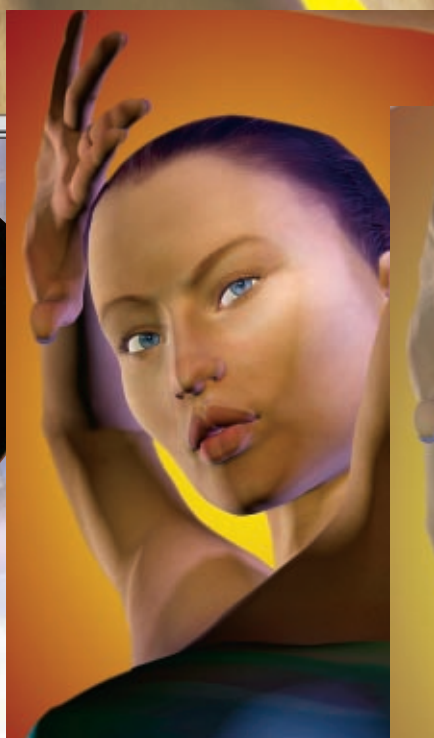
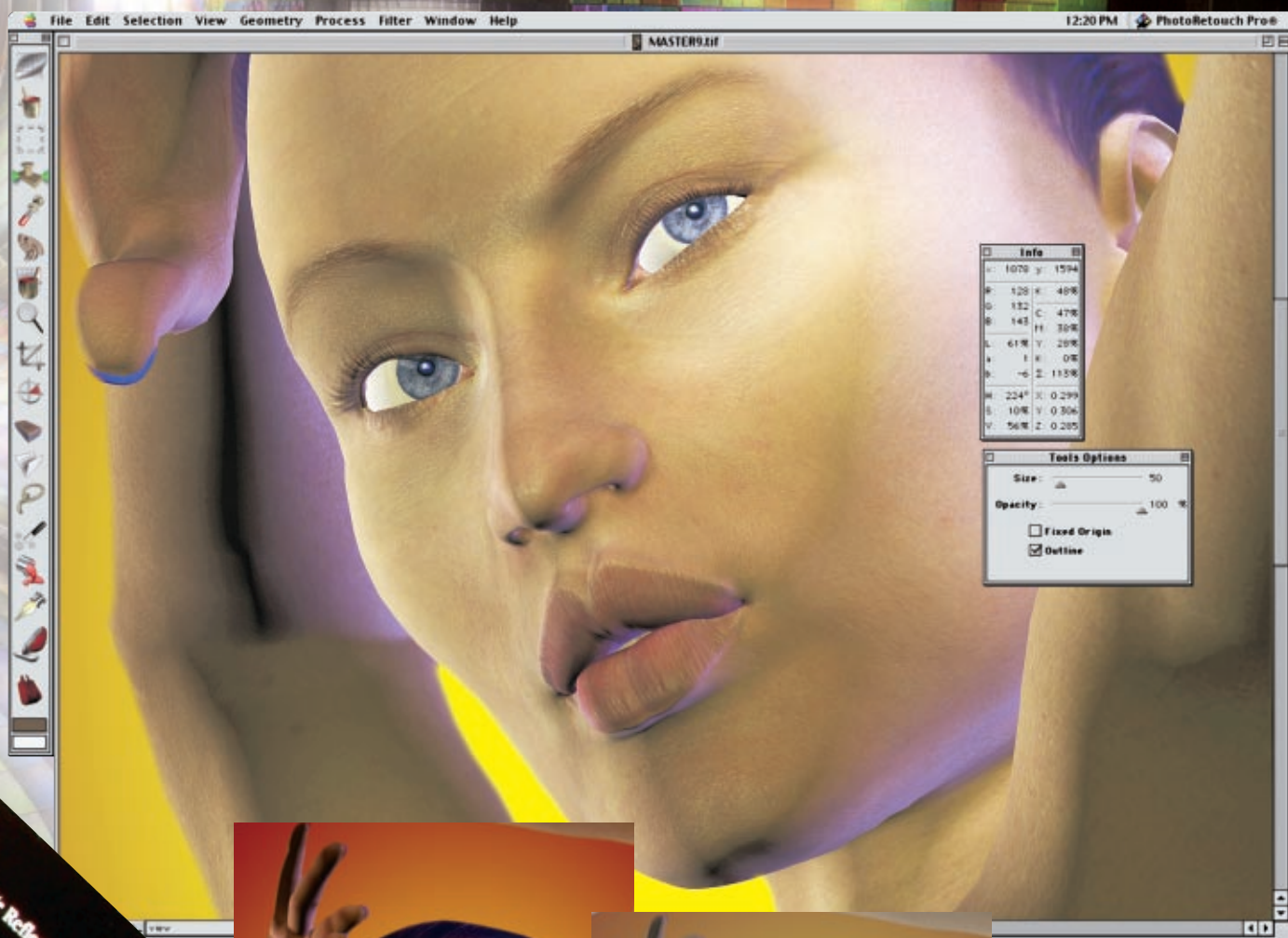
Let's check out another standard process—Brightness. PhotoRetouch Pro doesn't just shift all your pixel values by the same amount. It's based on gamma, so that you don't blow out the highlights to get good midtones. This same thinking has gone into Saturation as well. Once saturation has reached a printable maximum, that particular color stops increasing, letting you beef up the others as much as necessary. Contrast also compresses the extreme levels rather than letting them get clipped during printing. Pretty nifty.

binuscan's philosophy is to preserve as much of the original information as possible. In fact, PhotoRetouch Pro's gamma/curves process provides you with all the bells and whistles necessary to get the best out of 16-bit images—meaning you can get everything possible out of your scan or digital camera *before* converting to 8-bit. This philosophy is most evident in the crown jewel of its processes, RECO.

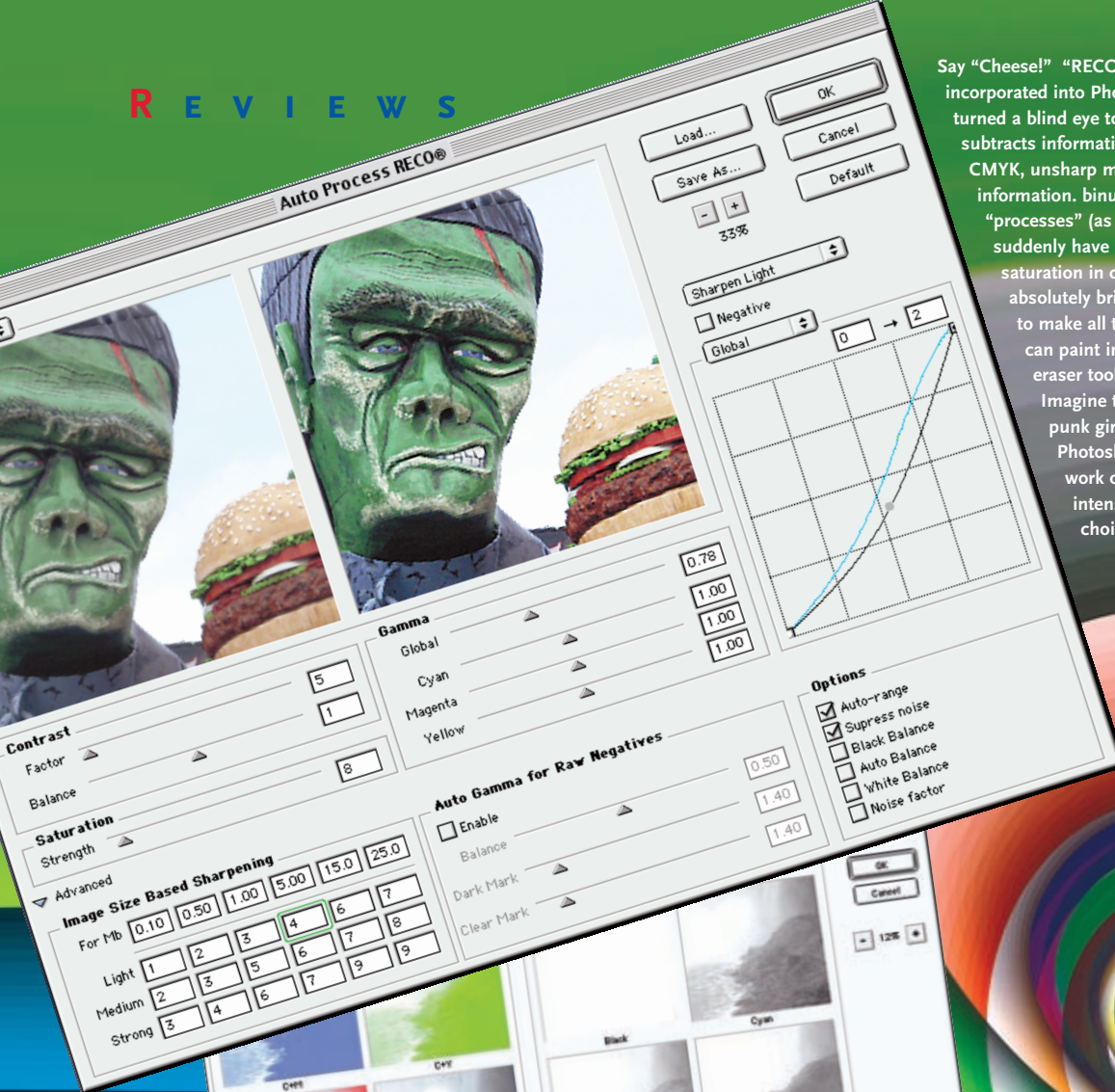
AUTO-PROCESS RECO

RECO technology analyzes and reorganizes an image's histogram levels to cover a density range optimized for the human eye. To that end, RECO can artificially "create" levels that were not originally captured to produce much smoother transitions in tone and color. This effect is apparent when using the default settings, but it becomes especially interesting when you make your own adjustments. This is because the RECO box contains almost every image-modifying control you could ever use, all in one place! That means all your modifications are applied at once, eliminating the gradual deterioration that occurs in images when applying changes in sequence. The results are often so stunning that one begins to wonder if these changes are really printable!

Is that all there is? The PhotoRetouch Pro interface (right) gives you an image area, a toolbar and two floating boxes. That's it! When you use any of the tools or "processes", the contextual box changes to provide you with options. If you choose a paintbrush, the contextual box displays brush size and opacity. Choosing the cropping tool gives you options to type in a shape or specific measurements.



In a world where images aren't necessarily coming from cameras any more, publishers converting 3D imagery to a printable format have discovered that Photoshop often produces dark and ruddy CMYK from 3D renderings. This is probably because there are no ColorSync profiles for digital art. PhotoRetouch Pro converts these images and then provides an array of tools with an eye to preserving as much of the original color as possible. The Poser image above left has been converted to CMYK using Photoshop, with normal settings for output; the image in the centre is binuscan's translation from RGB to CMYK. PRP's image seems rather flat, but when we apply the default settings of the RECO tool in RGB (right), we arrive at something much closer to what we expected.



Say "Cheese!" "RECO" is one of the more exciting technologies incorporated into PhotoRetouch Pro. We Photoshoppers have turned a blind eye to the fact that anything done in Photoshop subtracts information from the original image—convert to CMYK, unsharp mask...each step subtracts more information. binuscan's philosophy is to do all the "processes" (as it calls them) in one fell swoop. We suddenly have access to sharpening, gamma control and saturation in one palette that's easy to figure out. An absolutely brilliant idea that binuscan came up with was to make all these alterations work with a brush. One can paint in intensified color, for example, and use the eraser tool to undo the effects where necessary. Imagine that you want to heighten the color of the punk girl's hair but leave the skin tones alone. In Photoshop, you would have to select the hair and work on it separately; with PRP you paint in the intensification you need, having first made your choices in the preview palette.

You may not be able to tell your GCR from your UCR, but PhotoRetouch Pro certainly can. The Color Management menu (above) provides both color and black and white versions of the separations, which change when the GCR and UCR are adjusted, while the full color image remains exactly the same. PhotoRetouch Pro can also profile 16-bit RAW files from any digital camera. At the right is the ICC Profile dialog which shows the RAW file of PRP's color chart (left) and the 'target' version (right). Selecting one of three levels of accuracy gives you a profile of your camera that you can use with any RAW file from that camera.



Let me point out that although I've been talking mostly about overall effects that change the entire image, PRP has very capable selection tools to isolate the areas which you want to affect.

A BRUSH WITH GREATNESS

The most stunning feature in PhotoRetouch Pro has to be the fact that these processes (including RECO) can be painted onto the image with a brush! Choose the Paint Process tool and control-click on the image; up pops a selection of processes. Choose RECO, for example, and its floating window appears. Make your selections and click OK. In the options box appear your brush size, opacity and whether you want a cumulative


effect. Now start painting a process! This is genuine magic. If you 'color outside the lines', the eraser tool now erases only the process, like Photoshop's history brush.

PRO—AS IN PROFILE

By now, you're probably thinking, "But I can do most of that in Photoshop anyway." If you wanted to spend the time to do that, you'd be mostly correct. But then you have to get into PRP's third little manual, the color profiling section. binuscan's thinking about color is straightforward enough. Define the source, define the target, and PhotoRetouch Pro will create the ICC profile that gets you from one to

the other. Wow! I can understand that. It means I can take the color chart that comes with PhotoRetouch Pro and scan it or shoot it with a digital camera; then open Edit>Color Management>Create an ICC Profile menu and find the Target file.

Voila! The ICC profile derived from this process can be used for any future imaging done with that scanner or that camera. Mind you, with digital cameras the RAW file is what you want to profile. It's 16-bit color, and PRP was specifically made to play with that amount of data.

I found working in PhotoRetouch Pro's color space almost like getting a new monitor (or new glasses). Everything is familiar or easy to figure out but at the same time so much richer in the variety of choices and results. 

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Yummy as the colors are that our Olympus E-20 camera delivered, it was a real surprise to open the 16-bit RAW file in PhotoRetouch Pro and see how much more information there was to play with. The crayons on the left were a straight download from the E-20, while the ones on the right were processed through PRP's RECO process before being converted to CMYK.



BINUSCAN PHOTORETOUCH PRO 1.0

System Requirements

MACINTOSH ONLY
Mac OS 9 and higher, or OS X
141 MB hard disk space required
35 MB RAM (128 MB recommended)

Pricing

US\$749/~CDN\$1160

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