

Mechanically deboned

Graphics Software CorelDraw Graphics Suite 11

by Steve Aykroyd

At the outset, let me say that the obvious new features in CorelDraw Graphics Suite 11 will not seem earth-shattering to veteran Corel users, and may even mystify the uninitiated. Corel artists are used to the additions of new and innovative tools to the already powerful Corel suite and would expect no less. It's not the grandiosity of the new features that attracts, but the more subtle and intuitive, deeper changes that become apparent with use, and that will impress both new and old users alike.

FORGIVE MY RANT

Since articles on CorelDraw are not as prevalent as those on other design programs, I'll take this opportunity to mention some of the existing features as well as the new ones in order to encourage new users. Instead, I'll try to explain some of the features that have made me a confirmed CorelDraw user since version 3. The general speed, user-friendliness, intuitive interface, stability and reliability and what I like to call the malleable nature of the Corel suite of programs make the creation of ads, posters, brochures, magazines, and etceteras—dare I say it?—an enjoyable experience.

When I was asked to write this article, I was reminded of how little the typical Mac-based Adobe-indoctrinated designer knows about the wonders of Corel's suite of programs. It has been my experience that CorelDraw is regarded as (a) below serious consideration, (b) a toy drawing program for children, (c) some weird Canadian thing, or (d) a design option for PC-based losers.

Au contraire! The most commonly voiced opinions on CorelDraw used to be that there were too many options to

choose from and that the program was too difficult to decipher. I can't help but wonder what cars these people own (the word Amish springs to mind). I mean, who would want a vehicle with all those pesky extras like air conditioning or power steering? My all-time favourite

comes from an artist based somewhere in the Deep South. Although I normally enjoy the mellifluous tones produced by a southern belle, the content of our conversation still irks me.

We were discussing how best for her to prepare an ad for publication, and I mentioned that I was working on a PC and using Corel products to prepare my own ad work. As I was describing the various advantages, her condescending drawl oozed back with comments such as, "Oh no—You poor thing! What torture that must be for you!" and other grating platitudes. Always the true professional, I managed to control my temper and explained that the PCs we use (and CorelDraw in particular) operated much better in the frozen environs of our igloo office.

CORELDRAW IN ACTION

The creation of artwork should be a visual exercise rather than a mathematical equation. This tends to make the creative process a smooth, interactive, real-time experience rather than a boringly technical one. Compared to the buttock-clenching fear that is QuarkXPress and the stiff, math-major constraints of the Illustrator interface (which tend to give the design process a feel akin to laying bricks), Corel lets you spend more time on the creative aspects of your chosen project (did I mention it was payback time?).

Being of the old school of graphic design—where hands-on was the rule of thumb and utility of time of utmost importance—I find that the uncluttered workspace of Corel products and the speed with which the tools can be utilized dramatically reduces production time. For example, I use CorelDraw in the production

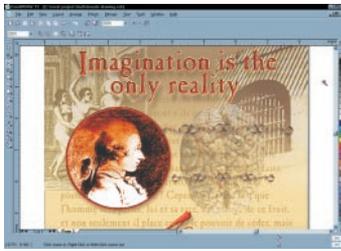
of all of my ad work. In just the past month, a co-worker and I (with some part-time help from a production assistant) were responsible for the creation of six magazines, including an 80-page, perfect-bound program. In addition, I created three posters, two T-shirt designs and a variety of in-house promotional devices.

CorelDraw has let me invoke what I refer to as "saving the salesman's ass hyper-speed" in ad production. In one instance, a neglected dealer ad for a major motorcycle company came close to being omitted from our current issue. The person in charge of production of said ad waited until the day we were going to press before informing the ad agency of its necessity. The agency informed the client of a two-week wait (one week to mix the mortar, one week for the acquisition of bricks—but I digress).

I was able to create a suitable ad within the hour, export a JPEG for their perusal, (which, I might add, was roundly admired) and prepare it for press that day. The ad is still running six months later, at a considerable profit. The salesman took the credit and the free lunch. As any artist will attest, this is not an isolated occurrence.

The Corel Graphics Suite includes CorelDraw, Photo-Paint, Corel's bitmap manipulation program, and R.A.V.E., a vector animation program. Also included is CorelTrace for tracing and converting bitmaps to vector objects (worth the price of admission) and Corel Capture for screen grabs. But what I'd like to emphasize here is the ability to make extensive bitmap adjustments in CorelDraw itself.

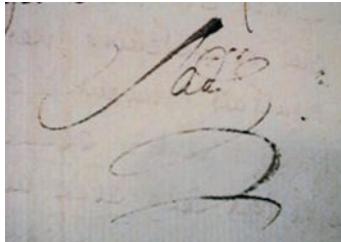
Say, for instance, that you have to produce a catalogue or brochure with innumerable bitmaps to illustrate the product. The client has supplied you with a disk of JPEGs in RGB and a massive blob of text. The ability to turn these rough JPEGs into printable TIFFs through resampling, color mode adjustment, and tone and contrast adjustments (as well as a myriad of artistic filters) can save you hours of work in a separate program. Trust me, I've done it (did I say that out loud?).



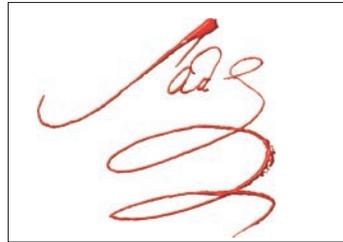
Normal view



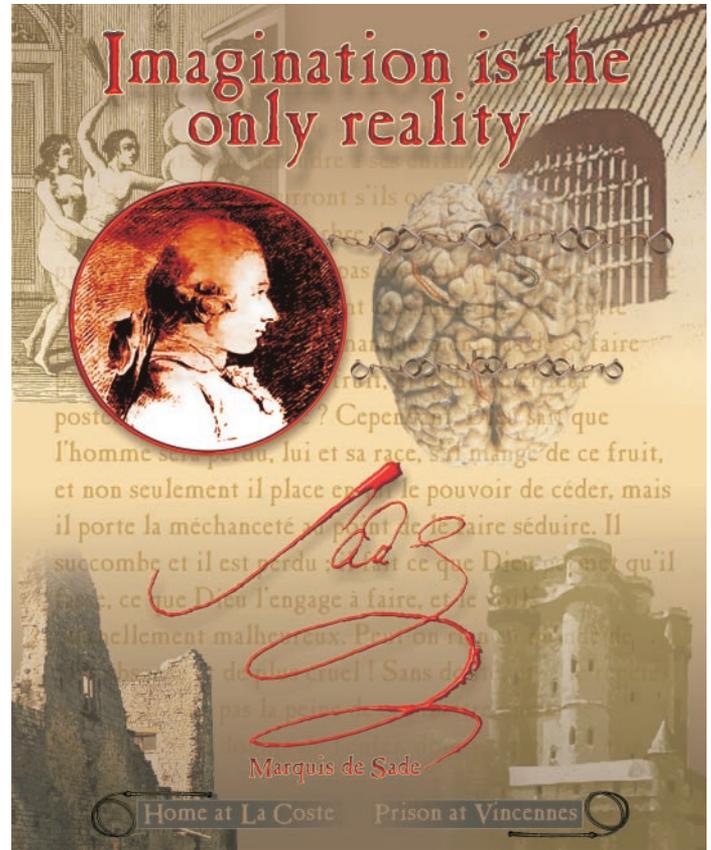
Wireframe view



Original de Sade signature



"Plasticized" de Sade signature



What's the Marquis de Sade doing in this fine, family-oriented magazine? I purposely did this drawing in the down and dirty style to which every all-suffering designer is eventually exposed. Imagine this—the client, when asked for artwork, replies “Use the stuff from our website,” or “Just scan my business card.” The horror. So in that vein I've used mostly rubbish gleaned from the web (with the exception of the brain and insects, which come from the set of discs that are part of the CorelDraw package). I wanted (among other things) to display the extent of bitmap editing options contained in Draw itself and the ease and variety of ways in which they can be deployed.

The drawing is done on one layer (though adding layers is always an option), and I used a variety of interactive tools available as standard

issue. Some of these I find indispensable. One that I use a lot is the wireframe option (in the view folder) which allows the artist to see through the drawing and pick out various objects for further alteration, thus avoiding the frustration of other objects being selected at the same time. It also makes things move faster when working on a large drawing since the view is in black and white (see illustration). The interactive transparency tool allows you to apply transparencies to any object vector, bitmap or text. The interactive drop shadow tool allows easy application of drop shadows to any object with a wide variety of options for color, opacity, feathering and the angle of one's imagined light source.

Although I made most of the alterations to the various elements in

the draw program, there are some instances where I used Photo-Paint (which can be seamlessly accessed from CorelDraw itself). For instance, de Sade's signature was particularly messy. I made adjustments to the contrast, cloned out extraneous type fragments that could be seen through the original document, then painted in faded lines with the clone and brush tools. Next I created a mask around the signature and applied red with the paint brush tool. The object

was then “plasticized” using the plastic filter in the texture folder, giving it that “bloody” appearance. Sharpen and serve. This operation took roughly ten minutes. The rest was achieved through the application of various degrees of transparency, the creation of duotones, masking tricks and some seriously sneaky monkey business known only to moi. The quote “Imagination is the only reality” was penned (or quilled?) by the Marquis de Sade himself.

Another strong point of the suite is its use of the context-sensitive property bar. Located at the top of the page, it changes as you change tools, displaying the options available with each tool. This leaves your workspace uncluttered and box-free, unlike other programs I could mention. The time saved by not having to move boxes out of your way adds up, and those who use smaller monitors will enjoy as much work space as available.

In my own work (magazine production), I use Corel products for ad work and cover designs as well as for anything fancy.

I also use Adobe InDesign 2 for the quick page layout functionality it offers. I was impressed by the improvements made over the initial version of InDesign (i.e. the option to actually print what you created) and the addition of transparency, gradient fills and drop shadow functions. An option to add a pen outline to text also reared its head. (But Corel does a more efficient job of this, allowing you to put the pen behind the fill, three different corner shapes, any line weight or color, etc.)

Why am I mentioning this? Because of the aforementioned box mania factor.

When working on a spread of pages in InDesign, the right hand page is badly encroached upon by these pesky devils. And while I'm at it, InDesign's color selection bar must have been created by a munchkin. It's so small as to make a color choice an irritatingly long process which usually involves much sampling with the eyedropper tool and finally dialing in CMYK values (but again, I digress).

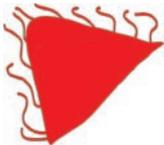
SO—WHAT'S NEW?
CorelDraw. CorelDraw's interactivity and its ease of object manipulation has always



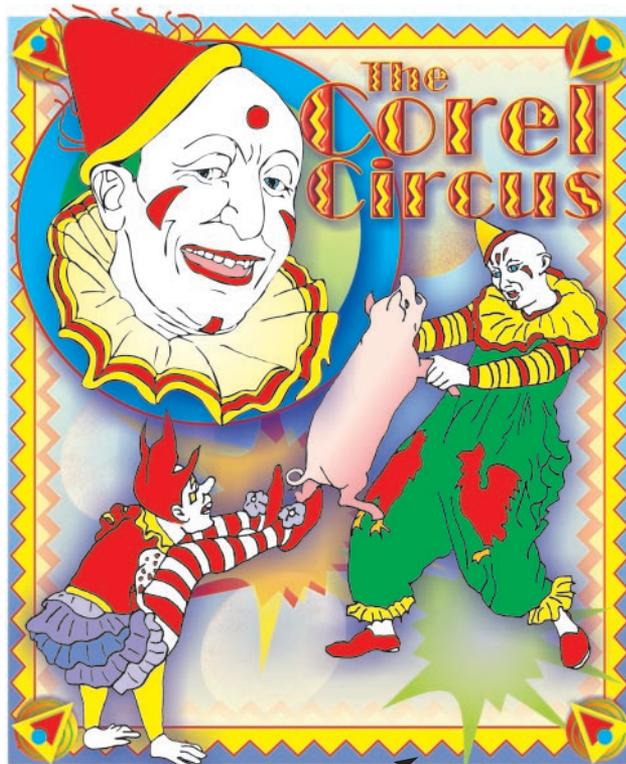
Art dealer clown scan of original sketch



Detail of symbol



Detail of hat showing use of Smudge tool



Jaggy border shows use of Roughen tool

allowed artists to make quick choices and revisions. Newly enhanced “snap to” functions give you more control over the placement and layout of graphics. It’s also easier to control the stickiness of snapping with a new threshold control. This allows you to set the distance between objects before they snap. As well, the object align and distribute functions have been beefed up.

Shaping tools have been greatly improved. In addition to the usual Weld, Trim and Intersect functions, the new shaping flyout includes such tools as Simplify (removes the overlaps of overlapping objects), Front Minus Back (keeps the object on top while trimming the objects behind), and (strangely) Back Minus Front (which lets you do the reverse).

And there’s a great new symbols creation function—common to both DRAW and R.A.V.E.—which lets you create objects, define them once, and reuse them any number of times, without significantly increasing the file size. This is particularly handy when creating R.A.V.E. vector animation files for the Internet. The symbols

are also independent and let you change size, position, rotation and transparency.

The addition of the Smudge brush and Roughen brush tools is tentatively of interest as they are pressure-sensitive as well as sensitive to tilt and bearing—probably best used with a design tablet. I had only limited success with a mouse (see the clown illustration). The Smudge brush allows you to smudge the edges out from the outline of an object with surprising smoothness (the object must be converted to curves). The Roughen brush, when applied to curved objects, gives a textured ripple effect to hard edges which I found decidedly hard to control. These brushes work on both simple and compound paths.

Something I found a little more exciting was the inclusion of new three-point drawing tools. These allow you to accurately and quickly create and position angled or slanted shapes. The ellipse and rectangle tools operate by click-and-drag along the centre line to determine size and clicking again to determine height. The three-point curve tool enables quick

This illustration was created using the Draw program, and consists entirely of vector elements except for the type saying The Corel Circus which is a bitmap utilizing the “plasticized” effect I mentioned earlier. The main elements—the clowns—were adapted from an old poster extolling the “Ringling Brothers Circus, Army of 50 Clowns.” (I thought of calling it Adobe’s Army of 50 Clowns but decided that would just be plain mean). I took some liberties and did a pencil sketch by hand of the characters I wanted to use (coincidentally, the large clown looks uncannily like an art dealer I used to do business with), then scanned them directly into Photo Paint. Here I cleaned them up and imported them into Draw. From Draw I accessed Corel Trace from the bitmap options folder and converted the bitmaps to vector objects. By ungrouping the result I was able to add the simple color scheme by selecting the various components that the clowns are comprised of, adding color from the color samples, and regrouping them when finished. I know that somewhere there’s a reader saying, “This looks like something my kid could do,” and they’d be right. That’s part of what I’m trying to illustrate here—that the program can be used in creative ways that don’t involve endless fiddling with a series of numbers to create the effect wanted and that experimentation with the real-time interactivity of CorelDraw allows the artist more time to be creative. That’s not to say that if specific color or other attributes are warranted they cannot be obtained. CorelDraw contains the sophistication of its competitors presented in a user-friendlier manner. It doesn’t have to be difficult to achieve greatness. (Oooooooh!)

I have tried to use as many of the new drawing features as I could in this drawing, including the pressure-sensitive Smudge and Roughen tools (sounds like a pair of cartoon characters) the new and improved line drawing tools, and the new symbols creation tool (see illustrations), as well as the improved color palette options.

curved segments and would be particularly useful when creating a path for text to follow when copying the curve of an existing shape, such as a logo.

New Polyline and Pen tools make for easier and smoother creation of complex objects. The Polyline tool allows clicking and dragging to make alternately straight or curved lines. The Pen tool is incredibly smooth; it works with a minimum of nodes and handles like a simpler version of the Bezier tool.

Text features have not been ignored. You now have the option to keep or discard font-formatting displays. For instance, you can discard overzealous formatting when importing from another application and reformat from scratch. But my personal favourite is the ability to convert para-

graph text to curves while maintaining paragraph formatting such as bullets, justification and drop caps. This will allow for greater cross-platform sharing of drawings since fonts will not be an issue.

Layers in a Corel drawing can now be preserved when exporting to an Adobe Photoshop or Corel Photo-Paint file. Corel lets you choose a transparent background when exporting images—again, allowing for greater cross-platform sharing.

PDF creation has been greatly enhanced; CorelDraw supports PDF/X and Adobe Acrobat 5.0. The program supports symbols, all transparency types and mesh fills and will decrease PDF file sizes. I find it easier to use than its Adobe brethren.

When done with a particularly arduous drawing which you expect to repeat with revisions in the future, Corel allows you to save application defaults, including fonts and colors and application settings such as nudge and so on.

Photo-Paint. Photo-Paint has also been tweaked, making for high-end functionality. The interface has been streamlined and more web functions have been added.

Red-eye removal has been improved over the previous version, and unless you're doing work on a piece about Satan, it works well.

However, a big disappointment was the new Cutout masking tool—I suspect it's a simplified version of the excellent Corel Knockout. A major portion of my work involves the use of cutouts—I've made millions of them. I was hoping that this was the magic tool that I would use to save myself hours of work and I spent much time and effort trying to make it work. Alas, 'twas not to be. Was I doing it wrong? In a word, no.

At first glance, Cutout masking seems deceptively simple. Draw a rough line around the area you wish to cut out (the window in which it is displayed is on the smallish side), fill the rest of the object with the fill tool, and apply. The results are a little weird, to put it mildly (see illustration). To be fair, I can see where a person could use this function in the context of



My dog suggested I use this photo to demonstrate the Cutout tool.



Cutout using freehand mask tool.



Cutout using new Cutout mask tool. Note the bizarre edge rendering.

making an online catalogue or in some other situation where a lot of cutouts are required at low res.

Artists who do a lot of web work will be pleased with the addition of the new Image Slicing tool, the Rollover creator and the enhanced web image optimizer. The Image Slicer (no, it's not from K-Tel) allows you to slice images into several smaller files to increase the speed at which graphics-intensive web pages load into a browser. You can also use sliced images as web buttons or rollovers.

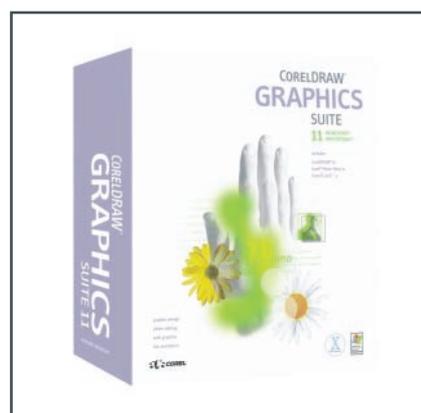
Rollovers feature three states: normal, over and down. You can also attach sound to them and they can be previewed in the new Rollover Docker window.

The image optimizer allows you to maintain image quality while reducing image file size. You can apply it to sliced images and save your settings to be reused.

Photo-Paint supports JPEG 2000, which allows for high compression with minimal loss of image quality. JPEG 2000 also allows the use of masks to change the compression rates in different parts of the same image.

EXIF file support included in Photo-Paint allows digital camera users to maintain additional information about the camera used when saving JPEG files.

My favourite features also include a new spot filter effect, which can be used to simulate depth of field; the enhanced lens flare effect to give boring photos a false sense of immediacy; and enhanced lighting effects that can control location, color and aperture. The Dust and Scratch re-



CORELDRAW GRAPHICS SUITE 11

System Requirements

For Macintosh

- Mac OS 10.1
- Power Mac G3 or higher
- 128 MB RAM
- 1024x768 screen resolution
- 250 MB hard disk space

For Windows

- Windows 98, Windows NT 4.0, Windows Me, Windows 2000, Windows XP
- Pentium II, 200MHz or greater
- 64 MB RAM minimum
- 128 MB RAM recommended (required for Windows XP)
- 1024x768 screen resolution
- 200 MB hard disk space

Pricing

Suggested list US\$528

Corel Corporation
Web www.corel.com



Your **Total**

Internet

Service Provider

- golden.net — High Speed Internet Access
- nexuss.com — Web Design/Development
- gcsgroup.net — Corporate Solutions

Division's of
Golden Triangle
On Line Inc.

519.576.3334
1.800.613.6045

www.golden.net



Tie dye meets power tie.

It's business, but not as usual. That's because our talent is experienced in the bottom-line realities of marketing and design. Call us today for a perfect fit that meets your deadline and improves your bottom line.

© The Creative Group.



A Robert Half International Company

888.846.1668 | creativegroup.com

R E V I E W S

mover effect has been improved; it can help restore that old picture of mom or repair a picture of a loved one that was crumpled up and thrown into a corner of the room in a fit of pique.

R.A.V.E. Although I have not had time to fully explore the intricacies of R.A.V.E. (Real Animated Vector Effects), I have been able to (in my dwindling spare time) create sophomorically humorous little movies, usually involving images of one or more salespeople. That's not to say that this program is in any way inferior to its more recognized brothers. It works on the same premise as Macromedia Flash—and in fact exports files in Flash format—but has the familiar look of your other Corel programs.

Improvements include support for symbol use, allowing for reductions in finished file sizes. The option to export text as text without converting to curves also decreases file sizes. 3D extrusions can now be tweened, including light sources, color and intensity, which will allow you to create more realistic 3D rotations to add convincing elements of depth and dimension to your animations. With the addition of a Macromedia Flash preview option you can now test playback and ensure that what you intended is what you get.

I LIKE IT, I USE IT

I could go on forever extolling the virtues of the Corel Graphics Suite but instead I'll try to wrap up with a few choice words for the uninitiated—and especially for the young designer who is still open to logical options.

The CorelDraw Graphic Suite is easy to use. It's as powerful as anything out there, if not more so. It's inexpensive when you consider what it would cost to buy individual programs available from other sources. Programs come with an extensive set of fonts, clip art, photos, web objects, high res photos, comprehensive instruction manuals and a lay-flat catalogue of your digital content. You can make it look like Illustrator (although I'm not sure why you would). And it works on a Mac!

Draw contains features still on the wish lists of other programs' users, including layers and extrusions with lighting settings. (As an interesting aside, I recently spoke with a young artist who is new to the game and who was complaining about the expense he was incurring in buying all the programs he needed, as well as the daunting price of individual type fonts and clip art. When I explained what he would have received in the Corel package he turned an unsightly greenish tint. Where's my cheque, Corel?)

This version of Corel is decidedly the best to date. For those thinking of a change or for someone who is new to computer design, open to new ideas and on a budget, this is the one for you. As I recently overheard one wag exclaim (I believe it was me): the old grey industry standard just ain't what she used to be. ☺

Steve Aykroyd is lead designer and production manager for Performance Publications of Toronto and also does freelance work for filthy lucre. He can be reached at steve@prnmag.com.