



Yule be lucky...

Last year, Gordon Laing made his Christmas wishes known. Some came true, some didn't. Here, he reviews the year gone by and, ever hopeful, makes up his present list for 1997.

Ho ho ho! It's Christmas time again in the festive land of graphics and DTP. It's funny that the world seems divided into those who love Christmas but hate New Year, or vice-versa. I definitely fall into the former category, lapping up all that is symbolic in the materialistic Western interpretation.

A couple of years ago, when I was editing this Hands On section, I thought it would be a laugh to have a Christmas wish and rant session every year. Fortunately, for me anyway, Hands On's current captain, Eleanor Turton-Hill, has decided to continue with this tradition. So here goes.

Quark and Adobe

It's been an eventful and quite satisfying year in the world of graphics and desktop publishing. This time last year, Windows 95 was still a fresh and unknown beast, with little native software. Today, we are of course flooded with Windows 95- and NT4-ready products. Sadly, 1996 has not seen an upgrade of two major applications, Quark XPress and Adobe Illustrator, so my joint number-one rant starts here.

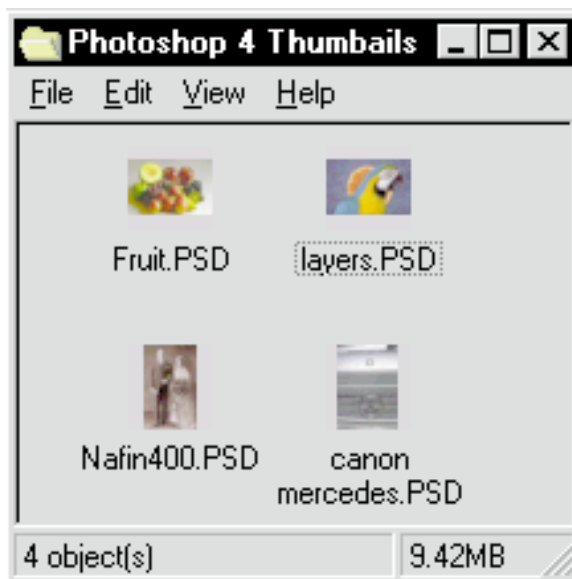
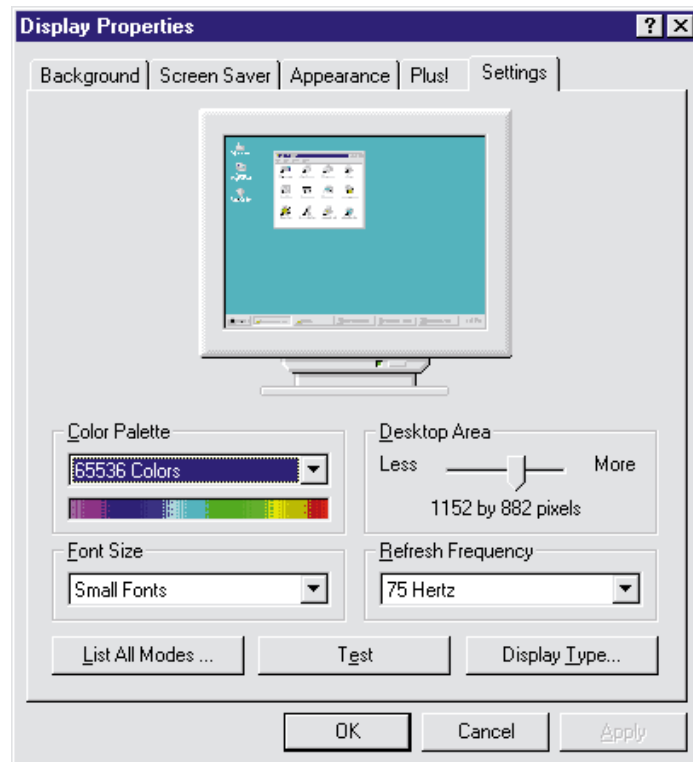
XPress 4 is supposedly on its way yet Quark doesn't seem to be in any hurry. After upgrading to Windows 95, I had to

download several updates to get XPress 3.3 working correctly on my system; I'm currently on XPress 3.32 revision 3 but printing is not always 100 percent reliable. Interestingly, Quark dropped development of its fabled image editing package, XPosure, but is poised to release Immedia, its internet and multimedia authoring tool. However, the PC Immedia won't be released until well into 1997.

Quark had better watch out, since Adobe's latest PageMaker 6.5 is beginning to look attractive on both platforms. However, Adobe is the target of what is becoming an annual rant. It's none other

Left Two wishes come true: Windows NT 4's display control panel, complete with a screen refresh rate box for a Matrox Millennium card. Let's hope 95 has this facility soon

Below Preview icons for graphics files created by Photoshop 4 under Windows 95. Great news for native PSD files in the beta



Font of the Month

Pablo Plain
 ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
 abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyzß&1234567890

Monotype has launched a package of three handwriting fonts. Until 31st December 1996, you can buy all three for £45 and even have a cool T-shirt thrown into the bargain. Pablo was created by British designer Trevor Pettit, and is based on the signature of Pablo Picasso.

than Illustrator, which bounds ahead on the Mac but hasn't had a Windows upgrade for years. When I meet Adobe, I comment on how much I admire the company for releasing cross-platform versions of its products almost simultaneously, then gape dumbstruck as Illustrator stumbles uncomfortably into the conversation.

There's still no news to tell, but then, I've always thought FreeHand is a far superior product. Incidentally, FreeHand Graphics Studio 7 is due for release by the end of 1996, along with CorelDraw 7 — a battle of the heavyweight suites we look forward to reviewing soon.

In last January's Graphics & DTP column, I yearned for thumbnail preview icons for graphics files under Windows 95, in the same way that Photoshop generates them on the Macintosh. A few months later my wish was kind of granted by HiJaak 95, which certainly fulfilled the job of creating the icons but, sadly, slowed my PC to a standstill. So I removed it and racked my brains for the answer.

The solution may have arrived in the form of Photoshop 4, which generates thumbnail icons, but only for its native PSD file format on the beta copy — fingers crossed it will work on all file formats when the final is released by the end of 1996.

Photoshop 4 is another winner, despite still not offering some means by which you can quickly work on a low-resolution preview image, record the actions, then have the computer laboriously apply them to the high-resolution original while you're off doing something far more interesting instead.

Particularly welcome, though, is the new Navigation palette, which is great for finding your way around. See last month's review for more details.

Fonts in fashion

Judging by the amount of response I get each time I write about them, fonts are the in thing this year. Regular readers will be pleased to see the return of this column's "Font of the Month", following its two-month absence.

Mid-year I got quite excited about the prospect of OpenType ending the Type-1 versus TrueType font format wars, but sadly, I've heard nothing since.

Web developments have meant more typography on the internet, but this still tends to be displayed as graphics. We'll have to wait and see what happens here.

In the meantime, Adobe released ATM Deluxe which, along with cunning font management, also smooths the outlines of on-screen Type-1 fonts, using similar anti-aliasing techniques to those employed by Microsoft's Plus Pack for TrueType fonts under Windows 95.

Digital doings

1996 has seen a massive commitment by the industry to digital cameras and electronic imaging as a whole. Clearly, someone has come up with enough market research to believe that in 1997, every home computer user will rush out, take digital pictures, scan existing ones, remove unsightly blemishes on friends and relatives, paint moustaches on auntie, and output these masterpieces on colour printers.

The hardware has already started to arrive: everyone and his uncle are releasing digital cameras, while colour inkjet printers are becoming increasingly adept at outputting photographic-quality images. Sony has even announced a mini dye sublimation device for genuinely glossy prints. You want to scan existing pictures? Colour flatbeds are dropping in price, and

p310 >



Is it a heavenly usherette, or is he just doing the washing up? No; it's my Christmas card this year. I'm supposed to be an angelic DJ, spinning the righteous tunes! I've always wanted to do a stained glass window and this year toured the local places of worship for inspiration. In the end I opted not to simulate real lead, but drew heavy black lines on a sheet of paper, then scanned it in line-art mode. The colours are, in fact, real stained glass scans after heavy recolouring and manipulation in Photoshop. I selected the scans in one window, the blank areas in my original, and used Paste Into to fill. I scanned a five-year-old photo (hence the full head of hair!), upped the contrast, then applied the Photocopy filter from Adobe Gallery Effects. A little retouching here and there, and I was finished!

some manufacturers are releasing mini print scanners just for this job (see Kodak's Snapshot Photo Scanner 1, reviewed in this month's First Impressions).

Hardware for graphics users

One of the greatest but most infuriating things about the computer industry is the rate at which hardware drops in price. The good news is that today, you can buy a lot of PC for little cash. But that's bad news for anyone who bought last month, or is too

paranoid to make the commitment. This is an issue for graphics users, who often need some serious equipment to do the job.

Santa delivered the goods last year in terms of hardware: 1996 saw RAM halve in price. So, vulture-like, I swooped down for the kill. I now have 32Mb at work and 48Mb at home which, although it may sound slightly over the top, ended up costing me very little. I've always recommended the upgrade from 8Mb to 16Mb, but now equally strongly endorse moving up to

32Mb and beyond. Windows 95 under 32Mb is excellent, particularly if you're using Photoshop and layers. This amount is also the ideal starting point for Windows NT 4 Workstation, about which I'll be writing more in the future.

Big bugbear

Actually, I'm reminded of one enormous bugbear which is the basis of my ultimate wish to Santa: an obvious way of altering the screen refresh rate from Windows 95's display control panel.

This is generally up to the graphics card manufacturer who should write it into the driver, yet there are surprisingly few. Those that do offer the facility also tend to hide it away, which is unforgivable. Interestingly, when installing NT 4, the system recognised a Matrox Millennium card and installed Microsoft's own driver, complete with refresh rate control — the way it should be.

Dear Santa...

My Christmas wishes this year:

1. I'd like to see RAM costs fall again.
2. In an attempt to ban flickering displays, I'd like to see refresh rates easily accessed from the display control panel.
3. Inkjets are improving, but I wish for true photographic quality.
4. Once and for all, I'd like preview thumbnails for graphics file icons in Windows 95 and NT 4.
5. I also wish scanner advertisers would stop confusing buyers with outrageous interpolated resolution claims.
6. Illustrator for Windows, and better use of Windows 95 specifics (recent file lists, right-clicks, etc) for other graphics applications like FreeHand and XPress.
7. How about low-priced, decent digital cameras to really drive the imaging revolution — a great Christmas gadget.
8. And on Christmas morning, every stocking should have an unlocked copy of Adobe's comprehensive Type CD. Now that *would* be a dream come true.



PCW Contacts

Merry Christmas everyone! If you'd like to send any festive greetings, please email me at gordon@vnu.co.uk

FontWorks 0171 490 5390
Monotype 0800 371242