eview by Erik J. Barzeski

Title: Furbo Filters (Designer/Webmaster)
Version: Designer — 2.0, Webmaster — 1.0
Developer: Craig Hockenberry
Price: $39.00 for each set
Contact Info: http://www.furbo-filters.com/
Genre: Adobe Photoshop™ plug-in
Requirements: Photoshop 3.x/4.x and enough power to run it

ntroduction and Notes

From the Furbo Filters website comes this explanation:
Furbo Filters are a series of Photoshop plug-ins that allow you to automate design tasks, generate special effects, and enable you to churn out cross-platform, highly-transportable graphics in Photoshop and compatible image editors. The Furbo Designer Pack creates dazzling visual effects, from psychedelic patterns to new levels of embossing. The Furbo Webmaster Series does the grunt work for website designers, creating small cross-platform files that fly across the slowest modem.

This review will be a little bit different. Because I am reviewing both the Designer and Webmaster series, with four and three plug-ins respectively, I have been forced to review the entire package and each separate filter. I have attempted to outline the information as clearly as I can. I have also placed as many sample graphics as possible, but I ask you to realize that about 1,000 times as many effects can be created as can be displayed here. Visit the Furbo website for more sample graphics. Also feel free to check out this free desktop picture, created largely with Furbo Filters: http://applewizards.net/furbo/desktop.jpg (336K).

Summary comments will appear at the end of this review.

esigner Pack

Furbo's Designer Pack contains four plug-ins, listed
nd reviewed below. Basically, if you have an image
that needs one final touch to stand out, one of these
filters may be your best choice.

All graphics in this section have been modified using the image above
(hereafter called "Stock Image") — note how ugly this image looks before
applying any filters. For the most part, the filters' default values were used,
though it should be noted that these could easily be changed to create
thousands of different effects.

Boss Emboss
his filter attempts to better Photoshop's standard
emboss filter. Know what? It does, hands down. The
Boss Emboss dialog box features sliders to allow
adjustment for the amount and height of the embossing. It allows you to set
the angle at which the embossing is applied, which color (greyscale, blue,
red, etc.) to base the embossing on, and whether to use a texture map that
can darken the image, lighten the image, or leave the brightness relatively
untouched. A preview window shows you what your current settings will
produce. I've used this plug-in to create realistic-looking mountain ranges
textures and many other things. This filter has little or no effect on text — I
would recommend various other third-party plugins to achieve text
embossing.

Organic Edges
rganic Edges contains three sub-filters, as I will call
them — Blurry Edges, Thin Edges, and Chrome Edges.
Shown here are Thin Edges (top) and Chrome Edges
(bottom). The dialog box representing this plug-in
gain allows for much customization. It includes
smoother and tweaker sliders, texture map options,
methods of applying edges (Phong, Sine, Puddles, etc.)
and a few other things. Again the preview window allows you to look over
your filter effects ahead of time. As you can see by the two graphics above,
the results can be varied greatly by simply switching your choice of sub-
filter. The PlusMaker/Maximizer title graphic in this issue was created in
part using this filter.

Vibrant Patterns
es they are! For those of you with a need for great
patterns, this filter can easily come to your rescue.
Whether you need patterns for web pages, Power-
Point presentations, or your company letterhead (Jerry Garcia, Inc,
anyone?), this filter's for you. The dialog box gives you, oh, about 9 trillion
possibilities, and I kid you not. It allows you to create and modify three
layers of "patternability," including their sharpness, color, density, etc. You
can also mirror your patterns, change the hue and color, and perform some
other functions. As with the other filters, all changes are reflected
immediately in a preview window. Note that this graphic was not created
using the Stock Image.

Wavy Color
his filter takes the colors that are already present in
the image and, well, messes 'em up! Suppose you had
a picture of Elisabeth Shue that you wanted to use on
your "I Love Elisabeth Shue" website. You could run her pretty face through
Wavy Color and see what you'd get. Once again, the options present in the
dialog box are many in number and simple in concept. You can set custom
densities, colors, and hues, or you can allow the filter to randomly set them
for you. This provides fun for hours! Okay, not really, but it is kind of neat to
run graphics through it and see what comes out. Some of the results are
quite impressive.

Webmaster Series

The Webmaster Series attempts to make the creation of web graphics easier
and more rewarding by performing various tasks relating to color, file type,
and many other things. As the webmaster of Apple Wizards and as CEO and
President of my own web design firm, you can rest assured that these filters
were put through their paces!

Browser Preview
This filter is superb. I honestly feel as though it could be sold for $40 (or
more) itself. If you are a web designer and you have only $50 to spend, buy
this filter and spend the other $10 on Cherry Coke. This plug-in shows you a
simulation of your graphic on a Mac or Windows machine, and the Windows
viewing option can be adjusted for screen darkness (gamma correction) as
well. Browser Preview can show you how your file would look as a GIF with
any palette (web-safe, Mac, Windows, Navigator). It can show your images
as a JPEG at all levels (1-10) of compression. It displays approximate file

size for each format. It can dither your graphic. It slices, it dices, it does it all. After you figure out what format you'd like to save your graphic in, it can apply effects to bring the color table to match your selected option. I rarely do this — I tend to use it simply to determine whether to save an image as a GIF or a JPEG (and at what compression level) — but that doesn't mean it's useless. I'm sure many others could make use of this facet. Below is a graphic depicting part of the Browser Preview plug-in.

eb Posterize

In a world with many web-safe GIF preparation tools, this one stands out for a few reasons. This filter allows you to adjust colors and balances, saturation, brightness, contrast, color inversion, and much more. The cool thing is that all affects applied to the image are done in web-safe colors. All of them. Your image will be non-dithering and darn small. This allows you to work with your image in web-safe colors from the beginning rather than trying to reduce it in the end. So, you have two options — the Furbo way or the normal way. Which is easier? Furbo. Which is better? Furbo. Which is more fun to say? Furbo.

Web Scrubber

As far as I'm concerned, this one's dead weight. You know what else? It doesn't matter. From the manual:

Sometimes a little dithering in the browser can improve the quality of your image. But how do you control which areas get dithered and which areas don't? Try scrubbing your image. Colors that are nearly Web Safe are shifted so that they use one of the 216 colors. Colors that aren't close to being Web Safe are left alone to dither when displayed in the browser.

I never found a true use for this plug-in. Images that made bad GIFs were usually saved as JPEGs based on results in Browser Preview. I'm sure that other people may be able to use this filter, but I couldn't and didn't.

aults

Listed among the "Known Problems" in the documentation is that the previews can not zoom. Yep, this is a problem, sometimes... It's not often that I found myself wishing for a zoom function, but because so many other filters have them, I'd come to expect that a zoom function would be there

when I needed it.

Another problem is that a filter can only be applied to one layer. This is a fairly large problem when I'm working on a multi-layered graphic, especially when implementing Browser Preview. I must first save the file as a different name (so I don't lose my layers) and combine the layers into a single layer before using any of the filters, especially the Webmaster series. It's a hassle that I shouldn't have to deal with, a hassle that a simple "all layers" checkbox could alleviate.

xtras

There are some other things that make Furbo Filters a top notch set of Photoshop plug-ins. Each of the below contributes a great deal to making these Furbo Filters a well-rounded set of tools

Help — From within any filter's dialog box, a little "i" icon gives you immediate access to a simple help screen that exlains what can be done with the filter. There's no need to guess or dig around your hard drive in search of the manual.
The Manual — Nice segue, huh? At any rate, the documentation included with the Furbo Filters is top-notch. Because of the black background, the manuals can't be printed unless you want to waste a LOT of ink. No biggie — the built-in help takes care of that. The manuals succeed in providing a basis for the use of each filter as well as explaing some other things. They are very handy and informative.
Chrome Actions — Recently released are a set of free
ctions. For those of you that are afraid of Photoshop
actions, don't be. These actions are simple to use with
the Designer Pack and produce some great-looking results,
including the effect (Wet Chrome I) used in the graphic
at right.

onclusion

I usually don't say it, but for $40, you can't go wrong. The few faults are heavily outweighed by the benefits of both Furbo Filter Packs. I recommend them to anyone that knows how to use Photoshop beyond smudging pictures of their sister to make her look like an alien. They will increase your options and help you to create smaller graphics for use on the Internet. What else

could you want?

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