

hotoTools 3.0.2

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Pros: Great effects in minutes for Adobe Photoshop 4.0 - 5.0

Cons: PowerMac only

Categories: PhotoShop plug-in

Developer: 30 Day demos and freeware can be had from www.Extensis.com or from their ftp folder

Phototools 3.0.2 by Extensis for the Power Mac is simply the coolest design software I know. I'll give you some of the techie reasons why no serious designer should be without it below, but suffice to say that if Adobe Photoshop is the engine then Phototools is the body - I find it unthinkable these days to imagine doing any graphics work without it. I gave a friend my Mac computer to play with for five minutes - he owned an antique copy of Photoshop but had never seen Phototools before - This is what he produced:

his first graphic including text actually took about forty five seconds though he claimed it took two minutes - and his second I timed at ninety seconds though he again claimed a further two minutes.

or anyone who owns Photoshop 4.0 this software is a 10/10 must have - proud Owners of Photoshop 5.0 may find that some of the features are theoretically producable in the Extensis Phototool software so I'd rate it a 9/10 for them.

I stepped in, and with my friend timing me, I created this third button in three minutes including the shadow effect.

ove or despise my instant button, the point is that several years back the labour involved in the above would have involved charging a client for hours of labour - now (shhh...!), it's as easy as falling off a log. Because Extensis cleverly integrates Phototools into the standard Photoshop plugin interfaces there is no new learning curve either. PhotoTools 3.0 contains a collection of texture making, button building, custom bevelling, shadow casting and other effects generation tools, that are completely essential to getting the best out of Photoshop. They work equally well for both Web and print design.

For those already familiar with version two of Phototools, major enhancements in 3.0 include multiple light sources in PhotoCastShadow and textured surfaces in PhotoButton but more significantly includes three new components - PhotoTexture, PhotoAnimator and PhotoGroove and the upgrade is a measly \$49.95 if buying from the States (and why not).

PhotoTexture can create an almost infinite variety of textures - I found myself making lots of hippy-dippy, gloopy, transparent indentations for some reason. Nice.

PhotoAnimator, a gif animation application, often overlooked in this package as it sits in a separate folder. With automatic optimisation, to ensure smallish file sizes, it generates both frames and transitions for animated GIFs. It also provides a number of useful special effects. I'm a fan of GIF Builder for its old fashioned crude simplicity, so it might be hard to drag me away but this little extra application might well be worth further investigation.

PhotoGroove. This allows you to create bevelled effects but has a customisable shape Editor so you can create less cliched bevel effects. It also sports some unique surfaces euphemistically called rubber, plastic, metal and chrome. The effects are not always

going to be as described. Though not as unpredictable as say Bryce, or Blade Pro, features in general might behave slightly differently than you would expect - but you'll find sufficient variation to provide something fairly fresh and unique and quickly .

PhotoCastShadow creates single or multiple shadows from more than one light source if required - very quick and simple to use.

PhotoButton is my favourite - instant "Ahh" value - perfect for beginners and pro's alike. The Extensis blurb on this is essentially correct it says "The ultimate button maker is now even better with custom button shapes, user defined bevels, textured surfaces and bump maps. Design just one perfect button, or dozens all at once." To tell the truth I've not been able to master some colour gremlins that occur when I try to make multiple buttons - but it's still a lifesaver for making customised rollovers.

PhotoBars offer access to Photoshop commands in floating customizable button bars... Not strictly necessary if you are already familiar with Photoshop's layout - but nice to have the choice.

PhotoGlow, PhotoEmboss and PhotoBevel are three more cool effects to complete the package.

Tons of neat features but to mention just one, Pop-up Web Safe Color Palette is handy - Instead of opening up a color-picker dialog box that hides your effects, you have instant access to Web safe colors via an innovative pop-up color palette. This allows you to stay in the preview area and to have your color choice applied to the effect in real time. Effects are processed in the background as you work in the preview to maximize performance and minimize apply times. Multiple Undo/Redo and Reset, as you would expect, applies.

PhotoTools 3.0 is extensively documented complete with feature explanations, help and tutorials, but like all the really classic Mac applications is so easy to use, that most of the time, if not all, you won't need a manual. With a sensible price point of less than \$150 US, this is the most versatile collection of text-editing, button-building, shadow-casting Adobe Photoshop plug-ins available for Web or print design. Full marks.

What Happened to PhotoText?

PhotoText has, to some extent, been made 2/3rds redundant by Photoshop 5.0's text features, though PhotoText still provides superior kerning compared to Photoshop. The good news however is that PhotoText 2.0 is now available as a FREE solo component for download from <http://www.extensis.com/freephototext/> or if you're upgrading it will remain active in your plugins.

Snags

If you are an old fashioned designer still happily getting by on your Quadra with a 68k chip you're stuffed - but maybe this little application is the final nudge you've been needing to get one of those revoltingly superficial looking new G3s with all the ooh!

ooh!! ooh!!! features ... I want one!

For those, like poor me, who have to flip flop between Macintosh and Windows however it might be useful to know that both versions ship in the same box. Buy Phototools and you won't regret it.

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