plugs·n·pixels

IMAGE CREATION, MANIPULATION & EDUCATION

PLUG-IN

•*Topaz Adjust 4 released!*
•*Mister Retro Machine Wash*
•*PhotoWiz ContrastMaster*
•*nik Viveza 2*

Create
the "Groovy Buddha"

plugs·n· pixels

ISSUE #17

Background image treated with
Topaz Adjust 4. Cover created
with Topaz Adjust, onOne
PhotoTools Pro and
Mr. Retro Machine Wash

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Topaz Adjust has taken the plug-in world by storm in the last couple of years due to its ability to both mimic and exceed the results offered by products many times its price. Adjust provides the HDR look so sought after by digital artists while extending the spectrum of results in other directions as well.

The new version 4 introduces an entirely redesigned interface, new presets and upgraded image processing algorithms. Let's take a close look at what this new release has to offer for your workflow.

Original image

After Topaz Adjust 4

adjust 4: presets

You'll find getting started with Adjust 4 very easy by virtue of the sheer number of effects presets included upon installation. Let's begin our exploration of Adjust 4 by examining the variety found in this list.

Beginning at the top, you can perform basic Exposure Correction, which in itself does wonders to improve the tonal range of your image. Exposure Color Stretch builds on the first preset and performs much stronger correction, while the next several presets offer different types of overall image improvement (popping, smoothing, adding drama and contrast.

You'll notice as you mouse over the Presets list, the thumbnail of your image at the top changes to reflect a preview of each particular preset. This is a most efficient way to decide which preset works best with a given image. (By the way, Adjust 4 actually tailors these adjustments specifically to each photo you open in it, adapting to unique image conditions such as light, detail, and color, as opposed to being a generic solution for all images.)

Once you hit the Crisp preset you'll begin to see what all the fuss is about. Even if your image is a bit fuzzy, this and the subsequent presets will make the details pop in a way few plug-ins can. It's like having a whole new camera! You can go the opposite way as well, simplifying and reducing details if your project calls for it.

These Presets are just the beginning. On the next page we'll discuss how you can edit and customize them at will.

Presets

- Exposure Correction
- Exposure Color Stretch
- Photo Pop
- Mild Contrast Pop
- Mild Color Pop
- Portrait Smooth
- Portrait Drama
- Enhance Contrast
- Crisp
- Dramatic
- Small Details
- Mild Details
- Detailed
- Simplify
- Smooth and Flat
- Spicify
- Vibrance
- Psychedelic
- Equalize
- Color Blast
- Clarity
- Neutralizer by JorgeDiaz

Save   Delete   Import   Export

The old Adjust 3 interface: Nice, but not efficient
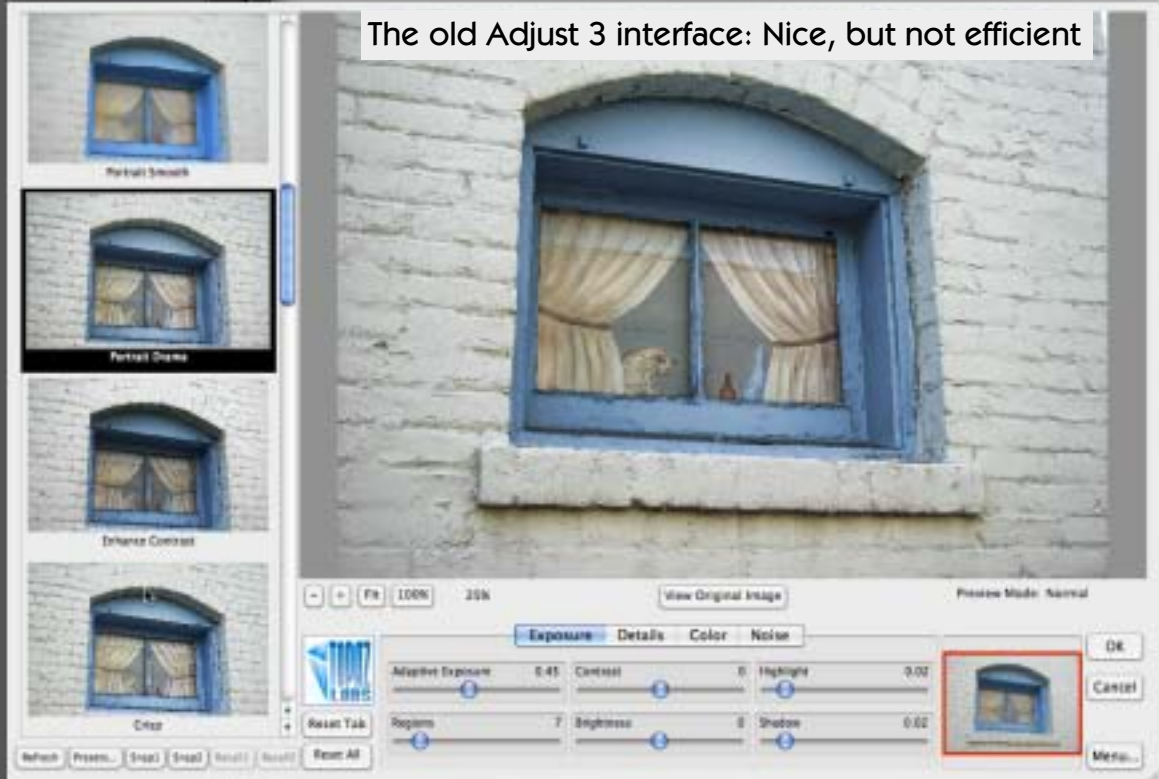
Adjust 3 (shown above) offered presets at the left of its layout with a separate preset preview for each effect. Adjustment options for Exposure, Detail, Color and Noise were spread across four separate tabs. Adjust 4 is a major step forward in terms of convenience and ease of use (see the new Presets list at left).

adjust 4: effects settings

On the right side of its interface, Adjust offers a set of adjustment palettes so you can fine-tune the results of each preset (the results of which you can save, reuse and share with others). While you may well be happy with the factory presets, it's nice to know you can make multiple changes as necessary for the particular image you are working on. The general workflow here is to start at the top with Exposure and work your way down.

Under Exposure, along with several self-explanatory sliders, you'll see Adaptive Exposure and Regions. Adaptive Exposure is for balancing out the overall exposure, while Regions divides the image into sections for individual processing (a higher setting results in more localized detail).

Adjust is especially known for its ability to pull details out of an image that you may not have noticed in the untreated version, whether you're aiming for standard enhancement or artistic effects. The sliders in the Details section offer control for overall and small details enhancement, along with Threshold and Radius limitations, as well as degree of Sharpness. You may wish to check the box that says "Process details independent of exposure" to isolate the adjustments to details only, thus reducing the creation of unwanted noise in the results. Then you can use the Exposure sliders to deal with underlying exposure adjustments (this is a more flexible approach).

Besides enhancing an image's details, Adjust can control the resulting color effects as well, whether by adding or subtracting. Adaptive Saturation evens out the image's color intensity, while Regions divides the image into sections of various sizes for controlled treatment. The Saturation and Saturation boost sliders are worthy of mention. My personal preference is to back off from the default colorization results, while others seem to like the exaggerated color effects Adjust makes possible. It all depends on your image and your end-result intentions. But it's nice to know you have a choice.
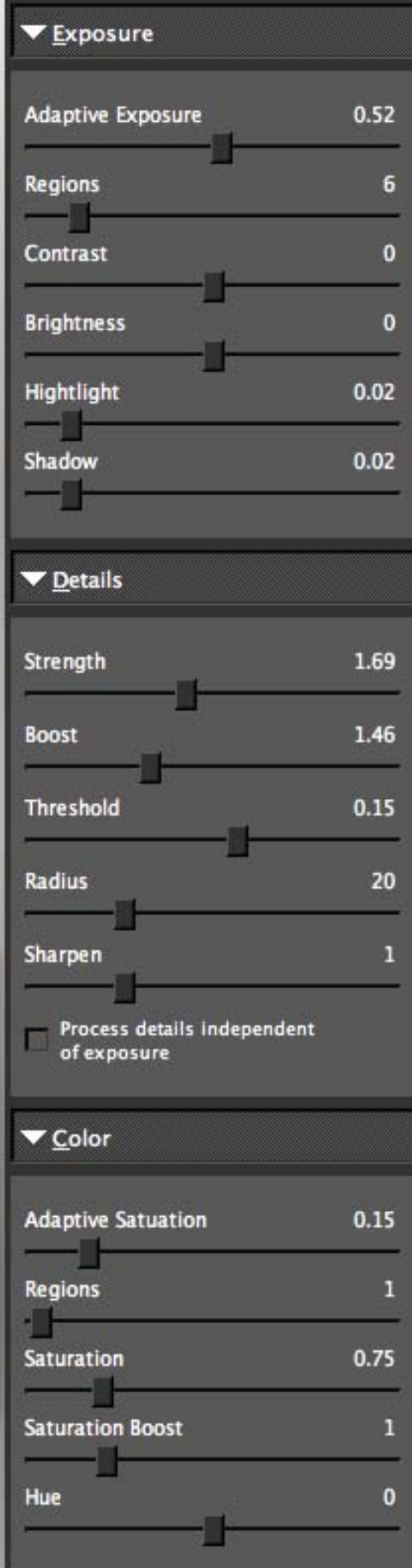
The last set of sliders for controlling Noise is shown on the next page.

You've probably noticed how efficient the layout of Presets and Effects are! No more clicking back and forth among several tabs!
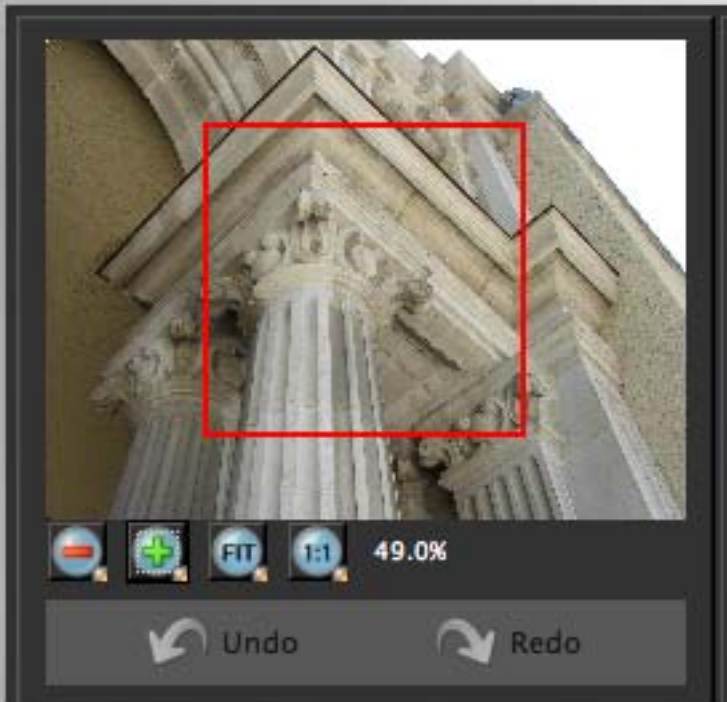
The new Adjust 4 interface: Everything is instantly accessible!

Find the latest deals for Topaz products:
www.plugsandpixels.com/topazsuite.html

Exposure

Adaptive Exposure	0.52
Regions	6
Contrast	0
Brightness	0
Hightlight	0.02
Shadow	0.02

Details

Strength	1.69
Boost	1.46
Threshold	0.15
Radius	20
Sharpen	1

☐ Process details independent of exposure

Color

Adaptive Satuation	0.15
Regions	1
Saturation	0.75
Saturation Boost	1
Hue	0

adjust 4: additional functions

Noise

Suppression   1.1

Amount   0

☐ Use Topaz DeNoise

The Noise panel helps you counteract the effects of Adjust's strong enhancements by applying noise suppression to the results. To retain more detail, check the "DeNoise" option.

49.0%

↶ Undo   ↷ Redo

In Adjust you can view and navigate your image at various magnifications. Zoom in, zoom out, fit your image to the preview or view actual pixels.

🏠 Reset All   🎲 I Feel Lucky!
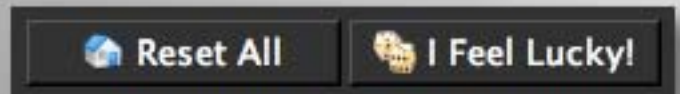
After experimenting you may wish to start over, so use "Reset All" to zero out. For a cool tour of random Adjust effects, use "I Feel Lucky!"

● Original   ● Preview

As you apply effects in Adjust, compare them to the original image. Hint: Use the Space Bar instead!

Save   Delete   Import   Export
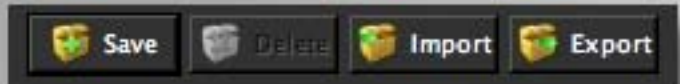
Like what you have created? Save the settings as a preset, plus import presets from others.

Enter Key...

What's This?   ⇧F1

Users Guide...

Tech Support...

Product Info...

Gallery ...

MyTopaz ...

Tutorial ...

About...

Adjust's menu is where you enter your license key, access the PDF manual, connect to various related online resources and find out which particular version number of Adjust you are using.

TOPAZ ADJUST V4
QUICK START GUIDE

TOPAZ LABS

Every Topaz plug-in comes with an illustrated PDF instruction guide, and Adjust 4 is no exception. It's a quick and helpful read.
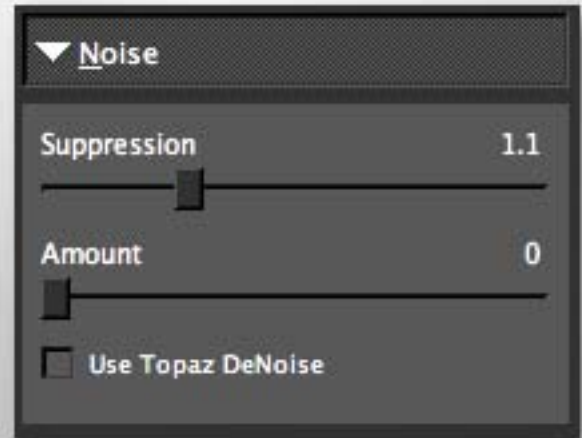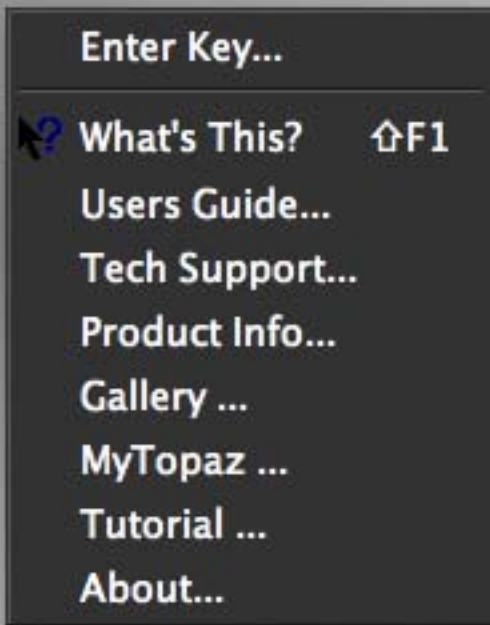
Find the latest deals on Topaz products: www.plugsandpixels.com/topazsuite.html

topaz tipz:

Original

The original photo of the abandoned train terminal near Ellis Island (above) was a bit too "urban decay" for my taste, so I treated it with Adjust, Clean and Simplify to arrive at the more attractive whimsical result (shown in detail in the background art).

making the groovy
buddha

Our tutorial project for this issue began as most of them do, with a source image and half an idea of what to do with it...

The beauty of having a decent number of plug-ins on hand means you can experiment more freely and enjoy a number of lucky accidents. Or maybe in this case some good Karma was on our side!

The Groovy Buddha began its life as a quick snapshot taken in bad midday lighting and ended up rather groovy with a little help from some crazy plug-ins, man!
 Here's the procedure:
1) The original unretouched image
2) Topaz Adjust pops the image
3) Topaz Detail refines the details
4) Topaz Clean's Curly Smooth preset smooths the image and adds creative lines and edges
5-6) Topaz Simplify's Sketch presets are added and a hard light blending mode is applied to each layer (the cumulative effects are shown here)
7) Another treatment with Adjust takes us far from our original, but as cool as this result is, it is only the beginning of the long, strange trip…

This screenshot of Photoshop's Layers pallet shows the Groovy Buddha's various layers, numbered corresponding to the steps listed above. The effects accumulated as each previous layer was duplicated and the next plug-in applied.
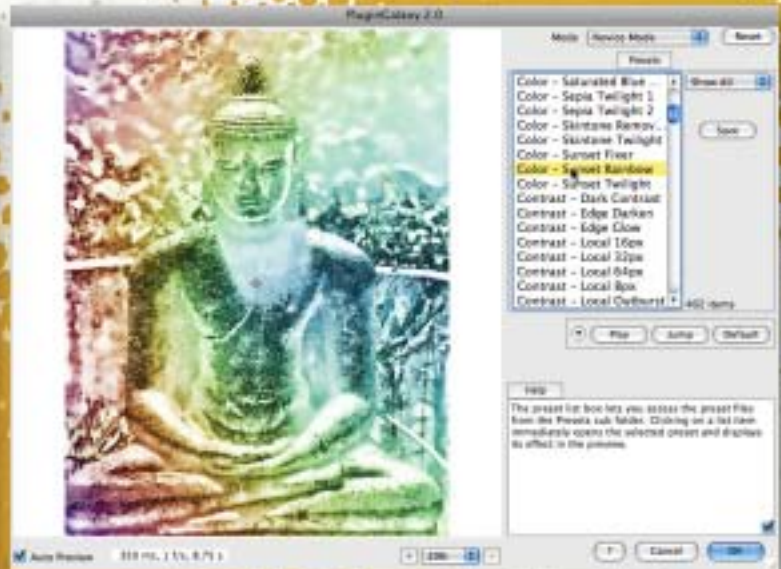
PhotoWiz PluginGalaxy

I was pretty sure I was done tinkering with enhancement plug-ins and layer effects at this point and began exploring some creative edge options using onOne's PhotoFrame, shown above. The high-key nature of the image called for a white edge, though black would have made a nice contrast. Then it became obvious to me that this image needed some color instead – not just a single hue, but something splashy.

PhotoWiz' PluginGalaxy (upper right) was the perfect choice to throw some rainbow colors across the Buddha This is when the phrase "Groovy Buddha" came to mind, and there was no turning back!

While the rainbow colors were a great addition, the Buddha's arms seemed to be asking for something more to cradle. Digital Anarchy's Knoll Light Factory (right) is perfect for adding fake light sources and lens flare to nature and studio images, so I used it to create an energy source for the Buddha to meditate upon. Or perhaps he generated it himself by the power of meditative concentration; you decide.

At this point the image was really finished (see next page), but a return visit to PhotoFrame (lower right) gave me a whimsical way to introduce this tutorial by way of a happening illustration, featuring the finished Buddha and a ready-made Layout preset from PhotoFrame. That is also where the background for this page came from. Yeah baby!
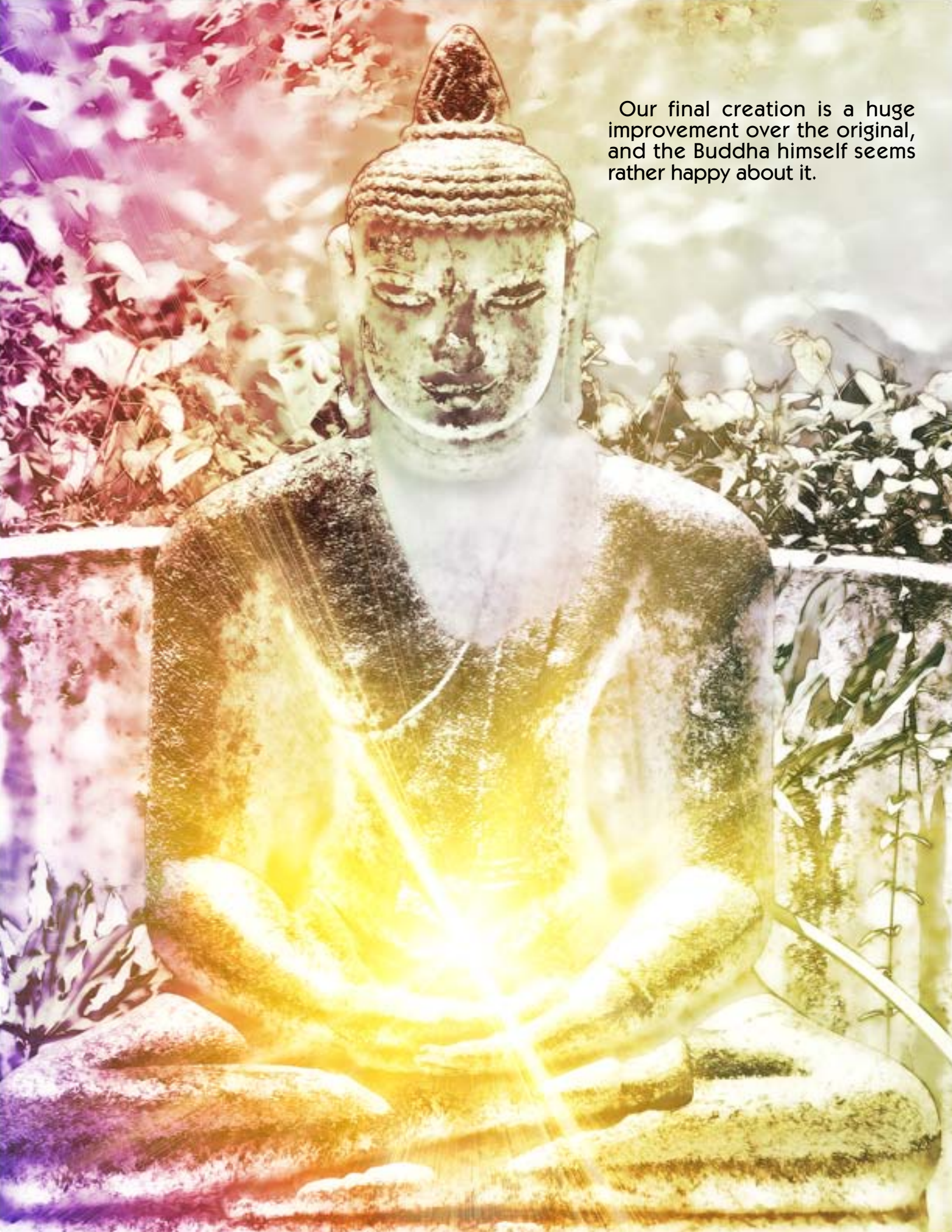

Digital Anarchy Knoll Light Factory

onOne PhotoFrame

Our final creation is a huge improvement over the original, and the Buddha himself seems rather happy about it.

vs. contrastmaster

crazy cat

ContrastMaster is offered by The Plugin Site under the PhotoWiz line of image enhancement plug-ins, and is one of those few products that offer both high quality contrast enhancement and HDR-like capabilities at a reasonable cost.

If you have a low-contrast photo in need of rescuing, or wish to turn a merely good photo into a great one, ContrastMaster should be one of your top choices.

In my examples here, the photos of a neighborhood stray cat benefitted from ContrastMaster's ability to increase image clarity by increasing contrast in a controlled manner.

ContrastMaster features include spilt views, logged settings, 17 histogram types, blown highlights detection, rendering time estimation, novice/expert modes, local presets and preview tab sheets.

On the next page we'll take an overview look at the various editing modes within which you can perform your image enhancements in ContrastMaster.

Original

ContrastMaster 1.01

< Original

ContrastMaster + B/WStyler

While it can be considered initially daunting, ContrastMaster's interface can be broken down into six different modes ranging from the simple Novice mode to the sophisticated Expert Mode (shown above).

Novice and Expert mode let you apply all of the contrast effects at the same time, while the remaining four modes let you apply each of the three local effects and all the global effects individually for greater control.

The four global methods (S/H-Contrast, Stretch, Equalize and Polarize) work on the tonal range of the image and help to improve the result even further. The three sophisticated methods for enhancing contrast in small image details are called Dynamic, Adaptive and Local.

Notice how the dull, flatly lit original image of the cat (above right) comes to life with only minor adjustments.

Enhancing your image in ContrastMaster is only the beginning. The list at right links to the other plug-in products offered by The Plugin Site/PhotoWiz and are well worth checking out.

Other PhotoWiz plug-ins:

B/WStyler
FocalBlade
LightMachine
PluginGalaxy

www.plugsandpixels.com/contrastmaster.html

MISTER RETRO

MACHINE WASH DELUXE

Let's face it: It's a dirty world. As much as we try to remove noise and artifacts from our images in an effort to keep everything bright and shiny, it's a losing battle. So you might as well give in to the grunge.

Mister Retro offers their Machine Wash Deluxe plug-in, with several sets of banged up and bumpy textures that you can apply to your images or blank backgrounds to give them that real-world weariness and distress.

There are a number of new features in the latest version of Machine Wash. First, it's downloadable (no more waiting for CDs to arrive in the mail). Functional enhancements include a Texture Effect Picker with live preview, ability to apply the Wash Effect on a mask layer, create and save presets, create multiple effects at once, and more. See the next page for info on the detailed control options for editing the Wash, Surface and Background effects.

Panel 1 (Wash tab):

Basic | Wash | Surface | Background

☑ Use Wash

Misfeed | Choose | ∞

Wash Scale — 0

Wash Intensity — 25

Coverage — 50

Coverage Scale — 18

Edge Distance — 0

Edge Softness — 0

Orientation
☐ Flip Horizontal
☐ Flip Vertical
☑ Invert

Random
123
Random

Wash Area
⦿ Inside
◯ Outside

Panel 2 (Surface tab):

Basic | Wash | Surface | Background

☑ Use Surface

Misfeed | Choose | ∞

☐ Enable Depth Perspective
☐ Apply Surface to Entire Canvas
☐ Including Wash Area

Surface Scale — 0

Texture Depth — 77

Surface Tone — 53

Orientation
☐ Flip Horizontal
☐ Flip Vertical
☐ Invert

123.69 34.28

Panel 3 (Background tab):

Basic | Wash | Surface | Background

☑ Use Background

Misfeed | Choose | ∞

☑ Apply Background to Entire Canvas

Background Scale — 0

Orientation
☐ Flip Horizontal
☐ Flip Vertical
☐ Invert

Background Tone

Highlights — 100

Midtones — 100

Shadows — 100

The three tabs open the controls for choosing and editing the Wash textures, which mostly cover your image; the Surface options, which add scalable surface textures to your image plus any selected Wash, and the Background textures which can be placed on a layer underneath your image for use with blending modes.

www.plugsandpixels.com/machinewash.html

NiK Software | VIVEZA® 2 Precise Selective Photo Editing

If you're used to doing your tonal corrections strictly in Photoshop using global Levels and Curves, the revolutionary selective Control Point approach taken by Nik Software's Viveza 2 may come as a shock. After the shock wears off, you may never use traditional correction tools and masks again!

Control Points may be used to darken skies, remove color casts, lighten subjects, improve contrast and color, select unrelated tonal values as a group for global editing and apply strong curves without losing detail.
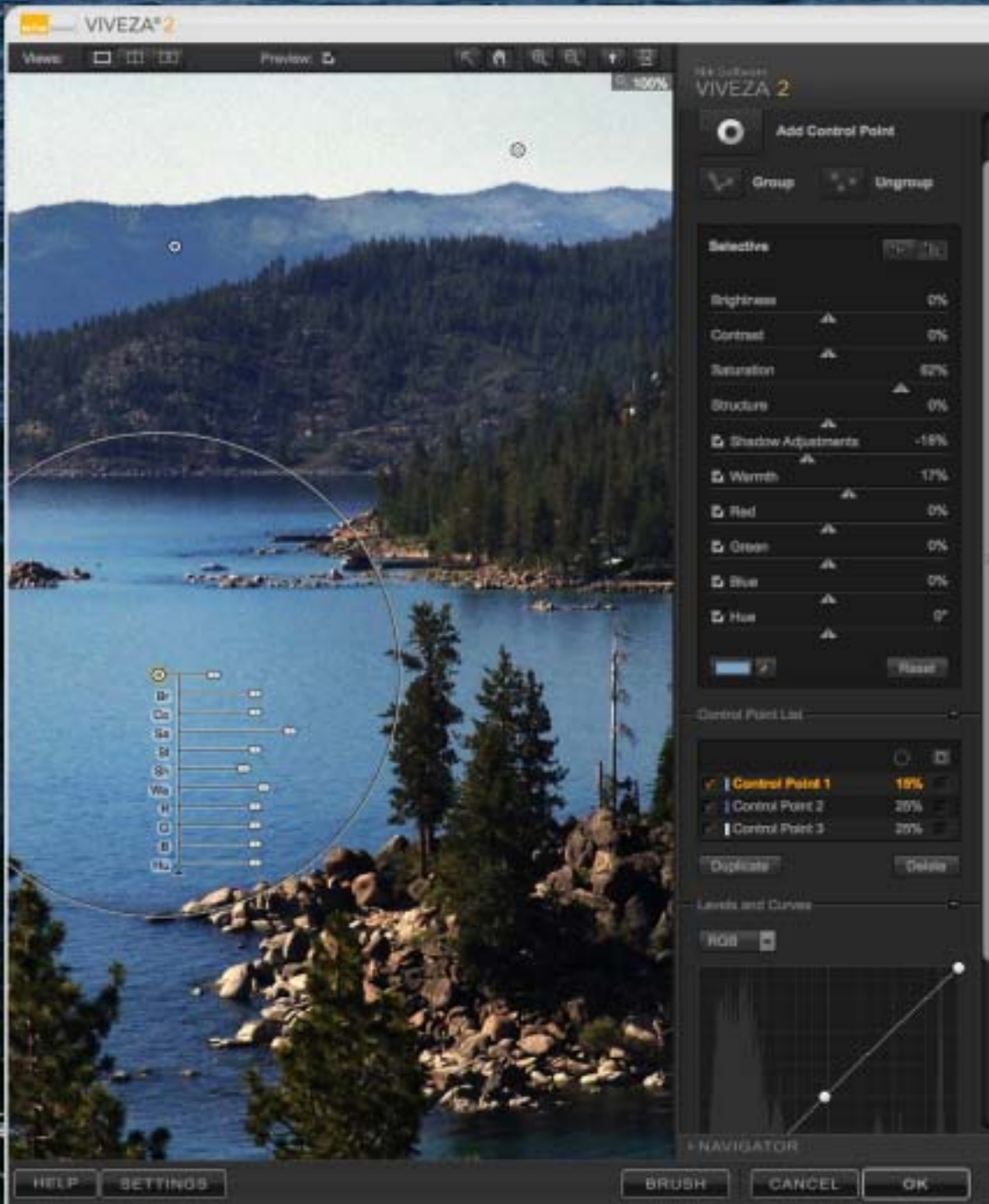
Here's an overview of how Viveza 2 works:

Using the Add Control Point button (see the screenshot at left), click in an area of your image that needs adjustment (such as the sky). Control Points (known as "U Point" technology) automatically identify any unique characteristics (such as color, tonality and texture) of the areas upon which you place them. Multiple Control Points are capable of communicating with each other to keep selections natural looking.

You'll notice each Control Point contains various sliders corresponding to Brightness, Contrast, Saturation, Structure, Shadow Adjustments, Warmth, Red, Green, Blue and Hue – pretty much every setting you could wish for, all in one settings tree. These same settings are also accessible from the right of the interface for your convenience.

You also have full control over the Control Point list as well as a standard Levels and Curves dialog.

Your workflow is further streamlined by the availability of dozens of shortcuts. The editing of multiple images is supported in Lightroom and Aperture.

www.plugsandpixels.com/viveza.html

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ALIEN SKIN	Blow Up, Exposure, Eye Candy 5 Effects Collection, Eye Candy 5: Nature, Eye Candy 5: Textures, Eye Candy 5: Impact, Image Doctor, Snap Art, Splat!, Xenofex (10% DISCOUNT off each using coupon "PNPXNN")
AUTO FX	Auto FX is currently offering various bundle specials. Click here for more info (bottom of page).
AV BROS.	Page Curl, Puzzle Pro (10% DISCOUNT off each)
IMAGENOMIC	Noiseware, Portraiture, RealGrain (10% DISCOUNT off each using coupon code "PNPXNN")

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closing
artwork

Photo and artwork by:
Mike Bedford

Created with:
the Topaz Plug-in bundle