And the winner is!
Ulco Glimmerveen wins the
"NWDA & Planetside Animation Contest"

© Ulco

plugs·n·pixels
ISSUE #18

It's time for another issue of the Plugs 'N Pixels ezine! We were recently one of the sponsors of New World Digital Art's "NWDA & Planetside Animation Contest", with our prize contribution being the ezine's cover image and an article featuring the winner's artwork and workflow (see next page). The goal of the contest was to provide a storyboard of six stills representing a scene of the artist's choice (created with Planetside Software's Terragen 2), with a strong emphasis on realism.

The render set of accomplished traditional and digital artist Ulco Glimmerveen of The Netherlands was picked as First Place by a panel of judges comprised of all NWDA members, Oshyan Greene (Planetside), Stewart McSherry (Xfrog Inc.) and Stephen Schmitt (World-Machine). Besides the coverage in Plugs 'N Pixels, other First Place prizes included a Terragen 2 Deep+Animation License, the XfrogPlants Bundle (1300 plants in .TGO-format), a fully animated render of the artwork and six NWDA products of choice.

And that is only the beginning of our coverage in this issue! Besides catching up with other options for creating realistic digital landscapes, we look at alternatives to Dreamweaver for web design, and of course cover the latest creative and image enhancement plug-ins from the top developers.

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Ulco Glimmerveen (made with Terragen 2)

NEW WORLD DIGITAL ART

PLANETSIDE SOFTWARE

WORLD MACHINE

Xfrog inc

Terragen 2 animation contest winner announced!

Project description by Ulco Glimmerveen

   My winning entry "Garden of Eternity" was commissioned by 'Het Drentse Landschap', a Dutch environmental and cultural organization. The intention of their project is to create a natural area dedicated to the remembrance of the deceased in The Netherlands. Visitors will be able to place urns and stroll through this garden with its woods, grassy areas and lakes while reflecting upon life and death.
   There will be a circular area surrounded by a ring of water (Threanta), within which plants and trees will be growing according to a specific ground plan. The Labyrinth, a circular rough stone structure, will grow as more urns are placed and sealed in, with a tower overlooking the area. A series of burial mounds in different shapes will grow at the edge of some small lakes. In the long term all of these monuments (as well as others) should become massive and awe inspiring. In order to raise awareness and funds to get this garden off the ground, the client came to me to create realistic images to show what it could look like. This was a tough commission, but also a perfect project to submit to the NWDA Animation Contest.
   I was given a lot of artistic freedom, so with a Wacom pressure sensitive pen in hand I started painting a 5000x5000px map, with the possibilities and limitations of Terragen 2 in mind. The map needed to have all elements present, so I would be able to point my camera and pick 10 spots from which to to render detailed, large scale images, according to the original commission.
   On the base layer in Photoshop were the sandy paths, over which came a series of layers to map out water, heights and various kinds of objects (see screenshot on next page). Where I intended to render closeups in Terragen 2, I paid particular attention to creating the necessary detail in the maps using textured brushes, smoothing and other methods. It took many reloads and changes in the maps to get everything right. For maps which should be detailed I used maximum-size grayscale TIFFs, while maps with vegetation I reduced to 25% to minimize memory use.
   In Terragen 2 I loaded all the masks and set up my basic height image. A small series of surface layers were dedicated to different soils, blended by masks as needed and fed by color and displacement power fractals. >

Garden of Eternity

I loaded all of the objects and populations, blending them by their masks and setting size and distribution variables. For the commission I used some grass objects, their ranges localized to the area I intended to render at that time, and placed elsewhere in the scene as needed. For the animation this was replaced by an overall procedural grass, consisting of some "clump displacement", two tiny, elongated fake stones and some power fractals to vary their colors. I also integrated other plants where appropriate, such as ferns in the Glacial Wood and daffodils near the entrance.

The trees and shrubs are quite detailed but for the distant views I devised some very simple fake trees, from some overlapping planes, with alpha leaf images.

I like the light to come from slightly ahead, so there will be nice shadow and light playing over the top of trees. The mist and cloud shadows were another problem. They had to conceal areas (to reduce the chaos of texture) and give the garden some mystery, while at the same time being sufficiently transparent. It took many trials to get it right.

The Labyrinth and other structures were modeled in Lightwave, and luckily I had enough freedom to change them quite radically from the original sketches and give them a personal twist. I have only used modelling software for a few months now, so it was a bit hectic to learn and get it all right by the deadlines.

In my oil paintings I strive for mystery, and I try to achieve the same thing digitally. Although the graphical node editor of Terragen 2 has a tough learning curve, the software is perfect for me as it offers these possibilities and is able to produce extremely photo-realistic images.

See more of Ulco's artwork on his website at:
www.ulco-art.nl/English.html
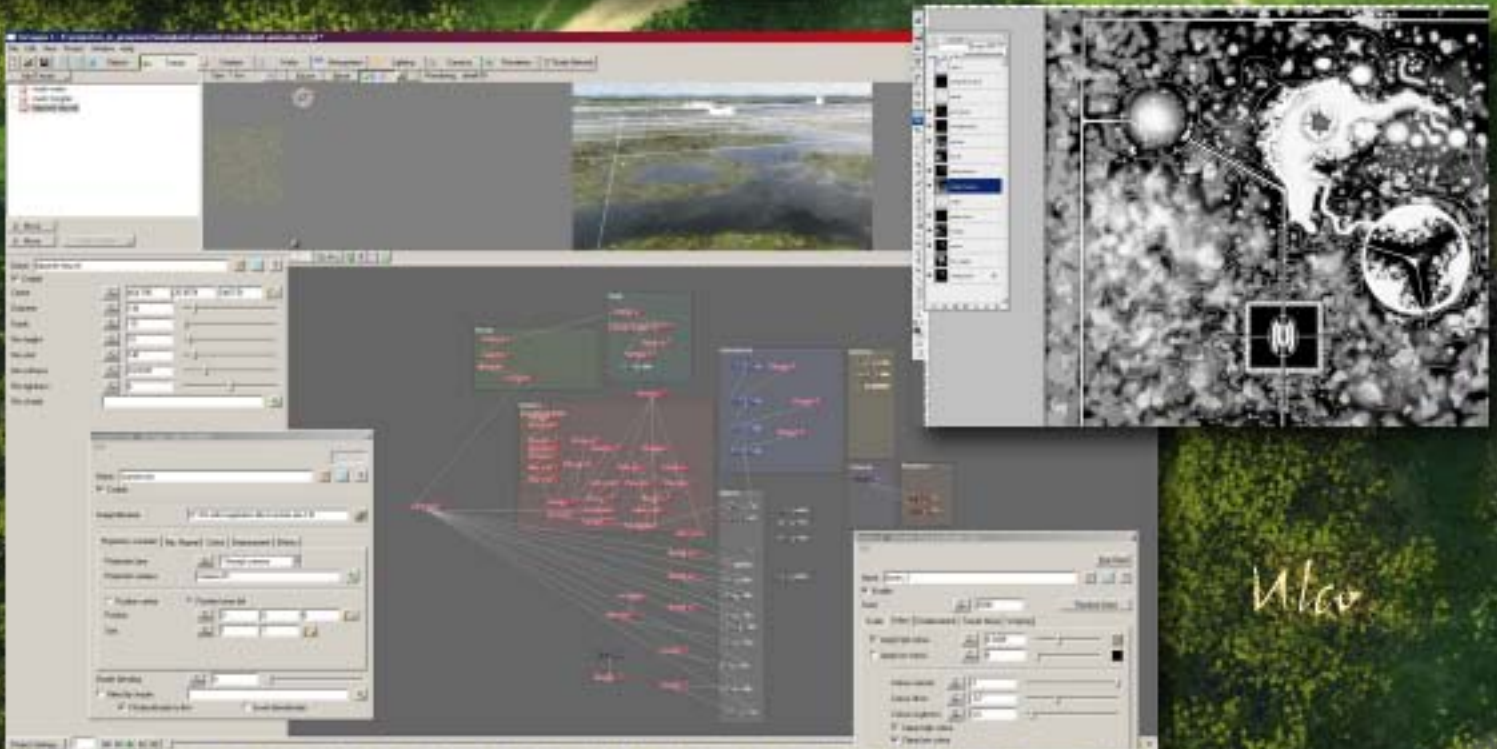
RELEASE 8.5

In the 8.5 release, e-on Vue features and performance have been improved in the areas of natural scenery creation, precise artistic control, performance, immersive integration and content.

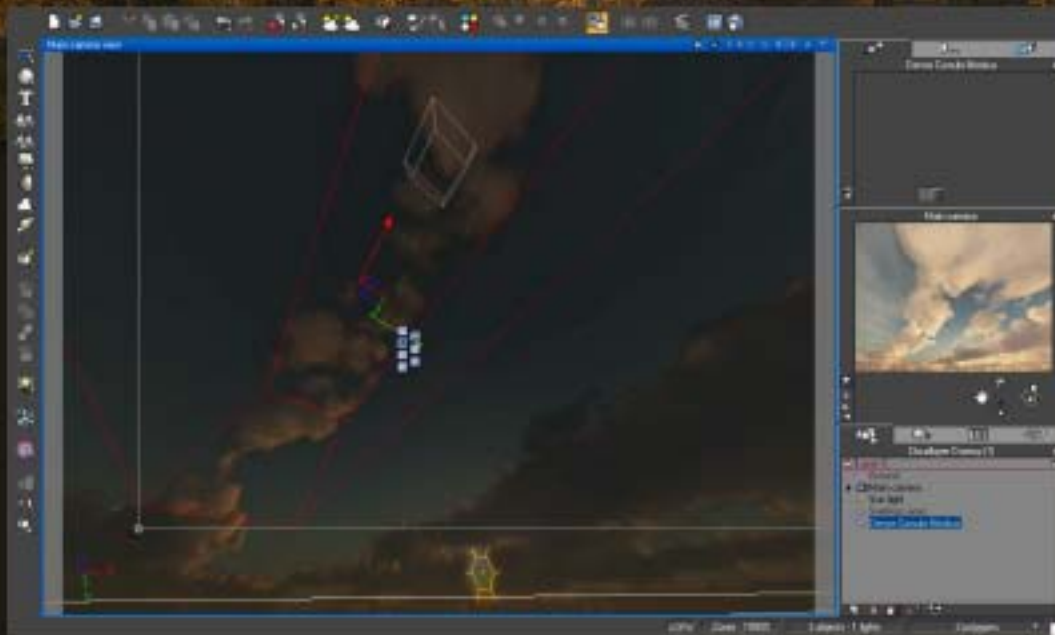See the next page for a partial list of these enhancements.

Vue 8
Infinite

The Standalone Solution for Professional 3D Environments

e-on
software

Vue 8 Infinite What's New!

As you would expect with each update, Vue 8.5 further improves overall performance by providing diagnostic information to easily detect rendering bottlenecks and thus optimize your render times. The rendering of displacement on standard terrains is greatly improved and is no longer contingent upon the resolution of the terrain.

All of these features just described are but a fraction of those available in Vue 8.4 and 8.5. See the URL above for a complete list.

Where to start! In Vue 8.5, natural scenery creation capabilities have been enhanced, with improvements to the 3D terrain sculpting editor (shown at right), with unlimited material painting, new sculpting tools, zone extraction and sculpting from references; the creation of atmospheres and terrains (animated planetary cloud density maps and new material controls referenced to sea level), while additional precision of control has been added.

For instance, individual cloud layers can be selected and manipulated as regular objects (see above). Multi-materials let you change in one single operation all the materials of any given object.

EcoSystem display improvements provide a more accurate coloring and reduce flickering when moving the camera around the scene. You can now drag objects from the World Browser directly into the EcoPainter list.
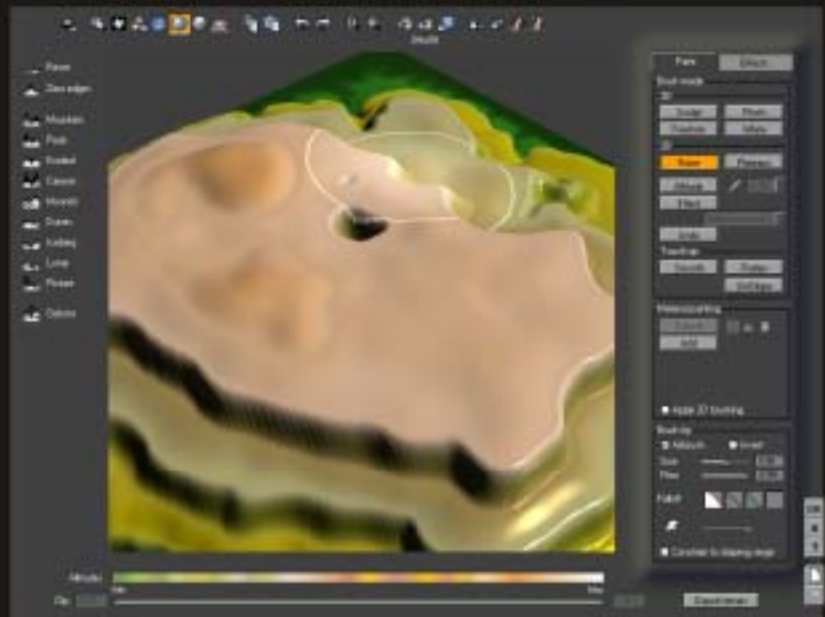
DAZ 3D
Carrara™ 8

   Carrara 8 builds on an already impressive legacy by continuing to respond to suggestions and input from its user base.

   Carrara is now 64-bit native on both Macs and PCs, with multi-threading support for both platforms to spread the computational load among available CPUs.

   FBX and COLLADA Data Exchange have been improved (for export to Unity, for example). There have been improvements in plants and vegetation and a halving of render times on high-end workstations.

   Negative lights, God-rays and barn doors are now added to your arsenal of creative lighting tricks. Puppeteer is now fully integrated into Cararra, containing the same functionality as in DAZ Studio.

   See the URL below for a full features list.

www.plugsandpixels.com/carrara.html
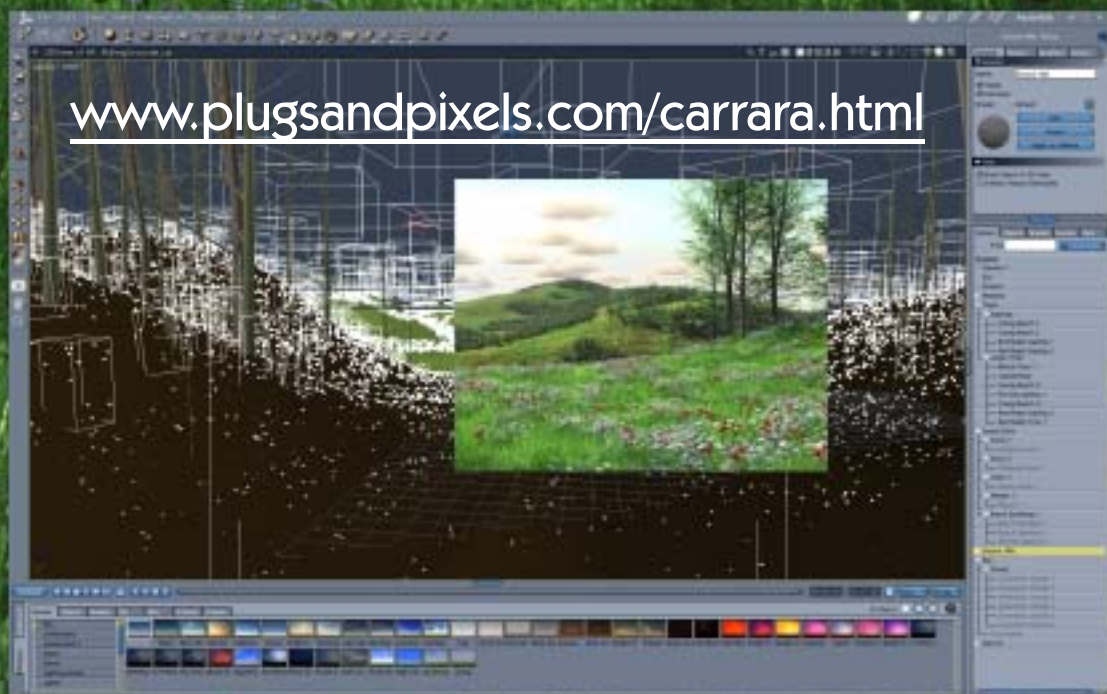
web design of a different kind!

plugs·n·pixels
IMAGE CREATION, MANIPULATION & EDUCATION

If you're mainly a right-brained creative-type designer who is more comfortable working in Photoshop or in page-layout applications than typing HTML code, a number of helpful options exist to aid you in creating a cutting-edge, standards-compliant website anyway. And no, you won't need to get anywhere near the ugly source code and Javascript stuff under the hood.

You might first think of Adobe Dreamweaver as THE go-to web design app, but honestly, besides being expensive, it's not a warm fuzzy place to spend your creative website design time. And sure, you can convert Microsoft Word documents to HTML, but let's not even go there...

In this feature we'll take a look at four excellent alternatives for creating both entire websites and animated web graphic elements. One is a stroke-of-genius Photoshop plug-in, while the rest are standalone applications. In each case, you can expend the majority of your efforts concentrating on how your site looks, not how it works. After all, isn't software supposed to make our lives easier? >

Welcome to **Plugs 'N Pixels!** Here you can get one-stop, organized information about creativity and productivity software and related educational materials more quickly and easily than from any other source. Access to the entire site is **FREE**, with no registration required!
Don't miss our **free ezines** and **discounted products** (see menu at right). Stop by often as new information is added regularly.

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- Image enhancement
- Effects galleries
- Terrain generation
- Web design
- Multimedia
- Graphic design & DTP
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For just over a decade, the folks at Media Lab have been making Photoshop do things that even Adobe probably never intended: produce fully CSS and XHTML standards-compliant websites!

The SiteGrinder 3 plug-in is developed especially for Photoshop professionals who are most comfortable in that design environment and don't have the time or the inclination to learn additional, traditional web design applications. SiteGrinder leverages their Photoshop skills to help them achieve a large degree of additional productivity in a totally different genre, while retaining familiarity.
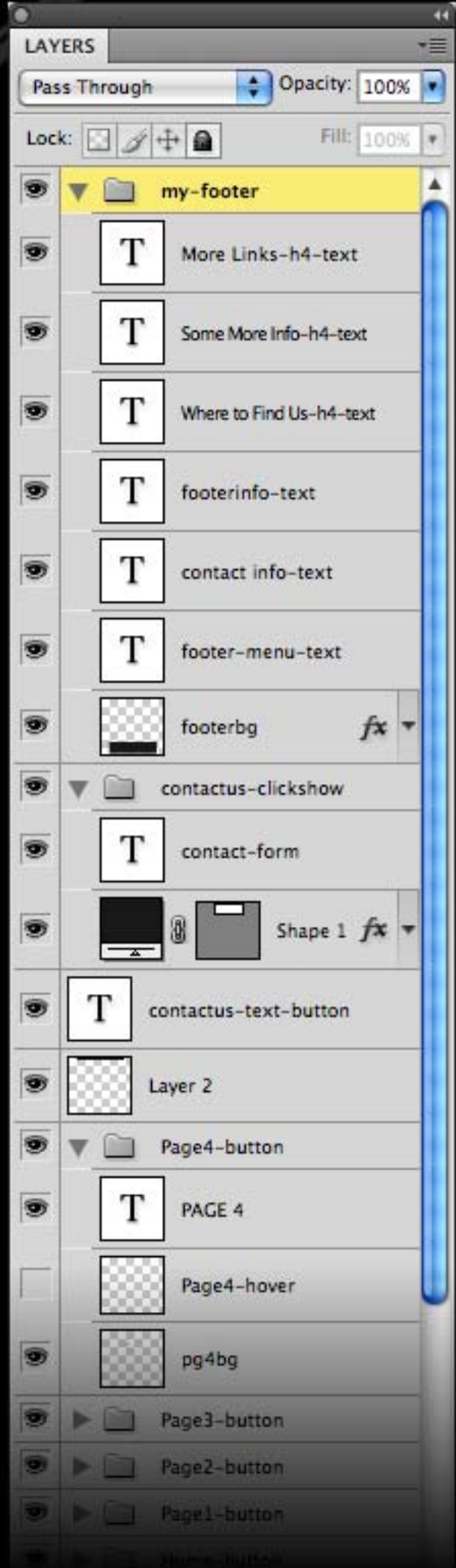
Here's how SiteGrinder works for these pros (and everyone else!):

Once you have basic Photoshop skills such as layer groups mastered, all you do is add specific hints to the layer names (as shown at right), which tell SiteGrinder how to handle each layer element upon output (the "Build and Deploy" step, one of the functions found in the SiteGrinder interface, shown below).

The result is a gorgeous website unrestricted by the usual design limitations, complete with CSS web text, dynamic/interactive pages, multi-level menus, image galleries, flash and multimedia elements, forms and everything else you'd expect in a contemporary website.

The latest version of SiteGrinder, completely rebuilt since version 2, adds over 300 new features on top of an already impressive feature set. Two new optional add-ons, Commerce and Control, are offered. Commerce builds web stores with fully integrated shopping carts from within Photoshop, while Control enables website content management from any Internet-connected computer through a web browser.

In a nod to those who prefer to retain Dreamweaver and other dedicated web design apps in their workflow, SiteGrinder's generated code can be edited externally with these applications.

www.plugsandpixels.com/sitegrinder.html

freeway

HTML Item

Properties

Title: h3Sidebar

☑ Layer   Absolute ⬍

☐ Lock   ☑ Show

☑ Publish

Color: ⬚ None ⬍

Dimensions

	←☐ 606px		☐↑ 205px
	↔ 283px		↕ 24px
	☐→ 51px		⬇ 689px

Overflow: Visible ⬍

Padding: 10px ▾

Wrap: ▾

Screen Measurements

X: 606px   Y: 205px

W: 303px   H: 44px

For the page layout (desktop publishing) crowd, Softpress provides Freeway Pro 5.5, a Mac-only web design application that will be immediately familiar to users of InDesign, XPress, etc. Simply drag-and-drop original full-res PSDs, TIFFs, even EPS and Illustrator files into your layout and let Freeway automatically deal with the conversion to web-ready formats.

Freeway offers such features as fully editable graphic text using any font and style (Freeway handles the conversion and saves you a trip to Photoshop), automatic link management (changes to internal and external link destinations are silently updated for you), master pages to handle repetitive content, accessiblility preview options, support for additional plug-in actions such as a shopping cart and a CSS Menus action, free professional site templates and, of course, much more.
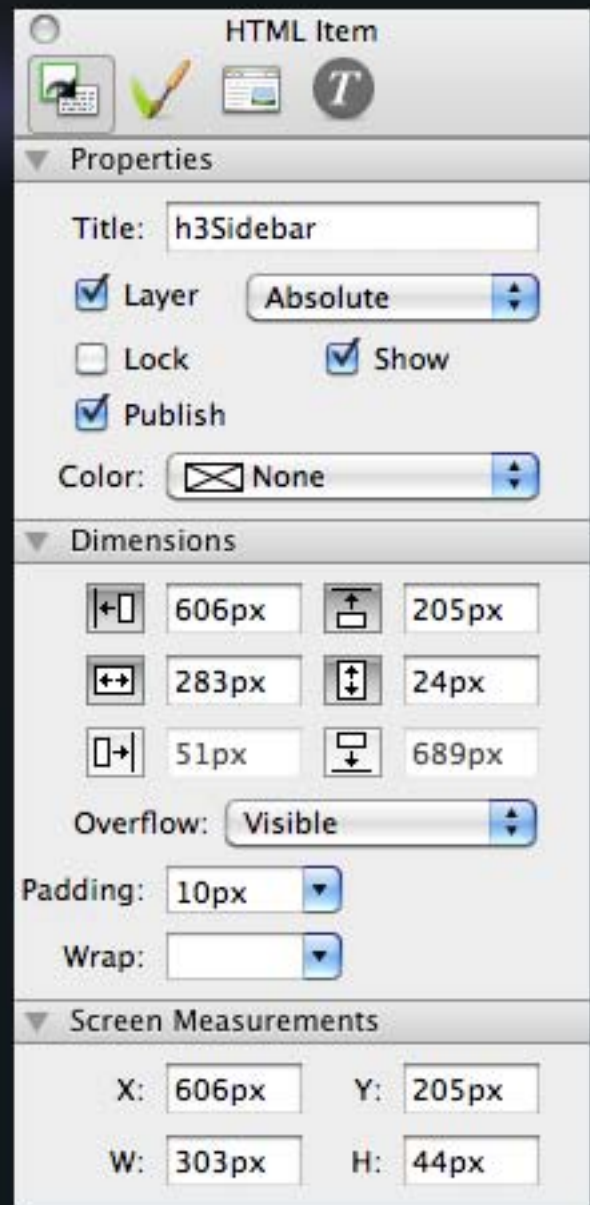
Select any design element and see a palette with various editable options (above). See an overview of your site structure while you work (below).
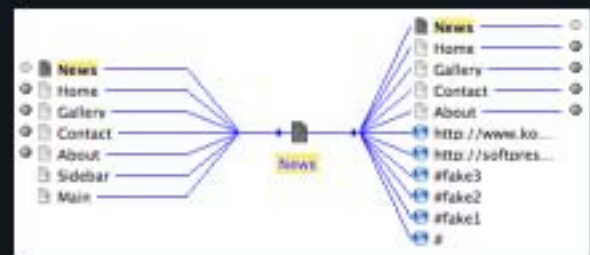
www.plugsandpixels.com/freeway.html / www.plugsandpixels.com/easywebanimator.html

Easy Web Animator 2
Ultimate Edition of Flash application software with new features!

If you're not yet using Flash (or tried it and decided it required too much of a learning curve), Softpress also offers Easy Web Animator to get you started creating banner ads, interactive diagrams, intro movies, dynamic menu systems, slideshows and interactive photographic galleries immediately, with little effort. You can even add specific functionality to your animations, such as "Stop" or "Open URL", as desired.

A selection of pre-made templates is included with Easy Web Animator, or you can bypass them and use the blank canvas to create custom flash content on your own.

See the URLs above for info on both of these products.

Xara
Web Designer 6

DESIGNER PRO 6

Xara offers two totally redesigned products to enable even those with no Photoshop, page layout or web design skills to produce their own websites quickly and easily. Xara Web Designer 6 is dedicated specifically to web design, while Xara Photo & Graphic Designer 6 (the latest version of graphics powerhouse Xara Xtreme) includes all of Web Designer's features plus much more vector and bitmap editing capability.

In either case, Xara's goal is to offer its customers a design-based – not a technical, HTML or script based – website creation tool. You create your design by placing text, photos, graphics, animations or widgets anywhere on the page you please. You are never exposed to the underlying HTML or Javascript.

Both Windows-only packages provide an easy way to create interactive effects, such as pop-up photos, NavBar menus or mouseover effects, as well as animated Flash. You can automatically repel text around objects on your page as you move them around the layout or have non-straight text edges. Either procedure is very difficult to pull off in a traditional web design application, even for advanced webmasters or HTML hand-coders.

The screenshot below shows the redesigned interface and Web Properties dialog that appears when you click on a design element, and a template-based design.
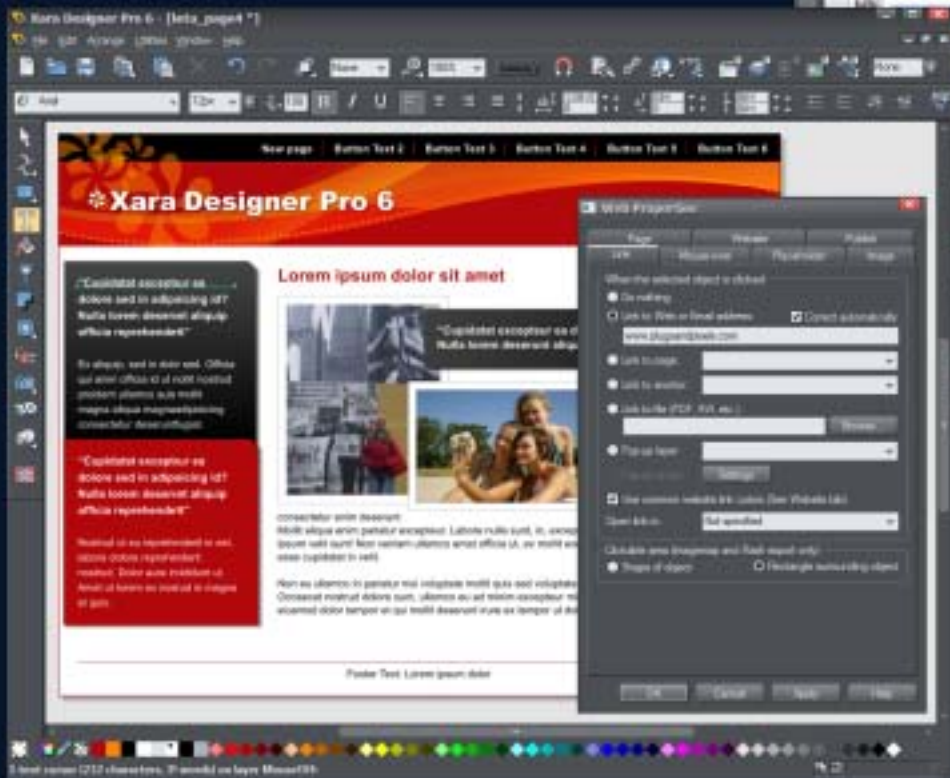
There's no need to concern yourself with how you're going to get your site started! Over 300 pre-designed web templates are available to get you up and running (whole pages and even entire ready-made sites, plus collections of individual items such as NavBars, icons, buttons, text panels, etc.), as shown in the screenshot above.

Of course, you can customize these designs, or create your own from scratch.

TOPAZ LABS DeNoise 5

Topaz DeNoise has earned itself the distinction among users as being perhaps the best available option for digital noise reduction, due to its excellent results and low price. This high quality of noise reduction used to come with the price of slower performance, but DeNoise 5 doubles the processing speed of version 4. Not only that, it can now handle images twice as large and removes horizontal color banding noise as well. All while preserving the image's original detail!

Another new feature is the Correct Black Level slider, seen in the lower right of the screenshot below. Sometimes reducing noise leaves behind a haze or color cast in the darker areas of an image, but the original color integrity can now be easily restored.

Save 15%

Photo: Judy Gilde

At left is a 100% crop from the photo shown in the screenshot above. Due to the necessity of using a long exposure at an extremely high ISO, the image had both horrible noise and horizontal banding. DeNoise 5 easily took care of both problems, rescuing an otherwise unusable image.
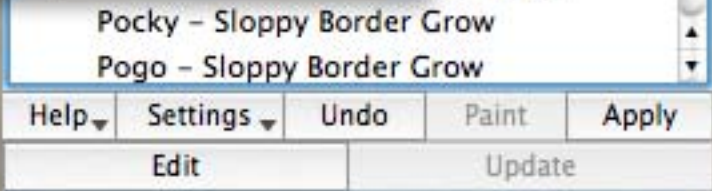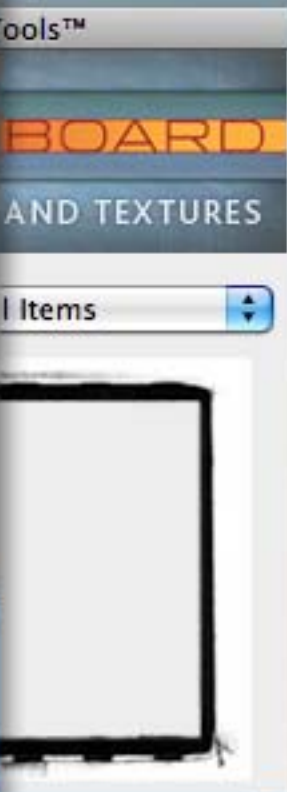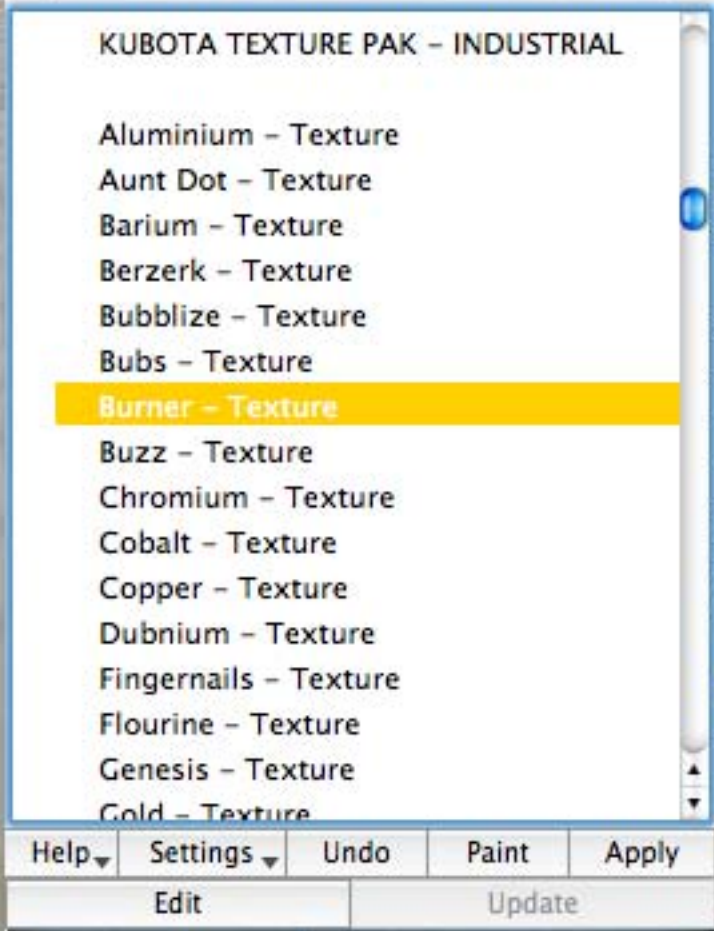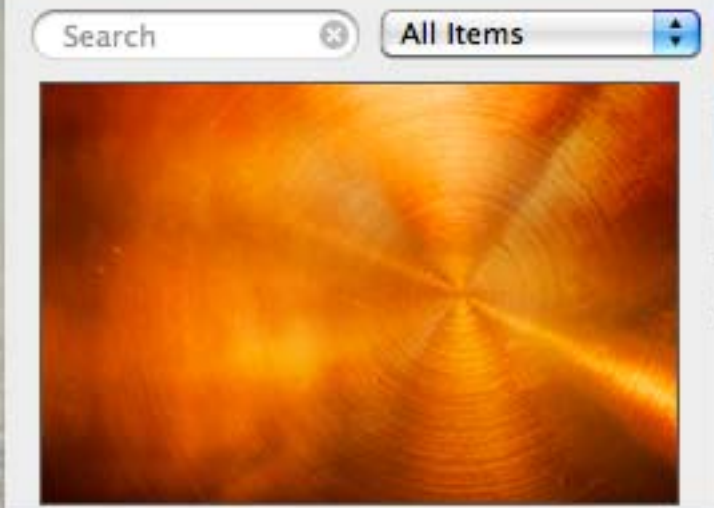
KUBOTA
IMAGE TOOLS
EMPOWERING PHOTOGRAPHERS

DASHBOARD™
YOUR PHOTOSHOP®

If you're already familiar with Kubota's line of Artistic and Production Photoshop actions, you'll already know their latest offering is another winner. The Bor-Tex Pak sounds quite exotic, and indeed it offers 125 sloppy borders and 100 textures to complete your image effects recipe, along with a customized version of DASHBOARD made especially for using them.

DASHBOARD is a remote control/search engine for accessing Kubota actions, making your workflow much more efficient. >

Kubota Image Tools™

DASHBOARD
BORDERS AND TEXTURES

Search | All Items

KUBOTA TEXTURE PAK – INDUSTRIAL

Aluminium – Texture
Aunt Dot – Texture
Barium – Texture
Berzerk – Texture
Bubblize – Texture
Bubs – Texture
Burner – Texture
Buzz – Texture
Chromium – Texture
Cobalt – Texture
Copper – Texture
Dubnium – Texture
Fingernails – Texture
Flourine – Texture
Genesis – Texture
Gold – Texture

Help | Settings | Undo | Paint | Apply
Edit | Update

Pocky – Sloppy Border Grow
Pogo – Sloppy Border Grow

Help | Settings | Undo | Paint | Apply
Edit | Update

In the Bor-Tex pack, the DASHBOARD (shown at left) provides both a list of the available effects plus a preview of each effect as it is selected. You can search for effects by name or by genre for quick and easy access.

Two new Texture Tools paks offer different types of creative surface treatments for your images which add a whole new layer of visual effectiveness.

The Earth Textures–Smooth Organic Pak contains 50 smoother textures while the Industrial Textures–High Tech Electric Pak contains 50 rougher textures.

The Sloppy Borders Pak includes 125 darkroom-style, film-inspired edges ranging from thin through medium and heavy. These borders can be used inside or outside the image area and can really help enhance a photograph intended for eventual sale or gallery presentation.

Once you've chosen a texture or border you can alter its interaction with your image by use of blending modes, opacity adjustments or even erasing through the layer.

These three Paks are also available separately.

www.plugsandpixels.com/kubotaactions.html

gmx·photopainter
Where photography and art meet

In the early days of photography there was much controversy over whether photography was "art". In the digital age you can have your photography and your art at the same time! Applications such as GMX-PhotoPainter (formerly Gertrudis Pro) do a wonderful job turning your scanned or digital images into veritable works of art, either automatically or with your input.

GMX-PhotoPainter (now also available for Mac) includes a variety of style options which you can choose from (depending on your preferences and the subject matter of your photo): Pen and Ink, Crayon, Oil, Watercolor, Pastels, Bristle Brushes and user defined styles like Van Gogh, Seurat and Pointillism.

The process is as simple as opening a photo from within GMX-PhotoPainter and selecting a style. As you select each style, the Tools palette (see screenshot on the next page) will change to reflect the available settings for that style.

At this point you can simply start painting over your image, watching your artwork magically appear, or let GMX-PhotoPainter do all of the work for you. >

GMX-PhotoPainter's Tools palette gives you full control over each Style's settings, which can be customized and saved for later reuse.

Tools

Watercolor

- dry – large strokes
- dry – med. size
- small brush
- very dry
- very wet – med. size
- wet – med. size

Brush

Select

Style Settings

Alpha:153

Width:17

Length: 60

Preview

Texture

The Advanced Style Settings palette provides options for adjusting brush type, effect color, 3D settings, texture and pen & ink.

Manually paint over a reduced opacity copy of your source image (left). Use different styles and style settings in combination for unique results.

www.plugsandpixels.com/bokeh.html

ALIEN SKIN SOFTWARE

BOkeh 2

Nothing's more beautiful than a soft focus background, but chances are your camera or phone is not capable of doing them very well, if at all. It often takes very expensive glass or even a large-format camera with tilt adjustments to achieve this sort of look.

Alien Skin's Bokeh 2 goes beyond even the capabilities of the previous version by adding more speed, Lightroom and 64-bit Photoshop support, motion blurring, the combination of multiple radial and planar shapes in a single image, grain matching to replace original grain lost during blurring, desaturation of the vignette area plus more and combinable presets for customizable focus effects.

EXPOSURE 3
Taking the digital out of digital photography

You may have given up on film (or perhaps you're young enough to have never used it at all), but you don't have to give up the unique look and feel of film in your digital photos.

Alien Skin has been developing plug-ins since the early '90s, so they know what film is and how to emulate it in software. The 64-bit Photoshop-compatible Exposure 3 not only provides accurate film and Polaroid simulation, but goes a step further and adds a wide selection of related creative effects.

Exposure 3 doesn't merely add digital noise and try to pass it off as "film". The developers at Alien Skin carefully examined vintage film stocks in their lab and in film archives, which allows Exposure to realistically clump grain and reproduce the exact color and texture characteristics of Technicolor movies and Kodachrome slide film, to name but two of the over 500 presets.

Special effects include darkroom manipulations and Holga/Lomo camera quirks, besides offering control over the common artifacts that plagued film such as dust and scratches.

All of this is offered in a simple interface that gives easy access to the power under the hood.

ALIEN SKIN SOFTWARE

Save 10%

www.plugsandpixels.com/exposure.html

featured artist: christopher sileo

Some Beatles fans are content to collect their music, while others bid on memorabilia, attend conventions or make pilgrimages to Liverpool and London. Then there's Chris Sileo, who applies his many years of experience as a broadcast designer (virtual sets, motion graphics, 3D logos, news graphics) to reproducing locations and objects related to the Beatles.

In this scene, part of George Harrison's childhood home is reproduced. Below is John Lennon's Sunroom, where he spent much of his leisure time. Both scenes are accurately reproduced to the smallest detail.

[Chris' work is created in 3D Max 2009 and rendered with VRay. Composited and color corrected in Photoshop]

"25 Upton Green"

THEBEATLESIN3D.BLOGSPOT.COM

Visit Chris' blog to see many more examples of his Beatles-related 3D renders
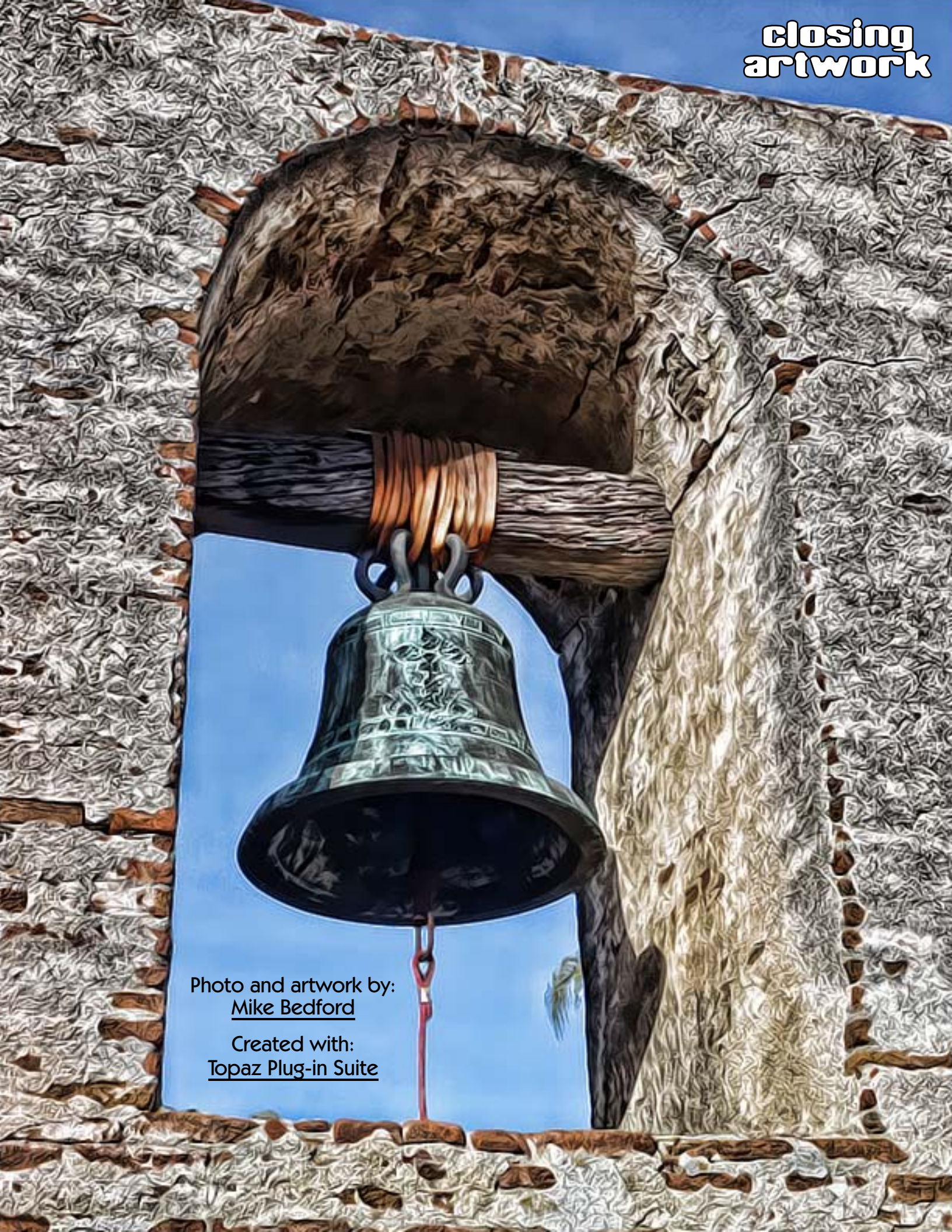
"Kenwood Sunroom"

THEBEATLESIN3D.BLOGSPOT.COM

Photo and artwork by:
Mike Bedford

Created with:
Topaz Plug-in Suite