NWDA
NEW WORLD DIGITAL ART

PLANETSIDE
SOFTWARE

First Place:
Hannes Janetzko

Winners of the 2013 New
World Digital Art Terragen
Roadside Image Contest

plugs·n·pixels

ISSUE #22

Created with iStudio Publisher
www.plugsandpixels.com/istudio.html

table of contents

•Background image created with different effects
found in the Topaz Complete Collection (see page 10)
•Texture backgrounds created with Flypaper Textures
(www.plugsandpixels.com/flypaper.html)

Here's how Hannes
created his First Place
Terragen illustration...

In real life I am a male nurse in a small city in Germany, but I spend as much time as I can creating CG imagery, mainly with Terragen. During the last two years I had been hired a few times by a German VFX company to contribute some TG animation work to some commercials, which was great fun to do. They did a great job incorporating my TG scenery into live action footage. (con't.)

First Place:

Hannes Janetzko

NWDA

NEW WORLD DIGITAL ART

I have been a fan of movie special effects since I was a kid, building miniature models and taking photographs of them. Since it was possible to make convincing photorealistic computer graphics on a home computer by using incredible software like Terragen I became a 3D addict. Many years ago I found classic Terragen (version 0.6) on the CD of a computer magazine. I was impressed how real the generated landscapes looked, even if the actual version of the new TG produces much more realistic results.

I remember when the theme of this year's NWDA contest had been announced, I was tempted to quit before I even started, because I had not the slightest idea how to create a road in TG. I've been a TG user since the first version had been released, but I never made a road before. Frank Basinski, one of the NWDA guys and a member of the Planetside community, provided us with some tips on how to start. I took a look into the nodes of one of his files and tried to understand how to use a simple shape shader (a very long and narrow square) and to warp it with a power fractal noise shader to create a curvature. Using this I could "draw" the simple shape of a curvy road into a terrain.

After I understood how Frank's method worked, I was able to copy these nodes and to use instances of them with different settings to create everything that had to follow the road's curvature: the road marks, the dirt and the distribution of the gravel and the bushes. I added a reflective shader with a smooth reflection to the basic road's surface to create the soft shiny effect you can see when the sun is low. Then I broke up the road marks with another power fractal to give them a more grungy look.

Without any idea how the final image would look like and what kind of scene it was going to become, I started to add some objects. The first ones were the telephone poles and the guy who is staring at something. I created the poles and the lines in 3ds max after I had exported the visible terrain into Max, placed them along the road and reimported the whole poles array as one single object into TG.

The person was a free mesh from 3dscanstore.com, which I had to texture first before later using it in TG. Still not knowing what the guy was looking at, I started to add some more vegetation. Although the road was already dirty and dusty, I thought that something was still missing: garbage. So I started to build cans, bottles and even cigarette butts and imported them into TG. It was a bit tricky to place the small objects correctly, so that they didn't float or intersect with the road. The cigarette butts might be barely noticeable depending on the image size, but sometimes it's the details that sell the picture.

After I had placed the barns and the car in the scene (there are lots of fantastic free models out there!), I had the impression that there should be something strange and disturbing in the air and I knew, that it had to be an alien spaceship. Some time ago I had built this ship, which is quite detailed and carefully textured. I also wanted to have a road sign in the image. I googled for the look of a common one but found a funny image of an alien abduction warning instead, which I happily used for the sign. A crumpled sheet of paper with some Area 51 stuff written on, pinned onto one of the poles, was the next thing I thought would fit into the scene.

After this was done I remembered a scene in District 9 where a lot of helicopters were flying towards the UFO. I had a nice helicopter model on my hard drive (another great free model), and placed a few of them in the scene. Texturing the rotors was a bit of a problem. Object motion blur is not yet implemented in TG and at that time I thought it wasn't possible to use smooth greyscale image maps of a blurred rotor as alpha maps, so I used disks with a water shader instead to create some transparency, which was the closest I could get, but didn't look very good.

And then along came Ulco, the winner of last year's NWDA competition who generously showed me a way to place a smooth transparent image of blurred rotors onto the disks. I still don't know why this worked, but it did. The last thing I had to do was a little bit of Photoshop magic. I slightly increased the contrast and added some chromatic aberration to make the image look less digital.

Creating this picture was a big challenge but also a great experience. I learned a lot and once again it showed me, that it is fantastic to be a member of the great Planetside community. •

"The cigarette butts might be barely noticeable depending on the image size, but sometimes it's the details that sell the picture."

Second Place: Jani Peltola

Second-place winner Jani describes his Terragen workflow:

The first thing to do was to create a mask for the road. This was a warped Simple Shape Shader. Base terrain features were very simple, just one Power Fractal shader a quite smooth and slight displacement. Later I added an Alpine Fractal Shader for the mountains in the background. When the road was in place, I started adding more masks for the ditch, the field, tracks, road sides, etc. All of these masks were made with Simple Shape Shaders and warped with the same Power Fractal as the road, so they followed the road lines.

Next was to populate the scene. At first I chose just some trees and grasses to see how the scene would look with the current masks. When I got those placed I surfaced the whole scene except for the road itself. The surfacing was done with Surface layers and Power Fractal Shaders.

Then I started surfacing the road itself. It was quite a difficult task and took a lot of time to get it to look like I wanted. The road surface itself has several Power Fractals for coloring and minor displacements. There are also eight Fake Stone Shaders with different scales for the gravel on the road. The Fake Stone Shaders are blended with warped Simple Shape Shaders so that the biggest stones appear on the sides and middle of the road. The largest stones are surfaced and displaced with Power Fractals and the smaller ones are just colored without displacement. In addition to these I also added small cracks on the road and blended them with Power Fractals so there are only small parts visible here and there. I continued tweaking the road surfacing throughout the final versions.

After surfacing it was time to concentrate on the vegetation. I chose better models for the trees and grasses. Placing the trees was quite simple and quick, but the grasses and wheat field took more time. It was quite difficult to get the field look how I envisioned, but adding color variation to it helped a lot and made it look more lively. There a lot of different grasses and flowers on the sides of the road and they are blended with Power Fractals to break up the distribution. I tried to keep the population areas as small as possible. The grasses in the middle part of the road are mostly made with several grass clumps with different sizes and colors. (con't.)

The whole scene contains a total of 28 populations and one log object.

I wanted the sky look quite neutral and not to draw too much attention from the road itself. There are two Cumulus layers and one Cirrus layer. The main Cumulus layer is the most visible and I made it billowing with negative warping. The other Cumulus layer has very low density and edge sharpness and reduced density just to add some sparse variation among the main clouds.

The overall lighting was the trickiest part. At first I added two suns to get the shadowed parts more visible, but that made the whole scene look flat. Then with only one sun, the lighting was better, but still quite flat. Adding a fill light setup was the key to achieving a deeper variation of shadow and light. Another last minute change was to use soft shadows, which slightly softened the too-sharp lighting and gave a result I was happy with.

Although in retrospect this workflow might sound like an easy and straightforward procedure, it really wasn't. I wouldn't have completed this illustration without help from the great community at Planetside forums. Many times I was about to give up after getting frustrated, but the great suggestions and supportive comments helped a lot and encouraged me to continue (especially Dune's suggestions for the middle part of the road and Hannes' suggestion to use fill lights, to mention only two).

There aren't many contests around where all participants help each other to get the best possible result!•
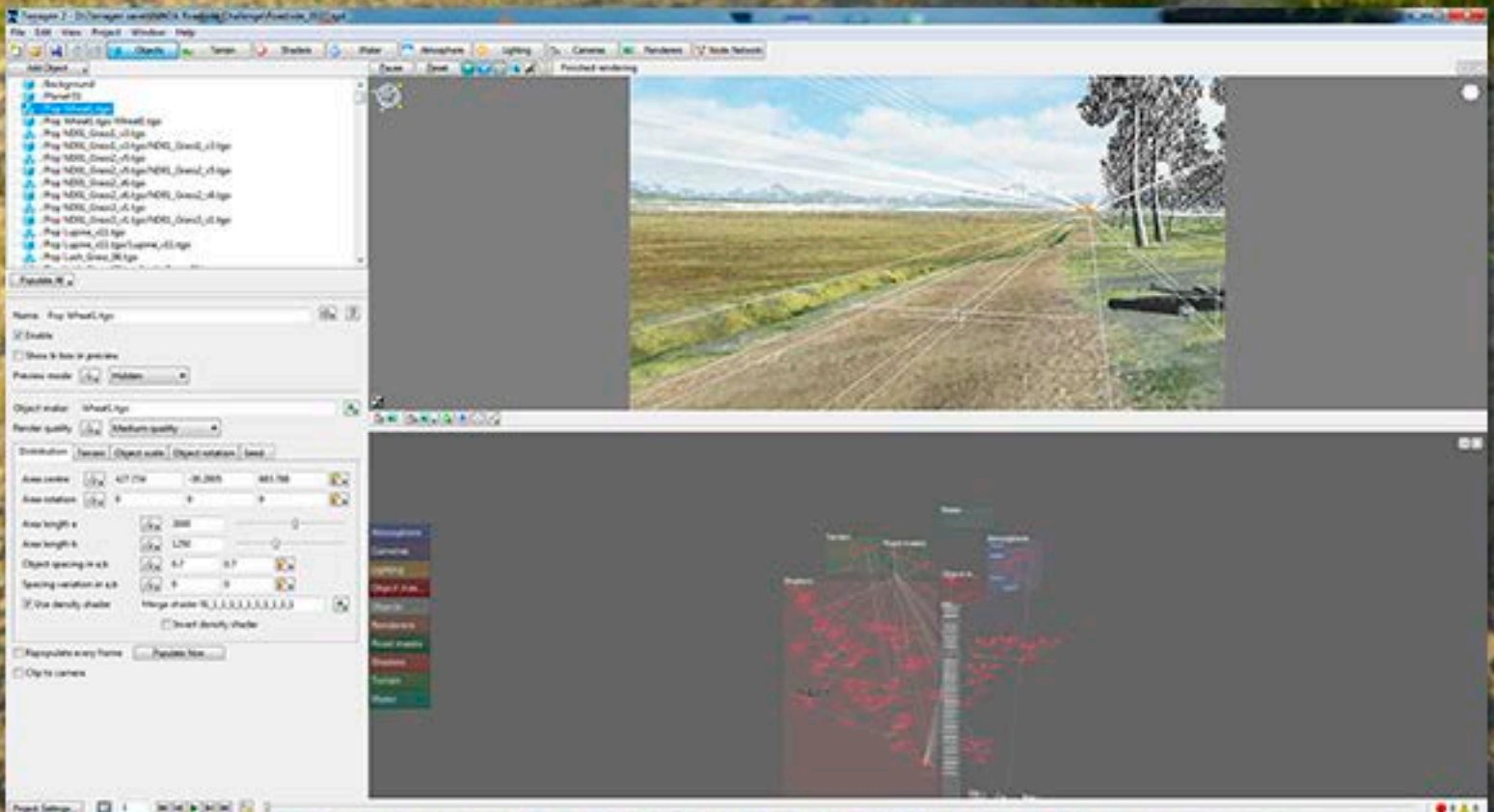
Third Place:
Pierre Chartier

Third-place winner Pierre Chartier began his career with photography and music endeavors but entered the world of 3D terrains only five years ago, using Terragen 2 because of its ability to render photorealistic scenes (which appealed to him as a photographer).

His winning entry, entitled "Vieux Chemin", was not his first attempt at the road concept. His original idea was to create a traditional paved road but didn't like the lighting he was getting, so he modified the concept toward what you see here (inspired by his memories of Quebec).

Pierre created this work without the use of masks, relying on the paint shader to distribute populations. He employed various models to populate the scenes, including free 3D buildings. The clouds were positioned to add depth and compositional interest.

As he works, Pierre patiently and experimentally modifies default Terragen settings and sets up multiple cameras.

This is far from being Pierre's first scenic work, as he has created many excellent renders featuring vistas of mountains, lakes, deserts and forests. •
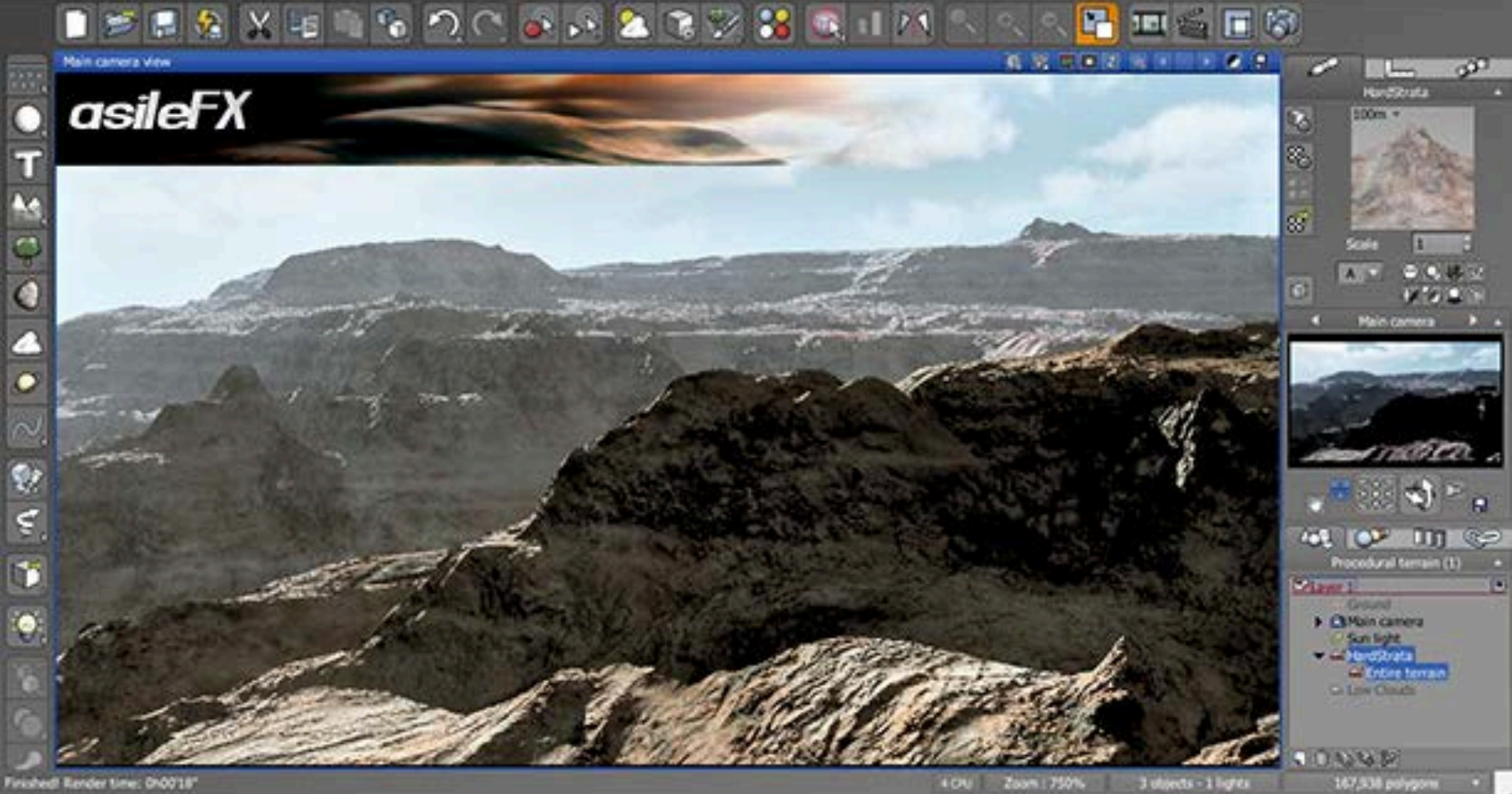
If you're interested in getting involved with creating your own 3D terrain art in e-on's Vue but don't know how to start, asileFX has the pre-made building blocks you need to get up to speed quickly.

The example stratified landscape above was created in mere moments using the new asileFX Vue Terrain and Materials Companions. The Terrain Companion includes 156 terrain objects of every conceivable style (slopes, erosion, plateaus, rivers, etc.). The Materials Companion includes 208 materials and 214 functions including rock, landscape and displacement materials (plus you can design your own).

By combining these professionally prepared terrain objects and materials, you'll save hundreds of hours trying to set these up yourself. Now you are freed up to concentrate on getting the perfect camera angle, lighting and atmosphere for the scene you have in mind.

For more info visit: www.plugsandpixels.com/asilefx.html

e-on Vue info & examples: www.plugsandpixels.com/vue.html
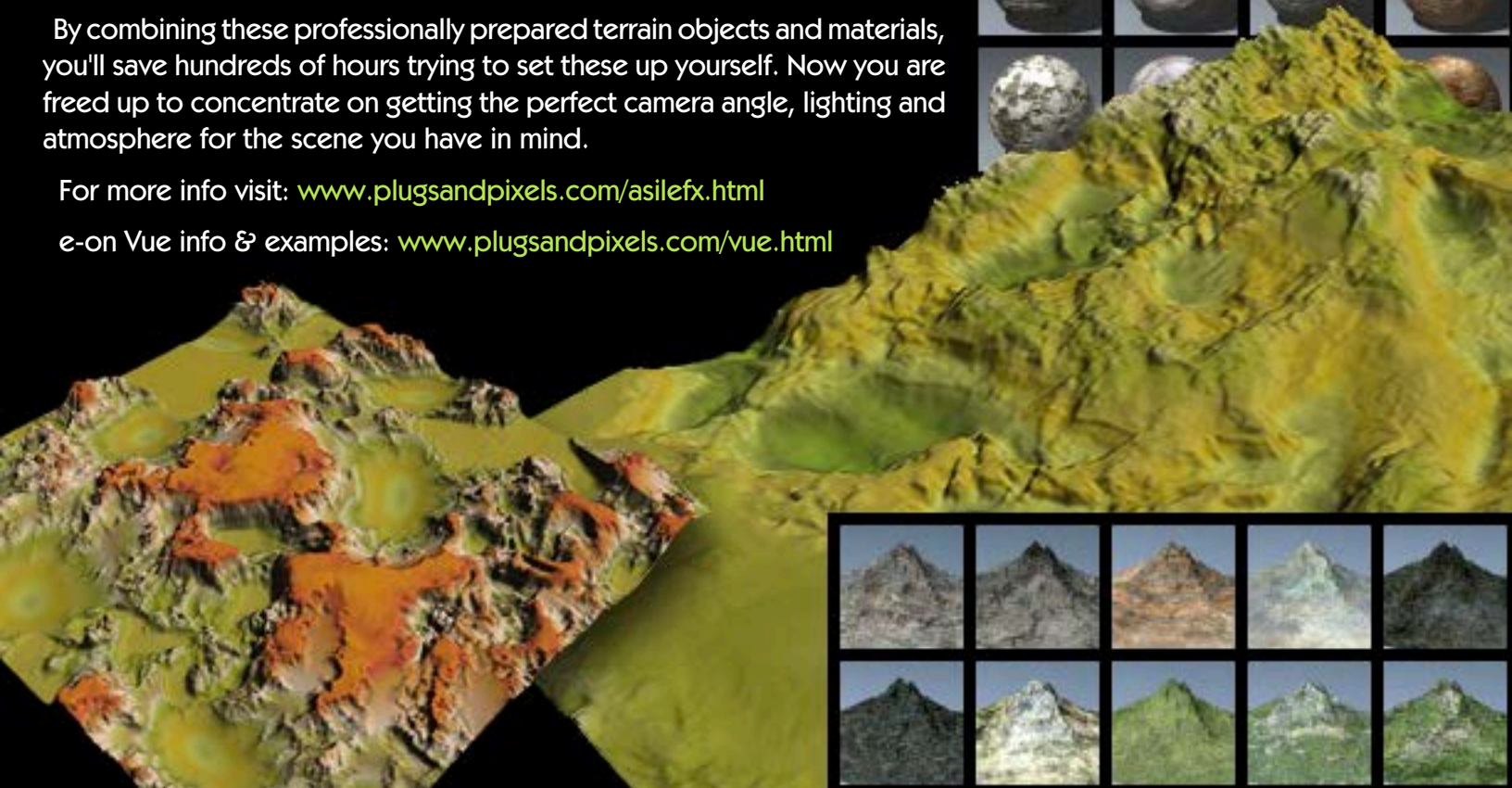
The new Topaz Complete Collection: What can you do with it? Let's find out!

The Topaz Complete Collection consists of 13 plug-ins/apps for performing both corrective and creative manipulations on your photos. This gives you a huge amount of photo-processing power! The plug-ins can be accessed by using Photoshop (or any other image editor that supports plug-ins) as a host, or from within Topaz' own photoFXlab (which can itself be used as a plug-in or standalone app where no host is required!).

Here's what's included in the Complete Collection:

Adjust | B&W Effects | Clarity | Clean | DeJPEG | DeNoise

Detail | InFocus | Lens Effects | photoFXlab | ReMask | Simplify | Star Effects

For more information on each of these plug-ins with effects examples, please visit:

http://plugsandpixels.com/topazsuite.html

You can use each of these plug-ins individually or, as I enjoy doing, combine the unique effects from several of them into one using layer effects.

For the purposes of this overview, we will examine each of the Topaz Complete Collection plug-ins individually, showing what each can do by using a single reference image. (con't.)

Getting Started

  For the example image I chose a photo I took in Las Vegas recently. You might call this "Faux York City". It's a good scene to use to demonstrate the corrective and creative capabilities of the Topaz Complete Collection because it has sky and clouds, architecture, strong lines and a variety of colors and tones. Each of these elements will be accentuated and manipulated by our Topaz post-processing.

  To create the following examples I used Photoshop CS6 and had the unretouched image as the Background layer. For each application of a Topaz plug-in I first duplicated the Background layer and applied the effect to the copy, then repeated the process until I had a multi-layered image file with a different effect on each layer.

  As I mentioned earlier you can mix and match Topaz effects, and this procedure is how you would do it, experimenting with Blending modes and opacity between and among the layers.

  So let's begin our tour of the Topaz Complete Collection! (con't.)

Topaz Adjust

Adjust is Topaz' most popular plug-in and is the one that put them on the map several years ago. Unintentionally, for $50 Adjust was producing detail enhancement effects similar to a $600 plug-in that was being offered at the time, and went way beyond it in terms of flexibility. It has only become more capable since. And upgrades to later versions have traditionally been free!

You will want to turn to Adjust to manipulate the exposure, color and detail in your weaker images, or to add HDR-like effects to even the best of shots. As seen above, you can also create color effects by starting with the many included presets and tweaking them to your liking.

For more info and custom examples, see www.plugsandpixels.com/adjust.html

Topaz B&W Effects

It's so easy to shoot in color now as opposed to the vintage days of film that Black and White has taken on a special appeal. Topaz' B&W Effects provides you with presets to achieve any of the traditional B&W looks, or to go beyond that into the more advanced and historically popular styles such as Cyanotype, Opalotype, Albumen and more.

But you are not limited to grayscale – you can also apply many color tonal effects too!

For more info and custom examples, see www.plugsandpixels.com/bweffects.html

Topaz Clarity

Topaz Clarity is one of their more recent offerings, going beyond even Adjust's capability to pull detail out of an image. Clarity's main claim to fame is that you can perform extreme tonal enhancements without generating unwanted halos or other artifacts common to such processes.

Using the various modules (clarity, tone, HSL) you have full control over the available enhancements. Masking brushes are provided for selective application of the effects. Over 100 presets enable you to get started quickly, after which you can fine-tune the settings according to each image's particular needs.

For more info and custom examples, see www.plugsandpixels.com/clarity.html

Topaz Clean
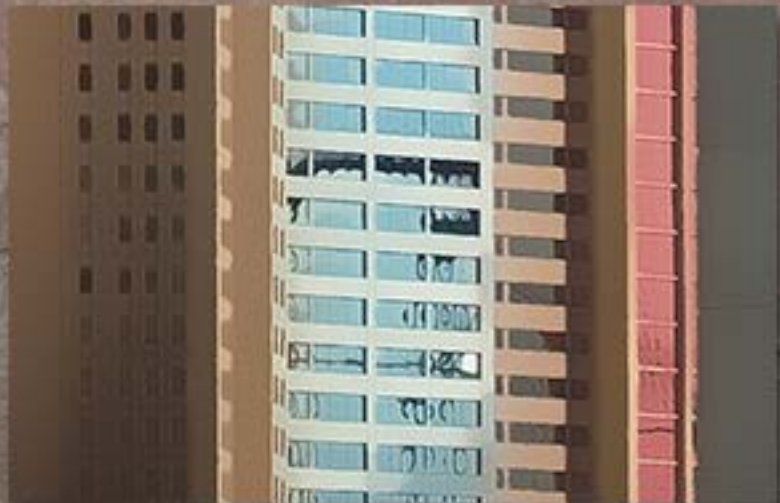
Topaz Clean is very practical and very fun at the same time! It's main purpose is to smooth out roughness in your image, improving edge transitions via its sharpening capabilities. But push it a little (or work though the presets provided just for this purpose) and you can create wonderful cartoon-like artwork, complete with unique curly accents if you want them (this treatment is fantastic on foliage).

I enlarged sections of the sample image so you can see the interesting smoothing effects taking place.

For more info and custom examples, see www.plugsandpixels.com/clean.html

Topaz DeNoise & DeJPEG

Photos by Judy Gilde
www.judygilde.com

Digital noise is a big problem, especially if you are shooting longer exposures in low light or grabbing interior/nighttime photos with your smartphone. In many cases you are probably deleting these images.

Topaz DeNoise is one of the most popular choices for addressing this issue. As you can see in the extreme ISO shots above, DeNoise was easily able to salvage this moody bad-weather shot, removing the noise while retaining detail in the moon and trees.

For more info and custom examples, see www.plugsandpixels.com/denoise.html

_____

A problem similar to that of digital noise but caused by the inherent compression of the JPEG format is artifacting. This is especially a problem when you have a small, low-resolution JPEG image and need to enlarge it for publication or display-sized printing. The example above right is a detail from a 1-megapixel image.

Topaz DeJPEG is designed to address the artifacting and noise without removing detail.

For more info and custom examples, see www.plugsandpixels.com/dejpeg.html

Topaz Lens Effects

Most enthusiasts engaging in the art and craft of photography for fun can't afford a huge collection of specialized "glass" (ie, expensive prime lenses and front-mounted filters). The good news is, Topaz Lens Effects not only gives you realistic simulations of various lens behavior (depth-of-field, bokeh, pinhole, tilt-and-shift and more) but also adds presets covering traditional filter effects such as color gradients, diffusion, polarization, streaks, color temperature, etc.

The 20 effects come with over 130 presets, and you can stack effects within the plug-in itself while experimenting. You can even create and edit custom depth maps.

For more info and custom examples, see www.plugsandpixels.com/lenseffects.html

Topaz ReMask

Depending on the type of post-processing you do, you may often be called upon to remove a subject from its background and put it onto another scene. Topaz ReMask makes this normally tedious task almost easy!

By simply drawing simple lines on your image using the Keep, Cut and Compute brushes, you can aid ReMask in quickly creating an editable and refinable mask. ReMask works closely with Photoshop's layer mask feature, enabling you to apply and even reimport the mask as needed.

For more info and custom examples, see www.plugsandpixels.com/remask.html

Topaz ReStyle

Topaz ReStyle is among the most recent of Topaz' offerings, and it opens up a lot of creative possibilities. ReStyle comes with over 1000 styles and looks that you can immediately apply to your image.

ReStyle works by applying the colors and tones from the included styles to your image, thus entirely changing the appearance and mood of the original. You can even use your own images to create styles than you can apply back onto other images!

A number of advanced features are included, such as blending modes, HSL technology and masking.

For more info and custom examples, see www.plugsandpixels.com/restyle.html

Topaz Simplify

Topaz Simplify is another unique tool for your artistic arsenal. It's main attraction is that it reduces an image to its basic components while also adding artistic touches of its own.

Simplify offers a fresh approach to the no-longer-available Buzz simplification but also adds presets for detail removal and traditional art styles such as line and ink, painting and sketching. The examples above show both extreme simplification and a crayon sketch style.

For more info and custom examples, see www.plugsandpixels.com/simplify.html

digitalizer 2

Turn your photos into symbols or stylized text with the new Digitalizer 2! Here is my photo of the Lincoln Memorial digitized using the text of the Gettysburg Address.

Original

www.plugsandpixels.com/digitalizer.html

Featured Artist

Bob from Rat Rod Studios
www.ratrodstudios.com

Bob describes his workflow:

   "I extracted the car using the pen tool in Photoshop CS5. Once done, I placed it on a white background. I used Topaz Adjust and Lucis Art to detail the car. I then used the brush tool in CS5 to paint some color around the car on the white background and added a little painted color on the car as well.

   "I also brushed some white on the car to make it appear as if I didn't quite paint the entire car. (Alternatively, you could also erase a little of the car and let the white background show through). I used Topaz DeNoise to clean the noise from the earlier filter treatments.

   "To finish up I used Topaz filters to add an aged coloring to the image. For the final step I added a little reflection below the car to make it appear grounded."

closing artwork

Filter Forge effect by Mike Bedford
www.plugsandpixels.com/filterforge.html