



plugs·n·pixels

IMAGE CREATION, MANIPULATION & EDUCATION

Using multiple plug-ins: A creative team effort



Topaz Plug-in Suite | Alien Skin Snap Art | onOne PhotoTools

Once you've collected a number of plug-ins from different developers, your options for engaging in creative experimentation increase that much more.

In this issue we'll explore using multiple plug-ins on the same image, working layer by layer to build up some wonderful artistry not otherwise possible using single effects.

We also take a look at the latest products from the major plug-in and terrain-creation developers, as well as begin a new feature: Topaz Tipz (for the rapidly growing group of Topaz Labs plug-ins fans).



Both photos were taken within minutes of each other on the same evening from the same location, but looking in opposite directions. Lucky timing!

twitter

www.twitter.com/plugsnpixels

plugs·n·
pixels

ISSUE #15

table of contents

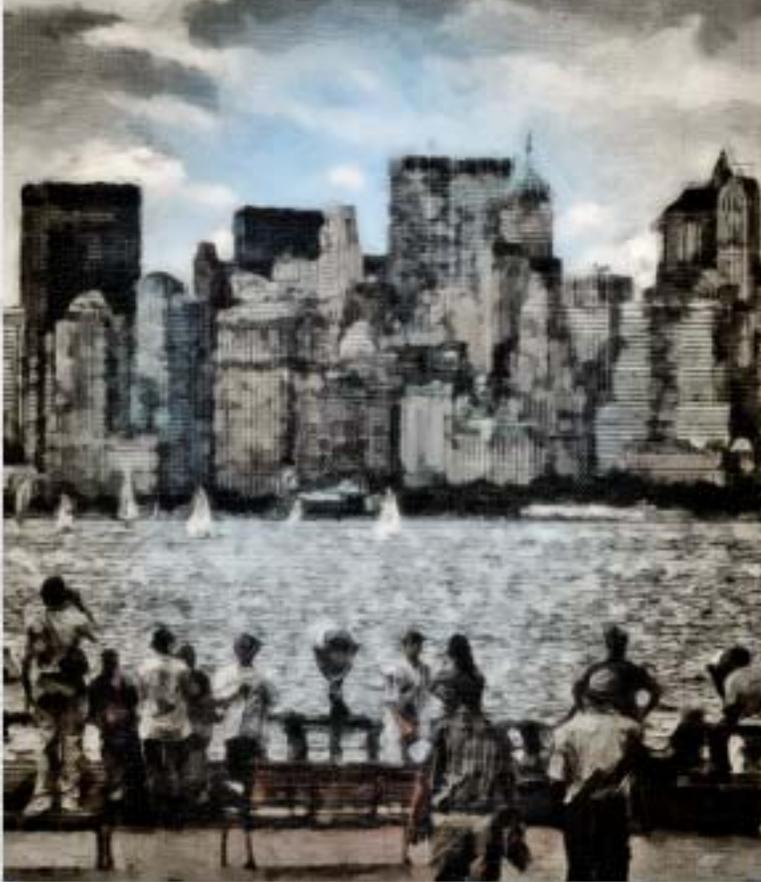
Pages 3-6: Creating the cover art | Page 7: Topaz Detail | Page 8: Topaz Tipz | Pages 9-10: Alien Skin Snap Art | Page 11: onOne FocalPoint | Page 12: Auto FX Mystical Tint Tone & Color | Page 13: Plugin Galaxy 2 | Page 14: Kubota RPG Mini & Dashboard | Page 15: 1-Click ActionStation | Pages 16-17: e-on Vue 7.5 | Page 18: New World Digital Art | Page 19: Xara Xtreme 5 | Page 20: Closing Artwork

WEBSITE: www.plugsandpixels.com | EMAIL: mike@plugsandpixels.com

creative cooperation, not competition

Using multiple developers' plug-ins: A successful team effort

Creating this issue's cover art



With so many excellent plug-ins currently available from multiple developers, it seems a given that one would experiment with combining and applying the results from several of them into one image. And that's exactly what was done for this issue's cover artwork (a summertime view of New York City).

In the toolbox this time around are plug-ins from Topaz Labs, Alien Skin and onOne. Each plug-in offered its own unique contribution to the whole, their effects stacked, managed and combined by use of Photoshop CS4's layers and blending modes.

The first step was to prepare the base image. I chose a nice view of the New York skyline taken from the Statue of Liberty. Problem was, the shot was horizontal and I needed a vertical for the cover. Plus, the sky in the original was a bit washed out.

So I increased the canvas size upward and stripped in a new sky from a photo taken the day before from the Circle Line (the clouds were just fantastic). Next up: Adding the plug-in effects.



Let's introduce the plug-ins used in this tutorial:

1) Topaz Adjust. Adjust is currently one of the top plug-ins favored for creating HDR-like effects from a single image, or for simply "popping" a flat image (while stopping short of a full-on HDR effect).

2) Topaz Clean. Clean does exactly what you might expect: cleans grit and roughness from images, smooths skin and goes even further by adding artistic "squiggles" to lines and edges.

3) Topaz Simplify. Simplify offers a range of artistic image interpretation, from buZZ-like simplification to sketches and wood carving.

4) Alien Skin Snap Art. One of the best ways to add realistic oil, watercolor, impasto or other brushstrokes with various degrees of photorealism.

5) onOne PhotoTools. Apply a wide range of image enhancement and treatment effects such as photo filters, overlays, edges, optimizations and B&W.



Enjoy discount pricing on these and other imaging products at the Plugs 'N Pixels website!

www.plugsandpixels.com/discounts.html

On the particular day I shot this issue's cover photo, the sun was going in and out of the clouds. It just so happened to be behind a cloud when I tripped the shutter, resulting in a bit of a dull, overcast view of Manhattan. Topaz Adjust is the perfect tool for popping some life into images like this. I used Adjust's Portrait Drama preset to increase the intensity of the colors and to add detail to the shadow areas (see screenshot, below left). The gray water turned to a shimmering silver and in the end, it didn't matter where the sun was when the photo was shot!

Off to a good start, I wanted to take the image in an artistic direction (even enhanced reality can be so boring...). I duplicated the Adjust layer and turned to Topaz Clean to add a unique type of wavy effect to every line and edge in the duplicate layer (see screenshot, below right, and large image at the bottom of the page). The Curly Smooth preset which I used is one of my favorites for transforming most any image into a fantasy piece.

I really like the whimsical feel Clean added to the image, and you don't see this often. Tip: Use Curly Smooth on images of deep foliage, such as trees in the woods, or flowers. Actually, even people look great once Cleaned!



Topaz Adjust screenshot



Topaz Clean screenshot



Work in progress: Topaz Adjust + Clean layers

Alright, so what's next? The image at this point is quite nice and can stand on its own. But having more plug-ins on hand means having more creative options to play with. Topaz Simplify (see screenshot, below left) has a nice Wood Carving preset I thought I'd try incorporating into the mix, and it turned out to be just the thing.

Working on a merged copy of the earlier layers, I ran the Wood Carving preset and got the effect you see below. With this new layer on top of the others, I changed its blending mode to Multiply, which revealed the layer below while adding the Wood Carving treatment to it.

Once this effect was complete, I flattened the image and saved it under a new name. I duplicated the Background layer for safety and experimented with the various presets in Alien Skin's Snap Art 2. I almost went with the Watercolor style (see next page), but opted for the Oil Paint preset (with my own modifications to the brush size, photorealism amount, canvas height settings, etc.). The result thus far was completely satisfactory, but there was yet another plug-in left to use, which took the image in a totally different direction (from art to antique).



Topaz Simplify screenshot



Alien Skin Snap Art screenshot



Work in progress: new Topaz Simplify layer



The final step involved using a flattened copy of the image thus far and applying onOne's PhotoTools 2.0 (Mocha Java B&W preset) to a duplicate of the Background layer. With the PhotoTools layer on top of the color layer, I drew an oval marquee selection, feathered it and deleted it, revealing a hint of color underneath while leaving a vintage mocha vignette. •



Unused option: Alien Skin Snap Art Watercolor

new! topaz detail

The latest addition to the Topaz family of plug-ins is Topaz Detail, which frees HDR-effect practitioners from the embarrassing halos that are often an unwanted by-product of the process of extending the tonal range of a single image.

Following on the heels of the wildly popular Topaz Adjust, Detail gives you even finer control over the extraction of hidden content in your images while offering artifact-free edge manipulation (see the lamp and sky example below).

As a bonus, Detail is also an excellent monochrome-conversion utility, offering you individual access to the cyan-red, magenta-green and yellow-blue ranges of your image.

Detail is available for purchase as a standalone plug-in or as part of a suite of six creative and enhancement plug-ins.

Treated with Topaz
Detail (B&W conversion),
Topaz Clean
(simplified lines)
& Topaz Adjust
(lip saturation)



Original

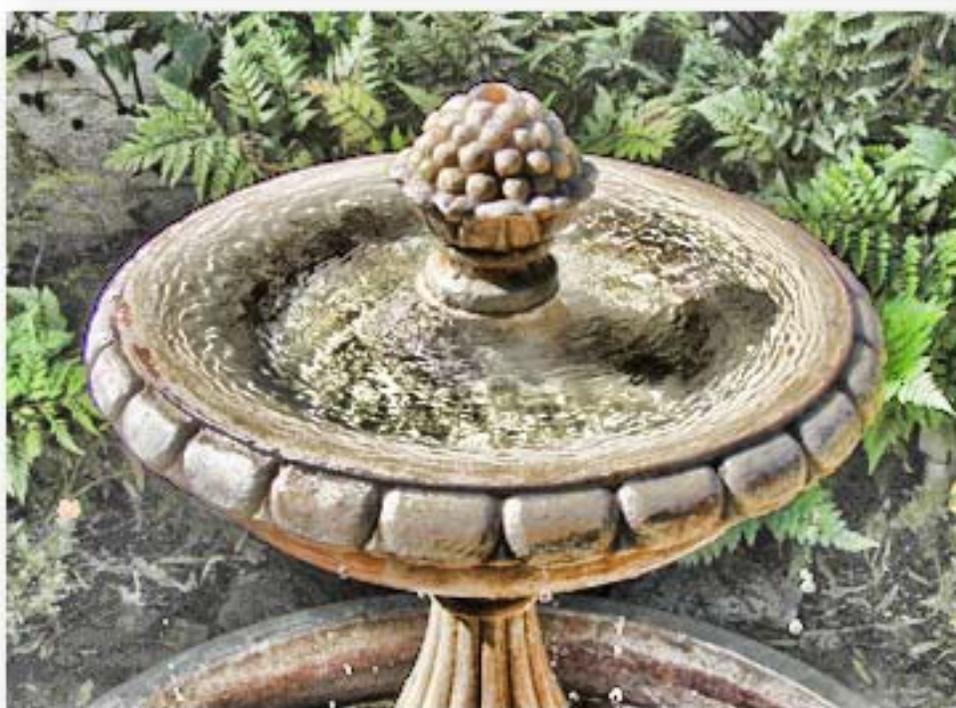


- No-halo HDR!
- Detail enhancement
- B&W conversion
- Artistic effects



topaz tipz:

To recover detail from severely underexposed areas of your image while improving highlight detail, use Adjust's Exposure Correction preset and increase the Adaptive Exposure and Regions sliders.



Exposure

Details

Color

Noise

Adaptive Exposure

0.95

Contrast

0.38

Highlight

0.02

Reset Tab

Regions

28

Brightness

0.32

Shadow

0.06

Reset All



Megapixels don't matter when you're applying Snap Art effects!
 Even ancient 1-megapixel images can be enlarged to poster size and given new life

See next page
for closer view



Impasto

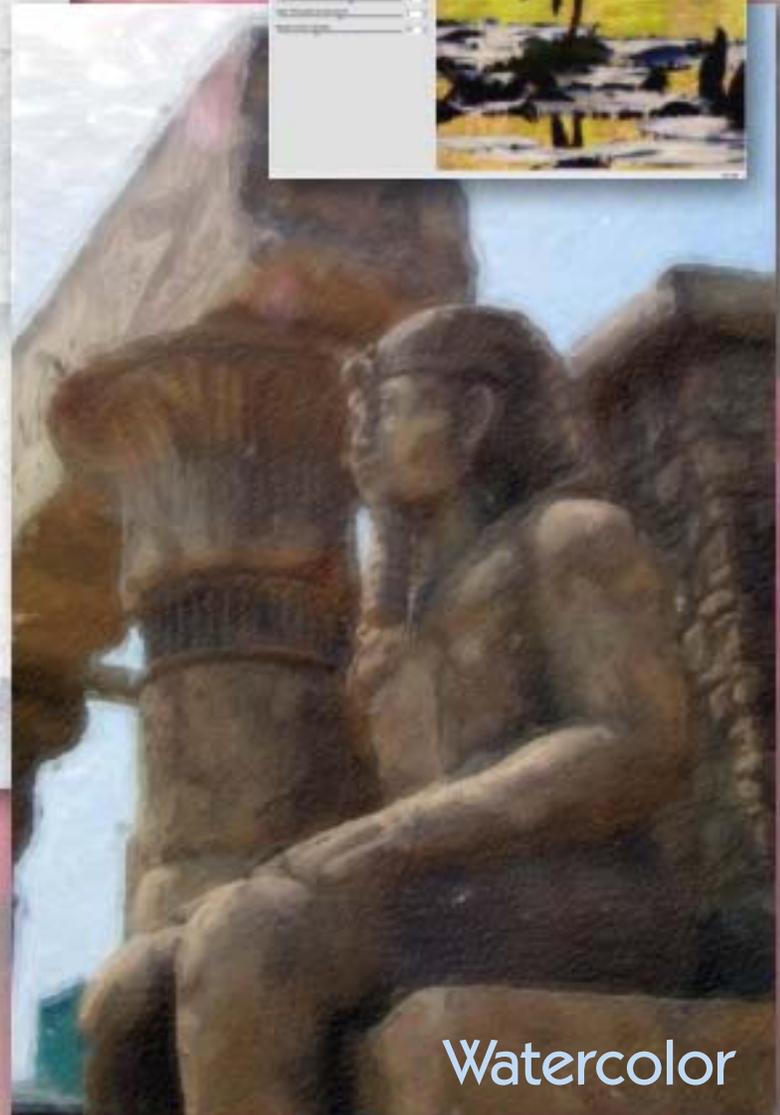
**Save
10%!**



Back in 2001 I was using a 1-megapixel Kodak DC265 digital camera. It did a pretty decent job, considering its limitations. I put a lot of effort into capturing scenics and textures for use as personal stock photos. So of what use are all those resolution-challenged images to me now?

Well, when you're applying digital art effects plug-ins, I discovered megapixels don't matter!

Alien Skin recently released version 2 of its Snap Art plug-in, and I decided to try it with some of my mini-meg images. As you can see, a new plug-in breathed fresh life into old images.



Watercolor

- Snap Art 2 artistic effects:
 Color Pencil | Comics
 Impasto | Oil Paint
 Pastel | Pencil Sketch
 Pen and Ink | Pointillism
 Stylize | Watercolor

Snap Art 2 Stylize

Original



www.plugsandpixels.com/snapart.html

1-megapixel image, interpolated

Snap Art 2 results

on FocalPoint

Selective focus after the fact

We don't always have the luxury of capturing our photos with the perfect depth-of-field and point-of-focus, whether due to shooting circumstances or the limitations of our equipment.

But no matter, because onOne offers FocalPoint, a virtual lens that offers you exceptional control over the placement and type of focus as well as vignettes.

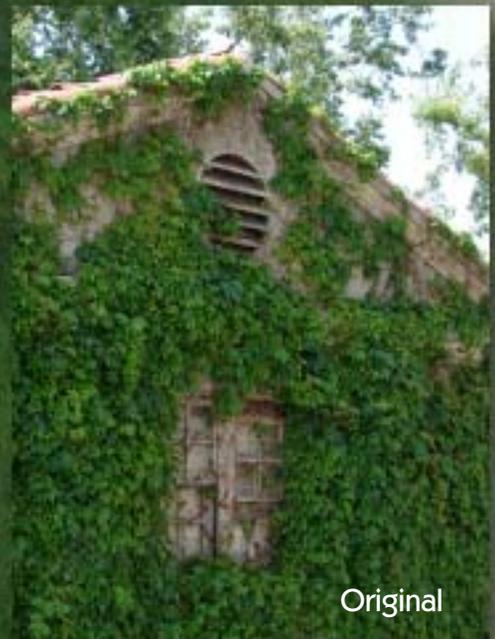
It's actually better to save decisions about focus placement until after the shot, where you have more time to experiment with the best effects.

FocalPoint's "FocusBug" (left) is the perfect tool for carefully controlling the sweet spot in real time in Photoshop.

SAVE 20%!
Use coupon code 1502

Width: 288px Height: 206px Angle: -109.4deg

The FocusBug (above) controls the placement and attributes of FocalPoint's "sweet spot". Drag the FocusBug into position, then use the "legs" to adjust the size and shape of the sweet spot. Adjusting the "antennae" controls the type and amount of blur and the feathering of its edge.



Original

The original image was shot in such a way that its depth-of-field is deep and no particular area is emphasized over any other. After treatment with onOne FocalPoint (background image), the main architectural elements stand out amidst a dreamlike vignette.

Auto FX Software

VISUAL IMAGING SOLUTIONS

Auto FX is one of the oldest names in the Photoshop-compatible plug-in business, so it's exciting whenever they release their latest product. Mystical Tint Tone and Color 2 is just out with a total of 60 effects, including 22 making their first appearance in this version, with the remaining filters redesigned and improved (as was the interface itself). Included along with the effects are over 300 presets to get you started. It is possible to experiment with an

unlimited number of effects combinations using MTTC's Layer Palette, which is similar to Photoshop's: Add and rearrange photo and correction layers and control opacity.

The many effects are categorized as follows: Color Effects, Tinting, Tonal Effects, Lens Filters, Sharpening, Special, Smoothing, Portrait and HDR Filters. In other words, MTTC is a complete set of digital effects and enhancements wrapped in an attractive futuristic interface.

Image shows a fade between MTTC's Antique Photo and Smooth Range effects & its Moon Glow effect.

www.plugsandpixels.com/mttc.html



Original



MTTC 2.0 screenshot





plugin galaxy 2

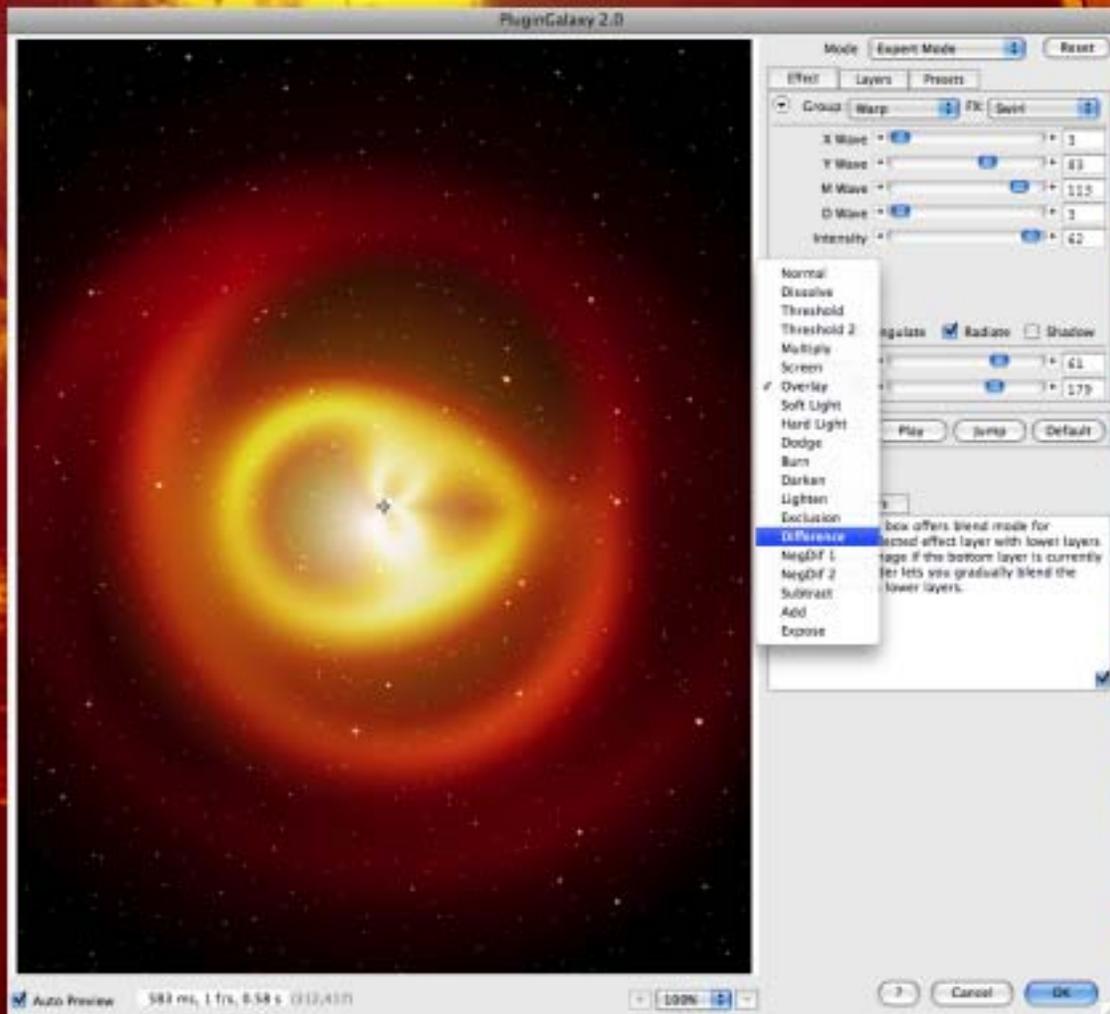
The latest version of this popular plug-in offers a universe of wild effects!

As with all of The Plugin

Site's plug-ins, Plug-in Galaxy 2 gives you full control over every aspect of the final effects. In this new version there are more than 160 esoteric effects to make your wildest creative urgings come to life. Run wild with nature effects, cosmic scenes, text and frame effects and stack the results in layers before combining them with different blending modes. The Play and Jump buttons provide random application of effects for even more incredible results.



Original



kubota actions: remote control

Editing your digital images is a lot of work, so anything that streamlines and speeds the process is more than welcome in your workflow.

Kubota Image Tools is known for offering high-end, professional-quality actions used by wedding and portrait photographers. With the new RPG Speedkeys wireless remote (below), they've gone even further to make your image editing painless!

Tired of sitting at your desk editing images for hours? No need. Sit comfortably on the couch and do your editing remotely. Seriously! The RPG remote interacts with Adobe Lightroom and lets you tweak the image settings from a distance.

Perhaps you already know about the DashBoard, Kubota's earlier software product that gives you quick access to every Kubota action in a single palette. A search function helps narrow your search to the type of actions or action sets you are looking for and enables you to apply them.

Either way, Kubota has got you covered.

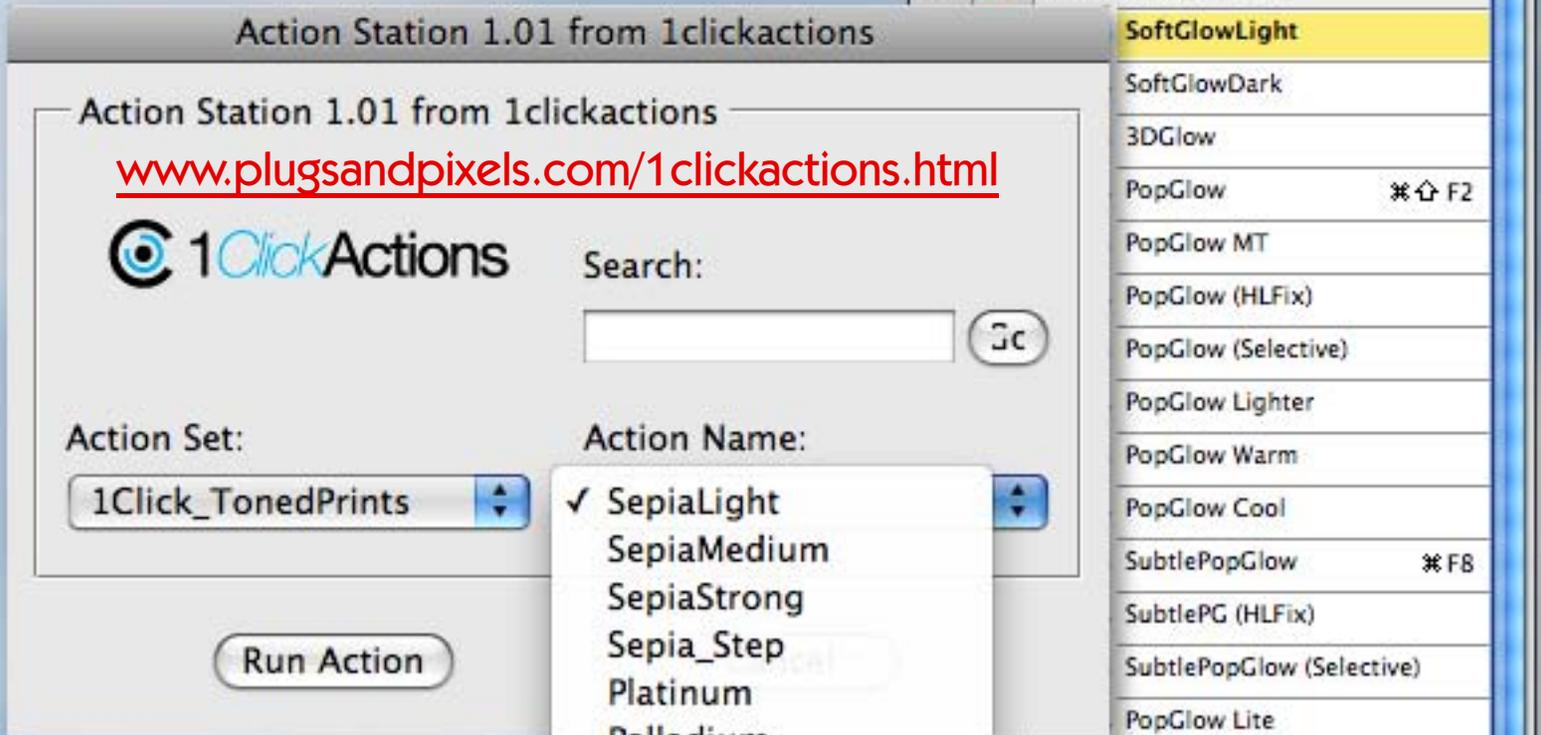


www.plugsandpixels.com/kubotaactions.html

1ClickActions

action station

Access your entire actions collection



Photoshop's Actions palette is a great way to access your installed actions – that is, until you have too many. That's when the Actions palette becomes unwieldy and loooooong (see screenshot at right, where only part of ONE set of actions is visible).

The folks at 1-Click Actions have solved this problem with their clever Action Station, which condenses the actions into a small and easy to manage interface.

Search for actions, select them from a drop-down menu and apply them, all without leaving the Action Station.

While you're at it, check out 1-Click's range of action sets at great prices.

SAVE 15%!

Use coupon code
"plugs2009"

Action Station
works with
actions from all
developers, not
just 1-Click!



vue infinite 7.5

Be the master of your own imaginary universe



The full Moon rises up behind a mysterious pyramid set into a rocky landscape. A spotlight from an unknown source illuminates the scene. What happens next?

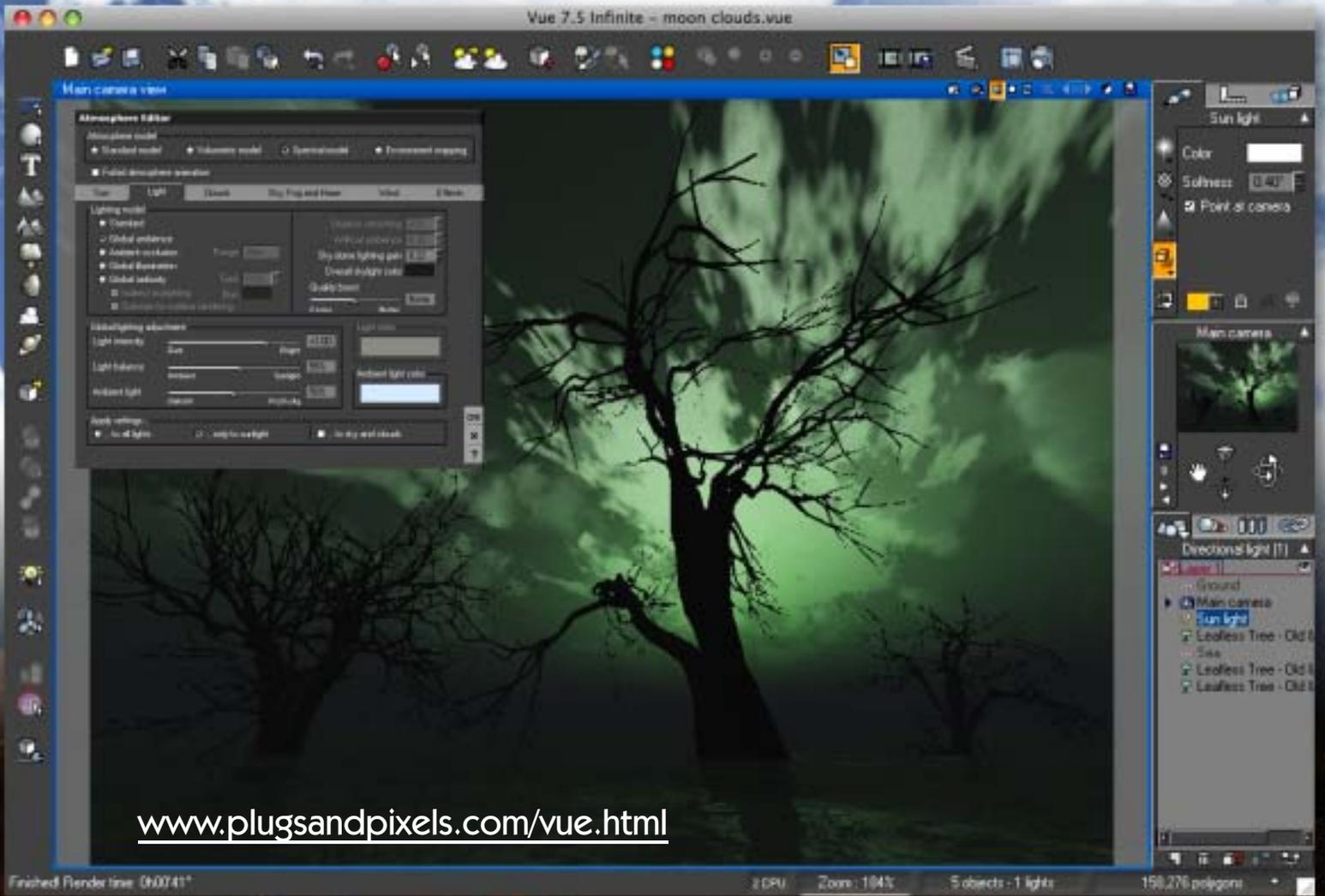
This is the kind of fun you can have with e-on software's Vue 7.5, where you are master of the universe when it comes to envisioning a 3D scene – anywhere on earth or in space – and bringing it to life using Vue's many advanced production tools.

Of course Vue can be used for serious projects as well, with professionals in SFX, animation, illustration, architecture, matte painting and CG using it for commercial still and motion projects.

On the next page we'll take a look at some of the new features introduced in version 7.5.

	Altitude	<input type="text" value="2.2km"/>
	Height	<input type="text" value="500m"/>
	Cover	<input type="text" value="100%"/>
	Density	<input type="text" value="100%"/>
	Opacity	<input type="text" value="71%"/>
	Sharpness	<input type="text" value="0%"/>
	Feathers	<input type="text" value=""/>
	Detail amount	<input type="text" value=""/>
	Altitude variation	<input type="text" value=""/>

The tools for creation are at hand.
What new worlds will you make?



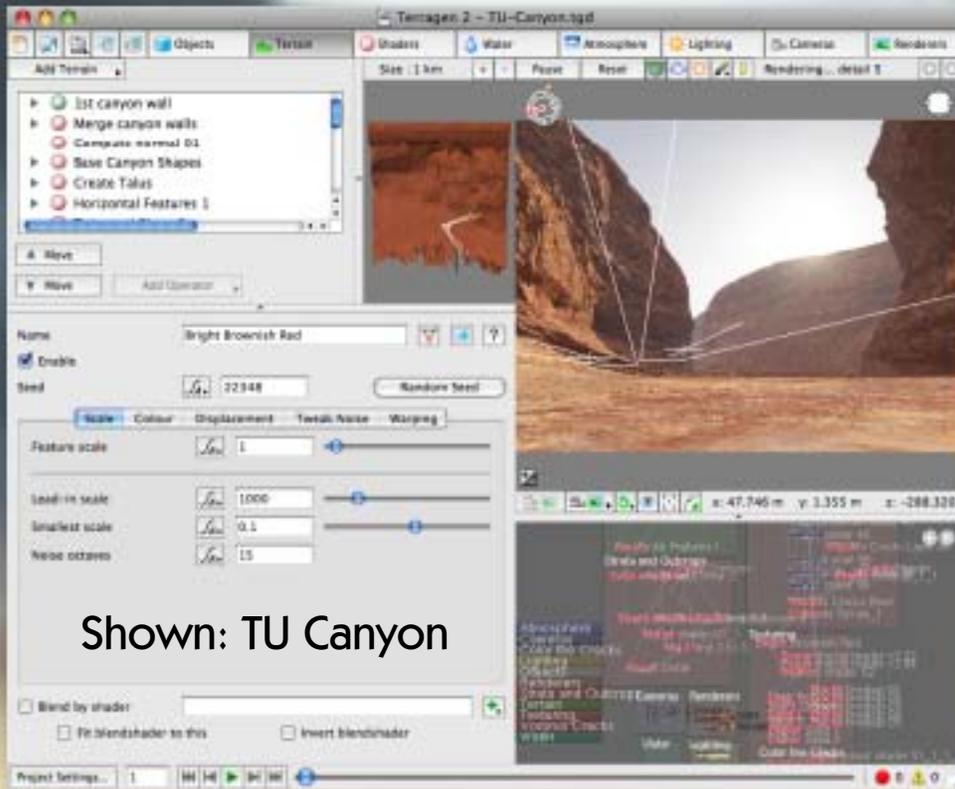
New in Vue 7.5:

Improvements and new features include material mapping on terrains (defining surface material distribution by painting, viewing and modifying imported material distribution maps, affecting material mapping with terrain effects); planetary rendering (infinite procedural terrains that extend forever, rendering of entire planets via converted flat, spherical or planetary procedural terrains); easy planetary navigation via unwrapping of the surface; improved cloud technology such as the creation of real-world spherical clouds via imported cloud maps, cross-shadowing on clouds, cloud masks, more detailed cloud close-ups via spectral 2 detail, enhancement of the OpenGL cloud previewing; realistic sun shadows in OpenGL views; plant preview quality improvement via dynamic adjustment on a global basis; animated EcoSystem populations that evolve over time; enhanced multi-processor usage; and camera mapping, where a render of your scene is projected back through the camera for matte painting creation, etc.

terragen 2 object and preset packs

NEW WORLD DIGITAL ART

Start creating Terragen 2 artwork immediately!



Shown: TU Canyon



Big Fat Atmo Pack



TU Canyon Pack



Sky Starter Pack

Terragen 2 is a professional-level, photorealistic terrain creation and rendering application. It's a bit harder to master than the previous version (0.9) and it takes a bit of additional know-how to generate advanced landscapes and skies that surpass the norm.

The folks behind New World Digital Art have spent many, many hours working with TG2 in an advanced capacity and have saved out a number of finished Terragen-native environment files as starter packs to get new users up to speed quickly. You simply open one of their files (as shown above) and start exploring the prepared desert, sky or plants. Tweak the provided settings as desired, and make your own unique renders from any angle you choose.

Visit the URL below for more information about NWDA's offerings.

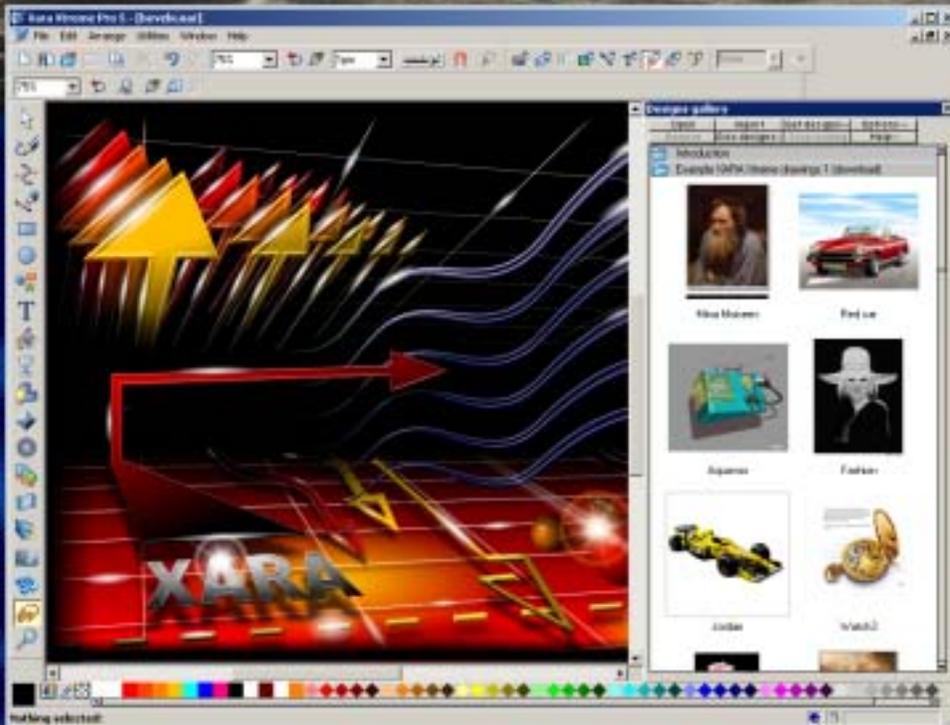
Background art
(bottom) Milk and Honey Sunset (from Sunset Pack 2)
blended into:
(top) Wild Clouds 1 (from Wild Clouds Pack)



Xara Xtreme

5

Artwork courtesy of Xara



Graphic designers will be familiar with Xara's products as among the best in the business for vector illustration, photo editing, 3D extrusion and web design, with powerful import/export.

Xara Xtreme 5 continues this tradition with a redesigned Object Gallery, content-aware scaling, enhanced website design and export capability, live spell-checking and other text tool improvements, better sketch freehand drawing, cross-layer grouping, more advanced Flash file handling, multi-layered and different sized pages, much improved Adobe EPS import, a large collection of templates and support for network installation.

Visit the URL below for a complete list.

www.plugsandpixels.com/xaraxtreme.html

closing artwork

Photo and artwork by:
Mike Bedford

Topaz Plug-in Suite
Alien Skin Snap Art
onOne PhotoTools and
PhotoFrame



Original

