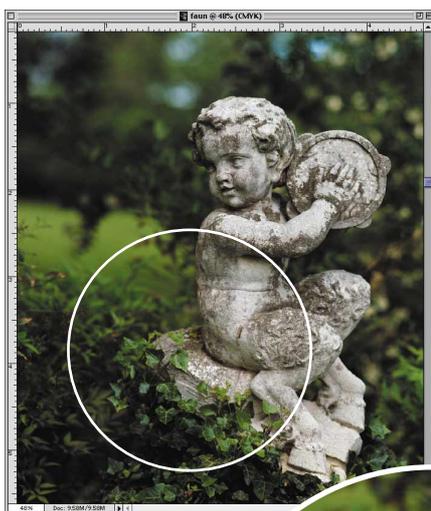


Look Sharp

By Conrad Chavez



In the image above, Sharpener Pro brought out the fine details in the stone and the ivy, but, appropriately, did not sharpen the out-of-focus background.

Sharpener Pro (plug-in for Adobe Photoshop 3.0 and later). \$329.95. Windows 95/98/NT and Mac/Power Mac. nik multimedia, (619) 562-4456, www.tech-nik.com.

SHARPENING IS USUALLY THE LAST STEP IN touching up photographic images you prepare for print or the Web in Photoshop. But learning how to properly sharpen an image for a specific output is one of those mysterious initiation rites every new designer must endure. Normally, you choose a command with a seemingly backwards name (Unsharp Mask) and use its three cryptic sliders to sharpen the image without ruining it (and your reputation). Is there an easier way? Possibly—in the form of Sharpener Pro, a Photoshop plug-in that adds several sharpening commands on the Filters menu for specific output types, such as Color Laser, Inkjet, Internet, and Offset.

Sharpener Pro's simple and attractive interface presents sharpening options in terms of how your image will be output and viewed, and then does the math for you. While there are some unclear controls and labels—perhaps due to translation from the original German—the manual contains good explanations.

Despite its simplicity, the program is not a blunt instrument; you can adjust image and output details. The plug-in also does some clever image analysis behind the scenes, such as hue protection (preventing color fringing) and selective sharpening (avoiding moiré patterns on background objects). Sharpener Pro can also automatically adjust the sharpness for the amount of actual detail (resolution) it detects in an image; if you scan an out-of-focus photo at 300 ppi, for

example, there won't really be 300 ppi worth of information in it—because no part of the original was completely sharp to start with. Photoshop pros use special techniques for manually dealing with all of these challenges, but Sharpener Pro can do them for you.

While Sharpener Pro does much to automate sharpening, you're not completely off the hook. Like any high-quality sharpening technique, Sharpener Pro works best on dust- and scratch-free images, and under specific, known output conditions. The plug-in provides a convenient preview window, but sharpening for print can be evaluated reliably only through a proof print (of course, this is true with any sharpening method).

Because Sharpener Pro automates an operation that directly affects final image quality, you'll want to run tests comparing it to your existing sharpening procedures. If the arcane science of proper sharpening is second nature to you, Sharpener Pro might save you some time through automation. For the rest of us, and perhaps for high-volume imaging departments, Sharpener Pro can be a simple, fast way to achieve a level of quality that would normally require a lot more training and work. • Conrad Chavez, a senior technical writer at Adobe, is a regular contributor to *Adobe Magazine*.

What a Sorted Life!

By Wendy Peck

Cumulus 5.0. \$89.95. Canto, (415) 703-9800, www.canto.com. **Portfolio 5.0.** \$199.95. Extensis, (503) 274-2020, www.extensis.com. Both products are stand-alone applications for Windows 95/98/2000/NT and the Mac OS.

AS A GRAPHIC DESIGNER JUST STARTING out, you discover very quickly—often painfully—the importance of organizing files. But you may find that even the best organization doesn't prevent you from

Cumulus, like Portfolio, gives you a thumbnail view of your cataloged files along with myriad options for sorting and searching.



wasting your time locating that certain image. You need an asset manager.

In the quest to find order for my own projects, I tested single-user versions of Extensis Portfolio 5 and Canto Cumulus 5. Although their work patterns are different, both programs deliver exceptional control over your files, with enough bells and whistles to make them fun to use.

The organizational structure of each program is based on a catalog—the key to the power of these programs. I enthusiastically rushed into testing them, but didn't unleash their potential until I did my homework and planned my structure (both products' manuals provide sections on organizing catalogs).

It was crucial that my past work could be quickly cataloged, and both programs delivered one-click or drag-and-drop convenience for this task. My test project was one of my Web tutorials, and approximately 1,100 items were cataloged in about five minutes. I loved how Cumulus automatically mirrored my system's directory structure (old habits die hard), but preferred to specify options as I imported with Portfolio.

Both programs provide almost unlimited options for records. The prospect of entering keywords for hundreds of files seemed daunting, but it took surprisingly little time. Even without keywords, you can do some limited searching, and the

visual presentation of most file types allows quick identification. Portfolio's automatic update function is especially slick, although both programs manually update a catalog with one click.

Portfolio and Cumulus offer the option to publish selected files or even entire catalogs to HTML thumbnail pages, and the generated code is surprisingly clean. Both programs will also create a slide show. Cumulus uses QuickTime to create the file, and you can save or e-mail it from the program. Portfolio and Cumulus also have add-ons and versions for advanced Web publishing, CD-ROM distribution, and workgroups.

Although each product delivers the same result—perfectly organized project files—they do have different workflows. Some users will be comfortable with

the Cumulus hierarchical structure, while others will love Portfolio's floating palette system. Since both programs have demo versions, try setting up a small project in each to discover which one best suits your style and your needs. Either of these programs will prove to be a worthwhile investment. • Wendy Peck (wpeck.com) is a Web designer, writer, and trainer, and writes the graphics column at www.webreference.com.

House Detective

By Glenn Fleishman

Summary (server software for the Web). \$59. Windows 95/98/NT, Mac OS, Unix, and Linux. Summary.net, www.summary.net. **Funnel Web** (standalone application). \$249 for Windows and Mac versions, \$995 for the Unix and Linux professional versions. Active Concepts, (800) 551-5282, www.activeconcepts.com.

LIKE A LATTER-DAY SAM SPADE, WEB-LOG analysis software examines a muddy field of a thousand footprints from last night's fandango to discover just who was doing what, and where—in other words, it gives you a crisp report about traffic to your site. The translation and presentation of all that data has typically been limited to very pricey software. Fortunately, two inexpensive, intelligently designed programs—Funnel Web and Summary—

have appeared on the scene to offer a range of reporting and analysis options that will meet the needs of most moderately trafficked sites.

Both programs recognize a wide variety of Web server logs (without manual configuration) and produce easy-to-read reports that include straightforward visitor analysis; traffic analysis by hour, day, month, and other intervals; bandwidth usage; entry pages; browser and platform breakdowns; and keywords used by search engines that brought people to your site. Both programs also come in standard and pro versions (see the Web sites for details), with the latter aimed mostly at Internet service providers.

Funnel Web, which allows you to choose site-specific options and schedule multiple reports, is the slicker of the two programs. It produces gorgeous graphs, even three-dimensional charts (in the pro version) with three axes—not chart junk, but a plot of certain users, for example, by location over time.

Summary, while not as polished, has power under the hood. All of its administration, from configuration to report viewing, is done via the Web. This means you can run the software on any platform it supports, and administer and view the server remotely from any Web browser anywhere. Summary offers a fair amount of detailed configuration, including the ability to create custom reports. The manual is quite technical but also neat, precise, and readable.

Neither program lets you drill down to multiple variables (the number of visitors from Estonia, for example, who viewed more than five pages). You also can't take the same data and cut a different time slice without reprocessing all the logs. More expensive software can do that sort of thing on the fly; that's the primary difference between these two programs and the high-end packages.

Which one should you choose? Funnel Web offers a bit more veneer to protect users without any experience. Summary might be better for people who don't mind getting their hands dirty sometimes, and are willing to trade their time for a lower price and greater configurability. Both are excellent solutions for those with access to Web logs, but without the tools or dollars to work with them. • Glenn Fleishman writes the Web Watcher column for *Adobe Magazine*.