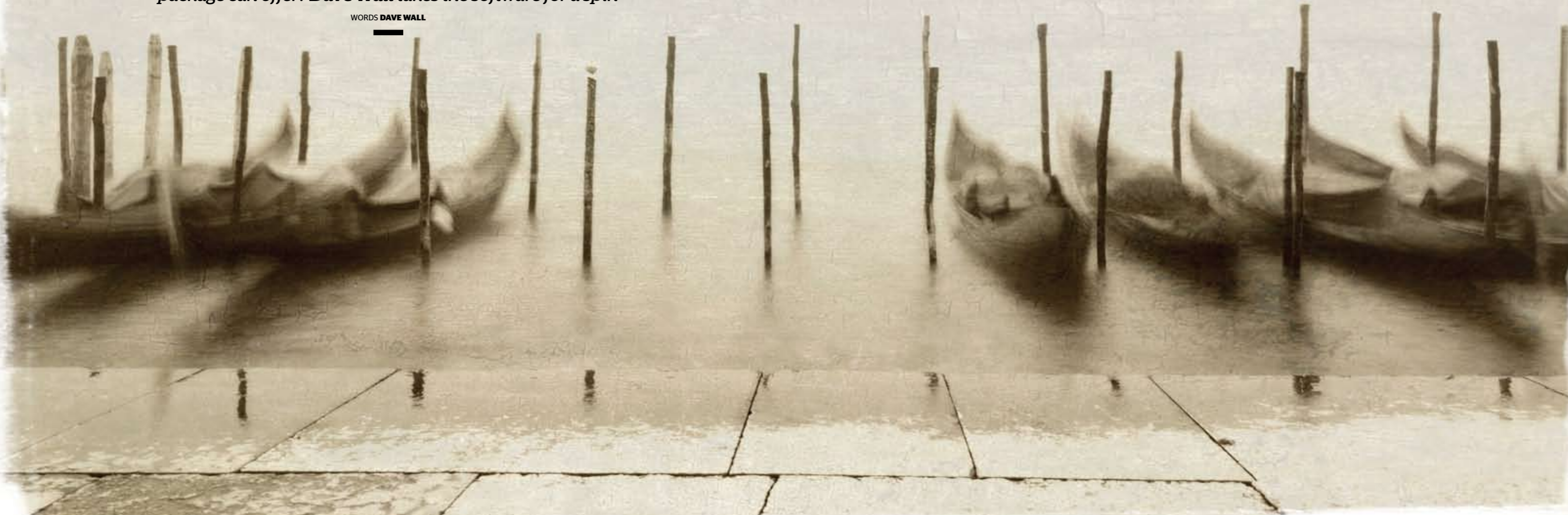


ON TEST:

OnOne Perfect Photo Suite 6

With the launch of Perfect Photo Suite 6 from OnOne at a reduced price point is this a good time for professional photographers to see what this package can offer? **Dave Wall** takes the software for a spin

WORDS DAVE WALL



Perfect Photo Suite 6 includes no less than seven different software solutions all under the umbrella of the one package, effectively covering off a whole range of eventualities.

The new software also has the advantage that it integrates smoothly as a plug-in with Adobe Photoshop (CS4 & 5), Adobe Lightroom (2 & 3), Apple's Aperture and even Adobe Elements.

In addition to this extensive compatibility Perfect Photo Suite 6 will also run as a standalone program for those who either prefer to work that

way or who do not have the funds, or know-how, to work with any of the aforementioned software packages.

With the price of Perfect Photo Suite 6 now down to £225, which is a considerable improvement on the £375 being charged for the previous version of this software which came out last year, this particular package is increasingly looking like a good option for the professional photographer who needs the benefit of a powerful suite of software at their fingertips.

Meanwhile, its various elements provide a broad and flexible range

of options for those working on an everyday basis with image files.

With all these things in mind I decided to take a detailed look at what Perfect Photo Suite 6 offers the photographer and to see exactly what each of the separate components that it contains were capable of doing.

I also set out to answer what is possibly the most fundamental question of all: is this package actually good enough for the professional to use?

Here then are the seven different packages offered under the Perfect Photo Suite umbrella.

ABOVE The various elements within Perfect Photo Suite 6 provide professional photographers with a broad and flexible range of options



Perfect Effects 3

This was originally packaged as PhotoTools, its primary function being to allow the photographer to create impact in their images through simple one-click solutions backed up by a huge effects library. These effects can be used individually or in combination with each other, giving a seemingly endless array of 'looks' quickly and with minimum fuss. Although Perfect Effects 3 may have originated as PhotoTools it has been redesigned from scratch, and now includes a live preview function (in full screen mode) so you can pre-visualise adjustments before committing any settings, saving time and, quite frankly, sanity! Perfect Effects 3 also has a whole host of manual controls that mimic pretty much anything Photoshop has to offer, but with much less knowledge required.

I have to say being a control freak the idea of a one-click wonder to enhance my images leaves me cold. How wrong can one man be? Perfect Effects is just fantastic: even for geeks like me! Not only does it include a myriad of black & white options, it has whole sections dedicated to movie looks, photo filters, sharpening, darkroom effects and vintage looks, just to name a few.

For those of you that are thinking this is just a bunch of cheesy American effects, I'll be honest and say that I was expecting that as well. Not a bit of it: the effects are well thought

out, well executed and, most of all, really useful. If that wasn't enough just delve into the advanced tab and there is some more really powerful stuff under the hood that would take an age and a fair amount of skill to achieve in Photoshop.

RIGHT & BELOW Perfect Effects now includes a live preview function so you can previsualise adjustments before committing yourself



Perfect Portrait 1



Perfect Portrait version 1 is new to Version 6 of Perfect Photo Suite and has been designed from the ground up. The aim is to automate the process of retouching people (and skin in particular) and with face detection it can automatically fine-tune skin colour, blemishes and skin texture and also enhance eyes, lips and teeth. For the beginner there is a simple set of tools to use or, for the more advanced user, a complex, although easy to use, set of options.

Perfect Portrait was the one part of the new suite I was really not looking forward to trying. I have tried other solutions and they have

all fallen flat for me. Yet again I found myself surprised, mainly due to the easy interface that's offered and the ability to fine-tune the look that suits me, which is one that still looks realistic.

As well as subtle (and not so subtle) skin smoothing options there is also the option of blemish removal by a healing brush, which is great as there is now no need to jump in and out of Photoshop. The skin colour adjustments are effective and I like the option of targeting specific skin types. The masking options are good, helping things along without requiring the knowledge you would need if in Photoshop.

Perfect Layers 2

Perfect Layers 2 has taken version 1 into a whole new dimension by some simple but effective additions. The idea behind Perfect Layers is to allow the user to create new images by combining multiple photos, either in its standalone package or, more usefully, directly from Lightroom and Aperture. This revamped software is at the heart of the new suite and has some exciting new features, such as the new file browser which helps keep everything under one roof, as does the new retouch brush. The real-time preview option showing before and after options before committing is also a very helpful and time-saving addition.

I loved Perfect Layers 1 and version 2 only confirms its status in my everyday workflow. The new real-time preview option is fantastic and I'm delighted that the real-time preview option for the blend modes (which Adobe should adopt) is still present. The addition of a retouch brush is also helpful, even if it is a little basic in use. The file browser not only helps to streamline things but also lightens the pressure on your system resources, since you only have to open one software package at a time rather than several. The upgrades to Perfect Layers aren't massive, but making it the hub for the whole suite is a great idea and ensures that things work smoothly throughout the suite.



LEFT & BELOW Although the upgrades for Perfect Layers aren't huge, the new real-time preview option is really useful



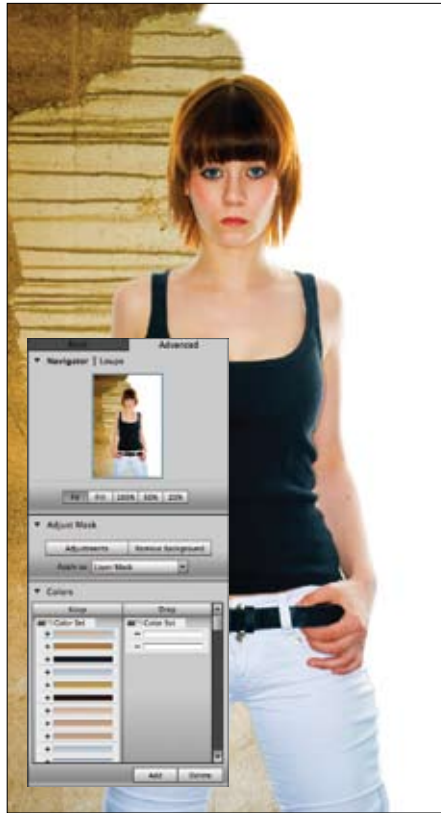
Perfect Mask 5

Perfect Mask 5 is based on the original software called Mask Pro. Mask Pro was always one of the leaders in its field, creating complex cut-outs so that items within an image could be seamlessly placed into another. With its extra functionality and improved masking technology I am sure it will only serve to reaffirm its place at the top. This new technology helps automate certain tasks, taking them away from the user but gives flexibility back by adding a new set of keep and erase tools to help things along. The user can also see the progression of the masking by way of a real-time before and after view.

Masking is an art form within Photoshop and realistic results can only be achieved by a small percentage of people due to the technicalities involved. I have tried all of the masking programs in the past, including offerings from OnOne, and I have always ended up going back to Photoshop and doing it the painful way.

Has Mask Pro 5 changed my mind? In a way it has, and it's certainly way better than anything that has gone before, but it still needs a great deal of user input to achieve good results.

While still easier than Photoshop, my advice would be to watch the training videos on the OnOne site and practice! I will admit my hit rate was still not the greatest, but I do feel with more practice and looking into all the tools and their options more closely, this would improve matters in a short space of time.



PhotoFrame 4



If you like unique borders then you'll love PhotoFrame 4.6. It features over 1000 borders and design elements, including complete design layouts, some of which are quite cheesy, but most are very usable. There is a simple drag and drop interface with the option to customise almost every conceivable variable, the most popular of which are the film edges, some of which are even marked with china graph pencil just like in the old days when choosing images on contact sheets! Ironic perhaps in this day and age, but still timeless and endearingly fun.

Although there is no upgrade to Photoframe

4.6 in this package it is still a mighty program. As well as adding grunge, Polaroid edges and the like, PhotoFrame also has an impressive collection of finished page layouts for different occasions. While using this software is easy I do have a couple of gripes: I feel there are too many variables and options available, which can be daunting and time consuming. On the flip side however you can find the frames and effects you like best and save them as your own presets, and this helps. I would also like the edges to be of a higher resolution for larger print sizes as I find they break up if they go too big.

Perfect Resize 7

Perfect Resize 7 is probably better known by the Genuine Fractals name it carried for many years and, without a doubt, this is the industry standard for image resizing. OnOne claims images can be increased up to, and over, 1000% without the loss of sharpness or detail. Within Perfect Photo Suite 6 this plug-in has no improvements made to it and, to be fair, there probably don't need to be.

I found this part of the overall software package amazing. Perfect Resize will scale images to huge proportions with ease and finesse. I would say that claims of 1000% might be pushing it, but there is no doubting that if you want big prints then this is the package to use. There's no need to know bicubic this or that... just dial in your output sizes and, if required, add sharpening, smoothing and grain.

Perfect resize also has the option to resize for canvas wraps taking into account the thickness of the wooden frame, and this can be a real lifesaver. If you need larger print sizes there is an option to output the files as tiles to help things along. A word of warning however; the larger the output size, the slower things get, even if you're working with a powerful machine with heaps of RAM.

RIGHT & BELOW Perfect Resize will scale images to huge proportions with ease, although claims of a 1000% increase may be slightly over the top



FocalPoint 2

With a large selection of lens presets and the flexibility of the FocusBrush allowing you to place blur where you want it, FocalPoint 2 is a useful tool. Need selective focus, so that the image looks like you've used a tilt & shift lens? Done. Need a different (but realistic) depth-of-field to an image? Done. It's a creative way to add blur to any image.

This is easily my favourite part of the suite, even though this is another part of the package that hasn't had a makeover. I find it very liberating to have the ability to adjust depth-of-field post-capture and it's also very creative. With its simple focus bug, namely a set of intuitive tools to alter shape, size, vignette and blur amount within your new focus selection, things just don't get any easier. In addition to the focus bug the user can also change their aperture shape, feather amount or even choose a different lens, again all after capture and all with just a set of easy sliders.

There is even a brush to adjust your selections for ultimate control. It's a great way to get rid of unwanted backgrounds or to just concentrate the viewer's attention on the area you dictate.



ABOVE Despite not having had a makeover Focal Point 2 is a very creative and useful tool and has the ability to adjust depth-of-field post-capture



Conclusion



When asked if I would write a review for a new Photoshop plug-in I have to admit that I was not overly excited. Plug-ins in general can often be a let down and sit idle most of their lives. However, as you can probably gather, I rather rate Perfect Photo Suite 6. As well as all the new features that this latest package contains, the biggest bonus for me is that everything is now all in a self-contained package. No need any longer to open various

programs to get things done: with its new and simple tabbed interface Perfect Photo Suite 6 does practically everything I need to do on a daily basis. It's hard to believe that a package of this sophistication is only £225 inc VAT.

In my view this package could be a game changer for some professionals and for many applications it could allow you to live without Photoshop altogether.

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

MACINTOSH:

Operating system: Current maintenance release of Mac OS X 10.5, 10.6 or 10.7

MICROSOFT WINDOWS:

Operating system: Current maintenance release of Windows XP, Windows Vista or Windows 7

PROCESSOR:

Intel Core 2 Duo, Xeon or better processor(s)

MEMORY:

4 GB RAM

FREE DISK SPACE:

4 GB

DISPLAY:

OpenGL 2.0 compatible video card with 256 MB dedicated video RAM, 1280x800 resolution

OPTIONAL APPLICATION INTEGRATION:

Photoshop CS4 or CS5

Photoshop Elements 9 or 10

Photoshop Lightroom 2 or 3

Apple Aperture 2.1 or 3

OTHER:

Internet connection for activation, auto update checking, content downloads and tutorials.

(plus Windows needs:) Adobe Flash Player 10 Microsoft .NET Framework 2 or higher

MORE INFORMATION

www.ononesoftware.com

PHOTO RATING

EFFECT QUALITY 9/10
 FUNCTIONALITY 8/10
 EASE OF USE 8/10
 VALUE FOR MONEY ... 9/10

Overall Rating

8.5