

re:views

PLUG-INS, COMPATIBLE PRODUCTS, AND MORE

Add Some CAD to Your Life

By Ted Alspach

CADtools (Illustrator 7.0 plug-in) v. 1.0, \$129, Windows 95 or NT 4.0 and Mac OS. Hot Door, (888) 236-9540, www.hotdoor.com.

HOT DOOR'S CADTOOLS PLUG-IN IS NOT ONLY FULL-featured and well executed, but is one of the first plug-ins sets to use the Illustrator 7.0 API (application programming interface), showing off the amazing things that can be done by plug-in vendors.

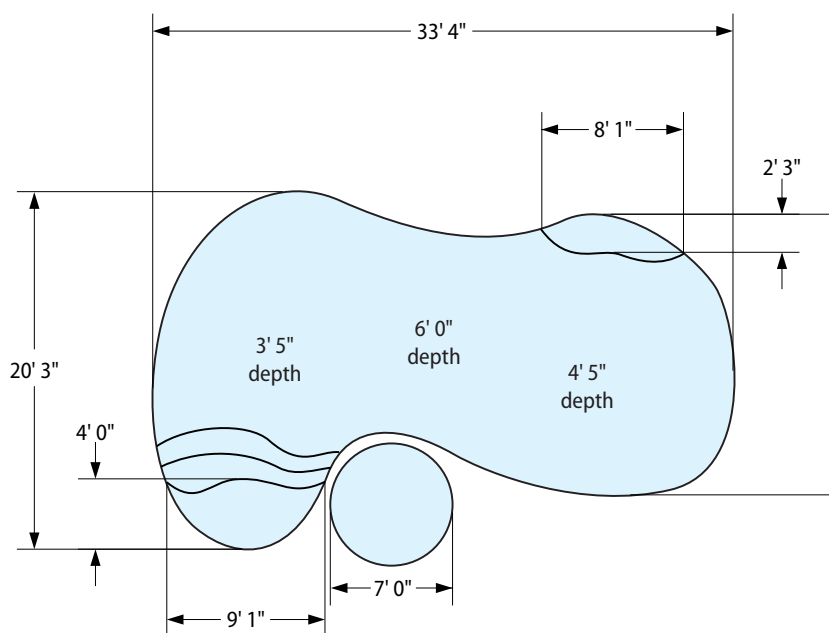
Even if the term "CAD" frightens or disturbs you, don't let it sway you from CADtools. Sure, CADtools contains many CAD mainstays, such as automatic dimensions of lines and curves, and fillet, chamfer, trim, and wall tools. But it also contains tools that can be handy for almost any Illustrator user, such as arc, line, Bézier curvature dimension, and labeling tools. There's even a handy CADtips palette (dockable, of course, so you can stick it with the Info palette or any other palette set) that guides you through using the tools.

CADtools includes a total of 33 tools, almost as many as are available in the basic Illustrator toolbox. The tools are integrated into the Illustrator Tools palette (thanks to the new API) in a fairly logical fashion so that they don't take over your screen. Many of the tools are placed in existing tool slots; the arc tool, for example, is placed in the ellipse tool slot, while the line and wall tools are placed in the pencil tool slot. Four additional slots have been added right above the navigation tools, which contain the label and dimensioning tools.

Have you ever tried to draw something to scale just using Illustrator's tools? I have, and it's not pretty. I drew our entire house plan at $1/72$ scale, so 1 pica = 1 foot. It kinda worked, but it required a lot of brain power to keep things straight (no pun intended). CADtools makes this much easier. Just specify the scale you want in the CADtools Preferences dialog box (where there are plenty of options), and type the *real* measurements. So if your wall is 4 inches thick, you can set the wall tool to that thickness, and CADtools draws the wall at the correct scale. There's even a wall healer tool that acts like a smart Unite filter so that when walls cross, there's no ugly overlap.

Technical illustrators will find the eight customizable label tools invaluable. You can specify not just type attributes, but things like how far away the text should be from the end of the line. The Bézier curvature dimension tool is fantastic, because it gives you the radius of a

CADtools and Illustrator give you both mechanical-drawing and professional illustration tools.



Bézier curve at any point along the curve, interactively, as you drag the cursor. Most things about CADtools are interactive in this way, so you actually see labels and dimensions as you click and drag, not just when you release the mouse button.

Hot Door has successfully brought precision drafting and dimensioning features to professional designers. ◆

Painting a Mask

By David Herman

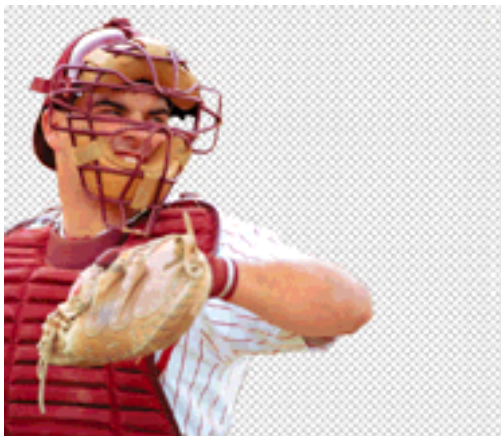
Mask Pro (Photoshop 3.0.5 or later plug-in), v. 1.0, \$299, Mac OS 7.5.1 or later. Extensis Corporation, (503) 274-2020, www.extensis.com.

IF YOU'RE A PHOTOSHOP USER, CHANCES ARE THAT YOU spend at least some of your time making selections. Regardless of whether you ultimately use a selection for an effect, a saved alpha channel, a mask, or a clipping path, you need fine control over which pixels you do and don't include. Photoshop offers tools for making complex selections, but finding the best strategy to apply them can be tricky. Fortunately, Mask Pro is a powerful new plug-in that can take some of the hassle out of getting the right selection.

When you use Mask Pro, start by selecting the destination for your mask (a layer mask, a layer that supports transparency, or an alpha channel). Then open Mask

Pro, and you'll get a resizable work window that you can experiment in all you like. Nothing you do in the work window is applied to your original image until you select Save/Apply from the File menu. Floating palettes let you specify which colors to include and exclude from your selection and which painting tools to use, and you can also adjust options that include brush size, threshold level, and edge softness. Select the options you want, and then use the magic-brush tool to "paint" your mask on your work window. Your mask will immediately start taking shape. It takes only a little practice and experimentation to get the hang of removing only the pixels you want to mask out, leaving soft, anti-aliased, and semi-transparent edges (if desired) that make composite images look convincing.

Mask Pro makes it easier to isolate complex elements on complex backgrounds (right). It comes with its own tools (below).



As you're working, you'll be able to have an unprecedented Photoshop experience: multiple, unlimited undo. Just watch your work roll backward as you hold down Command + Z (as long as you remain in the Mask Pro dialog box). And if you mask off too much, it's a breeze to paint things back in. Mask Pro is very forgiving of experimentation (or sloppiness).

When you're done brushing you have the option to generate a clipping path to isolate an object on a transparent background for import into another application, such as PageMaker. Mask Pro even helps you avoid a common clipping-path pitfall: When you generate a conventional clipping path around a complex object, the path often contains so many curve points that it won't print. But Mask Pro generates clipping paths that consist of straight line segments (lots of them, so they appear to your eye as curves), and they seem to print without a hitch. If you choose not to create a clipping path, the mask that you generate is applied to the destination that you selected at the beginning of the process.

If you spend a lot of time separating objects from uncooperative backgrounds in Photoshop, Extensis Mask Pro will save you many hours of struggle and frustration. It belongs in any well-equipped Photoshop user's bag of tricks. ♦

ViZualize Effects

By Julieanne Kost

ViZ fx (Premiere 4.2 plug-in), v. 1.1, \$399, Windows NT 4.0 or Windows 95. Intergraph, (800) 692-8069, www.intergraph.com/vizfx.

THE ViZ FX PLUG-IN FOR PREMIERE HAS MORE THAN 50 special effects, including digital transitions, transformations, and particle effects. Although some of the effects sport names similar to built-in Premiere effects, they differ in several significant ways. For instance, ViZ fx provides parameter settings that give you an unprecedented degree of control over how the effects interact with the source files.

Finding these effects is easy because they're grouped with the built-in ones in the appropriate palettes and dialog boxes, and a ViZ prefix makes them easy to spot. When you apply a ViZ fx filter or transition to your movie, animation, or still image, you'll be opening the effect window for that effect. This window includes parameter settings, preview areas, toolbars, effect timelines, and a status bar. To get an idea of how much control you can have over how each filter is implemented, consider the parameters for the Foggy Glow filter.

When you apply Foggy Glow, you'll be able to decide whether the glow should be generated alone or be appended to an image. Next, you can consider whether the glow should emanate from behind or in front of the source, and then determine the colors in your glow and the source of the colors. If your glow is generated by a secondary image, you can select how far you want to offset that image, and then what to do with the offset portion that extends outside the frame. And lastly, you can define how far the glow should extend from the shape that generates it and how much intensity it should have. You'll be able to make decisions like these for every ViZ fx effect.

Version 1.1 includes 200 presets of effects with commonly set parameters. You can also save an unlimited number of other presets as you come up with effects you'd like to use in future projects. You won't run out of options with the variety of effects (and their abundant settings), including powerful masking (which lets you create or manipulate alpha channels) and color transformation (which lets you tint, posterize, blur, or shade, for example).

You can set keyframes for your ViZ fx effects so that they're applied to just a portion of the clip or to the whole clip, which gives you a lot of flexibility. You can also set the speed of the effect to be constant or to be based on a Bézier curve. An unlimited number of clips and effects in any combination can be used with the Sequencer, ViZ fx's version of Premiere's Construction Window. For example, you can layer multiple streams of video with multiple effects.

If you work on Windows NT or Windows 95 and frequently use Premiere's filters and transitions on your video clips, Intergraph's ViZ fx will be an invaluable addition to your library. ♦