

re:views

PLUG-INS, COMPATIBLE PRODUCTS, AND MORE

The Broadcast Calls for a Steady Grain

By Conrad Chavez

CineLook (plug-ins for After Effects 3.1 and later), v. 1.0, \$695 for Broadcast version (Windows 95/NT and PowerMac), \$1,995 for FilmRes version (Power Mac only). DigiEffects, (415) 841-9901, www.digieffects.com.

WHILE SQUANDERING MY YOUTH IN FRONT OF THE TELEVISION, I noticed that British half-hour comedies such as *Monty Python's Flying Circus* and *Fawlty Towers* were different from American programs in one strange way (aside from the accents, of course): When the action was in a room, the picture looked like a TV show—live and bright. When the action moved outside, it looked like a movie—soft and grainy.

If these shows were shot today in exactly the same way, the producers would be able to remove that rather jarring visual transition between film and video using DigiEffects's CineLook, a new plug-in for Adobe After Effects. CineLook specializes in applying the softer, more theatrical characteristics of film to footage originally shot on video. Unlike video, film has grain; it also runs at a different frame rate and has a different color and contrast range. CineLook lets you adjust all of these properties (and much more) with the familiar sliders in the Effect Controls window.

Matching a specific type of film can be a challenge, but CineLook simplifies things greatly by including a number of presets for common motion-picture film stocks. For example, if you're assembling a program shot mostly with Kodak film but must also include footage shot in Betacam video, you simply choose the correct Kodak film stock from a menu. If it's still a little off, you can tweak properties individually.

It's worth noting that CineLook doesn't just throw in some "canned" film grain. It actually uses mathematical models to simulate the grain patterns in different types of film. Control over color is equally sophisticated—you can adjust color response curves for each color channel individually, using the RGB or HSB color models.

CineLook includes a plug-in called Film Damage that lets you create the look of older film—you can add realistic defects such as scratches, dust, hair, inconsistent focus, and even sprocket jitter. For example, hair can suddenly appear, flutter at the edge of the frame, and eventually become dislodged by the simulated moving film. It's the perfect plug-in for applying an antique or distressed look to music videos or commercials.

As far as quality goes, I got convincing results by ap-



plying a 16mm preset to Hi-8 footage. For the best look, use high-quality video such as Betacam, and use lighting techniques intended for film rather than video.

If matching video footage to film is a regular part of your job and you're tired of paying a postproduction house to do it, or if you want the film look but can't afford film equipment, CineLook is an easy and flexible way to produce professional results on your desktop. ♦

With CineLook, video can appear as old, aging, or grainy film.

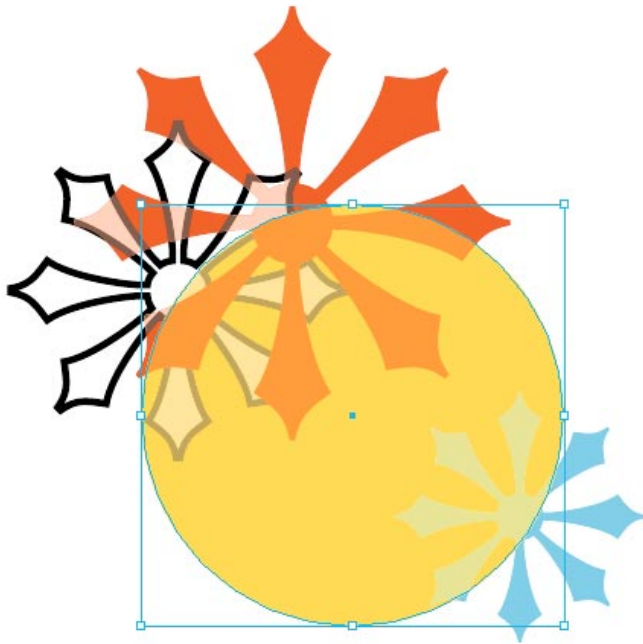
Making It Perfectly Clear

By Ted Alspach

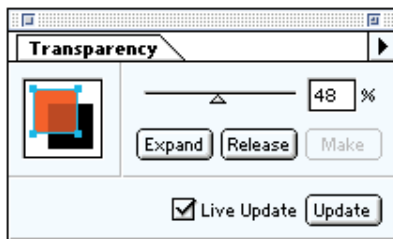
Hot Door Transparency (plug-in for Illustrator 8.0), v. 1.0, \$39. Windows 95/NT and Power Mac. Hot Door, (888) 236-9540, www.hotdoor.com.

IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME COMING—FOR YEARS, ILLUSTRATOR users have dreamt of the day when they could make objects transparent. Sure, early versions of Illustrator had the overprint checkbox, but you could never tell what was happening until you printed separations. And even though Illustrator 5.0's PathFinder filters revolutionized the way designers created images, there were limitations with both creating and editing transparency.

But jump ahead to 1998 and Illustrator 8.0: Hot Door, the creators of the superb CADtools package for Illustrator, have released Hot Door Transparency, a plug-in that makes all those opacity dreams come true. The underlying concept is simple, and the execution of Hot



Use the Hot Door Transparency palette to see through objects in Illustrator 8.0.



Door Transparency is everything an Illustrator user would expect. Quite simply, any vector object with a standard color fill can be made into a transparent object, which can then be placed over

any other vector object. And—most importantly—the results are totally editable, even after the file is saved and closed.

Hot Door Transparency works as an Illustrator 8 palette, which is opened from the Window menu. The palette has three main buttons: Make, which renders the selected object(s) transparent; Release, which removes transparency from objects; and Expand, which transforms them into “regulation” EPS objects, so that your art can be taken into other applications. In addition, there’s a Transparency Level slider, which controls the amount of transparency in the selected object. Finally, there’s a control along the bottom of the palette that specifies how the preview is updated: by default, it’s on “Live,” which I found usable on all but the lowest-end machines. There’s an option to change to manual updating for those systems.

There are a few limitations with the plug-in. You can’t create transparency in text (without first converting it to outlines), gradients, or objects that contain patterns, and you can’t position a transparent object over a raster or placed image. But the ability to put several objects with varying degrees of transparency over each other (and even on top of gradient or gradient mesh objects) is simply astonishing.

Hot Door Transparency takes Illustrator to the next level in vector functionality, providing designers with an

entirely new paradigm. The easy-to-use palette (the controls are all intuitive and excellently labeled with tool tips) combined with the low price make this plug-in a must-have for Illustrator users. ♦

Border Skirmish

By Sandee Cohen

Photo/Graphic Edges (plug-in for Photoshop 3.0 or later), v. 4.0, \$149. Windows 95/NT and Power Mac (OS 7 and later). Auto F/X Corporation, (603) 875-4400, www.autofx.com. **PhotoFrame** (plug-in for Photoshop 3.05 or later), v. 1.0, \$129. Windows 95/NT 4 and Power Mac (system 7.5 or later). Extensis Corporation, (800) 796-9798, www.extensis.com.

SUDDENLY THERE’S A REAL COMPETITION ROILING IN the edge business—the Photoshop plug-ins that let you quickly add and modify artistic borders or frames around your images.

Auto F/X’s Photo/Graphic Edges, available since 1994, was first. Originally, the product was simply a set of grayscale frames that you could apply to images with channel manipulations. Extensis then came out with PhotoFrame, which provided more Photoshop-like controls over the effects. Auto F/X countered with a preview, scaling, and presets. And the race was on.

The result? Both products work in approximately the same way. Once the plug-in is invoked from the Filter menu, you can pick an image to use as a frame, and then change various parameters, such as size, border width, color, blurring, and opacity. PhotoFrame’s interface is extremely intuitive for anyone with some Photoshop experience, following many of the program’s conventions, including controls and keyboard shortcuts. The interface for Photo/Graphic Edges, which has little relationship to Photoshop, offers fewer controls; it provides only sliders to control amounts (you can’t enter specific values), doesn’t let you resize the dialog box, and gives you only two levels of zoom. There is, however, an excellent log of all actions that lets you retrace your steps—though there’s no keyboard shortcut for Undo.

Both products ship with a number of preset images to use as edges. Those in Photo/Graphic Edges are of excellent quality, and Auto F/X sells more volumes in addition to the basic set. Also, Photo/Graphic Edges offers a greater variety of effects, such as textures, bevels, and lighting, though generally they’re not as sophisticated as the results you could get by applying Photoshop’s filters. But Extensis has named its frames with descriptive labels, rather than the numbers used by Auto F/X, and the addition of Extensis’s database program, Portfolio, makes it much easier to find the image you want to use.

With its wide range of preset controls, such as bevel and burn, Photo/Graphic Edges is excellent for the inexperienced Photoshop user who simply needs a quick and easy effect—perhaps for a Web site or for a family album of digital-camera shots. With its more exacting interface and output, PhotoFrame is best for producing frames for professional design. ♦