

contributors our panel of experts



JULIE EASTON
www.dphotographer.co.uk



Julie's renowned for her attention to detail on *Digital Photographer* magazine. That's why she's the ideal person to tell you how to create the perfect portfolio, on page 18.



ROB ANSELM
www.chainstyle.com



Rob is our resident Action man this issue, with a fantastic Big Technique on the wonders of this time-saving tool. Turn to page 46 and learn how to speed up your workflow considerably.



ADAM SMITH
www.advancedphotoshop.co.uk



Adam is the newest recruit on our sister title *Advanced Photoshop*. He's gone back to the Sixties with a psychedelic project on page 50 (even though he wasn't even born then!).



GILES ANGEL
www.angelphoto.co.uk



Giles dives into the depths of 3D imagery on page 36, with a wonderfully watery tutorial to wet your whistle. He tells us how to create artwork so lifelike it almost swims off the page.



TIM SHELBORNE
www.timshelbourne.com



We've sent Tim dotty this issue, giving him the task of perfecting Pointilism – just like Seurat did in the 1800s. Check out his fantastic tutorial on page 28 and soon you too can paint like the artist himself.



MATTHEW HENRY
www.matthewhenry.net



Matt's been a busy bee for us this issue, not only teaching us about the Vanishing Point tool available in Photoshop CS3 (page 42), but also getting into character as a cosmetic surgeon. Turn to page 54 and put your portraits under the Photoshop knife.



GEORGE CAIRNS
www.georgecairns.com



He's got that summer feeling on page 58 with a great lesson in creating realistic tennis balls! George also solves your Photoshop queries in his fab Q&A session on page 74.



JAMES DAVIES
www.imagine-publishing.co.uk



Although he's the Art Editor for the computer games magazine *Next3*, James momentarily gave up his console to create a crafty tutorial to design your own gift boxes on page 64.

Photoshop creative

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THE BIG TECHNIQUE

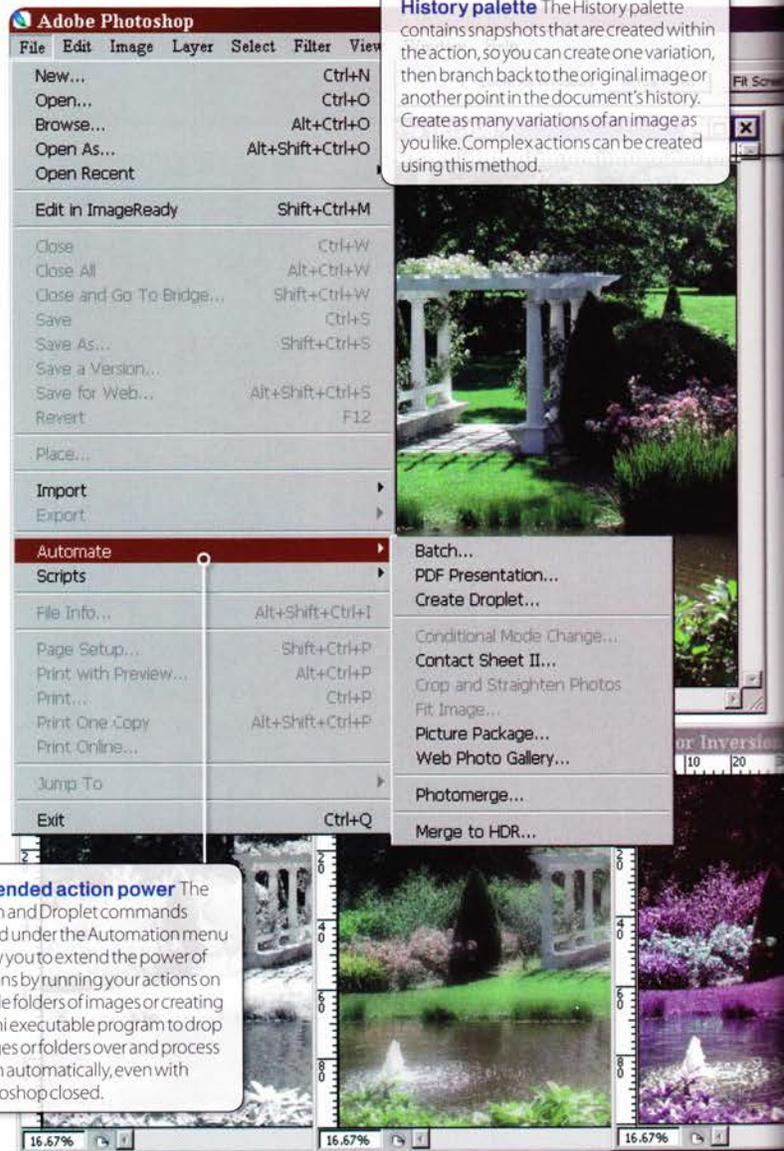
Actions

Optimise your workflow processes, save time or get creative with the powerhouse of actions

An action is a series of commands that are recorded and then run on an existing image, or they create a new document. Actions are one of the most powerful Photoshop features.

Actions can be used for common tasks such as rotating images or black and white conversion. They can also be used to create sophisticated frames, text effects, patterns and anything else you can dream up. The main things you cannot record are the painting tools. Almost everything else is fair game – even paths, and the use of patterns and shapes. Just remember to ensure that all required external files (fonts, layer styles, patterns) are also provided when sharing your actions, otherwise the action generates an error.

When building actions, try to prepare for every image possibility. Also keep in mind that if you share actions with other people, the version of Photoshop is important. Any new Photoshop features incorporated into the action won't work when the action is run in prior versions. Also name all layers, snapshots, etc, and they will work across most Photoshop languages. Finally, change your units to 'percentage' before recording transformations, because the size of your images may change. This helps avoid some action pitfalls.



The Actions palette

The heart of action creation

The Actions palette is where you stop, record and play actions, as well as create new sets, new actions and delete actions. And that's just the buttons at the bottom! If you look at the left side of each action command, there are two columns. To skip a step when the action plays, uncheck the checkmark in the first column. The second column contains a dialog icon. This icon is only available in steps where additional parameters are required for the step to be completed (whenever a step has an associated dialog box). Enable the icon if you want to enter new parameters in the dialog box each time the action encounters that command – for example, to change Sharpening parameters for each image processed with the action. Turn it off if you want to have the same parameters run each time the action is played.

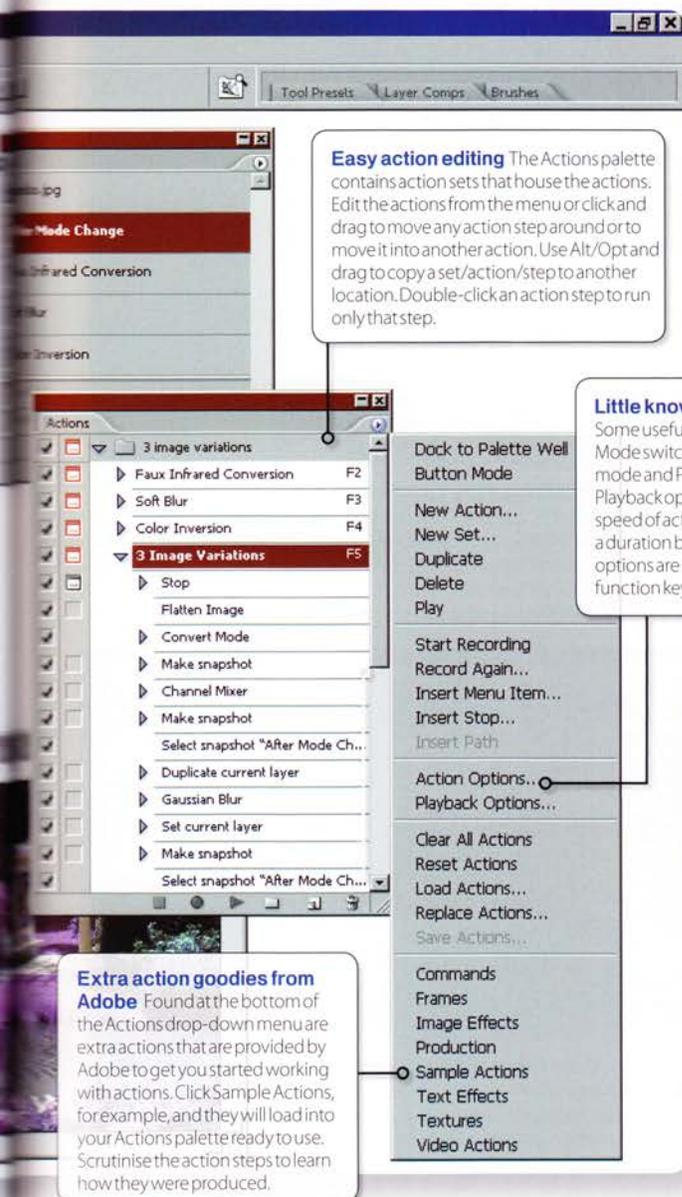


The Batch command

Supercharge your actions

The File>Automate>Batch command is an action powerhouse. It allows you to process not one, but any number of images within folders/subfolders with a single action. Select the action, source (where the images are located) and destination (where the image output is stored). Generally, don't pick Save and Close as a destination, which overwrites the original files. Instead, create a folder on your hard drive and use this as a destination, then select a numbering system for the images. Select Extension in the last drop-down. If you have a Save command in the action, select None as the Destination.





Easy action editing The Actions palette contains action sets that house the actions. Edit the actions from the menu or click and drag to move any action step around or to move it into another action. Use Alt/Opt and drag to copy a set/action/step to another location. Double-click an action step to run only that step.

Little known menu item features Some useful menu items; Button Mode switches between Edit Action mode and Power Action User mode. Playback options allow you to set the speed of action playback and pause for a duration between steps. The action options are useful to assign a colour or function key to the selected action.



Tip
Droplet compatibility
If the droplet is created in Windows, drag and drop it over the Photoshop icon on the Mac operating system before using it. This updates it for Mac.

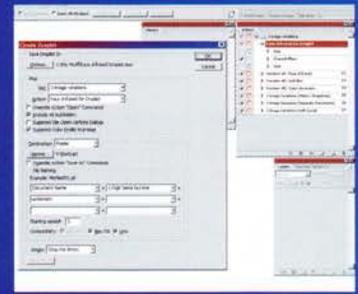
Extra action goodies from Adobe Found at the bottom of the Actions drop-down menu are extra actions that are provided by Adobe to get you started working with actions. Click Sample Actions, for example, and they will load into your Actions palette ready to use. Scrutinise the action steps to learn how they were produced.

Droplets Creating mini action programs

A droplet is a small program created out of an action. It's stored as an executable program and used to process images without having to launch Photoshop.



01 Choose an action
Highlight the action to turn into a droplet. Uncheck stops and dialog boxes, or the droplet will stop each time they are encountered. It's best to let the droplet handle any Saving commands for you, not the action.



02 Create the droplet Go to File>Automate>Create Droplet. The action will be entered. Hit Choose to provide a name/location on your hard drive/desktop. Pick Folder as a destination; enter the location/serial naming scheme for your photos.



03 Test and use the droplet Navigate to the droplet. Select a photo, group of photos or entire folder. Click-drag it on top of the Droplet icon. The droplet opens Photoshop and processes the images, and they're output to the folder you specified.

The Actions menu

All the commands for action production

The Actions drop-down menu is the place to be for controlling your actions. Button Mode is perhaps the most useful of functions here because it turns your actions from Action Editing mode into a one-stop button factory in Photoshop. All action editing operations are hidden, and clicking any button automatically runs the action – useful for using the actions after they are created. At the bottom of the menu are several of Photoshop's preset actions, such as commands, frames, text effects and image actions. The Insert Stop command is useful for providing instructions to the user, and Insert Menu Item is useful for inserting commands even when they are not accessible within the image you are working with (for example, if you want to insert a flatten image command but the image is already flattened – see the main tutorial).



The History palette

The little-known action branching warrior

Most people wouldn't associate the History palette with actions, but as shown in the tutorial on the next two pages, it can be an invaluable tool. Create snapshots to provide an endless variety of branching points for your image ideas, and jump back and forth to and from the image's historical points of interest, all recorded within your action. In addition to the History palette, the actions in and of themselves are learning tools. By reading through the steps in an action you can learn how a developer created the action, solved a problem or used a feature in Photoshop.

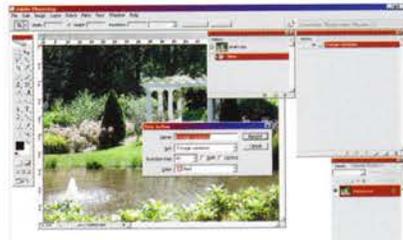


GETTING IN ON THE ACTION

First steps in creating an action



01 Create an action set to contain the action Here you will create an action that produces three photo effect variations of an image, separates them into three documents and saves them to your hard drive. Open any image in Photoshop. Click the Create New Set icon at the bottom of the Actions palette, and give the set a name. Actions can only be created within an action set.



02 Set up the action Now click the Create New Action icon and give the action a name. If you wish, you can assign it a Color and Function key, both of which are used later in Button mode to add visualisation and one-click action execution. Click Record. The Record button turns red to signify the action is recording your every move from this point on.



03 Introducing the action (optional) If sharing the action, it is essential to provide a message at the beginning of the action explaining its function. Access the drop-down at the top right corner of the Actions palette and select Insert Stop. Now enter an Introduction Message and click the Allow Continue checkbox, enabling the user to continue through the action when encountering this message.



04 Flatten image Go into the Actions palette drop-down menu and this time select Insert Menu Item. A message prompts you to select an item from the menu. Go to Layers>Flatten Image, and click OK in this message prompt. This ensures that any images with layers are flattened, and ensures compatibility with a variety of possible images.



05 Convert Mode Select Insert Menu Item and convert to RGB (Image>Mode>RGB), so the action will work when applied to images from any mode (except Bitmap and Multichannel). You can use File>Automate>Conditional Mode Change instead, but the action will stop each time Convert Mode is called upon.



06 Create an original image history state Click the History drop-down palette and hit New Snapshot. Give it a name, eg 'After Convert Mode'. As history states can be recorded in the action, you can use them to quickly bring the image back to any history state.

Digital photo frames

Create professional quality layouts with frame actions

Actions can be used to create a variety of photo frames around your images, and since you can incorporate layer styles into the action, you can also include beveling, embossing and inner drop shadows that create a realistic lighting scenario where the frame creates a shadow on the image. To create a quick frame, with the action recording, alternate between sizing the image up and filling a newly created layer with colour. When you have three layers or more created, apply some filters to each layer and a unique bevelled layer style for each (don't forget to experiment with the Bevel contours). Then apply the inner shadow to the main image layer, and you have yourself a nice and tidy little frame. There are a variety of frame actions included on the CD which you can experiment with.



Text effects

Add a touch of style to your fonts

Creating various font effects is a perfect way to learn how actions operate. When creating a specific font effect, keep in mind that you have to have the correct font loaded into Photoshop first. If the font is not loaded, an error can occur. Depending on your effect, the size of the font and placement in the document window will matter. Make sure to provide instructions to the action user on what type of font is suited to your action. The text effect you see here is included on this month's CD.



VARIATIONS ON A THEME

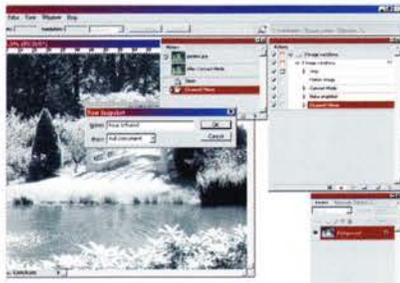
Completing the action

Tip



Save your action sets

If you only remember one thing, remember this: ALWAYS save your action sets to a CD/hard drive. If Photoshop crashes or the default settings are restored, your actions won't be lost.



07 First image variation Create a Faux Infrared look by going into Image>Adjustments>Channel Mixer. Check Monochrome and enter Red -45 Green +200 and Blue -55. Now create a new snapshot, giving it the name of 'Faux Infrared'. This records a new history state. Our first variation is complete.



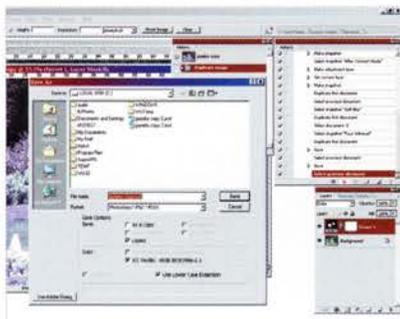
08 Second image variation Next, select the After Convert Mode history snapshot and you can start on the second variation. Duplicate the layer, naming it 'Soft Blur 50%' and then add a 35-pixel Gaussian blur and change the Opacity of the layer to 50%. Save a new snapshot in the History palette and call it 'Soft Blur'.



09 Third image variation Select the After Convert Mode history snapshot again, and perform the steps for your third variation. For this one add an Invert Adjustment layer, and change the layer's blend mode to Color. Then create a new snapshot called 'Color Inversion'.



10 Separating the variations (optional) Snapshots are not saved with the image, so you may want to create separate documents for each variation. Go to Image>Duplicate. DO NOT provide a name. Instead, leave the default. Then go back to the original image, click the Soft Blur snapshot, create a duplicate, go back to the original and do the same for the Faux Infrared variation.



11 Saving Default names are used for each copy, so subsequent images run with the action aren't overwritten during a save. Go to File>Save As and save each as a Photoshop document without changing the filenames. Note the path and folder are stored; don't change or move the folder, or the action produces an error.

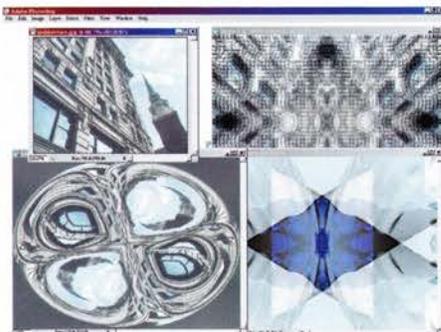


12 Final action steps If including the Save command in the action, you can close all files and include this in the action. Note: select NO when prompted to save the original file. This cleans up the workspace. Finally, create an end Stop without Allow Continue, with a message saying who you are, where people can find you, your website or email address.

Pattern generators

Generate an endless variety of seamless patterns

If you want to get even more creative, there are a variety of ways you can create seamless patterns in Photoshop using an endless combination of filters, offsetting and layer masking. If you record each pattern generator as an action, you'll never forget how you accomplished it. Also, these patterns can be saved and reused as patterns in Photoshop, for text masking or in layer styles. To get you started, there are several pattern generator actions on the CD. Look inside the action steps, and you'll unlock the secrets of how each pattern was created.



Layout templates

Templates for CDs, DVDs, web and print

You can create a site navigation template or even a complete website template in Photoshop. It may take some time, but once you get used to creating actions, it's not difficult to add custom shapes, lines, grids, tables and anything else you need to complete the template. Layouts actions can also create CD or DVD jewel case insert templates for your printer, publishing templates for newsletters, or scrapbook page layouts for photos. And if you like a specific template action you've made, you can duplicate it by holding Alt/Opt and dragging to a new location in the set. Then tweak the action steps to create a variation on your existing template.

