

Imagenomic Professional Plug-in Suite

by Stan Sholik

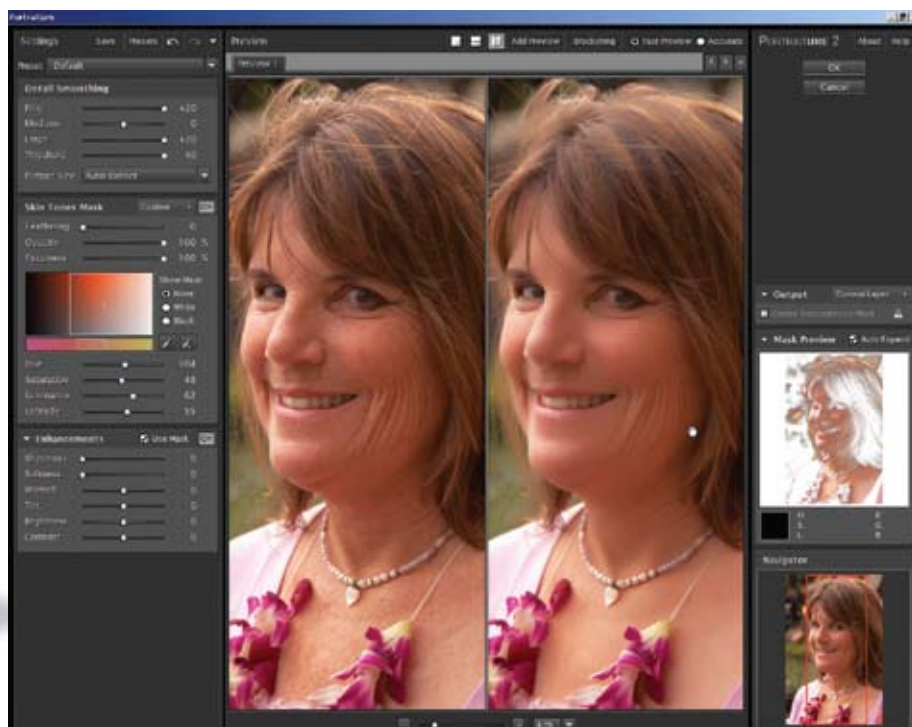
Imagenomic LLC has updated its three Photoshop plug-ins—Portraiture, Noise-aware Professional and RealGrain and packaged them together into the Professional Plug-in Suite. Taken together, you will find that these programs provide nearly all of the corrections and enhancements you will ever need for your portrait and wedding images.

After opening your image in Photoshop, you select Imagenomic > Portraiture from the Filters menu. As the image opens in the Portraiture window, the software automatically calculates a mask for the skin tones in the image and applies either the default settings or your last saved setting to the image. You can view the original image by clicking on the preview, or see before and after images by using one of the split screen views.

For many images, the automatic ad-

masked area. “Fine” seem to encompass blemishes and small imperfections, while “large” is the entire face. “Medium” covers smoothing in between these extremes. I found that maxing out the small and large sliders was most useful for the images with which I was working, then adjusting the “Threshold” slider to control the amount of smoothing that is applied.

If the automatic mask is smoothing areas of the image other than the skin tones, for instance the hair, you can easily adjust



In Portraiture I found it easiest to preview the enhancements by splitting the screen into the original image on the left and the enhanced image on the right. A range of magnifications is available also. The settings I found most useful are the Fine and Large detail sliders set to maximum, the Medium detail slider set to “0” or close to it. The Threshold slider setting determines the amount that the other sliders will affect the image. Here, the Threshold slider is set to 100% so the maximum effect of the other sliders is applied.

Portraiture

There are a number of portrait enhancing plug-ins available from various manufacturers and I have worked with most of them. Imagenomic Portraiture strikes a nice balance between simple one-click programs and complex programs that require you to choose multiple points on the face before the software can make adjustments.

justment is all you need. But if you feel the image requires more or less enhancement, Portraiture provides a lot of options. The left panel of the Portraiture window holds sliders to increase or decrease smoothing in small, medium and large areas of the

the mask to compensate. Clicking on the Mask Preview triangle in the right-hand panel opens up a small window showing the mask, but I preferred using the split screen mode and clicking on the Show Mask > White radio button in the Skin

Tones Mask palette. With the mask view open, you can drag the box inside the color gradient window of the Skin Tones Mask palette or use the eyedropper just below it to refine the area affected by the enhancements.

Once you are satisfied with the mask and the smoothing, you can use the sliders in the Enhancement palette at the bottom of the left panel to further refine the image. These adjustments apply to the entire image, not just the flesh tones. You can sharpen, soften, and adjust the warmth, tint, brightness and contrast.

When you are satisfied with the image, you can export the enhanced image back to Photoshop as a new layer, a new document or a replacement of the currently active layer. When exporting as a new layer you have the additional option of exporting the enhancement as a mask rather than a finished image, and I chose to do this most of the time. This allowed me to refine the mask further.

The controls in Portraiture don't go as far as those in other portrait retouching programs, which can eliminate skin pores entirely. The enhancements in Portraiture almost don't seem to exist until you compare the before and after views. It is then that you are aware of the quality of the enhancements.

There is more to the program than I have space to describe in detail, such as the built-in presets with thumbnail views, the ability to save your settings as a preset, the history view with thumbnails, enhancement bracketing and more. The Imagenomic Web site has tutorials and usage guides that will help you get up to speed quickly if you want to learn the full extent of the program's capabilities. But a few mouse clicks with the default settings will take you well on your way to a vastly improved portrait image.

Noiseware Professional

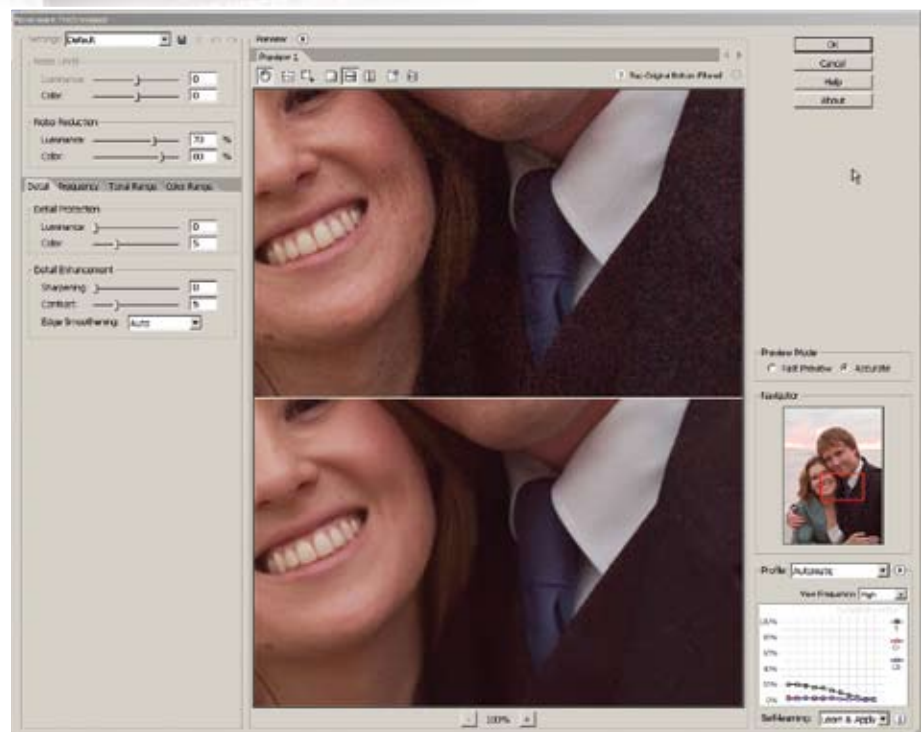
I confess to having been a longtime satisfied user of a competing noise reduction program. I photograph many classical music performances at high ISO settings and batch process the files through the noise reduction software before delivering them to the clients. So I was really curious how



fortunately, the Noiseware window and the RealGrain window both also lack the modern attractive gray and black styling of Portraiture. It also lacks the ability to fit the image to the preview window, offering only 10-, 25-, 50- and 100-percent views. It defaults to the 100% view on opening and this is where you would want to be if you are going to manually adjust noise reduction anyway.

Noiseware, while it offers a robust toolset for doing manual noise reduction, does an excellent job with its automatic default settings. I tried adjusting the sliders from the automatic noise reduction and also manually selecting areas for noise reduction and found I could rarely improve on the automatic settings.

Noiseware does an excellent job



You can compare before and after views of the noise reduction by clicking and holding down the left mouse button on the full preview image, or by splitting the screen vertically or horizontally.

Noiseware would perform on a noisy underexposed image I had taken of a backlit bride and groom at sunset compared to the same image I had run through my longtime noise reduction software.

The Noiseware plug-in is found in the same Filter > Imagenomic menu. Again the image opens in a new window. Unfor-

of preserving image detail while reducing noise. Hair remains acceptably sharp even at the high settings used on the wedding image and the process even minimizes skin defects. Some problems exist in the groom's jacket, where the luminance noise is impossible to separate from the texture of the wool, but I found the result accept-

able. Since Noiseware operates on the Lab channels of the image rather than the RGB channels, it deals with color and luminance noise independently with excellent results and without color shifts.

There is also a “learning” mode in Noiseware when you use it on automatic noise reduction. It reads EXIF data to teach itself about your camera, your settings and your shooting conditions in order to generate better results more quickly. As with Portraiture, there are many additional options, tabs and settings in Noiseware, but for me, it is a one-click solution for noise reduction.

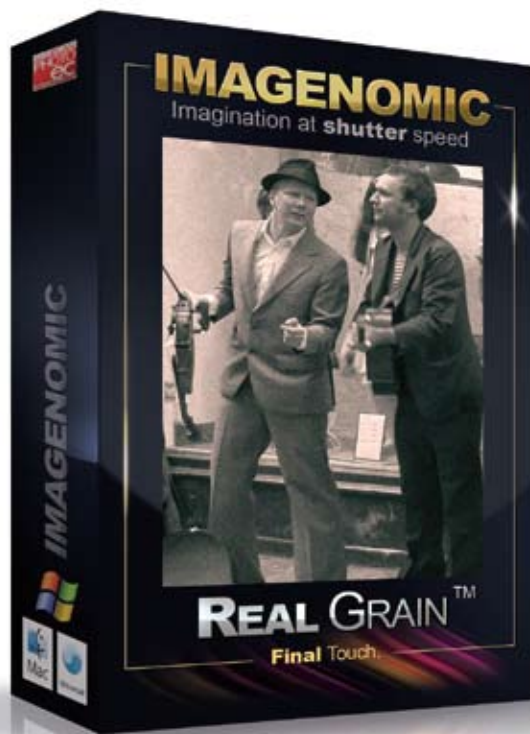
How does it compare to my old standby noise reduction software? In every comparison I made, Noiseware produced a sharper image with less noise and with no color shift. I hadn’t really noticed a color shift in my program until I compared its results with those from Noiseware. The differences were subtle, but they are there. Fortunately for me, there is also a standalone version of Noiseware for the Windows platform that allows batch processing.

RealGrain

Where Portraiture and Noiseware should become indispensable production tools for many photographers, RealGrain is more of an experimental playground. While it does include film grain simulations as the title implies, RealGrain is much, much more.

Included are controls for adjusting image color balance, brightness and contrast, hue, saturation and brightness based on specific colors, black-and-white conversion with filter effects, and a wide variety of toning and split-toning presets and adjustments. There are also presets to simulate the look of a variety of color films, both positive and negative, a variety of black-and-white films, grain effects of course, and even digital camera noise.

Unlike with the Portraiture and Noiseware, when you open your image in RealGrain no adjustment is made to the image. You are on your own to experiment to your heart’s content. For every possible adjustment and preset there are multiple sliders available to personalize your result. When




you are done, you can save the settings to apply to future images as a dropdown item in the Custom Preset menu.

You can set up multiple previews to investigate and move quickly between different effects applied to the same image.

You can even set parameters and let RealGrain “autobrackt” an effect with different settings and display them for you. If you long for the look of film or wonder what people are talking about who do, the RealGrain is loaded with options for you.

All of the plug-ins in the Suite include a PDF software manual that is well written and easy to follow. Video tutorials are available on the Imagenomic Web site. Current versions are Portraiture 2.1, Noiseware 4.1 and RealGrain 1.1. The plug-ins are available for Mac OS 10.4.x/10.5.x (PowerPC/Intel) and Windows XP/Vista. Photoshop CS2/CS3/CS4 or Photoshop Elements 4/5/6/7 are required as the host program for the plug-ins. Currently the MSRP is \$299, a savings of \$70 from their individual purchase price. Portraiture is also available for Lightroom and Aperture. Imagenomic offers other

bundles on its Web site, www.imagenomic.com. 

Stan Sholik is a commercial/advertising photographer in Santa Ana, CA, specializing in still life and macro photography. His book, Professional Filter Techniques for Digital Photographers, is published by Amherst Media.



Having chosen Ilford Delta 100 (pushed 1 stop) as my black-and-white film, I toned the shadows Sepia and the highlights Selenium. I also adjusted the midpoint of the split toning to favor Selenium before saving the image.