

Adobe Photoshop CS4 on Demand

Steve Dell

This Reviewer's point of view

I have Adobe *Photoshop* from the CS days, roughly version 8 in 2004, and I have a good feel for many aspects of *Photoshop*. My point of view is as a photographer. The reference books on my shelves are geared to the needs of the photographer. Since I'm not a graphic artist, I tend to evaluate books on how well they address the software from the photographer's viewpoint.

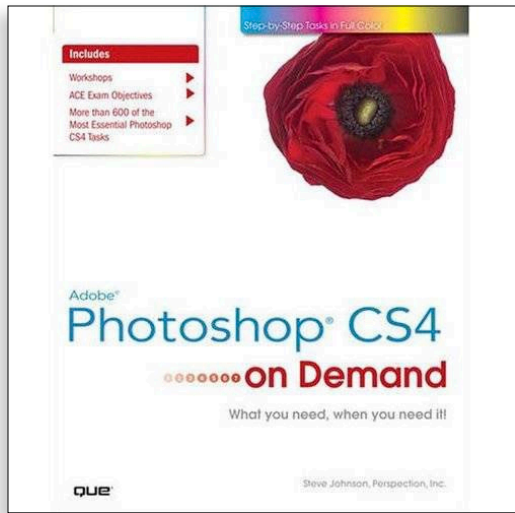
To be blunt, I don't care how to use *Photoshop* with *Illustrator* to create a phenomenal graphic logo. I want to use the tools in *Photoshop* to optimize my images quickly and impressively. It is from that perspective I view the suitability of a given volume on *Photoshop*.

With each new release of this important software, there comes an abundance of new books, or updates on previous versions, targeting a specific user - some for the digital photographer and some for digital artists. A quick survey recently on Amazon showed well more than 100 volumes on the subject of CS4 alone. WOW!

A Reader's Perspective

As one seeks reference materials for a subject, it is critical to understand how one learns. If one were a "visual learner," an appropriate reference typically would be full of graphics and

step-by-step processes. Others who are more tactile in their style, learn by doing and "getting their hands dirty." Others learn by reading text, absorbing and applying it. This book should appeal primarily to the visual learner and to a limited extent to the tactile learner. (To be fair, my learning style tends away from the graphic style and leans more toward the textual style.) I had hoped that this graphical approach would be a good helpful learning tool.



Using Selections to Generate Complex Layer Masks

Layer masks are easy to create; you select a layer and then click the Add Layer Mask button. Unfortunately, when you create a mask this way, it's up to you to define the transparent areas, using drawing or painting tools. There is another way to generate a mask, and that's by making a selection first. When you click the Add Layer Mask button, Photoshop searches the document for any selected areas. If it doesn't find any, it creates a blank (all white) mask. However, if you first select an area of the image, Photoshop interprets the selection as the area you want to remain visible.

Use Selections to Generate Masks

- 1 Open a document.
- 2 Select the areas of the image you want to preserve.
- 3 Click the Add Layer Mask button.

Photoshop generates a layer mask based entirely on your selection.

Did You Know?

You can apply layer styles to a masked image. Create the mask, and then click the Add Layer Style button, located at the bottom of the Layers panel. Then use any of Photoshop's layer styles, such as Drop Shadow, or Bevel and Emboss. The layer style will only be applied to the visible portion of the image.

See Also

See Chapter 4, "Mastering the Art of Selection," on page 77 for information on selecting areas of an image using different tools.

Easy-to-follow introductions focus on a single concept.

Illustrations match the numbered steps.

Numbered steps guide you through each task.

See Also points you to related information in the book.

Did You Know? alerts you to tips, techniques and related information.

An example of how Photoshop's tools and menus are covered in this book.

Publisher's Perspective

Now that you know how I evaluate a book, it might be useful to know what the publisher says about the book. The following information appears on a variety of web locations, ostensibly to help prospective buyers decide if this book will work for them.

"A visual quick reference book that shows you how to work efficiently with *Photoshop CS4*.

"What you need, when you need it!

"You don't have to read this book in any particular order. We've designed the book so that you can jump in, get the information you need, and jump out. However, the book does follow a logical progression from simple tasks to more complex ones. Each task is presented on no more than two facing pages, which lets you focus on a single task without having to turn the page. To find the information that you need, just look up the task in the table of contents or index, and turn to the page listed. Read the task introduction, follow the step-by-step instructions in the left column along with screen illustrations in the right column, and you're done.

"Need answers quickly? *Adobe Photoshop CS4 on Demand* provides those answers in a visual step-by-step format. We will show you exactly what to do through lots of full color illustrations and easy-to-follow instructions.

"Inside the Book

- Improve productivity with the CS4 interface and templates
- Use automatic layer alignment and blending to work with objects
- Use live filters to view and modify the results of opening files
- Use more precise color correction to enhance a photo
- Easily convert images to black and white
- Use image trickery to change or enhance an image
- Create eye-catching bevels and special effects
- Transform plain text into a show-stopping image

- Create web animation sequences the easy way
- Use tool presets to construct the right tool for the right job
- Test content on different target devices"

What I found

Sounds impressive, doesn't it? Each topic is covered on two facing pages. There's not a lot of back-and-forth page turning. Most topics are handled in this manner. This style makes for a friendly and easy-to-use method of learning various techniques.

As the publisher stated in the quote used above, this book doesn't need to be read sequentially. If one needs to know how to use the "Magic Wand" tool or add a blur, look it up in the index and follow along on the appropriate pages. In fact, one will become frustrated if the book is read in order.

The graphical approach should appeal to most readers who want to know "how to do" something with the program. Where the book falls woefully short, in my opinion, is that it doesn't cover "why to do" something. This was my biggest disappointment with the book.

While the information provides the basis for tools for your tool belt, I felt the book was inadequate from a "workflow" prospective. The key to successful image processing is developing and using a repeatable process, staying with it, and knowing when and how to vary from the workflow when necessary. (A great chef has a process and knows when and where to vary the recipe.)

As an example, say I've brought in an image of Bell Rock in Sedona into my computer. As I look at it, I sense "something is missing:"

- Is the contrast off?
- Is the color off?
- Is it out of focus?
- Can it be cropped more effectively?
- Is there a distracting element in the image?
- What's wrong?
- What should I do?

These are all things that the photographer deals with on a daily basis processing and optimizing images. I could refer to various sections of the book to find a topic, such as contrast. Unfortunately, there's no one "good" solution to these issues. Having more information about "why" to take a particular approach in handling one's image would be improve the user's skills.

Conclusion

Overall, this book gives the reader a reasonable understanding of various tools in *Photoshop CS4*. It presents the program, which can be a complex and intimidating, in a straightforward, easy to use, reference approach manner. The graphics are excellent and easy to read and comprehend. While this book might not be the first one I'd reach for when I'm stumped, it could prove a handy addition to many artists' libraries.

Rating



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The beautiful Jacaranda tree at the NW corner of Grant and Craycroft, in full bloom. Photo by TCS member John Kamper.