

# AKVIS Retoucher 5.0

Ken Blake

AKVIS *Retoucher* is a graphics-editing program that essentially does two kinds of things: retouching (removing defects: dust marks, scratches, stains, etc.) and removing unwanted objects (people, date stamps, wires, garbage cans, etc.) from photographs.

Both of these things are very desirable and I looked forward to trying a program that made it easy to accomplish both of them. I had little doubt that the program could do what it claimed to do, but how easy it was to use the program to accomplish them was another matter.

The program comes as both a stand-alone program and as a plug-in for several graphics programs (Adobe *Photoshop*, Corel *PaintShop Professional*, and Corel *PhotoPaint*). I used the stand-alone version in my testing.

The interface is non-standard and takes some getting used to. What's particularly odd about it is that you have a choice of running it in Express mode or Advanced Mode. The difference is that Advanced Mode includes some extra tools and options. Since there was no real advantage to running without those extra tools and options, I used Advanced mode all the time.

It isn't easy to figure out how to use the program, so I went to Help (identified with a question mark rather than the standard "Help" on a menu line). Help brings up a html page, a local one installed on your own computer, not a web page. But unlike a real Help file, there is no opportunity there to do a search on what you want help on.

So I clicked on "How to Use the Program." That told me how to use the program for retouching, but told me nothing about how to use the program for removing objects. To find out how to remove objects, I had to go to "Examples: Removing Large Objects." The Help file provided a minimal amount of

information and was poorly organized, so it wasn't easy to find what you were looking for.

So "How to Use the Program" tells me how to retouch photos. Great! That was the first thing I wanted to try. I opened a scanned black and white photo with some defects I wanted to remove (dust marks, etc.) The first few steps of "How to Use the Program" told me how to open a file, so I started with step 5. It said "Mark the areas of the image which need to be retouched" and then went on to say "You can use the following tools to make a selection: Selection Brush, Exclusion Tool, Eraser, Selection Bucket, and Magic Wand."

Magic Wand sounded good so I tried that first. I selected it and then clicked in a black area of the photograph, the area with several defects I wanted to remove. The Help file said "The selected areas will be highlighted in red," and that's exactly what happened; the entire black area with its irregular contours was highlighted in red.

Help then said "Press the Run icon to start reconstructing the image." I held my breath. If doing that would remove all the defects in that red area, it would be exactly what I was hoping for. So I pressed the button.

Alas! Not only did it not remove the defects, but it very slowly made that entire area far worse than it started out – a mishmash of irregular various gray areas of various sizes and shapes!

Help said "If you are not satisfied with the result, you can make correct [sic] the selection areas or adjust the algorithm's parameters in the Settings Panel and start processing the image again." So I changed the settings in the direction that Help indicated might help, and pressed Run again.

Nothing happened so I used the Magic Wand again (this time, having to click it in multiple places within that area that used to be black) and tried Run again. The result was more of a mishmash.

One more trial: I reopened the original file and tried again with the new settings. Even more mishmash.



The “Magic Wand” is not as magic as they say it is, so I opened the file and tried again with the Selection Brush. The Selection Brush let me put a little circle of red paint on each of the defects I wanted to eliminate and when I pressed Run, it did eliminate those defects.

Using the Selection Brush generally worked very well. Although it wasn't particularly difficult to use, it takes much longer than the “magic” I had hoped to get from the Magic Wand.

I tried the other tools. With the exception of the Selection Bucket (which worked well to select larger areas) none of them worked the way they were described. Either they were defective or Help was sorely lacking.

I moved on to removing unwanted objects. The Help file gives an example of a landscape with a man and woman walking on it. The man and woman are removed perfectly and the result looks like they had never been there. If I could easily do something similar, this would be a wonderful tool.

So I chose a photo to try this. It was a street scene in Rome with a person in the foreground that I wanted to try removing. I used the Selection Brush tool to outline the figure, then used the Selection Bucket tool to select the rest of what I had outlined. They worked well: the entire figure was now marked in red, just as it was in the sample in Help.

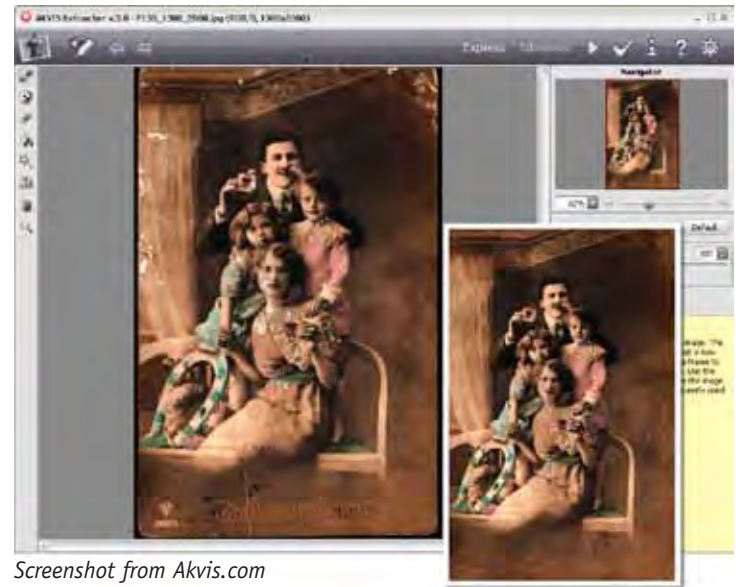
The next instruction was to use the Linear Retouch tool to restore lines that needed to go through the object being removed. I didn't do that because I had purposely chosen an object without such lines.

The next step was to “use the Patch tool to fill in the red zone with samples from the image which are best suited for restoring the background.” I did that, following the instructions – first clicking the tool in an area with a background I wanted to replace the figure, then clicking it in several places within the red-marked area. But unlike the sample in Help, the result of clicking within the red area didn't change what was visible. The clicked areas couldn't be seen.

The following instruction was to “use the Linear Retouch tool to connect all patches and divide the selection into homogeneous fragments.” I couldn't do that since I couldn't see where the patches were. So I tried clicking Run. It erased the figure, but left a mess where it had been.

This was a very bad result, so I tried again. This time I used the Linear Retouch tool to scribble randomly across the red figure, assuming that doing so would connect all of (or at least most of) the patches I had made but couldn't see. The result? Much less of a mess, but still unsatisfactory. Parts of the figure were still there and what had been removed was replaced by a uniform gray, not the mottled texture of the cobblestoned street that I used to create the patches.

Before giving up, I decided to try one more time with something easier. I selected a picture of San Francisco and would try to remove the top few floors of a skyscraper silhouetted against the sky. I repeated what I did with the Rome picture, including using the Linear Retouch tool to scribble randomly across the red figure, but this time I scribbled more than I did the previous time. The result? Still terrible. Some of it changed to the blue



Screenshot from Akvis.com

sky I wanted, some of which changed to white and some didn't change at all. A mess.

So my opinion of the program? For its retouching function it did a good job (except for its Magic Wand) and was easy to use (but lots of other graphics editing programs can do this easily too). For its object-removing function, it was terrible—completely unacceptable.

And one remaining point: selecting a file to open was very slow, and there were also often major problems opening files. I would sometimes click on a folder I wanted to look in, and the display changed not to that folder, but to a choice between C: or D: (and not E:, another drive on that computer).

Not recommended.

**About:** **AKVIS** *Retoucher V5.0*

**Vendor:** Akvis  
[www.akvis.com](http://www.akvis.com)

**Price:** Plugin or standalone \$87 (if you download it).  
Home Deluxe version (Plugin + standalone) \$98.  
Add \$19.95 for a DVD.