

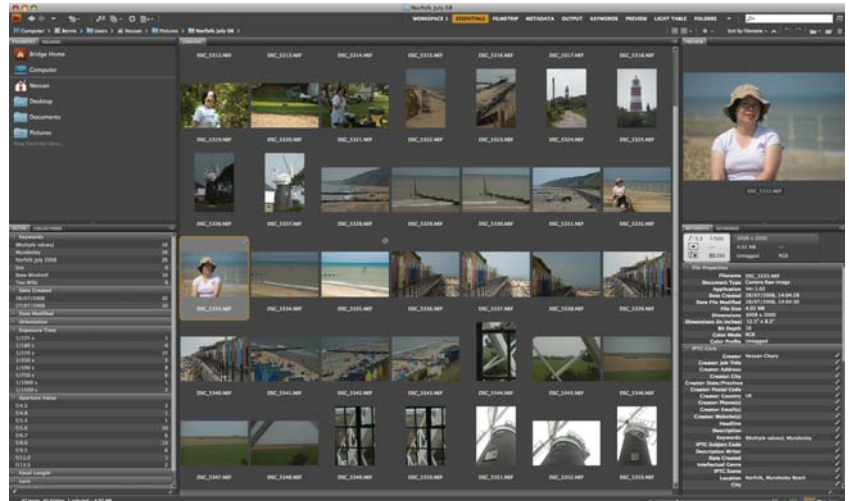
Kitchen sink not included

The first and most obvious thing to say about Creative Suite 4 is that it is quite a large collection of programs. I had planned to zip merrily through these in one go, but it quickly became obvious that there just isn't the time or the space to do this justice in a single story. Plan B was to just write about the print-related elements of the Creative Suite, but in today's world of cross media publishing that seemed like a bit of a cop-out. So, instead I'm going to look at the print-related elements this month, and come back to the rest in a second story.

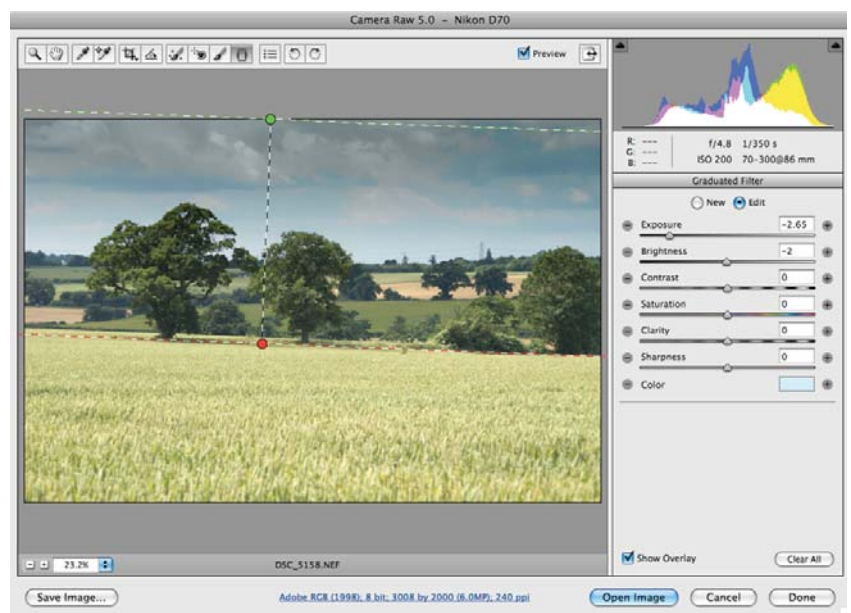
Most people will be aware by now that the Creative Suite is Adobe's collection of its main creative programs into a single package. Not surprisingly, the main theme of the latest iteration, CS4, is much greater integration between all the different programs that make up the suite. There's much more uniformity in the look and feel of the various programs, which makes it easier to jump back and forth from one to the other. There's also better compatibility between file formats, so that you can work on a file in one program and be able to read the same content in another. This is partly down to the way that many of the programs can now handle native Flash content. And just to make the point, Adobe has added Flash Professional to the Creative Suite.

There's also a much greater emphasis on reducing the time taken between tasks. Many programs now feature context-sensitive controls so that you don't need to waste time moving the mouse back and forth between the task in hand and the control panel. In addition, many effects are controlled by sliders that directly affect the object in question, which feels a lot more positive than typing numbers into a dialog box.

Overall, there's been a general tidying up of the interface for most of the CS4 programs. Many of the programs, for example, have gained tabs for each document so that when you have multiple documents open you can simply click on the tabs to go from one to the other. I especially liked the ease with which you can now switch between different layouts from a short cut in the top right



It's much easier to navigate around Bridge, thanks to the use of breadcrumb links in the top left of this screen, and a list of workspaces across the top right.



Camera Raw gains a number of useful tools, including the ability to add graduated filter effects.

hand corner. And Bridge at least appears to have inherited my custom workspaces from the CS3 version.

I must confess that I've always been disappointed with Adobe's Bridge. It sort of works as a File Browser, but it always seemed to me that it could have been so much more use as a digital asset manager. So it's a relief to find that Adobe has finally improved the search facility in Bridge, integrating it with the OS, with Spotlight for the Mac, and Desktop Search in Vista. It's still not nearly as good as a proper asset manager like Portfolio, but it's a welcome improvement. In addition, many of the CS4 programs have gained breadcrumb navigation so you can see where you've been and can jump right back to a previous folder.

Photoshop CS4

One of the most jaw dropping new features of Photoshop CS4 is Content-Aware scaling which can recompose an image as you resize it. Normally if you needed to crop an image you'd run the danger of cutting out people at either end of the picture, but this tool can squeeze the people together so that they all fit into a narrower space. It works the other way for images that need to be stretched, and you can choose which elements of an image not to scale.

There's a new Adjustments Panel which lets you edit things like curves and levels with the effects immediately apparent on the image, and without having to go through a dialog box. It also has a new Vibrance adjustment for controlling colour saturation across an image without blowing the skin tones.

There's a new Masks panel for creating vector and pixel masks. This has simple sliders to control the density and feathering of a mask. There's also a Refine Mask command, which pulls up a dialogue box, and gives better control over the size and edges of the mask. Adobe has improved the Dodge, Burn and Sponge tools, which can now be used to even up an exposure with very little real skill needed.

Elsewhere Adobe has tightened up the automatic Alignment and blending capabilities of Photoshop. This is particularly evident in the Photomerge command, which can stitch images together to make a panoramic and smooth over the slight differences in geometric distortions from wide-angle lenses as well as tone and colour.

You can also use the blending tools to merge several versions of an image together and in so doing can alter elements within that image. For example, if you shot the same image with different focal points, you could then blend the different versions together to get a single image with a wide depth of field.

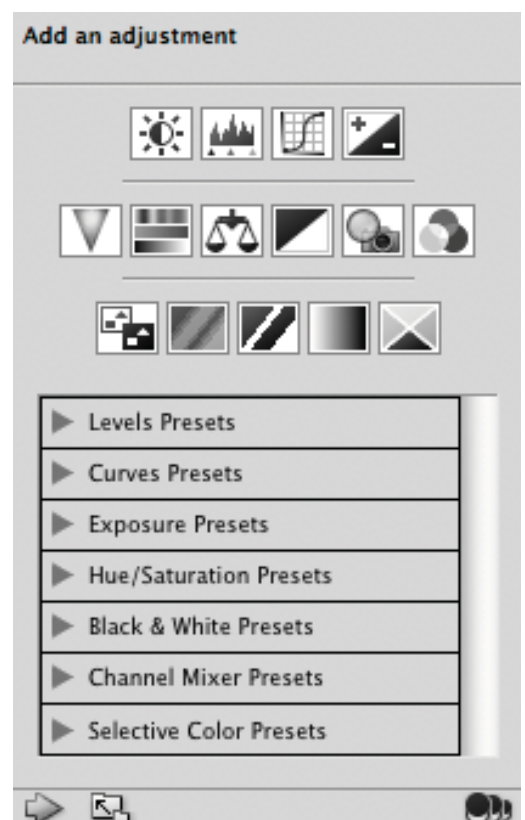
Adobe also appears to have been tinkering with the OpenGL technology that drives graphics cards to make it possible to zoom right into images with much less distortion than with previous releases, and with much

System Requirements

Mac users will need at least OS X 10.4.11, and a Multi-core Intel processor. Windows users will need Windows XP SP2 or Vista, plus at least a 2GHz processor. All users will need 2GB of RAM, 24GB (26GB for Mac) of hard drive space, a 1280 x 900 display with OpenGL 2.0 compatible graphics card and QuickTime 7.4.5.

The Creative Suite 4 should ship at some point during October.

Pricing ranges from €1500 for the Web Premium edition to €2500 for the Master collection with more details from www.adobe.com



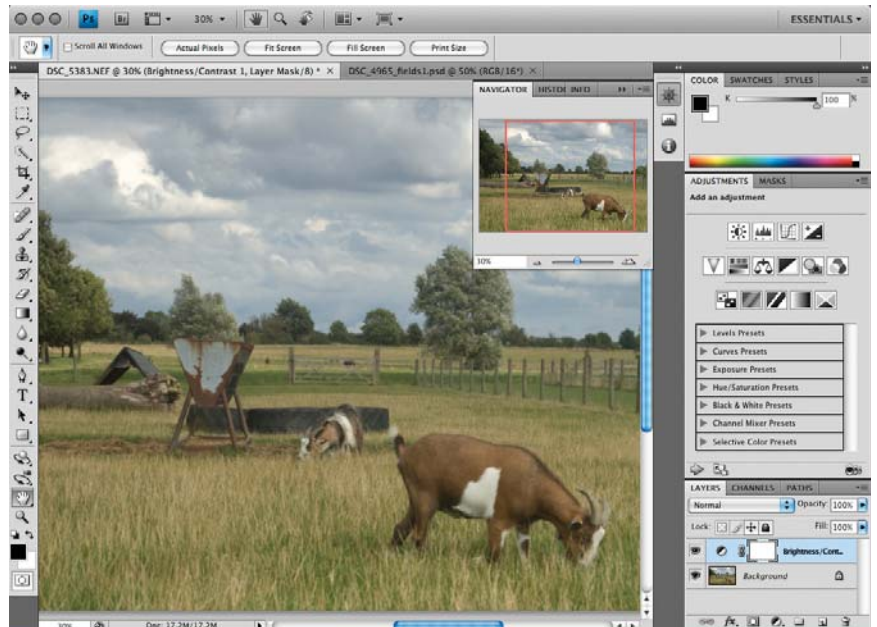
Adobe has collected all of the Adjustment tools together into a single panel.

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better performance so that you can quickly zoom in and out without waiting around for the image to catch up.

There is a host of smaller improvements, such as the preview cursor that's been added to the Clone Stamp and Healing brushes so that you can see the elements that you are cloning or healing. There's a new Print window which lets you preview out of gamut colours, and brings 16-bit printing to the Mac. In compensation, Windows users get support for 64-bit editions of Vista.

Photoshop CS4 also includes Camera Raw 5, which gains a whole host of added effects. You can, for example, add the effect of a graduated filter, rotate or crop the image or use an Adjustment brush to select an area to apply localised changes such as the exposure, brightness or colour.

As with CS3, there's also an Extended edition which adds 3D editing, some motion graphics abilities and image analysis functions. Adobe has developed a new 3D engine that is said to be much faster. It will, for example, let you paint directly onto 3D objects, convert 2D images into 3D objects or merge a 2D layer onto a 3D layer to effectively wrap an image around an object. Adobe has also improved the motion graphics side of Photoshop such as the ability to animate 3D objects. After Effects can also read and import 3D layers from Photoshop files.

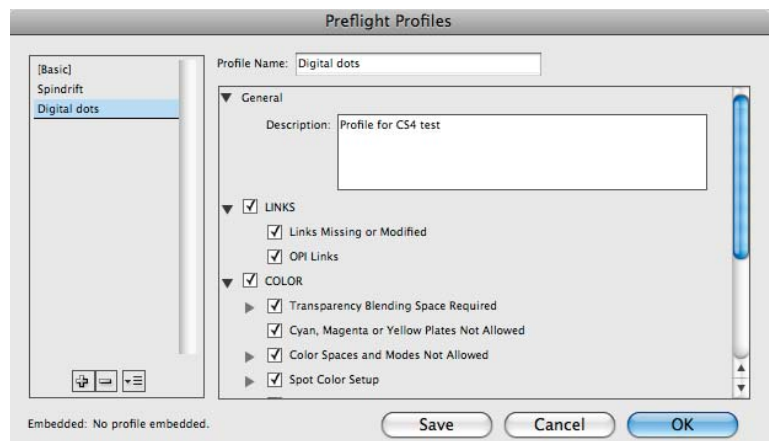


Adobe has improved the interface for Photoshop, with the tabbed documents seen here. The entire interface is now a single window so its easy to resize it when working on different programs.

InDesign CS4

InDesign has borrowed a trick from QuarkXPress in that you can now export InDesign page layouts as Flash pages complete with interactive elements such as hyperlinks and buttons, and without the need to learn complex Flash programming. When it comes to exporting Flash content, users have a choice between exporting to the standalone Flash player format .swf, or to XFL, which is an interchange format that allows the file to be opened in Flash Professional, now making its debut in the Creative Suite. Exporting the file in XFL means that the text and graphics can be further edited in Flash.

There's a conditional text feature that allows you to have the text for several editions or language versions within the same document. Rather than having to manually decide which layers to print, you can tag the elements for each version with a condition. So for example, a computer magazine published in French and English might use one condition for the English ▶



Adobe has developed its own preflight engine for InDesign.

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text and another for the French text, complete with language-specific screenshots and captions. Conditions can also be used to show or hide words from one version or another that are on the same layer. You could also use conditions to choose high resolution images for one version of a publication, and low res images for an online edition.

Adobe has also developed its own preflighting engine, which lets you check through a document for any potential errors before you export it to a PDF, or before you do any further work on it in Flash. The preflighting is based on templates – with each user defining the parameters of what’s allowed within the document – and these profiles can be exported to other users. Adobe has also redesigned the Links panel which now shows thumbnails of assets as well as all uses of the asset where it’s used multiple times in the same document

Illustrator CS4

Illustrator gains a number of useful gems. For starters, Adobe has added the ability to have multiple pages or artboards within a single file. The individual artboards, can be different sizes, and they can be tiled or overlapped with each other, or you can even create one artboard within another. The various artboards can be saved as a single multipage PDF or as a numbered sequence of files in other formats.

There’s a new Blob Brush tool that is very much like painting with a very fat brush. It can create a vector shape, filled, and complete with outline paths which can easily be selected. The shape can then be further refined with the Eraser and Smooth tools. As with other drawing tools you can set options for stroke character and pressure sensitivity.

Adobe has also improved the Appearance panel, which shows attributes, such as the fill colour, for both single and multiple objects, and which can be edited by clicking on the attribute. You can now turn off complex effects to prevent constant re-rendering from slowing you down. There’s a Same Appearance Attribute option that lets you select all the objects with similar attributes, and then apply a single edit to all of those objects.

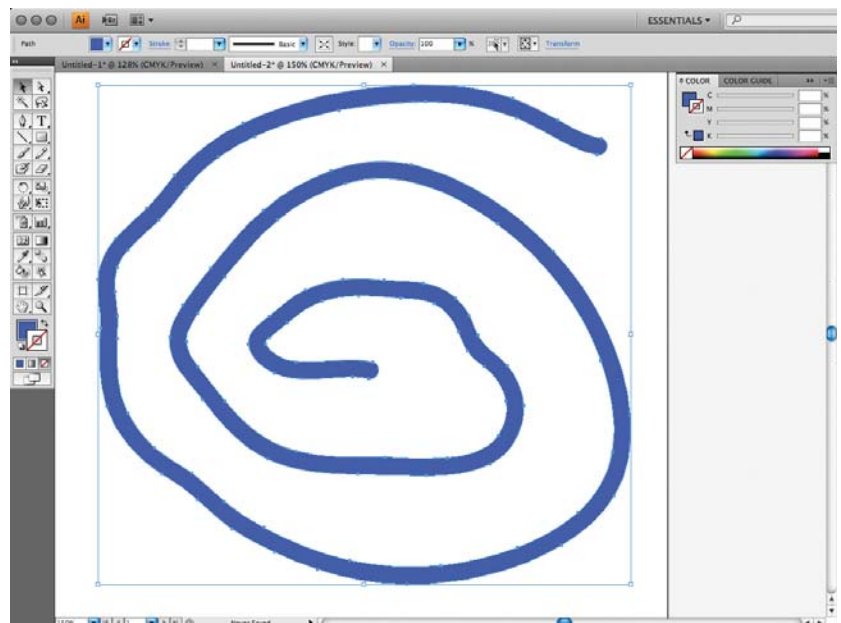
Conclusion

In truth, dwelling on individual features within the various programs doesn’t really capture the essence of this release. What really comes across is the ease with which you can switch from one tool to another, and apply effects fairly quickly direct to an image or a document without having to go through dialogue boxes or mouse backwards and forwards from one side of the screen to the other. On top of this Adobe has done a much better job of integrating the programs together so that CS4 feels much ►

Which collection?

There are now six editions of the Creative Suite, and 14 programs included in the CS4 family. Design Standard includes InDesign, Photoshop, Illustrator and Acrobat, while Design Premium includes all of these as well as Dreamweaver, Flash and Fireworks, as well as the Extended version of Photoshop. Web Standard comes with Dreamweaver, Flash, Fireworks and Contribute, while the Web Premium edition has all of these plus Photoshop Extended, Illustrator, Acrobat and Soundbooth.

For those working on video, there’s a Production Premium edition, which comes with Photoshop Extended, Illustrator, Flash, After Effects, Premiere Pro, Soundbooth, OnLocation and Encore. And of course, there’s a Master Collection that includes everything. All the different editions also get Bridge, Device Central, and Media Player, and all of them except Production Premium include Version Cue, while Production Premium also gains Dynamic Link.



Illustrator has gained a number of new features including the Blob tool which can produce vector shapes, filled with colour, and with editable points.

▼ more like a single product rather than a disparate collection, and it feels much more natural to take a file from one program to another to apply different effects.

We'll come back to CS4 with a part two of this review to look at the other programs that make up the collection. Principally we'll focus on the web-based products such as Dreamweaver and Flash, but do write to us if you would also like us to cover the video and sound editing programs.

However, be patient with us, as this may take a month or two. We've written this story from a beta copy of the Master Collection but we'll wait until we have the final released version for the next part of the story. Not every feature has worked for us, but that's the nature of beta software so we've given Adobe the benefit of the doubt, but with the final release we'll have more to say on the overall productivity of the Creative Suite.

– **Nessan Cleary**

