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Photoshop Aficionado

By E. Sapwater

Cover Artist Jeff Schewe Takes on the World's #1 Imaging Application



Photographer Jeff Schewe sits in the digital imaging area of his Chicago studio. The computer on the top left—a 450 MHz Macintosh G4 with 1GB RAM—is his primary imaging machine.

"It's easy to assume that good photography no longer has value. But high-quality photography and craftsmanship are still absolutely critical."
—Jeff Schewe

In 1992, Jeff Schewe attended a course for photographers at the Center for Creative Imaging, in Camden, Maine. He spent the entire week immersed in Photoshop. When he came home, his life had changed. All the frustration he had experienced with outside retouching services had been caused by lack of communication. He could never get them to understand exactly what he had in mind. With his new-found knowledge of Photoshop, at last he would have complete control over his images—be it in-camera or on the computer, he says, "I'm always predisposed to manipulate the hell out of the final image."

As a boy, Jeff Schewe lived and breathed art the way other kids his age lived and breathed baseball. Years later, he would major in art and three-dimensional design at Illinois State University, but he found his true medium of expression when he volunteered to photograph a student production of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. "I still remember the first time I pulled a print in the darkroom," he said. "Watching the image appear in the developer tray was like, way cool."

So began Schewe's photographic career. He sold his stereo and motorcycle, bought an engagement ring for his girlfriend Rebecca, and after their wedding went to work in a photo store, where he picked up odd jobs in photography. A year later, he enrolled at the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York, the prestigious graphic arts school. In 1978, he graduated with highest honors, and a bachelor of science degree in photography.

Schewe returned to Chicago to open a studio and quickly gained a reputation as a problem solver. His ability to create "impossible"



The second of Schewe's two motorcycles, this 1997 Harley Heritage Springer was photographed with a Canon DCS 2000 digital camera. The ad was for a Canon "Explorers of Light" promotion. Schewe was added to the Explorers program as one of its digital gurus.

images in-camera precedes the digital revolution. Case in point: The art director of the agency for the Country Music Association recently hired Schewe to create an image of a melting telephone, assuming he would create the effects in the computer. The final image was so convincing that the director asked how he did it. He answered that he had merely placed the telephone in the oven and melted it.

"In this day and age, with so much technology at our hands, sometimes the easiest way to do something is to just do it for real," Schewe said. "You see people beating their heads against a brick wall trying to do something on the computer,

when it would have been easier just to photograph it on film.

"It's important to come to grips with technology. Whether you have the capacity to sit and work in Photoshop, or you hire someone else to do it in-house, you need to exert control over the way your photographs are manipulated. Remember, you can be an old fart like me and still be on the bleeding edge."

Photoshop's Magic

Schewe was introduced to digital imaging in 1984, while working with Raphaële, the world-renowned digital retoucher. He had accepted an assignment to create an elegant kitchen setting on top of a chopping block. He photographed the kitchen

and chopping block on two sheets of 8x10-inch film, which he sent to Raphaële in Houston. She digitally combined the images in a perfectly crafted montage on 11x14-inch transparency film. "What she does is absolutely magic," said Schewe.

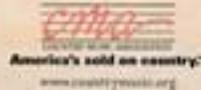
It wasn't until the week-long course at CCI in 1992 that Schewe realized he could wield his own brand of magic with Adobe Photoshop. He didn't have the money, but he knew he had to have his own digital imaging equipment. "Late at night I'd read manuals and product brochures," he said. "I told my wife I wanted to spend \$20,000 on a high-end workstation." With Rebecca's blessing, Schewe bought a Macintosh Quadra 950, a 21-inch

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Though he's considered one of the top Photoshop experts in the world, Schewe knows when to use the computer and when to use his imagination. The telephone in this ad for the Country Music Association was melted in the oven for 30 minutes at 350°F.

monitor, 1GB hard drive, 256MB RAM, and SyQuest 44 drive. His first retouching job paid for the system. "I hit the ground running and haven't looked back."

Schewe found himself "falling in love with photography all over again," pushing the limits of Photoshop in ways it was never intended to be used. That's when he began to find bugs in the Photoshop program. Little did he know it would launch a relationship with Adobe that few photographers had.

One of his first discoveries was a

bug in Gaussian Blur, Version 2.5. He documented the exact point where the problem occurred and shared the information online with lead programmer Mark Hamburg. "I didn't know he worked for Adobe until he told me it took him about 15 minutes to fix the problem."

Schewe soon found himself beta testing Version 3.0. Previously, he had beta tested the image manipulation program Live Picture. "When I beta test software, I break the hell out of it. I go through every single tool, every feature, and every

command. I want to see what works and what doesn't." He developed the skill to document problems so that Adobe engineers could understand and fix them.

Schewe's close relationship with Adobe made him the first outsider to see an alpha version of Layer Masks, a feature that would be introduced in Version 4.0. Some of Schewe's ideas have even contributed to Photoshop's development. Hamburg's original idea for multiple undos, for example, was based on Schewe's theory of time travel, which he had developed from a lifelong interest in science fiction. In this digital environment, you could move backward and forward in time to alter an image, yet still have the original universe to return to if necessary. Hamburg called the new feature the "History Palette."

Hamburg credited one of Schewe's images as the inspiration of the technology. Adobe developers continue to share information with Schewe about future releases of the program.

Artistic License

Schewe admits to being "driven" as an artist. "It's difficult to have the self-discipline, or in my case, an absolute love of anarchy, when it comes to creativity," he said. "I don't like to have anybody tell me what to do. I try to set myself up in situations where I have to be more creative, or I'm richly rewarded for being creative. It's a conscious effort—inspiration, passion, desire, and dedication. If you feel strongly about something, it's not that hard to be passionate. Then you'll be dedicated and work hard."

"There are lots of different aspects to creativity. Some people get an idea and immediately discard it; or they are too predisposed to believe it's a good idea. I look at every idea as though it may be a

diamond. I'm perfectly willing to throw it out once it's proven to be glass, but if it's a diamond, I want to use it. "

Clear copyright ownership is one of the reasons Schewe insists on doing image manipulation himself. "When a photographer does his own manipulation, there are no gray areas about who owns the image," he said. "It makes the whole issue very simple. I own it. It gives me an automatic leg up on any photographer who has to go to an outside source for imaging."

As the new national president of the Advertising Photographers of America (APA), and a member of some 15 years, Schewe has never been shy about sharing his opinions. His first goal as president during his year-long tenure is to organize the focus of APA. Schewe is concerned that photographers

don't get enough support; that the time has come to work together as an association to protect their rights. Toward that end, he has been working to forge alliances with other photographic associations that share APA's goals, such as Professional Photographers of America.

At Home in the Studio

Schewe's studio in Chicago is a mere 28 steps from his home next door. The space is divided into two areas, one for photography and one for digital imaging. The 28x53-foot, ground-level studio has a concrete floor with a drain—if the shoot gets messy, the staff can just hose it down. His roots as a model maker have grown into an elaborate and well-equipped workshop, where Schewe builds his own riggings and sets as needed.

The studio's photographic arsenal

consists of Canon 35mm SLRs, Hasselblad bodies for medium-format photography, and a Sinar view camera for 4x5 and 8x10-inch formats. For each camera, there's about a half-dozen lenses and an assortment of adapter rings. He has discarded all of his filters, with the exception of the Polarizer, an effect he has yet to replicate in Photoshop.

Generally, Schewe photographs location work with a Canon and commercial work and portraits with a Hasselblad. The Sinar 4x5 is often mounted with a 6x7 roll film back. He lights his sets with Balcar flash equipment, designing and building most of his own lighting accessories and light boxes.

Nowadays, the imaging studio claims most of Schewe's time, but at least it has ambiance. Indirect, daylight-balanced lighting makes it a neutral color environment. Music



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CASE IH

Photographed on location in Phoenix, this image was assembled from two different tractor shots. Art director David Willett hired Schewe because he wanted it to look "photographic," even down to the film edges showing.



This straight shot of Schewe's primary touring bike, a BMW R1100 GS, was photographed in Yellowstone National Park. He was on a return trip from a speaking engagement at Seybold San Francisco.



Jeff Schewe self-portrait

“When a photographer does his own manipulation, there are no gray areas about who owns the image . . . it makes the whole issue very simple. I own it. It gives me an automatic leg up on any photographer who has to go to an outside source for imaging.”

blares from speakers mounted around the room, and globs of wax bubble and slither in a red Lava Lamp.

There's an assortment of computers. The Photoshop workstation is a Macintosh G4/450, loaded with 1GB RAM, and connected to two Mitsubishi monitors, a SpectraView and a DiamondPro. An Adaptec SCSI card allows it to be connected to multiple SCSI devices. The Mac 9600 is the studio business machine. Linked to the Internet using DSL for fast connections, it contains a Newer Technology G3 upgrade card and a TV card. Three monitors are hooked up to the 9600, including a hand-me-down Radius PressView and an Apple LCD Monitor—for television viewing.

A third machine looms in the back. It's a scanning workstation—a Daystar Genesis with a Newer Technology G3 upgrade card. It has 1GB RAM, which he admits “may

be a bit of overkill.” Among all the scanners he tested, he could not find one for less than \$20,000 that could perform as well as his Imacon Flextight II. It, too, has a SpectraView monitor and CD-burner connected.

Schewe highly recommends using multiple monitors—high-end models that can be color calibrated. He can't stress enough the importance of having a color-corrected light box for viewing transparencies and proofs. He designed his system so he can compare prints and transparencies to his calibrated monitors, which are fitted with custom hoods that he crafted from corrugated plastic.

A Seagate Sidewinder AIT tape drive performs daily backups. Each tape is good for 27GB. All of this equipment is on battery backup in the unlikely event of a power failure. The machines are networked using 100BaseT fast

Ethernet driven by a Farallon Switcher networking system. The main server is a second Genesis, which has also been enhanced with Newer Technology. The box contains 4-, 9-, and 18GB drives. Images are scanned to the server, from which they can be opened on any machine.

On location, Schewe uses a PowerBook G3 laptop with 192MB RAM. "I'm a Mac advocate. I'm a Mac user. But I'm not a Mac bigot. I'm not particularly proactive in terms of convincing people that the Mac is the best—though it is." His Mac-centricity earned him an invitation to join the Apple Customer Advisory Board.

He swore never to buy another Macintosh unless he could load it with 1GB RAM. Now he's credited with helping convince Apple to add a fourth RAM slot, the "Schewe Slot," to both the G3 and G4 workstations. His feedback also helped Apple change the "yucky" looks of the G3. "We told them we wanted a silver-gray-platinum look. They gave us the G4 box."

The Highway Ahead

Schewe says that he never regretted being without a motorcycle. But in 1996, Rebecca told him that he was spending far too much time in the studio. Get a hobby, she suggested, even hinting he buy another "bike."

"The deal was that I quit smoking, too," he said. "This is something I never forget, because Rebecca won't let me. One bike wasn't enough, so I have two, a BMW, which is a motorcycle on steroids, and a Harley for scooting around."

"Scooting around" includes trips to Adobe Systems in San Jose, California, trade shows and speaking engagements around the state, and when time allows, camping treks through Yosemite National Park, Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and the Badlands of South Dakota, peaceful interludes in a not-so-peaceful lifestyle.

Next up? A couple of things. "I'd like to wrap up my Photoshop book, which has a working title of *Jeff's Photoshop*, slated to be published this summer by MacMillan. "The other is to get back to my day job."

In Schewe's ideal scenario, he works with really nice people, on extremely creative projects, for obscene amounts of money.

"At this point in my career, I'll accept any two out of the three," he said, "but ultimately, I'd like three out of three." He's an artist and a businessman, no bones about it.

"I would also like to expand my lecturing and teaching. And, of course, I want to continue to break things and view the world in my uniquely perverted perspective." ◀

Contact Jeff Schewe by e-mail at info@schewephoto.com or visit his Web site at www.schewephoto.com.