

First look at Adobe Photoshop 7.0!

This first look at Photoshop 7 is based on a pre-release beta therefore some items discussed may change in the final, released version.

Photoshop 7 has a number of new features that should please most die hard users. While we can't say that there is a single "Killer" feature in this update, Adobe had continued to refine the product and produced some compelling features most users will appreciate. The interface is continually being refined (check out those cool new icons on the tool bar). There are few items that should appeal to any Photoshop 6 user and encourage them to upgrade. We can say that after working with 7.0 for a few months, there is no going back to 6.0!

OSX Support. For those users working on the Macintosh platform, Photoshop 7 is now completely native meaning that users can run the new version under OSX and utilize all the benefits of this modern operating system. Adobe has done a fine job implementing the Aqua interface to Adobe Photoshop. All the screen dumps in this article are from Photoshop 7 running under OSX. New users to Photoshop and OSX should be aware of some issues. First, there is no reason to assign a specific memory allocation to Photoshop as this is all handled by the OS. Yet, Adobe has provided a preference for OSX users only (see figure 1) called "Memory Usage" where a percentage of total memory can be limited. We are still uncertain of the role here, as there doesn't appear to be any advantage or disadvantage to setting this slider to high values. At this time, we suggest leaving the defaults for memory.

The Photoshop 7 application is carbonized meaning that users on the Macintosh can launch the one file as an OS9 application if that operating system is running or as an OSX application should OSX be running. Be aware that there are "support files" (Profiles, saved settings, preferences, dictionaries) that both operation systems require, therefore it is recommended that should a user wish to work with both OS9 and OSX, users install Photoshop 7 under OSX at the very least. That is, have OSX running when installing the application. It is too early to say which operating system is faster (beta's are usually not optimized for speed until the very end of the programming process). We have found that Photoshop running under OSX is very stable.

For those who wish to use their existing ICC profiles under OSX, there are several places where they are stored for use by Photoshop 7. Since OSX assumes multiple users, one place to store profiles is "Users->Library->ColorSync->Profiles." Profiles placed in this location will be available to the user logged in. If you wish all users to view all profiles, than place them in the main Library folder (Library->ColorSync->Profiles." Not that Adobe installs all their settings in this main Library folder in a folder called "Application Support" much like that on OS9.

File Browser. Previous versions of Photoshop expected users to open full resolution files to examine them, rotate them, and so forth. When you have just returned with four hundred 6mb images from a digital camera, this is laborious to say the least. It is for this reason that we find the new File Browser one of the most compelling new features of Photoshop 7. As seen in figure 2, the browser is a resizable palette that acts very much like other Photoshop palettes (you can even dock it in the option bar). To the left of the main interface is an area to navigate to folders on any mounted hard drive. Clicking on a folder of images produces thumbnails in three sizes (small, medium or large) and by ranking or what is called "Detail" (a thumbnail with various textual data about the file). Just below the navigation area is a resizable area where any image that is selected in the browser appears enlarged for easy inspection. Below that is a window area that shows all the meta-data in the file. For those new to the term meta-data, there are copious amounts of textual data that an image file can contain. Many digital cameras produce information such as date captured, file size/resolution, shutter speed and so on. This can be seen in figure 2. Photoshop has allowed users to insert meta-data into any open file for years using the "File Info" menu. All this capture data can be seen in the new Browser.

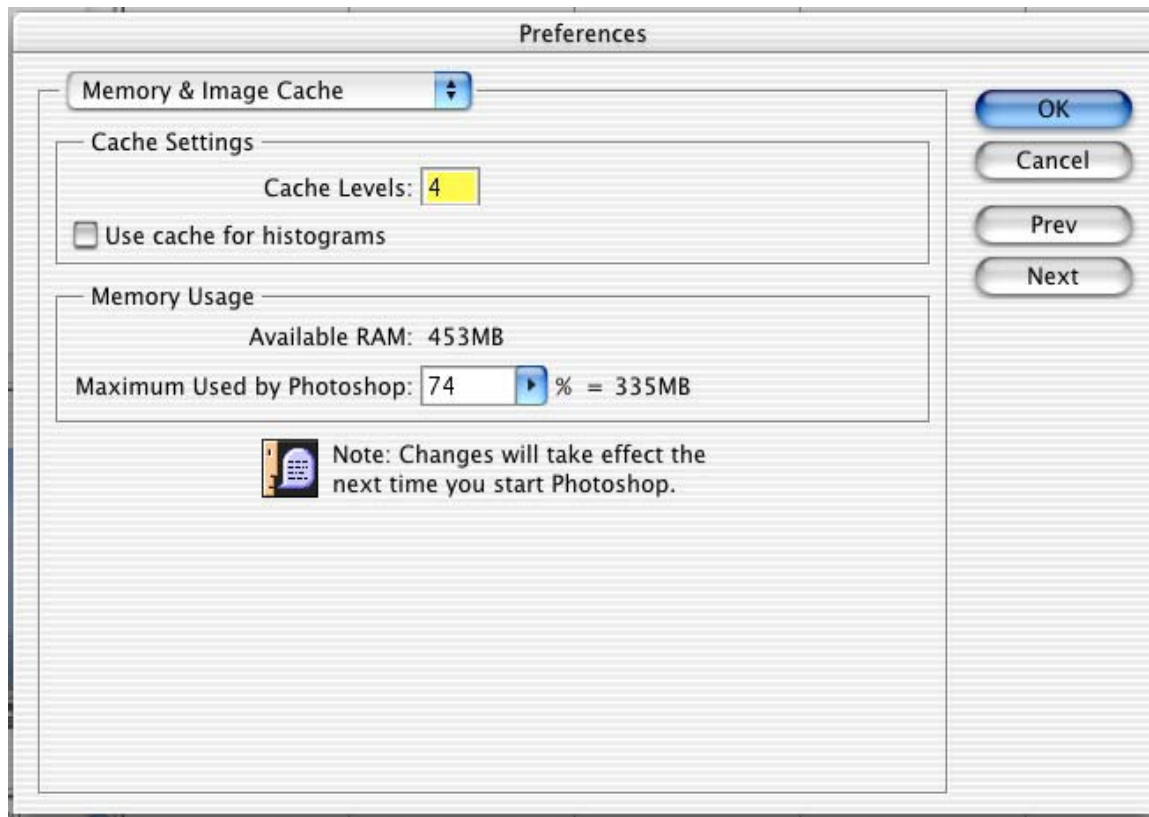


Figure 1. Notice the new memory preference for the OSX version!

Users can control the order of images in the browser in a multitude of ways (such as name, date modified, width, height and so on). Users can even create new folders from the browser and drag and drop any selected image in the browser to that folder. Images can be rotated and deleted from within the browser as well. Double click on an image and it will open in Photoshop. The browser is a fantastic tool for dealing with multiple images. Once users begin to get used to the Browser, they will wonder how they ever got by without it.

Tool Presets. This new palette as seen in figure 3 is potentially a huge time saver. Users can click on a tool, configure specific settings, and record them inside this palette. For example, when set to “Current Tool only” and with the crop tool active, a user could set and save a number of predefined crop settings to use at any time by simply selecting it in the palette. Suppose a user wants a [8x10@300dpi](#) crop, a [5x7@300dpi](#) crop, a [640x480@72dpi](#) crop and so. Simply click on the crop tool and enter those values into the option bar, then select “New Tool Preset” from the popup menu in the Tool Preset menu. A dialog box will appear asking for a name for this preset. Once saved, users can simply click on a preset to recall all the options for that tool. The Tool Preset palette allows two behaviors. In its default behavior, all tools appear in the palette. Clicking on any saved tool setting will select that tool and its saved setting, ready for use. By clicking on the “Current Tool Only” check box, only presets for the currently selected tool appears. This behavior works well when a user has many different saved tool settings as only those saved settings for each tool appear in the palette. Tool Presets finally allows users to configure multiple tool settings to their specifics and quickly use them. The items in the actual Tool Preset palette can be shown in various ways such as large or small icons or text only to save space in the palette. The presets can be saved (as .tpl files) and reloaded latter or shared among users much like Actions and brushes can be saved and latter loaded. The presets can be accessed from a palette or directly from the Option bar.

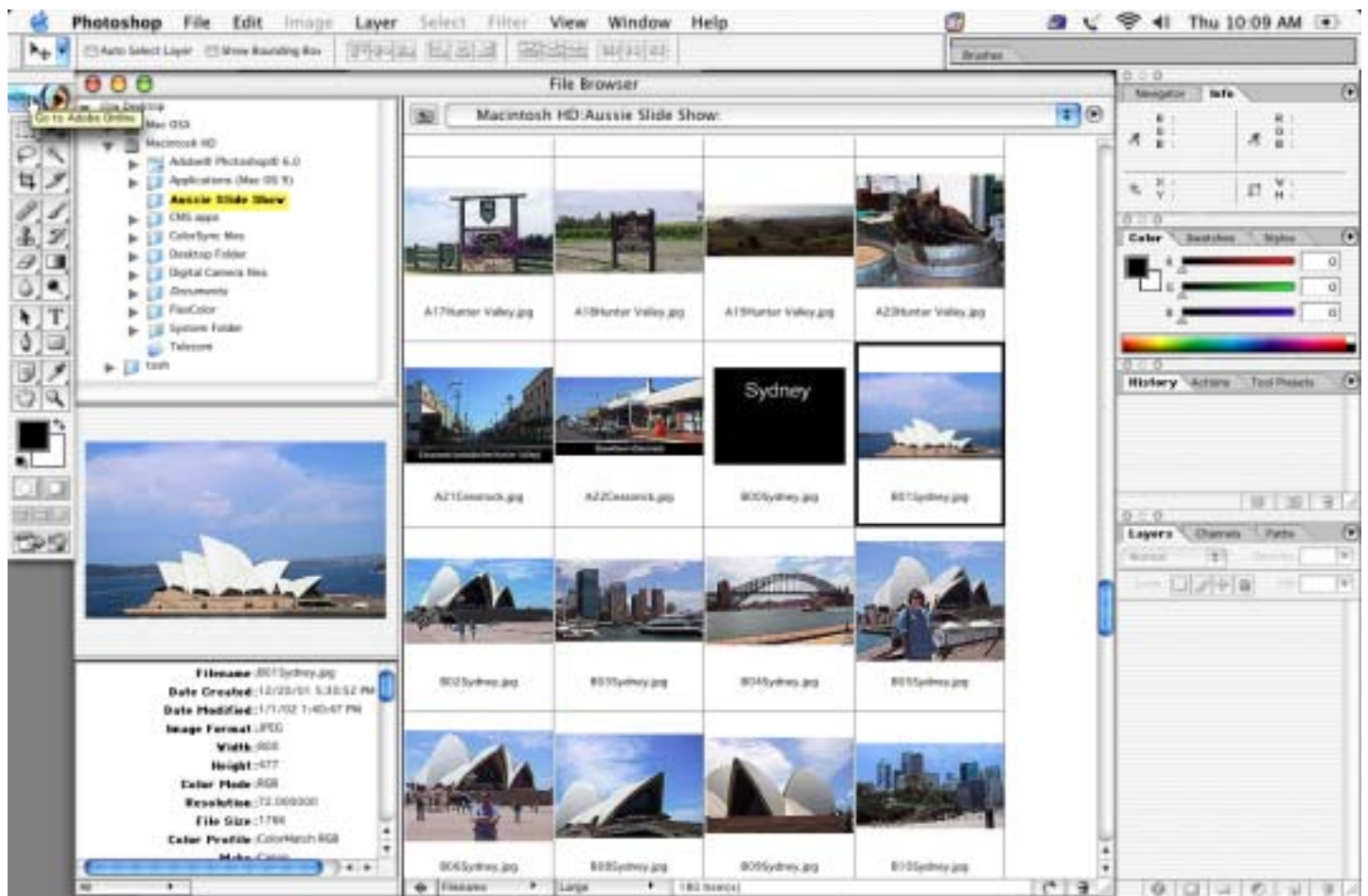


Figure 2. The File Browser and the rest of the new OSX Aqua interface.

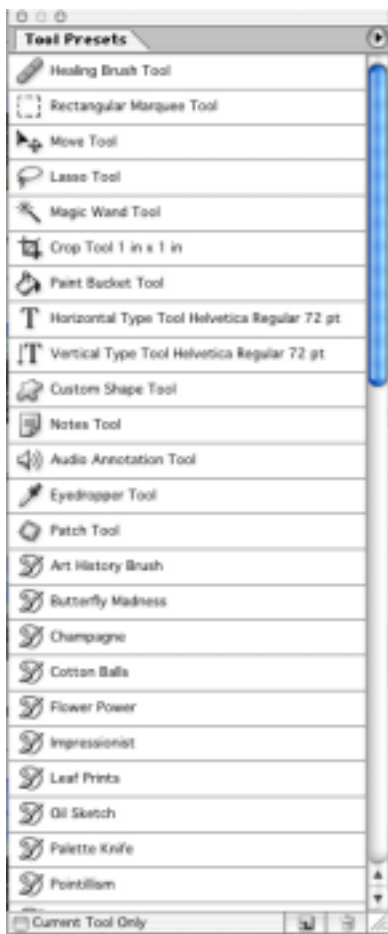


Figure 3. Tool Presets allow multiple settings to be configured per tool. The checkbox below allows only the active tool or all tools to be seen in the palette.

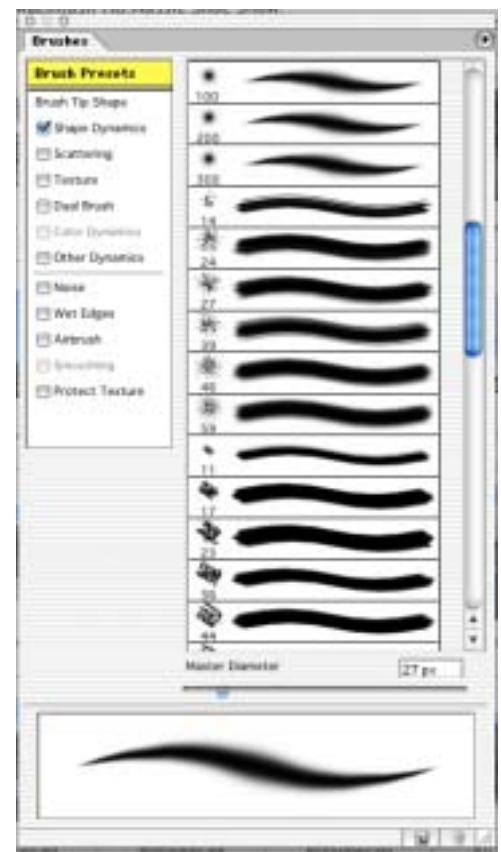


Figure 4. The Brush Palette is back! Whats more, there are tones of new new options!

Brushes: Photoshop 7's brush engine has been revamped from the ground up. For years, users have asked for "natural media" brushes. Well Photoshop 7 provides brushes like never seen before. In addition, for those users who complained about the lack of a true brush palette, Adobe has listened and has brought back an improved brush palette (see figure 4). There are so many new options for creating and modifying brushes with the new engine, we expect to see articles about just this new feature alone. As seen in Figure 4, there are no less than 10 separate areas where one can click and open brush setting parameters such as "Shape Dynamics, Scattering, Texture and so on. As the user clicks on each section and configures the numerous options, a preview of the brush characteristics is seen below the dialog in a large preview. There are numerous Brush presets which are supplied by Adobe and users have options for how they wish to display the list of brushes much like the Tool Presets (by name only, with various sized previews of the brush and so on). Brush presets can be accessed from the brush palette seen in Figure 4 or from the option bar when a brush tool is selected. These few sentences can't do justice to the huge number of options users now have for creating brushes. You will just have to upgrade and start playing!

Healing Brush. This is a pretty cool tool that takes the "Clone Tool" to another level. Basically Adobe came up with some pretty smart algorithms for removing dust, spots and other nastiness in an image. Its not perfect but it can be quite effective. There are really two tools here which behave differently. The Healing Brush operates much like the Clone Tool where a user option clicks on an area to "pick up" an area of the image to use and then paints over another area to fix it. Like the Clone tool, there is the option to align or not align where the sample is taken for subsequent painting. The Patch tool works like a lasso tool tied to this new healing algorithm. When active, a user would select an area of the image that needs repair and then drag that selection into an area that has good data. The originally selected area is healed based on this secondary selection. There are options to reverse this process (select good, pristine data and drag that over the damaged area). The Patch is either the source or the destination but the results end up being the same; a fix. There is no feather for this Patch tool selection but it still seems to do an excellent job of producing a very difficult to detect correction. Edges are very well blended. Like any selection, after using the Patch tool, be sure to deselect or you'll end up going nowhere. These two tools will really put the Clone tool in the back seat for a lot of retouching. When used correctly (and that isn't too hard to do), they produce far more seamless clean up than one can produce with the old clone tool. This is worth the upgrade alone!

Auto Color. In the past, we usually advised against using any tool that started with the word "Auto." We have to admit that the new Auto Color can work quite well at removing color casts. While its no substitute for a smart user who understands how to use Levels or Curves, Auto Color might just be the tool when you need to process 5000 web pages that need a bit of a tweak. The key is understanding how to access the Auto Color options which are themselves new features found in both Levels and Curves (see figure 5). Go into either Levels or Curves, click on the Options button, and notice the new settings available. What's cool is as a user alters the various settings, the underlying image will update on the fly making it easier to set these options for representative images. We have found that keeping the clipping values low is key to producing good results. Notice in the screen dump that there is a checkbox called "Save as Default." This allows the settings configured to "stick" and be used anytime a user clicks on the Auto button in the Curves or Levels. If unchecked, the settings are stored in each correction dialog and used until changed. . If checked, both correction tools will use those settings as a "default." While on the subject of curves, notice a change in the interface for enlarging or reducing the size of the curve dialog. Its seen in the lower right hand corner.

Tiling and Cascading. New in Photoshop 7 is a command for that will automatically tile or cascade multiple open document windows. PC users have had this built into the OS for years but now, Mac users can quickly organize open windows with a simple click on a menu.

New Document options. There are a number of preset, hard-wired New Document sizes that a user can quickly select when creating a new document (see figure 6).

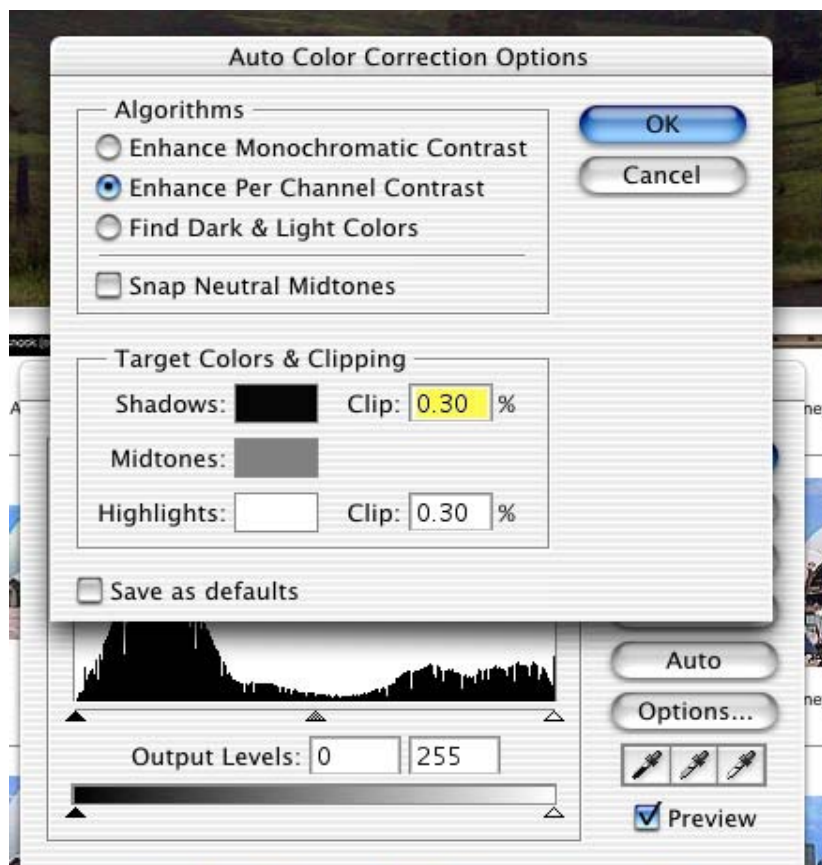


Figure 5. The Auto Color options, seen here in the levels command allow many new options for correcting color casts and setting a clipping of shadow and highlight. Notice the “Save as default” check-box below.

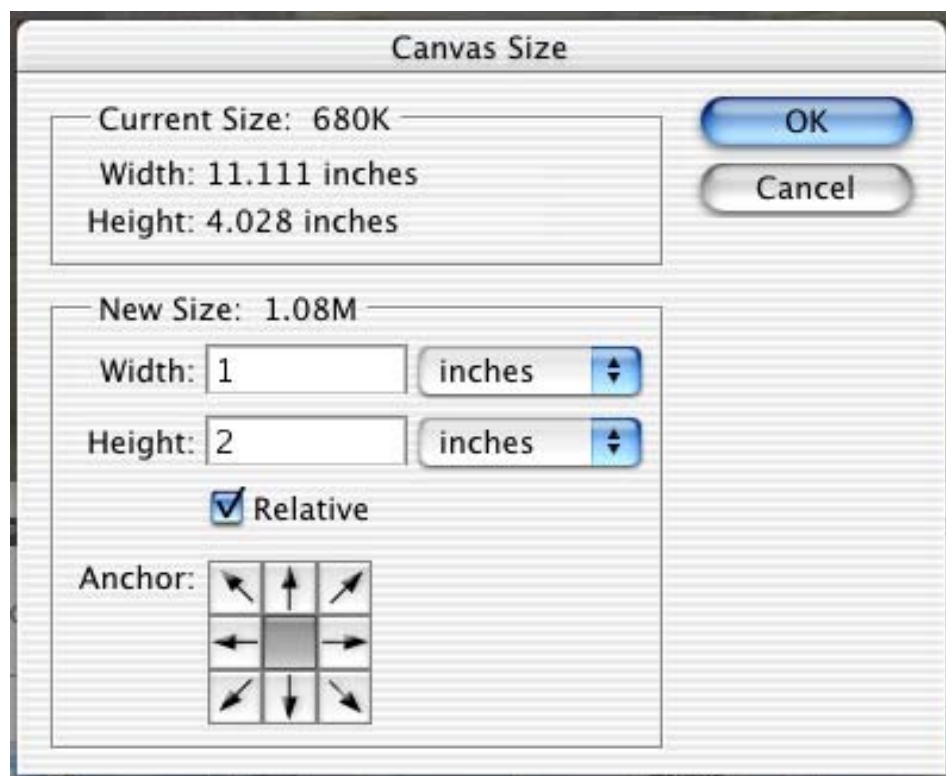


Figure 6. The Relative check box here allows 1 inch to be added to the width, and 2 inches to the Height, without having to worry about the original canvase size.

Spelling. Yes, Photoshop 7 now has a Check Spelling option for those of you that like to go hog wild with the type tool. We've been using a universal spell checker inside of Photoshop for years so we didn't get that excited about this feature. However, we expect many people will like it. Why go into detail? It corrects your spelling. Enough said.

Canvas Size. There is a check box called "Relative" which makes it a bit easier for the mathematically challenged to increase the canvas size as seen in figure 7. Say you have an 8x10 canvas and all you want to do is add an inch to each dimension. Click on "Relative" and add 1" in both height and width and Photoshop will add that to the current size (saving you from having to figure out that adding one inch would be 9x11). It's new and for fractional changes, it will be easier for users so we had to tell you.

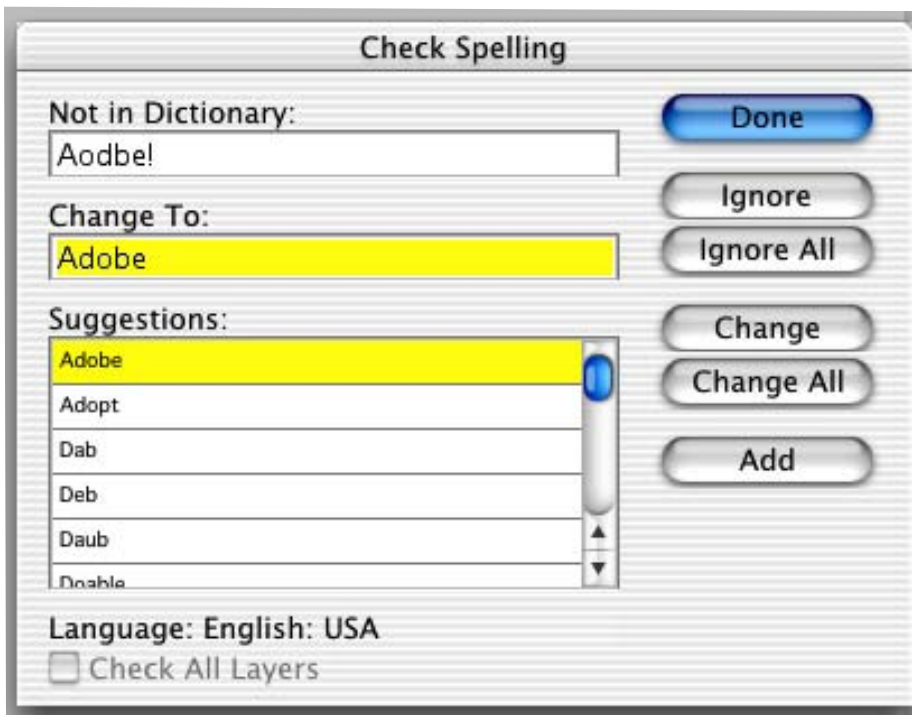


Figure 7. Check your spelling in Photoshop 7!

Other Tweaks. There are other nice tweaks to Photoshop 7. There were some tweaks to some of the Automate plug-ins such as the Picture Package, Web Gallery, and Contact Sheet. There are two new blend modes (Linear Dodge and Linear Burn). There is also a new plug-in called “Pattern Maker” that as the name implies allows a user to make some pretty cool Patterns as seen in Figure 8. Liquify was also worked on. Workspace presets allows multiple users on one machine to save their various settings for palettes and windows and reset them at any time.

Overall, Photoshop 7 has some very nice new features. It doesn’t feel like the major upgrade that Photoshop 6 was (it was a hard act to follow). For those that were hoping for new 16 bit capabilities, there are unfortunately none. Perhaps Photoshop 8 will have those features.

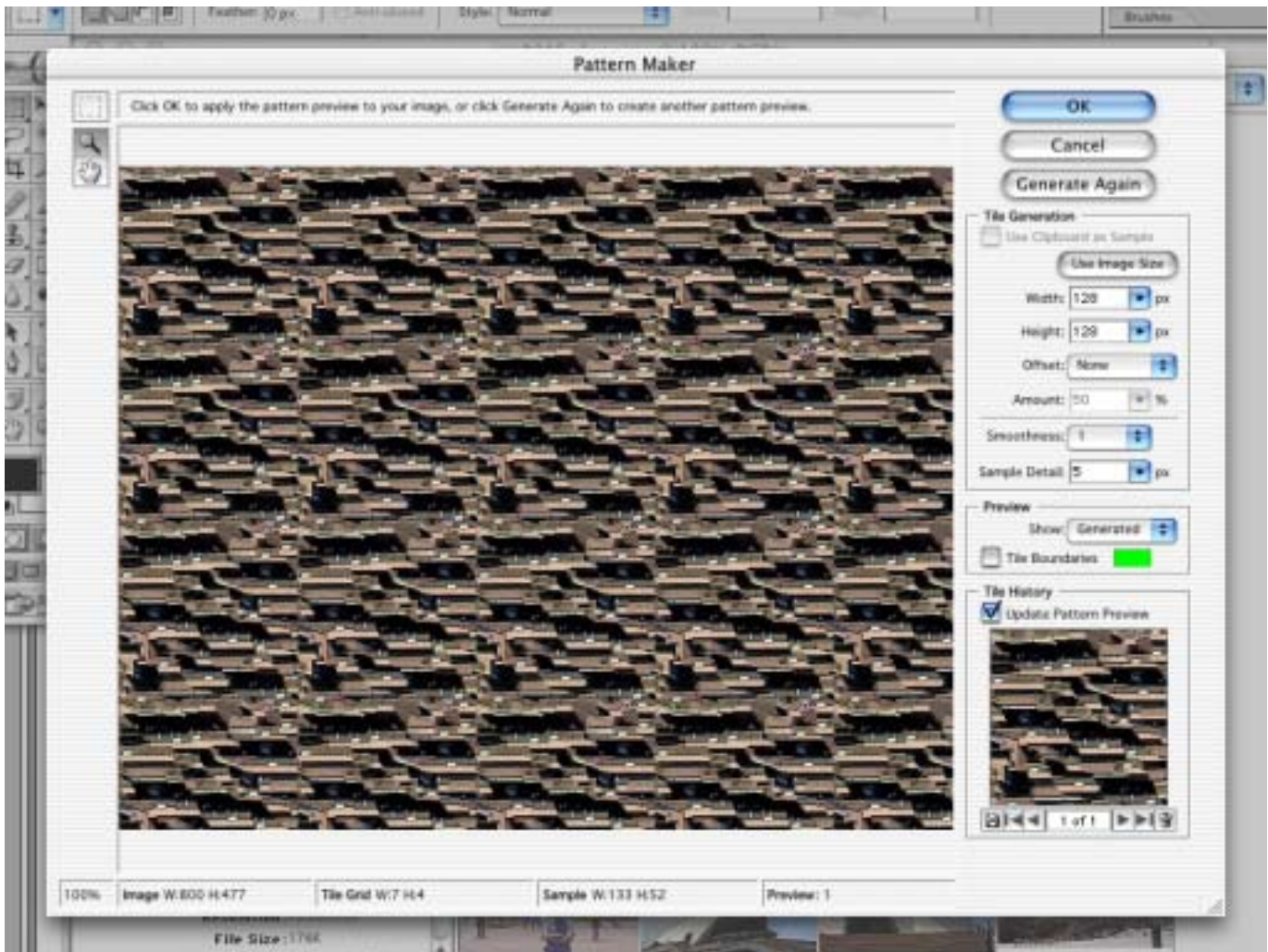


Figure 8 . The new Pattern Maker