AKVIS Coloriage

Kevin Poulter

AKVIS says

> Coloriage creates natural-looking colorisation in a quick and entertaining manner. It works equally well for colouring of portraits, landscapes, fashion, and still life. The skin, sky, verdure, and tree colour patterns help users to select realistic colours for their picture.
> AKVIS Coloriage is as easy to use as a colouring book. No layers manipulation, no complicated techniques, no more hours of frustration attempting to get just the look you want - everything is done with a few brush strokes. Indicate the desired colours by the stroke of the brush; the program does the rest of the work: recognises the object's border and tailors the new colour to the grayscale tones of the initial picture.

Certainly the software does try to adapt to the selected texture and tone - for example skin tones, as supplied in their menu, however unless there is a very defined edge between colours, then it is not auto-fill. In this photograph of Elvis, I found it was far preferable to paint a very accurate border. Considering auto-fill is a big ask on soft edges, it was not unreasonable to require colouring the edges.

Like most plug-ins, the result can be alternatively achieved manually in Photoshop or Elements, however the plug-in makes it easier, quicker and better. I found the manual somewhat daunting, with 54 pages (PDF), so I read a few starter points for just a few minutes and worked out the rest. This is assisted by hovering the computer pointer over a tool and a short description of its use soon appears. Considering this was my first use of both Coloriage and Photoshop Elements, its a good result.

This photograph of Elvis was supplied to the media to promote the sale of records of his "lost" tapes. As is often the case in mass-reproduced images for the media at the time, it's contrasty and blocked up in the shadows. So firstly the shadow detail was restored in another Photoshop Plug-in.
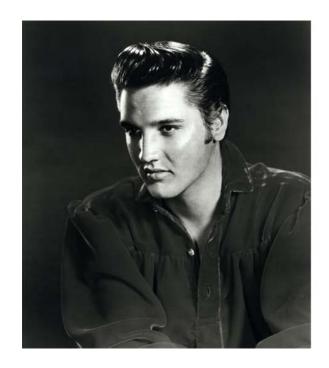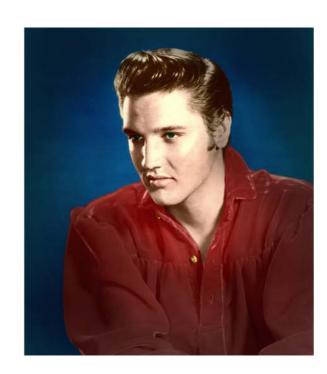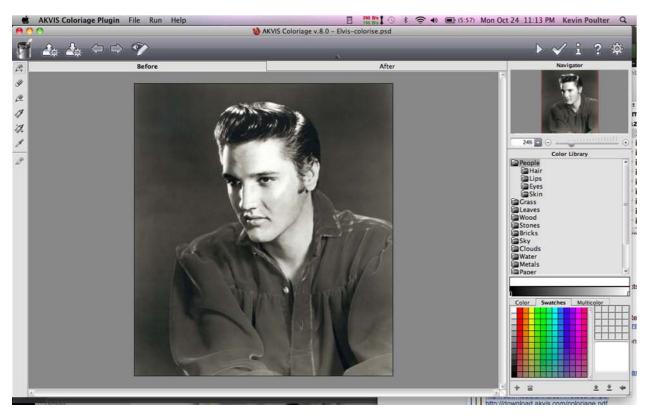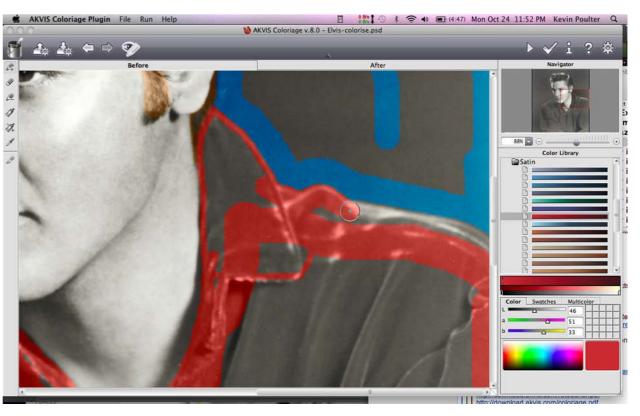
Before / After

Coloriage is a stand-alone or plug-in application that works with Photoshop, Photoshop Elements or other image editors listed on their site:

http://akvis.com/en/download-macintosh-software.php
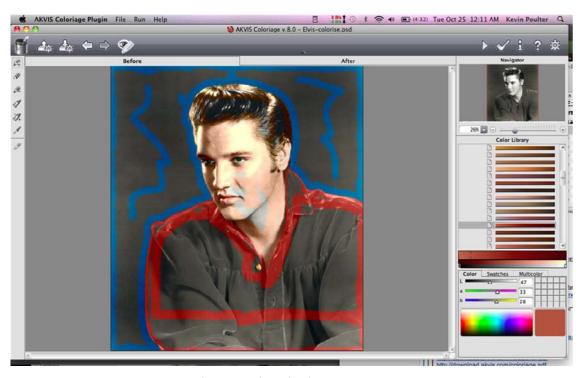
Restoring Shadow Detail

Note the colour library of different textures. Clicking on any one reveals a palette of many colour choices. For example, click on Skin > White and all possible colours for people of european heritage are shown. You can also choose from other colour palettes too, like Swatches.
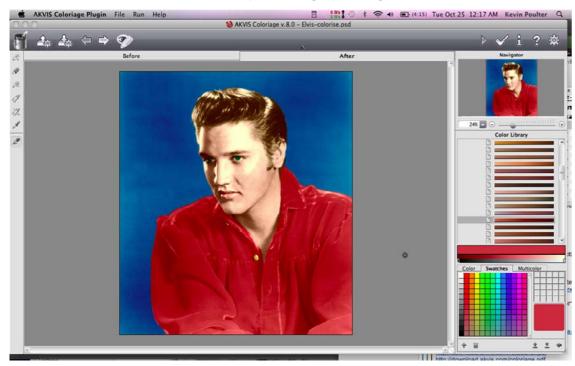

Applying Colours

Once you choose a colour, you paint the area of that colour. Unless there is a highly defined edge, painting at high magnification is best for accuracy. An excellent feature is you can click to see what the finished result will look like as each area is completed, then return to colour painting.
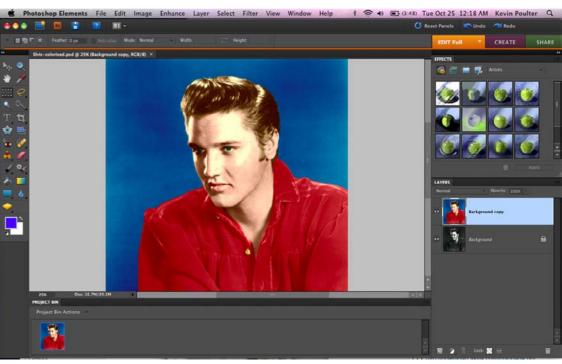
The completed edge-painting.

Viewing the final image in Photoshop Elements

The image easily shows in Photoshop Elements when completed.

This is the result—very colourful, in fact like many colourised images, too colourful. Note the skin tones palette on the right.

A new Copy Layer

A new copy layer was created and the colours toned-down on that layer, using Hue / Saturation. Then some of the lower colour saturation image was erased, so the stronger colour showed through. (See the erasing on "Background copy 2")

Vignette the Edges

Finally a new layer was created on top and filled with black. The aim was to vignette the edges. The black layer was set to 57 percent opacity and then erased in the centre selectively with the eraser set at 20 opacity.

A close-up shows the images on each layer. The top image is an emergency spare, in case needed to go back to square one.

Coloriage is not cheap, however you can try it out for 10 days to decide if you like it.
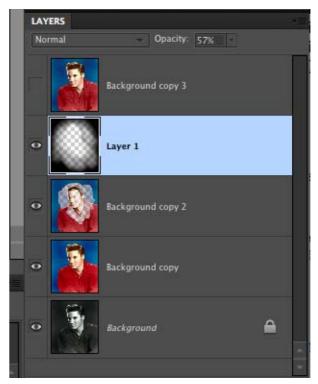

Photo Credit: Elvis Presley, courtesy RCA and Jem Records

Summary

The application is easy to use if you are familiar with a graphics application like Elements. I would have liked to have seen features like soft brush and a way of layering on subtle alternative colours, however there are manual ways this can be achieved, especially the layering of tones on tones. This can be done later in Elements.

Prices are US$75 for the starter version, US$90 for the Home Deluxe and US$246 for the version which can be used for business/commercial.

My verdict is 8 out of 10—very useful if you regularly like to colourise.