

Retoucher & Chameleon Akvis

<http://www.akvis.com>

Akvis produces creative tools that aid digital image editing. I recently got to review two of their packages: Retoucher and Chameleon.

Both tools address issues that are often quite time consuming: retouching photographs and inserting new objects into an image while making it look natural.

Akvis Retoucher is supplied as a plug-in for leading graphic editing programs such as Photoshop and Photoshop Elements on the Mac and a number of packages under Windows. The Akvis web site has a page where you can check the compatibility of each tool they offer with your editing program.

Retouching photographs requires time and a creative eye. There are all sorts of retouching techniques. Indeed, some folks have built their reputation on their ability to retouch and entire books are written on the subject.

Akvis Retoucher aims to eliminate some of the creative eye requirement and some time along the way.

Akvis Retoucher is added to your graphics program by running an installer. During the installation, you will be asked to identify the image editor you want to use

Retoucher with. I found no way to install Retoucher in both Photoshop and Photoshop Elements on the same machine... running the installer a second time just tries to do an update.

Akvis is one of those companies that wants you to know what you are buying and how to use it.

To that end, their web site has samples of before and after photos as well as a nice range of tutorials. Indeed, for Retoucher, they provide well over a dozen tutorials, giving hints on the best way to approach a given task.

In use, you select areas that need to be retouched then invoke the Akvis Retoucher filter and click on the Go button. Nothing could be simpler and, in my test, it performed as advertised.

Now, for removing one scratch on a photograph, Retoucher might not be worth the purchase price. But most damaged or otherwise marred (like date stamped) photos require fixing more than just one spot. In these cases, Akvis determines how to correct the defects that you identified in the image. Pretty neat. Retoucher costs \$87 and you can download a 10-day demo copy.

Akvis Chameleon performs a different task, but, again, one that can prove quite valuable.

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Again, the web site provides about two dozen tutorials for various types of tasks, but basically Chameleon helps you place an image from one photo into another. Chameleon does this by automatically adjusting the inserted image to the color range of the destination image and then smoothing the inserted image's border.

I know that this is one task that seems to baffle me each time I try it. My inserted images just don't look right. Chameleon aims to make this process easier and make the images look right.

Like Retoucher, Chameleon is a plug-in and you can check the Akvis web site for the compatibility chart.

There are two major ways to apply Chameleon. The first just runs Chameleon, the second operates through Taking and Using a Snapshot.

I tried the former method and found nothing could be easier. I was amazed at how realistic the merged object looked in my test. Just paste in the new object and run Chameleon.

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The Snapshot method, in addition to applying the techniques that the normal mode does, also makes the applied object semitransparent so that the underlying image and textures show through.

Basically, you use Akvis to take a snapshot of the destination photo, insert the new image, then apply the snapshot. Magic happens. I had a LOT of fun playing with snapshot mode.

Inserting an object into a new photograph always involves the proper selection of the object to be inserted. Current image editing software like Photoshop provides some very efficient selection tools.

Chameleon provides the other half of this toolbox: a way to make the inserted object blend in. At \$69, Chameleon is a worthwhile tool for anyone who combines photographic images.

The web site examples and tutorials for both of these packages will really help you see the power of these tools. The 10-day demo downloads let you experience them for yourself.

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Other Akvis products that I did not review include Stamp (for instance, to remove wrinkles from faces in photographs) and Enhancer, a tool to bring out details in improperly exposed photographs. Stamp is currently available only for Windows but will be released for the Mac later on.

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Visit the Akvis web site and look at the samples and tutorials. You may just find the solution to your image-editing problem.

(Did I already mention that using Chameleon is a blast? Yeah, I probably did.)