

tools ^{of the} trade

There are literally dozens of improvements in this year's ATX MAX® tax preparation software, including everything from new ways to import tax data to the consolidation of the ATX Community Discussion

reference with a visual index on its front cover. The guide features line-by-line instructions organized by forms, and the guidance is in plain English. New rules and changes are highlighted, and the sections are formatted in two colors for quick reference. Icons identify Cautions, Examples, Planning Pointers, and Gray Areas. The MAX program features federal individual programs, all business forms, unlimited individual state returns, unlimited e-filing of supported forms, easy-to-use interface, toll-free customer service, full interview option, Client Letter Wizard and customizable letters/invoices, built-in spreadsheets, in-program Quick Tutors, ZillionForms® (which has more than 10,000 calculating forms), and more. The program improvements include: You can now import QuickBooks and Peachtree accounting data directly using the new

Accounting Import feature, there's a new Mark as Estimate feature that lists fields you've marked when you run the Error Check, Update Manager has been streamlined, and you can add notes to yourself and staff using the Insert/Edit Note feature. For the complete list, go to the www.atxinc.com site.

TurboTax Home and Business Schedule C is designed specifically for your self-employment and personal income taxes. With expert interview guides to take you through Schedule C, business expenses, deductions, and depreciations, this

year's version has new industry-specific deductions and a new deduction maximizer section that covers more than 350 possible deductions. Transferring last year's data from a TurboTax return is simple, and there are summary pages at the end of each section to help you find and make changes to data already entered. The Home and Business Schedule C includes one free state download. You can check the Intuit site to see if this version fits your business operations. Visit www.turbotax.intuit.com and click on the Learn More link under Home and Business Schedule C.

If nothing else, tax time reminds us of the incredible mess that can be created by saving all kinds of information over the course of a year—bills, invoices, slips, business expenses from any number of programs, federal forms, employment documents, and so on. Com-



ATX MAX®

Center forums. There are a number of ATX tax programs for individual tax, business tax, and accounting and practice builders, but let's focus on the MAX program. (Visit www.atxinc.com for information on all the programs.) Along with the first CD you receive with MAX, you'll get a spiral-bound copy of *1040 Express Answers*, a basic



Intuit's TurboTax

Two Historical Rivers ◆ Michael Castelluccio, Editor

■ OPENING UP THE FLOW OF ELECTRONS through power lines imported light, energy, and sound into every home and factory in America, and what followed was a realignment of the polarities of our culture. Then a short time later—short, that is, in the way spans are measured in history—there followed a digital flow through braided copper strung alongside the hot power wires. These cooler lines created and destroyed industries as they reshaped the economy and the people.

The upheaval created by these two kinds of directed streaming can be studied on a smaller scale by examining some of the stones in the stream beds. We'll take a look at the one marked "photography"—not a bad choice because it's both an art and an industry, and it has been

more than just tumbled and polished by the flows—it has been radically transformed.

Basically unchanged for two centuries, the photographic invention depended on the alchemy produced when light struck silver embedded in paper or film. This was followed by two identical but opposite chemical processes. The first produced a reverse image in which light was dark (the negative), and then the same kind of three-step chemical process was used to create a relatively permanent, recognizable image of the visible world (the print).

A camera focused the first exposure to light (film), and an enlarger lit up the negative, exposing the image on paper a second time, and you treated both pretty much the same way in the darkroom. Developer kept at just

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Seagate eSATA Hard Drive

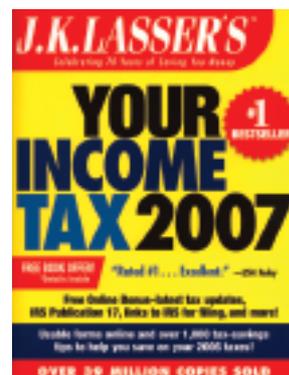
bine an inexpensive scanner with an external hard drive and you'll remove a lot of the clutter from your desktop and drawers. To eliminate much of the time needed for your project, you might consider one of the new external hard drives in the Seagate eSATA line. What sets these machines apart is their speed—up to five times faster than existing external drives (USB 2.0

or FireWire 400). The eSATA drives transfer data at speeds up to 3 gigabits per second. To achieve these speeds, the Seagate eSATA drives come with a two-port PCI card and shielded cables and connectors. The drives are available in either 300GB or 500GB capacities, and the footprint on your desktop is a modest 7 inches deep, 3 inches wide, and 6.75 inches high. www.seagate.com

J.K. Lasser's *Your Income Tax 2007* from John Wiley & Sons, Inc., includes the usual line-by-line explanations and instructions for commonly used forms, more than 2,500 easy-to-use tax planning tips and strategies, Form 1040 mapped to the section of

the book you need, a what's new quick-reference section for 2006, and the key tax numbers (limits and maximums at a glance). This year's volume includes a copy of the free booklet, *J.K. Lasser's Fast Cash, Top Deductions 2007*, available by mail. With your purchase of the book, you also get free access to information online at www.jklasser.com, including latest breaking tax news and law changes,

answers from "Ask J.K. Lasser," IRS Publication 17 with official directions, the latest IRS tax forms with constant updates, and the free e-mail newsletter. As in past issues, the Lasser guide uses icons to mark hints and highlight alerts. These include filing tips and instructions, planning reminders, cautions, law alerts, court decisions, and IRS alerts. The glossary of terms and a very comprehensive index simplify using the text, and the chapters progress from the Basics of Filing in Chapter 1 to Now That You're Done in Chapters 46-49, which include topics such as Electronic Filing, IRS Audits, Filing Extensions, and Amended Returns. ■



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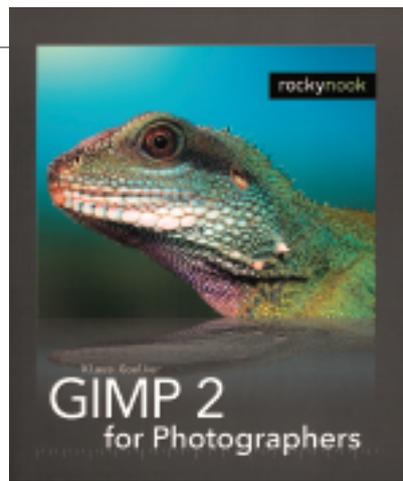
below 70° F exposed the image. Something called stop, which smells like acrid vinegar (acetic acid) halts the process, and then a bath in a fix(ative) dissolves the rest of the silver so that what you end up with is relatively permanent. The negative strips go in sleeves and the photo prints in albums.

That was then—a pretty ingenious process that lasted from 1820 to the end of the 20th Century. Since 1981, however, the digital stream has reinvented the camera and emptied the darkrooms. Our sunlit world now gets recorded by machines handling two switches—on and off. You still get the prints, but there’s no silver and no trays or tanks of chemical liquids. For Kodak, the disappearance of film has threatened its existence. Canon and Nikon have had to recruit electronics engineers to work alongside their optics people. And darkroom supplies and machine processors have been marked for extinction.

A Great History Text

The best way to study history is to participate in it, and with the speed at which digital imaging is progressing, joining in is much more exhilarating than just reading about it. Fortunately, you can climb onto the express without spending a fortune on a megapixel camera or dropping several hundred dollars on an imaging program. In fact, this excursion will only cost you \$29.95 and some of your time. For the price, you get a professional digital “darkroom” and a pretty good guide book.

The textbook for this Contemporary Digital Imaging 101 is *GIMP 2 for Photographers* by Klaus Goelker, published by Rocky Nook, Inc. (www.rockynook.com). The illustrated text has a companion CD that



includes an Open Source program called GIMP 2, which is a PhotoShop-like graphics editing program. The CD has the program in Windows, Linux, and Mac versions. If you don’t have your own catalog of digital images to work on, there are two directories, SampleImages and FinishedImages, with plenty of examples to use with the tutorials. Finally, the CD has a freeware version of the Irfan Viewer that will help you create albums, slide shows, and prints.

Oh, one last thing. The CD contains a copy of the book, so you can load it onto your computer for convenience or to use the search function to find what you need while you’re working.

The Curriculum

Digital photographs can be manipulated in so many different ways that the news agencies have had to adopt a new ethical standard of zero tolerance for their news images. No “photoshopping” at all if the photo is to be accepted as real. That’s because the same process used to make a slight adjustment in the background could be used to insert a popular politician into the middle of an orgy or violent street rally. In Goelker’s course you will learn why skepticism has attached itself to what was before a trusted means of documentation.

The course assumes nothing, and

you begin with short lessons about how photos are made of pixels, how you import them into the program, the different color models, file formats for images, and how to set up GIMP on your computer.

With a basic grammar in place, the fun begins with an explanation of the basic tools in your toolbox. You can select rectangular or round portions of the photo to work on; you can run an outline around a part of an image and select it out—to cut, to move, to paste in somewhere else, to repeat in the same photo; or you can paint or adjust the color apart from the rest of the photo.

You have tools that will let you crop a photo or scale the image or selections of it. You can rotate selected parts of the image or shear them, moving the parts in one direction and the rest of the image in another. You can fill whole sections with new colors or erase or draw on the image area. Selective blurring or smudging will give you a different way to highlight elements in the photo, and a clone tool lets you copy focused fragments of the photo in other areas.

At the heart of the transformative process is layering—the ability to create a new composite photo out of a stack of layers—something like stacking a number of slides together, only with a great deal more control than you would get with physical film.

The course isn’t something that you’ll succeed at just by showing up. But the book is relatively short for a manual—under 200 pages—and it presents a great panorama of what’s possible when you feed an image into a computer. Makes you wonder what Ansel Adams, the landscape photographer who was a wizard in the darkroom, might have been able to do with the controls available today. ■