The Basics

Introducing PaintShop Pro X4

What’s Covered in this Chapter

- This chapter explains what PaintShop Pro X4 can do and how it works. If you’re new to the program, I’d strongly recommend you start at the beginning and read this chapter right through. It’ll put you in a much better position when it comes to some of the basic photo editing explored in Chapter 2. In fact, for beginners, taking things in a linear fashion, chapter by chapter, is the best way to use the book, as the simple stuff is dealt with early on and things advance gradually as you go.
- Unlike the other chapters, there isn’t a lot of hands-on stuff here; it’s mostly an explanation of how PaintShop Pro X4 works. All the same, I’d recommend you prop the book open in front of you while you’re at your computer so you can play with the menus, tools, and features while you’re reading about them.
First off, the chapter covers PaintShop Pro X4’s basic tools, including the Learning Center, which is by far the best place to start if you’re new to the application. If you’re in a big hurry to get started on your own stuff, by the time you reach page 11 you’ll know enough to download your photos from your camera and carry out basic guided tasks using the Learning Center.

Next are brief descriptions of some of PaintShop Pro X4’s more advanced editing tools. Then we take a look at the features Corel has introduced in this latest version of the program, so if you’re using an older version of PaintShop Pro and you want to know what you’re missing, turn to page 16. In addition to the brand new stuff, we will also take a look at features that were introduced in earlier versions.

The four step-by-step projects—Exploring the Learning Center, Straightening an Image, Perspective Correction, and Cropping Pictures—can each be completed in just a few minutes with little or no previous knowledge of the program—a nice easy start!
FIG 1.2  This is the Adjust workspace, which is used to make quick adjustments using Smart Photo Fix (shown in the Adjust palette on the left) and other quick fix tools. Notice the Organizer palette containing thumbnails is now displayed at the bottom of the screen.

FIG 1.3  The Edit workspace, shown here, provides more advanced tools for photo editing and composition. These include layers, selections, and masks and an extensive range of retouching tools. The Learning Center, shown on the right, can help you find your way around and walk you through editing tasks.
Whether you’re a novice PaintShop Pro user or an old hand, there’s one fundamental aspect of the interface that you need to be aware of, as everything you do revolves around it. PaintShop Pro X4 has three workspaces, which you enter by selecting one of the tabs in the middle of the top edge of the screen.

- The Manage workspace is where you organize your photos into collections, assign star ratings, caption them, and add keyword tags. There are lots of other things you can do in the Manage workspace. I’ll describe them in a little more detail later in this chapter, and Chapter 2 is devoted entirely to organizing your photos using the Manage workspace.

- The Adjust workspace is where you go to make quick, everyday edits such as rotating and cropping photos. It also has some clever one-step filters designed to improve image quality and other easy-to-use tools for making tonal adjustments. I look at the Adjust workspace in more detail in Chapter 3.

- Finally, the Edit workspace is for full-on image editing, the only limits to which are your skill and imagination. The Edit workspace offers a huge array of tools that provide massive scope for control over image adjustment and editing. I’ll look at some of them later in this chapter, and from Chapter 4 onward most of what we’ll be doing involves working in the Edit workspace.

### Introduction: Basic Tools and Functions

Over the next few pages, I’ll explain the various features of the PaintShop Pro X4 workspace and how to use them to carry out basic photo editing tasks. This part of the book is aimed squarely at beginners, so more experienced readers might want to skip to the overview of the Edit workspace on page 9 or to the New and Enhanced Features section on page 16. For those starting out, I’d recommend you read through the following section while in front of your PC, so that you can try things out and familiarize yourself with the basics of uploading, organizing, and editing your photos.

Earlier versions of PaintShop Pro included an application called Corel Photo Downloader, which ran in the background and helped download images when you plugged your camera or a card into a universal serial bus (USB) port on your PC. This was largely superfluous, as you can easily drag and drop a folder of images from your camera or card reader into the Pictures folder on your hard drive (or wherever else you want to keep them) using Windows Explorer. Some people prefer to use software supplied with their camera; however you decide to do it, once the images are on your hard drive, they’re ready for you to work with in PaintShop Pro.
The Manage Workspace

More likely than not, you already have some photos stored on your hard disk and you’ll want to open these in PaintShop Pro X4. There are a number of ways you can do this, but try to get into the habit of using the Manage workspace from the start. Figure 1.1 shows what the Manage workspace looks like. If yours doesn’t look like this, you need to click the Manage tab in the middle of the top edge of the screen.

Chapter 2 explains in more detail how the Manage workspace works. For now it will help you to know that it makes finding and opening photos much easier than selecting File > Open, though you’re welcome to do it that way if you prefer.

The Manage workspace has four elements: the Navigation palette on the left, which shows files and folders on your hard drive; a large preview area in the middle of the screen, which shows a preview of the thumbnail selected in the Organizer palette at the bottom; and, finally, the Info palette on the right, which displays metadata for the selected image including the exposure details, time and date, and IPTC metadata such as captions, keyword tags, and ratings.

FIG 1.4 This is what the Manage workspace looks like in Preview mode. The Organizer palette moves to the bottom of the screen to be replaced by a big preview. This is useful if you want a good look at your photos, but for organizing them the thumbnail mode (shown in Figure 2.1) is best.
There are a few important things about the way the Manage workspace functions that you might find it helpful to know at this stage. The first is that there are two viewing modes: the one we’ve been looking at is called Preview mode; the other is called Thumbnail mode. To change between the two, click one of the two mode buttons at the top right of the Manage workspace. When you enter Thumbnail mode, a smaller preview is displayed above the Info palette and the Organizer palette moves to the middle of the screen, providing a larger area for viewing and working with thumbnails.

The Navigation palette has two tabs labeled Collections and Computer. The Computer tab shows the files and folders on your hard drive. This is quite useful to begin with, as you can locate a folder of images anywhere on your PC, but there’s a lot of clutter—folders that have nothing to do with your photos—getting in the way. Click the Collections tab at the top of the Navigation palette and you’ll see a list that includes your Pictures folder, some Smart Collections, which are collections of photos selected using saved search criteria, and the option to display thumbnails based on their star rating. The Collections tab provides a far more useful way to organize and find your photos because you can decide exactly what appears on it and which images are displayed in the Organizer palette. More about that in the next chapter.

FIG 1.5 The Navigation palette tabs. The Computer tab (left) displays the files and folders on your PC, useful for finding photos if you know where you put them, but there’s a lot of clutter. The Collections tab (right) shows only those folders you choose.
For now, let’s take a quick look at some of the functions of the Navigator palette and how you can use it to browse for photos on your PC. Start by clicking the Computer tab at the top of the Navigator palette, then click the + sign next to the hard drive on which Windows is installed; it’s probably called Local Disk (C). Click the + sign next to the Users folder, followed by the + sign next to your username (in my case, ken). You should now be able to see the My Pictures folder. Mine has subfolders in it, so I need to select one of these to display the thumbnails of the photos it contains in the Organizer palette. When I do that, the first image is automatically selected and its info is displayed in the Info palette on the right, below the preview.

Now click the Collections tab, then click the + sign next to Folders, and you’ll see your My Pictures folder right there. It’s automatically added to the Folders collection and it’s much easier to get to without all that other stuff in the way. You can easily add other folders by clicking “Browse more folders” at the top of the folders list.

Notice there are three tabs on the Info palette labeled General Info, EXIF, and IPTC. The first of these tells you the file name, the date the photo was taken, the rating (which you can change by clicking on the stars), what keyword tags have been applied, and, if you scroll down, the caption and some other information. EXIF stands for Exchangeable Image File format and it contains noneditable information recorded by the camera at the time of exposure. Click the EXIF tab and you’ll see the exposure details, date and time, camera make and model, resolution, and a lot of other stuff. EXIF information can include all kinds of things down to the kind of metering mode you used, whether the flash was fired, and the focal length of the lens.

IPTC stands for International Press Telecommunications Council (these acronyms, usually named from the organizations and committees that define these standards, aren’t particularly useful to know, but there you are) and is a standard for adding metadata to digital photos after they’ve been taken. IPTC metadata can include things like your name and address, a copyright statement, and a caption. The distinction between EXIF and IPTC metadata is that the former is recorded by the camera at the time of exposure and is usually noneditable and the latter is subsequently added by people and can be edited. The Info palette and the information it displays are described in more detail in Chapter 2.

The Organizer palette appears in all three workspaces, which makes it easy to select any photo from the currently selected folder or from a tray to adjust or edit. The Navigator palette appears in the Manage workspace. To display it in the Adjust and Edit workspaces click the Show/Hide Navigator button on the Organizer tray. If you select an image in the Organizer palette in the Manage workspace, when you switch to the Adjust or Edit workspaces that image is open and ready to work on. Alternatively, you can right-click the thumbnail in the Manage workspace and select Adjust Photo or Edit Photo from the menu.
The Adjust Workspace

The Adjust workspace is new to PaintShop Pro X4. If you’re working with PaintShop Pro X3 or PaintShop Pro Photo X2 (consistency hasn’t been a strong point of Corel’s branding strategy), you’ll have something called Express Lab, which is similar, though less well-integrated.

As I’ve said, the Adjust workspace is where you carry out routine adjustments such as cropping and straightening, correcting color and exposure problems, fixing red-eye caused by on-camera flash, and touching up spots and blemishes. I’m going to go into more detail here than I did for the Manage workspace because if you only read this chapter and the next you’ll be well equipped to carry out the most important tasks—organizing and basic photo editing.

The Adjust workspace is shown in Figure 1.2. As you can see, it’s divided into three areas; there’s the Organizer palette (familiar from the Manage workspace) at the bottom of the screen, the Adjust palette on the left, and a large preview area occupying most of the screen on the top right.

Most of what goes on in the Adjust workspace happens, appropriately enough, in the Adjust palette, but before we look in detail at that I’ll explain what some of the other controls are for. Above the Preview area there’s a toolbar with rows of buttons top left and top right. The buttons on the left are for saving your work, rotating photos left and right, deleting, and undoing and redoing. On the right are view buttons for zooming to 100% view, fitting in window, a Pan tool for grabbing the image and moving it around in the preview window when you’re zoomed in, and, on the extreme right, a zoom slider with + and − magnifiers. Incidentally, if you get to the Adjust workspace and find the image you want to adjust is located in a different folder, you can display the Navigation palette by clicking the Show/Hide Navigation button on the top left corner of the Organizer palette.

At the top of the Adjust palette, there’s a histogram display. I look at histograms and how to interpret and work with them in Chapter 3. Below the histogram the EXIF exposure information is displayed, and below that is a toolbar containing four tools—Crop, Straighten, Red-eye, and Makeover—and a Clone brush. If you want to know how to use some of these tools, take a look at the step-by-step projects at the end of this chapter.
Below the Adjust palette toolbar is the Smart Photo Fix panel. Unless you’ve clicked on one of the tools above the Smart Photo Fix panel (in which case just click the Smart Photo Fix header to expand the panel), the control sliders will be displayed. You can experiment with these to try and improve image quality, but it’s called “Smart” photo fix for a reason; click the Suggest Settings button, and it will do the hard work for you by analyzing the image and deciding what settings to apply to get the best results.

Below the Smart Photo Fix panel you’ll find a range of other tools designed to improve your photos quickly and easily. These include Color Balance, Fill Light/Clarity, High Pass Sharpen, and Digital Noise removal. These are “simplified” versions of tools that are available in the Edit workspace and described briefly later in this chapter and demonstrated throughout the book. They’re included in the Adjust workspace so that you can quickly access and apply them without having to think too much about the process. The point of the Adjust workspace is to provide a place where you can scan through all of your images from an event and apply adjustments to those that need it.

Of course, no matter how quick and simple the adjustments you make, if you have to apply them individually to hundreds of photos they’re going to add up. Thankfully, PaintShop Pro X4 allows you to “capture” the changes you make to a photo in the Adjust or Edit workspaces and apply them to others. This feature is described more fully in the Nearly New Features section of this chapter, and there’s a step-by-step project at the end of the chapter.

**The Edit Workspace**

The Edit workspace is where you go for serious photo editing work. The Adjust workspace is fine for quick edits, but the Edit workspace has the tools you’ll need to carry out more substantial work. In the Edit workspace
you can create layers, superimposing photos on top of each other, and you can add masks to layers that work like stencils by hiding some areas of the layers below and revealing others. Sophisticated selection tools allow you restrict edits and adjustments to parts of an image, and these selections can form the basis for masks, which do the same thing only more flexibly.

As well as including a wide range of editing tools, the Edit workspace has a raft of special effects filters as well as controls for adjusting tone, color, and just about every other factor that affects how a digital photo appears. Using these tools, you can fix exposure problems; remove color casts; change the color of individual objects in photos; sharpen or blur photos; remove scratches and digital noise; remove people, cats, lampposts, or anything else; make old photos look like new and new ones look old; produce one good photo from several not-so-good ones; and a lot more besides.

Figure 1.3 shows the Edit workspace. The main components of this workspace are the menu bar and Standard toolbar at the top of the screen; below that is the Tool Options palette, then the image window, and at the bottom of the screen the by-now-familiar Organizer palette. The Tools toolbar is the long, narrow strip on the left that contains all of the Edit workspace tools. When you hover over a tool, its name is displayed in a tool tip and its function is explained in the status bar at the very bottom of the screen. Finally, on the right of the screen is the Learning Center palette.

**The Learning Center**

The Learning Center appears on the right of the screen in the Edit workspace and shows you how to get things done. If you can’t see the Learning Center, select View > Palettes > Learning Center, or press the F10 key on your keyboard.

For simple tasks, such as rotating photos, the Learning Center just does it for you. For more complex tasks involving several steps, the Learning Center walks you through, step-by-step, selecting the tools for the job at the appropriate moment.

Because the Learning Center selects the tools for you and tells you how to use them, after a while, you’ll find you no longer need it for common tasks like cropping, straightening, and rotating photos—when you know how, it’s quicker and easier to do it yourself. When the time comes you can close the Learning Center palette (press F10 again) to make more room for your photos and other palettes.

The Learning Center works like a website. The Home page has eight categories: Get Photos, Quick Adjustments, Retouch and Restore, Layers and