PHOTOSHOP

AGE YOUR IMAGES

Photoshop expert and retro-kitsch enthusiast Don Sparrow reveals the tricks and special techniques he uses to digitally age his images in this step-by-step guide to giving your work that familiar styling of the forties and fifties

DOWNLOAD

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Click here to download the files you need to complete this tutorial

TIME LENGTH

3 hours

INFO

Don Sparrow is a professional Illustrator and a graduate of Canada's famed Sheridan College. He is currently based in Saskatoon, Canada. You can see more of his work by visiting www.donsparrow.com or his Artist Collective site www.threestepsleft.com.

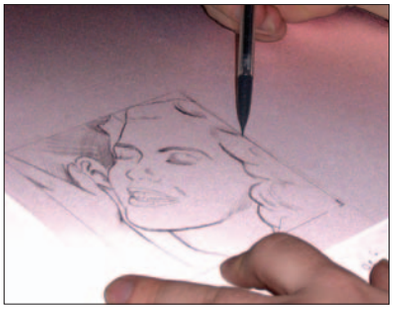
Within the next few pages, I aim to share some of the tricks I have learned during my time as a professional illustrator. The style I have developed as a delivery device for my illustration work leans heavily on the look and feel of printed material from the forties, fifties and sixties. By using a style that is reminiscent of a long gone era, but often dealing with modern subject matter and personalities, I've been able to find a way to approach a story in a more timeless way that (hopefully) engages the reader.

I use Adobe *Photoshop* to colour most of my pieces, although I try to ensure that this modern, digital technique doesn't make my work appear too slick and computer generated. I guess it could be described as digital collage. I take a real-world work (most often an ink drawing or gouache painting) and adding layers of textures and colours from my library of digital resource material, such as the files provided on the cover CD, to create a cohesive piece. It's retro warmth meets sly modernity. Well, that's the idea anyway.

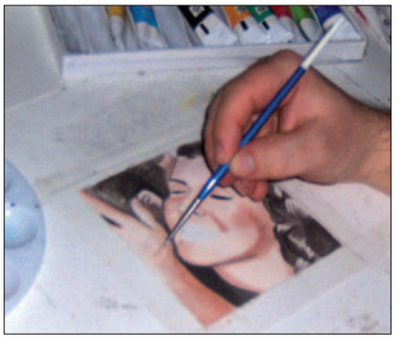
During this tutorial, I hope to impart a novel way of solving a visual problem, digitally, while ensuring that the finished piece doesn't reveal its *Photoshop* roots. Then, if you ever need to create an image with the look and feel of decades gone by, you can use some of these tricks rather than applying the same old filters, familiar to everyone, time and time again.

Follow these steps and you'll add another useful arrow to your digital quiver, gain another option for self-expression, and, if nothing else, have a cool new trick to show off to your friends.

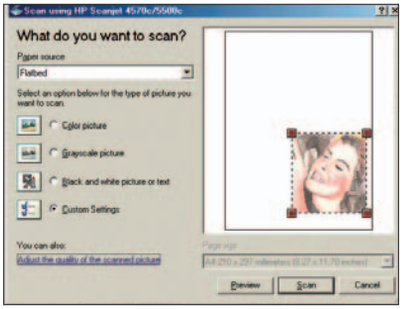
Illustration and tutorial by Don Sparrow
www.donsparrow.com



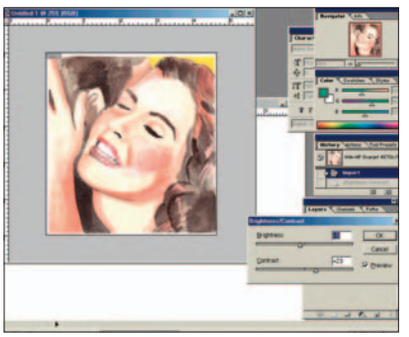
1 This tutorial starts with a simple pencil sketch. Choose a subject you think will work, but ensure that the image helps to convey the retro feel that you're trying to achieve. To produce the image here, I chose to work from an old photograph of a couple embracing, but narrowed my focus to just the woman's expression.



2 Next, start to paint over your sketch using gouache, an opaque watercolour paint. At this stage, you'll need to try and produce an image that has the appearance of a colourized photograph, using over-saturated colour on the woman's lips and pastel colours across her cheeks.



3 Now for the fun part! In order for this to be a truly digital image, you'll need to bring your painted image into *Photoshop*. It's important that you create a high-res file. I scanned this particular painting using a Hewlett-Packard ScanJet 4570C, in full colour, at 300dpi. Use the scan option in File menu, under Import.



4 Your image now needs to be tweaked before you go on to the next stage. One of the staples of vintage graphics is really saturated printing, so adjust the brightness/contrast. Select Image→Adjustments→Brightness/Contrast and move the sliders that appear until the image boasts the more garish colours of old-style printing.

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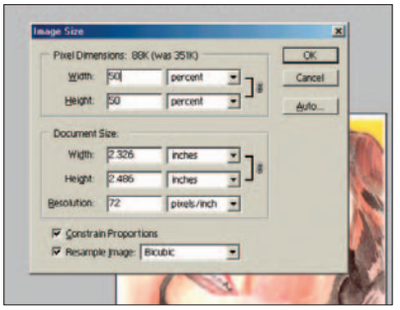
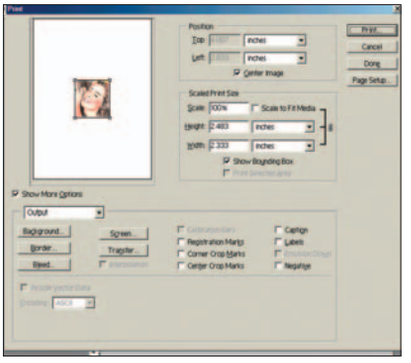
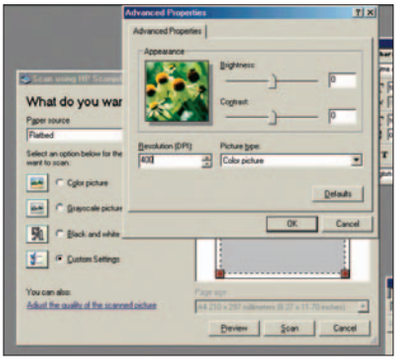


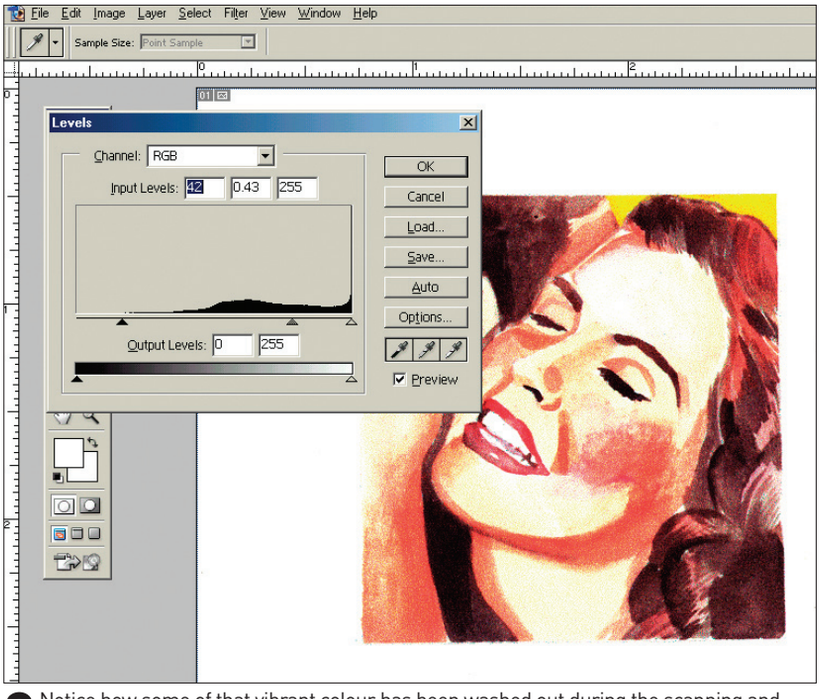
5 Now reduce the image size and picture quality by choosing Image→ImageSize. First, reduce the resolution from 300dpi to 72dpi and then the overall size by 50 per cent. The image, which originally measured around four inches square, should now print out at about two inches square.



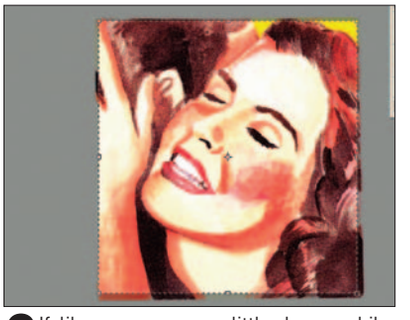
6 You can now print your shrunken image out to see how it looks. Hit Ctrl+P to call up the Print Preview menu – this will give you a clearer idea of how your image will appear on the page – and hit Print.



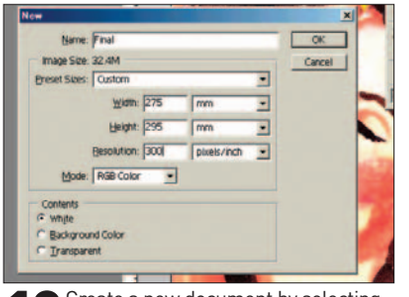
7 Next, to mimic the "dotted" appearance you get with offset printing, re-scan your printed image back into *Photoshop*. This image will need to be scanned in at an even higher resolution because of the previous reduction in size and image quality. Scan a full colour image at 400dpi.



8 Notice how some of that vibrant colour has been washed out during the scanning and printing process... so you'll need to play around with the levels. Choose Image→Adjustments→Levels (Ctrl+L) and change the input levels to 42, 0.43, and 255. Alternatively, just play around until you're happy with the results.



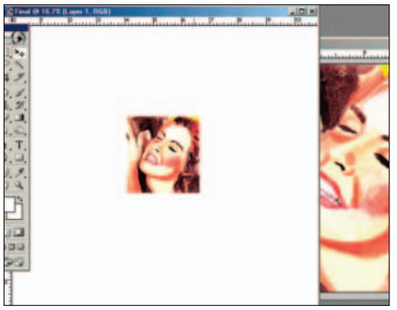
9 If, like me, you were a little clumsy while taping down the page during painting, your image may still have a slightly crooked shape. Correct this by cropping it down using the Crop tool from the Tools palette.



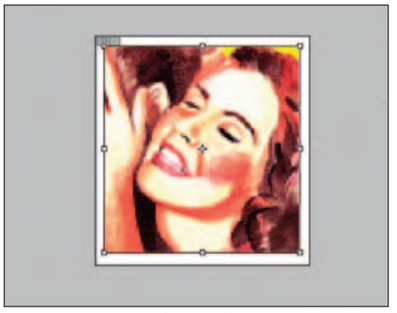
10 Create a new document by selecting File→New with dimensions of 275mm wide and 295mm high. Set the resolution at 300dpi. Finally, name your document "Final" and hit OK.

USE YOUR BRAIN

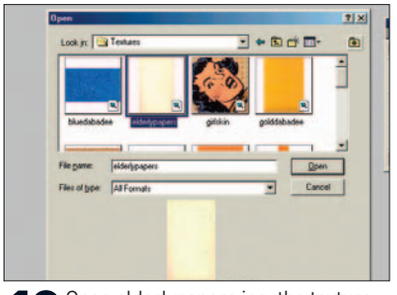
Although I make a living using a computer for my art, I like to think that my brain has something to do with it, too. I would advise any digital artist to avoid becoming too reliant on computers alone. The computer truly is a versatile and reliable tool, but so are your hands, and your mind. I've found that the more work I'm willing to put in, computer aside, the more rewarding will be the final result.



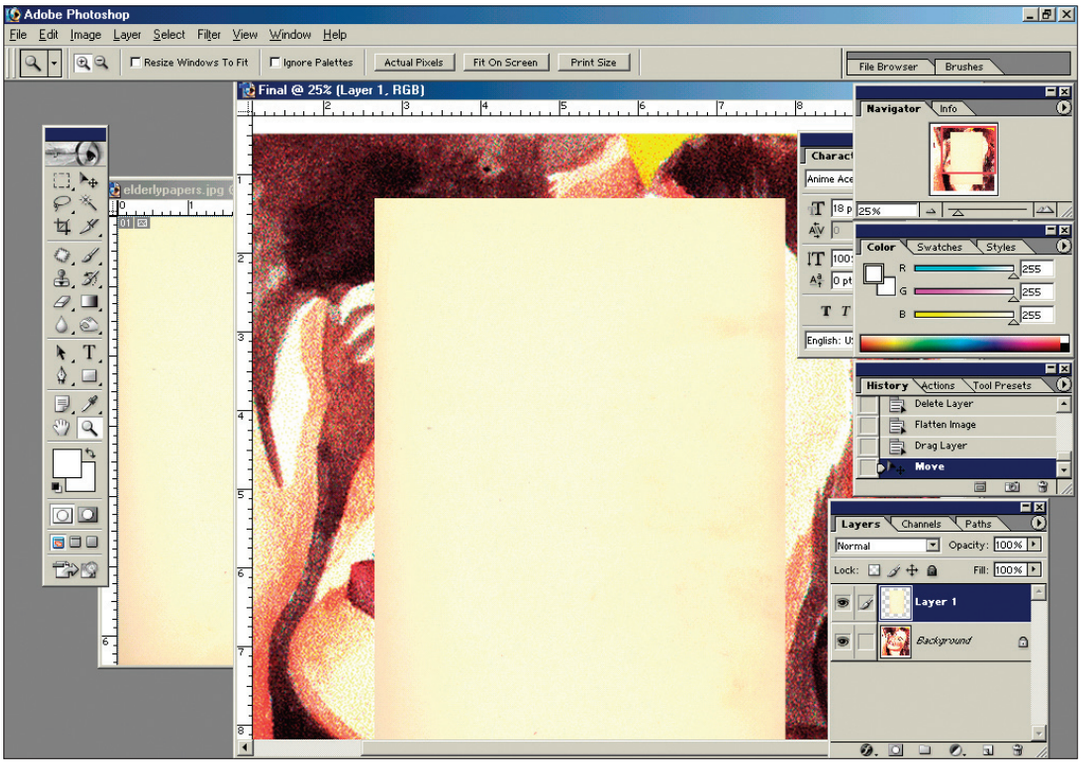
11 Using the Move tool, drag your scan into the document you have just created. You'll immediately see that this new layer looks pretty tiny, even at 400dpi.



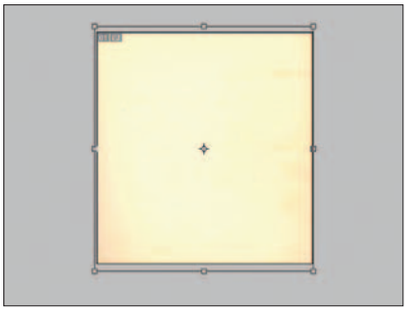
12 Transform (Ctrl+T) the image layer so that it fits your background more comfortably and extend it to each edge to allow for "bleed". Once you're happy with its position, flatten it by selecting Layer→FlattenImage or hit the Flatten Image command in your Layers palette.



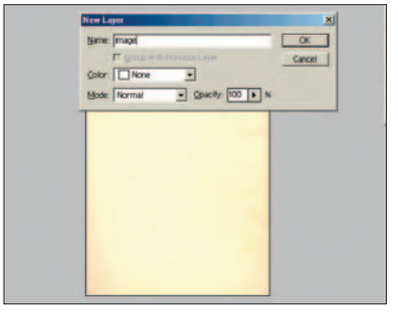
13 Open elderlypapers.jpg, the texture file provided on the cover CD. To create this texture, I simply scanned an old yellowed book page at high resolution.



14 Select the Move tool from the Tools palette and use it to drag and drop the aged paper texture straight onto your "Final" image. Now we can get to work combining the two to create a suitable forties/fifties feel.



15 Once the aged paper layer is in place, Transform the page (Ctrl+T) so that it takes up the entire image. By doing this, you'll ensure that even the border surrounding the image will have an interesting texture, which will look good for visual "bleed" on the printed page.



16 Double-click on the "background" layer in the Layers palette to call up its file information. Change the name to "Image". The layer will now be unlocked, so it's possible to change the layer order. Switch the layer order so that the "Image" layer is on the uppermost level.

DO THE MESS AROUND

Although it's unlikely that Ray Charles's lyrics referred to digital art, his sentiment still applies. Digital art, more than any other discipline, has the greatest potential for happy accidents. So experiment, try stuff out and don't be afraid to "wreck" a piece. If a move doesn't turn out quite how you like, there's always the Undo command!

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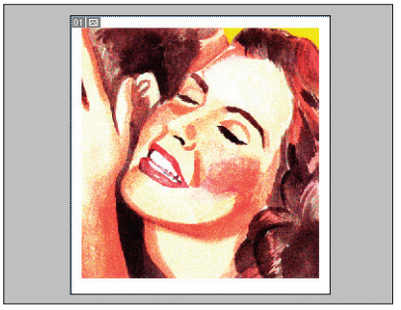
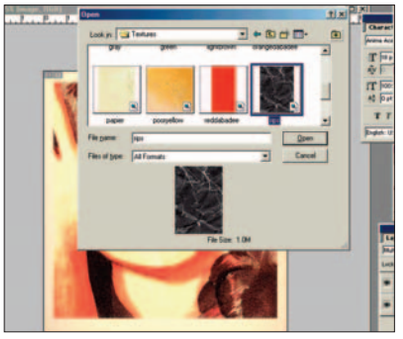
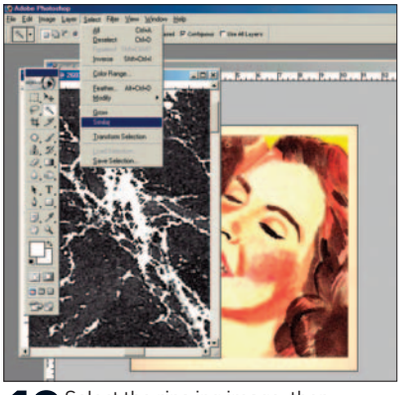


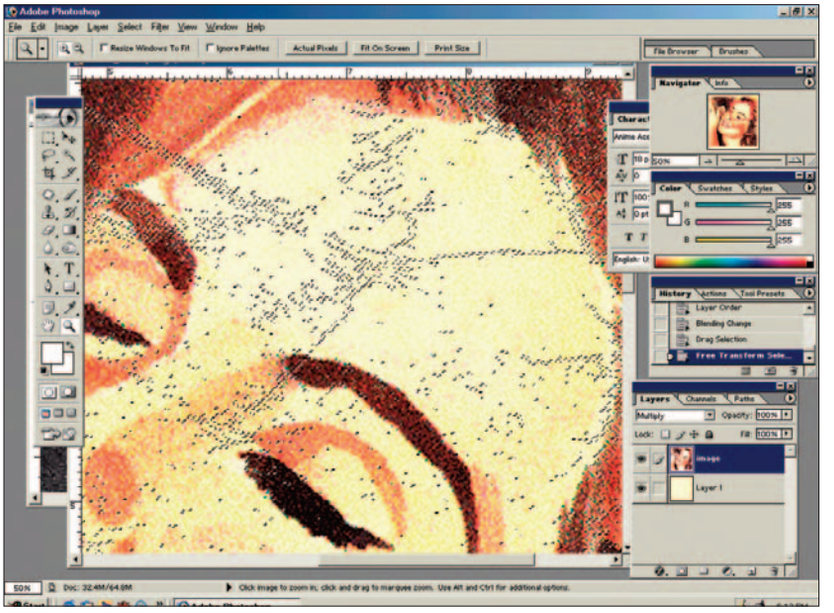
17 Once you've successfully reversed the layer order, change the "Image" Layer Style to Multiply in the Layers palette or by going to Layer→LayerStyle.



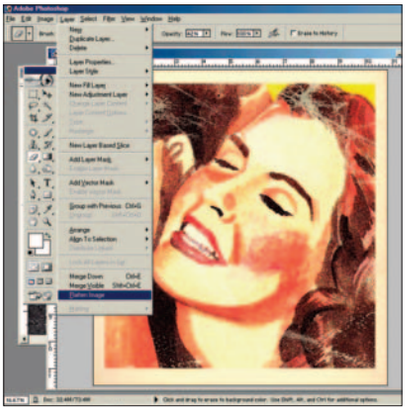
18 Now you can open the remaining texture file, rips.jpg, from the cover CD.



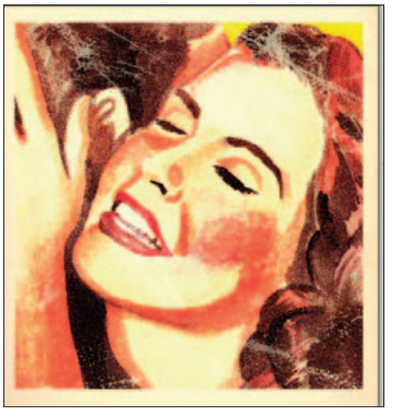
19 Select the rips.jpg image, then magnify it using the Zoom tool from the Tools palette. Now use the Magic Wand tool to select a tear from within the scanned image. If you would prefer to use a larger aged area, use the Select Similar command from the Select menu instead.



20 Using the Rectangular Marquee tool, drag the selection from the "rips" texture over to your "Final" image. At this point, you may need to Transform your selection (Ctrl+T). Once you have your rip selections in place, switch to the Eraser tool and carefully rub away at the top layer to reveal the aged paper underneath.



21 Once you're happy with your weathered areas, flatten the image by selecting Layer→FlattenImage. By doing this, you can save significant hard drive space, because your computer will retain the image quality without having to store redundant layer information.



22 Finally, save your flattened image as a TIFF (with no compression) and pat yourself on the back for a job well done. You've taken an original work from the year 2005 and made it look like authentic artwork from decades ago. For a new challenge, try giving the same treatment to a more recognisable modern image and see what happens. arts

MAKE IT LOOK COOL

This was the simplest, most profound advice I was ever given by one of my instructors, and it has stuck with me ever since. You can read all the books you want with theories on composition, style or symbolism, but the most important thing, for me anyway, is having a finished product that's interesting enough to hold the viewer's interest for more than a few seconds.

NEXT ISSUE IN Computer arts

SKETCH HAPPY
Incorporating hand-drawn elements into photography