Software Review: AKVIS Lightshop v2

By Tanya Mattson, Computer Users of Erie

AKVIS was a company whose products I had never heard of, until my husband introduced me to s couple of them he had reviewed here in past issues. Being not only a graphics designer, but a long-time photographer by training, I am always on the lookout for new ways to improve my work.

When I looked t the AKVIS site, I immediately was intrigued by the Lightshop plug-in. There are many ways to create lighting effects, but this program gives you a fast and fun way to do it.

It will run either inside of Photoshop (or other editor programs), or all on its own...i guess what you call stand-alone. Either way, you pull in a photo into the program, and start adding the effects you want.

In the image shown above, I have taken a photo of a park bench in the sunlight, and added a subtle enhancement to it. The sun was shining brightly on the corner post of the bench, and I wanted to enhance this, so I added a stylish type of lens flare to it, to make the feeling of brightness more obvious.

The image also shows the use of Lightshop inside of Photoshop as a plug-in. I could have also done the same using it as a stand-alone program, with no difference in operation.

In either case, all I need to do to add the flare effect would be to open the image and start the Lightshop. Once there, I would choose one of the starburst presets, and click on it to select it. At the top, then you would click the green arrow button to apply the flare to the image.
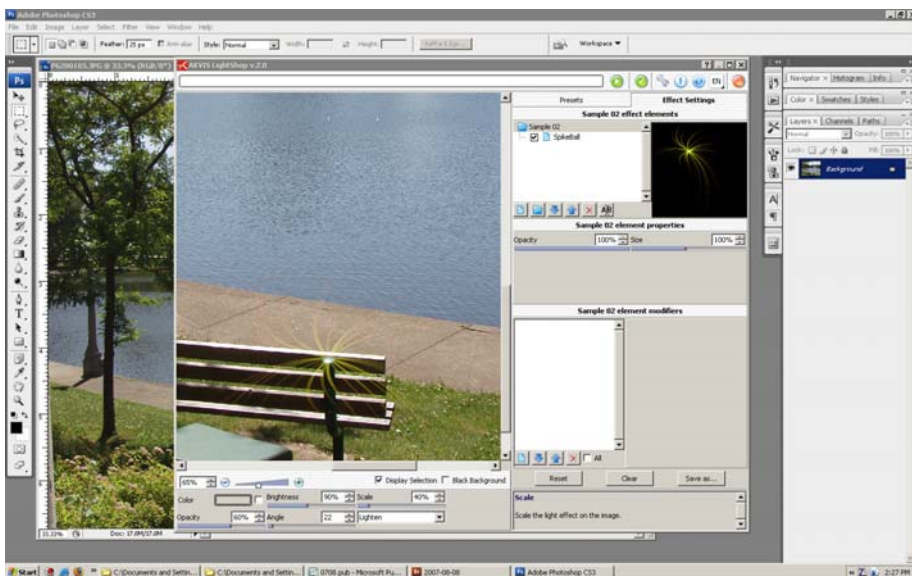
When the flare is on the image in the preview area, you can move it, resize it, adjust the brightness and opacity, and change the blend mode as well (like blending modes within Photoshop).

Lightshop comes with 55 built-in effects, called Presets, to give you a starting point to work from. All these presets may be changed as you want, to give you custom effects, and saved to let you use them again.

Not only do you have the built-in presets to work with, you may make your own custom presets, and save them as well. This will let you build up a large library of effects to choose from to make your images look even better.

Some of the presets will let you do some real magic to your photos. If you have night pictures of a city skyline, you can use a few of them to make it look like you had taken the photo when fireworks were going off. Add them to the photo, adjust color, brightness, and the other settings, and you can make a shot taken during the dead of winter look like it was actually the Fourth of July! (If you want to see a sample of this, check it out on the Akvis website, under the example page). You can also find instructions there on how to make the fireworks shot yourself.

You can buy Lightshop direct from the Akvis website at www.akvis.com. Go there, and click on the link for the Lightshop page. You can get a 10 day free trial to try it out before you buy it. Lightshop costs $117 for either the plug-in or stand-alone versions for home use. If you want both, it will cost you $135. If you want to use it for a business, it will cost $270 which lets you use both versions as well. You can put it on up to 2 computers, no matter which license you buy.

You get the program immediately after purchase via download from the website. The registration code comes in an email to you. You get a single, self-extracting file that you double click on to install the software. There are only a few questions to answer, and you can let it use the supplied answers for fast setup.

I like Lightshop for the flashy effects it can add to your work. You need to be careful, though, to keep the effects you add subtle, so as not to make things appear TOO fake. Less is a lot of times more when dealing with enhancements to photos.

One thing I feel is lacking in this program, though, is the absence of traditional lighting effects, such as the ability to add fill light, catch lights, to actually alter the lighting of an image more than to add special effects to it. I know that you can do a lot of this right in Photoshop, or with other plug-ins, but if you have this one that lets you add lighting effects to a photo, why not include more "normal" ones as well? It would make a more rounded and featured package.

Overall, I like this program for what it can do. I have some of my own photos I have in mind that I would like to add some of the enhancements to, just to see how they look Perhaps at some point in the future I will write a follow-up, giving some more samples of how they look.