Software Review: AKVIS Frame Suite

By Mark Mattson, Computer Users of Erie

The images have been scanned or captured, the tweaking in your favorite photo editor has been done, and the final images are ready to be printed… or are they?

You look at your images on-screen, and feel that there is some-thing a little extra that can be done to polish them up, to give them a bit more snap and pizzazz...top make them really stand out in the crowd.

As you look at them, you find yourself real-izing that the static, age-old boring plain edges of your prints would look much better with some sort of framing, or edge effect present. But what works best for your image? And how do you get it there?

The framing I am talking about here is not the frame that the photo is placed in to pro-tect it and hang on the wall. Rather, I am talking about a frame for the image that is part of the image itself...an 'edge effect' as it were...something to break up the monotony of an edge-to-edge straight print.

Edge effect framing is becoming all the rage lately with digital images. As they are easy to apply and manipulate, they can be seen all over the place, enhancing the work of many photographers. There are many sources for frames and edge effects, but one of the best places is from good 'ol AKVIS, with their Frame Suite package.

AKVIS has been producing high quality plug-ins for Photoshop and other compatible photo editors for years now, and each version of their packages gets better and better. I've reviewed a few of their other offerings in previous issues, but this is the first time I have had the opportunity to try out an end-of-workflow product from them.

As with most of their other products, Frame Suite is available in both Mac and Windows versions, either as a plug-in or a stand-alone application. You download the file from their website, run the installer, answer a few sim-ple questions (standard to most software installations nowadays), and you're off and running. Total install time on a typical Win-dows platform is about 1 minute.

The main interface window of Frame Suite is shown below, with a sample image open in it (this is the stand-alone version running for these screen captures).

The large preview window on the left side of the workspace shows both the before and after views of your image, depending on the tab chosen above it.
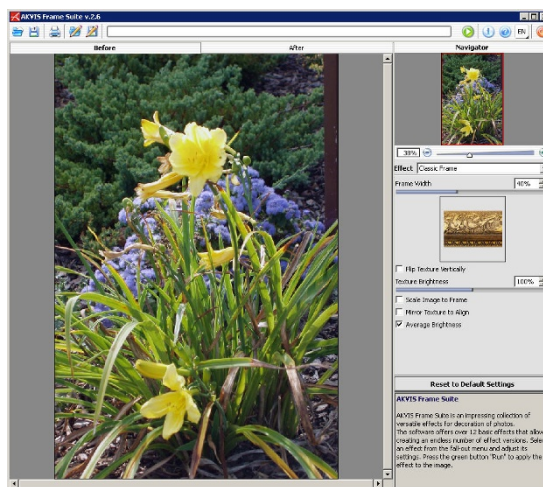
To the right of the preview panel is where the magic of this plug-in is found. Here are the controls that allow you to choose your frame style, and adjust the parameters to suit your needs.

As shown, the choice of frames for the sam-ple image is the Classic Frame style. This gives your image the look of being framed in an old wooden frame, with sculpted edges and details.

If you would rather use a different edge effect for your image, there are 11 additional styles to choose from, found in the pull-down list. Styles such as Scratches, Frost, Artistic Crop, and the others, give you a wide range of effects to enhance your photos.

As you choose a different style, the controls available to you will change. The functions of each control will vary the edge effect that will be applied to your photo, giv-ing you complete control over how it looks.

As with the other current releases from AKVIS, the controls are laid out nicely, with everything you need all in one place. If you are unsure of what a con-trol function is, there is a help pane at the bottom of the window; hover your mouse over a particular slider, and it will tell you what it does.

To appl;y your chosen frame style and settings to your image, click the green GO button at the upper right portion of the interface window. A progress bar will show that the edge effect is being applied to your image and, after a few sec-onds, the preview window will be updated to show you the final effect. If you don't like what you see, just modify the control set-tings, and try again. Your original image file is unchanged until you click the Save Image icon found at the left of the progress bar. There are also buttons there for saving and loading your personalized frame presets,

Membership News

Current Membership: 37

New Members: None last month

Renewals Received: Scarlett Skarupski   Lou Cioccio   Bill Ellis   Don Grim   Dave Howell   Olen Seidler

Renewals Due: Lee Skywark   Norma Smith   Greg Ames   Timothy Smock   Gerald Singer   Ralph Walter   Chet Walkiewicz   John Fair   Tom Kuklinski

Remember, a CUE Membership makes a nice present!!

giving you the ability to create a library of favorite frame styles to use at a later date.

I've included several samples of different frame styles here for you to see how they very, and how they can make your photo look and feel different.

The first style, shown above, is the Classic Frame style. As you can see, it gives your photo the look and feel of being framed in an ornate wooden frame. This would be a good choice for an old restored black and white image, or a color one you wish to give an old -time feel to.

The next sample is called Squares. As you can see, it adds rows of square boxes to the edges of your photo. While mostly white in color, if you examine them closely, you can see that some of them are translucent, allowing part of your underlying image to show through. One option of this frame style is to make random squares turn a random color when applied.

The pattern of the squares will change from image to image. You may also set the number of squares used in each section of the frame. A random number generator determines the tile count and distribution, and a control is given to allow you to change the 'seed' number for the random number generator, thus affecting the look of the frame even more.

The last example I am showing here is called Artistic Crop, shown below.

As you can see, this frame effect is very similar to what you see on fine-art photos produced by professional studios. The original image is used as a background, and blurred to give it a dream-like quality. The original image is then overlain on this background, in sharp focus, and surrounded by a boundary line, to define its edges. If you are looking to simulate a gallery-style look to your own photos, this is the choice I would personally use.

As you can see from the examples I have included, there are many different ways you can change the look of your images. Some frames will work better with certain subjects than others; what works best for yours will depend on your own personal tastes. All you

can do is experiment and see what looks the best.

One thing to keep in mind, however, is that less is more in quite a few situations. Don't go overboard when setting up your frame styles...sometimes the simplest settings will bring out the most from a certain image. The frames should COMPLIMENT your photos, not overpower them.

Frame Suite is, s mentioned before, available for both Mac and Windows platforms, running under the following operating systems:

Windows 2000/XP/NT/2003/Vista; Mac OS X 10.3.9-10.5

Minimum system requirements are 512MB RAM, a P III CPU, 60 MB drive space, and a 1024x768 video resolution (Windows). Macs need at least a PPC G3 system with 512MB RAM and 100 MB drive space. The upper limits are as high as you want to go...the package supports a Core Duo CPU and 2GB RAM on Windows, and can use up to 2GB of drive space (why, I am not exactly sure..the installer is a relatively small file).

The current release version of AKVIS Frame Suite is v2.6. It is available for download as a free trial from the vendor's website at www.akvis.com. Click on the link there to go to the Frame Suite page. You may purchase the full version license key for $49, or try it out before you buy.

There are many other ways to get frame and edge effects applied to your photos: action sets, other commercial software packages (costing into the hundreds of dollars), custom brushes… all can provide you with distinctive borders to frame your photos. Some can be applied in seconds, while others can take time to get just right. Depending on the look you are aiming for, it may or may not be worth the time and expense .

Frame Suite is a small, inexpensive alternative that gives you a wide range of effects and taking very little time to apply. The learning curve is not very intensive, either...you should be able to start using the utility as soon as you get it set up. Experimentation with the various styles is the best teacher.

If you need a little extra touch for your photos, frame Suite is the way to go.