INSPIRE

First look: Adobe Photoshop Touch for iPad

written by A.J. Wood

As a working professional, I wear many different hats — instructor, photographer, consultant, and digital media specialist. My photography focuses primarily on working with special-needs kids while shooting on location. It's a different process compared with taking children's portraits in a studio. When working with families with special-needs kids, I have different challenges, but the work is just as rewarding.

The portable workflow

Lately I've been trying to find new ways to use my iPad on location so I can travel light and leave my laptop at home. I also want to accomplish more during the shoot and spend less time editing the files on my workstation later. I keep reinventing my workflow to reduce the amount of equipment I have to carry and improve my ability to collaborate and share ideas with everyone at the shoot.

Last summer, I started using remote control apps, such as DSLR Camera Remote HD from onOne software, to trigger a Canon 7D camera with my tablet or phone. Using the Canon WFT-E5A Wireless File Transmitter, I can create an ad hoc network on location, eliminating the need to locate a Wi-Fi hotspot. I can shoot with the Canon camera on location and use the network from the camera to transfer the photos directly to my iPad. (Thanks to Damien Tepe who scoured Google for David Ziser, figured out the camera-to-iPad-via-Wi-Fi process with the help of a Korean photography forum, and shared the information with the rest of us.)

The great benefit is that I can hand my tablet to the parents during the shoot. They can see the large images as I'm shooting them instead of trying to review the photos I took afterward on the camera's tiny LCD display. If they see images they love, I can use the tablet to send the files via email or post them online immediately. I often use an HDMI connection to display the images on a much larger TV screen. This setup is convenient and enables everyone to become more involved in the production.

Digital editing on the go

When I got my hands on Adobe Photoshop Touch for iPad, I was both surprised and happy with some of the things I could immediately accomplish. I can select irregular areas of an image, such as hair, on a tablet screen. And I'm not just making a generic marquee selection — I can make some really intricate selections with the Scribble Selection tool. I use Photoshop Touch as both a compositing tool and as a scratch pad. It helps me flesh out my ideas before finalizing a piece. Photoshop Touch is the first application for a tablet that provides all the photo-editing features I'd expect to find in a desktop application.

With Photoshop Touch, you can:

- Apply filters
- Adjust curves
- Change opacity
- Add blend modes
- Isolate areas of a photo
- Make complex selections
- Combine multiple layers in a single document

As a long-time Photoshop user, I was excited to experiment with Photoshop Touch and surprised by its power. The tablet app is not a replacement for Photoshop — it is a whole new tool. It doesn't have layer masks but you can apply adjustments to individual layers to change the saturation, work with curves and levels, and much more (see Figure 1). The workflow is slightly different because you duplicate existing layers and then edit the copies, making it easy to revert back when needed.

Adjustments

Figure 1. Choose from a wide variety of options in the Adjustments menu.

Compared to Photoshop, Photoshop Touch does not have a steep learning curve. I got up to speed quickly by following along with the interactive video tutorials that display when you first launch it. For example, the selection tutorial has 10 simple steps that guide you through the entire process and describe how to use the interface. If desired, you can even save the sample documents you create as you walk through the tutorials and repurpose the files later.

Photoshop Touch in action

Recently, I worked on a project with a friend, Officer David Lightfoot. We came up with an idea to create a service announcement to raise awareness for how the police department is helping the local community. He liked the style of the Captain America movie poster, and I agreed to volunteer my services to create the first composition and approach the district to see if they would be interested in pursuing the project. Our goal was to create a large metallic poster-size print and distribute smaller prints as flyers.

I began by shooting the background image (a Formica table top) using the tablet's camera. That was easy and convenient, and the background was ready to go.

In the studio, I shot images of my friend using my Canon 7D. He reviewed the shots immediately on my tablet, which helped us speed the production time while ensuring that all the details in the image were correct. He was pleased with the original image we captured (see Figure 2). The next step was to duplicate the layer of the foreground image to remove the background.
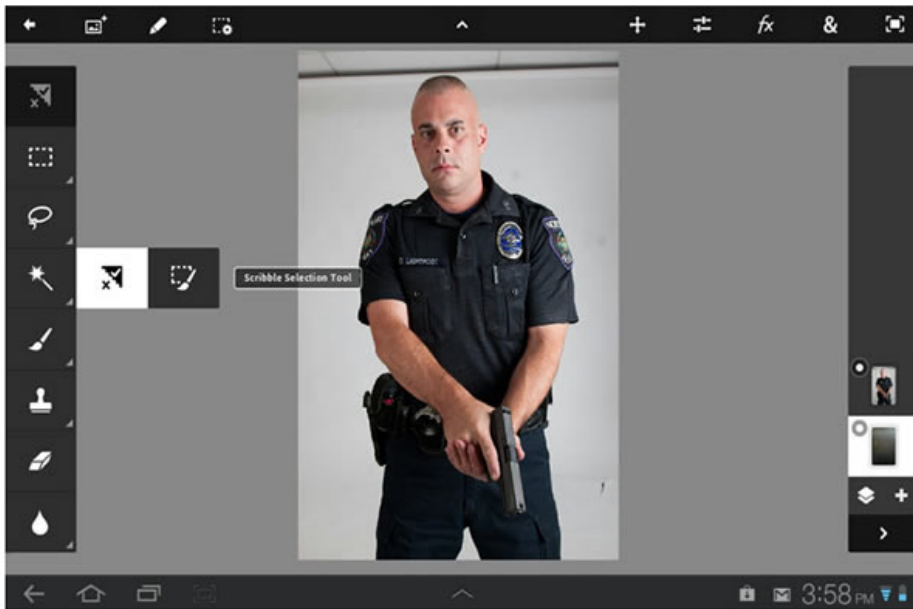
Figure 2. Access the Scribble Selection tool in the left toolbar to begin making a selection.

With the Scribble Selection tool, I used my finger to define the selected area. The area marked with green indicates the pixels to keep, and the area marked with red defines the area that will be removed (see Figure 3).
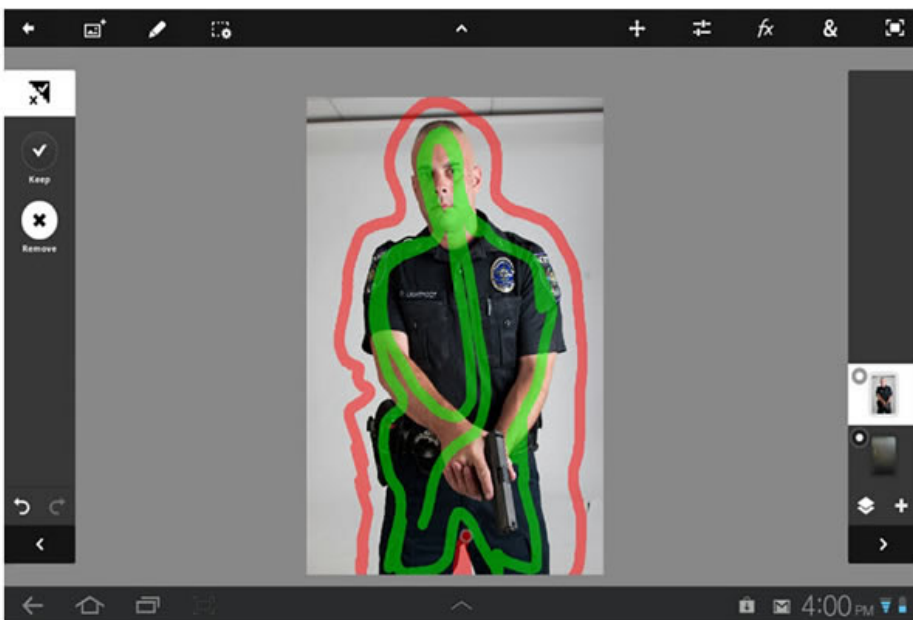

Figure 3. The colored scribbles make it easy to tell which parts of the image are selected.

After completing the selection, I had a marquee of marching ants surrounding the foreground image (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. I used the Refine Edge feature to achieve a very precise area selection.

After deleting the background of the studio, I composited the studio image over the photo of the Formica table top that I took with the camera in my iPad. The bright spot in the top right corner is actually the reflection of the camera's flash (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. The first composite contains both the foreground and background layers.

Before we left the studio, I wanted to share my ideas for the final composition. I created a duplicate of the background layer and then ran a filter on the copy to pull out some of the color. Using this strategy, I created the final version of the composition in Photoshop Touch (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. The final composition was created directly in Photoshop Touch.

The benefits of this workflow are huge. Rather than attempting to verbally describe my concept in the studio, I have the ability to immediately show comps to my clients. This level of visual communication enables me to collaborate with them on the final design immediately. I can compose my ideas and quickly execute them in real time.

From tablet to desktop

When content is destined for the web, I can use the files on my iPad. However, since this project involved creating a large metallic poster-size print, I later returned to my workstation to open the PSD file in Photoshop. This was only necessary because I wanted to continue tweaking it and I needed to generate a higher resolution file.

Photoshop Touch syncs files to Adobe Creative Cloud. The sync services run seamlessly in the background, and my files are immediately available on my iPad, laptop, and desktop computer. When I returned home, I opened the tablet composite PSD file in Photoshop and started using it as a template to create the final image (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. The completed poster created in Photoshop, following the same theme.

Summary

With Photoshop Touch, I can shoot images, retouch them, swap out a different background, store all the project elements and iterations in Creative Cloud, and show my clients the immediate results for instant gratification and approval — all on my iPad. I can quickly execute my ideas, and that excites my clients.

Photoshop Touch immediately improved my production workflow. I now have the ability to make selections and then work with layers in a significant way to apply blend modes, filters, and effects right in the studio or on location. Other tablet applications I have used enabled me to perform some of these tasks, but Photoshop Touch is the first app that enables me to perform all of these tasks together.

To explore the creative possibilities of Photoshop Touch, try creating your own sample projects on iPad and see how it works. Photoshop Touch is available now on iTunes.

About the author

A.J. Wood is an Adobe Community Professional and Adobe Certified Instructor. He is based in Dallas, Texas, and works primarily as a digital media consultant and photographer. He is also a frequent speaker at user groups and technology conferences. Check out the Photoshop and Lightroom tutorials posted on his YouTube channel (ajwood.com/youtube) and learn more about his webinars by visiting ajwood.com.