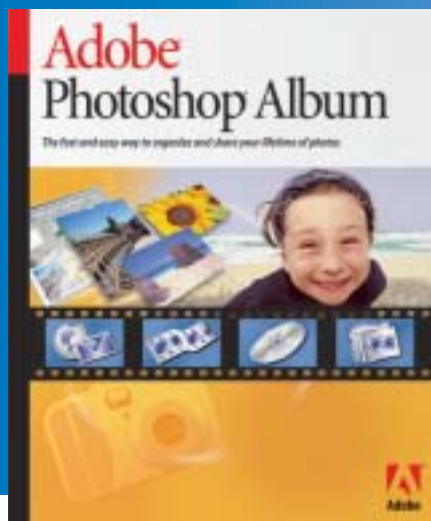


Adobe Photoshop Album & Jasc Photo Album

by Geoff Walker



Are digital photos piling up on your hard disk and on CDs? Do you have trouble retrieving a specific photo from the morass? Do you wish you had a simple way to edit and print photos? Have you ever wanted to easily create a slide show on a CD that could be played on any living-room DVD player? If any of these questions strike a nerve, you need digital photo album software. Two major players in digital photography software (Adobe and Jasc) have just released new offerings in this category, and this article compares them in detail.

Predecessors and companions

Adobe's Photoshop Album (v1.0) is a brand-new program, not directly based on any previous Adobe product. With this release, Adobe's digital photography programs can be classified into three tiers:

- ✗ **PHOTOSHOP (V7.0)** – digital image manipulation tools for professionals
- ✗ **PHOTOSHOP ELEMENTS (V2.0)** – digital image manipulation tools for amateur photographers and photo enthusiasts (hobbyists)
- ✗ **PHOTOSHOP ALBUM (V1.0)** – organizing, enhancing and sharing tools for “active picture takers” (consumers)

You may have seen Adobe's Photoshop LE (limited edition) or PhotoDeluxe in the past. These discontinued products were both predecessors to Photoshop Elements. LE was an OEM-only product created by removing the production-oriented features from Photoshop, which still left it still too complex for the midrange user. PhotoDeluxe was a severely dumbed-down image editing program for the home user; it also included templates and guided activities for image-oriented projects such as calendars. Neither program fully addressed the “organizing, enhancing and sharing” needs of the digital image user, and neither program was particularly successful.

Jasc's Paint Shop Photo Album (v4.0) is the renamed and upgraded next generation of Jasc's After

Shot. (After Shot was in turn previously known as Image Expert.) Jasc is best known for PaintShop Pro (v7.0), which is directly competitive with Adobe's Photoshop Elements. (PaintShop Pro v8.0 is currently in public beta.) Jasc doesn't have a professional-level program equivalent to Photoshop, which stands alone as the “gold standard” in image editing.

Getting started

For the remainder of this article, the two programs are referred to as “Adobe” and “Jasc”, rather than “Adobe Photoshop Album” and “Jasc PaintShop Photo Album”. As intimated above, both programs are aimed at the millions of digital camera owners who need software to “organize, enhance and share” their ever-growing stacks of digital photos. These are both entry-level programs; they don't require any previous familiarity with digital image management. The feature comparison table is the heart of this article; you should probably study it before you read the rest of the text. From this point on, the rest of the article is a detailed comparison of the two programs.

Basic screen layout

Both Adobe and Jasc display thumbnails in the middle of the screen. Adobe has a collapsible panel on the left for keywords/tags, and a collapsible panel on the right for image information (properties). Generally, you want both of these panels displayed all the time, so the screen layout remains relatively constant as you use the program.

Jasc has a single, multi-function, collapsible panel on the left with four or five tabs (depending on the mode you're in). The tabs are as follows:

- ✗ **Browse**, for displaying the PC's directory tree and selecting which Albums (folders) to open
- ✗ **Info**, for displaying image information and some metadata (e.g., camera settings)
- ✗ **Keywords**, to apply keywords/tags to images
- ✗ **Search**, for finding images

- ✗ **Album**, for displaying thumbnails in the left panel when in Image View mode

Because the panel is multi-function, I tended to constantly switch between Browse, Info and Keywords as I worked on images. This layout is substantially less convenient than Adobe's two-panel layout.

Photo Well vs Album

At first glance, the basic user interface of Adobe and Jasc seem very similar – they both display thumbnails. Adobe calls the screen where the thumbnails are displayed the “Photo Well”; Jasc calls it the “Album”. However, there is a fundamental difference. There is only one Photo Well; whatever thumbnails are displayed are the result of a search or a command such as Show All. The user doesn't need to be aware of the physical location of the image files. In fact, only the image date and time is displayed for each thumbnail. To see the file and folder name for an image, you have to select the thumbnail and look in an information panel on the right side of the screen.

In Jasc, multiple Albums are often displayed. Each Album represents the content of a single folder (the folder name is at the top of the Album). You open Albums by browsing the directory tree that appears when you click on the Browse tab on the left side of the screen. When you do a search, the results of the search appear in a separate Album labeled Search Results (a kind of temporary folder). The thumbnails resulting from a search can be located in multiple folders (the image file name is displayed at the top of the thumbnail and the folder name is at the bottom).

The difference is one of orientation. Adobe is strongly date-oriented because the Adobe designers believe that most consumers know when they took a photo, but not typically where it's stored on the hard drive. Jasc is strongly folder-oriented because that's the traditional way of managing files on a PC. As a technical person, I like the folder orientation, but keeping track of where everything is stored eventually becomes a nightmare.

Overall I think the Adobe approach is better, because they really are right about date (time) being important, and because it focuses on using (enhancing and sharing) images rather than managing where they are.

Adobe's date orientation is best illustrated by the "Timeline" graphic that's displayed across the top of the screen. The timeline shows when the images in the Photo Well were taken. The timeline is divided into months and years; if you click on a month, the thumbnails in the Photo Well are scrolled so that they start with the first photo taken that month. The timeline also shows how images are distributed across time; the height of the bar in each month is proportional to the number of images taken in that month.

Proxy vs Direct Link

Thumbnail photos in Adobe are proxies for the actual images, while thumbnail photos in Jasc are directly linked to the actual image. This is a subtle but important difference in the architecture of the two programs. As an illustration of the difference, suppose that outside of Adobe or Jasc you move an original image to a different folder. In Jasc, the thumbnail simply disappears from the Album view because the underlying image is no longer in the folder. In Adobe, the thumbnail remains



■ Above: Adobe PhotoWell
■ Below: Adobe Fix Photo



displayed in the Photo Well. When you click on the thumbnail to display the image in Adobe, the following message appears: "The source file for the item you've selected to view cannot be found at the location stored in the catalog. It may have been moved and/or renamed. Please reconnect this catalog item to its source file." A browsing tool is then displayed to help you reconnect the thumbnail and the original image.

The use of proxies in Adobe is driven by a philosophy of doing everything possible to preserve the original image. If something happens to an original image, Adobe wants you to know about it and do something about it. Jasc generally ignores the situation and lets you manage it. For example, when you edit an original image, Adobe puts up the following warning: "You are about to edit an original photo; however, the original file will not be changed. Your changes will be written to the

The following steps were used to create a slideshow from images on an offline CD containing digitized film in three different resolutions (from PhotoWorks.com)

In Adobe Photoshop Album 1.0

- Use the Get Photos from Files and Folders command on the File menu to bring a proxy of all the images from the high-res directory on the CD into the Photo Well.
- Select the images to be used for the slide show.
- Select Slideshow on the Creations menu. This brings up a Workspace window containing small thumbnails of the selected images. The order of the images can be changed by drag-and-drop.
- Right-click on each image and use the Find in Photo Well command to select it for editing.
- Make corrections to each image as needed (rotate, crop, enhance, etc.). Photoshop Album saves each edited image automatically in a folder specified in Preferences. The thumbnails in the Workspace are updated automatically as you edit the photos.
- In the Workspace window, start the Creations Wizard.
- Select Slideshow as the desired output.
- Select the slideshow style and settings (layout template, title page, background music, timing, transition, etc.).
- Preview the slideshow to check that everything looks right.
- Select the output media for the slideshow: PDF file, burned to a CD, printed or attached to an email.
- Select the device, folder and file name where the output will be written.
- The finished creation is included in the Photo Well as a thumbnail. Select it and use the Slideshow command on the View menu to view the slideshow while in Photoshop Album. To view the slideshow externally, open the PDF file or insert the CD.

file: <FileName_edited.jpg>." (This and other warnings can be disabled if desired.) When you edit an original image in Jasc, the original is overwritten with the edited version by default with no warning.

The use of proxies in Adobe also gives the program a performance advantage. Whenever you do a search in Adobe, the resulting thumbnails display instantly because no reference is being made to the original image file. In Jasc, the thumbnails initially appear as blank rectangles labeled "loading"; the thumbnail images gradually appear as Jasc reads each original image file. Most of the time the difference is only a matter of a few seconds, but in some cases, the difference is very noticeable. For example, displaying a print preview of a 30-image contact sheet in Jasc can take as long as 40 seconds. In Adobe, a contact sheet print preview appears instantly.

Database

The database used to store catalog and other informa-

In Jasc Paint Shop Photo Album 4.0

- Catalog the CD using the Catalog-CDROM command on the Tools menu. This displays thumbnails of all the images on the CD as an Album.
- Since the CD contained multiple copies of the images at different resolutions, delete the duplicate thumbnails in the Album, making sure to keep only the high-res images.
- Select the images to be used for the slide show.
- Use the Save a Slideshow command on the Share menu to save the selected images and the settings in a new directory on the hard drive. Select the new directory in the directory tree under the Browse tab to open a new Album consisting of just the Slideshow images on the hard drive.
- Put the images in the desired order, either by drag-and-drop, or by using the Sort Thumbnails By command on the View menu.
- Select all the images and make them writeable by using the Unlock command on the right-click menu (the images are imported as read-only, since they were copied from a CD).
- Make corrections to the images as needed (rotate, crop, enhance, etc.), saving each image over itself.
- Select the slideshow settings (timing, transition, etc.) using the Slideshow Settings command on the Share menu.
- Select the Album background music using the Album Soundtrack-Choose command on the Audio menu.
- Save the finished slideshow using the Save a Slideshow command on the Share menu again.
- Use the View Slideshow command on the Share menu to view the slideshow while in Photo Album. To view the slideshow externally, run Player.exe in the folder above the one containing the slide show files.
- To burn the slideshow to a CD, use third-party CD burner software. (Jasc supports burning to CD, but while I was able to burn a Video CD, I wasn't able to burn a slideshow CD.)

tion in both programs is Microsoft Access, although neither database is designed for direct manipulation with Access. While both programs provide a backup facility for the database, there's an important difference. Jasc's backup routine backs up only the database and no images. You must manually archive images to back them up. Adobe's backup routine backs up both the database and images, which is consistent with Adobe's "preservation" orientation. Jasc's backup can be set to run automatically after a certain number of exits; Adobe's backup can be run as a full or incremental backup, which is a necessity because of the potential size of the backup (Adobe's help observes that "it's best to back up to a CD, DVD, or external hard drive").

Actually, anyone who's serious about backup probably already has a backup methodology in place, so neither program's backup facility is that important. Possibly more important is Adobe's Recovery utility which fixes a "catalog damaged by a power failure or technical glitch." Jasc doesn't have a database recovery utility.

PHOTOSHOP ALBUM VS JASC PHOTO ALBUM COMPARISON TABLE

FUNCTION/FEATURE ADOBE PHOTOSHOP ALBUM 1.0 ASC PAINT SHOP PHOTO ALBUM 4.0

Organize & Find

Acquire images from	Camera (USB), card reader, scanner, files or folders on any media, WIA, TWAIN	Camera (serial or USB), card reader, scanner, any media (all files), Picture CD, FlashPath (SmartMedia), WIA, TWAIN
Import images from other programs	Adobe PhotoDeluxe & ActiveShare	No
Supported file types	.avi, .bmp, .gif, .jpg, .mov, .mp3, .mpg, .pdd, .pdf, .png, .psd, .sac, .tif, .wav	.avi, .bmp, .dvi, .flc, .flc, .gif, .jpg, .jp2, .mov, .mp3, .mpg, .png, .psd, .psp, .qif, .sgi, .tga, .tif, .wav
Catalog images on local or offline media	Yes	Yes
Exclude files from catalog by size	Yes	No
Database backup	Catalog and images	Catalog only
Database archive/export	Yes	Yes
Database recovery utility	Yes	No
Specify default file save location	Yes	No
Sort by taken or last modified date	Yes	No (last modified date only)
Thumbnail display sizes	3	3
Modify top-level keywords/tags	No	Yes
Add multiple sub-levels of keywords/tags	No	Yes
Time line/calendar of all images	Yes	No
History of image usage	Yes	No
Adjust image date and time	Yes	No
Display all metadata in image	Yes	No (only partial metadata)
Number of clicks for "Quick Fix"	5	1
Wizard for guided adjustment	No	Yes
Manual image adjustments	Crop, rotate, red-eye, brightness, contrast, fill-flash, backlight, saturation	Crop, rotate, flip, red-eye, brightness, contrast, fill-flash, backlight, saturation, color balance, sharpness
Image view while making manual adjust.	Choice of 4	Single small image
Zoom range	3% to 1600% in 8 steps	6% to 1600% in 10 steps
Set fixed aspect ratio during crop	Yes (9 choices)	Yes (12 choices)
Free-angle image rotation	No	Yes
Elliptical and freehand selection	No	Yes
Resize image pixel dimensions	No	Yes
Full-screen image view	Yes	Yes (only in slideshow)
Pen tool for image annotation	No	Yes
Embed text in image	No	Yes
Create panorama from multiple images	No	Yes
Special effects	No	Yes
Add audio to image and/or project	Yes	Yes
Configurable Undo/Redo limit	No	Yes
Attach image to email	Yes (4 sizes, image/PDF)	Yes (original size or reduced)
Select email client to use	Yes	No (uses defaults email client)
Set images as screen saver/wallpaper	Yes	Yes
Instant and/or structured slide shows	Yes	Yes
Create slideshow as PDF (single file)	Yes	No
Create standard web gallery	Yes	Yes
Create 3D web gallery	Yes	No
Includes FTP client to load web gallery	No ("contact your ISP")	Yes
Create Video CD (VCD)	Yes	Yes
Same VCD plays on DVD/computer CD	No	Yes
Menu for multiple shows on VCD	No	Yes
Control burn speed, video format & copies	No	Yes
Archive original images on VCD	No	Yes
Create formal photo album, greeting card, eCard or calendar	Yes (10 + 12 album styles, 22 greet. card & eCard formats, 6 calendar styles)	No
Create QuickTime movie	Yes	Yes
New downloadable templates/formats	Yes	No
Print sizes & combination layouts	23	40 + 28 Avery sizes
Presentation of finished project in catalog	Yes	No

External media

In Jasc, to display images located on the hard drive, you can click on the folder to open an Album and browse the thumbnails. But if the images are located on an offline CD that's been cataloged, there's no way to browse the catalog directly. The only way to display the images is to do a search for them, using criteria such as the name of the CD or a keyword/tag that you previously applied to all the images on the CD.

This contrasts with Adobe's approach, where all thumbnails are equal. Adobe stores all thumbnails, regardless of where they came from, in the catalog. You can browse all the photos in the catalog by selecting the "Show All" button. Or just like in Jasc, you can do a search for the images on a specific offline CD. In both programs, clicking on a thumbnail of an image on an offline CD brings up a dialog that asks you to insert the CD.

In general, Adobe does a better job than Jasc of handling external media. For example, if you edit an image on a CD and then save the edited version, Jasc tries to write the edited image back over the original on the CD — which of course it can't, because it's a read-only media. Adobe not only won't overwrite the original (unless you ask it to), it also allows you to set a default folder for edited images, usually located on the hard drive. Consequently, editing an image on a CD is a smoother process with Adobe.

Tagging images

The purpose of tags is to allow retrieving images by keywords. For example, if you have photos of your pets stored in multiple folders on the hard drive (like I do), you can tag them all, search for the tag, and have all the photos displayed in one place, regardless of their physical location. Both programs allow attaching multiple tags to an image and/or a single tag to multiple images. However, they differ markedly in how much freedom they give you to create tags. Adobe provides four tags at the highest level: People, Places, Events and Other. You can't rename them, delete them or add more. All other tags must be in subcategories below the top four, and you can only have one level of subcategories. The result is a very restrictive, flat structure.

Jasc, in contrast, allows complete freedom in the names and number of subcategory levels. Although Jasc also provides four starting tags at the highest level (Location, Occasion, Photographer and Subject), they can be renamed or deleted. The result is a very flexible tagging system that can be used to create a hierarchy of any depth and complexity.

Searching for images

The two programs have fairly similar searching capabilities. However, Jasc can search on a wider range of items, while Adobe does a better job of specifying the search criteria. For example, Jasc's date-range search allows "within 1 day to 6 months" of a given date, while Adobe's date-range search allows entering two actual dates. This means you can't find "all images taken in 2002" (for example) in Jasc without OR-ing two 6-month search windows.

The one search capability where Adobe significantly outpaces Jasc is in searching image history (Jasc doesn't even have the concept of image history). Adobe can search for items that were:

- ✗ Imported from/date
- ✗ Emailed to/date
- ✗ Exported to/date
- ✗ Shared online to/date
- ✗ Used in web gallery name/date
- ✗ Used in 3D web gallery name/date
- ✗ Received from/date
- ✗ Printed on printer/date
- ✗ Ordered online from/date
- ✗ Used in creation name/date

Enhancing images

The image enhancement capability of these two programs is probably their least important aspect because there are many programs that can enhance images. Organizing and sharing images are activities for which there is much less existing support software. A serious amateur photographer or photo hobbyist is likely to also

PRODUCT DETAILS

Operating system support	Win 98SE, ME, 2000, XP	Win 98SE, ME, NT4, 2000, XP
MSRP	US\$50 boxed or download	US\$49 boxed, \$45 download, US\$29 upgrade
WEBSITE	www.adobe.com	www.jasc.com

own Photoshop Elements or PaintShop Pro, either of which are a much more powerful tool for image enhancement. (Adobe expects >50% of Elements owners to purchase Album, and >20% of Album owners to purchase Elements.)

That said, both programs are quite capable of making basic image adjustments. There are three main differences: the image view while making adjustments, the cropping tool, and the availability of special effects. In Adobe, there is choice of four image views while making adjustments: the original image, the most recently modified version ("before"), the current version ("after"), and side-by-side before and after images—which is by far the most useful. The images are quite large, about half of the screen height.

In contrast, Jasc provides only a single small image (only one-quarter of the screen height), and the image is split vertically into before and after. You look at only the right half of the image to judge the enhancements—but what if the left half is the portion that most needs enhancing? Unfortunately, the pan control can't be used while adjusting an image. Adjusting an image in Jasc's isn't very satisfactory. On the other hand, Jasc's slider controls are much better than Adobe's; they have a clearly marked center point, eight clickable gradations and a nice big slider.

The ideal cropping tool would be a blend of the two programs. Jasc's cropping tool makes a decent educated guess at an initial crop and dims the remainder of the image, which is a helpful visual aid in cropping. However, the distance over which the cursor becomes a two-headed arrow is extremely small (only three or four pixels), so it's quite difficult to grab one side of the outline. Adobe's cropping tool is an annoying, animated, dashed box, there's no initial guess at a crop, and the rest of the image isn't dimmed. However, the two-headed arrow remains on for 10-12 pixels, which makes it very easy to grab one side of the outline.

I think Jasc includes special effects mainly as a differentiator. In my opinion, none of the effects are particularly effective except possibly some of the picture frames and the inversion/solarization. I find all the distortion effects (e.g., glass blocks) to be just annoying, but perhaps that's the technician in me speaking rather than the artist.

Sharing

Both programs offer a substantial amount of capability to share (publish) images. Adobe has more different projects (formal photo albums, greeting cards, eCards, calendars, etc.) but Jasc has more print sizes and combination layouts. Both can create an "instant" (select-and-show) slideshow and a more structured slideshow. Only Adobe can publish the slideshow as a PDF, however, which can be a substantial advantage when distributing the slideshow.

Both programs can burn a slideshow with music on a Video CD (VCD) that can be played on a living-room DVD player, but there are some differences. Jasc wins in this area by offering VCD menu capability, more control over the burning of the CD, and the ability to have a single VCD work both in a DVD player and in a computer CD drive. Both programs can create a web gallery,



■ Above: Jasc Album View ; Below: Jasc Video CD



but Jasc offers 40 background templates and 32 background textures, versus Adobe's seven. On the other hand, Adobe lets you build a 3D web gallery that's quite remarkable. In it, the images are displayed on the walls of a virtual building or other structure. By manipulating the cursor you can walk around the building, or you can let Adobe give you a guided tour of the building. There are 10 different virtual building styles (including Stonehenge) with appropriate background music that plays automatically. The 3D web gallery even includes a Chat capability for conversing with other viewers of your site.

The formal photo albums that Adobe can create are handy, but limited because you can't control the layout page-by-page (it's all automatically handled by the program). The album templates also generally expect standard aspect-ratio images, which I found to be rather limiting, since I tend to crop my photos for maximum visual impact rather than standard sizes.

Error messages

Adobe's error messages tend to be more detailed and thorough than Jasc's. Suppose you want to rotate and save an image whose pixel dimensions are not a multiple of 8 or 16. Jasc lets you rotate and save it without warning, but Adobe puts up the following message: "The photo <FileName> cannot be rotated losslessly and written back to the original file. Reason: Lossless rotation of JPEG files is only possible when the image dimensions are multiples of certain sizes. An edited copy will be created for the rotated photo." Again, Adobe tries very hard to preserve your original image.

Jasc's error messages are sometimes an oversimplified version of Paint Shop Pro's error message. For example, if you try to modify a locked (read-only) file on the hard drive, Jasc's error message is only "Error writing to <FileName>", while Paint Shop Pro's error message in the same situation is "Cannot save <FileName>. The file exists and is read-only."

User interface details

Both programs are standard Windows applications, so they're both relatively easy to use. However, I found some minor differences between them that had some

effect on the overall ease of use. Adobe is the more "standard" of the two. For example, to go from one mode to the previous mode (e.g., from the Image View screen back to the thumbnail screen), Adobe uses a "Back" button—just like a browser. Jasc puts a "Close" button in the middle of the toolbar at the top of each screen. Because of years of browser use, I find using the Back button more intuitive.

Adobe also makes more use of the right-click context menu, which I like because it reduces mouse movement. In Image View in Adobe there are 21 distinct functions on the right-click menu; Jasc has only 10. In Jasc, some functions are closed via a standard Close control (such as the Make Movie dialog), others use a toggle (such as all the tabs along the left side of the screen), and still others (such as the Pen Tool) can only be closed by selecting a different tool (such as Zoom or Pan). More consistency would make Jasc easier to use.

Help is an order of magnitude better in Adobe. The Product Overview is a real movie, rather than slides with animated text like in Jasc. The help system is browser-based, and it contains a full user guide with a good index. Adobe's help contains many suggestions, hints and tips, as does the program itself. Unfortunately, the program doesn't come with a printed User's Guide, only a Getting Started manual—which at least provides a decent introduction.

Jasc's help system uses the standard Windows application help engine; the content is a basic series of "how to" procedures—some of which are missing, for example, the procedure to create a VCD menu. The same content is provided in the box as a printed User's Guide, but it's not any better in print. There are no tips, suggestions or error message translations. The index is weak; there isn't even an entry for "search", which is one of the four big tabs on the left side of the screen! There's also no entry for "unlock" (or "lock"), which you need to know about in order to unlock files imported from a CD. Adobe wins this part of the contest by a mile.

Support for the product on the Jasc website is poor, where the Knowledge Base is empty. Support on the Adobe website is a little better, where there is at least a decent set of 67 FAQs and a good user-to-user Forum—although the Adobe Knowledge Base is also empty. Once the programs have been on the market for a few months, the support on both websites should improve substantially.

And the winner is...

After using both programs over a period of a month, I could live with either one. They both do a better job of organizing and sharing images than anything else I've ever seen. But my favorite is Adobe, because of the following features:

- ✗ Proxy architecture
- ✗ Selective cataloging
- ✗ Timeline
- ✗ Image history
- ✗ PDF output
- ✗ Excellent help
- ✗ Wide range of projects for sharing
- ✗ Side-by-side image view for adjustments
- ✗ 3D web gallery

For US\$49 or US\$50 for the boxed product (US\$45 for a Jasc download), both programs offer a terrific amount of capability. —Geoff Walker