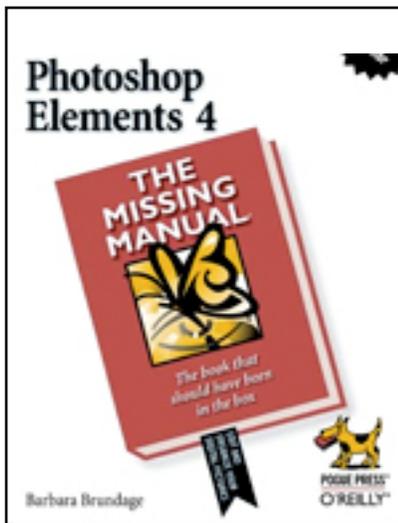


Book: Photoshop Elements 4 - The Missing Manual
Author: Barbara Brundage
Publisher: Pogue Press/O'Reilly - 2006

Subject: Book Review
Reviewer: Don Schaefer, QCMUG Secretary

For those of us who are familiar with the "... Missing Manual" series of books, from O'Reilly Press, we almost expect to see the name: David Pogue as the author. Many times, this is the case, and my bookcase has more computer help books written by Pogue than anyone else. Actually, some of the applications come with manuals, even though there is a "...Missing Manual" book available for them. I haven't found a supplied manual yet that matches the clarity, simplicity, organizational skill or thoroughness shown in its Missing Manual counterpart, especially if written by David Pogue.



Though this book, "Photoshop Elements 4 - The Missing Manual" is not written by Pogue, it shows much of the same empathy for the person who actually wants a manual to tell him/her step by step exactly how to learn to use the application. In addition to the words, telling step by step how to do something, what really helps is to see, on the page, exactly what you should see on your screen when you follow

the steps - that is really reassuring, and this process is followed throughout this book, as is the case with all the books I have by Pogue.

One confusing point, right off the bat, is the statement that this book was written for **the version of PSE 4 that was produced for Windows**, and it states that **the version for the Mac has not yet been produced**. Now, that is no longer true, so you wonder whether there is any point in using this book if you plan to buy the Mac version of the program.

I can't answer that question with certainty, since I haven't purchased the application and am actually checking out what's new in version 4 which might cause me to upgrade from Photoshop Elements 3. With version 3, the programs for Mac and PC are so similar that the video tutorials are for both the Windows and the Mac versions - the screen windows look almost identical, and when they say to use the "alt" key (for the Windows version), we simply substitute the "option" key for the Mac. If the book refers to the "control" key, just substitute "command" key on the Mac. However, if this great similarity is to be continued with version 4, the author should have anticipated that there would be a Mac version, and included a clear statement about all the differences to expect, if she hoped to sell this book to Mac users.

In checking out the list of things that are claimed to be new in Photoshop Elements 4 (as compared with PSE 3), I find some things that look useful (if they work as claimed, on

both the PC and Mac). I also find some things that address only Windows related actions, so I have no way to know that the Mac version will have comparable capabilities.

This is another example of the confusion that results from this book having been written for PCs and not specifically for Macs, or clearly to include Macs.

Here are two examples:

1. Version 4 is said to have improved selection tools to select complicated (shaped) objects. Version 3 had such “magic” tools, but did a much better job selecting simple shapes than complicated ones. If that works as claimed, it would be helpful.
2. A second claim is that you can send your (improved) slideshow to your TV by using Windows Center Media Edition (whatever that is), and the question remains - is there a comparable Mac capability, and if so, what does it use? There are 12 listed “new” things in version 4, and it would seem that most would be present in both a Mac and a Windows version, but until this is clarified (as it should be in any book expected to be purchased by Mac Users), you won't be able to tell from this book.

What about the organization of and information in this book? It helps if a manual starts out with the most basic things, assuming very little, and indicating exactly how to become acquainted with the most basic capabilities of the application. At the same time, it is important that the user accomplish acceptable results with these first experiences. You learn best by actually doing something and seeing the results for yourself, and the instructions should guarantee success with the first experience. In an image editing program, you want to get an image into the application easily and without confusion, learn how to improve it (with the least possible effort and complexity) and either save the edited file or print it.

The Photoshop Elements programs (1, 2 and 3) have all had numerous ways to do just that, by using automatic editing tools that are really pretty good. The author says it well in the introduction, when she writes: “...the key to learning to use Elements, or any other program for that matter, is to focus only on what you need to know for the task you are currently trying to accomplish.” This is what the Missing Manual series has done so well - the instructions have been so clear that you almost have to work to get it wrong.

Here is an overview of the book layout. You will see that it follows the basic premise that the book should help you learn the fundamental things first, become acquainted with what you absolutely have to understand and be able to use to edit your photos. Then you can progress on to the more complicated stuff, only as you need additional tools and capabilities - such as a more thorough understanding of formats, resolution, layers, advanced retouching techniques, sharing your photos....

There are 493 pages in this book, 17 chapters, and the book is divided into 7 parts. I'll just list the parts, (divided into chapters) to illustrate the thinking the book demonstrates:

Part 1 - Introductory Elements: Finding Your Way Around Elements, Importing and Managing Your Photos, Rotating, Re-Sizing and Saving, The Quick Fix

Part 2 - Elemental Elements: Making Selections, Layers, The Heart of Elements

Part 3 - Retouching: Basic Image Retouching, Elements for Digital Photographers, Retouching 102: Fine Tuning Your Images, Creating Panoramas

Part 4 - Artistic Elements: Drawing With Brushes, Shapes, Other Tools; Filters, Effects, Layer Styles, Gradients; Type in Elements

Part 5 - Sharing Your Images: Printing Your Photos, Elements and the Web, Photo Galleries and Slideshows

Part 6 - Additional Elements: Beyond the Basics

Under each of these chapter headings (in each Part), there are from 4 to 10 subheadings that help you locate just what you want to learn how to do, and all this information is in the Table of Contents. This book has a very effective Index (16 pages), so between the expanded Table of Contents and the Index, you really can find your way around this book with ease. In addition, the upper outside corner of each page has an identifying phrase for the type of content on that page or in that section. The author includes (on page 8) a reference to files that can be downloaded from a website which can be used for practice, in case you would prefer editing somebody else's images rather than use your own. These are also the same files referred to in the tutorials in the book.

I would recommend that the author, Barbara Brundage, (or Pogue Press and O'Reilly) be contacted and asked about a Photoshop Elements 4 book that clearly answers these questions for Mac Users. Only then would I recommend that (especially beginning users of an image editing program) purchase a Photoshop Elements 4 Missing Manual book - there is no need for confusion when the clarifying information should be included in any book claiming to be "The Missing Manual".

Notice that the cover of this book does not state: "For Windows Users Only". It just has the title all Mac Users have learned to recognize as another book to help learn to use a program for the Mac. If Pogue/O'Reilly Press publishes this book, modified, with the same title, but with the additional claim: "For Mac OS X as well as Windows", it is well enough written so I'd recommend the purchase.

Until then, I would recommend that only those experienced enough to recognize the differences, and potential problems, consider buying this book - as good as it is.

Reviewed by: Donald A. Schaefer, D. Sc.
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