

# Chapter 1

## Braving the Elements

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Introducing Photoshop Elements
  - ▶ Working with the painting tools
  - ▶ Understanding the image-editing tools
  - ▶ Using Elements' helpful Help features
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**A**s you know if you read the Introduction to this book, the image-editing powers of Photoshop Elements are inherited from another Adobe application called simply “Photoshop.” But you still may not be aware that Photoshop is the most comprehensive and popular image editor around. In fact, there’s probably not a single computer artist who doesn’t use Photoshop almost daily. As an Elements user, you have most of that professional power coiled up inside your computer, waiting for you to discover how to harness it.

Even if you haven’t yet used Elements or Photoshop, you probably have at least a vague idea of what they’re all about. But just so we’re all clear on the subject, the primary purpose of these applications is to make changes to photographic images that you’ve managed to get on disk, whether from a digital camera, a scanner, or other means. Windows users also have the Organizer component of Elements, which lets you organize and arrange your digital image collection. We examine the Organizer half of Elements in Windows in Chapter 6; for now, when we refer to “Elements,” we’re referring to the Editor component of the Windows version, which is basically equivalent to the entire Mac version.

If you’ve used Elements for only a week or so, you may have mistaken it for a fairly straightforward package. Certainly, on the surface, Elements comes off as quite friendly. But lurking a few fathoms deep is another, darker program, one that is distinctly unfriendly for the uninitiated but wildly capable for the stout of heart. Sigmund Freud would no doubt declare Elements a classic case of a split personality. It’s half man, half monster; half mild-mannered shoeshine boy, half blonde-grabbing, airplane-swatting King Kong. In short, Elements has a Dr. Jekyll-and-Mr. Hyde thing going — only it’s way scarier.

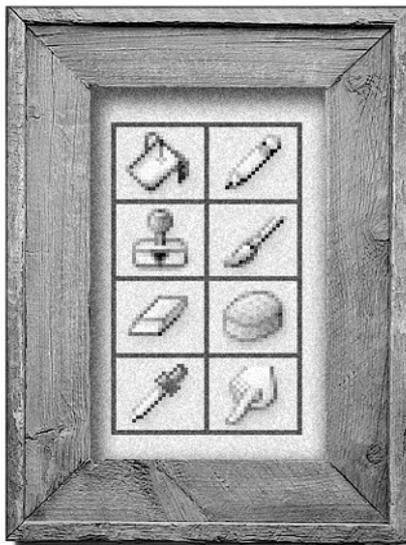
As you may recall from the last time you saw *Abbott and Costello Meet Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* — indisputably the foremost resource of information on this famous tale — this Jekyll character (not to be confused with the similarly named cartoon magpie) is normally your everyday, average, nice-guy scientist. Then one day, he drinks some potion or gets cut off in traffic or something and changes into his ornery alter ego, known at every dive bar in town by the surname Hyde. Elements behaves the same way, except no magical transformation is required to shift from the easy-to-use part of the program to the scary, technical side. Both personalities — both “elements,” if you will — coexist simultaneously in symbiotic harmony.

This chapter explores both the cuddly and not-so-cuddly parts of Elements’ brain. (We’ll leave the exploration of Abbott’s and Costello’s brains for another book.) We’ll also take a look at the built-in Help features, which are the chief means of distinguishing Elements from its not-so-friendly big brother, Photoshop.

## *The Bland but Benevolent Dr. Jekyll*

To discover the benevolent Dr. Jekyll side of Photoshop Elements, you need look no further than the standard painting and editing tools. Shown in Figure 1-1, these tools are so simple they’re practically pastoral, like the kind of household appliances your great-grandmother would have been comfortable with. The eraser tool erases, the pencil tool draws hard-edged lines, the brush tool paints, and so on. These incredibly straightforward tools attract new users just as surely as a light attracts miller moths.

**Figure 1-1:** Many tools in Elements have an old-world, rustic charm that’s sure to warm the cockles of the most timid technophobe.



But you quickly discover that these tools, just like the boring Dr. Jekyll, aren't super-duper exciting on their own. They don't work much like their traditional counterparts — a line drawn with the pencil tool, for example, doesn't look much like a line drawn with a real pencil — and they don't seem to be particularly applicable to the job of editing images. Generally speaking, you have to be blessed with pretty strong hand-eye coordination to achieve good results using these tools.

## *The Dynamic but Dastardly Mr. Hyde*

When the standard paint and editing tools don't fit the bill, you might try to adjust the performance of the tools and experiment with the other image controls of Elements. Unfortunately, that's when you discover the Mr. Hyde side of the program. You encounter options that have meaningless names such as Dissolve, Multiply, and Difference. Commands such as Image Size and Brightness/Contrast — both of which sound harmless enough — can easily damage your image. It's enough to drive a reticent computer artist stark raving insane.

The net result is that many folks return broken and frustrated to the under-equipped and boring but nonthreatening painting and editing tools that they've come to know. It's sad, really. Especially when you consider all the wonderful things that the more complex Photoshop Elements controls can do. Oh sure, the controls have weird names, and they may not respond as you think they should at first. But after you come to terms with these slick puppies, they perform in ways you wouldn't believe.

In fact, the dreaded Mr. Hyde side of Elements represents the core of this powerful program. Without its sinister side, Elements is just another rinky-dink piece of painting software whose most remarkable capability is keeping the kids out of mischief on a rainy day.



It must be noted, however, that even the dastardly Mr. Hyde side of Elements can have a friendly face, namely in Elements' new Quick Fix mode. This mode lets you deal with the complex task of image editing using greatly simplified controls. Compared to a snarling, maniacal real-world encounter with the powerful Mr. Hyde, this is sort of the Hanna-Barbera cartoon version. We visit the Quick Fix mode in Chapter 12.

## *The Two Elements of Photoshop Elements*

Generally speaking, the simple side and the complex side of Photoshop Elements serve different purposes. The straightforward Jekyll tools concentrate mostly on painting, and the more complex Hyde capabilities are devoted to image editing. Therefore, to tackle this great program, you may find it helpful to understand the difference between the two terms.

## *Painting without the mess*

*Painting* is just what it sounds like: You take a brush loaded with color and smear it all over your on-screen image. You can paint from scratch on a blank canvas, or you can paint directly on top of a photograph. Notice in Figure 1-2 the charming young lady, possibly in costume to portray Glinda the Good Witch in her high school's production of the musical *Wicked*. We introduce this lovely person solely to demonstrate the amazing functions of Elements.



**Figure 1-2:**  
Are you a  
good witch  
or a bad  
witch?

Were you to paint on our unsuspecting fairy queen, you might arrive at something on the order of the image shown on the left in Figure 1-3. All these changes were invoked using a single tool — the brush — and just two colors — black and white. Clearly, the artistic work here is a little, shall we say, unsophisticated. However, it's worth pointing out that the image isn't permanently damaged, as it would have been with a real-life paintbrush. Because the original image is saved to disk (as explained in Chapter 7), we can restore details from the original whenever we get the whim.

**Figure 1-3:** The image on the left shows how a few strokes and clicks of the brush tool can alter the image, albeit in rather crude fashion. The image on the right shows what more complex tools can accomplish.



## *Editing existing image detail*

The lady on the left in Figure 1-3 may be entertaining to look at, but she's nothing compared to what she could be with the aid of some image editing. When you *edit* an image, you distort and enhance its existing details. So rather than paint with color, you paint with the image itself.

The lady on the right in Figure 1-3 demonstrates what we mean. To arrive at this bizarre image, we started by doing a little plastic surgery on our subject, using the Liquify filter as a substitute for the traditional ugly stick. Liquify was also used to create her stylish hairdo. We selected her crown with the lasso tool and placed it back on her head at a mischievous tilt. Her skirt was turned into a sort of seahorse tail by the Twirl filter. We replaced her pitiful little fairy wings with a pair of eagle wings from another picture, and then cut the whole thing out and placed it on a new background. And finally, we used the custom shape tool to draw the yin-yang symbol at the end of her wand, and applied a couple of layer styles to give it dimensionality and a nice glow. We're not sure exactly what it all means, but she certainly has a little more credibility as an authentic magical fairy-type creature than she did in the left image, huh?

Mind you, you don't have to go quite so hog wild with image editing. If you're a photographer, for example, you may not care to mess with your work to the point that it becomes completely unrecognizable. Figure 1-4 shows a subtle adjustment that affects neither the form nor composition of the original image. These kinds of changes merely accentuate details or downplay defects in the image.



**Figure 1-4:**  
You can apply more moderate edits to your image, such as sharpening and color correcting.

Just for the record, here are a few common ways to edit photographs in Elements:

- ✔ You can *sharpen* an image to make it appear in better focus, as in Figure 1-4. Generally, sharpening is used to account for focus problems in the scanning process, but you can sometimes sharpen a photograph that was shot out of focus.
- ✔ If you want to accentuate a foreground image, you can blur the focus of the background.
- ✔ If a photograph is too light or too dark, you can fix it in a flash through the miracle of color correction. You can change the contrast, brighten or dim colors, and replace one color with another. The image in Figure 1-4 has been color-corrected.
- ✔ Using the selection and move tools, you can grab a chunk of your image and physically move it around. You can also clone the selection, stretch it, rotate it, or copy it to a different image.

And that's only the tip of the iceberg. In the book's remaining chapters you'll see Photoshop Elements examined as both a painting program and an image editor. Some chapters contain a little bit of information on both topics, with Part III pertaining to image editing in particular. But you'll find all sides of Photoshop Elements' personality flourishing in this book.

## Psychiatric Help: The Doctor Is Built In

Poor Dr. Jekyll. He spent all his time trying in vain to mix a drinkable antidote for that split personality problem of his, when all he needed was to seek help from another doctor — one of the *psychiatric* kind. Luckily, Photoshop Elements has seen the light, and the many built-in Help features that it puts at your disposal ensure that you'll never suffer by association with its split personality. Elements has woven the various aspects of its Help system together in such a way that help is always just a click away.

### The Welcome screen

Let's start with first things first: The Welcome screen is the very first thing you'll see after you've fired up Photoshop Elements. (Don't worry if you don't know how to start Photoshop Elements yet — we'll cover that in the next chapter. If you feel lost, just smile and nod as you read and come back to this section later. We'll understand.)



#### The Mac Welcome screen

As Figure 1-5 makes clear, the Mac Welcome screen gives you these options:

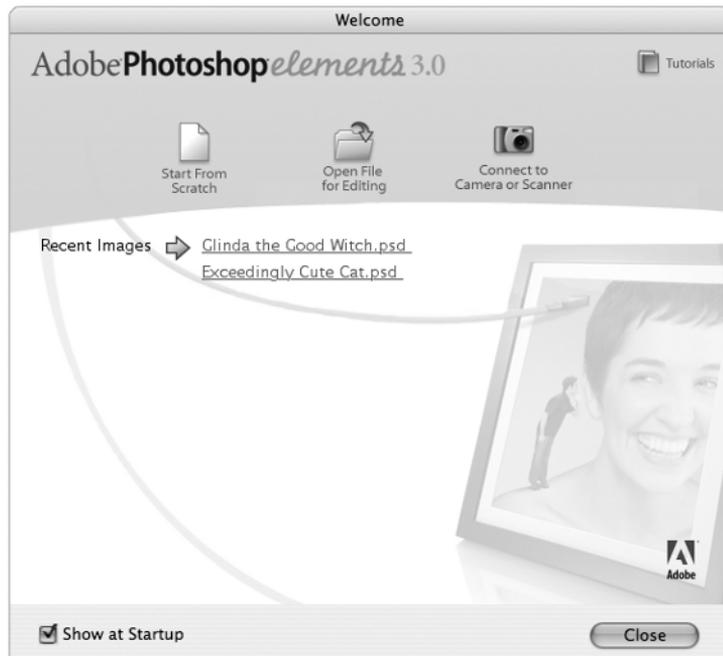
- ✔ **Start from Scratch:** Click here to start out with a pristine new canvas, just waiting for you to express yourself all over it. You'll be asked to specify some properties of the new canvas; we'll get to those in the next few chapters.
- ✔ **Open File for Editing:** Click here to open the File Browser palette, which lets you search for images on your hard drive, giving you image thumbnails to help you find exactly the file you're looking for. We cover the File Browser palette thoroughly in Chapter 3.
- ✔ **Connect to Camera or Scanner:** Click here to start the process of bringing an image into Elements from a scanner, a digital camera, or an already captured video. You'll be taken to the Select Import Source window, where you can choose a source from the Import menu. Frankly, so many different scanners and cameras, each with its own quirks and oddities, are available that we can't possibly begin to thoroughly explain this process for each and every device. But if you have a scanner or a digital camera (and there's a chance that your copy of Photoshop Elements came bundled with just such a device), it's of primary importance that you've correctly installed the software that came with your digital device. For instance, if you've installed your scanner software properly, you should see that option listed in the Import menu. If your digital camera shows up as its own little hard drive when you connect it to your computer, you may have better luck using the File⇨Open command to import images from that camera instead of the Welcome screen. (See Chapter 3 for the skinny on opening files.)

You can also choose Frame from Video from the Import menu to be taken to the VCR-style controls, which let you import a frame from pre-captured video. Just click the Browse button to locate the video on your hard drive, use the controls to locate your frame, and click the Grab Frame button.

The Web site for the company that made your device can be a great place to turn for help as well as an easy source for downloading updated software for your device. And the Photoshop Elements manual that came with the program has a surprising amount of helpful information.

- ✔ **Recent Images:** If you've opened or created any images recently with Elements 3.0, you'll see them listed here. Just click a name to open the file.
- ✔ **Tutorials:** Click here and Photoshop Elements will fire up your Web browser to show you Elements tutorials on the Adobe Web site.
- ✔ **Close:** If every Elements option were this easy to understand, we'd never sell any books. But don't forget, you can always bring back the Welcome screen by choosing Window⇨Welcome.

Okay, there's one more button in this window, though technically it's a check box. If you click the check box for Show at Startup to deactivate the Welcome screen feature, you'll receive a thoughtful reminder that this screen can be turned on again by choosing Welcome under the Window menu.



**Figure 1-5:**  
The Mac  
Welcome  
screen  
helps  
get your  
Elements  
work  
session off  
to a quick  
start.



## *The Windows Welcome screen*

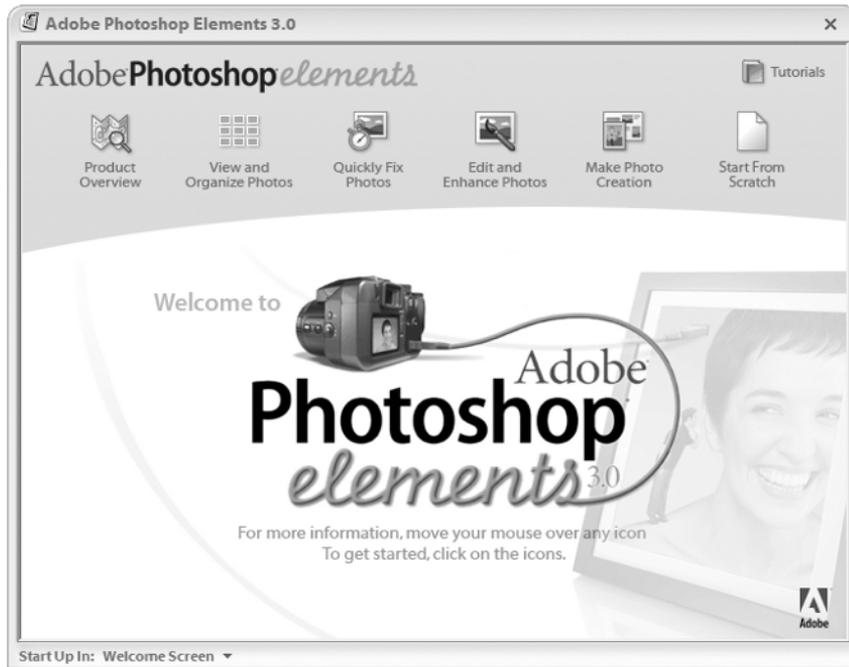
Figure 1-6 shows the Windows Welcome screen, which gives you seven icons to click:

- ✔ **Product Overview:** Click here to find out a little general information about Photoshop Elements. You'll also find a link to special information for users of Elements 2.0.
- ✔ **View and Organize Photos:** Clicking this link takes you straight to the Organizer component of Elements, which we cover in Chapter 6.
- ✔ **Quickly Fix Photos:** This link takes you to the Quick Fix mode of the Editor component in Elements, giving you access to some simple image-editing controls.
- ✔ **Edit and Enhance Photos:** This link takes you to the Standard Edit mode of the Editor component.
- ✔ **Make Photo Creation:** Click here to open the Creation Setup window, part of the Organizer component. We cover Organizer's creations in Chapter 18.
- ✔ **Start from Scratch:** This link opens the Editor component and takes you straight to the New dialog box, where you can specify some properties for the new canvas you want to create. We explain those properties in the next few chapters.
- ✔ **Tutorials:** Click here and Photoshop Elements will fire up your Web browser to show you Elements tutorials on the Adobe Web site.

The Start Up In menu at the bottom-left corner of the screen lets you specify how you want your Elements sessions to begin. Welcome Screen is selected by default, which means when you start Elements, the first thing you see is this screen. You can also choose Editor or Organizer if you want to skip the Welcome screen and have Elements open in one of its two components. But you can always choose Welcome from the Window menu of either Editor or Organizer to access the Welcome menu again.

## *Adobe Help*

Whether you're in Elements on the Mac or in either component of Elements in Windows, the first command available under the Help menu is Photoshop Elements Help. Here you have access to the built-in help information that Adobe provides. This help is divided into three sections: Contents, Index, and Glossary. You can access these sections by clicking the tabs at the top of the left panel in the Adobe Help window. Provided you have an Internet connection, clicking the Go to Adobe Help Online link in the lower-left corner of the window loads the Support page from Adobe's Web site. You can also open this page in your Web browser by choosing Help⇨Online Support. Adobe has many helpful features here, including the Forums link, which can take you to the online community of Photoshop Elements users.



**Figure 1-6:** The Windows Welcome screen presents several options which take you to either the Editor or Organizer component of Elements.

The scores of warnings, messages, and dialog boxes that appear throughout the program often feature technical words that you may find confusing. These words are usually underlined and colored blue, like links on Web pages. Sure enough, clicking one of these words gives you a link straight to Adobe Help, where you'll find a definition of the word or term.

Yet another way to access Adobe Help is through the interface's Search field. On the Mac, this feature is located in the shortcuts bar; in Windows, it's in the main menu bar. By default, the field reads "Type a question for help"; if you follow its sage advice and then press Enter (Return on the Mac), you'll be taken to Adobe Help for the answer. You can also click the adjacent question mark icon to activate Adobe Help.

## *The How To palette*

The How To palette, pictured in Figure 1-7, is the place to turn in Elements for the latest and greatest recipes. Now, if the thought of recipes makes you hungry, put down this book, make yourself a sandwich, eat it, and then come back to us when you're finished (but please wipe your hands first). These recipes can't help you remember how to make your great-aunt Naomi's meat-loaf, but they are a big help where Photoshop Elements is concerned.

**Figure 1-7:**  
The How To  
palette  
presents  
you with  
step-by-step  
tutorials for  
image  
editing.



In the How To palette, you'll find an assortment of image-editing recipes for doing common tasks such as removing dust and scratches from scanned photos and restoring faded photos. You can click to be guided through the tutorial step-by-step. Browser-style forward and backward icons are at the top of the How To palette, as well as a printer icon you can click to print the current tutorial.

You know, there's another way you can apply the whole Jekyll/Hyde analogy to Photoshop Elements. Although Elements definitely has its wild and woolly Hyde side, full of intimidating tools and forbidding commands, the Dr. Jekyll side of Elements — represented by all the Help features — is dedicated to making sure you understand the darker side of the program. Doctors are generally helpful that way. So with this much help at your fingertips, why have we decided to write this book? Well, we thought you might want a second opinion.

