Beginning GIMP

From Novice to Professional, Second Edition

Akkana Peck

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Beginning GIMP: From Novice to Professional, Second Edition

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To Dave.

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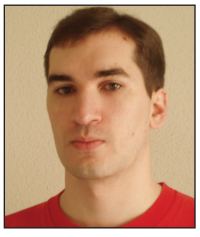
About the Author

AKKANA PECK is a freelance software developer and writer who has been working with open source software for over 20 years, and using GIMP for nearly half that time. Starting with a high school summer job writing image processing and data visualization routines for a cell biology lab, she has worked for a diverse collection of companies, including Netscape, Silicon Graphics, Los Alamos National Lab, and City of Hope. She has written software ranging from GIMP plug-ins to HTML editing, photo viewing to email clients, as well as penning articles and how-tos on Linux, astronomy, and other topics for various publications and websites.

About a decade ago, her longstanding hobby of photography spawned an interest in digital imaging and creating photos for the web. Frustration with the existing Windows tools, combined with a switch to Linux as her primary platform, led to fiddling with the basics of GIMP. After a long period of resistance she was finally persuaded to go beyond basic photo cropping and resizing and try "that layer thing," and the rest is history.

Akkana is a long-time member of the GIMP community and an occasional contributor to GIMP's source code. She enjoys hiking, mountain biking, and astronomy, giving talks about all sorts of topics (especially GIMP), and filling up her hard drive with digital images that she can never bring herself to delete, mostly of scenes from local hiking trails and from travels in the desert southwest. She lives in San Jose, California, with her husband and a motley assortment of old computers.

About the Technical Reviewer



A native of Madrid, Spain, **GUILLERMO S. ROMERO**, while always technically oriented, became interested in art through building and painting scale kits as a child, and that has shaped his life ever since. He graduated from Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, with a degree in Telemática, a specialization of Ingenieria Técnica de Telecomunicaciones. While studying, he began to explore Linux, POV-Ray, GIMP, and Blender, mixing technology and art. This knowledge led to some freelance jobs in the form of articles for magazines and reviews for book publishers.

With a career mixing telecommunications jobs with others more focused in publishing and photography fields, he discovered that drawing with a pen can be learned, step by step, with the right people around providing guidance. His other hobbies are reading, playing in a black and white photography laboratory, walking, and swimming.

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First of all, thanks to my husband, David North. Not only did he help enormously with formatting, proofreading, finding sample photos, and endless testing of GIMP quirks on multiple platforms, but he also put up with the neuroses of a stressed-out first-time author. And then he was willing to do it all again for a second edition!

Equally important is Guillermo Romero, the book's technical reviewer, without whom this book would not have been possible. He patiently waded through first drafts, flagged my silly errors, asked probing questions, and took the time to teach me a lot about digital art. I'm not an artist yet, but I'm learning.

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Last but not least, many thanks to the folks at Apress for helping me through every step of the process, and for putting up with all my tweaks and revisions. In particular, thanks to open source editor Matt Wade, project manager Beth Christmas, awesome copy editor Liz Welch, production editor Jill Ellis, and proofreader April Eddy.

Introduction

So you want to learn image editing!

Maybe you've been shooting lots of pictures with your digital camera and want to learn how to make them look great, or prepare them for the web.

Maybe you're interested in creating drawings or cartoons. Or you're already editing photos, but you want to do more… even learn some of the theory behind imaging.

In any case, you've been hearing about GIMP—the GNU Image Manipulation Program—and you're ready to learn how to use it and get the most out of it.

This book is ideal for anyone attempting image editing for the first time, but it goes deep enough to satisfy the intermediate GIMPster who knows the basics but needs more. Plus, it contains enough tricks and reference matter to gratify even power users. Anyone with an interest in digital art and a willingness to explore should find lots of useful tips and fun projects throughout the book.

This second edition includes several new projects and tips not in the first edition, and covers some of the new features that went into 2.4 at the last minute (as well as a preview of GIMP 2.6).

Structure of the Book

The first few chapters assume no knowledge at all of GIMP or of any other image-editing program. Later chapters will assume you've picked up these basics, and will build on them.

Chapter 1 introduces GIMP's various windows, menus, and interface conventions. GIMP has a somewhat different user interface from most other programs, so it helps to get an idea of how its windows and dialog boxes work together and how the menus are structured.

Beginning with Chapter 2, you'll dive into practical image-editing tasks. Chapters 2 through 6 each cover a different category of image operations—layers, drawing, selection, touching up—and each one describes a series of different and related techniques.

Chapter 7 takes you on a whirlwind tour of the special effects available in GIMP. Then you'll dive into more advanced topics in Chapters 8 through 10, which cover subjects such as color theory, layer mode effects, shading, perspective, image stacking, and panoramas.

Chapter 11 explores scripts and plug-ins: how they work, how to install existing ones, and how to take one and tweak it to do something slightly different. I hope that even people with no programming experience will at least take a look at the scripting sections—there's a lot you can do with GIMP scripts, even if you've never written a line of code before.

For the exercises throughout most of the book, you will want to have some digital photographs handy. If you don't already have a digital camera or a collection of scanned photos, the section "Additional Resources" in Chapter 12 offers a list of websites where you'll find all sorts of terrific photos you can use in your own projects. The rest of Chapter 12 covers a few topics that don't fit anywhere else in the book, plus web resources for finding more GIMP information.

If you don't already have GIMP installed on your computer, skip straight to Appendix A for an outline of how to install GIMP on the most common platforms it supports—Windows, Mac OS X, and Linux. Appendix B gives tips on installing on older versions of those operating systems. If you ever decide you want to build GIMP from source, Appendix C has tips on how to do just that. Finally, Appendix D gives a look at the upcoming GIMP 2.6.

A Note on GIMP Versions

This book was written based on GIMP 2.4. As it goes to press, the development version, 2.5, is coming along and there's no telling when it will be released as 2.6.

Therefore, I've tried to include enough 2.5 information, where it differs from 2.4, that the book will be useful with 2.6. Appendix D gives an overview of the differences. You can also use the book with an older 2.2 or even 2.0 GIMP version, though you'll miss some of the nice new features introduced with 2.4. When possible, I mention locations of menu items that have moved.

If you're using *Beginning GIMP* with GIMP 2.6, check the book's website, *http://gimpbook.com*, for notes on any features that may have changed after the book went to press.

Downloads and Feedback

When learning image editing, it's always helpful to have lots of examples you can use. Some of the images that appear in the book are available in GIMP's native XCF format on the Apress website, along with any scripts used to create them. You'll also find source code there for the scripts and plug-ins presented in Chapter 11, a collection of the images used in the book, and any (gasp!) errata. Just point your browser to *www.apress.com* and search for this book.

I also maintain a website for the book at *http://gimpbook.com*, with a separate errata page, the images used in the book, and an updated version of the links from Chapter 12.

Please email any feedback or suggestions to *akkana@gimpbook.com*.

I hope you enjoy your introduction to GIMP!