



FLAT KIT. USER MANUAL

Online version of the Manual —

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1GQbTaZQmdmliz31bKxJDDSIhAz0vKgHQ3mxDfCV-iOw>

Contents

Contents	1
1. Quick Overview	2
2. Quick start. Beginning to work with Flat Kit	3
3. Shaders. In-Depth Overview	3
3.1. 'Stylized Surface' Shader	4
3.1.1. The Main Parameters of the Shader	5
3.1.2. The Additional Parameters of the Shader	8
3.2. 'Stylized Surface Cutout' Shader	9
3.3. 'Stylized Surface with Outline' Shader	9
3.4. 'Gradient Skybox' Shader	10
3.5. 'Terrain' Shader	11
3.6. 'LightPlane' Shader	12
4. Camera Image Effects	13
4.1. Fog Image Effect	13
4.2. Outline Image Effect	14
5. Additional scripts	15
5.1. UV Scroller	15
5.2. Constant Motion	15
6. Scenes	16
7. Presets	16

1. Quick Overview

Thank you for purchasing the Flat Kit. We hope it will bring you some serious streams of inspiration and suit your wide variety of design needs.

We've spent hundreds of hours to research, design and implement the right set of assets needed to achieve a slick minimalist look. We hope it works for your project out of the box. If you have questions after reading this guide, let us know at [hi @ dustyroom.com](mailto:hi@dustyroom.com).

To name Flat Kit a set of flat shaders, cel shaders or toon ones, would be a serious underestimation. Yes, these all can be easily done. As well as countless other (maybe unseen before) styles. It can be sharp flat, it can have one, two, nine steps of hard shadow, or soft-shaded, or gradient-shaded — with pale or acid colors, it can have three gradiental effects (when you start thinking out of the box, the parameter like 'Specular', usual for, well, a specularly or a glare, here can act as your fourth shadow, or a gradient etc).

In case you already use any other flat-looking shaders, you will still find a variety of useful tools for quick image processing. Particularly, later in the manual we'll overview the *Height Gradient mode* of the *Stylized Surface Shader*, the *Fog Image Effect* camera component, *LightPlane* shader effect etc. They have quite little related to toon or cell shading, but in conjunction with a stylish flat or cel look, they add a whole new life to your scene. Plus, they can be used out of context of non-photorealistic aesthetics. It is a spice that can dramatically make your dish sweeter (more tasty).

Flat Kit was made with optimized and fast workflow in mind, so that one could fulfill the picture popped up in the mind — as quick as possible, in various ways. This means:

- One task could be done in different ways. It is a multi-purpose set of shaders;
- Some outstanding graphical results can be achieved in minutes (given that you have your models ready, there are lots in FlatKit);
- There is always an element of you-didn't-think-it-can-be-done-this-way surprise thanks to FlatKit deep yet streamlined interface.

For example, let's take fog. Fog is usually a big part of any 3D environment, isn't it? There are lots of methods to implement fog into the scene, often complex and complicated. With Flat Kit, we decided to make it as convenient as possible for the user end. So, the fog can be done in two ways.

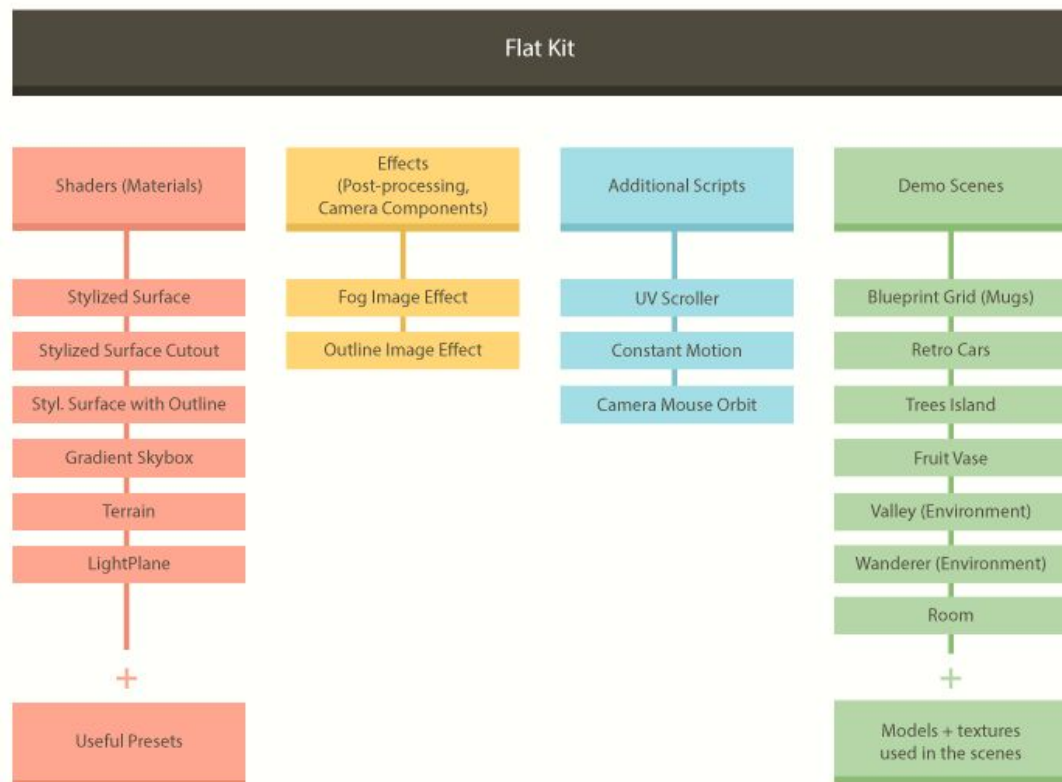
- Using **Fog Image Effect** post-effect / camera component
- Using **LightPlane** shader

We are going to explain how these work and what are they down in the manual. Both ways suit different needs, but they really do compliment each other.

Another example of multi-purpose nature of our shaders is cel shading itself. Now, it's going to take a whole chapter of this manual to elaborate on cel shading. For now it's only worth mentioning that same or similar results can be made using different parameters of the shader's interface.

It's important, because apart from the expected 'Cel Shade parameter', Flat Kit also has a bunch of additional settings to explore. Each additional parameter of the shader adds an extra dimension of possibilities. It's like having purple color paint, then you have red, and blue, and yellow. Purple is cool by itself and you already have it, but you can make it up by mixing blue and red. Or you can spare blue to match with yellow — to get green. In any case you get your purple, and also, simultaneously — other combinations, often surprising and inspiring. We'll talk about the importance of such a potential later in the manual.

One of the big advantages of using these shaders is the fact that you don't have to guess how the colors will look on your scene. If you want precision and accuracy — you have it. Moreover, if you want something unpredictable and you are trying to make your scene look different to spark your inspiration and imagination, but not sure how, you can do this too! Remember, this is a set of shaders selected to complement each other.



Flat Kit structural view

2. Quick start. Beginning to work with Flat Kit

Flat Kit is fully self-contained and does not depend on any external assets.

If you do not need demo scenes, example materials and models you may skip importing the Demos directory in the asset.

The easiest way to get started with the asset is to dig into the demo scenes.

It may take a while for Unity to import the asset — this is normal. Under the hood, Unity needs to generate all shader variants that are used in the demo scenes.

On 3D models side, it's important that you make normals 'smooth' for your meshes. If you import someone's else models and can't edit the object in 3D editor, at least try to calculate normals in Unity — in the import settings of the model. It should work anyway, but sometimes the difference can be obvious, especially on objects with rounded corners.

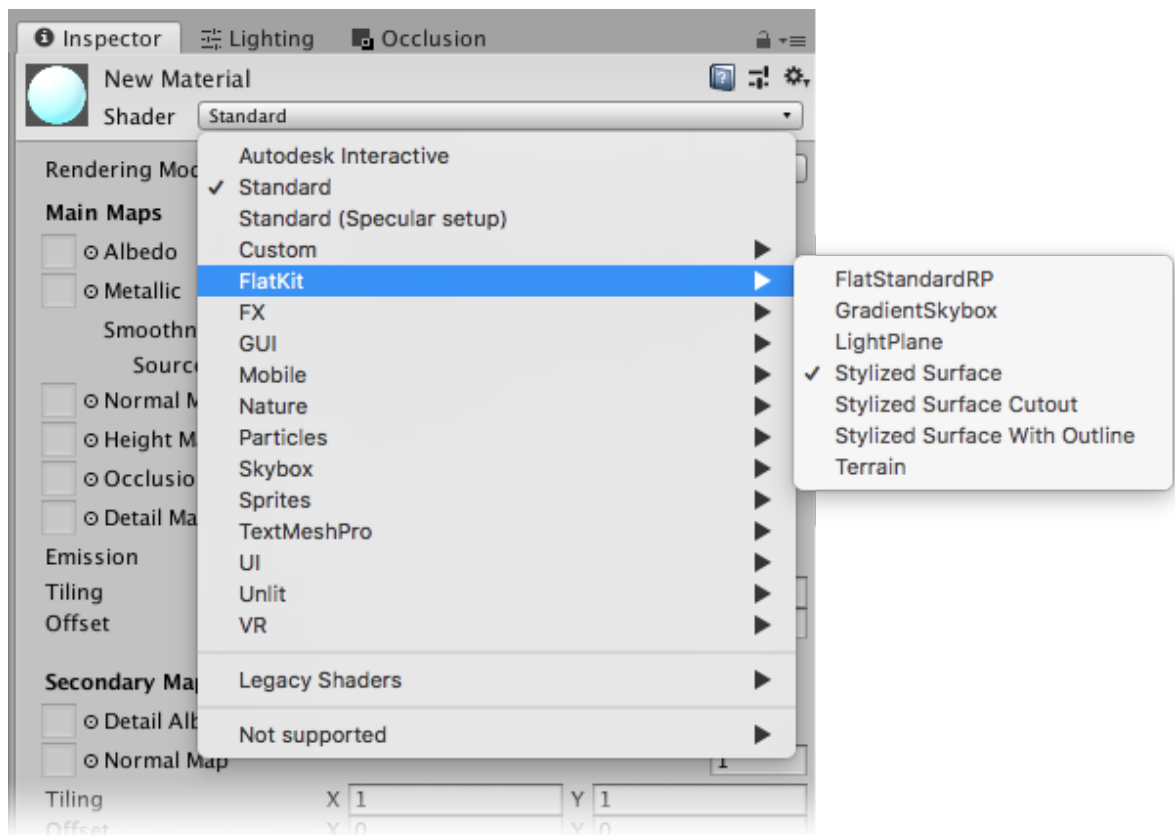
3. Shaders. In-Depth Overview

When you create a material, you'll choose a shader. By default, Unity has the standard shader picked up. Once installed, all Flat Kit material shaders are located under Flat Kit sub-menu of the Shader drop-down menu. Please choose the one that would work for your current task. Below is the description of all the shaders.

All object shaders in Flat Kit require Unity's **Standard Rendering Pipeline**. If your project requires a Scriptable Rendering Pipeline (**LWSRP** and **HDSRP**), please drop us a line at hi@dustyrooom.com.

Our shaders expose shading properties as material features. If a feature toggle is not activated on any materials in the build scenes, the portion of shader code for that feature is not included in the build.

At the moment, there are the following shaders included into Flat Kit: *Stylized Surface*, *Stylized Surface Cutout*, *Stylized Surface with Outline*, *Gradient Skybox*, *Terrain*, *LightPlane*.



Collection of shaders in Flat Kit. From a Shader drop-down, hover the FlatKit sub-menu and choose a shader

3.1. 'Stylized Surface' Shader

This is a versatile shader to be used on rigid object materials. To use it on a material select the shader "FlatKit/Stylized Surface" or "FlatKit/Stylized Surface Cutout". This is your main go-to shader. It works for the vast majority of cases.

Stylized Surface shader consists of the following **main** building blocks:

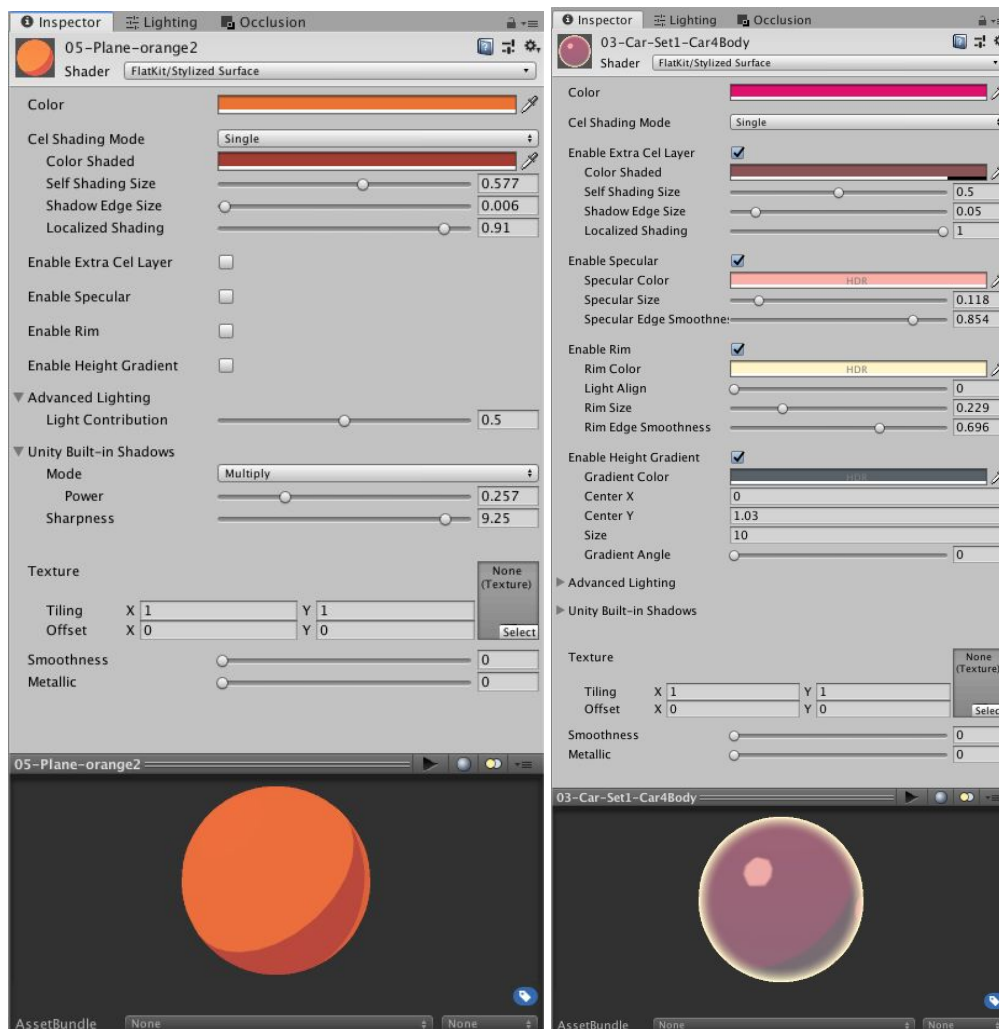
- Color,
- Cel Shading mode (None, Single [Cel], Steps, Gradient),
- Extra Cel layer,
- Specular,
- Rim,
- Height Gradient.

The **additional** parameters are:

- Advanced Lighting,
- Unity Built-in Shadows,
- Texture.

Note: Each combination of the features above, used in your project results in generating a **shader variant** during the build process. To limit the build time and the resulting binary size be careful not to add unuseful feature combinations. On the other hand, this mechanism makes sure that only the used features are included in the build. More information on shader variants:

<https://docs.unity3d.com/Manual/SL-MultipleProgramVariants.html>



'Stylized Surface' shader in Single mode. Simple use case on the left, more options engaged on the right

3.1.1. The Main Parameters of the Shader

Color. This would be the color of your mesh (applicable to most cases, though you can make shader's other parameters override or mask this main color, if you wish so).

Cel Shading Mode. This is where you choose the style (mode) of your shading, the color of the shading, and other respective parameters of the modes. Depending on the mode you choose the parameters will look differently. So, let's talk modes.

- **None.** Use this to achieve simple flat look or to get any other creative picture not involving cel shading, however, the following parameters of Stylized Surface shader will still let you do this, if you choose so.

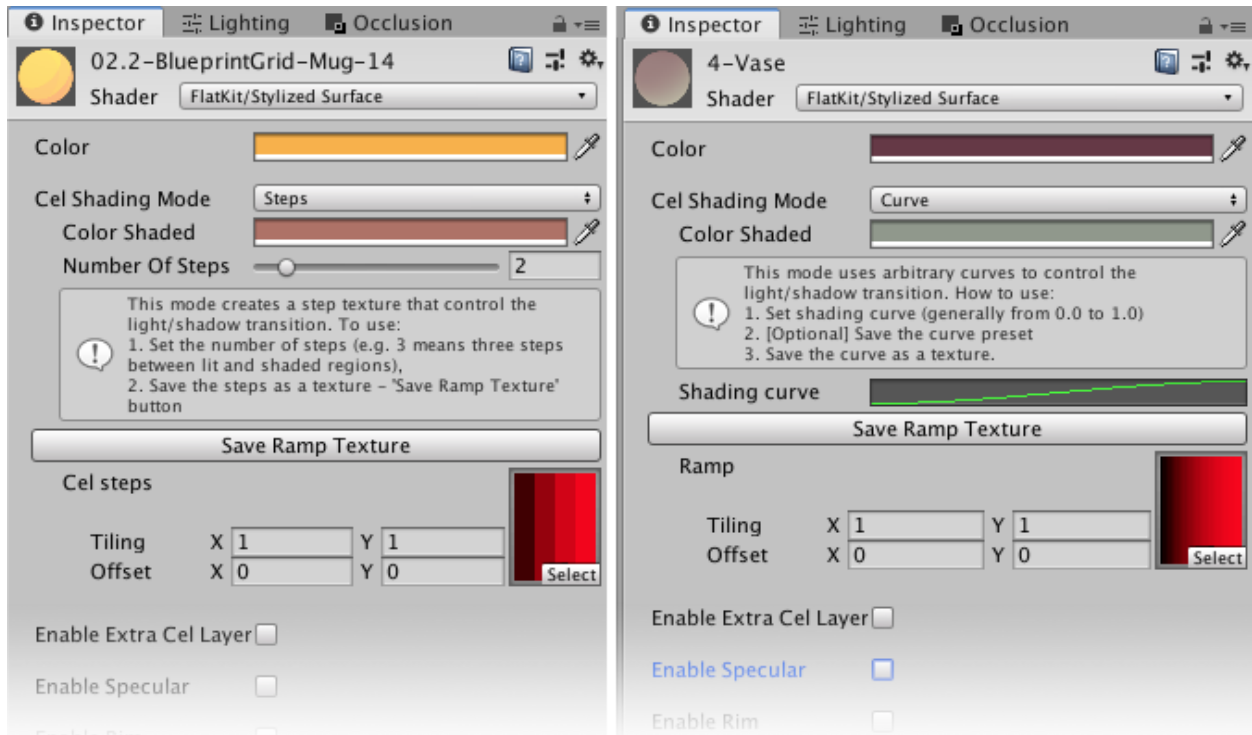
Note, the flatness and actual representation of colors on the scene depend on the lighting of the scene. In our demos we use Skybox as the source of lighting. Conveniently, there is a Dependency slider on the Lighting panel of Unity, which tells how much of the influence the Skybox provides. On minimum, there won't be any shadows, as well as the colors will be identical to those you would choose in **Color** block of the shader. On maximum, the Skybox heavily dictates what the colors will look like. For more natural (not necessarily realistic — but natural, *organic* look of the scene, it's healthy to let Skybox influence the coloring of the scene).

- **Single.** This mode provides you with one shadow of chosen *Color*. *Self Shading Size* is the size of the cel. Larger values mean larger size of the shadow. *Shadow Edge Size* controls

sharpness of the cel. The lower the value — the sharper the cel. The higher the value — the more blurry is the shadow. *Localized Shading* is basically how condensed the shadow is. Higher values represent sharper cel.

- **Steps.** Basically, you choose the shading color and number of steps to blend from main Color into the color you pick up in Steps mode.
- **Curve.** The gradient, interpolated transition from one color to another.

In order to get *Steps* and *Curve* modes to work — as soon as you have number of steps (*Steps* mode) or curve shape (*Curve* mode) chosen — the shader will ask you to save its utility ramp texture somewhere on the disk. It will write the transition onto it. The texture will appear red in the editor. This is because internally we use the R8 texture format for efficiency.



Steps (on the left) and Curve (on the right) Shading Modes of Stylized Surface shader. Inspector interface

Extra Cel Layer. This is like another instance of **Single** Cel Shading mode. Works independently from the main **Cel Shading Mode**. It means, you can make main Cel shading as **None** (flat), and add an **Extra Cel Layer**. The result will be the same as if you would have used the **Single** mode. Or, make main Cel layer and Extra Cel Layer almost identical, giving an Extra Layer a darker color, and making it smaller. This would result in stepping, similar to **Steps** mode with 1 step.

Specular. You can make a, well, specular with this parameter. Also it can be used as another layer of shadow.



Specular. Inspector interface

Specular Color picks up the color of your glare, the parameter works in HDR. *Specular Size* determines how big the specular is. Higher values mean bigger specular. *Specular Edge Smoothness* — moving slider to the left decreases blurriness and makes specular sharper.

Rim. Rim was designed as a way to make outlines.



Rim. Inspector interface

You can think of Rim as some kind of inner shadow and/or as inner glow. In one of the **Fruit Vase** demo scene, there is an example of extensive use of Rim as outline. On **Blueprint Grid** demo scene Rim is used as smooth inner glow. This parameter can be used creatively, for example, to substitute Curve mode or Extra Cel parameter. Just reminding you that the name of any parameter should not be perceived literally, most of them have many use cases. On the screenshot below with help of Suzanne the Blender Monkey we tried to show a few instances of Stylized Surface shader with *None* mode selected (meaning no straightforward shadows are applied), using orange color, and only Rim parameter enabled. The results are variations of Rim section only. Imagine to add some creative Specular and Height Gradient...



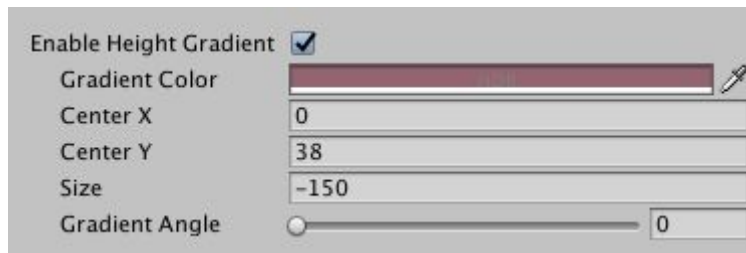
Variety of uses of Rim parameter alone on Suzanne the Blender Monkey. Interface of Stylized Surface shader with 'None' cel shading mode

Rim Color selects the color of the parameter. It works in HDR. *Light Align* parameter rotates the rim. *Rim Size* controls how big the Rim is. Very high values can serve you as an unlit effect. *Rim Edge Smoothness* — moving slider to the left sharpens the Rim, to the right — makes Rim blurry.

Although *Rim* option is creatively useful, there are two more obvious ways to add an outline using Flat Kit: to use '**Stylized Surface with Outline**' shader and/or to use '**Outline Image Effect**' camera component. We'll talk about them both later in this manual.

TIP. Animate Cel layer size, Specular size or Rim size — to get a neat transition effect.

Height Gradient. This effect overlays a gradient from opaque selected color to transparent color onto everything you've set before. Height Gradient is absolute, it depends on the position of the object on the scene. If you would like to make a relative height gradient, duplicate a material and adjust the height gradient.



Height Gradient. Inspector interface

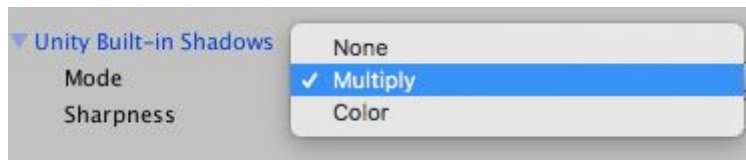
Gradient Color picks the parameter's own color to fade into from transparency. **Center X** and **Y** are initial points from where the effect takes effect. Adjust these to move the gradient across the scene. **Center X** is useful if you engaged **Gradient Angle**, which means the rotation of the Gradient. **Size** determines how steep the transition of Gradient is. The further the value is from 0 (zero) — the more gradual the effect is. Negative values flip the Gradient.

More about the nature and use of **Height Gradient** is covered in '**Terrain**' **Shader** section of this manual (chapter. 3.4).

3.1.2. The Additional Parameters of the Shader

Advanced Lighting (Light Contribution). Light Contribution defines how much the lights of the scene impact the color of the object. The value of 0.0 results in completely ignoring scene lights, the value of 1.0 results in full multiplication between scene light color and the object color.

Unity Built-in Shadows. If the object has 'Receive Shadows' option turned on in Mesh Renderer, you have an ability to use Unity-processed shadows, as you would do in Unity Standard Material shader, with a few extra-options.



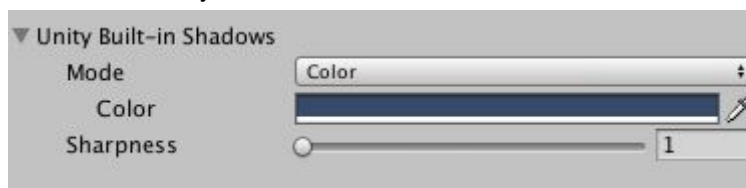
Unity Built-in Shadows mode menu. Inspector interface

First, you have to select what mode to work with.

None mode turns the Built-in shadow parameter off.

Multiply mode lets you cast shadows as in default material. You don't have direct control over the color. You can change intensity and sharpness.

Color mode lets you choose the color of the casted shadow.



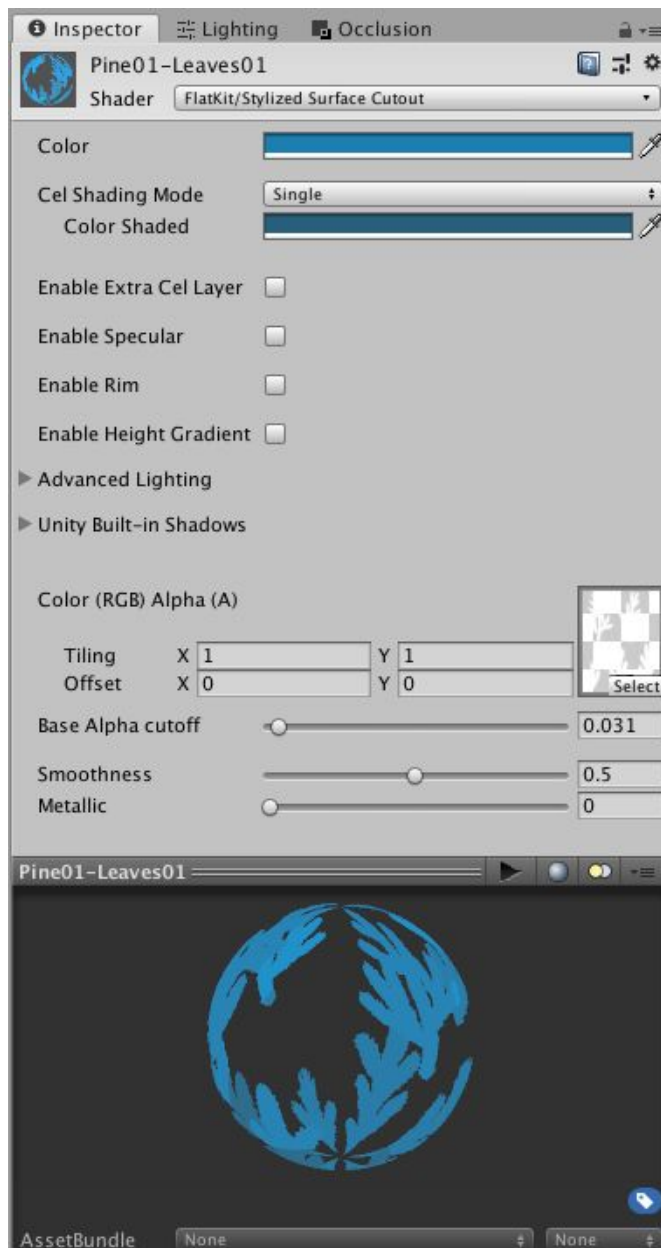
Height Gradient in Color mode. Inspector interface

Texture. If you've got a UV-unwrapped mesh, you can add a texture to it. If you work with transparency in textures, please use **Stylized Shader Cutout** shader. It can see alpha on the texture as transparency.

3.2. 'Stylized Surface Cutout' Shader

This is a version of Stylized Surface shader with an option to treat alpha as transparency on a texture. The rest of the shader is the same.

The *Base Alpha cutout* parameter determines how much of alpha portion of the texture is going to be transparent.



'Stylized Surface Cutout' shader — Valley demo scene, trees branches material. Inspector interface

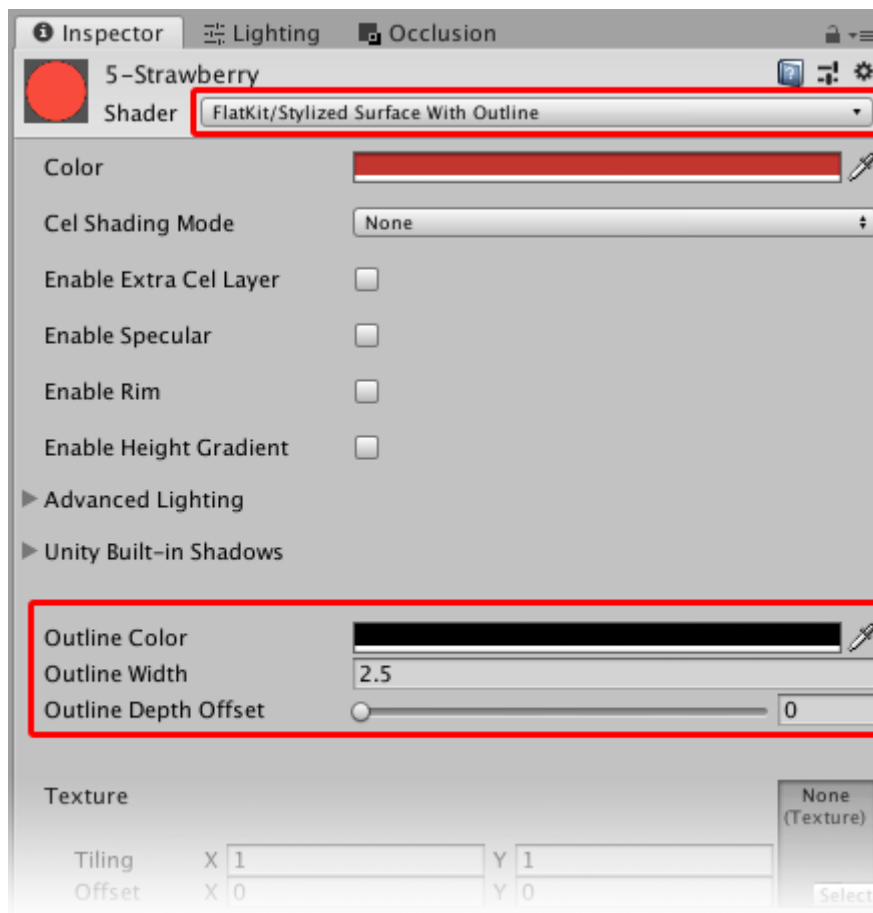
3.3. 'Stylized Surface with Outline' Shader

'Stylized Surface with Outline' shader, being the same as the regular 'Stylized Surface' shader in a nutshell, has an additional option of... outlines.

Outline Color picks up the color of an outline. *Outline Width* determines how thick the outline is.

Outline Depth Offset moves the outline inwards or outwards an object.

Please note that the width is absolute to the scene, meaning, it won't scale depending on the distance from an object to the camera. Objects closer to the camera will have an outline of the same width as the more distant ones, of course, if they share the same material.



'Stylized Surface with Outline' shader

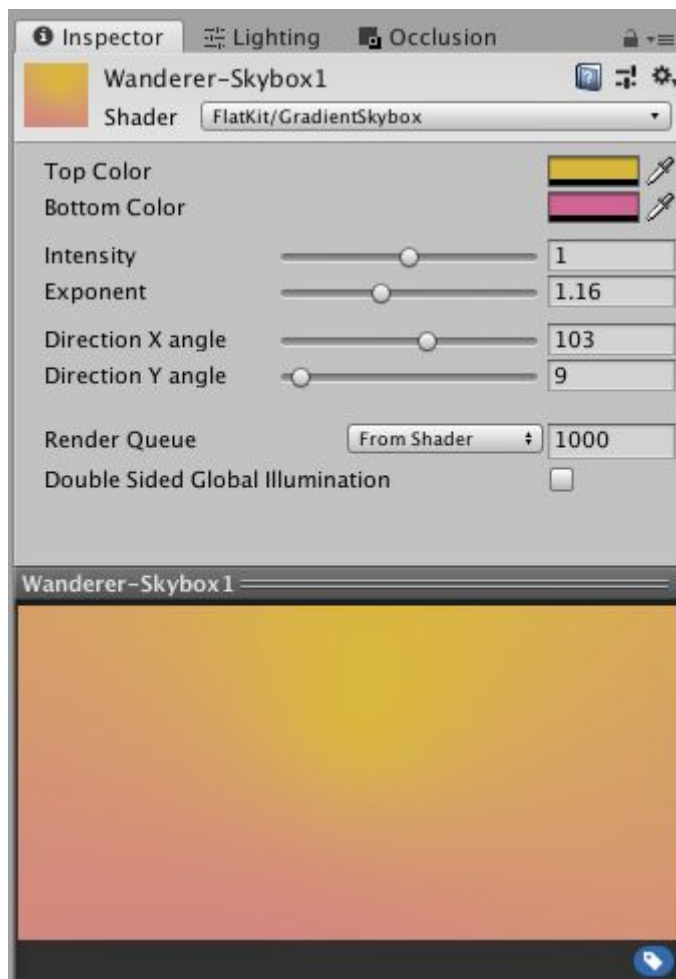
3.4. 'Gradient Skybox' Shader

This is a simple method to fill the sky of your scene.

Top Color and *Bottom Color* define two colors to be blended. *Intensity* is a darkness/brightness controller. *Exponent* accentuates the effect in favour of either *Top Color* or *Bottom Color*. *Direction X angle* and *Direction Y angle* rotate the effect along corresponding axis.

Make *Top Color* and *Bottom Color* identical colors or move *Exponent* parameter to one of the extremes if you want a flat background.

Intensity is brightness of the skybox.



Gradient Skybox. Inspector panel interface.

3.5. 'Terrain' Shader

Terrains are great in Unity. But it's not so trivial to work with terrain materials, that is why we added a separate shader that deals with Unity Terrain system.

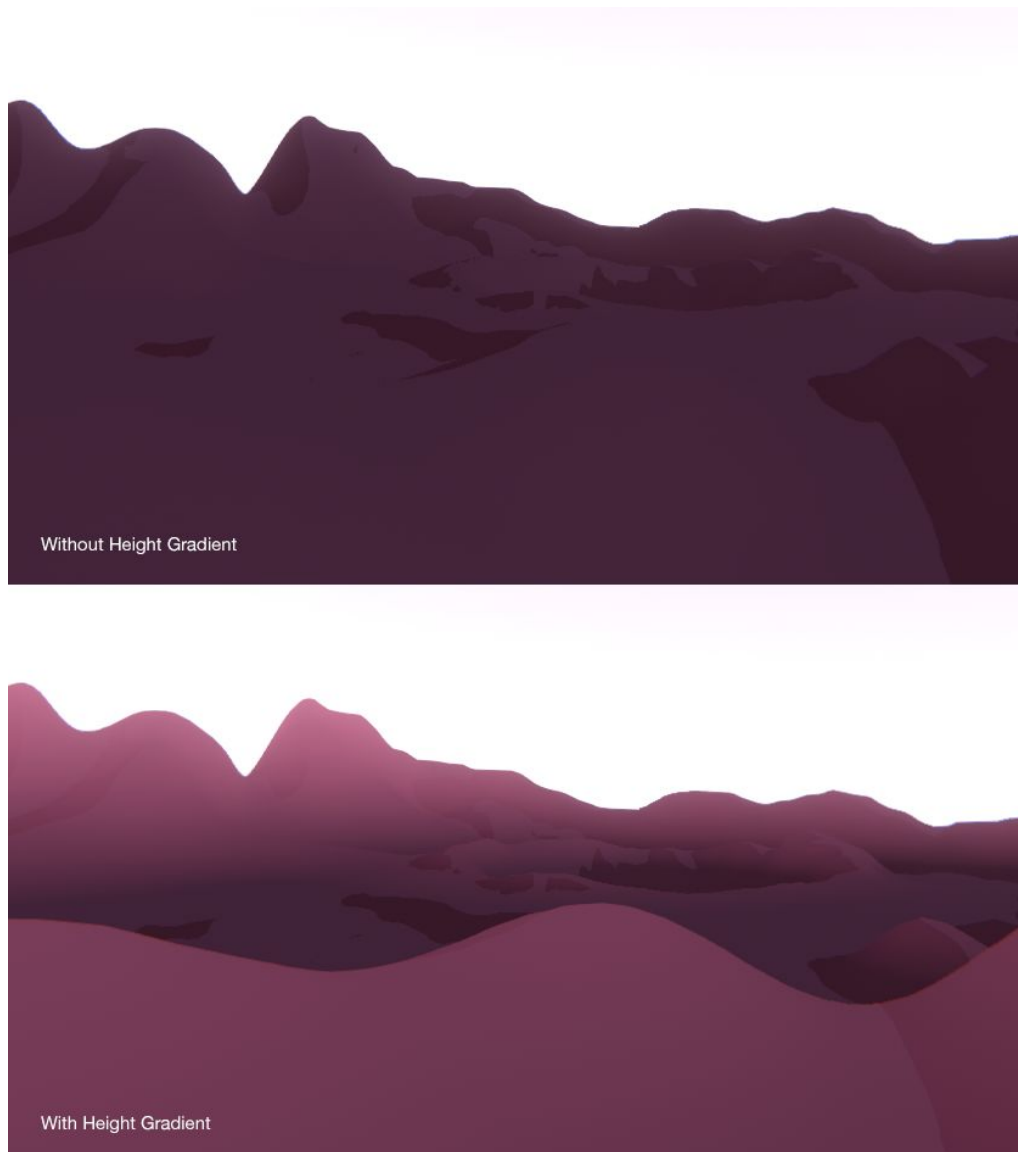
If you are not familiar with Unity Terrains, please refer to their documentation. In two words, terrain uses Terrain Layers, something like containers of all textures — diffuse, normal, bump etc. FlatKit Terrain shader sees those textures and applies own colors onto the layers. Since we are talking about flat look, no normal or bump maps are required. In order to have a full control over colors of the terrain, you can load a plain white texture as your terrain layer (on **Valley demo scene** we did so). All the colors will be available from the shader interface, they will be multiplied with your white texture, resulting in pure color you choose. If you are already familiar with Stylized Surface shader, Terrain shader interface won't be news to you.

This is an appropriate time to talk about Height Gradient parameter FlatKit offers. You can use it as a part of Stylized Surface, Stylized Surface Cutout and Terrain shaders. Height Gradient works wonders on terrain in context of flat shading.

Usually flat shaded landscape objects lack organic embellishment the real world has. All extra-shadows, small scale details, big and tiny grunge spots etc make the picture nonlinear to our eyes, thus, interesting, engaging. With flat aesthetics — there is a color, there may be a shadow or shadows, maybe a few models for the more natural look. The result — quite boring scene. If you want more polished look, you'll want to fight linearity, with Height Gradient coming handy. It stretches the interpolation between transparency and its own color along vertical axis (by default) and multiplies the gradient over the colors you already have. You can rotate the direction, so that it is no longer vertical but diagonal, horizontal and all in-between.

This effect changes the scene dramatically. Now, the terrain has its shadow work you set on the interface, and on top of that there is a gradient, subtle or obvious. Immediately, it adds depth and more professional look to the scene.

If you work on some kind of an environmental landscape object but do not use Unity Terrain, please use Stylized Surface shader. Height Gradient is available there too.

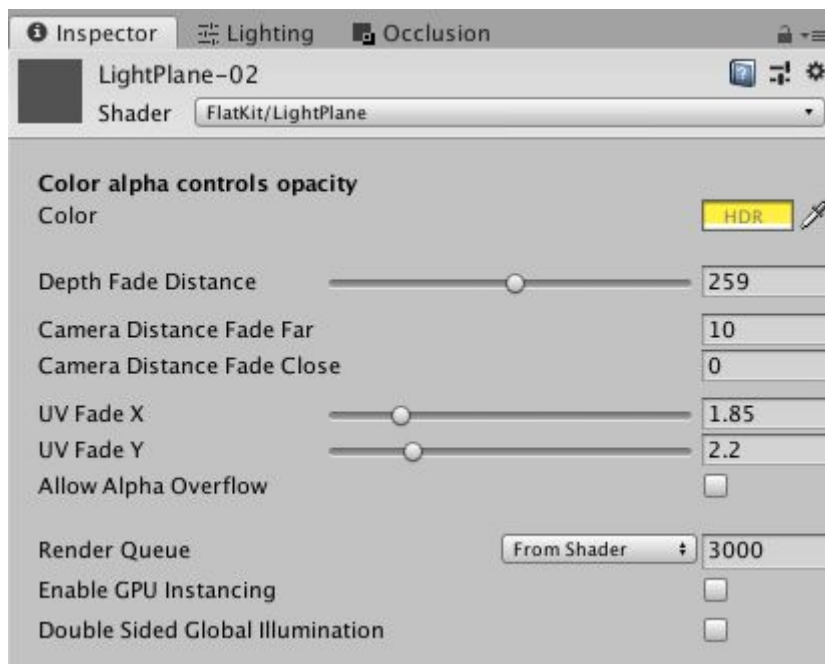


Height Gradient on Unity Terrain (without on upper image, with — on lower one). Valley Demo Scene

3.6. 'LightPlane' Shader

This shader is what we are particularly proud of. It looks like a small tool. But it has unmeasurable possibilities. Fog, mist, delicate scene boundaries, light beams, glow of magic swords, laser beams. These things are what LightPlane is for.

Wanderer scene includes LightPlane shader implemented not only as fog areas, but also as light beams of so-called pick-up objects and even as planets. One of the Valley scenes has got LightPlane shader as floating air particles thanks to Unity particle system.



LightPlane Shader. Inspector panel interface

4. Camera Image Effects

Both Fog and Outline image effects rely on image-based anti-aliasing, like the one in Unity's Post-processing stack.

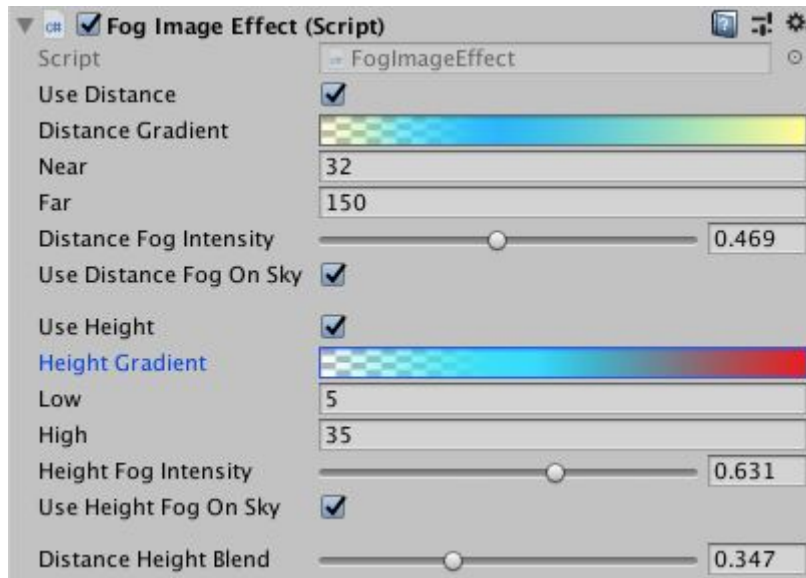
4.1. Fog Image Effect

Fog Image Effect camera component can be reviewed as a post-processing effect. It can be subtle, like a mist in the lower part of the valley, or a dominant effect, as in completely hazed environment. Simply put, it works in the following way. You decide whether you need only length fog or height fog or both. Then you determine the bounds where it would take an effect. Then you choose colors along each dimension. And after that, blend between distance and height. This effect starts from camera position up to the Near/Far, Low/High bounds, meaning, your camera is the zero coordinate from where the fog spreads. Each camera on the scene can have a separate independent instance of an effect.

Because Unity's MSAA (multi-sample anti-aliasing, which is an option in the Quality Settings of your project) does not apply to depth texture, there may be inconsistencies between the anti-aliased color image and the unprocessed depth image. This may look as aliasing if fog intensity is set to a high value. **Such artifacts may only occur if using MSAA**, so we recommend using screen-space anti-aliasing, such as in Unity's post-processing stack that you can import by going to Window - Package Manager in Unity 2018+.

When you click on any of the the color ramps (Distance or Height Gradient), the Gradient Editor pops up.

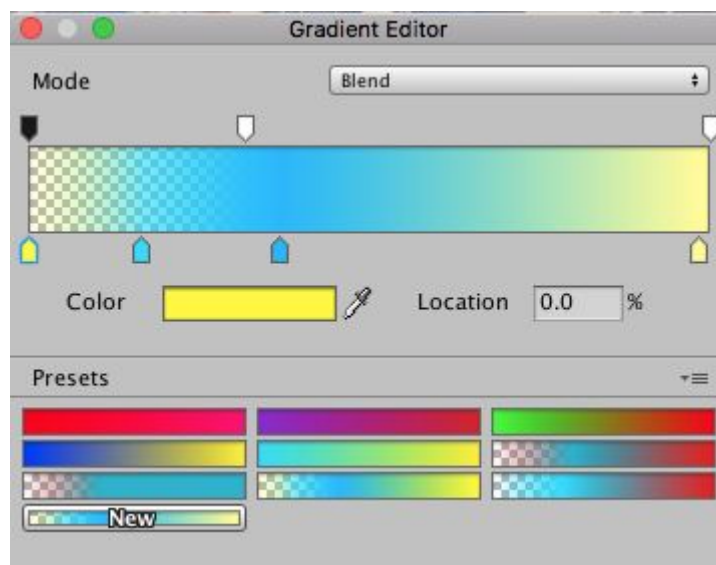
Fog Image Effect is being used in Wanderer demo scene (more subtle) and Valley Demo scenes (more accentuated). For the Valley demo scenes we prepared a couple of presets to be found in the demo scene folder.



Fog Image Effect. Inspector panel interface

Gradient editor controls the colors of the gradient. To open it, click on Distance Gradient or Height Gradient. The bottom row of breakpoints (pointing up) is the selection of the colors. The above row (pointing down) controls opacity of the area it points at; opacity value of one breakpoint fades into the opacity value of the adjacent one. Same for colors.

TIP. If you want the area close to you to be without fog, apart from increasing *Near* parameter, you can open up the color ramp(s), add a breakpoint next to the leftmost one on the ramp, select leftmost one, make it transparent (see screenshot of Gradient Editor below). The breakpoint you created (opaque, next to the transparent one) becomes your distance or height control.



Fog Image Effect. Gradient Editor interface.

4.2. Outline Image Effect

Outline Image effect is, essentially, a contour on the objects on the scene. It can draw outer outlines, inner ones or both outer and inner outlines of the objects.

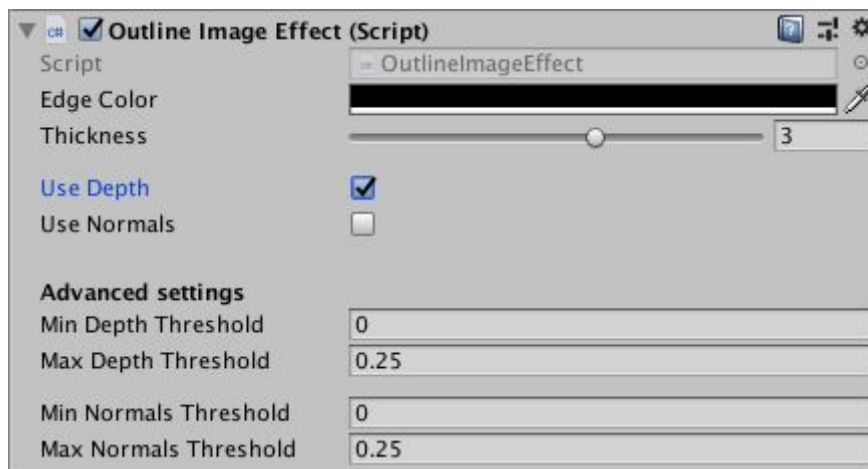
Edge Color is a color of an outline. *Thickness* makes outline thicker or thinner.

Use Depth parameter outlines the outer contour of the objects with depth threshold control.

Use Normals creates outlines for “inner” parts of the objects, meaning, for those that are inside the boundaries of the object, for every the given camera perspective. The effect depends on the geometry of an object. So, having proper normals here is important. There is a normals threshold control.

Min Depth Threshold and *Max Depth Threshold* determine the range of depth differences where outline should be applied. Lower values draw lines “inside” the scene resulting in more beveled image. Higher values have more flat effect.

Min Normals Threshold and *Max Normals Threshold* determine the range of normals edges to be outlined. Lower values increase amount of effected normals, leading to more stroked effect. Higher values decrease amount of effected normals, leading to flatter look.



Outline Image Effect. Inspector interface.

Please, note that *Outline Image Effect* is a global effect, as it is used as the camera component, which is suitable for a consistent look of your project. If you would like to outline a particular object on your scene, you can engage the shader instead — **‘Stylized Surface with Outline’ shader**.

5. Additional scripts

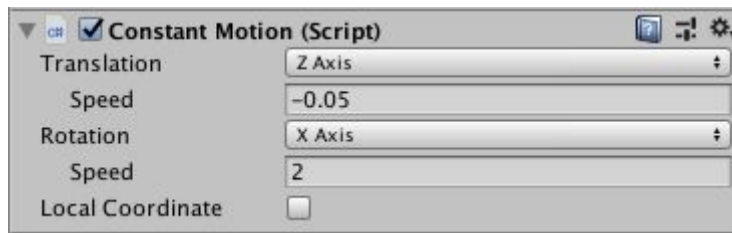
5.1. UV Scroller

Used in Wander demo scene. It scrolls waterfall texture along the Y axis.

5.2. Constant Motion

Constant Motion is a simple script that translates (moves) and rotates any object. We used it heavily on cameras to prepare promo video footage. There is an option to translate or rotate along X, Y, Z axis, to the vector coordinate or randomly.

TIP. Use a couple of instances of this component if you want to translate and rotate along more than one axis and make more complex automations.



Constant motion script. Inspector interface.

6. Scenes

We tried to depict the big spectrum of possibilities using various scenes. They are one of ten million examples of possible Flat Kit use cases. Consider viewing them as starting points or macro-preset objects for your own project.

Valley, Wanderer scenes are environmental. There we tried to show the work of both fog systems of Flat Kit. Also it is one of perspectives of displaying the shaders — how these would look in large scene.

Valley uses Terrain shader and transparent textures inside Stylized Surface Cutout shader. Valley demo scene is also an example of obvious, rather than subtle, use of **Fog Image Effect**. Once the scene is loaded, you can scan through the Fog Image Effect presets to find which one you like more. There is a Presets chapter later in this manual with explanation how to use them.

Blueprint Grid (Mugs) and **Fruit Vase** scenes are an exhibition of most sought use cases of cel / toon shading.

However, you can find there more experimental stuff too. It has been a temptation to overpopulate the scenes with content, because during making these included materials — literally dozens of interesting by-product or work-in-progress materials showed up, but we had to discard them to keep the scenes clean.

Blueprint Grid is a descriptive one, there is a text telling what we had used to get the displayed materials.

Fruit Vase is actually the collection of scenes. There is one vase with fruits across all scenes and each scene is dedicated to some specific look, thus uses different set of materials.

Tree Island scene is a showcase of more cartoony use case. Imagine 3d-platform game with such a look. Or Any other arcade game.

Room. We just had to include a room.

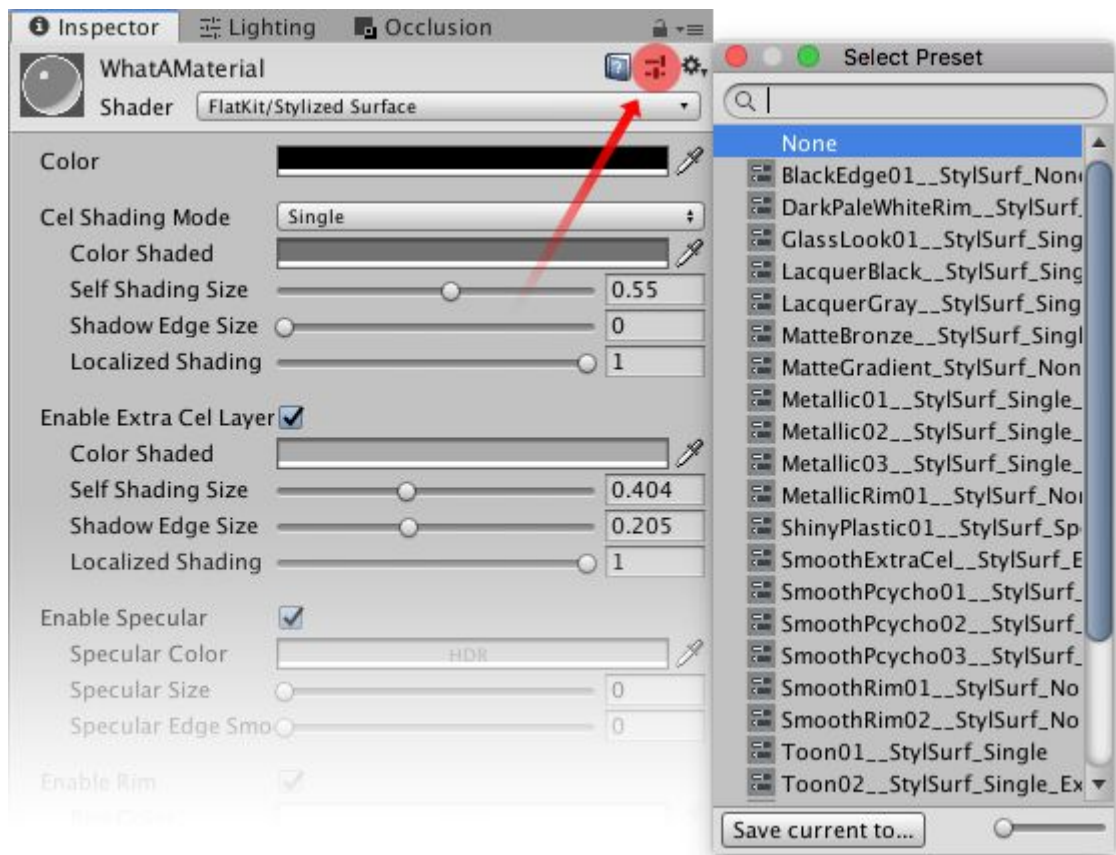
Retro Cars. Retro cars are curvy. What a possibility to show how shiny (or rough) the shaders can be.

7. Presets

Unity has its own Preset management system. The preset is the saved current state of the shader, in our case, the Flat Kit material. The presets are available across scenes and can be saved whenever you want inside the current project. For convenience, we saved the most useful presets inside shared presets folder (*Assets/FlatKit/PresetsShared*).

In Flat Kit you can find presets as *.mat Material instances (that you can drag and drop on the objects) and *.preset Unity Presets (saved states of shaders that you can recall from interface of already applied materials). The sets are identical. Unity presets (*.preset) are great when you have a material (*.mat) applied to lots of objects and you want to swap it with a preset you already have.

To save the preset, select the material or an object with this material you want to save, click on the 'mixer' icon on top right of the shader interface on the Inspector panel. Then, the menu will pop up. Click 'Save Current to...'. Then you choose the destination. Once created, you can move the actual file wherever you would like. All presets within a project will show up in the 'Select Preset' menu.



Preset menu. How to load.

Save, recall, experiment, discard bad results, save great results, all by using Unity's preset system. You can A/B this way and share the shader's parameters across multiple separate materials. Scan through them and once you stumble upon something close to what you are looking for, adjust the one.

TIP. Naming the preset files as descriptive as possible is a gratifying practice. It would save your time later when you gather lots of them. It would be easier to navigate through them and distinguish between them, and also the proper names would remind you what you had in mind at the moment of saving the preset. Just look at the screenshot below.