



# An Overview of Photo Editing Software

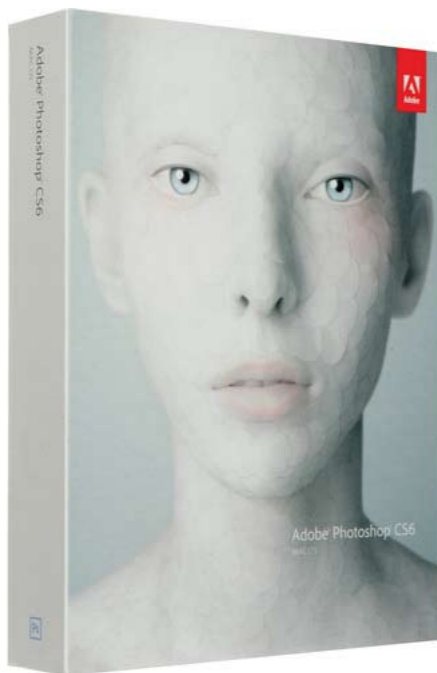
Text by Matthew Meier. Product images courtesy of the manufacturers

**Creating photos in this digital age requires postproduction computer work to get the most out of your images. In days of old, post processing meant time in the darkroom developing film and then perhaps hours spent massaging the final print under an enlarger. The techniques may have changed but the concept is the same. The real question is where do you start?**

There are many options on the market that vary from easy to complicated, expensive to free of charge, and your choice will depend on your level of expertise and/or expectation. This article is by no means meant to be a definitive glossary of photo editing software but more of an overview of several of the top players at various levels on the spectrum.

## Adobe Photoshop

For a large majority of professionals in the photo world, Adobe Photoshop is the image software of choice. It works with both PCs and Macs and is currently available as a stand-alone or cloud-based application. Though it appears as though the future will be limited to a subscription based in the cloud.



Currently, Photoshop is available at US\$9.99 per month for subscribers and a one-time cost of \$649 for the previous CS6 stand-alone version.

As the most expensive option on the market, it stands to reason, that this is also the most feature rich and powerful image editing tool out there. The software allows for global and localized adjustments, innumerable effects, layering, and the ability to process RAW files, plus the organization of photos through Bridge.

Photoshop is also complex, requiring ample time and effort to master. There

are incredible resources at your disposal for that knowledge gathering, including online tutorials, forums, books and classes. However, this learning curve and/or price tag may not be suitable for everyone. [www.adobe.com/products/photoshop.html](http://www.adobe.com/products/photoshop.html)



## Photoshop Elements

At a more reasonable price of \$99.99, Adobe Photoshop Elements is a simpler version of the flagship model. The software contains similar features, though less in number and also works

on Macs and PCs. It offers global and localized adjustments, the ability to process RAW files, sharing to social media sites and is easier to use.

Numerous video tutorials and online forums help with the learning curve, but there is still effort involved in mastering this application. To help they have added several one-

step enhancement shortcuts, which are aimed at helping the less-experienced user obtain desired results more quickly. [www.adobe.com/products/photoshop-elements.html](http://www.adobe.com/products/photoshop-elements.html)

## Corel Paint Shop Pro

In a similar vane, Corel's Paintshop Pro will run you around \$79.99 but only works on Windows-based PC's. It offers RAW, HDR and plug-in support with 64-bit performance. The software has a wide array of editing tools including layers, brushes, quick selection and vector tools. Like Elements, Paintshop Pro has a shortcut feature they call Smart Photo Fixes, which are suggested corrections that may be accepted and/

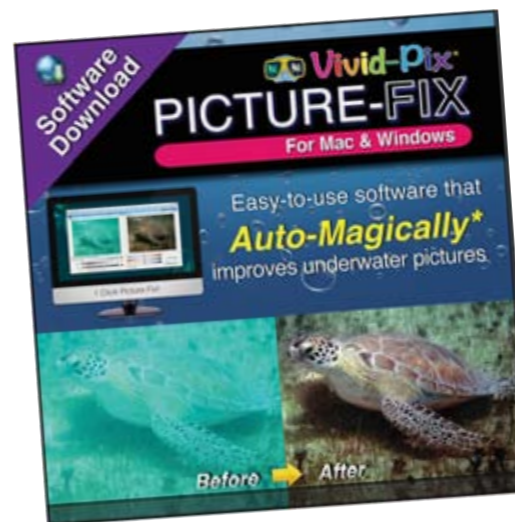


While Picture-Fix will work on topside photographs, its strength lies in improving the exposure, contrast and color of underwater images. The software is incredibly easy to use and upon import, offers a nine-window preview of possible corrections to the original photo. Once selected, the improved photo may be further fine-tuned by adjusting a handful of sliders, in a side by side

display with the original image. At this time, there are no localized adjustments, layering, metadata or text overlay available, and the software only supports the processing of JPG files. All edits are non-destructive, and the final adjusted photo is saved as a new file, leaving the original untouched. New features, just released, allow control of sharpness and crop, and the website contains a video and FAQ section with the full overview of the software. While a bit limited in scope by comparison to the other options listed here, Vivid-Pix is a great tool for the budding underwater photographer looking to improve the look of their pictures. [www.vivid-pix.com](http://www.vivid-pix.com)

## VividPix Picture-Fix

One of the newest options on the market is designed specifically for amateur underwater photographers. Vivid-Pix's Picture-Fix software works on both Mac's and PC's and costs \$49.99 for the online download.



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### Google Picasa

There are several free image editing software on the market, and one of the easier to use is Google Picasa. It works on Windows, Mac and Linux systems but currently offers no iCloud support. Picasa does support RAW images and has an array of photo effects, plus features like geo and name tagging along with facial recognition. The software is intuitive, has good organization tools and offers side by side editing to compare changes made from the original file. Picasa contains an extensive online help system and is designed for easy sharing of photos on Google+ and social networks. [picasa.google.com](http://picasa.google.com)

### Gimp

Another free option with near Photoshop-like image editing capabilities is called Gimp. It also works on Windows, Mac and Linux systems but is considerably more complicated to use than Picasa. Gimp supports RAW images, plus layering and plug ins. It offers a vast array of photo effects but in a less intuitive and cramped interface. There are tutorials on the Gimp website and online forums to reference for questions. For capabilities resembling Photoshop, at none of the cost, this software may be worth the learning curve and inherent quirks. [www.gimp.org](http://www.gimp.org)

### Photo Mechanic

Another major player at the profes-



sional level is software called Photo Mechanic. It works on Macs and PCs but does not process RAW files or even edit photographs. Photo Mechanic is a fast import, preview, selection, organization and metadata tool. It

offers direct upload to standard services and exports to other applications for editing. The software uses unconventional terminology, so there is a bit of a learning curve to using it, however, many pros consider Photo Mechanic invaluable

for the speed at which it helps them sort through mountains of images after returning from a job. The current price online is \$150. [www.camerabits.com/products](http://www.camerabits.com/products)

### Apple Aperture

Last but not least on the list are two programs that not only aid in image editing, but also do a masterful job of keeping track of your photo library. The first is Apple Aperture, which is a Mac only software that is listed at \$79.99. It offers local and global adjustments, support of RAW files, numerous effects and multimedia sharing, while being fully integrated with Apple's iPhoto. Aperture automatically shares photos



on the web through Photo Stream and furthermore allows for the creation of photo books. Like Photo Mechanic, some of the terminology used is a bit different, but there are many online tutorials and forums to aid in the educational process. As in most of these programs, images must first be imported into Aperture before use, and they are then stored according to folders. Unfortunately, that filing structure itself is hidden from the user, and in my opinion, is one of the pitfalls of this system when trying to retrieve images. It is not possible to look on the hard drive for a folder of images, so the only way to access them is through Aperture. That being said, this program offers a great many more features than most others in this price range and should not be dismissed. [www.apple.com/aperture](http://www.apple.com/aperture)

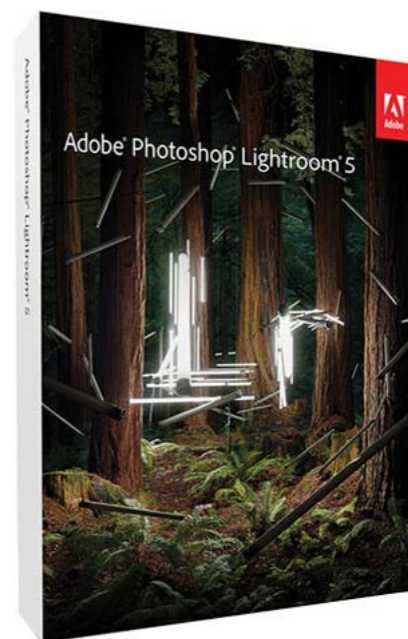
### Photoshop Lightroom

The final software offering is Adobe Photoshop Lightroom. It is currently obtainable as a stand-alone application for \$149 and in conjunction with Photoshop as a subscription from the cloud. Lightroom runs on both Macs and PCs and will process RAW files. In fact, it

uses the same RAW processing engine as Photoshop and is fully integrated for advanced editing techniques as well. All adjustments are non-destructive and include both global and local changes.

The vast majority of Photoshop tools necessary for image enhancements are available in Lightroom, save layers and some specific localized adjustments. In fact, many photographers use Lightroom for most of their image corrections and edit in Photoshop only when necessary.

Additionally, Lightroom keeps track of all of your images, regardless of whether or not they are on your computer or external hard drive. It has an excellent printing interface, creates slideshows, exports to the web and also allows for book creation through Blurb.



This is an incredibly versatile tool, but its immense array of features certainly requires time and energy to understand. Lightroom has an extensive built-in help system, plus a plethora of online tutorials, forums, books and classes to assist in that process. [www.adobe.com/products/photoshop-lightroom.html](http://www.adobe.com/products/photoshop-lightroom.html)

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Gimp running on Linux system