

PixBuilder Studio

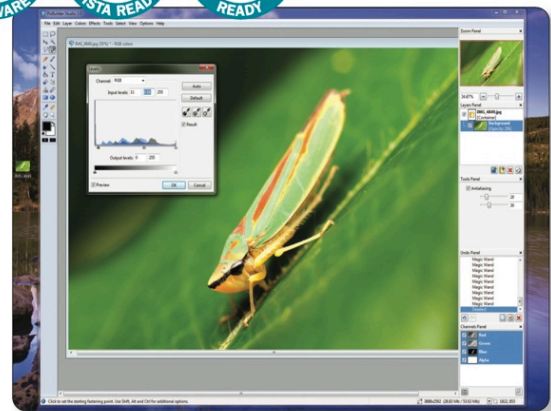
- Layers support
- Levels adjustment
- Magnetic lasso tool
- Clone stamp

It seems the world of free is taking over and the large companies are under attack from open source and smaller companies who are giving their software away for free. This doesn't really apply to the world of photo editing yet though. As Adobe Photoshop has attained such market penetration and technological wizardry that free programs aren't a significant threat. Nonetheless PixBuilder Studio provides a piece of free photo editing software. It would be unfair to compare free software to Photoshop, so we will judge it on its merits. Can you perform basic photo editing operations and does it do a reasonable job of the basics?

When you launch the software the

usual suspects are there, the photo tools on the left, layers tools and channels on the right. So at first glance you can see they have created a GUI that functions in a familiar way for a user of Photoshop or GIMP. The layers panel is extremely welcome as it immediately means that you can create composite images from different pictures and cut pieces out of a picture and move them around. You can also show or hide a layer by simply adding or removing a tick from the box next to it. You can set a layers opacity too although it is hidden in a menu, so you need to right-click on the layers and select Properties to access it.

The other mainstay of photo editing is altering curves and levels. For the uninitiated this is effectively altering the brightness of different tonal ranges of the picture. The levels adjustment is in the standard form displaying a histogram of the picture and allowing you to move the

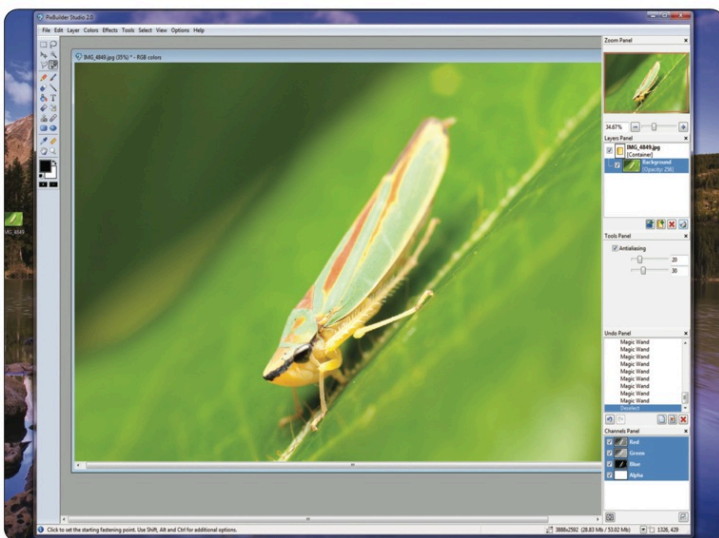


▲ *The levels adjustment works well and is an essential step in any photo editing workflow*

black, white and midpoint sliders. Unusually for free software it also allows you to do this in the picture itself using the dropper, just like Photoshop. The levels tool provides an instant preview and adjustment can be performed on the full RGB spectrum or individually for each colour channel. This is all very well done and familiar, good stuff. The curves tool is functional and does the job. It is a little bit harsh for our taste as it does not bend the curve as much as it could to ensure natural tonal changes. However, the results are still the same, you just have to remember not to make wildly huge changes in one part of the tone curve without balancing them somewhere else.

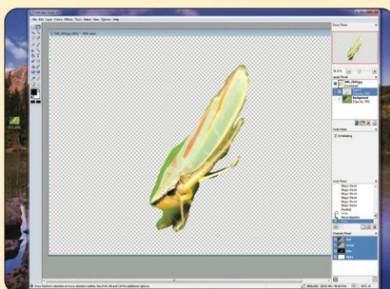
All in all this is a very reasonable little photo editor. It covers all the basics and does so with polish. It doesn't have the huge collection of plug-ins available to GIMP, but as a free photo editor you can't really fault it.

▲ *The interface is polished and the layout and tools provided will be familiar to users of Photoshop*

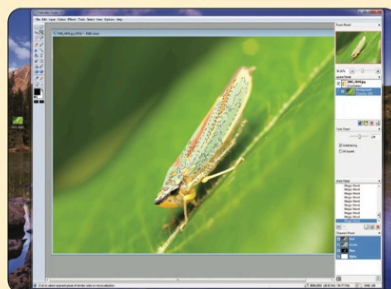


Location	photo and design/pixbuilder_setup.exe
System	XP/Vista/Win7
Licence	Freeware
Contact	www.wnssoft.com
PCU link	www.pc-utilities.co.uk/details24014.html

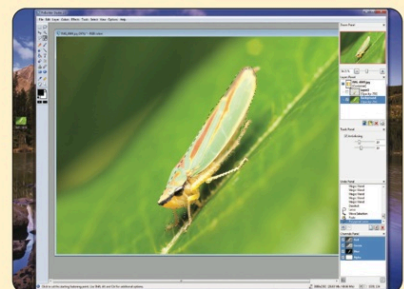
CUTTING OUT AN OBJECT IN PIXBUILDER



1 ▲ *The first and most basic method of cutting out an object is to use the lasso. This is simply where you draw round the object as accurately as possible by hand to make a selection. Left click to draw and double click to close the selection. Use Ctrl+C and Ctrl+V to copy it to a new layer.*



2 ▲ *The next cutting out tool is the infamous magic wand. This works by determining, thanks to a mysterious algorithm, how similar contiguous areas of an image are. Left-click to select an area and Shift-click to add additional selections. Set the tolerance slider higher if the area grabbed is too small.*



3 ▲ *The final tool is a rarity, the Magnetic Lasso. This tool works like the lasso except that it incorporates intelligent edge detection to attempt to adhere to the edges of objects automatically. You can combine these methods by using Shift-click to add to the selection or Alt click to remove from the selection.*