



BUG-BYTES

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SOFTWARE REVIEWS: PICASA2

EVALUATE THIS **FREE** PHOTO EDITING AND ORGANIZING PROGRAM



Last month I talked about Irfanview's free slideshow and file conversion features. Irfanview provides very limited photo editing options.

Picasa, from www.google.com (click on the More link and scroll down to Picasa), fills the wide gap between very basic photo editors and a very high end editor such as Adobe Photoshop. Adobe Photoshop Elements is a consumer-friendly version of Adobe's flagship Photoshop for professionals.

product, and the easiest to use. Open a photo in Picasa with a tilt problem, such as the before photo of a tilted light pole.

STRAIGHTEN PICTURES

Click the Basic Fixes tab, then the Straighten button. Move the slider at the bottom of the frame to resolve the tilt, and click apply. Picasa displays a temporary grid to aid you in straightening your photo. (The screenshot captures the grid to show you what you will see. Picasa shows a slider, Apply, and Cancel buttons in grey at the bottom of the pictures). See the before and after photos at the left. The current photo rotates as you move the slider left or right to get it aligned just the way you want it. It is like magic.

SAVE COPIES OF YOUR EDITED PICTURES

Save the changed file by clicking on File, Save a copy. As a safeguard, the program does not overwrite your original photo. You can rename the original if you wish.

ORGANIZE YOUR PICTURES

Picasa offers an excellent photo organizer besides its strong photo editing features. The photo organizer displays your photos in a timeline view, or in slideshows. Select the folders that you want included in a library of photos. A slider at the right bottom of the display includes a slider that controls the size of



BEFORE



AFTER

Picasa is a refreshing addition to the many photo editing programs that are available, and it is free. Using it is intuitive and easy, while providing a generous subset of the more useful features found in Photoshop. Users who are familiar with Photoshop or Photoshop Elements will feel right at home with the controls built into Picasa. The straightening tool in Picasa is the best that I've seen in any



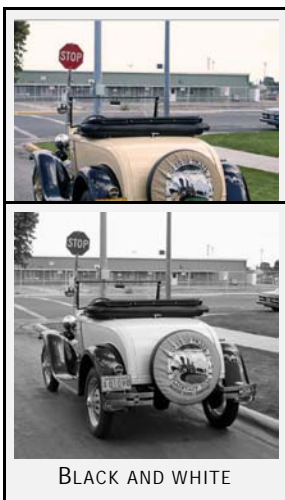
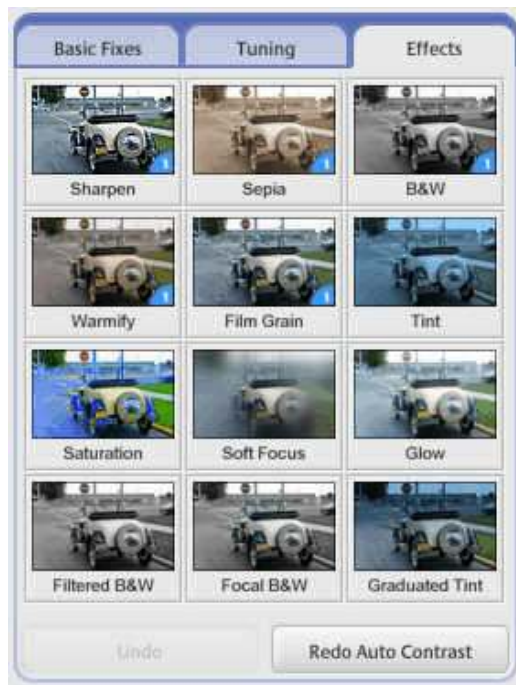
SAMPLE THUMBNAIL VIEWS FROM PHOTO ORGANIZER

the photos, and therefore the number of thumbnail views shown at a time. Click on any photo in the library to edit it.

In the editing mode, Picasa offers three tabbed views—Basic Fixes (Crop, Straighten, Red Eye, I'm Feeling Lucky, Auto Contrast, Auto Color, and Fill Light), Tuning (Fill Light, Highlights, Shadows, Color Temperature, and Natural Color Picker), and Effects (12 effects from sharpen, to a graduated tint).

The editing controls let you see the results of your choice or choices before you finally apply changes. What you see is what you get.

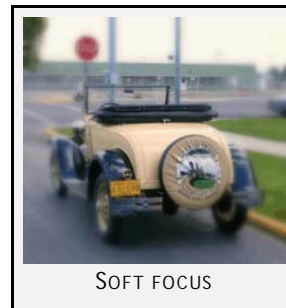
APPLY SPECIAL EFFECTS



BLACK AND WHITE

Let's look at some actual photo editing examples using the Effects tab. At a glance you get an idea of how the effect you choose will look. Go ahead and experiment. Cancel your choice or choices by clicking on the Undo tab at the bottom of the Effects dialog, or redo the last change.

Pick the effect or effects that you want. Some effects are very spe-



SOFT FOCUS



SEPIA

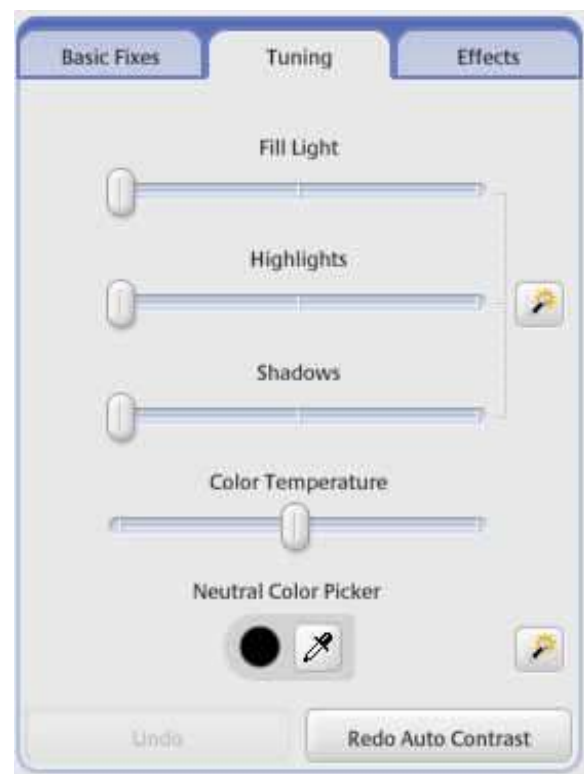
cialized and may be useful only for special projects that you may have. There may be times when an effect, such as Soft Focus or Focal B&W (black and white), are just the what you need.

You can apply a combination of effects, as in Sharpen and Saturation, or Sepia and Sharpen.

TUNE UP YOUR PICTURES

Tweak your pictures with Picasa's Tuning tool. Use the **Fill Light** slide to add light to back lighted subjects, as if you just used fill flash. Use **Highlights** to control the highlight areas of your photos. Control the dark shadow areas of your photos with **Shadows**.

Color Temperature controls how warm or how cool the lighting looks in your photos. Move the slider to the left for cooler (bluer) light and to the incandescent for warmer



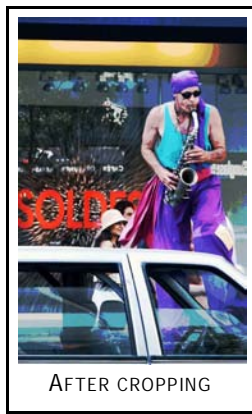
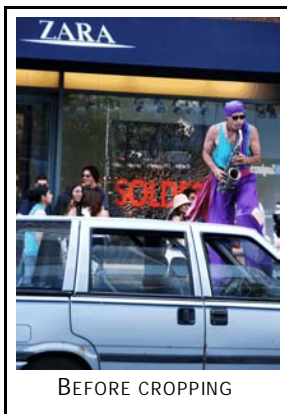
(more yellow) lighting. If your camera tries to guess under what lighting conditions your photos were exposed (bright sunshine, hazy sunshine, fluorescent, or incandescent lighting.) Sometimes the final pictures need a little tweaking to correct the look of the lighting. If you don't like the way a change looks, click on the undo button. Picasa lets you undo your most recent changes one at a time. It is like peeling an onion.

BASIC FIXES TO THE RESCUE

Perhaps most of the changes that you may need to make can be accomplished from the Basic Fixes tab.

CROP TO HIGHLIGHT INTEREST

Cropping is the process of removing part of a photo to enhance the enjoyment of what is left. Click Crop, select a point, such as the upper left corner, where you want to select the new image. Drag your mouse to the lower right



picture appears to be tilted toward the right.

RED EYE REDUCTION

Glowing red eyes appear in pictures taken straight on or slightly to the side of subjects with full flash. A version of that effect shows up in animal photography with glowing eyes. For cameras with a built-in redeye mode, use the red eye flash mode to prevent that effect. Cameras with red eye reduction flash quickly two or more times to make the eyes adjusted to the flash.



To correct red eye after the fact, click on the Redeye button in Picasa. Place your cursor around an affected eye and drag a box around the eye. Release the pressure on the left mouse button and the red eye is gone. Save a copy of your changed file.

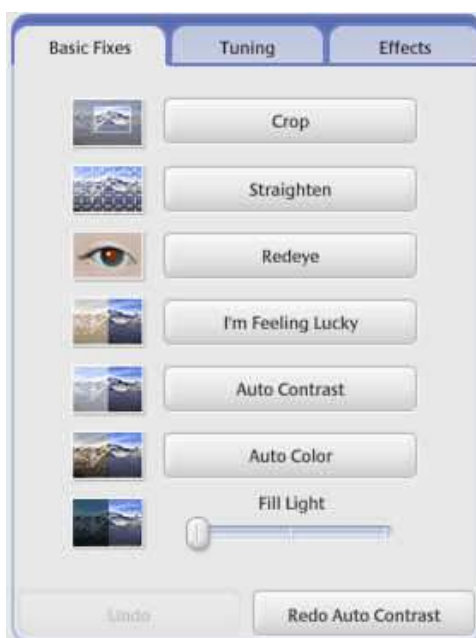
I'M FEELING LUCKY

Click that button and the program makes an educated guess about the changes that may be needed. Sometimes it works great, sometimes the results are bad, and sometimes it makes little or no difference. Click the Undo button if you don't like the results.

AUTO COLOR AND AUTO CONTRAST

Click these buttons to let Picasa to automatically select a color balance and a contrast level based upon the information contained within your photo. Undo the result or results if you do not think they make worthwhile improvements in your photo.

The after graphic displays a brighter white in the dresses and more contrast in the train engine. Take your pick. **Picasa works well with graphics or photos.**



corner and release your mouse. This defines the new image. Click Image, Crop.

See the examples of a photo I took of a jazz musician on stilts at the 2004 Montreal Jazz Festival.

An example of straightening is shown on the first page. In that example the streetlight in the first

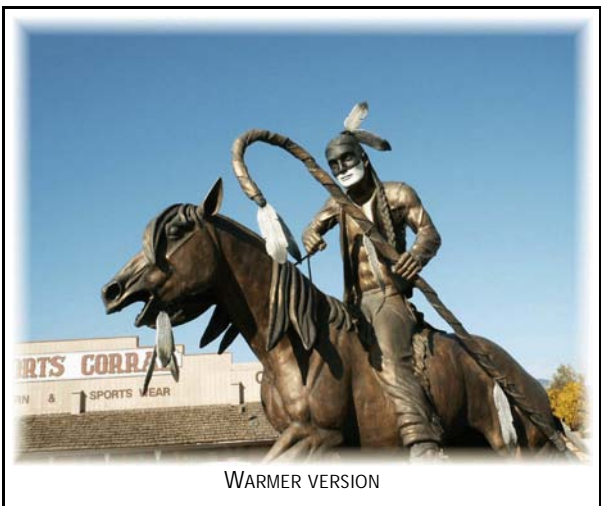
Yes, the tools in Picasa (or in photo editing programs) work well with graphics that need a little tweaking as well as with photos. Don't be afraid to experiment. You can always undo any changes you make.

CHANGE THE COLOR TEMPERATURE

Move the Color Temperature slider left to make a picture cooler (blue), and to the right to make it warmer (yellow). Notice the brassier color on the horse's chest in the after photo.



NEUTRAL COLOR



WARMER VERSION

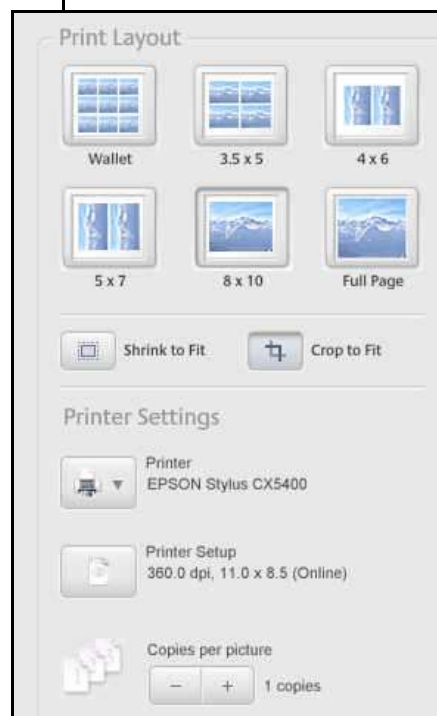
This adjustment can help compensate for existing lighting condition that overly bias the color toward cool or warm, such as that for an overcast day, partial sun, early or late time of day, etc.

I've left some features uncovered for you to explore.

Use Picasa to weed out duplicate photos after you've touched them up just the way you want them. Have fun with your photographs.

PRINT AND SHARE YOUR PHOTOS

Picasa makes it a snap to print your photos using a commercial film service or your own printer. See the list of vendors at the right.



Unlike other photo editors with which I am familiar, Picasa provides links to the most popular services. Take your pick.

Note that the Print Layout menu above makes it very easy to print your photos using one of the presets shown in the menu, Shrink to Fit, or Crop to Fit.

CREATIVE OPTIONS

Use the Create tab to order prints, create a picture collage, to make a photo your desktop background, make a poster, or to create a movie of your photos. This should keep you busy for days.

