

Photoshop Elements 13: Where's the Manual?!

By Veronica C. Valero

www.ComputerTutorOfMarin.com

BOOK REVIEW: *Photoshop Elements 13: The Missing Manual®* (the book that should have been in the box®), Barbara Brundage. Publisher O'Reilly, © 2014, \$44.99

I started using the high-end photo editing software, Photoshop, in 1997 for basic editing and photo manipulation. I learned, understood, and used about 20% of its tools. The cost of the product \$700+ was prohibitive and so I rarely upgraded. When Photoshop Elements came out at a greatly reduced price (est. \$120-150), I purchased it and used it for basic editing. I've worked on one of the early versions on the Mac and then upgraded to 9 and 11. Unfortunately, some key Photoshop features are missing for professional work (TIFF and CMYK formatting) and the newer versions do not come with a manual. Nevertheless, for the home user, Elements is an upgrade from most basic photo editing programs, but it is also a downgrade when it comes to supportive documentation.

THE MISSING MANUAL: I miss the days when software came with a physical instruction manual. The move towards putting manuals on a CDs or as digital PDFs brought frustration to novices who couldn't figure out how to "install" it, find it, or navigate it. Now the manuals have moved online and more angst has followed: The novice somehow, *intuitively*, needs to know how to navigate the online manual. Options vary: click on a link OR a triangle OR an arrow. Scroll down OR click on an icon. To watch a video, click on the triangle. But, how do you stop it, or rewind it, or adjust the volume? And, how do you read your manual online while simultaneously try the steps in the application? You're also out of luck if you don't have an internet connection because you won't have access to the online manual or video tutorials. Alas, our common sense page-turning-days are over!

If you miss turning pages and sipping coffee while the sunshine filters through your window and the dog sleeps restfully at your feet, there is hope. Publishing companies still exist that will print manuals to accompany your new software. One such company is O'Reilly, and they produce *The Missing Manual®* series. As O'Reilly says, it's "the book that should have been in the box."

MANUAL OF CHOICE: I reviewed the *Photoshop Elements 13: The Missing Manual* side-by-side with a trial version of Adobe's Photoshop Elements 13 on my PC (instructions cover Mac version). The layout of this 617 book is pleasing: It has clear headings and subheadings and helpful graphics. The table of context and the index are clear and easy to navigate—turn the page.

Although extremely helpful for those new to Photoshop Elements, this book is also valuable for those with Elements experience because it informs you about what is similar and different from previous versions of the software, while also addressing the infuriating "where did it go" syndrome that upgrades usually cause. I could use this book for Elements 13 as well as for Elements 11 as the interface is very similar. But, Elements 9 interface is very different.

INSIDE THE BOOK: The first few chapters cover the lay-of-the-land while also giving instructions on how to customize the workspace. I found it helpful to learn the four different modes you can use to edit your images. These modes are listed as tabs at the top of your Elements screen. They are:

(1) eLive Mode: This new mode shows you a sampling of edited photo using special effects that you can learn to create by clicking on the "Learn" link to view instructions on how to create the special effect. The link will take you to a website, not necessarily Adobe's website. The **eLive mode** really is a collection of featured websites with instructions via text or videos on how to create the photo effects. So, beware: these websites can have ads and other annoying features – enter at your own risk.

(2) Quick Fix Mode: This mode is great for the novice who wants to just click to do some rudimentary photo editing without instruction or complexity. It gives you a few of the helpful tools that will automatically adjust

your image by just clicking. You will find basic editing tools similar to those found in photo viewer software like: cropping, rotate, exposure, lighting, color balance, and red-eye reduction. This mode also gives you basic Photoshop tools like adding text and tools to correct blemishes and allows you to see “before” and “after” previews side-by-side.

(3) Guided Edit Mode: Visit this tab to learn some basic editing skills using the simple written instructions. Featured tools include: Brightness and Contrast, Correct Skin Tones, Crop Photo, Enhance Colors, Levels, and others. You also can see your photo side-by-side in “before” and “after” preview. This mode will introduce some more advanced Photoshop features without overwhelming the novice.

(4) Expert Mode: Those familiar with Photoshop Elements will view this as the “classic” mode that gives you access to its many formatting tools, options, and special effects. Unfortunately, some of the classic tools and “palettes” (now called “panels”) have been relocated.

Photoshop Elements 13: the Missing Manual guides you on how to use rudimentary editing techniques as well as the more advanced professional special effects. Along the way you will learn how to import and organize your photos, manage the Organizer, make duplicates of the originals before you edit, and back up your files. You will also learn the mysteries of resolution and pictures size, as well as many other important photo editing terms and techniques.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENTS: The how-to instructions at times were challenging to follow. The deficiencies listed below lost a star in my rating:

(1) Rather than including an image (icon) of the tool, the author gave descriptors: “click on the four-line square in the bin’s upper right” or “click on the brush that’s pointing downward like its painting,” or “click its icon in the Tools panel (it’s at the top left of the Modify section) or press C.” It annoyed me and wasted my time when the descriptor did not match what I imagined, or the icon wasn’t located where I thought it was supposed to be. Adding these icons will immensely improve the book and the reader’s experience.

(2) The step-by-step instruction sentences are too long with too many steps within one paragraph. A few more graphics would help too. The steps should be broken down further, making each step one sentence that includes one task: Example: Step 1, select the layer you will edit. Step 2, Click on the Brush icon located... (show icon). Step 3: At the bottom select the brush size... Step 4: etc.

(3) The commentary of what to expect within the step-by-step instruction distract the reader from understanding the sequence of steps. I do find the commentary—the “what happens” text—helpful, but this commentary should be pulled out and inserted in its own paragraph below or put in parentheses so that it doesn’t interfere with the flow of the instructions.

Photoshop Elements 13: The Missing Manual is a helpful book to have on hand while you learn to edit photos using the software. It gives a decent introduction to the various tools and features, while also teaching you concepts and terminology. This book will help reduce your frustration on how to use the software. It is a good resource to have on-hand to supplement Element’s Help tools when you have online access. It is not a comprehensive in-depth book that addresses all the features and nor does it use complex technical explanations—a plus for some. For the novice and intermediate user it is suitable resource.

3-Stars (4 star-rating)

ABOUT: Veronica C. Valero started her own computer tutoring business in 2002 in Marin County California. She provides one-on-one computer assistance and instruction in your home or office. For more info www.ComputerTutorOfMarin.com or 415-897-2302.