

Scanner Software par excellence: SilverFast Ai Studio 8

Lasersoft Imaging's SilverFast Ai Studio 8

In this day and age, in which the analogue photography has almost been forgotten, a software for digitizing images seems to be rather superfluous. Just the opposite might be the case. The information age has inevitably found its way into the world of image processing and allows to use software for digitizing images from the pre-computer era. Today's images are created almost entirely digital, but should we throw away our old pictures for the sole reason that they can not be used on the computer easily?

Scanners and similar devices for digitization are already equipped with a manufacturer's software. But are these easy to operate for an extended period of time? Do they have detailed control options to scan slides and negatives with high quality? Are they able to digitize large amounts of images at once? Here, SilverFast Ai Studio 8 comes into play. SilverFast, which was principally developed for professionals, might be equally suitable for ambitious home users, who want powerful but user-friendly tools.

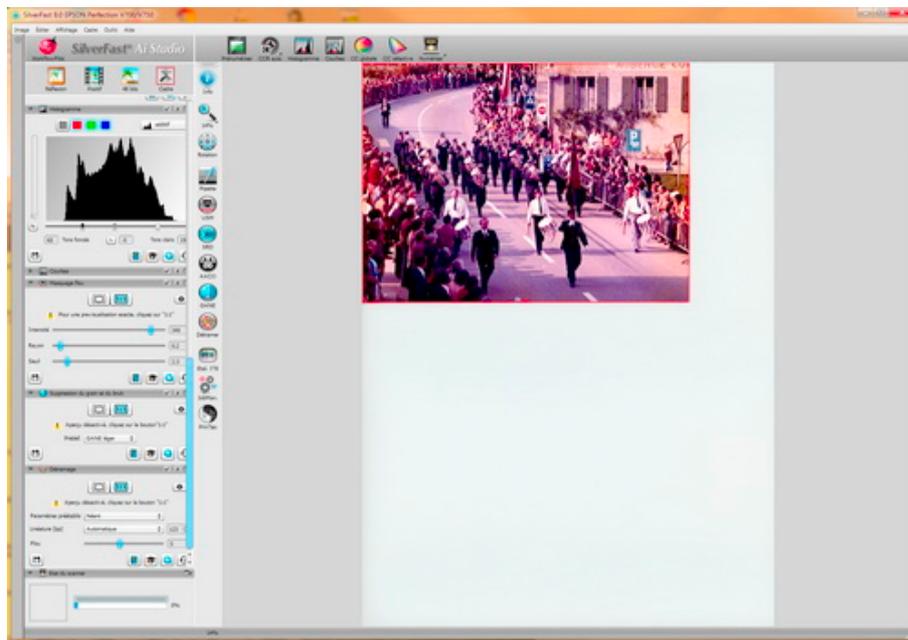
Is SilverFast Ai Studio a software that only professionals can actually work with? This is exactly what we like to find out.

SilverFast can be run as stand-alone software or as Photoshop plug-in. When starting the stand-alone version, an initial welcome dialog opens. Its top left area holds introductory information and movies, that are loaded from the web, about the concept of WorkflowPilot and other SilverFast features. The actual scanning program is then accessed via a small button located at the bottom left of this welcome dialog window.

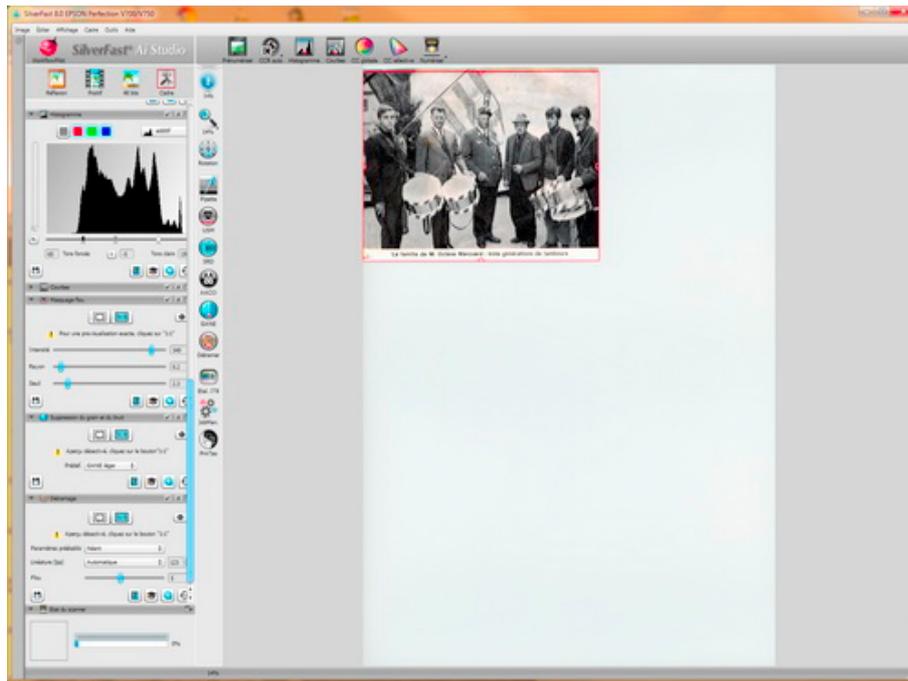


Select the scanner to be used and a desired working language at the bottom left. Below you will find aforementioned start button, which shows a small arrowhead, and another button to enter the service dialog. Before starting SilverFast, it has to be unlocked entering the serial number, which can be done in the service dialog. Any driver software required for the scanner, should be installed first. This is preferably done before installing SilverFast to ensure SilverFast will correctly recognize the scanner.

Once these steps are completed, we can begin to get familiar with the user interface. This will require some time and also some English or German language skills to understand the web-based movies. Of course, it would be also possible to learn operating the software by trial and error, but much easier to follow manuals and documentation, which are also available in French on the manufacturer's website.



Fortunately, SilverFast also provides a kind of wizard that guides the user step by step. This WorkflowPilot is activated by clicking on the big red button at the top left. A small airplane will appear right below the horizontal toolbar to show the actual position in the imaging process. If the WorkflowPilot is deactivated the user can freely choose from many tools, each with an own control dialog. Tool dialogs can be moved to any place on the screen, even to a second monitor, if available. By default, these dialogs are fixed one below the other at the control dock on the left, but can be fold or unfold and moved by the user at any time. Four buttons to determine kind of image to digitize, data format and frame settings are arranged above the tool dialogs. You select "Reflective" to scan opaque documents such as photographs, and "Transparency" for digitizing slides and negatives. In transparency mode, the second button distinguishes between positive and negative. You choose the resulting scan's color depth from 1bit to 48bit. The last button provides some frame options, e.g. scan frames can be saved and reused later. All buttons feature tooltips, which open with brief descriptions when you move the mouse over it.



After the preview scan has been performed, many image processing tools offer numerous opportunities for image enhancement, for removing image defects, for adjusting the histogram, in short, a variety of functions that cannot all be listed. This software leaves really nothing to desire, correction of scratches, color and image screens, everything is there. Learning how to use this software requires patience and effort, reading of documentation and experimenting. But at last, the user will be impressed by the large number of image optimization tools and the capabilities to achieve superior results.

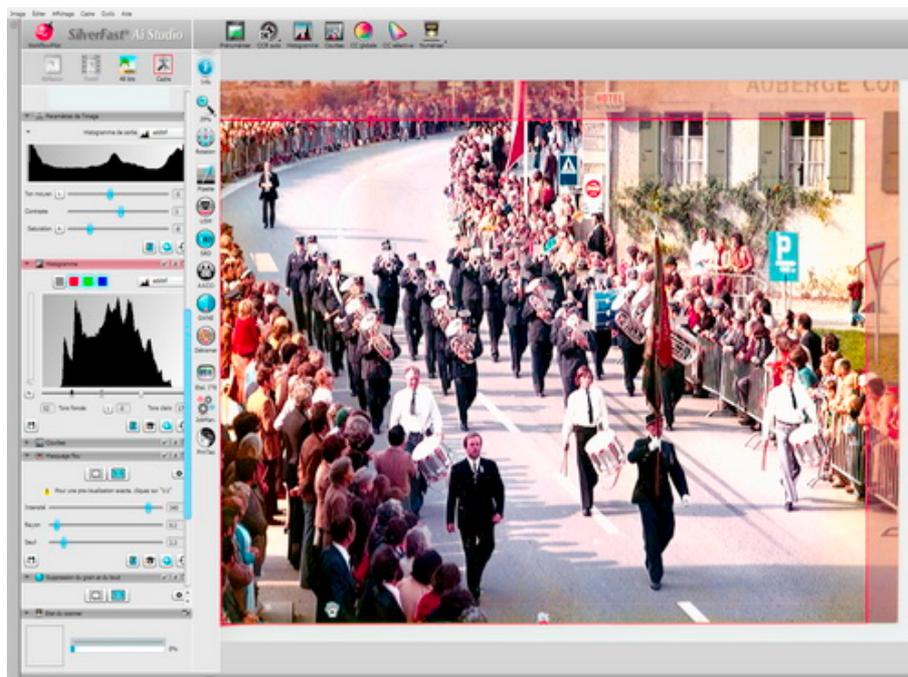


Image material older than 40 years has been used for this test. However, SilverFast has delivered excellent results, and this although a little trial and error has been necessary due to our lack of experience. Also the HDRi functionality has been reviewed in detail and it has to be said, that all actually available image information can be captured with a single scan.

The same also applies to color negatives. Using an old Fotolabo film, the results we managed to achieve are truly amazing. The NegaFix filter for Fotolabo film has completely removed the bluish color cast. Even unsharp images can be corrected and optimized with SilverFast 8. Of course, it can not be expected to turn really bad images into masterpieces.



As even Multi-Tasking and batch processing are available, this software is quite suitable for professional use. Also the motivated amateur is quickly able to work very well with the software, if he is during the learning phase willing to temporarily set some of the advanced features aside.

SilverFast on the web: www.SilverFast.com

Remy Pilliard

Copyright: The author holds copyright on images and screenshots.