

# THE ALMOST FORGOTTEN ART TO SCAN AN IMAGE

Even though LaserSoft Imaging has devoted itself to the art of scanning images for 34 years, there is still something new to develop. The concentrated know-how from decades of experience has flowed into the latest version 9 of the award-winning scanner software SilverFast.

I was able to take a first look at the program and felt transported back to the beautiful times of analog photography in the 1990s.

## The scanning itself

Basically, the scanning of analog images is very different from scanning simple documents. This is especially true for scanning film material, which depends on color fidelity and capturing a high tonal range. In order to meet these requirements and to achieve colors close to the original, the scanner has to be calibrated, regardless of whether you are digitizing reflective or transparent material. In the SilverFast software, this step can be automated. Similar to a monitor calibration, a target state is compared with an actual state. The target state is represented by a so-called IT8 Target, a pattern with color fields and gradients. The SilverFast IT8 calibration compares a scan of this IT8 Target and compares it with a reference file. The naturally resulting difference between target state and actual state is used to create a scanner profile. LaserSoft Imaging manufactures these IT8 Targets in excellent quality, for reflective and transparent originals.



At first glance, you will find an almost unmanageable amount of features and buttons. However, everything follows a strict, comprehensible order in the new version 9 of SilverFast.

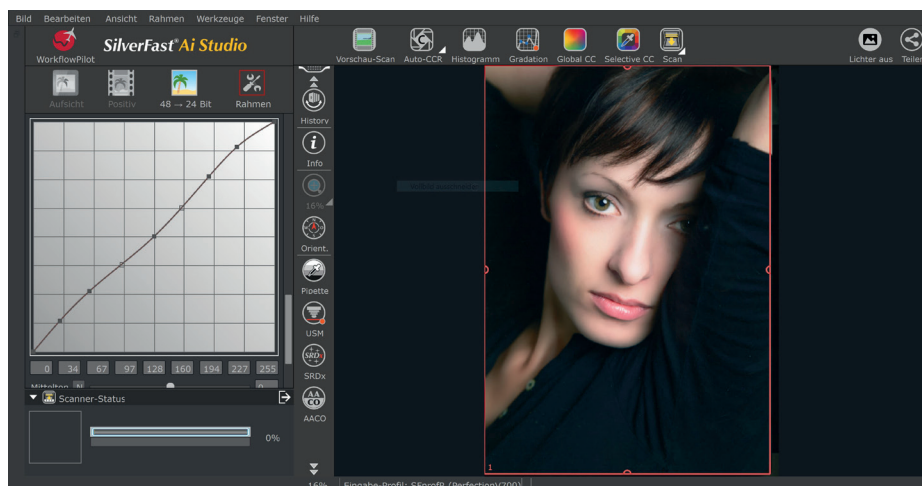
Now we can begin the actual scanning process. The first start of the software shows immediately that the developers have come up with a lot. The Dark Mode is brand new and, as the name suggests, it colors the interface in dark gray. This not only looks modern, but is also significantly better for assessing tonal values and colors. We noticed already beforehand that we have not to laboriously enter a license number for the software

or a serial number of the scanner. All of this is managed in a user account, much more conveniently from now on. It also includes changing the license to another scanner twice if the originally licensed scanner breaks or has been replaced by another model. This has not been possible before.

If you are scanning with SilverFast for the very first time, you may be confused by the large number of buttons and abbreviations. But don't worry, everything is sensible and, if you look closely, it is often self-explanatory. If you are still unsure, you can start the WorkflowPilot, a guide through the scanning process that has also been significantly revised. There are different workflows for different tasks. This pilot is definitely wonderful for the first scans, but can also be understood as an introduction to manual scanning later on.

## SilverFast specialties

The special thing about scanning with SilverFast 9 is not only the innovations, but also the combination with the tried and tested. In addition to the classic tools such as gradation curve, unsharp masking, noise elimination, global and



Basic tools such as the gradation curve are natural components of the SilverFast 9 scan software.



A great help for scanning transparency originals, here a positive slide, is the removal of dust and scratches using the infrared channel of the scanner. In the enlarged preview, the detected areas that will be removed in the subsequent scan are marked in red.

selective color correction, this includes the Multi-Exposure functionality and the so-called iSRD defect removal. The Multi-Exposure feature ensures an increased dynamic range by scanning a transparency original twice, similar to a photographic HDR shooting. This tool is simply activated and then runs automatically when scanning. However, the extent of the dynamic range expansion depends heavily on the combination of scanner and film material. For example, you get significantly more details in the shadows of Kodachrome slides when scanning with the Multi-Exposure option activated.

Defect removal means that dust and scratches are detected and removed. The small i in the abbreviation iSRD stands for infrared. Many scanners feature such an infrared channel, the light of which is reflected differently from normal light. Unevenness, i.e. dust as elevations and scratches as depressions, are recognized and can thus be calculated from the image. This defect removal has different modes. In the "Mark" mode, you can see that dust and dirt particles on an older slide marked in red. Usually they cannot be seen with the naked eye. The automatic mode is then responsible for the removing calculation during the scan. If the scanner you are using does not feature an infrared channel, there is always the software-based dust removal available, called SRDx.

Another specialty of the new software is the large selection of bit depth settings for the scan. There is a section for general output purposes such as web, email,

social media, or small printouts. Here the basic maximum bit depth used by the software of 48 bits, is reduced to a lower one, for color to 24 bits and for grayscale to 8 bits. In the second section, the full bit depth is retained. These settings are for scans that are passed on to an image processing system such as Photoshop.

The third section is the real characteristic. Here, settings for scanning raw data are available. Just like with RAW data from a camera, there are no losses due to processing or format conversions, the entire data captured by the scanner is backed up one-to-one. This also applies to the infrared channel, which is additionally recorded using in the 64-bit HDRi<sup>RAW</sup> setting. This format is mainly used for archive scans, which can later be reused for output just like a fresh scan. This is also what we are used to



Entry level, basic and professional version (from back to front) of the scanner software SilverFast from LaserSoft Imaging.

from digital photography with the RAW format.

## The novelties of the current version

One of the most striking differences to the previous version SilverFast 8 is the significantly increased speed (up to 70 percent according to the manufacturer). And it can be felt. The workflow also seems to have been optimized. When I zoom into the preview for features such as the unsharp masking or the dust removal, the image is scanned like finally. Once I have made all the corrections and click the scan button, this process is already complete – without any waiting.

In direct comparison with the previous version, there are many visual differences. The Dark Mode has already been described. In addition, the information given from the WorkflowPilot is also rewritten and extended, as are the manuals and tutorials videos that can be accessed from there. The WorkflowPilot now features batch processing, which is a real facilitation.

Speaking of batch processing. SilverFast's JobManager feature is responsible for this task. It has undergone an extensive facelift and it has also received a so-called QuickEdit dialog to work even faster and easier to handle. You can setup different scan jobs and copy settings back and forth between this jobs. If a number of jobs, i.e. various different scans, have been created, all you need to do is click on Start and off you go.

## Conclusion

LaserSoft Imaging has always kept the almost forgotten art of scanning up-to-date with its SilverFast scan software. With the latest version 9, they have taken a very decisive new step towards wonderfully simple handling paired with an enormous range of functionality and highest quality. In my tests, regardless of whether reflective or transparent material, I got scans that really amazed me with just a few clicks. In addition, the software works fluidly and reliably. For me, these are characteristics of professional software. So if you want to digitize your analog archive, you should definitely take a look at SilverFast 9.

[www.SilverFast.com](http://www.SilverFast.com)