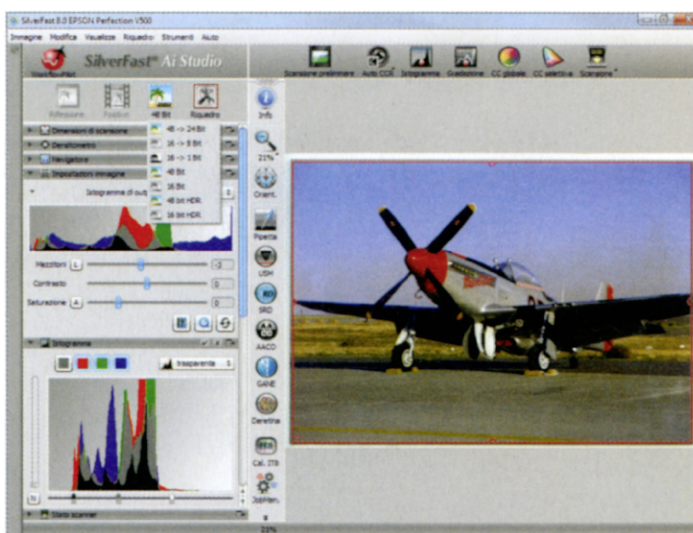


SilverFast Archive Suite 8, scanning is served

Getting the most from a scanner: this is what you get with SilverFast 8, a software from LaserSoft Imaging available in several versions.

Preview by **Nicola Martello**

LaserSoft Imaging is a German company founded in 1986 and specialized in imaging software, especially in the scanning area. LaserSoft Imaging's offering for professionals is SilverFast 8, an application designed to integrate with scanners (when purchasing the software, one must specify what scanner model will be used), and also bundled with the top scanners from Canon, Epson and Microtek. SilverFast 8 is available in three versions: Ai Studio, SE Plus and SE. Compared to the main release Ai Studio, the SE Plus version does not offer the automatic calibration, the expert mode, the 16-bit histogram, and the JobManager (which allows to set up a batch of scans). The cheapest version, SE, also lacks the Multi-Exposure, the



At the left of the preview are located the panels for setting options and adjustments to improve the color balance of the scan

AACO (for shadow details recovery) and the Kodachrome presets. LaserSoft Imaging also offers a suite comprised of SilverFast 8 and SilverFast HDR 8, a solution designed to work with digital images (that is, not for scanning). This Suite is actually available in two versions: the Archive Suite 8 (the most complete, and tested here), and the Archive Suite SE 8, which is comprised of SE Plus 8 and HDR 8.

SilverFast Ai Studio 8 uses a very neat interface, with the commands on a upper bar, and the main functions placed vertically on the left of the preview. Even more to the left, there are dynamic panels with all the options and adjustments selectable for the scans. The software can work in a wizard mode, thus leading the user step by step with instructions and video tutorials, useful for beginners. Expert users can instead access all the available tools, set them with a few clicks, and observe in real time the results in the preview, which is constantly updated by the software.

The software also includes a fully automatic scanner calibration pro-

cedure: it even automatically detects the location, size and inclination of the IT8 target that must be used, if provided by LaserSoft Imaging (the company sells targets of several media and sizes, all printed in small batches and Fogra certified). The calibration can also be done with targets from other manufacturers. However, in this case the user needs to calibrate manually.

The global color balance is manually tunable, with the usual sliders and a histogram, or automatically by using the many presets (that resemble the ones usually found on digital cameras: Landscape, Portrait, Night, and so on). In the toughest scenarios, there are several features designed to improve the final image quality. USM (*Unsharp Masking*) increases the edge contrast, working only on the luminance. GANE (*Grain and Noise Elimination*) is used to denoise an image, and has three levels of intensity; unfortunately it is not possible to calibrate the GANE on a uniform-color area. In our tests, we

SilverFast Archive Suite 8

Score: 8.5 (out of 10)

Pros

- Fully exploit the scanner hardware
- Multiscan with Multi-Exposure, infrared scans
- Film presets for converting negatives

Cons

- Noise reduction not very effective
- SilverFast HDR 8 not as good as the best competition

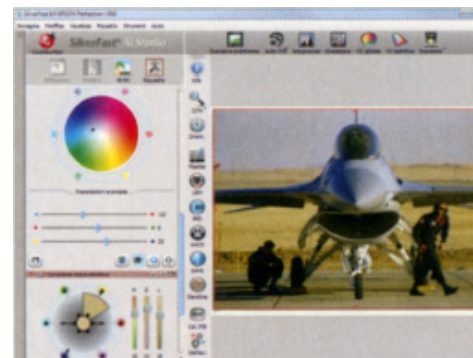
Developer: LaserSoft Imaging, www.silverfast.com

achieved the best results with the Low setting, whereas the other two resulted unsatisfactory. SilverFast also offers a Descreening filter, to minimize the moiré effects often resulting when scanning printed pages (such as newspapers, magazines and books). AACO (*Auto Adaptive Contrast Optimization*) operates on the contrasts and only in the shadow areas, so to pull out more details. In our tests the final effect has always looked a bit artificial. In order to set the global color balance the GCC (*Global Color Correction*) is providing a traditional color wheel. To operate on a specific color, the SCC tool (*Selective Color Correction*) is used. Again, here you operate via color wheel; initially the user picks a color to change, which can then be modified by dragging it towards one of the six primary and complementary colors.

When scanning a negative film it is important that the color inversion is correctly performed, since every film has its own color curve. That's why LaserSoft Imaging included NegaFix, a library with more than 120 profiles for the most used films: the user can therefore immediately achieve a color-balanced scan. Besides, the ME (*Multi-Exposure*), available both for negatives and positives, allows two scans in a row, each with a different exposure.

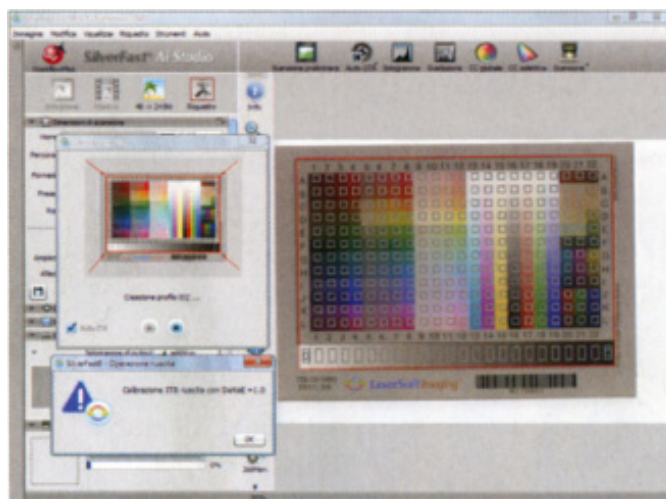
This minimizes the noise and enhances the Dynamic Range of the scanner, so to capture more details in the dark and light areas. In order to get rid of the defects caused by dust on the originals or on the scanner plate, the iSRD technology (*infrared Dust and Scratch Removal*) is available; it is similar to the Kodak's Digital ICE (*Image Correction and Enhancement*), that thanks to a dedicated scanning with an infrared light can detect the defects and fix them (of course, the scanner must support this feature). In the iSRD panel there are several options available, to set the threshold and to highlight all detected defects by color. The system can also work without using the infrared (SRD), when using a reflective original, but in this case the results are not as good as before, because together with the dust the smallest details are blown away as well.

SilverFast is multi-tasking and allows the user to work on a scanned image while the scanner is scanning another one. This feature is also useful when working with the JobManager, a tool that permits to set up a series of scans with the same adjustments to be applied on each and every image. As per the file saving, TIFF, PSD, JPEG and JPEG2000 formats are available; the color depth can be set at 24 or 48 bit



The global color balance is adjustable by operating the traditional color wheel.

(8 or 16 with grayscale images). It is also possible to save images in a 48- or 16-bit HDR format, thus storing untouched all the color scanning metadata. The resulting files can be archived or opened in SilverFast HDR 8 for further processing; this software offers basically the same interface and features, but does not have any tool requiring the scanner hardware, such as the Multi-Exposure and the iSRD. Actually, with reference to the typical photo-editing activity, SilverFast HDR 8 shows its limits. Compared with other applications designed for this purposes, several tools are lacking - for example spot correction tools and photographic filters; also, the denoise tool hasn't proven to be very effective. In other words, where SilverFast Ai Studio 8 is certainly an excellent software for professional-quality scanning, SilverFast HDR 8 seems to be below its best competitors.



The scanner calibration is totally automated, when using a LaserSoft Imaging IT8 target.



For film scanning, the NegaFix library with more than 120 film presets is available.