

LaserSoft's SilverFast PrinTao

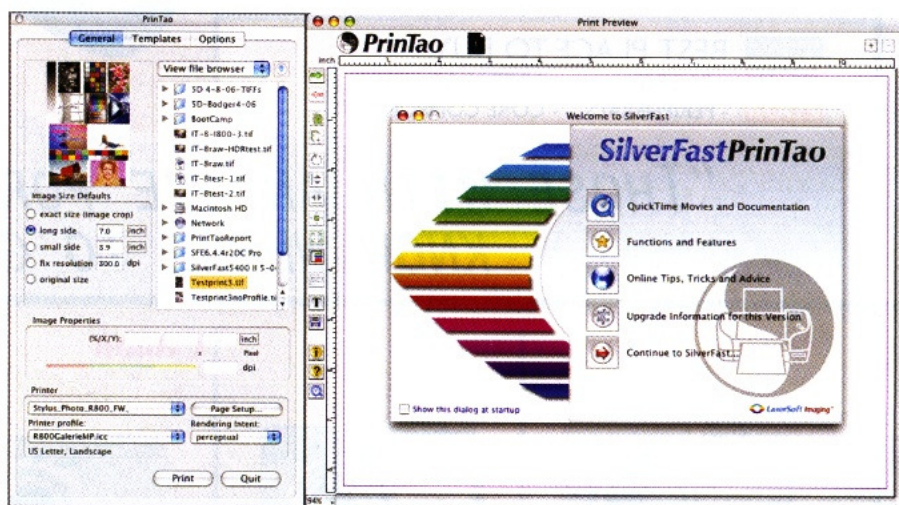
by David B. Brooks

Is This "The Path" To Easy, Efficient, And Flexible Photo Printing?

With a digital camera, a computer, and a printer, all that remains to make photo prints is an application that will access and open your photo files and send the images to the printer. That's simple enough. But there are obviously other issues—what about color matching between screen and print? How do you get to the pictures you want printed? There are also questions about how you could print two, three, or four photos on a page and how you can add your name, a copyright notice, or insert text for a caption. It used to be that you had to purchase a moderate to expensive image-editing application to do all this, with a steep learning curve thrown into the bargain. Now, LaserSoft has created a software utility just for printing called SilverFast PrinTao. In my testing I found that it can help you output professional-looking results with minimal effort and little learning required. It is what computer geeks refer to as "intuitive" software.

SilverFast PrinTao provides an on-screen user interface with two distinct windows, a Control Panel on the left and a Preview window on the right. At the top of the left Control Panel there are three tabs, General, Templates, from which pre-configured and custom print templates can be chosen for use in the Preview window; and Options, which includes the choice of a work space default profile. Immediately below on the left is a logo/thumbnail window that will display an image thumbnail to provide visual identification of any file highlighted in the Browser window to the right side of the Control Panel.

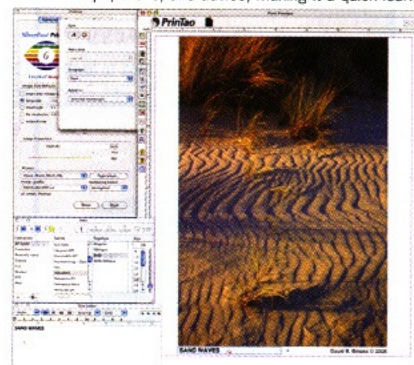
To begin the printing process you open



The environment provided by the SilverFast PrinTao application supports a logical progression of workflow steps for easy and efficient print setup and execution. And although its use can be learned almost intuitively, the splash screen (accessed from Options) and Help includes a QuickTime movie demonstration, provides a list of function and feature descriptions and online tips, tricks, and advice, making it a quick learn.

a file in the Browser window. This provides easy, direct access to all the files on all drives connected to your computer. Once a file is located, click on it to highlight the file name in the Browser window. Then at the top of the column of action icons in the left vertical frame of the Preview window, click on the green arrow pointing to the right. This will cause the file to be opened in the Preview window, sized according to the selected Image Size Defaults in the next window down from the logo/thumbnail window. You can select any default by highlighting its radio button. The middle three buttons allow you to define either a specific long or short side in inches, as well as the print image resolution.

With an image open in the Preview window, and with its frame highlighted, you can rotate or flip an image vertically or horizontally, as well as center an image on



Adding text to photo prints, like a title and copyright notice, are desirable functions. This is made easy with PrinTao using the operating system's installed fonts and native text editor. The text function also includes the ability to use a selected font color, as well as include Metadata in a text frame.

the page. You can also enlarge or diminish its size to the allowed printing size, using the fourth through eighth action icons in the Preview frame next to the Control Panel. In addition, PrinTao's Preview window supports free-floating objects like images

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and text blocks. It fully supports drag and drop positioning of images and blocks of text using the mouse cursor. You can also add a variety of frame effects to the image by clicking in the ninth action icon from the top. When you are finished printing or decide you want to print a different image, click once on the image with the mouse cursor to activate the frame highlight and then click the second action icon down from the top with a red arrow pointing to the left, and the file will be removed from the Preview.

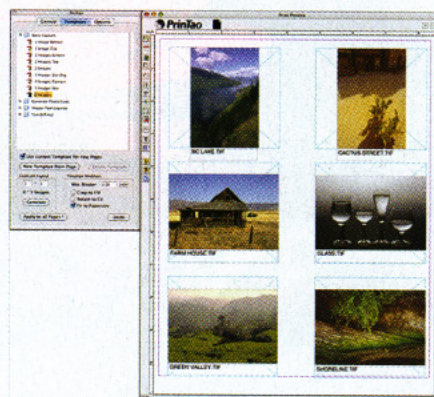
Once your image is sized and placed as you prefer within the Preview window space—inside the red outline that demarcates the printable region of the page—you are ready for the final choices, controlling print quality and color management in the Printer control section at the bottom of the Control Panel window.

Quality Control And Color Management

Printer control, particularly color management, is often confusing. PrinTao makes it all accessible and relatively easy by providing a simple, direct interface located under Printer at the bottom of the Control Panel window. At the top left under Printer is a drop-down menu which will show all printers installed, so just click on the printer name you will be using. The Page Setup button will then open the Printer's Page Setup dialog that should be set for the page/paper size to be printed and its orientation, portrait or landscape. Selecting these Page Setup factors actually controls how the Preview window is configured, and therefore should be selected before actually opening, sizing, and positioning images to be printed.

If you want to do application controlled color managed print matching, then open the Printer Profile drop-down menu and select the profile for the printer/paper you are using. However, if you want to keep it easy and simple and let the print driver control and adjust print color, select either sRGB or Adobe RGB (1998) as the Printer Profile. If you have selected a printer profile to do color managed printing, use the Rendering Intent drop-down menu and select Perceptual for most photographic printing, although some prefer the results obtained by selecting Relative Colorimetric.

The next and final step using SilverFast



The Templates tab functions included with PrinTao provide many ready-made image and text frame arrangements, all of which can be customized. In addition to the maximum ready-made template I used for this contact sheet, at the bottom of the window dialog is a way to define a higher number of image frames and specify the space between them and generate a new template. A user can save this new template in the Custom folder for future use.

PrinTao is to click on the Print button.

This will bring up the driver window for your printer. There are some differences between the Apple Mac and Windows driver window arrangements, but primarily you select your media type and the quality, and then click on Color Management and select "No Color Adjustment."

If you have chosen not to make color managed prints and have selected sRGB or Adobe RGB (1998) as the Printer Profile, then after selecting your media type and quality, select from the available options of your printer's color adjustment options. This selection will vary, with only one choice with some printers and several choices of output with other brands, models, and types of printers.

Multi Image And Text Add Options

Users of SilverFast PrinTao are not limited to printing just one image on a page. You can add as many images as their size on the page allows. There are a number of pre-configured templates available. Then just open an image in each frame of the template. You are also free to use drag and drop to re-arrange the position placement of the images and also re-size the images, making some larger and some smaller, whatever your needs dictate. Once done you can, after removing the images, save the arrangement as a custom template if you think it will be needed again.

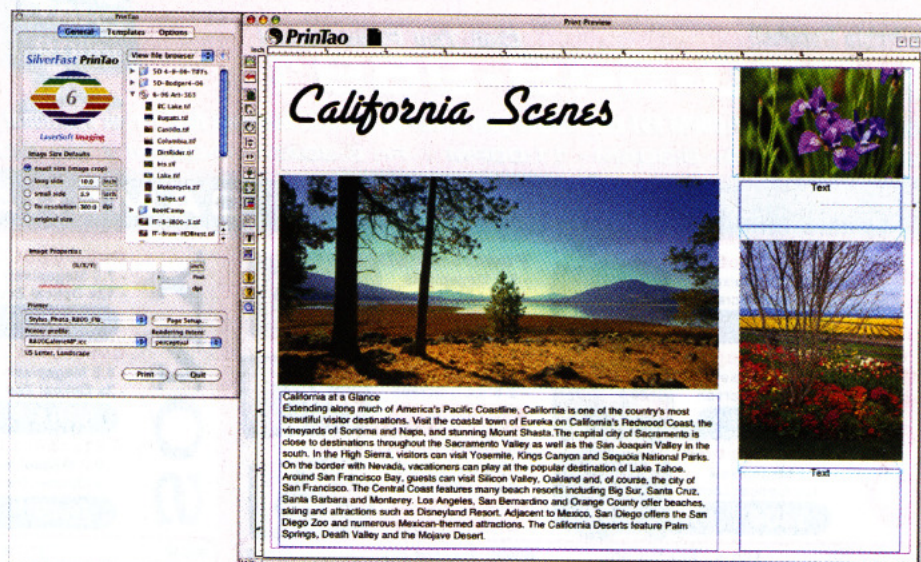
Some of the pre-configured templates include text boxes associated with the image

frames. You can also manually add one or more text boxes to the Preview window in which you can type or paste in text, choose different fonts, and also choose different colors for the fonts. A text box of any size can be drawn in the Preview window by clicking on the "T" icon that turns the mouse cursor to a cross that allows drawing a box for text. Double-clicking within a text box opens a text editing window and a text control window pops out from the side of the Preview window frame. (Windows will place a text control bar in the top of the Preview window frame.) There is even a provision for editing a copyright notice that can be placed next to a photograph or, if desired, overlain, so the notice is embedded in the image when printed.

SilverFast PrinTao also supports multiple pages, indicated by page symbols at the top of the Preview frame, with a plus and minus click button in the far right corner to add or subtract pages. This feature essentially supports batch-process printing.

Evaluation And Recommendation

After using SilverFast PrinTao for a number of weeks it became my first choice for printing. Being a limited function, thus a small application, it loads quickly. Opening files for printing is faster because the print size I will be using is usually smaller than the full file size, taking less time. When using the same printer and page size, PrinTao



The flexibility of the PrinTao Preview page space allows for a wide range of configurations of images and text to produce all kinds of printed pages. Even a many page booklet can be designed and executed, and even saved as a digital document file for future use—all simply and effortlessly.

remembers the last print made and fewer entries are needed before clicking the Print button. All this means that if you are pressed for time, PrinTao is the choice to make prints. I even find it's an easier and faster way to produce prints of "contact sheets" from image folder files stored on CD-Rs than using Photoshop's automated function to generate a contact sheet.

I also think that for most photographers the program's simple, upfront control setting for selecting profiles and rendering intent will make color managed print matching easier and simpler to execute. What I did not expect

was how SilverFast PrinTao seems to be more precise in generating the data it sends to the printer. Using it I experienced fewer print anomalies, apparent profile malfunctions, and better overall print quality. I can recommend LaserSoft's SilverFast PrinTao as a great value, particularly at its download price of \$49.

But you don't have to take my word for it. You can download and try it out before paying the fee by going to www.silverfast.com.

For more information, contact LaserSoft Imaging, Inc. at 3212 Gulf Gate Dr., Unit B, Sarasota, FL 34231.

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