IT'S MAGIC!

The Photoshop plug-in SRDx from LaserSoft Imaging removes image defects in scanned originals in such a smart way that it almost appears magical. With his test, Michael Marczok has gone to the bottom of the magic.

When analog originals are scanned, the degree of contamination is not always as bad as in this example. But the SRDx plug-in for Photoshop is able to deal with these strong defects.

Anyone who wants to transfer his analog image archive to the digital world using a scanner knows this: Even with the greatest effort and care, it is never completely avoidable that dust on the surface of the analog original or scratches caused by careless storage are digitized to disturbing artifacts on the scan. If a scanner is used that does not have a separate infrared channel for dust detection, or if there are black-and-white images, through which the infrared rays do not reliably transmit due to their high silver halide content, it becomes even more extreme.
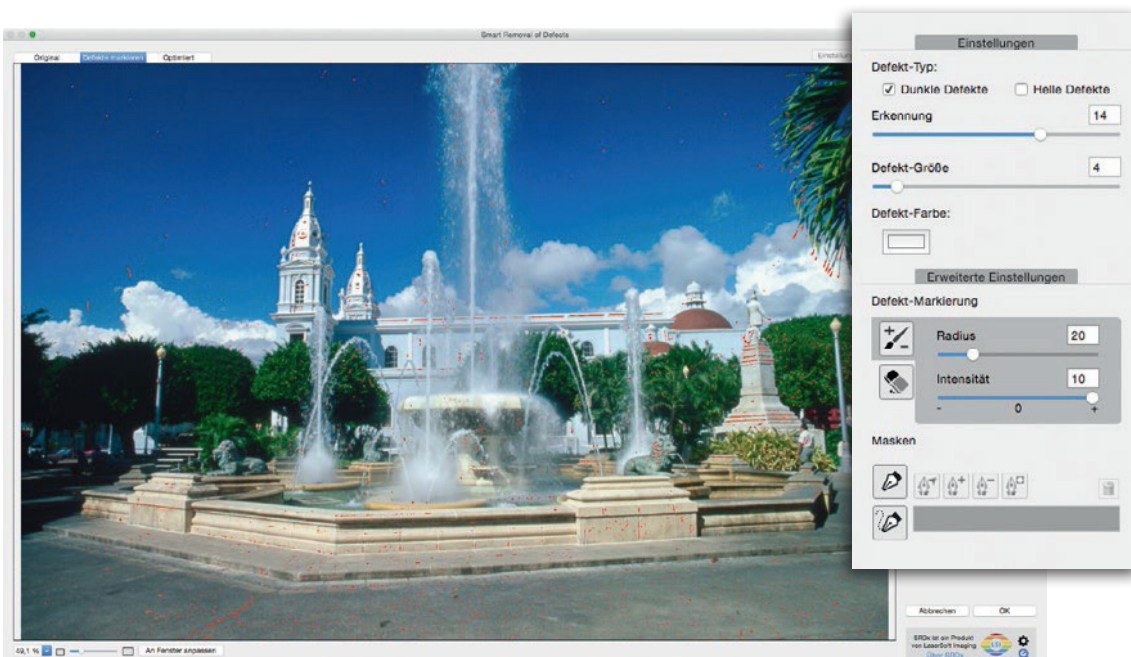
Adobe Photoshop offers a variety of retouching tools "on board", but all of them have disadvantages. Either a lot of small-scale manual work is required, for example with the classical copy stamp tool, or the image quality decreases, for example the image sharpness decreases, when using the r "dust and scratches …" filter. And in the case of image archives, we do not speak of single images, but of large amounts of files, and on every image you will find not only individual scratches or dust particles, but usually very many.

This is where SRDx from LaserSoft Imaging comes into play. The abbreviation stands for Smart Removal of Defects, i.e. the intelligent removal of disturbances in an image.
Intelligent is the perfect, seamless integration of the plug-in into the Photoshop workflow. It nests itself as a new point in the filter menu for direct access.
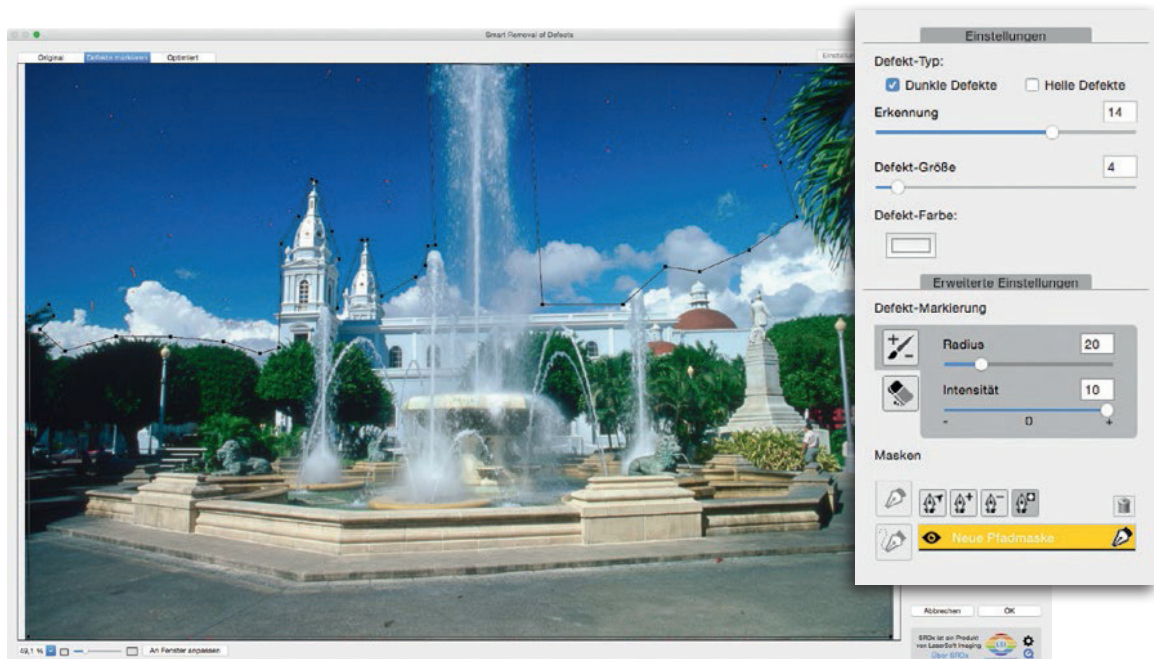Intelligent is also the underlying algorithm, which finds every defect in the image. Of course it also finds image details that belong to the image and should not be removed. SRDx has various settings and tools on the user interface, which ensure that image details do not disappear. No less intelligent is that the calculations for the detection and removal of dust and scratches are hardware-based accelerated by the graphics card.

Left: The scan was performed without infrared channel defect detection. This is how it looks in the SRDx plug-in. Many image areas have been marked in red, the settings for the defect type and size on the right side will be applied.
Right: The few tools of the SRDx plug-in are all you need. The extended settings are used to precisely adjust what should be removed and what not, either with a brush and eraser tool or with a mask.

A mask for applying the SRDx plug-in to a selected image area is "drawn" as you know it from Photoshop with the path generation pen. In this case, only the sky is masked for retouching.

Looking at the practice

The SRDx plug-in of LaserSoft Imaging is very easy to use. If the image file you want to optimize is open in Photoshop, you start the plug-in via filter menu entry. A new window with its own user interface appears. This window can be resized to your desired size, which makes sense, if you need an overview of the entire image. All tools can be found on the right side of this plug-in window. There are not too many tools, but they are really powerful. In standard view you get the selected image with all defects, which were recognized by the software, marked in red. Already at this point, you can use the sliders for defect size and the degree of defect recognition very finely to determine, which image areas are recognized as dust and scratches and which are not. Also, there is the possibility to search for light or dark defects separately.

So far, all that's not a big deal. We reach the interesting part, when looking at the plug-in's advanced settings. The defect marking contains a brush and an eraser tool, which can be used to manually add individual defects that are not detected or to remove those, which are detected but are no defects at all. Compared to known solutions, This is exactly where the advantages of SRDx are.

The next tool is also very helpful, it is the mask tool. Use this tool to draw a mask as you know it from Photoshop. This becomes valuable when, for example, in a landscape or travel photography only the sky has to be freed from dust and scratches. Like in the example above, the mask will contain those image areas for which the optimization should be processed. Here, it is the complete sky area. With a simple mouse click, you can invert the mask, so that everything within the mask is excluded or protected from the correction. And then you can again use the defect marker brush or eraser tool to add or subtract fine image areas.

This might sound a little bit complex in this theoretical explanation, but in practice it is not. The rough mask for all image areas, which are not to be processed, is quickly applied, since it can be drawn very coarsely. And the boarders of this rough mask, are quickly adjusted using the defect marker and eraser tools. In any case, with this SRDx tool you will be significantly faster, as if you put the whole small and large spots manually with the instruments included with Photoshop.

To evaluate the quality of the selected settings, you can switch to a preview of the result and also to a view of the original image without the marking of the defects at any time. This is also very useful for the final check, to very that really all defects have been removed without destroying any image details. By the way, all settings can be saved and applied to similar images.

Then just press "ok" and the retouching is finished. The result, as noted at the beginning, is almost sorcery. Without any blurring or other artifacts, dust and scratches simply have vanished. And due to possibilities to select the image areas, which should be corrected, very exactly, there are also no lost image details. "It's magic!"

Conclusion

The Photoshop plug-in SRDx from LaserSoft Imaging is a tool, which photographers who work with digitized image material from the analog world, have desired for a long time. With a few workflow steps, which even can be stored as a preset, a very precise, fine and extremely high-quality retouching of image defects, no matter how many defects are on the image. The time savings which can be generated are enormous. And time is money, not just for photographers.

The SRDx plug-in for Photoshop CC has been released in early December. The software is available for downloading at www.picture-plugins.com (for the time being only for Mac OS X). Until the end of January there will be an introductory price of 69 euros. After that the recommended retail price will be 99 euros. This is a real bargain for such a powerful tool. Our recommendation: Purchase instantly.