Photoshop Tip: Create 3-D Illusions

Give flat objects the illusion of depth.

By Bert Monroy

Most images are flat. On tonight's "Screen Savers" I'll show you how to give your digital art more depth in Photoshop.

You can use any images you want. I decided to scan images of a CD and sheet music using my flatbed scanner for tonight's tutorial.

Once you get the images into your system, put Photoshop to work.

Make your starter layers

1. Select the CD and copy it over to the music notes file. It'll automatically show up in its own layer.

2. Name your new layer "CD."

3. Use the Scale function (Edit > Transform > Scale). Shrink the CD horizontally to add the feeling of perspective.

4. Drag the layer with the CD to the document icon at the bottom of the Layers palette to duplicate the layer.

5. Title your new layer "CD Copy."

Adjust your original CD layer

1. Click on your original CD layer to make it the active layer, making sure Transparency is locked at the top of the palette.

2. Select a gray color and press Option + Delete on your Mac or Alt + Delete on your PC to fill the area with active pixels on the CD layer with gray. To view your change, click the eye icon on the CD Copy layer.

3. Using the Move tool, move the CD layer down just enough to create the illusion that the CD has thickness. You can also use the arrow keys.

Lighting

1. Choose the Paintbrush tool with a large, soft-edge brush tip. Choose colors from the CD and add a soft spray of color to the outside edges of the CD, creating the effect of light reflecting off the CD's sides.

2. Use a small brush to create similar effects at the small circle opening at the center of the CD.

Merge your layers

1. Turn off the Background layer, keeping CD and CD Copy layers visible. Go to the Layers palette and choose Merge Visible to turn the two layers into one.

2. Drag your new 3-D CD to the document icon at the bottom of the Layers palette to duplicate it.

Make the CD's center look like transparent plastic

1. Use the Pen tool to create two paths: one of the outside area of the center of the CD and the other at the hole in the middle of the CD.

2. Turn the paths into a selection.

3. Press Delete to knock out the center of the CD.

4. Make the layer containing the CD without the hole active. Lower its Opacity to create the illusion of transparent plastic.

5. Turn off the Background layer and merge the other two visible layers.

Add text

1. With the Text tool, type the letters "CD."

2. Rasterize the type (Layer > Rasterize > Type).

3. Distort the text to an angle so that it looks like it's resting on the CD (Edit > Transform > Distort).

4. Duplicate the layer and add the same depth effect you used on the CD. Your letters will need some additional alterations to fill in edges where letters break off.

5. Lock the Transparency and add tones to the edges of the letters.

6. Merge the layers that make up the 3-D letters.

Reflect your text

1. Duplicate the layer.

2. With the Move tool, lower the bottom-most layer with the letters so it appears as a reflection on the face of the CD.

If the reflection extends beyond the CD, make a Clipping Group of it with the layer of the actual disc.

3. Duplicate the letters again and lock the Transparency.

4. Fill the layer with black and move it back to look like a shadow for the 3-D letters.

Your image now has a realistic 3-D effect.

Bert Monroy is a photorealist painter and Photoshop expert. You can find more information about Monroy at his website. His latest book is "Photoshop Studio With Bert Monroy."

Adobe Photoshop 7 --

"Photoshop Studio With Bert Monroy" --

Originally posted September 18, 2003

Return to Regular View