

YERVANT PAGE GALLERY 4

Making Beautiful Photo Books with Ease

By Larry Brownstein

My wedding photography business has been growing of late, so I thought it would be a good time to explore some of the new options in wedding album design. I recently made an album with a company, Artefact Studio.com (see pg. 144), that provides a Web-based solution to album design. The process went smoothly, produc-

ing a beautiful wedding album on HP Indigo printers. This time I wanted to take a slightly different approach and look at desktop software that is dedicated to album, portfolio and photo book design. In this article I'll share with you my experiences with Yervant Page Gallery 4.

Yervant's name may be familiar to you as he has been profiled in *RangeFinder*, has been a popular presenter at WPPI conferences and has appeared in PhotoVision videos. I mention Yervant's background to make the point that Page Gallery 4 is a product designed by a photographer who knows what photographers need in a layout program. You may ask, since I referred to Page Gallery 4 as a page-layout program, why you wouldn't be just as well off using one of the well known layout programs such as QuarkXPress or InDesign. Certainly, you could. However, both Quark and InDesign are general purpose programs that are designed for numerous applications besides just albums, portfolios and photo books. Quark and InDesign are ideal for projects that have a

Page Gallery™

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large amount of text as well as integrated photos. But if you don't have much text, then you are dealing with a far greater level of complexity than is necessary by using Quark or InDesign.

By contrast, Page Gallery is all about keeping it simple and to accomplish this it even maintains knowledge about the formats of books available from two of the most prominent book printers: AsukaBook and GraphiStudio. The program is designed in such a way that one can design a book—let's say a square format, and generate different sizes when desired, e.g., 5x5-, 7x7- or 10x10-inches.

Page Gallery keeps things simple in numerous ways. It has a click-and-drag placement model so that once images are imported, they show up within the program and one merely drags the chosen image into the layout. It offers a wide variety of templates that are easily searchable. I could search for templates by specifying the number of horizontal, vertical and square place holders and then scroll through my choices. I typically had 10

or more choices for a given combination of square, vertical or horizontal placeholders. They range from simple and conservative to artsy, poetic and wild. Many of them are designed to incorporate low opacity background images, some of them support text and others incorporate graphical elements into the design. The containers are color coded to clue you in.

For example, solid blue indicates 100 percent opacity. Solid gray indicates 50 percent opacity. A colored box indicates toning of that color. Some templates also incorporate tears and fades too. Templates can be flipped, essentially doubling the available options. By relying on existing templates I was able to design my book quickly with the advantage of not having to worry about whether my bleeds were properly extending beyond trim lines. The range of available templates is impressive and it testifies to this being a mature product. There are helpful housekeeping devices such as a colored diagonal line indicating that an image has already been used (or, alternatively an option to hide any used images) and a "D" on the page list indicating that a particular template has been used in the album. Also, when you settle on some favorite templates they can be selected as favorites and subsequently chosen from the Favorites list.

Let's look at few details. It all starts with file import. Page Gallery supports JPEG, TIFF and PSD files. I recommend really

thinking about this step before jumping in. First of all, give yourself some options and import more images than you anticipate using as it interrupts the flow of design to have to repeatedly prep more files and import them. If you have a vertical and horizontal version of the same image import them both and decide based upon the layout. I also recommend doing all the necessary tonal adjustments before importing, as this is the most efficient workflow. Once I have a folder of images prepped for import I make a copy and sharpen based upon the size of the album I will be making. After importing, Page Gallery allows you to sort the imported images into categories, such as Getting Ready, Ceremony, etc., but I found this unnecessary as my images were numbered sequentially and therefore it was easy to scroll across to find the later images as I worked on later parts of the book. Since the imported images are small thumbnails it was convenient to use the Option-click on my Mac (Alt-click on PC) to see a larger image.

The user-interface has several sections: One shows a laid out spread (a spread is a left and a right page); another maintains the list of spreads; another is used to search for and select templates and another displays the imported images. After a template is selected, an image is dragged from the imported images

to a thumbnail that represents one of the images in the template.

This is one step I think can be improved. It would be easier to drag the image directly onto the template instead of using the indirect method of dragging it to the thumbnail that represents a placeholder in the template. Also, when making changes to a page, the letters may not be visible in the layout area (if you are in layout mode rather than template mode) so it can be guesswork as to which placeholder each thumbnail represents. (Keyboard shortcut "T" toggles between displaying the template and the layout.) Dragging the images directly to the template would avoid all

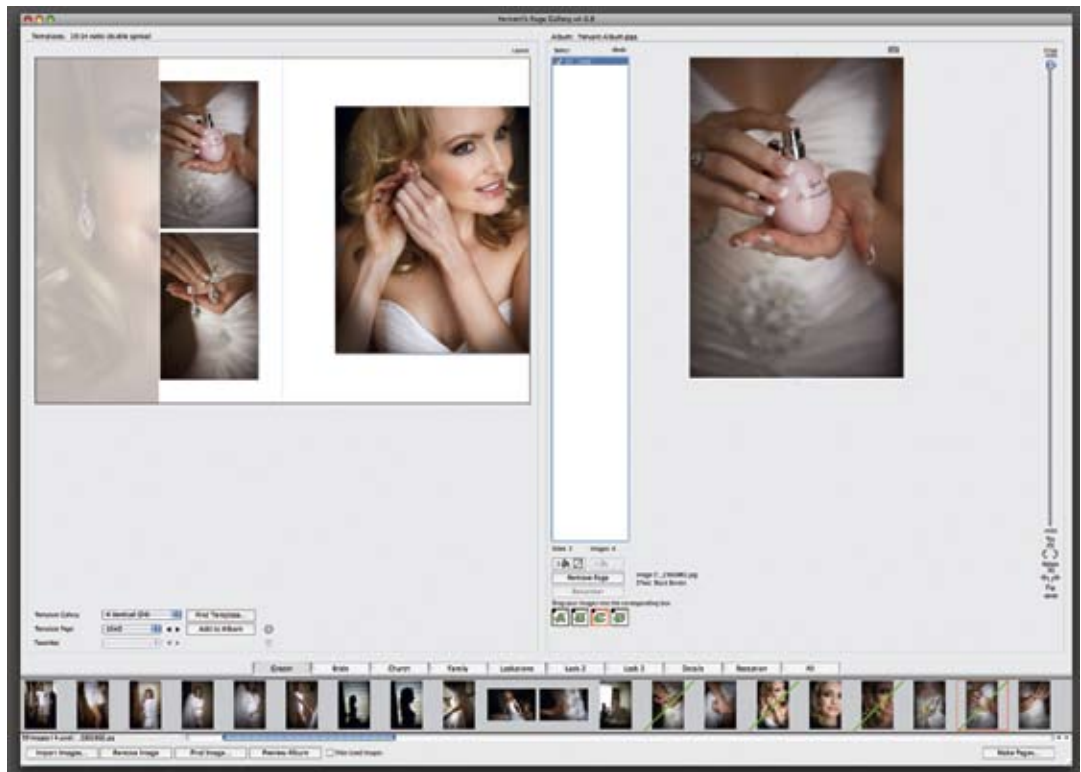
this trouble and difficulty.

According to a tech support person, the layout area is currently designed to switch between displaying either the template, the layout or the finished page (with effects rendered) so that it could be confusing dragging images directly to the layout area. It was also explained to me that the thumbnails have another purpose: indicating whether effects have been applied. So, I guess there are good reasons for the current architecture.

Reordering pages is simple—just drag them to where you want them in the

until you generate pages with the Make Pages command.

At first, not seeing the effect in real-time seems like a serious problem as photographers are used to WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) software. However, there is a good reason for this design decision: The effects can be controlled by the user who can add to them, delete them, swap them, etc. I have been told that users place all sorts of actions that they have made or bought here. So, given the flexibility and power that this makes available, I think most photographers will live with



This shows the user-interface. On the bottom are the imported images available to be placed into the layout. On the top left you can see a layout of a two-page spread with a total of four images. On the top right you can see one of the images that has been selected to add a black border to it.

page listing and then click the Re-number button. The program provides the ability to crop into any image and even to rotate or flip an image. From the Effects menu you can apply a wide variety of effects such as Soft Focus, Soft Edge, Sepia Tone, Blue Tone, Old Photo, Vignette, Black and White conversion, etc. From the Layer Effects menu you can add a black or white border and drop shadows. This would be an ideal place to support artistic and sloppy borders rather than the simple ones provided, but unfortunately the option isn't available. Also, when an effect is applied from either the Effects or Layer Effects menus you won't see the results

not seeing the effect until rendered by Make Pages. Happily, after running Make Pages, the rendered effects can be seen from Page Gallery when in Show Finished Page mode.

One excellent feature is the Preview All Album, which allows you to view the album while using all of your monitor's real estate. This is where you can make more critical judgments as to how it looks. In one template that used a small gutter of white between images, it appeared that two images were abutting with no border between them, until I used the preview to look more closely.

Once your album is designed in Page



Left and below: Finished spreads (a left and right page) that were generated by Page Gallery

Gallery, the Photoshop files are generated using the Make Pages command. I recommend that you select the option to generate layered files, as this will give you one last opportunity to tweak things as you wish. With some templates I like the layout but I don't like the low opacity that some of the background images are placed with. So, I could go into Photoshop and, in the Layers palette, increase the opacity to 70 percent or sometimes even 100 percent.

Beware though: Choosing the route of using Photoshop to do the finishing touches could backfire in the case where you want to make several identical albums of varying sizes, as you'll have to duplicate your Photoshop changes. So I recommend doing as much as possible before generating the pages. Besides, Page Gallery makes it easy to edit the images by double-clicking the thumbnails. Or, if you prefer importing a slightly different version of the image, it can be simply dragged from the desktop to Page Gallery's thumbnails, saving a bit of time importing.

Page Gallery 4 is a great tool for a photographer or a studio that wants to main-



tain control of the album design process without a big learning curve and with a simple but capable workflow. You don't have to be a designer to get great results. You probably don't even need to be a photographer to get great results. You can make beautiful books, quickly and easily with Page Gallery 4. As my wife said jokingly to me, with a Yiddish accent, "Vot more could 'yervant' from a page-layout program?" So true.



Yervant will be teaching a two-day WPPI Plus Class at WPPI 2009 on Feb. 12 and 13, titled "Yervant's Signature." Unfortunately, the class is already sold out.

Larry Brownstein is the photographer of the books *Los Angeles, Where Anything is Possible* and *The Midnight Mission*. He is represented by Getty Images, Alamy and other agencies. He has a growing wedding and portrait photography business. He also offers stock photography consulting and career coaching for emerging photographers. See his work at www.larrybrownstein.com or contact him at 310-815-1402.