Selective Color Controls

Making selective color corrections (color within color) can be an often needed yet difficult task in image editing. Photoshop actually has a few surprisingly good tools for producing selective color tweaks which we will examine. There have been a number of 3rd party Photoshop plug-ins that attempted to produce improved and more precise selective color work inside of Photoshop. One such product that just came to my attention was "Pandora Color's Color Correction Pro 2.0".

Color Correction Pro 2.0

Color Correction Pro 2.0 is a Photoshop plug-in that has been around in other forms for several years. When I recently got an email announcing "The original Inventors of the award winning CoCo software (Kees Spronk and Oscar Rysdyk) proudly present: Color Correction Pro 2.0," I downloaded the product and started playing. The software in this case was an OSX version (there is an OS9 but no Windows version). The demo came with a sample file of a red Porsche in a parking lot that became very easy to make blue with a few clicks in Color Correction Pro 2.0. This was impressive. The software is easy to use. Mouse click an eyedropper over a color to be sampled and a color palette appears (see Figure 1). Before (Color sample from image in left) and after (what the color should appear as) samples can be manipulated to control what colors are selected and thus which colors get altered. A "Range" slider is like a selection feather. The range needs some work. One can produce virtually any number of selective corrections and add them to a stack of other such corrections. The individual corrections can be double clicked to open the palette for further tweaking and can individually be turned on or off, much like layers in a stack.

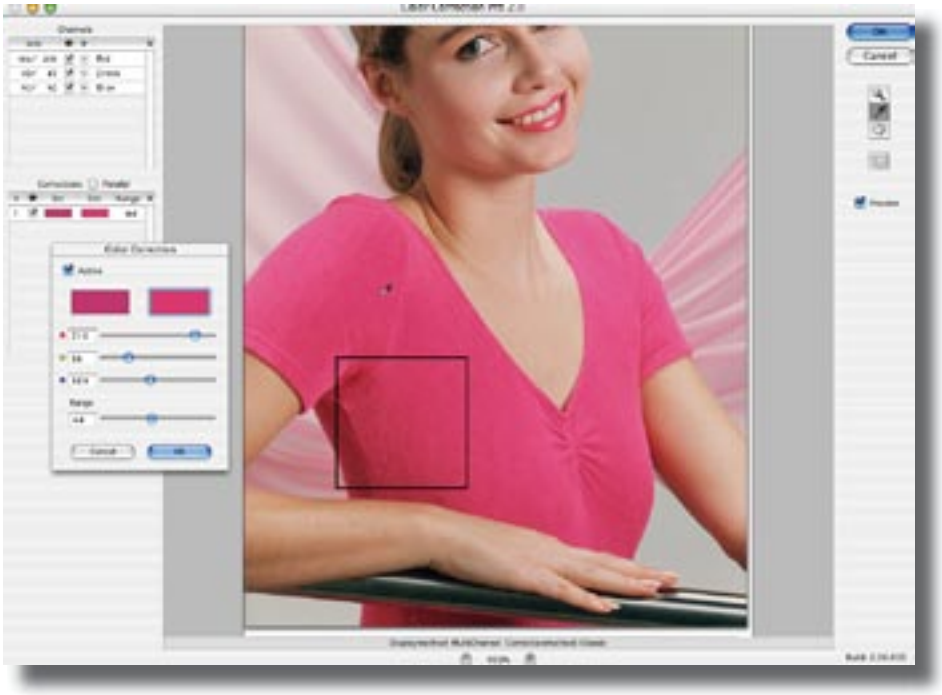

Figure 1. The main Interface to Color Correction Pro 2.0

The car tutorial was one test. How did the plug-in do on a tougher file (the woman in red from the "Printer Test File")? This is tough because we want to selectively change the red outfit but leave the skin tone (which has a high red component) clean and unaltered.

Figure 1 shows the first selective color correction I made. By keeping the "Range" low, I was able to keep the corrections off much of the rest of the image (the lips are getting affected for sure!). The slider however doesn't have the control I really need. If I set it too low, I see crunchy areas of transactions. At higher levels, they get cleaned up and smooth but I'm adding unwanted red to other areas of the image. Notice the darker tones near the seam of the models outfit? Some textures are produced by the way the outfit is selected and changed. Not good. The other issue I have with the sliders in Color Correction Pro 2.0 is there's no easy way to change just tone! You'd need to manually add or subtract identical values in all three fields to keep the color while only altering the tone. As you can see, the values for altering color are seen in RGB (since this is an RGB file). However, having an LCH or HSB mode of selection would be more useful when dealing with selective colors. I will say one thing, this plug-in is quite fast.

Photoshop's Selective Color Controls.

To see how well I could alter the file using just Photoshop, I resorted to the "Replace Color" command. As you can see in Figure 2, I've selected a good deal of the red garment as seen in the preview window of the plug-in. That feature alone is very useful in getting to the "meat and potatoes" of the area to work on. The next step is to see how well the selection and feather appears on the high rez image. An easy way to do this is to make the adjustment in the Hue or Lightness so extreme that you can really see what pixels are getting selected and which are not. Crank up the Hue slider to something ridiculous like +63 as seen in figure 3. You can easily see what colors are selected and what degree of feather is necessary. I move the feather setting from 49 to about 74 and now I can see how smooth the entire effect will be using this exaggerated hue shift as my "quick mask".

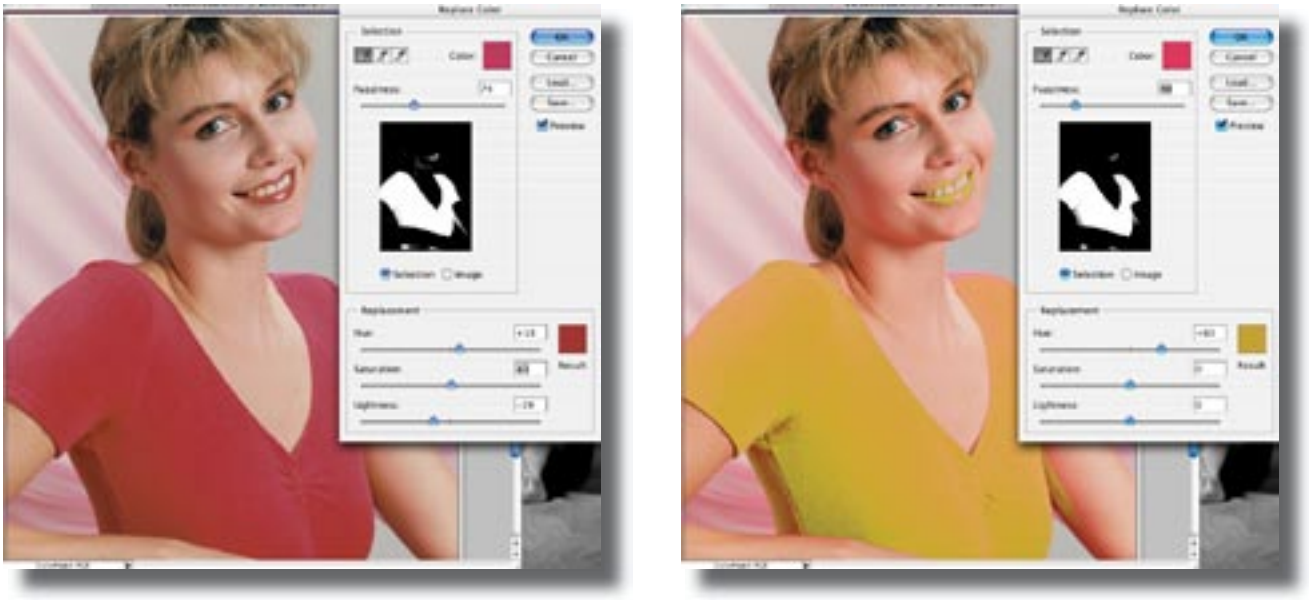

Figure 2 & Figure 3 showing Photoshop's Selective Color.

Back the Hue slider to zero and the image appears normal again. Now I can alter Hue/Saturation/Lightness with that perfect selection. In this context, it's easier to alter the selected color since I have individual control over Hue/Saturation and Lightness. Notice the selection on the underarm of the model in Figure 4. We can fix that later. Still, the effect is much smoother and seamless than using Color Correction Pro 2.0. I think I had better tools to make the adjustments. I do see where some of the color got onto the models underarm. Using the History brush set to a low opacity, I'm able to paint back from History some of the original color to blend the two. This looks more natural than totally removing the color, which would change the skin tone nearby. This could also have been accomplished using Color Correction Pro 2.0 after applying a color tweak. History brush with opacity is very useful in cleaning up the illusion! In addition, don't forget to use some exaggerated slider move with tools like "Replace Color."

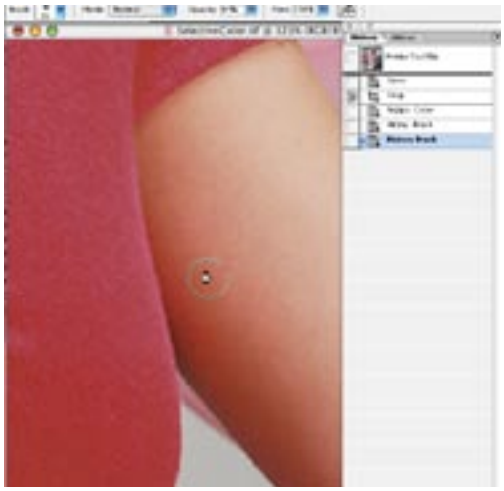

Figure 4. The History Brush

"Hue and Saturation" is a very good and powerful selective color tool as well. Color Correction Pro 2.0 is an interesting product that you may wish to download and demo for 30 days. It will operate in 16 bit mode and has support for external Spectrophotometers like the Spectrocam. The web site is http://www.imagesware.com/