

## Sensitive is good

Rediscovering an old friend—drawing

I've created paper meanderings most of my life, writing, drawing and doodling. Pen in hand, I've passed hours jotting notes, scrawling flowers, circles and lines.

Now the computer has replaced the paper and the Wacom Intuos3 is my pen.

More rare than blue moons on Thursdays are brand new products that slide into our workflow like an old friend. The Wacom Intuos3 graphics tablet is one of them. It fits like a pair of well-worn athletic shoes, but in the guise of the hottest new footwear from Nike.

Wacom tablets make everything about my workflow quicker and more intuitive. I have an Intuos2 tablet on every workstation in my studio, including the one with the Cintiq (an LCD display that doubles as a tablet, with a stylus you use right on the screen). I carry one in my briefcase along with my PowerBook. My expectations were high when I drew the Intuos3 from its box.

What I held was a blotter-esque tablet with fluid, almost Deco lines, and mirrored sets of ExpressKeys on either side of the workspace. Touch Strips flanked the inside edges of the key arrays. Top center, a single LED glowed blue. Certainly its design meets my expectations.

The ExpressKeys and Touch Strips are easy to customize. With the tablet's increased resolution, drawing or writing on it with the new Intuos3 Grip pen is tactile and sensitive. The experience is exquisite. The long pen itself is elegant,



The Intuos3 driver allows you to customize each of the keys on each side of the tablet. You can choose what works best for your work style.

and shaped to fit naturally in the hand. Like its predecessors, it has a contoured DuoSwitch and 1,024 levels of pressure sensitivity, with the addition of three new nib styles that increase its pen-like feel.

This tablet, pen and driver combination is so intuitive and easy to program that in minutes I was retouching a photograph faster than I ever had. The speed comes from Wacom's making

each ExpressKey and Touch Strip programmable, which is the heart of Intous3's productivity. An interactive guide-tutorial-help desk-installer walks you through installing the drive, and clearly and painlessly demonstrates the features of tablet and pen.

### **Programming ExpressKeys and Touch Strips**

The left set of ExpressKeys in this example shows Wacom's default settings on a Macintosh. On computers running Windows, control replaces command and alt replaces option. I have modified the settings to control image size in Photoshop. Wacom provides a simple window for programming each key. Notice how the function of each key is displayed opposite the ExpressKey in the driver. The functions are named when you assign them to keys.

Touch Strips can be customized individually, too. I have forgone the default setting of zooming in or out in favor of changing the brush size. Tapping at the top of the Touch Strip makes the brush larger. Running a finger from the bottom to the top smoothly increases the brush size. Moving from top to bottom reduces it. I retouch a lot of faces, and Touch Strips make getting to the right brush size quick and easy.

One sticking point: I am righthanded. Notice that the left strip is programmed and the right one is disabled. When I am working, my wrist brushes over the right Touch Strip. Were it not disabled, every time I hit it, the image would zoom. Wacom needs to make the Touch Strips individually programmable to be activated only with the stylus tip. In the current driver, you can set both of the Touch Strips to be sensitive to the stylus only, but not just one at a time. It slows productivity to reach across the tablet to make the brush larger when the left index finger is already there. It's a shame to disable a whole touch strip that could instead be controlling brush hardness. I am holding out for a fix in a future tablet driver. As always, I have high expectations for every Wacom release. □