Kai's Power Tips #6

Top Ten List:
Often Overlooked Basics

You may have read these things somewhere in the manual the first time you leafed through it, but for some reason it just didn't stick. Re-acquaint yourself.

There is no real 1 through 10 order of importance. Nor does it build to the ultimate punchline...sorry Dave.

Sure, all of you know 9 of the 10. Good, you found ONE new thing then.

#1 Magnifying Glass
With the magnifier selected, click-and-drag will marquee a rectangle. On release the current window will be maximized and that section shown magnified to fit. Very handy. Double click on the magnifier to reset to 1:1 The maximum magnification is 16:1 Notice that the Magnifier tool will keep the window dimensions and zoom within those boundaries, whereas the Zoom In/Out function under "Window" (shortcut Command"-" and Command "=" (referred to as Command "-" and "+" but that implies the additional shift key, which you can skip....)(Windows users substitute Ctrl key for Command) will actually change the window dimensions as well as the zoom status.

#2 Tool Vectors

All the tools can be forced to follow straight vector paths. Click at the starting point with any tool or even the marquee, then hold the shift key down. Wherever you now click with the brush, pencil, airbrush, blur / sharpener, smudge or eraser will become the endpoint and the tool will follow that path. Keep the shift key down to work in ongoing vector mode. Example use: create clean anti-aliased edges by letting the blur or smudge tool travel along the edge (use several smaller segments in curves). Set it to 33% opacity for finer control and go back and forth several times. After every step evaluate if its a keeper or use the UNDO (Command-z, Ctrl-z) immediately. Use a small size and zoomed window for detail work.

#3 Hide Edges

Make it a habit to delete the “marching ants” marquee with the Hide Edges command (Command-h, Ctrl-z). Not only can it speed up operations, it’s quite often mandatory to see the inside and outside area side by side. For example if you use Levels or Brightness you will be able to judge whether you have identical shades before and after if the edges are hidden. In fine detail work it is equally useful to see things as they will actually look. E.g. pasting floating text into a particular position is a hell of a lot easier, faster and then gives you the actual final appearance if you first use command-h. Also before you use the Paste controls I recommend strongly you turn off the ants. The effect of the fuzziness setting can reach to the edges and is much easier to judge without. Once you get into complex selection regions by manipulating the selection in its own channel you can get such complex marqueed regions that a mere redraw can take close to a second. Certainly by that time you may come to see the light about this command. You can check under the “Select” menu whether you have a region active or not. To unselect all regions use the marquee, ellipse or lasso tool and simply click once anywhere in the window.

#4 Nudging
You may have read somewhere that the arrow keys can move things a pixel at a time, called nudging. Invaluable when you work on small objects, e.g. aligning text by baseline...(If you keep the Option key down, you will move a copy of the selection) (Windows users substitute Alt key for Command). Great for fixing small blotches: use the rubber stamp cloner, hold down the Option key (Alt Key) and find a good area to steal from and position it, then steer it like a little vehicle with the arrow keys. Very precise, no jitter, neat.

#5 Constrain
When moving selections (marqueed, ellipse, lassoed...) use the Shift key to constrain the movement. E.g. selecting an area and moving away with the option key depressed will drag a copy of the area. If the Shift key is depressed the dragging is constrained to be exactly horizontal or vertical or at an angle of 45 degrees. In contrast to many other programs, this constraining action works even if the shift key is pressed AFTER the dragging is already underway. Example use: moving text horizontally only. Also particularly good with the blend tool to create gradients that are truly vertical/horizontal (one pixel difference across the length of the blend vector will be quite noticeable!).

#6 Across windows...
Rarely mentioned and little known is the fact that several tools work outside the current window (unlike any other Mac program). The rubber stamp tool will copy one area to another (with a bunch of options). Press the option key, alt key (notice the cursor change) to select the source and then go anywhere: first click is the destination. The source can be defined in ANY open Photoshop window...Extremely handy, when you want to fix up an image via cloning, but the clean source area is complex but very small: Marquee a rectangle around the source, use Edit > Define Pattern then create another image, select all, fill with pattern. Now you can define the Rubberstamp source in there and clone around at will...
Another tool that works that way is the eye dropper. You can define the current color (and with the Option key, Alt key down the background color) in any window currently open...Utterly handy. You can keep another window open just for that: a quick color picker!

#7 New Window
It seems the real use of the New Window command has passed by a few people. The idea is to create a true clone second window (not another duplicate copy in another untitled window, but just another view of the very same file) and then change what is being looked at in that second window. Prime examples:

a) In a very large file create a left half/right half set of windows and switch with a single click, rather than scrolling.

b) Zoom one window in as much as you wish, leave the other in 1:1 true scale. Now all tools will be reflected instantly in both, allowing you to work in the detailed zoom mode and see the overall effect at the same time. Notice that you can do it either way: a large window with detail and a tiny overview, or a tiny local detail zoom, while you still work in the big picture at normal size.

c) In the color modes, look at each channel in a separate window, E.g. one is RGB the other just R, G, or B. Or three windows with hue, saturation and brightness separately.
Once you get in the habit of cloning new windows you find more reasons to do so.

#8 Screen Modes

The three icons at the bottom of the tool palette represent the three modes to show windows: normal multi-window, normal single window (with grey background if its smaller than the screen) and full screen mode. In the last mode even the menu bar will be hidden and by using the Tab key the tool palette will vanish as well. This has several advantages: it makes for much more impressive presentations focussing solely on the art-work itself. It also shows exactly how the edges of the image behave (in the Mac window mode a single black pixel surrounds the image. And, it is mandatory for taking screen shots with a camera (yielding surprisingly good results! Use a slight tele to reduce barrel and pincushion distortion, shutter less than 1/30th up to 2' (best to bracket 3 or 4 exposures, better yet shoot a test roll))

Note that the single window option in the middle reduces the selective update greatly and can speed up work when you have many overlapping windows (as often happens on large monitors). Particularly with an 8 bit card all background windows have to be constantly updated... Notice also that the screen mode is NOT a global setting, but is remembered for each individual window!

#9 Cross Hair

Utterly basic: the cursor is forced to be a thin crosshair if you keep the Caps Lock key down. As banal as that sounds it can make a big difference when you apply detailed changes: particularly the rubber stamp, smudge and blur tool are sometimes obscuring the actual work as well as being a bit ambiguous about the hot spot and active size. Either way the crosshair is a much clearer target.

#10 Info Window

This little gadget is highly underrated. Make it a habit to open it early on in your session. I usually drag it right underneath the toolpalette (in fact I wish it were a fly-out bottom extension of the tool palette. That vertical column of screen real estate is shot anyway...) It is very flexible and changes behavior depending on the operation currently performed: initially it shows X-Y position and RGB CYMK color value. If you have a selection marqueed and move it around, you will see the delta offset, the angle and distance as well. This is also true for the Line tool, making it a nice Distance Measurement utility. Incidentally if you want to use it just for measurements and the Line tool does draw lines (which you could immediately undo of course) you should switch to the Blend tool and set opacity to 1 (minimum) and fore/background both to white. Then measure with abandon. Notice that the units in the Info window can be changed from pixels to inches, centimeters etc...in the File>Preferences>Units dialog (and in Photoshop 2.5 and later- from the pop-up menu on the palette itself). Just to see the exact size of a marqueed selection is useful enough, but you will find many other instances. For instance drawing multiple concentric circles is a lot easier if you note the center coordinates, using the cropping tool with the option key allows you to rotate with an angle readout, or judging whether to grayshades are really identical, (or if that white is really white...) and on and on....

I did not want to clutter the tiny tips in each KPT document every time one of these things comes up and so I thought it's a reasonable idea to decouple them into a small document by themselves....hardly Power Tips & Tricks, but as many of you have let me know, sometimes rediscovering the most obvious ones can be very helpful, too.

Happy Photoshopping, Kai Krause