

Epson 4990

The editor revisits his old trade, looking at the Epson Perfection 4990 Photo

GOLD
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AWARD

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CHOICE



Although it was enough to award the 4990 Best Scanner in our Awards last issue, we didn't have space for the review – so here it is.

Once upon a time, I worked in a prepress house operating a Process Camera. Computerised, it shot pasted-up artwork on to film to make plates for press reproduction. In a separate room there was an incredibly expensive film scanner, operated by an artisan who had done her four-year lithographic apprenticeship plus extra training for film scanning. In those days (nearly 20 years ago), this was up there with rocket science and splitting atoms.

The Epson seems to accomplish almost identical results with virtually no training whatsoever, and it costs less than \$1000. And it can scan prints as well.

Digital ICE technology corrects dust and scratches in the scan and does a bit of a clean-up, which is good a starting point if you're in a hurry. However, nothing compares to a careful image repair session in Adobe Photoshop or Elements (Elements v2 is supplied with the scanner).

Other software that ships with the scanner is an Epson suite that includes file management (many would choose to leave this to the familiar Apple iPhoto) and Epson scan software, usable either in Automatic, Home or Professional modes (pro mode is definitely usable in most instances, allowing a host of tweaks and preferences to be set).

Prints reproduce clearly and quickly over FireWire; the 4990 powered through big colour prints at 300dpi in gorgeous 48-bit colour in under a minute.

But the real gem is transparency

reproduction. I was more than pleasantly surprised with the last Epson Perfection scanner (in fact, Parkside Media bought one and it still does sterling work in our production department), because flatbeds traditionally fail to produce good transparency scans. But the last Perfection produced results close enough to high-end scans it wasn't funny.

This is even better – I scanned 20-year-old black and white negs, colour transparencies and even colour negatives, all with breathtaking accuracy.

With a variety of scan functions available like unsharp mask, ICE, dust removal, colour restoration and more, there's enough in the supplied software to keep most users more than happy. In case that's not enough, SilverFast software is also supplied, plus an Optical Character Recognition package for turning printed type into editable text.

The 4990 can be connected either by FireWire or USB (and not both at the same time). The USB 2 cable is supplied, but you have to find your own wire of fire.

Twenty-four scans at 2400dpi from transparencies in around 20 minutes is a great working solution – although this slows down considerably when you turn on ICE and/or Dust Reduction.

The 4990 comes with four transparency templates for different filmstrips, mounted slides and transparency formats plus a flexible guide for larger sheets of film.

Fitting strips of film into the holders is fiddly (it's hard to imagine a flatbed that wouldn't be), but it works fine, following the pictorial guides on the holders to get images placed the right way up.

Conclusion

This is a top-of-class unit that justifiably won the top *Macguide* hardware>scanner award last issue (we just didn't have space to run this review!)

EPSON PERFECTION 4990 \$999

DESCRIPTION Flatbed transparency scanning solution, 48-bit and 4800dpi native resolution with an Optical Density (D-Max) of factor 4. Handles up to A4 prints, batches of three 120 or 220 medium format transparencies, two 4x5, eight mounted slides or 24 frames of 35mm film. Drivers for OS 10.2.7+ (and various Windows iterations) supplied along with Adobe Elements 2, SilverFast scan software, ABBYY OCR and Epson Scan and file management. Best Scanner in issue 20, *Macguide* Awards

+ Fast
Accurate
Simply stunning results

- Not the prettiest beside a Mac
Hard to keep dust off the scan surface while fiddling with film-strip placement

Aesthetics	7/10
New Features	8/10
Stability	10/10
Value for money	10/10

Overall 9/10

AVAILABLE FROM Apple resellers and some electronics outlets. Contact www.epson.co.nz