

STEVE CAPLIN'S **A** TO **Z** OF DESIGN

H: History

Steve Caplin walks us alphabetically through the concepts essential to success for any jobbing or aspiring designer.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

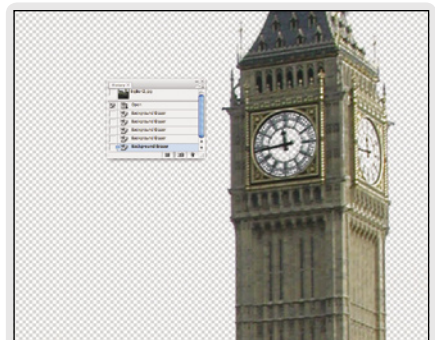
Steve Caplin is a designer and illustrator working for a range of national newspapers. His best-selling *How to Cheat in Photoshop*, now in its fourth edition, is published by Focal Press.
<http://books.macuser.co.uk/caplin>

For years, a multiple undo feature held top place in Photoshop users' wish lists. When it was finally unveiled in Photoshop 5, it far exceeded expectations: the History palette, and its associated History Brush, provides a powerful way to apply earlier – or even later – versions of your image in a selective manner.

The History palette stores each action you take as a discrete step, whether it's a brush stroke, a filter, a change of size or image mode, or any other task or process. By default, the History palette keeps track of the 20 most recent steps, although you can increase this number in the Preferences pane. With every step clearly listed with the name of the tool or process that created it, it's easy to step back and forth through your most recent actions, and even to jump to particular points.

When you open a document, the History palette creates a 'snapshot' of the state of the file at that point. Whatever actions you then take, it's always possible to return to this state by clicking on its thumbnail in the palette. Unlike choosing Revert from the File menu, this is a near-instant process, and it's possible to switch back and forth between the file and the reverted version with ease.

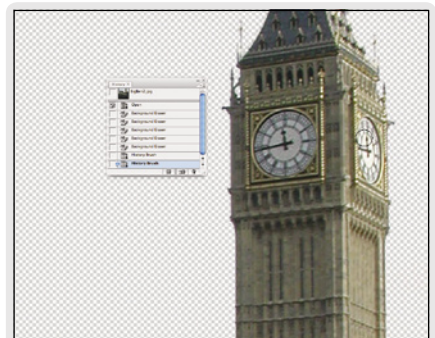
You can choose to take a new snapshot at any point by selecting it from the pop-up menu in the palette. This will capture the entire state of the document, represented by a thumbnail at the top of the palette. In practice, you can take as many snapshots as you like, providing an easy way to flip between different states of the artwork. It's a hugely powerful technology, enabling you to experiment at will without ever having to commit to a series of actions. However, snapshots aren't maintained when a file is closed and reopened: they only operate for the duration of the current session.



▲ **ERASE SKY** Erasing the sky has had the unfortunate effect of removing the two clock faces, which happened to be almost exactly the same colour.



▲ **PIN HISTORY** Removing the sky from this image should be straightforward with the Background Eraser tool. First, we'll pin the History state.



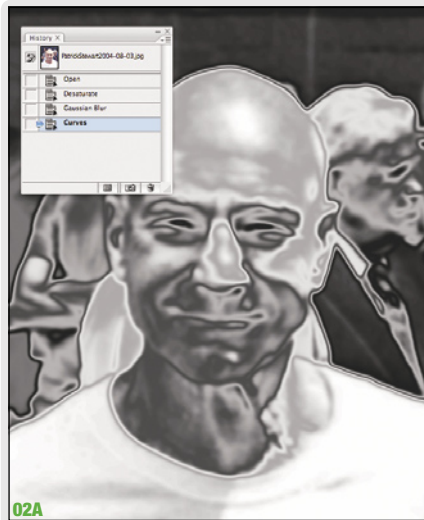
▲ **RESTORE CLOCKS** When we switch to the History Brush, we can paint back the state of the document as it was when we first opened it, restoring the clockfaces.

By default, a new snapshot is created whenever a file is opened. The Options dialog for the palette also enables a new snapshot to be created automatically each time the file is saved, although this can result in a huge number of snapshots. There's also the option to create a new document based on a chosen History state.

By the side of each snapshot, and each item listed in the History palette, is a separate column that can be clicked to 'pin' the History at that point. This allows the document to be reverted to that state selectively: make a selection and press shift-delete to open the Fill dialog. Choosing History from the pop-up menu in this dialog will revert just the selected area on the current layer.

Where the History palette really comes into its own, though, is through the use of the History Brush. This allows the document to be reverted to an earlier state – chosen by pinning it in the palette – by painting on the current layer. You could, for example, apply a series of transformations or filters to a layer, and then paint back the original layer selectively. The 20-item default limit doesn't apply when a History state is pinned in the palette: that position will be maintained however many steps are subsequently taken, as long as the state to which you want to revert remains pinned in the palette.

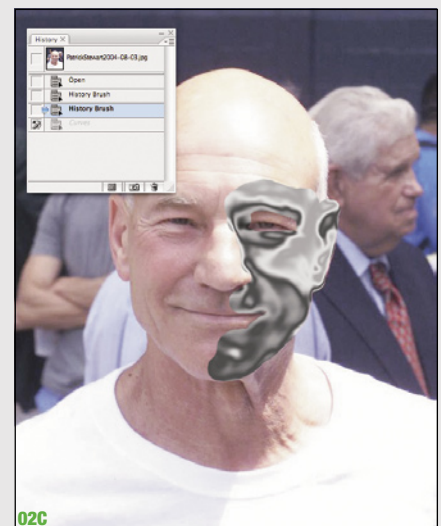
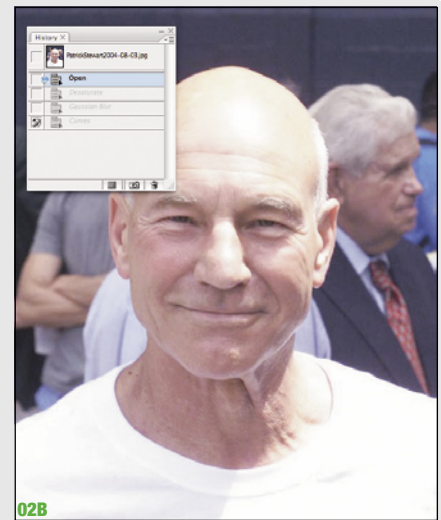
This is particularly useful with processes such as using the Background Eraser tool to delete the sky behind buildings, or a background from behind a portrait. What frequently happens here is that if the Tolerance on the Background Eraser tool is sufficiently high to remove all of the background, you'll inadvertently erase part of the face, or windows in a building that happen to be a similar colour to the sky. Since using the Background Eraser tool



▲ **02A** This photograph of Patrick Stewart, aka Captain Jean-Luc Picard, has been desaturated and blurred, with a metallic Curves effect applied to it.

▲ ► **02B** We'll pin the history state after the final operation, and then click on the initial state of the document to revert it. The subsequent operations, though, have been stored in the History.

► **02C** This allows us to use the History Brush to paint in the effect we'd built up, but which we'd then reverted from. This could be the first step to full Borg transformation.



involves making a large number of small brushstrokes, your 20-item History limit can quickly be used up. However, if you pin the History state before you begin to erase, the state of the image at that moment will be retained. Then, when all the background has been removed, you can switch to the History Brush and paint back any details that have been removed in error. Without the History Brush, the Background Eraser would be a significant more cumbersome tool to use.

As well as reverting to earlier states in a document, the History palette also enables you to return to 'future' states. Let's say we want to add noise to a layer, but we only want it to show up in certain areas. We can run the filter – or as many operations as we choose – and then pin the History state after all the processes have been completed. It's now possible to return to the original state of the document by clicking on its position in the palette; now, when we use the History Brush, we can paint in the state of the file after the filters have been run, exactly where we want them.

The History palette adds each new event to the bottom of its list. If you undo a series of actions, they'll be cleared from the list, which will continue to be added to from that point on. A special variation on this is available through the Options dialog for the palette, called Allow Non-Linear History. In this mode, reverting to an earlier state won't remove subsequent actions from the palette. Instead, any further operations will be listed below them. It's a useful option, but can be confusing in use: it's generally preferable to have this option turned off, unless there's a specific series of actions that requires it.

The History palette, especially when using snapshots, involves the writing of huge temporary files to your hard disk. Reading and writing these files can slow down Photoshop considerably: it's good practice to Purge your History every now and again to ensure smooth running of the application. This is best achieved through the Purge All command in the Edit menu, which will also clear the clipboard and standard Undo capability.