

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

W: Workspaces

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.

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Whether using a 15in MacBook screen or a 30in Cinema Display, you'll always want to see the image you're working on at the largest possible size, which means dealing with the clutter of palettes and toolbars that eat into your viewing area.

In Photoshop CS2 and earlier, a Palette Well at the top of the screen is a convenient place to store infrequently-used palettes. These have the advantage of popping open when their tab is clicked on and neatly disappearing from view once you click elsewhere. In CS3, a unified interface for the entire suite approaches things differently: the Palette Well has gone, and instead we can store these infrequent palettes in a narrow strip on the right of the monitor.

On-screen palettes have three states: fully open, icon and name, or just the icon. Once you've learned which palette each icon represents, the icon-only view is the most convenient way to store a lot of palettes in the minimum possible space.

But while you're still learning, it's useful to be able to drag the button width to reveal the first word, or even the first few letters, of the palette's name. It takes up a little more space this way of course, but serves as an instant key to the palette's function.

Because palettes can be stacked next to each other in any of the three states you can choose which ones you want permanently on view and those that are reduced to icons or text.

The arrangement depends on your own working practices but a good starting method is to have the Layers palette fully open at all times since you'll need to refer to it frequently. You may use the Channels palette only occasionally but when you do, you'll want it to stay open. Nesting this behind the Layers palette makes it easy to switch to it when required, switching back to the Layers palette when you've finished.

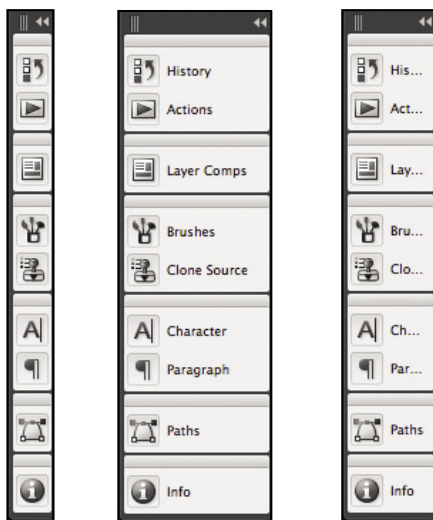
If you have a large monitor, then it can be handy to keep the Colour and Swatches palettes open on top of this. They don't take up much space and having the colour picker handy is a good use of the space.

The Layers palette can be customised to show small, medium or large thumbnails of the layers they represent. Choose the size from the Palette Options item at the bottom of the pop-up menu list at the top right of the palette.

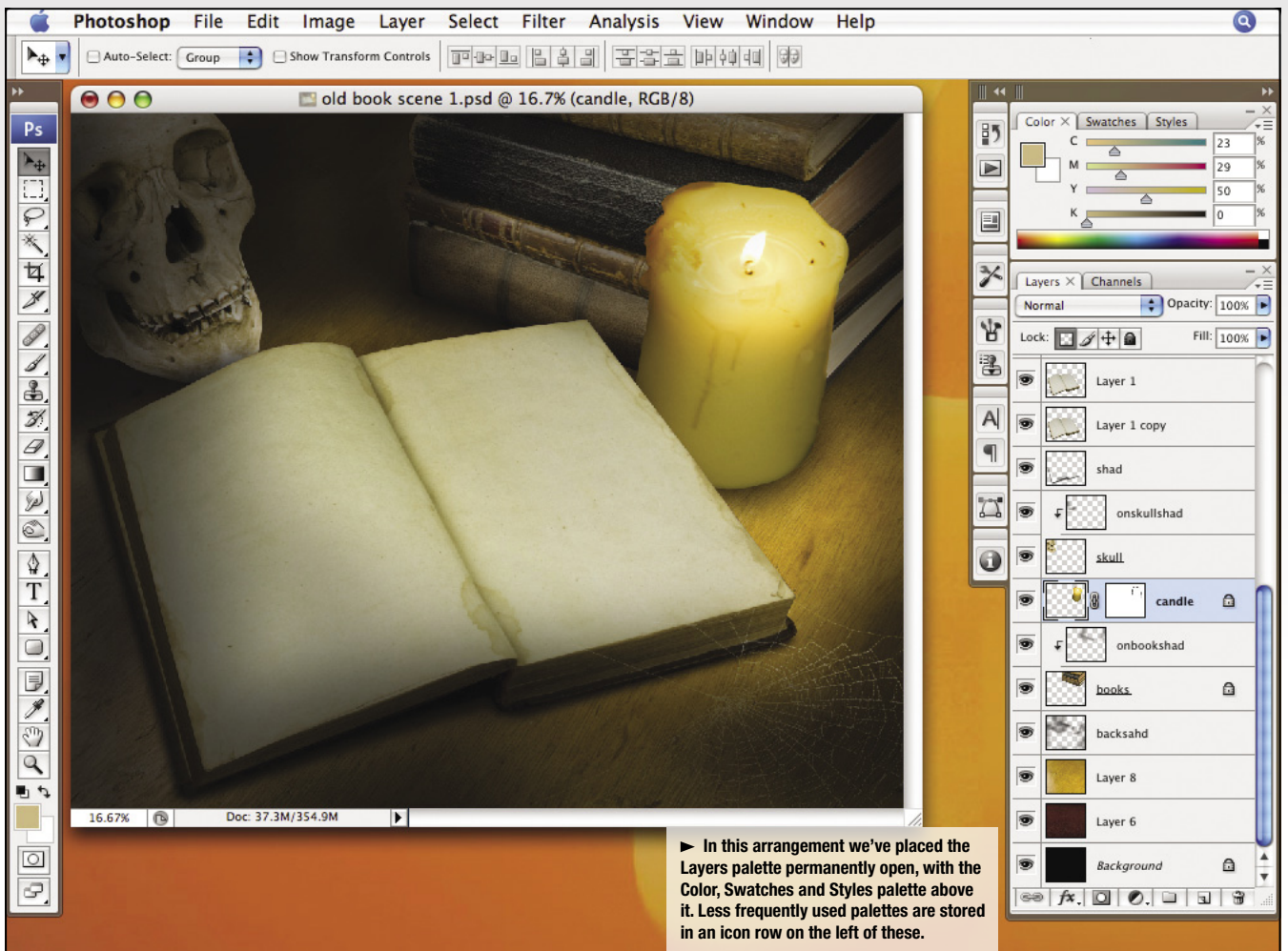
Generally you'll want to work with small thumbnails since this enables you to get the maximum number of layers on view in the palette. You can also choose how each thumbnail is displayed – either in 'layer bounds' mode, in which each thumbnail will fill the space with a view of that layer, or in 'entire document' mode. In the latter the thumbnails are much smaller but they do show the layer's location within the file. This is probably the more convenient method as it makes it easier to identify which layer you're working on.

Keep your infrequently used palettes in button form, if you can remember the icon, attached to the side of the Layers palette. For easier recognition they can be grouped by kind – by dragging the icons together so that they link. By default, these palettes will stay open when selected; the Auto-Collapse Icon Palettes option in the Interface section of the Preferences dialog allows them to disappear once they've been used (the best option for most users).

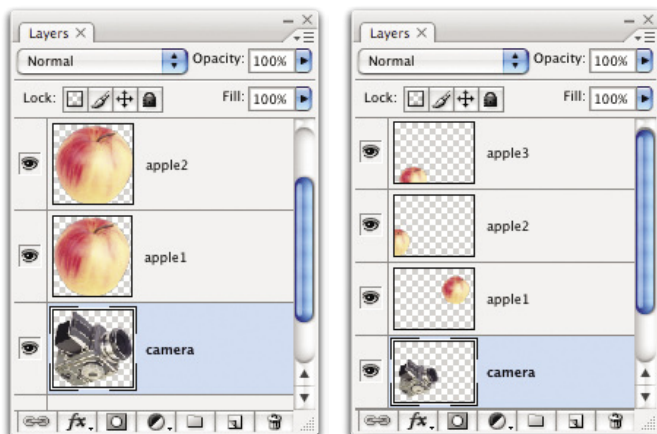
Not all palettes are best auto-collapsed, however. The Animation palette, for example, needs to be constantly on view while working with movies or animations; so if you use this only occasionally, don't dock it as an icon but select it from the Window menu each time it's needed. When you've finished with it, put it away manually. You may wish to have different set-ups for



▲ Docked palettes can be stored as icons only (left), or as icons and text (centre). If you have trouble recognising the icons, you can expand the view to show the first few letters of the palette name (right) to help you learn them.



► In this arrangement we've placed the Layers palette permanently open, with the Color, Swatches and Styles palette above it. Less frequently used palettes are stored in an icon row on the left of these.



▲ In Layer Bounds mode (left), the Layers palette displays each layer as large as possible within the thumbnail. Although it's easy to see the contents of the layer this way, it's hard to tell their location; the preferred Entire Document view (right) shows the thumbnails smaller but in their correct location within the document.

different kinds of jobs. For example, with general montage work, you'll want the Layers palette to have prominence; but for text-heavy design work you may need the Character and Paragraph palettes on view permanently.

You can save multiple workspaces in the Workspace section of the Window menu, making it easy to switch between them with

different colour, so you can explore them more easily. But be sure to save your preferred workspace arrangement here before changing to another, so you can return straight to it.

You can make individual menu items stand out, using the Menus dialog (found in the Edit menu). Here it's possible to assign different colours to specific menu items,

a single click. Photoshop ships with a selection of pre-set workspaces customised for colour correction, image analysis, web design and more – all worth experimenting with.

A novel addition is the What's new in CS3 workspace, which highlights all the changed menu items in a

making it easy to spot those suitable for a particular task. This dialog also allows you to hide certain items from view, which in turn shortens the menu list – but you should think carefully before doing this. It's likely to cause confusion and frustration when you can't find the item you're looking for.

This mode is best saved when designing a workspace for students, for whom you want to limit the range of options to just those they've been taught already. Hidden items can be shown temporarily by holding the Command key as you click on a menu.

If you need to see your image without any on-screen clutter at all, pressing the Tab key will hide and show all palettes – including the Tools and the Options bar.

The problem here is that the Options bar is extremely useful as it presents the key information from the palettes in a more compact, context-sensitive manner. So instead of just pressing Tab, press Shift-Tab – this will hide the floating palettes but leave the Tools and Options on view.

In this mode, dragging the cursor to the right of the screen will pop the palettes back into view temporarily. These will hide themselves though once they've been used. ☒