

INDUSTRY Career focus

Get the job you want with tailored advice from industry insiders

So you want to be a... Photo retoucher?

Highly skilled Photoshop experts spend their time transforming photographs into amazing works of art, but how do you get a job as a retoucher?

Introducing the experts

Yahor Shumski

A freelance photo retoucher who has been working in the profession for six years, using Adobe Photoshop.

www.euphoria-imaging.com

Craig Zaduck

A proprietor/high-end retoucher working freelance through the Photo Transform company, with a massive 16 years of experience in retouching and currently working with Photoshop CS4.

www.phototransform.co.uk

Nadine Schneider

A freelance photo retoucher and art director who has been working in retouching for four years and using Photoshop CS3.

www.delicate-media.com

Best career advice for potential retouchers?



"Always stay interested in learning new techniques as there are many ways to achieve the same result. Have an open mind to trying new ways or methods as there is a lot you can do with the software. Build up a portfolio in both printed and digital form as this is what you'll use to convince that would-be employer you've got what it takes."

Craig Zaduck
Proprietor/high-end retoucher
Photo Transform

Photo retouching is most common in the fashion industry, working up models to have flawless, dewy complexions, a digital nip and tuck, and ramping up the contrast as required. There are plenty of other retouching jobs too, such as in commercial or business arenas, but how do you get started as a retoucher in the first place? We asked those working in the industry today to answer all your most-pressing questions.

What qualifications or training do I need?

Are there any skills that I definitely need to know to work in the industry as a retoucher?

Craig Zaduck: A knowledge of digital photography post-production is valuable, as the processing of raw camera files is an important first phase of the retouching procedure. Obviously, a good knowledge of Photoshop is essential as this is where all the amazing things happen. Experience in fine art also helps a lot if you're interested in beauty/fashion retouching as it gives you a better feel for the human form, which is something you end up working with a lot.

How do I build up a portfolio of work?

To get a job I need a portfolio, but how do I build one when I am just starting out?

Yahor Shumski: A prospective photo retoucher can ask relatives for old photos of ancestry and you'll get tonnes of materials to perfect photo restoration skills. If you're more interested in fashion photography, I advise you to find internet communities of photographers and models. The photographers will receive



UNTITLED: This is an example of work by retoucher Yahor Shumski. On his website you will find a great video of a 'retoucher in action' as well as before-and-after shots. Studying the work of the professionals is a great way to learn, teaching you best practice
Photographer: Christian Peterson, www.christianpeterson.ca
Retoucher: Yahor Shumski



JOOP BODYWEAR: This photo was taken by Alexander Leon Diaz and is the cover photo of the Joop! Bodywear Fall/Winter 2009 Collection catalogue
Photographer: Alexander Leon Diaz
Retoucher: Nadine Schneider

FAB MAG: Craig Zaduck has worked on a number of high-profile campaigns and well-known magazines
Photographer: Elisabeth Hoff
Retoucher: Craig Zaduck

retouched images for free and you will expand your portfolio. If you want to retouch images of products for advertising purposes, free photo stocks (for example from www.sxc.hu) can be useful too. The majority of images on free stock sites aren't retouched and there is plenty of space for enhancement. You can't use images from free stock sites for commercial use, but why not to use them to build up a portfolio?

Do I need to get work experience?

I really want to get started in my retouching career, but how important is it to get work experience as well as having the right skills for the job?

Craig Zaduck: Work experience is what counts the most, as this is where valuable tips and tricks are picked up. Getting a junior retouching position in any repro-graphic house or retouching business is advised. There's a lot that can be learned from the pros working there.

Should I consider an in-house role?

I don't know whether I am better off going freelance, but an in-house role might be of more benefit. What do you think?

Craig Zaduck: Absolutely! Like I said, the best techniques are learned from working with more experienced retouchers who have had years of experience in the industry. Working in-house with these people could prove to be very beneficial.

What starting salary should new retouchers expect to start on?

Okay, so it's not all about the money, but what's the reality of this profession when starting out?

Yahor Shumski: It's not a bad idea to work for free, expanding your portfolio at first. As a freelance retoucher I started out charging five pounds per image. The retouching was difficult and I spent an



Industry insight



Photo by Michael Braun from Cologne, Germany

Essential advice for digital artists hoping to enter the competitive field of photo retouching

Nadine Schneider
Photo retoucher and art director

"The most difficult task for a newcomer photo retoucher will be to find high-quality photos to work and practise on. Holiday photos or other snapshots wouldn't make a valuable reference and also don't have the right light settings, and so on, in most cases. Setting up a profile as a photo retoucher on a modeling and photography website (for example, <http://modelmayhem.com>) can be useful. Many models and photographers are willing to provide one of their high-quality photos on a non-paid basis and allow the photo retoucher to use the result for his portfolio afterwards. To achieve the best results it's also advisable to work on RAW files instead of the already compressed JPEG version of a picture and use a graphics tablet instead of a mouse.

The best way to find valuable work experience is to actually watch people who already have experience and work with them. The best tricks are passed on from one person to the other and that's how I learned most retouching techniques myself. Some professional retouchers offer workshops to help you get into the basics and beyond. Some also produce very helpful workshop DVDs and online tutorials.

To become a successful retoucher you have to be different and better than the many competitors in the field. You need to have an eye for details and a lot of knowledge about the beauty and fashion industry and how they require a model or product to look. You have to be willing to learn and practise a lot and to accept that it will take a while to build up the necessary understanding of Photoshop, which can be quite frustrating at times."



What's the biggest mistake novice retouchers make?

Yahor Shumski
Freelance photo retoucher
Euphoria Imaging

"The common problem of novices is over-retouched images. The skin is too blurred, the make-up is too loudly coloured, the image looks unnatural and the retouching is obvious. The novice wants to see the result of work and to show it. But that isn't what the clients want to see. The retouching should be as transparent as possible, it shouldn't overlay the idea of original image. Try to achieve realism and natural look."

hour for a photo. But keep in mind there is a great demand for slight corrections of photos and they don't take much time. Therefore, pricing per hour is more justified.

Is having the right experience more important than education?

The big question, which one will help me out the most, the right skills, or the right experience?

Yahor Shumski: The demand of students is varied. Some of them want to design websites in Photoshop, others want to retouch photos. Each of these groups should use different tools and techniques. Therefore tutors prefer to teach general principles of Photoshop and the students have to learn the details themselves. My education isn't correlated with graphics at all. At university I trained my learning skills and stretched the mind, but it is nothing without a real live practice. I began to learn Photoshop ten years ago without attending any classes. All I know I got from books and the internet.



WHAT OTHER SOFTWARE PACKAGES WILL I BE USING?

This career relies almost entirely on your knowledge of Photoshop, but make sure that you are comfortable with Camera Raw and Bridge too, as these will be handy. Also, you might want to experiment with time-saving plug-ins, such as PhotoTools from onOne Software, which can give great results.

Want to know more?

The best resources for finding out more about photo retouching and restoration

Inspirational websites

www.retouchpro.com

Essential training

Digital Photography and Retouch Masterclass
Cost: £795 Location: The London Academy of Media, Film and Television Website: www.media-courses.com

Photo Retouching

Cost: \$475 Location: Sessions Online School of Design
Website: www.sessions.edu

Must-have resources

Skin: The Complete Guide To Digitally Lighting, Photographing, & Retouching Faces & Bodies
Author: Lee Varis Publisher: Wiley Price: £25.99/\$39.99
Website: www.wiley.com

Photo Retouching In Adobe Photoshop

Author: Meghan Farrell Publisher: The Gnomon Workshop Price: \$69 (approximately £47)
Website: www.thegnomonworkshop.com