



Photography-budget saver

MatchLight

Publisher: MatchLight www.gomatchlight.com

Pros: Gives results that would cost thousands of pounds to shoot, for a fraction of the cost; simple to use.

Cons: The interface seems primitive.

Min specs: 500MHz G4; Mac OS 9.2 or X

Price: Software and Light Targets, £429; MatchLight Library Images, single images £149; 3-10 images, £129 per image; CD collections of background images available from £149. All prices exclude VAT.

Star Rating: ★★★★★/8.8

Professional photographers are often asked to travel the world to get pictures of beautiful people in beautiful places. This is fine for big-budget shoots, for photographers that like to spend a lot of time away from home, and for models that like to earn money while sunning themselves in exotic places. In real life, however, shipping photography crews and models to Hawaii for a week is ideal only for the models and crews, but not for the budget.

For photographers who wish they could get the look of a far-away place, but who don't have the budget to leave the studio in Bermondsey, MatchLight is a revolution. Now they can take pictures that are convincingly exotic from their own studio.

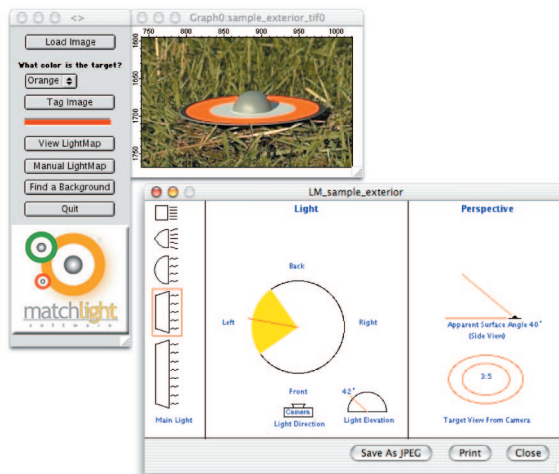
MatchLight consists of a piece of software, three plastic light targets, and a library of images of scenes waiting to be populated with products and models. Normally if you have a picture of a sun-drenched beach or an Italian cobbled street, adding a model from your studio

isn't technically that difficult. Products such as Extensis Mask Pro and Corel KnockOut make it possible to add your models to a scene without unsightly joins. It isn't the joins that give away the cut-&-paste job, though – it's the lighting. If the subject has the wrong kind of lighting from the wrong angle, it will stick out like a sore thumb. The viewer may not realise exactly what's wrong, but it will definitely jar.

Looking at a scene doesn't always give you enough information to match the lighting in your studio; it's a hit-and-miss affair. This is where MatchLight comes in. It gives you the tools to exactly match your studio lighting to the scene. Unfortunately, it can't work miracles: you need to take a calibration picture of the scene before the software can figure out where the lights are. If you weren't actually at the scene (if it was a library picture, for example), then MatchLight won't help much. However, MatchLight's image library contains around 25,000 images, each including a light target. These can be used with MatchLight to give you exact measurements of lighting angles, types, and direction.

Using MatchLight is straightforward. If you're using your own background images, you simply need to include a light target somewhere in your picture. So whether you start with your own image or one from the library, you need to open it in the MatchLight application. Then you simply tell the application which target is shown (there are three different colours), and where it is in the image. The application does its magic, measuring the diffusion, angles, highlights, and shadows. It then produces an easy-to-read map of the lighting in the scene.

The next step – to actually light



your subject – is a simple matter of angling the lights correctly. When you then take the resulting image into Photoshop, it will look as realistic as any exotic photo shoot.

Macworld's buying advice

The interface of the MatchLight software is a little primitive-looking; the job it does is anything but. This might not appeal to top photographers that spend half the year in Barbados, but those people are rare. It will definitely appeal to those that don't get to go on foreign trips, but want to create the same effects. If you're one of these, filling your portfolio with exotica may just get you the dream jobs in sunnier climes.

If you think for a second that the MatchLight system is expensive, just pause to think how much a flight to Rome with your assistant, equipment, models, stylists, make-up, and hair people might cost.

MatchLight is the bargain of the century!
David Fanning

Photo call

If you don't have the time or budget to fly your models and crew to an exotic location, MatchLight is the next best thing.

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