

Artist PROFILE

Alp Altiner
COUNTRY: USA



Alp Altiner is an award winning matte painter with over ten years of experience in film, video games, conceptual design and art direction. He is currently working in the film industry as a VFX art director, creating 2D and 3D matte paintings. Alp also runs his own publishing company, Bionic Unit. www.alpaltiner.com

Working files

Download the working files for Alp's workshop from the downloads section of www.imaginefx.com and Download a trial version of Photoshop from www.adobe.com/downloads

Photoshop

MATTE PAINTING FOR FILM PRODUCTION

Join **Alp Altiner** in using various photo elements, painting and adjustment techniques to create a seamless and convincing matte painting...

When you're creating a matte painting for film production and you're provided with a plate that already has foreground and/or mid-ground elements, your goal will be to create an extension and/or the backdrop of the final image.

Sometimes you'll be given the plate photography with an actor in front of a green screen stage, where there may be some basic mid-ground elements and markers on the green screen that are used as a guide for perspective.

For this workshop, I created the main gargoyle and edge structure elements from a photo (which you can download from our website), made a clean matte and filled the background with green. This is a good example of what you'd typically be dealing with in a true production environment.

If the camera's moving and there's no green screen behind the elements to be replaced, those elements will need to be roto-scoped. Then your goal is to create the background image to replace the unwanted or non-existing environment. So it's quite possible you'll be working on a matte painting with a foreground and/or a mid-ground element.

Either way, it's vital to understand that you need to be able to create a seamless painting that will communicate with the elements provided from the real shot.



In depth Matte painting



Christmas 2007 **ImagineFX**





1 Creating a clean background

The director wants me to create a very moody matte painting where we're on top of a castle, looking over the mountains at sun down, and there may be a 3D element of a flying creature approaching the castle. Based on the camera move and thus how wide the painting needs to be, I set up an appropriate canvas size.



2 Designing the shot

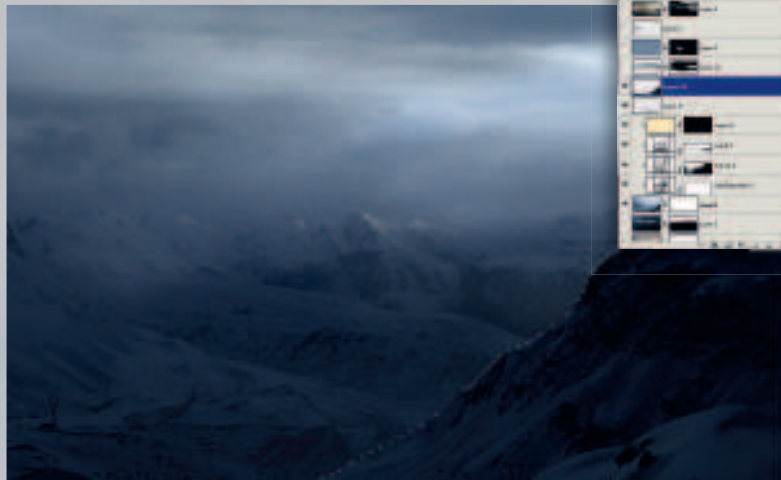
I've searched for some reference photographs appropriate to the mood the director is looking for. One is of snowy ground, while two are of the sea. These images are available from the downloads section of www.imaginefx.com.



3 Blocking in the background image

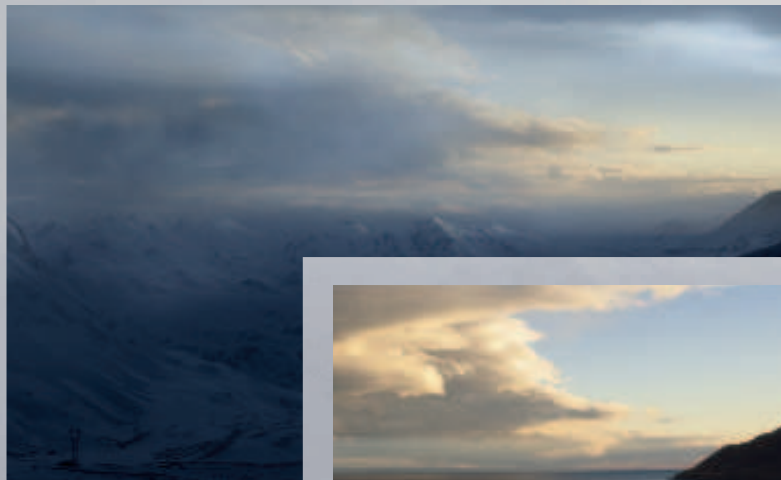
I drop my snowy mountain reference image into the background, making sure that the horizon matches the 3D perspective guide I have created. To add some mood and dramatic lighting to the scene, I do some adjustments, first to the overall saturation, then using Curves to adjust the black levels painting into a mask. Next, I create a fill with a hint of orange for the licks of sunlight to be painted on: this masks in to the far mountain tops.





4 Foreground mountain patch

It's very important to create convincing blends between all your elements, so now I'm going to focus on my foreground patch of snow-covered mountain. The two most important things to make believable are the scale and the amount of light this element would receive from the environment. Your lighting needs to match where your main light source is coming from exactly – all the individual elements need to look like they are receiving the specular levels from the same source as well as various integration of bounce light in the environment.

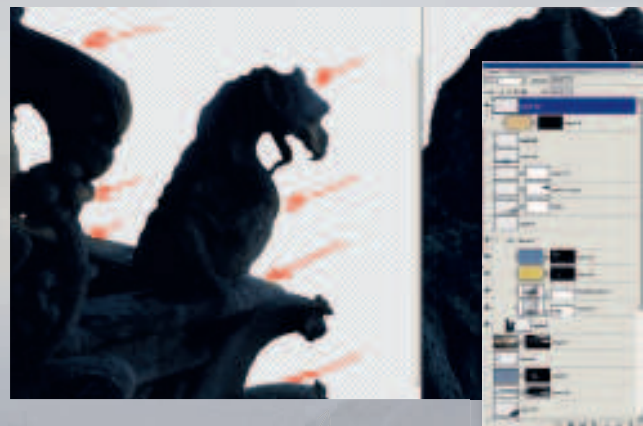
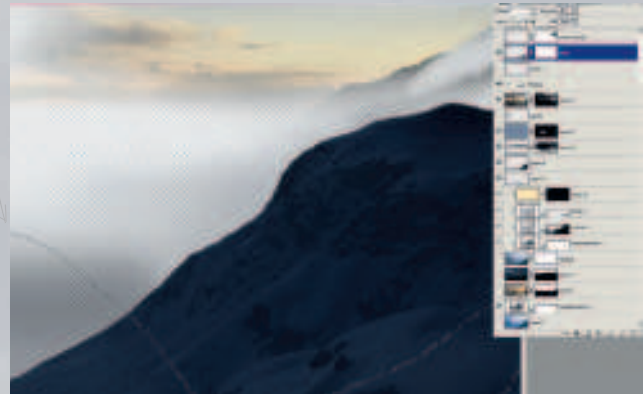


5 Sky patches

Before I begin hand painting, I usually start with one main sky element, and/or a painted sketch and then find various photo elements that I use as patches. It's fun to hand paint, especially if the matte's for a sci-fi or fantasy movie, but most of the time for film you'll need to be able to blend up to ten different skies together perfectly – so I usually need to drop a few other photo elements into my canvas. After positioning and scaling them, create a Channel Mask and slowly, using an Airbrush, paint in using white (as the foreground colour) the sections you would like to integrate in to your work. Make sure that you keep your masks – don't delete them – so you can easily go back and forth to paint things in and out of the layer as necessary.

6 Atmosphere layer

I create another layer and fill it with 100 per cent of the colour of the general atmosphere tone/colour, for use as a mask adjustment layer. I start airbrushing very carefully at 10 to 20 per cent Opacity, to get things blending better, and more convincing to the eye. It's really important to name your layers when working on heavy production files, as you can end up with as many as 50 layers or more, which can require a number of detailed adjustments.



7 Highlights on foreground elements

Let's assume a camera move is revealing the environment. We usually create the highlight pass on a separate layer and paint it, then the compositors 2D track it and match move it. A challenging camera move can be 3D projected on to the area, where a 3D model would be built to match the real plate elements. In this step I'm creating another fill layer and using a mask again. I'm painting various highlights on to the surface of the edge of the foreground element, so it is receiving that far sunlight, softly creating high points on the surface. Always look at real references; don't guess and start hand painting areas – people will notice!

PRO SECRETS

Expand your knowledge

Try to learn additional new software packages in your free time, and take advantage of such programs as Vue 6, which is a great program for creating skies, digital landscapes and vegetation. In Vue 6 you can easily create renders with Alpha and Z Depth channels, and try using some of the preset GI render options that come with this package when you buy it.



8 Additional foreground elements

To help level the foreground I want to add a few elements to the very foreground, showcasing the more snowy areas; these are little patches on the left and right with snow on them. It's important to give a sense of height to this castle, looking over the mountains, and giving more weight to these foreground elements helps to achieve this. I use various photos and then paint on top of them with the Airbrush, making sure that it feels like snow and has additional bounce light information on it.



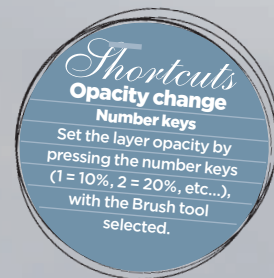
PRO SECRETS

Layer organisation

When working in Photoshop, make sure you name your layers at all times, and organise them into groups, then colourise them. I tend to use a green colour for my final effects, and blue to identify all the additional adjustment layers. When you're working in a production environment it's quite usual for your files to be handed over to another artist and it's good practice to ensure that the next person who may work with these files can easily see what you've done on them so far.

9 Sky touch-up

At the very end I usually hand paint some highlight into my clouds, using an Airbrush, as well as the Smudge tool to blend it in with the original image. It would have been tempting to add more detail and extreme highlights here, but I wanted to make sure that the image was not overdone and had a natural feel to it.



10 Final delivery stage

If you need to deliver separate layers to the compositors it's most important to check all your Alpha Channels. When creating Alpha Channels of individual layers to be used as separate elements, make sure that you don't have miscellaneous brush strokes outside the main area. If you're delivering a flat file, then save your file as a Tiff or PSD, depending on what compositing package the company is using.

