

by Annmarie Utroska

## Wacom...WAY Cool!

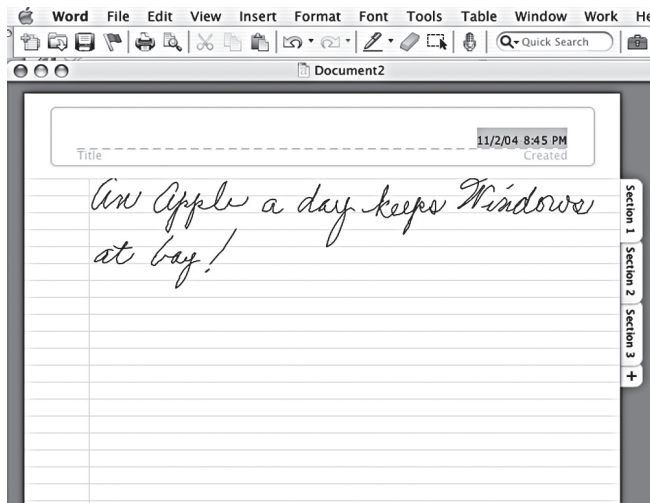
The first Saturday of the month I attended a half-day seminar on retouching old photographs. The presenter used only a tablet and pen. He had set up his ribbon toolbars for easy access of frequently-used functions and with just a click of the pen here and there (combined with use of some keyboard strokes to enhance the function) his actions appeared to be effortless. Since the TNWoU presentation in April, a Wacom Graphire3 Tablet has been on my wish list—now it moved up to the top. Little did I expect that just one week later I'd be crossing it off my list after winning a TNWoU raffle item.

Loading the software was simple, as was plugging in a USB device. Activation was immediate. Now the fun and the challenge of learning to use a writing tool!

As a desktop publisher, my "mousing" skills are well honed. Just as learning to use a mouse was a new concept for each of us once upon a time, now picking up a "pen" and using it instead of a mouse is a new experience, and it does take practice—but all nice things are easy to get used to.

I found the pen to be comfortable in size and weight—ergonomically designed—not too thick, not too slim (unlike the early models that required batteries creating bulk and weight). I would suggest holding off on programming the in-line buttons on the pen until one is fully comfortable holding and using it. In the early stages of practice I'd accidentally touch the programmed button and distract myself. Turning on the sound in the beginning helps to keep track of one's clicks.

Strokes with the pen are very fluid. One doesn't need to touch the tip to the tablet to create a stroke. The pen will register movement over the tablet up to about 3/16 in. off the surface. In light of this, I found I could put pictures of items I wanted in



the computer on the tablet and trace the outlines—just slide them under the clear plastic snap on/off cover. It's not scanning, but it is a way to get an outline into the system.

Just as with a calligraphy pen, one can create different widths depending on how the pen is held—the Wacom pen reacts to pressure. While touching the nylon tip to the tablet lightly (within a drawing program), one can create a fine line; increasing the pressure, even within the same stroke, will create a heavier line. And, at the opposite end of the pen is an eraser that will erase what has been drawn!

The wireless mouse was another

new experience. I have preferred trackballs because repetitive wrist and arm movements are substantially reduced. The Wacom mouse's relationship to the size of the tablet requires very little movement to cover the entire tablet/screen area. A nice feature. The mouse comes with two programmable buttons and a roller/button combination wheel. While I prefer keystrokes to programmed mouse buttons, the wheel is useful.

There is a wide array of uses for a tablet and pen/mouse. The Wacom website offers tips for beginners, intermediate and advanced users in a half-dozen different applications. Probably the most useful application



# Wacom Graphire3 continued Review

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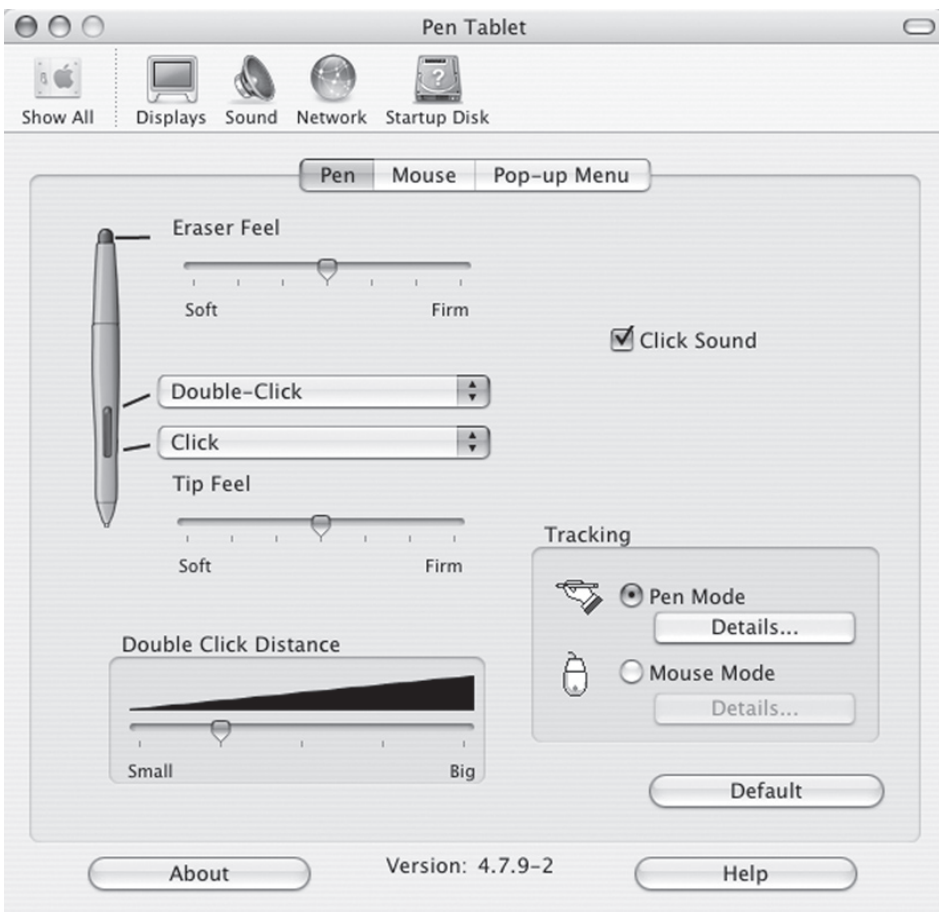
of the tablet is for drawing which can range from freehand creations to manipulation of something already drawn (changing lines, angles, shapes, etc.), to modifying something like old photos. Recalling the TNWoU May presentation of MSOffice 2004 and MSWord's ability to do scribbling on a notebook page, I tried it. Using a tablet and pen is a thousand times easier than using a standard mouse.

Denis Jordan's December 2003 review of the larger size version of the Wacom tablet contains informative comments about the included software programs. Denis did suggest that tablet size may have a relationship to hand size—I beg to differ. Unless one is

**I highly recommend either of the Wacom Graphire Tablets (4"x6" or 6"x8") to everyone. They bring back a bit of the old (holding and using a pen) while greatly enhancing the present (computing).**

a high-end designer needing a larger work area, desktop space availability and cost are the more practical considerations in deciding which size tablet to purchase.

I highly recommend either of the Wacom Graphire Tablets (4"x 6" or 6"x 8") to everyone. They bring back a bit of the old (holding and using a pen) while greatly enhancing the present (computing). I thank the all of the TNWoU volunteers for their time and energy and, in particular, those who made this review possible. 🐼



## Wacom's Graphire3 4x5 Pen, Mouse, and Tablet

Retail price \$99.99;  
on sale for about \$79.99

Cross-platform operation  
(Macintosh OS9/OSX;  
Windows®, XP)

Upgraded drivers available on  
Wacom website: [www.wacom.com](http://www.wacom.com)

Software included:  
Photoshop Elements; Painter™  
Classic; penPallet™ LE

78-page User's Manual available in  
searchable PDF format at  
[www.Wacom.com](http://www.Wacom.com)

