



home



Tech stuff



in the studio



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movies



reading



forum



showcase



PencilTest

Stop-Motion Studio

Stop-Motion Junior

Carrara Studio

Poser 5

Toon Boom Studio

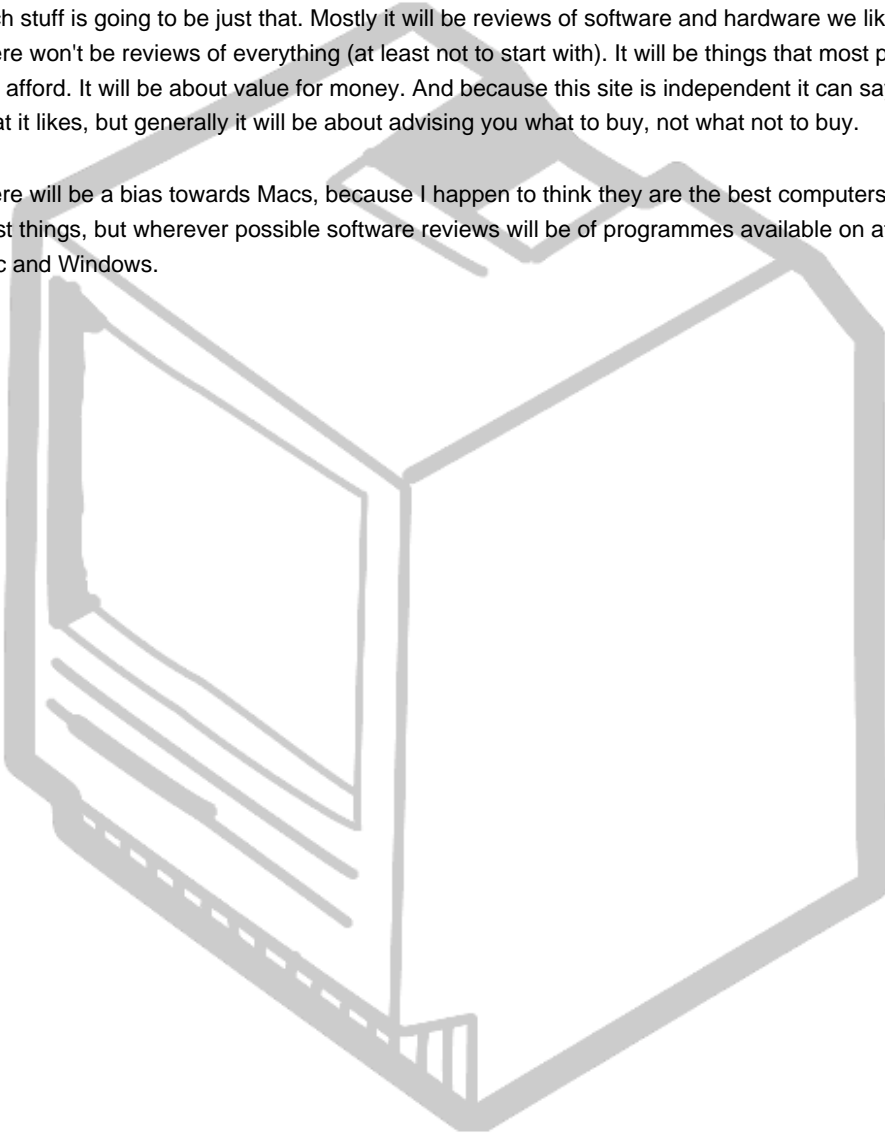
2.5

HARDWARE

JVC GR-DV700

Tech stuff is going to be just that. Mostly it will be reviews of software and hardware we like. There won't be reviews of everything (at least not to start with). It will be things that most people can afford. It will be about value for money. And because this site is independent it can say what it likes, but generally it will be about advising you what to buy, not what not to buy.

There will be a bias towards Macs, because I happen to think they are the best computers for most things, but wherever possible software reviews will be of programmes available on at least Mac and Windows.



TOON BOOM STUDIO 2.5

Review

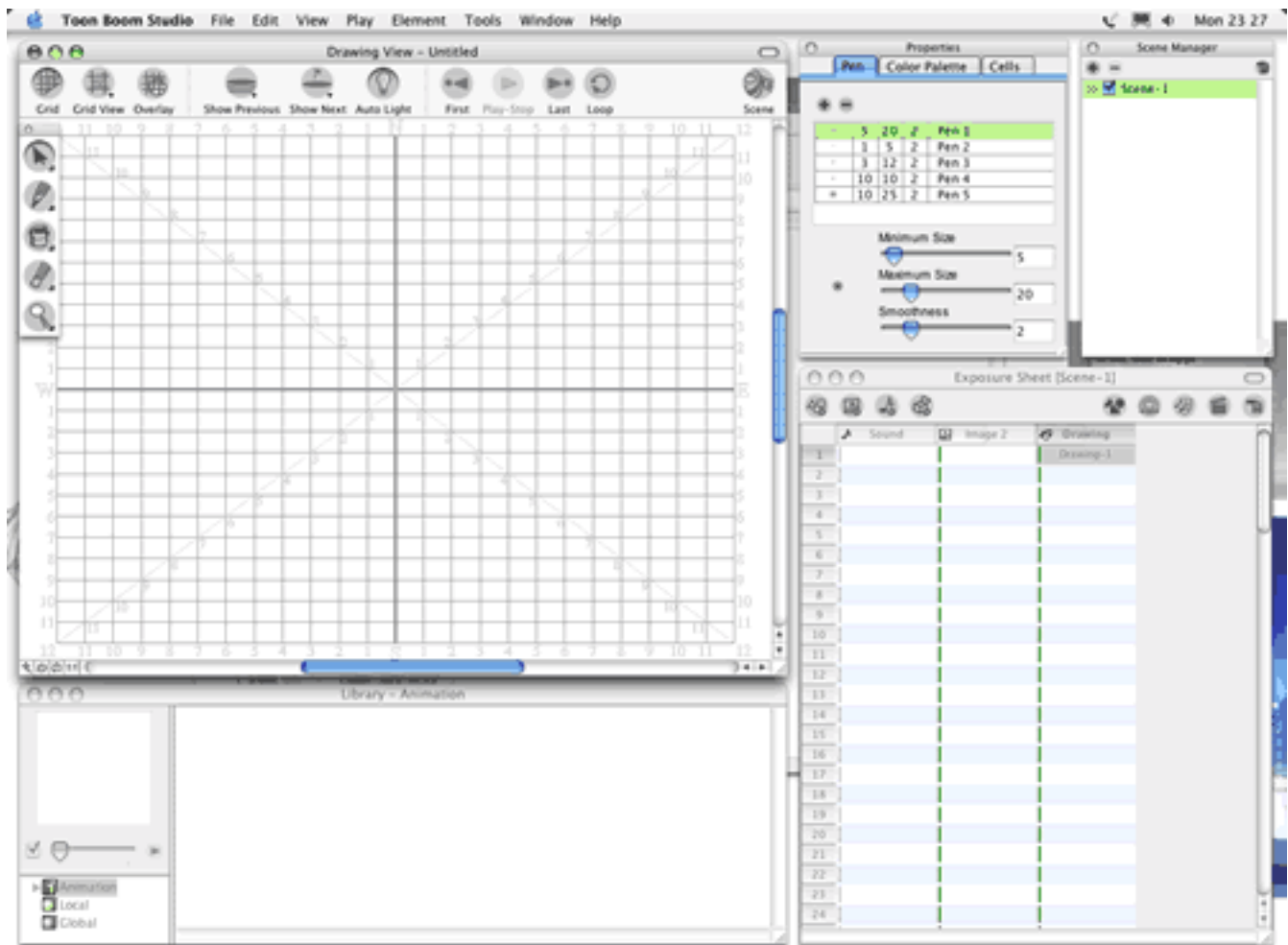
by Chris Patmore

Despite a general malaise towards 2D line animation at Disney and Dreamworks, the artform is still alive and well, and a lot of thanks for this have to go to the people at Toon Boom. Their Toon Boom Studio (and Toon Boom Express) has put an affordable, professional-quality tool in the hands of home animators, while their USAnimation OPUS caters for the major studios (or least those ones that still recognise the validity of 2D).

For anyone who wants to create vector-based animations the only real choices are Macromedia Flash or Toon Boom Studio. While the Flash (swf) format is the default standard, the programme itself has developed into an all-round multimedia tool (a kind of Director lite), that is being used for website and game creation, through its scripting tools. While there is no denying Flash's power, animators are paying for features they don't need and not getting ones they do need.

The recent release of ToonBoom Studio 2.5 for Mac OS X means that Mac users now have a very stable version with a feature set to match and surpass the Windows version. It's been a long time coming but the wait has been worth it.

Animators coming from a traditional pencil and paper background, looking at entering the world of digital animation will find Toon Boom an easy introduction, not only for its tools and workflow but economically as well. For around £1000 you can set up your own desktop animation studio (eMac, Wacom Graphire tablet, a scanner and Toon Boom Studio). A G4 running OS X 10.3 is the recommended minimum to run the software and the eMac is unbeatable value. (I did manage to run it on a 15" CRT, 500Mhz G3 iMac but the eMac is much better in all respects.)



field chart, exposure sheet and fully editable pens and brushes should make any animator feel at home

Anyone used to working with pencil and paper may have trouble adjusting to using a graphics tablet, but Toon Boom does a great job of emulating the traditional tools complete with pressure sensitivity. It even has a rotating light table, standard field charts, onion skinning and an exposure sheet. This new version now adds support for scanners and the tracing/vectorisation of bitmap drawings, so if you are more comfortable starting with pencils you can then finish your work with digital ink and paint, which is definitely a superior way to work that with cels and paint.

If you ever wanted to create animations using multiplane camera effects, Toon Boom Studio does it simply and intuitively. Now you can move your camera through the scene with complete control over tracking paths and speeds as well as other camera movements. And because you are working with vectors, the images always remain sharp and at the optimum quality.

Toon Boom Studio also does an excellent job of integrating sound, especially voice-overs, and will import any sound format that QuickTime recognises. It even supports multiple soundtracks, so you could add a music track created in GarageBand, if you wanted to. To help with the laborious task of lip-syncing the software will analyse your voice recordings and create a graphical representation of the necessary phonemes linked to the exposure sheet.

The feature list goes on and on, and given the price it is quite phenomenal. Rather than take my word for it, the best thing to do is download the 30-day trial version and see for yourself. If you're a student check out the educational prices and their special offers. If you decide to buy the software don't forget to tell them where you heard about it.

For anyone trained in traditional cel animation, or just starting out in 2D, looking for a comprehensive (and affordable) digital solution with the features to translate their ideas into reality, Toon Boom Studio is really the only choice.