

Creating the 'Gel' Button Effect in PhotoPaint 10

As Found on the Mac OS X (and Elsewhere)

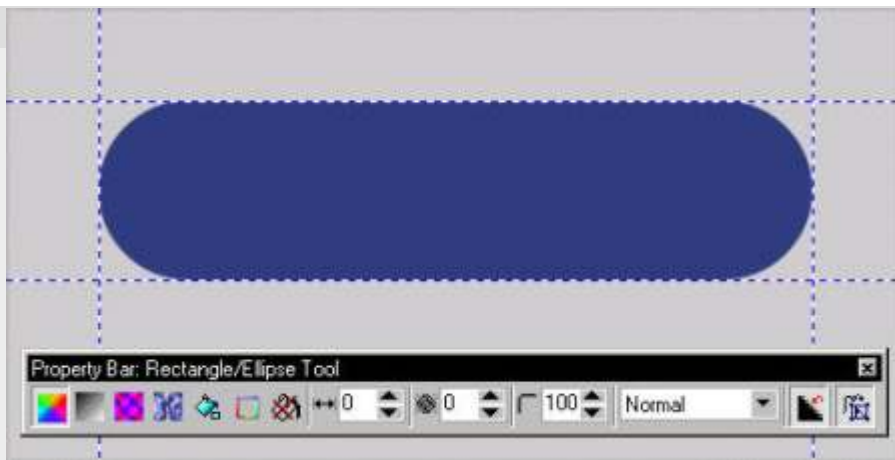
by Clifford Anderson



As is obvious by looking at the original, above, we are going to be building one of those 'Aqua' buttons so coveted by web designers everywhere. I've seen it done in nearly every program except PhotoPaint (not that it hasn't...I simply haven't seen it put down as an exercise file yet). If it has already been done I hope this rendition warrants an audience still by offering a few extra tips as we go.

Some of this exercise is based upon the exercise, "Dazzling Glassworks" in Rathgeber and Nicholls, "Playing With Fire : Tapping the Power of Macromedia Fireworks 4" (Hungry Minds, New York : 2001), pp.126-9. Our take on it will be a little different but the book does a good job if you're wanting to quickly do this effect in Fireworks.

For PhotoPaint's setup, open the Dockers, Objects and Info. Set the Paint/Paper/Fill wells to their default.



Create a new document : 500w x 250h, 72ppi, 20% black.

'Ctrl R' to set the Rulers and double-click on one of them to quickly navigate the Options dialog to the Guides section. Add the following guides :figure 1 : Creating the Initial Rectangle Shape

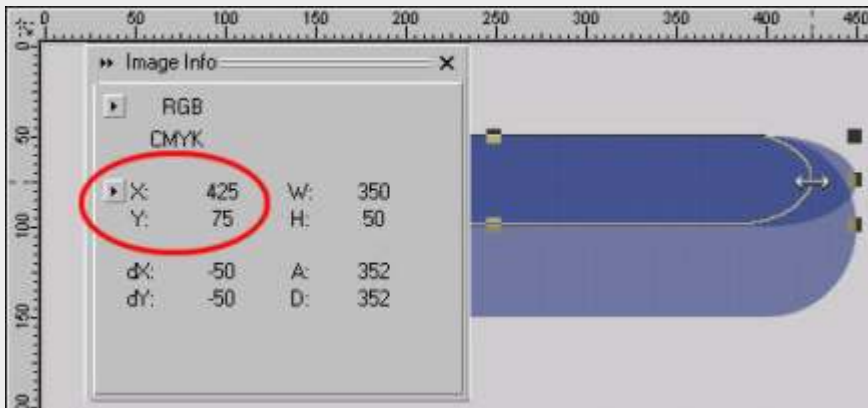
- Horizontal : 50, 100
- Vertical : 50, 450
- Check both 'Show Guidelines' and 'Snap to Guidelines'

Press 'F6' for the Rectangle tool. At the property bar, set a solid fill at : R40 G60 B120; 'Rectangle Roundness' = 100 and 'Render to an Object' is enabled (figure 1). Create the rectangle according to the guides. Once done, rename the object 'Original'.

We will be using them a little later so please hide only the guides from view (View | Guidelines) and remove the 'Snap to' feature ('Ctrl ;').

Reduce the Opacity of the 'Original' to 60%. We will need to see certain elements behind it as well as have things in front of it interact with its transparency, so we'll take care of the opacity right up front.

Duplicate 'Original' and replace the Opacity of it to 100%. Rename it 'Highlight' then make sure it is above 'Original' in the Objects Docker. We're going to squish this object a bit, both horizontally and vertically, so have your Info Docker in view.



Press 'O' for the Object Picker, click and squish using the bottom-middle handle of the object, upward, until the Info docker says 'Y 100'. Click and squish the object with the top-middle handle at 'Y 55' (figure 2); shift-click and squish the right-middle handle until the Info Docker says 'X 425'. Press 'Enter' to commit the transformation. Finally, right-click on White and fill it with transparency locked.

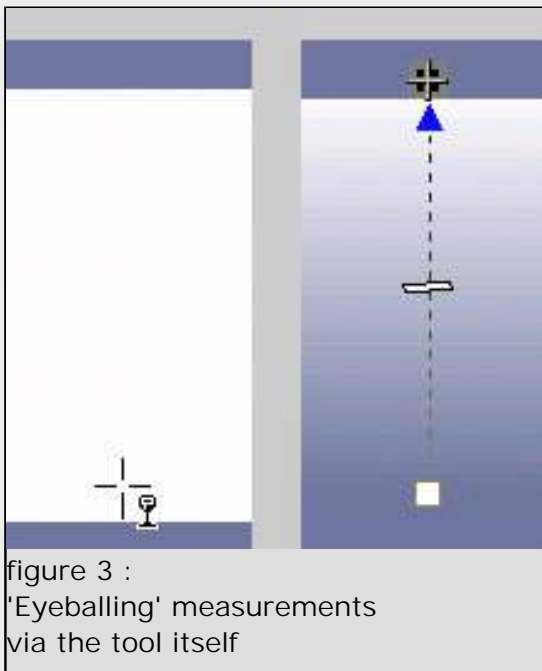


figure 3 :
'Eyeballing' measurements
via the tool itself

all you exacting types!

We're going to use the Interactive Transparency tool on 'Highlight' which is simple enough. But what I would like to show you is how to use a tool to quickly measure a thing reasonably accurately by using the tool itself (figure 3 [This figure is at 400% for clarity]).

First of all, zoom in at 200% to make things a bit easier. Please note figure 3 for a moment. The idea is to take the tool, place it strategically according to crosshair we have to work with; i.e. let the bottom tip serve as the beginning point of the transparency (figure, left) then let the top 'box' on the outside of 'Highlight' serve as the end point (figure, right). Isn't that easy? It sure beats me trying to give exact measurement for

Once you are done adjusting the transparency, set the Opacity of the 'Highlight' object to 90%. Save your work.

The shadow on the wall will be next. Make another duplicate of 'Original' then rename it 'Back Shadow'.

Press 'O' then 'Sh DnArr' 3 times to nudge it 30px (assuming your super-nudge is set to 10px; figure 4a).

Go to Effects | Creative | Scatter... and set both Horizontal and Vertical to 12 (figure 4b); then finish with a Gaussian Blur of 12.0 radius (figure 4c). From the Objects Docker, reduce its Opacity to 40% then set the Merge Mode to 'Multiply'.

Adding the 'Scatter' effect to the mix gives a nice 'diffused' look to the shadow that is more along the lines of what a shadow does. Regardless, it is only an effect that I've acquired through rehearsal and can be easily dispensed with while still getting the look we are after.



figure 4 :
Object Nudged (a), Scattered (b), and Blurred (c)

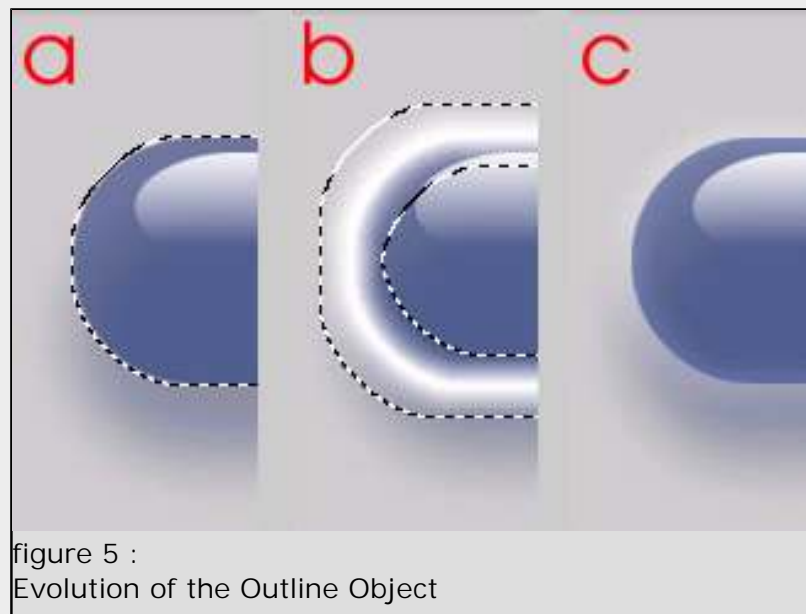


figure 5 :
Evolution of the Outline Object

Our next object is the 'Outline Glow' (which is what we will call it once created); a subtle but most effective object.

Select object 'Original' and press 'Ctrl M' to generate a mask (figure 5a).

Be mindful. If one of the masking tools is currently selected, the 'Ctrl' key will not necessarily give you the

desired results; namely, if the 'Normal' mask mode is enabled, 'Ctrl' will switch the mode to 'Subtract', resulting in an inverted mask. Therefore, best to have the Object Picker enabled when using the shortcut.

Remove the mask ('Ctrl Sh R') then change the object's Merge Mode to 'Saturation' and its Opacity to 40% (figure 5c). Save your work.

Add a New Object, rename it 'Outline Glow' then place it below 'Highlight'. We want a border for this object only, so go to Mask | Shape | Border..., set it to 12 pixels and 'Soft' for the Edges. Click OK; Right-click on White and fill the object accordingly (figure 5b).

The 'Backlight' object is what will give this button effect its punch. We will need the original guides and the ability to snap to them. You won't need to make them visible but only press 'Ctrl ;' to enable them (if you're not comfortable with enabling them only then make them visible also).

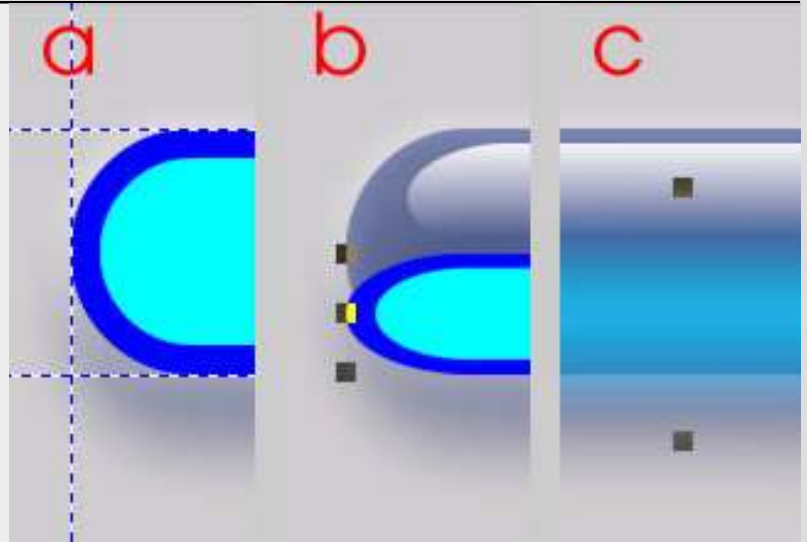


figure 6 :
Steps for Creating the Defining Glow

Press 'F6' for the Rectangle tool and modify as follows : left-click Blue and right-click Cyan (both from the default palette); this sets the Fill and Outline, respectively. Set the 'Shape Width' to '12' in the property bar. Create the shape then rename it 'Backlight' (figure 6a).

Press 'O' and squish down halfway (figure 6b; hint : the Info Docker will read 'Y 100' as before). Add to it a Gaussian blur with a 20.0 radius (figure 6c).

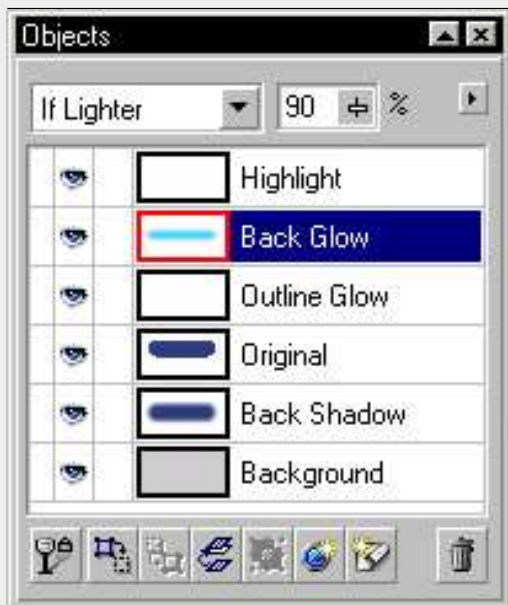


figure 7 :
Docker Details

Please note the handle positions of figure 6c. I shift-clicked and squished a little *after* applying the Gaussian blur. I thought too much of the 'light' was bouncing off the back wall thereby losing some of the transitional effect. As an experiment that you likewise might want to try, I moved the 'Backlight' object above the 'Original' and clipped-to-parent to see the change in effect. I liked it (but I didn't keep it, here) so I thought I'd pass it along as a viable option.

The Merge Mode of the 'Backlight' object is 'If Lighter'; its Opacity is 90% (figure 7). Save your work.

(We won't want them in our way and we don't need them anymore, so rid yourself of the guidelines and 'Snap to' feature for the remainder of this exercise.)

The
text



figure 8 :
Applying the Text Object

object uses Bremen Bd BT, 48, Black. I wrote 'TAKE TWO' because this trick reminds me of a gel cap! Anyway, once the text is in place make sure it is centered vertically but nudge it a bit upward from center horizontal. We'll need a little room for the shadow effect (figure 8).

Place the text object below the 'Highlight' object then press 'S' for the Interactive Dropshadow tool. Use the following properties as a starting point :

- Preset : Flat Bottom Right
- Shadow Direction : 270°
- Shadow Offset : 8
- Shadow Opacity : 16
- Shadow Feather : 12
- Shadow Feather Direction : Middle
- Shadow Feather Edge : Squared

Great. Two small matters and then we're done.

Let's add a small highlight to further enhance this pill and give it our own special signature. Add a new object, rename it 'Touches' then place it below the 'Back Glow' object.

Select the Paint tool ('P'), click on the 'Airbrush', nib #37, then reduce the nib size to 11;

click on White for the paint well. Scrub in a spot of paint on the right side (or left; figure 8a), add a Gaussian Blur of 4.0 radius (figure 8b), and change the object's Merge Mode to 'Lightness' (figure 8c). Save your work.

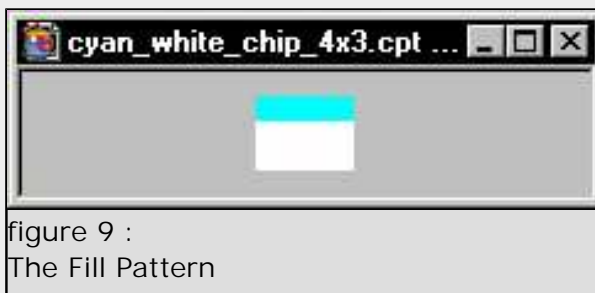
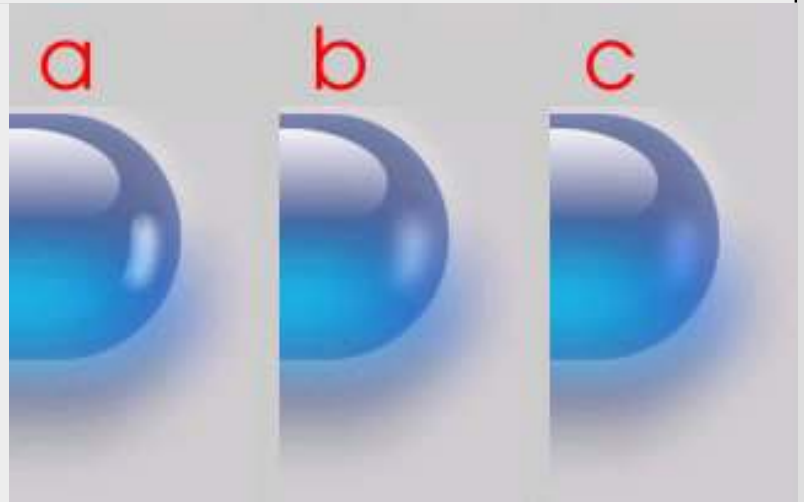


figure 9 :
The Fill Pattern

brushes can be difficult at first and you may find yourself undo-ing over and over again trying to get it right. Well, in PhotoPaint, when any tool *except* the Object Picker is selected, <delete> will remove all object information but leave the object. If you want to get rid of a section of an object's information, create a mask around it first, then press <delete>. On the other hand, if the Object Picker is selected, <delete> will trash the entire object.

Add one more object, place it above the Background then rename it 'Backdrop'. Create a new image according to figure 9 (it is 4 x 3 pixels; amplified here 1000% to serve as a visual). Go to Edit | Create Fill From Selection...

and give it a name. Reselect the 'Backdrop' object and Fill it with the newly created fill. Finally, change the Merge Mode to 'Color' and its Opacity to 40% (figure 10).

Paint

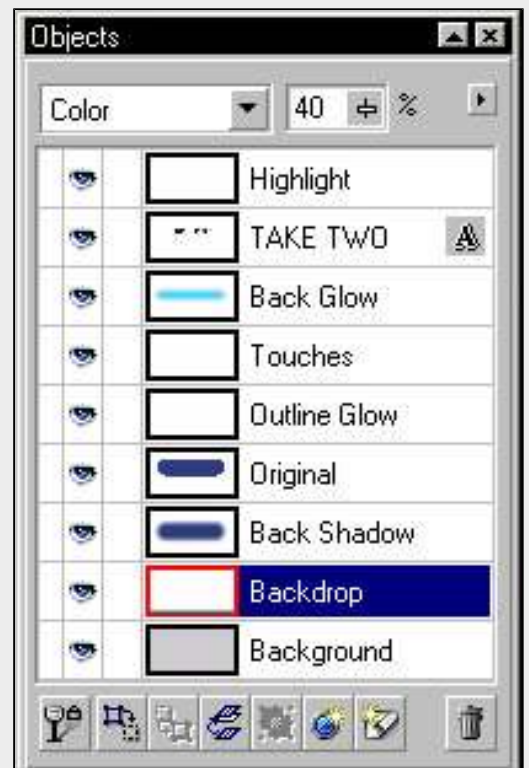


figure 10 :



What do you think? With another look at our original this concludes the exercise.