



Fig. 3-24 The photograph is too blue. The CurveMeister 2 plug-in has several clever tools for correcting color and lets you choose different color spaces to try them out in. Yet, you don't need a sophisticated knowledge of Curves to make corrections with this plug-in—that's its whole reason for existence. To fix this photograph, I used pushpins. I selected the gray-color pushpin (upper left) and placed it on the back of the cushion in the photograph. CurveMeister 2 instantly created a set of curves that corrected the overall color of the photograph quite well.

CurveMeister2 (<http://www.curvemeister.com>)

I will admit that it took me a while to warm up to CurveMeister2 (Windows only, \$80). The reason it's making my recommended plug-in list is that I think many readers will appreciate its value much more readily.

The Curves tool is the heart and soul of fine image control in Photo-shop (see Chapter 5, Restoring Tone, page 134). If you haven't mastered curve corrections, you can't precisely manipulate tone and color rendition in your photographs. Unfortunately, curves are not a natural nor familiar concept for many photographers, and so they tend to avoid them. This is a mistake.

CurveMeister2 hands photographers powerful and intelligible ways to adjust curves. For a start, the CurveMeister2 interface (Figure 3-24) is much more agreeable than Photoshop's. You can see and work with the curves for all the channels simultaneously. The curves have histograms superimposed on them, which makes it a lot easier to match the range of values in your photograph with points on the curve.

CurveMeister2 lets you work simultaneously in four different color spaces. You can experiment with curve adjustments in each color space and compare the results in the plug-in preview window before committing yourself to applying the curve adjustments in one particular space. There's much to be said for noodling around; often playing with curves leads to a better result than going into them with a certainty of exactly what adjustments you need to make. CurveMeister2 encourages such useful playfulness.

CurveMeister2 adds a bunch of special controls to the curves windows that make standard adjustments easier to do, such as increasing contrast or saturation without altering overall color balance or midrange values. CurveMeister2 has several ways to assign pixels in the image to points

on the curves to set highlight or shadow points or maintain overall neutrality. The “floating neutral” point in particular is a fast and clear way to alter brightness levels with minimum alteration of colors.

Pushpins are a clever idea! Pushpins are predefined colors that you can assign to points in your photograph. CurveMeister2 comes with a set of standard pins, and additional sets can be downloaded from the author’s website. For instance, CurveMeister2 comes with a collection of pushpins for skin tones from a deep ebony to pale Nordic. You can add intermediate skin tones of your own to the existing set. Stick one of these pins into the skin of a person in your photograph, and the curves will adjust themselves to make the subject’s skin tone and color match the pin’s. By pinning key colors this way, you can quickly bring a badly color-distorted photograph into approximate compliance with reality.

CurveMeister2 is of minimal value to me because it’s not layer-savvy. When you apply most adjustments and filter plug-ins in Photoshop to the base layer of an image, you see the results as they will look after they’re filtered through any overlying layers. The preview window in CurveMeister2 completely ignores those layers; all you see is the layer that you’re working on and the effect that CurveMeister2 will have on it. This means that the actual effect of applying CurveMeister2 to a multilayer image file looks entirely different from what the preview shows.

I would not normally recommend a tool with this flaw, except that I do know how much trouble controlling curves gives many otherwise-skilled photographers. The best way to figure out if CurveMeister2 is for you is to download the trial version of the plug-in and thoroughly and carefully read the extensive help manual. There are lots of worth-while gems buried in this application that won’t be obvious to you until you do.