

LaserSoft SilverFast Ai 5

Part 4 - Basic steps to batch scanning

By Ian Lyons © 2000/01

A question that crops up in my mailbox on a regular basis is "how do I batch scan?" It bugs you and it bugged me. Reference to the SilverFast manual doesn't really help much either. Follow the instructions in the SilverFast manual and the slide or negative holder will at the first step be ejected, not loaded or pre-scanned! That said, once you get the hang of things; batch scans are quite simple.

Up until now, I have concentrated this series of tutorials on scanning a single slide or negative. As implied above it was for a perfectly good reason, I couldn't find an approach that consistently produced results. Typically, I could get a series of four slides scanned into Photoshop or out to file as requested, but the next series ended up as a single image. Finally and after much experimentation, I drew up a sequence of steps that worked every time, but proof that it worked on other scanner models was required, and eventually obtained. The following methodology has been tried and found successful on the Polaroid SS4000/120, MicroTek ArtixScan 4000, Nikon LS2000 and LS30 film scanners.

At the risk of repeating myself, again, the screen grabs used for this tutorial are all based on the Mac version of SilverFast Ai 5. I have personally tried the methodology on the Polaroid SS4000/120 and Nikon LS30 film scanners using both the Mac and PC platforms, and have been assured by other testers that it works on the other two scanners named above.

SilverFast Ai Scanner Set-up

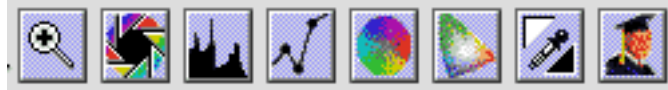
As it turns out configuring SilverFast to batch scan isn't really that difficult, but there are a few quirks and thus you must follow the steps outlined below to the letter, step-by-step-by-step. If you follow the steps in the order given, all should be okay, but deviate or try to outsmart the system and who knows? Again, I assume that you are using Photoshop 5 or 6 and are familiar with the SilverFast interface, although use of screen grabs should make things a bit easier to follow, I hope!

Step 1 - In the beginning!

Stupid as this statement may appear, you must first load the "film carrier" with your slides or a negative strip, why stupid? Well SilverFast will batch scan the blank film slots along with those containing film, there's no point wasting time scanning blanks.

With SilverFast NOT open - yes I did write NOT open, insert the film carrier into the scanner. Now you can open SilverFast.

Make sure that all the colour correction tools are cleared, the toolbar should look like the following. If not, press the "ALT" key on the keyboard and at the same time click the SilverFast "Option" button.




SilverFast Toolbar set to default "Off"

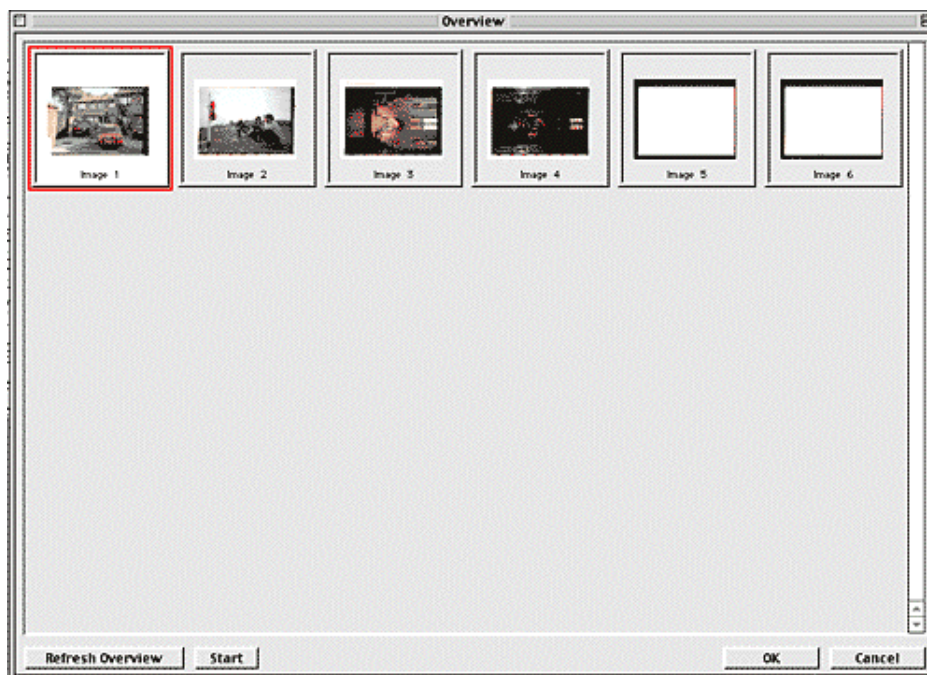
Actually, a far better option would be to make high-bit scans and process them at your leisure later on using SilverFast HDR, but that's a decision you can make. I described how to make high-bit scans and use HDR in Part 2 of the tutorials, so I won't repeat it here.

Step 2 - Prescan or overview

Depending upon your personal preference you can either prescan the first frame or do a complete overview of all frames in the carrier.

Personally, I prefer to save time and simply choose the Prescan option. This brings the first slide/negative up on the main preview window. However, many users feel more at ease with the "comfy blanket" wrapped up under their arm, so who am I to argue :-)

To obtain an overview of the images simply press the  button. The following dialog appears and after pressing the "Refresh Overview" button, you should have a series of X images on show.





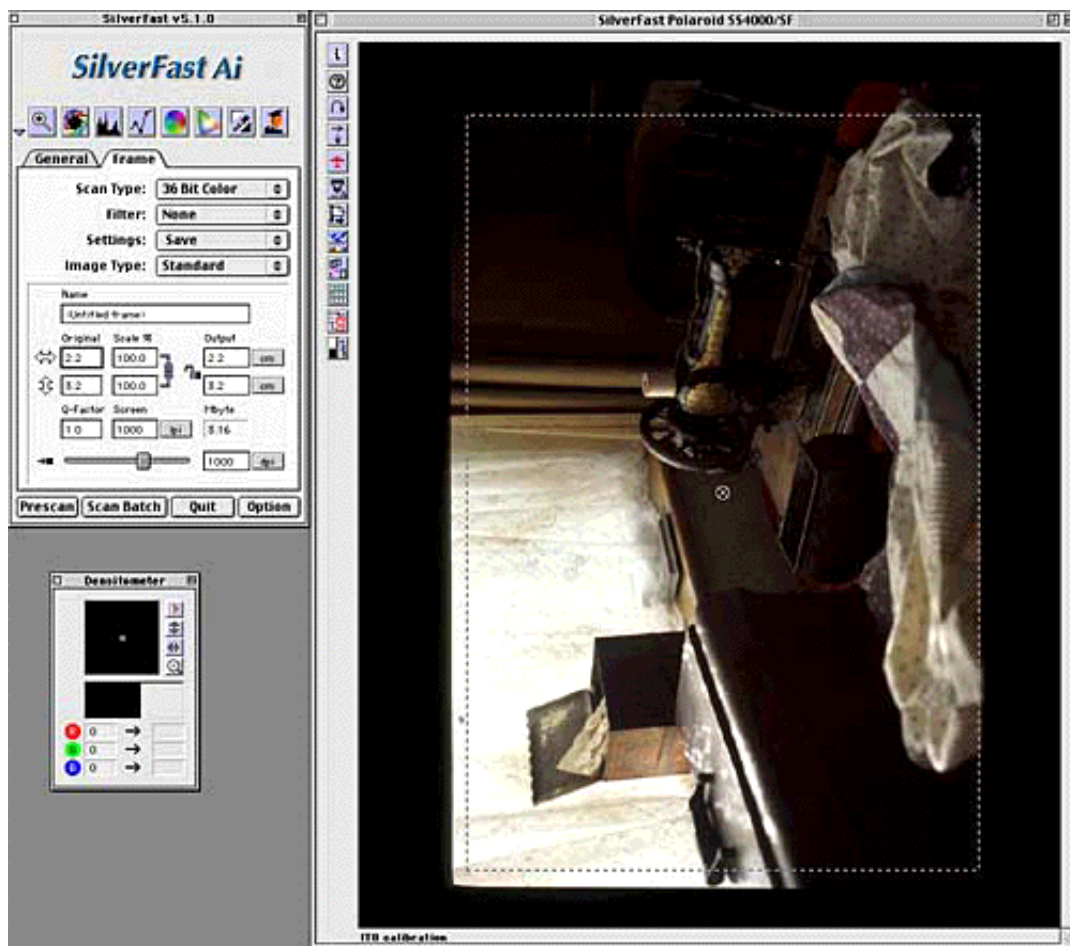
Overview of images in film carrier

Click "OK" and you should be returned to the main SilverFast screen.

Step 3 - Aligning the image in the preview screen

The default format for scans in SilverFast is "**vertical**". "**Horizontal**" scans will take considerably longer to process, especially those being saved to file, so I suggest that you set SilverFast to scan vertically. By this, I mean the image should be configured in the Preview window as shown below.

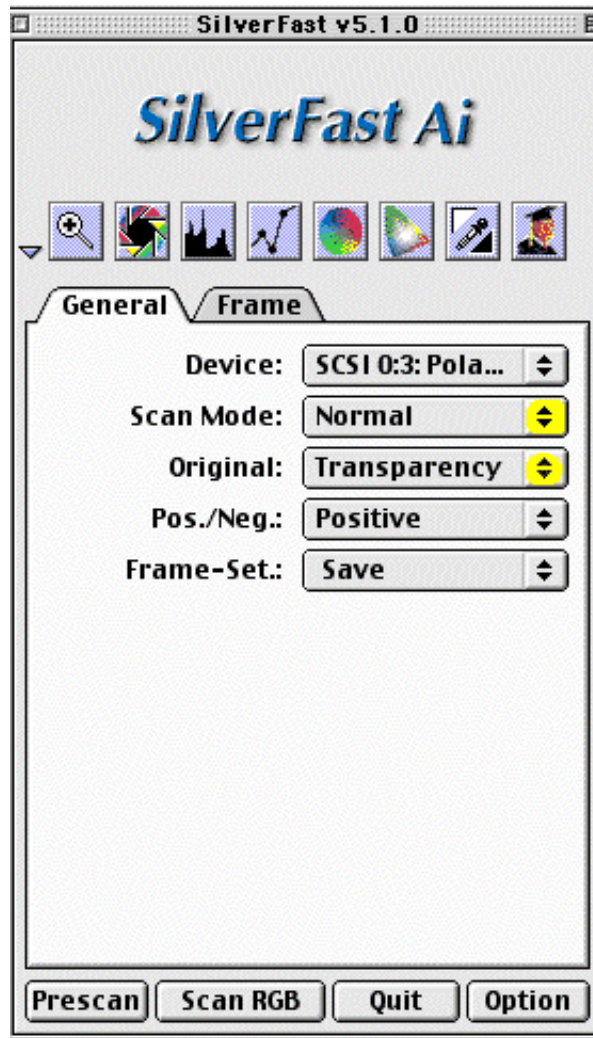
Use the rotation  button to get the image into the correct orientation. Don't go making the mistake of using the horizontal/vertical flip  button or you could end up with images that are reversed. Also, remember to choose your scan resolution.



Keeping your image in vertical format makes for a quicker overall scan

Step 4 - Selecting the type of batch scan

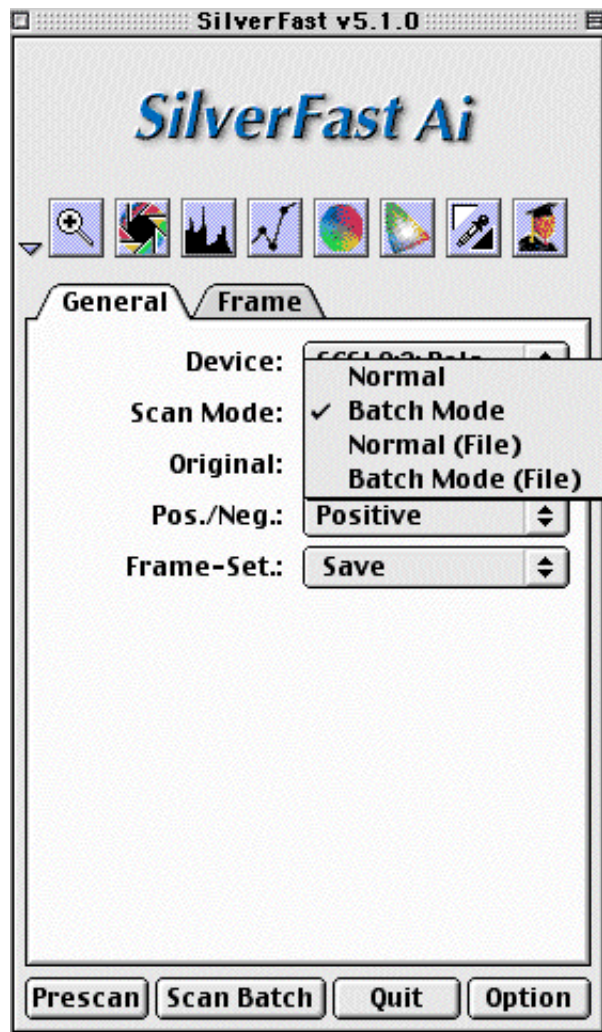
This is the point where SilverFast can become slightly confusing. Select the "**General**" tab and the following dialog will appear. The two pop-ups that I have identified with a "yellow spot" are the ones that are important.



Choosing the type of Batch scan

SilverFast can batch scan directly into Photoshop or save each image to file, the latter choice is actually the better. SilverFast can also produce two types of batch scan, "fully automatic correction", or "manual correction". I'll explain each of these latter two options in a moment, but for now we will concentrate on whether to scan into Photoshop or save to file.

To scan directly into Photoshop (not a good idea as it uses lots and lots of memory) you simply select "Batch Mode" in the "Scan Mode" dialog. Alternatively, to save each scan to file you select "Batch Mode (File)".

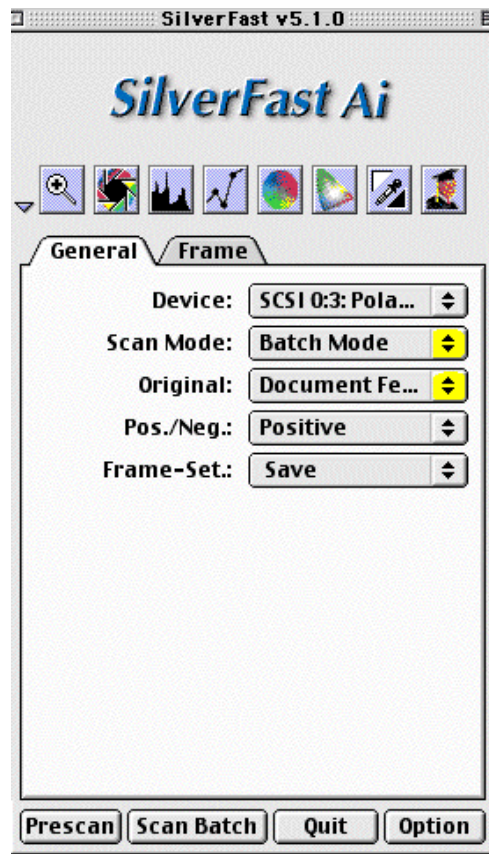


Batch scans into Photoshop

Now for the option that most folk seem to overlook or just can't find. In the pop-up labelled "**Original**" you **MUST** choose "**Document Feeder**". Keep in mind this sentence; it's critical to successful batch scanning. If you don't then you will return to it repeatedly, I promise!

I don't know how often I've been contacted and asked why the "**Document Feeder**" option isn't available. The answer is of course simple; the user jumped the gun and didn't do as they were instructed in the SilverFast (the one on the CD-ROM) manual - "**Insert the film holder before opening SilverFast**", hence my comments at Step 1 above. The film holder **MUST** be inserted before opening SilverFast otherwise it won't be found, period! The dialog may say different, you might even read different, but no matter what the dialog reads or "you" think it won't "really" have been found unless it was in the slot before you opened SilverFast Ai.

On completing, the settings associated with the "**General**" dialog you should end up with it looking something like that shown below.



SilverFast set-up for Batch Scans into Photoshop

The final part of this step is to return to the "**Frame**" tab.

Step 5 - Nearly Home!

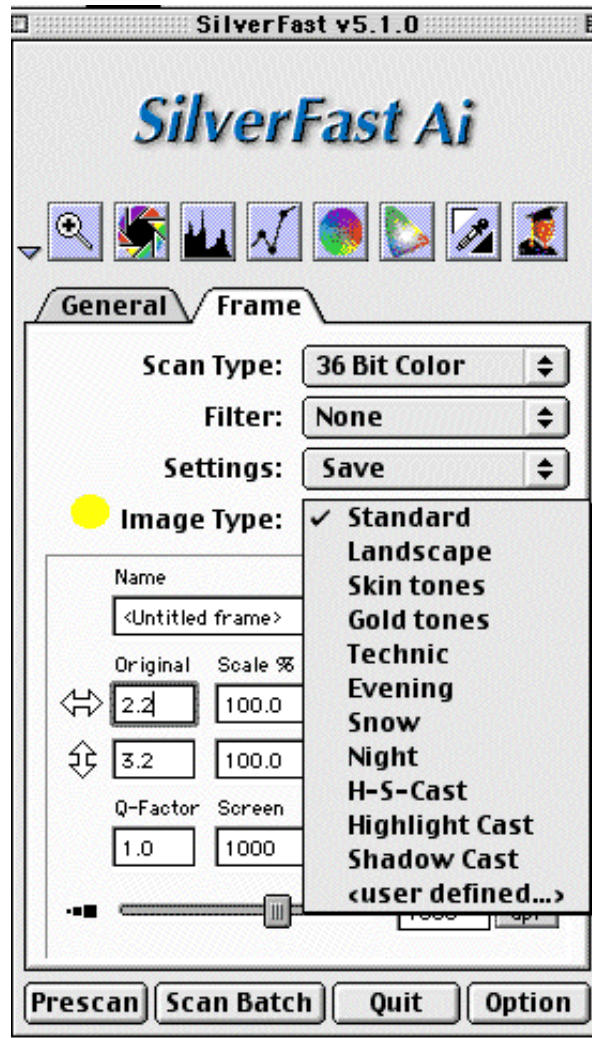
As the title implies, we're almost at the point of beginning the series of scans. However, there are still a few housekeeping issues to sort out.

I mentioned above that there are two types of correction that can be applied during batch scans. The first is "manual correction" the second being "fully automatic". I also mentioned in Step 1 that high-bit scanning and later correction using SilverFast HDR was a good option. HDR is the quickest and safest option in terms of what SilverFast will do during the scan process, since it does nothing other than capture the "**raw**" image.

"**Manual correction**", as the name implies this form of image correction allows the user to make a correction to contrast/tone/colour/brightness/etc. as they see fit. The sting in the tail is that any correction made on the prescan image becomes the "**default**" correction for the whole series of images. You don't need to be a genius to realise that this isn't really a smart choice, so it's probably best not to make any corrections.

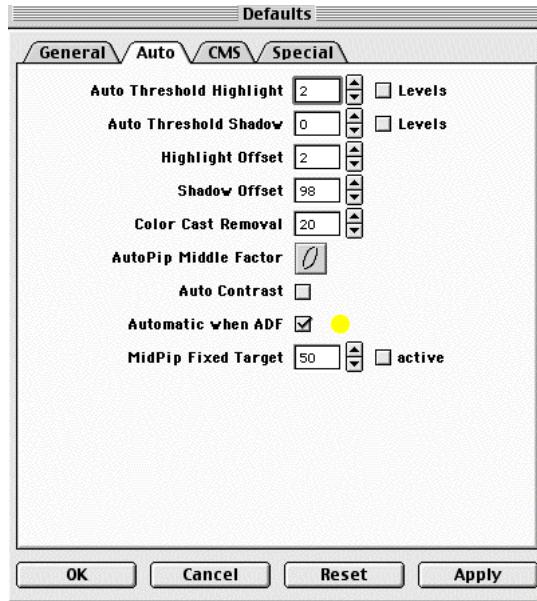
"**Fully Automatic Correction**", means that each and every frame is individually analysed by SilverFast and adjusted in accordance with the predefined settings of the "**Auto**" settings dialog or those chosen by the user in the "Image Type" pop-up window (see below for options). To be honest I think sticking with the default "Standard" setting is the safest choice when the film carrier contains images of different subject/lighting conditions, etc.

Before "**Fully Automatic Correction**" will work it is necessary to turn it "**ON**". Click the "**Option**" button and choose the "**Auto**" tab, now place a check mark against the selection labelled "**Automatic with ADF**" (ADF = automatic document feeder).



Choosing the Image Type for Automatic Correction

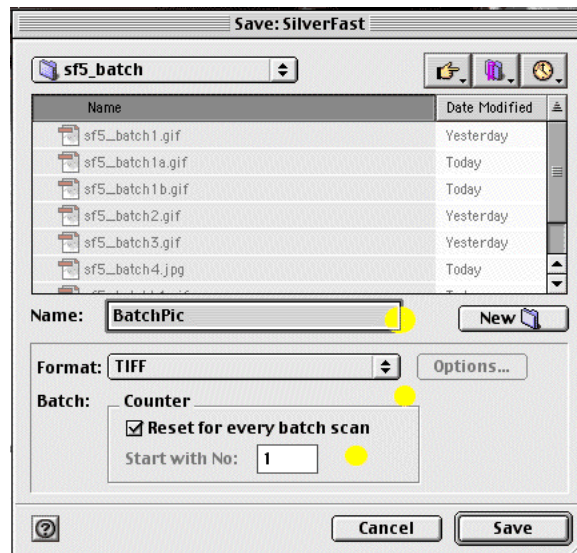
Leaving aside my personal preference for correcting batch scans using SilverFast HDR, I think the fully automatic option is the best choice for most users wanting an easy life. The images will be full range and any inherent colourcast such as sunset/sunrise will be left untouched.




Set-up for Fully Automatic Image Correction

Step 6 - Making the scan

This is it; the scanning process can begin. I assume that the image is now rotated correctly, the exposure setting is set for manual or auto and that batch scan mode is selected. If you chose to scan into Photoshop then just press the "Scan Batch" button and sit back (go for tea or coffee would be better) and let things happen. If on the other hand you chose to save each scan individually then after pressing the "Scan Batch" button a "Save" dialog will appear. You can choose your own file name convention and number sequence. You can also change file format from the default "Tiff" to Jpeg, etc. but it's probably best to leave it at "Tiff".



"Save" batch file dialog (Mac platform)

Once the series of slides or negatives have been scanned you should eject the film holder using the special "Eject"  button. Pulling the carrier out by hand has a real nasty habit of making SilverFast

forget that you had it in to begin with, so be warned. You can now begin reloading the film strip/carrier ready for the next series of images.

IMPORTANT

If you change ANYTHING in SilverFast, and I emphasise "**anything**" for good reason and personal experience, then you should return to Step 4 and reselect "**Document Feeder**", that is **EVEN** if it "**appears**" that it is already selected. Nine times in ten a change will have not caused any ill effect, but on that odd occasion it can make SilverFast forget that it was batch scanning using the "Document Feeder" even when it still says/thinks that it is.

I hope that you will find the above methodology proves as successful for you as it has for me and the other testers I've used. However, if you come up with a method that you think is shorter, quicker, easier then "please" don't tell me, I don't want to know :-)