

## PRACTICE: IT

# Help with the stairs

Making change easy is the claim of the recently released Vectorworks 2010 cad software. **Jonathan Reeves** finds out whether it delivers

Vectorworks 2010 feels like a significant upgrade on its predecessor in many areas.

Now that the Parasolid 3D modelling core, introduced in version 2009, has been fully integrated, Vectorworks 2010 offers an extremely flexible and easy-to-use 2D environment, combined with a true 3D BIM solution.

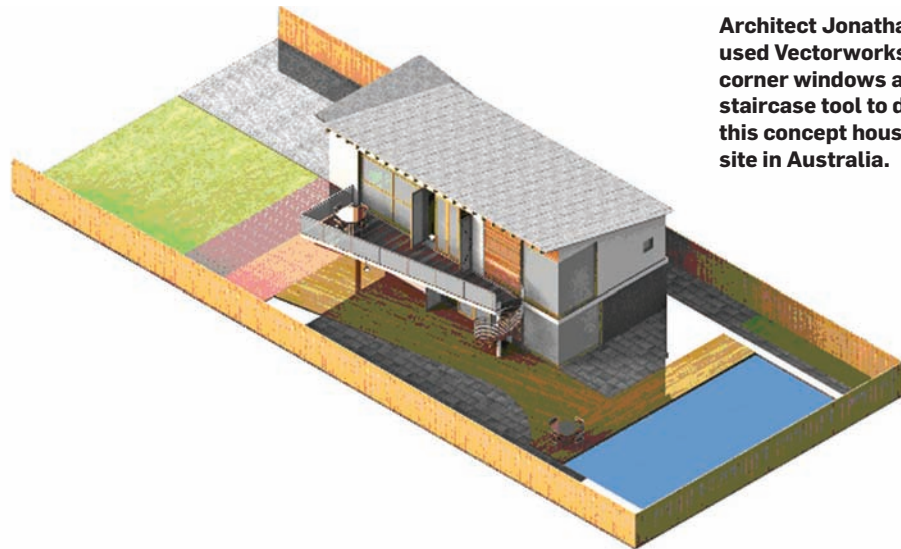
Initially, it does not look too different, with the 2010 interface appearing almost identical to the previous version apart from a few new tools and modes.

The developers have chosen to focus on improving underlying performance, streamlining productivity and making the program easier to use. The new tools and features concentrate on streamlining workflow and saving time and money. The whole program feels more responsive, and the 2D/3D snapping system has been improved again and is now one of the best in its class.

As a modelling program, Vectorworks has always had a strong set of free-form and parametric architectural tools. However, less experienced users found it complicated navigating and working in the 3D environment.

Now planar 2D graphics can occupy the active layer and screen plane, so 2D drawings maintain their relationship to the 3D model. This has been combined with powerful and reliable 3D snapping, and a unified view, which allows you to select and modify multiple layers while in 3D. Finally, much improved working planes make the whole process of working in 3D simpler.

The full implementation of Parasolid also has some other big benefits to the speed and robustness of the 3D parametric objects, such as doors, windows and stairs. Corner windows are now possible,



Architect Jonathan Reeves used Vectorworks' new corner windows and staircase tool to design this concept house for a site in Australia.

ble, and the new stair tool is virtually as powerful as a standalone application — doing a great job modelling a wide range of complex designs, such as winders, spirals and the more traditional forms. Wall sculpting now enables 3D projections and niches to be added to walls, which means walls can now be used to model even the most complex facades. This has been combined with the ability to make any shaped wall holes.

Improved usability functions have also been a major focus of this release. There is a new “select similar” tool that allows users to custom select similar objects based on a combination of different criteria, which can also be saved.

Associative hatches can now also be edited interactively allowing you to set size, origin and rotation directly in the drawing without going into the powerful but complex hatch editing dialogue. A new global world coordinated feature will be important for large projects that involve rotating the plan and referencing files when teamworking.

Other simple, but time-saving enhancements have been made to the drafting and reshaping tools, which also no longer require pre-selection since the selection tool can be temporarily activated by using the command key mid-process.

Importing and exporting information is always an important consideration for practices involved in collaborative work, and Vectorworks 2010 has excellent inter-operability. When importing DWG/DXF files, setting can now be saved, and Xrefs

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can now be automatically imported as design layer viewports with support for AutoCAD tables and also ADT objects. Batch DWG/DXF export support has also been added along with a SketchUp 7 import function. The improved import and export functions will also save practices a lot of time, and improve consistency of data when working with other consultants.

While IT budgets are inevitably under pressure in the current economic climate, investing in software and cad training may not seem like such a priority.

However, for practices that keep up to date, Vectorworks 2010 offers many potential benefits in terms of increased productivity, creativity and the opportunity to easily change from 2D cad to 3D BIM.

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## What are the odds of defeating spam?



HELPDESK

HUGH DAVIES

Thomas Bayes was a Presbyterian minister and mathematician who spent much of his life working on the theory of probability. It was only after his death in 1761 that “Bayes Theorem” was published. It is this theory that lies behind the Bayesian filters that underpin today's anti-spam software.

Spam email is a significant problem. In many architects' practices it can account for over 50% of incoming email. Anti-spam software can use several methods to filter spam from legitimate email, including “whitelists”, blacklists, keyword filtering and Bayesian filtering.

Whitelists comprise email senders who are considered to be legitimate contacts (eg people in your address book). Blacklists are the exact opposite, being custom or commercial lists of known spam originators. Keyword filtering relies on rejecting emails on the basis of the particular words (eg Viagra) appearing within the email.

Bayesian filtering is particularly clever in that it ranks words by the probability that they are contained in a junk email, using this to rank the probability of the whole email being junk. Bayesian filtering can also “learn” from its mistakes, recalculating probabilities on being told it has failed to spot spam or has falsely identified a legitimate email as spam.

The advantage of spam filtering on your own computer is that you can manage your own whitelist merely by keeping your address book up to date, and it is very easy to fish out false positives — legiti-

mate email labelled as spam — merely by looking in your junk email folder. The disadvantages are that the filtering may be inadequate and all these junk emails still end up being moved around the whole system.

The next level up is to use spam-filtering software on your mail server. Mail server software may have its own built-in mail filtering (eg Spam Assassin in Kerio Mail Server) or there are third-party solutions for exchange servers (eg GFI mail essentials). Using server-level filtering means that all interfaces to your mail: workstation, webmail, laptops and mobile phones are equally protected. It is possible to “train” the Bayesian filtering, optimising it for the whole network. “Training” can also be achieved by individual users moving spam into the junk folder rather than just deleting it.

### Coarse filter

Beyond this you can try and catch spam before it even reaches your mail server, through hosted spam services such as those provided by Messagelabs. But as false positives are not as readily available to end-users it is perhaps best used as a coarse filter, augmented by finer server-level filtering.

While spam is annoying it is not as potentially damaging as false positives. Waiting endlessly for an email from a potential client about the “erection” of a new building because overzealous spam filters have blocked it causes much more frustration than any number of junk emails.

Since no spam filtering is infallible, it is worth remembering a few golden rules:

- Never open an attachment that has arrived by unsolicited email.
- Never reply to spam or try to “unsubscribe” — it only encourages them!
- If it sounds too good to be true then it probably is!

Hugh Davies is a co-founder of IT consultant Lomas Davies.

## Introducing Vectorworks Architect 2010



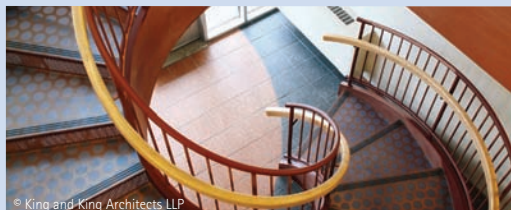
### Making Change Easy

With Vectorworks Architect 2010, we're making change easy. Use our superior 2D capabilities and a simplified 3D environment to accurately visualise and edit your design with ease. Take advantage of robust core technologies like Parasolid® and the Dimensional Constraint Manager (DCM) from Siemens PLM to tackle larger, more complex models and reach higher levels of modelling automation. Use the architectural design features and simpler rendering for accurate, beautiful work with fewer clicks. And, do it all without turning your firm upside down. We're making change easy, so your work is easy too.

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