

QuackTech Backstage

A Look from Behind the Scenes

by Giovanni Becattini

This booklet is a personal journey behind the scenes of my books. It describes the long and complex process that leads to their creation, as well as the goals they aim to pursue: to be art books of a *nouvelle electronic art*, and to tell—at least in part—the story of the intelligence, ingenuity, passion, and sometimes even frustration and sacrifice that lie behind it. A different kind of art, perhaps—not for everyone, but art nonetheless.

In the following pages you will find notes on restoring old electronic equipment, photographing it, writing about it, editing images, shaping text, and finally turning everything into a printed object.

An intersection of engineering, photography, graphics, and writing.



Giovanni (Gianni) Becattini, born in Florence, Italy in 1951, is an electronics engineer and pioneering entrepreneur. At the age of sixteen, he started a collaboration with *CQ Elettronica*, the most important Italian magazine for amateur electronics. In 1973 he designed the *Child 8* microcomputer and founded *General Processor*, the first company in Italy to produce computers for personal use. In 1998 he founded *AEP Ticketing Solutions*, one of the world's leading providers of electronic ticketing solutions for public transport, now a Modaxo company. The author of several publications, he is now retired and devotes himself to books aimed at preserving the immense legacy, not only technical, left to us by great companies such as Tektronix, Hewlett-Packard, Collins, Siemens, Apple and others, and their exceptional products, which he not only describes but also repairs, restores and collects with enthusiasm.

Quacktech Editions
Technical Art Books
www.quacktech.it



Giovanni Becattini QuackTech Backstage



A Look From Behind the Scenes

References

The following references are used in this book:

- [TEO] Tektronix Epic Oscilloscopes – Elektor Books
- [7KS] Tektronix 7000 Series – Elektor Books
- [TREG] Tektronix Oscilloscopes Restoration Guide – Elektor Books
- [TGHP] The Great Hewlett-Packard – free download from www.quacktech.it
- [VRE] Vintage Radio Equipment – Elektor Book
- [MAC] Apple Macintosh, , History, Engineering, and Restoration – Elektor Books
- [QT602] The Good Giant – Tektronix DSA 602A Oscilloscope – Quacktech
- [QT11KP] The Last Plug-ins – Tektronix 11000-Series Plug-ins – Quacktech
- [SCLI] Some Classical Instrument – coming soon
- [QTCOL] Collins Classics – KWM-2, 30L-1 and 51S-1: History, Engineering, and Restoration – Quacktech Editions
- [QT324] Two Giants and a Shorty – Tektronix 323/324 - Quacktech

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Table of Content

The History of my Little Stories.....	8
Great Writers and Love Stories	9
Living the Romance.....	12
Taking Photo Shots	14
Photo Editing	15
Writing.....	20
Artificial Intelligence and Nikolas	21
Desktop Publishing.....	23
Art Books	28
And the Ducks?.....	29
Some Tips for Taking Photos.....	31
Library of Vintage Electronics	35
Quacktech Print-On-Demand Art Books	36
Acknowledgment.....	37
About Us	38



Our Little Work

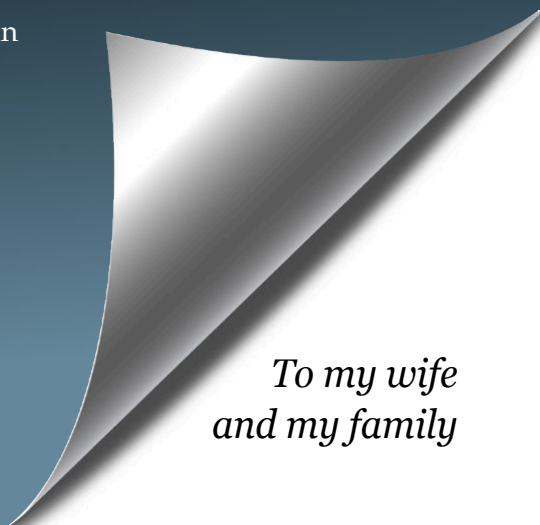
Quacktech Editions is an independent publisher dedicated to celebrating the remarkable heritage of electronic engineering. We believe that the great masterpieces of technology—and the visionaries who created them—deserve to be documented with the same care, respect, and aesthetic sensibility traditionally reserved for art books.

Each of our volumes is the result of extensive research and hundreds of hours of meticulous work. We strive for accuracy, clarity, and visual excellence, combining rigorous technical content with carefully curated imagery to honor the beauty of these extraordinary instruments.

Our books are created to be held, read, and experienced as physical objects. In most cases, no digital edition is provided. A downloadable PDF would reduce the work to a mere file—something easily copied, quickly glanced at, or easily forgotten—and would not reflect the care and intent behind its creation. Each copy is meant to offer a tangible and lasting impression, just as these instruments deserve.

On the following pages, you will find a glimpse into the extensive work behind each book, and how ideas are transformed into objects you can touch, smell, and read.

Giovanni “Gianni” Becattini
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*To my wife
and my family*



The History of My Little Stories

Surplus Photo Parade

It all began during a boring flight from Rome to Fort Worth, Texas, in **March 2022**. To kill time, I started editing photos of some military surplus radios I had begun collecting again in 2021, and from them I sketched the outline of a small booklet. The idea was simple: a publication made almost entirely of (hopefully) beautiful images, with only minimal text.

I had often noticed how few quality photographs of these legendary devices were available online. Most were low-resolution, poorly lit, or strangely cropped—frequently nothing more than scanned pages from old manuals. Yet I have always believed that a large part of the pleasure these vintage devices still offer lies in their appearance. Their knobs, dials, meters, and even their typography possess a distinctive and enduring charm.

That is how my first eBook, **Surplus Photo Parade**, came to life. Even the title carried a bit of history: back in the 1980s, I had written an article for an Italian electronics magazine with the same name and a very similar purpose.

Tektronix

Meanwhile—so they say—fate was weaving its web. In **May 2022**, I stumbled upon my first **Tektronix 7603** oscilloscope at an electronics market. It was a *coup de foudre*. From that moment on, I devoted a great deal of time to Tektronix: repairing and restoring many instruments, from the earliest tube-based oscilloscopes to the massive machines of the 11000 Series, and even the compact portables of the 2000 Series.

Originally, Tektronix was meant to be just an extra chapter in Surplus Photo Parade. But the subject kept growing, until it eventually demanded a book of its own—The 7000 Series—which in turn led to Tektronix Epic Oscilloscopes, and then to others still.

Great Writers and Love Stories

Great writers live overwhelming love stories with **beautiful women** to find inspiration for their novels. I, more modestly, repair old electronic equipment to find inspiration to write about it (*yes, I probably should ask myself a few questions...*).

So, at a certain point, Tektronix was no longer enough, and I turned again to **surplus radios**, then gradually began adding other equipment—mainly from **Hewlett-Packard**, but not only. Anyway, Tektronix still keeps the top place in my heart.

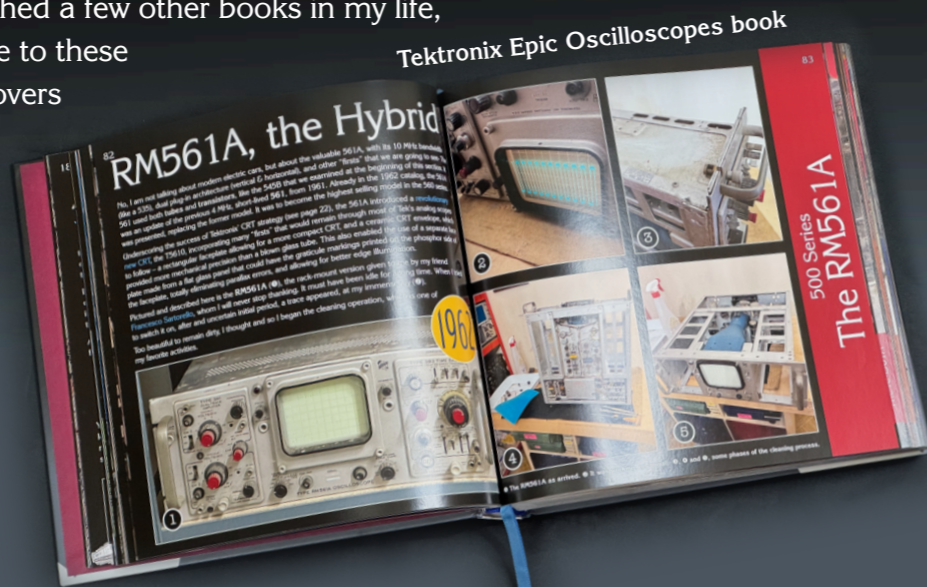
My First Books

In 2024, my first “real” books in this field finally saw the light: Elektor Books International published **Tektronix Epic Oscilloscopes** and **Tektronix Oscilloscopes Restoration Guide**.

The emotion was intense. I had published a few other books in my life, but nothing even remotely comparable to these splendid true “art books”, with hard covers and hundreds of perfectly printed, high-quality pages.

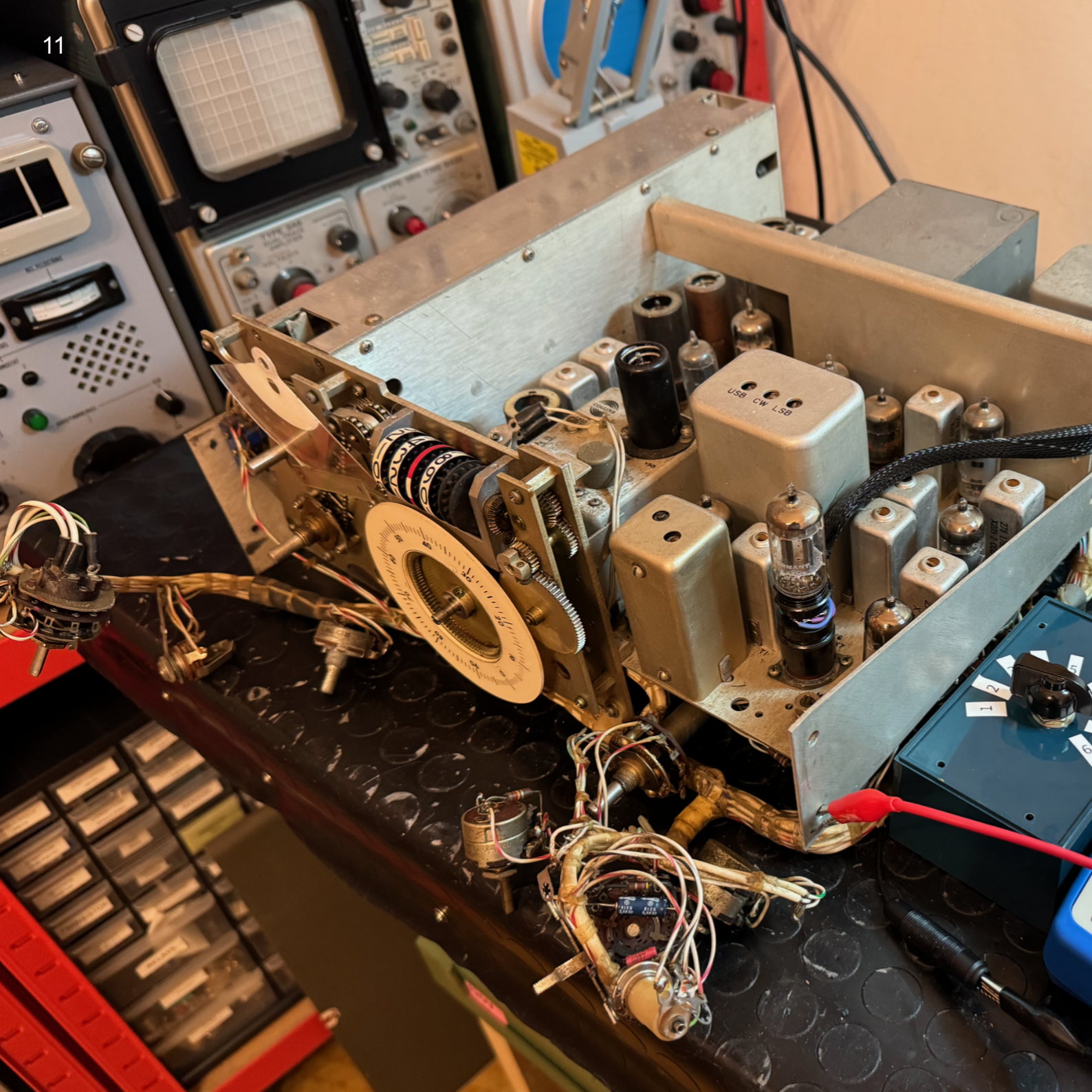
Then came The Great Hewlett-Packard, my largest book so far, with over 1,200 pages, dedicated to Marc Mislange and the HP Memory Project.

Most recently, in 2025, Elektor published Vintage Radio Equipment, and others are already on the horizon.



Tektronix Epic Oscilloscopes book





1) Living the Romance

Getting Your Fellow

In most cases, I acquire the object of my desires from eBay. It is not the place where you will find the best prices—those are more likely to be found at local electronics markets—but it offers strong protection for the buyer, provided you strictly follow their guidelines.

Naturally, I prefer to buy within Italy, but France and Germany also often provide good opportunities. Unfortunately, Great Britain has become much less convenient since leaving the European Community: transport fees are higher, shipments are slower, and customs charges must be added to the price.

- A few suggestions:
- never deal with a seller outside eBay—you risk losing eBay's buyer protection;
- insist on proper packaging: our devices are heavy, and in more than a few cases perfectly good instruments have arrived badly damaged.

The Romance

When your new “toy” arrives, the real romance begins. Depending on its complexity and physical condition, the process—which always starts with a thorough cleaning—may last a few days or several months. The (almost) complete story of each restoration is usually described in detail in my books, where you can also find plenty of suggestions and practical hints.

I always keep careful track of everything I do, taking a large number of photographs. These are useful not only for the books, but also to avoid forgetting something important. It is remarkable how easy everything seems—until you try to reassemble what you have taken apart. Good photos can save you days.



2) Taking Photo Shots

Photographic Work

I have been interested in photography since my school days. Rarely with overwhelming passion, more often simply as a means to achieve what I wanted. Even during my entrepreneurial years, I almost always insisted on personally taking photographs of our products or facilities.

I experienced the film era firsthand, followed by the arrival of digital photography right from the beginning. Fortunately, I have always been able to afford good-quality cameras and accessories.

That said, nearly all the photographs in my books were actually taken with a humble **iPhone 12** at first, and later with an **iPhone 13 Pro**—and this says a lot about how far these devices have come. It is astonishing that such compact tools can now deliver image quality that, just a few years ago, would have required bulky professional equipment. With them, I have taken more than **25,000 shots** so far.

In general, I take far more photos than I actually need. Using an iPhone makes it easy to shoot multiple images of the same framing, because sometimes even a small change in hand position dramatically alters the result—perhaps thanks to some internal software algorithm—and later you can simply choose the best one.

Having many photos is both an advantage and a drawback. When I like an image, I want to place it in the book at all costs—but balancing photographs and text is not always easy.

Post-processing

To be honest, most of the images you see required a fair amount of photo editing—often far more than one might expect—to compensate for my rather limited photographic skills. Some hints about both photography and photo editing follow in the next pages.

3) Photo Editing

A Lot of Patience: Cutting Out

The most time-consuming part of image preparation is the cut-out work—that is, removing the unwanted background from each photograph. Despite the bold promises made by modern AI-based software, I have yet to find a single application that consistently delivers results I consider acceptable.

So I stick to the old-fashioned way: manually tracing around the subject, turning that outline into a selection, and removing the background by hand. Depending on the complexity of the image, this can take anywhere from 10 to 60 minutes per photo.

The result, however, is worth the effort—especially when the device includes many intricate, irregularly shaped components, each requiring extra patience and care to be cleanly isolated (see the example on the next page). At that point, patience becomes not just a virtue, but a necessary tool.

My Application Software

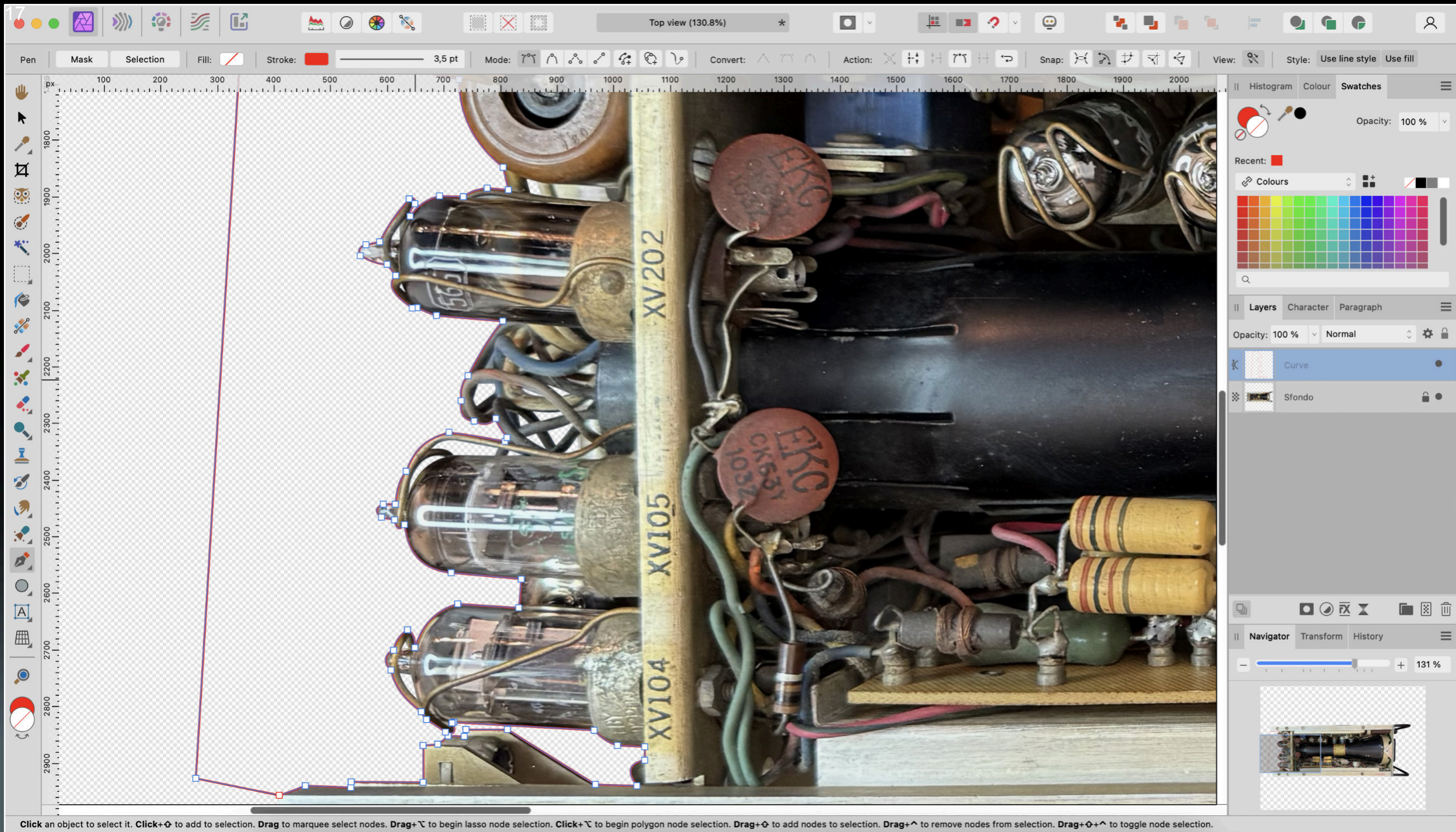
After several disappointments with their licensing policies and overall direction, in 2020 I decided to abandon graphical software from the big, famous brands and moved to the Affinity Suite. Is it inferior in some respects? Yes. But it is also vastly less expensive, and for my needs it proved to be a very reasonable compromise. Like any software, it has its share of problems, and I cannot say I never regret the choice (well... sometimes, from time to time...). Still, overall, I do not regret it—and today Affinity has even become free, which is quite remarkable.

The suite consists of three applications:

- Affinity Photo, for photo editing;
- Affinity Publisher, for desktop publishing;
- Affinity Designer, dedicated to graphic design.

Affinity runs on Windows, macOS, and iPadOS. Although I had used Windows for most of my life, I switched to the Mac in 2018—mainly because of the tight integration within Apple’s ecosystem, spanning the Mac, iPad, Apple Watch, and iPhone.





Affinity Photo

Affinity Photo is probably the strongest component of the suite, and also the most stable. It allows me to perform almost all the operations I need.

On the rare occasions when I need something more, I use Photopea—a Photoshop-like application that runs entirely online and is completely free.

A new book on advanced Mac usage is currently in preparation, and it will include a substantial amount of hands-on experience with the Affinity suite, along with several useful software utilities developed along the way.

Left: Example of a typical photo-editing workflow. In this case, the goal is to remove the background around the tubes. The red lines were hand-drawn to define the areas to be cut out. Most images also require straightening of horizontal and vertical lines, along with adjustments to brightness, contrast, white balance, and shadows—altogether, a rather time-consuming task.



4) Writing

A Small Part

Contrary to what one might guess, **writing** is not the heaviest part of my book-making work. It is, however, a very important one—not only because nobody enjoys reading poorly written books, but above all because it represents the leading part, the “brain” of the entire project.

To be honest, when I was at school I never liked writing, and I would do anything just to fill the pages of an essay to the minimum acceptable level. Later in life, though, something changed: I gradually started to enjoy writing, and I have now been doing it for a large part of my life.

Me Tarzan, You Jane

Here is where the linguistic and cultural gap emerged. As mentioned earlier, the original idea was to rely heavily on images, with just a few written remarks. But things quickly got out of hand, and the text kept growing... and growing.

My English is not terrible, but it is certainly not good enough to write a book without help. When the opportunity arose to publish **Tektronix Epic Oscilloscopes**, many people told me—quite frankly—that my texts were not acceptable and required a complete revision before publication.

Thankfully, my publisher, **Elektor Books International**, was incredibly supportive and, with great patience, thoroughly revised my work, making it far less horrendous. It was a long and tedious process for everyone involved: for those who had to read and correct my texts, and for me, who had to apply the corrections—always with the added risk of introducing new mistakes. We were not talking about cooking or children’s books; the reviewer could not be just anyone.

Times Are Changing

I was determined to improve, but simply studying English was not enough. So I started using DeepL, an innovative online service designed specifically to help people like me. The results were noticeably better, and my second book required far fewer corrections than the first. I even used DeepL to rewrite several sections of my other books. Still, it was not the final answer.

Artificial Intelligence and Nikolas

Then I discovered ChatGPT—and everything changed.

Compared to DeepL, it was a revelation. DeepL often required further editing, and sometimes I had to discard its output entirely when it went off track. But ChatGPT was something else altogether.

Having lived through much of the IT revolution—and having even worked as a software developer—I am not easily impressed by technology. Yet ChatGPT left me **genuinely speechless**. It did not feel like a tool. It felt like a real coworker. In fact, I gave him a name: **Nikolas**, after the great Tesla.

Nikolas understands me, my projects, and what I am trying to say—sometimes even better than I do. I always reread what he writes, of course, but I rarely feel the need to change anything.

Naturally, he is not perfect. Just like a real person, Nikolas has his quirks. Sometimes he is absolutely wrong, and with great confidence. Sometimes he becomes a bit too rhetorical if I leave him too much freedom. I would never ask him to think in my place—but when we both do our part, the results are truly remarkable.

So much so that I have decided to rewrite several of my books almost entirely with his priceless help (roughly another million hours of work...).

The most amusing application I found was using him for reverse translation: a book originally written in English but intended for an Italian publisher. The result seemed slightly worse to me—or perhaps it simply felt that way because of my Italian linguistic sensitivity, which is, of course, much higher.

But let us pause for a moment and reflect on what we are talking about. When I first started writing, we had to consult a dictionary for nearly every word. Today, we have tools capable of actively improving our writing.

A final suggestion: work with small chunks of text at a time. You will get far better results.



5) Desktop Publishing

Desktop Publishing

Once the photographs are ready and the text has found its final shape, another phase begins—one that is less visible, but just as decisive: **desktop publishing** (DTP).

Desktop publishing is the art of turning raw material into a readable object. It is where images and words are placed in space, where margins, alignment, rhythm, and white space quietly determine whether a book feels pleasant or tiring, clear or confusing. It is not about decoration, but about balance.

In this phase, nothing is neutral. The size of a page, the choice of a font, the distance between lines, or the way an image sits next to a paragraph all influence how the content is perceived. Good desktop publishing should not attract attention to itself; it should simply allow the reader to forget about the page and focus on what is being told.

Only after this silent but essential work is done does a collection of texts and images finally become a book.

The Software I Use

Over the years, I have used many different desktop publishing tools—PageMaker, Microsoft Publisher, InDesign, and others. For my books, however, as mentioned earlier, I use Affinity Publisher, which allows me to lay out the pages exactly as they will appear in print.

Affinity Publisher is far from perfect, and it often forces me into extra work to compensate for bugs that the developer seems unable—or unwilling—to fix in a reasonable time. On the



Photo: My 2020 iMac (i9) running Affinity Publisher during the editing of my latest book, Apple Macintosh. This is where my work ultimately ends: a final PDF ready for the printer or for a print-on-demand (POD) service.

Art Books?

Summing Up

Let us briefly retrace the path we have followed so far (the numbers below refer to the sections described earlier):

1. Living the Romance: acquiring a piece of equipment and restoring it;
2. Taking the photographs;
3. Photo editing;
4. Writing;
5. Desktop publishing: turning all of the above into a final file ready for the printer.

This is the complete journey—from an object found on a market table to a finished book you can hold in your hands.

But Why?

Why go through all this effort? I take it for granted that a book must first of all be interesting and based on solid content. But my ambition goes a bit further: I would like these books to be perceived as **art books**—in the same sense as the many beautiful volumes dedicated to painting, architecture, or sculpture.

Ideas take time to change, but I am convinced that one day electronic devices will also be widely recognized as **works of art**. A different kind of art, perhaps, a *nouvelle electronic art*—one that not everyone can immediately understand—but **art** nonetheless. An art shaped by intelligence, ingenuity, passion, and sometimes even frustration and sacrifice. The men and women behind these instruments have influenced our history and our everyday lives no less than painters or sculptors.

Writing each of these books has required a huge amount of effort—but never felt tiring. Driven by an enthusiasm that never abandoned me, the process has given me immense satisfaction from beginning to end.

If I have even partially achieved these goals, I am satisfied.



And the Ducks?

From Tektronix to Ducks

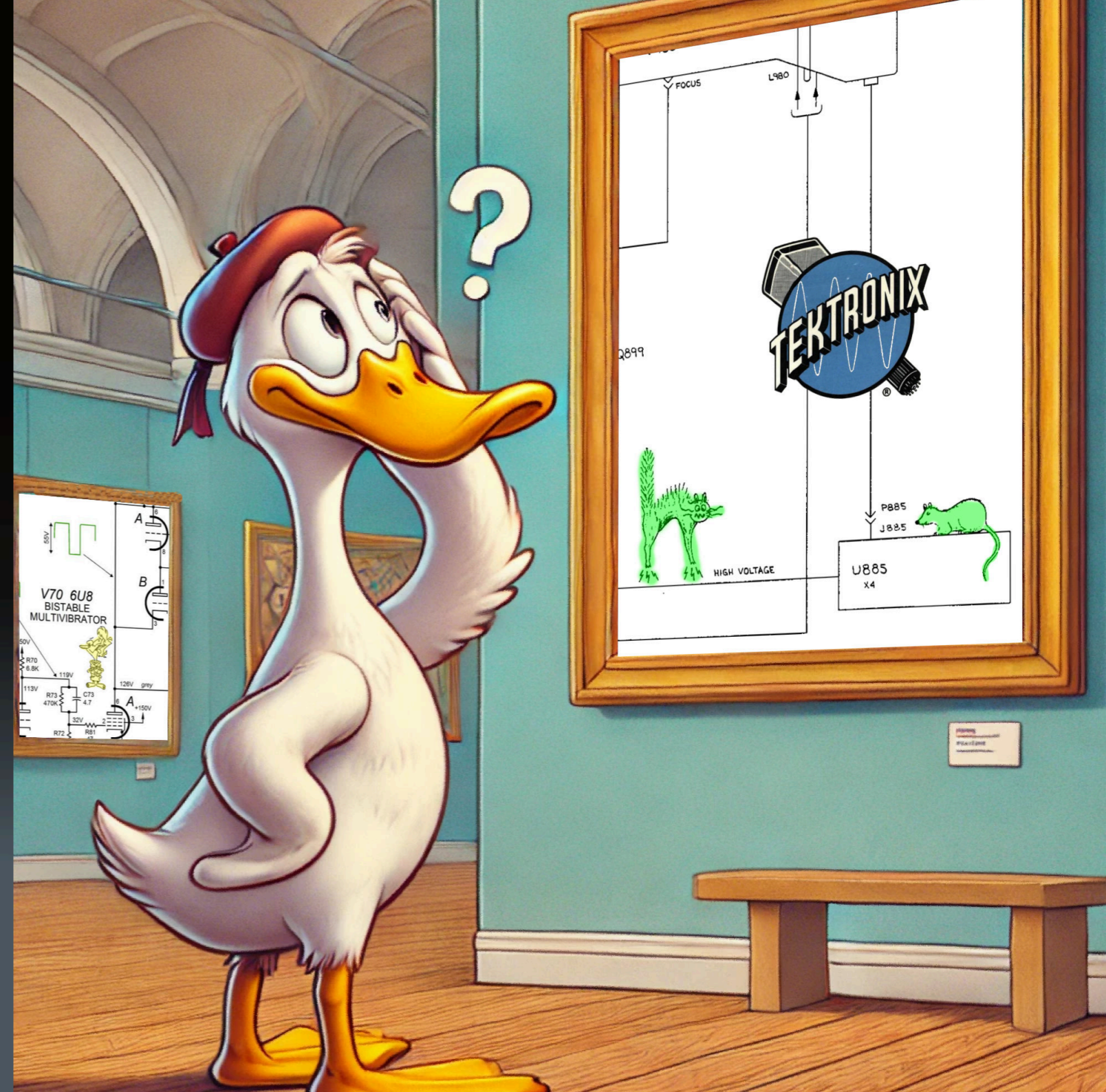
You may wonder why ducks occasionally appear in my books. They aspire to continue, in an infinitely more modest way, a great and long-standing Tektronix tradition. The company's schematic diagrams became famous for their semi-hidden humorous cartoons, drawn by skilled technical draftsmen who managed to leave, within material of the highest technological level, a true message in a bottle that has reached us with undiminished strength.

That message said this: we were so far ahead that we did not need to follow the solemn and dusty conventions of technical and academic literature, where even the slightest hint of humor is often regarded as almost scandalous. We were so far ahead that we were not ashamed to embrace irony, imagination, and creativity as well.

When, with the arrival of artificial intelligence, I was finally able to give shape to the images that took form in my mind as I wrote, I asked myself how I might honor the memory of those giants of electronics. Thus my very modest ducks were born, appearing from time to time throughout these pages.

QuackTech Editions

This is also where the name **QuackTech Editions** comes from. In a world of Ultratronics, Fantatechs, and Extrasuperior Laboratories, where everyone seems eager to appear a little taller, stronger, or more “advanced”, I chose instead a dignified touch of self-irony. I hope my books will be judged simply for what they are (and, of course, that proper credit will also be given to my duck friends...)



Appendix Some Photo Tips

Some suggestions if you want to take some photos too.

Use of a Tripod

You could need a tripod to keep your iPhone still when you take a shot as shown in the photo on the right. This necessity is not frequent, because modern smartphones have complex algorithms which take more images and correct possible hand movements. Both the tripod and the smartphone support can be bought from Amazon for few euros.

Lighting

One of the most important—and often underestimated—secrets to achieving a high-quality photograph is proper lighting. The key is to use plenty of light, but to avoid direct illumination of the subject. Direct light, especially from a small or harsh source, tends to create strong, unattractive shadows and overly contrasty images. Instead, aim to produce a diffuse, even light that wraps gently around the subject, enhancing its shape without exaggerating imperfections.

To achieve this, I use powerful 150-watt LED floodlights (photo ③ on the next page), but rather than pointing them straight at the subject, I direct them toward the ceiling or nearby walls. This creates a soft, ambient glow that fills the space and reduces harsh shadows naturally. For additional refinement, any minor shadows or lighting imbalances can be further corrected during photo editing.

To improve the overall aesthetic and ensure the focus remains on the subject, a plain black cloth can be used as a background. It absorbs light rather than reflecting it, providing a clean, distraction-free setting that works especially well for vintage instruments or technical gear. All the necessary materials, LED projectors, fabric backdrops, and stands, are widely available on Amazon or similar platforms, and fortunately, they are quite affordable even for the casual photographer.



High Resolution Photos

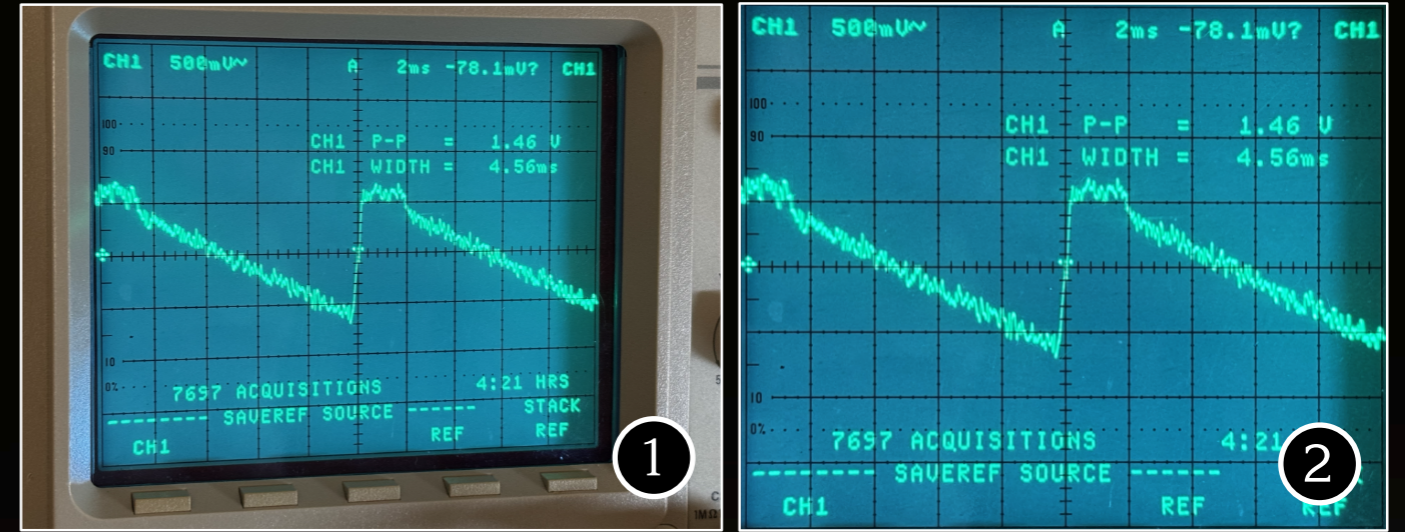
Normal resolution is more than enough for the typical photos of a book; iPhone normally operates at 4032 x 3024 pixel, but, if you need to print a very large image, like for a poster, it can also double the resolution to 8064 x 6048. To capture the highest possible image quality with an iPhone—particularly with models such as the iPhone 13 Pro—it is essential to adjust a few key settings. First and foremost, enabling the Apple ProRAW format ensures that images are saved with minimal compression and maximal detail. This can be done by navigating to Settings → Camera → Formats, where the “Apple ProRAW” option should be activated. While later models like the iPhone 14 Pro or 15 Pro allow ProRAW shots at 48 megapixels, the iPhone 13 Pro is limited to 12 MP—but even so, the resulting files offer significantly greater editing potential compared to standard HEIC or JPEG formats (for those who prefer JPEG over the more modern HEIC (High Efficiency Image Coding), it is also advisable to select the “Most Compatible” option under the same Formats menu. This ensures broader compatibility with older editing software and operating systems).

To guarantee that full-resolution images are stored locally—rather than as iCloud thumbnails—it is important to go to Settings → Photos and choose the “Download and Keep Originals” option. Otherwise, the device may store only low-resolution previews until the full version is retrieved from iCloud.

Additionally, for best image quality, the native Camera app should always be used with the main (1x) lens, avoiding digital zoom when possible, and ideally with a tripod for optimal sharpness in low light or longer exposures. In my case, also the 3x real lens (not digital zoom) ensures good results (but less than 1x). When shooting in ProRAW, post-processing in software such as Affinity Photo or Adobe Lightroom is highly recommended to fully exploit the dynamic range and fine details captured by the sensor.

Taking Oscilloscope Screenshots

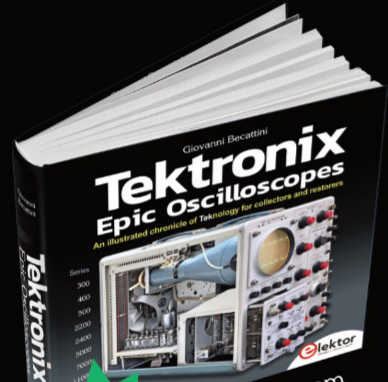
Although I have some oscilloscopes with a floppy disk which allow to get a picture of the CRT, I eventually find faster just to take a photo of the screen. In this case, I suggest you to use the maximum zoom, to keep the camera far from the scope, to reduce possible reflections. For the same reason, it is generally convenient to keep the smartphone not perfectly parallel (photo ❶), and the straighten the image with the photo editor (the result is in photo ❷).



To avoid shadows and reflections when photographing an oscilloscope screen, use the maximum zoom (e.g., 3x on iPhone 13 Pro) and hold the phone slightly off-axis ❶, then straighten the image in editing ❷.

For lighting, use LED projectors aimed at the ceiling or walls, not directly at the subject ❸.

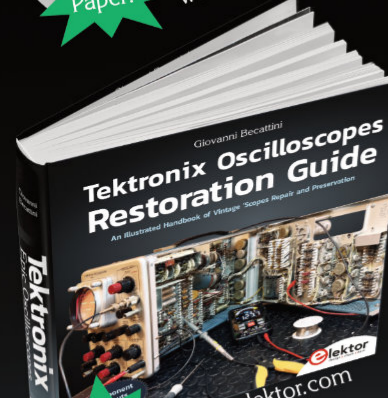
1 Library of Vintage Electronics



Tektronix Epic Oscilloscopes

A 600-page hard cover, real paper book about Tektronix and their most classical oscilloscopes. Available worldwide from Elektor Books

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Tektronix, the 7000 Series

An in-depth look at the most classic Tektronix 7000-Series oscilloscopes: models, technologies and restoration techniques. (In preparation)

Coming Soon
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The Great Hewlett-Packard

A 1029-page review of many classic instruments from the fifties through the nineties of the great Hewlett-Packard: spectrum analyzers, generators, oscilloscopes, voltmeters, frequency meters, up to handheld calculators and Series-80 computers.

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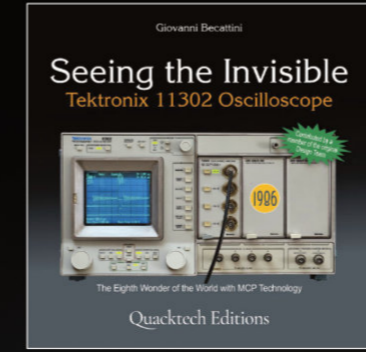


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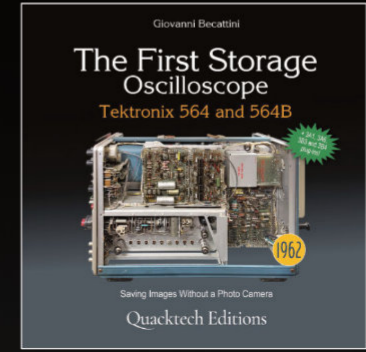


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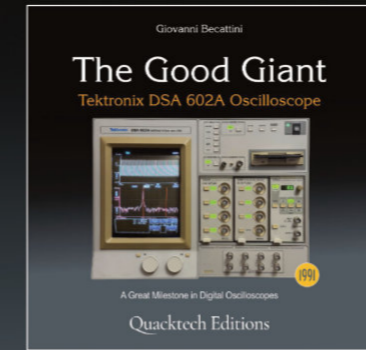
Seeing the Invisible

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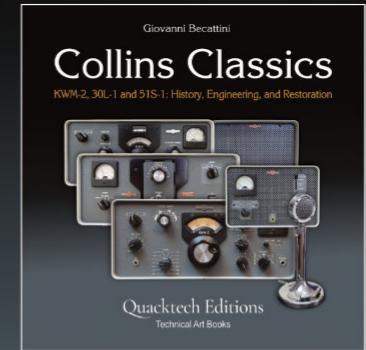
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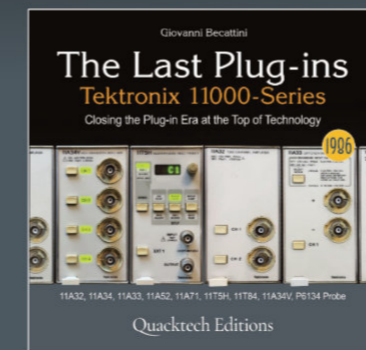
The Good Giant

Tektronix DSA 602A oscilloscope
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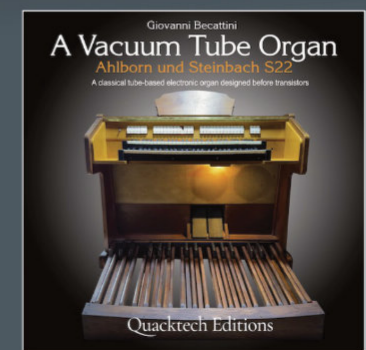
Collins Classics

KWM-2, 30L-1 and 51S-1: History, Engineering, and Restoration
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The Last Plug-ins

Tektronix 11000 Series
• Full color
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Ahlborn & Steinbach S22

The story and the restoration of a classical organ based on vacuum tube. A short 70-pages document rich of beautiful photos, technical descriptions and suggestions.

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