

The Pixel 6A comes with a better Magic Eraser

Google's clever Magic Eraser tool debuted on the Pixel 6 and 6 Pro. It's an editing feature that's designed to remove people or objects you don't want in the background of your photos. Considering that it's dead simple to use, the results are okay, but it's definitely not putting Adobe out of business anytime soon. But with the Pixel 6A – and coming soon to the 6 and 6 Pro – Google has added a new Magic Eraser function that I like a lot more than the standard erase tool: Camouflage. It's just as easy to use, and the results are a lot more consistent.

Magic Eraser works a bit like Photoshop's content-aware fill. You make a selection, then it uses information from the surrounding image to remove the unwanted subject and fill in the area. With certain subjects, especially if they're isolated from other objects in your image, it works fairly well. Given that most photos are viewed on (relatively) tiny screens these days, the results look passable. But if the object you want to remove overlaps with other elements of the image, the final image doesn't look as good. It's harder for the system to make a good guess about how to fill in the space left behind, and it can create some weird-looking artifacts that are an even bigger distraction.

The purple stroller isn't a great candidate for Erase since my subject overlaps it and the background is busy.

Changing it to grey makes it less of a distraction.

That's where Camouflage is a great option. Rather than trying

to remove the unwanted object entirely, the tool just desaturates it to make it less distracting. It's perfect for, say, a bright purple stroller behind your subject. Using Magic Eraser will make a mess of it trying to clone it out of existence, but Camouflage will do just enough to make it less of a distraction.

I often shoot in portrait mode for basically the same reason that Magic Eraser exists: to bring attention to my subject and de-emphasize things in the background. But especially with a portrait mode shot, I don't necessarily want to entirely remove something that's in the background since it's already blurred to partially reduce the distraction. Plus, it might be something that adds context to my photo. De-saturating a brightly colored object behind my subject helps keep attention where I want it, without losing that context or introducing other distracting artifacts.

The turquoise stool is a little distracting in the background.

It's not perfect, but camouflaging it makes it a bit less of a distraction to the overall image.

Google spokesperson Matt Flegal says that the Pixel 6 and 6 Pro will get the Camouflage tool on July 28th, the same day the Pixel 6A goes on sale.

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