

CAMERACRAFT

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 THE GUILD OF PHOTOGRAPHERS



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GLYN DAVIES

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Excellent event with three informative and knowledgeable presentations that certainly provided me with great tips for my photography. Great opportunity to speak with not only the presenters but also leading industry suppliers. Thank you! - D Hounslea (22/04/2024)

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RIPLEY – and there can be few photographers who have not watched this Netflix series – really drove home the emphasis we put on black and white on a few pages of the last edition. In this issue, you'll find my review of the Fujifilm X100VI and half the examples shown are B&W. It seems certain that *Ripley* will have kicked off a new spate of creative B&W and we look forward to 2025 being colourless!

Ripley establishes this likely new trend thanks to director Steven Zaillian (and his team of co-directors) and cinematographer Robert Elswit, described to me as 'old school' by trusted ex-TV lensman turned star still photographer Giles Christopher. My last editorial mentioned the use of viewing filters to help directors see the tone and light range movie cameras once saw. Today a camera with an EVF should be able to show the final effect in colour rendering or black and white, with filter, contrast curve and exposure adjustments.

Despite this one of the appeals of the X100VI was the optical finder. Well, I can't afford an X100VI and in any case the entire world stock was sold out almost before anyone had got one. The special edition to mark the launch ended up allocated by lottery in each country to decide who should be eligible to buy one. That's Leica territory, not Fujifilm – but this is where they are heading.

No real alternative

So, I thought about other optical finder digital rangefinder-style cameras. I'd really enjoyed using that mode. Apart from the obvious Leica models and their price-tags, the earliest example is the Cosina/Voigtlander made Epson R-D1 and you'll pay more for a mint 2004 body with its 6.1MP sensor and SD card limit of 2GB than the Fujifilm's £1599. The latest variants which take 32GB cards and have minor modifications are rare in Europe. Then you need a Leica M fit lens or three.

There's nothing else on the used market except Fujifilm's earlier X100S, F, T and V though with a smaller sensor size the 2013 Fujifilm XT-20 combined a decent 12MP with 28-112mm zoom equivalent and a fairly accurate optical zoom viewfinder. The Canon Powershot G compact series with optical finders ended in 2012 with the G1X, also 12MP. Then you remember – it was a great camera to use, but a viewfinder with only 80% of the view, not very clear or accurate, meant you ended up using the rear screen all the time.

You could pop a used Leica 36mm field viewfinder in the accessory shoe of a used Leica X2. From mpb.com that came to a neat £968 to get 16MP APS-C and a fixed 24mm f2.8 Elmarit. It would look very cool, like a Leica 1 series with a big modern finder. But the same source had no fewer than 57 used X100F examples with 24MP, f2 lens and many refinements from £150 less to £50 more depending on condition and accessories. The VI launch sent them flooding the market.

All this is why a £1599 camera with a fixed lens can take over the world. Fujifilm is on record acknowledging that the X100 series alone may have boosted their fortunes, though I'd guess the Instax instant-print range has been just as important along with increasing interest in using real film and the services of mail order and local labs. Then there's the GFX medium-format system too.

Only two things count in photography – *being* and *seeing*. A simple compact camera helps you *be there* and *see* when a bag full of bodies and lenses could hinder you. An optical viewfinder which works even when the camera is switched off helps you frame the scene and learn to see pictures better without the aid of a screen or EVF. And monochrome makes your vision memorable.

– David Kilpatrick

IN THIS ISSUE

Glyn Davies, Ronnie Hek, Maria Munn, Stuart Wood, Gary Friedman, Tom Hill, David Kilpatrick.

CONTENTS MAY/JUNE 2024

Cover – photographs from our features

- 4 News
- 6 Tom Hill – Book Learning! The journey to becoming a self-publisher.
- 8 Stuart Wood – Voted Europe and Asia Favourite Photographer by the RSVP organisation, the wedding industry equivalent of the Oscars.
- 10 Ronnie Hek – Tails of the Riverbank. Location matters, and Ronnie found the environment near his home encouraged him to become a proficient nature photographer.
- 16 Glyn Davies – The Quay to Success. Location matters even more for retail space! Glyn had to find new gallery premises and Caernarfon's new Slate Quay development was waiting at just the right time.
- 22 Maria Munn – A Toe in the Water. Living near the sea, Maria started underwater photography using the most affordable compact solutions. She's written a guide for anyone doing the same.
- 26 Locations – we invited readers to send pictures and words recommending great places to visit for photography.
- 32 Gary Friedman – flash sync outdoors at up to 1/80,000s for 'studio in broad daylight' control.
- 34 Camera Field Test – David Kilpatrick in Lisbon with the new Fujifilm X100VI.
- 40 Software – Gary Friedman on Adobe AI noise reduction, Topaz and DxO Optics Pro.
- 41 Lenses – Nikon Z fit budget Meike 50mm f1.8 and Viltrox lightweight 20mm f2.8, first look.
- 42 Bags – the Lowepro Tahoe BP-150 backpack, big enough for a full kit, small enough for Ryanair.
- 38 Rearview Gallery – selected entries from the Guild of Photographers Image of the Month.

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Sigma and Tamron both announce lenses for the Canon RF mount – but only APS-C

AFTER resisting the demands from Canon system owners for the mirrorless RF mount to be licensed to third party lens makers, both the big independent brands announced their first RF lenses pretty much on the same day in mid-April. This is the first apparent about-turn Canon has made on its intent to keep the mount to itself when Sony's E-mount has been available to all makers since 2010, and Nikon has released the Z mount in the same way.

However, the existence of other third party AF lenses in the mount such as the full-frame **Samyang 14mm f2.8 RF** and **85mm f1.4 RF** points to licensing costs as a possible barrier rather than any Canon unwillingness to let the system grow beyond its own control. They formally announced a ban on third-party RF AF lenses two years ago, confirmed it a year ago. Viltrox and Yongnuo marketed an 85mm f1.8 RF FF which quickly disappeared, presumably when Canon invoked patent law.

Significantly, Sigma's press release on this development says "There is no information regarding SIGMA lenses for Canon RF Mount (full-frame)". They are putting the **18-50mm f2.8 DC DN** out in July as the first lens, followed by the **10-18mm f2.8 DC DN** in the autumn. This will be followed rapidly by the f1.4 fixed focal lengths in the DN DN Contemporary series – the **16mm, 23mm, 30mm and 56mm**.

See: <https://www.sigmamk.com>

Tamron's release says nothing about full frame or a road map of this kind, but to quote: "After receiving many requests from customers to offer lenses compatible with the Canon RF mount, Tamron made the decision to develop a lens for the Canon RF mount under a licence agreement." This one lens is the **11-20mm f2.8 Di III-A1 RXD** (Model B060) with its close focusing to 15cm, and it will for sale "some time in 2024".

See: <https://www.tamron.co.uk>



The Sigma 18-50mm, top; 10-18mm on body, centre; Tamron 11-20mm above.

Kenro's tiny movie and still light

THE KENRO KSLC101 is a 60W LED COB light with a power output of 60W, colour temperature range of 7500-2700K, and dimming range of 1-100%. With a CRI (Ra) of 96+ and TLCI of 97+ this Bi-Colour palm-sized light at under £200 retail includes a removable reflector and white silicone diffuser. Delivering up to 29000 Lux at 0.5m it offers eight specialised lighting effects including lightning, flickering screen, and candlelight via a user-friendly OLED display and Android/iOS app or 2.4G remote control. Just 161 x 74 x 68mm



and 250g, it can be powered using an included AC adapter, or via a PD mobile power supply using the built-in USB-C port.

See: <https://www.kenro.co.uk>

Nikon Z 28-400mm compact zoom

THE NIKKOR Z 28-400mm f4-8 VR fits a 14.2x range into only 725g, taking 77mm filters and just 141.5mm long though extending when zoomed. The 21-element design comes with an unusual wide-angle rectangular lens hood and can be locked at 28mm. The variable aperture of f4 to f8 over its range stops down to f22 to f45, and it is not teleconverter compatible. It offers 5.0 stops of lens IS (5.5 stops with Synchro VR capable body). With a close focus range to 0.2m at 28mm



and 1.2m at 400mm, the largest image scale is 0.35x. The lens is in stores now at a price of £1399.

<https://www.nikon.co.uk>

Sony 16-25mm f2.8 G FE

SHORTER all round than Tamron's 17-28mm and sharing the same 67mm filter thread, Sony new wide angle fast zoom is a G series much like the recently launched 24-50mm and presumably competing with their own larger 16-35mm. At 91.4mm long and 409g, it shaves 7.6mm and 11g off the independent rival and offers a declippable aperture control ring on the lens. AF/MF switch and function button but costs £1,249.

The 16-25mm focuses down to 19cm at 16mm, 26cm at 25mm, and



has a largest close-up scale of 1:5.2 at the wide end. It has a 9-blade circular aperture and comes with lens hood and caps.

<https://www.sony.co.uk>

Leica SL3 60MP with 8K video

NOT a Sony clone by any means, the new £5,920 Leica mirrorless offers 60, 36 and 18MP DNG and JPEG files along with 8K video, AI autofocus using three technologies, the L-mount lens system, a 5.67 megapixel OLED EVF and tiltable 3.2" display with 2.3m dots. It also has advanced connectivity, 5-axis IBIS and lens IS, an ISO range from 50 to 100,000 and 14-bit depth with 15 stop claimed dynamic range, and uses CF Express Type B memory cards. The SL3 is made in Germany.

<https://www.leica-camera.com>



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IF YOU want to shoot professional quality footage with your iPhone, the Lexar SL500 portable SSD supports Apple Pro Res recording and it's magnetic! With Magnetic Set, and custom cables for its extremely fast transfer rates, it clings to your phone's magnetic field. Shoot directly to the

drive in up to 4K 60FPS with iPhone 15 Pro and iPhone 15 Pro Max. It is compatible with PC, Mac, Android devices, iPhone 15 series, gaming consoles, cameras, video cameras and more.

It's distributed by Transcontinenta and info is at: <https://www.lexar.com>

Laowa Venus 10mm f2.8 FF Zero-D AF

The
Photography
Show



In February, the Chinese lens-maker Laowa introduced the Venus **10mm Zero-D f2.8 AF** ultra wide angle for E and Z mounts (Canon RF and L mounts get manual only). The lens was in such great demand that by the time of The Photography Show it was only available on backorder through the main UK dealers. It was expected to reach customers by May.

At the show, I tried the lens briefly on the Laowa stand. It was immediately clear even through the EVF that it has exceptional geometry, the expected level of vignetting, and corner-to-corner sharpness. I have been using the Voigtlander 10mm Hyper Wide Heliar since its introduction at the same show in March 2016. It has the benefit of being small, but it will not accept filters – it is also a manual focus lens, and has a relatively limited maximum aperture of $f5.6$. Despite the great depth of field, when used on a 61 megapixel sensor very accurate focus matters. Because the Voigtlander has electronic coupling it enables magnified manual focus when the focus ring is moved, but there is no doubt that AF is a major step forward, and may be essential for video.



The downside of the Laowa lens is that it is much larger but takes 77mm screw thread filters directly without needing an adapter or holder. The lens has been initially priced at £839 in mainstream retail outlets, where once this brand was mail order or import only.

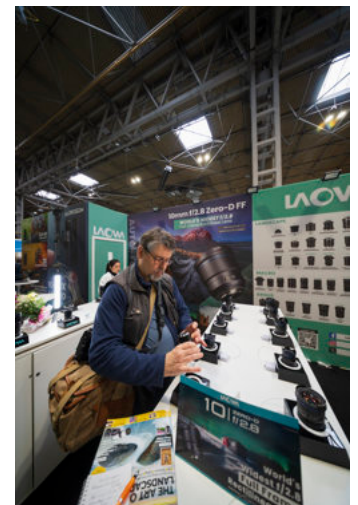
Close examination of a few shots is enough to show that this lens can match the Hyper Wide Heliar and probably has either less distortion and vignetting or a better built in lens profile. In Adobe Camera Raw turning the profile on and off produces little visible change, which indicates the lens is well designed to start with. My dilemma has been whether to sell my lens and buy this new one, or order the Venus before selling the Voigtlander to have a chance to compare them properly and see



Checking geometry on both horizontal (above) and vertical (right) frames matters as distortion may vary with distance from the axis.

whether the extra bulk of the faster AF lens is a barrier to carrying it when travelling.

I have been using the 7.5mm $f2$ Laowa AE MFT (15mm equivalent) with manual auto-magnified focus, electronic aperture and EXIF stabilisation coupling in my Olympus outfit since late 2021. This tiny lens has similar excellent qualities, and if I need a 10mm view it's possible to shoot three vertical frames and stitch them side-by-side. Starting with a very wide view can mean a result with semi-fisheye curvature. It's better to stitch multiple shots at 12mm on the 12-45mm zoom I use, or take a couple of 20mm frames on my Sony full frame for 'Merge to Panorama' in Adobe Bridge. But it's better to have a native 130° view lens on a 61MP full frame sensor.



Where this new AF lens really wins is for video. Take a look at the website of photographer Dave Hill (<https://www.davehill.com/>) and see how he uses the extreme wide angle of action and phone cameras.

This lens can bring both still and video ultra wide views to high resolution, full frame cameras and enable them to more than match the 13mm angle of the widest iPhone lens.

– DK

Stockists include WEX, Carmarthen Camera Centre and UK Digital or go to <https://www.venuslens.net>



TOM HILL

Book learning: how a charity fundraising project taught me publishing

Ernest Hemingway once said: "...how good a book is should be judged ... by the excellence of the material [the author] eliminates."

And that's the first challenge of producing a book about 40 years of a life involved with the photographic industry, as I have done recently. The proceeds of all sales are going to charity.

As I never produced any off-spring (fortunately for the world, for them and for me) I wanted to produce a publication; some sort of legacy to prove that I once existed. After a heart-related health scare a couple of years ago, I thought it a good idea to kill two birds with one stone; I decided to raise some money for the British Heart Foundation by writing a book that might also create a minor fold for me in the overall fabric of history.

But what do you include in your 'life retrospective' from over 20,000 images and hundreds of interesting, sad or amusing anecdotes? As I was marking 40 years involved with the

medium of photography, the obvious number was 80 pages – 40 images and 40 accompanying page-facing stories. You'd think that would be straightforward enough. Yeah, right.

The Cobbler's Children isn't a book about photography, and it certainly isn't intended to be a book of stunning photographs; I would have struggled to produce that. Instead, it's a load of old cobblers – a collection of anecdotes about the way that the medium of photography can legitimise some of the bizarre scrapes I found myself in over the years; with plenty of alcohol, recreational drugs, humour and poignancy thrown in. Someone said it read like Hunter S Thompson meets Frank McCourt via Johnny Knoxville. Then I added a bit of John Berger style self-critique to satisfy any potential highbrow readership.

Anyway, enough about me. Let's look at a few things, mainly practical and financial issues, which I discovered on producing a publication of this nature. Simon Hill, (no relation) president of the RPS, helped me out immensely with his knowledge and experience, as did the editor of this magazine, David Kilpatrick. Simon also wrote a very complimentary foreword for the book, as did Prof Paul Hill (also no relation) with whom I studied my MA in Photography at De Montfort University.

Size matters

Obviously the first thing you decide when producing a book is choosing the intended content. The more that's in it, the more expensive it will be to produce and distribute. So, one of the first decisions you have to make is the physical size of your intended product. David K took me on a tour of his bookshelves to demonstrate how 'landscape' format books can project by



Tom Hill is a travel writer, copywriter and sometime photographer living in the Scottish Borders in the UK.

His 116pp book produced in conjunction with Paul Hill MBE and Simon Hill, President of the RPS, is available now.

Details at his website: bigfrogsmallpond.co.uk

several inches over the front edges of many people's domestic bookshelves. That's a sure-fire way to get your tome consigned to a cardboard box in the loft, if it won't fit the shelves in the reader's house.

If you choose A4 for a book size, it can be cheaper to produce than other formats, mainly because of presses whether digital or litho cut their paper stock from a reel or load large sheets based on A-sizes. The more popular the format, the

cheaper the material, the less waste when folded and trimmed.

And it's not only the length but the thickness that's important. If you choose a nice heavyweight glossy internal paper, plus a cover material, you can work out the width of a perfect bound (flat) spine of your intended masterpiece. A spine of at least 15mm gives sufficient size to print the title downwards along it, readable from walking past a bookshelf from a couple of feet away.

Snail Mail

But then, the thicker it is, the more it weighs. This has to be considered when navigating the tortuous pricing structure offered by the Royal Mail website. Prices to post the same item to the same place can vary considerably depending on the service level and whether the transaction is carried out online or over a post office counter.

Perhaps more importantly, try to have your book and its packaging fall within the 'Large Letter' (LL) criteria, as opposed to a 'Small Parcel'. The shipping costs for 'Small Parcels' can be so prohibitive as to make you rethink the entire project.

LLs can be a maximum of 353mm x 250mm with a depth of no more than 25mm, weighing under 750g. *The Cobbler's* dimensions are 250mm x 200 x 13mm. Effectively in old money, a ten-by-eight. It weighs in at 650 grams with its 116 pages (58 sheets) plus heavy laminated cover in an appropriately sized padded envelope, which cost 30p each so long as you buy at least 50 at a time via Amazon.

Standard non-tracked 2nd class Large Letter for that package currently costs £2.70 when postage is purchased at home and a label produced from your own printer. Then again, printing ink isn't cheap either, those QRs and barcodes demand a lot of pigment.

You can also elect to have your parcels collected by the postie nowadays. They can even bring printed self-adhesive labels ready for you to affix to your packages. But bear in mind the postie is going to have to wait around while you peel and stick. OK for one or two packages, but not a hundred.

There are dozens of things I learned from my first venture into

this world of book-based fundraising. As space is short here, I'd urge first-timers to research at least these important factors before deciding on the format, content and design of any publication:

- If you want your book to sell new as 'retail' in any shop and qualify for DACS/ALCS/PLS payments in future, it must have an ISBN number and barcode. These are expensive to generate as one-offs, around £100, but many printing companies and self-publishing platforms can supply them very much cheaper (even FOC) as they pre-register runs of numbers in bulk.

- If considering the retail route for a charity fundraiser, make sure that the charity involved has a national distribution network across all its shops – otherwise you'd have to pay to send about a dozen copies to each shop yourself.

- Carefully research fonts, line justification, layouts, gutters, margins and publishing templates. There are all kinds of accessibility issues and conventions which have been modernised nowadays. If you're creating your own layouts to being print-ready, try to find a good publishing software like Affinity or Blurb. Ensure that every page is laid out as a fixed template. More than two or three templates throughout the pages begins to make a book appear somewhat haphazard.

- Look out for punitive fees when selling online, particularly eBay. They charge a fee that includes the postage cost – so if your book sells for £10 and costs £3 to pack & ship, eBay will charge you a percentage of the £13, not just the £10. It soon eats into any profits or charity proceeds.

- Don't order too many books initially but DO order a one-off proof first. A typical £40 spent on a proof is invaluable. Then calculate the cost per unit for say, a minimum 100 print run. If they sell OK and you're getting good feedback, you can order bigger print runs later. The unit cost difference between 100 and 500 is nominal compared to paying for 200+ books you simply can't shift. Many people end up with hundreds of unsold books weighing (literally) a ton and taking up surprising amounts of space – you can't store in a shed or loft – it must be a dry and warm interior space.

- If you're shipping overseas, since Brexit, EU countries' customs officials seem to charge punitively even if the item is sent as a 'gift'. Research customs rates in destinations overseas to avoid nasty expensive tariff surprises for recipients.

These are just a few things of the dozens that I learned when trying to raise funds for charity. And don't get me started on the hard work of marketing and promotion. I should

have raised just over £1,000 for the BHF by the time this goes to press. It's hard work. No good deed goes unpunished.

As I'm self-employed, it probably would have been cheaper in terms of hourly rates for me to pay the BHF considerably more from my own pocket and simply have not bothered in the first place.

But where would be the fun in that?



Picturing with words

IT'S NOT RIGHT to feature a book without a review. Tom can't review his own book, and maybe I should not as I have witnessed the last year and more of its gestation. However I will, because the final book is nothing like my original idea of what it might be.

Tom is now more of a writer than a photographer though he is clearly both. It's much quicker to process words from raw, working as a remote freelance copywriter, than it is to process photographs from raw. While copywriting is equally threatened by AI, good writers have always been able to take ideas, styles and facts from countless sources. It's called looking stuff up and mastering the language, while reading as much as possible to develop your own. It's not like grabbing millions of photographs and analysing them to synthesise imaginary variations – or maybe it is?

'The Cobbler's Children Were the Worst Shod' includes some very ordinary pictures for good reasons – they have out-of-the-ordinary stories attached to them. It also features some excellent photographs, and these too have great stories behind them. Or in front of them. It's hard to tell.

If you put over 40 photographs in frames in a gallery, and followed the trend to place lengthy screeds next to them which result in visitors reading instead of seeing, Tom's words would get people arriving in the morning and getting kicked out when the gallery closed. Every story is a page (or more, it varies) and every one is written in a slightly different way. This makes them more interesting.

There's no *instruction* in this book, but much about being a photographer and photographic matters, and more about being Tom. That could be a negative if he wasn't consistently honest, self-deprecating, and funny. He can also manage to be kind and human even when letting the magma of his frustration with other humans break through the crust.

The book is almost a disordered autobiography (time jumps around) and more revealing than you would expect when clearly recognisable real people with real names crop up. I found myself thinking, "what if she saw this?" – or "he" or "them", or in a few cases their ghosts and their descendants.

It's called being candid. That's a word we once used in photography before 'street' replaced it despite so many street photographs not being taken in a street. These words are like candid photographs. Each story is a snapshot, often from the hip and occasionally from the hip-flask.

The book is only £10 plus £3 postage, signed, from Tom's website and the cover price less eBay fee goes the British Heart Foundation because Tom has a heart. He's been told it needs looking after rather better than this book implies. That he is certainly doing and helping us all on the way.

– David Kilpatrick



Stuart Wood voted RSVP's top Europe and Asia wedding photographer – with an A-list style presentation in Istanbul



RSVP is an organisation honouring the leading wedding planners, venues, bridal fashion houses, florists, and with a category each, photographers and video producers. Above, Stuart in Istanbul with two of Italy's leading wedding organisers at the Ottoman Kempinski Çırağan Palace 5-star hotel.

Stuart Wood is a Fellow of the BIPP and SWPP and a regular speaker at conventions. See:

<https://stuartwoodweddings.com>

“Branding trumps talent any day”, says Stuart Wood – but he’s not talking about his own branding, just the trend for inexperienced and often mediocre photographers to dominate social media platforms with influencer-style self promotion.

It’s not competition which worries him as he’s established an international reputation without daily Instagram, Tiktok and Facebook Reels and Stories. With a string of magazine covers and features behind him as one of the UK’s leading TV and film editorial publicity specialists, his relationship with top international wedding venues has flourished and in April he was voted Favourite Photographer for Europe and Asia by RSVP. This is not a competition you submit to or pay to enter – it’s a nomination like the Oscars, which the organisation’s panel vote on.

There’s only one winner out of eight photography shortlisters and for 2024 Stuart is that winner.

The presentation ceremony saw him head for a three-night stay beside the Bosphorus in Istanbul, with a boat trip, entertainment and visits hosted by hotels at the top end of the market. The awards venue of the Çırağan Palace is the only Ottoman Imperial palace to have been made into a hotel.

This award is not judged by looking at submitted images. The whole of Stuart’s record and current position in the industry is taken into account. On the facing page you can see examples of two distinctive lighting and graded processing looks which are very much Stuart’s own, light and bright and subtle.

On this page, two recent black and whites indicate a direction he’s taking because of the popularity of a paparazzi-style direct flash on camera look (where the branding does trump talent!). The top one is less so – the bottom shot with casual horizon level and obvious fill-in flash more so. But it’s not flash on camera (so many examples have sideways shadows from that). It’s Elinchrom 3 portable battery flash carefully positioned and using the right light shapers for each shot. It’s what the clients want but done properly!

– DK





TAILS OF THE RIVERBANK

Travelling the countryside with a Nikon and a long lens is far removed from starting work at 14 in a carpet factory but Ronnie Hek's journey has taken many turns. From being a weaver in Kilmarnock to working in ICI's vast Scottish chemical plant he found an income on the side making feather jewellery. He moved to the Hirsels, the Douglas Home estate near Coldstream, where Lady Caroline fostered a crafts community. Ronnie's equally creative wife Gail joined him and from 1990, they designed and made bonnets, shirts, tartan and feather gifts. Six years later they had a busy factory and workforce in the town. His Tartan Teddies proved a hit and they moved in 2001 to Norham, where the Tweed runs through Northumberland before meeting the sea at Berwick. With his interest in wildlife and fishing he started to take photographs and helped ghillies, shooting parties, and forest rangers including a memorable time on the Isle of Arran.

Through a succession of Nikon cameras he made the journey from

Ronnie Hek was a creative fashion, giftware and collectibles designer before selling his successful company to become a wildlife photographer. His base on banks of the Tweed often brings subjects to his door – and he knows where to go to find those other elusive special shots.

small sensors to full frame D500 and D850 and found his solution to getting closer to subjects with Sigma's lighter weight Contemporary series 150-600mm. He started using manual pre-focusing with the camera framing carefully set-up feeding stations or perches, dressed with lichen, moss and foliage to give a natural setting. He found that using back button AF to acquire the locked focus, rather than relying on the viewfinder, improved sharpness in fur and feathers which mattered so much.

His own garden and nearby woodlands and riverbank attract many songbirds, small mammals, and regular visits from roe deer. Now that otters are not being targeted as vermin he is getting to know their haunts and habits. However, his favourite subjects are Red Squirrels a little south of the river in north Northumberland and he's well known now for his Red Squirrel Calendar.

Left, Ronnie Hek in his gallery space at Chain Bridge Honey Farm. Below left, a Common Lizard in the College Valley. Below, harvest mice at a photo workshop.



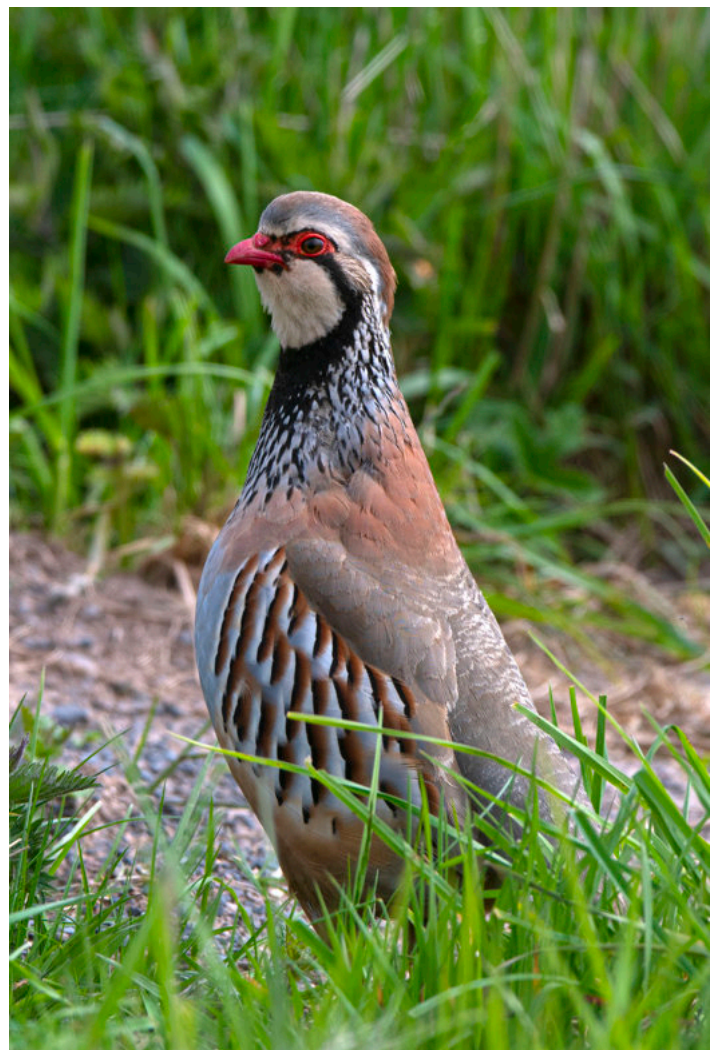


Ronnie's star aerobic Red Squirrel (Tufty) in mid-leap.



*Above, a garden feeding station attracts a lively confrontation between blue tits and a chaffinch, with flash and a black background sheet.
Below, two young roe deer, typical morning visitors.*

*Above, the woodland offers a natural dark background and natural light is good enough for close shots like this with a 600mm lens.
Below, a Red Legged Partridge poses confidently.*





More tails – or the lack of them – as different animals visit Ronnie’s doorstep or encounter him on walks. A young roe deer follows a pheasant through a carpet of blue speedwell, a chance shot walking as a stoat pauses to check Ronnie out – and a heavy crop from an early JPEG capture of a Tweed otter with an eel in its mouth. Above left, the bank vole above is tiny and fast-moving making a shot like this rare. Above right, a pair of hares observed without putting them to flight. Ronnie uses both personal and camera environmental camouflage as well as set-up hides.



Every year Ronnie publishes a Red Squirrel Calendar and enlists the help of a family of squirrels in Northumberland. They like exploring the photo set-ups which offer hazelnut rewards, and are naturally curious about humans and cameras!



The robin proved difficult to focus on against the snow, so a twig was placed on the feeder as a focus target.

Walking in the College Valley, Ronnie has encountered adders unusually early this year as well as lizards – temperatures are rising.



Like many wildlife photographers he shoots with like-minded friends, and collaborates to establish hides. For subjects like harvest mice or birds of prey, which add variety to his exhibited work and print sales, he will shoot at organised workshops and wildlife centres, or visit known locations. Islands are a regular pilgrimage – Lunga (his favourite), Staffa, and nearer at hand the Farne Islands. He shoots in Cumbria, Galloway and the Scottish Highlands which all contrast with the heavily farmed lands around him with their lost hedges.

Close to his home, the historic and recently restored and re-opened Union Chain Bridge crosses the Tweed and on the English side the Chain Bridge Honey Farm, Horncliffe, is a popular day out with a permanent interpretation centre and a funky café housed in a vintage double deck bus near its bee gardens and old agricultural exhibits. Owner Willie Robson offered Ronnie a gallery there with prints of his shots from the local environment and further afield. He also has prints on show at The Green Welly stop which anyone travelling to the

western highlands will know well, and The Café at the Mill, Heatherlaw, in Northumberland. He makes his own prints using an Epson Surecolor 600 and an Eco-Tank in sizes up to A3 for framed sale but is finding canvas wrap prints from My Picture UK offer a more practical solution to delivering wall art ordered by visitors. Sizes like 7 x 7", A4, 40 x 60cm and even the very large 120 x 80cm are possible, though many enquiries come from his work being seen on Instagram or Facebook to a much smaller scale.

Ronnie's latest move is to mirrorless with the Nikon Z8, which with its lightweight 180-600mm close focusing zoom will offer even better detail in fur and feathers. The red squirrel family is under an hour's drive away and Tufty, Ronnie's favourite performer with aerobic leaps, will be rehearsing for his 2025 Red Squirrel Calendar. A few years ago he'd have been designing a souvenir one dressed in your choice of authentic miniaturised tartan!

– DK





Above – a male kingfisher in flight, photographed as this article was being laid out in April. Below – a buck salmon makes it up the weir at Twizel Mill on the River Till. For more images and info, see Ronnie's Facebook Artist Page – Ronnie Hek Wildlife Photography and Instagram, @ronniehek123
The Chain Bridge Honey Farm website is: <https://www.chainbridgehoney.com>
A short documentary on Ronnie's photography can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8uRhm0KSbc>



THE QUAY TO SUCCESS

I had run a gallery in Menai Bridge, Anglesey, since 2002, firstly in a small corner-shop style premises but after the landlord decided to hike the rent astronomically in 2005, I moved to a much bigger premises over the road for half the price. The old place remained empty for a very long time!

My new landlord was an ex-mariner and we used to have frequent chats about boats and sailing. He and his wife were old-school landlords, gentle, fair, and kind. During Covid for instance, when I had to completely close my gallery to the public, and unlike other landlords in town who had the audacity to 'raise' rents for traders, my landlords said, "Don't you worry about paying us rent Glyn, you just make sure you stay safe and well". They also hadn't raised the rent for years as they appreciated just how hard trading as an artist is. During one rent review a few years back, he said "I'm not saying you're a charity case Glyn, but we know how hard you work and how many people love your work, so we'll just leave the rent as it is"!

In 2022 he came to me and said "Glyn, I'm not going to be around much longer – same cancer that killed my wife a year ago – but don't you worry, my daughter will inherit everything and she will make sure you're alright" Sadly, she wanted nothing to do with being a landlord so whilst on my holiday in June 23 I had a phone call where she told me I had to leave as she needed vacant possession. She didn't do it with malice of course but regardless, I felt my boat had been holed and I was immediately being drawn into a very dark whirlpool of fear.

As I flailed around physically and especially mentally, a hand took hold of mine and started to pull me out of the whirlpool. A friend of mine is a corporate law and commercial property solicitor, and he was able to negotiate not only a longer period before I had to move out, but also told me I had an absolute right to compensation. My life partner Jani was doing her utmost

to keep me afloat as I knew I was sinking into depression, but the additional help from such an astute legal friend started to calm the waters for me.

I would still be without a gallery of course, despite a delay of execution and compensation, and I thought I would lose my career anyway. I started considering other careers just in case, but I also LOVE what I do, so I wouldn't be just losing a job, I'd be losing my way of life, my vision, the way I communicate to everyone, and I was starting to get pulled back into that whirlpool. Jani had numerous times tried to reassure me that everything would be alright, that no matter what happens I'd always be me, and my skills and talent would prevail, but at the time I was in such a dark place that I couldn't believe that.

Then one day a few weeks later, another friend came into the gallery and clearly said to me "Glyn, these four walls are NOT you, they are just a shell. You are the business, not bricks and mortar. Whatever you do, even if you work from home, YOU are Glyn Davies the artist, and customers will follow you wherever you go" I thought about other very well-known painters and artists in the area and realised I didn't know where any of them lived or worked, but they were still eminent local artists. The penny finally dropped long after Jani had tried to tell me; I AM the business, I just needed to find a new premises where I could continue to meet new customers.

I started looking and asking around in earnest for new premises. I knew I didn't want to stay in Menai Bridge for as Jani said to me when all this started, "Glyn, be honest, for the last five years you've been saying you must leave the town and find somewhere busier, this is your chance to do just that". Commercial property was really scarce, and two of the only available options in nearby Beaumaris were quite frankly ridiculous rent for what you'd get, so that town was out. I spoke with a business adviser at the Anglesey business centre, and she happened to mention that there were still some units available at



It's been a roller-coaster first quarter of 2024 for Glyn Davies but his gallery move to a busier location in Caernarfon with the castle as a backdrop is making the work and investment worth it.



Work on the gallery included putting up divider panels to display the prints, and getting 44" printers in through removed windows.





Above: swimming at the reef at Trwyn Du (Penmon Point) in small but powerful waves in a beautiful and short-lived sunset. Three seals had just been swimming quite close to me but by the time I'd grabbed my Sony A7RIII with 12-24mm f4 G (at 12mm) they'd moved further away. I'm always a bit wary of seals so in one way I was relieved but it would have made an even better image if one had been peering at me within these frames! Below: a colony of Goose Barnacles had grown attached to a buoy which lost its mooring and washed up on Llanddwyn Beach, West Anglesey. Fujifilm X-T1 with 10-24mm lens at 10mm.



“Ceï Llechi” (Slate Quay) a new £6 million, architect-designed artisan shopping centre on the quayside in the castle town of Caernarfon just 10 miles away. I had to go and look.

With a wide river opening to the Menai Strait just 60ft away, a castle out of one window and the famous Welsh Highland Railway out of the other, this destination ‘surely’ had to be miles better than where I’d been for the last 22 years. It took five months of negotiations to get the lease for two adjoining units agreed but my legal angel was by my side the whole time. In December 2023 I was handed the keys, and in January 2024 the physically and mentally exhausting process of moving gallery began.

I couldn’t just move in. Although these stylish, corrugated metal, glass and stone buildings looked fabulous, bright, and airy, there was simply hardly any space to hang pictures, so useless as a gallery. It cost me many thousands to have constructions created inside the shells that would allow me to display large prints facing out to passers-by, but also clean white walls on the inside to create more display space. I relocated all my LED lighting tracks from the old gallery and paid to have them re-installed in the new premises, creating a beautifully lit window display for evening visitors. I needed a framing bench built (that cost £600 but is exactly what I needed) and for the cost of materials and for one of my prints, my friend Dez, a fellow cold-water swimmer, also built me a wonderful driftwood-effect computer/reception desk. Jani, and best buddies Kamal, Rob, Helen and I spent days cleaning then painting all the wooden structures that I needed to create a working gallery but finally, just before a two-week holiday booked a year before, I finally measured up and hung my first print in the window. My buddy Kamal was there, and I just cried, tears streaming down my face. He hugged me. Finally, having swum hard against this wide whirlpool I realised that I had a gallery again, that I could be who I wanted to be and work in the way I wanted to work. The relief was enormous – I had survived a catastrophe. On February 19th, 2024, I opened my doors to the public, in a new location and to a new market.



We decided to ignore the warnings not to drive during Storm Ciara in February 2020, and headed for the sea. The narrow coastal roads were covered in seaweed and pebbles but high up above the cliffs of South Stack (Ynys Lawd, a small island with lighthouse connected to Anglesey) we only had the gale force winds to contend with. I left Jani warm in the van and fought my way down to the cliff edge, thankfully the wind blew me onshore not off! On arrival the skies

Cameracraft: How did you manage to set this up, in the wake of Covid-19 with tourism numbers only now recovering, and a long period of difficult conditions to overcome?

When the Covid pandemic started in 2022, and businesses were forced to close, many of us were offered a Business Bounceback Loan at just 2.5% interest. I know many of us took advantage of this unbelievably low rate and I borrowed the maximum I could, fearing that it would have to tie me over for an unknown

period that the pandemic might last. Amazingly I had never needed to touch that loan since I took it out and thank heavens because if it weren’t for that ‘safety net’ I could never have afforded the relocation. The compensation I would be receiving from the ex-landlord wouldn’t be paid until lease-end at the end of February. That was too late to cover me, my downtime and loss of income, plus all the construction in the meantime.

Thankfully, with a good email list and social media followers, I was still able to bring in an income

though obviously substantially lower than normal for the times of year and the combination of loan and continued earnings meant I didn’t drop into the red throughout.

However, the move itself was only half of the problem as on March 9th I would be opening my major photographic exhibition at Oriol Môn, one of the largest public galleries in North Wales. This had been booked years before as artists normally only get a major show there approximately once a decade, and this would be my third. I couldn’t say no, having waited so



were dark and gloomy but as I set up the tripod, sunlight burst through a break in the clouds and illuminated the short grasses clinging to the siltstone and quartzite rocks around me. I had to lean hard onto the tripod just to try to keep the camera still enough to make the shot. Even then I decided on a higher ISO for safety. Almost as soon as the sun warmed my wind-blown face, it disappeared and I was blown uphill back to the van! Sony A7RIII, 16-35mm at 16mm.

long, but the frames and printing alone were over £6K and the physical printing and production was incredibly time consuming. I was still printing the 72 A1 and A2 prints just days before I started moving my huge printers across the Menai Bridge to the new premises. I then had to frame all 72 prints in my tiny upstairs framing room in the new gallery.

I worked late into the dark night for almost two weeks to get the exhibition together and I was literally cutting the foam-boarded, translated image descriptions the

night before the show would be hung. The pressure was so intense, especially as all of this was just after opening the new gallery. I lost weight and built muscle during this period (which is a good thing) but after I delivered the show and then gave my opening speech on Sunday March 10th I could finally breathe a sigh of relief and get back to improving the set-up of my new gallery. Even as I write this, I have two small gallery rooms without any prints on the walls yet, but I hope this will be remedied in the next week.

I have relocated during the darkest, gloomiest, quietest time of year, when customer spend is traditionally at its lowest, but retail generally is facing very difficult times anyway, so the fear for one's future never really goes away. Menai Bridge had become a very quiet town indeed during the days, only getting busy at night due to the number of hospitality businesses that have moved in, but the very recent development of Cei Llechi means that it's still not well-known enough yet, with very poor advertising indeed for this wonderful little

artisan shopping centre. The council haven't even erected brown tourist attraction signs yet, which is quite mind-blowing for such an important business development in the town. The wet winter weekdays have been quiet for everyone but the weekends in this 'destination' town do seem busier than at my old location and when Easter came it was very busy indeed, much busier than Menai Bridge. There have been many days when my two units have been so busy that I never got to say hello to some visitors, but hopefully they will come back another time.

It has been a huge advantage having established a good mailing list as well as social media following. I still need footfall without question, but many of my recent customers are those who knew me from Anglesey and have followed me and continue to offer custom and support. This is very good news indeed and it reminded me of my friends comment that "I am the business, not the four walls". Customers have continued to seek me out as they promised they would AND I am now starting to attract a new customer base of both locals and holiday makers to this new location.

When Cameracraft featured Glyn in a portfolio profile almost ten years ago, his exhibition "Landscape Figures" at Oriol Ynys Môn the major gallery space on the island was devoted to nude figures in the landscape, often in challenging wild environments helped by his experience as a climber, mountaineer, sailor and wild swimmer. This year's exhibition at the same gallery was entirely landscape with many signature shots taken in the water. From the opening, the response to the exhibition has been most impressive. We asked Glyn if he had returned to pure landscape photography and where he saw the direction of his work moving.

I've always been a landscape photographer, when you have such a passion and emotional engagement with landscape it's not a subject you drop in and out of, it's a part of you, part of your soul and reason for living. Even with the nudes in landscape it was always about the landscape, and our tiny organic

relationship to nature. “Landscape Figures” was almost a five-year project so in a way I feel I have now explored the concept and fully immersed myself in the project, but although I will always still feel most connected to nature when naked within in, I have no further interest in exploring it photographically. Perhaps if I were to spend a long period of time in a very new topographical area I’d shoot some new work but I can’t see the point of finding more and more volunteers to pose naked in the same locations.

The sea has been such a strong element for me since childhood, growing up in Falmouth in Cornwall. I am at my absolute happiest when in the sea, even in the coldest depths of winter – it’s my happy place. My purchase of waterproof housings from America for my Sony A7R3 kit has been SUCH a revelation for me. I have zero interest in photographing surfers or even endless ‘tubes’ and ‘barrels’ but I do love seeing the sea as a landscape, an incredibly fascinating, endlessly changing topography that creates a myriad of facets and reflections. It’s a natural extension of my daily swims and dips, though I do ‘usually’ wear a wetsuit when I’m just shooting images. I’ve seen huge numbers of Insta followers for surf photographers world-wide, but it’s been wonderful to see such excitement from my own customers about my in-water seascapes locally. We don’t get many crystal-clear seas and huge tubes here in North Wales, but we do have wonderful light and coastline.

Cameracraft: Where do your art buyers come from, or how do they find you? Caernarfon is not May-fair or Las Vegas, which do have galleries selling large photographic works at this level.

A framed A1 print is not easily shipped, and tourist buyers may be driving or even flying with no space to fit it. Even a rolled-up print in a tube is going to be at least 60cm long.

My customers come from such a mix of sources. Clearly running a physical gallery means that I get to meet real world customers who can see ‘actual’ prints and can appreciate the sheer beauty of a finely



At the end of January, drifting snow hides the treacherous rocks on the mountain slopes of the lower Carneddau. Glyn is an experienced mountaineer and walks the hills in all weathers. Canon EOS 1DS MkIII, 16-35mm at 16mm.

crafted photo-print. Real world visitors can also be asked to be added to newsletter lists which is a long-term connection with customers, many of whom continue to buy over the years.

Instagram has generally been a non-starter for gaining customers (with one or two exceptions) and seems to mainly attract other snappers who will rarely become gallery customers. I’m finding it perhaps a waste of time. I have completely dumped Twitter and Threads for similar reasons, I need customers for my art, respectfully not other photographers. Selling art for a living means allocating precious time to making sales, not social media following. Facebook however continues to bring in good customers and good income as the people I engage with are everyday folk from different walks of life – people who genuinely may be interested in buying art they see, rather than simply trying to emulate it themselves.

Creating large exhibitions, getting on TV and radio, selling to celebs are all excellent ways to really engage with a big audience and attract new customers, but you still need to be producing top quality, honest imagery that customers can truly connect with. Publicity is just the start of course, your customers need to believe in you, to have faith in you, to want to know more about you, and this is why wearing my heart on my sleeve and

being open about my thoughts and feelings has been very positive for business for me.

I don’t ship framed prints anywhere as I haven’t been able to find any sensibly priced courier that will insure glass framed prints. I am considering high end acrylic but then again, I don’t have the space to do large packing OR store packing materials, so I see sending rolled prints as the most economical and practical way of selling prints to customers. Cardboard tubes are so lightweight that many international travellers either place them within their suitcases or carry them on as hand baggage.

My frames are built by a local framer, but I must clean them, mount the prints, cut the barrier board then pin and tape them all. I have a purpose-built framing bench for this, but I am working in a very tight space regardless. The two units house four gallery spaces, with my two huge 44” large format printers now crammed into one of them, I hardly have any space to sit let alone print, but I see no other option at present. The framing room is upstairs so doesn’t get in the way of selling areas, but of course if I’m upstairs framing then I can’t deal with customers downstairs, so I’m currently investigating security systems/monitors to help me manage different operations.

Cameracraft: For those considering any similar venture, the

support of local enterprise agencies and the planning department is usually vital. It also helps if the rateable value is low enough to qualify for full business rate relief. Have you been given support to create such a valuable tourist attraction?

I do get Small Business Rate Relief and Rural Business Rate Relief which helps a great deal. Personally, business rates should be scrapped altogether in order to help business in very changed and changing times. The business rates are a joke really as they don’t cover water, sewerage, energy, waste, or anything. It’s not like we get anything directly from it, it’s just another tax in a way, so the business rates relief is vital in the meantime, though I still pay three figures sums each month in rates regardless. Thankfully my second unit is classed separately and is small enough to attract full relief.

The rent however, even though reasonable, is more than double what I was paying in Menai Bridge so that’s an extra financial pressure that I need to be very conscious of. I had to put it in perspective and think of it as selling an extra edition print every month to cover the difference. However, there are some advantages as the fast broadband is now provided within the rent, and because the new premises is so much more heat efficient than my last, my energy bills are a quarter of



A whirlpool between the Menai Strait bridges – not without danger as the rib skipper killed the engine to show how small boats can be pulled in. A7R11, 16-35mm at 16mm. For Glyn, the first sale at the new gallery – see the final photo!

what I paid before. Buildings insurance is MUCH higher though so swings and roundabouts.

It's now over two decades since Glyn transitioned from a full time commercial, industrial and location photographer to establish a gallery on Anglesey and become an award-winning landscape photographer, with books published by his own company from 2007 onwards. The last book, Landscape Figures, is a digital print on demand title unlike the litbo printed runs of his earlier four books. We asked Glyn how he saw his business going ahead, in terms of plans and projects.

I think my whole professional career has never been about planning ahead. I don't have major aspirations or plans. I don't hunger for new projects. A bit like the way I see landscape, I'm wise to the reality that fascinating and exciting opportunities will appear around every corner, and when those opportunities arise, I can choose to embrace them or dismiss them depending on how I feel. I have learned to say no to things I really don't want to do, without guilt or fear. The world has become a frighteningly dark place this last few years and with good friends passing away recently, I'm not prepared to waste any time on things that don't make me happy or feel rewarded. I am certain I won't die a rich man,

but I want to leave this planet knowing I've been as relaxed and happy as I can be.

As I get so close to 60, every minute is becoming more and more precious. I love meeting and chatting with new customers and even if they never buy anything it doesn't make those meetings any less precious. My hope is that my new gallery will be much busier than the last one. I want to be selling more prints. I want to be shooting and selling FAR more of my sea images and I'd love to do a new exhibition and book based entirely on the seas I've swam in. I have a feeling that my sea images could be my USP as my merman love of the ocean means I want to spend every day in that environment and sharing it visually with others. I'd also love to make a new book based solely around my favourite images from the last four decades, but I'd want help this time, not only with funding but also with distribution and marketing. I can and have sold literally several thousand of my books all by myself, but as I get older, I would love more help doing so.

I have lost my portrait studio in this massive, forced relocation, but that doesn't worry me at all. If I need to shoot more portraits, they will always be natural light in natural environments. I'm sickened by the worship of fake, AI, over-processed nonsense, the adoration of lies, so any portraits I make must be as honest and naturally lit as

possible. My landscapes are as honest to my experience as possible, if you stand with me, you'd near as damn it, see the same as my photograph. Strangely, though I love landscape, nature, solitude, and peace and quiet, I do love fascinating, respectful people and I do love making portraits still. Just two years ago I took on a major project for the NHS, documenting the numerous people 'behind the front line' who helped to keep the front-line NHS team functioning. I found the project easy and fun despite the terrifying reality of what was happening. It was fun because I was meeting wonderful, amazing people in the heart of their own occupation.

I have become increasingly resistant to taking on commissions and projects because of how it may

impact my life. I have just two days off from running the gallery and I have my loving, endlessly supportive partner Jani, whom I want to spend as much time as possible with; my climbing buddy Kamal whom I need a day rock climbing with; and I also 'need' to swim each day to keep me mentally healthy and happy. Commissions have become an imposition on my life, freedom, and happiness, but every now and then, like the NHS commission, I find projects that I just love and believe in, and then I commit myself wholeheartedly.

I taught for 13 years at the University of Bangor, but I absolutely never want to be doing workshops or teaching again. I don't want to popularise special, beautiful places and I don't want to be training those who seek to make cheap prints for sale from their photography, and sadly that's exactly what 90% of my students wanted to do when I stopped teaching back in the late noughties. I feel that if I were to start teaching again to survive, then I have failed as landscape photographer. I don't want to go there; I don't want to be that photographer.

I do hope to have another major exhibition when I'm 70 (just 10 years away) that really will be more of a retrospective and celebration of my half century as a professional photographer.

My life has become a long series of stepping stones, and as long as I can stop at each one, savour what I see and who I meet, then I know the journey is still more important and exciting than any destination, and that makes me happy and gives me relief.



The new gallery is <https://www.glynsphotoart.com> and Glyn can be found on Instagram as @glyndaviesgallery and on LinkedIn as @glyndavies His exhibition was at Oriel Môn Gallery, Anglesey – <https://www.orielmon.org>

Underwater photography conjures up a huge variety of subjects from some of the tiniest animals on the planet measuring just the size of a grain of rice, to some of the largest creatures that have ever lived..

But with such a huge choice of underwater camera equipment available for the beginner, how do you know what to buy and whether it will suit your needs? And can just your phone really meet your expectations of a great image?

Let's remember though that taking images which stand out from the crowd is harder than it looks. Eye-catching images require heaps of patience and sometimes the ability to stay still for more than just a few minutes plus the knowledge of the correct settings to capture them correctly. Sometimes there's just one chance to get it right.

There's also the equipment knowledge that you need, the correct drysuit or wetsuit to keep warm (water absorbs heat 25 times faster than air) and training if you are a scuba diver, the ability to practice perfect buoyancy to protect both the marine life and coral (where you hover motionless in the water) as well as remembering to keep safe in the ocean. It's all too easy to drift off with a current when you're captivated by an underwater subject. Whether you are a scuba diver, snorkeler or even a sea swimmer it's really important to not kick, to protect corals and marine life that lives in the sandy bottom.

There are so many options available from easy-to-use phones to GoPro, compact cameras to mirrorless systems as well as DSLRs, which one do you choose and why? Yes, of course it all depends on your budget, but it also depends on which subjects you want to capture and the conditions you are shooting in. Let's have a look at some ideas which I hope will help.

Choosing your camera

There's little that can beat the instant euphoria from seeing your images immediately on the back of your phone and the fact that there are housings now available at affordable prices – such as Sealife's Sport Diver Housing which has the unique ability to allow you to change settings such as ISO, Aperture, Exposure Value and even

A TOE IN THE WATER

Maria Munn gets you started in underwater photography using compact gear ideal for travelling abroad this summer



The Olympus TG (Tough) rugged waterproof camera series are an ideal introduction to underwater shooting. Both these shots were taken with the TG-4 – at 5.1mm focal length (wide) above at Durdle Door, and 4.5mm plus fisheye attachment below at Kimmeridge Bay, both in Dorset. The school of barracudas in Malaysia, top right, and mimic octopus in Indonesia were taken with a Canon Powershot S95 in and underwater case.



toggle between RAW and JPEG – make this a fabulous way for all the family to capture special underwater memories. Does it deliver on quality? Absolutely. I love creating large canvas prints from my iPhone with little need for editing. The beauty of the Sealife Sport Diver Housing is that you can add wide-angle and macro lenses via an adaptor to give your creativity an extra boost too.

GoPros have evolved to be far more than just an action camera and with a whopping 27.6 megapixel offering also deliver highly on the print capability side. They have a much larger native field-of-view than a phone, making them better for reefscape scenes and larger creatures such as whale sharks. They also have the bonus of creating high-quality images from video frames. If you are interested in the creative side, Backscatter offer both macro and wide-angle lenses which easily add on to a GoPro housing via their Flip Filter System (another useful tool to bring colour back into your images if you go deeper).

Compact digital cameras have come a long way in terms of both popularity and acceptance by professionals. They can capture higher quality, professional images since my 2007 portfolio of both compact and DSLR work submitted to the Royal Photographic Society received a distinction, the first of its kind. Olympus, Canon, Ricoh-Pentax and Sony all offer high quality models, and you can grow your creativity with lens attachments. Wide-angle lenses are essential to be able to get closer to larger subjects such as reefs, turtles, caves, wrecks and even your buddy. They reduce the water column between you and your subject, making it appear sharper and more colourful. They are also essential to create 'above and below' images.

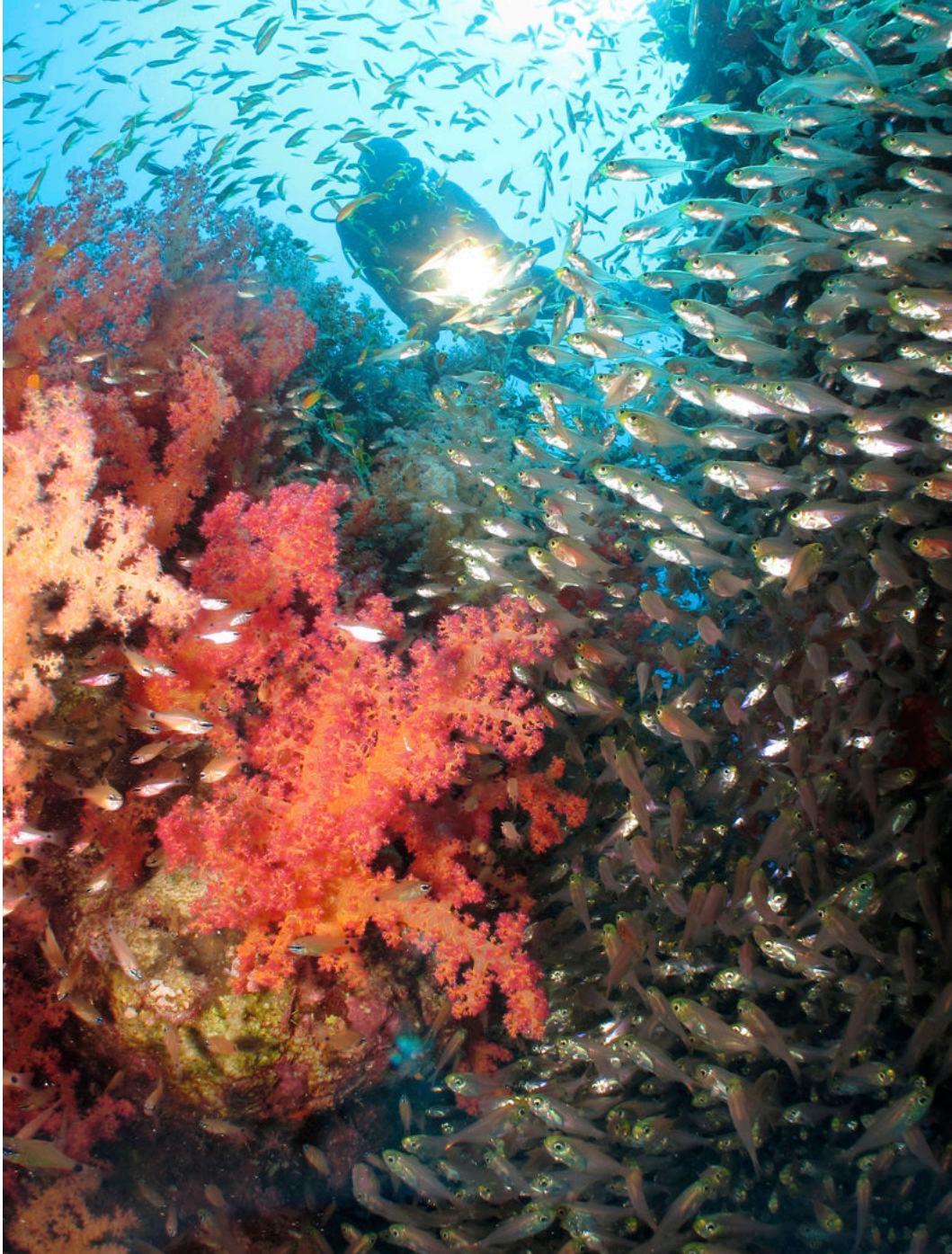
Olympus TG (Tough) models offer the most incredible and high spec macro mode of any underwater compact camera range, being able to focus from just 1 cm away from the subject. They may lack full manual controls, but have the ability to control the shutter speed through menu settings. Ricoh and Pentax WG models are similar waterproof, shock-resistant compacts you can use underwater without needing a housing.





The background photo of The Passage at Raja Ampat was made on basic point and shoot digital – the Canon Digital IXUS 980 IS. Green turtle in Egypt was shot on a GoPro, the manatee with an iPhone 13 Pro Max in casing, and the seal with the Olympus TG-6, while the Anemone clownfish and the Sea Lemon below were captured on a Fujifilm FinePix F30. The Red Sea reef, facing page, was taken on the Canon S95.





With an underwater housing, both the Canon Powershot G series and the Sony RX100 series offer access to full manual modes with independent control over aperture and shutter speed, ideal if you'd like to create "bokeh" effects, capture fast moving subjects or use advanced lighting techniques.

Many camera manufacturers such as Olympus and Canon make their own housings, but choosing one which works for you depends on how deep you plan to go and the conditions you will be in. If you are snorkelling, all you need is an Olympus Tough camera! You can even add an FCON t01 converter lens directly onto it to give a larger field-of-view, ideal to fit a large chunky seal into your frame.

Ikelite and Nauticam are popular makes if you are going deeper, or want a more robust system, complete with a leak alarm to let you know if you have water creeping into your housing.

Light and colour

Colours are lost underwater very quickly, with red being lost within the first few feet, even in bright sunlight. There are different ways to bringing back colours to your underwater images apart from shooting in RAW and using post-production techniques afterwards.

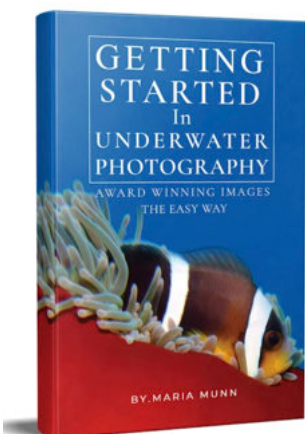
The three main ways to bring the punch back into your images are through using filters, setting your camera's white balance or by using external lights and strobes. Filters and white balance are great for those starting out who don't want to fiddle with too many buttons. External lights and strobes deliver vibrant, beautiful, striking colours to any scene and create stunning blue hues to your ocean background. Even a simple starter kit for a GoPro like a Mares 10LRW LED torch will make a huge difference to your images.

Learning the quirks of underwater photography is an incredibly rewarding process, especially when images can be used for conservation purposes to protect the creatures that we capture. There are so many options available to capture award-winning images but always remember that you can start out with a small camera and still win!

Top five shooting tips

Once you have your new kit and are exploring a whole new world, it's all too easy to be completely captivated and want to shoot everything in sight. Here's some useful tips to help you create beautiful images quickly:

1. Be Patient. Patience is crucial in underwater photography. Staying still is the 'golden zen rule' so as not to frighten your subject, but it also gives you time to compose and make sure that your settings are correct before you shoot.
2. Get Close. Remember that water magnifies subjects underwater, so if your images look blue, then it's a sign to get closer to your subject and adjust those settings if needed. But always remember to look after the reef and marine life around you. No image is worth damaging the precious marine world for.
3. Check your conditions beforehand. Speak to your guide. Find out the best times and locations for the subjects that you want to capture. Previous knowledge is essential to nab those "unique image goals."
4. Positioning. Shoot with the sun behind you (unless creating silhouette shots or capturing rays of light). Get level with your subject and look up. Look for a pleasing background which complements your subject.
5. Finally, look after your housing after every dive. Rinse it in fresh water, press all those buttons so that salt doesn't stick in the controls and leave it in a cool place between dives.

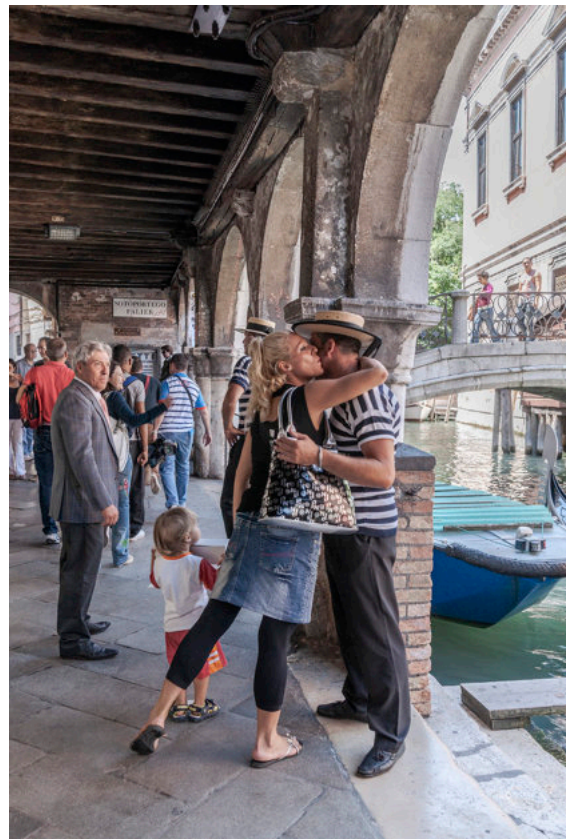


For details of Maria's underwater photography workshops and to order her book visit [The Ocean Studio](http://TheOceanStudio.com) at www.theoceanstudio.co.uk



Locations

We asked readers to send photographs showing a place which helps them make better photographs and to write a few words about why. Some places may be on your doorstep, some are a travel destination but the only thing which makes photography productive beyond the confines of the studio is to get out and go somewhere.



Venice

No short break offers more certainty of great photographs than Venice, more so since February as the vast cruise ships are now being redirected to docking up to 3km away and soon will not be able to enter the major canals and spoil the views they want their customers to enjoy. The season hardly matters as Venice is photogenic in rain, fog, snow and after dark. Full summer sunshine is not desirable as it gets very hot and the clarity of the air suffers, and overcast or cloudy days may be better. 2024 hosts another Biennale which runs until November 24th with art, music, film and more in the Giardini exhibition hall area and the historic Arsenale naval shipyards – a trip in May or June can catch the installations and exhibitions while they are fresh and before the holiday season crowds them. Because cameras are everywhere, locals and visitors alike accept street and candid photography will happen. Look for the distinctive straw boaters and matelot shirts of the gondoliers (*right*) and the busy tourist trap of the Rialto Bridge (*left*), above. A suggestion from the editor, to introduce this section.

– David Kilpatrick <https://www.davidkilpatrick.co.uk>



River Clyde, Glasgow (between the Millennium and Bell's Bridges)

Before sunrise this spot is perfect. The slow flowing Clyde can treat you to glass-like reflections as the stunning structures old and new stand as diligent architectural portrait models. An early rise gives you the benefit of being able to use the bridges for long exposures, normally this isn't possible during daytime as a single cyclist is enough to rattle the whole bridge. The sun rises in the east (above the Clyde Arc) which means golden light can bounce off the old factories and modern glassy hotels and offices. The only issue is that the SECC, Finnieston Crane and Crowne Plaza make the North bank slightly lopsided in terms of interest and symmetry. The South offers the BBC building but not much of a spectacle. In a city with a 'reputation' you feel totally safe with your gear, which is handy because there are shots from 15mm-400mm – bring an array of lenses. Glaswegians are friendly too, dog walkers often stop and chat. Any trip I have to Glasgow is built around being able to walk to this wonderful, calm place as you cycle through blue hour into gold the light just keeps developing and it sets you up for a fantastic day.

– Charles Brooker @charlesbrooker <https://www.charlesbrooker.com>



Staithes, North Yorkshire

Overlooking the historic fishing village of Staithes in North Yorkshire, there's a public viewpoint where the natural beauty of the area makes it easy for photographers to capture great images with just a little effort. The village, nestled between imposing cliffs with the North Sea extending beyond, can be captured from this spot at the top of Cowbar Bank and there is rarely a day when it doesn't look good.

Dusk is a particularly favoured time for shooting from here as the cottages become illuminated by the glow of streetlights, but the scene looks equally quaint at most times of the day. Staithes is a popular destination for artists and hosts an annual arts festival, which attracts visitors from all over the country. It is also home to the Staithes Heritage Centre, which celebrates the life of the famous explorer Captain Cook, and is known for its narrow, winding streets and traditional red-roofed cottages which make it a popular filming location for TV. The shot above was taken using a Nikon D750 with a Nikon 24-70mm f2.8 lens, set at 24mm, 15 seconds at f11, ISO 100.

– Paul Cooper FMPA FBIPP QEP <https://www.baileycooper.co.uk>

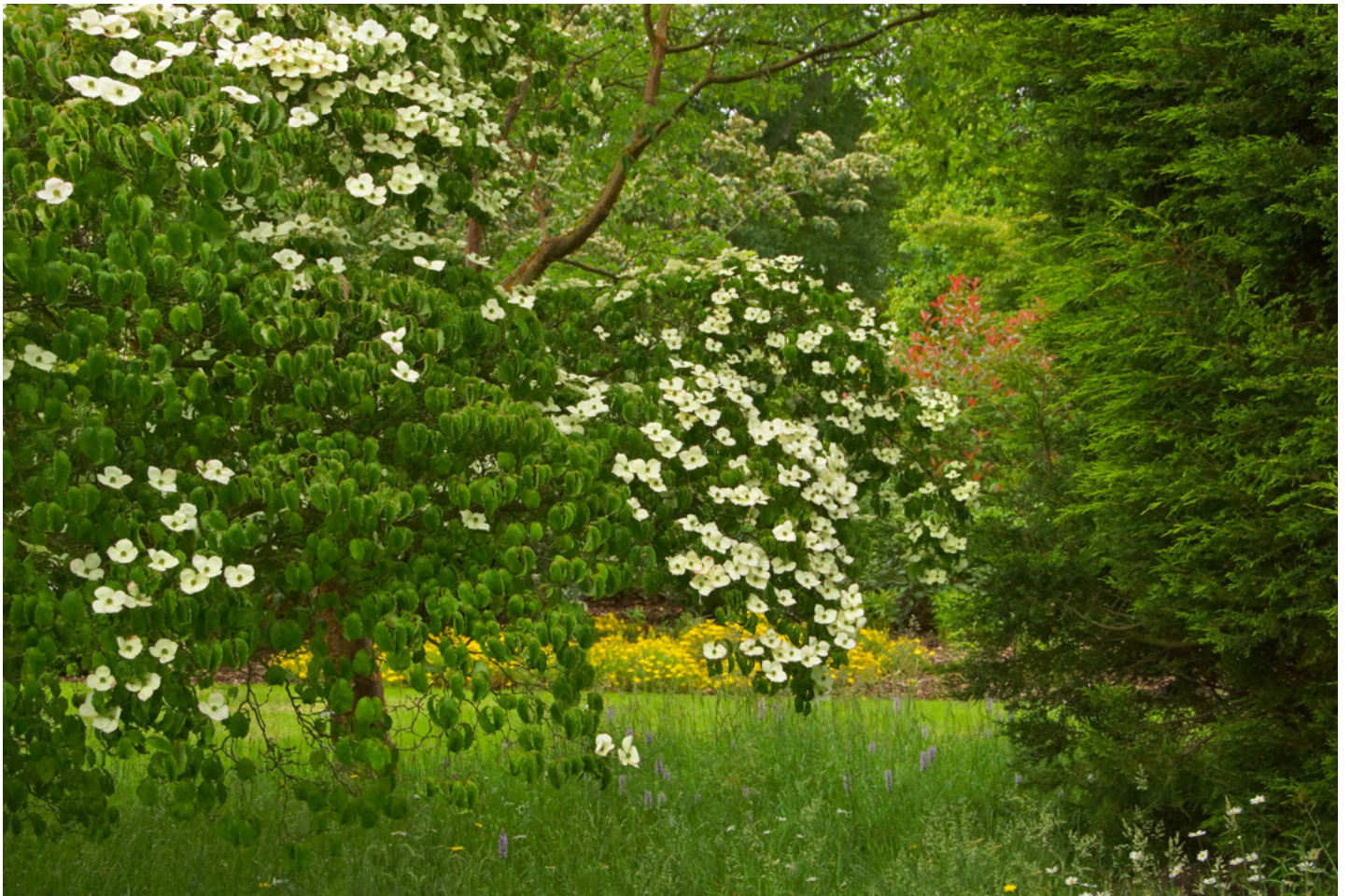
Bailey Cooper Photography on Facebook, Twitter & LinkedIn

Online training at <https://www.masteryourphotography>



A September evening angle from a nearby viewpoint. Right, lightstick installation during the Staithes Festival of Arts and Heritage (this year's dates are September 14th-15th 2024, see <https://www.staithesfestival.com>).

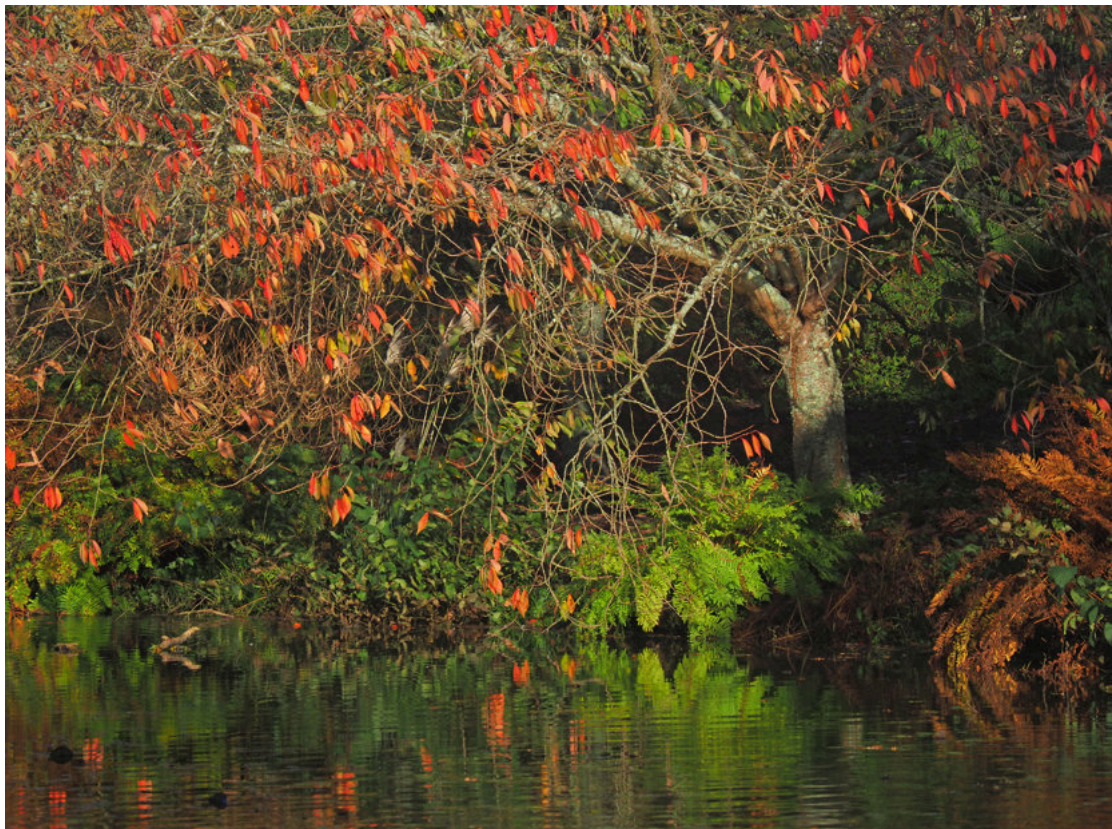




Wakehurst Kew

Wakehurst Kew is situated at Ardingly, near Haywards Heath, Sussex. Wakehurst is a combined Arboretum and Garden, which also contains the Millennium Seedbank, with seeds from all over the World. Wakehurst has interesting plants and trees and is well worth visiting all the year round. Spring and Autumn can be spectacular, and there is a walled garden which is wonderful to behold in Summer. There are many species of trees around the Garden and in the woodlands. The garden and woodlands occupy over 500 acres, and also contain two lakes. Wakehurst is open to visitors all the year round.

– *Tony Jones*. See Tony's garden photography books on Blurb: <https://www.blurb.com/user/tonystuart>





Camber Sands

This stunning three-mile stretch of sandy beach is home to the only sand dune system in East Sussex, near Rye. Camber Sands is the perfect get-away with unspoilt views of sand and sea stretching for miles. The beach is famous for the long ridges of sand dunes leading down to miles of soft golden sands. It is accessible in all types of weather, though cameras should be protected from the sand and sea spray that can be blown across the vast spaces. There's a variety of photographic subjects to be found right on the beach, from wide open landscapes to close-ups offered by ripples of sand left by the fast moving tide, as well as all the textures to be found in the seashells and seaweed left on the beach. It is also a favourite location for walkers and horse riders. Sometimes there is action to be seen created by very colourful kite surfers who have a centre specially for the sport. Any search for more nearby subjects can be met by nearby Rye to the West and Dungeness to the East.

– Peter Karry Flickr: peterkarry998 Lensculture: <https://www.lensculture.com/peter-karry>



Belton House and Park

The National Trust owns and manages the Belton Estate just north of Grantham, Lincolnshire. It has both a stately home with formal gardens, and a deer park. Belton is where I go if in need of some “shutter therapy”. At any time of year it can provide great photographic opportunities. The formal Italian garden is a riot of colour in spring and summer, whilst the woodland park can give stunning autumn colour. Also in autumn the deer in the parkland can be wonderful subjects, just don’t get too close! I find the yellow boat house on one of their three lakes is always a great subject. Walking around the lake can give different viewpoints and depending on the light, different moods. Trying to avoid getting people in shot can sometimes be challenging, particularly inside the house, but patience normally prevails. The pictures were taken with Olympus (now OM-System) bodies and lenses.

– Malcolm Sales Facebook: Malcolm Sales Flickr: BXPMal

FLASH

Sync up to 1/80,000s shutter speed with Sony A9III

Gary Friedman looks at the potential given by the high speed global electronic shutter



Who needs a studio anymore? At 1/80,000s, f2.8 and ISO 125 –very little ambient light gets let in, but the flash pulse can still get through. These images were taken two minutes apart, on a bright slightly overcast day. Two flashes were used as shown; one above and one behind the subject.

Frequently Asked Questions:

"Gary, this seems like a waste of time – I've never needed 1/80,000s flash sync before; why go to all the trouble to try to make it work? This camera has so many other great features that are actually useful, like the 120 frames per second with pre-shooting buffer – why not concentrate more on those?"; I hear you ask.

Good question. My only answer is, "Because I can, and besides, I like to explore the limits of my tools". The idea of not needing a studio or room blackout but being able to create lighting set-ups in any location, regardless of ambient light, resonated with me. So this exercise is worth doing."

Practically speaking, though, shooting with a pure black background is really a parlor trick. At 1/80,000s the flash intensity is attenuated much as it is when using High Speed Sync. I have found 1/10,000s – 1/20,000s to be a better working range, providing a better balance between darker backgrounds and brighter flash. The real benefit is taking outdoor portraits like my example of my wife Carol on the opposite page. Outdoors, bright day – but wide open which provides the background defocus – wireless flash, and no neutral density filter required.



I've been a BIG fan of wireless flash since the 1990s, ever since Minolta invented it. See my wireless flash gallery: <https://www.friedmanarchives.com/wireless-examples/>

So when Sony first introduced the Alpha 9III with its earth-shattering global shutter, I glossed over all the benefits everyone else was gawking over – I didn't really care if my fast-panning videos no longer had the jello effect as I don't consider myself a videographer. Nor did I care much about shooting sports at 120fps. And I've learned the techniques to shooting video in theatres with LED lighting with electronic shutter without banding, so that benefit was marginal for me.

However the promise of the elimination of a flash sync speed limit, combined with the top shutter speed of 1/80,000s really captured my imagination. I dreamt of being able to shoot outdoor portraits on a bright day, wide open using flash without needing a neutral density filter to bring the shutter speed down to under 1/250s, as is required of conventional cameras with focal plane shutters. The camera handled this effortlessly as this page shows.

I realised I could shoot wireless flash outdoors on an extremely bright day, with the flash illuminating my subject perfectly and the background being deep black as 1/80,000s doesn't let in much ambient light but the flash burst can squeeze through – see the facing page. Studio result with no studio!

There were some surprises as I started to try this. The first is that the top shutter speed of 1/80,000s can only be attained when the drive mode is set to "Single" and the aperture is f1.8 or smaller (higher number). With a conventional third party flash attached the shutter speed is limited to 1/500s of a second, the official flash sync speed. In all other situations the top allowable shutter speed is 1/16,000s which is still nothing to sneeze at.

There are two ways to get flash to work at 1/80,000s. The first and easiest is to use a pure Sony solution. Currently only two flashes in Sony's lineup support shooting at this fastest setting with full TTL flash



Global shutter means no flash sync limitations. I can light my subject with wireless flash and control my background brightness (first shot, ambient light only) by increasing the shutter speed. The fourth example maybe goes too far.



Typical flash output at full setting (left) and 1/16th (right). The timing at the fastest focal plane shutter sync speed is just before the rise in output so always gets most of the duration – but precise timing adjustment in microseconds is needed for very fast global shutter speeds to match the peak output.

metering – the HVL-F46RM and the HVL-F60RM2. Both must have firmware v2.0 installed. Sony's Wireless Radio Commander FAWRC1M can not be used for so I ended up using the F46 flash as a trigger and the F60 flash as my off-camera flash.

Once paired, the Commander (F46 in my case) must be configured as in the setting screen shot seen left: Ratio mode ON, output from Channel A and C set to zero. If you find that the TTL flash at such a high shutter speed is darker than you want, you can switch to manual output to get at least one stop more light out of the flash.

So I tried it, and I made a youtube video of my first attempt:

<https://youtu.be/RIHHek54pyY>

One thing I learned while

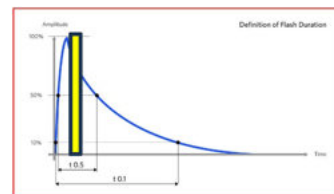
making this video is that on a very bright day, 1/80,000s still lets some ambient light in, even at the lowest ISO. So I had to choose my backgrounds carefully in order to get a black background.

I also made a second youtube video, showing how to pair the two Sony radio flashes, and other important configuration details:

<https://youtu.be/b9AcOE7Xb4U>

You might be like me and own lots of flashes, many more powerful than Sony's HVL-F60RM2. Can you use those?

The answer is 'maybe', as not every flash will work well with this feature. The discharge time for most is considerably longer than 1/80,000s, and peak output doesn't always occur when you would



The 1/80,000s shutter opening shown in yellow timed for a an optimum output with maximum exposure (blue is the output curve).

expect. In short, you'll only be able to capture a fraction of the flash's output. I spent an entire afternoon experimenting with all my flashes, to find that only one had a discharge curve that could mostly be captured using the fastest shutter speed. That was the Godox AD200 many of our readers already use.

Different flashes have different discharge curves, and those curves change with the selected power output, so if you want to use your flash in this way, you have to do a little bit of trial and error.

Since every flash's discharge curve is different, every flash should have its own ideal time to take the picture during the discharge – when the blue line is highest but not too far to the left. To address this issue, Sony has provided a feature that essentially moves that yellow rectangle to the left or right, allowing you to capture the flash when it's at a fairly constant high level but not before. It's called Flash Timing Setting and only the A9III has it.

You can't use a conventional flash trigger, since if the camera sees a trigger attached (that isn't a 46RM or 60RM2) the fastest flash sync speed is 1/500s, and if you want to go faster you have to use High Speed Sync like any other camera, which reduces the flash's effective output. I try to avoid it when possible.

In the shots of my friend Raj posing with the cigar outdoors, the only way I could trigger the flash was by using an old-fashioned PC Sync cable wired between the camera and the Godox AD200. I had to set the flash to Manual output, full power, in order for the flash to record. The second half of this youtube video gives more information about using a third party flash:

<https://youtu.be/b9AcOE7Xb4U>

FIELD TEST

by David Kilpatrick

Fujifilm X100VI

The Fujifilm X100VI test camera arrived just in time for an early March short trip to Lisbon to test the camera in a city environment well suited to the X100 series reputation as the best street camera. It's almost 14 years since the X100 hit photokina, and the market a few months later.

Impressed on first using that, we owned one a few years later, still the original 12.3 megapixel model. Shirley had an eye operation after a detached retina and found the optical viewfinder let her keep shooting when her sight was not yet properly restored. Like the latest model, it also had the electronic finder which can replace optical through the same eyepiece at the flick of a switch but it wasn't a match for the EVF of models like the Sony NEX-6 at that time.

The controls on the camera definitely were more than a match, with a proper shutter speed dial on the top and an aperture ring round the lens. Auto functions are easily set, but being able to check settings with a glance at the camera and no need to examine an LCD display, rear screen or finder information is one reason for this camera's success.

When the X100V appeared I knew the 26 megapixel sensor would be a match for XT series with the same, and a very close match to a 1.5X crop factor from the 61MP full frame I work with. The 40.2 megapixel sensor changed things in the X-T5 and X-H2 creating a crop factor camera able to exceed that. The X100VI allows cropping from the field of view of the 23mm f2 lens (35mm equivalent) about as effectively as enlarging from a 35mm negative ever did.

The required file size for a top quality A4 printed image is a 9MP 2:3 ratio file and this sensor gives 10MP from a quarter of the composition. With no AA filter, the X100VI's 40.2MP is highly detailed down to pixel level thanks to the exceptional quality of the fixed lens which was improved for the

X100V's 26 megapixels over the original 2010 design, which handled the second generation 16MP adequately. The dimensions of 7728 x 5152 allow printing up to 24 x 36" (40 x 60cm) for close examination and an almost unlimited size for distant viewing, as in mural or billboard.

The 10MP crop (70mm lens equivalent) prints to A3, aided by the first sensor-based stabilisation to be built into an X100 series body. This 6-stop IBIS gives a theoretical hand-holding limit of 1 second with the near-silent leaf shutter speeded to 1/4000s, and the extreme range of the totally silent electronic shutter to an unprecedented 1/180,000s. That's beating the Sony A9III's 1/80,000s thanks to the APS-C sensor. When you add to this a built-in 4X ND filter and a lower ISO 125 base sensitivity there are no conditions met on this planet which will not allow the maximum f2 aperture in full sun – or shooting with a tripod in the dark at its top regular ISO of 12,800.

OVF and EVF

With very accurate and fast autofocus, and an ISO range which can safely be assigned Auto up to that limit without excessive noise, such an over-specification for a fixed lens rangefinder style camera at £1,599 may be more than is needed. It would be wasted if the viewfinder options did not live up to demands. Unlike the original X100, the EVF and its modes with the optical finder simply work seamlessly. A bright frame in the OVF can give a very accurate parallax corrected composition, or the EVF replace it in an instant to give a larger scale frame filling view or a smaller one with an extended field of view to see what's beyond.

Lisbon was, for most of the six days I was able to get from a well-timed four-night booking morning outward and evening home flights, sunny and bright. At no time did the finder choices present any problems, though switching to the



The classic looks of the X100VI



The focus mode switch is simple and direct – M, C, and S on the left hand end. Below, Micro HDMI, USB 3 and microphone connections under the right hand cover. Right, the screen in its full angled extremes.



Below, a beautiful face in a queue – silent shooting at close range using the rear screen facing upwards to compose.



EVF definitely helped view and control flare with the sun in or just out of shot. Optical rangefinder cameras can produce surprises but the EVF ensures every aspect can be previewed by assigning function buttons, from depth of field to the exposure effect.

There is a crop mode function, which crops JPEGs leaving the full raw file intact and gives a corresponding EVF view. By default, this is enabled by turning the control ring on the lens (also for manual focus). This caused me some issues as sometimes the ring would be turned accidentally, changing the EVF to show a 50mm or 70mm equivalent view. On a couple of occasions I didn't spot this until Adobe Bridge replaced the cropped embedded JPEG preview with one built from the full raw image field.

The 35mm field of view (roughly 60° diagonal) is far more

versatile than I remember from film compacts, or indeed the original X100. You're aware that the frame can be cropped so not always trying to move in for an exact composition. The X100VI is fast enough to lock manual settings quickly and shoot a multi-shot wider angle view. Three landscape shots stacked vertically make 80 megapixels with the equivalent view of a 24mm lens.

Multi-shot wider views are not likely to feature often in a day out and about with the X100VI. Walking from Lisbon's centre to Belem Tower, the Navigators' Monument is a subject which either needs a close viewpoint with a wide lens on land or a distant view from a passing ferry. It's teeming with visitors – had any been in an overlap, Adobe's AI panorama stitching now seems to avoid ghosted or double imaged elements.

The X100VI also takes multi-shot sweep panoramas, stitched to JPEG in-camera. It's not a full size – you don't get a 5120 pixel high or even close output. It also does not work all that well, as it requires a speed of panning which would almost take you through full circle. I tried repeatedly to change my sweep to match the frame rate and every time it threw up a message telling me to speed up, when I didn't want more than a 180° view. I tried sweep pans with a vertical composition swept horizontally and even this demanded a faster sweep.

Then there's the video function. While a fixed field of view might seem restricting, the sensor stabilisation means you can pan, close in, move round and even walk carefully without a gimbal though that would be the way to ensure the best results. The AF during video is responsive without

being twitchy and the sound quality is up there with the best for a built-in stereo microphone. It handled the volume of a Jethro Tull concert in Lisbon's Coloseu, and a fado trio just a metre or two away in a small restaurant, flawlessly. 4K at 30p uses the full sensor width but at 60p it's cropped significantly, and you can also shoot 6.2K 30p this way. I did not test either.

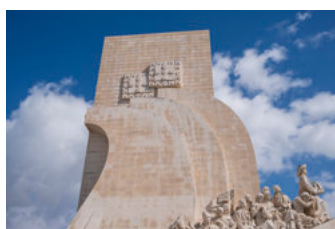
Colour and mono

Throughout the time testing I was also shooting with my Sony A7RIV, 20-70mm and 70-300mm G lens kit and 10mm Voigtlander. For whatever reason, the colour from the X100VI in all lighting situations including night-time streets was cleaner. Maybe it's all to do with white balance and A-to-D conversion curve, maybe with raw conversion in both Fujifilm camera matching and Adobe's own profiles. In-camera both the film

X100VI three horizontal shot vertical panorama stitch, full image 82MP.



Sony 20mm shot from similar distance slightly cropped to correct horizon angle, full image has more sky, 50MP.



Left: the three shots used to make the pan stitch. Note that the perspective projection is improved by the Adobe process and how little of the image width is lost at the bottom despite the upper part being adjusted for almost architecturally correct verticals.



simulation colour and black and white JPEG profiles, which also change how the EVF shows the scene, are better than similar settings on the Sony cameras I'm used to.

If you shoot black and white, there are many settings. The ACROS film with a choice of contrast filter simulations look better than standard Monochrome to me, and I generally shot with Acros+Y. You still get a normal colour raw file, but a B&W JPEG of very good quality (selecting to shoot RAW+JPEG) and an EVF view in black and white. I found this improved my pre-visualisation, composition, use of light and

contrast, and control of exposure. The optical viewfinder is, of course, what would have been used with a Leica loaded with Tri-X – no B&W viewing when shooting traditional rangefinder B&W! But switching the EVF to B&W this way makes a different shooting experience.

Would I do this with JPEG only recorded? The colour raw file is a vital backup on the single SD card. The accuracy of exposure, and the way the film simulations handle highlight to shadow range, should ensure that only the occasional bracketing would be needed. However, the X100VI can record in HEIF format, with the same previewing benefit but a 10-bit file

instead of 8-bit allowing more post-processing adjustment. It's not the same as the 14-bit .RAF raw and is restricted in uses. I preferred to have a web-friendly JPEG+RAW.

In colour, I found the REALA Ace colour negative simulation tweaked the contrast and saturation in a way I liked. It's a touch subdued and looks like a 1960s *Life* magazine reproduction, very different from the other most popular colour setting for Velvia/Vivid slide film with its intense colour saturation. I used both, in-camera partly for the EVF and rear screen preview of the effect, and in processing the raw files using Adobe software.

And the rest

If you know the X100 series, it's changed little from Masazumi Imai's original, just a few refinements to the body contours and controls and the development of an articulated rear screen which in the VI allows 45° downward positioning ideal for overhead use. The VI is about 2mm deeper than the V, to accommodate the IBIS mechanism. Because of the fixed 23mm lens, and the limited power of the tele front converter (both wide and tele redesigned for high resolution and lens profile communication) the sensor does not have to move as far as full



Black and white street photography – almost the *raison d'être* for the X100VI. Although I used the albada bright framed optical finder's 95% view often, the 100% 0.52X view of the 0.66X 3.69 million dot EVF is both larger and more precise with framing at the edges. Of these shots, some were taken using the ACROS+Y setting and BW finder view, others using REALA Ace with colour EVF but processed to ACROS, normally with the Yellow filter. Exceptions: top left facing page, optical finder colour raw capture, and cropped in post; bottom two facing page, ACROS+R for the dramatic sky, ACROS+O for the white building. Above, plain ACROS and a strong contrast curve in raw processing. Below, ACROS+G in processing, as this filter gave the best tone differences in the subject. And yes, I did speak to him (after shooting), asked approval, and gave him my smallest euro note. The book under his pan for coins is a bible. Casa Para Viver...



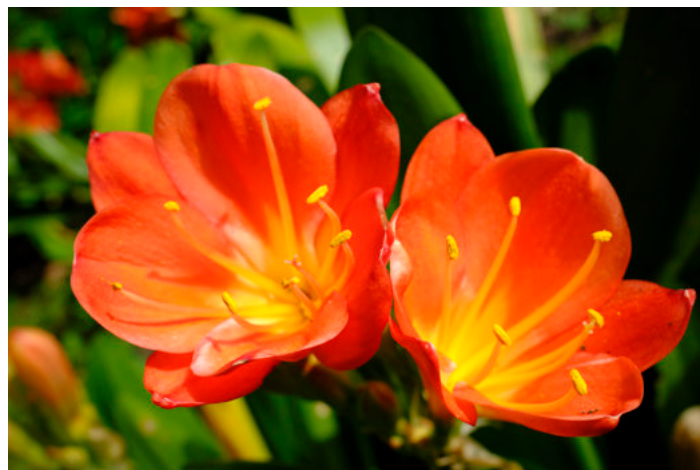


After dark the X100VI comes into its own. In mixed artificial light, black and white is safe but it's worth experimenting with the colour film simulation. The graffiti and grunge café with busker and small audience had the worst lighting I encountered and nothing could show the artwork in the colours seen by day. REALA Ace had the best profile to suit the subject with the colour cast neutralised – 2000K, ISO 2000, 1/60s at f2. The Santa Justa Lift with evening sky, 1/35s at f2 at ISO 800, had much better colour with ASTIA/Soft than any other film variation, the biggest difference being a much brighter and purer blue sky along with more creamy and less yellow buildings.

system cameras... but getting this with only 2mm extra external size is a triumph of engineering!

Everything fell to hand, and eye, naturally. It feels like a classic rangefinder camera but has a touch more right hand grip. The battery size has not been changed, a step which increased the bulk of Sony's A7 series almost out of necessity. Fujifilm have managed to keep almost the same battery life despite almost doubling the pixel count.

The menus and display settings give everything you need, including the ability to shoot 16:9 and 1:1 format shapes as well as the full 3:2. The raw file is not cropped, only the JPEG/HEIF and the finder/screen view. Various screen overlays help with geometry or composition when shooting 3:2 if needed. There's a movie mode which shoots 17:9 instead of 16:9 if you want super-widescreen.



The Velvia/Vivid film simulation and the closest focus of the 23mm lens, at f8, produced this result from small Clivia flowers at 10cm. The repro scale is about 1:4 or 25%, equal to 1:3/33% on full frame. Flowers roughly life-size on page.

In a camera like this the menus are deep, not unlike OM-Systems, but easy enough to navigate. It was quick to set up GPS co-ordinate embedding from my iPhone with the Fujifilm X app, for example. This function is not as reliable as Sony's which connected and disconnects with notification on the phone, and generally stays connected. The

Fujifilm X app gave no warnings, sometimes connecting, sometimes needing opening and refreshing, often embedding the same GPS position in many shots even when moving a good distance.

There is no rear controller to move focus points, as the touch screen function replaces this. I very rarely want to move my central

focus point and like to use the camera in traditional rangefinder manner. It's good to have AF which does not suddenly shift to the far corner of the frame because you bump a control. You need to be careful with the touch screen and I turned this function off, as I have done in other cameras. It's too easy not to spot a shifted AF point.

The X100VI has already proved a success with back orders mounting up, and a special edition selling at a premium. In the end, a few days using a camera like this won't give any idea of its potential. There were features and functions I simply did not explore as I was too busy enjoying using it. It felt like there was no need for other lenses. I would actually have been very happy to use nothing but the X100VI and in the end this is about the best recommendation a fixed lens, non-zoom camera can have.



<https://www.fujifilm-x.com/>



The Film Simulation matching profiles are a vital part of the Fujifilm appeal. They can be set for the in-camera JPEGs or applied to raw files when processing using a choice of software – Fujifilm’s own X-Studio, Adobe Lightroom and Camera Raw, DxO Optics Pro or the free downloadable Capture One Fujifilm Edition (which may make you think that you have to subscribe to the full product and cancel – scroll down to find the free version!). Highlights lowered, shadows boosted, Clarity at +20 in Adobe Camera Raw.

Above, Purista barbershop in Lisbon’s Alto Barrio. A traditional wet shave is offered together with light meals and some excellent ales as it’s also a bar! Shooting towards the door for a sharp 1/50s at f2.8, ISO 125, with REALA Ace profile. Left, homing in on a glass of IPA and putting the barbers and customers out of focus using f10 and previewing to get the right depth of field effect. Velvia/Vivid profile, 1/35s at ISO 3200 with +0.67EV compensation. Highlight control, and local dodging (circular soft mask) to brighten the glass

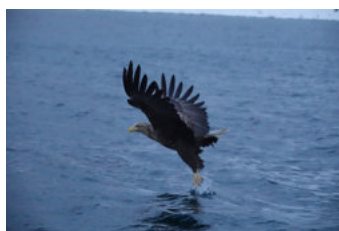


Below – edited in Adobe Camera Raw using the REALA Ace profile. A direct quickly taken shot – one of only two frames as all three figures moved and one of these had the woman looking back at the camera. Underexposed from the sky and water brightness, the overall frame was brightened by +1EV and the sky selected and darkened by the same factor. Some highlight reduction, shadow boost, application of +20 Clarity, Medium curve, and a Crop alignment correction to keep the pillars parallel while making the horizon precisely level.

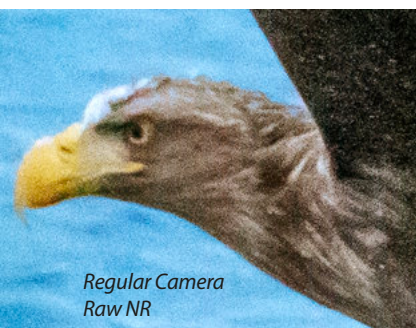


Rescuing a shot with Adobe AI, Topaz & DxO NR

So here we were, on vacation in Norway, getting on to a small boat to travel to where the eagles nest. It was a miserable day and I was shooting in the worst light possible. Armed with my Sony RX10 IV (my favorite travel camera due to its 24-600mm range) I took about 450 shots, using the spray-and-pray approach. Shutter priority mode, 1/4000s, auto ISO. The RX-10 IV had no problem tracking these birds, even in such poor conditions. But our images can only be as good as our light. At least that's the common thinking. Back at the computer, I identified a few potentially usable shots all horribly underexposed. But because I had shot in RAW+JPG, I felt there was a chance of turning them into usable shots. Here's the most promising of the bunch.

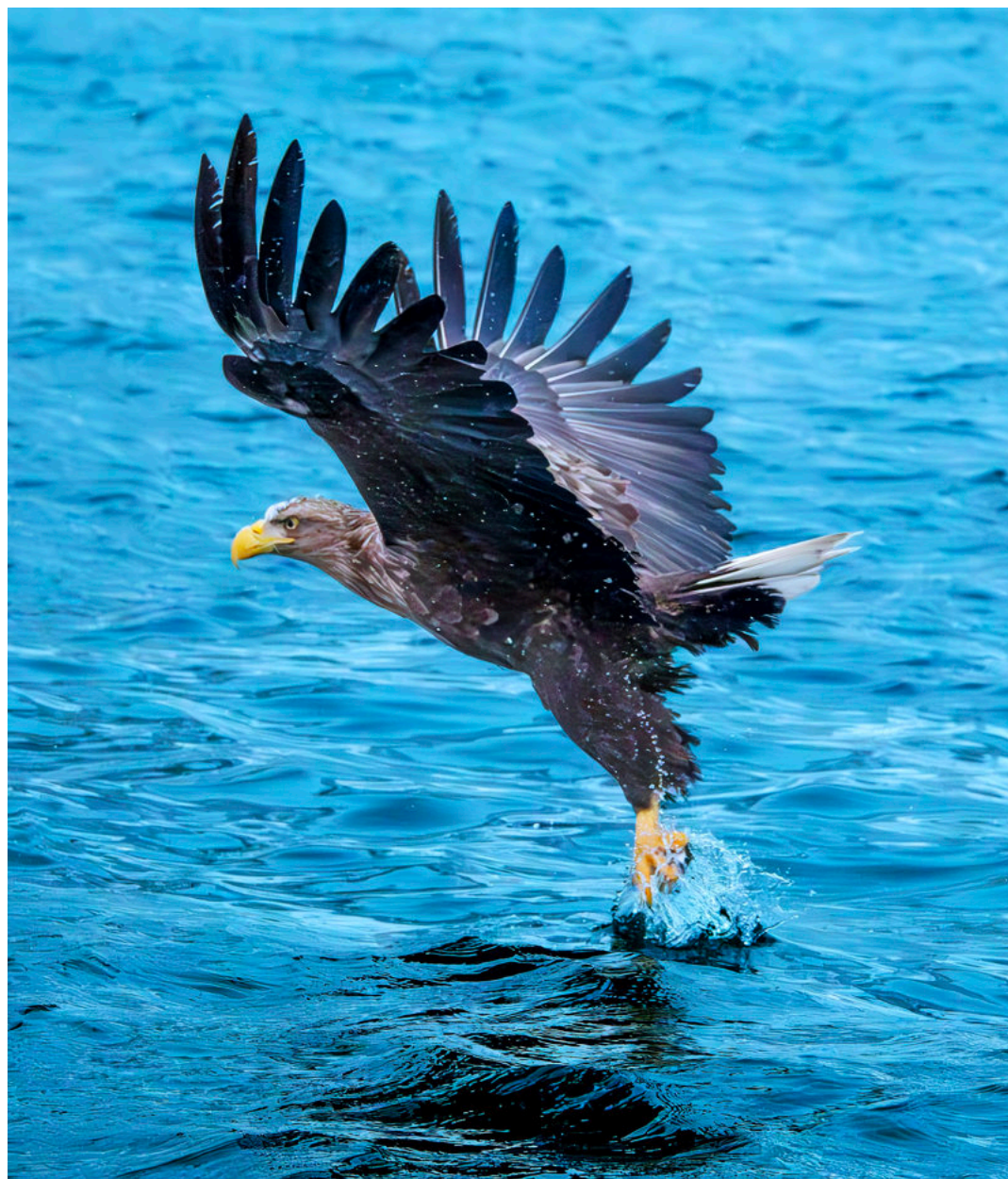


But – underexposed at ISO 5000 on a one-inch sensor! Can it be saved? I processed it using all of my Photoshop noise-reduction technique, 40% Luminance and 25% color for this. But I wasn't at all happy with the results (crop below at 240dpi). Too noisy.



Regular Camera Raw NR

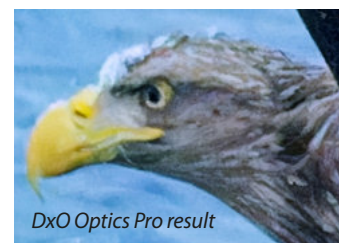
Then I decided to try the new AI-based noise reduction feature in Adobe Camera Raw. It uploaded the image to their cloud processors and overheated the graphics card my brand new LG laptop. But the result (main photo) set to 90% NR – wow! The screen shot (right) is before improving color and tone.



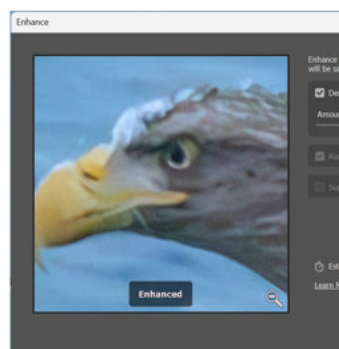
Topaz result 1 – default



Topaz result 2 – expert



DxO Optics Pro result



Three of my readers (via Facebook) thought they could improve on this using their favorite tools: DxO Optics Pro and Topaz Raw Denoise AI. They sent in examples applying only noise reduction. I added the curves and color boost to my Adobe result to make my image look "happier". If you have to pixel peep in order to see a difference, then the difference is not meaningful. All three of these tools do an impressive job with such a difficult starting point, though Adobe gets extra points for being a two-step operation with no denoise skill required. Special thanks to David Redfearn, Larry Powell, and Theodore Simon for their talents and efforts in denoising using their tools of choice. – Gary Friedman



LENSES

Meike 50mm f1.8 AF Z

WHILE Canon has only just started licensing the RF mount to third parties – Samyang, Tamron and Sigma being apparently able now to release AF lenses – Nikon has permitted wider use of the Z mount.

One of the new budget lenses appearing from independent makers is the Meike 50mm f1.8, which you'll find at around \$160 direct from the maker, or £150 from UK eBay sellers. The question has to be 'why another 50mm?' and we will try to answer this in the next issue with a field report and results, possibly compared to one or more

similar lenses which have appeared in the main full frame mirrorless mounts. These are the Viltrox at around £260 but looking slightly more compact and featuring a third-stop marked aperture ring on the lens, and the similar 7Artisans at £216.

All these lenses are much larger than lenses in the same mount such as Sony's 50mm f1.8 or CZ Sonnar 55mm f1.8. It is not down to more 'tube', the rear elements are placed fairly close to the sensor,

and the front elements are all concave – like the 55mm Sonnar design. The lens is well packaged, though plainly compared to some Chinese optics now. It comes with a deep lens hood, focuses down to 63cm, and takes 58mm filters.



The Meike 50mm f1.8, above, might look similar optically to the Sony CZ 55mm f1.8 Sonnar but it's a very much larger lens. The Viltrox 20mm f2.8, below, is a very compact light lens and does not seem to be an equivalent to any else made.

Viltrox AF 20mm f2.8 ASPH ED IF Z

THE SECOND Z-mount independent we are testing at the moment is the Viltrox extra wide angle, a lightweight compact design taking 52mm filters, and if there is any evidence that these independent makers are not just brand names on a common source of supply, it's that this lens does not have equivalents under other names. The packaging is superior to the Meike 50mm, a soft lens pouch is included and it has a

luxury rather than utility feel. The price is \$158 from the maker, and they have a UK store selling if for a comparable and competitive £145 including VAT, compared to Amazon at £165. Given the reputation of Viltrox to date with their 20mm f1.8 (filter-unfriendly) released last year, and this very low price for an AF full frame 20mm f2.8, it seems a safe bet to buy but we will be seeing how well it stands up to regular use.

In the Viltrox UK stores you will find many innovations. There's a 16mm f1.4 full frame, a 28mm f1.8 FF, 13mm 23mm and 35mm f1.4 AF for cropped formats, a 35mm f1.8 full format (E and Z mounts), a 56mm f1.4 APS-C, 85mm f1.8 FF, even a 27mm f1.2 AF for Fuji X – and so on. They also make dozens of adaptors and converters. We can't afford to try out all of these and if you have experience of them we'd love to hear from you!



Lowepro Tahoe BP 150 airline friendly backpack

The search for a camera backpack which can go on Ryanair flights as the 'personal' underseat bag means looking for something no larger than **40 x 20 x 25cm**. My Sony A7RIV with 20-70mm f4 G and 70-300mm f4.5-5.6 G travelled to Lisbon with me in March in a Vanguard Sydney II small shoulder bag, with room for the 10mm Voigtlander Hyper Wider Heliar as well, but no room for the Fujifilm X100VI on its field test, or a water bottle, and no way anything like a laptop or tablet could be packed. Even a small loaded bag can strain on the shoulder. Walking 20km one day in Lisbon, I ended up with no problems from hips, legs and feet but an unexpected backache.

I'm not a fan of how photo backpacks handle in public transport or crowded spaces. They can be a security risk unless they are made very difficult to open. They also make you look like a photo nerd unless you're out in the landscape. But a lightweight backpack can carry a kit effortlessly, with two hands free.

At The Photography Show after returning I looked for Ryanair-friendly backpacks. Vanguard almost had the right answer, Urth nearly did... Tenba, ThinkTank, Manfrotto and all the others came so close. Most were within 46cm height, which happens to be EasyJet friendly but not Ryanair. Many were 4-5cm too wide, thick or high. Most cost north of £100 and some simply didn't have the ability to fit my MacBook Pro 14". These bags are flexible, and 2cm on one dimension is not going to cause problems. Several makers confirmed that Ryanair underseat cabin bag size models were being worked on as this is repeatedly asked for. Check on-line and you'll find that larger cabin luggage photo bags are widely advertised but not the 'personal bag' size.

Nearly giving up, I checked out an old friend – Lowepro. On the WEX stand at the show, I was quickly shown the smallest Lowepro backpack – the **Tahoe BP**



150. Nominally, it's 40.3cm high but when measured it actually comes to 40. The width at 27.5cm is 2.5cm oversize but it deforms into 25cm readily. As for the thickness, they state 21.7cm but it's well within 20cm including the back straps. It weighs 800g so does not eat much into a 10kg limit, or even the 5kg which can apply on some small connecting airlines.

Lowepro state it's "suitable for a DSLR with lens such as a Canon Rebel T5i with 18-135mm, a second lens such as the 50mm f1.8, and a flash, and a tablet 24 x 26.5cm". This gives an idea of how old the design must be! The tablet pocket took a 24 x 32cm 14" MacBook, tried on the spot, so the bag was bought helped by a show offer under half the £85 retail (£65 street price now). Back at base I was able to fit the ARIV with Tamron f2.8 trio of 28-75mm FE, 17-28mm FE, and 70-180mm FE (all with filter, caps and hood) plus the 10mm, 50mm Sony FE Macro f2.8, Nissin i40 flash and Sony ECM-B1M mic in pouches,

two spare batteries, air blaster, 67mm polariser, memory cards, table-top tripod, MacBook.

Zips can be tied or padlocked and there are clip-lock security straps both sides to stop the main storage opening even fully unzipped. The shoulder straps have no stow-away and don't detach, the net side pockets are too skinny for most water bottles. There are no bottom tripod straps (the m-Trekker offers these, but it's over the size limit). You can press a side net and strap into service but that prevents opening.

Taking Sony 20-70mm f4 G and 70-300mm f4.5-5.6 G as I did for Lisbon, the extra lenshood diameter made it a tighter fit but 5kg not 6kg. The T shape for the body and lens left vacant space either side, one of the three short velcro dividers forming a lens compartment and the other end stuffed with my neoprene wide camera strap. The zipped compartment at the top can fit a second full frame mirrorless body.



The bag closed is fully loaded as shown – including 14" MacBook.



A larger lens like my Samyang AF 35mm f1.4 could replace the macro and flash with creative divider configuration. The 10mm can be replaced by my 85mm f1.8 FE. It would need some thought to fit a typical 70-200mm f2.8 but the compact Tamron 70-180mm is no problem, same for many new compact optics for the Nikon Z and Canon RF systems. The internal compartment is 25-26cm width and height, so one lens that length can be stowed but three lenses across must average 80mm diameter allowing for the padded dividers. Lenses 13-15cm long can fit vertically (it's deepest at the bottom end, which makes sense for centre of gravity). Filter threads over 77mm or expansive petal lens hoods it would make it very tight, but you can see from the open bag how my five lens kit goes in. The closed bag shot has all that in it and the MacBook. It all fits!

– David Kilpatrick

<https://www.lowepro.com/>



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REARVIEW



From the March round of Guild of Photographers Image of the Month judging – above, a Gold award shot from **Ian Taylor**, Canon R5 with Canon RF 100-500mm f4.5-7.1 L IS USM lens at 343mm, 1/1600s at f9 ISO 320., Below, a Gold from **Jacki Gordon** taken with exactly the same camera and lens combination at 451mm and ISO 1250, 1/1250s at f6.3. Facing page, a Silver award winner by **Paul Wilkinson** using the Nikon Z9 with 70-200mm f2.8 lens wide open at 150mm, 1/160s at ISO 64.







Above, by Steve Collins, taken in London a month after the start of the Israeli war on Gaza. Canon R5 with 24-105mm f4 L IS USM lens, 65mm, 1/640s at f6.3, ISO 1250.



Left, by Kerri Relton, Canon EOS R, 70-200mm f2.8 L IS II USM at 200mm. 1/3200s at f3.5, ISO 3200.

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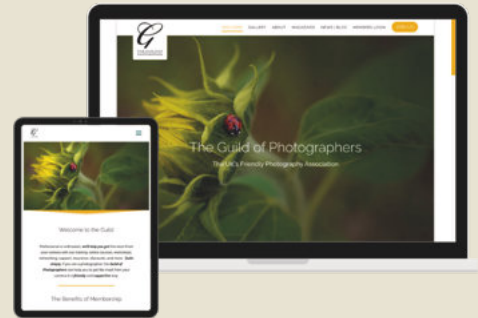
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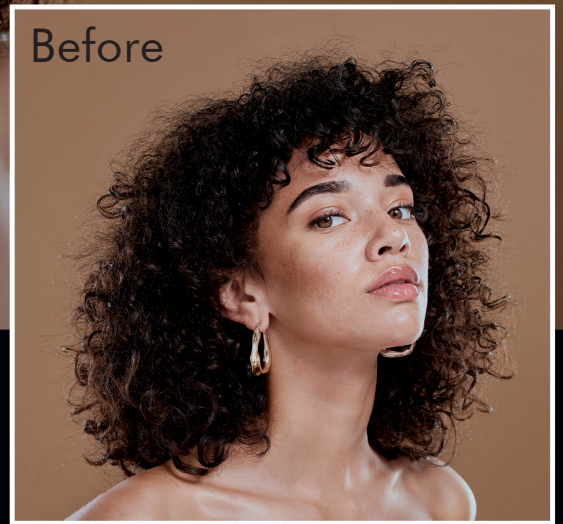


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