

CAMERACRAFT

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 THE GUILD OF
PHOTOGRAPHERS



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FAVE YERBURY



JASON SMALLEY



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Familiar names are nothing new in photo magazines. I really enjoy finding new photographers but new work from photographers I have known for years counts just as highly. This issue is unusual because it doesn't feature any photographers who have not been in *Cameracraft* before, or in one of our associated titles like *f2* before it was merged with *Cameracraft*.

But if we look back to the inspiration for *Cameracraft*, the *Camera Craft* of a century ago in California, the issues feature the same photographers time and time again. The same goes for old volumes of *Amateur Photographer*, or the *British Journal of Photography*. Find a run of yearbooks from almost any era and you'll see the same bylines year on year. Sometimes even the photos look similar year on year – but that is a criticism aimed at most annual awards now, just as it was once aimed at the photo annuals and yearbooks.

In this edition we have Jason Smalley – he featured with *Outland*, his studies of the far north-west coast of England, in *f2 Cameracraft* in 2017 but over ten years earlier in *Freelance Photographer* was writing about travel outfits and Canon lenses. We have Allan Wright, who featured in 2017 with his book *Now Glasgow* and later with a story on his Peebles Zen Gallery venture. Then there are Trevor and Faye Yerbury, whose fine art work inaugurated the portfolio section of *Cameracraft* Issue 1 back in 2012 – this time, it's just a two-pager about their unique home with studio, acclaimed garden and that all-important platinum printing darkroom.

Also with businesses built in gardens we have Panikos Hajistilly, who has featured many times in professional magazines, and Jules Hunter who first came to notice over a decade ago and went on to win awards which won awards and magazine cover use.

As an editor, I know there are reasons why names come to the front and are seen regularly in magazines, and presumably on line though the unedited, unmoderated nature of self-published content dominates that. There are those who if given an idea for an article casually, maybe at the bar during a photo convention, will send in the finished words and pictures the next day. There's not even any need for a brief or synopsis.

Some don't even need a suggestion. A set of JPEGs attached to an email will arrive just because they have something new to show, and the best way to find out whether it could be worth publishing is to let it be seen. All those out there with ideas or images needing to be aired, take a hint. I used to get dozens of letters a week, hundreds of entries to print and slide competitions, back when all this involved spending a fair amount. These days that never happens – even emails are rare. Yes, we are sent plenty of messages with *links* to work but invariably to well-publicised pages or galleries, and there is little point in a printed magazine just printing what has already been seen.

I've made an exception in this issue for a few pictures from the Sony Awards, because they make it both quite difficult and very expensive for them to be seen for a super-brief period. Mostly, I rely on recommendations. Someone in a Facebook group will share something good they have found and there will be a story behind it. Associate Editor Gary Friedman is very good at following up such networking and for upcoming issues he's got stories he should never really have time to follow up!

– David Kilpatrick

Email: editor@iconpublications.com

IN THIS ISSUE

Jason Smalley, Allan Wright, Panikos Hajistilly, Trevor and Faye Yerbury, Jules Hunter, Gary Friedman, Tom Hill, David Kilpatrick, Richard Kilpatrick.

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Tamron extends 300mm tele zoom range down to 50mm with new design



THE TAMRON 50-300mm f4.5-6.3 Di III VC VXD which went on sale on June 27th builds on established zoom lenses with a 70-300mm focal range by expanding the short end to 50mm. Unlike the 70-300mm Di III RXD for Sony E and Nikon Z mounts, the 50-300mm uses the superior VXD autofocus motors and adds Tamron's VC image stabilisation.

Weighing just 665g, the compact size handles well on both full frame and APS-C bodies. It's 120g more than their 70-300mm

The optical construction of the 50-300mm f4.5-6.3 VC uses 19 elements in 14 groups, with two XLD (eXtra Low Dispersion) and two LD (Low Dispersion) lens elements, plus Tamron's BBAR-G2 (Broad-Band Anti-Reflection Generation 2) Coating. The closest focus distance is 0.22m at 50mm and the maximum subject scale is 1:2 at the wide end. At 300mm 0.9m and a scale of 1:3.1 matches the best full range close focusing so far in a 70-300mm, Sony's G OSS with exactly the same figures. The contrast with Tamron's 70-300mm is notable – that lens is limited to 80cm close focus at 70mm, 1.5m at 300mm, and subjects scales of 1:9.4 and 1:5.1 respectively. When shooting video at focal lengths up to 100mm, AI technologies in the VC system provide additional compensation. No information is given about any claimed degree of stabilisation.

The lens has a USB port for Tamron's firmware update and lens function customisation software, which give the reference to AI incorporated in the lens itself, may allow future development.

Physically, it is 150mm long (2mm more than their 70-300mm) with a 75mm maximum barrel diameter (2mm less). It uses 67mm filters, as with most other Tamron designs for mirrorless cameras

Lens controls are a Focus Set/Function Button and Zoom Lock. It has a moisture-resistant construction and fluorine coating. Initially released in the Sony FE mount, it is compatible with many functions including Fast Hybrid AF and Eye AF.

The launch price in UK retail stores was £819, when the same outlets were stocking the 70-300mm at £419.

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



Hasselblad's astro-friendly ultra-wide, the 25mm f2.5

THE XCD f2.5 25V is the widest-angle lens in the Hasselblad XCD Versatile (V) series lenses. It has a 20mm full-frame equivalent focal length.

Thirteen elements in ten groups, including four aspherical and three ED, meet the requirements of 100-megapixel sensors. The 25cm minimum focus gives 1:5.8 subject scale. Aperture, shutter speed, ISO, and exposure compensation can be assigned to the control ring. It uses a linear stepping motor and smaller, lighter focusing lens group. The leaf shutter is speeded up to 1/4000s with flash synchronisation at all speeds.

Priced at \$3,699 USD/€4,199 it is available to purchase online and at selected retail stores worldwide.

<https://www.hasselblad.com>



Fujifilm House of Photography

ON MAY 31st Fujifilm's Covent Garden House of Photography re-opened.

Planned events include secret live music gigs, fitness classes, panel discussions, workshops with photography experts such as Capture One, and talks from high profile industry figures including Alan Law and York Place Studios. There will also be guided photo walks to capture London's most picturesque landmarks, as well as lesser-known spots.

The FUJIFILM House of Photography, located at 8-9 Long Acre, Covent Garden, was the first store of its kind to be opened in the world, originally launching in 2019.

The renovated space includes:

- A redesigned print workshop
- A FUJIFILM School learning space
- An extended gallery space
- Dedicated areas for the company's professional GFX medium format system and X Series camera range
- An updated photographic studio with professional headshot services for talent such as actors, models and dancers
- An all-new book shop offering key titles for photographers and creators
- An INSTAX Creator Cube booth, for visitors to capture fun, infinity room-style content

• Kit and product loans for photographers to try before they buy

The opening hours extend into the early evening making this an ideal destination for anyone travelling from outside London and the south.

Monday – Wednesday: 11am-7pm

Thursday – Saturday: 11am-8pm

Sunday: 12pm-6pm

For more information and to book tickets to events at the House of Photography, visit:

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



OM-Systems cash-back until July 28th

BUY OM-Systems selected items by July 28 in Europe, and you have until August 11 to submit a cash-back claim: <https://explore.omsystem.com/ie/en/>

The rebate figures are:

- M.Zuiko 150-400mm f4.5 PRO – £450
- OM-1 Mark II (body or kits) – £350
- OM-5 (body or kits) – £300
- M.Zuiko 40-150mm f2.8 PRO – £300
- M.Zuiko 12-100mm f4.0 IS PRO – £300
- M.Zuiko 150-600mm f5.0-6.3 – £300

- M.Zuiko 100-400mm f5.0-6.3 IS – £200
- M.Zuiko 300mm f4.0 PRO – £200
- M.Zuiko 8-25mm f4.0 PRO – £200
- M.Zuiko 12-40mm f2.8 PRO II – £200
- M.Zuiko 40-150mm f4.0 PRO – £200
- M.Zuiko 90mm f3.5 MACRO PRO – £200
- E-M10 Mark IV (body or kits) – £100
- M.Zuiko 9-18mm f4.0-5.6 II – £100
- M.Zuiko 45mm f1.8 I – £100
- M.Zuiko 60mm f2.8 – £100
- M.Zuiko 12-45mm f4.0 PRO – £100

Firmware updates – love, hate or ignore?

I've been sitting here for weeks updating my ebooks on specific Sony cameras because Sony came out with four firmware updates for four different cameras all at once (while I was on a month-long road trip). Of course, the new features and bug fixes are different for all four, and of course Sony didn't make known everything that they changed. I had to find a lot of it on my own. Don't feel bad for me – it's a good problem to have.

Why are firmware updates needed at all? What happened to the days when a product shipped fully debugged and that was the end of it, like a washing machine? And what vulnerabilities might they introduce to those who upgrade?

The answer to why they're needed boils down to two factors: 1) Our products have become gratuitously complex, and 2) software has always been hard to do right, and the more complex the product, the more difficult it is to test all edge cases for functionality.

That's what happened with the firmware update for Sony's A1: due to insufficient testing, Firmware v2.00 "bricked" many of their cameras, making them non-functional, requiring factory service in some cases to reset. About a month later Sony came out with Firmware v2.01 to fix it. Then a few months after that they came out with Firmware v2.02, fixing a problem they initially missed – support for their 200-600mm lens.

"Bricking" hardware via firmware updates isn't a new thing – laptops, routers, game consoles, and even the Leica Q3 would be "bricked" when upgrading to v1.3 as recently as 2023.

So what's the problem?

Software Quality Assurance (QA) is now a big part of any engineering organization, and it's a thankless and tedious task. There are sophisticated tools out there for automating the process of testing EVERY. SINGLE. FEATURE. every time a firmware update is issued. It's not unheard of for a software patch that has been well-tested to



**"Never be the first!"
– that's the voice of experience
and advice from Associate
Editor Gary Friedman**

"brick" a product upon release – that's because not every possible scenario had been tested.

Like if a Minolta xi-series lens is being used with an LA-EA3 adapter on a camera body that doesn't use phase-detect AF while shooting PAL video (on a camera that defaults to NTSC) and tethered to a PC without antivirus software installed. There are just a growing number of obscure variables to track, some of which are out of the manufacturer's control.

Of course, firmware updates can be a double-edged sword. Manufacturers often use them to add new features while simultaneously increasing brand loyalty. So that's a good thing.

Hackers (and I use the term positively) often take advantage of the fact that camera behavior can be changed to add or improve features that the manufacturer simply didn't provide. Canon's earlier EOS cameras we most famous for being the most hackable DSLRs out there – to great benefit.

There is a software platform called Magic Lantern – <https://www.MagicLantern.fm> – which ran on the camera's memory card and added a host of new features to bodies ranging from EOS 5D II to the original EOS M. Some of the more interesting feature additions were a custom bulb timer for extra-long exposures, motion detection, voice tags for photos, seven new focusing modes, auto "Expose to the Right", override exposure settings in LiveView, toggle LiveView on and off, zebra displays, focus peaking, false color for precise exposure control, custom bitrate/frame-rate for video, 14-bit uncompressed RAW video to

memory card, and the ability to run scripts! Over 100 possible improvements in all.

Older Nikon DSLRs (D3100, D3200, D5100, D5200, D7000, D600, D610, D800/800E, and D4) were much less hackable, because any firmware change had to fit within the camera's on-board memory. Most of the hacks in these cameras simply enabled features that were disabled in the firmware because it wasn't a high-end camera – manufacturers often reuse the same software across multiple camera bodies, disabling individual features for the lower-end models to save money.

"New" features that have been enabled in the Nikon cameras include using allowing the use of non-Nikon batteries, removing the data overlay on video exiting the HDMI port, the removal of the EU-imposed 30 minute time limit on video (and the inevitable overheating which resulted because video for DSLRs was always a kludge), lossless RAW file compression, increasing the video bitrate, and disabling the infamous "Star Eater" hot pixel suppression algorithm which astro-photographers just hated.

Sony and Panasonic (Lumix) have had relatively little hacks done to their cameras. The Lumix GF1 through GF4 (among others) were all hacked to add extra picture profiles and improve the video quality. Reportedly Panasonic didn't like it when people transformed their consumer stills camera to rival their high-end professional video cameras.

Sony's hacking history is somewhere between Canon's and Panasonic's: for a while Sony had the ability to download apps on to

their phones and many cameras via a platform called *PlayMemories Apps*. Most of the apps were useless, perhaps two were actually useful – the *Smooth Reflections* app comes to mind, which emulated a neutral density filter when taking long exposures. Third-party app developers – the usual source of innovation – were locked out. A free software tool called PMCA-RE (<https://github.com/ma1co/Sony-PMCA-RE>) became popular which would connect to these app-enabled cameras via the USB port, and allowed the most annoying characteristics of the Sony cameras to be bypassed: no more 30-minute video clip length restriction, activate all menu languages (helping if you bought on the grey market!) and most importantly it allowed removed the NTSC/PAL nag screen when starting up your camera. Not much more than that.

But can your camera be hacked for nefarious purposes?

Ransomware hack

The answer is "Yes!" Back in 2019 some security researchers demonstrated ransomware that could be remotely uploaded to the Canon 80D out in the field, without needing physical access to the camera. The ransomware would encrypt all of the images on the memory card and promised to decrypt them if the photographer paid up.

The vulnerability lied in the camera's Wi-Fi capability, which could be tricked into installing a malicious firmware update by a computer that's on the same Wi-Fi network as the camera. The good news is that it was a research demonstration only, and Canon was notified and a firmware update was issued to fix it before the demonstration took place at a vulnerability conference. The better news is all modern cameras have the ability to encrypt their wireless communications. Either enable encryption or turn-off Wi-Fi and Bluetooth when not needed.

But how many people regularly update the firmware of their cameras?





TOM HILL

A change of scenery may be what you need to find your future

In September 1996 Sheryl Crow released her second album, a studio LP uninspiringly entitled 'Sheryl Crow'. The second track – 'A change would do you good' – was apparently written after Crow's producer, Bill Bottrell, quit his job and left the production team leaderless in the middle of the album's production. This angered Sheryl, and some of the lyrics are apparently having a dig at Bottrell for leaving Crow and her team in the lurch.

But in fact, the song went on to become Crow's third top-five single from the album in Canada, where it reached number two in the charts. It also managed the eighth slot in the UK Top 40.

There may well be a moral to this story; that leaving one's comfort zone from the familiar to a change of scenery can force a person to explore new opportunities and possibilities.

That's also very true when considering genres of photography. An amusing quote from American



stand-up comedian and one-time journalist, the late Lewis Grizzard, is very telling:

"Life can be like being in a dogsled team; if you're not the lead dog, the scenery never changes."

In the context of the world of photography, that's also partially true. One's scenery changes every time we move house, perhaps emigrate to another country, get divorced, produce children, maybe get a new job and all those other milestone life events. So why not take the opportunity when your 'scenery' changes to have a stab at a genre of photography that you've never tried before?

If you're a working photographer who already makes a living from the medium, I'm not suggesting that you pack in, say, wedding photography overnight and go to be the next Tim Page on the Ukrainian front line. But getting out of one's comfort zone creates challenges that will certainly educate and inform your practice.

In my case, I was a holiday camp photographer in Lowestoft (complete with a parrot for the victim's shoulder!) after qualifying with an HND in Photography at Blackpool College in 1984. I then went on to be a snapper on Caribbean cruise ships. Having returned from there before potentially expiring from an excess of unbridled hedonism, I then dropped photography for a while and ran mini-labs for Kodak in London and Bristol. This was all before the tender age of 28.

Like many photographers, I enjoyed the medium and creativity thoroughly, but I struggled to take the plunge to be a working freelance practitioner. Subsequently, working as a technician then tutor at Derby University's photography



Doing an MA in photography at Leicester's De Montfort University, Tom tackled a project returning to environments of his school days to record the details and architecture of memories.

In the USA, he found many new subjects like the 'Cadillac Ranch' in Amarillo, right.

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

Tom's book fundraising for the British Heart Foundation 'The Cobbler's Children' depicts his 40 years in the imaging business... check out details at bigfrogsmallpond.co.uk





course from 1992-2000, I then jumped ship from the safety of academia to become Lastolite's product and marketing manager from their HQ in Coalville, Leicestershire for a couple of years.

I would travel to trade shows in New York, California, Cologne (*photokina* as was), Dublin, Paris and all over Europe as the ambassador for the company to our various distributors across the world. The travel aspect of the job was extremely fulfilling. I always took a couple of days' holiday after a flight to wherever to explore with a camera on my own time before returning to Blighty.

Despite not having earned the majority of my income directly as a working photographer over the last 40 years skirting around the imaging business, I've had more changes of scenery than a stagehand at The Old Vic!

After a difficult divorce in 2002, and having no burdensome dependents, I swore never to have a 'boss' again. I was determined to somehow make a living as a self-employed something or other. That journey, until now, at 61 years of age, has included stints as an occasional snapper for *The Guardian*, travel writer for that same publication and dozens of other bread and butter newspapers, magazines and websites. Taking all the long hours into account I probably often worked at less than minimum wage, – but it beat the nine to five.

I was always a photographer of my contemporary environment,

often for a hobby, sometimes getting paid. For a time, having the luxury of large studios and decent lighting equipment at the university, I produced a series of 'formal' studio portraits of people with unusual jobs or hobbies, such as Steve the lizard breeder pictured here with his friend Eddie.

Finding myself in capital cities round the world I dropped into 'street' mode, capturing images like the portrait of a homeless lady in New York with her three cats – people love their pets wherever you are!

When wintering in Spain as a digital nomad web designer, I loved to capture the unspoilt rustic Andalusian coastline and its fishing villages as a 'landscape' photographer.

In 2007, driving across the USA from New York to San Francisco, I'd photograph unusual roadside oddities like the art installation of scrap cars – the 'Cadillac Ranch' in Amarillo Texas, as referred to by Bruce Springsteen on his 1980 album *The River*. I guess that sort of imagery is called 'travel' photography.

Some of this work was as rough as hell – some fairly acceptable – but the great thing about being a hobbyist is that you just bin the stuff that's not up to scratch. It's a luxury that amateurs can afford as they don't have to submit anything to anyone if their photo session goes pear-shaped.

Over that time of some 30 years photographing anything and



Changes of scene mean changes of subject. With access to a studio, Tom made portraits (facing page) of characters like Steve the lizard breeder with iguana Eddie. In cities, street photography may take over with subjects like the homeless lady with three cats. Staying in some places has obvious appeal, like Tom's winter seasons in Spain working as a 'digital nomad' copywriter. Settling down in Scotland, he's enjoyed his local music scene.



everything, I feel that I've become a more 'rounded' practitioner as a result. At least, all the sandwiches and beer consumed while waiting for 'the shot' have certainly rounded my physique!

In order to illustrate the point with more gravitas, I was forced into a change of scenery when studying the MA Photography course at De Montfort University from 1998-2000 under Prof Paul Hill (no relation).

He was the course leader who encouraged all his students to 'get out of their comfort zone'. We were pushed to try new forms of photographic practice we hadn't attempted before. Consequently, I dug down into memories of a troubled childhood and revisited the schools I attended from aged 11 in 1974 until sixth form.

I framed 'still lives' of desks and old inkwells, wooden gym wall-bars that still made me shudder to look at, and empty playgrounds where I was once kicked by school bullies while rolled up like a hedgehog at

12 years old, 1975. Fortunately, the whole project ended up being quite cathartic and banished a few demons from my head.

Most recently, in 2020, I moved to Galashiels in the Scottish Borders, which despite its population of only 12,000 is home to Mac Arts, a superb music venue and arts centre. They attract very talented tribute acts and some well-known bands, so currently I'm enjoying a resurgence as a local music photographer.

In short, variety is the spice of life, so over the years, I've always prided myself on never being a creator of images within a fixed genre. A jack of all trades certainly; probably master of none.

So the next time you're considering a photographic project, I strongly suggest you try some kind of totally unfamiliar photography to test your mettle. The more deeply personal the subject the better.

After all, a change might do you good...

Some things just come naturally, and meeting Jason Smalley you quickly become aware that he's a bit of a force of nature. There's a well-thumbed volume of *Lord of the Rings* out from one of the many bookcases, and he's somehow stepped from the pages. Is he Gandalf or Elrond? Probably neither. He's Radagast without the manic ADHD, a wizard of wild things. He's a shaman, a poet, an explorer of unseen spaces, an inspiration for thousands and a consummate professional photographer.

Like so many, he started young. However nine is about as young as you can imagine having a proper camera kit and darkroom. His Lancashire factory worker dad invested £35 getting that for Jason, who went through school battling a stammer. Published in BBC Wildlife magazine when he was just twelve, seven years after leaving school he went freelance, full time in 1984. In his mid-30s he travelled from Lancashire to see editors and art directors in London, securing commissions from top magazines. He worked for Condé Nast and IPC, titles like *Country Life* and *Woman's Weekly*, capturing classic interiors and gardens as well as editorial portraits. It was a different time.

MOSS EROTICA

It's an unusual book title appealing to an initially small readership of launch subscribers. There is more to moss than meets the eye, and few eyes have engaged its gaze better than Jason Smalley. The images are as beautiful and unexpected as his thoughts and words about this prehistoric miniature rain forest we rake out of our lawns.



His favourite markets were, before their time, the 'green' magazines and picture libraries. It was this field, the countryside without so-called country sports if he could manage it, which was a natural fit. He had been on a survival wage, working in a metal bending factory, putting in 45 hours doing three days of double shifts to fine time to concentrate on writing to publishers and editors. Though he says he was 'not good with people' he won regular commissions, illustrating books for majors like Harper Collins and Octopus. But the magazines closed, low-cost stock pictures cut out commissions, and the times of £450 a day fees and expenses which once took him as far as the Isle of Arran for a single portrait evaporated.

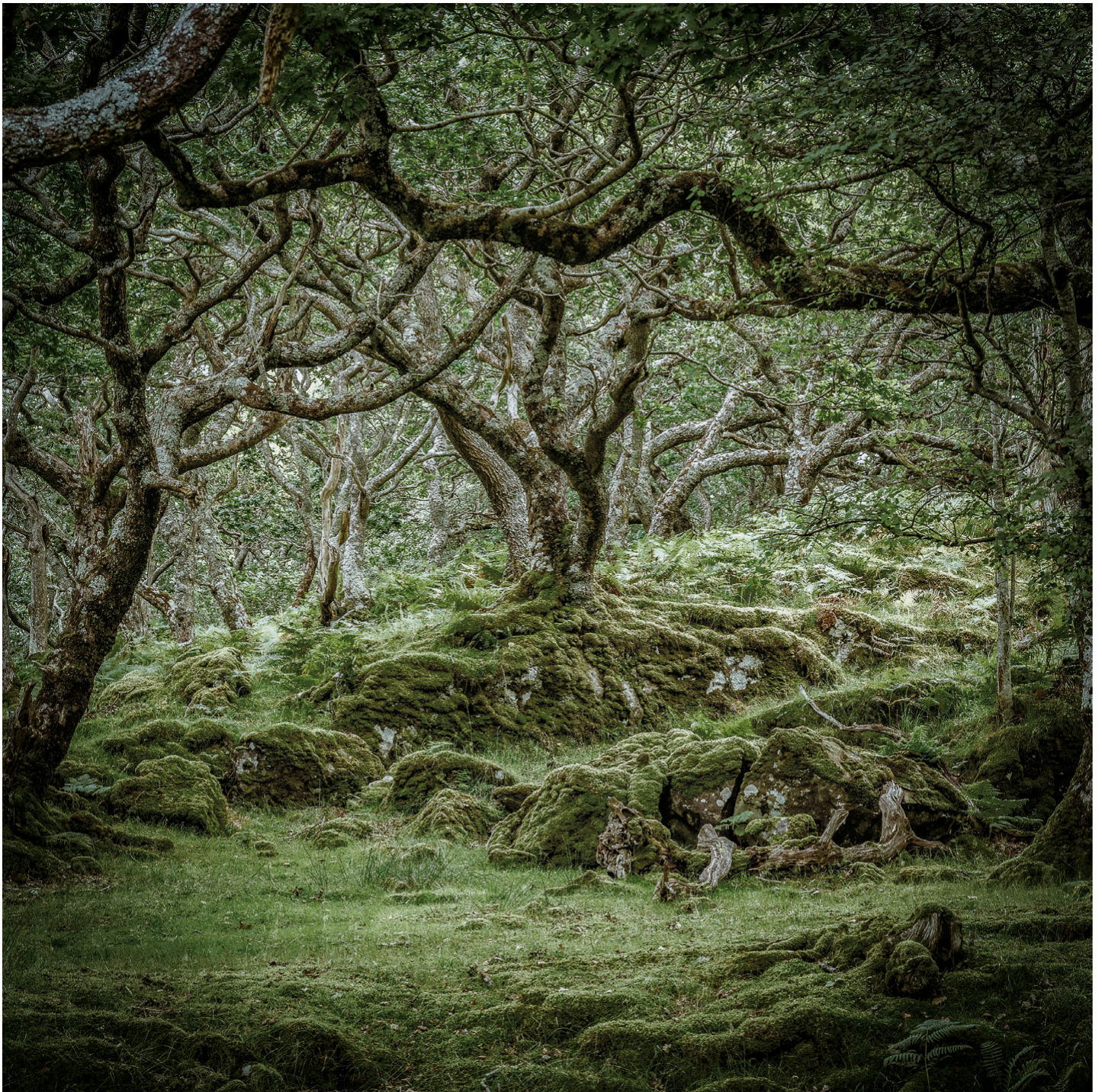
This career ended when an "san accident took me out of the loop", he says – but by then, day rates had fallen to offers of £150 including expenses. Being an efficient pro able to arrive, set up a three-head studio flash rig, shoot and depart 20 minutes later did not help. But he was already falling out of love with work which he seen him need to use bodyguards (recruited on the spot!) to mind his car and gear in a dodgy part of Liverpool, and lose a key client by making the wrong





The QR code will take you to <https://www.earthlight-images.com> with information about the book, videos, prints and products which feature Jason's photography





noises about covering a pheasant shoot and then refusing to do a fox hunt – “I could not hold my tongue”, he admits.

And thus, ten years ago, he pulled out of the county and country big magazine work, dropped his editorial career – and met and married Nicola, a sustainability manager who encouraged his ‘green’ preferences. She’s a natural community-builder, and helped him create an on-line following for his spirituality and place in British Shamanism (yup, this is New Age stuff, and they are proof it’s neither a pastime nor passé).

Finding a home in a wonderful location minutes from the M6 near Carnforth and Arnside on the

The opening image of ‘Moss Erotica’: “The air thickened around me, syrupy with Midges and the drift of fern exhale. Millennial memories grew from the lichen gowned limbs, giving heft to the place. Scarisdale Wood. Pools of living water gasped their indignation as I stumbled through, unchaining streams of scents – rot, sour, moulder, decay. Stunted by wind and rock-bound roots, the oaks and birches squat tight to the sopping sod, crawling with adagio overtones through the limpid island air. At night they wake, in my dreams at least, to wave a renewed chant of leaf and bark.”

border between Lancashire and Cumbria. Here, near Wharton Crag, there are 50 nature reserves within a “mile or two” where ancient mosses and woodland hide remnants of Rheged, hill forts, earthworks and old stones. Beyond the Kent estuary’s soft flow the hills of the Lake District peninsulas rise. The boy from Anglezarke had found his best place.

Today, his Earthlight business identity (“For the Love of the

Land”) goes far beyond photography or leading workshop groups into his hidden hallowed landscapes. Nicola has helped him build a community of 30,000 followers through email and Facebook, and they regularly have over a thousand sign in for on-line events like the premier of new videos. With a Mystery School and on-line Drumming School, their retreats in locations like the wilds of Wales can be attended by 200.

The book, digitally printed so it will not be remaindered or pulped and every copy will count, will have QR codes going directly to movies and web pages which will expand on the content dynamically. Interviewing Jason has given *Cameracraft* some valuable ideas for the future – we started using QR codes in *Icon*’s magazines a decade ago, before the widespread use of smartphones. They seemed to have little value to most readers but time passes and times change. A printed book or magazine can be a portal to constantly evolving related content and a growing readership.

Evolution and change are constantly in Jason’s thoughts. “We would not have been here if moss



had not arrived”, he said. “Our planet cooled down, and brought the first Ice Age. Ninety-five percent of life, which had existed only in the first oceans, was lost.

“Moss emerged from the seas and clothed the rocks, breaking them down and creating dust. It

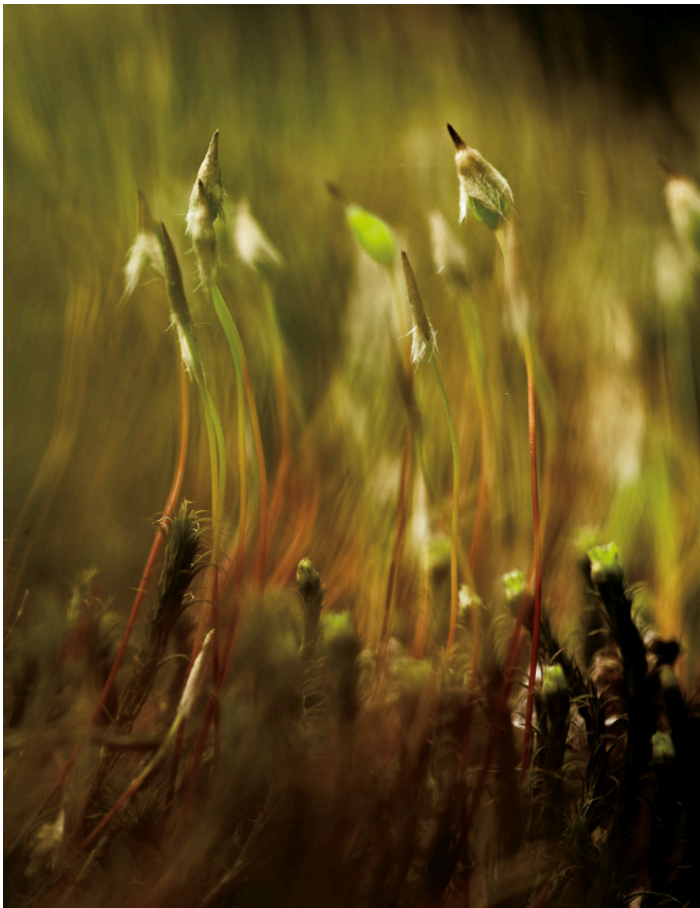
became able to live on dry land, but it needs water to reproduce.”

Jason explained how moss invented sex – depending on that water – by having mobile sperm, as it still does. It’s from this germ of information that his concept for *Moss Erotica* emerged some

fourteen years ago. His study of it should make any reader see afresh mosses, lichens, liverworts, fungi, slime moulds, algae and the whole green world under their footprints. It’s also an alien world, even to modern grasses, flowering plants and trees – “moss has a different

kind of chlorophyll”.

As this small green world evolved alongside the emergence of animal life, Jason sees it as “being”. He hints at the sentience of plants, their ability to communicate which science has only begun to focus on recently. With his camera, he has





explored what mosses might feel and even what they might see through the apertures of ground cover and undergrowth or the canopy of trees, on the retina of millions of chloroplasts created by a bed of moss.

From his book introduction: “Steering well away from scientific descriptions, mind-blowing facts, Latin names and landscape locations these pages simply shine a light on moss. It’s a green light, illuminating from elsewhere and delineating the edgeworlds inhabited by these little understood beings.

“Pointing my camera fairly and squarely at my subject I strive to convey the feeling of the mossy nooks and crannies and hope you too can experience the wet feet, damp knees and soddened elbows that are all part of the moss investigator’s experience.”

And so, on to the photographs themselves! I had no idea before talking to Jason how they were created. I assumed macro lenses, bellows, even micro lenses or special gear like the Laowa ‘probe’ lens or endoscopes. No way!

Jason does use a Canon 100mm macro (EF until recently with DSLRS, now the new RF model on Canon R5 mirrorless). But he peers though the undergrowth from a much greater distance, throwing intrusions totally out of focus, by fitting a Canon 100-400mm zoom with a 2X extender, 1.4X extender and up to three extension tubes. He uses high ISO – no issue now with

efficient use of raw noise reduction – and may shoot with settings like 1120mm at $f256$. He’s also used a 300mm $f4$ the same way. The resulting bokeh effects can be unique, and the scale of the subject detail immerses the viewer. Often only water droplets give reference. The sharpness is (remarkably) exquisite, aided by the light and contrast, and the colours are intense.

Jason’s portfolio – with followers subscribing through *Substack* at



£5 a month – encompasses photography, writing, and film-making. *Moss Erotica* was launched with a Zoom event and, as was done 200 years ago, subscribers have their names listed at the end of the book.

His next project is a book of photographic Hai-bun (Haiku verses paired with images) to be printed on Japanese hand-made paper and hand-bound. For the future, he’s entering the world of dragonflies where his skills with the

R5 and its fast macro AF and possibly even his mastery of drone photo-flight should open eyes and doors. In the meantime, followers pay for his poetry recited with film sequences. He’s also looking at the idea of a quarterly print media Zine to sell through specialist shops like Manchester’s UNITOM (which has a special section for photo magazines).

– David Kilpatrick



What would you do if years of archived work ended up ruined by water and fungus? Most photographers have had some slides or negatives spoiled by slightly damp storage conditions or close contact with storage that turned out to be far from archival. Most consign the worst examples to the skip – there's no market now for recycling and recovering valuable silver – and spend hours retouching scans of rare shots which can not be lost.

Allan Wright took a third path after looking carefully at the way water damage and time had ruined some but not all of his archives. These extreme cases form the basis of an exhibition series which attracted much attention and many print sales in June.

It's maybe best to start with the two examples on this page. Of the top one, titled *Deltoid*, he says:

"I have no idea what the original image was – there is not a vestige in the picture of whatever it was. It's quite bizarre and off the scale".

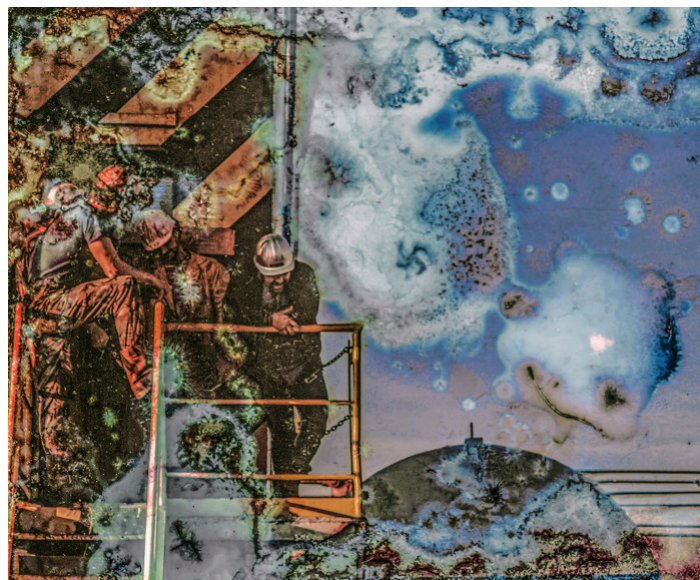
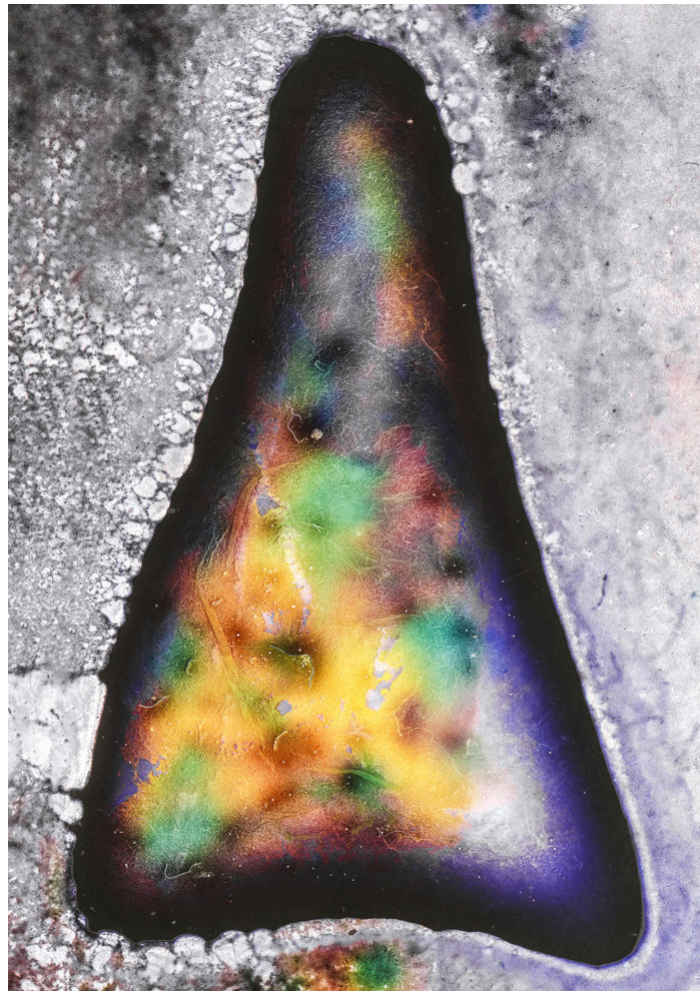
The second picture comes from Allan's time working on oil rigs internationally, and not as a photographer. It was a rather gloopy kind of job, like the effects on his slides, testing the consistency of the mud which is pumped during drilling for oil or gas keeping the drill bit cool and lubricated and bringing waste back to the surface. But he had his camera all the time, and took pictures of his workmates. What effect the damp and adhesion to vinyl filing sheets had on this shot, it left a strange vestige of a swastika with three arms. It's the only ruined shot he retouched – to add the missing arm!

In fact, he experimented with *Photoshop* filters and textures when working on dozens of scans he had made from the spoiled work, but on reviewing the results realised the 'pure' renderings were what he wanted – not something which might as well have been produced using texture overlays and art filters.

What he did do was make adjustments to colour channels the bring out or subdue the colours diffused into the emulsion of the slides by repeated exposure to water. The slides already had shared colour palettes due to the different cyan, yellow and magenta layers of various films from the 1970s onwards

OSMOTIC REVERIE

Damp, fungus, mould and those old fibrous filing sheets have ruined countless rolls of negatives and slides over the years. Allan Wright decided to scan the worst results of his non-archival storage. He salvaged a unique exhibition and edition of gallery prints from the wreckage.



including Kodachrome, Ektachrome Agfa and Fujichrome types. The scans processed to constrained colours give the exhibition series a number of different common looks, and in some cases, Allan selective desaturated selected channels to bring out the more interesting dominant shades.

You can see this in the two final versions opposite. The coach has been titled 'Blood of the Tracks' and may just hint at the willingness of certain classes in Britain to crush others under the wheels of privilege. The red is all in the original remains of the slide but other colours have been desaturated from the coach itself leaving it black and white, which emphasises the carnage created by a couple of house and business moves.

These were what caused the damage to just a part of Allan's huge archive of slides, covering four decades and more. For much of this time he supplied original slides to calendar publishers and photo libraries, whether for stock or for the use of organisations like tourist boards. Every year he'd have a substantial list of all the subjects his clients needed to stock up on, filling in the gaps where subjects were missing or needed new up to date shots. His files of additional shots kept growing, some would be returned after use, and all needed carefully filing using in suspension sheets often with additional clear vinyl flaps for protection.

When the digital era arrived in the 1990s – for scanning rather than camera capture – he acquired a Nikon LS5000 film scanner, one of the best ever made and still highly valued.

"Much of my archive had already been scanned", he explained, "before house moves which obliged me to put about 15,000 slides into storage for almost three years. I had seven or eight metal supermarket delivery baskets filled with sheets. It was my business but also my life, with some of the pictures going back to 1979 shot in Vietnam when I was working for oil exploration based in Singapore. I got some amazing pictures with my Nikkormat."

It's maybe no surprise that after this early industrial experience Allan has become a dedicated conservationist and passionate about



The colours of the water-damaged slides were all present, if changed by scanning. The body of the coach was desaturated to emphasise 'blood on the tracks'...



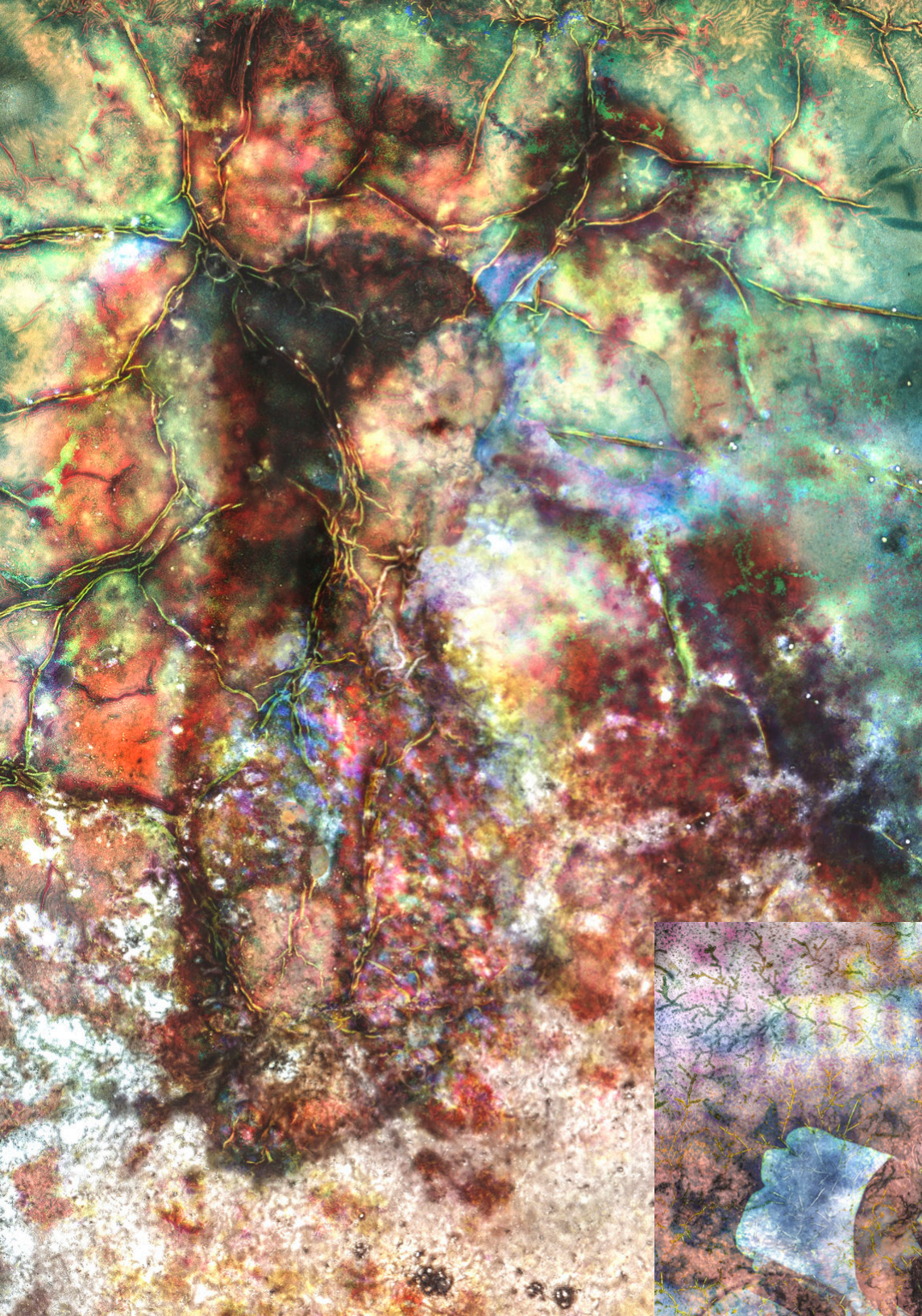


Allan has titled this Hogwoods. It's a mysterious alien ectoplasmic entity...



Above, lugworm diggers on the Solway – the cloud effect is all down to the water damage. Below, in some slides, just the right area remained unaffected.





“My son was devastated that his help had resulted in this”, Allan said. “Most slides had been scanned, before the LS5000 was damaged during moving. I had my digital backups. I started going through the files after moving back to Galloway, to create a back catalogue as a project in summer 2023. Maybe 10% had visible damage, and 1% had amazing damage! Nothing was really retrievable from either. Some slides were stuck and came away, but I liked the effects and sent them to Mr Scan (<https://www.mr-scan.co.uk>) along with undamaged ones. I even kept the vinyl attached to some, cutting it out and sending a sandwich!”

And so Allan made A3+ exhibition prints on Hahnemühle Torchon Rag paper using his Epson SP-700, and staged a show of 20 of the final 35 at the Dumfries & Galloway art collectives' Spring Fling. People were fascinated by the effects of the water damage. The final show can be seen at the Samphire Gallery in Castle Douglas until August 8th 2024, (Tuesday to Saturday, 10am to 4pm) and on-line at <https://www.allanwrightphoto.com>



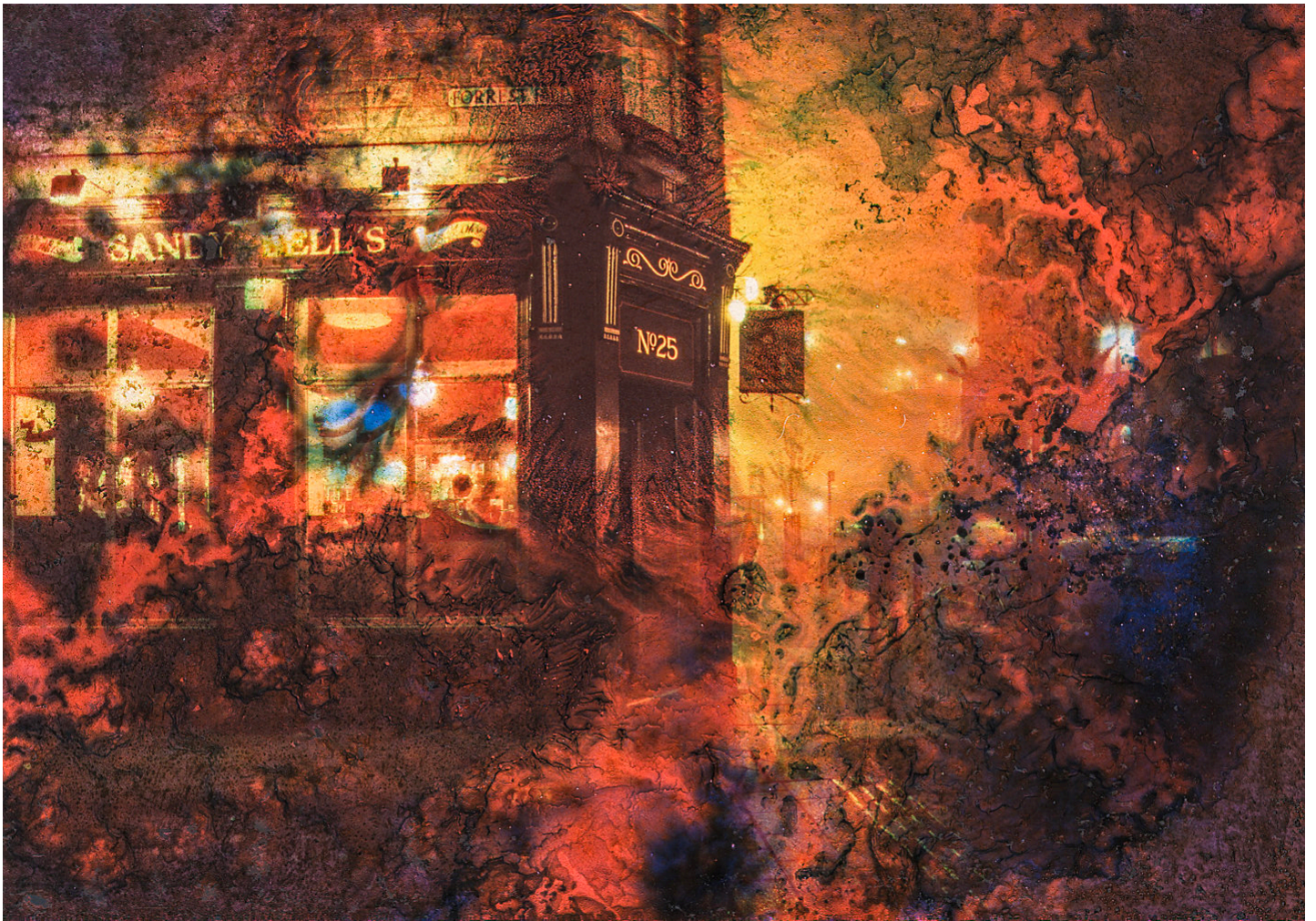
the environment, returning to Scotland to become a leading landscape photographer and publish one of the best-selling lines of calendars covering the whole country. The film originals for most of this work had been scanned by 2016 when changing life circumstances obliged him to move house and business. He had employed an assistant to help with the bulk scanning and essential clean-up as even Digital ICE dust and scratch removal in the scanner system couldn't undo what commercial scanning did to originals in the past. Then he had to find a

place to store possessions, and his son was working on a dairy farm with what seemed suitable dry barn space. They had not realised that the biomass boiler in the premises could release moisture from the wood pellets as steam. Though it didn't penetrate to the centre of the packed filing sheets, steam got to slides at the outside edge of many, where it condensed on the emulsion then dried. This repeated process, with slides sometimes adhering to the archival file, leached out some of the dye layers leaving an image behind.





Top left: a refugee girl in Vietnam. Bottom left: two girls during a pirate-themed festival in Portpatrick, Galloway. Above left: Mind Body Spirit in Cockburn Street, Edinburgh. Above right: Lockerbie. Below: Sandy Bell's, one of Edinburgh's best-known small pubs.



In 1980, Shirley and I moved with our five-year-old son Richard to a neglected redbrick Nottinghamshire village farmhouse, after agreeing to be bought out of a successful partnership with another photographer, Steve Lister, and his wife Tanya. Minolta signed us up at the same time to take over and develop their UK user club and magazine.

At the studios we created in the old barn range, we held photo workshops, and starting in 1981 the days or weekend always included a model shoot, most often portraiture and fashion with occasional topless. The same year I wrote *Light and Lighting for Photography and Video* for Focal Press and this needed a wide range of studio lighting examples, so we bought a full studio flash system. Daughter Ailsa was born in 1982 into a world of dressing up, make-up, pretty girls and happy amateur photographers.

These workshops and our overseas photo holidays brought in some enthusiastic regulars and one of these was D, an executive with the UK government's Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) Ash Marketing. Forty years later I won't give his full name as I have not been able to reach him to ask. This was power station country, and many of my clients were in coal, steel, oil and power generation. He wanted help with marketing and advertising the valuable fly ash by-product of coal fired power stations, and we became that division's regular studio, eventually helping CEGB nationally create their own photo archive.

D learned lighting and photo technique at our workshops and he wanted us to produce his great project – a quality glamour calendar of the size and type to find a place in architectural practices as well as building sites. I was to shoot it, helped by Shirley who always worked with me for model shoots doing make-up and accessorising. She helped the girls, often in their late teens, be comfortable with a thirty-something year old behind the camera and groups of older workshop delegates, mostly but not entirely male.

In the summer of 1985, D secured his budget. We came up with twelve concepts using geology, minerals and the landscape to link to the uses of fly ash as a substitute

FOUR SEASONS IN SIX DAYS

A long time ago in a land far away your editor embarked on a September road trip with a commission to create a calendar combining landscape and glamour – of the era. The past is indeed a different country and it would never be possible now.

It was not even possible then...



Slate Borrowdale, Cumbria

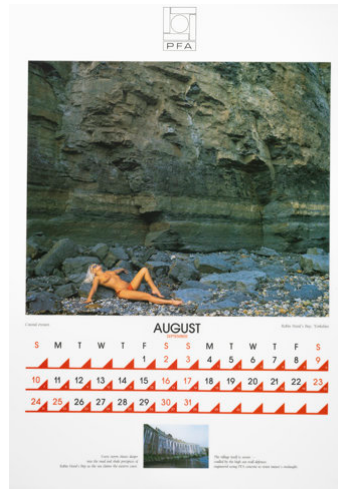
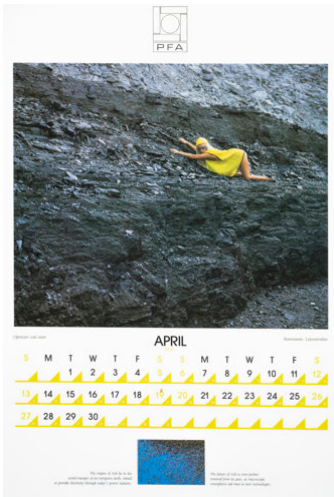
JANUARY
FEBRUARY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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Cleft from the body of the Lakeland hills, slate has formed a traditional roofing for houses for centuries.

Future roof-tiles will incorporate PFA to match all the qualities sought in roofing slates, conserving natural materials.



Locations: Borrowdale slate quarry, Ravenstone opencast mine, Robin Hood's Bay shale cliffs, Ennerdale Water, Milford-on-Sea beach, the Giant's Causeway.






The Giant's Causeway County Antrim, Ulster

DECEMBER

JANUARY '87

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Volcanic heat and cold seas structured the polygonal basalt steps of the Giant's Causeway on the Antrim coast of Northern Ireland.

PFA, itself a product of heat tempered by water in modern power stations, now replaces materials of volcanic origin in the construction industry.

for volcanic pozzolana in cements, concrete, foundation and void grouting, thermoset plastic fillers and more. Sounds very technical – but technical was my scene. It's why I ended up shooting for engineering, technology and construction companies. Every rock or mineral could be found in Britain, I knew exactly what landscapes I needed to visit. I had somehow to book three major agency models for two days of location shooting each, and hit the road in mid-September covering everywhere from Cornwall and the south coast to Northern Ireland.

The girls had to be ready for a day shoot or a road trip at short notice with an eye on weather conditions, and you'll see from the pictures that even rainy days – as in the Lake District and Antrim – can work when the sky is nearly always excluded.

I shot using a Hasselblad ELX and 40mm, 80mm and 150mm lenses, acquired new on HP. The rate of inflation at that time allowed us to get new kit every three years. The value when sold was usually more than when bought, instead of today's huge drop the moment you open the box. We'd sell all the gear every now and then to pay our tax liability, and get new on finance.

All the pictures had their own stories and Shirley's presence, alongside our models, often smoothed the way through impossible shoot-and-run situations. We arrived at the Giant's Causeway unannounced, in the rain, half an hour before entry closed. Despite this we were able to get through to the National Trust by phone from their site office and obtain permission to allow a topless shoot on the basalt columns after



China clay spoil

FEBRUARY

St. Austell, Cornwall

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With the valuable kaolin washed out, sand the china clay spoil is used locally in brickmaking and concrete mixes.

Today's brickmakers and concrete producers reuse waste with PFA to provide enhanced thermal and structural properties.



Limestone pavement

JUNE

Malham, West Yorkshire

S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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Remove the rain-soured limestone clots and grates of Malham, the fells are laid with uncut stone slabs.

Where uneven walls make land unusable, PFA grouting provides a rapid and technically broad-based solution.

Locations: St Austell kaolin spoil, Malham Cove limestone pavement: below, Isle of Purbeck chalk, Roche Rocks in Cornwall, Kirton brick clay and Honister Pass.



MARCH

Isle of Purbeck, Dorset

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When the rain-soured limestone clots and grates of Malham, the fells are laid with uncut stone slabs.



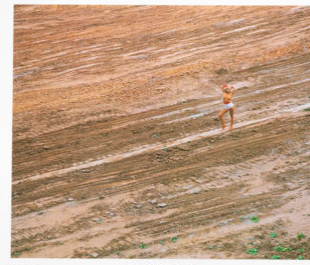
MAY

Roche Rocks, Cornwall

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When the rain-soured limestone clots and grates of Malham, the fells are laid with uncut stone slabs.



NOVEMBER

Kirton, Lincolnshire

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When the rain-soured limestone clots and grates of Malham, the fells are laid with uncut stone slabs.



OCTOBER

Honister Pass, Cumbria

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When the rain-soured limestone clots and grates of Malham, the fells are laid with uncut stone slabs.

visitors left. No fee was asked and there was never any problem later – a contrast with the Trust a few years on, seeking to prevent or charge highly for pro photography. We shot in the Lake District, on sea shores and other now restricted locations... but got permission for brick clay and opencast coal mines. The most incredible landscape was the kaolin spoil heaps of Devon, with no apparent barriers to access.

We created some stock for libraries like Tony Stone, Images, the Model Photo Library and for future use in books and magazines. Shirley returned to topless modelling

briefly for one year planner shot with model Jo Phillips in the foreground. She posed in the background with the proviso she would be out of sharp focus! She had modelled that way already for a perfume brochure and the client knew we'd use the same approach.

My ex-art college studio photographer Richard Bradbury designed the A2 calendar layout. He went on to fame and fortune and to become President of the British Institute of Professional Photography.

Producing this calendar led to TV and press coverage, giving talks including 6 x 6cm slide projection

in Britain and Austria, requests for wall planners and calendars from others, plans for calendar awards entry and an opening with Mel Romane. He arranged photographers and models for clients like GKN, Avon Tyres, breweries and printers like Howitts. They offered stock calendars to be overprinted for smaller businesses in transport, building and similar fields where giving away a girlie calendar every year was part of the rep's presence.

I was lined up to pitch against the likes of Mel Grundy and Harry Ormisher for GKN as a start.

However, it was never to be.

My calendar career ended with this. It's also why we ended up leaving Nottinghamshire two years later and moved to Scotland. In short, the main trade union in the CEBG had a strong feminist leader who saw the calendar launched in London and created havoc. All copies were to be recovered and destroyed, and this action made public through the Press. Since this was 'the electricity board' the outcry was predictable, though Ash Marketing was a little-known subsidiary. We had found out our model for the Lakes and Giant's Causeway, Gail Thackray, was well-known for Page 3 and



The model releases for the shoot also covered magazine, book and future stock library use. Gail Thackray was keen to do additional shots with ideas she liked. On the Solway coast, we stopped and ran to the beach (in full view of the road) to try a synchro-sunset flash shot with floating scarf inspired by the work of Guy Bourdin. September in Cumbria is not like summer in Provence and I had to give Gail my jacket, recover her clothes from the sand and dash back to car. Only a few exposures were taken, no second chances, and the entire stop probably took under five minutes. It remains one of my favourite shots and this is the first time it has been in print, though I'm sure picture libraries found uses before shoot 'residuals' came back to me around 2002. The selected and scanned calendar Fujichromes did not survive, nor did a single copy of the calendar. I had a set of A2 pages heat encapsulated. They were photographed for this article.

men's magazines but booked her regardless. Now, with all her contacts in the tabloids and weekend magazines, she was handed a story of feminists sending a £20,000 calendar to incineration. She made sure she hit the headlines! The other models, brunette Jo Phillips and blonde Tina Green, didn't gain the same publicity. All three worked very professionally in cold and uncomfortable, if not actually dangerous, settings.

Our studio and home was well-known in our large village, not anonymous in a city. The attention drawn to me, and the negative effect

on Shirley, were as bad for us as the loss of the major client. D left his position with CEGB, and with his wife moved to Bath where the Royal Photographic Society had relocated, buying a beautiful hotel which they made into a haven for visiting photographers. Shirley was disturbed by the way I had suddenly come into demand for a single aspect of my work and how the Press headlines risked our studio's reputation as an unexpected outcome. We didn't stop the Minolta weekend workshops and travel but ended the calendar industry connection and cut back on test shoots with models.

In 1987 we formed Icon Publications Ltd to make a transition from the photographic studio to magazine and book publishing, and in 1988 sold the Tuxford studio and bought Maxwell Place in Kelso. Those two years had seen us think we needed to go our separate ways. In the end we did not, and had over 30 more years until Shirley's death in 2019. Maggie Thatcher had helped by creating rampant house price inflation which made a move within England impossible and I'll always be thankful for that!

The CEGB, realising just how much publicity had been gained

from the controversy about the calendar, somehow managed to neuter NALGO's feminist wing and decided to publish a CEGB Calendar 1987 for the entire electricity board the next year. Whatever anyone thinks of the sexist or inappropriate budgeting of my calendar – which probably had more in common with Patrick Lichfield's 'fashion and glamour in landscape' work – they went all the way and commissioned Britain's least sexist photographer... Bob Carlos Clarke!

– David Kilpatrick

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

GROWING A BUSINESS

IN THE GARDEN

Fifteen years ago Panikos Hajistilly put his North London High Street studio up for sale.

It was an impressive business, inheriting the Venture Studios high turnover model he had learned during his time with that groundbreaking group. Three full double-front shop units created a long window able to display very large wall prints brightly lit at night, seen by thousands of commuters every day whether driving or using the bus. Inside, 2,000 square feet gave space for two large camera rooms along with front of house and viewing.

There had just been one major collapse in the UK economy and 2009 was time when many studios changed hands, not knowing that 2011 and almost every few years since then would throw up equal challenges.

Panikos was a Licentiate of the Master Photographers Association, but batting way above average. He had worked as a Nikon service manager looking after gear at international events like the Olympics, keeping London's media photographers up to date first with repairs and service and later on with training. He'd been a skilled amateur before moving into social photography, and could equally well have chosen to become a landscape, sports, wildlife, fashion or beauty shooter. However he was also a savvy businessman and knew the rewards of portraiture, especially family portraiture in his North London patch.

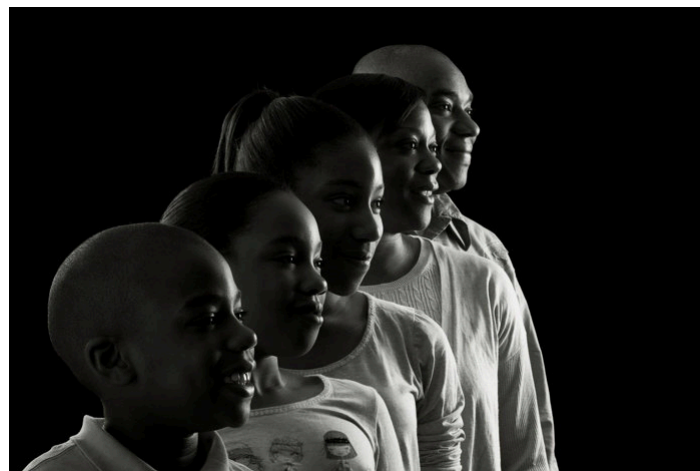
He chose to set up one of the first 'garden room' studios – it's amazing how large the gardens of 20th century semi detached houses in Winchmore area compared to what any developer would consider now! The brick built, carefully designed and fitted studio was up and running ten years before Covid-19, furlough and lockdown persuaded so many High Street studio owners to take the same path if they did not change their entire life plans and careers.

Within a very short time Pani, already well-known to fellow professionals, has achieved his

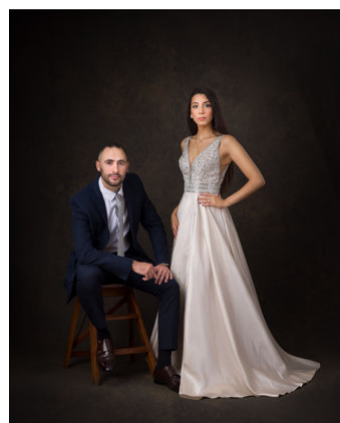
It's an affordable and environmentally friendly solution to owning a studio and in the last few years more photographers have gone down the 'garden room' route.



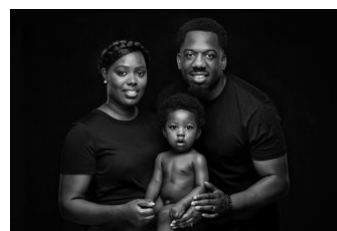
Setting out with the new studio, Panikos used top quality promotional idea.



This lighting and posing technique is a family session favourite which Panikos has perfected – and it's not as simple as it looks!



Three shots from 2020 give an idea of how a fairly small studio can work well with good light control.



Associateship and won a string of awards for innovative angles on the portrait session, making it an experience for the sitters with the potential for action and interaction which younger clients loved. He used Photoshop creatively, lighting expertly with a clutter-free ceiling tracked Profoto flash system, and despite his Nikon heritage a Canon 5D series based outfit able to keep up with his demands. The background roller system in the studio is now as likely to carry Hand Painted Backdrops as plain paper.

This is not a low-value business, as the high quality fitting out of the unit shows. It's not only heated, but air-conditioned which past years have proved essential. A one-hour head shot sitting with Panikos is priced at £250 including four final digital files, and a digital delivery family shoot is £545 for a similar slot covering around 95 shots with five final files. Special offer promotions down to £295 are practical at this price level and form the basis of some of his social media marketing.

By the time the MPA began to change (leading to eventual absorption by the RPS this year) Panikos had won the very last overall top title of their traditional annual awards – Master Photographer of the Year 2017/18. Since then, he's achieved Master Craftsman of The Guild of Professional Photographers, a Fellowship from the British Institute of Professional Photography, the status of Qualified European Photographer from FEP, plus a portrait Fellowship and major category wins like Fashion and Fashion Portrait with the Society of Photographers. He is also a regular winner in the London Portrait Group, a less formal gathering of photographers which he supports.

Most of this has been achieved within the space of his garden studio though he's much in demand to demonstrate lighting and technique in other locations.

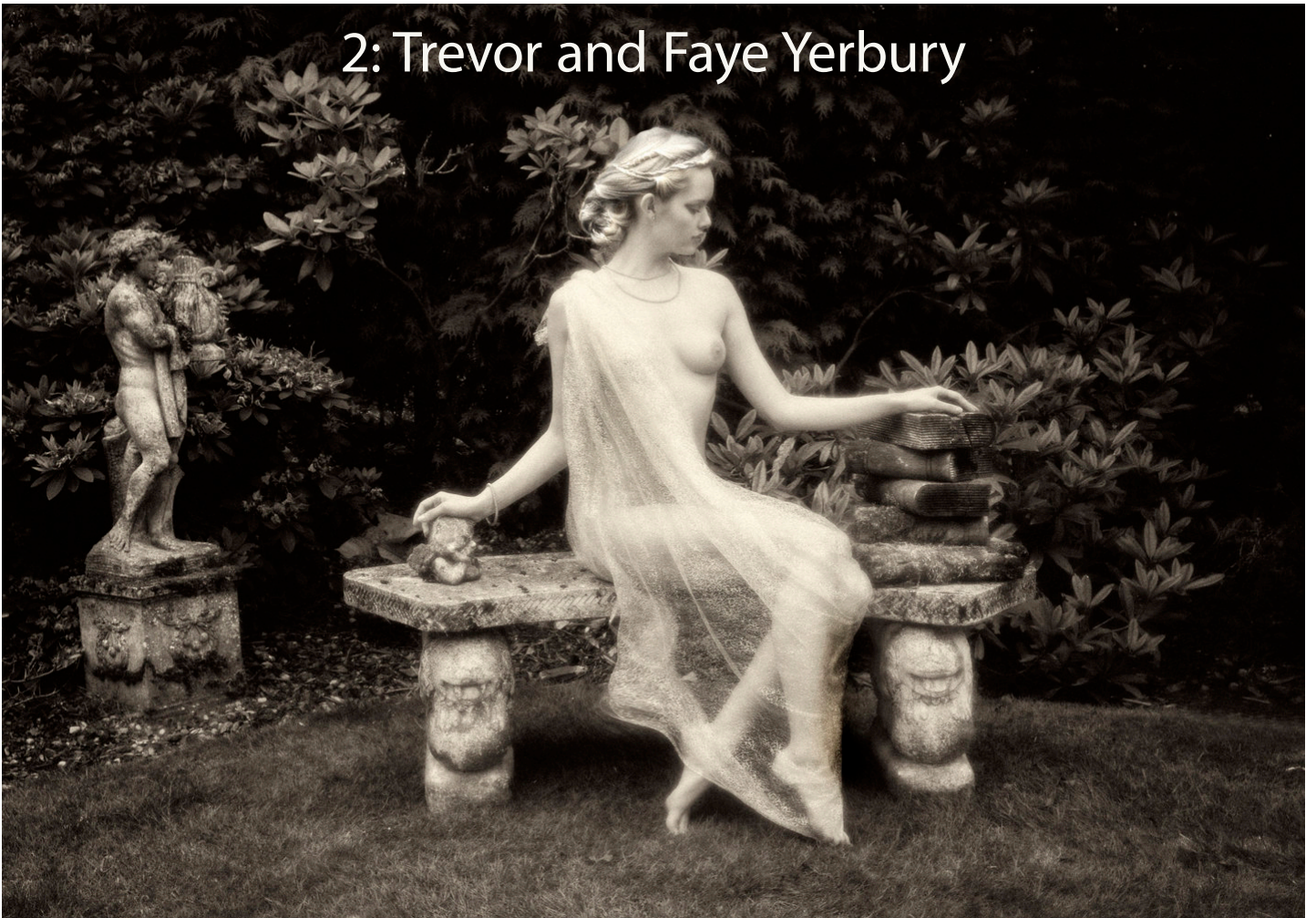
To see more of his work visit <https://www.panikosphoto.com> or follow Facebook [panikos.hajistilly](#) and [@panikosphotography](#).



The outside, with additional storage building to the right, and interior views of Panikos Hajistilly's Winchmore Hill, Enfield garden studio. Relatively low ceilings mean the lighting tracking uses close mounting, not deeper scissor-action hanging, with tracks right up the ceiling. The relatively compact Profoto B2 heads help. Two recent examples below show how light all round the subject can be balanced, and shadowless when needed. Dancer: Sophie Anne Farquhar.



2: Trevor and Faye Yerbury



In 2003, Trevor and Faye Yerbury made the decision to close and sell the Edinburgh New Town East Claremont Street studio, home of the family business (founded 1864 on the corner of Princes Street and Frederick Street) since the early 20th century. While it was an impressively substantial building it was time to move on.

They found a new home at Redmill in the Almond Valley, an architect-designed bungalow in an exceptional position just a few metres away from the river and the old mill lade. In Old Mill Court, a drive gate at the end of the cul-de-sac opens out into a large garden offering space and privacy. They renamed the house Claremont to recall





Studies in the garden – left 'Garden Nymph' photograph by Faye Yerbury; above, 'Reflection' by Trevor Yerbury; right, Carla in 'bridal' muslin, by Faye. Faye styles the models' hair and also creates the fabric drapery. Below left, in the daylight studio, Riona by Trevor.



Yerbury of Edinburgh origins. Its design, with a central link between two wings, lent itself to living and working with a daylight studio easily opened for sitting appointments. While both Trevor and Faye have also made full use of studio lighting when needed – as visitors to national photo shows will have seen demonstrated – the daylight potential of the room is its winning feature. Trevor, with a lifetime using large format vintage cameras and silver halide in a tradition going back to his great-grandfather, may step outside the studio itself, composing through the doorway for full length studies.



Details of the garden at Claremont, left. Below, Trevor in the darkroom, one of two garden buildings, and showing an Innova Pictorico inkjet printed digital neg.

The garden itself forms a natural light outdoor studio with settings devised by Faye and Trevor, landscaped and maintained through his very physical dedication to the art.

His current choice of camera for film is the gold Hasselblad 500CX he's used – not showcased as a trophy! – since it was presented to him as a Kodak Gold Circle winner when that small elite club represented the best in creative portraiture. He uses it with the 80mm and 150mm lenses, and Kodak T-Max 100 film. For digital, it's a Fujifilm X-Pro 2 with the classic look given by their 56mm f1.2 lens (a view very similar to the 150mm). He has a set of well-used canvas backdrops



with tones that translate well to his signature black and white.

This is not ordinary BW – at the edge of the large and beautifully maintained garden there are two buildings, one a brick-built office and workroom, the other a substantial shed darkroom. Here, Trevor makes platinum contact prints from digital negatives on Innova Pictorico Photo Art overhead transparency film. These are output in the workroom from an Epson Surecolor P800 using the highest resolution slow single-direction printing. After that – well, it's alchemy!

The garden gets the same attention as the printing process, and is open on selected days to raise funds for several charities under Scotland's Gardens Scheme. This year cancer, Alzheimer's and hospital charities benefit and remaining open days are Sundays July 14th and August 4th, 2.00-5.00pm.

<https://www.yerburystudio.com>

3: Jules Hunter



Five years ago Jules Hunter, established as an award-winning fine art and social photographer, moved house to one of those rare properties almost ready-made for a photographer.

In the garden, the previous owners had built an 18ft square gym room – it could equally well have been a garage or workshop, but the door and windows into the garden made it a cut above that.

Jules rolled up her sleeves, got to work with ideas and plans, and made it ready to open as The Garden Studio in her village on the Sherwood Forest outskirts of Worksop. Then along came Covid-19 and Jules, a qualified nurse, rolled up her sleeves again for a different task. She returned to the NHS at a time when most would be thinking of retiring. With no chance of launching a studio catering for babies, children and families during the epidemic, she remained on call when needed until this year.

In her previous Worksop studio, she had devised a promotion aimed at young ballet dance pupils. A stage re-creation of a Nutcracker Suite music box provided a platform for ballet poses. It could be repainted to create changes in photo look for



each season, and proved very popular with the dance schools in the East Midlands (*see above*).

The new Garden Studio got quality floor-boarding and wooden panelling to dado height, painted in neutral white, allowing natural light from the windows to be used as well as flash. The big square space means she has three 'sets' which can be lit and propped as needed, just moving lights and camera as needed. A new Music Box – more simply painted for a clean look – is one of her shooting zones and a hand-painted canvas backdrop with a floral swing bringing to mind Fragonard or Watteau is another. The Skytrax-style pantograph system for trip-hazard free family photography is just another tool, a device,





Top: Mia on the Music Box, and in a classical standing pose. Above: a range of light and shade in the studio to suit subject, outfits and accessorising.

to let Jules's real skill shine. In a short space of time at a new location she has established a strong social network. Not the one full of ads and fake news, but the real kind, with community centres, extended families, and friends-of-friends who are keen to benefit from the years Jules put into translating the classical art she studied, into inspiration for award-winning and marketable images.


The potential catchment area for Jules's client base is huge. Reaching those clients is where skill and education meets innate talent, and it's the special ingredient that is crucial

if you want to make a go of portraiture – more than ever, now that every parent, every partner, every employer or agency has a camera full of flattering post-processing tools, and an Insta full of inspiration. But people still want the 10x8s, the little framed portrait for their grandparents or grandkids alike. This is what Jules creates within those four walls, with three ready-to-go possible sets that can be configured rapidly – no fuss, no faffing, just photography and chatting.

Readers of county magazines like *Derbyshire Life* will know Jules

as a fashion photographer, pro photo association members will know her for fine art portraits and conceptual work, her 'van life' and Northern Soul buddies know her for documenting culture and lifestyle often in monochrome and a reportage idiom – but local customers know her for the best portraits of

young dance students and the essential bump to brat years of baby development.

Philter Photography, her trading name, is back in business after Covid changed her course. And everything in the garden is beautiful. 

www.facebook.com/julesleapyear

Sigma 28-45mm f1.8 DN DG ART

One of the great advantages of mirrorless cameras is the compact size, the big reduction in weight. The efficiency of carrying little more than your film-area worth of sensor and the bare minimum needed to capture an image.

Even higher-end cameras targeting professionals used to carrying about bulky DSLRs are somehow smaller, more petite, as if trying to engineer the bulk of a mirror box would be a fakery too far alongside the prism-less prism shapes of the EVF housing. For street and documentary photographers, this is a huge point in favour of upgrading to mirrorless, with some excellent 'pancake' fast lenses available for typical indoor/outdoor scenes and framing.

But it still means swapping between lenses, come rain, snow, dust or pet hair. Don't worry, Sigma's got this covered. An all-new **28-45mm f1.8** constant aperture zoom wraps up the most

popular standard-wide primes in one handy package, sealed against the elements and with the 'Art' branding that signifies Sigma's highest-quality optics.

You can relax, no needing to swap between two or three different fast prime lenses. Instead, the near 1kg, 15cm long and 82mm filter diameter Sigma wide zoom delivers a single-body setup for interiors and close portraiture or architecture, with immensely flexible control of depth of field.

Sigma's attention to detail extends to an aperture ring that can be switched into stepless mode for video, a pair of function buttons between the control rings (on L-mount, these can be assigned to a custom function though the camera's own menus) and side panels on the lens barrel that have the same grippy ribs as the zoom and focus rings, making it an extremely easy lens to hold steady. The build quality and overall finish is excellent, but this isn't a surprise

unless you're old enough to remember Sigma's earliest lenses.

The lens uses 18 elements in 15 groups, takes 82mm filters, is 151mm long and weighs 960g. The minimum focus is constant across the zoom range with a subject scale of 0.25X at 45mm. The lens supports AF, MF, DMF (turning the focus ring after AF is acquired changes focus), and on Sony only, AF Assist which is a similar function where the focus ring will over-ride continuous AF when filming.

Smartphone angles

Why is the 28-45 range so interesting? With increasing numbers of smartphone photographers, and crucially, non-photographers who use smartphones to capture images daily, the field of view of medium wide and wider-standard lenses has become as natural as '50mm for what the eye sees' was in the early days of consumer kits and compacts. Whether it's your own



creative language, or the expectations of a client, 21st century expectations have been shaped in part by the technical limits (and comfortable proximity to subjects) that the iPhone or Android cameras exist within.

The latter point, proximity to





Pictures: 28-45mm on Sigma fp2 body. Moss by Jack Redgate at 45mm and f1.8 (APS-C on Sony A6500); Japanese weaver by Yuchihiro Fujishiro, 28mm at f1.8, both courtesy Sigma. Above, keyboard, 28mm at f1.8 by Richard Kilpatrick.

subject, is worth considering in a moment. What matters with the Sigma lens is that by going for a constant f1.8 potential, and paired with class-leading full-frame sensors, it can put meaningful ground between a neural-engine artificial depth of field effect and smartphone dynamic range. Yes, the composition and light is still important, but if a smartphone is recording a concert on a pocket tape recorder, the Sigma is giving you a full 24-bit, 196kHz master to work with.

In short, the idea is to give you the edge that a smartphone shot can not achieve, and that's what you can sell. Or take pride in. Like the smartphone and Sigma's past fast primes, it'll let you get close – 30cm – and the 11-blade diaphragm can throw background or foreground detail into smooth, liquid blur with ease.

However, there is one tiny, insignificant, really not worth worrying about detail. It's by no means unique to Sigma, but it does highlight why smaller camera bodies need smaller lenses as well.

Part of the charm of a smartphone (at least, in circumstances where it's welcome) is the unobtrusive way it captures people. The 82cm front element, petal hood and inevitable bulk of the Sigma 28-45 f1.8 mounted on the front of my Panasonic S1 with grip is a little too 'in your face' for the flattering selfie angles,

especially when you're not working with professional models or Instagram posers. People who will gleefully beam into a Polaroid are slightly intimidated by such large front elements, and it's why pancake lenses as so rewarding for street shooting and travel with natural, real-life scenes intact.

What is it for?

How much you like the 28-45 really depends on how much you enjoy playing with depth of field within your narrative. It's flawlessly sharp at any aperture, allows relatively close working distances for video, and you very quickly adjust to the

range of perspectives it allows when walking around, making it easier to visualise the shot before you capture it. So it succeeds in taking the iPhone-driven contemporary understanding of 'images' and turning the quality and artistic potential up to 11.

Commercially, it seems like a must-have for natural light, indoor portraiture and architectural work. With the backlash against photographers reported in some circles of wedding photography the ability to lose the popping flashgun and still get a sense of intimate connection within a group, with fine aperture control

and a silent shutter on most mirrorless systems at least, is an obvious justification to choose the Sigma over flipping between your wide and standard primes in a corner of the church.

Technically it gives full-frame photographers the flexibility of the earlier DSLR mount Sigma 24-35mm f2 DG HSM, or the APS-C DSLR 18-35mm f1.8 DC HSM lens. That early entrant into Sigma's Global Vision series is available on a very low budget now, reflecting its suitability for small sensor DSLRs and need for an adaptor for mirrorless systems. The similarities end with the aperture and perspectives though, as the quality for close-focus and wide-aperture shots is reflected in the secondhand values of the APS-C lens.

Verdict: Art is in the hands of the beholder, for just £1,299.

There's no denying that this is a powerful creative tool for photographers, and one that speaks a language a new generation of artists are very familiar with. It is a shame the final product is so bulky, though. Many photographers will probably find the cheaper, lighter and smaller 24-70 f2.8 DG DN II (which features the same function buttons and stepless aperture control) a more versatile all-rounder, with only the most subtle variation in depth of field offered by the new lens.



<https://www.sigmauk.com>



Olympus Pen E-P7

Testing the Fujifilm X100VI for the last issue put me on the trail of other cameras which might have a similar appeal for everyday use – street photography, something to keep in the car, something smaller and less obvious than a system camera. I already use OM-Systems for a highly portable and packable travel kit, and when a greatly reduced price popped up from the company for their Olympus Pen E-P7 along with an offer of a discount code I ordered the white version of the Pen E-P7. The cost including its surprisingly good 14-42mm f3.5-5.6 kit zoom was just £411 plus VAT. The regular OM System on-line price in June was £549 for the white body



with lens, while a black/silver body alone (no lens) was priced at £749 in all dealers. Seems an odd situation.

The white kit was £50 less than the black/silver kit from OM System .com as apparently it doesn't sell as well. Maybe, though more than one passer-by has asked me if it was a Leica, and sitting in the sun it kept cool where my all-black Sony became too hot to handle. It comes with a white leather neck-strap, bulky enough to almost double the bag space needed. My first good camera in the 1960s was an Olympus Pen D and for that I bought a slim metal snake strap. From the start I have always avoided needless bulk.

One real appeal of this summer 2021 legacy of the pre-OM-Systems designers is a 'Color/BW' switch to the lower right of the lens on the camera front, similar to the more expensive Olympus Pen. This works with a range of BW and colour Profiles, allowing the contrast curve, effects filters such

as orange or red in BW, addition of grain and vignetting to be apply to the JPEG produced. A normal raw file is also saved in RAW+JPEG mode so these effects are not baked in. Setting the JPEG quality to Large and Super Fine gives you the best out of camera working file for direct BW shooting.

While OM-Systems (the new company) had clearly taken over a former Olympus Optical Co. product in this model, there's some evidence of the improved menus and functional controls found in their 'own' designs. It's not a massive change and the Pen E-P7 has many of the menu navigation and buried settings puzzles of older Olympus OM-D. A little button on the top, to the right of the shutter release, brings rapid access to settings unique to whatever mode and profile is currently in use for rapid changes without diving into the hierarchy of rear screen menus.

There's an AP (Advanced Photo, not *Amateur Photographer!*) mode on the PASM dial as well as Scene program, Art filter, Movie. Auto and B. This opens up a further layer of customisable functions including the Live Exposure (see the image build up with open shutter or multi shot approaches). Focus Bracketing (no in-camera processing) and the silent electronic shutter going past the 1/4000s mechanical limit for 1/8000s regular or 1/16,000s extended access.

With its all-metal top dials giving two control wheels, a properly sited movie release on the top and not the back of the camera, a pop-up flash and hot shoe the rest of the settings are via very small and precise rear buttons and a four-axis pad with that important 'OK' centre button. For those unfamiliar with Olympus, pressing OK when not already in a function or menu screen brings up a full screen of settings.

Some functions also appear by magic – no need to invoke them. Half-press the shutter release to focus, and a small symbol appears on the screen to indicate whether touch screen is enabled, will set the focus point for shutter-activated

AF, or actually release the shutter after AF when tapped.

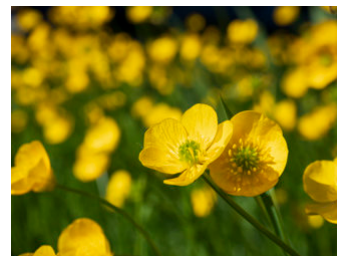
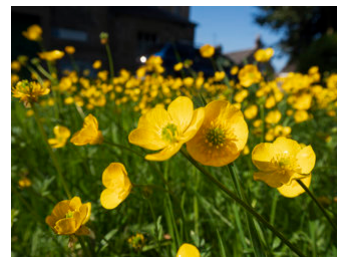
The AF speed, despite it being a contrast-only system, is so fast that you will rarely ever get an out of focus capture and the tap-to-shoot AF is made practical by this. Combined with the 4.5 stop (slightly inferior) sensor stabilisation and a bias towards using faster shutter speeds, the camera is set up to make sharp shots no matter how you hold it. Having an ISO 200 base setting helps, and the FourThirds format being one quarter of the size (half linear) compared to full frame also gives a two-stop advantage in depth of field. Yes, it has a two-stop disadvantage in high ISO noise, and it's only a 20 megapixel sensor, but in practice if you are shooting for print up to A3, movies at 4K or large screen display like the 32 inch UHD monitor I use it works better than full frame in many situations.

You should not worry about setting Auto ISO range to 3200 or using 6400 when needed. Limiting auto to 1600 will give almost noise-free results in all conditions when using the latest Adobe raw conversion.

As for results in general, it's not a 14 or 16 bit look – but a 12-bit raw with a film-like A to D curve outputs colour which looks like a great classic colour slide, vivid and with a full dynamic range. I find my Olympus/OM 4:3 shots not only look bigger than 3:2 ratio in Alamy's browser, they have more punch and life to them. My full frame Sony work gives much greater scope for adjustment, highlight recovery and shadow lift but often lacks the eye-appeal of the Olympus and OM-Systems shots I've produced over the years. You just need to get the exposure right in-camera and the Pen E-P7 does this consistently.

But it is a camera with design flaws and downsides. It doesn't just lack on EVF, it can not be fitted with one. The excellent 3" rear screen uses two horizontal hinges and can indeed angle flat down and almost almost flat aiming up. But its 'selfie' position is frustrating, hanging under the camera where any tripod





Top, BW with Red filter effect in-camera at 14mm with verticals corrected after opening the JPEG in Camera Raw. In-camera correction is also possible. Above left, the closest focus using 2.5x Sony front lens converter at 42mm, good sharpness at f8 though distant views lacked this clarity. It's fairly easy to find 37mm thread lens converters, a legacy from camcorders. Above right, closest normal focus at 14mm (upper) and 42mm (lower).

will be in front of the screen making this self-shooting or filming feature almost unusable.. The screen itself is not very bright and in daylight it's hard to compose, but if you turn the brightness right up it will be deceptive indoors. Normal brightness is recommended for judging Live exposure mode at night and for comfort even the minimum setting can be better. There's no auto screen brightness setting.

While the E-P7 has WiFi/NFC, takes the same batteries as the OM-5 (etc.) and offers in-camera battery charging, it can not record GPS location data from your

smartphone as the OM series will. Nor can it use an external mic or headphones, though the recorded sound quality from the whole range is excellent (portable sound recording was, of course, a key Olympus technology).

The little zoom lens, almost free with this camera. resets to its 14mm (28mm equivalent) view with power on. It's probably the best walk-around lens despite limited aperture, as fast compact primes lack the wide-angle range. It has a 37mm filter thread which happens to be something used by many front-lens wide and tele converters made for video. I picked up a Sony VCL-DH2367 2.5X tele

attachment for under £20 and with the lens set to 42mm and f8 it's pretty sharp. Unlike rear converters, these attachments don't change the aperture, but they do change minimum focus distance. They also do lose some sharpness, but fun to try.

In practice the good close-up ability and overall range of the 14-42mm cover what I like to have in a pocket camera. I have not touched the clever stuff like built-in time lapse 4K movie creation or live time exposures but that's mostly down to not carrying a tripod with this type of camera!



<https://explore.omsystem.com/>

Above, the rear screen articulation – it's good for 'waist-level' or over head viewing of horizontal compositions, or slight angles. But it's almost useless for self-filming as it hangs down behind any tripod mounting! Below, a used 2.5X camcorder tele converter fitted the 37mm thread.



Sigma 24-70mm f2.8 DN DG II ART

The perception of value in a new lens may depend on whether it feels worth the price you pay. Recent Sigma ART lenses aim the challenge the makers' own top lines and are designed to look and feel worth as much.

The DG DN 24mm f2.8 model II ART is squarely aimed at Sony's 24-70mm f2.8 GM II, and almost coincidentally at Panasonic or Leica L-mount equivalents. Sigma had a 24-70mm f2.8, Sony had the first GM lens and updated it to include movie-friendly features including an aperture ring on the lens. Now Sigma has updated theirs to Mark II, and it is immediately clear how closely it resembles the Sony in shape, size and controls including a similar de-clickable aperture ring marked in third stops.

Anyone used to the Sony will find the Sigma familiar – the zoom ring is closer to the camera, the fly-by-wire focus barrel set at the front, and in the space between there's the AF/MF switch and function buttons. The aperture ring runs in the same direction, with the A auto lockable setting to the left of f22.

However, the zoom ring works in the reverse direction. The Sony has 70mm at the left hand end in common with their other zooms such as the 20-70mm f4 G, the Sigma has 24mm at the left and you twist anti-clockwise (seen from the front) to zoom in.

The Sony uses 20 elements in 15 groups, weighs 695g, takes 82mm filters and is 119.9mm long. It focuses down to 21cm at 24mm, 30cm at 70mm, and the largest image scale is 0.32x which is achieved at 70mm. It costs a little over £2,000. That's also the case with the L-mount marques.

The Sigma uses 19 elements in 15 groups, weighs 735g, takes 82mm filters and is 122.2mm long. It focuses down to 17cm at 24mm, 34cm at 70mm, and the largest image scale is 0.37x, achieved at 24mm. At 70mm, the scale is 0.25x. It costs a little under £1,200.

If anything the major difference between them is in the way close



focusing is handled, with the Sigma getting very close indeed to the subject when the strongest close-up is wanted, accompanied by the characteristics of using a wide angle at this distance.

Compared to the 28-45mm f1.8 DN DG launched at the same time, it's a bonus to be able to get 0.37X regardless of the focal length. The very well-made large petal lens hood, which adds to the bag space needed to carry this lens, is best removed when shooting very close as the front element ends up roughly 3.5cm from the subject. The lens hood can easily touch or cast a shadow.

As for 'fit and finish' there is no criticism to level at Sigma now. The slightly matt and slightly polished barrel rings plus the ribbed grips look great and provide tactile clues for handling at eye-level without looking at the lens. The mirrorless design has the inevitable slimming towards the lens mount, and this section might have been better in a matt finish as it's where you are likely to grip the lens when turning it to mount.

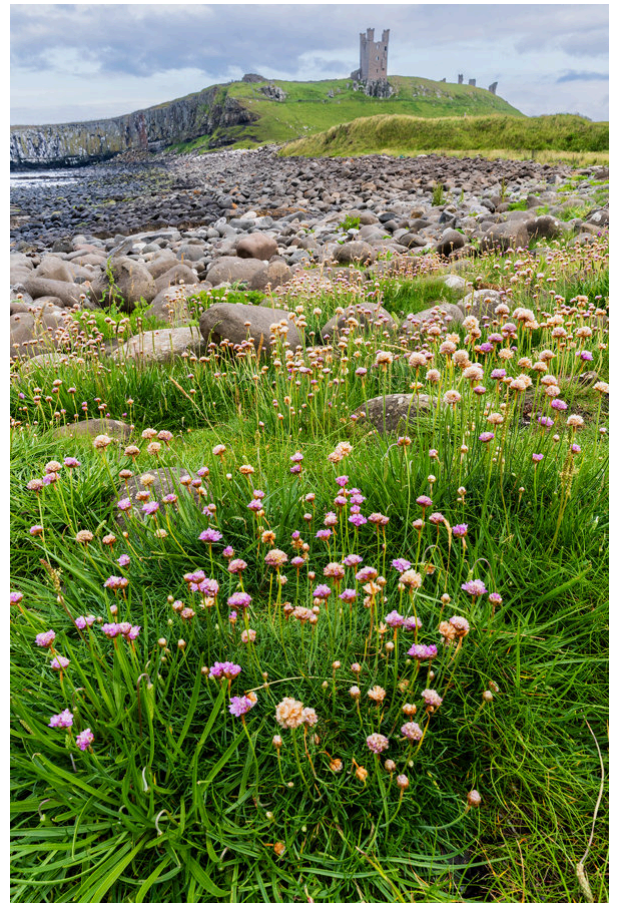
Optical performance

The 24-70mm II shows its best performance at portrait to landscape distances rather than the close-up range. Even when used wide open at 24mm (as in the shot of Trevor Yerbury in his darkroom on page 29) the sharpness of fine detail is crystalline. It's not prone to flare, as



A section of the page 27 shot of Trevor Yerbury as it would look printed to 24 x 36".





The focal length range, aperture and handling of the lens make it a versatile companion. Top left, standing on the bank of a small stream with wind blowing the grasses, an exposure of 0.4s at f16 at ISO 50, 56mm and f16, cropped to square. Top right, at 24mm stopped down to f18, though the sharpness didn't seem to suffer from the small aperture and f22 would probably have been fine. Below, at 70mm, 1/80s at f2.8, ISO 200. There some evidence of chromatic fringes.





The Sigma 24-70mm f2.8 DG DN II was used at 70mm for this view of Dunstanburgh Castle from the marshland to the west. At f8, there's not really enough depth of field for a large print and f16 or even f22 would have been preferable, but this is easily overlooked with hand-held shooting on a walk. The Adobe 'Camera Matching' Standard colour result, below, shows very little promise and the scene looked flat and dull to the eye. However, the marsh grass has a great range of tones brought out by the Adobe B&W 12 profile (which combines high contrast with a red filter effect). For the version above, this profile was used with: -.04EV, +73 Contrast, -41 Black, +20 Clarity, -18 Vignette and the sky area auto masked with -1.90EV. Sony A7RV., 1/80s at f8, ISO 200.



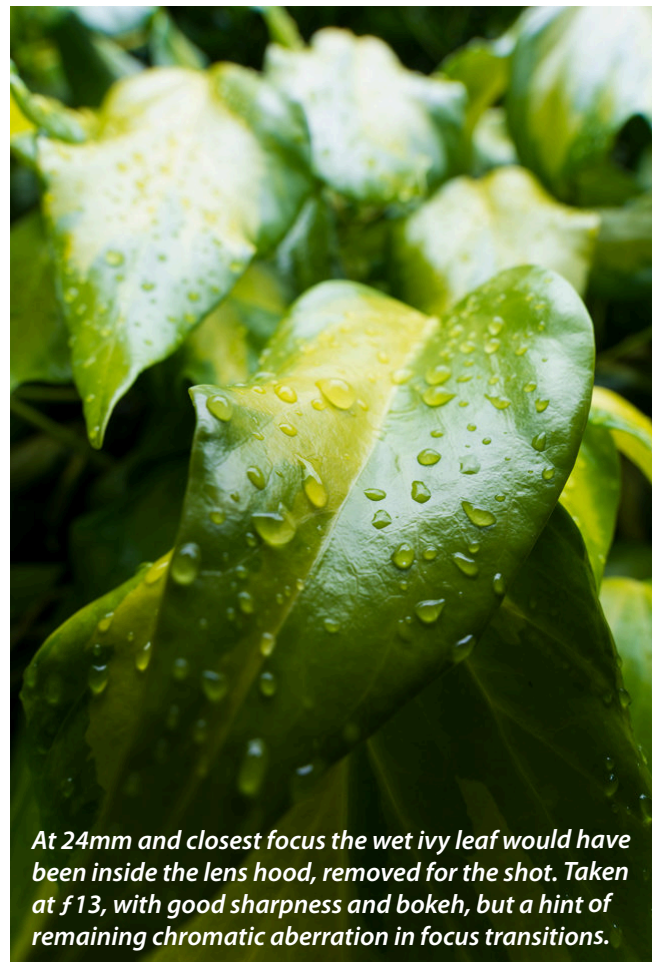
the fluorescent tubes included in that shot show. The geometry is as good as you expect from any modern zoom with a built-in profile to correct this along with vignetting.

With no optical stabilisation, the size and balance of this lens work well. Hand-held exposures up to half a second, even at 70mm, had a good success rate. Stopped right down, diffraction loss was hardly evident on the Sony A7RV. The aperture ring lets you can set from f2.8 to f22 instantly without using camera body controls.

Aberrations appeared when shooting very close up wide open to get strong blur in the background, like the garden centre orchid shot. The edges of the out of focus flowers show a definite hint of longitudinal CA. Stopping down never removes this but reduces it to a few pixels easily fixed in Camera Raw/Lightroom.

Overall it's a great standard zoom with top-of-the-line performance at a midrange price.

<https://www.sigmauk.com>



At 24mm and closest focus the wet ivy leaf would have been inside the lens hood, removed for the shot. Taken at f13, with good sharpness and bokeh, but a hint of remaining chromatic aberration in focus transitions.

PortraitPro v24 – retouching the impossible

A QUESTION in a professional photo organisation's Facebook group asked how it was possible to remove reflections from glasses... and got few useful replies other than take the glasses off, learn how to light your portraits and so on! That's the problem with such groups, there's always a mansplainer out there to call out the questioner as being dumb even to seek help.

But face it, reflections in spectacles DO happen in real life photography, especially group shots, events and at weddings. They can ruin bounce flash shots where the ceiling or walls are lit by flash. Many battery studio-location flash heads now have very low power modelling and it's all too easy to light your subject and fail to spot that your octa-box is reflecting in specs.

When it happens in a set of pictures where the photographer is unable to prevent it, you discover that manual retouching is almost impossible.

Then you see a promotion for PortraitPro's latest AI-powered Version 24 and the 'with and without' processing examples show truly natural looking reflection removal – not making the spec glass look as if it has been removed from the frame, but restoring visible eyes behind a greatly reduced reflection.

For some photographers this function alone – which is automated and very fast on any modern PC or Mac system – is worth the cost of the software. Then you can consider the very subtle and advanced auto retouching for eyes, mouth, skin, hair and poor lighting or colour.

One other function which could rescue a disaster (and this also happens though hardly ever with current digital systems) is the sharpening of faces from a blur. What comes to mind is the group shot where the second row is not sharp.

The new v24 has improved gender and age recognition and controls, and runs very fast indeed on Apple Silicon.

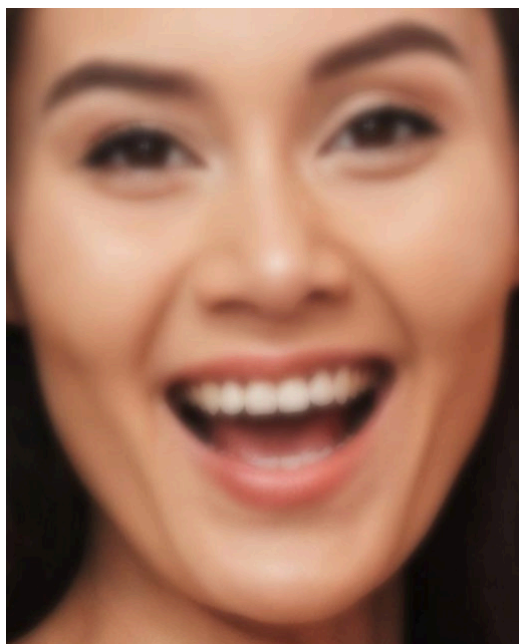
David Kilpatrick has a much fuller review of the spec reflection function in Cameracraft.online, including the variations the program created for reconstructing eye detail behind an even worse reflection. Go to: <https://tinyurl.com/2t6mbdtd> or scan the QR code to read the review. Get 50% off when buying PortraitPro v24 as a download, and an extra 15% off with Cameracraft's code **CC724** at <https://www.anthropics.com/portraitpro>



PortraitPro's own example really is typical of a situation where spec reflections can spoil a head shot in a group or solo.



In our studio room, the editor sat for a selfie deliberately getting the white window blinds reflected in glass, to test the program. By default, other PortraitPro enhancements were applied and you can see the reduced lines and wrinkles, age spots, nose reflection and 'character' round the eyes! Also note the improved skin colour. This took almost no time.



Portrait Pro's own example of rebuilding a face from a blurred shot. It uses AI to recreate missing texture and shape.

Meike 50mm f1.8 AF Z

One of the delights of mirrorless cameras is grabbing an adaptor and a bunch of cheap old manual lenses, and just enjoying taking pictures without worrying about the plethora of expensive, technically advanced lenses you could choose from. Except, of course, the mild inconvenience of having to focus, despite all that clever AF sensor tech in the camera. Oh, and the fungus and scratches. The adaptors are usually crude or expensive, too.

Okay, the delight is getting really cheap glass when you blew all your budget on the all-singing, all-dancing high-end full-frame mirrorless body. Like my Nikon Z7-II – bought for an archival project to take full advantage of the 46Mp sensor, easy access to Nikon's macro and slide copying kit, and with a side order of 'this will bolt onto a copy stand', the one thing I couldn't do was afford the lovely Z-series lenses to go with it.

As such, the **Meike 50mm f1.8 Af Z AF** has a lot of appeal. It's the same focal length and field of view, and aperture, as the old SLR standard kit lenses I'm forever sticking on adaptors and trying to find the sweet spot of 'quirky' but 'usable' with, it's got rudimentary weather sealing, and it costs as much as buying a new genuine lens hood and caps for that 'bargain' used Nikon zoom you found in CeX.

While the focal length is comparable with the SLR classics, the physical length is something of a surprise. Previous Meike lenses followed the pattern set by other budget-brand OEMs in Asia, with manual focus and compact, dense designs that go for headline-grabbing speed such as the f0.95 35mm and 50mm. These keep the image circle restricted to APS-C, which probably explains how they get tolerable performance at such wide apertures.

The 50mm f1.8 uses an STM focus motor and is offered for both Nikon Z mount and Sony E mount. It weighs under 400g, and is just under 100mm long excluding the



The Meike packaging is tidy but not made to feel like a luxury item (which Laowa, Viltrox and other Chinese makers do). The lens is large. Below, next to Sony's 50mm f1.8 FE. The front rim high gloss is an odd design anomaly, and the front element is concave. The mount is very well machined but the red rim does not indicate weather sealing.

Around £140-180 on-line or through Amazon.



mount and lens hood (this is at odds with the spec, which claims 73mm). Although it looks bulky, it has a 58mm filter thread.

Physically, it's inconsistent; the end of the lens is finished with a shiny black trim that looks cheap, and the lens hood bayonet is flimsy and often snaps out of register. Once mounted correctly it stays on well, and the rest of the lens is a very uniform, matte-grey plastic feel with just a focus collar and a manual/auto focus switch to break up the surfaces. Naturally with that length of barrel, it's internal focusing and the front doesn't rotate, making it easy to use effects filters.

The natural rivals for the Meike 50mm f1.8 AF are Viltrox's 50mm f1.8, which costs more and adds an aperture control ring, and Nikon's own 50mm f1.8 Z which weighs slightly more, has a larger filter thread, but is physically a little shorter. The Nikon lens costs three to four times as much, and uses two ED and two aspherical elements in the 12 element, 9 group formula, where Meike has one ED rear element and one aspherical in its 11 element, 7 group design.

Unsurprisingly for a 21st-century lens produced by a firm that is OEM branding four-figure bundles of cine lenses for



Swinging light bulbs, autofocus at 1/320s and f1.8 with focus tracking the centre bulb.



Aperture choices: top, 1/2500s at f1.8 – very sharp on the people walking, fall off most visible at the left hand end. Centre, at f2.8 – pin sharp as focused, smooth bokeh, no fall off. Bottom – f5.6, ISO 640, just the right depth of field and natural looking background bokeh.

videographers, the Meike 50mm f1.8 is a strong performer in a rather light, but useable package. It doesn't feel as solid to touch or use, but optically, it's difficult to find fault. Wide open, there's some fall-off in flatness of field towards the outer edges resulting in a gentle blur at full aperture, but a central subject should be pin-sharp when benefiting from on-sensor focus accuracy.

Objects in the foreground for close, narrow depth-of-field compositions can show some fringing, but background and focused subjects are remarkably clear, with smooth circular bokeh (the diaphragm is 9 blade, rounded – the days of cheap five-bladed apertures away from special effect lenses seem long gone).

Focus is quick and silent, though that's from the perspective of working with cameras over many decades; it may seem slow next to the latest state-of-the-art hardware, but at this price it's impressive and much better than a secondhand servo motor or worn-out ultrasonic option.

Is it worth buying?

With close focus at mere 63cm compared with Nikon's 40cm, if you're finding offers that bring the Nikon down to the lower end of its prices (or a good secondhand example – typically around £300), the upper end of price you might pay for the Meike when you take tax and shipping into account is probably not the best value.

For less than £180 on Amazon, however, it's a great 'fit and forget' multi-purpose lens for portraiture, general travel and working conditions where your lens can be at risk

I'd recommend this, and saving your budget for better specialist lenses, rather than blowing all your money on the expensive same-brand primes and getting your more purposeful glass from the cheap brands.



<https://www.meikeglobal.com>

RESTORATION

Cleaning a vintage Nikon 35mm f2.8 AI

Try removing fungus from old lenses and you may need to get your Nikkors in a twist – with some specialist tools to do the twisting. Some vintage lenses are much easier than others to clean, and one of the simplest must be the five element, five group 35mm f2.8 Nikkor AI from 1979-81.

When fungus gets into a lens and grows on the surface of the elements, it can over time etch the relatively optical glasses used. They may be inorganic but the fungus is a living thing and produces acidic waste. The effect is minimal and most easily seen on coated lenses one the fungus itself is removed. When a lens has cemented elements, it is also possible for the balsam cement glueing these together to be attacked, in addition to 'shell marks' from separation. When two or more elements are in a sub-assembly sealed at the factory (most likely in modern zoom lenses and not older manually assembled designs) the sealing may not be enough to prevent fungus getting inside. Either of these cases will be beyond the cleaning resources we're showing here.

There are many manual lens designs similar to this Nikkor. It came with a well-used but fully functional Nikon F3 HP plus MD-4 motor-drive, remote release and waist level finder, along with a Nikkor AI 300mm f4.5, found in an antique shop. Because both lenses had what seemed to be terminal fungus – a finder view obscured by fog rather than mist – an offer was made accordingly. None of the kit would ever be highly saleable even if cleaned as it had seen too much hard use or abuse.

The first problem to tackle was a dented front rim of the 35mm. This wasn't just ugly, it prevented any filter from being screwed in and might have prevented the front name bezel of the lens being unscrewed. The solution was to get a Neewer lens tool via Amazon.

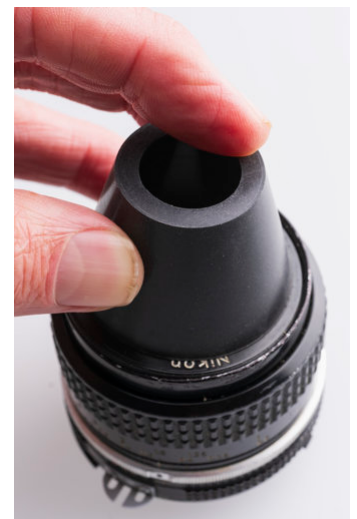
This brand is Chinese, but trusted. The tool resembles a screw clamp but has flat blade and sharp point side inserts, locked home with a hex grub screw (two spares provided). On either side there are castings with 0.75mm pitch grooves (not a screw thread, parallel). One is a large diameter, the other small. By putting the expander these create inside the filter rim, tightening into the threads using the screw and then rotating in both directions while relaxing or tightening the fit as needed, the dented rim is forced back to a usable circle. The small diameter can be used to push out definite dents.

It took about ten minutes or repeated pressure and rotation to get the dented rim able to accept a 52mm filter easily. At this point, a second tool is needed – one of a set of hard rubber cones. If you've never seen these (we had not) they seem expensive for what they are, but they turned out to be more than useful. You press one end of the cone, narrow or wide, on to the bezel or on to any of the retaining rings which hold the lens assemblies in place. Without using any metal tool which could slip and cause damage, the friction is enough to unscrew most rings. The front bezel came out cleanly revealing dust and hair which had got inside the lens over time.

To unscrew the front optical assembly, a tiny drop of acetone nail polish remover was needed to penetrate the retaining ring threads, then the pointed arms of the Neewer tool made a very positive fit into the slots of the ring. It unscrewed with little effort once the seal (tiny amount of locking goo applied when the lens was made) was broken. After this, a rubber cone did the work safely. The same method released the rear optical assembly, using the flat blade arms not points. The inner element retaining rings only needed a rubber cone of the right



Top, the lens after removing its front bezel, the name and serial number plate which screw into the filter thread until firmly seated. The Neewer Lens Vise tool above is clamped inside the damaged thread by outward pressure and rotated to make it circular again. The rubber cone can then unscrew the bezel.



Above right, the Neewer tool's pointed prongs used to unscrew the front element retaining ring. The rear group unscrewed with initial help from the flat blade prongs, then one of the set of rubber cones. These also came in useful hold the optical assemblies (bottom left) as the shape of optical units tend to be either a cylinder or a stepped series of cylinders. The components of the lens during cleaning are laid out below right.





Before and after fungus removal, above. A bright sky, a window or a light source will show whether a lens is in this state even when the fungus is not immediately visible. As SLR viewfinders, mirrors and focusing screens can all be affected by dirt or fungus, check a lens on a modern digital body.



The 35mm $f2.8$ pre-focused and set to $f8$, subject focus judged in the EVF when moving the camera closer or further. Right, 270dpi, equal to a 36 inch print.



Although it's a simple old design, the 35mm Nikkor focuses down to 30cm. Setting minimum focus and $f5.6$ a shutter speed fast enough to stop chicken movement (very fast and unpredictable) showed its cleaned quality. The $f11$ sunstar through branches is a serious test of a cleaned-up lens.



The workbench photographed using the lens just cleaned up on it! At $f11$ with studio flash the detail in the texture of the rubber blower bulb, and throughout all the shot, is as good as any current lens but the contrast is low. In the shot you can see two grey lens cloths included with the Neewer tool, some rubber cones for unscrewing groups and retainer rings, the Neewer tool with its prongs and spare grub screws, a lens-pen, precision screwdriver, a bottle of nail polish remover (acetone based), cotton wool bud and an unused glass cleaning cloth from a screen protector kit.



ColorCoral dust removal goo is a product used for cleaning components and getting dust out of things like textured car dashboards. It needs care but it's great for cleaning dusty cameras and lenses (not the optical surfaces though!).



diameter. This particular lens design is easy to dismantle without touching the main barrel or the aperture mechanism. There is no need to unscrew focusing helicoids or replace any component in a precise alignment to mechanical parts. The front assemble simply fits in front the aperture iris and is removed from the front, the rear assembly from the rear. All mechanical functions of this old lens were working well.

All the elements could be cleaned on both sides, though the innermost front and rear glass remained mounted in the overall assemblies. A lens-pen with carbon cleaning head was ideal for getting to these, after blower-blasting, lens cleaner and a fresh lens cloth (Neewer pack two in with the tool) to start the job. However, the fungus remained.

Domestic cleaning

You have a lens fungus remover at home – almost for sure! Clean vinegar, weak ammonia or hydrogen peroxide solution will all kill the fungus. Domestos Oxygen bleach, a pure weak peroxide, works well. Drop a fungus-covered single element into a dish of this and you'll see it fizz slightly and a film of the contamination lift off. The element then needs careful washing and even more careful drying. It will still need some polishing with a new lens tissue or cloth. You will find a lens brush and some cotton wool buds useful.

The caveat is that this cleaning process may affect coatings on some lenses. The Nikkor's coating was not great to start with, but no worse after immersion.

Checking the reassembled lens, it was necessary to get into a couple of times before it was clean enough to use. It was not possible, with such an old neglected lens, to restore it to perfect condition as that would need ultrasonic cleaning and cleanroom assembly, not to mention re-coating the external glass. The internal elements did not seem to be multicoated at all.

When removing the filth from different parts of the lens, we used ColorCoral cleaning 'slime' – it's also what we use for getting dust off cameras and items being photographed. A gob of this will lift

dirt from inaccessible recesses, and from its virgin blue colour turns a mucky blue-green with what it picks up. However, when cleaning inside the front unit some got left behind and was not spotted until the lens began misting over – even tiny quantities of this gel contain a surprising amount of water. It's like the reverse of dried silica gel, and if you do use it, get any trace of it removed. Normally it does not leave scraps behind but this lens was dirty it did, calling for a quick third dismantle and final clean.

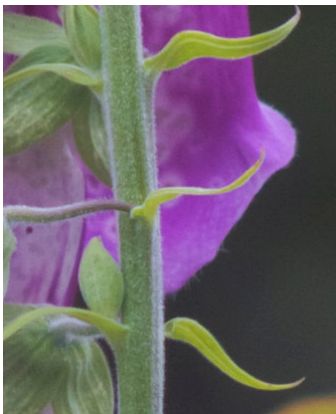
Whether loose (4th element) or rim mounted (5th element) the single glasses are not easy to insert into the ribbed tubes perfectly seated. It's easy to understand how rogue lenses can exist with an element at an angle. A rubber sucker made for hard contact lens handling would help. Once alignment was thoroughly checked and the lens examined to see that the surfaces were clear and clean, with only minor evidence of the etching from fungus, test shots made on Sony A7RV with a £20 K&F Nikon F/AI/G adaptor showed that it's a very high resolution lens for the simplest of all the Nikkor 35mm f2.8 designs.

Before cleaning, any hint of backlight from a bright sky or a window veiled the entire field in bright soft glare. After cleaning, it was possible even to shoot right into the sun though the sunstar shows evidence of directional flare from the cleaning.

The 300m lens has equally bad fungus, but proves surprisingly sharp and could almost be used as it is. It will be a superb lens once cleaned – but this is not a simple job like the 35mm, and may need more tools to access deeply set retaining rings. The cost of the Neewer lens vice tool and rubber cone set was £64 – tools for life, but not worth that to repair a lens with a likely value of £30. It's good to work at that level to learn how to do this with a lens which does not need a full strip-down.

For vintage camera and lens repairs in the UK, see Liverpool firm <https://www.newtonellis.com/> – still in business but the partners will work from home once the premises lease ends.

– DK



A fungus-hazed 300mm

The other lens obtained with this 45-year-old camera was a 300mm f4.5 Nikkor AI. The full shot below needed only a change from Linear to Strong Contrast curve in raw conversion for a very natural look. Examined in detail, the ISO 400 image taken at 1/200s and f8 with image stabilisation manually set resolves even the fine hairs on the rim of the flower. When cleaned, this should be a stunningly sharp lens – if not very practical. Focusing was by magnified EVF view.



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REARVIEW



Sony World Photography Awards 2024

Above, the overall Open Winner by Liam Man (UK) shows a snowy Quiraing on Skye lit by his signature drone light painting, with a 220-second exposure at $f8$ on Sony's 35mm $f1.4$ GM lens, ISO 100, A7RV. Below, in the Professional portfolios, the Sustainability Prize went to Katie Orlinsky (USA). She writes: "Joe Saenz, a wilderness outfitter guide, environmental activist and educator from the Chiracahua Apache Nation, leads a horseback pack trip through the Gila Wilderness of New Mexico. Over ten days, Joe and his handler Kristen Kairos led National Geographic writer Peter Gwin, photographer Katie Orlinsky and podcast producer Brian Gutierrez across hundreds of miles of canyons, pine forests, mountain ranges, rivers and winding streams. Throughout the Journey Joe shared knowledge about the Gila Wilderness today, and its history as the ancestral homeland of the Apache." Sony A9II, 24-70mm $f2.8$ FE, 1/500s at $f5$, ISO 640.

Each year the Sony World Photography Awards stages a very brief exhibition at the end of April in to the first week of May, at Somerset House in London. It's a pay to enter show of around 800 prints. I does not tour and if you blink or don't live or work in London, you've missed it, unlike the Wildlife Photographer of the Year and similar awards which tour the UK. Here we show selected winners.

Sony World Photography Awards 2025 entry is now open. The Student competition closes 29/11/2024, the Open (including National & Regional Awards and Alpha Female Award) and Youth competitions closes 3/1/2025. The Professional competition (including Latin America Professional Award and Sustainability Prize) closes 10/1/2025. Entry is free.

See:
<https://www.worldphoto.org>





Overlaying graphic art and photographs, Sujata Setia (UK) won the Professional 'Creative' Award for her portfolio of portraits themed on the 'Death of a Thousand Cuts' ancient method of torture and execution once practiced in Asia. This was paralleled to the issue of controlling abusive relationships, with portraits of women and different graphic elements all in the same slashed red and black manner. For the portrait itself, Sujata used a Canon EOS 5D MkIV with 50mm f1.2 lens, with flash at f13 at ISO 320.



Above, by Siobhán Doran, Ireland, Winner, Professional competition, Architecture & Design. Siobhán's portfolio documented restored heritage sugar plantation houses in the Philippines. She used a Canon EOS 5DS with the 17mm f4 TS-E tilt-shift lens, 0.5s at f13, ISO 100.

Below left, Tine Poppe, Norway, 3rd Place, Professional competition, Creative. Tine used an Olympus EM-1 MkIII with 45mm f1.2 lens, 1/60s at f5, ISO 64.

Below right, well known for location lighting and use of colour, Britain's Drew Gardner took 3rd place in Professional Portraiture with this wet-plate simulation created using a Fujifilm GFX 100S with the 120mm f4 OIS Macro lens and an exposure of 0.5s at f16 and ISO 100, replicating 1860s shooting conditions.



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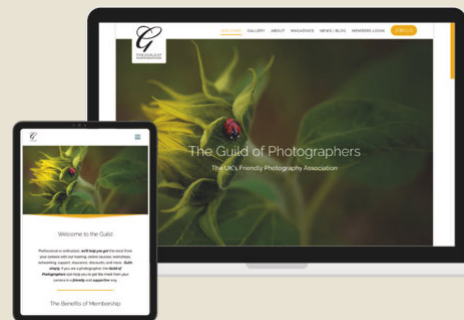
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