

photoworld



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Cover: by David Kilpatrick

It looks lovely – but we never got into that pool! Early morning, ten minutes before handing a sample NEX-5 back to Sony with an exhausted battery and full card, and the first clear sunshine we got to see in our 24 hour Press visit to Split. The 16mm lens at f10 (and 1/500th, ISO 200) is bitingly sharp corner to corner but colour and contrast needed a boost to Vivid setting for this Sony IDC raw conversion. Hotel Meridien Lav and Adriatic sea.

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Sony moves towards pole position

IT WILL not take much to put Sony into the number one position for sales of large sensor cameras – APS-C and full-frame – if the present trends continue and the rollout of models is as predicted by many observers.

Photokina is coming very soon, in the second half of September, but we have to cope with the almost certain launch of new models in August. And our Summer issue is supposed to be July, really, so we can't wait for news.

The new models are DSLRs which use a pellicle mirror, wrongly called 'pellex' by many. Pellex was, and is, a trademark of Canon and was the name of a camera in the 1960s which used a pellicle (stretched plastic skin vacuum coated with a semi-silvered mirror surface). Pellicle does not have any meaning connected with semi-silvering or beam splitting in itself; it actually refers to the use of the stretched (Mylar) ultra-thin film which forms the mirror substrate. It means 'skin' and in this sense, it's being used like a drum skin.

Sony's patents relating to pellicle mirrors include positioning the mirror at rather less than 45°, so that the image-forming rays are not directed vertically upwards but slightly forwards. About a third (or less) of the image light is diverted to an AF sensor located in the top of the camera, around the front of the space normally taken by the prism. The rear part of the 'prism' is devoted to an electronic viewfinder, or EVF, similar to the Konica Minolta Dimage A2 or the Sony Cybershot DSC-R1. There is no focusing screen, and the image is fed from the sensor (14 or 16 megapixels, 1.5X factor) to this viewfinder or the rear screen as required.

In many ways this is like a DSLR version of the bridge camera, but with phase detection autofocus similar to a regular SLR, rather than contrast detection as used on the NEX models (see the full coverage in this issue).

Sony's pellicle, unlike Canon and Nikon models from 1965 onwards, is a moving mirror – or so it is thought. The movement may be optional. In fixed mode, 1/3rd of the light is lost, so exposures in low light would be less satisfactory, or action shots could not get quite as fast a shutter speed. But for 90% of everyday photography, the mirror would not need to move, and this includes HD movie shooting which could benefit from the fast tracking of phase detection AF not taken from the sensor.

For special conditions, the mirror could move out of the way. At least, that's how the patent diagrams have been interpreted.

In practice, what this means is that Sony will have an Alpha A-mount DSLR with good HD video abilities, live view, real-time action focusing with all lenses, video tracking focus with quiet SAM and SSM lenses, an electronic eye level viewfinder and relatively quiet operation.

What will this mean, if the predictions are correct?

An A5XX series and A700 successor, with HD 1080p video, live view with acceptable contrast-detection autofocus and excellent phase-detection, but perhaps with no optical viewfinder? There remains a strong chance that the patents seen don't relate to the A5XX or A7XX model, but other/s, and revised conventional DSLRs with optical prism finders will also be released.

The effect on NEX sales – which have been broken all records for Sony, proving that they could bring something to the range which Minolta might never have conceived – might be negative. Or not. The NEX is something unique, as this issue will show you. I have never spent more on rescuing ancient lenses and peculiar bits of gear – and rather wish I had kept all that Minolta CLE, Leica screw and other kit I once had but sold!

– David Kilpatrick

The NEX system

The Sony Alpha NEX system uses the new E-mount and offers a pocketable mirrorless slim live sensor view alternative to DSLR bulk. With the same 14.2 megapixel CMOS size as the Alpha 550, it adds full HD movie shooting and exceptional scope for experimenting with lenses.

I COULD almost have bought a NEX-3 camera for the outlay involved in getting to Gatwick Airport to meet Sony's press team for a very quick trip to Split in Croatia. Fortunately, I was reporting for the *British Journal of Photography* and this was a paid assignment with reports filed by email to appear on their website, and in the magazine.

Needless to say, on return I checked the dealer advertisements because Sony revealed they had given every scrap of information in advance to key dealers. The prices and specifications for the NEX-5 and NEX-3 kits were already in print and on-line. I ordered a NEX-5 twin lens kit, a stereo microphone, an adaptor to fit my Alpha lenses on the slim rangefinder-style NEX body, and a free accessory kit including a spare battery.

Even just the single day and night we had with the NEX models on the Dalmatian riviera was enough to let me know I wanted one, and not just a review loan sample. I wanted one to keep, and use.

What exactly is the NEX?

Simple enough. It's the first APS-C (15 x 23mm) format compact system camera. There have already been many such cameras designed for the FourThirds system, including the classic 'relaunch' of the Olympus Pen as the Pen Digital or EP-1 followed by Panasonic's GF1.

Unlike earlier Panasonic models (G1 and GH1) which look a bit like SLRs and have an eye level electronic viewfinder, these new slim models rely on the rear screen for viewing and composing pictures. They may or may not offer a plug-in electronic viewfinder for eye level use, or some kind of optical accessory finder.

Sony has apparently decided not to offer an electronic finder, but the slot on top of the camera which accepts a tiny accessory flashgun (provided with every NEX body) is used for a rather expensive optical finder which is matched to a slim 'pancake' 16mm lens. This slot has an array of electronic contacts – perhaps more than either the flashgun or the stereo microphone which also fits there

A black NEX-3 fitted with the 18-55mm OS zoom (without hood)



The NEX-3 is slightly larger than the NEX-5 seen below as delivered in silver finish with 16mm and 18-55mm twin lens kit. The shutter release is in a different position and the hand grip is long and slim, not deep



The oddest view of the NEX-5 with one-inch thick 16mm lens shows how tiny the body is, with the very large rear screen folded out for waist/chest level use. It's all lens.



The TruBlack screen below shows how dark and non-reflective it is in our studio conditions. Outdoors it can be turned up to a very high brightness.



would need. There are 14 gold contacts in a narrow array spanning just 6.8mm, a very fine pitch indeed. For comparison, an SD card uses contacts almost 2mm wide and fits nine across 21mm; an MS Duo card has contacts about 1mm wide with ten across 14.5mm. The NEX accessory interface contacts are barely 0.5mm wide each.

Surely this indicates that an electronic viewfinder is planned, as there is no way that the flash or mic can ever need this complex an interface.

However, for the moment the NEX models are strictly for arm's

length, close vision limit, chest or waist level composition on a very bright and clear 3 inch HD format rear screen with hard glass finish.

It is very similar to the articulating screen of the Alpha 300, 350, 380, 500 or 550 but the brightness is improved and the metal frame supporting the screen has been made as slim as possible. A special 'sunny day' mode can be used instead of manual or auto brightness, and this really does allow you to see the picture you are composing even on the brightest day.

NEX or Alpha?

At this stage, given that the NEX models are extremely light and compact compared to any SLR, you may already have decided whether or not you can function efficiently

with a viewing screen and no viewfinder. Your eyesight could be the determining factor; there is no dioptre adjustment available on a bare screen! If you can see to read a paperback comfortably in the specs you wear every day, you will be fine. I can't, but taking my specs off solves the problem. The camera becomes even easier to use with reading glasses which I use for close-up work.

It is worth mentioning that viewing hoods with a magnifying lens are made by third parties to fit the screen. One of these may be a good solution if you can't use LCD screens comfortably.

The idea of the NEX models is that they should be pocketable snapshot cameras when fitted with the 16mm f2.8 lens, and reasonably compact neckstrap friendly combinations with the 18-55mm kit zoom. This is much smaller than the similar lens for DSLRs, taking 49mm filters. The zoom is optically stabilised, as the NEX body is too small to allow sensor based stabilisation. This in turn means that the combination with the 16mm lens lacks any form of stabilisation.

At first, I thought this would be a disadvantage for stills and make movies almost impossible. In fact, the 24mm equivalent angle combined with the relatively light shutter action of the camera (and of course, no mirror) solves the still problem. Movies can enter 'Blair Witch' mode easily enough if you move around a lot with a wide-angle lens, but it's not seen as shake, more a kind of dynamic action.

Whether in the NEX-3 (plastic body, slightly larger size, 720p movies) or the NEX-5 (magnesium alloy body, smallest camera of its class, 1080p movies) the heart of the camera is essentially an Alpha 550. The NEX-3 lacks wireless remote control support.

The shutter speed range is the same – 30 seconds to 1/4000th – with flash sync at exactly the same 1/160th. The megapixel count is the same, the ISO speed range of the CMOS sensor is identical at 200 to 12,800. The primary options for shooting are also the same, including colour space (sRGB or aRGB) and scene modes. The maximum frames per second rate is the same at 7fps, indicating that the sensor and the BIONZ processor are comparable. The card media choice is the same SD or Memory Stick Pro Duo, though a single slot is used which can handle either type.

The NEX-5 can be operated by the standard wireless remote controller for the Alpha range, and the file format is .ARW with an updated version of Sony Image Data Converter provided to handle it.

The NEX accessory flash turns on when flipped up, and stores flat to the body



The 18-55mm's lens hood can also be used on the 16mm f2.8 lens



Three uses for body to lens adaptors: top, Chinese Leica thread adaptor with Russian Jupiter 50mm f2 lens; middle, LA-EA1 adaptor with M42 adaptor, Pentax bellows unit and 25mm f2.5 Minolta Micro lens; bottom, Chinese C-Mount adaptor with 12.5-75mm Kowa f1.8 zoom (covers about 6 x 9mm image area).

Key differences, which enable the mirrorless design with live auto-focusing from the sensor, are:

- * The CMOS sensor can provide a high resolution video feed

- * Contrast Detect autofocus is enabled from the sensor, both for stills and during video filming

- * Continuous shooting is slowed to 2.3fps if AF is used, rather

than the 5fps of the Alpha 550

- * Improved rear LCD screen with similar articulation, but better brightness and contrast for viewing in all conditions

- * A new lens mount slightly narrower than Alpha, but only 18mm from the sensor plane instead of about 44mm, with electronic control of aperture and focus

- * No flash shoe or terminal

- * No in-body SSS (sensor based stabilisation)

- * No physical dial for mode setting, and fewer buttons for functions as all these are replaced by a new user interface on the screen

Retro appeal

Despite the new user interface – the cause of more early complaints than any other aspect of the NEX design – Sony saw fit to make sure that a certain type of enthusiast buyer was not left in the cold.

Where the Alpha 900, 850 and all current entry level or consumer models can only operate in manual exposure mode with 'alien' lenses the NEX is able to auto-expose. A simple menu option enables shutter release without lens, but this leaves the metering active and it doesn't matter whether the camera is set to A (Aperture Priority) or P (Programmed) mode.

With the camera, Sony showed an E mount to A mount automatic adaptor. This £149 accessory, the LA-EA1, is intended to allow autofocus with SSM and SAM type lenses having built-in focus motors. This function has been disabled in firmware between prototype and first production stage, and Sony apologise for what will hopefully be a temporary delay. We await a firmware update..

But the adaptor has a micromotor which operates the mechanical aperture of Minolta/Sony Alpha AF lenses, making PASM and all other exposure modes available when any Alpha lens is fitted, right back to 1985.

Once the firmware is finally sorted for autofocus or some kind of 'bleep' focus confirmation, the NEX system will be even more attractive to owners of a collection of HSM, SSM, SAM and Tamron lenses with motorised focus.

The great news is that we have tested Sigma OS (optically stabilised) lenses on the LA-EA1 and their OS is fully functional. The adaptor passes through the power correctly, and both our 18-250mm OS and 70-300mm OS provided a smoothly stabilised view.

You might expect that Sony would limit retro lens fitting to their own E-to-A mount, which does have electrical contacts and a chip to identify itself. But they have not; the camera will work with ANY adaptor.

Because there has never been any camera made with a thinner body, almost every lens you can find from the last century or two of optical production will work on it and focus to infinity. I was able to buy Leica screw thread and Bolex C-mount adaptors within a month of the NEX launch.

Of course, being able to fit



Above: taken with the Sigma 70-300mm at 200mm, manual focus, hand-held with stabilisation. The image is very sharp at the focused point. Red River hoglets.



The LA-EA1, above and below, can adapt Minolta AF lenses to the NEX bodies with auto aperture control but manual focus only. The Sigma OS is supported.



CCTV and 16mm ciné lenses to an APS-C camera is little more than an academic experiment. They cover about one-ninth of the full frame, or a 1.5 megapixel image.

Leica lenses are far more useful, as are all the lenses from Nikon, Canon, Contax, Voigtlander, Pentax and countless other makes which you can now adapt for NEX.

This includes Minolta MD lenses, which could never be used on the Alpha DSLRs (or SLRs) with infinity focus. A £50 adaptor with a tripod mount allows my vintage 200mm f4.5 MC Rokkor to prove that it's not really as sharp as any decent modern zoom...

This, of course, is the folly of messing round with all manner of

glassware just because you can. It must all be manually focused, using the excellent 7X or 14X live focusing on the rear screen; the aperture must be manually set. It is not always necessary to open up the aperture to focus, as you can see the slightest change at 14X even when working at settings like f11, and the gain on the sensor provides a perfectly bright image.

Fix the NEX to a microscope, macro bellows, a telescope, a tilt-shift mechanism or some other unusual applied optical gear and there is no hint of pointless experiment. You get a tool the like of which has never been seen before, a tiny lightweight high resolution imager which almost anything can support.

The other obsession, with ultra high quality camera lenses, is also not folly. Manually focused directly on the sensor at high magnification, some Leica M lenses can yield breathtaking sharpness and textural detail. A tripod must be used.

Within a week of getting my NEX-5, I was experimenting with micro lenses using a Minolta M-2 microscope thread adaptor and a Chinese made Leica thread mount for NEX.

I can not praise Sony too much for making this possible. When

you fit any 'dumb' mount to the camera, the bottom right hand button next to the focusing screen becomes a manual enlargement focus button (one press 7X, two presses 14X). The camera actually responds to third party adaptors by providing the necessary function.

Action – unpacked?

This is one side of NEX which works. But there's real weakness in NEX for the everyday user, who has no interest in creating strange rig-ups using Lensbaby or macro bellows. The camera simply is not fast enough to capture expressions, let alone actions. The camera takes about 2 seconds to 'come to life' in switch-on, but it also takes a similar time to wake up from sleep mode. Between each shot, there is also a kind of hiatus even if you don't review the image.

It has face detection for focusing, and Smile Shutter which will automatically fire the camera when a smile is detected. These modes in continuous autofocus mode do allow the NEX to capture certain types of portrait or party action, but you either must be using the camera (finger on trigger mode) or have it set up for self-timer style groups.

What I found happened all too often was that I spotted a shot, raised the camera, pressed the shutter to bring it to life, then waiting the critical one or two seconds for the viewing image to appear before focus and exposure were normalised. By then, the subject had turned away, moved on or changed position.

This experience is very different from a DSLR where if you switch the camera on as you raise it to your eye you can generally lock focus and get your shot the moment you can see the subject.

Another issue with the LCD screen method for composing is that while it works well for wide-angle views, and copes adequately if you start off at wide angle and zoom in, it's next to hopeless if you leave the lens set to a long focal length.

Even at 55mm on the 18-55mm (equal to 82.5mm full frame) it was surprising how hard it was to get a perfect composition by guessing the camera aim. Fitting a 70-300mm zoom, set to 300mm, it was almost impossible to raise the camera and frame a subject. You would almost need some kind of gun-stock with a sight to centre up the view; even a six-shooter pistol has its sights you can use at arm's length. A camera held a foot in front of your face, or even worse at chest level, is extremely hard to aim with anything longer than a standard lens field of view.

This is why some kind of electronic viewfinder will be essential for the NEX models when the 18-200mm OSS (Super Stabilised) $f3.5-6.3$ appears later this year. It will be launched with the HD camcorder using the E-mount, the final part of Sony's initial strategy for the new system. That camcorder has an electronic viewfinder. As yet, the 'still' NEX-5 and NEX-3 do not – and using a lens at 200mm will be nearly impossible without zooming back to 18mm, then towards 200mm, to frame the subject.

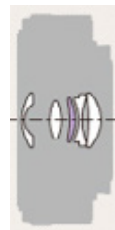
The lens choice

Sony has priced the NEX kits so that it really pays to buy both the 16mm pancake and the 18-55mm OS lens with the camera. The saving, no matter how the bundle is put together, is around £100. However I look at it, I either got the 16mm for about £90 or the 18-55mm for about £110. For that amount extra above the kits with just a single lens, the decision was easy. In the end I also found a retailer offering the microphone (a £90-ish accessory) free with the kits.

The 18-55mm is essential if you want any kind of close-up ability. Both



The 16mm seen actual size, left, and its optical diagram with only 5 elements. The interior of the Sage Centre, below, needed its 24mm field of view equivalent.



lenses focus a little closer than 25cm (10 inches) but with the 16mm this is not a close-up in any sense. For flowers, one of the most popular subjects, the 18-55mm is perfect. Much the same goes for conventional portraits, pets, children and general scenes.

The 16mm is unusual. Although it has a very small optical unit, it is still a retrofocus wide angle to about the same degree that a 35mm lens needs to be on a regular SLR. The 18mm flange to sensor distance is greater than 16mm, and to avoid colour distortion at the corners of the image, Sony has kept the rear element plane with the mount and placed the nodal points and exit pupil ahead of the 18mm distance.

With only 5 elements, the inverted telephoto design is one of the simplest ever made for a 24mm equivalent and is reminiscent of the classic 28mm $f3.5$ G Rokkor used on the Minolta TC-1 film camera.

This simple design proved ideal for two add-on converters, a 0.75X straight line wide angle afocal which gives the lens the same field of view as an 18mm on FF, and a 0.62X fisheye which results in a 15mm $f2.8$ fisheye equivalent. I have not had the chance to use these converters but samples from early buyers indicate the quality is much as you would expect from any front-lens converter.

The 16mm is not all that sharp in the corners at full aperture to start with, though the resulting 'look' is pleasant for photojournalistic shots. It

needs to be stopped down to around $f11$ for exhibition quality results. That would definitely be necessary when adding either of the converters.

The lenses have both been criticised; despite their impressive thin metal skin and bayonet mount, the inner workings are plastic just like any other kit lenses. *dPreview's* testers felt obliged to ask for further samples and Sony hastily decided all the first stocks handed to the Press were pre-production and had manufacturing faults. I would agree that the 18-55mm I used in Croatia showed decentring which made the left hand side unsharp at 40-55mm, but the 16mm I used was just fine. In fact I felt it was one of the best 24mm-equivalent lenses I had used. Comparing it to 16mm on my Carl Zeiss 16-80mm $f3.5-4.5$ fitted to the Alpha 550, it has better illumination into the corners and equally acceptable geometry. Sharpness (centrally wide open, across the frame at $f11$) is a match but contrast is not. The Zeiss lens has much more 'bite' to its fine detail.

If you own both lenses, the lens hood for the 18-55mm also fits the 16mm. I found that the 16mm is very flare-resistant and light sources can be included in shots without worry.

The sensor exposed

This brings me to the really big difference with an APS-C mirrorless ILC ('interchangeable lens camera',

an acronym gaining currency).

The sensor is uncovered all the time. Even when the camera is switched off, the CMOS and its anti-dust vibrating AA filter cover sit there in the open. They do not live behind a closed shutter, as in a DSLR.

When you shoot, the shutter first closes, then opens and shuts again. This gives the NEX a distinctive double click which is most obtrusive at speeds around 1/2 to 1/15th of a second.

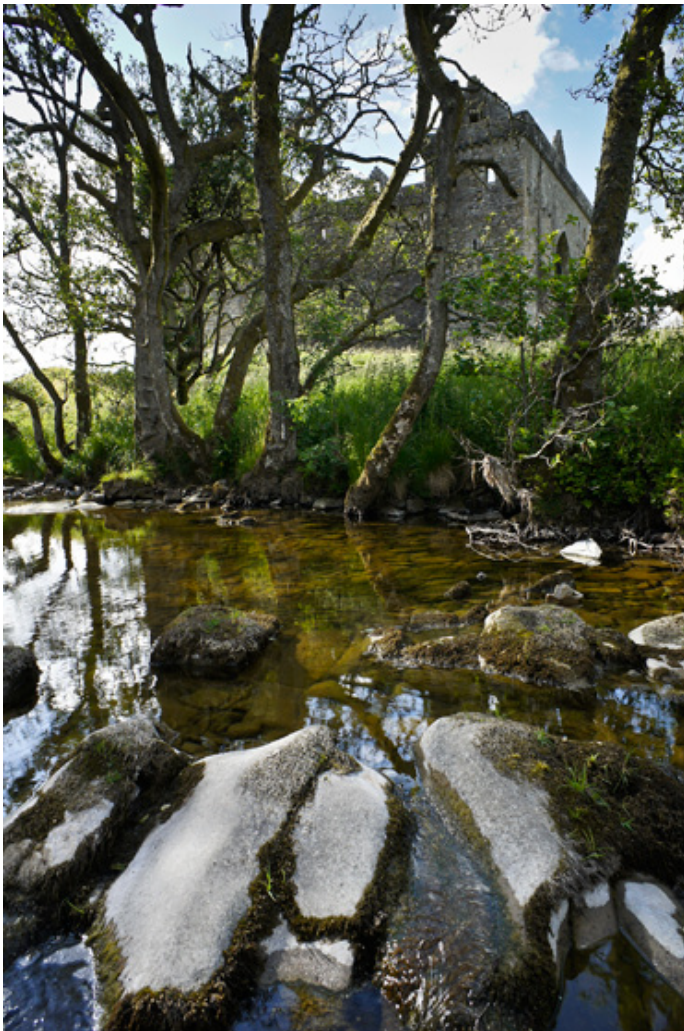
Because the sensor is exposed, when the NEX is turned off or goes to sleep in power save mode the attached E-series lens automatically stops down to its minimum (e.g. $f22$). The camera strap lugs are placed on the sides of the body, aligned so that when carried over a shoulder or round your neck the body hangs lens-down, LCD up. This is not just for user convenience, it reduces the risk of direct bright being focused on the sensor. The warnings about this are not prominent, but they are present in the manual. The sensor could be damaged if, say, a wide open $f2.8$ image of the sun was focused on it by leaving the camera lying on its back with the 16mm aimed at the sky. The default power save time is one minute; it can be changed to much longer times, but be warned. The auto-closure of the lens aperture, and the down-facing strap hanging, are precautions with a reason. I would suggest using a lens cap too.

Special care must be taken when using adapted lenses. The E-to-A mount correctly closes Alpha lenses at switch off or sleep. Manual lenses (Leica, etc) could be left at full aperture all too easily.

The sensor is also exposed when you change lenses; there is no mechanism to close the shutter and protect it. Sony say the shutter is more fragile than the sensor in such an accessible shallow body. This means that dust can land freely on the cover glass, but it also means it is really easy to blow the dust off again. I got my first dust bunny after 130 shots and a good few lens changes. Reviewing the image and magnifying it is easy enough on-screen, so identifying unwanted dust during a trip or a day out is not difficult.

Battery life

The NEX-5 and NEX-3 use the same small NP-FW50 cell. Though 300 shots may be claimed, shooting HD video or making panoramas (over 20 exposures per 'shot') can reduce this. My first battery lasted exactly one day and my combination of still, HD movie, HDR and panorama tests



Top: standard NEX JPEGs have low contrast and cope well with difficult light.



Above: the Sweep Panorama function used vertically with the 16mm lens. Some density banding is visible in the sky, but the accuracy with which the camera's processor has almost instantly assembled over 30 frames taken at 7fps is incredible, right down to mapping the tower into a fisheye-like curved perspective.



Left: upper picture, the 'normal' JPEG saved from a three-shot Auto HDR standard setting. Note the dark shadow area of the vase, and the burned-out window. Lower picture, in-camera assembled HDR result from three exposures. Detail is visible outside, and the light and shade round the vase is well rendered. Unlike the Alpha 550/450/500, the NEX has adjustable HDR up to a 6EV span.

just fell short of filling 8GB when the battery exhausted warning appeared.

Spare Sony batteries are over £60 each (ridiculous) and clone versions were not due to appear on eBay until the end of August, even then the cheapest announced so far is £37.50. Apparently the battery is coded to operate with the NEX bodies.

You need a spare battery to make serious use of NEX. So factor that cost into any decisions about buying. There is a mains adaptor available which uses a dummy battery connection.

The movie function

NEX-5 captures 1080/25p (Europe) or 30p (USA) video from the sensor, but saves it in AVCHD 1080/50i or 60i form. This does not mean the video is interlaced! It just enables the camera to play back HD videos to perfect quality directly on HDTVs, which use 50i/60i interlaced fields to show 25p/30p progressive frames.

When NEX-5 video is transferred to an editor like *iMovie* or Sony *Vegas*, the 1080i data format is restored to 1080p. The quality is quite exceptional even in low light, as you would expect from an APS-C sensor. There is an alternative choice to save the footage as 1440 x 1080/24p directly; this is a stretched-pixel true HD format, better for immediate review on computers and uploadable to services like *YouTube* without further editing.

The NEX-3 is restricted to 720/25 or 30p direct progressive MPEG4 encoding, so it lacks the higher resolution but always produces a computer-friendly file.

I compared NEX-5 and NEX-3 video capture, since it had been suggested that there was no advantage at all in the NEX-5 1080/50i AVCHD. That proves to be untrue; the NEX-5 AVCHD quality video capture is far more detailed than the NEX-3 set to High quality. There is much less compression and textures like grass and foliage are preserved.

There is little or no control over HD movie settings, and the cameras tend to use wide apertures and fast shutter speeds by default. This is felt by some to produce jerky action and an 'un-cinematic' look. Well, I have to say I like the result. Frames grabbed from NEX movies are generally sharp enough to print like stills.

As for sound recording quality, I was still waiting for my accessory stereo mic when this article had to be written. The quality from the two tiny mic holes in the camera top is impressive to start with; I'd rate it as the best auto-gain movie sound

The forthcoming (October) 18-200mm OSS super 10X stabilised zoom is shown here on the NEX VG-10 camcorder, an APS-C HD video model accepting E-mount lenses



from any HD DSLR or ILC. Where my Nikon D5000 is incapable of recording any musical performance without clipping, distortion and noisy break-up the NEX-5 and NEX-3 alike seem able to cope with amplified, close quarters sound pressure.

Let's just say that the NEX has allowed me to sell three other HD video capable cameras, because it simply does it better than any of them. Unlike any DSLR I have so far used or owned, NEX autofocuses during video filming and its E lens focus motors are so quiet you hear no camera noises.

Special functions

I have not really experimented with face detection and smile shutter; that must be left to later. The multi-shot modes of the NEX are of more interest. As a raw shooter, I am willing to put up with JPEG-only results if they can do more for me.

The 3-shot extended HDR function is simple a better version, with more range, of the Alpha 550 HDR. It also saves a normal non-HDR result.

The Sweep Panorama functions – standard, extra wide, vertical, horizontal and 3D HD-movie – all depend on panning the camera across the scene steadily while the shutter rattles away. What's amazing is how quickly the camera creates a huge stitched JPEG, from 15 to 23 megapixels – or a playable 3D file.

Of course, if you use a tripod and spirit level you will get the best results. If you pan hand-held with the 16mm and have people milling around, you'll get a panorama but with some amusing inconsistencies. It is still an uncanny function and the camera seems to be able to remap the E lenses for a near perfect stitch every time.

The Anti Motion Blur and Twilight

modes are variations of one theme – a burst of shots taken at ultra high ISO, intelligently analysed in the camera and merged to create a single JPEG. The sharpest detail is preferred in the Anti Motion Blur merging, while in the Twilight mode noise is reduced. Both these functions work well.

Menu diving

Finally, that interface! It is aimed at the beginner, and I turned off the help tips. Yes, it's a bit tedious getting to ISO or White Balance settings. No, it's not impossible and you learn to get there fast enough.

One complaint is that the control wheel can not be locked, and is very easily turned. I was constantly finding my Manual or Aperture Priority settings getting adjusted by merely picking up the camera.

You can't help but like the graphic representation of the mode dial (Shoot Mode) which responds to turning the wheel as if it was a physical device. But if you go into the intelligent green auto mode, this graphic changes to the 'Background Defocus' control which Sony place so much emphasis on. This is nothing more than a program shift control (remember, the thing you lost in the Alpha 550 are other new DSLRs?) which opens up the aperture, or closes it down, to provide softer or sharper backgrounds.

It's odd that Sony should have removed Program Shift from their DSLRs, then restored it under another guise in the NEX.

Because the display now shows this function and can also show your shutter and aperture settings it is not entirely dumb. But you can't get back to the Shoot Mode display to use the mode dial and get out of green-i-Auto. You must press Menu, go to the top left graphic icon, enter the menu list and confirm that you want Shoot Mode again. Now you can get back to P, A, S, M, Panorama, 3D Panorama

or scene modes.

It is annoying that Panorama and 3D pan are choice on the 'mode dial' but HDR, Anti Motion Blur and Twilight Shot are not and require menu diving – not only that, you have to change Image Quality to a JPEG setting and not RAW or RAW+JPEG, as these lock out HDR

and the multi-shot modes.

Why? You can select the Panorama modes, and these temporarily over-ride your Image Size and Image Quality settings. Move back to P (etc) and you get RAW or RAW+JPEG back. Sony should put HDR, Anti Motion Blur and Twilight modes on the 'dial' and have them do exactly the same thing – temporarily over-ride raw settings without requiring menu diving before and after using these modes.

Flash

The absence of a 'serious' flash or an adaptor for the Alpha shoe does not mean these will not arrive. The accessory flash can not operate wireless remotes, and its GN is just enough for close range shots.

My **Elinchrom BXri** studio flash heads were easy to programme to respond to the second flash pulse; the NEX flash gives one pre-flash burst, then fires. A small loop of white paper in front of the flash cured any direct light shadows, and has allowed me to use the NEX in the studio set to Manual mode.

With the accessory flash fitted, auto gain is enabled and the image can be composed using modelling lights. With the flash removed or turned off, the screen goes almost black as you would expect with settings of 1/160th at f11.

To use the NEX with additional studio or battery flash heads, you need either a programmable slave cell or heads with this function (designed to cope with pre-flash bursts in digital cameras).

The bottom line

I could write even more about the NEX system, and I'm only just starting to see what it can do. Our website and forum at www.photoclubalpha.com will have much to cover in the coming months with this new system, so drop in, register and keep in touch.

But for me – it's just great fun!

And later announcements prove Sony is *not* abandoning the A-system.

– David Kilpatrick





Three new Alpha lenses announced

SONY announced three new A-mount lenses – two for full frame – just as we were going to press with this issue. In fact, more products for both the A-system and E-system were expected to be revealed in late July and further launches in August, so check our website for updates.

The new lenses include the long-awaited Carl Zeiss 24mm f2 Distagon T* SSM, which is a unique scoop for the Alpha system and promises to win many professional users. It takes 72mm filters, weighs 555g and focuses right down to 19cm giving images at 0.29X scale. But don't expect this to be less than £1,000.

The two new SAM type lenses (non-SSM built in focus motors) will be only £199 each. They are a DT (APS-C format) 35mm f1.8 and a full frame 85mm f2.8, both which are only 52mm long and weigh within 5g of each other at 170 and 175g respectively. They take 55mm filters, the classic Minolta system standard size. Although they both are claimed to be the closest focusing designs in their class (which includes Nikon's 35mm f1.8 DX lens) they don't quite match the 24mm for close-up ability.

All the lenses have circular 9-blade apertures and the 85mm is described by Sony as a classic Sonnar-type design. The CZ comes with case, hood and caps while the SAM lenses just have hood and caps.



Alpha 390 and 290 – and more?

THE ALPHA 390 and 290 are replacements for the 380 and 230, though the 290 is no longer a 10 megapixel model – both these cameras now feature the classic 14.2 megapixel CCD first seen in the Alpha 350, and the 10 megapixel CCD is probably a thing of the past.

Despite a remodelling of the body which creates a better handgrip, the relentless design objective of the Sony Alpha consumer products team marches on. The mechanical controls are further simplified, the number of buttons reduced to the absolute minimum, and as much user control transferred to the rear LCD screen as possible.

The 390 has an articulated screen and Quick Focus Live View, the 290 has a fixed rear screen and no live view of any kind. Neither camera has video or any other new primary function.

Before or at **photokina**, Sony is rumoured to be launching four new DSLR cameras more or less in the Alpha 550 to 700 class. Two will feature HD video using a system much like any other DSLR, and will also have live view direct from the sensor. Two will use pellicle mirrors and a new design to allow HD video with continuous phase detection focusing. If this rumour is true Sony will have a 'first' equal to anything Minolta once achieved.



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α gallery



Above: having a good time at sunset, photographed by Ayan Dakshi. Alpha 700, ISO 640, 1/320th at f5.6 with a -0.7 auto exposure compensation at 70mm using the 70-200mm f2.8 lens. Below, 'Carrick Spires' by Alan McKeown. "I live in Girvan and the boat was being painted by the owner at low water. Alpha 700, CZ 16-80, DRO Level 3 to lighten up the opposite bank of the river, which was in heavy shadow from the trees. The boat is called Aspire, the town spire is in the background, hence the title".

To enter your own pictures for future *Gallery* pages, just send digital files. Images should be no larger than 2000 x 3000 pixels or the equivalent data size for panoramas (6 megapixels). They should be saved as AdobeRGB or sRGB JPEG files, with embedded ICC profile and intact EXIF data, to level 8 quality (High) or better. Your details, caption, copyright information, website URL, email address etc should be written into the file EXIF or IPTC fields – use 'File Information' in *Photoshop* **File Menu** to view and edit these text fields.

You may also put caption, website, etc information in a separate text document attachment or in the body of your email.

The pictures must have been taken on Minolta, Konica Minolta, Sony or Sony Alpha equipment. Scans from slides, negatives or prints are accepted and full details must be provided of equipment used. EXIF data will be used to confirm the origin of digital entries.

Send by email to: gallery@photoclubalpha.com

You may also send by post on CD or DVD to :

**Photoworld Gallery, Icon Publications Ltd,
Maxwell Place, Maxwell Lane, Kelso, Scottish Borders TD5 7BB.**

You may enter as many images as you like at any time, including your name and address and all relevant caption details. *Gallery* entries will be considered for cover or portfolio use and web editions. Each contributor chosen receives a year's subscription/renewal, or a prize of similar value which may be a photographic book or other item.





Animals laughing or making faces which remind us of human expressions are one of the top selling subjects for picture libraries. Anna Stevenson was lucky enough to capture the bull elk above with full eye contact and a pretty fierce expletive aimed at the camera. She used an Alpha 350 at ISO 800, 1/400th with a Sigma 150-500mm lens wide open at f5 and 160mm (Banff National Park, Alberta, Canada). Shirley Kilpatrick used a Sigma 18-250mm OS lens for the 'smiling' Atlantic bottlenose dolphin at MGM Mirage, Las Vegas, dolphin sanctuary. Alpha 700, 1/320th at f8 at 180mm, ISO 160. Unlike the 'real' expression of the elk, the dolphin smile is an illusion.



A lifetime behind the lens

Back in 1982, when this magazine was just a year into its new life with Minolta (UK) Ltd behind it, Bill McIntosh was featured in *Professional Photographer* for his large format corporate portraiture.

He was also a leading Minolta sponsored lecturer in the States and his lecture service brochure ('Captive, Educate, Motivate') featured him using an X-700 with the 500mm f8 RF Rokkor-X mirror lens.

Bill is still shooting – he marked his 80th birthday last year by celebrating 60 years in photography, producing a digital show using much of his past award-winning 35mm and 6 x 6cm AV material.

This year he was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award by Professional Photographers of America. He has written several highly regarded instructional books.

His work and articles still appear from time to time in our professional magazine *Master Photography*, and his daughter Lesley is continuing a family 'career' which started in 1948.

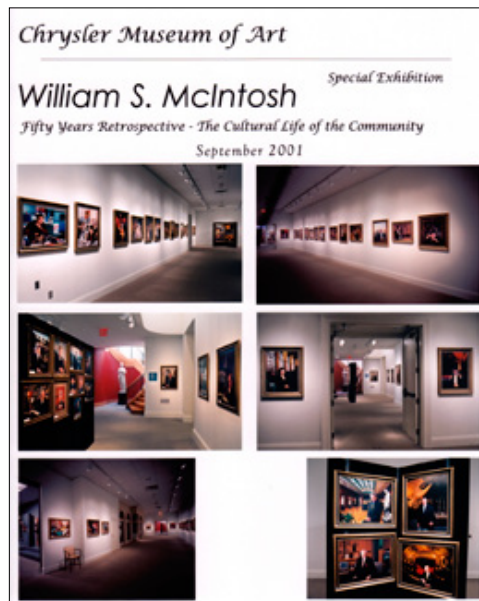
It was only when Bill sent through a selection of cuttings and prints that we found out he had been a Minolta lecturer and featured photographer.

See: www.mcintoshportraits.com

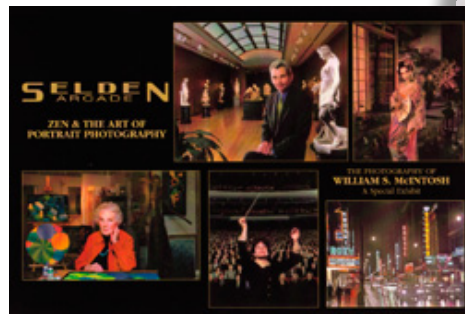


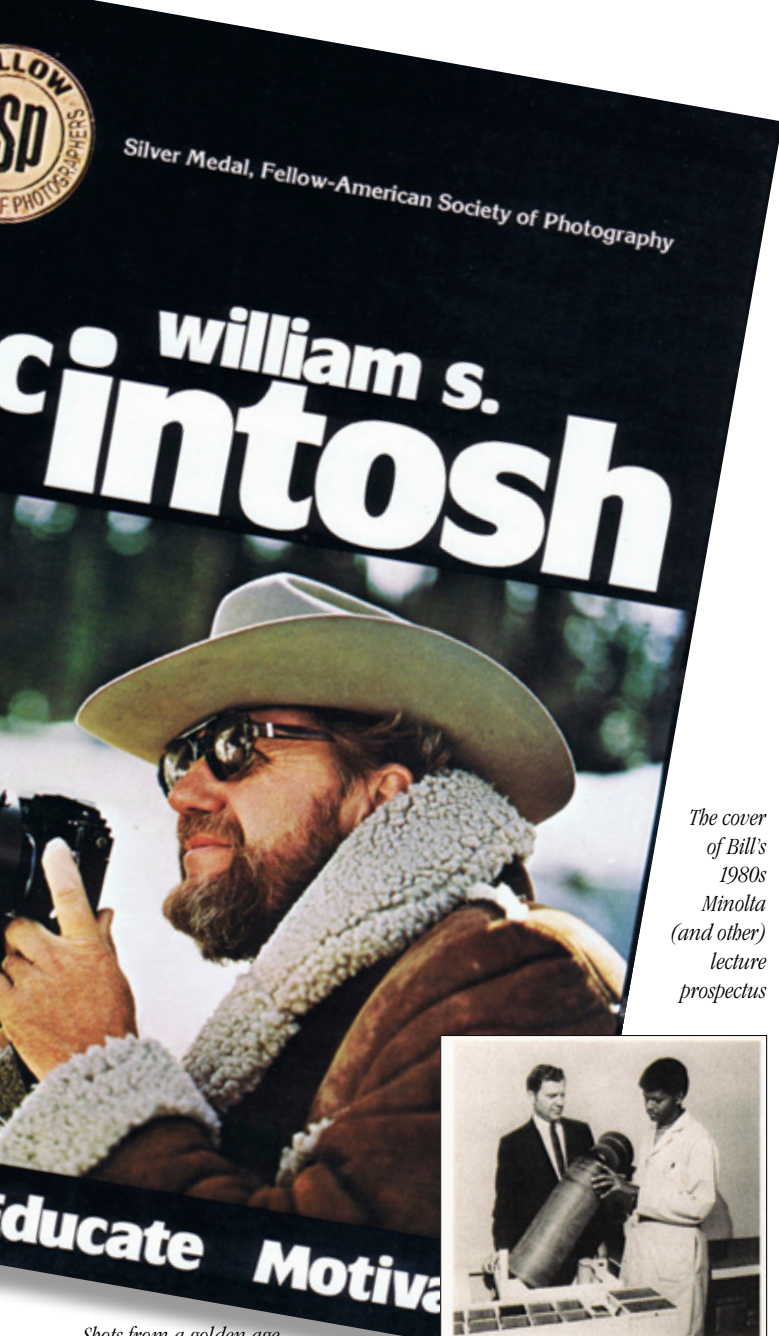
Above: 1968 US pro magazine

Below: 1983 British cover shot



Exhibitions from 2001, above, and 2010 below





The cover of Bill's 1980s Minolta (and other) lecture prospectus

Shots from a golden age, below – and the first 30 x 40" colour processor for studios from Kodak, right.



In less than one hour after installation, Bill's lab technician was making Big 30 x 40" color portraits.



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In natural colour!

In the era of film Peter Karry created a slide show which many audiences enjoyed – Karry on Kolour. Always an advocate of dramatic contrasts and striking effects, he's only softened up a bit with digital flower photography.

One of the most prolific of subjects to focus on in Summer is the fantastic world of accessible beauty and colour to be discovered through close-up flower photography.

Obviously you can find flowers and plants in your own garden, but many gardens and arboreta that are open to the public have specialised and stylised planted areas and a much bigger choice of varieties – so do not forget to visit the many National Trust locations and the various RHS gardens round the country. These subjects can be large or small, but all are appealing to the eye, and are easy to find – in fact, they are hard to ignore, but how many of us do use them as the main subject for our cameras?

By morning or evening, and as we move towards the 'Indian summer' of September which can be as colourful as Spring, the light is lower in the sky which gives better modelling on outdoor subjects.

As there are so many potential options for your photography, it means that you can try different aspects of the art from floral landscapes to floral portraits and even abstract close-ups – and then you can use your favourite output to make your own cards, calendars or even create a Screensaver on your PC.

And of course, there is the added bonus of discovering the insect population that can be found in or on these plants – adding another dimension of colour and texture to those of their guests – from bees to grasshoppers.

Colours of flowers and leaves can be bright or subdued, in shades and hues of blue, green, orange, pink, purple, red, and yellow – in other words, all the colours of the rainbow. This has changed but little over the millennia, but what has and continues to change is the style in which they are painted and photographed. From images that are sharp all over, the style used in many magazines has moved to one plane of focus – so using differential focus becomes an important knowledge base.

For this reason, reverting to use manual focus, and placing your camera on a tripod for careful





One unexpected colour links these three photographs. Shallow depth of field (left and above) or deep sharpness (below) are chosen to suit the subject.



composition as well as accurate focus, has become *de rigueur*. If you have any doubt about where to focus, you should aim to have the focus sharp (with the lens at full aperture) about one third into the area that you want to be sharp.

As the background must not be cluttered or show distracting light or dark areas, using **Depth of Field Preview** (not all models have this) becomes another important way of life and allows you to check what parts of the image are sharp. You certainly slow down when using these techniques – and you need to decide where you can locate the best (perfect if possible) specimens of the plants before setting up the tripod – after all, following this careful work, you do not want to walk a little distance to find that you have found a better example and have to repeat this procedure.

There are some other vital accessories to use in these circumstances – one is a **remote release cord** so that you do not end up with a shaky or out-of-focus image through inadvertently moving the camera even if it is “static” on a tripod. I have found that I can buy ‘clone’ release cables very cheaply via eBay from sources in Hong Kong.

Another useful tool is a **reflector** to bounce some light back into the plant – especially when shooting into the light. Obviously you could buy one from a well-known brand like Lastolite, or, like me, you could make your own by gluing some crumpled silver foil onto a piece of cardboard.

Something else that you will find essential is a **lens hood** to keep the sunlight off the front of the lens, and you may want to cast a longer shadow by judicious use of your hand (or even your partner's hand if you have persuaded someone to accompany you) or by a piece of card (the reflective board could double up). Of course using one hand with the release cord and another hand to control the light and shadows, means that use of a tripod becomes essential – as you won't have one left to hold the camera!

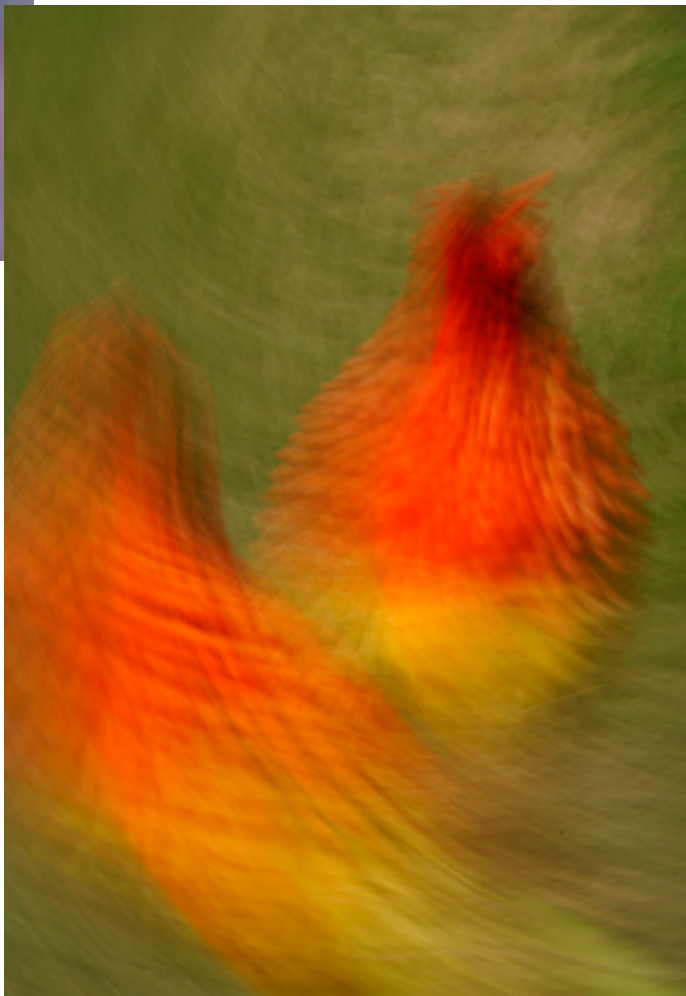
Shaking the barley

Another factor that can work against you is the **wind** – you certainly do not want to end up with an image in which the plants are moving around – unless you happen to have tried for a special effect from some creative blur. So patience is required to wait till a still period happens – it will. For low level plants you could bring your reflective board into play as a windbreak but be careful that it does not intrude into the frame.



Look for insect activity when photographing flowers – the contrast in colour can add to the image. A macro lens is not always needed with modern kit zooms like the 18-55mm designs, and a close-up dioptre can always be screwed in the front filter thread if needed. Right: open shade offers the potential for beautiful soft light and unusual colours, but you may need to set manual white balance or take a custom WB reading using a grey or white card. Below: manual exposure can avoid the overexposure typical of metering systems with potentially rich and saturated subjects like this. A polarising filter can deepen colour too. Facing page: instead of just a straight shot (top) try controlled movement of the camera during a long exposure, here the polariser can help too.





At this stage I haven't mentioned your camera much, and some of the benefits to be gained from the latest range of digital technologies. The obvious one is the frequent use of **White Balance**, as you may decide to take some shots in the shade to avoid the harsh glare from the direct sun which tends to burn out colours – and so you should set the WB to “Shade” if available, or take a custom WB reading using your white card. Even better light is obtained under bright clouds, and again, just dial in “Cloudy” to the WB.

I tend NOT to use Auto WB, as it can easily misinterpret colours and end up with incorrect results from some plants – especially the blue ones. Do NOT forget to reset once you are back in the sunshine, although you can get away with this if you are using RAW files. Unlike JPEGs, which can not have the WB changed later without degrading the colours, RAW files allow you to correct WB mistakes or fine-tune a custom setting at leisure.

This is one area in which digital is better than film, when the colours of flowers like bluebells are really difficult to capture accurately on film-stock. You might decide to follow my practice of not using Auto ISO either, as again I like to **control the ISO** for specific reasons of detail and/or shutter speed – frequently you need longer exposures if you are using small apertures. If, as recommended, you use a **polarising filter** to control the amount of glare that occurs even in background reflections from shiny leaves, then shutter speeds get even longer. Within limits, you can then increase the ISO to avoid the automatic use of Noise Reduction – I tend to use ISO 250 as default on my Alpha 700, and David Kilpatrick believes ISO 320 is the optimum for the Alpha 900.

It is best with the subtle colouring of flowers that you try to obtain the results as nearly correct in-camera as possible. So, once again, you could revert to using **Manual Exposure** setting – and come off the various Auto settings.

Following this, use of the **RGB Histogram** display during reviewing after every shot is really advisable when available – and I know I forget to do this sometimes ! After all, you definitely do not want to have any areas of the plants blown out as they are not really recoverable in post processing. The RGB Histogram is useful because it can tell you if one channel – like the reds – is clipping at the highlight (right hand) end.

Colours do not react the same way to digital capture as your eye, and so you cannot assume that the

same lighting applied to a different colour will give the same meter reading. Colour can also affect AF accuracy, advises Photoclubalpha – your AF may settle on a slightly different distance for a red flower compared to a blue flower, if that is all you have covering the AF zone.

Also a lesson I learnt the hard way, is not to leave the viewfinder uncovered when pointing up at a bright sky – it can so badly affect the digital image that the result is nearly black (all the Histogram bunched up on the left) – so use a third hand, or better still, a cap for the viewfinder. Of course this does not apply to the screen of the NEX models or the Quick Focus Live View of the Alpha 330/350/380/550 and so on, only to SLR optical finders.

In terms of framing your images, you will find that results are more appealing if you do not place the main subject in the middle – the Rule of Thirds used in landscape photography often comes into its own again – but it is not something to follow rigidly. In general, images shot in the horizontal landscape position tend to be more placid, whereas images in the portrait mode are seen as more dynamic. You may want to use both on one subject, and decide which result you like best! The creative use of colour is also important in achieving the result you want – complementary colours give gentle results and contrasting colours provide impact.

One option with which you might like to experiment, is movement of the camera on purpose – to create a totally abstract result. This is at the other end of the spectrum to creating sharp images, but equally valid and can aid your creativity.

Of course, you might decide to take an altogether different approach, and buy some flowers from your local florist and bring them indoors to avoid exterior distractions. But then the light levels will be even lower, although the direction of the light and shade will be easier to control, and of course you do not have to contend with the wind. Whichever way you decide to take your photos – have lots of fun !

Checklist for plant photography:

- Fresh batteries*
- Lens with close focusing*
- Recording media*
- Tripod*
- Remote cord*
- Polarising filter*
- Reflector/WB card/windshield*
- Lens hood*
- Viewfinder cap*
- Use manual focus*
- Use manual exposure*



The world's best

Thomas Goseberg reports from the prestigious Sony World Photography Awards held in Cannes earlier this year.

It was that time of the year again – springtime in the south of France, festival season coming to Cannes. As in 2008 and 2009, just a month before the Film Festival, Sony celebrated the World Photography Awards in Cannes, though next year they promise a change of venue to London. It will not be the same!

The event started with the award ceremony in the Palais des Festivals in the **Grand Auditorium Louis Lumière**. This is not only a beautiful theatre, it's also a fully equipped cinema.

In May, the world of movie and glamour fights it out here for the **Palme d'Or**, in April photographers were after a **Sony World Photography Award**.

While I have in previous years reported about the photo exhibition that follows the award ceremony, this year I want to take you into the world of the gala evening and the award ceremony.

David was kind enough to let us have the tickets Sony offered to *Photoworld*, as they were enjoying the Turkish riviera that week. It proved just as well, as the Icelandic volcano which kept them in Turkey for a further week also caused problems for visitors to Cannes.

So on Thursday evening, 22nd of April, my wife and I had to dress up to the nines (evening attire was mandatory) and head to Cannes. The invitation included also the champagne reception just before the ceremony – this is a private event, invitees only.

Arriving at the Palais des Festival, it turned out we were not on 'the list'. Fortunately, after some struggling and presenting the emails showing I was invited, we were finally let in. So we had some glasses of champagne and some yummy canapés.

The place of the reception was also a gallery. This year's life time award was given to Eve Arnold and we had the privilege see many of her most famous pictures. These included the ones she took of Marilyn Monroe.

Eve is nearly 100 years old now and unfortunately she was not able to attend herself. During the ceremony, one of her grandchildren represented her and took the award in her place.



Photographs by Thomas Goseberg: top, Eve Arnold's retrospective; above, her grandson receiving the award on her behalf. Facing page top left: Fashion Photographer of the Year, David Handley from London, prepared a wee speech and needed some notes! Top right: Student winners. Bottom right: Photographer of the Year, Italian Tommaso Ausili, holds up his awards presenting by Sony Europe President Mr Fujio Nishida.

As expected, many guests walked around with DSLR equipment. I had expected to see many huge and expensive lenses, but was disappointed. This event was certainly not gear-orientated. On the other hand I was surprised to see so many Canons and Nikons...

Clearly, this competition is open to photographers of all brands – the only important thing is to be a photographer!

The official language was English. Not only most guests spoke English, the organizers themselves also did. If you plan to visit next year it should be just the same in London!

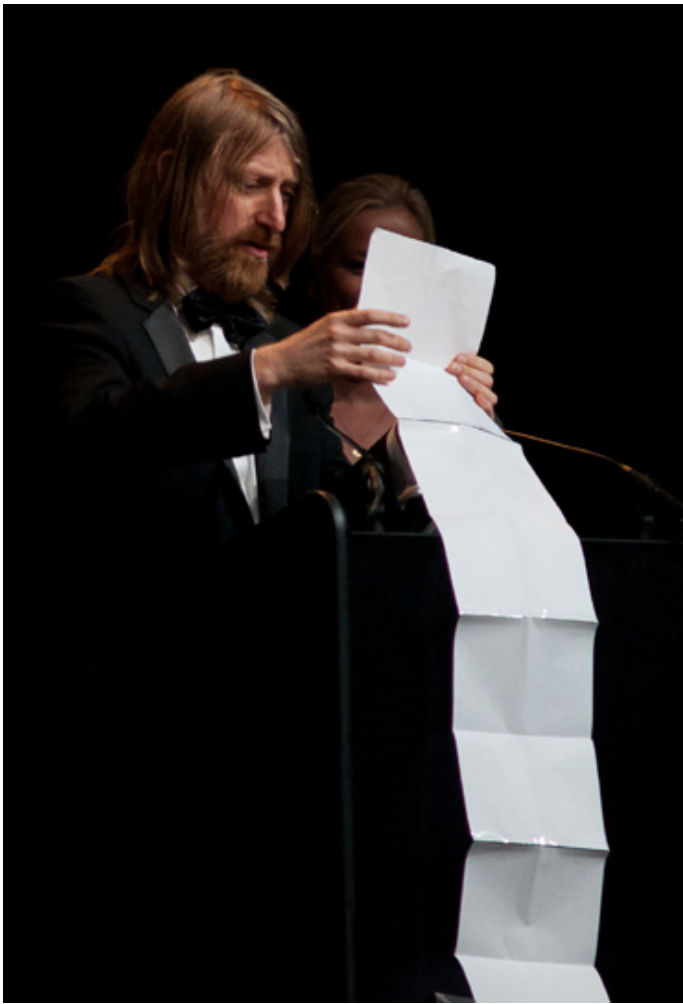
A charming young English presenter led us through the ceremony with humorous comments. There is actually not too much to say about the awards ceremony itself – a succession of important people and successful photographers.

Just to name a few, there was the president of **iStockphoto**, the vice president of **Getty Images**, a representative of **Unicef**, the president of the **World Photography Organization**, and many more, representing either large corporations, institutions or art magazines. Last but not least we had the president of all **Sony Europe** with us as well as the president of Sony Imaging Europe.

At the beginning of the ceremony there was some talk about Sony's sponsorship of Unicef – kudos to Sony, but I feel they spent a bit too much time stressing what a good hearted company they are. Then, two young girls were awarded a student's prize. Next was the presentation of the amateur winners. This took about two minutes on the huge projection area. We saw some great pictures, and I'd have loved to have seen some more time dedicated to the amateur photos, which were not amateurish at all.

In the professional photographers section, for each category the 3rd, 2nd and 1st winner's photos were shown. These presentations were excellent video shows, accompanied by music, taking your mind away into a world of art and imagination. My wife and I both loved these presentations.

Then the winner was given his award, either by last year's winner



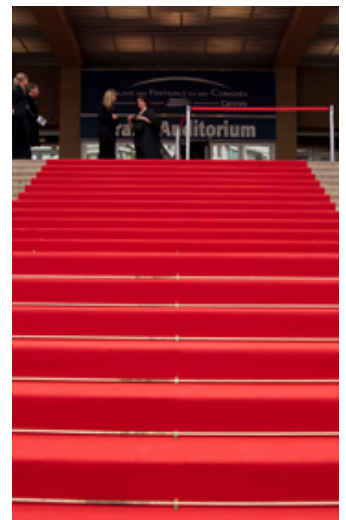
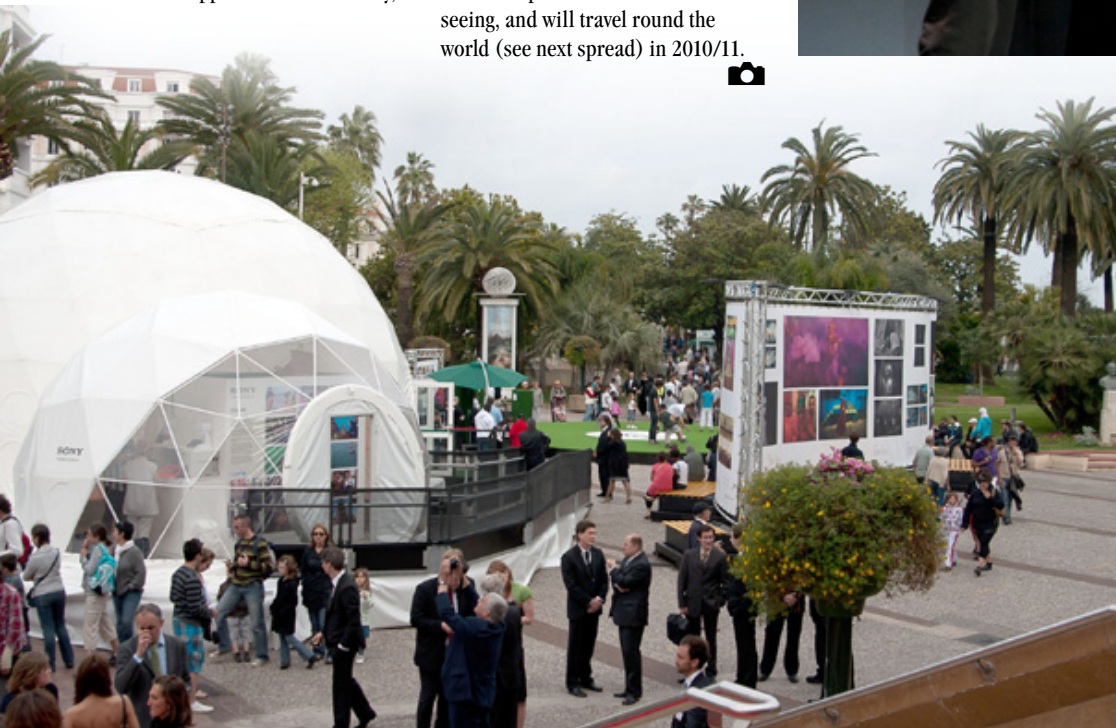
or by one of the industry VIPs. After this followed a speech of the winner – some just said a quick ‘Thank you’, others had prepared some more words. A few of the winners were not present due to the volcano but others managed to come over from as far afield as Brazil and New Zealand.

The spectators were not always in agreement with the jury. I remember especially the music category. One participant had some impressive portraits of orchestra conductors in action and he earned tremendous applause. Unfortunately,

he was only placed 3rd and someone else won this category.

After all awards had been handed out, the overall prize, the Iris d’Or, winner across all categories, was awarded to **Tommaso Ausili**, an Italian photographer. The happy winner was given his award by the president of Sony Europe.

All in all we had a great time. If you’re not involved in the competition or representing the Press, these events are generally something you will never attend. The exhibition of awards pictures is well worth seeing, and will travel round the world (see next spread) in 2010/11.





Some 2010 Awards Nominations: from top left, clockwise: Hayri Kodal, Turkey; E Zhang, China; Maksym Gorbatskyi, Ukraine; Richard Brocken, Netherlands; and Alex Gob, Malaysia.





Sony World Photography Awards 2011

- 2011 competition open for entries now
- London to host Sony World Photography Awards ceremony 2011
- World Photography Festival expands to Mexico, San Francisco, Shanghai and London
- Student Focus programme partners with Young Tate Online
- World Photography Organisation website re-launched – www.worldphoto.org

The World Photography Organisation has announced a number of exciting new changes for 2011.

Building upon the success of the annual World Photography Festival in Cannes, the festival will expand to four major cities across the globe throughout 2010 and 2011. It will visit San Francisco, Mexico, Shanghai and London, bringing the World Photography Organisation's passion for imagery to thousands more people each year. The tour will finish in London where the Sony World Photography Awards ceremony will be hosted for the first time.

The World Photography Festival is an opportunity for photographers from around the world to meet and discuss the latest trends, challenges and innovations in photography today. Each festival will showcase the Sony World Photography Awards 2010 winners and will feature practical workshops, exhibitions, talks, portfolio reviews and a photography symposium presented by leading international industry figures.

The World Photography Organisation also announces a new competition and additional categories for the 2011 Sony World Photography Awards.

The **Open** competition, which replaces the amateur competition, has been created for the growing number of people with a love of photography. It has nine categories including Nature & Wildlife, Travel and After Dark, and is judged on a single image.

Professional and 'serious enthusiast' photographers are invited to join the **Professional** competition and will be judged on a body of work. The 14 professional categories are arranged into three genres – Commercial, Fine Art and Photojournalism & Documentary – and new categories include Lifestyle, Still Life, and People.

Winners of the Professional and Open categories will each receive their trophies at the Sony World Photography Awards ceremony in London on 27 April 2011. The winner of the **L'Iris d'Or/Sony World Photographer of the Year** will also be revealed and will be presented with \$25,000 (USD) plus Sony's Alpha digital SLR camera equipment. The overall Open competition winner will receive \$5,000 plus Sony's Alpha digital SLR camera equipment.

The World Photography Organisation strives to support and connect the next generation of photographers via **Student Focus**, its global education programme and competition. In an exclusive partnership with Young Tate Online, the 2011 Student Focus programme will tie in with Tate Modern's new photography exhibition in *London, Exposed: Voyeurism, Surveillance and the Camera*. Inspired by this exhibition, 'Surveillance' will be the theme of the 2011 Student Focus competition.

For the first time, Student Focus is open to all universities from across the world, that hold a photography programme. Ten shortlisted students and their tutors will be flown to London in April 2011 to conduct their final assignment as part of the World Photography Festival. 45,000 Euros worth of Alpha digital SLR camera equipment has been donated by Sony and the overall Student Focus winner will be announced at the Sony World Photography Awards Ceremony on April 27th 2011 alongside the Professional and Open category winners.

To coincide with the opening of the 2011 competition, the World Photography Organisation has re-launched its website – www.worldphoto.org

The website is a hub for the photographic community and, in addition to showcasing the entries to the Sony World Photography Awards, it will provide the latest news from the world of imaging. The website will also include exclusive interviews and podcasts with the World Photography Academy, a members section, a dedicated student section, forums, videos and blogs.

The 2011 competition closes for entries on **January 5th 2011**.

Sigma 8-16mm f4.5-5.6 HSM

Chris Malcolm discovers a lens
which takes in all four walls at once

I like wide angle linear lenses (which preserve straightness of lines) for architectural shots, where it's often impossible to step back far enough to get everything in. Sigma's 10-20mm has been my wide lens. But two things annoyed me about it. The first was that it didn't quite reach that magic angle of view of wide enough to get all four walls of a room in a shot from a corner. The second was that a lot of my shots with the 10-20mm were at 10mm, confirming my suspicion that I'd often crank it wide and hit the stop, wishing it would go a bit wider.

The new **Sigma 8-16mm DC f4.5-5.6 HSM** is comfortably past that magic four-walls view angle. Stopped down to f8 mine seems about as sharp as my 10-20mm and maintains the sharpness better towards the edges and at wider apertures. Its aperture range of



Two wide views: the full frame Sigma 12-24mm, left, and the new APS-C format 8-16mm which is not much smaller (photographed side by side).

f4.5-5.6 is less than my 10-20mm's at f4.5-5.6, but it has (for me) a larger good quality aperture range.

There's some barrel distortion near the edges at 8mm, which I prefer because it reduces the width of people and objects near the edges. For architectural shots it corrects instantly to straight lines in such lens correction utilities as *PTLens* or *DXO Optics Pro* which use a database of lens geometry distortions. They also allow perspective adjustments such as correcting converging verticals. The eye is so sensitive to linear and perspective imperfections in large prints of architectural shots that it's hard to get such things exactly right in the viewfinder. So being able to make fine adjustments in software is very useful. These adjustments do lose some image width, but the lens has plenty of width to allow for that. The shot of Edinburgh

Queen Mother's Garden Pavilion: The ceiling of this small pavilion is domed and lined with fir cones, both poorly lit and dark, whereas the walls are lined with mostly white sea shells and well lit. The dynamic range here is extreme. It really requires HDR or carefully adjusted flash fill. This shot (an ex-camera JPEG using DRO) was snatched in a brief empty episode one afternoon when it was mostly crowded with tourists. The A550 was placed on the floor, the Sigma manually focused at 8mm.





This view was taken with the Sigma 8-16mm at 8mm. Like many very wide zooms this lens at its widest has a bit of barrel distortion at the edges. That's only noticeable in architectural photographs with appropriately placed straight lines, and is easily corrected with a lens geometry correction tool such as PTLens which was used here. The height of this view was got by holding the camera aloft on a monopod, probably about 10 feet off the ground. Original, below, has been toned sepia using Photoshop.



Uncorrected JPEG from the Sigma at 8mm. Notice the barrel distortion curving the straight railway lines and platform edge at the bottom. Below, the result of using PTLens to remove that geometric distortion, some of the CA, and to adjust the perspective to make the verticals parallel. This kind processing would normally be done if using this lens for critical architectural photography.



Below: Normally I take flower portraits with a combination of longer focal length and wide aperture to throw the background out of focus. This is an experiment with a very wide angle to distance the background and give a close perspective. This was close as I could get at 8mm and keep the near flowers in sharp focus. Aperture f16 for depth of field, although not the sharpest aperture with this lens.



University's Old Quad shows that.

On my 10-20mm I got used to using manual focus for critical shots because AF was inconsistent and sometimes weirdly wrong. Manual focus was often significantly sharper and much more consistent. The 8-16mm has the same kind of AF inconsistency (possibly a feature of ultra-wide lenses). My A550 has such excellent manual focus that I like using it and use it a lot. So I thought the HSM of the 8-16mm would be an unnecessary luxury. But it permits the lens AF-MF to be switched much more easily than the awkward AF-MF switch on the A350/550 (and possibly other Alphas). It also has a nice clutch on the manual focus ring, which lets you fine-tune focus manually with AF engaged just by moving the ring. All that makes manually focusing the 8-16mm much easier than the 10-20mm.

I expected to get usefully wider views than my 10-20mm, a quantitative improvement. I'm surprised by how much difference those 2mm less in focal length make, and impressed by how much easier this – and the easier manual focus – make it to use. Altogether for me it's an unexpectedly qualitative jump past the 10-20mm.



To see more of Chris's work:

www.flickr.com/photos/chris_malcolm

Sigma lens information:

www.sigma-imaging-uk.com



Spiral stair at the west entrance to Edinburgh Botanic Garden: this is not the best view to show the repairs to the woodwork after the cracks developed. The iron hanger on the left holding up the top landing is half of the structural strengthening to stop the bouncing which many people complained of, and may have contributed to the cracking. The cracks developed in the inner spiral wall at the point where the downgoing stairs meet the landing near the bottom, a point of inflection in balustrade. It's also as this view shows, a point where the ply sandwiching incorporated unusually strong contrasts between dark and light wood sections. Below, John Hope gateway at the west entrance to Edinburgh's Botanic Garden, another view of the stair. The extreme 8mm perspective creates a view which would be impossible to obtain with any other lens.



The Sigma 70-300mm f4-5.6 OS

SIGMA's 70-300mm optically stabilised zoom is not APO, it's not macro, it's not HSM though it does use an in-lens (SAM type) focus motor.

It only focuses down to 1.5m and this limitation lost me a few shots. But the stabilisation is superb, and the optical quality as seen from my Alpha 900 is better than my Sony 70-300mm f4.5-5.6 G SSM, which is also significantly slower in maximum aperture through much of its range. It's also much bigger; the Sigma, though it extends and takes the same 62mm filter size, is a much lighter and smaller lens. It will fit in my kit where the G lens with its hood will not.

If only this lens focused closer than 1.5m and had HSM! I'd sell my G and buy the Sigma tomorrow. I have never had sharper pictures from any telephoto in this range, even at the long end it delivers fine detail wide open.

So it presents a real dilemma, focusing more slowly and noisily than I want, but actually getting pin-sharp pictures where I felt my technique with the G was at fault.

— David Kilpatrick



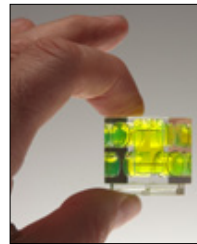
The Sigma lens hood is small and the bayonet tends to force zoom action.



Keeper and white tiger, Out of Africa, Verde Valley AZ. Only 90mm, and a safe f10, but beautifully sharp and smooth in tone. Bottom left – Grand Canyon lookout, at 200mm and f8. On the A900 image every detail of the rock can be studied, and tonal quality is again very smooth. Despite not having any 'special' designation, this lens seems to be up there at Sony G or CZ level optically if not in build.



Call the Photostore



Adrian Paul at the Photostore can obtain almost any accessory you need for your Alpha system camera. Lost a flash shoe cover? Or just want to get one for your new camera which came without? Call Adrian – the same goes for lens caps, body caps, flash 'feet', AC adaptors, battery packs, lens hoods, cases, straps, LCD protectors, eyepiece magnifiers, LCD hoods, hand grips... If it's a Sony accessory Adrian can obtain it for you. He also has stocks of Minolta and Konica Minolta items. Photostore has its own web forum with former Minolta expert Bernard Petticrew as resident guru.

01132 448664
www.photostore-uk.com

THE ARDECHE, FRANCE
with Experience Ardeche
7 nights, hotel based

**Sunday 26 September to
Sunday 3 October 2010**

The Ardeche region is rich with photographic opportunities – dramatic landscapes, large rivers, ancient forests, historical towns and villages. The variety of subject matter in the area will ensure a full and interesting week and of course we will enjoy the local ambience and French cuisine!

We will be staying at the Belvedere Hotel, close by the famous Pont d'Arc, at the head of the Ardeche Gorge. Situated only 6km from the town of Vallon-Pont-d'Arc along the gorge road, Le Belvedere is a popular destination for the French tourists who prefer the tranquillity away from the hustle and bustle.

This is a great opportunity to really enjoy this magical and welcoming part of France nestled right on the edge of the 'Réserve Naturelle'.

Early autumn is an ideal time of year to visit, with soft light and plenty of atmosphere. Quest has teamed up with 'Experience Ardeche' for this event, a company specialising in 'activity holidays' and their knowledge of the area will guarantee us a full and interesting week.

Please enquire if you would like more information and advice on flights, ferry or rail travel.

Price £825 (deposit £200) Single supplement £100. Maximum 10 places.

Price includes Dinner B&B, and travel in France during the week. It is based on a shared en suite room, and a supplement is payable for a single occupancy. Cost of flights or other transportation to France is not included.

PICTURE FORUM (EAST SUSSEX)
1 day, at Seaford, East Sussex

Wednesday 6 October 2010

Will include the usual mix of mini presentations, a competition and a talk by a leading photographer. Picture Forum is the opportunity for everyone to show their work, and we invite short presentations of up to 15 minutes (about 25 pictures). These can be with prints, slides, or digital files. The presentations occupy most of the day, and are a vital and enjoyable aspect of the programme.

It is your chance to show your photography, so please bring a selection of your pictures. 'Slots' may, however, have to be restricted, according to numbers, so when booking, please say if you would like to give a presentation, and if so, your subject, and the medium you wish to use. If possible everyone will be accommodated, but in view of the

increasing popularity of this feature, slots will be primarily allocated on a 'first come, first served basis', but also with regard to the need for a balanced programme. However, if you would prefer not to give a presentation, you are very welcome to simply attend and enjoy the pictures shown by others.

For practical reasons, the competition is open for prints only – not more than one per person. The judge (t.b.a.) will give a brief critique and appraisal on all entries. Prizes will be awarded for the best work, one to be chosen by our judge, and another by audience vote, plus runners up. This is always an interesting and exciting day of sharing pictures and experiences, where everyone can join in. Not to be missed!

Price £25 includes buffet lunch & refreshments (but not bar drinks!). Payable in full on booking – not eligible for 'early booking discount' arrangements.

ISLE of SKYE

Guest House based. 8 places, 7 nights.

**Saturday 9 October to
Saturday 16 October 2010**

Discount available if combined with Harris & Lewis trip – see below
Year after year, Skye is one of our most popular destinations and it is not difficult to understand why, as the "Misty Isle" is surely one of the most beautiful parts of the United Kingdom, full of mood and mountains, rivers, bays and lochs. There is all that the landscape photographer could want – but Skye does not give it up that easily, as it is well known for the fickleness of its weather. But the weather makes the mood, and magic moments are never far away – if only the photographer is in the right place at the right time! One day will be spent visiting the dramatic Applecross peninsula.

We will, as usual, be based at The Skye Picture House, near Broadford, which is run by photographers Steve & Gill Terry. It is situated in a stunning location, at the edge of a loch, with superb views, especially for the morning sunrise. Otters and seals can sometimes be seen. A talk by photographer Ken Bryan, who lives on Skye, will be arranged if he is available.

We will fly to Inverness (EasyJet from Gatwick or Luton and other airports) and travel by minibus to Skye.

Price £795 (deposit £200) Single

supplement £80. 8 places. See next item for combined discount.

Cost includes full board accommodation, with packed lunch. The price is based on a shared twin room and a supplement is payable for single occupancy. It also includes minibus travel from Inverness airport and on Skye, but not the cost of flights.

ISLES of HARRIS & LEWIS

Hotel based, 7 nights. 8 places

**Saturday 16 October to
Saturday 23 October 2010**

These hauntingly beautiful outer Hebridean islands are, in reality, only one island divided into two parts, each very different in character. Harris, in the south, is rugged and rocky, whereas Lewis is bleaker and covered largely in moorland. Both have fabulous beaches, including Luskentyre in the south, and the mysterious standing stones of Callanais (Callanish) are situated in the north. The islands are reached by ferry from Uig (Skye) or Ullapool on the mainland, and it is from the latter that we will make our crossing.

Travel on the islands will be by minibus, and this will collect everyone from Inverness airport on the first Saturday. Flights to Inverness are available with EasyJet from Gatwick, Luton and other regional airports. FlyBe also operate a service from Gatwick.

*Turn this holiday into a fantastic 14-night trip and take a discount of £100 by combining it with Isle of Skye (see above).

Price £875 (deposit £200).

Single supplement £80.

(£1570 combined price for Skye and Harris/Lewis – deposit £400. Single supplement £160)

Price includes travel and ferry, and half board accommodation on a shared room basis. A supplement is payable for single occupancy. The price does not include flights or mid day snacks.

AUTUMN IMPRESSIONS

with Colin Westgate

1 day, at Sheffield Park, Sussex

Tuesday 2 November 2010

Learn how to produce beautiful impressionistic images of the superb autumn colour in the lovely Sheffield Park gardens, well known for the variety of its exotic trees and

spectacular autumn colours. These are at their best at this time of the year and by the use of various diffusion methods, you are guaranteed to get some lovely pictures. After an initial discussion and demonstration of the techniques, the day will be spent photographing in the Park.

Price £58 (deposit £20). 10 places. Park entrance fees (where applicable) and refreshments on arrival included.

LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY

with Colin Westgate and Hugh Milsom
(2 days, at Seaford, East Sussex)

**Wednesday/Thursday
1/2 December 2010**

Frequently landscape photographs are disappointing because of unfavourable light, poor composition or unsatisfactory printing. This comprehensive workshop will cover methods of improving your landscape pictures from the moment of taking to aesthetic enhancements prior to making the final print.

The content will be a mixture of discussion, an appraisal of pictures from participants, and a field trip into the local area. The in-depth discussion will cover the principles of landscape photography, both technical and aesthetic. Topics such as the characteristics of different lenses, various filters, choice of subject matter, viewpoints, composition, principles of exposure, use of light and more will be included.

Pre-visualisation at the moment the picture is taken, and post production prior to making the print will both be covered, the latter using *Photoshop* procedures, which will be demonstrated using digital projection. A selection of images taken digitally on the workshop will be used, but if you are a film worker, you are invited to bring negatives or transparencies with you.

Both Colin Westgate and High Milsom have many years of experience photographing in the landscape and both will demonstrate and discuss their individual approaches to the subject.

Price £125 (deposit £40). 8 places



Club Diary

2010 LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY COURSES and HOLIDAYS with Duncan McEwan

Isle of Mull (13-19 September 2010)
Mull has a great coastline and a rugged interior which will be at its best with early autumn colours in the moorlands. The Pennyghael Hotel is ideally situated for exploring the Ross of Mull. One full day will be spent on the Isle of Iona with the possibility of a visit to Staffa and Fingal's cave. Cost: £810. (*D. McEwan*)

Isle of Arran (20-24 September 2010)
Arran is the most southerly of the major Scottish islands and is often described as 'Scotland in Miniature' due to the varied nature of the terrain – rocky peaks, glens, woodland, standing stones, waterfalls, moorland and some great coastal locations. Base: Kinloch Hotel, Blackwaterfoot. Cost: £890. (*Light and Land*)

Ullapool & Assynt (24-30 Oct 2010)
Based in Ullapool, this trip will explore the areas of Coigach and Assynt where there are many distinctively shaped mountains including Stac Pollaidh and Suilven. Loch Assynt offers Ardvreck Castle and the tree-clad islands are great

subjects. North of Lochinver is a wonderful coastline that includes fantastic sands and the rugged headland of Stoer Point. On-site E6 film processing. Cost: £985. (*Inversnaid*)

Torridon (1-7 November 2010)
Torridon has become a firm favourite with landscape photographers due to wonderful mountains, glens, lochs and coast. There is no better time to see the area than in late Autumn when, apart from the colours, wonderful atmospheric conditions can occur. Based in The Old Inn, Gairloch. Co-led with Lee Frost. Cost: £975. (*Photo Adventures*)

Details of all workshops:
www.dmcewanphotography.co.uk
For availability and bookings, contact the individual organiser directly:
Inversnaid Photography Centre:
www.inversnaidphoto.com
Light and Land:
www.lightandland.co.uk
Photo Adventures:
www.photoadventures.co.uk



From one of Cliff Carter's talks – the Spitfire is composed into the dramatic sky

PHOTOSHOP ELEMENTS & OTHER TALKS BY CLIFF CARTER

ALPHA photographer Cliff Carter is lecturing at SE camera clubs in the autumn. Please telephone:- 01903 812579 or email Cliff at: cliff.ccd@mac.com, or refer to the Southern Photographic Federation Handbook 2009/10

Monday 13th September
Bexleybeath Photographic Society
Pixels & Art?

Wednesday 15th September
Horndean Camera Club
PixElation – techniques & demonstrations using Elements.
Friday 1st October
Seaford Photographic Society
An Elements Workshop.
Wednesday 13th October
Littlehampton C.C.
Aviation and Infra Red Workshop.



HELPLINES AND INFORMATION

Authorised & warranty repairs, assistance and enquiries

OUR website www.photoclubalpha.com is now packed with detailed features on the Minolta and Sony Alpha systems, has a busy discussion **Forum** and you can search the site for help on topics. It has a full directory of useful links for downloading software or obtaining help. For personal advice from the Club, use e-mail only please, to david@photoclubalpha.com.

A **DEDICATED** helpline is available for Konica Minolta Dynax and Dimage digital system owners, and also for film camera owners. The helpline phone number is **0870 0104107**.

ALL REPAIRS for Konica, Minolta and Konica Minolta branded photographic products are handled by;

JP Service Solutions
Johnsons Photopia Ltd
Hempstalls Lane
Newcastle under Lyme
Staffordshire ST5 0SW
Tel: 01782 753366 – Fax: 01782 753340
Email: kmsupport@jpss.co.uk

SONY may announce further firmware upgrades or indeed products. Your first step should be to check Sony's website regularly:

www.sony.co.uk

Their general helpline, which will have information on any other numbers, addresses, departments or offices which Konica Minolta owners may need to reach in future, is: **08705 111 999**

For downloadable printable manuals, legacy firmware and software updates, visit:

<http://ca.konicaminolta.com/support/americas/>

For the Sony European user service – there is still no UK user club:

<http://www.sony.co.uk/nextlevel>

To order KM/Sony parts, accessories, and new Sony flash components etc, visit the Photostore, where Bernard Petticrew also hosts an advice forum:

<http://www.photostore-uk.com/>

MINOLTA REPAIRS

by specialist workshop in Milton Keynes

FOR MANY years **Camera Repair Workshop**, based in Milton Keynes close to the original Minolta UK service department, handled the repair of classic SRT, X, Vectis and later film cameras for Minolta UK.

They have obtained many of the spare parts and KM's stocks of older 'cannibalisation cameras' like 7000 and 8000i. Their proprietor is David Boyle, and his two technicians are Minolta trained. As an independent repairer they will specialise in film and digital, and hold parts going back to models like the XM. *The Dynax 9 is an exception, previously serviced by a special European centre, and must be sent to JP (see above).* No VAT is chargeable at present, and they offer Photoworld Club members a **10 per cent discount** on prices which they say are already better than former retail repair charges. This enables the Club to continue with its 10 per cent service and repair discount offer.

The **Photoworld Club Camera Check** scheme will be operated by Camera Repair Workshop, though in absence of Konica Minolta's former bulk shipping arrangements, the return carriage costs have increased and a charge of **£25 per camera/standard lens** combination is now required.

Your equipment is bench-tested for shutter speed, metering, focusing and aperture accuracy, externally cleaned and adjusted (this includes mirror box and film track, and all accessible parts or adjustments). If performance is below standard, a quotation will be issued for optional servicing. A certificate is completed showing the test results and functions checked, and returned with the camera. Camera Repair Workshop were actually responsible for most of the Club Camera Check work, and hold a stock of original 'Minolta Club' certificates along with all the necessary bench testing equipment.

They are based at:

Unit 9, Wharfside, Bletchley, Milton Keynes MK2 2AZ.

Telephone 01908 378088, fax 08712 427677.

Email: cameraworkshop@tiscali.co.uk

SIGMA

Payangan, Bali, Indonesia | CAMERA : SIGMA SD14 : ISO100, F6.3, 1/60sec | LENS: SIGMA APO 50-500mm F4.5-6.3 DG OS HSM : 226mm(50-500)



SIGMA LENS for DIGITAL

APO
50-500^{mm}
F4.5-6.3
DG OS HSM

For Sigma, Canon, Nikon, Sony and Pentax
Supplied with matched lens hood and fitted padded case



A re-design of a Sigma classic. Sigma's 50-500mm lens is legendary amongst telezoom photographers specialising in wildlife, birds and aeroplanes.

The lens features a staggeringly large zoom range from standard to ultra-telephoto. The completely new design incorporates Sigma's unique OS (Optical Stabiliser) function, HSM (Hypersonic Motor) for fast and quiet auto focusing and full time manual focus override. Four SLD (Special Low Dispersion) glass elements offer excellent correction of aberrations and improved optical quality. This lens also accepts Sigma 1.4x EX DG and 2x EX DG teleconverters (MF)