

photoworld



autumn07



The Alpha 100 is no more. Officially, though it is still on sale and prices are very keen, the camera is to be replaced in early 2008 with a new model at the same level. It's out of production, presumably because the capacity is taken up with the new Alpha 700 and this yet to be seen replacement.

Although it might seem bad advice to buy a camera on the way out, the Alpha 100 has some unique qualities. It was found to be the sharpest of the all the 10 megapixel class in terms of fine detail, and it has not been surpassed. Even the Alpha 700 with 12 megapixels is hard pressed to better the Alpha 100 when both cameras are used at ISO 100.

The postal strikes in October have had an influence on our magazine timing, along with the decision by Sony to delay the launch of the Alpha 700 in Britain by a full month. We were not invited to the September 5th European launch, and consequently had no hands-on experience with the Alpha 700 which could have permitted an initial report. We were invited to the October 10th London launch, and provided with a test camera immediately. We learned that the UK/European model had been delayed because EU regulations demanded a change in specification to avoid the use of nickel, and we received our test kit the very first day they were available.

—David & Shirley Kilpatrick

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# Photoclubalpha website breaks own records



OUR club website – [www.photoclubalpha.com](http://www.photoclubalpha.com) – which went live on May 21st and was announced in the last magazine has broken all expectations. Five months exactly after launch, the site had attracted 390,000 individual 'page reads' of the articles on. Each article is only a single page, very few have additional links to click. There are thousands of visitors each day to the site now, and over time we have built up a substantial archive of articles and information.

Photoclubalpha offers you extended views of topics covered in the magazine, and many additional short articles, along with news and resources. It has been built using Wordpress, a 'blog' system, which makes it easy for me to add complete articles in the time it takes to write them and prepare the images. They are automatically placed in the categories, indexed and searchable.

Photoclubalpha also has a Forum. While registering for the main site is not vital, you should register to use the Forum properly, and join in with discussions. Over the last couple of months we have been encouraging Forum activity so there are already plenty of topics you can view and

learn from. Please note that since our announcement, all Forum user registrations are manually activated. We had some real problems with porn and drugs merchants registering – they target any site with the word 'photo' in the title. We now have Shirley along with a volunteer admin helper clearing off these nuisances as soon as they try to register.

The benefit of Forum membership is that advice is available from other members who have encountered similar problems or are specialists in one field. I also drop in regularly and follow up posts where needed.

To go straight to the Photoclubalpha.com forums, the web address is:

[www.photoclubalpha.com/phpBB2](http://www.photoclubalpha.com/phpBB2)

To see the Reader Gallery (which you are automatically signed up to use when you create a user name and password for the Forum) go to:

<http://www.photoclubalpha.com/coppermine/>

There are no charges associated with the Photoclubalpha website. Pages carry advertising, and this helps cover the costs. Please visit your website soon!

—DK

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# Autumn launch for a camera with 'Autumn' option

The new Alpha 700 went on sale the week before this issue went to press. Around mid-November, it will be available with a new 16-105mm Sony SAL f3.5-5.6 zoom.

The A700 greatly extends the range of options for picture styles or creative looks.

You can select from Neutral sRGB, AdobeRGB, Vivid sRGB, Standard sRGB (this is not the same as Neutral, more midway between Neutral and Vivid) and three settings of your own choice. The options you can load into this settings are all the above settings, plus Clear, Deep, Light, Portrait, Landscape, Sunset, Night, B/W, Sepia and... Autumn.

You can't help wonder whether Sony knew the camera would be launched in Autumn and added a special colour rendering just for this.

You can see the difference, which is subtle, between Standard (top) and Autumn (bottom) in these shots of a fallen maple leaf.

There is something more to these shots though. They were not taken on an Alpha system lens. They were taken using a vintage 28mm f2.8



Minolta MD – one of the last lenses made for the manual system, and not labelled as a Rokkor. A Haoda Fu 1.2X adaptor went between the A700 body and the lens. Focusing was manual, and here the very good screen of the A700 helped. I have a Haoda Fu microprism and split image screen in my A100 because manual focus is so tricky on the standard screen. It is easy with the A700 and no replacement would be needed.

## A100 Firmware 1.04

Sony has finally released installers for the latest firmware for the Alpha 100. Several undocumented improvements include faster raw writing to card. See [photoclubalpha.com](http://photoclubalpha.com) for links.

— DK



Above – Autumn colour setting top, and Standard colour setting below. The difference is subtle but the warm colours get a definite boost.

## 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 right). 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](mailto:cameraworkshop@tiscali.co.uk)**

## HELPLINES AND INFORMATION

Authorised & warranty repairs, assistance and enquiries

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](mailto: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](http://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**

Our new website **[www.photoclubalpha.com](http://www.photoclubalpha.com)** has a full directory of useful links for downloading software or obtaining help, on its front page. 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:

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



# Sony launches World Photography Awards

These pictures are not winners – they are tasters, encouragement for the world's professionals to identify with and enter the new Sony World Photography Awards. The World Photography Awards (WPA), sponsored by Sony, is an international showcase of the best images taken by renowned and undiscovered photographers alike. From landscape to music and photojournalism to fashion photography, the WPA is the first awards of its kind and is supported by hundreds of the industry's top photographers, critics, gallery curators, directors, founders and more.

Featuring eleven different categories, both professional and amateur photographers will be invited to enter work from 9th October 2007 until mid-January 2008. All entries will be judged by a prestigious academy of experts and the winners will be announced at a black tie awards ceremony in Cannes at the Palais des Festivals on 24th April 2008.

The awards and subsequent exhibition will be to photography what the Oscars are to the film industry. With an annual ceremony and black tie gala taking place on the prestigious Côte d'Azur, the World Photography Awards are set to become the largest and most important awards in the industry. For the inaugural year, the World Photography Academy will be comprised over one hundred of the most respected photographers, critics, picture editors, gallerists and other industry leaders. It will include Phil Stern (US), Terry O' Neil

(UK), Chien-Chi (China), Sylvia Plachy (Hungary), Carl de Keyzer (Belgium) and Esko Mannikko (Finland). Members of the academy will form the judging panel for the awards, and winners will automatically gain membership of the academy.

The academy will be governed by the Honorary Board which consists of eleven members including Tom Stoddart, Mary Ellen Mark, Bruce Davidson, Martin Parr, Elliott Erwitt, Susan Meiselas and Stephen Cohen. These eleven board members will represent the academy, promoting excellence within photography and setting the standard for award selections.

Providing an unprecedented international platform in the world of photography, the aim of the World Photography Awards is to unearth the images of the future while paying tribute to the visions of the past. "It's a great honour to be part of the inaugural Sony World Photography Awards.

The awards will showcase the very best imagery from around the world and will undoubtedly inspire and excite anyone who is passionate about photography." (Tom Stoddart)

Image from today's press conference to announce the inaugural Sony World Photography Awards: from left to right – Scott Gray, (Founder); Tom Stoddart (Photographer); Alan Sparrow (president of Picture Editors

Guild, UK); Shaun Dorrington.

## Judging Academy

Some of the world's leading photographers, public gallery operators, curators and major picture editors have been invited to become members of the WPA. A full list of current academy members can be found at [www.worldphotographyawards.org](http://www.worldphotographyawards.org).





## Categories

From the 9th October 2007, photographers both professional and amateur will be invited to submit work to be judged in the eleven different categories. From this the academy will nominate a shortlist of photographers who will then be invited to attend the awards ceremony. The shortlist will be announced in February 2008.

The eleven categories are:

- \* Abstract
- \* Advertising
- \* Architecture
- \* Fashion
- \* Music
- \* Nature
- \* Nude
- \* Portraiture
- \* Photojournalism
- \* Science
- \* Sport

## The Awards

**Professional Awards:** All submitted works will be judged by academy members and three finalists will be nominated in each of the eleven categories. One photograph will represent the image of the year and win l'iris d'or which comprises:

- \* The title Sony World Photography Awards Photographer of the Year as well as \$25,000.
- \* Entry into the World Photographic Academy for future years.
- \* Exhibition showcase of winning image and 25 picture portfolio at the 2009 World Photography Awards.
- \* Winning images exhibited on the World Photography Awards' website and promoted to creatives worldwide.

There will be also be Individual Category Awards and one Lifetime Achievement Award.

## Amateur Awards

The awards will be international and interactive, allowing people from across the world to submit photographs online via the WPA website to an amateur competition that will run in parallel to the Professional Awards. Each photographer can submit up to three photographs per single category. The site aims to create an online community and social network in which people can interact, creating a destination point for amateur photographers across the globe.

The awards night will be a black tie event bringing together the crème de la crème of photography and the media on 24th April 2008 in Cannes. An exhibition of all finalists' work will be held at the Palais des Festivals in Cannes from the 21st-25th April and will be open for public viewing. World Photography Awards is delighted to welcome Sony as its headline sponsor.

"Photography plays a vital role in defining and documenting the world around us", says Shaun Dorrington, General Manager, Sony Digital Imaging, "and by sponsoring the inaugural World Photography Awards we can support talented photographers across the globe and give them the recognition they deserve."





# Sony Alpha 700: the Dynax 7D Mk II arrives

If you loved the Dynax 9, the Dynax 7 and ultimately the digital Dynax 7D you will find the new **Sony Alpha 700** irresistible. It's the size and heft of the 7D with a build quality closer to the 9 and responsive feel and sweet shutter action of the 7.

The Alpha 700 – named to show its heritage as part of the series which can be traced right back to the SR-7, through XD-7, X-700, 7000, 700, 7 and on – was unveiled to the British market on October 10th in London.

"Fourteen months after the the launch of the Alpha 100 we are introducing the Alpha 700", said Paul Genge, Sony's technical sales manager for the DSLR range. "Over this period Sony has been working very hard to develop what will be the full range of DSLRs from absolute basic to professional.

"The Alpha 700 is our advanced amateur model. It is not intended for photographers who are focused on money-earning – it is for those who want the absolute best in image quality and performance.

"It includes new key image technologies, including a 12.24 megapixel CMOS sensor. We will continue to develop CCD alongside CMOS to best fit each product in its target market".

Paul claimed that no other manufacturer has on-sensor noise reduction, though our own reading of Canon literature indicates that they make a similar claim. The noise reduction is handled differently, however, and takes place separately for each column (vertical line of pixels) on the sensor.

"The analog to digital conversion is done on a per column basis", said Paul. "We believe that in the operating range of ISO 100 to 3200, we will have class-leading noise reduction."

The A700 uses four types of noise reduction. First, there is on-sensor pixel by pixel NR where each column is analysed and the noise cancelled out before the charge is transferred to the A-to-D converter. Then, there is a stage called raw NR, which reduces noise even in the raw file format. These two stages are fixed, and can not be adjusted. Finally, there is High ISO NR which can be set to Low, Normal or High by the user and only affects the JPEG files. Long Exposure NR (dark frame subtraction) is also



*Above: Paul Genge introduces the Alpha 700 at the Firehouse, a club facing the Natural History Museum in London. The 700 is similar in overall size to the Dynax 7D and clearly owes much of its design to it.*

*The pop-up flash can be set to manual power like the 7D – right down to GN3.*



*The 16-105mm kit lens looks great on the camera, but is not due to arrive until late November.*

provided with options for on/off.

The Alpha 700 offers up to four stops of anti-shake via the Super Steady Shot sensor image stabilisation system, first introduced to 35mm DSLRs in the Dynax 7D and now appearing copied by other brands.

Special attention has been paid in the SSS system to camera shake occurring when lenses between 200mm and 300mm are used. It was found that the earlier cameras had a weak spot – presumably with shutter speeds around 1/30 to

1/60 – and this has been corrected along with a general improvement for longer hand-held exposure times.

The nine-point autofocus system of the A100 has been replaced in the A700 with an 11-point system (leaving behind the new Canon 40D by two points and matching the new Nikon D300, a possible marketing advantage where comparative charts of features are concerned). The central sensor is now a double cross type, which resembles the # symbol but not slanted, of course.

In the middle of this (imagine a hyphen overlaid on the #) is a single high accuracy sensor which works with lenses of f2.8 or faster, and can use their wider aperture.

All AF sensors are capable of focusing with fast lenses, but the optics effectively reduce the aperture to f6.7. The special central sensor has what would be like a wider rangefinder base, though AF sensors don't actually work that way. It can use the wider aperture image for a more accurate setting.

Paul explained that the new camera uses a choice of raw image formats – RAW .ARW or compressed RAW .ARW, known as cRAW. The body has a very fast shooting cycle and can achieve a nominal 5 frames per second. When shooting Fine JPEGs only, it will maintain this continuously until the card is full. Shooting raw, you can take a sequence of 18 RAW or 25 cRAW shots, 12 RAW+JPEG, or just 8 using Extra Fine JPEG.

## A bigger view

"We have found that shop staff pick up the camera, lift it, look through the viewfinder and say 'wow!'", Paul Genge commented during his presentation.

The viewfinder is like the Dynax 7D – big, bright, with a glass pentaprism instead of the hollow mirror-prism of the A100. It is very comfortable to view through with spectacles and has increased eye relief (meaning you don't have to press your specs to your face as much).

Also very big, and bright, is the rear viewing screen. This is now a 3 inch screen in place of the 2.5" of the A100. It is one of the highest resolution 3" screens made, true VGA 640 x 480 pixels, using a total of 920,000 R, G and B pixels in a striped array. It's a bit like a miniature Trinitron TV for those who remember the Sony classic!

The high resolution has made it possible to have a thumbnail image strip along the top of the screen showing five images, plus a larger image selected from this strip using the multi-selector (navigation joystick).

The screen also hosts an entirely new user interface called Quick Navigation, where you can highlight any of the settings shown as you

view it when shooting, jump through them and adjust any or all of them rapidly. There is no need to use text menus to change any of the settings visible when you are shooting.

The A700 sees the return of custom memories – three, just as on the Dynax 7D – which instead of being positions on the main mode dial, use just a single MR position with recall of the three choices from the menu screen. 28 different parameters can be preset for each custom memory. There is also a C button which can be assigned any one of 15 different functions.

The A700 body has been ruggedised substantially, though at under 700 grams it is lighter than the 7D and slightly more compact end to end. The thickness of the body has been beefed up, along with the handgrip, and a new slope-shouldered lens mount design with an additional metal ring on the outside of the bayonet mount counteracts the added chunkiness.

“The card door now has a pressure seal”, said Paul, “and there are silicon gaskets on the control buttons for weatherproofing”. There is no claim that the camera is splash or waterproof but all the rubber interface covers, controls and buttons are moisture and dust sealed. Being caught in a shower without camera protection should no longer be a problem.

## Extras and add-ons

Accessories for the Alpha 700 include a choice of hard polycarbonate or soft peel-off rear screen protectors, and the GPS CS-1 recorder, which works with the supplied PC *Picture Motion Browser* software.

An optional HDMI cable allows the A700 to be connected to an HD TV. The file format of the JPEGs and raw files embeds a 1920 x 1080 pixel HDTV version, and the latest Sony Bravia TVs equipped with the PhotoTV function will display this with enhanced tone, colour and sharpness.

To operate TV slide shows from the camera, a remote control handset RMT-DSLR1 is provided. This is a real bonus, because it also acts as a cordless cable release. You can set the camera to wireless release, and use either a ‘shutter’ or a ‘2 sec’ release button on the controller. The 2 second option lifts the mirror first, to minimise vibrations. The handset also allows menu navigation and direct printing, review and deletion of images.

This item included with the body obviously adds value – it must be worth about £50 of the £999.50 recommended retail price (body only).



Top: the big rear screen and five-strip thumbnail display. Above: the new 16-105mm and 18-250mm zooms.

The A700 also comes with a comprehensive software suite for both Mac and PC. Paul Genge said that the *Remote* software, which allows tethered operation via USB, was Vista only for PCs. A version is supplied, for the first time, for Mac OSX. *Picture Motion Browser* (which permits GPS data embedding) is still for PC only. A new browser which views raw files rapidly using the embedded preview, *Image Data Lightbox SR*, makes image management very easy. For conversion, *Image Data Converter SR v2* is provided, and this is compatible with previous .ARW files from the Alpha 100, .SR2 files from the Cybershot DSC R-1, and also with .SRF raw files from other Cybershot models.

A major optional accessory is the vertical grip which, unlike low-cost battery pack grips, duplicates the entire range of major controls and positions them correctly relative to the focusing screen and viewfinder eyepiece. It also places the shutter release for portrait compositions at the right relative height, just as the grip for earlier Minolta models did.

Both the European version of the Alpha 700 and the vertical grip are slightly different from US and Asian versions. These have a grip sensor strip, which activates eye-start AF as you pick up the camera. Because this strip used a nickel alloy or plating, it was banned in Europe, and a dummy plastic strip is fitted instead, along with different menu options.

## Lens choices

The Alpha 700 was launched with options of body only or a kit with the 18-70mm lens, which we were sent to test. The 18-70mm feels out of place on this body and in my view it is a mistake to have issued a £999 camera with what is really a £99 lens (regardless of its RRP). It doesn't look right, it doesn't feel right and it is a poor match of performance between body and lens.

In November, a new 16-105mm f3.5-5.6 SAL DT standard lens is set to join the camera. This lens resembles the Carl Zeiss 16-80mm in design and we were able to compare the two at the London launch. The only 16-105mm there was a prototype and not available for testing, but it felt better made and with smoother action than the CZ lens. Early reports suggest that has higher distortion (3 per cent barrel at 16mm according to Anders Uschold in the *British Journal of Photography*) and is significantly softer than the Zeiss, despite the improved mount quality.

“No other manufacturer has such a broad range in a standard kit zoom”, said Paul Genge. “We believe this lens to be absolutely fantastic in optical quality.”

It is the widest ranging such zoom ever made, equalling 24-157mm in 35mm full frame terms. To equal it, Canon would have to make a 15-100mm zoom because of the smaller size of their DSLR sensors.

There will be, said Paul, a special Limited Edition kit including the CZ lens in a presentation kit, as well as the 18-70mm kit and 16-105mm kit.

New lenses arriving alongside the camera include a Sony 18-250mm f3.5-6.3 SAL DT, which we predicted would appear based on the Tamron model. It is likely to be enhanced, compared to the Tamron, and Sony has taken the decision to retain Tamron's zoom lock feature for the first time. It has a circular aperture, modified mount with zoom and focus functions, and probably also uses modified coatings.

Another new design is a 55-200mm f4-5.6, described as entry class by Paul. This lens has proved excellent in its Tamron form and is only likely to be improved with a Sony label and associated enhancements. Early reports from users back this up.

The 18-250mm seems like a good kit lens choice although no kits are apparently planned with this option yet. The 75-300mm remains a good tele to team up with CZ 16-80mm or the 18-70mm, and got a thumbs-up from Anders Uschold in the recent *B/P* test.



Paul said that Sony intend to increase the lens line-up to 40 optics in 2008, including both Sony and CZ designs. A new Sony 70-300mm f4.5-5.6 SSM G lens will be available "in the Spring of next year". This is the tele zoom we pictured in the last edition. The surprise is that this compact twin-extension barrel optic, taking 62mm filters, is both a G series meaning apochromatic quality and metal mount components, and an SSM. It will be the first Supersonic Wave Motor lens for the Alpha mount designed by Sony, and in black livery rather than the white finish of the long apo lenses. Though it is a full-frame lens, like all SSM designs it is not AF compatible with any Minolta bodies prior to the (converted) Dynax 9.

As for the rumoured full-frame body, Paul would not say if the 'A900' is just round the corner or not – or whether it is full frame. With the World Photography Awards presentation ceremony in Cannes in 2008 at the end of April, we believe that the flagship DSLR will be completed and on show or in use by that time. It is an opportunity Sony could not miss, to have launched or previewed the camera earlier at PMA, the major US trade show held in March, and to have it in the hands of top photographers during the Cannes event.



*Both these pictures have been altered in raw conversion to enhance the colour.*

## Shot on sight

At the London Alpha 700 launch event, the press was let loose in small parties with the camera and a choice of lenses. The subject was the Natural History Museum, who had agreed to allow the photography. It certainly tested the high ISO noise reduction and the Super Steady Shot aspects of the camera, as well as its quiet operation and fast responses.

At the end of the London launch event, I was able to take away with me a test kit of Alpha 700 and lens. I fitted it up with strap and my CZ 16-80mm, charged the battery while doing some writing, and after leaving spent an hour photographing Westminster, the Embankment and the London Eye. I came away with shots I was pleased with. The dynamic range of the raw files allowed creative alterations to colour and tones, creating a vivid sunset London from a hazy late afternoon.

Nigel Wilson, who runs DSLR classes in London and Manchester, was on hand to advise the non-photographic press on DSLR handling. You can find information about his courses by visiting [www.photographycourses.co.uk](http://www.photographycourses.co.uk)

– DK





# The Sony Alpha 700: what's new, and how it performs in practice

Because the Alpha 700 was launched to the world market a month before the European version (with disabled grip sensor) was available, a great deal of discussion has already hit the forum pages of internet, and many photo examples both excellent and disappointing have been viewed. Before getting our test camera, we had received raw files from all round the world. We also ordered an Alpha 700 from DigitalRev in Hong Kong, without the disabled grip strip, because this magazine issue was already delayed and there was no news of the launch date for the UK.

Within hours of making that order, the October 10th launch was announced and on October 12th we found ourselves with two A700 bodies – one European spec, one 'rest of world' – in our hands.

Unfortunately, the Hong Kong import turned out to be a faulty camera body. See the panel at the end of this article explaining the pitfalls involved, and the costs you may encounter if you buy a camera this way and have to return it for refund or replacement.

## First impressions

Any 7D/5D/A100 owner will feel comfortable with the A700 straight off. Controls like the On/Off switch, SSS switch, Screen buttons, depth of field, lens release, AF/MF button, metering mode switch and focus mode switch are all derived from the 7D in position.

The body feels very substantial yet light – it uses two magnesium alloy outer shell, plus an inside hardened aluminium chassis. Every control is very smooth and positive. There is only one dial on the camera top, and at first the right hand end looks as if something is missing. In fact, the wide spacing of the buttons is designed to make working in gloves (or with larger fingers) less error-prone.

The viewfinder is superb, and on switching on, you immediately notice that the focus is much faster. The new focus motor is about twice as powerful as the older models, and drives lenses at their maximum speed. Locking AF is also more positive. This camera rarely hunts and rarely misses the focus point.



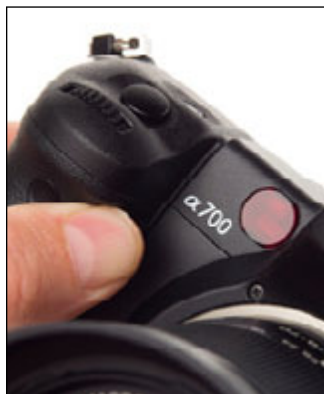
*The 18-70mm kit zoom is not a match for the scale or build quality of the Alpha 700. The lens mount now has an outer metal ring which goes beyond the diameter of the lens, and an orange gasket seal.*



*The orange outline highlights the item you are changing. You can navigate through the boxes using the multi-way controller (right of screen) or control wheels. Below: the Infolithium battery (A100 compatible) and AF-assist illuminator window.*



*The groove prevents you fitting A100 cells in the 700. The AF-assist for low light returns from the Dynax 7D.*



It is more accurately calibrated and the problems of the earlier generations have been ironed out.

Pressing the shutter, the sound is a welcome change from the harsh clack of the 5D/A100, and both quicker and quieter than the 7D. It is now one of the sweetest-action mirror and shutter assemblies you can find.

Setting motordrive mode, the 5 frames a second (only achieved with manual focus, shutter speeds less than 1/250th and so on) is impressive even at the 4.5fps or so it achieves using AF and auto everything.

Card writing is so fast you hardly see the light on – by the time you have looked down, a single shot is recorded. Reviewing the image is extremely rapid too.

The A700 has dual card slots, one for Memory Stick Duo. You have to change from one slot to the other manually. I keep an MS Duo Pro 2GB card in the camera as a spare. It is so much slower than any of my CF cards the slot is best considered a standby.

One point about the A700 is the tighter lens mount. The mounts of recent cameras have had a bit of play. This is corrected, and lenses bayonet home against firm pressure, feeling very rigid when fixed, and free from that tiny annoying hint of slack. The mount has an extra flange on the outside of an orange gasket insert. No-one knows exactly why this has been done yet but the mount is very well supported and protected as a result.

The new battery type NP-FM500H is Infolithium, and the camera displays the percentage of power left. I found this a bit nagging, worrying about having only 38% left when I never worried much about one bar left on the old displays. The camera takes about 15 per cent fewer shots per charge than the Alpha 100, probably because of the larger 12.24 megapixel image size.

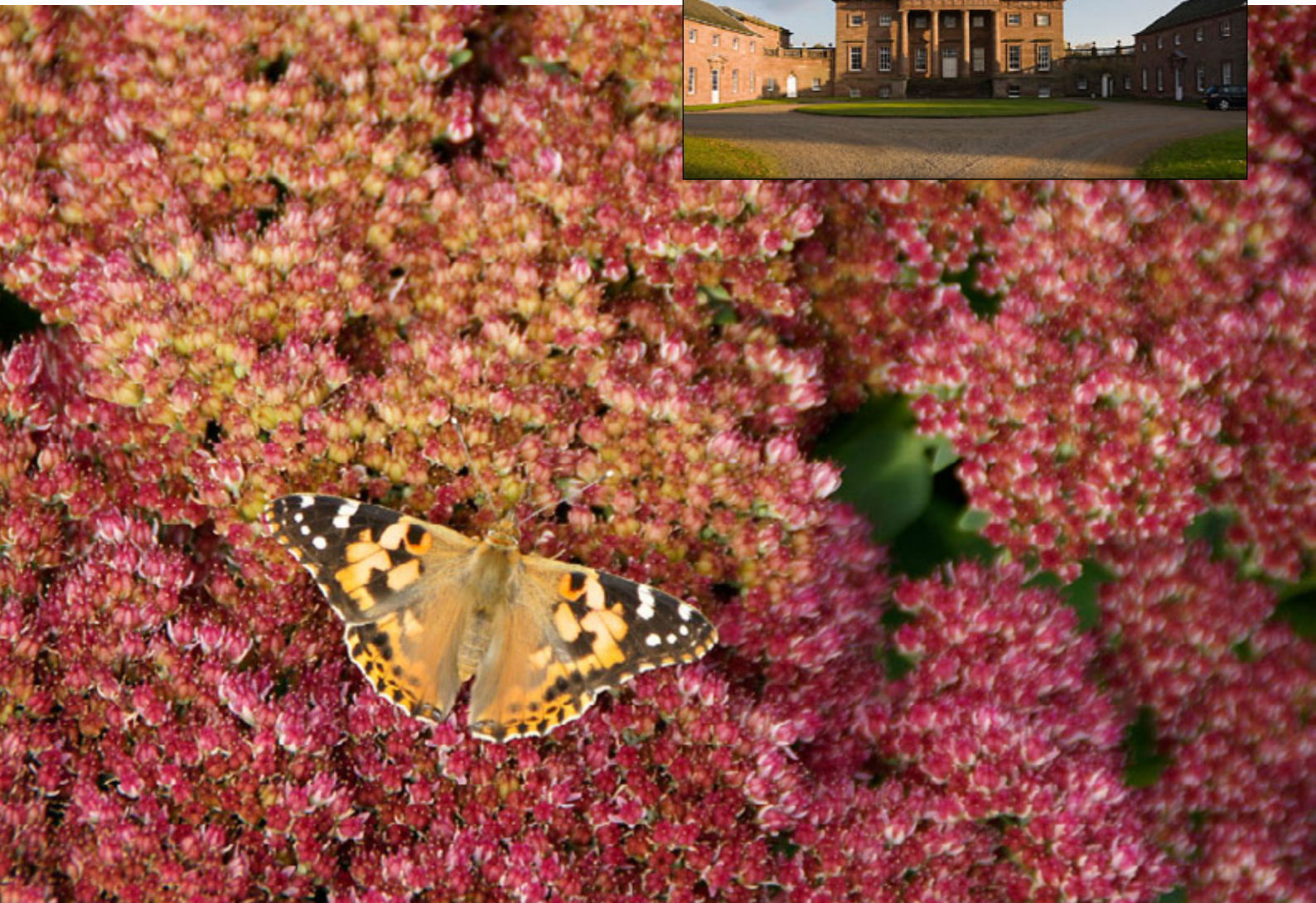
## Early results

I know that when using my Alpha 100 set to Auto ISO it makes a choice from 100, 200 or 400 plus some steps in between. All these settings are 'safe' and do not introduce too much noise or loss of detail in images. Therefore, when handed the A700 for the initial shoot in the Natural History Museum, I set the ISO to Auto, enabled SSS,





*Three shots from Paxton House, Berwickshire, on October 14th – a warm day for butterflies. All on the Alpha 700, Tamron 18-250mm zoom, by Shirley Kilpatrick.*





and fired away. I expected to get 90 per cent keepers. Instead, I got what are by my standards 90 per cent rejects. The Auto ISO on the A700 starts at 200 and the default let its select speeds between 200 and 800.

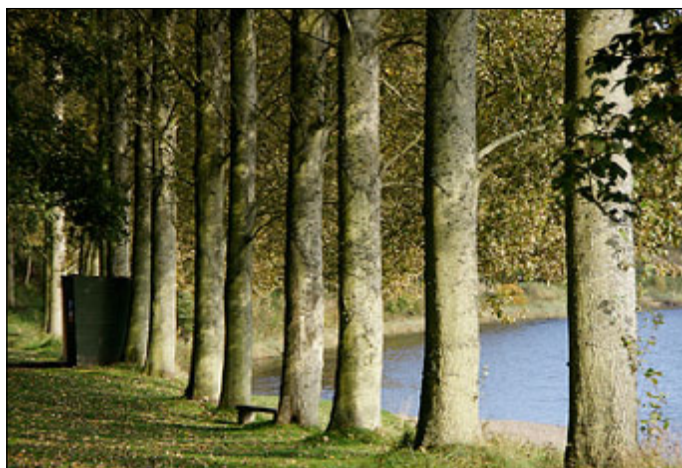
You can change this to allow a maximum of 400 or 1600, and a minimum of 400 instead of 200. You can not opt to have a minimum of 100. On the default setting, the camera naturally selected ISOs such as 400, 500, 640 and 800 most of the time inside the museum. I had left Noise Reduction on 'Normal' and I was shooting RAW+JPEG.

At 400, the JPEGs were good enough but just didn't seem ever to have the same sharpness as the A100. At higher speeds, the effects of noise reduction were very strong, creating a ragged looking watercolour effect. While the camera secured pictures in very poor light the SSS did not seem totally effective and very few shots had the sharpness I like to see. I transferred this shoot on to my laptop before being given a production-quality new A700 to take away for testing. Viewing the pictures alerted me to the need to set parameters carefully. On the new camera, I immediately set Auto ISO to be limited to 200-400 range; I set Noise Reduction to Low; I set JPEG sharpness to -3. While the light was good outside, I locked the ISO down to a fixed 200. We already had information that 200 is the optimum setting for the A700, and the 100 setting results in slightly reduced dynamic range.

## The real thing

Fortunately, the type of poor result I obtained from the handed-out test camera at the museum was not repeated with the production sample. The SSS seems more effective than on the A100, and worked far more consistently. Two days later we received the Hong Kong camera, and this gave cause for concern the moment I had finished taking studio shots of the product. Fitting a lens and inserting a card, it displayed CAMERA ERROR when I tried to fire a test shot. A black frame resulted, and the camera had to be turned off and one before resuming. In the instruction manual it says you should remove and replace the battery if this happens, and if it keeps popping up, contact Sony.

Well, the errors displayed on ours when turning SSS on after having it switched off, when changing lenses, and when starting up after leaving the camera. Every time, it was persuaded to work after a couple of black frames, so I risked an afternoon's shooting with it, handing



*Top, Tamron 18-250mm at 100mm, ISO 200, 1/200th at f6.7. Above, at 250mm, f6.7, ISO 400. Both photographs by Shirley Kilpatrick.*



## DRO in action

*Above: Shirley in old doorway, standard JPEG. Below: the same with DRO Advanced manual setting +5, the maximum strength. It's too much for the hair tones.*



Shirley the 'official' body. Needless to say, many shots from the imported camera showed odd double imaging effects from SSS apparently working incorrectly, and to complete the catalogue of errors, stripes of red pixels appeared in a fixed position on both raw and JPEG images.

The sensor in the grip is a really good feature. It made it possible to use eye-start, which I find annoying in the European version as it is active all the time and can't tell whether it is your eye at the viewfinder or your clothing. But the camera had to go back, and we asked for a refund, with no intention of trying to get another non-European model with the full specification. Far safer to live with the absence of the grip sensor, and have proper recourse to local warranties or a dealer to swap the camera over immediately if it has a fault.

After about one week with the cameras, my best set of pictures remained the shots taken around Westminster after collecting the test body. Many further tests were done using high and low ISO settings and it became clear that the Alpha 700 is at its best when you use the in-camera JPEGs.

Using Extra Fine JPEG and taking sensible steps like reducing the file size to the smaller 6.4 megapixel option when shooting at 3200 ISO can give results far superior to the Dynax 7D – which has a good reputation for high ISO quality. Some consumer cameras reduce the filesize whether you want it or not at their highest ISO setting ('binning' pixels). Doing it voluntarily with the Alpha 700 can produce the best image quality.

## DRO settings

The 700 has a more advanced form of Dynamic Range Optimisation than the A100. This is fully functional when you shoot RAW+JPEG, instead of being disabled. If you shoot raw only, it processes the embedded preview, but you don't get any effect on the raw data. Sony's *Image Data Converter SR* version 2 includes DRO in software form but it's not the same as the intelligent process which happens in the camera.

You can set basic DRO (a gamma curve adjustment based on contrast of the scene overall), DRO Auto which is similar to DRO+ in the Alpha 100, or DRO Advanced with manual settings from 1 to 5 controlling the extent of the auto treatment. The way in which this adjustment is applied to the JPEG is surprising if you have not seen it before. Dark shadow areas and difficult highlights are all brought into line perfectly, and on



Level 5, the result looks like an HDR processed picture (in darkroom terms, it looks as if the sky has been burned in and shadows dodged).

Because it is impossible to replicate the complex local adjustments made by DRO Advanced and Auto, the JPEG from the A700 is often better than anything you can get from raw. It is also better than the typical raw processed result for colour, gradation and sharpness especially once you work at ISO 400 or higher.

I actually found myself rejecting the raw version of some shots and using the in-camera JPEG for my final 'filing' picture. I have never done this with any DSLR before. There is a penalty for selecting the highest quality JPEG, Extra Fine. You can't shoot raw, and the camera slows down, only managing 8 frames in sequence at 5 fps instead of up to 25 with raw shooting. You get, however, the best quality JPEG I've ever seen. If you reduce the filesize to 6.4 megapixels you also get continuous shooting for more than 30 frames. The standard Fine quality JPEG which comes with RAW+JPEG shooting is up to A3 (double page spread) standards at ISO 100-320.

You can select exact ISO intervals with the A700 – in third steps, so you can use 125, 160, 250, 320 or any intermediate speed. It is not limited to full steps. You can also pick whether exposure override and bracketing are in third steps or half steps. Shutter speeds and apertures always work to third-step accuracy. Overall, the camera has finer control over exposure, contrast, colour, sharpness, and white balance than any previous model.

## Bracketing and control

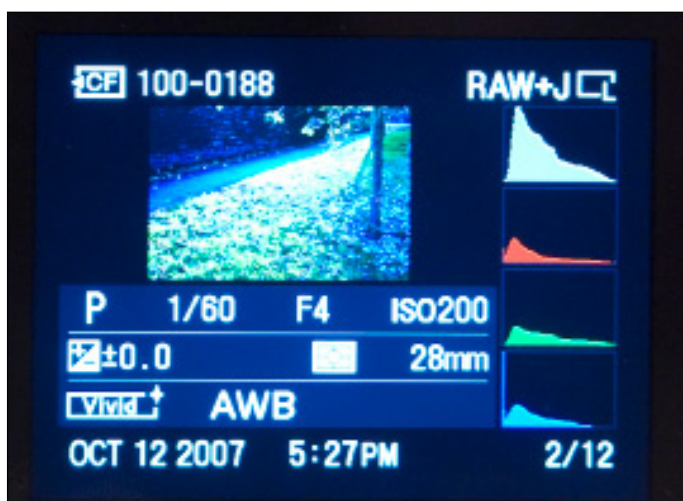
If you decide, like me, that raw shooting does not necessarily produce better potential than the very advanced processing inside the camera – you may want to bracket.

With the A700, you can do normal exposure bracketing but you can also bracket White Balance (10 or 20 Mired units in each direction created from a single frame, -/0/+ ) and even add DRO Bracketing. This takes one shot, not three, but produces three JPEGs from it using Lo, Mid and Hi DRO levels. You can not combine this with auto exposure bracketing, it's a separate choice, but of course you can quickly shoot using the rapid plus-minus function given by the button near the shutter release and a quick turn of either control wheel.

The rear screen gives a slightly warm looking image, but it has a full colour histogram option and the display can also flash to warn you of highlight or shadow clipping (only



*The 700 has well sealed covers for all connections. The flash socket cover, remote and AC adaptor covers are hinged, not just flexible. The card door has clear insertion instructions. Below: the full separate R, G, B histogram display is a big step forward.*



in the histogram view, not in full screen mode). The magnify function takes you to 13X view and shows a miniature image of the shot inset into the magnified section, if you want to navigate round more easily.

You can magnify immediately even when shooting raw, during the brief auto review appearance of the image on the screen. There is no need to use the playback function to do a quick playback check. I did find I tended to nudge the rear control wheel when diving for the magnify (AF/MF) button with my thumb, so I switched on Control Dial Lock, which neatly prevents this, unless you happen to have your finger on the shutter release at the same time!

The Quick Navi screen function is wonderful. You can set it so that you get the whole screen (all important shooting parameters) appearing whenever you thumb-press the rear buttons for Drive, WB, and ISO, AF/MF, or the front Exposure Compensation button. This is done by changing the default menu from 'Button Ops' (their dedicated function only) to 'Quick Navi' (jumps straight

to the button function but displays all other adjustment choices).

Once in Quick Navi, you can use the multi-way controller like a small joystick, or the control wheels. Either will scroll you or jump you from one setting to the next, highlighting it. Pressing the middle of the multi-way controller then activates adjustment on that setting, and once again, either of the front/rear control wheels or the controller stick will change the settings. Pressing the multi-way centrally again confirms.

It's much harder to explain than it is to do. Even a very brief demonstration will have you understanding just how rapidly you can adjust any of the important setting you need for creative photography.

For JPEGs (not affecting raw) you also have a huge choice of creative looks, from regular sRGB and AdobeRGB through to Autumn Leaves, Sunset, 'Deep', Sepia and more.

Put all this together, and you have a camera which is well suited to getting it right with JPEG shooting. Though I continue to shoot raw, I'm finding the results

from Adobe Camera Raw are only satisfactory with low ISO files.

Image Data Converter SR is better in some ways, but neither really matches the JPEG quality from the camera at higher ISO settings.

This is the first time I've recommended using a DSLR in JPEG mode.

## Is it worth it?

We have almost forgotten, with the falling price of the Alpha 100, that the 7D cost well over £1,000 new. The Alpha 700 at £999.50 body only is competitively priced in its market (prices as low as £769 body + 18-70mm have already appeared). But it's a big investment. Using the camera for a couple of weeks before this magazine went to press, I found myself missing something in the images which I get from the Alpha 100. While fine detail and good sharpness can be found in Alpha 700 images, it's obvious that the Anti-Aliasing filter is far stronger (tests bear this out) and the dual stage on-sensor Noise Reduction followed by BIONZ processor RAW NR combine to smooth out a lot of microcontrast.

The images simply look softer, which is theoretically a good thing, as there are fewer artefacts. The Alpha 700 is never going to produce moiré patterns from fine textures, which the Alpha 100 and Canon 5D both manage to do if conditions are right. At really high ISO settings 1600-6400, it pays to use the in-camera JPEG rather than shoot raw. You can get an excellent shot at 3200, and the best 1600 shots are almost as good as we used to expect to ISO 400.

I would not want to go back to the A100 for shooting sports, concerts, weddings, pets, kids – all common targets for a DSLR. It transforms focus speed and accuracy and produces low noise results with adequate detail.

However, for landscape and travel work the lighter A100 with its rather crisper-looking results at ISO 100 will probably remain our normal weapon. The arrival of the A700 doesn't suddenly remove the A100's unique status as the sharpest, highest-resolving (and least high-ISO friendly) DSLR of its generation.

You will know if you want better low-light capabilities, better focus tracking, 5 fps, studio flash compatibility, low noise high ISO, a larger more rugged body, an optional vertical grip, a wireless remote control provided free with the camera, HDTV playback and all the other benefits of the Alpha 700. All you need is the best part of a grand!

– David Kilpatrick





# The pitfalls of buying an import

The price is little different – and the costs of anything going wrong could be into three figures just to get a replacement or your money back

We bought an Alpha 700 from a Hong Kong company called DigitalRev who do good business in the UK. Their price was roughly £808 including shipping, to which VAT and customs clearance was added at their end. This is something they do which very few other overseas vendors attempt; they pay for the import duty and clearance, and ship via DHL.

When you receive the package, you contact DigitalRev and they will refund your VAT and clearance charge. In our case, we would not have needed this – a proper VAT form showing import duties if present, clearance costs and the VAT would be enough. In fact, HM Customs and Excise normally issue a certificate for the VAT to be reclaimed.

We ordered on October 8th and the package arrived on October 13th – very good service – for a total of £950. This was not much saving. The A700 body can be bought for £999 at full price including VAT and any UK business like ours would be able to



*DigitalRev gave great service with freebies thrown in – but the cost of the return for a faulty camera was prohibitive, at £87.60 fully insured.*

reclaim that. The actual saving would only ever have been £40 plus postage for any VAT registered buyer – and the package came with no paperwork, no invoice, and no VAT statement.

We wanted the camera because at that date, we had no idea if we would be able to obtain one to report



in this edition. We already faced late publication, made worse by postal strikes affecting the rest of our work. Having the Alpha 700 fully covered in this issue was essential.

But we were unlucky enough to receive a faulty camera. Repeated CAMERA ERROR messages were

enough warning, faults in the image files and in SSS operation confirmed it. It's good thing the faults emerged right away, as DigitalRev only allow 7 days for notification of faulty goods for a refund.

On October 22nd, the camera was posted back. DigitalRev agreed to make a refund minus £21 postage on receipt of the camera. We could find no method which offered £1,000 of insurance cover plus a guaranteed delivery with confirmation, short of using International Datapost. There probably are services but Parcel2Go, DHL, and others did not produce them.

Datapost with insurance cost £87.60, bringing the cost of having a faulty camera delivered and returned to £108.60. DigitalRev seem a good company, and pop some freebies in with every shipment (lens cloth, CF pouch, neck lanyards). They were easy to deal with in English and had a UK local rate phone line.

*But would you risk it?*



## Lensbabies

A fun little lens that will add a creative spark to your photos

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# gallery

**CARL GARRARD** is a true Minolta-Sony enthusiast from the USA who writes some detailed reports on all the equipment he uses – on a non-commercial basis – and he's recently invested in an Alpha 700, Sony 18-250mm zoom, Tamron 55-200mm zoom and other interesting stuff. Carl's Sedona moonrise image, right is an HDR (High Dynamic Range) process from a long time exposure. It's an Alpha 100 picture, using an 18-50mm f2.8 lens at 18mm, with a 20 second exposure at ISO 100. It shows the Cathedral red rocks and the river crossing; it's a magical place, and a magical photo.

To enter your own pictures for future *Gallery* pages, just send digital files (full resolution – 6 megapixels from a 6 megapixel camera, and so on) in RGB JPEG high quality form by email to [iconmags@btconnect.com](mailto:iconmags@btconnect.com), or by post on CD (TIFFs may be used on CDs only, not by email) to **Photoworld Gallery, Icon Publications Ltd, Maxwell Place, Maxwell Lane, Kelso, Borders TD5 7BB**. CDs or DVDs must be universal (Mac or PC) and always 'finished' never left open for another writing session. Please do not send memory cards.

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Where appropriate we will also publish details of websites of web galleries which our readers can visit to see more work.



⊗ Bass Rock shots by Ian McColl – see story, right.







*Birds in flight: facing page, both images by Ian McColl. The top shot almost looks faked with the circling gannets in line! Alpha 100, 1/1250th at f9, ISO 400, 16-80mm CZ lens at 75mm.*

*"Before I bought my Sony Alpha I was advised by a professional photographer that to photograph birds in flight without an SSM lens could only be done with manual focus", Ian tells us. "I feel I have proved this wrong during a recent trip to Bass Rock. I used the 16-80 mm lens with autofocus throughout. While on the rock I used my Tele Plus 1.4x converter for some shots (I'm not sure exactly which), and used the AF-A setting throughout. From the boat, on leaving the rock, I used the lens without teleconverter, and the AF-C setting. I am very pleased with the results. My success rate was very much better than I ever managed to achieve using manual focus with my Dynaflex 500 Super SL."*

*The gannet coming in to land was shot at 1/2000th, at 80mm, ISO 400.*

*For once, your editor is stealing a Gallery space. The sunset ducks, right, were shot by David Kilpatrick using the Alpha 100 and vintage 1985 70-210mm AF zoom set to 210mm. At ISO 400 the exposure with 1/2000th at f11. The AF had no problem here!*











Two seasonal Gallery shots – left, from our regular garden photography contributor Tony Jones, proving again that summer is not the only (or best) season for pictures. Alpha 100, ISO 400, 75-300mm lens at 200mm, 1/200th at f8. Above, by Dr Francis Vallely of Harrogate. Dynax 7D, 1/90th at f5.6, ISO 100, lens set to 30mm.

The Friedman Archives Press

## THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO SONY'S **ALPHA 100** DIGITAL SLR CAMERA

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# Paul Murphy: Northern Light

The west coast is always tipped as the best place to be for dramatic skies, but Cramlington photographer Paul proves that the North East offers all the drama and colour you could want at the start of the day.

Any reader of the UK photo press would be forgiven for thinking that Northumberland consisted only of Dunstanburgh Castle, so frequently does it feature in articles on Britain's favourite photo locations.

Paul Murphy, living within easy striking distance of this and the similarly iconic Lindisfarne and Bamburgh, has found an equally dramatic subject in St Mary's Lighthouse, Whitley Bay. His pictures prove that it is often the drama of the sunrise sky-scape which really makes the picture. The castle, island or lighthouse serves as an anchoring focal point for the canvas of clouds.

Paul has worked first with the Konica Minolta Dynax 7D, and this year moved on to a Sony Alpha 100 (after a 'dog related incident' cut the life of his 7D short). He uses a technique called High Dynamic Range, or HDR for short, in which two or more widely bracketed exposures are taken rapidly and combined using *Photoshop* or special software like *Photomatix* to map the highlights and shadows into one printable tone curve.

The picture of the lighthouse on this page is an HDR processed shot. They are often vividly coloured and look larger than life – not truly realistic – but that is part of the appeal. Film users have Velvia, neutral density and coloured graduated filters; digital users have HDR, whether created from bracketed exposures or differently adjusted conversions from a single raw file.

– DK







*Left: HDR sunrise shot of St Mary's Lighthouse. Above: a sunbeam strikes Lindisfarne Castle. Below: processed for impact, another Whitley Bay sunrise.*







## Paul Murphy: Northern Light

*Above: a dusk view with a floodlit St Mary's Lighthouse. Below: a moss-covered bridge over the brook in Jesmond Dene, Newcastle, in autumn.*





# UK SonyCentre store guide

Where to find the Alpha system from Sony's specialist dealer network

Aberdeen Sony Centre	Aberdeenshire	AB10 6BY	01224 587817	Brent Cross Sony Centre	London	NW4 3FB	0208 202 4748
Dundee Sony Centre	Angus	DD1 4BH	01382 228045	Kensington Sony Centre	London	W8 6BA	020 7938 3994
Sony Centre Belfast	Antrim	BT1 2BE	028 90236983	Sony Galleria at Harrods	London	SW1X 7QN	0207 730 1234
Sony Centre Galleria Lisburn	Antrim	BT28 1AW	02892 672305	Lewisham Sony Centre	London	SE13 7EP	0208 852 0011
Bristol Sony Centre	Bristol	BS1 3XD	0117 922 5850	Mayfair Sony Centre	London	W1K 6WL	020 7355 2040
The Cribbs Causeway Sony Centre	Bristol	BS34 5UR	0117 914 3477	Putney Sony Centre	London	SW15 1SU	020 8788 7444
Bath Sony Centre	Bath & NES	BA1 1UN	01225 460000	Sony Centre Galleria TCR	London	W1T 1BP	0845 634 0350
Luton Sony Centre	Bedfordshire	LU1 2LJ	01582 480320	Wood Green Sony Centre	London	N22 6YQ	020 8826 0633
Reading Sony Centre	Berkshire	RG1 2DE	0118 950 0350	Edinburgh 2 Sony Centre	Lothian	EH10 4BZ	0131 447 7000
Slough Sony Centre	Berkshire	SL1 1JQ	0845 634 0430	Edinburgh Sony Centre	Edinburgh	EH4 1HL	0131 311 7040
Windsor Sony Centre	Berkshire	SL4 1TF	0845 634 0440	Middlesbrough Sony Centre	Cleveland	TS1 5UB	01642 254450
High Wycombe Sony Centre	Bucks	HP11 2AZ	01494 521382	Enfield Sony Centre Galleria	Middlesex	EN2 6AZ	020 8367 5300
Milton Keynes Sony Centre	Bucks	MK9 3PD	01908 240500	Harrow Sony Centre	Middlesex	HA1 1BE	0845 634 0420
Cambridge Sony Centre	Cambridge	CB2 3ET	01223 351135	Ruislip Sony Centre	Middlesex	HA4 7AA	0845 634 0410
Alloa Sony Centre	Clackmannan	FK10 1DT	01259 724230	Staines Sony Centre	Middlesex	TW18 4BL	01784 469988
Carlisle Sony Centre	Carlisle	CA3 8RY	01228 542824	Uxbridge Sony Centre	Middlesex	UB8 1BP	0845 634 0400
Derby Sony Centre	Derbyshire	DE1 1EX	01332 205234	York Sony Centre	North Yorkshire	YO1 6JX	01904 624488
Plymouth Sony Centre	Devon	PL1 1LR	01752 251155	Northampton Sony Centre	Northampton	NN1 2EW	01604 626064
Bournemouth Sony Centre	Dorset	BH1 2BY	01202 293112	Mansfield Sony Centre	Nottinghamshire	NG18 1JN	01623 659632
Poole Sony Centre	Dorset	BH15 1AS	01202 771200	Nottingham Sony Centre	Nottingham	NG1 3FB	0115 947 4566
Sony Centre Ards	Down	BT23 4EU	028 918 27978	Oxford Sony Centre	Oxford	OX1 1NZ	01865 793937
Dumfries Sony Centre	Dumfries	DG1 2BD	01387 254374	Perth Sony Centre	Perthshire	PH1 5NU	01738 638806
Carmarthen Sony Centre	Dyfed	SA31 1QN	01267 235 378	Shawlands Sony Centre	Glasgow	G41 3XA	0141 649 4758
Brighton 2 Sony Centre	East Sussex	BN1 2HA	01273 735123	Cardiff Sony Centre	Cardiff	CF10 3FD	029 20 228020
Brighton Sony Centre	East Sussex	BN1 4JG	01273 696069	Penarth Sony Centre	Cardiff	CF11 8TW	02920 350 355
Eastbourne Sony Centre	East Sussex	BN21 3NW	01323 417017	Sheffield Meadow Hall Sony Centre	Sheffield	S9 1EN	0114 256 8620
Basildon Sony Centre	Essex	SS14 1DT	0845 634 0480	Lichfield Sony Centre Galleria	Staffordshire	WS13 6NG	01543 415486
Chelmsford Sony Centre	Essex	CM1 1XF	01245 490726	Stafford Sony Centre	Staffordshire	ST16 2AJ	01785 222 788
Colchester Sony Centre	Essex	CO1 1JT	01206 560652	Stirling Sony Centre	Stirling	FK8 2DG	01786 470750
Harlow Sony Centre	Essex	CM20 1XN	01279 426155	Bridge of Allan Sony Centre	Stirlingshire	FK9 4ET	01786 832246
Ilford Sony Centre	Essex	IG1 1AT	0208 514 0244	Falkirk Sony Centre	Stirlingshire	FK1 1HQ	01324 630064
Loughton Sony Centre	Essex	IG10 4BE	0208 508 4838	Ipswich Sony Centre	Suffolk	IP1 1DT	01473 216556
Romford Sony Centre	Essex	RM1 3HD	01708 746 600	Camberley Sony Centre	Surrey	GU15 3SG	01276 682000
Lakeside Sony Centre	Essex	RM20 2ZF	01708 862159	Croydon Sony Centre Galleria	Surrey	CR0 1TY	0208 688 7766
Cheltenham Sony Centre	Gloucestershire	GL50 1JZ	01242 226589	Epsom Sony Centre	Surrey	KT19 8DA	01372 727045
Cirencester Sony Centre Connect	Gloucestershire	GL7 2AE	01285 641456	Farnham Sony Centre	Surrey	GU9 7TX	01252 714 563
Gloucester Sony Centre	Gloucester	GL1 1PD	01452 500005	Guildford Sony Centre	Surrey	GU1 3QS	01483 533224
Manchester City Sony Centre	Manchester	M4 3AB	0161 835 3775	Kingston Sony Centre	Surrey	KT1 1SU	020 8541 0681
Trafford Sony Centre	Manchester	M17 8AR	0161 747 2108	Richmond Sony Centre Connect	Surrey	TW9 1AD	0208 948 7188
Lincoln Sony Centre	Lincolnshire	LN5 7DN	01522 544 464	Sutton Sony Centre	Surrey	SM1 1AX	0208 770 2040
Newport Sony Centre	Gwent	NP20 4Ad	01633 212900	Woking Sony Centre	Surrey	GU21 6XX	01483 766600
Basingstoke Sony Centre	Hampshire	RG21 7JR	01256 355777	Swansea Sony Centre	Swansea	SA7 9EH	01792 795161
Fareham Sony Centre	Hampshire	PO16 0DU	01329 286000	Gateshead Sony Centre	Gateshead	NE11 9YP	0191 460 1755
Portsmouth Sony Centre	Hampshire	PO1 1BQ	023 92 870222	Newcastle Sony Centre	Newcastle	NE1 4PW	0191 230 0313
Southampton (East Street)	Hampshire	SO14 3HG	02380 236 663	Sunderland Sony Centre	Tyne and Wear	SR1 1SE	0191 564 1398
Southampton (London Road)	Hampshire	SO15 2AD	023 80 339952	Leamington Spa Sony Centre	Warwickshire	CV32 4XU	01926 888511
Hereford Sony Centre	Herefordshire	HR4 9EA	01432 343108	Nuneaton Sony Centre	Warwickshire	CV11 4DZ	02476 374 616
Bishop's Stortford Sony Centre	Hertfordshire	CM23 3XG	01279 755322	Livingston Sony Centre	West Lothian	EH54 6NB	01506 439740
St Albans Sony Centre	Hertfordshire	AL3 5DG	01727 790618	Birmingham Sony Centre	West Midlands	B4 6TB	0121 236 0679
Stevenage Sony Centre	Hertfordshire	SG1 1EG	0845 634 0450	Coventry Sony Centre	West Midlands	CV1 1DX	02476 559111
Watford Sony Centre	Hertfordshire	WD17 2RR	0845 634 0360	Merryhill Sony Centre	West Midlands	DY5 1SY	01384 486770
Welwyn Sony Centre	Hertfordshire	AL8 6HA	01707 391044	Solihull Sony Centre	West Midlands	B91 3AT	0121 711 4145
Inverness Sony Centre	Invernesshire	IV1 1QA	01463 222282	Sutton Coldfield Sony Centre	West Midlands	B72 1PA	0121 354 9646
Bluewater Sony Centre	Kent	DA9 9SG	01322 427101	Wolverhampton Sony Centre	West Midlands	WV1 3QD	01902 714415
Bromley Sony Centre	Kent	BR1 1HG	0845 634 0390	Crawley Sony Centre	West Sussex	RH10 1EG	01293 518786
Maidstone Sony Centre	Maidstone Kent	ME15 6AR	01622 754746	Worthing Sony Centre	West Sussex	BN11 1QN	01903 214030
Orpington Sony Centre	Kent	BR6 0LS	0845 634 0490	Huddersfield Sony Centre Galleria	West Yorkshire	HDI 2QT	01484 439 030
Tunbridge Wells Sony Centre	Kent	TN1 2SS	01892 522226	Leeds Sony Centre	West Yorkshire	LS1 6PJ	0113 242 2569
Glasgow Sony Centre	Lanarkshire	G1 2PW	0141 248 7077	Wakefield Sony Centre	West Yorkshire	WF1 1PQ	01924 372704
Bolton Sony Centre	Lancashire	BL1 1NB	01204 388111	Marlborough Sony Centre	Wiltshire	SN8 1HQ	01672 516444
Preston Sony Centre	Lancashire	PR1 2NR	01772 252783	Salisbury Sony Centre	Wiltshire	SP1 2NW	01722 349 490
Leicester Sony Centre	Leicestershire	LE1 6DN	0116 275 6015	Swindon Sony Centre	Wiltshire	SN1 1SD	01793 531039
Baker Street Sony Centre	London	W1U 6UB	0207 486 2526	Kidderminster Sony Centre	Worcestershire	DY10 1AA	01562 827100
Bayswater Sony Centre	London	W2 6LY	020 7229 9110	Worcester Sony Centre	Worcestershire	WR1 2RF	01905 613218
Chelsea Sony Centre	London	SW10 0LR	020 7795 0500	Redditch Sony Centre	Worcestershire	B97 4AD	01527 62683
Ealing Sony Centre	London	W5 5AH	020 8840 4442				

E&OE – all details current as of 22/10/07



# The China Experience

Long-term Dynax film user Colin Brenchley trusted everything to digital when he toured China in 2005 with a new Dynax 7D.

In many ways China is a photographer's dream. Despite the general absence of brilliant hues, the country is immensely photogenic because there is so much taking place all around you.

Foreign visitors are still relatively few in numbers and as such you are sometimes being photographed just as often as you are photographing the Chinese in their environment. This is refreshing as people tend to be oblivious to cameras as a whole. Generally a wave to the intended subject while pointing your camera will more often than not break down the barriers, producing a smile and willingness to be photographed.

When you research for your visit to China you soon discover that to describe the country you become immersed in facts and figures –

- More than a billion people, about a fifth of the world's population, live in China.
- Geographically China is the third largest country in the world.

Our holiday can best be described as an intense whistle-stop tour that required an international overnight flight to Shanghai followed by internal travel including one train journey, four internal flights and a four-hour boat trip.

It included staying at good quality hotels in the following cities:

Shanghai – to view the modern city skyline with its historic waterfront Bund area.

Suzhou – a town with 8 million population, built on a system of canals, and a centre for silk production.

Beijing – to sample the World Heritage Site of the Forbidden City, where entry has only been allowed since 1911. It has 9,999 rooms contained within a perimeter wall six kilometres long. The Great Wall at Badaling 70 kilometres northwest of Beijing requires a full day to view just a small section. The entire wall extends for 6,400km.

Xian – a modern, vibrant town within easy distance of the site of the Terracotta Warriors (on display in London this autumn) which were discovered by a farmer drilling a borehole for water in 1974.

Guillin – a base to see some of China's countryside, particularly the unique mountainous Karst



Night-time on the river – 24-105mm lens, hand-held 1/15th with AS.



Colin at the Great Wall.

scenery which borders the River Li in the Yangshou region.

The final stage took us to Hong Kong, now a special administrative region following the handover from Britain to China in 1997.

Previously, I had used a Minolta Dimage A1 digital camera on a trip to Egypt so I was confident in the reliability and performance of their digital products.

For this trip, I used a Konica Minolta Dynax 7D together with the lightweight 24-105mm D, 17-35mm D and the 75-300mm. In a leap of faith, to keep the weight down, I left my film Dynax 7 at home and opted to shoot the tour entirely on digital.

Data storage was an unknown area for me, and after some research I invested in a Flashtrax portable storage device with 20GB of storage, using one 512MB and three 256MB CF cards which were downloaded nightly. 1GB and larger cards were still relatively expensive in 2005!

After 16 days, a total of 3,500 images had been captured. The benefit of digital is cost. Previously on a similar trip shooting film, the processing costs amounted to £700 – roughly the price of a digital SLR.

The quality of images captured under a variety of lighting conditions was excellent, and they have been converted into seven separate digital 'slide shows' using both *ProShow Gold* and *Pictures-to-EXE* software on PC.

After many years of shooting both B&W and slide film, carrying two 7000i bodies, then upgrading to 700i and finally the superb Dynax 7 I had completed my conversion to digital with the Dynax 7D.



Left: children in Tiananmen Square, Beijing. 75-300mm lens at 75mm, 1/250th at f5.6, ISO 100.





*Above left: the Great Wall of China near Badajing. 75-300mm lens at 300mm, 1/500th at f6.7. Above right, market stall businessman in Yang Shou. 24-105mm lens at 24mm, 1/90th at f9.5, ISO 200. Below, Karst scenery on the River Li near Guillin. 75-300mm lens.*







*Faces of modern China – above, Hong Kong street scene. 75-300mm lens at 300mm, 1/350th at f6.7. Below, Red Guard in Tiananmen Square, 75-300mm lens at 300mm, 1/500th at f5.6, ISO 200.*







Above, the Terracotta Warriors exhibit near Xian where photography is not encouraged and the light is very low. Left, a 24mm view needed 1/15th hand-held at f3.5 wide open, ISO 400. Right, zooming to 105mm on the 24-105mm reduced the aperture to f4.5 but 1/15th was still correct for the better lit detail. Hand-held with Anti Shake.



Above left, the Reed Flute Caves near Yang Shou. 1/20th was needed at full f2.8 aperture with the fast 17-35mm f2.8-4 (D) lens set to 17mm. Above right, bamboo raft boat transport on the River Li near Guilin. 75-300mm lens at 300mm, 1/350th at f6.7, ISO 100. Below: the Venice-like canals of Suzhou. 75-300mm lens used at 140mm, 1/125th at f8, ISO 400.





# Falling for Autumn colour

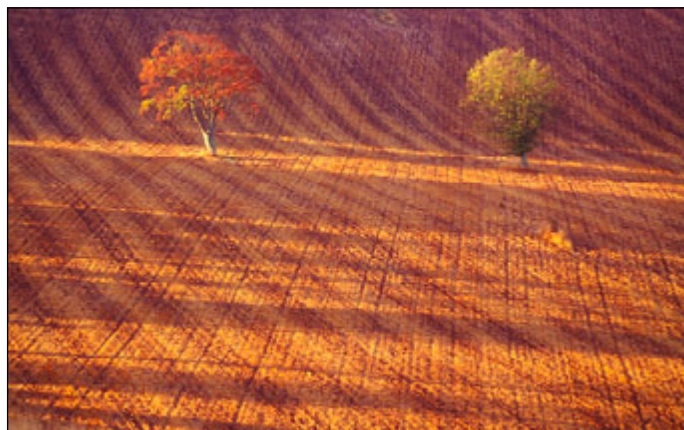
The colours of a British Autumn are often easier to find in November and December these days. John Gilkerson captures them here.

Global warming not only produced a swarm of butterflies in mid-October and a few cases of sunburn even in Scotland – it has also reduced the frequency of early hard frosts, which are the catalyst for brilliant Autumn colours.

If the weather stays fairly mild throughout October, many trees begin to shed their leaves while they are still green, others keep their leaves longer without a big colour change, and the chances of a whole woodland turning to its fall colours overnight are low.

John Gilkerson photographed this issue's cover on a day more commonly associated with fireworks and his leaf and stream close-ups were taken on November 19th last year. Visitors to Scotland in early October found the countryside looking more like Spring than Autumn.

Central regions, 'frost pockets' and higher altitudes are all more likely to get good foliage colours simultaneously. If you want to seek out these colours, head for places like the Cotswolds, Perthshire, the eastern



*Pictures on this spread:*

*Above, Field Pattern, Kodak Elitechrome EBX, Minolta 700si, 100-300mm zoom at 135mm, 1/6 at f16, tripod.*

*Below, upper left, Autumn Light, Kodak Elitechrome EBX, Minolta 700si, 100-300mm zoom at 180mm, 1/30 at f9.5, tripod.*

*Below, upper right, Impact, Kodak Elitechrome EBX Minolta 700si, 24-105mm zoom at 35mm, 1/35 at f19, tripod.*

*Below, lower left, Rising Sun Country Park, Tyneside, ISO 100. Minolta Dynax 7D, 24-105mm zoom at 50mm, 1/160 at f8.*

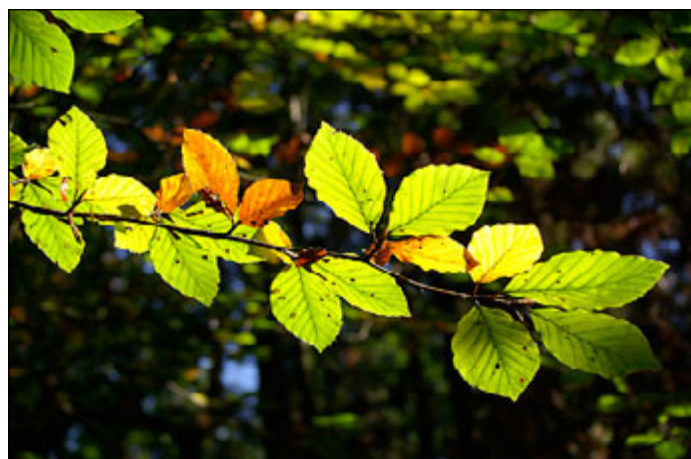
*Below, lower right, Bridle Path berries & dew, ISO 400, Minolta Dynax 7D, Vivitar macro 1/15 at f5.6.*

*Facing page, Old Bridge in Glen Lyon, ISO 400, Minolta Dynax 7D, 24-105mm zoom at 75mm, 1/3 at f27, tripod.*

Lake District, Yorkshire Dales, Derbyshire and the Welsh Borders. Don't expect to find the best colours close to the coast or in sheltered, temperate spots. While the USA heads for New England as early as the end of September, British photographers are better waiting until November despite the falling light and frustrating shift of the clock to curtail our afternoons.

John's shots are mainly taken on his Konica Minolta Dynax 7D, with some here on film. Can you tell which those are at a glance?

John took some of the pictures some here on Duncan McEwan's Scottish Autumn workshops. It is always useful to find someone who knows where the best colours are likely to be found. Contact your local authority's ranger service (if they have one) or look for guided walks. In most places you can find walks to see wildlife or find fungi. The walk leaders and rangers will be able to show you the best views faster than you can hunt them down yourself!











*Above: Moss-covered rocks, Glen Lyon, ISO 400, Minolta Dynax 7D, Sigma 18-50mm zoom at 18mm, 1/20 at f8, tripod. Below: at the Birks of Aberfeldy, ISO 400, Minolta Dynax 7D, 100-300mm zoom at 200mm, 1/3 at f19, tripod. Shooting tip: John's pictures taken at moderate apertures like f8 are sharper than his shots taken at very small apertures like f19. With DSLRs, there is a noticeable loss of sharpness if you stop down beyond f16 and optimum sharpness is normally around f8 to f11. For longer exposures, a polarizer or a grey neutral density filter can improve the detail by allowing a wider working aperture.*





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# photoworld

is a quality photo quarterly magazine dedicated to the Minolta/Sony Alpha camera system. You'll see some superb advanced photography on its pages, keep up to date with news and offers, and you'll read many absorbing articles from fellow Minolta SR/MD, Minolta M-AF, Konica Minolta and Sony Alpha owners.

Every issue contains reference pages and offers – Photostore ([www.photostore-uk.com](http://www.photostore-uk.com)) for replacement parts and small accessories, hire service, insurance plan, special offers, members' sale and want ads, compatibility data, battery data, firmware and software updates, website addresses, contact phone numbers and more. Each edition is designed to be kept for future reference to help you understand your camera system.

You will learn about photo workshops and weekend breaks run by expert long-time Minolta users and sponsored by the Club... like the 'Quest' workshops (both digital and film based) organised by Colin Westgate based in South East England – and Duncan McEwan's Scottish Highland and Border gatherings.

There are discounted servicing and insurance options available only to subscribers. You'll have a list of many contacts, the magazine and the Club who can help you, including experts in digital imaging.

Inside you'll find dozens of pictures carefully reproduced. Captions tell you the digital processes and settings used, or the type of film and darkroom techniques. Friendly but authoritative articles and product tests give you insights and ideas you won't find anywhere else.

Now independent, Photoworld goes back to 1966 and has been produced by David & Shirley Kilpatrick since 1981. It's still only £19.95\* a year (or less with annual credit card renewal savings) inclusive of all club benefits.

We look forward to welcoming you as a new reader.

– David Kilpatrick FBIPP AMPA & Shirley Kilpatrick BA (Hons) MSc (Col. Science) Icon Publications Ltd

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# All your lenses are in Sony's black book...

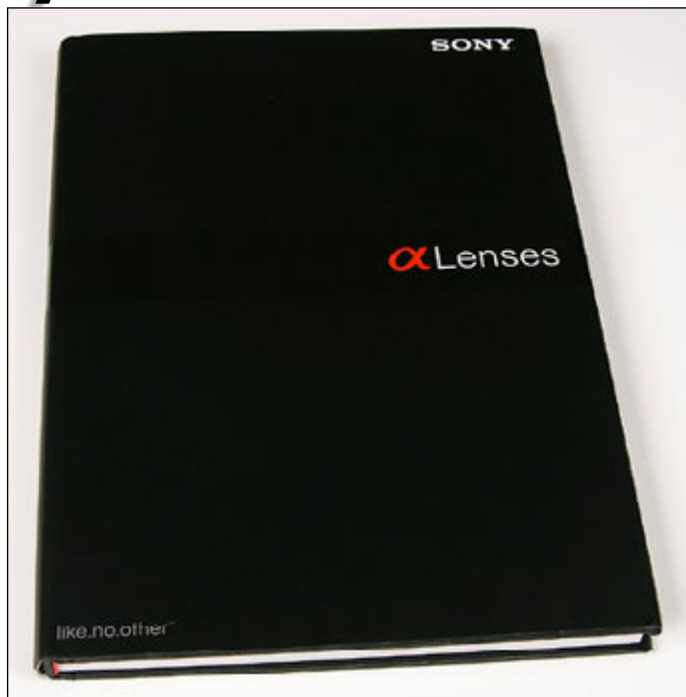
At the end of August, a surprise package arrived at *Photoworld*. Normally, Sony communicates by email – the days of printed press releases are long gone. This was a book, called 'Sony Alpha Lenses', which had been put into production as early as February 2007.

That's remarkable, bearing in mind that Sony took over the Minolta camera division and operation of the lens factory (Sakai, Japan) less than one year previously and some of the lenses featured in the book were yet to appear on the market.

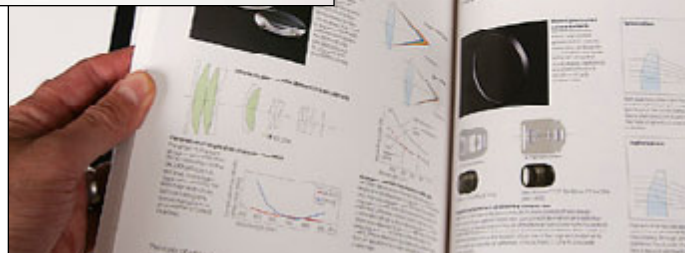
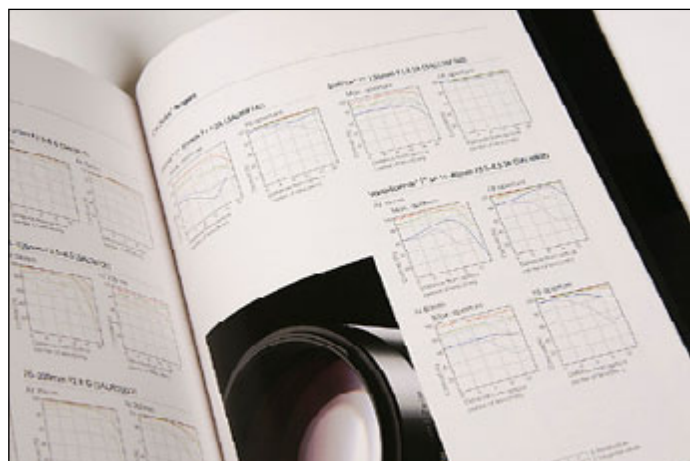
The book was personally signed to David Kilpatrick by Toru Katsumoto, Senior General Manager of the Alpha Mount Company, enclosing a photograph of Mr Katsumoto and a letter from the managing director of Sony United Kingdom Limited, Steven Dowdle.

"Following the showcasing of two prototype Alpha bodies and many new lenses during the PMA show in February many photographer are eagerly awaiting news of these bodies being introduced. I am happy to confirm that moment is almost upon us. We will be in touch again shortly as the first of our exciting introductions is made. The Sony Alpha system will expand rapidly in its second year and we aim to grow our market share within this vibrant sector", wrote Mr Dowdle.

We already knew from industry moles that a launch was scheduled for the first week of September, and accordingly I worked like mad to clear my diary and ensure I was available! But it was not to be. Icon Publications Ltd did not receive an invitation to the European launch in



*The hardback book has 144 pages and a very plain cover. Above, Duncan McEwan's work. Below, MTF charts; right, tech pages and a dedication.*



Italy. Damir Tiljak, a fellow photo magazine writer and Alpha system user from Croatia, kindly supplied a report for the Photoclubalpha website in excellent English.

The book is a great production, full of excellent colour pictures. It has been incorrectly designed for a different type of binding, so the images disappear into the binding and a big chunk is missing from any which cross the gutter. But this is the only criticism – it's excellently printed, features two photographs from our own Duncan McEwan, and a wealth of technical information about lens production. It even has a full section of MTF charts for all the Sony system lenses.

As for obtaining a copy, it seems this book has only been issued to staff, customers and the Press. We can find no reference to it on Sony's UK website, it has no price and no ISBN data.

So, it's something of a rarity. If you are buying an Alpha 700, ask if you can have one. In some countries Sony Centres are giving them with the new camera.

– DESK



# Workshops & talks with Duncan McEwan

2008

## LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY

### COURSES and HOLIDAYS

The programme for 2008 is currently in preparation and will include courses with \*Light and Land and \*\*Photo Adventures (in conjunction with Lee Frost).

#### Isle of Eigg (5-10 May)

Glebe Barn

#### Harris & Lewis (17-23 June)

Gearannan Blackhouses & Harris Hotel

#### Isle of Eigg (25-29 Sept)

Glebe Barn

#### Isle of Arran (20-24 Oct)

Kinloch Hotel, Blackwaterfoot

## EIGG – SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

MAY 5th-10th 2008

Eigg is an island of outstanding natural beauty, unspoilt, spectacular and photographically inspirational. Visits to the fantastic coastline at Laig and Camus Sgiotaig (the Singing Sands) will be central to the trip. With the Isle of Rum as a backdrop, fascinating rocks and shore details for foregrounds, the variety provided by high and low tides as well as different times of day, there are endless photographic opportunities at these two locations alone.

The crofting landscape is typically Hebridean – isolated crofts, some ruinous and with abandoned agricultural machinery, dot the landscape in picturesque settings. Those at Cleadale nestle under the towering cliffs of Beinn Bhuidhe, while the abandoned 17th century township of Grulin lies at the foot of An Sgurr.

Eigg is the largest (5 miles by 3) of the Small Isles group of the Inner Hebrides, lying to the South of the Isle of Skye and only ten miles from the mainland. Following the pioneering community buy-out in 1997, the island is now managed in partnership with the Scottish Wildlife Trust and the Highland Council in order to ensure a viable future while sustaining its unique environmental and cultural heritage.

The walk to the summit of the pitchstone ridge of An Sgurr (1291ft) leads across wild moorland and ends with commanding views of the island and beyond to Rum, Canna, Muck, Skye and the mainland. Eigg is rich in wildlife including Golden Eagle, Corncrake and Otter, but most striking at this time of year, is the colour provided by the flowering plants – there are over 500 species, including twelve orchids.

Subject to weather conditions, an afternoon excursion to the Isle of Muck (30 minute sail) will be included, allowing three hours ashore to explore the small Isle of Muck.

Duncan McEwan is honorary organiser of the Photoworld Club Scottish Region. His work represents Britain in the hardcover presentation book produced by Sony at the beginning of 2007, 'Alpha Lenses'. He has been featured many times in Minolta Photoworld, Minolta Image and Minolta Mirror.

For contact details see: [www.dmcewanphotography.co.uk](http://www.dmcewanphotography.co.uk)

Accommodation will be in the comfortable Glebe Barn, the only place on the island that can cater for groups. Sharing will be necessary.

Visitor vehicles are not allowed on Eigg, so a fair amount of walking will be involved. There is a minibus taxi which could be used to save time and reduce walking. Thankfully, midges should not be troublesome at this time of year.

Cost: £775 (deposit £150). Book directly with Light & Land:

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Web: [www.lightandland.co.uk](http://www.lightandland.co.uk)

## LECTURES by Duncan McEwan

### JANUARY 2008

14th – Livingston CC – Scotland: *Land of Light*

Crofthead Farm Community Education Centre, Dedridge, Livingston, 7.30pm

21st – Penilee CC – *Landscape Commandments*

Penilee Community Centre, Gleddoch Rd, Glasgow, 7.30pm

23rd – Saltcoats CC – *I Never Thought I Would!*

St Andrew's Episcopal Church, Ardrossan, 7.30pm

24th – Queen's Park CC – Scotland: *Land of Light*

QPCC Clubrooms, 54 Millbrae Rd, Langside, Glasgow, 7.30pm

30th – Earlston & Galashiels Camera Clubs, title & venue TBA.

### FEBRUARY 2008

4th – Bathgate CC – *I Never Thought I Would!*

St Columba's Episcopal Scottish Church, 79 Glasgow Road, Bathgate, 7.30pm

5th – Midlothian CC – *Landscape Commandments*

Clubrooms, 7 Polton road, Lasswade, 7.30pm

11th – Cowal CC – Scotland: *Land of Light*

Clubrooms, Castle Street, Dunoon, 7.30pm

14th – Kinross CC – *I Never Thought I Would!*

Church Centre, High Street, Kinross, 7.30pm

19th – Lesmahagow PS – Scotland: *Land of Light*

Glebe Gardens Hall, Langdykeside, Lesmahagow, 7.30pm

20th – Eastwood PS – Scotland: *Land of Landscapes*

Albertslund Hall, Westacres, Road, Newton Mearns, 7.30pm

27th – Inverness CC – *I Never Thought I Would!*

Culduthel Christian Centre, Culduthel Road, Inverness, 7.30pm

### MARCH 2008

4th – Friends of The Museum Association, Saltcoats – *I Never Thought I Would!*

St Cuthbert's Parish Church, Saltcoats, 7.30pm

6th – Crieff CC – *Landscape Commandments*

St Andrew's Halls, Strathearn Terrace, Crieff, 7.30pm

10th – Mearns CC – *Special Brew 2*

Stonehaven Community Centre, Stonehaven, 7.30pm

*These lectures are not sponsored by Photoworld Club, and members should make contact before turning up at venues, to check that guests are admitted, and whether any admission is payable. All clubs will be very happy to welcome new faces.*





# Sol Sims: fairy fantasies

Fantasy portraiture – using photomontage, props or costumes – is popular in the USA for both kids and adults. Sol Sims shows us some great examples.

Sol Sims is a working professional photographer in Atlanta, Georgia and he has been shooting using the Minolta A-mount system since 1992.

While it's unusual for professionals to have used the Minolta system in the UK, there has always been a tradition of pro ownership in the States.

"All these images were shot using the 7D", says Sol of his fairy fantasy portrait shots, "except for 'In the Sun', which was shot with my film Dynax 7, a number of years ago. On the other images, I used the 28-75 f2.8 (D) lens, except for 'Golden Touch', which was taken with the 70-200 f2.8 SSM."







*Top set of photos, left to right: 'Of Sunbeams and Flowing Streams', 'Golden Touch', 'Enchantment Rising'.  
Facing page, bottom – 'Into the Sun'; this page, below, 'The Little Ones'.  
Visit Sol Sims, Solarview Photography, on the web at [www.solarviewphoto.com](http://www.solarviewphoto.com)*





# SIGMA



## OUR WORLD

**In the Niger Delta, even routine cooking looks extraordinary.**

ED KASHI: Born in 1957 in New York. Earned a degree in photojournalism at Syracuse University.

Photographed in more than 60 countries. Received numerous awards for a wide range of work.

Photographs appeared in National Geographic magazine, among many other publications.

Photo data: SIGMA 10-20mm F4-5.6 EX DC HSM, 1/250 second exposure at f13.

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FOR  
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## SIGMA 10-20mm F4-5.6 EX DC HSM

\*Vignetting (a darkening of the corners of the image) will occur if the lens is used with digital SLR cameras with image sensors larger than APS-C size or 35mm SLRs, and APS SLRs



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