

Madison PhotoPlus the Photo Summit e-Photo Newsletter

July, 2004

Last month Nikon announced they would exit from the 35mm compact camera business. Eastman Kodak disclosed they are closing 6 of their primary processing labs this summer - including the Fair Lawn lab here in New Jersey. (The Fair Lawn lab processes Kodachrome film for all of North America.) Films from this geographic area will be transferred to either Hartford or Allentown, PA. This comes hot on the heels of Kodak's pricing increases during May. Let's consider what this means...

Like it or now, we are all being forced to digital photography. Depending upon when you buy your next camera, you may have little choice other than digital. Very few new models are being made in 35mm, and no new APS models were introduced this year. Many 35mm companies are transhipping models from one continent to another to create the illusion that there are new camera introduction. What they are really doing is paring down their inventories. More and more the manufacturers are dictating what we will purchase by eliminating the choices of availability.

As digital photography continues to increase its share of the photo world, there will be less and less demand for film and film processing. Getting traditional prints from negatives and slides will become more difficult. Film processing will get even more expensive and take longer. What we are now getting done in a day will take a week. As fewer and fewer lab replacement parts are being made, there will be fewer and fewer machine to process what films are being exposed. As an example, the Fair Lawn lab routinely processed more than 25,000 rolls of film a day working 3 shifts. Now 2 shifts process about 1/2 that volume. Services are being eliminated (like bordered prints, wallet size prints, etc.), delivery services reduced, employment eliminated. Industry statistics show that film processing is down by over 20% compared to a year ago.

The minilabs, or independent film processors are feeling the pinch even more. The small labs who are not offering ever expanding digital services are going out of business at an alarming rate. The use of film cameras is no longer great enough to ensure their survival. The outlook is bleak for those not making the transition to digital input and output. Even the change from black and white to color was not as great a challenge as film to digital.

Something more insidious is also happening during this technological revolution - a diminishing of quality.

The average digital camera yields inferior images compared to the average film camera output. Typical consumers accept this lesser quality as a trade off between time saving and convenience. The ability to quickly and easily get a mediocre picture is preferred by many to getting a high quality image that will last a lifetime. At Madison PhotoPlus and the Photo Summit we are hearing consumers say the new digital lack of quality is "good enough". Is society becoming just "good enough".

Try looking at two pictures taken of the same subject - one traditional one digital. Notice the differences between them. Some are subtle, some more pronounced, but certainly noticeable. As these pictures are enlarged, the differences are also enlarged, the subtleties more pronounced. "Good enough" doesn't really seem good enough any longer. The flaws are too pronounced.

This is not to say that all digital is inferior to all film based photography. Be aware that simply being silicon or silver based is not the issue, quality is. No matter whether your camera uses film or is digital, insist on the highest quality possible. Don't just settle!

Mike Johnston writes a monthly column about photographic issues from serious to whimsical. Please go to the following link for a short discussion of fakery in photography. It's an eye-opener.

<http://www.photo.net/mjohnston/column56/>



There seems to be a lot of talk about cows lately. Not to be left out of a good thing, here's one found roaming around West Hartford, CT recently.



You may not realize it, but one the finest camera clubs in New Jersey meets Friday nights (during the school year) in our area. For more information, visit <http://www.morrisphotocolor.com>.



July is a beautiful month, and usually very sunny. Remember that you can improve your pictures by adding flash outdoors if your subject is within about 15'. Also use your flash if your subject is wearing a cap or visor. With many of today's automatic cameras, the flash won't fire because there's a lot of light, even though it is photographically lousy. Set your flash to the lightning bolt with such cameras and you'll bet pictures.

This issue of the newsletter has kept you indoors too long. Go outside & take pictures. Have a great July!

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