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Thailand Flood Update

The rains have stopped - for the most part! The waters are continuing to recede. Nikon and Sony have been able to save some of their machines and start manufacturing cameras and lenses in new Thai facilities. Nikon has said they will not resume full production until March, 2012. Sony has not committed to a date yet. Both companies have delivered a small number of units of most models, but not in all configurations.

Canon, Olympus and Fuji are constantly shipping all models and are not able to keep pace on their interchangeable lens lines.

Product All Stars

In our stores we always listen to our customer feedback on items they've purchased from us, and sometimes bought elsewhere. Each year at Holiday time we publish a list of what we think are the best products that year. In short form, here's the 2011 list of candidates for All Stardom ... (prices before any rebates)

There are several choices for camera of the year. The models named represent different types of cameras, not necessarily differing picture quality.

The Fujifilm FinePix X10 is the closest thing we've seen in a non SLR type digital to rival high quality 35mm cameras. The optical viewfinder is superb; the build quality is superior; the manual 28-112mm zoom produces professional quality images and the flexibility of the camera's system makes using it a dream. \$599.99.



The Olympus SZ-30MR boasts a **25-600mm zoom** lens that almost fits in a man's shirt pocket. The camera's speed of focusing and incredible image stabilization allow even novice photographers to take sharp, shake free photos throughout the zoom range. In addition to its excellent 3D and panorama modes, the SZ-30MR also takes Full HD video with the option to shoot a full resolution still photo while still in video mode. Even camcorders can't accomplish this. (There is also a lower priced SZ-10. It is a much different lens and camera with fewer features using the same chassis.) \$379.99.



The Sony A55 SLR camera has won just about everyone's Camera of the Year award. Its advanced technology replaces the moving mirror assembly and replaces it with a small, high quality LCD TV screen viewfinder (without altering its lens mount)! Think of it - A SLR camera with **no** internal moving parts. This allows the camera to autofocus on any



lens made by Sony or Minolta in Maxxum/Alpha mount since 1985. Because the image stabilization is in the camera's body instead of the lens, camera shake is well reduced if not eliminated.



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So far, this is the only SLR system camera that allows AF during video with all lenses. The camera also can shoot up to 10 full resolution photos per second, making it great for sports photography. \$799.99 including 18-55mm lens.

Canon has millions of cameras and lenses in users hands, and for those with EF (autofocus) lenses, the EOS 5D Mark II delivers unequalled picture quality from a hand-holdable camera. Because its sensor is the same size and shape as 35mm film, the lenses deliver all the sharpness they were designed for. If enlargability is important to you, look no farther. \$2499.99 (body only, without lens)



On the other end of the SLR size spectrum is the Panasonic Lumix G3. This diminutive SLR shows how computer designed and assisted technology makes excellent picture taking fast, easy, and fun. It handles like a compact camera, has a fully articulated touchscreen LCD back as well as SLR viewing. Enlargements up to 64" are impressive and have superior color fidelity. This micro 4/3 camera uses Lumix, Leica (some), Olympus and other lenses without any adapters. Available in red, brown or black. Price includes 14-42mm lens. \$699.99



Speaking of small, Pentax rules the roost with its model "Q" camera and lenses. It is so tiny that some people think it's a toy. Q's photos say otherwise. Whether you like a camera to fit in your purse, golf bag or attache case, you now don't have to give up quality photos.

\$749.99 with lens (in white or black).



Many people want a small, versatile camera for everyday snapshots without any muss or fuss. In 2010 our happiest clientele were those who chose the Fuji F300EXR point and shoot camera. In 2011 Fuji improved the camera with the F600EXR by adding more megapixels, GPS, and even lower light capabilities while keeping the same great 24-360 zoom lens. Although every product (including cameras) have some weak points, they are hard to find in this beauty.

\$299.99.



If there is any major fault to be found with all the cameras mentioned do far, it's that it isn't safe to take to any of them to the beach - not even once. Cameras need special seals and lenses to protect them from salt, water, sand and even salt spray. Tried, true, and improved, the Olympus TG "Tough" series of cameras has the best track record for durability coupled with picture quality and ease of use. For a decade or so, Olympus compact cameras used xD picture cards which, frankly, slowed the

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cameras down. As HD video became a standard feature, Olympus went to the faster SD•HC card and this new generation claims the fastest auto-focusing times of all compact cameras. We select the TG-610 as the best value in their line-up. Besides being beach and ski slope safe, the improved 28-140mm zoom supplies better low light photos. And yes, it's still safe to drop it up to 6 feet without damage or voiding the warranty!
\$249.99.



All-in-one zoom lenses keep getting better and better and smaller. Last year's All Star was the original Tamron 18-270 lens - 2011's winner is the downsized 18-270 PZD improved version of the same lens. The PZD motor silently focuses the lens allowing cameras to use autofocus while shooting HD video. Add 3+ shutter speeds of image stabilization and this lens becomes the "right lens" to keep on your SLR almost all the time. Available in Canon, Nikon and Sony mounts. (Ed. note: a lens trade-up sale and Tamron rebate are included in the following price.)
\$499.99



Panasonic recently introduced the smallest, lightest super telephoto zoom lens for their G series cameras. Labeled 100-300mm, this lens is the equivalent of a 200-600mm zoom on a 35mm camera. Because of its optical image stabilization, this is truly the first 600mm lens that the average person can successfully hand hold! Photos from this lens are incredibly sharp and colorful. This micro 4/3 lens mount zoom works correctly on all micro 4/3 cameras.
\$599.99



During 2011, Promaster introduced several new accessories for SLR cameras, 3 of which we award All Star status.

The first is the HGX filter line. These highest quality filters are made from individual ground lens elements instead of the typical stamped glass disks. The same care and precision goes into each filter that goes into your camera's lenses. Add the spectacular Repellamax™ coating and these become the finest filters we have ever carried! Prices vary upon filter type and diameter.



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The Taskmaster UT25 system tripod is the most versatile support we've ever tested. This light-weight unit comes complete with all the components to make a tabletop tripod, full size tripod, monopod, and copy stand (without baseboard). It hugs the ground or stands tall. Each leg can be set to its own angle as well as length. The ball head included can be replaced by almost any 1/4" or 3/8" mounted head. As shown, the vari-angle adapter allows exact positioning for almost any center of gravity. The entire system comes in a roll up case which can lie flat in an attache or suitcase. \$199.99.



Rounding out our 2011 All Star roster is the VL306 portable studio light. Instead of traditional studio light bulbs, this unit has 306 LEDs for cool, energy efficient lighting. This variable output light keeps a constant 5600K color temperature. The unit comes with reflector, softbox diffuser, stand adapter and a/c power adapter. For truly portable location lighting, this gem also operates for about 2 hours on 10 AA batteries. The VL306 is available as described above, or multiple units in a studio lighting kit including light stands, etc. \$149.99



A Suggestion for Better Holiday Photos

Whether it's Chanukah, Christmas or New Year's Eve - Thanksgiving, graduation or any other special event, spontaneity is the key to great photos. Who wants to take time to think when the excitement is unfolding?

To be able to enjoy your precious moments, think before the event. As an example, as gifts are being opened in front of an illuminated display (such as a Christmas tree or Menorah), you have a choice of two different types of shots:

1. The overall scene, with some action taking place in the foreground, or
2. The action taking place without emphasizing the background scenery.

Let's say the lit display is in your family room. Gifts are being opened by family members seated on sofas and chairs. If you want to capture the overall scene and establish the mood of the day, stand as far back as you can and be at the widest angle your camera offers. If there are lit lamps or windows in your field of view, use your flash. If the windows or lamps are behind you or to the side but not in your photo, turn your flash off and use available light. **DON'T DECIDE WHEN YOU ARE READY TO SHOOT. DECIDE THE DAY BEFORE!**

Things go more smoothly with just a little forethought. The overall scene should be a horizontal photo.

If you are photographing a person opening his or her gift, move in closer and shoot a vertical. You'll get a larger image size and more detail to make your picture more interesting. If your light source is visible in the scene, use your flash even though your camera might not automatically use it. If you are shooting a child unwrapping presents or playing on the floor, bend your knees and get down to his or her eye level for much better shots.



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One more thing can improve your photos, but this involves timing and sometimes hard work. Don't let your subjects have alcohol, sugar or caffeine before you take your photos. These all cause eyes to dilate, causing or increasing red eye. Red eye never enhances any shot other than at Halloween.

The gist of all this is to think before you shoot - way before.

A Brief Editorial

Especially at this time of year, please support your local camera shop. You each need one another. In some cases the local guy may be a couple of dollars higher than Amazon or other online vendor, but those dollars come back to your community. Does Amazon, Snapfish, Kodak Gallery or other web presence sponsor a local Little League team, contribute to the local PTA or First Aid squad? Does B&H employ your local children for summer jobs? Sometimes the lowest price ends up costing you the most! Caveat Emptor.

All of us thank you for your support during this past year. Without each other we would be less than the people we are together. We look forward to 2012 and will work hard to make your photographic experiences better and happier than before.

Merry Christmas!
Happy Chanukah!
Season's Greetings!
Happy New Year!

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