



Shameless Promotion

What's the skinny on all this new photography stuff? Don't camera makers know people just want to use their phones to record their lives as well as their friends' lives? Who'd want all this stuff? And isn't Hillary a shoe-in to win the election?

Sometimes we don't see the forest for the trees. Marketers and advertisers depend on perception and repetition to make sales based on buyers' emotions and brand name familiarity instead of common sense and experience.

In this spirit, we present our seasonal gift guide by evaluating our products on the basis of customer feedback, satisfaction and experience. With the rarest of exceptions, no single brand is clearly head and shoulders above the rest. Some specific items within a brand name often can raise or lower the sentiment that the specific item is indicative of the overall quality of everything from that brand. Some people also still believe in the tooth fairy.

We can tell, for example, how user friendly items are by how many times and how often buyers of that product return for help in using it. Some products look great on paper, but don't perform very well when in the user's hands.

There are some brands that sell very good quality products, but have no repair facilities (or even parts) for the products they sell. As an example, Samsung withdrew from the photographic marketplace earlier this year. Since then, Samsung has appointed several repair facilities for both in and out of warranty repairs, and continues to supply parts. Another company (primarily known for its TV and consumer electronics) whose cameras we

previously sold has refused repairs on 90+% of the products which failed. Although they are still popular, we won't sell them!

Here are our recommendations for this year's gift giving ...

Interchangeable Lens Still Cameras - Mirrorless

The contenders are Fujifilm, Olympus and Sony.

Fujifilm X series cameras and lenses are superb. Models with the X-trans sensors are the superior low light cameras available. Their cameras produce tremendous enlargements at ISO speeds up to 51,200. Fujifilm's lens line offers a great selection of prime focal length lenses as well as several zooms and macro. Their 18-55mm "kit" lens is the best we've ever seen. Eye level viewfinder Fujis start at \$799.99 (with lens). To date, customers have reported zero problems, complaints or service issues on Fujifilm X series cameras and lenses!

Olympus OM-D and PenF purchasers have been the most enthusiastically positive new camera owners in our stores. The most common report we get on these cameras is "Wow!" They are amongst the smallest and lightest cameras available and easily produce consistently great results. A wide range of zoom and fixed focal length affordable lenses are available, as well as superior professional quality lenses. Many of our older and most experienced customers have wanted something smaller and lighter than their older equipment, and have opted for Olympus. Without exception, they have all said the lenses and camera handling surpassed their wildest dreams. OM-D cameras start as low as \$599.99 with zoom lens.

Sony offers 2 different styles of interchangeable lens cameras, those with a point & shoot style, and one with a decidedly SLR type appearance. The former style, being less expensive, offers great portability and very good lenses. The a6000 (starting at \$549.99) takes excellent photos and videos and has excellent battery life. Lower priced versions are available without eye level viewfinders, but are comparatively awkward to use with a variety of lenses.

The a7 and a7r series cameras employ full frame, high density sensors and are capable of taking the sharpest photos of any readily available hand held camera. Camera bodies start from \$1100 and go to \$3200 (without lens).

We hear and see two major complaints regarding these Sony cameras ...

Most cameras have traditionally used buttons, switches, and dial to make changes in shutter speeds, metering, etc. Sony uses drop down menus and the user highlights his or her selection and continues. This is seen as curbing spontaneity and increases the chance for error.

Sony has appointed a national repair facility to handle all their repairs. This company has a history of denying warranty service, incomplete repairs, re-estimating original repair cost estimates, and taking forever. On more than one instance, we received a camera back from them which was not even the same brand and model as the customer's own camera.

We are not as enthusiastic in recommending Sony in spite of their high quality and reasonable prices.



Interchangeable Lens Still Cameras - DSLRs

Canon, Nikon and Pentax are the mainstays of SLR cameras today. These companies have continually updated their original 1936 camera design to keep their amateur and professional customers happy.

Let's look into Pentax first. Our Madison store was once the largest Pentax SLR store in New Jersey (at least according to Pentax at that time). We no longer carry Pentax at all. Asahi Optical Co., the original manufacturer is long gone, and Pentax has been sold several times in the past decade. Their products continue to be good, but our customers have not been as happy with their operating system or selection of affordable lenses. There are constantly rumors of the brand's demise. For these reasons we are staying with just Canon and Nikon DSLRs.

Both of these brands offer a multitude of models and quality ranges. In general, the top professional cameras have the newest features and technology, which eventually drift down to the prosumer, amateur and mass market levels. A tremendous variety of lenses are available, from excellent quality down to not so good quality. When considering a first DSLR purchase, consider the following truths:

DSLR cameras almost always take better pictures than point & shoot cameras.

Entry level DSLR cameras and lenses are NOT of the quality that got Nikon and Canon their reputations for excellence.

Not everything bearing a company's trademark is actually manufactured by that company, no matter what their marketing claims.

At the time this is being written, Canon offers 13 different DSLR models covering a wide range of prices (\$499.99 with lens - \$6299.99 without lens). Anyone thinking the \$500 camera will take as good a photo or last as long as the \$6300 camera is deluding him or her self.

For most casual photographers, we suggest the Rebel T6i or Rebel SL1 with other than the "kit" 18-55 zoom lens. For someone with more experience, the 80D, 7D Mark II or 6D.

In many ways, Nikon is similar to Canon. Offering 12 models spanning a vast range of prices and qualities. Also like Canon, Nikon tries to have a camera for every budget - from \$500 to \$6600. But Nikon cameras are quite different from Canons in how they are set up and perform in your hands.

Nikon puts fewer controls on the back of the camera, with greater emphasis on the top deck or the very top of the back plate. They have also done more to integrate wi-fi into their camera line than Canon - not a simple task for a tool designed as far back as 1936.

The new Nikon D500 may well be the best camera Nikon has produced in 20 years. It's too soon to tell, but it looks like they really hit the jackpot with it. It's not envisioned to be a person's first camera, but a superior step-up model at \$1800.

The new D3400 entry level DSLR has much faster autofocus than any previous amateur level Nikon as well as built-in Bluetooth for wireless communication with Apple iOS or Android phones. It also features Full HD video capabilities for a little under \$500.

Many people consider the D5500 to be Nikon's best amateur DSLR. It offers wi-fi,

a variable angle touch screen LCD panel and good ergonomics. As with Canon, the 18-55mm "kit" lens is not one of Nikon's best lenses. The body is available for only \$599.99. Add another \$100 to get the "kit" lens attached.

Non-Interchangeable Lens Compact Cameras

Two years ago there were well over 100 different camera models in this category - now there are fewer than 30. Smart phones have taken over the market, even though their picture quality is still limited. We select 2 cameras for your consideration ...

The Sony DSC HX80 is our choice for a long zoom camera. It has a sharp 30X zoom lens and a built-in, eye level electronic viewfinder and shoots high quality HD video to boot. It's our choice at \$349.99

The Fujifilm XP90 is far and away our most popular compact camera. It's an outstanding family camera. This camera survives dropping, ice and snow, and the salt and sand environment at the beach. In fact, a snorkeler can take it down 50' and get very good photos. The 5X zoom goes from a true wide angle to medium telephoto and shoots very good HD video. Your smart phone links up with the XP90 and acts as a remote control as well as uploads your pictures to the internet.

XP series Fujifilm cameras have been so well received that our customers sing their praises to prospective buyers. They last and last and owners are so pleased that they often have more than one in their family. The price was recently reduced to only \$149.99



Supplemental Lighting

This is a very broad category which we will address in two areas - on or off camera.

The built-in flashes on most cameras are barely adequate with most lenses and offers little if any efforts to make the light more pleasing. We recommend 3 different flashguns for on camera use. All three units offer full automation, bounce capabilities for both horizontal and vertical photos and use AA size batteries.

The Promaster 100SL flash is mid size, a flash range of up to about 60' and also has a built-in L.E.D. video light. The time between flashes can be as brief as 1/4 second. It is available for Canon or Nikon for only \$149.99.

Nissin's i40 flash is somewhat smaller and heavier and has similar output range. It also has variable output on its video light and can link to wi-fi for wireless off camera flash use, making it a desirable item in a small studio setting. It is available for most interchangeable lens cameras for \$269.99

Promaster's 200SL flash is physically larger than the first 2, but has almost double the power. It has a IR focus assist and can allow the camera to autofocus in total darkness.* It can stop action to 1/20,000 second! This flash is available for \$279.99 for Canon or Nikon DSRs.

For off camera lighting, the majority of our customers prefer L.E.D. studio lights. The model VL800 series studio kits are popular for setting up a small, home studio.

*At least up to the distance the flash will reach.

They offer exceptionally bright, color corrected and variable power in quite small units. Being L.E.D.s they generate extremely little heat. All that you need to start a 2 light studio is included in the box (including stands, handles, softboxes, diffuser and wireless remote control) is included in the box for only \$699.99.

Many of our patrons came to us needing a way to photograph many of their belongings or items to sell on-line. The Promaster Still Life Studio™ garnered "oohs" and "aahs" from buyers. The built in L.E.D. lights give even, shadowless lighting without the heat of previous design portable studios. So little heat is produced that several customers are enjoying photographing flowers and small animals. Everything needed is supplied - other than electricity. Different sizes are available starting at \$159.99 for a 16" cube.

Supports

Although our full size tripods start at under \$50.00, the most popular and customer praised unit is the XC525 tripod. It has a working height of more than 60" and folds down to about 16", making it very easy to carry and store. Available in 6 colors (including pink and copper), it is only \$179.99.

Smartphone Camera Lenses

We were wrong! We never thought people would really want, much less use, accessory lenses for their cell phones. Our Mobile Lens Kit proved us wrong. These lenses (wide angle, telephoto, fisheye, and macro) work on ANY smartphone in almost any case. The photo quality is improved beyond our customer's expectation. Also in the kit is a polarizing filter - the first ever for a phone - which produces vivid, natural colors outdoors. The

difference with and without it is stunning. Supplied with case, the full set of lenses is \$79.99. The lenses are available separately at under \$20.00 each.

Camera Lenses

Last, but not least, are camera lenses. All are from Tamron.

Many customers have come to us complaining that they're not always happy changing lenses - is there a lens that does everything? The Tamron 16-300mm zoom does it all from very wide angle to long telephoto. Its fast autofocus and superior vibration control make it very easy to get great photos - and great video. Available for Canon, Nikon or Sony, it is currently (through December 3) available for \$499.99.

Extreme wide angle photography has gained so much popularity recently that lens makers are finally providing lenses to deliver the quality people have been wanting. The Tamron 15-30/2.8 zoom (\$1199.99) is the lens that both our professional and amateur customers rave about. Realtors use it to photograph complete rooms as well as exteriors without telephone poles and wires. This lens is also available for Canon, Nikon and Sony.

Also available is the Tamron 85mm f/1.8 portrait lens. It is the world's only Vibration Controlled 85mm lens. It certainly makes life easier. \$749.99 isn't a budget price, but its quality and usability make it worth the price.

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The next lens is brand new, and therefore has no track record. The Tamron 150-600G(eneration)2 lens is a tremendously improved version of the original, which had won the overwhelming approval by our customers. Among its improvements is state of the art vibration control which allows the average photographer to hand hold this super telephoto (900mm angle of view on cropped sensor cameras) and still get sharp, detailed shots. We anticipate this \$1399.99 lens to make many camera wildlife, nature and sports photographers VERY happy.

Have a great November and a Happy Thanksgiving.

Remember to register and use your American Express card for Small Business Saturday, November 26. It's to your and our mutual advantage.



Thanksgiving Photo Tips

Each year people express an interest in photographing their beautiful Thanksgiving table. Here are some tips to get things the way YOU want them...

- The shape of your room and the table size determine whether you shoot from a corner or from the middle of one side. If shooting from the center of the longer dimension, make sure you have a lens with a wide enough angle to include all of the table.
- Use a small aperture to get sufficient depth of field to have the whole table in focus.
- Use a very small aperture and long shutter speed (tripod or other support needed) to capture the rising steam from the hot foods.
- Avoid using flash. You'll get hot spots every time the light reflects back from anything glass or shiny.

Madison PhotoPlus
40 Main Street Madison NJ 07940
voice 973-966-2900 fax 973-377-1458
staff@madisonphoto.com
www.madisonphoto.com

*Jerry, Joey, Joy,
Rachelle, Rob. & Vincent*



the Photo Summit
383 Springfield Ave. Summit NJ 07901
voice 908-273-7427 fax 908-277-0218
staff@photosummit.com
www.photosummit.com

Bret, Larry, Lynne & Vanessa