



Digital Photography Mastery

DIGITAL
PHOTOGRAPHY
MASTERY



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Introduction

My introduction to digital photography was probably a bit more dramatic than most people's. To get the full picture – so to speak – let's travel back in time to the salad days of my life as a fledgling photographer: six years ago!

Although digital cameras were available even then, they had as yet to come into their own, or rather into my hands.

Naturally enough, this meant that I was still lugging around my film SLR – that's single lens reflex to all those out there who're sitting around scratching their heads.



Anyway, along with my trusty camera, which I had spent a fortune to get by the way, I was also lugging around everything else that I needed along with it. Spare lenses, extra film, batteries, filters, basically the whole works.

Having said that, even though I'm now almost fully digital through and through I still do carry most of the same things. The only thing that's radically different is the lack of film rolls.

I now don't carry with me rolls and rolls of film, and I don't need to wait eternally to reload the camera either. Instead I have learned to do a quick change of my memory cards even under the direst of weather circumstances.

Speaking of dire weather conditions it was on one of these days that I was introduced to digital cameras.

There I was in the middle of nowhere as I like to call it, (other people prefer the term countryside), when I was suddenly beset by what was tantamount to a flash flood but in storm conditions not flood conditions.

Naturally being in the middle of nowhere with not a house in sight and no car in sight either – I had parked about five miles away – I

decided to make a break for the nearest road, where I was sure there were bound to be tons of cars.

Well, my assumption was right, there were close to half a ton of cars on the road, unfortunately for me, I never got to it. With my usual impeccable sense of direction and timing I headed away from the road which was quite nearby, and also away from where my own car was parked.

I could give you poor excuses as to why I forgot all about the map and the compass I had with me, but I won't bother. I didn't have a GPS with me at the time, but that's still no excuse for forgetting about the rest since I do periodically get lost on occasion.

However, the fact that it was pouring down that I could barely see ten feet in front of me and that there was lightning crashing down around me at the time all contributed, and that's all I'm going to say on that matter!

Anyway, suffice it to say that I did get lost, wandered and blundered my way into a grove of trees and generally went around like a staggering blind drunk.

I assure you that it wasn't a pretty sight. And in all this furor, I finally managed to remember my map and compass and paused in staggering to fish it out.

Being the thoughtful soul that I am I had waterproofed my map and never was I so grateful for that as I was at that moment.

However, it seemed the gods were laughing at me because they took even that away from me when they sent the ledge I was standing on, tumbling downwards.

In my defense I have to say that with the roar of the rain in my ears and the bright idea of the map buzzing around in my brain, I didn't even notice that I was standing on a river bank.

Luckily I hadn't far to go and only fell about six feet or so into more mud and water.

And where in all of this do you suppose that I was introduced to digital for the first time you ask?

Well, as amazing as it sounds, there was another intrepid photographer who had also had the same bright idea as me of trekking through the middle of nowhere when he too was caught in the middle of the storm.

And, just like me, he had had the bright idea of heading towards the road. Only, unlike me, he actually was heading towards the road. That's why we met up, we were both heading in opposite directions towards each other.

Well, being the intrepid photographer that he was, he couldn't pass up the chance to take a shot of a fellow photographer in distress and caught me in mid tumble with his new digital camera.

This would all have gone unnoticed by me in the heat of the moment, but a flash in one's face is an unmistakable occurrence and that was what had me looking up into the eyes of candid camera.

At the time of course, all I cared about was that I kept my gear dry, and got myself to dry land as soon as possible as well.

The appearance of this equally crazy photographer in the middle of nowhere gave me hope and we trudged our way back in the wake of my muddy footprints.

The long and short of it though was that we finally managed to hail down a passing car and hitch a ride back into town where we promptly walked into the nearest bar and got down to the serious business of warming ourselves up.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is where I got my first appreciation for all that's digital in cameras.

The shot of my infamous slide down the treacherous incline of six feet was duly brought up and passed around to everyone where we all had a good laugh at my expense.

And for my part, I also had a good looking over of the camera as well. The end.

And touching and funny though the story was, I have to say that it still took me at least two more years to muster up the cash to get myself a digital camera. They weren't going cheap in those days.

Going digital

The one great thing about going digital though, was that I get to see the pictures I take immediately I take them.

The small viewfinder that accompanies just about all new digital cameras is perfect for determining in an instant whether you need a reshoot or not.

Of course the screen is generally too small to see too much detail but it works for the most part.

And if you really want to go high tech and see right then and there whether your photograph came out okay, all you need is a laptop computer.

With one of these little babies your shooting abilities will increase manifold as you now also have the ability to store more shots as well. All you need to do is to transfer the pictures to the laptop and you have a newly emptied memory card just waiting to be filled.

If you're somewhere in the middle of deepest Antarctica or somewhere equally cold of course, then you won't want to spend time fiddling with all these gadgets and might only want to get back to blessed warmth.

But the option is always open for you to take if you want to take the time and effort to empty out your memory cards while you're out in the field shooting away.

For my part I prefer to have the laptop with me only on certain trips that I take. Like the ones where transportation and storage are easy and where I don't have to lug the silly thing along with me everywhere I go, along with my camera equipment!

You might of course feel differently about that, but as I like to say, each to his own. First things first though, you need to decide whether you like digital photography or not.

For many a professional photographer, the difference between choosing digital cameras over film cameras, is somewhat akin to the

preference of manual transmission over automatic transmission cars for the professional driver.

Although to a very great degree they're both the same, and they both yield almost identical results, in the end when push comes to shove, the manual car will always give them more power and control when they need it most.

And that's why you'll still see quite a lot of professional photographers hugging their old film SLR's to their chest, refusing to part with it.

It has nothing whatsoever to do with the inability to change and adapt as much as it is the knowledge that film cameras – for the moment at least – will yield far better results when push comes to shove.

For the beginning photographer though, digital is as good a way as any to go, and if you're mainly an enthusiastic amateur, you'll get along fine with your digital camera.

It's when you start going up in the stakes that you have to make a decision whether you want to upgrade with digital all the way, or whether you want to go for the film camera.

Then again, before we end this segment, I just have to point out that technology is advancing in quantum leaps and bounds, and that there's a huge possibility that you will see more and more people abandoning their film cameras for the power of the digital camera.

Digital Photography

Gone are the days when you had to load and reload rolls and rolls of film. These days there's no fumbling around in the thrill of the moment because you need to reload your camera.



And there's no need for you to miss that perfect shot because you've just run out of film either. Now all you need to do is to insert your picture card inside your camera and you're good to go.

Of course you should check first whether your card is full, and whether you've already uploaded the pictures to a suitable place before you delete them.

Then again you'll also want to check that your batteries are fresh, and whether you have a spare set around. And if you have rechargeable batteries, have you recharged them?

No one ever said that just because camera's went digital that your life would become easier. Or did they?

Digital cameras, when they came out seemed like the perfect solution to the eternal hassle and problem of loading film, but as is the case with many new "toys" and gadgets, things just aren't what they seem.

And although digital cameras are heaven sent in many ways, they also have their own set of problems for us to contend with, some of which I've already named.

It's also true that you'll still be lugging around just about the same amount of gear with digital that you did with film cameras. The only thing that's really missing is the rolls and rolls of film.

But storage-wise digital is probably the better option as now you don't need to keep every one of your positives in a protected slide mount and album.

Instead now, you get the choice to print out the ones that you do want and to store the others either on your computer, CD, or a DVD, or any other type of format that you can think of.

And the other good thing is that you can take as many shots as you want while you're in the field, then you can discard the ones that you don't want before going on to take even more photographs.

And that's the real beauty of going digital. Your learning curve just became easier with the ability to keep and discard almost immediately those shots that aren't good.

Theoretically speaking, a person should be able to learn all about depth of field, lighting, overexposure, underexposure and just about everything else there is within the span of a few dedicated days.

That won't make them a genius, a guru, or a professional even, but it will make them more familiar with the ins and outs of photography, faster, more easily and in a costless way to boot.

Photography 101

First and foremost before you start taking any pictures, you should really go out and get yourself a camera.



Now, this is alright if you already have a camera, but what about if you're still looking for a camera and feeling indecisive over what you should go for.

Since you're reading this we can assume that you're interested in digital cameras.

Or it could merely be that you already have a digital camera and want to see what you can do with it.

Then again you could have already gone ahead and bought your film camera, are regretting this action and are now drooling over the possible amazing things that you could have done with a digital instead.

Whatever the case may be, it's a fairly good bet that at this point you will need a digital camera to be able to take digital pictures and to be able to take advantage of all the pluses, that going digital will afford you.

That said, before we go on to the next topic, I really feel that you should be aware of one tiny little fact.

Most digital camera's that you buy now will in all probability become obsolete before they hit the shelves, and there's a better than even chance that their prices will drop within a year or two.

It's a shocking, but true fact, and something that you should come to grips with before you go any further.

The hard truth is that we shell out such large amounts of money for cutting edge technology and there's really nothing for it, if our newly acquired cutting edge technology becomes obsolete almost immediately it's developed.

After all, that's the whole point of cutting edge technology and that's why we go in for it in the first place. That said there's really nothing to worry about.

Just because your new digital camera is not the latest in cutting edge technology doesn't mean that you will suffer for it.

On the contrary, trying to always equip yourself with the latest and the greatest can in fact be quite a handicap.

You'll spend more time – and money – on trying to play catch-up with your latest digital equipment than you would on actually taking breathtaking photographs.

If you're completely new at this digital photography thing then I would suggest for you to do a little research and buy yourself a digital camera that fulfils your needs for the moment.

When you get more familiar with digital photography and you're more comfortable with your digital camera and all that you can do with it, then I would suggest upgrading your camera to a better model.

Or if you're satisfied with what you have, then stick with it. There's no use changing something that you're happy with, only to have to stumble and fumble your way through a new camera.

Of course you have another option and that's to buy additional accessories like lenses and things to enhance the camera you already have.

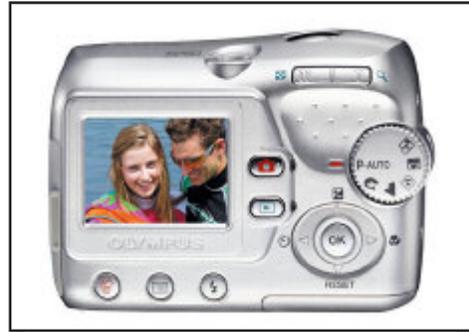
Human nature being what it is though, there's a good chance that you'll go in for a new camera.

Thriftiness and a lingering affection will keep your old camera within reach, but you'll still hanker after one of those latest and greatest digital cameras that are being advertised so assiduously everywhere you look.

Which Camera

Just like with normal film cameras, there are different types of digital cameras which you can buy.

What exactly you buy though depends entirely on your preference. If you're only a family-holiday kind of photographer you might want to stay away from the more expensive professional cameras.



Whereas if you're a budding photographer who has only now seen the light through the lens, so to speak, you might want to go in for something that's not top of the line in terms of equipment, but something that will instead help you in your endeavors.

If you're a professional photographer then you probably don't need my input into which type of cameras you should get.

On the other hand, the budding, novice photographer might find it interesting to know that when they get to a stage where they feel comfortable enough with their photography skills, they can then move on to the top of the range professional cameras.

What I tried to do here though is to give you some insight into the different types of cameras available.

It's up to you to take it from there and do more research into the various different makes of cameras and their pros and their cons.

Before you wonder why I'm not giving you any detailed specifications on any of the existing cameras, it's for the very simple reason that by the time you're reading this, the cameras I'm talking to you about might not be the best on the market.

As I said earlier, technology is a forever changing thing and what's new today, will almost definitely be old hat three days from now.

Phone Cameras

With the advent of new technology and the ability to make small micro-chips and things even smaller to a macro level, we're now faced with the ability to use these macro-chips just about anywhere we want to.

This is the reason why we now have the ability to take reasonably-good photographs from our mobile phones.

If you look anywhere these days you won't be surprised to see many people with their phones out and snapping merrily away.

To illustrate my point let me give you a small snapshot if you will, of something that happened to me not too long ago.

There I was at a friend's wedding, snapping merrily away on my digital SLR camera – I was the designee photographer – doing my utmost best to remain inconspicuous and blend in with the background.

I wanted to get as many candid shots as I could that the happy couple could laugh over and treasure for a long time.

It was during my efforts at attaining this state of photographic perfection that I came across a scene that was hilarious as much as it was thought provoking in its own way.

While the newly married couple had taken to the dance floor for their first dance as man and wife, the guests had gathered around to admire their grace.

This though, was not the moment that remains in my memory as a candid camera moment.

No, it wasn't the picture of the happily dancing couple, but instead the picture that caught my eye was that of their friends and relatives all more or less huddled together as close as they could get to the best view point of the dance floor.

It was nighttime, and only the floor was softly lit, so in that dim gloom it was amusing to see so many blue screens all held up in their owners' hands pointed all in the same direction, towards the couple.

Just about everybody with a camera phone was out there snapping merrily away, some even taking videos.

This might seem normal and not even remotely funny – especially if you do the same thing yourself, but to me it was a sign of the times.

And what was amazing was that no one even noticed this highly unnatural phenomenon of over a dozen people all with phones in their hands and all looking into their screens, instead of the dancing couple.

Compact

I still remember the first compact camera I had. My dad gave it to me for my fourteenth birthday, and I have to say that it was the pride and joy of my life – for exactly five months.

After that I have no idea what happened to it, and frankly I have to say at that time I wasn't really all that bothered about it either.

The joys of photography still hadn't caught my attention and there were more interesting things for me to do at the time.

However, it must also be said that when I finally did gain more than an average interest in photography, the first camera that I went out and bought was a compact. And a more worthwhile purchase I have never made.

Since to all intents and purposes I was very much an amateur in the photography field, (my first camera at age fourteen notwithstanding), I was able to experiment and fiddle around as much as I wanted to.

And since at that time I wasn't yet into the expenses of positive films, and since negative film rolls were generally inexpensive, I was able to pretty much do what I wanted.

The only restriction that I had, if at all, was the cost of developing the film, which I solved by creating my own darkroom and developing the negatives myself.

However that may be, you'll be glad to know that the compact camera is probably the best camera for when you're starting out.

And since nowadays you're more likely to go for the compact digital camera, your life just got considerably easier, and your photography just became considerably more enhanced.

You know that you don't have the expenses of processing to contend with, and with the ease of digital, if you're still very much a novice then you can learn your way quickly and easily through photography 101.

SLR – Single Lens Reflex

These are the cameras that professionals go for, but don't limit yourself thinking that only professionals can use these properly. There's no such thing, anyone can use them as long as they can point and shoot.

Things get slightly more complicated as you go further in depth into photography, but don't let that stop you.

If you're interested in photography at all and are considering taking it up seriously as a hobby or a profession, then I would suggest that you shop around and find the right digital SLR for you.

Start as you mean to go on and you should be fine. Admittedly you might be stuck on the auto meter button for a while, but you will eventually get over that problem and will find yourself using the many functions offered to you by the digital SLR, with ease.

Accessorize

There are many things that you will need in your quest for digital photo-taking, and I have to tell you that they are legion.



It's just as bad and maybe even worse, than the masses of stuff you need with a good film camera.

However you look at it though, just as with a film camera, most of these accessories are stuff that we buy just to please ourselves.

There's really only a very small amount of these accessories that can be truly thought of as essential to the serious photographer. Everything else is just for the fun of it really.

Accessories you should have

Since accessories can be anything that you need, want, or see from one given moment to the next, I thought it best if I separated them out for you. You know, just to make your life somewhat easier.

In actual fact I did this for myself a few years ago when I was still on film cameras because I found that no matter how hard I tried, I always wound up buying something that was useful, but which wasn't useful to me.

Like the fisheye lens that I bought a few years ago, just before I got into my digital stride. It's useful yes, just not for me.

Needless to say, I still have it. I've used it only once, but since the thought that I might actually get around to using it crosses my mind every time I try to part with it, I'm still the proud owner of a completely useless fisheye lens.

If you've been a photographer of any sort for any length of time, then there's a better than even chance that you've also indulged at some point in time and have bought something that's absolutely useful – just not useful for you.

So to that end, I started out writing a list of the things that I absolutely must have in order to get any sort of photography done, but instead came up with a list of all the things that I needed, wanted and saw just that morning in my favorite photography magazine.

Obviously that wasn't going to get me anywhere fast, and I have to say that I ditched the list at that time.

Luckily for all you readers out there going through this with breathless anticipation, I found it just the other day in time to include in this book.

For the purposes of clarity, I've cleaned it up somewhat and have now divided it into two sections.

The accessories that you should-have, or that you might want to look at getting at a later point in time. And the accessories that you want and that you will get at some point in time.

Also for sake of this book, I've updated my original list so that it now encompasses digital photography accessories instead.

Assuming that you read the title of this section, you will then know that you're in the 'should have' accessories section, and not the 'must have now' accessories section.

Hopefully you will find both sections interesting and of use to your endeavors. Again, needless to say, there will be a few things that I might have left out of the list, but trust me, it's not for lack of trying!

Lenses

If you read that little piece of chatty witticism before this, then you might be tempted to think that the accessories you're reading about in this aren't really as necessary as all that. And you would be right.

None of these accessories are necessary, but I have to say however

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