

Fancy shooting things old-style? Film might surprise you with its creative possibilities. **Andrew Sanderson** explains the basics of black & white film photography

lack & white film photography is becoming more and more appreciated. After all, some of the most amazing pictures from the history of photography were taken on film (or glass plates) and there are still thousands of dedicated film users around today. Why is that? Why should you consider using it again? And if you've never loaded a roll of film into a camera, why should you start now?

I believe black & white film can be an amazingly creative and rewarding medium. It can be frustrating when things don't turn out as planned, but this is usually down to poorly thought-out methods. If you can get over the odd disappointment, making mistakes can sharpen your wits and improve your

photography very quickly. It doesn't have to be an expensive exercise, either. There are countless second-hand film cameras still on the market, and young entrepreneurs are even now setting up businesses based on film equipment and methods. There is a wonderful second-hand film camera shop in Leeds, run by two young guys, which is packed with beautiful old film cameras (check out www.wycameras.com).

You only have to look at the popularity of the Holga camera, the Lomo and the revival of some of the Polaroid films by The Impossible Project to see that film is still viable, popular and cool. And just consider the sheer number of apps and plug-in filters that mimic film effects. So why not try the real thing if you haven't

before? Some basic film cameras such as Zenit and Praktica are probably cheaper to buy than the software available to fake the results they create!

Film cameras are a joy to hold and to use. They feel properly made – beautiful, well-engineered objects. When you press the shutter, the camera fires immediately without lag or delay. If you're using a fully manual camera that doesn't rely on any form of battery, you don't have to carry spare batteries around, or hard drives to back up your pictures. And once your images are processed as negatives, you'll have them for life. No crashing, accidental deletion or software incompatibility issues – the negatives will still be printable for hundreds of years.



THERE are still a number of conventional films on sale, ranging in sensitivity from ISO 25 up to ISO 3,200 (see Silverprint's guide to films on the market on pages 6-7 of this supplement). Some people love the grain of a fast 35mm film, but others try to use films and developers that keep grain so small that it's almost invisible on an average-sized print. Over the next three pages I have provided a quick summary of the many I have tried, and how I think they perform.



1 Low-sensitivity films

THE SLOWEST films currently available are specialist types that need careful processing and are designed to give the greatest detail and the finest grain. There are a number on the market, with speeds that range from ISO 3–25, depending on how they are developed. These include ADOX CMS 20 II, Gigabitfilm, Kodak Technical Pan and Rollei ATP 1.1 Technical Pan.

Next in the speed ratings are the ISO 50 films, although Ilford Pan F Plus is the only one currently available. To get the best out of them, I would advise processing soon after the film is finished, but you can expect smooth tonality and very fine grain.



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Andrew Sanderson is a highly respected

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2 Fast films

ISO 400 films were once considered fast, and a lot of press photography was shot on them. If you're after a slightly grainy look, these will provide it. While they're not as grainy as they used to be, due to advances in film manufacture, the grain is still visible. These are good general-purpose films and excellent for street photography. Ilford HP5 Plus, Ilford Delta 400, Kodak Tri-X, Kodak T-Max 400, Fomapan 400 and Kentmere 400 are all worth looking at.

There are a couple of ISO 400-speed films that have a much finer grain structure (strictly speaking, a dye image), but they need to be processed using the same chemicals as colour negative film. This C-41 process is used by all high-street minilabs, making it easy to get this type of film developed.

The films are known as chromogenic films and there are currently two on the market that I know of: Ilford XP2 and Fujifilm Neopan 400 CN. Both are rated at ISO 400, but I'd suggest you set your meter's ISO to 320. This will overexpose each frame a bit, but give you much better negatives. Don't tell the lab, though! Just get them to process it as normal.

Fast films today are between ISO 1,600 and ISO 3,200. Fujifilm Neopan 1600 has been discontinued, but you may find the odd roll online. Some photographers love it, but I found it a bit too contrasty. Ilford's Delta 3200 is a good all-rounder: it can be rated at speeds between ISO 800 and ISO 3,200, although it's claimed it can be rated much higher. You're welcome to try this, but don't expect much printable detail on the negative. My own preference is to rate it at ISO 1,600 and process it for the appropriate time, as this gives a good tonality and superb grain. Kodak made one of the same speed for a while, but I believe it has been discontinued.



3 Middle-range films

DIFFERENT photographers have their preferences, but the quality is good with all middle-range films. Processed in the correct developer, they will still give you fine grain and smooth tonality, but not as fine as the previously mentioned films. Ilford FP4 Plus, Ilford Delta 100, Fomapan 100 Classic, Fuiifilm Neopan 100 Acros, Kentmere 100, Kodak T-Max 100 and Rollei Blackbird 100 - I haven't tried them all, but I know that FP4. Delta 100 and T-Max 100 all produce beautiful negatives.



True infrared films give snowy-white foliage in sunlight

4 Specialist films

THERE are a few unusual films that fall outside the normal range listed so far. There are infrared and pseudo-infrared films, such as Ilford SFX, as well as oddities like Ortho film. This will give you different tonality to ordinary (panchromatic) films, since it is mainly blue-sensitive. This means skies are rendered oddly and skin tones come out much darker. It can, however, be loaded and processed under red safelight rather than total darkness.

So that s my quick rundown on film. Go out and shoot some and enjoy the challenge it provides. Film imposes a discipline that will sharpen your wits.

USEFUL CONTACTS

For more information on available black & white films and darkroom equipment RK Photographic at www.thedarkroom.co.uk www.rolleifilm.com, www.ilfordphoto.com, www.foma.cz, www.fujifilm.co.uk, www.kentmere.co.uk, www.silverprint.co.uk

On pages 12-13, Andrew looks at film processing and developing