



Taking the Digital Plunge

Introduction

So you think its time to make the switch, time trade in celluloid for 1's and 0's? It is an exciting time, but can also be a time of confusion as you try and figure out the best system for your photography. As a long time expert in the use of transparency film, for me taking the digital plunge was met with some apprehension. Now having made the official 'switch', I am thrilled, and wish I would have done it sooner. If you think its time for you, I would like to share a few things I learned while making that switch.

Choosing Your Camera

Mega pixels, lens magnification, weight, size, CMOS, CCD, RAW, JPEG, so many questions, so many options. Too many options often lead to too many opinions. It is easy to get lost in the opinionated discussions of what is best for you! Before you get lost in this forest of opinions, stop and step back; decide first, what do you need, not what has the coolest features that you will never use! Are you shooting large gallery photographs and need the highest pixel count available, or are you a recreational photographer who likes to make smaller prints for your friends? Do you love spending time in front of you computer balancing the curves and levels of every single photograph you take? Or would you rather just publish them immediately? Do you have a lot of money invested in lenses and need a body that works with those lenses? These are only a few questions you need to ask yourself before choosing your digital system.

It is 2006, and I can say with some degree of confidence that ALL big name camera manufacturers (Nikon, Canon, Pentax, etc.) make fantastic digital cameras. With that said, sit down and make a list of the items that you need to successfully continue, or advance your photography skills. Then see which system best fits your needs. Remember, if you are like the rest of us, your pocket book does play a factor in this decision process. For me, I needed a completely separate digital system from my film system. I also needed a high pixel count. There were many opinions that would have swayed me in another direction, but in the end I have a system that works perfectly with my style and workflow.

Here are a few pointers about choosing cameras. Mega pixels are a large part of the puzzle, but not the most important. Don't base your entire decision on the number of mega pixels. With the internal camera processors, and software such as Photoshop the effective mega pixels that can be created from interpolation are huge. You can create fantastic prints from a state of the art camera with perhaps a smaller pixel count. I would recommend you choose a camera that captures images in the RAW format, even if you do not use it everyday (see Digital Workflow Paper). All cameras, except for a few in the Canon product line, have lens magnification. This is usually in the neighborhood of 1.5x. What this ultimately means is that a standard 24mm lens will behave as a 36mm lens mounted on your digital body, a 300mm is really a 450mm lens. This may be an advantage, or disadvantage to you, but you need to make sure you look at this item, especially if you want to use your existing lenses. Really my best advice is to pick what will work best for you. Do not worry about the opinions of others, after all they are not you, and do not shoot like you.