

Portable Flash for out on location & Studio Flash Lighting



What was exhibited at Photokina 2010?

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At the left Eduardo Sacayón at Elinchrom booth and on the right Mecablitz flash presented at Photokina 2010

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Introduction

There are dozens of well established brands of studio lighting. However the present discussion is of portable units, especially portable units that do not require a cargo truck to carry out to remote locations.

Probably most brands of really good studio quality flash lighting equipment make portable units. But even with a team of three of us at Photokina 2010 for many days, there were thousands of products available to inspect, so we tended to limit ourselves to brands we know from the past 12 years of Photokina, PMA, and Photo East.

Hall 9.1 was where the professional studio lighting systems were displayed. The European-made systems were in the front half; the Chinese-made systems were in the back quarter of this hall. The display area was arranged comparable to the past two shows (most brands were in roughly the same size and shape of booth, and in approximately the same position within the hall as at Photokina 2006 and 2008. My brain does not remember the layout of 2004 backwards, though the FLAAR Photo Archive probably has snapshots of those years also. 1998 was the first year that I visited Photokina.

Studio Flash, but especially Portable Studio-quality Flash Equipment

For the last several decades I have preferred to use traditional halogen (hot lights) in my studio. This is because four decades ago I asked E. Philip Levine what lights he recommended for me carrying around the world: he said that studio flash control units could not guarantee it would always hold up to constant travel, whereas with Lowel Lights or comparable you simply replace a \$28 lamp (bulb). I have used Lowel Lights for over 40 years now and am completely content

Though of course today I have found that “digital fluorescent” from Westcott and “cool lights” from various manufacturers are preferred by museums, I still continue to use tungsten halogen for in-house studio and for portable studio around Central America.

However FLAAR has long-range projects to photograph out in remote areas where there is not much electricity. Charging a battery is a challenge in these rain forest villages, but can be done. But using hot lights, or even fluorescent is not realistic. And, since we wish to photograph in sacred caves, fluorescent is not powerful enough anyway.

Hence my increased interest in portable flash units, to use in dark areas of the rain forest, and to use in caves.

So the following report on flash systems at Photokina 2010 is directed towards portable flash, of two kinds

- Studio-strength flash, used on light stands. (Elinchrom is a good example).
- Camera-associated flash, used on, or directly associated with, the camera (Metz is a good example).

Two reasons why the FLAAR Reports on photography equipment are popular are first, because we prefer to actually use the equipment we evaluate, and second, we tend to prefer equipment of professional quality. So we do not yet evaluate flash equipment developed in China. I have a high respect for Chinese efforts, indeed I am studying Mandarin presently, and enjoy Chinese culture, past and present. But if I am out in a remote part of Central America, it is statistically more likely that equipment made in Europe or at least America, will hold up. Plus, if a Chinese unit does fail, getting spare parts would be a challenge.

Eventually, gradually, more and more camera equipment will be assembled in China. After all, the Macintosh computer I am writing this report on is made in China, but being made in China (for a European design) compared with designed with local low-bid preferences are two completely different worlds.

Broncolor, Hall 9.1

SinarBron Imaging has undergone considerable financial and political evolution in the last five years. The gradual downturn in the market for 8x10, 5x7, and even full size 4x5" large format cameras has severely impacted the Sinar half of the SinarBron relationship. The in-and-out of Jenoptic and even Leica has been confusing for brand recognition, especially in relationship to Sinar. Presently SinarBron is doing business under the name Bron Imaging Group. The original broncolor, Foba, Sinar and other brands still continue.

At Photokina 2010 the Sinar booth was of modest size compared with its heyday of the other Photokina expos that I attended: 1998, 2000, and especially 2002, and even 2004. 2006 was still a powerhouse but by 2008 the Sinar booth had shrunk. It has leveled off now by 2010, since by now Phase One and Hasselblad hold the obvious lead in medium format cameras. Even what is left of Leaf had a booth about the size of Sinar (in 2008 the Leaf booth was packed, showing its status and popularity).

Through all of this broncolor has not had as many ups and downs as the Sinar portion, since digital photographers still need professional level studio lighting.

Powerbox 900 is a battery unit for broncolor monolights Minicom 40, Minicom 80, and Minipuls C200. You get between 50 and 240 flashes (without modeling light), depending on which monolight you select.

Broncolor is a premium brand name, as you would expect for a Swiss company, but if you have only their sophisticated European style book-sized catalog, *Be Creative with Light*. And with *System*, the conclusion would be that their company is more devoted to studio strobes than to portable solutions, whereas Elinchrom is strong in portable as well as studio solutions. So while a broncolor system (in that 58 page book on thick expensive stock) is technologically impressive for the studio, if I need a complete range of options exclusively for outside in remote areas, I would be more inclined to look at the Elinchrom options. The broncolor catalog on their Scorio A and Scorio AS flash systems reinforces the impression that broncolor is primarily for studio environments.

But then I looked at the other broncolor catalog, *Mobil A2R, Unplugged*, and it was clear that broncolor does have at least one range of portable lamps: *Mobil A2R* and *Moobilite 2*.

Elinchrom, Hall 9.1, B 21 – B 29

Every two years at Photokina I have looked at the Elinchrom Ranger system. It has developed and expanded over these recent years. The current catalog shows the Ranger RX. Elinchrom is one of the top five European manufacturers of studio strobe equipment. But increasingly they are developing portable systems, under the brand name Ranger.

You definitely need to visit their booth since a complete outfit includes diverse accessories, and it helps to have an Elinchrom person explain all this to you.

Elinchrom Ranger RX Quadra Asymmetric

- Ranger Quadra – ProSet
- Ranger Quadra RX AS
- RQ A/S
- RQ battery



Elinchrom Ranger RX flash system presented at Photokina 2010



Chris Whittle, VP of Elinchrom, and Eduardo Sacayon, FLAAR Reports, in the Elinchrom booth at Photokina 2010.

- Digital RX
- Digital 1200 RX
- Digital 2400 RX

When you get the Elinchrom catalog you quickly notice that they have a more diverse range of equipment than some other manufacturers. In other words you have many more options with Elinchrom for portable battery-operated flash systems. For this reason, it is Elinchrom flash equipment that I would be interested in evaluating for use out on location in remote areas of Guatemala.

When I do studio lighting my style is to work with at least four lights: two from the back for backlighting, and two from the side. In caves these are huge caverns, so it would take a row of four lights to light the space evenly.

I also wish to do extreme wide angle photography inside the jungle, under the tree canopy. Even though you are outside, it is dark because of the thick vegetation overhead. But you have five to ten meters of open space in front of you, and perhaps same distance left and right. To illuminate this much space, I would prefer to have four flash units.

We also do photography of crocodiles and other animals that were sacred to the Classic Maya a thousand years ago. The zoo gives us photography permits, and we are even allowed to go inside the caves if we wish to take the risk (I have been in cages of many wild animals; actually the most dangerous creature is the peccary; I would not set foot inside their pens because they attack in groups of 20 to 30 ferocious animals). But for crocodiles, since they are rather large, and we would need to put the flash units far away, I would prefer to have four units to illuminate them front and back.

In America Elinchrom was distributed by Bogen Imaging for many years. Now Bogen Imaging has changed its name to Manfrotto Distribution.

Hensel

Hensel had only German language brochures, which is fine since with a family name like Hellmuth it is not surprising that I can speak German. But it is rather limiting to be at an international expo and not have English language brochures. Or perhaps they had them but I missed them.

I did not notice any special dedication to portable flash systems in this one catalog.

Hensel is an international company headquartered in Germany.

Multiblitz

Multiblitz is one of the several German manufacturers of flash equipment. But instead of being primarily studio oriented, Multiblitz is primarily oriented to battery operated portable systems, but at studio strength.

Propac 1

Propac 2, twice as many flashes as Propac 1; four hours and a half charging time. Frankly if I were photographing out in a remote location I would tend to prefer the longest lasting battery pack available.

- PROFILUX PLUS 200
- PROFILUX PLUS 400
- PROFILUX PLUS 800

It is notable that everything they show in their catalog is fashion (fashion shots outside). Yet I can think of a dozen other applications for portable flash equipment that is of this quality:

- plants,
- flowers,
- animals,
- insects,
- geology:
- anything and everything which is outside.

Profoto

Profoto offered two brochures (that fit my requests; I had another 20,000 kilometers of flights on my September program before I got back to my office, so I did not want to drag too many brochures). The first catalog shows their D1 Air system.

- D1 250
- D1 500
- D1 1000

At the end of the catalog there is one page dedicated to the Profoto BatPac, which charges in 8 hours (meaning the battery is more powerful than most): 1200 full power flashes at 250Ws.

Then the second catalog is dedicated to describing the specs of the Profoto Pro-7b

Profoto is a Swedish company.

Battery Operated Lighting (constant, not flash)

Kobold

Kobold had an impressive booth that Photokina, in the same area as all the other elite European manufacturers of studio flash equipment. But Kobold is different: their equipment is 100% dedicated to being weatherproof (rain proof) and portable (battery operated).

What made me notice the Kobold equipment is that they had “rain” water dripping from above on a batch of their equipment that was set up as though it were outside in a “rain” forest. Otherwise I would not have noticed this equipment. Then inside their catalog most of the photographs showed their equipment out in the rain. All this of course reminded me of the botanical photography that could be done in the rain forests of Guatemala. The snag of course is the number of batteries that would be required.

- DW 200, small and focusable (200 watt)
- DW 400 (400 watt)
- DW 575/800 (575, 800 watts)

Kobold is part of the Bron Elektronik AG group in Switzerland.

Large & Powerful Camera-based Flash Systems

Metz, Mecablitz, Hall 4.2, E 9

Metz is concentrating on what normal photographers ask for: a flash sitting on their camera. This is the easiest way to carry and use your flash. Metz has upgraded/updated many of their basic models, since there are trends in what photographers want and what competitors make available. It is nice to know that at least in Germany and comparable countries that photographers prefer a name brand such as Metz rather than a generic brand made in China.

Metz had a booth of appropriate size at Photokina 2010. Most of the action was inside, by invitation only or at least clout.

I prefer a flash to hold in my hand, since I desire to control the angle of light and shadow. So I like the larger Metz units, such as the Mecablitz 76 MZ-5 Digital. The Mecablitz 45 CL-4 would be an option. But for wandering around in the jungle, when it is not realistic to bring an entire crew and entire studio, the Metz 58 AF-2 digital would be an option. For any of these off-camera slaves are essential.

Metz 58 AF-2 digital, with options

- Power Pack P 76 Set; be sure to have the cable
- Mecabounce 58-90
- Bounce diffuser 58-23 (if you are photographing inside a room with a white ceiling).



Mecablitz flashes presented at Photokina 2010



Mecablitz flashes presented at Photokina 2010

But after looking at the catalog, the one that would be preferable would be the Metz 54 MZ-4i digital, because it offers more options

- Power Pack P 76; V 54-50 connection cable required
- Connecting cable SCA 3008A with SCA 3002 adapters and camera bracket 40-36
- SCA 3083 digital slave adapter
- Mecabounce 44-90
- Bounce diffuser 58-23 (if you are photographing inside a room with a white ceiling).

Mecablitz 28 CS-2 would be a slave unit. I prefer to have a minimum of four light sources; so main source and three slaves.

Metz Mecablitz 76 MZ-5 DIGITAL

- Mounting bracket 50-25
- Power Pack P 76 Set, V76 cable required
- Mecabounce 50-90
- Bounce diffuser 76-23

Metz had their master catalog available in Spanish, English, and naturally German.

Quantum Instruments, Hall 2.1, D 11

Quantum had only an aging catalog, clearly labeled as 2008 Product Catalog. Like Metz, Quantum makes only flash for use atop your camera (or at least in close proximity). Quantum does not make studio strobe equipment.

Qflash TRIO

- Qflash TRIO QF8N for Nikon
- Qflash TRIO QF8C for Canon cameras

Qflash PILOT

The primary flash is (in their catalog) always pictured as being on top of the camera.

Quantum offers a full range of battery options.

- Turbo
- Turbo 2x2
- Turbo AC
- Turbo C

- Turbo SC
- QB1+
- QB1c
- QB2
- New (or at least not in the year 2008 catalog)
 - TURBO Blade, for under your camera or under the slave unit.
 - TURBO 3, clipped to your belt, or clipped to the light stand (on which your slave is mounted).

Others: Atech Flash Technology, 6.1, B 25

Conspicuous by their absence

Westcott was not listed in the main catalog. Norman did not exhibit under their name.

Flash Accessories

Acquiring your flash is only the first step. Even if your flash was original designed to sit atop your camera, there are many other places you can situate your flash. So finding appropriate accessories for holding your flash is the next step.

Accessories: holding the flash off the camera but still near

By Flash accessories I mean things such as Lumoquest or Gary Fong.

Macro flash

Canon and Nikon each offer their own brand of macro flash, as do most major camera manufacturers. Even Hasselblad used to offer this kind of equipment. But today a serious macro photographer should also look at independent brands.

Novoflex is a good example of specialized macro flash equipment.

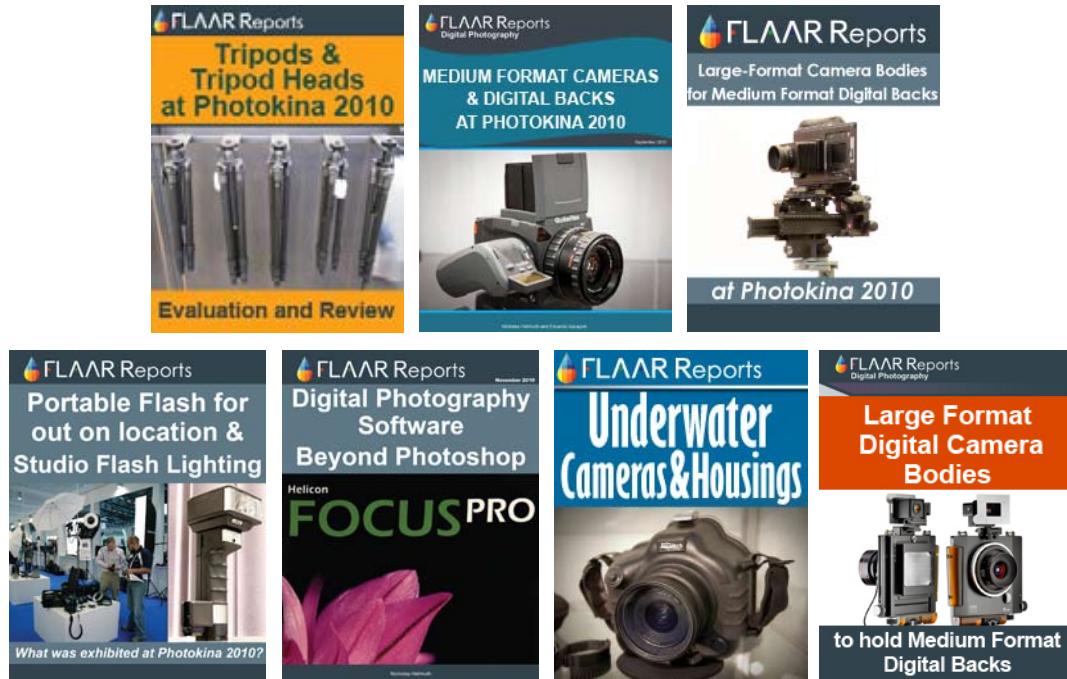
Metz also makes a ring flash: Mecablitz 15 MS-1 Digital.

Other Flash Accessories

Lastolite makes primarily backgrounds and lighting control systems, but Lastolite also offers diverse manners of holding a portable flash unit onto a light stand.

FLAAR Reports

These are the FLAAR Reports on Photokina 2010



Here are the topics that we will be working on during December (2010) and into 2011

