



FLAAR Trade Show Reports

# Digital Cameras

Studio Lighting, Portable Flash,  
Tripods & Tripod Heads



# PhotoPlus 2011

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## Updates and improvements

If you find any errors or permission in this report, or if you know anything that we missed, please let us know to consider it. Write to [FrontDesk@FLAAR.org](mailto:FrontDesk@FLAAR.org)



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## PhotoPlus is alive and well

I have attended PhotoPlus about seven times in the last ten years. But I skipped 2010 since that was a Photokina year. I returned to PhotoPlus in 2011 and the following pages are the FLAAR Reports on what we saw and heard at PhotoPlus 2011.

I attended PMA about six times in the last ten years. However I completely stopped going to PMA after Canon and Epson both dropped out. The remains of PMA are now co-locating with the CES electronics show in Las Vegas and I will attend again in 2012.

PhotoPlus 2011 (whose full name is pdn PHOTOPUS Expo) was worth the visit, however many companies now have smaller booths. And quite a few camera manufacturers were conspicuously absent.

Since FLAAR Reports is not a commercial company, and since we are definitely not a PR agency, we do not regurgitate PR releases. We write primarily about the camera equipment that we use ourselves. My photos grace the front covers of books and fill a Japanese coffee table book on pre-Columbian Aztec, Mixtec, Olmec, and Maya art. But despite decades of experience I always enjoy learning new ideas.



FLAAR staff photographing boa constrictor snake in Zoo La Aurora, Guatemala city. Notice that instead of flash we are using reflectors. We tend to use Westcott brand.

You can see our photography team and their work on our

- [www.digital-photography.org](http://www.digital-photography.org)
- [www.maya-archaeology.org](http://www.maya-archaeology.org)

A new site on photography of flowers, plants, and eco-systems: [www.maya-ethnobotany.org](http://www.maya-ethnobotany.org)

And this month we are launching a new web site on photography of insects, birds, reptiles, mammals, and shells, [www.maya-ethnozoology.org](http://www.maya-ethnozoology.org).

Another major difference is that FLAAR does not borrow equipment for a day or so. We actually use it. As a result photographers are more willing to use an actual-factual FLAAR Report to decide which equipment to use, rent, or purchase. If a photographer uses a sham review, a pseudo-review, or a PR release that pretends to be a review, you get suckered in with sheer commercial claims.

So rather than publishing PR releases we write about the equipment we have experience in and we list the equipment we look forward to acquiring so we can evaluate it during winter 2011 and all during 2012 and beyond.



## 35mm Digital Cameras

I have experience with Leica, Nikon, Canon, and Sigma 35mm cameras, so I can speak from experience about these brands.

### Leica

Leica offers nostalgia. My first 35mm camera, circa 1962, was a Leica IIIg or similar. I then moved to a Leica M1 while at college, since a major Leica dealer, E. Philip Levine, had a camera store in Harvard Square.

Leica blew their lead when SLR systems became more advanced than the rangefinder Leica concept. It took Leica several generations to make an acceptable SLR. By this time Nikon was ahead. My last 35mm cameras for Kodachrome slide film were a Leica R3, R5, and R5. I still have all three gathering dust. Have not used them since the 1990's.

Leica digital cameras were not successful because what counts in a digital camera is the software, not as much the lens or camera body. No early Leica digital camera was successful in the DSLR arena. Leica survived on nostalgia and with licenses to Panasonic for point-and-shoot cameras that exhibited the Leica or Leitz names.

Since Photokina a year or so ago Leica is trying again to move out of point-and-shoot digital size, but Phase One and even Hasselblad are too far ahead in medium format. And Canon is now unstoppable in 35mm. Plus Nikon is still popular. But if you are a wealthy Russian oligarch, or a newly rich Chinese businessman, you would tend to consider a Leica brand.





Leica camera booth, PhotoPlus 2011.

There were no Leica S2 catalogs available at PhotoPlus 2011, so I will skip Leica and concentrate on Phase One which had over 10 info sheets available in the booth of their NY area dealer, Digital Transitions.

## Pentax

Pentax was present but their booth was not visible in the shadow of Canon, Nikon, and Sony. I had to look in the exhibitor list to find the location of the diminutive Pentax booth. Pentax was too conservative and the owners did not understand digital imaging reality until it was too late (same with Bronica and Contax). Pentax (like Olympus) selected sensors that were too small, so they immediately lost 90% of the professional photographers. The remnants of Pentax have been bought by Ricoh, but Sony (who bought the stronger remains of Minolta), Nikon, and Canon are too far ahead for Pentax to catch up in even the prosumer arena.



PENTAX camera booth.

## Sigma

Sigma makes acceptable after-market lenses for Nikon but their Foveon sensor never developed past over-stated promises via constant PR releases. But for photography around the house and out on vacation, a Sigma camera is fine.



Sigma booth banner.

## Sony

Sony, if my memory is still functional, intelligently purchased the remains of the Minolta camera company. Sony cameras are more exciting than anything Olympus might offer. I would be tempted to evaluate a Sony if a complete system were available, but I would not waste my time on Pentax or even Olympus, since those brands no longer have a realistic future.



People in Sony camera booth.

## Canon

Canon has taken the lead in 35mm digital photography, mostly through sheer bluff (smoke and mirrors). I gave up on mid-range Canon models after being totally unsatisfied with a EOS 1D something-or-other about four years ago (the infamous model that could not focus adequately in low light). The EOS 1D Mark 1 or 2 was so awful that I returned it to Canon. I did not want to waste my time reviewing it.



Nicholas taking pictures with a Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III, Parque Nacional El Imposible. El Salvador, November 2011. You can notice that Nicholas is happy with his Gitzo carbon fiber tripod (from Manfrotto Distribution) and his Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III (obtained from Parrot Digigraphic). He also is content because he is in a remote rain forest at 800 meters elevation in Central America, as far from reality as possible.

I then tried a Canon EOS 5D and found it so uninspiring I gave it to my assistants. It now gathers dust. I bought a Nikon D300 to replace the Canon EOS 5D and am content with the Nikon for basic photography (keeping in mind that when I need a serious image I use a Phase One P25+, original Zeiss lenses, on a Hasselblad camera body).

Then I obtained a Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III. WOW, here was the first Canon that really was better than

any Nikon. So for the last two years I have used my Canon and not my several Nikon cameras. But if you want the ultimate sophistication, Phase One is still the world leader. But for bird photography and macro photography, it is so much more realistic to use a good Canon system.

I am fully content with my

- 14mm Canon EF 14mm f/2.8 L II USM Lens
- 17mm Canon TS-E 17mm f/4 L Tilt-Shift Lens
- 180mm EF 180mm f/3.5L Tele-Macro
- Canon basic zoom lens, EF 24-105mm
- Canon Extender EF 1.4x III



Nicholas photographing flower-carrying leaf-cutting ants with a Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III + Macro Ring Lite Flash Unit MR-14EX, Izabal, Guatemala November 2011.

All the prime lenses come from Parrot Digigraphic (ParrotColor.com).

But the 100-400mm tele-zoom is not adequate for professional use (at least not the specific lens that I have). It is mushy; stutters when it tries to focus; and after 18 months is virtually non-usable.

We will bring up this point with Canon camera USA and see whether they repair the lens to our satisfaction. I am extremely disappointed with the performance of this lens. Perhaps it is a one-bad-egg in

the basket; perhaps if it is replaced we will have the quality I expect from Canon, since they advertise themselves as a company that produces cameras and lenses that are professional in quality.

Even Luminous Landscape web site comments on an issue with the Canon 100-400 zoom lens. Actually if you Google Canon 100-400mm problems you get an avalanche of dissatisfied photographers. One web site says “my particular 100-400mm is garbage.”

I would be curious to learn if the AF VR Zoom-Nikkor 80-400mm f/4.5-5.6D ED or Nikon AF-S Nikkor 200-400mm f/4 ED VR would be a better choice than the non-functional Canon 100-400 tele-zoom.

But I am completely content with the Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III and all the other Canon lenses that I have. I look forward acquiring and evaluating the new Canon EF 500mm F/4L IS II USM.

It is a shame that one or two mushy lenses blemish the reputation of Canon. It would seem that Canon engineers would want to re-design the 100-400 tele-zoom and make it truly worthy of being considered a lens that a pro would feel was well engineered and of professional quality.



Kerry Ignatovic speaking with Nicholas Hellmuth in the HP booth, PhotoPlus 2011.

## Nikon

Nikon was the first camera that I bought after several decades with Leica. I needed a 15mm ultra-wide angle lens. It was less price to buy an entire Nikon F3 camera + Nikkor 15mm lens, than to buy a Leitz 15mm lens. And for 35mm, the Nikon gave me good resolution for projecting in the lectures I gave around the world. So I jumped from Leica and Nikon and never returned to Leica (the same time I was primarily using Hasselblad with Zeiss lenses for images that I needed to enlarge, so for slide lectures Nikon was plenty good enough).



My Nikon D100, D200, and D300 are acceptable for what they offer. The top of the line Nikon cameras have never inspired me to try them (price is too high for what you get). So when a Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III became available, I went for that (despite having been so disappointed by the two other Canon cameras I had tried).

The Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III is superior to any other Canon, or Nikon, that I have tried and I am totally content with it (other than that the sun shades for the lenses are cheap plastic and poorly engineered: they don't screw on easily; and when covering the lens it is too easy to have the lens fall on the concrete floor when your hand is holding the lens by the sun shade: you are left with the sun shade in your hand and the lens on the floor).



FLAAR staff photographing out in the jungle using a Nikon D300 and a Canon EOS 5D. Notice that we use, and evaluate, both Nikon and Canon. We also use digital cameras, usually Phase One, since this is what we received to evaluate.

For underwater point-and-shoot we have a Canon PowerShot S90 (with underwater housing) and a Canon PowerShot D10 (which needs no underwater housing).

Release cables of Canon fall apart after a year; (Remote Switch RS-80N3) or sometimes after several months of constant use. This reminds you that some aspects of Canon are still a low-price consumer camera: this is not Leica or former Hasselblad quality (when Hasselblad was made in Sweden; the present Hasselblad is made in Japan).

But the camera body and many lenses are of high quality and hold up to constant use and constant travel (except for the low-bid, poorly designed lens shades and cable releases)

Since, courtesy of Parrot Digigraphic, we have plenty of Canon lenses, the primary lens that I am still waiting to evaluate is the EF 500mm f/4L IS II USM. This lens is new and tough to find. As soon as we have this new 500mm prime lens we will publish our evaluations.



In Guatemala most water lily flowers start to bloom underwater. Nicholas did his PhD dissertation on water lily flowers, sea anemones, and related underwater plants and animals as pictured in Classic Maya art and cosmology of Guatemala, Honduras, and Belize. For the coming year (2012) we will evaluate underwater camera housings for Nikon D-series cameras, for Canon Rebel series, and compare these with two point-and-shoot underwater cameras, Monterrico July 2010.

Because I am so content with the Canon, I have had not much incentive to buy new Nikon equipment, but there are several Nikon wide-angle lenses that have much better reviews than Canon counterparts. So in the future, if Nikon produces a full-frame camera that tempts me, I would give up with my D300 and move to full frame.

I am content with all my 20-year old Nikon lenses: 200 tele-macro; 105mm macro; 15mm ultra-wide angle. These are all old manual focus lenses. All work just fine today, despite a thousands of miles of travel on bumpy and dusty roads in remote parts of the world.

But the Nikon DX lenses, made in Thailand, are cheap junk. We have two of these kit-lenses. They should be an embarrassment to Nikon. I can't imagine that Canon would make a lens this low-end.

These Nikon lens were wobbly after the first month; and gradually became unusable.

Twice I complained to Nikonians, and they told me they would do absolutely nothing: they seem only to want to hear chants from Nikon-lovers.

I complained to Nikon at a major international photo trade show. One person effectively laughed and said, "if you buy a cheap lens you got what you paid for." In other words, Nikon knows these lenses are inadequate.



Sofia assembling the camera housing for the Canon PowerShot S90, a process a little bit entertaining because it takes time to do it. One of our photography staff ended up with mistakenly buying this system; I feel cheated and feel that we got the wrong equipment (since this was the first underwater equipment that staff member had ordered). For example, the fish-eye cover was worthless but of course was expensive.

This is the worst camera purchase experience I have had in 40 years of buying cameras, and this is precisely why we write reviews. We are thus unable to recommend the camera store, Backscatter. The fisheye FIX M 52/67 Fisheye Conversion Lens (UWL-04) is needless and is the typical thing that adept sales reps can achieve when the buyer is totally naive. Monterrico, Guatemala July 2010.

To replace those worthless DX lenses, my choice might be an AF Zoom-Nikkor 24-85mm f/2.8-4D IF, since this model has a 1/2x macro setting.

I will not buy any more Nikon camera bodies until they have 16 megapixels or more in full-frame. So the D700, at 12 megapixels, is not enough; and the D7000, at 16 megapixels, has a 1.4x or whatever lens reduction factor. However I would be tempted by a Nikon D800, though the fact it is made in the same factory as the inadequate lenses gives me pause.

Whatever engineer was in charge of those cheap DX lenses should be reprimanded for damaging the brand quality reputation of Nikon Camera.

But over the last six to eight years, the photos in the Nikon brochures are often better than the photos in the Canon catalogs. Admittedly, most of the photos are family photos from weekend photography (since obviously this is their largest market). But for those photos that are supposed to be professional, the Canon brochure photos are really disappointing. Guatemala is so photogenic that I can usually get consistently better photos than in the Canon brochures.

The lenses of Nikon I would select from (if and when their camera bodies catch up) would be one of the 16-35mm zoom, or 17-35mm zoom; or 18-35mm zoom. Obviously only a FX class lens. DX lenses are lower price for sensors with the 1.4x reduction factor sensors.

I would consider a Nikon 28-80mm zoom as a basic lens as soon as I upgrade from my Nikon D300 to a full-frame Nikon (such as the forthcoming Nikon D800).

## Sony

Sony of course is a well known brand name, for consumer items. Sony is known for popular cameras for happy weekend photographers and people out on vacation. But like most professional photographers, my world is Hasselblad, Phase One, Linhof, Leica, and in the present decade: Nikon and Canon. However I feel that Sony has more potential than either Pentax or Olympus. Pentax has already faded away to melt into Ricoh; Olympus is in a corporate scandal of international proportions.

I have an open mind on Sony, for weekend photography, hobby photography, vacation photography. The camera offers more than Sigma. Sony is more active than Pentax or Olympus.

For the prosumer, and for the pro, this is where I would need to have a set of lenses, macro lighting for the Sony



Sony professional lenses, Sony camera booth.

Alpha 900. But that model is being phase out, to be replaced by the A65, until the Sony Alpha 950 is available.

If something is provided to evaluate, I will consider it, otherwise I am content with my Canon and Nikon cameras (and even more content with my Phase One digital back with medium-format quality).

I enjoyed meeting Samantha Corn, National Sales Manager, Digital Imaging Accessories, of Sony. I know her over many years in the digital imaging and printing industry.

## Olympus

Olympus was listed as a sponsor but I never noticed any Olympus booth. If they had a booth, it was not large enough to be noticed by me.

And on the Internet all you see are scandals about Olympus accounting practices. Clearly their focus is not on Photo Plus this season. I doubt Olympus will survive as a significant brand since the corporate scandal has decimated public trust in this brand name.

But the real reason that Olympus will only linger (and not ever be significant) is that they now lack funding to produce a camera that can compete with Nikon or Canon (or even with Sony). I would rather have any Sony than any Olympus.

The four-thirds concept was a losing idea from the beginning: too many unrealistic claims. You can't do serious wide-angle with a wimpy sensor.

## Accessories for 35mm cameras (most brands)

NOVOFLEX offers the widest range of accessories for 35mm cameras which have a quality "Made in Germany." Rather than list them all, I would recommend you go to the NOVOFLEX web site, or visit their booth at PhotoPlus or Photokina. The NOVOFLEX team is hospitable and in their catalog you will find all kinds of remarkable goodies.





Novoflex booth, PhotoPlus 2011.

## Accessories: Sensor Cleaning

In the aisles we ran into Rola Hamad of Visible Dust, whom I have seen at Photokina and earlier PhotoPlus expos and probably at PMA in past years. VisibleDust is the sensor cleaning product that we recommend.

## Medium Format: Pentax

Competition helps everyone. So I welcome competition. But I am not convinced that the Pentax 645D has much potential for significant market share.

The brochure handed out at PhotoPlus spends more time discussing the lacquered finish than the technical capabilities.

40 megapixels is nice, and the price of \$14,999 is sure a relief compared with Phase One, Hasselblad, or Leaf. But if I were a serious photographer, I would not want a camera just because it has an exclusive strap or that it comes in a paulownia hardwood box: a tree that is eco-friendly.



Sony professional lenses, Sony camera booth.

I want a camera that is fast and offers stunning quality. Everything featured in the front side of the Pentax data sheet is fluff and puff.

Plus the main issue is that there is no digital “back.” The sensor is enshrined inside the body. There is no way to upgrade it (at least none is easy to see).

## Medium Format: Phase One

Although there was no Phase One booth, a few Phase One personnel were present at the booth of a distributor, Digital Transitions. Here I spoke with Lance Schad, who has many years knowledge of medium format digital camera systems and workflow.

The distributor had at least ten brochures on various aspects of Phase One. I consider the Phase One back as the most advanced in the world, though I do not have any of their recent models (my P25+ is several years old).

It would be great if the advances of the last generation of Rollei cameras by Franke & Heidecke, could be added to the Mamiya which is the foundation of the current Phase One platform. Rollei was always a better camera than Hasselblad, but Hasselblad always had the most energetic brand name recognition. Rollei was too conservative and assumed people would jump to their camera. But a Hasselblad was chic (and good quality). So Hasselblad had the lion’s share of the medium format camera body and lens market (with help of the quality of Zeiss).



Leaf, Hasselblad, and Kodak each independently provided a digital back in past years. FLAAR Reports produced an informative evaluation study of each back. The snag was that if we have a back only a few months, there is not as much that we can say about it.

When we have a back an entire photo season we can issue more reports, and more often throughout the year. Summer and then November-early January are our two biggest seasons; spring is a short season but this is the time of year the most gorgeous photogenic flowers bloom on scores of jungle trees throughout Central America.

Phase One dealer (Global Imaging) provided a brand new P25+ about four years ago. We are still using this back and still writing about it

The point is that when we have a product we continue to issue fresh reports all year long.

Unfortunately the P25+ is obsolete now, but plenty of these P25+ models are available in the used digital back market, so the FLAAR reviews still help photographers. Obviously it would make more sense to evaluate a more current model of Phase One or Hasselblad or Leaf digital back. As soon as a back is available we will issue additional reports.

This year we already have about 42,673 more readers (through October) than last year. Since we do not write about cheap beginner level point-and-shoot cameras, our readership is deliberately less than commercial web sites that gush with pseudo reviews of equipment they are just seeking commission kick-back payments for.

FLAAR Reports does not sell camera equipment, and we do not ask for a sales commission for all the equipment that is bought and sold because of our suggestions. It is easier to write an honest coverage of pros and cons of a camera system if we are not being paid a sales commission.

We prefer to have about 450,000+ photographers around the world read our FLAAR Reports each year. We prefer to concentrate on professional level equipment (medium format, large format, reliable brands of tripods, studio lighting and related accessories).



PENTAX booth. PhotoPlus 2011.

Franke & Heidecke added additional features to the Rollei 6008 and created a camera that had the potential, if it went into a second generation, to run circles around any Fuji-version of Hasselblad. But the Franke & Heidecke patents and know-how got dumped by inter-corporate politics and personality conflicts. So photographers around the world are deprived of the advances of Franke & Heidecke.

A Leaf+Phase One + Franke & Heidecke would beat anything Canon can conjure up in the near future, can beat Hasselblad and show that medium format has a long-range chance against high-Megapixel 35mm DSLR cameras.

## Medium Format: Hasselblad

Zilch from Hasselblad at PhotoPlus 2011. No Imacon scanners or Hasselblad cameras. FLAAR has reviewed scanners for over a decade now, but have no Imacon scanner (we have only Heidelberg and Creo-Scitex scanners).

We have no Hasselblad cameras, so we write all our reports on Phase One, since this is what we have available.

## Large Format

I saw one or two large format cameras such as a Canham 4x5 in the booth of Kodak. Arca-Swiss was present. The large-format camera I have the most experience with is Cambo. I have also been to the Cambo factory in Europe. Since I have used Cambo large-format cameras for many years, we can recommend them.

Schneider Optics was more visible than Rodenstock since Schneider has a distributor in USA that is focused on Schneider.

## Lenses of interest: for 35mm DSLR

Since Zeiss lenses tend to be manual (not auto-focus), they are not very practical out in the jungles. You don't have time to do manual focus on a venomous snake that is about to strike.

I would enjoy a Zeiss lens for our Gigapan system, since that needs a manual focus lens. But there is no Zeiss 200mm lens (which is the lens that Gigapan suggests for landscape and cityscape panos).

The only other lenses I saw of interest at PhotoPlus 2011 are the Schneider PC-TS Makro-Symmar 4.0/90 HM. For photographing most insects a medium-format camera is no benefit whatsoever: the insects tend to be the size of a 35mm frame. And, you will not tend to need to enlarge an insect large enough to need the resolution benefits of a medium format digital back. I have the Hasselblad Bellows; two Zeiss Hasselblad macro lenses. I almost never use them because 35mm is so much more practical for macro.

Thus I would be tempted by the tilt-shift Schneider lens, though frankly I am not sure how often I really need tilt-shift when photographing a beetle or scale insect, or whether I would have time to do all the movements if I were photographing a butterfly. Plus, this Schneider lens is probably more a close-up lens than a real macro lens, so best for entire flowers rather than tiny insects.

## Lenses of interest: for medium-format

I still use 20 to 30 year old Zeiss lenses for my Hasselblad ELX with Phase One P25+ back. However I realize that with a “large-format” lens that quality will be even better.

Rodenstock was not visible, not unless you knew where to look. And when I asked for a brochure, all I got were brochures that were years and years and years old. They did not even have the correct brand name (Rodenstock made about every-mistake-in-the-book about messing up their brand name. First Linos, then Qioptiq.

Now their web site is Rodenstock-Photo, which is a relief to have a recognizable name.

Their lenses which we may in the future evaluate, with the Cambo Wide camera, would be the

- HR Digaron-W 32 mm f/4
- HR Digaron-W 70 mm f/5.6

No literature on these was given to me in the booth: just the several-year-old brochures I already got at PhotoPlus years ago, and at Photokina years ago.



Sony professional lenses, Sony camera booth.

## Lenses of interest: for large-format

Over the years I have acquired many Schneider and Rodenstock lenses for our Linhof and Cambo 4x5 and 8x10 (Linhof) cameras. But all of these are traditional lenses; we have zero digital lenses.

We have a BetterLight tri-linear sensor; very good for rollouts of Classic Maya vases, since no other camera can do a circumferential rollout as well as can a BetterLight.

## Unique lenses: for your iPhone

Very clever of a company to make lenses for the iPhone: company is iPro.

## Filters for your camera lenses

In the era of Kodachrome, Fujichrome and Ilford film, it was essential to have a set of diverse professional filters.

In the digital era, Adobe Photoshop can reproduce most filter effects.... but.... But in reality you still need a circular polarizing filter. At Photokina 2010 I saw the new breed of polarizing filters which did not require as many f/stop loss



LEE Filters booth, PhotoPlus 2011.

as the 2-stop loss of traditional polarizing filters.

It is better to balance your gray with a MacBeth colorchecker than to put on color correction filters and much better to balance your gray with a gray card while you are shooting. Yes, you can do this later in Photoshop, but best to do it up-front.

Nonetheless, there is still a continuing need for filters and at upcoming Photokina 2012, several of us from FLAAR will be doing research for evaluation reports on filters.

I prefer to avoid filters from China. I trust filters from companies whose presence I have seen at PhotoPlus, PMA and Photokina over the years. Thus I would rank Lee Filters as among the brands that I respect.

I recommend you obtain the booklet that Lee Filters has available at their trade show booth. It will show all their filter effects options.

So even though you think you can do “everything” in Adobe Photoshop, your image has more quality if you do the basics with filters, especially polarizing and a graduated neutral density system. If you do panorama or landscape photography you should look at what Lee Filters has available for you.

Schneider Optics also makes filters, but I know the people at Lee Filters and regret that I do not yet

know the managers at Schneider Optics. So I can only speak of my experiences at the booth of Lee Filters and my use of their products, especially with my Hasselblad and Cambo.

## Lens hoods

If you were to look at 90% of the student photographers and even more than half of prosumers, rarely do they use a lens hood. They either simply don't take the time to use a lens hood, or if they have a zoom lens, the front edge of the hood gets in the way when the lens is at full wide-angle.

A lens hood, like a cable release, and like a tripod, are essential for improving your photography.

The lens hoods of Canon cameras are okay to block incoming light, but if you put the hood on the camera barrel for storage, you tend to drop the lens every time: because the hood is slippery or the hood falls off the camera: so you end up holding onto the hood but the lens is on the concrete floor (or in the swamp or over the edge of the cliff).

So you might wish to invest in a serious hood from a knowledgeable lens hood manufacturing company, namely Lee Filters. Another advantage of a Lee Filters hood is that a slotted version allows you to add a neutral density graduated filter.



Manfrotto Distribution tripods, Photo Plus 2011.

## Tripods and Tripod Heads

Vanguard is a brand I see at PhotoPlus. Sorry, their catalog shows a Hasselblad camera atop a small pan/tilt head. This is not a likely combination out in the real world. If you can afford a Hasselblad, you should have a serious tripod head.

More and more tripods are made in China. And increasingly the Chinese companies are exhibiting under their own Asian brand name. But still a lot of brands under European and American brand names are really coming from China. If they work, that is fine, but a low-price video tripod that we bought in Guatemala fell apart after a few weeks. Of course there are brands made in Europe and USA that wear out prematurely, but at least they last about two years.

So for the current time, we are not evaluating brands until we can see with our own eyes that they are sturdy enough to withstand long-term use. For this reason the only brands we evaluate are those with a recognized quality: Gitzo, Manfrotto, Novoflex are the brands we know the best.

Gitzo tripods and Manfrotto and Gitzo tripod heads are my all-time favorite. I started with a Tiltall tripod, even before Leica bought that brand. Subsequently Leica sold it, and the brand is now made in Asia. I have not used any Tiltall tripod in over 40 years.

When I needed a system more sophisticated than the Tiltall, I opted for a Gitzo tripod. They were great, but (way back then, not perfect). The distributor was Karl Heitz. Their service was not inspirational.

Then Gitzo got a new distributor, Bogen, and the tripods (and support personnel) improved significantly, plus Bogen is a more modern (a polite way to say less conservative) and a more international American style distributor. Now Bogen Imaging is renamed Manfrotto Distribution.

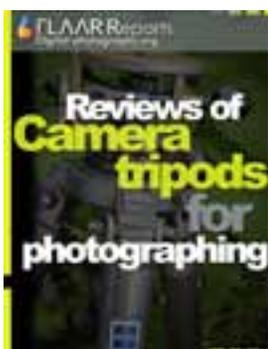
When I visit professional studios around the world, more than 75% are using a Gitzo tripod. A few may use a Linhof or comparable other brand, but by far Gitzo is the most common.



Manfrotto Distribution tripods and tripod heads.



Gitzo tripods in Manfrotto Distribution booth.



DOWNLOAD

When I see a professional photographer out on location, I mean a serious one, probably half are using a Gitzo tripod. Considering there are a dozen other brands, the fact that professional photographers prefer Gitzo suggests this brand offers a product that is the kind of equipment that we are satisfied with.

But just as there are dozens of brands of cars, and Mercedes, BMW, Lexus, and Audi are all excellent at that level, it is logical that you should also look at other brands. After all, some people drive a 4WD vehicle (me for example); others prefer a sports car. So no one single car is perfect for everyone. So let's look at some of the other tripods that you might enjoy learning about. We have many reports on Gitzo tripods and are issuing an additional report now that we have seen new models at PhotoPlus 2011. This tripod report is a separate PDF.

## Tripod head attachment plates

The original international standard is the Arca-Swiss plate. Thus it is intelligent when companies such as Kirk uses the same size (but makes the actual plates with additional features).

Wimberley and others also use the Arca-Swiss style: but none use an actual Arca-Swiss plate (which are a tad monotonous; Kirk, Wimberley and others intelligently adapt the Arca-Swiss to their versions are more customized to specific situations).

## Tripod heads

Several years ago I saw some tripod heads I was tempted to jump to, but since I could not obtain one for review, I never had one to test and evaluate. At PhotoPlus 2011 I did not see those products.

My first Arca-Swiss ballhead is one of the more sturdy and reliable ball heads every made: still functional and still in use after more than 27 years of action around the world. The next generation Arca-Swiss head, the original B1, was the infamous one that locked tight constantly; so tight you could not easily loosen it. There were endless claims of how to unlock it. But what were there obvious engineering design flaws that caused this issue. No piece of equipment should have failures like this. Why was it necessary to struggle with your tripod head?

After owning this second Arca-Swiss ballhead for now over 15 years, I have never used it more than 3 days (before it locked tight). I took it for repair to the Arca-Swiss booth at Photokina 2010 and look forward to trying it as soon as my shipping address is updated in their system.

I did not notice any Berlebach booth, or Berlebach tripod heads at the expo this year. The models of theirs that we would like to look at are their

- 3-Way-Head Pegasus, # 11128
- Leveling Adapter, # 111971

At Photokina 2010, the equipment that stood out in the FEISOL booth were the

- Gimbal, FEISOL UA-180 Carbon U-Mount
- FEISOL Video head VH-40
- FEISOL Elite Tripod CT-3472LV Rapid
- FEISOL ballheads

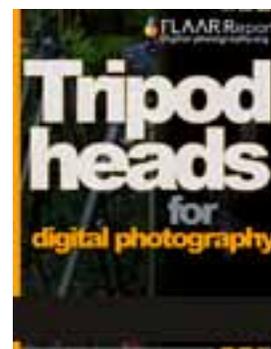
But I can say nothing about any FEISOL tripod or head, since we have none to evaluate. Instead we write about Gitzo and Manfrotto, since these are the brands we have plenty of to use, and write about, on a daily basis for our thousands of readers.

For over a decade one of our factors in evaluating a product is whether a company is significant enough to exhibit at a trade show.

Plus, there are a few companies whose products are rather iffy, and if they were dumb enough to have a booth everyone would line up to file complaints about their misleading advertising (there was a laminating equipment company a decade ago that was infamous for claims that most people would consider totally unreliable; they never dated to exhibit at any wide-format inkjet printer show).

Thus it was really good to see KIRK Enterprises at PhotoPlus; they are a reputable company but I rarely see them at any trade show. What I like about KIRK is that they focus on tripod heads and don't try to do too much. I like companies that concentrate and focus on specific product ranges.

I discuss Manfrotto tripod heads in a separate PDF. I am very happy with the early version of the Manfrotto 400 geared tripod head: this head is great for studio photography and I use it out on-location also.



[DOWNLOAD](#)

## Brackets (what stands above the tripod head)

The main problem I have with brackets is packing and traveling with them (the space they occupy). Most of our photography is in remote areas of Guatemala and even with a van it is hard to have enough space to load all the equipment, especially if we are also bring studio lighting equipment.

The next reality check is, who will haul all the accessories deep into the cave, especially since it is a several kilometer hike, uphill, even to get to the mouth of the cave. But if you are not hiking through Karst geology in remote areas of Missouri or comparable cave areas of Peten, Guatemala, then you may find various brackets useful.

For rotating a camera, a rotating bracket is a clever idea. But with a ball head I can rotate my camera pretty quickly and not need something that stands up so high as a bracket. Nonetheless, I perhaps could be convinced if I had one to try out..



Custom Brackets booth. PhotoPlus 2011.

Thus one bracket company I noticed is Custom Brackets. Their personnel were pleasant and as mentioned previously, I tend to prefer a company that focuses on one limited range of products (rather than trying to make everything).

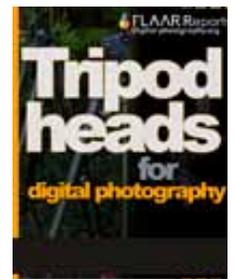
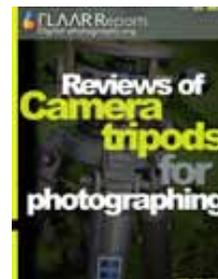
## Tripods we cover in separate FLAAR Reports

FLAAR has been evaluating tripods for ten years. Below is a selection of our evaluations.

For PhotoPlus 2011 our reviews specifically of tripods will be on our new web site [www.maya-ethnobot-any.org](http://www.maya-ethnobot-any.org). We test tripods out on location in Guatemala, and on our family property in the Ozark Mountain area of Missouri.

So check that web site for the new year 2011 tripod report.

Tripod heads we cover in separate FLAAR Reports.

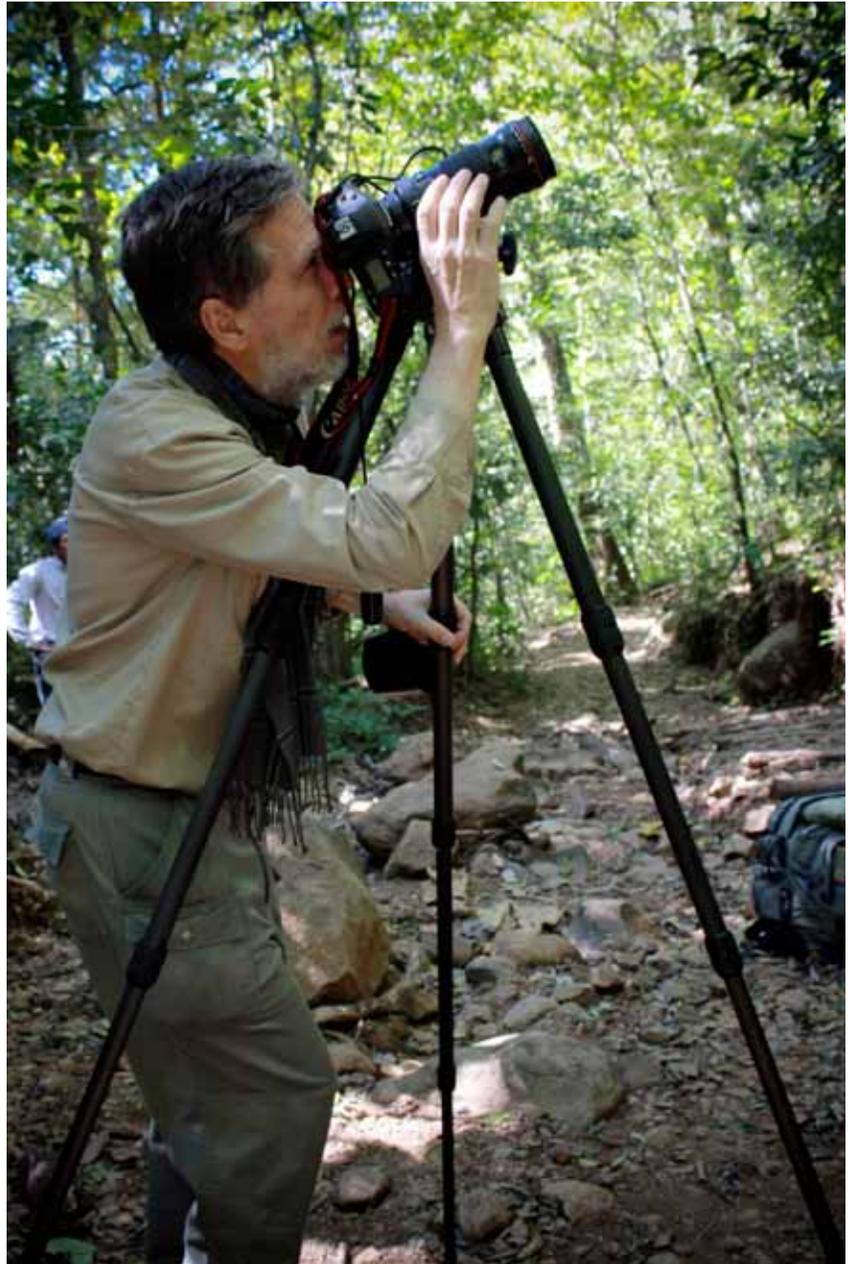


FLAAR Reports on Tripod Heads

<p>FLAAR Reports</p> <p><b>Carbon Fiber Tripods</b></p> 	<p>FLAAR Reports</p> <p><b>Manfrotto QTVR Pano Tripod Head</b></p> 	<p>FLAAR Reports</p> <p><b>Tripod Head Computer Table</b></p> 	<p>FLAAR Reports</p> <p><b>Medium Format Digital Cameras Combined With a QTVR Tripod Head</b></p> 	<p>FLAAR Reports</p> <p><b>Tripod Heads</b></p> 
<p>FLAAR Reports</p> <p><b>Learning Terms &amp; Jargon on PHOTOGRAPHY</b></p> 	<p><b>Panoramic Photography with Medium Format Digital Camera backs using Novoflex Pano Head</b></p> 	<p><b>Novoflex PANORAMA+Q PRO Panoramic Photography for Botanical Research</b></p> 	<p>FLAAR</p> <p><b>Using the Novoflex Castel-XL for absolute stability to do professional macro photographs</b></p> 	<p>FLAAR Reports</p> <p><b>NOVOFLEX PANO HEAD Panoramic Photography</b></p> 
<p>FLAAR Reports</p> <p><b>Stacked Focus Photography</b></p> <p>CANON MACRO LENS NOVOFLEX CASTEL-XL Helicon Software.</p> 	<p><b>GigaPan compared with Novoflex Pano Head</b></p> <p>Part I</p> 	<p><b>GigaPan compared with Novoflex Pano Head</b></p> <p>Part II</p> 	<p>FLAAR Reports Digital-photography.org</p> <p><b>Panoramic Photography Landscape Cityscape Photography</b></p> <p>Canon or Nikon VS Medium Format, Large format Digital Options</p> 	<p>FLAAR Reports Digital-photography.org</p> <p><b>Recommended Cameras, Lenses Tripods &amp; Software for Zoos, Zoologists Ethnozoology Studies, &amp; Natural History Museums Studio &amp; Field Photography</b></p> 



Nicholas inspecting Manfrotto Distribution tripods.



Nicholas taking pictures with a Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III + Gitzo tripod + Arca-Swiss tripod head, El Salvador November 2011.

## Tripod heads we cover in separate FLAAR Reports

FLAAR specializes in photographing tropical flowers, plants, trees, plus insects, reptiles, shellfish, birds, and felines, primarily in Guatemala. Since we prefer to write about tripod heads based on person experience, our comments on tripod heads that we saw at PhotoPlus 2011 is on our new web site about photography of all kinds of animals, crocodiles, lizards, etc: [www.maya-ethnozoology.org](http://www.maya-ethnozoology.org).

### FLAAR Reports on Tripods

<p>FLAAR Reports Digital Photography</p> <p>Large Format Photography in Archaeology &amp; Art History</p>	<p>FLAAR Reports</p> <p>Medium Format Digital Photography for Museums, Art History &amp; Archaeology</p>	<p>FLAAR Reports Digital Photography</p> <p>Studio Lighting Equipment for Archaeological Research</p>	<p>FLAAR Reports Digital Photography</p> <p>Using Cambo 4x5 Camera</p>	<p>FLAAR Reports</p> <p>4x5 Cameras: Large Format scan backs (PhaseOne, Betterlight, etc)</p>
<p>FLAAR Reports Digital Photography</p> <p>Using Gitzo Tripods Underwater</p>	<p>FLAAR Reports</p> <p>Tripods &amp; Tripods Heads</p>	<p>FLAAR Reports</p> <p>Manfrotto and Gitzo for Nature photography</p>	<p>FLAAR Reports</p> <p>Photographing with Medium Format Digital Cameras &amp; Lenses</p>	<p>FLAAR Reports</p> <p>Tripods &amp; Tripod Heads at Photokina 2010</p> <p>Evaluation and Review</p>
<p>FLAAR Reports</p> <p>Using Gitzo tripods for medium &amp; large format cameras</p>	<p>FLAAR Reports</p> <p>Panoramic photography with Manfrotto geared heads for large format</p>	<p>FLAAR Reports</p> <p>Novoflex pano head for creating panoramic pictures</p>	<p>FLAAR Reports Digital Photography</p> <p>Recommended Cameras, Lenses Tripods &amp; Software for Botanical Gardens Studio Photography</p> <p>Botanical field trips Ecological field trips Environmental studies National parks Field photography</p>	<p>FLAAR Reports Digital Photography</p> <p>Cameras, Lenses Tripods &amp; Software for Architectural Photography</p> <p>Including: Exterior architectural photography Interior architectural photography Cityscapes &amp; Industrial photography</p>

## Tripod heads for HDSLR video

The move to doing video with a HDSLR camera is noticeable. Most of the video being taken in the aisles and booths of PhotoPlus was with a DSLR camera that can do HD video. This is really a trend that you can see clearly.

You need two things:

- a tripod head for shooting from a tripod
- And a rig for shooting when you are walking around or for whatever other reason can't or do not wish to use a tripod.

We have not yet decided which brand to try, but at FLAAR we do HDSLR video, so look forward to evaluating and finding the rig which is ideal.

I would tend to look first at rigs from companies which specialize in video and cinema rigs. It is more probable that a company which has experience in the world of traditional video and cinema will make rigs and tripod heads which are more practical for pros. Redrock is one company whose products we would like to learn more about.

Presently for video with a HDSLR camera we use a Manfrotto 701HDV Pro Fluid Video Mini Head.

In addition to Redrock video stabilizers, we saw equipment from

- GLIDECAM Industries Inc.
- NOVOMEDIA MULTISYSTEM from NOVOFLEX



Gitzo tripod + Manfrotto tripod head for HDSLR video that we use at FLAAR Office to make our videos.

## Studio Lighting

F.J. Westcott has now come out with their Spiderlite TD6. This new model helps add extra lighting power to their earlier Spiderlite series. I have been evaluating and writing FLAAR Reports on their earlier systems for many years.

One of several benefits of the Spiderlite fluorescent technology is the lack of heat. Most art and archaeology museums do not like archaeologists or art historians to use the searing heat of tungsten lamps.



Glidecam Industries Inc booth. PhotoPlus 2011.

And for photographing plants and animals, the heat of tungsten can molest the creatures and wilt the flowers. So now you see why I prefer Spiderlites.

Lowel is the source of all my tungsten lighting for the past thirty or more years. Now they are sold to Tiffen, and were in the Tiffen booth. I missed the president of Lowel, who has kindly provided studio lighting to our archaeological projects in Guatemala.

One advantage of tungsten lighting is that it is enough light to do serious photography. Plus you can direct the light at the angle that you need. Even with the advent of cool lighting, there are many situations where tungsten lighting is recommended. Thus even as we enter 2012, I still find tungsten lighting from Lowel to be essential for studio photography.



Westcott Spiderlite TD6. PhotoPlus 2011.

## Battery operated Studio lighting that is usable also for field trips

If you do photography out on location, you may need more than a camera-based flash. In some situations you may prefer studio lighting style, but battery operated. Elinchrom makes lighting for field trips, but since we have not received any for evaluation, we have not produced any FLAAR Reports.

We would like to do photography of jungle areas with such battery-powered studio-like lighting. If you saw the movie Avatar, you have seen the planet Pandora. The floating islands are Karst formations and are found throughout Guatemala (and the Ozark Mountains of Missouri, where FLAAR also evaluates and tests camera equipment). The only difference between the planet Pandora and the Peten area of Guatemala is that our Karst formations are not floating in the sky.



Metz flashes in the booth of Manfrotto Distribution, Photo Plus 2011.

The other similarity of Pandora and Peten area of Guatemala are the forests. The huge tree that is the home for the tribe on Pandora is similar to the giant sacred Ceiba pentandra tree, the national tree of Guatemala and sacred Tree of Life of the ancient Maya civilization.

The jungle floor is very dark because the huge towering trees provide so much shade. So it would be helpful to have battery-operated lighting but powerful enough to light up a remarkable view of the rain forest.

The other place we really need to have battery-powered lighting is in caves. The caves of the jungle area of Guatemala are huge. The caves are sacred and considered as the entrance to the Underworld. Presently we are using 25-year old Metz 60 CT-4 units to illuminate the caves.

I have inspected elinchrom portable flash units, their Ranger kit, Quadra and RX but since none were offered for evaluation we have nothing written on them. There are huge caves where a full set of portable lighting would be helpful. And within the jungle it is so dark beneath the trees that a portable studio set of lighting would reveal the rain forest better.

The vegetation here is like on the planet Pandora of the movie Avatar. So we at FLAAR are very interested in having lighting available to show the remarkable eco-systems here.

## Flash and accessories

Metz offers the quality of "Made in Germany." My Metz units are several decades old. The only part that disintegrated totally are the cables (the black rubber coating on the electrical wires); the units themselves are still working perfectly. Obviously the batteries did not hold their charge for 12 years uncharged, but once I got new batteries, the flash units functioned just fine.

An item we really need for the Metz are at least two telephoto snoot-like accessories, the Metz 60-42 tele attachment.

Metz SCA 390 for Hasselblad (assuming they mean the traditional V series, since I have an ELX).

Metz SCA 3102 for Canon.

Metz SCA 3402 for Nikon (since we have all three brands).

Mecablitz 76 MZ-5 Digital, with Bounce Diffuser 76-23 for bounce flash and Mecabounce 50-90 for soft lighting. A Power Pack P 76 set with V76 cable would be essential since many areas where we do photography are far from electricity.

Norman is a studio lighting company that also happens to make portable lighting. But these are intended to be used on light stands rather than on the camera. The kit that would be the most useful for archaeological, botanical, zoological, geological field work would be the Normal A400B Kit.

My experience is that four lights are essential to facilitate serious photography out on location (and in the studio also).



Metz flashes in the booth of Manfrotto Distribution, Photo Plus 2011.



Westcott lights at Westcott booth. Photo Plus 2011.

Quantum Instruments offers mid-sized camera-based flash units comparable to Metz. But Quantum is more studio-oriented when you see their portable options. The Qflash system would be something we would like to evaluate for all the photographic applications in which we work around the world. But we have no contact with Quantum Instruments so continue with our Metz flash equipment (which, as we have mentioned, is still functioning into its third decade).

LumiQuest makes lighting modifiers that are useful. We have two; try to see if Sofia took photos of me using on in Salvador.

## Reflectors

It helps to have reflectors both for studio photography and especially for photography outside during field trips. The brands I use are Lastolite, and Westcott.

Lastolite is distributed by Manfrotto Distribution.

I bet that most photographers are not yet familiar with all the benefits of a reflector. Last week I was doing ethnobotanical photography in a remote national park in El Salvador, Central America. Even with a really powerful flash it was not possible to illuminate the base of the tropical fruits high up in a tree. The tops of the fruits were over-exposed from the hot sun.

Once I realized that the flash could not counteract the bright sun on the top of the fruit, I decided to try with a reflector. Even though we had no way to get the reflector high up, and though the fruit was far far up in the air at the top of the tree, with the Westcott reflector we were able to illuminate the dark bottom of the fruit with the reflector. Having two reflectors helped even more.



Westcott reflectors, Photo Plus 2011.

## Backdrop paper, for studio photography

Normally I stop to visit the experienced team at Savage Universal Corporation: Richard Pressman, President, Sylvester Hank, Executive Vice President, and Rich Memoli, VP Sales, but I did not see them this year at PhotoPlus.

We use Savage seamless background paper for photographing

- Maya artifacts in museums in Guatemala
- Tropical fruits, nuts, and unusual vegetables of Maya villages in Central America
- Venomous snakes, turtles and other reptiles for our [www.maya-ethnozoology.org](http://www.maya-ethnozoology.org)

We even use Savage background paper out in field trips, since many flowers and plants we need to photograph on the spot before they wilt. And insects we find in the jungles, we do not want to bring these back to our studio.



Savage background paper used out in field trips. FLAAR Photo Archive 2011.



Nicholas photographing reptiles using Savage paper as backdrop.  
Zoo La Aurora, Guatemala September 2011.

## Memory

Hoodman is the CF memory that I use every day. 100% of my photographs are taken with a Hoodman RAW CF memory card.

Of my assistants, an increasing number of their photos are taken with Hoodman cards, both for Canon and Nikon cameras.

SanDisk is a well known brand. Some of my assistants still have a SanDisk card, but as we acquire new memory, it tends to be provided by Hoodman, so one by one the other photographers of FLAAR are moving to Hoodman RAW cards.

Miscellaneous other brands are available, but I prefer not to risk my photographs to a brand that I am not familiar with. Another reason I like Hoodman, is when I make a series of errors clicking on the wrong buttons, and because of my mistakes I scramble a memory card, 100% of the time the folks at Hoodman have been able to rescue every one of my photographs (with their special software that they have at their headquarters). Obviously there is no way to guarantee that every scrambled memory card can be totally rescued, but now you can see why I continue to favor Hoodman RAW cards.



Hoodman booth. PhotoPlus 2011.

## Carrying cases, camera backpacks

With tripods, tripod heads, and most accessories, I prefer products manufactured in North America or Europe. This locus does not mean they are perfect, but a camera battery made in Germany (the old Metz batteries) lasted for years and years.

New batteries made in China are inadequate. I have had some Chinese batteries that “wore out” after less than two years.

I have had some Chinese batteries that did not last more than a few months. And other Chinese batteries that lasted only a few days.

But with camera carrying cases, suitcases, and backpacks, I bet 75% are made in China no matter what. So kind of hard to escape having a Chinese camera bag.

A bag from REI, that I bought about 7 years ago, are the normal hiking backpacks that have lasted the longest; over one million miles of airplane travel as carry-on, and I carry on only overweight bags! Books, brochures, and heavy camera equipment fill this bag. The strap holds perfectly, even when I pick up all the weight just by holding a single strap. But REI does not make camera-specific bags.

The camera bags I see the most at trade shows are the ones from Australia (but they were conspicuously absent from Photo Plus 2011), the bags from Tenba (we have the Tenba Backpack P263 Gray), and the bags from Kata.

Lowepro and Tamrac are other brands you see at most camera trade shows, but we have Tenba and will be trying out Kata.

I do not have a **Crumpler** bag to evaluate. But these are small basic bags; on our jungle field trips in remote areas of Guatemala we need a serious camera carrying system.



Tenba Backpack P263 Gray, FLAAR Photo Archive 2011.



Biology student Daniela da'Costa, photography assistant at FLAAR, using a Tenba out on location photography in a remote area of Guatemala.

**Think Tank Photo** bags, I did not notice them at Photo Plus nor do I remember them from any Photokina (so if they exhibit, they are definitely not leaving an impression or any brand recognition on me). But now that I check the exhibitor list, I do see Think Tank Photo, but not much help today since I am in Milano, Italy, to attend Viscom wide-format inkjet printer expo. So perhaps next year at Photokina I can find them.

**Vanguard:** am not familiar with these camera bags.

**Kata:** I can say more about their nice bags for three reasons: first, I have visited their world headquarters in Israel. Second, I know their enthusiastic product manager, Bellina Israel. Third, I know their capable distributor for the USA: Bogen Imaging, now named Manfrotto Distribution.

We would like to evaluate Kata bags for our over 450,000+ readers.

- FLAAR owns 8 Bogen 3078 light stands and several other light stands of other brands. Thus for evaluation it would help to have two Kata Bags HEXABAG-3
- FLAAR owns 5 Bogen 3086 light stands (and a few other brands of comparable size). Thus to evaluate it would help to have 2 HEXABAG-2 from Kata-Bags
- FLAAR has several Nikon DSLR cameras, a Canon EOS 5D, Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III, lenses including telephoto, and two medium-format cameras, plus of course lots of tripods. Thus something like the TLB-600PL would be good.

- The Kata KT-PL-B-282 Pro-Light Beetle 282 backpack

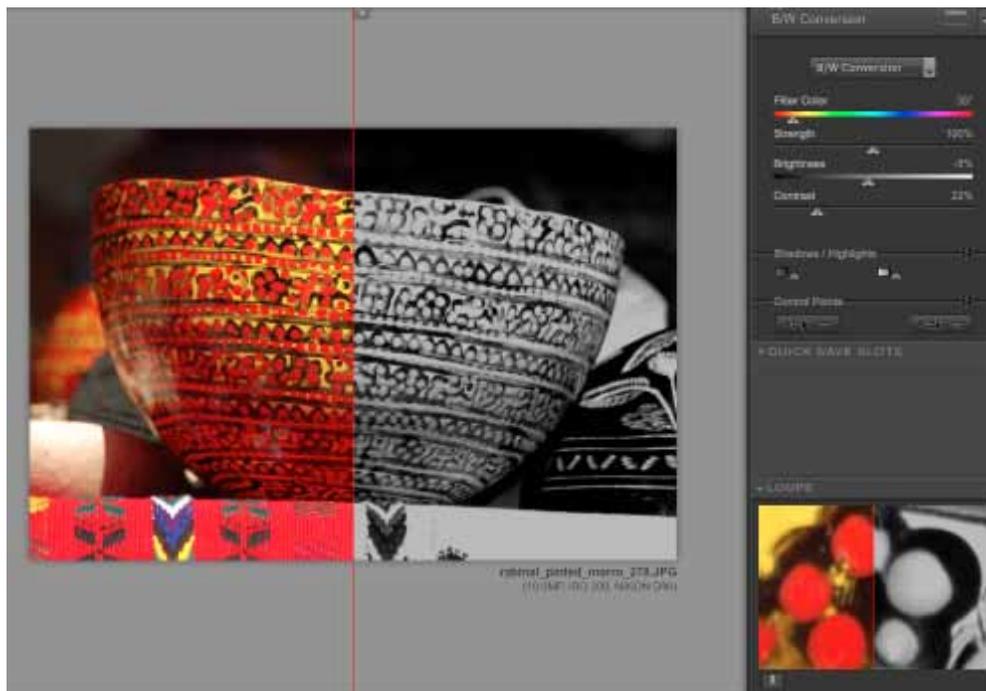
- Since there are usually three to five of us out in remote mangrove swamps, deep in caves, or in tropical rain forests at the foot of volcanic peaks, it's tough to have all the special accessories, lens, attachments, and equipment easily at hand. When a rare bird species, or a remarkable insect: or a venomous reptile, become visible, you want all your most-needed lenses and accessories on your own belt. Thus I like the Kata VPH PL with six different sized pouches to attach to the belt.

- And since it obviously rains a lot in the jungles, a Kata E-702 PI Pro Light Rain Cover (Black) KT PL-E-702 would be something we could reveal to the world how it functions in a rain forest of Central America.

**Tenba** is one of the better known international brands of camera bags. As mentioned above, we have a Tenba Backpack P263 Gray. We are fully content. We have carried heavy camera equipment on long hikes through the Peten rain forests and thousands of kilometers on rough roads.

## Software

**Adobe** Photoshop is so well known they don't really need to have a booth. All of us at FLAAR have Adobe Photoshop (and many of us use Adobe InDesign, Dreamweaver, etc). With over 15 employees we have dozens of licenses for Adobe software.



**Nik** is a good example of a company that focuses on specific software applications. Photoshop has to offer hundreds of tricks to thousands of different needs: so Photoshop does a lot well. But Nik focuses on specific problems, and can generally do a better job than Photoshop.

In the past we have used other HDR software. We would be interested in comparing that traditional HDR software with HDR Efex Pro of Nik Software.

NIK Software imaging process.

Sharpen Pro 3 and Silver Efex Pro 2 would be two other softwares we would be interested in. And Define 2 would be something to use for any photos where we thought there may be noise reduction.

Some other software companies are entry-level. A few other try to offer a Photoshop-like experience to beginners. What I like about Nik Software company is that they have a good track record, they offer software of a professional quality (not low-bid entry level), and their products provide features that professional and prosumer photographers look for.



Over the past several years we have used other brand(s) of HDR software, because that from NIK software is relatively new. As soon as we have access to licenses for NIK software for HDR and other digital imaging aspects, we will do further evaluations with their HDR product.

FLAAR Reports which evaluate HDR Software



# Wacom®

## Wacom tablets

Since FLAAR has about seven web and graphic designers full-time in-house (among our staff of 15+), it is logical that gradually we would consider a Wacom tablet. It is also logical to start at entry-level Wacom Bamboo Tablet.

At PhotoPlus the popular Wacom booth had primarily their high-end Cintiq 21UX and Cintiq 24HD interactive pen display units.



Since we are doing characterization of tropical flowers and animals that were sacred to the Classic Maya civilization, we would be interested in testing, evaluating, and writing a report on a Cintiq tablet for our several hundred-thousand readers.

## Essential items for a photo archive

Since FLAAR has over 50,000 slides and negatives and contact sheets from past years, we need to be able to preserve them as best as possible considering financial restraints. Thus it was helpful to see Print File Archival Storage company at PhotoPlus.

The catalog of Print File was available in their booth.

## Wide-format Inkjet Printers at PhotoPlus 2011

HP, Canon, and Epson had printers at PhotoPlus 2011. We cover wide-format inkjet printers on our [www.wide-format-printers.org](http://www.wide-format-printers.org). Since the trends in the last ten years have been UV-cured inks, we have tended to update our reviews primarily on our sister-site, [www.large-format-printers.org](http://www.large-format-printers.org), which is focused on UV-cured flatbed printers.

But for HP latex ink and textile inks from all manufacturers, we cover inks, media, printers, and RIP software on the wide-format web site. We tend to study these printers at ISA and SGIA in America and at FESPA and Viscom expos in Europe.

## Canvas and Digital Imaging Substrates at PhotoPlus 2011

We mention media for water-based printers on [www.FineArtGicleePrinters.org](http://www.FineArtGicleePrinters.org) and [www.wide-format-printers.org](http://www.wide-format-printers.org); and substrates for UV-cured and solvent ink on [www.large-format-printers.org](http://www.large-format-printers.org).

At PhotoPlus 2011 I noticed booths for

- “Magic” brand materials (formerly Rexam).
- Innova
- Museo Fine Art
- Premier Imaging Products

And several more.

**Kodak** put on a brave face and had a minimal size booth selling primarily inkjet papers and media. Considering that Kodak is on the edge of bankruptcy, it is remarkable that they have funds to exhibit at a trade show.

Kodak featured material for UV-cured printers, which are wide-format and very expensive machines (FLAAR Reports is the primary worldwide resource on UV-curing wide-format printers, so we know this market for over ten years). UV-cured printers are not something that 95% of photographers would use, hence it seemed an unrealistic focus for the booth at a photo equipment expo. Besides, I would

estimate that some if not most of the media is made in Korea, China, or Taiwan and simply re-branded.

We do not comment on specific brands or kinds of media unless we have enough to test-print with our HP Z3200 printer. When ink and media is available for testing, then we are glad to see how a material functions. But a single roll is not realistic, because our experience is that providers change over time. So a review written today is not necessarily valid for the same brand next year (sorry, but too many companies now buy from Korea, Taiwan, and China).

So if we receive a small amount of media every quarter, then we can attest that the quality is consistent.



KODAK booth, Photo Plus 2011.

## TRENDS, observed at PhotoPlus 2011

### Trend to video via HD SLR “35mm” Digital Cameras

Earlier in this report we commented on the obvious trend to use DSLR cameras that have HD video capability instead of a “video camera.”

### Conspicuous by their lack of a visible booth

Mamiya, per se, was not visible. Their medium format heritage is now developed by Phase One. Mamiya as a 35mm manufacturer was not visible. MAC (Mamiya America Corporation) had the same strong presence as in past years, with a long string of all the brands that they distribute.

### Conspicuous by their total absence

Hasselblad was not present, though surely one or more camera dealers with booths had a Hasselblad logo on their wall. Long ago Phase One has taken over the lead in the medium format market.

Leaf had no listing in the exhibit catalog but would have been in the logo list of the Phase One distributor.

Olympus had no listing in the exhibitor list but were listed as a Sponsor on the Sponsor page. Canon and Nikon (and Sony) offer everything that any and all photographers could possibly desire, so although Olympus may linger a while, they do not have much chance against Canon, Nikon, and Sony. The four-thirds size sensor was enough to make most pros never want to have an Olympus (or a Pentax). If you do architectural photography, you can't do wide-angle photography without a full-frame sensor system, period. Same with landscape photography: you really need full-frame to be comfortable.

Yes, of course I did both landscape, pano, and architectural photography before I could afford a top-of-the-line Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III, but it is so much better with full frame.

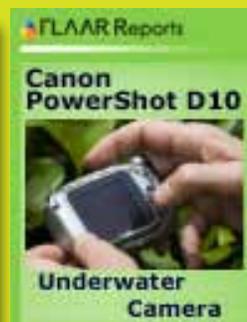
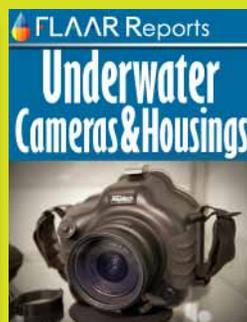
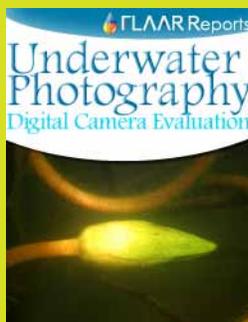
Rodenstock, or whatever name they use currently, was not present in the exhibitor list. Their lenses are excellent but they are kind of buried without much visibility in their distributor's booth. If you don't know who their distributor is, you would have missed Rodenstock completely.

Cambo had no booth, though they had a distributor. We have the nice Cambo Wide RS camera body, and as soon as we can obtain the two key Rodenstock lenses, we will publish our FLAAR Reports on the Cambo Wide RS system, for far more than architectural photography. This camera is also great for photographing jungle eco-systems, for photographing inside caves. We have lots of both in Guatemala.



Not many underwater housings for photography underwater, for available to evaluate at PhotoPlus 2011. AquaTech was the only one I noticed. It is helpful that they clearly state these are “sport housings” and can go down to a limited depth. This is very open and honest of the company.

## FLAAR Reports on Underwater Cameras



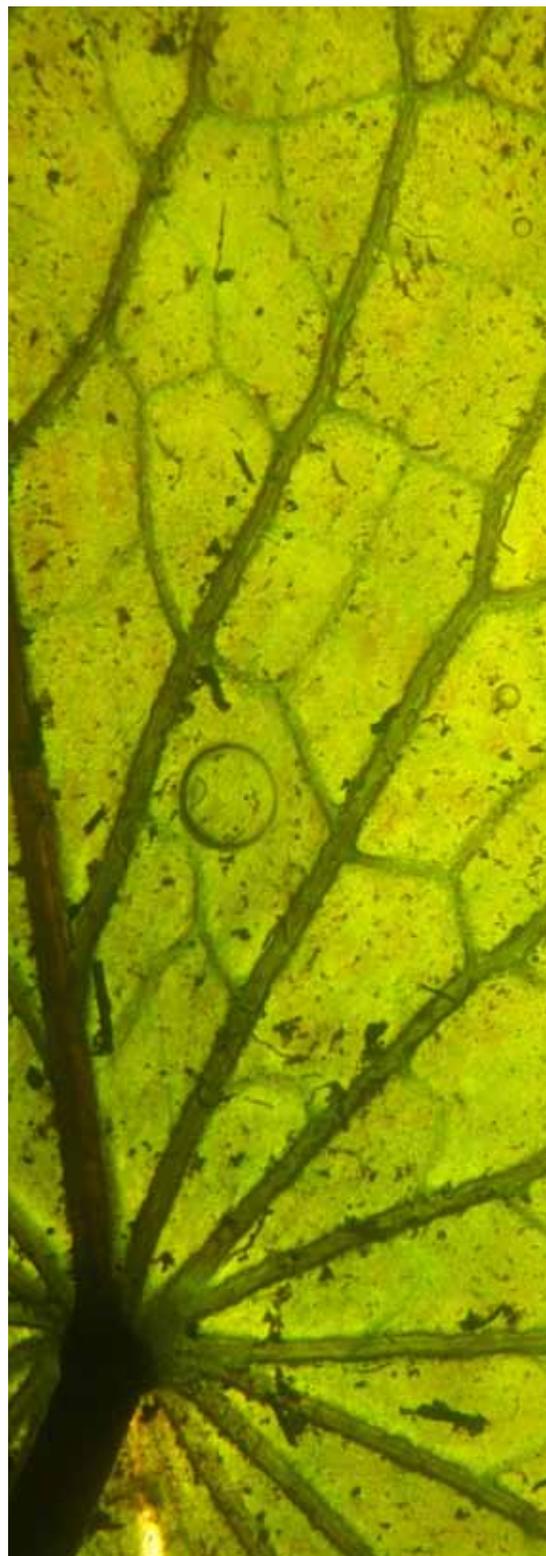
We will expand to cover underwater photography during the coming year. We have already begun with evaluating basic underwater cameras and will expand to evaluating underwater cases for Canon and Nikon DSLR size cameras out in the open ocean in 2012.

Since we live in Guatemala we have Belize, Mexico, and the Bay Islands of Honduras not too far away (the Pacific Coast is open ocean, with black volcanic sand, but has lots of marine turtles).

The ancient Maya worshipped a Shark God, indeed the word Shark is believed by some scholars to be derived from the Mayan word for this fish, namely Xoc.

The Maya also frequently picture marine turtles, sea anemones, and sea sponges (my PhD dissertation was on this aspect of Maya symbology).

The pre-Columbian peoples also utilized a species of seashell for colorant for their woven textiles. This shell is best known for the coast of Oaxaca but is also found just south of Guatemala on the coast of El Salvador.



The point-and-shoot budget Canon PowerShot D10 is actually close to as good as a circa three THOUSAND dollar system which we stupidly got lured into buying at Backscatter, in California. The next underwater system we test will be from a more professional resource. Since we have many Nikon D-series cameras and Canon Rebel cameras, it would be a better investment to obtain underwater housings for these.

## In transition

Pentax is in transition and its remnants were purchased by Ricoh earlier in October.

Pentax is a traditional Japanese company. I have lived in Japan for six months plus I am familiar with the pros and cons of Japanese corporate style. Being too conservative results in not reacting fast enough to digital reality (but Kodak, an American company, is the most infamous example).

Pentax was the only 35mm camera manufacturer slower than Mamiya to get their medium format camera concept up and running. Olympus was clever enough (or slow enough) never to launch such an unrealistic attempt to compete with Phase One.

Hasselblad had issues with the digital world many years ago and switched to Fujifilm as a camera manufacturer and joined forces with a scanner manufacturer Imacon (so instead of two separate companies having losing market share the two together are doing a bit better at surviving).

Bronica and Contax went totally belly up first (as medium format had more competition from good 35mm DSLR cameras from Nikon and Canon).

Then Rollei collapsed along with the attempt by the grandsons to re-create a separate medium format system, Franke & Heidecke. One reason was potentially that it was not realistic to get auto-focus lenses at medium format sizes. The official reason was that there were too many historical liabilities. Clearly there were other internal issues combined with external business politics, since Phase One and Hasselblad were the major competitors.

Then Leaf got caught in the world recession combined with the entanglements of Franke & Heidecke. Leaf continues, but as a shadow of its former significant market share.

An informative history of the decline and fall of Rollei digital is on the web site [www.rolleiflexpages.com](http://www.rolleiflexpages.com)



Mamiya medium format camera, Schneider Optics booth.  
PhotoPlus 2011.

All of the above is a set of historical tidbits on all the companies who disappeared, went bankrupt, or were otherwise unsuccessful with attempting to create a significant digital camera at medium format size.

Phase One is the most successful medium format camera company for many reasons, but a major cause of their success is because Phase One has the best software: Capture One.

Remember the rule in the transition from photography of the 1960's-1990's, and digital photography since 1996: it is the software which makes or breaks your digital camera. Leica was never successful because they were in lullaby-land in the naïve belief that all it took was a Leica-made body and a Leitz-lens.

And, you can't simply hire an outside firm to do your software: if they are not in-house, it is too expensive to update your firmware when end-users find all the issues.

In other words: I wish Pentax success with their medium format camera, but it is highly unlikely it will be successful in significant market share. Phase One is simply too good, and Hasselblad's brand recognition is too strong (though its medium format has not been able to surpass Phase One in market share).

## Conspicuous by their first appearance

Kirk; since they are rarely at an expo, it was nice to see them present at PhotoPlus 2011.

## More and more Chinese manufacturers

Some products made-in-China are acceptable: camera carrying bags. But I am content with my Lowel and Westcott studio lamps. I see no need to switch to a Chinese product that I do not know.

I will definitely stay with Gitzo tripods and Manfrotto tripod heads for still photography. For video Manfrotto is also a good option. I would not tend to opt for a Chinese brand, or brands with American or European names made-in-China.

Surely in the future quality will improve, and if I see and experience a made-in-China tripod that lasts for five years I will be glad to write about it.

I like Chinese culture, enjoy visiting China several times a year, and most of the clothes and shoes that I wear are surely made-in-China. Plus I am working on learning Mandarin, the main Chinese language. But I will admit that I am spoiled by Made-in-German Zeiss lenses for Swedish-made Hasselblad cameras from 20 years ago. Not even Japanese-made cameras come close.

## Publications: Books

We saw so many interesting new books on photography from the following publishers that we will issue a separate book-review report on books at PhotoPlus.

Amphoto, listed under Random House

Focal Press

Peachpit

Rocky Nook shared a booth with c't Digital Photography magazine.

Wiley offered mainly their for Dummies series

For each publisher, show the titles that we would like to have. Then I will add text (like I have for Amphoto Books already).



## Publications: Magazines

I will review photography magazines in the separate report on photo books. We hope to have this out within about two weeks.

## New York as a venue

New York is not as accessible to people on a low-budget: hotels in New York are twice to four times the cost of hotels in Orlando or Las Vegas. The airports in New York are further away also: the airport in Las Vegas is in the middle of the city!

But New York is a fun place to visit if you stay near Times Square and there are plenty of museums to visit. Daniela and I visited the New York Botanical Garden, but were hit by a severe snow blizzard and the trains were stopped by trees fallen on the tracks. We barely got back to the hotel due to transit snarls because of the unseasonably early snow.

The Javits convention center is probably safer to walk to than the convention center in Atlanta, but there are no acceptable hotels adjacent to the New York convention center: all are a 15 minute walk away (on 7th Avenue and thereabouts).

The Javits convention center was undergoing major retrofitting so the architectural beauty was totally obscured. The park across the street was wiped out by construction of new buildings across the street. But since your goal is the cameras and accessories inside, it does not make too much difference what the surroundings look like.



Times Square at night, NYC November 2011.

## Things the exhibit organizer did well

The floor plan was helpful: well done.

## Things the exhibit organizer could do better next time

The exhibitor list (catalog) was the most unusable of any I have seen in over a decade:

- Font size for Booth Locator page (p. 68) was too small to read comfortably. The illegible font size was because someone decided they had to cram all the exhibitors onto one page.
  - First, they should have put some on the adjacent (map) page.
  - Second, they should have separated the alphabetical letters so you could find a company under its alphabetical position faster.
- Text in the section COMPANY LISTINGS was stupidly small.
- Instead of a real exhibitor list, the “catalog” was pure advertising and PR
- The size of the name of each exhibitor was so small as to be illegible

I can fully understand the need of the exhibit organizers to have advertising revenue, but this year it was excessive (and the commercial aspect was too much in-your-face). The “catalog” was too obviously oriented to harvesting profit for the organizers.

Solution: have a separate folding map with the exhibits listed in a font size and font style that is legible. And have the commercial stuff separate.

As it was, the map was too hard to find inside, buried under so much advertising (cloaked as an exhibitor list).

Only on the second day did I find the second exhibitor list: a folded map format. This was done much better than the booklet version.

## Will FLAAR Reports return and attend PhotoPlus in the future?

Yes, we would likely attend PhotoPlus 2013. In 2012, since this is a Photokina year, we will tend to dedicate our travel budget to Cologne, Germany, especially since there are several photographers on our staff who would like to attend Photokina.

## Appendix A

We enjoyed speaking with many knowledgeable people at PhotoPlus 2011

Since many of the people I spoke with I already have their business cards from past PhotoPlus expos, or past PMA or recent Photokina, I don't list them here. But below is the list of people I interacted with and whose business cards I have from this year.

Allison DEVLIN, Marketing Director, the Crown Publishing Group

Brian PRIDGEON, Director Retail Marketing, Imaging & Gaming Segments, Scandisk Corporation

Chris LINK, Director Hardware Sales, GigaPan Brilliant Gigapixel

Christopher ABBISS, Product Manager, Manfrotto Distribution.

David WILLIAMS, Innova Art Ltd (USA)

Doug FELDNER, Product Category Manager, Manfrotto Distribution.

Eileen FRITSCH, Owner Eileen Fritsch Communications

Eric DRUKER, Regional Manager Eastern U.S, The Tiffen Company

Frithjof SPANGENBERG, Product Manager Photo, Business Unit Photo, Schneider Kreuznach

Jason LEDDER, Vice President, Media Relations, R & J Public Relations, LLC

Jeff GOSHERT, Director of Sales Photographic Division, AQUATECH

Jeff BELL, Commercial Photography Film Digital, photography.

Jodi PALM, Category Manager, Photo Support, Manfrotto Distribution.

Jody LAMB, Marketing Executive, Vanguard USA.

Joe BRADY, Webinar marketing Manager, Benro

John ADLER, Filtration Consultant, Lee Filters USA

John MASCIS, Director of Sales, Photo and Video, Specialty/Professional Markets, Manfrotto Distribution.

Julian BUHLER, Contributing Editor, Heise Zeitschriften Verlag

Keith JOHNSON, Keith Johnson Photographs

Kelly MONDORA, Vice President, The F.J. Westcott Company

Kerry IGNATOVICH, Large Format Printing Materials Specialist, Hewlett-Packard

Kevin MCCART, Director Customer Service GigaPan Brilliant, Gigapixel Panoramas

Kimberly SMALL, Director of Publicity, The Crown Publishing Group

Kriss BRUNNGRABER, Marketing Director, Manfrotto Distribution

Lance SCHAD, Digital Transitions

Max BOWERS, North American Sales Manager, Canson North America

Michael MUELLER, President, Feisol Europe

Mike KEITH, Premier Imaging Products

Nelson COPPEDGE, Senior Purchasing Manager, KEH.com

Pat MUZILA, Custom Brackets

Peter BIASOTTI, Progear

Rachel HOWARD, Revolutionist, Redrock Microsystems

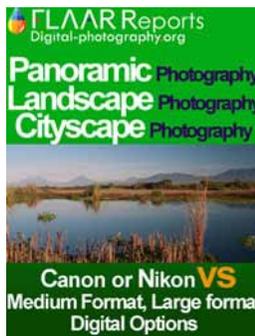
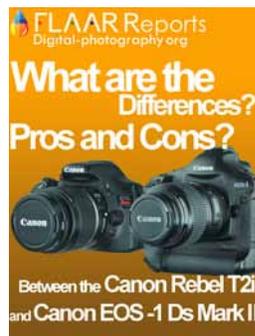
Reinhard HIESINGER, General Manager, NOVOFLEX Präzisionstechnik

Rod KLUKAS, U.S Representative, Arca-Swiss Nc.

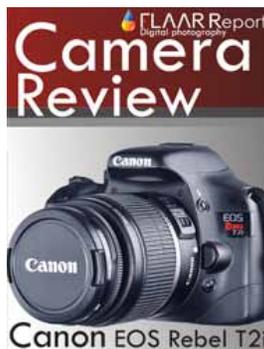
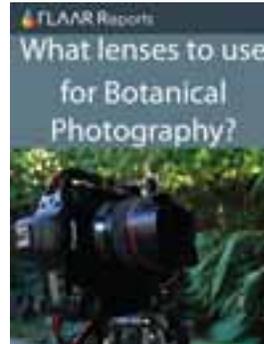
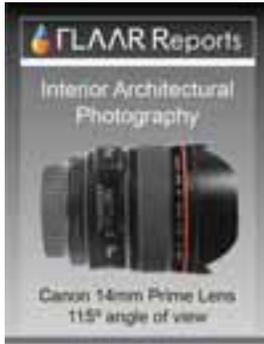
Tom SWEENEY, Vice President of Sales, Alpha Imaging Technologies

# Appendix B

## CANON and NIKON Comparisons



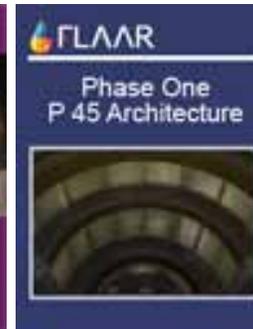
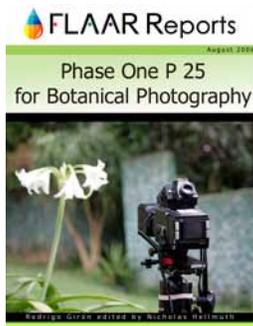
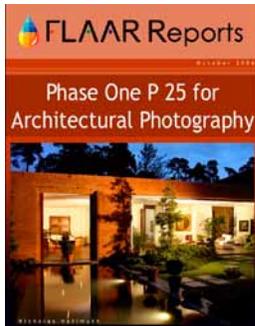
## CANON



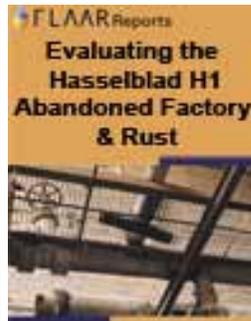
## NIKON Cameras



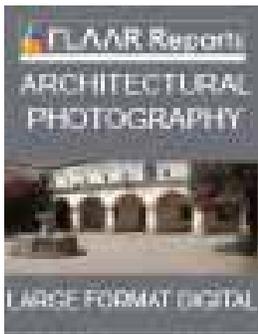
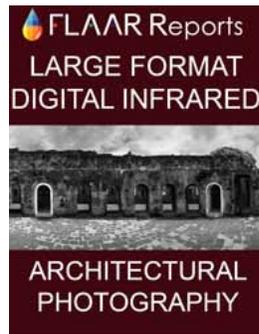
## PHASE ONE Camera



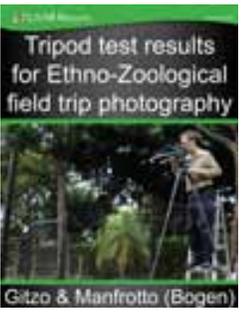
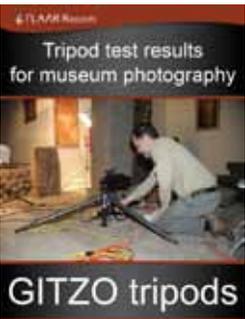
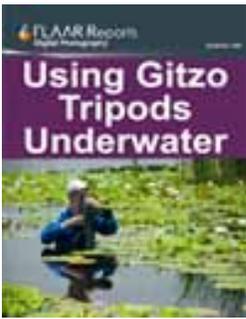
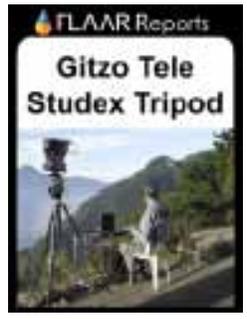
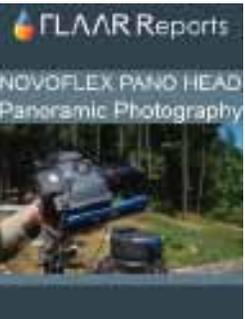
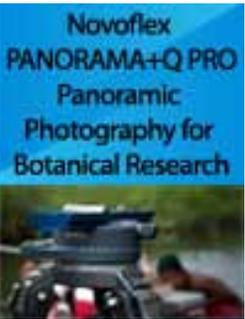
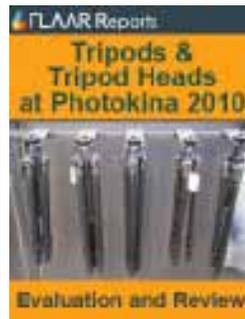
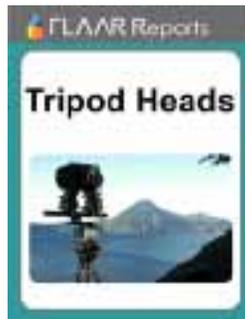
## HASSELBLAD Cameras



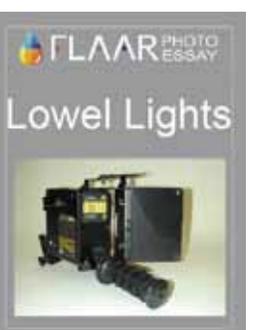
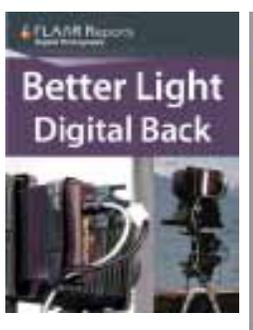
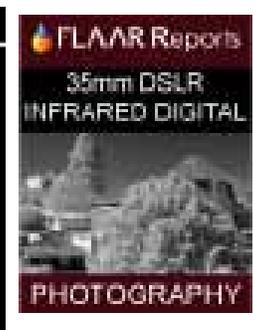
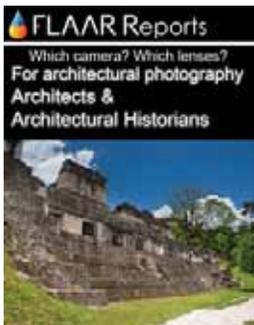
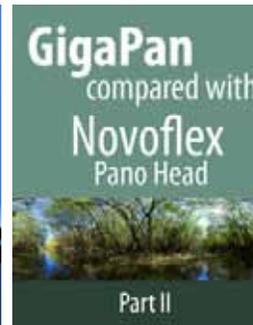
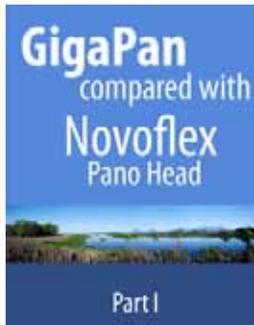
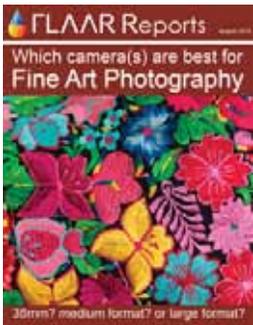
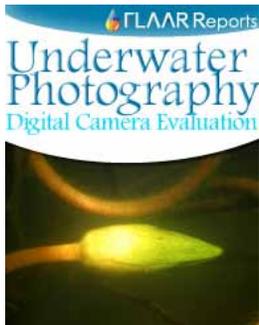
# LARGE FORMAT Cameras



## Tripod and Tripod Heads



Other FLAAR Reports of Photography



First posted November 2011

## Acknowledgements

Our goal is not just to take photographs but to print them for exhibits. We aspire to have a future exhibit on the ceiba tree. In order to exhibit these photographs we will need to print them. So we also evaluate wide-format inkjet printers.

Since we wish to have high quality photographs to send to a top quality wide-format inkjet printer, we evaluate the cameras, lenses, tripods to hold the camera. Then we evaluate printers, inks, and the media to print on. We publish all the results of our evaluations so that other botanists can see which cameras and printers they can use for their botanical gardens.

Our Canon camera equipment and printers we tend to obtain from Parrot Digigraphic. If you get things low-bid from a box pusher (Amazon.com is one good example) you don't get to speak with a person who knows anything about cameras or printers. So if you wish to understand the difference between an Epson, an HP, and a Canon printer, Parrot Digigraphic can help you. Plus they can explain the difference between medium format and 35mm DSLR cameras, since they offer Hasselblad in addition to Canon cameras. You can contact them at [info@ParrotColor.com](mailto:info@ParrotColor.com)

We thank Hoodman USA for the RAW CompactFlash memory cards which we use in our Phase One, Canon, and Nikon cameras. You can contact Hoodman via Toll Free (800) 818-3946 (U.S. Only), from elsewhere in the world you can reach them at +1 (310) 222-8608 (Torrance, California time zone), Fax (310) 222-8623, [sales@hoodmanusa.com](mailto:sales@hoodmanusa.com)



**16GB Hoodman Compact Flash memory card.**

Since FLAAR is dedicated to professional quality photography in archaeology, ethnography, ethno-botany, ethno-zoology, and geology, as well as macro, pano, landscape, architectural and fine art photography, we have many Canon cameras, many Nikon cameras, GigaPan, Hasselblad, and several large format Cambo cameras plus we just added a Silvestri 6x9 format camera (all digital). Thus we need a tripod for each camera.

Since each camera is different size, shape and application, it helps when each tripod is ideal for the camera and kind of location where we are photographing (studio or outside in swamps). We appreciate the tripods from both Gitzo and Manfrotto, as well as pertinent tripod heads, courtesy of Bogan Imaging.

You can see the Gitzo and Manfrotto tripods at Photokina, Photo Plus (Photo East in New York) and other professional photography equipment expos. Telephone: (201) 818-9500; Fax: (201) 818-9177;

E-mail: [info@manfrottodistribution.us](mailto:info@manfrottodistribution.us)

Since tungsten lighting is hot, you can't photograph fresh flowers, or a sensitive reptile, or a fragile Mayan artifact with hot lights. So the digital fluorescent lighting provided courtesy of F.J. Westcott is much appreciated. We look forward to evaluating their new Spiderlite TD5 for studio photography. When we are out in the jungle, we find the Westcott reflectors are absolutely indispensable (often better than the most high-powered flash or strobe). You can contact Westcott at [info@fjwestcott.com](mailto:info@fjwestcott.com), or telephone (800) 886-1689, or +1 419 243-7311 if you are outside USA.