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- Mohit Ghatak
- Srini Swaminathan

Showcase
Aryaman Jain

Printing & Beyond
Perspectives by Vimal Parmar

Also Reviewed
- Samsung Galaxy S26 Ultra
- Nothing 4a Pro

Learnings
- Capturing Life Up Close
- An Essential Tool or Fading Relic?
- The Secret Behind Perfect Exposures
- A Guide to Flower Photography



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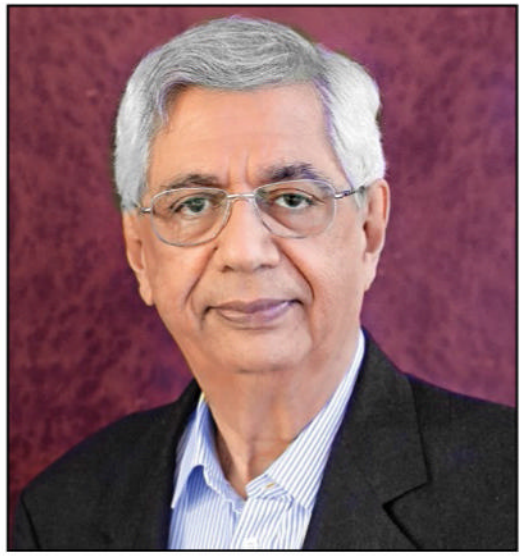
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# WELCOME

## Smart Photography

**INDIA'S NUMBER 1 IMAGING MAGAZINE!**



The world at large and the imaging industry gave a cautious welcome to AI. Subsequently, AI has been used by big brands to improve autofocus, metering and photo editing. It now emerges that the use of AI involves usage of considerable water and power. AI companies, as of now, are not issuing any data on usage of scarce resources. Is the world equipped to handle this additional demand?

**H. S. Billimoria**

## HERE'S WHAT MAKES US #1

**WE ARE GLUED TO THE GLOBAL IMAGING INDUSTRY**
Our team is updated with all the benchmarks and road blocks that the field of photography and imaging across the globe experiences. This helps us record the changes in the global perspective, thus making us the first to predict which products will be a rage in the Indian markets.

**WE'RE IMPARTIAL**
Loyalty towards our readers is a given, and their best interests are always on our mind. Every verdict is honest and not influenced by advertisers or personal favourites. So when we say a product is a 'BEST BUY', then, it is just that!

**OUR TESTS ARE CONDUCTED BY EXPERTS**
All equipment go through a series of tests at the hands of our experts. Our reviewers are experts in the field of photography across the country and have many years of experience. That gives us the foresight to distinguish between a passing trend and a big change in the field of photography and imaging. And finally, our reviews are not extended to just fill up the pages!

**WE ARE HERE TO HELP YOU**
There is no debate on why we are here. Our sole goal is to provide you options and better your judgement in product purchase while, sharing tips and tricks to improve your images. Our biggest joy is in building a bridge between you and your perfect picture!

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Photographer : **Mohit Ghatak**








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## DID YOU KNOW


81 | Chinese lenses have invaded the Indian photo industry – the signs were very clear since quite some time. Hoshang Billimoria lists eight Chinese lens manufacturers, along with some more details about each of them.




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## SNIPPETS

- Good news for OM owners! The shifting landscape of compact cameras has tempted the manufacturer of the Pen series to look again at the compact camera market. Currently, OM only sells the Tough series in the world market.
- Tamron, partly owned by Sony has always launched new lenses with Sony's E mount. Not anymore. Tamron has announced that future launches will be multi-mount. Good news for Nikon, Panasonic and Fujifilm owners.
- Nikon has a new CEO. Yasuhiro Ohmura took over as President and CEO of Nikon Corporation on April 1, 2026. A lifelong optical engineer, Yasuhiro san played a key role in developing core Nikon technologies.
- Brightin Star has announced the second generation of its 11 mm F 2.8 II full frame fisheye lens for the Nikon Z mount. Pricing is estimated at 249 dollars.
- Nikon equipment including the Z 9, D 5 and several Nikkor lenses were used by NASA during the recent Artemia II program.
- Viltrox has confirmed the launch of its new LAB 35 mm F 1.2 lens without a LCD screen . The lens will be available in Sony's E mount and Nikon's Z mount. The lens features all metal construction and weather sealing.
- Sigma is likely to launch a new 65 mm Ultra Fast Autofocus lens in September. The maximum aperture is likely to be F 1.0. The launch is meant to coincide with Sigma's 65th Anniversary celebrations.
- Tamron has announced a 35–100 mm F 2.8 DI III VXD lens for full frame cameras. The lens is available only for Sony's E mount and Nikon's Z mount.
- Canon has put in patent applications in Japan for a 130 mm F 1.8, 300 mm F 1.8 and a 500 mm F 5.6 prime lenses. Let's see whether they make it to the production line.
- TT Artisan has announced two new lenses in the Neo series – the 50 mm F 1.8 and 85 mm F 1.8. Both the lenses are available in Sony's E mount, Nikon's Z mount and Panasonic's L mount.




# Fujifilm has launched the X-T 30 III

Fujifilm has launched the X-T 30 III as a compact hybrid camera aimed at creators, courtesy its 6.2 K video and AI autofocus. Key specs include a 26.1 MP X – Trans CMOS 4 sensor with the X – Processor 5, both combining to deliver faster image processing and improved dynamic range. It will be sold in kit form with Fujifilm's 13–33 mm lens. The camera weighs only 378 gms.

## Sigma launches 35 mm F 1.4 II Art lens

Sigma has launched version 2 of its 35 mm F 1.4 lens. The new lens is lighter and smaller than its predecessor and promises silent and instant autofocus. Focus breathing is also beautifully controlled.



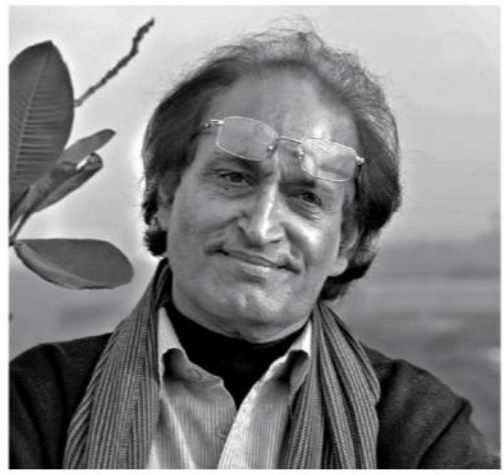
## Canon EOS R 7 Mark II leaked




Canon's next new APS – C mirrorless camera has been leaked and is expected to come with a 39 MP stacked sensor that is ideal for action and wild life photography. The camera is also expected to have 8K video facilities. A formal launch is expected in late May.

# SNIPPETS

- A new Canon R6V hybrid camera is doing the rumour rounds.
- At the NAB Show, Meike announced a 85 mm F 1.4 II and a 58 mm F 1.2.
- Leica has partnered with Gpixel to make its Next Gen image sensor.
- Nikon has shown its commitment to making strategic investments in human capital by raising the base salary of all its employees.
- Smartphone manufacturers are considering a shift in how the industry views camera sensors. Some of the makers are wondering whether they should continue to rely on CMOS sensors. Instead, they want to focus on image algorithym improvements that are also cost effective.
- Yet another Chinese manufacturer, Typoch has entered the market with what they call the first full frame Chinese autofocus constant aperture zoom lens. Yes, this lens is the 24 – 50 mm F 2.8 lens. The lens will be available in the Sony E mount, the Nikon Z mount and the Panasonic L mount. Typoch says that six new autofocus lenses will follow.
- Five Canon cinema cameras get a firmware update.



***Raghu Rai (1942–2026),*** *the legendary Indian photojournalist and Magnum Photos icon, passed away earlier this month at 83. His powerful images chronicled modern India's triumphs, tragedies, and soul, from the Bhopal gas disaster to portraits of its most defining figures, leaving an indelible legacy in visual storytelling.*




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## OCELLUS camera tracking system from Sony

Sony India has introduced OCELLUS (ASR-CT1), its first advanced camera tracking system designed for augmented reality (AR) and virtual production. Built for broadcast, cinema, and live applications, it enables precise, marker-free tracking—ideal for in-camera VFX, sports, and news production. The system features a compact sensor unit with five image sensors, powered by Sony's Visual SLAM technology for stable indoor and outdoor tracking. It includes a processing box and lens encoders, and supports Sony as well as non-Sony cameras.




Ellora Dasgupta, GM North and East, Next Gen Publishing handing over the award to Mr Sajjan Kumar, MD Nikon India

## Nikon wins Camera of the Year

Nikon won the most prestigious Camera of the Year at the recently concluded Technology Innovation and Imaging awards 2026, powered by Smart Photography for its Z5II camera.

The Z5II impressed with its magnesium alloy build, weather sealing, upgraded EXPEED 7 sensor, intelligent subject recognition, fast AF, improved video (including 4K Raw), and outstanding value at an MRP of Rs 149,995.

## BenQ Launches MA270S: 27-Inch 5K for Mac Creators

BenQ has introduced the MA270S, its new flagship 27-inch 5K monitor designed specifically for Mac users, aiming to deliver a seamless, native-like experience for creative professionals. The MA270S features a stunning 5K resolution (5120 × 2880) at 218 ppi, matching Retina-level clarity with sharp text and intricate details ideal for video editing, graphic design, and development work. It offers 99% DCI-P3 color coverage, a 2000:1 contrast ratio, and a Nano Gloss panel that enhances depth, contrast, and viewing angles while staying true to Mac color standards. A 70Hz refresh rate ensures smoother motion for timeline scrubbing and daily tasks.




Engineered as a true Mac extension, the display integrates deeply with macOS through BenQ Display Pilot 2 software. Users get automatic color profile syncing, keyboard-controlled brightness and volume, Auto Pivot, and advanced workspace management. Thunderbolt 4 connectivity provides up to 96W power delivery, single-cable convenience, and daisy-chaining support for dual 5K setups. Additional features include multiple HDMI/USB-C ports and Smart KVM for effortless switching between Mac and PC systems. The ergonomic stand offers 150mm height adjustment with tilt, swivel, and pivot functions. Rajeev Singh, Managing Director, BenQ India, highlighted the monitor's role in redefining Mac-first displays. Priced at INR 94,998, the BenQ MA270S is now available across retail stores and major e-commerce platforms in India. It positions itself as a compelling, feature-rich alternative for creators seeking precision and workflow efficiency.





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**Olympus is now OM SYSTEM**

# Postcards from Spiti



Blue Sheep



**Mohit Ghatak** from Singapore is a businessman as well as an enthusiastic photographer. His love for photography extends to several genres, be it travel, nature, enjoying a lazy afternoon in thickly wooded forests, et al.

**Mohit Ghatak**

**Text and photos by Mohit Ghatak**

***Spiti Valley*** *is a high-altitude cold desert nestled deep in the northeastern corner of Himachal Pradesh, India. Sitting at an average elevation of 4,000 meters and bordered by Tibet to the east and Ladakh to the north, it is one of the most remote and sparsely populated regions on earth — a stark, otherworldly landscape of ancient monasteries, frozen rivers and some of the last intact Himalayan wilderness remaining on the Indian subcontinent. The trans-Himalayan region is a treasure trove of unique bio-diversity, culture and high value for ecosystem services , where wildlife and humans co-exist in harmony. The snow leopard, one of the region's most elusive animals, is the soul of not just Spiti, but of the central Asian mountain range, covered under Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program (GSLEP). Spiti is a role model for snow leopard conservation in the whole of Asia.*

*These images reflect two weeks spent in Spiti, in the winter of 2026, highlighting the rugged white landscape, the culture, it's people, the wildlife and the enchanting mountains.*










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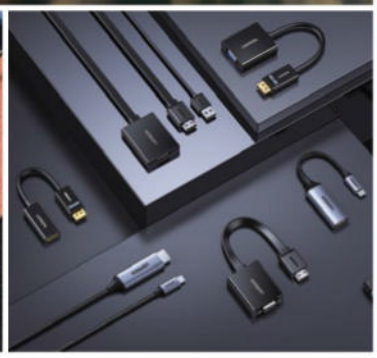
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Snow Leopard - sitting


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# Postcards from Sapporo

**Srini Swaminathan's** curiosity has taken him to 50 countries. He began his career on oilfield rigs and is now a marathoner and long-distance cyclist who has cycled from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and Bhuj to Assam. An author and translator, he lives in Chennai and hopes to travel the world carrying his Indie dog, Oreo, in a backpack. He is @srini091 on Instagram and X.



Srini Swaminathan

*Sapporo is a northern city on the island of Hokkaido, Japan's vast and largely wild frontier. It feels unlike anywhere else in the country. Sapporo is younger, more spacious, with wide grid streets, red-brick colonial buildings and mountains pressing close on every side. People come here for the snow festival in winter, the lavender fields in summer and the autumn colours that turn its parks and tree-lined avenues into rivers of gold and red. The rhythm of Sapporo is shaped by the seasons, from its distilleries and craft beer halls to the ropeway rides that lift you above the city into open sky.*



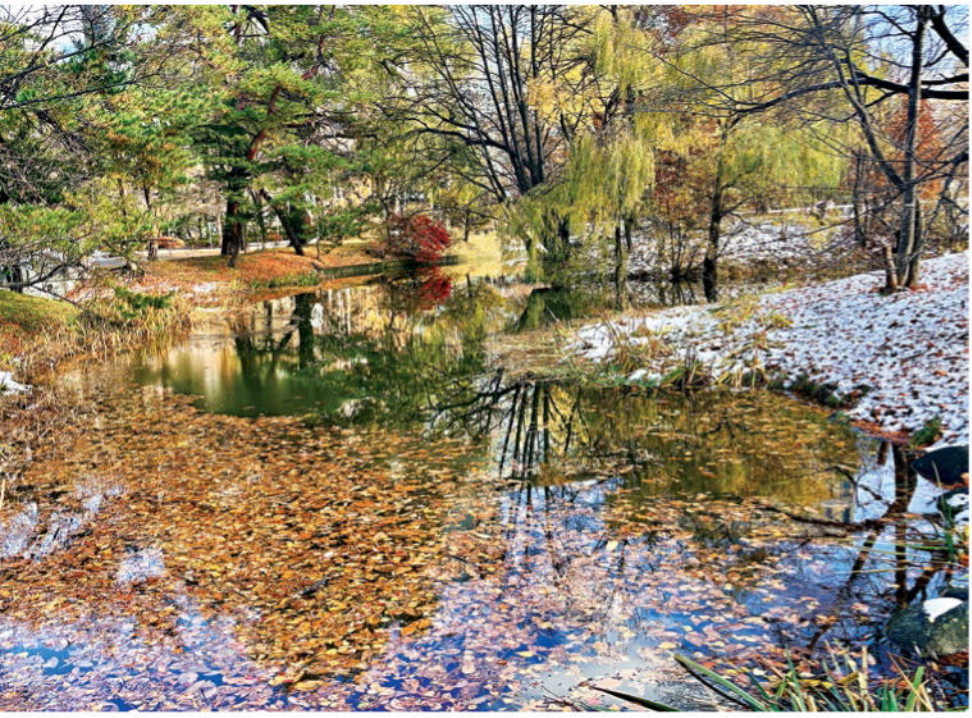
Erected in 1956 by the Artist Takashi MINE, this bronze sculpture of a shepherd boy and his calf happily running towards a bright future was the first sculpture erected in Odori Koen after World War II. The Dairy Farmers Association of Hokkaido erected this sculpture to commemorate the record breaking milk production of 200,000 tons and to express appreciation to the dairy cows.





Hohei Kan. Opened in 1881 as a hotel, this historic & architectural landmark now hosts events & tours. This Meiji-era colonial building is part of Sapporo's frontier legacy, raised when American and European architects helped shape the island's new capital.

Nakajima Park holds its autumn colour well into late October. The pond mirrors the surrounding golds and browns perfectly on a still afternoon.

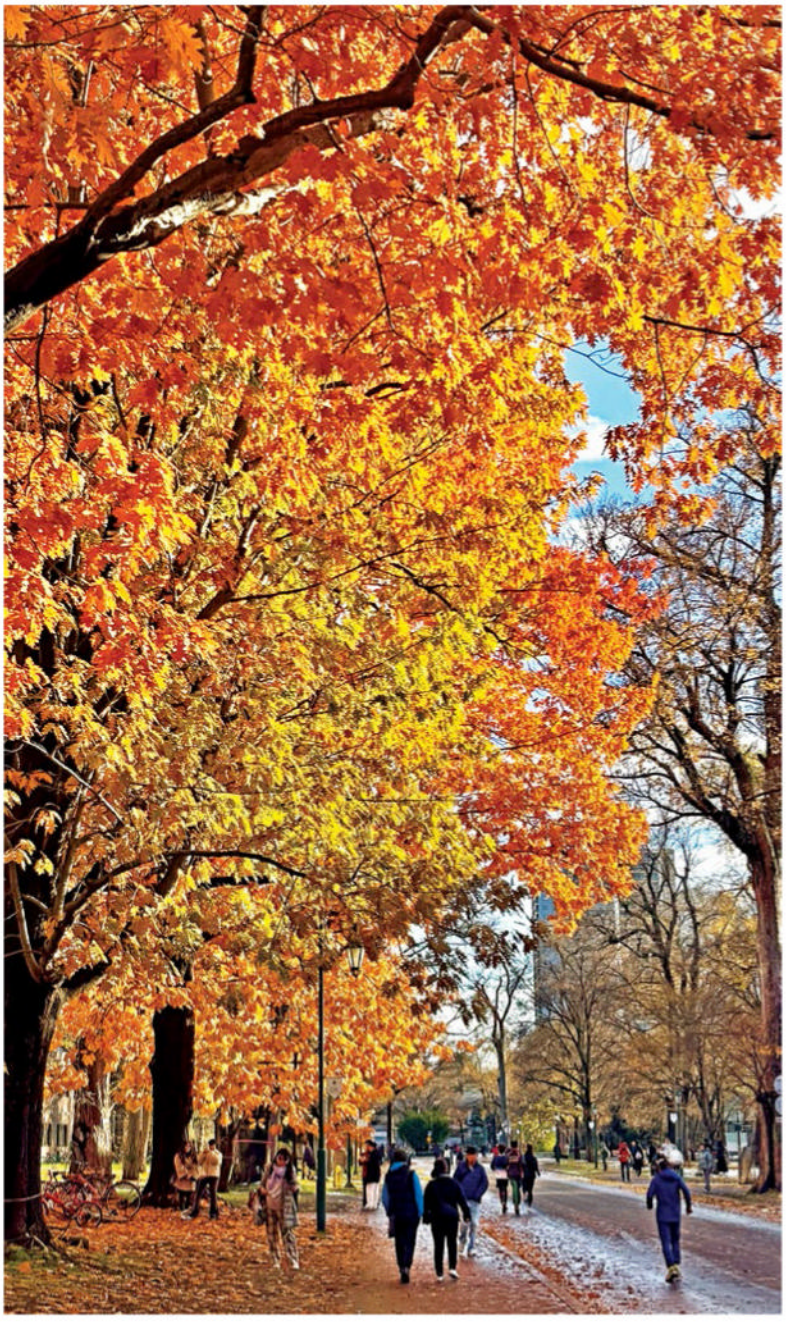





The Sapporo TV Tower has marked the eastern end of Odori Park since 1957. In black and white, its geometry stands clean against the open sky. It could be the most photographed structure in Sapporo as most tourists start their discovery of the city here.

These moai replicas at Makomanai Takino Cemetery were placed as part of a large sculptural landscape project. Seen against a snowy hillside, they carry an unexpectedly solemn presence.





Autumn in Sapporo turns its tree-lined avenues into corridors of red and gold. The Hokkaido University is one of the finest places in the city to walk through the changing season.



The poplar avenue at Hokkaido University runs for about 380 metres and is one of the great tree-lined walks in Japan. In autumn the tall poplars turn golden before the first snow arrives.



Ginkgo trees line many of Sapporo's streets and turn a brilliant yellow in October. The colour arrives quickly and does not last long, which is part of what makes it worth chasing. This image is from Nakajima Park.



After the peak, fallen ginkgo leaves cover the ground in a thick golden layer. The texture and colour together make for a frame that almost looks painted. Sapporo is full of Gingko Trees and the fallen Gingko leaves during winter make the roads colorful.



The Sapporo Factory Mall opened in April 1993 on the site of the former Sapporo Beer factory, which traces its roots to the Sapporo Kaitakushi Beer Brewery founded in 1876. The facade is wrapped in crimson ivy each autumn.



The first frost of the season settles over fallen autumn leaves, signalling that winter is close.
In Hokkaido this moment often arrives in late October, earlier than anywhere else in Japan.



A street lamp glows warm against a canopy of ginkgo leaves on an autumn evening.
The light and the leaves together give the scene a quality that is hard to find in daylight.



The Sapporo Clock Tower, built in 1878, is the city's oldest surviving Western-style building. Framed by autumn foliage, it sits quietly among the surrounding modern towers.



Hokkaido milk is richer in fat and creamier in taste than what you find anywhere else in Japan, and the soft serve here is the most direct way to experience that difference. People eat it through the winter without a second thought. In Sapporo, a soft serve cone is less a summer treat and more a year-round ritual.



Oak barrels age quietly in the cold Hokkaido air at one of the island's beer breweries. The climate here produces some of Japan's finest single malts and beers.




The Moiwa ropeway lifts visitors above the treeline to a panoramic view of Sapporo spread below. On a clear day in early winter the grid of the city stretches all the way to the horizon.



Autumn and winter collide in a single frame as red maple leaves settle into fresh snow in Sapporo. Hokkaido's seasons do not ease into each other gracefully. One morning the trees are still turning, and by afternoon the ground is white.



The Hokkaido Daibutsu at Hokkeji Temple rises 13.5 metres inside a circular open-top concrete enclosure. Shot from directly below, the composition is contained and quietly powerful.

# Through the Eyes of a 16-year Old



Puple Sunbird, female



**Aryaman Jain**

**Aryaman Jain,** is a 16-year-old bird photographer from Chandigarh, studying in grade 12. He started his photography in 2019 when he picked up his father's old Nikon D3200 and asked his father to show him how it works. He has been accompanying his father on photography trips and learning from him since. Aryaman mainly photographs birds and other wildlife in his immediate surroundings, including Chandigarh's Sukhna Lake and even his own balcony. He currently uses a Nikon D750 with a 200-500mm telephoto lens. Many of his friends often ask where he finds these "exotic" birds and are surprised to learn that all of his work features common birds from the city. Says Aryaman, "It is simply a matter of going out, being patient, and observing the nature around us". Aryaman hopes that his photography motivates more people to do the same.

His Instagram handle:
**aryamans_photography**



Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker




Rhesus Macaque, primate



Spotted Owlet, chic



Crimson Sunbird



Baya Weaver

Spotted Owlet



Indian Pond Heron





Great Cormorant



Common Myna



Indian Paradise Flycatcher, female



Wire-tailed Swallow



Little Egret

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A macro photo



Picture courtesy: Uday Hegde

## Capturing Life Up Close

Rohinton Mehta

How often do we spot that ladybug resting underneath a blade of grass while walking along a grass-covered path? We do not often acknowledge the existence of this teeny, but colourful world. However, a peek into this world of tiny living and non-living things is surely exciting and immensely satisfying to a photographer. This month, let us help you explore this world with a few tips.



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This is a general term for 'tight shots'. You take the shot by moving closer to the subject – using one of the several methods available – while taking in very little background.

The idea is to get a large frame-filling image that can show more details than a 'normal' shot – one that includes the subject with a generous amount of background.

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Close-up lenses, also known as close-up filters or dioptre lenses are supplementary lenses that attach to the front of the lens via the filter thread (consider them as magnifying glass). This is the easiest and the cheapest solution for close-up photography. Generally, we attach close-up filters only to prime lenses and not to zoom lenses but with extra care, that too is possible.

Dioptre lenses are available in different strengths, ranging from +1 dioptre to +10.

A close up photo



Photo: Rohinton Mehta





## An Essential Tool or Fading Relic?



**Ashok Kandimalla** has been in the photographic field for over three decades and has extensive experience in both film and digital photography. Being an electronics engineer by profession and a photographer by passion, his unique and deep insight into the technical aspects of digital photography and equipment. He has published more than a 100 articles on photography and some of his writings have also been published in the well-known photography magazine *Modern Photography*. An avid collector of photographic books and vintage cameras, Ashok has a keen interest in the history of photography and a passion for sharing his knowledge on photography through teaching and writing. He is the first Indian photographer to be featured on the Nikon Centenary website. He is presently working as a Management and Engineering consultant. He can be reached at **kashokk@gmail.com**.

To use or not to use a tripod is a dilemma – perhaps not as old as the famous 'to be or not to be' quote but is surely a topic that befuddled many photographers over time. The opinions changed, as technology advanced. The latter slowly and steadily, but surely reduced the need to take your loyal three-legged friend (a tripod) along with you. That said, is the tripod now an anachronism as more and more serious photographers are living without it? Or does it still have a role in the current era of instant gratification coupled with spray and pray? These are the aspects that we will examine in this article.

For many years, a photographer using a tripod was synonymous with someone practicing his craft seriously. That perception persists even today. Besides that, there are a few areas that always demand the use of a tripod. Let us look at these. Let us start with the most obvious – it steadies the camera. No doubt you can employ handholdable shutter speeds in low light that were hitherto impossible with film, thanks to advances in sensors and image stabilization. However, there are some situations where a steadying camera with a tripod is must. Consider following cases:

When photographing seascapes, waterfalls, rivers, etc., you may want to smoothen the look of water to get a silky effect (Picture 1). This needs shutter speeds that can extend from a few seconds to several minutes. Even longer shutter speed are used in astro-photography where exposures can stretch to even hours, making handholding a camera impossible.



**Picture 1:** Here a shutter speed of 10 seconds was used to get the silky look.



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## The Secret Behind Perfect Exposures

Rohinton Mehta

This write-up is designed for newcomers and intermediate users. We have, in the past, done similar write-ups but, since human memory is short and since there are always newcomers to photography, what's mentioned here will be of help to one and all.

A newbie photographer has a lot on his mind – he has to worry about AF modes, AF-area modes, Release modes, what ISO to set, what aperture to use, what shutter speed to set and some more. This write-up, done with simplicity in mind, will 'talk' only about 'exposure'.

So, to start with, what is exposure? It is the right dosage (quantity) of light that gives you an image that has the correct tones. If the tones are too dark, you say that the image is under-exposed and if they are too light, then you say it is over-exposed.

All modern cameras – whether a simple Point & Shoot, Bridge camera, D-SLR or Mirrorless – have what is called an 'exposure meter'. Sometimes, this is also mentioned as 'light meter' or simply, as a 'meter'. The purpose of the meter is to guide you while setting an 'exposure'. An exposure is a combination of the ISO (sensitivity of the imaging sensor), aperture and shutter speed.

There are, usually, three types of exposure meters built into our cameras (some Canon cameras have four). They are (a) Evaluative (b) Centre-weighted (c) Spot. Evaluative metering is known by different names by different camera manufacturers, e.g. Matrix metering, Segmented metering, Multi-segmented metering etc.

- **What type of metering should you use?**
  My suggestion is that you use whatever type you are comfortable with. However, it's good to know how the different meters work.

**Evaluative metering** divides the frame into several segments. The computer within the camera 'reads' the contrast and brightness amongst the various segments, then compares this information to an in-built databank of several thousands of exposures and selects the one that closely matches the contrast and brightness of the scene before you. *Camera manufacturers generally suggest the use of Evaluative metering, especially for beginners.*

**Centre-weighted metering** places greater emphasis on the centre of the frame. This means that, though the entire frame is metered, the central area is given more weightage. With some cameras, the user can have a choice to set the diameter of the weighted area from the ones which are available.

**Spot metering** reads a small area of the screen (usually about 2-5 percent) of the total area. It does not read the rest of the frame. With modern cameras, the user can move the 'spot' within the frame. Spot metering, we are told, is best suited for intermediate or advanced users, but as you'll see later on, it's not that difficult to use.
*Note: Do not confuse the in-built spot metering with the 1° spot meters which are available as a separate unit. A 1° spot meter reads only 1° whereas, the spot meter within the camera reads 2-5 percent of the frame area.*

- **Some more on how exposure meters work**
  The in-built exposure meter measures the light reflected back from the subject. Hence, it is also referred to as a 'reflected light meter' (as opposed to the Incident light meter that measures the amount of light falling on the subject).

Ideally, I repeat, ideally, we should measure only one reflectivity. But, let's take a practical example. In a landscape scene, different elements within our frame have different reflectivity. When we point our camera to the scene, the meter reads the multitude of different reflectivities and averages them. Most of the time, this works well, but, if there is a predominance of a very bright or very dark area, the result is less than perfect.

*Note: Exposure meters are designed to turn whatever you point them at, to a mid-tone. If you point it to a very dark shade of blue for example, the result will be 'mid-blue' (not too dark, nor too light). If you point it to light yellow for example, the result will be 'mid-yellow' (not too dark, nor too light). If you point the meter to black, the result will be 'mid-black' (middle grey); if you point the meter to white, the result will be 'mid-white' (middle grey). And so on.*

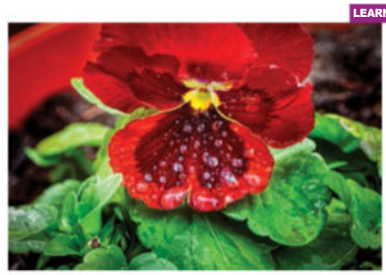
- **Why is it suggested that spot metering is best left to intermediate or advanced users?**
  The in-built spot meter, as mentioned earlier, reads about 2-5 percent of the frame area (which represents a very small area of the frame). As long as you meter off a mid-tone area of the frame, all is good. But what if you meter off an area that is not mid-tone? Well, if you know how much 'exposure compensation' to apply and in what direction (minus or plus compensation), you are okay. The problem is, most beginners do not know exactly how much exposure compensation to apply and in what direction. So here are some guidelines when using spot metering.



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## A Guide to Flower Photography

Flowers bring a sense of freshness into our lives. Here are a few tips, which, when followed, can improve your flower photography.

Rohinton Mehta

It makes sense to photograph flowers early in the mornings or late in the evenings when the light is not harsh. Harsh light makes the shadows go too deep (devoid of detail) and highlights to overexpose.

For the best image quality, try to photograph flowers at the base ISO (generally ISO 100). As you increase ISO, you lose dynamic range. A dedicated macro lens can yield better image quality and is convenient to use. (This does not mean that you cannot use other methods, like the use of close-up filters, extension tubes etc.) Consider using a sturdy tripod, especially, if the light is inadequate. A tripod will also allow you to use narrow apertures like f/11 or f/16 without using flash or increasing the ISO sensitivity. Keep in mind that there will be occasions when the use of a tripod will be cumbersome.

Wait for the breeze to die down before you release the shutter. In your excitement of the shot, don't jab at the shutter release button; gently squeeze it down. Shoot in Raw. You could set your White Balance to Auto, though personally, I set my WB to Daylight. In Adobe Camera Raw (ACR), you can always change the WB to the one you prefer.

Know where to focus and remember that the depth of field will be very shallow. Some photographers like a part of the flower sharp, leaving the rest blurred; some others like to have the entire flower sharp. If you are not sure which method you prefer, shoot both ways.

Do keep in mind that even at a narrow aperture like f/16, the depth of field at 1:1 magnification (life size) can be in the region of around 3 mm!

If you can, avoid using very narrow apertures like f/16, f/22 and f/32. The narrower the aperture, the greater is the DoF, but when using such apertures, the optical phenomenon known as 'diffraction of light' will cause the entire image to go 'soft'. You may not notice the softness if your picture size is reasonably small, but, you'll be able

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A macro photo



Picture courtesy: Uday Hegde

# Capturing Life Up Close

Rohinton Mehta

How often do we spot that ladybug resting underneath a blade of grass while walking along a grass-covered path? We do not often acknowledge the existence of this teeny, but colourful world. However, a peek into this world of tiny living and non-living things is surely exciting and immensely satisfying to a photographer. This month, let us help you explore this world with a few tips.

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This is a general term for 'tight shots'. You take the shot by moving closer to the subject – using one of the several methods available – while taking in very little background.

The idea is to get a large frame-filling image that can show more details than a 'normal' shot – one that includes the subject with a generous amount of background.

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Close-up lenses, also known as close-up filters or dioptre lenses are supplementary lenses that attach to the front of the lens via the filter thread (consider them as magnifying glass). This is the easiest and the cheapest solution for close-up photography. Generally, we attach close-up filters only to prime lenses and not to zoom lenses but with extra care, that too is possible.

Dioptre lenses are available in different strengths, ranging from +1 dioptre to +10.

**A close up photo**



**Photo- Rohinton Mehta**



**Photo shot using a Canon 500D close up filter on a Nikon 70-300mm zoom lens**

**Picture courtesy: Ashok Kandimalla**

| Dioptre | Focal length |
|---|---|
| +1 | 1 metre (approx. 40”) |
| +2 | 1/2 metre (approx. 20”) |
| +3 | 1/3 metre (approx. 13.12”) |
| +4 | 1/4 metre (approx. 10”) |

Let’s take an example of its usage. We will attach a +1 dioptre to three lenses – 50 mm, 100 mm and 200 mm. You know that the 100 mm lens provides an image two times larger than the 50 mm; the 200 mm lens provides an image four times larger than the 50 mm. We will set the three lenses (with +1 dioptre attached) to their minimum focus distance (MFD).




**Macro lenses**

*All three combinations (50 mm +1 dioptre; 100 mm +1 dioptre and 200 mm +1 dioptre) will now focus at 1 metre (40") because the +1 dioptre has a focal length of 1 metre (40").*

*Similarly, if you were to attach a +4 dioptre lens to the same three lenses and set those to their MFD, all the three lenses would focus at 1/4 metre (10 inches) since +4 dioptre equals 1/4 metre.*
**Whatever focal length you use, the lens gets the new focal length of the dioptre that you attach.**

**Since they will now be focussing at the same distance, the longer focal length (in our case the 200 mm) will offer the maximum magnification.**

Close-up filters are inexpensive, lightweight and very easy to use.

## Image quality with close-up filters

In life, you get what you pay for. Don't expect pictures shot using a close-up filter to be as good as those shot using a macro lens. I am not trying to run down the close-up filters; what I am trying to say is that don't compare your close-up filter images to macro lens images. Having said that, I have used close-up filters often and up till now, no one has yet pointed out a resolution flaw.

**Tips:**
1. Stay away from unknown makes. Cheap does not always mean better.
2. Use the optimum aperture of your lens (the aperture that offers the maximum sharpness)
3. Limit the usage to not more than +4 dioptre.
4. Avoid using a close-up filter on zoom lenses if possible.
5. Since the image will be magnified, consider using a tripod to avoid blurry images.

## Disadvantages of Close-up Filters

1. Attaching a close-up filter restricts your focus range. If you suddenly need to focus your lens to a distant subject, you first need to remove the close-up filter.
2. On some lenses, close-up filters (like any other filter) may cause vignetting.
3. Attaching and detaching any filter time and again increases the risk of cross-threading.

## Macro photography

When we talk of macro photography, we are referring to photographing small subjects/objects. You cannot, for example, create a macro photograph of a mountain or a person. For the sake of records, macro photography can be done using macro lenses, extension tubes, lens reversal rings, bellows and even tele-converters added to prime lenses.

## Magnification ratio

Magnification ratio refers to size of the image on the film/imaging sensor, compared to its original size. So, for example, if you are photographing a butterfly that is, say, 1-inch wide and the image formed on the camera's imaging sensor is also 1-inch in width, we would say that the magnification ratio is 1:1. In other words, the captured image is the same size as the original subject.

Continuing with the same example, if the recorded image is half-an-inch (1/2 inch) wide, then the magnification ratio is 1:2. In other words, the image is half the size of the original subject. Or to put it another way, the original subject is twice the size of the recorded image.

Going still further, if the recorded image is quarter inch (1/4 inch) wide, then the magnification ratio is 1:4. In other words, the image captured on the film/sensor is 1/4th the size of the original subject.
***Note:*** *Even though the recorded image is smaller than the original subject, in photographic parlance, it is mentioned as 'magnification'. If the recorded image is twice as large as the original subject, the magnification ratio is 2:1. And so on.*

Macro photography ends when the magnification ratio reaches 10:1. Magnification ratios greater than 10:1 qualify as photomicrography (the photographs are taken using a microscope).

## Macro or Micro?

Technically speaking, macro and micro is not the same thing, but Nikon calls their macro lenses as micro lenses.
Macro lenses are specialised lenses that allow you to focus very close to your subject. Technically speaking, a lens cannot qualify as a macro lens unless it can achieve a magnification of 1:1. But like several things in life, some leeway is tolerated and lenses that achieve a magnification of 1:2 (half life-size) are also considered as a macro lenses. Some zoom lenses have a letter 'M' on them denoting that they are macro lenses. Please note that they are not true macro lenses; they are close-focussing lenses. Macro lenses have magnification ratios displayed on the lens barrel.

Macro lenses, besides offering very high image quality, are convenient to use for close-up/macro work and they can be used for general photography as well. Note that macro lenses are 'flat-field' lenses that provide edge-to-edge sharpness even at high magnifications (you can check out SP, January 2020 for further information on Flat-field lenses).

Macro lenses are available in several focal lengths, like 50/60 mm, 90/100/105 mm, and 200 mm. So which one should you get?
The answer depends on the type of macro work that you do. Keep in mind that the longer the focal length, the longer is the 'working distance' (the distance between the front of the lens and the subject). So, for example, a 50/60 mm macro lens would be perfect for photographing coins, stamps, flowers etc. But if your interest lies in photographing, say, butterflies or dangerous /venomous subjects like scorpions, snakes etc. you would be better off with a longer focal length macro lens. With insects and animals, you need to stay outside their 'fear circle'. If you approach too close, the subject may fly away (a butterfly for example) or the subject may attack you (think of venomous reptiles, scorpions etc.). Since the longer focal length lens has a greater working distance, you can be relatively safer. The longer focal length lens also allows better illumination on the subject without casting its own shadow on the subject. And lastly, a longer focal length macro lens will include less of a disturbing background.

## Use a tripod for maximum sharpness

Remember, a macro lens magnifies the subject. But this means that any loss of sharpness due to hand shake during exposure will also be magnified. For

best results, use of a sturdy tripod is recommended. A tripod also helps to compose better. Of course, there will be situations where you might prefer not to use a tripod – I leave that decision to you.

## When using a macro lens, how do you focus?

Your reply is likely to be, "autofocus of course". While it cannot be taken as a wrong answer, it isn't the ideal.

First set the magnification ratio on the macro lens. Let us assume you've set it to 1:2 (half life-size).

Now, without touching the focus ring, go closer to the subject till it appears sharp. Avoid trying to focus the lens (you have set it for a particular magnification ratio, and if you turn the focus ring in either direction, you will change the magnification factor).

## Macro focussing rail

An accessory that I love is the macro focussing rail. Used with a sturdy tripod, it allows for very accurate focusing. Once the magnification ratio is set on the macro lens, the focussing knob on the rail allows you to move the camera forward/backwards without changing the magnification ratio.

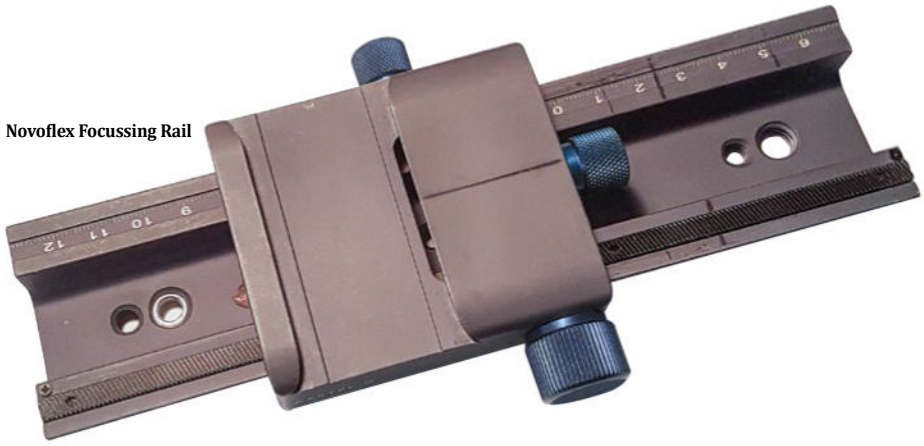
## Another useful accessory: A flashgun

Very often your macro subjects will be found in shade or in very low light conditions. An electronic flash – preferably a TTL flash – will get you out of the tight spot. A flashgun will also help you to use narrow apertures for increased DOF, freeze the subject and provide you with super crisp images. Used correctly, it can also help you to darken changing backgrounds.

## When you shoot 1:1 at f/2.8, why does the camera show f/5.6?

Let's say that you are using a macro lens having a maximum aperture of f/2.8. You set the aperture to f/2.8 and attempt a 1:1 (life-size) reproduction photo. Your camera will indicate that you are shooting at f/5.6. So what's going on?

You must remember that when your reproduction ratio is 1:10 or greater, the amount of light passing through the lens and reaching the imaging sensor, is reduced. This is generally not noticeable until you try to achieve a magnification ratio of around 1:4 or greater. At 1:1, there is a light loss of two f/stops and that is why you camera shows f/5.6 instead of f/2.8.



Novoflex Focussing Rail

## Depth of field in macro photography

For the sake of record (and for newcomers), let me define depth of field (DOF). DOF is the zone of acceptable sharpness in an image. I will not get into the nitty-gritty of how DOF is controlled but suffice to say that out of the total depth of field, (for non-macro photography) one-third is sharp in front of the subject and two-third is sharp behind the subject. This means that if the DOF is say 12 feet (DOF changes with every shot, unless you use the same aperture and also shoot from the same position), it is four feet in front of the subject and eight feet behind the subject.

With macro photography, things change. Whatever be the DOF, with macro photography, it is 50 percent in the front of the subject and 50 percent behind the subject. Also keep in mind that since your lens will be extremely close to your subject, DOF will be very shallow. To give you an idea, if you are shooting at 1:1 magnification ratio, at f/16, the total DOF is 2.14 mm (using any focal length), based on a circle of confusion of 0.03mm.

***Note:*** *Explaining what 'circle of confusion' is, without elaborating on the subject, could cause more confusion than it can solve. Hence, for the sake of simplicity, the explanation is avoided. But you can consider it as one of the standards used in calculating DOF.*

If you are shooting at 1:1 magnification ratio with three macro lenses (50 mm, 100 mm and 200 mm), with identical aperture, which lens will provide greater DOF if all three provide the same magnification on the imaging sensor? The answer that most photographers would give is that the 50 mm lens, being the shortest focal length, will provide greater DOF. That would be totally incorrect.

To achieve the same image size on the camera sensor, the 50 mm lens would be the closest to the subject, while the 200 mm lens would be the farthest. The correct answer, based on a corollary, is that all the three lenses will provide the same DOF.

## Diffraction of light

When light passes through very narrow apertures – like f/16, f/22, f/32 – it causes overall softness in the image. This is due to what is known as 'diffraction' of light.

You are unlikely to notice the softness on small prints but this softness will be visible on large prints (say, larger than 12 x 16 inches). If you are in a situation where you are forced to use a very narrow aperture and are also worried about the effects of diffraction, I suggest you go ahead and use the narrow aperture and ignore the diffraction effect.

## Summing it up

Macro photography opens up a new world for those interested in this genre of photography. What is more, you need not travel to exotic (and expensive) places; macro subjects are found everywhere, even in your own backyard. |**SP**

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# An Essential Tool or Fading Relic?



**Ashok Kandimalla**

**Ashok Kandimalla** has been in the photographic field for over three decades and has extensive experience in both film and digital photography. Being an electronics engineer by profession and a photographer, he possesses a unique and deep insight into the technical aspects of digital photography and equipment. He has published more than a 100 articles on photography and some of his writings have also been published in the well-known international magazine *Popular Photography*. An avid collector of photographic books and vintage cameras, Ashok has a keen interest in the history of photography and a passion for sharing his knowledge on photography through teaching and writing. He is the only Indian photographer to be featured on the Nikon Centenary website. He is presently working as a Management and Engineering consutant. He can be reached at **kashokk@gmail.com.**

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When photographing seascapes, waterfalls, rivers, etc., you may want to smoothen the look of water to get a silky effect (Picture 1). This needs shutter speeds that can extend from a few seconds to several minutes. Even longer shutter speed are used in astro-photography, where exposures can stretch to even hours, making handholding a camera impossible.



**Picture 1:** Here a shutter speed of 10 seconds was used to get the silky look.



**Picture 2:** Landscape photographs like this need to be carefully composed with care taken in determining exposure due to high contrast.

A tripod slows you down and makes your photography more systematic, contemplative and deliberate. If you are a landscape photographer where composition is of utmost importance, you can examine the scene very carefully to check if all the elements are in place, whether any stray elements are interfering with the scene, the level is correct and so on. You can also measure exposure accurately (Picture 2), check the histogram and other tools to previsualize the final result.

The best time for wildlife photography (Picture 3) is often when light levels are low. That, coupled with very long focal length lenses of 500 mm and above - which are usually slower - make handholding very difficult. In addition, these lenses are very heavy and carrying them for hours causes fatigue making steady holding even more difficult resulting in loss of sharpness.



**Picture 3:** A focal length of 700 mm (a 500 mm lens + 1.x X TC) was used here. The setup being heavy will cause fatigue.



**Picture 4:** A focus stacked photo. The two dragons measure about two inches end to end. A stack of 28 images was used to create an end-to-end sharp picture.

Macro photography is another area where the high magnification makes even a minute handshake result in a very blurry picture. At magnifications around 1:1, image stabilization is largely ineffective. In addition, DOF (Depth of Field) is always in short supply when doing close up or macro photography. The same applies to landscape photography when composing with a foreground element and relying on perspective to create depth. Whatever you do with aperture and magnification, which are the two parameters under your control, you will eventually reach a point where physical laws limit DOF. The only way out is focus stacking (Picture 4), which makes tripod support essential since accurate alignment of frames is needed.

Time-Lapse Photography is also an area where several hundreds or even thousands of photographs are taken at fixed intervals over a very long periods (even stretching for several hours) and then combined to form a high-speed movie clip. A tripod is essential for this application.

Millions of photographs of monuments and other architectural masterpieces are published every day. Many of them have poorly aligned geometries (symmetry and accuracy of angles) as they are shot handheld. Use of a tripod will help you align the camera precisely (Picture 5) even if you do not have any special equipment like shift lenses.

Several tests have shown that even when using the standard minimum shutter speed rule of 1/ (focal length), handheld results are typically less sharp than those from a tripod mounted camera.

In general, genres of photography that need sequences of multiple images where even slight movement between frames can ruin an otherwise excellent set, careful composition, precise alignment, etc., all benefit from a sturdy tripod. For photographers who regularly use these techniques, the tripod remains an essential tool. To sum up, a tripod has long been treated as a symbol of serious photography with the three legs symbolizing discipline, patience, and technical rigor. The previous examples show how important its usage is.

That said, the usage of tripods has declined drastically even among serious photographers. What are the reasons? Are the technology and software advances so significant that the photographers are abandoning this once all important tool? Let us look at these factors too.

Tripod was often used as a tool that eliminated handshake. It became indispensable as light levels dropped. This was because, a fine grain film had an ISO in the range of 25 to 64. Most were rated at an ISO of 100 and high-speed film meant an ISO of 800 or very rarely 3200. The advent of digital photography, and the steady improvement in sensors dramatically reduced the light required. It is now possible to photograph at light

levels as low as EV Zero (equivalent to a full-moon lit landscape). Parallel to this, though less recognized, is the development of noise reduction (NR) software packages that greatly reduce noise in images captured in low light while even sharpening them simultaneously. These are becoming incredibly powerful since they are using sophisticated AI algorithms.

The next major factor is the IS (Image Stabilization) that was achieved first by moving lens elements to counteract the camera shake. Later came the IBIS (In-body Image stabilization) which achieves the same effect by moving the sensor. This has the additional advantage that it is no longer lens dependent, and hence works with almost all lenses. Now, we have systems where both work together, helping a photographer to get shutter speeds 6 to 8 stops slower than the thumb rule of one divided by focal length!

For many photographers who are in the 'gun and run' situations (examples are photo journalists, street photographers, etc.) a tripod greatly hinders mobility. It also takes time to set up.

Many professional photographers who use strobes do not have to rely on the ambient light or shutter speed. The strobe provides the main light and the shutter speed is effectively the duration of light pulse which is extremely short.

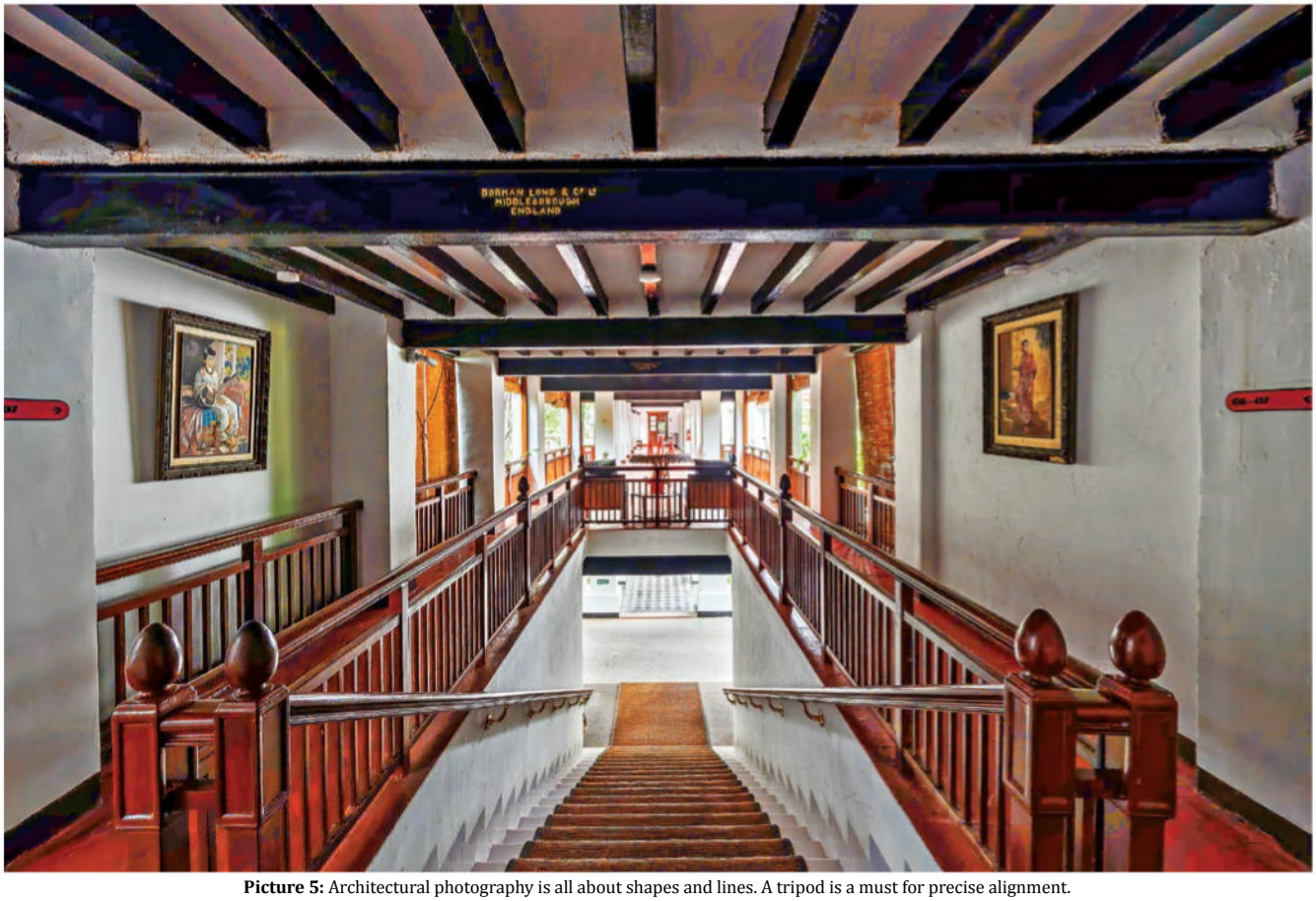
Tripods are also banned in many heritage sites and museums as they occupy space and obstruct movement. Strong winds and loose soil also make use of tripods difficult.

In my opinion, the main reason why photographers avoid tripods is the size and weight. If that is what is holding you back then consider a foldable travel tripod made from carbon fibre as these offer the best combination of vibration absorption, weight, and portability, though at a price.

Here is some advice from me. A good tripod lasts a lifetime. Unlike your cameras or lenses there is very little in a tripod that can get outdated. If you are serious about photography invest in a good tripod once and for all. Buying low-cost tripods will often force you to invest multiple times. Remember the old adage "Buy smart and buy once or go cheap and buy twice".

So, to conclude, is the tripod still essential? Or has technology finally made it obsolete? The answer is 'it depends'. It is still a very useful tool and I recommend using one when conditions permit. Its role may have diminished but has not been eliminated as my personal experience shows.

Certain image captures demand the use of one, as explained. Personally, when I have the time and want to get the sharpest possible image, best composition, and precise alignment especially in architectural photography, I definitely rely on my three-legged friend.|**SP**



**Picture 5:** Architectural photography is all about shapes and lines. A tripod is a must for precise alignment.

All text, diagrams, and images © Ashok Kandimalla.

# The Secret Behind Perfect Exposures

Rohinton Mehta

This write-up is designed for newcomers and intermediate users. We have, in the past, done similar write-ups but, since human memory is short and since there are always newcomers to photography, what's mentioned here will be of help to one and all.

A newbie photographer has a lot on his mind – he has to worry about AF modes, AF-area modes, Release modes, what ISO to set, what aperture to use, what shutter speed to set and some more. This write-up, done with simplicity in mind, will 'talk' only about 'exposure'.

So, to start with, what is exposure? It is the right dosage (quantity) of light that gives you an image that has the correct tones. If the tones are too dark, you say that the image is under-exposed and if they are too light, then you say it is over-exposed.

All modern cameras – whether a simple Point & Shoot, Bridge camera, D-SLR or Mirrorless – have what is called an 'exposure meter'. Sometimes, this is also mentioned as 'light meter' or simply, as a 'meter'. The purpose of the meter is to guide you while setting an 'exposure'. An exposure is a combination of the ISO (sensitivity of the imaging sensor), aperture and shutter speed.

There are, usually, three types of exposure meters built into our cameras (some Canon cameras have four). They are (a) Evaluative (b) Centre-weighted (c) Spot. Evaluative metering is known by different names by different camera manufacturers, e.g. Matrix metering, Segmented metering, Multi-segmented metering etc.

- **What type of metering should you use?**
  My suggestion is that you use whatever type you are comfortable with. However, it's good to know how the different meters work.
  **Evaluative metering** divides the frame into several segments. The computer within the camera 'reads' the contrast and brightness amongst the various segments, then compares this information to an in-built databank of several thousands of exposures and selects the one that closely matches the contrast and brightness of the scene before you. *Camera manufacturers generally suggest the use of Evaluative metering, especially for beginners.*

  **Centre-weighted metering** places greater emphasis on the centre of the frame. This means that, though the entire frame is metered, the central area is given more weightage. With some cameras, the user can have a choice to set the diameter of the weighted area from the ones which are available.

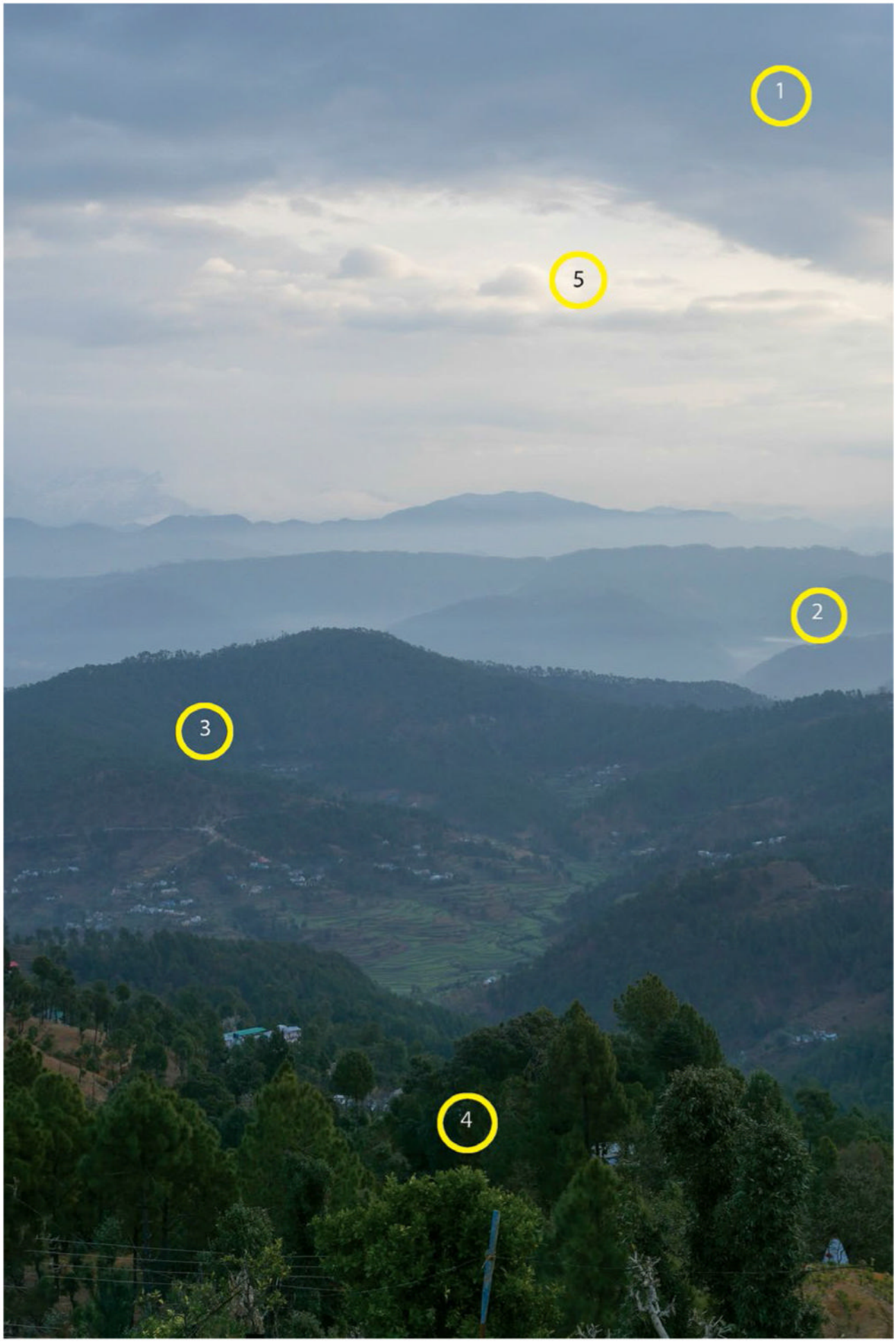
  **Spot metering** reads a small area of the screen (usually about 2-5 percent) of the total area. It does not read the rest of the frame. With modern cameras, the user can move the 'spot' within the frame. Spot metering, we are told, is best suited for intermediate or advanced users, but as you'll see later on, it's not that difficult to use.
  *Note: Do not confuse the in-built spot metering with the 1° spot meters which are available as a separate unit. A 1° spot meter reads only 1° whereas, the spot meter within the camera reads 2-5 percent of the frame area.*

- **Some more on how exposure meters work**
  The in-built exposure meter measures the light reflected back from the subject. Hence, it is also referred to as a 'reflected light meter' (as opposed to the Incident light meter that measures the amount of light falling on the subject).

  Ideally, I repeat, ideally, we should measure only one reflectivity. But, let's take a practical example. In a landscape scene, different elements within our frame have different reflectivity. When we point our camera to the scene, the meter reads the multitude of different reflectivities and averages them. Most of the time, this works well, but, if there is a predominance of a very bright or very dark area, the result is less than perfect.

  *Note: Exposure meters are designed to turn whatever you point them at, to a mid-tone. If you point it to a very dark shade of blue for example, the result will be 'mid-blue' (not too dark, nor too light). If you point it to light yellow for example, the result will be 'mid-yellow' (not too dark, nor too light). If you point the meter to black, the result will be 'mid-black' (middle grey); if you point the meter to white, the result will be 'mid-white' (middle grey). And so on.*

- **Why is it suggested that spot metering is best left to intermediate or advanced users?**
  The in-built spot meter, as mentioned earlier, reads about 2-5 percent of the frame area (which represents a very small area of the frame). As long as you meter off a mid-tone area of the frame, all is good. But what if you meter off an area that is not mid-tone? Well, if you know how much 'exposure compensation' to apply and in what direction (minus or plus compensation), you are okay. The problem is, most beginners do not know exactly how much exposure compensation to apply and in what direction. So here are some guidelines when using spot metering:




Rohinton Mehta

| Subject | Compensation |
|---|---|
| Mid-tone | Nil |
| Black | -2 stops |
| Dark (but not black) | -1 stop |
| White | + 2 stops |
| Light (but not white) | +1 stop |

*(You can also use exposure compensation during Evaluative or Centre-weighted metering).*

When you look at colours, try to visualise them in shades of mid-tones. For example, dark blue is not a mid-tone (it is darker than a mid-tone); light blue is also not a mid-tone (it is lighter than a mid-tone). So what is a mid-tone blue? Mid-tone blue is blue that is neither too dark, nor too light. It sits in the middle. The same goes for all other colours.

- **How can a beginner be sure that he/she is pointing the spot meter to a mid-tone?**
Once you start taking pictures and start to analyse the results, you'll know. In the beginning, your judgement may not be perfect but, with practise, you'll know a mid-tone when you see one. Believe me!
(Please see photo on page 65)

If you take a spot meter reading from *spots marked 1 and 2*, you can use the indicated exposure since those areas are mid-tone.

*Spot number 3* appears to be slightly darker than mid-tone. You could try -0.5 stop compensation.

*Spot number 4* covers an area that is much darker than mid-tone (but it's not black). You could try -1.5 stop exposure compensation.

*Spot number 5* covers an area that is much brighter than mid-tone. I would try +1 stop or even +1.3 stops exposure compensation.

So you can see that spot metering is not as difficult as it is often made out to be. Your judgement in deciding the metered tone could be wrong sometime, but with practise you'll soon overcome all related issues.

- **OK. But what 'exposure mode' should you use?**
Let's talk of the most basic four exposure modes: Program (P), Aperture Priority (A, but for Canon users Av), Shutter Priority (S, but Tv for Canon users) and Manual (M). (We will not discuss 'scene modes').

Instead of discussing all the four modes (and thereby getting into unnecessary arguments with some people), I'll explain my favourite exposure mode and why I use it.

Please set the ISO first. For a majority of shooting, that would be ISO 100.

My favourite exposure mode is Aperture Priority. In Aperture Priority mode, you opt for the aperture of your choice. You may like to use a narrow aperture like f/11 or f/16 for increased depth of field, or you may use a wider aperture like f/4 or f/2.8 for a diffused background. Alternately, you may use the 'optimum aperture' of your lens, for example, when doing 'focus stacking'. Once you have set your aperture, when you half-press the shutter release button, the camera will automatically select the corresponding shutter speed and *that shutter speed will be shown in the viewfinder*.

If I feel that the automatically selected shutter speed is too low (which may cause subject movement or camera movement during exposure), I can either 'open up' the aperture (from f/16 to f/11 for example) or increase the ISO (from 100 to 200). So, for example, if at my selected aperture of f/16, I get a shutter speed of say 1/500 sec, but I need 1/1000 sec shutter speed, I could go from f/16 to f/11, or, stay at f/16 and increase the ISO from 100 to 200. Simple!

## A note, especially to beginners

I have often noticed that beginners use only the Program mode. There is nothing wrong in using this mode – your exposures will be fine most of the time – but the Program mode has its limitations – it uses the algorithms (set of instructions) designed and set by the engineer who designs the metering system. As such, you may not be able to use the aperture of your choice (unless your camera also has a Flexible Program (P*) mode and you know how to use it!)

Another observation is that most beginners, when they use the Aperture Priority mode, they stick to whatever aperture is set when they pick up the camera. This is because they have not fully understood how apertures work and how they allow us control over the zone of acceptable sharpness (depth of field) in our pictures. Hence, it is imperative that you learn your basics well.

In closing, remember that photography is something to enjoy, something that is supposed to release the tension of daily life. If that does not happen with your photography, you are doing something wrong! |SP

## CONCLUSION

1. Use whichever metering mode you prefer (but you'll know for sure only after you have a good amount of practise).
2. Check the image on the LCD. If you feel that the image is overexposed (too bright), use negative exposure compensation and re-take the shot. If the image is underexposed (too dark), use plus compensation and re-take the shot.
3. To keep things simple, I have not discussed histogram and its usage; similarly, I have not discussed the overexposure warning (the 'blinkies').



# A Guide to Flower Photography

Flowers bring a sense of freshness into our lives. Here are a few tips, which, when followed, can improve your flower photography.

**Rohinton Mehta**

It makes sense to photograph flowers early in the mornings or late in the evenings when the light is not harsh. Harsh light makes the shadows go too deep (devoid of detail) and highlights to overexpose.

For the best image quality, try to photograph flowers at the base ISO (generally ISO 100). As you increase ISO, you lose dynamic range. A dedicated macro lens can yield better image quality and is convenient to use. (This does not mean that you cannot use other methods, like the use of close-up filters, extension tubes etc.) Consider using a sturdy tripod, especially, if the light is inadequate. A tripod will also allow you to use narrow apertures like f/11 or f/16 without using flash or increasing the ISO sensitivity. Keep in mind that there will be occasions when the use of a tripod will be cumbersome.

Wait for the breeze to die down before you release the shutter. In your excitement of the shot, don't jab at the shutter release button; gently squeeze it down. Shoot in Raw. You could set your White Balance to Auto, though personally, I set my WB to Daylight. In Adobe Camera Raw (ACR), you can always change the WB to the one you prefer.

Know where to focus and remember that the depth of field will be very shallow. Some photographers like a part of the flower sharp, leaving the rest blurred; some others like to have the entire flower sharp. If you are not sure which method you prefer, shoot both ways.

Do keep in mind that even at a narrow aperture like f/16, the depth of field at 1:1 magnification (life size) can be in the region of around 3 mm!

If you can, avoid using very narrow apertures like f/16, f/22 and f/32. The narrower the aperture, the greater is the DoF, but when using such apertures, the optical phenomenon known as 'diffraction of light' will cause the entire image to go 'soft'. You may not notice the softness if your picture size is reasonably small, but, you'll be able



Simi Jois, DCP Expeditions



Hardik Patel, DCP Expeditions



Balamahesh P, DCP Expeditions



to notice the softness on larger prints. Look for flowers that have not been eaten by insects or wilted due to age/heat. Sometimes, you may find stinging insects like bees on the flowers or hovering around them. No need to panic; do your work without making any sudden jerky movements. If you have a medical condition where a bee-sting could be life-threatening, it may be safer for you to avoid taking such photos.

Very often, water sprayed on a flower can make the flower appear fresh. What if you don't have a choice and must photograph flowers in harsh sunlight? It is a good idea to carry a foldable 'diffuser'. Hold the diffuser between the flower and the sun and you'll immediately see that the light on the flowers has softened. Bringing the diffuser closer to the flowers will soften the contrast; increasing the distance between the flowers and the diffuser will make the contrast comparatively stronger.

It is also a good idea to carry a portable 'reflector'. When angled correctly, you will be able to reflect some of the light back into the shadow regions and thereby, reduce the strong contrast of a harsh sun.

Should you autofocus or focus manually? The choice is yours. I initially autofocus and then override the AF to fine-tune on that part of the flower which I want the sharpest.

Do consider 'focus stacking' if there is no breeze or you are photographing the flower in a studio. If your camera does not allow automatic focus stacking, you can do so manually. Of course, using a sturdy tripod is a must. Using the optimum aperture on your lens, carefully focus manually on the closest part of the flower and take a shot. For the next shot, focus a bit further (may be a few millimetres), but keep your shooting parameters the same. Continue doing so till your focus reaches the other end of the flower.

Now, transfer all your images to your computer and either use Photoshop or use dedicated software like Helicon Focus or Zerene Stacker to create a sharp end-to-end flower study.

Consider carrying a lightweight portable backdrop for those occasions where you find the background disturbing. The backdrop could be a coloured paper or one that is painted, for example, with soft pastel colours and may be with out of focus clouds. You can ask a friend to hold the backdrop behind the flower/s and at an appropriate distance. |SP

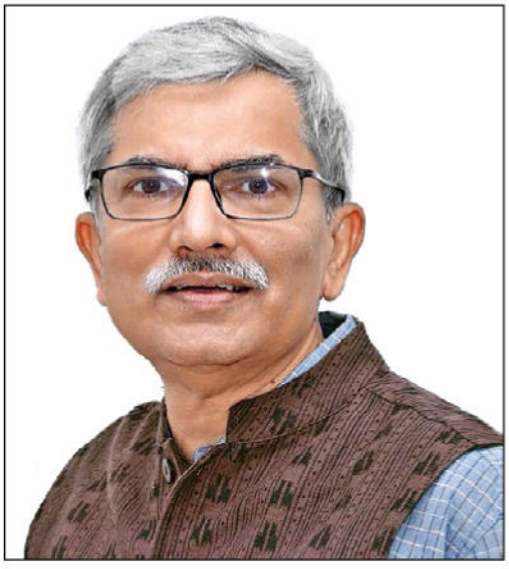
Rohinton Mehta





Rohinton Mehta

# PRINTING AND BEYOND



**Vimal Parmar**
An independent marketing consultant and digital print evangelist with over 40 years of experience in the imaging industry.
@vimalparmar

# When Stories Find Their Form in Print

***This issue celebrates the intimacy of zines and the sensory experience of print, as Hrishikesh Rao's Transhumance brings together photography, sketches, and text in a quietly powerful narrative.***

***Dear Readers,***

*The response to our April issue, featuring my interview with Ina Hilker, was both encouraging and insightful. Many of you shared how much you valued the deeper understanding of photographic printing. How materials, processes, and technologies shape the final image. It reinforced an important idea: a photograph truly comes alive in its printed form.*

*That thought carries naturally into my feature this month.*

*In this month's issue, I once again turn my attention to a form of visual storytelling that is intimate, tactile, and deeply personal. The zine.*

*At a time when images are consumed endlessly on screens, there remains something profoundly engaging about holding a story in one's hands. The act of turning pages, feeling textures, and lingering over images creates a connection that is both sensory and reflective. Print, in this sense, is not merely an output, it is an experience.*



Hrishikesh Rao

*In my feature this month, I present the work of Hrishikesh Rao, whose zine Transhumance explores the quiet, cyclical migration of Himalayan communities. What makes his approach compelling is not just the subject, but the way he chooses to tell it, through a seamless interplay of photographs, sketches, and prose. The result is a layered narrative that invites pause, observation, and reflection.*

*This feature also serves as a gentle reminder to photographers and visual storytellers: your work does not always have to live on a screen. Sometimes, the most meaningful way to share your vision is through something that can be held, revisited, and experienced slowly.*

*As always, I hope this issue inspires you to explore new forms, experiment with your storytelling, and perhaps even take that first step towards creating something in print.*

***Happy Printing,***
***Vimal Parmar***

# Transhumance : In Search of Stories That Move

*In an era dominated by digital imagery, Hrishikesh Rao turns to the tactile intimacy of print to explore migration, memory, and belonging using a unique blend of photography, sketches, and prose to craft a deeply personal visual narrative.*




Cover and back cover

**HRISHIKESH RAO**

**Mumbai**

**@light_a_pixel**

## Returning to Myself Through Zines

I run a boutique brand design and creative studio, shaped by years of working with brands across cultures. That work is structured, strategic, and often driven by objectives beyond me. But my zines, those are deeply personal. They are where I return to my creative instincts.

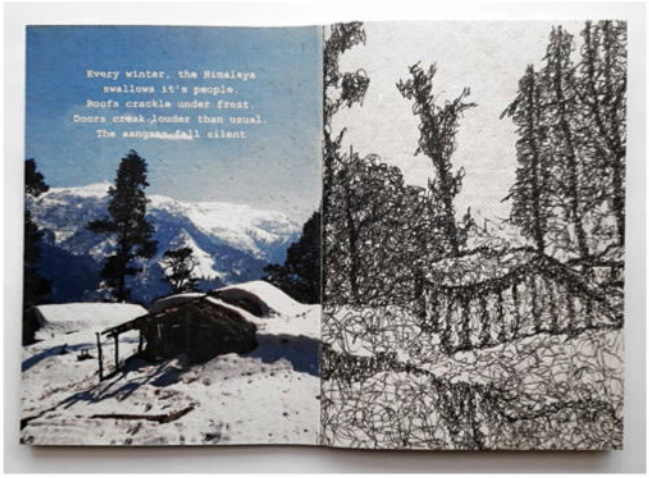
A zine gives me the freedom to create without instruction. A space where writing, sketching, and photography coexist effortlessly. There are no rules, no formats, only expression that is raw, immediate, and honest.

Over time, I have realised that this freedom is not just liberating; it is essential. It reconnects me with why I began creating. This instinctive approach has grown into a body of work that continues to evolve in form and voice. My zines have been featured at platforms such as the Bombay Zine Fest and exhibited at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art. These include I Am (2023), a collaborative poetry book with Ankit Singh; I Know Someone Who Knows Someone Who Knows Someone… (2024), a collection of micro-stories with sketches; and From the Beyond (2024), a folkloric archive created with Varsha Shanbhag. More recent works such as The Smudge and Virasat-e-Zeher (2025) continue to push narrative boundaries.

## The Idea Behind Transhumance

Transhumance was born out of a quiet fascination that stayed with me after multiple treks in the Himalayas. I encountered villages buried under layers of snow. Places that once held life, now temporarily abandoned.

The idea of people migrating seasonally, leaving their homes behind and returning months later, felt both alien and poetic. As urban dwellers, we are rooted in permanence. The thought of moving every few months, carrying one's life




Inside pages

along with cattle and community, is almost unimaginable. And yet, there is a rhythm to it. A quiet acceptance. A poetry. This project became my way of exploring that rhythm.

## A Tri-Medium Narrative

I did not want to tell this story through photographs alone. Instead, I approached Transhumance as a tri-medium exploration bringing together images, sketches, and prose-poetry. Each medium complements the other. Sometimes a sketch completes what a photograph cannot express. Sometimes words fill in the emotional gaps.

The result is not a linear narrative but a layered one. It is meant to feel like an archive. Almost like fragments of memory gathered from spaces that exist between presence and absence. The Himalayas, in this context, are not just a backdrop. They are a silent participant.

## The Physicality of Print

In an increasingly digital world, choosing print is a deliberate act. Print engages you differently. It slows you down. It asks you to touch, to feel, to pause. The texture of paper, the weight of the book, even its smell. These are sensory experiences that digital screens cannot replicate. For me, print is not just a medium; it is an extension of the story itself. When someone holds Transhumance, I want them to linger. To run their fingers along the paper. To experience the work not just visually, but physically. That immersion is crucial to how the story unfolds.

## The Making: Chaos as Process

My process is anything but structured. Sometimes I begin with a lingering photograph, sometimes a sketch, or even a line of text. Each medium informing the other.

I sketch directly with a pen. No erasing. It keeps me present, accepting imperfections and moving instinctively. That edge brings a certain thrill. Transhumance took shape as an A5-sized zine (148 × 210 mm), with an initial print run of 75 copies. Small in number, yet thoughtfully produced. Creative blocks are inevitable, but once I move past them, the work flows intuitively. Though the project took about a month to complete, it had been forming in my mind much longer.

## Choosing What Stays

Selecting images for the zine was not about technical perfection but narrative alignment. I chose photographs that felt integral to the story I was building. Not to stand alone, but to contribute to a larger emotional arc. If I were to revisit the project, I might include more images to deepen that arc. Yet, there is an honesty in its restraint. The sparseness allows the story to breathe. Sometimes, what is left out is just as important as what is included.

## The Experience of Holding the Work

There is a moment every creator knows. The first time you hold your work in your hands. For me, it was indescribable. There is a sense of fulfilment, yes. But more than that, there is a release. A lightness. It feels as though something that was within you has finally found its way out into the world. That moment makes everything worthwhile.

## Audience, Reception, and Reflection

The response to Transhumance has been encouraging. Readers have connected with its format, the way photography, sketches, and text overlap rather than exist in isolation. That interplay seems to resonate.

The zine has been featured at the Bombay Zine Fest and is available at independent spaces like Fluxus in Bandra and JoJo Library in Dadar, both in Mumbai, something I find deeply satisfying. But beyond reception, what matters most are the questions it raises: what makes a house a home? People, space, memory, or something more transient?

## What This Project Taught Me

Every project changes you in some way. Transhumance has made me more persistent in my search for stories. It has reminded me to look beyond the obvious. To seek narratives that may not be immediately visible but are deeply felt. It has also reinforced my belief in interdisciplinary storytelling. Photography does not have to exist in isolation. It can, and perhaps should, engage with other forms of expression.

## Advice to Creators: Just Begin

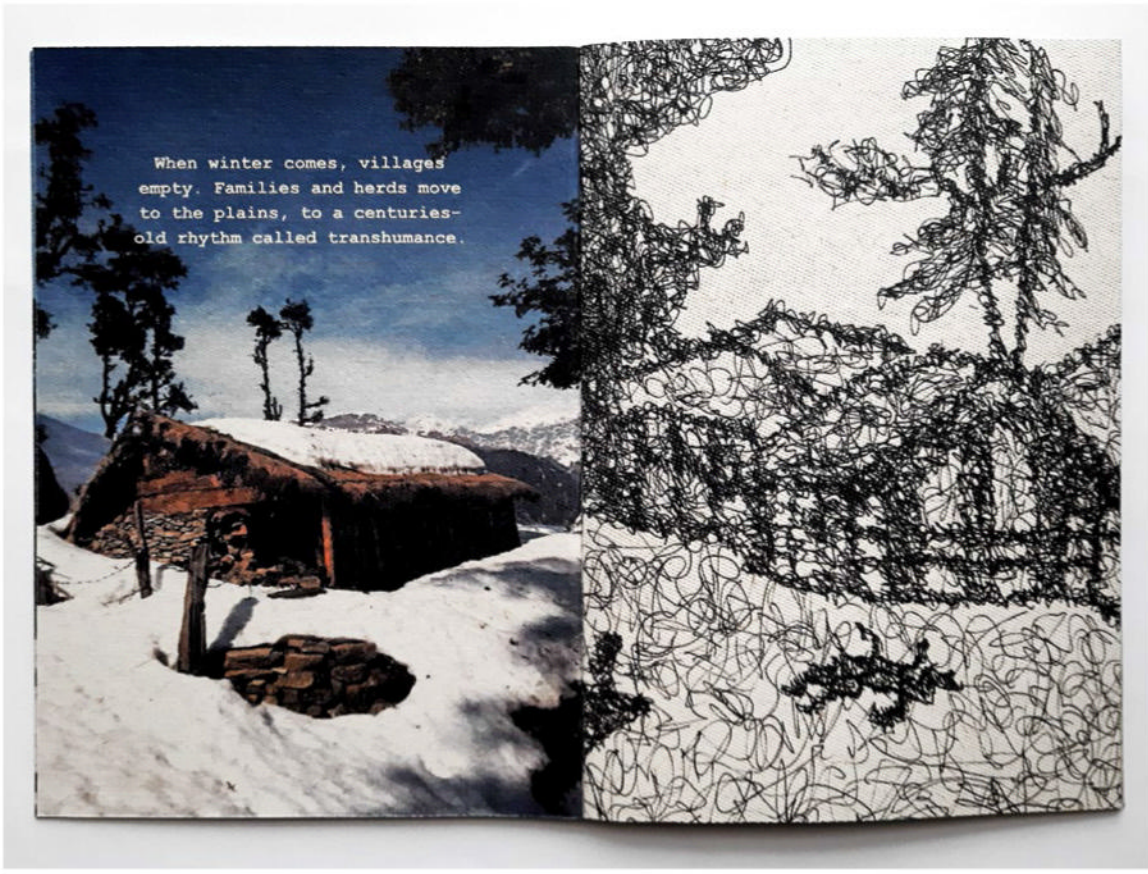
If there is one thing I would say to anyone considering a zine or photobook, it is this: just start. Do not wait for validation. Do not overthink the outcome. The very act of creating and printing your work will change you. Once you bring something into the physical world, there is no going back. It shifts your relationship with your own creativity.

And if you are on the fence about printing, take that as a sign. It means you care. It means something is waiting to be expressed. So go ahead. Do it for yourself.

## Why I Create

At its core, photography for me is about stilling time. It is about taking a fleeting moment and making it yours. About telling your version of that moment. Your story.

I often think of a line by Art Wolfe: “I always remember the shots I didn’t get… it gives me a reason to return and try again.” And perhaps that is what keeps me going. The pursuit of moments not yet captured, stories not yet told. Because in the end, I am driven by curiosity. And as Lovelle Drachman said, “Blessed are the curious, for they shall have adventures.”|**SP**




**Inside pages**





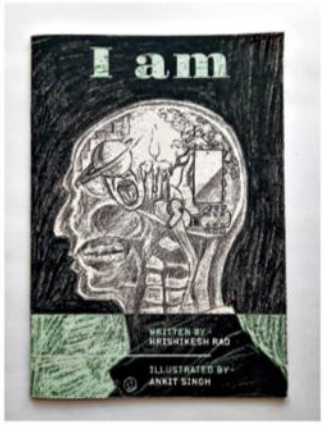


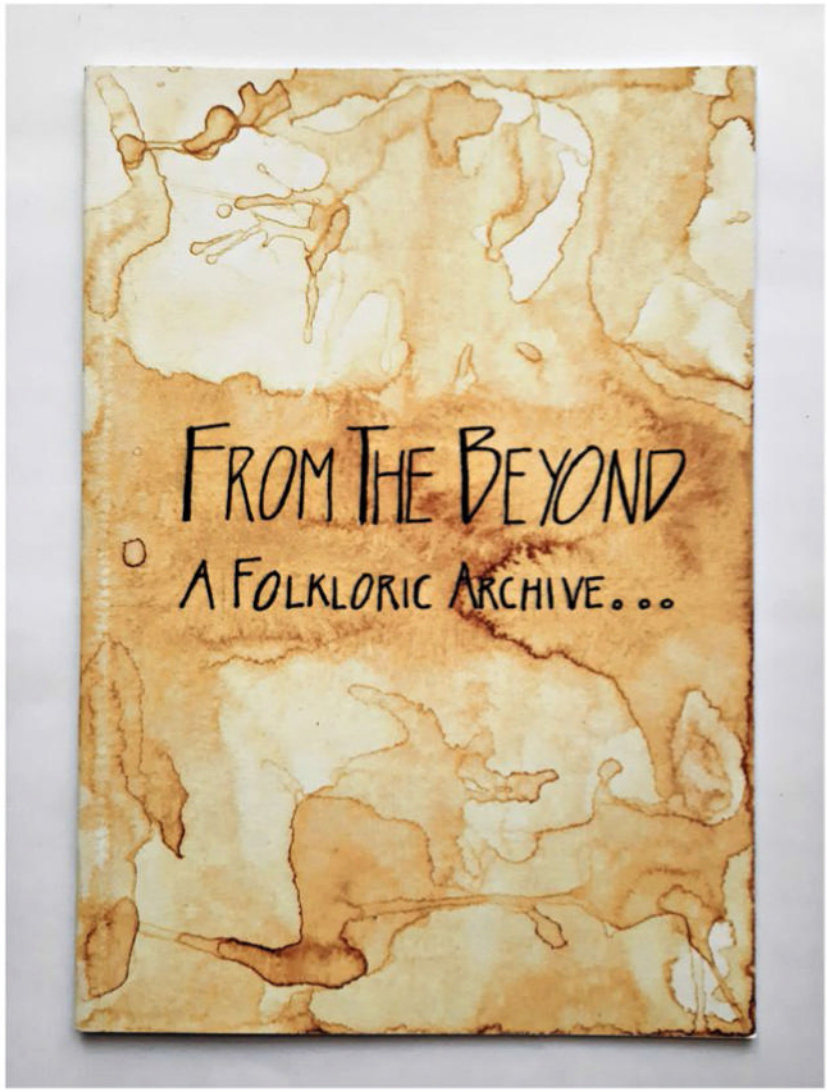


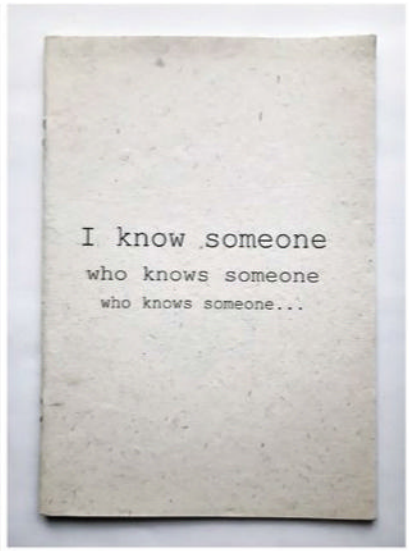
**Inside pages**









**A selection of zines created by Hrishikesh over the years**

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# REVIEWS

## FINAL RATING

The final ratings given in the reviews are not an indication of the performance or features of the reviewed device in isolation. It is a combination of all parameters including the price of the product.




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Camera Review

**Sony Alpha 7 MK V**

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Lens Review

**Sigma 135mm F1.4 DG Art**






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Smartphone Review

**Samsung Galaxy S26 Ultra**




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Smartphone Review

**Nothing 4a Pro**

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# Getting better and better!




### In the Box

- ✓ Camera body
- ✓ Body cap
- ✓ Battery NP-FZ100
- ✓ Accessory shoe cap
- ✓ Eyepiece cup

**Hoshang Billimoria**

The 7 Series from Sony hit paydirt from day one and is largely responsible for the company's domination in the mirrorless camera market. It all started with the Alpha 7 which was launched in October 2013. The Alpha 7 Mk 2 followed in 2014. The Mk 3 came in 2018 and was followed by the Mk 4 in 2021. A new model was overdue and Sony obliged with the Sony Alpha Mk 5 in December 2025. Unlike other brands, the entire range of the 7 series ( bar the Alpha 7) is still available and indeed selling very well.

The Sony Alpha 7 Mk 5 (or V) has been awaited with bated breath and the SP team was excited to review it.

## Design & Build Quality

Mk V of Sony's famous Alpha 7 Series continues to be a full frame camera with an emphasis on being hybrid i.e. videocentric. The camera design is similar to its predecessors. Sony has used lightweight, high rigidity magnesium alloy for the top cover, internal frame and rear cover. The front cover and grip are manufactured as a single unit and the mount is secured by six screws for extra strength. The body is dust and moisture resistant. Further, effective heat dissipation built into the camera allows 4K 60p video for up to 90 minutes. Camera dimensions are 130.3 x 96.4 x 72.3 mm and the body weighs 695g with battery and memory card. The rechargeable battery NP-FZ 100 is good for up to 750 shots.

## Key Features

Every new model in the 7 series has represented a generational uplift and the Mark 5 is no exception.

The 7 Mk 5 features a new 33 MP partially stacked sensor and a new BIONZ XR2 processor that integrates AI. This enables blackout free 30 fps shooting, improved subject recognition and superior 4K video. Autofocus is achieved by advanced AI powered Real Time Tracking for humans, birds, animals and insects using 759 phase detection points. The camera can shoot 4K 60p with a slight crop and 4K 120p with a 1.5 X crop. 5 axis in body stabilisation ( IBIS) can go up to 7.5 stops. The OLED EVF has a resolution of 3.68 M dots. A 4 axis multi angle touch screen, dual slots for CF Express Type A and SD cards, dual USB-C ports are some of the other features. ISO ranges from 100- 51200 ( expandable to 50- 204800) and with the electronic shutter, one can shoot still images from 1/16000 to 30 sec.

## A 7 Mk IV v A7 Mk V

What are the major differences between the Sony A 7Mk IV v Mk V?

1. Both have 33 MP full frame sensors. But the Mk V is partially stacked.
2. Read out speeds of the Mk V sensor are faster thus reducing rolling shutter distortion.
3. The Mk V offers an improved dynamic range of 16 EV.
4. The Mk V has a new BIONZ XR2 processor featuring an integrated AI unit providing improved AF. Maximum shooting speed is up from 10 fps to 30 fps and includes pre capture.
5. In the Mk V, human subject recognition extends to eye, face, head and body and includes vehicles. There is also a subject recognition mode.
6. Shooting speeds up from 10 fps to 30 fps using electronic shutter. This speed is maintained for 185 JPEGS
7. The Mark V in body stabilisation is up to 7.5 EV from 5.5 EV.
8. Battery life of the Mark V is higher at 750 shots from 580.
9. Video recording lasts longer in high heat (40 degrees Celsius) at 60 minutes versus 10 minutes on the Mk IV.
10. The Mk V offers 4K video recording

**Mahesh Reddy**

**Camera:** Sony Alpha 7 MK V
**Lens:** FE 24-105mm F4 G OSS
**Aperture:** f/7.1
**Shutter Speed:** 1/1600 sec
**Focal Length:** 68.0 mm
**ISO:** 2500





**Camera:** Sony Alpha 7 MK V
**Lens:** FE 24-105mm F4 G OSS
**Aperture:** f/4.0
**Shutter Speed:** 1/4000 sec
**Focal Length:** 56.0 mm
**ISO:** 2000

Mahesh Reddy

with virtually no crop.

11. Auto white balancing accuracy on the Mk V is better.
12. On the Mk V, 4K video recording is also available at 120fps but with 1.5 X crop.
13. The 3.2 inch LCD touchscreen is now dual axis.
14. The grip has been redesigned on the Mk V for better handling.
15. The Mk V has two USB – C ports.
16. All these new features have made the A 7 V an improved camera, particularly on the video side.
17. The Mk V has a claimed dynamic range of up to 16 stops in stills which is a substantial improvement on the Mk IV.

## Ergonomics

The A 7 V features a new grip that makes the camera easier to handle and balance. The 4 axis vari -angle is a step up on the Mark IV version. Other positive features include the high resolution EVF and the upgraded ports. For Sony users, the control layout and buttons are familiar leading to improved handling. The camera also gives you the option of uploading your own LUTs according to your choice. The A 7 V does not have a fan but the graphite heatsink built into the camera helps to control heat when shooting at high temperatures.

## Performance

Sony has further improved autofocus in the A 7 V. Autofocus is very fast, precise and hooks onto the subject with lightning accuracy. No complaints with metering either. Pictures were properly exposed and colour rendition was accurate. Sharpness was excellent. Auto white balance accuracy was also impressive. Pictures had very good dynamic range even in poor light.

On the video front, the A 7 V has less extensive options than some of the competition. There is no 6K or 8K. Also, no Open Gate video. However, 4K video at 60 fps was top class. At 120 fps however, there is some cropping.

Overall, the Sony is a top class performer and a prospective buyer is unlikely to be disappointed.

## Value for Money

The A 7 Mk V retails at 2799 Pounds along with the revised FE 28–70mm F 3.5 / 5.6 OSS lens. The Indian price is Rs 255990 for the body and Rs 270490 for the body along with the revised 28–70 mm lens. This section of the market is severely competitive and competition comes in the form of the Canon EOS R 6 MK III, the Nikon Z 6 Mk III and the Panasonic Lumix S1 II. Unless one is locked into a particular system, there is very little to choose between the four. Price may well play a deciding role. |SP

## VERDICT

**The Mk V is a significant step up over the Mk IV. The Mk V has better autofocus, improved features and better video performance. Yes, it is a great buy.**

## FINAL SCORE



**Design and Build Quality**
★★★★☆

**Key Features**
★★★★½

**Ergonomics**
★★★★☆

**Performance**
★★★★½

**Value for Money**
★★★★☆

**Overall**
★★★★½

## PLUS

- Better autofocus
- Faster readout and writing times
- Blackout free 30 fps shooting
- Super results
- Good battery life

## MINUS

- Some video features of competition are missing
- CF Express Type A cards are both expensive and hard to find
- Expensive
- No Open Gate shooting
- No 6K or 8K

## KEY SPECIFICATIONS

**Lens mount:** E-mount
**Sensor type:** 35mm full frame, Exmor RS CMOS
**No. of pixels:** 35.7 million
**Memory card slots:** Slot 1: SD, CFexpress 2 Type A., Slot 2: SD
**Focus type:** Fast Hybrid AF (Phase/Contrast detection AF)
**Metering type:** 1200-zone Evaluative
**ISO sensitivity:** Stills: ISO 100-51,200, expandable, Auto (ISO 100-12800), Movies: ISO 100-51200 equivalent, Auto (ISO 100-12800)
**Recording system (movie):** Kindly check Sony's website for details
**Viewfinder:** EVF, 3,686,400 dots
**Battery:** 1xNP-FZ100, rechargeable
**Weight:** Approx. 695g including battery, memory card

**In the Box**

- ✓ Lens
- ✓ Front lens cap (LCF-154 IV)
- ✓ Rear lens cap (LCR III)
- ✓ Lens hood (LH 112601)




**Sigma 135mm F1.4 DG Art** **₹1,77,920/-**

# Razor Sharp!

**Rohinton Mehta**

Sigma is a very well respected lens manufacturer. They control a good portion of the lens market worldwide. Sigma claim that its 135mm F/1.4 DG Art is the world's first 135mm autofocus lens to achieve a maximum aperture of F/1.4. The lens is available in Sony E-mount and Leica L-mount. Let's see how this beauty performs on our testbench…

## Design & Build Quality

The Sigma 135mm F/1.4 DG Art is a profession build quality 'handsome' lens with a beautiful all-black finish. While the lens itself is approximately 137mm in length, its massive lens hood adds another 67mm to make the total length to approx. 204mm.

The lens is made in Aizu, Japan. Filter diameter is 105mm and the lens weighs 1420g (Sony E mount) and 1430g (Leica L mount). The lens collar is detachable and offers a Arca-Swiss compatible foot.

## Key Features

The lens is constructed with17 elements in 13 groups, that includes 4 x FLD ('F Low Dispersion) and 2 x aspherical lens elements. The FLD elements are specially designed to offer the performance equal to that of fluorite glass, while the optical design along with the 13-blade diaphragm offers natural-looking bokeh. Sigma's Super Multi-layer Coating ensures sharp, flare & ghost free images even under the most demanding lighting.

Aperture markings on the lens are from f/1.4 to f/16 in 1/3rd stops. A 'Click' button on the side allows you to turn the aperture ring silently or in click-stops. An Aperture Ring Lock slider on the right side of the lens (not named) allows you to turn the aperture ring to the 'A' (Auto Aperture) position and lock it if required. The lens also offers 2 customisable Function Buttons (for horizontal and vertical shooting) which can be assigned various camera functions via the camera menu. An AF/MF sliding switch can be found at the left of the lens.

Both rings on the lens (the Aperture ring and the Manual Focus ring) offer excellent grip. The manual focus ring is very well damped.

## Ergonomics

Except for its weight, overall, the lens is a pleasure to use. On the Sony A7 V, the lens feels forward heavy. This is no longer an issue when using the lens on a tripod. The detachable lens collar with the Arca-Swiss compatible design makes it quick and easy to mount and dismount the lens. I applaud Sigma for offering the lens collar with the Arca-Swiss compatible design.

## Performance

The Sigma 135mm f/1.4 DG Art lens (Sony E-mount) was reviewed on a Sony A7 V body. All in-body auto-corrections were enabled.

Exceptional 'bokeh'— much better than that with the Sigma F-mount 135mm f/1.8 Art that I own and use with an adaptor on a compatible full frame Nikon body). The pleasing bokeh, isolates and highlights the subjects giving a 3D experience. Do keep in mind that at wider apertures the depth of field can be very shallow; so, don't mistake that for loss of sharpness!

Flare and ghosting, as also longitudinal chromatic aberrations, often found in large aperture lenses, were very well corrected.

Images were sharp even when the lens was used wide open at f/1.4. At f/1.4 and

**Camera:** Sony ILCE-7M5
**Lens:** Sigma 135mm F1.4 DG Art
**Aperture:** f/1.4
**Shutter Speed:** 1/320 sec.
**Focal Length:** 135.0 mm
**ISO:** 100



Rohinton Mehta



**Camera:** Sony ILCE-7M5
**Lens:** Sigma 135mm F1.4 DG Art
**Aperture:** f/1.4
**Shutter Speed:** 1/640 sec.
**Focal Length:** 135.0 mm
**ISO:** 100

Rohinton Mehta

f/2, I found it difficult to notice any loss of visible sharpness at the sides/edges. I take it that most users will feel the same as I did. By f/2.8, I was 100% sure that the center as well as sides/corners were equally sharp. One of the sharpest lenses that I have ever reviewed. Take a bow, Sigma!

## Value for Money

The Sigma 135mm F1.4 DG Art is available at an MRP of Rs.1,77,920 (was earlier Rs.193,400). Superb build quality, excellent overall performance and the use of large diameter front lens elements, (which are obviously difficult and expensive to manufacture), are the reasons for this price. Even then, the price is in line with similar lenses from the competition. |SP

## VERDICT

**I believe most buyers of the Sigma 135mm f/1.4 DG Art would be portrait and wedding photographers. I also believe that this lens would be a boon for indoor sports, street photography, candid, pets and to some extent, large flower photography. The lens is exceptionally sharp, even when used at wide open aperture of f/1.4. The build quality is excellent, and if you can put up with its weight, it would be difficult to find another such a gem. Best Buy!**

## FINAL SCORE



**Design and Build Quality** ★★★★½

**Key Features** ★★★★½

**Ergonomics** ★★★★☆

**Performance** ★★★★★

**Value for Money** ★★★★☆

**Overall** ★★★★½

## KEY SPECIFICATIONS

**Edition No.:** A025
**Mount:** Available in Sony E-mount and Leica L-mount
**Format:** Full frame (DG)
**Lens construction:** 17 elements in 13 groups, includes 4 FLD, & 2 aspherical elements.
**Angle of view:** 18.2°
**Diaphragm blades:** 13, rounded
**Aperture range:** F/1.4-16
**M. F. D. :** 110cm (43.4-inches)
**Max magnification:** 1:6.9
**Filter dia.:** 105mm
**Dia x Length:** 111.7 (D) x 137.5mm, (Sony mount), 111.7 (D) x 135.5mm (L-mount)
**Weight:** 1420g (Sony mount), 1430g (Leica L-mount)

## PLUS

- Very fast and accurate autofocus
- Excellent 'bokeh'
- 2/3 stop faster than f/1.8 lenses
- Lens collar mount is Arca Swiss type design
- Excellent Image quality
- Built like a battle tank
- Good weather sealing

## MINUS

- Heavy
- Forward heavy on the body
- 105mm diameter filters expensive and not easily available
- No IBIS (but compatible bodies have IBIS)
- Not compatible with teleconverters

**Samsung Galaxy S26 Ultra** ₹1,39,999 onwards (www.samsung.com/in)

# Ultra refinement. Peak Pro Galaxy.




**In the Box**

- ✓ Device with S Pen
- ✓ USB-C Data cable
- ✓ SIM Ejector Tool and guides




**Srini Swaminathan**

We reviewed the newly launched Samsung Galaxy S26 Ultra - a flagship smartphone that has been recently launched in the Indian market. The unit we tested is the Cobalt Violet 5G 12GB RAM/256 GB Storage variant. Samsung has continued its long-standing Ultra strategy: combine extremely high resolution hardware with computational photography and AI-driven processing. The device builds on the familiar Ultra formula but pushes imaging further with a brighter primary lens, improved telephoto optics, and deeper software tools for photographers and videographers.

## Unboxing & Design

Samsung has stayed close to the design language of previous Ultra models but improved ergonomics subtly. The corners are more rounded and the weight distribution is noticeably balanced, making the large phone easier to handle during extended shooting sessions.

The device houses a 6.9-inch Dynamic AMOLED QHD+ display with 3120 × 1440 resolution and a 120Hz adaptive refresh rate, with peak brightness reaching about 2600 nits, making it excellent for reviewing images outdoors.

The aluminium frame and slim 7.9mm chassis help maintain a premium feel despite the large camera module.

The display also introduces Samsung's Privacy Display, which reduces side-angle visibility for on-the-go editing or reviewing images in public environments.

## Camera

The camera system is the centerpiece of the Galaxy S26 Ultra, built around a versatile quad-camera setup consisting of a 200MP wide camera (f/1.4), 50MP ultra-wide, 50MP telephoto with 5× optical zoom, and a 10MP 3× telephoto, along with a 12MP front camera. The brighter f/1.4 aperture on the primary sensor allows more light to reach the sensor, improving low-light capture. Samsung complements the hardware with its ProVisual Engine, which processes high-resolution image data in real time to enhance texture, contrast, and overall detail. The phone also retains 100× AI-assisted Space Zoom, combining optical and computational techniques for long-distance photography but in practical use, the large zoom images appear heavily processed like a painting.

In good lighting conditions, the S26 Ultra produces images with strong resolution, wide dynamic range, and

**Srini Swaminathan**

**Camera:** Samsung Galaxy S26 Ultra
**Aperture:** f/1.4
**Shutter Speed:** 1.0 sec
**Focal Length:** 6.5 mm
**ISO:** 64



**Srini Swaminathan**



**Camera:** Samsung Galaxy S26 Ultra
**Aperture:** f/1.4
**Shutter Speed:** 1.0 sec
**Focal Length:** 6.5 mm
**ISO:** 64



Srini Swaminathan

vivid colours. The high-resolution 200MP sensor allows substantial cropping while still retaining usable detail, making it particularly useful for subjects such as architecture, wildlife, and landscapes. Exposure is generally accurate and white balance remains stable even under mixed lighting. However, Samsung's computational processing can sometimes be aggressive, occasionally smoothing fine textures or making high-contrast scenes appear slightly over-processed.

The brighter optics also improve low-light photography, with the wider f/1.4 aperture capturing significantly more light and Samsung's Nightography processing helping reduce noise while maintaining colour. While night photos appear brighter and clearer than before, heavy noise reduction can sometimes soften fine detail, particularly in darker areas of the frame. If you have moving subjects in low light, the images may not turn out crisp or sharp.

## Performance, Software & Battery Life

Powering the phone is the Snapdragon 8 Elite Gen 5 for Galaxy, paired with 12GB or 16GB RAM and storage options up to 1TB.




**Camera:** Samsung Galaxy S26 Ultra
**Aperture:** f/1.4
**Shutter Speed:** 0.9 sec
**Focal Length:** 6.5 mm
**ISO:** 250

The chipset handles high-resolution image processing and video editing with ease, making the S26 Ultra capable of functioning as a serious mobile content creation device.

Battery capacity remains 5000 mAh, delivering a full day of mixed photography and video use, while 60W fast charging helps quickly restore power between shoots. |SP

## VERDICT

**The Galaxy S26 Ultra is a powerful imaging tool disguised as a smartphone. Rather than chasing experimental hardware changes, Samsung has focused on refining what already works, namely brighter optics, stronger AI processing, and a versatile zoom system. For photographers who want flexibility and convenience in a single device, the S26 Ultra remains one of the most capable camera phones available.**

## FINAL SCORE




**Design and Build Quality**
★★★★★

**Key Features**
★★★★½

**Ergonomics**
★★★★½

**Performance**
★★★★☆

**Value for Money**
★★★★☆

**Overall**
★★★★½

## PLUS

- **Excellent 200MP primary camera with high detail retention**
- **Versatile dual-telephoto zoom system**
- **Powerful software tools like Expert RAW and Pro**

## MINUS

- **Image processing can appear slightly over-aggressive**
- **Extreme zoom relies heavily on AI reconstruction**
- **Low light or night photography is not the strongest**

## KEY SPECIFICATIONS

**Processor:** Snapdragon 8 Elite Gen 5 for Galaxy
**RAM:** 12GB / 16GB
**Storage:** 256GB / 512GB / 1TB
**Battery:** 5000 mAh
**Rear Camera System:** 200MP wide (f/1.4), 50MP ultra-wide (f/1.9), 50MP telephoto (5× optical zoom), 10MP telephoto (3× optical zoom)
**Front Camera:** 12MP
**Cover Display:** 6.9-inch Dynamic AMOLED 2X, 3120 × 1440 resolution, 120Hz refresh rate
**Durability:** IP68 rating

**Nothing 4a Pro** ₹39,999/- onwards (nothing.tech)

# Second phone. First choice.

## In the Box

- ✓ Device
- ✓ USB-C to USB-C cable
- ✓ Protective case (clear/transparent case)
- ✓ SIM tray ejector tool
- ✓ Safety information, quick start guide, warranty card



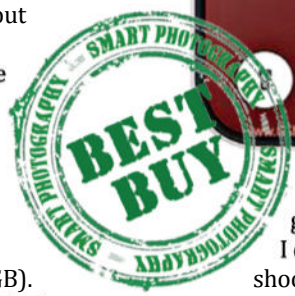




**Paromita Deb Areng**

The Nothing Phone (4a) Pro makes a strong case, whether you're buying it for someone else, or finally ready to switch.

Most people shopping for a sub ₹40,000 fall into one of two camps. You're already on a flagship and need a second phone, for your partner, parent, teenager, or yourself, and you don't want to hand them something that feels like a step down. Or you want the closest thing to a flagship experience without paying flagship prices, and you're willing to switch.The Nothing Phone (4a) Pro speaks to both.




## Form and Function

This phone does not look like a ₹39,999 purchase (startingvariant 8GB+128GB). The aluminium body is solid. The semi-transparent camera module gives it a design identity nothing else at this price has. Hand this to someone who uses your ₹1 lakh phone daily and they won't feel the compromise in their hand. It comes in three colours: Black, Silver, and Pink.

The screen is large, sharp, and readable outdoors. The Glyph Matrix, a grid of LEDs on the back, handles notifications, displays the time face-down, and doubles as a self-timer for solo shots. It sounds gimmicky. I used it more than I expected to. If you're a creator shooting with the back camera, it also helps you align yourself within the frame without flipping the phone around.

NothingOS is clean, fast, and completely free of bloat. Most Android phones at this price come pre-loaded with apps you didn't ask for, notifications nudging you to sign up for things you don't need, and settings that take ten minutes to find. This doesn't. You pick it up, open what you want, and use it. For anyone handing this to a family member who isn't particularly tech-savvy, that matters more than any spec on the sheet.

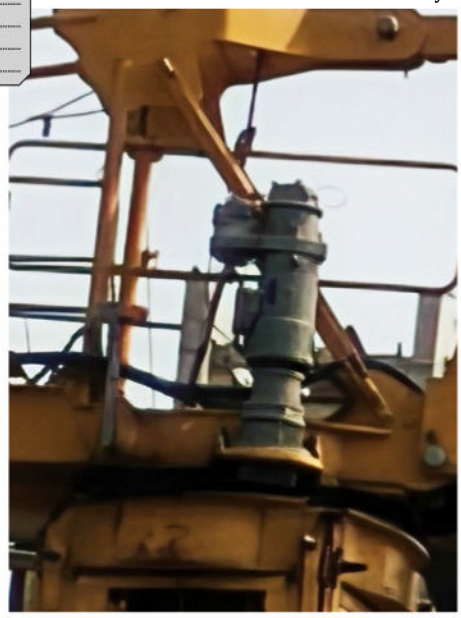
## Camera

The main camera handles daylight well. Skin tones are accurate, detail is sharp, and the Ultra XDR feature, developed with Google, manages high-contrast lighting better than most phones in this range. Window light, harsh afternoon sun, it holds up without blowing out highlights or killing shadows. Low light is solid on the main camera. The 3.5x optical zoom is genuinely usable for portraits and detail shots.

The 8MP ultrawide is the weak link. Noticeably softer. Video maxes out at 4K30fps, fine for social content, not ideal for anything requiring slow-motion.

**Camera:** Nothing Phone (4a) Pro
**Aperture:** f/2.9
**Shutter Speed:** 1/350 sec
**Focal Length:** 12.2 mm
**ISO:** 50

Girish Mallya



**Camera:** Nothing Phone (4a) Pro
**Aperture:** f/1.9
**Shutter Speed:** 1/2682 sec
**Focal Length:** 5.6 mm
**ISO:** 50

Girish Mallya



**Camera:** Nothing Phone (4a) Pro
**Aperture:** f/1.9
**Shutter Speed:** 1/640 sec
**Focal Length:** 5.6 mm
**ISO:** 50

Girish Mallya

The built-in LUTs and colour presets are worth understanding. A LUT is essentially a colour preset you apply before you shoot, like setting a mood for your entire shoot in advance instead of editing every photo after. You decide the look once, and every shot you take carries it consistently. It's a feature that Android phones in this range rarely offer, and it's genuinely useful for anyone trying to build a consistent visual style without spending time in editing apps after every shoot.

## The eSIM Question

The India variant has no eSIM. This is a deliberate pricing decision by Nothing, it's part of how they've kept this at ₹39,999 when the UK variant costs more and includes eSIM. Fair trade-off for the price. But if you're buying this as a travel phone, that's the one usecase where it stings. The ability to pop in a local eSIM abroad without hunting for a physical SIM card at the airport is the whole point of a travel phone.

For every other second-phone scenario, home phone, family member's daily driver, backup device, a physical SIM is perfectly fine.

## Conclusion

If you're a flagship user buying a second phone, the (4a) Pro is the best answer at this price. The build won't embarrass you next to your more expensive main device. The software is clean enough to hand to anyone. The camera handles daily use well.

If you're looking to switch and want flagship-adjacent quality at a mid-range price — this delivers where it counts. You'll notice the ultrawide limitation eventually. You won't notice it on most days.

At ₹39,999, this is one of the few phones in this range that doesn't ask you to pretend you didn't compromise. For most people, with this one, you genuinely haven't. |SP

## FINAL SCORE




**Design and Build Quality**
★★★★★

**Key Features**
★★★★½

**Ergonomics**
★★★★½

**Performance**
★★★★☆

**Value for Money**
★★★★★

**Overall**
★★★★½

## PLUS

- **Build quality holds up next to a flagship**
- **Cleanest software in this price range**
- **3.5x optical zoom is genuinely reliable**
- **Ultra XDR handles tricky lighting well**
- **3 colour options: Black, Silver, Pink**

## MINUS

- **No eSIM — real limitation for travel use**
- **8MP ultrawide is not strong**
- **Video capped at 4K30fps**

## KEY SPECIFICATIONS

**Display:** 6.83-inch AMOLED, 1260x2800 resolution (440 ppi), 144Hz adaptive refresh, HDR10+, up to 5000 nits peak brightness

**Main Camera:** 50MP Sony sensor, f/1.9 aperture, 1/1.56" size, dual-pixel PDAF, OIS + EIS

**Telephoto Camera:** 50MP periscope, f/2.9, 3.5x optical zoom, OIS, PDAF, up to 140x hybrid zoom

**Ultra-wide Camera:** 8MP sensor, f/2.2 aperture, 120° field of view

**Processor:** Qualcomm Snapdragon 7 Gen 4 (4nm), octa-core up to 2.8 GHz

**Memory & Storage:** 8/12GB LPDDR5X RAM + 128/256GB UFS 3.1 storage

**Battery & Charging:** 5080 mAh battery with 50W wired fast charging

**Build & Durability:** Aluminum unibody frame and back, 8mm thick, 210g, IP65 dust/water resistance, Gorilla Glass 7i




# DID YOU KNOW?

**Hoshang Billimoria**

The Smart Photography Awards announced last month broke new ground in that for the first time ever, an award had been picked up by a Chinese manufacturer, Viltrox. Is this the beginning of many more to come?

Chinese lens manufacturers are largely concentrated in Schenzen. The supply chain developed by them in the last few years is enviable. Listed below are the main manufacturers.

1. Viltrox
2. Meike
3. 7 Artisans
4. TT Artisan
5. Laowa
6. Youngnuo
7. AstriHori
8. Mitakon Zhongyi

**Viltrox** is currently the most active manufacturer in the international market. The company operates through country distributors rather than on its own. Established in 2009, Viltrox has moved from manual focus lenses to autofocus, all of them with steel mounts. The quality of Viltrox lenses today is very good and the price around 40% lower than Japanese competition. This makes them an attractive purchase. Whether they retain their value in the second hand market, remains to be seen.




**Meike** is owned by Hong Kong Meike Digital Technology Co Ltd. It started as a accessory manufacturer before moving into lens production. Meike make some quality lenses for mirrorless cameras as well as cine.

**7 Artisans** was founded in 2015 by a group of seven camera enthusiasts. The company suffered a split in 2019.

**TT Artisan** was formed by a co-founder of 7 Artisans. Both 7 Artisan and TT Artisan manufacture manual focus lenses and a few autofocus ones.

**Laowa,** owned by Venus Optics and headquartered in Hong Kong, has been innovative in its approach and has offered unusual lenses in the market like the 24 mm F 14 2 X Macro Probe lens.

**Youngnuo,** based in Schenzen, was an early starter but has now lost its lead to others. Youngnuo focuses on manual focus lenses and accessories. Youngnuo's 50 mm F 1.4 and F 1.8 lenses have been particularly popular in Asia.

**AstriHori** was founded in 2018 and is noted for its 18 mm F 8 full frame wide angle shift lens. The company also makes lenses for Fuji's medium format cameras. The company also made a Speedmaster 90 mm F 1.5 for Canon RF although it is not clear whether they still make it.

**Mitakon** sell their lenses both under the Meike brand as well as the Zhongyi brand. The company specializes in fast prime lenses with large maximum apertures. It is a leading third party lens manufacturer.

All the Chinese manufacturers make lenses for Sony's E mount. Nikon's Z mount and Panasonic's L mount are also popular as is Fuji's X mount and the MFT mount.

Cynics are skeptical about the consistent quality and service for Chinese brands. However, the Chinese are rapid learners. Wait a minute, we understand more Chinese brands are waiting in the wings!|SP

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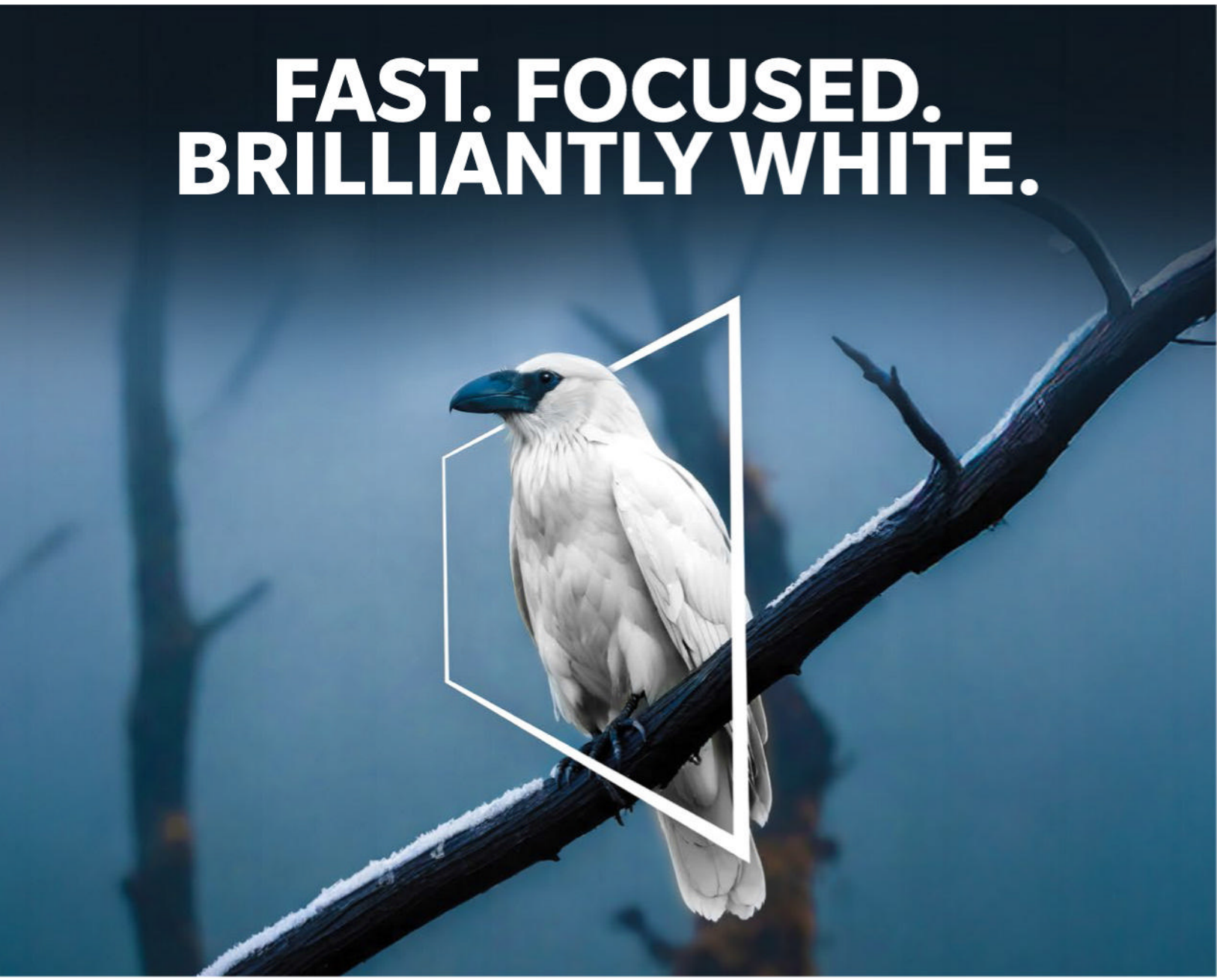
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