

photokina 2002

Gary L. Friedman crossed the pond to report for us from photokina – his first visit to the biennial photo show, arriving with no prior expectations, and briefed to avoid covering all the ground the press releases would fill in...

I will forgo the big announcements – the Canon EOS 1DS, the Olympus/Kodak 4/3 proposed digital camera standard, and others – you can read about these just about anywhere. Instead I will concentrate on bringing you the interesting and innovative products that the other headlines will likely miss.

Or I'll talk about interesting yet unimportant things, like how Canon and Nikon tried to out-do each other in terms of buying floor space, yet both were dwarfed by Fujifilm and Kodak displays...

The Unusual

Let's start with the unusual. Spheron VR AG claims to be the first full-spherical digital camera in the world. That is, just like a 360° camera will translate a cylindrical section in to a 2-dimensional rectangle, a spherical camera will render an entire sphere on to a rectangle, including the sky and the tripod the camera's sitting on. Useful for building virtual reality environments, and converting directly to QuicktimeVR, this can save loads of time shooting and stitching an environment together by hand. It is essentially a 360° camera with a fisheye lens, and software to remove the tripod artifacts on the bottom and "heal" the sky on the top.

What is probably the most notable achievement in this product is the sensor (which Spheron developed in-house). It has a latitude of 26 stops! They showed an impressive image of two helicopters inside their hangar, and all the shadow detail in the cockpit and the outside highlights through the window had all detail intact. Now imagine what this would mean to "normal" photography once this technology trickles down.

Don't worry about exposing for shadows and developing for highlights; just shoot for the average of the scene (and you can even be off by half a dozen stops), and have the computer compress the image for you after the fact. Or, go to your computer and play with Zone



The Dom at night (all photographs by Gary Friedman on Minolta Dimage 7i, except Hasselblad on next page). A view of the main halls, and above, Metal Photo for 20,000 year archival print life. Is she worth it...?

System placement interactively as an afterthought! This obscure product points the way to the future, and you saw it here first. The camera, sans lens, sells for a mere £11,688...

You say the 200-year life of your archival acid-free B&W prints is too short? Meet The Metal Photo from Woo Youn Master of Science Co., Ltd, Korea. They own a process where a B&W image is screened and then permanently engraved into a sheet of metal. They claim this print method will last 20,000 years (1,000 years if outdoors). The samples they provided looked pretty decent, like a high-quality newspaper photo that had been bronzed. Steel or copper mediums translate roughly to cold tone black or warm sepia in the final product – ideal for gravestones, not continuous tone fine art prints. An 11 x 14 "enlargement" will run to £230. www.koreamemo.com

If you do studio work and are looking for an in-camera way to do projected backdrops, the Scene Machine by Virtual Backdrops is worth a look. Adding to the standard half-silvered beam splitter and projector in front of the camera is a special highly-directional reflective screen from 3M. At £1,900 for a basic setup, it's not the cheapest but it is one of the more effective front-screen processes I've seen, and still keeping going despite the competition from digital backdrops. You can of course use it with film or digital cameras. www.Virtualbackgrounds.net

The Loreo Lens-in-a-cap series is exactly what its name implies – a variety of 35mm body caps which have 1-element instamatic-type 35mm lenses embedded within. It turns any SLR with aperture priority into a point-and-shoot with an f5.6 to f64 range. At f64 the hyperfocal distance covers 50 cm to infinity. It's also available as a shift-lens (pictured) with a 3-element 35mm f11 to f22 lens, with about 3.5mm shift in any direction. Image quality was decent, but for the £8.27 price (£11.45 for the PC-Shift version) who cares? It fits Nikon, Canon, Olympus, and M-



screw-mounts. If that's not unusual enough for you, they also make body caps with lenses that can take stereo pictures (two images on a split frame, non-interlaced). www.loreo.com

Hidden eye

More on the unusual front: fans of street photography who don't like to get beaten up by their subjects would be interested in Pretec Electronics Corp's new **Pen Cam** which really does look like a pen (it even writes!). The pen top contains a very tiny lens which feeds a 1.3MP sensor, and the pen can store 500 images before they have to be downloaded via a serial link. There is even a "surveillance" mode where the camera snaps a picture whenever anything passes in front of it. The back of the pen contains the shutter release and a tiny 2-digit LCD display.

The unit is so new that no sample images were available at the booth, nor was anyone there able to demonstrate to me how it works. The biggest disappointment for me was the fact that you must be holding the pen (and preferably looking through the tiny hole/viewfinder at the top) in order to take a picture; I wouldn't mind modifying one so it can be fired by remote control (while my hand is in my jacket pocket, for example). Or even better, take all the guts and hide it in a hat to better ensure proper framing when shooting blind. Lots of possibilities here. The expected price will be £76. www.pretec.com

'Blad with a pop-up flash

It's a dual introduction, really. Hasselblad introduced their new H-1, which is a 645 format with autofocus and motorized film advance. At the same time, Kodak announced their new 16 Megapixel DCS Pro Back 645H digital camera back

Above left: lots of tricks were used by companies to lure the mostly male attendees into their booths. In this case a painted model was posing by a medium-format vendor's booth. Above right: one-of-a-kind 3-D cameras, such as this stereo Canon T90, were on display by RBT ("Raumbildtechnik") stereo enthusiast's club.



Above: the digital Pen Cam, for spies. Below: the Loreo lens in a cap, in various flavours, turns an SLR into a snapshot or pinhole equivalent.



The Hasselblad H1 was the only real 'film star' of photokina, and Fuji will no doubt feel the same for their Japanese-market-only version. We must thank Hasselblad for their invitation to attend the full launch of the new system, but to do so would have meant missing several other Press Day launches as they held this in a private location some miles from photokina. That 35mm really has a Distagon look to it...

which was designed specifically to communicate with this camera (but will be able to work with others). You can probably imagine how great the output looks.

I had an in-depth discussion with Lave Tenne, the camera's primary designer, and he gave me some interesting insights into the camera's five-year development. You'll notice an absence of the words "Carl Zeiss" from any of the H1's marketing brochures. That's because Uncle Carl was too busy to accommodate Hasselblad's request to design new lenses, and so Fuji got the contract. Lave was incredibly impressed with the diligence of the Japanese designers, and says the Fujinon lenses even have an edge over the older Zeiss optics for the stringent digital needs.

Other components were outsourced as well: Minolta did the autofocus and the bright focusing screen; the in-lens shutter was outsourced to an anonymous company in Sweden, and the display/user interface was done by Sony Ericson's cell phone team, which is why it has the familiar feel of a cell phone. The H-1 and the Kodak digital back also talk to each other; allowing you to view the image's histogram on the camera's low-power LCD display rather than on the power-hungry color TFT display on the digital back.

Lave admitted he was very nervous about the product's introduction until the official unveiling on Tuesday, when the crowd of journalists politely applauded the camera's introduction. Then he knew he had done the job right. Like many camera brands, Hassie has an almost religious following, and changing something so drastically (in addition to making very little of it backwards compatible with exiting equipment) was a very large risk.

The unit feels and handles like a large 35mm AF SLR, not unlike the Mamiya, Pentax, and Contax

pioneers in this field. The big difference is the user interface and better integration with the digital back. And, of course, the pop-up flash! The retail price has not yet been set; a reference price for a complete set (lens, magazine, view-finder) would be between £3,500 and £4,200, available by November 2002. www.hasselblad.com

Innovation in rollfilm

If you think that all "new" features of medium-format cameras are just things the 35mm consumer world pioneered 15 years earlier, think again! The Horseman X-Act-D is a view camera which offers a sliding back plate that switches between ground glass and the film or digital back at the push of a button. And since the slide can be under computer control (specifically their ISS-G2 control unit) a skilled photographer could actually use this and a digital back as a horizontal shift lens, taking multiple images a few degrees apart, forming one long rectangular image, and then stitching the image together later in a computer. Although it is designed to accommodate a myriad digital backs, there's no reason a plain old film back can't be used if you're looking for more convenience. www.komamura.co.jp/e/

3-minute wonders

Now for the "I handled the camera for three minutes" Department.

Canon EOS 1DS – it's big, heavy, handles like an EOS 1D and costs £3,800 (though we heard £5,000 later on). It is also 11 megapixels and digital. Enough said.

Rolleiflex 6008 AF (with the 80mm Xenotar f2.8 – one of three AF lenses available for it now). I was woefully disappointed by the AF's, umm, "lack of grace". Compared to other MF brands that



Spandex-clad dancers were a common theme throughout the Olympus booth. Right: Another common trick to lure attendees into a booth. Will they stop at nothing?



The Horseman sliding digital back holder on a 5 x 4 system. Sliding backs are not new, but this one can be controlled by computer, servo operated, and even stepped across the image field to provide a stitch-together panoramic image. It also works with film...



Above: crowds at the Voigtlander booth. Left: a trained dog on a radio-controlled scooter was a real crowd pleaser outside of the convention hall. It was not obvious why he was there or who the sponsor was.



have successfully incorporated AF into their platforms (Mamiya, Contax, Pentax), this had the feel of a tank motor driving the AF, in small uncertain bursts which not only took a long time but made a lot of noise in the process. An experienced user might not gain anything by going to this model; on the other hand I believe it's the only 6 x 6 format that now offers AF.

Rollei's latest foray into the digital realm, the 5 megapixel d530, is almost as disappointing. At least the AF is as quiet as it is slow, and the motorized zoom feature slows you down and consumes more batteries to boot. Not a responsive tool; but then again, I am told it was shown at Focus in Britain in February, and that it is not exactly visible in the marketplace. www.rollei.de

Sigma SD9 – "the last of the pre-production cameras". They've been saying that for a while! This is the first digital camera to use the Foveon X3 chip, which works differently from all other image sensors. Don't expect to fall in love with the build quality, but the camera is well designed and has a very simple and intuitive user interface despite being digital. Removing the Sigma-mount lens reveals an unexpected but welcome glass plate for sealing the mirror, shutter, and sensor against dust and moisture.

The shutter is not as well-damped as some higher-end 35mm bodies, and there's no PC sync connector, but the autofocus is decent and quiet, and the camera is very responsive. A bargain at £1,130.

But I didn't bring up the best part about this camera – the image quality is phenomenal! 26 x 40" enlargements adorning the Foveon booth looked like medium-format Cibachromes!

Foveon folks were quick to point out (as I'm sure they were doing all

week) that their 3 MP chip cannot be compared to other 3 MP chips of conventional design. And although they were very tight-lipped about future products and partners, they did seem to indicate that their next projects all deal with smaller chip sizes and higher densities. This, along with the Olympus/Kodak 4/3 announcement (read on for more details on this) and the realization that the small digitals are by far outselling the retrofitted 35mm SLRs, leads me to believe that the future of digital will be more like the DiMAGE 7i or Coolpix 5700 in terms of form factor and backwards-compatibility with 35mm SLRs. www.sigmaphoto.com

Leica R9, which continues to look and handle exactly like its predecessors. With the exception of high-speed sync flash capabilities, there is little *major* improvement over the R8, but it is a more refined camera. Some of the smaller improvements include:

- 1/10th of a stop control for Shutter Priority and Program mode
- 2nd display on the back which shows ASA and some control functions.

- Magnesium top plate with a special coating that resists corrosion.
- Easier-to-read exposure counter

- "Level Correction" – essentially exposure compensation for multi-pattern metering mode.
- Rear-curtain flash sync

Leica also introduced 3 new lenses: a 15mm f2.8, 21-35mm f3.4-4, and a new 90mm f2. www.leica-camera.com

Bessa R2 – Cosina Voigtlander is taking dead aim at the introductory level M mount market, the same market which Leica has ignored for close to a half a century. The R2 is a much improved Bessa R, an all-mechanical camera with Leica M mount instead of screw mount, metal exterior body, trigger winder capability, +/- LED metering, ratcheted film advance, and much improved body covering and scratch-resistant splatter paint finish as compared to the "R". Closest comparison would be with a Leica CL with an exceptionally bright viewfinder (brighter than an M6).

It actually went on sale in Japan on April 1st 2002, and the UK not long after, so this isn't exactly "new" to *Freelance* readers (already fully tested) but it was to me, they don't have the same impact in the USA. And it does carry some features that have not appeared in other cameras in years – it has a bottom-operated "trigger winder", for example, which a skilled photographer could use to shoot up to



The lens trial areas – secured chained and locked, alarmed and surveilled – are very popular at photokina. Leica and Canon both have theatre-style set ups. Agfa's entire hall, above, was very dramatic in design.

3 fps by winding manually. It also comes in an olive green version, last seen on the Leica R3 Safari. Word has it that this camera doesn't suffer from the long list of compatibility problems that similar machines (such as the Konica RF and the Minolta CLE) suffered from. A new compact 7-element 50/2.5 Color Skopar lens was introduced with the Bessa R2. The 50/2.5 will be available in black or silver. www.voigtlaender.de

Old Friends

I also ran across companies that were like old friends from whom I have not heard in a long time. **Praktica** is still around (or at least their name is, which is gracing at least 50 different varieties of point-and-shoots), and **Alpa** is still kicking, concentrating on niche-market roll-film cameras and introducing two new shift and slide versions of the Alpa 12. www.alpa.ch

Then there's **Zenit**, the Russian camera maker. Think of your stereotype Soviet-era consumer goods, and you have a good feel for what Zenit used to produce. Zenit now has a lineup of five amazingly similar camera bodies and six lenses, and although the cosmetics of the cameras have been brought up to date, the all-mechanical guts

are still the same as my 1980s era model (which in turn were the same as anyone else's 1940s era model!). 1/500 top shutter speed, flash sync at 1/30; and a new feature: the shutter release button now stops down the lens automatically before taking the picture...

Their native market prices are astoundingly low – £33 gets you their high-end body (with TTL "+0 -" LED metering) and a 50mm f2 lens, which makes this the perfect introductory camera for the beginner with no aspirations for upgrading. However, you can watch the price triple itself as the camera makes its way across Europe. www.zenit-foto.ru

Fotospeed was there as well (giving their regards to this magazine's editorial staff), offering their historic/alternative photo papers and chemicals. Each chemistry kit comes with instructions on how to light-sensitize your own papers, plus software and large blank transparency so you can create your 1:1 contact negative using an inkjet printer. www.fotospeed.com.

Unexpected surprises

In the "Why didn't I think of that?" department, an embarrassingly simple yet effective method of removing dust specs from just about anything (without blowing

or vacuuming) is the **Kinetronics SpeckGRABBER**. It is merely a flexible stick tipped with a very malleable rubber piece on the end – it easily picks up dust pieces the same way your finger does, but without contaminating the surface with oils or other nasty stuff. Probably a lifesaver for removing particulates from CCDs, the product sells for a mere £1.87. www.kinetronics.europe.de

A company called **DPS Promatic** makes a low-res camera with a built-in GSM phone module – it can accept SMS messages as a command ("Take a picture"), and upload the picture to a specified location, all wirelessly. www.dpspro.com

The **Steady Stick** is a low-tech camera stabilizing system that doesn't employ gyros (okay, it's a stick, but very well-designed and will do a very decent job for not-that-much money). £276; available immediately. www.steadystick.de.

Rollei makes the **Rolleivision Twin MSC 535 P** dual-slide projector with built-in dissolve capability. Technically, this isn't news since the unit's been available since 1995 and had many predecessors, but I wish I had known about it before I designed my own dissolve unit from scratch back in 1985!

A Czech Republic company called **Lomographische AG** has a camera lineup with a cult following: the **Lomo L-CA** is a tiny point-and-shoot very similar to the old Olympus XA, and follow-on products can take 3, 4, or even 9 pictures on one frame. Similar to the Diana plastic camera from the 1960s, lots of artists and ordinary people shoot every aspect of everyday life with their cameras, and now a new book has been published compiling over 2000 images taken by 250 people from 40 countries using these cameras. Throw out everything you ever learned about technique, composition, sharpness, and exposure; throw in every bad picture you ever discarded and enhance the effect with the garish colors of outdated film and you'll have an idea for the flavour of this book. Definitely worth a look, although you might find yourself grumbling "I throw out better pictures than this!" Ahh, the world of art... www.lomography.com

And although this wasn't really new or unexpected, the **Epson** booth was showing off the output of the **2100** pigment-based printer with expanded gamut. Yeow! I gotta get me one of those! www.epson-europe.com

Even more unexpected (since

this has nothing at all to do with imaging) – many stands were selling a Swiss-developed super glue that actually works the way it does in the superglue commercials. Superglue doesn't actually work well in most situations... I was so impressed I bought a set.

3D Mania

The show had no shortage of inexpensive point-and-shoots, digital wallet clones, and different methods of producing pseudo-3D images. Only two I felt were worthy of mention, oddly both fall into the "pseudo-3D using the lenticular plastic sheets" category (the kind that are often found on baseball cards).

A firm from Hong Kong Colour Towne HK Ltd has a process for scanning a single 2-D photograph and turning it into a pseudo-3D lenticular picture. Their proprietary software accepts a scan of a normal print, and then outputs a massaged version on to a Canon inkjet printer. Coat with the plastic lens and voila! No need to take and merge dozens of images (as is usually the case). How they can tell what is foreground and background without human intervention is beyond me. They sell components at £1.27 each in quantities of 500. info@cte.com.hk

Equally impressive (in terms of the technology behind the tool, rather than the results themselves) is a firm in Jerusalem called HumanEyes which has developed a technology to create panoramic 3D stereo images from still photo sequences or a panning video clip. Although this is closer to the way such lenticular pictures are usually made, HumanEyes completely eliminates the need to calibrate the camera angles while shooting – just shoot 35 images each at a slightly different angle, and feed it to the computer – the computer figures out what the angles were, and reconstructs the scene knowing where the background is and how far away each element is. Then the inkjet and lens treatment as with the Color Towne process. Their system is available for lease only, at £6,358 per year. www.humaneyes.com

What Wasn't Introduced

Probably the biggest disappointment of the show was the (lack of) a true digital SLR offering from Minolta, whose fans have been clamouring loudly for something which can leverage their substantial investments in lenses and flashes, and have been salivating



Cologne Cathedral is one of the most magnificent (perhaps even intimidating) structures to be found anywhere. It took seven centuries to build, beginning in 1248. Right: the Minolta Flash Meter VI took a little less time to create, but even its EV-2.0 reading might be inadequate for the dramatic bloom of the Dom's furthest recesses.

over the pending release of a new line of lenses containing Canon-like ultrasonic motors. For some reason the Vectis-based RD-3000 didn't meet anyone's needs!

Sadly, the folks I spoke to at the booth had no knowledge of a DSLR even being developed (but were sick of hearing people ask them about it!) and no release date



for their new lenses was being discussed. Minolta did introduce two new handheld meters (the Flashmeter VI is an incident, 1° viewfinder spot, and flash meter all in one – nicely done!), a consumer film scanner, and a 3.3 Megapixel 'i' version of the tiny DiIMAGE X, which is a very popular camera. www.minoltaeurope.com

Perhaps Minolta is waiting to join the Olympus/Kodak 4/3 Digital System standard (which was also announced at the show) which specifies a common platform designed around a future standard of large 4/3-type CCDs, including interchangeable lens mounts. The picture size is smaller than 35mm half-frame, so the lenses could be very neat indeed, but resolution could be up in the same megapixel bracket as the new SLRs.

The idea being a system designed around the chip from the ground up will be better and smaller than a retrofitted 35mm or APS design, plus maybe for once camera manufacturers can agree on a standard lens mount (Pentax screw, K, and Leica M mounts are now almost the only standards around). Let's hope this initiative catches on better than the Kodak Photo CD standard. www.olympus-europa.com/FourThirds

Overheard in conversation

- Fuji's acclaimed Frontier 1-hour lab system can automatically detect if the images being processed were shot using their cheap disposable cameras by observing characteristic distortion of their plastic lenses, and then correct for all of its deficiencies. Thus a Fuji disposable, processed through their Frontier lab can produce Nikon-quality images!

- Digital technology has distorted the traditional film-based business model so much, manufacturers are now considering a dumbed-down technology to sell to the mass market: proprietary write-once memory cards for their point-and-shoot digital cameras. The established consumer photo industry likes the idea since it provides a revenue stream identical to the film-based model, and they believe it will appeal to the average consumer since no paradigm shift needs to occur in their minds.

- A slightly more honest but just as sinister plot is being considered for the future, when cameras, digital music players, and wireless communication devices will all be integrated into one unit. When you take a picture with such a unit, each picture automatically gets sent wirelessly to a pre-selected photofinisher, so the user only need pick them up (skipping the boring step of dropping them off). This sort of locks the customer in with one lab. It'll be interesting to see how difficult they make the process of switching (like the cell phone companies do now) in order to retain fickle customers.

