



BUILDING A PHOTOGRAPHY SYSTEM

WHAT IS A PHOTOGRAPHY SYSTEM?

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CHOOSING THE GEAR THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

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You may have read the long, heated debates on photography Web sites and in photography magazines about which digital SLR (dSLR) camera is best. They range from debating the speed and construction of different cameras to their ease of use and image quality. But few discussions concentrate on the fundamental consideration: When you buy a dSLR, it is the first step in building a photography system you will continue to invest in for many years to come.

So what is a photography system, and what considerations are important when you add components to your system? This chapter helps to answer those questions, and it provides evaluation criteria to help you decide which elements you need for a basic system based on your photography interests and shooting preferences.

WHAT IS A PHOTOGRAPHY SYSTEM?

From a broad point of view, a photography system includes all the components that are offered by the camera manufacturer and third-party companies and that are compatible with your camera. From this perspective, a system includes the camera body, lenses, flash units, battery chargers, extension tubes, interface cables, and so on. In other words, the photography system encompasses the universe of components that are compatible with your camera. Your current system may be as simple as one basic body and several lenses, as shown in 1-1.

ABOUT THIS PHOTO *A camera system can range from simple to complex. Here the Canon 1D Mark II and five Canon lenses make a powerful combination for a variety of photography applications.*
©Amy A. Timacheff



1-1

If you're reading this book, you probably either already own or are considering buying a Canon DSLR. As one of the oldest camera manufacturers in the world, Canon offers a photography system that reflects the company's long heritage of understanding the needs of photographers by supplying professional equipment and pioneering new technologies.

CANON SYSTEM OVERVIEW

From the broad view, Canon offers a complete range of cameras, lenses, Speedlite flashes, and accessories. There are so many options, in fact, that choosing among them is a challenge. Throughout this book, you get detailed information on individual components of the Canon photography system as well as help in choosing components based on your shooting preferences and needs. For now, it's worthwhile to review the overall scope of Canon's photography system.



x-ref

More details on each camera are provided in Chapter 2.



note

Have you ever wondered what EOS stands for in the Canon digital lineup? It is for electro-optical system (although the reference to Greek mythology's Goddess of Dawn is not necessarily accidental). EOS refers to the standardization of an electronic interface between the lens and camera to control functions such as focusing and aperture.

PROFESSIONAL DSLRS

Canon professional DSLRs are distinguished by both advanced features and build quality. For example, the shutter mechanism of the professional cameras is rated at 100,000 to 300,000 actuations (shutter releases) to account for heavier use. In addition, the design of the Mark III series DSLRs includes extensive weatherproofing to protect the camera against the elements and demanding use.

- **EOS-1Ds Mark III.** Professional-build camera with a 21.1-megapixel full-frame sensor with a capture rate of up to 5 frames per second (fps) for 56 JPEG or 12 RAW images per burst.
- **EOS-1D Mark III.** Professional-build camera with a 10.1-megapixel sensor with a capture rate of up to 10 fps for up to 110 full-resolution JPEG or 30 RAW images per burst.

CANON PHOTOGRAPHIC LEGACY Originally started in a Tokyo apartment in 1933, Canon's first commercial camera was built and released between 1935 and 1936 by Saburo Uchida and his brother-in-law, Takeo Maeda. Originally called "Kwanon," Canon today is not only known for its cutting-edge technology, but also for working closely with photographers to solve problems and to create innovative new approaches.

In 2005, Canon ranked second in the world in filing patents, after IBM. The company's technology pursuits range from developing an optical sensor for earth observation satellites — capturing light from a galaxy 2.8 billion light years away — to developing super UD (Ultra Low Dispersion) lenses to improve optical quality.

Canon designs, develops, and manufactures its image sensors and image processors in-house. Canon was the first to develop and offer a full-frame 35mm sensor in its digital SLR cameras — a sensor capable of both high-speed processing and very high resolution images.

- **EOS 5D.** Professional-level camera with a 12.8-megapixel full-frame sensor with a capture rate of up to 3 fps for 60 JPEG or 17 RAW images per burst.
- **EOS 40D.** A semiprofessional camera with a 10.1-megapixel sensor with a capture rate of 6.5 fps for up to 75 JPEG or 17 RAW images.

CONSUMER DSLRS

Canon's consumer dSLRs provide excellent durability and offer shooting modes similar to the professional cameras, as well as programmed point-and-shoot modes. Canon offers the following cameras in its line of consumer EOS dSLRs:

- **EOS Digital Rebel XT (350D).** Offers an 8.0-megapixel sensor with a capture rate of up to 3 fps for up to 14 JPEG images per burst.
- **EOS Digital Rebel XTi (400D).** Offers a 10.1-megapixel sensor with a capture rate of

up to 3 fps for up to 27 JPEG or 10 RAW images per burst.

- **EOS Digital Rebel XSi (450D).** Offers a 12.2-megapixel sensor with a capture rate of up to 3.5 fps for up to 53 full-resolution JPEG or 6 RAW images per burst.



Sensor sizes and frame rates are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

CANON LENSES

For years, the exceptional quality of Canon lenses, such as those shown in 1-2, has drawn photographers to the Canon brand. As any photographer can tell you, a camera is only as good as the lens that's mounted on it. Certainly more factors figure into image quality with digital photography than with film photography, but the lens remains an essential component in image quality.



ABOUT THIS PHOTO
The excellent quality of its lenses is one of the things that make the Canon system the choice of so many photographers. ©Jim White

Each year, Canon adds new lenses to an already extensive selection that covers the range from fisheye to super-telephoto. Here is the Canon EF (electrofocus) lens lineup:

Ultrawide Zoom Lenses

- EF-S 10-22mm f/3.5-4.5 USM
- EF 16-35mm f/2.8L II USM
- EF 17-40mm f/4L USM
- EF 20-35mm f/3.5-4.5 USM

Wide-Angle Prime (Single-focal-length) Lenses

- EF 14mm f/2.8L USM
- EF 14mm f/2.8L II USM
- EF 15mm f/2.8 Fisheye
- EF 20mm f/2.8 USM
- EF 24mm f/1.4L USM
- EF 24mm f/2.8
- EF 28mm f/1.8 USM
- EF 28mm f/2.8
- EF 35mm f/1.4L USM
- EF 35mm f/2

Standard Zoom Lenses

- EF-S 17-55 f/2.8 IS USM
- EF-S 17-85mm f/4-5.6 IS USM
- EF-S 18-55mm f/3.5-5.6 USM
- EF-S 18-55mm f/3.5-5.6 IS
- EF 24-70mm f/2.8L USM
- EF 24-85mm f/3.5-4.5 USM
- EF 24-105mm f/4L IS USM
- EF 28-80mm f/3.5-5.6 II

- EF 28-90mm f/4-5.6 II USM
- EF 28-105mm f/3.5-4.5 II USM
- EF 28-105mm f/4.0-5.6 USM
- EF 28-135mm f/3.5-5.6 IS USM
- EF 28-200mm f/3.5-5.6 USM
- EF 28-300mm f/3.5-5.6L IS USM

Standard and Medium Telephoto Lenses

- EF 50mm f/1.2L USM
- EF 50mm f/1.4 USM
- EF 50mm f/1.8 II
- EF 85mm f/1.2L II USM
- EF 85mm f/1.8 USM
- EF 100mm f/2 USM

Telephoto Zoom Lenses

- EF 55-200mm f/4.5-5.6 II USM
- EF 70-200mm f/2.8L IS USM
- EF 70-200mm f/2.8L USM
- EF 70-200mm f/4L IS USM
- EF 70-200mm f/4L USM
- EF 70-300mm f/4-5.6 IS USM
- EF 70-300mm f/4.5-5.6 DO IS USM
- EF 75-300mm f/4-5.6 III USM
- EF 75-300mm f/4-5.6 III
- EF 80-200mm f/4.5-5.6 II
- EF 100-300mm f/4.5-5.6 USM
- EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS USM



For details on lens categories and individual lenses, see Chapter 3.

Telephoto Prime (Single-focal-length) Lenses

- EF 135mm f/2L USM
- EF 135mm f/2.8 with Softfocus
- EF 200mm f/2.8L II USM
- EF 300mm f/2.8L IS USM
- EF 300mm f/4L IS USM

Super-Telephoto Prime (Single-focal-length) Lenses

- EF 400mm f/2.8L IS USM
- EF 400mm f/4 DO IS USM
- EF 400mm f/5.6L USM
- EF 500mm f/4L IS USM
- EF 600mm f/4L IS USM

Macro Prime Lenses

- EF 50mm f/2.5 Compact Macro
- EF-S 60mm f/2.8 Macro USM
- MP-E 65mm f/2.8 1-5x Macro Photo
- EF 100mm f/2.8 Macro USM
- EF 180mm f/3.5L Macro USM

Tilt-Shift Lenses

- TS-E 24mm f/3.5L
- TS-E 45mm f/2.8
- TS-E 90mm f/2.8

Extenders

- Extender EF 1.4x II
- Extender EF 2x II

ADDITIONAL CANON SYSTEM COMPONENTS

The most expensive components of a photography system are camera bodies and lenses, but a variety of accessories increase your creative options. Additional components include Canon Softmat filters and close-up lenses, teleconvertors to increase the effective focal length of lenses, Speedlite flashes, circular polarizing and haze filters, a variety of remote control accessories, a wireless file transmitter, a data verification kit, a variety of eyecups and extenders, angle finders, and focusing screens.

For lighting on the go, Canon offers the 580EX II, 430EX, and 220EX Speedlites. The ST-E2 transmitter allows control of slave flashes for up to 33 feet outdoors and almost 50 feet indoors. Macro photographers can benefit from the Macro Twin Lite MT-24EX or the Macro Ring Lite MR-14EX. In addition, you can add a variety of battery packs and magazines, hot-shoe adapters, TTL (through-the-lens) distributors, and off-camera shoe cords. A body, lens, and flash made a complete system for this wedding photographer, with great results (see 1-3).



For a more detailed description of Speedlites and accessories, see Chapter 9. For more on lenses, see Chapters 3 through 7.



1-3

ABOUT THIS PHOTO *The EOS 1Ds with 24-70mm L lens and 580EX Speedlite make up a high-quality camera system to take lifelike, high-quality professional images such as this wedding shot at ISO 100, 1/60 second at f/4. ©Jim White*

PERSONAL PHOTOGRAPHY SYSTEMS

Whether you started with an entry-level camera such as the Digital Rebel XTi, shown in 1-4, or went with a professional dSLR, from a photographer's point of view, a photography "system" includes the camera gear that you currently own. And in a larger sense, a digital photography system also includes the components of your studio and digital darkroom, such as computers, stand-alone hard drives for storage, printers, and image-

editing programs. From this perspective, a system includes everything that's necessary to capture, process, and print/fulfill images.

For hobbyists and advanced amateurs, photography systems run the gamut from minimal to extensive. In addition to a computer and an image-editing program, a basic photography system might include the following, as shown in 1-5:

- A digital camera body
- One or more zoom lenses
- One or two memory cards

1-4



ABOUT THIS PHOTO
The Canon Digital Rebel XTi is an entry-level dSLR that offers both professional shooting modes as well as programmed point-and-shoot modes. It is capable of working with all Canon EF lenses.
©Amy A. Timacheff

1-5



ABOUT THIS PHOTO A very basic system can consist of a camera, a lens, and a memory card. ©Amy A. Timacheff

For professional photographers, it's critical to not only have the primary camera bodies and lenses, but also to have backup gear to ensure that shooting assignments proceed on schedule. Thus a professional system can include several bodies, numerous lenses, and flash equipment, such as the studio lighting equipment shown in 1-6.

Because it is impractical to duplicate all components of a professional system, working professionals often rent backup components on location, a strategy that is popular with many event and wedding photographers. Renting backup gear lightens the travel load as well.

A professional photography system may include a wide variety of components:

- One or more primary camera bodies and secondary or backup camera bodies
- Multiple zoom and single-focal-length, or prime, lenses with multiples of the most often used lenses as backups
- One or more Canon Speedlites or third-party flash units, brackets, stands, and light modifiers such as softboxes
- Filters
- Multiple high-capacity, fast media cards
- Portable image storage and display units for offloading images during travel
- Tripods and monopods with heads
- Remote or cable releases
- One or more incident light meters
- A wireless file transmitter
- Cleaning accessories for the camera sensors and lenses
- A laptop computer for traveling
- Studio lighting, power packs, and backdrops, as in figure 1-6
- Padded camera bag and/or hard case suitable for shipping
- An extensive desktop computer system including large-screen and calibrated monitors, stand-alone hard drives, and archival-quality printers

Regardless of how much or how little your photography system comprises, the most important aspect of any photography system is having the gear that allows you to capture the range of images that you enjoy or need to photograph.

In addition to cameras, if you have a studio, you will need additional types of professional lighting as well as backdrops. You might consider something like a softbox, which provides softened and diffused light that wraps around subjects to provide even illumination — an essential tool in every professional studio.



ABOUT THIS PHOTO
A Photoflex Octodome softbox mounted on a Manfrotto tripod and boom, with a Bowens studio light, provides an adjustable modeling light and powerful flash that is triggered wirelessly from the camera. The back of the softbox (seen here) is black; the front of it is a white translucent material. ©Serge Timacheff

BUILDING YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY SYSTEM

Buying a new camera body or a backup body requires careful consideration of what your current photography system lacks and how to balance those needs with your budget. Lenses, especially Canon's high-end L-series professional lenses and specialized lenses such as for macro photography, are expensive, and it's often difficult to decide which lens or system component that you need next or need most.

Unless you have unlimited resources, it's best to have a plan for building your system. Even if your interests include more than one type of photography, such as the macro and portrait work shown in 1-7 and 1-8, this will ensure that you invest wisely and help you arrange your purchases around equipment that will enhance your own creative vision.



x-ref

For more on L-series and fast lenses, see Chapter 6.

**ABOUT THESE PHOTOS**

The versatility of a good camera system allows you to pursue multiple photography styles and techniques; with a limited budget, you can get a lot out of a single body and lens. Both 1-7 and 1-8 were taken with an EOS 5D and an EF 100mm f/2.8 Macro lens. 1-7 at ISO 320, f/22 at 1/60 second. 1-8 at ISO 100, f/16 at 1/160 second.

©Amy A. Timacheff



The starting place for any photography system involves having the basic components you need for everyday photography. While you may want and think that you need five, six, or even ten lenses, remember that many great photographers made great pictures using a single lens. Their work testifies to the fact that you can do much more with a single lens than you might imagine. The goal is to exploit your current gear to its greatest potential.

Many of Canon's dSLRs are available as kits that include a zoom lens that provides a focal range suitable for common shooting needs — from landscapes to portraits. For example, Canon offers consumer-quality lenses, including the EF-S 18-55mm f/3.5-5.6 USM, designed for optimized performance on the Digital Rebels and EOS 40D cameras.

While a kit lens ensures a focal range adequate for photographing landscapes and portraits, a single lens typically won't meet all your shooting needs. And if you didn't buy a kit or you bought a professional-level camera, then the question is what lenses you need to buy — lenses that will become the foundation of your system.

But what are the goals for a basic photography system, and what would a basic system include? Assuming that you already have a Canon dSLR, my recommendations for a basic photography system include the elements shown in the following list. With this system, you have a focal range that allows you to photograph everyday family photos as well as travel, landscape, portrait, and wildlife images. In addition, the basic system allows you to travel light while not missing photographic opportunities. A typical basic system would include:

- **A wide-angle zoom lens.** A wide-angle lens in the range of 17-40mm allows you to capture a landscape image (see 1-9), group portraits, and even individual portraits at the 40mm setting. On the Digital Rebel XTi and EOS 40D cameras with an APS-C-size sensor, a lens in this range is equivalent to 27-64mm. On the EOS-1D Mark III, with an APS-H-size sensor, this range is equivalent to 22-52mm. On full-frame-sensor cameras, such as the EOS-1Ds Mark III and the EOS 5D, a 17-40mm lens, for example, operates precisely as a 17-40mm lens.
- **A telephoto zoom lens.** A telephoto lens in the range of 70-300mm enables you to capture portraits, wildlife, birds, sports, and distant landscapes, such as the scene shown in 1-10. On the Digital Rebel XTi and EOS 40D cameras with an APS-C-size sensor, a lens in this range is equivalent to 112-480mm. On the EOS-1D Mark III with an APS-H-size sensor, a lens in this range is equivalent to 91-390mm.



x-ref

For a more complete explanation of sensor size and crop factor, see Chapter 2.

- **UV haze filters for all lenses.** These filters absorb ultraviolet light to reduce haze on a sunny day and protect the front lens element from dirt and scratches.
- **Circular polarizing filters for one or both lenses.** These filters allow rotation to reduce reflections and glare on water and other shiny surfaces as well as increase color saturation.

■ **Lens hoods.** Lens hoods prevent stray light, which can create flare in images, from entering the lens. They also offer protection to the front element of the lens.

■ **Canon Speedlite (optional).** I list this as optional because using a flash depends a lot on what subjects you like to photograph. Also, if you have a Digital Rebel or EOS 40D with a built-in flash, then you may find that it is adequate for your immediate needs.

ABOUT THIS PHOTO

With a good wide-angle zoom lens, you can crop your scene exactly as you want. Taken with an EOS-1Ds Mark II, EF 16-35mm f/2.8L lens, ISO 50, 2 seconds at f/16. ©Jim White



ABOUT THIS PHOTO

By remaining quite still and using a good telephoto zoom lens, I was able to capture this early morning image of a young deer crossing the road. Taken with an EOS-1Ds Mark II, EF 100-400mm IS L lens, ISO 400, 1/320 second at f/6.3. ©Jim White



This is a do-it-all approach that works well for general shooting. The basic system is, however, not as well suited for specialty shooting, such as for macro images and sports photography. If you have a specialty shooting area identified, then the composition of your basic system will be weighted toward the lenses you need for that specialty.

CHOOSING THE GEAR THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

While no one can tell you what is exactly right for you, you can evaluate your shooting history and preferences to better determine the photography system components that work for you. While reading over the list of Canon photography system components, you may have the overwhelming urge to buy one or two new lenses or accessories. Just seeing the list is like the ultimate wish list for the great camera store in the sky.

Patience, however, is a virtue, and so is developing a solid plan to help you build a system that's right for you. From personal experience, I can tell you that there are few things more aggravating than having an expensive lens or Speedlite gather dust in a gear bag. I've also learned that the loss on the resale price of gear I didn't really need or use is sobering enough to keep my personal wish list carefully prioritized.

PLANNING

To plan your photography system, think carefully about your areas of interest, and then try to look ahead to future needs and desires. You may be interested in flower macro shots (see 1-11), natural scenes, or portraits (see 1-12). To get you started, here are some general questions to help you create a plan for building your photography system:

- **Is photography your passion, a current or future profession, or a hobby and a way to keep family snapshots current?** If you are serious about photography, then the type of gear you buy will be different from the gear you'd buy for family snapshots.
- **What subjects do you most enjoy photographing?** If you shoot sports or fast-moving children, then you should factor camera features such as a high burst rate and fast focusing into your planning. But if you do fine-art shooting, portraits, or landscapes, a slower frame rate and high-quality lenses become more important.



x-ref

See Chapter 2 for more on frame and burst rates.

- **Who uses the camera?** If you and other family members intend to use the camera, you may want a camera that includes point-and-shoot modes such as the Digital Rebel and EOS 40D.
- **How important is it to you to get the highest-possible quality with every image you make?** If you tend to examine every detail of your images, your needs will be significantly different from the photographer who is happy with the average snapshot.
- **At what size do you print images?** Answering this question helps you determine the camera *resolution* you need. But also think ahead to the time when your photography skills are better — that's when you may want bigger enlargements from images. It is also a good idea to buy with the future in mind rather than settling for what you can get by with or afford today.

- **Do you often shoot in low light or need the ability to handhold the camera in moderate to low light?** If you shoot indoor volleyball games in a dimly lit gym, then a fast lens such as an $f/2.8$ with image stabilization (to counteract movement while handholding the camera) gives you an edge. If most of your shooting is outdoors in good light, then a slower lens should be adequate.
- **Is weight important?** In considering this question, factor in the combined weight of the camera body, the battery or battery grip, and the lenses.
- **Do you have specialized needs?** Shooting macro images, for example, may require a ring-type flash. Or perhaps you may want to try different types of filters to soften or enhance colors in your images (such as warming filters, which come in a variety of tones and shades for optimizing color in your images). Or perhaps you need a monopod for stabilizing your camera while still being able to move around and shoot.



1-11

ABOUT THIS PHOTO This photo of a dwarf iris shows the versatility of a sharp, fast telephoto lens. Taken with an EOS-1Ds Mark II, EF 70-200mm $f/2.8L$ lens, ISO 100, 1/80 second at $f/2.8$. ©Jim White



ABOUT THIS PHOTO A normal-range lens helps capture fine details across a wide range of tonality in natural-looking portraits — especially with RAW images. I photographed this child in a Shanghai marketplace. Taken with an EOS-1D Mark II with an EF 24-70mm f/2.8L lens, ISO 640, 1/250 second at f/5. ©Serge Timacheff

COST

As you learned earlier in this chapter, Canon offers both cameras and lenses in consumer and professional categories, and the price difference is significant. For example, if your answers to the previous questions indicate that you care intensely about image quality and the ability to

make enlargements from your pictures, then you'll get the best image quality and biggest enlargements with a high-resolution camera such as the EOS-1Ds Mark III, the EOS 5D, or, in the consumer category, the EOS Digital Rebel XT_i (400D).

For lenses, the highest image quality comes from Canon's L-series pro lenses, although many of the consumer lenses also offer excellent image contrast while providing excellent sharpness and speedy focusing.

Using the basic photography system and high image quality as the criterion, approximate costs for a basic system at the time of this publication are as follows:

Canon EOS 5D 12.8-megapixel digital SLR: ≈\$2,000

Wide-angle telephoto EF 24-105mm f/4L IS USM lens: ≈\$1,000

77mm UV haze filter: ≈\$50

77mm circular polarizer: ≈\$125

Canon EF 70-200mm f/4L IS USM lens: ≈\$1,000

67mm UV Haze-1 filter: ≈\$70

67mm circular polarizer: ≈\$95

Total: \$4,340

If, on the other hand, you enjoy photography as a pastime, and you don't tend to lose sleep over getting the biggest enlargements or fret over minute image details, then the basic system cost would look a little more like this:

Canon EOS Digital Rebel XT_i (400D) 10.1-megapixel dSLR with Canon EF-S 18-55mm f/3.5-5.6 USM lens: ≈\$600

58mm UV haze filter: ≈\$25

Canon EF 75-300mm f/4.0-5.6 III USM lens:≈\$180

58mm UV haze filter: ≈\$15

58mm circular polarizer: ≈\$85

75-300mm lens hood: ≈\$25

Total: \$930

These examples clearly show that knowing your priorities for a photography system makes a big difference in the amount of money that you spend. And, of course, there are many variations on the system components.

**note**

Other chapters later in the book detail specific criteria for purchasing

lenses, Speedlites, and accessories, but this overview helps you evaluate the factors that are most important in building a photography system.

TIMING

Another consideration is timing. If you are new to photography, the idea of acquiring many more lenses and accessories may seem overwhelming, but remember that you can acquire the lenses and accessories that you need over a period of months or years.

At the most basic level, all you need is a camera and a good walk-around lens that provides a focal range for wide-angle to moderate telephoto shooting. For the EOS Digital Rebels, a kit lens such as the EF-S 18-55mm meets that requirement for many people. The EF-S 17-55mm f/2.8 IS USM or EF-S 17-85mm f/4.5-5.6 IS USM lenses are also ideal walk-around lenses. For the other EOS cameras, the 24-105mm f/4.0L IS USM lens provides a great focal range and excellent image quality.

Then as you can afford to buy lenses, you have the advantage of additional time to think about your shooting needs and preferences, and you can choose the best lens to add to your system.

It is also important to think ahead. As your photography skills increase and the range of your photography evolves, the core pieces of your photography system — the lenses — should stand the test of time and change.

For example, you may spend several years shooting with a Canon EOS Digital Rebel. As you add lenses, the EF-S lenses may seem to be the best buy for the money and you may add a couple more EF-S lenses to your system. But if three years from now, you decide to replace the Digital Rebel with an EOS 5D, then you'll have to replace the EF-S lenses because they are incompatible with the 5D. This is only one example of why it's a good idea to think and plan for the future even if it means delaying a purchase until you can afford the item.

SHOULD YOU BUY NEW OR USED EQUIPMENT?

Certainly, used equipment can represent substantial savings over the cost of new gear. Used camera gear is sold online on eBay, on KEH.com, on www.robgalbraith.com forums, and on Web sites of major camera stores. Used camera bodies and lenses are usually rated by condition such as scratches, dents, the amount of wear, and so on. Pristine gear may be rated as “Mint,” which is defined as factory-new condition with original documentation and packaging. At the bottom of the scale is “Bargain,” which means that the item has 50 percent or less of the original finish, it is well worn, may have missing parts, or may not be fully functional. In most cases, you have to rely on the honesty of the seller to accurately rate the gear.

DEVELOPING YOUR PHOTOGRAPHIC VISION AND STYLE For new photographers, the idea of a photographic vision and personal style seems elusive and perhaps limiting. Many new photographers are absorbed by the overall concept and practice of photography in general, and do not have a clear idea of where the photographic journey will take them.

But after months or years of general shooting, more specific interests begin to emerge, and a sense of creative excitement and satisfaction emerges when you shoot certain scenes or subjects. For example, you may get the most joy from making portraits or from exploring the intricacies of nature. And sometimes the interest areas that emerge are not what you would have predicted at the beginning of the journey. But when you begin to envision images — images that sit restlessly inside your mind — and you know how you want the images to look and feel, you have the beginnings of a personal photographic vision. As you pursue your vision, a shooting and image-processing style may emerge as well.

Developing your vision and style is part instinctive and intuitive, and, for most, it takes time. As you read magazines and newspapers, pay attention to the images you are drawn to most often. Visit local galleries and make a note of images and art that resonate with you.

The time that you spend nurturing your vision is time well spent. From an artistic perspective, your vision and style can set your images apart from everyone else's. And from a practical perspective, your vision and style help you target the photographic gear that you need and will use most often.

You also want to focus on the working condition of an item rather than base its value strictly on appearance. Many picky customers pass over perfectly good equipment because it looks “used.” If the glass on a lens is clean and it performs well, then the aesthetic value should be secondary. A camera store I used to frequent was a great source for used equipment. Whenever the owner encountered a shopper obsessed with appearance over functionality, he would invariably ask, “Are you going to take pictures with it, or of it?”

I prefer to buy used gear from sources that accurately rate their equipment. The downside of buy-

ing used professional gear is that it likely has more miles of use on it than if you buy from a photography enthusiast who may not be as good at rating the gear, but will likely have used the gear less and in less demanding conditions. The same cautions apply to buying used camera equipment as to other used gear — if the price seems too good to be true, then it probably is. One way to ensure you don't throw money away is to buy from camera stores that provide a warranty with the used equipment. The warranty is usually limited and of a short duration, but if you use the gear right away to ensure its functionality, you have some recourse if it doesn't perform as described.

Assignment

Your Favorite Equipment

You may just be getting acclimated to your new Canon dSLR, or you may have had it for a few years and are just now ready to expand your gear collection. Regardless of which category or place that you fall, you no doubt have some combination of equipment that is your favorite.

Show your love to the other readers by taking a photo using your favored gear and post it on the Web site to share with other readers. Who knows? Maybe you will find a kindred spirit!

My favorite "Canon combo" is the EF 70-200mm f/2.8L lens with a fast camera, such as my 1D Mark IIIn. In this emotional sports image, taken by my 15-year-old son using my equipment, he captured one of his favorite fencers (Italy's Andrea Baldini) moments before a gold-medal match for a world title. Taken at the 2006 World Fencing Championships in Torino, Italy, at ISO 500, 1/320 second, and f/2.8.



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