

It's 2019, Do You Know Where Photography Is?

Since the publication of my "how-to" camera book, many aspects of photography as we knew it have changed.



As Frank Zappa is credited as saying, "Everything you know is wrong!" Well, not quite.

But if you haven't been following the photo market, it may be a bit disorienting, especially to those who grew up using film. Hopefully, this outline of changes will help.

Now, more than before, buyers will need to do some serious thinking about what they want to accomplish with a camera before buying one. Things have gotten more complicated.

Film???

Today film is a niche market. Some film enthusiasts have spurred the reintroduction of "classic" films, especially black and white. But these folks are essentially like those brave souls who roast their own coffee beans. Their level of enthusiasm is greater than most of us can maintain.

Some chain stores and buying "clubs" are quietly closing their local photo labs due to a decrease in demand for prints and increasing online competition. Freeprints.com now offers *up to 85 free 4x6 prints per month* and you just pay shipping.

Compact cameras???

The bottom has fallen out of the point and shoot camera market as many casual users found them "too darned technical." They now use smartphones.

Ironically, smartphones are slowly getting more technical, a classic mistake. There is even an iPhone adapter to "make it work like a full featured digital camera." Duh. That's the camera people just donated to Goodwill!

Careful thrift store shoppers who **want** a compact camera may benefit from this shift in use. I just found a donated Canon Powershot with a 24-560mm lens and many bells and whistles in the box for \$5. It currently sells new for more than \$200. But beware, ten year old compact cameras look a lot like much newer ones and will not have the quality and features you expect.

The enthusiast market???

Enthusiasts (formerly "prosumers") are finding a new world of cameras that look nothing like the old film SLRs or even digital SLRs. Flipping mirrors and their needed optics have been replaced with electronic viewfinders.

Companies like Olympus are using the same advertising approach as they did in the 70's for their highly successful smaller OM-1 film SLR line. They explain why they are better, get pros to use them, and pretty soon everyone copies their success. But this time they have serious competition from Sony and Panasonic, as well as Canon and Nikon.

What lens mount will win???

There is still confusion about what lens mount and sensor sizes will dominate, not unlike the first competing DVD formats or even the old Beta versus VHS battles. Everyone has an opinion. You may be surprised to learn that *some new interchangeable lenses now have their own firmware upgrades to improve focus speed, performance, etc.* How enthusiastic are you?

"Full frame" sensors, found in some cameras, are the size of a 35mm film frame and appeal to those with a lot of autofocus and manual 35mm film lenses. But how that need works out with buyers who have never shot a roll of film is questionable.

The quality of the full frame sensor is better than smaller sensors, but I recall Beta videotapes were better than VHS too and still failed. Many mirrorless cameras offer adapters to use older lenses, but the term "die hard" keeps coming to mind. Are users of 35mm film lenses also going to join the ranks of those who roast their own coffee beans?

Bridge cameras???

"Bridge cameras," those cameras that look like an SLR but do not have removable lenses, don't get much respect. Perhaps the idea that there isn't much else to sell bridge camera users is part of it! And that's too bad as they are still around and better than ever. Many folks simply no longer need to remove lenses. Also, my Fuji bridge camera directly connects wirelessly to my tablet or phone via an app and lets me see the image on the screen and make adjustments. Kind of a super selfie. Look for ones that have both a rear screen AND an electronic viewfinder.

Sony now had a bridge model with a lens that zooms from 24mm to 3,000mm (NOT a misprint!). The list price is \$999 right now. The old complaint that the lens quality of bridge cameras at all ranges cannot be good is now often overcome with computer algorithms in the camera that correct for things like barrel distortion automatically. In other words your images are "Photoshopped" in the camera.

Artisan cameras???

There are "artisan" cameras from the major makers that mimic classic manual control cameras, complete with optical or really good electronic viewfinders. There are also digital Leicas, etc.

Some offer new ways of showing what is in focus and what is not with color fringing and "focus peaking" indicators that may become standard...or maybe not. Sigma hangs in there with their Foveon chip that processes images unlike any others and has a small, devoted group of followers (coffee bean...never mind).

And there are numerous "artisan" lenses with classic designs coming back from years past, made by currently unfamiliar companies that are offered at spectacularly high prices. Many are the result of Kickstarter programs and there have been some equally spectacular fails or perhaps outright swindles.

While not a swindle, the expensive Lytro camera, the one that adjusted focus AFTER the shot was taken, is gone as if it never happened. Support is gone, software downloads have vanished. It's like the

“guy in the red shirt” in the old Star Trek TV show. Users are fewer than home coffee bean roasters, more like those who grow their own beans. I own one.

Odds, ends and quirky???

Fuji has previewed a new so-called *medium format* 100 megapixel camera. This term is also borrowed from film terminology. If you have to ask how much it costs, you can't afford it.

The Pogocam is a tiny 5 MP camera that attaches to the side of your eyewear. Models start at around \$49.

The Fly360 makes immersive images that allow you to “look around” up down front and back. Version one is under \$50.

The Papershoot camera is alive and well with their simple camera and many, many custom bodies.

GoPro is the still defacto king of action cameras. I've seen parts of PBS documentaries shot with one. Many knock-offs are around, so shop very wisely.

Ebay and direct from China buyers may see an ad for a “DSLR \$1,295 value” for \$48. First, it's not a DSLR, it is a junky little camera like those found with time-share pitches and carnival prizes. Everything said about it is fake. Other ads vary, same camera, same junk.



Finally, we say a sad farewell to Shutterbug magazine. In the 70's it was a large pulp paper full of buy/sell ads and few articles. Prompted in part by the Internet, it morphed into a nice glossy magazine aimed at what I would call “interested amateurs.” I had the great honor of writing for them and their digital camera cousin. Their front-page coverage of my camera tutorial “How To Buy Your First Digital Camera” really helped sales. They will be missed.

For those of you wanting the latest “bleeding edge” photo tech news, check out <https://photorumors.com>. For a more general forum of informed, uninformed and newbie discussions, check out <https://www.uglyhedgehog.com>. It's just like chatting in an old camera store!

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