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Tales of the Unexpected: The Nikon D3 & D300

by Simon Stafford

Heather Angel Wildlife & Natural History Workshops 2008

Open Sesame – Journey to the Centre of Nikon

– A Nikon D3 opens the
doors to a high-quality
virtual reality tour of
Grays of Westminster

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As the first half of 2008 draws to a close, it is a pleasure to welcome you to the latest issue of the *Grays of Westminster Gazette*.

Unprecedented rave reviews attended the triumphant release of the Nikon D3 and our ears ring with the almost universal acclaim that this camera has enjoyed in the photographic press and photographic chat rooms. The D3 sits high on the throne and as is often the case where you have an exciting ground-breaking new release, potential purchasers want to know what it is like, how it compares to other cameras in the range, and in particular how the D3 relates to the new D300. In addition we are also continually asked if all the rumours about the new professional zoom Nikkor lenses are really too good to be true. And nowhere are all these questions more often asked than here at *Grays of Westminster*. I asked the well-known photographer and author Simon Stafford, as one of the first people in the UK to test these items, to let us in on his findings. He does so in his article *Tales of the Unexpected: The Nikon D3 & D300*.



welcome

Thirty-one thousand plus and counting...

From our earliest times, far-flung customers were kept informed of what was new and exciting in Nikon equipment by means of our regular and celebrated catalogues.

In the early 1990s we added the *Grays of Westminster Gazette* to our publications. The catalogues and Gazettes revealed the world of Nikon camera equipment to a standard not before seen, and additionally highlighted the delights that were available from the shop and by mail order. The *Gazette* is now sent out to over thirty-one thousand customers and the good news is that we will be increasing its frequency to quarterly.

Grays of Westminster Delivered

Personal shoppers have never made up the majority of our customers.

From the dawn of our inception we have offered a professional and efficient mail order service; our mail order department is a most useful method of purchase for those customers who are unable to visit us in person. We have devoted ourselves to the singular policy that there is no item that is too small, nor any destination too far, and whether one is a personal visitor to the shop, a mail order customer from a distant shire or a client living half-way around the globe, *Grays of Westminster* will always do its utmost to service that demand.



Open Sesame – Journey to the Centre of Nikon

A Nikon D3 opens the doors to a high-quality virtual reality tour of *Grays of Westminster*.

One of the many questions we are often asked is what the shop looks like inside. We have long wanted to create a virtual tour of *Grays of Westminster* but until now we did not feel that the quality of the sites we had seen was good enough.

Grays of Westminster
www.worldwide

Grays of Westminster were one of the first photographic companies to go global by promoting ourselves into the digital universe www.graysofwestminster.com

Thanks to improvements in technology our reach is now wider than ever, which is completely in keeping with the adventurous spirit that drove our earliest enterprise. Although camera technology is changing almost beyond recognition, our core values of courtesy, knowledge and excellence have not changed. Whether our client is a long-standing customer or new to *Grays of Westminster* and the Nikon system, we aim to provide a unique service.

Using the latest advances in technology, we have created a high-quality virtual reality tour of *Grays of Westminster*, produced for us by Michael Eleftheriades. Michael is an architect and photographer who fuses his particular passion for architecture, virtual reality, computer graphics and photography in the creation of large-scale panoramic imagery. Michael had been photographing virtual reality scenes using Nikon film cameras since 1986, and subsequently moved into digital usage and implementation with the launch of Nikon's Coolpix range in 1998.

He has exhibited his photographs at three exhibitions in London and lectured on panoramic creation to wide acclaim in the U.K., Europe and the United States. When not photographing, Michael directs

the efforts of Media Synthesis, a media development and consultancy company established in 1993, and is responsible for virtual reality tours and interactive exhibits at many of the U.K.'s leading museums, including the Maritime and Natural History Museums. On page 4 he explains how he was able to create this virtual tour of our shop.

Bron Kowal joins Grays of Westminster



It is my great pleasure to introduce you to our newest member of staff – Mr. Bron Kowal. Having enjoyed a career in marketing, book publishing and stock photography, Bron has been involved in imagery in one way or another throughout his working life.

Married with four sons, he tells us that he risked divorce on many occasions by seeking sanctuary in his darkroom, producing prints of family and friends taken with his trusty Nikon FM.

With the acquisition of a D200, he is now coming to grips with the challenge of digital workflow, swapping misspent evenings in a darkened bathroom for the no-less addictive glow of a computer screen and Adobe Photoshop. He has joined us so seamlessly and with so little effort that it feels as if he has been here for years.

The 12th Annual Heather Angel Wildlife & Natural History Workshops with Nikon UK



July simply would not be July without the yearly Heather Angel Wildlife & Natural History Workshop with Nikon UK.

This year is no exception and I am delighted to announce that we are taking bookings for the 12th Annual Heather Angel Workshop which will take place on Saturday 26th and Sunday 27th July 2008 at Saint Hill Manor in West Sussex, England from 9.15 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. followed by an evening meal. These hugely popular two one-day workshops conducted by world-famous wildlife photographer Heather Angel are perfect for both the newcomer and experienced photographer alike. The workshops include lectures, demonstrations and the chance to handle and use a huge range of new Nikon camera equipment, and attract visitors from all over the U.K., Europe and throughout the world. You can book a place (£195 per person) by telephoning +44 (0)207 828 4925 or book online: www.graysofwestminster.co.uk For full details please turn to pages 22 & 23.

The Midnight Folk

Running a shop like *Grays of Westminster* is not unlike putting on a theatre production.

Customers from all walks of life and all nationalities have made their way through our doors and the job of buying, stocking, displaying and selling Nikon to suit their requirements is a very demanding one. No one can let up for a moment while the curtain is up and the production is in full swing and even when the curtains finally come down at night, there is still much activity and bustle behind the scenes to make ready for the following day. When the last staff member has departed and the cleaners have completed their work, the lights are dimmed and the shop becomes a place of silence and shadows. Unpeopled and quiet, except for the ticking of the George VI clock, it assumes a mysterious and regal timelessness.

Then, as the hands of the clock reach 10.00 a.m. and the chimes ring out once again, a member of our staff unlocks the front door. Another day in the life of *Grays of Westminster* begins. Welcome...

Now I must lay aside my keyboard and notes. Summer with its dazzling light and its colourful displays of flora and fauna is finally upon us. The days have lengthened and there are images to be captured. Here at *Grays of Westminster* our entire staff look forward to being of service to you.

With kind regards,

Gray Levett



GRAYS OF WESTMINSTER GAZETTE

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OPEN SESAME

JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF NIKON

by Michael Eleftheriades



MICHAEL ELEFTHERIADES is an architect, photographer and a *Nikon Owner* founder member, who fuses his particular passion for architecture, virtual reality, computer graphics and photography in the creation of large-scale panoramic imagery. Michael has been photographing virtual reality scenes using Nikon film cameras since 1986, and moved into digital acquisition with the launch of Nikon's Coolpix range in 1998. He continues to use Nikon digital cameras to this day.

■ THE FIRST STEPS

Sometime in 2003 and shortly after purchasing my first digital SLR (a Nikon D100) I heard from a friend about *Grays of Westminster*. I promptly visited, and was truly impressed by the special nature of this Nikon-only shop. Long-time subscribers to *Nikon Owner* will know of my fascination in discovering and photographing unique shops, such as the fossil shop (see article *Stretching The Limits - Part II*, *Nikon Owner* magazine Issue XXI). A shop that combined the traditional characteristics I have been looking for, as well as selling a huge selection of both old and new Nikons, was just too good to be true!

I soon started to visit often and brought some of my panoramic work to show Gray Levett, Nick Wynne and Uri Zakay (the shop's owners). Not surprisingly I became a customer too, and as soon as my fledging new company could afford them, I started to upgrade my lenses to the latest autofocus models. As the working relationship between us developed, I started to photograph the shop, initially in an unofficial capacity, mainly shooting conventional stills. Having so many legendary lenses at your disposal can be daunting, but I soon settled on my favourite wide angles: the gigantic 6mm f/2.8 fisheye, the beautiful 8mm f/2.8 fisheye and the diminutive (in comparison) 10.5mm fisheye (see article *Stretching The Limits*, *Nikon Owner* magazine issue XX).

The first commission arrived in November 2006 when I was asked to photograph two panoramas of the exterior and interior of the shop for the *Grays of Westminster Gazette* (appearing in issue no. 60). These gave me my first opportunity to identify the best positions to shoot from, the ideal camera elevation, and how to deal with the extreme contrast between interior and exterior – all of which contribute to the making of a good panoramic shot. During post-production, I also discovered that my client preferred a warmer look rather than the cooler white balance suggested by the camera!

■ VERSION ONE JUNE 2007

During early 2007, we discussed the idea of creating a virtual tour of the whole shop, and I was given approval to shoot in June later that year. The plan was to shoot with the staff at their posts and with customers present. Of course, this was easier said than done, because everyone had to stay still during the capture of 12 shots and this was not always practical in the presence of customers! An additional problem was that due to the low light levels, the shutter speed averaged 1/5s at ISO 400, which was not great. Photographing any interior with mixed lighting and a wide contrast between interior and exterior posed huge challenges, and these were overcome by shooting using High Dynamic Range techniques. The images were post-processed in Adobe Camera RAW for a slightly warmer tone and additional image



Nikon Showroom Panorama



manipulation was done in Adobe Photoshop. The images were stitched in Realviz Stitcher Unlimited, my preferred stitching tool mainly due to its immediate visual feedback.

We also decided that the best way to approach the virtual tour from the user perspective would be to include drawings of the spaces. This was not only to display the relationship of the spaces to each other, but also to reinforce the idea that collectively, they are all essential parts of the whole environment. To construct the drawings, accurate measurements of all the spaces were made, and rendered in a three-dimensional isometric projection. By the end of August 2007, the images were processed and stitched, the panoramas were created, and the web pages programmed. Version one was complete. But an unexpected announcement from Nikon a few days later was to have a drastic effect on our launch plans!

■ **VERSION TWO DEC 2007**

Whereas before we had evolutionary changes, Nikon's D300 and D3 seemed revolutionary. Being able to shoot in low light levels – or in the case of the D3 – at unheard of ISO speeds, with no noise and a smooth film-like grain, was hard to believe. After some testing, I was astounded at what the new cameras could achieve, and in terms of this endeavour we could not ignore them. If the shop represented Nikon, and the virtual tour represented the shop, then we had no choice but to reshoot using the latest cameras, and specifically, the D3!

So, for the photography of all interior panoramas, Nikon's new flagship D3 camera was used because of its superior low noise characteristics; indeed at the chosen ISO speed of 400 and using the AF Fisheye-Nikkor 16mm f/2.8D, there was no discernible noise in any of the images. A Nikon D2x with the AF DX

Fisheye-Nikkor 10.5mm f/2.8G ED was used for all exterior shots. For accuracy and repeatability, both cameras were mounted on 360Precision Adjuste panoramic heads. This latest design is lighter than the previous Absolute model, but is still robust enough to handle larger bodies, as well as offering adjustability, essential in calibrating for the new D3.

Version Two took less time to complete because essentially only the panoramas were recreated. A test-site was made available to *Nikon Owner* subscribers and was so enthusiastically received, the popular topic was at the top of the *Nikon Owner* message board between Xmas and the New Year. Thank-you to everyone for your feedback!

The *Grays of Westminster* virtual tour was made available publically in mid-January 2008, and can be viewed at the following web address: www.grayswestminster.co.uk/tour/

CONSTRUCTION SEQUENCE

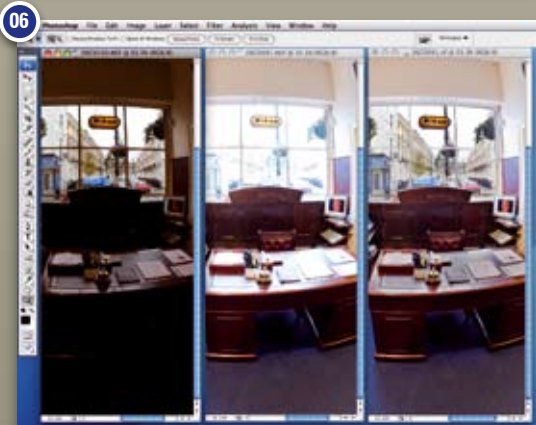


01
The rooms were measured in detail, and two-dimensional plans were constructed in Nemetschek's VectorWorks package

02
The drawings were extruded to create sectional plans, and rendered to an isometric projection

03
The vector-based drawing was exported to Adobe Illustrator, where the correct layer order and colours were applied

04
The file was imported into Adobe Photoshop, where the interactive roll-overs, captions, and image thumbnails were added



05 The interactive logic and web optimisation were made in Adobe's Fireworks package

06 High dynamic range images were created by compositing under and over-exposed versions

07 The images were stitched in REALVIZ Stitcher Unlimited, and spherical panoramas exported

08 To create the illusion of the camera floating in space, the tripod is erased from the nadir image

09 The final virtual tour is integrated into the *Grays of Westminster* website

10 The panoramas can be viewed using either the Adobe Flash or Apple QuickTime plug-ins, for the widest audience

Below The Spherical projection of the Nikon Secondhand Room panorama creates the illusion of floating above the space

Michael Eleftheriades can be contacted by email at: medias@dircon.co.uk

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TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED

THE NIKON D3 & D300

SIMON STAFFORD compares and contrasts the latest digital SLR cameras from Nikon and takes a close look at two of Nikon's latest zoom lenses.

Since their introduction at the very end of 2007, the D3 and D300 have basked in the glow of numerous reviews effervescent with high acclaim for their specification and performance. After using these two cameras for a couple of months I have no doubt that such praise is richly deserved!

Nikon have a long heritage of building fine cameras bestowed with urbane qualities born of innovative engineering and progressive design, which sets them apart from the rest of the pack, and its latest offerings are no exception. Featuring magnesium alloy bodies, extensive sealing against the elements, and a build-quality second to none, these cameras will last a lifetime.

It is clear that development of the D3 and D300 took place along near parallel paths with plenty of cross fertilization between them, as such the two models have much in common,

sharing cutting-edge technology and many advanced features, so much so that picking one over the other has become a rather fraught process for some photographers. In an effort to provide some clarity around this issue I have set out below a synopsis of my findings in the hope that they will help guide a prospective owner toward selecting the model that best meets their requirements. Consequently, I have neither dwelt on every aspect of each camera's specification, as this is readily available elsewhere, nor offer this piece as a comprehensive review of either model; these will follow in due course.



■ IMAGE QUALITY

Nikon have long been trumpeting that image-quality in the digital world rests on three pillars: optical quality of the lens, sensor technology, and internal camera processing. It is clear from my testing that developments in the two latter components has wrought a significant increase in the image quality that can be expected from either camera compared with previous models. Noise-free images exhibiting a beautifully smooth, rich tonality that exudes a film-like quality are the norm for the D3 and D300.

The quite incredible low light capability of these cameras is in part founded in their CMOS sensors and construction of their optical low-pass filters (OLPF). For example, the micro-lens layer of the OLPF used in the D3 has an innovative twin-lens layer. Located above the Bayer pattern filter, each micro-lens in the upper layer occupies an area larger than the pixel well below it and there is virtually no gap between these neighbouring micro-lenses. However, due to the presence of the CMOS circuitry embedded in the sensor between the pixel wells, a second layer of smaller lenses is used to further collimate the extra light collected by the first layer of lenses and prevent it from being wasted by striking either the circuitry or edges of the pixel wells. This enhanced ability to gather light, coupled with the large, 8.45-micron pixel pitch of the D3 camera's sensor allows it to scoop up every last photon and contributes to the amazing image quality that can be attained even at ISO3200, or ISO6400. Although the D300 does not benefit from this same twin-lens layer it is still able to turn in exceptional quality at ISO1600 and very acceptable results at ISO3200.

In order for the cameras to sustain their high frame rates, the signal from each pixel must be handled with pace and efficiency. In the case of both cameras a 12-channel parallel output is used, together with an on-sensor analogue-to-digital converter with the option to select either 12-bit, or 14-bit conversion for NEF Raw files (JPEG and TIFF files are always handled at a 12-bit depth), before the image data is passed to the next phase of in-camera processing, the processing engine, a component of the Expeed processing regime.

Nikon has done away with the twin ASIC (application specific integrated circuit) approach of the D2-series and condensed image processing into a single ASIC in both cameras to improve processing speed and efficiency. All further internal data processing is performed at a 16-bit level throughout right up to the point of final output, regardless of file format the cameras are set to record. This ensures fine detail and tonal graduations are preserved at their maximum level in the final image by avoiding the numerical errors that would inevitably creep in during a rounding-down process that would be required to fit the original data in to a smaller bit space.

“ Nikon have a long heritage of building fine cameras bestowed with urbane qualities born of innovative engineering and progressive design, which sets them apart from the rest of the pack, and its latest offerings are no exception. ”



The results speak for themselves. Using either camera with the default Standard option set for the Picture Control System (see below) renders images with bold, saturated colours that retain a true to life appearance. At ISO200 to ISO800 noise simply is not an issue and even at higher ISO values noise levels are minimal to the point that they should not cause even the most fastidious photographer any concern. The broad dynamic range (Nikon claim the D3 offers a 1.4x improvement in this aspect compared with the D2Xs) opens the shadows and reveals delicacy in highlights. The wizardry of the Expeed processing has yet more tricks to perform, as there is an automated correction for lateral chromatic aberration and the effects of vignetting with JPEG and TIFF files.

Allied to the internal processing performed by the Expeed processing regime of the D3 and D300 are two new features:

► **Picture Control System** – Nikon have done away with the Optimize Image controls and Color Mode options seen in their earlier D-SLR cameras and replaced these with the far more comprehensive Picture Control System (PCS) to enable precise control of colour, contrast and in-camera sharpening. Aside from the four default options, Standard, Neutral, Vivid and Monochrome all of which can be modified by the user to their own requirements, the PCS allows for a further nine customized picture control options to be stored on the camera. The system is fully integrated so Picture Control settings can be shared between cameras of the same model and Nikon View NX and Nikon Capture NX software, to ensure colour/contrast consistency across all devices. As such the PCS settings are only ever fixed by in-camera processing when the camera records JPEG or TIFF files; shooting NEF Raw files enables the PCS parameters to be altered at will at any time subsequent to initial capture. I have found the PCS intuitive to use and very effective, as it gives you complete control over a range of important parameters such as sharpening, contrast, brightness, saturation and hue. You can tailor the camera's response precisely, including the emulation of colour contrast filters with the black and white option, and have this reproduced consistently between different cameras.

► **Active D-Lighting** (not to be confused with the D-Lighting option available in the Retouch menu of the cameras) applies a localized adjustment to contrast (think of it as an automated dodge and burn effect) to improve the appearance of areas of deep shadow and bright highlight. The cameras use the Matrix metering system to assess the scene for bright highlights. If necessary the exposure will be reduced accordingly to preserve highlight detail, then the highlight, shadow and middle tones are adjusted to optimize the dynamic range. It is a feature I will certainly make use of in high contrast conditions, as the “Low” and “Normal”

settings open up the dark and light tone areas of an image with a greater subtlety than the D-Lighting option, which tends to give pictures a surreal appearance akin to HDR (high dynamic range) processing. I have found that highlight details benefit from use of the Active D-Lighting in particular.

■ METERING AND AF

The new Scene Recognition System incorporated in the D3 and D300 represents one of the core innovations of the new cameras. Conceived from some inspired lateral thinking the hub of the SRS is the tried and tested 1,005-pixel RGB sensor, which was first introduced by Nikon in the F5 film camera. By placing a diffraction grating in front of this sensor to separate light into specific wavelength bands the pixels used to detect red, green, and blue light respectively receive a purer form of that component of the light. This helps to maximise the efficiency of the sensor and allows three key aspects of camera control to be enhanced. In addition to enhancing the exposure control, including flash exposure control, the SRS also contributes to the ability of the auto focus system to track subjects, and the auto white balance to recognise colour and pattern and thus produce more accurate and consistent results.

I found performance of the Matrix metering II to be reassuringly reliable in all but the most challenging conditions; however, even then, Nikon have added a twist by including the Active D-Lighting feature described above, when applied judiciously can make a measurable improvement to the final image. Another area of performance that has attracted my attention is the automatic white balance. On previous Nikon D-SLR cameras I would actively avoid this feature, as I often found it produced bland and rather cool-looking colours in daylight and offered little help under artificial lighting where the restricted spectrum of its output invariably produced a noticeable colour cast. The D3 and D300 have turned this on its head: the preservation by the auto white balance of the naturally warm tones at sunrise or sunset has to be seen to be



“ Another area of performance that has attracted my attention is the automatic white balance. On previous Nikon D-SLR cameras I would actively avoid this feature ... The D3 and D300 have turned this on its head. ”

believed, and it has an uncanny knack of rendering delightfully accurate skin tones.

The distribution of the 51 auto-focus points of the new Multi-CAM3500 AF sensor creates one of the most significant differences between the D3 and D300 – the coverage of the auto-focus system. The larger area of the FX-format sensor in the D3 means that the 51-points are highly centralized, whilst on the D300 the same sensor provides coverage across a much larger proportion of the frame area (set the D3 to its DX-format crop and the 51-points occupy the same area as the D300). So, if you are the type of photographer who tends to compose with your main subject off-centre you will find you spend more time adopting the focus-recompose-shoot approach using the D3 in its FX format compared with the D300.

Using the single point auto-focus is a delight – with a top quality AF-S lens the cameras acquire and lock focus with lighting speed and unerring accuracy. The Scene Recognition System has certainly improved the ability of each camera to track a moving subject, regardless of whether it is moving toward, away, or laterally across the frame. In this respect I have found using the 9-point, or 21-point options with the Dynamic-area AF mode to render consistently reliable results with fast moving subjects even with the camera shutter cycling at its top frame rate.

However, I have not been totally convinced by the 51-point 3D-tracking system. Nikon caveat its use in situations where the subject has a similar colour to the background, or occupies only a very small area of the frame, which is understandable since the system relies on patterns of colour detected by the 1,005-pixel RGB metering sensor; however, I would also add that it struggles to keep focus on a subject in anything other than good light conditions. When it works the feature is amazing but clearly this is a technology still in development and future iterations will benefit from refinement of the Scene Recognition System at its core.

■ CAMERA FEATURES

The viewfinders of Nikon D-SLR have often been the subject of criticism due to their rather tunnel-like nature and restricted field of view. The D3 improves this aspect thanks to its larger sensor providing a very bright, clear view of the focusing screen and information displays arranged along the bottom and right sides of the frame. The viewfinder of the D3 is reminiscent of those on F5 and F6 models, although with a slight disappointment only as much as the eye-relief distance is reduced compared with the D2-series cameras, so you still need to get close to the viewfinder eyepiece to see the entire screen, and likewise the magnification offered by the viewfinder is not as great. The viewfinder of the D300 is the best of the DX-format cameras to

D3 auto-focus area array: the central 15 AF areas are cross-type sensors, whilst the remainder are line-type sensors (the bold black cross and vertical line show sensor orientation), the coloured shading is for illustrative purposes only. The coverage of AF sensing areas is confined to the central part of the frame; they are all available regardless of the format selected on the camera: FX, DX, or 5:4.

D300 auto-focus area array: the central 15 AF areas are cross-type sensors, whilst the remainder are line-type sensors (the bold black cross and vertical line show sensor orientation), the coloured shading is for illustrative purposes only. Note the broad coverage of AF sensing areas within the frame.

D3



“ The delightful monitor screen is also pressed into action with the new Live View feature, which allows the user to compose a picture using a real-time image taken from the camera’s sensor. ”

D300



◇ D3 twin CompactFlash card ports



◇ D300 monitor screen



◇ D300 shooting mode dial



◇ The build quality of the D3 is superb



◇ D300 with AF-S 14-24mm f/2.8G



◇ D300 auto focus area selector switch



◇ D300 flash control buttons

■ D3 SPECIFIC FEATURES:

- ▶ FX-format (24 x 36mm) and options for DX-format, or 5:4 ratio in-camera crops with automated viewfinder masking
- ▶ The larger pixels of the D3 provide a slightly broader dynamic range compared with the D300
- ▶ A wide ISO range from ISO200 to ISO6400, with options to shift to +1EV below ISO200, or -2EV above ISO6400
- ▶ 9 frames per second in FX-format with full auto-focus functionality and a buffer capacity for eighteen NEF Raw (12-bit, lossless compression), or fifty-two JPEG (Large/Fine)
- ▶ A double card port that allows either double-storage capacity, in-camera back up with each image file written to both cards, or separation of file types with one type written to one card and another type to the other card
- ▶ Attention to ergonomic design – all the command dials are set at a slight angle and the multi-selector switch has a separate centre button to improve camera handling, whilst the AF-ON buttons have been relocated for easier access with horizontal and vertical shooting
- ▶ The Virtual Horizon option that is intended to assist in ensuring the camera is level, only works in one plane and is not sufficiently sensitive; personally I consider it a gimmick, so stick to using a bubble level in the accessory shoe!

■ D300 SPECIFIC FEATURES:

- ▶ Fixed DX-format (16 x 24mm)
- ▶ A wide ISO range from ISO200 to ISO3200, with options to shift to +1EV below ISO200, or -1EV above ISO3200
- ▶ 6 frames per second with full auto-focus functionality using a single EN-EL3e battery, with a buffer capacity for eighteen NEF Raw (12-bit, lossless compression), or forty-three JPEG (Large/Fine). Frame rate can be increased to 8 fps with MB-D10 battery pack fitted with EN-EL4/EN-EL4a battery, 8x AA batteries, or EH-5a mains AC adapter. Frame rate restricted to 2.5 fps when 14-bit NEF Raw recording is selected regardless of power supply
- ▶ Self-cleaning sensor unit that oscillates the OLPF at four different frequencies to dislodge particles from its surface
- ▶ Built-in Speedlight flash unit with option to use it as a commander unit for wireless control of remote Speedlights (SB-800, SB-600, SB-R200 only)
- ▶ Optional battery pack, the MB-D10 with secondary shutter release and duplicated command dials to facilitate vertical shooting

date and for the first time in a mid-range camera it provides approximately a 100% view of the frame, so there is no chance of a surprise appearance by some element at the edge of the frame! It too offers a clear, bright view of the focusing screen and the information display, which is set out below its lower edge.

The rear panel of both cameras is dominated by the huge 3-inch, 920,000-dot TFT LCD monitor screen, which provides true VGA (640 x 980) resolution. Each screen, which are the best I have seen on any digital camera, is bright and crystal-clear, providing a wide 170-degree viewing angle and 100% view of the recorded image. A JPEG image saved at the Large-Fine settings, or a NEF Raw file can be magnified up to twenty-seven times on either model using the image review function making critical assessment of the focus accuracy a breeze. The delightful monitor screen is also pressed into action with the new Live View feature, which allows the user to compose a picture using a real-time image taken from the camera's sensor. There are two distinct modes: the hand-held mode requires the reflex mirror to drop down to its lowered position each time you need to adjust focus due to the dependence on the phase-detection auto focus method.

This impinges on the handling qualities of the camera when used this way but the drawback is more than made up for by the tripod mode, which is very well suited to shooting under controlled conditions, such as a studio. I found it very useful for close-up work and any situation where you need to make precise assessment of the depth-of-field, as both cameras provide a screen magnification of up to thirteen-times in the Live View tripod-mode. Focusing is noticeably slower in tripod-mode compared with the hand-held option but it has two distinct advantages: first, as it uses a contrast based auto-focus system there is no interruption to viewing, since the reflex mirror can remain in its raised position; second, the focus point can be placed anywhere within the frame area and is not restricted to one of the 51-points of the phase detection auto-focus system. My only disappointment is that mirror lock-up cannot be used when in Live View, particularly as it is so useful if you shoot at a reproduction ratio of 1:1, or greater magnification, where any internal camera vibration will undermine all the care taken in placement of the plane of focus.

■ SUMMARY

The D3 will redefine the way photographers think about digital cameras and their photography. It provides unequivocal proof that the pixel count is just one aspect of a camera's specification and alone it provides no guarantee, or measure of image quality; other facets of camera design are equally, if not more important in this respect and the stunning results delivered by this camera stand testament to that fact. Combined with its fast operation, extraordinary ISO range and robust build, it is truly a camera for all seasons and most subjects. If you cannot obtain outstanding 16 x 24-inch prints from the D3 and a high quality Nikkor lens, it is not your equipment that is at fault! If I were asked to sum up the D3 in one line I would say – it can see in near-darkness and in the blink of an eye to make the impossible possible. In light of the virtuoso performance of the D3 some might consider the D300 as a poor relation

but that would be completely wide of the mark.

The D300 is a highly competent photographic tool in its own right. Compact, fast, light-weight, it produces outstanding image

quality, whilst possessing most of the best features and functions of the D3. It will be chosen on merit by discerning photographers for whom its qualities will not only meet but also exceed their expectations. ■



THE NEW LENSES

Launched alongside the D3 and D300 were two new Zoom-Nikkor lenses: the AF-S Nikkor 24-70 mm f/2.8G ED and AF-S Nikkor 14-24mm f/2.8G ED. Both the new optics are fully compatible with the FX format of the D3 and the DX format of the D300 and earlier Nikon D-SLR cameras, and can also be used without restriction on any Nikon 35mm film camera provided it permits control of the lens aperture from the body.



The AF-S Nikkor 24-70 mm f/2.8G ED is set to replace the venerable AF-S 28-70mm f/2.8D, a lens that enjoys a very fine reputation as one of the best produced by the Nikon Corporation. It is a hard act to follow but the newcomer does so with aplomb!

Slightly longer than its predecessor but with a significantly slimmer profile, the new lens weighs 900g, making it a little lighter. It feels very well balanced on both the D3 and more diminutive D300, seating comfortably in the hand to assist positive and confident control. The minimum focus distance is also reduced and varies between 0.38m to 0.41m depending on the zoom setting.

The lens is very well sealed against the ingress of dust and moisture, including the now familiar rubber gasket of the G-type Nikkor lenses around the lens mount. It is supplied with the commendably deep HB-40 lens hood that attaches via a bayonet fit; there is sufficient clearance to rotate a polarizing filter with the hood in place. Also supplied is the high-quality, soft CL-M3 lens case. The optical construction comprises 15 elements in 11 groups, and includes three

Extra-low Dispersion glass elements, three aspherical elements, with one element covered by Nikon's latest nano-crystal coating. Nine blades are used in the iris to form a near circular lens aperture, which creates a pleasant graduated pattern in out-of-focus background detail. One aspect of the design that will doubtless prove to be a very real bonus is the fixed rear element; it does not shift with either focus or zoom action and thus significantly reduces the risk of unwanted material being drawn into a camera by the changes in air pressure within the lens as other elements are moved. Likewise, the front element does not rotate as lens settings are adjusted so the orientation of filters is maintained. The lens uses an internal focus (IF) mechanism, so it does not alter length when the focus ring is rotated; however turning the zoom ring in either direction from the 50mm marked position will cause the length of the lens to extend, as the inner barrel section is shifted forward. The position of the lens hood, which attaches to the outer lens barrel, is unaffected by the zoom action.

At 24 mm and close focus distances (i.e. 2m, or less) on the DX format there is very

moderate barrel distortion, which becomes quite noticeable on the FX format; however at longer distances the effect is much reduced and becomes far less troublesome. On both the D3 and D300 from around 28mm and beyond, out to almost 70mm, geometric distortion appears to be very close to the levels expected from lenses with fixed focal lengths. It is only as you approach 70mm that vestiges of very low pincushion distortion become visible but at a level that will not concern even the most demanding user.

Used wide-open at 24mm, the lens produced very sharp detail in the centre of the frame with the corners, which appear slightly softer just trailing behind but contrast is good across the frame. Stop down to f/4 and the entire frame looks sharp with the benefit of slightly increased contrast and colour saturation; this performance is maintained all the way to around f/16 on both DX and FX formats. From thereon the loss of detail due to diffraction effects and a reduction in contrast do become increasingly apparent. At the other end of the focal-length range the lens delivers sharp images from corner to corner even at f/2.8 and once again slight increases to contrast



and colour saturation from f/4 onwards improve matters further, with image quality maintained at this exceptional level all the way down to f/16. The short minimum focus distance enables reasonable close-up pictures to be taken and I found no concerns about optical performance being impaired even down to the shortest ranges. The lens demonstrates only the slightest degree of field curvature at 24mm and none that I could detect practically at 70mm, which further enhances its close range capabilities. The evenness of illumination across the frame is highly commendable; yes there is clearly detectable vignetting wide-open at 24mm on the FX format but this is confined to the extreme corners and is completely absent by f/5.6, whilst between 28mm and 70mm at f/2.8, again on the FX format, there is only a faint trace of vignetting and this is gone by f/4. No such effect is visible on the DX format at any focal length.

The control of chromatic aberration is unprecedented with virtually no trace whatsoever, even under challenging high-contrast lighting conditions. Likewise I found the effects of flare and ghosting were maintained at very low levels when shooting against the light, to a point where they were not a concern. Some have questioned the absence of Vibration Reduction (VR) claiming it restricts the application of the lens but inclusion would have increased bulk and weight adversely affecting handling, and doubtless resulted in higher price tag! I also think it is important to put the benefits of VR into perspective given the exceptional performance of the D3 and D300 at high ISO settings. Examining identical pictures shot on the new and old lenses demonstrates just how good the 24-70mm is; outstanding optical performance, including the improved acuity and micro-contrast in fine detail, have placed the 28-70mm in its shadow, which is no mean feat. In short it is now the mid-range zoom against which others will be measured.

AF-S Nikkor 14-24mm f/2.8G ED

The performance of the AF-S Nikkor 14-24mm f/2.8G ED is as impressive as its appearance. It is a substantial lens that weighs 1000g, yet despite this and its bulk, it compliments the D3 perfectly forming a very well-balanced partnership; on smaller cameras, such as the D300 it is most definitely front-heavy but then its angle-of-view is also restricted, so the appeal of its focal length range is diminished. The broad diameter zoom ring has a firm feel to it with no hint of drift, whilst the barrel flares to an even wider diameter for the focus ring, which has a very pleasant weight to its action and requires a throw of just 60-degrees to shift from its infinity setting to the minimum focus distance. This varies between 0.28m for focal lengths between 18mm to 24mm, and 0.3m below 18mm. The very short minimum focus distance, combined with the extreme angle-of-view, will provide the potential for some exciting compositions. The lens benefits from a similar level of sealing against the elements,



◊ AF-S 14-24mm f/2.8G (at left) shown with the AF 14mm f/2.8D

as the 24-70mm lens, including a lens mount gasket. The huge, bulbous front element is the new optic's most distinguishing feature and the fixed scalloped lens hood affords its only protection whilst in use, as there is no facility to attach a filter. It is supplied with a large push-fit front lens cap and the CL-M3 lens case. The optical construction comprises 14 elements in 11 groups, and includes two Extra-low Dispersion glass elements, three aspherical elements, with one element covered by Nikon's latest nano-crystal coating. Nine blades are used in the iris to form a near circular lens aperture and under most conditions out-of-focus background detail is rendered with a good gradation of tone and colour; however, under strong back lit conditions I did detect a propensity for highlight areas to exhibit an uncharacteristic harshness at their edges (at this time I consider my tests inconclusive on this issue).

The lens uses an internal focus (IF) mechanism, so it does not alter length when the focus ring is rotated; however rotating the zoom ring from 24mm to 14mm causes the front element to move forward and the rear element to shift backwards by quite a significant distance. There is no facility to attach a filter at the rear of the lens. At 14mm the lens offers an angle of view of 114-degrees across the diagonal of the FX format frame, so do not expect perfect image geometry! Even on the more restricted DX format there is clear evidence of moderate barrel distortion, particularly at close range, which becomes very noticeable on the FX format; however, the extreme angle-of-view also invites a strong keystone effect, a form of perspective distortion, which although not an optical defect per se, results from the camera's sensor not being perfectly parallel to the subject. In the region of 18mm to 20mm, on both the D3 and D300, the geometric distortion changes to a very mild pincushion effect but it is more than acceptable.

Used wide-open at 14mm, the lens produced very sharp detail in the centre of the frame whilst the corners, although perceptibly softer, hold up remarkably well. Stop down to f/5.6 on the FX format and this lens turns in pin-sharp results across the frame, with an excellent level of contrast and rich colour saturation, a standard it maintains down to f/16, with peak performance around f/11. At smaller aperture values the effects of diffraction and lowered image contrast



◊ AF-S 24-70mm f/2.8G (at left) shown with the AF-S 28-70mm f/2.8D

conspire to diminish optical performance. I observed similar traits at 24mm, although the image corners exhibited a higher degree of sharpness at f/2.8 compared with 14mm. Field curvature is present at 14mm but is well within acceptable limits and using an appropriate aperture should not detract from the close-range capabilities of the lens. As the focal length moves toward 24mm this effect becomes far less noticeable.

At f/2.8 and set to 14mm, the frame corners do suffer from noticeable but not disagreeable levels of vignetting on the FX format; however, that is not necessarily a bad thing on a lens with such an extensive field of view, as the effect can in many situations help to "hold" the image's edges. By f/5.6 this has cleared completely, whilst at 24mm and wide-open, the effect is minimal and of no practical consequence. At the long end from f/4 and beyond the evenness of illumination is exemplary. Again, as with the 24-70mm lens no such effect is visible on the DX format at any focal length on the 14-24mm lens. The control of chromatic aberration is commendable and when it does occur it is well within the ability of software to correct. For a zoom lens with such a complex optical construction and large surface area of glass the ill-effects of flare and ghosting are respectably low but care will always be required when there is a bright point source of light, even if it is just out of the frame.

For some the focal length range of this lens will be reason enough to use it, whilst for others the inability to attach filters in any practical way will be a major consideration and probably convince them to find an alternative solution – as ever it is a matter of picking the right tool for the job! Regardless of this AF-S 14-24mm f/2.8 represents a masterpiece of optical engineering and sets a new standard in the class of the wide-angle zoom lens. More so than ever the experience of testing these lenses has demonstrated that the image quality derived from modern camera lenses depends on the convergence of three key technologies: sensor technology, optical design and software. Digital imaging has come a long way in a very short period of time; Nikon's contribution to these advances has been considerable, with the D3, D300 and the latest clutch of Nikkor lenses re-affirming their place at the leading edge of camera and lens design. ■

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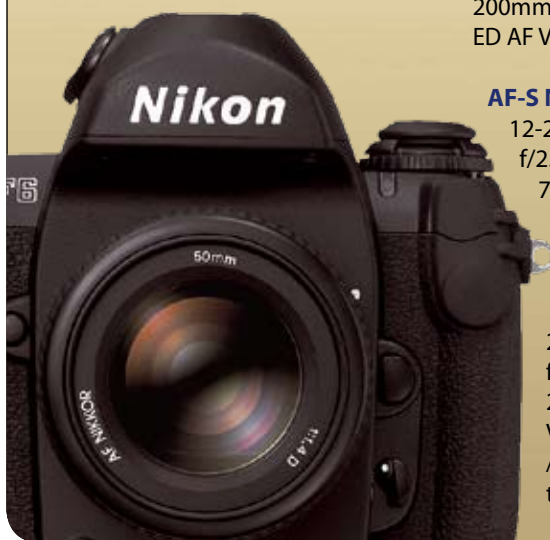


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AF-S Nikkor Lenses

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- Jim Brandenburg www.jimbrandenburg.com

Photographer Jim Brandenburg has shot images all around the world for National Geographic. His books, such as Brother Wolf and Chased by the Light, have been photographic best-sellers. He is considered one of the premier nature photographers in the world.



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Magic Lantern Guide: Nikon D200 by Simon Stafford

The Nikon D200 is the successor to the venerable D100 model. Packed with many of the features and functions found

on the Nikon's 'flagship' digital SLR camera, the D2Xs, it provides professionals and serious enthusiast photographers with a camera that has a very high specification.

Incorporating a newly developed 10.2 mega-pixel Nikon DX-format CCD sensor, eleven point auto-focusing system, with Nikon's renowned 3D Colour Matrix metering II system, and full compatibility with the Nikon Speedlight Creative Lighting System, including support for wireless, TTL control of remote flash units using its built-in Speedlight, the D200 sets a new standard in its class.

This book is supplied with a laminated quick reference card, and is packed with information explaining how to use the camera to its maximum potential; containing plenty of hints and tips that you will not find in the manual, it includes pictures that the author has taken using the camera.

£14.95 plus £3.05 postage & packing within the UK.



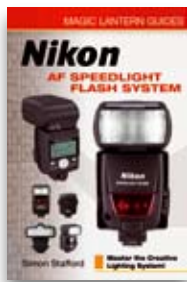
Magic Lantern Guide: Nikon D80 by Simon Stafford

The Nikon D80 has replaced the hugely successful Nikon D70/70s models. Sporting many of the features and functions found

on the Nikon D200 it provides enthusiast photographers with a camera that has a high specification. Incorporating a modified version of the 10.2 mega-pixel Nikon DX-format CCD sensor, eleven point auto-focusing system, 3D Colour Matrix metering II used in the D200, and full compatibility with the Nikon Speedlight Creative Lighting System, the D80 sets a new standard in its class.

The book has 336 pages, and comes with a laminated quick reference card; packed with information explaining how to use the camera to its maximum potential, it contains plenty of hints and tips that you will not find in the manual, together with numerous pictures that the author has taken using the camera.

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Magic Lantern Guide: Nikon AF Speedlight System by Simon Stafford

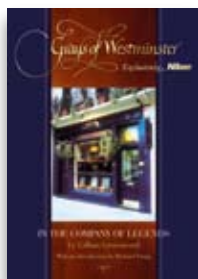
Nikon produces probably the most sophisticated portable

flash system currently available. The core components, the SB-800, SB-600, and SB-R200 Speedlights support Nikon's Creative Lighting System, which offers features such as i-TTL flash exposure control, Advanced Wireless Lighting system, automatic FP High-speed flash synchronization, and Flash Value lock. Regardless of whether you use a Nikon film or digital camera, this book shows you how to master not only the contemporary flash equipment and its operating modes but also covers, in detail, the use of other recent Nikon Speedlights.

Providing in-depth advice and information on flash modes, flash terminology, and the varied features and functions of flash equipment not available in the manufacturer's manuals, this book helps to explain every facet of the modern Nikon Speedlight system.

Comprising 288 pages, the book also encompasses a course on the basics of using flash, and describes a variety of specialized flash techniques, making it an essential reference for any photographer who uses flash.

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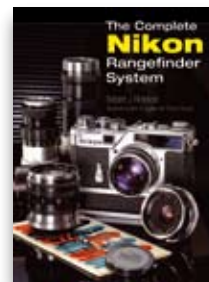
Grays of Westminster: In the Company of Legends by Gillian Greenwood

Gillian Greenwood's superb, illustrated

account of the history of *Grays of Westminster* and the history of the Nikon camera brand. The anecdotal style of the book provides an in-depth understanding of *Grays of Westminster's* development from its modest beginnings as a mail-order company to its present incarnation.

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***** Amazon: ...fascinating history of the legendary Nikon dealer delights with insights into the establishment of one of the world's most beloved specialty shops."



The Complete Nikon Rangefinder System by Robert J. Rotoloni

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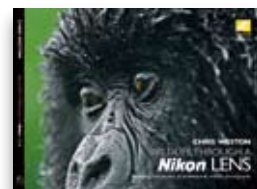


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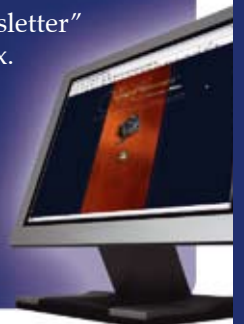
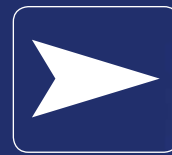
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heatherangel Workshop

Daily Event Schedule

09.15

Registration with coffee and tea served on the terrace of the Manor

10.00

Heather Angel presentation

Heather's presentation this year will be in two parts. In the first part, she will demonstrate how it was possible to create a series of images that were taken as a direct result of using the Nikon D3 – high speed action in poor light with increased ISO. The second part of the presentation will be the premier showing of the images and stories behind Heather's latest mammoth project for China's Olympic year. She worked for 7 months in China last year for her latest book *Green China*. Copies of the book and others by Heather will be available.

11.30

Break for mid-morning refreshment: tea, coffee, mineral water on the Terrace

12.00

Tutorial with John McDonald of Nikon Professional Support Group

John will explain how to get the best of the new technology employed in the latest DSLR cameras. He will show you how to exploit the wide dynamic range capability and improved high ISO performance and provide guidance on how to personalise Picture Controls to suit your imaging needs.

13.00

Lunch on the Terrace

14.00

There will be a choice of sessions throughout the afternoon. You may attend any or all of them, although the Photoshop clinics will be aimed at different levels.

14.00

Practical Sessions:

14.00

Still life macro demonstration with Heather Angel and the Nikon Pro Team

Heather will demonstrate how to portray still-life subjects indoors to the best advantage, selecting the lighting which is most appropriate for the subject – whether it be window light, flash, a light box, a light tent or fibre optics. You will then be able to try your hand using one of several workstations which the Nikon Pro Team will set up for use with the Creative Lighting System using the latest wireless technology with Nikon Camera Control Pro software. Flowers, fruits, shells and fossils will be provided for this still-life session. This is a marvellous opportunity for you to gain instant feedback on composition and lighting from Heather.

KIT TO BRING: Please bring a macro lens and flash; otherwise you will be able to borrow one of several from the Nikon stand. Indeed, these workshops are an excellent opportunity to handle and try out Nikon equipment before making a purchase.

14.00

Birds of Prey: Afternoon session outside with flying falcons conducted by Julian Huxley

By popular request, the birds of prey are back – ideal subjects to achieve stunning action images with the latest DSLR Nikon cameras!

14.00 - 15.15

Photoshop Techniques for Beginners with Giles Angel

Giles Angel, a professional photographer and digital retoucher and beta tests Photoshop for Adobe, will explain some basic Photoshop techniques with a Q and A session.

- Introduction to colour managed camera RAW workflow
- Bridge file browser / RAW conversion and DNG format / CS3
- Simple colour correction / variations
- Introduction to adjustment layers
- Levels – adjusting colour balance
- Preparing images for print and the web

15.15 - 16.30

Advanced Photoshop Techniques with Giles Angel

- Colour correction and manipulation
- Precise colour correction with adjustment layers
- Replace colour
- Black and white from colour
- Masking
- Solarisation / colour effects
- Photo Merge (to create panoramics) in CS3

16.15

Afternoon Tea and Coffee or cool drinks served on the Terrace.

16.45

Final Practical Session with Heather Angel. Heather will demonstrate various gadgets for aiding outdoor photography.

17.00

Workshop closes

18.15

Dinner at the Manor

This special thank-you dinner for all those attending our workshop has been organised by *Grays of Westminster* and the staff of Saint Hill Manor. **This must be arranged in advance.**

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