

THE INDEPENDENT

Independent Photographer

Part 3: Indoors



Produced in association with



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Introduction



As the chairman of the leading trade association for the photo imaging industry, I am delighted that *The Independent* has been able to do so much to highlight the value of good photography and imaging to its readers.

Independent Photographer not only explains how to take better images and gives advice on what to buy and how to print, but it also ensures that every sector available to the consumer is featured, leaving the reader to decide what to try.

The photographic industry has never provided the consumer with more quality and value than today and I am truly pleased that these series of supplements has been distributed to such a wide audience.

Gerry Dingley
Chairman, Photo Imaging Council



Autumn and winter are great times for photography. Not only do you have the range of autumn colours and the bright sunlight of the clear winter morning but you also can create scenes of your own while staying

indoors using natural light or flash. The Photo Marketing Association is pleased to support the production of this third *Independent Photographer* magazine, which will enable you to get the most from your photography. PMA Retailer members will always be delighted to meet you and advise on products and services so that you can enjoy taking, printing and sharing your pictures.

Nigel McNaught
Photo Marketing Association International

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Jamie Theakston

Cover: Getty Images



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The inside story

Don't put your camera away just because winter's here. Follow these ground rules and you will be able to produce some great images indoors, using whatever light is available. By Terry Hope

For many people winter is a time to put away the camera and to forget about photography for a while, but if you do then you will miss any amount of wonderful pictures. The weather might be less welcoming and the light is certainly harder to find, but even if you find yourself working inside much more than you would during the summer then there is no excuse for not getting great results.

The temptation indoors is to activate the flash, point it at your subject and snap away. That approach can bring results, particularly with the powerful and clever built-in flashes that many cameras feature, but it is by no means an infallible approach and there are other techniques that may very well get you better results.

Making the most of flash

The danger is that straight flash will look like exactly what it is: an unnatural burst of directional light that loses its power rapidly the further it gets away from the camera. The two most common errors with flash are the obvious faults: either you are too close to your subject, so that their face is completely washed out and overexposed by the intensity of the light, or you are hopelessly ambitious regarding the power your compact camera's flash is pumping out, and it will fail to illuminate a complete room and a main subject who might be several metres away.

The remedy for both situations is simply to get to know your flash: understand what it can do and then work with it. It just takes a moment to think before you press the shutter: are you really going to get a great result from up close, or are you asking too much of the flash by using it a long way from your subject? Move to the right

place and, if you are using a digital camera, check your result on the spot and re-shoot if necessary.

Another major problem with flash is that it will bounce back from a reflective surface. Position a subject in front of a window or, worse, a mirror, and you can guarantee a lovely bright hotspot that will ruin your shot. Even something like a highly reflective gloss wall or door will cause problems, so if you can move your subject to an area that has more matte surfaces then you'll give yourself a much better chance of getting the pictures you want.

Built-in flashguns give you a few options and some even allow you to alter the intensity of the light being output. Some will fire a soft burst of light to act as a fill in that can lift shadows on a face, while others will have a red-eye setting that is designed to remove the unsightly effect that is created when the flashlight bounces back from the retina. What this will do is to fire a number of pre-flashes into the eye to dilate the pupil before the flash fires for real, and this makes it less likely for red-eye to occur. It's worth a try, but the method is by no means infallible.

Shooting by available light

The alternative to flash, of course, is natural light, and there is still plenty of this around throughout winter, even indoors, although the best of it may not last for long and you could find that it is rather harsh and full of contrast. Learn to look for light inside and see if you can't manipulate it to serve your purposes.

Something as simple as closing a curtain, for example, will cut out light that could be falling in the wrong place and creating an ugly highlight, and you could also do this to make sure that all

the light you are using is coming from the same direction. You can also bounce light around by using a reflector. There are purpose-made examples that can be bought from a camera shop, but you could just as easily use a sheet of white card, and either prop this up out of frame so that it bounces light back on to your subject or ask someone to help you by holding it up and adjusting it until the light is falling exactly where you want it. The beauty of reflectors is that you see exactly what you are going to get, and you can increase or reduce the intensity of the light being thrown back by taking the board closer to, or further away from, the subject. One word of warning, however: don't use a coloured board, otherwise the light that is thrown back on to the scene will have a cast to it.

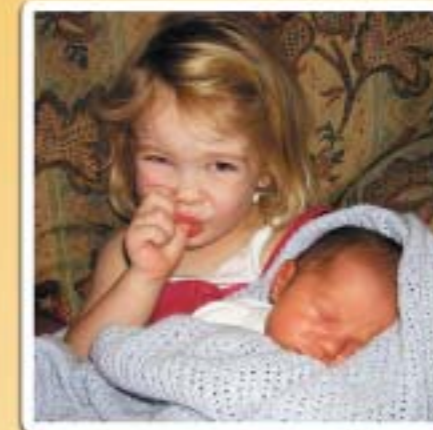
Use less light

Many of the better featured digital cameras these days have a function that allows you to alter the sensitivity of the CCD chip that is recording the image. It works in much the same way that film sensitivity does: for a fine result, but one that requires a good supply of light, you can set the ISO speed of the camera to 50 or 100. From there you can set the ISO one stop higher by doubling the speed, ie 200, 400, 800 and even 1600. At the high end you will need a lot less light to make a correct exposure, but the results will be degraded by what is known as digital noise, which is a little like film grain.

It's fairly safe to work at ISO 400, and some cameras are now so advanced that they offer good results at ISO 800 and above, but do check your results and make sure that you are happy with the quality you are achieving.

Turn off the flash

A lot of photographers don't realise that the flash that kicks in automatically when the light dips below a certain level is actually an optional extra, and it can be turned off if required. It's usually a very simple operation, and it's worth learning how to do this, because there are many situations where the use of the light that's available, even if it's fairly low, will help you to capture atmosphere that will be completely blown away by the use of a direct flashgun. Here the detail is much more visible in the flashlit image (left), but it's the softer, more natural look of the available light picture (right) that has the better feel.



Use flash carefully

Here the flash was used directly, but the approach has worked because the children were sitting on a soft-backed seat that sucked up the light hitting it and didn't reflect any back. The angles of the heads have created a lively composition and the fact that the little boy isn't looking directly into the camera gives the picture more of a natural and uncontrived feel.



Set up a still life

The winter months offer a wonderful opportunity to work on a few indoor still life projects and some of the simplest ideas can be the most effective. Here a candle was placed inside a carved pumpkin and the idea was to set up a picture that emphasised its scary nature. The pumpkin was set up on a table that featured a slightly reflective surface, so that it would throw back just a little of the light. The camera was a simple compact and the flash was de-activated so that the camera would take a time exposure, estimating the exposure automatically. A tripod made sure that the camera was held firmly in the correct position and it was fired by setting the self-timer, a procedure that meant there was no danger of camera shake. Had a tripod not been available, an alternative would have been to find a solid support, such as a chair, and to use this as a resting place for the camera. Compact cameras are light and relatively easy to hold still, and the exposure time for this picture was surprisingly short, around half a second.

Use daylight indoors

This is a shot that shows just how effective it can be to use the effect of natural light inside. It was a bright sunny day and the light was streaming through the windows of this hall, and it made sense to use the highlights that were being created on the floor as part of the overall composition. The little girl was keen to help with the cleaning and so she was set up close to

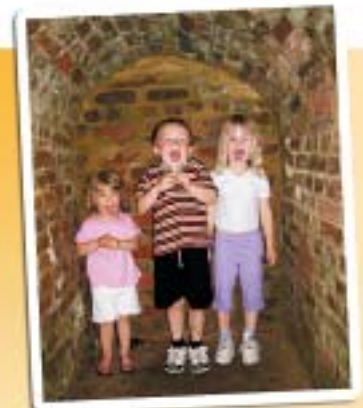


where the light was, but the picture had to be judged carefully so that she didn't walk into the pool of light itself. The picture only works because there is this contrast within the scene. Firing the on-camera flash would have taken away all the charm of this little cameo: instead it was de-activated, and the camera itself judged the exposure required for this well-lit interior.



Get rid of red eye

However hard you try, red eye is inevitable in a number of indoor situations and sometimes the only way around the problem is to use a little help from a software package. These days there are several available that will deal with red eye, while there are also a number of new compact digital cameras coming to market that actually allow you to carry out this procedure in-camera. In this case, a piece of software called Paintshop Pro was used, and the red eye removal was carried out by blowing up the picture and then positioning a cursor over each eye and making a single click. It was even possible to select the right eye colour to suit the subject, while a separate step dealt with animal red eye. The whole process took around 20 seconds and it has effectively rescued a picture that was otherwise destined for the dustbin.



Set up a scream

If you are wondering how to achieve animated pictures of children, give them something to do that they will relish. Here these children had found a brick tunnel that was used for storage, and they were having fun exploring. A burst of direct flash from a compact camera provided the illumination and they were simply asked to scream at the top of their voices. The children threw themselves into it with gusto, and the result is a picture that is full of life and which shows the subjects really enjoying themselves.

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Do it yourself

Home printing gives you complete control, says Daniel Paddington

Whether you've opted for a dye-sublimation printer or an inkjet optimised for photographs, there are plenty of ways to make the most of home photo printing.

Just as digital photography is possible without a computer (although it's certainly enhanced by the addition of a PC or Mac with image processing software to tart your pictures up), so printing is increasingly practical without a computer in the equation.

Dedicated inkjet printers for postcard-sized prints have LCD screens so you can pick which images to print and out they come. They are quick and efficient, and the finished prints are often hard to distinguish from traditional silver halide photographs. Many of the latest feature a series of memory card slots that enable pictures to be printed independently of a computer.

Dye-sublimation is a strikingly different process from inkjet printing. Instead of spraying jets of ink onto a page as inkjet printers do, dye-sublimation printers apply coloured dyes from a plastic ribbon, first cyan, then magenta, then yellow and finally a clear overlay to protect against fading and handling damage. It's hypnotic to watch as the ribbon adds one colour after another, creating images on the way that look as though they will never make sense until, suddenly, they resolve themselves with bright, solid colours.

Full-size inkjet printers, however, have one distinct advantage: you can choose the paper from a wide range of weights, formats and finishes. In fact, your choice is far wider than you will find at retail printers. Often you'll be limited to glossy, or at a push gloss and matt. But the range of papers on sale to take home and use is very wide. There's heavyweight gloss or lustre, or matt art papers, for high quality prints with a finish that suits your preference and also mid-weight papers for home projects where value is important.

You could even opt for ordinary photocopier paper, but this is a mistake: the images look less defined and dull and – given the cost of printer ink (which is now, litre for litre, as much as a fine

wine) – it is sensible to buy good quality paper. Anything else is a waste. Decide on the effect you want and choose the paper to match.

You don't have to buy paper made by the same company as your printer. In fact other brands may offer distinct advantages in comparison to the original equipment manufacturer's product. Whatever paper you use, it's important to refer to the sheet of instructions included – it will tell you how your printer software needs to be set for optimum results, and one printer's "premium glossy paper" setting may be another's "ultra transparency".

Once you've picked your paper, you could always go further by adding decoration. The craze for scrapbooking, where you create albums of memories by dressing photographs with everything from beads to bows, has taken off in the States, although it hasn't had quite the same impact in the UK.

Finally, when it comes to money, be cautious in what ink you buy. Though some inks made by other companies are identical to the original brand, there are others which are not.

Although the cartridges from Epson, for example, are much pricier than non-brand versions, successive surveys have often shown the original brands work out to be better quality and value.

However, ink costs can mount up, and if you have a regular A4 photo printer, it may be cheaper to have your 8x6 prints produced by a retail printer. For A4-sized prints, however, home printing can save money over shop or internet options.

The real joy of printing at home is that you have complete control, can be more creative with extra details, change the edging and so on, and can print again if you're not happy. Also, there is instant gratification in printing your own photos – and you don't even have to carry the prints home.



Stay in the picture

High street and internet retailers offer a wide range of photo services, from different print sizes to jigsaw puzzles, says David Phelan

Don't fancy doing the printing at home? You can do what generations of camera users have done – take them to the chemists to be developed. Of course, it isn't just Boots that has digital developing facilities. Photography shops, such as Jessops as well as specialist photo printers like Snappy Snaps and other independent retailers, all have similar printing capabilities, as do many supermarkets. You can leave your memory card or CD of images to be printed in the time-honoured way, but for the biggest sense of superiority over the other people in the queue who are handing in their 35mm films or disposable cameras, try an instant photo kiosk, which will copy the digital picture files from your memory card to the hard disk, so you can take your precious memory card away again and come back for your prints later.

The first thing to remember is that there's no negative with digital cameras – once you've wiped your memory card, all you'll have left is any print you have done. So it's important to back up the memory card before you wipe it. If you have a computer then that's easy, but if you don't, then pay the extra to have your images saved to CD, usually only around £2 or so.

In most retailers you can use a machine which will take your order and print your photos ready for collection in an hour or after a day. Then there's the instant photo kiosk, which does exactly that, and along with regular memory cards has infra-red and Bluetooth capabilities so you can create prints from a mobile phone.

In most stores, expect to find a machine which will accept all varieties of memory card and will give you choices as to the size of print, though not always the finish. There are some image editing possibilities, such as cropping or zooming in, and even red-eye reduction, sepia or black-and-white. Just don't expect Photoshop.

Another reason to go to a store to get your prints instead of slaving over a hot inkjet at home is that the range of options is much greater. Of course, you can print to much large paper sizes than your printer can manage. For example, Jessops charges between £3.99 and £7.99 for a 15x10-inch print. At Snappy Snaps an A1 poster (33x23 inches) costs from £44.99.

Or save yourself a trip and order your photos online. Various sites, including Snapfish (www.snapfish.co.uk) offer the full range of printing services, as well as options to print your pictures onto calendars, photo books, canvas, mouse mats, mugs, jigsaw puzzles and – wait for it –

Christmas cards. An increasing number of high street stores are also offering these facilities.

With such a variety of options it makes you wonder what items they'll come up with next. Dartboards for that special picture of the boss? Or how about something really ridiculous, like a comic photo on an apron, which would be funny for one minute at a family barbecue and then never worn again? Oh no, hold on, actually they already do those – see www.smugmug.com, which has a wide range of options, including tiles, fridge magnets and luggage tags.



A horizontal advertisement banner for ICI Imagedata. On the left is the ICI Imagedata logo and the slogan 'images for life' with the website 'www.ici-imagedata.com'. The banner is divided into several sections: a box for 'Olmec' photo paper, a close-up of a bright yellow sunflower, a pink box for 'Perfect Photo Printing' advertising 'Premium Inkjet Photo Papers' and 'High Performance D2T2 Photo Printers', a photo of a young girl in a pink swimsuit playing in a pool, and a photo of a small white photo printer.

The bright stuff

Turn off your digital camera's built-in flash and make the most of natural lighting.

By Steve Caplin

Shooting digital images indoors is straightforward enough: you don't need to worry about vagaries in the weather, about the position of the sun in your image, or about dropping your precious digital camera into a puddle.

But you do have to be concerned about lighting. Although virtually all digital cameras (apart from the extremely cheap ones) have a built-in flash, be very wary about using it. Built-in flashes point directly at the subject, as they should for maximum illumination; the downside is that, unlike the separate units that clip onto SLR cameras, you can't change the direction in which they point – to bounce the flash light off the ceiling, for instance.

Flash lighting brings a variety of problems. Firstly, there's the issue of red eye, which occurs when the light bounces off the back of the retina and produces an ugly, zombie-like effect. Some cameras offer a pre-flash, whose purpose is to make the subjects' irises contract so that there's less chance of lighting reflecting from the retina; but this does result in portraits with pin-prick irises, which look unattractive in the final photograph.

The main problem with flash lighting is that it tends to flatten out the image, producing a hard-edged central focus with a dark shadow behind. Any moody, evocative lighting is lost completely the moment a flash is used; a romantic candlelit dinner will end up looking like a police line-up shot.

If you can, avoid the flash completely. But this does mean you'll have to hold the camera very, very still, since not using flash will generally mean a longer exposure. The best solution is to carry a miniature tripod with you – and there are some very neat, small ones available, which will fit in your pocket and enable you to stand your camera on a table or sideboard. If this isn't possible, then rest the camera on a table, or on a bunched-up napkin if you want to angle it upwards. If you're standing up, press the side of

the camera against a door frame to steady it as you take the pictures.

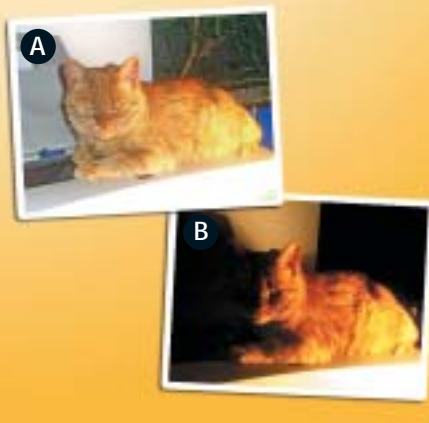
Digital cameras tend to have a selection of shooting modes that have been optimised for different situations. Even if the resulting image is slightly blurry, what you lose in sharpness you'll certainly gain in the atmosphere of the scene

that you'll retain. Once you get the photos on your computer, there are always ways of sorting out problems creatively (*see below*). To do so, you'll need to invest in a photo editing programme. Adobe's Photoshop Elements (available for around £50) is a good place to start.

Scene 1

Preserving atmosphere

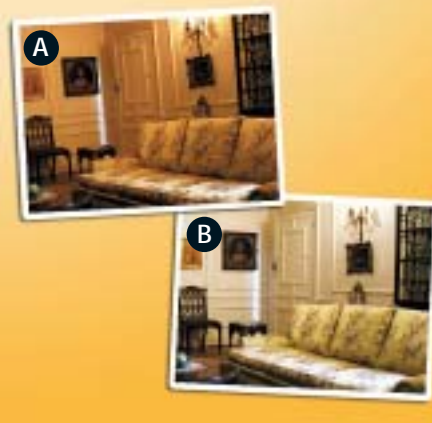
Two pictures of a cat basking under a light. The first has been taken using the camera's built-in flash. Although the scene is clear and bright, there's no sense of the light and warmth that attracted the cat to this spot in the first place. In the second image, the flash was turned off. The picture is certainly darker, but it retains the atmosphere of the original scene to a much higher degree. And it's easy enough to recapture some of that gloom in Elements – try the useful Shadows/Highlights feature as a first step.



Scene 2

Fixing the colours

Photographs taken indoors often come out with a strong red cast to them (A). If you haven't had time to adjust the white balance settings before taking the picture, don't worry: you can sort this out afterwards. In Photoshop Elements, use the Levels controls to boost the amount of blue, while lowering the red channel. Your aim should be to make any white parts of the image – the wall here, for example – look as colourless as possible (B). Once this is done, the whole image will look that much more realistic.



The bigger picture

Presenter *Jamie Theakston* is also a keen photojournalist

When and why did you first become interested in photography?

After I left school. I worked for Christie's on King Street where I worked on many photography sales. I loved Gerhard Richter, Alfred Stieglitz and Irving Penn – these were artists who showed me the power of photography.

What camera were you using when you first started taking photographs?

My first camera was a Canon EOS 650. It was Canon's first SLR, and I bought it from a shop on Tottenham Court Road in 1988.

How many cameras do you own?

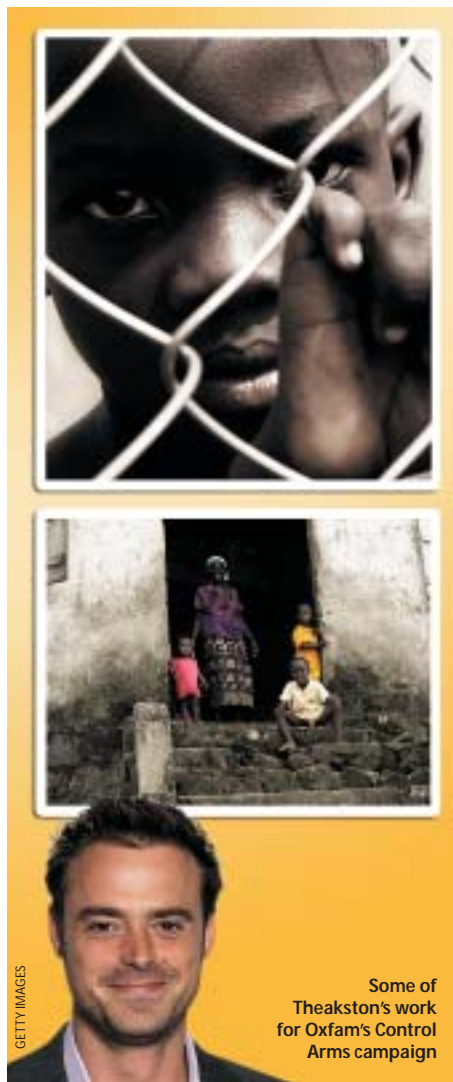
I recently disposed of my old 35mm SLRs, so now I just have my digital Olympus E-1. It's all I need. It feels right in my hand, has good weight, speed and optics, it's strong enough to take travelling and its dust protection is fantastic for shooting in hot and dusty conditions. It survived a lens change during a sandstorm in the desert of northern Uganda!

Do you ever develop your own pictures?

I used to develop my own pictures – I loved the drama of the darkroom. However, I fully believe that advancements in digital photography will make the whole process redundant. Developing was a time consuming and expensive process whereas digital is so liberating and will probably encourage more young people to take up photography, which has to be a good thing.

Who are your favourite photographers?

I have always admired the photojournalistic feel Henri Cartier-Bresson's pictures have. The photographs I have taken in Africa – I was asked by Oxfam to be a spokesperson for their Control Arms campaign – have a similar feel to them. I spent 10 days in Liberia whilst the UN was maintaining a ceasefire, which allowed me to



GETTY IMAGES

Some of Theakston's work for Oxfam's Control Arms campaign

take pictures of a country ravaged by civil war. No one captures the horror of war quite like Don McCullin, who was driven to show the world what was really happening.

Is there a particular type of photograph you like to take?

I enjoy taking portraits – people's faces tell stories full of detail. I often find that the best shots are ones taken when the subject isn't aware that you were shooting – one of the joys of digital is that you can shoot *everything!*

Is there anyone that you would particularly like to photograph?

The Brazilian beach volleyball team. Naked!

Have you ever been featured in an exhibition?

At the beginning of this year I exhibited two pictures at an exhibition in London – the whole thing was terrifying. Live TV is far less nerve-shredding! The exhibition was featured the pictures I shot for Comic Relief last year. It was a fashion shoot that included Jade Parfitt, Emma Bunton, Laura Bailey, Erin O'Connor, Jasmine Guinness, and Jodie Kidd.

What makes a good photo?

A good photograph always provokes an emotional reaction. Stuart Franklin's shot of a student standing in front of the tanks of Tiananmen Square uniquely displays the strength of the human spirit, and Robert Capa's shots of a Spanish militiaman at the moment of death show us the fragility of life.

Interview by Dan Poole

Jamie Theakston presents the Breakfast Show on Heart FM 106.2 every weekday morning from 6am

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