



Picture Perfect!

I purchased a new camera about a year ago. I didn't need a new one for taking *photographs*, but my Handycam for video work had developed problems, and as cameras like that can't readily be repaired these days, I had to head to the camera shop and look for a replacement. Not replacing it was out of the question, as my YouTube videos have become a major part (*the* major part) of getting our work exposed and understood around the world.

Video professionals of course use expensive dedicated equipment for their work, but down at the consumer level where I reside, it is common these days for cameras to take both video and stills, so I tried to select a unit that would give me good results in both areas. As it happens, one of the major manufacturers was having a major campaign promotion, and I ended up purchasing a prosumer type of DSLR body, together with a couple of lenses.

I have never had such a wonderful camera before. Everything I have ever owned has been very inexpensive, and very simple, and learning how to use this very complex tool has been quite a challenge during the past year. I have to confess right up front that I have done most of my work with it using its 'auto' settings, as I simply couldn't get reliable results when trying to use any of the other settings; there are just too many options for everything, and making one small error along the way seems to always result in a batch of useless photos.

(It would of course help immensely to study the manual I'm sure, but good grief, who has time to tackle a 400+ page book on "What to do before you press the shutter ..."?)

So one morning around a week ago, when one of the blogs I peruse each day linked to a post on a photography website in which the author promised a series of simple steps by which 'anybody' could obtain stunning photographs by using his recommended list of equipment and practices, I clicked over to read it. I saw right away that the photos accompanying the story were very nice indeed; I would love to be able to take such shots reliably!

So I read on, and soon found out that - simply by chance - the body and lenses I had purchased last year matched his recommendations. Hmm ...

His instructions on how to use the equipment were simple and straightforward. They did involve using camera settings other than 'automatic', but it was not complicated. I set everything up as he instructed, then put my camera in my bag and headed out to an appointment I had previously made, for discussions with a man we are hiring to produce wooden cases for our woodblock prints. (We'll have a story about him later, I'm sure).

He lives in a log house that he and his wife built together some years back. As we sat in his living room I remembered my camera and asked if it would be OK if I took a few photos. He said that it wouldn't be a problem, and I pulled it out, tried to remember some of the advice I had read on the blog page that morning, and took a half-dozen snaps.

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When I got home later that evening I transferred the images to my computer, and sat stunned by what I saw. These weren't 'snaps', these were 'photographs'! Woot!

Now any experienced photographer who looks at these samples I am showing will almost certainly just smile quietly to himself; he knows that there is nothing 'special' here at all. Simply Dave has taken one small step on the long road to proper understanding of how to use his new tool. But for me, this is a big deal. And it raises a very interesting point.

The author's approach on that website was extremely dictatorial: 1) get the equipment I specify, 2) follow the exact settings I tell you, 3) enjoy beautiful photographs. No ifs ands or buts, and no substitutions. Just do what I say!

Now I consider myself to be a pretty 'smart' guy who doesn't need to be babied or coddled when having something explained to me, and the approach taken on that page - the guru speaks; the disciples accept without question - doesn't normally appeal to me at all. But this time, perhaps due to his extremely confident tone, not to mention the excellent results visible on the page, I found myself willing to accept the advice.

Truly, it doesn't hurt to 'listen' sometimes ...

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