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**Grays of Westminster:
A Shop Less Ordinary**
by Gillian Greenwood

Nikon D700 and D90
Reviewed by Simon Stafford

**Heather Angel Wildlife & Natural
History Workshops 2009**

With **Nikon UK & Think Tank**

**50 Years Celebration of the
Nikon F** by master
photographer Tony Hurst

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welcome

Enthusiast-level Digital SLR of the Year: Nikon D90



Nikon D90

Fixed Focal Length Lens of the Year: 60mm f/2.8G AF-S Micro-Nikkor



60mm f/2.8G AF-S Micro-Nikkor

AP Forum Product of the Year: Nikon D700

High-End Digital SLR of the Year: Nikon D700

Overall Product of the Year: Nikon D700



Nikon D700

The Nikon D700 beat two competitive models with higher pixel counts, Canon's EOS 1DS MARK III and the Sony Alpha 900.

AP's editorial technical team stated the D700 takes the best bits of the D3, including the sensor and the AF, white balance and metering systems, but incorporates them in a smaller, lighter, and less expensive body, aimed at enthusiast photographers.

A Reputation for Service

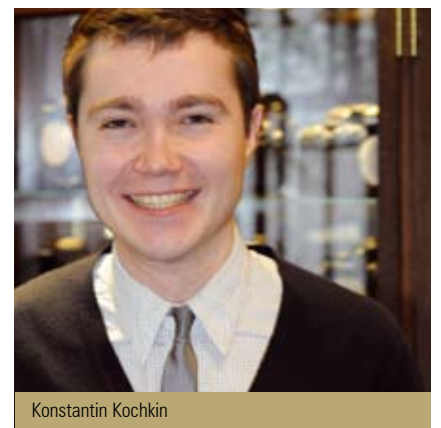
It has often been commented that *Grays of Westminster* have invented a new type of retail photographic environment for a new type of customer.

For many customers, their first encounter with *Grays of Westminster* is taking the virtual tour on our website www.graysofwestminster.com or perhaps from reading one of our distinctive advertisements in the pages of the photographic press. From those first encounters, a visit to the shop has then become, for some, an essential part of the Nikon experience.

One of *Grays'* most recognisable traits over the years has been profound product knowledge rendered with pleasing courtesy, and we continue to offer what we hope is still an elegant oasis of old-fashioned service.

Furthermore, it is our unstinting determination to relate to our customers with the spirit, courtesy and enthusiasm now so often lost to the modern retail world, to attend to detail because it matters, to inform and advise because we can, and to afford to each and every one of our customers the same grace, willingness and good manners that we believe is every customer's due.

Our staff are the key to this experience because we have always held as sacred, that our customers deserve the very best in staff and service. To that end I would like to introduce you to our two most recent members of staff.



Konstantin Kochkin

Our Technical Advisor Konstantin Kochkin is from Orenburg, Russia. He attended private school there and studied Humanitarian sciences. At University his main subjects were Linguistics and Languages (English, German, Latin), History, and British literature from *Beowulf* to James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Konstantin moved to London in 2005 to study photography and graduated with a BTEC² National Diploma in Photography course from the City of Westminster College. At College

Welcome, welcome, welcome to another issue of the *Grays of Westminster Gazette*. Spring is upon us and the heavy snows of February are largely forgotten.

All The Glittering Prizes

What a triumphant twelve months it has been for Nikon and *Grays of Westminster*!

On 22nd January I attended the prestigious *Amateur Photographer Awards* at One Whitehall Place in London which was originally designed for the National Liberal Club, and has been incorporated into The Royal Horseguards Hotel. As you cross the threshold, you will become aware of its architectural elegance: tall, lofty ceilings, glorious faience' tiling and intricate plasterwork, and a unique unsupported staircase that spirals through three storeys – the largest of its kind in Europe.

The award ceremony, conducted by *AP* editor Damien Demolder, was held in the historic Gladstone Library which until recently housed over 30,000 books which are now kept in trust at Bristol University and have been painstakingly replaced with wooden fascias in the exact location of the original book. Every year *Grays of Westminster* sponsors the Exceptional Achievement in Photography Award and I

had the privilege of presenting the award this year to Brendan Murphy the distinguished photojournalist.

Continuing their record-breaking achievements, 2009 brought praise and

recognition for Nikon when they received the lion's share of the awards in the following categories:

EXCEPTIONAL ACHIEVEMENT
IN PHOTOGRAPHY
AWARDS
2009

he learnt analog and digital photography, printing and studio lighting, as well as graphic design, illustration and retouching.

Konstantin first became interested in photography at the age of 16 during the summer break when he picked up his father's old Zenit manual SLR camera. He says "I have been shooting images since then. My first Nikon was an F100 which I bought in New York with the money that I earned working there. I later added an FM2n to my collection, and I am currently using a D700.

"I enjoy documentary photography (I am working on a few personal projects at the moment), but for commercial work I tend to specialise in studio photography, advertising, product shots and food photography. Examples of my work can be seen on:

www.konstantinkochkin.co.uk

I still use film for black and white work, and shoot digital for colour and commercial work".

Konstantin has expanded the level of expertise and assistance available at *Grays of Westminster*.



Niko Croft

Niko Croft is our youngest member of staff; having studied photography at school, he joined us late last year. Initially working on a Saturday, he is now with us full-time, and is taking part in our intense training programme.

Heather Angel: To the Manor Born

One of the most anticipated weekends on this year's photographic calendar will be when world-famous wildlife photographer Heather Angel returns for her 13th Annual Wildlife & Natural History Workshop this summer.



I am delighted to announce that we are now taking bookings for these hugely popular workshops which will take place on Saturday 25th and Sunday 26th July 2009 at Saint Hill Manor in West Sussex, England from 9.15 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. followed by an evening meal.

These two one-day workshops conducted by 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 including the world-beating D3X, D3, D700 and D90 cameras. This year, as well as the team from Nikon UK, we will be joined by representatives from Think Tank™. Think Tank Photo is a professional photography equipment manufacturer, creating innovative camera bags, camera cases, photo backpacks and beltbags for Professional Photographers that use digital SLR cameras.

These workshops sell out every year and attract visitors from all over the U.K., Europe and throughout the world. You can book a place (£199 per person) by telephoning +44 (0)207 828 4925 or book online at: www.graysofwestminster.co.uk For full details please turn to page 24.

50th Anniversary of the Nikon F



It is fifty years since Nikon introduced their first single lens reflex camera to the world: the legendary Nikon F.

It stands as one of the most important 35mm SLR cameras ever made. We enlisted the services of the distinguished photographer Tony Hurst, the man sixties' photography icon Terence Donovan described to me as a genius of still-life, to present our double-page celebration of the Nikon F.

We would like to thank all of our customers for your past and continuing support. We stand, as ever, ready to serve you...

With kind regards,

Gray Levett

¹ faience: glazed ceramic ware

² BTEC: Business and Technology Education Council



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THE D700: A CAMERA FOR ALL SEASONS

SIMON STAFFORD takes a look at the FX-format, Nikon D700 digital SLR.

The D700 was the second Nikon camera to feature an FX-format (23.9 x 36mm) sensor following the widely acclaimed D3. However, take a quick glance at the D700 and you could be forgiven for mistaking it for a D300, such is the similarity in their profiles.

The newcomer is a fraction taller with a slightly greater girth but otherwise externally the body design and layout of the controls is very similar. Anyone familiar with the D300, or for that matter even the D200, will have no difficulty in getting to grips with the D700 and be shooting pictures in a matter of minutes; the same goes for a regular D3 user.

Externally there are precious few hints to differentiate the new camera from the

D300, probably the most obvious is the larger viewfinder head with its circular eyepiece that has a built-in viewfinder eyepiece blind, which appears to have been transplanted straight from the D3, except on the D700 it houses a built-in Speedlight (flash) unit, with an identical specification as the one used in the D300. Another migrant from the D3 is the multi-selector button with its separate centre button that makes a significant improvement to the



operation of this key control. Refinement of camera handling continues with the provision of a separate "info" button. This opens what Nikon calls the Shooting Information Display but a second press of this button activates the Quick Settings Display, an innovation introduced on the D700, which enables the user to highlight one of several camera menu items and access them directly, obviating the need to navigate through the menu system itself. Otherwise the layout and function of control buttons and switches on the D700 are very similar to the D300, and all fall to hand easily with the exception of the flash control button, which is a little awkward to reach due to the proximity of the PC (prontor-compur) flash socket.

Whilst the D700 has a lot in common externally with the D300, internally it is a very different story. The real appeal of the new camera is that it uses exactly the same 12.1MP, FX-format sensor as the D3 with its 12-channel output with the option for either 12-bit, or 14-bit on-sensor analogue-to-digital (AD) conversion. Again, as with the D3, in-camera processing is handled at a 16-bit depth using the same Expeed processing regime. The D700 also provides an identical ISO range as the D3: ISO200 to ISO6400, with the option to select values up to 1EV below ISO 200 and 2EV above ISO6400, effectively ISO100 to ISO25, 600. Having used the D700 for several months, I can now say with confidence that image quality is on a par with the D3, no doubt by virtue of the large 8.45-micron square pixels on the sensor and the benefit delivered by the dual micro lens layer that enable the D700 to scoop up every last photon of light to render noise free images in an ISO range of 200 to 800. In the higher range of ISO sensitivities noise is apparent but extremely well-controlled and renders with a film-like grain quality. Normally noise is not the only consequence of increasing the ISO level, as colour saturation, sharpness and contrast all tend to suffer ill-effects but not so with the D700, since these attributes are maintained at excellent levels all the way out to ISO6400. The D3 has demonstrated beyond doubt that the megapixel count of a camera is no arbiter of image quality, as in-camera processing and lens quality are just as, if not more, important. The same applies with the D700; its combination of extremely low noise performance and Nikon's innovate Expeed processing regime allow images to be enlarged more than would have been possible with previous models; with interpolation, high quality prints above A3+ size can be achieved with ease. To whet appetites even further the D700 inherits the same highly capable AF system including 51-point 3D tracking, Scene Recognition System, Picture Control System, Active D-Lighting, electronic virtual horizon indicator, and superb 3-inch 920,000-dot TFT LCD monitor screen from the D3. Likewise the Live View system with its Tripod and Handheld modes is identical except that in the D700 there is no exposure preview in the Tripod mode, so it



“ Nikon have an outright winner in the D700, given its FX-format appeal, superb image quality, outstanding high ISO performance, plus excellent build quality. ”

is not possible to display a real time, 8-bit, histogram, as it is in the D3.

The comprehensive menu system, which follows the same basic structure as previous models, has no less than 117 main menu items, many of which have numerous sub-options. All the menu additions and tweaks introduced to the D3 by way of the firmware updates it has received since its launch are already plumbed in to the D700, so consistency in handling is maintained between the two models. This includes the provision of the Recent Settings option to compliment the My Menu feature, which allows the user to create a customised list of frequently used menu items to help reduce time spent working through the menu lists.

Finally, one common internal feature shared with the D300 is the self-cleaning mechanism used to vibrate the optical low-pass filter (OLPF) located immediately in front of the sensor. It appears to be just as effective at dislodging loose particles that settle of the OLPF as it does in the D300, which is extremely helpful given the much larger surface area of the OLPF in the D700.

After reading that list of features I expect that the first question on the tips of most tongues is likely to be – what sets the D700 apart from the D3? In this respect it is probably easier to look at what the D3 provides that the D700 does not:

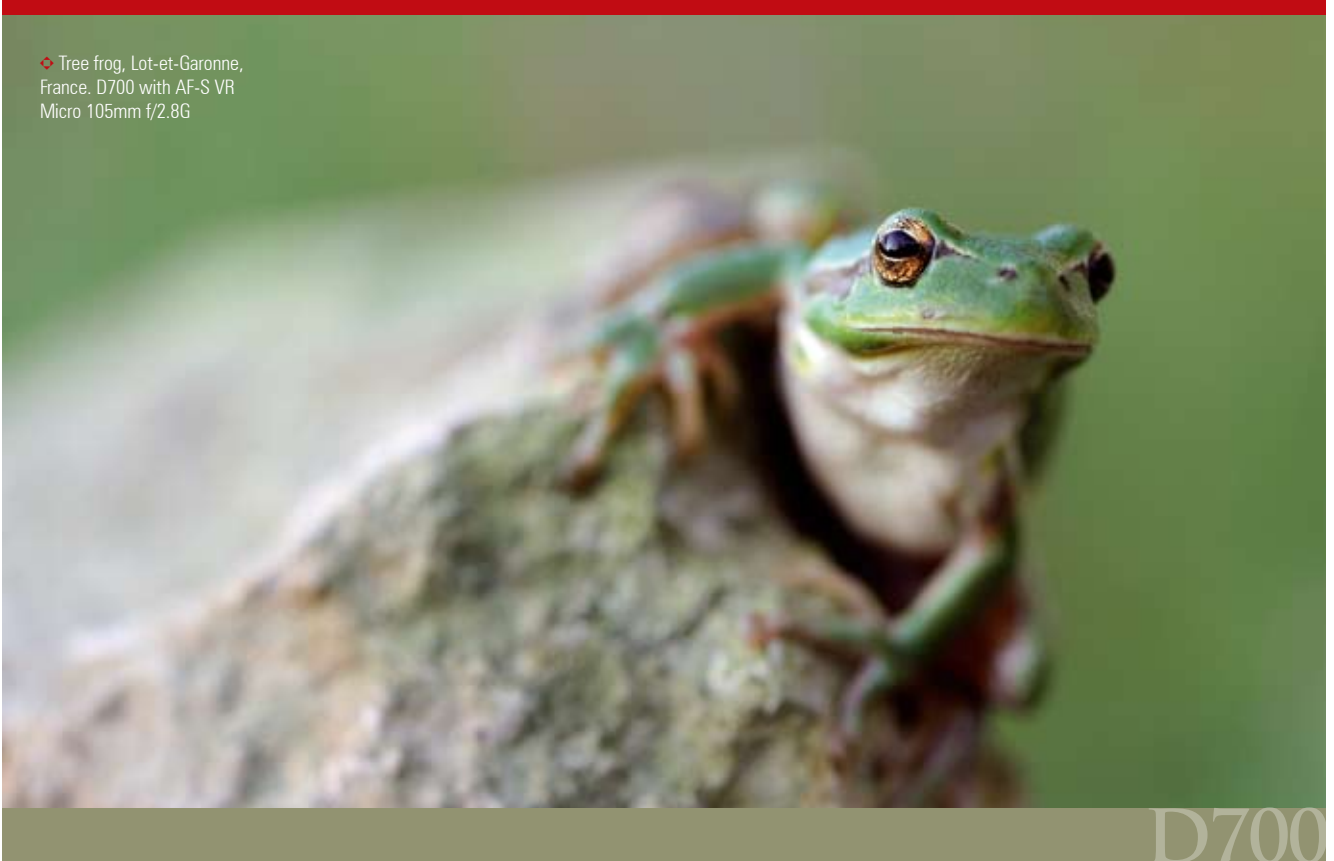
- All metal body and chassis
- Higher standard of sealing against dust and moisture
- Approximately 100% viewfinder
- 5:4 crop mode
- 9 fps (11 fps in DX-format)
- Built-in voice memo recording
- Built-in vertical grip
- Significantly more powerful battery (EN-EL4a)
- Interchangeable focusing screens
- Support for Type I & II Compact Flash cards

By contrast the D700 offers the following features that are not found on the D3:

- Lightweight, compact body with polycarbonate used for the viewfinder head plate, side panels to the camera body and memory card port door.
- Self-cleaning sensor unit
- BM-9 monitor screen protector
- Built-in flash (can be used to control compatible remote Speedlights)
- MB-D10 optional battery pack (accepts either one EN-EL3e, EN-EL4a, or 8x AA batteries)

However, it is important to point out that the D700 is not a D3 in a more compact body, at a significantly lower price! The uncompromising specification and armoured build quality that engenders such a sense of purpose and invincibility about the D3 continue to set it and the D3x apart from the rest of the Nikon pack. The D700 has a different role; it has been introduced to fill

◆ Tree frog, Lot-et-Garonne, France. D700 with AF-S VR Micro 105mm f/2.8G



the gap between the D3 and D300, offering a lightweight, portable, FX-format D-SLR, for the professional and advanced enthusiast photographers who do not require the high-speed operation and robustness of the D3. For example, the basic D700 offers a maximum frame rate of 5 fps against 9 fps in the FX format for the D3, while the shutter unit of the D700 is rated to last for at least 150,000 cycles, whereas the shutter in the D3 is rated to 300,000 cycles.

There are a few other points well worth considering about the D700, which set it apart from its illustrious sibling, the D3. Probably the most significant difference is the reduced viewfinder coverage offered by the former. As a consequence of including the scaled-up version of the self-cleaning sensor mechanism from the D300, the size of the reflex mirror used in the D700 has been reduced compared with the mirror in the D3. The effect of this is to reduce the size of the image that can be projected on to the focusing screen. Nikon state the viewfinder provides approximately 95% coverage in both vertical and horizontal directions, so the image displayed in the viewfinder actually represents only 90% ($0.95 \times 0.95 = 0.9025$) of the full, FX-format image recorded by the camera; this is the only aspect of the D700 that I have found to be somewhat irksome at times as unwanted elements, not visible in the viewfinder can appear at the edge of the frame; however, with practice and familiarity I soon adapted my approach to composition and by remembering to make regular use of the image review function, which displays the full image on the camera's monitor screen, such surprises are spotted at an early stage.

Otherwise the viewfinder is an utter delight; clear and very bright, it provides a magnification of approximately 0.72x, and displays all the essential information about exposure, focus, and other principal camera controls. An LCD projection system is used to display and illuminate the AF point, DX-format crop, and grid line markings over the focusing screen but the D700 has only a single LCD layer compared with the dual layer used in the D3; therefore, restrictions apply to the combinations and nature of the markings that can be displayed. For example, if you choose to have the AF points illuminated it is then not possible for the D700 to display the semi-transparent mask to define the DX-format crop area; instead the area is marked by a bold black line.

Another area of D700 design that I consider to be rather disappointing is the door to the memory card port, which is simply slid backwards to gain access just like the D60; there is no separate lock mechanism to prevent inadvertent opening. The door itself is not very substantial and seems vulnerable to being damaged.

The power source of the D700 is an important aspect of the camera that requires some thought, the small EN-EL3e (1500mAh) battery that powers the basic D700 body benefits from the very efficient power management of the camera but exhausts quite quickly with heavy use of the monitor screen and/or Live View feature, since both draw a significantly higher current compared with other camera functions. I have found that with restraint in the use of the monitor screen a single,



“ The D700 neither usurps the position of the D3 in the Nikon line-up, nor does it replace the D300; it complements both. Nikon have just given us yet more choice. ”

◆ Street musician, Jaipur, India.
D700 with AF-S VR Micro
105mm f/2.8G



◆ Chateau Duras, Duras, France.
D700 with AF-S 14-24mm f/2.8G

fully-charged EN-EL3e will last for about a day's shooting but I would recommend carrying at least one spare battery if you expect to shoot and use the monitor and or Vibration Reduction (VR) lenses for any protracted period. Alternatively, the EN-EL4a (2500mAh) battery, as used by the D3-series can power the D700; however, this also requires the optional MB-D10 battery pack and either the MH-21, or MH-22 charger, all of which adds to the basic price of the camera but then you do also benefit from the improved handling with the vertical shutter release and duplicated command dials, plus attain the higher maximum 8 fps shooting speed.

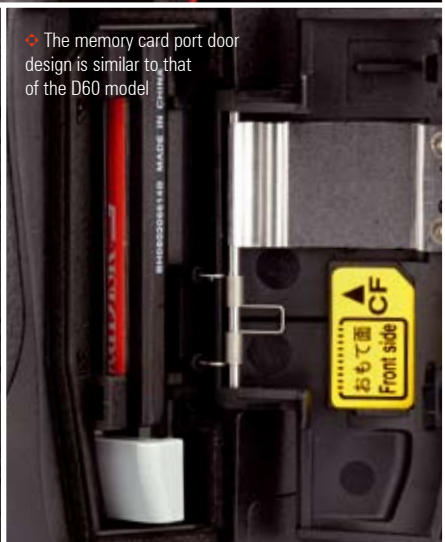
Is the D700 the camera for you? Well, as ever it is a matter of choosing the right tool for the job. The D700 neither usurps the position of the D3 in the Nikon line-up, nor does it replace the D300; it complements both. Nikon have just given us yet more choice.

Nikon have an outright winner in the D700, given its FX-format appeal, superb image quality, outstanding high ISO performance (I have no hesitation in using ISO1600 when the circumstances require it and at ISO3200 I believe it has the edge on the D3), plus excellent build quality. The flexibility delivered by its smaller, lighter body makes it ideal for many applications, especially for the travelling photographer. For those situations where a higher frame rate and/or greater bulk are required to improve handling with large lenses the MB-D10 provides a well-designed and convenient solution. While the wireless control capabilities of the built-in Speedlight make setting up a lighting system with a pair of compatible Nikon Speedlights simplicity itself. If you have been waiting for the right full-frame D-SLR to come along your patience has been rewarded – the D700 is a very good choice. ■

“ ... the viewfinder is an utter delight; clear and very bright, it provides a magnification of approximately 0.72x, and displays all the essential information about exposure, focus, and other principal camera controls. ”



◆ Sunflowers, St Avit, Lot-et-Garonne, France. D700 with AF-S VR 70-200mm f/2.8G





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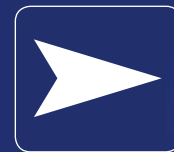
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TAKE ONE: D90

SIMON STAFFORD takes a look at the Nikon D90.

The Nikon D90, the long awaited replacement for the D80, became available almost exactly two years after the introduction of its predecessor. It occupies a key position in the Nikon D-SLR line up, as it is the first model where the specification broadens out to embrace the sort of features and functions demanded by serious photographers, from dedicated enthusiasts to full-time professionals.

In the two years that passed since the introduction of the D80, several new technologies became commonplace among many cameras in this class; it is a measure of how far development of the digital SLR has come, when you consider that features such as a 12MP sensor, built-in sensor cleaning, a Live View function, 3-inch LCD monitor screen, and 3D auto-focus tracking are now expected in a new model, rather than heralded as innovations! The groundbreaking step that Nikon have taken with the D90 is the inclusion of a video recording feature, a first for any digital SLR camera, a fact the company has made much of during its promotional campaign with the slogan: "The Nikon D90 takes you to the movies". At the launch of the D90, representatives from

Nikon made no secret of the fact that the ability to record video has been included to test the demand for convergence of stills and moving picture technology in to an SLR type camera; therefore, it will be interesting to see if and how this dual functionality develops.

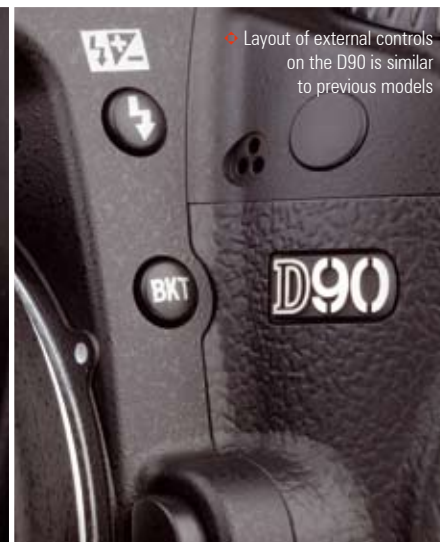
Setting the marketing hype aside, the D90 is first and foremost a stills camera, and in making it, Nikon has continued to maximize the economies of scale by using many tried and trusted components from existing camera models. For example, the D90 has a modified version of the 12.3 million pixel, DX-format (15.8 x 23.6 mm) CMOS sensor from the D300, the same 420-pixel RGB sensor for its TTL metering and Multi-CAM



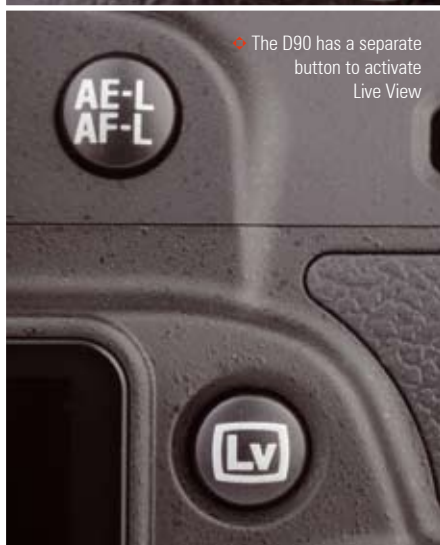
◆ Nikon D90 with MB-D80 and AF-S VR 18-55mm f/3.5-5.6G II



◊ The sub-command dial can be used to control lens aperture settings



◊ Layout of external controls on the D90 is similar to previous models



◊ The D90 has a separate button to activate Live View



◊ The D90 uses SD and SDHC memory cards

1000 module for its auto-focus system as its predecessor, the D80. However, both the latter two systems are augmented by inclusion of the innovative Scene Recognition System and improved data processing algorithms, again drawn from developments introduced in the D300.

The ISO range runs from 200 and 3200, with the ability to extend it to an ISO equivalent of ISO100, or ISO equivalent of ISO 6400, if required. While the increased resolution of the sensor is unlikely to make any significantly perceptible difference in a finished picture, compared with the 10.2MP sensor found in the D80, the performance at high ISO settings is appreciably better on the new model, with excellent noise properties at ISO800 that are maintained at almost the same level up to ISO1600, while even out at ISO3200 image quality is more than usable; however, with base ISO raised from 100 to 200, shooting at slow shutter speeds and/or wide lens apertures in bright conditions will require more frequent use of a neutral density filter.

Another feature that has migrated across from the D300 is its self-cleaning mechanism for the optical low pass filter. Based on the more infrequent cleaning I have performed since using the D300, I am satisfied this system works, and works effectively.

“ The real forte of the D90 is as a stills camera. It takes large strides in several directions to improve upon its predecessor, the D80, making an upgrade from any model between the D40 to the D80, very worthwhile. ”

Beyond the sensor the D90 benefits from virtually all of the latest features associated with image capture and processing available in the more highly specified Nikon models, such as the D300 and D700. This includes the ability to save multiple preset white balance values with full colour balance control, multiple exposure, and the automated control of ISO with maximum ISO value and minimum shutter speed limits. Image processing in the D90 offers the advantages of Nikon's Expeed regime with its associated Picture Control System that replaces the Image Optimization functions of the D80. There is even the ability to save/load Picture Control Settings to and from the D90, Active D-Lighting for assistance when shooting in high contrast lighting conditions, and automated control of lateral chromatic aberration for JPEG files. One purpose of the Expeed system is to enable different camera models within the Nikon range to produce very similar, if not identical results in terms of colour, contrast, and saturation. The D90 is no exception and its performance as far as these attributes are concerned is essentially the same as the D300, D700, and D3-series cameras. One common trait I have noted with all these cameras is the slightly high level at default settings for contrast and saturation, which can impinge on the dynamic range a camera can record. Set up with care,



◇ Autumn leaves,
D90 with AF-S VR
18-105mm f/3.5-5.6G

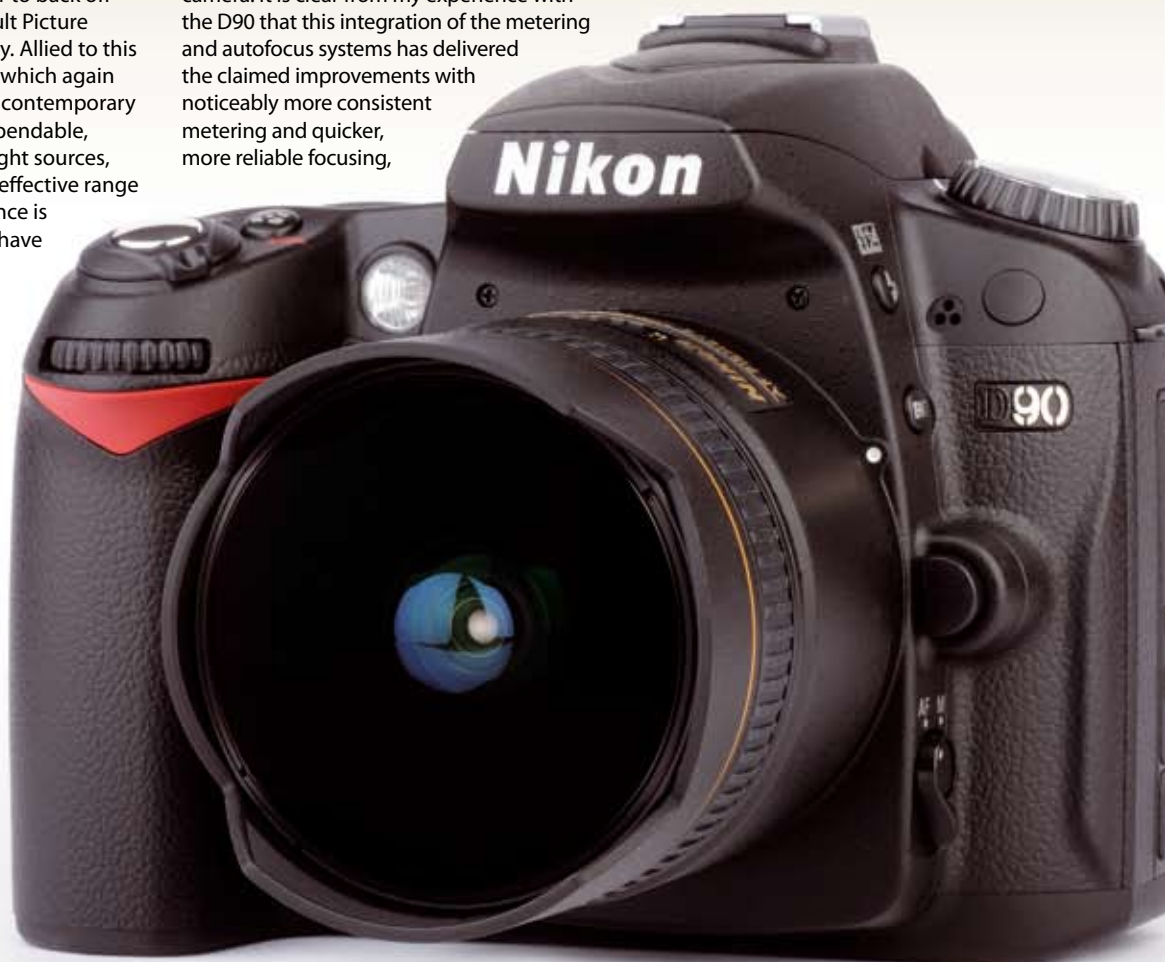
D90

the D90 can easily record a dynamic range equivalent to 8-stops, so remember it is much easier to tweak contrast and saturation at a later stage during post-processing, rather than try and undo the effects of over eager in-camera processing. Therefore, I believe it is better to back off slightly and modify the default Picture Control settings appropriately. Allied to this is the white-balance control, which again offers all the control of other contemporary Nikon models; results are dependable, even in situations of mixed light sources, although I maintain that the effective range for the automatic white balance is more limited than claimed; I have found it is generally reliable between 4000K to 6500K.

As mentioned above, the D90 uses essentially the same metering sensor and AF module as the D80, however there is a fundamental difference in the way these now work. The Scene Recognition System, which is also found in the likes of the D300 and D700, links the metering, auto-focus, and automatic white balance functions to deliver a perceptible enhancement in their performance. The D90 also offers the new integrated Face Detection System within the AF & Live View functions, which work by mapping the 420-segment Matrix metering sensor and

looking for patterns of colour and shape that equate to those formed by a human face. If the D90 detects such a pattern it will use this additional information to optimize the auto-focus system to identify up to five faces and focus on the face of the person closest to the camera. It is clear from my experience with the D90 that this integration of the metering and autofocus systems has delivered the claimed improvements with noticeably more consistent metering and quicker, more reliable focusing,

including the 3D focus-tracking feature. The only real limitations of the AF system are the number of focusing points provided by the Multi CAM1000 AF module; the 11-point system simply does not cover the same amount of the frame area as the 51-point



system found in the D300, and the gaps between the AF points are much larger, plus it only has a single cross-type focusing point, which is located at the centre of the field. In short, while the AF performance of the D90 surpasses that of the D80, it cannot compete with the D300 when it comes to focusing on a subject away from the middle of the frame, or focusing in low-light conditions.

Handling of the D90 is largely intuitive, with a very similar layout of controls to the D80, and near identical size and weight. Probably the most notable difference is the superb 3-inch LCD monitor screen on the rear of the camera; other changes that augment its handling properties include the relocation of the "OK" button to the centre of the multi-selector button, the addition of the "info" button to access the shooting information display and several key menu functions, a feature drawn from the D700, and a button to activate the Live View function. The viewfinder display is exactly the same as the D80 with just a fraction more of the full frame visible, so it now offers a 96% view in both horizontal and vertical directions. One change worthy of note is the new remote accessory terminal, which will not accept the older MC-DC1 remote release cable for the D80; the D90 uses the new MC-DC2, however this change does mean the new Nikon GP-1 GPS device is also supported by the D90.

While on the subject of accessories, the D90 accepts the optional MB-D80 battery pack that was introduced for the D80. It provides a second shutter release button and duplicated command dials to improve camera handling when shooting in a vertical format, and balance when used with larger lenses. The MB-D80 can hold two EN-EL3e batteries to extend the shooting capacity, plus it accepts six of the ubiquitous AA size batteries, as an alternative power source, although due to the power consumption of the camera this should only be considered as a temporary option.

Battery performance with a single EN-EL3e battery installed in the camera is commendably good with sufficient capacity to last for an average, full day's shooting; even with frequent use of the monitor screen and a lens with Nikon's Vibration Reduction (VR) function, you can expect the D90 to record 750 - 800 NEF (Raw) files. However, three aspects of camera operation will make a significant impact on shooting capacity, as far as draining the battery is concerned: use of the built-in flash, Live View, and the D-Movie video recording. Of these it is video recording that has the highest consumption and it is quite common for a fully charged battery to be exhausted after little more than 30-minutes of using the D-Movie mode, so if this feature appeals I recommend investing in several spare batteries!

The shutter unit in the D90 has the ability to cycle up to 4.5-frames per second, which is 50% faster than the D80, offering the potential for shooting sequences of fast action. The other limiting factor with a digital camera in this respect is its ability to write

“ Among the DX-format Nikon D-SLR models, past and present, the D90 shines, offering a perfect balance between feature set, handling qualities, performance and price. ”

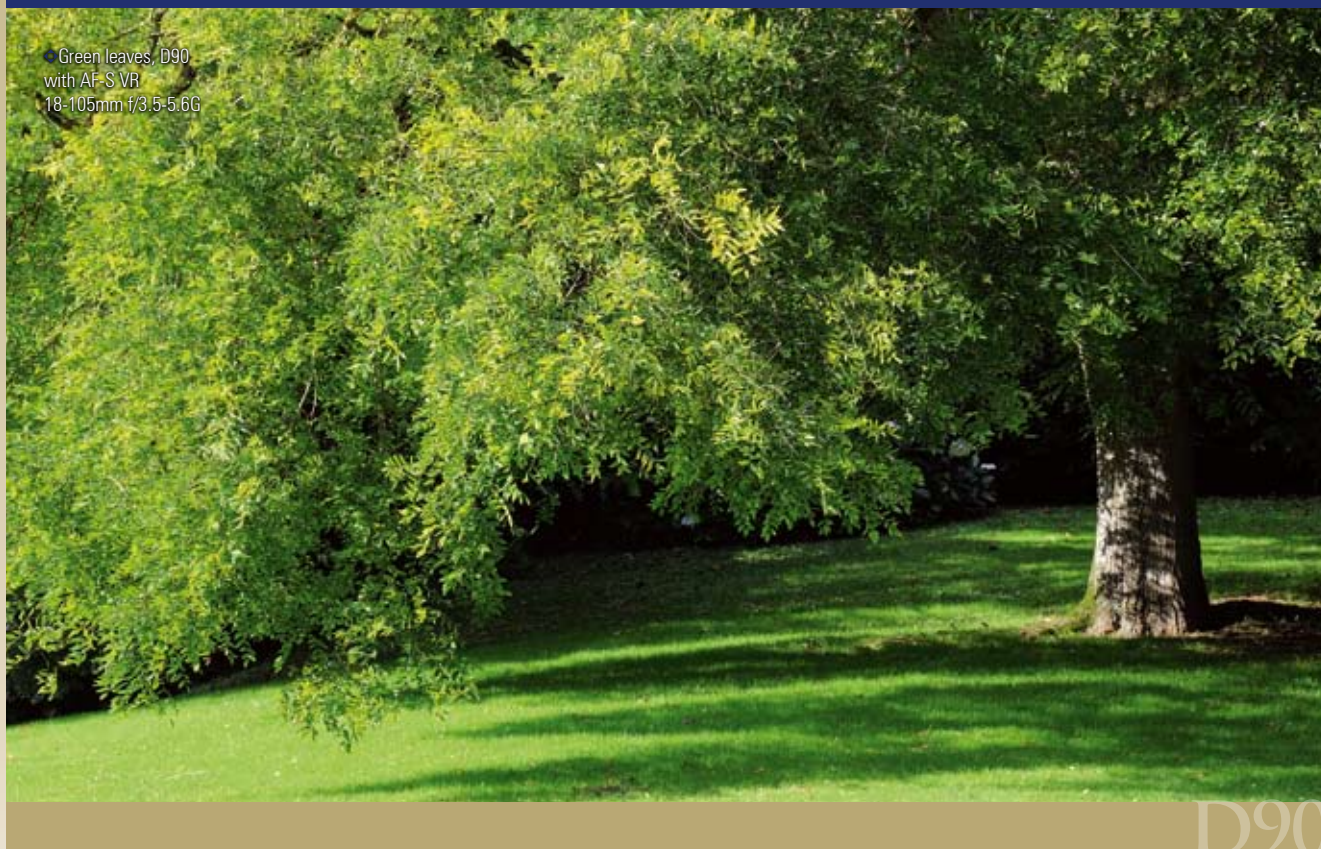


data from the buffer memory to the memory card. I am pleased to report that used with an appropriate memory card, such as the 30MB/s version of the SanDisk Extreme III, my D90 has achieved a write-speed in the region of 20MB/s making it 2.5x faster than my D80. This means that I am no longer concerned about the shutter being disabled once the buffer has filled, as the much improved write speed of the D90 enables it to continue cycling at a rate of approximately 1.5 fps once the buffer capacity has been reached.

The D90 has a Live View function that provides a real time, live image of the view through the lens, which is displayed on the monitor screen. The function differs from the system used in the D300, D700, and D3-series cameras, which uses a mix of phase-detect and contrast-detect focusing methods, as it offers three distinct focusing modes that all use contrast-detect auto-focus: Face-priority AF, as described above, can detect up to five different faces and the camera focuses automatically on the closest but if it does not detect a face, the AF area is displayed at the centre of the frame, Wide-area AF selects a large AF area that is intended for handheld shooting, while Normal-area AF uses a smaller AF area for more critical focusing when using the camera at short focus distances. The two latter modes allow the AF area to be shifted to any point within the screen area; so automatic focusing is not confined to the 11-points used by the normal phase-detection auto-focus. To simplify operation, the camera has a dedicated button on the rear panel, allowing the user to enter and exit Live View with a single push, and to help assess focus accuracy the Live View image can be magnified up to 6.7x.

The main innovation of the D90 is its D-Movie mode (video recording) and operation could not be more straightforward; open Live View, and then press the OK button to begin recording. Video files are saved at 24 frames per second as Motion JPEG in an AVI file, at a rate of around 100MB/minute, so one gigabyte of storage will be sufficient for about 10 minutes of recording. This file format is read by a wide variety of applications, so editing recordings poses no real obstacles. However, at its maximum resolution of 720p HD (1,280 x 720 pixels), the maximum clip duration is limited to 5 minutes; this is not a technical limitation but born of politics, because in Europe any device that can record more than 5 minutes of HD (High Definition) video is classified as a video recorder and attracts a higher import duty compared with stills camera.

At first glance the D-Movie mode promises much but look closer and things are not quite as might be expected. Essentially, once you initiate the D-Movie mode, the camera shifts in to something akin to the fully automated AUTO point and shoot exposure mode with Auto ISO activated, as can be used for stills photography. The only exposure control the camera offers



when recording video is an exposure compensation control, plus the ability to lock and hold the automated exposure value. Essentially, with any AF Nikkor lens mounted on the camera there is no user control over the shutter speed, lens aperture, or ISO value (Matrix metering is always used in D-Movie mode). The use of the AE Lock (hold) feature, which is an option that can be assigned to the AE-L/AF-L button, is important because in the D-Movie mode (as with Live View) the D90 adjusts the ISO value in steps of 0.3EV (one-third stop) to control exposure, so if the level of illumination in the scene being recorded alters, particularly if it does so rapidly, there is a noticeable jump in the exposure level. Both these exposure control functions can be set before activating the D-Movie mode, or after recording has commenced but be warned that if the built-in mono channel microphone is switched on it will pick up, with alarming clarity, the noise of the command dial being rotated to set an exposure compensation value!

Why is the D-Movie mode restricted in this way? It is all to do with the way the camera records the optimized image it creates for its Live View function, which is adjusted to provide the best possible image regardless of the exposure settings applied on the camera to record a still image; consequently the settings for shutter speed, lens aperture, and ISO used for still image recording are irrelevant in Live View and the D-Movie mode.

To reiterate my point above, the camera operates in a fully automated way including using automatic control to adjust ISO. Therefore, I am afraid that if you had aspirations of controlling the lens aperture

for depth-of-field effects, setting a fast shutter speed, or adjusting the ISO value to minimize noise levels, at will, you are going to be disappointed. In Live View and the D-Movie mode the D90 restricts the minimum aperture to f/8; however, it is possible to select a larger aperture outside of Live View and this will be used once Live View and the D-Movie mode are activated. The problem is the camera will adjust the shutter speed and ISO values to achieve a proper exposure and the user has no easy, or effective influence over these two settings.

That said, there are a few other parameters that you can control in the D-Movie mode when using an AF lens on the D90; these include focus (in D-Movie mode only manual focus is available) and focal length (with a zoom lens the focal length can be adjusted while recording). Prior to recording it is also possible to set the Picture Control settings, white balance (this can be altered during recording as well), sharpening, contrast, and hue.

As far as recording while panning horizontally in D-Movie mode, it is important to be aware that distortion effects in straight lines, particularly in vertical lines, are highly likely. The reason for this is the way a CMOS sensor records a video signal; rather than capture the complete frame simultaneously, the signal from the sensor is recorded from one side to the other, shifting from top to bottom in a scanning process. Hence, with rapid camera movement it is possible for an object to appear at different locations on the sensor within the same frame, which can give rise to curved, or wavy lines rather than straight ones! Likewise, when recording a subject that is moving rapidly it will often be

skewed making it appear to lean. Even hand holding the D90 while recording can result in this wobble effect being apparent, so a tripod is recommended!

■ SUMMARY

If you were thinking that the D90 could replace your camcorder for video work – forget it, as I have described there are too many limitations. In my opinion the video feature of the D90 is in the wrong camera; it should have gone into a D60-type model aimed at the ‘point and shoot’ user who would appreciate its automated simplicity, while a more flexible and sophisticated variant should be developed for the professional photographer, especially the photojournalist fraternity, and put in a suitably robust body, akin to the D700. That is not to say the D90 is incapable of producing good quality video; it is, you just need to invest time and effort to understand the system and learn how to work around its limitations.

The real forte of the D90 is as a stills camera. It takes large strides in several directions to improve upon its predecessor, the D80, making an upgrade from that model, or indeed any model between the D40 to the D80, very worthwhile. The D90 is also well-qualified for those photographers looking for a back-up body to their D300, despite the D300 using CompactFlash and the D90 using Secure Digital cards, since its image quality is, for all intents, identical and it shares many of the controls and menu functions. Among the DX-format Nikon D-SLR models, past and present, the D90 shines, offering a perfect balance between feature set, handling qualities, performance and price. ■

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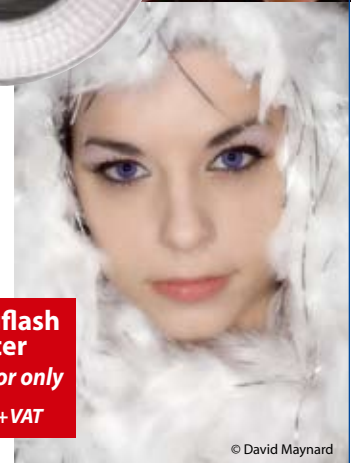
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Magic Lantern Guide: Nikon D700 by Simon Stafford



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The book has 416 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 taken by the author using the camera.

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The first Nikon D-SLR camera to have a sensor with the same dimensions as a 35mm film frame, the multi-award winning D3 has changed the way professional photographers working in the fields of news,

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Magic Lantern Guide: Nikon D300 by Simon Stafford



The Nikon D300 replaced the venerable and highly regarded D200 model. The D300 has a very high specification and shares many key features with the Nikon D3, the current flagship of the Nikon D-SLR line-

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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 D60 by Simon Stafford



The Nikon D60 has replaced the very popular Nikon D40x model. Sporting a high specification with a number of new features, including a self-cleaning sensor and Nikon's Active

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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 D90 by Simon Stafford

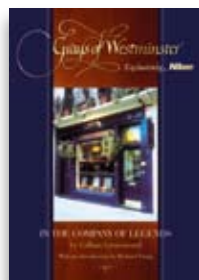


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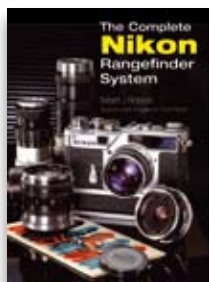
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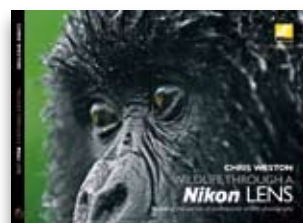


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BY GILLIAN GREENWOOD

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Grays of Westminster have managed to retain their unique ambience coupled with legendary old-world style...

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Grays of Westminster was founded in 1985 by director Gray Levett and both he and co-director Uri Zakay are committed to providing their customers with the ultimate retail or mail-order experience. Situated in an elegant Georgian building in Westminster, with its wood-panelled walls and fine desks,

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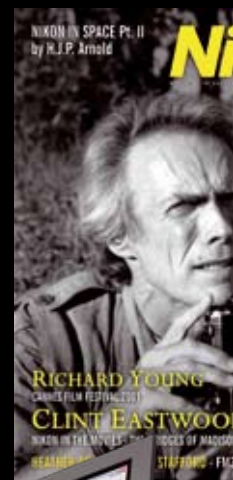
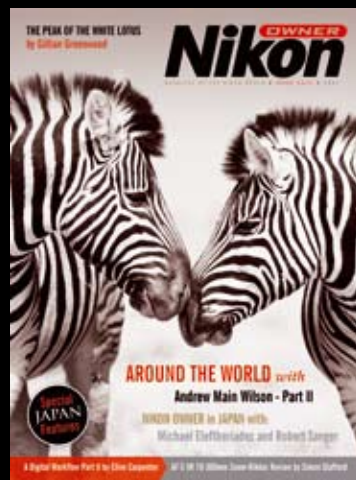
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