In Camera

FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to Camera Club 2009! I hope you had an enjoyable break over December and January. Our Committee has already organized the programme for the photographic year ahead, with speakers and competitions to inspire and motivate us to use and extend our photographic skills and put them to good use. It's not just about admiring nice pictures, though that is part of our enjoyment of course.

A lot of what we learn in Camera Club seems to enter our subconscious knowledge and we can apply it without thinking. It's good to know the technicalities of a camera without having to consult the instruction manual, and venture into choosing f/stops and exposure compensation to make creative use of the camera for a desired effect.

Looking back on last year we can be proud of our efforts in the various ventures we embarked upon. The Photos for Children being installed in the Children's Ward of Hawkesbury Hospital got us off to a good start. This snowballed into the calendar of the same photos because of the generous grant from Bendigo Bank. We are getting the 2009 images ready for the changeover, as chosen by our child judges last year.

Our major project for the year was photography for the Hawkesbury City Council Garden Competition. It involved a lot more than photography, and the hard work of our members ensured another successful culmination in the Awards Night for the Competition when our photographs were displayed and appreciated.

A new project we will embark on this year will be for the Hawkesbury District Health

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February 2009

Feb 4: Welcome Back Dinner

Feb 18: Competition - Open

Service, Stepping On Programme when we will be using our creative minds to provide some images in the prevention of falls for the elderly.

Please also be reminded of the Faces of the Hawkesbury Project, which will involve another meeting with our mentor, author Laurie Forth. I hope you have made some decisions about which people you would like to feature in our publication.

It is exciting to see our photographic skills and interests being used for the benefit of the community. As Camera Club President I attended the Australia Day Awards Ceremony at Richmond Club on Australia Day and was impressed by the wonderful community spirit that exists in the Hawkesbury. Many people with generous and willing hearts and a multiplicity of skills are willing to help others. Hopefully in Camera Club we can continue that ethos and put our passion for photography to good use. We benefit from being members of the Camera Club, enjoying the company of friends and a range of activities, while at the same time balancing that inward activity with the outward looking to the community and helping others.

We are thankful to Richmond Club for their generous provision of a venue for our meetings.

CAMERA CLUB SATURDAY OUTINGS.

In November last year a group of 15 or so members got together, complete with camera gear and ventured forth for the first of our Saturday escapades. We descended upon the locals of Blackheath and as is camera club custom, our first place of call was a suitable eating establishment. After refreshments, we set off on what became a very eventful day. During the day, we photographed various waterfalls; creeks; shrubbery; cliffs and each other. Some enthusiastic members even turned their macro skills onto an unsuspecting cup of hot chocolate. We started the day walking along bush paths, which tested our stamina & hearts. We got rained on, snowed on and then got hailed & sleeted on, which had us scattering and scurrying in all directions, all amid many smiles & much laughter. It was unanimously agreed on the

day that we all had a ball. About the only element missing from the day that could test our photography skills were lightning strikes. Lets see what happens next time.

Future outings currently being considered are Cockatoo Island; Bowral; Mt Tomah; Sydney City/Darling Harbour/The Rocks (for a night shoot); Mts Wilson & Irvine (in autumn) and Kangaroo Valley. If you have any suggestions or thoughts, please do not hesitate to let Ian know. (Ian)

WEDNESDAY MEETING

25th February

Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2008

See some of the world's most spectacular nature and wildlife

Leave Richmond on 9.31am train , alight at Town Hall Station and walk across Hdye Park or meet at the Australian Museum
6 College Street Sydney at 11.15am

(Opposite Hyde Park)

Lunch at City Extra ? ?

WHITE BALANCE

UNDERSTANDING WHITE BALANCE

Back in the days of film cameras most films recorded true colour when exposed at noon on a cloudless sky at noon. The professional photographer needed an array of correction filters to correct the colour when using daylight film. Most photographers didn't bother and their indoor photographs invariably come out with a yellow/orange or bluish cast. In the digital world, such correction filters are not necessary; a feature found in most -- even the entry-level -- digital cameras called, "White Balance", has replaced them.

LIGHT COLOUR TEMPERATURE

The reason that pictures turn out with a yellow/orange cast in incandescent (tungsten) lighting and bluish in fluorescent lighting is because all light has what is referred to as a colour temperature. Light emitted by a candle has a low colour temperature, which shifts light toward the red; a high colour temperature such as a cloudy sky shifts light toward the blue. Different light sources emit light at different colour temperatures, and thus the colour cast. Our eyes accommodate the difference so what appears white in daylight still appears white when illuminated by a candle. However the recording device in a camera, whether it be film or silicon chip, has no such innate correction so needs assistance.

An orange or blue filter absorbs the orange or the blue light to correct for the "imbalance" -- the net effect is a shift in the colour temperature back to what the film needs.

In the digital camera, the image sensor can do that colour shift for us. The information to do this can either be supplier by the camera's AWB (auto-white balance) or by a manual direction from the photographer.

MANUAL WHITE BALANCE

This is where the concept of "White Balance" comes in. Once the camera knows which object in the room is white and supposed to come out white in the picture, the camera can calculate the difference between the current colour temperature of that object and the correct colour temperature of a white object. The processor then shifts all colours by that difference. Most advanced digital cameras therefore provide the feature to manually set the white balance.

By pointing the camera at a white or grey card (angled so that it is reflecting light from the room) as a neutral reference, filling the screen completely with it, then pressing the White Balance button (or set it in the menu), the camera does its WB calculation. (See your camera's manual to determine the method)

From then on, any picture taken will have its colour temperature shifted appropriately.

[A "neutral" grey is 18% grey and will reflect all colours equally.]

Caution:

- Ensure the card is not in shadows, but illuminated by the artificial light in the room.

- If you are bouncing light off the walls, ensure the card is reflecting the bounced light.

- Beware of mixing artificial lights -- in this case, you might want to use RAW and adjust in post processing for each light.

- Beware of fluorescent light: since fluorescent light does not contain all the spectrum of light, you may obtain unexpected results

- Remember to readjust the white balance when the light conditions change.

PRESET WHITE BALANCE

To help with those special situations without having to go through the trouble of manually setting the white balance every time, cameras provide preset WB settings such as, Tungsten, Fluorescent, Cloudy, Sunny, etc. Using preset WB can improve on a picture, especially under indoors lighting.

In quite a few photographs taken under artificial or tungsten light appear to have an orange cast; by dialling in a preset Tungsten WB, the image gives a truer representation of the scene. Most DSLR cameras allow fine tunings of these individual settings.

Usually just selecting a Preset WB setting appropriate for the lighting situation is enough.

AUTO WHITE BALANCE

Since the days of the Kodak Brownie cameras, manufacturers have tried to automate everything. Hence, today's digital cameras

also all sport an Auto White Balance (AWB) function. Depending on the camera brand, some AWB works better than others. On the whole, though, AWB works very well in sunny and cloudy outdoors and fine for most indoors situations (a little orange or bluish cast does sometimes contribute to the mood of the picture anyway, e.g. the warm orange glow of a candle).

To test this feature set the digital camera to AWB and take pictures under tungsten, fluorescent, and mixed lighting (i.e. tungsten or fluorescent, plus natural light coming through the window), and see if the results are OK. If they are, you can just use AWB.

SNOW

Pictures of snow scenes typically reproduce the snow not as white but with a bluish tinge. Sometimes, the blue adds to the mood of the picture, but at other times it may be preferable to remove the blue.

If your digital camera allows custom WB, then set the White to the snow and the blue should disappear.

If the digital camera does not allow custom WB, then post processing can be as effective. In Photoshop, set the snow as white in levels this will produce a similar result.

SPECIAL EFFECTS

Once a selected WB is set, remember to reset this white balance setting when the light source is changed, or the effect will be unnatural colours.

In fact, by dialling in a WB setting inappropriate for the lighting situation allows the creation some special effects.

When taking a picture outdoors to make the light warmer, perhaps creating a late evening, sunset effect. Try dialling in a Fluorescent WB, in effect telling the camera that the light is too warm. The camera responds by shifting every colour toward the cool, bluer values. Dial in a Cloudy WB, and the camera shifts all colours toward the warmer, reddish values. Lots of trial and error recommended here.

RAW FILE FORMAT

A discussion in WB would not be complete without a mention of the RAW file format available in many advanced digital cameras. When saving an image in RAW file format, the photograph is saved the way the image sensor sees it - - without applying any adjustments (including white balance). In fact, the camera ignores any WB setting dialled in.

Later, in an image editing software with the appropriate RAW plug-in, the image can be converted from the RAW format to JPEG, at this stage the colour temperature can be altered. This change can be altered at infinitum until the ideal photograph is obtained.

Some professional photographers always use RAW file format. Saving in RAW file format comes at a price because it takes so much longer to save a RAW image that it might not be practical in many picture-taking situations. Professional dSLRs (and some "prosumer" models) have internal buffers that allow RAW images to be taken one after the other in quite rapid succession without having to wait for the saving of one image to be completed before you can take the next.

If taking landscapes, and it's early in the morning or late in the evening, or you are not too sure of which WB setting to use, try saving it in RAW.

Most digital cameras now allow the saving of an image in both RAW and JPEG simultaneously, though time to write to memory card is proportionally increased. However the advent of Extreme III cards have negated this problem.

SUMMARY

For most situations, Auto WB is adequate and does a professional job in diverse situations, both in the outdoors and indoors.

For those occasions when the avoidance of any colour cast is necessary, choose one of the preset WB settings.

If this still does not give the required outcome, consider manually setting the white balance by using a white card.

For ultimate control over white balance, shoot in the RAW file format, and adjust in post-processing. (eg PhotoShop) (AA)

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Want to move past the family snapshots to some really classy portraits? Then this book will give you new ideas. This is a book to help you take great portraits when you are not in your studio – how may of us has one of those?!

It covers a wide range from travel shots, people at work, the family, photojournalism and even selling your work.

A very practical book with each image explained for its composition, technique, lighting and technical details. It is not an introduction to portrait photography, but is at a more advanced level.

If you are keen to put some serious hours of reading and practice to make great portraits – then this book will help. (Paul)

March 2009

March 4 Lecture - Stepping Out (Calendar for the elderly)

March 18 Competition - Macro / Close Up