A lens with a view to please (Vol 1)

"What one has not experienced, one will never understand in print."
- Isadora Duncan – My Life.

…..Titillating pixels winking at the viewer, exciting their phosphorous emissions to the viewer on the screen, some images have that "pix"appeal"….

This new series will meander through the elemental possibilities of light metering, hyperfocal (yes it lives!) distances, apertures and flashy exposures. Nothing too flash, just the basics with a dash of luminous suggestions to create that pixappeal. (These topics are based on some of the most frequent questions asked and problems encountered at photography Institutes)

When we make an exposure of something, we can let the camera do it – "put the bloody thing on auto" and in 99 percent of the cases you will end up with a reasonable good exposed image. Most of us nowadays start/learn on "auto everything" and as it (photography) becomes interesting we want to know what on earth happened to do it better.

We haven't got a clue because we've never done it on manual…. so how do we get a well exposed image when the lighting conditions do not resemble an overcast day? (On an overcast day is the light is that soft, even, shadow- and gutless. You can not go wrong, it makes rather boring or flat images unless you know what the light does to exploit it to its full glorious potential.)

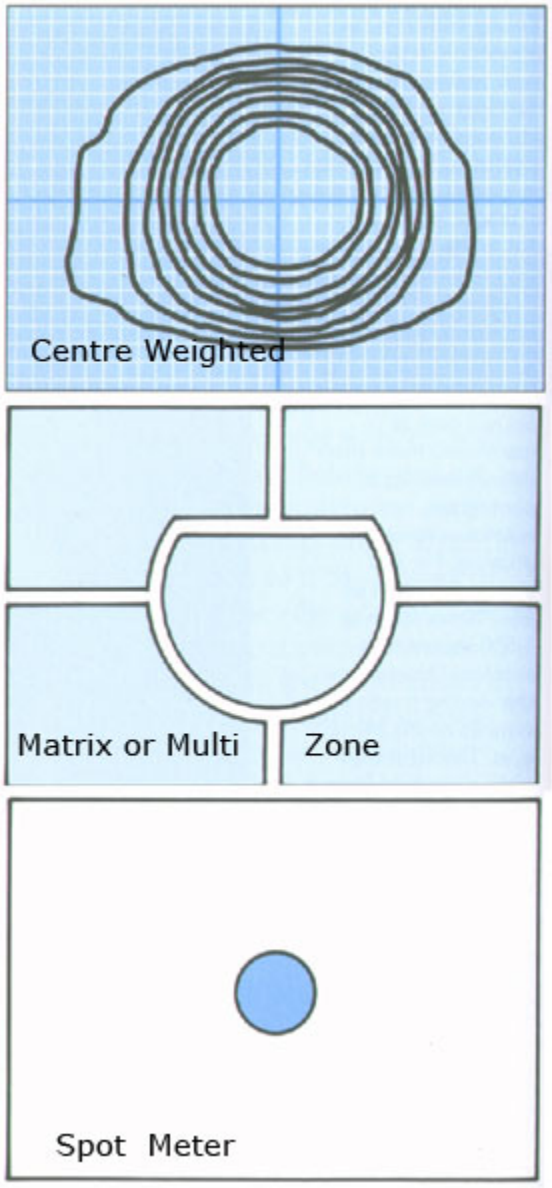
Most simple SLR and digital cameras base most of their light readings (say 60% approx) upon the light that is seen in the centre of your viewfinder and take only say 40 % of the light of the remaining part of your viewfinder in to account. This is centre weighted metering. (Photo 1).

Historically, learning photographers place what they like to see in the middle of the viewfinder - take the photograph - Bang! In 80 percent of all photographs taken by photographers in their learning days the focal point, or the main area of interest, of your photographs is located in the (boring/balanced) centre of your photograph. Nicely measured correctly by the light meter in centre weighted mode, except in the case of high contrasts.

There are more ways to measure the light inside the viewfinder, many cameras have matrix or multizone metering, or spot or partial metering as well, but you may have to select these settings by preference or choice.
The matrix or multizone metering is based on the fact that many photographs are containing light and dark areas in certain areas, based on analysing millions of photographs by the camera manufacturer.
The light meter bases its light readings upon the information it receives from the various zones, you have to know where they are, in what conditions they are applicable, they differ from camera to camera, so let's forget about them at present.

The other method of spot or partial metering is more useful and easier to use and gives more accurate results. It measures a very small area, usually only 3 to 5

degrees, or the area the small area inside the target box in your viewfinder (see photo 1).



But when do you apply these different methods?

Centre weighted Metering: If everything in your viewfinder has similar tones, very little contrast between the whitest and the darkest areas, you have no problems - this type of metering will give a balanced exposure. In high contrast areas like a landscape where the horizon is placed in the middle (something you should not do anyway ☹) your light meter does not know where you are looking at: the sky or the earth.

There is a substantial difference in tonal values between the two. Assume you want detail in the grass or earth in the foreground, so you aim your light meter down in such a way that you exclude most of the sky, perhaps let 10 percent in from the top. The centre weighted metering method will now measure the earth in front of you and set a light reading based on that.

Note the light meter reading and recompose your image and position the horizon where you want it to be. Your light meter is probably telling you now it wants to

expose at a different setting because it can see more light of the sky. Ignore this reading and use the numbers that were given to you when you looked at the earth only.

Most cameras will make it easy, push the shutter button slightly down to activate and lock the light meter when you take a reading of the earth in front of you to lock that meter reading into the memory. Then recompose your image while you keep the shutter button still depressed and once it looks good inside your viewfinder you push the button all the way down and make your photograph.

Some cameras have an Auto Exposure Lock called AEL. Look at up and try!
The correct exposure depends greatly on what information you feed in that centre weighted area of your viewfinder. If it represents a tone or colour that resembles a balance between the lightest and the darkest colours in your image you will be fine.

Did you know that a blue sky represents a value quite close to a middle grey?

Because a middle grey is the tonal value we are looking for. In photographic terms this is called the same as an 18 percent reflective grey card. If you are stuck, and you cannot see anything similar in a tone like grey, do not worry just point the middle of your viewfinder to that area where you want to see detail in. In reality it may look black to you, but once you point your centre weighted part of your viewfinder to that black area it will expose it into a grey, middle grey, area! Ok, forget the sun, we are now in the studio and we want to measure a figure study like

photo No 2.

Assuming we can only use a centre weighted light metering method
we proceed as follows. Model is lit by single light, deep coned reflector for strong directional lighting – like the sun. No reflectors to brighten shadows.
With this image inside your viewfinder, the centre area of your viewfinder shows mainly bright skin going slightly darker towards the right-hand side.

In reality the skin will have a tonal value, it is not white like in this photograph, the shadows will appear however quite dark. Take a light reading of the area where you want to see detail in; look at the transition area between highlight and shadow, in this case it is the edge of the nipple the surrounding darker areola. (Just to prove a point☺)
Measure this area only; you have established now a grey area in your photograph. If you had measured the bright skin with the centre of your viewfinder, you would have turned that area into a grey skin, and everything else that was darker than that bright skin would have turned into a darker or black tone. If you had included more shadow area, that would have turned into a grey colour and all highlights would have blown out.

Next month we will reveal more ☺, meanwhile any questions to hotshot@ihug.co.nz
Viewing you pleasingly next month
Cheers
Robert A F van de Voort © 2004

Reproduction of this article is permitted with name reference and link to my website
www.AlbanyStudios.co.nz