

A LENS WITH A VIEW 1

This and the following articles will introduce the view camera to the reader who is completely unaware of the possibilities, the surprises and ease of use of the big black box, my favourite working tool.

Most of us are very familiar with 35 mm camera's, medium format camera's that use 120-size film and digital cameras.

However, there is another camera, it has been used for over a hundred fifty years and making a come back, so we might as well get used to it. Most of us have seen the thing, big, unwieldy, complicated, ugly and no bells and whistles but awesome in its image making.....

Because the shape is so unfamiliar we do not know where to begin to take photo's, everything seems moveable, so let's take it apart, they are so BI%#@& simple, you're 35 mm camera or digicam is far more complicated than this baby!

There are 2 types of view camera, one is more suited for outside work I feel, (see picture of wooden camera)



, nice and compact, folds up in most cases, sometimes very nicely made in rosewood and brass, the other one (see picture of Sinar camera in bits)



is like a monorail or optical

bench type and more in use in a studio environment, the look is more utilitarian without all the shiny brassy bits that could stuff up your shots by causing reflections in the wrong spot... They both work on the same principles, the "landscape camera" has less moving options or is more limited in it's movements and you can not take it apart except change lenses, so lets examine the other one. Since I own a Sinar, I will demonstrate with photos of my own camera what the bits look like, the new one looks all black so this is probably easier to see the detail.

- The base is in this case a rail on which the components move, can be extended as long as you like or shortened.
- The Lens panel or holder, this holder holds the lens and shutter (in most cases the shutter is build inside the lens therefore allowing high synchronization speeds for flash photography, as high as the highest shutter speed of the lens.
- The Image holder. This holder holds the "groundglass" on which the image projected by the lens falls. This holder has also the facility to remove the groundglass a little to insert the holder containing your film.
- The bellows, that harmonica shaped thing, that connects the lens and image holder in such a way that no light outside the camera can fall on the film, a little like a "flexible camera body". Theoretically, you could take a picture without the bellows if you were in a total dark room, and the light on your object is directional and is far enough away not to cause any stray light to fall on your film, worth a try....
- Black cloth, or a viewfinder with a mirror to view the upside down image on the groundglass the correct way (mostly needed for art directors, photographers can read upside down images...), tripod of the very big kind is a must, a lenshood is nice, and so is a host of other things that will make life cool.

More or less this camera is the same as a SLR but without the mirrors, and the shutter in the front and not in the back of the camera. Ok, so these are the basic bits, now what do they do to make it work?

The lens projects an image, and depending on the focal length, it will produce a circular image (your lens is circular, not oblong or square). This image has to be focused to see it sharply on the groundglass. Your groundglass will collect the center of that projected image circle and what can't fit on the groundglass drops into oblivion. (Later I will tell you how to retrieve those bits...). You can focus in three ways (versatile don't you think?) you move the lens panel forwards or backwards until it is sharp, you can move the imageholder with the groundglass backwards or forwards until it is sharp, or both. If you move the lenspanel back and forwards you actually do

the same as getting closer or further away from your object, so it is not the best idea to start with that because it will alter your image you will see more or less. You know from your 35mm experience that in order to get very close for macro work etc. you might have to buy extension tubes or a little extension bellows to bring the lens further from the body to focus so close. The view camera does not need that, provided your bellows are long enough and the rail to support your camera is long enough, your lens can move away from the imagepanel in the back to get very close, diabolically close to the object of your desires. And you don't need to buy anything extra. (bonus, bonus!). On the contrary, if you do landscape work or work on "infinity" the lens and image panel will sit very close to each other.

What I like about the image on the groundglass is the fact that is viewable from a little distance. This gives the image maker the opportunity to "see" the composed image in 2D like on a printed photo or page. When you look through a 35 mm viewfinder you look "through" the viewfinder at reality in real life, small and not in 2D! Not that this takes anything away from your photo, but seeing your photo in detail from a little distance is an unforgettable experience, the detail, the colors, the sharpness, blah blah blah I love it....

Next month we are going sideways and bend a few things, any enquiries, email me at hotshot@ihug.co.nz, or see me at www.AlbanyStudios.co.nz

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