

Creative Use of White Balance

There are times when photographers do not want accurate colours in their photography. If you ever used a film SLR and used a 'warm-up' filter when photographing sunsets you'd have noted that the results were quite spectacular. What were already fairly warm tones in the photos became even warmer - in fact they sizzled!

You **could** go out and buy yourself coloured filters for your digital cameras but using White Balance controls on your camera can also impact the colours in your images - not only to correct them but to enhance the look and feel of your shots.

Look at three shots of a Camilia

The first shot was taken with Automatic White Balance mode (AWB) selected. The camera took a guess at what the colours were and it got it pretty much spot on.



The following shot was taken with exactly the same settings as the first except that the White Balance mode was Tungsten, so that the Colour Temperature was 2850k (2850 Kelvin). This cooled the colours down to the maximum that the camera would allow and the result was a much bluer (or cooler) shot than the first.



This last shot was shot at the same settings as the first two except that I warmed up the colours to the maximum by changing the temperature to 'Shade' - 7500k. The result is an image with an orange cast over it - much warmer tones.



I personally prefer the first shot but if I were photographing a sunset on a beach at the end of a hot summers day the warmer tones of the last shot might add something to the mood and feel of the image. On the other hand if I were shooting on a cold misty winters day out in the countryside and wanted to enhance that feeling I could use the cooler tones of the second shot.

Many cameras allow you to shoot at any Kelvin rating between 2800k - 10000k (in increments of 100) so you don't need to shoot at the extremes (like I have in these shots) to get warmer or cooler tones in my shots. Experiment with your own 'preset' WB settings - see what it does to your pictures. Want a dramatic sunrise/sunset? Put your WB to 'Shade'.

If you shoot in Raw, you can make all these adjustments 'back at base', with your Raw processing program..... some people will say, "I don't want to fiddle with the computer for that long"... others will say, "Yes, I could stick with Auto WB to save fiddling around while taking the pictures, then change the shots when they're on the computer". It also depends on how many shots you've taken - but if you use Lightroom you could alter many shots in one go.

PS: Some more advanced digital cameras also have White Balance Bracketing which allows you to take a series of shots at slightly different temperatures automatically so that you can choose which one you like the best. The only thing with that is, if you had a camera that sophisticated, why wouldn't you be shooting in Raw? Works well with mixed lighting, though..... think of those cozy pictures of warm (orange) house lights in the winter, while it's blue cold outside. You'd put one picture over the other in your photo editor and allow some of the top - e.g. The views through the windows - to come through.