

# Filters

Personal view - Geoff Chalcraft

If you were an enthusiastic user of film cameras, you probably learned quite a bit about using filters on your lenses. For Black and White, various Red, Orange, Yellow filters gave skies some texture, Blue was useful for portraits (of men) and Green displayed different tones of green in forests etc. Then there were some very odd filters like 'Stars', 'Tobacco' and various other things to spice up dull photographs. The Polarising filter was also an essential bit of kit and many people also used a 'skylight' filter - if only to protect the end of the lens.

So how has the switch from film to digital changed the way you take photographs? In my case, it hasn't - much. I take more of them, because they don't come with a 'cost per frame' element any more, and I definitely produced more black and white images now that I no longer need a darkroom. Other than that, it's business as usual - I compose shots in-camera as I want them to look when printed or published, I try to get the exposure right rather than rely on my Raw processor to correct error later and I use filters on pretty much every shot I take. Apart from the Polarising filter, though, they're not the same filters that I used with film.

Why bother with filters when digital technology is there to help? Not all filter effects can be replicated digitally..... and, in any case, if the 'information' isn't in that digital file to start with, it cannot be 'brought back' later. Anyway, I'd rather do it at the taking stage so I can spend more time taking pictures and less time at a computer working on them.

Not much need to use coloured filters to alter the way colours translate to grey tones - that's one job that is best done using a photo editor. But I still use neutral density filters, both 'Graduated' (to help with 'holding back' bright areas in an image) and 'Solid' (to slow down my exposure time for creative effects). Then there's the polarising filter to enhance sky, boost contrast, increase clarity and reduce glare. These filters are useful in both colour and black and white.

The question is, which filter system out there is the best? Round 'screw-in' filters are a non-starter for many.... your lenses (perhaps three in 'average') are all likely to have different filter sizes (the diameters you see marked at the front end of the lens) - so that means you'd need to buy the same filter in different sizes - and quality filters aren't cheap! - or invest in 'stepping rings' to bring all the lens diameters to one common size.

Slot-in filter systems are far more versatile as you only need one holder plus cheap adaptor rings to fit each lens.

So that leaves us with a choice of 'systems'..... and it's a matter of 'you get what you pay for'.....

The main contenders, in order of cost, are Cokin, HiTech, B&W and Lee. Having always been thrifty, I've only ever used Cokin..... but most reviews of filters would put their quality in the same, ascending order.