

Wooler & District Camera Club

Book review

In Camera: How to Get Perfect Pictures Straight out of the Camera by Gordon Laing

Kindle Edition - £3.99 Hardcover - £19.99[§]

Kindle edition reviewed by Dr John Miller

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This book title popped up when Amazon noticed I was interested in photography. The title prompted the thought that W&DCC members who are happy with what their cameras produce might be interested. Also true is that any image good straight from the camera needs a lot less editing in Photoshop.

A word about Amazon Kindle editions of print books: Kindles display black text on a white background - OK for novels, less so for anything else. Non-fiction books with pictures or maps often are disappointing because the images are too small. This book is different - the pictures are displayed full-screen (about post-card size). You have to know, however, how to switch between portrait and landscape to see all the images to best effect.

The book contains 100 pictures of a wide variety of subjects - landscapes, buildings, food, vehicles - and all different. As not a few are monochrome images, Kindle's black and white is no drawback.

Two things make this book worth reading if a good JPEG straight from the camera is your dearest wish.

The first thing is that each picture in the book has with it a list of eight settings - (1) camera type; (2) lens type; (3) lens focal length; (4) aperture; (5) exposure time; (6) exposure compensation; (7) ISO sensitivity; and (8) white balance. If you don't know what these settings do, get out your camera manual and understand each one of them: they are fundamental to shooting a good image.

Most of the camera bodies and lenses listed in the settings are (or were) expensive when new. Don't let this put you off. Your camera may not have some particular bit of clever technology, but that will not stop you from taking an excellent photograph if you take settings (3) to (8) as a starting point.

The second thing is that each picture is accompanied by a detailed explanation of how the author worked out the composition of the image. Are there objects in the scene that lead the eye into the picture? Is there water to reflect the main subject? ("Puddles are Nature's gift to photographers.") What time of day will give the best light? Should I use colour or monochrome? How do I frame to exclude something distracting? Can I frame better if I move left or right, forward or back? Do I use wide-angle, or tightly crop with telephoto? And so on, question after question *to yourself*: answer these questions well and you arrive at a good composition. As composition is about shapes, balancing light and dark areas, and framing the subject to best effect, Kindle's black and white actually helps to appreciate good composition, even of colour images. Sometimes colour distracts.

Do not run away with the idea that you'll have the perfect picture straight from the camera if you dial in the camera settings, carefully point the camera at the subject, and press the shutter button. Though the author doesn't labour the point, usually each example picture is the best of several dozen attempts. Early attempts suggest how to improve the later attempts. Quantity begets quality.

Of course, this is the virtue of digital photography. Unlike film, 100 shots are no more expensive than one. In-camera review (the ► button and zooming) tells you straight after shooting whether you're close to what you intended. Except when you forgot to take off the lens cap, however, it's probably sensible to delete your images only at home after viewing them on a large screen. There may be something really good in one of them that you can't see on the camera's small screen.

If you think about it, getting "*perfect* pictures straight out of the camera" is nonsense. The unattainable perfect is always the enemy of the attainable good. In the real world, you're trying to get a well-executed JPEG that needs no further tinkering. That is a very sensible and entirely laudable aim.

For Club members whose cameras shoot JPEGs in 4 : 3 format (or can be set to 4 : 3), then to be competition-ready all that your images need is re-sizing. The program bundled with your computer's operating system (*Paint* for Windows; *Preview* for Mac OS X) will do that for you. Bye-bye Photoshop.

A good JPEG straight out of the camera saves work!

§ Used copies at roughly half the new price are available from several sellers.