

# A case for new lenses on old cameras

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**The film/analog renaissance is a real thing and not merely a marketing gag. People all around the world are buying film, film cameras and old lenses. Everybody has a different reason for trying out film photography. Some are reviving old equipment they haven't used in decades that was stored away in boxes in the attic, while others, particularly the younger generation, might be getting into film for the very first time and want to find out where all these Instagram filters came from and what's at the root of this "retro look". Whether you are just starting out or have been in the game for a long time, you have an enormous pool of equipment to choose from. People usually buy a certain camera and a corresponding lens from the same time or era. This is how I started; but recently, I wanted to find out what would happen if I'd use a brand-new lens on one of my older camera bodies.**

There have always been photographers that were more on the technical side of things and wanted to get the absolute maximum their equipment had to offer. For them, lp/mm, was the ultimate mark of a lens and nothing else mattered. The more, the better.

When a beginner starts out on his photographic journey and asks the question of whether he should invest in a good camera or a good lens, the answer is almost always a good lens. A good lens might last decades, while one might want to replace the camera body after a few years. This holds even more true in the case of film cameras. Essentially, film camera bodies are just boxes that keep the light out and let you attach a lens in the front and a roll of film in the back. Plus, of course, the shutter, which lets you control the amount of light the film receives. This principle hasn't changed since the invention of the medium. What has changed tremendously, though, is the technology behind the lenses. The lens design and the coating may be the two aspects that have changed the most in the last hundred years or so.

## The camera

I love old mechanical film cameras and I am just nuts about film in general. To some outside observer this might look a bit strange (bordering on obsessive), but I guess that's the way it is with any

enthusiast. So, one day I asked myself what the best result (in technical terms) would be that I could get out of my films. I got myself a Minolta α7 (Dynax7 in Germany or Maxxum7 in the US) from Japan. (Yes, I imported it simply because I like the name better...) Minolta was bought by Sony who still uses Minolta's A-mount bayonet, which is fantastic because that means you can use brand-new lenses on a twenty-year-old film-camera. I have used a few Minolta lenses from around the turn of the millenium (the 50mm f1,7 for example is extremely fast and super lightweight) but recently have turned to Sigma. Their Art-lenses caused quite a stir when they were first introduced and I wanted to find out if the performance of these lenses would show on film.

Now, I'm not one of those people that look at lp/mm charts and stop their lens down to F4 or 5,6 so it's at peak performance, but still I wanted to experiment a bit and see what my films were capable of. When it comes to new lenses there is also the aspect of coating, which is intended to reduce lens flaring and increase contrast.

## The lenses

The lenses that I used were the 50mm F1,4 from the Sigma Art-Line and a slightly older 70-200mm F2,8. I can't guarantee any other camera/lens



Alps, 50mm F1,4



Italian chairs, 50mm F1,4

combinations, but my Minolta α7 and the two Sigma lenses worked perfectly. Focus was fast and spot-on, metering worked, and the OS did, too. You can try this with any other camera/lens combination, be it the newest red-ring L-lens from Canon or a Summicron on your Leica – the possibilities are nearly endless.

Compared to the Rokkor and Leica lenses I have used before, the increase in size was definitely noticeable. The 50mm F2,8 Elmar on my M3 is collapsible, which means it's so small that I can put it in my coat pocket and sometimes forget it's even there. (OK, that's not quite true; the weight of the Leica reminds you constantly that it's still there.) But I guess in search of that elusive one image, we photographers often not only go the extra mile, but do so with a heavy tripod in our hands and a backpack full of equipment on our backs.

## My expectations

As I've mentioned before, I am not that into sharpness and image clarity; for me the feel of the image is all that counts. That having been said, I do like a creamy, smooth bokeh, and since the Sigma 50mm has 9 aperture blades, I was expecting soft and pleasant-looking out-of focus areas. Another thing I was looking forward to was the optical stabilization of the 70-200mm.

I have never owned a lens that had OS and I was quite curious to see what all the fuss was about.

## The results

Turns out, it's pretty cool! It gives you the freedom of being able to leave your tripod at home once in a while and you can roam around more freely. The camera seems to be able to communicate well with the lens and the OS works just fine.

My go-to film is Kodak TriX and since it's a 400-speed film, the resolution is nowhere near as high as that of a Provia or Ektachrome. I did look for increased sharpness and all those other benefits these new lenses could offer, but an increase in sharpness and contrast wasn't too apparent. It is not like you've put on glasses and suddenly you could see better. If there was a difference it was rather marginal. Some films are susceptible to these changing parameters, while others are not.

What I did notice though, was that I'd gotten an image that was well-balanced and pleasant to look at. Both the color rendition with slide film and color negative and the bokeh were great. Of course, you won't notice these things on your tiny smart phone screen, but I shot a roll of Fuji Provia 100F slide film and projected the image on a wall and the results were