

FOCUS on imaging

It's one of the most eagerly awaited shows for both professional and amateur photographers in the UK. *MacUser* joined the throng to give you a roundup of the latest developments in the photographic field.

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Focus on Imaging attracted huge crowds, with eager photographers keen to get their hands on all the new products.



FOCUS on imaging 2008

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PRESS

Photographers and imaging professionals gathered in Birmingham last month, hoping to get their hands on the latest developments and innovations in digital imaging.

The venue was the NEC. The event: Focus on Imaging 2008. With developments and product releases happening so quickly in the market, this one show provides an irresistible opportunity to look at all the most recent launches at one venue.

Major brands like Nikon and Canon were there in force, as you might expect, showing off their latest DSLRs, lenses and accessories under the cover of imposing stands. Visitors got their hands on Nikon's most recent launches – the D300 and the D3 – while Canon showcased its latest DSLR – the Eos 450D. For the serious professional, Hasselblad was on hand to demonstrate the latest incarnation of its H digital camera line – the H3DII.

The show isn't just about camera hardware though, as Epson, HP and Canon took the opportunity to demonstrate their lines of consumer and professional photo printers and large-format printers. While intermingled among these stands was a dizzying array of inkjet papers. Ilford, Innova Art, Epson, Hahnemühle FineArt and Harman Photo all had a wide range of papers suitable for inkjet printers, and many were releasing new ranges that are more evocative of traditional photographic papers than the sheets we've become accustomed to using at home.

And finally, Apple and Adobe hosted talks about Aperture and Photoshop respectively. Apple boosted its photography credentials with Aperture 2, which was released last month, and is aimed at both the hobbyist and professional photographer. The Mac itself was out in force across the show floor, in the form of iMacs, MacBooks and MacBook Pros, and was clearly the computer of choice for many exhibitors showing off their wares.

Over the next six pages, we round up the latest developments, innovations and photographic gear that will shape the industry over the coming year.



→ The D300 is aimed at professional photographers on a budget, according to Nikon.

NEW DSLRS

Focus on Imaging is a traditional launch pad for a raft of high-end snappers from the industry's biggest names, 2008's show was no different, with Canon debuting the Eos 450D, and Nikon pushing its latest releases, the D300 and D3. They may all have been announced in advance of the show, but this was the first opportunity for the public to get our hands on the two Nikons without shelling out hard-earned cash, and the first time the 450D had been seen outside the confines of a press briefing.

CANON EOS 450D

Canon's prosumer line established itself as one of the most successful camera ranges of all time with the 300D, which put high-end kit in the hands of low-budget consumers. The company followed up with the smaller, faster 8-megapixel 350D, and then the 10-megapixel 400D. Despite the higher pixel count, the 400D disappointed some as it lost the secondary shooting info displays of the 300D and 350D and instead centralised everything – setup and playback – on a physically larger rear LCD. It didn't tempt as many 350D owners down the upgrade path as Canon might have liked. As such, the 450D is its second shot.

This 12.2-megapixel entrant sits alongside the 400D rather than replacing it. It still lacks the status display, but now that 3in rear screen has been given a third function: live framing, allowing for more creative over-head or under-foot shots which are difficult to achieve using an optical viewfinder.

Canon sees two markets for the new model: women, and anyone still holding on to their 350D.

The Eos 450D is available in body-only or kit form with a 18-55mm lens, at £599 (£510 ex VAT) and £679 (£578 ex VAT) respectively.



▲ The Eos 450D is the latest consumer DSLR from Canon.

NIKON D300 AND D3

'Superb performance for pros on a budget' is how Nikon is pitching the D300. It's not quite a consumer model (that would be the 10-megapixel D60 or D80), and Nikon's idea of 'budget' may differ slightly to yours, as it ships for £1299 (£1105 ex VAT) without a lens. As such, comparing it directly to the Eos 450D is perhaps unfair, but at 12.3 megapixels, it comes closer than any other Nikon to matching Canon's sub-£600 pixel count.

In other respects, though, the higher ticket price sees Nikon pull ahead in the semi-pro space, with an option for up to 8 frames per second (fps) with a 100-Jpeg buffer (3.5fps with a 53-Jpeg buffer on the 450D) and a dedicated top-mounted LCD

control panel. And when it comes to focus, there's no comparison. Give them a decent lens, and both will reward you with pin-sharp results, but while the Canon does this with a 9-point AF system the D300 boasts an impressive 51 focal points.

The £3399 (£2893 ex VAT) D3 is Nikon's play for the high-end market, which it sells on its full-frame sensor or, as Nikon terms it, FX format. The D300 and Eos 450D both feature APS-C sensors, which are physically smaller than FX, which matches the size of a 35mm film frame. Why is that important? Because with a full-frame sensor you can take lens sizes as described, so an 18-55mm lens will act like an 18-55mm lens on an analogue, film-based camera. With an APS-C sensor, it would act like a 28-88mm unit, and frame less of each scene.

FX should also allow for better low-light performance as the sensitivity can be ramped up without introducing so much noise into the results. It's no surprise, then, that Nikon has the confidence to push the ISO rating up to 6400 on the D3, which when combined with EV tweaks can emulate ISO 25600. The APS-C-based D300 caps this at ISO 3200.

The D3 and D300 are available now, while Canon has pushed back the launch of the Eos 450D to April, from an initial projection of March this year.

MONITORS

It's not just cameras, lenses and tripods that photographers have to consider these days: with the replacement of the wet darkroom with a digital workflow, a decent monitor is now an essential part of their working kit. And with LCD TV screen sizes ever increasing in the home, it came as no surprise to see several 30in monitors on display at this year's show. The clear benefit for photographers who do a lot of work in Photoshop is that they can display their image at a reasonably large size and have a multitude of palettes open as they operate.



► Apple gives show visitors a hands on presentation of Aperture 2, its photo editing and management application.



APERTURE 2 VS CAPTURE ONE 4

With the release of Aperture 2 just two weeks before the show, it was no surprise that Apple was on hand to market the tool by hosting presentations that highlighted its new features.

Aperture 2, which costs £129 (£110 ex VAT), has a revamped, cleaner interface and a more intuitive approach to working, although the key features that photographers will appreciate are its improved speed when viewing images and the ability to make adjustments to Raw images. Overall, version 2 of the photo editing and management application has more than 100 new features that aim to fulfil the roles of lightbox, organiser and digital darkroom.

However, Aperture isn't alone and Capture One 4, from digital imaging specialist Phase One, is also keen to corner the market for digital photography workflows on the Mac. Phase One is well-known among pro photographers for its range of digital backs and its bundled software Capture One Pro.

Capture One 4, which costs €99 (about £75), replaces Capture One LE and has a wider variety of support for Raw camera formats, including Nikon's latest cameras, the D3 and D300, Canon 1D Mark III and Adobe DNG. As with Aperture, the interface has been simplified and the ability to recover detail that has been lost in the highlight and shadow areas of the image has been added. Also you can create a web contact sheet that can be posted on your site to allow clients to view your photos and download them, just like Aperture.

Both applications offer a streamlined digital workflow and are easy to pick up, reducing the amount of time that you will spend in Photoshop. If you add Lightroom into the mix, which should be due an upgrade later this year, the market for digital photography workflows is set to become very competitive over the next 12 months.

Samsung had its 30in XL30 LED display alongside the more conventionally sized 20in XL20 and 24in XL24.

The XL30, which costs £2769 (£2357 ex VAT), has a native resolution of 2560 x 1600 pixels and ports for DVI-I, DVD-D and USB. The company claims that while traditional CRT monitors are capable of a colour gamut of 97%, the XL series has a colour gamut of 123%, making it ideal for displaying detailed images.

Eizo was also debuting its 30in ColorEdge CG301W LCD (see MacUser 1 February 2008, p25) alongside its 24in CG241W and 22in CG221. Like the XL30, the CG301W has a wide colour gamut and a native resolution of 2560 x 1600.

The CG301W also comes with dual DVI-D ports so that it can be connected to two different computers, allowing the screen to be split in two to effectively create two separate screens of 1200 x 1600. This allows you, for example, to display two computers side-by-side without the need to toggle between them. The CG301W costs £2676 (£2277 ex VAT).

LARGE-FORMAT PRINTERS

As you would expect at a show dedicated to image makers, photo printers were in abundance with Epson and HP both displaying a comprehensive range. It was the range of large-format printers and companies offering their services to print large-scale prints that really caught the eye, though, with the floorspace around their stands strewn with huge images. Three, in particular, stood out.

First up is the Designjet Z3100 44in Photo Printer from HP. As the name suggests, the Z3100 can print images up to 44in (111cm) in width from its 12-ink printing system, which is able to handle over 80% of Pantone colours. The printing system uses six print heads, each for two colours, and includes a gloss enhancer, four blacks and seven colours.

The Z3100 uses HP Vivara pigment inks, while the built-in spectrophotometer enables you to automatically generate custom RGB



▲ The photo on this page doesn't do the 30in CG301W full justice in regards to its size – this is a huge monitor.

► Elzo had a comprehensive range of its LCD monitors on its stand.



- ICC profiles for your preferred paper and precise printer calibration ensures you get colour consistency every time you print. Its best printing resolution is 2400 x 1200 optimised dpi. The Z3100 comes with 128MB of Ram and a 40GB hard disk. It costs £4799 (£4084 ex VAT).

On the Epson stand was its flagship large-format printer, the Stylus Pro 11880, which costs £10,451 (£8895 ex VAT). Capable of printing images up to 64in (162cm), the Stylus Pro 11880 uses 9 inks from the UltraChrome K3 Vivid Magenta set, which includes photo black and matte black inks for better results when printing black-and-white images. Each ink cartridge has its own LED light that monitors its status, while switchable spindles allow for the easy swapping of different media between jobs. It supports media up to 1.5mm thick, including glossy, matte, fine art and plain paper, matte board and cut-sheet stock.

Canon's flagship in the large-format printer arena was the IPF9100, which can produce prints up to 60in (152cm). The twin print head design handles 12 colours from the Lucia pigment ink system to produce accurate colours, while the combination of the black, matt black, grey and photo grey inks reproduce brilliant black-and-white images. The ink cartridges come in 330ml or

700ml variants. The printer has an 80GB hard disk and can print an A0 draft image in just over 2 minutes. With an on-board colour calibration tool, images are consistent from print to print and there is no need for external devices; once calibrated the printer is set-up.

A large LCD display makes operating the IPF9100 simple, while Canon's specialist printer driver gives a wealth of advanced capabilities such as Kyanos, the company's next generation colour management tool. However, the printer also has an 'easy mode' that uses pre-configured settings, if you need to print with the minimum of fuss. The IPF9100 costs £10,040 (£8545 ex VAT).

INKJET PAPERS

As the sensors in digital cameras start to match the detail captured by film, so more photographers are seeking a finished print that compares to that produced by the darkroom process. With this mind several paper manufacturers debuted fine art, inkjet papers at the show.

Ilford unveiled its latest development in inkjet papers on its stand. Galerie Gold Fibre Silk is a 310gsm weight paper with a traditional barium sulphate (baryta) base. It has been specifically designed to produce an inkjet equivalent of a classic air-dried,

black-and-white fibre-based silver image print.

'For many years, Ilford has aspired to recreate images of a by-gone age using the latest digital technology. With the combination of a true photographic baryta base and the latest in printer and inkjet solutions, Ilford has finally managed to achieve this,' Ilford Imaging sales and marketing director Andrew Stewart told us. For the optimum image quality Stewart recommends pigment-based inks. The paper ranges in size from A4 sheets up to 44in (111cm) wide rolls with prices starting at £12.99 (£11.06 ex VAT) for 10 A4 sheets.

Fine art paper maker Innova Art also showcased its paper for printing black-and-white images from inkjet printers. FibaPrint uses a titanium oxide base and, to best reflect the texture and feel of traditional photographic papers, it features a micro porous coating that helps the paper to receive ink, while an acid-inhibiting layer reduces the possibility of the ink cracking when the paper is flexed.

FibaPrint comes in two weights: 300gsm and 285gsm. The 300gsm range has three surface styles – white gloss, warmtone gloss and white semi-matte – while the 285gsm comes in white matte and ultra smooth gloss. Prices start at £23.44 (£19.95 ex VAT) for 25 sheets of A4. The FibaPrint fits in alongside Innova Art's current range of Photo, Fine Art and Book Art Papers.

With a history of paper-making dating back over 400 years, Hahnemühle FineArt has launched two new papers for inkjet printers in the UK. The first is FineArt Baryta 325, which is a brilliant white, high-gloss fibre-based paper. Although developed for high colour depth and a wide colour gamut for image definition, the paper is also suitable for black-and-white prints with fine grey tones. The company claims that because of the paper's barium sulphate base and inkjet coating, this enhances its glossy look and feel, making it an ideal replacement for traditional baryta papers. Prices for the paper start at £25.84 (£21.99 ex VAT) for 20 sheets of A4.



▲ The Epson Stylus Pro 11880 produces large-scale prints up to 64in wide and its colour rendition is pretty impressive.



It seemed as though everywhere you looked there was a Mac being used to demonstrate some company's products.

The second paper from Hahnemühle FineArt is Bamboo 290, which is made from 90% renewable bamboo fibres and costs £22.40 (£19.06 ex VAT) for 20 sheets of A4. The paper has a natural white tone and is particularly suited for warm-hued colours, where its wide colour gamut and extreme colour density give detailed prints.

Joining the throng of new papers aiming to capture the market for traditional-style papers is the Traditional Photo Paper from Epson, which costs £27.79 (£23.65 ex VAT) for 25 sheets of A4. Designed to work with Epson's UltraChrome K3 ink with vivid magenta, the paper gives high colour saturation to images. An innovative layer acts a barrier to prevent the ink migrating into the fibres of the substrate, while an enhanced optical brightener ensures a bright white surface. Overall, the paper is reminiscent of prints created using traditional techniques with its smooth, glossy look.

'Epson has been developing its professional paper range for many years, ensuring its printing system – printer, ink and paper – offers the highest quality output,' says Epson UK business manager Pro-Graphics Martin Johns. 'The addition of Traditional Photo Paper is further evidence of how far digital printing has evolved.'

Harman Photo also took the opportunity to preview a new paper at the show – Gloss FB AL Warmtone. It offers the same benefits as its current range of Gloss FB AL papers but has a warmtone tint that gives prints creamy whites and velvety blacks. The 320gsm weight paper uses baryta, which is applied to the paper before it is coated with a nanoporous Alumina layer that ensures a smooth gloss finish. The baryta layer is widely associated with traditional photographic fibre papers and it gives the finished print a greater level of detail and definition as well as an extended tonal range. An additional feature is the use of anti-curl technology, which ensures the paper lies completely flat, both before and after printing.

The paper is available in sizes from A4 sheets up to 44in (111cm)

CAMERA LUST

The downside to attending any show which is crammed with the latest innovations is that you are confronted with products that will make you behave like a child, pestering your bank manager for a loan so you can buy it. And this show was no exception with arguably, for any photographer that has become addicted to photographic gear, the Holy Grail of cameras being on display.

The H3DII is the latest offering from renowned camera maker Hasselblad, and is the fourth generation of its H series of digital cameras. The H3DII reflects a higher level of integration of the camera's operation by ensuring that its controls can be adjusted via the digital menu.

The range features a choice of 22, 31 or 39 megapixels. Both the 22- and 39-megapixel models have a full-frame 36 x 48mm sensor, which is twice the size of a standard 35mm full-frame sensor, while the 31-megapixel sensor measures 33 x 44mm and is near full-frame capture.

To get the best image from the Raw 3FR file the camera captures, Hasselblad includes its own Mac-compatible Raw image processing software, Phocus, which is also a digital workflow management system.

Like any ultra-desirable item, there's a suitably respectful price tag that goes along with it, in this case the top-of-the-range H3DII-39 costs £21,502 (£18,300 ex VAT) and that's without a lens.

The H3DII sure does look pretty and has a price to match its looks.



rolls with prices starting at £14.65 (£12.47 ex VAT) for 15 sheets of A4. Harman Photo marketing director Howard Hopwood says: 'We are confident its impressive performance and ability to deliver superior results will make it an instant hit with both amateur and professional photographers alike.'

ACRYLIC PRINTING

If you have ever printed your images on canvas and are now looking for something a little different, then acrylic printing could be what you're after. The process involves printing an image direct on to transparent acrylic panels and blocks. This creates a semi-transparent 'canvas', allowing light to interact with the image, which is effectively back-lit, to create an near 3D effect.

The process works equally well for monochrome or colour images, although images with a white background are particularly well suited as that is replaced with a crystal-clear background of the acrylic to give a sense of perpetual depth.

The printing is available from Acrylic Pictures and Foto Cube, with a range of sizes and thicknesses. Acrylic Pictures are targeting professional photographers and designers, its sizes start with 20 x 20cm and go up to 1.93 x 2.9m in a range of thicknesses from 5mm to 20mm with prices starting at £88.12 (£75 ex VAT). Foto Cube is aimed at the consumer with its sizes ranging from 25 x 25cm to 83 x 116cm and prices starting at £24.68 (£21 ex VAT).

THE FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT...

Whatever your level of photographic experience, there was something of interest at Focus on Imaging. And the good news for Mac users is that many of the products at the show had taken notice of the capabilities of the Mac and had designed their products accordingly. With Aperture 2 making a strong move into digital photography workflows, it looks as though Apple could shape another market, the way it has done with music downloads.