

# PHASE **ONE**

what the world's best photography is made of



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## **John DK**

An evolution of art and business

by Walter Borchenko



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FILM HAS BEEN THE MAINSTAY FOR CAR PHOTOGRAPHER JOHN DK of Barcelona, Spain. Working out the shoots with unique workflows and unique lighting approaches was hard to let go of. Making the change to digital is a great unknown for any who have a successful film-based business. Will the work have a similar look and feel? Will the jobs be as smooth? The questions are endless but the pressure to do digital capture, the right way, is now extremely high! What's at stake today is the growth or loss of business.

"I moved to the Phase One system in the fall of 2006. Before shooting with Phase One, I was doing everything with 4x5 film. The year before I bought my Phase One back, I shot about 3500 sheets of 4x5 film. The savings in film, processing and time was one thing and the other was everybody else shooting digital. My clients started to tell me "everyone else is shooting digital, why can't you." I was backed into a corner and I really didn't want to do it. We all have a fear of the unknown. I looked at the competing backs and it finally came down to a test with a car, using the two backs I had finally decided to compare. I chose the P 45+.

My Phase One back creates a better image with less effort than other backs. It just comes out right. The quality and rendering of the colors of the paint, the metallic feeling

## I press the button and I see it on the screen and it looks how it should!

of the cars, in the shadows — it all seems to work. I press the button and I see it on the screen and it looks how it should! I need the image to look right straight out of the camera. I don't want a RAW image that later you have to do a hundred things to make it look good! I need it to look like film. For me it made an easy transition from film to digital. It looks as good as film and it lets me enjoy the challenge of shooting cars."

Choosing to shoot with a digital back is only part of the transition. Changes in the workflow, lighting and the added control of software, combine to create a whole new photographic experience. In John's case these changes included evolving a process used with film to a whole new level.

"One of my techniques is to shoot on location at different times of day without moving the camera or the car. Sometimes we take sixteen hours or more to create a shot this way and are working from before sunrise to after sunset on a single shot. We also shoot with many flash-based, hard, point lights. To make the highlights spread out, we use dulling spray. A lot of photographers use dulling spray but they just won't admit it! The camera and the car does not move. It makes it easy to blend all the images together. The point lights do some unfavorable things to other parts of the car so it's important to get early day and late day light to be able to mix it all together for these images. A lot of my shots tend to be dark shots. For night shots, you have to shoot early on before night to give some shape to the windows.

It's a lot easier to do this type of technique with digital capture than with 4x5 film. With film, I would try to do a lot of this in one shot. It was working against me because it was really hard to tell what was working out or not. With the digital capture, we make quick jpegs and layer them together during the shoot. You can



see how it's working and if you see that you don't have much volume or shape in an area, I have time to fix it with a few extra captures, before we leave. I love this way of shooting because these are real images but all layered together."

The relationship that John develops with the car and the location is a combination of planning and intuition. Opportunities to create something better or different than planned are only available if you are aware of your surroundings. This means making very detailed plans but changing it all if the opportunity presents itself.

"I really don't like studio at all. I don't use the studio unless I have to. I like the street or a beautiful road. You have to be ready to take advantage of things that are happening around you, which happened with the Audi shot. The Audi image is kind of a lucky shot we did in the Canary Islands. The sand storm is real and the road is beautiful. We just happen to be there during a dust storm. What you see and the haziness is really there. What you see is

what we saw. We added some fill on the shadow side of the car. It was one shot. On our way to the real location, we just stopped and created a great shot. To help the art director see the image the way I did, we took out a little bit of saturation and brought up the blacks a bit. The image had a finished look right at the location that is almost identical to the final.

We were really lucky with the Peugeot image (see back page for image). The location is actually a bus stop by a famous architect. We planned this as a night shot, but we got lucky with this because of the fog. It added a lot of mystery. The background is actually natural fog. It's important to have a plan. These cars are like mirrors and it's important to understand what is going to reflect and what is not. Like in this shot, you have to be able to change your plans to work with the conditions.

You have to be able to change your plans. It's amazing when you tell a client the fog is rolling in and it's a good thing. You have to

be able to tell a client, let's stop here, unload the car and take a shot. The client may be asking you what you are doing but you have to be able to say 'It's a good moment, lets take advantage of it.' It can really work out."

Any of us who are photographers are driven by what we do. There is subject, light, concept, equipment and the photographers ability to bring it all together. Trying to put the experience into words can be painful unless you live the experience as John does.

"It's hard to say why I am a photographer. It was always a way to express myself. Shooting a car is like producing a TV spot. Shooting a car is like bringing together thousands of pieces and then making it all work together. I think that photography is the best brain trainer there is and I love it!" +



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