

COLOR-NEGATIVE STOCK PHOTOGRAPHY

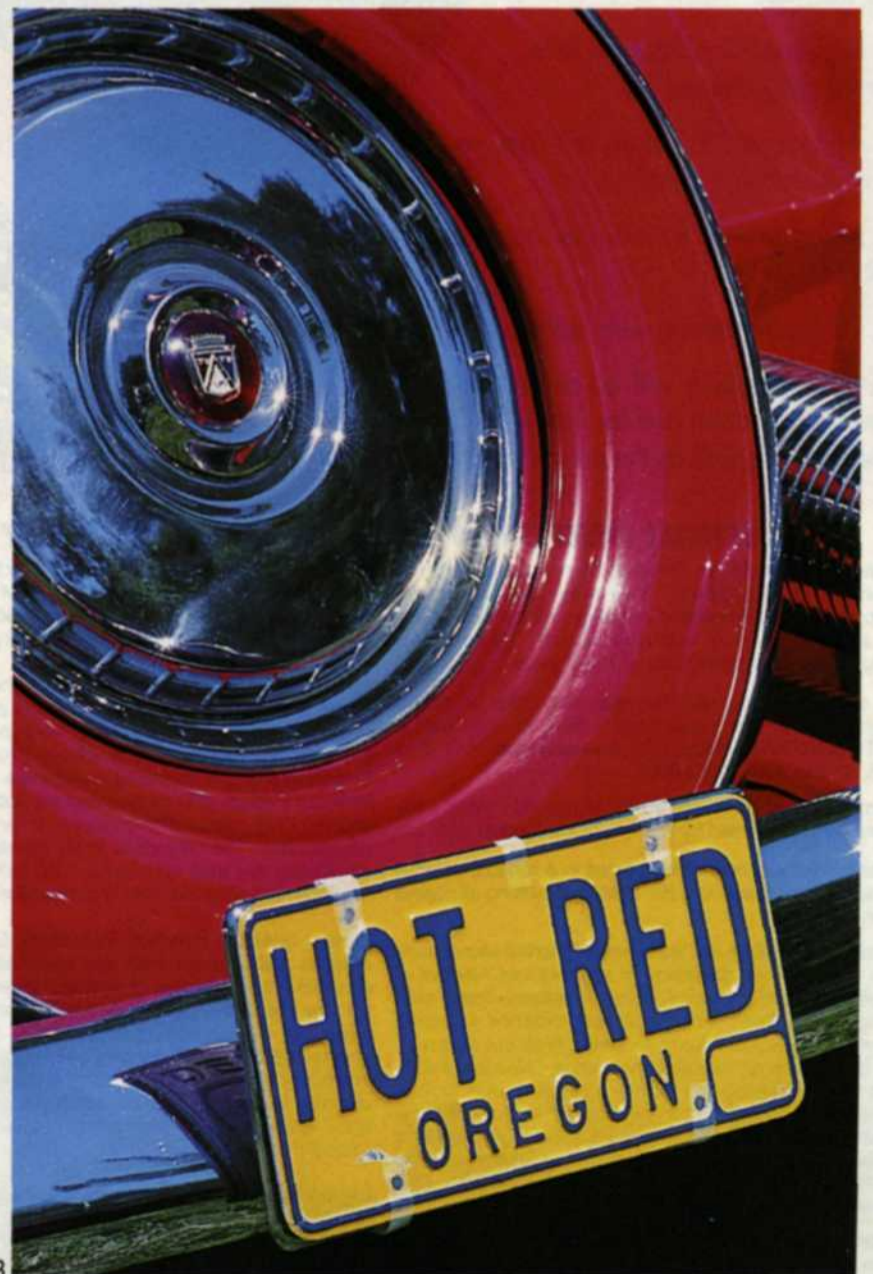
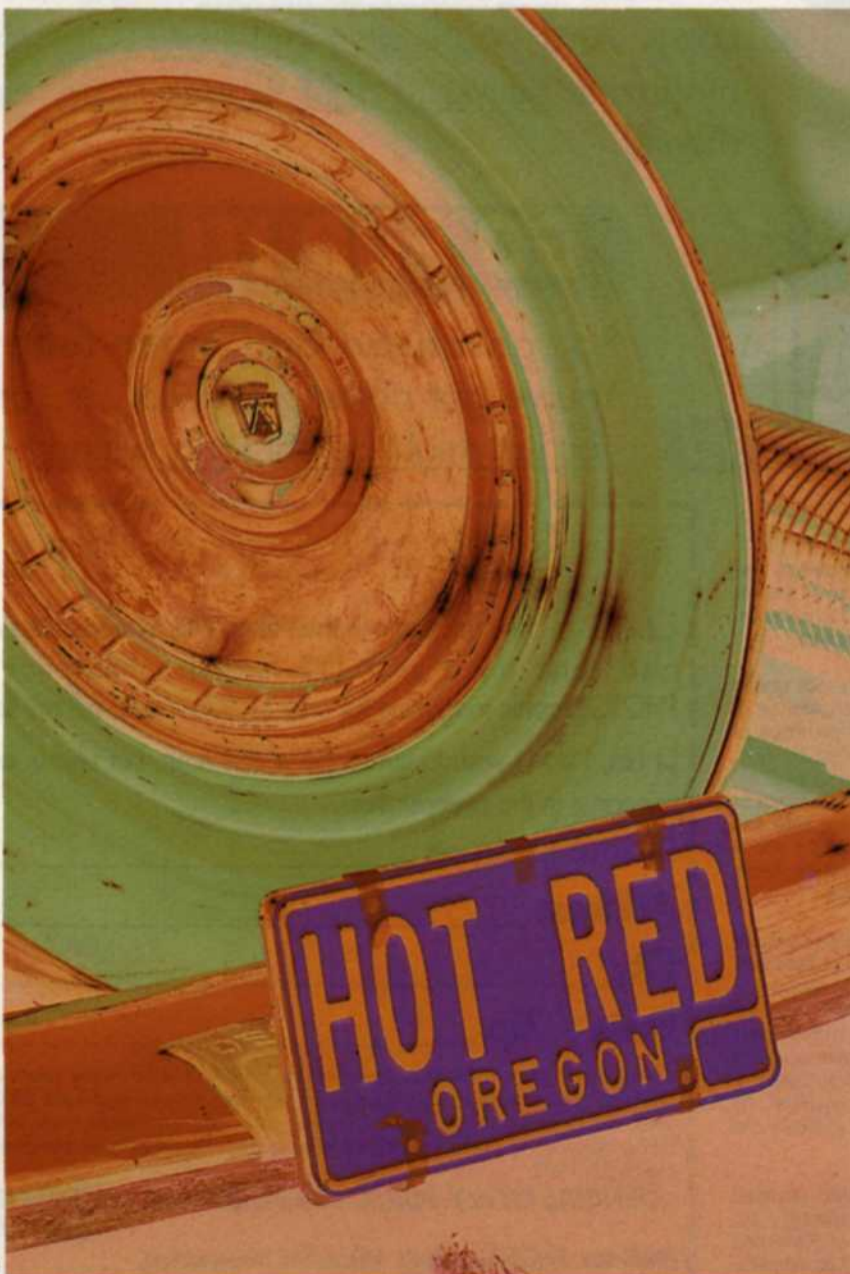
by Jack and Sue Drafahl

Pleading the
Case for a
Major Change
in the Type of
Film Most
Favored

In today's world of high technology, the buzz word "recycle" appears in most facets of photography. By definition, recycle means "to use again," or "bring back to the beginning and run through the same process." The purpose of stock photography is to recycle your photos again and again. It sounds simple, but, in reality, it is a fairly complex process.



ALL PHOTOS BY THE AUTHORS





4



5



6

Most stock photographers shoot, catalog, and submit color transparencies for use as stock photos. In the early stages of stock photography, large-format and 35mm Kodachromes were the only

1. The setup: Beseler slide duplicator, Nikon N8008, Nikon MF-21 multifunction back, 75mm flat-field Rodenstock lens, bulk Kodak 5072 Vericolor Slide film (100-foot roll).

2&3. Negative (Konica Super SR 200) and positive (Vericolor 5072 slide film). This shot was taken at a local car show, where the lighting changed drastically from one scene to the next—total shade to bright sunlight. Using Konica Super SR 200 film gave us the control over the varying color-temperature changes, and allowed us to shoot fully saturated pictures. The extra speed allowed for sharp images in low-light conditions, yet maintained high color saturation in sunlight.

4. Konica Super SR 100 color-negative film was used to control color saturation. Newer color-negative films use special DIAR couplers to separate adjacent colors, a characteristic that makes negative films better than chrome films for certain subjects. This trait retains fine image detail in fully saturated areas.

5. Kodak Ektapress 100 film was used to cut through the blue cast that normally appears on chrome films when shot underwater. The extra contrast also helps separate the subject from the background better than with chrome film. Exposures on chrome film underwater are difficult, but with Ektapress 100, exposure latitude is greatly increased.

6. Scotch 100 was used to increase the contrast and separate the water drops from the background. A difficult chrome exposure was avoided by using a color-negative film with a total of five stops of exposure latitude. (A subject that is shot close-up with a faraway background can often cause the TTL flash exposure to react unpredictably.)

7. Kodak Gold 200 film was used to control movement, and increase the contrast between the subject and background. Color saturation with 200-speed color-negative films is much better than with same-speed slide films, and helped bring out the color in the jets.

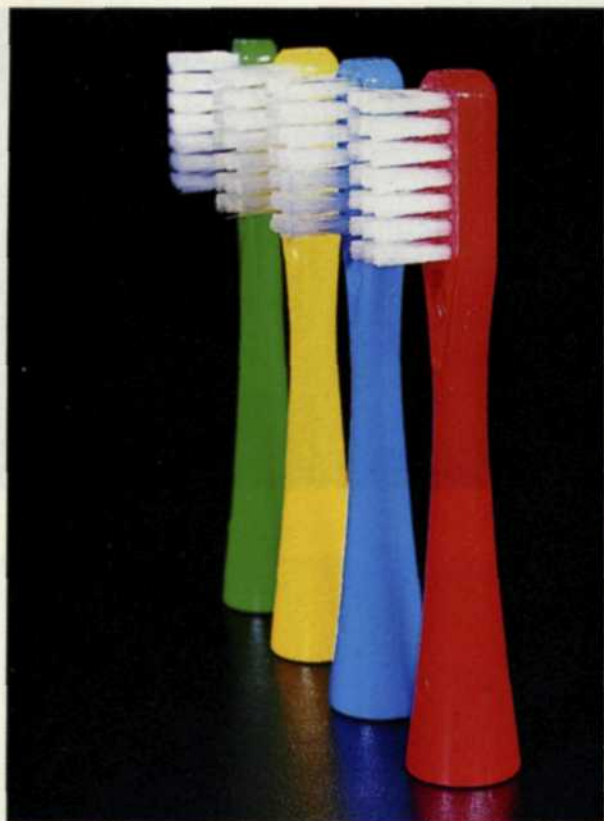
8. Kodak Ektapress 100 film was used to separate the brilliant, adjacent colors from the background.



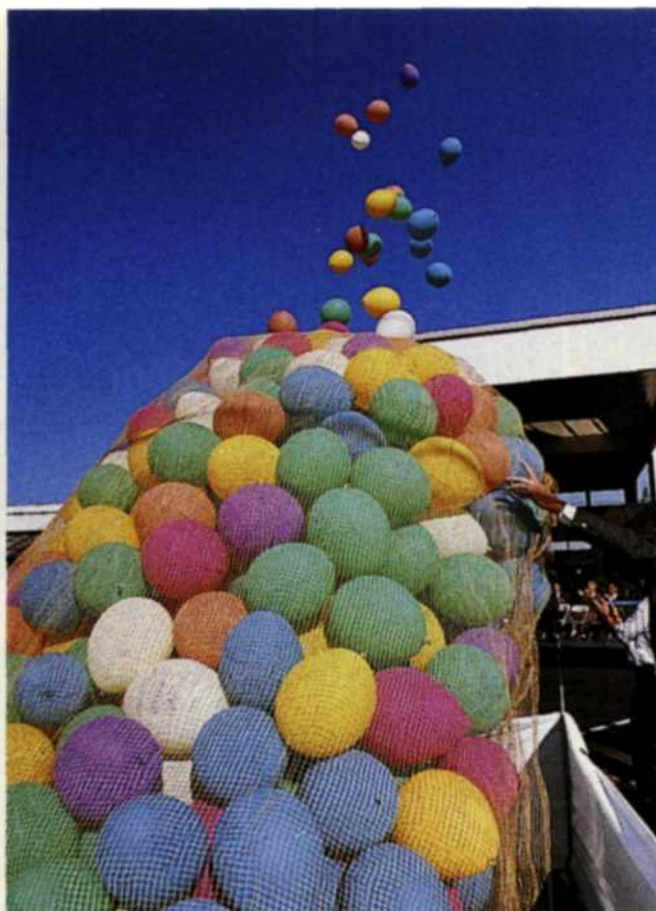
7



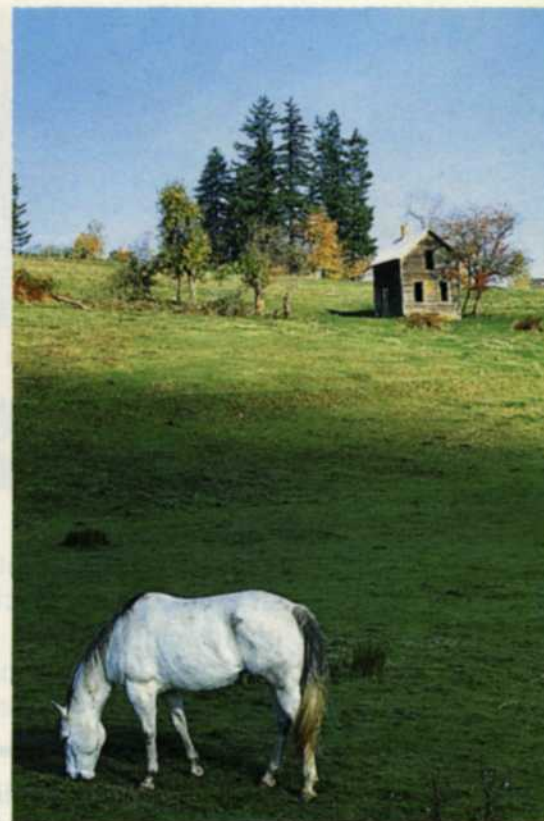
8



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STOCK PHOTOGRAPHY

accepted stock-film types. As film manufacturers improved slide films, smaller formats soon became the norm.

As film testers for *PHOTOgraphic Magazine*, we have found that many of today's color-negative films outperform color-slide films, especially when you need a high ISO. So, we decided, "Why not shoot color negatives for stock photography?" Well, it works for us, and we have decided to shock the photo world with this innovative concept.

Perhaps the most persuasive reason to shoot color negatives for stock is that you never have to part with your original, and run the danger of losing it. In most situations, this doesn't matter a great deal; but what about those times, or that one time in your life when you take *the* picture of *the* event: a one-of-a-kind photograph? The original image would be extremely valuable to you. By shooting a color neg, the original can be duplicated onto high-resolution film and submitted over and over.

STOCK-NEGATIVE FILING

Our approach to filing color negatives is the same as with our color slides. You may think it bizarre, but listen to our logic before you judge: We mount all of our color negatives in slide mounts, and label them with the copyright, date, photographer's name, film type, and any pertinent captioning. We find this method has several advantages over storing the negatives in sleeves. First,

we can easily round-file any shots that are less than successful. With negative sleeving, you either end up with little short pieces, or you leave your bad shots in the page. Second, we can easily file specific shots in their own category file, even if several different subjects were shot on one roll. We file our slides and negatives in pages of 20 in hanging folders inside filing cabinets. We use the same category headings for both negatives and slides, but put them in different file drawers.

We have found that negatives stored in slide mounts get scratched less because they are more easily handled than negatives in sleeves. When we need a print, only the negative in question gets handled, not the entire film strip. We rarely use one-hour labs for our stock photos, but when we do, we find that the labs are challenged to take greater care with one individual negative than with a whole strip of film.

REVERSING COLOR NEGATIVES: THE TECHNIQUES

There are three basic methods for submitting photos taken on color-negative film. Most magazines now use laser scanners that can pull images from transparencies, as well as prints, for making the final separations. Color prints are not as widely accepted by stock houses, because they tend to fade, are hard to store, and the color balances vary too much; however, this is one method of submitting your stock work.

The second, and most acceptable, method for submitting images from color negatives is with Vericolor slide films. Kodak 5072 slide film is a C-41 color-negative film that is used to make a slide from your color negative. The film comes in 36-exposure rolls and

1. Kodak Ektar 25 film was used to maintain the highest degree of sharpness and tight grain pattern. The inherent high contrast also kept the background very black. With this setup, TTL exposure would have been very difficult (due to the black background), but with the wide exposure latitude of this film, we did not have to bracket exposures.

2. We needed a high-speed color film with excellent color saturation and sharp-image quality. Add the facts that the event was one-time only, and bad exposures were not in the client's vocabulary, and we selected Agfa XRS 400 color-negative film.

3. Two problems arose with this shot: First, the lighting ratio was extreme. Second, the color temperature was considerably different in the sun than in the shade. After making a normal exposure on Kodak Ektapress 100, we were able to compromise the exposure and color balance to make an acceptable image.

100-foot bulk loads. We recommend the latter in a bulk loader, so you can maintain color balance from roll to roll.

The color-negative original is placed on a slide-duping substage, and the slide-copying camera is loaded with Kodak 5072 slide film. We use a Nikon N8008, and a Beseler Dual-Mode slide duper with a 75mm flat-field Rodenstock lens.

(Note: The most important link in the re-imaging chain of your color negative is the lens. Simply put, use the highest-quality lens you can afford. It will retain the quality of your original to the highest possible standards. Also note, we use a flat-field lens, meaning that its area of highest resolution is in a flat plane [not a curved plane, as is the case with conventional lenses], matching the flat plane of the subject.)

Since slide duplicators are designed to accommodate slides, simply slip the negatives mounted in slide mounts onto the substage. It is paramount that you use some kind of air gun to blow the dust off each negative before making the reversal exposure. Tests for color balance and exposure must be made, as each film type will have a different color balance. Color balance is controlled by changing filters under the substage.

We use the metering system of the Nikon N8008, and make the following settings on the camera and duper: auto-exposure, f/8, ISO=6, exposure compensation=+3. We use a starting pack of 95 yellow and 65 magenta with this system. The exposed roll is processed in standard C-41 processing, and we end up with transparencies that are similar to E-6 films. The main differences are in the process film's clear, rebate edge and increased grain and contrast. Once the 5072 slide film is mounted, it technically becomes a chrome film, which can be easily labeled and used for stock.

Since you have taken your original photo on color-negative film, you have the ability to adjust color balance, exposure, and contrast of the reversal slide through a variety of lab techniques. Exposure correction is simply a matter of changing the exposure on the slide duper. When we want to see how different densities look from a single negative, we use an exposure-bracket back on our duper camera. We normally set it to five exposures at $\pm 1/2$ -stop increments for each exposure. This is especially handy for sunsets, since many times, all five exposures are usable, each creating a different mood from one negative.

Color balance is adjusted with the color filters in the slide duper. If you want the final result to be a little more green, you would reduce the setting on the magenta filter. Standard color-printing methods apply when using 5072 slide film. This is particularly handy when having to photograph under fluorescent lights without a correction filter. You can easily remove the green cast when doing the reversals, and avoid losing the one-stop correction necessary when you use a CC30M correction filter.

Normally, 5072 processed in C-41 chemistry will net excellent, high-quality reversal slides. Every once in a while you come upon a problem negative that causes the reversals to be too high in contrast. Contrast control can be accomplished in two ways: If you process your own C-41 films, or know a lab that will special-process your film, you can reduce the developer time by 10-15%. This will reduce the overall contrast for

(Continued on page 67)

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(Continued from page 51)

those situations where both highlight and shadows were not captured well on the Vericolor slide film.

The second method is to use a contrast-control device found on many slide dupers. This beam-spitting device normally adds exposure to the shadow areas of a slide duplicate. Since 5072 Slide film is reversing the image, this contrast control is adding exposure to the highlights. But that's okay, because the highlight on color-negative film is high density, and the added exposure to this area will reduce the overall gamma of the negative and of the final image.

Probably the biggest question you might have about this technique is about the quality of the reversal images. Rest assured, the quality is extremely good. In fact, whenever we report on color-negative films for *Photographic*, our submitted results are on 5072 film. Sharpness, color saturation, and grain are excellent. And because the end result is a transparency, the final image has a *better* range than would a print made from the same negative. 5072 is a high-resolution, relatively low-contrast film designed for copying. So, if the original is well exposed and sharp, that quality will be transferred to the reversal version of the image.

If you prefer not to set up your own reversal system, you can send your negatives to Kodalux, and, for less than \$1 per image, they will make the slide reversals for you. If you do decide to have Kodalux make the reversals, you will probably have to send the negatives unmounted, then remount them upon their return.

The third method for using images made from color negatives requires a peek into the future. In 1992, Kodak will make it possible for local film processors to scan your negatives directly onto compact discs (Kodak Photo CDs). You can then take these images home and import them into your computer, where you can retouch, edit, and otherwise modify them.

Personal 35mm scanners are already available to the general public. These can create files similar to those planned for the Kodak CD. Once scanned, these images could then be sent directly to those stock agencies who realize that this is the future direction of stock photography, and have the equipment necessary to receive and output these images. Using a modem, images could

also be transmitted from photographer to stock house, and then to the client, in a matter of minutes.

If you still want to send chromes to an agency, you can scan your color-negative files into a film recorder that will re-image them on the slide film of your choice. You could shoot Kodak Ektar 25, re-image it on Fujichrome Velvia 50, then use that image as the stock image. The key to the future of stock photography is that it will use all types—slide and negative films—for the master image.

If you decide that our idea of using color negatives for stock isn't so crazy after all, then you have to do your homework. You need to read all the film-test reports, and start determining just which color-negative films are the right ones for you. Don't narrow down your film selection too much, as each color-negative film has its own unique characteristics that just may satisfy your needs. Make sure you select films that range from ISO 25 to ISO 1600, or even higher; these speeds will satisfy virtually every photographic situation.

We personally use no less than seven different types of color-negative film for our stock needs. We use Kodak Ektapress 100 for general photography, Kodak Ektapress 400 for action and telephoto photography, Fujicolor Reala 100 for mixed lighting, Kodak Ektar 25 for high-contrast copy work, Kodak Ektapress 1600 and Fujicolor Super HG 1600 for low-light situations, and Konica SR-G3200 for special, scientific applications. As new films hit the market, we constantly change our grab-bag selection to keep up with the changing times.

JUDGING COLOR NEGATIVES

One reason that using color negatives for stock photography has not caught on is the fact that most photographers can't faithfully evaluate the color of the final image. In a color negative, each color in the scene is its own complimentary color. Then, an orange printing mask is added to these reversed colors. Even to the experienced photographer, analyzing color negatives can be confusing, to say the least.

Like anything that's worth pursuing, judging color negatives is a skill, and it takes practice to master. We recommend shooting several rolls of film, getting them printed, and then spending some time comparing the prints and negs. Learn to look in the shadows and in the highlights; soon you will see that, say, the varying tones of magenta are just the vivid green of the grass hillside. In no time at all, you will be able to distinguish a well-exposed color negative

(Continued on page 77)

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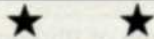
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(Continued from page 67)

from one that just doesn't make the grade.

Another method of judging your color negatives would be to have color proofsheets made, or have the images reversed onto 5072 slide film. If you are still having trouble thinking positively about your color negatives, then an electronic device called Fotovix (distributed by Tamron Industries, Inc., 99 Seaview Blvd. Port Washington, NY 11050; (516) 484-8880) might be your best bet. With this device, you can place your negative on the optical stage and see the image reversed and color-corrected in its final form on a TV screen. This would take the guesswork out of selecting the good images. (See PHOTOGRAPHIC, August, 1990 issue for a report on Tamron's Fotovix III.)

Before you make a decision on whether or not to shoot negative stock photos, you should look at some of the advantages of our system.

ADVANTAGES

1. You never send out the original.
2. More film types are available for stock.
3. Wide exposure latitude (no need for bracketing, which allows for increased creativity).
4. Film and processing cost less.
5. Color-negative film technology is improving more rapidly.
6. Better control over mixed lighting.
7. You can correct for color and exposure after original is processed.
8. Higher percentage of successful images.
9. You can make black-and-white prints directly onto Panalure paper.
10. Less handling of original image.
11. Color saturation and film latitude are better than those of E-6 films at higher ISOs.

DISADVANTAGES

1. A two-step process is involved (more time consuming).
2. You can't see the final image without a video-viewing device, color print, or reversal on 5072 slide film.
3. The alternative is not yet fully accepted in printing industry.
4. Contrast and grain are higher than those of E-6 films.
5. You could accidentally send out two of the same shot to different clients.

(Continued on page 78)



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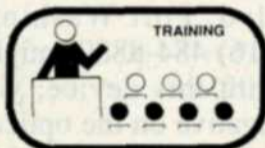
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INDEX**

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Brooks Institute of Photography	78
Buff, Paul C.	61
Camille.....	75
C & C Associates	78
Canon USA, Inc.....	8-9, 59
Chinon America, Inc.	54
C.M.I.	53
Color Master	74
Contemporary Frame Co.....	63
Dale Laboratories	67
Daylab.....	53
Eastman Kodak Company	Cover 4
Essex Camera Service, Inc.	75
Europtik	62
Frame Fit Co.....	74
Fuji Photo Film, USA, Inc.	Cover 2
Glamour Models.	75
Graphic Works.	75
Hasselblad, Victor, Inc.	11
Holland Photo.....	74
HP Marketing Corp.	63
Image Institute of Photography.....	78
Kinetronics Corp.	74
Konica USA, Inc.	54
L.A. Sack Company	74
Lindahl Specialties, Inc.	74
L.T. Sound	74
Microstamp Corp.....	75
Minolta Corp.	Cover 3, 52
New York Institute of Photography.....	71
Nikon, Inc.	4-6, 31-39
Ohio Institute of Photography.....	78
Olympus Corp.	15
Palm Beach Photog. Workshops	78
Pentax Corp.	21
Perfect Niche Software	13
PermaPak	60
Photek, Inc.	74
Photographers Warehouse	51
Photo-Therm.....	74
Pierce Co.....	74
Pro Photo	74, 75
Rhode Island School of Photography	78
Samsung Electronic.....	57
Samyang	13
Saunders Group	51
Seattle Filmworks	58
Tamron Industries	22-23, 53
Ugo Nardi.	78
Wedding Photographers of America.	56
WW Inc.....	74

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**STOCK
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(Continued from page 77)

CONCLUSION

After reading this article, you may think that we only use color negatives for our stock shooting. Wrong. We still use a 50:50 ratio of slide versus color-negative film. We take both types of film with us on shoots. When the situa-

tion is very controllable, and does not require high-speed film, we lean towards slide films. When the lighting becomes difficult, the action increases, or color balance becomes mixed, we start to search for the color-negative films in our camera bag.

We try to look at film the way mechanics look at their tools. Each tool performs a specific task. The question we have to answer is, which film will capture a specific image in the best possible way? Thanks to the film manufacturers, our tools keep getting better, thereby allowing us to keep doing better and better work. ●