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# LENSPIRE

Special Edition

2017

The ZEISS Photography Magazine

## THE LAST MAIKO IN GIFU

Irwin Wong | Travel Photographer

## HOW DOES ZEISS DEFINE BOKEH

An Interview with Dr. Stefan Ballmann

## 4 PORTRAITS WITH THE MF LOXIA LENSES

A Lighting Tutorial by Vladimir Morozov



content



editorial

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# THE LAST MAIKO

Irwin Wong | Travel Photographer

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Irwin Wong is a professional photographer based in Tokyo, Japan. In his ongoing personal project Irwin is documenting traditional crafts and traditions in Japan that are in danger of going extinct.



It is twilight in Gifu, and the lights of the city sparkle prettily on the Nagara River. Irwin's assistant Will and him are standing on the bridge closest to where the boats dock, and as we watch, several pleasure boats peel lazily away from the harbor and float downstream. Bright lanterns cover the outside of the boats which will play host to revellers eating, drinking copious amounts of sake and watching the cormorant fishers ply their trade. It is a beautiful night in Gifu for being out on the river, which is one of the pillars of the tourist trade here, and it is oddly calming watching the boats sedately cruise down the river. From his vantage up on the bridge Irwin tries to spot the lucky boat that is carrying Gifu's last maiko.

The city of Gifu was, at one point, the most important city in Japan. At a time in history when all of Japan was a battleground contested by numerous feuding warlords, Gifu was seen as the base from which all of Japan could be unified. Powerful warlords used Gifu as their seat of power, and as a result Gifu's commerce went through the roof.

## Artisans, craftsmen, swordsmiths, traders and so on made their base Gifu

Gifu's economy became rich, and where there is riches there is entertainment, and where there is entertainment, there will be Geisha. It is from these roots that the culture of geisha found its way to Gifu and has survived here to this day... barely. >>

//1 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Loxia 2.4/85, f/2.8, 1/100 sec, ISO 200  
//2 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Loxia 2.4/85, f/2.5, 1/125 sec, ISO 500



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### Maiko - An apprentice Geisha

Meet Kikumame, or Mame-chan to her friends. The first time Irwin visited Gifu just over a year ago, she was one of three maiko who were residing there. Now she is the last one left. Maiko are apprentice geisha, and they wear the white face paint, girlish kimono and hair accessories that are most often mistakenly associated with fully fledged geisha. Maiko are generally less uptight and more playful than their geisha counterparts, making them more approachable. They dance, they laugh, they engage you in spritely conversation, they play drinking games with you; to be entertained by a good maiko is a singularly awesome cultural experience that Irwin cannot recommend enough. For the maiko however it is a tough life – one that has its rewards but requires your complete devotion to honing the craft over a lifetime.

### Constant practice and training leave little time for other pursuits.

The attrition rate is high in the already ailing industry. There are perhaps only

10 places remaining in Japan with Hanamachi, or geisha districts. The most famous of these is Kyoto, the former seat of the Emperor. Geisha from Kyoto are known to be the most expensive and exclusive in Japan. Gifu on the other hand, is the only place in Japan where you can party with a maiko on a boat. During the spring and summer months, if you are very lucky, you can book a very limited spot on a boat with Kikumame to go watch the cormorant fishing take place. Because of this Gifu maiko are different to those of other provinces in many ways; the way they dress is different, the way they dance is different, and the drinking games they play are different. Take the most visible difference a Gifu maiko shows; the obi – the wide sash that is usually tied around the back into elaborate patterns. A Gifu maiko who has to walk up and down the cramped confines of a riverboat cannot afford to have a bulky silk knot whacking customers in the back of the head. That is why their obi are tied higher up in a style called yanoji, a style which is completely unique to Gifu. And

with Kikumame being the only maiko in the city, it is safe to say that she is the only one the world wearing kimono in that style.

### Entertainer from older times

As Irwin watches Kikumame go through the ritual of putting on her traditional white makeup, he notes there are many ways in which she still seems an apprentice; she mutters and scolds herself when she makes a mistake putting on makeup, and she has to come and go several times to retrieve things that she has left in her room. Irwin did not know it, but at that time she had only been a maiko for less than half a year, which seems like such a short time in a lifelong profession. Once the makeup is completed however, there is a palpable difference in the air. Gone is the shy girl who greeted me at the door; someone else with different mannerisms and gestures has taken her place: a maiko. >>

//3 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Loxia 2.4/85, f/2.4, 1/125 sec, ISO 500  
 //4 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Loxia 2.4/85, f/4.5, 1/100 sec, ISO 800  
 //5 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Loxia 2.4/85, f/2.4, 1/100 sec, ISO 500  
 //6 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Loxia 2.4/85, f/3.5, 1/50 sec, ISO 2000  
 //7 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Milvus 2/100, f/4, 1/125 sec., ISO 1000

**Lenses used on this shoot:**

This is the first time I get to talk about the ZEISS Loxia 2.4/85 and I'm super excited about it!!! After months and months of praying for a mid tele Loxia lens I finally got my hands on it for this shoot and I have never been happier to be ZEISS shooter. Finally – the Loxia lens line-up has reached maturity, and aside from a few lesser-used focal lengths or maybe a macro, I don't know what else I could possibly want in a camera bag. I've talked about the other Loxias in previous posts but the 85mm, where do I start...for one thing it looks amazing wide open. Like, holy crap. Check the tight frames in the video for proof – I don't know if I've used an 85mm this rock solid wide open. Max aperture of f/2.4 doesn't even bother me, especially with the slim Loxia form factor with the same filter ring size for all four lenses. I have literally never been more excited to take my camera bag out and about. Needless to say, as a portrait lens it sings, especially stopped down on the Sony A7rII sensor. The portraits I made of Kikumame should be proof enough, I would say!

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**Born to be a maiko**

The next day Will and Irwin board Kikumame's boat to see her perform. Through deepening twilight, the boat churns through the water, laden with merrymakers, booze and food. Kikumame sits with customers, keeping cups topped up and engaging in lively conversation. Her mentor, a famous male geisha called Kikuji shows off his drinking prowess. The boat, having arrived at its destination, drops anchor and shuts off its motor. Stillness

descends over the river. There is still time before the cormorant fishers arrive so Kikumame stands up and goes to the front of the boat and starts to dance. There is no hesitation in her movement; the graceful, serene figure twirling in front of me is without a doubt the future of Gifu's geisha industry. She is seen two of her sisters quit the profession in the short time since she joined, but it is clear to me and everyone on the boat that Kikumame was born to be a maiko.

The night ends with more drinking, more dancing, more merrymaking, culminating in the procession of the cormorant fishers cruising by with their spectacular flaming lanterns. A collective sigh goes up from the boat as they recede into the distance, and everyone makes their journey back to port. It has been a long day for everyone, not least of all Kikumame, who for the first time looks a little pensive. She has a lonely road ahead of her. Days and months of training until she is a fully

fledged geisha, and then many more years training her own apprentices. The weight of the mantle upon her shoulders is mind-boggling. She must be tired and yet she bows deeply as she sees us off, waiting until the last of the passengers is out of sight before looking up again. ■

//8 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Loxia 2.4/85, f/2.0, 1/125 sec, ISO 250

//9 Hasselblad H5D, ZEISS Distagon CF 4/40

//10 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Loxia 2.4/85, f/2.8, 1/80 sec, ISO 250



//11



**Irwin Wong** is a professional portrait and documentary photographer based in Tokyo. His ability to interpret and photograph a wide range of subject matter keeps him busy with dozens of worldwide clients including Forbes, The Hollywood Reporter, BBC, Top Gear Magazine, The Washington Post, amongst others. His current major project is documenting traditional Japanese crafts that are in danger of becoming extinct.  
[www.irwinwong.com](http://www.irwinwong.com)

# UP TO THE TOP

Renan Ozturk | Filmmaker and Photographer

Renan Ozturk is an American filmmaker and photographer with German-Turkish roots. He travels all over the world – preferably so he can scale cliffs at minus 20 degrees Celsius.

Everything had already been planned for Renan Ozturk's vacation over Christmas 2015: sun, beach and some chilling out. But then he got a call from three young men in Great Britain who wanted to do something really different before starting their university studies: instead of getting drunk like many of their peers, they had another plan for how to test their limits: they wanted to cross Iceland unassisted from its northern to its southern tip. And they wanted to do it in December, Iceland's coldest time of the year.

## Trading sunshine for blistering cold

Such hopelessly extreme experiences are just the type of thing that Renan, a professional climber, photographer and filmmaker, seeks out for his work. Extreme cold is his normal working temperature. For these conditions, Renan will happily travel to Nepal or other far-off corners of the world. This time, too, he and his fiancé Taylor simply packed up their camera equipment and left for Iceland.

The expedition, called "The Coldest Crossing", was a complete failure. The three novices and their photo team had to be evacuated three times from risky situations, and ultimately they broke off the tour completely. But for Renan and Taylor, the trip was still worthwhile from a photographic perspective and the struggle and misadventures is what makes a great story in the end. They created images that make you shudder from the cold and remind you that nature is much more brutal than you can ever imagine when sitting in your comfortable recliner at home watching nature documentaries on TV. >>

1/1 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Loxia 2.8/21,  
f/2.8, 1/20 sec, ISO 5000



//2

**The cold is visible in the photos.**

Taylor Freesolo Rees who like Renan Ozturk is a passionate photographer and adventurer. Her middle name, by the way, is not a nickname; it was given to her by her parents, who are also adventurous spirits. When Taylor and Renan met, the young woman still did not know which direction she wanted to take in life. But for her boyfriend, the path was soon apparent: "With a name like that, you should live like that." The perfect adventurer couple was born. Today it is a trio: their dog Baloo, a husky-wolf mix with the temperament toward the wild, accompanies them on many of their expeditions. It was minus 20 degrees Celsius (minus 4 degrees Fahrenheit), but the temperature quickly rose. "Suddenly everything was wet. Even the best clothing cannot repel wetness," recalls Renan. Both their

camera and the lens withstood this situation, and indeed the entire trip. It is never pleasant encountering unwanted surprises on the other side of the globe, which is why Renan only had ZEISS Batis lenses in his pack. During treks through the mountains, where every gram counts, the Sony a7R II was Renan's first choice because it is the lightest full-frame camera. His favorite lenses are the Batis lenses because they are also very light and allow him to take sharp pictures – even using just one hand along a cliff – thanks to the autofocus and, in case of the Batis 1.8/85, the image stabilization.

The excellent features for creating video were another argument for using this camera/lens combination. In fact, Renan describes himself more as a filmmaker than a photographer. Sometimes he

crops photos out of a film – that's how good the image quality is. The ZEISS lenses allow him to choose between both options, and further support him with features like the De-Click function, with which the grid on the aperture ring of Loxia lenses can be deactivated. As a result, taking along a second piece of equipment to film is unnecessary.

**Always take a Portrait lens.**

For his spectacular landscape shots, Renan often uses lenses with a short focal length and large angular view. But even in Iceland's icy landscape, there are situations where a portrait telephoto lens makes sense. A picture, shows one of the members of the expedition in the tent. Because of the picture's tight crop, the fur hat and down sleeping bag look even puffier. The only light source is a headlamp hanging from the roof >>

//2 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Batis 2/25, f/2.2, 1/320 sec, ISO 2500

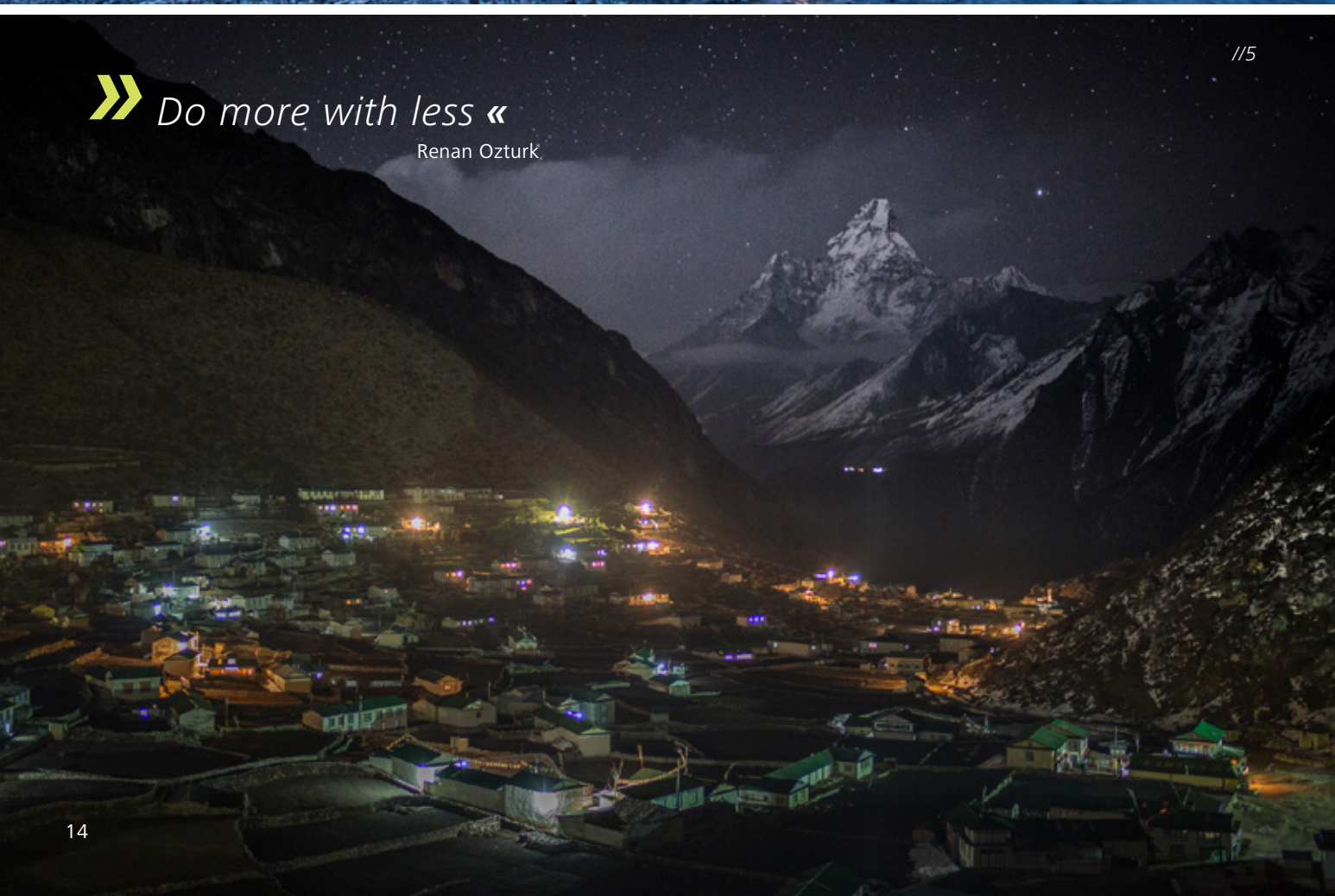
//3 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Batis 1.8/85, f/1.8, 1/40 sec, ISO 5000



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» Do more with less «  
Renan Ozturk



of the tent, which provides enough brightness for the fast lens. The spotlight throws spooky shadows on the face of the young man.

When you look at the entire photo series of this trip to Iceland, you notice how with each picture the three young men look increasingly worried and depressed. The team had to be rescued three times from dangerous situations because icy snowstorms swept over the mountains. Twice the group decided to continue – which the rescue workers thought was unwise. “They were pretty angry because the three guys simply couldn’t be convinced to give up their plan,” comments Renan. For the third (again free-of-charge) rescue – a powerful snowstorm was moving in – the rescue workers picked them up only because a helicopter happened to be flying nearby for a training mission. The picture above shows the group climbing up an icy hill. The star created by the Loxia around the floodlight of the helicopter has the effect of being a ray of hope in an environment hostile to life. “No other lens makes such beautiful stars,” says Renan.

#### From Iceland to Nepal

This picture of the world-famous temple complex Swayambhunath has since gained historical value, as two months after it an earthquake destroyed parts of this ‘Monkey Temple’. During this trip, Renan only used Otus lenses.



“The sharpness of the Otus 1.4/55 exceeds that of all other lenses in this focal length.” Separating the objects in different distances also works effectively with the Otus. And its speed means the Otus is also ideal for situations with little light – such as in the photo with the towering Ama Dablan mountain in Nepal. This 6,814-meter mountain is the spiritual heart of the Sherpa people who guide tourists to the peaks of the surrounding eight-thousanders.

Nepal was also the destination of Renan Ozturk’s following trip. For National Geographic he documented the dangerous work of the last honey gatherers in the Himalayas – a tradition that unfortunately is dying out. The collectors climb vertical cliffs to reach the beehives, which are stuck to the cliffs. As always, Renan only took the essentials in equipment. “Do more with less” is his motto. ZEISS lenses are definitely a part of this. ■



**Renan Ozturk** lives in Park City, Utah. He was born in southern Germany, where his parents went to university. When he was one year old, the family emigrated to the US. Together with two colleagues, Renan is co-owner of Camp4 Collective, a company that photographs the best action and adventure athletes in the wildest places on earth. Renan is a well-known climber himself and has been the first to conquer several cliffs. His expeditions frequently take him to the Himalayas, the jungles of Borneo or the deserts of Africa. Renan has won several prizes for his expedition photography, most recently the audience award at the Sundance Film Festival for his documentary of a climbing expedition called Meru. [www.renanozturk.com](http://www.renanozturk.com)

//4 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Loxia 2.8/21, f/13, 1/60 sec, ISO 400  
//5 5D Mark III, ZEISS Otus 1.4/55, f/1.6, 6 sec, ISO 1600  
//6 5D Mark III, ZEISS Otus 1.4/55, f/1.8, 1/6400 sec, ISO 160

# HOW DOES ZEISS DEFINE BOKEH

Interview with Dr. Stefan Ballmann



Bokeh is a term that has prompted plenty of discussion and certainly causes a lot of confusion. Learn more about how ZEISS defines bokeh.

*Bokeh is a term that has prompted plenty of discussion in many online forums. How do you define bokeh at ZEISS?*

The term bokeh certainly causes a lot of confusion, and funnily enough it actually means “mental haze” or “blur” in the original Japanese! In photography, the word stands for the “confusion” of rays of light, in other words the way in which the light beams emitted by an object do not meet in an orderly fashion at a single point on the camera sensor when they pass through a lens. That is why the parts of an image that lie outside the focal plane appear blurred. Bokeh can therefore be used as

a general term for all the properties of blur. For example, is the transition from the in-focus to the out-of-focus parts of an image hard or soft? How high is the contrast between the sharp and out-of-focus areas? How does the background blur differ from the foreground blur? And what kinds of chromatic aberration occur? When people post on forums, they often use the word bokeh to refer to the shape and structure of out-of-focus highlight areas, sometimes referred to as aperture iris images. The appearance of these iris images is certainly important to the overall composition of the image, but it is only one of many facets of

bokeh. We often come across sentences like “The rounded iris blades produce images with soft bokeh.” But scientifically speaking that doesn’t make sense, so it actually causes even more confusion.

*What influence do you have on bokeh as a lens manufacturer?*

Influencing bokeh during the design phase of a lens is extremely challenging. Obviously factors such as the number and shape of the iris blades and the choice of lenses affect how the highlight areas look in parts of the image that are significantly out of focus. That is a key issue for us when we are designing a lens, but it does not tell us much about the actual bokeh. Without going overboard on the technical details, it is generally the case that lenses with spherical overcorrection tend to exhibit a harsher transition to out-of-focus areas. Lenses that are undercorrected for spherical aberration generally have a much larger depth of field, which creates a softer transition. Distracting double images – in other words sharp edges within out-of-focus areas – are regarded as “bad” bokeh. They are essentially undesirable side-effects that need to be corrected.

*Does it actually make sense to define the properties of blurriness as a set of measurements? Is that even possible?*

Plotting values in defocus curves can give us useful information on out-of-focus areas, both during the design phase and using measurements taken from real lenses. But ultimately blurriness is a somewhat hazy term that primarily comes down to a subjective judgement. That’s why no set of scientific measurements can ever be a proper substitute for the visual impression of a photograph taken under realistic conditions. We appreciate that fact – and that is why we equip our photographers and brand ambassadors with lenses right from the start of the prototype phase so that we can gather as many images and appraisals as possible.



//1 © Batu Balkanlı, Nikon D800 + ZEISS Classic 2/35, f/2.8 with 1/1600 sec., ISO 100  
 //2 © Stefano Zatti Nikon D700 + ZEISS Classic 2/100, f/5.6 with 1/250 sec., ISO 400  
 //3 © Stefano Zatti Nikon D700 + ZEISS Classic 2/100, f/3.5 with 1/320 sec., ISO 200

*Why do people focus so heavily on the qualities of blur with 85 mm lenses? And what kind of bokeh are you ideally looking for in an 85 mm lens?*

An 85 mm lens is a classic focal length for portrait photography, so bokeh is obviously very important. That is especially true of fast portrait lenses that exhibit a low depth of field at wide apertures. The idea is to make the subject stand out as sharply as possible against the blurred background. That gives an impression of spatial depth and focuses the viewer’s attention on the key part of the image. As a photographer, I strive to ensure that the contrast of the sharp part of the scene such as the face or eyes is nicely in harmony with the blur gradient and background blur.

*How does that differ from a wide-angle fixed focal length lens, for example?*

Due to their shorter focal length, wide-angle lenses exhibit a larger depth of field as >>

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compared to normal and telephoto lenses in situations where you have the same f-stop and distance to the object. That generally produces a softer blur gradient than you would get with a telephoto lens of a comparable speed.

*What's the difference between zoom lenses and fixed focal lengths in this context?*

People often assume that zoom lenses will produce a less harmonious bokeh than fixed focal length lenses. But that is not normally true, at least as far as modern zoom lenses are concerned. That assumption basically stems from the fact that the out-of-focus highlight areas of certain zooms are not considered to be as "aesthetically pleasing" as those of a fixed focal length lens. But it is true that prime lenses usually have a higher max. aperture than zoom lenses. Therefore, prime lenses show a more shallow depth-of-field and thus demonstrate a faster transition from focus to out-of-focus areas.

*How can a photographer know whether a lens has the potential to produce harmonious, soft bokeh?*

As I mentioned before, lenses with spherical overcorrection tend to exhibit a faster

transition from sharpness to blur, while lenses with spherical undercorrection make a softer transition. You can see that clearly in the MTF charts for each lens. You can also look at how the contrast changes between very bright and very dark elements in the out-of-focus areas of the image, for example by including a branch set against the bright sky in the background of a portrait photo. Some lenses produce hard edges in that situation, which are often regarded as rather artificial and aesthetically unappealing. The shape and structure of the aperture iris images are also important. Currently, rounded iris images are considered to be attractive. The regular pentagons or hexagons that used to be so common are nowadays frequently felt to be "too technical". With a sufficiently large number of rounded iris blades – for example eight or nine – it is possible to come close to the ideal of a circular aperture.

*What would you say are the key determinators to influence the bokeh of a lens?*

In order to give a convenient explanation, let me refer to the new Batis tele portrait lens which was introduced recently. With its 135 mm it has the longest focal length in the Batis family.

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As a result, it has a more shallow depth of field at the opening aperture of f/2.8 than the Batis 1.8/85 at full aperture. It is therefore excellently suited to exempt the main motif from the background. As known from the other members of the Batis lens family, the Apo Sonnar 2.8/135 is characterized by a harmonious transition between the focus and out-of-focus areas. The apochromatic correction also ensures a color-neutral reproduction of contrast-rich transitions and conveys a particularly pleasant bokeh, free from color fringes.

**Depth of field of the ZEISS Batis 2.8/135**

(Sony A7 with 24MPix):

Object Distance	<b>1m</b>	Depth-of-field	<b>0.2 cm</b>
Object Distance	<b>2m</b>	Depth-of-field	<b>1.3 cm</b>
Object Distance	<b>5m</b>	Depth-of-field	<b>10.0 cm</b>
Object Distance	<b>10m</b>	Depth-of-field	<b>41.0 cm</b>

*Do you have any recommendations on how photographers can track down lenses with very special types of bokeh?*

We are often approached by photographers who have adapted their analog lenses to a digital camera body and are over the moon with the bokeh of these sometimes very simple lenses. They may not have been designed for optimum image quality, but these old lenses often produce soft and attractive bokeh. Ultimately, though, it is all very much a matter of taste: bokeh that appears harmonious and aesthetically pleasing to some people may seem too soft and uneven to others. My advice is to simply try out a couple of lenses under real-life conditions, because you can normally judge what you prefer quite quickly. ■

//4 © Irwin Wong, Sony A7R II + ZEISS Batis 2.8/135, f/2.8, 1/160 sec., ISO 200  
 //5 © Irwin Wong, Sony A7R II + ZEISS Batis 2.8/135, f/2.8, 1/160 sec., ISO 200  
 //6 © Lars Mueller, Nikon D800 + ZEISS Otus 1.4/85, f/1.4, 1/500 sec., ISO 100

//6



**Dr. Stefan Ballmann** has worked as a research assistant in the ZEISS research and development department since 2013. He studied physics at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg as part of the Elite Network of Bavaria graduate program, completing his doctorate in 2012. In his free time he is a keen portrait and nature photographer. He prefers working with fast telephoto lenses because of their ability to isolate the subject from the background – and of course because of bokeh. For a more in-depth look at this topic, Dr. Stefan Ballmann recommends reading the article "Depth of Field and Bokeh" by Hubert Nasse. This article was first published in German photo magazine c't Digitale Fotografie, issue 1/2017.



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# TRADITIONAL INDIAN INDUSTRY

**DOCUMENTED WITH THE ZEISS BATIS 2.8/135**

Gurushankar Subramanian | Travel Photographer

My wife suggested we remove ourselves from our comfort-zone and head out-of-town and shoot from the hip. A few hotel bookings were made and soon we were on the road with the Sony A7R2, the new ZEISS Batis 2.8/135. I wanted to be able to shoot on the go but still be able to control the ambient light to achieve the look that I wanted.

Here was a series of E-mount ZEISS lenses I could afford and, as an added bonus, they came with very fast and accurate focus! It was a very easy decision to buy the ZEISS Batis 1.8/85 and my jaw dropped when I experienced the performance of the lens and the sharpness and rendering of the images when it was used with the Sony A7R2. I let go of my Canon and Rokinon lenses to go native E-Mount with the Batis 1.8/85. I also have the ZEISS Batis 2/25 and Batis 2.8/18. I have executed several commercial and personal shoots with the Batis series as well as the excellent Loxia and Milvus lineup."

Like most photographers I started my journey as a photographer with Nikon. In 2013 I picked up my first DSLR (a Nikon D600 with 14-24/2.8,

85/1.8, 300/4, 70-200/4) and within a year I switched to mirrorless with the excellent offering from Fuji (XT1, 10-24/4, 56/1.2). The combination of a portrait lens and a wide-ultrawide lens worked perfectly for me. The quantum of weight and volume I shed by moving to Fuji had several benefits and it made me a better photographer purely because my back did not give up carrying my gear to remote locations or during a long and tiring day. This unobtrusive nature of the mirrorless system was key to helping me get into places or up close to people who were camera shy. After I switched to Sony I found myself shooting with large adapted Canon lenses. There were no compelling lenses from Sony at the time (soon after the A7R2 was launched). The weight and volume was back! I found myself wondering if the added dynamic

range, resolution and RAW file handling convenience was really worth the switch. I desperately needed compact lenses that were designed for the E mount. The Batis lenses ticked all the items in my wish-list and I was hooked!

The ZEISS Batis 135 soon landed in my hands. The by now familiar packaging of ZEISS was discarded quickly and I held the lens in my hands for the first time. A key difference from the Batis 1.8/85 and Batis 2/25 is that the focus ring is much bigger and feels like it was handed down from the Milvus line. Now, I am not spec savvy and do not know for sure if this is a focus-by-wire system or not but THIS is how a focus ring should feel. The focus rings on the Batis 1.8/85 and 2/25 did not quite measure up to what I had expected from a ZEISS lens. >>



//2

//1 SONY A7R2, ZEISS Batis 2.8/135, f/5.6, 1/13 sec., ISO 100  
//2 SONY A7R2, ZEISS Batis 2.8/135, f/5.6, 1/640 sec., ISO 100



The 135mm has a proper focus ring that gives you a sense of authority when you switch to manual focus. Anyone who has shot with the Loxia 2/50 or any of the Milvus or older ZEISS lenses will know what I am talking about. The lens is a little bit heavier than the Batis 85mm but still feels surprisingly light and well balanced on the A7R2. Build quality is top-notch and this lens is dust and moisture sealed. I do wish they had seen fit to give this a metal hood, even as an optional extra. These long lenses tend to stick out a fair bit and I did knock this one on a few doorways. Perhaps the plastic is better at absorbing the shock rather than transmitting it to the chassis of the lens? I do love the Milvus 2.8/21 and the metal hood on that lens is a work of art on its own!

#### Overcoming the creative trough

So I had the lens...and I drew a blank! I had nothing to shoot and no source of inspiration. I was tired of shooting the same scenes from around Chennai. The problem with photography today is that it has a very high "Cliche to Original" ratio. Everything sort of looks like something you have seen the day before. The rate at which I browse through images, beautiful albeit, on Instagram makes me wonder if we are being badgered with so much imagery that we are slowly becoming desensitized.

The box and lens just sat there on my desk as a reminder of my laziness and

every time I walked into my office I would avoid looking at that corner. The fact that this was probably one of the handful of lenses handed over to photographers world-wide served to amplify my guilt. The pressure was building and I was almost content to call ZEISS and tell them that they would be better off finding someone else to shoot with it because I had run out of ideas. But my wife had the solution. She suggested we remove ourselves from our comfort-zone and head out-of-town and shoot from the hip. A few hotel bookings were made and soon we were on the road with the Sony A7R2, the new Batis 2.8/135, Einstein Vagabond Mini, Elinchrom FRX400 and a Rotalux 70. I wanted to be able to shoot on the go without having to search for wall-power and with the Elinchrom Skyport Plus HS trigger, I could control the ambient light better to achieve the look that I wanted. I did take the Batis 2/25 and Batis 1.8/85 along but I forced myself to shoot with the 135mm even in situations where the wider lenses would have made life easier.

#### Engaging with the 135mm focal length

What the Batis 2.8/135 brought home was the ability to pull in the distant backgrounds and make them significant again. As you go wider, the background distances itself from the subject and becomes less apparent. With the longer lenses it pulls right back in. >>

**>>** *The famous ZEISS look is a quality that makes an image leap out of the screen and make you wonder "Did I really shoot that!?".«*

Gurushankar Subramanian





//5

**The aperture question: f/2.8?**

Now let us talk about the number that everyone is raising eyebrows about, the F stop. At f/2.8 it is collecting roughly half the light than the Milvus 2/135 or the excellent Canon L 135/F2. I rarely shot at f/2.8 though because I had my strobe with me. Had I been shooting with natural light then I might have been happier working with a faster lens that would afford faster shutter speeds and lower ISOs. For my style of photography, the lighting has to enhance the image and help tell the story. Natural light was not suitable in the situations in which I was shooting. These are ancient cottage industries that have not changed much since the days of chariots, clan lords and gratuitous violence. The rooms were dark and there was precious little light trickling through holes in the roof or through the windows. Even the f/1.2 lenses would have struggled to shoot using ambient light in these conditions. Shooting with a powerful strobe hooked up to a battery gave me the flexibility to work around the slower F stop of the lens. I did not test the image stabilization as I did most of my photographs with the camera perched on a tripod. Most of the images below were shot between f/4 and f/8 with a

with fast F:1.2 Canon lenses and while the bokeh is smooth and ethereal, I am happy to trade that for quick AF and a delightful rendering that is popularly known as the ZEISS “pop”.

**Experience the ZEISS ‘pop’**

The sharpness of this lens depends a lot on where you shoot. Out in the open on a hot day with the sun rising up I had some softness creeping in from the convection currents in the air. This was exacerbated by the longer focal length. You can see this effect to some extent in the image of the horses at Dhanushkodi. The ZEISS rendering means a lot to me. It forms the foundation of the look that I use to tell my stories. The lighting accentuates the look and actually thrives on it. When I get both of them right, I can make a powerful image. I do not get this rendering or the “look” that I am after when I shoot with other glass with the exception of the Sony 55mm and the 85mm G-Master. I have shot with the Sigma Art series of lenses and I love the build quality and the pricing. I personally believe the Sigma lenses are highly competent and do no disservice to the camera and sensor. As you start to rein in your “look” you will automatically gravitate towards the glass that helps you achieve it. Some of you



//7

//5 SONY A7R2, ZEISS Batis 2.8/135, f/4.0, 1/100 sec., ISO 100  
 //6 Sony A7Rii, ZEISS Batis 2.8/135, f/4.0, 1/125 sec., ISO 100  
 //7 SONY A7R2, ZEISS Batis 2.8/135, f/4.0, 1/250 sec., ISO 100  
 //8 SONY A7R2, ZEISS Batis 2.8/135, f/2.8, 1/3200 sec., ISO 100

will stick with Canon, others will prefer Sigma and some of you will not deviate from ZEISS.

My desire is to show you a scene precisely how I see it. There is nothing lost in translation. What you get is what I see when I observe a scene, sense the mood, smell the energy, hear the thwack of the chisel against the metal, feel the heat from the summer sun against your skin and experience the gravity as your knees buckle under the load that these workers carry around as they do what they and their ancestors have been doing for centuries.

\$2,000.00 is more money than you would pay for a Sigma 1.8/135 or the excellent Canon 2/135. What makes this ZEISS Batis so special? You have to shoot with it to experience the Autofocus performance and the quality of the image at all apertures. I am confident it will be a great tool for videographers as well. The ZEISS look is unique and I depend on it and get a kick out of it. Finally the lethargic AF of the other non-native (adapted) 135mm lenses feels disappointing after shooting with the ZEISS Batis 2.8/135. These factors make the Batis 2.8/135 worth the money. ■

I could now work with backgrounds that had textures and colors that made my subject pop right off and out of the screen. Many of the locations were small and dark. I ended up shooting with my back against the wall or through a window or doorway while standing outside the room where the action was happening. In a few photographs I am actually standing in the middle of a busy street shooting back through the doorway and into a small room. With a 135mm lens, you have to accommodate for the working distance if you want to shoot full body / wide shots. It is possible and I shot several of these because I believe that the body language is not communicated with a tight half-body shot. If you watch a cyclist in action, they generate power from the legs as well as their core.



//6

Their arms provide stability and control. Shooting a tight shot of a cyclist can look interesting but it tells only half the story. I try to shoot full body shots so I can capture the energy from every extremity.

majority sitting in the f/5.6 bucket. My own personal style aside, will you miss having the larger f/2 aperture if you bought this lens? I don't know. If you use lights at all or shoot in a studio, it should not matter. I have tried shooting



//8

# 4 PORTRAITS

## WITH THE MF LOXIA LENSES

A Lighting Tutorial by Vladimir Morozov

Vladimir Morozov gives an insight into different ways of shooting portraits using the ZEISS Loxia 2.4/85.

Perhaps, it seems a bit outfashioned, but, working with images, I don't like to rely on automatics neither choosing exposure parameters, nor choosing focus points, as I got used to have full personal control over the process. I know pretty well that such an approach is not that widely accepted among modern photographers, but least of all I would like to convince anyone of the opposite, for I consider it to be my competitive advantage. Therefore, without imposing my point of view upon anyone, I would like to tell you how I work on my images and what tools I have chosen for this work. And, surely, while doing so I will share my impressions of the new ZEISS Loxia 2.4/85.

As 85 mm lenses are often applied for shooting portraits, in this article I am going to tell about several simple and easily ways for any photographer to create a good portrait. We have thought up the concept of this small photo project together with my son Mikhail who has two beloved grandmothers and two great-grandmothers. So we have decided to take four portraits of their beloved grandson. And Misha (Russian diminutive for Mikhail.) will be able to present them the printed and framed images for Christmas. Besides, Mikhail gave his consent to the publication of the photos without retouch, extra thanks to him for that.

### 1 Portrait with one large light source.

It is very easy to take such a portrait if there is a large softbox or octabox not less than 150cm (5ft) in size at your disposal, either a window, which can be veiled with light diffusing white fabric. Further, you have to place your model as close to the light source as possible, so that the light source was at the edge of appearing in the frame. All other parameters in this scheme can be and have to be changed for creation of that very picture you are seeking for. Moving your model forward relatively the light source, you will amplify contrast and increase the apparent 3D-volume of the picture due to increase of the modeling light. Moving the model farther, you will get less contrast on his or her face. Relatively to the background allows you to control the brightness. And some more words about the source height in relation to the model: in this particular case it is lifted so that the model's head is at the level of its lower third, to get more lighting from above.

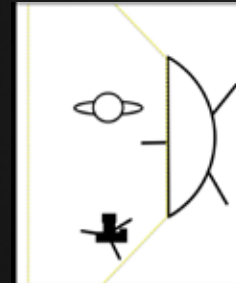
If I was to teach portrait photography, I would start with this very exercise, and here is why: first, working with one light source, the beginning photographer would be able to focus on the desirable result and on better work with his or her model; second, working with a large light source, it is possible to allow the model more freedom in posing, as this lighting fits many shooting angles; and third, lighting will always remain the most balanced, for if you add some light somewhere, then some is diminished by itself. //

### 2 Portrait with one small light source.

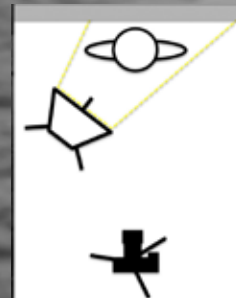
Working with just one small light source we will not be able to get the model and the background filled in simultaneously. But we will be able to get much higher microcontrast in our image. This makes your images stand out. In my practice I use halogen light by Dedolight. I prefer continuous light to impulse one for several reasons: first, it is friendly for the model, the photographer and all those who are on the set as there are no flashes that make eyes tired; second, using continuous light combined with a mirrorless camera, in the viewfinder and on the LCD I see exactly that light distribution, with which the photograph is going to be exposed; and third, I don't need to adjust light intensity if I want to change aperture for increased and reduced of the depth of field.

A small 41x56cm softbox with a 300W halogen lamp was the only light source in this shot. The light source is lifted above the model and located on the left. And even such a simple scheme of lighting offers many ways of adjustment. The optimal height is adjusted by the model eyes: the light flecks should be in the top most part of eyes. Just keep an eye at them so that those flecks remained at all times, otherwise the model's gaze turns fireless. Bringing the light source closer to the model you make the light softer; moving it away you get more harsh light. The light-and-shade distribution over the model's face can be controlled by changing the light angle and moving the light source around the model. This portrait is shot at f/2.8. //

# //1



# //2



**Used equipment:**

Camera: Sony A7R II  
 Lens: ZEISS Loxia 2.4/85  
 Light: Dedolight DLH1X300S + White  
 Dome small, DLH4X150S + Octodome 5,  
 DLHM4-300  
 Tripod: Gitzo GK3532-82QD Mountaineer  
 PC: MacBook Pro  
 Software: Capture One Pro 8

**Model:**

Mikhail Morozov

**Photographer:**

Vladimir Morozov

Official web site of Vladimir  
 Morozov's studio:

[www.vladimirmorozov.ru](http://www.vladimirmorozov.ru)

**3 High-key portrait with two light sources.**

For this portrait I used two light sources from the previous shots. It is a large octabox sized 150cm, and a 41x56cm softbox. In this setup the octabox acts as a background, and provides the modeling light on the left and right sides of the model at the same time. Just like in the previous shot, the main light comes from a small softbox that I moved to the right side and lowered a little to get an evenly lit face. In this shot the light adjustment means the correct balance between the two sources, and in the correct placement of the model between them. Start with choosing the model-to-octabox distance, while the main light is switched off. Changing the distance from the source to the model you have to find that way of a flare on the edges, which suits your idea. The closer the model stands to the background, the stronger is the flare, and vice versa. Then you have to set up the drawing main light; and I explained how to make it in the previous chapter. After both the light sources are in place you should properly balance their intensity. Work with continuous light, to do that you have to meter and set exposure by the weakest light source, and then to reduce the power of the second one correspondingly. I conceived a gameful plot, so I had to chose a shorter shutter speed to avoid blur. To add some movement, I asked Mikhail to raise his hands and make faces at me. With fully open aperture his hand should be strongly defocused, and that would add some movement to the shot, while

the faultless sharpness in the eyes would draw viewers' attention to the smile. I have to point out that manual focusing is an absolute must for such subjects as the AF would be just unable to perform on the eyes precisely. And I'd like to rate the new Loxia 2.4/85 pretty highly for a large rotation angle of the focusing ring, which allows to pinpoint superb sharpness, especially shooting close-ups. //

**4 Low-key portrait with two small light sources.**

Before the description of the fourth and final shot I am going to make a small technical digression to explain what else I use in my work, as I consider it important. If I have an opportunity, I always shoot from a reliable steady tripod, here it is a Gitzo Mountaineer. The tripod allows me to keep my consciously selected shooting angle, to keep the selected distance to the model and, oddly enough, it helps me to work with light. This is how it goes. Having placed my camera on the tripod, I connect it with an USB cable to my MacBook Pro and launch Capture One. All this can seem bulky, but this linking of a tripod, a camera and a computer allows me to view and analyze the taken material instantly, and on a large monitor; besides, having started the video mode, one can to control light very precisely, watching all changes on the MacBook monitor turned towards the shooting ground. I talk about all this just because photographers who hand

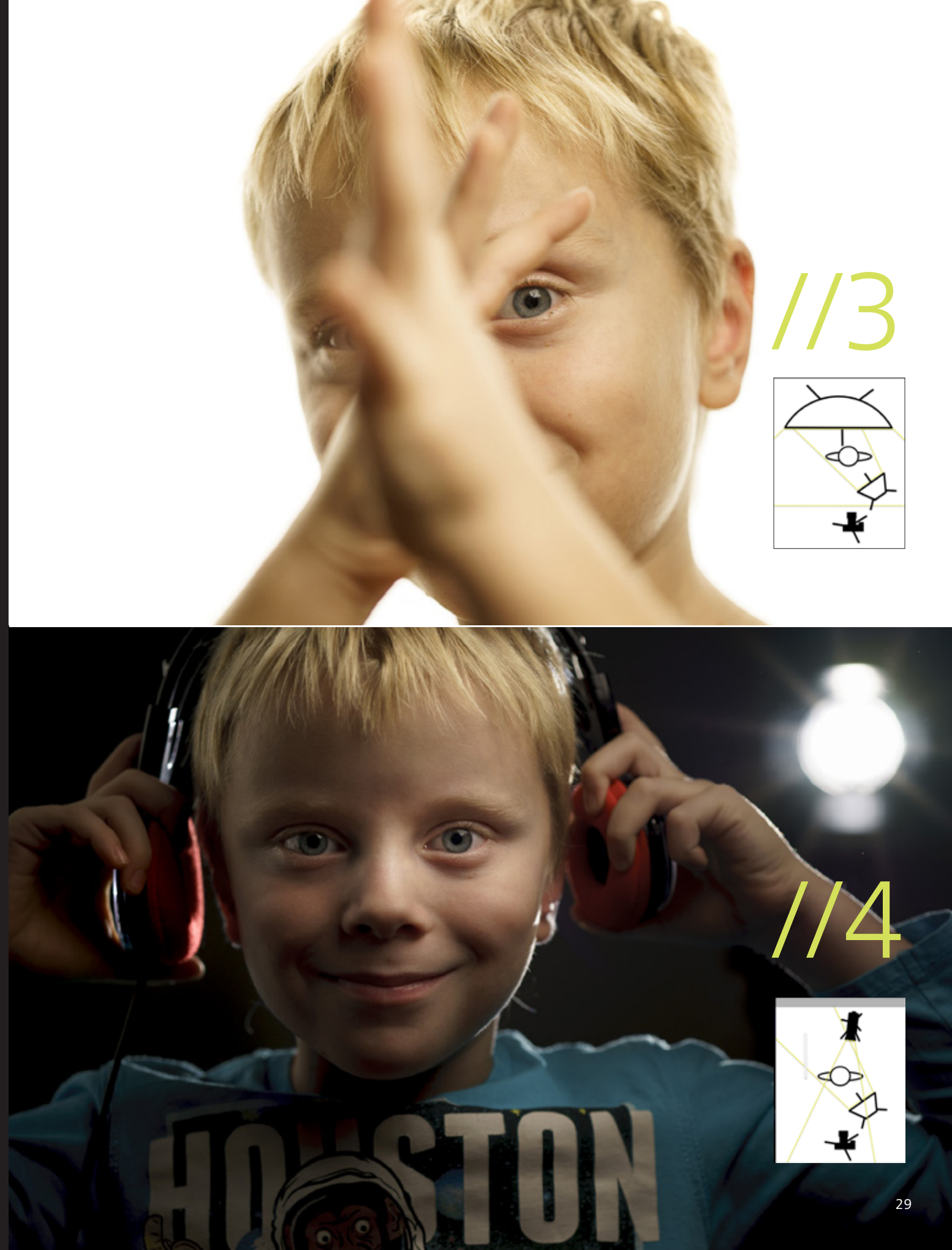
hold their camera, are forced to move constantly from the shooting point to lighting equipment and back trying to control light.

Coming back to the description of my fourth shot, I am going to explain its concept. I like it very much when there is a light source in the image, whether it be the sun, a streetlight or just a studio light that gives some strong backlight. It is surely possible to get beautiful backlighting without entering the light source into the shot, but in this case the story loses its authenticity. There is some light, but it is unclear from where it comes. Here, the light sources are placed almost identically to the previous shot, though you won't guess by the picture. I have only changed the big octabox for a lens device with barn doors and lifted the main higher to create more dramatic lighting of the face. Having set everything up, I added a white reflector to fill the deep shadow on the right cheek.

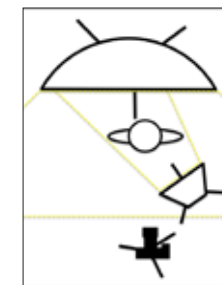
The only basic difference of this light setup in comparison with the previous shot is the restricted freedom of model's posing. Just a small lean or turn of the head, and the light is gone. Therefore I had to charge Mikhail with retaining earphones in one point so that to keep him at least relatively motionless.

In conclusion I have to tell that shooting all the project took a little more than two hours, and Mikhail stayed on the shooting ground just 20 minutes, using the rest of time for watching his favourite cartoons. ■

//1 SONY A7R2, ZEISS Loxia 2.4/85, f/2.4, 1/100 sec., ISO 100  
 //2 SONY A7R2, ZEISS Loxia 2.4/85, f/2.8, 1/125 sec., ISO 200  
 //3 SONY A7R2, ZEISS Loxia 2.4/85, f/2.4, 1/320 sec., ISO 800  
 //4 SONY A7R2, ZEISS Loxia 2.4/85, f/3.2, 1/160 sec., ISO 125



//3



//4





Sony A7R II, ZEISS Batis 2.8/21,  
f/2.8, 1/100 sec., ISO 320

# FASCINATING CUBA

Brian Matiash | Travel and Landscape Photographer

Classic cars in a host of colors, locals dancing salsa in the streets, historic places that tell stories of famous revolutionaries such as Che Guevara and Fidel Castro: Cuba is a truly fascinating place for photographers. Anyone who wants to savor the delights of the Cuban capital should do so on foot. Whether you choose to explore the city on your own, with a friend or with a local guide, as a photographer you can get true inspiration if you simply let your senses guide you. Professional photographer Brian Matiash gives us his tips for taking some exceptional photos while on vacation.

## Strolling through Havana

There is no end of sights to see in Cuba's capital. The best way to start your journey is with a stroll through the old town, La Habana Vieja. The most beautiful squares are Plaza de San Francisco, Plaza Vieja, Plaza de la Catedral and Plaza de Armas. The Habaneros, as the locals are known, are friendly, polite and always have time for a chat. That's why tourists always feel welcome and are happy to sit back, relax and soak up the atmosphere. But photographers should get prepared before heading out. It's important to have the right equipment with you.

Many travel photographers swear by the compact and high-performance system cameras from Sony. Combined with a few interchangeable lenses from

ZEISS, no challenge is too great for the photographer. If you want to capture photos of people, you should keep a high-speed portrait lens in your bag. >>



Sony A7R II, ZEISS Batis 1.8/85,  
f/2.0, 1/5000 sec., ISO 200



//1



//2



//3



//4



//5



//6



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//8



//9

## ¿Puedo tomar su foto?

The ZEISS Batis® autofocus lenses were specially developed for mirrorless, full-frame system cameras from Sony. They are compact and lightweight, which makes them perfect for traveling – and even hold up in bad weather thanks to their dust and splash guard. Accurate autofocus quickly brings moving subjects into your line of vision. For creative work, the innovative OLED display shows the distance and depth of field.

//1 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Batis 1.8/85, f/1.8, 1/1250 sec., ISO 100  
 //2 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Batis 1.8/85, f/1.8, 1/125 sec., ISO 200  
 //3 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Batis 1.8/85, f/1.8, 1/640 sec., ISO 200  
 //4 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Batis 1.8/85, f/1.8, 1/640 sec., ISO 200  
 //5 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Batis 2.8/21, f/2.8, 1/500 sec., ISO 100  
 //6 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Batis 1.8/85, f/1.8, 1/800 sec., ISO 800  
 //7 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Batis 1.8/85, f/1.8, 1/500 sec., ISO 200  
 //8 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Batis 1.8/85, f/1.8, 1/2500 sec., ISO 200  
 //8 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Batis 1.8/85, f/1.8, 1/2500 sec., ISO 200  
 //9 Sony A7R II, ZEISS Batis 1.8/85, f/5.6, 1/30 sec., ISO 125

» No matter the time of day, you can always find something interesting happening in one corner of Havana or another.«

Sony A7R II, ZEISS Batis 2.8/21, f/2.8, 1/320 sec., ISO 100

A focal length of 85 mm is perfect. A 35 mm lens is just what you need to create street shots – and a wide-angle lens, e.g. with 18 25 mm, is great for capturing impressive landscapes. Equipped with such a compact lens and camera, you can move through the streets largely unnoticed – so you don't need to worry about people immediately singling you out as a photographer. This means you can capture much more authentic images.

### ¿Puedo tomar su foto?

No matter the time of day, you can always find something interesting happening in one corner of Havana or another. And most habaneros are more than happy to oblige you with a photo. However, that doesn't mean you're entitled to photograph anyone you want just because you have a camera. If you spot an interesting face, you should talk to that person. If you speak Spanish, you can ask for their permission; otherwise, simply smile at them and point at your

Ever since 1890, ZEISS has been producing camera lenses for photographers who simply don't settle for second best when it comes to telling their stories. The aim: to push boundaries and try new things. Touching people – every day, time and again. With image quality that is truly unique. [Learn more: lenspire.zeiss.com](http://lenspire.zeiss.com)



camera. That will usually get you a clear “yes” or “no.” Above all else, you should respect whatever decision is made. Once you've taken your photo, why not show your appreciation? Here's a tip: Cubans love pens! So why not be prepared and always have a little something with you!

### A Havana highlight: a classic car tour

Anyone who wants to explore the city a different way should take a tour in one of the classic cars, which are over 50 years old. Try to make sure that your tour passes by Malecón, Havana's beach promenade, and Hotel Nacional. The university, the district of Vedado, the Paseo del Prado with the Capitol Building, the theater and the Museum of the Revolution should also be on your itinerary. And no tour would be complete without a stop at Plaza de la Revolución. If you don't get the chance to do so earlier, this is where you'll definitely get to sit in the driver's seat for a photo.

### Tips for your Cuba travels

When traveling to Cuba, you should keep an open mind while also maintaining some common sense. It's a good idea to stay in casas particulares, private rooms often rented out by families. This is a great way to get an authentic impression of Cuban culture,

get talking to locals and receive plenty of tips for your travels.

As it's not advisable to drink the tap water in Cuba, and because it's usually quite hot, you should always have at least one bottle of water with you. Cuba's internet infrastructure is quite poor compared to other developed countries. So it's worth buying a Wi-Fi card and getting online in a larger tourist hotel or an “internet park.” I strongly recommend that you install an app on your phone that lets you use maps offline. Then you won't have to worry about getting lost. ■



**Brian Matiash** is a professional photographer from Portland, USA. In his travels, which have taken him across the world, he has specialized in visual storytelling involving natural landscapes and foreign settings. For almost a decade now, Brian has been inspiring other photographers the world over through his tutorials, videos and blog posts. [www.matiash.com](http://www.matiash.com)

# TRUE TO ITS WORD

## IDEAL FOR VIDEO AND STILLS - LOXIA LENSES

Jonathan Edwards | Photographer and Cinematographer

Jonathan Edwards, director, photographer and cinematographer of Naïve Studio tested the ZEISS Loxia 2.8/21, with some outstanding results.



### The highly compact ZEISS Loxia MF lenses are specially developed for mirrorless full-frame system cameras from Sony.

Jonathan was excited to test out the wide-angle full-frame Loxia 2.8/21 lens across several different application areas. From commercial architectural photography to landscape location

scouts, time-lapse work and an interesting thought with slow-motion and the Sony A7SII.

### Vignetting and distortion kept to a minimum

The build quality of the ZEISS Loxia range is second to none. The all black inconspicuous design of the lenses is highly desirable and they are light and yet robust. Weather sealed and sharper than any other lenses Jonathan has have tested within the price bracket. Saying this, he did wonder how sharp the 21mm would be, being a wide-angle lens and also had concerns with

vignetting and distortion. But enough of listing possible concerns as after field testing the lens across both stills and 4K film, it was obvious that this matched the quality and sharpness of the others within the range and vignetting and distortion are seriously kept to a minimum even at f/2.8. Glare, artifacts and flare are removed via the unique T\* anti-reflective coating and bokeh is great if shooting shallow depth of field, although not a great concern with such a wide lens.

So rather than simply set a day aside or spend an evening shooting on the 21mm Jonathan thought it would be

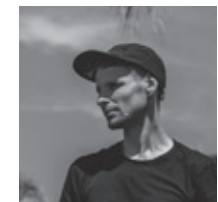
much more interesting to throw it right in the mix with some live commercial projects. He added the lens to his kit bag and it has been on hand to shoot a wide range of locations and subjects. From online social media films for a new men's swimwear brand, to a low and available light fashion shoot in Chinatown Manchester, to rural landscape location scouts. The lens has been taken out of the kit bag for a wide range of uses and been superb every time.

### Great results for both – stills and 4K film

Aside from the obvious uses of such a wide lens, Jonathan had also wanted to test the 21mm for a slightly less conventional purpose. The Sony A7SII shoots high-speed rates of 120fps (100fps in PAL) which can be highly useful to track a moving object and also seeming to reduce handheld movements when film speed is reduced in post. The only downfall with the A7SII is that when the record button is pressed the high-speed option is created via cropping the sensor to a full HD image which is 2.8x crop. So when

framing shots in high-speed this must be considered and Jonathan has found that the focus zoom assistant with the ZEISS Loxia lenses is highly useful, as not only can you check that your subject is sharp to track but this also gives you a rough idea of the 2.2x crop for recording. But further still the ZEISS Loxia 2.8/21 is the perfect wide-angle lens to track a subject. Obviously you still receive the 2.2x crop but it gives you plenty of space within the frame and makes a huge difference against say a 50mm, depending upon what you want from the shot of course.

Thanks to the iris de-click feature and super-smooth manual focusing are the perfect tool for demanding videographers. The completely new feature of the Loxia lens is that you can 'declick' the aperture's locking mechanism using a tool (supplied) and an adjustment screw on the bayonet surface. This means that for video applications, you can smoothly eliminate any unwanted differences in brightness as you pan the camera. ■



**Naïve Studio** is cinematographer, photographer and director Jonathan Edwards. The 32 year old first established his career after winning the commercial sector of the Sony Pro Production awards in 2013, now specialising in high-end creative, high-speed, time-lapse and cinematic commercial film. While continuing an active schedule in both commercial photography and cinematography, Jonathan is currently director and producer for the fashion series Ascensions for the men's lifestyle magazine Highsnobiety. Supplies film stock to Sony Ci, Sony USA and Sony Pro Europe and is also an ambassador for 3DR drones.

You can see examples of his work at: [www.naivestudio.co.uk](http://www.naivestudio.co.uk)

//1 SONY A7S II, Loxia 2.8/21, f/8, 1/100 sec., ISO 320  
//2 SONY A7S II, Loxia 2.8/21, f/8, 1/160 sec., ISO 100  
//3 SONY A7S II, Loxia 2.8/21, f/8, 1/125 sec., ISO 100  
//4 SONY A7S II, Loxia 2.8/21, f/8, 1/125 sec., ISO 100

