

The Agfa 400's

Newest-technology HDC 400 and Optima 400 color-print films yield great results

by Jack & Sue Drafahl

We love it when a plan comes together. Recently, *Skin Diver Magazine*, a sister publication to PHOTOGRAPHIC, assigned us to do some travel articles in Fiji. About the same time, we received the new Agfa HDC 400 and Optima 400 films to review. We couldn't ask for a better coordination of assignments. Fiji offers some of the friendliest people on earth, flowers that seem to bloom year-round, constant watersport action and bright colors guaranteed to give the Agfa 400s a challenge.

Now, you may wonder why Agfa has two new 400 films. The Agfa HDC 400 color-negative film is for amateur use, while the Optima 400 is designed for professional use. Each has slightly different specifications designed to match the photographer's end use. Agfa's research has shown that 92% of the exposed film is color negative shot by amateur photographers trying to capture special memories. The bulk of these folks are using point-and-shoot cameras often restricted by limited focus and small internal flash systems. The ISO 400 films enable the users to shoot in lower light, with smaller flashes, and still get better depth of field and improved image sharpness.

Before we take you with us to Fiji we will take a quick look at what the Agfa engineers have up



their sleeves with these two new films. The newest Agfacolor HDC 400 was introduced at Photokina 1996 and utilizes the same technological advances as the new APS film system. HDC 400 is the first member of a new generation of High Definition Color amateur color-negative films. Lower ISO versions of this film will be introduced later in 1997. The introduction of new cyan, magenta and yellow couplers has resulted in higher color saturation and improved color brilliance.

The second area of improvement is with image definition. Using a new SEM (Surface Enhanced Multistructured) crystal that is flatter and thinner, the emulsion was reduced in thickness, allowing a visible improvement in image resolution.

The engineers also worked on increased storage life of HDC 400, which is really important if you

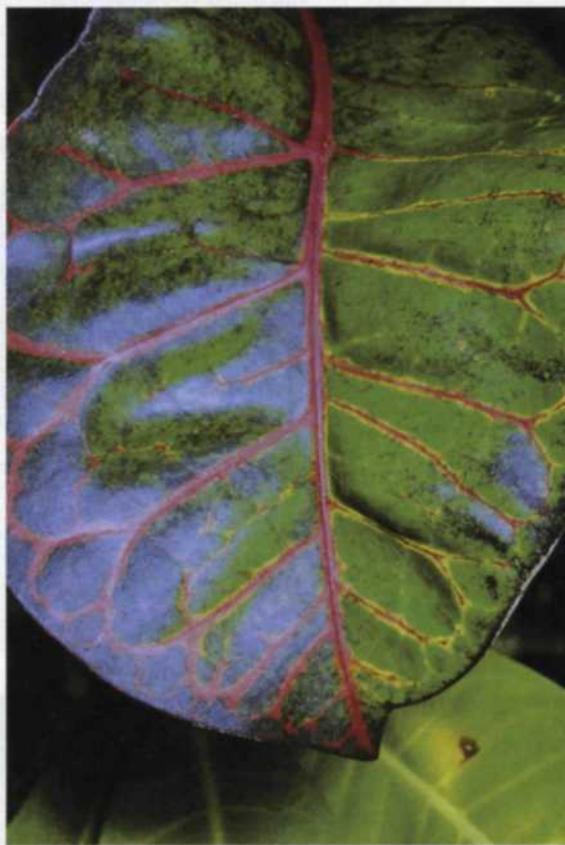
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Agfa film we had brought with us! ISO 400 speed made many of the shots possible with its extra stops of film speed and increased exposure latitude. During our stay in Fiji, we photographed in low light conditions, fast action on the beaches, waterfalls, parasailing and numerous portraits of our new-found Fijian friends. Before we knew it, we had exposed all our Agfa film and were homeward bound.

Stepping off the plane in Portland, Oregon and facing the freezing rain was a rude wake up call. It was now time to put the shorts, tank tops and thongs away and process all the film.

The most impressive images from both films were of some bright red flowers found all

Right: Agfacolor HDC 400 handles natural tones well, as in the greens of this leaf.
Below: Optima 400 is a great sunrise/sunset film, recording the beautiful colors as they are and holding good blacks in silhouetted portions of the scene.



over Fiji. The reds were extremely rich, but they didn't bleed into the adjoining colors. There was even very sharp detail deep inside the red itself. The new couplers were working very well indeed.

The portraits of our Fijian friends had very clean, realistic colors indicating that the Agfa engineers were definitely on the right track. They had made two ISO 400 color-negative films that could be used as a standard film choice, not just when the light level drops.

The overall color differences between the two emulsions were very slight, and if asked which image had been shot on which film we would have had to review our notes. On very close inspection, we did note that the Optima 400 seemed to record the flesh tones in the portraits a little better, and HDC was more forgiving with mixed lighting.

Both Agfacolor HDC 400 and Agfacolor Optima 400 film emulsions worked extremely well in capturing the flora, fauna, and Fijian flavor. Although these films will work great anywhere, a return trip to Fiji would be nice. For more information, contact Agfa Corp., Div. of Bayer Corp., 100 Challenger Rd., Ridgefield Park, NJ 07660; 201/440-2500, or log onto the Internet and see what's new with Agfa at its website at <http://www.agfaphoto.com>. ■





Left: The new Agfacolor Optima 400 yields beautiful colors and holds a good range of contrast, as demonstrated by this Fijian beach shot. **Below left:** Optima 400's consumer-film twin, HDC 400, is another great all-around emulsion, shining in dim light and bright, distant scenes and macro shots.

are going to places like Fiji. We were plagued with constant weather the whole trip—hot, hot, sunny days in December! It was tough to handle, but we managed.

A new Agfacolor Optima 400 was also introduced at Photokina 96. It uses new color couplers to ensure improved color saturation, especially in critical lighting situations. Its new technology achieves a more precise separation of colors, especially in the red/green range. The Agfa engineers also worked to extend the range of shadow detail through "oil formers" that improve development control.

Optima 400 also uses the new SEM crystal technology that allows the emulsion layer to be 24% thinner so 30% more light can be converted from incident light.

Both films have an RMS granularity of 5 and have no reciprocity change from with exposure times from one second to $\frac{1}{10,000}$, which covers almost everything. Only when you get to exposures of 100 seconds will you have to make any exposure changes. At that exposure level HDC needs one extra stop of exposure while Optima needs two additional stops. The HDC emulsion is available only in



35mm cassettes, while the professional Optima is available in 35mm and 120/220 roll film.

We rotated the two films between a point-and-shoot camera and our professional 35mm systems so we would have a nice cross-section of varied subjects and lighting conditions. As we proceeded on our Fiji journey (we know it is a tough job, but someone has to do it), we found ourselves surrounded with flowers in the middle of a color explosion. We put the Agfa films to the test of capturing the vibrant reds, greens, yellows and oranges. It is too bad that the films couldn't also record the fragrances of these colorful flowers.

Fiji is noted for its friendly people, traditions and festive dance and song. We had plenty of photo opportunities sitting around the Kava bowl sharing a traditional coconut shell of grog. As the locals mixed up this nonalcoholic but slightly

Novocaine-like brew, we had misgivings about drinking this muddy water concoction. The Fijian meke of song and dance began, and we were having trouble giving our electronic flashes sufficient time to recycle. The action was intense and the kava was kicking in!

As the sun slowly set on the Fijian shoreline, we realized that we had already shot one-fourth of the