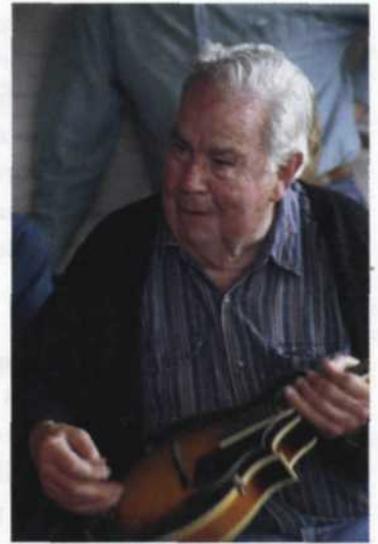


# Kodak Portra 800



A fine color-negative film for film and digital fans

Text and photography by Jack & Sue Drafahl

**T**he shift to digital over the last few years has changed the way we view film. We now begin to think of film as a digital capture medium. Varied emulsions now make it easy for the film user to enter the digital world via the film scanner. But in order to compete in the digital camera world, film has to be flexible, and multiple

ISO film speeds are critical.

Since many digital cameras feature ISO 800 with very little digital noise, film counterparts must be able to do the same. Kodak's Professional Portra 800 provides the tools to do just that. The ISO 800 film speed is high enough to enable you to work in very low light conditions yet still maintain image quality that closely

matches ISO 400 films.

Before we look at the improvements to this ISO 800 emulsion, we need to step back and take a look at the entire Professional Portra family. This group of films withstood the changing digital times because of the tight family unit. There are six color-negative emulsions in the Kodak Professional Portra film family,





While the film is named Portra, it's well suited to lots of subjects besides people. Portra 800 is a fine choice anytime you need extra film speed, including available-light portraits, close-ups and dim-light shooting.

ranging from ISO 160 to ISO 800. Portra 160NC is a slower color-negative film designed to work in brighter light and record natural colors with extreme accuracy. When the light level drops, the same color capturing qualities can be accomplished using the 400NC emulsion. If you want to capture more-vivid colors, you can move to the 160VC and 400VC emulsions. The combination of these four emulsions gives you the flexibility to work in flat lighting, contrasty lighting, low lighting, or mixed light sources.

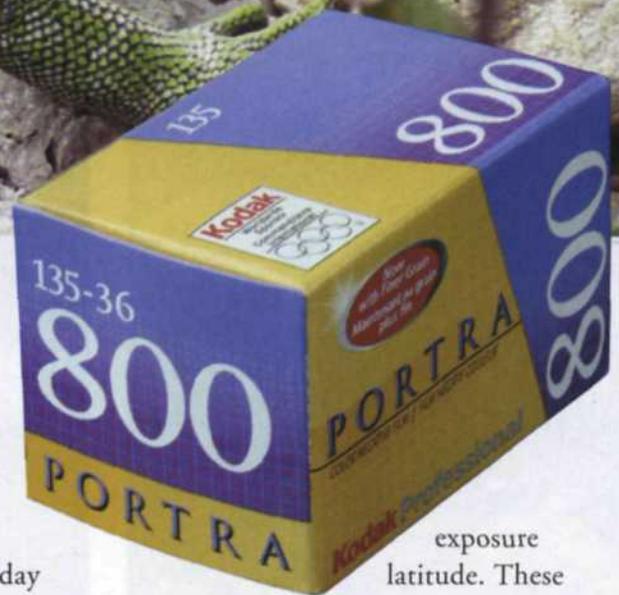
If the main light source is tungsten, you can reach into the Portra film bag and grab a roll of Portra 100T. With tungsten-balanced emulsion, you will have less color corrections to make when printing or scanning the images into your computer system.

Finally we come to the Portra 800 emulsion. This is a critical member of the Portra family, since there are

many lighting conditions that require the use of ISO 800 speeds to maintain image sharpness and depth of field. This is especially true when photographing people in every day life or special occasions like weddings.

An important aspect of a film family is that images from the different emulsions within the family can be printed using the same color printing pack, or scanned into your computer system using the same color-balance settings. This allows you the freedom of moving from one film speed to another, or from one color saturation level to the next.

Now let's move to see the improvements in Portra 800. In order for a film to become part of the digital world it should have a fine grain, high speed, and smooth tonal range. Kodak has tweaked this ISO 800 emulsion so that it has an even finer grain pattern and improved



exposure latitude. These two improvements provide smoother tonal values from black to white when this film is used in either the analog or digital world.

The good news for the new Portra 800 emulsion and all other emulsions is that Kodak is now the proud owner of a group of Photoshop plug-in filters designed to further enhance the capabilities of the Portra film family. These filters include Digital GEM, Digital SHO, Digital ROC and Digital GEM Airbrush. These filters originated with Applied Science Fiction (of Digital ICE fame), and have since become part of the Kodak Austin Development Center.

The filter that directly applies to high-speed color-negative films like

Portra 800 is Digital GEM. You might ask yourself why you would want a grain reduction filter, if Portra 800 has such a fine grain structure. If your only application was direct analog color printing, then you wouldn't need any grain reduction. But if the digital world is your direction, you should understand that converting color-negative film to digital via the film scanner has its down side. Scanners are designed to extract the maximum detail from your negative, and in the process the grain pattern is enlarged.

Many of the film scanners, like the Nikon Super Coolscan 4000 and 5000, feature Digital ICE

recommend adding these filters to your digital darkroom. Check out Kodak ADC plug-ins at [www.asf.com](http://www.asf.com).

Over the years we have tried to vary our film testing process from concentrating on very specific subjects, to covering a wide gamut. The direction we head depends on weather and our workload. In this case, this film test was spread over a two-month period, which gave us plenty of opportunities to run the film through its paces.

Our testing started while visiting a small island off the coast of Venezuela called Bonaire. We hold photography classes in Bonaire each year, so this time

we packed half a dozen rolls of Portra 800 and our old trusty Nikon N8008.

We attempted our first images by enticing some of the local birds using pieces of bread. As we threw bread crumbs high in the trees trying to get them to come down, most of the bread just fell to the ground. To our surprise though, several large iguanas crawled out of the brush and headed for the food. Within minutes we had several of these creatures ranging from 1-3 feet long lining up to have their pictures taken. They weren't afraid of us and came right up to our camera lens. Some critters stayed in the shade, while others basked in the sun. We ran a full gamut



Actually, Portra 800's image quality is good enough to use for general shooting, even when super high speed is not required. Skin tones are beautiful.

technologies. These hardware and software technologies remove scratches, restore color and reduce grain during the actual scanning process. Now the same grain reduction technology comes as a Kodak ADC Photoshop-compatible plug-in called Digital GEM. If you plan on becoming a digital photographer via the film process, we highly



of tests to see just how the exposure range of this film could handle these different lighting conditions. Over the next few days we branched out and tried our luck with flowers, colorful buildings, and even photographed the rescue of a baby flamingo.

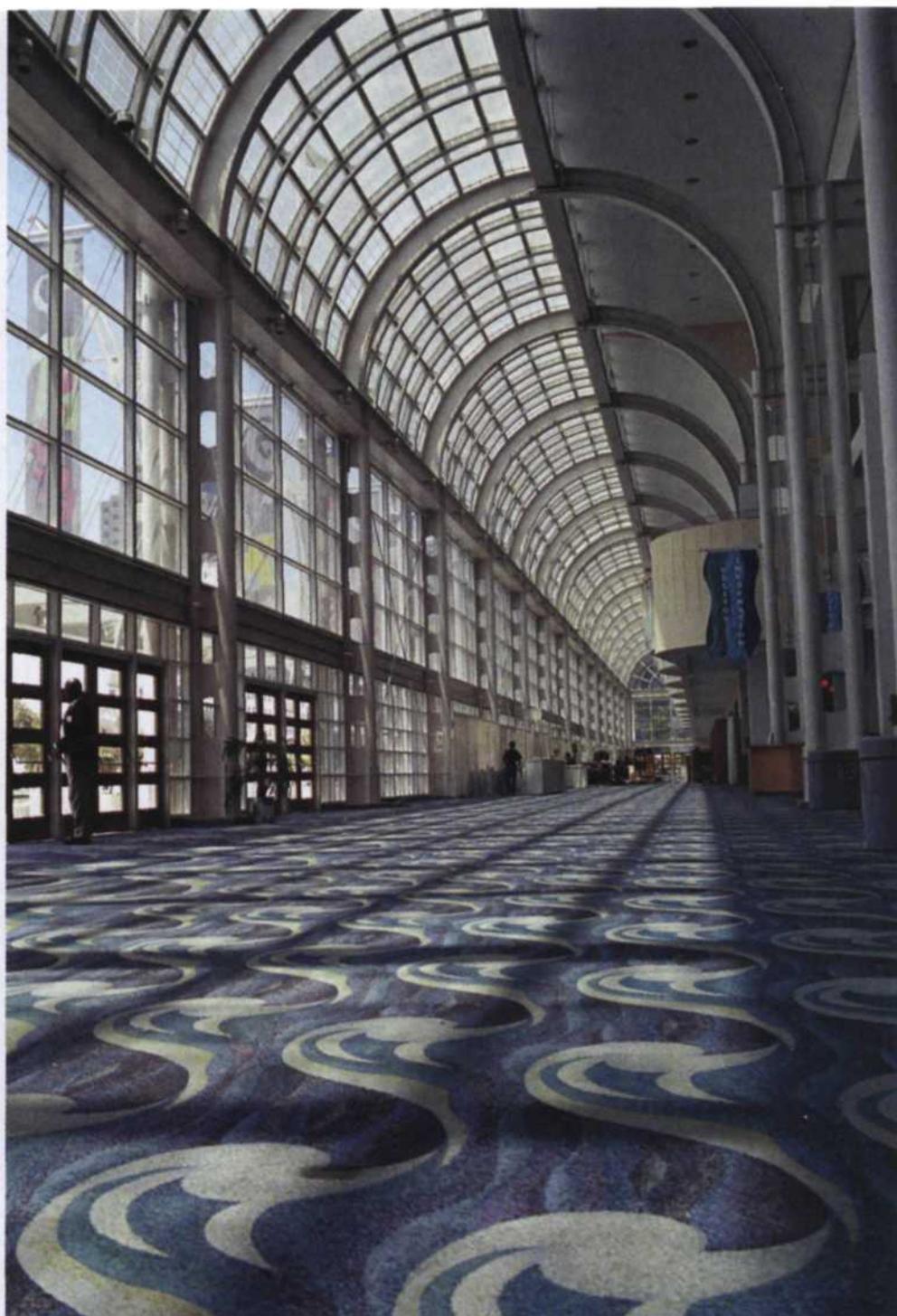
We returned home, and a month flew by as we concentrated on photographing the various activities happening along the Oregon Coast. The weather was cooperative so we were able to photograph several large garden spiders, portraits of the neighborhood children, and a jubilant friend who had just caught a large salmon in the bay. Then it was off to



Improvements in the new version of Portra 800 include finer grain and better shadow detail, while colors remain accurate. You can push Portra 800 to EI 1600 when necessary.

the colorful Cayman Islands where we taught more classes, and conducted the final film tests. During the entire testing process, we tried as many different lighting situations as possible, and bracketed the exposures to really test this versatile film.

When the dust had settled, we had a hundreds of images from which to make our final selection. As we viewed the uncut rolls on the light box, we noted that the film could handle an exposure range of at least  $-2$  to  $+3$  stops. The grain appeared to be very small in the loupe and the image detail was impressive.



We scanned the first images into the Nikon Super Coolscan 5000 film scanner, using the default setting on the scanner and found that no corrections were necessary from previous Portra emulsion settings. Over the rest of the day, the scanner used the same settings for all 400 images. We enlarged the first few on the editing screen, and were quite impressed with the overall tonal quality, especially that of our friendly fisherman portrait. Looking back at the iguana images, both those taken in sunlight and those in shade, we found that this film had a much broader exposure range than any digital camera today. Most impressive was the degree of detail found in the shadows. That extra detail gave us more maneuvering capability as we edited

from one image to the next.

The bottom line is that if you are one of those photographers who prefer to remain in the film world, then Kodak Portra 800 is an excellent choice. It provides the extra ISO speed for those times when you need the added exposure and yet it still maintains image quality. If instead, you use film to break into the digital world via scanning, then Portra 800 should be your film choice as well. Besides its added versatility when shooting due to its high ISO, this film works well when scanned, especially when you use Digital GEM. That makes Professional Portra 800 a film for everyone, and it comes in 135mm, 120, and 220 formats. For more information of the entire Portra family of films, log onto the Web at [www.Kodak.com](http://www.Kodak.com). ■