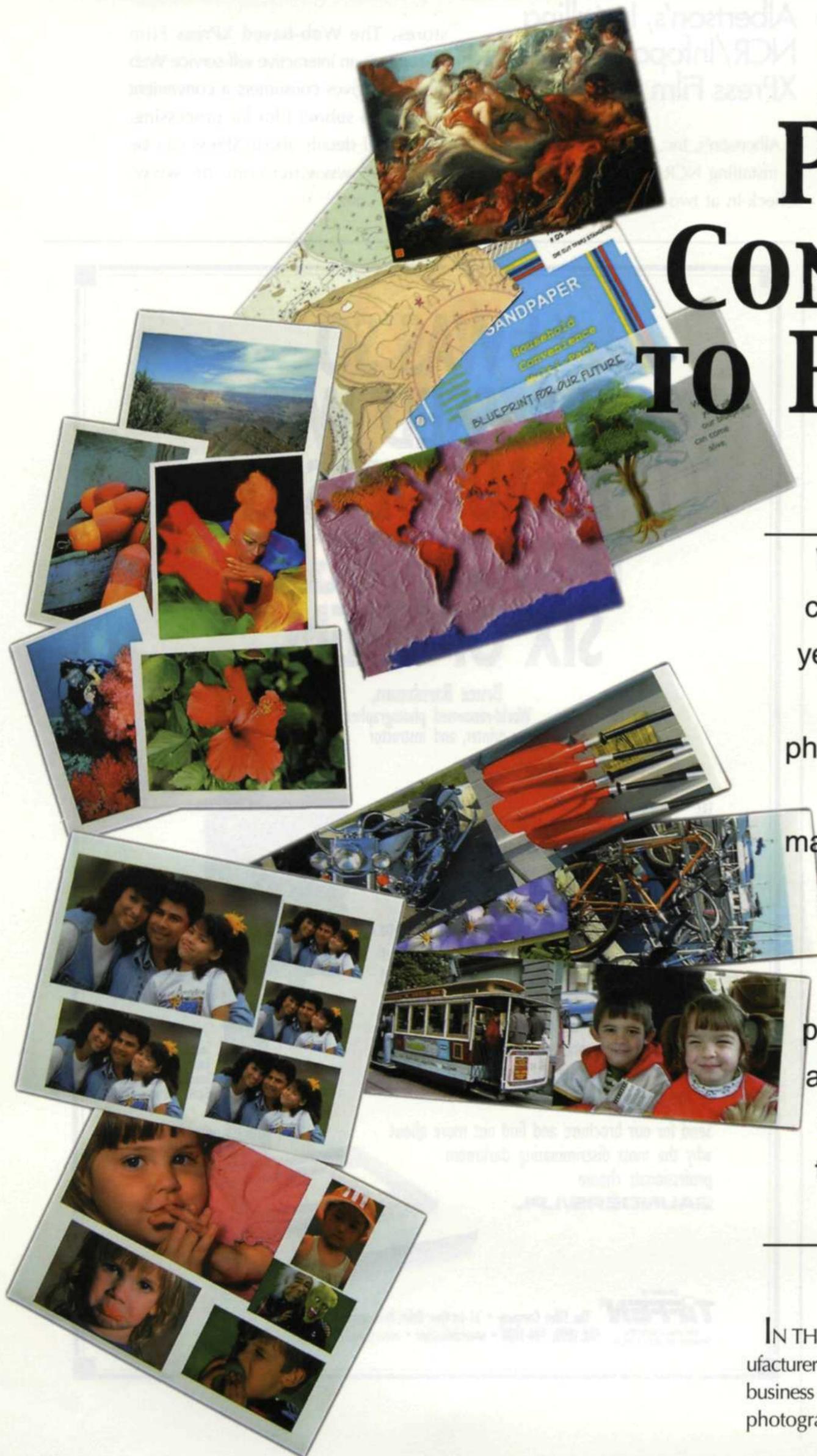


INKJET PAPERS CONTINUE TO EVOLVE

Jack and Sue Drafahl

When inkjet printing first came on the scene a few years ago, photographers considered it a passing phase. Based on the initial quality of the printed materials, they felt it would never replace, or even compete with traditional photo printing. Inkjet paper manufacturers had another plan in mind and were dead set on giving traditional photo printing a run for its money.

IN THE EARLY STAGES of inkjet printing, manufacturers focused on offering solutions for small business applications. They never had a clue that photographers would think that inkjet papers



might offer them an alternative to traditional color printing. Manufacturers had to stop thinking 8.5x11 and 11x17 printing and remember that photographers think 8x10, 11x14 and 16x20. Inkjet manufacturers had to quickly learn the photo lingo in order to understand photographers' needs.

Most photographers wanted paper that looked and felt like traditional photo paper. They wanted the papers to have durability and archivability. The papers need to be water resistant and offer faithful color reproduction. Image sharpness was a must and repetitiveness from 5x7 to 16x20 was a necessity. Photographers wanted the option to print with borders or borderless. Oh yeah; it also should be cost effective. Now that wasn't too big an order, was it?

In the beginning, manufacturers couldn't come close to meeting photographers' expectations. But now, thanks to new technology, they are all making valiant efforts. Remember that traditional color printing has been around for decades, and inkjet is still in its infancy. If inkjet papers have come this far so quickly, who knows where things are headed?

In order to satisfy all the photographers' demands, manufacturers have experimented with different substrates to be used for printing photos. The different paper varieties include: Glossy, Semi-gloss, Matt, Watercolor, Silk, Film, Adhesive, Postcards, Business cards, Two-sided paper, T-shirt transfers, Greeting Cards, Banners and Photo Stickers.

We decided that in-home use and small photo labs would be using inkjet machines that used sheet fed paper. So, we concentrated our efforts in this article on those papers that are A2 or 17x22 and smaller. These smaller inkjet machines offer the small photo lab options to print posters for trade shows, calendars, short-run print jobs and smaller prints.

Dozens of Options

One of the main problems with inkjet printing is that you have so many options. There are dozens of inkjet machine manufacturers and even more companies who offer inks and paper. So how do you decide which one is right for you?

The best bet is to read everything you can, check out the samples and compare specifications between the various companies. Eventually you will have to bite the bullet and make the plunge. The industry is changing so rapidly that no matter what you decide to buy, there will be something new being offered next month.

Once you have selected your printer, you need to investigate which papers to use. The assumption might be that your best paper choice bears the same brand name as your printer. Maybe, but to be sure we recommend running a series of tests with several paper brands. Select a test image that has clean whites, solid blacks and considerable detail in the shadow areas.

When you are testing different papers in your machine, keep in mind that some papers use different printer settings. For example, some glossy inkjet papers require that you use the glossy film setting rather than glossy paper, as the ink blocks up in the blacks. It's a matter of trial and error before you find a combination you like.

Most of the inkjet paper manufacturers include special charts that match their papers to specific printers and settings. Be sure to correctly insert the paper print side face up or face down as your printer designates. If you use several types of paper, you may need a paper storage bin near your printer that indicates the brand, resolution, paper surface and printing instructions.

The archivability of inkjet paper vs. traditional photo paper is a very com-

plex subject. Light, temperature, humidity, paper construction, and ink types are all factors in effecting inkjet printed paper. Our research on this subject led us to Wilhelm Imaging Research, Inc.

This company specializes in testing inkjet papers, inks, printers, as well as their traditional counterparts. In talking with the researchers, we found the information overwhelming—so much so that we are planning a trip to the company in Grinnell, Iowa to prepare an article on their testing approach for proving archivability. We'll get back to you later with our results.

Each inkjet paper manufacturer offers its own solution to photographers' demands, so we will take a quick glance at a few companies that represent what is going on in the inkjet printing industry.

Some Key Paper Lines

Kodak: Kodak's Premium Picture Paper is the latest, greatest inkjet paper Kodak has to offer. This high-gloss 58-pound paper has the look and feel of traditional photo paper. Kodak now uses an RC type paper with a new ink receptive coating to minimize light scattering, and provide sharp, colorful images.

The company also offers soft gloss and matte finishes for other photo related applications as well as business imaging. They feature software and paper kits with micro-perforated paper that allows borderless prints from wallets to 5x7s. Kodak also offers photo transfers, business cards, photo stickers and greeting cards.

Hewlett-Packard: Hewlett-Packard's newest line of Premium Plus Photo Papers are the same thickness as silver halide photographs. This rounds out HP's fine selection of papers that now range from high gloss photo grade to cost effective matt business application papers.

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HP's specialty line of inkjet papers are designed to fit almost any home or business project. Some papers have coatings on both sides for brochures and flyers, while others are pre-scored for greeting card applications. HP's line of extensive inkjet paper products include a variety of end applications such as coasters, t-shirts, brochures, banners, menus, certificates and full color photographs. You can even create your own sticky back labels from HP's creative project papers group.

At PMA 2000, Kodak and HP announced a joint venture into a new inkjet printing system to be introduced in the near future. We will update you as this new twist in the inkjet world unfolds.

Ilford, a leader in silver halide paper production, also offers a line of inkjet papers. Their most recent addition to the line is a semi-matte surface which offers a heavyweight RC base to give that true photographic feel. Both the semi-matte and popular glossy surface are back printable for a wide range of applications. Ilford inkjet photo papers are compatible with the most popular desktop inkjet printers.

Mitsubishi: This fully integrated inkjet paper company makes a variety of photo quality papers that include Photograde, Artist and Matte papers. The Artist group of papers are uniquely coated to feature water and light resistant properties. A special heavy weight grade paper is also available in all three groups. Some of the papers also have coating on both sides for special printing applications.

Olympus-Pictorico: Olympus, one of the world's leading manufacturers of filmless digital cameras recently announced a partnership with Pictorico Ink Jet Media. The company now offers a complete line of inkjet media that is compatible with virtually any inkjet printer made. The star of their lineup is the Photo Gallery Hi-Gloss White Film that is truly water-resistant. The waterproof idea was a

little hard to swallow, so we made our own print and took it down to a stream feeding into the ocean. We tested it in both fresh and saltwater and found no adverse effects.

They also offer Photo Glossy paper, PolySilk Fabric, Premium WaterColor Card Stock, Premium Canvas, Adhesive Film and OHP Transparency Film. Inkjet papers are definitely becoming diversified.

Epson: Epson has been offering inkjet solutions since the beginning of inkjet technology. The company features a variety of printers and papers in every variation, shape and size.

Epson has now taken inkjet technology to a new level. In order to increase archivability and improve water resistance, the company has come out with a new line of printers, smart ink cartridges, and a new type of inkjet paper. The goal is to create real photo lab quality prints that are fade resistance and water resistant. Borderless roll paper can now be used with this new process, and the finished roll paper looks exactly like that we see coming off a quality one-hour printer.

Ever since inkjet came upon the scene, we have heard the traditionalists say, "It still does not look like a traditional color print. When it does, then I might consider it.." Well, after looking at samples from these manufacturers, we are certain that inkjet technology is here to stay. The manufacturers have listened to photo labs and photographers and are working hard to develop products to meet our expectations. This is a new generation of papers that have the true photo feel and offer water resistance. The papers are becoming more archival with every new technological advancement. We spoke and they listened and delivered.

Jack and Sue Drafaahl are freelance writers and professional photographers based outside Portland, Ore.

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