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Fuji NHGII 800 by Jack and Sue Drafa

The creation of high quality images depends on many variables. Professional photographers can master most of the technical problems that arise, but varying light levels is tough to control. Most of today's photo equipment is dedicated to helping photographers combat the lighting demons. Of course, there is always the option to use a faster film in low and varying light, but that is usually reserved as the last resort. Photographers are continually concerned about compromising image quality by using a faster film.

Thanks to new technological advancements, professional photographers can now confidently select Fuji's NHGII 800 color negative film.

The first time we ran into this film, we were on a shooting expedition in Fiji, where we were shooting Fuji Superia color negative films. The folks at Fuji added a half dozen NHGII 800 rolls for us to shoot during our other film test. Our first thought was, "How good could an ISO 800 film be?" The ISO 400 films have been getting pretty good, but an ISO 800 film seemed beyond what we deemed, professional standards. What the heck, we we'd give it a try. When all the editorial dust had settled, we analyzed the images and were shocked. This film was good; no, better than good...it was very good!

When our editor, Bill Hurter, asked us if we wanted to do the test on NHGII 800, we hesitated. Looking at the spec sheets on NHGII 800, we saw that it seemed to be designed specifically for the portrait photographer. Portraits are not really our specialty. Yes, we have been professionally trained in portraiture, but even when we had our studio in full force, we specialized in commercial photography. We answered the phone: "We don't do people." Asking fish to stop swimming for a second and pose for a shot or two was our idea of portraiture.

We decided it was time to try a new film testing concept. We contacted several working professional portrait photographers who had used NHGII 800 and evaluated their film results. We appreciate the efforts of Frank Cricchio, Lori Rose Fehr and Bruce Hudson for their help with this film test. They took time out of their busy schedules to provide us with information on why each of them liked the film. Each person also provided us with a cross section of negatives and prints so we could loupe the negatives and evaluate how well they printed.

Technology Foundation

While we waited for the images to arrive, we looked closer at the press releases and the tech sheets to better understand the foundation of this film's technology. As it turns out, we had already done most of the research, as NHGII 800 uses similar technologies found in Fuji's Superia films. Here are some of the technological highlights.

Real Tone Technology is de-signed to maintain true-to-life skin tones.

Super Fine Grain Technology keeps the grain structure at a level of present-day ISO 400 films, but adds one additional stop exposure.

Emulsion Layer Stabilizing Technology keeps the image from changing before and after the film is processed.

Super Hexagonal Grain Technology is a method of minimizing flare, a common problem when working in low and mixed lighting.

Super Concerted/Composite Coupler Technology renders saturated but accurate colors through-out the exposure curve.

As each group of negatives and prints arrived, we viewed each image through a film loupe, and then re-scanned them using photo scanners. We compared one and all, zoomed in, checked the D-Max levels, and most importantly, examined grain structure. Color quality was important, but the grain structure was the critical key to qualifying this film as a viable professional tool. The 8x10 color prints demonstrated a very fine grain pattern, which is exceptional for an ISO 800 film. The color saturation, flesh tones, and tonal gradation seem no different than those of a much lower ISO portrait film. NHGII 800 was definitely a winner!

Portrait photographers can now have a new way of thinking. Instead of using high speed film as a last resort, Fuji NHGII 800 can be used as their standard film choice. The high ISO allows photographers to venture into areas of portrait photography never before possible. They can shoot in lower light levels and maintain sharp images. Situations once impossible without extra lighting equipment may now be feasible. NHGII provides that extra ISO edge for active portrait subjects and increased depth-of-field to capture large groups. NHGII translates into additional creative control over the final image for the professional photographer.

Lori Rose Fehr

Lori Rose Fehr was very concerned when she learned that NHG 400 was being replaced by an ISO 800 film. Her Fuji representative assured her that the new film was even better than its predecessor. So, she ran the film through the paces using soft, non-direct lighting and even occasions where the subjects were backlit with strong lighting ratios.

Lori says, "When I received the film back from the lab, I was amazed! The colors were not only as good as, but better than the original NHG. I examined the negatives under a loupe and found the grain structure to be at least as tight as the old film. ...I felt the best test would be to enlarge the NHGII negative up to 40x60, and then place the image side by side next to a photograph of the same size printed from the original NHG. The results were clear—the new NHGII film had better color and grain structure than the older film."

"Since then," Lori states, "I have gone on to use the NHGII film exclusively for all my environmental portraits. When photographing children, an extra step-up on the shutter speed dial can make or break the success of the session."

Frank Cricchio

Frank Cricchio had a few words to say about his "Indian Spirit," an image he photographed in Slot Canyon. "I chose Fuji NHGII color negative film because of the film speed and fine grain with excellent color. The film speed of ISO 800 allowed me to use a faster shutter speed, which enabled me to use a model in the photograph. The exposure in this canyon would have been too slow with ISO 160 speed film."

For the photograph of the family at the beach, Cricchio says, "This photo was taken during the last hour of daylight. A bare flash tube was used to balance the illumination, and to five highlights to the eyes." The image was made with a Fuji 6x8 camera and NHGII rated at EI 400 for that time of day. The electronic flash was set to ISO 800, "giving a perfect balance of illumination."

The image of the girl in the swimsuit was made with a Hasselblad Camera and NHGII. According to Cricchio, "This was a sun-light situation with flash-fill. The NHGII was rated at ISO 800 and the flash fill was also set to 800, resulting in a balanced highlight and shadow image."

Bruce Hudson

Bruce Hudson says that "NHGII has allowed me to work later into the evening, catching the 'sweet light' that much longer. This film has incredible color saturation and virtually no grain! It's hard to believe that this is an 800 speed film, but it is!"

We couldn't have said it better.

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