

NEWSLETTER

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PHOTOGRAPHY



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excerpt

## Making Fine Art Prints

*An excerpt from my updated e-book [A Professional Photographer's Workflow](#)*

**T**his is an excerpt composed of material from Chapter 6 of my recently updated e-book [\*A Professional Photographer's Workflow: Using Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop\*](#). The updated e-book is a 497-page book that gets down to the nuts and bolts of a real world digital workflow. It starts out with a shooting workflow and then covers every aspect of the digital workflow, including storage options so you don't lose images. Chapter 6 is a new chapter entitled, "Making Fine Art Prints," hence the title of this article. What follows is the introduction from this chapter, a section entitled, "Why even bother making Prints," and a brief section on the hidden costs of printing on an ink-jet printer. For more information about *A Professional Photographer's Workflow: Using Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop* and to purchase a copy please visit my [website](#).

The word "artist" is a word I use very sparingly. That term seems to be very much overused these days. Most artists that I know and respect never call themselves artists at all. I have been in and out of the art world my entire life, having produced my first work at the age of three and a half, and then spending most of my upbringing in one art class or another. I started out drawing, then branched out into just about every other form of art including painting, scratchboard, woodblock prints, lithography, glassblowing, sculpture, photography and others too numerous to

list here. After a brief stint in the physics world, I returned to art in the form of photography. But, as an adventure photographer, I have never felt like my images were art.

In the last few years, I have made a number of huge prints of my images. I recently had a client ask for thirty-five large format prints up to 40x60-inches. During the process of creating those prints, I felt more like an artist than I have in a long, long time. There was something familiar about putting ink onto paper and producing a tangible thing that would make people stop and stare. It was also very interesting to watch people interact with those huge prints at the client's offices and see their mouths drop open with amazement, not knowing that the photographer was standing just next to them. Seeing my images printed, framed and hung on wall in the last few years has changed my perspective on printing and how important it is to take the image all the way through to a tangible product.

Modern digital photography relies on a wild array of high-tech tools to create the final image. There is certainly a completely different feeling with photography than I had in my early teens when I painted an image or molded an orb of molten glass. With photography that feeling of connection to the final piece isn't as immediate. After all, for any photograph I've created, I didn't sketch every



contour of the image and render it by physically touching the paper or canvas. Instead, my camera captured the light, then I toned and worked up the image on a computer and the printer laid down the ink using very sophisticated technology on high-tech archival paper. Nevertheless, when the finished piece is on the wall and I watch people interact with it, the end result is the same: the viewer is transported to another place, another state of mind, and one hopes, is inspired by the image.

### **WHY EVEN BOTHER MAKING PRINTS?**

Why make prints of your images? This is a valid question in this day and age of digital photography. It isn't an easy question to answer, especially because printing is expensive and unless you sell prints, it is tough to see why or how it will improve your photography. I will explain why I think it is important to make prints in a rather

round-about way. Before we dive in, understand that I don't work for, nor am I sponsored by, any of the companies that make printers. So I am not here trying to sell you on why you should buy a printer. I am discussing the value of printing your work and how it can improve the quality of your photography.

In the [Summer 2011 issue](#) of my Newsletter, I discussed an [interview](#) that appeared on the popular website *aphotoeditor.com* with legendary photographer Kurt Markus in my Perspective piece entitled, "Following Through." In that interview, I was struck by some of his comments where he said, "It takes guts to make a print. You know you have to convince yourself that this is you, that you've made this and that you're putting your name on it, and you also have to believe that maybe somebody else either can appreciate the work you've done or can appreciate the fact that this is you." Kurt went on to say in that

If you are looking at large-format printers, then there are great options from both Canon and Epson here as well. On the Epson side, the 7900 and the 9900, which are respectively 24-inch and 44-inch printers, are the standard of the industry. On the Canon side, they have the iF6400 and the iF8400, which are respectively 24-inch and 44-inch printers. Image quality out of both the Canon and Epson models are neck and neck. If pressed, I have seen a slightly wider color gamut on the Canon printers but in all honesty the Epsons are a lot easier to use. HP still makes the excellent Z3000 series printers in 24-inch and 44-inch models, but as HP as all but given up on the large-format photo printers I would be hesitant to purchase one of these.

Which printer model you choose depends more on your budget than anything else. The reality is that buying a printer is just a gateway to buying inks from Canon or Epson. Once you have the printer, if you print regularly, you will end up spending far more money on inks than you ever paid for the printer. In my experience, Epson printers, because they are the industry standard, have the widest array of printer profiles built for them (which we will talk about shortly) and because of this, they are the easiest printers to get great results from. In large part, this is why I recommend the Epson F900 and F800 to first-time inkjet printer buyers. If you are looking to purchase a large-format printer like those mentioned above, I am willing to bet you have owned a few other printers and are capable of getting excellent results—especially considering the cost of those large-format printers.

### COLOR MANAGEMENT FOR PRINTING

As we detailed in Chapter 2, solid color management is the heart of any digital workflow and if you intend to print your images your color-management skills will be tested. When you start printing images, it becomes apparent very quickly why excellent color management is important. With poor color management comes poor results—and that will result in sub-par prints that look dark and muddy

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compared to the image as displayed on the monitor. While this might sound counterintuitive, I have found that spending money on top-end color management tools, like a good monitor calibration device that can also make printer profiles, will save you money when printing.

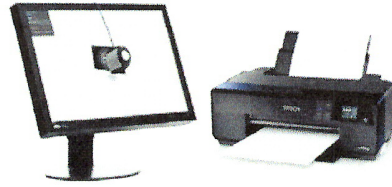
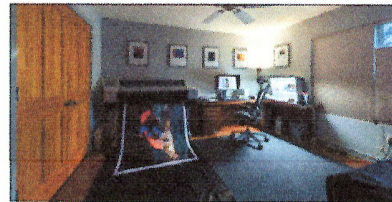


Figure 2-10: A good monitor calibration device that can also make printer profiles, will save you money when printing.



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interview, “I’ll boldly say this. Those people [who never print their images] are never going to make it.” Now that is a bold statement, and I probably had the same knee-jerk reaction when I read that as you are having right now. Over the course of my 20-year career, I haven’t printed a whole lot of my images—until recently. Before you blow off Kurt’s statement I implore you to listen to his explanation and let this roll around in your mind over the next few weeks. Kurt went on to explain, “[They are never going to make it] because they won’t be satisfied. They’ll just get fed up with looking at their pictures on a computer monitor, because they’re going to surf the net, and they’re going to look at other people’s pictures, and they are going to wonder what’s wrong with theirs.” He also said, “If you make pictures, and pictures is your work, you might last for a few years, maybe even 10, but why would you want to be a photographer and not take it all the way, all the way to a print? I do not get it.”

Ok, so before you think I am off my rocker here, let me explain my reaction to Kurt’s comments and my experiences with printing my own images of late. About the time I read this interview with Kurt Markus on *photoeditor.com*, I was making 13x19 inch prints on my Epson R1800 and I had worked up a particular image file so that it would print well. The print came out very nice, but while I was looking at it closely I noticed a bunch of strange spots in the print. I checked my image file and low and behold, there were fifty or sixty dust spots right there in the image file. Now, this is a very specific example, but the point is that we look at prints with a much more critical eye than we look at images on a monitor. Also, with a monitor, we are relying on the monitor to show us an accurate preview of the image, which is why I harped so critically on monitors way back in Chapter 2 (in the e-book). The point I am trying to get across here is that you really don’t see your image in all its full glory

until you print it. What you see on your monitor, regardless of how amazing your monitor may be, is not the full image. By printing your images and looking at those prints, you will either be depressed or inspired by your own work. Either way, those prints will act as motivation to keep working on your photography skills.

Another reason to print your work is to improve your post-processing skills. If your prints look less than appealing, that is a clear sign that you need to hone in your post-processing skills and especially your color management. A good looking print is proof that you have worked up your image with an eye towards excellence. If you are really obsessed with photography, and it just isn't a passing fad, then the drive to take it as far as it can be taken involves printing your images. You will take your work to a higher level once you start printing your images on a consistent basis. This may or may not be a statement you believe, but in the last few years I have found this to be true—and it is also the best reason I can give as to why it is important to print your images.

## **HIDDEN COSTS OF PRINTING**

One of the factors you will also need to think about is maintaining your printer, especially if you live in a dry, dusty environment. To my knowledge, none of the manufacturers really talk about how to keep your printer humming along without any issues. Here in New Mexico, it is particularly difficult to keep the inkjet nozzles from clogging up because this is a fairly dusty and very dry environment. I find that if I make one print each week that keeps the nozzles primed and the printer working in excellent form. Having to make a print each week definitely means that there is a hidden cost to owning and using an

inkjet printer. For my Epson 9880, which is a huge 44-inch printer, this means I have to spend about \$800 each year on ink and paper just to keep that printer humming along. For my smaller Epson 3880, the cost of keeping it in top form is only a few hundred dollars per year. I bring this up because anyone buying one of these ink jet printers, from Epson, Canon or HP may not be aware of this added expense. Inkjet printers are made to be used. If you let any inkjet printer sit around unused in a dry environment for several months it may never work the same again—if it works at all. For those in a more humid environment, this is less of an issue to worry about but still the printers need to be used regularly and I would suggest making, at a minimum, at least one letter-sized print every two weeks.

I have personal experience with printer inks drying up. I owned one Epson printer that dried up after lack of use over six months. I spent a few hundred dollars on ink cartridges trying to clean the nozzles to no avail. That printer, an older Epson R1800, never came back from the dead. I have also owned a Canon iPF5100, one of Canon's large format printers, which had one print head permanently clog up after a five month period without use and needed to be replaced. One month later the other head clogged up and never worked again. That Canon was so old when the print heads clogged up that it wasn't worth paying the \$900 USD it would cost to replace the printer heads. One other piece of hard won advice I should share is when buying a printer, spend an extra \$50 to \$80 and buy a cover for your printer. That will keep dust and grime out of the printer and help it to keep working as new.

To purchase this e-book please visit my [website](#), where it can be purchased via PayPal.