



Fujifilm FinePix S1 Pro Digital SLR

By Bob Coates

My starting point with digital image files has always been a dedicated film scanner. At least until I tried out the Fujifilm FinePix S1 Pro digital SLR-style camera with Fujifilm's Super CCD chip.

I've been delivering about 80 percent of my commercial work jobs on disk. Using digital capture greatly shortens the turnaround time—no trips to the lab and no scanning images. And I can show the client a non-Polaroid image immediately.

On the wedding side of my business as well, digital capture makes sense. In one two-month period I spent more than \$1,400 on film, and another \$1,400 for film processing. I've been producing digital wedding albums on CDs and making images available to clients on the internet, take away the added cost of scanning the film, and the savings really add up.

In the studio

I was concerned about a digital camera's ability to capture smooth

tone in backgrounds and detail in small items like jewelry. So I borrowed a pendant from my wife for a test shot (*Figure 1*). Measuring less than an inch high, this gold piece presented the challenge I was looking for. The FinePix S1 Pro held detail in the shadow areas and rendered the gold tones well. In my first exposures, some of the highlight areas were blown-out. I corrected this by applying a custom white balance rather than using the auto setting, and slightly underexposing the capture. This time I kept the detail in the shadow areas and got significantly better color rendition.

Next came a real life test. A client called and needed a full-color ad on a very short deadline. The ad called for two product images and a model in a dress. Before now, I would have turned this job down or lost it because of the rush charges I would have had to apply. I decided to give it a go with the FinePix S 1 Pro, and my wife Holly stepped in to model the dress. The two product images



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Figure 1: Nikkor 105mm f/2.8D Micro AF lens. Exposure 1/125 second (top sync speed) at f/32. Fine mode, softbox, grid spot, gold and white reflectors. Exposed one f/stop under meter reading. Custom white balance.

were set up, tweaked, and photographed. The entire process, from shooting and building the ad to delivery, took less than five hours to complete (*Figure 2*).



Figure 2: Art Mart magazine ad created in less than five hours.

Outdoors

I was curious to see how the FinePix S1 Pro digital camera would render skies. In my outdoor tests at Cathedral Rock, the captures held the detail in the white clouds against the deep blue sky. Using the camera's automatic settings gave me perfectly fine results. I underexposed some sky and scenic images and felt that the color was richer and more detailed. Shooting at midday to test highlight to shadow ratios, I found tremendous detail across the entire range. Note the shadow areas on the rocks (*Figure 3*) and the shadow side of the sun on the garage wall (*Figure 4*).



Figure 3: Nikkor 17-35mm f/2.8D ED-IF AF-S lens (25.5-52.5mm equivalent). Note the detail in the deep shadow area of the rocks. Exposure 1/250 second at f/8, handheld. Note: The Fujifilm S1 Pro does not support auto focus with Nikon's AF-S lenses.



Figure 4: Nikkor 80-200mm f/2.8D ED AF lens. Shot in full sun with auto white balance. Note detail in highlight and shadow areas.

When shooting sunsets, it can be a real challenge to hold detail and color in the sky while not blocking up shadow areas. Split-field neutral density filters are helpful, but it's still a bit of a crapshoot getting the exposure you want. Using the LCD preview takes the guesswork out of the process. Immediate feedback allows you to fine-tune the scene while you are still working the light. You don't have to return another time and hope you will get light as good as you have now (*Figure 5*).



Figure 5: Cathedral Rock, Sedona, Arizona, Nikkor 17-35mm f/2.8D ED-IF AF-S lens. Singh Ray enhancing filter. Split field neutral density filter.

As I was leaving the site at sundown, I turned and saw this beautiful glow. So I stopped to take

another frame. Normally, I wouldn't have taken this shot because the light level was too low, but with no film and processing cost, why not? As you can see, it turned out just fine. (*Figure 6*)

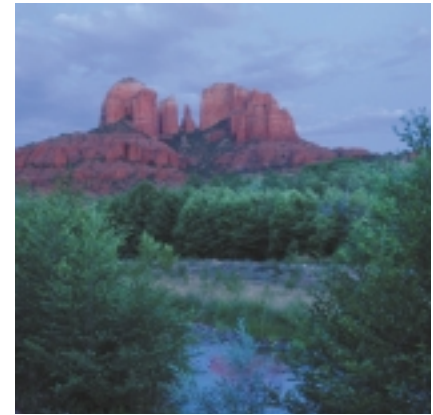


Figure 6: Nikkor 17-35mm f/2.8D ED-IF AF-S lens (25.5-52.5mm equivalent). Exposure 1/4 second at f/5.6.

Photographing people

The first portrait images I created were frightening. There was so much detail you could make out every tiny mark, pimple, flaw, and pore on the subject's face. Not a flattering way to capture portraits. After checking in with Richard Blue, a photographer from Hawaii who has used the S1 to

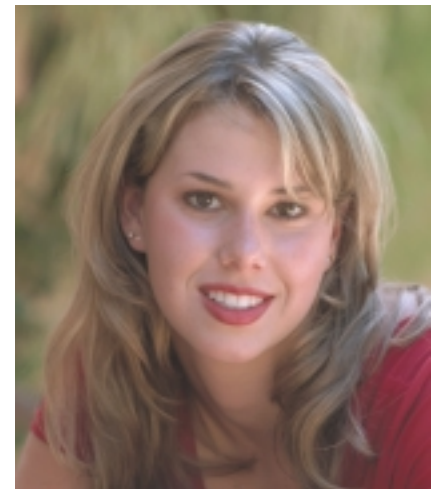


Figure 7: Image made with no sharpening in camera. Note smooth skin tones and good color. Exposure 1/250 second at f/4. Model: Angela Biddle.



Figure 8: Typical fashion image. Good color rendition. Nikkor 80-200mm f/2.8D ED AF lens (120-300mm equivalent). Exposure 1/500 second at f/2.8. Model: Angela Biddle.

capture a third of his wedding images this year, I found out you need to shift from the camera's default settings. Switch the color and tone settings from Standard to Original and turn Sharpening off. This gives a better starting point for people images. I photographed my favorite Sedona, Arizona model, Angela Biddle, at Tlaqapaque Village to see what the FinePix S1 Pro could do with both a head shot and a fashion shot (*Figure 7 & 8*) The camera captured both skin tones and clothing colors very well.

Working the camera and files

Getting the files out of the camera is no problem. There is a USB connection direct from camera to computer. Or, remove the media and transfer the images to your computer quickly with a PCMCIA adapter and a card reader.

Files that come straight from the Super CCD of the FinePix S1 Pro are clean and easier to work with than files created from film scanners. Scanners pick up the grain of the film. A minor clean up on FinePix S1 Pro files takes care of the occasional dropped pixel or dust spot on the Super CCD. I found these easy to clone out.

Print size from the FinePix S1 Pro is what you want to make it. Reports from the wedding photographers in Hawaii say using Adobe Photoshop to create a 16x20-inch print is no problem. You can go larger using Altamira Genuine Fractals to resize files. I made excellent 12x18-inch prints on the Epson Stylus Photo 2000P.

Supplied with the camera, the Exif Viewer software, used for editing and viewing images, is serviceable. It makes an excellent contact sheet and gives you four viewing sizes. You can also download FinePix Viewer, a better software package that allows you to rotate images and change file names, free of charge on the Fujifilm website www.fujifilmsupport.com.

Personal likes and dislikes

Some easily fixed drawbacks of the camera were lack of a depth of field preview, a shallow tripod fitting set in plastic, and no built-in flash sync terminal. You can look on your preview LCD or your monitor if you are hooked up to your computer to check depth of field. Add gaffers tape to your tripod fitting to snug the fit. Purchase the Nikon SC-15—it slides into the hot shoe to sync studio lights to the camera. Batteries can be a problem. Like all digital cameras, the FinePix S1 Pro chews through alkaline AAs pretty fast. Add the Quantum auxiliary battery pack for better results.

Tech stuff

The Fuji FinePix S1 Pro has 6.1 MB capability capturing 3,040x2,016 pixels. Shutter speeds range from 30 seconds to 1/2000 seconds with a 1/125 second flash sync. It accepts SmartMedia, CompactFlash, and IBM Microdrives.

Because the 1.1-inch Super CCD sensor is smaller than a 35mm film, that 17-35mm lens you bought now becomes a 25.5-52.5mm lens—not so hot for the wide-angle shots or photographing interiors. On the plus side of this 1.5X conversion, the 300mm lens becomes 450mm, and wildlife just got closer. Another camera company claims that because they manufacture their lenses specifically for the digital chip, they give enhanced edge performance. This *may* be possible in the case of a chip that is the exact size of 35mm. Because the CCD chip is smaller, you never get to the edge of the SLR lens capability. I found no fall off of edge detail in any images

The Fujifilm FinePix S1 Pro digital camera is now part of my commercial and portrait studio's tool kit.

Suggested retail price: \$2,995. ◀

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