

TO CROP OR NOT TO CROP

Last year I switched from a medium format film camera to a 35mm digital camera. I have had to be especially careful when framing my portrait subjects because 35mm is a 2:3 ratio and standard print sizes do not conform to this ratio. Wallets & 5x7's crop a little from the top &/or bottom. A 4x5, 8x10 & 16x20 crop even more. 11x14 & 20x24 are a slightly different crop also, but they are very close to 4x5. I have had to back away from my subjects & give them cropping room to make sure I do not lose something important when the portraits are printed.

DARN THOSE CUSTOMERS WHO WANT STANDARD SIZE PRINTS.

EASEL IN THE VIEWFINDER

Years ago, several photography students & I went on a trip to Colorado. We met Bill Meriweather, a local photographer who instructed us for a few days. This tip is his, & I want to pass it along to you.

'Look through the viewfinder like a painter looks at his easel. Scan all the things that you see there. Study the subject, but pay attention to the background as well. Use your knowledge of composition to frame the photograph the way it should be printed. You don't see the painter spend all his time creating a painting just to take scissors & crop it in the end.'

EXPERIMENT:

When you shoot your next batch of photographs, use your camera's format to compose your images. (You may already be doing this, but when you print at home or at a lab, the photos are converted to a standard printing size) Try printing the whole negative or digital file. You won't get a true 8x10 or 11x 14, but you will get all the composition that inspired you to take the photograph in the first place. Most of my prints are about 9.5x 14. Later, I mat the photo up to the next standard framing size.

This only works if you want ALL your photos to be the same ratio as your negative or digital file. You don't want to become a slave to the dimensions of your format. Sometimes I see more in the viewfinder than I want in my photograph, so I'll plan to crop later. These photos are usually a very odd size, mostly long and narrow.

ONE MORE NOTE ON CROPPING:

Most of the subjects I shoot don't require a long telephoto lens, so I don't have a really long lens. The longest one I have is 300mm, but on my digital camera it acts like a 450mm. That still isn't much when your out there trying to get eagles and such. So, to compensate, I crop. I get the best shot I can, knowing that when I process in my computer, I will crop in tighter on the subject.

In the end, all that is important is the enjoyment of taking & making photographs that you like, cropped or not.

JSS