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OCTOBER 2010

TOOLS, TECHNIQUES & CREATIVITY

OUR ANNUAL IMAGING SOFTWARE UPDATE

CALIBRATION•MANAGEMENT•RAW•SCANNING•DEPTH•RETOUCH•PAINT•SPECIAL EFFECTS

WE TEST
Sony NEX-3
Epson V600 Scanner

US $4.99 • CAN $5.99
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Epson's Perfection V600 Photo & LaserSoft's SilverFast iSRD

Teamwork In Scanning

Scanning is most effective when hardware and software work together. It's a bit like some black-and-white film developers that mix Metol and hydroquinone for a super-additive outcome. They work much better together than either one alone.
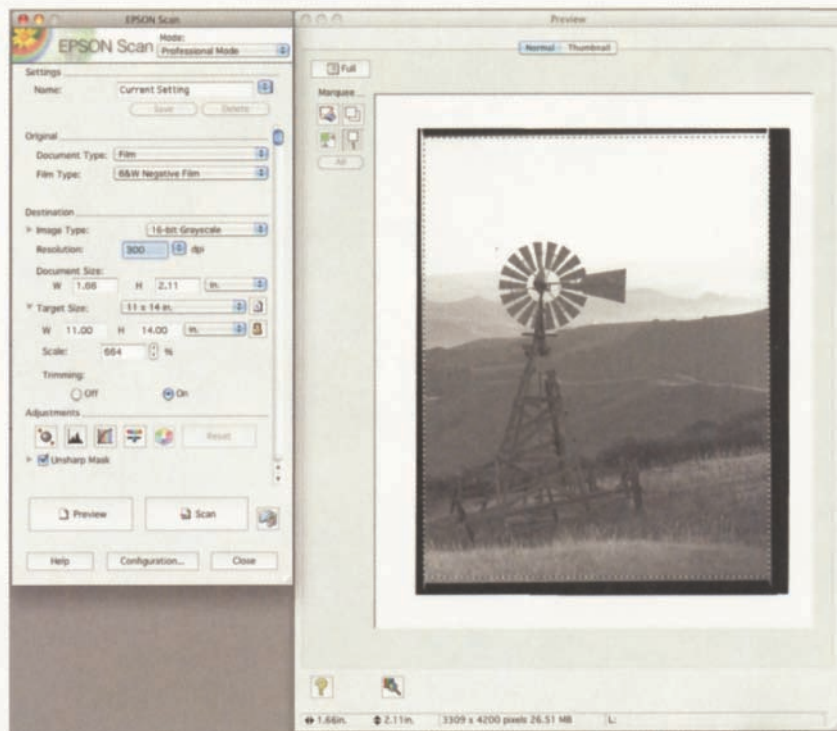
The first member of this team is the new Epson Perfection V600 Photo flat-bed scanner. Although seen by some as just an upgrade to the V500, the introduction of LED light sources in the scanner adds quite a bit more performance. This is particularly true for film scanning as the light source is now limited in coverage to what is being scanned, which reduces the flare of illumination from an all-over fluorescent light panel. In addition, LED lighting is immediate with no warm-up and also provides a more consistent scanning light source.

In addition to light effectiveness and efficiency, the quality of film scans is noticeably improved with the V600. From my use of the V500, which I considered extraordinary for its cost, the V600 provides more refined scan image quality, better film support, and ease of handling. In general, the resulting scan images are exceptionally fine and especially so for the modest $250 cost of this scanner. My only reservation is that the Epson software is not effectively supportive of the hardware, particularly with carefully adjusted film scans, and that's where the LaserSoft SilverFast software comes into play.

After many years of working with Epson scanners using LaserSoft's SilverFast software to run the scanners and adjust my scans, I must admit to being spoiled. So I did little with the Epson driver and moved on to SilverFast for a series of black-and-white film scans. I prefer to scan black-and-white film because it is inherently sharper with

(Left): The new Epson Perfection V600 Photo is just a bit larger than the earlier V500, but contains a much better film scan operating system. In addition to the new advantages of LED scan light sources, the V600 supports 6400 ppi resolution and a 3.4 Dmax dynamic range. (Right): Although the film holders look similar to the earlier V500, the design and construction has been refined, particularly the 120 medium format holder.

The Epson Scan scanning software (in Professional Mode) is much like it has been for many years now. It looks simple but involves many obtuse options and settings that have never worked well from my experience. I instead opt for the SilverFast solution.

usually more distinct grain than either color negative or transparency film. Black and white tells me more about the scanner's ability to reproduce fine detail and whether it is or is not prone

to reproducing graininess in scanned images. I also choose to scan both landscape and portrait black-and-white images because each is exposed and developed quite differently. Landscapes

(Left): Using LaserSoft's SilverFast to run the V600 provides a sequential ideal of adjustment choices to assure the picture processed is exactly what you want via the on-screen preview. (Right): Using LaserSoft's SilverFast to scan High Dynamic Range (HDR) files, select the Scan Type option: 64 bit HDRi. This presents a usually darker preview from a Prescan. All the adjustment needed is to set the size of the image in dimensions and resolution as well as the frame line within the edges of the preview image, and then click Scan.

(Left): LaserSoft's SilverFast HDR has the same configuration of tools and adjustments as the SE or Ai scanner versions. Just open the 64-bit file and a preview appears that you can adjust, color correct, and refine to appear as desired to process as an output file for printing and other uses. (Right): With your 64-bit archive file open in HDR click on the iSRD button in the left vertical frame of the preview to open iSRD. You will then obtain a blowup version of the image in sections, and the identification of dirt, dust, and scratches will appear in red overlaying the image. Click on Auto and then, if need be, you can lower or increase the correction for the artifacts of dirt that should be removed in your final output file.

and similar "hard" subjects are easier to scan to a file that prints well compared to portraits because the characteristic curves of the density ranges are so different. Getting good reproduction of the light skin tones in a portrait is the crucial element.

A choice of packages with LaserSoft's SilverFast are available. A basic SilverFast SE package is sufficient for black-and-white and basic color scanning. (Check

www.silverfast.com for specs and prices.) For my test color scanning I chose to work with the new Archive Suite of both the scanner and HDR software to learn how the new iSRD image cleaning system functions. This involves an infrared scanning sensor that creates an independent file that identifies dust, dirt, and scratches on the film being scanned by setting the scanner software to 64-bit color, a combination of the

48-bit full dynamic range plus the 16-bit infrared channel. This raw scan information is saved to a file. That file is then opened with the SilverFast HDR application to process and adjust the image.

In other words, it is a bit like using a D-SLR camera and saving the Raw files. You then open a Raw file in conversion software to color correct and adjust the image to the final picture you want for

Just getting a scanned image file that is clean without any dust or scratches that have to be retouched would seem a great advantage, and it is. But added to that is a brighter, more brilliantly saturated reproduction of the colors in a photograph.

One of the most wondrous and magical natural environments are the rainforests along the coast of Washington state, but they are also a challenge to photograph because there is so little light under the canopy of trees. Getting a good scan of a transparency made in the rainforest can be a challenge, too. But with this new SilverFast iSRD archival system I obtained the best scan results I have ever made of these images.

printing or other output. The original 64-bit SilverFast scan file then becomes an archival file of all the information you scanned. And you can then process that file again at any time to obtain an 8-bit file for printing and other output.

The image adjustment and color correction in HDR is the same workflow as it is with a standard scan, with the addition of clicking on iSRD, getting the cleanup preview, clicking on Auto, and adjusting how much cleaning needs to be applied. Then once all the scan adjustments are applied, click on Process and you get a new file that is adjusted, cleaned, and ready to use.

The new Epson Perfection V600 Photo and LaserSoft SilverFast simply offer more for less. In addition, the new system produces better results more easily and effectively if the ultimate Archive Suite option is added to the package. The image cleaning is now visually controllable, fast, and effective.

Many users have asked for a quick and easy way to scan their film. Well, it is still work that has to be done with careful knowledge, but you now get a better result with less work. Considering the amount of information scanned, I

Landscapes in black and white usually depend on the resolution of fine detail in the scene, so scanned image sharpness and good tonal separation in highlights, mid tones, and shadows are essential. The Epson Perfection V600 Photo does this and records a realistic and minimal reproduction of film grain.

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Black-and-white film negatives, exposed and developed for portraiture, typically involve a different balance of characteristic curves so skin tones are in the straight center of the curve and shadows on the toe are less contrasty. Scanning film just captures film characteristics pretty much on a straight line, so with portraits you can lose detail in the shadows and the file becomes difficult to print effectively. Fortunately, the highlights, mid tones, and shadows can be separately adjusted with SilverFast and you can preserve the character of the image successfully in a final scan.

could not believe that the scanning and processing could be accomplished so rapidly.

Just buying inexpensive hardware may be enough for some, but having a good marriage between hardware and software produces a superior result in all ways, and that is worth the investment. And it is still less than the best scanner hardware of just a few years ago. So don't short yourself by being too frugal. Many of my comments about the process are contained in the captions to the images. For more information, visit www.epson.com and www.silverfast.com.

Making studio images that are striking and eye-catching has always been fun. To make them work can be a lighting and exposure challenge. When you team up a good scanner, such as the Epson Perfection V600 Photo, and the right software you have a better chance that the image is closer to what was hoped for when the initial film exposure is made.

To Request Information on RS# 25, See Page 6.