

Feature Article...

Lunch Hour Photography

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Like all of you I love to take photographs of nature, but I have a day job that takes up a lot of my time. I have been in the habit of taking walks on my lunch hour for exercise. One day while walking, I thought, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if I combined taking photos with walking?" However, since I didn't work near any parks, I thought about where could I go to find some photogenic subjects. I was lucky enough to work in an area that borders a residential section where I take my walks. I looked around the street I was on and I saw all these homes with yards filled with flowers.

The next day I took my camera along with me on my walk. Since I planned on handholding my camera, the only lens I had that I thought would be usable was a 28-70 zoom with macro capabilities, so I brought that and my favorite film, Velvia. I quickly found that even at 70mm I couldn't bring my subject close enough to fill the frame the way I wanted to. After some fretting about the cost, I sprung for a 105 mm macro lens. I was immediately hooked. The sharpness of this lens was a joy, but I still had a problem achieving an adequate depth of field at shutter speeds fast enough to handhold. The point that I focused on was sharp, but not much else. I tried pushing Velvia one stop, but in general I found the results too contrasty. For a few days I brought a tripod with me. The results were good, but I rarely got more than a few blocks before I had to go back to work.

As luck would have it, a local camera store offered me a free roll of film to make good on one that they had messed up. Provia 100F had just come out so I decided to try it. The faster shutter speeds allowed me to use smaller f-stops and increase the depth of field, which was a big plus. Even though the color wasn't as snappy as Velvia, I could live with it because of the extra f-stop.

But, I still wanted more depth of field. After all, macro images are supposed to be very sharp. I thought about pushing Provia 100F to 200, though it had only been out a few months and I had no idea how it would push. I decided to give it a try. I shot a few rolls of Provia 100F at 200 and had them processed. I was completely blown away. I couldn't tell the difference between ISO 100 and 200 transparencies. They were both sharp. They were both fine grain and they both had good, but not too much contrast.

I've been doing lunch hour macro photography for about a year now and I'm very happy with the results. I put my Nikon F4s with my 105 f/2.8 Micro Nikkor over my shoulder whenever I go out, even if it's just to take a break in the morning. I have the camera set to shutter priority at 1/60th of a second. I've found that I can generally handhold the camera steady enough at that shutter speed. My f-stops vary from around f 6.7 to f 32 depending on the subject and the light. If there is a lot of light, I'll switch to a higher shutter speed.

So, on a typical day, I'll go out for a walk during my lunch hour with my camera slung over my shoulder. I look for any shapes and colors that catch my eye. I love roses and different color leaves. I am careful to not violate anyone's privacy and I just shoot objects that are available to me as I walk by people's yards. Occasionally I'll walk up the driveway a short way if there's something that attracts me, but I'll never go anywhere if I think it may offend someone. If I do see the owner in the yard I'll ask permission but generally, since this is in the middle of the day, it seems that most people, like me, are at work.

It has been drilled into me for so long: for sharp photographs you want a tripod and slow, fine-grain film. And for macro photographs this is even truer. But I am violating all the rules and taking beautiful photos. I'm looking forward to Provia 400F coming out, and meanwhile, I'm dreaming of higher shutter speeds and smaller apertures.

Editor's Note - Be sure to visit Dan's web site at www.timelesslight.com.



