

Title: My Summer Vacation

Version: final draft

Recently, I saw some captivating Giclee prints from Iris and Epson printers. I was struggling on my own with an Epson Photo 1200, when I ran into Richard Newman at PhotoExpo Plus in New York. He kindly let me know that the Calumet Institute teaches quadtone printing workshops. I discovered that I could learn this for the price of a weekend get away. That was in October, and June found me en route to Salisbury State University, MD, the site of the workshops, to see for myself.

My 'simple' goal was that I would be printing black & white negatives all digitally by the end of the week. Nothing less would do! In preparation, I crammed my car with my Apple G4 computer brimming with a half gig of memory, my Epson 1600 scanner with IT8 calibration targets, backup image of my system disk, spare SCSI drive, stereo speakers, 100 meg of MP3s, my negatives, my medium format camera, and my favorite pillow.

The drive south gave me time to reflect on my darkroom dilemma. I had been out of a darkroom arrangement for two years and had accumulated so many unprinted negatives of all types and sizes that I was having trouble unearthing my camera gear. Lack of a darkroom was nothing new. I never had one of my own and shuffled from one arrangement to another. I searched last year for a space to rent. In the Boston real estate market squeeze, I failed to locate even a converted broom closet.

I arrived at the workshop, breezed through check in, and headed to the gallery reception. Under the gaze of the masters, Ansel Adams, Elliot Porter, Edward Weston, Brett Weston, Paul Strand, and others, all the students and staff in the various workshops intermingled. After dinner, the quadtone folks gathered together for the first time with George DeWolfe, the instructor, for an overview of the course. The week sounded good except for the part of starting at 8:30am because I don't think of setting foot in the office until 10am.

Nonetheless 8:30 found me in a thought provoking lecture on ambient and reflected light and Photoshop basics. The second day gave us a chance to manipulate our own images and start printing them. The strength and variety of the photographs of the 20 students, all darkroom veterans, added another dimension to the workshop. George's feedback about the prints touched on both the quadtone process and the creative process.

The schedule for the week consisted of a morning session with George and then various printing team shifts. The printers got quite the workout running from 8am into the wee hours. By the end of the week, we had practiced every aspect of constructing a digital darkroom: monitor calibration, Photoshop setup, scanning, histogram interpretation, printer calibration, and print trouble shooting. Two different quadtone printing systems, MIS and Cone Editions Piezography, allowed us to make side-by-side comparisons and determine the merits of each system.

If all-printing-all-the-time was not your thing, there were respites at hand. The gallery offered another audience before the masters. The campus gardens beckoned with their photogenic nature. Meal times and early evening provided an opportunity to collaborate with the other instructors and support staff.

By the end of the week, I was thrilled. The luscious tonal range of the Piezography prints, produced without the hassles of the traditional wet process, inspired me to shoe-horn one of the workshop printers into my car for the return trip. I am so happy to be printing again!