



Cliff Mautner

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Catching the "Bokeh"

With the power of his new D3, Cliff Mautner is creating images he never could before.

Ask Philadelphia photographer Cliff Mautner how his wedding photography has evolved since he acquired the Nikon D3, and he offers an answer that is as revealing as it is succinct: "Simply put, I'm able to make images that I just couldn't make before."

Cliff was the first wedding photographer in the world to use the D3 on a wedding—though he wasn't the only one interested in the camera's much-anticipated capabilities. "When I posted the images on my blog after shooting the very first wedding with this camera, I got 225,000 unique visitors within a week," he says. "That's unbelievable."

IN AWE OF AUTOFOCUS

Cliff's admiration of the D3 was instant. "Of course, the highly touted ISO performance of this camera is paramount," he says. "But I think it's very easy to overlook the other improvements, and other characteristics and features, because the ISO performance is so good. Take the 51-area autofocus system, for example: You can go into a situation and shoot at 6400, but shooting at 6400 is such a difficult circumstance to begin with. Your focusing opportunity will be

questionable from the start. For this camera to be able to focus in that kind of light is astounding and, in my opinion, as equally important as the ISO performance itself. What good is ISO performance if you can't focus under those conditions?"

He also appreciates the 15 cross-type sensors. "I like to shoot at wide-open apertures quite often, and when you're shooting at 1.4, focus points are critical," he explains. "If you can use your various focus points within the camera and not have to recompose after locking on focus, you'll keep the plane of focus intact. This allows me to shoot at my shallow depths-of-field and gives me a look and a 'bokeh' (the quality of out-of-focus area that a lens produces). It's an extremely effective use of depth-of-field—you can really isolate your point of interest within your frame."

THE WONDER OF WHITE BALANCE

The auto white balance is another feature that impressed Cliff right from the start. "Unless I'm in a given situation where I know one white balance setting or the other is the one to go with, I just put it on auto,

and the camera does the work for me," he says. "Even in extreme mixed-lighting conditions, the camera seems to pull off the right white-balance performance."

As a case in point, Cliff mentions shooting a bride in a tungsten-lit room that's partially lit with daylight from a window. "In the past, the veil would usually turn out blue," he explains. "Now with the D3, the veil is white, the skin tones are perfect, and the background is nice and warm. That's a very challenging scenario for a sensor to handle."

The D3's Scene Recognition System has enabled Cliff to take on even the most formidable situations. "The Scene Recognition System in the D3 has enhanced the ability of this camera to produce very refined files straight out of camera," he says. "To white-balance in difficult situations—say, a church with mercury vapors, sodium vapors, fluorescent, tungsten, and daylight—and still come up with accurate skin tones simply astounds me. Even though I'm a RAW shooter, this camera is a JPEG's dream because of its exposure consistency, white-balance accuracy, and the polished files that it produces straight from the camera."

EASE OF USE

Ergonomically, the D3 follows in the Nikon tradition of consistency. "You can close your eyes and literally control this camera without having to look at the buttons," says Cliff. "If you've used previous Nikon cameras, you can just pick up the D3 and use it without the need to sit and study the manual."

But ergonomics is about more than just easily accessible buttons and convenient dials: It also allows photographers to create their images without being distracted by the technical aspect. "Right from the get-go, I was able to use my mind's eye and see images as opposed to having to *think* about images," says Cliff. "Because I wasn't concentrating on my equipment and instead was letting the equipment think for me, all I had to do was just 'see.'"

The brilliantly clear LCD screen is another feature that allows Cliff to view every cake topper and centerpiece in stunning detail. "The accuracy and resolution of the 920,000-dot VGA LCD screen, the color and clarity—it makes it very easy to just look down and see everything that's going on."

A smoother shutter release is another enhancement that's caught Cliff's attention. "I find that the mirror slap has been dimin-

ished," he says. "There's less vibration. I'm confident that I can handhold this camera at slower shutter speeds because of this smoothness and lack of vibration in the shutter slap."

LENSES DRIVEN BY TECHNOLOGY

Shooting with the FX-format CMOS sensor has proven "liberating" for Mautner, taking his lens use to the next level. "One of my favorite lenses is the 28mm f/1.4," he says. "Now, because of the FX format, this lens is truly a 28mm f/1.4 again. To be able to take this camera and handhold it at a 15th of a second at 1.4, at 6400—that's just an incredible weapon and an unbelievable tool to have in your bag. It allows me to take photographs and produce images in nearly any lighting condition without the assistance of a strobe if I don't want it."

Cliff brings eight lenses with him to every wedding. "I know that sounds excessive, but I'm a lens changer," he says. "I use every lens in my bag at just about every wedding." While the bride is primping and preening, Cliff taps into his prime lenses, especially his 28mm f/1.4, 50mm f/1.4, and 85mm f/1.4. "On the D3, I've noticed such an enhancement in performance with these lenses because of the autofocus system," he says. "The D3 drives these lenses so beautifully and so quickly that these lenses are now fast-focusing lenses. There's nothing like an 85mm f/1.4 in a room where a bride is getting ready. It's just a wonderful piece of equipment—driven by the D3, the focusing is nearly instantaneous, and with the 15 cross-type sensors, it just doesn't miss."

THE ULTIMATE COMBINATION

Cliff's tried-and-true SB-800 Speedlights come in handy when he needs fill, even though he tries to shoot in natural light as much as possible. "I'm using flash less than I used to," he explains. "As a former photojournalist, I like to maintain the integrity of a situation as much as possible. However, when I do use an SB-800 for fill, it's flawless."

By combining all of these powerful components with his new D3, Cliff has put together an imaging system for himself that's unsurpassed. "Let's put it this way: We're doing less tweaking and saving more time, because my camera is more accurate," he says. "In the long run, that saves us money!"

But just as important as the cost savings is the fact that Cliff can now head into any wedding without having to worry his equipment won't come through. "It's comforting to know that, no matter what circumstances I'm facing, I'm going to be able to produce images," he says. "The D3's improvements are nothing short of revolutionary—it will absolutely change the way photographers capture images. When you have a camera with the ISO range, exposure accuracy, and focusing speed it has, I'm not going to say it will automatically make me a better photographer. But it's allowing me to make pictures I couldn't make before." §



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