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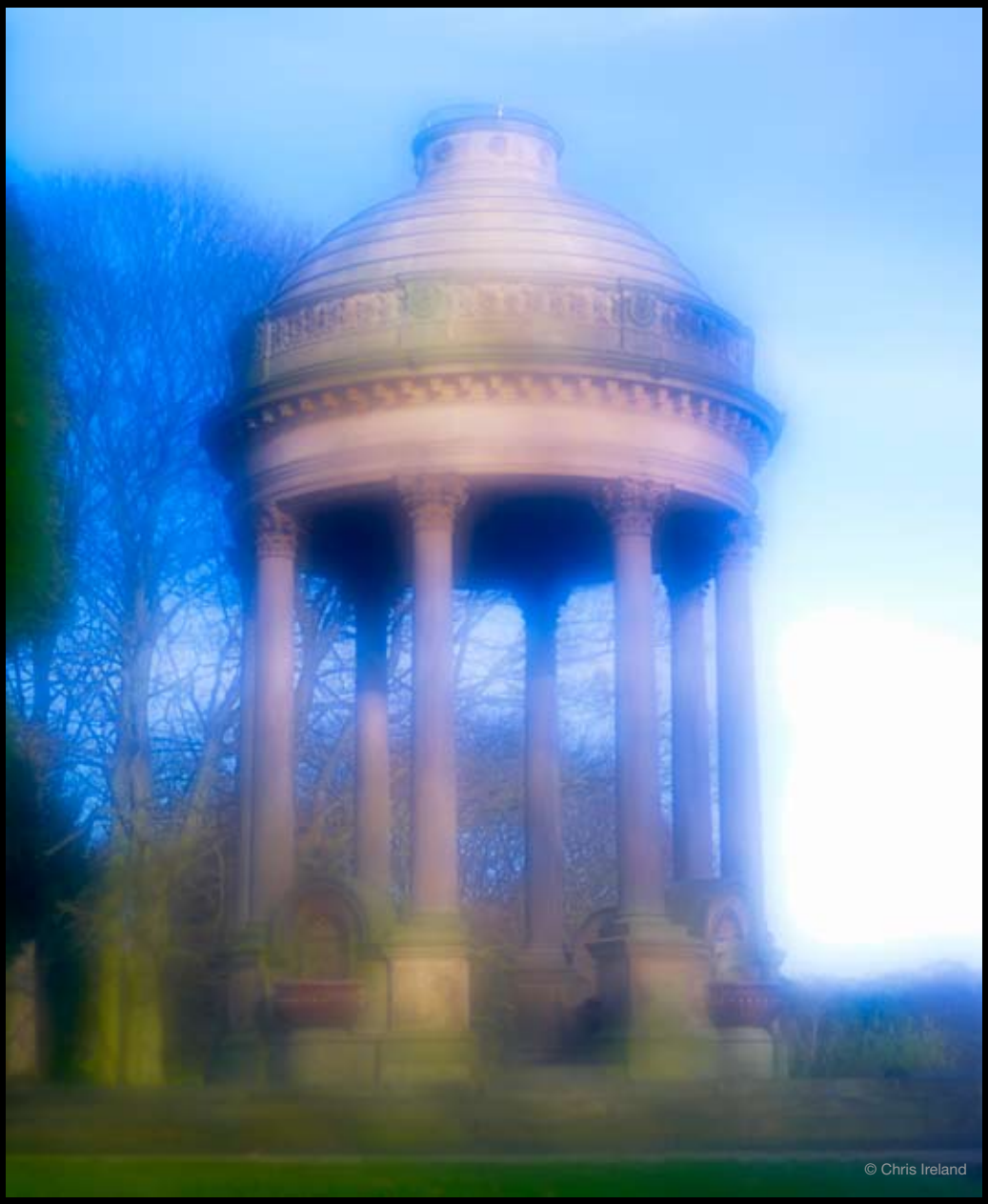

Chris Ireland

Exploring digital pinhole photography

by Walter Borchenko

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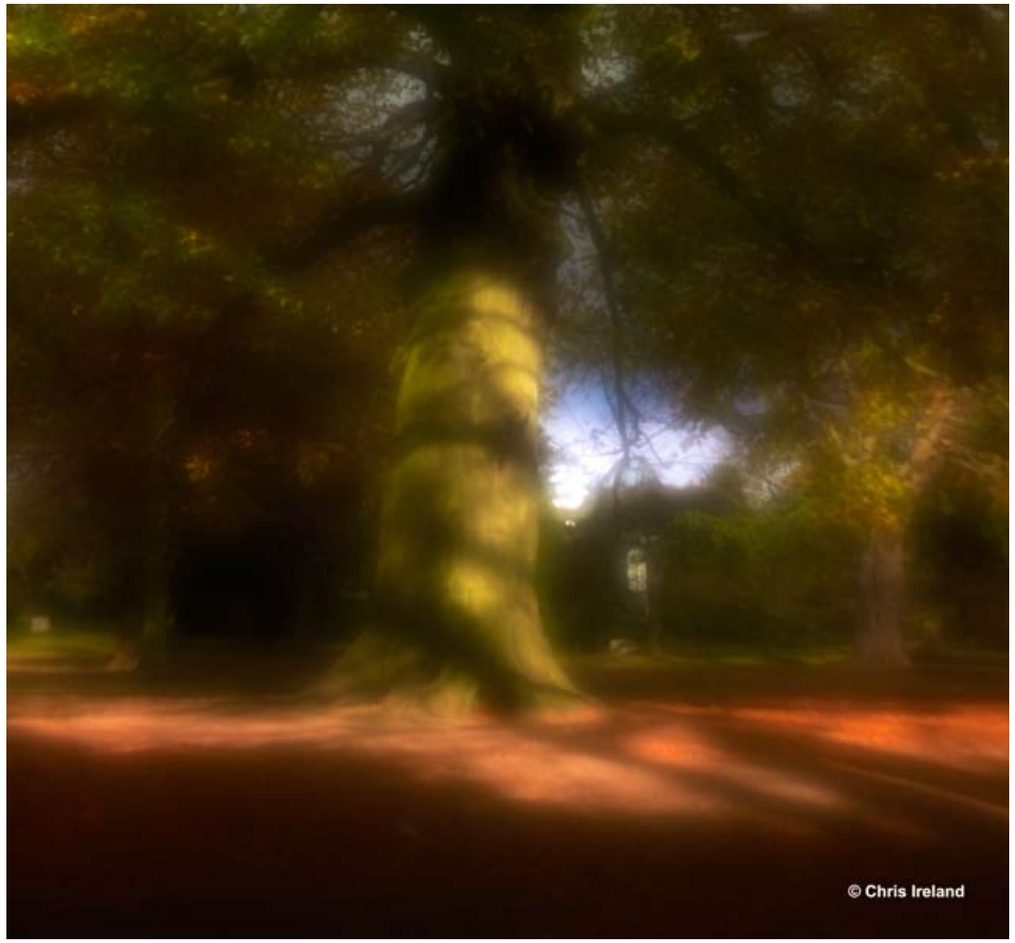
what the world's best photography is made of



Photography as a non-commercial pursuit can evolve technique and method to new levels. The lack of pressure to create a profit drives techniques and results that can change our perceptions and add new creative tools to our community. The limit is usually the pocketbook, time or both. On rare occasions, it all comes together as it has for Chris Ireland through his evolution of pinhole photography to digital capture.

Chris has been selling and supporting Phase One digital backs for over ten years as a Phase One dealer. Based in Leeds, UK Chris has been

providing equipment, seminars, installation, and training through his company Direct Digital Imaging DDI UK Ltd. The high level of knowledge and education offered is only possible because Chris is also a passionate photographer!

The first time I saw Chris's work was with his long exposure hand-held photography that was completely abstract and brilliant in tone and feeling. The work was inspirational and a celebration of the possibilities of digital capture. Shooting these

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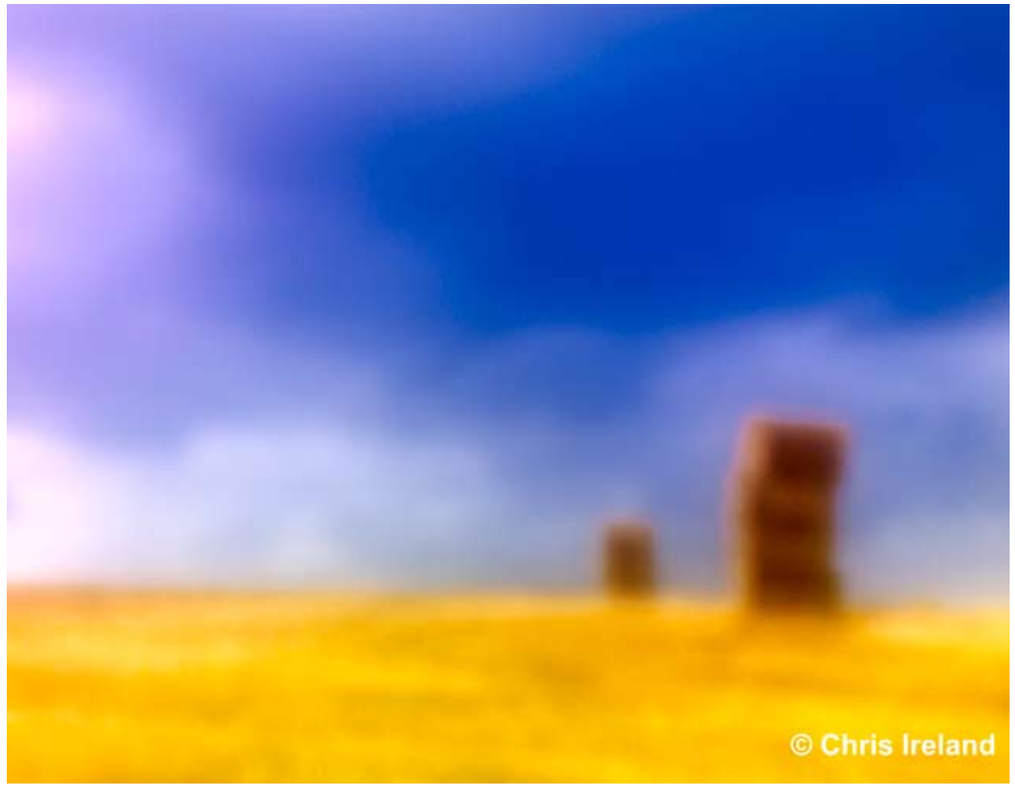
serene subtly colored images took advantage of the unique look produced by the Phase One backs. The final results were silky smooth. Most would think a point and shoot would produce the same results yet nothing could be further from the truth. Since then,

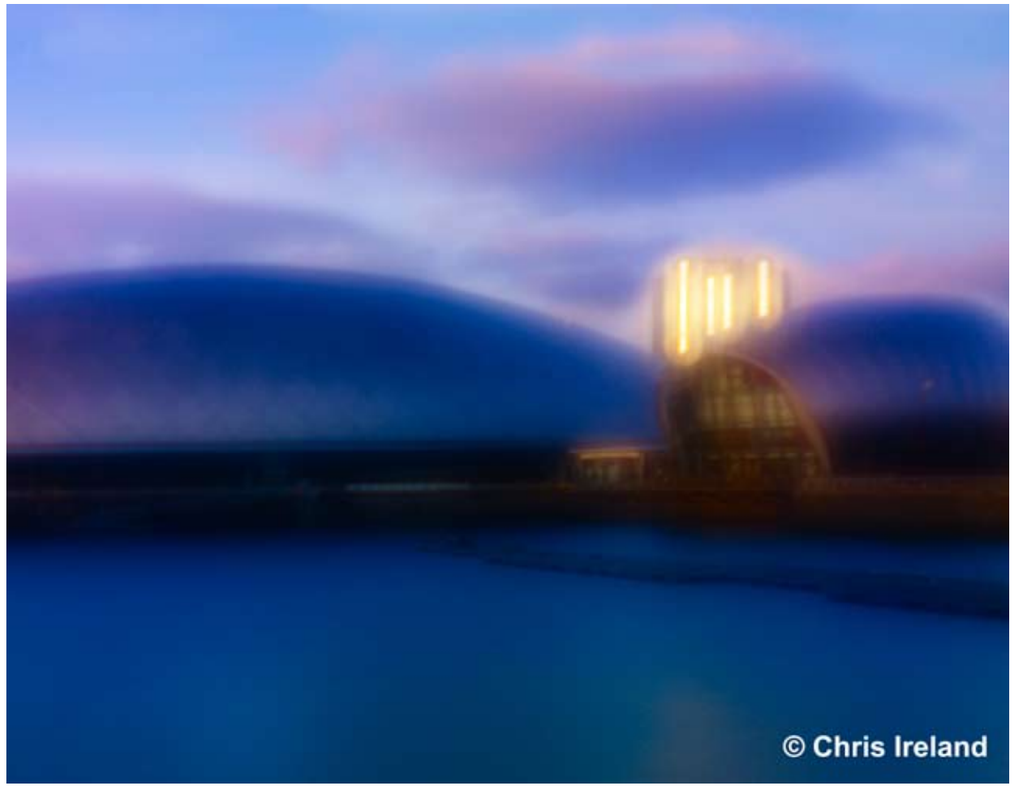


The P+ series back now supplies an excellent depiction of the image captured on its new enhanced screen. It creates the opportunity for you to think about the subject composition.

Chris has chosen to explore the pinhole camera with digital capture.

" In the last few years I have experimented with digital capture in unusual ways. The question has been "What can I do with this and how does it affect the end results". I have always loved landscape photography and my experiments had a landscape feel. It was about that same time I realised how much could be done with a Phase One back for fine art Landscape photography. I started to pursue some of the established and respected landscape photographers as clients and met two wonderful photographers, Joe Cornish and Steve Gosling. I was inspired by their work and I realised that it was important for me to capture some of the landscapes I loved but not as abstract art.

I went out in to the wilds with the Horseman SWD II camera and 35mm lens. This is a brilliant



solution. I captured some excellent images, including super panoramic shots, by stitching several images together using the Horseman's movements. As much as I had fun, I really didn't feel I was pushing the process enough but I just couldn't figure out how to push it further.

At about this time Steve Gosling ordered a Phase One P+ back and I visited his latest exhibition of stunning images using film with a Pinhole camera. I loved the feel these images created by using a pinhole lens and that brought about a eureka moment! An exciting idea came in to my head. Could I build a pinhole camera that would work with the new P+ backs? If so, this would combine the oldest original image creation technique with the most cutting edge capture technology in the world. Could it actually work?

Although pinhole photography may seem like a incredibly simple process, the development of Chris's pinhole camera solution became a labor of love that took a lot of time. From concept to final working product took over twelve months.

"I needed to choose a camera body that I could have easily modified for digital use. I decided to use a self-build 5x4 field-camera kit called the 'Bulldog'. Working with the manufacturer, I had the back portion modified so I could easily adapt any camera platform mount supported by Phase One. The design takes seconds to switch between Phase One, Mamiya, Contax and Hasselblad V or H mounts and no tools are required.

I really like the classic field camera design of the Bulldog! Assembly is required, mostly with glue. The camera kit comes in a flat pack with all of the parts

cut out ready to assemble. All the hardware for the camera is included. The final camera is solid and very sturdy. The bellows are compressed taking up very little room in the camera bag.

The Phase One sleeping architecture proved to be the first challenge for pinhole photography. I had to find a way to wake up the back before taking an image. Pinhole cameras are usually just a box with a hole in it. A shutter is required to activate the P+ back. I then found in some of my old camera kits an old Copal 0 lens shutter. Problem solved.

Next, I needed to create a pinhole lens and a converter for the Copal 0 shutter. I worked with a camera engineering company and manufacturer capable of precision cut pinholes in metal. We collectively designed an adaptor to fit a Copal 0 shutter in which I could easily change the pinhole metal lens to figure out what size the pinhole should be. Finally I had a single piece built that simply adapts to the Copal 0 shutter.

After some experimentation I was able to wake up the P 45+ with a Phase One wake up cable and then fire a copal shutter and it worked!


© Chris Ireland

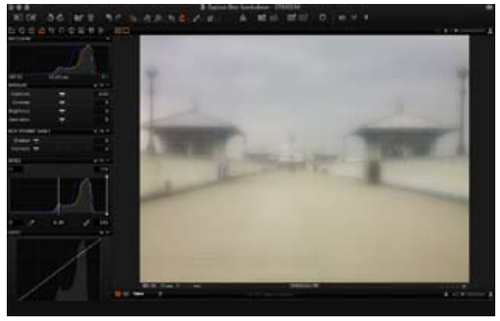
Too often today, creative photographers fall into the trap of doing what has been done before without really pushing the medium into new directions. So much effort is taken to create looks and feels that are not part of the capture experience today that in too many ways photo illustration has replaced the tradition of capture. Experiencing capture through the limits of a particular process can be a terrific way to create a unique look. Better yet, this approach makes it much easier to recreate a particular look consistently and with virtually no post-production time.

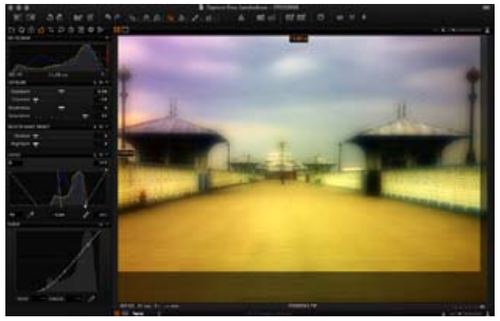
I love the soft feel pinhole photography creates whilst still retaining detail. There are no camera or digital filters that I am aware of which can produce this wonderful feel. The fact that it is impossible on a pinhole camera to look through the lens is more inspirational than difficult. I cannot see myself using a camera with optics for some time, as digital pinhole photography is just so creative and exciting! The results I get are different from the results of film in a surprising and positive way.

Surprisingly, dependant on the time of day, the exposures are not that long ! The focal length I have achieved is like using the 35mm wide angle on a medium format system. Typical exposures are from 1 second to 9 minutes dependent on the time of day. The effective f-stop is f 180. The hole in the metal is also the lens so the aperture can be a lot smaller than those that are possible with lenses.

In the past the combination of being unable to see through the lens with film as the recording medium made it a challenge for photographers to experiment with pinhole photography. The P+ series back now supplies an excellent depiction of the image captured on its new enhanced screen. It creates the opportunity for you to think about the subject composition. You can experiment to your hearts content to achieve what you want as your final image.

All of these images have been processed with Capture One 4 software. I have found that Capture One 4 has far greater control, color rendition and overall giving me results with pinhole captures that have not been achievable with Capture One 3.7.8.





Working with Capture One 4, I have found a specific group of settings that give me just the look I need. I have saved an image with these settings that I use to load the settings clipboard. This gives me a terrific result that is much like a Style in Capture One 3.7.8. I have gotten used to the exposure and look I need for the setting to work and now I am creating consistent results that I can achieve anytime.

Over the New Year I had taken an image of Llandudno Pier in Wales on a very flat, dull, rainy day. However with the experience I have gained from taking many pinhole pictures I knew I had exactly what I wanted. The original Raw file looks nothing like the finished image and many may have discarded it at this point. My setting give me that pastel finish that I love so much.

Chris has been lucky to work with several companies that have solved some basic technical issues with pinhole digital photography. Now Chris is making the kit and some of the key components available through his website www.directdigitalimaging.com at a price of about $1,300 USD or 650 Sterling plus shipping. This includes the 5x4 you build Bulldog camera kit (you have to build it) modified for accepting a Phase One digital back, the Phase One platform plate and a pinhole lens and adapter for a Copal 0 shutter. You need to find your own used Copal 0 shutter. In addition to a Phase One back, you will need a wake up cable not normally supplied with the back. The package includes assembly instructions.

As with any new product in photography, the unusual capabilities of the Phase One P+ backs are allowing photographers to push the envelope. The new experiences can literally create a whole new approach as Chris clearly demonstrates with pinhole capture.

I am really lucky to have the resources and talent that I have around me. I feel responsible to do something with all this that really has some meaning. The pinhole capture solution really does that for me. Most of all, it's really about capture and it's fun!

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www.directdigitalimaging.com/index.html/
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