



# Using the Phase One P 30 digital back out on location in Central America

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Nicholas Hellmuth



We realize that probably 95% of the people who buy medium format digital backs are professional photographers who use it for portraits, weddings or commercial photography (such as product photography for advertising). Yet these medium format cameras are great for fine art photography as well.

In past decades many non-commercial photographers bought Leica or Hasselblad cameras for their personal enjoyment. In the digital era the Leica is a non-event and medium format on a Hasselblad is intimidating for a lay person (once you get used to it these are easy to use, but the size, weight and cost may cause pause to a lay person, and medium format software of some brands does have a learning curve). Yet there are thousands of photographers who have plenty of money, and brain cells, to master a medium format back. We believe that photography aficionados should seriously consider upgrading from their Nikon or Canon 35mm cameras to medium format.

I have a Nikon D100, a Kodak SLR/n, and a Canon EOS 5D. But these are not really exciting: they take acceptable basic photos and that's about it. Yet when you bring a medium format digital camera out on the weekend, you can really notice the difference. It's like if you normally drive a Ford, Chevy or comparable car, and all of a sudden someone loans you an Audi, Lexus, BMW, or Mercedes for the weekend.

*Photographs of the shoot are by Eduardo Sacayon, FLAAR Mesoamerica. He is using a Nikon D100. All photographs of the bricks are by Nicholas Hellmuth using the Phase One P 30, provided courtesy of Global Imaging Inc, Greg Lamb, CEO.*

FLAAR does professional photography of architecture and art, especially in museums. But we also like to take a really good camera out on a weekend and do fun photography. To me it is enjoyable to go into a situation, such as a brickyard, and come out with viewpoints that, when exhibited, make people stop and look at the photograph rather than merely walking by without a second look.

Not every photo here will win a prize, and for sure many people prefer to see alluring nubile girls in scanty clothing as models, but we don't do that kind of photography (not because we are prudes but because it would not be appropriate in Guatemalan society). Besides, it is more challenging to make a photograph of a pile of unbaked bricks stop you in your tracks than to present just another young model. In Greece a leading cause of traffic accidents on the highway is in front of giant billboards that picture scantily clad models who are offering themselves to some guy who is smoking a cigarette (Greece has the highest percentage of smokers in any Western country).

If you don't like photogenic patterns and natural textures, this is not the PDF to look at.



Photograph by Nicholas Hellmuth resulting from Phase One P 30, provided courtesy of Global Graphics Inc. Unfired hand-made roofing tiles waiting to be fired, El Tejar, Guatemala, Central America.



Here is the kiln, typical of the almost home-made brickyards in this picturesque town about an hour from Guatemala City.

Inside the roofed-over area alongside the kiln the unfired bricks have various colors, possibly depending on how wet they are (dark) or how dry they are (light). As we will see later, the gray balance from “shade” outside did not translate well inside under the roof. But the shots taken with the Nikon D100 were probably set on Auto-White Balance, so these shots are okay inside and out.



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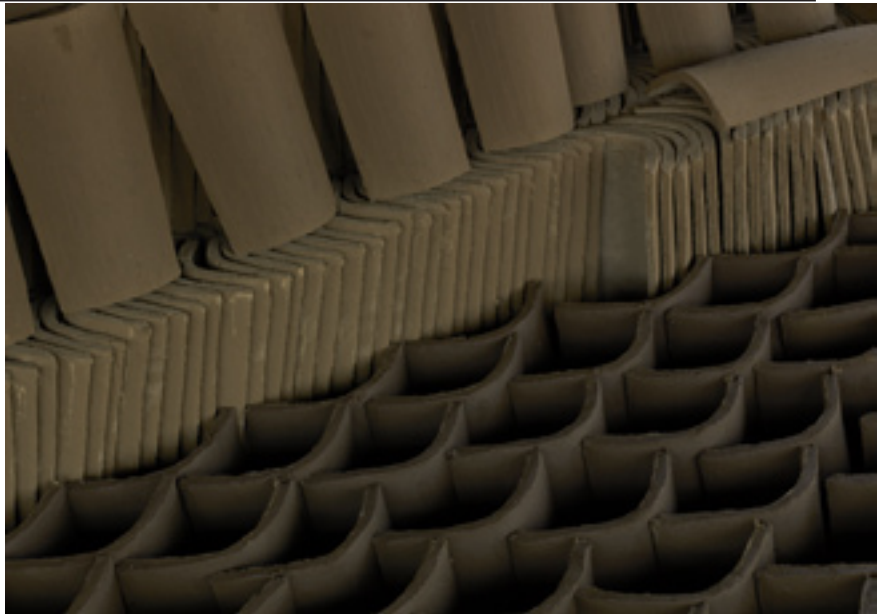
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The tripod needs to be sturdy enough to carry the weight of a motorized medium format Hasselblad ELX with the Phase One P 30 digital back. We use a Gitzo G1548 GT tripod. This particular day we had an Arca-Swiss ball head. We also use Gitzo and Manfrotto tripod heads.



Photograph by Nicholas Hellmuth resulting from Phase One P 30, provided courtesy of Global Graphics Inc. Unfired hand-made roofing tiles waiting to be fired, El Tejar, Guatemala, Central America.

Here you can see the difference between the roughly gray-balanced (at the top right) and what the camera captured (bottom left). The capture from the P 30 is whiteish because no custom gray balance was taken when I moved from the open shade outside (which was balanced) to under the roof where the light was obviously totally different. This is not the fault of the Phase One, but the fault of the photographer (me). I should have switched the camera to auto-white balance or better, done a gray balance under the roof. After-the-fact, you can recreate a relatively good gray balance if you know a few Photoshop tricks. Since there is no gray or white areas in the unfired bricks, you do need to know a few Photoshop tricks, or know how to operate the CaptureOne software of PhaseOne very well.



Frankly I was so excited about finding such an exceptionally natural pattern in how the roof tiles were stacked that I forgot to re-set the gray balance. I always call it gray balance, and not white balance. To me white balance is what you do with a video camera or a cheap digital still camera. Gray balance is what you do with a large-format BetterLight, indeed it's software can allow you to click on at least three different grays in the Macbeth ColorChecker (or in your scene) and balance all three levels of gray.

But the PhaseOne has a really easy almost one-click color balance. This is so much better than the Canon EOS 5D that I am not willing to accept the Canon EOS 5D as a professional level camera. Canon cameras are mid-range consumer digital cameras that have a billion-dollars of advertising savvy behind them. It is the same phenomenon as Macintosh computers. PCs are faster but a Mac is definitely cooler. So people pay no attention to reality: they just love their Mac computers. Its the same with Canon cameras. 99% of the people that own and use Canon EOS cameras have probably never used a medium format camera, so they have no idea how much better a medium format technology is. And definitely, how much easier the color balance is (if you use it). Note that the camera was set for custom white balance for outside open shade.



## Unfired hand-made roofing tiles



What I like are the repetitive shapes, and the texture. The lack of “color” helps see the form, light, and shadow. The shot at the bottom is not yet color balanced.

I would like to work this further as a black-and-white fine art image in channel mixer in Photoshop to see the results.





This is the main highway between Guatemala City and Mexico. About a dozen family-run brickyards line this highway in a single town, named El Tejar





**T**hese brickyards are a treasure trove for anyone looking to photograph patterns. Precisely because the bricks are monotone, your eye is not distracted by color. So you can concentrate on finding patterns.



May through September is the tropical monsoon rainy season in Central America, so it is overcast most of the day. Thus the clouds cause the exposure to vary considerably. And some bricks are wetter than others. Shooting in the same brickyard on a bright sunny day the result would be totally different.





## Acknowledgements



Photograph by Nicholas Hellmuth resulting from Phase One P 30, provided courtesy of Global Graphics Inc. Roofing tiles after they have been fired. The slight variation in color depends on how far they are from the heat source and probably how much air gets to this particular part of the pile.

The solid carbon fiber Gitzo model G1548GT tripod used to hold the Arca-Swiss tripod head and heavy Hasselblad ELX camera was provided courtesy of Kriss Brunngraber, Bogen Imaging ([www.BogenImaging.com](http://www.BogenImaging.com)).

This camera back was provided courtesy of Greg Lamb, CEO of Global Imaging Inc. This is the only company we know of in the USA which handles four or five major brands of wide format inkjet printers

- HP
- Dilli Neo Plus UV-curable flatbed printers
- Mimaki
- ColorSpan
- Vutek solvent and Vutek UV printers

Plus all four leading brands of medium format digital backs:

- Hasselblad-Imacon
- Leaf
- Phase One
- Sinar-Jenoptik

And Imacon-Hasselblad scanners.

Global Imaging sells nationwide. If you wish to visit them in person, they are located at

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