



While reproduced here in black and white, early evening light produced subtleties and tones not obtainable under a noontime sun. Monte Nagler made this

photograph of Rain God Mesa in Monument Valley, Ariz.

How color film works

Most of us have been using color film for years and probably haven't given much thought to how our film really works. Film is a photographic "miracle" we take for granted. Let's learn a little bit about it.

Color film contains three separate layers of light sensitive emulsion that create an image according to the intensity of light falling on it during the brief instance of exposure.

One layer is sensitive only to red light, one to green and the other to blue. At a particular stage in the development of the film, the image is dyed to the appropriate shade in each layer to reproduce the full range of colors in the original subject.

There are two basic types of color film - transparency (slides) and negative (prints). A negative film records light areas in the original scene as dark tones and dark areas as light tones.

Colors are shown in reverse so that anything blue will appear as a mixture of red and green which is yellow. Anything green will record as a mixture of red and blue called magenta and anything red as a combination of green and blue which is cyan. These are the complementary colors.

To make a print, the negative must then be exposed again to a similar emulsion on a paper base to convert the colors and tones back to those of the original subject.

With a color transparency, all of this process takes place when the film is developed.

Modern technology has made color films sensitive to even the slightest changes in the color quality of light. Unfortunately, we tend to notice only the drastic changes in light quality because the brain makes adjustments for what we see.



photography
Monte Nagler

For example, grass will almost always appear to be green regardless of the color of light used to illuminate it, simply because we "know" that grass is green. We are rarely aware of color changes in daylight, yet it varies as surely as the sun rises and sets, and these variations are faithfully recorded on film. This accounts for the most surprises, and sometimes disappointments, when you see your processed prints for the first time.

The color quality of light is measured on what is called the Kelvin scale and is recorded as a color "temperature." Most daylight balanced films are designed to give a correct color balance when the light source is about 6,000 degrees Kelvin or approximately a noon sun. However, light from a rising sun can be as low as 3,000 or as high as 6,000 degrees on a hazy day.

When you consider that a variation of only a few hundred degrees will be quite noticeable when recorded on film, it becomes easy to understand how a photograph can appear with different tones of color than you thought you saw. It also explains how sunsets and sunrise pictures have color values unlike those shots lit by a noontime sun.

'All About Color' column to start

A new column, "All About Color," debuts in the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers next week. Written by color analyst Helen Diane Vincent, the column will appear on Thursdays and discuss the effective use of color.

Vincent holds a bachelor of fine arts from Wayne State University and a masters from Cranbrook Academy of Art. She has written articles, market reports for home furnishings trade and consumer magazines and established a color system for a major chain store used as a standard for over 300 suppliers and consumer aid.

Currently residing in Troy, Vincent was one of the first women designers in the automotive industry. She also has supervised product development projects in the USA and England for a major fiber producer and served as a consultant for a number of USA and overseas manufacturers selling mass-market lines.

She has also taught classes on color at the Grosse Pointe War Memorial and the Birmingham Community House. At the present time, she is writing a book on color and the psychology of color.

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