How do I use a film camera?

AGFAPHOTO

The advent of digital photography put film cameras on the back burner for quite some time, but they're now making a huge comeback. People are increasingly turning to film cameras in their quest for authentic shots with a unique colour rendition.

But to get those amazing shots, you need to know how a film camera works.

For Millennials and Gen Zers who've grown up with digital photography, loading a film or developing photos means learning new techniques.

And as we want your analogue photo experience to go without a glitch here's AgfaPhoto's guide on getting to grips with your film camera.

1- So what exactly is a film camera?

If you're going to get the most out of your film camera, you'll need to know how it works.

Analogue vs digital: what's the difference?

Film cameras (AKA analogue cameras) get their name because they use rolls of silver halide film to take photos. The film is inserted into the camera's housing body and is traditionally made from a plastic coated with silver salts. Which is why film camera photos are sometimes referred to as silver halide photos.

The term "analogue" is also used because film photography is not the same as digital photography. Using a film camera also means going back to the roots of photography, way before digital cameras and smartphones hit the scene.

The big difference between digital and analogue photography is the film. In a film camera, you need to insert a photographic film that captures an impression of the subject being photographed. When you aim your lens at a landscape or a person and press the shutter, a chemical reaction occurs that captures the image on the film. Once you've used up your roll of film, you'll need to get it developed in a lab where a technician will carry out a series of processes to leave you with a print that you can pop in an album or a frame!

Silver halide photography: a centuries-old process

The history of silver halide photos goes right back to the dawn of photography! It was at the beginning of the 19th century that Nicéphore Niepce first captured an image by placing silver salts on the bottom of a "camera obscura", AKA a tiny dark room.

His invention was a watershed moment that others improved, notably Louis Daguerre, who managed to reduce the exposure time with his famous "daguerreotype". This invention led to the notion of a "latent image" that could be "revealed" using a chemical process.

Over time silver halide photography improved in leaps and bounds: reduced exposure times, a more stable image and an easier process meant everyone could try their hand at photography.

Modern film photography

Film photography today is pretty much the same as it was in the 19th century! It comprises a plastic black and white film that's coated with an emulsion which reacts when exposed to light: this reaction creates a latent image that's turned into a final photo when the film's developed. The film is developed in total darkness. It's placed in a tray filled with a photographic developer solution that makes the latent image appear! The process is slightly different when it comes to coloured film, which is made up of different layers that create different shades: these layers form a dye during development.

2- How do I use a film camera?

As you can see, film photography harks back to the dawn of photography, in particular the process of loading a film and getting it developed.

Using a film camera means (re) discovering a tactile form of photography. It also means choosing a film according to the result you want to achieve, taking the time to choose and line up your shots and enjoying a more authentic and measured approach to taking shots.

Choosing the right film

Film photography means using film (obviously!). AgfaPhoto has several types of film:

- film to take colour photos,
- film to take black and white photos,
- films with 24 or 36 exposures,
- ISO 100 or ISO 400 film.

Black and white or colour, the choice is yours depending on the type of shots you want to take. Black and white film photographs have a distinctive, artistic charm. Black and white photos are superb if you want to have fun with contrasts and shapes. Colour film photography also has a nostalgic charm about it, for example, if you want to snap unique photos during a holiday. The best thing is to try out both types of film to fully appreciate all that your film camera has to offer!

You should also understand ISO sensitivity when learning how to use a film camera. The ISO number refers to the film's sensitivity to light: in other words, the lower the ISO sensitivity, the more light the film will need to capture an image.

An ISO sensitivity of between 50 and 200 is ideal for daytime shots in sunny environments.

You can, of course, use this type of film indoors if the place is well lit or if your film camera comes with a flash. An ISO sensitivity of 400 is more versatile, and you'll be able to take photos in low-light conditions.

Note that our range of films are the most common ones used for film photography. 35mm film is the most common type of film both for taking shots and when it comes to getting it developed in a lab.

Film cameras' main features

Firstly, all the AgfaPhoto film cameras can take 35mm colour or black and white film. They are also reusable cameras, powered by AAA batteries.

AgfaPhoto film cameras are a cinch to use. All our models come with a technical specs sheet that tells you:

- if it has a flash,
- the type of lens and its focus mode,
- the type of films it uses,
- the focus mode,
- the shutter speed,
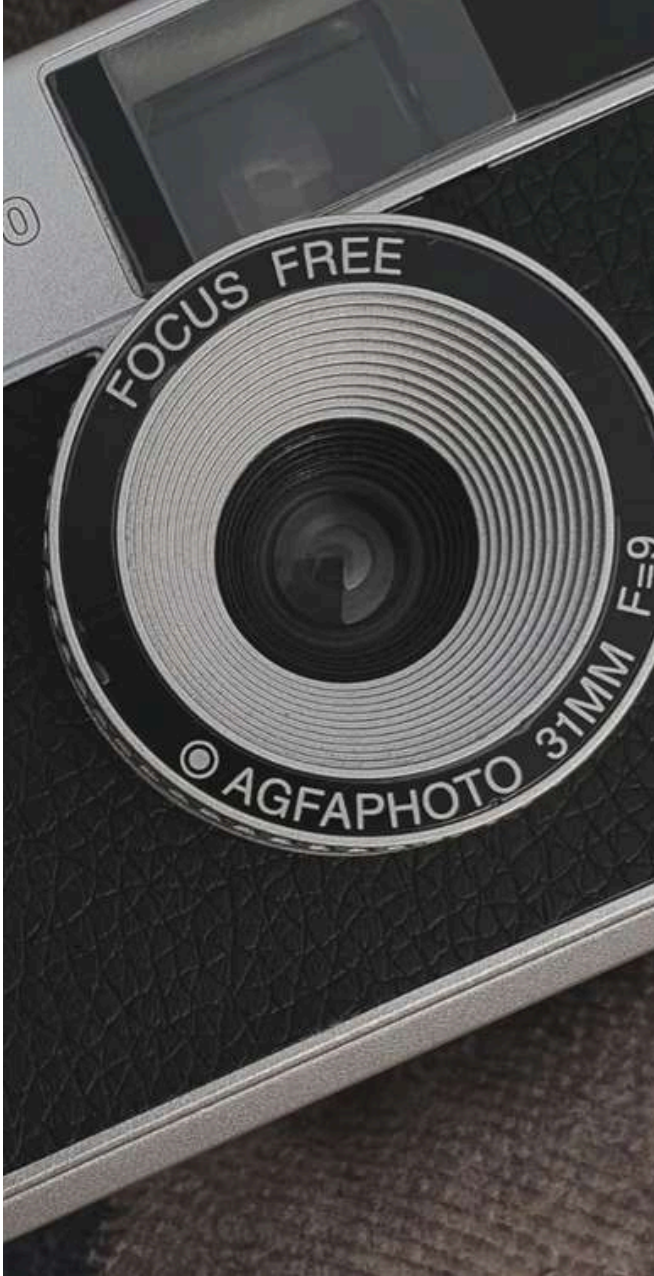- its power supply

The Flash

Most modern film cameras have an in-built flash. Unlike digital cameras, a film camera's flash is not automatic, so you need to switch in on if you're in a dimly lit environment.

The lens

AgfaPhoto models are equipped with what is known as a fixed lens.

In practical terms, a fixed lens means that you cannot zoom in to photograph distant subjects. A fixed lens is ideal for beginners because you'll get great shots without having to faff around with additional lenses. Zooming in with a film camera requires the use of different lenses, all of which will affect the accuracy of the lens.

A fixed lens will help you to get to grips with film photography: you'll learn how to move around and find the right angles to line up your shots! We recommend the 'grid technique' when lining up your subject. Imagine there's a regularly spaced grid behind your subject and use it to line up your subject for a beautifully composed shot!

Shutter speed

The shutter speed is the length of time the film is exposed to light, and is measured in fractions of a second. In practical terms, a fast shutter speed means you can capture highly detailed images and moving subjects. On the other hand, a slower shutter speed is best for getting artistic blurred effects, particularly with moving subjects.

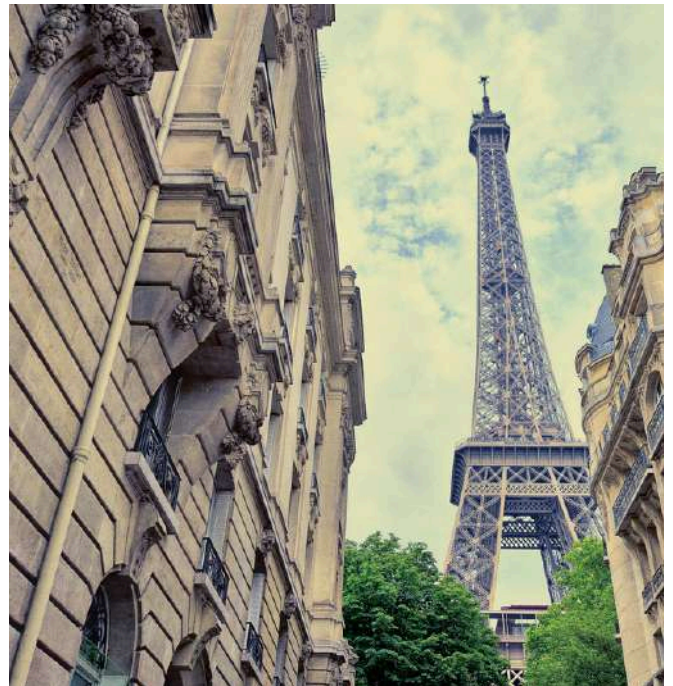# 3- Discover all possibilities that film photography has to offer

Film photography is loved by pros and amateurs alike. It offers a whole new way to appreciate photography whether it's how you handle your camera, line up your shots or how you display the developed photo.

FILM PHOTOGRAPHY: A SENSORY EXPERIENCE

The digital age has totally changed the way we take photos. In an age of digital cameras and smartphones with huge storage capacities, we all snap tons of photos and rarely think about printing them out. Film photography is the complete opposite of digital photography: it's slower, requires more thought and involves us in the authentic art of photography.

Loading the film, carefully lining up and framing our shots followed by the excitement of waiting for our photos to be developed: film photography involves specific steps before we get to show off the result. The limited number of exposures means less flexibility, so we need to think about how we're going to take the shot. And there's that huge feeling of satisfaction when we admire a photo that took a while to compose.

FILM CAMERAS FOR MORE AUTHENTIC SHOTS AND ARTISTIC POSSIBILITIES

The way film cameras work means they take unique photos. When it comes to tones and colour the images are a world apart from their digital equivalents. One of silver halid photography's distinctive features is the way highlights show up. If you take a landscape shot on a bright sunny day, you'll get a lovely velvety effect. Colours also come out differently: they have a nostalgic tone for an old-fashioned charm you'll only get from film photography!

While film photography is something everyone can enjoy, it's a wonderful way to perfect your photography skills. This type of photography encourages us to experiment, to try out different effects, to observe how colours and contrasts come out, to create soft-focus effects and to play with light.
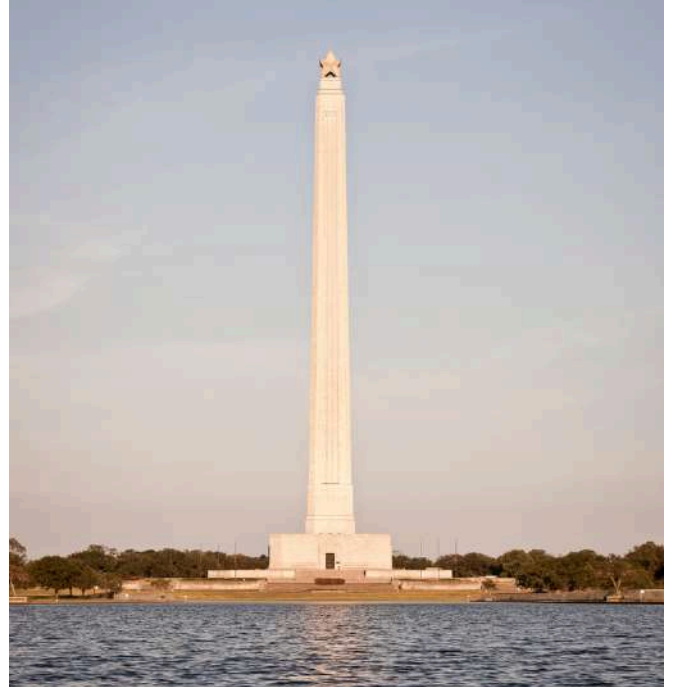
ANYWHERE, ANYTIME PHOTOGRAPHY THAT CAPTURES ANY MOOD

The charm of film photography lends itself to all situations whether you're larking about with the family in a park or globe-trotting around the world.

And film photography is a superb way to immortalise family moments. It's a way of bringing several generations together around a tactile medium, for a fun, shared experience. And for those generations who experienced the transition from film to digital, it's a lovely nostalgic experience!

Plus film photography is also an excellent way to get into more artistic photography. Take your film camera for a stroll through the streets to capture fleeting moments, photograph cool urban architecture, snap the flurry of passers-by or the changing light as evening falls.

Film photography is also perfect for portraits: it gives faces a special texture and captures the emotion of the moment in an authentic way. And a film camera is a must when you go on holiday so you get a unique record of the landscapes you admire and the people you meet. Plus, waiting to collect and admire your developed shots makes the holiday experience even more special!

So if you want to give film photography a go, check out our range - we have a colourful vintage-style model that's perfect for getting started!

MORE INFORMATION

On www.agfaphoto-gtc.com

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