

Why should photography be important for model builders?

by a novice photographer, intended for similar neophytes

An often neglected or “after-thought” aspect of model building is the photography of the build processes and finished results. So much work goes into producing exacting replicas, yet far too little thought and effort is consecrated to this component, including the acquisition of the proper equipment without, space-wise, turning one’s workshop into a photography studio; my own needs are summed up below, in purposes and equipment:

- I write detailed reviews of some models I build; thus, photographs of the smaller parts assemblies require micro lenses capabilities
- I photograph the actual aircraft I am reviewing, to avoid copyrights issues; these aircraft are in museums in Canada, the US, and Europe; some of these aircraft are located in such close quarters this relative proximity requires wide angle lens, even fisheye lens, to capture the relevant details
- I photograph aircraft in flight and on tarmacs (both from relative great distances), requiring sturdy tripods, and telephoto capabilities of up to 1600mm, preferably featuring Nikon’s Vibration Reduction (VR)
- I use photography to inspect my work, as some mistakes are not noticeable otherwise. I also send these photographs to the recipients of the models, so they have a photographic record of the build progress
- The Nikon Ultra-wide-angle zoom and Pro-Optics Fisheye lenses allows for creative large diorama photography, and aircraft in flight special effects

Why mostly Nikon? Quality, availability, compatibility, two-way loyalty

Simple: 20 years ago, I started photographing lighthouses (+/- 240 of these to date) on the east coast of Canada/USA, using a film Nikon F90X, which I still have. In the mid-2010s, I began shooting digital (most would say “About time!”, including myself), with a Nikon D7100, and acquiring a wider variety of Nikkor lenses, mostly for use inside air museums, and at home for the build reviews I write for Scale Modelling Now (UK). That is when I started getting serious about photography. Methinks I now own all the equipment I need, though temptation will assuredly lead to more acquisitions. And I am but a babe in the woods, “photography learning curve”-wise. I even hired the services of a private tutor to maximize my investment in time relative to results; why reinvent the wheel?

Cameras

7 Nikon bodies: D7100, D300, D90, D70, D50, D40, F90X

Secondary camera: Nikon Coolpix L340, w/lens adaptor, filter, flower hood

Lenses (“HB” denotes Nikon hoods)

1. 8mm DX f/3.5 Fisheye Pro-Optic w/flower hood
2. Nikon AF-P DX Ultra-wide angle zoom 10-20mm f/4.5-5.6G VR w/HB-81
3. Nikon AF-S DX 18-55mm f/3.5-5.6 w/Quantaray 52mm C-PL filter w/HB-69
4. Nikon AF-S DX Nikkor 18-135mm f/3.5-5.6G ED w/HB-32
5. Nikon AF DX Nikkor 24-120mm f/3.5-5.6D w/HB-11
6. Nikon AF FX Nikkor 28-105mm f/3.5-4.5D w/HB-18
7. Nikon AF-S DX Nikkor 55-200mm f/4-5.6 ED VR w/HB-37
8. Nikon AF-D ED FX Nikkor 70-300mm f/4-5.6G w/HB-15
9. Vivitar FX 75-200mm f/4.5 Macro Focusing Zoom w/Nikon F-Mount Adapter, hood
10. Yongnuo FX YN50mm f/1.8 AF G Large Aperture, for Nikon
11. Nikon AF-S DX Micro Nikkor 40mm f/2.8G w/HB-61
12. Nikon AF-S DX Micro Nikkor 85mm 1:35G ED VR w/HB-55
13. Sigma AF FX 100-600mmD f/4.5-6.7 for Nikon AF D mounts w/hood, including Tamron-F AF FX Tele-converter 2X N-AFd BBAR MC7
14. Opteka FX HD 420-1600mm f/8.3-16 w/2X Teleconverter, T-mount for Nikon, hood
15. Starscope Monocular Telescope Gen 2, for Smartphone camera

Remote shutters

D7100 Remotes: Shutter Cord MC-DC2; Infrared Wireless Shutter Control ML-L3

D300 Remote: Shutter Cord MC-30

Lighting

Constant lighting: two Lumahawk LMX-LD48A LED Ring Lights

Nikon Speedlight Flash SB-22s

Supplemental non lens-mounted lighting: Acetaken desk-clamped ring LED, 3-hues settings

Tripods

Tripods: Manfrotto MT190XPRO3 with MHXPRO-BHQ2 head; Velbon CX540, 3-way pan head

Chargers/spare batteries

Two spare D7100 batteries w/charger; spare D40 battery w/charger; D50, D70, D90 chargers;
D300 spare battery w/charger

Sundry

Assorted Nikon LensPen, memory cards, filters and anti-glare lens hoods

Five “Nikon for Dummies” books: D40, D50, D90, D300s, D7100

Backdrop, tarmacs

Airfield backdrop, 48” long x 18” high, on adjustable height photography table, with 48” x 24” tarmac; supplementary tarmacs (two): 18” x 20”, for build progress purposes; more below

Obsolete gear

Canon T50 w/FD 50mm f/2, Vivitar Macro Focusing 75-200mm Zoom, and Starblitz flash



Rear to front, left to right:

**Canon T50/FD 50mm f/2, Starblitz flash, Nikon LensPen
F90X/Sigma 100-600mm, D40/Opteka 420-1600mm, D50/28-105mm, D70/55-200mm
D90/24-120mm, D300/18-135, L340, Nikkor DX 10-20mm, Nikkor DX 85mm
Nikkor FX 70-300mm, Vivitar 75-200mm, 2 x Lumahawk Ring Lights, Nikkor DX 18-55mm
Nikkor 40mm, ML-L3 remote, Pro-Optic 8mm lens cap, Nikon SB-22 flash**

Not shown:

**D7100/8mm fisheye (used in taking the above photograph), Yongnuo FX Y N50mm, Starscope
Telescope, both tripods (one used in taking the photograph)**

Backdrop, tarmacs

The attached photographs illustrate in a nutshell the two main components. The backdrop, 48" in length and 18" in height, is a creation of W. Mark Roe, an aircraft enthusiast and a volunteer at the Montreal Aviation Museum; he photographed the 6 000-foot runway of the Gatineau-Ottawa Executive Airport as the trees were starting to sport their autumnal splendor; this montage of 6 panels is glued on a rigid 1/8" thick MDF board, secured in place atop a table:



The tarmac is made using 9" x 12" 100-grit light-grey sandpaper glued onto another 1/8" thick 4' x 2' MDF board, placed in front of the backdrop on that 30" high folding table; the joints are scribed, and then weathered using a constantly-sharpened graphite pencil; the excess graphite is dusted off, using a large soft paintbrush; one can add oil stains, tire marks, ... if so desired:



1:48 Canadair CT-114 Tutor in military livery (tint photoshopped lighter)



and the 1:32 CF-104 "12704", on permanent display at the Montreal Aviation Museum:

