

Micro

Northern California

Publishing

July 1994

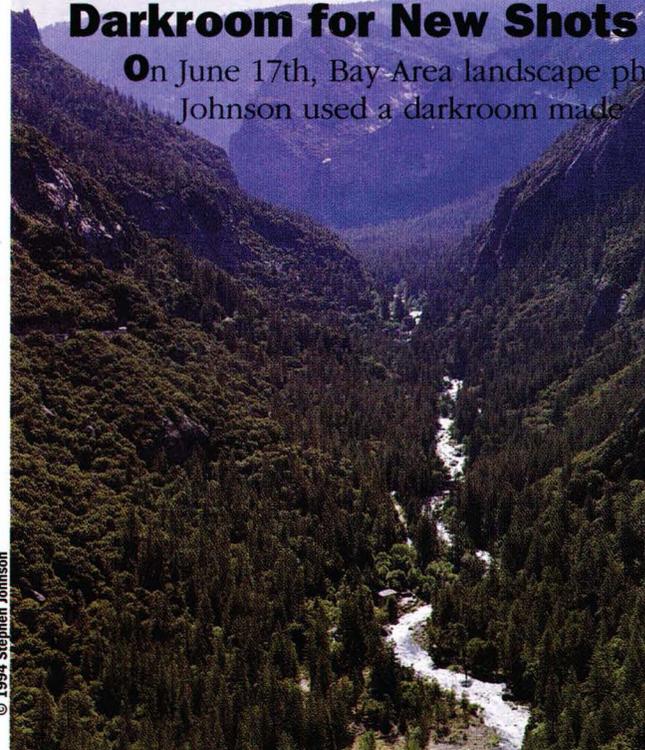
News

The Newspaper for Electronic Designers and Publishers

Digital Photographer Uses Ansel Adams Darkroom for New Shots of Yosemite

On June 17th, Bay-Area landscape photographer Stephen Johnson used a darkroom made famous by Ansel Adams to process and print a series of digital images captured in Yosemite Valley. Johnson used a 4x5-inch view camera with the Dicomed digital camera back to capture images from the locale immortalized in many of Adams' most famous photographs.

Johnson processed the images



© 1994 Stephen Johnson

Stephen Johnson used a Dicomed digital camera back to capture this image of Yosemite Valley.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHER

—continued from page 1

in the darkroom at the Ansel Adams Gallery in Yosemite using a Macintosh computer, Adobe Photoshop software, and a SuperMac Proof Positive dye sublimation printer.

"We had to have the printer set up somewhere," Johnson says. "We had to have AC current somewhere. It seemed like an appropriate place. The circular nature of it has not been lost on any of us."

Johnson, who knew Adams in the latter years of the famous photographer's life, is a well known landscape artist

who has also influenced the development of digital photography. His book and exhibition, *At Mono Lake*, toured the U.S. between 1980 and 1983 and led to a Congressional Special Recognition Award from the U.S. House of Representatives. He also developed the duotone curves used in Adobe Photoshop and designed a rotating film-strip negative carrier for the Leaf Digital Camera Back. His *Making a Digital Book*, published in 1993, described how he used computers to create *The Great Central Valley: California's Heartland*, a 264-page book published by University of California Press.

Johnson says that Adams, who helped him obtain funding for the Mono Lake



Stephen Johnson is using digital photography to shoot scenes in the same locale made famous by Ansel Adams.

project, would have been an advocate of digital photography. "He would have had Photoshop, and he would have been looking at this stuff," Johnson says.

Sarah Adams, director of fine prints for the gallery and granddaughter of Ansel Adams, agrees. "I think my grandfather would have loved this technology," she says. "He was always excited by new creative possibilities."

Johnson says that he was so excited by the project, he almost called Adams to tell him about it. "I thought

to myself that Ansel's got to see this. In my excitement, I lost track of time and space and forgot that it was 1994."

Johnson was one of the first photographers to experiment with the Dicomed digital back, which offers 7520-line resolution and works with any 4x5 view camera. Michael Collett, who invented the camera, approached Johnson to try his creation before Dicomed agreed to market the product.

The photographer acknowledges that the Dicomed camera was not primarily intended for outdoor work. Because of the camera's long exposure time, which ranges from 30 seconds to 15 minutes, it is targeted mostly at shooting still objects in a studio.

"It's clearly an issue, Johnson says. "The shortest exposure time is 30 to 40 seconds for a relatively low-resolution scan, and most exposures take around three minutes. Anything moving will record as an artifact. It will record the passing of time, like long exposures of film. It's like the early days of silver-based photography."

The ability to open and print an image as soon as he captures it also recalls the early days of photography, Johnson says. He notes that 19th century photographers like Carleton Watkins made their negatives and developed them on the spot, "bearing a striking resemblance to the immediacy of the digital process I am now experiencing."

Because of the long exposure time, Johnson says he is careful about where he sets up the camera for outdoor work. Among other challenges, the camera can be buffeted by winds, he says. At the same time, he says he is happy with the results he's gotten so far.

Johnson notes that digital technology has given photographers options they have always longed for: "the ability to be sure of the exposure and focus on the spot; to examine the image as rendered for composition, color, and mood; to assert control over the dynamic range of the image. It is very exciting to have all of these options without the color biases, grain, and contrast limitations of film."

The Yosemite project coincided with "Evolution: Digital Art," an exhibition of digital prints at the Ansel Adams Gallery. The exhibit included a display of Iris prints of Yosemite that were shot earlier by Johnson and produced on rag paper by Digital Pond, a San Francisco service bureau. On October 1, the exhibition will move to the new Ansel Adams Gallery at the Inn at Spanish Bay in Pebble Beach. The gallery will also sponsor a symposium on digital photography October 15. For more information, call the gallery at (209) 372-4413.