

# Large Format Photography: An Introduction to The View Camera

## Course Requirements

This is an active hands-on course. It requires that you spend time, energy, and activity using a view camera, experimenting with its functions and capabilities, and creating interesting photographs. As you do this, you will come to understand in a real way what you can only ever know in a superficial way by reading about large format photography. You will be expected to photograph every week, and to bring work to show at every class.

According to the Registrar, letter grades A through F have the following meanings: Exceptional, Good, Acceptable, Poor, Failure. If you care about your grade, there are at least three things you can do to improve your chances for success.

1. Come to class. It's worth a third of your grade.
2. Turn in assignments every week. They are worth one third of your grade.
3. Make interesting photographs. The effort and quality you put into your work is worth one third of your grade.

Enthusiasm and a good attitude toward work will be an asset in this course. Extra weight will be given for work produced in the second half of the course, once basic technical issues are solved. Exceptional students take heed. Talk to me if this, or anything else covered in this course, is not clear.

The first part of the course will have assignments with some structure. During the second half of the semester you will be expected to work on photographs that have some personal interest to you. Your final presentation will come from this body of work. Along the way, we will look at your progress weekly. You won't benefit from comment and criticism unless you have something to show and are present to show it.

Although I have been a photographer for more than thirty years, making interesting photographs is still the essential problem. You will have to figure this one out on your own since everyone is so very different. The best suggestion I can give you is to approach your work with interest, curiosity, enthusiasm, and thoughtfulness. Don't be afraid of mistakes. Photography what you like, in a way that shows commitment. Have fun. And with all of this equipment, don't hurt your back.

## Course Site

A course web site is at [woodypackard.com/auvc](http://woodypackard.com/auvc). I will post as much as I can there, including information about your assignments, additional reading you can do, some notes on subjects we cover in class or don't have time to cover in class. You can also check your current standing by logging in to *Progress* with your last name and a password that you give me in class.

## Equipment

You and your partner will be issued a 4x5 view camera with lens, a tripod, a case, 4 film holders, a dark cloth, a cable release, a light meter, and a cart to haul it all around with. At the end of the semester, we will expect to get this equipment back in good condition.

## Technical Problems

Although this is not strictly a technical course, photographic results depend on technical proficiency. Basic photographic proficiency is a prerequisite for taking this course. You must be able to show results each week, so if you're having trouble with this part of the process, we need to talk and find a solution sooner rather than later.

For questions about the view camera or its operation, you should feel free to ask me questions in class, or during the week by calling me at my studio— 585 232-1187. I get email at [wood@woodypackard.com](mailto:wood@woodypackard.com), so if your question requires a really brief answer this will work. (Email gets lower priority than a phone call and is less useful in solving a problem of any complexity.)

For questions about processing your film I will probably refer you to or with cameras or lenses that are broken, talk to Hope Zacagni, x2545.

## Large Format Photography

The purpose of this course is to give you a working sense of the advantages and use of the 4x5 view camera. Although the term *Large Format* has looser definitions than this, we are interested in this one narrow definition, first because that is what kind of camera we have available for you to use, and second, because this particular tool offers more control over the image than other representatives of the *Large Format* clan. As you will soon learn, it is hard to justify the inconvenience of this method of photography unless you value control of the photographic image. This camera is not for dilettantes.

The advantages of the view camera fall into several broad categories. Here is an overview.

### ***Advantages of Larger Film***

Large film provides more image area and requires less enlargement to get to a given size of print. If your definition of image quality includes an absence of film grain and a maximum of optical sharpness, larger film will provide you with more quality in your images. There are also advantages to the fact that your film does not come on a roll. Each sheet can be given individual treatment for optimal development and contrast.

### ***Advantages of Camera Movements***

With the view camera comes the ability to align every plane of the camera with any plane of your subject, allowing you to control which plane is in focus, which plane is out of focus, and to a significant extent, how you render the inherent perspective of your subject. Through the use of the camera's swings, tilts, shifts, rises and falls you can make decisions about how, exactly, you want to translate your three dimensional scene to the two dimensions of your film.

### ***Advantages of Manual Controls***

Although a few manufacturers work at the effort to automate the view camera, one of the chief advantages of it are that it is not automated. You directly control the lens's aperture, the length of time the shutter is open, the focus, the number of times you expose each sheet of film. If nothing else, you will come to appreciate what can and can't be done with other more popular kinds of cameras.

### ***Advantages of Working Methodically***

Finally, and probably most importantly if you will be making a career out of photography, there is an advantage to working in *the view camera way*, slowing down and paying attention to the image instead of just the subject. Because of everything I've listed above, it is impossible to use a view camera without thinking about what you are going to do with it. It requires time, attention, care, and intent, all qualities that can be transferred to other areas of photography. Once the initial learning curve is over, the mechanics of operating the camera give you time to actually think about your image, and each mechanical step provides an opportunity to make another decision.

The view camera also has disadvantages. It would not be fair to ignore this fact, but you will soon discover plenty of them on your own. Fourteen weeks from now, you will have had an opportunity to weigh some of these strengths and weaknesses. I am hoping you'll have a good time learning, and that you put its advantages to use in making some wonderful photographs.