



## THE RIGHT DIGITAL CAMERA FOR YOU

MAYBE YOURS IS TOO SLOW, TOO BIG, OR, after that camping incident, too broken. Whatever your reason for needing a new digital camera, the good news is that innovation in this industry never stops. The hardest part? Finding the one best suited to your needs.

For weekend trips, today's much smarter point-and-shoots work fine. But anyone itching for something more advanced should try

the "prosumer" models, which package better quality and more manual input in an easy-to-schlep form. And for those who want full creative control, a digital SLR (single lens reflex) camera is the ticket. Even on lower-range models, high-end features like Live View monitors are becoming common.

We tested cameras in all categories to select the very best of each. —DAVID BECKER

### DETAIL:

The Nikon D700's weatherproof magnesium alloy body can take a hit and a splash.

### ▲ NIKON D700

Nikon's taken its premier SLR, the \$5,000 D3, and essentially shoved it into a smaller body, complete with the same amazing 12-megapixel, full-frame sensor. The D700 also boasts superb low-light sensitivity, with an ISO that maxes at 25600. (Most cameras top out at 3200.) You'll need a chiropractor, though — it weighs more than two pounds without a lens. [*\$3,000 for body only; nikonusa.com*] ■■■■■■ 9

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## DIGITAL SLR

▶ **CANON REBEL XS**

To help SLR novices, the 10-megapixel Rebel XS comes with an 18-55mm lens. The "lighting optimizer" can automatically balance shadows and bright spots, and the one-click "picture style" tweaks ensure pleasing images out of the gate. It's light, too, at just under a pound. The seven-point autofocus sometimes struggles, but otherwise, the Rebel is a winner. [\$700; [usa.canon.com](http://usa.canon.com)]

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## TRANSLATION

Cameras are always evaluating what "white" is. Better rigs let you customize it by aiming them at something—a sheet of paper or Irish skin.

◀ **OLYMPUS E-520**

The 10-megapixel E-520 has a revised optical image-stabilizing system to counteract shaking, and "shadow compensation" to preserve details in the corners. Advanced photographers will appreciate wireless sync with an external flash and easy custom white-balance settings. One problem: Autofocus is slow when composing shots on the LCD, and the viewfinder offers a small image for an SLR. [\$600 for body only; [olympusamerica.com](http://olympusamerica.com)]

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## HOW TO SHOOT BETTER PICTURES

*Because upgrading your hardware is only half the battle, here are three professional tricks to improve your technique.*

**LANDSCAPES: NO BRIGHT LIGHTS**

Try to snap outdoor scenes an hour before sunset or after sunrise, which cinematographers call the "magic hour" for the warm glow that intensifies color and cuts glare. If you must shoot at noon, turn down exposure (or EV) compensation a few notches to adjust for the sun.

**INDOORS: DITCH THE FLASH**

The average flash has a 20-foot range, so it's useless in big spaces like auditoriums and cathedrals. Shoot in low light without a flash by ratcheting down shutter speed and raising the ISO to, say, 400 or 800. To avoid blur, set the camera on something steady and use the timer function.

**PORTRAITS: FIND NEW ANGLES**

Snapping a person from below adds drama, while shooting from above makes the subject stand out strongly against the background. And go long: Maxing out the camera's zoom softens skin blemishes that would be revealed by a wide-angle lens stuck in the subject's face.

## PROSUMER



## ▶ RICOH GX200 VF KIT

The new 12-megapixel GX200 combines Ricoh staples — a superbly detailed wide-angle lens and a removable periscope-style viewfinder — with a few new talents. A level indicator helps ensure straight horizons, and in-camera editing functions let you correct color and exposure. Ricoh has only a couple of U.S. distributors, so don't expect easy warranty service. [\$750; [ricoh.com](http://ricoh.com)]



## TRANSLATION

The pause between hitting the button and the camera shooting. One-tenth of a second or less is fine for anything save extreme sports shots.

## ◀ PANASONIC LUMIX DMC-LX3

The 10-megapixel DMC-LX3 is a pocket-friendly digital SLR, thanks to a large 1/1.63-inch image sensor that creates stunning pictures. Also impressive: an image-processing engine that reduces shutter lag to .005 seconds, meaning you won't miss a shot of fast-moving subjects. We wished it had a viewfinder, though, and lamented the measly 2.5x optical zoom. [\$500; [panasonic.com](http://panasonic.com)]

## ▼ KODAK Z1015

If you want to get up close to the birdies with an SLR camera, you'll need a lens as big as a horse's leg. But with Kodak's newest compact "superzoom" camera, telescopic power comes standard in the form of a 15x lens. "Smart Capture" promises click-and-brag shooting, while RAW mode will appeal to advanced shooters. The small image sensor likely means some noise, though. [\$299; [kodak.com](http://kodak.com)]



## TRANSLATION

Instead of saving pics as JPEGs, high-end cameras can save them as RAW files, which use more memory but contain more visual info for Photoshopping.

## LIES MY SALESPERSON TOLD ME

## "ELECTRONIC IS AS GOOD AS OPTICAL"

By now you know that digital zoom means nothing and optical zoom is the one true way. The same goes for image stabilization, which keeps the shaking of your hand from ruining shots in low light or at long zooms. "Electronic image stabilization" just boosts light sensitivity — and with it, noise in photos. Demand optical stabilization, which can be lens- or sensor-based.

## "MEGAPIXELS DETERMINE QUALITY"

The most touted number on a camera is usually its resolution, expressed in millions of pixels, a.k.a. megapixels. The Man wants you to believe that higher is better, but cramming more pixels into a small camera is a recipe for blurry shots. All you need for good 9-by-12 prints is eight megapixels. More than 10 on a point-and-shoot is overkill.

## "YOU'LL NEED THESE EXTRA MODES"

The be-poleed salesperson will try to impress you by cycling through a point-and-shoot's 35 different scene modes, which optimize settings for specific scenarios: one for landscapes, one for beach shots, one for grandparents sitting on a patio on an overcast day drinking iced tea. Truth is, more than 12 is hell to scroll through, and auto mode will get you the best shot 99 percent of the time.

