Digital …

A monthly column by Harry

This will be a monthly column of digital questions and answers, alternating between beginner, intermediate and advanced questions. Please send me your questions – and comments – by email to **harry.iris@usa.net**; I will answer them directly as best I can and use some of them for this column. The first question is most relevant to intermediate level photographers.

How to shoot in RAW and why?

Is your style to make each image perfect as shot? If so, stay with JPEG. Also, photojournalists, who lack time to "develop" their images, shoot in JPEG. But, if you will develop your images using a computer, *the RAW file format provides more flexibility to make changes without loss of quality*. See here for an example.

To shoot in RAW: find the *Quality* menu option on your camera. If it supports RAW (some small cameras don't) then choose "RAW" or "RAW+JPEG". "RAW+JPEG" is a good way to start: it gives you two files for each image. Then shoot as normal. Be careful with focusing and exposure (Av, Tv, ISO) settings as before but don't worry about white balance and other development settings.

RAW files contain more information, so they are larger than JPEG files. You may need a larger memory card for shooting in RAW. The camera may take longer to write the RAW file to the memory card especially if you take several shots quickly. To take multiple shots quickly, temporarily switch back to JPEG. RAW is OK for automatic exposure bracketing.

RAW files may be invisible or unrecognized by your computer's built-in software, so you will use additional programs to view and process RAW files on your computer. These programs adjust the images and output them in the JPEG format for printing, email etc.

Programs in the Adobe Photoshop family (Lightroom, CS-, and Elements) work well with RAW images. Unfortunately, RAW formats change when new cameras are released. If your Adobe software doesn't read your camera's RAW file directly, convert the files to DNG. Use the free converter at www.adobe.com/support/downloads/detail.jsp?ftpID=4034 .

Once you get used to shooting in RAW, you will find it is much easier to just do than it is to explain. Give it a try!