

HIGH PRAISE

Adrian Malloch puts a premium inkjet printer through its paces—with impressive results.



EPSON
SURECOLOR
P800 A2

» **ALTHOUGH I HAVE** used a variety of great professional-quality printers over the past two decades, I have never bought one of my own. There has always been some niggling problem to prevent me from splurging.

But after a solid week printing with the new Epson P800, I am firmly of the opinion that it is good enough. The visual faults that I previously associated with inkjet prints are no longer noticeable. No bronzing shows when viewing prints against the light at odd angles. No metamerism, or differing colour casts under different light sources. All colours print true, from delicate pastels through to demanding skin tones and deep, saturated shades.

Fine detail in high-key areas was not disrupted by the ink-dot pattern (as was the case with the 3800 series) and as for detail and sharpness, the P800 is not the limiting factor—at least with my photographs.

No matter which paper I used, there was a significant improvement in colour and shadow depth compared to previous printers. I suspect this is mostly due to the updated Epson Ultrachrome HD inkset that comes with the P800 and its sibling, the P600

(which prints A3 and larger).

My overriding impression from the P800 is that prints have a natural, three-dimensional quality. For the first time, I could look at an inkjet print without wanting to compare it to a traditional darkroom print—instead it's as though I'm looking at the photograph itself.

I tested the P800 with a wide range of papers, including Epson Traditional Photo paper (an exhibition-grade fibre-based paper with a soft gloss surface and broad tonal range), Epson Premium Luster photo paper (a good all-rounder day-to-day paper), Epson Cold Press bright (a very white matte paper) and Epson Velvet Fine Art paper (a warmer matte paper with a bit more tooth in the texture). Both matte papers held detail well into the shadows with a high apparent Dmax.

The P800 was mostly a joy to use. Set-up needs care and double-checking between the printer-driver and the onboard settings, but it was suitably foolproof; warning me whenever I was using the wrong paper or feed tray.

The paper feed was the only source of frustration. Inserting heavier fine art papers into the front manual feed tray, which accepts media up to 1.5 millimetres thick, was a

battle of wits. The P800 constantly insisted that the paper was skewed; the key was to keep tapping the load button until it finally accepted the paper and proceeded to print perfectly.

Printing a stitched panorama 1300 millimetres long was very cool—and I could have printed to 15 metres long with the current Epson driver.

The P800 has eight large 80-millilitre ink tanks and matte black with auto-switching, Wifi connectivity, AirPrint via Apple devices, and remote printing with Epson

iPrint and Google Cloud. I printed mostly from Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop using Epson colour management, which I found to be superior to Adobe's. The Epson-supplied print profiles were very accurate but if you have the equipment and skill, then making your own custom profile is likely to produce even better results.

The P800 is good enough to be a part of any professional photographer's equipment—and will make you re-evaluate your photographs and processing to ensure you are good enough for the P800.

ADRIAN MALLOCH

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