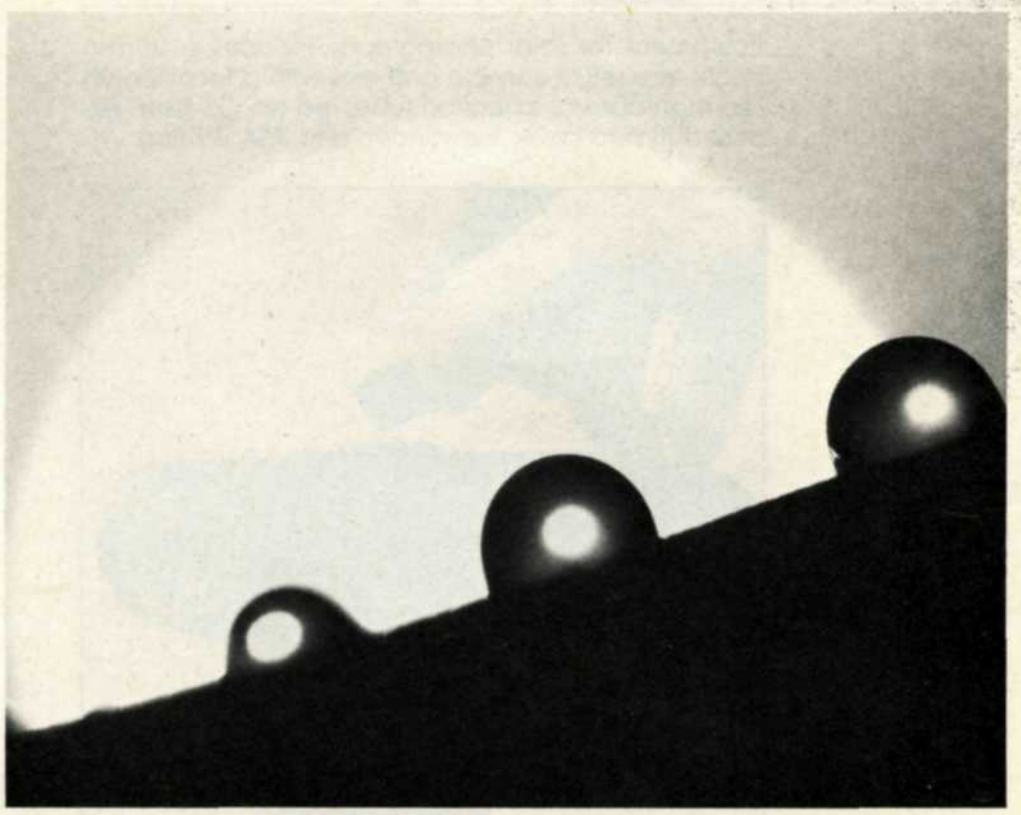
PUT THE SUN IN YOUR SHOTS



The most striking photos of the sun depict it as a huge fireball that dominates all other subjects in the scene. Solar photography used to require extremely long and expensive lenses, but today, any photographer can create giant suns without using lenses with focal lengths in the thousands of millimeters. In fact, your 35mm single-lens reflex camera and 50mm normal lens, fitted with a simple viewing device, a red filter and an extension tube, can produce stunning solar photographs.

NEVER LOOK AT THE SUN

Before discussing just how solar photographs are made, a few words on eye and camera safety are in order. A photographer's eyes are his most valuable tools, so be sure you never look directly at the sun, with or without a camera. Since this technique includes the sun in the picture, and you'll be shooting directly at the fiery orb, you'll need a solar-viewing filter to protect your eyes.

MAKE YOUR OWN SOLAR FILTER

To make your own viewing filter, simply develop a strip of black-and-white negative film (previously exposed to white light) until it turns a rich black. Wash the

Various organic forms were juxtaposed against the sun to create the photographs on these pages. Photos were made outdoors with an Olympus OM-10 camera and simple solar viewing filter, 50mm Zuiko macro lens fitted with an extension tube and red No. 25 (A) filter, and Kodak Panatomic-X Film, exposed for 1/1000 at f/1.4 (wide-open for this lens).

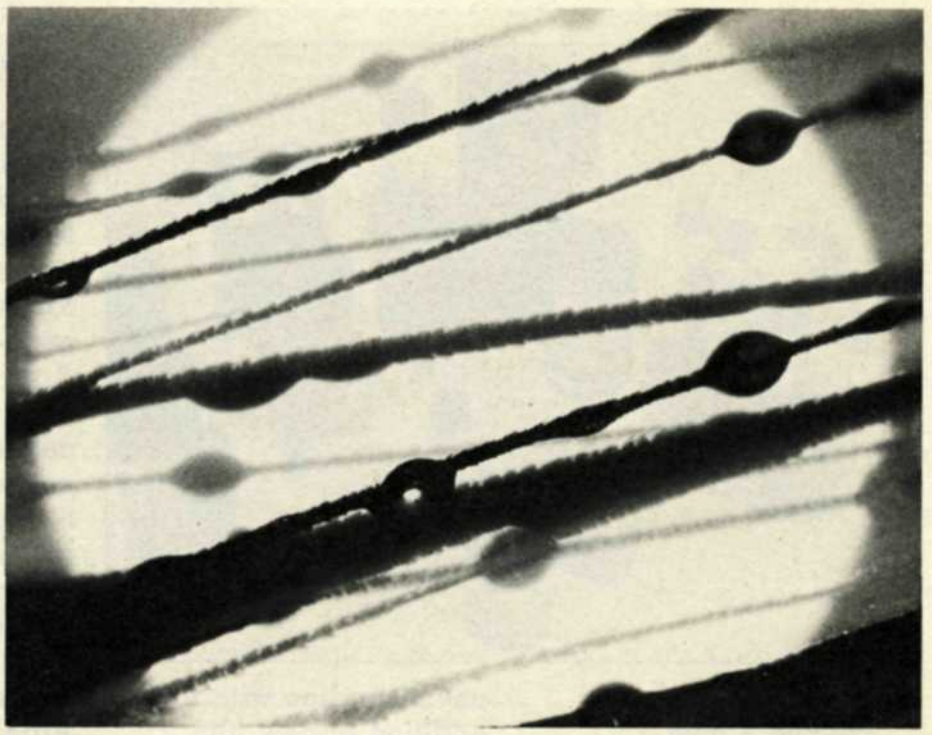
SUN SHOTS

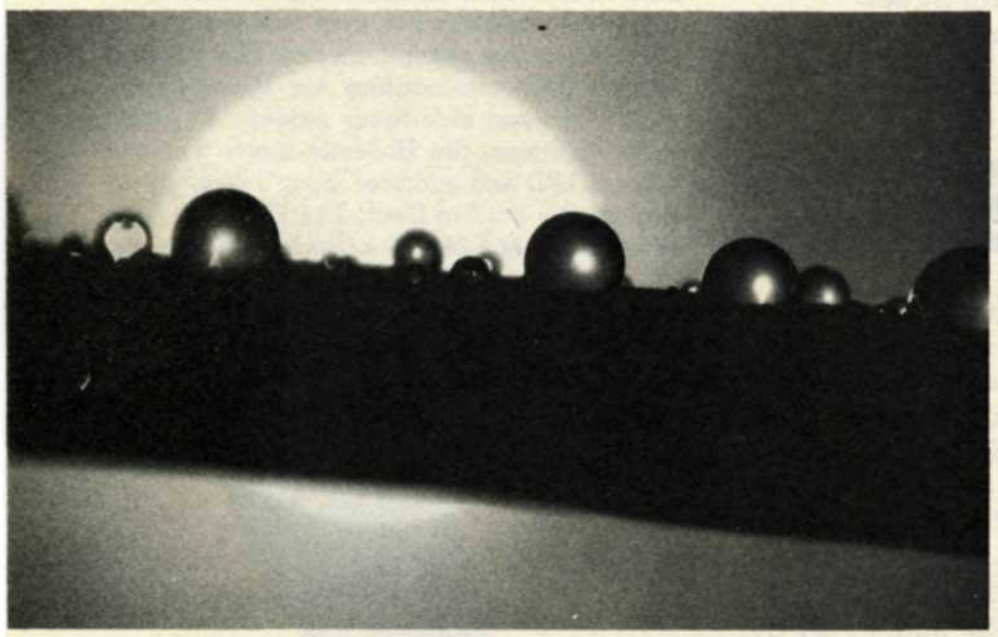
Equipment for solar photography includes a 35mm single-lens-reflex camera and lens with a focal length less than 80mm, extension tube, red No. 25 filter, exposed film to cover viewfinder, and ASA 25 film.

Solar viewing filter is simply a strip of exposed black-and-white negative, cut to fit over the eyepiece of the camera and attached with black tape. This viewing filter should always be attached when you include the sun in your shots, to protect your eyes.

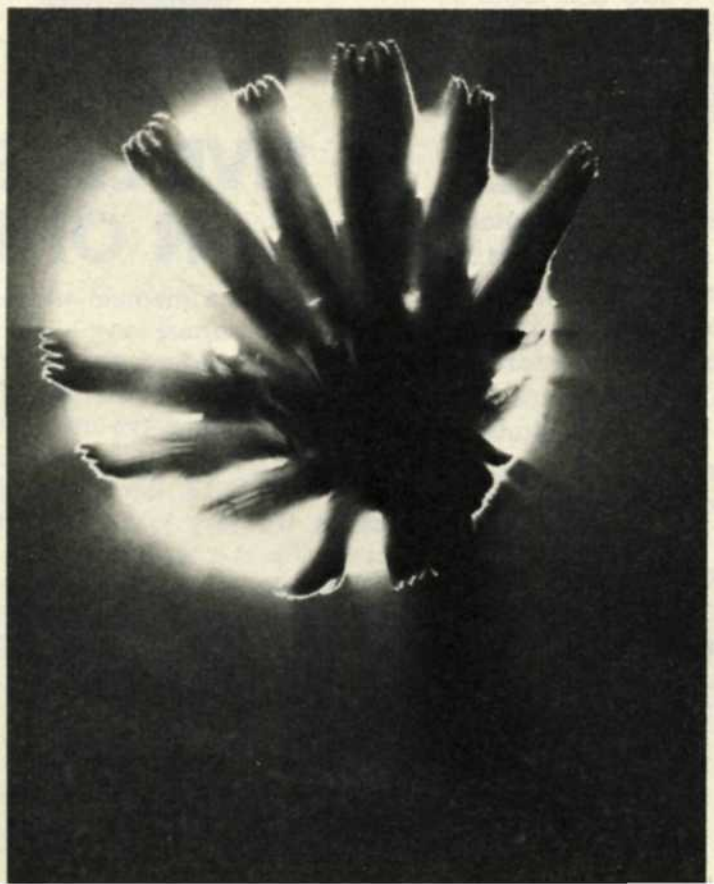
film, fix and dry. All of this can be done in normal light. Cut out a small piece of this film and mount it to the eyepiece of the camera. This will act as your solar-viewing filter. It should be very difficult to see an image through the viewfinder.

Now all that remains is to prepare your camera lens for solar photography. Attach a deep red, No. 25 (A) filter to an f/2.8 or slower camera lens with a focal length





ALL PHOTOS BY THE AUTHORS



By Jack and Sue Drafahl

BACKLIGHT WITH THE FIERY ORB

less than 80mm. Mount this lens on an extension tube (extension tube and red filter can be purchased at any camera store), and attach to your camera. With the red filter and extension tube on the front of your camera, and the solar-viewing filter over the eyepiece, your camera is now safe for solar photography.

THE FILM

Use slow, (ASA 25-32) black-and-white film. Make sure the red filter is on the front of your lens and the viewing filter is mounted on the camera eyepiece. Now, turn the focus control on the lens to the closest focusing distance, set the f-stop to wide open and the shutter speed to 1/1000 second.

FOCUS ON SUBJECT

Locate a small macro subject, like a flower, water drop or leaf. Place the subject between your camera lens and the sun. Focus on the subject by moving the camera back and forth as you look through the eyepiece, protected by the viewing filter. You can vary the placement of the sun by moving the camera from side to side. When the subject is in sharp focus, and the sun is placed correctly, take the picture. Remember not to look directly at the sun when your eyes are not protected by the viewing filter.

SIMULATED SUN

If the sun doesn't cooperate and chooses to stay behind the clouds, you can simulate a solar photograph by using a small light bulb to achieve similar, backlit results. No red filter or exposed film over the eyepiece is necessary when you're using a light bulb as your source of illumination. The camera should be set up with the same lens and extension tube, though.

With an artificial light source, a faster film can be used to minimize camera movement. Focus the lens at the closest focusing distance and move five to ten feet away from the bulb. Select a small subject and again move the camera back and forth for focus, and side to side for placement of the light. Auto-exposure or manual metering can be used to determine exposure.

Solar and artificial-light photos both require that the lens aperture be wide open during the entire shooting session. If the lens is stopped down, using either method, the sun will turn into a hexagonal shape, instead of the familiar round orb.

WHAT ABOUT COLOR?

To take color photographs utilizing the natural sun method, use the same technique as for black-and-white photos. Use slow, ASA 25 color film, and expect to see a yellow sun with multi-toned reds around it. Using the alternate, light-bulb method, a variety of colors can be created, especially when you experiment with different color and special-effects filters.

HOW ABOUT SOME MIST?

We've found that a simple water atomizer can be a very helpful item for backlit, solar photography. By spraying mist on small subjects before photographing them, you can enhance the picture and create a natural, dewy effect. The more you experiment with this and other techniques, the better and more varied the results.

The sun, after all, is more than an energy source. It's also a perfect light source and a fantastic subject for some very unusual photographs. So throw out the old rule that the sun has to be over your right or left shoulder at a 45° angle to your subject, or whatever else you may have learned. This is the exception that proves the rule. Protect your eyes, protect your camera, and shoot for the sun! □