200

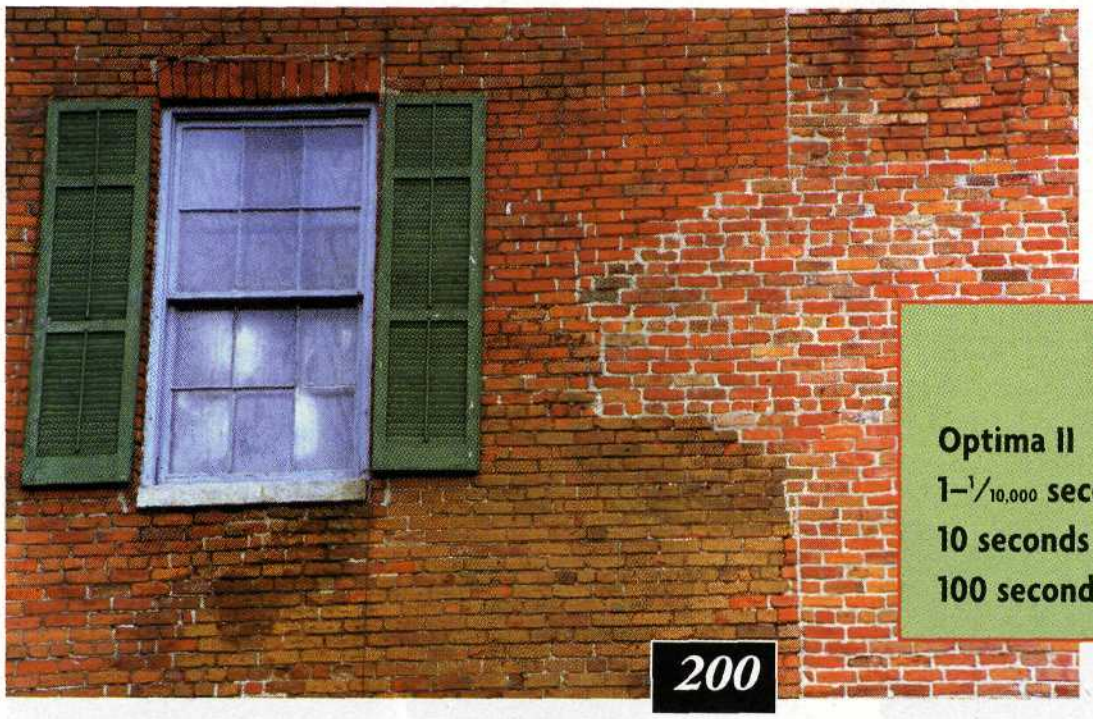
AGFA Optima II Prestige

ALL PHOTOS BY JACK AND SUE DRAFAHL

Pro color-print film family gets even better

by Jack and Sue Drafahl

The level of film quality is ever improving. Today, the competition to grab a piece of the silver pie means the constant introduction of new and better films. The moment of glory does not last long, though, because as soon as a new emulsion is introduced, engineers start working on ways to improve it even more.



Left, and opposite page top: **Optima II Prestige 200 has it all—rich and accurate colors from highlights through shadows, sharp rendition of fine detail, minimal grain, wide exposure latitude and a highly useful ISO 200 film speed.**

Reciprocity Effect

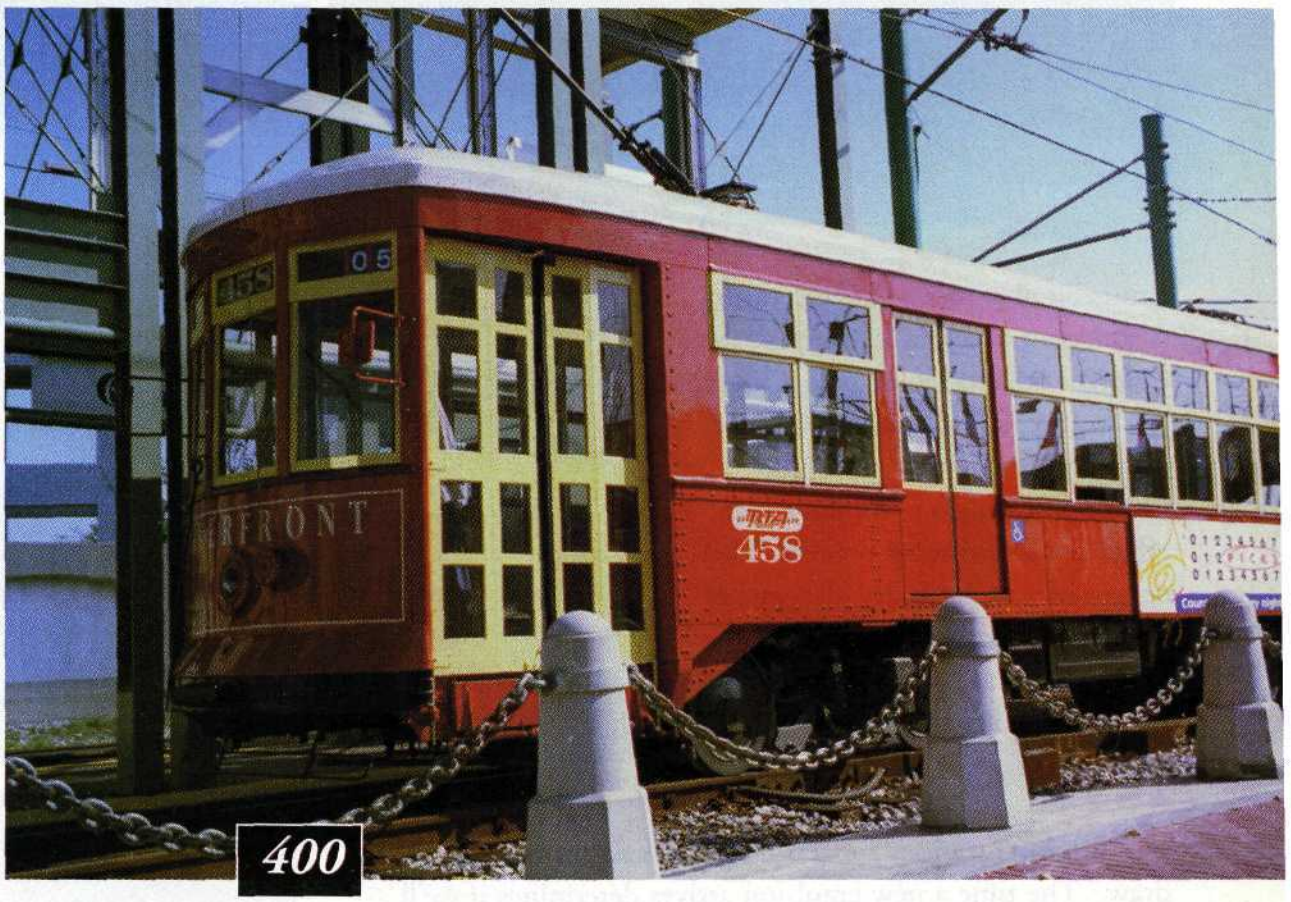
Optima II	100	200	400
1–1/10,000 second	0	0	0
10 seconds	+ ½	+1	+1
100 seconds	+1½	+2	+2

Agfa's most recent contribution to the professional color-negative market is a tweaked version of their Optima emulsion. The new 35mm family, dubbed Optima II Prestige, consists of three emulsions, ISO 100, 200 and 400, which offer a new level of Agfacolor quality to the professional photographer. The quality level of the original film family was really quite good, but the new emulsions offer improvements to grain and color fidelity, and an increased tonal range at the lower end of the curve.

In years past, researching technical data on a new emulsion was often a difficult task. We usually called the manufacturer, and then dealt with being passed from one person to the next. A week or two later we got our data in the mail. When the fax became the norm, we could get our information in less than 48 hours. (Is this story dating us or what?) Today, we merely send an e-mail to our manufacturer's contact, and magically "We got mail."

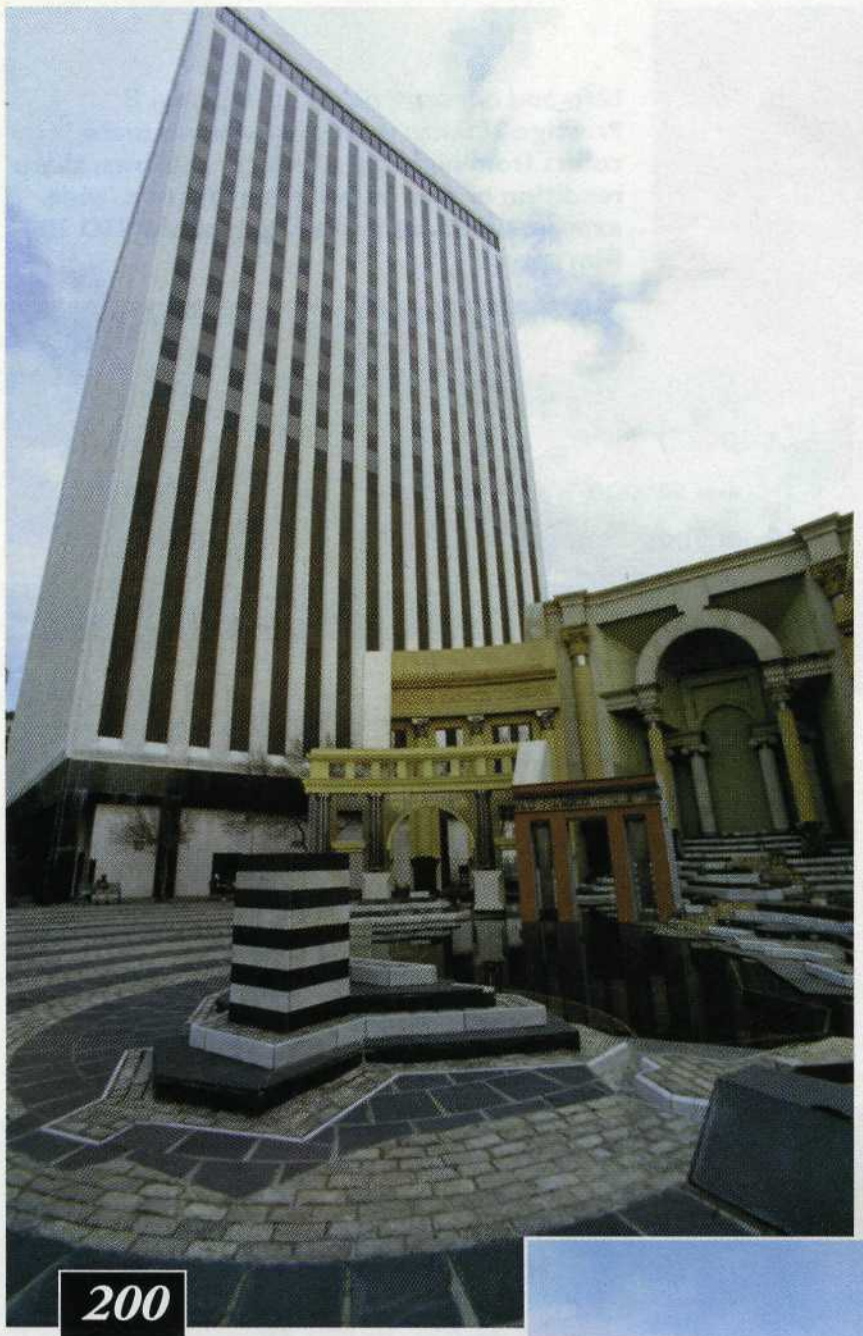
Recently, when we opened the Adobe PDF file from Agfa, we were pleasantly surprised to see a new tech-sheet format. Instead of creating a specific tech sheet for each film, Agfa created an "Agfa Range of Film" tech sheet that provides a side-by-side comparison of all their professional films. From all indications on the tech sheets, the ISO 100 and 200 emulsions are definitely new and improved versions, but the ISO 400 looks to be a re-packaged, re-named version. We guess the old adage fits that if it works and ain't broke, then don't fix it.

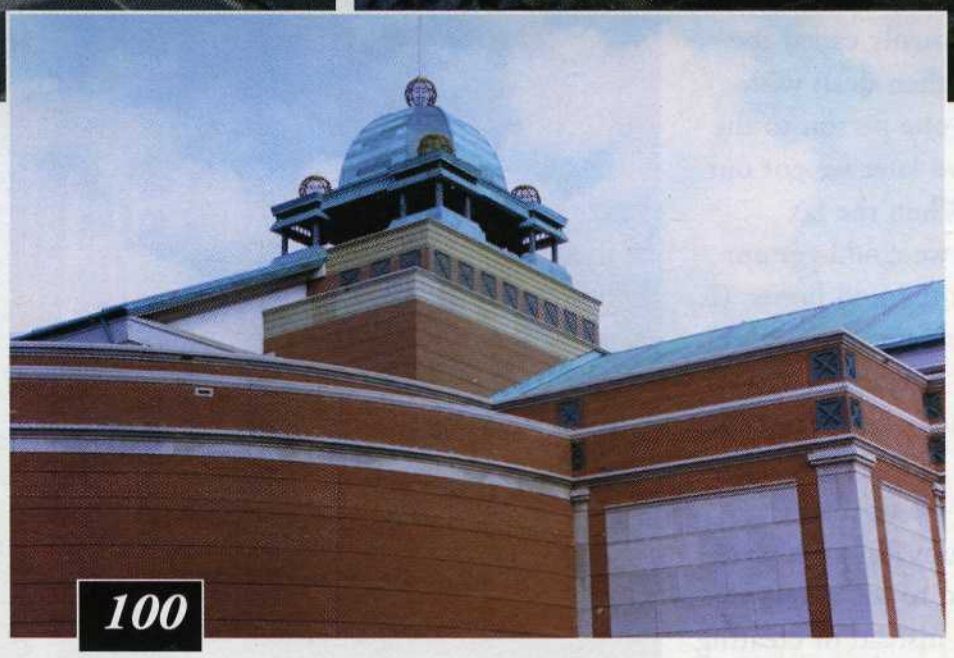
Getting back to the specifications of the Optima II emulsions, we find that the photochemical engineer's saying of "flatter is better" applies to this emulsion. Using a technology called SEM (Surface Enhanced Multistructured) crystals, Agfa enlarged the surface area of the crystals, thereby decreasing the amount of crystals needed to maintain the same ISO. SEM crystals extract up to 30% more light than conventional crystals, so these crystals produce a finer, denser grain structure. The light-scattering effects are also minimized because of the thinner emulsion. All this gives the final image increased definition and image detail, which produces higher-quality enlargements.



A new color coupler is responsible for improvements in color fidelity and color shade differentiation. The Super Inter-Image Effects (Super IIE) extends the range of the information collected at the lower end of the characteristic curve. This results in greater color saturation in the darker areas of the picture. These new improvements to the Optima II

Above: **Optima II Prestige 400 delivers beautiful colors, fine grain and excellent sharpness for the speed, and is a great all-around color-print film, whether or not you need the benefits of its high speed. Detail is good throughout, from shadows to highlights.**





All three Optima II Prestige emulsions are balanced to print (and scan) with the same settings, and to yield matched results—we couldn't tell which film was which with our naked eyes. We liked all three Prestige films very much.

emulsion also increase the stability of the gray tones, which makes it easier to balance color prints. Each of the three emulsions is balanced to the others so that switching from one emulsion will have little effect in the printing process. This emulsion compatibility also makes the digital process easier, since you can set up one pre-scan setting for all three emulsions.

IN USE

Selecting locations for testing films is basically "luck of the draw." The time a new emulsion arrives determines if we'll shoot it locally or at some distant location. Much as we like to photograph waterfalls, sunsets on the beach, and other highlights of the Pacific Northwest, we are always looking for a change of scenery. The Optima II test coincided with our convention trip to New Orleans. Mardi Gras was not for a few more weeks, but the color and flavor of New Orleans were alive and well. We rotated all three emulsions through a point-and-shoot 35mm camera and a Nikon F5 so that each film had to perform in all conditions. Now that may sound like a weird combination of cameras, but these two gave us the most

Filters for Artificial Light

Photo lamps 3400 K	80B	+1½ stop
Photo lamps 3200 K	80A	+2 stop

Fluorescent lamps

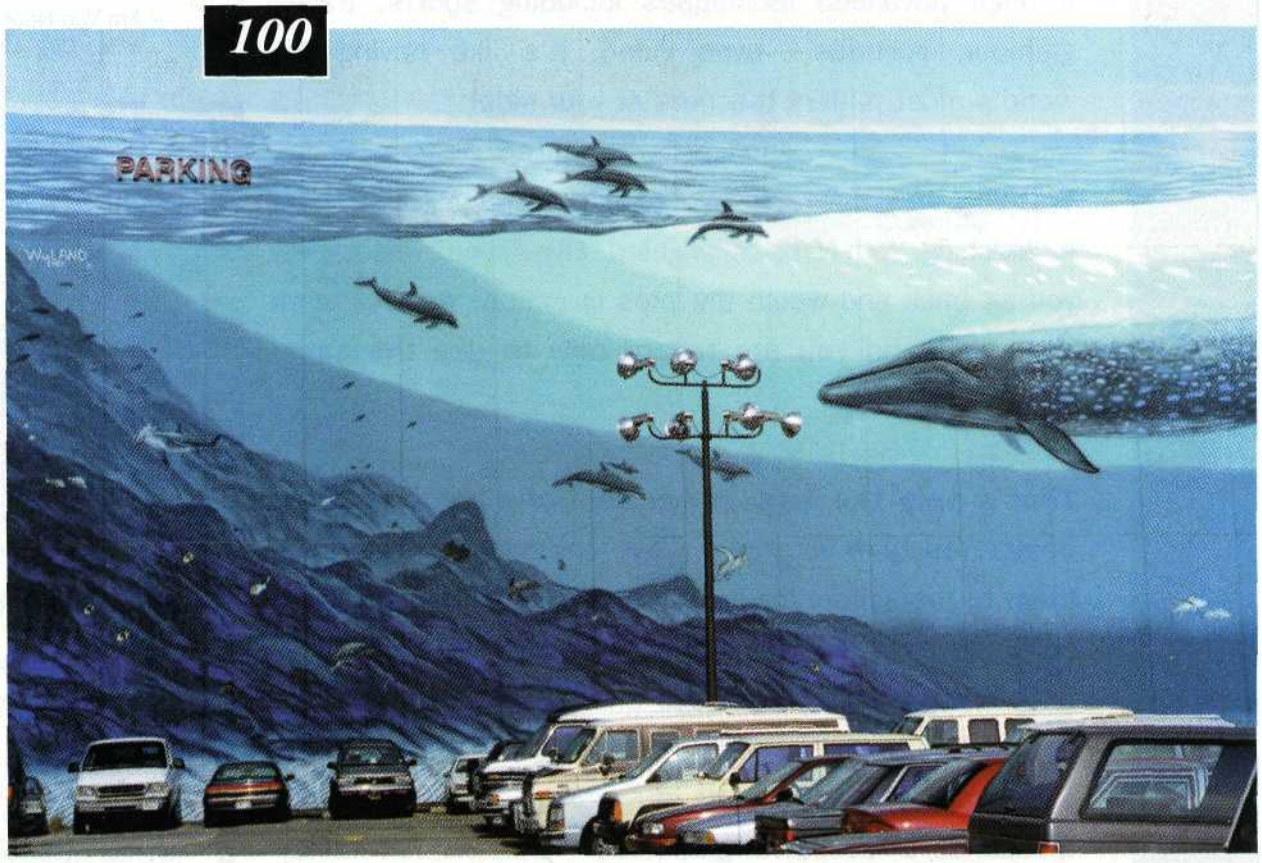
Daylight	50R	+1 stop
White	40M	+⅔ stop
Cold-white	20C+40M	+1 stop
Warm-white	40M+10Y	+1 stop

Above and below: **Optima II Prestige 100 offers the finest grain and greatest sharpness, along with rich, accurate colors.**
Right: **Skin tones are beautiful with all three films, whether in daylight or with flash.**

versatility. When we did not want to be noticed, we used the point-and-shoot. When we found situations beyond the capabilities of a point-and-shoot or wanted to get someone's attention, we switched to the F5. As we walked the convention floor, we came upon a group of clowns that instantly brought back memories of Stephen King's movie "It." What more could we ask for in a color film test? After exhausting 12 rolls and three days enjoying New Orleans, the test was finis!

As we laid out the processed film rolls on our light box, we noticed that the density of all three emulsions was equal, making it difficult to tell which film was which. The only way to really tell was to examine the rebate edge. Using a single color balance, we scanned in one negative from each emulsion. They all matched just as the tech sheets indicated.

Next, we enlarged sections of each emulsion to check the grain structure. The grain structure of the ISO 200 and ISO 400 films appeared identical, and the ISO 100 film had a slightly tighter pattern. All three would be acceptable for any professional application. We were most impressed with the color saturation from the highlights to the deep shadows. We also noted that the out-of-focus areas in the ISO 100 and 200 films were much smoother than we had seen in previous emulsions. Flesh tones were also very accurate, and the colors in the shadows offered great saturation. The images taken in mixed lighting (tungsten and flash) balanced with no problems. Agfa does have a filter recommendation for tungsten lighting, but we found no need to compensate. These negatives just needed a slight filter-pack correction to bring them in line with the other images. The exposure latitude of the three emulsions ranged from –2 stops to +3 stops. If you still have trouble obtaining a good exposure, you may need some adjustments about six inches behind the camera!



These three Optima II Prestige emulsions can rival any professional films on the market. Amateurs and pros alike should give them a shot. We think you will be very impressed with this high-calibre film family.

For further info, contact Agfa Corp., 100 Challenger Rd., Ridgefield Park, NJ 07660; 800/243-2776; on the Internet www.agfaphoto.com. ■