

MASTERING THE UNEXPECTED

By Scott Meivogel



Excitement mounts. You wait and count down the days. A Twitter feed teases with images and scant information. Then suddenly, it arrives: The latest edition of The Impossible Project film.

“Holy smokes, what is this version going to look like?”

“Where are we shooting today?”
“Is there really a black border???”

...Then excitement morphs into concern.

“Will we still have to cover our images?”

“Will the humidity be a factor again?”

“Will I have to carry an ice-pack in my camera bag?”

“How close do I have to park my heated (or cooled) car in order to properly expose my photograph?”

We ask ourselves these questions when rumors start flying about any new film from The Impossible Project. Forums and groups have been launched where people all over the world come together to offer their tips, tricks, suc-



cesses, and disasters. It's something of a small phenomenon with numerous proud participants.

Many of us are seasoned veterans and have been using Impossible's film from the beginning. I am lucky, and honored, to be the owner of an official Impossible partner store. My store would not exist without The Impossible Project. Their outstanding work and development, customer service and overall passion for the medium has rekindled a dying format.

From the inception of their first film — PX 100 Silver Shade, their work is nothing short of amazing — truly an accomplishment. That said, it's not been an entirely smooth ride for them, or us, in embracing a retro format. Frankly, it has been downright frustrating at times. But we love what we do; love it. Why else would we, in the midst of an exponentially expanding digital age, opt to regress and embrace “dead tech”?

Interest. Passion. Love.

True enough, but as anyone of us could quickly attest, it is a tough, hard-won love. Analog is temperamental. There is wider room for error. Impos-

sible film is certainly a child of this medium. It is imperfect, irregular, delicate — wonderful. It is all the reasons why we embrace the format in the first place. We live for the process, the labor of love with the progeny of chance and the happy accidents worth framing.

Many use this film for fun, readily embracing the irregularity, intrigued by the quaint imperfection. However, many other photographers use this for both fun AND professional means, really pushing the capabilities of the product.

Recently, I was shooting in-store displays for local businesses, as well as for my own business, Aperture. The businesses in question wanted an alternative to the typical flashy polish of “modern” photography. One company in particular, a local clothing shop, asked me for some macro images of their product being made. I drove to their factories and photographed the actual ink hitting the shirts; the thread running through the machines, etc. Knowing prior that I would be using

In the hopes that my experience and “field training” with Impossible film will benefit others in the same way other photographer’s shared tips have helped me, consider the following anecdotes on my experience with Impossible’s films.

Using PX 100 First Flush

I bought and started using their PX 100 FF in the summer, which is not the best time of year to use the Silver Shade. It turns brown/orange if too hot. Some folks like this and some don’t. Personally, I don’t prefer the brown look, but I loved what I saw with the orange tone (on about half of all exposures) and wouldn’t trade that look for a second.

With this film, I use a SX-70 with a tripod mount so I can shoot both indoors and outdoors. I found that photographing indoors with this first batch was easier, so that’s where I did most of my shooting. Not having the sunlight over my head was a huge benefit, especially when I first started. I

Using PX 70 First Flush

I then started using the first Color Shade, PX 70, for the SX-70 cameras. I love this film and still have a bunch in my fridge waiting for that perfect opportunity. Ultimately, it is a lesson in letting the medium just “be.” Initially, it was very difficult to obtain nice colors with the PX 70, with most of the images carrying a blue tone. Like other users of this particular film, I found myself seeking out colorful subjects to see how much color I could actually capture. It never really happened, and I was stuck trying to obtain quality color instead of quality images. Eventually, I stopped chasing color, and enjoyed the chance when I did actually catch some. I switched my mind-set and went to seek out images where color was not an issue. I looked at it as if I was shooting the “Blue” pack film... And that’s when it clicked— I love this film!! It’s a better idea to photograph what looks best with certain film and not force anything. Don’t let the tail wag the dog. I



PX 100 First Flush



PX 100 First Flush



PX 100 First Flush

Impossible Project film, I had to know its behaviors beforehand. These photographs would be scanned and enlarged to 30x30 prints for their walls, so I could only make so many mistakes before they started wasting their money. Due to the overwhelming online support of people using this film, sharing tips/methods/do’s-don’ts, I shot with ample confidence.

set up the tripod, rigged a cover, hit the shutter and let the folding SX-70 do its thing. If you are not aware, the folding SX-70’s have a shutter that remains open for around 10 seconds, allowing enough light to expose properly. Heat is a major factor with this film. You can see that my photos are a bit on the brown side because it was about 80 degrees in most of my locations, but they’re not too bad, all in all.

PX 600 Silver Shade was designed for the Type 600 cameras, and was a huge improvement. I did not shoot a ton of this until the UV+ was released. However, I did shoot my fair share, again mostly indoors due to the temperature issue. Many folks would stuff an ice pack in their camera bag when they used this film, or jump back into their car (with the AC or heat on) immediately after shooting. This very



PX 70 First Flush



PX 70 First Flush



PX 600 UV

much limited your subjects, especially if you are too far from a controlled setting. For instance, I took a friend out on a frozen Lake Erie to shoot. It was extremely cold and we obviously were both too far from ample heat. Aside from the threat of drowning under ice, heating the photograph tight under my arm did not do the trick. The image ended up lacking any contrast and was very ghostly.

Using PX 600 UV AND PZ 600 UV

Ah! But then came the UV+ versions! My goodness, the UV+ versions for both the 600 and Spectra cameras are outstanding, a marked improvement! The UV+ versions have darker darks, brighter whites, more depth, and overall improved tones. It contains a special coating that helps to protect the image from light damage.

Using PX 600 Black Frame

And best yet — the black frame edition. Really, black frame? Stunning... all with the ingenious swap of white border to black. Skin tones look smooth and milky, metal gears look shiny and greasy.

And a bonus for us all... this film made its debut during the end of winter / early spring, the perfect time



PZ 600 UV

to shoot Impossible Project's black and white film! Not too hot, not too cold. It's recommended that we shoot this film between 63-75 degrees F. Yes, you still have to cover your shot, but we're all used to that. Yes, the temperature is still an issue, but much less so, and hey — that's all part of the experience!

Using PX 70 PUSH!

If pressed to say, my favorite Impossible Project film has to be the PX 70 Push. So many had issues with this film in regards to obtaining nice colors, but there are a million solutions and tips, some involving heating the image after exposure, the amount of light needed, and storage. Other methods involve turning on your oven, using a hairdryer, or running a bath. Obviously, not the greenest or most efficient means of doing this. 20 gallons of water to get our photograph to show colors? Use your own discretion.

To recap, these small musings on the film all deal with variable situations — temperature fluctuations, outdoor conditions, limited light, etc. Impossible film in a controlled situation is a whole other ball game. In a controlled setting, Impossible film provided me with so many winning photographs.

As of today Push is no longer available on Impossible Project's website, which is a huge disappointment! The best Push photographs I have involve a folding SX-70, a tripod, external daylights, and a little heat. Many of my



PZ 600 UV



PX 70 PUSH!



PX 600 Black Frame



PX 680



PX 70 PUSH!



PX 600 Black Frame



PX 680

photographs were taken without the use of any heat, taken indoors at about 70 degrees. Using daylight bulbs was crucial, as it added some badly needed blue light to many of the images. Most Push images are very magenta, which I love, but when shooting on a professional level some 'real' color is preferred. I'll miss the Push film. Hopefully The Impossible Project has a huge stock that'll eventually hit the streets years from now.

Using PX 680

In hindsight, I would have to say the standard has been set with the PX 680. The beta version was preferred over the First Flush edition, but it's all awesome. I was sent the beta version to test and was blown away. Still cover your image, but temperature is not a huge issue. Neither is long-term storage and aging. My PX 680 images are

doing just fine months after shooting, even in a hot building. Now the PZ 680 is out for the Spectra cameras! The fun awaits.

I have to bestow a great deal of gratitude upon The Impossible Project. They have shared a valuable lesson in process and craft, not to mention rekindling a newfound love for film. Sure it's "instant" — but so is a brush stroke. However, as much consideration and planning goes into the moments before a brush line is applied as a photo is taken. Our time required to obtain a suitable image, gauging the condition, composing our shot is neither instantaneous nor impulsive. And like an artist working in other media, we must always strive to know our materials better. The more we acquaint

ourselves with their potential and their quirks, the better results we can yield.

Again, this is not easy. But what of value and worth IS? Perhaps it is not such a coincidence that in a time where every Tom, Dick and Jane can snap "shots" with their cell phone, people with a true passion for the medium seek out more meaningful, labored methods.

To quote an obscure, unrelated yet fantastic film, Tom Hanks coins this perfectly in "A League of Their Own": "If it was easy, everyone would do it. The hard... is what makes it great."