

INSIDE TOM A's WORKSHOP!

By David Young¹.

There are those amongst us who are, dare I say it... cheap. Not in a mean spirited way, but in a thrifty, value for money, sort of way. We buy Leica gear, when we want the best, but sometimes buy Cosina/Voigtlander gear when, for any number of reasons, money becomes a larger consideration.



The no-name bellows that started it all! Note the Pentax screw threads.

I've been known to go a bit further. For the 1994 Annular Eclipse of the Sun in the Vizcaino Desert, I wanted a 90 degree finder, so I could look horizontally whilst the telescope looked up. But for one hour's use, I wasn't about to pay for a Leica right-angle finder! Not even for a used one!

In my local used-camera shop I found a no-name finder made to clip over a Minolta's eyepiece at a very reasonable \$15. One hours work with a file, some small screwdrivers & a spray bomb of black enamel paint and it fit my R5! Sure, it had barrel distortion like there was no tomorrow, but that didn't affect the photos, just my view. And the central area is sharp enough for accurate focusing. For short term use, who could ask for more?

Early last year, I began thinking about doing some macro work... something more than I could do with the two-element Nikon 6T Achromat close-up lens on my 80~200/f4 Vario-Elmar. (*Another cheap trick, to avoid the cost of an Elpro. A used 6T and a new 60 to 62mm step-up ring were under \$25!*)

I thought about a bellows that had been languishing in my basement, unused, for the last decade or so. It had a 'T' mount on the back, so it could be adapted to any camera, but the front was equipped with a Pentax thread mount. Too bad, for it was rather well made; with a slide copy attachment and very nice focusing rail. Sure, I could go out and buy a used Pentax macro lens for it, but that's not what I *wanted* to do. I *wanted* to experiment with my Leica lenses! And for experimentation, I didn't want to pay for a Leica Bellows-R!



The master at work.



Rapidwinders under construction.

One day, over dinner, I complained to Tom Abrahamsson of this deficiency in my bellows. He suggested I join him one day, for "Friday Zen". After that we'd go and 'play' in his workshop! Talk about a silver plated offer with gilt edging!

Now Friday Zen is not what it might first appear. It is an informal gathering of photographers who meet each Friday morning for coffee at Vancouver's Zen Café. Depending on who has assignments, there might be 4 or 30 there. That August morning there were 8 of us; and it was a fascinating time with lots of interesting conversation.



Afterwards, we drove across town to Tom's workshop, where he manufactures his RapidWinders², Softies and other paraphernalia. Buried deep in the bowels of a huge industrial building, it can only be found by going through such a maze of hallways that without a guide I'd never get out, let alone find it again!

Truly a photographer's workshop, it is a study in organized disorganization... with lathes large and small, as well as every kind of precision drill and milling machine one can think of. It's tidy enough to allow an organized work flow, but still reflects the sometimes unordered thought pattern of a genius at work.



Now, before you can add a lens mount to anything, you have to have one. Fortunately, Doug Herr³ was selling off spare bits from a parts camera and I was able to pick up a genuine SL lens-mount for the princely sum of \$20, postage included!



The bellows with it's new Leica mount installed.

I'd like to say that 'we' made the conversion, but the truth is that Tom did the work, while I watched. *And I must say it is always a joy to watch someone who is truly good at what he does!* Tom made quick work of removing the old Pentax mount and soon had the hole large enough to accept its "new" SL mount, using only a Dremel tool & various bits.

Once the hole in the lens-frame was the right size, it was simply a matter of drilling and tapping holes for the six 5mm screws which would secure the mount to the frame.



Originally the bellows was held to the back of the lens frame by nuts on the four screws that secured the old Pentax lens mount. Now a little epoxy holds the bellows in place. Cheaper, faster and perfectly satisfactory!

We also decided to forgo the lens lock, as the lens stays in the mount very well without it and it saved Tom a *lot* of work!

With Tom's kind help, I now have the world's only bellows, for Leica-R, of its kind! One day, I hope to master its use!

¹ www.horizon.bc.ca/~dnr

² www.rapidwinder.com

³ www.wildlightphoto.com