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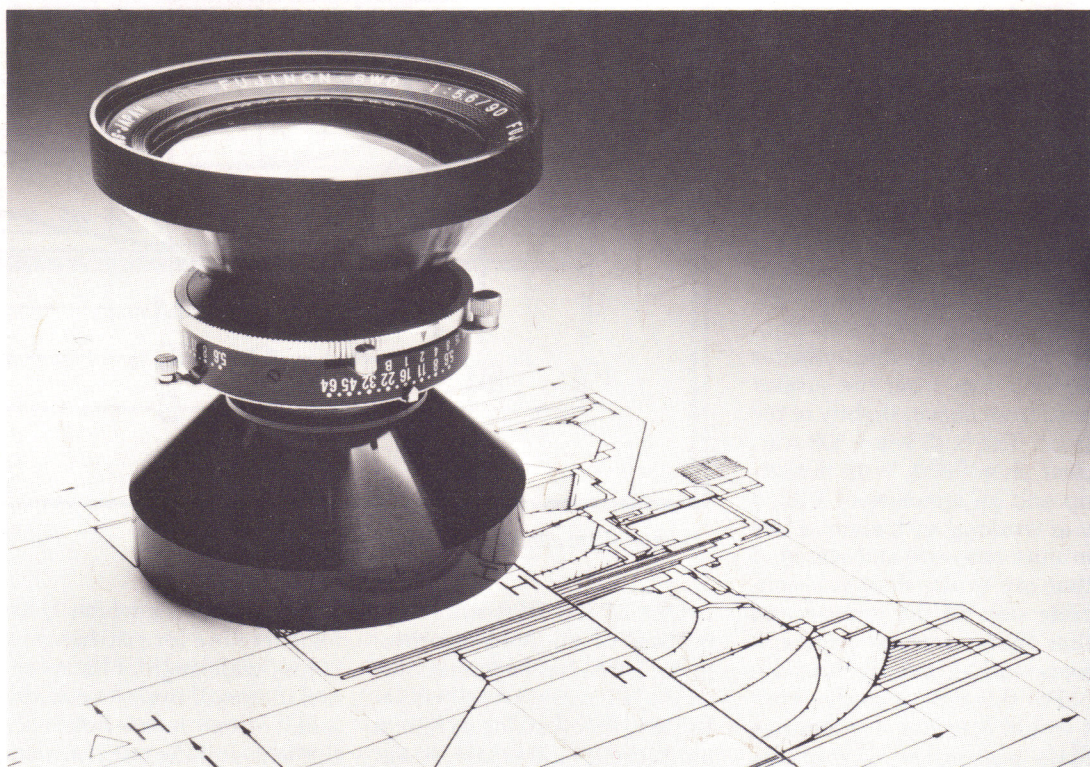
Who Makes the Best View Camera Lenses?

by Bob Shell

In the last few years there has been a real rebirth of the view camera. In the mid 1970s, you couldn't give away most used view cameras, and those of us who carted the things around were looked at somewhat askance by the Nikon toting generation of "professional photographers." Something must have changed, and I think it was caused by the realization that not everything photographic can be done with 35mm 2-1/4 inch x 2-1/4 inch or 2-1/2 inch x 3-1/4 inch. The realization that true control of perspective and depth of field can only be accomplished with the full movements of a true view camera has had a lot to do with this, but also the desire to make premium quality exhibition prints for which only a large negative will suffice.

Now, there are many view cameras on the market and many lenses for them. The old standard Schneider lenses are still well represented, but some of the newcomers deserve a good look.

I had known for some time that Fuji was making a very complete line of lenses for view camera use. I had seen them advertised and had seen them displayed at the trade shows, but I had never worked with them on camera. (By the way, the U.S. distributor of Fuji



The FUJINON 90mm f5.6 wide angle lens which was tested for this article.

view lenses is not Fuji USA, but a company called D.O. Industries [317 East Chestnut Street, East Rochester, NY 14445]. They will be glad to send you brochures or answer your questions about these lenses. They were kind enough to loan me two of the lenses for my own version of testing.)

I am not much for lab testing, though I do scan the lab test reports in the major magazines to see what they think of things. My way of testing a lens

is to take a bunch of pictures with it, either in the studio or in the field. In the case of these two Fuji lenses, I did some of both.

First, let me get over the negative aspects. The lenses which D.O. sent to me were a 180mm f 9 AS Apochromat and a 90mm f 5.6 SWDS wide angle. These lenses will never win any awards for first impressions. The outer finish and general appearance, while not at all bad, is not impressive.

Perhaps Fuji needs to take a lesson from Nikon and make the outside a bit spiffier so that the first impression, on picking up the lens, is better. On the other hand, perhaps they simply chose to put all of their concentration on the "innards" and let the outside slide a bit. After all, it's the image on the film that counts and not the image of the photographer, right?

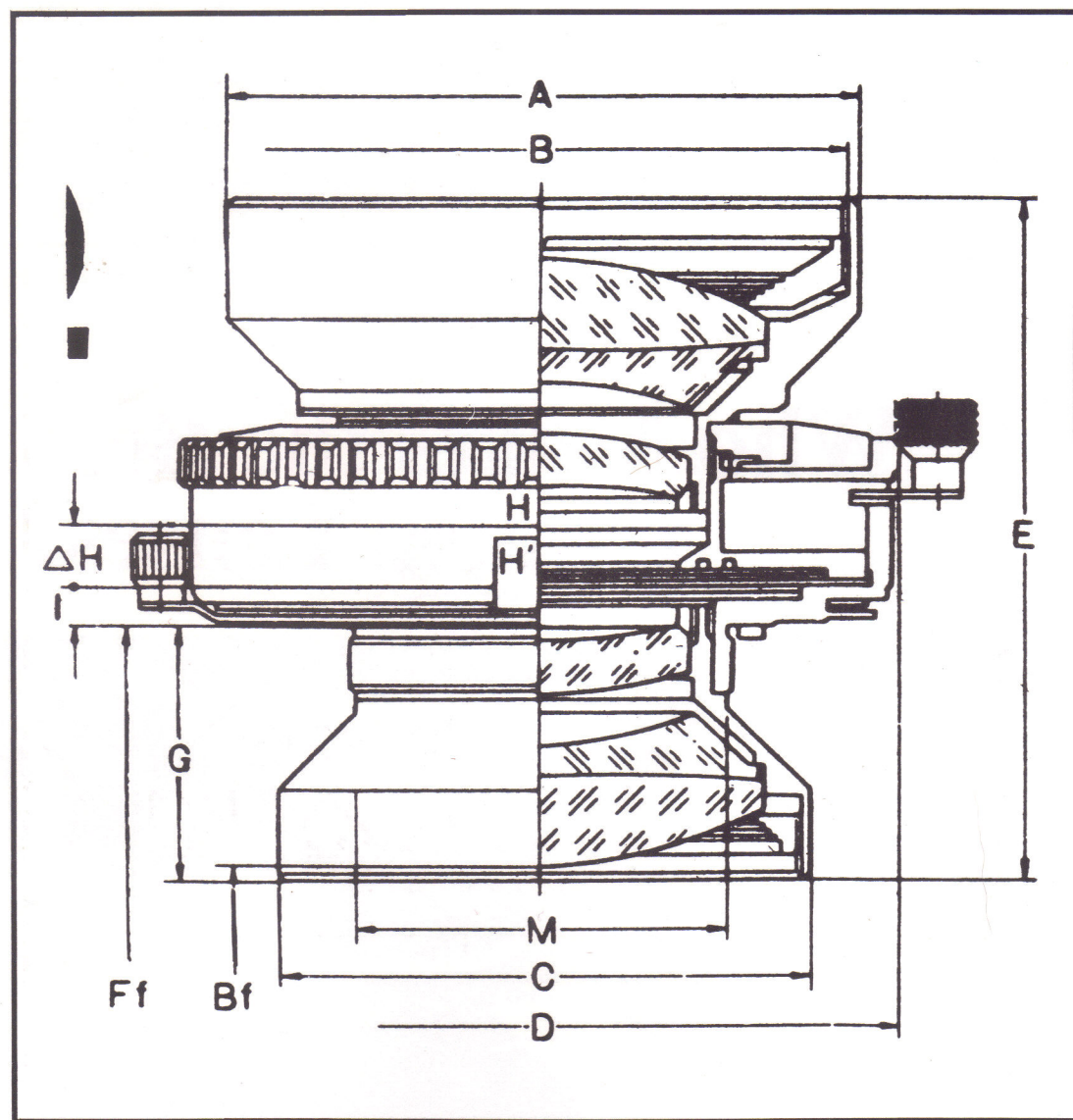
I have always been infatuated with Apochromatic len-

ses. The very best of them are capable of fantastically sharp and saturated color shots. I tried this one out in the studio for some close-up tabletop still life subjects. Due to the small maximum aperture of $f/9$, I was expecting that focusing would be a real problem; to my surprise the very crisp and contrasty image thrown by this lens made the focus quite easy. I was very surprised, especially since I was working indoors with limited light. I tried several different arrangements and was most pleased with the one shown of the sprouting onion. It will suffer from black and white reproduction, but I can assure you that the original is impressively sharp and snappy and the colors very deep and saturated. The sharpness holds up under high magnification, so I am sure I could make a Cibachrome of any size from the original Ektachrome and have it very sharp.

The photos were all taken with Ektachrome Professional tungsten type (this particular batch had an ISO rating of 25) and with a single 21 inch Photax baffled white dish reflector about a foot from the subject and, from above, slightly to the front. The bulb was a 500 watt clear photoflood. With this set-up and an aperture of $f/32$, I was working with about a five minute exposure and was glad that my studio floor is a concrete slab on the ground and that there were no jackhammers working nearby that day.

For this type of studio work I would consider this lens one of the best around. If your specialty is ultra saturated color shots done in the studio, I am sure that this lens would make you very happy.

Because this lens is optimized for 1:1, it could be classified as a macro lens for the view camera. Fuji states that it is for use throughout the "range of studio distances," which I interpret to mean that it is not intended for use at infinity. Just for the heck of it, I shot some outdoor stuff at infinity and saw nothing wrong with it. But, perhaps the incredibly picky would find it unusable for this purpose.



Fujinon Wide Angle Series Lens Design.

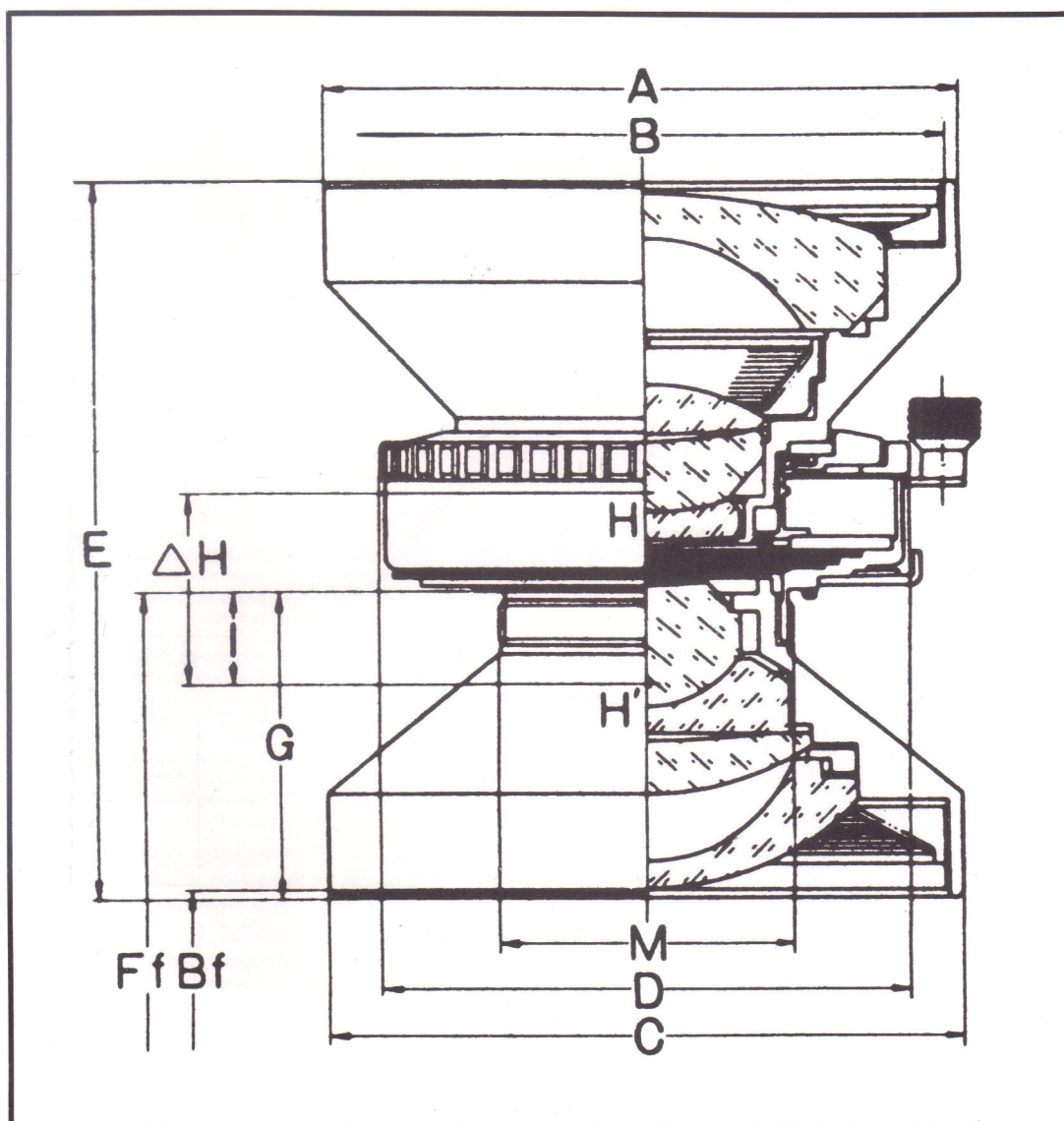
One of the frustrations, in the past, of almost all Apochromatic lenses has been that they throw a narrow image circle. In part, this was due to design limitations, and in part, it was intentional, since the correction was easier to maintain over a more narrow field. However, this lens from Fuji is a true state of the art Apo, which means that the image circle is every bit as big as that from non-apochromatic wide-field lenses. In terms of angular coverage, these lenses give 70° , which is plenty to allow for shifts and tilts. In summary of this lens I would say that it would be excellent for the studio photographer specializing in still life and advertising product shots and very good for almost anything else.

The other lens which D.O. loaned to me for testing was a 90mm wide angle. I had planned to spend, over a weekend, a day or two in the field with this lens, but the last remnants of a major storm chose that weekend to pass through the Virginia Appalachians, and I was left with only part of a somewhat overcast and drippy Sunday to work with.

My first problem came when I set up to work. I had mistakenly assumed that the 90mm would not require a recessed lens board on my Toyo 45G. With the front and rear standards as close as possible, and the tripod block moved to behind them, I could barely reach infinity. Substitution of the bag bellows helped a bit, but I would really have liked

to work with the lens on a very recessed board. (I was not about to spend the money for a recessed board, not unless they were letting me keep the lens!) Once this problem was partially licked, I found this lens a pleasure to work with. The maximum aperture of $f/5.6$ made it a lot easier to bring to focus than the $f/8$ Super-Angulon I normally work with. The viewscreen image was sharp and contrasty and snapped in and out of focus with a very positive feel, so much so that I did not feel the need to verify my focus with a magnifier.

This lens is stated to have a 105° field of view. I was not able to verify that the image circle was this great because of the above mentioned limits on



Fujinon Super Wide Angle Series Lens Design.

camera movements. But, I am sure that the amount of room for swing and tilt is greater than most of us would ever need.

The very sharp and contrasty negatives tell their own story. Because I wanted to know how well they would do, I intentionally gave these lenses no help in the developing process. Since the wide angle shots were taken on a very overcast and flat day, I would normally have given the film increased time in the developer to add a bit of extra contrast. This I did not do, and the results show that it would have been overkill to have done so.

Both of these lenses came mounted in Copal shutters with a range of shutter speeds from 1 to 1/500, as well as B

field previewing. Marked shutter speeds were well within tolerances on both shutters, and the variation between the two was very slight. This speaks for very good manufacturing tolerances.

All of the Fuji lenses feature EBC Coating, Fuji's name for their multicoating process. This seems to work very well toward controlling flare and keeping contrast high.

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The response to my article on buying photo equipment from overseas sources has been the biggest of any yet. To everyone who wrote, my thanks. However, a lot of people somehow got the idea that I was offering to supply a list of names and addresses of overseas suppliers. I did not intend

to give that impression, and I do not have any such list. My dealings as described in the article were all some years ago, and many of the firms I knew may not be around any longer. I suggest looking regularly in the best source of all, *Shutterbug*, because all of those guys eventually realize that this is the place to advertise.

If you want a list of dealers in a particular country, I suggest writing to the Chamber of Commerce in the main city and asking. Most of them will gladly supply you with such a list. This is how I located several of the sources I mentioned.

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