

Why is Everyone Shooting Vintage Digital Cameras (aka Digicams)?

Maybe you've seen a TikTok or stumbled across the [digicam.love instagram account](#) and now you're wondering – what's with the vintage digital camera trend?

We've written plenty about the explosion of point and shoot film cameras and how their popularity has caused prices to skyrocket. And while the interest in compact film cameras may be past its peak, their prices aren't showing any signs of decline.

As a cheaper alternative, young people – bored with the pixel-perfect, filter-filled images from their smartphones – started snatching up dollar-bin digital cameras.

Plenty were pleased to find they already owned one of these trendy cameras – all it took was a voyage to the depths of the family junk drawer to unearth it.

If you're interested in shooting photos on a digicam, we've got all the info you need.

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What Are Digicams and What Sets Them Apart from Other Cameras?

In the late '90's and early 2000's, it was becoming pretty apparent that digital cameras were here to stay and shooting film was destined to become a small niche in the world of photography.

This was, ironically, around the time that some of the [cult-classic point and shoot film cameras](#) could be found at their cheapest.

Digital camera technology was young and scrappy with a lot of room to grow, but it was also improving very quickly. Once camera manufacturers were able to translate this new technology into smaller, simpler cameras that *anyone* could use, it was a game-changer.

Compact, digital, point and shoot cameras became the go-to for the average consumer. For family vacations, parties, everyday snapshots, and everything in between.

These cameras didn't break the bank and most importantly, they prioritized ease-of-use over everything else. It had never been simpler to take photos of your life, immediately see the results and share them with your friends and family.

For many years, these cheap point and shoot cameras were some of the most popular models on the market and they sold in massive numbers. This is why now, 15 years later, you can find hundreds of cameras from this era in the bins at just about any Goodwill.

But around 2005, cameras were being integrated into smartphones – the newest sector of technology making significant strides in its budding stages. From there, it only took a few years before smartphone cameras were much more common and produced much better photos.

With the rise of smartphone cameras came the fall of digital point and shoots – although this type of camera is still manufactured, they will never again reach the popularity of the digicam era where almost every household had one.

In short, digicams are vintage point and shoot digital cameras – most would consider the mid-90's through the early 2000's the prime era for digicams.

CCD vs CMOS Sensors

While nostalgia certainly plays a big role in the digicam revival, it's not just nostalgia for the cameras themselves, but the images they produce look...different.

In many cases, the reason is simple – the images look different because the camera uses a different type of sensor than modern digital cameras.

Early digicam models used what's called a CCD sensor while later models used a CMOS sensor, which is still common today.

The scientific differences between the types of sensors is quite complicated and dense. [This article published on PetaPixel](#) does a much better job explaining the differences than we could ever do, so check that out if you want to know the nitty gritty.

In a practical sense, there are pros and cons to each type of sensor and they each produce different looking images. One isn't better or worse than the other, it just comes down to preference.

Characteristics of CCD Sensors

When digital cameras first started to gain traction, they utilized CCD sensors. It wasn't until around 2007 that CMOS sensors took the throne as the most popular type of sensor.

Some people prefer the look of CCD cameras because they say the images look more like film. While that might be up for debate, there's no denying that the images look different.

One of the key characteristics of the CCD look is the colors. They often appear a bit brighter with more pop – some find that these sensors produce colors more realistic to what we see with our eyes.

The vivid images are reminiscent of stills from a vintage camcorder. In fact, CCD camcorders are still sought after, too – many professional skateboarding videos are still shot on analog video cameras with CCD sensors.

Characteristics of CMOS Sensors

You'll be much more familiar with the look of images taken on a CMOS sensor – this has been the most common option for almost two decades.

CMOS sensors produce images that are much more flat and neutral than those produced by CCD cameras.

This isn't to say that the images are inferior or that the colors are lacking. It's just that they don't have quite the same pop that you find with CCD sensors.

CMOS sensors tend to be a bit more forgiving and flexible. While CCD images look fantastic in the right lighting conditions, they can produce less pleasing photos in situations with difficult exposures.

Especially if the camera can shoot RAW, CMOS sensors can usually handle a bit more over or under exposure.

Which is Better – CCD or CMOS Sensors?

Everyone's ideal camera will be different, but to summarize the debate between types of sensors:

CCD sensors tend to produce more vivid images. If you're looking for the vintage, "film look" straight out of the camera, you'll probably prefer a CCD sensor.

CMOS sensors are more versatile. They produce images that are more neutral and great for editing or using built-in picture profiles.

How Many Megapixels?

Another common characteristic of vintage digicams is a low megapixel count. We'd consider the average to be around 5-12 megapixels for this type of camera.

In contrast, the cheapest iPhone model contains a 12 megapixel camera, and modern, high-end digital cameras can reach 50 megapixels and above.

The ideal number of megapixels will be different for each person and depends mostly on what you want to do with your photos.

If you're just looking to take photos to post on social media, almost any camera will do. We might avoid some of the *extremely* low-megapixel models, which can go as low as 2 megapixels.

If you ever want to print your photos, the megapixel count becomes a bit more important.

A common measure of a digital camera is the maximum size you can print with high resolution (300 DPI or "dots per inch" is the standard for high-res prints).

Even a 3 megapixel camera is capable of printing a 5"x7" high resolution print. Jumping up to 12 megapixels gives you a maximum print size around 9"x14".

You can check out this [megapixel and print size chart](#) to find the maximum print size for any camera.

It's worth noting that megapixels are not the only factor in image quality and the 300 DPI for high resolution prints is not a strict rule. Use these maximum print sizes to get a general idea of the camera's output capabilities.

Plus, some people want the images to be grainy and filled with digital noise – that's the aesthetic that attracts them to these cameras. In that case, they may want the fewest megapixels possible.

As we noted above, 5-12 megapixels is the standard for most vintage digital cameras and we think that this range is perfectly suitable for most people.

If you tend to get prints, we'd aim for the higher end of the range. If you're only interested in looking at your photos on a computer or phone, you'll probably be fine with a camera with fewer megapixels.

What to Consider When Buying a Digicam

If you've decided you want to try shooting photos on a cheap, vintage digital camera, you'll have plenty of options.

Here are the factors that we'd take into consideration when deciding which model to buy.

- **Memory card** – some digicam models used their own unique memory cards. The most ideal are cameras that take SD cards, which are still made today. If it's an uncommon memory card, it's best to find a camera that comes with one included.

- **Battery / charger** – does the camera come with a battery and/or a way to charge it? Some models run on basic AAA batteries and others run on specific batteries and need a separate charger. Check what's included and the availability of the missing parts if there are any.
- **How many megapixels** – see [above](#).
- **Type of sensor** – see [further above](#). The type of sensor isn't always included in online listings or noted on the camera itself. You may just have to google the model to find out which type it uses.
- **Size** – we much prefer a compact option for this type of camera. Ideally one where the lens is flush with the camera body when closed so we can store it easily.
- **Focal length / zoom** – the majority of digicams have a similar focal length range. This is how far the camera can zoom. The focal lengths will not be equivalent to 35mm film or full frame cameras because of the [crop factor](#). Their equivalents are usually somewhere around 28mm – 100mm, but exceptions definitely exist.
- **Maximum aperture** – the lower the maximum aperture, the more you'll be able to separate your subject from the background. You can find digicams with apertures as low as f/1.8.
- **Shooting modes** – we prefer a camera that allows some amount of manual control. Ideally it has shutter priority, aperture priority, and manual exposure modes as well as exposure compensation.

Obviously, a lot of this information will be hard to find if you're looking at cameras in person. If you're looking online, we'd definitely take the time to Google any specs that aren't listed to have the best idea what you're buying.

Fortunately, you can still find vintage digital point and shoot cameras for cheap, so even if you're not completely sure what you're buying, it's not too much of a risk with many models still selling for \$20 or under.

What Are the Most Popular Digicam Models?

There are more models of vintage digital cameras than we could ever write about.

If you're looking to purchase a digicam of your own, we'd recommend checking out the following camera lines.

These are some of the most popular options and each has a few different models available.

Canon Powershot

Canon first launched the [Powershot line](#) in 1996 and still produces compact digital cameras under the same umbrella.

The [Powershot G](#) was the flagship line, providing more features than other comparable point and shoots.

While these cameras were still compact and easy to use, they provided a bit more control for experienced photographers.

Fujifilm FinePix

The first [Fujifilm FinePix camera](#) was released in 1998 and new models are still being produced.

FinePix is a broad series, including compact point and shoots, dSLRs, and modern mirrorless cameras.

If you're looking for the digicam style models, you'll want to check out the Fujifilm FinePix [A-series](#), [E-series](#), [F-series](#), and [J-series](#).

Ricoh GR Digital

Continuing the legacy of the iconic [Ricoh GR point and shoot film camera](#), the GR digital is just as beloved.

There are seven digital versions in total, the first being released in 2005 and the newest version still being produced today.

Unlike the majority of the cameras discussed in this article, the [Ricoh GR Digital cameras](#) all feature fixed-length lenses (meaning they have no zoom).

Kodak Easyshare

In 2001, everyone's favorite film manufacturer launched the [Easyshare line](#), featuring compact point and shoot digital cameras, printers, and more.

Lasting just over a decade, the entire series of Easyshare products ceased production in 2012.

Many of the compact digital cameras were compatible with docking systems and small, handheld printers that could print photos on the spot, directly from the camera. This was a noteworthy product at the time and inspired the name of the series.

Some of the most popular lines of digicams under the Easyshare umbrella include the [V-series](#), the [C-series](#), and the [M-series](#).

Nikon Coolpix

Nikon's entry into the world of compact digital cameras is known as the [Coolpix line](#).

While all of the cameras in this series are smaller than a DSLR, some models are definitely on the large side, with lenses that do not retract fully into the camera body.

The [S-series](#) is the most common and is full of compact, pocket-sized cameras. The [L-series](#) and [P-series](#) also had many models that were small and lightweight.

Sony Cybershot

Some of the earliest digital point and shoot cameras were the [Sony Cybershot line](#), first released in 1996.

It's noteworthy that many Cybershot cameras included Carl Zeiss lenses, which are frequently praised for their quality.

Popular and common models of Cybershot digicams include the [S-series](#), the [P-series](#), the [T-series](#), and the [W-series](#).