

A smart investment

Cutting-edge cameras come and go, but good quality glass can last a lifetime. The Classic Camera Shop specialises in new and second-hand gear, and Carl Zeiss lenses are amongst their most popular products

We all love to work with cutting-edge kit, but sometimes it seems as though we've no sooner got our hands on the latest state-of-the-art camera than it's superseded by the next product. If you want to keep up it's a continual and expensive process of renewal.

With lenses, however, it's a different story altogether. There's a real incentive to go for the very best glass you can afford because this is a genuine investment in your career. Not only will your results be improved by the clarity and definition that a top class piece of glass, such as that produced by an industry leader such as Carl Zeiss, will provide, but you also know that your lenses could be your companions for years to come. We're seeing photographers and filmmakers working, via adapters on occasions, with decades' old lenses, while the resale value of a well-maintained lens can be such that you could well achieve a price that's higher than what you originally paid.

Someone who knows the new and second-hand market better than most is Andy Riley, who runs The Classic Camera shop in Pied Bull Yard, west London. As well as working as a photographer in the US and London during the 1990s Andy also had a vast range of experience in the retail sector, and his chance to set up his own establishment arose in 1996. Pied Bull Yard itself at that time was home to a selection of outlets specialising in vintage camera gear, but nearly 20 years on the others have sadly succumbed to the pressures of the retail business. However The Classic Camera, a virtual treasure trove of kit ancient and modern, is still going, and it's enjoying its status as a Mecca for filmmakers and photographers looking for new and pristine second-hand

RIGHT A virtual treasure trove of kit ancient and modern, The Classic Camera is a Mecca for filmmakers and photographers.

gear, alongside useful advice and great service from knowledgeable staff.

Zeiss lenses are one of its bestsellers, and these are provided in Leica M, Canon EF, Nikon F, Fuji X and Sony E/FE mounts. "We specialise in rangefinder and mirrorless photographic systems," says Tim Martin from The Classic Camera. "Specifically we have always focused on high-quality German optical designers such as Leica, Voigtlander and Carl Zeiss, and we sell both new and used Leica M, R and screw mount cameras and lenses as well as Voigtlander lenses for Leica M, Nikon F, Canon EF and Micro Four Thirds cameras and Zeiss lenses for Leica, Nikon F and Canon EF cameras. We also stock a good range of medium-format cameras and other classics."

Top quality glass

These days top professionals in both the filmmaking and still arenas have a much more open mind in terms of what they use, and many of them will work with a hybrid selection of kit: brand-



"Carl Zeiss lenses are so well respected is because the glass is gentle and considered in its subject rendition"

new alongside pristine classic. It's just a question of choosing what will best get the job done and will meet individual requirements. With its impressive and extensive track record Carl Zeiss lenses are more treasured now than ever, and The Classic Camera can sell as many as they can get their hands on.

"We sell lots of Zeiss glass!" Tim confirms with a smile. "For those using DSLRs the most popular wide optics are the 21mm and 25mm Distagons, both of which handle distortion very well and exhibit excellent sharpness and contrast across the frame even when used wide open. At standard focal lengths the 50mm and 85mm f/1.4 Planars are enormously popular. These offer plenty of definition but are forgiving enough to be suitable for portraiture, and the out of focus areas are rendered very smoothly. The difference in the definition of the subject and the smoothness of the out of focus areas give that signature Zeiss 'pop' and '3D look' to images. For longer lengths, the 100mm Makro-Planar has always had a big following. It's one of the best performing lenses for any system anywhere."

As proprietor of the shop and someone with a long track record as a photographer, Andy has the benefit

of being able to work with a choice of amazing optics, and CZ products are amongst his most regular picks. He's used the SLR series lenses for Nikons in the past and now uses the Leica mount Zeiss lenses on his M cameras. His favourite at present is the 50mm f/1.5 C-Sonnar, a lens based on a 1930s Zeiss design, which lends a stunning classic rendition to images.

Recently he's also been using the Loxia line of lenses for the new Sony Alpha 7 series CSCs. The Loxias are based on the Leica mount line of Zeiss lenses but are optimised for Sony's system. They are incredibly compact when compared to SLR alternatives and are very well built. The focus throw is perfect for movie work and the aperture rings can be de-clicked on the fly using a switch on the mount.

"The reason that Carl Zeiss lenses are so well respected is because the glass they utilise is gentle and considered in its subject rendition," says Tim. "The contrast and saturation isn't too high and allows for a softer roll off into the shadows and highlights, creating smoother transitions throughout the tonal range. The definition and micro-contrast produces very delicate yet crisp and clear images."

ABOVE Thanks to their impressive and extensive track record Carl Zeiss lenses of all shapes and size sell well at The Classic Camera, with the 21mm and 25mm Distagons, 50mm and 85mm f/1.4 Planars and 100mm Makro-Planar among the most popular.



LEFT Established in 1996 by photographer Andy Riley, The Classic Camera has withstood the ups and downs of retail and is still selling new and vintage kit to filmmakers and photographers.

"The colour tends to be cooler, as opposed to warmer, and feels more natural than the rendition of other maker's glass. The build quality and reliability is on a par with the best and the price is sensible. All in all the lenses are refined, well considered and technically accomplished feats of optical engineering. You can tell there is human influence in the design of the optics; the rendition is deliberate and doesn't feel clinical, as though a computer was chasing MTF curve scores."

Still photographers have always appreciated the quality of the Carl Zeiss product, but more and more filmmakers are now buying into the glass as they become increasingly aware of what it can offer. "Aside from the performance and reliability of the lenses they are the closest one can get to the look of the compact primes or even the master primes," says Tim.

"Also, in addition to the financial argument behind buying lenses of this quality, filmmakers have realised that the optics have the greatest impact on the quality of the image. We used to say the camera is just a box, the image happens in the lens. Digital sensors have a greater influence today but the fundamentals are still the same.

"Thanks to the wide range of converters that are now available one can now pair the greatest optics from throughout history with the greatest sensors of today. Throw in a competent photographer/DP and there is little that cannot be achieved."

» More information
www.thelclassiccamera.com
www.zeiss.com

