

PRESS CUTTINGS

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Review of the ColorMunki Photo from X-Rite

Meet The Munki - First impressions last as they say

Back in May 2008, when I was first introduced to the ColorMunki, via the Inside Digital Photo podcast, I laughed out loud. The name sounded silly and it looked funny. But in the following days, I could not get my mind off the monkey. Something kept me fascinated. I felt the ColorMunki was The Missing Link - the colorful soulmate I've been longing for, all those long nights messing around with images, printers and tight deadlines, only to wake up the next day with colors that didn't match my intentions and expectations.

I just plain simply had to get myself a ColorMunki. So I ordered one from Colour Confidence in Birmingham, United Kingdom. I will recommend every EU customer to get their color management stuff from them, as they are true experts in the art and mystery of colour management, and has been very helpful, even when I had seriously tiredome problems making my ColorMunki Photo dance.

Heads Up On The ColorMunki

The ColorMunki is available in two versions. The ColorMunki Photo is aimed at portrait, people, wedding and event photographers, while the ColorMunki Design is aimed at the InDesign, Illustrator, Photoshop using graphic design crowd. ColorMunki Photo is black, ColorMunki Design is white. The inner technology is the same. The software is what makes them different. This review is featuring the ColorMunki Photo edition.

What makes the ColorMunki special?

Up until now, you had to be a geek if you wanted to calibrate your printer. It would require meticulously measuring several sheets of hundreds and sometimes even thousands, of small color patches, individually, one at a time. Sounds like fun? Well, maybe if you're generally very very bored. And, the devices used to measure, often cost quite a lot, if they are of any worthwhile quality.

That was until the ColorMunki came to town. The ColorMunki is based on a spectrophotometer, not the cheaper colorimeter variations that are found in cheaper monitor profiling packages, like DataColor's Spyder range. The difference is, a spectrophotometer can see color, while a colorimeter consists of several, colorblind sensors, that can each only measure one color. From this, a measurement is calculated.

A spectrophotometer is generally accepted as the more precise instrument to measure color, and the one that can be used to profile printers. The fact that X-Rite has put a good quality spectrophotometer in such an affordable package, is almost revolutionary. At least it is bound to make X-Rite's only real competitor, DataColor pee in their pants. X-Rite wants to own the color calibration market, both ends, the whole range. And they are already well on their way.

The ColorMunki is also different, because it is affordable, and offers a more intelligent approach. With the ColorMunki you first print one piece of paper, with only 50 patches. These are then swiftly measured in a few sweeps, which will take you less than a minute. Based on the first measurement, the ColorMunki software then calculates the second and final print of 50 additional patches, that are then measured. This is called an iterative process. If you want even better precision, you can optimize your paper profiles using more patches, based on your own images. This is good for skintones, black & white images, etc.

It works very well.

Calibration of monitor using ColorMunki

The quality of the monitor calibration done with the ColorMunki was very precise and consistent. It has done wonders to my LED backlit MacBook Pro, and my girlfriends otherwise very magenta tinted MacBook screen. ColorMunki can also calibrate CRT screens.

The meat - Calibration of printer using ColorMunki

If something bad is to be said about the ColorMunki, it is the sad fact that it is very sparsely documented. The manual is thinner than thin. So, when it came to making printer profiles, problems started to show. When making printer profiles, the settings of the printer driver are extremely important. Color management (ColorSync on Mac) has to be off, but often that is easier said than done. The printer driver will trick you, and impose color management even though you set it to off, and the resulting profiles from my first 40 (fourty) attempts looked horrible. The profiles where mangled, and the prints were totally off colorwise. This of course frustrated me, and I was just about ready to sent it back to Colour Confidence, when the solution for the correct settings dawned on me. And then it worked wonders. Very consistent profiles. Very good and clear results. I was a happy camper. I wanted the ColorMunki to work, and finally it did.

I might write up the solution and my preceding learning process in an upcoming blog post. For now, I don't care to remind myself of the horrors and sheer boatload of wasted paper and ink, plus time and effort, before I got lucky.

ColorMunki offers much more than just good calibrations

The ColorMunki is a system. It offers good vibrations. No more bad vibes when color come out bad.

The bundled application Photo ColorPicker was a very positive delight to boot. It features a modern interface (Apple XCode Cocoa?) with a CoverFlowish interface, and perfect integration with your Apple Aperture or Adobe Lightroom images databases. Instant access to grab colors from all your images.

You can also grab colors from live, real world surfaces, like skin, toys, fabrics, etc. These can be made into intelligent color palettes. These palettes can be soft proofed, in order to check how well the colors will fare in different lighting scenarios, like tungsten and fluorescent light. Very cool indeed. That is what I mean when I say the ColorMunki is a system. Everything fits together. Color will no longer be a mystery full of guesswork and unpleasant surprises.

The palettes are synced live across your Adobe Creative Suite (PhotoShop, InDesign, etc) and even the standard Apple color palette, used in pretty much all Mac applications, so your palettes can be put to use instantly and easily.

As a fashion photographer it is cool to be able to exactly match the nuance of a red dress, so there are no doubts it will print the way it is intended to be perceived.

<http://olivernielsen.com/review-of-the-colormunki-photo-from-x-rite/>

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As a designer it is very cool to grab the primary colors from an image, and use those colors for the text and design of your website or an whatever layout you are producing.

The Digital Pouch

There's also an app called Digital Pouch which makes it possible to send a picture package to your client, and have the correct color profile set, so the you and client see the same colors on screen. This is without doubt useful, and works well, though I haven't used it much yet.

Conclusion - The Final Verdict

The ColorMunki works well, is unique and very very useful. It is a winner. A complete system for discerning photographers like me, who want more accurate prints, and no more guesswork when it comes to color.

Colour Confidence: <http://shop.colourconfidence.com>

ColorMunki:
<http://www.colormunki.com>

Inside Digital Photo

An X-Rite produced infomercial for the ColorMunki:
<http://www.xritephoto.com/html/colormunki1/>

Interview with Francis Lamy from X-Rite:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0JDuL0Ls1k>

Interview med Vincent Versace, master monkey Elite Coloratti:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1DWMVkwNNFo>

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