Funky florals

Andy Small's glorious flower studies are created without the use of altered chemistry or computers. **Sarah Jackson** finds out more

IF YOU'VE BEEN put off cross-processing because of the chemistry involved but still hanker after the weird and wonderful colours it allows, take a look at the work of Andy Small. His images of flowers were all produced using the 'correct' developing chemicals for the materials involved – and he didn't go anywhere near a computer. So how on earth does he do it?

'It's a straightforward technique,' says Andy, 'which you could say involves "traditional" cross-processing.' He first got the idea when he had an interneg (that is, a negative) of a slide made. The colours were the opposite of those found on the original subject. When the interneg was printed onto positive paper the results, though promising, looked a little dull, so Andy set about finding a way to produce much more vibrant colours. He ended up copying an original slide onto print film, then recopying it onto slide film. The resulting 'negative' image displays bold, brash colours that are highly appealing.

■ If you want to try the process for yourself, see page 57 for AP's own efforts and a step-by-step rundown, plus ways you can vary the process for different effects.

ALL PICS PAGES 54-56 BY ANDY SMALL

ABOVE Yellows turn bluey-violet in this process

BELOW The delicate shape of *Dicentra*, or Bleeding Heart **BELOW LEFT** Love-in-the-Mist

RIGHT Ranunculus (of the buttercup family). Interesting textures work well with this technique

BELOW Depth of field is greatly reduced in macro shots

ABOVE A cactus captured in all its spiky glory

COLOURFUL RESULTS

Getting the results you see here involved a lot of experimentation. Andy tried lots of different speed films. 'Fuji 1600 print film came out too grainy, but when I went for sharpness with Kodak 25 it came out flat,' he recalls. Eventually he found that Agfa Ultra 50 print film gave the brightest colours, especially with blues – with other emulsions the blues seemed to turn out green-looking. He also found that having to bracket exposures to ensure a decent copy affected the actual colours of the final shot.

Andy always looks for subjects with a design element. He likes strong shapes and interesting textures and concentrates on simple, graphic compositions so flowers and leaves are ideal. Bright colours are, surprisingly, not essential. Look for contrasting colours rather than lots of similar tones. 'Dandelions are one of the best,' Andy says.

Half the fun is seeing what colours you end up with, though Andy nowadays has a good idea what will happen. When a colour is 'reversed' it turns into its opposite on the colour wheel. Hence violet goes green and blue turns orangey. 'You'll never get pure white on negative film,' Andy points out, 'so the final print won't have any white areas. The orange cast looks quite effective anyway.'

ABOVE *Vriesea*. The background was painted on glass behind the subject

CREATING THE FRAMES

Andy creates the backgrounds and 'frames' to his subjects by painting them on. He's made slots in a length of wood so he can 'sandwich' the subject in the middle with a pane of glass in front and one behind. Using acrylics, he paints a design on the front of the glass nearest the camera (to avoid shine and reflections). Afterwards the paint can be scraped off and the glass re-used. Andy also uses a piece of glass with a hole in the middle, which he places in front of the plant and then pokes the flower through.

ANDY'S EQUIPMENT

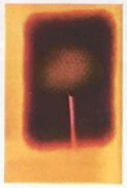
You don't need complicated equipment for this technique. Andy uses a Contax RX SLR fitted with a Carl Zeiss 100mm macro lens, giving 1:1 magnification. He doesn't use filters except for the occasional polariser. His Benbo tripod can be fixed at lots of weird angles, which means it's ideal for shooting low-growing plants and the central arm makes it easier for copying by placing the film on a daylight balanced lightbox with the camera overhead. For prints on Ilfochrome paper he uses an LPL 7700 MX enlarger and processing is done in a Nova slot processor (for larger quantities) or a drum.

BUY A PRINT

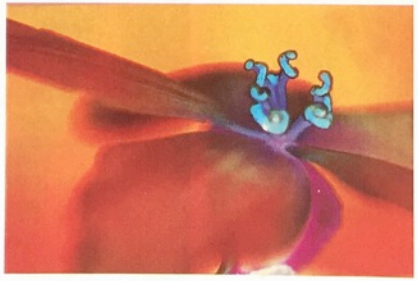
Many of these images are available to buy from Andy as mounted Ilfochrome prints ready for you to frame. Prices range from £20 for a 7x5 photograph to £75 for a 12x16 photograph, excluding p&p. For more details ring Andy on 01256 322600.

ABOVE An orange California poppy is transformed into a study in blues

RIGHT AND CENTRE Andy uses acrylic paints to create border and background effects for his shots



BELOW Exploit diagonals and other graphic elements for maximum impact



ABOVE A Love-in-the-Mist seedhead makes a powerful architectural study

ABOVE Strong shapes, such as these serrated leaves, work particularly well

ANDY SMALL

Andy Small teaches graphics during the day but finds himself doing more and more photography in his spare time, concentrating on the flower studies you see here but also doing other still life images. He contributes to the Corbis stock agency and aims to show his work at one exhibition every year. Eventually he'd like to teach part-time, to devote more time to his photography.

CREATE YOUR OWN WEIRD AND WONDERFUL PRINTS

TECHNIQUE BY ALAN MACKEN

Inspired by Andy's images, we had a go at creating our own in the AP studio

1 Take an existing image that is on fine-grained slide film (eg Fuji Velvia or Provia) or shoot one specially and develop it in normal slide chemistry (ie E6 process)

2 Place the slide on a daylight balanced lightbox and surround it with matt black card to avoid flare (see pic below). Position the camera overhead and, using a macro lens (plus extension tubes if necessary), copy the slide onto fine-grained print film such as Agfa Ultra 50. Develop the negative in normal print chemicals ie the C41 process

3 Copy the negative back onto fine-grained slide film, using the normal E6 process

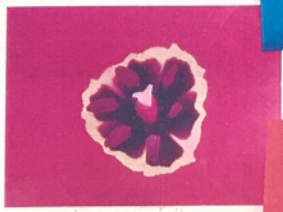
VARIATIONS ON THIS THEME

You can use the 'wrong' chemistry to process the film at any stage in the step-by-step to end up with totally different effects. If you're not doing the processing yourself, remember to give the lab very clear instructions and label films individually. The important point is to experiment to see which effects you prefer.

ABOVE A normally processed slide recopied onto slide film, processed in the 'wrong' chemicals (ie the C41 process)

RIGHT The same pic copied onto slide film and processed in E6 chemicals

LEFT Slide film copied onto slide film 'wrongly' processed in C41, then recopied onto slide film and again processed in C41



RIGHT Slide film copied onto print film and normally processed, then copied onto slide film and 'wrongly' processed in C41

TIPS

- You must start off with a decent image – one that is well exposed and sharp.
- You can omit Stage 1 and shoot straight onto print film for extra sharpness, though this will reduce the contrast.
- It's not normally a good idea to cut up negatives into single images, but for this technique putting a negative into a slide mount makes it much easier to copy.
- At each copying stage you can, if necessary, improve on the original composition by cropping in slightly on the image. Set f/11 in case the film isn't quite flat
- You can increase the contrast further when copying by pushing the slide film by two stops.
- Use the camera's TTL meter to gauge exposure while copying. If the subject is average-toned you may be able to get away without bracketing. If the background is very dark, you'll need to decrease exposure by around half a stop to avoid overexposing and if the background is light, you should increase it by around the same amount.