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Mamiya 7 N 43mm f/4.5 L Test Review

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Lens without hood. Note that half the lens comes out of the back of the mount.

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INTRODUCTION

This spectacular lens is the most perfect lens I have ever used.

It appears to be a direct copy of the Zeiss Biogon. The cross sectional diagrams are the same. It also has the same unusual freedom from internal mechanical vignetting unique to the Biogon, has the same speed (f/4.5) and angle of view.

Even better, the Mamiya 43mm is a copy of the better, original 10 element Biogon first used in the [75mm f/4.5](#) lens for view cameras, not the simpler 8 element

Baines & Ernst

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version used in the far more expensive [Hasselblad SWC](#).

This is a better design than the simplified 8 element design used in the Hasselblad SWC. The 43mm is multicoated, the earliest SWCs are not. The Mamiya 7 has a rangefinder for precise focusing, the SWC requires you focus by guessing or measuring the distance with a tape measure or separate rangefinder!

This works far better than the SWC I used to own, and is sharper, too. I have compared them directly and have the film to prove it

The need for an external viewfinder is a pain. You need to focus and meter looking through one hole, and compose looking through another. This is better than the SWC because the SWC does not have any meter or even anyway to focus other than by guessing the distance.

SPECIFICATIONS

67mm filter

10 elements, 6 groups.

1.7" (42mm) around by 2.8" (72mm) long.

14 oz. (390 g)

Focuses to 1 meter or 3'

Five-bladed diaphragm stopping down to f/22.

PERFORMANCE

Sharpness

I already said that the 43mm is one of the world's most perfect lenses. The 43mm is intensely sharp at every aperture and, like most lenses, limited only by diffraction at f/22. Use it with gusto at f/4.5 or any aperture!

Distortion

None at any distance.

Falloff of Illumination

Like all other view-camera lenses, the 43mm has some minor light falloff.

People who only use SLR lenses may not be used to this. Falloff is the tiny price we pay for superior sharpness and complete freedom from distortion. Falloff easily can be corrected with a center filter. Unsharpness and distortion cannot.

The 43mm does not require any center filters, unless you are photographing blank walls AND want the whole wall to be the same shade.

The falloff of the 43mm is invisible for photographs of real subjects worth photographing.

In fact, the falloff can add drama and keep the viewers attention directed towards the center of the image. Ansel Adams took great pains to introduce this effect deliberately as "edge burning." See his book "[The Print](#)" for details.

I do have a center filter for a different lens I use on my view camera. It does improve scientific photos of walls, but to be honest has little visible effect on real photos other than to lose 2 stops of speed and make me have to screw with screwing the filter on and off to compose. Forget the center filter. Real architectural photographers don't use center filters either. If they are worried about this they just adjust their lighting accordingly.

I would use this 67mm Schneider center filter #3 you can get [here](#) if I worried about this. Schneider says add 1.5 stops; with this filter I add two full stops. Just set your exposure compensation to +2 with the filter and shoot away. Be sure that the filter does not cover the rangefinder window through which the in-camera meter reads if you use the filter. As I mentioned, I don't use this. Sell me yours if you buy one and get tired of it. No, you probably cannot use the hood at the same time as the center filter. The center filter is much bigger than 67mm.

Ghosts

None. Point this straight into the sun and there is no ghosting, even when I've deliberately tried to induce it.

The old, single coated Hasselblad SWC I had was worse.

Viewfinder



The level is very accurate, unlike most of the panoramic cameras I have used.

Having to use an external finder sucks. Not only is it a pain to have to look in two different holes, but you have to put it on and take it off when putting the camera away in most camera cases. You still focus and set exposure through the regular hole and then have to compose through the external finder. You also lose your hot shoe if you need it for fill flash. I never use fill flash with my 43mm lens. If you do, look [here](#) for a two shoe adaptor!

The finder has a focus adjustment to compensate for your eyesight. I have to readjust it every time I put it to my eye since it gets rotated just by carrying the camera around. Also my rubber eye hood fell off from normal wear.

What do the stupid letters N and L mean in the lens designation?

Nothing. Just marketing poof.

RECOMMENDATIONS

If you can afford it, buy one.

If you can't, then spend half as much for a 75mm lens for a 4x5 camera and get results twice as sharp, plus tilt and shifts at no extra charge!

Don't bother with the Hasselblad SWC unless you already are in the Hasselblad system and want the interchangeable backs, or prefer the 6x6 format.

Watch out when mounting this into the camera. You easily can damage the rangefinder roller follower if you hit it by accident as you insert the rear of the lens deep into the camera.

It takes a special rear cap unique to the 43mm. Make sure to buy a spare in case you lose it out in the field. OK, maybe the 50mm or 65mm lenses take this cap, too, I just don't own one of those. I do know the 80 and 150 take different caps.

See this [page](#) for information on the special depth-of-field scale I attached for optimum sharpness.

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