

IN THE BAG

# Photo Girl!

**Darren Crush** talks equipment and technique to the aptly named **Sarahphotogirl** – a quirky photographer who prides herself on bending the rules



This image, taken with a Ricoh Caplio R5, was casually shot in a park on a summer's day





One of the many great things about photography is that there are no rules. Well, there are rules but it's down to you as to whether you want to use them or not. And when we met the memorably monickered Sarahphotogirl it wasn't long before we realised that this Scarborough-based pro photographer plays the game very much on her own terms. 'I've got my grandad to thank for teaching me the developing side of photography when I was about 14,' says the 31-year-old. 'He actually didn't think I'd be able to make a career of it. Not in a negative way; I just think he didn't have the confidence that I'd grasped the

fundamentals of it. I think he may have been right at the time, but I'm not one to lie down and roll over – if it meant doing things a little bit differently, then so be it.' However, Sarah's interest in photography took a back seat until her second year of university. 'I didn't really think about it much after that until a couple of years into my degree course at university, when I was really getting into my music. I'd always been a fairly bold person and after going to watch bands like Blur and Supergrass, I'd hang around afterwards and try to get some pictures.' It was around this time that Sarah fine-tuned her ability to sniff out a celebrity shot – a trait

that would come in handy later in her career. 'In this business you've got to be prepared to get knocked back, but you've also got to be prepared to bounce back,' she added. 'Don't be rude, just gently persistent. Sometimes you'll come up against stiff opposition, and at other times, they'll be happy to accommodate you.' When it comes to offering advice, the word 'minimal' crops up in one's mind when talking to Sarah, who insists it's always best to carry as little kit as you can. She adds: 'You really don't want to be laden down with stuff when you're on a shoot. Not only can it look a bit clumsy, but it can restrict movement a little. Of course, each to their own, but for me, less is best.'



**WHAT KIT?**

**Camera**  
Nikon D200  
**Lens**  
Tamron 17-35mm F/2.8  
**Exposure**  
1/60sec © f/4.5, ISO 400

Paul Weller is actually quoted as saying he really liked this shot, and Sarah used her Nikon D200 (long since gone) to capture it. It's all about looking for a different angle, and this picture illustrates this remit well, and goes to show how the most basic of props (in this case a mirror) can transform a photograph.



**WHAT KIT?**

**Camera**  
Nikon D200  
**Lens**  
Tamron 17-35mm F/2.8  
**Accessories**  
Photoshop CS2  
**Exposure**  
A variety

Composed using a series of approximately 20 images, Sarah set out to re-create a scene from the much-loved children's novel *Alice in Wonderland*. Although something like this does take time, it is not beyond the realms of possibility for someone with a Photoshop program to try to do a similar project.



'As for the creative side of things, I'd always suggest to someone to challenge themselves every time they take a photograph,' she enthuses. 'Don't go for a normal composition; move things around. Place the main subject elsewhere in the frame. It's always good to bend the rules. It might sound odd, but I like to think I do things a bit differently from everyone else, and I'm always looking for a new angle.'

Sarah recently switched from Nikon to an Olympus E-3 system and particularly enjoys the creative possibilities afforded by the camera's multi-angle LCD screen and LiveView feature.

'Getting right down to what I call "rat's eye" level is always good. And from this angle, with something like a fisheye lens on your camera, you can get some really original shots.'

'I also love using on-camera flash, especially bouncing it off a wall or ceiling, and will take a reflector with me to get light into the darker areas of the subject.'

Although not everyone has the opportunity to shoot famous bands, as Sarah does, much of the advice on how to do it properly can also apply to everyday 'normal' shoots. Take a professional approach to an assignment, no matter how

**I'd always suggest to someone to challenge themselves every time they take a photo**

informal, and the pictures will speak for themselves.

'Always be prepared when you arrive to photograph people. Even though you might not be shooting a band, it's always more professional to have a good idea of what you're doing before you arrive. I sometimes only get 10 minutes with a band and that means you have to work really quickly, and taking into account that some of your time might be swallowed up getting to where you want to take the pictures, that can mean even less time. If you get the opportunity, try to arrive early and then check the location out. Always be on the look-out for something a little bit different to photograph them against. Failing that, and this might sound a little boring, I always find that a cream wall can give you quite a good look – especially if you get the lighting right. If done properly, it can even give the impression that the shot has been taken in a professional studio.'

'I'd also recommend being quite assertive. Don't intimidate your subject, just direct them firmly. It can sometimes be quite tricky getting people to do what you want them to, but if you issue positive and firm instructions, then the remit you set out to achieve will be clearer in the final images. However, don't be too regimented; always be able to react to something spontaneous that crops up and make the most of it. Maybe an inquisitive dog turns up, or the light changes for the better. Be open to new angles.'

'I'd also recommend that you get to know your camera really well. It's not all about buying the best equipment there is, although that is obviously a personal choice. As with anything you ever learn, you have to practise and practise. And practising with your camera will definitely help, as you'll find the best ways to use it.'

'There's also natural ability: some people are born with it; some people have to nurture it. I'd like to think that my eye for a good photograph comes pretty naturally, although you can always improve. And as mentioned earlier, I want to continually challenge myself – that's what drives me.'

'I also think it's quite a good idea to exhibit your work, even if it's just to family and friends. I exhibit from a professional point of view and it's very beneficial to get the feedback. And if you did show people you could also get some useful comments that will help you improve your work.'





As you can see from these pictures, Sarah doesn't just limit herself to standard shots and will use Photoshop to create a plethora of different scenarios. The picture of Alice falling down a rabbit hole is one such example. 'This is the combination of approximately 20 images,' says Sarah. 'Some of them were shot in the studio and some were shot on location. It took two days in the studio to create the insides of the rabbit hole. The muddy background is taken from Cayton Bay near Scarborough and the sky is from a completely different day. Alice herself is made up of two separate images. The bottom half (up to the neck) was me jumping in the studio, and the top half (head and shoulders) was shot closer up with a fan machine blowing my hair back and upwards. I then stitched it up together on the computer later.'

'It's my dream to do some really high-end advertising work. There's some really inspirational stuff on TV and billboards today. And I hope that my unique approach to photography, and the creativeness that I bring to it, might just give me the edge.'

See more of Sarah's work at:

- [www.sarahphotogirl.com](http://www.sarahphotogirl.com)
- [www.flickr.com/photos/sarahphotogirl](http://www.flickr.com/photos/sarahphotogirl)
- [www.youtube.com/sarahphotogirl](http://www.youtube.com/sarahphotogirl)



**WHAT KIT?**  
**Camera**  
 Nikon D200  
**Lens**  
 Tamron 17-35mm  
 F/2.8-4  
**Exposure**  
 1/60sec ©f/2.8, ISO 400

Sarah has known the Kaiser Chiefs for 10 years now, before they were famous and were in a lesser known band called Runston Parva (she did their cassette demo cover). According to Sarah, they're lively and quick-witted and she enjoys working with them.



**WHAT KIT?**  
**Camera**  
 Nikon D200  
**Lens**  
 Nikon 12-24mm F/4 (borrowed)  
**Exposure**  
 1/60sec © f/16, ISO 200

These, as you will guess straightaway, are a lot of images of Sarah pasted together in different poses. To give you an idea of the exposure, the main image of her at the front was taken using the settings on the left. Of course, while this picture might look complicated to do yourself, a little practice will have you creating multiple images of yourself before you know it.



### A rundown of what's in Sarah's kit bag

- ② Olympus 7-14mm lens  
The wideangle lens is definitely a favourite and fits in nicely with my style of photography.
- ③ Olympus Zuiko Digital ED 50-200mm f/2.8-3.5
- ④ Olympus Zuiko Digital ED 35-100mm f/2.0
- ⑤ Olympus Zuiko Digital ED 90-250mm f/2.8  
These are great lenses for long-distance work, although I do favour the wideangles for most of my work.
- ⑥ Olympus Zuiko Digital ED 8mm f/3.5  
This lens helps me capture dramatic ultra-wideangle shots. I am obsessed with the eye of the fish or anything else which warps the overly familiar aspects of the world I live in.



① Olympus E-3  
I particularly love this camera because of its live view feature and the multi-angle LCD screen. It allows me to be really creative and experiment with lots of different shooting angles. [www.olympus.co.uk](http://www.olympus.co.uk)

- ⑦ Olympus Zuiko Digital ED 14-35mm f/2.0 SWD  
A wideangle lens, and fast with it, this lens gives me a lot of options. And it can help in low light.
- ⑧ Olympus Zuiko Digital ED 12-60mm f/2.8-4.0 SWD  
Olympus's premium 'standard' zoom, goes from a pretty good wideangle to short telephoto
- ⑨ Olympus Zuiko Digital ED 50mm f/2.0 Macro  
Used for my commercial photography. I like to use it also to shoot little things to add to a bigger picture – like Alice, which was one big photographic jigsaw.
- ⑩ Olympus FL-50 flash  
I have three of these so that I can use them all together to light a scene when I don't have my studio lighting kit with me.
- ⑪ Olympus ring flash  
Although it's primarily a macro tool I can do studio portraits with it and get a nice even light, and a little ring of light in the eye.



- ⑫ Prolinca IR trigger  
No more wires in the studio – I just attach this little box and it triggers off all my studio lighting. Brilliant! [www.theflashcentre.com](http://www.theflashcentre.com)
- ⑬ Velbon AE-2  
This tripod was given to me by my grandfather. It's brilliant because it is so sturdy, and has helped when I have done landscape photography. [www.velbon.com](http://www.velbon.com)
- ⑭ Lowepro Orion Trekker II backpack  
A great bag for going out and about with my camera gear. I like to keep my equipment to a minimum when I'm out on a shoot, and this bag is just the right size to get the essentials in. [www.lowepro.com](http://www.lowepro.com)

- ⑮ Memory cards  
I don't like to have all my eggs in one basket so will use smaller memory cards so that if something goes wrong with one I haven't lost everything. [www.SanDisk.com](http://www.SanDisk.com)
- ⑯ Battery holders  
I just love the colours of these. [www.7dayshop.com](http://www.7dayshop.com)

- ⑰ Joby Gorillapod  
This is a fun thing more than anything and I like its versatility. [www.joby.com](http://www.joby.com)

**EXHIBITION**  
 Sarah has an exhibition in York from 28 Aug to 5 Oct. Visit her website for more details.



**PREVIOUS KIT**

Although these pictures were all taken using Nikon equipment, Sarah has recently switched to Olympus, and has been chosen by them to be one of their ambassadors. So while she is surrounded by her current Olympus equipment in her gear shot, we thought it would be a good idea to list her previous kit too.

- Nikon D200
- Nikon D70
- Nikon 10.5mm fisheye lens
- Nikon 28-105mm f/3.5-4.5 lens
- Tamron 17-35mm f/2.8-4 lens