

Phone or Digital Medium Format for Photography

Avoid the Middle; Embrace the Extremes

To live a better life, embrace the extremes. Avoid the boring middle-- either relax 100%, or go hard 100%. "Sleep hard, or work hard". In this essay, I will try to combine personal thoughts on living, photography, working out, health, and diet (with this embracing the extremes strategy):

Why not just shoot everything on your phone?

Dear friend,

A mini-epiphany I had:

In today's world, phone cameras have phenomenal image quality. At this point, we don't really need "better" image quality on a phone camera. And as computational photography, image-processing algorithms advance, and technology advances -- phone camera quality will just keep getting better and better.

So at this point, why *NOT* just shoot with a phone?

Henri Cartier-Bresson would probably shoot street photography with an iPhone

I was talking to my buddy Jun and he told me:

If Henri Cartier-Bresson was shooting today, he would probably just shoot with a phone.

Jun's rationale makes sense. The reason why HCB shot with a small 35mm Leica camera was because it was small, convenient, portable (compared to the medium-format and large-format cameras of his day).

I look at all the 'stand-alone' digital cameras right now, and honestly -- they are so much more similar than dissimilar. There is no camera really which is 'meaningfully different', besides the Leica rangefinder or the digital Leica Monochrom.

And honestly at this point, image quality isn't that important. Most of us are looking at pictures on our 6-inch phones (horizontally). Thus, for 99% of us, we cannot really appreciate the image quality of our cameras.

But if you need really really really good image quality, honestly your best bet is to just buy a digital medium-format camera (Pentax 645Z).

So this is my first simple proposition:

Embrace the extremes: Either shoot with your phone, or a digital medium format camera (for professional work, or work when you want to really blow up the pictures).

Embrace the extremes

My best friend Nassim Taleb came up with this 'barbell' approach to life-- embracing the extremes (a bimodal strategy). I loved the concept. This is how I interpret it:

Embrace the extremes is more fun than living a "normal" life.

For example, this is how I have applied this concept of 'embracing the extremes' in my life:

1. Either plug yourself totally 100% into the internet/technology (plugged into your laptop with headphones when you are working), or embrace the techno-zen (other extreme) of 0% technology (reading paper books at night to detox).

2. Embracing the extremes with food: Instead of having 3x 'medium meals' throughout the day, better to fast (not eat anything) and have 1 extreme huge meal (unlimited food for dinner). For example I have become more productive in the day by fasting (not eating breakfast and lunch) and drinking lots of black coffee and water. But for dinner, I will eat 3 pounds of meat. This way during the day I am sharp and keen, and at night I get 'food coma' after my massive meal, and then go straight to sleep (desired outcome for myself).
3. For camera equipment: Either shoot with your phone (super small and convenient) or perhaps shoot with a digital medium-format camera (extreme other end). Or another idea: either shoot with your phone and shoot with a film camera (embracing both extremes). Avoid using the "medium" cameras -- in the \$1000-\$2000 range. Either shoot with a super cheap camera (RICOH GR11) and a super-high end camera. And avoid upgrading your camera or phone when the gains are marginal (for example, the camera quality improvements in every new iPhone camera is probably only 5-10% better in every upgrade).
4. For working out: either go extreme powerlifting-style, and do lots of effortless walks, instead of boring "cardio" at the gym. When I go to the gym, I 'go hard'. I go extreme on deadlifts, squats, dumbbell press, and weighted chin-ups or dips. But when I'm not working out, I just like to go on nice little walks. I don't like doing group classes (I feel like a prisoner) and I don't like cardio. Thus I avoid the boring "medium-intensity" workouts.
5. The best or nothing: I wear a very expensive black merino wool T-shirt, black merino wool leggings (with athletic shorts), but that is all I wear. I would rather own 1 really really expensive clothing item I wear everyday, instead of 100 medium-priced items. In life obviously it is useful to own certain equipment, tools, and stuff. But the problem is nowadays we got TOO MUCH STUFF (which distracts us). So **own fewer stuff, but make sure the quality of the stuff you have is very very good.**
6. Have a very few friends, and curate your inner-circle very carefully. Better to have a few friends and cultivate super-deep relationships with them, instead of having lots of "medium" friends.
7. (Via Nassim Taleb): Better to read super-old-school philosophy and epic literature and watch trashy stuff on the side, rather than read "mid-brow" business books or The New Yorker. Better to look at Kim Kardashian gossip news and read Dante's Inferno, than to read any new modern business book you see on the bestseller list.
8. People choices: Better to hang out with guys "from the hood" and high-level academics, than "average" people (the typical boring college-educated

- economics major).
9. Music choices: Better to listen to old-school classical music and hardcore hip hop, than "medium"-styled 'alternative rock'.
 10. When you are on your device, either be 100% focused on it, or don't use it at all (turn it off). For example when I am talking with Cindy, I try to make it a huge effort to turn off all my electronics to give her 100% attention.
 11. In easier words, better to "full-ass" your relationship interactions than "half-ass" them. Better to have a hardcore intense friendship (or no friendship) than having certain people be 'acquaintances'
 12. Better to get a job as an investment banker and be a poet on the side, rather than just being a "moderately paid" consultant or "business manager". Better to be extremely greedy with money (or a total money-averse monk) than to be someone who just wants a "steady" salary.
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You can have it your way

My philosophy in life is like Burger King: "You can have it your way."

There is no perfect life philosophy; nor should there. Anyway you decide to live your life is a set of 'heuristics' (simple rules of thumb, which are not perfect, but work pretty well 80% of the time). I don't think any of us should seek to optimize our life 100% -- otherwise we would just be machines.

So this is my suggestion:

Take from the best, and get rid of the bad.

Steal philosophical ideas and ways of living which resonate with you, and adjust it for yourself. Be like one of those new soda machines in which you can combine all the different flavors in different concentrations or combinations.

Even for myself -- I mix Zen-Taoism with Stoicism, I mix powerlifting with pointless walking, I mix internet addiction with disconnecting-zen, I mix moments of extreme social interaction with extreme isolation, and I mix trashy gossip magazines with ancient literature.

This works for me, but it probably won't work for you. Just experiment, have fun with it, and never forget to ask yourself *WHY* you do anything in life.

For example, the reason *WHY* I embrace the extremes in my life is that it helps me be more intellectually productive. I avoid 'food coma' during the day (by fasting), which allows me to be more intellectually sharp. I also like to power lift and get strong, because I have found it also helps me strengthen my mind. I surround myself with the best, because I want to produce the best.

Whenever you need to work through a certain idea, or ask yourself *WHY*-- send a Facebook message to "ZEN OF ERIC" (a Facebook chatting bot that my friend Stoytcho made for me). I like to chat with it and use it as a mirror; to just work through certain ideas of my own.

Never stop asking why, ERIC