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Wednesday, 20 April 2011

Why I Love My Epson 3880

By **Ctein**

So, I've been using an Epson Stylus Pro 3880 printer for some six months, and I have to say it's just about the best less-than-a-grand I've spent on photographic gear in a while. It's fast. It's reliable—its aperiodic automatic self-cleaning cycles genuinely seem to work, as I never see a clogged nozzle. I love being able to make 17x22-inch prints in the comfort of my own office; it's just amazing how impressive they look compared to 13x19 prints. And, even though 90+ percent of my printing is no bigger than 13 inches wide, I'm still thrilled I bought it because, you see, it's really all about the ink.

First wonderful thing: the ink costs half as much as it did for my Epson R2400 printer. I'm saving nearly a buck every time I make an 11x17 print. Not as cheap as the ink for my 9800 printer, but I'm not complaining.

Second wonderful thing: those 80 ml cartridges. I just *love* not having to constantly swap ink cartridges as yet another dinky little 11 ml cartridge goes dry. When those big cartridges run low, I get plenty of warning; I can run a good dozen prints before "low" turns into "empty."

Third wonderful thing: when a cartridge does run dry, the printer handles it with impeccable grace. It halts mid-print and waits for me to replace the empty cartridge. Then it picks up printing where it left off with nary a missed line of droplets. The print comes out looking perfect, despite the interruption.

Why am I writing this right now? Because there's a $150 Epson rebate until the end of the month. That takes the price of the 3880 to under $1000. At that price I can't see any reason to buy the Epson R3000, which runs around $800. The 3880 is an all-around more capable machine, handling media up to 17 inches wide. You may not think you care about printing wider than 13 inches. Well, many of you will be surprised to find out how much you'll like it when you can turn out real "16x20s."

Even if you're positive you won't ever want to make bigger prints, the 3880 is still the better choice. After charging the feed lines, the 3880 includes about 480 ml of usable link. The R3000 includes about 160 ml of usable link. Ink for the R3000 runs a bit over a dollar a milliliter, so that's like getting more than $300 in extra bonus ink with the 3880.

It gets even better. Ink for the 3880 costs only about half as much as for the R3000. You'll average a milliliter of ink for an 8.5x11 print, two for an 11x17 and three for a 13x19 (more or less). Six small prints a week or two large ones gets you close to the break-even point in a year; after that you're saving money with every print on the 3880. Don't believe the people who say you have to use up an ink cartridge in six months. That's just Epson's ultraconservative warranty. Everyone I know has no problem using cartridges that have been open for well over a year, so long as they are printing regularly. What kills printers is letting them lie fallow for weeks at a time, not printing with older ink.

On the other hand, the R2880 is still a pretty good deal. Yet even at the aforementioned modest rate of printing, you'll still hit break-even in about three years. My recommendation is that if you're serious enough about your printing that you're considering one of the professional 13-inch printers, skip them all and go straight to the 17-inch 3880.

Ctein

NOTE: Time is of the essence! You must *take delivery* of your printer by the end of this month to get the rebate—not just order it. So if you want to take advantage of this, don't delay.

When all is right with the world, master printer Ctein's weekly column appears on Wednesday mornings on TOP.

Posted on Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 06:30 AM in Ctein, Printers and Printing | Permalink

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Comments

Sound great -- Just cranked up my Epson 7800 after it sat around for over a year. Ran the power clean and it was up and running with out any problems. The first test with out the power cleaning all jets where clogged.
Some ink karts are marked 2008 when installed -- they all work great. Have run older ink carts on other pro Epson machines with out any problem or color shift.
No matter how you slice it -- inkjet printing is way cheaper then C printing in the red light dungeon.

Posted by: Carl L | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 07:53 AM

Under a thousand bucks eh?

I am so sick of getting ripped off in this country - the best I can find online for the 3880 in Australia is about $1800 Au... and the Aussie dollar is at least equal to the greenback atm.

Signed
disgusted in sunny Queensland.

Posted by: RobG | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 07:55 AM

You are *not helping*, Ctein! :-)

Especially after doing the set of prints for work (at 20x30), I'm rather excited about big prints. And 8x10 stopped looking big a long time ago.

(I've been working fairly hard on not buying an Epson 17" printer since last fall. Successfully, so far.)

Posted by: David Dyer-Bennet | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 08:12 AM

I'm trying to decide between the R3000 and R3880 now. I'm leaning towards the R3000 because it supports roll paper. I like my occasional panorama print. :-)

Posted by: Bruce KRobusek | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 08:34 AM

I have been using Epson printers for years and years and have always been happy with their photo printers. (My first photo-quality printer was a Stylus Photo EX.) I usually buy them as refurbs from the refurb section of Epson's website: several years ago they went to a full-warranty policy on their refurbs and IME the service is exactly the same as buying new unopened. The one time I had a refurb die on me out of the box, they cross-shipped me a replacement - which turned out to be new unopened. Given that they also usually apply the current discounts other than model rebates to refurbs - and sometimes even those - you can get AMAZING deals. (Free shipping and $100 off ANY printer makes a refurb that was already $300 cheaper than new unopened ridiculously cheap.)

I have a 3800, the first 17" printer in the 38xx line, and I really like it. Sometimes I can go quite some time between prints and I never have clog issues, and the ink tanks just go on and on.

One thing that I had to learn the hard way about wide-format printers, especially larger than 13", is that while they technically CAN print on small sheet stock, it can be aggravating. For instance, my 3800 can print on 4x6 paper, but printing borderless is very hard because the paper tends to not quite be in register. I thought I had a problem and went to Calumet to see if their printer did it too, and it did. The salesperson saw me fiddling and noted that really big printers often have problems with small sheet stock because their paper-handling mechanisms have to be very robust to deal with the big sheets. I don't know if it's true but it makes sense.

It may seem silly to worry about 4x6 and 5x7 prints on your 17" printer, but that's the ONLY printer I have in my office. (My wife has an all-in-one upstairs that I can send regular printouts to.) Just a note so you don't spend most of a day figuring out why you can't get perfect small prints sometimes. :)

Posted by: MarcW | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 08:42 AM

Question: I have an R2400 that's been in a box for 2 years. I'd like to start printing with it again. How do I rehabilitate it? What steps do I need to take to clean the nozzles, get it working?

Posted by: www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=712952536 | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 09:08 AM

Also, can someone recommend a good book or website that covers digital printing with these printers, the different types of paper, etc.?

Posted by: www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=712952536 | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 09:13 AM

I have, for some time, been very attracted to the low ink costs that you mention with the 17" printers. There is no doubt that someone who is only an occasional user will see a savings in the ink, due to the aforementioned 80ml cartridges.

I love my R2400, but it seems like I am putting a cartridge into it almost every time I use it.

Posted by: Jim in Denver | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 09:19 AM

Re: your 2400.

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Sarge (1)
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Assuming it was stored with the tanks in it and had been used, your nozzles will almost certainly have clogging issues. But, first, give it a go. You may be pleasantly surprised. I have a 2400 sitting on the floor in my office that I keep meaning to try to find a home for. (Anybody in Chicago or north suburbs need one? Free to good home.) Every few months I hook it up and run a nozzle check, and it does really well about coming back up after just a few print tests. It hurts nothing to run the nozzle check pattern first.

Many Epson printers have a "deep cleaning" cycle which cannot be accessed from the user-level command dialogs. Epson techs have a special program that can access it, but it's easy to activate with a freeware program for many models. For a printer in storage that long, I'd nose about on the web and see if I could find out if the 2400 is one of them. If so, do that FIRST. It uses a lot more ink, but it's much more effective than the regular cycle. And, fair warning, when I say a lot more ink, I am not kidding. Run it more than once and you will see your levels drop quite noticeably.

If all else fails, they make tanks full of cleaning solvent for some printers, you might look around to see if you can find them for your 2400.

Posted by: MarcW | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 09:30 AM

For those of you wondering what the difference between the 3880 and 4880-4900-9900. The '880 series are Epsons K3 magenta printers, which have now been superseded by the '900 inkset printers, which feature red and green inks and internal switching between photo and matte black cartridges. On the 880 series, manual switching of black inks is necessary. Switching inks is costly, and if you do a lot of switching between matte and RC (resin coated) "gloss, semi-gloss, luster" paper, the savings from a '900 series printer (it uses slightly less ink in switching), and don't like the hassle of physically switching cartridges, the 900 series might be worth the investment.

Another point of consideration is roll vs cutsheet. Roll paper can be found very inexpensively from a variety of sources online, and if you do a lot of printing, the advantages over more expensive "cut sheet" papers might prove significant. As I understand it, the 3880 is cut sheet only.

Finally, the 4880 and up feature a vacuum inside the print mechanism to create a seal between the printer and the paper. Since I live in S. Florida, the expansion of boutique papers and curling due to humidity means I cannot use the 3880, as even with the widest platen gap I get print anomalies.

If you do live in a humid climate and desire the 3880, I recommend buying paper stock (which can obviously be expensive) only as you need it, for the reasons mentioned above, as storage, even with a desiccant, will not prevent papers from expanding, contracting, and curling.

As an aside, I have hammered my 7880 for 3 years with a variety of unapproved media (japanese hemp papers, plastic sheets), and it still produces prints like the day I got it. Thanks to Ctein for an excellent review, if you treat your Epson right (as has already been mentioned in the comments) and use the manufacturers ink, you can be assured many years of bulletproof service.

Posted by: yunfat | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 09:32 AM

Mine is a 3800, not 3880, but I everything Ctein says applies. Wonderful printer. Not a single problem in over 2 years. The one problem I do have is that I can't upgrade from Leopard (10.5x) to Snow Leopard (10.6x) because of some kind of problem with drivers for the 3800 and Snow Leopard. I don't really understand the cautions on Epson's support pages about this but I am leery about using Gutenprint or Rosetta (whatever they are).

If anyone can shed any light on this issue, I would be most grateful. Eventually I will have to go to Snow Leopard (or Lion) and I hate to get rid of a perfectly good printer just to make an OS upgrade.

Posted by: John Haines | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 10:08 AM

Hi Ctein. Can you post in the future something about papers? I would like to know opinions for fine art prints and too for paper used to make proofs. I like very much Exhibition Fiber Paper by Epson but i would like to know how about other brands like Canson or Ilford. Saludos

Posted by: Hernan Zenteno | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 10:21 AM

Now you've done it. I bought a 2880 when I bought a camera for my daughter over the holidays because with the rebate it was a very good deal. First time I've been able to print larger format prints and have been rotating displays on my office wall to many compliments. Unfortunnately I've come to realize that 13x19 doesn't look so big when you put it on a wall. You may have pushed me over the edge.

Posted by: Pete F | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 11:30 AM

Dear Yunfat,

The 880 series does not require manual switching of cartridges. The 3880 holds all nine carts, including both blacks, and it automatically switches inks as necessary. Ink consumption is very low when it switches.

I seriously considered the 4880 last fall for several mechanical reasons, including the ones you mentioned. Mechanically, I think it's in the same league with the 7K and 9K series. The 3880 is a step below that (still a much more solid design than the 2K series).

Decided against it because it was twice as large and more than twice as heavy as the 3880. I wouldn't have been able to move it into my office and if I had it wouldn't have fit!

pax / Ctein

Posted by: ctein | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 12:54 PM

Playing off the various advantages and disadvantages of the 4880 vs. the 3880 has contributed significantly to my ability to resist both (so far).

But yeah, roll paper is of some financial significance, and also useful for panoramas. (My little R800 will take roll paper; I should do some panorama prints on it.) (Apart from the size, the big problem I have with the R800 is that it doesn't do B&W very well at all.) The 4800 takes bigger cartridges yet, too.

The 4880 takes considerably more space, too. (And the 3880 is not exactly small.)

You know what's really rather terrifying? Looking at the price of a full set of replacement cartridges for a 4880. Those cartridges are $70 each, and there are, what, 9 of them? Of course, you won't have to replace one very often. But at least at first they may well come due about at the same time.

Posted by: David Dyer-Bennet | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 01:15 PM

As I sit here reading this and needing to replace the matte black in my R2880, I'm curing the sky

Posted by: Sean | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 01:21 PM

As a follow-up to Marc W's comment, a question: what is the *smallest* sheet-paper stock that can be precisely handled by a 3880? I'd like to make occasional 17x22 prints, but 13x19 is my regular size. Will it handle that size? Will it go smaller yet?

Posted by: John Camp | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 01:50 PM

i have an r2880 and love it, except that getting it synched to the computer has never been quite right even after using the paper company supplied icc files. is the r3880 better in that regard? what is the difference between the two aside from the width of the paper?

Posted by: steve | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 02:07 PM

Dear Carl (and the fellow with no name with the R2400 printer),

If your cartridges have sat around a year or more without any use, I would take them all out and shake them a few times before firing up the printer, just in case there's been any settling of the ink particles, ala what Epson recommends with new cartridges. Mind you, I don't actually know whether this happens or not, but if Epson recommends it, what the harm?

As a general rule, printers are not going to survive a year of disuse with ink in the jets. I ruined my Epson R2200 by letting it sit fallow for about nine months while I was writing the first edition of DIGITAL RESTORATION. Even with power cleaning cycles and third-party cleaning solutions, I couldn't get it back to perfect running order. Ended up scrapping it, as the cost of having the heads replaced was a significant fraction of the cost of buying another printer.

A very good idea with any printer is to set aside a specific time each week when you cycle all your printers. All you have to do is print out the internal test page or a nozzle check. It's negligible ink consumption. Think of it as cheap insurance.

~~~~~~

Dear DDB,

Wait until you see my 17" x 22" prints this weekend. I will be helping you even less [VBG].

~~~~~~

Dear Bruce K,

I think it would depend on how long a panoramic you like to make. And how often you make them. I know there's a print length limit on the driver for the 3880, but I just told it to make a 17" x 60" print (16" x 58" image area) and it didn't choke. That's under Snow Leopard; the Windows driver might be different.

If your panoramic needs are only occasional, I would go buy a roll of paper, just cut off the length you need with a paper cutter, and feed it in as if it were a sheet.

~~~~~~

Dear Marc,
~~~~~~

The Epson store refurbished deals are great. What you actually usually get is a entirely new printer that someone returned, a so-called “open box” unit. In any case, the printers are fully covered by the Epson warranty. That's how I bought my R 2200, and I was entirely happy. On their professional printers, you can even buy the extended warranty if you want. Which covers any and all failures, even human error, last time I checked.

Before writing the column I did look at the Epson site and their price for a refurbished 3880 was not less than Amazon's standard price.

~~~~~~

Dear Yunfat,

A postscript to my previous reply:

Another advantage of the 4880 is that it takes even larger, cheaper-per-milliliter ink cartridges than the 3880. Combined with the more solid and robust mechanical design, if it weren't for the unwieldy weight and size I would've gone for it. I do enough printing to justify the extra expense.

I think if it had used the same form factor cartridges as the 9K series, I would've succumbed and just rearranged my whole office to make it work

Not sure most of our readers really need this, though. I think for them the economic sweet spot is the 3880, even if they are only a slightly-more-than-casual 13 inch-printer user.

pax \ Ctein
[Please excuse any word-salad. MacSpeech in training!]
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-- Ctein's Online Gallery http://ctein.com
-- Digital Restorations http://photo-repair.com
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Posted by: ctein | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 03:11 PM

I second Ctein's opinion to purchase a 3880 instead of a 2880 or 3000 even if you don't think that you'll ever print larger than 13x19 or often enough to amortize the additional cost via savings on ink.

In February 2010, I bought a 2880 because I was positive that 13x19 prints would be plenty large enough for my needs and I wouldn't be printing nearly often enough to amortize the additional cost of a 3880 over any reasonable period of time.

Fast forward to February, 2011, however, and as I about to place an order for yet another round of ink cartridges for the 2880, I ran the numbers and realized that, sho'nuff, I would've more than paid for the difference in cost between a 2880 and a 3880 with the savings in ink cost over the previous year, just as everybody had been telling back then.

Lesson learned, I bought a 3880 instead of more ink cartridges for my 2880 and as Ctein posits, I have since discovered a hitherto unknown fondness for printing 15x20s on 17x22 sheets of paper. :-)

Posted by: Jeffrey Goggin | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 03:11 PM

Ctein, that's a feature not present on the 7880 or 9880, so in at least one way, the 3880 is quite a bit easier to use. The footprint is another advantage... I think people should probably see these beasties in person before they buy one, because, as you say, they are pretty darn huge. Thanks again for the wonderful report, it's nice to see an accomplished multi media printer as yourself sing the praises of the Epson K3 magenta, it means a lot.

Posted by: yunfat | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 03:23 PM

Dear Hernan,

I'm not the best one to do that. My tastes in paper are very narrow. I dislike just about all the fine art papers. For matte prints, honestly, I like the Epson Ultra Premium Presentation Matte. I think the ultra-expensive matte papers are only miniscully better, and they cost many times as much per sheet. The Epson paper is so inexpensive that I don't even need a proofing paper.

My taste runs much more towards semi-gloss finishes, though. Personally I prefer the Ilford Gold Fibre Silk to the Epson Exhibition Fiber, but that's only because I really hate textured papers. The less of that, the better. Otherwise, they look the same to me.

~~~~~~

Dear DDB,

Continuing to make your life difficult, note what I said to Bruce K about running panoramas through the 3880.

Strangely, I don't find ink consumption is at all similar between the cartridges, even though I think I print a fairly eclectic mix, tone- and color-wise, of photographs. The lighte black went first, closely followed by the photo black. That's no surprise; I have consistently found those get used heavily, especially the light black. After that it was the light magenta; I just replaced the light cyan, and I'm going to have to replace light light black pretty soon. All three of those within the span of about a month, but I've been printing pretty heavily.

But the magenta, cyan, and yellow cartridges still are showing about half as much ink as they had after I charged the printer last October. They are consuming less by a factor of more than two. So, no, you're not likely to get the sticker shock of having to replace everything at once.

~~~~~~

Dear John C,

As I mentioned at the beginning of my article, the majority of my printing is smaller sizes. Actually, even 13" x 19" is larger than my usual; 11" x 17" paper is my norm. My second most heavily-used size is 8.5 x 11. The printer has absolutely no problem feeding paper that small with high accuracy.

pax \ Ctein
[Please excuse any word-salad. MacSpeech in training!]
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-- Ctein's Online Gallery http://ctein.com
-- Digital Restorations http://photo-repair.com
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Posted by: ctein | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 03:34 PM

And it is so compact : living in a Parisian appartment, compactness closed the deal with my wife.

Unused, it stays inside a 20" wide cupboard. I roll it out to print.

Posted by: Francois | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 03:42 PM

John:

I have an old but still very functional 2200 running successfully on an iMac with Snow Leopard. It was a bit of a pain to get it running. The default seemed to be Gutenprint, which was unsatisfactory - most printer options seemed to be unavailable.

I downloaded drivers from Epson's website, and still had problems until I first ran Uninstall and then did an install. That did the trick.

Since then, and calibrating with an Eye-One, things have been fine.

Ctein:

Thanks again for a useful and readable article.

Posted by: Steve G, Mendocino | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 03:43 PM

The print quality of my 3800 is lovely, but it has, at times, been haunted by strange behavioral problems: Currently, the printer balks at use of the rear feeder, which is necessary for thicker papers. I tell it I'm going to use the rear feeder, but when I feed the paper into rear, it stalls and announces that I've made a "paper setting error" . Anyone have a fix for this anomoly???(Mac, 10.6.x, LR3)
FYI: Run the 3800 with Snow Leopard using Rosetta(an Apple product); web search "Rosetta" for more info.
FYI: Personally, I would stay away from Gutenprint...I accidentally tried to use it once and found the drivers to be limited compared to the Epson drivers. Gutenprint seems to be kind of an emergency, default, I've-got-nothing-else kind of thing.
FYI: The 3800 will not accommodate rolls of paper, but I have read in several places that it will run sheets larger than 17x22"; 17x38" or some such.

Posted by: Keith B. | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 03:57 PM

Ctein, does the 3880 avoid the problems with Snow Leopard that occur with the 3800?

Posted by: Jeff | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 04:06 PM

Steve, the generic profiles from the paper companies are usually pretty good, but for *best* results you should get a custom profile made for YOUR printer. That could account for "not quite right", if you have a good eye. (If the difference is bigger than that, though, there's something else wrong in your workflow.)

(I used to make profiles myself, using second-class methods, which were useful in the early days when using random third-party paper and third-party pigment inks in a continuous inkfeed system. The second-class methods, scanners and such, aren't good enough to be clearly better than generic profiles, though, and I haven't stepped up to that. One firm often mentioned as making good custom profiles for a good price is Cathy's Profiles.)

Posted by: David Dyer-Bennet | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 04:11 PM

It is totally refreshing to read an insightful review of a printer. Ctein has provided! Such observations as the real life advantages of larger ink cartridges, and especially how the 3880 handles a run-out in the middle of a print are so GOOD TO KNOW, and missing from other reviews. So, thank you thank you.
I am still printing with a Stylus Photo 2200. It still works like day one. The only problems came when after printing several prints one day running Leopard, and installing Snow Leopard (which I now sacrilegiously refer to as Snow Job) I found that the OS switch had relieved me of drivers for both my printers and a new (less than a year old) scanner. Not, as I see it, an Epson shortcoming.
You have made the case for the 3880, and it is on my list for later 2011.

Posted by: Mark K Lough | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 04:57 PM

Morning Ctein,

Rule of thumb, if you print A4 regularly buy an A3 printer.....if you print A3 regularly buy an A2 printer.....if you print A2 regularly buy an A1 printer.....if you print A1 regularly.....buy and A1 printer and if you print A0 regularly buy an A0 printer. Ink does not vary in prince between A1 and A0 printers. A2 printers are a bit cheaper. A3 printers are about as expensive in ink then A4 printers (so an A4 printer is no use what soever) and an A3 printer is an A4 printer with which you can print an A3 occasionally. And the price gap between a 2400 and a 3880 is filled nearly completely by the fact that a 2400 is delivered with 99 ml ink and an 3880 is delivered with a whopping 9 x 80 is 720 ml ink (if I'm not mistaken and Epson does deliver a printer with full cartridges). Thus I consider everything under an A2 printer a waste of resources and money.

Greetings, Ed

Posted by: Ed | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 05:07 PM

~~~~~~

So I take it the 3880 does not do roll paper? Does anyone know which is the smallest Epson printer that has >80ml carts and takes rolls?

Mike

Posted by: Mike Johnston | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 05:13 PM

I am on my 3rd Epson 3880 Printer. Within a month, the first 2 did not work. Epson were good at replacing them though. If you print black-and-white as I do, with large stretches of just black, on Epson 'ultra-premium-presentation paper' ie formerly Enhanced Matte, the results are not consistent at all.
Sometimes the printer works fine. Other times, you have to print several times to get a print without a pattern of jagged white spaces, while the "nozzle check" shows everything is ok. I was a beta-tester for Crane Museo, so I know printing. BUT, with semi-gloss and glossy papers, no problem. Ctein's work is wonderful, but he doesn't print in black-and-white with large expanse of black on matte papers. (perhaps I should get a 4th printer?)

Posted by: ben ng | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 05:40 PM

RobG,

We don't even have 2xxx series in Asia. Perhaps the demand is not strong enough, but it still sucks!

Chan

Posted by: Chan | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 06:51 PM

Ctein,

Do you see a useful increase in print quality over the 2400? The above arguments aren't quite enough for me to upgrade, but are close.

Can you characterise any differences you see?

Thanks,
Dave.

Posted by: Dave | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 07:41 PM

To all and sundry,

For everyone who's clamoring for comparisons between the 3800 and the 3880, I've never used the former nor have I investigated it in any respect. I can't help you with any of your questions about differences in features, performance, or system compatibility between the two. Sorry.

I've not been able to track down the maximum print length the Epson driver will allow. I've determined experimentally that it's at least 60 inches for the Snow Leopard driver. Anybody have some reference information on this? Just curious.

BTW, yet one more advantage of the 3880 over the 3000 and lower-numbered printers is that it has cheap, user-replaceable waste ink cartridges. As I wrote in "Planned Obsolescence" (http://tinyurl.com/2cn78vj) that will become a significant issue if you're at all a regular printer.

Speaking of which, here are some Atlex prices, which are the best source I know of for supplies for this puppy. 80 mL ink cartridges from them are $45 plus shipping. The maintenance cartridge is $20 plus shipping.

If you're going to buy one of these printers, please use the link that Mike set up, so he'll get his cut. But when you need supplies down the line, you'll save a lot of money with Atlex.

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Dear Yunfat,

Yeah. the lack of automatic black changing on the large printers really bugs me. I own a 9800 and I never use it with anything but “photo black” media, because the time and cost of switching inks is so high. I figure switching between inks and back again would eat up at least $100 in supplies and take a couple of hours. I've told clients that I'm not even interested in considering doing printing for them on matte media unless the job's going to come in in the mid four figures and I can print all the work at once; if it's a job that would stretch out over more than a week or so, they can forget it.

In fact I've got three outdated matte black 220 mL ink carts that I'll sell really cheaply to anybody who wants them. Like, $20 apiece plus shipping. They were included when I bought the printer, and after three years I've decided I'm never, ever gonna have a use for them.

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Dear Mike,

That would be the 4880. Moderately more expensive, definitely much more robust, and much, much bigger.

If you're only going to be running occasional extra-long prints, I'd go the paper cutter (or X-Acto knife) route that I suggested to Bruce K.

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[Please excuse any word-salad. MacSpeech in training!]
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-- Ctein's Online Gallery http://ctein.com
-- Digital Restorations http://photo-repair.com
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Posted by: ctein | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 08:20 PM

@Keith B....I put thicker papers in the front feeder with no problems.

Posted by: Jeff | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 09:39 PM

John H:

If you're running MacOS X 10.5 (Leopard), you're already using Rosetta to run old Mac PowerPC applications. The main difference between Leopard and Snow Leopard in regard to Rosetta is that Rosetta doesn't ship with Snow Leopard.

The first time you try to run a PowerPC application, Snow Leopard will notice, and offer to download and install Rosetta for you.

Given others' comments about successfully using their Epson printers under Snow Leopard, you probably ought to go for it.

If for no other reason than that it appears very likely at this point that Rosetta will not be an option at all under OS X 10.7 (Lion), which probably will be introduced late this coming summer. The last PowerPC Mac was introduced in October, 2005, it's been a long time since the handwriting appeared on the wall for its eventual end.

Rosetta was intended to be a stop gap, to ease the transition from PPC to Intel architectures.

Posted by: steveH | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 10:05 PM

well, after 3630 prints my 3800 is completely shagged (australian for distinctly worn out) and I came to realize that I only used one box of A2 paper in all that lot so I just bought an R3000, which prints exactly like the 3800 but does not cost me hundreds of dollars every time I buy a few cartridges. I am very aware that the smaller cartridges are more expensive per ml, but in Australia the 3880 cartridges cost nearly $100 each, and our dollar's worth more than yours!
I would be very interested to know how many prints other people do before their 3800 becomes uneconomic to repair.

Posted by: mark lacey | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 10:08 PM

Dear Dave,

You'll be happy to know, not a bit. In point of fact, I was thrilled at how similar my R2400 and 3880 prints were after I made a custom profile for the 3880. I didn't have to do any tweaking to my finished-print files to get them to look the same on the 3880.

Truth is I've seen precious little difference in print appearance between the 2400, 2880 and 3880. Yeah, yeah I know there's K3 vs Vivid Magenta K3 inksets and 5760ppi vs 2880ppi output, but I just can't see any of it making much difference in how my prints look.

So, save your money.

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Posted by: ctein | Wednesday, 20 April 2011 at 11:40 PM

Just a little note about print and paper sizes. I often like to print with a substantiaI white border. Some images I don't like to frame with a mount (matte in US speak). For me a print often works nicely sitting in a large sea of pristine white. I print on various Epson printers - 2400, an old 4000 (still going strong) and a 9880 - and I like the opportunities that the large paper sizes give, quite apart form producing large images per se.

Posted by: richard | Thursday, 21 April 2011 at 12:47 AM

The Epson3880 is the best as I just won a bet with mine.
Swiss banknotes contain a small 1cm x 1cm section with tiny print describing the achievements of the person depicted. Most people even Swiss, haven't noticed and even less can read it. I'm one of the lucky ones who can and so is a coworker. Anyway I bet with him that I could scan the text and print it in the same size while leaving the text readable.
Aside from some trouble scanning the note (Scaners recognize this as being illegal and bring up a funny warning) it all went fine. I learned that for me printing at 560dpi resolution provided optimal results.
Printed on Gold Fiber Silk so I second that choice of Ctein as well.

Posted by: Christian Kurmann | Thursday, 21 April 2011 at 01:12 AM

Dear Mark,

I don't see the economic logic. Assuming an average print size of A3-A4, 3600 prints equals a good 3 liters of ink. How much would that cost you in 3880 carts vs R3000 carts?

Not counting the extra 300 ml of ink that comes with the printer.

You may reasonably feel that an over-$1K printer should be good for more than 3600 prints, but more than the entire cost of the printer was saved in ink costs over buying a smaller one.

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Posted by: ctein | Thursday, 21 April 2011 at 04:48 AM

I am done with Epson since, years ago, I bought a Color Stylus 3000. A printer unable to draw the paper in rectangularly, with nice pizza wheels on most prints, slow as a snail and with permanent clogging issues. For a repair Epson demanded a modest lump sum of 1/3 of the recommended retail price of the printer even if only a roller was to be exchanged.
It spend a decade in attics and cellars and now HP gives me 300 Euros in HP papers for it on the purchase of my new HP Z 3200 44" which is a real photo printer So, it finally had its worth :-)With the HP: no switching between matte and photo black, no waste ink container, and calibration on board. (and, in photography, nowadays, like it or not, size matters, so a mere A 2 is a little small).

Posted by: Torsten Walter | Thursday, 21 April 2011 at 07:27 AM

I feel very lonely now. Am I the only person in the world with a Canon? :)

I recently bought a Canon iPF5100 (comparable to the Epson 4xxx size, does up to 17" wide with a roll) second-hand for A$1000, and am absolutely loving printing for myself rather than using a lab. Think it'll pay for itself in under a year, but boy when those cartridges empty it hits the wallet hard.

I've been printing on Canson Baryta Photographique (semigloss photo, as recommended by Luminous Landscape) and the Hahnemuhle Photo Rag (matte / art paper). Bought a Spyder3Studio profiling kit and am getting just perfect matches between screen and print... it's a whole new world!

Posted by: Josh Marshall | Thursday, 21 April 2011 at 08:43 AM

Ed, I queried ATLEX on the question of Epson printers and what cartridges they shipped with (last year, so probably still current info). At least the ones sold by ATLEX (they said "all", but ATLEX people would know the ones they sold best) come with full normal cartridges (no "starter cartridge" games).

Posted by: David Dyer-Bennet | Thursday, 21 April 2011 at 08:46 AM

So, the 3880 works fine with Snow Leopard? Still not clear. Thanks.

Posted by: Jeff | Thursday, 21 April 2011 at 10:01 AM

John Camp:

My 3800 handles 5x7 paper with no trouble, although you need to kind of be prim and proper about evening the stack if you're doing borderless as it might drop slightly out of register if the paper guide isn't just so. Borderless 4x6 is entirely hit and miss. Anything larger than 5x7 is a nonissue (8.5x11 it handles just as well as larger papers.)

I use my 3800 with OS X 10.6.7 (Snow Leopard) and aside from an annoying tendency to default to the wrong print settings (I just check them before I hit print, every time) it works just fine. It *did* have some serious driver issues with, IIRC, 10.4 which required many hours of twiddling and manually altering configurations. But right now it's go go go.

I've never printed a borderless 17" print, but I've printed borderless 13" prints and they were just fine.

Posted by: MarcW | Thursday, 21 April 2011 at 12:38 PM

I bought a 3880 last fall under a similar rebate program in Canada but alas it still sits in its original shipping box! I just love my 2200 too much - but you column has inspired me to get a grip and taste the fruits of a larger format

Posted by: David Tanaka | Thursday, 21 April 2011 at 12:46 PM

Thanx David, I thought so, that starter catridge game was beginning to smell a bit iffy, wasn't it? But thanx, for informing and nice to know when I fork out 1100 euro's for a 3880 in the Netherlands (including VAT of course).

Greetings, Ed

Posted by: Ed | Thursday, 21 April 2011 at 01:34 PM

Hate to make everyone cry, but I think it was last Thanksgiving when I bought my 3880.

Here's why:
Calumet had a price of $1099
They offered $100 discount plus free shipping
Then Epson had a $300 rebate.

So, I got my 3880 for about $700

Not bad.

New in the box.

Posted by: David Bram | Thursday, 21 April 2011 at 10:43 PM

Late to the party, I know, but I thought I had this link around here somewhere... article from Epson UK on dealing with Snow Leopard driver issues with Epson 3800 printers. Probably applicable to other similar printers.

http://www.epson.co.uk/Printers-and-All-In-Ones/Large-Format/Epson-Stylus-Pro-3800/Drivers-Support?target=article&extn=.html&articleId=3989

Posted by: MarcW | Friday, 22 April 2011 at 09:06 PM

oh Epson, how do I love thee, let us count the ways...

The planned obsolescence, in not creating firmwire/driver updates which bridge system changes. It is a (green) crime to have to dump a perfectly good printer because Epson does not want to service customers when customers update systems/computers. The 2200 lost some function with the change from OS9 to OSX. (Apple is incredibly guilty of this too. I just dumped two older units at the hazmat recycling dump. Have two others under the desk, and will have to get a third soon as mu main unit is not Intel literate - though still a strong, capable machine).

The error messages, default back print settings, and printing which just stops midway through :((

The drips of ink, and smudged edges, and tracked ink across the pages.

The price of ink!!! ";O

The paper feed which continually jams, or circulates page after page - unprinted! (Even with regular stationary).

Epson's apparent inability to address these issues.

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Ctein, thank you for the review! It does sound quite tempting, however every time I hit one of the snags above, I swear I'll never buy another Epson again. Then I wonder if the competition doesn't have it's own set of issues to frustrate, and pick our pockets.

But another reason not to buy this printer is my lack of volume. I'm still using a 2200, on (the last Apple) non-Intel machine. The photography business is crap these days, and I don't print that many larger prints, that the occasional outsourced Lambda, lightjet, or large format inkjet wont service in a more economic manner. In fact my bigger ocassional prints tend to be much bigger than 17".

Since this printer is working so well, you must have lost interest in the last of your dye transfer materials. I may have some room in the garage ";P.
btw - how does the 3880 handle a crisp business letter on recycled business stationary?

Posted by: Scott | Saturday, 23 April 2011 at 11:43 AM

Glad the ink is cheaper. I had the 2400 and the ink ate me alive. I guess I just don't use a printer enough to justify having one. By the time I get the calibration/heads straight, I've done 5 or 6 prints to get one good one. I finally decided to just leave it to the lab! lol

Posted by: Larry Lourcey | Saturday, 23 April 2011 at 01:26 PM

Dear Larry,

I touched on this some in my series of columns last year on custom printing, starting with "Do 'Real' Photographers Print?" (http://tinyurl.com/2fa4a5s)

Short form is that I don't see any moral or artistic superiority in doing one's own printing. It's only a matter of preference. The time and energy one would put into getting to a good print can be just as valuably spent towards making more good photos.

But, now I'm wondering about something. I need to make very few prints to get to a final one, but this is my profession. 5-6 doesn't sound like it's necessarily an excessive number. Heck for all I know, you might even be more efficient than most.

I have no idea.

I'd guess my mean is 2.5, 'cause my mode is 2 and occasionally I'll nail it on the first print, but then there are those annoying ones that take 3-4 trials before I finally get it right.

As I said, it's my job.

Mike, does this sound like an interesting poll question for the readership that prints? On average how many prints do you think you make to get from the first trial print to a finished one?

pax / Ctein

Posted by: ctein | Monday, 25 April 2011 at 11:12 AM

The comments to this entry are closed.