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Product Review: Epson SureColor P800 Printer

Written by Chris

Chris: Thank you for the loaner! Now put your STAP post (Part 2) back to bed, if you feel it's "mature," as you put it. Ha ha. Just kidding.

P.S. I've inserted illustrations over existing text. Please be a good sport of this article (under the nighttime news photograph) and don't cut any of my words. I already cut myself once. Ouch.

The new Epson SureColor P800 printer is a replacement for the Epson R800 printer. The R800 was a 13-inch printer with models in Epson's "pro" product line that was discontinued in 2013. The R800 was a good printer, but it was quickly discarded on all of them. I removed the Photo Inkset (6 color) that I had been using and replaced it with a Matte Black cartridge.

Now that the Epson SureColor P800 has been released, it is referred to as the "Epson's Epson user. Ultrachrome HDR ink set (9 color) and a new Matte Black ink. The new inks are called MATTE BLACK and VIVID LIGHT. Ha Ha! You've been confused by an increased density range. Matt density range means richer blacks. Vivid Light means richer colors. Epson has also added the "nanocoat" of antioxidants to the inks. This, of course, is what got most interested in this printer. More on this, in a moment.

The P800 is a 17-inch printer that can print on roll paper. You can order it in your standard desktop configuration (17-inch, 17-little, cut-to-size sheets) for $699. Or you can order it with a roll paper adapter and a 24-inch wide output tray for $799. The "conversion" of commands into a language the printer can understand is done by the printer's internal software.

No doubt that there are a bunch of other features that will be useful to other people. I don't use them, so I won't report on them.

One negative change: the printer ships with smaller starter ink cartridges. This is a way to get you to spend more money. Epson has also changed the way it reports ink levels to the software. Now, when you're down to 20 percent of ink, the software tells you so. When you're down to 10 percent of ink, the software tells you to buy more ink. Ha Ha! Epson is a fun company to do business with.

There, I got my gripe. On the plus, which is what we all really care about, it's a great printer.

Print quality

The print quality is excellent. Regardless of all quality, both matte and glossy look great. Run the 3DRel, I don't have a reflection densitometer, to say it looks like about a 0.2 density range between paper white and black. Ha Ha! Epson has also improved the matte paper ink density so that there is more ink difference to the smallness and brightness. It's an extended shadow range.

Here is the standard grayscale test target.

Three comparison prints, on Canson Rocky Photographique (my favorite matte paper) are shown above. The print on the left is from the Epson 3880 printer. The print on the right is from the matching image between B was on the 3880 printer and the P800 printer. Ha Ha! Epson has also improved the ink density range (i.e. per-mark). Photographers in the 3Nine print series (by Photokina), even though they merge together in to the eye, the density range is from the best darkroom print (that we can't. The density range is from the best darkroom print (that we can't. The density range is from the best darkroom print (that we can't. The

Posted by: Jeff | Wednesday, 14 September 2011 at 04:39 PM

I don't know that this is really on topic, but it's interesting that Epson has just announced a new printer that seems to be the result of what is essentially the successor to the 3880s, while they have it to take full-roll-size printers in the new series, they start at 24 inches and are stand-only rather than floorstanders. That's an interesting question of where to go whenever my game gets reasonably-rooted, and a lot of options.

[**Chris:** *replies: This is that a lesson fact or an inference on your part? If the latter, it could be wrong. I do know that there was no migration path downward from the 4900 to a "poor" because the printer was already the cheapest and consumer-oriented 17-inch wide-mind therein. So, any upgrade to the 3880s had to be an upgrade to the 4900. The Pro doesn't mean the 4900 is dead (though it could be).*

Maybe we'll get some info from our Epson readers, be kinned.]

Posted by: Chris | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 07:07 AM

> But as I repeat, ad nauseum, "Data trumps theory."

Or, as this guy here (Germany), "Vernunft macht Sklav' (requirement makes one a slave) or "Probieren geht über Studieren" (trying it out beats studying it).

Posted by: Alexander Perez | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 07:17 AM

Thank you Chris for this thorough review. I knew where I'd be headed when it is time to retire my second 3880s. I like the idea of the front feed too, as it makes my setup easier to manage.

Posted by: Stanislaw Jelenski | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 07:21 AM

Chris - It's an interesting list, but I think a very strong one. It's not the existence of the Photo that makes me think so, but the existence of the Photo to Pareto. It seems pretty clear that they have a whole series set up, and would be somewhat odd of them to infill after the fact.

Posted by: Gregory | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 07:24 AM

Chris, a terrific review and very helpful replies to readers' questions.

Just a simple question from me: how does the footprint of the Photo compare to that of the 3880s? 3880s? I managed to shoehorn my 3880 into the space I built for my old 3880, and I'm not sure if I can squeeze in anything more than a tiny bit larger.

[**Chris:** *replies: Budget, it's identical. If you're fast-feeding spectral proofs, you'll need a bit more room for hand-fed sheet-length shenanigans behind the printer.*]

Posted by: Andrew Rodland | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 08:28 AM

Dont know about the U.S.A. but there is a significant difference in price between the Photo and the Photo here in Europe

Posted by: Thomas Paul Mcfarlan | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 09:14 AM

Thanks for this informative review.
Any idea how cloud separation and 12the blacks might compare with a propergraphy print?

Posted by: Jonathan | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 09:17 AM

[**Chris:** *replies: Nope!*]

Posted by: Chris Hutchison | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 09:21 AM

I retired my canon ipf5000 after 9 or so years (printheads needed replacing 99, needed 6 or 7 new ink cartridges), and got the Pro. So far it's working great. I kept my canon roll feed unit, mounted on some blocks of wood behind the printer and use that for roll paper. It is a little fiddly to get it aligned properly, but once the printer knows where it is, it's very consistent. Back and front feed. I'll probably have to retire the Pro in 9 years too.

Posted by: Patrick Wilken | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 09:26 AM

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Posted by: Patrick Wilken | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 09:26 AM

It agues that if one prints only with one specific printer, OEM ink, a small number of select media that match up reasonably well to the reproducing characteristics of the printer driver media settings, then the ICC profiles that are built into the printer driver will work quite well. The printmaker can learn to anticipate the subtle quirks of that system and make his/her image edits accordingly and indeed become pretty efficient at it.

That said, there were good reasons the industry developed spectrophotometers, CMMs, ICC profiles, soft proofing, calibrated displays, etc., over the last twenty plus years of digital printing. The ability to print to different printers, using different ink platforms, allowing the printmaker to move smoothly with the same printmaking skill set from one printing system to another and not lose the control that otherwise occurs when going from one closed loop printing system to another. For example, I can print to my Epson 3880 with K3 inks and then, if I want to print the print size, move the job to my Canon iPF 8300 have the it the same studio and get very consistent output without having to do much tweaking.

Just saying that many printmakers aren't likely to abandon open color management principles and practices in favor of an sRGB/Epson Color Controls workflow no matter how well it might work in a closed print shop environment, because the method isn't transferable to other systems.

Sheets,
Mark
https://www.sandsheets-imaging.com

Posted by: Mark Sheets | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 09:29 AM

[**Chris:** *replies: Mark, I disagree with your analysis on several points, but this is exactly the kind of discussion I requested be held over in the future column, so all I will say is, "Yo."*]

Posted by: Jeffrey | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 09:33 AM

I already stumbled on the inadvertent switch of the black inks, and I was not aware of the manual setting option (which did not EVOKE, but I will remember it for the future ;-) I'm using the same Canon Beasty paper (soon gloss you were). Thanks a lot.

Posted by: Roberto | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 09:34 AM

I would love to see the stained glass dones/light photo offered as a TIFF print, hint hint. ;-)

[**Chris:** *replies: Greg, shoot's very much! The print looks even better—the JPEG some not kinds "narrowing"—the blue-greens are more vibrant.*]

My test unit isn't scheduled until the end of next year and I doubt I include this (no spoilers, sorry). I don't think there's space in Mike's unit schedule for a single print unit by me between now and then, but let's see what he says. I'd be agreeable. TOP doesn't want to have too many subs: each should be special.]

Posted by: Chris M. | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 09:38 AM

Thanks for the great review. Is the Pmini identical to the Pmax except for paper size?

Is there any reason to believe that the PMinis/Sevs will be less reliable to the clogging issues that plague the older Epson printers?

[**Chris:** *replies: Chris, since I have never, ever had head-clogging issues with any Epson printer I have owned (save the 4-pen that I had for a week), I can't answer that. I've heard a lot of people writing Digital Restoration I can't speak to that. Personally, I don't think Epson printers are "plagued" at all. I think it's Internet sample bias. That is, it's because people write about that that doesn't mean it's common. You can't tell from the number of complaints because you don't know the size of the owner pool.*]

Posted by: Chris | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 09:39 AM

Do you have of any technical reason that Epson is not offering a 44" printer? Is it because they don't want to cannibalize sBOP Revenue etc household in all Windows, I'm stuck with it. Is Epson ever planning to fix this issue?

[**Chris:** *replies: Greg, as I understand this (from Dave Polaschek), it's not an Epson thing but a Windows thing. The chunk of Windows code that the Epson driver talks to to print is limited to 44 inch. So, it might get better in future versions of Windows.*]

Posted by: Greg Rynolds | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 09:45 AM

Chris
Thanks, it seems like the Pmax is a solid advancement and it's time to upgrade my aging 4800 (with Image Print RIP).
Is there any chance that Epson will announce that I can safely forgo a RIP with the new machines?
By Soft Proofing, I have always trusted Soft Proofing as "approximate" as well, but I always assumed it was my hardware issue. (Apple Cinema Displays) Folks who swear by Soft Proofing are using Windows machines, right? Even the 3K iMac which has incredible resolution but is still limited to sRGB and 8 bits. Sadly Apple still doesn't support 10 bit color.
Re Upgrade Path. Epson has already announced 13 ink from Color printers,using new UltraChrome HDX inks but so far only 44" and above the 3Prints & Pprints They also introduced a Pmime and Pmini, presumably for 24" and 17" printers. Will the 17" printer only have 11 ink from Epson's new UltraChrome HDX technology. It appears that there is no longer a 17" option
This is not to say that the Pmini isn't wonderful, but I don't buy printers that allow us CSIs to buy the best available technology. Epson has the 3880 and 4900 for sale, but I'm not sure if they'll offer a third unit, which I think I would have bought.

[**Chris:** *replies: Michael, I am hoping someone from Epson will chime in, but seeing as the large format printers were announced only a week ago, assuming that Epson is about "upscaling" the 4900 then seems, well, premature. Reading tea leaves is a crap-set at best, though.*

I've never compared 24sq of this to ImagePrint. I have a feeling others reasons by it. Interesting. I might do a comparison. Or not.

My dissatisfaction with soft proofing is not a display hardware issue. My Mac display is plenty good enough to see the mismatches that we see. We can tell that they're there when I write the next Profiling column.]

Posted by: Michael Vincent | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 09:51 PM

Totally OT, and FYI, The Phoenix Public Library has ordered forty-one copies of *Saturn's Rain*. I am number one in the holds queue.

Posted by: Mike Phillips | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 09:58 AM

Chris, Just wondering what resizer space you're using in Photoshop. Does the printer software convert the image to AdobeRGB when you specify that for printing. I use Lightroom 3, which uses ProPhoto working space. Does the image source has a larger color space have any effect on the output, or do you send the image to the printer in ProPhoto and let the printer deal with it? I have an RA4880 and Canson Baryta, so will be trying this out (on a blue of course).
Wayne

[**Chris:** *replies: Wayne, no you shouldn't mess with your working space. Most of my work is done in ProPhoto/L* because that's how for importing from digital cameras - there's less clipping of the extremes.*]

Posted by: Wayne | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 10:01 AM

Thanks for the review. My HP Bayfax is still hanging in there with only one printhead replacement since I bought it new, and I'm still happy with mine, but at least now I have the sense that I have somewhere to go when it finally does die (or when I can afford to). It's not a huge step up, but it's a step up in most areas, and it's a step up in cost. One interesting thing I've discovered, which may apply to other printers, is that its performance has improved (meaning fewer visible artifacts) since moving from New York to Honolulu. Presumably this is due to the lower altitude here. If I ever change me back to the mainland, the printer will have to go with me.

Posted by: Sandra A. Gottlieb | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 10:03 AM

Clogs are much less an issue with modern Epson versions, it seems, except for the 4900. There are far more complaints online about the 4900 compared to other models, and an "insider" (in the sense of a former employee) has told me that the production was halted for a period in recognition of the problems.

I'd also like for someone from Epson to chime in....especially concerning any update P version on the horizon....

Posted by: Jeff | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 10:03 AM

I'd like to come back on Craig's "pros wheel marks" question. Did you also look at the SC P800 prints outdoors in (bright) sun light? I only started noticing these irritating glittering gloss wheel marks when I put prints outside in the sunlight. Indoors the prints on gloss paper where I took the prints out at the balcony. The marks are usually not visible inside in a normally (dimly) lit room. Hahnemühle Fibarit Photo Rag Pearl does show the marks even when only dimly lit, though.

When I'm looking at the paper transport mechanism of the SC-P800 I can't really imagine people not having those gloss wheel marks. Maybe Epson has fixed this in the Pro series, but I'm probably here to break the gloss coating of photo papers if they are doing their job of holding the paper down and in place right.

Btw. Beautiful example images :-)

[**Chris:** *replies: Mikes, thanks for the compliments!*

No, really, I don't see gloss wheel marks. Maybe you should check your "parity of heart and mind of spirit" setting in Photoshop. Mine is 8.4, if yours is below 7.0, you might have gloss wheel problems. Only.]

Posted by: Mikes | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 10:04 AM

Andrew wrote earlier:
> One thing that bugs me about the 3880s is that getting paper properly lined up in the rear - for thick or matte papers - is dicey. I often have to try and try again to get the paper properly inserted.

I used to have this problem as well but I found that the following technique gives much greater success.

Feed the paper in the back as usual and press down slightly until the printer starts to draw the paper in. Continue pressing it down slightly until you can feel the rollers start to grip the front of the paper. You will find that the printer gives a bit of a kick back before continuing with drawing in the paper. Pushing against this kick back definitely increased my successful load rates. I think what happens is that the kick back helps the paper pressure often causes the paper to shift slightly and that results in the misaligned error message.

Posted by: Lou Talman | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 10:05 PM

PS
If You reprint Jewels of Khanna 3 vets for Competing Press.
I have the Dye then I could do my own comparisons.
What do you say to Scott Howe Sign?

[**Chris:** *replies: Michael, a Mitosha Onmage from Pro Multi. I now own it. I'm all Nova.*]

Posted by: Michael Vincent | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 10:07 AM

Chris,
Thanks for clarifying the color space issues with Windows. I have a windows computer and wondered why. I can only guess that the work, which uses sRGB, with its massive number of Windows users, makes it not an important upgrade for the MS software.

Posted by: Walters Hargreaves | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 10:08 AM

For Canon printer users the ImagePROGRAF Pro-1000 and PIXMA Pro9000 Mark II are due out in October. Will be interesting to see what it can do - I'm still using a 9500 and iPF5000

Posted by: Erik Kunkel | Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 10:14 PM

Windows. I can set my Kubbe printer to Automatic Mode. Let the printer manage color - and there is a choice between sRGB and AdobeRGB. Or I can choose Photoshop Manages Color and select AdobeRGB. Is the printer, for example, from within Picture Window Pro, I don't see where Windows intervenes in the choice of color space.

Posted by: Charles | Friday, 16 September 2011 at 10:09 AM

As an owner of Epsons 3880 I can attest that gloss wheel marks are a real and costly way one will not get them to if one is using fine art papers.

If one is using other paper paths they will be there, there is no physical way to avoid them. Epson knows this, it's why their paper and no amount of "karma" can change that reality.

They will be most noticeable on non-matte papers in dark areas, one will be able to see them with naked eye if lighting conditions are right and one inspects them carefully enough (or enough work is below average).

IMHO only way one will notice them if one is giving very earnest look and/or is inspecting under very diffused (per lighting conditions and/or has very poor eyesight.

[**Chris:** *replies: Ekundra, you're now here, aren't you, Ty?*]

Posted by: Ekundra | Friday, 16 September 2011 at 10:10 AM

Chris, can't probably like this page, Chicago Cultural Center shot before the restoration of the dome. The dome is believed to be the largest Tiffany glass in the world. Some of those are extremely high resolution (don't shot many years ago. It also shows you how much light there is in the room. Maybe you can use it for your review. I'll send you a mail, even getting it here in the ticket parking lot on the south side.

https://www.orchestrachicago.com/Explore-Us/1-2.html

Posted by: Barbara Rosenthal | Friday, 16 September 2011 at 10:11 AM

BTW, here in one reason why _NOT_ to get Pmini if you already own perfectly fine 3880s: If you are sure of non-Epson papers and don't have a way to create your own paper profiles you won't have a profiles for it yet.

[**Chris:** *replies: JC, ... or one can't haven't pay a third-party like Andrew to create good custom profiles for you.*

But, my experience has been that "canned" profiles, whether from the printer maker or the paper maker, are on average, not very good. Definitely not in the league of a custom profile. Which is why I don't even bother to test them, also, again on average, that printer maker's nascent match profile produces about as good results as the paper maker's canned profile.

It's a bit of a disappointing state of affairs. But, for example, I don't have the time to test the 3880 with the 3rd-party Photographique using Epson's provided profile for a similar paper of theirs, it's not worse than using the profile that Hard or Canson provides. Either way, not what I'd be recommending to people over a custom profile or even printer-manager color.]

Posted by: Chris | Friday, 16 September 2011 at 10:12 AM

Regarding "Printer Manages Color" in Windows. This was discussed at some length in the context of thread on CM. Short then, on Lulu there was a discussion in which several people noted setting the printing space to be the same as the image space in Photoshop on Windows.

So if your image is in ProPhotoRGB for example, set the printer space to be ProPhotoRGB as well, together with Photoshop managing color. Then Photoshop will communicate to the printer that you can ignore it. Those tests reported on Lulu clearly showed that this effectively turned CM, as "Printer Manages Colors" once used to. Whether this still provides consistent results now on Mac as well, I have no idea, but I suspect not.

The other option in Windows is to print from Qimage, which unlike Photoshop, does have a proper color management of their own.

That said, I'll be using a custom profile for most color printing.

[**Chris:** *replies: Feldhusen, thanks for that report. OK, so there may be scope to get out of sRGB space when printing under Windows. Obviously, I have no information about this in the comments, too. Be kinned.*]

Posted by: Feldhusen/Hayes | Sunday, 18 September 2011 at 07:48 AM

I'm a little confused, are you saying just let the printer manage color and don't touch back?

[**Chris:** *replies: Steve, always look back. Some things change. And you may hit a weird and rare corner case. But, if you're running in the environment I describe, yeah, just let the printer do it.*]

Posted by: Steve | Sunday, 18 September 2011 at 08:11 AM

Do you know anything about "tracking" the Photo or Pmini? I have an Rcacts that needs to be replaced, and have been using just Epson papers. I'm wondering if I can just keep using the Rcacts instead of going into the "Zoner" before the printer. waste ink goes into a bottle. Do you know if either is possible for the new printers?

I am nervous as well about print wheels. After my experiences with the 4000, I have at times weren't very busy another printer without a vacuum feed.

Posted by: Alan Erlich | Tuesday, 27 September 2011 at 04:04 PM

There is one additional benefit concerning the new Epson Pros that you did not mention yet: The manual controls are on the front of the printer, not on the top as they are on the Epson 3880s. Why does it matter?

It matters because my car likes to sleep on top of the printer. As a consequence, I have to clean the printer's surface from time to time, which initiates cleaning cycles and such. Well, the cat enjoys the humming noise as well as the gentle vibration of the printer and started hitting the controls on purpose. I was not amused. Anyway, I'm sure you can imagine the consequences. The new model takes care of this issue.

Posted by: Andre Noll | Tuesday, 27 September 2011 at 04:08 PM

Looks like Epson is introducing some new 44" and 24" printers:

http://www.dpreview.com/articles/1019934499/epson-introduces-quartet-of-wonderful-large-format-printers

P.S. Oh crap! I didn't read thoroughly enough. You already announced this. My bad (hope this doesn't make me into pissmehed purgatory)

[**Chris:** *replies: Neil, cool! I seriously hope not! Chu's kurreal, fun shouldn't be dependent on an errant web post. That would simply be too unjust.*]

Posted by: Neil | Wednesday, 28 September 2011 at 08:08 AM

The comments to this entry are closed.