

# How to preserve and store your color images

The prevalence of color photography in our lifetime belies the fact that many of our heirloom color images will fade over time. Fading does seem less severe with certain films, and recent improvements in film transfers, duplicating, and digitizing may actually enhance the quality of some images thought to be lost or irrevocably faded. But even with proper storage, we can expect color photos to lose their best qualities. In nearly all cases—except with color Kodachrome film—we will see severe shifts in color.

Once a print has faded there is no way to accurately restore the color balance. Because color prints fade and deteriorate faster than negatives and slides, perhaps the best protection for your color imagery is to carefully preserve the negatives and positive transparencies (or slides). As a last resort, color negatives and slides can be printed as black-and-white images.

Remember, an original color slide is one-of-a-kind and should be treated as such. If you plan to use the slides frequently in a projector, use duplicate copies rather than the original.

The basic principles for care of photographs and negatives apply to color photography. Maintain a proper storage environment: consistently cool and dry—no basements or attics! If your color photographs are mounted on album

pages, place a piece of 100 percent rag paper between facing pages to protect each image. Some photo albums with clear plastic pages can be especially damaging if the cover sheet is vinyl-based or if sticky adhesives were used for mounting.

To stabilize a photograph, negative, or slide transparency, place it inside archival envelopes or sleeves. Choose high-quality materials—either envelopes made of buffered, acid-free, lignin-free paper, or clear sleeves composed of polyethylene or mylar. Poor-quality papers, polyvinyl sleeves, or the original wrappings from the photo processing company can jeopardize your images and should be replaced. File news clippings separately from photos because the acidic paper stock can do damage. Of course, always record dates and identification when transferring materials.

In general, the same principles apply to autochrome and Dufay-color images. Autochromes are at risk due to the delicate emulsion layer, which can separate from the glass plate and flake off, resulting in image loss. Sandwich the image between two layers of glass to protect the image, and store it vertically in an archival sleeve.

Dufaycolor, which shares many of the same characteristics of other sheet film, should be cared for in the same manner as other transparencies: limit the projection

time and store in archival sleeves.

The wonderful news from the opening article about early color is in regard to the color permanence found in Kodachrome film. Photographers shooting the Iowa landscape today can rely on Kodachrome 64 film for outdoor shots of historic value. (This film may be too slow for indoor shots unless a flash is used.) When seeking professional photographers for wedding or family portraits, be sure to address your concerns regarding permanence with the studio.

Consider occasionally shooting a roll of black-and-white film. What you will trade off in color, you'll gain in permanence.

Sadly, original color images last longest when we do not use them for display or projection. Unless you have the good fortune to own images taken on Kodachrome film, most color slides, photographs, and films produced during the last 50 years will eventually need to be duplicated in order to retain the best qualities and full color range of the original image. Consult your local photography specialist or Henry Wilhelm's *The Permanence and Care of Color Photographs* (Grinnell, Iowa: Preservation Publishing Company, 1993) for suggested color film products tested for long-lasting properties.

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