

# Modern Antiques

Telling camera history in tintypes



The 19th-century wet-plate collodion process Bill Westheimer used brought a sense of timelessness to these old cameras. Left, from top: Alfa 6C, Cambo 8x10, Contax II, Leica IIIa, Zeiss Hologon, Polaroid Spectra Onyx. Right: beer can and Rolleiflex 3.5F.

**THE PROJECT STARTED** by chance, after I photographed someone in my studio for a different assignment. He saw my collection of old cameras and told me a wonderful story about his old camera and his father—I realized that everyone who owns an old camera has such stories. I do, too.

I started photographing my old Polaroid, my old Nikon. But the stories are what interest me, and I wanted to hear them from other people. So I contacted friends and other photographers, and put up an ad on Facebook, asking to borrow their old cameras.

Some people were so enthusiastic, they would send me three or four cameras. I got all different kinds. A bunch of people are in love with their Rolleiflexes. I photographed some digital cameras, too—straddling the eras.

I made tintype and glass-plate images using a wet-plate collodion process, with a Cambo 8x10 monorail camera and Fujinon 210W lens. I'd position 5000 Ws Comet strobes and one or two heads about 18 inches from the camera—it needs to be this bright for the collodion process. I left the lens open at f/16 for two or three

**Westheimer is a studio and fine-art photographer living in Llewellyn Park, N.J. See more of his work at [www.billwest.com](http://www.billwest.com).**



ELLUCHTENSTEIN

pops of the strobes. Then I'd scan the glass plate and clean up the images in software.

The tintypes I'd send back with the cameras to the owners, and then I'd ask them to write up their recollections of each camera.

I love the old cameras, but I really love the stories about people and their memories. One of my favorites was of one woman's Seagull: When she looked through it for the first time, everything was upside down and backwards, and she thought that was perfect.

—Bill Westheimer, as told to Lori Fredrickson