Copying Stereo (and flat) Slides - A FASTER Easier Way
by David Starkman *(with help from Susan Pinsky)*

I've always thought that the only way to get a good digital copy of a slide was to use a dedicated slide scanner. These tend to be more expensive than flatbed scanners, and have holders that are usually designed for 2"x2" (50mm x 50mm) 35mm slides or 35mm filmstrips (positive or negative). For Realist format 3-D slides the slide or negative holder has to be modified to hold the 1 5/8" x 4" (41mm x 101mm) mount.

A few years ago one of our local stereo club members showed us an Epson Perfection 4870 Photo flatbed scanner, which had the capability of making both high quality scans from reflective materials, and also scans from transparencies and negatives in many sizes up to 6" x 9". With this scanner we were able to put 8 2"x2" slides. or 5 stereo slides, onto the scanner, for scanning all at once. While the results were very good, the scanning process was very time consuming, taking at least 15 minutes just to complete the scanning process for 5 stereo slides.

Recently our friend David Burder (UK) mentioned that he had come up with a virtually point-and-shoot method for duping slides with a digital SLR camera. After a few emails on the subject he sent us some photos of his rig. This involved using a digital SLR that has interchangeable lenses. Using a lens designed to give a flat field copy (no pincushion or barrel distortion) he mounted a custom made tube of the exact length to give proper focus on the slide inserted into the holder at the other end.

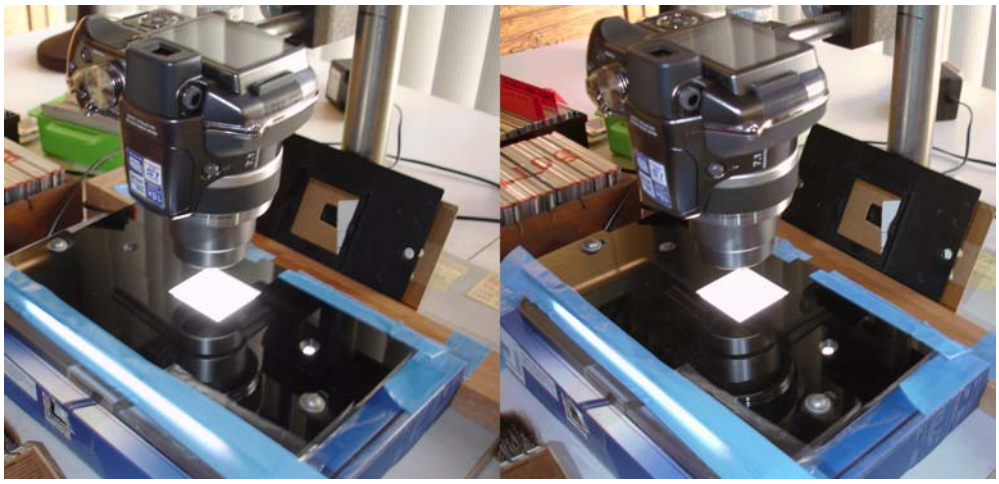
We decided that we didn't quite have the skills to make the tube assembly properly, and the digital SLR camera was quite expensive (close to $1000), not counting the copy lens (which we did not get around to pricing).

Seeing his inspired us to take a similar, but different tactic. Susan saw a digital SLR-style camera at Costco for $369.00. This model did not have interchangeable lenses, but it did have both Macro and Super Macro (very close focus) capability. Knowing that we could return the camera without any problems if it didn't work, we bought the camera (an Olympus SP-550UZ).

We mounted this camera on a copy stand, which we have had for almost 30 years, and which we used mainly for copying stereo view cards, using flexible-arm lights and a 35mm SLR.

We removed the lights, and using a small cardboard box of a suitable size and shape, made a holder for a fluorescent light source to sit perfectly flat on the bottom of the stand. The light source was one that had been created for using on a flatbed scanner that did not have a backlit lid for copying slides. Any

small fluorescent lightbox with good diffusion should work. Color correction, if needed, is easily done on the computer.



On top of the light source we tape down either a 2” x 2” slide holder or a holder for 1 5/8” x 4” stereo slides. Both of these were borrowed from an old Repronar 35mm film slide duplicator that we still own. See the photos to get an idea of the setup. Holders could easily be made with cardboard or plastic strips taped into place.

With the camera set in position to focus on a backlit slide we found that it would focus properly on full automatic in the Super Macro mode. We frame the slide so that a little bit of black is seen at the top and bottom edge. It is easier to crop this away on the computer than to try to crop tightly when making the actual copy. Once the slide is in position, and framed at the proper distance from the camera, it is a simple matter of partially depressing the shutter button to get the camera to focus, and then to depress the shutter button all the way to take a picture. Once set up one can shoot about as fast as one can place the slide, frame it, and then fire. And one can copy one slide or 100, whatever you choose.

We have been very happy with the copy quality once the images are uploaded to a computer. Cropping and framing is done with the StereoPhoto Maker program. This requires two steps. First, a rough cropping of the images to remove as much of area around the image as possible, Then AUTO ADJUSTMENT, to tweak for better alignment and rotation corrections. And then a final tighter cropping (and manual window adjustment, if needed). Color and brightness adjustments can be made with Photoshop or similar programs. We have projected the digital copies with twin DLP projectors and the quality is excellent. If you’ve been put off about copying your film slides to digital format, perhaps this will show you that there is an easier way. Give it a try!

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Here are some example copies made this way.