

A complete guide to the Mamiya RZ67, part five: conclusion and personal stories

This five-part review has taken the best part of three years to complete. At over 40,000 words, I admit that it is quite long (!) but I wanted it to be as detailed and as precise as possible. To the best of my knowledge, no book has ever been written about the Mamiya RZ67 Professional, not at least, as you can find about cameras from other brands. This series of articles is my attempt at making one, or at least something somewhat close to one.

As you might imagine, the closer I got to completing the review, the more I wanted to add things. I hope you found it interesting – despite its length – and that my analysis of this camera system will be useful to other users of the Mamiya RZ67 Professional.

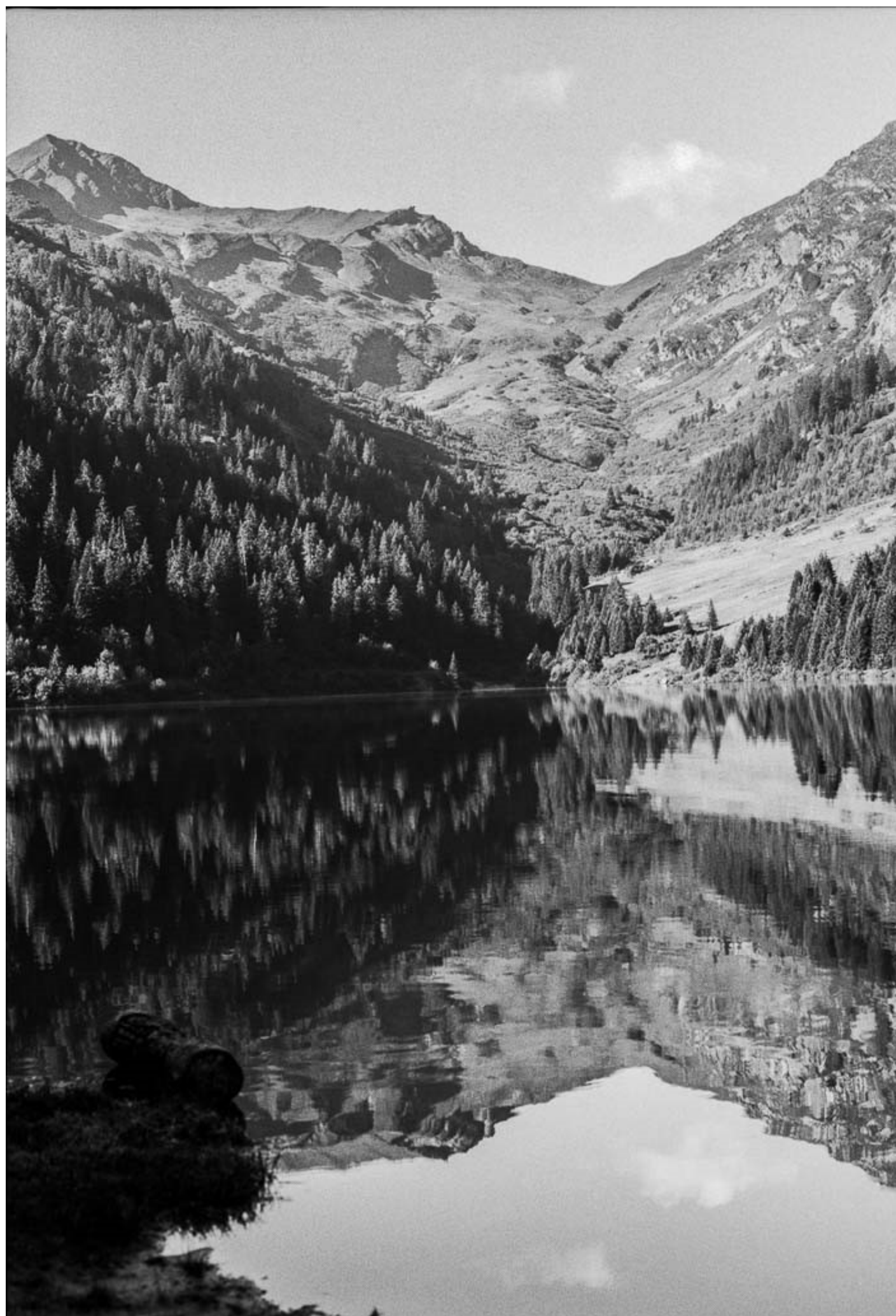


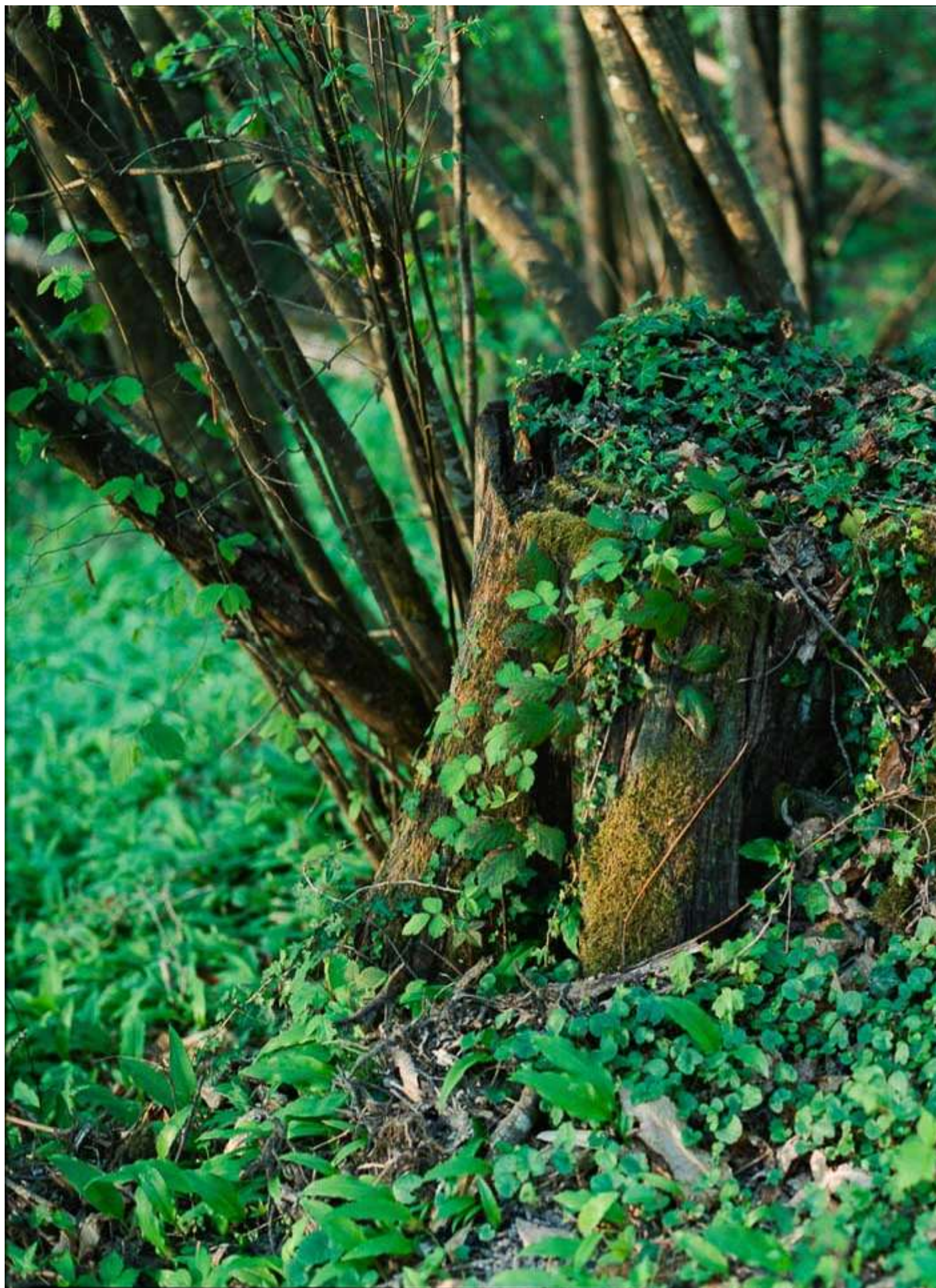
For photographers who are tempted to use it, it may be useful (I hope so!) and for those of you who have been using it for a longer time, I hope I have taught you a few things. In any case, a huge thank you to EM who undertook the time-consuming task of layout, corrections and the cutting of this text which, was really too long to be published in one go.

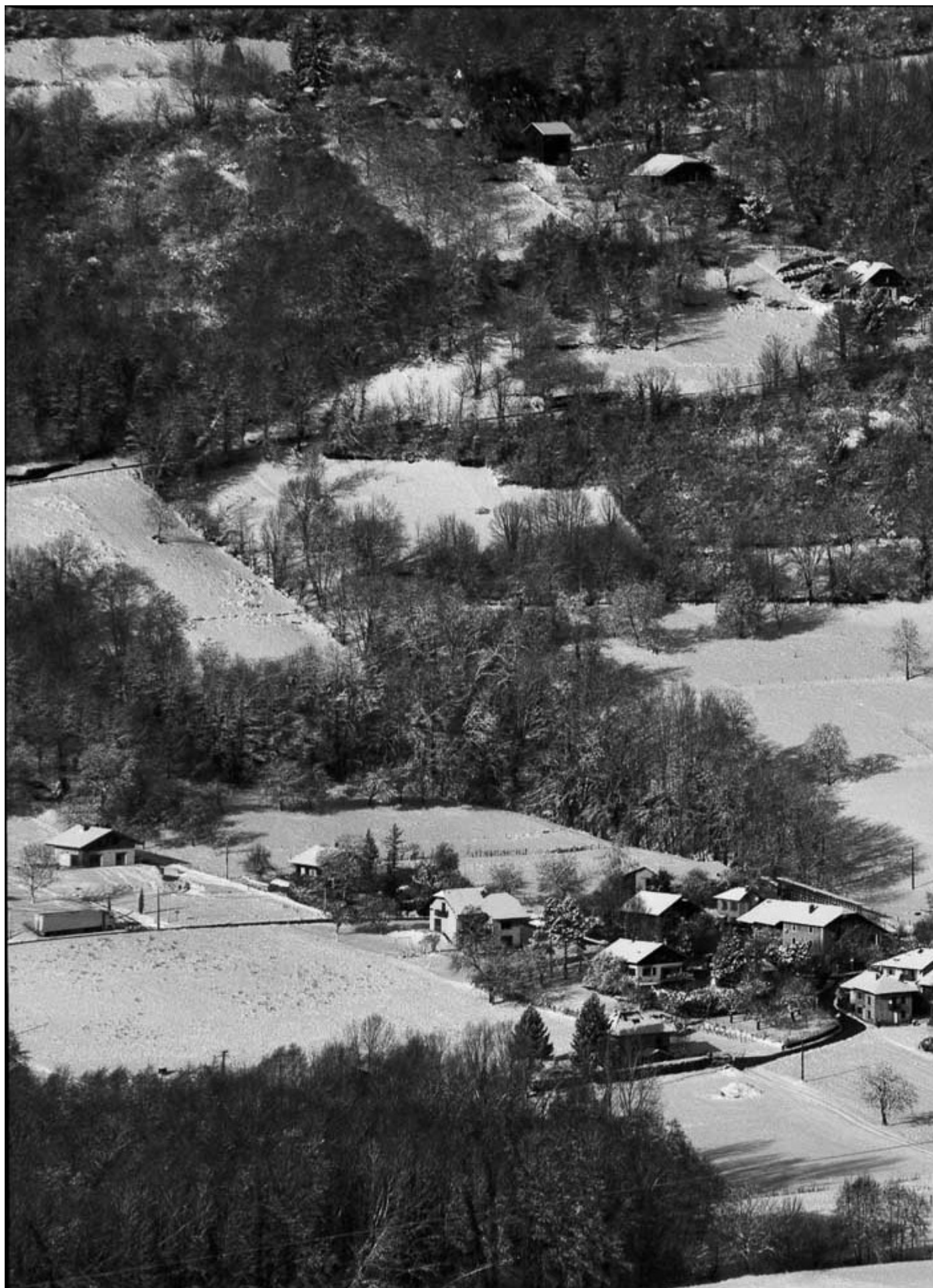
The Mamiya RZ may appear to be a complicated camera, unwieldy, too big, too heavy. I in writing this review, I tried to simplify all of this and to make it clear that it is a high-quality camera, especially thanks to its fabulous lenses.

My main advice may seem obvious, like equipping your RZ with a neck strap, or the description about how to load a film but I have seen photographers who had not thought of how or were loading film upside down...

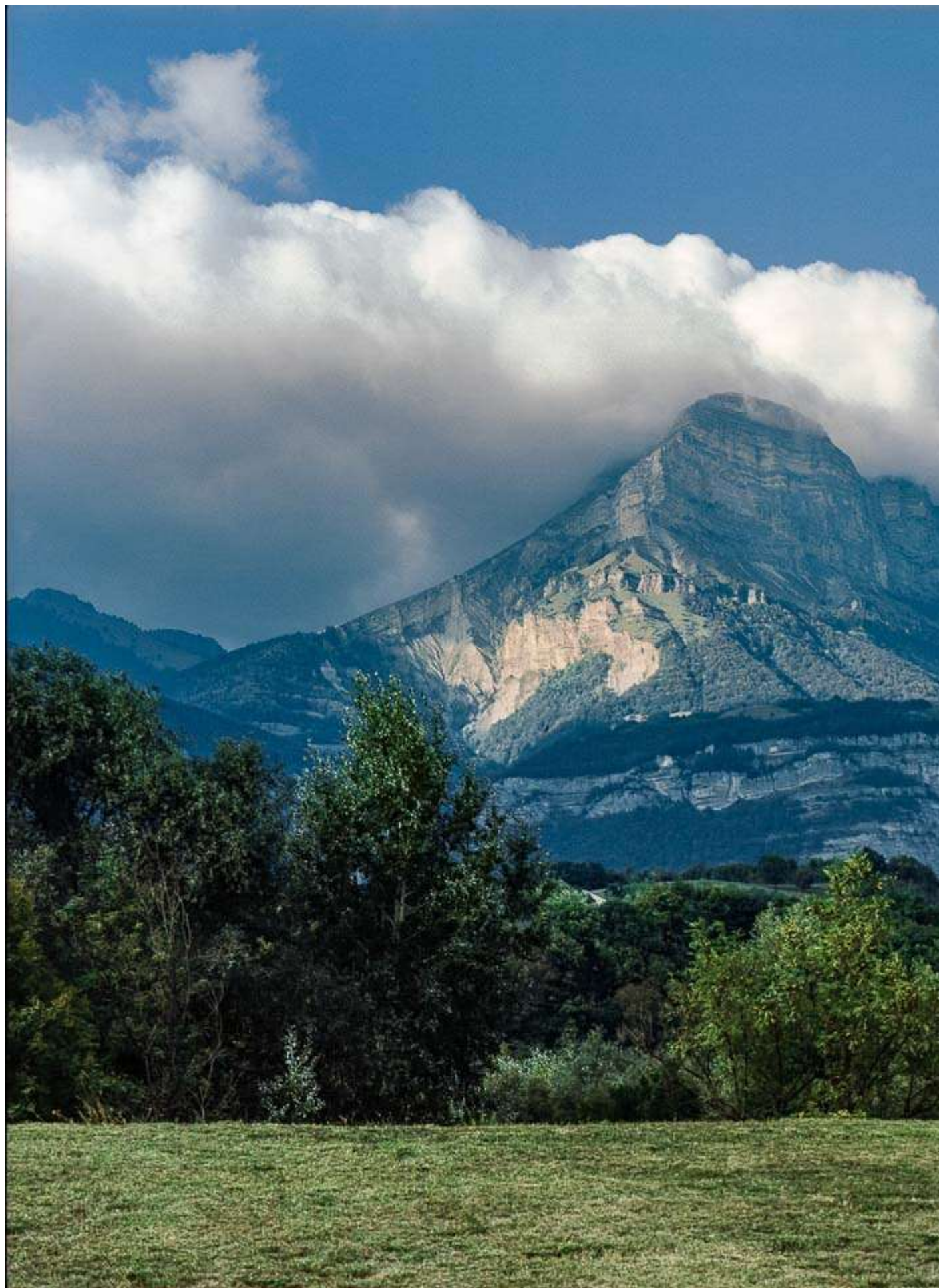
I am a fan of the cameras and lenses of the Mamiya brand, as you guessed. It's been 40 years since I began my photographic journey, but I'm not professional. I'm a former chemist, and today I work in the hydrographic field and in the topography. For the moment, I'm a mapmaker and I work in geodesy, perform precise satellite positioning surveys (GPS and more) of some different kinds of equipment or installations to make maps for end users.











I will soon retire (probably at the end of 2020), and I continue to take pictures because I still love photography: I develop my own films, whether black and white, color negative or color slides in my home lab, and I also print my images in a classic way.

To finish, I'm Canadian, I was born in Québec, but I live now in France, not by choice, but because of my work. After I retire, I'll be back home! Probably on the west coast, mostly because of the fabulous landscapes. And Vancouver is a city that I really love!

I am not a collector of cameras, I have only very few, all from Mamiya: a C330 Professional S, an RZ67 Pro II and recently, a 645 AFD II. I also work in large-format, but not lately, because of the time that I took writing this document.

I prefer to have a fairly complete kit rather than many different models of cameras. I had a Hasselblad but I sold it because I found it a little too capricious for my taste and all accessories and lenses were totally overpriced.

I installed a lab in my home, large enough, with everything needed to develop or print my images. For the moment, I mainly develop film because the printing side of things is not quite finished yet. I also have a little studio I built myself with some flash units and classic backgrounds. But for the moment, I mostly take pictures of my friends or family. In this regard, the only one who has agreed to accept the publication of her images is my cousin Vicky. That's why I only published photos of her.

How I came to find the Mamiya RZ67 Professional

I have always been passionate about photography from my childhood until today. I think I remember that I started in the mid-70s with a camera that I got from my family. I no longer remember the model very well (I must still have it somewhere), I only remember that it was an all-plastic Kodak that used 126 film but did not take very great photos.

I wanted to do better, to make images like I saw in the press and magazines! So I asked my parents if it was possible to have this kind of gift for my next birthday / Christmas: a "real" camera. The next Christmas, I was given a Minolta pocket 110 for Christmas / birthday, with no more settings as my previous Kodak (none in fact), a unique plastic lens, which taken images a little better (maybe, nor sure) but on tiny-tiny-tiny negatives... My parents may not have understood my real passion for photography... I had hoped for a little better camera. Too bad.











I spent a long time, too long, taking pictures with this camera. I seriously wasted my time, never being able to do anything well, and it even disgusted me to continue in this way... However, I remember going to the Paris Air Show, around 1980 to try to take the pictures of the planes in flight, but with this Minolta pocket 110, let's say that it was not the most ideal camera to do that. Instead, I took photos of planes presented on the ground. I couldn't even frame the planes in flight, which looked like a dot in the viewfinder!

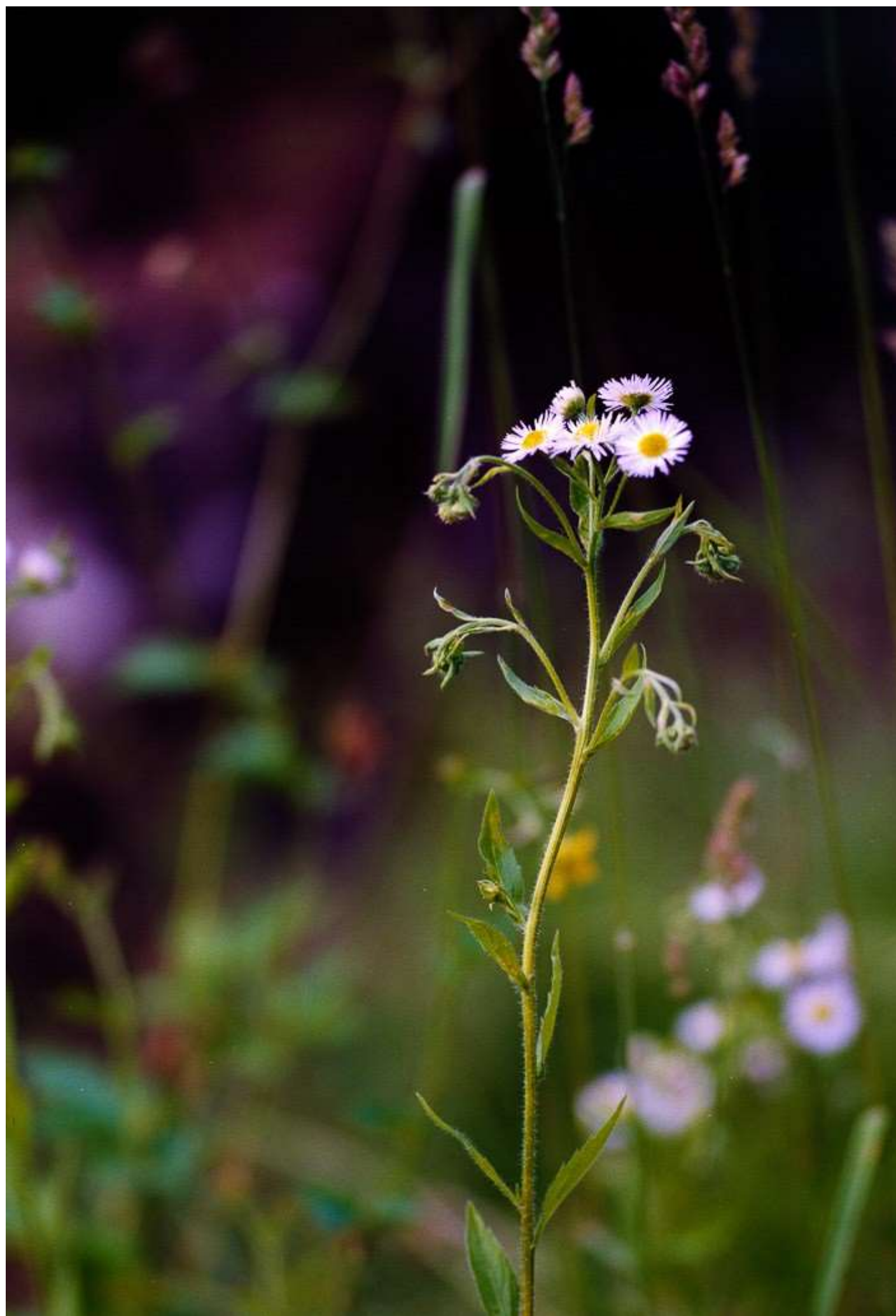
In the end, I was convinced to buy a better camera as soon as I could afford it myself, that is to say, as soon as I began work. ... So, when I started working, at the beginning of the 80s, the first thing I bought with my own money was a slightly better camera. It was a Minolta X700 that I used for a long time, and which included a fabulous lens: the 50mm f/1.7 (That I discovered later) and a little zoom.

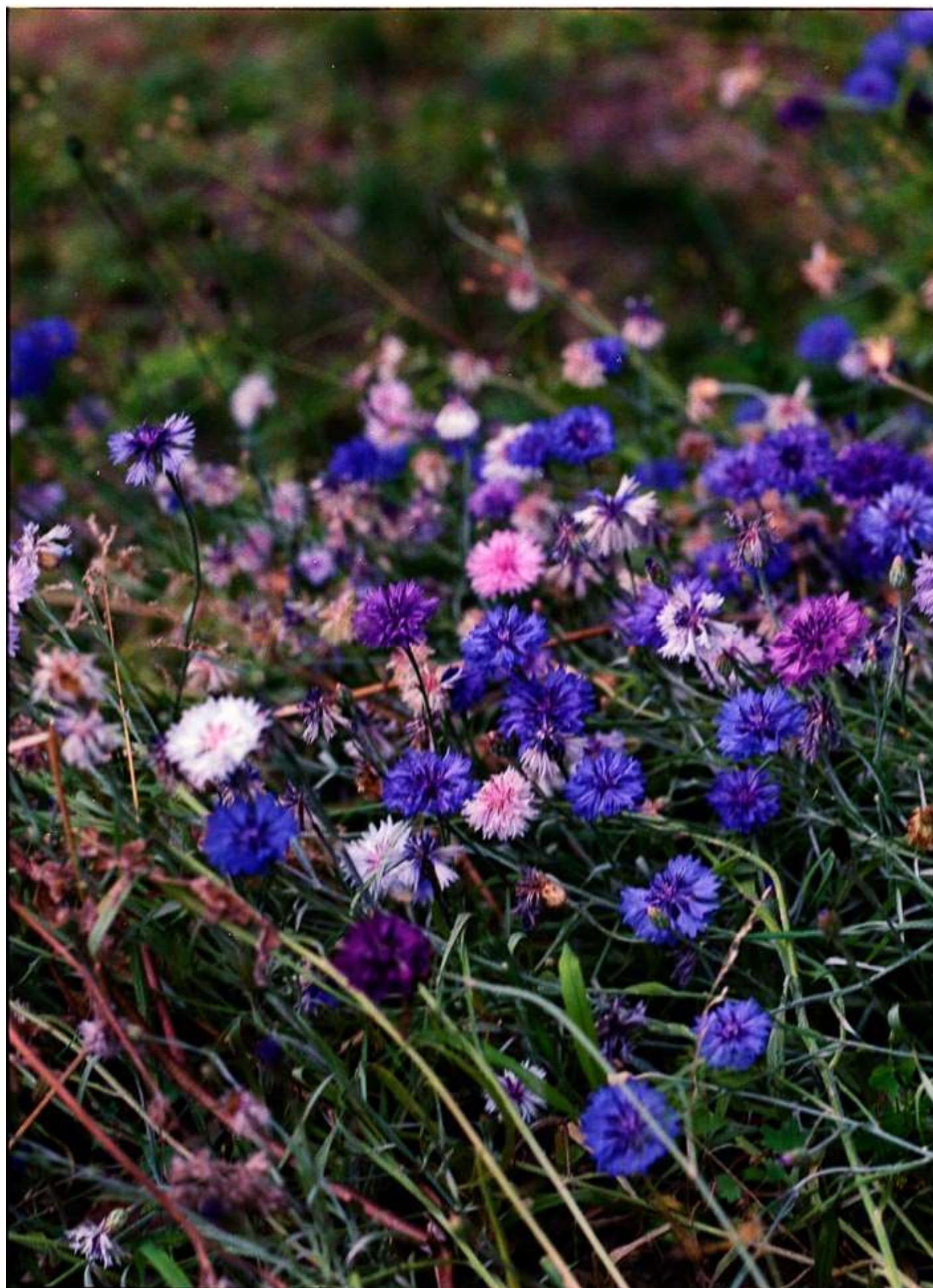
In 1986, I changed my job and place, I continued to take photos of airshows, I met aviation enthusiasts at my work, and with them, I visited most of the air shows in Europe. In the same time, I also joined a photo club, and that's where I learned to develop my own film and to print my own photos. First in black and white, but also in color. I learned to use black and white films I had not used at all before, and also that there were other photographic formats in photography. Some members of the club had medium format cameras. One had a Mamiya and another a Pentax that tempted me a lot... I was immediately captivated by the dimensions and the quality of the negatives in 645 or 6x6...











But my dilemma: I wanted to set up a lab at home (my photo club was far away from where I lived), so I had to buy equipment for that, and the purchase of a (good) medium format camera was not in my budget at the time. Imagine: in 1986, digital photography did not exist and medium format cameras cost a real fortune at that time. They were for the majority, for the professional environment and the brands that made them sold them at prices that the general public could not afford.

For all those who are old enough to have known this time period, did you know as many photographers who took photos with a Hasselblad or a Rollei SLR in the streets as you do today? Not me. Without going too far, I do not hesitate to say that at that time, this kind of equipment was really unaffordable for most of us!

At the end of the '80s I kept putting aside money to pay for better equipment and ended up buying a Nikon F4. A 300mm f/2.8 Nikkor telephoto which allowed me to enormously improve in my airshows shoots followed. It was perfect for my airplane photos at airshows!

You might be interested in...



A complete guide to the Mamiya RZ67, part three: lenses, filters and accessories



A complete guide to the Mamiya RZ67, part four: maintenance and miscellaneous accessories





























After shooting 35mm film for a very long time, I tried medium format because of the size and the quality of the negatives. Don't laugh, but my very first medium format camera was a Lubitel 166! The only one I could afford at that time. It was not very good quality, but still not so bad for this camera. The biggest missing feature for me? No ability to change the lenses. As I started to make the prints of

my photos, I immediately appreciated the increase in negative size and despite the average quality of the lens, the results surprised me.

At that time, we didn't really like to see grain in the images... The first thing you heard when you showed your photos to others after a lot of "it was over (or under) exposed", was "you should have taken that at 50 ASA!", "There's too much grain, it's not beautiful". Anyway, I must say that I quickly understood the interest of enlarging an image from a negative larger than the 35mm... So I dreamed of being able to afford a better quality medium format camera with interchangeable lenses. Except that the prices in the stores were always as high...

One day, in my photo club, one of the members who used a 6x6 TLR asked us if his camera interested someone because he wanted to buy a 645 instead... I jumped at the opportunity! This was around the '90s and I got a Mamiya C330. I did not even think of looking at this brand, everyone was talking about Hasselblad or Rollei SLRs at that time, even if none of us could afford one... This C330 was accompanied by a 180mm lens to take portraits, and I, therefore, started to test that.

I discovered a new way to take images, all manual, problems of parallax between the viewing and taking lens, a weird system to make focus...but the quality of the lenses was breathtaking for me! Remember that I started medium-format with a Lubitel...

The Mamiya C330 was a great camera (and still is), and I had a lot of fun using it. What a change! I was completely dazzled by the quality of the images I obtained with it... But it also changed my style of photography. I was still continuing the airshows with my Nikon F4, but with this C330, I could explore more things. The landscape photography, the portrait, everything seemed possible to me. I could of course also do all of this with my F4 or even my Minolta X700. But at that time, I was very obsessed with what we saw in photo magazines, books or even in all the press: the best portraits were almost always made in medium or large format, it seemed to me then not even think of being able to make the same kind of images using the 35mm... It was false of course, but when I saw a magnificent portrait made by Yusuf Karsh or Jean-Loup Sieff, how to try to make an image like them without using the same equipment?









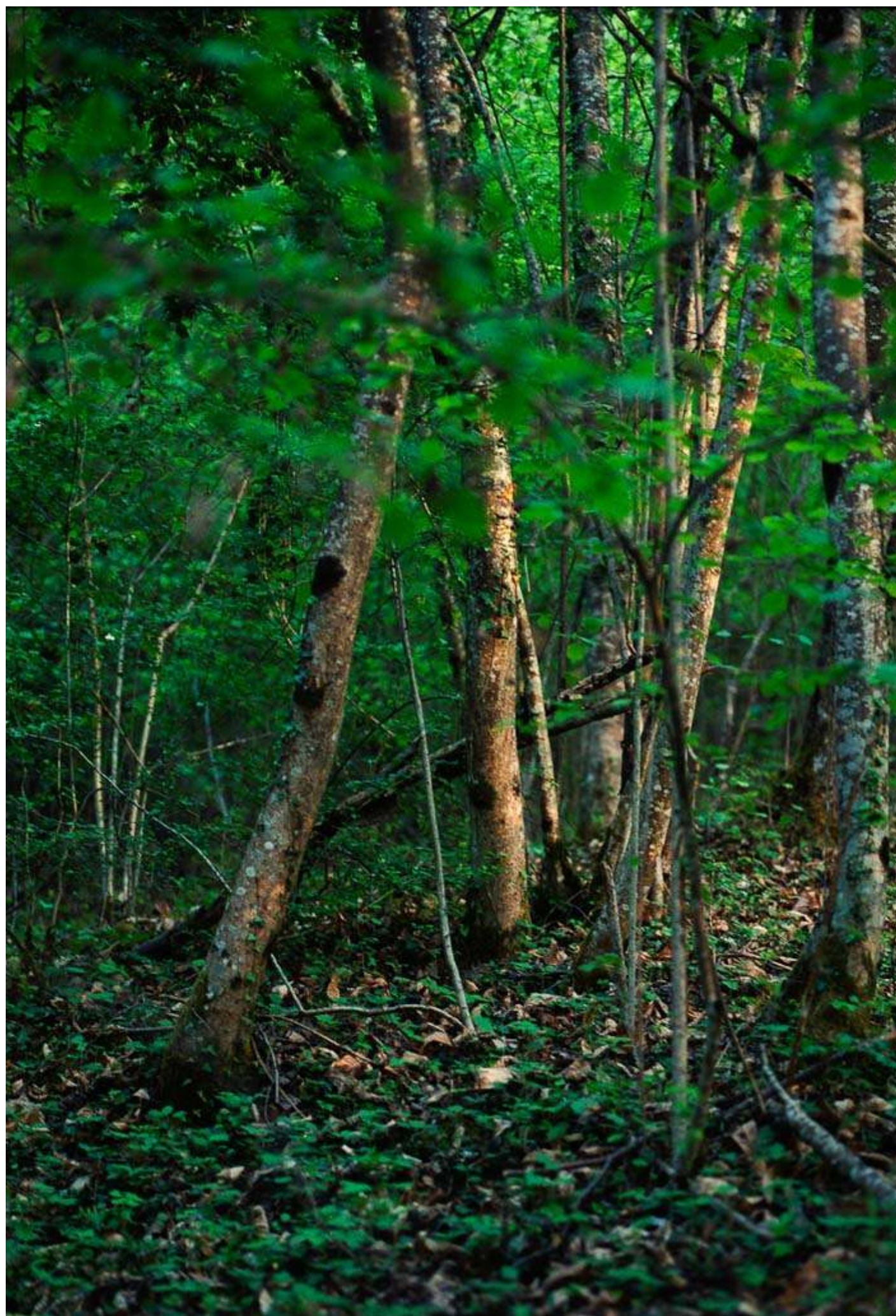


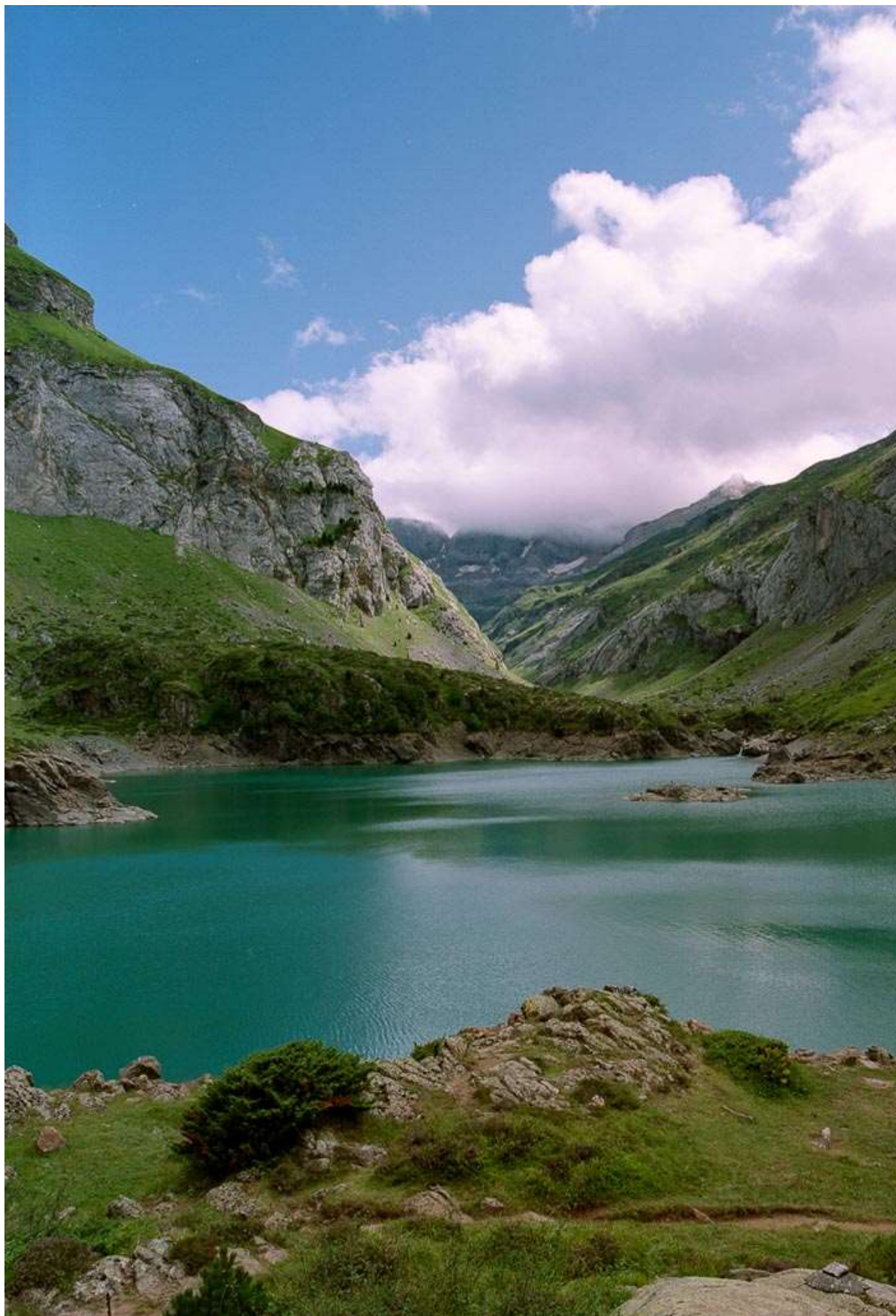
One day, a bit later, I had the opportunity to come across a large format camera: a Linhof Technika. I went to a photo store to buy film, and they had this Technika on sale not very expensive (around 150 euros). For a price like that, why not? I found myself full documentation on the subject and started to get passionate about the format. After reading books on Yusuf Karsh, Shinzo Maeda, or David Muench, all users of large format cameras, I was convinced that to try to get to approach the same kind of images like them, I needed a large format camera. But the big problem was the cost of the development and prints (mostly for color negative and slide films). I didn't have the equipment to develop and print 4x5 negatives myself. I could make 4x5 images, but I couldn't work on them myself...

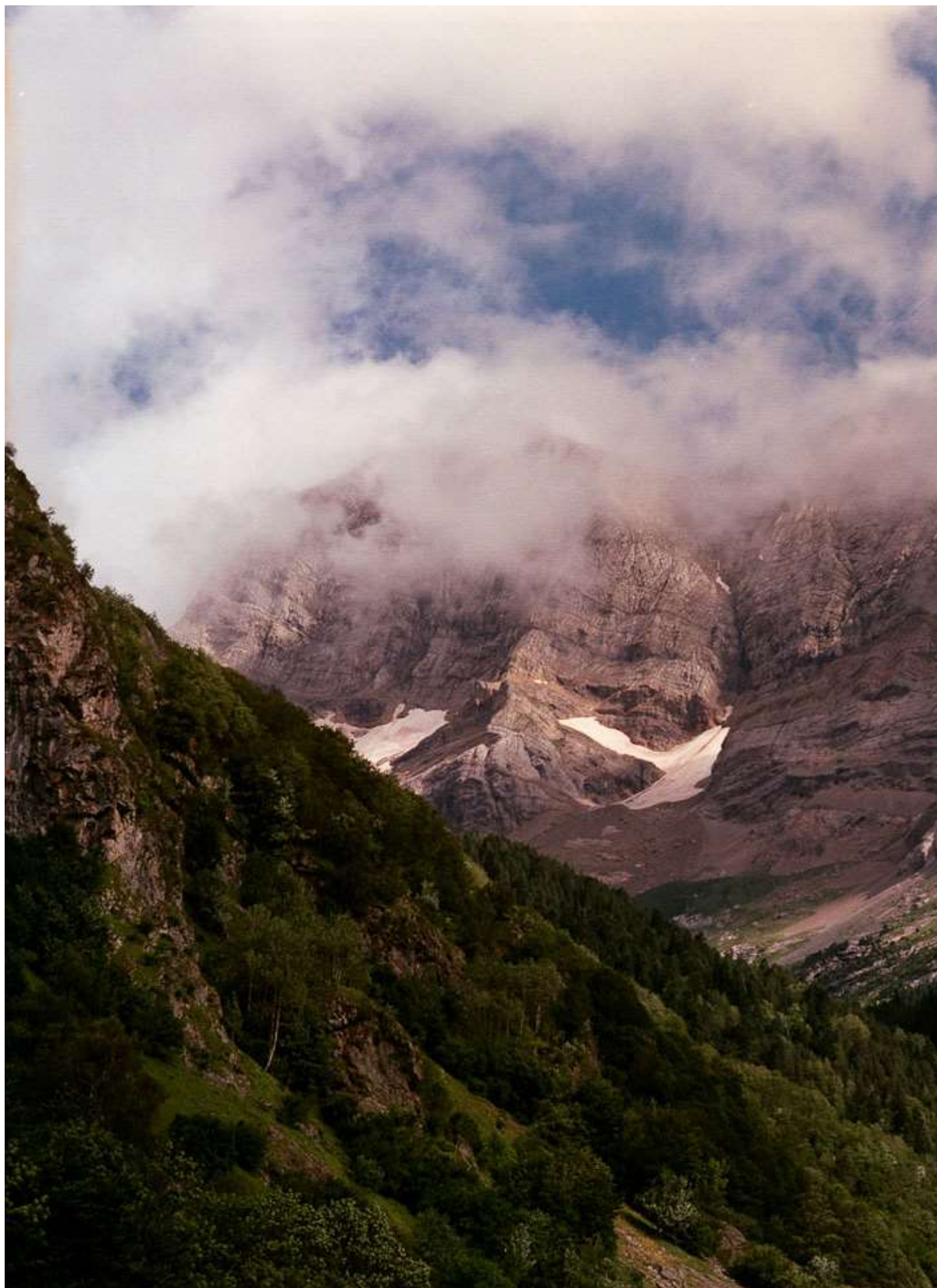
I decided to buy myself a more modern and better medium format system. Hasselblad and Rollei were too expensive, and because of the C330, I liked Mamiya, so I was tempted by the 645 or the 6x7 format.

Shortly after that, the digital era arrived, and like many, I purchased a DSLR. I thought it was a great improvement in photography: you can see your image right after shooting it, and make much post-processing "easily"... However, for that, you also need a computer, some software, a printer, ink (a lot), many hard drives, and a lot of other things, that all cost a lot. It would not be a problem if we did not need to change the hardware (mainly hard drives) so often, and to buy every time software update!

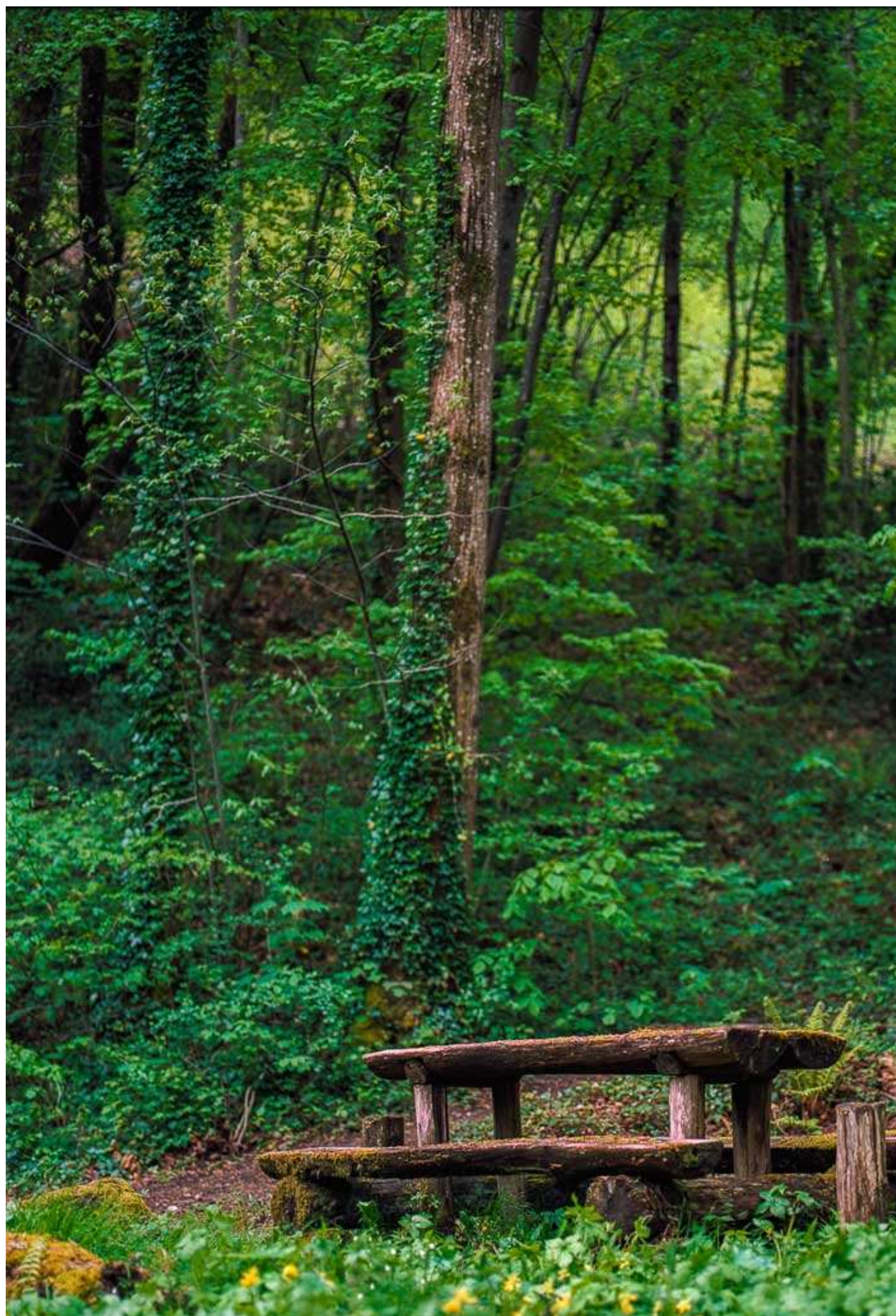
The other very big problem of digital is the upgrade cycle. I too fell into this system of excessive consumption, always better, always more, more pixels, more power, more, more, more! Only, what is it really for? The vast majority of photos taken today are shot with mobile phones, the users of which never download the photos to their computers... Rarely print them, and most often do nothing with them. Apart from maybe showing them on the screens of their smartphones or on social media. The almost only time they worry about their photos is when their phone memory is full...











I decided to detach myself from all this and to ask myself a little. To bring out my photo equipment from before, to reassemble my photo lab, to start thinking about my photos again. And I had everything, I didn't sell or throw away anything when digital arrived. I had put everything in boxes, well sheltered, and despite all my moves, I had everything. I even had more than before, because many have gone digital by throwing their old equipment in the trash: especially with regard to laboratory equipment, no one believed that it would be useful again one day. And I recovered a lot of things in recent years. Everyone who took photos got rid of their lab equipment and a few I knew gave me everything. I even bought a large format enlarger. In short: everything to revive my ideas from before, to explore the medium and large formats, and to be able to go all the way for once!

Six years ago, a retired friend of my work decided to gift me all of his old equipment, because, like many, he thought film was over. I found some incredible things in the box he gave to me: A Hasselblad 500C with three lenses, a large format MPP folding camera and a Rollei SLX with three lenses. Wow! However, I had big problems with all of that: The Hasselblad was completely stuck, the lenses of the MPP too, and with the SLX it was a nightmare: "cheap" plastic camera, specific battery problems that were no longer manufactured, etc. None of those cameras were functioning. I then tried to find someone to repair all of that, I found ones, but it was incredibly expensive! Especially for the Hasselblad. Nobody could repair the SLX, and for the MPP, it was better to buy new lenses on eBay. About the Hasselblad, the repair coast was a lot more than buying another working camera on eBay.

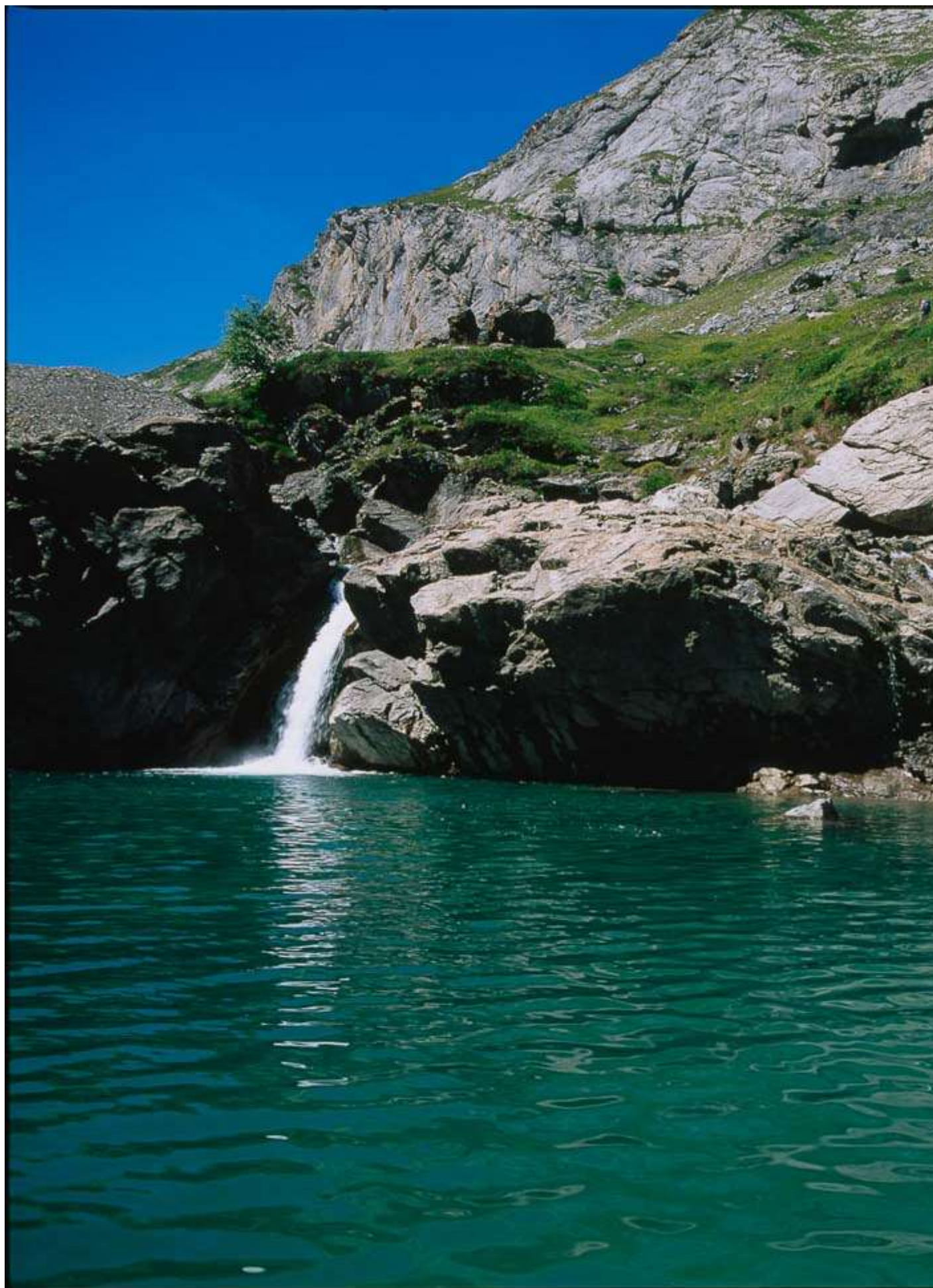
The only thing I can say with this gift is that it made me want to work again with film, definitively, and because I began to be really disgusted by digital photography. I finally found a Mamiya RZ67 Pro II which cost less than fixing the Hasselblad: the RZ Pro II with the waist viewfinder, a 6×7 back, and the 50mm cost less than only the lonely cube body of a Hasselblad 500CM! Step by step, I purchased all my current equipment: some lenses (finally a lot), a prism, a winder, and all you can see in this review.











Recently I finally decided buy a Mamiya 645 AFD II. It's like a modern SLR and I can carry it everywhere. The RZ is a fantastic camera, I really still love it but it can be a little complicated to take everywhere all the time. The 645 is now my everyday camera, its lenses are also fantastic, and it's a lot lighter than the RZ. I don't have many lenses for the 645, but like what I have done with my RZ, little by little, I think I will find what I need.

Unfortunately, it seems to me lately that the prices for this equipment have been rising and quite a lot. I do not know if it's because of the resurgence of film or a new fashion, but it's a shame because some sellers are starting to have big head...

But: Kodak has just relaunched the Ektachrome in 120 reels! Ilford also just released a new ortho film in this format ... The film community is fantastic and is growing every day... I am personally on Twitter, you can follow me [@MamiyaRZ67pro](https://twitter.com/MamiyaRZ67pro) if you need some advice about the Mamiya RZ67 or the 645AFD, just ask me.

If I can have one last thing to say it is this: keep using these cameras, they still work and the film is available, so shoot! And as I said in one of the previous chapters, I still have negatives dating from 1980, I can still use them, make prints, or scan them.

I don't know about you, but my first digital images are lost forever, following the crash of a hard drive ...

~ **Pierre-Gilles**