Epson Stylus Pro 3800 Printer Review

Since its introduction, Epson’s Ultrachrome K3 pigment inkset has established a dominant position in the hearts and minds of legions of professional photographers and knowledgeable enthusiasts. With a wide colour gamut, a higher D-max of 2.3 and the virtual elimination of bronzing on prints, Ultrachrome K3 arrived with a hiss and a roar! Subsequent glowing reports by Wilhelm and other reviewers using Epson’s wide format printers, plus the feedback from many professional photographers and reviewers, pointed to the Epson Stylus Pro 3800 as a likely future standard bearer for professional photographers.

The Epson 2400 (November 2005 issue of TPM) with its high performance and low cost was the one that really captured the imaging world’s attention. As a result, many professional photographers were interested in the Epson Stylus Pro 3800, an A2+ printer that could print on a variety of media types and provide a high level of control and customisation for advanced users.

However, in my idea of a perfect world, the 3800 would be a svelte 2400 with a higher resolution and a lower purchase price. Many professional photographers are already using Epson’s Ultrachrome K3 inkset, and the Epson Stylus Pro 3800 is a natural extension of that line.

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At 80ml each, the 3800’s pressurised ink cartridges cost round $124 each, track key data such as ink levels and usage rates and are only a bit smaller than the standard size 4800 cartridges which are 110ml. The 3800 cartridges will be more expensive to buy - but more economical to use - than those for the 4800. It won’t be as economical to run as a 4800 though, particularly if you’re using the larger optional 220ml cartridges available for that model. That’s the thing with ink, buying in larger capacities saves money and delivers economy. A lot like soft drinks and nothing at all like petrol!

The quality of prints is identical to that produced on the more expensive 4800 and the print longevity is identical. Prints made using this ink system are now widely accepted as archival quality so you’ll be in good company with many professionals who sell their print work.

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More specifically, why would you buy an Epson 3800? Maybe you’re a 2400 owner wanting to print in huge volume. Why would you buy the more expensive Epson 4800? Well, you’re making heaps of prints and need higher capacity ink cartridges, or maybe the roll paper capacity is important for batch production or panoramas printing, or maybe you need a large paper tray because you’re churning out prints in huge volume.

Most likely because you’re making and selling fine art prints, or have a requirement to produce large images for décor, education or promotion. Purchase cost aside, it’s faster and more economical than an A3+; even if you make many smaller prints the A2 size is there when you need it. You might also be able to do away with buying expensive double mates by doing first level matting or edge effects in Photoshop and printing for this effect on larger paper sizes.

The Epson software is excellent and provides a high level of control and customisation for advanced users. Epson’s advanced black and white mode offers quick and easy tone and contrast control and some nice effects are possible. The less experienced will still be making prints quickly and easily and will find that they can explore more of the options as their skills develop and as they become more demanding about their own print work. The printer dialogue is intuitive and it’s easy to find the paper you’ve chosen to use within this setup for a perfect match of paper and print settings.

Where the heart and mind goes the cheque book and it’s the Epson Stylus Pro 3800 Printer Review. I hope you have found this review helpful and informative. It’s a tough act to follow and will be hard to improve on as it responds to so many of the suggestions made by reviewers of its admittedly excellent predecessors.

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Tim Steele