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A close-up portrait of a man with a shaved head, wearing black-rimmed glasses and a grey collared shirt. He is resting his chin on his right hand, looking thoughtfully towards the camera. He is wearing a black chronograph watch with a brown leather strap on his right wrist. The background is dark and out of focus.

Frederick Van Johnson on Podcasting & the Future of Cameras

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Frederick Van Johnson is the founder and editor-in-chief of the TWiP podcast, probably one of the best-known photography podcasts. He's also a good friend, and I've spent many hours talking to him on the TWiP Podcast and offline. We met in person once around ten years ago, and I recently spoke with Frederick about my new app PhotoClock Pro and was happy when Frederick agreed to jump back on my Podcast for a chat. Both being pretty long in the tooth when it comes to podcasting, the first half of our conversation is about our experiences over the years and how podcasting is becoming mainstream, as well as the difficulties people face in preventing their shows from fading out, as around 80% of the shows in iTunes seem to have done. We went on to talk about camera gear and our respective systems and what we'd like to see in the future of cameras. I really enjoyed our conversation, and I hope you do too. We actually recorded this via zoom so I'm going to embed the video into the post for this episode. For those of you that prefer to read, I've had this episode transcribed and will insert that here, followed by Frederick's bio and social links etc.



Martin: Frederick Van Johnson back on my podcast for the first time in at least ten years.

Frederick: Yeah.

Martin: Probably more than that. I've interviewed you many years ago. We've been talking on and off TWiP for many years as well, and it's an absolute honor to have you back on my show. Welcome.

Frederick: Thank you. It sounds weird to say, "Boy, how time flies," but it's a thing. It is real. These years are flying by. I feel like you and I just met and now it's been decades. It's crazy.

Martin: I know. I need to check before I post some notes about this and push this out. But it's probably at least 10 years since I jumped on TWiP for the first time or so. Recently, we've spoken a couple of times, I'm not jumping into TWiP so much these days. You've sort of changed the way you do that, although you're still doing an excellent job. We're going to talk today about both our experiences, as now relatively long in the tooth podcasters, and also talk a little bit about cameras and where we see the future of cameras going. I'm really looking forward to chatting.

I want to just start off with a few questions about you. I know that from reading your bio, and obviously, over the years, you worked at Apple, Adobe, and a number of places. You were key in most of the technology that keeps me going on a daily basis. So, that's interesting in itself. We've spoken before about that, but what gave you the motivation or the drive to switch to what you're doing now with the podcast and all of that?

Frederick: Yeah. The kick in the pants moment or kick the bird out of the nest moment to see if it can fly. That's easy to narrow down because I was working at Adobe at the time as a senior marketing manager for the professional photography segment for Lightroom and Photoshop, and loving it. Many of your audience may remember, several years ago, when Adobe had

these massive layoffs. It was like 800 people in one day globally that they made the decision to downsize at that point, pre-Creative Cloud, all that stuff. I was one of them, I got caught up in that storm. It was literally you look at your phone, you see your schedule, and it's just like Tetris of all the appointments and overlapping appointments and squeezing in lunch there. Basically, a 9 to 5 losing game of Tetris. And then one day, you get an alert from your boss that says, "Hey, I need to meet with you at this time," and you go in there, and human resources is in there. It's like, "Uh-oh, I know what's going on here." But that played itself out hundreds of times over the company.

As a result, layoffs, go home, licking wounds, and I'm there thinking, "What can I do that is an amalgamation of the stuff that I love doing in corporate and the stuff that I love doing on the podcast, and I'm doing this podcast with Alex Lindsay and Scott Bourne, is there something there?" Ironically, around that time, Alex Lindsay and Scott Bourne had made the decision to take a step back from TWiP, and I took it on. So, it was, "Hey, I have some free time on my hands, and there's this thing there that I can play with during this downtime." So, I took it, and applied my corporate marketing knowledge to this fledgling podcasting, and grew it into what it is today. So, that's kind of where it came from.

Martin: That's pretty amazing, really. It kind of mirrors my experience in some ways. I was working for a US-based IT company, a big company. We went into work one day, and all of a sudden, the VIP of our department was there. And it's like, usually when

this guy has come in, there is, "Okay, let's do a presentation. Let's get this." Nothing, we heard nothing, and he appeared. I wasn't let go on that day, but because I was a senior manager, I was responsible for telling a number of people, including someone in India that we just hired, that they no longer had a job. And I had my own engineers who my manager was had the honor of firing, come into my room crying because they just lost a job they love. And it was like, okay, I've thought it myself, photography is something that I love to the point that I know I want to do this as my main profession. I knew I was going to take a big drop in salary, because I was earning a truckload of cash at that company. But I thought, "You know what? I don't need this anymore."

At that point, that's when I did all of the stuff. I got myself the Japanese citizenship, so I didn't have to worry about a visa, and I just exited. It was planned. It took a year because I had a lot of stuff to get in place. It's pretty much the same sort of time, and the same kind of related impetus that got me to— I was already doing the podcast, of course, I've been doing it since 2005. But—

Frederick: It's crazy. That's nuts.

Martin: It was that was that was the thing that I knew, that was my vehicle, that was my marketing vehicle, and I knew that that was going to give me enough. It had got me an audience that I knew I could at least make a bit of revenue from with the tours, because I was already doing the tours. I think it's very similar, and it seems like the

corporate American tendency to just frog march large numbers of people out of buildings is the root of it.

Frederick: It is. The story is a little bit more multidimensional than that, because what that did for me, was that watershed or the Peter Parker radioactive spider moment. That origin story for me was a revelation of the dangers of having all your eggs in one basket financially. You've got all these things balancing on the whim of one layer of management above you. You've got your mortgage, your car payment, your gymnastics lessons, your this, your that. All these things are basically on the fulcrum of this one person who may or not care about your wellbeing or have your best interests in mind. It's more about the company. So, that's a huge risk. And part of what I did when I made the switch over was think of it from the short term and the long term.

And the short term was what I called Operation Fireproof. Basically, I had a sit-down with myself, Mr. Corporate Man, I got all my eggs in one basket, and had a reality check of, "Yeah, that is cushy. You're doing a great job. You're valued at the company, but at any moment, that could go away. And if that goes away, you can't be the guy that's in that situation. So, how do you fix that?" And that was Operation Fireproof, which is essentially, how do you create multiple streams of income, so that you're okay, regardless of, if you have a big- you're working for a company, which, at that moment, I made the mind shift, or the mindset shift to instead of thinking, "Here's my job, and here are the other things that I'm doing to make side money or side jobs to all these things are revenue sources,

including the main job," which I'm going to internal- even if I'm a full-time employee, in my brain, I'm going to think of it as a contractor so that I'm doing contractor level above and beyond work for one. And internally, I'm looking at that income source as a revenue stream versus the end-all-be-all. So, if that revenue stream goes away, there are these other revenue streams to keep the boat moving forward, maybe slowly, but it's not going to sink. And then, maybe you work to replace the main engine if something catastrophic happens there, versus, "All I have as this main engine, and when it goes away, I'm screwed."

Martin: It's interesting. I love the fact that you gave it a project name. At this point, you've started with TWiP. I remember, that was around the time that I was exiting from my company, but I'd been listening to TWiP, either on my walk to work or on the trains. And we got together probably- we communicated and you asked me to join a- I mean, it must have been like eight years or so, where I would come on relatively regularly. I really enjoyed the TWiP experience. You helped me to build my audience.

Frederick: It was awesome.

Martin: That was great. And of course, we've remained friends. And we haven't been communicating quite as much as we probably could have, but it's been great to catch up with you recently. We spoke about my new app. I've got a lot of memories that contain Frederick Van Johnson because we used to joke that we were brothers, and my wife would always call you, my brother, the brother from the US.

Frederick: It's true.

Martin: I just think that it's nice to be able to jump back on like this and just chat. After you started, you jumped into TWiP, you've already got all of this corporate knowledge. And you do the video production, your connection with Alex Lindsay, I remember seeing years ago photos of you in the White House as you did interviews and things over there. What was all that like? Is that is that something that you still do? Or, is that pretty much-?

Frederick: Not so much that, that particular experience was literally a once in a lifetime experience because Alex at the time was running a company called Pixel Core who was contracted, I'm guessing, by the White House or by an organization that was representing the White House, but they were contracted to go in there and produce what the President then, Barack Obama, was calling as Virtual Town Halls. So, he would basically get in a Google Hangout, and they will have invited several different American citizens to come in and ask questions to the president and he would answer them live, but all in the Google Hangouts format. So, as you can imagine, there's a lot of planning and prep and setup and security clearances and all this stuff in order to do that, because we literally set up a set inside of the Roosevelt Room inside the White House. For those who don't know, the Roosevelt Room is the basically the conference room that's connected to the Oval Office, the president's office. So, he has his own little conference room. That's where we set up right in there, with the door to the Oval Office right there. We set up. And long story

short, "my position" there was to impersonate the president.

Literally, because he and I were, at least at the time, within one inch height of each other, so I'm one inch taller than the president. He's 6'1", I'm 6'2", around the same build, complexion, all that stuff. Plus, I had experience speaking on camera so I could play the role of the president. So, they brought me in to sit in the chair as the president with the suit on, with the flag, the whole nine yards and pretend I was him, while the citizens were practicing on me, asking me questions, and then I would respond as I think the President might respond, knowing his policies or whatever. We did that. We did that for a couple of years actually. And I got a chance to meet the man and get the photo and do the whole nine yards. It was a good time.

Martin: Wow. And on that, I recall as well, we've met in person once, and that was about 10 years ago.

Frederick: Yeah.

Martin: We went to that really nice restaurant that you recommended. I remember getting a photo outside there, and it was really dark. I was like glowing white. We've got the streetlights and trying to get the exposure right. It's just me, literally, I'm almost- I showed you my legs once and you were laughing your head off. In the winter, my legs are blue and then I get a bit of sun and I finally get to go white.

Frederick: That's awesome.

Martin: Yeah. Anyway, after that, you're starting the podcasting. How's

the technology to you? How has the technology changed over the last 10-12 years or so? Has there been a lot of big changes that you've noticed?

Frederick: Yeah. Well, a lot of it. I mean, I have noticed that, I'm sure you have too, first of all, I don't know, acceptance is the right word, but the understanding and embracing of podcasts as a means for storytelling or news gathering or whatever. Back when we started, if you said, "Yeah, I have a podcast," no one knew what it was. Now, everybody has a podcast, it's popular. I think as a result of that, there's been multiple boatloads of money poured into the industry, everything from Spotify ratifying the podcasting format and all the money that they've invested into podcasting and legitimizing it by throwing millions of dollars at some host to say, "Hey, you could get to that level of podcaster if you wanted to." I think a lot of that spurred the influx of people in, and with that influx of people, and dollars and legitimizing of the space came the tools to do it. Both cloud-based tools, and proper app, local-based tools that made it easy to produce a podcast like this, or bring in a remote guest or a number of guests and livestream it and do all these things.

Back when we started, we had to figure it out. A lot of times, it just didn't work. Technology would take a couple of steps forward and, "Hey, now we have Skype, maybe we can do this." Skype has its issues. I think probably one of the best things to happen, if there is a silver lining in the cloud, that is the pandemic, one of the silver linings in that cloud would be the legitimization, if that's a word, of Zoom in distance

conferencing and distance production, like we're doing right now. That was a shot in the arm that would have probably taken maybe another 10 plus years to go from where we were pre-pandemic, to where we're now in the wide scale adoption of Zoom and understanding and embracing of these technologies. We are at a point now where it would have taken at least a decade to get to, and as a result, podcasting came along for the ride with that, and the tools to podcast and to create a quality, sometimes even 4k broadcast livestreamed production with an unlimited audience, that used to be magic and a fairy tale, only accessible to a few with a gazillion dollars. And now, anyone can do it from their phone. We'll continue to see the evolution as the needs for, you and I, the podcasters change, and the demands for different types of content change and processors and computers get better, and cameras get better, and smaller, the capabilities will continue to increase. So, yeah, I'm excited about it.

Martin: Do you have a lot of TV shows in the US that are bringing people in via Zoom now because of the isolation policies and things?

Frederick: Yeah. A lot. I see a lot of that more. We used to see it on those big networks like CNN, MSNBC, Fox, those guys, and they would bring in guests remotely. A while ago, they were doing it using some proprietary software. I think it was Cisco, something specific from Cisco. And then, it was Skype, and you'd see the little bug on the bottom of the screen, "Video feed provided by Skype Business" or something like that. Then, during pandemic, we saw it basically switched to Zoom. And

now everyone's doing it and doing live hits from their kitchen and their home offices on broadcast news, like you and I have been doing since the beginning of time. Now, it's great.

Martin: That was something that I found interesting because you see these big TV channels that have obviously got a lot of technical ability in how to bring together all of the videos stream from multiple cameras, the audio and everything, they bring it into the console, and someone mixes it. I mean, I've traveled with a guy that that was responsible for the control room at the big football games in the US, and I think he said he'd even done the Super Bowl. He was the guy sitting there saying, "Camera four," and all of this and switching everything around. These big, big new stations and regular chat shows and things, they've got all of this knowledge, but then all of a sudden, Zoom comes along, they need people in right and they're tripping over. They're like, you get someone with a crackly connection, they get a bug, all the video freezes and they're like, "Okay, what do we do now?" And I'm thinking, "We've been dealing with this stuff for 10 years already."

I remember when Google Hangouts first started, there was no record button. It was like you can hang out, but you can't record it. So, I did a podcast about how to record it, and that was really popular because everybody wanted to record them. And so, I was recording them with screen cams and doing— not screen cams, with screen capture and all of this. And then literally a few months later, Google added the record button. So, I think that in many ways, you and I, people like us have been on the front of that, maybe we've

been driving a lot of those changes.

Frederick: We've been the guinea pigs. One of the features, I don't know if you got hit by this in Zoom, and I think this is no longer the case. I'm sure your listeners will correct me if I'm wrong, but Zoom prior to the more current versions of the software, whenever you wanted to record, it would— and you introduced a screen capture into the recording. So, you and I are talking and then I say, "Hey, Martin, let me show you this thing on my desktop," and I screen share my desktop, the resultant video would always expand to whatever the size of the screen-shared video was, instead of forcing it to 16:9. So, you get on a 5k iMac, you get the 5k recording, in the middle, two little heads talking, right?

Martin: Yeah.

Frederick: So, I got on the phone to them, they called me up randomly, they were doing one of these random, "Let me check how you're doing, Customer," type touch bases. I said, "Well, as a matter of fact, I have some questions for you. How come I don't have the option to just click a button and say, "force my video to 16:9 because I'm going to be able to share it on YouTube, etc." And their response back then this is pre-pandemic, by the way. Their response back then was, I'm paraphrasing them, but they were basically, "That's not our market. We're more of a conference room software and the fact that people are using it for other things, it's kind of not at the top of our radar." And now post-pandemic, it does 16:9, so you see.

Martin: Just saying.

Frederick: Just saying.

Martin: Yeah, it's brilliant. Excellent stuff. I remember a few days ago, we were talking, I think, I don't remember if it was on air or not. But yeah, I remember when I first started my podcast, I built my own database that I still use now. All of my podcast feeds are all- I'm talking with the people that Libsyn, the Liberated Syndication company that I use to share my audio, or one of the podcasts, and they're saying, "Why don't you just use our feed system?" And I'm saying, "Well, sorry, but mine's better. I can do more with mine." When I've entered all of the information, I click one button and it creates four copies of the feed for various places. There's does one. Usually, because I manage it myself, and I developed it myself, I can do all of that. And I think to myself, sometimes I should have packaged that as a plugin.

Frederick: I would've used it.

Martin: And probably sold it. Yeah. Anyway, we've both had a lot of fun over the years and getting through the hard times, but also watching it all sort of come to- be pretty much mainstream. Like you said, it's much more acceptable or legitimized now. You see regular people and celebrities have their own podcast, things like that. It's like we did it the other way. We did the podcast, and that built us an audience. They have an audience and decide, "Oh, yeah, it's a good idea now to do a podcast."

Frederick: It's another way to feed the audience.

Martin: Yeah. Have you noticed many people that have come and gone, thought it was a good idea to do a podcast and then a few weeks, months, or sometimes years later decided it's not such a good idea? Have you seen many of the- They call it podfade, right?

Frederick: Yeah, it's called podfading. In fact, that was part of a presentation I did at NAB a couple of weeks ago.

Martin: Really?

Frederick: Yeah, it was about podcasting. One of the cautionary tales I spoke of is the lifecycle that we see. I think part of it was, how are successful podcasters able to be successful? Of course, there are many variables, but one of the variables is longevity and repeatability, and consistency. I guess it's three variables. Those three things, basically showing up on time, producing a repeatable and quality product, and rinse and repeat and doing that over and over and over and over whenever your listeners have become accustomed to it, being able to do that. You look at some of the statistics in podcasting, and what we see is, if you look at the numbers, I don't have a slide in front of me, but if you say there are a million podcasts available today, of that million podcasts, you'd be surprised that maybe 10%, under 10% of them are actually actively podcasting and releasing shows on a regular repeated basis. The rest were either episodic or seasonal and have paused for a certain amount of time or it was just a podcast to accompany a book and it's over, something like that, or the podfade

occurred.

That's when someone has the big idea to start a podcast on X topic, and they didn't realize how much work it was going to be to get it started. And let alone dedicate the time for recording the thing. And if you're doing interviews, logistics around scheduling guests and time zones and all that stuff too, and then of course, the production and distribution side of it, being able to do that repeatedly at a level of quality is not a trivial thing. It takes a lot of commitment. I think a lot of people discount that at the beginning when they say, "Yeah, I can start a podcast and submit to to all the directories, and I have a show." You could, but that's like saying, "Yeah, I can buy a car and go racing the Indy 5000," 500 or, whatever it is. You can't do that. It takes experience and time and know-how and all that stuff. There are no shortcuts.

There's some easier cuts now because the tools have gotten easier. So, the hot coals that you and I walked over are not necessarily there right now. So, getting from zero to having a running show is much easier. But there's still the due diligence and hard work that comes from keeping that show going for a decade. That's a lot of shows, a lot of commitment.

Martin: I think mentioned this to you, but it's such a nondescript story, you've probably forgotten. But many years ago, someone emailed me and said, "I've been doing this, that, and the other. I'm a photographer for so many years. And I've identified TWiP as a show that I think I would like to be on. Could you introduce me to

Frederick?" I'm like, "Well, actually, no, because I identified TWiP after five to seven years of podcasting, hard work, building my own audience, and then finally getting noticed, and being able to get a request to go on. Go and do the work first, and then come back." It's amazing how some people just think that they can jump right in, and some people can. I'm not necessarily saying that that person should have been held back. It was more the tone, "I've identified TWiP!"

Frederick: That was worthy for me to distribute my message.

Martin: Anyway, podcasting, it's been something it's kept us, both very busy over the last 10 to 15 years or whatever. Mine is 17 years old now. If I'd have had a kid when I started my podcast, they'd be like second-year high school, and that to me is incredible.

Frederick: It's crazy. Yeah.

Martin: Don Komarechka, who I know is a mutual friend, he mentioned recently, I forget the name that he threw out, but someone is saying that they are the longest running podcast that has released a podcast every week. I'm sure they're correct because I have missed weeks and I have missed months sometimes when I've had to go and have brain tumors removed and things like that. So, there's been there's been times when I've skipped. I'm not saying that they're wrong, but I can still say that I was the third photography podcast in iTunes shortly after the first two. That's something that people can't take away from me.

Frederick: I remember Chris Marquardt and Tips from the Top Floor.

Martin: He was the first.

Frederick: That was the first photography podcast. I remember it was the first.

Martin: I believe he was the first. But LensWork from Brooks Jensen.

Frederick: Oh, okay. Yes.

Martin: That was already in iTunes when I hit the third slot.

Frederick: Wow. Isn't that great?

Martin: Yeah. I remember a friend in the UK emailed me and said, "Have you seen these podcast things?" and like three days later, I've got my database built and my first episode ready to put out, but I listened to Chris and Brooks' first few episodes, and I was like, "Okay, I could do this. I could jump in the middle there." Be a little bit more serious than Chris who's more sort of bubbly and everything, and a little bit more in depth than the short bite-sized lens work episodes, and I thought, "There's a slot for me there." But I remember then, literally, a few days after putting the first episode out, I jumped on a plane because I was still in my old job, and I was in Florida presenting one of the company's big meetings there. And at the end of that, going out and buying one of the white iPods so that I could actually listen to it on an iPod.

Frederick: Yeah.

Martin: Ironically, for being a part of that presentation, I received exactly the same iPod a few days later, so I came home with two.

Frederick: That's awesome.

Martin: And I still have them, they're sitting in a drawer downstairs. But I also remember seeing like, comment after comment come in via email, people saying, "Oh, we love the podcast," and I'm like, "Oh, Jesus, it's hitting an audience." People were hungry for it. They really ate it up. So, it's been really, really good.

Frederick: Yeah. No, it has. I agree. I think that was part of the lightning in a bottle that you're not going to get back again, because it was Wild West. What you describe is kind of like a scene in a podcasting movie where somebody does something, they have no idea what the response is going to be, and then it blows up. And now, there's an audience. It sounds very cinematic. But yeah, it's really cool. For me, it's still exciting, the whole podcasting industry, because much like photography— you and I love photography as well, much like photography, podcasting is many faceted, and you can go as expensive— just like cameras, you can go as expensive and as nerdy and as geeky on microphones and gear as you want to go or not. You can go completely commando and just podcast with an iPhone, you can totally do that.

Things are changing all the time, which keeps it really interesting. Aside from the technology side of it, there's also the performing art side of it. Being on the mic and being on camera, and being able to hold a conversation with someone and pull

out different information, that piece of it is, I think, an art form versus the all the bells and whistles of technology to make it happen, but you've got to be good at both of them in order to pull off a podcast.

Martin: Absolutely. Especially if you're producing it yourself and doing all of that. Well, you started a wonderful segue there to the second part of what— see, you're doing that your Frederick Van Johnson thing—

Frederick: I can't help it.

Martin: -segue. Cameras and gear and stuff well that's what we're going to talk about a little as well. I want to start that section by asking what you're shooting with these days. What's your camera bag look like at the moment?

Frederick: Well, it depends on what I'm doing that day. For example, right now, if you want to call it a webcam, my webcam is a Panasonic LUMIX BGH1, which is their box camera, Netflix-certified camera with a 12-bit, 35 2.8 lens on it, and that just lives on a little tripod behind my display forever. This mic runs into it, HDMI that into the computer, everybody's happy. So, that's the studio setup. With one single softbox behind it, that's the studio setup. If I'm doing photography, for the most part still photography or something that's destined to be a still, maybe it's a cinemagraph something that's based on still, I'll use my Nikon Z 6II, which I just got, I'm happy with that. And I use that almost specifically for, or— I forget the word I'm looking for. I only use it for still photography.

The LUMIX gear— I also shoot with the LUMIX S5 camera and an S1.

They're both full-frame LUMIX cameras, but when they take the L, the L glass, the Leica glass, I use that specifically for video type work. Like the camera behind me over there and you can see its silhouette, that is a LUMIX GH6 even, and that's rigged for video. Those cameras, there are no better cameras in my opinion for video. I know I'm going to get hate mail for that, but LUMIX cameras just excel at video, especially for the kind of things that I do. I love the color, I love the operating system on them. But for still photography, I was brought up on Nikon way back in the day in the Air Force.

Martin: Yeah, I remember that.

Frederick: It was all Nikon all the time. One day, I just had the epiphany— because I was doing still photography with my LUMIX cameras and it was great, it's fine. I had some setbacks with focusing and that sort of thing in low light performance, but for the most part, solid cameras, even for still photography, but I came to the realization one day of like, "You love Nikon. Why not just use Nikon for the still stuff?" Plus, they're coming out with this— or they came out with the Z9, which is amazing. So, my path was, "Why not have your cake and eat it too," which is use LUMIX almost exclusively for video and motion type stuff where it excels. And for stills, you'll use your Nikon, which you love and it excels at still photography. So, that's my loadout. Long answer to your question, three setups. This one, the BG camera for the webcam. One of the LUMIX cameras for video-type shooting and then the Nikon for stills.

Martin: I've been enjoying using my Canon cameras as a webcam as well. As you have done a lot of times over the years, the idea of feeding the audio directly into the camera and then just having the one feed, that's magical right there.

Frederick: One feed, yes. Oh, man. And none of that sync issue, and the delay, all that. It just comes out as one sweet, perfect HDMI signal that you can do things with versus the mic is going into the ATEM and this and this. MixPre-3 from this and then compression and all that, just everything goes into the camera and it's happy.

Martin: Yeah. I have some video gear and on one of those video monitors, a seven-inch monitor that I put on top of the camera when I'm going to be actually using it as a video camera, and I can get a 4k HDMI feed out of that. I also link the audio to the camera. So, I don't know why— Well, I do know why I didn't think of it, it's because I'm not quite on the ball there. But yeah, recording that feed. That's a little great tip right there.

Frederick: Yeah, it cleans up your desk too, because before I did that— like I said, I still have these things but I had in commission and active use, the MixPre-3 from Sound Devices. So, my microphone was running into that, which has built-in hardware compression, which is great. And then, coming out of that into an ATEM Mini Pro from switching and I had multiple camera angles, and all the HDMI were going into that thing, so I can just hit buttons to go to different cameras. And then, I found I never did that. I'm usually just one camera. That's all I need. So, I got rid of all that and

piped directly into the camera, and there's nothing on the desk now.

Martin: Excellent. Great advice.

Frederick: No wires. Not one wire over here.

Martin: I've got wires everywhere. Because I'm mainly audio, so I'm fine. I don't need the video camera for a lot of my podcasts. But when I'm doing the video, that's a great idea. Wonderful stuff.

So, you've got your three systems. The one thing I mentioned that I was going to keep until we were talking— pre-show, I mentioned something that I was going to hold up. Remember when I was on TWiP regularly, we would often speak about how I'm on the fence with mirrorless?

Frederick: Mm-hmm.

Martin: Do you realize that I'm fully mirrorless now?

Frederick: No, you were the most resistant person to anything mirrorless. Martin's audience, I'm going to just turn and talk to you specifically about Martin. Martin was so resistant. "No, I don't need it. This camera does fine. Why would I spend the money on that? Look at these pictures. The proof is in the pudding," all that stuff. I think I said, "One day, you will," and you did.

Martin: Oh, yeah. I'm not sure if you'd remember, but I used to say that the one thing I was waiting for is for Canon to do it right, and that's how I've gone mirrorless. It's the EOS R5. And before this, the EOS R was the

steppingstone. That was a good enough camera. Actually, it's this, it's the mount. I saw the EOS R come out, and initially I was still on that fence. I was, "You know what? Maybe we need another generation or two." And that in many ways was the case. But when I looked at the specs for the EOS R for the arm mount or the RF mount, is it? The arm mount here, I thought they shaved off. They did what they should have done. They took the mount and made it 24 millimeters further back from the camera, that mirror, the space that they needed for the mirror, that inch, they removed it. And so, the arm amount is 24 millimeters further back and that enabled them to make the lenses. They're still good. I mean this is a 15- to 35-millimeter F2.8 lens. It's still a hefty lens, but it's significantly shorter than what it would have been in in a regular EF mount.

Frederick: Absolutely.

Martin: And I have been loving this. They've gone on. People that were thinking Canon were done, I'm like, okay. Now you realize why I stuck with Canon, because it really just all depends. What you found is great for you, and everybody finds their own systems. I fell in love with Canon 30 years ago, and I'm really happy that I've waited for the arm mount and the EOS R series to come out, because they've really done everything that I hoped they do. They capitalized on the shorter distance. The quality's amazing. To me, the R5 is— they've brought out the R3 now, which is their fast sports model. I don't need one. It's 20 megapixels. In the past, I used to enjoy using my 5DS R because it was 50 megapixels. I'm a megapixel whore, as I've said many times in the

past.

Frederick: Yeah.

Martin: I will always go after the megapixels as long as I can get good quality pixels, and the 5DS R was. I looked at the specs for the third for the EOS R, it was 30 megapixels. So, I took a drop, but that was my first steppingstone into mirrorless. It was not perfect. There was the blackout as you shot wildlife that made it very difficult to shoot moving subjects, but you could get used to it and I was still getting birds catching fish out of the sea and stuff. That was a good first few years. But then, they came out with the EOS R5 45 megapixel, still not quite 50, but 45 megapixels, that area is where I want it to be, and at 20 frames per second. I'm like, "Okay, so now there's not even a need for me to buy the one series format bodies because they've got 20 frames per second—"

Frederick: You've got what you need.

Martin: So, I was sold. Been two years now, I think, since they released the R5. Unfortunately, since it's come out, the pandemic has had a hold of us, so I haven't actually used it on tour yet. I've been getting a lot of use in many places, but in two weeks' time I'm going to be back in maybe with this camera and all of my new RF mount lenses.

Frederick: That's going to be Disneyland for you out there.

Martin: Yeah. It's like three lenses now. I have more. I've got the 100-millimeter macro lens. But I have everything uncovered with three lenses now. So, 15 to 35 millimeters,

24 to 105, and 100 to 500. Even during the pandemic, as my revenue plummeted 97% as I mentioned recently, I have been able to still rebuy pretty much change all of my kit because of the secondhand resale value. My 200- to 400-millimeter lens was over \$10,000, and that was a \$12,000 lens. That paid for a big chunk of all of the new stuff, so I ended up changing everything. I've got five including the 50-millimeter, five RF lenses, and it's all been done for like a grand outlay of \$100 or so in total.

Frederick: Through where? Through a local camera store or one of the...

Martin: Yeah. There's a store here in Tokyo. I actually did a review and-

Frederick: Don't say Yodobashi Camera.

Martin: It's not Yodobashi.

Frederick: Yodobashi.

Martin: They do secondhand gear, but it's a store called Map Camera, M-A-P Camera. They actually sell online as well, but they are a great store to go in. They're usually about 10% cheaper than the Yodobashi, which is literally next door in Shinjuku. I shop at Yodobashi for various things, but when I want to buy a camera or lens, I go straight to Map. They give you a ticket when you buy your lenses from them that says if you take this back to them to sell it later, they'll give you an extra 2%. I was able to sell all of my old gear back to Map Camera for a really good price. It's basically all paid for itself. The only thing I had to pay any money for was when I bought the macro lens, which I had

to add \$100 for. Apart from, that I'm set. So, I'm now a mirrorless camera person, and I'm absolutely loving it.

Frederick: Welcome. Welcome, my friend. Finally. Now, I want a full report after you're actually out there and you take it on a workshop, and you shoot with a new glass and you feel out the limitations and where it excels and all that. Then, we'll have a conversation.

Martin: I've been using it. I used the EOS R on tour for a couple of years. Like I said, there were times when the blackout was annoying. There's no real blackout with this. I have shot birds and things just in the area here. I've been shooting with it, just not on tour. I already know that I love it. I think that the R5 at this point in time is the best camera Canon has ever made.

Frederick: That's what they say. It's funny when you said about the slow pace of iteration that Canon made. It took you this long to feel like it was ready for you to jump. Troy Miller, who I do these photo critiques with, he said the same thing. I did an interview with him about the Nikon Z 9. He said the same thing about that camera, because, in that interview, I challenged him about how Canon and Sony were running circles around Nikon, and everyone's like, "What's going on with Nikon? Is Nikon going away? Are they going to do something?" And then they come out with this crazy unicorn dust powered, dark matter, unobtainium-bodied camera, that's doing all these magical things.

One of the questions I put forth in that interview was, "Okay, so now it would appear-" of course, this is

subjective, "But it would appear that Nikon has either caught up with the competition, or even innovated a little bit past them," which of course they'll catch up and do whatever. But the question was, "Is this the new path of Nikon. Now that they they've caught up, are they going to continue to keep pace with Canon and Sony and the rest of them? Or, is it going to be another 5 to 10 years before they make another quantum leap and what we have today is what we're going to live with for a decade?"

Martin: Yeah.

Frederick: It's interesting.

Martin: I know about the new cameras, I've not really followed what they're probably going to do. But Canon has, unless I've missed a follow-up post or a follow-up announcement, they did announce a few years ago that they were not going to design and manufacture any new EF lenses. And if you look at their lineup now, they have been on a stampede of new lenses, R mount or RF mount lenses. They've actually just announced a new 1200-millimeter lens. They used to have an old EF 1200-millimeter super telephoto lens. They've just announced an RF version of that. I think it's something like \$10,000 or \$12,000- No, actually, I think it's \$20,000 or something like that. Needless to say, I'm not going to own one but that was an amazing lens years ago.

Say you want to get a portrait of someone with the moon sort of directly behind them and things, or someone on a hill and the moon is huge behind them, or sports and

stuff, that is going to be- not a regular sports lens. I don't own a super telephoto other than the 100 to 400. So, I've downsized, my kit bag for Namibia is going to look nice and neat, because it's literally going to have three lenses and two bodies. I'm going to take my EOS R as a backup, but my main shooting is going to be with the R5.

Frederick: It's going to be good.

Martin: On that, what do you think's going to happen with cameras in the future? What would you like to see now in a camera that is currently not on the horizon or not something that you can buy at the moment?

Frederick: That's a really good question, because the cameras themselves, even though all these bodies that we've been talking about in this conversation are just magical and they have so much headroom, that the average photographer is going to be happy for years to come with what's available today. That said, there's always room for improvement. And I think one of the more glaring leaves from my perspective- and I'd be really interested to hear what you think about it, one of the glaring omissions right now across camera brands, some more than others, but basically across camera brands is an app ecosystem, like you find on your phone where you can buy different capabilities for your camera, which is essentially a supercomputer that happens to have high-quality optics attached to it. Why can't I get some of the more computational photography type features that you find on modern smartphones inside a camera or a device with proper optics on it,

versus the little cell phone camera? I know it's a big nut to swallow, but the whole idea of having a robust ecosystem to allow those sorts of things where it be something as simple as an intervalometer, and instruction on how to do astrophotography, to portraiture or whatever, why can't I have an app store ecosystem for my camera, so that maybe I can? Maybe Martin Bailey writes an app, and you have all of your workshop attendees download your specific app, because it has settings and all this stuff for their camera depending on the model, wouldn't that be great? And you can keep in touch with them.

Martin: So, it needs to be a standard that works with all systems, they all get together.

Frederick: Ultimately, that'd be great, but unlikely considering the nature of competition with these camera companies. But even to have them as solo, like there's a Nikon app store for all the Nikon cameras that support it and a Canon store and a Sony store. Sony kind of did it, but in my opinion kind of half assed it with the application delivery to the device, but to have one that has the fit and finish and polish of a Google Play or Apple App Store in it, but for people that have spent the money for these, these cameras, I think that'd be amazing. Then, if the camera becomes a platform, even if it's a platform specific or brand-specific platform, but if it's a platform, then you can do all kinds of things, like network the cameras together and do bullet time type shots and do all these things that you can't do today, because each camera is basically dumb. They're not smart cameras. I want a smart

camera, like having a smartphone.

Martin: That is the thing that you pretty much touched on what I would love to see, and that is just Bluetooth connection— my cameras all have Bluetooth now. I would like for them to— I open a specific menu and say, "Sync this camera with X number of cameras in the vicinity," and it looks for other cameras that I've also set trying to pair or something like that. And then, once you've done that, you've got a series of checkboxes to select which options, which settings you want to sync. Okay, sync my shutter speed, my aperture, and my ISO and maybe white balance, things like that. All of these common settings that pretty much all cameras have sync these with— it doesn't necessarily even have to be cross system. Even if my Canon cameras did it with other Canon cameras, I'd be happy.

When I'm shooting wildlife, I always pretty much— unless it's very specific challenging weather conditions or lighting conditions, I always shoot in manual. What I find is that I've got one camera, say, on a tripod, another over my shoulder and I have to— as the light changes, I have to constantly change both cameras. If I could just change the shutter speed or the ISO on one and have it automatically synced to the second, I'd be in heaven. It would stop me making mistakes every so often when I needed to change things quickly and forget the change the other. It seems like a no-brainer.

Frederick: It seems obvious, that and syncing the clock so that you've got frame accurate— Those sorts of things, other things that I like to see added beyond just features and

computational photography, superpowers, would be either the Apple AirTag's technology or something like it, because these cameras are very expensive. To have something in, is where I have a "find my," exactly. I've got one in every camera bag, but I want—

Martin: I've just got some— the literal ones...

Frederick: I want that technology integrated into the camera itself. I don't want to have to stick it on there or hide it in my camera bag. I want it inside the camera.

Martin: This size with one button battery in there, again— the thing used to be, it either takes up too much battery power, or the signal can't get out of the magnesium alloyed body. In that case, put it under the rubber. It's so small now, you just put it under the rubber there, it can get out. But yeah, I actually just had three of the people that I'll be traveling in Namibia with, they were in Chile a few weeks or a month or so ago. They fell for the flat tire scam. They stopped to help someone with a flat tire, and they ended up with all of their camera bags and everything being stolen from them. Luckily, they had a tag in each of their bags, and they got them all back. I ordered these, a pack of four a month ago, they proceeded to be shipped the following day, and then sat in Shanghai from the lockdown that they've got in Shanghai, they sat in Shanghai for a month. I was about to cancel the order, but they did arrive. So, I'm happy, I've got that. They're amazing little things. I've got a pack of four. I'm going to put one in all of my bags and things every

time I leave the house now.

Frederick: I started with four, and now they're in every camera bag, every little day bag, whatever. So, they're in all the bags named appropriately. And, of course, all the camera bags as well, and luggage and everything. So, I know where everything is, or at least my luggage, I know where it is...

Martin: Did you did you get them inscribed on the back with the name? That's why mine had to come from Shanghai. Like MBP4 here. I have MBP1 through 4 just so that I know which ones they are.

Frederick: I got a Sharpie marker. I write on there with a Sharpie, and no one will ever see those. The whole point of those is—

Martin: Exactly.

Frederick: They just gone and hidden forever. You never even see them.

Martin: I like the note. There was a notification when I paired it saying that planting them on people to track them without their permission is illegal in most countries. That's an important thing to put out there. Even with that out there, like they say, "Locks on doors only stop honest people."

Frederick: Yeah, I know there's probably meanings about that message, because part of me is if somebody gets that message like, "Oh, that's actually a good idea. I didn't realize that. I'm going to track my spouse..."

Martin: “Oh, no, I’m going put one in my girlfriend’s bag.

Frederick: Exactly. There’ve been several instances of people misusing those things as they do anything, because humans. But guys were dropping them in pockets of girls or whomever at clubs, and then now they know where they live. The thing will alert you and tell you that you’re being tracked or whatever but if you’re not paying attention or it’s loud or whatever, you’re never going to hear it. Yeah, there’s issues that need to be worked out with these things, but I think the positives of me being able to have the peace of mind to, when I arrive somewhere, at some airport, I’ve been in several airports in the last couple of months, you can look on your phone and see that your luggage is, “Oh, it’s here. It’s over there. Okay, cool. At least it made it to the airport,” versus looking and not having any information about where your luggage is, until it shows up on the carousel.

Martin: I’m going to put one in my main suitcase, a big duffel bag that I take to Namibia. So, yeah, I’ll be able to track that.

Frederick, we’ve been speaking for an hour now and I don’t want to keep you for much longer. I have absolutely enjoyed this conversation, and I know that the audience are going to enjoy it as well. I’ve got a big list of all of the social networks and places that you can be contacted on and followed through. I’m going to put those into the show notes, which are going to be at mbp.ac/778. I just wanted to ask you if there’s anything that you wanted to plug or talk about before

we drop off?

Frederick: Well, yes and no. Of course, all roads lead to This Week in Photo, which is where the podcast is, so please subscribe to the podcast and check it out and let me know what you think. I would love that. And also, the TWiP community, Martin, which you are a member of is our private paid community. I’d love it if some of your audience would come over there and check it out. I think we’ve got a two-week free trial going right now. So, go ahead and check that out. It’s at join.twip.pro? Let me double check. I’m so not good about that stuff. It is join.thisweekinphoto.com will take them there.

Martin: It’s a very thriving community as well. You’ve built something really good over there and so on. Congratulations on all you’ve achieved. And I’m looking forward to seeing what the next 10 years are going to bring for Frederick Van Johnson and your TWiPverse. Hopefully, if you’ve got anything that you want to chat about again or just for catching up like this, it’s always a pleasure. So, I’d like to maybe hope that we can jump back on a call in some few years.

Frederick: In a few years? Few months. What are you talking about?

Martin: Few months would be great. I mean, you can have a regular spot and we’ll—

Frederick: Likewise, we can do that.

Martin: You bring more to the podcast than you realize, so it’s a lot of fun.

Frederick: Thank you.

Martin: Well, really, thank you very much, Frederick. We’ll drop off there. But I am really looking forward to continuing to stay in touch and have a great—I was going to say have a great week whatever you’re doing, because that’s how I normally end my podcasts. But I’ll add something after this anyway. But really, thank you very much. It’s been a lot of fun.

Frederick: All right. Thanks, Martin.

Frederick’s Bio:

Frederick is the founder and Editor-in-Chief of The TWiP podcast — a popular and influential photography show. Frederick served as Chairman of the Board at Brooks Institute (Brooks.edu) as well as strategy and marketing advisor for several photography tech companies.

Frederick began his career as a Combat Photojournalist in the United States Air Force, where he served for 8 years, and was decorated many times for his exemplary work in the field. Frederick’s unit at Vandenberg Air Force Base, California was among the first in the armed forces to receive, and put into daily use, digital imaging processes and DSLR camera equipment. As a result, Frederick was awarded the prestigious U.S. Air Force Commendation medal for his key role in facilitating the USAF’s transition from film-based photography to digital imaging.

After being honorably discharged from his photojournalism unit in the US Air Force, Frederick went on to study visual communication and marketing at the University of

California at Santa Barbara.

As a prior employee of Apple and Adobe, Frederick was a key player in the development of iPhoto and Adobe Photoshop Lightroom, respectively. Also while at Adobe, he was the director for professional photographer marketing and outreach.

More recently, Frederick has been experimenting with drone-based aerial photography, 360° video, and virtual and augmented reality based photography.

Today Frederick lives in Northern California, and continues to podcast and practice photography whenever possible.

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