

## They're Taking Kodachrome Away



(AP) - In this photo taken on Sept. 11, 2008, a roll of Kodachrome 64 is seen at Color Tech in Amherst, N.Y., Thursday, Sept. 11, 2008.

ROCHESTER, N.Y. (AP) - Sorry, Paul Simon, Kodak is taking your Kodachrome away.

The Eastman Kodak Co. announced Monday it's retiring its most senior film because of declining customer demand in an increasingly digital age.

The world's first commercially successful color film, immortalized in song by Simon, spent 74 years in Kodak's portfolio. It enjoyed its heyday in the 1950s and '60s but in recent years has nudged closer to obscurity: Sales of Kodachrome are now just a fraction of 1 percent of the company's total sales of still-picture films, and only one commercial lab in the world still processes it.

Those numbers and the unique materials needed to make it convinced Kodak to call its most recent manufacturing run the last, said Mary Jane Hellyar, the outgoing president of Kodak's Film, Photofinishing and Entertainment Group.

"Kodachrome is particularly difficult (to retire) because it really has become kind of an icon," Hellyar said.

Simon sang about it in 1973 in the aptly titled "Kodachrome."

"They give us those nice bright colors. They give us the greens of summers. Makes you think all the world's a sunny day," he sang. "... So Mama don't take my Kodachrome away."

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Indeed, Kodachrome was favored by still and motion picture photographers for its rich but realistic tones, vibrant colors and durability.

It was the basis not only for countless family slideshows on carousel projectors over the years but also for world-renowned images, including Abraham Zapruder's 8 mm reel of President John F. Kennedy's assassination on Nov. 22, 1963.

Photojournalist Steve McCurry's widely recognized portrait of an Afghan refugee girl, shot on Kodachrome, appeared on the cover of National Geographic in 1985. At Kodak's request, McCurry will shoot one of the last rolls of Kodachrome film and donate the images to the George Eastman House museum, which honors the company's founder, in Rochester.

For McCurry, who after 25 years with Kodachrome moved on to digital photography and other films in the last few years, the project will close out an era.

"I want to take (the last roll) with me and somehow make every frame count ... just as a way to honor the memory and always be able to look back with fond memories at how it capped and ended my shooting Kodachrome," McCurry said last week from Singapore, where he has an exhibition at the Asian Civilizations Museum.

As a tribute to the film, Kodak has compiled on its Web site a gallery of iconic images, including McCurry's Afghan girl and others from photographers Eric Meola and Peter Guttman.

Guttman used Kodachrome for 16 years, until about 1990, before switching to Kodak's more modern Ektachrome film, and he calls it "the visual crib that I was nurtured in." He used it to create a widely published image of a snowman beneath a solar eclipse, shot in the dead of winter in North Dakota.

"I was pretty much entranced by the incredibly realistic tones and really beautiful color," Guttman said, "but it didn't have that artificial Crayola coloration of some of the other products that were out there."

Unlike any other color film, Kodachrome is purely black and white when exposed. The three primary colors that mix to form the spectrum are added in three development steps rather than built into its layers.

Because of the complexity, only Dwayne's Photo, in Parsons, Kan., still processes Kodachrome film. The lab has agreed to continue through 2010, Kodak said.

Hellyar estimates the retail supply of Kodachrome will run out in the fall, though it could be sooner if devotees stockpile. In the U.S., Kodachrome film is available only through photo specialty dealers. In Europe, some retailers, including the Boots chain, carry it.

Responding to photographers like Guttman, who refuse to go digital, Hellyar said that despite Kodachrome's demise Kodak will stay in the film business "as far into

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the future as possible," even though the company now gets about 70 percent of its revenue from its digital business.

Hellyar points to the seven new professional still films and several new motion picture films introduced in the last few years and to a strategy that emphasizes efficiency.

"Anywhere where we can have common components and common design and common chemistry that let us build multiple films off of those same components, then we're in a much stronger position to be able to continue to meet customers' needs," she said.

Kodachrome, because of its one-of-a-kind formula, didn't fit in with the philosophy and was made only about once a year.

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