

19 PRINT FORMATS



Leica LEICA M8

in-depth
review



3. Body & Design

Design



An image of the M8 leaked a few weeks before it was officially announced and I was amused to read a comment on a Leica forum stating that it was obviously a fake, there was no way Leica could keep the design so simple and clean. Well, that image wasn't a fake and Leica have managed to maintain a clean simple design which looks every bit as exclusive as you would expect.

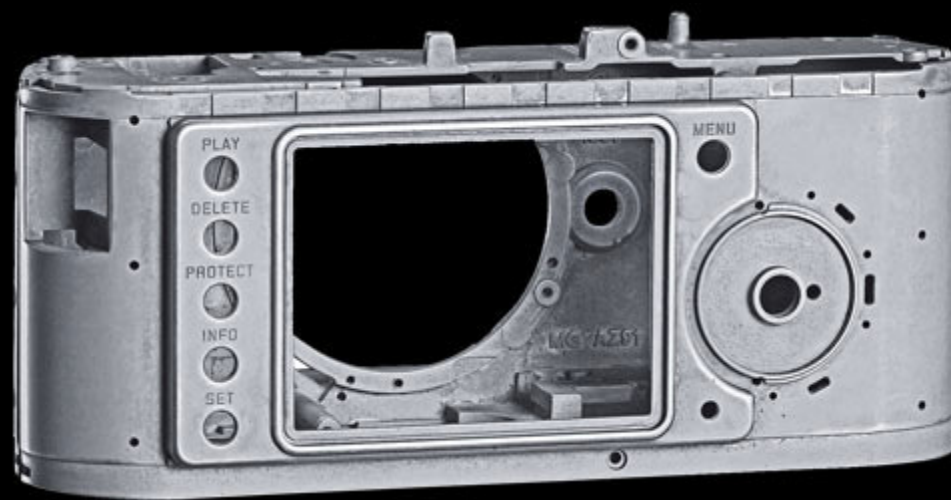
From the front there are no clues that this is a digital camera, it looks almost exactly the same as the M7 film camera, classic rectangular proportions (approx. 5:3) and the almost-central lens mount. Above this the distance meter viewing window, bright line illumination window and the large viewfinder window. Around the back a straightforward and logical layout, the large 2.5" LCD monitor flanked by five buttons on the left and on the right the menu, control dial and direction buttons. No fuss, no doubling-up of controls, just clean logical design.

On the top of the camera (not shown here) is the main power / drive mode switch, shutter release and shutter speed dial. Because the M8 utilizes an electronically controlled metal blade shutter it doesn't require a wind lever (which on a film M series both winds the film and primes the shutter).

Materials and build quality

It goes without saying that following in the fine tradition of previous M series cameras, and as is expected, the M8 is built like a tank. The main body is made from a two-piece magnesium alloy cast (shown below), the top which contains the viewfinder chamber and controls is milled from a single block of brass, likewise the removable base (which hides the battery and SD compartment) is also

made of brass. So to say that the M8 is well built and robust is perhaps an understatement, the M series of cameras have built their reputation among professional photographers as being able to cope with pretty much any situation, the M8 has made no compromises in this sense.



Side by side

The first image shown below is the classic comparison, the current film M series, the M7, beside the M8 (see below for a more detailed look at the design changes). The second image is simply for scale, the M8 beside Canon's new EOS 400D, for those who have never seen or handled an M series Leica this image will perhaps give you some insight into its compact dimensions (you could of course buy six EOS 400D's instead of the M8, if you so wished).





In your hand

Comfortable semi-circular sides are the trademark of the M series design, and they really do work, surprisingly easy and comfortable to hold, despite its weight and lack of a molded grip. The first time you lift the M8 I promise you will be instantly impressed and realize that this isn't any ordinary camera.



Direct comparison to the M7

As you can see from this A/B comparison (just place your mouse over the image to see the M7, remove it to return to the M8) there is actually almost no difference in size between the two cameras (impressive when you consider how much more has to be packed into a digital camera). The less subtle differences are (obviously) there's no need for a wind or rewind lever, that the frame count window has gone digital and swapped sides, that the battery compartment has been removed from the front of the camera, there is a USB port on the left rear and that the entire back of the camera has of course changed.

Less obvious differences are the slightly raised lens mount (which allowed Leica to shave a couple of mm off the depth of the camera) and the brightness sensor, above left of the Leica badge (this is used to automatically adjust the brightness of the LED display in the viewfinder depending on ambient light). Plus a few more changes you can't see here; the sensor on the lens mount for the 6-bit lens coding and the battery / SD compartments in the base of the camera behind the removable cover.



LCD monitor



The M8 features a 2.5" 230,000 pixel (320 x 240 x RGB) TFT LCD monitor with a perspex protective window and a slight anti-reflective coating. In use the screen was sharp and detailed although the default brightness did appear to be a little dark for use outdoors, luckily there are two more levels of brightness above the default. We found the screen to be best viewed straight on with a particular drop off in brightness when looking from above.

Top LCD







On the top left of the camera (from the rear) is a small circular window which is clearly designed to be reminiscent of the frame count window found on film M series cameras. This window contains a small LCD display which has a three digit counter indicating the number of frames remaining on the SD card and below this a five stage battery status indicator (75-100%, 50-75%, 25-50%, 5-25%, 0-5%).

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