Picture Effect

The Picture Effect menu option provides a rich array of settings for shooting images with in-camera special effects. The Sony RX100 gives you a terrific variety of ways in which to add creative touches to your shots, and the Picture Effect settings are probably my favorites. Of course, there is a lot of competition in the arena of special-effects photography nowadays from apps for cameras that are built into cell phones (such as Instagram, Hipstamatic, and others), and there also is competition from the trend for using cameras like the Holga, film-based models whose images are purposely degraded to look old-fashioned, with low resolution, grain, and other attributes of images taken by cheap, plastic cameras.

The Picture Effect option lets you delve into this area and into numerous other types of creative photo-making, with considerable flexibility. The Picture Effect settings do not work with RAW images. If you set a Picture Effect option and then select RAW quality, the Picture Effect setting will be canceled. However, you still have control over many of the most important settings on the camera, including Image Size, White Balance, ISO, and even, in most cases, Drive Mode. So, unlike the situation with the Scene mode settings, when you select a Picture Effect option you are still free to control the means of taking your images as well as other aspects of their appearance.

To use any of these effects, select the Picture Effect menu option as shown in Figure 4-70 and, as with other menu screens, scroll down through the choices at the left of the screen.
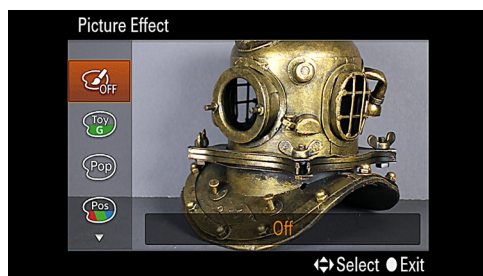

Figure 4-70: Picture Effect Menu Option

Some selections have no further options, and some have additional settings that you can make by pressing the left and right direction buttons.

I will discuss each option in turn. In Figure 4-71, I provide a chart with one example image taken with each effect, all taken of the same scene—a life-size fantasy cottage on display inside the conservatory at the local botanical gardens. Then, for some of the effects, I will include additional images of other scenes to provide larger illustrations.

Following are some details about each of the settings.

Off

The top setting on the Picture Effect menu is used to cancel all Picture Effect settings. When you are engaged in ordinary picture-taking, you should make sure the Off setting is selected so that no unwanted special effects interfere with your images.

Toy Camera

The Toy Camera menu gives you an alternative to using one of the popular models of "toy" film cameras such as the Holga, Diana, or Lomo, which are popular with hobbyists and artists who use them to take photos with grainy, low-resolution appearances. (There is a genre of photography called "Lomography," named for the Lomo camera.) With all of the Toy Camera settings, the RX100 processes the image so it looks as if it were taken by a camera with a cheap lens; the image is dark at the corners and somewhat blurry. The several individual settings, reached by pressing the right and left direction buttons, act as follows:

Normal: No additional processing.

Cool: Adjusts white balance to the "cool" side, resulting in a bluish tint.

Warm: Uses a "warm" white balance, giving a reddish hue.

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Picture Effect Samples

Picture Effect Off

High Contrast Monochrome

Toy Camera Cool

Soft Focus High

Pop Art

HDR Painting High

Posterization Color

Rich-tone Monochrome

Retro Photo

Miniature

Soft High-key

Watercolor

Partial Color Green

Illustration Mid

Figure 4-71: Picture Effect Chart

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Green: Adds a green tint, similar to dialing in an adjustment on the green axis for white balance.

Magenta: Similar to the Green setting, but adjustment is along the magenta axis.

Figure 4-72 shows a fountain with the Toy Camera setting. Many people really enjoy the stylized, purposely cheapened look of images taken with the Holga and similar cameras. The RX100 comes with a built-in ability to let you experiment with this genre, so you might give it a try if you have any interest.

Figure 4-72: Toy Camera - Green

Pop Color

This next setting, according to Sony, is intended to give a "pop art" feel to your images through emphasis on bright colors. I don't have much background in art history, but I'm not sure that pop art is distinguished primarily by bright colors; I thought it had more to do with the subject matter, including images that originated from advertising and comic strips. Be that as it may, as you can see in Figure 4-71, what you get with this setting is another way to add "punch" and intensity, along with added brightness, to your color images. I have not found that this effect adds anything more to my images than the Vivid setting of the Creative Style option.

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Posterization

The Posterization setting adds a fairly dramatic effect to your images. Using the right and left direction buttons, you can choose to apply this effect in color or in black and white. In either case, with this effect the camera applies a distinctive form of processing that results in heightened emphasis on colors (or dark and light areas if you select black and white) and imbues the image with a high-contrast, pastel-like look. It is somewhat like one of the more exotic types of HDR processing. The number of different colors (or shades of gray) used in the image is decreased to make it look as if the image were created from just a few poster paints; the result has an unrealistic but dramatic effect. It's a good idea to remember that, with all of the Picture Effect settings, you can still make additional settings, including White Balance, exposure compensation, and others. With Posterization, you might try using some positive or negative exposure compensation, which can change the appearance of this effect dramatically. For Figure 4-73, however, I did not use exposure compensation.

Figure 4-73: Posterization - Color

In general, I recommend using the Posterization setting only when you want to achieve a striking artistic effect, perhaps to create a distinctive-looking poster or greeting card.

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Retro Photo

With the Retro Photo setting, the RX100 uses sepia coloring and reduced contrast in order to mimic the appearance of an aging photo. This effect is not as pronounced as the sepia effects I have seen on other cameras; with the RX100, a good deal of the image's original color still shows up, but there is a subtle softening of the image with the sepia coloration.

Soft High-key

The term "high key" refers to a technique in which the photographer uses bright lighting throughout the scene, striving for a very bright overall look with light colors and few shadows. This technique often is used in advertising photography. With the RX100, Sony has added softness, to give the image a bright, light appearance without the harshness that might otherwise result from the overexposed appearance. I enjoy the pleasant, relaxing look of images taken with this effect.

Partial Color

The Partial Color effect lets you choose a single color to retain in an image; the camera then reduces the saturation of all other colors to monochrome, so that only objects of that single color remain in color in the image. I really enjoy this setting, which can be used to isolate a particular object with great dramatic effect.

Figure 4-74: Partial Color - Green

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In Figure 4-74, I used the Green setting to isolate the greenery inside the conservatory at the botanical gardens; in Figure 4-75, I used the Red setting to show the bricks of a house. As you can see, some of the earth around a tree was sufficiently red to show up in color as well.

Figure 4-75: Partial Color - Red

The choices for the color to be retained are red, green, blue, and yellow; use the left and right direction buttons to select one of those colors. Then, just aim the camera at your subject; you will see on the LCD display what objects will show up in color. There is no direct way to adjust the color tolerance of this setting, so you cannot, for example, set the camera to accept a broad range of reds to be retained in the image. However, if you change the White Balance setting, the camera will perceive colors differently. So, if there is a particular object that you want to depict in color but the camera does not "see" it as red, green, blue, or yellow, you can try selecting a different White Balance setting and see if the color will be retained. You also can fine-tune the white balance using the color axes to add or subtract these hues, if you want to bring a particular object within the range of the color that will be retained. Also, by choosing a color that does not appear in the scene at all, you can take a straight monochrome photograph.