

The Voigtländer Trio Review of the FE 10mm, 12mm, and 15mm Extreme Wide Angle Lenses

by
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In October 2015, Austrian iconic specialty lens brand Voigtländer, now a division of Cosina, the same company that manufactures most Carl Zeiss camera lenses, announced that they would be bringing a line of ultra-wide angle lenses to the Sony full frame E-mount platform by Spring 2016. The announcement was for a redesigned version of the Leica M-mount 15mm f/4.5 and 12mm f/5.6, and a brand new design of a 10mm f/5.6. The actual names of the lenses are as follows:

- 10mm / F 5,6 Hyper Wide Heliar
- 12mm / F 5,6 Ultra Wide Heliar III
- 15mm / F 4,5 Super Wide Heliar III

These lenses are very high quality, all metal construction, direct-manual focus lenses (not focus by wire) that have the same buttery smooth, perfect tension mechanical focus mechanism of the legendary Carl Zeiss lenses and a manual aperture ring. The lenses are chipped and have electronic connections so that correct EXIF data is recorded in the image files and so that RAW conversion software can apply the appropriate lens profiles if that RAW converter chooses to support lens correction for these lenses.

The announcement was very exciting to me because the only extreme-wide lenses available at the time of announcement were very large Samyang/Rokinon DSLR lenses with a welded on mount extension. The Voigtländer lenses are tiny and purpose built for the short flange distance of the Sony E-mount system. Also, if the Leica versions that two of these lenses are derived from are any indication, optical quality would be superb.



Asturias, Spain - Voigtlander 15mm

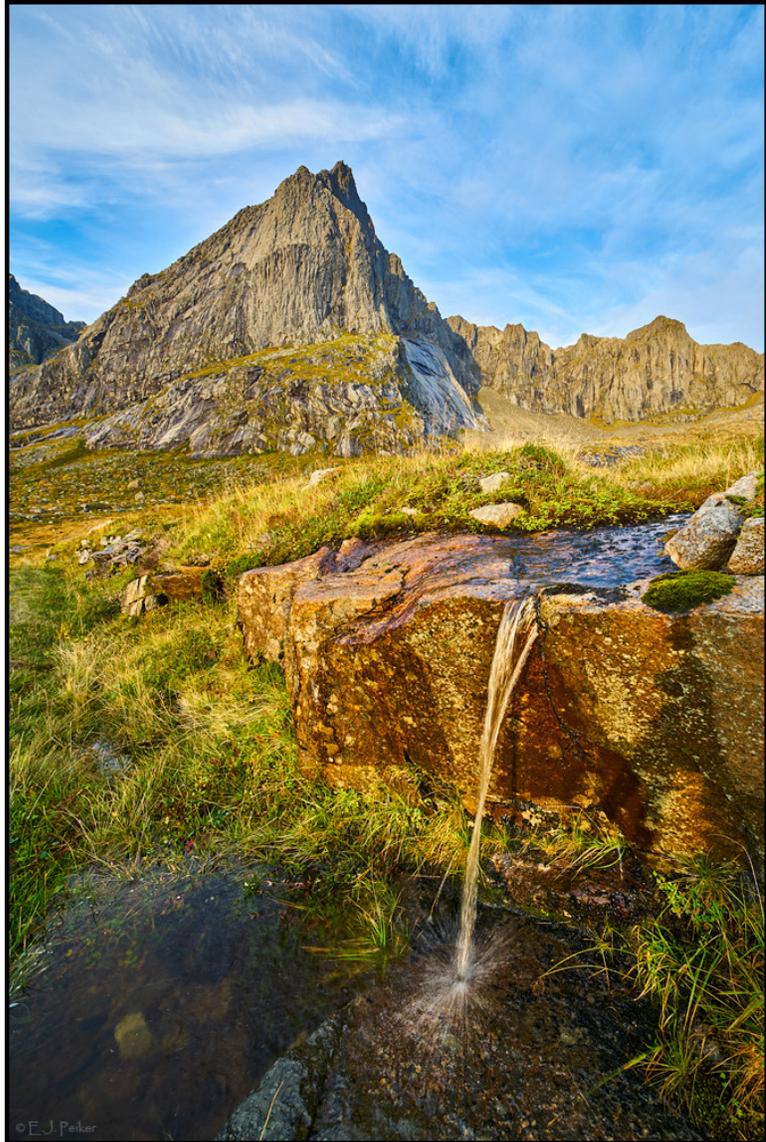
Voigtlander met their Q1/2016 release target only for the 15mm and I was fortunate to receive one of the very first production lenses in the USA and immediately put it to the test. I was blown away by how much better the lens is, image quality wise, than the 16mm end of the Sony-Zeiss 16-35 f/4 lens in a lens that is a fraction of the size and has drastically more robust build quality and it allows you to actually set a hyperfocal point. Simply setting the lens to f/8 and the focus ring to 7 feet renders everything from 3.5 feet to infinity sharp even with a highly conservative circle of confusion of 12 microns on the a7R Mk II's 42 megapixel sensor. A landscaper could essentially tape the lens down at that setting and never have to make another change. Linear distortion is very well controlled and while there is vignetting, it is no worse than any other super wide lens and better than many. The angle of view is 110 degrees, it uses a 10 blade aperture ring and weighs just 298g or 10.5oz despite the all metal construction. The Voigtlander 15mm was so good that I had no hesitation in purchasing the lens and then

using it extensively on my trip to Asturias Spain just a week later. The lens uses very economical 58mm filters. MSRP is \$850 but it can be purchased for \$800 from most of the major online photo stores. My recommendation is to get it through the USA's Voigtlander expert, CameraQuest - you simply will not find a better place to do business with for specialty lenses like this.

The next lens to be released was the 10mm in Q2. I briefly tested the lens and found it to be surprisingly good for the widest full frame non-fish eye lens ever made. Construction is exactly like the 15mm and exudes quality - you really can tell that these are made in the same factory that produces the very best Zeiss lenses. As expected, things get a bit distorted into the corners if you have close-by objects due to the extreme perspective distortion in a lens this wide but vertical lines even along the edges stay vertical without too much distortion. There is just a bit of barrel distortion along the horizontal axis and significant exposure roll-off in the corners but still within the realm of being correctable in your RAW converter. Due to the bulbous front element, screw-on filters are not supported. The lens sports a super wide 130 degree angle of

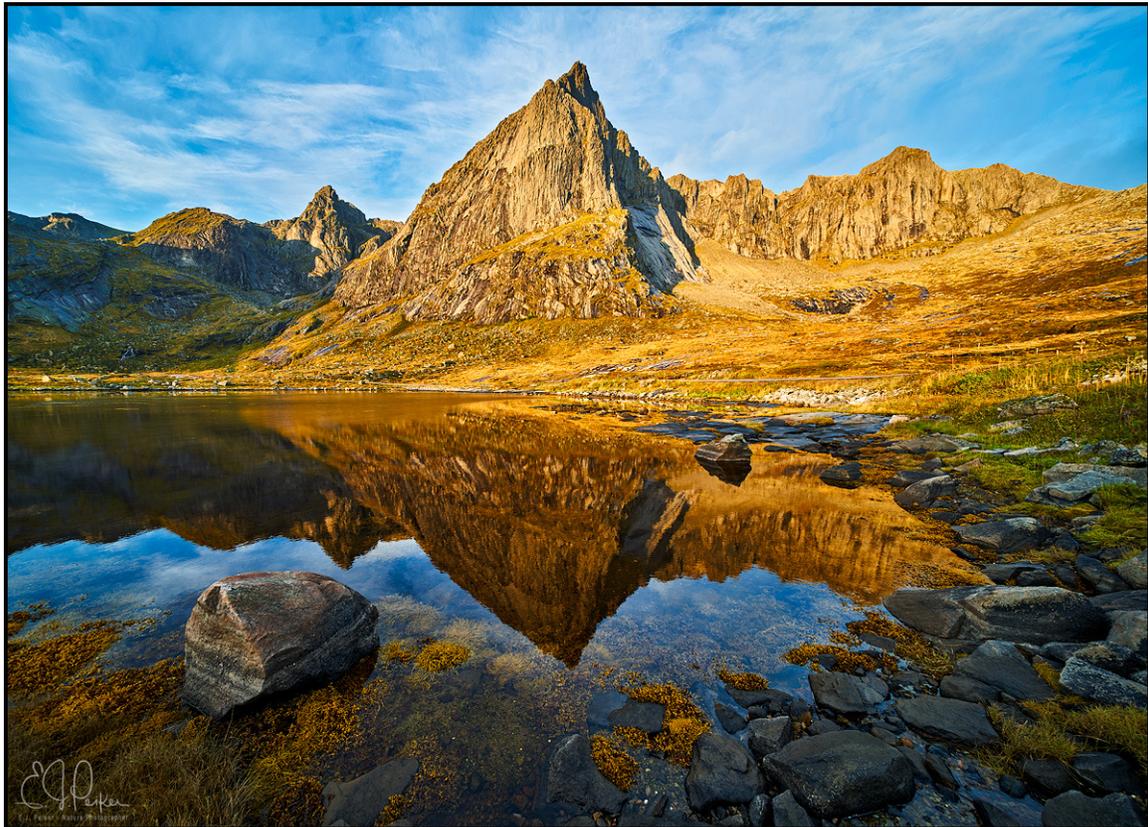
view, has 10 aperture blades, and weighs 375g or 13.2oz with its integrated metal lens hood. Landscapers can lock this lens down at 3 feet and f/8 and have everything from 1.5 feet to infinity be dead sharp (again using a super tight 12 micron circle of confusion). The street price for this lens is \$1100 at CameraQuest or online retailers that carry it. I did not decide to purchase this lens simply because I personally didn't think I'd have enough use for something this incredibly wide to justify \$1100 although there were times on a recent trip to Norway where it would have been fun to use.

The final lens to be released, in mid Q3 2016, about 2 quarters late was the lens I was most anticipating from the start - the redesign of the legendary 12mm f/5.6 Heliar for Leica into a lens made to optimize image quality on the Sony full frame E-mount. Super wide Leica lenses tend to not perform well on Sony cameras since they were not made for the thick cover-glass that sits on top of Sony sensors. This can result in some strange color shifts in the corners. Voigtländer set out to change the optics to be compatible with the Sony sensor and they succeed beyond my expectations! This lens is just plain crazy good! Never before have I shot with anything approaching this wide of a view with as few compromises. The lens is sharp to the edges, almost distortion free, buttery smooth, tiny, and... well... crazy good!!! Weighing in at 350g or 12.3 oz despite the high quality all metal construction with integrated metal lens hood, the lens has 10 aperture blades and covers a 121 degree angle of view. I received this lens right before leaving for Norway to photograph the beautiful islands of Lofoten and I simply could not stop using it. It provides such a unique view and allows you to place foreground elements without suffering from distortion while taking in a relatively close expanse of mountains. Setting the lens to 4 feet and f/8 gives you a "fire and forget" solution that has everything from 2 feet to infinity sharp at all times. As long as you are shooting more than 2 feet off the ground allowing the extreme foreground to be in focus, you can achieve very natural looking results despite the extreme wide angle. In the photo above, I was just 2 feet from the little stream of water with a towering mountain behind. This lens is a definite keeper for me at \$1000.



Lofoten, Norway - Voigtländer 12mm

Overall I am elated that Voigtländer has come to the E-mount party with such unique and exceptional lenses in such a small package. I could not be happier with the lenses and highly recommend them to Sony a7 series landscape shooters.



Lofoten, Norway - Voigtländer 12mm