

## Lensbaby Composer and Optic Swap System

Remember when the original Lensbaby first appeared in camera stores a number of years ago. It was an interesting and unique product I had fun playing with in the store, but never got around to buying and trying out more seriously. Well, since that time the popularity of the Lensbaby has taken off and new models have been developed to offer photographers a greater range of options, shooting styles and creative possibilities. I decided it was about time that I took a more serious look at the Lensbaby to see what all the fuss is about.

For those readers who aren't familiar with the Lensbaby, it's best described as an adjustable selective focus lens. Currently there are three different models that are designed for different shooting styles: the Muse, the Composer and the Control Freak. All three are available for most SLR and DSLR cameras (check the Lensbaby website to see the complete list of compatible cameras). The Muse is great for a fast and loose shooting style, whereas the Composer allows for smooth and precise control, and the Control Freak is for photographers who need extreme control and precision. I chose to review the Composer because I felt it was the most versatile of the three and had some of the features of the other two models.

The Composer has a focal length of about 50mm and comes with the double

glass optic installed. More about the optics a little later. It, like the other two Lensbaby models, is manual focus and comes with eight interchangeable aperture disks (f/2, f/2.8, f/4, f/5.6, f/8, f/11, f/16 and f/22) so you can adjust your depth of field. It is relatively easy to change the aperture disks with the aperture tool and its magnetic tip. The aperture tool also has a handy aperture disk storage compartment. It focuses from about 46 cm (18 inches) to infinity, so you can use it for landscape images, portraits and close-up photography — it's extremely versatile.

The Composer is really simple to use; just point it straight ahead at your subject and focus so the centre of the image comes into focus — setting your "sweet spot." Next, tilt the Composer in the direction you want to give the creative effect of selective focus around the sharp "sweet spot." The amount of out-of-focus area will be determined by the aperture disk used and the amount of tilting applied. The tilting action of the Composer is stiff enough so it doesn't easily slip once you have it in position, but not so stiff that you have difficulty making fine adjustments to it. There is also a focus-locking ring that you can tighten to ensure the focus point doesn't change after you have focused it.

All three Lensbaby models feature the Lensbaby Optic Swap System, which means that you can change the type of optic that's used. There are currently six optic choices available: double glass optic, single glass optic, plastic optic, pinhole/zone plate, soft focus optic and fisheye optic. As I already mentioned, the Composer comes with the double glass optic, which is a multi-coat-

ed double glass lens that provides a tack-sharp "sweet spot" of focus with minimum diffusion at all apertures. I also got the optic kit to review, which included the single glass optic, the plastic optic and the pinhole/zone plate. The single glass optic is an updated version of the original Lensbaby uncoated optic, which produces a subtle, soft, dreamy effect. It's my favourite of the four optics I tried; I love the effect it creates. The plastic optic gives a very soft, ethereal image with lots of chromatic aberrations, which can be quite effective with certain subjects. Finally, the pinhole/zone plate optic lets you create pinhole or zone plate photos, which can best be described as a softer focus — dreamy images that are equally sharp from edge to edge.

Each of the three optics in the optic kit comes in its own hard plastic storage case. The lids double as the optic swap tool, which allows you to remove and attach the different optics to the lens. Optic exchange is really easy and quick. The biggest problem you'll have is deciding which one to use.

If you are really interested in learning more about the Lensbaby system and seeing a collection of great images taken with it, then you should definitely check out the photo galleries on the Lensbaby website ([www.lensbaby.ca](http://www.lensbaby.ca)). Here you can just scan over the entire image collection or selectively view images taken with a particular optic and/or accessory. Viewing the example Lensbaby photos will surely get your creative juices flowing and allow you to see how versatile the system is. The Lensbaby Composer is fun and easy to use; I just wish I hadn't waited so long to check it out.

**Price: Composer, \$299.95; Optic Swap System, \$129.95**



[www.daymen.com](http://www.daymen.com)  
[www.lensbaby.ca](http://www.lensbaby.ca)

