



Gray Levett is the co-founder of Grays of Westminster, the award-winning, exclusively Nikon dealer, as well as the editor of *Nikon Owner* magazine. He started his career as a photographer and his work has appeared on album covers, book dust jackets and in magazines all over the world. He has been involved with the Nikon brand since 1971 and is an acknowledged expert on the history of Nikon. He is a member of the London Press Club, the Explorers Club, the Institute of Directors (IoD), the Nikon Historical Society and the Royal Photographic Society for whom he has lectured.

'Over the years, Grays of Westminster has become a magnet for photographers from all over the world and from all walks of life'

Words by Gray Levett
Portrait by Stephen Perry

THE SECOND-HAND NIKON equipment department at Grays of Westminster is a rather special room. It is situated in the lower ground floor of the building which dates back to 1855. The shop was originally a gentlemen's hairdressers and continued to be so for about 100 years; it is rumoured that Sir Winston Churchill had his hair cut here – the great man lived only about a 10-minute walk from the shop.

One of the reasons it is my favourite room is because behind its glass-fronted cabinets are the fruits of over 90 years of Nikon engineering and optical excellence, which has so often given me inspiration for the many articles that I write on the history of Nikon. Here, there can be found examples of rather rare pieces of equipment such as in the Nikon Air Camera that dates back to 1941, the Nikon F2AS Data used for scientific and industrial uses, a Nikon F2 High Speed, as well as fine examples of Nikon rangefinder cameras from the late 1940s through to the legendary Nikon F.

These iconic examples of past engineering sit elegantly next to more recent Nikon designs and innovations, and a visitor can wander around this wonderful wood-panelled room, contemplating the diversity and profusion of Nikon kit in every glass cabinet, weighing down every shelf. The vast amount (over a ton in the past three months!) of secondhand Nikon we keep in stock is enough to distract even the most careworn of customers.

The cabinets on this lower-ground floor are full to the brim with a breathtaking range of secondhand Nikon equipment from the legendary 6mm f/2.8 Fisheye-Nikkor, which offers an angle of view of 220°, to the mighty line-up of 200mm f/2, 300mm f/2.8, 400mm f/2.8 and 600mm f/2.8 super telephoto AF-S Nikkor lenses.

To add yet more riches to this treasure trove of secondhand Nikon are 14 of the superb 70-200mm f/2.8G AF-S VR Zoom-Nikkor lenses lined-up on the shelf of one cabinet, whereas another cabinet contains eight of the 17-35mm f/2.8D VR AF-S Nikkor lenses. On a different shelf, 105mm and 135mm f/2D AF DC Nikkor lenses can be found in multiples, complemented by an equal number of AF-S Nikkor lenses of numerous focal lengths. Furthermore, a huge selection of the mint and near-mint condition manual focus Nikkor lenses is also available to purchase.

The timeless delight of walking into the second-hand department is as impressive as ever. First-time visitors almost always say the same thing: 'It's like an Aladdin's Cave in here...' Over the years, Grays of Westminster has become a magnet for photographers from all over the world and from all walks of life, and this room has frequently been used as a meeting-point or a place from which they head out to photographic assignments. As such, there are numerous memories which have seeped into the fabric of the building; we have enjoyed patronage by some of the photographic greats, such as Lord Snowdon, Richard Young, the late and much-missed Terence Donovan, and many other luminaries. They have all been so kind to us. The late Lord Lichfield would recommend us. David Suchet, a great favourite, has been a client for many years. And the late legendary film director Stanley Kubrick had some kind words of praise about our service.

If you are unable to visit Grays of Westminster in person you can now journey to the centre of Nikon in London via our new high-quality virtual reality tour which can be viewed at :<http://www.graysofwestminster.co.uk/tour/> **B&W**