

LENS REVIEW \$3995

Free Tilt Schneider 50mm TS

Ewen Bell takes the tilt-shift lens beyond the tripod to produce stunning effects in the field.

The quirky feel and shallow depth of field from a really good tilt-shift lens is appealing for the creative eye but a challenge to master. Getting familiar with the power of tilt is most effective from a stable tripod, but the real fun lies beyond the basic angles when you can twist and turn your focus through the lens.

Tilt-shift lenses throw around the projected image at off-beat angles, delivering a wonky but wonderful blend of focus and blur to your camera sensor. The effect is very different to a fast lens where a flat plane of focus emerges from a background of bokeh. Tilting the lens at various angles of rotation can create unusual combinations of focus that defy convention. For an audience trying to make sense of a tilt-shift image, the

lines of focus can be hard to follow. Rolling the plane flat across the landscape and working at f/2.8 yields a thin band of focus based on height rather than distance. For near subjects this hovering plane of focus can appear at odds with reality, probably because it is.

The science behind tilt-shift lenses holds an element of magic for most of us, which is part of the reason mastering the technique is so very difficult. Add to this complexity that some lenses in the category spin or rotate their plane of tilt, while some do not. »

A DEMANDING SYSTEM

With no metadata to accompany captures, the Schneider range requires vast patience and attention – or, failing that, copious note taking.



» DETAILS

Website: schneiderkreuznach.com

Lens grouping: 9 elements in 9 groups

Maximum shift: 12mm in any direction

Maximum tilt: 8 degrees in any direction

Aperture range: f/2.8 to f/32

Nearest focus distance: 65cm

Dimensions: 108mm diameter and 128mm length

Weight: 1.4kg

RRP: \$3995

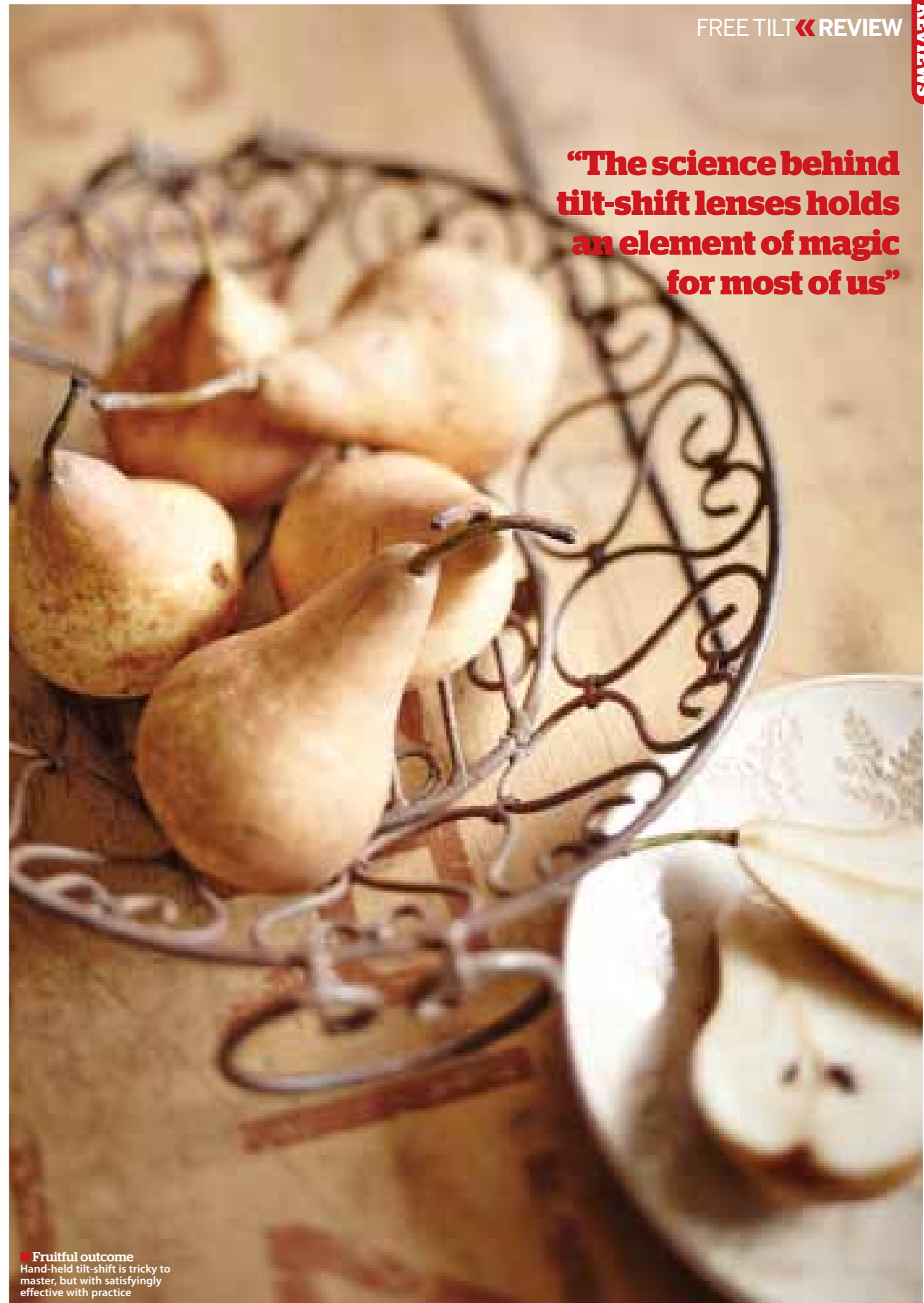
» VERDICT

Gorgeous to shoot with; a work of true craftsmanship; no metadata is problematic.

» RATING **8.5/10**



“The science behind tilt-shift lenses holds an element of magic for most of us”



■ **Fruitful outcome**
Hand-held tilt-shift is tricky to master, but with satisfyingly effective with practice

“Schneider’s range of tilt-shift lenses are works of art in themselves”

■ **Tricky first glance**
Initially, the lines of focus created via tilt-shift can be difficult to follow



■ **Targeted focus**
Hand-held tilt-shift requires steady nerves – and minimal adjustments

SMALL STEPS

Learning a new technology for your camera is best done one step at a time. Start by adjusting one function of the tilt-shift at a time, and making those adjustments severe rather than subtle. This helps you to more clearly see the impact and decide how it might be useful for your creative composition.

Master of the Rings

On a weekend workshop, I recently took along a Schneider 50mm TS, one of the more ornate of its class. Every function on the lens has been reduced to a ring around the barrel, resulting in a tricky array of rings that take some practice to learn. For this feature we’re stepping back from the “shift” feature of tilt-shift, reserving our attention on the barrel for aperture, tilt, rotation and focus.

Engineers of fine lenses around the world have yet to design an autofocus system for tilt-shift lenses, so the travel of the focus ring remains a key feature of the design. On the Schneider models, the focus ring rolls through a very long distance to aid in accuracy when focusing close, and anything that makes a tilt-shift experience more accurate is desirable.

Once you set the working aperture and degree of tilt, and have a good handle on the manual focus, you’re pretty much left with the rotation of the tilt as the last major variable for composition.

This is where the Schneider design excels, as a slip ring allows you to quickly unlock the rotation of the entire barrel and thereby easily experiment with applying rotation to the tilt. In practice, this means going beyond a simple horizontal or vertical tilt, making it easy to swap from portrait to landscape and select a plane angle in between the perpendiculars.



■ **Tilt freedom**
The advantage of independent and uni-directional tilt-shift is evident

HIGH CLASS GLASS

The optics on the PC-TS (“Perspective Control through Tilt/Shift”) lenses are among the finest in the world, and employ multi-layered anti-reflective coating for ghost reduction.



Angles on the Angle

Slipping the rotation rings and spinning an angle is easy, but using this to effect in your compositions is where life gets tricky. Focusing through the lens is completely manual, which is not a big deal when anchored to a tripod and tethered to a laptop to verify the focus plane. Shooting freestyle, however, is far more challenging, demanding careful attention as you compose through the viewfinder.

The first objective is to ensure your primary subject is in focus. Any movement of the lens angle after setting focus can put the subject out of the plane, depending on the tilt and rotation being used at the time. Great care is needed. Once you get a handle on locking focus on the main subject, you then want to practice adjustments to the rotation to vary the rest of your scene. »





HASSELBLAD TS ADAPTOR

Hasselblad have a unique solution to tilt-shift shooting with a 1.5x magnification adaptor that executes the tilt and shift functions in between the camera body and your choice of lens. Not only does this offer a wide range of shoot options based on your existing lens collection, but it tracks the full range of metadata for each capture as well.

For the sake of practice, I've chosen to begin experimenting at f/2.8, so the impact of the rotation and tilt selections are most dramatically observed.

Selecting a rotation that tilts across the scene will create a vertical in the frame with sharp focus, while all else leading into it will be blurred. Think of this as shooting landscape with the tilt bending left or right. Directing the tilt up is like narrowing your existing depth of field, making f/2.8 dramatically narrower than usual, while directing the tilt can extend your depth of field.

Adding depth of field sounds great in theory but in practice has a few limitations. If you tilt too hard on the plane with a wide open lens, then the narrow focal plane at f/2.8 is exposed. The result can be a thin band of focus that extends across your landscape, with everything inside the band very sharp but all else above or below dramatically blurred.

This effect is often desirable for its creative potential, and forms the basis of the "tiny little cities" effect that makes the real world look like a scale model.

Skewed results

The true power of this extreme tilt comes into play when you work in the range between horizontal and vertical, and skew the plane of focus both across and down at the same time. Working close in with still life subjects, this mode lets you add interest to simple compositions, or add complexity to wider scenes.

Schneider's range of tilt-shift lenses are gorgeous to shoot with and works of art in themselves, but the one major drawback to these lenses is the lack of metadata to accompany the capture. It's impossible to review your files on the desktop and know for sure which frame was taken with a particular tilt or rotation, so you have to pay close attention or make your own notes.

Without a tripod it's difficult to get a handle on tilt composition, but it's not impossible. It takes you back to a time when autofocus and autoexposure metering didn't exist. The net results have a retro feel that suits the shooting experience, putting the creative opportunity firmly in the hands of the photographer.



■ **Master at play**
2011 MasterChef contestant Billy Law takes time out



■ **Long and smooth**
Schneider focus rings roll through a long distance to aid accuracy when focusing close



■ **Delicious compositions**
For close work, tilt-shift can add interest to simple compositions