



# Searching for a good Ring Flash

Nicholas Hellmuth



# Using Canon Ring Flash

The ring flash photos turn out like a dream of a perfect photo. The lighting is so even. Each spine is perfectly illuminated.

But, precisely by being so even, there is not as much individual input of style by the photographer.

To get more individuality I took the ring flash off the camera and moved it by hand. Images 9293 through 9297 show the different effects.

Any and all of the photos look great.

If you enlarged all these, and color balanced them, some people would pick the Westcott images; other people would select the ring flash. Keep in mind that many of the ring flash have two Westcott providing backlight!

Downsides of this unit: no rings of any different sizes so you are stuck using this ring flash on one single lens.







# Nikon has no ring flash

Because Nikon offers no ring flash, we had to buy a no-name ring flash. Ended up with a MeiKe Flashgun FC100. It functions okay but is so weak that at a distance over a foot it is inadequate. At a distance of a meter (a yard more or less) the MeiKe is too cheap. You get what you pay for. But up close, and for a nice soft light (meaning a weak light), the MeiKe is okay. When I need a ring flash with more power I simply dump my Nikon and move my Canon to the tripod head.

On a recent field trip to photograph margays and ocelots in the main zoo of Guatemala City, Central America, we could not get the MeiKe to work. Unsure whether it was the batteries or what.

What is labeled as a Polaroid ring flash looks very very similar to the MeiKe!

Ironic that Nikon had a Nikon SL-1 for a Nikon Coolpix 4500 years and years ago.

Sigma makes a Macro Ring Flash for a Nikon but it is priced beyond any possible value. This is the Sigma EM-140 DG Macro Ring Flash. Looks like it has three or four lights.

So far, the best ring flash I have seen on the Internet for a Nikon is from AlienBees, their ABR800 Ringflash Unit. Benefits include that it mounts on any lens with no need for finding lost ring threads! Plus has a stepless slider adjustment from full power to 1/32nd power.



# But up close the MeiKe produces professional results

Much to my surprise, if the camera is less than 8 inches from the flower, the MeiKe softness is perfect (a stronger lamp would be too harsh). Here are examples of outstanding images with a ring flash. Even there there is no light from the sides, the flower still looks in deep relief.

These are marigold-like flowers in the FLAAR ethnobotanical garden, 1500 meters elevation, Guatemala City.

Hmmm, why does this web site say The Canon Macro Twin Lite MT-24EX Flash is an extremely flexible and very easy to use macro flash.

Hmmm, is it because at the bottom of his page there are SIX commercial places to suck you into buying this item of equipment.

He repeats his claim over and over.... The Canon Macro Twin Lite MT-24EX Flash is an incredibly flexible, portable and powerful flash that makes macro flash lighting easy (well, almost).





# Other Ring Flash Brands

Alien Bees offers one of the most remarkably sized ring lights. Frankly this looks much more potentially useful than other kinds. Alien Bees was not at Photokina. [www.paulcbuff.com](http://www.paulcbuff.com)

CononMark iQ is a bizarre combination of lights which has been pictured on <http://petapixel.com/2012/07/17/hybrid-ring-flash-is-the-frankenstein-of-the-lighting-world/>, which they gathered from the site of the manufacturer, [www.cononmk.com/cp1.asp?sendid=137](http://www.cononmk.com/cp1.asp?sendid=137). CononMark was not at Photokina.

Elinchrom 1500 Ringflash can be used in conjunction with an Elinchrom Ranger RX Speed AS battery pack. [www.brodiebutler.com/benefits-of-using-the-elinchrom-1500-ringflash-with-the-ranger-rx-speed-as/](http://www.brodiebutler.com/benefits-of-using-the-elinchrom-1500-ringflash-with-the-ranger-rx-speed-as/)

The Elinchrom web site (accessed Dec 2, 2014) shows the Quadra Ringflash ECO and Quadra Ringflash PRO. It is a challenge to figure out how many accessories are needed to make this work. [www.elinchrom.com](http://www.elinchrom.com)





Novoflex Ring Flash, as does the Canon macro unit, requires a step-up lens for lenses other than 52mm diameter. A step-up ring can cost a whopping \$50, for a piece of plastic that is only a few dollars...

Metz Mecablitz 15 MS-1 digital-kit is wireless, which helps. If you are stuck with a wire, sooner or later the connector-end gets bent from years of use. Or the cord gets in front of your lens and ruins your photo. Much appreciated that Metz has a ring flash with no cord. They call it a macro flash and not a ring flash, which is typical of German precision descriptions.

Photojojo is a "ring flash adapter" which turns your regular old flash into a ring style flash. Whoooa. Looks a tad weird, plus is not a complete ring either. At \$40 I would be dubious whether it could provide as much light as the wimpy MeiKe. The advertisement claims "pro-style." Hmmm, my photos have been published by National Geographic and by Hasselblad magazine, so perhaps I am in a pro category. I am not sure I would want to drag all or any of this out on location. This looks very heavy. If they can make a profit at \$40, it's actual manufacturing cost sounds like peanuts.

RoundFlash.com is a soft cover to your normal flash to turn it into a kind of ring light. At least it somehow looks more realistic than the Photojojo. This RoundFlash brand was not visible at Photokina. Frankly I would be tempted to try this.

<http://petapixel.com/2011/10/26/roundflash-a-collapsible-ring-flash-adapter-that-sets-up-light-a-tent/> There is evidently now a newer model.

[www.RoundFlash.com](http://www.RoundFlash.com)

Samigon FRL 1 Fluorescent Ring Light. Not at Photokina.

The Sigma EM-140 DG is labeled as a "ring flash" but is really a flash unit with four modules: top, bottom, and both sides, so really four flash segments fixed inside a frame. You can fire one set of another set if you want to get a slightly different effect. You can get adapters for all standard lens diameters but it appears you have to pay extra for each one. When you buy a Nikon or Canon macro flash you get a complete set of rings.





What would be our choice?

Cheap Chinese ring-flashes vary from ok to inadequate. But these are what put Metz out of business. So lets look at some serious lights.

If the RoundFlash would work on an off-camera Metz that would be interesting (would need an assistant to hold it).

I would definitely be tempted to try the Metz Mecablitz 15 MS-1 to replace my cheapo Chinese ring flash for Nikon.

I would be tempted with the Elinchrom ring flash if I could figure out what accessories were needed.

And I would definitely want to try the light from Alien Bees.





# FLAAR Reports

Digital-photography.org

