

A NIKON LEGEND

Mr Tetsuro Goto

Simon Stafford speaks with Mr. Tetsuro Goto, Nikon Fellow, about his long and illustrious career with the company.

► Mr. Tetsuro Goto



MR TETSURO GOTO is a Fellow of Nikon and until his retirement on 25th June 2019 was General Manager of the Imaging Business Unit, also known within Nikon as 'Goto's Lab'. He was responsible for heading the teams that created the famed Nikon F5, D3 and the Df cameras, and was involved in the development of many other classic Nikon cameras beginning with the Nikon F3.

About Mr. Tetsuro Goto

1973	Graduate of Electronic Engineering at Chiba University
1973	1975 Instruments Business Unit, Nikon
1975	Camera Designing Division
1980	Nikon F-SLR from F3 (1980) to F6 (2004)
1999	Nikon D-SLR from D1 (1999) to D3S (2009)
1989	Manager of Electronics Designing Section for flagships
1994	Manager of Mechanics Designing Section for flagships
1997	General Manager of Designing Division
2004-09	Executive Officer & General Manager of Development HQ, F-SLR, D-SLR, Nikonos, Compact DSC, Interchangeable Lens, Application Software & Speedlights
2009-17	Fellow & Goto's Laboratory Manager
2009-11	Chairman of Nikon Imaging Japan
2013	Nikon Df
2017	Fellow & Imaging Business Unit
2019	June 25th, Retirement

During a visit to London, shortly before his retirement, Mr. Tetsuro Goto honoured Nikon Owner by delivering a fascinating presentation on the history and development of the Nikon F camera. Simon Stafford took the opportunity to speak with Mr. Goto, whom he has known for many years, about his time with Nikon.

S.S. Welcome back to Grays of Westminster! You may recall I met you for the first time in this building back in 2003 along with your colleague, Dr. Chen. At that time the D1X and D1H were the flagship cameras for Nikon; the D2H had not yet been announced and the D70 followed a year later. It is also nearly 20 years to the day that the original Nikon D1 was announced, back in August 1999. Of course you were involved at the forefront of the design of all those cameras and many, many more for over thirty-years, beginning with the F3, which was introduced during 1980. During your long and illustrious career with Nikon do you have a personal favourite camera and, if so, which model and why?

T.G. My favourite camera is the Nikon Df. My thoughts were what sort of camera would I want to buy and own for myself? So I designed, planned and persuaded many of our staff members to [create] the Df. That is why I like the Df so much; it is my favourite!

S.S. So would it be correct to say the development of the Df was essentially a 'personal project'?

T.G. Yes, I would say so.

S.S. The Df has certainly earned a loyal following among a certain group of photographers, and proved to be very popular, particularly with photographers who have experience of Nikon film SLR cameras.

T.G. Yes, but actually, compared with other cameras, the sales of the Df have not been as good, because for the same price you can buy a full-frame camera, such as the D750, with two kit lenses.

S.S. Throughout your many, many years with Nikon during which you have been so closely involved in the design of cameras what has been the most challenging engineering project you have had to contend with?

T.G. For me it was the F5, because as you know the F4 was not one of Nikon's most successful cameras. The Nikon F was really competitive; in fact the F, F2 and F3 were very successful, but the F4 was not quite as popular. We had briefly lost our way as to how to make a top professional camera. Around the time the F4 was in production I became the manager of the mechanics designing section, but I was an electronics engineer, and as I could not communicate well with the mechanics team, I went to a number of bookstores in Tokyo and bought books on mechanical engineering to learn the subject for myself, so that I could talk to the engineers and we were finally successful with the F5.

S.S. The F5 was certainly one of my favourite Nikon cameras, so thank you! I believe that during the span of its production the F4 underwent over four hundred modifications.

T.G. Ah yes, this is so; there were a lot of changes!

S.S. In more general terms of camera design, including both film and digital camera models, have there been any other specific engineering challenges for you and your team?

T.G. For every camera I oversaw there was always new technology to deal with; we would begin by trying it out in a mid-range type of camera, for example, Matrix metering for the Nikon FA, then that technology was used for the the F4 flagship camera. We changed the F5 radically: we designed new metering and AF systems, a five-point AF system for the F5 unlike the single AF point system of the lower and mid-range cameras we had used until then. So from then on we used the technology designed for the flagship cameras first and moved it across to other cameras later. Another example is the D3; the effect of the competitors' cameras was the same as the F4 on the D2H. So as a result of that, we developed new technologies especially for the D3.

S.S. A variety of sources indicate a continuing global trend of declining camera sales, particularly of consumer digital cameras of all types, due in part to the popularity of smart devices. In light of this how do you see the range of Nikon cameras evolving over the next five to ten years?

T.G. I do not believe the smart phone camera is the right camera for a true hobby photographer, so Nikon will need to maintain a range of products for both the professional and hobby photographer. The smart phone is very easy to use, but as an example, many years ago the Nikkormat was

dedicated for use by the hobby photographer and later the Df. Using those dials and controls to adjust the shutter speed and aperture and ISO speed to make a good picture is one of the things a hobby photographer enjoys. It is quite different from the regular DSLR camera. However, for Nikon, cameras need to be the main product as before, the principle point being that very high quality must be maintained, which is why the regular digital cameras and the specialist hobby models must be part of Nikon's product range.

S.S. Do you believe there will be a digital version of the Nikonos underwater camera?

T.G. No. The Nikonos is only for underwater use and the underwater camera market is small, which is why we ceased the production of the Nikonos range. A dedicated underwater camera will not be something that Nikon will be producing in the future, because there are underwater housings available for regular cameras which are available and very good.

S.S. The Nikon full-frame mirrorless system in the form of the Z-series camera and Z-mount lenses has been acclaimed widely since its introduction last year. How do you see the introduction of the Nikon Z-series mirrorless system affecting the development of Nikon D-SLR cameras and F-mount lenses in the future?

T.G. Both camera systems are running together now and will be for the future, as they should be; however, I do not want to discuss the Z-series; in Japan in my laboratory, "Goto's Laboratory" as it is called, there have been many discussions and meetings about how the Z-series will develop in the future.

S.S. I appreciate you do not wish to discuss details of the Z-series development, but could we turn to look at the F-mount and can you tell me how difficult it was to work within the constraints imposed by the dimensions of the mount while you were designing cameras and lenses in both the film and digital eras?

T.G. To make the F-mount lenses smaller and provide superior performance the F-mount caused Nikon many difficulties because of the limited conditions we had, due to the size of the mount and the distance to the back of the camera. From my experience of the Nikon F (now sixty years old) we were able to introduce a small AI prong

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► Goto-san's Nikon Df fitted with a 24mm f/2.8 Nikkor N.C modified to AI



(Automatic Indexing) to couple with the Nikon metering system which overcame the disadvantage of the F mount. However, for mirrorless cameras, the Z 7 or Z 6, the flange to focal plane distance of the F-mount is 46.5mm too long to make it workable with a mirrorless camera system.

S.S. Over ten years ago I recall discussing with you when we met at Nikon (Thailand) your aspirations for camera design in general; then, you told me ultimately it would be a camera with no moving parts. The Z-series mirrorless cameras take a large step closer to this goal, but still have a mechanical shutter. Do you believe a “no moving parts” camera is achievable, and if so when, in your opinion, is this likely to occur?

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T.G. Yes. Of course with a DSLR we have a mirror and other mechanisms, so there has to be moving parts, but with: mirrorless we can do a lot more; it is easy to work with, we can position the EVF and monitor screen where we like, so yes, I think we will have a camera with no moving parts very soon.

S.S. The D850 and Z 7 have a resolution of 45MP. Do you see any purpose in Nikon pursuing an even higher sensor resolution in future camera models, or do you believe the current level of resolution is sufficient?

T.G. From my personal experience there is no limitation on the number of pixels. Several years ago when the DSLR cameras had 6 million pixels, many people said it was enough. However when we provided cameras with 10 million pixels most of them were very satisfied when they used them; people will find they can benefit from a camera with many more pixels every time. Perhaps a camera offering 100 million pixels would satisfy many photographers. I am using this one (pointing to his Nikon Df) and I'm very pleased with 16 million pixels!

S.S. Looking across the product ranges from all current camera manufacturers, which design concepts do you find the most interesting?

T.G. This is a difficult question; every camera manufacturer is unique with its technology and cosmetics. Canon or Sony are both an electronics companies so they have advantage inside the camera such as high-density processors or sensors. However, Leica is dedicated largely for hobby photographers and there are many wealthy people willing to buy Leica. As for Nikon we have to create cameras both for the professional market and the hobby photographer, for the camera enthusiast in all fields and for Nikon fans, so we must cover all aspects, to be the best in both technology and design.

S.S. I understand you are due to retire from Nikon after 46 years with the company. What do you believe you will miss the most in respect of your work with the Nikon Corporation after you have left?

T.G. I have absolutely no idea Simon (chuckles) — no idea! Actually, my relationship with Nikon will continue as Nikon Imaging Japan have asked me to help them. I will also be in contact with the Japanese domestic market online via the Nikon Club and will carry on having discussions with many photographers.

S.S. I am sure photography will continue to be a part of your life during retirement. Apart from your fondness for the Nikon Df are there any other cameras you enjoy using?

T.G. I use a Nikon F and F2 and a Leica IIIF; it is my “birth year” Leica, very special, and sometimes I use a Nikon Coolpix P340.

S.S. What do you like to photograph and which of those cameras do you prefer to use?

T.G. I use all my cameras. I like to photograph everything, but I most like to photograph parties and events with my family and friends as a record.

S.S. Finally, after all the years you have spent at Nikon what do you consider to be your greatest achievement, your greatest success, in terms of the Nikon products you have been involved with?

T.G. I feel my greatest achievements were the F5 and the D3, especially in the development of the D3. We lost our share of the market with the D2H and there was a lot of pressure on us to be successful from top management. I lost a lot of weight at the time. I wanted to protect our young designers in order that they could continue to work and I encouraged them to do their best. After the success of the D3 I gained the 7kgs I had lost immediately!

S.S. Goto-san thank you so much for your time and fascinating insights in to your work with Nikon. I would like to take this opportunity wish you a long and very happy retirement on behalf of all the staff at Nikon Owner, the subscribers and myself.

Comment: I would like to thank Mr Yoshihiro Katakami of Nikon (UK) for his invaluable assistance in preparing this article. ■

