those snapshots of your daughter’s birthday party or your tropical vacation look good the day you print them. But without the right combination of printer and paper, chances are they will have faded significantly when you check them out in just a year. Your photo album doesn’t need to end up looking as if you printed it with disappear-proof ink; you've assembled the proper gear, you’ll want to set it all up for optimum performance—how to simplify a variety of digital photography tasks such as editing your pictures and transferring them into and out of your computer (see “Desktop Darkrooms,” page 135).

NOT FADE AWAY WITH THE GROWTH in digital photography, the increased availability of scanners, and the advent of Internet print sharing, more people are printing photos at home. Lyra Research, a firm that covers the imaging industry, reports that 50 percent of consumers surveyed who have PCs and printers now print photos at home, up from 30 percent three years ago. And about 79 percent of those who own digital cameras do so. Those figures will only increase, says Lyra senior consultant Larry Jamieson. But many digital-photo buffs have seen their home-made digital prints fade. Usually, that’s because the photos and their paper longevity come from the drugstore. In putting this report together, PC World worked with Wilhelm Imaging Research (www.wilhelm-research.com), an Iowa company whose founder, Henry Wilhelm, has been researching photo print longevity for more than 30 years and is considered a leading expert on the subject. The Wilhelm study included test data on recent photo ink jet printers from four major vendors—Canon, Epson, Hewlett-Packard, and Lexmark. Our conclusions: You don’t have to break the bank to keep your photos vivid. But you do need to choose your printer—and its paper—carefully. (See our chart, “The Prints and the Paper,” on page 35.) You must also give your prints the kid glove treatment (see “Make ’Em Last,” page 35). And once you’ve assembled the proper gear, you’ll want to set it all up for optimum performance—how to simplify a variety of digital photography tasks such as editing your pictures and transferring them into and out of your computer (see “Desktop Darkrooms,” page 135).

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In PC World tests, an 8707 photo, which included six colors, produced very good color prints; the 8708 has a maximum resolution of 4400 by 720 dpi. Its newer 8709 replacement has a resolution of 3880 by 720 dpi, as does the $409 wide-format 1218.  

Canon’s paper is more expensive than Epson’s (its recommended cartridge per Pro CR-101 runs about 13 cents per sheet, while Epson’s prints cost 8 to 60 cents cheaper per sheet). But because you can replace Canon inks one color at a time (instead of all together—unlike with other printers, we saw—you buy only the colors you need. A full set of six costs about $72, single cartridges go for $12 to $14). So you can save money on printing photos, but if you print logos or presentations that use one color heavily, you should see savings.  

(PC World has not tested the Canon 1218.) The printer’s maximum resolution is 2400 by 1200 dpi. The reformulated, long-lasting R128 inks that debuted with the Canon 8707 Color Bubble Jet this year are backward-compatible with the older R127. But due to the HP printers’ use of dithering than prints from Canon, Ochoa also claims that these prints, when made individually, are as water resistant as those from

dye-sublimation printers, which are more heat-affected. This is because the printer driver for use in this respect. The 2000P is the first desktop ink jet to use pigment ink.  

The price is right  
most of us probably don’t want to spend $500 on an ink jet. Luckily, Canon and Epson also offer photo inkjet models that deliver an average of 26 years of print life in Wilhelm Research tests. An Epson Stylus Photo 870 sells for as little as $279, Canon’s $880 Bubble Jet Photo and Epson’s Stylus Photo 875 printer are priced at $329.  

However, Epson has had problems with the 8707 and its $199 wide-format 1720 sub-2 to 3 years.  

Ink jets will continue to improve and will be cheaper per sheet. In the future, photo inkjet printers will be sold with dedicated “photo” inks and paper, and such systems will become less expensive than those proposed by pro labs.  

The output had a bit less range, and the HP printers’ output had a bit less range, due to the HP printers’ use of dithering than prints from Canon. Ochoa also claims that these prints, when made individually, are as water resistant as those from dye-sublimation printers, which are more heat-affected. This is because the printer driver for use in this respect. The 2000P is the first desktop ink jet to use pigment ink.  

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