

Gift Guide: Accessories to satisfy inner Spielberg

December 9 2013, by Ron Harris



The Joby GorillaPod Focus with Ballhead X tripod head is shown on Tuesday, Dec. 3, 2013 in Decatur, Ga. The tripod has bendable legs that can be wrapped around various things, like benches, chairs and tree limbs. (AP Photo/ Ron Harris)

Full-bodied cameras known as SLRs have long been able to shoot high-definition video besides still images.

But when budding filmmakers use them, production results vary. It's not just the level of talent, but the additional gear available for the job.

Fortunately, accessories designed specifically for shooting video with SLRs have become much more affordable.

I've had a lot of experience with accessories over the years in my work as a multimedia journalist for The Associated Press. My job entails shooting a blend of video and photos on assignment. Here's a look at some of the best products I have found to add polish to video productions.

— Cinetics CineMoco System (\$850):

A little motion can go a long way to add life to otherwise stagnant shots. To that end, the Cinetics CineMoco motorized dolly and rail system is a high-grade addition to a filmmaker's bag of tricks.

The package consists of a wheeled plate to hold the [camera](#) on a tripod head, a rail system for the wheeled plate to roll on and a programmable motor that inches along at the speed and interval you desire. I shot both HD video and time-lapse stills with a Canon 5D Mark II and the new Nikon D610. I found the system's control and performance to be exceptional.

I synced the Canon camera to the CineMoco using an optional cable that allowed me to program the total number of shots and the interval between shots, as well as the distance travelled along the rail. The control is precise to the centimeter. (If you want inches, you'll need to change the settings.) The menus on the motor's screen are easy to navigate.



The Beachtek DXA-SLR PRO audio adapter is shown on Tuesday, Dec. 3, 2013 in Decatur, Ga. The device can be mounted to the bottom of a DSLR camera and provide professional audio mixing capabilities to the sound recording of the video footage. (AP Photo/ Ron Harris)

The results turned stagnant shots of my neighborhood community garden into lush explorations of the fauna with the movement and life. Check it out here: vimeo.com/81417034 . Hand-held jitter would have cheapened the footage, but the smooth dolly action added a professional luster to the shots.

The rail system, including the wheeled plate that rides on the rails, can be mounted on tripods, placed on table tops or laid on the ground. I would highly recommend this for mid- to full-length productions that need more variety among shot sequences.

— Beachtek DXA-SLR PRO (\$449):

Bad sound is a bad thing. It can ruin video and force you to redo a shoot. Badly acquired sound cannot always be rescued in post-processing and editing.

The Beachtek DXA-SLR PRO can set you on the right path at the start. This audio adapter mounts on to the base of your camera and routes audio from up to two microphones, which aren't included. You can adjust volume and listen to the results in real-time through a headphone jack, if your camera has one.

Recording sound through the Beachtek helped eliminate the camera's guesswork. It allowed me to focus microphones on my sound sources instead of relying on the camera's built-in mic to manage, and often muddle, the mix.

Beachtek has produced similar models for a few years now. The DXA-SLR PRO is a smart buy if you care about proper audio management.



The Cinetics CineMoco System is shown on Saturday, Nov. 23, 2013 in Decatur, Ga. The motorized dolly system can be programmed for video and time-lapse photography for controlled-motion shots. (AP Photo/ Ron Harris)

— Joby GorillaPod Focus (\$150):

Most filmmakers probably already have a nice tripod. But that doesn't mean it's the right tripod for every job. This tripod from Joby has multi-jointed legs that can be bent and wrapped around tree branches, bench backs and other places where a regular, larger tripod is impractical.

It's easy to switch between my regular tripod and the GorillaPod, thanks to its ball head mount with a removable baseplate. I can just move the baseplate to the tripod, as it uses a standard size. The legs are strong and held my full-sized camera and heavy pro lens in place firmly.

— Lowepro Flipside Sport 20L AW (\$180):

A good way to lug along your movie kit to various locations is a backpack with sturdy section dividers to keep things from clanging together. Lowepro makes several dandies, including the Flipside Sport 20L AW.



The Lowepro Flipside Port 20L AW backpack is shown on Tuesday, Dec. 3, 2013 in Decatur, Ga. The backpack has adjustable section dividers to hold photo and video gear in place. (AP Photo/ Ron Harris)

I filled this backpack to the brim with two cameras, a long 70-200mm lens, two smaller lenses, a hand-held microphone and a Litepanels LED lighting unit. I was also able to strap a small tripod to the side. My back

appreciates that Flipside Sport distributed the weight well along the padded shoulder straps. The backpack held tightly to my body, moving with me instead of sagging as I walked up inclines.

The section dividers can be adjusted depending on your gear. This backpack offers a nice blend of storage capacity, snug fit and lightweight construction. It carried everything I needed for several shoots with room to spare for snacks.

— Zoom H6 Handy recorder (\$400):

For more robust audio requirements on your video shoot, you might consider the Zoom H6. It has four professional-grade XLR inputs for use with high-quality microphones. Each mic input has a dedicated volume dial.

The H6 records hours upon hours of high-resolution audio to SD memory cards. You'll have to sync your audio to the video footage later if you go this route, but the resulting quality is pristine.



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I got a tight, sturdy fit when I mounted the unit on the flash mount of my Nikon camera. However, if you want to quickly take some still photos, the H6 ends up getting in the way of the optical viewfinder. So I would recommend mounting your camera to an accessories cage, a bracket extending around the camera that can hold various devices.

The sound recording quality of the H6 is exceptional. It comes with two mics. An adjustable, two-directional X/Y mic permits stereo recording and can cover a wide area of sound. The other is a traditional, ball-shaped mic, which I prefer because it can focus on sounds directly in front and to the side. The two mics can be interchanged and attached at the front of the H6.

This is a well-built workhorse with an excellent backlit LCD menu.

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