



Russell Croman

Russ Croman lives in suburban Austin, Texas with his wife and three daughters where he works as a chip designer for a local company. Like many of us, Russ became interested in astronomy at a young age. His parents had a set of Time-Life books, one of which was “The Universe” that captured his fascination. He poured over it again and again. Then one night he saw Saturn through his father’s small department store telescope. It wasn’t much, but seeing the rings that he had previously only seen in books was enough to make a lasting impression. But school and growing up left little time for astronomy. It wasn’t until finishing up his Master’s Degree in electrical engineering at Washington State University, that Russ got his first “real” telescope, a 5” Meade ETX at a local store that was going out of business. He set it up and observed every chance he got for some months, rekindling the excitement and enthusiasm for astronomy he experienced previously.

“Having done quite a bit of photography for the student newspaper in college, it wasn’t long before it occurred to me to put a camera on the back of that telescope. I tried a couple of rolls of film for some lunar shots, but very quickly figured out that it takes a good telescope and a good camera to get good astrophotos. I got a Meade LX-90 and an SBIG ST-237A for my first imaging rig. That went pretty well, but I wanted more: deeper images, full color, bigger field of view. I plunked down for an ST-10XME and went at it. What a thrill! My first shots of M51 and M42 were awful by today’s standards, but they were mine, and I loved every pixel. There I was, capturing ancient photons that had traversed immense distances to reach my little telescope and camera. If I had been hooked before, I was really hooked now. Pretty soon I upgraded to a 10” SCT, and then a 14” RC. Then came the STL-11000XM. What a treat it was to use all of this superb equipment.”

Russ’ skills advanced along with the equipment, and many of his incredible photographs were taken from his backyard observatory. Eventually he found the limiting factor to better images was the light pollution of his suburban location. He sought out a solution to this and finally found a prime location for a remote observatory in the mountains of New Mexico. Russ designed his observatory building and had his dream built within about 6 months. This new site now houses his 20” RCOS Ritchey-Chretien and STL-11000M camera on a Paramount ME all of which Russ operates remotely from Austin over the internet.

Even before moving his observatory to New Mexico, Russ had already established himself as one of the top amateur imagers in the world. Now, his results are quite spectacular. Russ has had dozens of his images published in various media, including National Geographic Magazine, Time Magazine, Sky & Telescope Magazine, Coelum Magazine, Le Stelle, Night Sky, Star Observer, and Sky & Telescope’s Beautiful Universe magazine in 2006 and 2007. His image of M1 won the Best CCD Photograph at the Texas Star Party 2003 (his M51 also won the Best Photograph at the same time). Russ’ images grace the cover and interior of Ron Wodaski’s book, The NewAstro Zone System for Astro Imaging, and NASA has selected his CCD images as Astrophoto of the Day 13 times. He has published two calendars, and his images appear in this year’s Celestial Wonders calendar from Sky & Telescope, also this year’s Vatican Observatory calendar. Russ recently held an astrophoto gallery show in Austin. He has been a speaker at the Central Texas Star Party, 2004, the Texas Star





Party, 2004. Russ is also an advisor Imaging Conference in San Jose, CA, where he has been a speaker for the past three years (2004 - 2006) and where he is scheduled to speak again this Fall.

"I am an integrated circuit designer by training, but I've always been an artist at heart. I even view circuit design as an art, and try to put aesthetics into everything I do in that field. But electronics design is esoteric, and there are relatively few people who can really appreciate the art of it. For me, astrophotography is a chance to express my sense of art in a way that anyone can understand. It is a beautiful universe we live in, and I find great joy in capturing that beauty... For me, astrophotography is a perfect blend of the very technical and the very aesthetic, both of which I love."



Russ's remote observatory in New Mexico with 20" RC and SBIG ST-11000M Camera



Russ's earlier backyard observatory, first with a Meade 10" and later fitted with a 14 inch RC, both using an ST-10XME

Russ has certainly accomplished what he intended. His images clearly communicate his affinity for the beauty of the Universe and allow us to perceive this reality from a unique viewpoint. SBIG is proud to welcome Russ to the Hall of Fame and we are pleased to present him with our Award for Excellence in Astronomical Imaging.

A small sampling of some of Russ' work is seen here. For details of these images, and to see more of Russ' work, please visit his web site at <http://www.rc-astro.com/>

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