

These minimalist camera apps will help you fall in love with photography again.

All these AI features and extra processing are just gimmicks that detract from the artistry of photography. That's why many people have tried replacing the default camera apps on their smartphones with third-party apps.

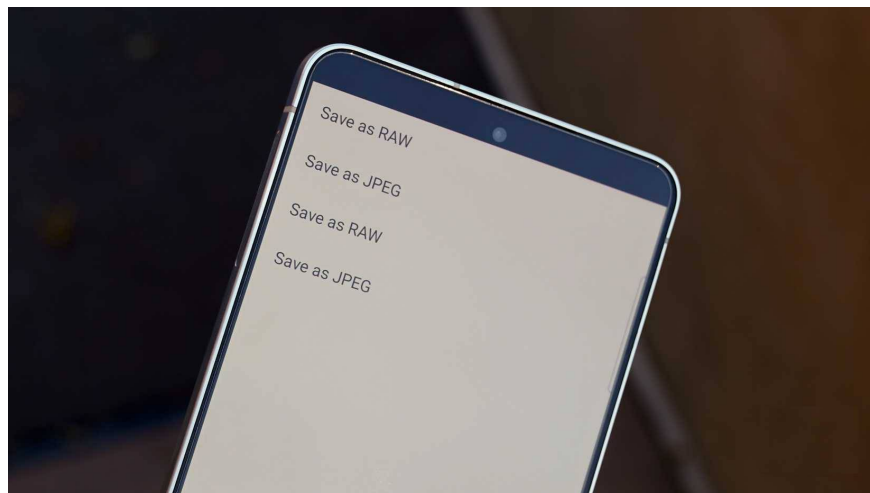
Smartphone cameras have become incredibly good over the years, with the latest iPhone, Google Pixel, and Samsung Galaxy models capable of rivaling dedicated cameras in quality. In fact, top-tier camera hardware is part of the reason today's flagship phones are so expensive. However, hardware is only part of the story. Smartphones also utilize image signal processing, computational photography, and post-processing software to enhance image quality.

The use of Generative AI is further complicating what constitutes a true photograph from a smartphone camera. Samsung was caught using AI to fake moon images on its Galaxy Ultra phones, and now Google is openly using AI to create details in photos through the Super Zoom feature of the Pixel 10 series.

All these AI features and extra processing are just gimmicks that detract from the artistry of photography. That's why many people have tried replacing the default camera apps on their smartphones with third-party apps that eliminate unnecessary computational photography, and the results have been better than expected.

Unprocess on Android

Experience the most minimalist smartphone camera setup you can find.



Each smartphone camera brand has a different color science and computational photography profile. Samsung phones often prioritize brightness and exposure, Pixel phones tend to increase color saturation, and iPhones prefer to maximize high dynamic range (HDR). While these image processing profiles on smartphones may look great on social media, they don't always align with the camera's primary goal—accurately reproducing the image you're trying to capture.

Fortunately, there's an easy way to take photos with an Android phone without excessive processing. Several apps offer this functionality, but the best is Unprocess, and it's available for free on GitHub. This open-source Android app uses the official Camera2 API to collect raw sensor data from the phone's camera, which is then converted to a viewable file format. Users can choose to save unprocessed photos in RAW or JPEG format.

The difference between photos taken with the phone's default camera app and photos taken with Unprocess will depend on the phone's model and software. However, the difference is easily noticeable. In the series of photos below, the first photo in each pair was taken with the default camera app of the Samsung Galaxy S25 Edge, and the second photo was taken with Unprocess.













You can see that the unprocessed image has had the brightening effect that Samsung usually applies to photos taken with the default camera app removed. The result has warm and vibrant colors, which is understandable since the original photo was taken in the Arizona desert sun.

The issue isn't necessarily what unprocessed photos taken directly from the camera look like. Because apps like Unprocess capture raw sensor data in RAW format, smartphone photographers can use photo editing and color grading software to adjust the images to their liking. This is impossible when shooting with the smartphone camera app on default settings, as the image is processed and edited immediately after shooting.

Halide Process Zero on iOS

Less post-processing, more features

iPhone users can bypass Apple's computational photography software by downloading the Halide Mark II app. This is a professional camera app designed by former Apple programmers, including a Process Zero mode that skips the iPhone's usual post-processing. This shooting mode captures images in RAW format directly from the camera sensor. Compared to Unprocess on Android, Process Zero in Halide incorporates many features that give users the feeling of using a traditional film camera.

The app is designed to provide a "digital negative," with exposure levels that can be adjusted after the original photo is taken. It avoids core elements of iPhone camera processing, such as Smart HDR, Deep Fusion, and noise reduction. This results in photos that are reminiscent of the real world, sometimes with grain and underexposure.

In the series of photos below, the first photo in each pair was taken using the iPhone Air's default camera app, and the second photo was taken using Process Zero.



