Cyanotype vs. SolarFast Fact Sheet

What is the difference between Cyanotype and SolarFast?
This is one of the most common questions we are asked. Both are photographic sun-printing processes, but they are markedly different. *This document explains the differences:*

Cyanotype	SolarFast
Cyanotype prints are always blue. Prints can be toned to other colors such as brown, yellow and black using post treatments (see our "Toning Cyanotype Prints" document), but the initial print is always blue.	SolarFast is available in 14 mixable colors, allowing for photographic prints in virtually any color desired. Finished prints cannot be toned to other colors.
Cyanotype can be done on fabric and paper, but printed fabric must be laundered carefully. Only non-phosphate detergents can be used, and the print is prone to fading and discoloration with washing.	SolarFast is permanent on paper and fabric and can be laundered like any commercially dyed fabric. It is exceptionally washfast.
Cyanotype prints are made once the sensitizer has dried. This means coated paper and fabric can be stockpiled and used at a later date. Also, there is also no risk of staining the negative.	SolarFast prints are made while the dye is still damp. This means prints must be made immediately after the paper or fabric is coated. Stockpiling coated paper or fabric is not an option. Also, because the dye is damp when used, the film negative may get stained during photographic contact-printing (fortunately, SolarFast Film can be wiped clean!).
Cyanotype produces a broader range of tones and detail than many of the SolarFast colors.	Some of the SolarFast colors produce a narrower range of tones compared to Cyanotype.
Cyanotype is very economical. The chemistry can be purchased as powders and used to sensitize large pieces inexpensively.	SolarFast is only available as a liquid and may not go as far as the Cyanotype chemistry.
Jacquard offers pretreated Cyanotype fabrics that are ready to use.	Because SolarFast must be exposed while damp, pretreated fabrics are not available.
Cyanotype is prone to discoloration, making mixed media, over-dyeing, etc. somewhat risky or problematic.	SolarFast is great for mixed-media. SolarFast prints can be embellished, over-dyed, etc. without risk.
Cyanotype prints are processed in cold water. Hydrogen peroxide, which is optional, readily available and inexpensive, is the only auxiliary chemical used.	SolarFast prints must be washed is hot water after exposure. SolarFast Wash is highly recommended for initial wash.
The Cyanotype process has been around for more than 150 years, so there is plenty of literature and information available.	SolarFast was invented by Jacquard Products in 2013.
Exposure times for Cyanotype are short (3-15 minutes, depending on conditions).	Exposure times for SolarFast are generally longer than they are for Cyanotype (10-25 minutes, depending on conditions).
The Cyanotype sensitizer is generally a liquid with the consistency of water. It can be thickened with the SolarFast Thickener.	SolarFast comes thickened so that it will not bleed or spread on fabric. It can be thinned with water or thickened further with the SolarFast Thickener.
The blue color of Cyanotype is caused by the precipitation of a pigment within a fiber.	SolarFast is a true dye that develops color with exposure to UV light and chemically bonds to the fiber.
Cyanotype is generally considered a forgiving and easy to do process.	SolarFast tends to have more of a learning curve, but it is also easy to do.
Because Cyanotype prints are made on dry media, full-body mural prints or handprints are easily done.	Because SolarFast prints are made while the dye is damp, making full body mural prints with SolarFast could be a messy affair.
The Cyanotype sensitizer is made from two stock solution that, once mixed, have a very short shelf life.	SolarFast is a one part system with a virtually limitless shelf life.

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