

Insight + Inspiration Series

Food & Product Photography



Photo by featured photographer:
JORDAN BUSH

VOLUME 3

This Insight + Inspiration Guide dives into Food and Product Photography and features eight articles from a wide variety of photographers who all use a distinct style both in-studio and on location. Go behind-the-scenes on a beauty product styling shoot in Los Angeles, on location at a crawfish restaurant in Louisiana, and a food and beverage shoot at the Waldorf Hilton in London.

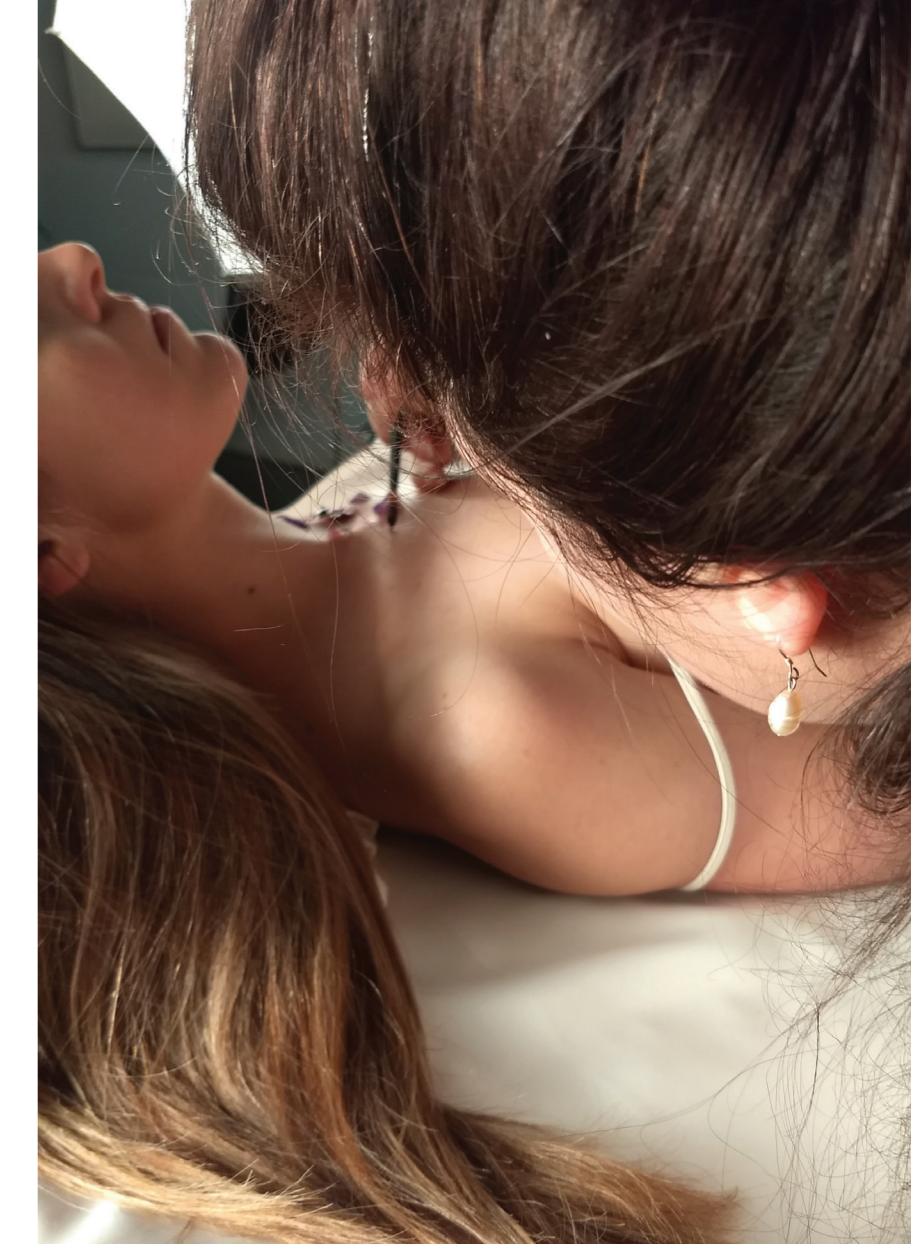


Photo: Jesika Orahoske

Highlighting the Chakra

by Barney Taxel

Several months ago, Sarah Saylor (concept and recipe developer, plus food stylist), and I began planning a joint personal food photography project, primarily for our respective portfolios. Sarah's interest in recipes for elixirs and crystals that promote Chakra health is the subject of the project. I suggested we shoot the ingredients for these recipes and crystals on the 'landscape' of a model's body- each 'landscape' corresponding to one of the Chakra locations. Once I secured the interest of model, Cassie Hoy, we set up a pre-production meeting. With that, the three of us finalized plans

for the shoot and Sarah finished the recipe development. As the shoot date approached, Sarah honed the ingredient list, sent us a spreadsheet with details for each photograph (there are eight in all). I considered several approaches to the method of capture, including which camera and lighting systems to use.

Each photograph in the series corresponds with an elixir recipe. Each elixir is developed to promote health in the part of the subtle body represented by the individual Chakra ... Root, Sacred, Solar Plexus etc.

The biggest challenge on this shoot was that neither Sarah nor I had worked with our model, Cassie, before. We were confident Cassie would do an outstanding job, however, there was a lot of pressure to work efficiently through an enormous agenda for a limited period of time - one production day. It was my duty as director of photography and photographer to create an atmosphere conducive to the calm chaos that is often the case with multifaceted studio food productions. Based on these parameters I chose a lighting system (continuous- Lowell Tote-a-lites) and scheme (soft all around

- using homemade translucent flats to soften the tote-a-lite with umbrella combos) that would promote natural visualization and flexibility. I chose the Sony capturing technology for this experimental shoot because it is new to me and this would be a great opportunity to become familiar with the Sony a7rIII's capabilities.

The Sony a7rIII was tethered to a MacBook Pro (2015) and Capture One 11 for Sony, using the TetherPro USB-C 15' cable. The RAW files were processed in CC 2018 Camera RAW. Adjustments to

highlights, shadows, contrast, and clarity were made in Camera RAW.

Tethered shooting allows for instant critical image evaluation of composition, color, and focus, plus client confidence in the achieved results. Additionally, files are instantly archived to a storage space separate from the camera and its card.

THE TEAM:

- Concept and Food Stylist: Sarah Saylor
- Model: Cassie Hoy
- Assistant: Jesika Orahoske



Barney Taxel is a food, lifestyle and architectural photographer based in Cleveland, Ohio.

Cooking with Crawfish

by Collin Richie



For this shoot, I was hired through MESH Design as a photographer for Don's Seafood, a regional restaurant chain across Southeast Louisiana. My team was tasked with photographing their full menu, almost 100 items, collaborating with an art director, brand manager, and a team of multiple owners. The art director had a deck of samples and a color palette, which we used to salvage wood and fishnets from a local antique store.

The concept of the shoot was classic Louisiana backgrounds and seafood, meaning distressed wood, fresh ingredients, and proteins, with wooden sets. I was really trying to showcase the freshness of the food served by Don's and available in our region. I picked colors that would contrast well with our major proteins, like crawfish, oysters, and fish. I wanted the target audience to think classic Louisiana cuisine.

My biggest challenge was ensuring all principals agreed with our direction. With a team of owners, a design team, and my team all interacting, communication was key throughout the day. Also, the volume of photography was much more than your average shoot. Our art director was monitoring the entire shoot via an iPad that I was tethered to. Because of this, she was able to give immediate feedback and make slight adjustments to my sets. With a shoot of this scope, I rely on someone to help with styling, so I can focus on the technical aspect of the work. In this particular frame, we were working with crawfish, a key promotion for any Louisiana restaurant. The photo had to be perfect, and our art director was able to rotate specific crawfish as well as place other props in real time.

For gear, I used speedlights, Westcott Rapidboxes, Canon 24-70mm f2.8, Canon 100mm f2.8, Canon 5DIII, Canon

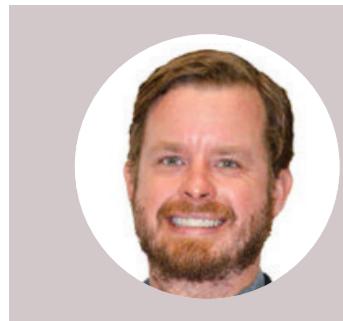
5DIV, Paul C. Buff Einstens with an array of modifiers, Tether Tools Case Air Wireless Tethering System, as well as a basic whiteboard for a bounce.

For this particular shot, I used camera left natural light, enhance via whiteboard camera right and a speedlight set manually to 1/16th in front of the camera at a slight upward angle.

The cull was done through Bridge, RAW images were processed via Lightroom, and final touches in Photoshop. Basic editing elements like dodging and burning, color correction, sharpness, as well as some light saturation.

THE TEAM:

- Art Director: Carolyn Blakely
- Brand Manager: Jaime Little
- Asst Photographer: Andrea Matherne
- Asst Photographer: Janay Martinez Richie



Collin Richie is a Baton Rouge, Louisiana-based photographer specializing in weddings, editorial photojournalism, commercial, and family photography.

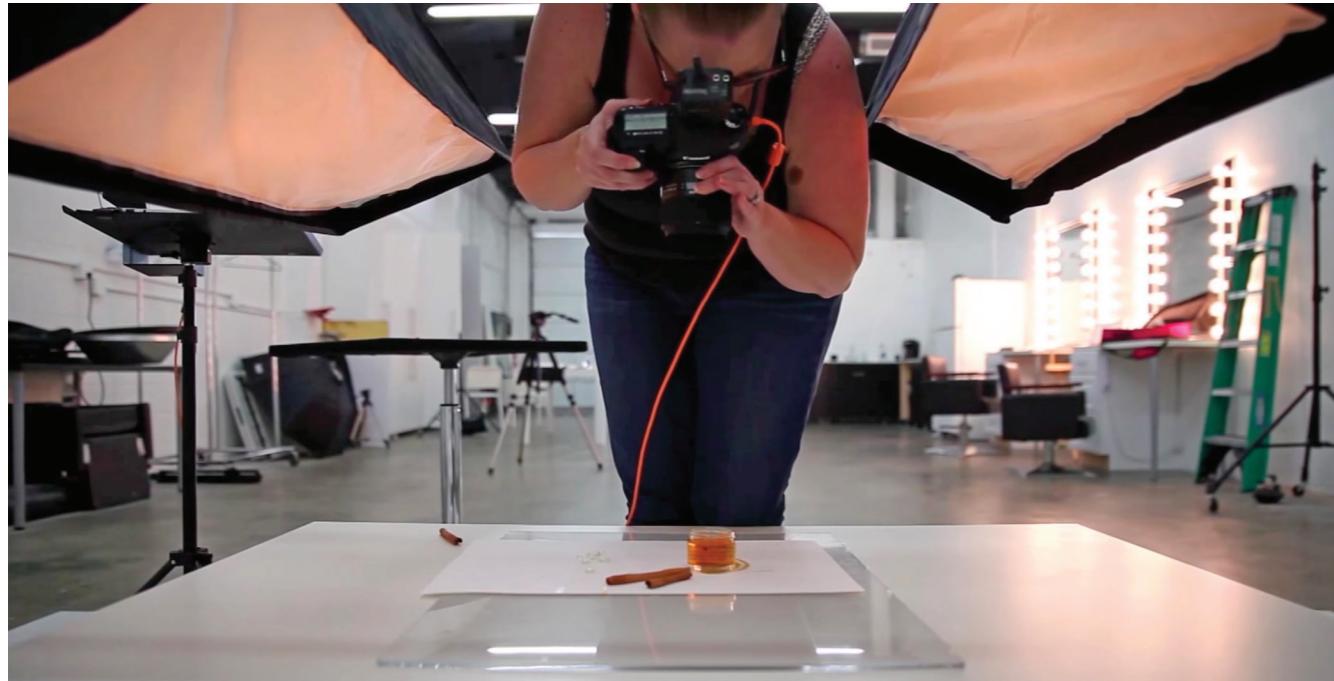
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Skincare Product Styling

by Courtney Dailey



Courtney Dailey is a Los Angeles based beauty and still life photographer.

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I would describe my style of photography as colorful, feminine, and clean. I am a commercial beauty photographer, so I try to keep my work as marketable as possible for my target demographic. I love shooting skincare cosmetics and hair care, so having that very polished fresh look to my work is very important to me.

Shot 1

For this shot, my lighting setup consisted of two soft boxes that are strip boxes on strobes. I was tethered so I could check on my lighting and product styling. For this shot I only had one jar of orange peel to style, so I tried to duplicate that texture and color using agave oil and sea buckthorn oil. After mixing, I transferred it onto a fresh piece of paper to style it and gave it a quick sweep to give it some texture and movement, since a glob doesn't capture the viewer's eye.

Shot 2

For the night cream, in the same product line, I wanted more graphic detail and sweeps. I kept the bottle in place with putty, then added aloe as it's a main ingredient, and used it twice – the second time as a geometric shape to frame the product.

Foodographer in Action

by Jordan Bush

There is a bit of a dance when it comes to collaborating on a monthly editorial piece. I work with an amazing editorial staff, my two editors make me want to be a better writer. Their revisions and critiques take it my work another level every single issue, and the same is true for our lead designer. All three of these women are heroes in my book. When it comes to content, I'm trying to find human stories that bring something unique to the table and to the story.

This is a cross-section of images from a monthly column I create for Lancaster County Magazine called "Foodographer." Being both the writer and photographer, the column is focused on my discovery of food and cuisine as a photographer, encouraging readers to upgrade their culinary experiences and share it with others. We started planning in autumn of 2017, building the calendar out for all of 2018 and into 2019. The initial start was a little more challenging, trying to work ahead of the seasons without much lead time, but having concepts established that far out is starting to make creating content for future submissions easier. The worst part is sitting on images for a year that I'd love to share but need to hold back for scheduled publication.

The story I was trying to was a simple one: to make people hungry! That's the first step to inspire readers to step out of their comfort zone, cook with and try new foods, recipes, and live out shared culinary experiences. Connecting them with local produce, ingredients, spanning from farm stands that sell free range chicken eggs and the freshest produce often on the honor system, to exquisite restaurants and hydroponics farms. Lancaster is a booming food city with a diverse pallet and a much big city feel than it's population number, and our county is extremely agricultural center. As a whole supplies food to approximately 100 million people on the east coast

daily. It's easy to take for granted how many fresh and cultural foods we have at our fingertips. Even fresh seafood is brought in from Maine and Maryland on a daily basis across multiple grocers.

Every month, I have to photograph, write, conceptualize/prop, style, cook, interview, and occasionally bake. Doing all of those things well often independently is incredibly challenging, but I love every component of it. If I didn't, it simply wouldn't work. I found my inspiration working with chefs at restaurants and events over the years, which led me to take a year-long cooking class. That opened the door to a lot of discovery which is part of the premise of the column. The brilliant part is that each article lives in my head for a month (or more) at a time. I can visualize images as storytelling elements, how a caption or photograph will add to the copy or bring something ancillary to the conversation. When propping and styling, I know how

everything will fit together and that's a lot of fun.

Trying to get busy restauranteurs and entrepreneurs to respond ahead of a deadline can be a challenge simply on a time basis. Receiving a last minute, story critical cast iron skillet to photograph the day after the submission deadline, charring Brussels sprouts at 3 AM to take into the studio, situations like that arise and are a labor of love. Those Brussels sprouts were as delicious as they look, like green popcorn with parmesan cheese and sea salt dashed about on top. In the studio, I have a lot of creative control to work with. I know my lighting, have a styling kit, acrylic ice, with a collection of vintage and new styling props at hand to the source. My studio is out of my home so if I'm cooking, it's a short trip from kitchen to studio. That can get complicated if I need to have other folks working on a piece with me but most of the time I'm on my own. In the field, there's less of all



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of the above but more random creations and collaborations can happen. In every case, I need to be a consistent storyteller and creator, which means being prepared, technical, observant, curious, and occasionally lucky. People often ask how many lies are told in my food work and aside from the occasional ice cube or oil-free coffee substitute, I'm happy to say zero. Everything is edible. If you come over sometime, you might see your meal as a two-page spread (double truck) in the magazine. I like the idea of saving time in food prep if it's a tip that benefits readers, but abhor it from a quality standpoint.

I work in Capture One 11 exclusively. Years ago I worked at Apple as both a software trainer and later a hardware technician. Aperture was a pro solution and I used it for years, and it blows my mind how much improved the clarity and color accuracy I can get out of Capture One. If I pull any raw file from my archives, it gets reprocessed in Capture One before going to a gallery online for the editorial staff to review. Textures and color are critical for an image to be appetizing. Chefs want to see that in their food, and with a column name "Foodographer," it goes without saying, I need to deliver. I use a Spyder5 Pro color calibrator on a number of different monitors in my office. An Intuos Pro is superb for retouching, giving fine control in picking off pieces of dust that canned air didn't brush off. Everything is backed up to a flash drive in the studio then immediately merged to an annual Capture One catalog on a 16 TB Thunderbolt RAID 5 array. Carbon Copy Cloner creates an incrementally updated backup maintained at my desk on another hard drive and yet another for off-site. Final JPEG images end up on SmugMug for another copy.

There are two scenarios that occur on a monthly basis: studio and on location. In the studio, I have a 7' Cambo studio

stand that moves on the X and Y axes, locking in to place and on a mobile cast iron base that also locks down. The studio stand is heavily customized and the core of my studio work-flow. Being able to lock it down, measure, and precisely move the camera in all directions is a massive time saver. On one end of the x-axis arm is a Nikon D800E mounted to a Tether Block and an Arca Swiss holder. The D800E is tethered via USB 3 and plugged into AC power. On the other end is a Tether Tools Aero Traveler table with a MacBook Pro. D800E files are massive, and there are fewer things more embarrassing than losing files in transmission due to signal issues. The Tether Boost has virtually eliminated that issue for me and the TetherBlock ensures I won't unplug the camera on the studio stand or handheld.

In the field, I have a mobile kit starting with tethering solutions. I have a duffle bag loaded out with a T-Setup, Aero traveler, Rock Solid Tripod Roller, TetherPro USB cables, gaff tape, JerkStopper Camera Support, and A clamps. Add in a tripod and the MacBook Pro and I have a quick setup with much of flexibility that I appreciate in the studio. Keeping everything in one bag ensures I won't leave anything behind or have to look in multiple places to get my mobile studio stand setup. There is a reason there's no mention of gear in what I consider challenges. I know my gear, read up on it and use it often in pressure free scenarios, and look for quality tools that make a meaningful difference in my workflow. It makes a professional impression on people I work with and makes my job less difficult.

I have a few recipes for my lighting style in my studio, typically going for a large, window light quality. My lighting setup in the studio relies on Alien Bee 800 units with a number of light modifiers. Diffusion is everything in creating that





Turning Up the Volume

by Nick Bumgardner

When I was approached by Paul C. Buff and Tether Tools to do a shoot for the Insight+Inspiration series I knew that I wanted to create something fun. So, I reached out to an art director that I have an existing relationship with. She had a few speakers from a client that needed to be photographed. The client needed some images photographed on a black backdrop, and also something that was more lifestyle friendly, but product driven. The concept of the shoot was to capture two unique shots of the speakers that my client brought in. We wanted a clean shot on a black background with a reflection in the shadow. We also wanted

to get a shot that was a little more disco where it looks like the speaker could be in use at a club scene or a show.

For lighting, I used a few different setups throughout the day. I had one set up for the all-black look which I did in two variations because of the different orientations of the photo. I also had a setup that was more fun and used colored gels.

For the setup on black, I positioned an Elinchrom El Octa with a Paul C. Buff Einstein and PocketWizard Plus 2 behind the product with a black cloth on it to give us a black background and nice

sharp highlights on the edge of the product. I had the product itself placed on a black plexiglass. I then had a strip box on the bottom filling in the shadow of the speaker because it had a curved front. I had as my fill light a Paul C. Buff 64in PLM in Extreme Silver with a diffuser over it to the camera right. For my key light, I used a Paul C. Buff Beauty dish with a 30-degree grid and polarizing gel. I pushed a bit more fill into the bottom of the product with a Paul C. Buff strip box placed below the shooting surface. I filled in the right side of the product with a white fill card.

For the setup on black, I positioned an Elinchrom El Octa with a Paul C. Buff Einstein and PocketWizard Plus 2 behind the product with a black cloth on it to give us a black background and nice



Nick Bumgardner is a commercial food, beverage, and advertising photographer based out of Nashville, Tennessee.

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camera screen if you are really getting the effect that you want, and still have a sharp photo. Also, with this particular client, we tend to be working remotely so my art director and I can send off the pictures from set to the client who is located somewhere else and get feedback from the client.

The biggest challenge for this shoot was working with the curved speaker. It made it difficult to get light under the product. It also meant that the reflection that we wanted under the product had to be made in post.

Shooting tethered helps me and my client to work together. We can look at a full-size laptop screen and see the nuances and detail of the photo. We can discuss where things should be positioned if the styling is right the mood etc. It just makes everything easier. Especially when you are working with things like lens flare it can be hard to see on a small

camera screen if you are really getting the effect that you want, and still have a sharp photo. Also, with this particular client, we tend to be working remotely so my art director and I can send off the pictures from set to the client who is located somewhere else and get feedback from the client.

The final shots are composites of multiple images that were combined in Photoshop. There is a base exposure, and then there are little bits of light added with silver and white fill cards. In the more disco image, I took the best bits of fog and light and moved them around to make the image. The same goes for the lens flare. The flare in the final photo came from several exposures.

We shot at my studio and I was working with a regular client. I own all of the gear that was needed for this shoot. To find the gear that I used for this shoot use this link <https://www.nickbumgardnerphoto.com/blog/how-i-got-the-shot-with-paul-c-buff-and-tether-tools-kit>

WATCH THE VIDEO

Lighting in Tight Spaces

by Steve Hansen

For this shot, I needed to light the interior of a fridge. Shots like these are often quite difficult as built-in refrigerator lighting is often low-quality and not very powerful. Thus, it's typically necessary to bring in studio lights which can become difficult as most constant lights and strobes are bulky and require light stands. It would also become very hard to access power controls on standard studio lights once in place.

Because of these factors, I chose to use a Flex Daylight LED Mat. Flex LED mats are extremely handy for detailed images like this one. Flex has an extremely low-profile design and are ultra-lightweight for placement in tight or con-

fined spaces. These lights, available in a range of sizes, are even flexible for super simple mounting.

I was able to place the Flex directly above the subject (in this case dairies and cheeses) while keeping the Flex dimmer outside of the confined fridge.

The 2x2 Flex used has a daylight-balanced color temperature, which perfectly mimics the lights typically found in refrigerators. I used a simple white card mounted just below the food to bounce a bit of the light back onto the food. This fills in some of the shadows to really perfect my vision.

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Steve Hansen is a food and beverage photographer based in Seattle, Washington.

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Waldorf Hilton in London

by Viktor Kery



This project at the Waldorf Hilton in London was in the planning stage for two months prior to the photo shooting. The idea was to have an extensive food and beverage photo library built including the client's restaurant menus, special offerings, Afternoon Tea, bar and room service items with added lifestyle element. In order to make this happen, we had to align the shooting time frame to the hotel operations hours with a rigorous agenda.

I have received an extensive brief from the client, including mood boards, ideas they liked and wanted to see in the photos. I always ask my clients to do so; it gives me a very clear indication of their expectations. Prior to the photo shooting, I met their Head Chef, their Commercial Director and a few F&B team members for a general chat. This allowed me to know more about the people, their motivation. For example, I found out that the head bartender, Daniele who recently won a company-wide cocktail

competition for the Europe region, puts all his effort and passion into his cocktails for the best guest experience. That is something I wanted to include in the photos.

The plan was a two days photo shooting, starting in the restaurant and kitchen on day one, then moving to the bar and room service on day two. Because it involved multiple locations, I wanted to have the necessary gear only, so I can move around quickly. My goal was to cre-

ate trendy, modern pictures that showcase the atmosphere of the place with a strong emphasis on guest experience.

Our biggest challenge was time and that the outlets were open during the photo shoot. While the team served guests, I had to use minimal gear and space - not to block too many tables, and not to disturb customers. Logistic wise I am well prepared, I use minimal gear and all fits in large luggage and in a couple of smaller bags. I don't have an assistant; I have to drag everything myself.

For food and the drink photos, I used a softbox with reflectors and speedlights - I didn't always have access to power outlets/sockets during the shooting. That could be something to consider for everyone shooting on location.

Shooting tethered is definitely the way to go. Since I was accompanied by the hotel's management team all the time, I could show them the picture we shot, and make adjustments where needed. The chef could make small tweaks on the dishes to look better on the camera; we

could build up the shots much easier using my laptop and camera connected to it. Also, backup of the photos was easier too - from my laptop's hard drive it was uploaded straight to my online storage.

Using a laptop to view pictures is so much better than a small LCD screen of a camera - and my clients are always happy to have a sneak peek during the work. One of the managers kept taking photos of the screen, he was very excited and loved the photos.

During the project, the hotel's team was involved including the Head Chef, Head Bartender, Director of Operations, F&B Manager, and a couple of team members for some of the lifestyle shots.

Some photos were staged, such as the room service breakfast pictures, but most were done during the actual process of making cocktails, and dishes we photographed. I am not a fan of staged photos; those don't represent people's passion for what they do. The guys did have a basic brief about how to act in front of the camera to eliminate the

stress of being photographed, but once they got comfortable in front of my lens, all went as per the plan. Some cocktails had to be done twice to get the result I wanted. For food shots, all dishes were exactly as they are selling, no fake ingredients were used.

You can achieve a lot with minimal gear, as long as you understand the requirements, the light, and everything you need - these have to be determined during the planning stage. Often you won't have time to build your ideal environment for photography, and you'll be short on time. Shooting tethered will really make the project more manageable, keep your client updated and excited to receive the final pictures.

I try keeping the post-production to a minimal level and do as much as I can during the shoot. I used Lightroom tethered to shoot and to correct the photos (colors, contrast, lens correction, crop, etc). Photoshop was used only to remove a couple of marks and lens dust (yes, that's my fault I did not clean my lens prior the shoot).



Viktor Kery is a food, restaurant, and hotel photographer based in London

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Rock Solid 2-Head Cross Bar Side Arm

by Tom Pitts, Tether Tools

From cookbooks in bookstore windows to magazine covers you pass in the grocery store check outline, it is hard not to notice the overhead camera view's popularity in food photography. Overhead shots are also incredibly popular in creating stylish product shots or knolling photography for social media and the web.

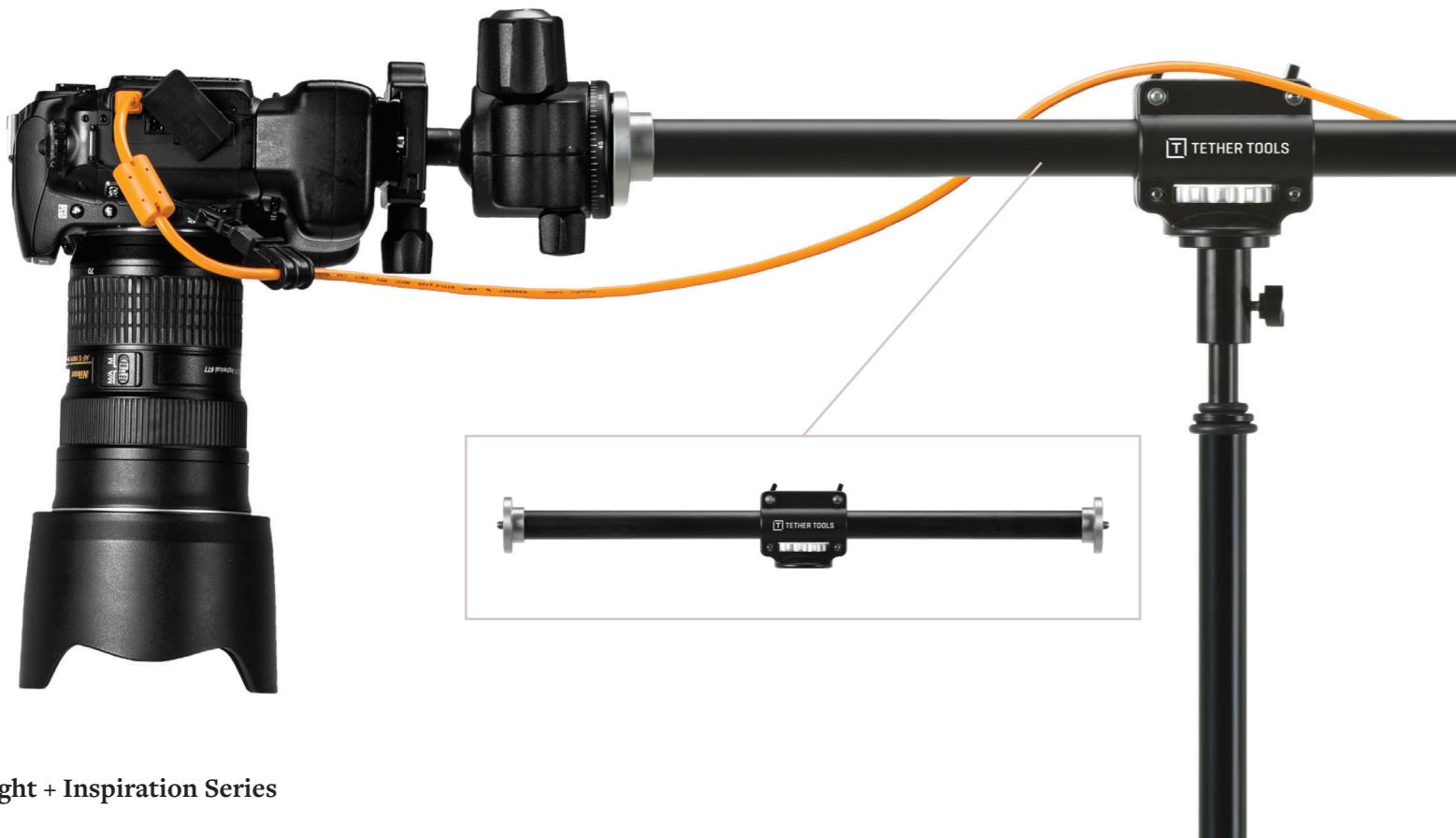
An overhead shot setup is a great tool to have in your arsenal. In this article we'll discuss the process, creation, and necessary hardware to create your own simple overhead shot setup.

To shoot from the overhead camera angle, your camera will need to be direct-

ly above your set and pointed straight down. If you are hand holding, you will end up in a position that puts a lot of stress on your lower back. That may be fine for the one-off, but if you're doing multiple overhead shots that's going to take a toll on your body and lead to poor image quality.

The one key to making this type of photography super easy is a stand with the Rock Solid Cross Bar Side Arm pictured below. The Cross Bar is 25" (63.5cm) in length and allows photographers to extend the camera over the shot.

In the below image, we've mounted the Rock Solid Cross Bar Side Arm to a light-



NECESSARY HARDWARE

- **Rock Solid Baby Ballhead Adapter** – the ballhead adapter provides a 3/8" mounting option to a c-stand or light stand
- **Rock Solid 2-Head Cross Bar Side Arm** – features 3/8" threads at each end and base, knurled plates for quick and easy mounting, and double locking ratchet knobs to keep the side arm secure
- **TetherPro USB Cable** – the necessary USB tethering cable for your camera
- **JerkStopper Camera Support** – cable management to protect your camera port and to stay connected
- **Computer and Tethering Software** – Lightroom, Capture One, or Smart Shooter are all great options
- **Camera** – that supports instant image transfer



Photo Courtesy of: Brooke Lark

SETTING IT UP

1. Place product as you like it, but realize that you'll adjust after you setup your camera and see the first round of images
2. Set up your tripod.
3. Secure your Rock Solid Cross Bar Side Arm to the 3/8" thread on your tripod. If you don't have a tripod, you could substitute a light stand or C-stand paired with a Rock Solid Baby Ballhead Adapter.
4. Attach a camera ballhead to one end of the Rock Solid Cross Bar Side Arm, and attach your camera.
5. Connect your TetherPro USB cable (and JerkStopper) from your camera to your computer and launch your tethering software of choice.
6. Snap your first shot from the computer and adjust the camera placement, product, and lighting as necessary

Scandinavian Flat Lay

by Scott Choucino

For this Scandi flat lay, I had the help of Elle from Boss management. Elle works as a stylist and also sources some really beautiful props. Food photography is almost always a collaboration between a photographer and a stylist. We set about sourcing the props for the shoot. I went off to reclaimed wood merchants to find the background and Elle searched through John Lewis and charity shops to find the right props. Having Elle on the shoot was amazing. A good food stylist can make or break a shoot. If left to my own devices the food would not look anywhere near as appetising.

Before the shoot, I had a rough idea as to the style of image I wanted to create, so this helped us to look in the right places and find appropriate props.

Having seen a million and one Scandi styled shots on Instagram, I thought I would give it a go. I wanted to try and

really convey the way of life and the aesthetic that comes with it. The biggest challenge for this was sourcing the right props. Making sure that we had everything following suit and within the right genre was key. From the wood to the plates and then the food. This is then mirrored in the type of light I chose.

I chose to shoot on my 5D Canon camera with my Sigma 35mm Art lens. The 35mm focal length is not a “classic” food photography pairing, but I find that it is great for this sort of work. I set up a few fill lights for the shot but ended up going for a single light source in the end.

By using a mixture of a doubled up softbox and a scrim I was able to create very soft light and keep the entire scene in the 4-7% fall off of the inverse square. I used about 800 Watts of light which gave me an exposure of 100th of a second, iso 160 (it's the best on the Canon 5Dmk2) and f5.6.

In order to get such a large flat lay, it is vital to set up on the floor. Even then, the camera ends up pretty high on the studio stand. I connected my 5D to my Mac and used the live view feature in the Canon EOS utility. This was really helpful for both focus and composition. I then took the shot through EOS Utility and had an auto-upload folder into Adobe Lightroom. This is my preferred workflow for food photography when shooting Canon. When I switch to the Phase One system I am able to do all of this within the Capture One Software.

The post-production for this shot was really simple. I did a bit of colour grading in Lightroom and then made sure that the black and white points were set correctly. Apart from that, there wasn't any fancy post-production that I had planned nor needed to do.



Scott Choucino is a commercial, portrait, and food photographer based in Leicester, United Kingdom.

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