

## Natural Light Still-Life Photography

When I'm not outdoors photographing -- when the weather is poor or when I'm inspired by an object or floral bouquet -- I take my work indoors. This article aims to inspire you to be creative with your own photography and to try to set up your own still lifes to create beautiful art. Indoors, as outdoors, I usually work with natural light. For the most part, no special lights are required for beautiful indoor photographs if you have a nice sunny window. In my house, the light in the eastern sun room is nicely diffused in the afternoon and this serves as a good start for lighting the scene. Lighting an indoor scene is very different from catching the proper light outdoors. Sometimes, I will use artificial light when the light levels are particularly low, for example, if I have decided to work at the wrong time of day to take advantage of the lighting in the sun room. For artificial lighting, I use my sunlamp which does a great job of imitating the sun for my moods and for my flower images. You can experiment with candles and other soft household lights too. I often use reflectors and diffusers to balance the light and highlight certain aspects of a scene. You can use a white sheet, tin foil, or colored fabric rather than fancy professional equipment to accomplish the same thing. For example, in a Christmas still-life on which I have been working, I am using a gold foil bag underneath the subject to reflect light up, get rid of shadows, and enhance that holiday glow. I don't generally use a tripod when I am working outdoors, but the lower level of light indoors makes it a necessity if I don't want to use a flash. Since I am focused on one general subject in the middle of my table, I don't mind keeping my camera stationary. When I am in a garden, I prefer to move around without the tripod. (Though, sometimes I will use a tripod outdoors if I have a particularly interesting flower and want to spend a lot of time with it or if the lighting conditions call for a slower shutter speed with a more open aperture.) A tripod allows you to hold the camera perfectly still for long periods of time. You can then keep your shutter open for longer periods without getting any blur from shaking hands. As a garden photographer, I aim to include flowers in all the work I do. I like to set up still life images of found objects that delight me and will hopefully interest the viewer of my photographs. Setting up plants indoors gives me more flexibility to pick the "proper" angle at which to photograph them. I set up my tripod and move single potted plants around in circles on my "studio" table (a folding card table) trying to find the plant's best side. I take single blooms and do the same or cluster them with other single blooms and leaves to make an arrangement. I sometimes use objects to play off the flowers, as I am doing now in the holiday card series on which I am working. You can use any items that appeal to you to create an interesting subject. I start with colors and objects that I think will look nice together. I sometimes have an idea of how I will set them up together, but more often than not, I use serendipity to start arranging objects and then see what comes of it. As I look at an arrangement and snap away, I start to reposition one object at a time, ending up with a totally different arrangement than the one with which I started. I use different backdrops and table cloths. And sometimes, I bring in new objects from my personal things when an idea hits. The objects with which I start are usually purchased especially for the occasion and become part of my treasures for future still lifes. I usually take about 50 photographs in an hour when I work this way and come up with two or three that I really like and perhaps one special treasure. I have had three sessions of holiday stills like this in the past week and only have one photo that will make it to my Christmas cards. I hope that you can use some of these tips to create your own unique still lifes. Think outside of the box about lighting and indoor subjects to create beautiful art using natural light indoors.

## About the Author

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