

CCC Hints and Tips - Still Life pictures at home - useful equipment

If you are into taking studio/still life pictures at home and you are looking for some kit to here are a few links:

Another handy little gadget is from Wimberley who make "The Plamp". Although it's not cheap, they are great for holding plants and other still life objects. The clue is in the name - sort of. See <https://tripodhead.com/products/plamp-main.cfm>

When it comes to speedlights think about soft boxes. The smaller the light source, the harsher the light so one option (rather than buying studio lights) is to use small diffusers capped to your speedlight which can bounce and soften the light. The Ezybox Speed Lite 2 from Manfrotto will create a larger softer spread of light with less shadows. At under £60 it's good value. See <https://www.manfrotto.com/uk-en/lastolite/ezybox-speed-lite-2-ll-ls2430/>

As an alternative, have a look at umbrella soft boxes by Wallimex. See <https://www.walimex-webshop.com/en/products/studio-items/studio-umbrellas/>

Finally, if you fancy some fake snow to bring an extra dimension to your picture, try "The Snow People". A bag of fake snow is around £7.00. See <https://www.thesnowpeople.com/>

Backdrops

Interesting backdrops - <https://clubbackdrops.com>

Colour backdrop rolls try Colorama backdrop rolls from Manfrotto. <https://www.manfrotto.com/uk-en/colorama/backgrounds/>

Depending on the story you want to tell, anything could be used for a backdrop as long as it enhances the photo and does not distract from the main focal point!

White and Blacks are good, but mainly for commercial type shots, coloured backdrops can enhance, i.e. a flower against a blue backdrop, here the colours would support and enhance each other and so on. In Jill's case, for white or black backdrops, I have smooth acrylic sheets in white, black, mirror, grey and 50% white opacity. These blend seamlessly as they have no surface texture to them. I purchased them online for about £10 each (A1 size sheets). They do show every spec. of dust though! The clone / healing tools in Photoshop come in handy!

I have used slate, copper sheet, wallpaper, white and black cotton, acrylic sheets, leather in red and green, velvet, patio slabs, carpet, pretty much anything as long as it's in context with the photo...Add something, don't subtract from an image! Don't just always use Black and White backgrounds!

A tip for people using mirrors is that you will get a double image, one from the glass surface and one from the mirrored back. Therefore if you can, get flexible mirror sheet (look for "d- c-fix mirror" on Amazon (they also have every type of surface you can think of)) or get a polished piece of sheet steel. It's as reflective as glass but doesn't have the multiple layers that you get in a mirror!

Syd - As you know I am very interested in Macro Photography and with extreme enlargements the background surface can become too apparent. I have purchased a small selection of ceramic tiles with both a gloss and matt surfaces in black and white and some other colours. The gloss tiles can give an interesting reflection of the subject placed on them whilst the matt surface provides a neutral effect with no surface pattern. Lighting can provide a challenge especially with the gloss tiles where light reflection can be a problem, in these instances I tend to just use ambient light and carefully position the subject in relation to a window. I always explain what I want the tiles for to get individual sample tiles from old stock. Also, it could be an advantage to take your camera with the closeup/macro lens and focus on the tile surface to get the effect.

The roll of white vinyl is matt on one side and reflective on the other which is quite useful – about £15. The lecturer on the RPS creative flower photography course I attended sometimes uses pastel crayons on white card to create patterns & textures (rather than using Photoshop). She was obviously skilled at Photoshop so the DIY approach with crayons must have had some benefit which I have yet to discover!