

Scrap Your Day

Photo Fact Sheet #02 :: May 2008

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Each month as we near the 25th, there will be a new photo fact sheet to download. Although we all have different levels of experience and different styles, I hope you will find some photographic inspiration whether you're sharpening existing skills or trying something new for the very first time.

Things to remember...

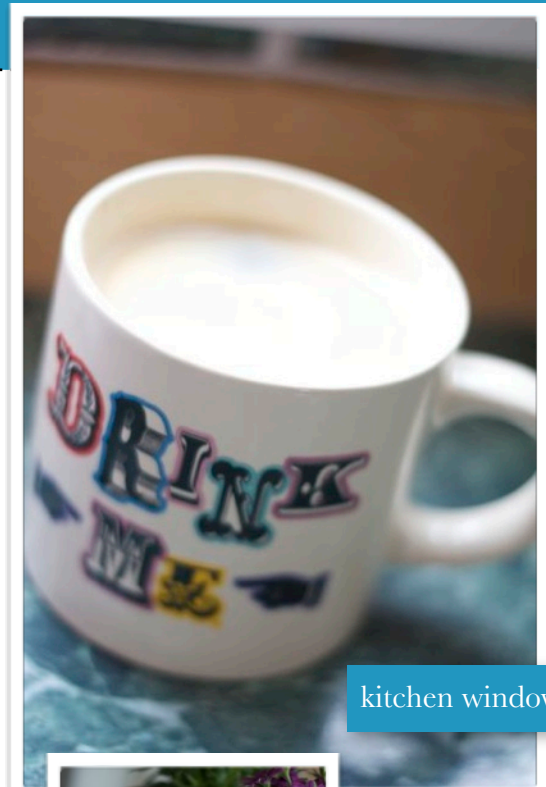
- ★ Charge. Your. Camera.
- ★ The 25th is this Sunday.
- ★ Consistent shots for every month: clock when you wake, each meal, view from a window, self-portrait, clock when you go to sleep.

This month: Catching the Still Life

While much of day-to-day life has action, we have eleven months left to try a variety of photography techniques so we don't need to jump ahead to something that might result in a headache. We're going to start with the things we can control in front of the lens: still life. If you have a few minutes to try a few shots with your camera today or tomorrow, grab an everyday object that doesn't move and go through these steps. I used a cup of coffee, but it really doesn't matter what you are photographing in these exercises...just that you're going to shoot the same object in several different locations. You can use any kind of camera to try these ideas...just keep in mind that it might be a bit costly on your Polaroid!

Step one: finding the light

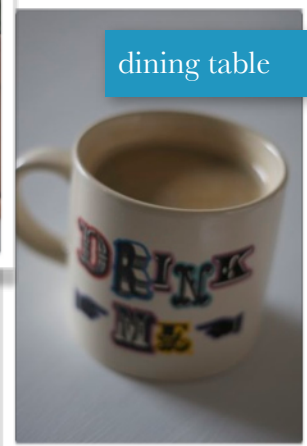
Are you aware of where the best light is in your house? Take your object on a little journey to find the places where you have the magic combination of light + surface. There are four that I return to often: the counter under the kitchen window, the coffee table near a window in the living room, the dining table and a little table on the patio. Every home will be different for so many reasons: the direction your home faces, where you are in the world, the size of your windows, what's outside your windows, the colour and location of your surfaces. So step one: take your object and photograph it on a variety of surfaces in your home, then load the pictures onto your computer so you can see the differences in each. For extra points, try different times of the day as well, since one side of your house may be bright in the morning but darker by early afternoon. Looking side by side, you should be able to see differences -- the light in my kitchen window is very bright while the dining table is quite shadowed, for instance. This is less about getting a perfect shot and more about discovering what you have available right at home.



kitchen window



patio



dining table



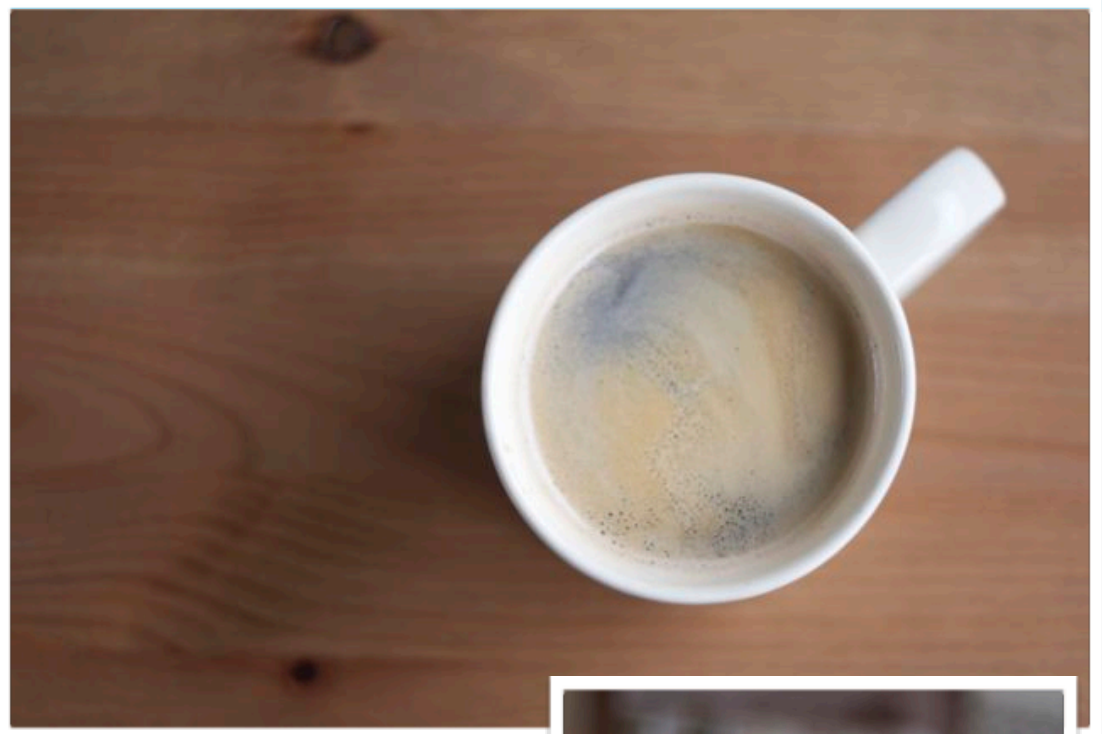
coffee table

Step two:

play with perspective

Once you find a combination of light and surface that you like, shoot the same item on its own from several angles to see what you capture. If you normally shoot using the screen on the back of your camera, try turning that off and looking through the viewfinder this time. Shoot up close, far away, overhead and crouched down low. Put your object in the centre of the frame, then take another shot with your object to one side of the frame and a third shot with the object only partially in view at the edge of the frame. Shoot some with everything lined up straight and some at an angle. Now you can see why we're trying this on an inanimate object -- you can shoot for ages and it's not going to complain or start pulling silly faces.

Once you've taken several, pull them up on the computer screen again to compare and see what you like and dislike. The shot above is still my coffee table, but the shot is taken standing straight up and looking down over the coffee, with the coffee cup off the central point. I even like how the handle points toward the corner in that shot. The shot to the right is what happens if I pull back a bit on the dining table. The dining table shot on page one has all white in the background, but here you can see other things in the room. I know that's the back of a chair and the radiator cover, but others who look at the picture may not know that and may find the background distracting. Again, it's not about being right and wrong...it's just about looking for these details.

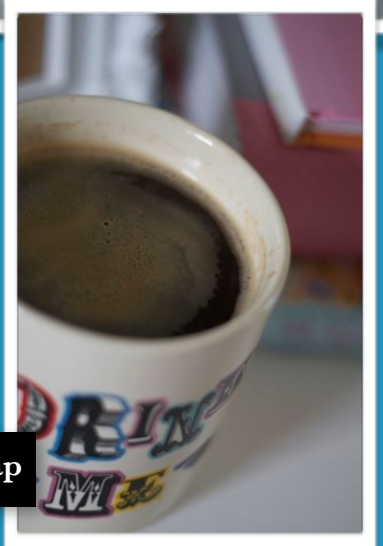


Perspective Check List

- ☉ Eye-level extra close
- ☉ Eye-level far away
- ☉ Overhead in the centre
- ☉ Overhead off the centre
- ☉ Overhead off the edge
- ☉ From below close up
- ☉ Shooting up from the floor
- ☉ Shooting down from a chair
- ☉ All table in the background
- ☉ Room visible in the background
- ☉ Everything lined up straight
- ☉ Object at a slight angle
- ☉ Extra close detail shot

Once you've tried all those from one side of the room, try another point in the room -- like I might shoot from where the chair is in the middle photo. Shooting into and out of the light may have a big effect on the end results. Sometimes we shoot from a point that feels natural when really there is a better place in the room that we've neglected.

snap, snap, snap



Try the accidental shot: Don't look through the viewfinder or the preview window. Just hold the camera in place -- nowhere near your face -- and use the autofocus to take a picture. Then see what you've got!



Step Three: Adding more stuff

Once you've looked at light and perspective, the next step in still life is to arrange more stuff in the frame. Just like the bowl of fruit in an art class, sometimes we want the whole bowl and sometimes we just want to look at a solitary apple. Part of styling your still life is deciding what to put in the frame...the other part is deciding what to leave out of the frame. The shot on the left has two things I dislike: the awkward cropping of the artwork at the top of the shot and the messy mix of books on the shelf at the bottom of the shot. Being a bit more careful produces the shot on the right, which is more simplistic and a bit more pleasing to the eye, but it gives quite a limited view as far as 'real life' is concerned. Turning the camera to take the landscape shot below adds meaning to the perspective -- you can get a better idea of what I might be doing as I sit there with my coffee.



[links to this month's album prompt](#)

While last month we used several landscape shots, either in full or cropped into short, wide rectangles, this month we're looking for one or two shots that we want to celebrate in their full 4x6 glory. That doesn't mean you'll use fewer photos. It just might mean that Sunday's album prompt will ask you to play favourites. See you then!

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