

# ALAMANCE PHOTOGRAPHY CLUB

2012-2024

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## January 2024 Newsletter

[www.alamancephoto.com](http://www.alamancephoto.com)

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# Happy New Year!



Photo by Resi Forrest

## APC ACTIVITIES

Our club will be taking a different approach in 2024. While our Programs, PhotoShows and Field Trips will continue, all will be geared towards an overall theme of learning and practicing basic photography.

We will also be adding some workshops to the mix. We feel our planned activities will appeal to both novice and advanced photographers alike and provide an opportunity for us to learn more from each other.

See more about what we have planned for 2024 on pages 3 & 4. We hope this will be a fun and educational experience for all. – Your editor

## President's Comments—January 2024

By Keith O'Leary

**Happy New Year!** 😊  
**Is it really 2024 already?**

As I reflect on this past year, I want to thank John Reich, our program chair, for the great presentations we enjoyed and learned from in 2023 and to Hugh Comfort for organizing the quarterly field trip opportunities. We had a personal tour of the Duke Chapel, took pictures at the Burlington Arboretum and City Park, visited the Duke Homestead, and the annual Occaneechi-Saponi Pow Wow in October. We had two very successful exhibits last year: "The Photographer's Eye" at the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro and the "Double Vision"

exhibit with the Burlington Artists League at their Fine Arts Gallery in the mall. Some of our artists had works selected for purchase and permanent display at the new Norville Breast Center at ARMC and we have a similar opportunity now for the new Heart and Vascular Center (more info to follow). We had visitors throughout the year and several new members joined us in 2023. Looking forward to what we have in store for '24!

Thanks for your participation in making this a great club. Stay warm and happy shooting!

Keith O'Leary

## APC BOARD

President	Keith O'Leary	Interim Exhibit Chair	Christie O'Leary
Vice President	John Reich	Outings/Field Trips	Hugh Comfort
Secretary	George Siple	Membership	Ken Sellers
Treasurer	Dianne Sellers	Web Master	Christie O'Leary
Interim PhotoShow Chair	Keith O'Leary	Editor	Ray Munns

**2024 Activities – Calendar View**

Jan 15, 2024 Program: Sean Leahy – Birds from Columbia

Feb. 19, 2024 PhotoShow: The Rule of Thirds (and ‘Back to Basics’ Ice Cream Social)

Mar. 18, 2024 PhotoShow: Photograph **three (3)** of the following:

1. Close-up of a person
2. 2 to 3 people interacting
3. Action shot
4. Animal shot
5. Nature shot

Apr. 15, 2024 Program: George Bohannon – Camera Basics with a Twist of History

May 4, 2024 Field Trip/Workshop:

Place: Burlington Arboretum

Objective: Understanding Light & Exposure

Exercise: Experiment with different light sources and exposure settings.

May 20, 2024 PhotoShow: One subject with 2 Different light sources

June 1, 2024 Field Trip/Workshop:

Place: Burlington Arboretum

Objective: Understanding Depth of Field, Composition, Angle of View

Exercise: Experiment taking same compositions with shallow (wide aperture) and deep (narrow aperture) depths of field and from different angles.

June 17, 2024 PhotoShow: One Subject with 2 Different depths of field

June 29, 2024 Field Trip/Workshop:

Place: Burlington City Park

Objective: Understanding Stop Action vs Blur Motion

Exercise: Experiment taking stop action & capturing blur motion from same or similar subjects.

July 15, 2024 PhotoShow: Stop Action & Blur Motion of Same (or Similar) Subject

Aug. 19, 2024 PhotoShow: One subject from 2 different angles/perspectives

Sep. 16, 2024 Program: Photo Editing Workshop/Presentation (Host TBD)

Oct. 21, 2024 Program: Jim Harrington – Drone Photography

Nov. 18, 2024 PhotoShow: 5 to 8 Picture PhotoStory by Youth Participants

Dec. 16, 2024 Christmas Party & Slideshow

## 2024 Programs

JAN: Sean Leahy – Birds from Columbia

APR: George Bohannon – Camera Basics with a Twist of History

SEP: Photo Editing Workshop/Presentation (Host TBD)

OCT: Jim Harrington – Drone Photography

## 2024 PhotoShows

FEB: The Rule of Thirds (and 'Back to Basics' Ice Cream Social!)

MAR: Photograph **three (3)** of the following:

Close-up of a person

2 to 3 people interacting

Action shot

Animal shot

Nature shot

MAY: One subject with 2 Different light sources

JUN: One Subject with 2 Different depths of field

JUL: Stop Action & Blur Motion of Same (or Similar) Subject

AUG: One subject from 2 different angles/perspectives

NOV: 5 to 8 Picture PhotoStory by Youth Participants

## **(Tentative) Field Trip/Work Shops**

5/4: Place: Burlington Arboretum  
Objective: Understanding Light & Exposure  
Exercise: Experiment with different light sources and exposure settings.

6/1: Place: Burlington Arboretum  
Objective: Understanding Depth of Field, Composition, Angle of View  
Exercise: Experiment taking same compositions with shallow (wide aperture) and deep (narrow aperture) depths of field and from different angles.

6/29: Place: Burlington City Park  
Objective: Understanding Stop Action vs Blur Motion  
Exercise: Experiment taking stop action and capturing blur motion from same or similar subjects.

# January 15th Program – “Birds from Columbia”

By Sean Leahy



I grew up outside of Hartford, CT where I enjoyed photography and the outdoors. I would take photos at family gatherings and other events. I was always the person you would see with a camera. Then one day, I just stopped taking photos. I don't remember why I stopped.

I had a major life event, and I needed a new focus in my life. I was lost, I didn't know what to do. I was walking in a small New England town and decided to walk into the camera store. I went in and came out with a Canon Rebel and two Kit lenses.

I have always loved the outdoors, and I started taking photos of birds and I got bird fever. I set a goal to photograph all the birds in New England. I remember thinking how “hard can that be to take a photo of all the birds in New England, there are only 250 different birds that live in New England”. My experience is, it is very hard and even harder with a Kit lens.

I was very discouraged with the quality of the photos that I was shooting. After talking to other photographers I met along the way, I purchased a good 400mm lens and the *Sibley Bird Guide* book. My journey of bird photography has had a rebirth. I'm sure my path will continue and be convoluted as I move forward.

Today, I live in Burlington, NC and have traveled to over 25 states photographing birds. I traveled to South America in 2018 and have birded all 100 counties in North Carolina. I look forward to my next adventure and seeing some beautiful subjects to photograph as I branch out into more wildlife and landscapes.

Thanks,

*Sean Leahy*



## WEBMASTER NOTES

Thank you to all who participated in the Christmas party. It was a great success!

A shout out to: Keith O'Leary, Ray Munns, George Siple, and Ken Sellers who helped set up the room for the party. Thanks to those who helped tear down afterwards.

Don't forget to visit the club's website in 2024 @ [www.alamancephoto.com](http://www.alamancephoto.com) for:

- Membership renewal
- 2024 Events
- Member Galleries

**Christie O'Leary—Webmaster**

(Editors Note: Thanks to Christie for planning our Christmas Party!)

## APC Membership Corner

January 2024

One of my resolutions for the New Year is to become a better photographer by learning from my peers. Beginning in February with a kick-off ice cream social, we will be able to become better photographers by listening to experts. “BTB”, or “back to basics”, is a series of educational seminars and labs/workshops that will give us the useful tools we need to become better photographers.

What more appropriate time to invite a friend or acquaintance to join the Alamance photography club. BTB is just one of the many perks members receive. Field trips, PhotoShows, and a place to buy and sell camera equipment are just a few of the other perks!

January through the end of March is the time for membership action. If you have not renewed, this is a good time. If you have not gotten around to asking that friend or acquaintance to join, now is the time. It's still not too late to give a gift of a years' membership in APC to someone.

**HAVE A HAPPY NEW YEAR EVERYONE!**

Ken Sellers – APC Membership Chair  
336-253-1113 or [taikijorsel@gmail.com](mailto:taikijorsel@gmail.com)

## Exhibits

APC had a very successful year with exhibiting their works at CCL: 'The Photographer's Eye' and at BAL Fine Arts & Gallery: 'Double Vision'. Several artists sold photographs! Thank you again for all who displayed your photographs in either or both of these exhibits.

This year the board voted to create their own wall calendar for 2024. Many of you participated in this project either by submitting photos or being part of the committee who selected the photos for the calendar. This calendar is beautiful! The club is still offering the calendar for \$18. You must pre-order (see below for more details):

- If you have a photo in our 2024 calendar and were unable to be at the Christmas party, your free calendar can be picked up at January's meeting.
- If you pre-ordered a calendar, then it can be picked up at January's meeting.
- 2024 calendars can still be pre-ordered by emailing me at [alamancephoto@gmail.com](mailto:alamancephoto@gmail.com) or by seeing Dianne Sellers or me at the next meeting.

Earlier this year, three of our photographers, Bob Finley, Mio Winkle, and Keith O'Leary had photos chosen to be hung in the new Cone Health Norville Breast Center at Alamance Regional. On January 23, 2024 from 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm, there will be an open house at the center where you can visit with the Norville team and the featured artists while touring the space.

On December 20th, you received an email from the club announcing another opportunity for APC photographers to have their artwork permanently displayed. The chosen artwork will be hung in the new Heart & Vascular Center at Alamance Regional Medical Center. I encourage you to consult the email and apply today.

Thank you for contributing to the 2023 Exhibits. I am looking forward to future exhibits in 2024. We are scheduled to display at Alamance Arts in September 2024. So be sure to keep an eye on your inbox as 2024 progresses. BTW: If you are aware of a facility where the club may hold an exhibit or offer an opportunity for photographers to display their artwork permanently, please let me know at [alamancephoto@gmail.com](mailto:alamancephoto@gmail.com).

**Christie O'Leary—Interim Exhibit Chair**





## Table Talkers



**Watch your emails for the next  
Table Talkers meeting.**

**Mark Austin**

# APC Trading Post

Submit brief descriptions of photography items you would like to sell, swap or purchase to Ray Munns ([raymunns@bellsouth.net](mailto:raymunns@bellsouth.net)) no later than the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month. Please include your name, contact info (phone and/or email) and if each item is for sale or something you are looking to purchase. Also notify Ray when items should be removed from the newsletter.

### For Sale

Nikon D5000 Camera with 2 batteries \$300

Nikon 28-300 F3.5- 5.6 ED VR  
\$500 Excellent condition

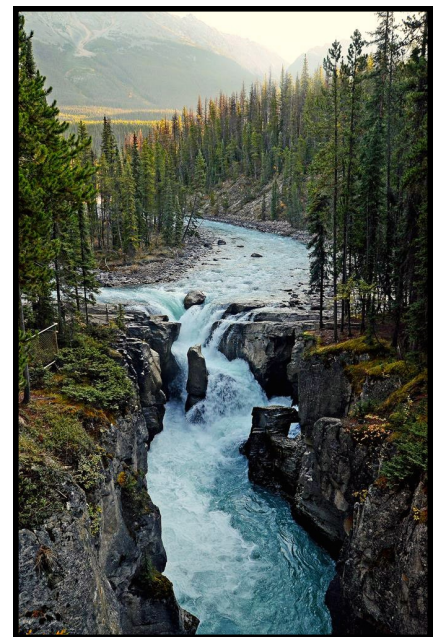


**Contact Mio Winkle 336-329-4423**



# U.S. and Canada Rockies

By Bob Finley



# 12 Snow Photography Tips

## How to Capture Magical Snow Shots

By Dena Haines



Snow is stunningly beautiful, yet capturing gorgeous photos of snow can be surprisingly difficult. If you simply head out on a snow photoshoot without proper preparation, you may run into autofocus and exposure issues (plus, the weather can lead to all sorts of gear failures).

Fortunately, I've been photographing snow for years, and I know how to handle each and every one of the common snow photography problems. In this article, I share my absolute best tips for snow shots, including:

- The best snow photography settings
- The best time to head out for pictures in the snow
- How to keep your camera gear safe in the cold
- How to photograph falling snow for a beautiful, ethereal effect
- Magical snow picture ideas
- Much more!

So if you're ready to learn how to take gorgeous photos in the snow, then let's dive right in, starting with tip number one on the next page.



## *12 Snow Photography Tips How to Capture Magical Snow Shots . . . Continued*

### **1. Focus on contrast (or use manual focus)**

Camera autofocus works by identifying contrast. This works great in normal shooting situations – but when everything turns snowy and white, your autofocus will have a hard time acquiring focus, which can lead to a lot of frustration and even missed opportunities.

Fortunately, there's a simple way around this:

Switch your camera to its single-point AF mode. Then position your main focus point over a contrast-heavy area of your snow scene. For instance, you might focus on the bark of a tree, some vegetation poking through the snow, the roof of a house – anything that pops against the white.

Next, press your shutter button halfway. If you've found a sufficiently contrasty part of the scene, the focus should lock – but if it still won't work, you'll need to identify an even more contrast-heavy subject.

Finally, hold down your shutter button as you recompose the shot. And once you've created the perfect composition, press the button the rest of the way to take your perfect photo of snow!

Note that if you're trying to photograph a low-contrast scene, such as a white house against a snowy backdrop, you may want to give up on autofocus entirely. Switch your lens over to manual focus, then carefully turn your lens's focus ring until you've achieved perfect sharpness. (For even better results, use your camera's Live View mode to preview the image on the rear LCD and zoom in to check the focus at a high magnification.)



## *12 Snow Photography Tips How to Capture Magical Snow Shots . . . Continued*

### **2. Choose the right camera settings for snow photography**

While the best snow photoshoot settings will vary depending on the light, the situation, and your artistic intentions, I do have a few simple recommendations to keep your snow shots looking sharp and well-exposed.

First, set your camera to shoot in RAW. You see, when you use the RAW file format, you'll have far more information to work with when editing. This will let you recover clipped shadows and highlights (and thanks to the brightness of sun on snow, the latter are pretty common in snow photography).

Second, I'd also recommend selecting your camera's Evaluative metering mode, also known as Matrix metering. This will analyze the entire scene to achieve the best possible exposure in most situations. If you're struggling to get a good exposure, you can always try switching over to Spot metering or Partial metering, but Evaluative metering is a good starting point.



Third, shoot in Aperture Priority mode. It'll allow you to adjust the aperture and ISO while your camera automatically changes the shutter speed (with the goal of achieving a good exposure).

Aperture Priority mode is a great way to gain control over different camera settings without feeling totally overwhelmed. It's also a lifesaver in cold weather because you generally only need to spin a dial to adjust your aperture (cold fingers aren't so great at doing complex operations!).

Another option is to shoot in Manual mode. However, in Manual mode, you'll need to adjust all your settings, not just the aperture and ISO, so Manual mode isn't ideal if you're still wrapping your head around exposure, nor is it great for fast-moving situations. But if you want complete control over your camera settings, and you don't mind working with cold fingers, then Manual mode is an excellent choice.

Once your camera is set to Aperture Priority mode, you'll need to choose an aperture and an ISO. I'd recommend setting your ISO at its base level (generally ISO 100, though this can change depending on your camera). This will keep your images looking clean and free of noise.

## **12 Snow Photography Tips How to Capture Magical Snow Shots . . . Continued**

As for your aperture setting: This really depends on your artistic interests. A wide aperture (such as f/2.8) will give a beautiful shallow depth of field look, but a narrow aperture (such as f/11) will keep most or all of the shot in focus, which can help highlight all the intricate details in a snowy landscape. If you're not sure which aperture to choose for your snow photography, try shooting two images of each scene – a wide-aperture shot and a narrow-aperture shot – then compare them when you get home and see which you like best.

After you've chosen an aperture and an ISO, take a look at your shutter speed. Your camera will choose this based on exposure considerations, but if you're shooting handheld, you'll want to make sure the shutter is fast enough to ensure a sharp shot (1/100s or so is a good starting point, though it's a good idea to experiment so you have a sense of your own handholding skills and limitations).



If the shutter speed is too slow, go ahead and either widen the aperture or raise the ISO, which will force the shutter speed upward.

Finally, you'll generally need to dial in one or two stops of positive exposure compensation. Due to the quirks of its meter, your camera will try to make the snow look gray, and exposure compensation will counteract this effect to keep things bright. Note that your shutter speed may drop below its acceptable limit (see the previous paragraph), and if that happens, you'll need to adjust your aperture or ISO to move the shutter in the right direction.

### **3. Use the right snow photography gear**

You can capture gorgeous snow photos with any gear, but if you're looking to really elevate your shots, I do have a few recommendations.

First, make sure you use a camera with a larger sensor and strong high-ISO capabilities. On dark, cold, snowy days, the light is often relatively limited, and you'll need to boost your ISO to capture sharp handheld shots, so an impressive sensor can make a big difference. A full-frame mirrorless camera like the Canon EOS R5 or the Sony a7 IV will do an amazing job, though you can also get great results using an APS-C mirrorless model (e.g., the Nikon Z50 or the Canon EOS R10) or a DSLR.

## **12 Snow Photography Tips How to Capture Magical Snow Shots . . . Continued**

Second, if you plan to shoot in bad weather, make sure you pick a weather-sealed lens. The focal length isn't especially important, though it should match your interests; you don't want to shoot with a super-telephoto lens if you're trying to capture snowscapes! If you're not sure what type of images you want to capture, consider using a 50mm prime lens (which works great for street photography, portraits, and walkaround photography) or a 24-70mm zoom (which is extremely flexible and can handle both wide-angle landscapes and tighter shots).

Third, if you'll be working with limited light, be sure to use a sturdy tripod or at least a monopod. That way, you can keep your shots sharp, even when the sky is heavily overcast or covered by falling snow.

You also shouldn't neglect your own winter gear; make sure you wear warm clothes, a heavy coat, a warm hat, and warm but flexible gloves. You don't want to head out only to end up with frostbite (and it's also worth noting that, if you're shivering due to the cold, it's tougher to capture sharp shots!).

### **4. Capture snow while it's still fresh**

If you want magical photos, head out just after a fresh snowfall. The world will be sparkly and pristine. You won't have any footprints, yellow snow, mud, or dirt to deal with; instead, you can focus on creating stunning shots of your winter wonderland.

That said, if you want footprint-free snow, you should plan the photos you're going to take and the order you'll take them in. Otherwise, you might accidentally trample the snow during the shooting process, which will ruin your ability to capture future pristine photos.

Note that pristine snow doesn't last long. Capturing fresh snow might also mean heading out early to shoot (before the kids get up!), or monitoring the weather and getting outside just as the snow stops. Of course, if your schedule isn't quite so flexible, that's okay. Just take your camera to an area that you know people won't disturb, like a forest or field.



Dena Haines

## **12 Snow Photography Tips How to Capture Magical Snow Shots . . . Continued**

### **5. Keep your batteries warm**

You can't take pictures in snow without fresh batteries – and unfortunately, in cold weather, your batteries won't last long.

So carry at least two batteries, and keep one in an inside pocket at all times. (Depending on your camera's battery life, I'd even recommend shooting with three or four batteries. You can grab cheap third-party options online.)

When the battery in your camera runs low, replace it with a warm one. Then put the drained battery in an inner pocket; you may even be able to use it again once it warms up.

### **6. Bag your camera when you come inside**

When you take a cold camera into a warm environment, what happens? You get condensation on the lens and potentially even on camera internals, which is – you guessed it! – not good. (If you're really unlucky, it can lead to mold.)

Fortunately, it's an easy problem to prevent.

When you head out into the cold, bring along a large zip lock bag. I usually keep one in my camera bag or jacket pocket. Then, when you're ready to go inside, just fill the zip lock bag with cold air, put your camera in the bag, and make sure the lock is sealed tight.

Once you're in the house, put your camera somewhere it can warm up slowly. When the camera reaches room temperature, you can take it out of the bag and use it normally.

(And if you decide to go back outside to photograph after a brief rest in the house, you can safely take your bagged camera out in the cold, open the bag outside, and start shooting again.)

Note that you'll need to bag your cold camera before taking it into any warm environment, including stores, heated elevators, and a heated car. Therefore, if you want to photograph an outdoor snow scene and a beautiful interior in a single photoshoot, capture the indoor areas first, then go outside. That way, you won't get stuck waiting around while your camera warms up (which often takes several hours!).



## **12 Snow Photography Tips How to Capture Magical Snow Shots . . . Continued**

### **7. Shoot in any light**

Snowy landscapes look good in both sunny and cloudy weather, so don't restrict yourself to shooting in specific light. Simply learn to work with the lighting conditions you're given!

When the sky is cloudy, find elements that will break up the white snow and add interest to your photos, such as trees, grass, or ice. You can also look for intricate landscapes, such as grasses against snow or patterns in frozen puddles and streams.

When the weather is sunny, look for shadows created by the bright sun, and try converting your shots to black and white. If you shoot in the early morning or evening, do what you can to capture the warm light on the cold snow. Consider using a wide-angle lens and see if you can find a high angle that really conveys the expanse of the landscape.



You can also capture beautiful blue-hour snowscapes, though you'll need a tripod to keep your camera steady for a lengthy exposure. If you do decide to go this route, I recommend identifying several potential compositions in advance, then setting up a few minutes before the blue hour arrives. Once the light gets going, take plenty of shots, but be careful not to touch your camera; you don't want to cause any blur due to vibrations! Here, a remote shutter release can be extremely helpful.

### **8. Photograph when the snow starts falling**

Some photographers don't like to take their cameras out in bad weather, which is perfectly understandable; just know that snowy days often provide amazing opportunities for images!

Here are just a few ideas for photography on snowy days:

- Birds huddled in snow-covered trees
- Trees surrounded by a minimalist expanse of white
- Pedestrians hunched over against the wind
- Plants with little "hats" of snow
- Cityscapes with blowing snow and warm lights in the distance

## **12 Snow Photography Tips How to Capture Magical Snow Shots . . . Continued**

If your goal is to capture scenes that feature falling snow, you'll want to avoid using lengthy shutter speeds, which will simply blur the snow into near-invisible streaks. Make sure your shutter speed is fast enough to freeze the snow (if needed, you can always boost the ISO – noise doesn't show up as clearly when mixed in with snowflakes!).

Of course, be sure to protect your camera, especially if the snow is wet and/or heavy. Consider using a rain cover or – if the wind is minimal – an umbrella. I'd also recommend carrying a towel, which you should use to wipe any stray flakes off your camera and lens, as well as a rocket blower, which you should use to blow snow off the front lens element. It's also a good idea to use a lens hood to prevent snow from landing on the front element, though you'll need to check the front of your lens frequently to make sure it's snow-free.

### **9. Act fast**



Snow changes quickly. It can stop falling in an instant. And when the sun comes out, snow melts, so that those beautiful trees go from dazzling to drab in no time at all.

Monitor the weather carefully. Look out your window frequently. Have your gear ready to go.

And if you come up with a snow picture idea that you like, or if you look out the window and see beautiful snow photograph opportunities, don't dawdle. Capture some snow photography while you still can!

### **10. Be patient**

This tip is a corollary to the one above – because while it's important to always be ready, it's also important to be patient, especially when you're faced with rapidly changing conditions. You see, depending on the light, snow can look sparkly, ethereal, three-dimensional, flat, and so much more. Sometimes, getting the right look simply involves waiting for the light to change.

So if the snow doesn't look quite how you hoped, check the light. Is the sun behind a cloud? Is the sun too low or high in the sky?

Then wait for the right conditions to take your shot.



## 12 Snow Photography Tips How to Capture Magical Snow Shots . . . Continued

### 11. Play with perspective



As with all forms of photography, composition is an essential ingredient of great snow photos – so you should pay very careful attention to the items you’re including in the frame, and you should also carefully consider your perspective.

For creative snow photos, try getting down low to shoot up.

You might also find a deck or a hill that you can use to shoot downward; that way, you can show how the snow blankets the ground, weighs things down, and clings to everything.

And for each photo you take, look for opportunities to make the shot even better. Walk to either side of your subject, consider different angles, get in close, walk far away, and even change lenses.

### 12. Capture some sparkly bokeh

A sunny winter day is a great time to create bokeh thanks to all the sparkling snow and ice.

You see, pinpricks of light – e.g., light sparkling on snow – when rendered out of focus, can create outstanding bokeh effects, like this:

Look for a subject that has something bright or shiny in the background. This background element could be light reflecting off melting snow, light broken by tree branches, or light shining through ice. Set your camera to a wide-open aperture (e.g., f/2.8 or f/4), and make sure there is some distance between your subject and the shiny background.



Thanks to the wide aperture, your subject will be in focus, but not the shiny background elements. And when you hit the shutter button, you’ll get lovely background bokeh!

Pro tip: You’ll get the best results if you can get close to your subject, so pick your closest-focusing lens and have fun!

### **Snow photography tips: final words**

Will you be out taking photos on the next snow day? I’m planning on it, and I hope you are, too. Have fun with your snow photography and experiment with different settings for creative results.



**Digital  
Photography  
School**

# Still Life Photography

## The Ultimate Guide (+ 9 Tips)

By Lea Hawkins

Ever looked at a simple fruit bowl and wondered if it could be something more? Well, it can! Still life photography is all about transforming ordinary objects into visual art, and it comes with an array of powerful advantages:

1. It's highly accessible (you can do it in your own home!)
2. It doesn't require ultra-expensive gear
3. It's not nearly as hard as it might seem

I've been taking still life images for years, and in this article, I offer everything you need to improve your shots. I cover all the key elements including lighting, composition, and editing – so that, no matter your level of experience, you'll be ready to shoot some amazing still life photos of your own.

### What is still life photography?

Still life photography is an art form that involves capturing inanimate objects. This can include anything from a bowl of fruit to a carefully arranged collection of antique tools.



The appeal of still life photography lies in its accessibility and its potential for immense creativity. With complete control over all elements, from lighting to composition, you can turn ordinary objects into something extraordinary.

Seeing everyday objects through an artistic eye is the essence of still life photography. It's about finding beauty in the mundane and ordinary. Whether you're a professional photographer or just starting, still life photography invites you to see the world anew, and it's a wonderful way to explore your creativity!



## *Still Life Photography The Ultimate Guide (+ 9 Tips) . . . Continued*

### **Essential still life photography gear**

You don't need to spend a fortune to get started with still life photography. An entry-level mirrorless camera or DSLR will work just fine. These camera types provide more control and flexibility compared to simple point-and-shoot models. Paired with a close-focusing lens, they allow you to capture sharp images of your subjects that you can edit, print, and hang on your wall.

A tripod is another important item, and while not every still life photographer works exclusively with a tripod, it's a great piece of equipment to obtain. Even a slight camera movement can change the focus and composition, so a tripod will help streamline your workflow. More importantly, it'll keep your camera steady, which is crucial for achieving clear, sharp images in low light conditions.

Other useful accessories include reflectors to reduce shadows and diffusers to handle too-harsh lighting.

That said, you don't need to go gear-crazy; the key is to understand that quality images don't necessarily come from expensive gear. With the right basic tools, beautiful still life images are entirely within your reach.

### **Key still life photography settings**



Manual mode is where you want to begin in still life photography. Working in this mode gives you ultimate control over your image, allowing you to fine-tune the aperture, ISO, and shutter speed. With control over these settings, your creativity can truly shine.

A narrow aperture such as f/8 is a standard choice for still life photography. It keeps the subject in focus, giving you the crisp details that'll make your still life images stand out. As for the ISO: Keep it low to maintain the best image quality. As long as you're using a tripod, shutter speed is less critical; you can slow it down without causing blur.

Understanding these settings is essential to achieving professional-looking photos. While dialing in apertures, ISOs, and shutter speeds may seem technical at first, you'll find that it quickly becomes second nature!

## *Still Life Photography The Ultimate Guide (+ 9 Tips) . . . Continued*

### **Basic lighting for still life photography**

Light is an essential component of still life photography, and many still lifes feature beautiful lighting arrangements (which often create moody, painterly effects).

But it's important to realize that you don't need fancy lighting to create a stunning still life. When you're starting out, I recommend using whatever light you have available, such as:

- Indirect light from a window
- A lamp
- A flashlight
- A candle

Don't just create your setup, take one shot, and call it a day. Instead, try out different lighting effects! Use a curtain to block out some window light, then remove the curtain to let the light stream in. Shine a flashlight at your main subject, then try a second shot where the flashlight is positioned off to the side and shrouds your subjects in shadow. Make sense?

Note that, if you're using lamps, flashlights, or candles, you will definitely need a tripod; indoor lighting won't get you a fast-enough shutter speed for handheld shots. (This can be a relatively cheap model; as long as it's positioned on a sturdy surface, it should be able to keep your camera steady.) When you're ready to shoot, just mount your camera to the tripod, activate the two-second self-timer, and start taking images.



### **Still life photography composition**

Learning to compose still life photos is often a struggle for beginners. This is understandable, as still life composition brings up a ton of questions, such as: Where should I place all my items? Should they overlap? Should they be close to the background? What camera angle should I use?

Fortunately, still life composition isn't as hard as it might seem. I have two main recommendations, and they will take you far:

## *Still Life Photography The Ultimate Guide (+ 9 Tips) . . . Continued*

First, if you've not encountered them before, read about the rule of thirds and the rule of odds. These will offer a fantastic compositional starting point for beautiful still life shots, plus they're really easy to use.

Second, just keep moving your items around. This recommendation might seem a bit silly, but if you rearrange your objects enough, you'll eventually hit on an arrangement that looks great. Don't just settle for the first composition that you try – instead, test an arrangement, then evaluate it critically. Determine what you like and dislike about it, then make adjustments.



As you create different compositions, here are a few items to keep an eye on:

- Overly empty gaps (you generally want to keep the entire arrangement balanced!)
- Busy areas (you don't want to confuse the viewer with too much activity)
- Movement between objects (aim to lead the eye from one object to the next)

Remember: A tiny tweak can make a huge difference. So if an arrangement doesn't seem perfect, make a few changes. Chances are that you'll soon hit upon a better setup!

### **Tips and tricks to improve your still life photos**

Now that you're familiar with the basics, let's dive into some of the higher-level aspects of still life photography, including subject selection, different lighting directions, and more!

#### **1. Look at the work of great still life photographers**

It's a valuable practice to study the work of great still life photographers online. By observing their photos, you can learn about the different ways to arrange elements, and you can even find inspiration for new subjects.

But don't limit yourself to photography alone; look at the world of painting as well. Masters like Cezanne offer a treasure trove of lessons on composition, balance, and the use of color. The way these painters arranged objects, used light, and chose colors can translate into unique insights for your photography. A painter's eye for composition can open new doors for your creativity. Learning from others can be an exciting and enlightening process. While it's important to develop your unique style, the techniques and ideas you glean from observing the masters can enhance your skills.





## *Still Life Photography The Ultimate Guide (+ 9 Tips) . . . Continued*

### **2. Experiment with side lighting**

Side lighting is a powerful tool in still life photography. By ensuring that your light source is hitting the subject from the side rather than the front or back, you add shadows that improve a sense of three-dimensionality. The play of light and shadow brings depth and drama to an image, allowing ordinary objects to appear extraordinary.

A 45-degree angle is often a fantastic starting point for side lighting. It offers a balanced blend of light and shadow, producing a visually appealing effect. Don't be afraid to play with different angles and light sources; experimentation is key to finding what works best for your particular setup.



Realize that the angle of light can drastically change the mood and appearance of your photograph. By embracing the experimentation and understanding how side lighting works, you add an essential tool to your still life photography toolkit. It's a step towards creating more engaging, eye-catching images.

Bottom line: Whether you're using natural light from a window or an artificial source, side lighting can become your go-to option for stunning still life shots.

### **3. Pick items that interest you**

Still life photography beginners often struggle to pick a subject and get started. But in truth, there are no "best" still life subjects, so there's no need to stress! Ideal subjects are simply items that interest you, and they can come from anywhere, including:

- Around your house
- Flea markets and thrift stores
- Estate sales
- The grocery store
- The florist

Of course, the words "still life" generally conjure up visions of vases of flowers, pears on candlelit tables, old paper, and violins. And you can certainly capture beautiful still life shots by obtaining and arranging these "classical" items.



### *Still Life Photography The Ultimate Guide (+ 9 Tips) . . . Continued*

But you don't need to spend time pursuing such images if they don't interest you. Instead, ask yourself: What is meaningful to me? What objects do I love? Is there a story I would like to tell with my still life?

Alternatively, you might look for items that simply catch your eye. This next shot contains a piece of dried seaweed on some calico. Was the seaweed meaningful to me? Not really. Did it tell a story? Nope. It simply looked beautiful, so I wanted to capture it!



Finally, you can capture "found" still life arrangements – that is, still life arrangements that already exist (in houses, backyards, or on the street). Here's a found still life, taken of a friend's bedside table:



When picking still life subjects, here's my final piece of advice:

If you're stuck, just find some items that are personal and important to you, such as:

- Family heirlooms
- Pictures containing relatives
- Books that you love

Then, after a bit of arranging, you'll capture a still life that's loaded with meaning!

## *Still Life Photography The Ultimate Guide (+ 9 Tips) . . . Continued*

### **4. Work with a theme**

Still struggling to pick the right still life photography subjects? Then I highly recommend working around a single theme.



Themes are an essential aspect of still life photography that can add depth and coherence to your images. They help you move beyond randomly selected objects and push you to think about the mood and meaning you want to convey. Whether it's a color, season, or concept, a unifying theme can drive creativity.

For example, if you choose a theme around the color blue, you may gather items like blue glassware, a blue scarf, or blueberries. The consistent color palette not only creates visual harmony but also allows you to explore various textures and shapes within a specific color family.

Themes also help in storytelling. A setup focused on a seasonal theme, like autumn, can evoke feelings of warmth, change, or nostalgia. From leaves to pumpkins, selecting objects that resonate with the chosen theme helps in creating visually compelling stories that speak to the viewer.

### **5. Carefully select a background**

The background can make – or break- your still life. If you want great results, you must choose your background with great care.

Specifically, don't choose a background that features distracting elements. Avoid eye-catching colors that draw the eye, and if you use fabric, make sure you iron it first (few things are more distracting than a wrinkled backdrop!).

Instead, keep it simple. Fabric, cardboard, and existing walls often work great, provided that they're relatively plain. The goal is to emphasize your still life subjects (so the viewer knows exactly where to look).



### *Still Life Photography The Ultimate Guide (+ 9 Tips) . . . Continued*

Here's an image featuring a plain backdrop made from a couple of old potato sacks:



And here's another shot, this time featuring a sheet of red fabric:

Also, experimentation is important! Different background textures and colors can complement your subjects in different ways, so it pays to test out a few options before deciding on a final arrangement. You may be surprised by the backdrops that make your still life really pop.

And while I generally do advocate using a narrow aperture and a deep depth of field when starting out, over time, you might want to try experimenting with focus and depth of field. You can create a shallow depth of field effect – where you keep the front element sharp and the background blurry – for more artistic shots. It's a trick that can also come in handy if you like the background but find it a little too conspicuous.



## *Still Life Photography The Ultimate Guide (+ 9 Tips) . . . Continued*

### **6. Try light painting for creative still life shots**

Light painting is a thrilling technique that allows you to “paint” with light. It involves setting your camera to a long shutter speed, usually in the range of 10 to 30 seconds, and then moving a flash-light or candle around your subject during the exposure. The result can be mesmerizing.

One of the great things about light painting is that it enables you to have greater control over your lighting without investing in expensive strobes and softboxes. You can create unique effects and highlights exactly where you want them. All you need is a dark room and a source of light, such as a flashlight, candle, or even a glow stick.

Experiment with different light sources, movements, and exposure times. You’ll soon discover a whole new world of creative possibilities. Light painting can add depth, character, and flair to your photos, making it a valuable technique in your still life photography toolbox.

### **7. Consider using artificial lighting**

Once you’ve mastered basic still life lighting using natural sources like windows or candles, you may wish to explore artificial lighting for more control. Studio strobes, speedlights, or continuous LEDs are common options, and each has its advantages.



For those just starting, speedlights can be an affordable choice. They are portable and easy to use but still deliver excellent results. Strobes, on the other hand, are more powerful and include modeling lights so you can see the lighting effect in advance.

Whatever your choice, softboxes are essential. A bare flash will result in harsh and unflattering light. Softboxes diffuse the light, making it softer and more pleasing to the eye. They come in various sizes and shapes, allowing you to fine-tune the lighting effect to match your vision.

Artificial lighting may seem intimidating at first, but with practice, you can use it to create stunning still life photographs. From generating specific effects to offering complete control over the intensity and direction of light, artificial lighting opens up a new realm of creativity. It’s an investment not just in equipment but in expanding your artistic capabilities.



## *Still Life Photography The Ultimate Guide (+ 9 Tips) . . . Continued*

### **8. Shoot from different angles**

The angle you choose to shoot from can dramatically alter the look and feel of your still life photograph. While it's common to start with a standard frontal composition, experimenting with different angles adds richness and variety to your portfolio.



Moving to the right or the left, shooting from above or below – these choices offer new perspectives on familiar subjects. Even slight adjustments in camera height can change how a setup is captured. Higher angles can amplify depth, making objects appear more spread out, while lower angles can give a greater sense of intimacy or grandiosity.

Experimentation is key here. There are no rigid rules, so feel free to explore various angles until you find what resonates with your subject and theme. Try photographing a bowl of fruit from directly above to emphasize shape and pattern, or shoot a vase of flowers from below to give it a towering, majestic appearance. The creativity of angles is in your hands.

### **9. Make sure you spend time editing your still life photography**

Post-processing can make a huge difference to your still life photos, so I highly recommend you spend time editing your images in Lightroom, Photoshop, Capture One, or some other program.



Start out with basic adjustments, such as white balance, exposure, contrast, and saturation. Then, as you become more experienced, play around with more advanced options.

Consider doing HDR photography, where you take several images at different exposure levels then blend them together in Lightroom. Or use Photoshop to add a beautiful texture to your image for a painterly look.

## *Still Life Photography The Ultimate Guide (+ 9 Tips) . . . Continued*

### **How to create stunning still life photography: final words**

As you've discovered, the world of still life photography offers a vast playground for creativity, exploration, and skill-building. By working with themes, you can craft images that are not only visually stunning but also filled with depth and story. Shooting from different angles adds another layer of expression and offers endless possibilities for capturing ordinary objects in extraordinary ways.

Remember to embrace the tools and techniques outlined, and practice to see how they transform your still life photography. The joy of creating mesmerizing still life photos isn't reserved for professionals; it's within your reach.

So experiment with lighting, composition, and editing. Have fun! Enjoy yourself! You're bound to end up with some stunning photos.

