

Simple photo shoot

By John Lucas

Shooting your work doesn't have to be difficult. I know it would be wonderful to have a separate place to shoot work and have a place set up and ready to go. Doesn't happen for most of us. I have to clean off my table saw to have a place. And then of course it requires that I get out all my equipment and background. Not really a problem for me because I have all the equipment in another room and easily accessible. This article will be about how to do it inexpensively and easily.

Most people are lulled into the photo booth concept. Although it is an easy way to shoot all kinds of things from jewelry on up it is not the best in my opinion. First is the background. Anything smooth and large enough will work. If you use material, iron it, please. Posterboard is easier and readily available. White, gray and black are good choices. Don't go with colors. They reflect up into the piece and change its color. It's easy to bend them into a gentle curve and then just tape them to the wall or a support.

Lighting. Any good light of known color will work. I say known color because you need to be able to set your white balance on your camera to the light. I buy FLD full spectrum bulbs from Alzodigital. They no longer carry the reflector that I use so until I find another source you will have to come up with your own lamp. This is a daylight balanced bulb. It should be 5500K and ideally have a CRI index of 92 or higher. Many cheaper bulbs may say they are light correct but they are not. I have found the Alzo bulbs actually do put out the light they say.

Lighting modifier. I make a panel out of PVC pipe. This one is about 28" square but you can make any size. Larger is better for this simple lighting purpose. I use translucent white fabric. Nylon is great. Needs to be thick enough that when you

hold it up and look through it you can see the lights in the ceiling but not tell what they are. I use small adhesive Velcro dots to hold the fabric to the pipe. I don't glue the pipe joints so it can easily be broken down for storage.

You need a way to hold the panel. Being a wood worker I made this years ago to hold lights. Just an X base with a turned pole. It collapses for storage. I simply velcro'd it to the light panel.



Set this up fairly close to the piece. Move the light back so it lights the whole panel. Raising it up will create a little more natural look to the piece. Now add a reflector on the other side. I use white foam core I buy at Hobby Lobby but any white cardboard will work.

Now set up the camera on a tripod. For this photo I am using a zoom lens set at 100mm. This is a small chip camera so that works out to be about 135mm on a full frame camera. This gives me enough distance to be able to put other light modifiers between me and the camera or simply a place to walk to adjust the lighting or piece if necessary. It also gives a more natural look. The narrow angle of a longer lens means your background won't have to be as large as well.

Set your white balance on the camera to your lighting. In this case I used the daylight setting. I put the camera in Program mode and took a photo.



You will notice that it's a little gray. That's because of the light colored wood and even lighter background. Your camera only knows average which is gray. To make it closer to correct I set the over/under exposure button to +1. It looks a lot better. Probably should have been +1.5 or even 2 but you can see the difference.



You can also see just a little of the edge of the background. I would of course crop that out later but I wanted to show that these were not edited photos.

Here is a photo of the lighting set up. I did sweep off the table saw before I started.



If the left side of the piece was too dark move the reflector closer. If it's too light move the reflector back or switch to a gray reflector. I painted the backside of this reflector with primer gray just for that purpose. You want one side to be darker than the other to give the work some shape.



I didn't have any really glossy pieces to shoot right now so I picked a darker wood that is pretty shiny to show you some of the problems. This same set up works pretty well even for this piece.

I took a photo again on program mode with set at +1. I would normally shoot on manual exposure but wanted to show you what happens in program mode. Because the piece is darker the overall average exposure is pretty close because the camera see's both white and dark. You will see that you can see the main lighted panel on the right and the fill panel on the left. The dark area in the middle is where the camera is and there aren't any panels for it to reflect. The bottom of the piece shows the white foreground.



What many of you do in this situation is to add a flash on the camera. This is rarely a good choice. Can you see the hotspot. If the background was darker you would also see a harsh shadow right around the piece.



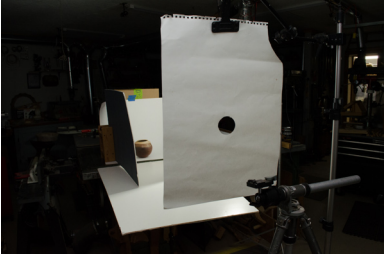
To help with this dark area I moved the right hand panel forward as far as I could and tilted it in toward the piece until it was just out of camera view. I did the same for the left panel. Then I took another piece of foam core and put it in front of the piece on the bottom. This extended back toward the camera. This reduces the size of the dark area because the bowl “see’s “ these reflectors.



To further get rid of the dark area what I normally do is to cover all the areas that the glossy piece sees with white cloth. I was getting tired , it had been a long day so I took a white piece of paper with a hole in it for the lens and shot through that. I would normally spend more time and use a bigger cloth or move everything closer to completely cover area reflected by the piece. Don't know if you will be able to see this since it needed to be closer and possibly more light shining on it but it was late and I was tired. Look in the center of the dark area.



Here is the photo showing this card.



Here is what the lens see's.



Well I could go a lot further but this should get you in the ball park. I will be writing an article shortly for More Woodturning online magazine. If you want to know more advance turning photography techniques keep your eye out for that. As always feel free to call me if you have questions. If your shooting work and have problems send me a photo of the work showing the problem and then back off and take a photo of your whole set up so I can see your lights and where you place them and I can usually solve your problem. Johnclucas45@gmail.com