A still life photograph featuring a large green melon with a small stem, a pomegranate with its seeds exposed, and a knife with a wooden handle. The scene is set on a dark wooden surface. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows, creating a professional food shot. The background is dark and out of focus.

Pro • Lighting

# FOOD SHOTS

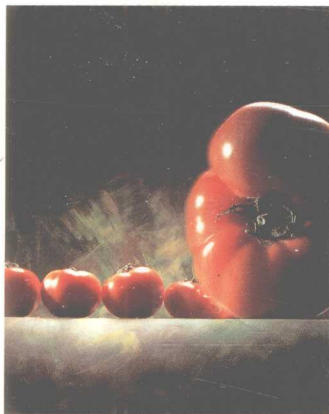
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GUIDE TO PROFESSIONAL LIGHTING TECHNIQUES

ROGER HICKS and FRANCES SCHULTZ

45

Pro • Lighting









Pro•Lighting

ROGER HICKS and FRANCES SCHULTZ

FOOD  
SHOTS



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THE MOST COMMON RESPONSE FROM THE PHOTOGRAPHERS WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THIS BOOK, WHEN THE CONCEPT WAS EXPLAINED TO THEM, WAS "I'D BUY THAT". THE AIM IS SIMPLE: TO CREATE A LIBRARY OF BOOKS, ILLUSTRATED WITH FIRST-CLASS PHOTOGRAPHY FROM ALL AROUND THE WORLD, WHICH SHOW EXACTLY HOW EACH INDIVIDUAL PHOTOGRAPH IN EACH BOOK WAS LIT.

Who will find it useful? Professional photographers, obviously, who are either working in a given field or want to move into a new field. Students, too, who will find that it gives them access to a much greater range of ideas and inspiration than even the best college can hope to present. Art directors and others in the visual arts will find it a useful reference book, both for ideas and as a means of explaining to photographers exactly what they want done. It will also help them to understand what the photographers are saying to them. Finally, of course, "pro/am" photographers who are on the cusp between amateur photography and earning money with their cameras will find it invaluable: it shows both the standards that are required, and the means of achieving them.

The lighting set-ups in each book vary widely, and embrace many different types of light source: electronic flash, tungsten, HMIs, and light brushes, sometimes mixed with daylight and flames and all kinds of other things. Some are very complex, while others are very simple. This variety is important, both as a source of ideas and inspiration and because each book as a whole has no axe to grind: there is no editorial bias towards one kind of lighting or another, because the pictures were chosen on the basis of impact and occasionally on the basis of technical difficulty. Certain subjects are, after all, notoriously difficult to light and can present a challenge even to experienced photographers. Only after the picture selection has been made was there any attempt to understand the lighting set-up.

While the books were being put together, it was however interesting to

see how there was often a broad consensus of opinion on equipment and techniques within a particular discipline. In food photography for example, one might correctly have predicted that most



photographers would use cool-running flash rather than hot tungsten, which melts ice-cream and dries out moist food; but the remarkable prevalence of slight back lighting might not have been so immediately obvious to anyone not

experienced in that field. In glamour, there was much more use of tungsten – perhaps to keep the model warm? – but a surprising number of photographers shot daylight film under tungsten lighting for a seriously warm effect. After going through each book, one can very nearly devise a "universal lighting set-up" which will work for the majority of pictures in a particular speciality, and which needs only to be tinkered with to suit individual requirements. One will also see that there are many other ways of doing things.

The structure of the books is straightforward. After this initial introduction, which is common to all the books in the series, there is a brief guide and glossary of lighting terms. Then, there is a specific introduction to the individual area or areas of photography which are covered by the book. Sub-divisions of each discipline are arranged in chapters, inevitably with a degree of overlap, and each chapter has its own introduction. Finally, at the end of the book, there is a directory of those photographers who have contributed work.

If you would like your work to be considered for inclusion in future books, please write to Quarto Publishing plc, 6 Blundell Street, London N7 9BH, England, and request an Information Pack. DO NOT SEND PICTURES, either with the initial inquiry or with any subsequent correspondence, unless you are requested to; unsolicited pictures may not always be returned. When a book is planned which corresponds with your particular area of expertise, we will contact you. Until then, we hope that you enjoy this book, that you find it useful, and that it helps you in your work.

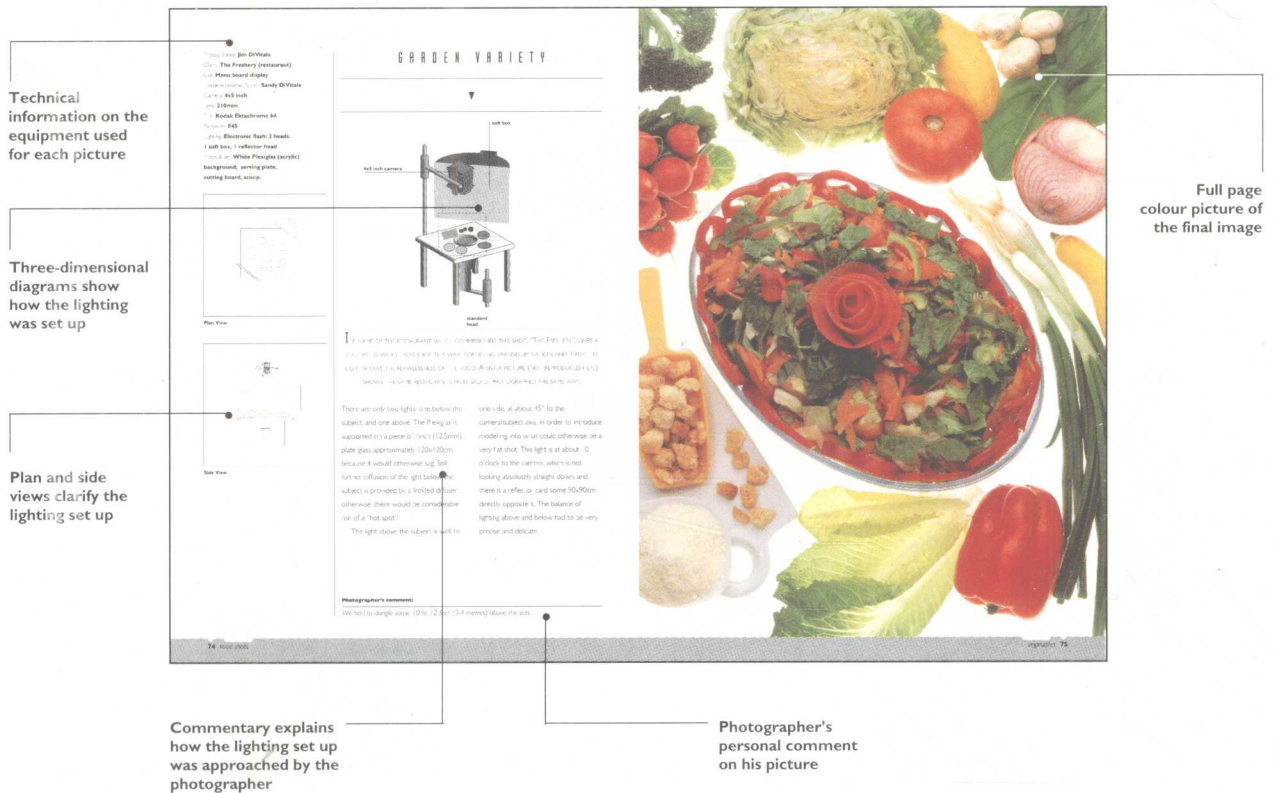






# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

THE LIGHTING DRAWINGS IN THIS BOOK WERE PREPARED FROM SKETCHES SUPPLIED BY THE PHOTOGRAPHERS THEMSELVES. NEEDLESS TO SAY, THESE VARIED SOMEWHAT IN QUALITY AND IN THE CARE WITH WHICH THEY WERE PUT TOGETHER. THEY HAVE HOWEVER BEEN CHECKED AGAINST THE PICTURES BY AN EXPERIENCED INDEPENDENT PHOTOGRAPHER, AND WHERE THERE WERE DISCREPANCIES, WE HOPE THAT THEY HAVE ALL BEEN CLARIFIED.



The drawings are not necessarily to scale, but that does not matter. After all, no photographer works strictly according to rules and preconceptions: there is always room to move this light a little to the left or right, to move that light closer or further away, and so forth. Likewise, the precise power of the individual lighting heads, or more importantly the lighting ratios are not always given; but again, this is something which can be "fine tuned" by the photographer if he or she wishes to reproduce the lighting set-ups in here. Besides, flash heads vary widely in efficiency, and therefore in light output

for a given rated power, and reflectors also vary widely in efficiency. In any case, people cannot always remember the finer details of what they did: lights are moved this way and that, or their power turned up or down, in accordance with the needs of the shot, and no records are kept.

We are however confident that there is more than enough information given about every single shot to merit its inclusion in the book: as well as just lighting techniques, there are also all kinds of hints and tips about commercial realities, photographic practicalities, and

the way of the world in general.

The book can therefore be used in a number of ways. The most basic, and perhaps the most useful for the beginner, is to study all the technical information concerning a picture which he or she particularly admires, together with the lighting diagrams, and to try to duplicate that shot as far as possible with the equipment available. We have deliberately omitted information about which makes of camera and lens were used, because it really does not matter very much whether you use a Linhof or an Arca or a Sinar; the important thing is

the format. The same would be true of a Hasselblad or a Mamiya. The same is of course true of the focal length: using a 127mm lens on a 6x7 cm camera is after all much the same as using 110mm or 120mm on 6x6 cm.

A more advanced use for the book is as a problem solver for difficulties you have already encountered: a particular technique of back lighting, say, or of creating a feeling of light and space. And, of course, it can always be used simply as a source of inspiration: "I wonder what would happen if I took *this* technique and applied it to *this* subject . . ."

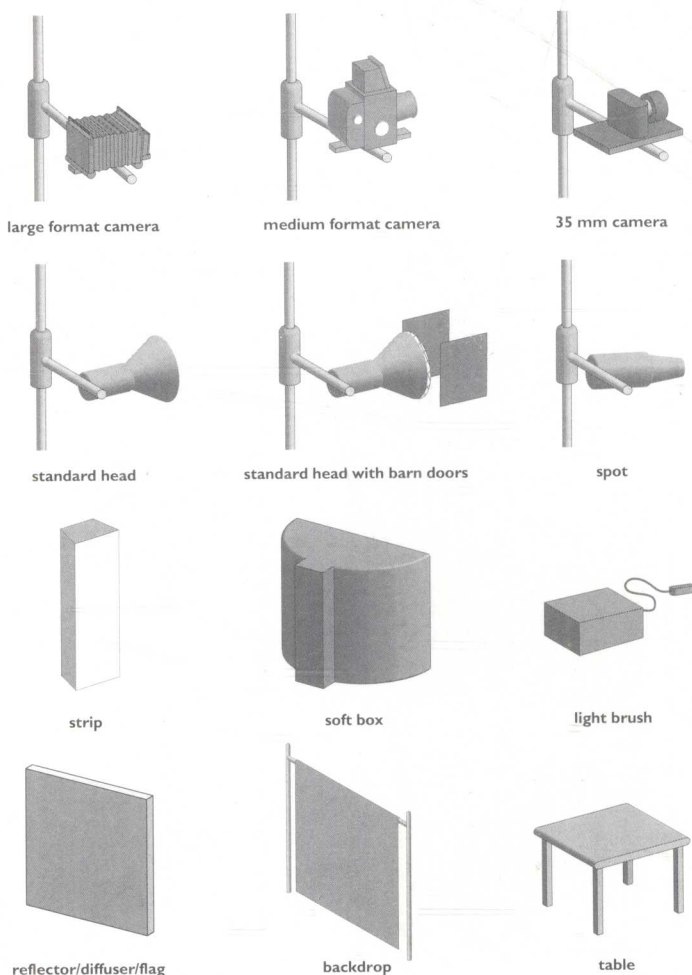
The information for each picture follows the same plan, though some individual headings may be omitted if they were irrelevant or unavailable. The photographer is credited first, then the client, together with the use for which the picture was taken. Next come the other members of the team who worked on the picture: stylists, models, art directors, or whoever. Camera and lens come next, followed by exposure. Where the lighting is electronic flash, only the aperture is given, as illumination is of course independent of shutter speed. Next, the lighting equipment is briefly summarized – whether tungsten or flash, and what sort of heads – and then comes film. With film, we have named brands and types, because different films have very different ways of rendering colours and tonal values. Finally there is a brief note on props and backgrounds. Often, this last entry will be obvious from the picture, but in other cases you may be surprised at what has been pressed into service, and how different it looks from its normal role.

However the most important part of the book is the pictures themselves. By studying these, and referring to the lighting diagrams and the text as necessary, you can work out how they were done; and showing how things are done is the brief to which the *Pro Lighting* series was created.

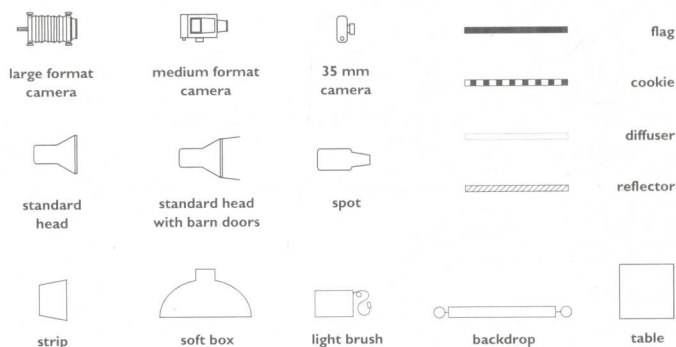
## DIAGRAM KEY

The following is a key to the symbols used in the three-dimensional and plan view diagrams. All commonly used elements such as standard heads, reflectors etc., are listed. Any special or unusual elements involved will be shown on the relevant diagrams themselves.

### THREE-DIMENSIONAL DIAGRAMS



### PLAN VIEW DIAGRAMS





# GLOSSARY OF LIGHTING TERMS



**L**IGHTING, LIKE ANY OTHER CRAFT, HAS ITS OWN JARGON AND SLANG. UNFORTUNATELY, THE DIFFERENT TERMS ARE NOT VERY WELL STANDARDIZED, AND OFTEN THE SAME THING MAY BE DESCRIBED IN TWO OR MORE WAYS OR THE SAME WORD MAY BE USED TO MEAN TWO OR MORE DIFFERENT THINGS. FOR EXAMPLE, A SHEET OF BLACK CARD, WOOD, METAL OR OTHER MATERIAL WHICH IS USED TO CONTROL REFLECTIONS OR SHADOWS MAY BE CALLED A FLAG, A FRENCH FLAG, A DONKEY OR A GOBO — THOUGH SOME PEOPLE WOULD RESERVE THE TERM "GOBO" FOR A FLAG WITH HOLES IN IT, WHICH IS ALSO KNOWN AS A COOKIE. IN THIS BOOK, WE HAVE TRIED TO STANDARDIZE TERMS AS FAR AS POSSIBLE. FOR CLARITY, A GLOSSARY IS GIVEN BELOW, AND THE PREFERRED TERMS USED IN THIS BOOK ARE ASTERISKED.

## Acetate

see Gel

## Acrylic sheeting

Hard, shiny plastic sheeting, usually methyl methacrylate, used as a diffuser ("opal") or in a range of colours as a background.

## \*Barn doors

Adjustable flaps affixed to a lighting head which allow the light to be shaded from a particular part of the subject.



Barn doors

## Boom

Extension arm allowing a light to be cantilevered out over a subject.

## \*Bounce

A passive reflector, typically white but also, for example, silver or gold, from which light is bounced back onto the

subject. Also used in the compound term "Black Bounce", meaning a flag used to absorb light rather than to cast a shadow.

## Continuous lighting

What its name suggests: light which shines continuously instead of being a brief flash.

## Contrast

see Lighting ratio

## Cookie

see Gobo

## \*Diffuser

Translucent material used to diffuse light. Includes tracing paper, scrim, umbrellas, translucent plastics such as Perspex and Plexiglas, and more.



Electronic flash: standard head with parallel snoot (Strobex)

## Donkey

see Gobo

## Effects light

Neither key nor fill; a small light, usually a spot, used to light a particular part of the subject. A hair light on a model is an example of an effects (or "FX") light.

## \*Fill

Extra lights, either from a separate head or from a reflector, which "fills" the shadows and lowers the lighting ratio.

## Fish fryer

A small Soft Box.

## \*Flag

A rigid sheet of metal, board, foam-core or other material which is used to absorb light or to create a shadow. Many flags are painted black on one side and white (or brushed silver) on the other, so that they can be used either as flags or as reflectors.

## \*Flat

A large Bounce, often made of a thick sheet of expanded polystyrene or foam-core (for lightness).

## Foil

see Gel

## French flag

see Flag

## Frost

see Diffuser

## \*Gel

Transparent or sometimes translucent coloured material used to modify the colour of a light. It is an abbreviation of "gelatine (filter)", though most modern "gels" for lighting use are actually of acetate.

## \*Gobo

As used in this book, synonymous with "cookie": a flag with cut-outs in it, to cast interestingly-shaped shadows. Also used in projection spots.



"Cookies" or "gobos" for projection spotlight (Photon Beard)

## \*Head

Light source, whether continuous or flash. A "standard head" is fitted with a plain reflector.

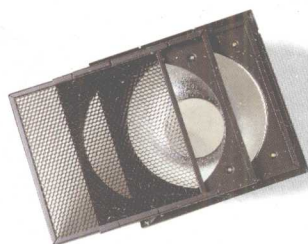
## \*HMI

Rapidly-pulsed and

effectively continuous light source approximating to daylight and running far cooler than tungsten. Relatively new at the time of writing, and still very expensive.

**\*Honeycomb**

Grid of open-ended hexagonal cells, closely resembling a honeycomb. Increases directionality of



**Honeycomb (Hensel)**

light from any head.

**Incandescent lighting**

see Tungsten

**Inky dinky**

Small tungsten spot.

**\*Key or key light**

The dominant or principal light, the light which casts the shadows.

**Kill Spill**

Large flat used to block spill.

**\*Light brush**

Light source "piped" through fibre-optic lead. Can be used to add highlights, delete shadows and modify lighting, literally by "painting with light".



**Electronic Flash: light brush "pencil" (Hensel)**



**Electronic Flash: light brush "hose" (Hensel)**

**Lighting ratio**

The ratio of the key to the fill, as measured with an incident light meter. A high lighting ratio (8:1 or above) is very contrasty, especially in colour, a low lighting ratio (4:1 or less) is flatter or softer. A 1:1 lighting ratio is completely even, all over the subject.

**\*Mirror**

Exactly what its name suggests. The only reason for mentioning it here is that reflectors are rarely mirrors, because mirrors create "hot spots" while reflectors diffuse light. Mirrors (especially small shaving mirrors) are however widely used, almost in the same way as effects lights.

**Northlight or North Light**

see Soft Box

**Perspex**

Brand name for acrylic sheeting.

**Plexiglas**

Brand name for acrylic sheeting.

**\*Projection spot**

Flash or tungsten head with projection optics for casting a clear image of a

gobo or cookie. Used to create textured lighting effects and shadows.



**Electronic Flash: projection spotlight (Strobex)**



**Tungsten Projection spotlight (Photon Beard)**

The light can only escape from the small hole in the



**Tungsten spot with conical snoot (Photon Beard)**



**Electronic Flash: standard head with parallel snoot (Strobex)**

**\*Reflector**

Either a dish-shaped surround to a light, or a bounce.

**\*Scrim**

Heat-resistant fabric diffuser, used to soften lighting.

**\*Snoot**

Conical restrictor, fitting over a lighting head.

end, and is therefore very directional.

**\*Soft box**

Large, diffuse light source made by shining a light through one or two layers of diffuser. Soft boxes come in all kinds of



**Tungsten spot with safety mesh (behind) and wire half diffuser scrim (Photon Beard)**





**Electronic flash: standard head with large reflector and diffuser (Strobex)**

shapes and sizes, from about 30x30cm to 120x180cm and larger. Some soft boxes are rigid; others are made of fabric stiffened with poles resembling fibreglass fishing rods. Also known as a northlight or a windowlight, though these can also be created by shining standard heads through large (120x180cm or larger) diffusers.

#### \*Spill

Light from any source which ends up other than on the subject at which it is pointed. Spill may be used to provide fill, or to light backgrounds, or it may be controlled with flags, barn doors, gobos etc.

#### \*Spot

Directional light source. Normally refers to a light using a focusing system



**Tungsten spot with removable Fresnel lens. The knob at the bottom varies the width of the beam (Photon Beard)**

with reflectors or lenses or both, a "focusing spot", but also loosely used as a reflector head rendered more directional with a honeycomb.

#### \*Strip or strip light

Lighting head, usually flash, which is much longer than it is wide.



**Electronic flash: strip light with removable barn doors (Strobex)**

#### Strobe

Electronic flash. Strictly, a "strobe" is a stroboscope or rapidly repeating light source, though it is also the name of a leading manufacturer:

Strobex, formerly Strobe Equipment.

#### Swimming pool

A very large Soft Box.

#### \*Tungsten

Incandescent lighting. Photographic tungsten

Umbrellas may be used as reflectors (light shining into the umbrella) or diffusers (light shining through the umbrella). The cheapest way of creating a large, soft light source.

#### Windowlight

Apart from the obvious meaning of light through a window, or of light shone through a diffuser to look as if it is coming through a window, this is another name for a soft box.

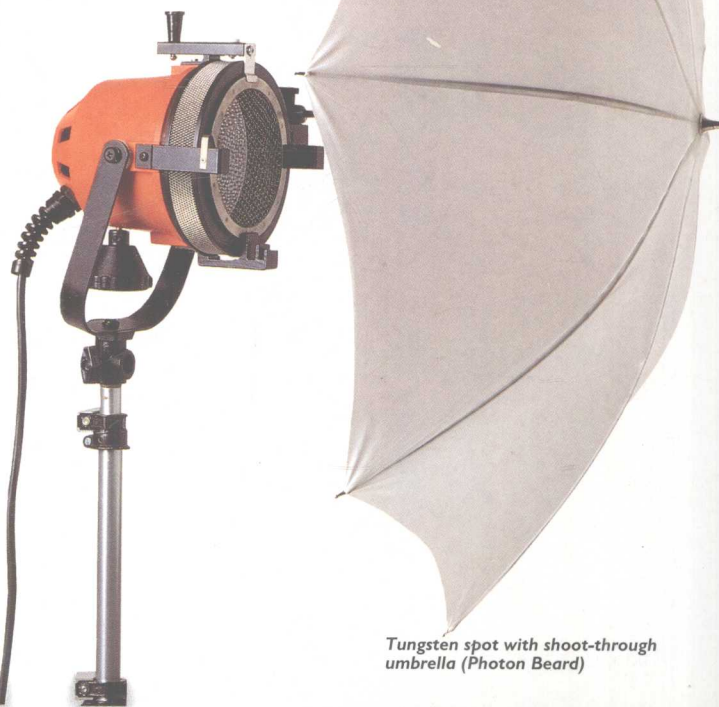


**Electronic flash: standard head with standard reflector (Strobex)**

lighting runs at 3200°K or 3400°K, as compared with domestic lamps which run at 2400°K to 2800°K or thereabouts.

#### \*Umbrella

Exactly what its name suggests; used for modifying light.



**Tungsten spot with shoot-through umbrella (Photon Beard)**



FOOD PHOTOGRAPHY ENJOYS A REPUTATION FOR CONSIDERABLE DIFFICULTY; A REPUTATION WHICH IS SUBSTANTIALLY, BUT NOT FULLY, DESERVED.

The good news is that of all the aspects of food photography, lighting is one of the lesser problems. The bad news is that food preparation and styling are very nearly as difficult as their reputation would lead you to believe.

Like almost all other branches of photography, food is something you need to care about if you are to be successful at it. Unless you genuinely like good food, you are extremely unlikely to be able to photograph it well, which may be why so many food photographers are far from slim.

Again like most other branches of photography, it demands a very high degree of perfectionism. A food photographer's job often begins with choosing ingredients, sorting through maybe dozens of avocados or peppers or bread rolls to pick the best-looking – and then picking some spares in case anything happens to the first example. But "best-looking" does not always equate with "most perfect". For example, a slightly misshapen or even marred tomato might be preferable to a perfect supermarket wonder, if what you are trying to convey is flavour and traditional culinary arts.

As a result of this perfectionism, food photography can sometimes be very wasteful. One photographer, for example, tells of using 21 litres of ice cream to shoot just one bowl. Only the first two or three spoonfuls from the top of the tub would have the right texture: the remainder would compact, and not look right. The only way to do the shot was to shoot the same thing (no two bowls were quite identical, for obvious reasons) again and again.

You may feel that what we have just said, together with what follows, is stating

the obvious. This is fair enough; but sometimes, it is only by stating the obvious that one can think about a subject clearly. It is like using a check list. You may know every item on it, but unless you go through the check list, there is always the danger that you will forget something. Also, by stating the obvious, one can sometimes get around a "block" caused by a preconception. Instead of saying, "It has to be like this," you can find yourself saying, "Why does it have to be like this?" Asking yourself such questions can be a useful spur to creativity.

## THE PURPOSE OF FOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

The purpose of food photography is basically to make people want to eat the food. Within this broad remit, there are however two very different ways to approach the problem.

At one extreme, where you are shooting what purports to be pre-packed food to appear on the outside of a box or package – the sort of thing which is labelled *serving suggestion* – the aim is to make the food look almost supernaturally perfect. No one seriously expects the food to look like that when they open the box. They expect the usual flaws and they will get them.

At the other extreme, for some kinds of editorial food photography – especially cook books – you can actually benefit from having something of a ragged edge; many people prefer the sort of dish which looks as if they could have prepared it themselves. It cannot afford to be as artless as it seems of course, but it does not have to be perfection made real. The question of the flawed tomato, mentioned above, comes into this.

In between these two extremes, there

are endless gradations. An editorial shot for an expensive glossy magazine, for example, is likely to be very different from an editorial shot for a more down-market, family oriented publication.

One constant though, is that texture is normally very important in food photography: only rarely can you get away with diffusion or grain or anything else which conceals the texture of the food itself. A psychologist might argue that this is because, by definition, we see our food very close up, so we are accustomed to rich texture and detail; but it does not matter very much why it is so. All that matters is that it is so. This is why a great deal of food photography is done on 4x5inch/9x12cm film, and a surprising amount is still done on 8x10inch, though it is possible to use roll film if you stick with the best available lenses and the sharpest available films. You may find, however, that even with roll film you will need a camera with movements, in order to get front-to-back sharpness using the Scheimpflug rule.

## FOOD, INGREDIENTS AND LIFESTYLE

There is an old rhyme among advertising men, which goes,

*If your client screams and yells,  
Print a picture of what he sells.  
If he still should prove refractory,  
Print a picture of his factory.  
Only in a desperate case,  
Print a picture of his face.*

Printing a picture of what he sells is as far as you dare go in food advertising, and there are times when you can run yourself into trouble by doing even that. Some meals are merely dull to look at while others may taste delicious, but look distinctly unappetizing.

In this case, you have three choices.



The first is that you can, by sheer genius, make unappetizing or dull food look good. There are examples of this in these pages. The second is that you use ingredients, rather than the finished dish, as the main subject of the shot. Most ingredients can be made to look appetizing, and there are examples of ingredients shots in this book too. The third choice is to make the food itself – with or without ingredients – a subsidiary element in the picture, which instead concentrates on what might loosely be called “lifestyle”.

These “lifestyle” shots can cover an immense range. A perennially popular approach is the “Country Kitchen”, which uses warm evening sunlight, old wood, and weathered brick or stone, to create a welcoming ambience. Another is what one might call the “neo-Japanese” look, in which textures and shapes are contrasted in a way which corresponds more or less to the traditional canons of Japanese art. This is very much the approach adopted by “nouvelle cuisine”. A third is the “gracious living” approach, with elegant silverware, snowy damask, fine china and beautifully polished wood. Yet a fourth, for want of a better name, might be called “high-tech”, using strong, graphic shapes and colours, often with a lot of white in the picture.

#### THE FOOD STUDIO

The food studio itself does not have to be very big; a few square metres will suffice for many kinds of food. After all, the subject is not very big, and it is really only for “lifestyle” shots that you need much space. A surprising number of food photographers find that they can work at home, though if they do, their homes tend to be large, Victorian houses with high ceilings; a modern small house really would be too small. Some photographers even have parts of their houses rebuilt to serve as sets; the “country kitchen” look and the “gracious living” look in particular lend themselves to this sort of approach.

On the other hand, you do need food

preparation facilities close at hand, a subject to which we shall return in a moment under the heading “Props and Logistics”.

#### LIGHTING EQUIPMENT FOR FOOD

The vast majority of food photographers work with electronic flash, simply because continuous (incandescent) lighting is too hot: greenery wilts, food dries out, ice cream melts, condensation evaporates . . . The list of problems is almost endless.

The great advantage of incandescent lighting, on the other hand, is that it is inherently warm and welcoming: in food photography, as in people photography, it is very difficult to err too far on the side of warmth. Cold, blue lighting and films with a cold, blue colour balance will almost invariably make food look profoundly unappetizing. At the very least, you need “gold” or colour-balanced flash tubes and warm colour films, and it is by no means unusual to use 81-series warming filters on the camera lens and all sorts of amber, yellow and orange filters over the lights themselves. It is also quite common to see tungsten being used for effects lights, even when the overall lighting set-up is flash or HMI and the film is daylight balanced.

You can get away with remarkably little lighting equipment, especially if you use mirrors and other small reflectors, but it would be a rash photographer who undertook food photography with access to fewer than four heads, a large soft box, and an assortment of reflectors, snoots, barn doors and honeycombs. Focusing spots are extremely useful, and although they are expensive, projection spots are a Godsend.

#### LOGISTICS, PROPS AND BACKGROUNDS

The real problem with food photography is logistical: you need a well-equipped kitchen, preferably with gas and electric hobs, two or three ovens, and at least one microwave. You are also likely to need a good, large freezer and a large refrigerator. In practice, a well-equipped

domestic kitchen will suffice for many, though not all, types of food photography. Apart from this, you also need good, reliable sources for photogenic ingredients, some of which may not be the kind of thing you will find in every grocery store. It is well worth cultivating your local butchers, greengrocers and market stall holders in order to get attractive ingredients, and you may need to make trips to specialist stores to get the more unusual ingredients. Photographers who live in big cities will have an easier time than photographers who live in small country villages.

Props fall into three groups. The first is what you might call “kitchen” props: crockery, cutlery, cutting boards, baskets and bowls to hold the food, utensils of various kinds and so forth. These are the kind of things which you would expect to find in a kitchen or dining room, and are seen at their most prominent in “country kitchen” shots. The second group could be called “pure” props, and are seen more clearly in what were called above the “neo-Japanese” and “high-tech” styles. They include flowers and other objects which are attractive in their own right, but which are not immediately and obviously related to the preparation or consumption of food. The third group could be called “fakes”, and include all the things which you use to make food look more convincing. Glass marbles are used to bulk out soups and stews which do not fill the pan deep enough; fake ice, either sculpted from clear plastic or in the curious colloidal form marketed by Condor of Italy, substitutes for the real thing. The extent to which you use these things depends on your conscience: there are some photographers who simply will not use cigarette smoke to represent steam, or glycerine to make food look juicy. It is also worth adding that fakery is probably on the decline; more and more photographers today are telling it as it is.

Closely related to props are garnishes, and indeed it can sometimes be hard to draw a line between the two: there is



little philosophical difference between a prop and a non-edible garnish.

Garnishes fulfill a number of different purposes. They make the food look attractive, obviously, and this is as important to the domestic or professional cook as to the photographer; but from the photographer's point of view, they have several subsidiary purposes. One is to break up large, dull areas of monotonous texture and colour: a sprig of parsley on a sandwich may add little from a culinary viewpoint, but it usually looks a lot better than an expanse of plain bread. Another is to cover flaws such as a crack in a pie crust, or a tiny missing corner in a piece of otherwise perfectly cut cheese. Finally, garnishes provide visual balance, by introducing a splash of colour or form in an otherwise empty area.

Although over-garnishing can be a problem, the wise food photographer will always have a good idea of appropriate garnishes for any dish – inappropriate garnishes will do nothing for your credibility, and “foodies” can be very critical – and a good stock of those garnishes to hand.

Finally, backgrounds are as much a matter of fashion as anything else, but if you study the photographs in this book and elsewhere you will find an extraordinary variety. Wood is an obvious choice, from ancient farmhouse tables (or passable imitations thereof) to elegantly polished mahogany and rosewood. Various forms of stone are also very popular, and some food photographers' studios resemble masons' yards with great heaps of stone stacked in the corner and in the yard outside; you need strong assistants to help you move them.

#### THE TEAM

Depending on the sort of food photography you want to do, you are likely to need a good deal of assistance. On a commercial shoot, it is virtually impossible for one photographer to work on his or her own, without any

assistants or domestic economists or food stylists. And it is only possible for two photographers to take food pictures without assistance if they are both good cooks in their own right, as well as being fair stylists. The smallest team you can conveniently work with for editorial food photography is three; and once again, all three must be enthusiastic and skilled in food preparation and styling as well as in photography. For speed and efficiency, the three-person team is ideal; but it will be over-stretched if the brief calls for “picture perfect” food. In this case, the ideal is a team of four-and-a-gofer. The domestic economist prepares the food; the stylist's job is self-explanatory; the “gofer” washes dishes and collects ingredients (a gofer with a motorcycle is invaluable); and then there is the photographer and his or her assistant.

Despite all this, it is possible to learn a great deal about food photography single-handed, if you choose the right food – namely, food which will survive for ten minutes (or maybe even longer) without drying up, curling, losing its shine, or otherwise becoming unattractive. Cold food is a good bet, as are pictures of ingredients as described above. Even a salad or a sandwich will slowly lose its charm however, so you have to be prepared to work quickly, and to re-make your subject as necessary. If you are a student, you may find it useful to work with one or two fellow students, who need not necessarily be fellow photographers: painters and sculptors, catering students (obviously enough) and others may well be interested in working with you. You can also eat the stuff afterwards; the traditional painter's still life of a loaf of bread, a piece of cheese, an onion and a mug of ale is an instructive subject to try to photograph, and a welcome addition to the diet. Why do you think so many painters concentrated on precisely the same subjects?

#### THE FOOD SHOT

The normal drill in a food shot is as follows. You begin by marshalling all the ingredients, all the props, all the backgrounds, and all the people. You then rough out the lighting, using the actual set, but with something else standing in for the food. Crumpled tissue paper of various colours is very useful for blocking in the shapes and approximate colours. This is the stage at which you determine the overall lighting and the exposure, making Polaroid tests as necessary; anyone who shoots food without Polaroids is asking for trouble.

Two identical dishes are then prepared in succession. The first is used to verify the lighting and the exposure. Detail changes are made as necessary, and the second version of the same dish is substituted for the first, for the final shot.

It is, however, as well to be prepared for the “right first time” syndrome, where the dish looks much better the first time than it does the second. This is familiar in many fields, but in food photography, it seems to happen inconveniently often. If everything does look right first time, then by all means shoot immediately; after all, you can always shoot the second dish as well, but you will have the choice of two pictures. Do not even shoot a Polaroid test if everything goes right; either bracket (on roll film) or if you are shooting on cut film, then use the “process one, hold one” technique and have the speed of the second sheet adjusted at the lab if necessary. By all means shoot a Polaroid test after you have shot on the transparency film, but do not waste time shooting it beforehand if you do experience the “right first time” syndrome. Some food photographers find that as many as one-third of their pictures, maybe even more, come out better on the first shot than on the second.





# 1 abc appetizers, beverages and cooking techniques