

“STILL LIFE” by Joyce Gilbert



PART ONE - HOW I CAME TO PHOTOGRAPHY

I came to photography, believe it or not, by purchasing a computer. My daughter was going off to Australia and she thought it would be a good way for us to keep us in touch.

With the computer installed I then felt I needed some tuition. I asked around and found this lady who lived quite near me, who eventually became a very good friend. She was a member of the then North Norfolk Photographic Club as they were known then.

She persuaded me to go along and join. I found it a friendly club, mostly men and very serious about their photography. With the help of my friend, it was not long before I found myself buying my first serious camera. I guess you could say I had caught the bug and remained a member for a good number of years.

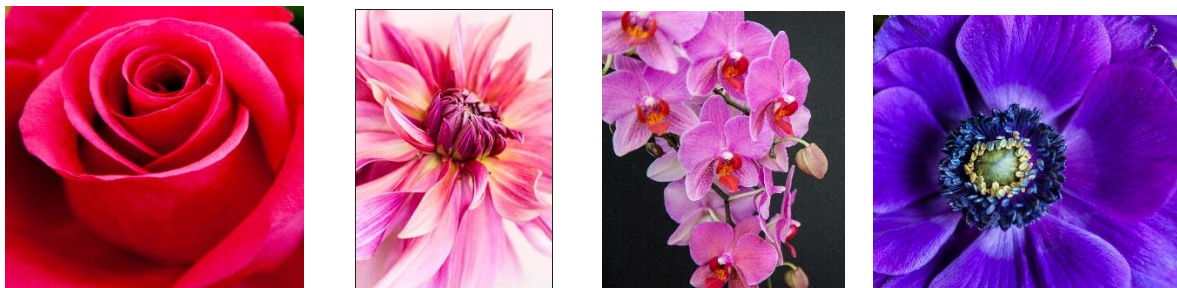
I also found other outlets like the U3A where I then found other classes; one of them was our own Digital Photographic Group. Way back then it was run by a photographer KEITH Chinn. Keith was a very good landscape photographer.

We used to bring our three photos in each month in print form. He then would put them up on an easel and advise us on how to better our photos. Digital was just beginning. At this club one of our then members told me about a course she had taken. Being as I was looking to further my photography, I decided to embark on this photography course.



It was one of my best decisions. This course gave me such a wide scope of camera, technique and processing as well as meeting up with like-minded people each week. My subjects for my photography at this time were Architecture and Landscape; the course gave me plenty of scope for both subjects. Their photoshoots were so good.

On the second year of the course, I had my eyes opened to a variety of subjects, one being the photographing of flowers and Still Life. Although I have painted flowers as an art form it was a great opportunity to use the camera in a creative art form.



Apart from arriving each week with all the camera gear there was the added baggage of bunches of flowers, some weeks pot plants and of course anything else one assumes you will want to make up a good picture.

Our tutor would allocate each one of us a space and armed with lights and Macro Lens we would then be given instruction. But once given the theory we were left to use our own creative way to produce a picture. You then produce a picture for the following week for it to be assessed, where all the mistakes are addressed, and how to put them right.

PART TWO – GETTING STARTED

Flower and Still Life subjects are not for everyone but here are a few tips if you think you would like to do something different. There are lots of approaches to photographing flowers; but here we are focusing on how to get high-end results with a basic, naturally lit, home studio set-up.

HOME STUDIO

To set up your own budget home studio, you will need a tripod, your coloured paper, a sheet of white A4 paper, your flowers and a small vase.

CHOICE OF SUBJECT

Choose your flowers carefully; try to stick to a wide-headed flower such as Anemones, poppies, sunflowers or dahlia.



BACKGROUND & POSITION

Next, think about your background. You could use a sheet of A3 or A4 paper with a similar colour to your flower or try a texture that would blend in to give you a good background. You should choose a spot immediately next to a window, and ensure any lights in your room are turned off.

PART THREE – THE SHOOT:

1. POSITION YOUR SUBJECT.
2. CHOOSE YOUR SETTINGS. SET YOUR ISO FOR MINIMAL NOISE, CHOOSE APERTURE F8
3. SHOOT IN RAW FORMAT.
4. SET WHITE BALANCE TO DAYLIGHT.
5. ACTIVATE THE 2 SECOND TIMER TO ELIMATE THE RISK OF CAMERA SHAKE.
6. FOCUS USING LIVE VIEW IF YOU HAVE THIS ON YOUR CAMERA.
7. MANUALLY FOCUSING IN LIVE VIEW IS THE MOST ACCURATE FOCUSING METHOD FOR STATIC OBJECTS.THIS IS BECAUSE YOU CAN ZOOM 10X ON YOUR FOCAL POINT AND ADJUST THE MANUAL FOCUS RING WITH AMAZING ACCURACY.
8. FILL IN HARSH SHADOWS
9. DIRECTIONAL WINDOW LIGHT HELPS TO GIVE THE FLOWER SHAPE AND DEPTH.
10. HOWEVER, IF YOU FEEL THE SHADOWS ON ONE SIDE OF THE FLOWERS ARE TOO HARSH, SIMPLY HOLD A SHEET OF WHITE A4 PAPER IN POSITION TO REFLEX SOME LIGHT BACK INTO IT.



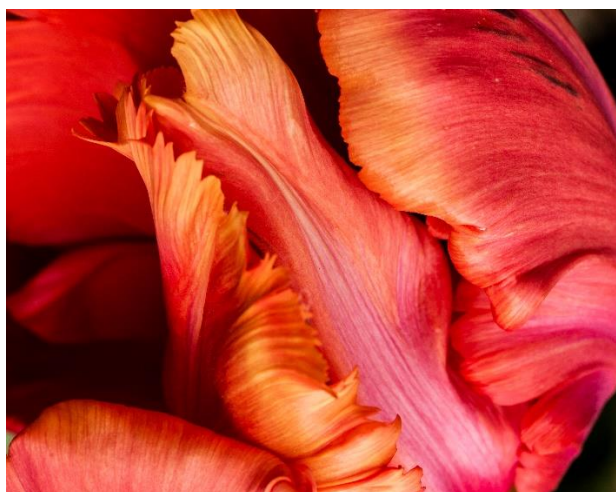
PART FOUR – GENERAL ADVICE:

TAKE YOUR TIME

Deciding on your base, background and subjects can be tricky at first. Be clear about what you are trying to say with your composition, and then play with different combinations. If you are struggling to create what you are visualising, have a break and come back to it. You'll often find everything clicks on your return.

STAY FOCUSED

For simple flower set-ups I use a shallow depth of field (around f4 to f8) but for something more complicated can look better around f11 to f16, which will keep everything in the composition in focus. Do not place your objects too close to the background or you can run the risk of overpowering your composition.



CHOOSE YOUR OBJECTS WISELY

A Still Life arrangement can be made up of pretty much anything, so long as the objects are inanimate. I tend to source older and vintage items as they often have interesting texture and patina. Think about how your objects are related to one another, such as a book and reading glasses, and look for complementary colours and patterns.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

A still life composition can feature a single object, such as a flower, or consist of a combination of items. Try experimenting with common objects that you find around the house. I use old books, vases, teacups, tablecloths, weathered wood, fruit vegetables, bottles and fresh or dried flowers, for example.

STILL LIFE PHOTOGRAPHY INVOLVES A FAIR AMOUNT OF TRIAL AND ERROR, SO BE PREPARED TO EXPERIMENT.

Think about how colours and textures work together, and try to communicate a style or mood or story through your composition.