

SAMPLE

THE **FOOD** **PHOTOGRAPHY** BOOK

Practical how-tos and game changing tips that make all the difference



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This is the book I wish I had when I started learning food photography.

Highly practical. Actual “how to” steps, not just concepts. I’m sharing all my game changers!

Hi there! I’m Nagi from [RecipeTin Eats](#) food blog.

I was born a foodie. It’s in my blood and it was inevitable that one day, I would walk away from my corporate finance career to pursue a future in the food industry.

And that’s exactly what I did. I started my blog and picked up a DSLR camera for the first time in May 2014.

10 months later, I was making an independent living from my blog and related activities, including photo shoots for commercial clients.

There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that the rate at which I was able to grow my blog was impacted by my photography. I invested an enormous amount of time researching, learning and most importantly, practicing.

When I started out, I found that the resources I used were full of tips and concepts, but they didn’t actually explain how to apply all those in practice. And some really big game changing tips were completely omitted!

As I practiced more and more, things began to “click”. Little things I figured out that made all the difference.

So this is The Food Photography Book. The book where I cover the basics as well as sharing the really juicy tips that took my photography to a level where I was taking on photography clients less than a year after I picked up a DSLR for the first time ever.

This is a highly practical book and doesn’t require fancy photography equipment. I use consumer grade equipment (i.e. budget!) and I don’t have fancy extras!

I hope you find it useful!

- Nagi



My Number 1 Tip:

Don't try to learn and practice everything at once. Take out as many variables as possible by starting with a simple "plonk and snap" set up so you can concentrate on learning lighting, camera angles, where to focus and camera settings.

Use minimal props and just concentrate on the food. Then build on that by adding one extra thing at a time.

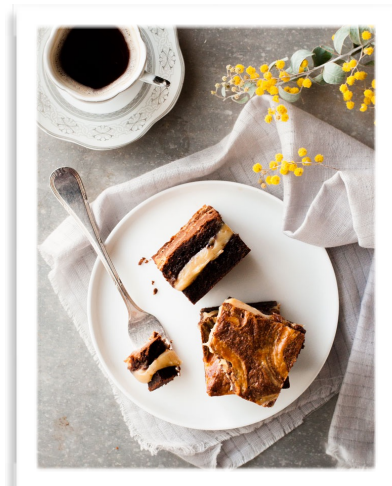


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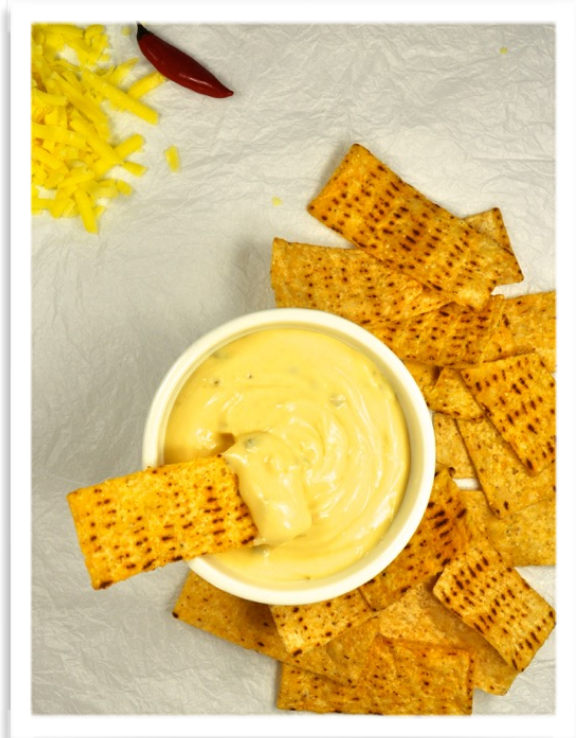
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Then....and now....

Month 1 - May 2014



Month 4 - August 2014



Month 8 - December 2014



Month 15 - July 2015



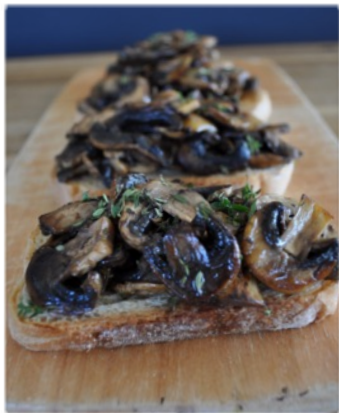


What's Wrong

- X Shooting under house lights and using the camera flash
- X Yellow shooting surfaces
- X No styling

What's Right

- ✓ Lighting
- ✓ Styled food
- ✓ Show off its best features!



What's Wrong

- X Not enough light
- X Unflattering yellow tone wooden board and shooting surface
- X Crooked photo

What's Right

- ✓ Shot straight!
- ✓ **Directional** lighting
- ✓ Better styling using dark wood



What's Wrong

- X Wrong props - blue fabric dominates far too much!
- X Too much light = washed out photo

What's Right

- ✓ Better, more subtle use of props
- ✓ Directional lighting coming from behind the food = glossy sauce + texture and colour enhancement



Chapter 3: LIGHTING

With great light, you can keep styling and props simple.



Introduction

Lighting is the single most important aspect of photography. With great lighting, you can take a beautiful shot no matter what camera you have, even an iPhone, with simple styling and props.

Lighting is also the hardest thing to master. It's certainly what I struggled with the most. I found that the resources I used at the beginning were focussed on concepts and the practical side was loosely explained. With practice, I figured lighting out for myself and with each new "thing" that clicked, my photos drastically improved.

So instead of concepts, this book is highly practical and focussed on how to recognise, find and create great light to show off the amazing food you create.

This book focuses on easy ways to find, recognise, manage and CREATE great light for food photos.



The 10 Commandments of Light

1. Never use the camera flash or take photos under house lights.
2. You need enough light.....
3.but TOO much light results in washed out photos. Shooting on your covered, open porch and under the shade of a tree are classic examples. **(KEY TIP!)**
4. Directional lighting is when light is mostly coming from one direction. It makes food look amazing. **(KEY TIP!)**
5. The most flattering light direction for food is side and backlighting. **(KEY TIP!)**
6. Light coming from the front of the food (3 o'clock to 9 o'clock) is the least flattering.
7. The smaller the gap through which the light source is directed onto the food, the more dramatic the lighting. That's how to create dark, dramatic style photos.
8. Diffuse your light to make your photos "glow". Cloudy days are great because light is naturally diffused. **(KEY TIP!)**
9. Create extra light and reduce unwanted dark areas by using reflectors/bounce cards. **(KEY TIP!)**
10. Taking good photos in direct sunlight is hard. You need strong diffusion and low sun.

Use my Secret Lighting Test (page 45).
Without taking a shot, you'll know if the lighting will be flattering.



Rule #1: Never Use House Lights or the Flash

Don't do it! The built in camera flash is not a friend of food. The photo just looks like....well, like it's been taken with a flash!

Same goes for kitchen lights and any other lights in the house. Even if the house lights are bright enough, the big problem is the hue it casts over the photo.

It is virtually impossible to get correct colour tones on a photo taken under house lights because house lights tend to have warm/yellow tones so it casts a yellow tone over the photos. Fixing the colour balance of photos taken under house lights is challenging even for experienced photographers.



House lights...don't do it!

Rule #2: You need enough light...

If you don't have enough light, you will either have to compensate by reducing your shutter speed so low that you end up with a blurry photo, especially without a tripod, or you'll end up with a dark, dreary, grey photo.

When you learn how to use your manual camera settings, you will be very surprised at how great photos come out even in what you think are low light situations. Even in winter, I can shoot until the sun is almost completely down and you'd never know by looking at the photo.

Learn how to:

- Make sure your photos are exposed enough by using the Exposure Meter in your DSLR camera - see page 28;
- Use your camera settings to compensate for low light using the Camera Settings Cheat Sheet - see page 32;
- Create extra light using reflectors - see page 56; and
- Use artificial lighting - see Chapter 8.



I hit the jackpot with this one - not enough light PLUS flash. Delicious looking!

Chapter 7: LIGHTING SETUPS

This chapter walks through how to do the following:

- Direct Backlighting set up - when the light is coming from directly behind the food. This is the light direction I use the least;
- Side Lighting set up - when the light is coming from directly beside the food; and
- Side Backlighting - **my favorite light direction** because it encompasses the best of backlighting and side lighting and is the easiest to work with.

Backlighting

Backlighting is a very flattering light direction for food because it makes things “glow”. But it is the most difficult, because:

- You need to arrange the reflector in a way that it isn't obstructing the shot;
- You need to manage overexposure/ “blow out” at the back of the photo;
- You need to manage the balance between the strength of light at the back of the photo and the dark front of the photo. Too much contrast means the back of the photo will be massively blown out with severe loss of detail blurring into the main subject. And not enough contrast will result either in a totally blown out photo or a photo that looks washed out (i.e. shooting with *too much light*); and
- You can easily end up with *too much reflection* on the surface of food. I went way overboard with backlighting when I first discovered it!



Chapter II: FOOD STYLING

Food styling refers to how you style the food to make it look as amazing as it tastes. Some foods, like brightly coloured dishes, are far easier to style than foods that “look ugly” but taste amazing. A classic example is “brown foods” - like casseroles and curries.

Food styling is such an art that people make a career out of it! Photo shoots for gourmet magazines and cookbooks typically involve a recipe developer, a cook, food stylist and photographer.

Professionals often cook different components of a dish separately then assemble it for the shot as it gives them great control over the styling. So for example, to take a shot of a one pot pasta - cook the pasta, sauce, vegetables etc separately, then put it together for the photo.

I do not do this! This book is a little more practical for real life and assumes that the food is cooked as per the recipe.

My Tips and Tricks

1. Show off the greatest feature of the dish

Before you plate up the food, the thing you must ask yourself is this: “What is the greatest feature of this recipe?”

Once you get in the habit of this, styling your shot is going to come much more easily because you will automatically start plating up your food in a way that shows it off the most. And seeking a lighting angle that shows off that feature the best.

In the photo on the right, the feature is the sticky sauce on the chicken. I made sure to use side backlighting and shoot fairly low so the surface of the chicken would look nice and glossy.



2. Garnish, garnish

Almost everything looks better with a little bit of garnish, even if you wouldn't use it in real life! Whether it's a sprinkle of crushed nuts, scallions/shallots, herbs or spice, or even more of one of the ingredients in the dish, almost every food benefits from a touch of something.

Tip: Keep a bag of dried parsley handy! It's a lifesaver for those days when you don't have fresh herbs. It comes out pretty green in photos and you'd have to inspect it closely to know it's dried!

The other thing I have taken to doing is freezing chopped parsley. Curly parsley, rather than flat leaf parsley, works the best because it stays separated and “fluffy” when it freezes, making it easy to take a pinch and sprinkle it lightly over the food. Sprinkle while frozen as once it defrosts, it becomes wet and you can't sprinkle it as easily. Also, chopped parsley keeps for around 1 week in the fridge and stays green enough. Most of my photos use either DIY dried or frozen parsley garnish!

Chapter 14: BACKBOARDS/SHOOTING SURFACES

TIP: The more interesting, weathered and textured a shooting surface is, the less props you need.

Having one great backboard makes a profound impact on your food photography. A really great rustic, textured, weathered backboard not only adds loads of character and mood to a photo, but it also means you can use far less props in a shot because the shooting surface itself is so much more interesting. The more interesting the backboard is, the less styling and props you need.

I fluffed around for ages in the early days trying to find backboards and figuring out which ones worked best. You don't need to spend a fortune on backboards - though it is easier if you buy them from speciality photography prop stores! I personally have never spent more than \$10 on a backboard.

If there's one piece of advice I can give you about props, it's this: Invest the time to find or make **one great backboard**. Even if it means skipping a post because of time limitations. It is worth its weight in gold. *I wish someone had emphasised that to me when I started out!*

Tips for Choosing Backboards

1. **Cooler colours are easier to use. Avoid yellowy and orange tones.** They just aren't flattering and are harder to work with (until you become a pro!). Whites, grey tones and dark colours are easier to work with.



✓ Styling can be kept simple when using shooting surfaces with texture.



✗ Avoid yellow and orange tone surfaces.



✗ Avoid shiny laminate surfaces.

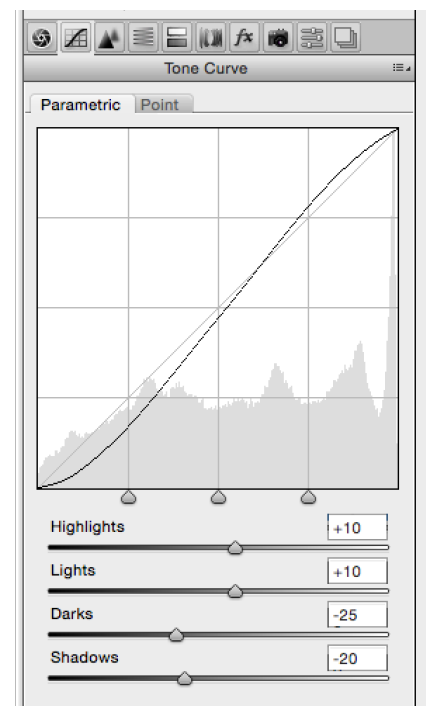
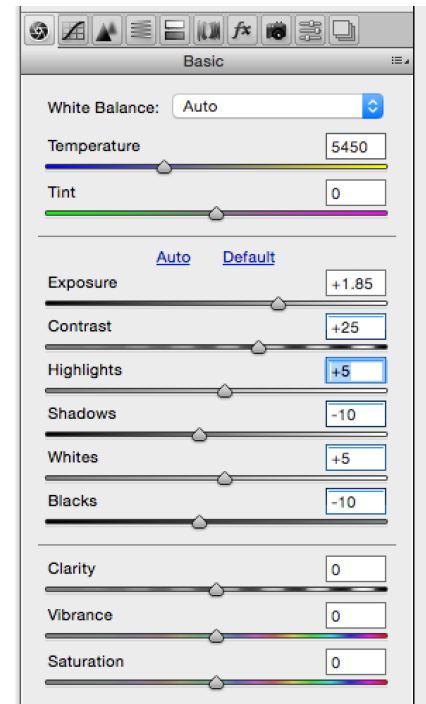
As I mentioned on page 162, I have a slight preference towards the Tone Curves but that is because I have become comfortable with using them.

So to get the contrast balance in the Nachos Pie photo to my taste, I would use the Tone Curves more than the Tone Sliders.

Here are the settings I have decided I am happy with:

- Tone Sliders - all pulled back to around half the settings in step 8; and
- Tone Curve - left the same as per step 9.

Here's the edited photo I'm moving forward with.



That's it! And here's the post edited shot. Not bad for a few quick clicks!



Out of camera



After editing.

Remember: This shortcut editing approach only works for decent photos. I hardly ever edit photos this way. If it's a "problem" photo, edit it properly using Camera Raw - refer to page 155 for a step by step.