

An Inexpensive Home Studio For Photography

© 2011 Tone Garot

Introduction

Home studios are a great way to learn photographic techniques. The purpose of this PDF is to show you that home studios do not have to be expensive, and you can get very good results.

I highly recommend setting something like this up for yourself, especially for a beginner. It is through this process that I really learned the ins and outs of exposure, how to shoot in low light conditions, and how to use Live View mode to zoom and really get that crisp, perfect shot.

Although I generally use Aperture Priority as a general rule, in the home studio I mostly shoot in Manual mode. I often shoot the same composition as many as 10 times with different shutter speeds, apertures, etc., to get that one great shot. Then I will vary the scene and take another ten shots. It requires patience, but the rewards can be outstanding.

Here are two images of "prior" home studio setups I have used. Your home studio will vary as new ideas come to you.

Images "Bottle Setup" and "Bottle City On Lake Avalon"

I bought two desk lamps from Home Depot. They were perhaps \$14 each. The bulbs are GE Soft lights, maybe \$4 each. I covered the lamps with loose-leaf paper to further diffuse the light. (My current setup has added an additional lamp and different diffusers than loose-leaf paper.)

The backdrop is an extra-wide roll of wallpaper that I bought from a thrift store for \$5. I use the non-printed side. Note the four nails used to hold it to the wall.

For shooting glassware, I experimented with a polarizing filter (shown at the forward right-front of the table). Polarizing filters will get rid of reflections from non-metallic surfaces.

The light blue elephant on the table is coordinating the photo shoot.

An example image follows, which I called "Bottle City On Lake Avalon." I combined to home studio shot with a sunrise over Lake Avalon in south Florida, then did a few tweaks in Photoshop.





Images "Blue Flowers Setup" and "Blue Flowers"

As you can see, I am using the exact same lighting setup as in the bottles photo. Lamp stands are whatever I find on hand, in this case, a 13 gallon tote.

This time, the backdrop is a regular roll of wallpaper. I attached the wall paper to cardboard stock from Dollar General—cost \$1. The wallpaper was from a thrift store for \$2. I bought this particular roll because the printed side had an interested print, although I didn't use it in this particular photo.

My camera is mounted on a "macro focusing rail," which is then, in turn, mounted on the tripod. A rail allows you to adjust in two dimensions without the need to turn the lens to focus the camera. The rail was a little more pricey, around \$42 from eBay. Professional rails cost considerably more but may offer more sensitivity than this particular unit. (There is always some piece of equipment that is better than the one you have. If there isn't now, there will be one day.)

For close-up work, I never use auto focus. By putting the camera into Live View, then zooming in digitally, I can really fine tune the focus.

The camera has a shutter release cable attached. This was about \$7 shipped from Korea via eBay. It is possible to do many of these shots using the built-in camera timer; however, a shutter release cable offers considerable convenience and is well worth the \$7. It is a good idea to have a backup cable. On one trip, a shutter release cable went through the laundry. It still worked for a few months, but then died. It's good to have an extra on hand rather than wait the two weeks to have it shipped from Korea.

The lens pictured is an 85mm old school, manual-everything lens. This was an awesome find on eBay. The old lenses are perfect for the home studio environment since you really want to focus yourself, and you never want VR while using a tripod. A home studio is where you have full control over all aspects of the picture taking process. You have graduated from point-and-shoots.





Tone Garot Photography

Seeking art through a camera

All images and text
© Anthony J. Garot
unless otherwise labeled.

<http://www.garot.com>
photographer@garot.com



About Tone Garot

For me, photography started as a means to chronicle and share my many and varied excursions including desert hiking, peak bagging, caving, and exploration of Mexico. For approximately a decade, I shot only point-and-shoot cameras, starting with film, then switching to digital. Although I did do some post-processing (cropping, auto-levels, sharpen edges), I never really took photography seriously until July 2010 when I bought my first DSLR.

Having a technical background, I rapidly learned the ins and outs of camera basics, lenses, exposure, tripods, etc. I also picked up post-processing quickly.

I spent a lot of time shooting and a lot of time post-processing, all the while experimenting and discovering a whole new world of possibilities. I soon realized that knowing how to use a camera isn't the same as knowing how to take a good photo. Many, if not most, of my best shots have an element of serendipity, even those taken in my home studio.

I am still learning and haven't chosen a particular adjective to describe what I do yet, i.e. I don't know if I want to be a travel photographer, product photographer, wedding photographer, or what. For me, this is a hobby, a pursuit, perhaps even a passion. I don't want to limit myself yet with adjectives.

