

PHOTOS THAT SELL: PART I

> If creating better original product images for your website and social media platforms is one of your New Year's resolutions for 2019, you're probably not alone — and for good reason. We live in a visual world, thanks to Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest and smartphone technology. Customers are looking to local florists for inspiration — and, increasingly, realistic portrayals of the designs they're ordering for their loved ones. Very few florists have access to (or the budget for) a photographer or photo studio; however, thanks to advances in photo technology, and with a little bit of creativity, creating your own custom library of unique images has never been easier.

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Find out how to build a backdrop for less than \$100 at safnow.org/moreonline.

In this two-part series, I'll walk you through how we approach photos, from design conception to postproduction, at my family's business, Beretania Florist in Honolulu.

Design Smart

Control over your product offering is key to your overall profitability — so, remember to show what you want to sell. Create new photos of products that include flowers you receive in your standing orders. This is also a great opportunity to consult your staff so that you are creating designs that they are confident mass producing. As you know, profitability comes in part from speed. You can increase margins by planning new products that utilize easy-to-access varieties and hard goods that you always have on hand.

While we all love to show our "wow" work, for everyday posts on your website and social media, you'll want to avoid highlighting complicated designs — those that require advanced skill, are

more challenging to design and deliver or can't be mass produced. In addition, you should avoid designs that require you to run out and pick up stock or hard goods.

Backdrops That Deliver

The right backdrop can make or break a photo. That's why I recommend building a dedicated photography shooting and staging area. You don't need a lot of money or space to do that, either.

First, remember that a light tone background will produce the best results. Find a tabletop with wood, wood laminate or stone for modern appeal. At our shop, our tabletop is actually a piece of plywood with peel-and-stick vinyl plank flooring glued to the top — an inexpensive material you can find online or at your local hardware store. I was happy with how the table came out, and even better, the assembly required no tools.

Painted walls work best for a backdrop. I picked up a thin sheet of plywood and painted it gray. My creation mounts easily and photographs well. Don't forget that paint with a matte finish absorbs light and reduces glare, making flowers stand out. Glossy paint or bright white backgrounds will reflect light and may make photography look dated and unflattering.

Avoid curtains, roll paper, muslin fabric, worn-out columns and any roll-down material: Creased folds and wrinkles give photos an unfinished look.

Lighting Photos Right

Lighting is key to beautiful product photography. Natural lighting from a window or door is a plus, but it can be inconsistent. That's why cool, white lighting is a happy medium. A diffused light panel kit — we got ours for less than \$50 — will give you consistent light at any time of day. Make sure your background doesn't reflect your light source. Finally, avoid using a harsh flash, which makes photos look washed out. 🌿

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LOOKING SHARP Photos that compel customers to purchase are composed well and have a simple background.



PHOTOS THAT SELL: PART II

> Looking to improve your design photos this year, so that you can impress customers and encourage them to buy more flowers more often? Of course, you are! Who isn't?

Last month, I talked about three important elements for great digital photos: how to brainstorm and create the designs best suited to showcase online and also how to create backgrounds for your photos and how to light them well. (If you missed that column, you can check it out at safnow.org/moreonline.) This month, I'll discuss other characteristics of successful photos.

Choose the Right Format and Distance

When it comes to design photos, there's no need to get fancy in your composition. Forward-facing shots and those taken right above eye level tend to give the best results. I recommend including the entire arrangement in the frame as well as the vessel for size reference.

Deciding how close to take the picture can be a balancing act. Naturally, we want closeups but including empty space around the featured product will add interest and balance. Consider how the photos will be used, too. When photographing a new collection for major holidays, for instance, take pictures from a consistent distance so customers get a good price-to-size reference.

Avoid top-down photos. They're great for detail shots of the design to supplement the primary product photo but can be confusing to customers who are trying to determine the size of the product. You should also avoid having the photo fill the frame — that can confuse customers about size, too.

Prop It Up

Photo props, including Japanese shears, books, votives, air plants, flower heads

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Read Part I in this series and find out how to build a Pinterest-worthy backdrop for less than \$100 at safnow.org/moreonline.



KEEP IT SIMPLE Shots taken right above eye level tend to give the best results.

and foliage, are attractive and can add interest and dimension without drawing attention away from products.

Props can also give customers some reference for scale and size. When developing smaller products, in particular, props can help manage customers' expectations. Don't go overboard on props, either: A simple, clean and minimal studio backdrop with one or two props will enhance your product photography.

Exposure and Postproduction

If using a DSLR camera, lightly overexposing photos (brightening them) may give you an attractive effect, especially for flowers with vibrant colors. You can adjust the exposure or brightness on your smartphone with a simple adjustment in the camera app.

Lighter and brighter photos always display best on computers and mobile devices. You'll want to avoid dark photos and underexposed photographs, which can misrepresent you and hurt sales.

Once you have the photos, strive to do as little editing as possible for speed and efficiency. Aim to capture your products' natural beauty. Less is always more. The only edits I consistently make:

- cropping photos for website compatibility
- adding logos and watermarks
- brightening

Finally, once you have a new batch of photos, take a moment to develop a plan for improving before your next shoot. Your photos are the window to your business for many, many customers. You need to keep improving them to stay apart from the competition. 🌿

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