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***Food Styling
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Food Styling & Photography FOR **DUMMIES®**

by Alison Parks-Whitfield



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Alison Parks-Whitfield is a successful technical writer and food photographer located in the San Francisco Bay area. After studying photography in college, Alison worked as a photographer in several different capacities, eventually finding her true bliss in food and vineyard photography. Her tasty images have been published in books, magazines, newspapers, on packaging, as well as in many online venues. To see some of her work, check out her website: www.alisonparkswhitfield.com.

Dedication

To my amazingly awesome children, Gary and Chloe.

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Introduction



Welcome to the amazing world of food photography! And it *is* amazing to create delicious images that can quite literally make your audience drool. Understanding what makes a food photo appear super appetizing is what this book is all about. In this book, I discuss the creative and technical aspects of food photography to help you discover how to best capture the essence of a food subject, using styling, focus, lighting, angle, and more.

My love of food photography started early on. I noticed that when traveling, instead of taking photos of monuments and notable sites, I'd take pictures of the local cheeses, pastries, and other delicacies. That's when I realized I had found my passion.

I wrote *Food Styling & Photography For Dummies* to share my love of food photography with you. I hope the tools, techniques, and tips you find in this book can help you on your way to creating some incredibly delicious photos!

About This Book

Food styling and photography are in keen focus these days, with popular food blogs and food-related websites cropping up all over the Internet. But there's a perception that good food photography is difficult and way more complicated than ordinary photography. Well, in this book, I strive to shatter that illusion.

Food Styling & Photography For Dummies uncovers the tools and tricks you need to style and create delicious food photos. And to do just that, you need an understanding of both the creative and the technical aspects of dealing with food as the subject and having all the equipment, props, backgrounds, and settings in place to capture the moment (because sometimes, you really have only a moment to get the perfect shot). The key is to take that moment and shine, whether you do so by simply keeping your yummy photos organized in your own archives or by sharing with friends, family, blog or website followers, clients, or agencies. I provide the info you need to do all the above.

In this book, I share the ins and outs of food styling and photography in a simple and friendly way to help demystify the subject. So whether you're interested in food photography as a business or for your personal blog or website, this book provides easy-to-understand, well-organized, and useful information designed to get you started on your path.

Conventions Used in This Book

In this book, I use the following conventions to make sure the text is consistent and easy to understand:

- ✓ For each pertinent photo example, I include the focal length of the lens, shutter speed, aperture (f-stop), and ISO value. For example, under each photo in this book, you'll see something like this:

85mm, 1/40 sec., f/3.2, 200

- ✓ Words in *italics* are new terms, followed closely by a definition.
- ✓ Website URLs always appear in `monofont`.

What You're Not to Read

While reading this book, if you happen across a Technical Stuff icon along the way, you may or may not be interested in that technical information. Read it only if you need it!

Any sidebars (text in gray boxes) found within this book are also *asides* and aren't vital to the content of the book itself.

Foolish Assumptions

Before I could write this book, I had to make some assumptions about you, the reader:

- ✓ You want to figure out how to photograph food to make it appear delicious and appealing.
- ✓ You're fairly well versed in the basics of using a digital single lens reflex (SLR) camera.
- ✓ You're somewhat familiar with using Photoshop for post-processing your images.

How This Book Is Organized

To help you easily find what you want to know about food styling and photography as you need it, I've divided the chapters in this book into the following five parts. Each part takes on both technical and creative aspects of food photography.

Part I: Introducing Food Styling and Photography

In Part 1, I provide an introduction to the tools and techniques of food photography. Chapter 1 sets the stage for the rest of the book with a broad overview of the material covered within these pages. In Chapter 2, I explore the type of photo equipment you need for food photography, which includes cameras, lenses with various focal lengths, tripods, and other photographic tools.

I discuss the fun world of plates, linens, and other treasures in Chapter 3. I also cover types of backgrounds used in food photography and some nifty places to find great ingredients for your photos. Chapter 4 is all about teamwork and developing relationships with the folks you may work with on a shoot.

Part II: It's All in the Presentation (Styling)

In this part, you discover a little more of the creative side of food photography. Here, I discuss how to present a food in its very best light for the camera. In Chapter 5, I talk about the importance of preparing before a shoot and what that entails. Chapter 6 has some fun information covering creative ideas for super-yummy images. And Chapter 7 explores some cool ways to overcome those messy food problems, including tricky foods like ice cream and whipped cream.

Part III: Shooting the Food: Techniques with the Camera

Part III may seem more technical because it's all about shooting and lighting techniques for food photography, but you can still have fun with these tools. In this part, I explore image composition and camera angles to use when shooting a food subject; I also talk about lighting and focus, both critically important in a food shoot.

Part IV: And for Dessert: Managing Your Photos and More

After you've shot your beautiful images, what happens next? You find out in this part. The chapters in this part center in on what occurs after you set the camera down, including saving, backing up, and editing your photos, discovering tricks with postproduction tools, creating a portfolio (in print and/or online), and advertising your business.

Part V: Part of Tens

The Part of Tens is the well-known part found at the back of all *For Dummies* books. In this part, you can find brief and helpful info on the business of food photography, figure out how to accent your food with creative toppings, and check out important basics needed for a food shoot.

Icons Used in This Book

Icons call attention to some important tidbits of information that can help you on the road to successful food photography. In this book, I use the following icons.



I use a Tip icon whenever I have a helpful piece of information to share with you about food, styling, photography equipment or settings, or a combination of these.



The Remember icon acts as a visual nudge to remind you of certain practices or concepts.



The Warning icon warns you about problems that can trip you up on the road to creating delicious images.



I use the Technical Stuff icon to let you know when I delve in to greater detail on a particular subject. This info is purely optional, meaning it's not essential to a basic understanding of the topic, so feel free to skip it if it doesn't interest you.

Where to Go from Here

Food Styling & Photography For Dummies is the type of book that doesn't need to be read from beginning to end — of course, you can read it straight through if you want! — but know that I organized this book so you can start just about anywhere to pick up useful info as you need it.

With that said, I recommend that you do a quick read of Chapter 1, which is an overview of all the material in the book. That chapter provides a bird's-eye view of the information held within the following pages. I also suggest a read through of Chapter 3 for an introduction to the unique props and ingredients typically used in food photography.

Part I

Introducing Food Styling and Photography

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"Quick—get into position! I want to capture this light."

In this part . . .

If you want to discover how to shoot delicious food images, you've come to the right place! In this first part of the book, I introduce the craft of food photography: the hardware, the styling, and the working relationships you'll deal with on the job.

Food photography, like any photography, requires some basic tools to get started. These tools include your camera and lenses (of course), a few lights to make your food look yummy, and some supporting props and backgrounds to complement the food's best traits.

Also in this part, I provide info about working with chefs and other crew members on a shoot. So what are you waiting for? Dig in!



Exploring Food Photography

In This Chapter

- ▶ Introducing food styling basics
 - ▶ Finding where to set your focus
 - ▶ Taking a peek at camera and lighting gear
 - ▶ Backing up and saving your photos
 - ▶ Starting your food photography business
-

Maybe you picked up this book because you've started a food blog and are interested in creating more interesting photos, or perhaps you're looking to grow your budding food photography business. Or could it be that you want to create a pictorial cookbook to showcase your delicious recipes? Or maybe it's close to lunchtime and you're getting a little hungry!

Whatever the reason, welcome to the wonderful world of food styling and photography! Like most types of photography, food photography is a complementary blend of the artistic and technical, with a pinch of extra styling to make the food images look scrumptious.

In this book, I provide a robust look at food styling and photography to help you capture the deliciousness of your food subjects. I include helpful information on equipment and settings, composition and focus, managing your images, and growing your business, among other subjects.

Some folks insist that food photography is far more difficult than other types of photography, but with a little know-how under your belt, I think you'll find it's a piece of cake!



Styling Food for Delicious Photos

Food styling is all about making foods look appetizing and interesting for the camera. At its core, styling involves choosing backgrounds and settings for a shoot. That is, you pick (and place) the dishes, linens, unique surfaces, and utensils. Check out everything that's involved in Figure 1-1.

For this photo, I placed the cupcakes on a green milk glass cake plate, with a wrinkled white fabric set behind the food. The arrangement of the cupcakes may look natural and effortless, but it took a lot of experimenting to get just the right look for the shot.

You may notice a small riser hidden under the center cupcake to lift it up from the bunch. I also put one tiny plastic block under one side of the green-frosted cupcake at the back to make that cupcake lean slightly off-kilter.



85mm, 1/40 sec., f/3.2, 200

Figure 1-1: These cupcakes are carefully arranged on a green cake plate.

Getting into a little more detail, you also have the garnishes and accents, or the little something extras, that increase interest and deliciousness in a photo. You can add so many different types of accents to a food dish, such as the large sprig of dill and the cream-colored sauce in Figure 1-2. Creativity reigns with accents, so don't limit yourself to that conventional piece of parsley!

Pull it all together by placing these elements, which I discuss further in the following sections, in a pleasing composition, and shoot *a lot* of images!



The food you're photographing may look good for only a short period of time, so use the time wisely and approach your subject from various tilts, angles, and distances (see Chapter 10 for details). If you have time, try some different backgrounds and settings as well. You can also change up the garnishes for a slightly different look. The more images and options you have to choose from, the better.



70mm, 1/40 sec., f/7.1, 200

Figure 1-2: A couple of well-placed accents can enhance any dish.

In Figure 1-2, my chef provided the lovely grilled salmon and vegetables dish on a clean white plate. For this part of the shoot, I decided to use a dark background to really make the colors of the dish stand out. I steamed away the wrinkles of a dark brown cloth napkin and then placed it under the plate to use as a background. I tweaked the vegetables slightly to make the arrangement look a little more natural. I also wanted to make sure the veggies picked up the highlights from the lights.

Speaking of lights, for the image in Figure 1-2, I had three lights going on at the shoot: a *key light*, or main light; a *fill light* (a weaker light source) to help shape the light and shadows; and a small light shooting across the back of the scene as a background light. (See the later section “Looking at lighting” and Chapter 9 for details on lighting your food subjects.)

Starting with backgrounds

Backgrounds are an integral part of a food image's overall look, even if you don't actually see more than a hint of them. Backgrounds often set the mood for the image and either blend in or contrast with the food subject. Whatever look you go for, the idea is to really make the food the star of the show. A

clean, beautifully lit white background, as shown in Figure 1-3, creates a light, whitewashed setting that can be a lovely and appetizing look for a food shot.



85mm, 1/50 sec., f/3.5, 400

Figure 1-3: An all-white background lets the food shine.

And on the other extreme, a rustic, southwestern type of background can provide a bold and colorful counterpoint to the food subject, as the rusty, well-worn painted metal chair does in Figure 1-4.



32mm, 1/125 sec., f/5.0, 400

Figure 1-4: The background in this shot complements the rustic look of the tomatillos.



Did you notice how each of the tomatillos in Figure 1-4 points in a different direction? The variety of angles in the placement of foods against a background can also increase interest in a food photo. I go into detail about how to place and arrange your food subjects in Chapter 8.

The possibilities are endless for what you can use as a background to add texture to and increase interest in your food shots (just check out Figure 1-5). You can use metals, woods, plastics, papers, and fabrics, as well as cool organic materials, such as leaves or coffee beans. (See Chapters 3 and 4, where I talk about various styles and looks for backgrounds and settings, for more ideas.) When it comes to backgrounds, let your creativity go wild!