

FOODPRINT | A GUIDE TO PHOTOGRAPHING PORTRAITS

What is a portrait? How can we communicate the story and personality of an individual through an image? Using examples from the Foodprint photography exhibition, you will learn how to photograph portraits in 4 steps:

STEP 1 | UNDERSTANDING 'THE PORTRAIT'

A photograph gives the viewers important information about the subject; information that cannot always be put into words. Visual clues such as the setting, lighting all communicate information about a person.

Take a look at the photo below, taken by Myrto Papadopoulou in Morocco.



What can you tell about the gentleman in this photo? What might his personality be like? What kind of work do you think he does? What makes you think that?

Can you also try to guess the tone or mood of the image? Do you think it's serious? Cheerful? Calm? Something else? Why?

STEP 2: BASIC PHOTO COMPOSITION TECHNIQUES

What makes a strong portrait? The answer to this is partly subjective, since what you like doesn't necessarily appeal to someone else. But usually, there is a reason why a photo draws your interest or stirs an emotion. Photographers use compositional techniques to catch the viewers' eyes and create images that tell a story. Below are some composition techniques you can try.

ANGLE

The angle from which you choose to photograph your subject, is central to how they will be perceived. While shooting straight on is always an option, you can also try other approaches.

For example, photographs taken from a worm's eye angle are captured from below, looking up at the subject. This angle can make your subject appear larger or more powerful. You can crouch down and aim upwards, or even lie on the ground for a more dramatic shot.

Photos taken from a bird's eye view are taken from above the subject. This angle may indicate a sense of power over the subject or make the subject appear smaller. To take a bird's eye view photo, stand on an elevated surface such as a chair, table or ladder - and aim your camera down at your subject.



Elena Heatherick shoots with a straight-on shot



Chris de Bode uses a bird's eye view

DEPTH OF FIELD

Photographers use depth of field, in order to choose how much of the background is in focus. When a photo has a shallow depth of field, the subject is in focus and most of the background is rendered blurry. A large depth of field puts most of the scene in focus.

It is important to consider how much you want the background to feature in your portrait. A small depth of field will focus attention on your subject and prevent background distractions. If you want the viewer to notice important background details, consider a large depth of field.



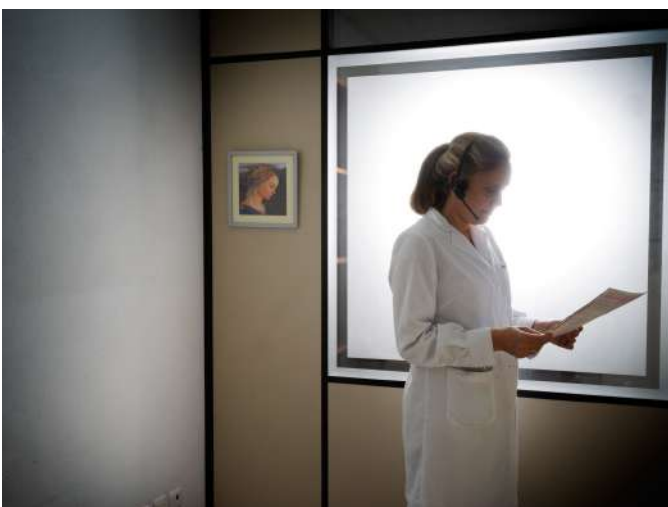
In this photo Chris De Bode focuses on the young cook's face and hands, while the background is dark and blurry.



Here Chris also emphasizes the environment where the doctor is located. Why do you think he does this? Do we usually imagine a doctor in a garden?

SUB-FRAMING

Sub-framing is a technique, wherein photographers place their subject in a frame within the image. This frame can be created from any physical object- such as a door, person or lamppost- but also elements such as light and shadows. A subframe can create dimension in your image, and also guide the viewer's eye. Once you start noticing the subframes, you will see them everywhere!



Through the frames he finds in the space, Chris de Bode not only adds useful information about the environment of the photograph, but also directs the viewer's attention.



DISTANCE

Consider capturing your subject from different distances. Photographers often take photos from wide, medium and close-up distances. Wide shots emphasize place and location, while close-up shots reveal details of the subject and highlight emotions of a character. You can combine photos from different distances to tell a story.



Here Maria Contreras Coll focuses on the woman's hands while she is harvesting mussels.



Here we see the woman in her wider environment.

LIGHTING

Lighting is one of the main ways photographers communicate tone and atmosphere, so the type of light you choose is very important.

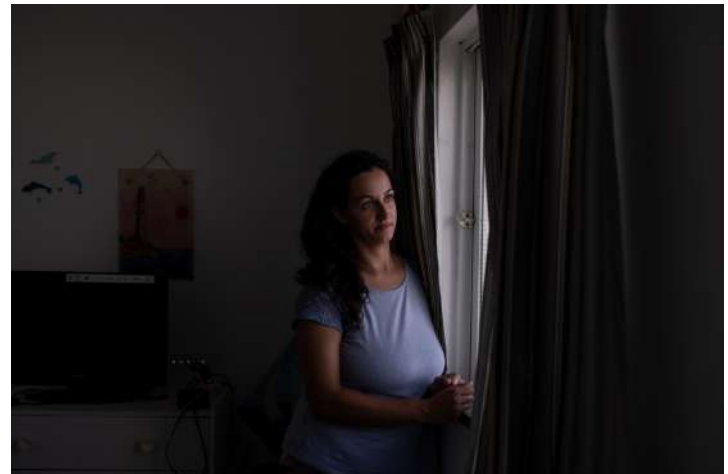
Natural lighting is generally softer and more flattering than indoors. If it makes sense for the story you're documenting, take your photos outdoors. The early morning hours and the last hours before sunset often provide the most attractive light.



Myrto Papadopoulou makes great use of natural light, reflections and shadows in the above portraits.



If your theme is more suited for indoors, try and think of creative ways to light your subject. One option is to use light from natural sources such as a window, like Maria Contreras Coll in Portugal.



If additional lighting is needed to enhance your subject in a darker space, you can also use an source of light in the space, such a lamp.



In this image Chris De Bode takes advantage of the fridge light to illuminate the scientist, and create a dramatic contrast.

If you want a softer effect you can use soft lamps or even consider covering the artificial light with translucent fabric to soften the reflection. You will want the light to be in front of your subject rather than behind them.

IMAGE ORIENTATION

If you often take photos vertically, try taking some photos horizontally and vice versa. Study the difference between vertical and horizontal framing for your shots. Which direction tells the most complete story about your subject?



In Portugal Maria Contreras Coll experimented with The framing of the photo. What do you think are the differences?



STEP 4: THE PHOTOSHOOT!

Photography is more than just technique. When you photograph, it is important to think about how you can creatively communicate aspects of a person's personality and story.

Below are some elements to think about out when creating a portrait:

- Your subject's pose
- Their expression
- Their clothing
- Where they are looking
- The settings of the photo
- The objects in the frame

Remember that every object is important to a portrait, so carefully select what you want inside and outside your frame. Get rid of the things that don't add to your story.

Once your subject is in the perfect spot, put down the camera and talk to them. What is their story? Try to get the person to relax and enjoy the process of being photographed.

Try to capture genuine expressions that look comfortable, not forced. And, remember, you are responsible. Your subject will trust you to tell them if something doesn't seem right. Don't be afraid to try different things: ask your subject to move or try a different position.

STEP 5: SELECT, EDIT AND ADD A CAPTION TO YOUR IMAGE

Now that you've taken a few photos of your subject, you'll need to select and edit the image you want to submit.

A way of checking if your portrait tells the story you want, is to show your photograph to a friend. Ask them to try to guess some things about your subject. Is your friend able to guess some information about the personality of your subject? The guesses don't have to be 100% correct, but they should be close enough.

If your partner's guesses are too far off, or if they don't think there is enough visual evidence to make a guess, go back to your photo collection and see if you can find others that better represent this person.

Finally, once you've made your final selection, add a one-sentence caption to each photo explaining the image.

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