

UNCATEGORIZED

CARL'S PHOTO STUDIO 2018

FEBRUARY 11, 2019 | CARL FORD | LEAVE A COMMENT

Carl's Photo Studio 2018 [\(Click for printable PDF\)](#)



Here is my new photo setup. I started using it in 2018. I am very happy with it.

I am now using "softbox lights" with a big graduated black to white background. See photo above.

Previously I used a "Photo Tent". (See photo at the end of this blog post.) Like recommended in AAW Symposiums, etc. It worked ok for years. But then I decided I was tired of it. I did not like the lights all that much. The tent was to small. I wanted to take photos of bigger things and groups of things. Moving things around and positioning them inside of the tent was a pain.

I looked around and decided that "softbox lights" were the way to go.

Softbox Lights

I found some softbox lights on Amazon that I liked the looks of in my price range.

They are "LimoStudio 700W Photo Video Studio Soft Box Lighting Kit, 24 x 24 Inch Dimension Softbox Light Reflector with Photo Bulb, Photography Studio, AGG814". \$64 on 2/2019.



I like them.

Big Light Bulbs

The bulbs are big. Really big. 4" diameter by 9" tall.

I think big is good. They create lots of light that is soft from the start because it does not all come from a small point source.

The bulbs are marked "eTopLighting photo bulb PB-85 120V 85W". No other markings. But, I think they are 6500K, daylight neutral.



Big Black to White Background

I decided to get a big background so I could take photos of big things. I like the background in photos to trail off from grey to black. Thus I use a graduated black to white background.

Real photographers use a huge studio and let the light trail off naturally. I don't have room for that.



My background is from Amazon. It is a "Flotone Vinyl Graduated Background 43" X 67" Black to White #609". \$74 on 2/2019.

There are lots of similar choices on Amazon. The price was more than I would like. But, it was the best I could do.

I wanted a vinyl background so I could wash it off when it got dirty. However, that does not work well, because all these backgrounds scratch really easily!

Note: I use the smudge tool in Photoshop to wipe out any scratches I see on the background in my photos.

If you want to go cheaper you could just use some photo gray paper.

Photo Studio Stowed

Here is my new photo studio all stowed. I just roll the background up to the ceiling. Then shove the lights, back out of the way. The table is part of my photo set up. I just, leave it up and use it for other things. Stowing things takes just a minute or two.

I made my own background roller. More about that latter. Before, I made the roller, I used some big binder paper clips that hung the background from the ceiling from some wires. I never put the background away and thus ended up with scratches on it.



Note: I had to use the flash on my camera to get a photo of the screen up against the ceiling. Err... I hate on camera flash! The light is just way to harsh.

Photo Studio Ready To Go

Here is my photo studio set up and ready to go.

The tall light is lighting the background and the over all scene. The low light is my accent light. For this big group with lots of shiny things, I have the accent light higher than normal. Later, I had to dork around with the accent light, quite a bit to get rid of hot spots on that glossy red plate.

I am using an old *GOOD* tripod, I got from a friend. A good tripod is a must! A cheap tripod that moves around will drive you crazy.

The big black binder paper clips on the bottom of the background just add some weight so it hangs down, out of the way. The paint cans, keep the background from slipping off the table.

I adjust the height of the background and paint cans to get a nice almost black background at the top of my photos.



I always take my photos in a dark room at night or on a cloudy day. The photo lights are the only source of light. I don't want any other sources of light that may reflect off my work, cast weird shadows or color shifts.

Note: My good camera is on the tripod. I am taking this photo with my old camera. Thus the quality of the photos in this blog entry, vary a lot.

My Camera

Here I have my camera set up ready to take a shot. I am going to live with the hot spots in centers of bowls. They are virtually impossible to get rid of in a group shot like this. The top of the red plate is still a little too bright. I need to adjust my lights a little more.

In the viewfinder you can see the edge of my background on the left. For this big group, I have to frame the photo based on top and bottom of all items in the photo. I will cut left and right off later in Photoshop. I also leave some room on the top and bottom of shot for cropping in Photoshop.



My camera is an "Olympus TG-3". I really good camera. I really like this camera. But, it is totally the wrong camera for this application. But, it works just fine. This camera is designed to be really tough for travel. It can be bounced off a concrete floor, dropped in a lake or you can take photos in pouring rain. I have done most of these things. It has a piece of glass in front of the internal folded lens to make it really waterproof and thus totally the wrong camera for this application.

You can put this camera in manual mode. And lots of other stuff. But, I never do, because it takes FANTASTIC photos in AUTO mode. Here I have forced the flash off, set it to 8m (3216 x 2144) photo size (not the max), 3:2 photo with a 1 second self timer, in auto mode.

The most important thing here is to **FORCE THE FLASH OFF!** No flash for any reason come hell or high water with digital cameras.

A 1 second self timer is also real important. i.e. take the photo 1 second after I push the shutter button. Wait until, I let go and the camera stops shaking then take the photo.

These days, any good point and shoot camera will get the job done.

Note: If I had a ton of money to waste then I would get a fancy OFF CAMERA flash unit that I could ADJUST the brightness of. Then I would not need to dork with my lights, etc. I could just use the flash. On camera flashes like I have and can afford, do not work! Only one brightness (usually super bright) flashes like I have and can afford do not work!

The Original Photo

Well, sort of the original photo. The original is 3316 x 2144, 1.46 MB. The photo here has been down sampled to a reasonable size for the web.

Here is the photo I decided to go with. It is one of 10 or so, taken from slight different angles and heights. I picked the best one.

If you are taking photos on Auto. Just moving the camera a little often makes a **BIG** difference in how the light is captured by the camera. Big differences in ISO, F stop, shutter speed, white balance, etc.



I have found the best solution for ME is to take 10 or more photos on AUTO and then pick the best one. Because, I don't really know what I am doing. Taking photos on manual is a waste of time for ME. What F stop, etc should I use? I have no clue. Once in a long while, I will take a photo on Auto and then switch to Manual, where I tweak the settings that Auto mode came up with.

I often rotate the pieces around a little or lot. The grain on some pieces only looks great from one angle. Often not the angle I start out with.

There are lots of scratches and some dust/dirt on the background in this photo. Can you find them? I did not touch them up. I can't find them even in the 1.46 meg original with out a lot of zooming.

The Cropped Photo

Here I cropped the photo a little in Photoshop. Remove the edge of the background on right. Leave a nice amount of space all around.

Auto Levels in Photoshop often does wonders. Makes the background look better. Removes the dull gray cast. Auto levels did not do much to this photo. I got the lights, etc right from the start. My TG-3 camera is not the right camera for the job, but it does a pretty good job.



In Photoshop I did an Export, Save for Web. Saved the photo at 1600 px wide (1600 x 1160), 648K. Then I let Jalbum program down sample it to 828 x 600, 93K for my blog on the web. I normally shoot for original images saved on my computer for the long term around 600K to 800K. If just one object in the photo than I save at 800 px wide. If you save photos anywhere on the web (Flickr, Google Photos, etc) they frequently get saved way below this size.

Photoshop use to be head and shoulders above any thing else. That is no longer true. The programs that now come with most digital cameras are pretty good. They all support cropping. And most support some form of "auto levels". You don't need Photoshop. Photoshop is a tool. A tool with a HUGE learning curve. The programs that now come with digital cameras are often a lot easier to use.

Note: This is one of the promotional photos for my Woodturning Workshop class at Peters Valley on July 12-16, 2019. PV is calling it "An Exploration of Woodturning". See

<http://petersvalleyworkshops.bigcartel.com/product/an-exploration-of-woodturning>

Pick the BEST Photo

Like I said earlier. I ALWAYS take 10 or more photos from slightly different angles, heights and rotations of the subject. Then I pick the best one.

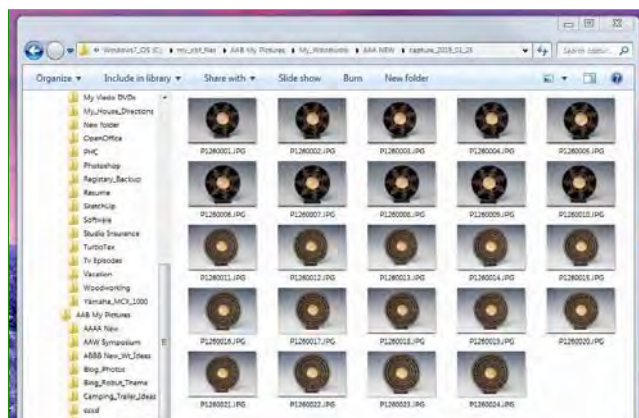


Photo of a Big Thing

Here I am taking a photo of a lamp that will definitely not fit in my old photo tent. I have raised the background up to make this work.



Background Rolled Up for Storage

Here is what my background looks like when rolled up for storage. The big black metal binder clips add a little weight to the end of the background. They make things a lot easier.

Notice that my roller is roughly 6" wider than my background. I did this on purpose. I didn't want the edges of my background getting all screwed up.

I made the roller out of 4" Sewer and Drain PVC pipe from local big box store. I wanted a big diameter roller. I did not want the background to get screwed up by being rolled to tight. I also, did not want it to develop a memory and try to roll back up on it's own.



Note: Before, I made the roller, I used some big binder paper clips that hung the background from the ceiling from some wires. I never put the background away and thus ended up with scratches on it.

Background Rolled Down

Here you can see that I put 3 feet of heavy construction paper above my background. This allows me to roll down the background further.

I REALLY like this roller because it has a clutch mechanism built into it. It will not roll down on it's own while I taking photos, etc. You have to pull on the white chain on the right to roll it up or down. See next photo.



Clutch Mechanism for Background Roller

I purchased some roller brackets with a built in clutch mechanism. I purchased "Good News Roller Blind Shade Metal Core Clutch Bracket Cord Chain Repair kit 38mm" from Amazon. \$9 on 2/2019.



I turned some pine wooden disks to reduce the 4" PVC pipe down to the 38mm required by the rollers.

Close Up of Roller Bracket

Here you can see that I cut the long slots off of the roller brackets in previous photo. Then I drilled my own new mounting holes.



Old Photo Tent

Here is picture of my old photo tent with lights. The one, I no longer like.

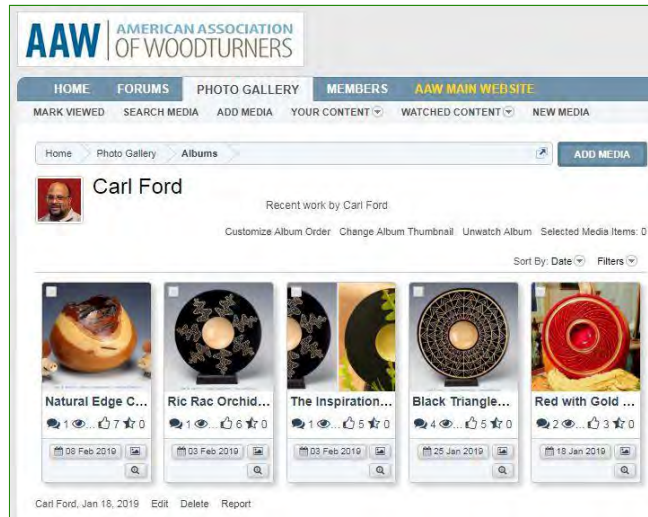


Carl's AAW Photo Gallery

Recently, I decided to start posting one photo per week of my recent work on the AAW's Photo Gallery.

Go here to see some recent photos taken with my new photo studio set up:

<http://www.aawforum.org/community/index.php?media/albums/carl-ford.842/>



◀ PHOTO STUDIO