

SOGPHOTO

January 2007 #2

This issue is about the use of the Guild light tents for photographing smaller items.



Your Guild now has three different light tents for photographing small items

Two new hot lights on stands make it easy to light even difficult subjects

By Jerry Work

Light tents are simply opaque enclosures into which you place the item to be photographed. Any kind of light from a desk lamp to just the ambient light in the room shined on the outside of the light tent will provide a soft light that is ideal for photographing small objects without unwanted glare or harsh highlights.

Shown above is one of the new Guild units. It is made up of

individual pieces that zip together to form the enclosure. Unzipped the pieces roll into a small tube for ease of storage and transport. The pieces are made from a very sturdy plastic material so they are robust and not easily damaged or soiled.

With the front door zipped down as in this picture it is easy to place your object and any background material you wish. Holes

in the front allow you to place your camera for different angle shots.

While you can use any old light source that is handy, your Guild now also owns two light holders and stands which accept standard light bulbs. For the example shots shown here I used 100W halogen exterior flood bulbs.

The stands, lights and bulbs all fit into a cardboard carry case for ease of transport.

The first example are two shots of a battery operated drill, a Festool C12 in this case. I simply

You can see from the photo on the previous page that the light tent can be placed on any old surface, in this case one of my work benches.

The lower photo and those

the black bag this light tent comes in. So the backdrops you use need not be fancy.

The three photos of this ceramic bowl differ only by where the exterior lights were placed.



placed the drill on a piece of gray cloth, turned on the lights as shown and took the pictures. These two shots show the effect of simply moving the lights around the exterior of the enclosure.

While these are hardly award winning photos they, and the other sample photos in this issue of SOG-Photo, indicate just what great shots you can achieve with very little set up or work.

In one of these shots the camera was set on fully automatic while the other was set to aperture preferred exposure and manual focus. The post processing was identical in both cases so what you see is occasioned only by moving one or more of the lights.

on the next page show a ceramic bowl made by member Art Linemeyer. I changed the gray cloth backdrop and instead used

Moving a light away from the side, front or back of the light tent will lessen the intensity and diffuse the light further. The inten-





sity of the light decreases by the square of the distance so you don't have to move a light very far to see a noticeable difference. In the case of these three pictures I likely did not move the lights more than a foot or two in any direction. See how the highlights and shadows move subtly from photo to photo.

Rather than trying to guess what light will look best for a given subject I suggest you simply turn on the lights and shoot sample shots. By looking at each shot as you take it and noting how a movement in one or both lights effects the outcome you will quickly close on what you think works best for your subject.

On the next page we will look at a third example, this time a ceramic tea pot and cups which have much less gloss than Art's bowl. But, before we see those let me say a word about camera set up.

CAMERA SET UP

Any time you turn on a digital camera, whether the Guild's or your own, check a few critical things.

First, set the **size** of image you want. On some cameras this is indicated by the actual pixel count horizontally and vertically



while on others it will be descriptions like "small", "medium", or "large". Be sure you set what you want for your intended use. For web posting or emailing a small image is just fine. For printing you usually want the largest image your camera can produce.

Second, set the **quality** of the image. All digital cameras can output in JPEG (Joint Photographic Experts Group) format. The quality is a function of how much compression is applied to make the stored file smaller or larger. The less compression the better the quality.

Some cameras can also output in TIF (Tag Image File) format. This is normally an uncompressed format of the best quality

the camera is capable of delivering and is usually a bit better than the lowest compression JPEG image but at the cost of a much larger image file.

Some cameras also allow outputting files in what is called RAW format. This is the image as it captured by the light sensor inside the camera with no in-camera processing. To use RAW format you must do post processing on a computer to make the images usable. I suggest the best quality JPEG for most of you.

Next, set the light sensitivity

of the light sensor inside the camera. This is usually called **ISO** (International Standards Organization) after the group that first established a scale for measuring light sensitivity of different films. ISO 200 is twice as light sensitive as ISO 100 but at the expense of additional noise in the image.

For all your still work set to ISO100. Don't use ISO automatic as the camera will try to use a much higher ISO setting to offset the relatively low light setting inside one of these light tents. Instead put your camera on a tripod, set to ISO100 (to get the best quality image) and shoot with a longer exposure.

The final setting is to set your camera for the color of light you

will be using, called the “*white balance*”. This is noted on a scale called the “Kelvin color temperature” of the light and is a scale named after a Brit who developed it. Bright sun light on a cloudless day will be about 5500 degrees on the Kelvin scale. A normal household tungsten light bulb will be more like 2500 to 3000 degrees on the Kelvin scale, much yellower. A normal flash unit like the ones the Guild owns are around 5500 degrees just like daylight.

By setting the color of light you will be using you are telling the light sensor how to accurately render white, and from there all other colors, without creating a yellow, blue or green cast to your image. You can do some degree of color temperature correction with post production software like Photoshop Elements, but come

as close as you can in the camera itself.

Now you can either set the camera to auto focus and auto exposure or do those yourself and you will get the kind of outcomes shown here.

MORE EXAMPLES

Below are two photos of the small tea pot and cups taken inside this same light tent with the same lights. Notice how the interior of the cups changes as well as the highlights on the top front of the pot. Again, post processing was identical, so the only change was in the location of the lights themselves.

The set up is shown with the front of the light box unzipped so you can see the tea pot, cups and black background.

Next let’s explore how different types of light tents impact the outcome.

In the photos to the right the same tea pot and cups were photographed using one of my light tents illuminated by the Guild light stands and lights.

The tent shown is available to any of you to use if you would like but it is made of cloth instead of plastic so it is a bit easier to damage or get dirty.

The take home message for me is that the light tent design makes little difference in the quality of the images. It is the placement of the lights and the proper settings on the camera itself that are much more important.



A CLOSING NOTE

Many people consider photographing clear glass to be about the most difficult thing one can do. Using a light box, this difficult thing turns into a much simpler task that any of you can do well with a little practice.

On the next page are three photos of a crystal wine glass taken inside the cloth light tent pictured above and using only the Guild lights. Each photo differs only by where the lights were placed. I took no special care or time in doing the initial set up, I just placed the glass, shot, looked at the image, moved the lights and shot again. In this three photo sequence the first image was taken with both lights on, the second with only one light on and



the third with neither light on, just the ambient light in the room at the time.



Now, if I can get these results by just putting objects into a light tent and moving lights around, so can you! Just try, practice a bit and you will be amazed by what you can accomplish all on your own.

It doesn't matter whether you use your camera or the Guild camera.

At the beginning I said the Guild now had three new light tents. Two of them are the zip together plastic units with one as shown here and the other an even smaller tent for things like jewelry

even for smaller furniture items. It is cloth so folds up into a small carry bag.

All three are at the Guild Service Center and Gallery located in the Rogue Community College building in Kerby. You can use them there or take them to your own shop or studio.

Enjoy!

Jerry



and the like. The third is a large circular hanging tent like structure. It will hang from our back drop supports. It is about three feet in diameter and about six feet high so it should be big enough