

Photographing Quilts

By Diana Vandeyar, an enthusiastic amateur photographer who enjoys a well styled shot.
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Whether you are entering a show, marketing a class, or posting on the socials, a great photo promotes your work long before anyone has read the description.

You've made a significant effort in producing a stunning quilt, lesson plans, class notes, samples, learning and perfecting your area of quilting expertise, so don't let poor photography let you down. I believe it is a vital skill that needs to be learnt and practiced, and ultimately it will significantly enhance your work.

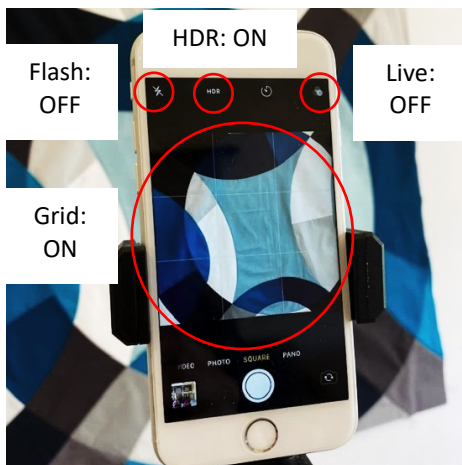
Quilt photography takes time so do not rush the process.

DIGITAL CAMERA OR SMART PHONE?

I will be referencing features on the iPhone because that is what I use, but I am sure other smart phones have similar features. Use what you have, but like any tool, make sure you know how it works... read the manual! You do not need to use the most complicated settings or features, just make sure that you are getting the most out of the simplest functions.

I discovered that my digital camera has a "Museum" setting which produced really good results when photographing quilts for shows. Check your pre-set "Modes" to see if any are suitable for taking photos of quilts.

Smart phone technology has come a long way and the quality of phone cameras is amazing. Turn off "Live" photos and "Flash". HDR (high dynamic range) ON or OFF? HDR helps you get great shots in high-contrast situations, try both and see which gives you the best shot. I always tweak my photos using the photo editing function on the phone to slightly adjust brightness, contrast, straighten and sometimes "Filters" to correct the colour balance.



EQUIPMENT

If you have an unsteady hand and your photos look a bit blurry use a tripod, not expensive to purchase. You can also use the camera's self timer if you are holding the phone, less chance of camera shake. I use a cheap phone mount/bracket with my tripod.

LOCATION AND LIGHTING

Recon your home both morning and afternoon to survey where to find the best light at different times of the day. Check every room, opening your curtains to get the most natural light.

Get out into your garden (morning and afternoon) for different lighting options. Look at textures, brickwork, concrete, hedges, trees, flowers etc.

Bright overcast/cloudy days, which provide diffused light and eliminate shadows, are best for taking outdoor shots. But you can also get interesting effects on sunny days for beauty shots.

Get into the habit of looking at small areas around your home and garden as potential photoshoot locations. You do not need a large expanse, just a well-lit, interesting area with colours and textures that complement the item you want to photograph. Declutter your space to give you the best shot. Ahem, and you only need a small area to be tidy... what's not in the photo will never be seen.

Make sure there is no junk photo-bombing your pic. It's easy to get excited about a composition or perfect location, only to realise later that there was a garbage bin lurking in the corner... ask me how I know.

Take LOTS of photos, shifting your angle or position slightly each time. You can always delete what does not work, but you may be surprised by a perspective you did not consider.

Indoor lighting. Lights on or off? Take photos with both and see which gives you the truest colours and best shot.

PHOTOGRAPHING LARGE QUILTS

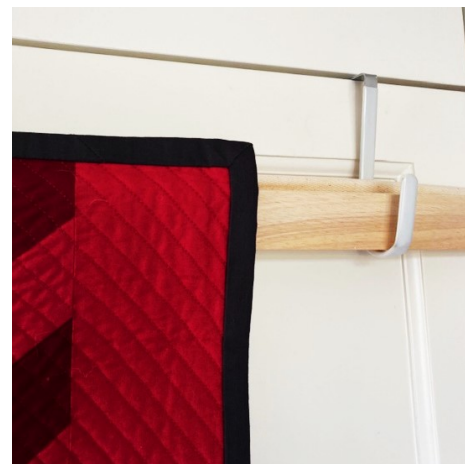
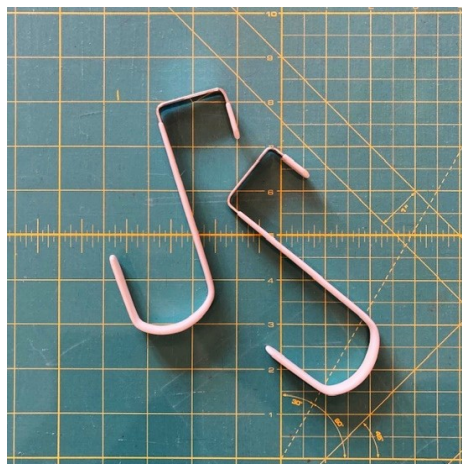
No way to get around this, but you will need a large wall, or consider built-in cupboards, garage doors, exterior walls, fences, or any large leafy area in your garden.

Make sure your quilt looks its best, it may seem obvious but de-fluff and straighten that quilt! Use a piece of rolled up tape on the back to hold down corners or edges that do not behave, especially for an outdoor shot on a windy day. For show quilts I would recommend blocking, quilts hang beautifully straight and look so good after they have been blocked!

Hang the quilt (using a quilt sleeve and rod), pin it to your design wall or use a quilt stand (photographic backdrop stand) to get your best shot. A quilt stand is great for positioning your quilt in just the right location in your house or garden. Small quilts can be taped to a wall using rolled pieces of tape on the back. If you have a large, well-lit wall, use Command Strips to temporarily attach hooks to your wall as a support for a rod. If you do not want to sew a hanging sleeve, you can attach your quilt to a rod with café curtain clips or spring clamps.



If you do not have a large design wall or quilt stand you can improvise a hanging system with cheap non-permanent back-of-door hanging hooks hung on a built-in cupboard.



Sometimes, if I do not have time to block the quilt, to get it to hang straight I temporarily attached a rod with tape along the back bottom edge. Anything to get it flat for a beauty shot!



Before



After

Another makeshift hanging system you could try is this wacky empty spool and string contraption to hang a quilt on your garage door. I opened the garage door slightly to insert the string, then closed it to hold the spool/string in place.

**Disclaimer: These photos are to illustrate various hanging systems and not an actual photoshoot. My quilt has been folded for a very long time so disregard the creases and waves, my garage door is grubby, and it was not the right time of day to take the photo, you can see glare in the shot. If I was taking this photo "for real" I would make sure everything was set up to produce the best shot.*



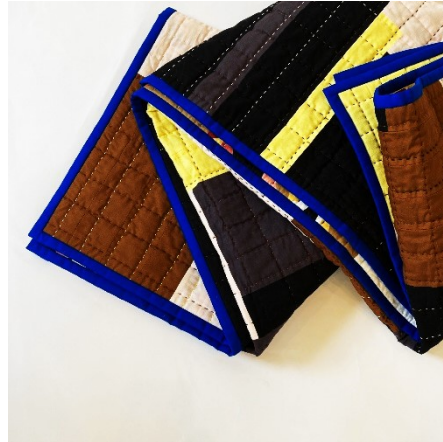
Take photos straight on to avoid perspective distortion. Perspective distortion is when the top and bottom or sides are not parallel, the quilt you are photographing looks warped or bigger/smaller at the top/bottom or from side to side. All digital cameras and phone cameras have an alignment grid to help you take a straight photo, make sure this feature is turned ON. And if you happened to have a photo that is a bit off, use the straighten adjustment option in photo editing.

Unless you are going for a casual shot, avoid using a person to hold up your quilt. These types of shots do not make your work look its best and are not suitable for entering into a competition. If you have no other choice, you can minimize the tell-tale sign of scrunched corners by attaching a sleeve (even temporarily) and using a rod for the person to grasp (make sure the quilt is lowered to the ground, so you do not see any feet).

BEAUTY SHOTS

Backgrounds: What color or texture compliments your project. Just like creating a colour palette for your quilt, now you need to place that quilt or item in a setting that works harmoniously with its aesthetic. Use props that work with the style of the item you are photographing. Create a mood that is in keeping with the character of your work. But don't let the props take over the photo, you want your work to be the primary focus.

For detail and up-close shots, my secret weapon is a big sheet of white paper... minimal outlay, maximum impact.

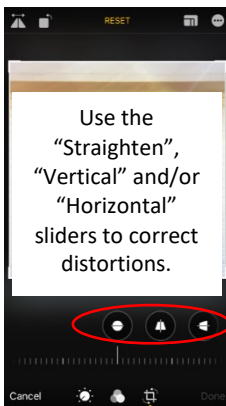


POST-PRODUCTION PHOTO EDITING

Brightness, Contrast, and Filters are there to make your photos look fabulous... use them! Don't use the zany ones, just fine-tune your photo enough so that it is at its best. If your colours are not true in the photo, these adjustments can restore the original colors. Sometimes adjustments (especially Filters) can distort the colours, so be judicious.

Don't forget to crop your photos so that your quilt or item is positioned perfectly within the frame.

Use phone Apps to cut out the background. I have recently discovered the PhotoRoom App it removes a background almost instantly. A great way to focus on the quilt and not what is around it. The quilt photo below is the "After" photo on Page 3 with the background removed by the App.



Get into the habit of taking LOTS of photos of your work. Document your process, progress, and practice beauty shots. A great way to self-evaluate or critique your photographing technique is to post on Instagram. Instagram is a fabulous way of documenting your work and practicing your skills. It establishes a record of what you create and the type of work you produce. Another reason for using Instagram is that you are putting your work out there for other quilters and potential students to find you... basically, brilliant publicity!

If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me diana@vandeyar.net