

IN THE KNOW

Cake photography



Great photos are key to showcasing your designs online, and creating maximum impact. Award-winning cake maker Corinna Maguire reveals her top tips for nailing the perfect shot...

1 GET RID OF SHADOWS

If the cake's reflection tends to show up on your backdrop, it could be because you're using 'Auto' mode: the main light direction is coming from the camera, meaning the shadow falls behind the cake. Turn the flash off or switch to 'Semi-automatic' mode, so the flash doesn't automatically fire in low light (you may need to use a tripod to avoid 'camera shake'). The most important thing for avoiding shadows is to try and change the direction of the main light. Alternatively, move the cake as far as possible from the background so the shadows don't fall on it.

2 UNFOCUS THE BACKGROUND

Make sure your cake is in focus on the area that you want to be the sharpest and draw attention to the most. Depending on the lens (phones are more difficult), zoom in as much as the lens allows, then open the aperture to the largest size hole (smallest number). Also, ensure the background is a good distance away from the subject.

3 OPTIMISE YOUR COLOURS

If you're shooting with available light, make sure you're not in mixed lighting - for example, tungsten light and window light are two totally different colours. It's best to choose one light source and adjust the camera's 'White Balance' setting to get as close to that light source's colour. Better yet, invest in a 'continuous lighting' setup, a studio light set where the light bulbs have been balanced for daylight - the colour should be great then.

4 TO FLASH OR NOT TO FLASH

The best lighting is something you can control; something that allows you to move around so you have lots of options, but that is also consistent. This can be hard to do. The best solution is a continuous lighting setup (see Tip 3), but if this isn't possible, try to use window light rather than flash.

5 MAKE YOUR CAKE 'POP'

To give your cake depth and a 3D-like appearance, use a small aperture and zoom in, making sure the background is as far away as possible. This makes the image 'pop' off the page.

6 PHONE VS CAMERA

Phones can limit things such as 'shallow depth of field'. A fairly inexpensive Digital SLR (DSLR) or compact camera can adjust the ISO (sensitivity of the image sensor) for quality, and white balance for colour. It can also be attached to a tripod for stability. I'd recommend buying an entry-level DSLR and tripod rather than a special lens/tripod for your phone.

7 INVEST IN A TRIPOD

A tripod steadies the camera and eliminates 'camera shake', and with it blurry photos. It also allows for longer exposures, letting in more light.

8 KNOW YOUR SETTINGS

A basic DSLR or compact camera has many different settings. Spend time reading up on how each function works so that you can maximise your camera's use and get the best shots.

9 REFLECT THAT LIGHT

An alternative to a formal photographer's reflector is to use a large piece of white, silver or gold card. This will 'bounce' more light into specific areas and even things out. Make sure it's sturdy card, though, as floppy card is hard to manage.

10 ACCESSORISE

There are a number of simple and inexpensive accessories that will save you a lot of hassle and stress. Small clamps are a lifesaver and excellent for holding backdrops up, and tape and Blu-tack can help stick things up or even level out an object.

11 LIMIT YOUR FILTERS

If you're using a smartphone to photograph your cakes/decorations, be aware that adding too many filters to a photo can tarnish the look of the image. Make sure the brightness is turned up to a standard setting, or you run the risk of editing the picture so that it's too bright and clearly not a true representation of the cake.

MEET THE PROS...

Corinna Maguire is an award winning cake maker, recognised for making amazing cakes. She compiled the award winning book, *The Celtic Cakers* and also teaches throughout Ireland and abroad. Brad Anderson owns and operates Photo One Studios in Galway, Ireland.