

Shooting in Isolation – what you can learn and how you can benefit your photographic skills whilst limited to your home

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The lockdown is upon on us, and we must make the most of a very uncomfortable situation. But all is not doom and gloom; there are ways in which you can make the experience of isolation less painful.

The good news is that now “shooting in isolation” does not mean you have to keep looking over your shoulder all the time, as we are used to do when out all alone in a more rural area with expensive camera equipment. This time it means you are on your own, or with your wife/hubby/partner/children, and no club member, professional friend or serious enthusiast /best buddy with which to discuss photographic subjects, camera settings, compositional approaches and so on.



Canon EOS 1D X, 180mm Macro with 25mm Extension Tube, flash, 1/250, f20, ISO 1000

The jumping spider with his catch was taken on the wall of the enclosed section of my balcony. These little guys live all over and spotting them can be a challenge as they sometimes tend to hide in nooks and crannies in the walls. But they are a delightful macro subject, cute and harmless to humans. Wait for them to come out into the open when hunting and then be ready for the opportunities they offer. This is an ideal subject with which to practice your true macro skills, virtually in the comfort of your own home.

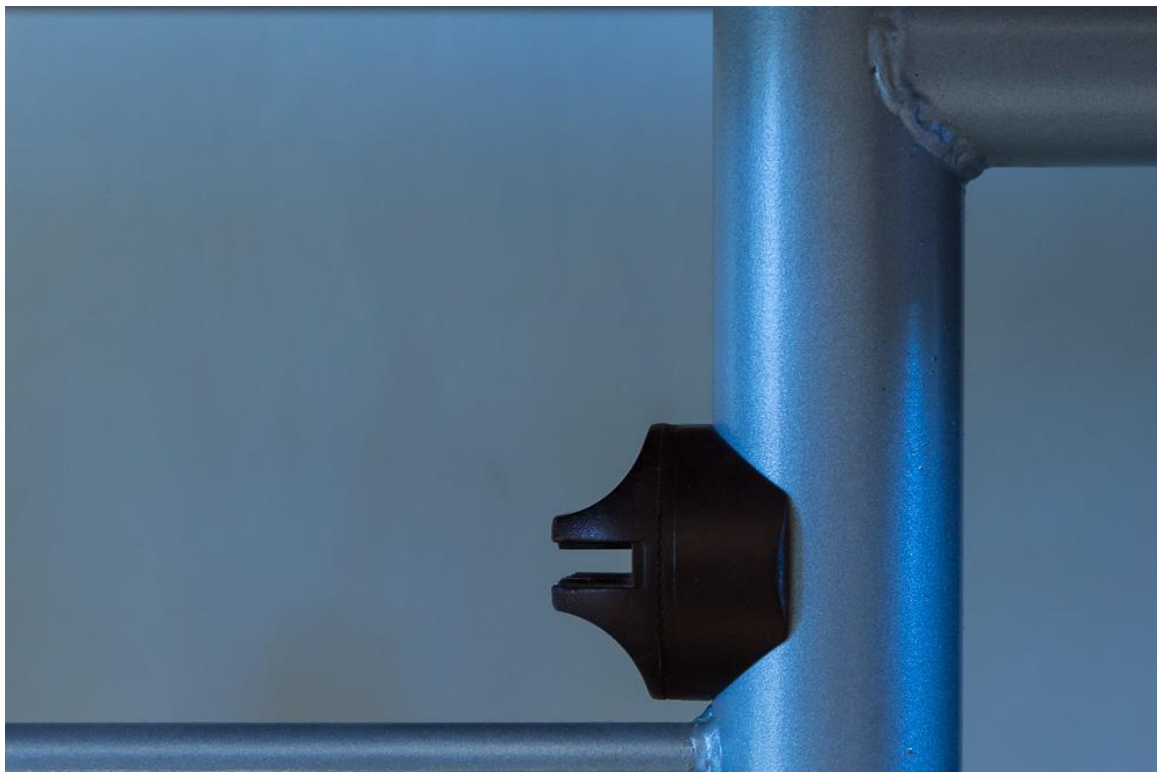
Potted plants indoors also form a good perch for insects, and don't discount that pesky housefly or blowfly, they too can make interesting subjects for the true macro photographer. Just to clarify; true

macro is where you can achieve a magnification ratio of 1:1, or life-sized. No zoom lens I know of will reach that ratio, the macro designation is somewhat of a sales gimmick, and usually offers a closer focus setting to achieve anything from 1:0.3 or 1:0.6. Still handy to play with, so make use of what you have.

Deciding what to photograph can be a challenge when you're confined to an indoors location. Belonging to a photography group or page on social media can greatly assist you in this regard. I know some groups are setting challenges of "photo per day", or provide a topic of "in the kitchen" etc. Obviously, we are not considering the regulars such as pets and family members.

To set the record straight; I am a sports and wildlife photographer, rugby, cricket, motorsport, and I love birding and nature photography guiding to groups, also macro photography. But I live in a small townhouse with no real garden, and with all sports cancelled, all reserves closed, and all travel prohibited, being in virtual house arrest is painful, very painful. I am an active person, always out and about, so keeping my photographic mind active is the one thing I can do indoors.

Indoors it is more challenging, now you have to find subjects you won't cover as rule. Those are the more abstract ones you will have to locate. Look for symmetrical shapes, patterns, textures, a frame with a focal point or use the shapes as the theme. Also use creative lighting on regular subjects found in the house. Play around with contrasting lighting, even black and white images. The pipework of my TV stand created this almost simplistic image.



Canon EOS 1D X, 24-105 f4, 105mm, 1/8, f6.3, ISO 1600, natural light.

If you are a photography crazy family, you're in luck. You can support each other, discuss images captured, try different suggestions all whilst living in lockdown. The singles out there must rely on their own creativity and use social media to get feedback on their images. Emailing your efforts to a friend can also be done.

Yes, now is also the time practice your indoor pet portrait skills. I would suggest you test your creative skills and make those portraits a little more special. So instead of capturing your cat sleeping, go a little further and get a special pose. The photo of my pleading kitten Milo was captured many years ago, hence the old Canon and non-art version of the 17-70 lens.



Canon EOS 20D, Sigma 17-70, 65mm, 1/200, f5, ISO 200, natural light.

The pose was achieved by waving a small fluffy toy tied to a string and teasing her to try and catch it. A portrait of a beloved pet that will always be with me, even though Milo has since passed on after 16 years of sheer pleasure

Capture portraits using natural light streaming in through a window. Your bounced flash lighting techniques can receive some practice. Plan each image with a specific end result in mind. Decide on the mood you want to create, the type of portrait you wish to create. Will it be formal, semi-formal, casual, candid, opportunistic? Casually posed but with special setup and lighting. Just be sure your model will be cooperative, remember he or she is also a little frustrated at being kept indoors.

The photo of my niece relaxing on the bed with her soft toy (she lives with me and is therefore housebound for the duration) was planned and captured at the start of this lockdown. Also into photography, I asked her to just sit casually holding her teddy bear, stare out the window, contemplating this lockdown situation and not mind me faffing about with setup, curtains, arranging

background objects, taking various exposures at different camera settings until I got the shot I wanted for this article – one setting an atmosphere and mood befitting the current crises. Exposing must be planned carefully, you do not want to burn out the window light, and don't get the subject too dark. Easy identification is preferable. Portraiture is not my preferred genre; now is the time to pay it a little more attention. We have lots of time on hand, and I can see quite a few more sessions for both of us.

I always maintain to photograph in colour and keep B&W conversion in mind when doing so, as it can be done in post-processing. You cannot convert an in-camera B&W image back into colour at a later stage. Everyone will have his own idea on this, just my opinion.



Canon EOS 1D X, 24-105 f4, 67mm, 1/320, f5.6, ISO 1600, natural light and soft bedside lamp, B&W conversion in Lightroom

If you are lucky enough to have pets other than cats and dogs, such as an aquarium or two, lizards, snakes or some other exotic pet, remember they make good portraits too. Capturing some of my Goldfish in the right pose and moment, just like cats they don't listen to your instructions, did take a little time. Photographing through the glass can be a little tricky, flash can cause glare on the glass, unwanted shadows, and highlight any watermarks or scratches on the glass.

Be sure to clean the glass properly and decide where in the aquarium you want to capture the image so that it will look pleasing and natural. Holding the camera at a slight angle to the glass will lessen the chances of glare and flash reflections. Waiting patiently for the right moment when two of my Shubunkins swam close to each other, and looked towards me, in the right spot in my aquarium, yielded the image shown. Fortunately, I wasn't in a hurry. Using manual focus and fine tuning the focus as I track them swimming worked better than autofocus for me.



Canon EOS 1D MkIV, 180mm f3.5 Macro, 1/200, f9, ISO 800, flash

There are many other photography related activities you can do during this lockdown period to while the time away. The internet is your friend in these times; a wealth of information is available when you just type in a few search parameters, and finding lens reviews, camera reviews and topics on techniques for photography and software developing will be quite easy.

Go a little further and download alternative software packages for developing your digital images and learn to use those, compare it with your current favourite software packages by developing the same images in both software sets. Remember you probably know your current package a whole lot better than the new package, so give it a fair chance and learn its parameters properly.

Nothing stops you from doing a little video capturing and learn to use some free software packages for video editing in your spare time. It just might open up a whole new world for you. Not into video myself, I have already downloaded a basic editing package and started learning my way around video editing. I have a young model on hand so might as well sharpen my skills in videography. Seems like fun, you should try it too.