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### 3 Simple Steps to Better Beadwork Photos

**Kirsten Creighton**

Originally published in *Beading Daily* 2008

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# 3 Simple Steps to Better Beadwork Photos

Kirsten Creighton

You put a lot of time and effort into your beadwork, but you just can't seem to take a photo that does it justice. If this sounds familiar, find comfort in knowing you are not alone, and that there are some simple steps you can take to improve your photos and capture the true beauty of your designs.



Figure 1: Turquoise and spiral rope by Kirsten Creighton

## Step 1: SET A SIMPLE STAGE (PREPARATION)

**Less is more**—Choose a plain white or other single-color background to make your beadwork the focus of attention. Choose a color that contrasts with your beadwork so colors will stand out, not fade into the background. If you plan to submit the photo to an art jury, use black, gray, or white. Busy patterns and too many props can be distracting. Be sure your backdrop is large enough to fill the entire shot without showing seams or edges. A simple sheet of printer paper or poster paper, depending on the size of the beadwork, should be all you need.

**Clean up your act**—Remove unwanted price tags and stickers from your beadwork, check for lint and dirt, and clean and polish your silver and crystal before you shoot. This not only makes a better looking photo, but it also protects your backgrounds and keeps them clean for the next setup.

**LOOK AT THE PHOTOS IN FIGURE 1.** The photo on the left pairs a nice Southwestern vase with a brick hearth to give the photo an earthy feel, but the initial focus is on the vase, not on the spiral rope necklace. Just by removing the vase, the photo

on the right maintains the same earthy character without distracting from the main attraction. Simple doesn't have to mean boring. Experiment with backgrounds that bring out the personality of your pieces.

## Step 2: LIGHT IT RIGHT (LIGHTING)

**“Look, Ma . . . no flash!”**—That's right . . . SHUT OFF your camera's flash to avoid harsh shadows, reflections, and washed-out colors. The best light for taking pictures comes from natural sunlight, so if you can't shoot outdoors, shut off the lights and bring your setup close to a window. Use a sheer white curtain to soften direct sunlight. If you choose to shoot indoors, use compact fluorescent bulbs that simulate daylight and won't overheat. Just as the light bulbs you bead under affect how you see the colors in your beads, they will also affect the colors of the beads in your photo.

**Expose yourself**—If your camera has manual (M) options, experiment with exposure settings to let in just the right amount of natural light. This may be the most valuable tool

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Figure 2: 5-strand bracelet by Diane MacDonald



on your camera and only takes a few minutes to learn by reading a section in your camera’s instruction manual. The screen will darken or brighten as you lower or raise the exposure value (EV), so you are able to see which setting is best before you snap the shutter.

**LOOK AT THE PHOTOS IN FIGURE 2.** The photo above left was taken using the camera’s built-in flash, which caused an overly bright center with a lot of reflections on the beads and dark shadows on the edges of the photo. The photo on the right was taken with the flash off, allowing the natural light to show off the true colors across the entire piece and reduce reflections.

camera’s timer and walk away for perfectly still, clear shots of your beadwork!

**LOOK AT THE PHOTOS IN FIGURE 3.** The pair of photos shown below demonstrates just how big a difference using the macro focus setting on your camera makes, especially when trying to focus in on details such as the flowers in the millefiori beads in this pair of earrings.

Following these three simple steps (plus the tips on the next page) will help you greatly improve the quality of your images without the need for costly digital editing software or expensive lighting and backgrounds.

**Step 3: USE YOUR “FLOWER POWER” (FOCUS)**

**Flower Power**—Use the macro (flower) setting on your camera to get in close to your design. This function allows you to get in close, within inches of your beadwork, to focus on the details. Get as close to your jewelry as your camera will allow before it is unable to focus.

**Zoom Out**—Set your zoom to the widest (W) setting possible to eliminate distortion. The zoom is meant to bring objects that are far away closer to the lens. Your jewelry is already up close, so using the zoom feature will create a “fish-eye” effect much like that of a glass paperweight.

**Go Hands Free**—Use a tripod and your camera’s automatic timer function to avoid camera shake. Inexpensive tabletop tripods can be found for under \$20 and are a must-have for getting the clearest images possible. Just the action of pressing the shutter button can move the camera enough to cause blurry images, so set the



Figure 3: Earrings by Natalie Creighton

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**A few more tips for photographing jewelry:**

- This article was written for today's digital camera users, but the same principles can also be applied to taking photos with a 35mm camera using a close-up lens and ISO 100 or 200 film. Many photo centers offer a digital photo CD with film developing, so you can have the best of both worlds.
- If you are using your photos for sharing via e-mail or on the Web, you should be able to accomplish this with even a modest 2 MP (megapixel) camera and still be able to print a 4 x 6 photo. If you plan to create large prints, including posters and flyers, you will need a camera with more megapixels, about 5 MP or better.
- Try to let light hit your beadwork from all sides. By doing this, you can show details such as veins in leaves, facets in crystal, and striations in agates and other transparent beads and gem-

- stones. Hang earrings to let light in from the back and prop larger items up on sheets of glass or plastic to let light in from underneath.
- Use a dot of thread conditioner wax to secure single art beads to your background to stand them up straight and keep them from rolling around.
- Use monofilament to suspend earrings.
- When in doubt, hire an expert. If you are selling your beadwork online or entering a beading contest or juried art exhibit, your success depends on the quality of your photos. Don't miss a single opportunity for lack of a great photo. ●

*Note: All jewelry designs in this article were created by the design staff at Tatnuck Bead Company, owned by Diane MacDonald, the author's mother.*

3 Simple Steps to Better Beadwork Photos: A Quick Summary			
Photo	How it was taken	Problem	Solution
	Photo taken inside my kitchen on a wooden tabletop. Camera is set to auto-matic. No adjustments were made before snapping the photo, and no camera supports were used other than my hands.	The automatic setting set off the flash bulb, washing out colors and causing harsh shadows in the corner. Object is too close to focus on with automatic zoom, so the photo is blurry.	Disable the camera's flash (lightning bolt with a line through it). Use the macro focus setting (flower) for close-ups.
	Photo is still taken inside the house on the same tabletop, but this time the flash has been disabled and the macro focus turned on.	Details are now in focus, but without the flash, it's pretty dark and still hard to see the design clearly. This photo is lacking enough light.	Bring the object closer to a light source, preferably outside or by a window for some indirect natural sunlight.
	I've moved out of the kitchen and have placed the beadwork by a sunny window. Camera is attached to copy stand and set to manual (M). Flash is off. Macro focus (flower) is on and zoom is set to its widest (W) setting.	Not much problem here. This is as close to perfection as you can get without using any editing software or investing in special lighting equipment.	Things that can be done to further improve this photo include cropping and editing in software, upgrading to a camera with special Macro lens and using professional grade lamps and backgrounds.

*Summary Photos: Blue spiral rope and glass pendant by Barbara Haberlin. Final version of photo is on page 1.*

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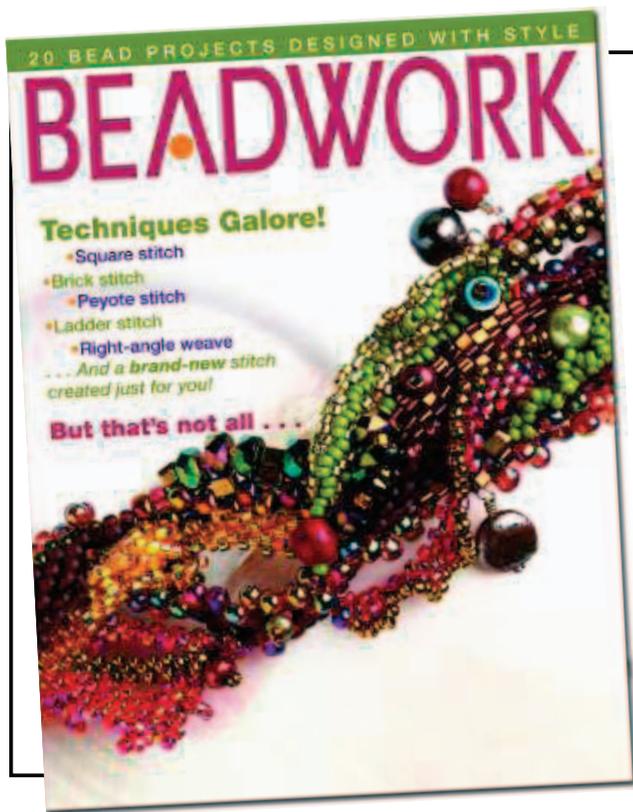
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### Kirsten Creighton

*Kirsten Creighton owns BeadAmbition <www.beadambition.com> and photographs beadwork, art beads, and other small handcrafted items. She also handles the marketing and promotions at Tatnuck Bead Company <www.tatnuckbead.com>, a family owned and operated bead store chain. Her other favorite pastimes include beading, teaching, cooking, playing with her kids, and sharing the bead dream with her entire family each and every day.*



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