

The craft&design Business

Words by Linda Doran
Images by Dave Ward

Synergy gets results commissioning professional photography



Meet professional craft photographer Dave Ward, *craft&design's* regular columnist and advisor.

If you have a photography query that you would like Dave to help with, just email or write in to the Editor.

Or to contact Dave about photographing your work, see his advertisement on page 61.

Picture the scene - a wonderfully crafted item of jewellery, ceramics, or wood is brought into the world with a huge amount of love and dedication. There it is poised on the verge of greatness, only needing a suitable photograph to be able to communicate itself beautifully to those not lucky enough to be in its actual presence. If it's unlucky what it gets is a quick flash with the family's super-snappy camera and there it is, a dull, lifeless representation of its true self - a sad end indeed to such promise.

Fortunately help is at hand for these poor mistreated objects; help in the form of specialised professional photography. Dave Ward, of Photography by Ward, explains:

"The thing about wonderful handmade objects is that they come about only because of the months and years of practice that their makers have already spent in the pursuit of their craft. The piece of work is the end result of *all* that, not just the time it takes to make the item. The same should be true for the photograph, that's how I see it. The image obtained by using a specialised professional photographer benefits from all the time that he or she has already committed to taking photographs. The synergy of two dedicated professionals coming together really can create something worthy of the object itself."

To understand more fully how this synergy is achieved in a photographic context we've come to Cumbria, to the studio of *craft&design's* regular photography columnist, Dave Ward.

The first thing to notice about the studio set up is the amount of technical kit involved (opposite page, top left). To be a professional photographer you obviously need a lot of specialist equipment and dedicated space to use it. The camera and stand, wall-mounted boom arms and lighting all confirm a photographic studio, but it is the flashing blue lights and array of silver-grey boxes which are testament to the technological revolution that has overtaken photography in the last decade. Not only is it necessary to have the traditional knowledge of a photographer, but now a whole new IT skill set has been added.

The emergence of digital photography in the last decade has transformed the way professional photographers work. Dave is enthusiastic about the practicalities of using digital with clients.

"The sheer immediacy of digital photography and the way that images can be shown to clients

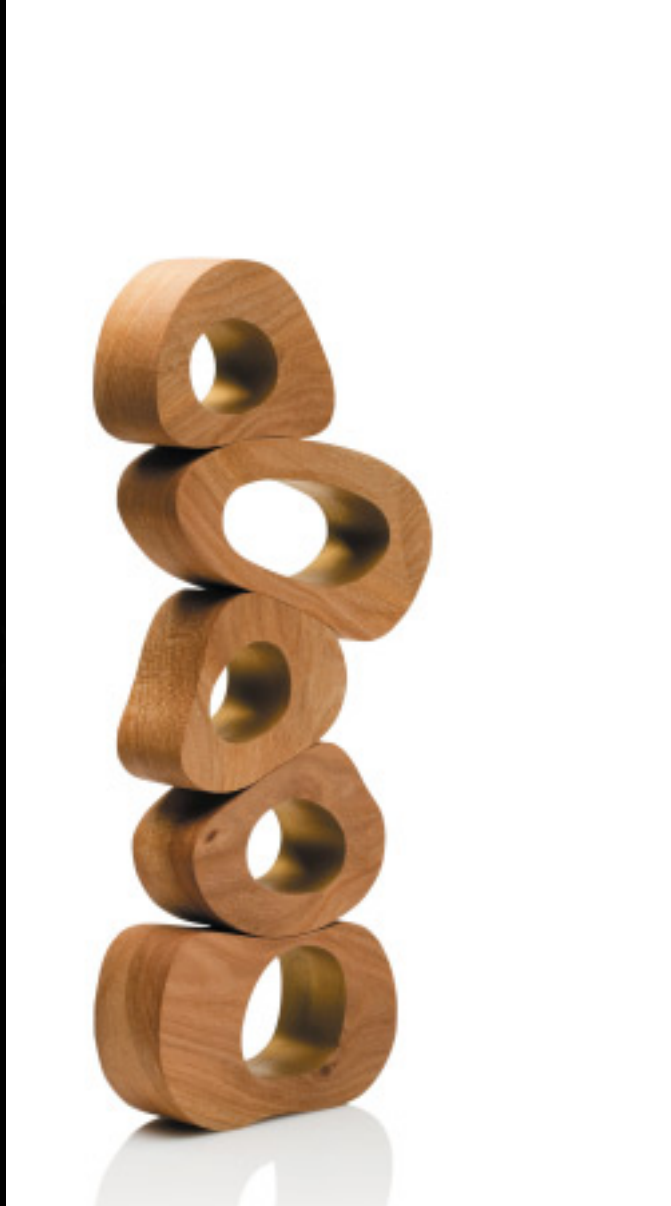
for instant feedback make it a great way to work. I have businesses I work with at the other end of the country and even in Europe, contacts who I've never met, and yet we establish great two-way communication when we work on photo shoots together. It means I can give the same service whether clients are here beside me in the studio or hundreds of miles away and that's important to me."

Good communication it seems is at the heart of the process. Some clients come to Photography by Ward knowing what to expect in a professional studio shoot and with a well-developed sense of what is wanted. For others the process is wholly new or they have not yet established a clear idea of what is required. With the latter group Dave is keen to put them at their ease and work with them to draw out what it is that will satisfy their requirements. Initial discussion will be supplemented by providing them with tailored gallery images from Dave's extensive range of work; clients' favourite websites and magazine images can also be used as a source of ideas. As Dave's ideas develop, rough sketches may be drawn up or ideas described for feedback using the same type of creative train of thought familiar to any creative professional.

All this prior discussion means that the essential practical and creative information is gathered to determine the right photography for every shoot. Questions to answer include the following:

What sort of images are needed? *Product-style* images are true representations of your work. They usually show the whole piece on a plain background, (opposite page, top right). The intended use for this style of image is to show the work 'as is' and are generally used for catalogues and submitting to galleries, etc. The *creative-style* on the other hand is used for impact and provides an aspirational feeling when someone looks at your work. They can be used as the main image on your website or on postcards, etc. The craft piece may be photographed whole, say with a creative setting, or may pick up some detailing, or concentrate the eye in certain areas by using funny angles or by making other bits go out of focus. This is done both in-camera and on the computer and the effects achieved are virtually limitless, (opposite page, bottom).

How are the images likely to be used? Fairs (e.g. banners), Shows/Galleries (e.g. introducing new work), Exhibitions, Catalogues



(printed and web), Websites (e.g. craft&design Selected), postcards and business cards.

What are the items to be photographed like?

Especially their unique features and challenges and what aspects the maker wants to promote.

What is the budget available? Photography by Ward has a basic pricing plan for small numbers of product-style images (this starts at £90 +vat for the first three images and rises to £210 + vat for seven individual shots of work). Creative shots are equally accessible with a few hundred pounds of budget allowing some fantastic creative shots combined with product shots as well if that works best.

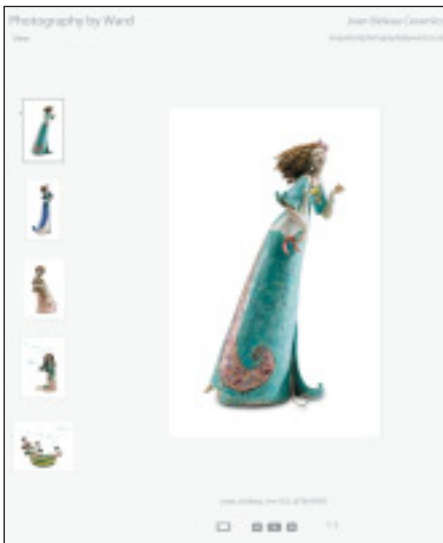
What is the previous experience of using professional photographers? Not all photographers specialise and commercial studio photography is a specialised field with a skill set quite distinct from weddings and portrait work. Exploring expectations and previous experience is an important part of building trust.

How is feedback on the photos to be managed? We need to know who will be involved in the design process. For example, will the images be used for a new website. If so, will the web designer need to liaise with the photographer regarding their design and where the images are to fit in?

How is the work to get to the photographer's studio and when? The mundane aspects of when to schedule and set up for a client appointment at the studio or delivery/pick-up of makers' work.

When it comes to producing the photographs themselves it is important to Dave that the client has involvement in creating the final images. Where once this meant being in the studio looking at upside down images through the camera view-finder, technology has now made it possible for remote clients to be brought right into the process of image-capture. As soon as a shot has been taken it can be sent on-line for review and feedback in "real-time" during the photographic process. Using easy

to understand gallery software, viewable through Photography by Ward's website (left), even hesitant web users can view the images and provide feedback about what is and isn't working for them. Dave is able to respond to what clients are asking for in this remote art direction by amending the staging and altering the technical aspects of the image-capture. It is an important part of the whole process, adding an extra creative dimension. As Dave stresses, "although we start with an idea of the style of images needed, the fact of two artists (the client and myself) working together often results in a different and more refined end result. Particularly with the more creative styled shots, it is important to allow photographic creativity to evolve." The result is a very high quality set of images arrived at through collaboration with a quest for perfection which drives Dave just like other makers. He sheepishly admits to having on occasion re-shot an image at no extra cost to the client to improve some small esoteric technical detail probably only relevant to himself when the client was already delighted with the result.



For a designer-maker who can attend in person the experience of being in the studio as the stage is set and the images created can be even more involving. Sometimes this extends to other members of the family too; Dave recalls employing the services of the client's husband to waft smoke from a smoke machine to get just the right amount of mood and atmosphere for a particular creative shot. It was a memorable occasion and one that gets laughed about each time they meet. Another client enjoyed the experience and recognised the beneficial nature of the process; "the photo session was just what my business needed and Dave is a brilliant man to work with. He knew what he wanted and how he would achieve it, but was open to my suggestions as well," Sue Dunne Ceramics.

Whilst local artists can more easily come to the studio, geographical distance does not have to be a deterrent to those who like the idea of being there in person. Working in the heart of one of the UK's premier holiday destinations, the Lake District, means it is perfectly feasible to combine a break with having work photographed. One designer-maker took a day away from her family during their week's holiday and had a collection of work photographed.

Attendance in person is certainly not required, however. For many designer-makers used to sending pieces to galleries across the country this is a convenient way for work to be photographed too. Many craft businesses have business insurance which covers goods in transit, whilst others prefer to use the postal service's own insurance and posting items across the country needn't be a cause for concern. For bigger businesses with a need for larger volume photography, taking the time out to be involved in all the shooting (which could take several days) is just not feasible and so sending the work, allied with a bit of periodic feedback is the solution. "We had a huge catalogue of jewellery pictures to be taken and were delighted with the variety that Dave managed to achieve despite the relatively narrow product range. The stylised group shots are particularly beautiful and look fantastic in our magazine advertising." Fatlip Contemporary Jewellery, Worcester.

The link between being a fellow artist and working with them as clients is one which Dave recognises. He likes to visit galleries to see what work and artists are out there and will search out interesting work and its creator at fairs as well as catching up with old friends. "I've always been interested in creativity in all its forms. Many of my photographic ideas come from seeing the work in the flesh. By visiting fairs I not only meet makers, but see their latest creations, too. I always look forward to photographic shoots for my designer-maker clients, and I'm a bit like a kid at Christmas, excited about what is coming out of the box next!"

It is clear that professional photography in this specialised area is about much more than just pointing a camera. The professional synergy between the artist-maker and the photographer working closely together, however that is achieved, can go a long way towards ensuring that dull images of beautiful objects can be a thing of the past.

(For contact details, see advertisement opposite).



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Heike Brachlow, *Waiting IV*, 2008.
Kilncast glass, kinetic, 16.5 x 51 cm. Photo: Patrick Leonard.

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Image - Silvia Levenson