



# HOW TO PHOTOGRAPH ARCHITECTURAL MODELS

From FIRST IN ARCHITECTURE

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## Introduction

For those of you who have spent hours hunched over your architectural model, got covered in glue, and cut yourself numerous times - I feel your pain. The architectural model making process is lengthy, dangerous, but necessary! Once you have finished your masterpiece, it is important to document your achievement with a set of photographs that show off how wonderful your design looks in foam board and balsa wood. You can even use photographs of the model in presentation work and get clever with a bit of photoshop. Either way, as soon as you finish that model, you need to be taking some pictures. It's not long before the white walls aren't so white, and bits start falling off or going missing..... time to get your camera out! In this guide I will show you how to get the best out of your photographs with some tips and techniques with lighting, your camera, post processing and so on. Lets get started.

## Formulate a plan

Before you start worrying about cameras, tripods and lighting you need to study your model. You want to start visualising what you want to achieve with the images - study the surfaces, material textures, the form, colour and size.

Which aspects of the design do you want to show off? What perspective will you go for? Will you want the image of the model at a distance - or is it a detailed model that would be better seen up close? Do you want to see the model from above, from eye level, or low?

How do you want your lighting to look - soft, hard, backlit - do you want to show surface detail? Does it need to look glossy? Obviously you will be limited by the equipment available to you, but it important to formulate an idea of how you would like your model to look in the images.

## Select your kit

First things first. You don't need a fancy DSLR. If you have one, great - use it. If not, don't worry - you can achieve great photos of your model with your iPhone or similar device. If you use your iPhone you even have the benefit of using various apps to enhance the image without even having to take it into photoshop.

If possible I would suggest using a tripod, particularly if you are using a DSLR. Either way, it will avoid the shaky hand and ensure your photos are crisper.

## Lighting

Professional photographers have all sorts of lighting equipment and expertise at their disposal, but usually we do not - so it is a case of making the best we can. A little bit of improvising. Ideally you want to use two light sources. One is a direct source, which is essentially acting as the sun, lighting the model from one direction, and creating shadows. The second source is an indirect light, which acts as an overall reflected light, giving the model a general light and stopping the shadows from being too dark.

Your first light, the direct source, needs to be pointing at the model. Select the angle based on the plan you made earlier on what you want to achieve with the look of the photographs. This light can be as simple as a desk lamp on a second table near the model, angled at the model.

The second light is a bit more difficult, and usually consists of a lamp, directed away from the model and reflected onto an umbrella which bounces light back towards the model. You could angle a light towards a wall that would reflect the light back - so location choice is important. The corner of a room works quite well as you have options to play around with your lighting, and you have the wall to use as your pin up for the backdrop. You can also experiment with positioning the model close to a window, (make sure the sun isn't streaming in though), to give the overall light and just use the direct source lamp.

Don't use more than one main direct source light - as this will create multiple shadows which you do not want.

Remember, if you are at university or college there is a good chance you may have access to photography materials and it is well worth asking around and seeing if this is the case. You may also be able to get some assistance and expertise of some photography students...

## Taking your photographs

Set up a white or black cloth on the wall behind the model, and let the cloth drape onto the table, then place your model onto the cloth. You can also use card, but this is a little bit more tricky. The idea is you want a continuous background.

If your camera has the option, amend the white balance to 'incandescent' which will allow for the use of artificial light as opposed to daylight.

Turn off the flash - you are setting the lighting atmosphere with your light sources, the automatic flash is a harsh light that is not suitable for what you are trying to achieve.

With the flash turned off the lighting will no doubt be a lot softer, as a result, it is important to use a tripod if you can.

If possible, turn off the overhead lights in the room, as these will be creating multiple shadows on the model.

Position your camera between the two lights you have set up. Then start taking your pictures. Experiment with different angles, move the lighting around, and try a different backdrop - if you started with white, have a go with black.

Another option, is to photograph your models outside. You get nice bright natural light, natural shadows etc. The difficulty is selecting your location. Try and keep backgrounds to a minimum so that photoshopping is easier afterwards. Also be mindful of the angle you are shooting from.

## Post processing

Once you have taken your photographs you can further enhance them using photoshop, or perhaps on your phone you could use one of the many apps available. I have shared some links and ideas below that should give you a little inspiration.

Photoshop tips for models

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8BFewloC-gA>

Editing model photographs

<https://visualizingarchitecture.com/part-1-model-pic-editing-the-making-of-performance-theater-portfolio-page/>

If you are reluctant to use photoshop - time issues etc - consider looking into photoshop actions. Automated actions that photoshop can carry out for you. These can be good time savers if you need to add certain effects to numerous images:

<http://www.vandelaydesign.com/photoshop-actions/>

<http://www.hongkiat.com/blog/60-useful-photoshop-actions-for-photo-enhancements/>

You can record your own actions or download free ones from the links above.

## Other points to consider

I would also suggest speaking to other students who have good photographs in their portfolios and getting some tips from them. They may even offer to help you out. If you aren't keen on doing this, speak with your tutors - they should really be able to offer you some advice.

Another idea, find out if there is a photography club near you and see if you can contact them, and perhaps set them a challenge to photograph your models... in return for some cake perhaps??!! (obviously make sure you can keep some of the pics!).

Another thing to think about is the weight of the photographs on the overall grade of your portfolio. Obviously it is important that the models are represented well, however, is it worth losing too much sleep over if there are far more important things you should be focusing your time on? Just a thought.

## Summary

Taking photographs of your architectural models doesn't have to be difficult or expensive. You can use everyday objects and lighting to create atmosphere and shadows that will show off the model. Remember to experiment, with different angles, locations, backdrops, lighting, until you get the look you are after. You can then work on the images in photoshop to further improve the photograph. Get inspiration from other sources - Pinterest is a great starting point - to get ideas of how to photograph the model, angles and more.

Don't be afraid to ask people for help - you will probably find that people will be too happy to lend a hand.

I have a pinterest board dedicated to architectural models - click on the link below to get some inspiration!

<https://uk.pinterest.com/1starchitecture/architectural-models/>

Want to visit the original blog post? Click on the link below to see the original post and all the associated images.

<http://www.firstinarchitecture.co.uk/how-to-photograph-architectural-models/>