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Food Pairings

Slick photos with a healthy dash of wit

KYLE DREIER, 45, has a taste for visual simplicity. "I've always liked ideas that are strong enough to stand on their own, without requiring a specific environment or much ancillary propping," says the Nashville-based professional food photographer.

Before opening his own studio three years ago, he worked as art director for *American Way* magazine, and his sense of graphic design shapes his photographic style today. His penchant for engineering his subjects plays into all of his

work now, but most of all in his personal project, "Pairings."

He says, "The idea just popped into my mind one day, and when I sketched it out I realized it would just be a question of engineering. And doing it in-camera, rather than [in]

See more of Kyle Dreier's culinary photography at dreier.com.





Dreier shot his food pairings using an Arca-Swiss medium-format body with Phase One back under Profoto studio lighting.

Photoshop, seemed a good way to learn more about food styling.”

For his first experiment, a brownie-and-milk combo, the first logistical challenge was rigging the items together. Dreier used wire armature to fasten his subjects (supported by gaffer’s tape) then bound them with string. He lit each pairing carefully with various Profoto strobes and softboxes with reflectors. “I’m used to working on client deadlines,

and having long, leisurely days in the studio just helped me to play and learn,” he explains.

Experimenting expanded the range of his pairings: a steak and merlot juxtaposes the decidedly lowbrow hot dog and beer. It also led to some happy discoveries in styling, such as when he learned that cooled spaghetti is just sticky enough to help bind a meatball and a bottle of mineral water.

But the best lesson of all came

when Dreier showed a final eight-image series to various art directors and buyers. He found that it was not only a great conversation starter, but one that stuck with clients.

“I often find myself making creative decisions based on what I see in the market, or based on what I think a client wants,” he says. “This taught me that it makes a more lasting impression to produce what I’d like to see.”

—Lori Fredrickson