



# 22 PHOTO PROJECTS

You Can Do Inside Your Home

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# Intro

As of April 3rd, at least [311 million people in the United States](#) have been urged to stay at home. The specifics might vary, but the message is clear: in order to flatten the curve and keep more people safe from the novel coronavirus, we must practice social distancing.

For photographers who find inspiration and motivation in the outside world, these circumstances can pose a particular challenge — but there are ways to cope and get your creative juices flowing during this difficult period.

“If you want to be shooting while you’re in quarantine, my suggestion is to be proactive about it,” Danny Ghitis, photographer and professional development coach tells us.

“Keep your camera with you as often as possible, and think of it like a sketchbook. Your thoughts and behaviors influence each other, so the more you take pictures, the more you’ll think about taking pictures and feel like someone who can take pictures in the moment.”

Here you’ll find twenty-two projects you can do from the safety and comfort of your home. Some might require a few accessories, but many you can do with whatever you happen to have around the house. Use these ideas as a starting point, and add your own as you go.

— The Feature Shoot and PhotoShelter Teams

**Note:** At the time of this guide’s publication, COVID-19 has been classified as a worldwide pandemic by the World Health Organization. As a result, countless city, state and national governments have issued shelter-in-place orders and we urge everyone to follow them. Please note that some of these projects involve going outside or interacting with people from far away. Should you be under a more restrictive policy we encourage you to adhere to those orders and take part in such projects once such restrictions have been lifted.



# Projects



# The Self-Portrait

We all take selfies, but there's something to be said for the old-fashioned self-portrait. Taking photos of ourselves can inspire introspection and deepen our understanding of our goals, worries and desires.

There are no rules here; you can take a documentary approach and chronicle your daily routine at home, or you can shoot some cinematic tableaux using colored gels. You can play a character like Cindy Sherman or delve into the psyche like Francesca Woodman.

Add depth and dimension by bringing in mirrors and playing with your reflection, or use water and glasses for cool refraction effects. Alternatively, you can also bring in a prism or experiment with bending light; [Fractals](#) has a line of prismatic camera filters for this purpose.



© Dimitrije Tanaskovic

# The Still Life

As popular Instagram feeds like [@still\\_life\\_gallery\\_](#), [@country\\_stilllife](#) and [@tv\\_stilllife](#) can attest, this time-honored genre is as “trendy” today as it was in the 16th century. It’s also easy to do at home using nothing but groceries, household items and natural window light.

Study the light around your house or apartment, and aim to shoot your still lifes at golden hour. If it’s too harsh, you can use plain, sheer curtains as a diffuser.

Again, remember to have fun and experiment with different styles. You can play with austere minimalism or channel Caravaggio with lush fruits and bountiful objects. Maybe you photograph things that are meaningful and precious, or you set yourself the challenge of making ordinary household objects look beautiful. Try out different angles and perspectives, and use a reflector to bounce light back onto your subject when needed.



© Carles Rodrigo Monzo

# The Food Shoot

Cooking is a well-known stress reliever, and the current pandemic is encouraging more of us to make do with what we have in our pantries. If you're experimenting with new recipes, use it as an incentive to bring out that camera. You don't have to be a great chef; even simple staple ingredients will work.

Keep in mind that, depending on the food, you might want to photograph it before it's completely cooked to keep that vibrant color. You can use olive oil and a brush to make it shine. Go in with a concept, and consider doing a quick sketch of your composition. Once you're there, you can play around with various angles and set-ups.



© Nadine Greeff

# The Background Experiment

For this project, get a roll of seamless background paper ([B&H](#) has lots of options and colors) or use fabric or construction paper you have lying around the house. If you don't have a backdrop stand, you can find all sorts of DIY hacks for setting it up at home, from PVC pipe stands to wall-hangings. A few pony clips can come in handy here.

Whether you're shooting portraits or still lifes, a great background can elevate your work. You can go with a simple white background to practice commercial product photos, or you can play with color theory and complementary pairs to catch the eye. Go minimal with just a few objects in front of your seamless, or go all-out with complex compositions.



© Leandro Crespi



# The Macro Shoot

Now is the time for small pleasures, and perhaps there's no better way to embrace that than shooting with a macro lens. You can work with any subject you choose, from smoke to soap bubbles. If you have an off-camera flash and a softbox (you can make one yourself), go ahead and use it. If you don't have a macro lens, you can "hack" it by putting a manual lens on your camera in reverse, using extension tubes and electrical tape to hold it in place.



# The Interior Shoot

You don't need to live in a luxury villa to capture great interiors. All you need is a room with nice window light and curtains you can use as needed for diffusion. Track the sun's movements throughout the day to determine what times work best for interior photoshoots, and scout all your rooms to find the one with the prettiest light.

From there, simply tidy up your space, add some unique touches, and compose your shot for clean, straight lines, compelling shadows and plenty of negative space.



© Joe St.Pierre

# John Baldessari's Assignment #96

In 1970, the conceptual artist John Baldessari created a delightful and inspiring list of “[optional assignments](#)” for his CalArts class. They all hold up today, and many of them can be done from home. We found this particular Baldessari assignment, #96, in the book [The Photographer's Playbook](#) from Aperture (if you don't have it yet, we recommend it!).

Here's what Baldessari writes: “Using photography, prove a point as in a science fair diorama, display, tableau, such as: ‘How quickly does bread mold under certain conditions?’, ‘Is plant growth hampered by use of conditioned water?’, ‘What is the effect of colored lights on plants?’” He goes on to suggest a few more ideas, but you get the picture: use your camera to conduct a “scientific” inquiry into something that makes you curious.



© Yaroslav Danylchenko



© Ryan Ahern

## The Film Challenge

While at Yale, the painter Josef Albers had a trick for motivating his art students: if he felt they were having trouble concentrating, he had them switch to more expensive drawing paper. His philosophy was this: when working with pricier materials, they'd be more conscientious about every mark they made. Even after they later turned back to cheaper newsprint, he found the lesson held; the experience taught them to remain thoughtful and diligent about their work.

Although working in a different medium, many photographers have the same experience when switching from digital to film. Digital cameras give us the freedom to take an almost unlimited number of photos, but using film — even for just a short time — can serve as a reminder to slow down and take our time.

Being stuck indoors can be an opportunity to take a breather, and film photography is a great way to do that. If you want to learn to process your film at home, that's another avenue to explore during this time; if you keep it simple and basic, all you'll need is developer, fixer, water, a developing tank, plastic reels, a thermometer and measuring cups.

# The Collage

On social media, in art galleries, and in the world of commercial photography, collage art is having a moment. In our digital world, the meaning of the word “collage” has expanded. There’s always something magical about creating a tangible, physical piece of art, but Photoshopping and compositing, within a certain context, is also a form of collage.

Whether you’re cutting up your photos (or found photos) and pasting them together or experimenting with editing apps like [Pixlr](#) and posting your results on social media, collaging can be a meditative, therapeutic activity. Tap into the zine culture of yesteryear, and let your imagination run wild.



© Guille Faingold



© Catherine MacBride

## The Custom Bokeh Project

Dreamy bokeh can add a new layer of meaning to any still life or portrait photo, or it can serve as the foundation for abstract, painterly pictures.

All you need for a simple bokeh background is some aluminum foil, a camera and a fast lens (wide-open aperture). If you have a speedlight or colored gels, bring them out too, as they'll give you more freedom to experiment. Crinkle the foil, set it behind your subject and shoot with a shallow depth of field (only your subject should be in focus). You can find a more in-depth how-to [here](#).

For more control, you can also create your own custom bokeh shapes, like hearts, stars, squares, etc. Here's how: draw your shape on a piece of sturdy black cardboard, and cut it out with a paper cutter. From there, you can cut out a filter and a filter holder to attach to your lens with a rubber band. PhotoPills has a great video tutorial [here](#).

# The Fun With Flowers Challenge

Yes, we already discussed still life photography, but it's springtime, so we thought flowers deserved a section of their own. According to [research](#), living with flowers can decrease stress and lift our spirits, so even though we might not be able to spend time outside, it's worth bringing flowers into our homes.

Flowers are versatile subjects, so you can introduce them to your still lifes, portraits or macro photos. If you want to keep them fresh, you can always pop them in the refrigerator to slow the wilting process. Another popular technique is freezing your flowers in ice and taking photos of the delicate shapes they form. All you need are your flowers, a container, distilled water and your freezer.



© Sophia Hsin



© Melissa Ross

# The Pet Portrait

As far as we know, there aren't any "meaningful signs" that pets can get or spread the coronavirus, but that doesn't mean that your dog or cat isn't in need of a little extra care during this difficult time. Like humans, animals can become stressed or depressed when stuck indoors, and [The New York Times](#) recently published a great story on keeping them enriched right now.

In between playing puzzle games, introducing treat dispensers, training and other enrichment activities, plan a photoshoot both you and your pet will enjoy. The key is to make it fun and pleasant for the animal, so bring out some toys and treats and use it as a bonding experience. You can roll out that seamless background for more formal portraits or document them as they go about their daily routines.





© Leandro Crespi

## The Drop Art Challenge

In 1957, Harold Edgerton stunned the photo community by creating his now-iconic picture [Milk Drop Coronet](#) using a dropper, strobe lights and a camera he invented for this purpose. These days, it's easier than ever to get these kinds of images using regular electronic flashheads.

You can create high-speed photos almost anywhere, as long as you have the right lighting and setup, including a reliable flash (set it at its lowest setting), a tripod, and a shutter release if you have one. If drop art like Edgerton's is what you're after, you might consider investing in [a drop kit](#), though you can also play with droppers you have at home.

As for the water itself, you can add any food dyes you want, or you can make it more viscous by adding xanthan gum. It might take several tries for you to get the shot you want, so be patient, and don't forget to have some towels on-hand for clean-up. You can read Shutterstock's tips for high-speed photography [here](#) if you're just getting started.

## The View From Here

Being stuck inside doesn't mean you can't take photos of the outside world; just think of all the romantic, rainy window photos we see these days. You can do some creative and striking projects using the view from home, no matter where you live.

Years ago, for instance, the Anchorage-based photographer [Mark Meyer](#) photographed the changing seasons as seen through the window of his 100-year-old log house. [Andrew A. Amundsen](#), a photographer in Minnesota, photographed the view from his attic loft using his iPhone.

Use whatever camera you have on hand, and document the view as it shifts from day to day. Watch for changes in weather and in the quality of light; you can get some beautiful variety by shooting at different hours of the day, moving from warm light into cool.



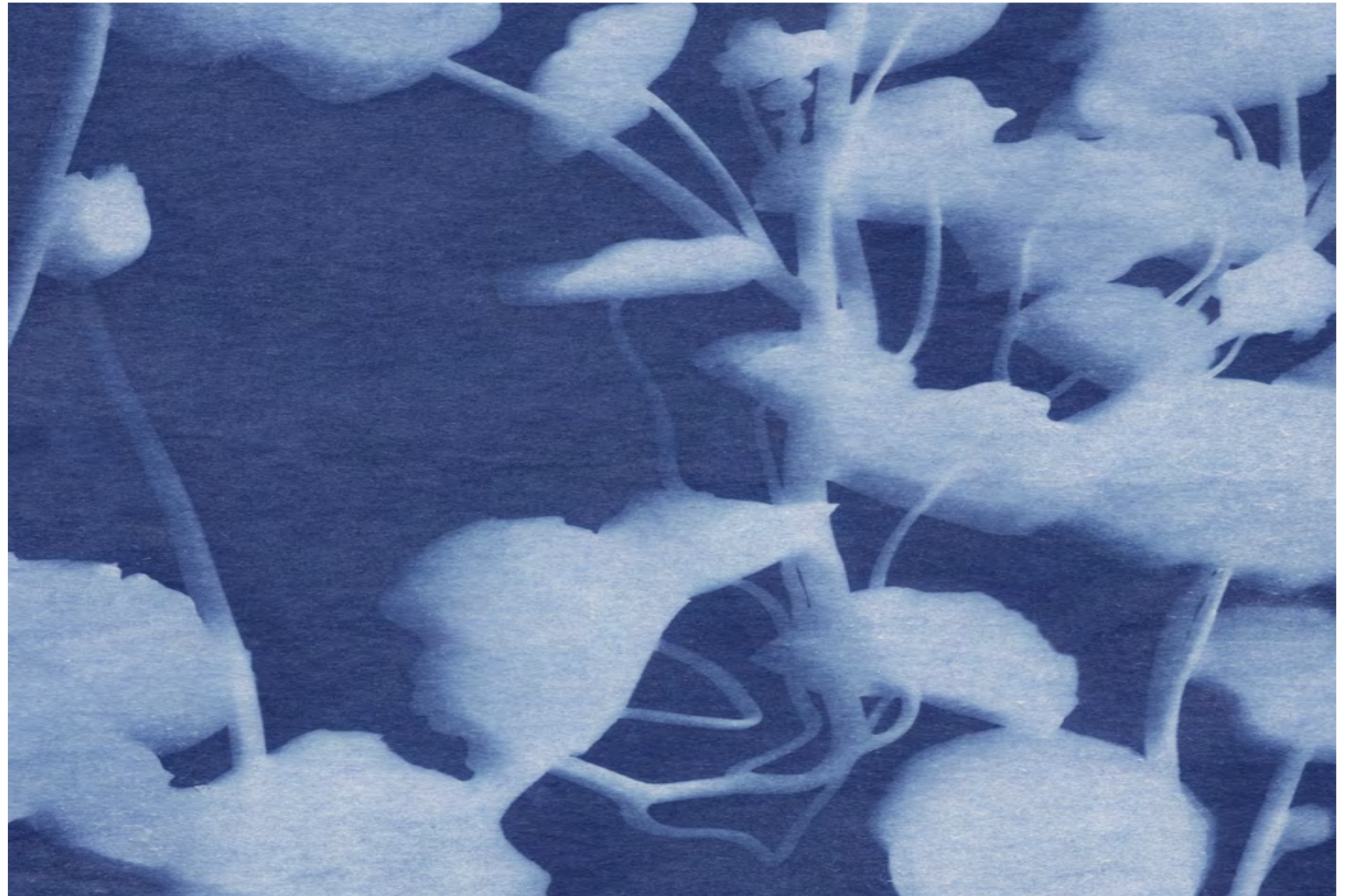
© Bisual Studio

# The Sun Print

Here's one photography project that doesn't require a camera; all you'll need is sun-sensitive paper like [Nature Print Paper](#), cardboard and some tacks to keep your print stable and flat, water, and any objects of your choice.

Place the objects (flowers, leaves, shells, buttons, household items, paper cut-outs) onto the paper to form your composition. You can even use an old black and white negative from your archive if you have a specific image in mind.

If you have a balcony, backyard, or porch, you can set your paper outside to expose it, but you can also use bright indoor lights (e.g. a photoflood bulb), as long as you run some quick tests to determine the right exposure. After it's done, remove it from the light source and soak it in water.



© Alicia Bock

# The Anonymous Project

Throughout the years, we've interviewed more than a handful of artists who work under pseudonyms or create anonymous social media feeds to showcase their work. The reason is pretty straightforward: while many of them have professional accounts where they showcase their portfolio and client work, they also want a space where they can experiment and have fun creatively.

Now is a good time to get out of that perfectionist headspace and focus on personal projects that bring you joy. If you share them anonymously, you give yourself the freedom to try new things, whether it's a different lens, a filter you've never used, or a post-processing technique you've been wanting to try. Chances are, the work you create and share under a pseudonym will eventually influence your day-to-day workflow and encourage you to take a few creative risks.



© Anna Berkut

# The 30-Day Challenge

Sometimes, limits can turn into opportunities. At home, you have a finite number of materials and subjects, so take it as a chance to get back to the basics.

You've probably heard of the old creative prompt or assignment where you think of an everyday object — a brick, a toothbrush, a blanket, etc. — and list all the potential ways in which it could be used. Once you get past the obvious ones, you can get into wacky, creative territory — and that's where the fun starts.

This project, which we've dubbed the "30-day challenge," is similar. Instead of brainstorming different uses for an ordinary object, think of all the ways you can photograph it. Pick out an item in your home — it can be as boring and basic as you want — and photograph it every day for 30 days.

No two photos can be the same, so try repositioning the object, switching lenses, or photographing it at different times of day under natural and artificial light. As the days go on, you'll be forced to think outside the box and try new things.



© HEX.

# The Cinemagraph

Kevin Burg, one of the pioneers of the cinemagraph, once described it as “[a photograph that has a living moment inside of it.](#)” These days, they’re everywhere, from social media feeds to high-end department stores. If you have a camera that shoots video and access to Photoshop, you can create a cinemagraph.

Alternatively, you can find [dedicated apps and cinemagraph makers](#) available for download, and many of them help simplify the process. It’s the perfect medium for those who like to blur the boundaries between filmmaking and still photography.



© Giada Canu

# The A-Z Project

There are a few different ways to do an A-Z photo project, but perhaps the simplest is to look around the house and photograph one item that begins with every letter of the alphabet. So, maybe you start by photographing an apple, a book, a clock, a dress, an eggplant, a fork, etc., until you have 26 photos of various subjects.

This exercise will get you thinking about photography 24/7, even if you're just going into the kitchen to grab a snack. It'll also push you out of your comfort zone and encourage you to photograph subjects you might otherwise overlook.



# The DIY Photobook

These days, you can create top-notch photo books online with apps and tools like [Blurb](#), [Motif Photos](#), [Printique](#), [Artifact Uprising](#), [Shutterfly](#) and more. The accessibility of the medium has led to what many are calling a “boom” in photobooks.

If you have the time (and a printer), you can also make a book from your favorite prints. Design your pages using an app like InDesign, print your images and bind them. Photographers like [Paul Politis](#) and [Uma Kinoshita](#) have created some beautiful books themselves, with varying levels of difficulty, and [Skillshare](#) has several bookbinding classes to help you get started.



© Nicole Mason



# The 'Dream Photo' List

"Photo bucket lists" have been around for a while, but now is a great time to slow down, sit back and reflect on your personal photography practice. Make a list of everything you hope to photograph someday; it can be a far-flung destination, a wild animal in his natural habitat, a human emotion, or a portrait of a person you love but have never photographed.

It's hard to say when the coronavirus pandemic will end or what our "new normal" will look like once it's in the rearview mirror, but we can use this time to set goals for the future. In between your indoor photoshoots and daily chores, take five minutes or so each day to think about where you're headed and where you'd like to be.



© Lumina

# #TheFrontStepsProject

Okay, this last one isn't technically an indoor project, but you can do it while practicing social distancing and staying safe. Developed by Massachusetts photographer Cara Soulia and marketing consultant Kristen Collins, [The Front Steps Project](#) has gone viral around the globe, with photographers far and wide joining the cause.

In a moment when many of us are feeling isolated, the project is bringing communities together through portraiture; in the Boston suburb of Needham, the group spends their days photographing families and residents on their doorsteps, making sure to stay at least ten feet away. The shoots last around five minutes, and in exchange for the professional photos, participating families are encouraged to donate to the Needham Community Council to help those in need.

Since the project launched, its creators have been contacted by hundreds of photographers hoping to start new versions in their neighborhoods. Photographers have urged participants to donate to local hospitals, animal shelters, food pantries, local businesses and more to support them through this challenging time. You can get in touch with the group [here](#) to launch your own #FrontStepsProject and foster a sense of (virtual) connection and togetherness in your hometown.



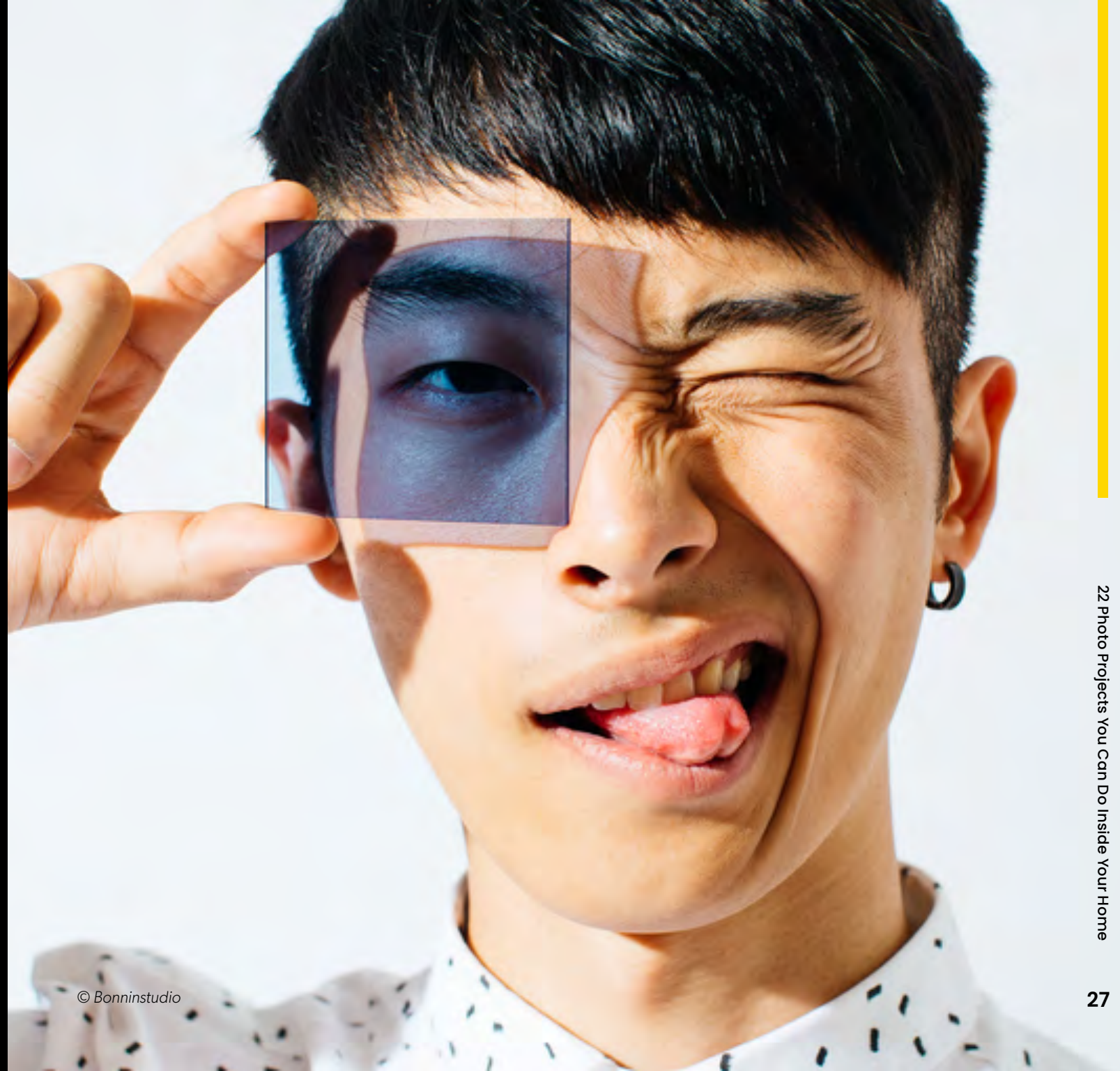
© Rob and Julia Campbell

# Conclusion

In the past few weeks, we've seen the photography community come together in inspiring and unexpected ways. Some artists have offered free online courses for fellow creatives, and others have hosted giveaways of prints and photobooks.

Use this time to think about how you can leverage your skills to help others through this difficult period, in small ways and large. That can mean offering a discount on your products or giving something away on Instagram. It can mean creating a blog post full of tips for other artists. It could mean posting a photo every day that makes you smile, or maybe it means sharing information about how people can donate supplies to local hospitals.

Get creative, and find ways to connect with the larger community, without in-person interactions; with a little ingenuity, sheltering-in-place doesn't have to be something we do alone. We'd love to see what you're shooting during this period, so feel free to tag us on Instagram and Twitter at [@photoshelter](#) and [@featureshoot](#). If you tackle one of these projects, let us know how it goes!



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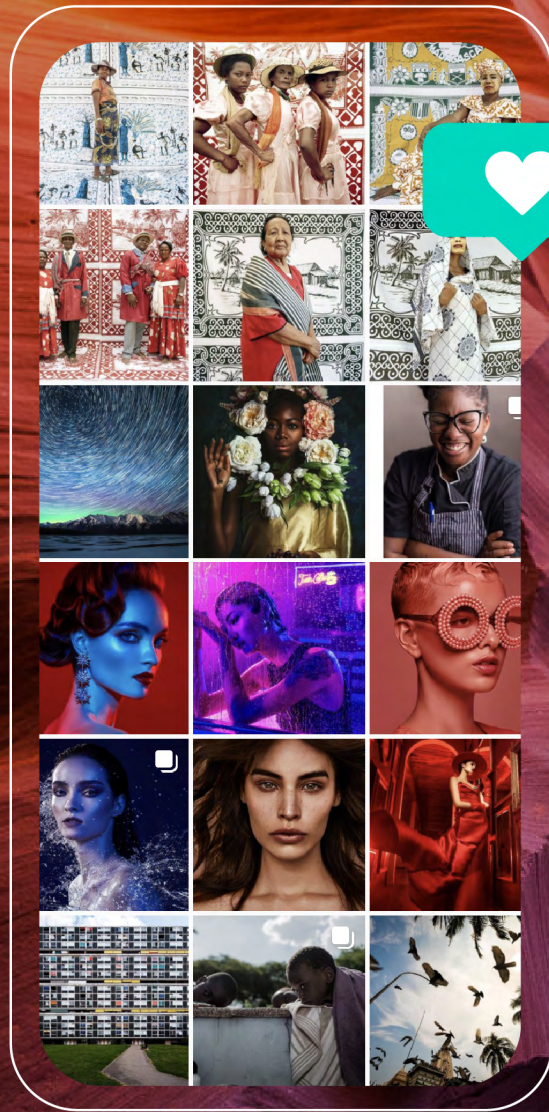
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