

# THE MALTESE WALL

Dave Wall enjoys the hospitality of the Maltese people and does a bit of work along the way!

So my mini Malta tour has come to an end...but what great fun we had!

This has to have been some of the most enjoyable training I have undertaken in a very long time (and that is saying something considering the amount of training I undertake in any given year), mainly in part to the generosity and warmth of the Maltese delegates, and the impeccable organisation from the MIPP.

So where do I start?

How about...meeting up with Juliet at some ungodly hour at Manchester Airport (read 4am!) After hazy 'good mornings' we jet off to the sunny island of Malta, getting there a full 40 minutes ahead of schedule due to a 140mph tail wind...fantastic.

So just after 9am we were met by Martin Agius, a local press photographer and all-round fantastic guy who drives us over to our hotel to drop off our bags.

So what next?

Food and beer of course! Sitting outside in the sun having a natter about nothing in particular, enjoying the Maltese sun...burning my head and nose to a crisp!

Back to the hotel to change before we are back out again down to the pub! Hard work this networking you know! Here we meet back up with Martin and also with the president of the MIPP, Kevin Casha (a very funny guy with a twinkle in his eye that says he is always looking for mischief...a man after my own heart). A few beers later and we have all put the photography world to rights; a really relaxing enjoyable evening where I am instantly made to feel extremely welcome.

So Friday morning dawns and again Martin comes to pick up Juliet and me for a day site-seeing around the south of Malta.

Tough this training malarkey you know!

We had a really enjoyable day (burning more of my bald head) before we were taken into the fantastic crumbling capital city of Valletta by two more members of the MIPP Therese Debono and Sergio Muscat for an evening eating local Maltese cuisine. Much to Juliet's delight the main course of the evening was 'legitimate' horse stew which Juliet couldn't resist taking pictures of to send back to Phil (it did look, however, extremely nice, although I didn't risk it, chicken for me!).

So finally the frivolity ends and Saturday arrives and time to actually do some work!



Saturday's training session was one of my new courses 'Studio Photography - On a Shoestring'. This particular session takes quite a while to set up and requires lots of little items of equipment to allow things to run smoothly. Thanks to Easyjet for not weighing hand luggage I was able to haul most of it into my overhead locker so my seminar could have full impact.

The early part of the morning was taken up with the whys and wherefores of product photography, equipment needed and the skills required to ensure professional results - mainly being patient (at which point the delegates starting laughing out aloud as Kevin isn't famous for this particular attribute).

In addition to this I also wanted to dispel the myth that lighting products was less technical than photographing people, as the products obviously don't move, photographers assume things will often be easier (afraid not)! In this early section of the day I also like to cover the subject of photographing 'cut-outs' - products on plain white backgrounds, and how it (if done correctly), is pretty much a licence to print money. With all the boring stuff out of the way it was time for the room to be plunged into darkness and start shooting. As always I like to 'impress first' to get people sitting up in their seats so I set up what many would perceive to be the most complicated product shot - the Gucci after-shave you see on these pages, shot with just two watts of light and three pieces of children's tracing paper!

This demonstration always amuses people with how easy product photography can be with a little ingenuity and thought.

From here I took the delegates into Photoshop and Lightroom to show how easy 'building' the image can be and how quickly it can be achieved. It's still not even lunch time...so time for another completely different product to shoot, the Cree torch (again shown on these pages). This time, however, it was time to show off my Blue Peter home-made strip-lights to undertake the lighting duties. In fact all my modifiers generated a great deal of interest throughout the day and I am pretty sure I sparked quite a few imaginary light bulbs above the delegates' heads. Time for a quick retouch before lunch!

While eating lunch I decided to rip up the rule book for the afternoon session as I got the feeling that delegates 'had got it' and they were ready to dip their toes in the product photography waters.

Time for a social experiment!

I divided the group into two sections, experienced and non-experienced and gave each a product to shoot and a 20-minute window to complete the task. To make things a little more interesting I was the client and I gave both teams a strict brief to follow.

The experienced members went first with their 'opponents' heckling

at every opportunity! Under the guidance of Kevin Casha (their most experienced photographer) the group made progress quite quickly, however, fell at the last hurdle somewhat, as they had decided to shoot their product with various exposures while moving the lights around ready to piece together later in Photoshop (my preferred method). However, somebody knocked the tripod in the last minute causing havoc! From my point of view very amusing but a valuable lesson learned nonetheless.

Next was the turn of the less-experienced group. Although they instantly went along the correct path, they made the fundamental error of changing too many lights all in one go, causing confusion to reign with a few heated debates on the merits and pitfalls of this! Even so I awarded them the winning prize as they completed their shoot without any errors. When we had finally completed the live shoots everyone commented that it was far harder than they had anticipated, and that maybe I had led them into a false sense of security (which actually was my intention all along). This part of the day was purely intended for delegates to problem solve, slow down and get organised, as these are the main attributes for any product photographer.



As the afternoon session was now not following a programme, I threw myself on the mercy of the delegates and asked what they wanted to see - always a BIG risk this one, especially when you are working with a background roll that is just a piece of A4 paper (no, I am not joking) and just three watts of lighting!

So next we covered how to shoot effective and efficient cut-outs, using just one watt of light, which was great fun. The next request, however, did make me stop and think 'why am I doing this?'

'Can you show us how to shoot a white, shiny object on a white background?'

Great !?@\*?!!!

Shooting white on white is pretty tricky at the best of times but when you are working within just a few inches from product to background, things become a lot more tricky!

Thinking on my feet is often what I do best as it makes me dig into the



cloudy bits of my mind to find solutions...and within five minutes we had the shot nailed (which even impressed me if I am being totally honest). So a really fun day which was a great eye opener confirmed with so many delegates milling around at the end looking and taking notes of all my equipment to put their new found skills into practice. I think I can safely say that none of the delegates now feels that product photography is boring, and they will never look at everyday objects quite the same again! My final training day dawns and I am really excited as the MIPP have (some how) managed to get permission for us all to have complete access to shoot in St. James Cavalier in Valletta - an amazing art gallery with a mix of medieval and ultra modern combined architecture... a perfect backdrop for my Ambient Interiors seminar!

We all met in the main gallery area, which is a long cave-like structure that used to be the gunpowder store for Valletta, an amazing and inspiring space.



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I explained to all the delegates that shooting interiors is very formulaic and actually quite easy if the space has been prepared in advance (fully working light bulbs, clean and tidy, etc). We spend half an hour or so discussing techniques and then began shooting.

We only had three hours so I proposed that I shoot all the interiors as if it were on a live job, as I have promised the gallery I will have some images for their archive for their generosity in letting us have full reign around the building. This way the delegates could also go off and shoot what they want and then can drift back to me at any point to see what I am doing, show me what they have shot and also ask technical questions along the way.

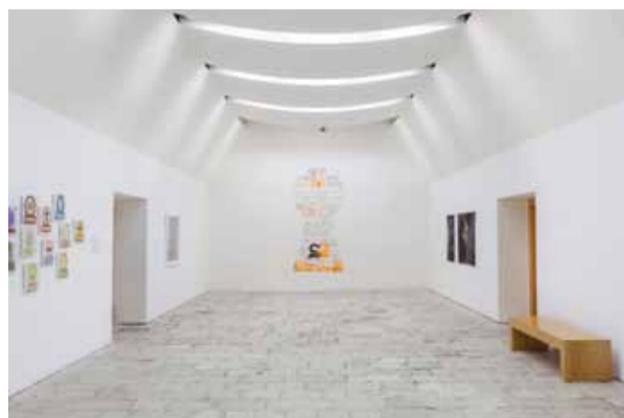
I have to say, from a delegate's point of view, there is nothing more boring than watching another photographer just clicking away, so this approach worked brilliantly, as people could shoot at their own pace and enjoy the experience.

With time against us we all worked away with great speed, meeting up to discuss 'my secret sauce' on how the images are pieced together on the computer. At this point there was many a dropped jaw, and discussions that 'it can't be THAT easy surely!'

As time comes to a close we all drift off for a bite to eat and a few (more) beers before an evening of...you guessed it...more food and more beer! It's a tough life this training you know!

I would like to thank all of the MIPP who made this trip so much fun and go so smoothly. Thanks especially to Kevin, Therese and Sergio for their hospitality and warm nature, but most of all to Martin who ran Juliet and me around the whole of our stay (it was like having our own personal tour guide).

Thanks guys, Juliet and I really appreciated it.



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