



# Honey, Tea, and Bourbon

## ASSIGNMENT TEN: MORE POURS AND SPLASHES

Thirsty to learn more about pours and splashes? Then read on to explore the challenges of shooting liquids. As with food, the goal is to emphasize whatever makes the subject the most appealing. The honey's thickness, the iced tea's splash, or the bourbon's color—each liquid has its own unique way of connecting with the consumer. And as commercial photographers we are constantly searching for ways to help make that connection as strong as possible.

◀ A sense of movement was what I wanted to capture with this image.

ISO 100, 1/160 sec, f/20, 50mm lens on Canon DSLR  
Food Stylist: Jacqueline Buckner

► Getting the honey cold was the secret to capturing this image.

ISO 50, 1/125 sec, f/16, 90mm lens on Sinar P3



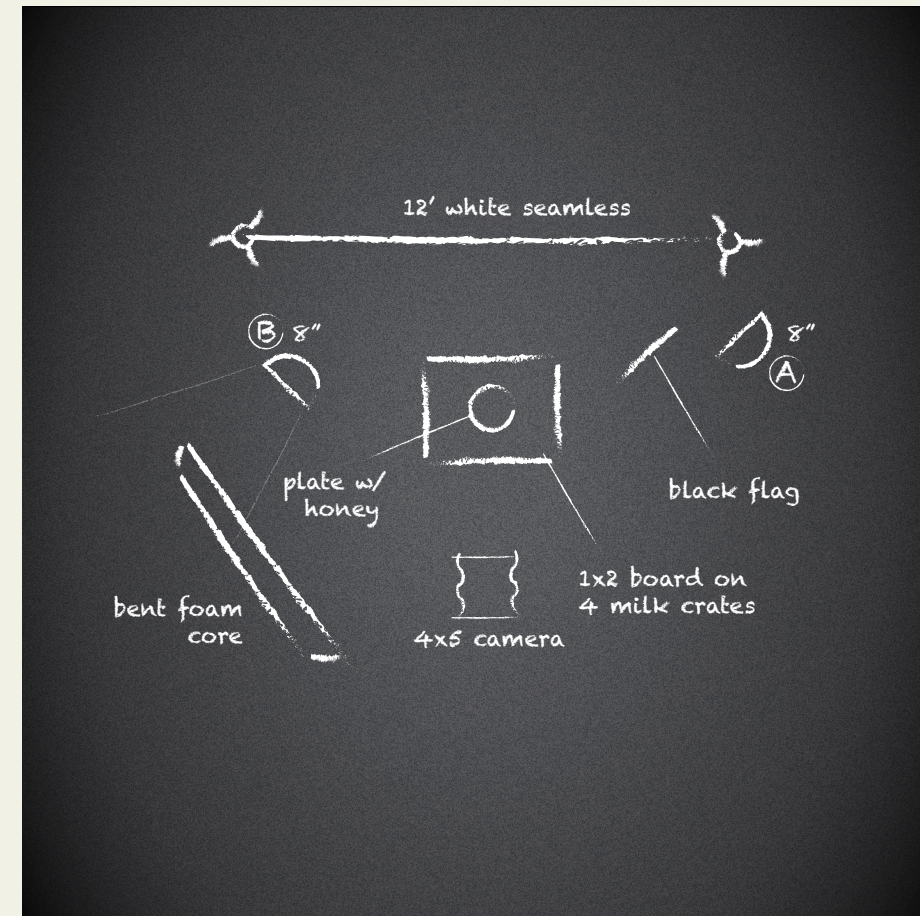
## Honey

For this assignment, which was going to be used on a package of cough suppressant, the art director wanted the honey to fold over itself as it was being poured out. But we weren't exactly sure how to achieve that, because in reality honey being poured out of a bottle collapses into a puddle rather quickly instead of neatly folding on cue.

This was not the first time an art director had "just assumed" we could do something that defies nature. Art directors do this on a daily basis. And somehow we keep making their vision a reality. Of course, all that does is encourage them.

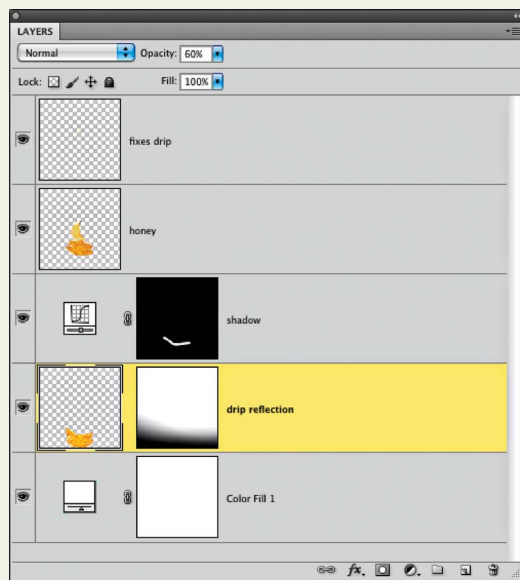
## Technique and Lighting

We started by purchasing several different brands of honey, looking for variations in thickness and color. After some trial and error, a food stylist suggested cooling the honey in the refrigerator to thicken it. This worked, but we still needed a vessel to pour from. Then I remembered the foil mini-loaf pans we had in our pantry. They had a large flat edge to pour from, and could be manipulated as needed to adjust their shape. Trying to eliminate as many air bubbles as possible from being trapped in the honey, I filled several of the foil pans the night before and allowed them to sit overnight in the refrigerator.



◀ Here is the setup for the folding honey shot.

Power settings (watts per second):  
A=750, B=990



▲ Here are the Photoshop layers used for the honey image. Notice the gradient layer mask on the reflection layer.

► FAR RIGHT This photograph was created from six different images that were composited using Photoshop. The background image of a mint plant and the lens flare were also added in post-production.

ISO 100, 1/160 sec, f/20,  
50mm lens on Canon DSLR  
Food Stylist: Jacqueline Buckner

Because honey reflects everything around it, I chose to use a 12-foot-wide roll of seamless paper as my background, essentially creating a 12' x 10' wall that became my light source. By bouncing a light into the seamless, I was able to create the soft reflection you see on the top of the subject, and provide a backlight to give the honey its glow.

To make sure the light directed at the seamless didn't spill over onto the honey itself, I placed a black card between the honey and the light, being careful to make sure it did not affect the light that was hitting the seamless. On the left side and toward the front of the set, I placed a 4' x 8' piece of foamcore and bounced a light into it. No additional fill light was needed.

## Image Post-Production

Although we were able to capture the basic elements of this shot in-camera, the image still needed some work in post-production. The first thing was to outline the honey pour and eliminate the background. Our digital artist, Scott, used the Liquefy filter in Photoshop to bend and thin the top portion of the pour so it appeared to be spreading out as it settled, making it more believable.

Next he created the reflection by copying the image to a new layer, flipping the canvas vertically, and transforming it to fit. He then dialed down the opacity of the Reflection layer to 60 percent, so it looked less like a mirror and more like a soft reflection. He also added a gradient mask so that the image would fade out toward the bottom of the frame.

## Iced Tea

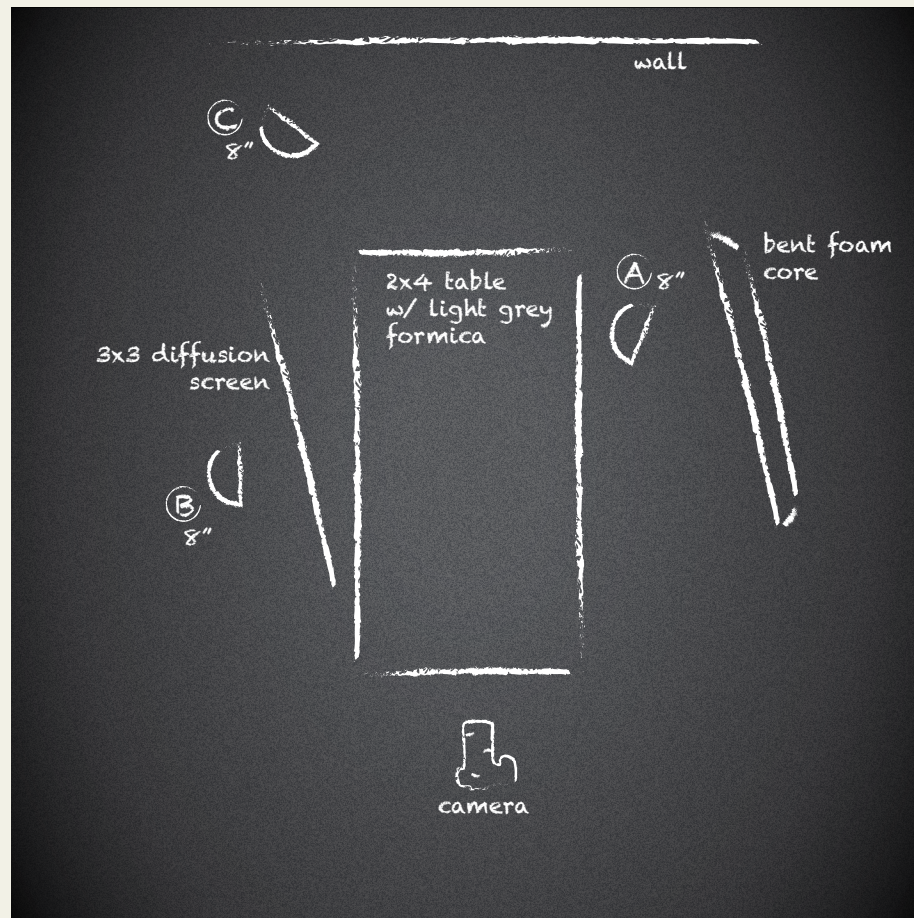
Obviously, this isn't the first time anyone has shot a pitcher of iced tea being poured into a glass. When I find myself in these types of situations, I try to think about what I can do to improve upon the usual concept. How can I make mine different or better? In this case I decided to focus on the movement of the tea as it was being poured and to create a sense of action.



► The lighting setup for iced tea.

Power settings (watts per second):  
A=650, B=530, C=1220.

▼ Tea poured into clear casserole dish to create bubbly turbulence in the liquid.



## Technique and Lighting

It began as it usually does, arranging the ice. I knew that I had to leave room at the top of the glass for the pour, and I wanted the ice to look as if the liquid rushing in was moving it around. So I placed an ice cube on the left side, up against the glass, and that helped to create an irregular liquid level. Because I wanted the liquid in the glass to appear lower where the tea was coming in and higher on the sides, I shot the liquid at two different levels and combined them in post.

To capture the pour itself, I used a variety of pitchers and a clear casserole dish to pour into. The casserole dish served a couple of purposes. First of all, it made the

cleanup a little easier, but it also allowed us to capture what was happening as the tea struck the bottom of the pan or splashed into the liquid that was already there. One of these captures was used to create the “turbulence” in the area where the pour hits the tea in the glass, helping to emphasize the movement.

The pitcher was yet another capture. It would be very difficult to get the pitcher at just the right angle and fullness while at the same time pouring the perfect pour. Doing another capture was also advantageous because it allowed me to shoot the pitcher with a lower f-stop, which created less depth of field. And less depth of field meant that in the final image, the attention was on the glass and the pour, not the vessel being poured from.

## Image Post-Production

This image file is made up of many layers. The background alone is four layers—the mint leaves, a shadow layer that helps to separate the iced tea, lens flare near the top of the glass, and an additional layer with the yellow glow.

The glass also includes several layers. First we selected waves from the casserole dish image and combined them with other layers from other images—like the pour, the pitcher, and a less-full glass so we could create the dip in the liquid.



▲ We could have stopped here and not added the motion to the drink itself.



▲ The motion in the glass makes the image feel more real.

You can see in the images above, that, although we could have stopped after combining the pour with the glass, it is those extra details after that step that make this shot so refreshing.

## Bourbon

It was about 11 a.m. as we sat in the oldest bar in New Orleans, Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop Bar, drinking a beer. We had just finished shooting a two-day project for the New Orleans Tourism Board that morning (see Assignment One), and we were going to spend the rest of the day walking around the French Quarter. As we sat in the bar, I began to notice the cool windows and brick walls. I couldn't help myself, I had to shoot it. Nothing too serious, it just seemed cool.

Several months later, back at the studio, I was working on a personal project of shooting a bottle of Maker's 46 and I thought about that image. Maybe it could work as a background for this shot. We wanted the image to feel like Dad's workshop, a place where things were fixed and stories were told. And merging images together is nothing new for us; we do it all the time. It is a quick way to create a

- ▶ Drinking at 11a.m.?  
Hey, it's New Orleans!  
ISO 100, 1/40 sec, f/4.5,  
35mm on Canon DSLR



- ▶ FAR RIGHT The final piece was composited from an image I shot while on location in New Orleans and a studio shot taken months later.  
ISO 100, 1/160 sec., f/22,  
24–70mm Zoom Lens (set at  
35mm) on Canon DSLR



kitchen behind the food, or just add some out-of-focus environment to the rest of a shot. This one was trickier than most, though.

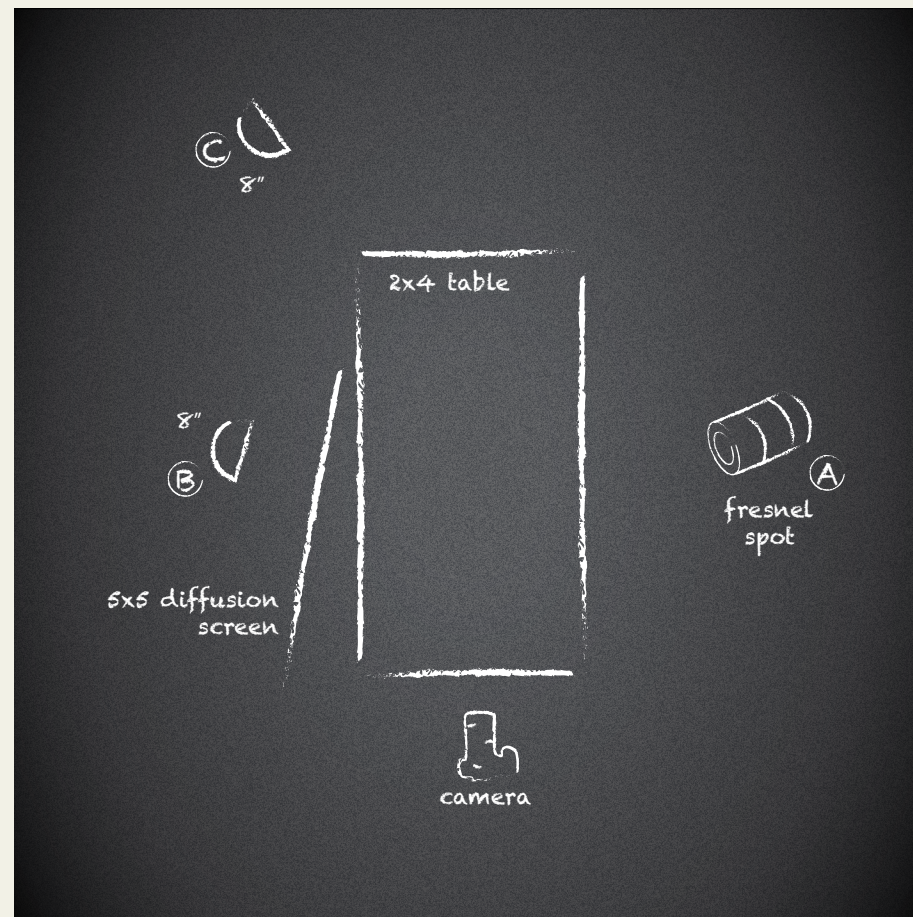
## Technique and Lighting

Anytime you plan to merge images, it's important to make an effort to match the lighting between the shots. In this case the background image had a strong back-light (the window), but there was also light coming in from windows to the left of the camera. So we set up our studio lights to mimic that situation.

Using the wall behind the set to bounce a light (all of the walls in our studio are painted a light gray for this purpose), I created the bright yet diffused window

► Here is the lighting setup for the Bourbon shot.

Power setting (watts per second):  
A=530, B=200, C=1220



light. Another light coming through a 5' x 5' diffusion screen on the left side of the set mimicked the soft light that came in from the other windows on the front of the building. It also created a nice highlight down the side of the bottle and glass.

Placing the light source close to the diffusion screen allows the light to fall off quickly and not create a hard edge where the diffusion screen ends. Notice how the reflection fades out on the bottle as it wraps around. We also used one additional light for our studio shot, one that did not exist in the bar. This was a Fresnel spotlight (like what you might see in a theater). This very directional light source was used to illuminate the foreground and saturate the colors in the image.

Behind the bottle I placed a piece of frosted acetate cut into the shape of the bottle. This helped to even out and soften the light passing through the bottle.

The props were from a toolbox at the studio, and a few of the items came from my workshop at home. The final selection was not easily achieved; we shot many other options with various props, including a radio, more nails, and a pipe wrench. But in the end, it's all about finding the right mix.

Don't be afraid to experiment. For me, I know it when I see it. I'm not the kind of photographer who "has a vision" and then executes it perfectly. I am always adjusting and changing based on what I see.

## Image Post-Production

It was because of those prop selections that we stumbled upon a lighting option that became part of the final image. When I tried placing an old radio in the background of the shot, it was in too much shadow to be visible. So I turned the

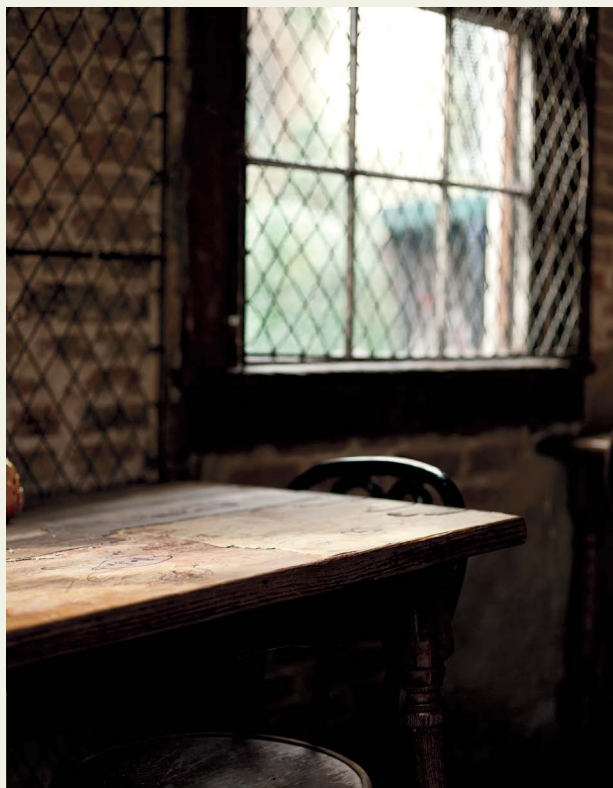




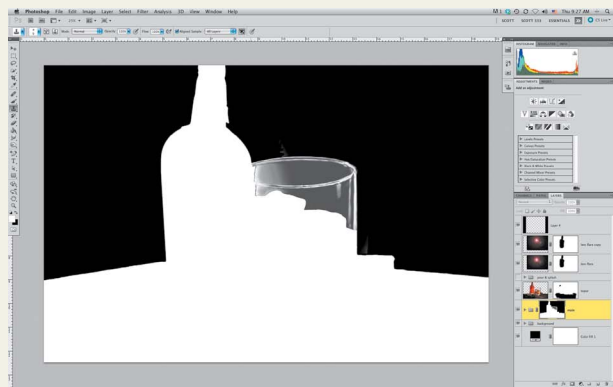
▲ The main hero image.



▲ Placing a radio in the background didn't work, but redirecting the main light source to illuminate it caused the foreground to become much more dramatic. We eventually used this more dramatic foreground in combination with the other shots to create the final image. Here you can also see the words on the back of the bottle, which had to be removed in post.

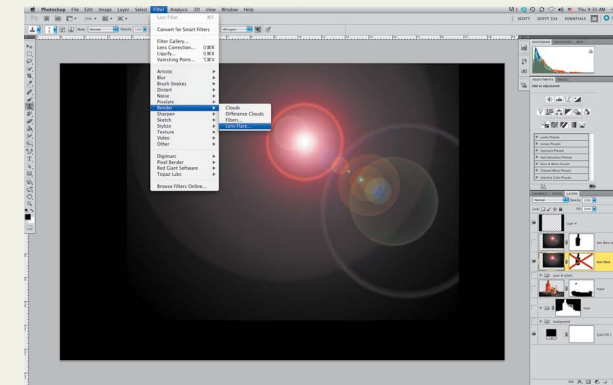


▲ Background image, from a bar in New Orleans.



▲ Notice the gray areas of the mask where the glass is. This allowed the glass to look transparent against the background.

Fresnel spotlight toward it, knowing that I already had the shot, and if we liked the radio we could outline it and drop it in. We ended up not liking the radio, but the absence of light in the foreground created some cool shadows in the wood and also some very dark shadows on the tools and nail box. We eventually used this shot in combination with the others to create the final image.



▲ The lens flare filter was applied to a new layer (filled with black), and then the Blend mode was changed to Screen mode. This allowed the lens flare to be adjusted later.



◀ The final composited bourbon image.