

# To Infinity and Beyond

John Henshall has discovered the easy way to photograph items for articles and picture libraries

I frequently have products to photograph, usually against a white background and hopefully with just a vestige of real shadow, to avoid giving the impression that they are floating in space.

For years I have had to empty an office desk, set up lighting stands either side linked with a cross-bar reclaimed from a tv wardrobe department clothes rail, and tape a sheet of white plastic, first to the cross-bar, then to the front edge of the table to form an infinity cove.

This method has worked reasonably well, except when the close proximity of objects makes shadowing a problem. The main problem has been the inconvenience of having to fix up the rig each time, then break it down after use.

Recently I found an alternative system which is a far more elegant solution in the form of the **Tre-D Still-Life Table** model 7373, which I bought for £253.85 from Studio & Lighting Services (Telephone +44 (0)208 418 9848, Website [www.slservices.co.uk](http://www.slservices.co.uk)).

The table is of strong but light construction, made of black painted steel with a 150 x 75cm 3mm thick translucent acrylic panel which is held shaped into an infinity cove 75cm wide.

Bending the acrylic panel down at the front edge and up to form the back makes the surface much stronger and

more rigid than it would be if it were just a flat sheet of acrylic. The principle is somewhat similar to the way a FlexTight scanner gives transparencies rigidity by bending them in one plane.

The height of the table is adjustable from 65cm to just over 1 metre. Castors on the rear legs make manoeuvring very easy. A spigot is provided for mounting a luminaire underneath.

A larger model 7372 table with a 200 x 130cm wide translucent acrylic panel is also available.

A separate adjustable stand, model 7376, with a small transparent support table, can be fixed under either size of table to give extra support and stop the acrylic sagging when photographing heavy objects.

The table has proved to be a very useful studio accessory which enables a variety of objects to be photographed with ease.

Because the table top is made of matte translucent acrylic, it may be lit from underneath – with white or coloured light – eliminating shadows.

To begin with I used one flash head directly from behind to light the curved section and another low down at the front to light the flat part of the table.

Photographing relatively small objects – such as digital camera bodies – the setup was not too critical but when I

photographed six predominantly white puppies I needed to use the whole area of the table.

Lighting the table's underside directly with flash heads is fine for small, predominantly dark objects, such as cameras. The potential problem was not even noticeable when the puppies were placed in a hamper. But when they were placed directly on the table – which was just large enough to carry all six – the importance of careful and even underlighting became all too apparent.

I have since spent many hours acquiring different exposures from each raw file and brushing them together in Adobe Photoshop to obtain a full white background without burning out the white fur underneath the dogs.

After coping with this problem the hard way – with lengthy post production – I experimented to find the best way of lighting the acrylic evenly from beneath.

I found that standing the whole table of a sheet of bright white plastic was the best answer. This was then lit by a series of flash heads so that, in effect, it becomes a large softbox or reflector bouncing the light upwards evenly.

Test shots of the empty table enable me to get even background exposure before I light the objects from above.

**The Tre-D Still-Life Table has now become one of my best studio tools.**





ABOVE: The Tre-D Still-Life Table model 7373 which I bought from Studio & Lighting Services. The table is constructed of black painted steel and has a 150 x 75cm 3mm thick translucent acrylic panel which is shaped to form an infinity cove 75cm wide. Table height is adjustable from 65cm to just over 1 metre. ABOVE RIGHT & BELOW: The table can accommodate a large range of subjects which are not limited to still life. The longer the focal length of lens used, the less the risk shooting off the background. Lighting of the translucent table top needs care. RIGHT: Some examples of the original use for which I bought the still-life table.

