



# Business Roundtable

Tips for Better Food Photography  
with Lisa Cherkasky

This free roundtable was presented to Columbia Pike businesses by the Columbia Pike Revitalization Organization (CPRO). The complete presentation can be found online at [www.columbia-pike.org](http://www.columbia-pike.org) and on CPRO's [YouTube channel](#).

## 1. Use Natural Light

Harsh, fluorescent lighting can make objects appear "flat" and 2-dimensional

Place objects beside windows for soft, directional lighting; Darker objects should be placed closer to the light source than lighter objects

If natural light is not an option, use a small lamp to one side of the subject rather than flooding it with overhead lighting; use Night mode on your phone (stabilized as best you can) to let in more light

## 3. Show Off Ingredients

If it is difficult to understand what ingredients are in the dish, find fun ways to show them off (e.g. photograph a burrito before it is rolled, show a sandwich from the side or without its top bun)

On social media and websites, use your captions to explain what the viewer is seeing and avoid creating an expectation that the dish is served in this way (e.g. "Take a look inside our burritos").

## 2. Simplify Your Background

Remove distracting objects and keep the focus on your primary object

Use posterboards or hang table cloths behind your subject when busy backgrounds can't be avoided

Simplify your subject as well by keeping the main dish in the foreground and any side dishes off to the side or in small bowls as props in your background

## 4. Create Depth Without Distraction

Use complementary items in your background or to the sides as props around your subject

Props should always be relevant to the primary subject

Use Portrait or Selfie mode on your smartphone to slightly blur the background and keep the focus on your primary subject

Examples: place more of the same item in the background, use ingredients as props, add coasters or cutlery that would come with the subject

## 5. Capture An Experience

Take “behind the scenes” photos of food preparation

Capture “action” and don’t be afraid to get a little “messy” (e.g. photograph carbonated drinks immediately after pouring to capture the bubbles, show cheese melting down the side of a hot sandwich)

Show props during or after use (e.g. place a knife with a condiment on it beside a sandwich, place a fork in a bowl of pasta rather than just beside it)

Ensure food looks fresh by capturing it quickly after it is prepared; keep oil or water and small brush handy to add moisture and shine to food as it becomes dry

## 7. Depth & Focus With Your Phone

Use portrait or selfie mode to blur backgrounds

Don’t zoom in, get closer to your subject

Zooming in can create grain in your photo

When using Portrait or Selfie mode to blur your backgrounds, get closer to your subject to ensure it remains crisp and your phone can properly detect the subject’s edges

Experiment with the various modes and settings on your phone to find what works best for your subject

## 6. Plan Ahead

Have a list of images you to capture in order of priority

Make all decisions about lighting, placement, and props before bringing out food to ensure freshness

Take close-up images first to capture the most detail while food is still fresh

Take photos with simple backgrounds, empty space, and the entire subject in frame for images that can be used in multiple ways (cropped for social media, horizontal for a website header, or empty background extended for the placement of text)

Capture different angles for variety

Take close-up images first to ensure you capture food when it is freshest

## 8. Use Your Phone’s Grid for Composition

iPhone: Settings > Camera > Grid

Android: Open Camera > Settings > Grid Lines/Type

Using the “rule of thirds” places objects at the intersection of grid lines for more dynamic composition than placing subjects in the center

### **Remember to have fun and try new things!**

Don’t be afraid to show off your food in ways other than how it is served. Viewers can only see your food, not taste or smell it, so it is up to the photograph to create that illusion and experience for the viewer.



Lisa has been a professional Food Stylist and Food Writer for more than 30 years. She has worked with restaurants and stores, such as California Tortilla and Giant Food, as well as national publications, such as Washington Post and National Geographic.

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