

MOBILE PHOTOGRAPHY GUIDE

Catering Service

Shoot your own product photos
with just a smartphone.

Spreads, setups, the moment guests gasp at the buffet — twenty photos that book events before the tasting.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- **Phone photo basics for total beginners**
Wipe, lock, light — the cheat sheet.
- **Free editing apps that pros actually use**
Snapseed, Lightroom Mobile, VSCO. All free.
- **Cheap gear that triples your photo quality**
Lights under \$40, lenses, props, backdrops.
- **20 scenarios × 3 angles each, drawn**
Eye-level, top-down, low — copy them on set.

PHONE PHOTO BASICS · READ THIS FIRST

10 things pros do that amateurs skip — for stills.

Photos are different from video: every frame counts. One sharp, well-lit still beats a hundred half-baked ones. These ten habits become muscle memory after a couple of shoots.

01 Wipe the lens. Every. Single. Time.

Phones live in pockets. Fingerprints look fine to your eye, terrible in the photo. Microfibre cloth in your apron.

03 Use natural light, kill the ceiling lights.

Window 90° from subject = magazine cover light. Yellow ceiling LEDs poison everything.

05 Get close, but use the 2× lens for objects.

Phone macro under 30 cm distorts. For tight product shots, switch to 2× and stand 50–80 cm back.

07 Use the 2-second self-timer.

Pressing the shutter shakes the phone. Timer + tripod = pin-sharp every time, even at low light.

09 Fill the frame deliberately.

Decide what's the hero. Then put it on a third — never dead-centre unless the composition is symmetrical on purpose.

02 Shoot at the highest resolution.

iPhone: Settings → Camera → Formats → Most Compatible (or Apple ProRAW).

Samsung: Camera → Pro → RAW. JPEG is fine for casual; RAW for product photos.

04 Tap to focus. Tap-and-hold to lock.

iPhone shows yellow box → "AE/AF Lock". Slide the sun icon to fine-tune brightness. Keep it locked between shots.

06 Use a tripod (or stack of books).

Sharpness drops the moment your hand shakes. Brace on a counter, or invest \$25 in a mini-tripod. Game over.

08 Shoot at eye-level of the product.

Hip-height phone snaps look amateur. Get the lens at the same height as the focal point of the subject.

10 Shoot 5 takes minimum.

Tiny shifts in angle change everything. First take is rehearsal, fourth is usually the keeper. Free to retake.

CAMERA SETTINGS

Best photo settings for your phone.

Set these once, forget about them. They turn a snapshot into a product shot — without you doing anything different on set.

iPhone

- **Photo format: Most Compatible (JPEG).**
Settings → Camera → Formats → Most Compatible. Easier to share. Use "High Efficiency" only if storage is tight.
- **Apple ProRAW (Pro models).**
Settings → Camera → Formats → Apple ProRAW & Resolution → ON. Then tap RAW button in the Camera app. Edit-friendly, larger files.
- **Grid + Mirror Front Camera + Level: ON.**
Settings → Camera → Composition → Grid + Mirror Front Camera + Level. Three free upgrades.
- **Live Photos: OFF for product work.**
The yellow icon at the top — tap it OFF. Live photos burn battery and storage. Off for product, on for people.
- **HDR: AUTO.**
Default. Phone decides. Works 95% of the time. Manually disable only when shooting backlit silhouettes.
- **Tap-and-hold to lock AE/AF.**
Yellow box says "AE/AF Lock". Slide the sun icon to fine-tune brightness. Re-lock if you move the camera.

Samsung Galaxy

- **Photo size: highest available (3:4).**
Camera → Settings (gear) → Picture format → JPEG. Picture size: maximum. Use 3:4 for product (more frame to crop later).
- **RAW (Pro mode).**
Camera → MORE → Pro → tap RAW icon. Saves a DNG + JPEG. Edit-friendly, bigger files.
- **Grid + Vertical/Horizontal Guides: ON.**
Camera Settings → Grid lines → 3×3. Settings → Composition → Auto guide. Free upgrades.
- **Scene Optimizer: OFF for product.**
Auto-modes oversaturate food and skin. Camera Settings → Scene Optimizer → OFF for shoots, ON for casual.
- **Pro mode for hard light.**
Camera → MORE → Pro. Manual ISO (100 in daylight, 400 indoors), shutter, white balance. Beats auto when lighting is tricky.
- **Tap-and-hold to lock focus & exposure.**
Yellow circle appears. Slide the sun icon to brighten/darken.

LIGHTING

The cheapest setup that still looks pro.

Lighting is 80% of why pro photos look pro. The good news: you can fake a \$1,000 setup with \$40 of gear and one window. Here's the fastest path.

THE FREE SETUP — WINDOW + WHITE WALL

Place the subject 1 m from a window so the light hits at 90° from the side. Stand a sheet of white foam-core (or a folded white sheet) on the opposite side to bounce light back into the shadows. That's it — same setup magazines use for ten thousand-dollar product shoots, and it costs nothing.

FOUR LIGHTS WORTH KNOWING

LED panel

The product photographer's workhorse. Best for flat-lays, product, B-roll. \$30–60.

Tape parchment paper over the front for instant softbox effect.

Softbox kit

Big, soft, magazine-look. Best for portraits, food, garments. \$40–80.

Get the biggest one you can afford. Bigger softbox = softer light.

Ring light

Even, beauty-friendly. Best for face/portrait/closeup work. \$25–60.

Don't use for products — ring shape reflects in shiny surfaces.

Clip-on phone light

Tiny LED that snaps onto your phone. Best for venues, markets, outdoor. \$15–30.

Use as fill, never as the main light. Cheap clip-ons make skin look plastic.

WHAT TO BUY (AMAZON)

- **Neewer 660 LED Panel** · ~\$45
Adjustable brightness + colour temperature. Bicolour. Search "Neewer 660 LED".
- **Ulanzi VL49 mini LED** · ~\$15
Pocket light. Magnetic. Perfect for top-down product shots. Search "Ulanzi VL49".
- **Westcott Ice Light** · ~\$80 (alt)
Tube light, soft & wraparound. Ideal for jewellery, glass, eyewear.
- **Foldable softbox 24" + LED** · ~\$60
All-in-one starter kit. Search "24 inch softbox LED kit".
- **Free version: a north-facing window.**
North windows are nature's softbox. No direct sun + soft, even light all day.

MOBILE LENSES & ACCESSORIES

The cheap kit that turns a phone into a real camera.

Most of these clip onto your phone, cost less than a dinner, and will outlast three phone upgrades. Buy the right ones up front.

CLIP-ON LENSES (ESSENTIAL)

- **Macro clip-on** · ~\$25
10×–20× zoom. For jewellery, food close-ups, fabric texture, watches. Best one-purchase upgrade. Search "Apexel macro".
- **Wide-angle clip-on** · ~\$25
0.45×–0.6× wide. For interiors, real estate, group shots. Eliminates 'cramped' look in small spaces.
- **Telephoto clip-on** · ~\$30
2× zoom. For phones without a real telephoto. Skip if you have a Pro/Ultra phone.
- **Filter kit (CPL + ND)** · ~\$30
CPL kills glass reflections (shop windows, screens). ND blocks light for outdoor portraits. Search "phone CPL ND filter".

TRIPODS & RIGS

- **Ulanzi MT-08 mini tripod** · ~\$25
Extends to 90 cm. Best \$25 tripod on the market. Use as tabletop or floor stand.
- **Joby GorillaPod Mobile** · ~\$35
Bendy legs wrap around chairs, railings, branches. Most versatile \$35 you'll spend.
- **Top-down tripod arm** · ~\$30
Horizontal extension for flat-lay food and product shots. Search "overhead phone arm".
- **Phone clamp + cold shoe** · ~\$15
Mounts your phone to any standard tripod. Sometimes the only thing missing.

ALSO WORTH HAVING

- **Bluetooth shutter** · ~\$8
Press a button instead of the screen. Eliminates shake. Single-best photography accessory under \$10.
- **Microfibre cloth × 5** · ~\$5
One in your apron, one in your bag, one near the till.
- **Reflector (5-in-1)** · ~\$20
Silver, gold, white, black, diffuser. Folds into a 30 cm disc. Search "5 in 1 reflector 32 inch".

EDITING APPS

Free apps that pros actually use.

Most professional Instagram photographers edit on their phone. The apps below are free or near-free — and they're the ones the pros use, not student-grade alternatives.

FREE — START HERE

- **Snapseed (Google)**
Best free editor on any phone. Selective tool, brushes, healing, perspective. Used by pros for years.
- **Lightroom Mobile**
Free tier covers 95% of needs. Apply presets, sync across devices, RAW editing. Free with an Adobe ID.
- **VSCO (free filters)**
Iconic film-look presets. Free filters are some of the best out there. Skip the paid subscription.
- **Photoshop Express (free)**
Quick fixes, blemish removal, cropping. Free version is plenty for product photos.

WORTH PAYING FOR

- **Lightroom Mobile Premium** · ~\$5/mo
Unlocks all features, syncs presets, auto-cloud backup. Best \$5 in mobile photography.
- **Tezza** · ~\$3/mo
Trendy filters + collage maker. Big with fashion and lifestyle creators.
- **Afterlight** · ~\$3/mo
Beautiful film looks + dust/light leaks. For brands going for a vintage feel.
- **Picsart Pro** · ~\$5/mo
AI background remover, sky replacement, magic effects. Use when you need to fake stock-photo backgrounds.

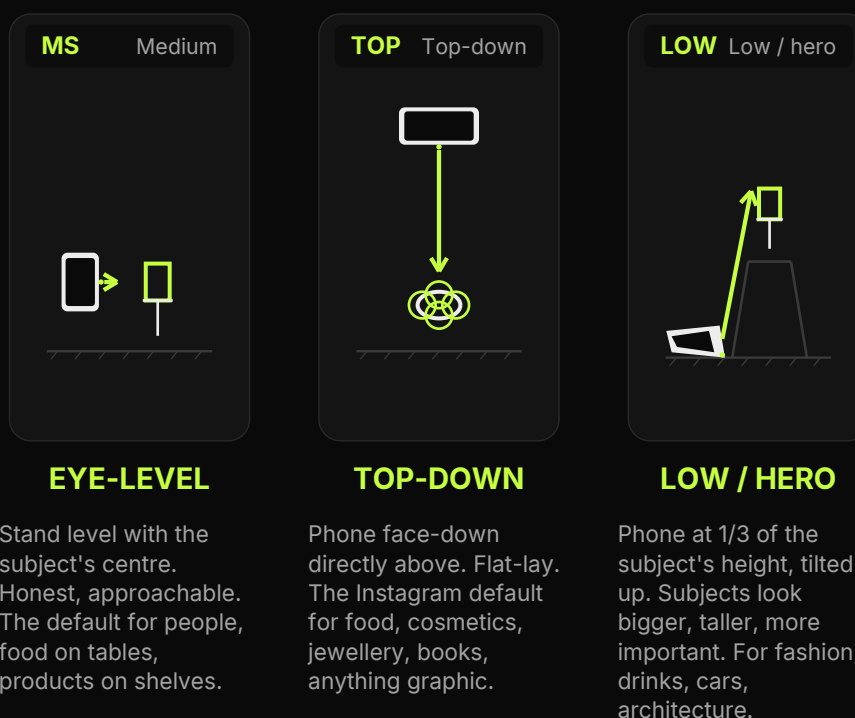
THE 60-SECOND EDIT (SNAPSEED OR LIGHTROOM)

- **01 · Crop & straighten.**
Rule of thirds. Horizon level. Trim distracting edges.
- **02 · Exposure +0.3 to +0.7.**
Lift the whole image one notch. Phones underexpose product shots by default.
- **03 · Shadows up, highlights down.**
Recover detail in dark and bright areas. Photo looks instantly professional.
- **04 · Whites up, blacks down.**
Increases contrast where it matters. Less murky.
- **05 · Vibrance, not saturation.**
Vibrance boosts dull colours. Saturation neon-fries faces.
- **06 · Sharpen +20.**
Adds bite. Phones soften by default. Don't go higher than 30.

COMPOSITION & ANGLES

The three angles that work for almost any product.

Every scenario in this guide uses these three. Memorise them once and you can shoot anything — coffee, jewellery, dogs, furniture. The same three angles. Always.



FIVE COMPOSITION RULES

- **Rule of thirds.**
Put the main subject on a third-line, not in the centre. Phone Camera grid helps you see the lines.
- **Negative space sells.**
Empty space around a product reads as 'expensive'. Crowded frames feel like clutter, not style.
- **Leading lines.**
Counters, shelves, tile edges, road lines — let them point at your subject. Lines lead the eye like an arrow.
- **Frame within a frame.**
Door frames, windows, arches around the subject. Adds depth, focus, and a 'documentary' feel.
- **Odd numbers feel right.**
Three plates, five candles. Three. Always three. Even-number compositions feel symmetrical and boring.

PROPS & BACKDROPS

The styling kit you can buy at the dollar store.

Background and styling decide whether your photo looks 'made for Instagram' or 'taken on the kitchen table'. Most of these cost less than a coffee.

BACKDROPS — WHAT TO BUY

- **Roll of white seamless paper** · ~\$15
53" wide, no-seam, infinite background. Tape to wall, drape over a table. The pro-photo backdrop.
- **Linen tablecloths × 3** · ~\$10 each
White, beige, charcoal. Wrinkle-friendly textures. Drape over anything; instant warm flat-lay surface.
- **PVC tile boards** · ~\$15 each
Marble, oak, slate-print boards. Two boards = floor + wall corner. Cheaper than the real thing.
- **Black foam-core × 3** · ~\$5 each
Black backdrop, light absorber, light blocker. Most-used cheap photo tool.
- **Free version: a clean white wall.**
If your shop has one, you have a backdrop. Photograph against it. Done.

PROPS — DOLLAR-STORE STYLING KIT

- **Linen napkins, kraft paper, twine.**
For food, packaging, gift shots. Natural textures photograph better than glossy plastic.
- **Small dried bouquets / eucalyptus.**
\$5 at any florist. Adds life to flat-lays. Doesn't wilt under hot lights.
- **Wooden trays, marble cheese boards.**
Elevates plate flat-lays. Hides ugly tables. Buy two sizes.
- **Glass jars, ceramic bowls (matte, not glossy).**
Glossy reflects ceiling lights. Matte absorbs them. Always buy matte for photo props.
- **Two acrylic ice cubes.**
\$3 on Amazon. Drinks photograph 10× better. Real ice melts; acrylic doesn't.
- **Black velvet cloth (1 m).**
Background for jewellery and dark products. \$5 at a fabric store. Eats reflections.

PRO TRICKS

The things pros do that you won't read on YouTube.

These are real production secrets — most cost nothing. Use one and you'll see the difference; use all of them and your photos will look like a magazine shot them.

- 01 Wipe the lens before every shot.**
Phones gather oil. Two-second wipe with a cloth between shots is the difference between haze and bite.
- 02 Lock exposure on the brightest important thing.**
Tap-and-hold on the lit subject — not the dark background. Phones try to balance everything; you have to overrule it.
- 03 Use the 2× telephoto for product close-ups.**
Stand 50–80 cm back. The 1× lens distorts close-up; 2× flattens it like a portrait lens.
- 04 Shoot 5+ angles. Pick later.**
Same scene, eye-level, top-down, 45°, low, macro detail. You'll know which is the keeper only when editing.
- 05 Wipe the product, too.**
Lint, fingerprints, flour smudges all photograph 10× more visibly than they look. Wipe the product. Then wipe again.
- 06 Light from 45°, never head-on.**
Side-light reveals texture. Head-on light flattens everything. Move the subject 90° to the window.
- 07 Bounce, don't add lights.**
More light isn't the answer. Bounce existing light into shadows with white card. Cheaper, faster, looks pro.
- 08 Shoot through something.**
A pane of glass, a leafy branch, a stack of books in soft focus in the foreground. Adds depth instantly.
- 09 Shoot one stop underexposed for moody.**
Slide the sun icon down by half a stop. Slightly darker = more cinematic = better Instagram.
- 10 Dirty plates beat clean ones.**
Crumbs, drips, fingerprints in food photos read as 'real'. Spotless = ad. Lived-in = wanted.
- 11 Symmetry only on purpose.**
If a photo isn't deliberately symmetrical, push the subject off-centre. Boring rules: centred subjects feel amateur.
- 12 Steam, mist, droplets.**
Boil a kettle next to a hot drink. Spray a vegetable with water. Visible texture = 10× more clicks.
- 13 White-balance manually for warm scenes.**
Auto white-balance kills the warm light of cafes/bakeries. In Pro mode, set WB to 4500–5500 K to keep the glow.
- 14 Shoot vertical 4:5 — not square.**
Instagram crops 1:1 from feed but shows full 4:5 in posts. 4:5 takes more screen, more attention.
- 15 Crop in post, not on the phone.**
Phone digital zoom = quality loss. Always shoot wider; crop tight in Snapseed/Lightroom later.

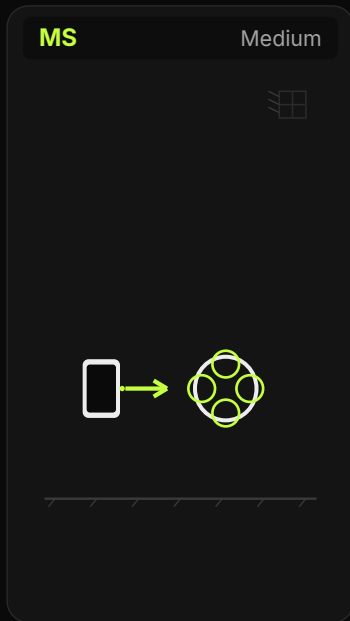
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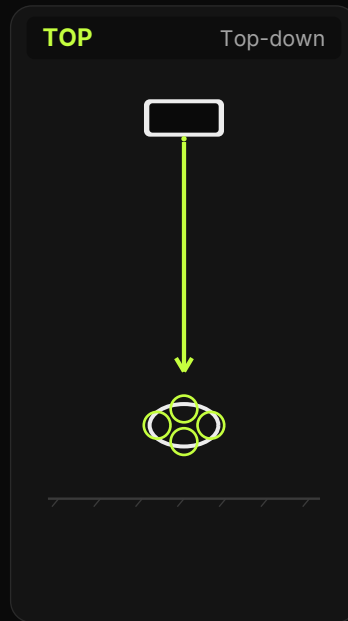
SCENARIO 01

Hero buffet

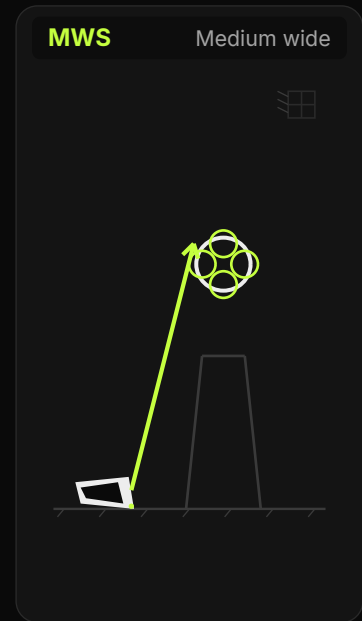
Full spread on a long table.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with table.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above table.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at table edge.

STYLING TIP

Photograph 5 minutes before guests arrive. After, it degrades.

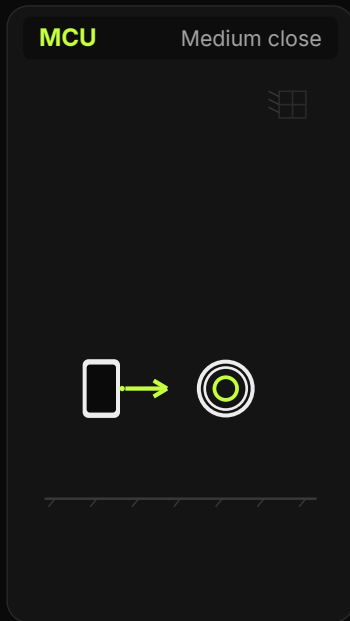
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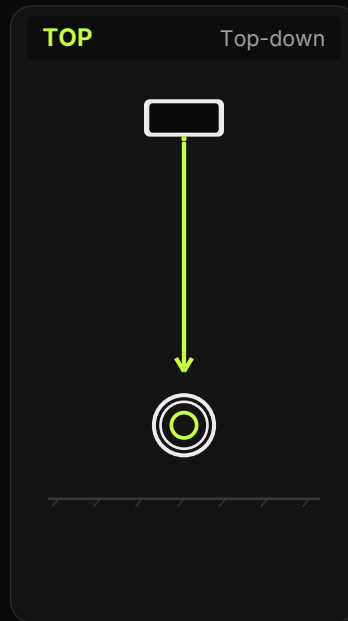
SCENARIO 02

Single platter macro

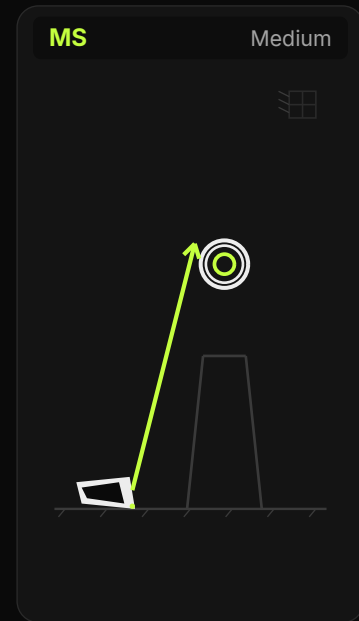
One signature platter, full beauty.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with platter.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above platter.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at table edge.

STYLING TIP

Garnish just before. Garnish wilts in 90 seconds.

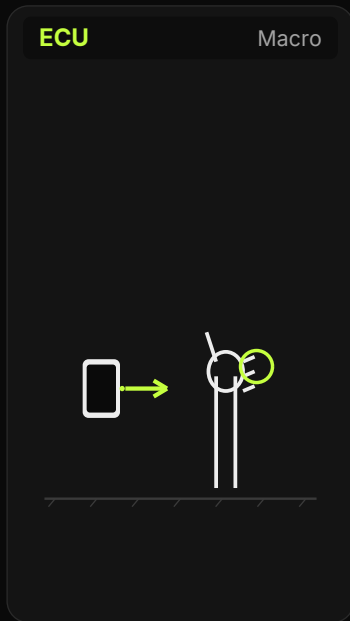
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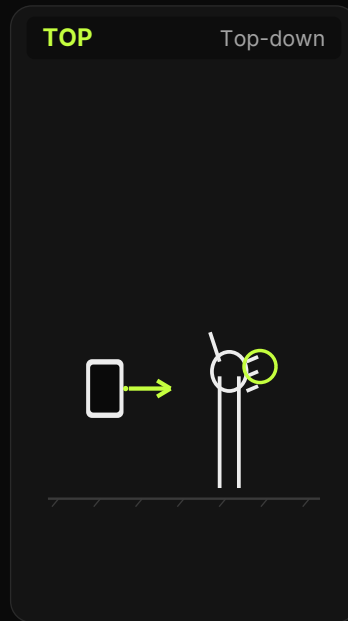
SCENARIO 03

Hand placing canapé

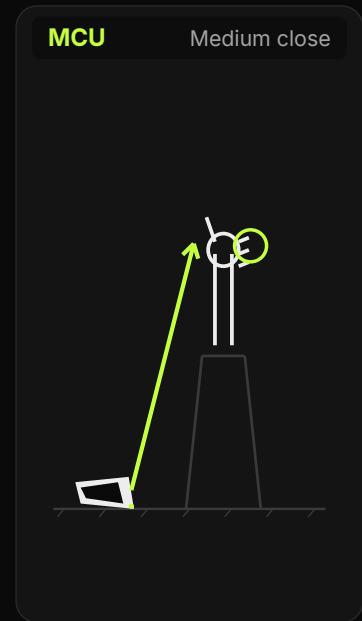
Tweezers placing a tiny appetiser on a tray.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with tray.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above tray.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at table edge.

STYLING TIP

Real chef, real placement. Photograph during real plating.

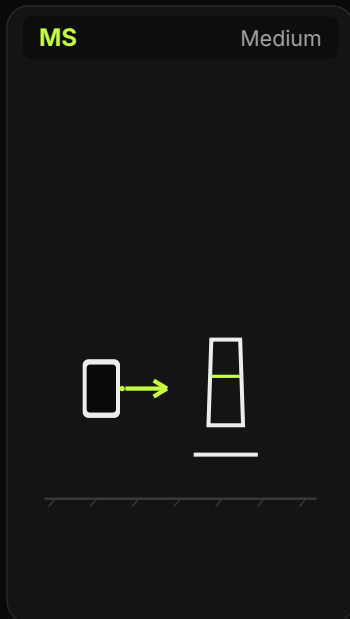
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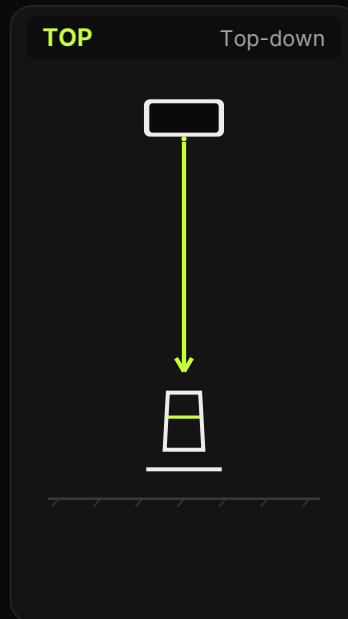
SCENARIO 04

Champagne tower

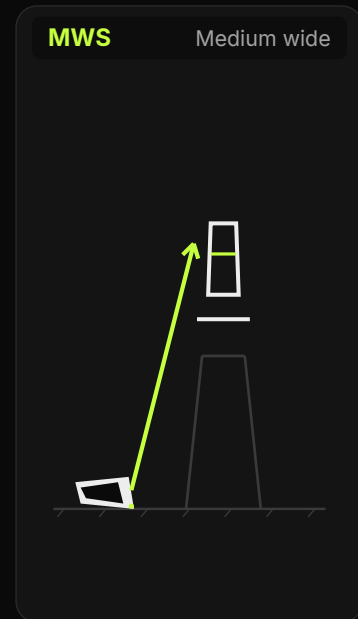
Stacked glasses with bubbly.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with glass tier.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above tower.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at floor.

STYLING TIP

Photograph during real pour.

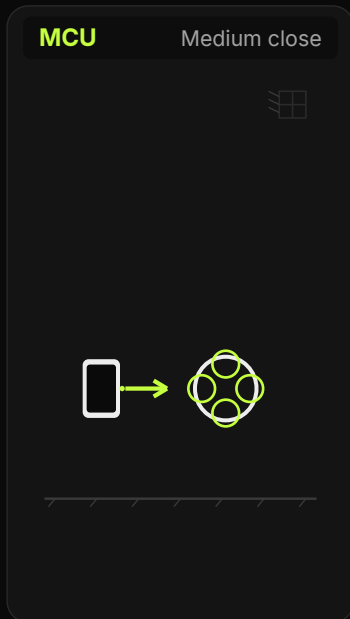
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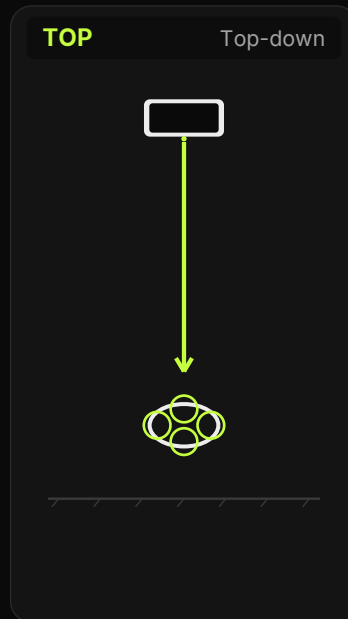
SCENARIO 05

Place setting detail

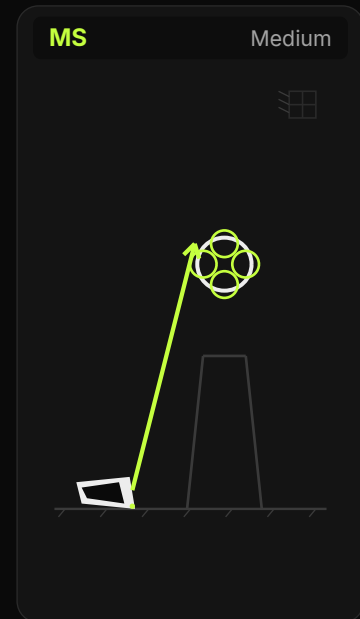
One place setting hero.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with plate.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above setting.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at table edge.

STYLING TIP

Steam napkin first. Wrinkles photograph 5× more visibly.

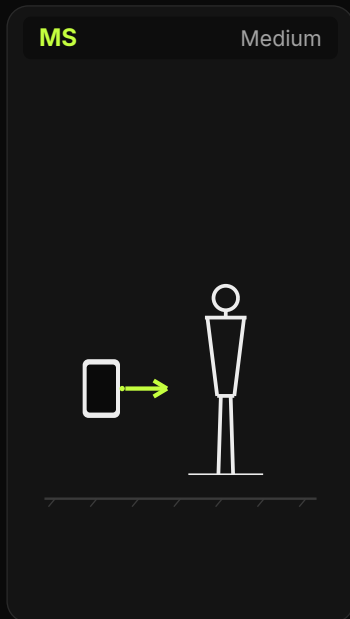
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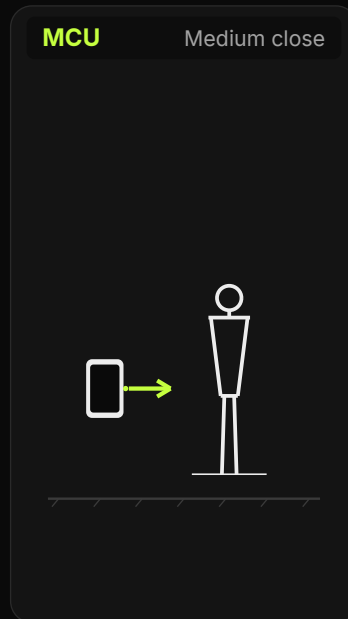
SCENARIO 06

Server with tray

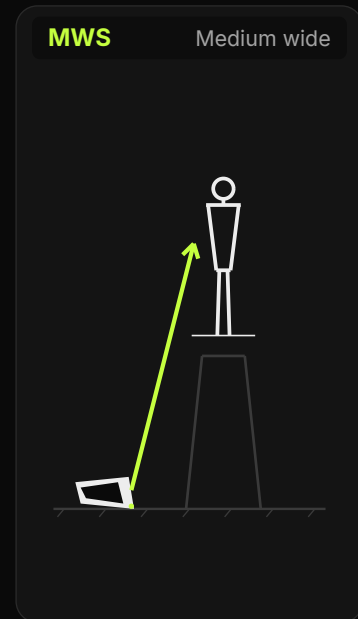
Server walking through with hors d'oeuvres.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with subject.

**TOP-DOWN**

Skip — top-down doesn't apply.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at floor.

STYLING TIP

Photograph mid-walk. Static reads as posed.

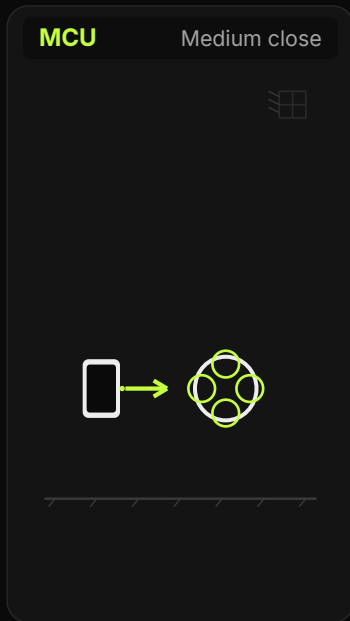
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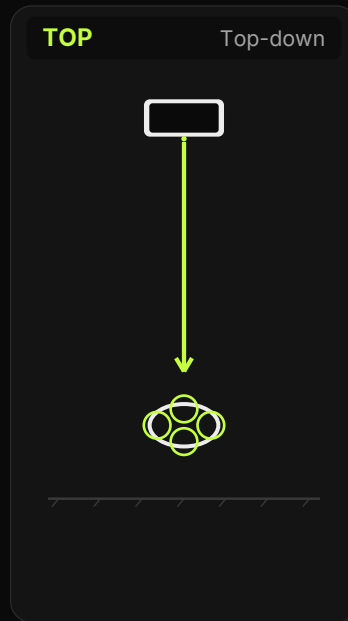
SCENARIO 07

Cheese board

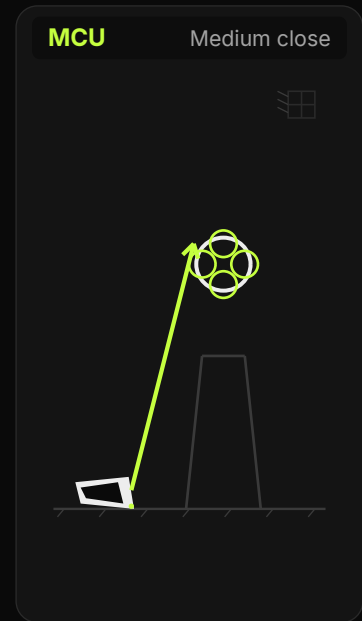
Wood board of cheeses, fruit, crackers.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with board.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above board.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at table edge.

STYLING TIP

Three cheeses, never four.

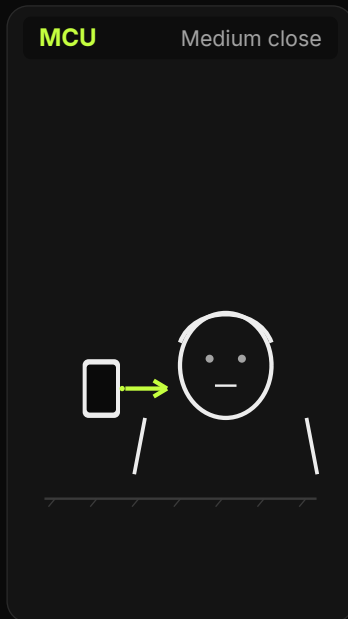
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SCENARIO 08 OF 20

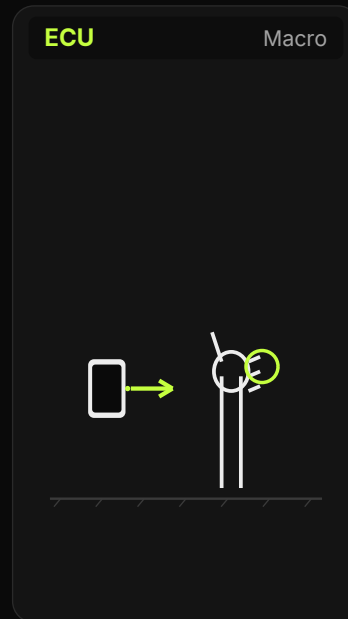
SCENARIO 08

Chef portrait at station

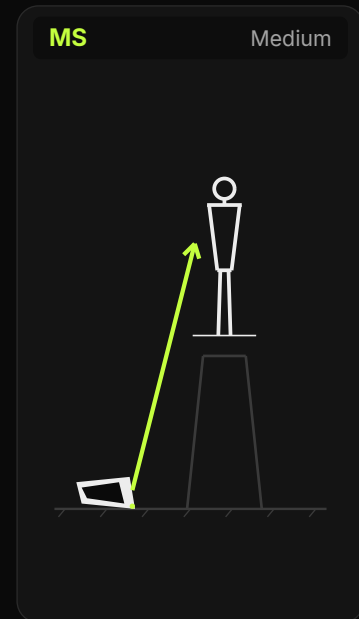
Chef in apron at the prep station.

**EYE-LEVEL**

2x zoom, 1.5 m back.

**TOP-DOWN**

Skip — detail of hands plating.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at counter edge.

STYLING TIP

Eye-contact, soft smile. Big smiles read fake.

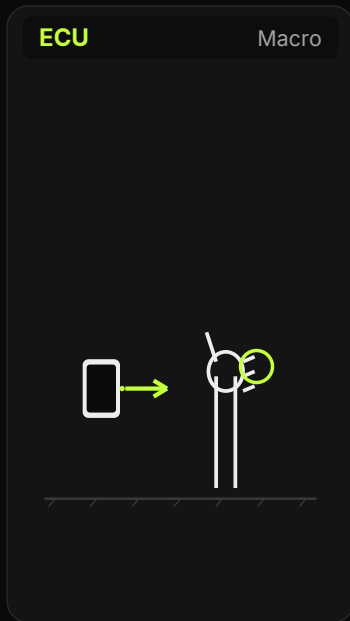
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SCENARIO 09 OF 20

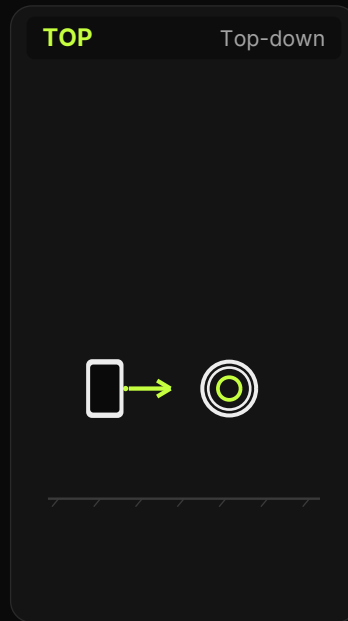
SCENARIO 09

Sauce drizzle on plate

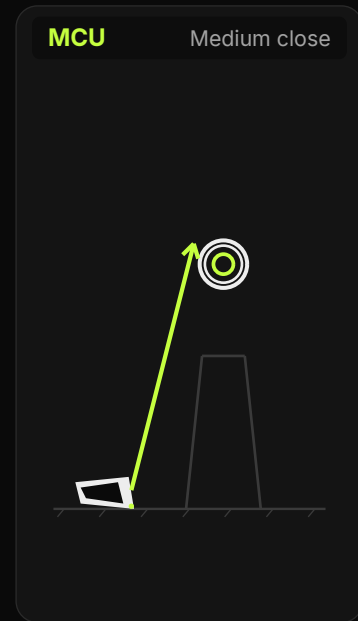
Fine sauce stream onto canapé.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with plate.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above plate.

**LOW HERO**

Phone below plate.

STYLING TIP

Warm sauce. Cold clumps; warm ribbons.

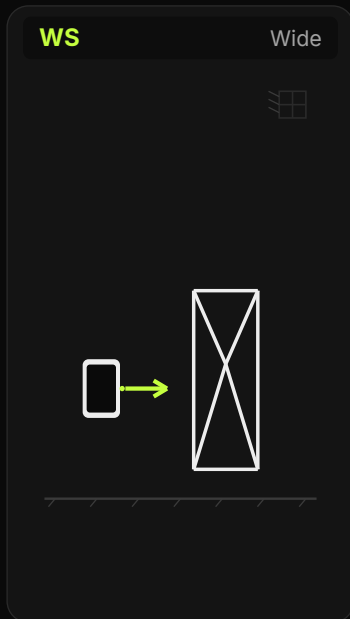
CATERING SERVICE

SCENARIO 10 OF 20

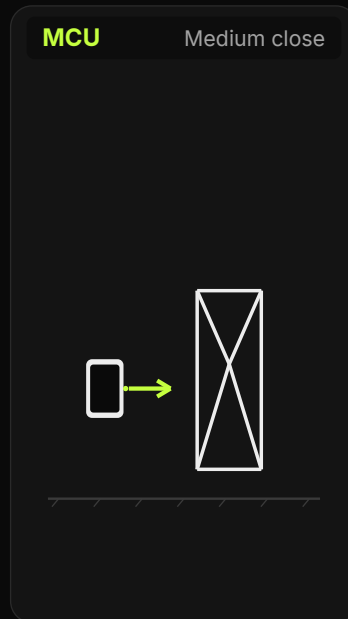
SCENARIO 10

Setup time-lapse start

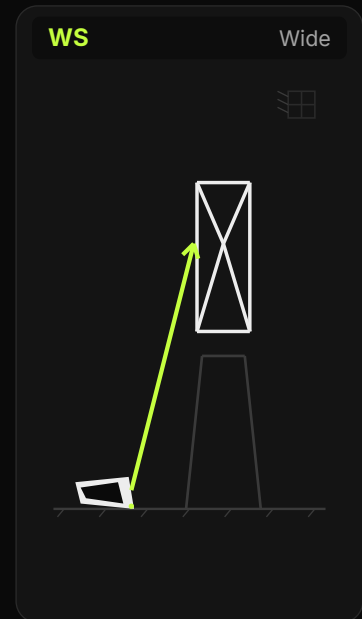
Empty venue, tables ready.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone vertical at far end.

**TOP-DOWN**

Skip — top-down requires drone.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at floor.

STYLING TIP

Photograph empty. Tells story of the work to come.

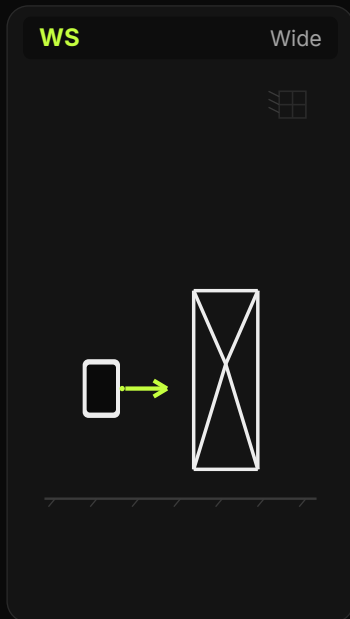
CATERING SERVICE

SCENARIO 11 OF 20

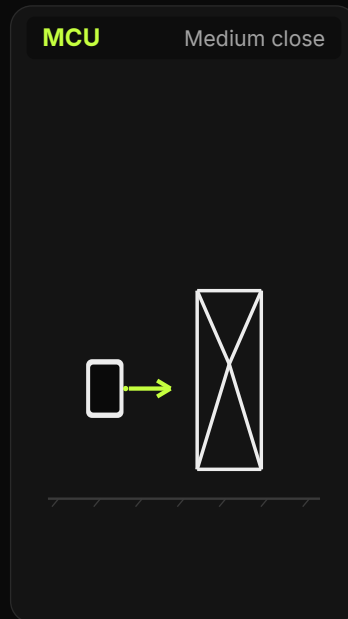
SCENARIO 11

Setup time-lapse end

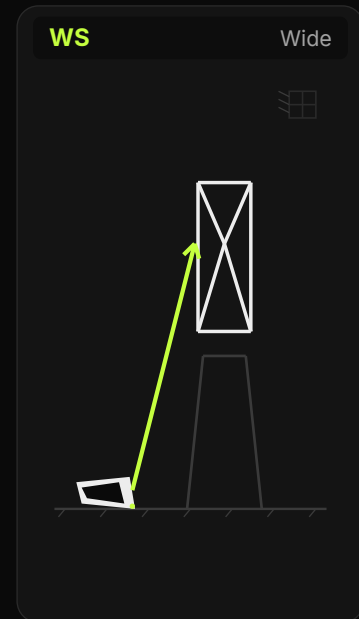
Same venue, fully set.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone vertical at far end.

**TOP-DOWN**

Skip — top-down requires drone.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at floor.

STYLING TIP

Same vantage point as the empty shot.

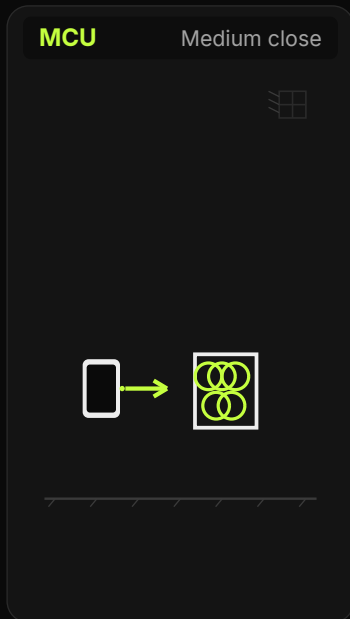
CATERING SERVICE

SCENARIO 12 OF 20

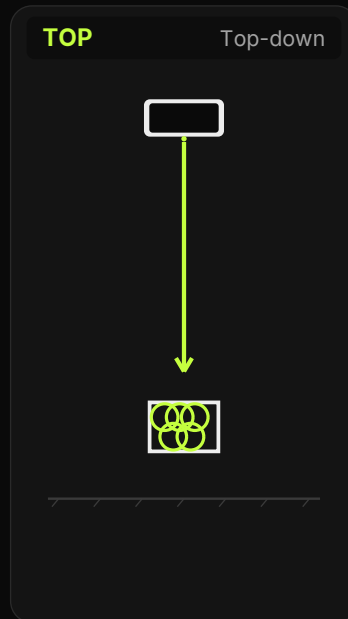
SCENARIO 12

Bread basket

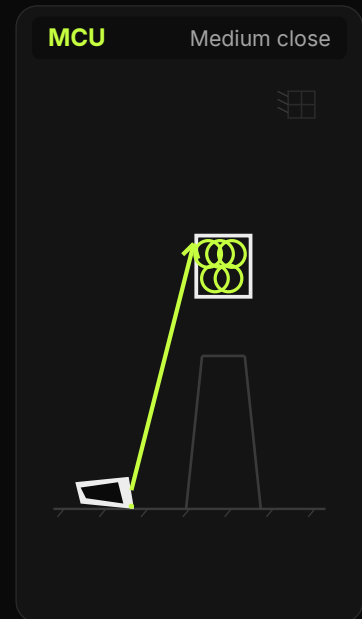
Fresh bread in a styled basket.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with basket.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above basket.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at table edge.

STYLING TIP

Reheat bread for visible steam.

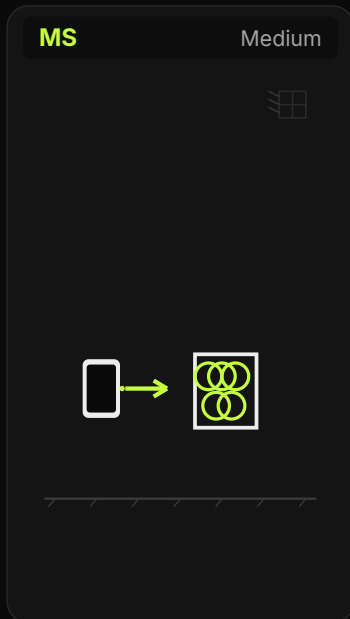
CATERING SERVICE

SCENARIO 13 OF 20

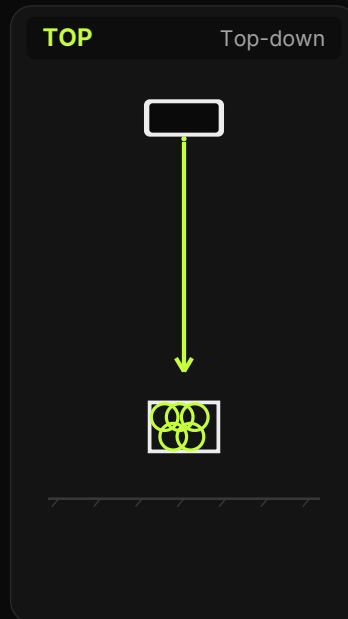
SCENARIO 13

Dessert tower

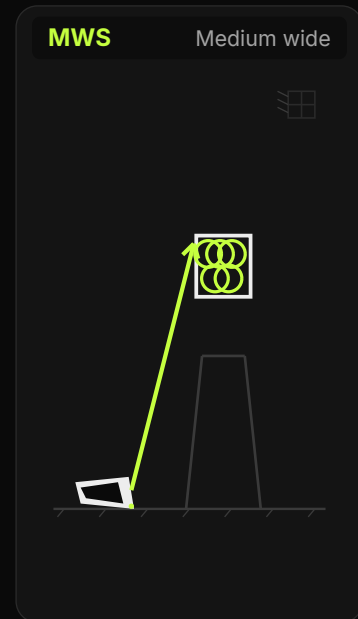
Tower of desserts on tiered stand.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with stand.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above stand.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at table edge.

STYLING TIP

Photograph 5 minutes before service. Frosting softens fast.

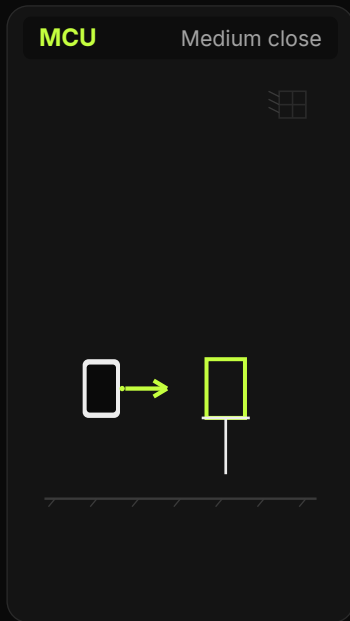
CATERING SERVICE

SCENARIO 14 OF 20

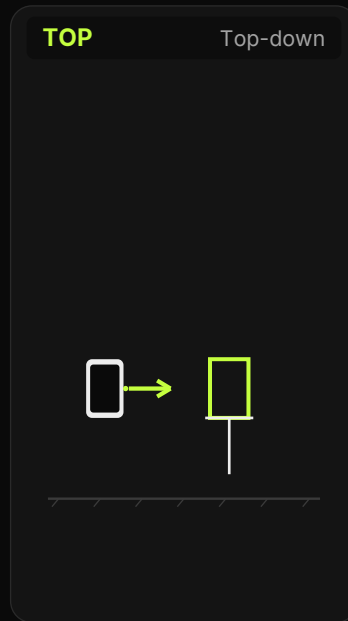
SCENARIO 14

Branded napkin / menu

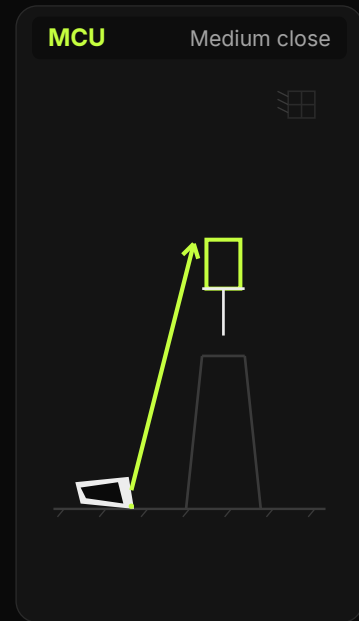
Branded items on the table.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with item.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above item.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at table edge.

STYLING TIP

Real ink, hand-pressed if possible. Printed reads cheap.

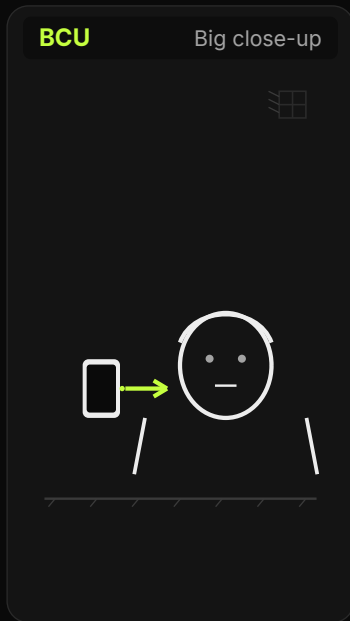
CATERING SERVICE

SCENARIO 15 OF 20

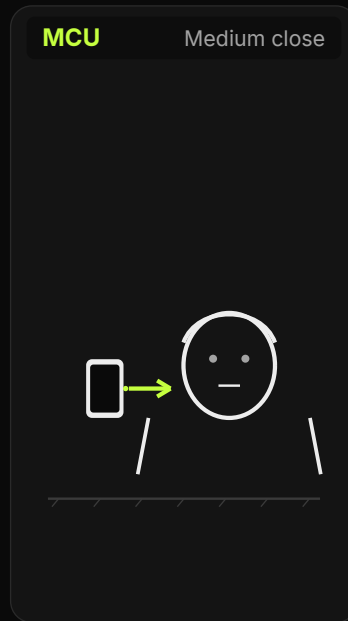
SCENARIO 15

Guest's first bite reaction

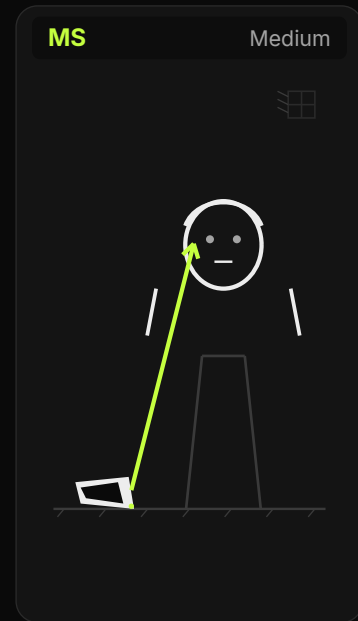
Customer enjoying canapé.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone at face level.

**TOP-DOWN**

Skip — top-down doesn't apply.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at table edge.

STYLING TIP

Roll quietly. Real reactions happen at second 10 of a 30-second hold.

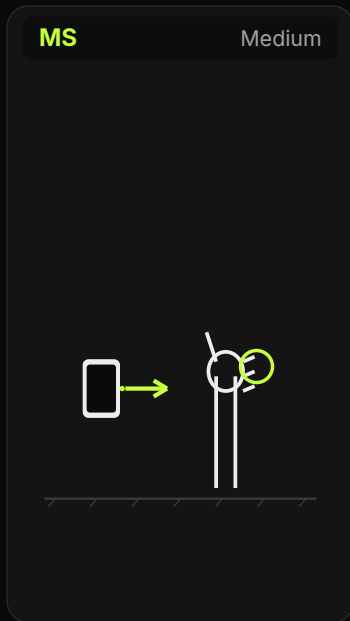
CATERING SERVICE

SCENARIO 16 OF 20

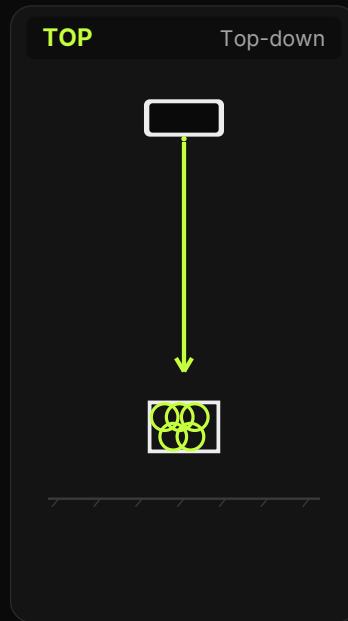
SCENARIO 16

Cake delivery

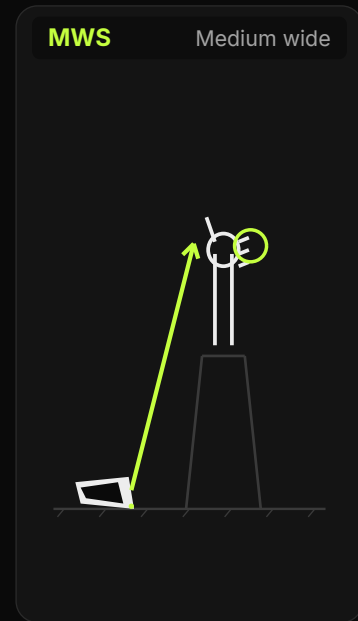
Hands carrying a finished cake.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with cake.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above cake.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at floor.

STYLING TIP

Photograph during the actual delivery.

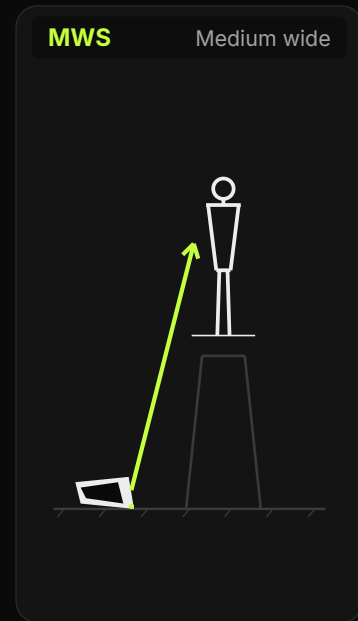
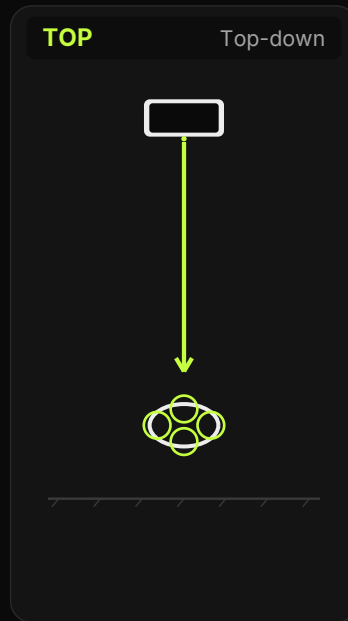
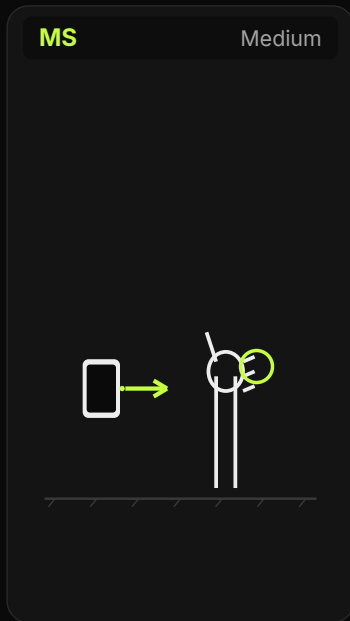
CATERING SERVICE

SCENARIO 17 OF 20

SCENARIO 17

Cocktail station

Bartender mixing.

**STYLING TIP**

Photograph during real shake.

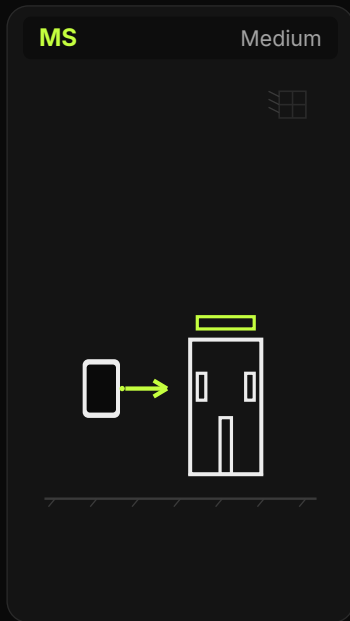
CATERING SERVICE

SCENARIO 18 OF 20

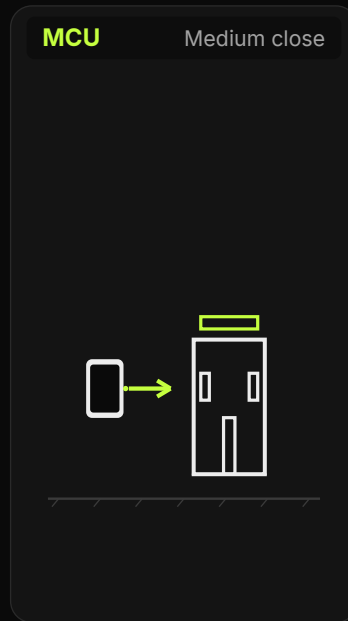
SCENARIO 18

Branded delivery van

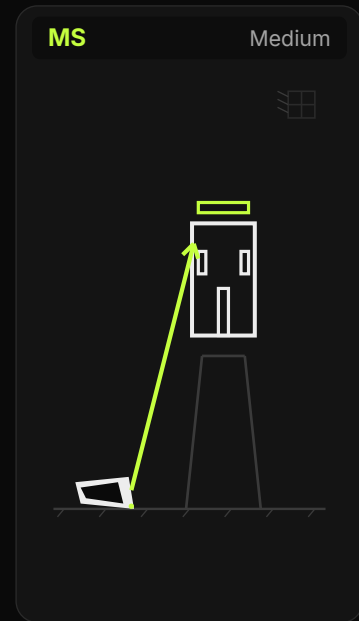
Catering van loading boxes.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with van.

**TOP-DOWN**

Skip — top-down doesn't help.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at ground.

STYLING TIP

Brand visible on van side. Photograph during real loading.

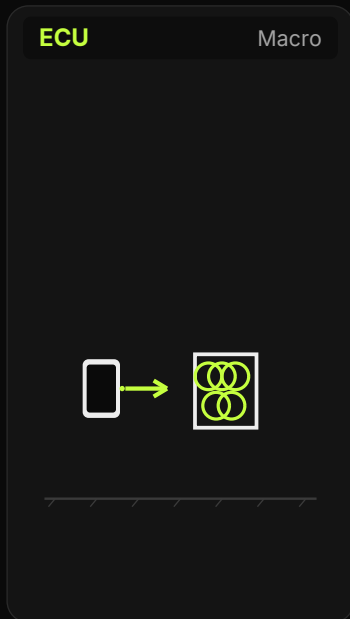
CATERING SERVICE

SCENARIO 19 OF 20

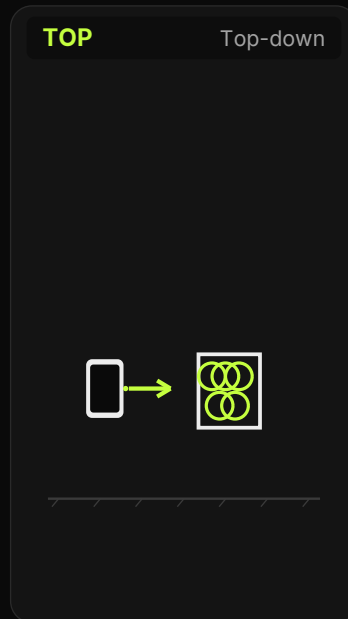
SCENARIO 19

Closeup macro food

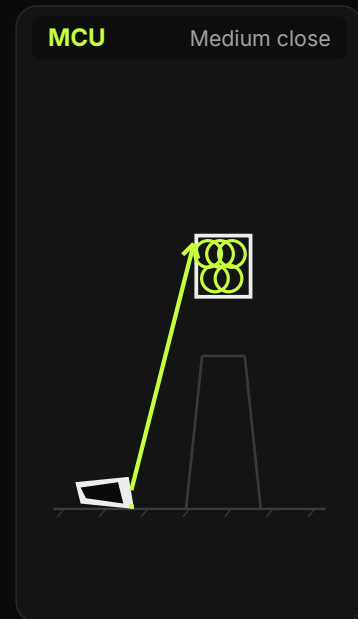
Single dish, full macro.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone level with plate.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above plate.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at plate edge.

STYLING TIP

2x zoom + macro lens. Phone macro alone is OK; equipped is gallery.

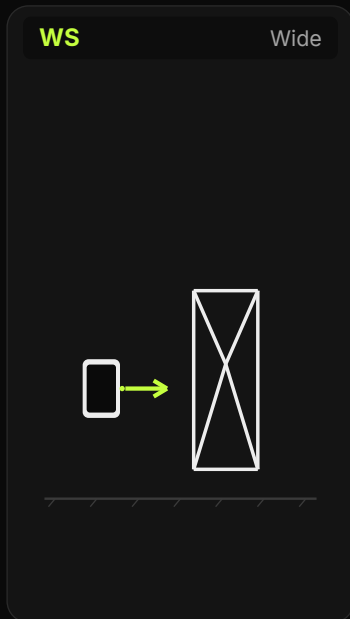
CATERING SERVICE

SCENARIO 20 OF 20

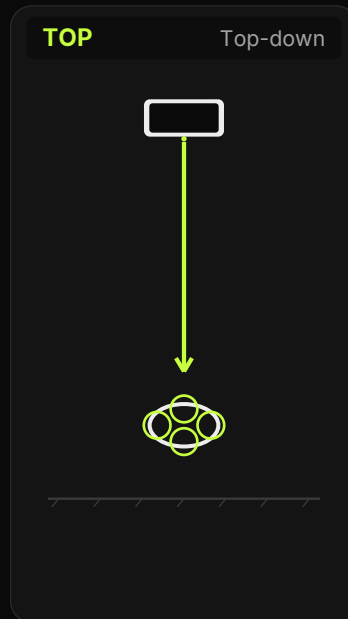
SCENARIO 20

Closing — venue cleared

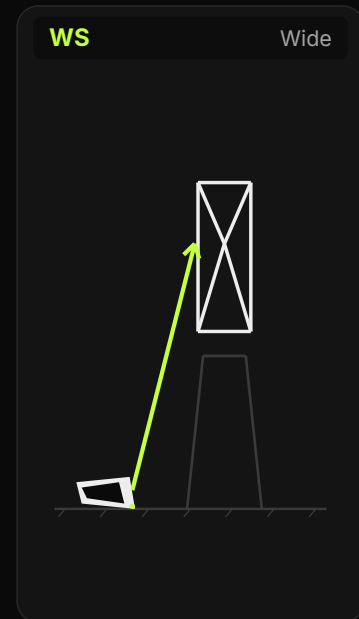
Empty venue, tables stripped.

**EYE-LEVEL**

Phone vertical at far end.

**TOP-DOWN**

Phone above one cleared table.

**LOW HERO**

Phone at floor.

STYLING TIP

Leaves one detail mid-process. Sells the day's work.

YOU'VE GOT THE PLAYBOOK.

Now go shoot.

This guide was built specifically for catering services. Every scenario in it works on a phone you already own. The only missing ingredient is press-the-button, ten times in a row, until one of them is the keeper.

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