

THERE'S POSITIVE POSSIBILITY TO BE FOUND IN NEGATIVE SPACE

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Popular lifestyle and design-focused photographers have an aesthetic: clean, simple and stark. They accomplish this sophisticated look through the smart use of “nothingness.” A smart photographer knows to think just as much about what isn't there as what is there. Photographers call nothingness “negative space” and it's the key to accomplishing a look that has taken social media by storm lately. Browsing through influential and trendsetting profiles, you'll see strong colors, clear subjects and as little clutter as possible. Take, for example, this shot from lifestyle photographer Jeff Mindell's Instagram profile that takes full advantage of negative space:

Images like this don't look so appealing by accident – they ground the subject in a backdrop of nothing, making it stand out that much more. You too can make your shots just as interesting by knowing how to use negative space to your advantage. Smart use of “nothingness” can elevate your Instagram profile from a collection of snapshots to a gallery of purposefully composed gems.

As your followers haphazardly scroll through their app, you'll have about half a flip of a finger to catch their attention. The easiest way to draw in someone's eye is by showing them that less can be more. Negative space allows your subject to pop. The more you try to cram into an image, especially on a tiny phone screen, the less your followers are actually going to see. Instagram shots that get featured are the ones where a photo tells one short, digestible story. The story below, by Nantuck3t, is all about the simplistic deliciousness of these macarons. She uses the attention-grabbing image to tell a longer story in the image's description.

But don't get lost in your subject. Negative space sets the mood of your image and should just as carefully be considered. It has weight and impact. Negative space can easily weigh more than your subject and create an oppressive feeling, drowning your image. It can make you feel loneliness if it surrounds your subject, or can give a sense of wonder and adventure when regulated to the spaces above or below your images. Smaller subjects, like jewelry and food, are comfortably framed by negative space while larger subjects, like people and structures, can be made to feel smaller than they actually are.

Long story short, negative space can be a powerful tool, especially if your smartphone is your main camera. You don't need the world's fanciest camera to make smart use of negative space. This is another one of the reasons negative space has become so popular on social media. Smartphone photography is ubiquitous, but it can't yet capture the exquisite details of a DSLR. That's totally cool. Don't try to push your iPhone where it can't go. Keep it focused on the simpler things.

Thankfully, negative space doesn't require intensive, complicated editing to look its best either. Basic tools found in most photo editing apps, like brightness, contrast and saturation will do the trick. Jack up the brightness in your shot to wash out imperfections from your background to separate the subject from its surroundings, or increase the saturation to help your subject stand out.

The next time you're trying to compose your perfect shot, start thinking about what isn't there as much as you think about what is.