

Focus on Hands

By Shelly Perry

When we consider all the parts of ourselves that are expressive, we don't always think of our hands. But hands are a magical appendage that are uniquely adept at changing shape and form to show the way, make a point, soothe a friend, communicate our feelings, build strength, wield tools, defend ourselves, create art, save a life, make noise, get dressed, cook a meal, and express emotion.

And that's just the tip of the iceberg.

Just by looking at someone's hands, we can tell a lot about a person — are they a laborer whose hands have seen years of hard and grueling work, or a young child? Are they an artist's hands, stained by years of working with paints and materials?

Hands can be extremely expressive and even tell a story all on their own — and yet, in many ways, the person behind the hands remains anonymous, a representative of all those with similar stories.

This month, we are turning our attention to hands. I want you to consider not just the *who* behind the hands, but *what* they are doing, the story they are telling, the feelings they show, the message being conveyed, and the mood they create.

Really put in some time thinking about it and then work on creating the series of images you envision.

Here are a couple of my own images of hands:

The one on the top is newer and I haven't uploaded it to my stock sites yet, but the one on the bottom has been in my stock portfolio for years now and has earned its spot on book covers, T.V., and in Times Square.



With so many potential uses, as you can imagine, it's earned me a few pretty pennies as well.

Now it's your turn: With hands as our theme, we are getting really specific. I want you to look at all the examples and then I want you to think about how you can make a hand image that is unique and different — how can you take a hand shot that's all your own?

What I personally do with most things (you may be different) is I sit with the ideas for a while, sometimes a long while, letting it "roll around" in my head, maturing and developing. Then I think about how to execute the idea as it comes into clarity. Get creative, take your time, and play with it.

Some of the places you might see "hand" stock photos in use include:

- Blogs, websites, brochures, and advertisements.
- Instagram, YouTube, and various other social media outlets.
- Medical publications and ads, including western and alternative medicine.
- Specific/niche media depending on subject. Military would be an example with the photo above. Cooking might be another, or spa/wellness.
- Newspapers, magazines, flyers, newsletters, and ads that come in the mail.

"Hands" as Stock Images

Photos of hands as stock can be excellent sellers! They enjoy the unique benefit of including people (even to the point of being all about people) and at the same time are generic and anonymous. This works so well for the stock industry, as it makes the shots more versatile and yet relatable to the end user/client/viewer.

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- **Visualize it:** Think of what you want to express through the photo you create. The subject is hands, so whose hands can you access and photograph, and what story do you want to tell with them? Once you have that figured out, then think through

how to portray that idea with the camera.

- **Think Sparse:** The main subject of each of these shots should be the hand(s) and they should be fairly obvious and not in competition with anything else for the viewers' attention. Fairly simple, sparse compositions will do best.
- **Be Creative:** Think of not just the emotion and the story you want to capture, but also about the lighting, the setting, what the hands are doing, and what props or people are important to the shot. Be intentional about what you include in the frame and make sure each element supports the story you want to tell.

- **Make it Unique:** Try to make the shots as unique as possible. They say that “there is no new idea” and they may be right, but there also is no other you with your unique experiences, thoughts, feeling, and views. Even if the shot has been done a thousand times over, only you can take the shot that you create.

Let’s look at a few examples of “Hands” found in stock:

For starters, the black and white is exquisite for this shot. I love the connection and togetherness. It speaks to issues of diversity and coming together rather than being separate and different.

And here’s another shot expressing togetherness, this time as a couple. What I find interesting is that even though this shot and the previous shot are essentially the same sort of action, two people grasping/holding hands... the feel, the story, and the meaning behind each of these tells a really different story.

Here’s another powerful shot with a “togetherness” concept. An image like this could be used to show effort, group togetherness, community, teamwork, shared vision, goals, and hopes, to name a few.



This photo is more conceptual in nature. It's obviously been staged and set for this exact shot. Both people wearing black, paired with the black background, all help to bring out the subject. You can see how the simple composition really helps to hone our attention, keeping the viewer in the photo. When we (as the viewer) "linger longer" on an image, then it's a winning photo.



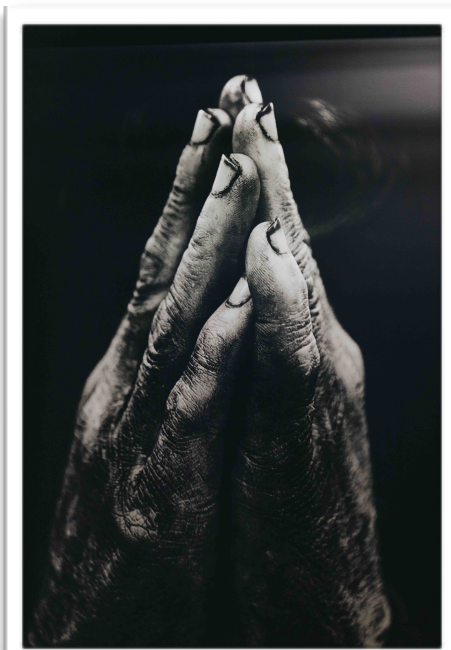
Hands DO a lot of things...

Your shot could be like this — hands making, baking, cooking, building, creating, etc. In this particular image, I love that the hands are covered in flour. The shallow depth of field created by using a wide aperture opening (such as $f/2.8$ or $f/4$) was important here to keep our attention focused on the hand and noodles without being distracted by the background.



The activity and message here is pretty clear, I'd say. Shots like this are always in high demand for stock agencies. As our population is aging, we have health care issues all over the news pretty much daily, so medical shots, including medication, are going to continue being in great demand as stock images.





I couldn't leave these out... so here are three more “hand” shots for you to consider. Again, observe how clean, simple, and visually powerful they are. The photographers got close to their subjects and kept the backgrounds clutter-free.

A stock-worthy “Hands” photo should have these qualities:

Simple Impact: some shots can be so simple and yet so powerful in their impact, it's really all about what is IN the frame and what is left OUT. Take your time here, there is no rush. Ask yourself these questions before each shot: Are the important things in the frame? Are the distractions out? Is my subject clear? How is my composition looking? How is the light? What could be better?

Good Lighting: These types of shots can run the spectrum, however most will typically be natural light. And remember, natural light can change often, so watch

for soft, even light, such as window light, overcast days, or open shade. (More on lighting below.)

Good Composition: Use the Rule of Thirds when placing the hands in the frame and think about implied motion, leaving plenty of space around the hands. Even if you are filling the frame with the hands, you will still want to basically look edge to edge, corner to corner, getting in what you want in and out what you want out.

Concepts: Remember that images representing universal concepts always do well for stock. Think about the concept you are trying to convey, such as love, thankfulness, hard work, etc., and build an image around that theme.

Story/Emotions: Let the hands do the talking here... dig deep to show a story, draw emotions, and provide an impact. Try to create something that makes the viewer look twice or linger longer.

Where to Find Good “Hands” Shots

I don't think I need to share with you where to find hand shots, they are literally everywhere you find others and everywhere you are. Rather, what I'll say is to open up your wonder, be observant, and take notice of all the things hands are doing around you all the time.

I am noticing my own hands plunking away on this keyboard in the glow of

the computer light, for instance... even that could be a story. I think of the cashier scanning my groceries, or the young gal working so hard on my last mani-pedi. Or what about the mechanic changing the oil on the car with those grease-stained hands... each one a story, each one representing not only themselves, but others as well.

Shooting Tips

How to get good lighting:

When it comes to lighting, think about where you can find or create the best light for your subject in your location. For example, if you're using window light in your home, what time of day is going to be best to shoot your subject?

I have my windows all figured out and know just which window at what time of day (although that changes some during the seasons). If you need to add lighting, and want to use flash, be sure to diffuse and/or bounce your flash if possible to avoid harsh on-camera light. Or use a reflector, white poster board or even a white sheet to bounce light back into your subject. Use your tripod if you need longer exposure times or just



want to get your camera all set up and ready (good for shooting your own hands).

If you are heading outside, keep in mind you typically want to stay away from direct, harsh, midday sunlight. Lighting really depends on subject and location, but is a critical component to your shots.

Also, think about your exposure and how that will affect the mood or feeling of the image. For example, if you take a bright exposure such as the image above, that will create an uplifting, happy feeling.

Conversely, if you create a darker exposure, the photo will have a quieter, more contemplative feeling as in the example on the left.

The trick is to match the lighting and your exposure to your subject. You want the mood of the image to make sense with what the hands are doing.

Work the shot:

One key idea to keep in mind is point of view. If you want the viewer to feel like the hands are their own, then have the hands coming in from the bottom of the frame like this:

This is a popular point of view for stock images, because it's a composition that really engages the viewer, making them feel like they are part of the photo.

Alternatively, in the image below, the viewer is watching someone else make cookies. The point of view chosen by the photographer makes the viewer feel like they are observing or looking into the scene, rather than taking part in it themselves.

Both perspectives are effective for stock, but it's good to be aware of and intentionally choose the point of view you want the viewer to have.

The best advice is to try a variety of angles and viewpoints as you're composing, in order to come away with plenty of different images to upload to your stock sites.

Stretch yourself to work the scene and play with composition. Doing this will keep the process fun and keep you open to learning, growing, and developing your creative eye.



Keywording Tips for “Hands”

All your shots should include the who, what, where, when, and why as keywords. The actions, mood, and feeling are all important descriptors, as well as a few concept or idea words. For instance, all images for this theme should be able to use “hands” or “hand” as a keyword. Remember not to include things that aren't there or are not specifically expressed.

The trick with keywords for any shot is to be clear and detailed about all the things that matter in a shot in a way that people who are searching can find it without being over reaching and including details that



simply don't matter at all. Ban the spam, essentially.

Since most of these shots will be fairly simple and straightforward, the keywords will likely be limited in scope and number — and that's perfectly alright.

Let's look at this “Praying Hands” shot again. Here is how I would keyword it:

age	hands
aged	life
aging	nostalgia
aging process	nostalgic
black and white	old
clasped	older
close up	person
concept	photo
dirt	photograph
dirty	prayer
elderly	praying
fingers	spiritual
fingernails	vertical
grimy	

Remember, keywording is not an exact science. There are always words that could be added, changed, or taken away. The goal is to try and be as clear as possible.