



3 PHOTOGRAPHERS DISCUSS USING NATURAL LIGHT TO ACHIEVE BEAUTIFUL INTERIORS

COURTESY OF FEATURE SHOOT

“Natural light seems to invite us to play with it,” explains international commercial photographer Jacob Snively of shooting interiors.

Using natural light, especially indoors, necessitates a give and take between the will of the photographer and the whims of nature, a precarious dance that involves taming the light and surrendering to it at exactly the right moments.

We interviewed three leading photographers specialising in interiors – Jacob Snively, Anna Williams, and Emily Gilbert – about the joys and challenges of working with natural light.

For an interior photographer, light is essential to capturing the spirit of a place. In Williams’ experience, light can either make or break an image, regardless of how beautiful or how drab the subject itself might be.

Both Snively and Williams cherish natural light for the range it offers; it can be warm and glowing or cool and pristine, depending on the location, time of day, and the choices of the photographer.

For all its aesthetic merits, shooting in natural light comes with a unique set of challenges, the first being that often there isn’t enough of it. Gilbert jokes that she takes winters off from work, before admitting that shoots are in fact much more jam-packed when there are fewer hours of daylight. In wintertime, she’s racing the clock, so she saves her most ambitious projects for a more fitting season. For Snively, working with natural light has shown him the importance of meticulous planning. Since he can’t control the weather, he says, he has made himself adaptable and ready for surprises

In order to make natural light work for a picture – rather than against it – it needs to be controlled and harnessed. The key to a good interior shot is what Gilbert calls “a sense of airiness.” Light needs space to breathe in order to highlight the right areas or objects. It’s the negative space that determines how and where the light falls, reminds Snavelly. An ideal set includes what Snavelly calls “just the right amount of openness,” with neither too much nor too little light.

Gilbert feels most comfortable when shooting with a window to either side of her; that way, she can regulate how much light comes into the space. Similarly, Snavelly controls the gradient of his final compositions by including the light source within the frame itself so that the final image ranges in tone from areas of “solid white to solid black.”

Just because they shoot with natural light doesn’t mean that Gilbert, Williams, and Snavelly are afraid to add their own touches. On the contrary, introducing some artificial light can enhance what’s already there. Gilbert is happiest “when there is ample natural light and [she] just need[s] to fill some areas with a bit of artificial fill.” And Snavelly agrees: “I rely on the control, precision and craft of strobes too.” Williams, also a strobe enthusiast, has learned that the best photographs often require some augmenting of the natural light.

Working with art directors and stylists, notes Snavelly, can help reduce postproduction work, and forethought goes a long way. Gilbert’s processing routine can be quick and simple or more involved; compositing multiple exposures can bring out details in exposed areas and reveal nuances that would otherwise go unseen, like the view from a window.

When Snavelly, Williams, or Gilbert photograph an interior they’re telling a story and creating a moment. It’s about taking what’s in the room and making it even more appealing than in real life.