

ICE CREAM FOR HOT LIGHTS

THE REAL DEAL

I have styled a lot of ice cream, both real and fake. The legal guidelines for food photography used for advertising purposes are very specific. I am not an attorney, and will not recite the law; however, I can offer an interpretation to give you an example of how the law applies to food advertising. For instance: If you are selling ice cream, you must photograph the real thing, but if you're selling the topping on the ice cream, you can use fake ice cream.

Styling real ice cream requires special equipment, mainly in the freezer category, warm clothes for the entire crew (especially for the stylist), and a lot of hard, fast work. Styling ice cream without a stylist is extremely challenging, to say the least. But if shooting real ice cream is something you crave to do, let's start the discussion with a few techniques for styling the real thing. (Can you tell I'm trying to talk you out of it?) Assuming you're a glutton for punishment, oops, I mean challenges; here are a few hints to get you started.

Rent a chest-type freezer a few days before you plan to shoot, so it can come to the appropriate temperature, around 0° to 10° Fahrenheit. Purchase ice cream scoops the size you choose for your hero scoop. You'll need a minimum of three scoops because they need to be cleaned and dried between uses. Purchase the ice cream, flavor of

your choice, in 1-gallon containers. The round containers work best. You'll want lots of ice cream, because you'll need to practice scooping until you get comfortable with the technique. When you're ready to start scooping, first put on your sweater and gloves. Open the chest freezer and, bending at the waist, work in the freezer. All the scooping and styling will be performed as you bend over the open chest freezer. Shall I go on? Your back may not want you to.

A GREAT FAKE

Let's talk about styling with fake ice cream instead. Many years ago, fake ice cream was made with a base of instant mashed potatoes. It did not look realistic, and I never personally used that recipe. The first time I made fake ice cream, the base ingredient was solid white shortening. It wasn't bad-looking fake ice cream, but the process of making it was tedious. There were several ingredients and I often had difficulty getting the proportions just right because humidity and room temperature had to be accounted for. Then I chanced upon another recipe, which has never failed me: store-bought ready-made frosting and confectioner's sugar. This mix can be colored, swirled, and solid ingredients can be added for chunks. It also mixes well with Elmer's Glue-All to make melted ice cream to create the drips that convey a realistic appearance.



of green Wilton paste icing color. The paste icing colors are very concentrated. It takes very little of the concentrate to color one batch of fake ice cream. I dipped 1/2 inch of a wooden skewer into the paste icing color, and the small amount that stuck to the skewer was added to the frosting. That was enough to create the pale green fake ice cream. The addition of confectioner's sugar will slightly dilute the color of the frosting, but not much.



I cannot tell you exactly how much confectioner's sugar to add, but I can say that it normally takes more than two-thirds of a 2-pound bag to get the right consistency for fake ice cream. There are about 1 1/2 cups remaining in the bag when I've finished one batch. But you need to add the confectioner's sugar in stages. Start out with the frosting mix in the food processor bowl, using the metal blade. Pulse the frosting a couple of times. If you are adding paste icing color, add it at this stage. You cannot

add it later because it will not blend evenly. Add about one-third of the bag of confectioner's sugar. Put the top on the processor. Before you pulse or mix with a processor containing confectioner's sugar, fold a damp towel to create a square covering and place it over the processor's tube opening. This technique will help trap the sugar dust that might otherwise pollute the air.

Pulse the processor a few times to mix the ingredients well and to incorporate all of the sugar into the frosting. The mixture will still be sticky. Using a rubber spatula, scrape the sides of the processor bowl. Add additional confectioner's sugar so that half of the bag is in the processor, and run the processor until the contents form a large ball. With a wooden spoon, break the ball up into smaller sections. Add about two cups more of confectioner's sugar and run the processor again until the sugar is incorporated into the frosting.

In ice cream language, the term *barking* refers to parallel crevices that appear on the surface of a scoop of ice cream. Barking is good. And this recipe will bark when the right amount of confectioner's sugar has been added. You will need to test the mixture to determine when it's at the proper barking stage. I can usually tell when the mix is ready by cutting into it with a wooden spoon and noting whether barking is taking place. However, the best way to test the mix is to pack the

fake ice cream mix into an ice cream scoop. Working over the open processor bowl, depress the scoop's releasing mechanism so the scoop of fake ice cream is released onto the palm of your hand. If the mixture is a little sticky or if there is no barking pattern in the fake ice cream, you will need to add more confectioner's sugar.

When the mix is ready, you will notice that it is no longer sticky and that it has a looser texture. It will look similar to dry biscuit mix, but it can still be formed into a ball. Once you are satisfied with the fake ice cream mix, put the batch into a 1-gallon Ziploc bag. Squeeze all air out of the bag and seal. Knead the mixture through the bag to form it into a solid ball.

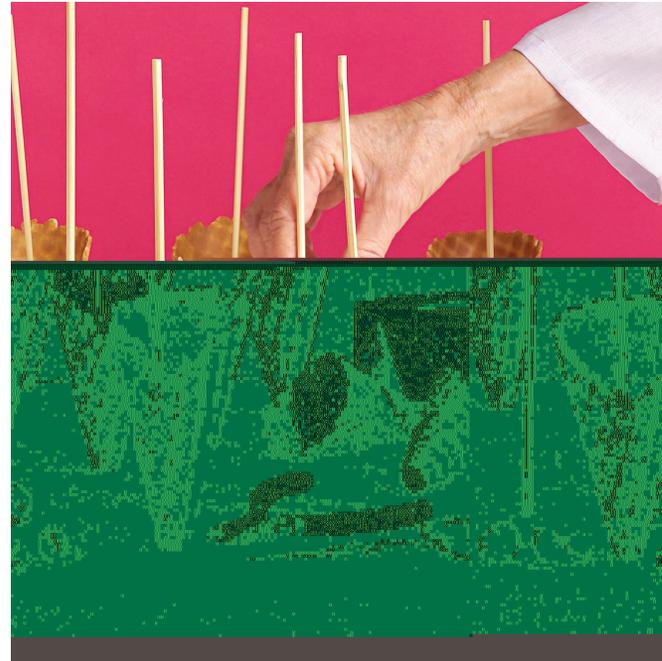
TRICKS OF THE TRADE Removing the air from the plastic bag is an important step, because it helps prevent the fake ice cream mix from drying out too quickly. When the mix is exposed to air, it starts to form a crusty surface and harden. This is a good/bad thing. It's good after the scoops are styled, but during styling, the mix works much better if it is soft and moist. After you have several hero scoops, they can sit on a cookie sheet and will not change in appearance as they harden. However, the optimal time to take the hero scoop to set is soon after it is made. After 10 to 15 minutes, the ruffle edges (see the following discussion) will not easily adhere to the scoop.

Work inside the plastic bag to fill the scoop with fake mix. Place the scoop into the bag. With one hand holding the scoop and the other hand on the outside of the bag, press the mix into the scoop. You will notice that some mixture will extend outside the scoop. This is a good thing because real ice cream does the same thing. This small shelf around the fake ice cream scoop will provide a place to position ruffle edges and drips later in the process. Make a number of scoops by holding the filled ice cream scoop over your hand or over a cookie sheet. Depress the releasing mechanism so the scoop is deposited flat side down in your hand or on the cookie sheet. If you make a scoop that doesn't meet hero standards, immediately put that scoop of fake mix back into the plastic bag. Squeeze the air out of the bag, zip it closed, and knead the scoop back into the mixture. Continue making scoops until you have two or three hero scoops for each ice cream of that color in your shot.

BUILDING CONES ON SET

Regardless of the number of hero cones in your shot, you will want to select the hero cones and position them on set before making the fake ice cream mixture.

Prepackaged cones were used for the shot in this chapter. However, waffle cones can be ordered from an ice cream specialty shop. Regardless of the type you use, as you



choose the hero cones, look for even color, well-formed waffle marks, and front edges that are not broken. Because the tip ends of the cones in our shot weren't planned to be in view of the camera, the task of securing the cones was not too challenging. To achieve the same cone relation to the camera for your shot, you will first need to cut away the very tip end of each cone with a sharp scissors to create a hole large enough for a thick wooden skewer to be inserted into the cone.

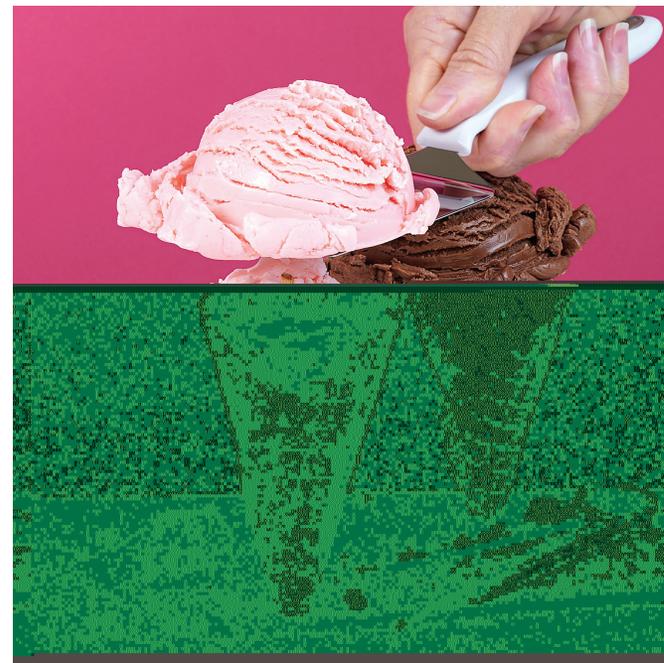
TRICKS OF THE TRADE The ice cream cones must be very stable on the set. The fake ice cream mix is heavy and the weight of the mix resting on top of the cones would cause the cones to wobble or fall over. To make a platform to stabilize and support the cones, stack two 1-inch sheets of STYROFOAM together and place two of these units side by side on the set. Secure the stacked sheets of STYROFOAM together by inserting wood skewers in a few places. Insert the skewers at slight angles for better hold. With duct tape, secure the craft foam units to the set surface.

Determine the final positions for the cones on set by inserting a skewer into the STYROFOAM to represent each cone. Slide stand-in cones over the wooden skewers to help align the cones to the camera. Once positions are final, replace the stand-in cones with hero cones. Place a small amount of craft clay inside each cone around the skewer to ensure the cone is standing straight to the camera. If the cones you are using have a high shoulder on the back side, use sharp scissors to cut away some of the height on the back of the cone. When the fake ice cream scoop sits on the cone, it will rest on the ledge of the back of the cone. Therefore, if the back of the cone is too high compared to the front, the scoop will face downward, creating an unseemly presentation.

After the fake ice cream mix is made, fill the cones with the mix up to the back ledge of the cone. Pat the top of

the mix down gently to create a flat, level surface. This will provide a flat surface on which the scoop will sit. Filling the cone with the fake mix also gives a camera view of the fake ice cream at the exposed V-shaped front of the cone.

At this point, use a wire cutter to cut the skewers so the end of each skewer extends 1/2 inch above the fake mix surface you just built. The 1/2 inch of skewer will help hold the hero scoop in place.

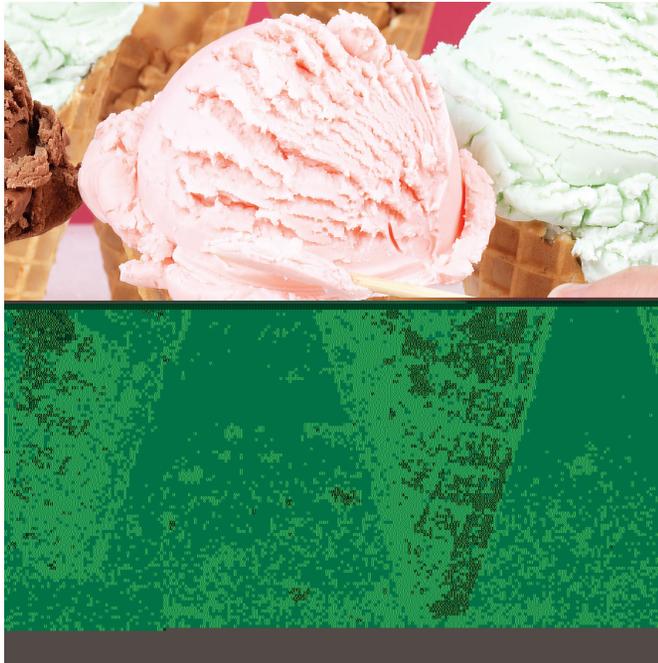


The surface of the fake ice cream scoops cannot be touched with hands or tools in any place the camera will see. Practice your positioning techniques with a stand-in cone and scoop until you are comfortable with the procedure. Select the hero scoops and reserve the best scoops to be positioned on cones closest to the camera, or where the camera focus will be sharp. Beginning with the cones furthest from camera, begin to place the fake ice cream scoops on the cones. Using a cookie spatula inserted under the back, non-hero, side of a scoop, lift one scoop off the cookie sheet. Set the cookie spatula/scoop assembly on a clean cutting board surface. Look at the scoop once again to determine the exact camera front. Hold the cookie spatula/scoop assembly over the selected cone. Working with your face at camera level, align the scoop so it will be centered over the cone. Using your free hand or the flat side of an artist's palate knife against the back side of the fake scoop, push the scoop from the cookie spatula to rest on top of the cone. If the scoop does not sit solidly on the cone, insert the artist's palate knife about 1 inch deep into the center back of the scoop at an angle that is horizontal to the set surface. Very gently press the spatula downward. This motion should help secure the scoop on the cone.

After the scoops are positioned on all cones, you may need to add additional ruffles of the fake mix around the



scoop for a more pleasing visual presentation. To make the ruffles, first remove a chunk, about 1/4 cup, of the fake mix from the plastic bag. Be sure to remove the air from the bag and seal it after opening. Place the mix on a plastic or paper plate. Using a wooden skewer held at a horizontal angle to the plate, cut into the edges of the mix so the skewer presses through the mix and touches the plate. In effect, the edges of the fake ice cream are being cut away from the larger portion. These slender



pieces will be the fluff or ruffled edges around the bottom circumference of the scoops. Position each fluff piece by maneuvering it with a wooden skewer or on the spatula. Hold the fluff piece next to the ridge along the bottom edge of the scoop. Using the wooden skewer or spatula, move the fluff against the fake scoop. Place the bottom or flat side of the fluff against the area where you want to position it. In an area of the fluff ruffle that the camera will not see, gently press with the flat end of the skewer



to adhere the ruffle to the scoop. If the outer surface of the scoop is too crusty to stick to the fluff, use an artist's brush wet with water to slightly moisten the surface where the fluff will be placed. Apply the fluff to the area where the water was brushed. With your eyes at camera, build the fluff around the front and sides of each scoop for a realistic presentation.

FINAL TOUCHES TO THE FAKE ICE CREAM ON SET

When all of the cones are in position and the fluff is built around each scoop, double check that the cones are in good position. When you have made any necessary adjustments and are ready for final photography, you will have one more step to perform. To make a realistic presentation for the camera, the “ice cream” will

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need to appear to have some small areas of melting. To achieve this look, you will need to make melt for each color of fake ice cream on your set. Place about 1 tablespoon of the fake mixture on a plate. You will need a separate plate for each color of fake mix. Add about 1 tablespoon of Elmer's Glue-All to the plate and mix the two substances together using a Wilton 9-inch angled spatula. The mixture needs to be perfectly smooth. The mixture also needs to have a consistency that can be administered using a plastic syringe applicator. If the mix is too thick, add a little more glue. This is the "melt."

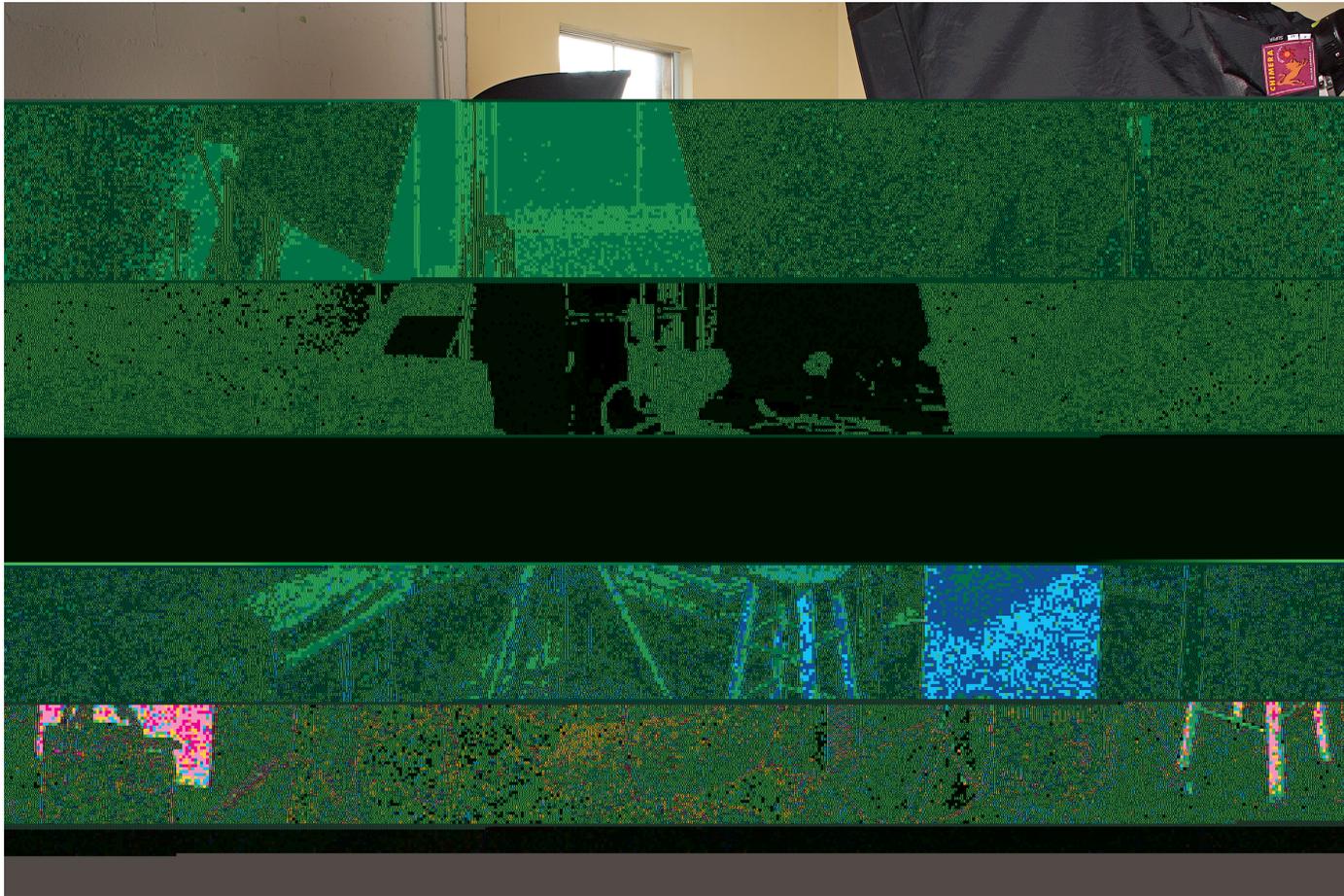
Place small amounts of the melt in strategic areas on the ice cream. Placing a few dots or ridges of the melt along the top ridge of the barking crevices creates a believable appearance. Also, melt looks good on the ridges and bumps in the fluff area, and can be used for drips if you want them.

Supplies used to create the ice cream cone shot at the opening of this chapter:

- Cuisinart Custom 14 14-cup food processor (DFP-14/BC)
- Three 2-pound bags of confectioner's powdered sugar (one bag for each flavor)
- One container each cream cheese, chocolate, and strawberry ready-made frosting
- Wilton kelly green icing color concentrated paste, three Wilson Recipe Right Non-Stick medium cookie pans, 9-inch Comfort Grip angled spatula, and cookie spatula
- Ziploc bags, gallon size
- Four 3-foot × 1-foot × 1-inch-thick STYROFOAM sheets
- OXO Good Grips medium silicone spoon spatula
- Elmer's Glue-All
- Three plastic syringes or eyedroppers
- Sturdy wooden spoon
- Ice cream or food portion scoop size 8
- Long, thick wood skewers
- Wire cutters
- Duct tape
- Plastic or paper plates
- Waffle ice cream cones
- Fisherman's fly-tying scissors

PHOTOGRAPHER'S COMMENT—Notes on the Ice Cream Cone Set

Even though using fake ice cream gives the photographer more time to work lighting, you still have to be ready to shoot because the “melt” moves. Your set has to be lit, prepped, focused, and ready to shoot when the cones are ready. The ice cream cone set has a bright pink seamless background behind the cones and is lit with a medium Chimera lightbank that fills the set. The key light is a small lightbank set to the side that provides a raking effect to give texture to the cones. The low angle of the camera will give you a better shot of the face of the scoops and the front of the cones. I used a Hasselblad H3D camera with a 50–110-mm lens.



A BOWL OF ICE CREAM

Now let's move on to creating the bowl of ice cream shown in the accompanying shot. Because we wanted to convey a premium quality vanilla ice cream, we chose to add real vanilla seeds to our fake ice cream mix. To remove the seeds from vanilla beans, use a sharp paring knife to cut the vanilla beans open lengthwise. The easiest way to achieve this is to lay one bean on a cutting board. Stick the end of a paring knife through the center of the pod, near one end. Hold the knife in one hand and the end of the bean pod with the other hand. Using your hand holding the pod, pull the pod away from the knife. This action will cut the pod open lengthwise making the seeds accessible. Scrape the tiny seeds from the center of the pod onto a plate with the end of the knife or with a skewer. Mix seeds from two vanilla bean pods into each batch of fake mix for a homemade vanilla ice cream appearance.

Techniques for building a bowl of fake ice cream are the same with regard to the fake mix; however, the bowl will require some special techniques. Because the fake ice cream mix is heavy, a large scoop or several smaller scoops in a grouping will require a solid base for support.

The safest and easiest thing to use in the bowl to support the hero scoops is the fake ice cream mix itself. Pack the mix tightly into the bowl and form a flat, level surface on



which the hero scoops and fluff will sit. The mix should fill the hero bowl to within 1/4 inch of the top rim. If the support is further down than 1/4 inch from the rim of the bowl, you will lose the height advantage of the hero scoops.

Position the back two hero scoops of fake ice cream first. Use the same technique described earlier in this chapter for positioning scoops on cones. Make sure the hero side of each scoop is facing the camera and the scoops are at



This shot is dedicated to the National Breast Cancer Foundation. The Zak Designs patented Gemini bowl and ice cream spoon were both created in honor of the foundation.

the height you choose. It may be necessary to create a riser or lift under the fake scoops to achieve a better presentation for each. If you need to make adjustments that require moving or lifting the hero scoop, use an offset angled spatula inserted under the back of the scoop to lift or leverage the scoop. Use a piece of the fake mix inserted under the scoop as a riser. The front scoop may need to be trimmed to fit into the bowl with the other scoops. I cut away almost one-half of the back side of the front scoop in our shot. I also removed about 1/2 inch of the bottom of the scoop so it would be shorter.

Make the fluff ruffles as described earlier in this chapter and position them alongside the scoops within the bowl. The bowl and flat surface of fake mix will give extra support for the fluff ruffles, making the job of positioning ruffles a little less challenging than for a cone build, where the edge of the fake mix is suspended in air!

As described in the ice cream cone section of this chapter, apply melt to the scoop and ruffles before final photography.



Supplies used to complete the ice cream bowl shot:

- Zak Designs patented Gemini bowl and ice cream spoon
- Cuisinart Custom 14 14-cup food processor (DFP-14/BC)
- Henckels 3-inch paring knife
- Ziploc bags, gallon size
- Le Creuset spatula
- Elmer's Glue-All
- Wilton medium cookie pan, 9-inch angled spatula, and cookie spatula
- Two 2-pound bags of confectioner's powdered sugar
- Two containers cream cheese ready-made frosting
- Four vanilla beans
- Sturdy wooden spoon
- Long wood skewer
- Plastic syringe
- Ice cream or food portion scoop (size 10)
- Plate for mixing melt
- Hand-painted tablecloth provided by www.bamsart.com



PHOTOGRAPHER'S COMMENT—Notes on Ice Cream Dish Set

My favorite way to light food is with a mixture of ambient light and strobe. On this hero shot, I used natural backlight. In my studio I have windows with southern and western exposure giving me good daylight all day long. For the ice cream texture I have placed my small Lightbank to the right of the set and slightly overhead. My small white fill card is in the front of the set to light the bowl but not the ice cream. I used a 4X5 camera with Hasselblad 39MS digital back.