



# Backgrounds for Studio Photography



for museum, art &  
archaeological photography

**Savage Seamless Backdrop Paper**

FLAAR has been doing outdoor and indoor archaeological and nature photography (among others) for many years. Our experience has let us try and test many kinds of photographic equipment and accessories.

Studio photography has been a very important aspect of what we do. And when we talk “studio photography” we almost inevitably need to address the necessity of using a background that will be compatible with our subject, which for the most part is made up of pre-Columbian Maya artifacts. This report will discuss some of the advantages and disadvantages of the various types of backdrops which we have used.



Figure # 1. Setup of one of our many photo shoots. Sometimes we have more than one photographing station (one for FX/DX and another one for medium or large format photography)

The problem with other types of backgrounds, such as cloth and muslin, is that it is impossible to have a background without wrinkles or creases. Granted, this is the ideal backdrop for portrait and commercial photography, but here at FLAAR we do neither of those.



Figure # 2. Lint on a velvet background used for macro photography



Figure # 3. Example of one disadvantage of a cloth backdrop

And while black velvet backgrounds are ideal for studio photography, they are not as useful when doing studio macro photography. Velvet attracts a lot of dust and particles that end up showing in the photographs.

Glare-free vinyl backdrops seem to have the most durability and are known to be very versatile. However, they are not as cheap as other backdrop alternatives and we have yet to obtain samples to review them.

Savage Paper has provided most of the backdrop paper we have used in the past years. Their seamless, glare-free paper backdrop has been useful for our archaeology and botany photography. Backdrop paper has several advantages over some of the other types of backdrop material in the market. It is relatively cheap, so it is easier for us to have a considerable stock with a wide range of colors. It is also easy to store and transport, providing more options for great photography. As a matter of fact, we recently took at least 14 rolls of background paper outside of our studio for an archaeology photo shoot in Guatemala.

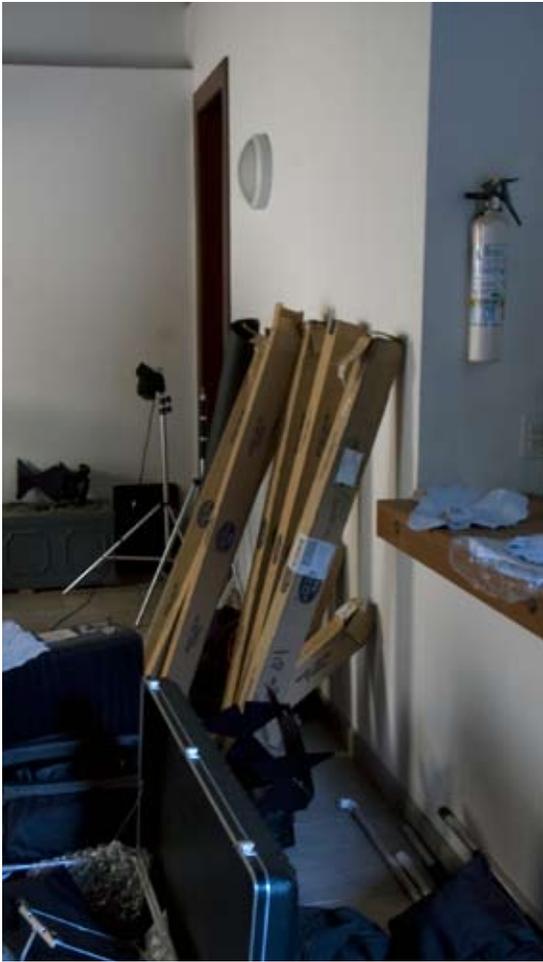


Figure # 4. Savage paper rolls used in a recent photo shoot at La Ruta Maya Foundation, Guatemala

Paper is easily reusable. Since Savage and other companies ship their paper in big rolls, one only needs to roll and unroll the paper for each photo shoot. Obviously this needs a system for holding the paper, which can be easily created with paper racks and cross bars. We use standard light stands and a light metal cross bar. This way we can easily adjust the height at which we need our paper.

Paper has some disadvantages though. Bad handling can lead to folds and creases. These can be removed in Photoshop, but when your photo shoots consist of hundreds (if not thousands) of photographs, you end up with a very time-consuming workflow.

While this feature is not exclusive to paper backdrops, Savage offers a wide range of colors. More often than not we have needed background colors other than the typical black, white, or even gray. Their Widetone Seamless Background Paper line has the colors and tones we have needed in the past years. A few times we could've used chroma key backgrounds but we don't actually have any samples yet.



Figure # 5. Our DIY background paper holder (light stands and metal crossbar)

The fact that paper is fragile is no surprise. Therefore, it is easy to leave scratch marks which cannot be cleaned up. Sometimes you also end up with dust and dirt on the surface of the paper. You can just brush it up but paper is definitely not an easy material to clean. Thus, the only solution is to cut away the scratched paper surface. The rolls are relatively big, so you shouldn't have to worry too much about the longevity of the roll.

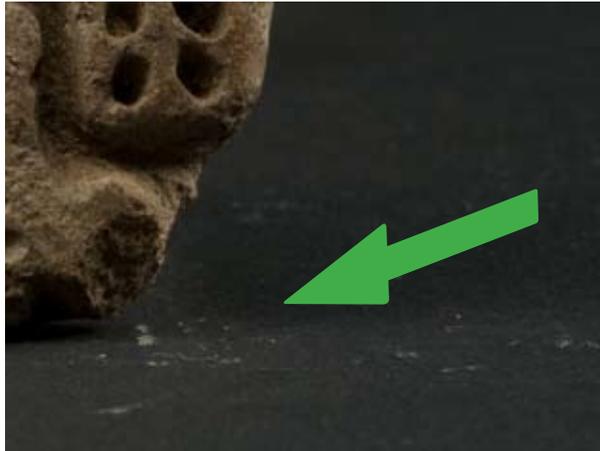


Figure # 6. Disadvantages and things to avoid with paper backdrops

Obviously, no backdrop material can be made perfect for every photographic situation. This is just a review of the materials we've used according to our needs. However, we find that Savage paper backdrops provide the versatility and quality we seek and demand for our professional photography.

Savage provides most of the background material featured in this report. They can be easily contacted through their website and also during some of the most important photography trade shows, including Photokina 2010.



Figure # 7. Savage booths during Photokina 2008 (top) and 2010 (bottom)