

THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S

LIGHTING

HANDBOOK

an educational guide by



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© Joe McNally



Light shaping by Joe McNally

Internationally acclaimed photographer Joe McNally knows more about lighting and TTL than most. Watch his three how-to videos and absorb some of that knowledge.

Watch them at profoto.com/joemcnally

 **Profoto**

PART I

Intro



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And then there was light. Great photography depends on great light. But relying on diffuse window light or the sun itself at the exact moment you need it isn't a good solution when you're dealing with a paying client, a busy CEO, or some melting ice cream. Flash/strobe photography (we use the terms interchangeably) was originally developed in the mid-1800s because of poor film sensitivity. From dangerous flash powder to today's flash tubes, we've

come a long way. Flash photography provides photographers with immense creative control. An explosion of lighting modifiers and emerging technology have made professional lighting systems more reliable and flexible than ever before. And while there has been a surge of LED-based continuous lighting solutions, flash photography still reigns supreme for its output power, compactness and low heat.



© Tobias Björkgren

Beyond the creative options, lighting presents a business opportunity. In a time where “everyone is a photographer,” being able to create a masterfully lit portrait with strobes is a differentiator that can increase your billable rate. In this guide, we’ll show you how some top photographers approach the business of shooting with strobe.

Whether you’re a neophyte or a lighting master, we hope this guide gives you both creative and business inspiration to create better images in the future.

Why Use Strobe?

You’d be hard pressed to find a photographer who doesn’t consider the sun to be the best source of light. Silk diffusers and reflectors can help shape the quality of sunlight. But even though we can count on the sun to rise and set on a predictable basis, we can’t control the weather, and we can’t drag sunlight into a studio. For most professional photographers who regularly use lighting equipment, the decision comes down to one thing: control.

New York-based music photographer [Chris Owyong](#) often has very limited time with his subjects. “I love ambient light when it’s available, but that’s the problem. I can’t depend on it being the specific shape, color, intensity or direction I need at the time I need it.”

Nikon Ambassador [Joey Terrill](#) agrees, “Artificial lighting simply comes down to having complete creative control. For example, using a reflector in a natural light portrait might produce some nice fill light, but I’ll have very little control over the intensity of the fill without also changing the quality of the light.”

Corporate and editorial photographer [Robert Seale](#) has been using lighting gear in his portraiture for decades, and doesn’t believe there is anything magical about strobe per se. “Light is light. I think available light, open shade, sunlight, hot lights, LED, and strobe, can all be beautiful and appropriate at various times.” For Seale, the goal isn’t to necessarily make the lighting the most noticeable aspect of his photography. “Extra lighting gear can sometimes create a look or mood that you can’t get organically, but in most cases, the point is to make the subject look attractive, interesting, and natural.”

That said, lighting styles can serve as a calling card for some photographers. Fashion photographer [Lindsay Adler](#) believes that clients hire her because of her skill with lighting. “For my style, shooting with strobes allows me to create precise and dramatic lighting that is a signature of my work. I can carefully place a highlight exactly where I want it to be. I can completely transform the mood of a scene by introducing strobes and have whatever control I need over direction, quality and intensity of light.”

PART I

Plan for a Well Lit Shoot: Key Questions to Ask Clients

Lighting a photo shoot brings an extra level of complexity to a project while ensuring consistency and professional results. What might seem obvious to you may not be for your clients, so it's your job to ask the right questions and educate the customer. We spoke to photographers [Joey Terrill](#) and [Robert Seale](#) to understand how they approach a photo shoot that involves lighting gear—including questions to ensure the entire day is a success.

1. WHAT IS THE INTENDED USE OF THE PHOTOGRAPH?

The use of the photo—whether for a corporate annual report, a brochure image, an advertisement, a simple website bio photo—can affect the approach and production value of a shoot. A corporate headshot might be a single light set-up in the corner of a conference room, while an advertising photo might require stylists, make-up artists, lighting assistant in a remote location.

Seale says, “You approach things differently, both creatively and financially, depending on what the purpose of the shoot is. Determining their intended usage is critical.”

2. WHAT STYLE DO YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE?

What's the mood, message and feeling they want to achieve? Are there comps they can send? Or a photo they found on my website that they like the look of? Light and bright? Dark and moody? Edgy or traditional? Like any major project, Seale believes the planning stage is crucial to success, “Clients may not be able to articulate exactly what they want, so communication at this stage is important.”

3. WHAT IS THE SCHEDULE/DEADLINE?

Time is one of the most important commodities. Seale tries to influence the schedule as much as possible. “If they offer a specific shoot date, that's fine, but I would rather them turn over contact info to me and let me try to schedule it myself if at all possible.”

4. WHAT ARE THE LOCATION SPECIFICS?

During the planning phase, Terrill does his best to scout locations beforehand. “While [scouting], I'll shoot pictures of the space, note the existing light conditions, and not insignificantly, consider where we'll park and how we'll get the gear into the location. Discovering and solving any unknown logistics of the shoot makes it possible to devote more mental energy to the creative side of things.”

Something as seemingly trivial as the location of the nearest power outlet can significantly alter the planning of a shoot. Environmental factors like wind and rain can dramatically change the equipment needs, and the smart photographer will plan contingencies well in advance of the shoot.

“What might seem obvious to you may not be for your clients, so it's your job to ask the right questions.”

5. WHAT LEVEL OF PRODUCTION IS EXPECTED/ NEEDED?

The type of shoot often dictates the number of people that will be involved with the decision making process. An advertising shoot might require a photographer to meet with the client, ad agency, make-up and hair artists and more. Photographers must ultimately account for all the pre- and post-production time that it takes to produce a shoot.

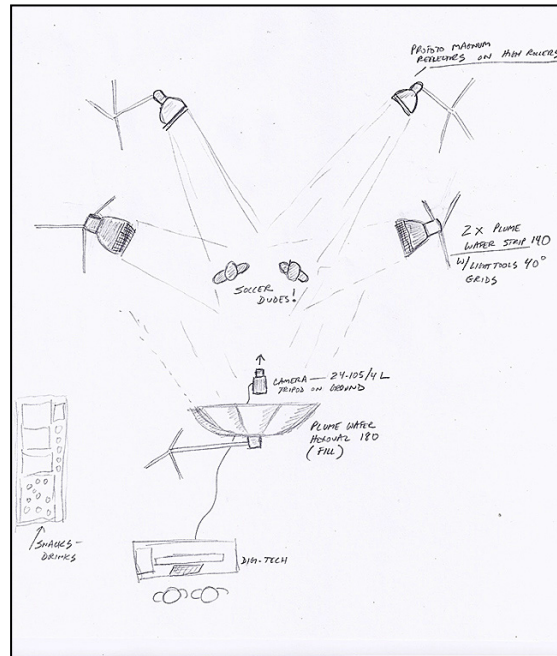
6. HOW MUCH PREP TIME AND SHOOT TIME IS AVAILABLE ON SET?

Since many of Terril's subjects are celebrities, athletes and CEOs, their time is extremely limited. "Before the first light stand is erected, I'll look for the failure point in each aspect of the shoot—from power locations, to foot traffic concerns, to ceiling height, to changing sunlight. Looking for what's going to trip me up is part of what Ansel Adams called pre-visualization...I work backward and consider where all of the lights will need to go while contemplating what might go wrong. Once I'm satisfied it will all work, we begin to build."

While it's not uncommon to only have a few minutes with the "talent" on-set, photographers should request as much prep time as possible

7. WHAT IS THE EXPECTATION FOR DELIVERABLES?

Setting expectations is the best way to ensure client satisfaction. Seale says, "I prep them for what to expect: from when they will receive the estimate, to how web galleries will be delivered, to how long retouching takes, etc...and try to explain that they will need to make selections for raw processing and retouching, and that we are not typically just handing over raw images at the shoot."



courtesy of Robert Seale



© Robert Seale

PART I

Pricing Considerations for Location Lighting

Whether you're hauling four cases of gear or just using a hotshoe-based flash, location lighting is more complex than showing up with a camera and relying on ambient light. For many seasoned photographers, location lighting means bringing multiple flash heads, lighting modifiers, battery packs, background stands, grip equipment, and often, an assistant or two.

Veteran [Joey Terrill](#) says, “Lighted portraiture brings increased creative fees and greater differentiation from the competition. Being able to use light creatively and effectively not only makes you more valuable to your clients, but it also makes you different.” For simple set-ups or editorial shoots, Terrill generally doesn't bill additionally, but he astutely points out, “the gear and photographer should be seen as separate entities.” That is to say that a photographer's skill and experience has a value that is separate from the thousands of dollars in gear that he/she uses. A photographer who regularly uses a pair of \$13,000 [Profoto 8a](#) packs can hardly be expected to charge the same as a photographer using speedlights.

The complexity and risk of a shoot increases significantly when photographing on-location and outdoors. Photographers can be confronted with wind/weather, shifting light, onlookers, police, insurance requirements and more. While it's uncommon to bill separately for lighting in retail (e.g. Wedding, senior portraits, etc) and editorial photography, commercial photographers often add line items to cover their cost of doing business.

Music photographer Chris Owyong says, “For commercial and editorial jobs the budget and usage largely determine what I can charge. That said, I do



© Allen Murabayashi

tend to charge more for lit portraits because gear has a tangible cost that I need to account for in my cost of doing business.”

Photographers break out their invoices depending on the needs of the client and/or the type of job. Some jobs—



particularly large commercial jobs which might include a “cost consultant”—require a detailed breakdown of every cost so that each line item can be scrutinized and potentially eliminated. Smaller jobs might combine gear considerations into the “shoot fee.”

Whatever strategy you employ, you should make sure your backend accounting properly identifies legitimate expenses (e.g. rentals) to accurately differentiate income from revenue for tax purposes.

Detailing Estimates

Robert Seale provides line item detail on all his estimates. This includes equipment, assistants, insurance, mileage, parking, food, scouting days, etc. “We use [BlinkBid](#) so it looks like a very standardized form for everyone.”

For Terrill, it depends on the needs of the client. “Some clients want every penny accounted for, while others are just concerned with the bottom line and the detail doesn't matter.”

Assistants

Both Seale and Terrill always bring an assistant for projects that involve lighting. Terrill says, “A great assistant is not just a set of hands and a strong back. They are often keen observers and someone who can jostle you into seeing something in a different way.”

Additional assistants are based upon the complexity of the project and the productivity gained.

Insurance

Many venues require a certificate of insurance (COI) typically in the \$1-3 million range to mitigate their liability for damages that you might create. Although some insurance companies will issue a COI for free, others will charge a service fee. Terrill charges for issuing and COI as well as a base fee for maintaining liability

coverage for his business. (Find out more in our free guide “[What Photographers Should Know About Insurance](#)”)

Travel, Parking, T&E

Both photographers bill for reasonable expenses. Terrill says, “I bill for actual expenses only and I always try to consider the client's money as my own. We eat reasonable meals, rent reasonable cars, and stay in reasonable hotels—just as if it was coming out of my own pocket.”

Some companies have vendor guidelines for various expenses. If you sign a standard vendor contract with a large company instead of executing your own [Terms and Conditions](#), your reimbursement rate might be different than expected.

PART I

Lighting Modifiers You Must Own (and Why)

Although flash heads typically have controls to alter the power output of the light, controlling the quality of light can be challenging (although it can be done depending on the quality of gear you use). Some photographers (e.g. [Landon Nordeman](#) and [Amy Lombard](#)) use hard light to good effect. But for other photographers, lighting modifiers provide a means to control the hardness, spread and color of light. Here are a few modifiers we think should be in your arsenal.

STANDARD REFLECTOR



Almost every flash head you can buy comes with a standard reflector in diameter ranging from 6-10 inches. Depending on the design, some of the reflectors have a slot to hold an umbrella. Given the range of choices of lighting modifiers, it might seem quaint to use the lowly reflector, but the versatile reflector gives you a focused, hard light.

Something like [Profoto's Zoom Reflector](#) allows Brian Smith to focus the light from a wide beam to a spot." The Profoto design allows the reflector to slide along the shaft of the flash head varying the light spread from 35°-105°.

SOFTBOX



The softbox is the workhorse of lighting modifiers. Providing diffuse light in an eminently portable package, the softbox is great for everything from people to food. Softboxes come in an incredible range of sizes, but look for strong construction because the rods that hold the softbox shape puts a tremendous amount of pressure on the seams.

Conceptual photographer [Rebecca Handler](#) says, "Softboxes are great light shapers with many uses, sizes and shapes. These lightweight and portable light shapers are a must-have modifier for any studio photographer! I love stripboxes for rim and hair lighting. For a harder light, I will sometimes use a strip without a baffle or silk. And a large softbox is wonderful for adding a natural soft broad fill light."

BEAUTY DISH



“Contrasty, but relatively soft” is how many describe the beauty dish—a favorite of many portrait and fashion photographers. The classic design puts the flash head behind a translucent or opaque tube cover, which eliminates a central hot spot. The dish typically comes with either a white or silver interior, the latter of which provides more punch. Arguably, the only downside? The beauty dish’s rigid frame is a bulky traveling companion, but a few companies have introduced collapsible versions that might fit the bill like the Profoto OCF Beauty Dish.

Fashion photographer Lindsay Adler is a fan. “For the type of work I do, I still feel that the beauty dish ([Profoto Softlight Reflector](#)) is my go-to modifier. It gives me more control over placement of shadows, a beautiful ‘pop’ to the image, and still creates flattering light.”

UMBRELLA



Reflected or shoot-through. White or silver. From a standard 40” to the 10’ Profoto Giant Reflector 300. When you need diffuse light, well, everywhere, the umbrella is hard to beat.

Swedish photographer [Sandra Åberg](#) uses umbrellas to create a “soft and subtle light” for her fashion and wedding photography. “Umbrellas are super easy to work. Unlike softboxes, umbrellas can be mounted in a matter of seconds.”

OCTABANK



The 8-sided cousin of the softbox is popular for people photography. One of the reasons? The circular catchlight in the eyes can look more sun-like vs the rectangular catchlight. Because octobanks tend to be shallower than softboxes, they feather less rapidly, which gives you a different type of creative look.

Like rectangular softboxes, Octagon-shaped light banks come in a variety of sizes. Profoto manufactures a range from the OCF Softbox Octa to the HR 7’ Octa.

Swedish photographer [Tobias Björkgren](#) is a fan of the 4’ version for location shooting. “The three-foot octa is a bit small to light a whole person, and the five-foot is a bit too big to bring on location. The four-foot is just perfect. Plus its shape creates a beautiful round catch light. It looks almost like the sun.”

GRIDS



Whether rigid or soft, grids attenuate the spread of light without changing the quality. The ability to control the “spill” gives photographers much more creative freedom without being overly reliant on barndoors, flags, and other bulky gear.

Joey Terrill has fabric grids for each of his rectangular and strip boxes. “Fabric grids make it possible to defy the laws of light physics somewhat because they provide a great deal of control of the depth of light while barely affecting the quality of the light.”

GELS



Arguably the cheapest way to modify light is to throw a gel in front of it to change the color of light. Gels used in combination with your camera's white balance setting can dramatically change the mood of an image in a way that changing the quality of light cannot.

For example, while shooting outdoors, you can use a CTO gel (color temperature orange) while setting your camera's white balance to "incandescent" to shift the color of the skies to a much more dramatic blue.

Rent or Buy?

The price of lighting modifiers can vary significantly. The price gradient gets even steeper when looking at specialty items. As with camera gear, the decision to buy or rent is partially a function of how often you intend to use the equipment over its lifetime, and your ability to monetize the use of the equipment. If you're frequently using lighting equipment, purchasing an item like a medium or softbox is a no-brainer, but you probably are better off renting a specialty item like a [fresnel](#) fixture.

Powerful lighting equipment with short flash durations and fast recycling times can run into the tens of thousands of dollars, but photographers who are looking to get into lighting have much more modestly priced options. If you're looking to build a lighting kit from scratch, we recommend renting gear to understand the quirks of each system.

PART I

Advancements in Lighting You Might Not Know About

The emergence of High Speed Sync gives more creative possibilities by allowing sync speeds up to 1/8000s

The areas of camera technological advancement—sensor sensitivity, dynamic range and pixel density (aka more megapixels)—have informed advancements in lighting technology. Namely, manufacturers have eschewed increases power output in favor of features like better performance (e.g. battery technology) and more interesting wireless options, which make the flash systems easier to use.

HIGH SPEED SYNC (HSS)

Traditional flash sync speeds for most CMOS-based DSLRs is around 1/250s. Thus, when using a flash in bright sunlight, it's often impossible to shoot with wider apertures without using a neutral density filter. The emergence of High Speed Sync (similar technologies are referred to as Hi-Sync and HyperSync) give more creative possibilities by allowing sync speeds up to 1/8000s (depending on the manufacturer). Specifically, HSS allows the photographer to:

- ▶ Freeze action
- ▶ Overpower the sun with less power from the flash (or with a farther throw)
- ▶ Use a wider aperture to shorten the depth-of-field

Using higher ISOs with smaller, more portable flash systems can necessitate faster shutter speeds. HSS is a perfect solution for these situations.

[Joe McNally](#) uses the HSS feature on his Profoto B1 and B2s. “I can sync on my [Nikon] D4s or D810 up to 1/8000s on high speed sync. You can work your f-stop to a very wide open area. Think about the portrait of a bride at 1/250s at f/16 with all sorts of things sharp in the background—telephone poles, lights, whatever—think about the same portrait done at 1/8000s at f/2.8.” Joey Terrill agrees, “[HSS] has also made it possible to mix daylight and available light, while simultaneously shooting at any desired f/stop.”

LiOn BATTERIES



If you haven't upgraded your portable flash system in the past 5 years, you might have missed the shift to LiOn technology, which provides more power than the previous generation of lead acid or nickel metal hydride batteries. In addition, LiOn suffers no memory effects nor does it require any cycling to prolong battery life—all without much variation in price compared to the older battery technology.

Be aware that lithium batteries are subject to air travel restrictions based on their capacity. The general requirement for the transportation of lithium batteries is that they have passed the test procedures of the [UN Manual of Test and Criteria, Part III](#). Currently, the [IATA requires](#) spare lithium batteries to be stored in carry-on luggage, and must be less than 100 wH (batteries installed in the generator can be checked). The Profoto B1, for example, has a 44.4wH capacity, so air travel is fine provided that spare batteries are stored in your carry-on luggage.

TTL SYNCING

TTL (through the lens) is an automatic flash exposure technology that measures the incoming light “through the lens” and hits the sensor to inform the flash how much power to output. In the past, TTL was usually associated with the native flash systems of a respective camera. But nowadays, 3rd party manufacturers offer a number of TTL options that can be used with higher output flashes. The Pocket Wizard Flex & Mini systems, and the Profoto B1/B2s have TTL transceivers that work with both Nikon and Canon systems to provide TTL capabilities.

Skeptical about using TTL with your professional lighting system? The next feature is for you.

WIRELESS CONTROL



Although there is much to be said for a simple one light set-up, many photographers are using multiple light sources to add a little flare to their photography. And even in one light set-ups, it wouldn't be unusual to have a light mounted high up on a stand or jib. In either case, changing the power setting manually used to be a cumbersome task, but wireless control has become easy and reliable, and has simplified this one aspect of lit photography.

Wireless systems used to be infrared-based, which required line-of-sight and relatively short distances between transceivers—an impracticability for many shoots. Nowadays manufacturers offer radio wave-based triggers. Systems like the Profoto Air camera transceivers offer multiple channels and multiple groups per channel to give you quick access to different settings. And wireless ranges of up to 500m make remote triggering incredibly easy.

Celebrity portrait photographer Chris Owyong agrees. “As a celebrity portrait photographer, I often have only 5 or 10 minutes to get the client a number of looks. [Wireless controls] enable me to travel lighter, set up faster, and respond instantly to changing circumstances—with zero sacrifice in image quality or creative freedom.”



PROFILE

Building Environments with Light: Tommy Shih



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Fashion photographer [Tommy Shih](#) is well-known in Hawai'i for his stunning use of light and choice of great locations. Shih was hired by HiLuxury Magazine for a fashion editorial shoot inside of CabaRAE, an aerial/acrobatic show at the Hilton Hawaiian Village. Unfortunately because of budget restrictions, Shih didn't have the benefit of working with the show's lighting designer. In fact, he was limited to "house lights" only. The dimly lit space offered only the most meager of incandescent lights that was barely showing up at ISO 1600. To compensate, Shih decided "we needed to create all of the light, and only balance the illumination from a few decorative features and the dim house lights."

What did he want viewers to feel?

The theatre-in-the-round configuration begged for a center stage shot. "I wanted the viewer to feel as if they were in the audience watching a performance while still feeling the grandeur of being in the location." To emphasize this, Shih placed some of his crew in chairs to frame the shot, and feathered the gelled lights to barely illuminate them. This added visual interest without overwhelming the subject.

What equipment did he use?

Shih Says, "The theater has some great details when you look up...I wanted to get as much of that into the

shot as possible, and have them look good too. This meant getting light on them and avoiding casting un-sightly shadows."

What equipment did he use?

Shih used a 5' octabox attached to a Profoto B1 as his keylight. A second B1 with a zoom reflector was placed in the far back of the room as a rim light. A third light with an XL Silver Deep Umbrella illuminated the background and the ceiling, and calibrated as to not overpower the incandescent light. Shih used a Lee 106 Primary Red Gel on the 4th light on camera left to give a warm red glow and highlight to the scene.

For a variation, Shih added a fog machine, which not only added appropriate atmosphere to the circus-like theme, but also served to accentuate the red light.

Did he succeed?

“Using multiple strobes was key in creating that live show feel. The key to this was using gels on our rim lights to mimic the colored light banks and up lighting that wasn't available to us. Having that 4th light for the stage shot to provide fill was important to light up the ceiling so that it wouldn't look too dark. I felt if it was too dark the theater would feel claustrophobic rather than open, airy and lively.”



© Tommy Shih



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ISO 400, 78mm, 1/125s, f/4.0 © Tommy Shih

PROFILE

Lighting the Perfect Portrait: Brian Smith



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Renowned celebrity portrait photographer [Brian Smith](#) believes the key to a successful portrait is more than turning knobs and dials. “Think of portrait photography as a process. It’s not just a case of setting your shutter speed and aperture, and you get a desired result. That’s part of it, but there’s so much more that goes into a shoot.”

In his book [Secrets of Great Portrait Photography](#), Smith describes the value of light in portraiture. “The quality of light you use affects how viewers feel about your photographs...Learn to take your cues from nature, and create the right light for the mood you’re after.”

Smith’s [Art & Soul](#) project combined stunning celebrity portraits with testimonials about the importance of the arts with proceeds going to arts education through The Creative Coalition.

For a project like Art & Soul, what considerations go into picking a lighting setup that will be flattering to a range of ages, skin tones, and levels of comfort in front of the camera?

Whenever I’m working on a project I always look for a consistent lighting approach that can work with all the subjects I photograph because I want viewers to focus on the people I photograph—not how clever I was with my lighting. For Art & Soul, I kept the lighting set-up very simple. We created a keylight spot using a Profoto Beauty Dish and grid plus an overall fill from a large 6’ bank. This looks good for pretty much everyone no mat-

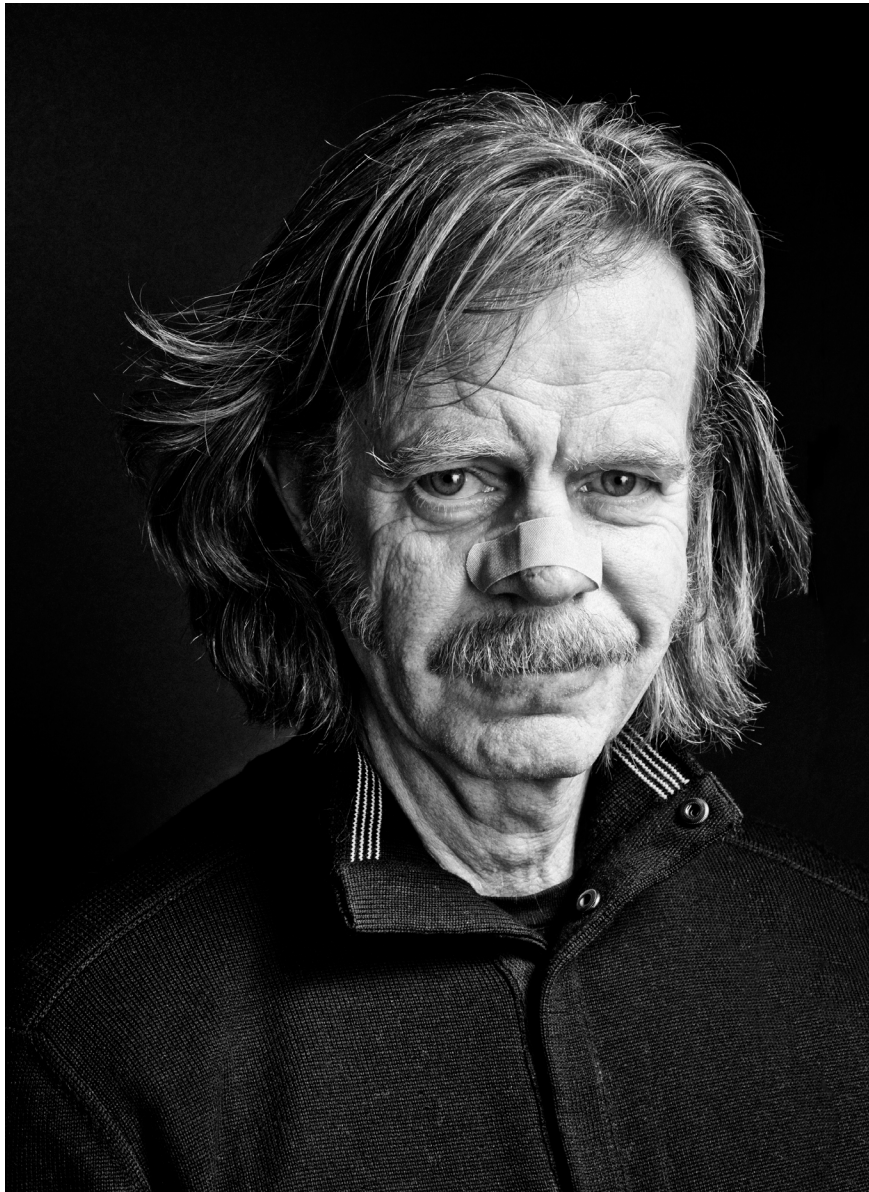
ter their age and because it’s very simply it’s easy to fine-tune for each subject i just a few seconds which means I can focus my attention on the person in front of my lens—not my gear.

How much direction do you typically give your subjects?

That depends on how much they need. If someone is uncomfortable in front of a camera, much of what I say to them is simply subterfuge to help them relax. I usually start with a pose that’s natural to them and tweak things a bit as needed.

What do you consider a successful portrait?

A good portrait should reveal something about the subject and make you feel something. Whether you feel admiration or disgust, compassion or envy, heartbreak or laughter—all are valid just as long as you feel something.



© Brian Smith



© Brian Smith



Lighting can dramatically accentuate facial features, wrinkles, etc. How sensitive are you when selecting a lighting modifier for a particular subject? Are you always trying to use lighting that flatters the subject, or are you more interested in "telling a story"?

I tend to go the flatter the subject route based on what I'd want someone to do to me. It's important to remember that "hard light" doesn't necessarily mean "harsh light". Just bear in mind that there's definitely a double standard. Wrinkles on women are considered a sign of age but on men they're seen as "character".

Does lighting help environmental portraiture?

God yes. The ability to place the light where you want it no matter the time of day allows you to select the best backdrop no matter what the sun is doing.

There's been lots of discussion about "photoshopping" models and movie stars. What's the role of post-production in creating a portrait?

I consider retouching to be successful when you don't notice it. You want your subject to look like they just came from a month-long spa visit—not a trip to Michael Jackson's plastic surgeon.

The ability to place the light where you want it allows you to select the best backdrop — no matter what the sun is doing.

PROFILE

The Joy of Flash and Ambient Light: Vanessa Joy



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Wedding photographer [Vanessa Joy](#) is well-known for her ambient light photography, but a few years ago she started to get creatively restless. “To be honest, I was getting sick of my work. Sick and a bit bored. I wasn't happy with what I was producing, not that I think I was doing bad work, but it wasn't creatively challenging anymore.”

Why did she turn to camera lighting?

Her antidote was to start to incorporate off-camera flash into her portraits, which had a secondary effect of making her photography stand out even more from the images captured by wedding guests with a phone. “Off camera lighting brings different things to different times. Sometimes it's helping me accent current light, or fake golden hour. Other times I'm using it to create something completely different than everyone around me can see or capture.”

How did she light the shot?

One of her most famous images is known as the Ring of Fire, which she shot at Liberty State Park in Jersey City, NJ. “The ring of fire is a natural phenomenon that happens when the sun is in that spot in the sky (my second shooter actually pointed it out), but without the Profoto lights being able to overpower the sun, you wouldn't have been able to see it at all when exposing for the bride's face.”

Using two bare bulb B1s, Joy was able to overpower the sun to darken the sky while properly exposing the bride's face and the ring.



Canon 1D Mark IV. 24mm. ISO 100. f/14 at 1/200s



The drama of the image is heightened by the cloud cover, which Joy often looks for when making a picture. “It’s something that can’t be exposed for correctly without adding light to your subject. I could silhouette it, but so can everyone else with a camera phone next to me.”

The image is only made possible by adding powerful lighting equipment to the equation. “I was able to give something to my clients that they didn’t even visually see while standing there and they were thrilled with it.”

What’s in her lighting kit?

Vanessa’s lighting kit typically consists of:

- › (2) Profoto B1 heads
- › (1) B2 kit with two heads
- › (2) Transmitters
- › Profoto OCF portable beauty dish
- › Shallow white umbrella
- › Gel starter kit
- › Full set of grids

“It may seem like a lot but on a wedding day I need to be 100% prepared for whatever. If I’m doing a night portrait for family photos the B1’s are my go to’s. But if I have to run out of my car for a quick 5 minutes of pictures on the beach, the B2’s are much easier to grab.”

PROFILE

Experiment, Experiment, Experiment: Lindsay Adler



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Fashion photographer and educator [Lindsay Adler](#) has wowed audiences with her dramatic and whimsical images. Her work has appeared in such publications as *Marie Claire*, *InStyle*, *Zink*, *Elle* and many more. We spoke to her about her use of lighting gear and her experimental approach to fashion photography.

Digital is infamous for clipping highlights, and shiny things are very specular! What lighting considerations do you have for this type of work, and how much experimentation does it take to "get it right"?

When you are shooting shiny objects or shots with high contrast, you have to make a decision on how you are going to handle that contrast. Are you okay with losing some information? Will you choose to shoot with a camera with a higher dynamic range? Will you modify and control lighting to tone down the highlights? Will you shoot multiple images and combine in post? Will you work with the RAW file to 'fix it in post'? To be honest, all can be valid options and it depends on the scene, your style, budget and more.

We often have a 'pre-light' day or session to allow me to experiment with light. Certainly 15+ years of experience allows me to pull from multiple solutions for lighting, but I try to give myself ample time to experiment with the lighting particularly when dealing with shiny or reflective subjects.

You've shot a lot of macro beauty. Does the lighting approach and gear differ from shooting a full-body portrait?

I love shooting macro beauty because it is fascinating to explore detail that is not often seen or appreciated. When lighting macro shots, there are a couple of things I often consider:

First, when I shoot will my body or camera get in the way of the light source(s)? I must be sure that I am not obscuring or unintentionally changing the light.

Next, I often choose a slightly harder light source. This extra bit of contrast emphasizes the texture in the skin, pores, eyelashes and more. When I'm shooting an image with larger than life detail, I really want to see that detail. A flat lit image with a soft light source usually doesn't showcase enough texture for the results I desire out of a macro shot.

Finally, in a macro shot, catchlights [the reflection of lights in the eye] matter more. If you're taking a closeup shot of the face or the eye, catchlights will be much more noticeable. The point is not that there's a 'wrong' or 'right' catchlight, but instead that you're aware that they will become a more important part of the image!



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You've written a number of guides on posing. What do you think the average photographer doesn't understand about posing their subjects?

Most photographers don't realize that a flattering pose requires more than just good body placement. To truly flatter a subject and bring the most out of a pose, you must carefully choose the right camera angle and lens or the shot. In other words, you might have a fantastic pose but if you are shooting from the wrong angle with the wrong lens, the shot will not be flattering at all! You really must learn how your camera sees to truly utilize the transforming possibilities of posing.

A great pose can help make an average shot more compelling. Even more importantly, a weak pose can ruin an otherwise fantastic shot.



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In many of your videos, you talk about the value of a great team of hair and make-up stylists. Can you elaborate on how these factors can transform an image?

In every image you shoot you want to ask yourself “What is the purpose of this photograph?” How is the image supposed to make you feel? What is the center of interest? Basically... what’s the point? All elements of the photo should work together and build around the image’s purpose. You need to consider all aspects of the photo; the lighting, the posing, the composition, the wardrobe, the hair, the makeup, the toning and more.

A truly high impactful and successful image uses all of these elements together to achieve your visual goals. For this reason, when I shoot fashion and beauty, working with a creative team is absolutely essential for my style. I collaborate with hair, makeup and wardrobe to be sure everyone is doing their part to contribute to the end goal of the image. Furthermore, working with other professionals not only elevates the quality of my work but allows me to focus my attention on the photographic aspects of the shoot (lighting, posing, camera angle, model-photographer connection).

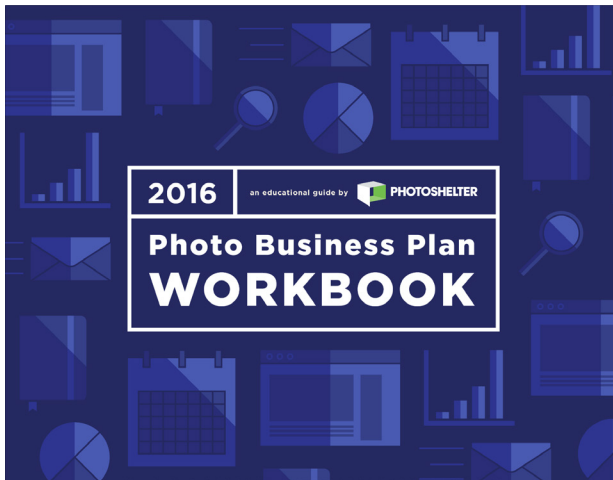
“In every image you shoot, you want to ask yourself “What is the purpose of this photograph?”

PART III

Conclusion

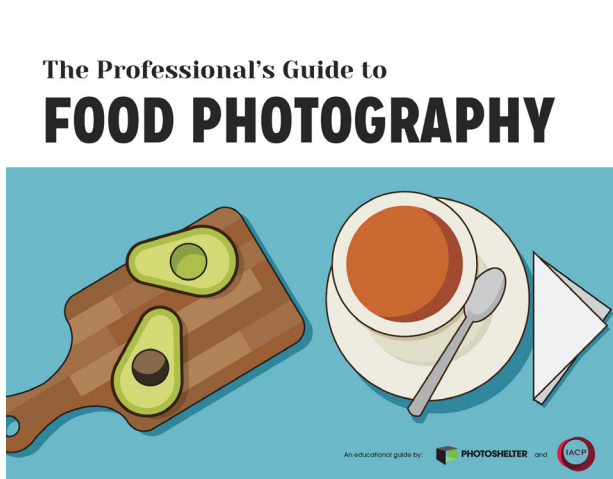
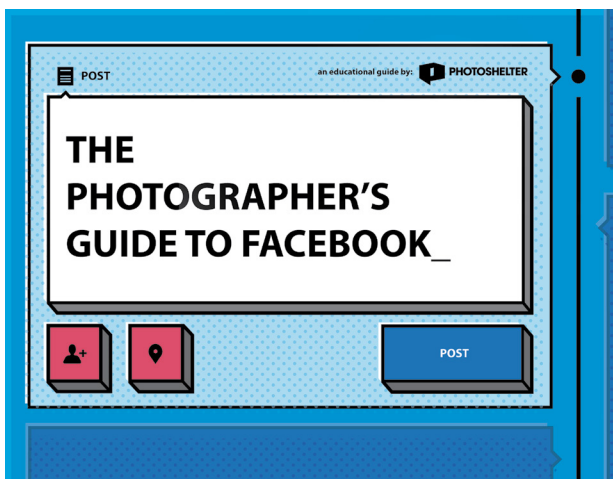
Lighting gear gives photographers a different bag of creative options and business opportunities. Gear manufacturers have created systems that can fit nearly any budget, and new technologies are continually emerging to make these systems even easier to use. And while we mainly focused on strobe solutions, continuous lighting solutions (especially with low noise, high ISO sensors) allow photographers to see the lighting patterns before they even click the shutter button.

So flip that switch, and take control of your lights!



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