

A woman with long, wavy blonde hair is sitting in a gold, ornate chair. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. She is wearing a white, lace-trimmed dress with a black belt featuring large, ornate silver buckles. The background is a soft, out-of-focus white.

By Michael Allen

Photography Lighting Secrets

Simple Techniques for - Available light,
Natural Light, Halo Light, Off Camera Flash
Techniques, Studio Flash, Hot Lighting
and Reflective Bounce Lighting

To Inspire Photographers

Canon 5dII with a 24-105mm lens at f4
ISO 800 shutter speed 1/60 th using an ND Filter
and this is a screen capture from video
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Photography Lighting Secrets

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To Inspire Photographers





A note of inspiration from Michael

I've had a passion for photography since I was a little kid. My first camera was a Polaroid, and it was pretty much just an automatic camera. I made the jump to a vintage Highland Pentax 35mm film camera, and used that camera for many years. I moved from being the yearbook photographer in high school, to working in a camera store for several years while attending college. I took as many photography classes as I could, but my college did not offer very many courses in photography. I got my "masters degree" in photography by working in studios and learning hands on. I worked in studios, assisted other photographers, and tried to keep up with other photographers with little professional training. Back when I was starting out, photographers did not share any of their secrets, finding any behind the scenes books and video was impossible, egos of the photography world had the attitude that if you did not have a good portfolio, then you simply could not be a professional photographer. Trying to learn and improve your portfolio was very hard.

I did not let that stop me, I kept working in the industry, and continued to learn and grow, I had a small fan club, so that kept me going to improve my talent. Along the way I also got involved in video and film production, so I was exposed to lots of professional work. I just did not know how to take it to a new level. The only option was to move to a major city like New York or Hollywood, and I was young, married with children and pretty much locked into my life. For a few years I got away from professional photography and had to work at a corporate job to make a living.

Over the years I started a small business with my wife, a hair salon. We did not have any big plans other than to trek out on our own and start a small business. It just so happened that the beauty industry was smack dab center of the fashion world. I began submitting fashion photos to the industry magazines, then book publishers began to take notice, and all of the sudden I was being published around the world on a regular basis. Magazines would call for photos, ad agencies would pick up my work, and our own business began producing ads in magazines like ELLE and Town & Country Magazine. That started me back in my own commercial photography business, and led me into all kinds of photography and video projects. I would also get asked to shoot weddings, and I began shooting for friends and families that I knew.

My passion for photography was reborn, and I wanted to take my career to the next level, even though I thought I'd pretty much reached the place I wanted to be, I wanted more, so I started going to WPPI in Las Vegas. Every year that I went, I was surrounded by thousands of professionals, and was inspired beyond my imagination. It was also a bit of an ego buster, these photographers were all really good, and very successful. I did not let that intimidate me, and I dug in even further with my learning, and began to upgrade all my older camera gear, especially my lenses. I did not know how valuable a great set of lenses could be, and how much better my photography became. In just a few years span, digital photography was born, and I put my old film cameras away and embraced the new technology.

I continue to shoot weddings along with my commercial photography, and have successfully grown my business. I made a decision to keep my business small, keeping my customer service manageable, and continue to attract some amazing clients every day. It has been a blast and I love every minute of it. It is so amazing to do something that you love as a career.

This little book will teach you how to find the light, look for halo lighting, and how to mimic natural light. I hope my little book inspires you, and if you want more information, I have another book written just for wedding photographers. Thanks so much for taking the time to pick this up and read it.



Cover Photo

This photo was taken at Nottoway Plantation right outside of New Orleans on a shoot for Southern Bride Magazine. Camera: Canon 5dII with a Canon 50mm 1.4 lens shot at F2 ISO 800 and 1/125th shutter speed. The light was simply ambient light from the room which was painted all white from floor to ceiling.

Photo By Michael Allen

About the Author

Michael Allen is a professional photographer, filmmaker, speaker and author based in Memphis Tennessee where he lives with his family.

Michael's business and photography skills have kept him busy in the beauty industry, Michael helped his wife Janice run a highly successful salon and spa business, where he used his photography to promote their business, winning them award after award as one of the Top 200 salons in America. Today his wife is an award winning hairstylist and frequently travels with him working on editorial magazine shoots.



His fashion photography has been featured in magazines around the world inspiring millions of salons and their customers since 1990. Michael began photographing weddings professionally in 2003, and has been published on wedding blogs and magazines such as Emmaline Bride, The Knot, Southern Bride, Borrowed and Blue, Southern Wedding News, Epic Love Stories, Colin Cowie Weddings and more.

Michael is also an editorial photographer and writer for Southern Bride Magazine, and has traveled all over the South, from Florida to New Orleans, and to such destinations as Mexico. His wedding photography style is beautiful, compelling and keeps his studio booked year round with weddings.

Michael's commercial photography projects have also attracted a lot of attention, he shoots for major companies such as Walmart Soundcheck, photographing such celebrity music stars as Lauren Alaina, Dierks Bentley, and more. He has recently worked on a major shoot with Conde Naste for GQ magazine as an assistant photographer for Sebastion Kim featuring Justin Timbelake. One of his recent portrait clients includes Leigh Anne Tuohy from the film "Blind Side". He's also an award winning film maker shooting for major corporations and indie studios across the country.

At the end of the day, Michael simply loves photography, and his goal is to share what he's learned over the years to help inspire other photographers.



Canon 5dII with a 50mm lens at f1.2
ISO 800 shutter speed 1/1000 th using available
light and Noise Reduction NIK Filters
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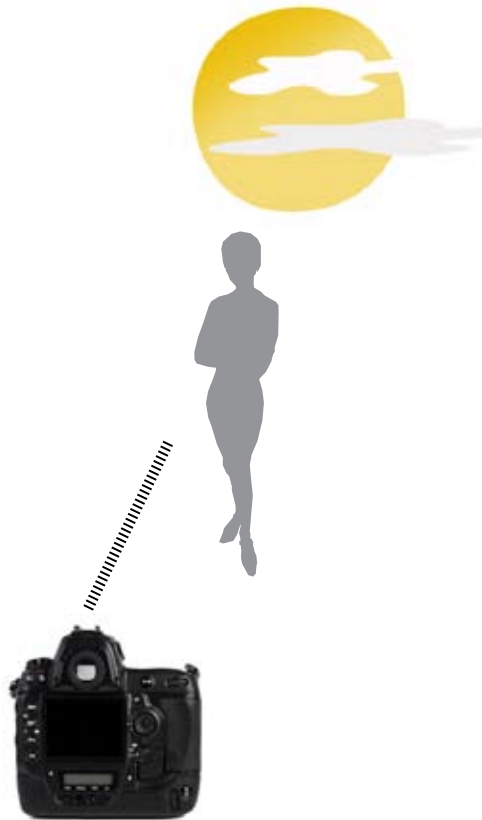


Modern Wedding Style

Shooting with sun and clouds - Blown out background

You may or may not have heard the term "blowing out the background", This means that you expose the subject and basically ignore what the camera settings want for an even exposure in the background. This style of photography is common in modern wedding photography, and offers a very romantic, natural style of photography. So don't be afraid to shoot this way, it will give your photography an artistic approach that people will love. It offers a timeless, classic style too.

To shoot this style of photography, set your camera to manual mode, expose to the the face and ignore the background. For this shot we were on a beach, the sun was behind the model with the ocean behind her. I intentionally over exposed the image as well, you can see the detail in the dress and most of the hair, but you may notice some of the flowers in her hair are very hot or over exposed beyond recognition, that's fully acceptable.



This style can be a challenge to shoot believe or not. Technically the background is over exposed, but I kept enough detail to actually recover most of the background. If I had simply wanted to expose this image properly and not overexposed it a little bit, then using post production to accomplish this style may not have worked. It's like walking a tightrope, you have to find the balance between over exposure and extremely hot and way over exposed.

For this photo I used a Canon 5d II with a 50mm lens, ISO 800, f2.8 at 1/3000th. I'm in full sun, but I'm exposing to what would be a shade setting, as I want to expose the front of the dress and her face.

Chapter 1



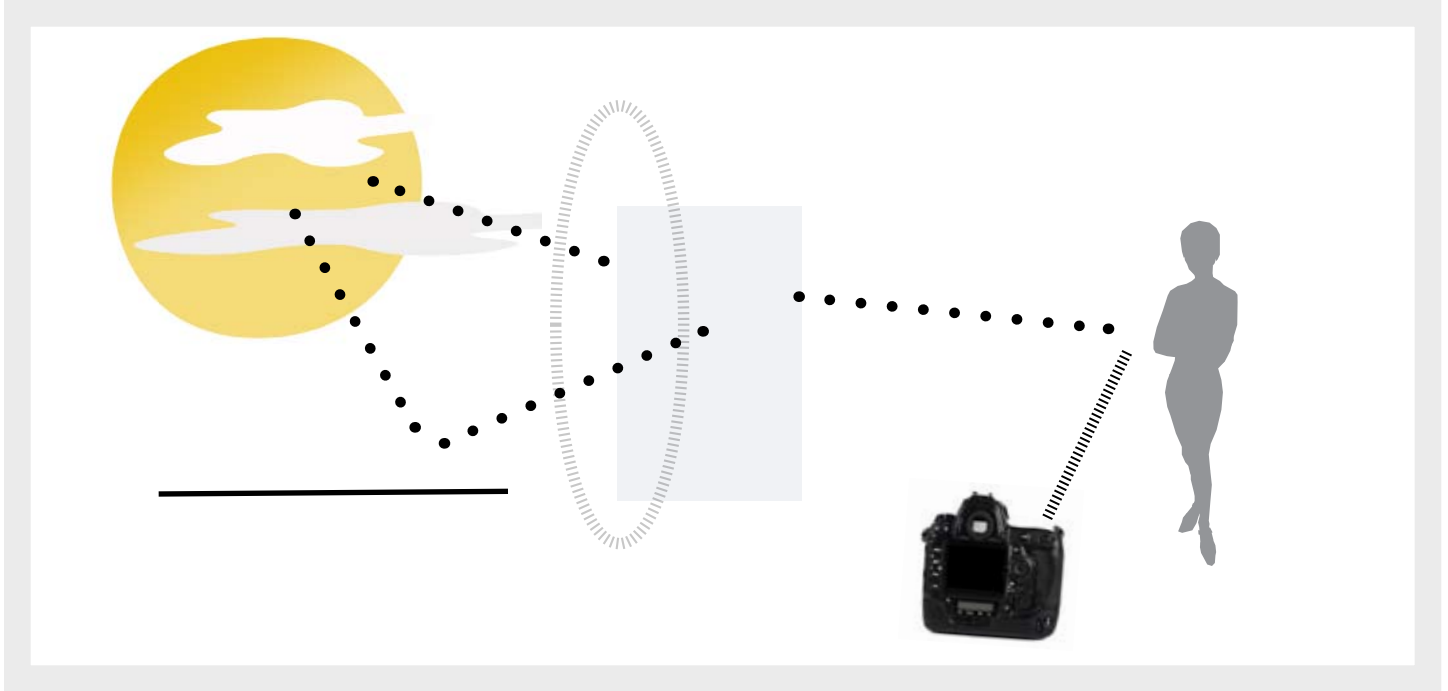
Canon 5dII with a 50 mm 1.4 lens at f2.8
ISO 1600 shutter speed 1/80th using
available light

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Commercial Editorial & Wedding Styles

Let's start off with the basics of ambient light

This is a good way to get some beautiful photography, simply using the ambient light of a room. You can see from this photo that the shadows were very dark, but a beautiful key light was spilling in from the large picture windows of this building. This light can be magical when you find the right time of day with the right amount of light. The sun bounces and sends diffused light everywhere, as in this window, the sun bounces off of the sidewalk outside the window, softened by clouds, creating what I like to call the halo effect, this is what you search for when finding the light.



Let's start off with the right gear

For professional photography, it's important to have the right camera gear. I'm a Canon shooter, but there are many great DSLR's on the market. I suggest either Canon or Nikon, as they are the leaders in the professional photography industry. In my bag I have 2 Canon 5d Mark II's and a backup Canon 7d. My lenses include a 24-105 mm IS macro, a 50 mm 1.4 and a 50 mm 1.2, a 15 mm fisheye lens, a 70-200 mm IS telephoto, and a 20 mm 2.8 wide angle lens. I also have 2 Canon 600EX Flash units for a variety of flash photography needs. If you don't have all this, you can rent most any of this gear at www.lensrentals.com until you can put these kinds of items in your budget. Most of these lenses cost anywhere from \$1000 to \$2000 or more just for one lens. The camera body sells for around \$3500 or more for a high quality camera like Canon or Nikon professional models. I'll review in Chapter 2.

For my studio I use Alien Bees studio flash units with a 60" moon light, and for location shooting I use a Profoto kit with a umbrella kits and a variety of snoots. I also use a 4x6 ft Sunbounce reflector and several 36' round reflector diffusers, and several 54" scrims, some cookies, flags, white foamcore boards and black foamcore boards, and a hand full of a clamps, c stands and lightweight lighting stands. I keep several tripods as well, even though I shoot mainly handheld.

For the type of photography shown on the opposite page, you'll need a wide aperture lens. For this photo I used my Canon 5d II with a 50 mm 1.4 lens set at 2.8 with ISO 1600 and shutter speed of 1/80th.



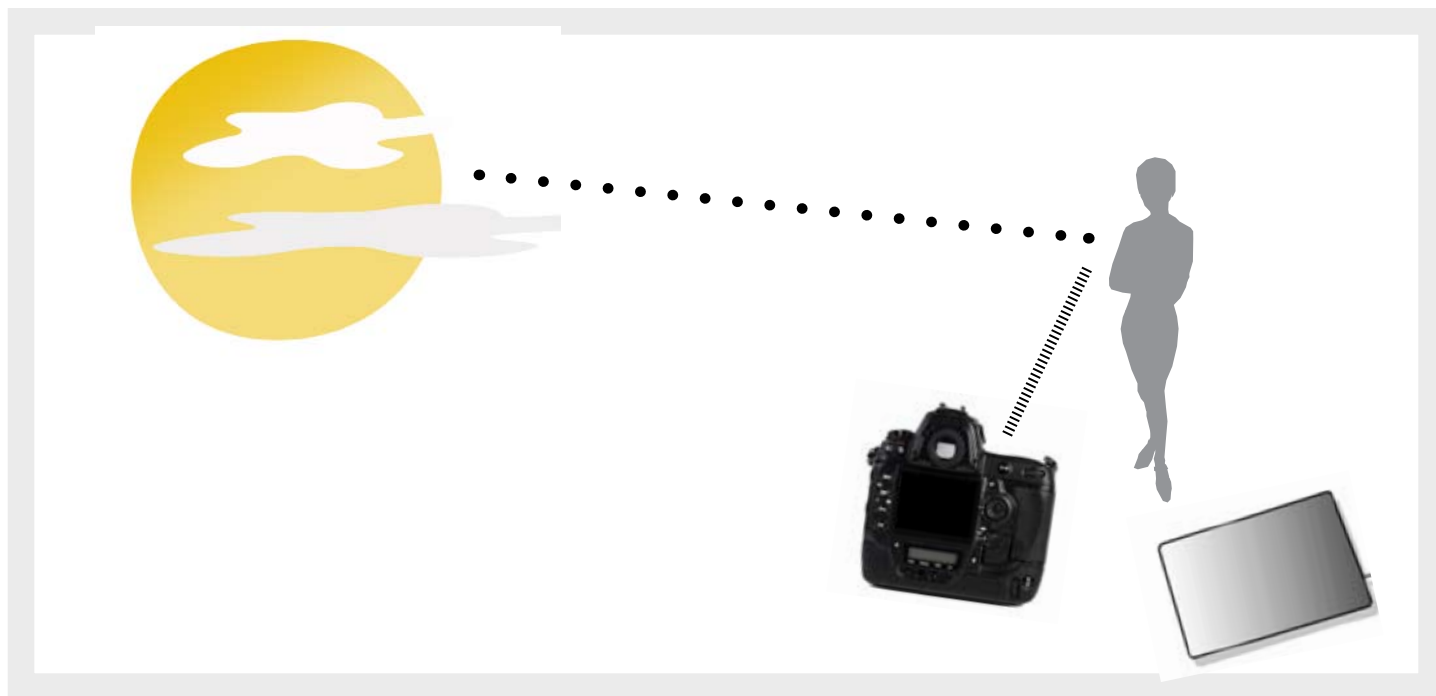
Canon 5dII with a 70-200mm IS lens at f2.8
ISO 800 shutter speed 1/5000 th using available
light and a sunbounce reflector

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Let's start off with the basics

This is a good way to get some beautiful photography, simply using the sun. You can see from this photo that the sun was very bright, and looks like a cloudless day. I had my model face the sun, place her hand up to block the sun so she could see, and I took the shot. The sun was right after mid day in the sky. Here's a diagram below with the breakdown.

Key light from sun is usually coming from behind the camera, I usually have my model face directly toward the sun, then I have them rotate 10 to 20 degrees away from the sunlight to change the direction of the shadow on their face, and to help keep the sun from beaming directly in their eyes. For fashion and portrait work I will use a reflector as a backlight or sidelight to add a little bit of light coming from behind the subject to create more dimension or lighting layers in the photograph.



Ok, that's simple enough. Here's a few more tips that I used to help give this photo such a brilliant look. First of all, I used a Canon 5dII with a 70-200 mm IS lens at ISO 100, F10 at 1/3200th shutter speed. I also used a Polarizer filter on the lens to help darken the blues in the sky and water. This gave an effect of the sun in the morning and gave us a darker background.

Shooting in full sun has its challenges. First of all, for the subject, it is very bright. In this case we created a shield next to her to block some of the light using a 4x6 white/gray reflector. That created a little bounce on her dress, but not so much that you can see with the eye. You can also use a black scrim to help subtract some of the light, and help the model to ease her eyes by being able to focus on a dark area. The other challenge is for the photographer being able to see the camera settings, For me as a photographer, I love shooting in this type of sun, and for fashion work it gives you a great light and some dramatic shadows to work with. I'll show some more outdoor sun situations in the next few pages.



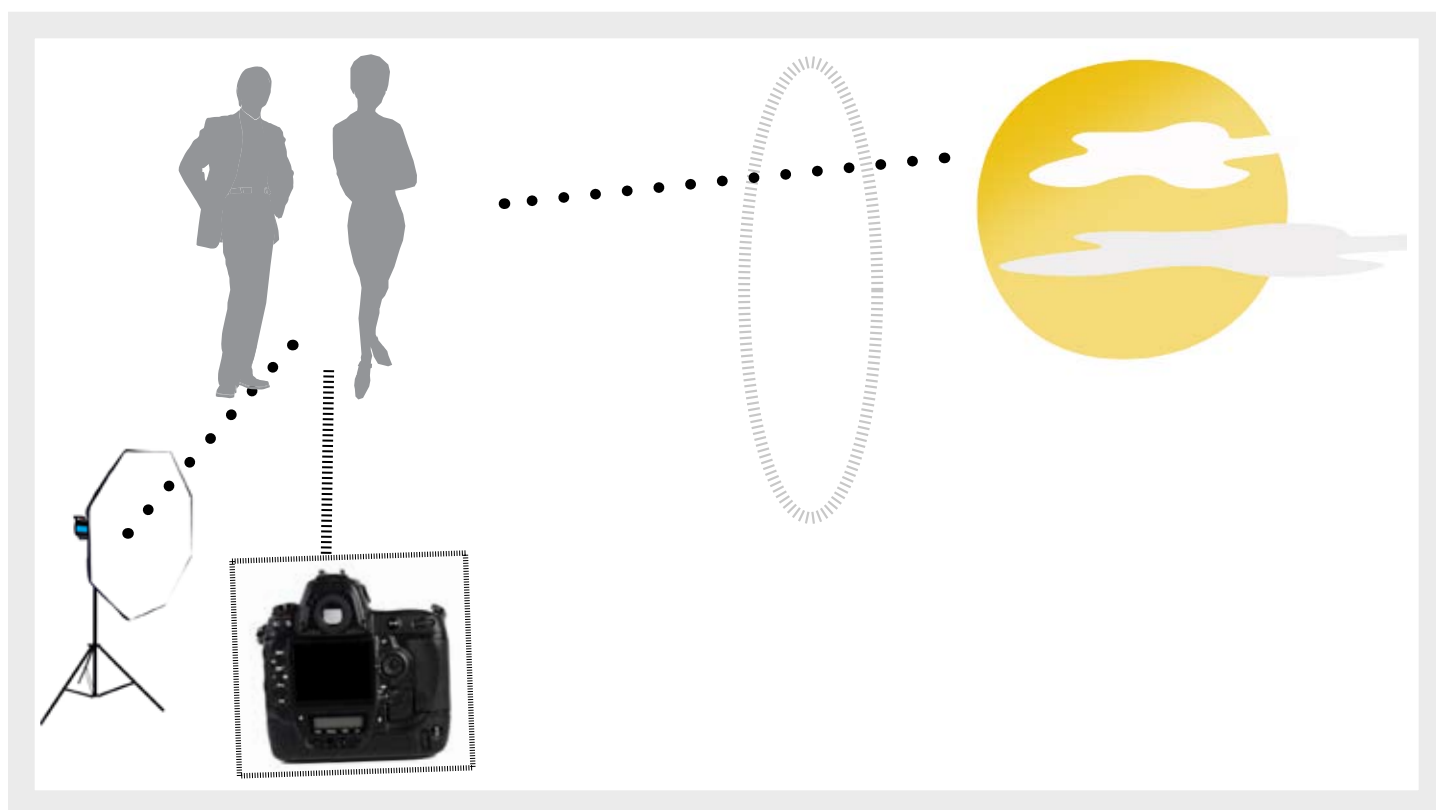
Canon 5dII with a 24-105mm IS lens at f13
ISO 800 shutter speed 1/250 th using available
light and an Alient Bees Moon Light at 1/8th
power
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Shooting in the sun with a studio flash

I love shooting in the sun. For this photograph I used my Canon 5dII camera with a 24-105 mm IS lens at f13 ISO 800 shutter speed at 1/250. Notice how the sun is on her face, simply a nice light to add some drama to the image. I shot this handheld, but sometimes will use a tripod just to help from getting tired of holding the camera for a long shoot day. I also placed the models in a shady spot, exposed the image to the scene in full sun, and used the flash to fill in the scene to make it appear as it was all shot in full sunlight. Shooting in partial shade and filling in with flash helps me control the brightness on her white dress and his white dinner jacket, the shade created a nice side halo effect.

Key light from sun

The sun was just about at mid morning in the day. You can see in my diagram that the camera is at a slight angle away from the model to let the sunlight hit her just right.



I've shared just a few simple tips to help you shoot in full sun with flash. Review: I used a Canon 24-105 mm f4 lens with image stabilization, which helps when shooting handheld. I'll adjust my ISO level from 100 to 800 to aid in filling in the shadows, as well as adjust my shutter speed to 1/250th of a second to control the light. I also use high speed sync, a feature on the pocket wizard triggers that lets the flash sync at faster than normal shutter speeds. This image was shot at f13 at 1/250th and the flash set at 1/8 th. I start by exposing the overall outdoor scene, then I turn on my flash unit at it's lowest power setting, then slowly ramp the power up with some test shots until I reach the desired exposure.

I also used a very large 60" moon light on a studio flash unit to give me a very large soft box, which allows me to shoot the model from head to toe with a nice soft light.

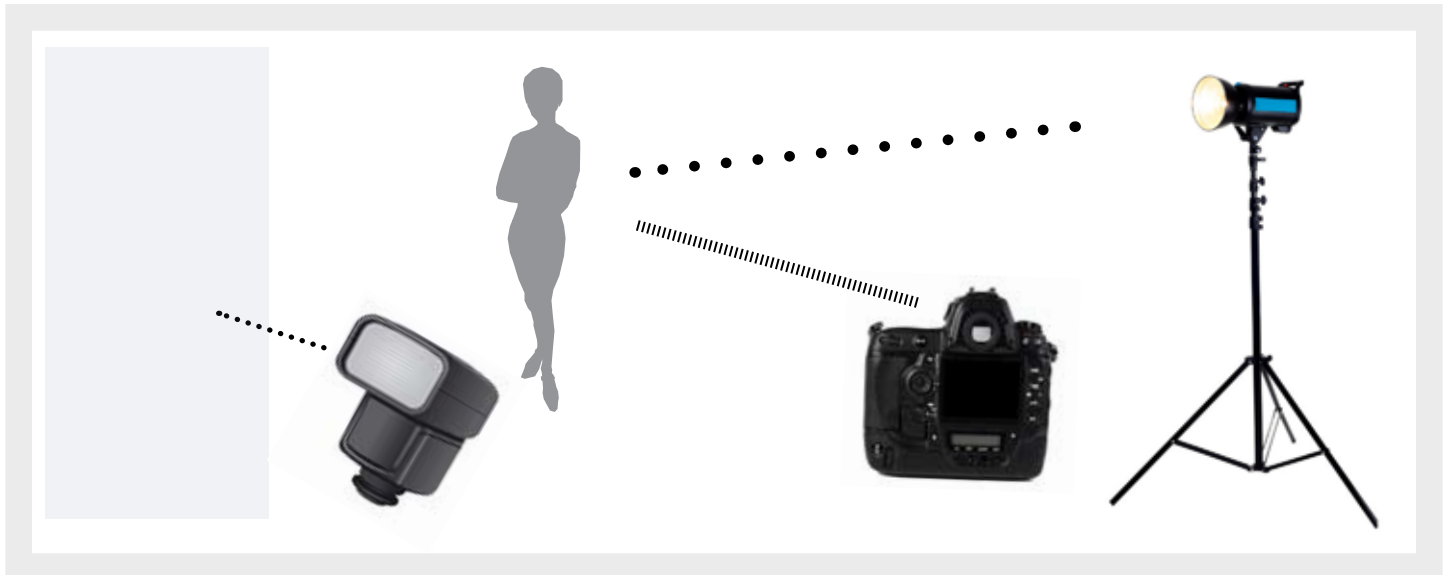


Canon 5dII with a 24-105mm IS lens at f4
ISO 800 shutter speed 1/125th using a 1000 watt
fresnel and a Canon 580 ex Speedlite wirelessly
triggered on a Pocket Wizard TT5 for the blue
backlight using a blue gel

Shooting in with hot lights and flash

As a fashion photographer and a wedding photographer, I love shooting beautiful dresses. These photos are great examples for photographers working with a variety of lighting techniques. For the photo show across the page, what you see is what you get! What do I mean by that? The very first image on was shot using a "Hot Light", which simply means a constant light source instead of flash. I used a 1000 watt fresnel lighting fixture that I purchased years ago from a theatrical stage lighting company. This lighting technique is known as butterfly lighting in photo studios.

These lights cast a beautiful, soft constant light that you can adjust by spreading the beam from a spot position to a wide angle position. In movies, they will use a variety of fresnel lights from the mini 1000 watt lights all the way up to a 4000 watt light. Some lighting directors will use a scrim or a soft filter on these lights, but for my photography, I simply use the stock fresnel lens. I also white balance the camera to a nice pure white. The light in my fresnel fixture is 3200 degree kelvin, or tungsten. When the white balance is corrected, this makes the light color temperature similar to the white balance from a standard flash unit that is white balanced at 5000 degrees kelvin.



One more lighting trick that I will share here, the blue background light that you see in this photo, that was from a Canon 580 EXII flash unit triggered with a Pocket Wizard TT5. To get the blue color, I simply used a dark blue gel right on the flash head, again, the same kind of gels used in theatrical stage productions. I'll set the flash to manual mode and do several test shots until I get the color blue that I desire. I've been using this gel technique for as long as I can remember. Back in my film camera days, I had to experiment with lighting techniques, then wait to see the results in the darkroom. Today with digital cameras I can instantly preview the results.

For some lighting set ups, I'll use 2 hotlights as my keylights, one centered on the face, and the other focused on the dress. I also use a set of dimmer packs to control the power level of the hot lights. I do need to warn you, hot lights mean that the lights get very hot, remember these are 1000 watt lights and can also use a lot of power. There are several new LED fresnel lights on the market now, but they can be very expensive to purchase, so try renting some before you commit to the expense.

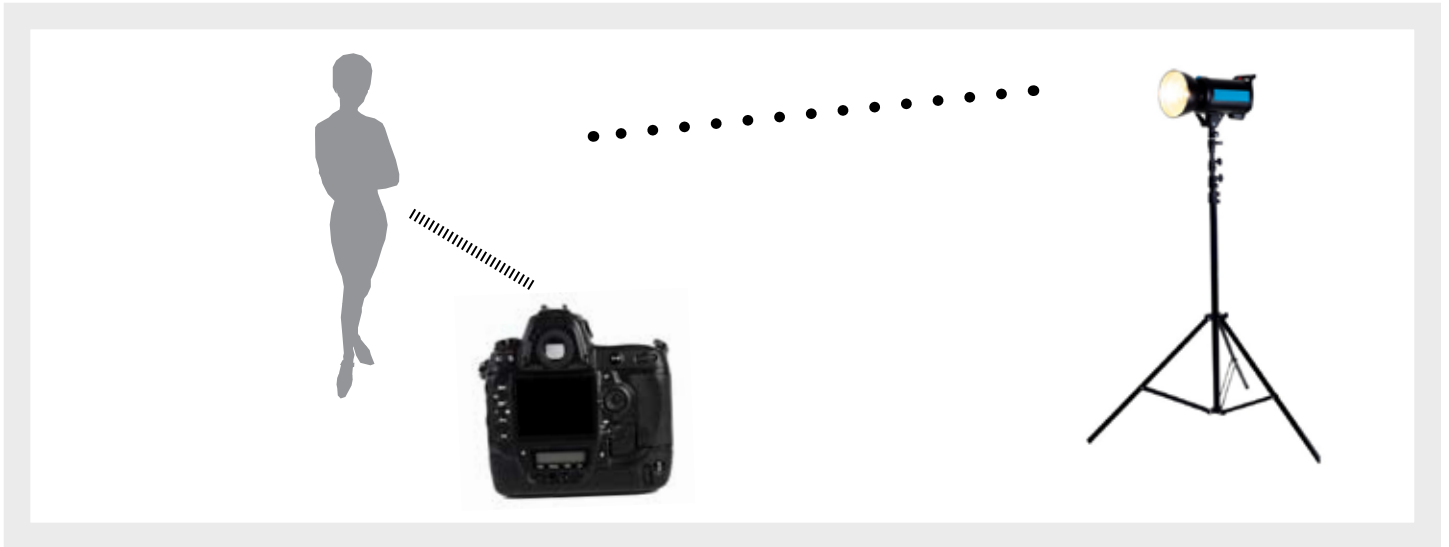


Canon 5dII with a 24-105mm IS lens at f4
ISO 800 shutter speed 1/125th using
a 1000 watt fresnel

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Shooting with one hot light

Here's another photo taken with just one single hot light with barn doors to shape the light pattern. This light casts a soft but intense constant light that you can adjust by spreading the beam from a spot position to a wide angle position. You have to have some distance between the subject and the light, in this shot we had about 20 feet or more. I chose not to use a backlight, as I wanted the intense dark shadow to hit the wall behind her, and I loved the dramatic look of all the shadows on her face and dress. This is probably an example of what is known as rembrandt lighting in a studio, but I started with a butterfly style of light in mind.



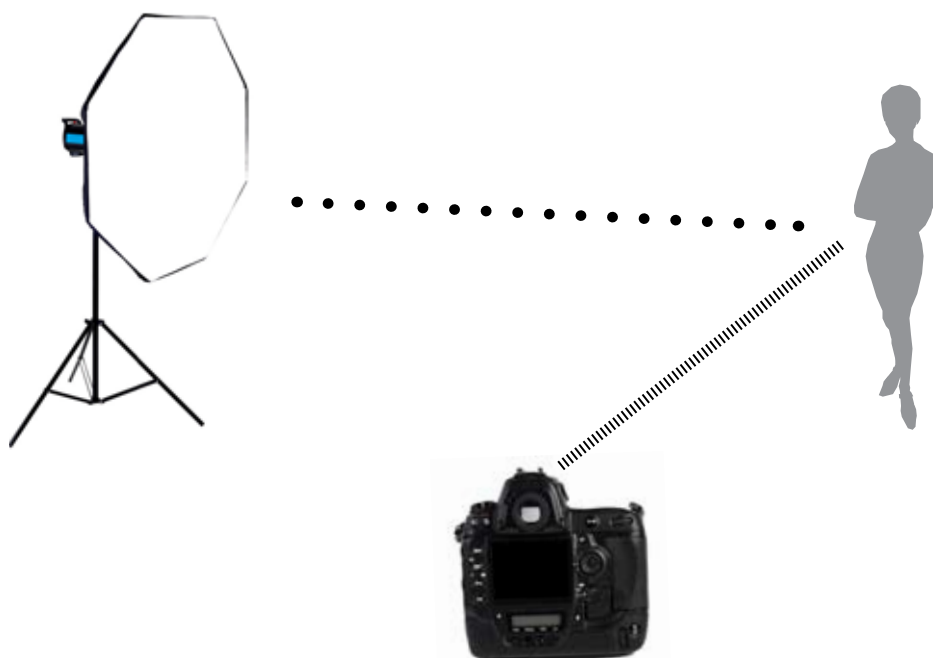


Canon 5dII with a 24-105mm IS lens at f4
ISO 800 shutter speed 1/125th using available
light and Alien Bees Moon Light at 1/8 power

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Shooting with studio lights

This photo was taken with a very large 60 in moon light. A moon light is a big round fabric disc made by Alien Bees lighting out of Nashville Tennessee. This model doubles as a ring light and can be used in a variety of combinations. For this shot I used the large moon light as my key light shooting at the last light of the day. This large light provides a very large, very soft and very wide light. If I have tried to use a small umbrella light, the light would not have hit the dress on the floor and her face at the same time. This is called short lighting in the studio world. This shot is almost a split between short lighting and rembrandt lighting. Even though I'm shooting outdoors, the same studio lighting principals can apply. I don't think much about the technical terms, I just like the dramatic shadows of this shot.



How do you expose a scene with flash and keep your natural daylight at the right exposure? Expose your camera to the outdoor daylight setting first, then fill in the scene with your flash. You want your flash to fire at the lowest setting, and then do test shots, slowly ramping up the flash power levels until you have an even exposure.

You can see the background was beautifully lit with the ambient light at the end of the day, For this scene, I wanted to use the lighthouse behind the model to act as a nice white background, using this one very large moon flash, I covered the model with a nice side light, and used the rest of the flash to wash the side of the lighthouse wall behind her. I also loved the dramatic light on her face and shoulders, as well as the shadow on the wall behind her.

I like to think of this as painting with light. Many years ago when I first started out in photography, I never used a flash, or any extra lights. Now I'm mastering the light and taking my photography to new levels. When I go to a gallery or view a magazine and admire other photographers, I fully understand what they did to achieve the light effects in their photos.



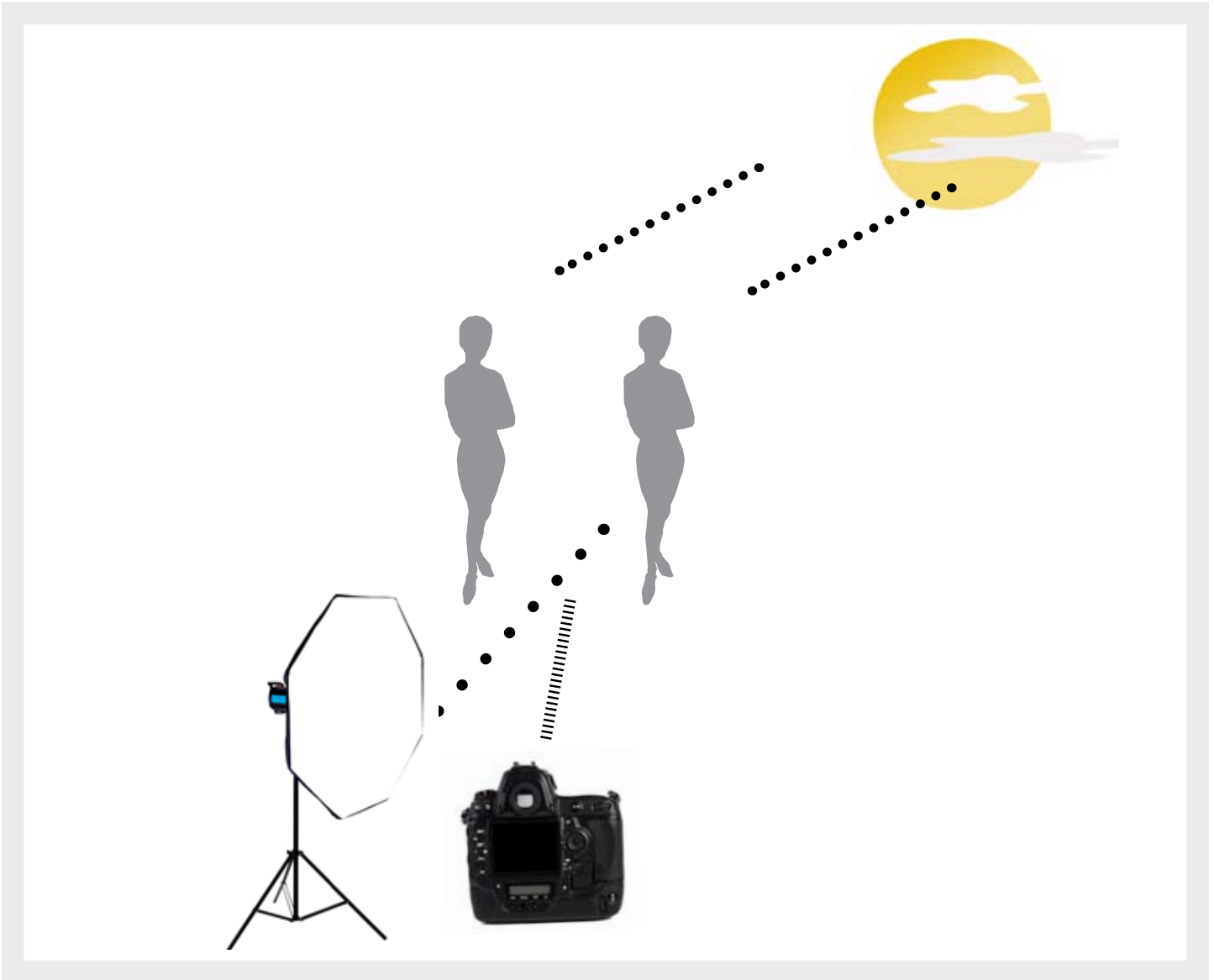
Canon 5dII with a 24-105mm IS lens at f13
ISO 500 shutter speed 1/250th using available
light and Alien Bees Moon light at 1/18th

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Shooting with studio lights as key lights and the sun as backlight

This photo was taken with a very large 60 in moon light just as in the last page, but for this shot I used the bright sun as a backlight, and used the moon light to fill in the scene as a key light. The large soft box effect of the moon light unit offers very soft shadows, where if you used a regular portable flash, then the shadows would be harsh. This lighting style is called broad lighting the the studio world, but the effect is combined with split lighting as well.

I also used the blue sky behind the models to act as my backdrop. This was an almost cloudless day, and I wanted to take advantage of the blue sky to give this photo a dramatic style.



This photo was taken on a Canon 5d II with a 24-104mm IS lens shot at f13 ISO 500 at 1/250th. The flash was set at 1/8th power level at about 15 feet away. One trick to remember with flash, you can adjust your flash settings to control your light output levels, or simply move the flash a few feet back until you get the exposure that you like. For outdoor shooting, I use a very heavy C Stand light stand with sandbags to weigh the flash down. I also require that my assistant hold the flash constantly to prevent any wind from blowing it over, and for safety of the models and crew.

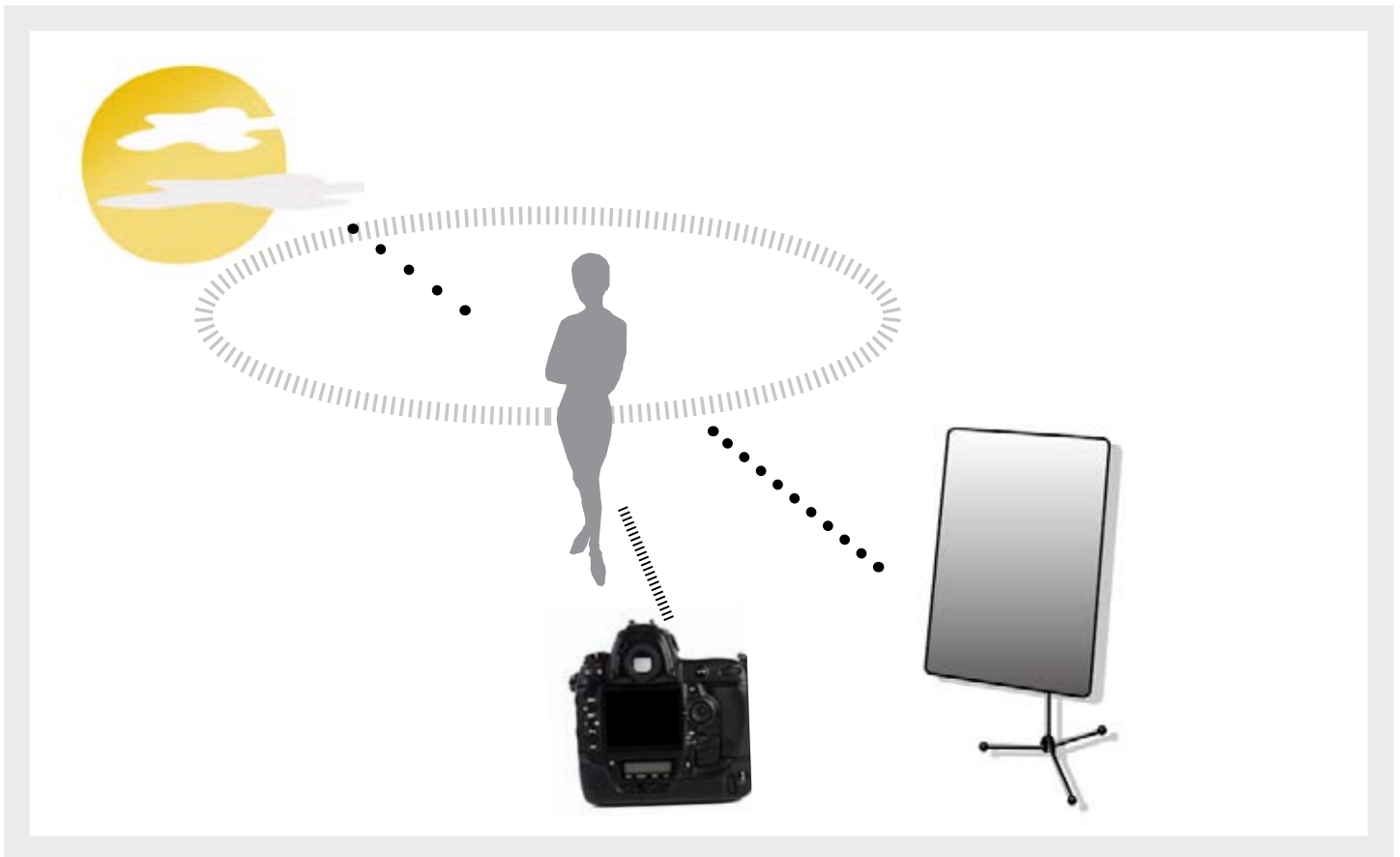


Canon 5dII with a 24-105mm IS lens at f4
ISO 800 shutter speed 1/250th using
available light and key light bounced in
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Shooting with all natural light

This photo looks like it was taken in all natural light, and for the most part, it was. I did use a very large 4x6 reflector to fill in some light on her face and dress. A lot of the success in this photo was the sky was cloudy at the time, and she was in partial shade. I only needed a little amount of extra fill light to help out this scene to help show the detail in her hair, her face and her jewelry.

Most of this scene was in full shade, with the area the model was standing in having a little more light. The forest behind her was very shaded. I look for spots like this when I'm scouting for a scene. I also angled my reflector so that the bounce light was not too direct. I used the white side of the reflector to help push some soft fill light into the scene. The forest canopy created a nice halo light.



For most of my commercial photography, I will almost always use a reflector or some type of flash gear, as I want my photos to have a little more “pop” than the average photograph. Sometimes a photo without any extra lighting assistance can look flat. By flat, I mean that the background and the foreground tend to look the same, as the camera is measuring light from an overall scene and making the exposure look even and balanced.

I also always set my camera to manual mode. For shooting in shade, I shoot my f stop wide open at f2.8 or f4 depending on my lens, I also set my camera to spot metering to tell the camera to calibrate my scenes to the light at the center of my photo, especially when I’m shooting models or people.

For this photo I used my Canon 5dII with a 24-105mm IS lens, set at f4, ISO 800 and shutter speed at 1/250. I also always shoot in RAW mode so I can have better control of the image in post processing. I use Adobe Lightroom on all of my images to adjust white balance, contrast, levels, etc.

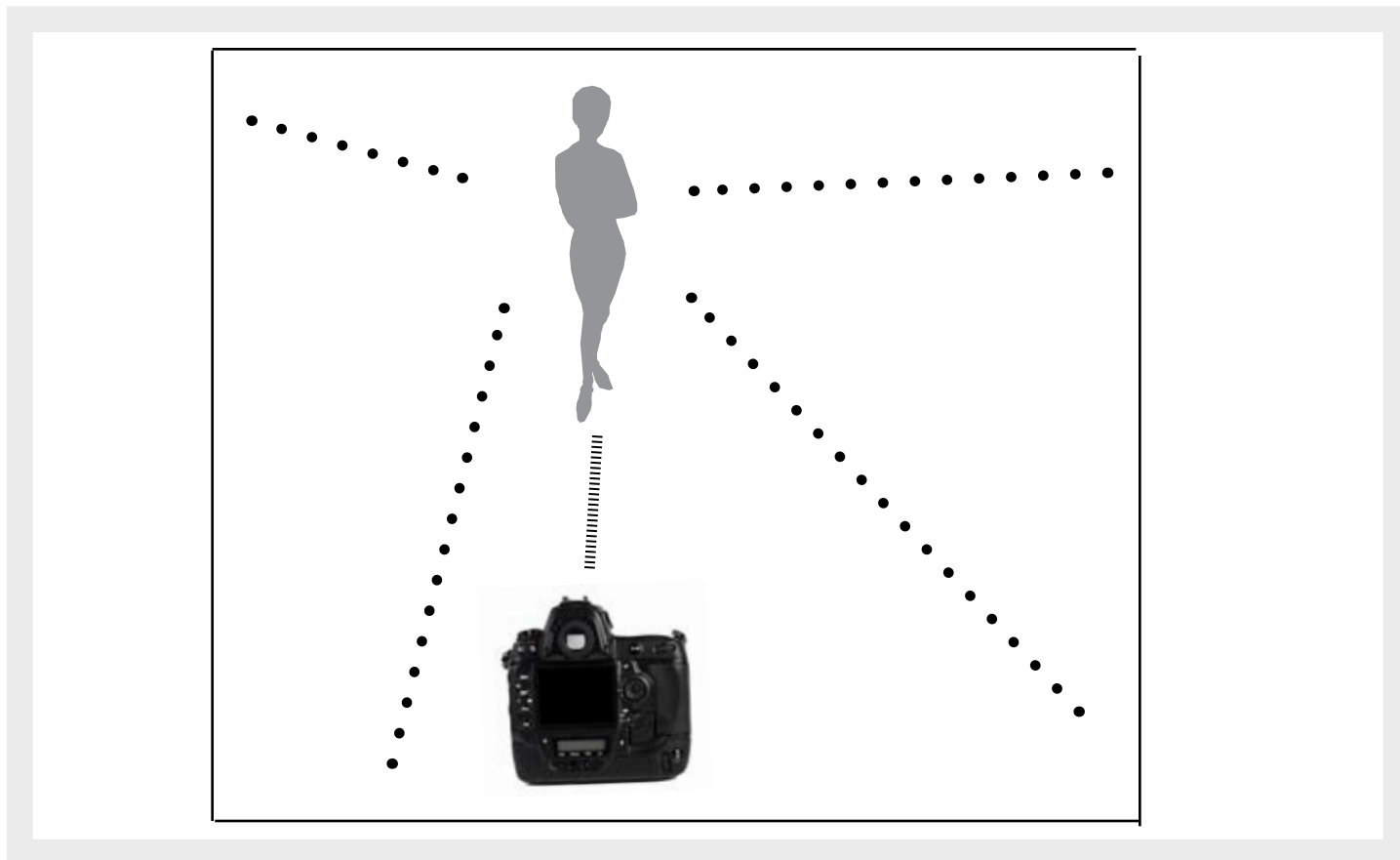


Canon 5dII with a 24-105mm lens at f4
ISO 800 shutter speed 1/125 th using available
light and Noise Reduction NIK Filters
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Shooting with all natural light

Here's a photo to was truly shot in all natural light. Well, not really. We were located inside a brick courtyard right behind a large two story cottage. The brick walls were painted white, which acted as giant reflectors coming from every angle. We we also in full shade. The warmth in the photo came from the brick pavers on the ground, which were basically old red bricks. This was a scene that almost any photographer could have mastered with little effort.

I did use my Canon 5d II with a Canon 50mm 1.4 lens, my exposure level was set at f2.0, which made the background look very soft and blurred. My ISO was set to 800, with my shutter speed set at 1/250th of a second. I shot this handheld,



Shooting a non image stabilized lens or camera requires some experience. I always use center spot focus, and for this image I focused on the models eye. As I mentioned before, I also set the camera to spot metering, so the camera calibrates the photo brightness level to the center of the models face. I lock my focus point on the models eye, then reframe my image composition before I take the final shot.

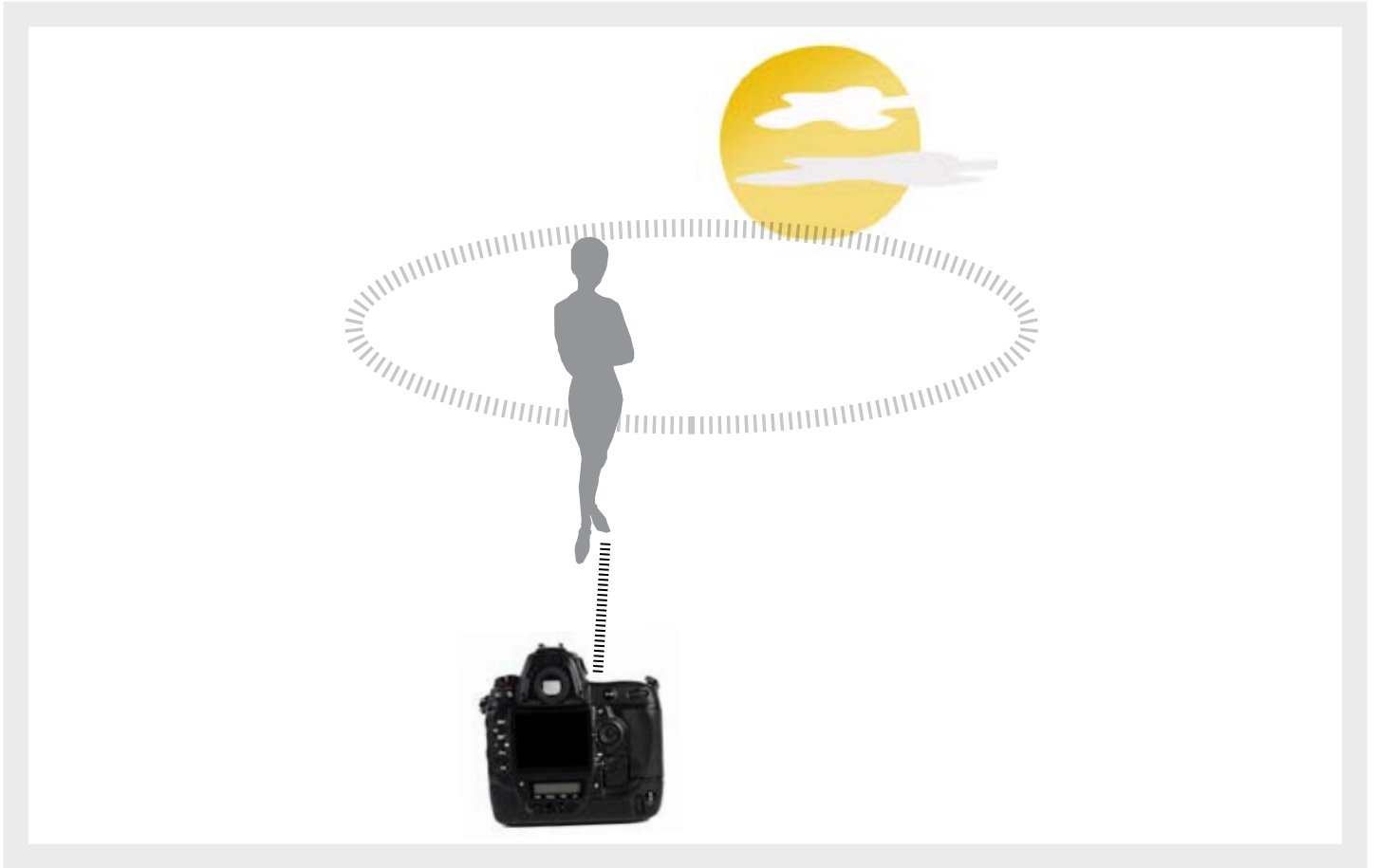
I also intentionally shot this image at what I consider to be very bright, pushing my exposure to the maximum before the whites get blown out or over exposed. Back in Lightroom, I then add in just a little black to my image to bring out the details. I also used NIK filters in Photoshop to do any re-touching to the models skin. I wanted to show the pink in her hairpiece, and maintain her skin tones and haircolor. If you look closely, you can see the catchlight in her eyes reflecting the white wall behind me, and my body in the reflection. I also wear grey or black clothing so that my attire does not reflect any unwanted color on the model.



Canon 5dII with a 70-200mm IS lens at f2.8
ISO 800 shutter speed 1/250th using available
light and Noise Reduction NIK Filters
www.michaelallenphotography.com

Shooting with all natural light

Here's a photo to was truly shot in all natural light. This was taken a little bit after mid day in the fall at Central Park on the mall. If you've ever been to Central Park, you may remember this long mall walkway with a beautiful canopy of trees that create a full ceiling of leaves. The filtered light I captured in this photo was a perfect photography situation. The sun was filtered coming from behind her left shoulder (camera right) and as you can see in the photograph, a beautiful exposure.



In my diagram, I drew a **large halo** to represent the filtered light coming through the canopy of leaves. Many times when you are shooting in shade with lots of trees, you can capture some beautiful light very easily if you can search for just the right opening in the canopy of the forest that allows just enough filtered light to come through the trees. If you are in a deep forest in the summer time, the green leaves may create too dark of a setting, so you have to be on the lookout for just the right filtered light.

For this photo I used my Canon 5d II with a 70-200mm IS lens set at ISO 800, f2.8 at 1/250 on spot metering. Remember what I reviewed on spot metering settings for you camera earlier, you want the camera to expose for the very center of your frame, especially exposing the face.

I also ran this photo through Lightroom and Adobe Photoshop with NIK filters to soften the models skin very gently. Some photographers go a bit heavy with softening for my taste, I want to see the natural beauty of my models for my portfolio. I also like to brighten my exposures to a nice level like you see here in most of my photos in this book.



Canon 5dII with a 24-105mm IS lens at f5.6
ISO 800 shutter speed 1/6400th using
available light
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Shooting with sun and clouds

You may have heard the term, blowing out the background, This means that you expose the subject and basically ignore what the camera settings want for an even exposure in the background. This style of photography is common in modern wedding photography, and offers a very romantic, natural style of photography. So don't be afraid to shoot this way, it will give your photography an artistic approach that people will love. It offers a timeless, classic style too.

My personal rule is to try to expose to the dress or brides face, in the case of our photo across the page, you can see all of the detail in the dress, but the sky and even most of the grooms head is over exposed with the bright sunlight creating some lens flare. For this type of photography, you don't want to use a flash or even any reflectors, just set your camera to spot metering as I mentioned earlier in the book, and let the camera exposure vary from frame to frame. For this image I hand held the camera down low without looking in the viewfinder, I was walking in front of the couple and keeping pace with them, simply firing lots of shots and varying my camera position until I had them targeted just right.



This may not be the most technically perfect photo, but my goal with shooting some images like this for the couple is to offer them some very real moments that are not so posed. I shoot these when they are not aware that I'm taking shots of them, and the only thing I suggest to them is that they hold hands and walk together. Most of the times I do this, the couples are laughing, relaxed and just enjoying themselves on the biggest day of their lives.

For this photo I used a Canon 5d II with a 24-105mm IS lens, ISO 800, f5.6 at 1/6000th. I'm in full sun, but I'm exposing to what would be a shade setting, as I want to expose the front of the dress. I blow out the background and try to get as much lens flare as I can on purpose.



Canon 5dIII with a 70-200mm IS lens at f4
ISO 1600 shutter speed 1/125th using available
light and Canon 600 EX Speedlite with a
diffuser at 1/8th and backlight at 1/16th
Noise Reduction NIK Filters
www.michaelallenphotography.com

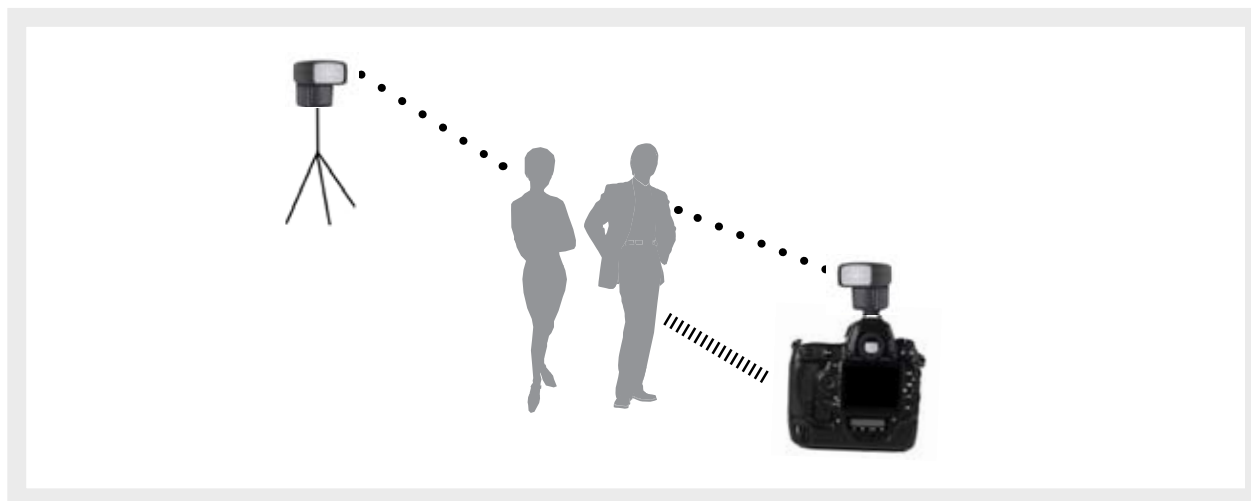
Let's talk about portable flash units

I recently traded in my Canon 580EX flash units for the new Canon 600 Ex portable speedlite flash units. These come with build in radio flash triggers, so you don't need separate radio triggers to remotely fire my flash units. The older technology of speedlites used an infrared beam, but that has limitations for distance and obstacles. Nikon offers a similar unit for their line. The wireless flash units can be remotely controlled directly from the Canon camera menu screen, which makes setting up several flash units at different output levels a very nice way to shoot. The best way to learn how to use these is to watch the videos supplied by the manufacturers. My advice - practice, practice, practice.

I will share some special tips. Be sure to keep lots of freshly charged batteries in your camera bag. I've learned through experience that once one battery gets a little weak, then the entire flash system can have operation problems, misfires, etc. The 4 batteries in the flash units control the computer chip in the flash, so when the batteries get weak, the flash will misfire. You can also have one bad battery in a batch of 4 that can cause problems. I purchased a high quality battery tester that I keep in my camera bag to test my batteries. I can generally work for 6 hours with a set of freshly charge batteries, but if you use the flash units a lot, like for an all day wedding, you will want to change your batteries at least once before the exit shot comes up and the bride and groom ride of in the limo.

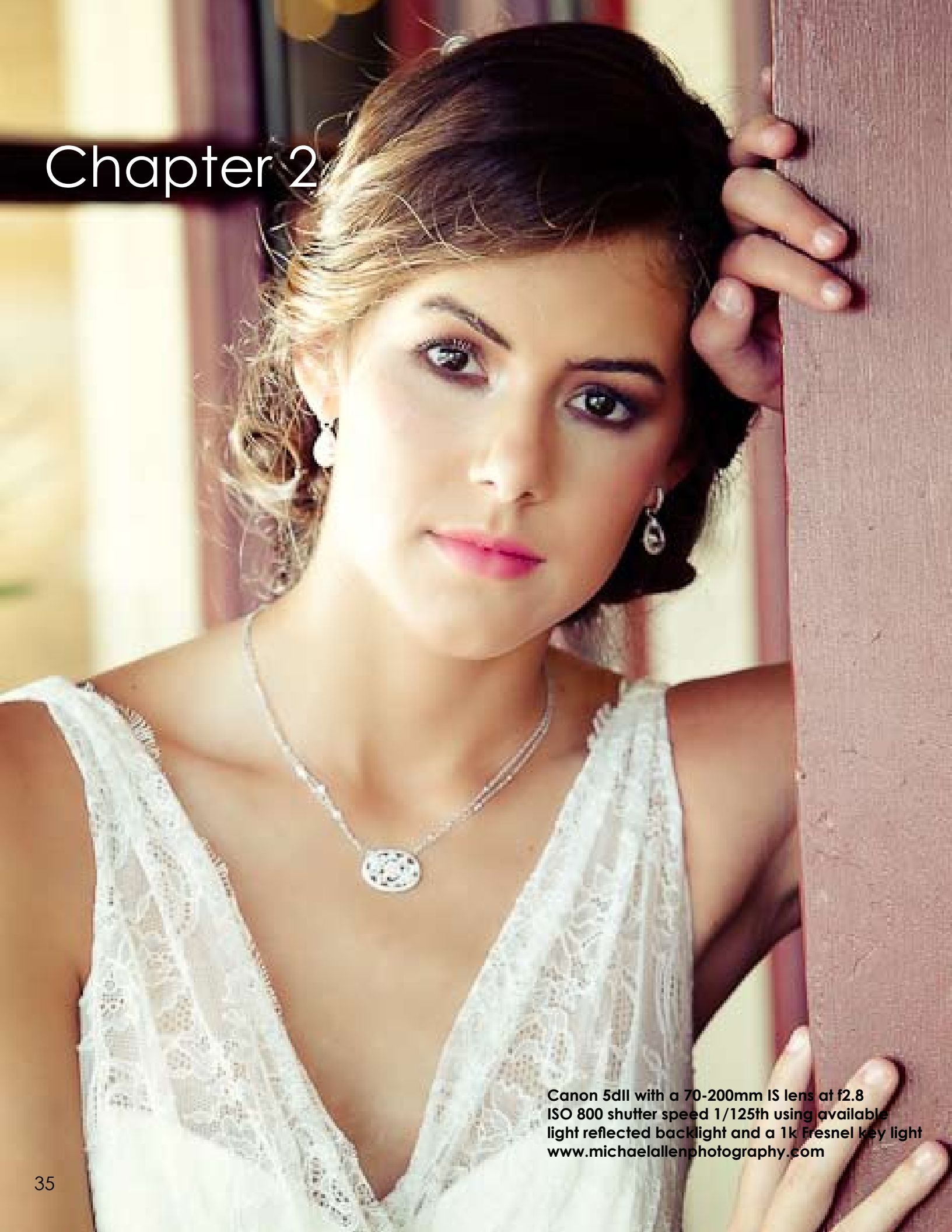
ETTL vs Manual: I almost always use my flash units in manual mode. ETTL tends to be a little weak for my style of photography. ETTL can vary depending on how you are using them. You can used a combination of ETTL and Manual if you use two flash units, so your key light can be set to ETTL and your back-lights can be set to manual so you can control the dramatic style of your backlight.

Flash Diffuser: I love to bounce my flash off of walls, ceilings, floors, reflectors, or just about anything. that is even close to white, but I also use a flash diffuser for working up close to a couple. A good photographer can work with one flash on the camera and create some amazing images with a little creativity. You can even bounce off of a group of people standing next to your subject if there is nothing else around to bounce off of. Try being creative.



For the father daughter dance photo shown on the opposite page I used a Canon 5d with a 24-105 mm IS lens at f4, ISO 1600, at 1/125th and I used 2 Canon 600EX flash units. The backlight was mounted on a tall light stand and set to 1/16th power, the foreground flash was mounted to the camera on a flash bracket, and diffused with a Gary Fong flash diffuser set at 1/8th power. I'll move in close and back away if the flash is too powerful to prevent blowing out the white dress. I also zoom in so that I'm not right next to the subject. I love using several flash units to create layers of light in my photos

Chapter 2



Canon 5dII with a 70-200mm IS lens at f2.8
ISO 800 shutter speed 1/125th using available
light reflected backlight and a 1k Fresnel key light
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Let's start off with the basics of camera gear

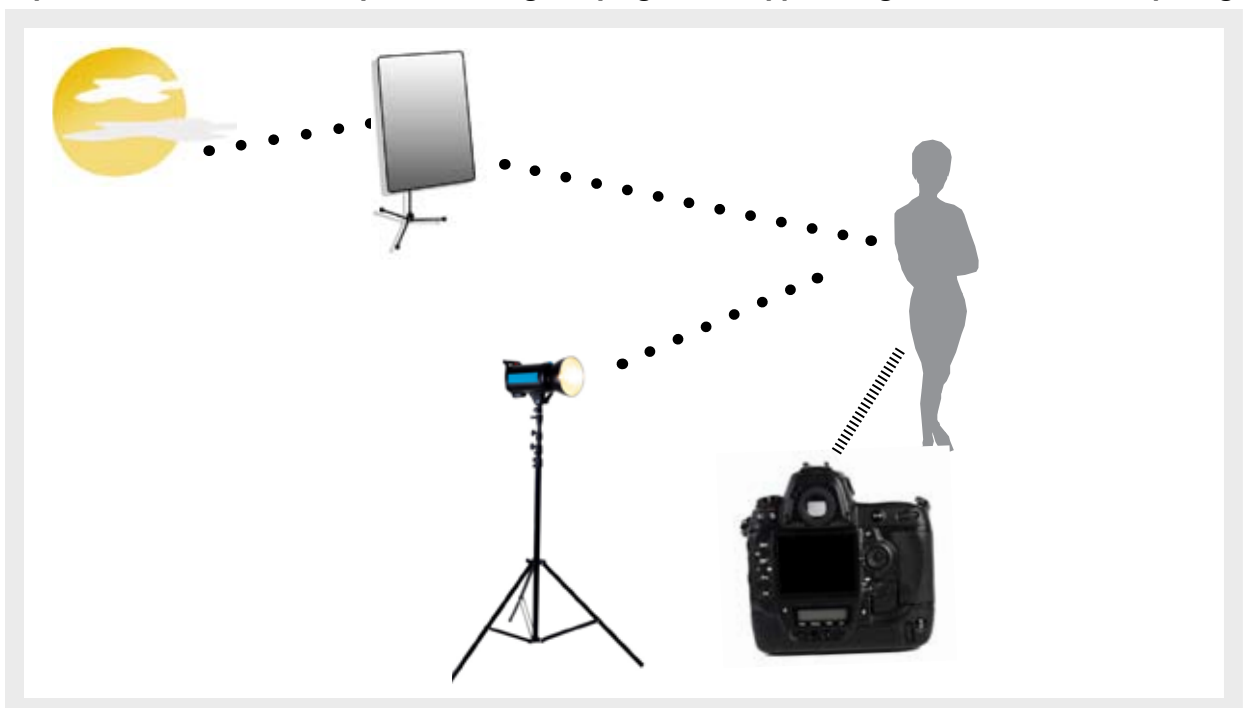
I come from owning my own studio, so when I make a purchase, I want it to last for several years. I've found that some of the good equipment that I buy holds some of its value if I take very good care of it, and I can easily sell my older gear and replace it with newer gear every few years. I will have to say that my original Canon 5d camera is still one of my favorite cameras, and I still use it frequently. I have the newer 5d II and rent the 5d III, and they all perform very well.

I also love the full frame format of these cameras and rarely use my Canon 7d which is a crop sensor. Once you get used to shooting full frame, you adapt and learn to use up all that space in the wide sensor. I'll leave the final decision to you about what camera to buy, but one more consideration is the low light capability. Be sure that you get a camera that can compete with the Canon 5d Mark III camera, it rocks in low light situations. Almost all prosumer cameras are very limited in low light and the images they produce have lots of noise. It's definitely worth the money to get the better camera if you do any photography late afternoon or night time. One of my biggest complaints about the Canon 7d is that it is very noisy after you set it past ISO 500. Anyway, spend money and get good cameras.

Let's talk about the lenses & gear

As I mentioned earlier, in my camera bag I have 2 Canon 5d Mark II's and a backup Canon 7d. My lenses include a 24-105 mm IS macro, a 50 mm 1.4 and a 50 mm 1.2, a 15 mm fisheye lens, a 70-200 mm IS telephoto, and a 20 mm 2.8 wide angle lens. I also have 2 Canon 600EX Flash units for a variety of flash photography needs. If you don't have all this, you can rent most any of this gear at www.lens-rentals.com until you can put these kinds of items in your budget. Most of these lenses cost anywhere from \$1000 to \$2000 or more just for one lens. The camera body sells for around \$3500 or more for a high quality camera like Canon or Nikon professional models. The 5d is worth the costs with its dynamic range and wide ISO choices.

For the setup across the page I used the sun bounced into the back of my model, and used a 1000 watt fresnel as my key light. Pretty simple setup, very fast to arrange and get to shooting quickly. I'll adjust my camera settings after a few test shots, then vary my shutter speed as the sun goes in and out on the days that the clouds roll by and change my light. This type of light can be called split lighting.





Canon 5dII with a 24-105mm IS lens at f4
ISO 800 shutter speed 1/125th using
available light
www.michaelallenphotography.com

Getting it right the first time in the camera

I remember sitting in a master class at WPPI (Wedding Portrait Photographers International) and taking notes from one of the speakers, his main point was to learn your camera gear, select your camera settings manually, and get the perfect exposure time after time.

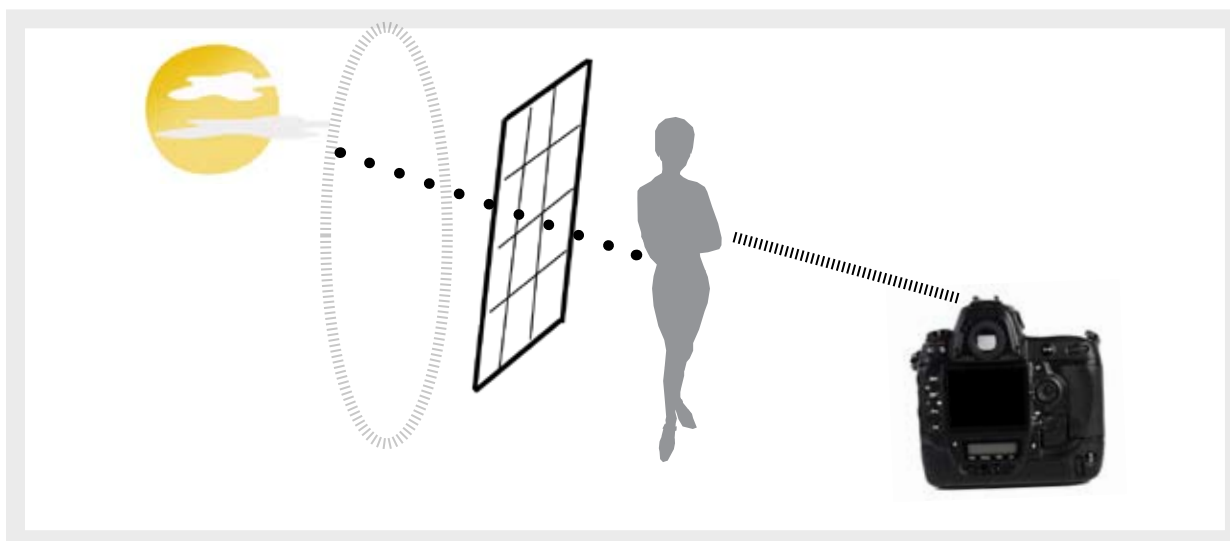
On one side of the coin, I can say that I agree with him, we must all learn to master our camera and make sure every photo we take is near perfect in the camera. Back in my film camera days, you really had to get it right, as the photo lab could only process a good image. If you shot it wrong, it pretty much was a bad photo.

Now on the other side of the coin, if you can get your photo pretty close in today's digital world, then you have a chance to improve it in post production. Be clear here, you don't want to shoot all your photos poorly in the camera, and then go back to your computer and fix everything, but I'm a big believer in knowing how to use Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Lightroom to enhance your photos. I review every single photo that I shoot using Lightroom to tweak my final images, that's what the pros do, so don't let anyone tell you any different.

I taught a photography class to a small group a few years back and I remember it well. We had a mix of new photographers, some with very little experience, and a few with some experience. We had a little contest after the workshop and I asked everyone to enter their best photos over the next week. We had a lot of great entries, they were all well composed, and their exposures were very good. I did teach a brief hour on image processing the day before the contest, and I was amazed that not one photographer did any adjustments to their photos. Every photo that I reviewed needed some image enhancement, so I guess that that room full of photographers did not know how to use any photo processing software.

I'm a big believer in Adobe Lightroom. I've taken dozens of classes, and actually learned how to use it from one of the Adobe program writers, Julieanne Kost. I'm not a complete expert in Lightroom, but I know it pretty well. I highly recommend that every photographer buy this program and learn how to use it.

First of all, I may take 1500 photos on a typical wedding, and most of my individual sessions will have well over 200 photos taken. Even if I just shoot 50 photos, having a good program just to view the photos quickly is vital. In Lightroom, I can quickly adjust my exposures, add contrast, remove noise, to some major retouching and some minor retouching, and quickly delete or cull out my bad images like flash misfires, people blinking, etc. I can even crop images and enhance or remove specific colors. Most importantly, I can import RAW images and white balance every photo, and make



Chapter 3



Canon 5dII with a 50mm 1.4 lens at f 2.8
ISO 800 shutter speed 1/800 th using
available halo light in full shade for both images
www.michaelallenphotography.com

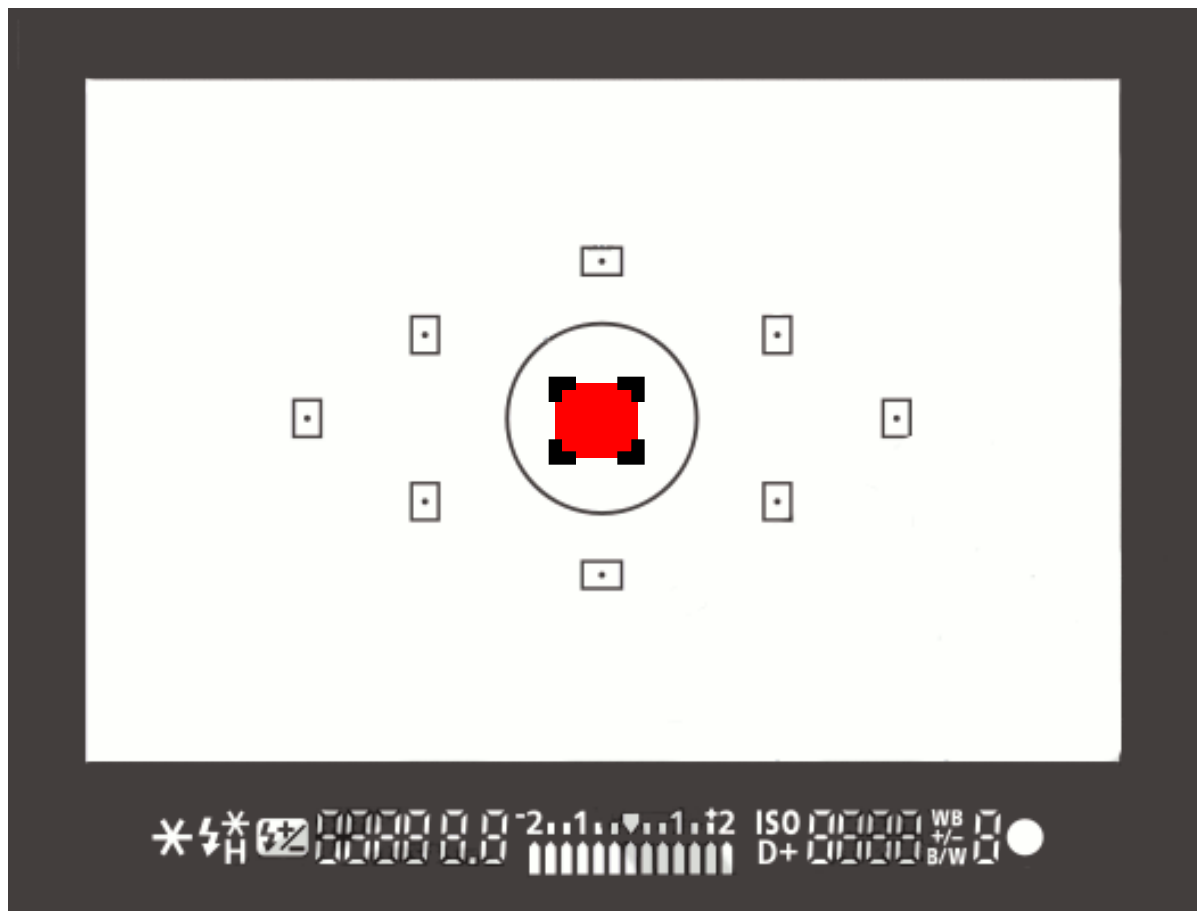
Camera Framing, Composition and Focusing

Over the years I get to meet a lot of new photographers, one of the most common mistakes that I run across is composition. So many photographers seem to miss the mark of the rule of thirds. I selected this photo because of the headpiece that the girls are wearing. This is one of those photos that requires bending the rule a bit. Generally you'd want the main subjects eyes closer to the top line, but for this tight of a shot, you would want to consider the headpiece.

I also wanted to emphasise just the first girl and let the other little girl simply be part of the background, I wanted the focus to fall off, and as you can see I focused on her eyes, rather than the beautiful headpiece. I also broke the rule of thirds and split the difference between her eyes and the headpiece.

I think the most common mistake for new photographers is focus lock. I focused the shot on the left on the girls eye, held the shutter release button, then reframe the shot upward to compose this shot. I strictly use center point focus, then lock the shot, then move it up to capture the shot. I see a lot of new photographers and some with experience, make this mistake, They just take the shot and think that they will crop it later in post production. That will work, but it takes a lot more time in post production than just framing the shot correctly while shooting it. This is very basic I know, but I do see this a lot with new photographers. I also see lots of poor composition in general with new photographers. My suggestion is to buy a book specifically on composition and practice. I learned a term in the video production world called "headroom". When you watch a movie, the actors are always framed with the heads near the top of the screen, not the middle of the screen. This same principal applies for both vertical and horizontal photographs.





Camera Framing, Composition and Focusing - Continued

Again, I think the most common mistake for new photographers is focus lock. Focus on your subjects eyes, re-frame the shot upward to compose the shot. I strictly use center point focus, then lock the shot, then move it to compose then I capture the shot. I see a lot of new photographers and some with experience, make this mistake, Maybe they just take the shot and think that they will crop it later in post production. That will work, but it takes a lot more time in post production than just framing the shot correctly while shooting it. This is very basic I know, but I do see this a lot with new photographers. Remember, I use the center point only, I turn off the multipoint focus and rarely use this feature. Its faster to use the center point, lock the focus, then compose the shot, rather than selecting a different focus point. For fast action photography, this technique may not be advisable, as you will probably be tracking your subject in fast action, and multi point focus may be necessary.

For tips on composition, I've done lots of study on this and the basic rules are broken down in this sample. The camera screen is broken into 9 areas for the rule of thirds. For landscapes and wide horizontal shots of objects, the general rule is to set your focus on the lower third, so your foreground is slightly out of focus, and the center part of your frame is in full focus, letting the background fade off in the top third. For products, the same rule applies. You can see the lower third is in sharp focus, the foreground is out of focus, and the background fades away. The opposite applies to portraits however, you'll generally want the top third in full focus. I suggest researching and studying as much as you can about composition. Once you have this principal mastered, then you can experiment with breaking the rule of thirds, you see lots of variation depending in the artist.



Chapter 3



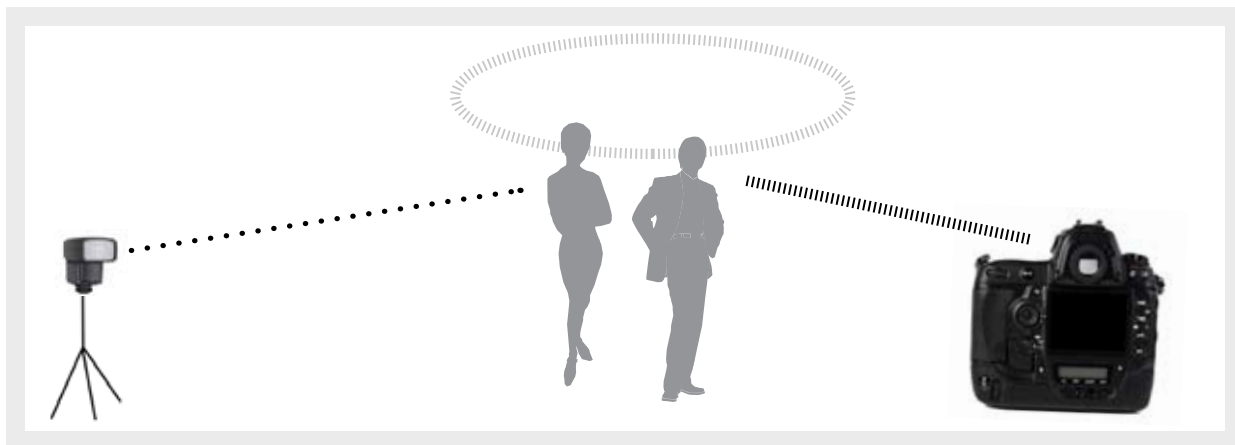
Canon 5dII with a 70-200mm IS lens at f2.8
ISO 800 shutter speed 1/125th using available
light and Canon 600 EX Speedlite with a
snoot at 1/16th Noise Reduction NIK Filters
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Difficult wedding photography lighting situations

Anyone that's ever shot a wedding eventually gets the dreaded "horribly lit church" situation. In the South, brides tend to choose 7:00 pm for their ceremony time, so they basically pick the worst light of the day for their best pictures. It seems in California, the average ceremony time is around 4:00, leaving hours of perfect light for a beautiful wedding. The only option usually includes flash photography, and most photographers don't know how to use their flash.

Here's a recent wedding that had an almost impossible lighting situation. The ambient light was from tiny string lights, like Christmas tree lights. The background was a massive stone fireplace which acted like a giant sponge soaking up all the room light. The main lights from the ceiling were 25 feet in the air, and only (2) 75 watt floodlights. The floodlights were aimed almost straight down, creating a horrible "raccoon" shadow eye on the couple. I shot half of the ceremony with my 50mm 1.4 lens, which helped, the ceremony area was very spread out, but the front row of guests was so tight against the wedding party, there was no room to get in close. Even up close there were other problems to deal with. The walls were all made of a redwood, and the ceiling was very tall which did not help for bounce lighting. The nearest wall was 40 feet away with a sloped ceiling, so bouncing off those walls was not an option. You may know when you bounce a flash, light floods the room.

I really don't like using flash in a wedding ceremony, it can look harsh, unnatural, and flat. I knew when I walked into this room that I had to at least supplement the light, so my plan was to mount a speedlite on a light stand and extended it to 15 foot tall, and use it like a spotlight from the back row of the guest seating area. I used a snoot on the flash to narrow the beam directly on the couple, that helps the light levels, and lets you take advantage of the ambient background light that is already in the room. I then used my remote trigger to fire the flash off camera. I used a gel on the flash to color correct and make the flash a bit warmer, but I wish I had used two layers of gels to balance the flash color a better match for the room. I manually set the flash to about 1/16th and did some tests shots earlier. You can see by this photo that the color is pretty good, and I went with a white balance to match the tone of her cream dress.



For this photo I used a 70-200 mm IS lens at 2.8 with ISO 1600 and 1/125th shutter speed. With the off camera flash as a supplement to the room light, I got a pretty good set of photos from the ceremony. I was able to work my way into a spot where I could get a good view of the couple. You can see a big black object on the upper left hand corner. that was a speaker from the DJ. He place both speakers in really bad locations, and they were in just about every shot that I had. He could have moved the speakers out to the corners of the room, but DJ's typically don't consider the photos either. I've tried on several occasions to have the DJ move their speakers, but they always get angry that I would ask them to change their speaker set up. Ah, the joys of being a wedding photographer!



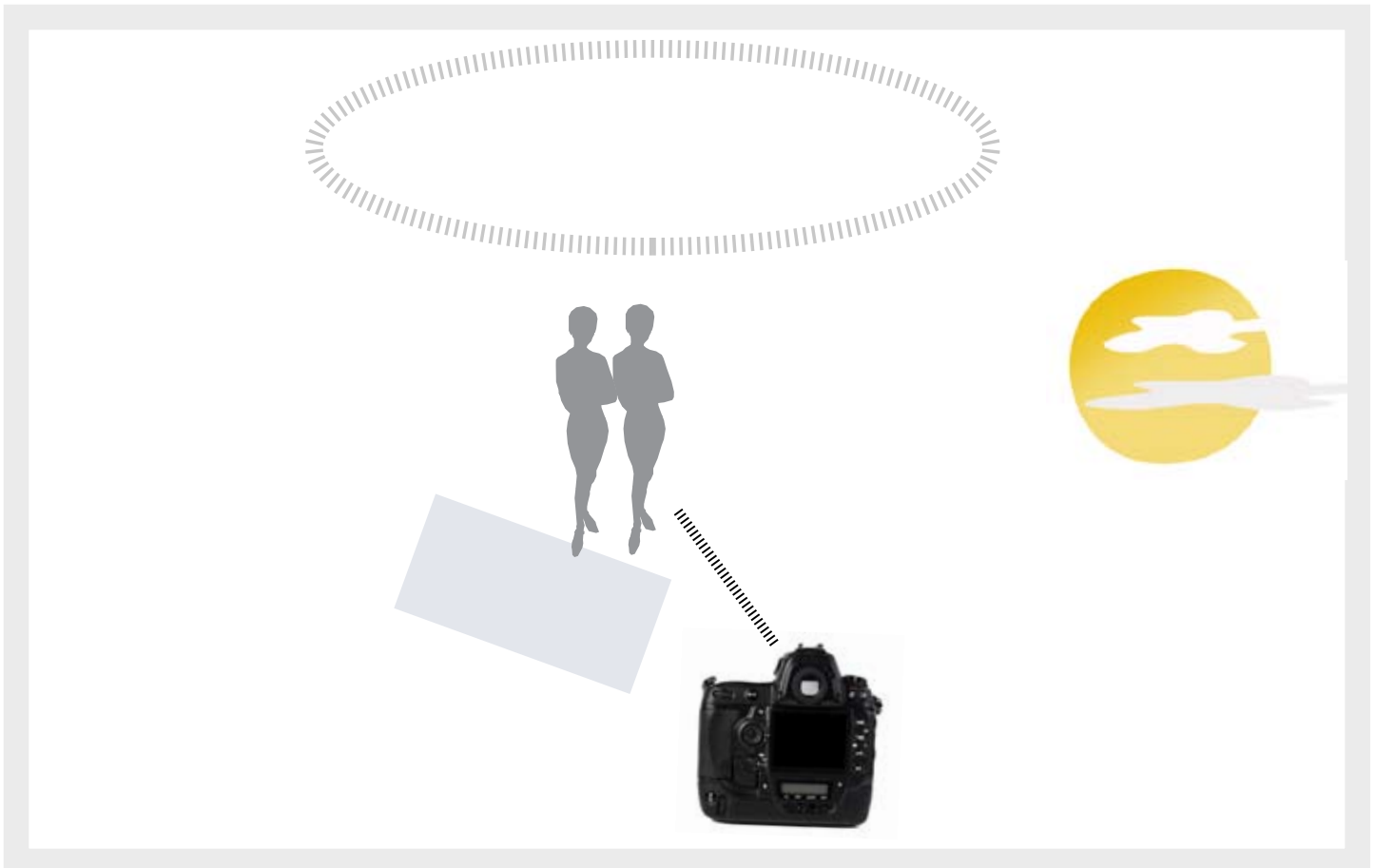
Canon 5dII with a 70-200mm IS lens at f2.8
ISO 800 shutter speed 1/250th using all
available lighting
www.michaelallenphotography.com

Basic natural light portrait photography

I get to shoot a wide variety of portraits, not everything I shoot is for weddings, I love photographing kids too, They are really pretty easy to shoot, they usually love the camera, and my one word of advice is to be fast on the shutter, you'll only get them to sit still for a few minutes.

In my studio I may shoot swimsuit models one week, then architecture the next, on to a major magazine shoot, then it may be food. Then the phone rings to shoot a family session. I'm at the point in my career that I don't shy away from any subject, and welcome the variety. Some photographers specialize in just one particular field of photography, but the principals are all the same. You want to find the best light to illuminate your subject. This type of lighting can be called loop lighting, but is really a mix of and butterfly lighting.

In this photo of the two girls, I sat them down to gain a few more minutes of shooting time, most kids wiggle a lot and getting them to sit down helps give me a few more minutes to capture them in a somewhat relaxed state of mind. Also, if you can find a concrete surface to reflect the natural light, combined with the right ambient light, you can mimic a studio lighting set up. I also placed them in the shade, which created some halo light, with the sun bouncing into my scene from the side. You can see that I over exposed the background, and set my final exposure to their faces.



When I converted this to black and white, I used a Lightroom Preset from Kevin Kubota called "Chocolate", and you can see the tone has some brown in it. This tone helps preserve the eyes, as sometimes a B&W image makes the subjects eyes look too black. I'll also adjust this done by adjusting the mid tone highlights in LR.

One last tip for shooting kids, get them to connect in the pose, this split second hug helps show the emotions of these two girls, and shows their love for each other. They did not stay like this for long, as 46



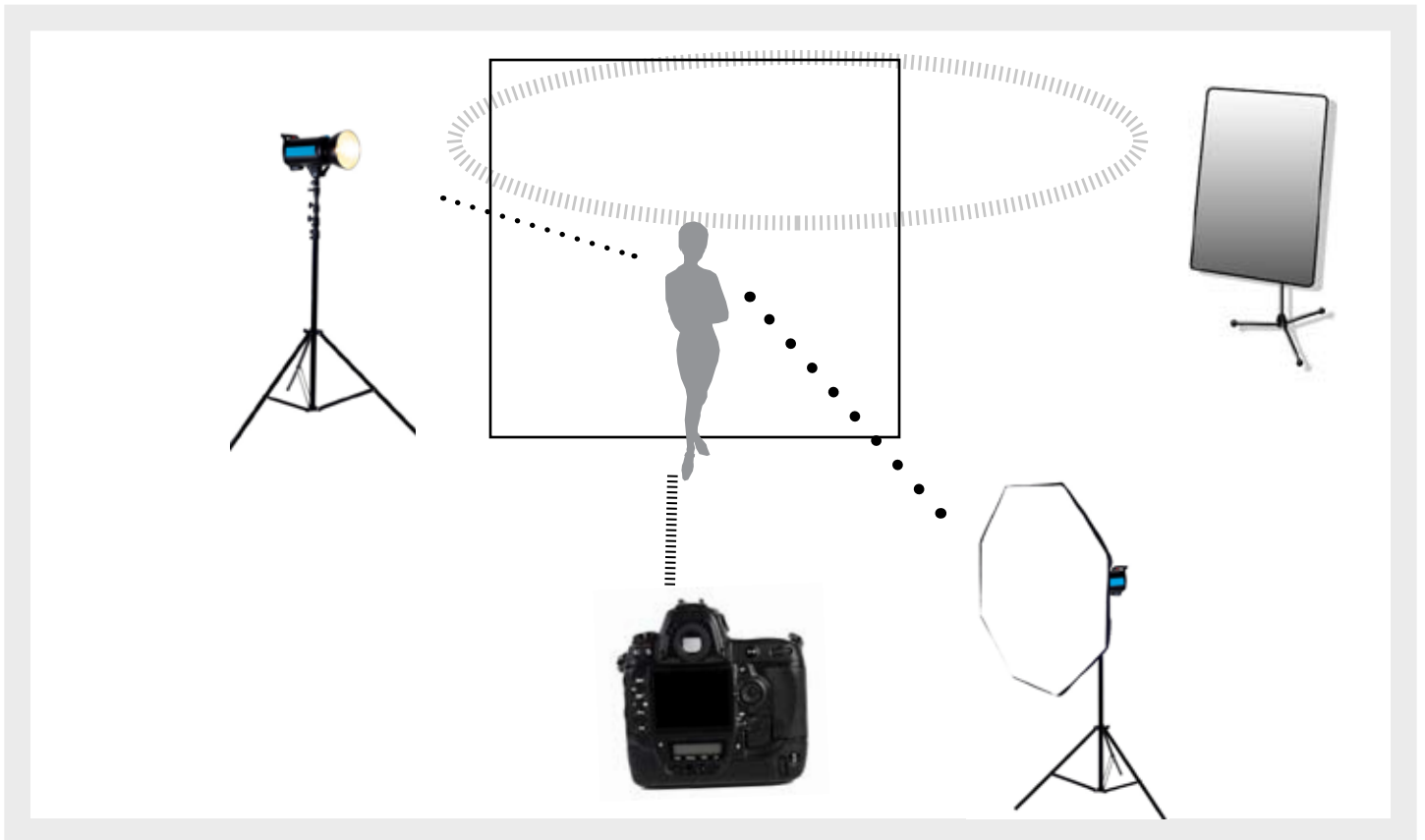
Canon 5dII with a 24-105 mm IS lens at f4 ISO 800
shutter speed 1/125 th using Alien bees moon
light at 1/16th key and 1/64 backlight
www.michaelallenphotography.com

Basics of studio portrait photography

Here is an example of a studio portrait. Studio photography seems pretty simple. It does take some preparation and attention to setup. For this set up I start with a large white vinyl or paper backdrop, I place my model about 4 - 6 feet from the backdrop, I set my keylight, which in this photo is an Alien Bees 60" moon light flash on a c stand, mounted pretty low, about 3 feet off of the floor. I shoot a test shot and raise or lower my flash level so that I don't over expose her skin or clothes.

Next I set my side / backlight. I use this light to rim the back of her hair, hit her shoulder, and a little of the flash spills on to the backdrop from the fixture and from a reflector set across from that light. I adjust the reflector to just skim the backdrop, and want very little of that light hitting the model. I shoot another few test shots and adjust this light to my personal taste, usually half of the value of my main key light. I adjust this light to add more drama, or just to help separate her from the background, or to highlight the models hair. For this shot I chose very little backlight. The lighting can be called broad lighting in the studio world.

You can see the catchlight in her eyes. if you look closely in her eyes, you can see a white dot, that's called a catchlight, and that little light helps the models eyes have more depth and color. Some photographers will add a small light under the models chin, called a kicker, or fill light. I rarely use this, as my moon light casts a huge soft light from head to toe. If I was using a small umbrella, I would not get this spread, I may want to add a fill light. In this studio, the ceiling is white, and the floor is white, so there is some bounce from that, but most of the light is coming from the main key light.



This image was shot with a 24-105mm lens at f4, 1/125th and ISO 500. I extended the lens to 105mm, as this helps the background go very soft. Notice the top of her head is soft, but her eyes and face are very sharp. Even a white background can show up if you shoot at a higher f stop, I like to shoot in the studio with the same camera setting I shoot for weddings. I set the main flash to 1/32th and the side flash to 1/64th and adjust my ISO if I am over or under exposed. I can adjust my white balance and HSL colors to tone the background to a flat white.



Canon 5dII with a 15 mm fisheye at f2.8 ISO 800
shutter speed 1/125 th using all
available lighting
www.michaelallenphotography.com

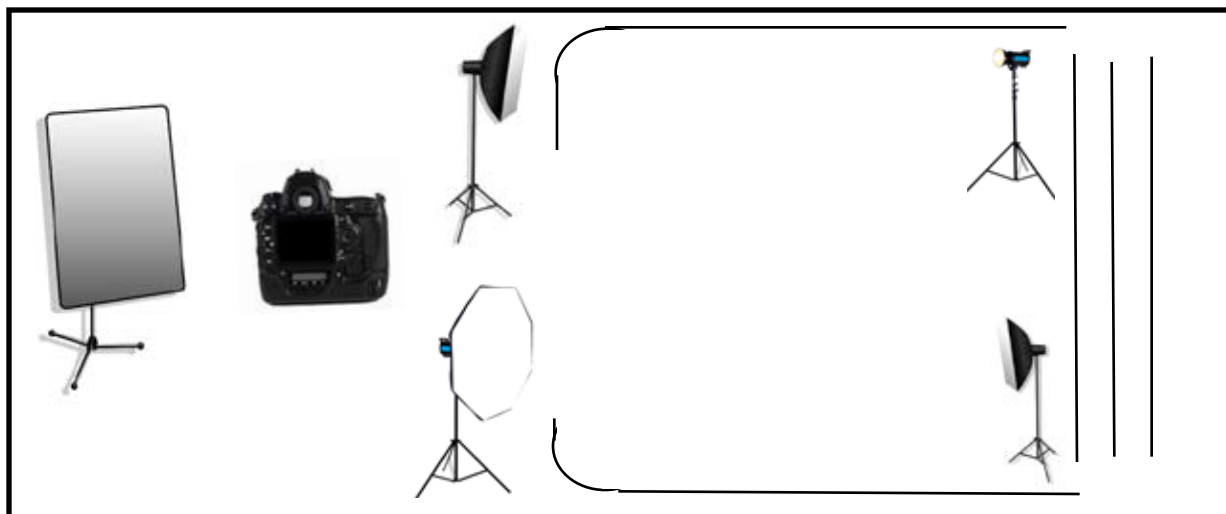


Canon 5dII with a 24-105mm IS lens at f4
ISO 800 shutter speed 1/125th using a Canon
600EX Speedlite @1/32 composited in Photoshop
www.michaelallenphotography.com

Our Studio

Here is an example of our small studio. Having a studio space to work in is a great asset to a photographer. I've had larger studios, but most of my work requires location shooting, so now I just keep a small portrait studio set up like this to handle portraits and product shoots. I just rent a larger studio project by project. I also use my gallery when needed for lifestyle portraits.

There is no magic formula to create a studio, I've seen photographers produce some amazing work in much smaller spaces. This floorplan has just the right amount of length and width to handle most any portrait work.



Here are the basics needed in a studio. You'll want room for a 10 foot wide backdrop, that gives you the room to shoot some small group portraits, or a fashion catalog model session. Most backdrops are manufactured 10 wide. I do have a white vinyl backdrop that is 9 foot wide, and you can get a variety of sizes smaller than 10 foot, but the standard width is 10 foot. For my studio I have 10 foot tall ceilings I have a roller system hanging to allow me to change up to 6 backdrops simply by rolling them up and down.

Next, I have a white painted floor, that comes in handy for both added reflective light and certain product shot sessions where a white background is needed. I can also put a variety of floor coverings on the painted concrete depending on the session that I'm doing. A great source for backdrops and flooring is www.dennymfg.com. I also have a ceiling that is painted white, and white curtains on ceiling tracks that I use for both lighting and product shot reflection. For this studio I also have a 6 foot wide by 10 foot tall window with a northern exposure, so I get a nice soft daylight glow all day long. This is a great studio for all natural daylight photography, and I use daylight balanced lighting to supplement the natural light. I can also use my reflectors to bounce more light around the room as needed.

I use a medium quality brand, Alien Bees 800 ringlight with a 60 inch moon attachment for my main keylight, This is a very affordable light and very easy to breakdown for compact transport. I use it with an Alien Bees battery pack, so I can take it anywhere. It is an inexpensive light, so be sure to investigate it if you don't have a big budget for some more expensive Profoto gear. My backlight has a slave mode, so it fires in sync with my main key light, which is triggered by my camera wireless remote transmitter system. I use a TT5 system from Pocket Wizard, and I have a Pixel King set that I use sometimes. Any flash trigger will work in most studio situations.

I also have some Westcott Spider lights that I use for my softboxes, which are great for video and still photography. I keep several tripods for those long shooting days, and for composite shooting.



The Gear Storage

I did a lot of research on camera bags. I wanted a big bag that I could carry on a plane, and I wanted lots of extra pockets inside and out for working on daily shoots. I found this Tamrac bag and purchased the big one and a smaller backpack. When I have a local shoot, I break out the smaller bag just for one camera. You can see some obvious things about this bag, first of all, there is lots of space for several lenses and several camera bodies, as well as smaller storage for accessories. I also have room for a macbook pro in the outside storage slot.

I also love the extra straps on the front of the bag for toting a tripod or light stand, and this bag has lots of extra storage areas outside of the bag. Be prepared for some sticker shock, this bag is very pricey, over \$500. But it's well worth protecting thousands of dollars worth of your precious camera gear. It also looks like an ordinary travel bag, so it does not stand out as a special camera case.

And, the fact that it fits in most airline overhead bins, and meets the airlines carry on limits, means I can carry lots of gear on destination trips. It's very water resistant, so I don't worry too much when it gets wet. It also doubles as a back pack, so I can carry it if necessary. However, when it's full of gear, it can weigh close to 50 pounds, so be sure to workout a lot before attempting to trek a mountain trail.

Both bags have velco dividers, so I can re-arrange my gear easily. I also carry my mac book pro inside the smaller bag as well. I can't replace equipment very often, so I want it in prime shape when I sell it. If its beat up and worn badly, it's less likely to sell at a premium price when it comes time for an upgrade. Protecting my gear is important to me to keep it in optimum working condition. I've seen some photographers that work for bigger companies, and they tend to abuse their gear, as they know it can be replaced whenever they want something new, and they are not personally paying for it.

I've also seen photographers digging through poorly designed camera bags trying to find a lens or accessory, a good bag helps your organization, and protects your gear. TIP: When switching lenses, always place the extra lens on the floor, rather than a chair or tabletop, if that lens rolls off and falls, you may crack a lens, or drop a camera.





Canon 5dII with a 70-200mm IS lens at f2.8
ISO 800 - shutter speed 1/250th using all
available concert lighting
www.michaelallenphotography.com

ISO and Camera Settings

Here's my rule of thumb for my camera settings. I'm not a very technical shooter, I like to keep it basic. For example, ISO 100 is the best setting for noise and sharpness in shooting almost every daylight situation. However, ISO 800 is my personal optimum setting for just about all my shooting. Why? ISO 800 is good for shade and low light settings, the noise level is pretty small and almost unnoticeable on the Canon 5d Mark II. The high ISO helps me increase my shutter speed and work in low light to get really sharp focused images. Every camera has different noise levels, I also use a Canon 7d, and it is very noisy at ISO 800 and almost un-useable at ISO 1600

My next optimum ISO level is 1600. I use this for very dark situations, low light at weddings at night more specifically. I might use high ISO for concerts, but most of the time I'll use ISO 800 for those situations. I usually set my shutter speed at 1/125 to 1/250 for concerts because of the action, for weddings I can slow down the 1/80 or 1/30 if I have an IS lens. I'll actually change my shutter speed in these ranges and move between 1/125 and 1/250. Most concerts these days uses really powerful LED stage lighting, so the light can be very bright, so I can drop my ISO and increase my shutter speed. I usually keep my shutter at f4, or f2.8 depending on the lens that I'm using. Most of the time for concerts I use a 70-200mm IS f 2.8 lens. Using higher ISO helps bring out the detail in shadows.

Here's a quick ISO scale for review:

100	=	sharp
200	=	brighter x 2
300	=	brighter x 2
400	=	brighter x 2 little noise
800	=	brighter x 2 minor noise
1600	=	brighter x 2 noise increased
3200	=	brighter x 2 noise increased
6400	=	brighter x 2 more noise
12800	=	brighter x 2 very noisy

The goal is to usually avoid high ISO as it creates more noise and softens the image, but the quality of pro cameras have almost eliminated the noise issue, and editing software has some nice noise removal tools, so using high ISO is very helpful in low light and shade situations where you want to see as much light on the face of your subject as possible.

Shutter Speed: I use a very low shutter speed like 1/80 th for weddings in shade and low light, and at that speed you can achieve sharp images with very soft backgrounds. In the daytime, I'll shoot at a wide f stop and increase my shutter speed to control the brightness. I'll play with my ISO but remember, I use my ISO to brighten faces in shade or back lit situations. High shutter speed makes sharper images.

F Stop or Aperture: I'm a big fan of f 2.8. I shoot manually starting at f2.8 and try to keep it there for everything so I can keep a nice soft bokeh or soft background. Even with flash photography, I choose high ISO so I can keep my aperture wide open as much as possible. I only raise my aperture for product photography in a studio setting, or for a fashion setting in the studio, or in bright daylight situations when I want very sharp images and I have lots of light to use. I may shoot at f 10 or higher to control the exposure in the camera. The higher the F Stop, the sharper the background gets.

Spot Metering: Most people don't realize that even in Manual mode, the cameras built in metering system can control your exposures. I set my camera in "spot metering" mode as opposed to "evaluative metering", which isolates the subjects face and ignores the background. I'd only switch to evaluative metering for landscape work.



Canon 5dIII with a 70-200mm IS 2.8 lens at f 8
ISO 800 shutter speed 1/800th using all
natural light just before sunset

www.michaelallenphotography.com

Resources

Even with my experience over the past 30 years in photography, I've done a lot of extra study over the past 10 years, traveling to WPPI and PPA just about every year. I've attended master classes, sat in on numerous lectures, watched many, many hours of video tutorials, asked lots of questions, and read many books on photography. I've walked up to some of the most recognized photographers in the world just to ask simple questions that I thought they could answer. So don't be afraid to ask questions, no matter how silly they may seem. I've participated in other photographers workshops, and learned some amazing things. I like to consider myself a life long learner.

Here are some of the best resources on my shortlist that I've found for learning more about photography and flash photography. I'll watch videos, then practice every day until I get it right.

www.creativelive.com

www.adorama.com

www.adobe.com

www.fisheyeconnect.com

www.lensrentals.com

You'll find many technical videos that are very helpful. I've purchased several books, and one of my favorites is by a photographer named Bambi Cantrell. I've attended many of her workshops as, well as many other photographers workshops. As a female photographer, Bambi offered many insights that are helpful to us guys.

It's a good idea to become a member of either PPA (Professional Photographers of America) or WPPI (Wedding Portrait Photographers International). Both are excellent resources and offer great insights into the world of professional photography.

I'm also a member of CPS (Canon Professional Services), and they offer excellent camera repairs, and have several VIP breakrooms at most major conventions where you can rub elbows with photographers from all walks of life.

There are also many facebook groups these days for both local and national groups, so get connected. You may not agree with everything you find on the internet, or even in these small groups, but it's a great resource and very helpful when you need to connect with other photographers.

Our Favorite Gear & Vendor Acknowledgements

We want thank the following vendors for their gear - Gary Fong Diffusers - California Sunbounce Reflectors - Paul Buff Ring Light - Canon Cameras - Nikon Cameras - Tamrac Camera Bags - Apple Computers - Adobe Lightroom & Photoshop - Nik Filters - Lens Rentals - View Bug - Southern Bride Magazine - Fisheye Connect - Janice Allen Salon.

Shoot a lot of photos!

Starting off can be challenging. As a busy photographer, I sometimes shoot over 2000 photos a week, but it took me many years to get to this level. I encourage you to shoot as often as you can, even if it's just for practice. Put together a personal photoshoot, find local models, designers or whoever you can find, and be determined. Ask for feedback, and be as self critical as you can. Try entering some professional photo contests, and then go see a live exhibit. You may get kicked down a few notches by a critique, but at the same time you'll be challenged and inspired by what you hear!

Some of my favorite photo accessories

I'm used to working in the professional studio world, but I do try to find budget friendly accessories that can do the same thing as expensive gear. Paul Buff has some great flash gear, Sunbounce has the best reflectors. My camera bags are by Tamrac, and I buy my cameras, reflectors and light stands from Adorama, I rent extra gear from Lensrentals.com

Wedding Flash Recipe: For weddings I use 2 standard folding light stands that reach up to 12 feet high, and I mount each Canon 600 EX flash using an umbrella holder (without umbrella) then slide them on the 5/8 stud on each light stand. For wedding groups I use the Gary Fong line of flash diffusers, they emit an amazing spread of a soft halo that can light any large group. I use wireless flash triggers to keep my camera lightweight, and to have an off camera flash effect. I've tried flash umbrellas, but this is much easier and works just as well. I also use gel correction filters inside the Gary Fong diffusers to match the room light, I use high speed flash sync and manually set each flash to get the brightness level needed for the room that I'm shooting in, also using high ISO 1600, f4 at 1/125th. This formula mixes the ambient room light with the Canon Speedlites nicely. I can also quickly move a flash to my camera handle bracket with a "Custom Bracket" using the umbrella clamp, and instantly move around the room with the flash mounted to my camera. I can take the diffuser off of my background flash when I want a stronger directional backlight, especially for receptions. I set my flashes to manual for the best control over my brightness levels. The diffusers create a halo effect that I diagramed earlier in the book.



For my indoor studio I use a very affordable brand called Alien Bees, a ringlight studio flash unit with a 60" moon light. These are made by Paul Buff based in Nashville. I love their very large umbrellas too. The reason you want a giant size is that these puppies throw a massive soft light from head to toe. This soft light is beautiful, and will make a difference in your photography. Several companies make sizes all the way up to 80 inches, thats a big softbox! Note: I don't bring this kind of gear to a wedding, I use my speedlites and Gary Fong flash diffusers.

The very best studio lights are made by Profoto, and I've used their gear many times. I usually rent their gear for bigger professional shoots. For a more affordable alternative, I love my Alien Bees, the build quality is not as good as Profoto, but I tend to take care of my gear, and it lasts a long time for my studio uses.

For my studio I prefer Alien Bees studio flash units with the 60" moon light kit, and for location shooting I use a Profoto kit with umbrella kits and a variety of snoots. I also use a 4x6 ft Sunbounce reflector and several 36" round reflector diffusers, and several 54" scrims, some cookies, flags, white foamcore boards and black foamcore boards, and a hand full of a clamps, c stands and lightweight lighting stands. I also have several backdrop stands, and lots of backdrops that I own. My go to background for the studio is a roll of white vinyl, and a roll of grey. I keep several tripods as well, even though I shoot mainly handheld. For my studio I use a low cost set of Pixel King flash triggers, they perform very well with both speedlites and studio lights.



Icons used in the book =



Reflector on light stand



Camera direction or positioning



Very Large Studio Flash Octagon Style Umbrella Softbox

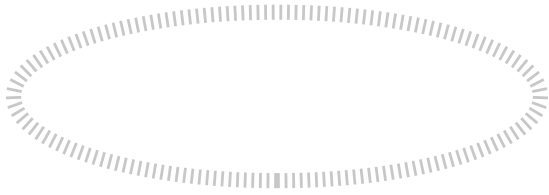


Large Hot Light or 1k Fresnel



Direction of Light

Icons used in the book =



Ambient Light or Halo Light



Direct Sunlight



Flag / Light Reflector or Subtractor



Very Large Studio Fluorescent Soft Box



Speedlite on light stand



Diffused Window Light



Cookie or pattern diffuser

Common Photography Lighting Terms in our Workshop

I'm not a highly technical photographer, so don't call me out if I change the name of a few terms. My first term deals with ambient light or what a lot of photographers now call "Finding the light".

Halo Light - In direct sun, the halo light comes from the back of the head and spills around to the face. In studio lighting, the halo light comes from the back of the head from a lower position. I use this term to talk about ambient light today, or finding the light, you may be in a shade area, or inside a building, or even outside in direct sunlight. This type of light is used to wrap a beautiful soft light around the side of the subjects face. I usually don't refer to this as a hair light or backlight. I think the term Halo light best describes a soft, heavenly light that natural light photographers spend their day searching for, that perfect ambient light in an outdoor setting. (See, I just broke the rules of photography, halo was coined by a studio photographer to describe a harsh backlight) A blown out background appears to be like a halo light, and the sun generally is bouncing in from the front to act as a key light.

Fill Light - I use this term to add extra light into a scene, it can be directly on the face of the subject, or just on the side of their face. It may also describe as a kicker light, used to add a bit more light to the key light from the same direction or from a different direction.

Key Light - This is the main light of any scene. It can be from a flash, reflector, the side of a building, bounce light from a large bank of clouds, direct sunlight. On a cloudy day, the key light can become a Halo Light. It can be a broad light - which lights the entire subject - sometimes referred to as a wide light, or used to make the subject wider. **Short lighting** can be a keylight, but is used at a narrow angle or from the side of the subject instead of straight on. It casts a shadow on one side of the face. When used up close with a lighting umbrella, the light is flat or soft, and casts less intense shadows, or lowers the contrast. Moving the light or the way the face is positioned creates the photography lighting terms known as **Butterfly, loop, rembrandt or split lighting**.

Rembrandt Lighting - A key light is aimed from a 45 degree angle and to one side on the front, and the fill light or a reflector is placed at an opposite angle and half height and on the other side at the front, set to about half the power of the key light. You can make several variations of this style of lighting, but it is basically a key light aimed at the side of your subjects face to create a dramatic shadow. I tend to shoot more of a **butterfly** lighting style for most of my setups, but love to mix the styles.

Off Camera Flash - This means the light is coming from another direction rather than right on the camera. As mentioned about key lighting, it acts like a short light, and creates more dramatic shadows.

Diffused lighting - Commonly called diffused front lighting to reduce wrinkles or soften facial features. You can use a white opacity fabric over the light, or certain gels with various opacity. Sometimes the leaves from a tree or object can diffuse your light. It can also be called a scrim.

Background Flash - This can be used to fill in the background if it is too dark. When I'm shooting at a wide open aperture, I adjust my background light by lowering the flash level, or by moving the light further away, or bouncing the light at an angle to soften the light, so I don't have to change my key light and camera settings.

Feathering Light - I use this term when using a reflector, if you bend the reflector, or angle it sideways, you can change the intensity or brightness of the light.

Common Photography Lighting Terms in our Workshop

Reflected light meter - the built in camera light meter that measures light reflected off of the subject.

Spot Metering - For this book, it refers to the camera setting to measure the light directly off of the face or body of the subject. I suggest your camera be set to spot metering instead of evaluative metering, which measures the entire scene or landscape.

C-stand - This type of light stand has a turtle base, or 3 legs. The legs are flat to help hold a sandbag and anchor the stand in windy conditions. The C-stand usually has a boom arm to mount a flash, cookie diffuser, flag, reflector or scrim.

Speedlite - A portable flash used for DSLR photography.

Fresnel Light - Usually a 500 watt to 1000 watt to 4000 watt halogen light fixture with a fresnel lens that spreads the light beam into a general soft spot light. Common in the movie industry.

Moon Light - This is a large 60" octagon soft box with a soft white diffuser. This is a brand name coined by Paul Buff Lighting, there are many brands of large softbox umbrellas available.

ISO - This is the basically the ability of the camera to brighten an image in a dark or low light setting

Ambient Light - This is basically available light either outside or inside. It is usually mixed light coming from several sources, like the sun bouncing off of a building, or a bank of clouds, or the ground. Inside ambient light usually comes from room lighting, but can be bounced in from outside.

Direct Sunlight - This is pretty much as stated, the subject would be facing directly into the sun or to the side of the sun.

Indirect Sunlight - This is opposite of direct sunlight, this can be considered shade, or bounce light, or light filtered through a window and bounced into the scene.

Pop Up Flash - The on board camera flash that pops up on most consumer cameras.

Soft Box - This is commonly a very large square or rectangular soft light similar to an umbrella, but a soft box is deeper, has a diffused cover, and can be used for a studio flash, speedlite, or florescent light fixture.

TTL -Electronic Through the lens metering. Most speedlites use ETTL to measure and control the light needed in an exposure.

Tungsten Light - The color temperature of a normal household light at 3200 degrees kelvin.

Flash Color Temperature - Most flash units emit a daylight color temperature, or 5000 degrees kelvin

Snoot - An accessory used on a flash to narrow the light to a spotlight, like a funnel.

Cookie - In movie or photography terms, it's a panel with various shapes cut in it. Then light is aimed through it, causing irregular shadows in the background of a subject.

Textures - These are rough patterns used by photographers to add into a layer of a photo to create a unique background, or to give the photo an aged look.

Some of my favorite headshots

I love using very simple backgrounds and I direct my clients like I would when shooting a movie to get that emotion from them to make the shot interesting. I just tell the model to laugh, or be serious, or suggests positions that they can use to engage their viewers. They have to be comfortable with you, so be confident in your approach. After a few minutes, they will get into the spirit of the session and you'll get great shots.

The first one below is using all natural light from the window behind me, I used one small fluorescent softbox behind her as a rim light. The key light from the window was diffused north light coming through the window without any filter or fabric. Shot on a Canon 5d with a Canon 50mm 1.4 set at f 2.8, 1/125 ISO 800.



The next photo on the right was shot using a 60" moonlight as the key light set at 1/16 power, and a studio strobe with an eggcrate as the rim light at 1/16 power. Canon 5d with 24-105mm lens at f4 and 1/125 at ISO 800. For both I used Lightroom using a split tone filter that I modified from Kuboto Presets. I used a white backdrop.

Some of my favorite headshots

The first one below is using one large fluorescent softbox as a key light. Shot on a Canon 5d with a Canon 24-105 mm set at f 4, 1/125 ISO 800. I used Lightroom with a modified black & white preset with a brown tone instead of pure black. I used a black backdrop. This helps with facial features for a soft look.

The next photo on the right was shot using a key light from the window was diffused north light coming through the window without any filter or fabric. I used a small light over her shoulder to add some depth to the shot. Taken on a Canon 5d with a Canon 50mm 1.4 set at f 2.8, 1/125 at ISO 800. In Lightroom I push the shadows and add extra black to darken the tones.



You can see throughout the workbook, using flash helps add layers or dimension to what would otherwise be a flat image. I'm always in search of a nice background to support my subjects, being careful not to dissect their heads with distractions. then keeping my flash technique as natural looking as possible.



Photography Lighting Secrets

Michael Allen is an accomplished, award winning photographer & cinematographer offering his insights into editorial photography techniques.

His simple to understand lighting setups will help you understand how to find the best light for your photo shoots and learn the secrets of the pros.

A close-up portrait of a woman with long, wavy blonde hair, looking slightly to the side. She is wearing a white lace dress with a black belt adorned with large, ornate silver brooches. She is seated in a gold-colored, tufted chair. The background is softly blurred, showing a white wall and a hint of a window.

By Michael Allen

Photography Lighting Secrets

Simple Techniques for - Available light,
Natural Light, Halo Light, Off Camera Flash
Techniques, Studio Flash, Hot Lighting
and Reflective Bounce Lighting

To Inspire Photographers