



HOW TO KNOW HOW

5 SUPER SIMPLE LIGHTING SETUPS FOR HOME SHOOTS

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PHOTOGRAPHY

Training

Foreword...

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These are some strange times indeed. Isolation, quarantine, lock-down. All words that are sadly too familiar right now, and for those of us that thrived and needed the creative outlet of photography alongside other creatives, it's especially tough to be trapped in our own homes.

What is photographically possible from home?

Thankfully, many of us don't actually need a huge studio with tons of kit to stay creative though and as long as we have some light and a camera, we're happy.

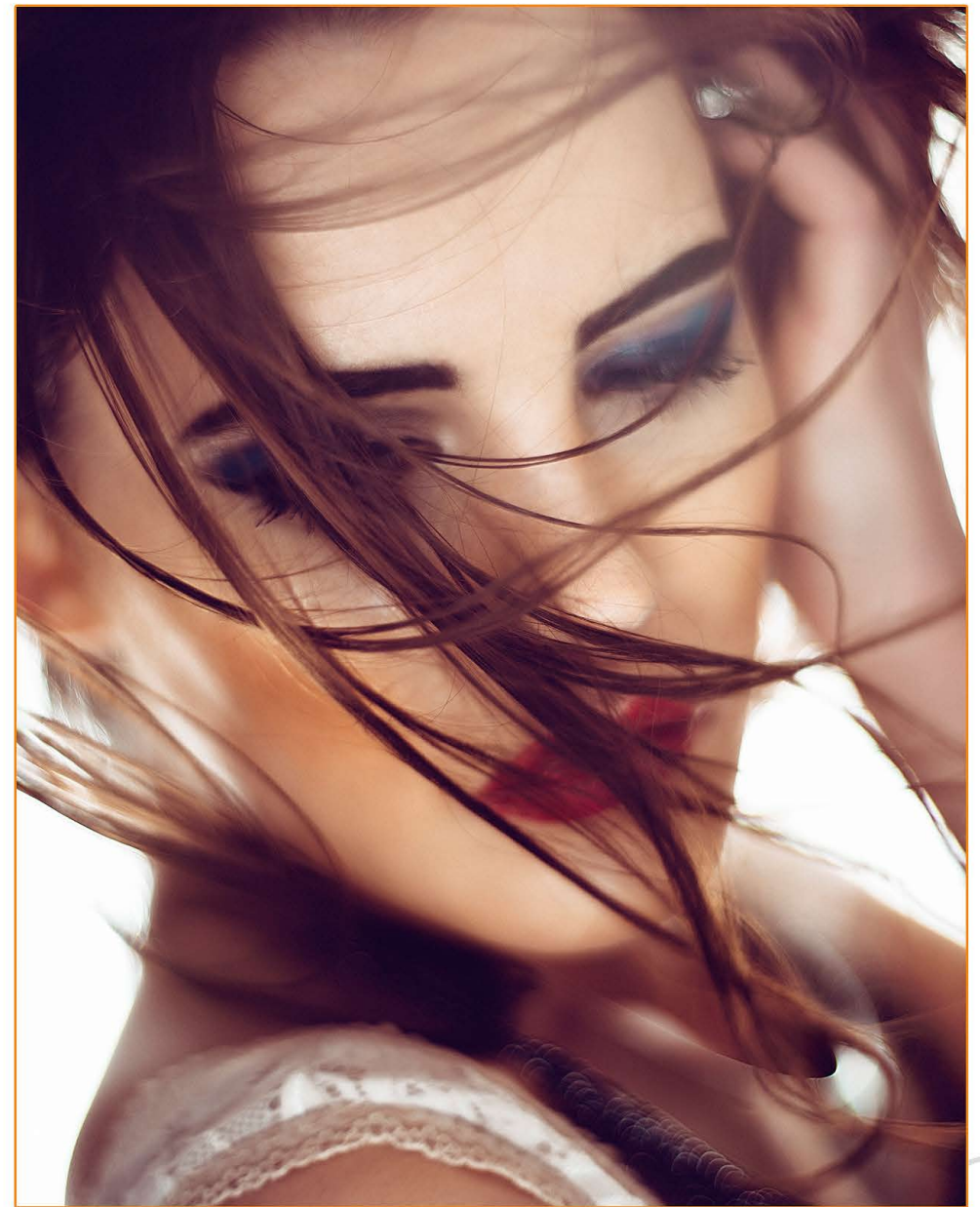
In this mini-book, I aim to show you just how creative you can be at home. In fact all you'll need for these 5 simple set-ups is one or two lights, some basic modifiers and a couple of common household items.

What about the team?

Although all of these set-ups, just like any photoshoot, will benefit from a team of stylists, makeup artists and models, it's not always necessary. Of course if you're stuck indoors, it's unlikely you'll have access to a team of people, but these set-ups will work on anything. Don't be shy about asking a family member to model for you, they'll likely love the idea and kids can be especially keen to jump in and pose.

But don't forget, you're not half-bad looking yourself. Why not take this opportunity to grab some new profile pics or simply practice your skills.

I promise not to tell a soul about your high-end selfies.... probably.



Lack of space and equipment is never an excuse not to be creative. But even if you're reading this after the 2020 global pandemic, all of these set-ups can be utilised almost anywhere, even if you aren't stuck in your own home.

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I'll come clean right off the bat here and say that I stumbled across this little super-easy lighting technique more by luck than skill.

I'm pretty sure I can't be the only one who has taken a portrait whilst using a single key light plus reflector and fought with the reflector in one hand and the camera in the other. You know the scene; super quick and clean 'clamshell' lighting with the key just above the models eye-line and the reflector just below the chin bouncing some much-needed light back up to fill in the shadows. You're micromanaging the reflector with one hand trying to bounce just the right amount of light back into the shot, you're scooping, flapping, bouncing and bending the damn thing around the key-light stand with one hand desperately trying to look professional. The result? Well the result for me is that when I load the images up on the laptop for review, I find that half the damn shots have the actual reflector peeking into the bottom of the frame! Not good.

A while back I was experimenting with the reflector by bouncing back light into the shot from two hair lights behind the model pointed towards the camera. I had the reflector on a stand and I was literally holding the camera up in front of it so that the viewfinder was pressed against it and taking pictures using the blessings of autofocus alone because I couldn't look through the lens.

It then dawned on me *'to hell with this'* and I cut a very rudimentary hole in the middle of my reflector so I could see what was actually going on.

From there I ended up changing the lights around by putting a big softbox behind the model and letting my reflector simultaneously be the key-light and the fill-light. In actuality this super simple setup produces such a flattering light that it's got to be one of the cheapest ring flashes you'll ever find.

So what can we do to refine this setup and make it a little more consistent

What you will need...

We'll be starting off with the simplest setup here, so you'll only need a few things.

1x strobe/speedlight

1x large softbox - anything bigger than 60cm x 60cm should be fine

1x medium sized silver reflector - I'm using a 80cm (32inch) one here

1x craft knife

-Plus a pen and something round like a roll of tape to draw around.



Step 1.

Pick yourself up a super-cheap reflector of a decent size. The one that I got was a 32inch/80cm diameter one. I wouldn't go much smaller than that as you want to bounce back as much light as possible. I was fortunate enough to get a reflector that had both silver on one side and white on the other. That means that I can use the silver side to get more of a contrasting look but I can also flip it over to get a far softer look to. I managed to find mine on ebay for about £6.

Step 2.

Grab yourself some real simple hobby tools like a craft knife, a thick pen, something circular to draw around (I used a roll of gaffer tape) and something like a cutting mat or cardboard so that you don't also slice a digestive biscuit sized hole in your lino!!!



Time to get crafty. A pen, a cutting mat and a craft knife and you're ready to make the cheapest ring-light ever.

Step 3.

Hopefully you've found something of a decent size to draw a circle around in the middle of your reflector. This should obviously be larger than the diameter of your largest lens and I used a roll of gaffer tape as that seemed large enough. *-In actuality I might go back and find something larger and cut a larger hole so I can stand back a little and still shoot through the hole without getting the reflector in shot.*



Find something circular to draw around, preferably larger than your lens!

Step 4.

Once you've found something of a suitable size to draw around, it's time to cut that hole. It's worth mentioning that I just plonked the hole roughly in the middle of my reflector and drew around it. I did think about placing the hole off-centre so that when I shot through the reflector I could rotate it to adjust the amount of light I had coming from the top or bottom. It's probably worth an experiment at some point, but for these shots I just had it in the centre. Place the cutting matt/cardboard underneath and simply cut the hole tracing the line you drew previously.



Cut the hole ensuring you've got your cutting mat beneath to protect the floor.

Step 5.

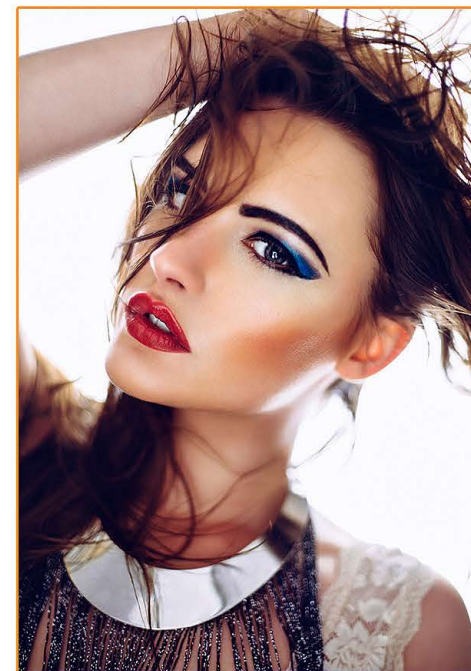
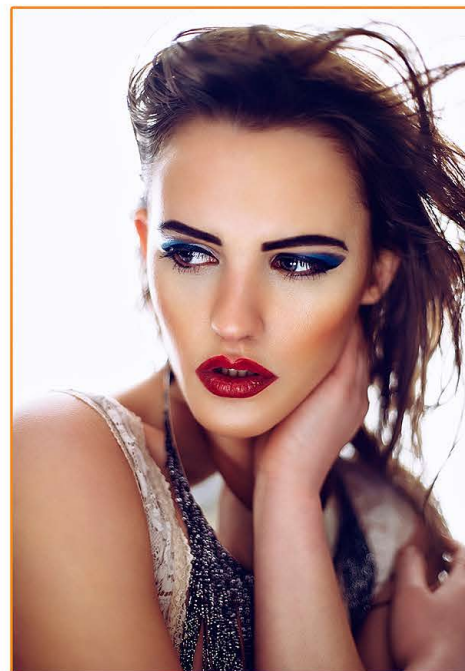
That's it, you're pretty much done! All that's left to do is to set up your one light. I had a big softbox placed behind the model and then hung the reflector on a light-stand in front of her. You don't even need to hang the reflector though really and it's pretty easy to just hold it in your other hand. Also your lens is poking through the hole so the reflector is never getting in the shot anyway so it makes it really easy to control.



The Results...

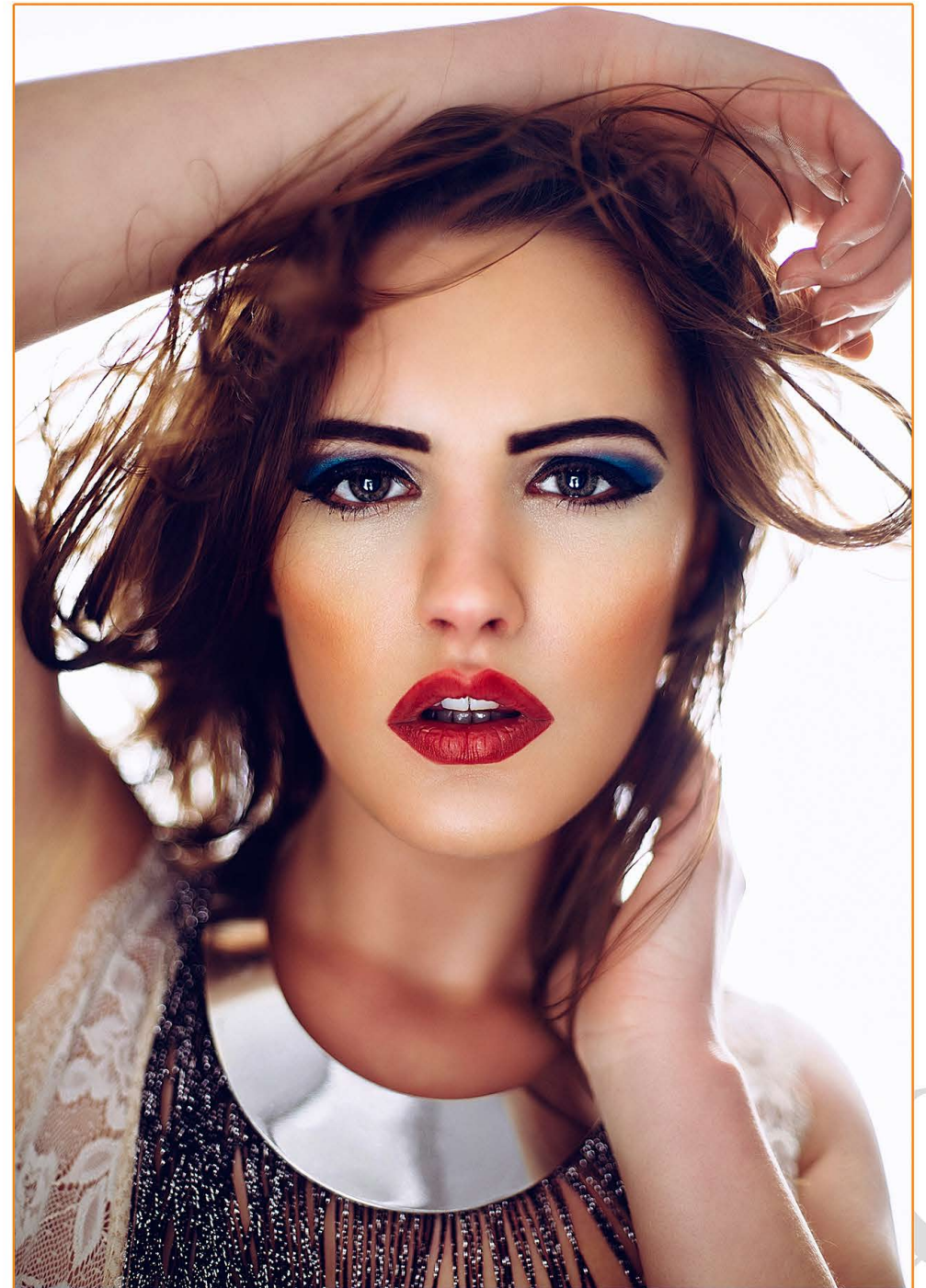
Check out some of the shots I got in literally a few minutes. I was genuinely shocked as to how stunning the lighting looked on the back of the camera straight away. The reason for this is simply just how flattering the lighting is and how that single light wraps around the model and bounces back into the shot giving the impression of the light coming from everywhere.

The softbox light bleeds around the model and cuts into her which has a visually slimming effect (especially noticeable with a shallow depth of field) and then bounces light back into her face from a source that is relatively large to her. This reflected light is coming from everywhere equally so it gives the appearance of very soft, flattering light.



Key Points to Remember

1. Use a silver or white reflector of a decent enough size to cover a half body shot. A 80cm/32in size is a good place to start.
2. Cut a hole in the centre of your reflector large enough to take the diameter of your largest lens.
3. Don't cut a hole in your carpet.
4. The bounced light of your reflector is your key light. To adjust the exposure of this light you will have to move the reflector closer and further away until you're happy.
5. Use a Neutral Density filter on your lens to reduce any unwanted power from your strobe and shoot as wide open as your lens will allow.





DIY GLOBE MODIFIER

DIY Globe Modifier for Simple, Stunning Portraits

It's not often I get to shoot very simple, clean white light shots, but in a recent shoot the model asked if she could get some updated 'Polaroids'. For those of you not familiar with the term when used in reference to a model shoot, it's actually not the now obsolete and ludicrously expensive single-shot film, but a request for very basic portraits of the model for their agency.

This 'Polaroid' term is a relic from the analogue film days and it essentially now means shots that are un-retouched and with the model wearing very little makeup.

I was happy to shoot a few of these 'Polaroids' as it literally takes two minutes. You throw up some simple light, the model stands in for a couple of headshots, some three quarter lengths and full body etc. You then send the shots with almost zero re-touching over to the model and she then passes them on to her modelling agency so that they can be used as a reference point for those who are interested in working with the model in the future.



Always ask for model 'Polaroids'

Just really quickly whilst we're on this subject. If you're a photographer selecting models from an agency, you really must insist on seeing the models 'Polaroids'. In a world of amazing makeup and ridiculous post-production, you need to be looking at what the subject looks like without all of that. Failure to do so will result in you being caught out with a model with bad skin or worse.

But back to the setup. I knew that for these raw-looking shots the light had to be very clean, flattering and without many shadows. This way, the light and its shadows isn't hiding anything and a soft light at least makes the model look her best under those raw conditions. Like I said at the start, I rarely shoot simple white light, but I did have an idea that I'd wanted to try for some time and I thought this would be a perfect opportunity to do so.

Why You Never See a Globe Modifier Being Used

For this setup I only used one light, and the modifier I used was actually a DIY one. The modifier is essentially a very diffused globe that sits on top of my strobe. The resulting light from this throws light absolutely everywhere around the room, especially when pointing straight up.

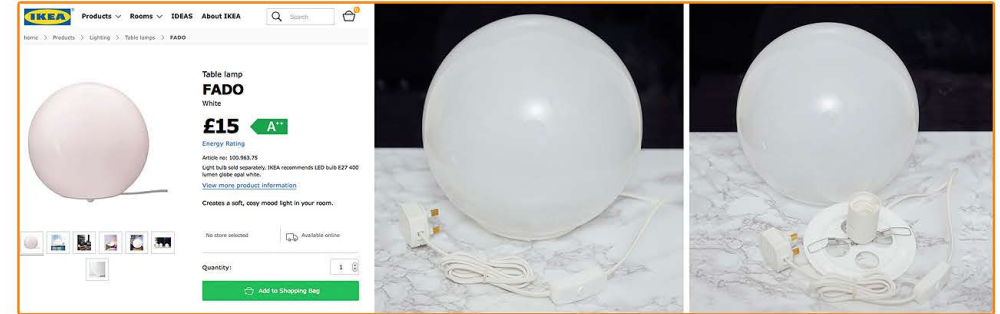
It throws light onto the model, onto me and all over the room that you're in. You can see why this type of modifier is not often used because as photographers we crave absolute control of the light and this diffused globe is not giving us any control whatsoever.

But we can use this one very fundamental flaw of globe modifiers to our advantage if we're smart?



What Do I Need?

Globe - The globe itself is a simple desk lamp that I bought from IKEA and it's about 25cm in diameter. I then just removed all the wiring and bulb from the inside and it was ready to use in my photoshoot.



The globe I used was the FADO Lamp from IKEA

Attachment - Once that was done, I simply mounted it to an old speedring with gaffer tape. A speedring is the part of a softbox that attaches it to your light. Imagine if you removed all of the struts from a softbox, you'd be left with the speedring. You can either temporarily dismantle your softbox for the speedring for this setup, or just use a spare one so that you don't have to keep re-taping the globe on each time. - Speedrings are also really cheap depending on the strobe brand you use so it might be worth picking up an extra one anyway.



First Setup: Direct-Light

Now that we have our light ready to go, let's take a shot of the model with the globe pointed directly towards her and see what the results look like. Here's a diagram of the setup I used below.



A pretty straight forward setup. Point the globe at the subject and take a shot.

Take a look at the resulting images from this direct light setup.



So you guys can see for yourself, although there is nothing wrong with these shots, there is still a lot of shadowing going on. Not only on the model, but also the background as well.

In fact, you may actually like this look as it provides very clean and directional lighting that is still flattering due to its diffused softness.

If you're happy with this, you're done and you can X-out of here now...

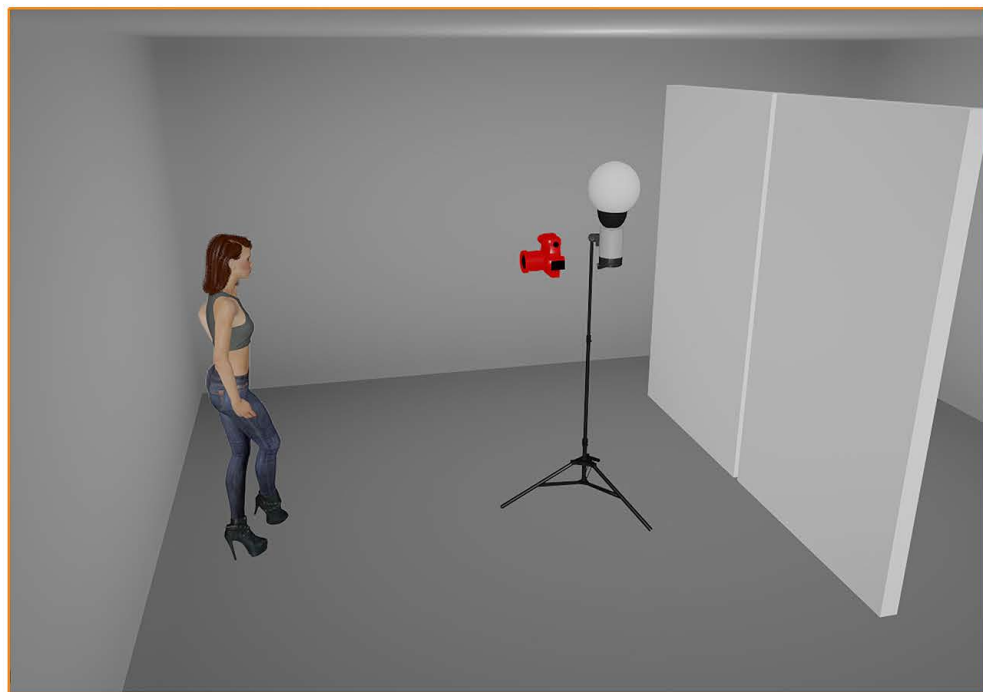
But if you'd like to see a far more beautifying look without the need for any additional lights, read on.



Second Setup: Diffused-Light

Like I said earlier, the real beauty of this setup is, *use its greatest flaw as its greatest strength*. I mentioned that this diffused globe throws light absolutely everywhere, including onto the model, you the photographer as well as all over the room that you're in. So here is the trick. By throwing up a couple of big white poly-boards behind you, (or a big white sheet like I did), you're effectively creating two lights. One light is the small globe that is a single point of light in front of the model, and the second light is now that big white sheet behind you.

Take a look at the lighting setup below and then I'll go on to explain why and how this works so well.



In the diffused look we have white boards behind the camera and the globe pointing straight up.

Here's some of the images from this diffused-light setup.



Look at the strong edge of the shadows yet filled with plenty of soft light. Look at how this setup still creates highlights, as can be seen on the legs, and look at how there are highlights and shadows on the arms in the three quarter length shot.

All of this results in a very flattering light because it cast shadows to create shape but those shadows are also incredibly soft.

A closer look...



The above image is from setup 1 - direct light



The above image is from setup 2 - diffused light

I'm not a fan of basic white-light, but...

As those of you who've followed my work for a while will know, I rarely shoot this type of bright white imagery, but even I have to admit that the light from this setup is absolutely beautiful!

Plus this is just ONE light in a small room! This setup could really be used anywhere. Also, this setup only gets better the smaller the room you're in and that includes home studios as long as the walls are white or at least close to white.

-White Poly-board Substitute

I mentioned in the description of this setup that you could use white poly-boards to bounce the light if you're in a studio. These are just large sheets of 2 x 1 metre polystyrene that can be positioned around the studio to either block or bounce light.

Most of us don't have access to them all the time or we simply can't use them in a home-studio, but a large white reflector or even a big white sheet is just as good.



If you don't have huge board of white polystyrene hanging around, then a large white reflector is a great alternative. Simply affix a clamp to the top of a light-stand and then hang the reflector off of that.



Failing all of that, you can simply hang a large white sheet up instead. Here I'm hanging it from a crossbar on top of a light-stand.

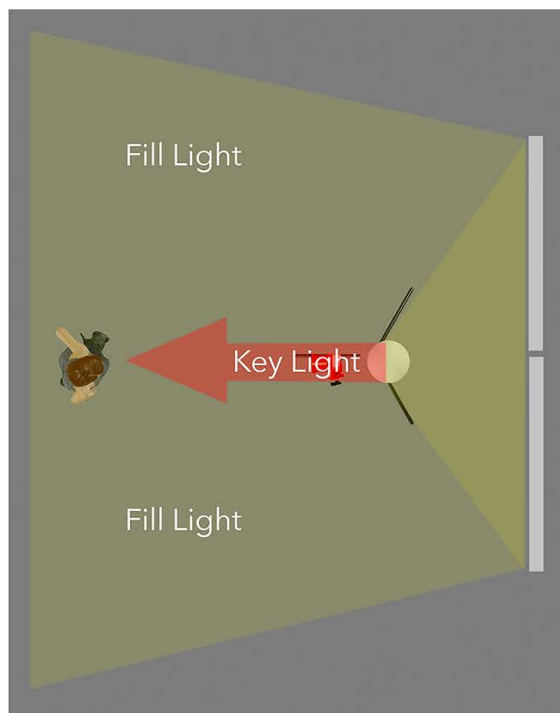
Two Lights in One

So what on earth is going on here? How can we have defined shadows from a key light, as well as a fill light.... but only be using ONE light?

Here's what's actually happening in the setup. Light from the globe facing the model goes straight to her like any key light to create a strong directional shadow. The resulting look of this is just like the original shots at the top of this article where the globe was pointed directly towards the model without any white bounce behind. The defined shadow of this key light is due to the small size of the globe in relation to the subject.

But with the globe now pointing up, the globe's light is also hitting the white boards/sheet behind you and bouncing back onto the model.

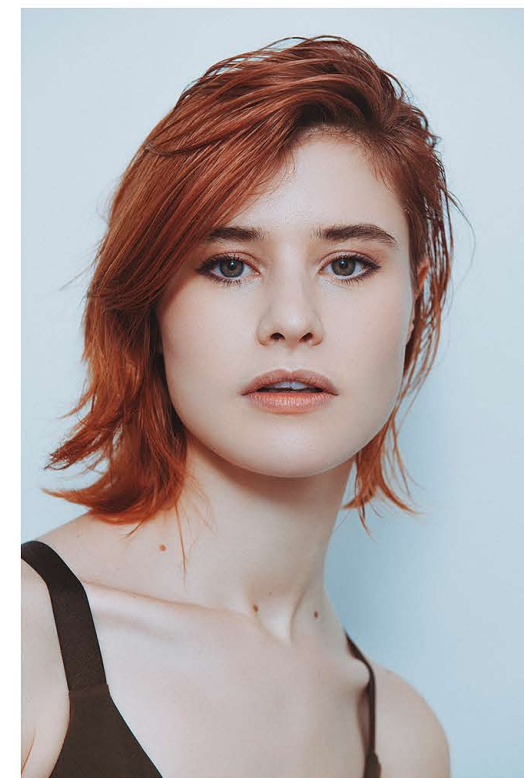
This bounced light now fills in those shadows giving the illusion of an additional fill light. This 'two-lights-in-one' effect of the bounced light has a double bonus too as that bounced light is now incredibly diffused after bouncing off of the sheet, plus it has lost some of its power due to bouncing and having to travel further. Both of these things make for the perfect fill light.



Closing Comments

I love that I finally got the chance to try out this setup as it really does produce some utterly stunning light and in such a simple way too. I know there are a thousand and one so called 'phenomenal' single light set-ups out there, but ultimately most of them either involve an expensive modifier or simply require you to move the light to a different position around the subject.

This single light setup doesn't require an expensive modifier as you can pick up one of these diffused globes very cheaply indeed, and within two minutes of tinkering you can have it on your light and ready to go. Of course you can play with moving the light around the scene if you like, but I personally preferred the globe above the camera so as to throw any shadows directly behind the model. This worked particularly well as the subject was always engaged with the camera, but if you were shooting with the model looking away from the lens, moving the globe around could create some cool looks too.



The simple DIY globe modifier can produce some absolutely stunning light and in almost any size space too.



CLASSIC BEAUTY LIGHT

Refining a Classic Beauty Lighting Setup

The title of the article may be a little opinionated regarding "refining" a classic lighting setup, but for me this little addition to an old technique improved the final image greatly.

So first off what's the "classic" setup that I'm referring to? It's simply a softbox in front, and a softbox behind technique that creates a wraparound lighting effect. It has its place in every photographers repertoire and it's incredibly quick and easy to setup. You place the model in front of a large softbox, then you set up another softbox/beauty dish/umbrella in front of them and take your shot. Simple.



This is a very simple setup to achieve as it's super quick and requires very little kit.

Like I mentioned at the start, there's nothing wrong with this setup and the images produced are perfectly usable. In fact when I worked in a commercial portrait studio we would sell a lot of these images because, to the client, they looked a little different to the 'normal' portrait. Plus the wraparound lighting is very flattering on nearly every subject. It's what we called an 'easy win'.



Here's a quick example of the aforementioned setup. Softbox behind and key light in front.

Dark Field Illumination

As I've just mentioned, there are a couple of plus points to using this setup. Sure it's easy to set up, but mainly the wraparound lighting has a 'thinning' effect on the subject. This effect is really only a by-product of the softbox being behind the model and blowing out the highlights around the model's skin though.

Any time you blow your highlights in an image, it's far from ideal in my opinion, so I wanted to look at making some of those so-called 'refinements' to this setup.

I had a beauty shoot lined up and I liked the idea of this wraparound glow surrounding the model, but I really didn't want to blow out highlights at all if possible. Consequently, I looked at modifying the basic setup with that specific goal in mind.

My first stop was to look at product lighting techniques I've used in the past. The lighting technique that I'm referring to is called "dark field illumination" and I wrote an article many years ago that goes into the details of it, but essentially the basics of the setup requires one light in front and one behind the subject like I've just shown you, but with the dark field illumination technique, you include a black sheet/board or similar between your model and the softbox behind them.

This allows for the light to still wrap around the subject, but with the added contrast that a darker background can provide. See the image opposite for the quick-and-dirty version.

Dark Field Illumination - at home



Here you can see the "dark field illumination" setup in it's simplest form. I wanted some quick and interesting looking product shots for an article so I simply used my T.V. as a replacement softbox behind the subject. I placed a black piece of card between the product and the T.V. and in two minutes I have a usable setup without the fuss of setting up my lights.

PRO TIP: The blue edging seen here is a result of my white balancing to my tungsten lounge light!

White Field Illumination

But as much as I like the dark field illumination setup, I still wanted a white background behind my model and the seemingly obvious solution in hindsight was to simply replace the black board for a white one - that's it.

Set up the dark field illumination lighting and simply replace the black board for a white one instead.

This incredibly simple, yet incredibly effective solution is a perfect combination of both lighting setups. By having that white board behind the model, I'm able to accurately control the amount of highlight on the edge of the model, but more importantly, I'm not blowing out any highlights as that white board is preventing it.

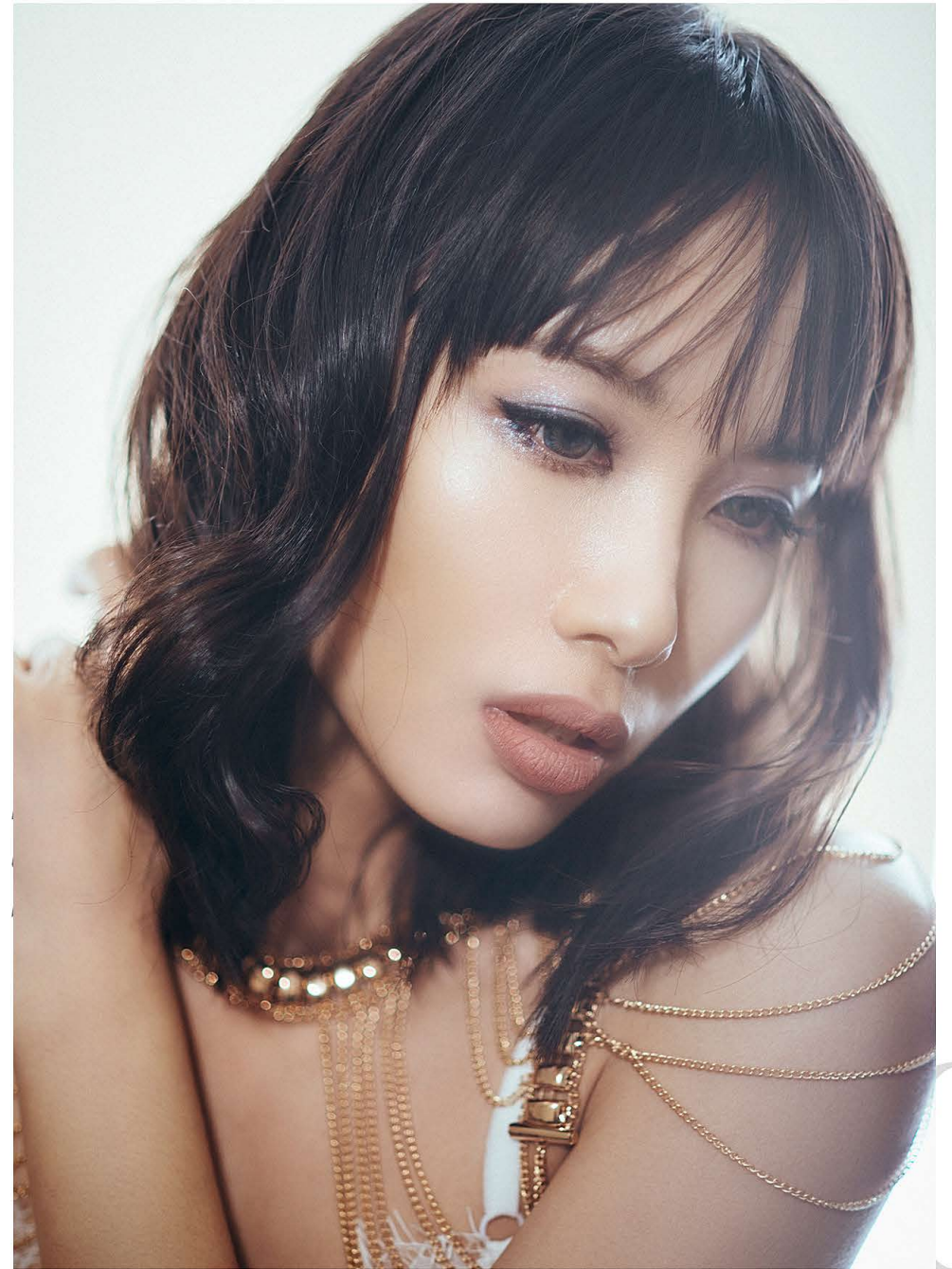


With the addition of a white board between the model and the softbox behind, we can gain a lot more control over how much of the highlights are blown on the model's skin as the white board is preventing it.



Here's a photo of my setup behind the model. I simply used a white sheet of acrylic and clamped it to the top of one of my light stands behind the model. You could use anything white but this acrylic sheet was sturdy enough to support it's own weight when clamped upright like this so made it perfect for the job.

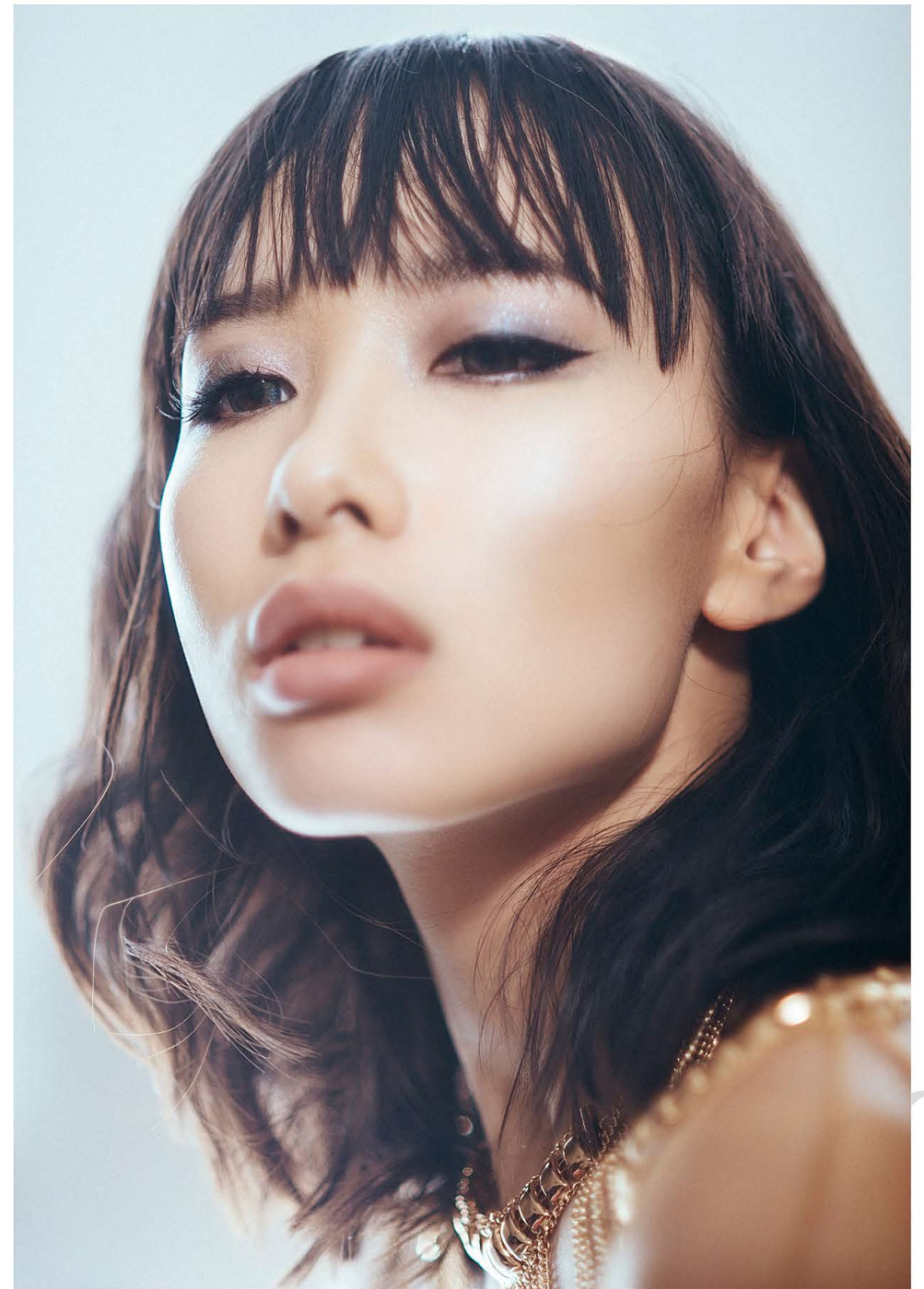
The Results...

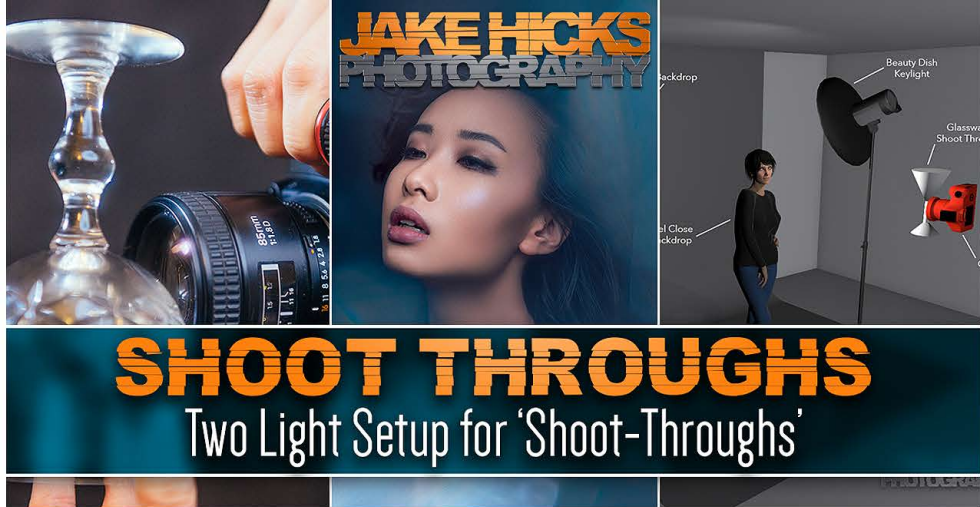


Closing thoughts...

So there you have it, I guess you could call it my 'light-field illumination' technique. As I mentioned at the start, although I claim this to be a 'refinement' of a classic lighting technique, it doesn't mean that if you don't have that white board that the shot is going to look awful. But, if I have to shoot this type of shot in the future, I know I'll be using this more refined and controlled version instead. This is simply an alternative that brings back a little more of the detail to the highlights in the shot and for me, that's most certainly worth the little extra effort this version requires.

PRO TIP: If you're going to play with this technique, remember that you'll still be aiming your lens straight at the softbox behind the model; as a result you will also start to get some flaring into the lens. I personally love this effect and that is why I wanted to use this technique to begin with. One important note on that though and that's that not all flare is created equal. Meaning that different lenses will produce completely different looks without changing anything at all in the setup. I personally tried three different lenses on this setup before I decided which one I would proceed with.



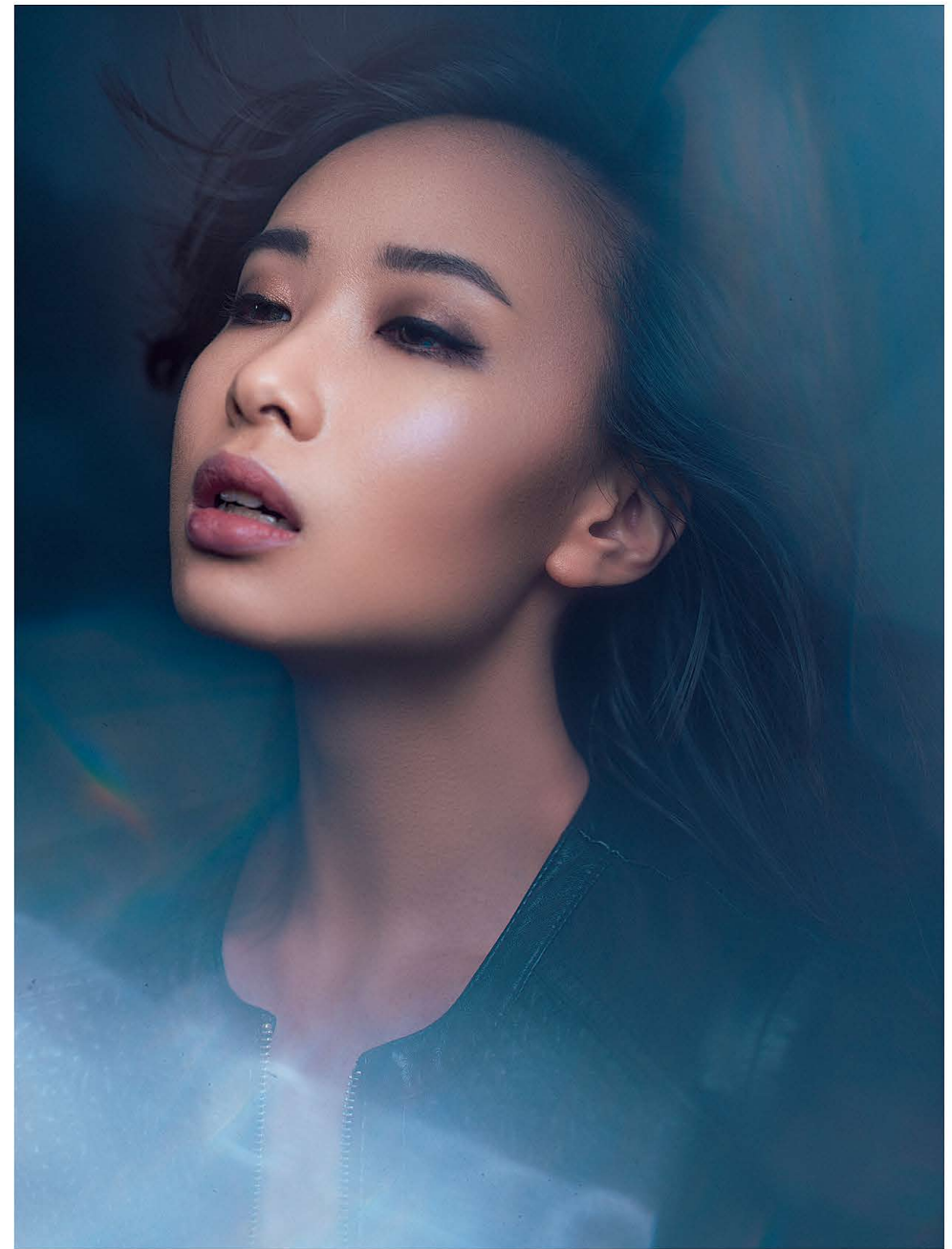


SHOOT THROUGHS

Two Light Setup for 'Shoot-Throughs'

You may well be wondering, “what on earth are ‘shoot throughs’?” Put simply, it refers to anything that you photograph through in the foreground of your shot. So for example, you could be taking a regular portrait, but in addition to the regular portrait setup, you would have a transparent object like a glass between the lens and the subject to create a visual depth to the shot.

This article aims to explain a very simple, but very effective two light setup to get the best results for this type of shot.



Adding artificial foreground elements to your shot can create visual depth that will draw your viewers in.

Get engaging results no matter the subject

Sometimes we can get stuck for ideas when it comes to creating a visually engaging portrait. It's fine if you have a model that can add drama and interest through pose and expression, but sometimes we're photographing regular people like you and I that find it hard to act natural and engaging in front of the lens. By introducing interesting elements into your frame you can add drama without relying on the subject to do so and in this very simple setup we'll be adding interest by photographing our subject whilst holding glassware in front of our camera's lens.

Shoot Checklist

- Camera
- Fast portrait lens (a lens with an aperture of at least f2.8 if possible). 50mm or 85mm will be ideal.
- 2 Flashes (speedlights or studio strobes)
- Beauty dish or small softbox
- Gridded reflector or reflector with barn doors
- Dark Backdrop/Background
- Glassware

The First Trick to Success

If we set our aperture to something wide like f2.8 and focus on the subject, the foreground element we're holding in front of our lens won't look like glasses at all, in fact they'll create a beautiful and dreamy flared effect that can not only add a sense of depth to our shot, but it can also add visual interest that will catch our viewers' attention.

The 'Shoot Through'

The setup itself is fairly simple as all you'll need is a couple of lights and a suitable background. Of course you'll also need the 'shoot through' and in this instance that's going to be just regular glasses like wine glasses or any other drinks glass.

Ideally, try to find some ornate glasses if you can as they often have intricate glass cut patterns that will catch the light perfectly for what we're after. If you don't have any at home, be sure to check some charity shops as they'll usually have plenty of these more old-fashioned style glasses and they'll be very inexpensive too.



Any glass object will work because we will be shooting at a very shallow depth of field which will make the object completely out of focus as we keep our subject in sharp focus.



Experiment...

This setup revolves around having objects in the extreme foreground of your shot. As a result, you're never quite sure what will end up looking great as your foreground object. Yes glassware can look great, but don't be afraid to play with all sorts of objects like crystals, rings, plastic wrap... the list goes on so have fun with it.

The Background

Once you have your glasses and your subject, you'll need to set up your background. Don't worry too much about what the background looks like as you'll be shooting at a very shallow depth of field so it will be completely out of focus anyway. What I would recommend though, is that a darker background will produce better results. The 'shoot-throughs' will produce highlights which are bright so they won't be as pronounced in your shot if you're using a white backdrop.

The Lighting

Model Light

This is only a two light setup so there's not too much to get wrong thankfully. Begin by setting up your key light with your beauty dish or small softbox and place it close enough to your model and background so that light spills past the model and onto the background as well. More details on this can be found in the steps below.

Sparkle Light

Once we're happy with our key light, we can now add our second light which we'll call our 'sparkle light'. This is the sparkle light as this is actually the light that will cause the highlights and sparkles to appear in the shot. It's this fundamental point that a lot of people overlook because we can't simply hold items in front of our lenses and expect them to sparkle on their own, we have to get them to catch the light and we'll do that with the addition of this light.

Position the sparkle light out of shot next to the model and point it back towards the camera so that it will create those beautiful dreamy sparkle effects in shot. Because we don't necessarily want this light to spill onto the entire set, we will have a gridded reflector or barn doors on this to control the pool of light solely onto the glasses in front of the lens.

The Steps

Step 1 - Keylight Placement

Place your keylight at about arms length away from your subject, just above their head and angled down at about 45 degrees. You can use a beauty dish if you have one or a small 60cm x 60cm softbox can also work.



Setting up your keylight first is the best place to start and I prefer a beauty dish but a small softbox will also work.

Step 2 - Adding a Second Light

This second light's job is to light the glassware only, so place it off to one side and out of shot. Aim this light back towards the camera which is where you'll be holding the glass.



The second light is going to be our 'sparkle light.'

Pro Tip: If you have space, you can also double this sparkle light up as a hair-light and place it behind the subject so that it lights both their hair and the glassware.

Step 3 - The background

The background isn't overly important in this setup because we will be shooting at a very shallow depth of field, meaning that whatever is behind the subject will be out of focus anyway. I would recommend a darker backdrop if you have one though, as this will allow for the brighter highlights of the sparkles to show up against it. If you're shooting in a home studio, then choose something simple so as not to distract from the foreground elements too much.



The background will be out of focus so it's not too important, but I would recommend a darker one if you have it.

Step 4 - Model Placement

Position the model far enough away from the lens so that you can create the depth of field effect in-camera. I opted to use an 85mm lens at f2.8 and positioned the model about 3ft/100cm from the camera and about 1-2ft/30-60cm away from the background. That way the keylight will spill onto the background as well.



Placing your model close to the background will allow us to light the background at the same time as the model with our keylight.

Step 5 - Camera Settings

We're finally about ready to begin shooting, all we have to do now is setup our camera and because we're using flash we want to set up our camera accordingly. Always aim to have your ISO as low as possible. I opted for ISO 100. Next I want to sync my shutter speed to my flashes, but if you're not sure what your camera syncs too, stick to 1/125th to be on the safe side. Lastly, set your aperture to as wide as your lens will allow, so for me that was f2.8.



Setting up your camera to work with off-camera flash.

Step 6 - Holding the glassware

This might seem obvious, but there are a few key things to bear in mind when shooting through glassware. Try to hold the camera in one hand (or use a tripod if you have one) and the glass in the other hand. Always experiment with having more or less glass in front of the lens as the effects can vary wildly from lens to lens and glass to glass.



Holding the glass close to the lens will ensure the bokeh sparkle effect. Be careful to not let the glass scratch your lens though.

Pro Tip: Be careful to not rest the glassware against your actual lens as it may mark or scratch the lens coating.



The Setup

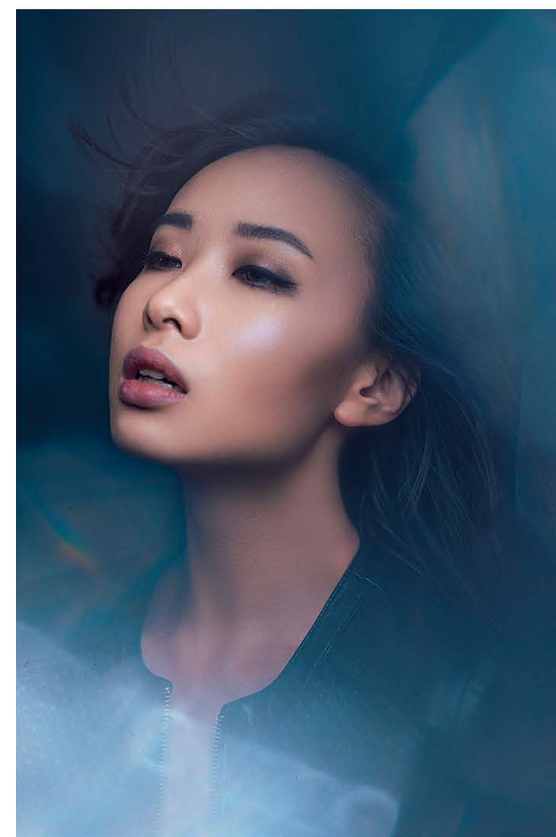
As with all of these setups in small spaces, these are ideally for headshots. Of course there's nothing stopping you from taking half body or even three quarter length body shots, but be aware that the foreground bokeh effect of the shoot-through really shines (literally) when you're on a slightly longer lens and zoomed in on a head shot. I think this works particularly well as the foreground effect starts to frame the subject in a way that draws the viewers in. But as always, don't be afraid to experiment with it.



Closing Comments

Although the basic principle of this setup is pretty simple and I'm sure the lighting is pretty standard for you, the real point of this one is the experimentation and unique results you can get from playing with foreground elements in front of your camera.

I know I mentioned it earlier, but I'll reiterate it again here, don't be afraid to try a whole host of random and bizarre objects in front of your camera.



Yes, cut glass or crystal will almost guarantee good results, but I've used all manner of objects in front of the lens to create some very unique looks.

You have to remember that these objects will be extremely out of focus, so we won't really know what they'll look like until we shoot with them. Items like metal chair legs, phone cases and even plastic bags have all produced interesting results.

If in doubt, try it.

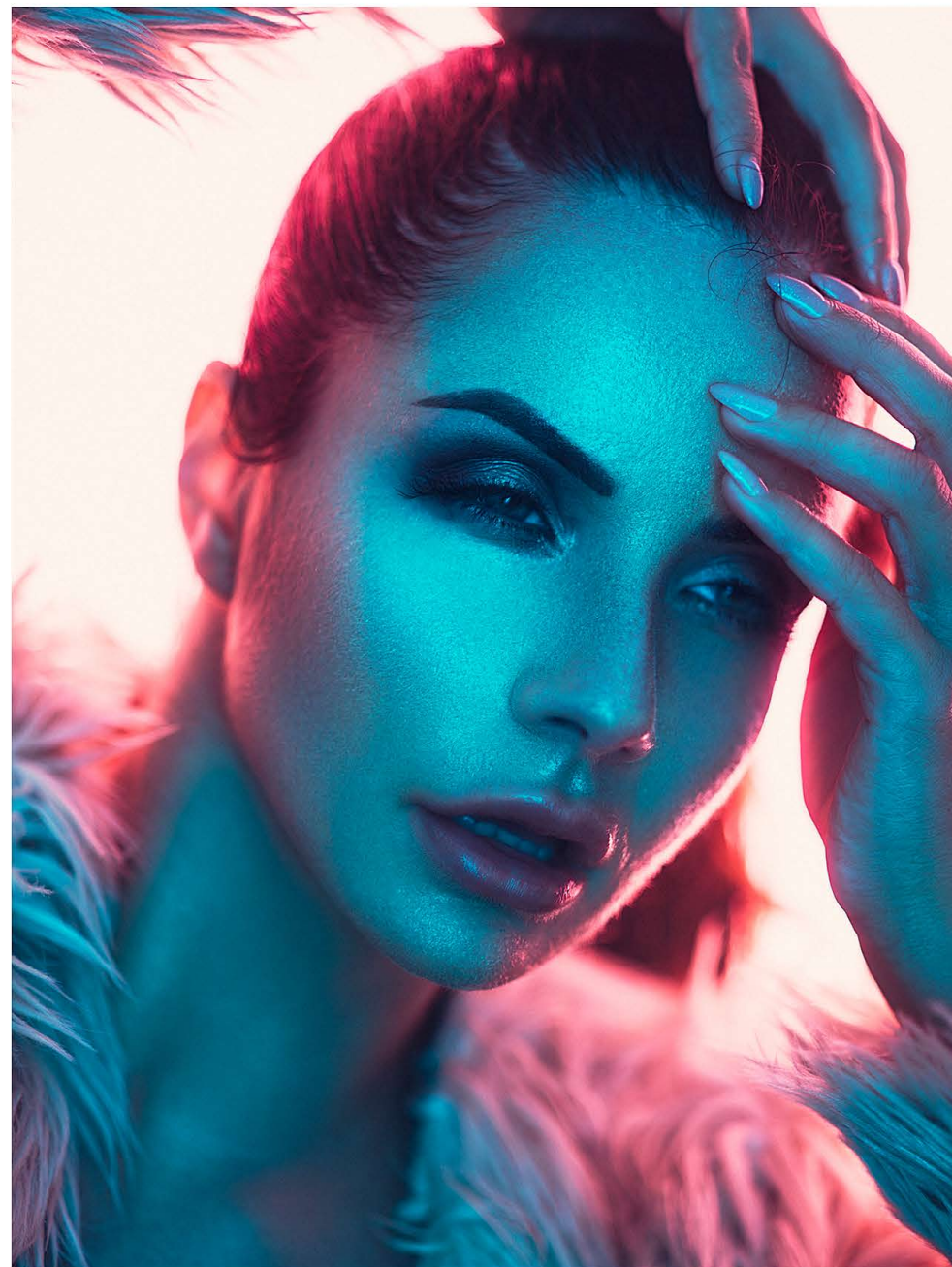
Good luck and have fun with this one.





Good news! This is actually a relatively easy JHP lighting setup to play with and it produces some pretty great looking results too.

It's easy to set up as you only need a couple of softboxes and this can be put together and shot in a very small space, no studio required. Plus it produces some great looking results because it uses coloured light. Now I know I may sound biased on that, but hear me out as we go through the setup and it should start to make more sense as to why this looks extra cool with coloured gels compared to without.



Don't Panic! This is actually a pretty simple setup to pull off. It can be achieved in almost any space and it only needs a couple of lights! So what are you waiting for?!

What you will need

Like I said this is super-simple so the list is very short:

- 2 Strobes or Speedlights
- 2 large softboxes - *By large I mean larger than shoulder width of your subject so 60cm x 90cm should be fine. I don't have two softboxes the exact same size but a similarly sized second one would be ideal.*
- Coloured Gels - *If you don't have any then, a) shame on you, and b) I sell them on my site so head there and check out the 'Coloured Gels' page for some amazing ones.*

The Setup

This look can be achieved in virtually any space so there's no need to worry about background or anything like that as we'll be using our softbox as a background.

The Backlight Softbox

Firstly setup one large softbox so that the centre of it is at shoulder height to your subject. This should leave a decent gap of light above the subjects head.



This diagram also illustrates why a large softbox is needed. The softbox will be filling the frame so as long as it's wider than your subject you should be fine.

The Front Light Softbox

Secondly we need to setup our other softbox and that should be placed about 2-3 metres/5-10 feet away facing towards the other softbox. This will create a sandwich of light with the model between them.



The diagram above illustrates how far apart the two big softboxes should be. Essentially they need to be as close together as possible whilst still leaving room for you to stand between them and shoot.

Choosing the Colours

Next we need to choose the colour to add to our lights. We'll do this via coloured gels and although you can choose whichever colours you like, I'd recommend starting with something simple like orange or pink behind the subject and something cool in colour like blue in front of the subject. For my setup I used the 'Teal' and 'Pink' from my Definitive Coloured Gel Pack. If you're after an even softer look, try the 'Mint' and 'Rose Pink' from my Pastels Colour pack as that will create more of a subtle look.



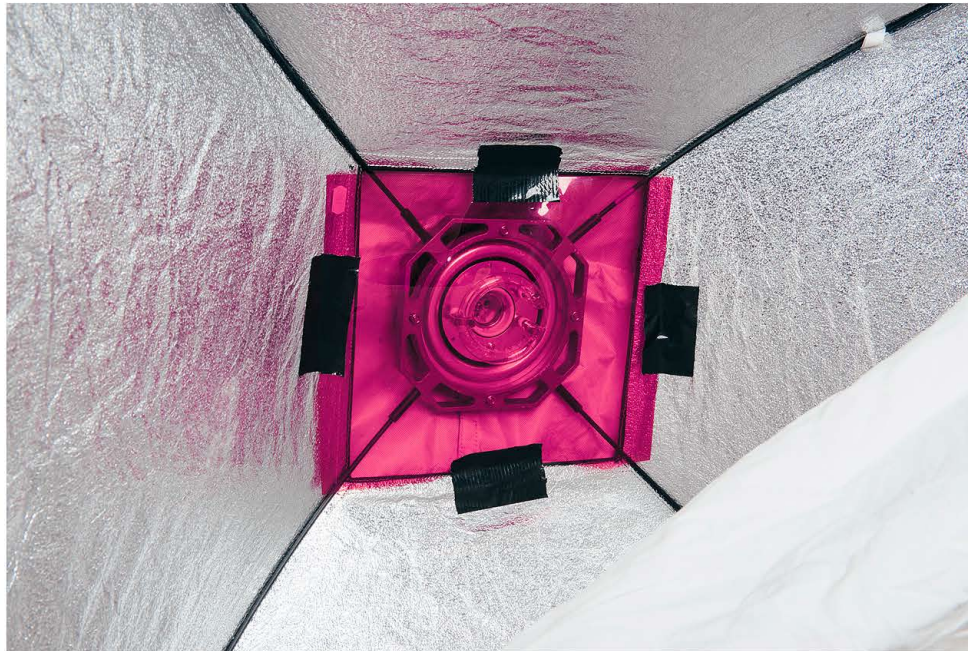
You can use any coloured gel you want, but stick to easy colour combos to begin with like blue and pink for example.

Attaching the Gels

Once you've chosen your colours it's time to get our softboxes gelled. Thankfully we don't need *humongous* sheets of gels to do this. Simply open the back (or front) of your softbox and tape the gel sheet you have over the flash tube.

If you have a tungsten modelling bulb, either turn it off or better still remove it. Failure to do so will result in melted gels for sure.

If your lights have LED modelling bulbs, you don't need to worry about the gel melting on those. Do this to both softboxes and you're done.



Attaching the gel to the inside of a softbox is fairly easy. If your flash has tungsten modelling bulbs, be sure to remove them to avoid melting the gel.

Don't Block the Light

Lastly we need to position ourselves whilst being mindful to not block the light that is directly behind us. I'm a relatively small guy so it's not too much of a worry for me, but if you feel you're blocking too much light, it's fine to bring the softbox out to one side a little whilst being sure to always keep it angled towards the subject.



If you find yourself covering too much of the light then don't be afraid to move it a little to one side, just be sure to always keep it pointed at the model.

Ready to Shoot

Once everything is finally in place it's time to start shooting.



Shooting

There are a few considerations to look out for when adjusting this setup and shooting with it:

1. Camera set up

Choose your aperture, ISO and shutter speed as you would do normally for a studio shot. It'll likely be 1/125th second at ISO 100 and if you're after a nice drop off in focus, choose an aperture like f2.8. Once we've done that we can now adjust the lighting around our camera, not the camera around the lighting.



I personally like to shoot these types of shots at a shallow depth of field. An aperture of around f2.8 is a good place to start and this ensures that the softbox behind the subject is definitely out of focus if we're focusing on our subjects eyes.

2. Light power behind the model

With only the light behind the model turned on, take a shot. We're looking for just enough power in the light so that the background behind the model goes white. Keep raising the power of that light bit by bit until it goes to white with no softbox detail present in the shot.



Not enough power

Not enough power

Perfect power

Too much power

The perfect power for the black light is to increase it right up to the point where it goes to pure white and no more.

3. Light power in front of the model

Once we're happy with that background light, do not touch it again. Now we can adjust the other light safe in the knowledge that whatever happens now, it's because of the front light not the background light. Again start off at a low power and keep taking images whilst increasing the power incrementally of that light behind you.

What we're looking for is the highlight on the front of the face but also the drop off to shadow towards the back of the face. Too much power and the shot will just look completely flat and boring so experiment with different amounts of light from that light behind you until you're happy.



Not enough power

Not enough power

Perfect power

Too much power

The perfect power for the front light is a little more arbitrary based on the colour you're using, but essentially you want just enough to light the face but not so much that it loses the shadow details.

4. Gels for the win

Once you have your lights set correctly, it should become very apparent why there's a benefit to using gels here and that's the separation between the overexposed 'white' behind our model that falls off to shadow which is the 'colour' on the face.

With only white light it would still be the same white light behind the model but there would also only be white light on the models face too. This is a clever trick and with a little care can be utilised in a lot of ways when using gels.

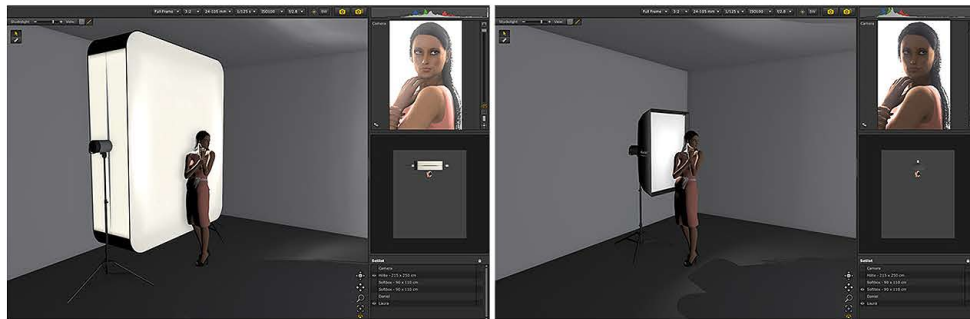
Important Considerations

It's not you, it's me.

Be very mindful of your movement whilst shooting this setup. It's rare that the photographer moving 6 inches from one side to another in a shot will affect the lighting, but it will here. That key-light is directly behind you so moving even slightly too much in front of it will block the light and reduce the light power output considerably. If you're not keen on this and you have the extra space, then by all means switch it up and try the softbox off to one side or raise it up out of the way of you getting in front of it so much.

Bigger is better though right?

The softbox size behind the subject in this setup is this size for a reason. If you start using a huge softbox behind the subject the light will start to completely envelop the subject. Eventually the light will even start to creep around the subject and begin to light the front of our models face which we definitely don't want as we're adding another colour to the front of the face and that white light would ruin it.



Alas bigger is not always better. Here you can see that if our softbox is too big, it starts to light the front of the face which is what we definitely don't want.

Flare Despair

Shooting directly into any light source can cause flare into the lens which results in a hazy, milky looking image. You may like this look, but if you're after a way to limit this effect, here's a few points to consider.

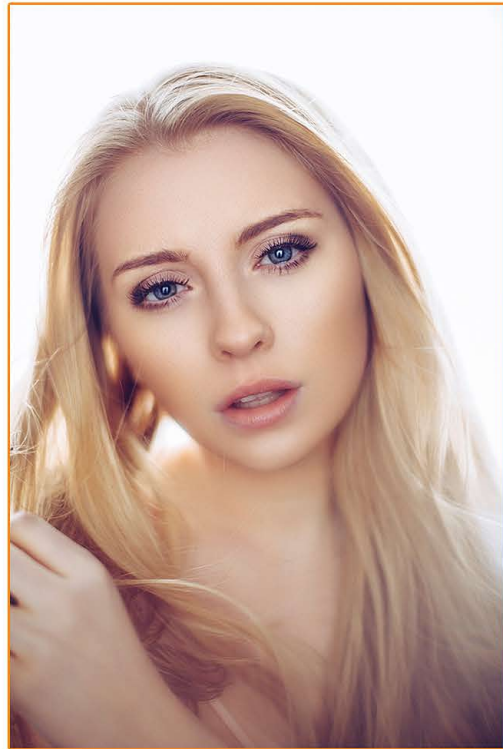
- **Shooting on prime lenses** - These lenses tend to have less glass in them and this results in less light bouncing around and thus less flare.
- **Shoot on a longer lens** - Flare is notoriously bad on wider lenses like 50mm or more. Even bringing the lens up to 58-60mm can make a big difference.
- **Shoot with good glass** - One of the reasons modern lenses are so expensive is because they are so sharp and visually clear. Pricy lenses tend to produce far less flare than inferior, cheaper models.
- **Stop down** - Sometimes shooting at wide open apertures like f2.8 will allow your lenses to gobble up masses of light, but that also means it's more likely that your lens will create flare. Stop down to f5.6, f8 or even f11 to minimise the flare effect.
- **UV Filters** - This is last time I'm going to tell you this, but please, please, please remove those UV filters on your nice lenses. If you're a natural light shooter then I get it, but in the studio please take those lens filters off. The skylight is the worst, so if you're using them, please consider removing them as these are often the biggest culprits of flare due them being the only flat piece of glass in the lens system.

I don't have to use gels though right?

Sure you can play with this setup with no gels attached, but the beauty of this setup is that you're using the 'over-exposed' background to create separation between the model. For example if we just shot with white behind the subject, the model can get lost in the brightness, whereas with colour we're using white that falls off into colour. It's one of the beauties of using gels with human skin as we can create specularly on the oils of skin that drop off into colour like we're doing in this setup.

"Uhhh Jake I have a question, what should the lighting ratio be between the two lights and where should I place my light meter to get a correct reading?"

You may have noticed that I told you **what to look for** when I was advising on light power earlier in the article. You having the ability to '**read the light**' is fundamental to you improving as a photographer and I'm very sceptical of shooters that mindlessly believe what a light meter tells them.



You don't have to use gels for this setup but the beauty of using gels is that you get far more separation between subject and background.

It is honestly like a chef using a 'taste-meter' in the kitchen to see if food tastes good or not. That chef is always going to trust what tastes good based on preference and experience over what the little machine says (*although I wont lie, I would now love a taste-meter please!*)

Light meters were from a time when we couldn't see the result immediately Don't get me wrong, light meters have their place and I always have one in my bag for emergencies, but this situation is not the place for them.

Closing Comments

So I know I mentioned at the start of this article it was a 'simple setup'but you didn't expect me to write a short article about it did you?! I know it might seem like a lot to consider, but this really is a simple setup that will likely take you less time to setup than it did to read this article. This piece went a little long as I was just trying to troubleshoot as many of the conceivable problems you might encounter along the way. Hopefully I thought of them all and you get some killer shots first try!!

I hope you give it a go and let me know if you do. I very much look forward to seeing what you come up with,

Good luck.

Thanks for Reading...

Thank you as always for taking an interest in my work and the education I put out there. I really do hope you found some of this useful, especially if you're dealing with shooting from home like many of us are during this stressful pandemic of 2020.

I thought long and hard about what setups to include in this book and although there are a huge number of more complicated setups that can be produced from a small space or home, these 5 setups all felt unique and simple enough for anyone to try.

Remember that none of these setups require huge amounts of equipment. In fact they can all be achieved with one or two lights, all achieved with basic lighting modifiers and they can all be achieved with either studio strobes or basic speedlights.

Again, I hope you found something inspirational in here and I certainly wish you luck if you're trying these setups out yourself.

To those of you enduring the 2020 global pandemic right now, you have my respect for staying positive and wanting to learn new skills in this uncertain time.

Good luck, hang in there and stay creative.



Stay up to date...

Be sure to be among the first to hear about the release of any of my new books by signing up to my newsletter. Not only do I send you a months worth of my tips and techniques articles every few weeks, but you'll also get exclusive deals and discounts on my latest workshops and products.

Head to jakehicksphotography.com and sign up via my [Newsletter](#) page.



I am very pleased to announce that my mentoring and one-2-one sessions are now available to everyone online.

Be sure to check jakehicksphotography.com/mentoring for more info

Option 1: Image Critique

-With this Image Critique option you'll receive:

- A 90 minute call to critique and offer feedback and actions on your work.
- A series of targeted actions after the call specific to your goals.
- A copy of all lighting diagrams, post-pro tips & notes from the call.
- Any relevant screenshots and links that were discussed during the call.



Option 2: Online Workshop

-With this online-workshop option you will receive:

- A 90-120 minute call covering everything about your chosen workshop.
- My detailed PDF of notes including lighting diagrams and kit lists.
- All relevant Lightroom presets.



Option 3: Personalised Retouching

-With the personalised Retouching option you'll receive:

- A 2 hour call of me retouching your files.
- All the layered PSD files of your shots that I worked on during the call.
- A video recording of the retouching session for you to re-watch.





Definitive Colour Pack

The Definitive Colour Pack contains all of the core colours needed to get you shooting in any situation that requires maximum saturation in your images. Each pack contains 12 gels including duplicates of the core gels that I use to achieve symmetrical lighting like the pinks, blues and oranges. Try combining the vivid orange & rich teal gels for a vibrant complimentary coloured look.

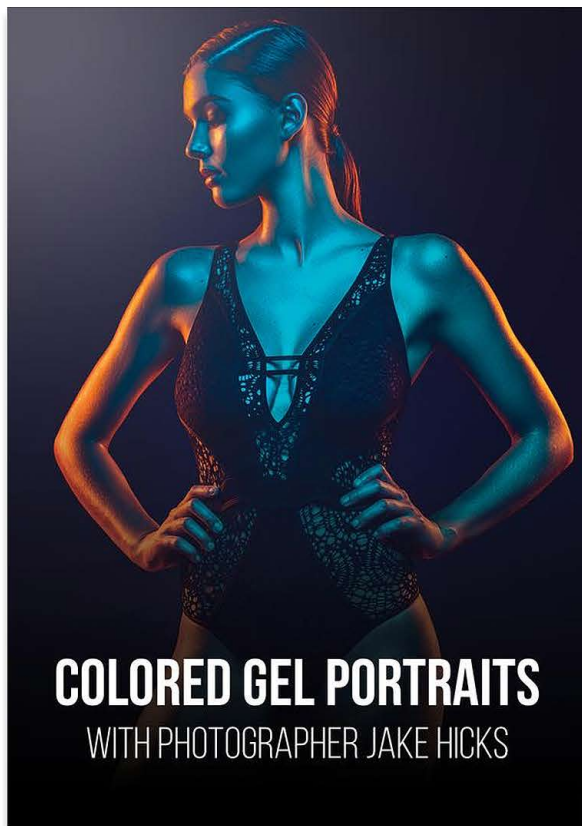
Pastels Colour Pack

The Pastels Colour Pack contains the subtler tones needed to achieve a softer coloured look. This pack is a perfect addition to the Definitive Colour Pack or as a strong set of colours in its own right. These gels will work on their own or together to create strong visual synergy in line with colour theory. Try the 'Powder Blue', 'Rose Pink' and 'Peach gels for a Triadic colour look.

Utility Gel Pack

The Utility Gel Pack contains 'Neutral Density Gels' to reduce the power of your strobes and thereby enabling wider aperture shots with flash photography. 'Diffusion Gels' are also included to reduce the harshness of hard-light modifiers, plus this pack contains a variety of colour correction gels including 'Colour Temperature Blue' and 'Colour Temperature Orange' gels.





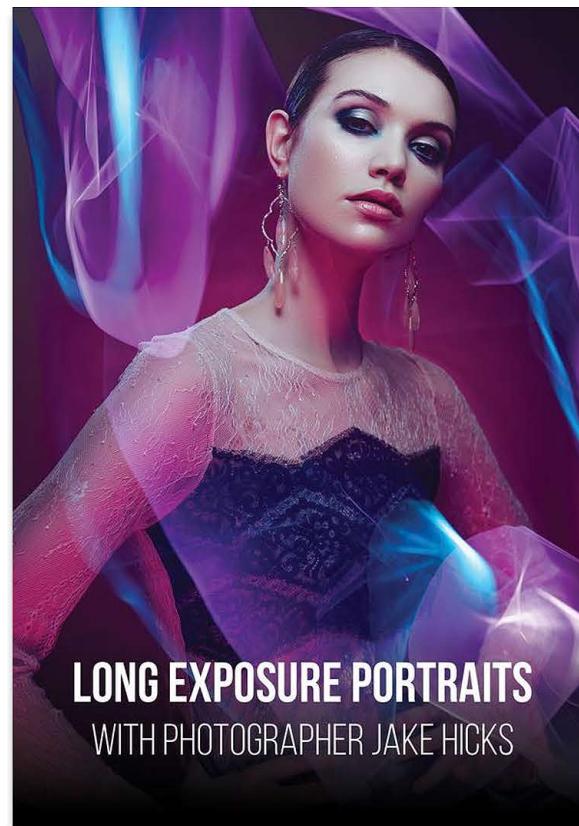
Coloured Gel Portraits

Colour gels are a great way to unlock the mysteries of white light. When you master lighting with colour gels you are actually mastering white light photography. This tutorial shows how to introduce colour gels to existing setups.

This colour gel tutorial covers everything from fundamental concepts to the most advanced lighting setups. You will learn how to rely more on technique and less on post-production.

What's included...

- 84 Videos - Over 20 hours
- Photoshoot Included
- Retouching Included
- Business Strategies
- Raw Files Included
- English Subtitles
- HD Quality



Long Exposure Portraits

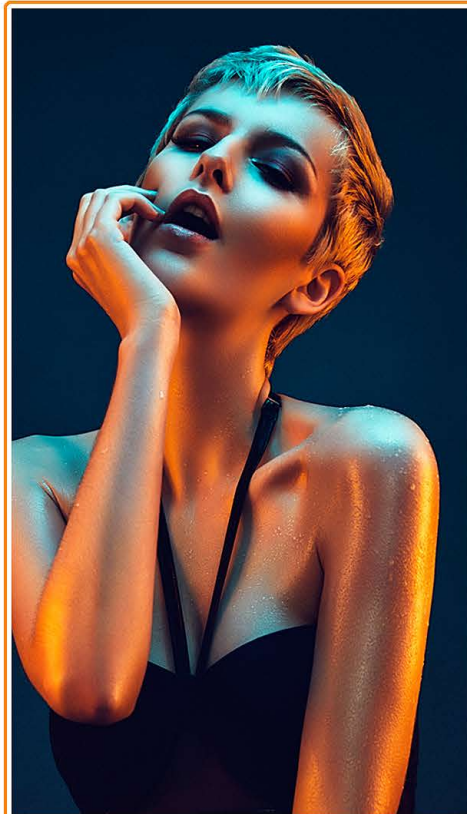
Combining ambient light with studio strobes, Jake introduces four unique methods of creating long exposure photography portraits while capturing unbelievable practical effects in-camera. This tutorial was designed to teach you not just the technical aspects of long exposure photography but how to be truly creative in the studio and experiment in ways that will set your portrait work apart from the rest.

What's included...

- 59 Videos
- Over 6 hours
- Photoshoot Included
- Retouching Included
- Raw Files Included
- English Subtitles
- HD Quality



**GELLED
LIGHTING
WORKSHOP**



**POST PRO
WORKFLOW
WORKSHOP**

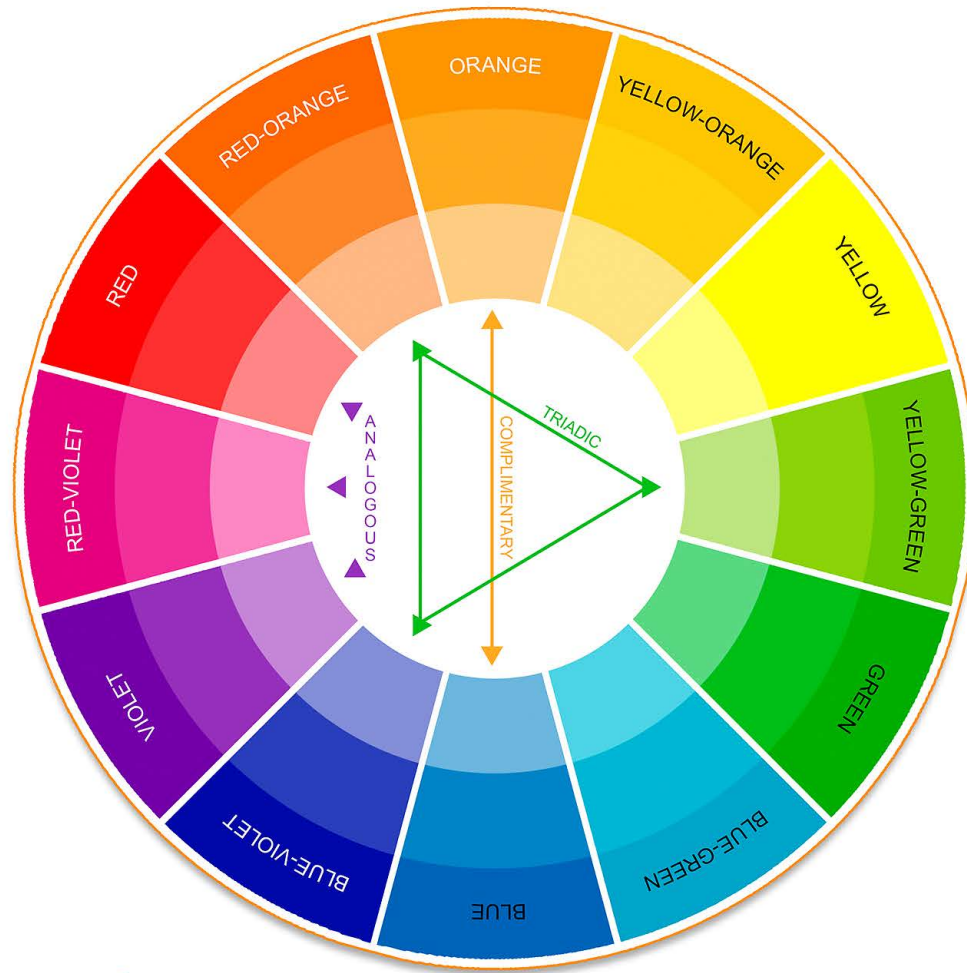


**COLOUR AND
EXPOSURE
WORKSHOP**



**CREATIVELY
SIMPLE
LIGHTING
WORKSHOP**





The Humble Colour Wheel

The colour wheel has been around since Isaac Newton laid out colours in a natural progression around a disc in 1706 and its the universal standard for displaying colours which we now refer to as a colour wheel. A statement like that is usually followed by saying 'look at how far we've developed it since then', but that simply isn't true. In fact it literally hasn't changed at all, colour is a representation of lights wavelengths perceived by our eyes, it's physics and as such hasn't changed and nor is it likely to. Although colour and its relationship to one another hasn't changed over the years we still find it tricky to remember all of the combinations that work well together. The reasons for why certain colour combinations work is beyond the scope of this mini article but the purpose is to highlight the importance of a colour theorists best friend, the humble colour wheel.



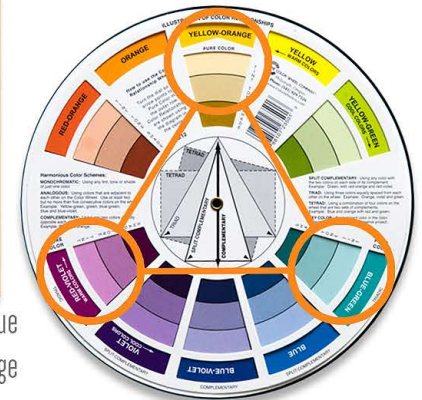
Complimentary Colours

These are the two colours that are opposite one another on the colour wheel. Popular colour combos to try are green and red, yellow and purple and my personal favourite, orange and blue.



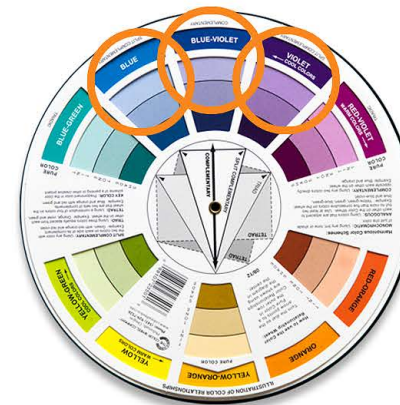
Triadic Colours

This colour combination requires three colours that appear at the three corners of a triangle laid out on the colour wheel. The most obvious and most popular triadic colour combo is the three primary colours, red, blue and yellow. Other colour combos to try are green, orange and purple or one of my favourite variations blue/green, red/violet and orange/yellow.



Analogous Colours

Analogous colours requires three colours to achieve but it's relatively easy to do because the colours are side-by-side on the colour wheel. Here I'm using violet, blue/violet and blue, but you can use any three similar colours, for example sunset photos that use the reds, oranges and yellows.





THANKS SO MUCH FOR READING

I wish you luck with your photographic journey
and you know where I am if you want to learn more

Jake Hicks

www.jakehicksphotography.com