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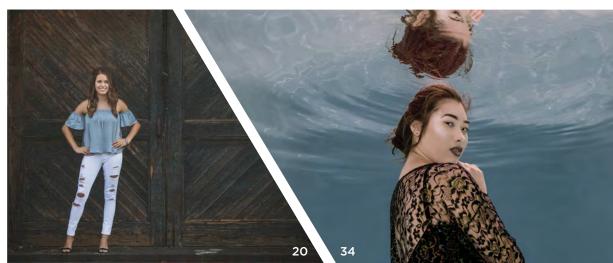
me to focus on shooting and the experience I provide for my clients while 17hats handles the rest." - Sal Cincotta



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## shutter

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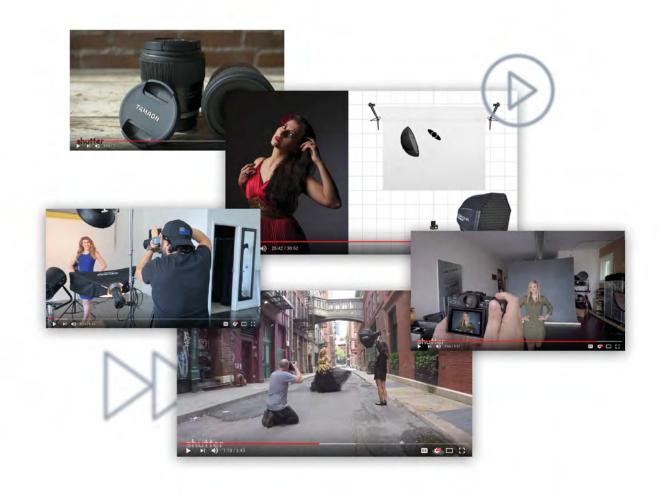
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### MISSION STATEMENT

Shutter Magazine's focus is on photography education. Our goal is to provide current, insightful and in-depth educational content for today's professional wedding and portrait photographer. Shutter uses the latest technologies to deliver information in a way that is relevant to our audience. Our experienced contributors help us create a sense of community, and have established the magazine as one of the leading photography publications in the world.

Shutter Magazine: By photographers, for photographers.

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### LAUNCH POINT

A message from the editor-in-chief







**MORE BUILDING BLOCKS FOR A STRONGER BUSINESS IN 2018** 

with Skip Cohen

I started 2018 talking about the "slow season," and the wealth of opportunities it brings to set the stage for the new year. Just because business might be a little light this time of year doesn't mean you can sit back. It's time to get busy building future business.

We've hit on your skill set, website and blog. I want to wrap up the first quarter with a mixed bag of ideas to help round out your business and set the stage to make 2018 your best year yet.

Remember, this is my monthly article for *Shutter*—no one piece can tell you everything you need to know, but here's what I'm hoping. Just like spinoffs of your favorite shows, everything I've written about has a series of extensions into other aspects of imaging and business. There's one idea after another to help you thrive, not just survive.

### **BUILDING OUT A CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

This is the biggest topic I've talked about over the last few years. Here are some of the basics about how to do your own annual calendar.

- Lay out a marketing/promotional calendar for the year ahead. Start with the major holidays that lend themselves to promotional offers. You won't be the only one out there, so your promotional offers have to be as creative as possible. Typical holidays and events with photography tie-ins are Easter, Mother's Day, Father's Day, graduation, back-to-school, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas and Hanukah. You can also create a few of your own. Leading children's photographer Vicki Taufer has put together an entire year of themed events.
- · Make your promotions unique. Call your lab for ideas for new products. Check out Photodex for slideshow ideas and ways to make your presentations more professional. Contact Marathon Press for direct mail ideas, postcards and designs.
- Look for partners with whom you can cross-promote like florists, restaurants and travel agencies. Stop thinking you have to do everything alone when partnerships help you decrease your costs and create new ambassadors for your business.
- Keep your promotions easy to understand and give them value.
- Plan for one big promotion during each quarter with secondary events happening on either side.



## People don't share

## experiences that are 'fine.'

### **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

Years ago I heard Jay Conrad Levinson speak. He's best known as the "father of guerrilla marketing." In fact, he coined the expression. In his Top 100 list of things guerrilla marketers should do is community involvement.

Why? Because people like buying products and services from companies they perceive as giving back. It's pretty simple: You're looking for the community to be good to you, so you'd better make sure you're good to the community.

Now, here's the fun part. It doesn't always matter if there's a camera involved or not.

- Get involved in schools. Starting with photo-centric activities like the yearbook, camera clubs and newsletters, you've got the expertise to help. Then there are events having little to do with photography but just need adult support. They can be as simple as working the refreshment stand at Friday night games.
- Find a nonprofit in your community to support.
- Offer to photograph fundraisers.
- Have a community calendar of events on your blog, but go one step further and post about upcoming events you're attending. Every event has at least three types of posts: the announcement with information about the event; photographs, videos or, even better, slideshows during the event; and social media sharing of images of people in the community after the event.
- Teach a photography class. Virtually all of you are qualified to teach an introductory class on photography, and no community is too small. There's also an opportunity with youth groups or your church to start a campaign to "beautify the community" by raising the bar on the quality of pictures being taken during the year.

### SET THE STANDARD FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE

Whether you're completely alone, have just one assistant or a small staff, you need to give the perception your customer service department is second to none. It's not something that happens overnight—just like your artistic skill set, it takes time to perfect.

Start by brainstorming and listing everything you think might go wrong working with any client. Then strategize on those events where you can influence a better outcome—even if the cause isn't your fault. Then, build a system that includes the following:

- Answer emails from clients and potential customers quickly.
- Return phone calls promptly.
- Take a "buck-stops-here" approach with every problem and do your best to resolve challenges as quickly as possible.
- Give your assistant or staff the authority to resolve problems quickly. No consumer likes being told by whomever they just poured their heart out to that they can't help them.
- You've got two ears and one mouth—so listen twice as much as you talk.

There's a great resource: Check out Shep Hyken at Hyken.com. Shep is a leader in customer service, a *New York Times* best-selling author, a podcast host and publisher of a great little newsletter that's always filled with great content for business owners.

We recently had him as a guest on the *Mind Your Own Business* podcast, and he made one of the greatest statements I've ever heard about customer service: He referred to "fine" as "the F-bomb of business."

Let's say you ask a customer how they like their album or portrait, and they say, "It was fine." A few of you would be elated, at least until you thought about all the things they could have said. "Fine" is horrible and means average, or it was all they needed, you met their minimum expectations—no other adjectives, nothing about the experience or the appreciation they have for their photographer or the results.

We're a word-of-mouth industry and people don't share experiences that are "fine." There's nothing to celebrate when you get a "fine." Check out Shep's website for ideas on how to avoid "fines" and deliver results that put a smile on your clients.

### **COSTS, PRICING, PROFIT**

Start reviewing your pricing for the new year. As Sal Cincotta has often said, the quickest way to screw up your business is to price yourself too low.

Sal and Lori Nordstrom both wrote books on the topic. I have a Lynda.com episode on the topic. Bryan Caporicci has written one of the best blog posts out there, complete with a formula.

There is a lot of help available, but if you're eating macaroni and cheese every night, stop thinking things are going to get better just by getting more business. It's not how much you make but how much you keep—and if you don't understand all your costs, you'll never learn to appreciate and build profits.

It has to start by understanding all the costs of doing business. Here's a short list of a few things so many of you forget:

- If you work out of your home, you can take a deduction for your home office. Talk to your accountant about what percentage of your rent/mortgage, upkeep, utilities and insurance you can deduct.
- So many of you have the wrong insurance. Your homeowner's policy won't cover gear that's stolen from your home.
- Just because you used the family car for business travel doesn't mean it's free. Keep track of its usage and include it in your costs of business. Again, your accountant can help you determine how much you can deduct.
- Phone and Internet.
- Travel, entertainment and expenses related to attending workshops and conventions.
- Service of your gear, computer, printers—everything it takes to run your business.
- Outside services from UPS, FedEx, your lab, frame company and other vendors.

The list goes on and on, but unless you know your bottom-line costs for the year, you'll never get to profitability.



The next challenge is figuring out your pricing, which I've written about in the past—so wander into the Shutter archives and check out my article in the May 2016 issue, starting on page 190.

I've shared this piece of wisdom before from my good buddy Denis Reggie, who for years has reminded new photographers, "Don't price your products based on what you can afford. It was years before I could afford myself."

The slow season is a myth because if you do the things you should be doing to build a stronger business, there should be no downtime, except when you need to step away from the business and simply take a break.

Working the hardest you've ever worked in your life is okay only if you recognize when you need to play harder too. Don't forget to schedule time to recharge your battery when you're laying out the calendar for 2018.

And, if you need help, you always know where to find me.





Skip Cohen is president and founder of Marketing Essentials International, a consulting firm specializing in projects dedicated to photographic education, marketing and social media support across a variety of marketing and business platforms. He founded SkipCohenUniversity.com in January 2013. He's been actively involved in the photo industry his entire career, and previously served as president of Rangefinder/WPPI and Hasselblad USA. He has coauthored six books on photography and is involved in several popular podcasts, including Weekend Wisdom.

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We all fail. That's life. Deal with it. Going through life chasing perfection, while noble, is exhausting. I work my ass off every day trying to be better than the day before, but no matter how hard I try, I still make mistakes. I still fail.

That dreaded word, *fail*. People just can't accept it. At Cincotta & Co., I tend to be rather blunt when I talk to employees. Some have been known to crumble under the weight of my blunt approach.

I'll cut right to the chase and state quite clearly: "On this task, you are failing." You would think I called them a four-letter word and condemned their family to life in prison. Get over it! You set a goal, a target, and you missed it. You failed. I am not going to sugarcoat it and call it something it's not. You didn't almost make it. Close doesn't count. You don't almost win the Super Bowl. You win it or you lose it.

This month I'm going to be ambitious and help you figure out how to make the most of your journey through life and business. What I'm not going to do is tell you to embrace failure. Screw that. Failure sucks, but denying failure is a recipe for disaster. Failure is how we learn. Every failure brings us a step closer to success.

### What does it mean to fail?

Failure to me means that you missed a goal. Let's not overcomplicate it.

You will fail at large goals and small ones. You didn't get through all the emails you planned to? *Fail*. Forgot to do social media this week? *Fail*. Supposed to edit your client images in less than two weeks and missed it? *Fail*. Business or personal, a fail is a fail is a fail.

Fail. I hate hearing that word because I hate when I do it.











### We all fail. It's not the end of the world.

But no matter how bad a failure, tomorrow will still come. Life's not like an episode of *Lost* where if you don't press the button everyone dies. But it sure might seem that way when you're in the middle of a bout with failure.

So we know it's not the end of the world. Wrap your head around that. Drop the horrible habit of making excuses. Do, however, examine what led up to the failure. There are always reasons. Why didn't you edit your client images in less than two weeks? Life got in the way, right? Life tends to do that. Accept it but don't use it as an excuse for anything other than learning how not to make the same mistake again.

Failure is integral to growth. Once you accept this simple truth that many of us will never learn to accept, you are well on your way to improving yourself, your business, your relationships—and even the world around you.

### Embrace it. Accept it. You don't have to like it.

Now that you have embraced the simple fact that you have failed, how do you transform that failure into a learning tool? First, never accept failure as a final doom. Accept it like you accept paying taxes. It's a shitty but inescapable part of life.

This is where I see a lot of people get complacent. They start to accept it to a point where they are content with it. "Oh well, so I failed, what are you going to do?" No! Screw that. "I failed and I am pissed about it! I don't like this feeling—in fact, I hate this feeling!" That's more like it. Now what?











### Use your failure as a catapult. Storm those castles one failure at a time.

If you made it to this point, you are well ahead of many of your peers. The world has become hyper-padded. We are so sensitive, so politically correct, so feelings-first, that we never want anyone to feel failure or get an ouchy.

"You almost made it, little Johnny!"

Sorry, little Johnny—you failed! We are raising a generation of humans who can't solve simple life challenges because their entire lives have been padded, all dangers removed.

In the business world, there are winners and losers. You don't almost win a wedding contract. You don't get a second-place trophy. You either get the contract and get paid or your ass is looking for more work. You don't almost get a work promotion. You either get it or you don't. It's pretty black and white, y'all.

Once you understand this, you will realize that every failure is an opportunity to improve, but you can't improve if you don't accept that you and you alone failed and are responsible for your destiny. Businesspeople who tackle failure correctly take failure to heart. They look at it objectively and ask themselves a few questions.

Why did I fail? How can I get better? What can I change? What things were in my control? What are the next steps to ensure this doesn't happen again?



If you've made it this far, you are ready to go out there armed with the knowledge and the bruises to try again. You may very well fail again, but that's okay. You will once again figure out where you went wrong, adjust and try again. I always tell my team that mistakes are okay if we learn from them.

I also remind my team of the definition of insanity: running into the same walls every time while expecting different results. Sometimes you have to knock down a section of wall or go around it. Either way, the key to success is not to merrily embrace failure but to make it your own and use it to fine-tune yourself and your business.





Sal Cincotta is an international award-winning photographer, educator, author and the publisher of *Shutter Magazine*. Sal's success is directly tied to the education he received in business school. He graduated from Binghamton University, a Top 20 business school, and has worked for Fortune 50 companies like Procter & Gamble and Microsoft. After spending 10 years in corporate America, Sal left to pursue a career in photography and has never looked back.

salcincotta.com



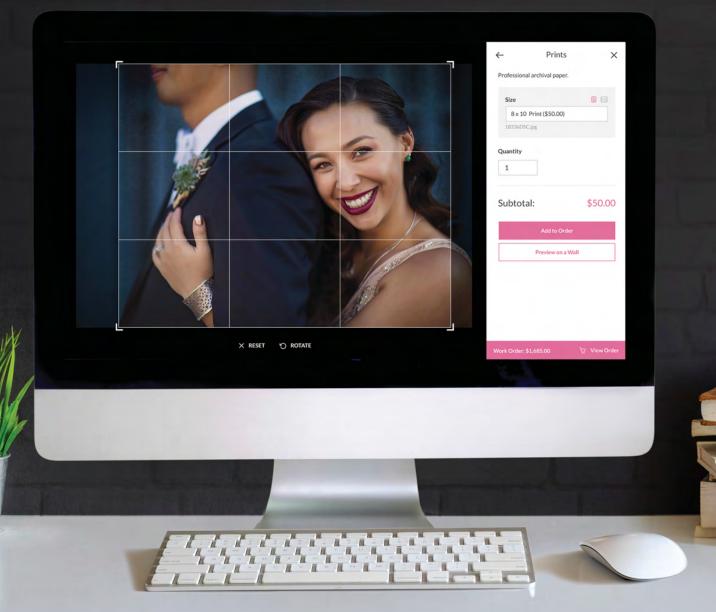






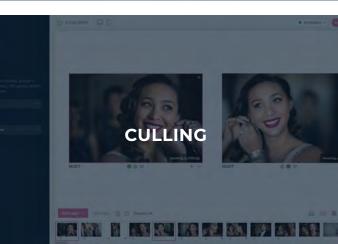
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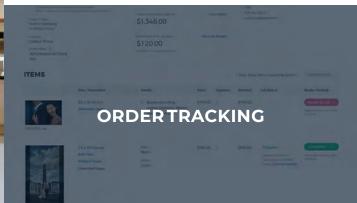
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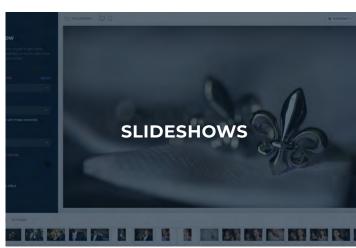




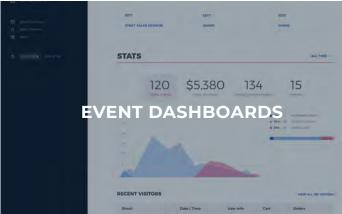












# THE **POWER**OF **PRINT**

Why does Sal Cincotta love the imagePROGRAF Pro-1000 Printer?



Sal Cincotta | Wedding & Portrait Photographer

We all start at different places in the creative process, but no matter your process, your end goal is to make a great image.

You pick the location carefully. The lighting has to be just right.

And of course, the post-production: You spend hours tweaking your image to perfection.

And then . . . you deliver a digital file to your client. Seriously?

Listen: You can't make a great image if all you do is deliver a digital file to your clients. That is absurd. You are delivering an incomplete service. There is nothing more powerful than bringing your images to life by creating a perfect print.

I love seeing my images printed. They come alive—the colors, the vibrancy, the texture, the paper, all working together to create something special.



image © Salvatore Cincotta Photograph



One of the things I love most? No switching of black inks! Matte Black and Photo Black inks have their own dedicated nozzles, which is where the no switching comes in. You can print on fine art paper then glossy paper with no worries, no changes, no waste.

Clogged heads have been a way of life for far too long. The Pro-1000 has anti-clogging technology built right in. Ink ejection conditions are precisely checked with sensors, and if a clog is detected, another nozzle automatically provides backup! Holy clog detection! It not only saves prints due to clogging—but you don't have to clean the nozzle as often.

This is a must-have for any portrait photographer. I use it in my business and my clients love the results.

From capture to print, I trust and use Canon.

The Canon imagePROGRAF Pro-1000 is my go-to printer. It sits right next to my desk. It's easy to set up and use, and the colors and details match the image I created with incredible accuracy.

With my style of photography, it's all about shadow detail. I need complete control to ensure the final print matches my vision. The Pro-1000 has 11 color inks and Chroma Optimizer ink, producing a wide gamut of color, tone, shadow details and smooth gradations.

A great printer is useless without great paper. The Pro-1000 supports up to 17x22-inch paper, and Canon offers a smorgasbord of pro-quality paper.



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## DIVE RIGHT IN:

# UNDERWATER PORTRAITURE TIPS

with **Scott Vo** 

### **SAFETY FIRST**

The subject's safety is the main priority during your session. You will have subjects who are strong swimmers and some who are not comfortable in the water. Getting certified in BLS (Basic Life Support) is a must. It will prepare you for emergency situations and add a level of safety to your session. You should also have extra help on the shoot. You can have a person stand by with a flotation device or in the water to help position the subject. Make your subject's safety the top priority, which will help them relax before the session even starts.







### **TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK**

Assembling a group of like-minded professionals to work with you can be a challenge. Finding a talented and knowledgeable cosmetician who has experience with waterproof makeup was one of my challenges. You don't want the makeup to run in the water and end up with a photograph of the girl in *The Ring*. Communication is key. If this is a collaboration, hear out what the professional cosmetician has to say about what would look good for your vision and the subject. Always be open-minded to your team's input.

Have a few helping hands around to help you out. You will need a hand lowering equipment and outfits into the water. Jumping in with your equipment in hand can compromise the integrity of the case. Have it handed to you or have an area where you can place your equipment coming in and out of the water.

If it is a large body of water, have a few extra people with scuba equipment on standby if there are challenges with the depth. I hold my breath and come up for air between shots. It is inconvenient, but I enjoy having minimal equipment on me so I can be mobile and focus on the shot. The model comes up for air as well. This moment can be used to catch your breath and regroup.

Have a discussion with your team and subject before getting everything ready. This gets everyone on the same page, and if something was left out, someone might have additional ideas or concerns.





### UNDERSTANDING THE ENVIRONMENT

Regardless of whether you are shooting in a controlled environment like a pool or a natural body of water, you should have some understanding of what you will face down there.

Photographing in a large body of water will yield some very blue results because water absorbs the red, orange and yellow wavelengths emitted by the sun. The more water you have above you, the darker and bluer the photos will be. Bring in a strobe underwater to clear out the blue and give you a more accurate color. If you have plenty of light but you want to reduce the blue, you can do one of two simple things. You can have a magenta filter on your lens to balance out the blue or you can go into post-production and correct it there. Some cameras have an internal setting that filters out most of that blue for you as well.

Being underwater can affect the sharpness of your photos. The more water between you and your subject, the harder it is to capture sharpness. It is like looking across a field on a foggy day versus a clear day. There are a lot of water molecules between the lens and the subject. Shoot with a wide-angle lens and get closer to the subject the best you can to reduce the amount of material between the subject and lens.

Gravity is fickle in the water. There is air in your lungs, and air rises. You can always exhale and descend into the water. Try adding weights to your subject and yourself. When you let the weights sink you down, you can focus on the subject and the task at hand instead of trying to swim and take pictures at the same time. Focus on the photography and let the weights do their job.

The type of water determines buoyancy. Saltwater will make you float more easily and chlorinated water is more neutral. Find a diving weight calculator online to determine how much weight you need to sink or be neutral in the water.

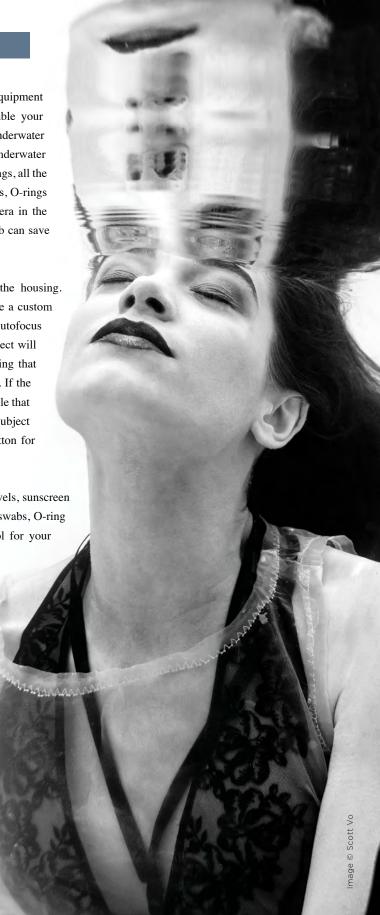
### FORTUNE FAVORS THE PREPARED

Let me just say this now: There is risk taking subjects and equipment into the water. The key is being prepared and to assemble your equipment correctly. I am not saying you need the best underwater housing and a professional mermaid to accomplish underwater photographs. From bag-style housings to magnesium housings, all the equipment should be checked and serviced. Check for leaks, O-rings that need lubrication and debris before placing your camera in the housing and into the water. A simple check in your bathtub can save you time and frustration.

Prepare your camera settings before you place it into the housing. Most cameras have a specialty menu where you can create a custom setting to switch over to if the shooting scenario changes. Autofocus settings should be set on tracking and spot focus. The subject will be moving, so use continuous focus. If you have the setting that changes how fast the auto focus changes, set it at medium. If the camera adjusts focus too fast, it might focus on a stray bubble that comes in between you and the subject. If it is too slow, the subject might not be in focus. If you have access to the back button for focusing, set it up beforehand.

Pack your bags like a day at the beach. Bring plenty of towels, sunscreen and your favorite flip-flops for the day. Pack some cotton swabs, O-ring lube, lens wipes, defogger, silica packets and a multitool for your camera and housing. Have a towel to place your equipment on and have another towel that you can wet down to cover it when you are out of the water. Keeping your equipment in direct sunlight after being in cool water can cause condensation inside your housing. Throw that wet towel over it after you come out of the water if you plan on going back in. Place some silica packets in the housing and wipe down your lens with defogger to reduce fogging or condensation.

After everything is checked, let's dive in!









### **BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER**

Start off with some breathing exercises to warm up your lungs. Ask your subject to slowly descend into the water to reduce the trapped air bubbles in the garment. While they are getting acclimated to the water, submerge the housing and take a few test shots. Depending on your location, there could be plenty of light or not so much. Meter your light. Have the subject warm up and start working toward your vision. Come up for air and discuss how that round went. Make some adjustments and go back into the water after both of you are ready.

These sessions take time and you have to be patient. There are a lot of variables. Here are a few tips and tricks that can help you capture your underwater image.

### **TIPS & TRICKS**

- Do breathing exercises leading up to your shoot or become scuba certified.
- Take your time and don't rush your subject.
- Use weights to help control buoyancy. Scuba weight belts are fantastic.
- If you want to use a flash, use optical slave mode to trigger or hard-wire. Radio signals do not travel far underwater. If you don't have a built-in flash, try a wireless trigger and keep the flash very close to the camera. You can daisy chain the flashes if you need to. Let the first flash trigger the second flash via optical slave.
- If you want to take something underwater that isn't waterproof, seal it with a food vacuum sealer. This works great for handheld flashes and light meters.
- Shoot with a wide-angle lens and reduce the distance between your subject and your lens.
- Find a cosmetician who specializes in waterproof makeup, which means less post editing and a more professional-looking result.







Figure 1

These tips also apply to film photographers (Fig. 1). Above all else, remember to have fun and be safe, and happy shooting!  $\blacksquare$ 



Fashion, beauty and lifestyle photographer Scott Vo brings unique portrait sessions to Oklahoma City. He created his photography business while studying zoology at the University of Oklahoma. Since graduating, he has taken his photography to new levels by taking over the underwater scene in landlocked Oklahoma. Scott has published works locally and internationally, and hopes to expand his photographic adventures to new destinations this year.

scottvophotography.com



## Luminar 2018

Everything you need to make perfect portraits in less time.

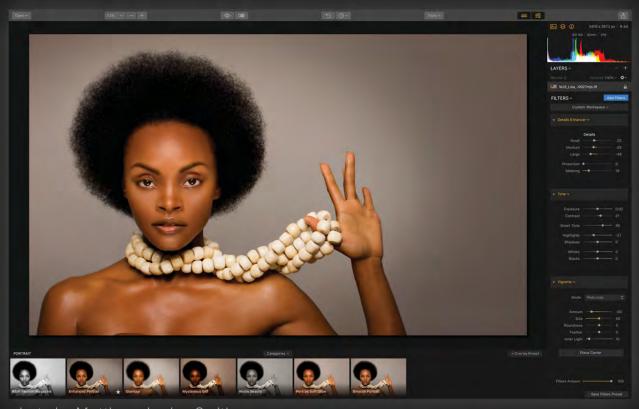


photo by Matthew Jordan Smith

SKYLUI softwa









### Why Luminar 2018?

Never heard of Skylum? That's okay. Macphun has now renamed and rebranded to become Skylum. And their new product? Luminar 2018.

These guys are looking to take over your digital workflow—and they mean business.

For both Mac and PC, this tool has something for everyone, giving you complete control over the look and feel of your images. Best of all, the interface lets you customize your entire workflow and create stunning images with little to no effort.

### The details:

- · Scalable, adaptive user interface with custom workspaces
- · Raw file conversion & nondestructive editing
- · Over 100 one-click presets
- · Over 40 image-enhancement filters
- · Stackable layers with brushes and an advanced layer masking system
- · History panel with multiple undos and exportable history for resumable editing
- · Real-time noise reduction
- · Object removal and clone & stamp (available for Mac, coming soon to PC)
- · Operates as a standalone or plug-in

Use code SHUTTERFEST to get 15% off PLUS a free upgrade to the version with a Digital Asset Manager. This is the biggest discount they've ever offered. Expires midnight on June 1.





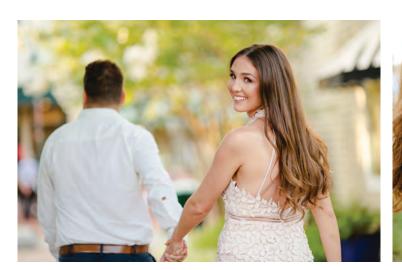
## 3 KEYS OF HIGH-END WEDDINGS with Vanessa Joy





One of the goals on the vision board of a lot of wedding photographers is the high-end wedding. Depending on where you are in the world, this can have a very different connotation. I'm in the New Jersey and New York City area, one of the most expensive regions to have a wedding, where high-end means multimillion-dollar weddings at places like Cipriani and The Plaza.

Whatever high-end means to you, you have to find a way to appeal to more luxurious clients. This isn't easy, especially if you don't run in those crowds yourself (I sure don't). But there are ways to position yourself and your brand so you get in front of those clients and make them happy when you do.









### 1. CLIENT EXPERIENCE

This is, above all, the most important part of photographing a high-end wedding. I know, you expected me to start with "here's where you get high-end leads." Guess what? There's no magic to that other than targeting your marketing and advertising toward them (which is another article in itself). The problem that most photographers face is not knowing how to give those prospects an experience that leaves the pickiest of brides begging for more.

To top it off, word-of-mouth is touted to be one of the best forms of marketing. If you want your brides talking about you, give them something to talk about. This is true regardless of where your ideal client falls on the low- to high-end wedding spectrum. It's even more true if you're aiming high. High-end brides expect a superior experience from you just as they expect a superior experience from where they bought their Porsche.

Here are some ways you can ensure you're giving a stellar experience to everyone who walks through your door.

- Give, give, give—and then give some more. Give gifts and surprises they don't expect. Don't give discounts (that's very anti-high-end). Give gifts even in your photography packages if you'd like.
- Overcompensate if something goes wrong. Things go wrong, but if you give them way more than is required to make it right, you're going to end up on top.
- If you meet them in person, act like they are customers at your high-end restaurant. Give them food and wine, hang up their coats, set the ambience—everything you'd expect when walking into a Michelin restaurant.
- Ask what they need. Always keep the lines of communication open and be one step ahead of them. Set yourself up to be able to answer questions before they ask them. Get them to open up so you know their expectations and concerns.





### 2. APPEARANCE

I talk a bit about this in my video. Don't think I'm telling you to go out and buy a \$1,000 suit, but there's a lot to be said for being relatable to your client. Since your client knows you only skin-deep, the superficial is all they have to start finding a connection with you, for now.

If you can't afford to buy some kind of statement piece that'll bring up your relatability to high-end clients, educate yourself on them. It's a trivial example, but if you don't know why those red soles are important on a bride's wedding shoes, then there's a chance they're not going to look at you like you understand what's important throughout the day.

I remember the first time I second-shot for a high-end wedding photographer in NYC. I did not understand most of the words that were coming out of the bride and wedding planner's mouths, and I'm pretty sure I embarrassed myself with the clothes I wore. Now I'm glad for experiences like this one. If you get the chance, second-shoot for other photographers' high-end weddings.

There are a lot of other ways to brand your appearance and business. Check out my free ebook, 9 Secret Ways to Brand Your Business, at Breathe Your Passion.com.

### 3. SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

Most of what I told you above comes into play once you have clients contacting you and you get a chance to meet or work with them. This tip comes before that and therefore is actually more important than the first two because it's your first impression.

Facebook, Pinterest and Instagram are your storefront, even more than your website at times. If you don't have those three social media accounts, get them. Prospective clients look at your social presence and judge your credibility and capability from them.

Here are three ways you can make sure you're putting your best foot forward online.

- Post often, at least once a day.
- Engage others by liking and commenting, and even sharing other posts.
- Have consistent visuals and voice. Instagram, in particular, is your new portfolio.



Even if you're not looking to tap into the high-end market, all of these concepts apply to the industry in general. As the world becomes smaller and consumers become more educated on how solid brands and businesses operate, the more expectant they'll be of what they experience with you.

Give yourself a leg up and start reflecting on what your business says to clients, and make positive changes along the way. You and your clients will be happy you did.





Vanessa Joy has been a professional wedding photographer in New Jersey since 2002, and an influencer in the photographic community for years. Since starting VanessaJoy.com in 2008, she has taught photographers around the globe at almost every major platform in the industry (LearnPhotoVideo.com). Vanessa has been recognized for her talent and business sense at the renowned industry events CreativeLIVE, Clickin' Moms, WPPI and ShutterFest. Her peers love her informative, open-book style of teaching.

vanessaiov.com







Before we go any further, let's establish that retouching is complex, time consuming and downright hard. True masters of retouching, like Nino Batista and Pratik Naik, take several hours, even days, to complete a single image. There are countless ways to retouch skin or enhance an eye. There are several third-party programs that can help you achieve your goal to varying levels of success. Don't let this discourage you from trying various methods and making them your own. It takes time to learn all the tricks to problem-solve every unique image you retouch, but with consistent practice and dedication, you'll soon be on your way to mastering this art form.

I began teaching myself how to retouch images with Photoshop version 4.0 (Photoshop CC 2018 is considered version 19). To this day, I still use some of the original processes and tools for retouching. In this article, I discuss the most important step in retouching, then explore the basics of retouching skin, enhancing eye color with blending modes and layer masks, and, finally, problem-solving stray hairs.

I recommend that you use the most current version of Photoshop (which is available as a monthly plan from Adobe). I also strongly advise using a pen tablet over a mouse; your art will only improve with the control a pen allows you.

### **USING THE RIGHT LANGUAGE**

One of the first and most important steps to retouching—especially if you will be representing your work to the client—is to use the right language. Being in front of the camera is a vulnerable process for any client; having all of their perceived flaws on display can be frightening. I always use words like *retouch* or *enhance* rather than *fix* or *correct* when speaking with a client. A common request you'll hear is, "Photoshop can fix that, right?"

Give credit where it is due and remind them that you are the artist who will use your skill. The tools in Photoshop will enhance the image, but you are the artist behind those tools. We take the time to make them feel comfortable in front of the camera; do the same to make them feel comfortable with the retouching process.

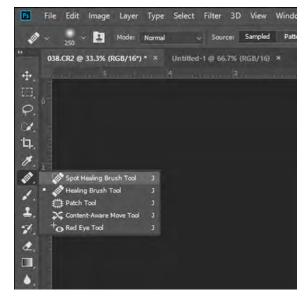
### THE GOOD OLD HEALING BRUSH

To begin our journey, we're going to retouch some challenge areas on our model's skin.



You'll notice that she has a few freckles: I strongly advise that you ask the client if they would like pigmentations like freckles, moles or other areas to be retouched or removed. If you decide for them, it could be hurtful and offensive. She has opted to have the freckles around her mouth removed from the image. The easiest way to do this is to use the Healing Brush.

To use this tool, you must select a "target area" of the image that Photoshop will use as a reference to begin transferring the data. To do this, move your cursor to an area that is near the section you want to retouch, hold down the Alt or Option key, and left-click once. Now with your target area in place, you can begin to use the tool to retouch.



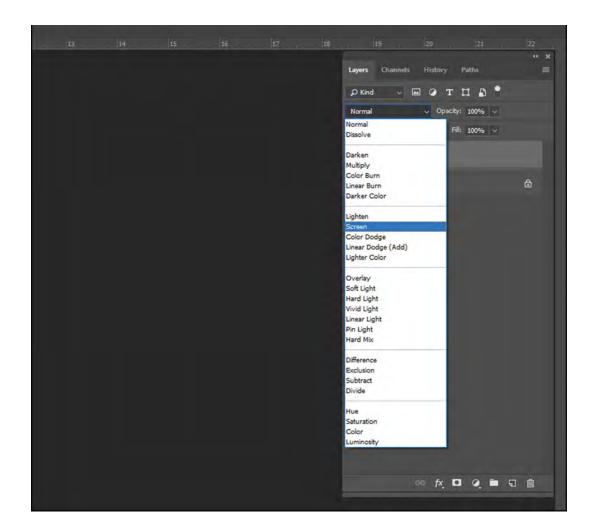
The best use of the tool is to keep the target area in the same region as the skin you are retouching. If you move the target area to a section of skin that doesn't have a lot of detail (it's out of focus or in an area of shadow), Photoshop will transfer that blurry data to the sharp area you are retouching. This creates a visual disparagement that will not look very pleasing. The key is to make the texture of skin you are retouching resemble the texture of your target area. Stay in the same zone, make small movements with your brush and go over the entire surface of the skin looking for challenge areas to retouch.

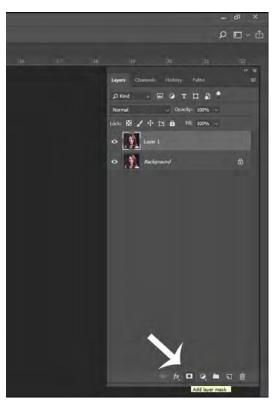
### **ENHANCING EYE COLOR**

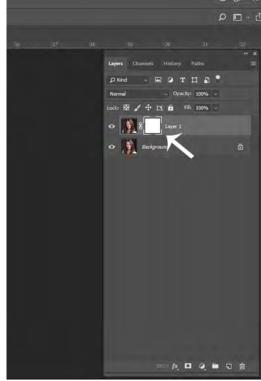
Eyes seem to be the first area that gets overly retouched and can be the cause for some very unrealistic-looking images. We've all seen an image where the white of the eyes has been brightened to the point that the client no longer looks human. Remember that small, subtle adjustments are the key to creating a realistic final result with Photoshop.

When you begin to retouch the eyes, zoom into your document so that both eyes are visible at the same time on the screen. This allows you to see how your efforts are affecting both of the eyes and you can adjust accordingly. Let's start with the iris and use one of the oldest tricks in the retouching book to brighten them. (Don't worry about that stray hair over her left eye—we'll get to that in a moment.) Select your Background layer in the Layers window and duplicate it by hitting the hot-key combination of Control or Command and the letter J. This makes a new layer entitled "Layer 1."

Now go to the Layer Blending Modes dropdown menu and select the Screen option.



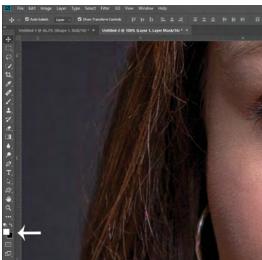




To change this layer mask to "hide all," click on the mask itself and hit the hot-key combo of Control + Command + I. Now the mask will be filled with black and your document should be back to normal.

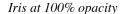
Select your brush tool by hitting B for brush. Make sure you are using a soft brush. To change the hardness of your brush, right-click anywhere on the document to bring up the Brush Preset window and move the hardness slider to 0%. Now change your foreground color to white, and, with the black layer mask selected, begin to paint white around the iris.





To get the best effect, paint only the lower half of the iris, leaving the very top center of the iris unaffected. As you paint, you are revealing the effect of Layer 1 at 100% opacity. This will be too much and make the eyes look otherworldly. To reduce this effect, simply lower the opacity of Layer 1 itself to 50% and continue to reduce the opacity until you find the right brightness blend for your image.







Iris at 50% opacity



White of eye at 100% opacity



White of eye at 40% opacity

We can also enhance the dark outer ring of the iris (called the limbal ring) with this process with one minor change. Instead of using the layer blending mode of Screen, switch to Multiply. This will make the image much darker, and when you selectively paint in this effect on your layer mask, you will reveal the darker tone of the limbal ring. As with the other steps, reduce the opacity of this layer to 50% and experiment with further reduction.



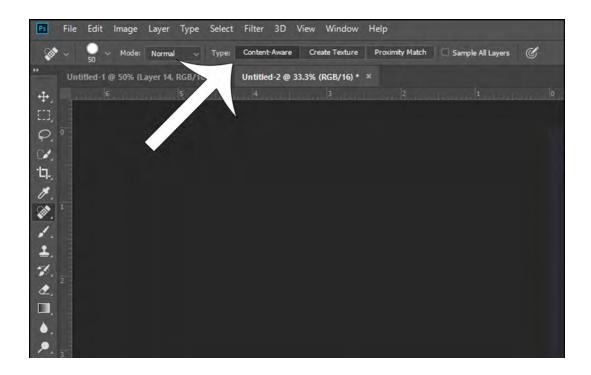
Limbal ring at 100% opacity



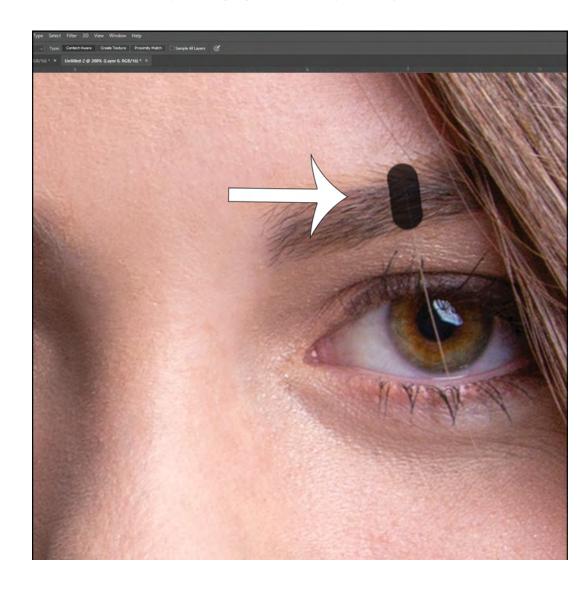
Limbal ring at 50% opacity

Consider further enhancements to the eye by sharpening the iris itself using a Vibrance adjustment layer to add more tone or even change the color with a Hue Saturation adjustment layer. Always make sure you are working on a duplicate layer or an adjustment layer so you can lower the opacity of these effects and achieve a subtle, natural look.

Return to your Spot Healing Brush by right-clicking the icon in the Tools palette and selecting Spot Healing. Now make sure that Content Aware is selected as the sampling option.



The tool functions best when you take small sections of your image and adjust them with a single small brush stroke. In this case of the stray hair, I'm going to start with the eyebrow and just make a brush stroke in that area.



Photoshop will sample the area of her eyebrow around my brush stroke and then paint in that data. I'll then move to the area of skin just below the eyebrow and make a brush stroke, but I will not pass into the eye with this stroke. I'm taking it in small sections to let Photoshop make the minor adjustments. I will repeat the process, taking each section of the iris, the pupil and so forth until the hair has been completely removed.





Before After

If your results look bizarre, go a step or two backward in your history and repeat the process and adjust your brush stroke. It's inevitable that this process won't work on all challenges you may face in an image. That is why as a retouch artist, you must learn alternative ways of adjusting elements of your image and practice them consistently.

### FINAL THOUGHTS

Retouching your images connects you to your own artwork and brand as an artist. As you begin to explore more complex procedures of retouching, your artistic style will begin to take shape. It is that visual style that clients will be drawn to. A Sal Cincotta image is a reflection of his artistry and brand. A fantasy image by Reality Reimagined is a reflection of my own brand.

Keep practicing and experimenting with the various tools in Photoshop. With hard work and dedication, you'll be able to create some beautiful art.





David Byrd has an overactive imagination and has used that gift in his art. He has a degree in theater, and worked as an actor and director before turning his attention to photography and Photoshop. It was through those collective disciplines that he realized he could tell stories from his imagination through photography, similarly to how he once did it in the theater.

realityreimagined.com



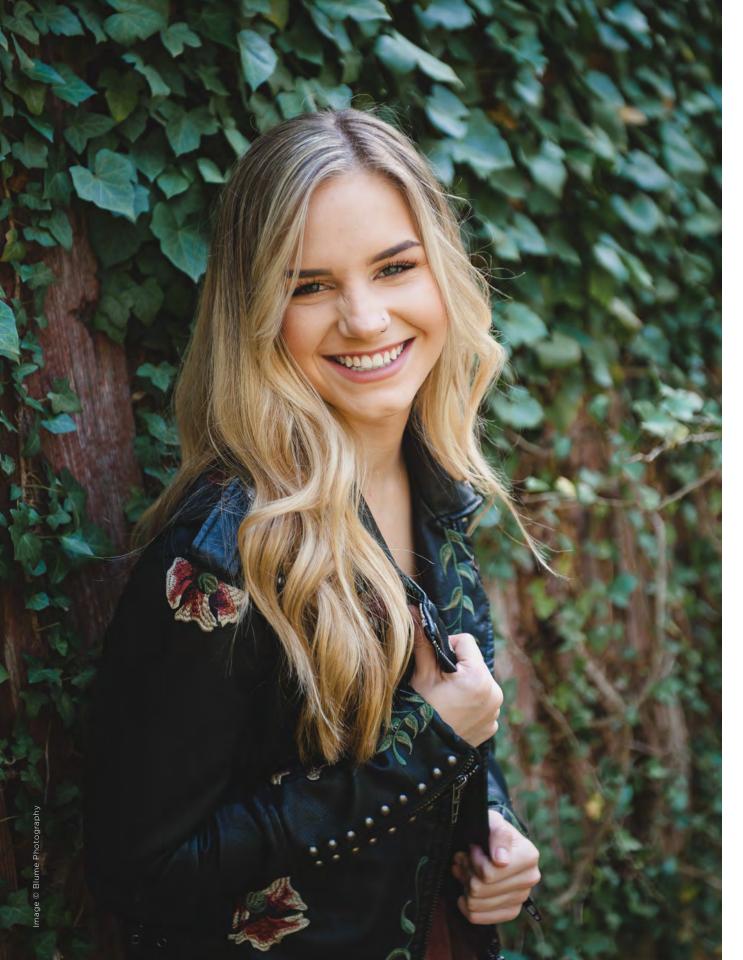
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\*VC Mode 3









One morning I was on the phone with Rob. Rob is a close friend and former groom whose wedding my wife Eileen and I photographed soon after we began Blume Photography in 2008. Building friendships with our clients has been one of our favorite perks as wedding photographers.

That morning, Rob and I were mostly just geeking out over recent updates to video editing software. Nerdy stuff. As the new media director at a nearby high school, he'd been given a pretty high-tech studio, the kind where kids get to sit in front of a green screen and role-play like they're news anchors for a live student body audience. It sounded fun.

Then it hit me: Rob was my "in" to the senior market.

At the time, I'd never marketed to senior portrait clients, but we had photographed a handful of seniors who'd come to us by word of mouth. The experience was far less stressful than weddings. There was no planning timelines, giving up our weekends or mediating family drama in front of a hundred guests.

It was just us and the client on an easy weekday afternoon. More like a fashion shoot. Plus print sales were great. I liked shooting seniors.

So how was Rob going to help me?

Our studio's senior marketing has been unconventional. It's easy to shower your market in direct mail or buy sponsor banners on the varsity football field. Those tactics are not necessarily bad, but everybody's doing it. So how are you going to stand out to your target audience?

As I started talking more with Rob, I learned he was busy recruiting volunteers for an upcoming career fair. Not an easy task today, when very few professionals have time to spare.

"I'm in," I said before I was even invited. "I'll host a table at the career fair. No problem."

Why did I want in so badly? From the faculty's point of view, I'm doing them a huge favor. I'm helping their event succeed, representing the arts and business ownership to their students. They feed me, set up my table, get me anything I need and thank me profusely afterward. I'm starting to wonder if I should actually charge *them* to let me advertise.

I've just been given a free booth at a trade show targeted at my ideal audience: students and their parents. The fairs I've attended are never boring, like bridal shows where the brides avoid your eye contact. No, these students—accompanied by their parents, the keepers of the purse strings—are required to come up and talk with me. They have questionnaires in hand, ready to interview me for their assignment.

Take advantage of this common high school event. Do you know a teacher on the inside? Easy in. If not, just visit the office and say someone sent you to ask about volunteering. They'll love you for it. All you have to do is make photography sound like the coolest job ever, which it is.

You don't have to hard sell, and you probably don't want to if your plan is to return annually. But don't be afraid to share your info via handouts, or even offer a personal promo. As long as you're there to offer a service and get kids excited about a profession, they will think you're awesome. And that is the only excuse they need to hire you when portrait time comes.





ages © Blume Pnot



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### SCHOLARSHIPS

I never would have graduated college if it weren't for scholarships. Most people don't realize just how many privately funded scholarships are available out there.

My family was struggling financially when my high school graduation came. There was no college fund. So I found out about all the scholarships. Most of them weren't huge amounts, but they weren't hard to get. All you really had to do was apply.

So today we love being able to pay it forward and give small scholarships to deserving graduates. It doesn't have to be much, maybe \$500 for a student's first-semester books. Just think of it as a strategic marketing expense. And how better to communicate to parents that you share their values?

In the same way a parent's eyes light up when she hears me preaching "work ethic," "dedication" and "passion" to her child on the career fair floor, they also light up when she hears me reinforcing her desire to see her child continue his education. Remember, most parents will be paying out of pocket for both their child's photos and college education. They'll appreciate that you give back.

How do you make the connection with senior students' parents? Why not put together a scholarship application? Make it professional but not too lengthy or intimidating. You could ask a couple essay questions: What are your ambitions as you pursue higher education? Describe an extracurricular activity you enjoy, and explain why you're passionate about it. Leave the application with every school guidance counselor you can, and they can start putting it in the hands of rising juniors at the perfect time to reach them. When the applications return to you, you will both congratulate the winners and send a promotion for your services to families now familiar with your brand.

### ALUMNI ASSOCIATIONS

Do you still have a connection to your old high school? Conveniently, I live just miles from mine.

As a result, I ate a very sad chicken dinner on a red cafeteria tray last week. My alma mater had messaged me on Facebook just a few days earlier, inviting me to an alumni event before the big rivalry game. I was hoping to see a few familiar faces; so I dressed our three kids in school colors and showed up early.

Sadly, we were the only people who showed up for the event. On the other hand, I received a lot of extra attention from the faculty who were there to foster alumni relations. And that was lucky, because it gave me the chance to pitch them an idea.

"Hey, this chicken dinner is so great and I feel really connected to the school at these events. What would you think if we could get a lot more alumni here?" Excited nodding. "I think we can do it. As a business owner, I've learned a lot about marketing, and I'd like to help. We could make this really exciting."

Now, make sure you know what you're doing, because you have to show results. For me, the project seemed simple enough, and the potential benefits looked great on both sides.

At the next strategic event, we would get an earlier jump on things. And we would send a series of three emails both to the school's list of alumni as well as to current high school parents—not just Facebook Messenger this time, which doesn't reach anyone.

In those emails, which of course include Blume Photography info, we'd announce valuable door prizes for attendees. For example, our studio would give away a free family mini session plus a small print package. Other alumni and parents with small businesses would want to do the same thing, helping to promote their companies to the larger school body while drawing a crowd. Basically everyone would get a few raffle tickets at the door (helping the school), and it would be really enticing to attend, win and see old friends. Making events like that successful is about building excitement and repeating the message.

We promised to donate our photo booth to make the event interactive and memorable. It really isn't as impressive as it sounds. A simple white backdrop and a flash will do the trick. Yet people love it. We often use it as a marketing tool. Event attendees wear funny hats while I take snapshots and get to know them. They pop their emails in my ShootProof iPad app in exchange for free downloads, and they also get a promo for future portrait sessions. It works.

Now we've built a great contact list. We have brand recognition among school families. New raffle-winning clients are already booking their sessions with us. And the school loves us. There's a pretty good chance they'll hear us out when we come back with a request to promote our senior sessions more directly to students.

Travel is an amazing educational opportunity for young people—it broadens their minds and horizons. It's great for building your portfolio, and you have enthusiastic and inexpensive models to work with, even if they're not pros.

This year, we'll be watching for ridiculously cheap last-minute airfares to scenic cities around the globe. And I bet whenever we find one, a senior and her parent will be ready and willing to board the plane with us. I invite you to watch my embedded video in this month's issue, where I explain more about how it works.







The senior photos in Phillip's article this month were created as part of the Blumes' wildly popular Maximized Senior Mini Sessions. Through their detailed system, they earn more in a single 20-minute mini session than many photographers earn from an entire wedding. Get more info at bit.ly/blume-minis-free.





Phillip and Eileen Blume are award-winning photographers just crazy enough to believe art can change the world. Having transformed their small-town home studio into a top brand, they now work with clients worldwide. The Blumes specialize in wedding and fashion photography, and continue to focus on what matters most to them: charitable projects that include adoption advocacy and documentary filmmaking to benefit children living in extreme poverty. Phillip is a monthly contributor to Shutter Magazine, and together the Blumes speak at numerous top industry events, have appeared on CreativeLIVE and have shared their inspiring vision of more meaningful photography from the TEDx stage. They are owners of three photography brands, including a newborn studio, and are the proud founders of ComeUnity Workshops for photographers who seek balance. They live with their children in rural Georgia.

theblumes.co

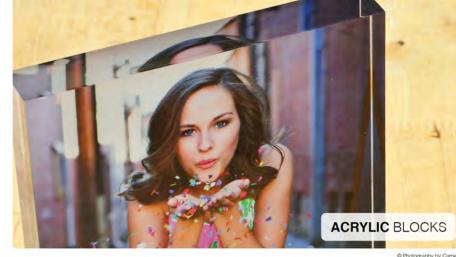












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### **CAPTURING**

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### PERFECT SHOT

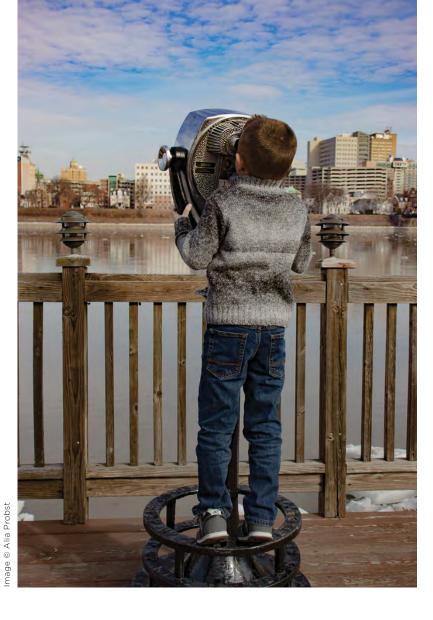
with Alia Probst

### **ANGLE AND PERSPECTIVE**

Whether you want a photo looking down on a city or a young girl walking through a field, your approach depends on how you are holding your camera to accommodate the perspective of the photo. You can decide whether you want the photo at an angle, straight on, or above or below the main focal point. Doing this allows you to focus on the person or item you originally wanted to focus on.



nage © Alia Pr



### LIGHTING

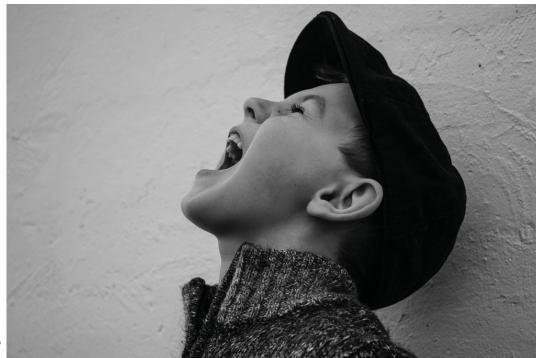
To get the best photo, make sure the light is directed at your subject. Then, allow everything else to fade into the background. Isolate your subject with the light. This makes a difference in the photo because it defines the object more and draws the viewer's eyes to the object. When taking a photo, you can choose natural or studio light. The closer the light source is to the subject, the softer the light will be; the farther away the light source is from the subject, the light will get dimmer. Try your best to align the different objects and shadows within the lighting to make your subjects stand out more.

### NATURAL REACTIONS

One thing that photographers thoroughly enjoy when taking a photo of someone is catching their subject's natural self. Capturing someone while they are doing an everyday task or just being themselves leads to a great natural shot. Regardless of what point of view you choose when taking a photo, remember the power of juxtaposition, or how the placement of two things in relation to one another affects the viewer. Proper juxtaposition makes a picture more aligned and professional.









### **TELL A STORY**

One way to strengthen your photograph is to tell a story by embracing the shadows around your subject. A few ways to tell a story through a photo is through mood, emotion, idea, narration and theme. Find the theme for a photo so you can more easily convey it to the viewer. A picture is worth a thousand words. When the picture tells a story, it grabs the viewer's attention. That sets the viewer's imagination free.





### **PRACTICE**

Finally, one of the most important things anyone can do if they want to take the perfect photo is to practice. No one can get the perfect shot on the first take. It may require more than 100 takes. Practice may not make you perfect, but it will make you better and help you learn new techniques through trial and error. Practice never hurts. Don't be afraid to break the rules—even if you break one or two rules in a photo, that doesn't mean the message is gone.

Photography is an art that takes a lot of practice. But if you stick with it, you will end up with amazing work you'll be proud to share with the world.



Alia Probst is a high school freshman who became interested in photography in middle school while living with her family in Central and South America. She's considering a career in photography after high school.









### Why the Savage RGB300 Color Video Light?

This thing blew us away!

You too will be blown away once you see what's possible with these incredibly unique and powerful lights. I was up and running within minutes with these bad boys. They are easy to use and are perfect for any kind of creative lighting in your studio.

These battery-powered lights are good for more than just video. As you can see in the video, we used them to create something very unique. Quickly dial into 300 different colors and a 5700K daylight-balanced light that has plenty of punch to it. Unleash all your creative ideas quickly and easily.

And the price? At \$119.99, let's just say that just about any shooter can afford to add one to his or her bag.

The details:

- · Two lights in one. The light functions as a standard 5700K daylight-balanced LED video light, in addition to being able to switch to an RGB setting to allow you to dial into 300 different colors.
- · Experiment with creative lighting effects easily, with no additional accessories necessary.
- · Get rid of the clutter of gels and the manual process of attaching different colors to your light.
- · This compact light can fit onto your camera or light stand.



**product** spotlight

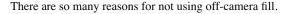
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RETHINKING OCF:

# 

with David Beckham





- I hate bold shadows and harsh lighting.
- It's too complicated.
- I love dreamy bokeh and I can't get that from OCF.
- I don't want to drag all that equipment around.
- TTL, HSS, OCF, WTF?

The photo above used an AlienBees AB400 with a beauty dish for fill. The light source was camera right about 6 feet away from their faces. It was set above them and pointed down at a 30-degree angle. I use off-camera flash for 90 percent of the seniors I photograph outside. In this article, I look at off-camera flash from a different perspective. Think fill flash, or off-camera fill. I'll cover 11 OCF setups. First, let's look at the lighting I use.

My go-to modifier is either the AB400 or the XPLOR 600, both with a beauty dish. There are two big reasons why.

- The bulb extends into the beauty dish, which spreads the light through the whole modifier and gives you the most even light across your subject. A speedlight won't be able to do that no matter what kind of modifier you have. It gives you kind of a spotlight, throwing the light in a 50- to 90-degree cone that doesn't properly fill the modifier.
- The low-end power on these two units is what we are looking for. The lower the power, the better. We want to add a kiss of light to brighten the subject enough to get crisp, clear images. Paul C. Buff makes a triple-layer diffuser sock that stretches over the beauty dish. Sometimes I use two of these to diffuse and reduce the power. The XPLOR's low-end light isn't as low as that of the AB400, but it has the advantage of high-speed sync (HSS), which gives you an alternative way to control that low-end flash.



Bold sun and blues skies are impossible to shoot without some kind of light. Jessie has her back to the sun and the flash unit is 6 feet away from her. I had to remove the stand from the photo in post-processing. The light was set at full power, but because the light is so close and I'm using the triple-thick diffuser, the shadows are soft and accentuate the curves of her face and arms, and bring depth to her dress.



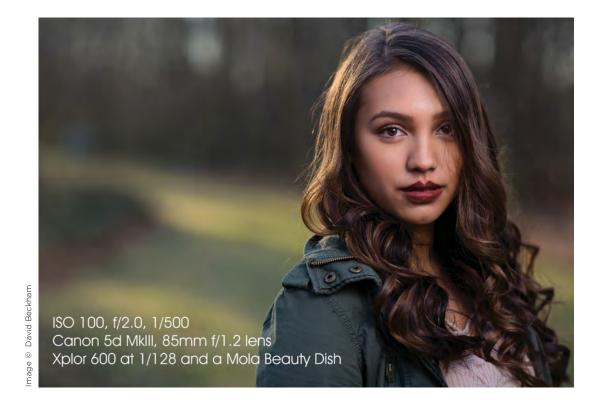
B400 at 1/4 power with a Beau

Cloudy days are my favorite days to shoot. Full sun wipes out half the places you can work. A cloudy day means I can use fill flash to make dreary days look bright and sunny, like in the shot of Maddie hanging from the handrail on the bridge. The light was 8 feet away. In the close-up of Katie, you can see how near the light was to her, no more than 5 feet away. This gives us the soft shadows and catchlights—perfect light. Even though it was a hazy day, the sun was behind her, and the ambient light created subtle rim light on her beautiful hair.



ehindtheshutter.com

**Shooting in shadows.** This shot of Rylie in the flowers is one of her favorites. The sun was setting behind the trees, camera right. As the area you are shooting gets darker, it might seem that you would want to increase the power of the flash. But think like you have no flash at all. Increase your ISO to get the ambients to the level you want and add the touch of fill to eliminate the shadows on her face and body. You can see in the pullback how close the OCF is to her and that the light head is above her face and opposite the sun. The backlight from the sun creates a soft glow and rim light on her hair, shoulder and back.



Sun as backlight. Using direct sun as backlight gives you crazy, dark shadows on the subject's face. In the close-up of Tiffany, the sun was very low behind her. Set the OCF to a lower angle to her face but still above her eyes. I used high-speed sync. With a 1/500-of-a-second shutter, we can control that kiss of flash needed to light her face and still keep the soft DOF. One added advantage of shooting that fast is less opportunity for camera shake while tripping the shutter.

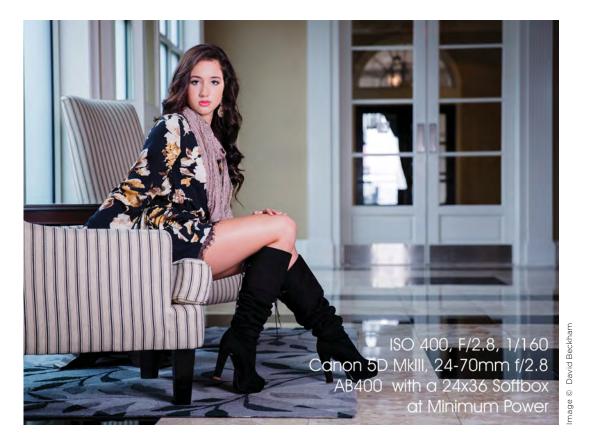


OCF as backlight. I love shooting in "tunnels"—
the spaces between walls or rows of trees that have
great ambient light at both ends. Sara was standing
just inside the shadows, and the natural light on her
face was perfect. But setting up the OCF behind her
with a touch of light gave her hair a natural glow and
added a rim light to her arms and body.

The invention of HSS has opened up a whole new world for portrait photography. Photographing someone in a gorgeous winter location has always been difficult. The hard part is trying to keep the light on her face correct and still not lose the details in the snow. HSS is the answer. In this shot, we get everything: great bokeh, wonderful light on Maddy and clarity in the snow around her. The 1/1000 shutter speed worked great at f/2.0. As always, keep the light as close to the subject as you can get, even if it means removing the flash unit in post-processing.



The close-up of Ryley in the snow shows all the details of her face and eyes. You can see the catchlight from the beauty dish but the intricate details of her iris are visible as well. I achieved that wide-open depth of field with the help of the compression I get by zooming my lens.

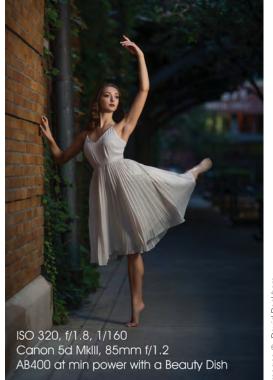


Using OCF inside with the ambient light from the windows and the room lighting completes this wonderful look. This photo of Emi was done as a promotional shot for a boutique. One light with a softbox was all it took to prevent skeleton eyes and other unflattering face shadows. We started at ISO 400 because the room was so shadowy. The flash was set at minimum power so we could blur the background at f/2.8.



This close-up of Sydney is a perfect example of a kiss of light. The light was above her at a 30-degree angle, camera left. The shadows are soft and bring out the contours of her face. The details in her eyes are highlighted and crystal clear. When setting up photographs like this, it is important to keep the backs of the subject's hands turned and not perpendicular to the flash so that the light on them doesn't create a distraction. I had Sydney turn her wrists so the back of her hands faced downward.





**Bokeh and soft depth-of-field** are important in senior photography. Other than a couple minor blemishes, this image of Grace is straight out of camera (SOOC). I set the XPLOR 600 at 1/256 power, which is all that was needed to get perfect light and great bokeh.

We can keep shooting after golden hour. Start by increasing your ISO so you can maintain the desired background lighting. Add a touch of fill with a properly located OCF, and you can get a dramatic image like this one of Megan dancing.



Here are the most important things to remember:

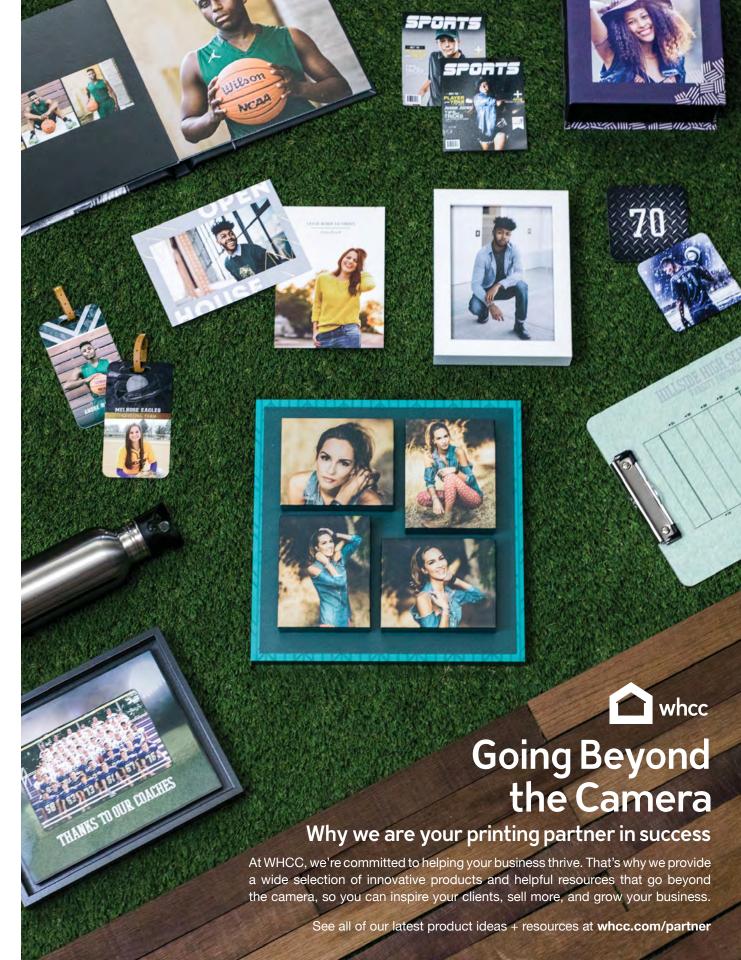
- Keep the flash power as low as possible.
- Keep the light as close to the subject as you can for soft shadows.
- Position the light source 15 to 45 degrees above the subject's face.
- Layer your diffusers.
- Raise your ISO first as you start losing ambient light.

I've covered every reason for not shooting with OCF except one: I had to drag my light to every location. But saving time in editing and getting perfect lighting in every condition makes it worth it.



David Beckham has been in business since 2001 and has a studio outside Columbus, Ohio. He is a two-time SSG Hot 100 winner and was awarded Top 10 Senior Photo at the Grand Imaging Awards by Professional Photographers of America. David speaks at conferences like ShutterFest, SPI and Sync. He leads one-day workshops at his studio and is available for engagements wherever he's needed.

davidbeckhamphotography.com





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In the United States, graduating high school is an important milestone. Around the country, documenting this stage in life is a great way to celebrate the end of an era and a new chapter. High-school seniors, especially girls, are thrilled to get the chance to be a model for a day with our studio. It's not always about the pictures for our clients and their parents, however. The main reason our studio has been so successful with high-school seniors is the unforgettable experience we provide from beginning to end.

### **GRAB THEIR ATTENTION**

Be bold in your marketing so you stand out from the sea of photographers in your area. Use imagery, design and messaging that represent your brand and the kind of experience your potential clients can expect. The worst thing you can do is push out false advertising to your market and not deliver to their expectations.

Our studio is known for big, dramatic Hollywood-style senior imagery. While every image from the session is not edited or shot this way, we still deliver at least one or two signature-style images to every client.

Showcase your work online (both on your website and Facebook page), but don't overwhelm your audience with too many images. Show what you think best represents and sells your brand, and show only your best work. If you're unsure, have an unbiased person look through your portfolio and give you feedback about which images best represent your studio.





### **MAKE IT EASY**

Don't overcomplicate the booking process from the beginning. Why make your clients jump through hoops to get to a session with you? We have a contact form and our phone number on our website for potential clients to get in touch with us. From there, we send an informational email giving them more details on our studio and what to expect from the session. We include how much money the average family ends up spending so they are not shocked by pricing when they come in to view and order their pictures. We are upfront about expectations: how long the session will last, how many outfits, turn time, etc. Our messaging in that initial email is clear and concise—but it also gets them excited about the experience.

There are two specific pieces in our initial booking process that add to the overall uniqueness of our senior experience.

- 1. We offer destination sessions for our clients at no additional cost. We give them the option to meet us in a city we will be in for a once-in-a-lifetime senior session. I send them a list of our travel dates for a six- to 10-month window and see if we can arrange our schedules to meet them in a different city. We love destination senior sessions because we can dedicate half a day to one client and provide a unique experience and amazing images that no one else in their school will have.
- 2. We offer dresses to our seniors at no additional cost. We use dresses from Enception Rentals for an extra look at the end of the session and some incredibly impactful shots. I work one-on-one with the senior in stylizing and selecting the dress that best fits her personality. We save the stylized dress shots for the end so our senior is warmed up and confident in front of the camera. These images end up being the ones your client orders as big wall art for their home.

## 116 Shutter Magazine. March 2018

### YOUR PERSONALITY MATTERS MOST

The number-one piece of the puzzle that is too often overlooked is personality. Teens want to work with someone they can relate to and enjoy being around. Who wants to work with some creepy guy with a dud personality? Who wants to spend hours with someone who doesn't enjoy what they're doing?

Having a male/female team is also beneficial to our senior experience. It gives us balance and helps things go more smoothly. We each have our own roles. Sal is the creative director and visionary, and I help assist with wardrobe, changing and other things a grown man should not be doing with a female teenager.

If you're having a bad day, brush it off the minute you are face-to-face with your client. Clients feed off the energy of their photographer and anyone else assisting on the shoot. If you're not enjoying it or getting excited about the images you're creating, chances are your client isn't either. In fact, you're probably giving your client a complex by not getting excited about the pictures coming off your camera with every new scene.

Be creative, be expressive, engage with your client (and the parents) throughout the session. We love showing our seniors and moms the images on the back of the camera as we're taking them. It's so much fun to build that momentum throughout the shoot so they cannot wait to come in and see the final edited images in our studio. This excitement guarantees sales.

Most of all, be *yourself*. Trying to be someone you're not will be completely transparent and will actually have the reverse effect of what you're trying to accomplish.

### **GET SOCIAL**

Welcome to 2018, the world of social media, where if you didn't snap a photo and post it to Instagram or Snapchat, it simply did not happen. Take advantage of this with your seniors. There's no reason for a senior photographer to *not* have social media accounts on the following platforms (rated in order of relevance based on our experience): Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook. Twitter is dead for us now because our seniors don't use it anymore.

Most of us document our lives on social media with pictures and video clips, especially teens. Adapt to the times and get in with the kids if you want to sell yourself to them.

During our senior sessions, Sal and I take videos and behind-the-scenes images. We post them to our accounts and tag the seniors we're working with. This is another way to get potential clients excited about the experience. Many of them will want the same experience.







nages © Salvatore Cincotta Photograp



These kids are getting ready for a new stage in life and are ready to celebrate an adulthood they are just entering. Find your brand and your X-factor and celebrate this moment in time with them. Make them feel like the most important person to ever step foot in front of your camera.



Alissa Zimmerman graduated with a degree in television production and has been a part of the Salvatore Cincotta team since 2011. Today she is behind the camera regularly as Sal's second shooter and as the executive producer and camera operator for Salvatore Cincotta Films, Behind the Shutter and Sal Cincotta's School of Photography. Alissa is the creative director for Shutter Magazine and serves as Sal's right hand, managing daily operations within the family of Salvatore Cincotta brands.

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Paul C. Buff, Inc.'s CyberSense remote can control the output of both the flash and modeling lamp on up to four Buff flash units. The CyberSense has a radio range of up to 300 ft., operates on a 2.4GHz radio frequency, and features both intuitive touch sliders and 3-button controls, that make switching the mood on set easier than ever!

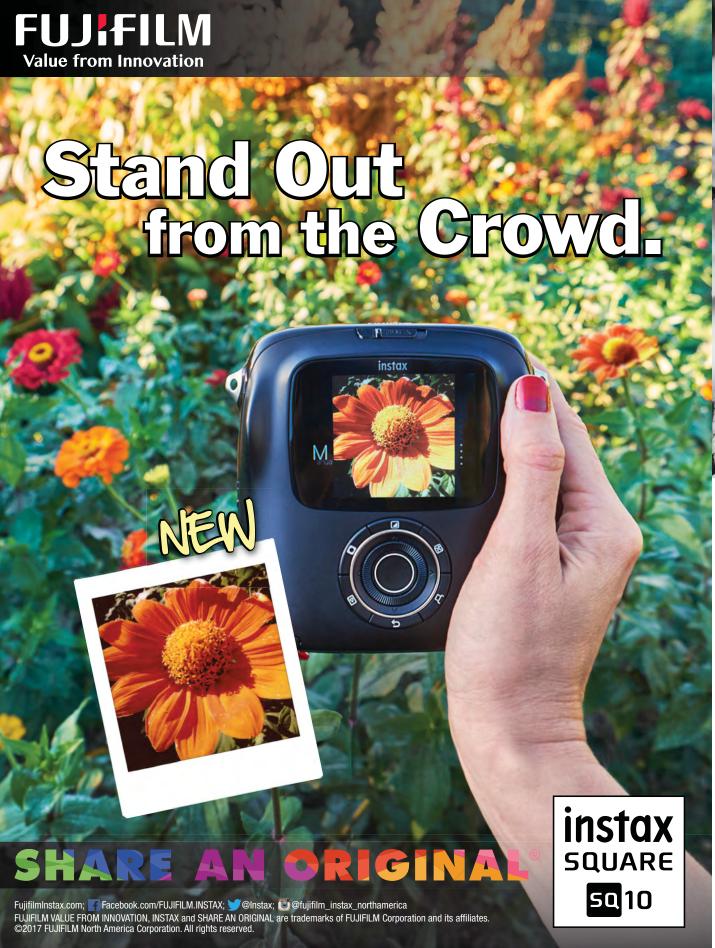
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Shutter Magazine . March 2018





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Inspirations | Our Readers



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### Inspirations | Our Readers



























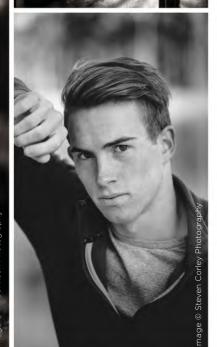














### Inspirations | Our Readers



















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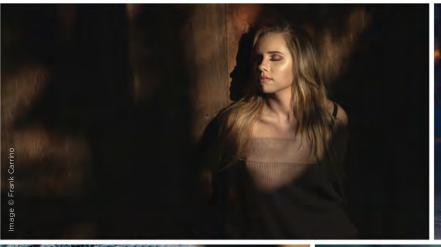










































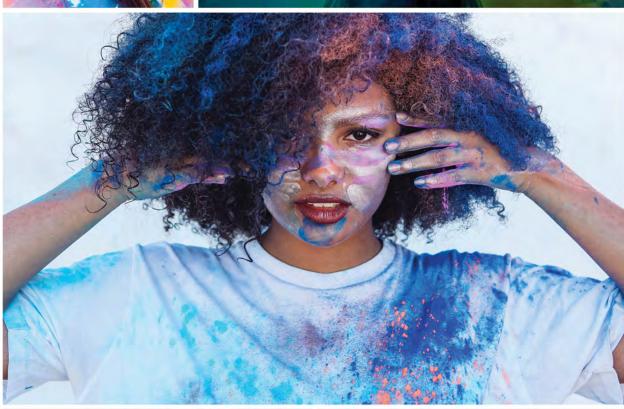






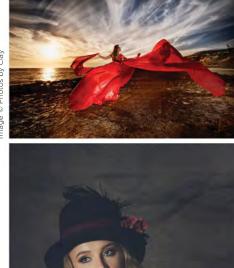




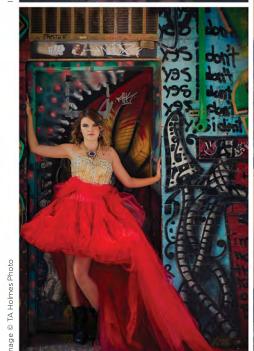


















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Photo Credit: Ben Grunow DC-GH5 with Leica DG Vario Elmarit 8-18mm Lens 1/400 sec, F/5.6, ISO 100, Focal Length 12mm (24mm, 35mm camera equivalent)















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The quality and price point are a non-issue with Bay Photo. This company's hardcover and softcover photo books are printed on Indigo printers, which contain the latest digital press printing technology available.

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# IMAGE SHARPENING:

A COMPLETE RAW WORKFLOW WITH LIGHTROOM & ON1 PHOTO RAW 2018

with **Dustin Lucas** 

When photographing people in a landscape, it is so important to push the limits of your lens to capture detail. We look for the eye of the subject, dial in the exposure settings and fire away. Many of us consider shooting wide open to draw the viewer immediately to the main subject, typically the person standing in the field, so to speak. In an image where removing the person from the frame would give you an amazing landscape, you have to push your technical skills to keep the focus on the portrait.

This is only the first step in the process as we ingest our Raw images to see how sharp the subject is. The biggest fear when shooting is losing the peak focus on the subject's eye and having an unusable image because you shot them at such a thin aperture. We've all been there. Even with full-frame digital cameras and the best glass, there is a chance for failure. That's where editing programs can save the image and bring back the sharpness you intended to capture.

There are different processes and programs we can use to sharpen our images. Knowing when and how to get the most out of sharpening is where I am going to focus in this article. I will be working strictly in Lightroom and ON1 RAW 2018 to demonstrate a complete Raw workflow. Let's get started in Lightroom.

#### LIGHTROOM DETAILS PANEL

Once we have our image prepped and ready to sharpen in Lightroom, we can navigate to the Detail panel and implement Input Sharpening. At this stage, we are going to simply bring back the sharpness to the Raw file. This panel is going to bring back details you saw on the back of your camera. I recommend removing all the fluff settings in camera for a more faithful representation of your image. Again, this is completely subjective but will help keep things in check.

We basically have three sections in the Detail panel: Sharpening, Noise Reduction Luminance and Noise Color. For this particular image, we do not need any Noise Reduction since it was shot at ISO 50 and properly exposed for. In the event you have a lot of noise in the image you are sharpening, you can read my previous *Shutter Magazine* article "Silence the Noise" for additional support. You'll notice the Amount slider is defaulted at 25, Radius at 1.0, Detail at 25 and Masking at 0. Let's dive into each of these settings. (1)



Something to consider with sharpening is we have to see the image at 100%, so working with a Smart Preview will be an issue. You want to be connected directly to your Raw, or original, file. Then we can copy all of our previous Develop settings onto the Before preview to comparably see the difference. (2)



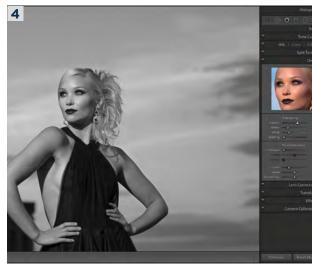
Zoom in to 1:1 or even 2:1 on the image so we can actually see the difference while adjusting the Amount from 25 to 50, 75 or 100. (3abc) Toggle the backslash or back slash (\) key to see the before and after preview in full view.

It is important to note that Lightroom sharpens based on the luminance and not the color in an image. You can view this by holding Option + Alt while moving the Amount slider. This will naturally bring back the sharpness we were seeing, or I should say hoping for, in camera. (4)



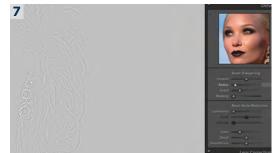






Remember that this setting is intended for input sharpening, so we don't need a heavy amount here. Leaving the Amount at 75, we can play with the Radius slider. Since these edges of your image are being analyzed, the Radius slider will extend the sharpness based on pixel size. This slider is usually left alone because I am typically not working on small or large megapixel sensors.





The same technique can be used for the Detail slider to keep the amount of skin sharpness we want. This setting is extremely useful for heavily detailed images versus beauty portraits. (8) I tend to lift this slider until I see the pores of the skin become gritty. (9) Leaving this at 35 will give us just enough wiggle room to push some creative sharpening later. Let's look at Masking, which is a useful tool to reduce oversharpening of the skin. Hold down the Option + Alt keys to show your mask. Black to gray is blocking out the effect and white is applied at 100%. (10)



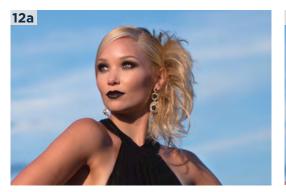


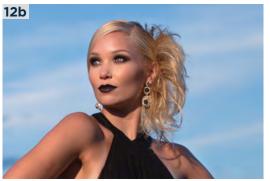


Since the face is in peak focus, most of the subject will naturally be in white. I recommend utilizing this slider to separate your subject from the background. Drag this slider to black out the soft areas of the image and keep the viewer drawn to the subject. (11)



Let's keep it at 20 and move into ON1 RAW for some creative sharpening. (12ab)

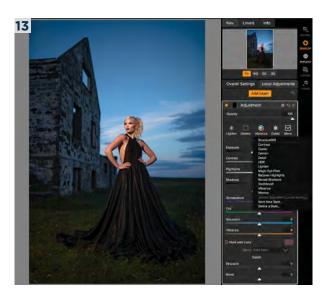




#### **CREATIVE SHARPENING IN ON1 RAW 2018**

We are now ready to edit in On1 RAW by right-clicking on the image in the filmstrip. Choose Edit In < ON1 Develop 2018. I choose file type Tiff for more editing flexibility outside Adobe programs. I select Adobe 1998 for color space and 300 PPI for resolution. This opens the image in Develop, where we can add a local adjustment for some creative sharpening. I like to use Structure for a light HDR effect, but I want to choose how it's masked and blended with my image. That is exactly why the Local Adjustment panel is my go-to tool.

Select the Local Adjustment tab and click Add Layer. This panel allows us to custom-build styles, or we can choose from the premade ones. (13) What I love about ON1 RAW is I can hover over each style and immediately see the changes applied to my image in real time. (14ab) Choosing detail sets the structure to +40, which is right around where I push this to. I also pull the saturation down to -100 to simply turn this image black and white. Then I can mess with the Blending options to pull out my creative details and tones. (15)









At the top of the panel is a gear icon similar to the preferences symbol in Lightroom. Click this to access the Blending options and scroll down to Luminosity. (16) Much like our input sharpening technique in Lightroom, I want to affect the brighter tones. Now the entire image has more dynamic range and crisper detail. Remember that we can control this adjustment mostly with sliders. (17)



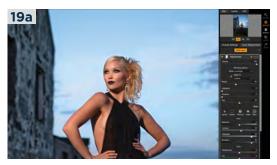


I like to zoom in at 100% to the face and move the skin slider to 50. (18ab) This controls predetermined colors that would fall into the skin tone range. Notice how the hair begins to lose this effect.





For more flexibility, we can copy the Local Adjustments mask and paste it to an Effects filter. (21) Now we can add sharpening and dynamic contrast filters to push the creativity with this image. (22ab) Feel free to experiment in this area to make your work stand out.









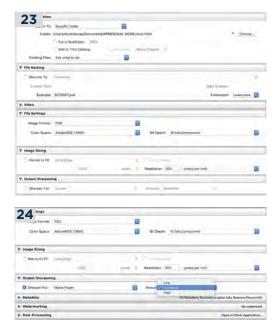




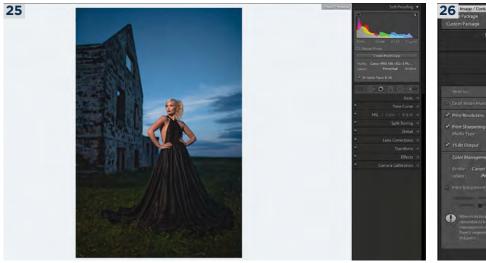
#### **OUTPUT SHARPENING**

Once you are ready to go back into Lightroom, click File < Done to render your newly edited Tiff file. Now we have many options for output: Export from Lightroom, Print from Lightroom, Publish from Lightroom, Edit in On1 Resize, etc. Most of these methods have Output Sharpening to allow your image to retain optimal sharpness no matter how you display it. Let's start with the easiest option, Export from Lightroom.

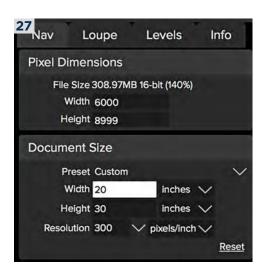
In the Lightroom Export module, we can choose all the standard file settings necessary: destination, name, type, resolution, color space, bit depth and output sharpening. (23) With this option checked, you get a limited number of output options for printing glossy or matte as well as screen or web. Then the Amount is broken down into low, standard and high. I never use these because I do my output sharpening in Photoshop or not at all when retouching images. (24)



Before jumping into the Lightroom Print module, review your image as a Soft Proof. To learn more about this feature and module, check out my previous *Shutter* article "Print Your Portfolio." This shows you a simulation of what your photo paper or lab's print will look like. (25) In the Print module, choose Print Sharpening options very similar to the Export settings. Another useful tip is to use Color Management and choose the ICC paper profile you are using. (26)



Choosing ON1 Resize is the best option for enlarging your image, and controlling the way it adds pixels and the sharpening you apply. Right-click on the image and choose Edit In < ON1 Resize 2018. Be sure to Edit as a Copy rather than the original so you can save a separate version later. In this output module, choose from file size, resize process settings, sharpening, film grain, tiling and gallery wrap. Without adding any pixels, I can basically print a 15x22.5 image. Since my image scales up in a ratio of 2:3, I immediately take it to a 20x30. This scales my image up 140% and requires us to look at the resize settings. (27)



These settings become important when upscaling a low-res JPEG or, in this case, a portrait. I exported this image with the Genuine Fractals and ON1 Resize Portrait methods, and could not see a clear difference. (28ab) I would stick with Genuine Fractals because this is the standard for resizing and moving to Sharpening. Now remember that with this tool, it's about sharpening for the loss of sharpness with printing. This is not going to recover a blurry part or increase the detail in the shot.

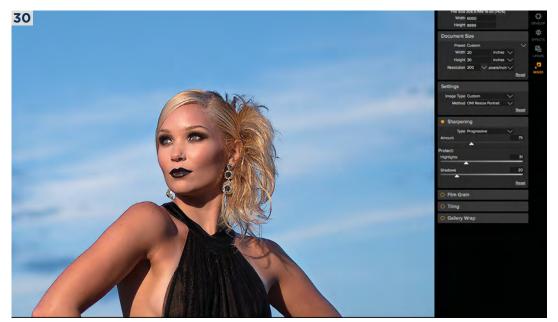




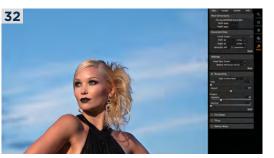


We have three types to choose from: Progressive, UnSharp Mask and High Pass. (29) These options are nothing new, but we lose some editing capabilities.

I find that Progressive starts to oversharpen easily, causing jagged artifacts across the skin tones. (30) Unsharp Mask offers an additional parameter to set the Halo as well as Amount. I am happy with the setting chosen and can move into Protect Section. (31) This acts similar to the Masking option in Lightroom. For portraits, I tend to lift the Highlights between 25 and 40 to keep the skin tones slightly softer. Shadows are typically left alone. (32)



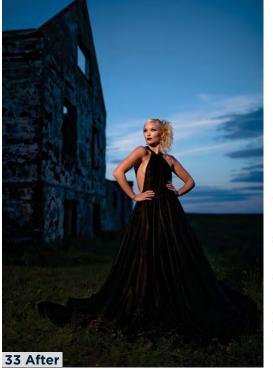




That's it—we're ready to send these off! (33 Before, 33 After)







THE RESULTS

Now that we've pushed this image with Lightroom and ON1 RAW, you can see all the lost detail from capture that was easily brought back in. For sharpening, you always want to process after you've edited the image and properly reduced any noise. The last thing you want to do is sharpen the noise. As a Lightroom user, I find that I am limited to a certain extent with sharpening. That is why I am always looking for good plugin software to quickly edit in and bring the results back into Lightroom, organized and ready to send off.

ON1 RAW offers quick and intuitive options to push the creativity with my images and resize without losing detail. My Raws start in Lightroom, and it's so important to dial in the Input Sharpening. Use the Option + Alt trick to sharpen accurately. Never oversharpen or push the HDR structure too high. There is always room for creativity, but you don't want to output crap.





Dustin Lucas is a full-time photographer and educator focused on the wedding industry and the academic world. After achieving his master of fine arts degree, a career opportunity opened once he began working with Evolve Edits. Through teaching photography classes and writing about photography, Dustin continues to expand his influence on art and business throughout the industry.

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A word of caution: If you are not careful, your photos will look like those of an amateur photographer shooting with a cell phone at a nightclub.

Back in 2016, I wrote an article about the basics of lighting receptions. This article takes it a step further and breaks down each individual part with some new knowledge I have gained over the last few years, and takes into account the newer cameras. Let's start with recommended equipment.

#### **RECEPTION GEAR**

#### Cameras

Canon 5D Mark IV or 1DX Mark II Sony A7RIII or A9 Nikon D5, D800 or D850

#### Glass

135 prime

85 prime (for Canon, exclude the 85 1.2; opt instead for the newer 1.4)

35 prime

24 prime

16-35 F/2.8

24-70 F/2.8

#### Lighting

Profoto A1 (preferred because of its built-in model light)

Native speedlights are okay

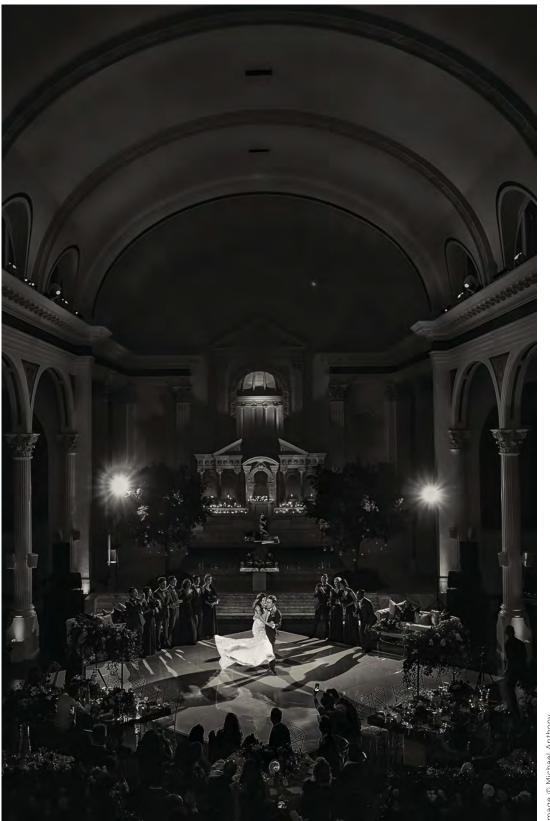
Westcott Icelight or other constant light source with modifiable color temperature

#### Modifiers

MagMod gels, sphere, bounce Profoto A1 gels, hood

Reception lighting can be broken down into six main parts:

- Grand entrance
- First dance/parent dances
- Toasts
- Bouquet toss/garter toss
- Cake cutting
- Open dancing



#### **GRAND ENTRANCE**

During the grand entrance, you are often at the mercy of the flow of events. You may have to photograph the couple weaving through the crowd, and often the bridal party will all take separate paths. Your off-camera lighting has to be set up in a central location where the majority of the bridal party will be congregating, like the dance floor. But that won't help you during the actual entrance.

A voice-activated light stand (VAL) allows you to use off-camera flash while mobile. My VAL typically stands at a 45-degree angle to our subjects and is stationary near the entrance so we can capture the moment the crowd sees our couple for the first time. Here, it's important to divide up the responsibilities between first shooter, second shooter and assistant. If you are shooting with a two-person crew, adjust these responsibilities among your team.

**GRAND ENTRANCE LIGHT SETUP:** VAL + Bounce Flash

**PRIMARY SHOOTER:** Couple's entrance, action/reaction, primary angle

**SECOND SHOOTER:** Bridal party, secondary angle

**ASSISTANT:** VAL

**TYPICAL SETTINGS** (general guidelines meant to be used as a starting point and adjusted where needed): 1/160th of a second, F/ 2.0-3.5, ISO 1,000, low to mid-power

on speedlights

**LENS CHOICE:** 24-70 zoom or 35mm prime





#### FIRST DANCE/PARENT DANCES

The first dance is a bit of a tough one. If you have not prepared your lights ahead of time, you will be forced to figure out your lighting on the fly, so avoid it if you can.

The trick to photographing this is to understand your angles and how they will appear on camera. Let's take a standard reception hall as an example. Most of the time the dance floor is positioned in the center of the room. Now, if the room is extra large, with equal spacing on all sides of the dance floor, then this process is a bit easier. If your dance floor is closer to the walls on certain sides, then you will want to avoid shooting into the shorter side of the wall as a background. The reason for this is that most of the time there are many distracting elements near the walls, such as doorways, exit signs or the catering staff. In addition, the lighting setups we cover later will cause shadows to fall on these walls, which will wash out any uplighting.

I choose a three- to four-light setup depending on the size of the dance floor. We use two lights on 10-foot stands in opposite corners and one to two additional lights on 10-foot stands in the opposite corners. The lights are placed high to avoid distracting flares and shadows caused later in the night when the dancing begins.

From here, we find the longest distance from our subjects to the background, and use that as our shooting angle. We set up our lights accordingly to make sure we are able to use those angles.

First dances are pretty controlled. There are only two people on the dance floor, so if the couple has not coordinated the first dance, we tell them to start and end their dance in the center of the floor to take best advantage of our lighting position. I do not use on-camera flash because the three- to four-light setup will usually cover all angles. I keep the lights at a 1:2 power ratio (the lights opposite each other have the same power) so we can create both highlight and shadow on our couple to add dimension to our scene.

Choose your angles and have a plan of attack when you approach this part of the day. When using off-camera flash, you have to be aware of timing to get the best shots. For instance, if a couple is constantly turning during their first dance, there will be a point where they line up with your lighting, and ideally you want to shoot at that moment.

Our primary and secondary responsibilities are divided. With different focuses, we are able to capture a complete story. Our primary focuses on creatives, such as wide-angle images, shooting through votives and other elements, and creative framing. Our second shooter focuses on photojournalism, using closer framing that features facial expressions.



**PRIMARY SHOOTER:** Creatives

**SECOND SHOOTER:** Photojournalism, moment-focused

**ASSISTANT:** VAL or third shooter for PJ moments

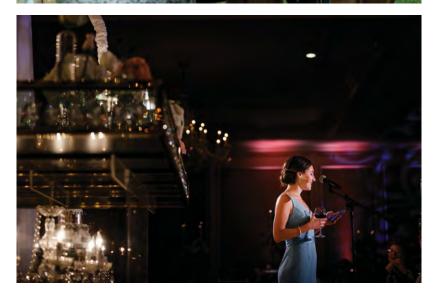
TYPICAL SETTINGS: 1/160th of a second, F/2.0-3.5, ISO 400, low to mid-power on

LENS CHOICE: Primary Shooter: 16-35mm & 85mm, Second Shooter: 35mm & 70-

200mm









#### **TOASTS**

Once we get to this point in the night, we move our lights around for the best possible scenario. Your assistant will come in handy here. Get everyone on your team set up with two-way radios. The planner or emcee will give you a few minutes' notice to set up, and at that time, you can coordinate where you will have people standing.

Toasts are filled with emotional moments. Moody lighting usually works very well in telling the stories of these events.

We limit this part of the day to two lights, and keep one focused on our bride and groom, seated at the sweetheart table. The other light is on our speaker. The speaker usually stands next to the bride and groom, but if they are talking from the center of the dance floor, then you will just have to adjust your lighting.

Angles are extremely important because we use our foreground elements to help tell the story. If you have an image of a couple laughing in response to a moment from a toast, the best way to give context to that moment is to have the speaker's hands, notes or microphone in the foreground of that image to tell the viewer what the couple is laughing about. If that is not possible, then you can always use two images on a spread to help tell the story.

Here, we use directional lighting gridded to control light spill. Instruct the speaker to stay put because if you have a person who likes to move around when they talk, you have to adjust your light setup to not be so focused, but you do so at the expense of controlled lighting.

Often the couple's backs are to the wall and the speaker is to the side of them. If we shoot this from the front, we will have unflattering light on our background and distracting elements will be visible. We choose angles on the sides of the table to avoid bad angles. We have our leads and seconds both focus on different subjects so they can avoid crossing over in front of the couple and being a distraction to the guests.

**PRIMARY SHOOTER:** Speaker **SECOND SHOOTER:** Couple **ASSISTANT:** Light Management

TYPICAL SETTINGS: 1/100th of a second, F/ 4-5.6 ISO 400, mid-power on speedlights

LENS CHOICE: 85mm, 135mm, 70-200mm



#### **BOUQUET/GARTER TOSS**

The bouquet/garter toss is very easy to photograph. You just have to make sure that your system is set up correctly. We put two lights on each side of the bride because her arms will block light on one side when she throws the bouquet over her head. By having flat light here, we can ensure we have no awkward shadows. In addition, we light the group of single ladies with one light from the side.

Our go-to setup is to have the lead photographer directly in front of the bride and our second shooter sitting behind the bride capturing the girls reaching for the bouquet. We used to use multiple speedlights dedicated to both the lead and second photographer for this, but with the Profoto A1's phenomenal recycle time, we are able to use a single-light setup. We shoot this on medium-speed continuous mode with our lights on half power or less to ensure we have consistent lighting throughout the sequence. Next time you hear "All the Single Ladies" by Beyoncé come on, you will be ready to rock it.

We light the garter removal and toss the same way we do the bouquet toss.

**PRIMARY SHOOTER:** Bride/groom

**SECOND SHOOTER:** Bridesmaids/groomsmen

TYPICAL SETTINGS: 1/160th of a second, F/4 , ISO 1,600, low to mid-power on

speedlights

LENS CHOICE: 24 prime or 16-35

#### **CAKE CUTTING**

I prefer constant lighting for the cake cutting. We've normally used the Profoto B2 or Icelight, but lately we have been reaching for the Profoto A1. At \$1,000 a light, there are less expensive options, but when you are at a point in your career where you value saving space and consolidating equipment, it's worth it for this part of the day.

You're going to need to give the couple advice on what to do. We have our process down. The worst thing that can happen is when your clients look at you and ask what they should do in front of all of their guests. Be proactive. Give them instructions on exactly what to do.

We light this from a 45-degree angle, making sure we do not cast a shadow on the bride from the cake. We use a secondary light behind the subjects if there is room, but there's usually not. Your assistant is crucial in making sure you have a good, solid light setup for capturing this important moment.

**PRIMARY SHOOTER:** Entire scene, PJ moments

**SECOND SHOOTER:** Tight shots of hands, reactions from guests

ASSISTANT: VAL

**TYPICAL SETTINGS:** 1/125th, F/ 3.5 - 5.6, ISO 3,200, video light

**LENS CHOICE:** 24-70 zoom or 35mm prime



e © Michael Anthon

#### **OPEN DANCING**

During open dancing, all bets are off. Because the dance floor is packed, your off-camera flashes can cause unflattering shadows. We go back to our diamond or triangle of light, but add an on-camera flash that we will ideally bounce off the ceiling. If you are not able to bounce your light, you can also have your assistant shadow you with a light on a pole.

Getting good dance shots requires more than just standing across the room picking off moments with a 70–200. For this sequence, I live on the dance floor. That means I am constantly getting bumped, elbowed, even stepped on to capture fun and exciting moments for our clients.

My rule of thumb is I want to stay at about a handshake's distance from my subjects to capture the environment and them as they move. If you're not quick, you will capture some cheesy smiles on the dance floor. The trick to capturing moments is to anticipate them, and then shoot through them as they are happening in real time. Line up your composition using back-button focus and then capture your images without needing to refocus every time.

**PRIMARY SHOOTER:** Couple **SECOND SHOOTER:** Guests

**ASSISTANT:** VAL

TYPICAL SETTINGS: 1/200th, F/ 4 - 5.6, ISO 3,200, flashes on low to mid-power

**LENS CHOICE:** 16-35 zoom or 35mm prime











ages © Mich

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Every wedding will require improvisation on these setups. It's important to understand your equipment; more importantly, it's crucial to understand the story you are trying to tell before approaching your next wedding with the tools we have laid out here.

Good luck, and be sure to send me some of the amazing images you created using these setups.





Michael Anthony is the owner of Michael Anthony Studios, a wedding photography studio based in Los Angeles. He has won multiple awards in international image competition for his creative use of light, storytelling and environmental portraiture. The five-member team at Michael Anthony Studios photographs around 60 weddings and over 200 portrait sessions a year.

michaelanthonyphotography.com





Does any of this sound familiar? Self-doubt is common for any artist. Every one of us has asked ourselves at some point if we are good enough to continue to do what we love. Why is that? Where does this self-doubt come from and how do we push through it?

We are always watching the competition and looking at countless images every day on social media and everywhere else our gaze takes us. We're constantly seeing amazing images that we feel blow ours away. It is easy to get discouraged. We also see stories of failure by photographers who we feel are better than we are. Our thoughts automatically go to, "If they can't make it, how can I? They are much better than I am." Trust me, I have gone through the same exact struggles as everyone else. It wasn't too long ago that I was doubting my own work. How do we push through and overcome this self-doubt?



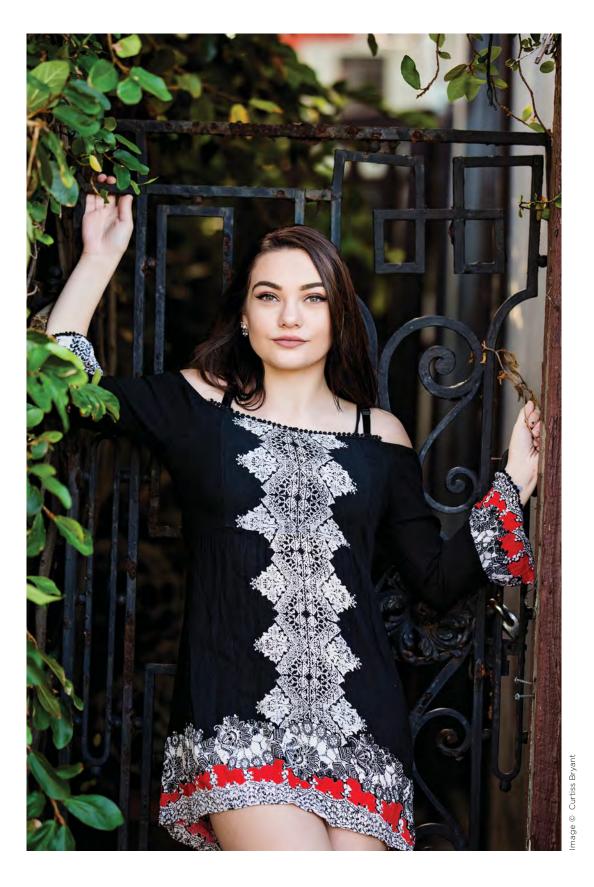














#### 1. GET OFF SOCIAL MEDIA

As difficult as this seems, maybe it's time to take a break from social media. Nothing fuels self-doubt more than viewing images from photographers we look up to. It is easy to browse a photography group on social media and spend hours looking at the amazing images photographers are putting out. If you aren't confident in your own images, how will looking at other photographers' images help you become more confident in what you produce? It won't. It will just show you the flaws you feel your work has compared to that of other photographers.

I have been there. Taking a break from social media and photography groups helped me focus on my own work. That isn't to say that we just ignore our Facebook or Instagram pages. We still need to do our regular posts for our clients, our advertising and normal day-to-day business on social media, but we don't need to go to the groups or spend time browsing the images. Focus on your business and how you can make it better. Comparing your work to the work of other photographers does little to help you. The only person you should be comparing yourself to is the photographer you were in the past. Are you better today than you were a year ago? That is who we should be comparing ourselves to, not a photographer 1,000 miles away. Social media can be a breeding ground for self-doubt. Don't allow it to consume your mind.

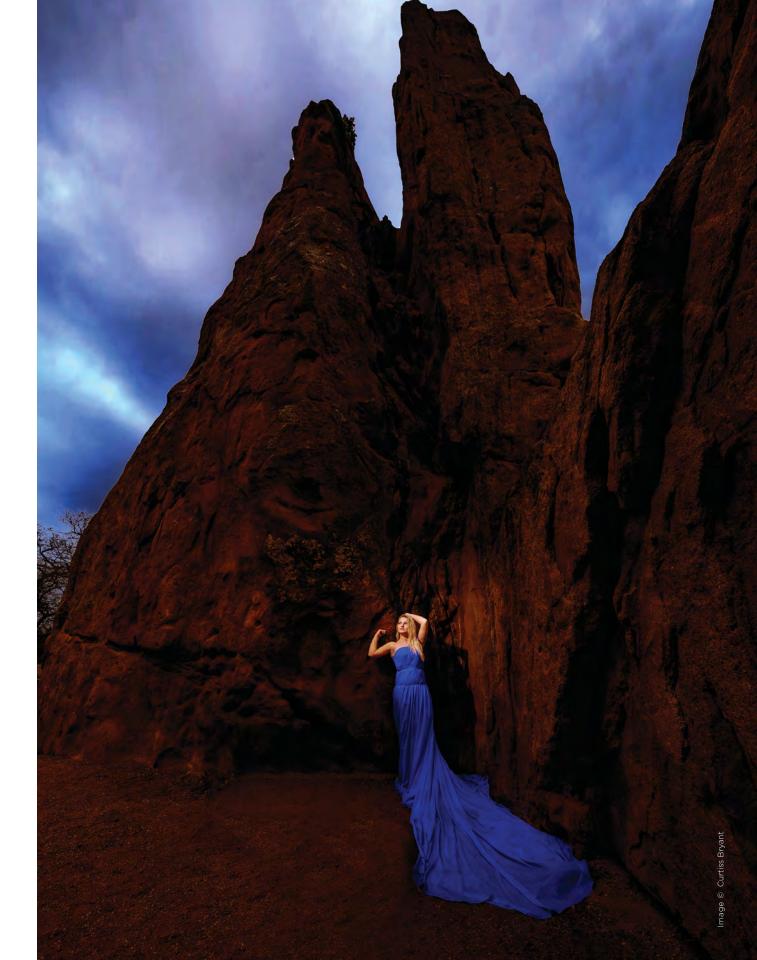


#### 2. SHOOT FOR YOU

We all got into this industry because we love photography. Don't lose that love. Self-doubt can destroy it. It's no longer fun. If photography is something you are dreading, then your work will suffer. You need to keep it fun. You need to keep that passion.

When I go through a lull in photography, I find a way to make it fun. I create a shoot for myself. Client work is obviously important, but many times we get burnt out, or we get discouraged because we aren't creating images we love. So get out there and create images you love. Ask a friend, family member or past client to model for you. You may not even need a model to photograph. Maybe it's a cityscape, landscape, architecture, etc. Just shoot for yourself and no one else.

This is also a great time to experiment with new things. Is there a lighting setup you have always wanted to try? Is there a lens you have wanted to play with, but weren't sure it was for you? Maybe it's light painting. Maybe it's long exposures. Maybe it's ultrawide angles. This is a great time to be creative. You don't want to do these things for paying clients, but when you are shooting for yourself, you can just have fun and experiment.











#### 3. FOCUS ON MAKING YOUR BUSINESS BETTER

Self-doubt can destroy a business. If you are not confident in your work, how can you expect your clients to be confident enough to spend their hard-earned money on your work? Here is the reality that most of us tend to forget. While we see the big-name photographers and the work they create, our clients have no idea who those people are. They will never see their images and see how much "better" they are than us. They will never see any of that. They will only see what photographers in our area put out. Even then, many areas have thousands of photographers, so the chances of someone seeing work from every single one is very small.

Keep in mind that these people have come to you. They have asked you for information about your services. They obviously like what they see, or they wouldn't have contacted you in the first place. They are interested in you being their photographer. They are interested in the work that you create and want to know how they can get you to create for them. That is the most important thing to remember. They want you, or, at the very least, they want to hear what you offer. It is important to be confident. If you are not confident, then it will show in your presentation to the potential client. There is no reason to not be confident—they came to you because they like what you produce.

Contrary to popular opinion, this industry is driven by business skills rather than photography skills. Yes, it is certainly important to know how to shoot, but you don't need to be the best photographer in the world to run a successful business. I always tell photographers just getting into the industry that if they want to run a successful business, they need to focus more on the business than the shooting.

You can be the best photographer in the world, but if you cannot run a business, then you will fail. You can be an average photographer and make six figures in this industry if you know how to build and run a business. Yes, we should strive to become better at our craft, but we need to focus on the business side of things. Our images will not sell themselves.

When we learn to separate the perceived value of our work from the perceived value of other photographers' work, then we can focus on the part that actually makes us money: the business side. As mentioned above, our clients do not know who the photographers are that we look up to and compare ourselves to. We know them because we are in the industry. We need to focus on building a business that sells our images and makes us successful. By focusing on the business side, we separate our emotions from our work. Now we are focused on running a business and making money, not on where we lack in our images. Successful photographers focus on their business first and images second.





#### 4. ENTER COMPETITIONS

Now, you might be thinking, "I am already self-doubting my skills as a photographer. Why would I enter a competition just to see how much I suck compared to others?" You are missing a key component. Competitions aren't about comparing your images to those of other photographers. Yes, there are "winners" (merits) and "losers" (no merit), but that shouldn't be the goal of entering an image competition.

I enter competitions to see what I can do better. I'm often blind to my own images. I know they are not perfect, but I can't quite put a finger on it. It takes someone else to point it out to me. Once that happens, guess what? I am more aware of that issue in the future. Maybe it's hand placement, maybe it's lighting, maybe it's the overall pose—the judges always find something that would make for a better image.

These professional critiques make us better photographers. It isn't about how your images compare to others, it's about how you can improve to make them better. Much of our self-doubt comes from the unknown. It's often hard to put your finger on why one image is better than another. Image competitions point that out to you. It should be looked at as a learning opportunity. We learn by having flaws pointed out, not by someone telling us how good an image is.

View image competition as a learning tool. Don't take it personally. It is meant to help you become better, not destroy you. Don't let a critique get you down. Implement what you've learned. Learn to correct the things the judges pointed out. You'll become a better photographer and your confidence will grow as a result.



Curtiss Bryant is the owner/photographer (along with his wife, Valerie) of Curtiss Bryant Photography in Central Florida. He has a degree in marketing and has been shooting professionally since 2005, specializing in weddings and high school senior portraits. Curtiss's work has graced the pages of international publications, and his awards include being named to the Hot 100 for 2016 by Senior Style Guide.

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## PROJUCT PHOTOGRAPHY LIGHTING BASICS with Michael Corsentino



We're all exposed to product photography every single day of our lives, so there will always be a strong demand for it. This month, I take a look at some of the basic concepts of product photography and how to approach lighting and other technical details. Adding product photography to your services can be extremely profitable. But these tips are helpful whether you want to start doing it professionally or just sell some stuff on eBay.

One of the bonuses of product photography is the lack of the logistics, time constraints and budgetary concerns encountered with location shoots and managing creative teams. It's just you alone in your studio with a product and your lights. You get to Zen out, put on some music and spend as much time as you need noodling and finessing everything until it's perfect. For me, that's heaven. Let's look at how I approached a recent shoot of high-end stereo components for a leading stereo magazine.

#### REZERRCH

With any new assignment, especially in an area new to me, my first step is research. I learn the norms and conventions for that type of work, who the best practitioners are and what they're doing, what clients they're working with, and what their work looks like. From there, I start winnowing down the styles that appeal to me, thinking about new things I can bring to the table and reverse-engineering the technical aspects I'm seeing.

I also seek technical guidance by reaching out to anyone I can who has experience doing this type of work. What are the best practices? How are they lighting their images? How many lights are being used? What tools and accessories are needed? Do I have the necessary equipment or do I need to budget for that? What kinds of surfaces are they shooting on—stone, wood, white, black? What are they using to create those shiny black-and-white bases we see under every product? How are they creating product reflections while minimizing unwanted reflections from lights? What kinds of backgrounds are they using? Is the majority of their work done in studio, in environments or a mixture? What should I charge?

You'd be surprised how willing people are to share with you when you approach them the right way. Keep in mind this is their livelihood that you're inquiring about, so tread lightly. Make it clear, whether it's true or not, that your goal is not to eat their lunch. Tell them you share a genuine love for this type of work, and your goal is to get better at it. This has been a winning approach for me.





nages © Michael Corser

#### SHOOTING SURFACES

My research told me the variety of common styles with which stereo components are shot. They include straightforward studio shots on matte and gloss white and matte and gloss black; more stylized studio work using exotic surfaces like rare woods, metals, veneers, fabrics, gel and effect-driven looks; and products shot in environmental lifestyle settings.

I learned that the gloss and matte black-and-white surfaces I'd been seeing were a common material known as Formica. I sourced four large 4x8-foot and 4x10-foot sheets of Formica from a local cabinet materials warehouse. They were relatively inexpensive, around \$30 each. They're thin, and can be rolled up for easy transport in a hatchback.

I got two black sheets in a matte and gloss finish and two in a white matte and gloss finish. Since this job called for basic studio shots, this combination would cover the bases and allow me to create a variety of options for my client. I also learned that the Formica sheets were best hung on a wall either separately for easier staging or together if wall space is a premium. If you're going the second route, store each sheet with a protective sheet of plastic or craft paper between them to prevent scratches. To hang the sheets of Formica, simply drill two holes, one in each corner along the short edge of the sheet. Leave a few inches of space between the edge and each hole to support the weight of the sheet while it's hanging.

#### MORKTABLE

Next I'd also need a large worktable to support the products I'd be shooting and provide a base for the Formica sheets. There are frosted Plexiglas still-life tables available that allow lighting from below, among other things, but they're large, costly and a bit dated. I preferred something I could easily store.

To accomplish this, I built a simple, sturdy and fairly reasonably priced worktable using two half-inch sheets of 4x8-foot CDX plywood glued and screwed together with two 8-foot 2x4's below to prevent it from flexing under weight. To support the removable tabletop, I purchased two collapsible sheet metal sawhorses. I screwed a 4-foot 2x4 onto the top of each one to provide a base of support as wide as the tabletop.

This arrangement gave me everything I needed: support for the stereo components I'd be shooting (ranging up to 80 pounds), a base to swap in and out different surfaces I'd be shooting on, a comfortable working height and something I could easily break down and store. And all for around \$150.

#### LIGHTING

Shooting anything reflective is largely a game of creating, managing and minimizing reflections. Like solving any good puzzle, this can be accomplished in numerous ways that depend entirely on the nature of the product being photographed—its size, the material and finish of its surface and its level of reflectivity. If the product is a matte-finished cloth sneaker, you'll need a different solution than that used for a chrome-finish toaster.

A good rule of thumb is that the more reflective the surface you're shooting, the broader and more diffuse you'll want the lighting to be. This is typically achieved using one or a combination of strobes and reflectors, softboxes, strip boxes, diffusion panels, velum diffusion sheets, fill boards and subtraction panels. The qualities and shapes of each of these will impact not only the lighting quality but also the shapes and intensity of the reflections created on the product's surfaces. The product featured here had a brushed aluminum finish, making reflections significantly easier to work with than a more highly polished product.

There are numerous ways, from simple to complex, to light product images like the ones featured in this article, but there are a few commonalities among each. Essentially, the goal is to create a fairly evenly lit image with maximum detail and a flattering portrayal of the product.

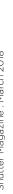
Your setup can simply be one light above the product with white fill boards behind and side to side. Typically there are also one or two keylights on the right and left side of the camera position. This is the basic arrangement: light above, light left and right, light from the front. Each of these elements can be swapped and modified as needed. If the fill boards don't yield the desired effect, substitute a softbox. If you need more contrast, a strobe with a reflector fired through one to three sheets of velum might do the trick, and so on. Sometimes a softbox on top, two side to side and one on either side of the camera is the ticket. Shooting with a black background requires fewer lights that a white background, which may need additional lights to separately control its illumination. There is no one-size-fits-all, but the concept is the same.



I built a DIY product-photography worktable using two sheets of 4x8 plywood, 2x4's and a pair of collapsible sawhorses. This can be easily stored when not in use.



In this BTS image, you're seeing the background, keylight, scrim, camera position, worktable and the first surface I used under the product. I'm a big believer in working as simply as possible. Here I've pared down what could have easily been a three-light starting point—with one overhead light and two lights left and right—into a one-light solution that kills three birds with one stone.





#### SHOOTING

Capturing accurate color in product photography is a critical element. It's a good practice to always shoot an 18% gray card or color target that can be used later in post to create an accurate white balance.

For many products, deep focus across nearly the entire item may be required by the client. In these cases, a technique known as "focus stacking" can be employed. It's much easier than it sounds and simply involves creating a series of exposures, each focusing on a different part of the product. These exposures are then composited together in post.

The focal length of the lens used also plays an important role. I chose a 100mm equivalent lens for its moderate compression and relative lack of distortion. Most images of consumer electronics are shot from slightly above the product. With these kinds of images, you'll also want captures from a variety of angles. Shoot the front and back straight on to show the dials, buttons, inputs and outputs, and 3/4-angled shots of each side to illustrate fit and finish. Give clients a set of images shot on white and black, both matte and gloss, so they have plenty of options.



I started with a gloss-black Formica surface but wasn't happy with the reflection. Gloss Formica is great for some products, but here it created unwanted and unpredictable bends in the reflection. Next time I'll use glossblack Plexiglas. I added the refection in post. Also pictured is the gray card I used to assure accurate white balance in post.



Next I tried shooting the product on black seamless paper, but it was way too flat and the seamless didn't absorb enough light. Next time I'll use black velvet under black Plexiglas to absorb the maximum amount of light.



Matte Formica struck the right balance between reflectivity and light absorption. Here you see only the keylight and no fill cards added. Notice how dark the left and right sides of the product enclosure are.



Here I've started to finesse the light by adding a white fill card to the left side of the product. Note the additional brightness. I like to add one light at a time—or, here, a reflector. Working this way allows me to isolate each element and get an accurate idea of what each light is contributing.



In this image, I've added a silver fill card on the right. Note how much brighter the right side is compared to the previous image. I opted for silver to create more light than the white card being used on the left. This created a graduated rake of light from right to left.



This is the capture I used for the final image. You're seeing it before post-processing, where I cleaned up the background, retouched the surface of the product, illuminated the lights on the front panel, created a better reflection and added additional shadows and highlights.



#### POST-PROCESSING

The work you'll do in post runs the gamut, and involves things like mirroring images to create/heighten reflections, compositing images, masking, creative computer graphic effects, burning and dodging, and lots of spot removal.

#### THAT'S A WAND

I'll revisit this topic in the coming months with more adventurous techniques as my skills set and assignments grow. In the meantime, this will give you a solid foundation to get started with. Keep in mind that you can apply these techniques to a variety of products. If you've been wondering how to best photograph the albums you sell on your website, now you know.





Michael Corsentino is an Orlando, Florida-based editorial fashion and portrait photographer. In addition to his busy shooting schedule, Michael is a passionate educator, teaching workshops domestically and internationally. He is an author of two books, writes a monthly lighting column for *Shutter Magazine* and is a regular contributor to *Photoshop User* magazine and JointheBreed.com.

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# FYRFLY-SONGFREEDOM 2018 LIP SYNC BATTLE STUDENTS VS. EDUCATORS

**4.3.2018** 

The BATTLE 4.4.2018

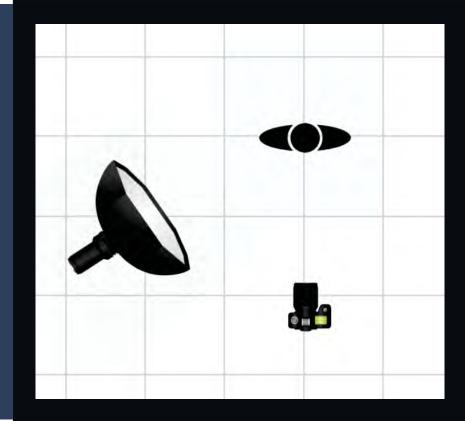
BOOTH #73/74 @ SHUTTERFEST

WHO WILL WIN THE GOLDEN MICROPHONE?



## final inspiration

photographer | salvatore cincotta image title | grand entrance



lighting location

exposure | f4.5 @ 1/100, ISO 400 profoto b1 with ocf beauty dish buðir, iceland gear | phase one iq3 | schneider 28mm





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