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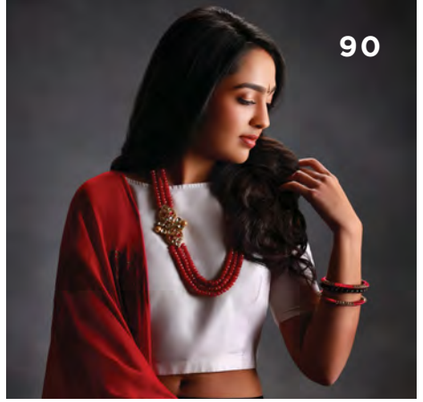

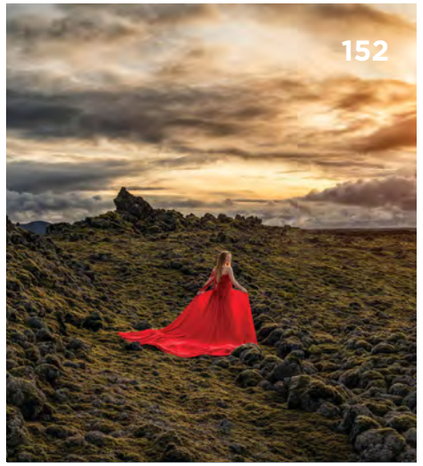

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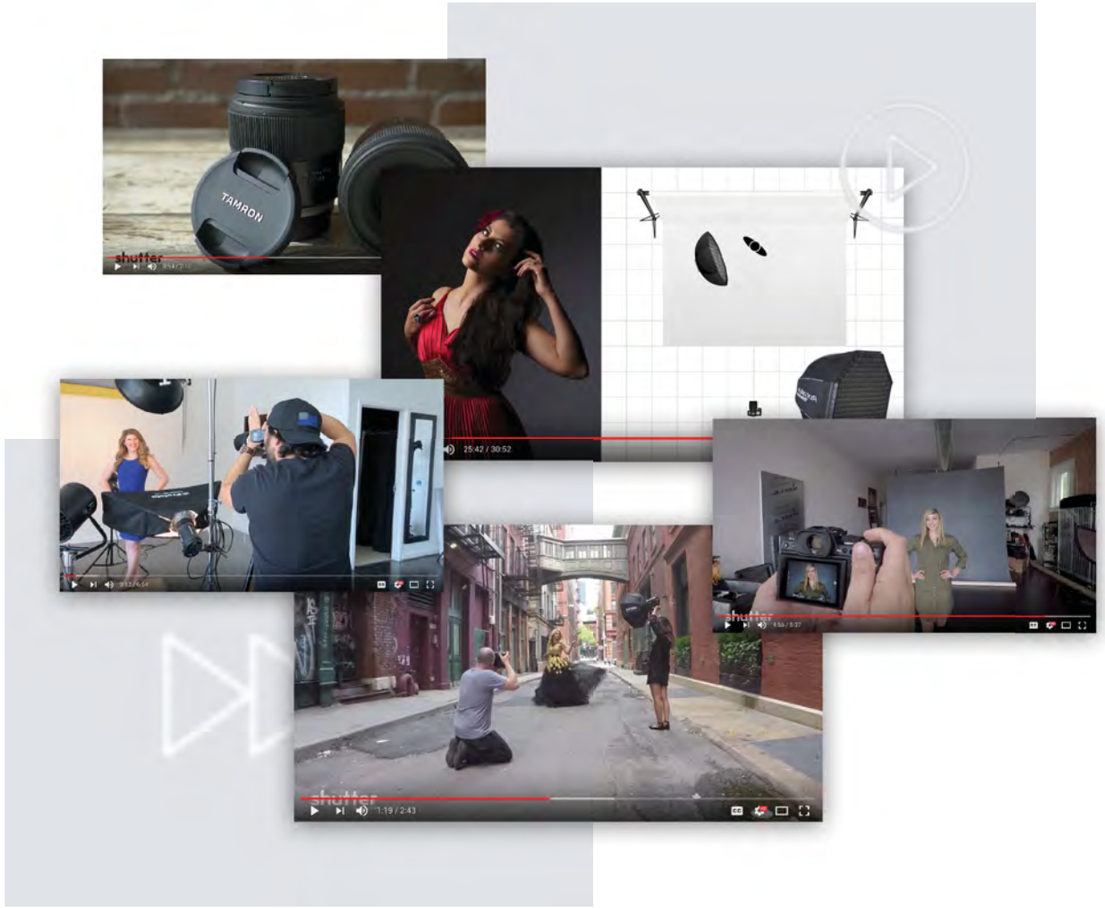

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MISSION **STATEMENT**

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.

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THE **COVER**

TITLE: just imagine
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CAMERA: canon eos 5d mark III
LENS: canon 70 - 200
EXPOSURE: f2.8 @ 1/1000 iso 320
LIGHTING: natural light
MODEL: jensen riley

ABOUT THE IMAGE: Sometimes, magic happens when least expected. I love a well-crafted plan, and this entire shoot—hair, makeup, styling, wardrobe and balloons—was designed for a unique indoor part of a local historic building. It was only after the successful shoot finished, as we were outside and ready to leave, that I saw Jensen in front of this wall and I had a flash of inspiration. Jensen's talent as a gymnast through childhood means she is powerful and graceful in motion. This image quickly became our favorite from the entire day. I still love a well-planned shoot, but now I believe the purpose of planning is to create space for inspiration to occur as you collaborate with your subject in the moment, because they are the magic.

LAUNCH **POINT**

A message from the publisher

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5 REASONS TO USE CREATIVE LIGHTING

with **Michael Anthony**

Image © Michael Anthony Photography

In today's age of high dynamic range cameras and increased knowledge of post-production software, photographers are beginning to rely less and less on the fundamentals of lighting. I can tell you firsthand that our studio built a foundation of its success on the ability to use creative light in any situation. Lighting, in my opinion, is the first thing that we should learn as professional photographers. Lighting will dictate the location that you shoot in as well as the overall style that you are trying to achieve.

Lighting has allowed our studio to stand out in the second-most-competitive market in the world. Even though there are thousands of options for clients to choose from, our studio has retained a consistent flow of new clientele throughout the years. The reason is that we can utilize creative lighting to create captivating images that supersede clients' expectations.

Our studio is in Southern California, the capital of the "natural light photographer, bright and airy, creamy and dreamy hipster shooter." And rightfully so—for me to deny that there is a demand for that type of photography in my area would be foolish. However, rather than fit in with the masses, I've always tried to differentiate our studio, and light has always been the key component to doing so.

So, with all that being said, let me give you 5 different reasons why I believe you should learn to use artificial light in the most creative way possible.

1. CREATIVE LIGHTING WILL HELP YOU STAND OUT IN YOUR MARKET

My market is not unique; no matter where you live, I guarantee that any market has many photographers. We are in an industry that is creative and fun, and has very little barrier to entry. Unfortunately, with that recipe, that means there will be a lot of competition. But fortunately for you, the riches are in the niches. The laws of supply and demand dictate that if you differentiate yourself and offer something so unique that clients have a hard time finding it, the demand for your product will be so great that your prices can only go up. I'm not saying that lighting by itself is going to give you that differentiation, but it will at least open the door through your portfolio for clients to find you and start a further conversation.

By utilizing creative lighting to bring attention to your subject within a composition, you can direct the viewer anywhere you need them to go. Light shaping gives you much more creative freedom to tell the stories that you want to tell.

Image © Michael Anthony Photography

2. CREATIVE LIGHTING HELPS TO BRING OUT EXCELLENCE IN YOUR CRAFT

No matter what type of photography you shoot, you will rarely have control over the scenarios that you shoot in without being able to craft light. Let's take the natural light photographer as an example. If they are relying on natural light to photograph family portraits outside in a park, generally there will be very little reflective light to create directionality on subjects. Natural light outdoors in open shade tends to leave your subjects with a two-dimensional look that is often imitated even by amateur photographers. What makes your images look unique and different is the ability to create a three-dimensional look in a two-dimensional medium. By using even a small amount of flash, you can help to create that three-dimensional appearance, bring light into your subject's eyes and saturation into their skin, and give your images that little extra pop that people are willing to pay big money to have.

Image © Michael Anthony Photography

3. BEING ABLE TO SHAPE LIGHT AROUND YOUR SUBJECTS CREATES MORE FLATTERING PICTURES

Our job is to inspire confidence in our subjects. It is a very difficult job considering society's beauty standards today; however, at the end of the day, our goal is to make our clients love the way they look. Using light creatively with direction allows you to create shadows, and shadows help to slim down our subjects and create texture in their clothing or body. The highlights created by directional light will also bring attention to their face, which will help the viewer of your image get to the subject much quicker.

By utilizing creative lighting, you can also photograph your subjects within larger scenes because you're able to darken your background and brighten your subject independently of each other. This allows you to create sellable portraits that show off the location you are currently shooting with them. Creative lighting is especially useful for wedding photographers, because often people spend a lot of money to book their venue, so taking scenic portraits allows you to show that off.

Image © Michael Anthony Photography

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4. AN UNDERSTANDING OF LIGHTING WILL ALLOW YOU TO PERFORM IN A VARIETY OF ENVIRONMENTS

If you are a natural light photographer, you're going to have a very hard time photographing a reception that is outdoors at night. Furthermore, if you don't understand how to use color, you're going to be dealing with mixed lighting that pollutes your subject's skin tones. By understanding how to place and shape light, you will be able to either mimic natural lighting when appropriate or craft lighting that looks cinematic or theatrical.

We probably book 10 to 15 weddings a year just because our clients can see in our portfolio that we are proficient at working in darker environments. Also, the ability to work in dark environments allows us the opportunity to sometimes photograph weddings during the winter months when we would otherwise be very slow.

But more importantly than just being able to help us make more money, understanding how to use lighting allows me to deliver a finalized product no matter what situation I am working in. This last New Year's Eve, I photographed a wedding inside a warehouse, where the couple utilized advanced projection mapping to create a moving enchanted forest on all four walls of the space. Any flash that we could have utilized would have washed out the scenery, but without light, the subjects had patterns projected onto them.

With just basic knowledge of light, we would've under-delivered on our client's expectations. But instead, to deal with the situation, we placed very controlled light patterns on our subjects during creative portraits. This allowed us to eliminate the issue without the light spilling upon the background. This was one of the most difficult weddings I have ever photographed. However, I can guarantee that we will have a situation like this again in the future, just as you will eventually if you are photographing weddings.

Going into a situation like that with the confidence that you know how to deal with it is worth every penny for keeping your stress level low and your client's images amazing.

5. CREATIVE LIGHTING ENHANCES YOUR CLIENT'S EXPERIENCE

Utilizing creative lighting will allow you to overdeliver on your client's expectations by taking a scene that looks one way in real life and transforming it into something that looks theatrical in photos. Every single one of your clients will usually start their dialogue with you by telling you that they are not photogenic. This usually means that the photos they view of themselves do not represent the way that they believe they look. However, if you can take a scene and transform it utilizing creative lighting by darkening your background, brightening your subjects, and creating highlight and shadow, you will be able to take that self-perception and meet the standards that many people hold themselves to.

It's important to remember that we are not selling photographs. Photographs are just a part of the overall experience that our clients are buying from us. The sooner you understand that, the more successful your business will be. If we deliver on our clients' expectations by offering them beautiful photos, a great experience, and a lifetime of memories, we will create customers for life who will be more than happy to refer us to their friends and family.

Image © Michael Anthony Photography

Image © Michael Anthony Photography

At the end of the day, photographic style is not the same thing as creative lighting. Lighting itself is not a style, but rather a technique that every photographer should learn to master. Once you understand the technique, then you can apply that technique to your style however you see fit. I love brighter images as much as I like the dark and dramatic stuff that our clients know us for. It is true, however, that almost every image in our portfolio has had the light manipulated in one way or another. Learning how to master lighting to shape it around your subjects and your scene will give you the creative freedom to go bring your vision to life. ■

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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.

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3 WAYS TO NAIL BRIDAL PREP

with **Vanessa Joy**

Taking pictures of the bride as she gets ready for the wedding ceremony on her special day is a time-honored tradition in wedding photography, but it can require a different set of skills from the traditional photos of the ceremony. I personally love the close, intimate setting and the candid shots that can be captured during bridal prep.

Of course, it does take a little planning, a good deal of forethought, and the right mindset to bring out the best in the bride, the bridesmaids, and the hair and makeup artists. Here are three keys to photographing bridal preps that I've found to be *extremely* helpful:

Images © Vanessa Joy

1. BE EMPATHETIC

Even if they want you to take pictures of their wedding prep, not all brides will naturally feel at ease with a photographer snapping shots of them in such a private setting. What I like to do to help the bride feel more comfortable is to arrive early at the prep venue, and start by photographing details first: the bride's shoes, her dress, the bridal bouquets, and other things that don't actually require the bride to be there. Typically, I'm using a Canon 50mm1.2 lens along with a 100mm 2.8 macro lens for the rings.

A lot of times, the bride and her bridesmaids are almost completely finished with their hair and makeup by the time I begin snapping pictures of them. If some of the makeup artists are putting on finishing touches, I make sure to stay out of the way, and focus on taking long-distance shots instead of close-ups, especially if the venue is unique or eye-catching. For the most part, I use my Canon 135mm 2.0 lens to stay inconspicuous while still catching the action.

Every once in a while, I may sneak in a close-up shot, but only if I'm not being intrusive or overbearing by doing so. This attitude also carries over to when the bride actually gets into her dress—some brides have no problem with me staying beside them as they get ready, while others are a little shy, and prefer me to wait until they're already done.

The bottom line is, I've found that I can get better shots (and feel more comfortable doing so) when I approach the bridal prep shoot from a standpoint of empathy, letting the bride's feelings guide what I do and don't try to do. If the bride is at ease, it really carries through to the photos.

Image © Vanessa Joy

Image © Vanessa Joy

2. FOCUS ON DETAILS AND LIGHTING

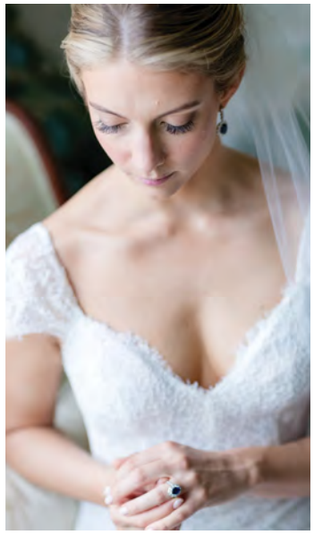
As I mentioned above, I like to start out a bridal prep photo shoot with a focus on the material details, such as the flowers and shoes. I try to carry this attention to detail over to my pictures of the bride and bridesmaids.

One big factor in almost all bridal prep shoots is lighting. Some rooms offer great natural light from big, well-positioned windows, whereas others are a little darker and less roomy. Whatever the case may be, I always try to get as much light as I can in these photos.

Whether I'm photographing the bride as she's getting ready, staging a "getting ready" shot, or snapping pictures of her in her dress, I usually position the bride's face toward the room's natural light source to capture the softest images. I generally prefer a large window for this purpose (who wouldn't?). Once I have my lighting and subjects set up, I can even play around with it by shooting directly into the light, or having the light come into the image frame from the sides. I tend to run circles around them during this time to get a variety of images with different lighting patterns.

When the bride is in her dress but not completely zipped (or buttoned) up, I tend to focus on a combination of details and lighting. As the bride stands in that perfect lighting area, I often photograph subtle things like her hands, the buttons on her dress, her face full of anticipation, or the moment when a friend or a parent zips up the dress. A lot of times I'll use the Canon 50mm or 35mm for this portion of the bridal prep. I usually need to be a little closer to the action here to get what I need.

Image © Vanessa Joy



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3. DIRECT AS NEEDED

This point really comes down to style. I know that most pure photojournalists take a hands-off approach to staging shots, preferring to stay in the background as observers and recorders, rather than directors. When it comes to staged shots versus candid shots, I personally have a "hybrid" take on wedding photography: I direct as needed to get the best possible shot, while still keeping things mostly candid and undisturbed.

For a large portion of the bridal prep shoot, I don't need to stage anything. I'm absorbed in long-distance shots of the bridesmaids getting their hair done, or focused on details of the room and bride, for example.

However, there are some situations in which I've found staged shots to be quite useful. For instance, once the bride is done with her hair and makeup, I often ask the bride and makeup artist to come over to a better-lit spot for a couple of fake "getting ready" shots. By doing this, the bride doesn't feel uncomfortable, as she's actually getting ready, and I can capture a more flattering shot with better lighting. It’s also nice for the makeup artist for me to capture a shot of their completed work rather than a half-done face.

When it comes time to photograph the bride in her dress, I direct her to stand where there's good lighting, and sometimes ask her to strike a simple pose, turn her head one way or another, or maybe hold a prop (like her engagement ring) in her hands. Sometimes I’ll re-do some of the detail shots I took earlier and I'll ask the bride to hold her shoes or flowers in her hands as a friend is buttoning up the back of her dress.

I also try to snap a few shots of the bride once she's *completely* dressed, but before anyone else sees her. I'm looking for headshots, creative portraits, and even full-length shots if there's room.

Again, for the most part I stay focused on candid shots. Of course, I am always willing to oblige any request from the bride or bridesmaids, such as taking a group picture, or another staged shot.

Image © Vanessa Joy

Images © Vanessa Joy

Photographing bridal preps can be a lot of fun, both for the photographer and for the bride and bridesmaids. If you'd like to learn more about how to get the best photographs from bridal preps, or any other aspect of wedding photography, explore my tutorials at youtube.com/vanessajoy, and be sure to check out the video on Behind the Shutter this month as well. ■

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youtube.com/btsShutterMagazine

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.

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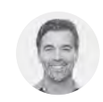

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THE SUB-STORIES YOU MUST COVER ON THE *Wedding Day*

with **Jeff & Lori Poole**

Image © Indigosilver Studio

Every wedding is different. And yet, as photographers, our approach to them is often the same, dictated by our own predispositions. These predispositions cause us to miss important images and important stories that could be costing us in sales and referrals.

We often see two common types of photographers: the Epic Shot Photographer and the Instagram Photographer. Each photographer is driven to shoot the types of images they feel others will admire most, but they often neglect crucial parts of the wedding day.

THE EPIC SHOT PHOTOGRAPHER

These photographers come to life when they finally get to photograph the wedding couple alone. They stage amazing wall-portrait-worthy images of the couple (usually during cocktail hour or at sunset). Other names for The Epic Shot include The Hero Shot, The Money Shot, or The Image-Comp Shot.

These photographers are all about the gear: the lights, the modifiers, the camera settings. They want to create images their clients can't (even with an iPhone 11), and they want to impress their fellow photographers. Their posing is often infused with drama: looking off into the distance, windswept clothing and hair. This style sells well with couples who want to feel like fashion models, edgy and sophisticated.

While the time spent photographing the couple is a relatively short portion of the day, many photographers spend the majority of their *creative effort* on The Epic Shot. However, once the creative portraits with the couple are over, these photographers morph into Event Photography mode. They photograph the rest of the day as it is presented to them. They may or may not have good photojournalistic instincts to capture fleeting moments, but they don't actively craft and shape the story throughout the day.

THE INSTAGRAM PHOTOGRAPHER

The Instagram Photographer also captures beautiful images of the wedding couple, but the mood is quite different: Instead of epic and dramatic, the Instagram Photographer goes for a romantic style. Image upon image of the couple holding hands, nuzzling, and smiling into each other's embrace abounds. This photographer uses softer, natural lighting to have a consistent style and palette. The style speaks very much to couples who want to be seen as madly in love.

Outside of the creative portraits, this photographer excels at magazine-worthy detail shots of rings, shoes, flowers and invitations. When unable to pose the subject(s), this photographer may struggle to capture true, unstaged emotional moments. Reception coverage in dim lighting may pose a challenge.

THE PROBLEM WITH ONE TYPE

If our photographic intent and skill stops within one of these styles, we are doing a disservice to our clients. We're not digging deep enough into the meaning of the wedding day, the importance of nuanced events, and the fleeting moments that deserve to be preserved in photographs.

Further, by going through the motions throughout the day, we're missing out on several business opportunities: upsales for the client, upsales to family members, client referrals, and vendor referrals.

Wouldn't it be great if we could get amazing wall-portrait-worthy photos of our clients, capture the minute details they so lovingly chose, and tell a complete wedding story that included fleeting moments and emotions? Let's take a look at how a little forethought and communication can go a long way to upping our game as wedding photographers.

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BECOME A STORYTELLER

The first step in improving our wedding game is to stop thinking of ourselves as Epic Photographers or Instagram Photographers, and start thinking of ourselves as Storytellers. When it comes to a couple's wedding story, we can break down a basic outline of the day and sub-stories we'll tell.

When we think of the wedding day as a series of sub-stories, we begin to photograph with greater intent. A story commonly has a beginning, middle and end. A story has a setting and a main character. The main character has an emotional experience. A transformation occurs.

If you were to approach each sub-story of the day with these elements in mind, would it change how you approach wedding photography? Would it make you more thoughtful? More observant? Would you begin to put more creative effort into portraying each sub-story?

In order to capture the full story, it would require both careful detail shots *and* hero shots. But it would also require intentional attunement to the client to provide excellent photojournalism. We are telling our *clients'* stories, not our own. This automatically requires that we talk to our clients about what is important to *them*, and that we listen and deliver.

Common wedding sub-stories usually include:

- Bride/Groom Preparation
- Ceremony
- Family Formals
- First Dance
- Cake Cutting and/or Toasts
- Open Dancing
- Grand Exit, if applicable

Capture those wedding-day sub-stories, and you have a solid foundation for a storytelling wedding album. Structure your wedding album to tell each sub-story, and your clients will no longer be concerned with page or image counts. They will be willing to invest in having their story told.

Even if you're already capturing the majority of the sub-stories listed above, are you investing as much creative energy into them as you are into your favorite parts of the day? Are you capturing them with as much skill as you put into your couple shots?

Here are a few parts of the day where you can step up your game even more.

SET THE SCENE

Detail shots: do you love them or hate them? Many Epic Photographers hate them (or tolerate them at best); many Instagram Photographers love them. For you Epic Photographers reading, we have news for you: it's time to step up your game. In the age of Pinstagram, wedding couples are more invested than ever in the "look" of their wedding day. As a photographer, you are the *one* vendor they are hiring to preserve every. little. detail. that they've spent the past year curating. And just snapping a photo of each detail isn't enough. It's important that you put creative effort into staging and lighting the details in an artful manner. The details need to tell something about your couple.

Pay close attention to photographing each of the couple's details: rings, shoes, garter, bouquet, ties, cufflinks, etc. Photograph them all together—as in, all the bride's details in one shot. But also, photograph them individually. For ceremony and reception details, set the scene first: Get wide shots of the ballroom, and then zoom in to the individual details. Make sure to photograph each centerpiece in the reception. The cake. The favors. Signage. Linens. Place settings. Every detail you can find.

These detail shots are going to serve some additional purposes for you:

1. Additional spreads in the wedding album. When a couple works this hard on how their wedding looks, they want images to remember it by. You can easily devote at least one spread each to bride's details, groom's details, ceremony details, and reception details. That's already four spreads! If they are particularly detail heavy, go for more.

2. Vendor networking. Share these images with your fellow wedding vendors! Often times, our images are the only professional images they can use to market their business. Believe it or not, many photographers never share their images with the other vendors. This is an easy way to stand out in their minds and earn referrals. Be sure to deliver vendor images within one week of the wedding so that they can do their own blogging and self promotion in a timely manner.

3. Marketing images. Weddings that are heavy on details are often more expensive, and are therefore viewed as higher-end. Simply paying careful attention to creating detail images can allow you to be perceived as a higher-end wedding photographer! Be sure to mix these images into your social media and marketing pieces. Additionally, wedding inspiration blogs and magazines are looking to publish detail-heavy weddings. Getting published helps your street cred and reinforces your relationship with the vendors you worked with.

Images © Indigosilver Studio

EMOTIONAL MOMENTS WITH MOM OR DAD DURING PREPARATION

You're already photographing bride and groom preparation. Parents may be present, may be in-and-out, or may be elsewhere during this time. Some couples don't want their parents hovering throughout the preparation time, and that's OK. But it *is* important to carve out a few moments with Mom and/or Dad prior to the ceremony. In the hustle and bustle of the day, these moments can be easily forgotten if not planned for. Have a discussion with your clients about planning a few minutes dedicated to being present with their parents.

On the day of the wedding, when the bride or groom and their parents are fully ready, ask the wedding party to leave the room for a few quiet minutes alone. Ask your clients to set aside the busy-ness of the day, and to truly think about the momentousness of the occasion. Set the stage for an emotional embrace with Mom; for Dad to see his baby girl as a bride; for some reminiscing and mindfulness.

One father and bride, both self-proclaimed as unemotional, had tears flowing freely during these few planned but unscripted moments. Dad kept shaking his finger at us for the rest of the day, saying "You're so good!" One mother of the bride lost her battle with cancer shortly after the wedding, but we created a time and space for her to have a few cherished moments with her daughter on such an important day.

What we do is so much more than photography. We not only tell the story, we help it to happen. Do this for your clients, and they will send you heartfelt referrals forever. Talk about this to your prospects, and you will stand out from every other photographer they've spoken to.

Image © Indigosilver Studio

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FIRST LOOKS, DONE RIGHT

If you haven't seen or done a First Look, it's a planned moment between the couple allowing them to see each other prior to the ceremony. It serves lots of purposes—it helps the couple get over their jitters. It allows more time for photography. At its most basic level, a First Look is simply the couple seeing each other for the first time. But if we don't understand the emotional significance of this moment, we can easily screw it up.

At its best, a First Look is a moment alone in which the couple can truly experience every emotion they're feeling, instead of covering them up or being rushed to the next event. In order for this to happen, we have to carve out the time and space for the couple. A minimum of 30 minutes. No bridal party. No onlookers. And as photographers, *no wide angle lenses*. To give the couple the feeling of being truly alone, we need to have our telephoto lenses on. As in the example above, talk to your clients for a few minutes about being mindful and present in the moment. Then let the events unfold without interruption.

I photographed a first look during which the videographer stayed five feet away from the couple at all times with a wide angle lens on. Rather than allowing the couple to experience real emotion, she coached them. She actually said, "OK, now is when you're supposed to cry." Tell me, what groom is going to exhibit *real* emotion when being told quite tackily to emote?

At another wedding for which I was a second photographer, the first look was planned five minutes prior to the guests arriving. The groom stood outside the church, in full view of passersby. A minivan rolled up, and the side door opened. Inside was the bride. She waved, leaned out and gave him a quick kiss. And then, fearful of being seen, she closed the door and asked the driver to pull away. What a missed opportunity.

Image © Indigosilver Studio

WELL-ROUNDED STORYTELLING = WIN

As wedding photographers, it's important for us to step away from capturing only that which we think will impress our peers. We need to talk to our clients about why wedding photography is important to them. We must go beyond great shots of the couple, and truly tell the whole story of their wedding day. We need to artfully capture their details. We need to attentively capture fleeting moments. And we should offer suggestions on how to create moments that may not happen on their own. If we do this, we become better as photographers, we enjoy better album and portrait sales, and we earn the referrals of our clients and our vendors. ■

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Just a few years after Jeff and Lori found themselves struggling to survive while living in the basement of their studio, back in 2012, they are the proud owners of a brand-new home on the coast of North Carolina. The owners of Wilmington's Indigosilver Studio offer boutique boudoir portraiture and wedding photography. They are also the founders of The Shoot Space, their educational resource for photographers. Their *Shutter Magazine* column, The Business Corner, is dedicated to helping you grow your photography business.

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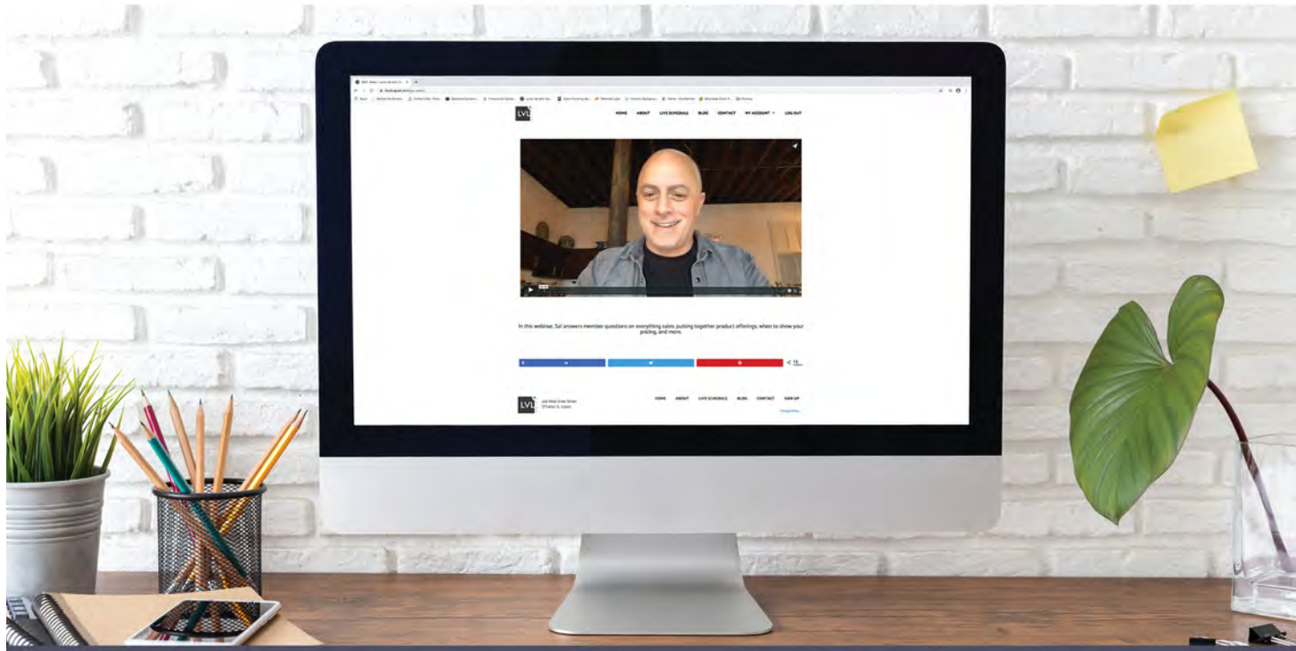

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5 STEPS TO *Brush Up* ON RETOUCHING IN PHOTOSHOP

with **Dustin Lucas**

Image © Jessica Briggs Lucas

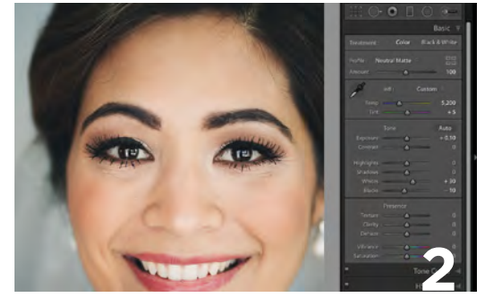
As photographers, you should focus on making your client look their best, but do not transform them into someone they won't recognize. The rule of thumb with retouching is to be subtle enough that it's not even noticeable that you did it. For this level of editing, I find myself starting in Lightroom or another RAW processing program, then retouching in Photoshop. In my opinion, there is no other comparable tool, and with actions, using a tablet for pressure sensitivity, and using a non-destructive post-production workflow, I can run through multiple images with ease. So if you need to dust off your editing skills, these are the five steps to brush up on retouching in Photoshop.

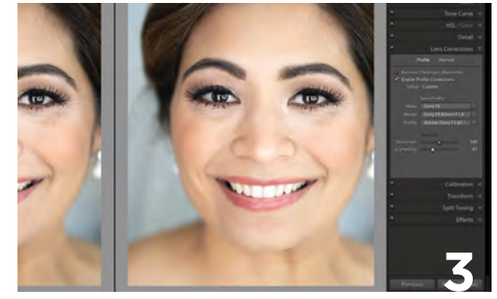
It all starts with a light dose of editing for color correction in Lightroom to make sure I have a solid base. Once I export my files into Photoshop, I start with the pixel manipulation to remove blemishes and distracting hairs. Then I am ready to accentuate the eyes, lips and teeth. Once we apply some Liquify, we can soften the skin while bringing back some sharpness to focus on the features of the face. Last but not least, it's dodge and burn to the rescue to get the image ready to show to the client.

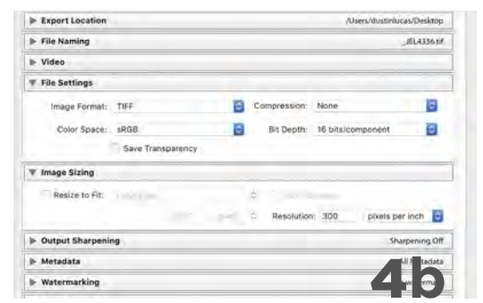
1. PREPPING YOUR FILE

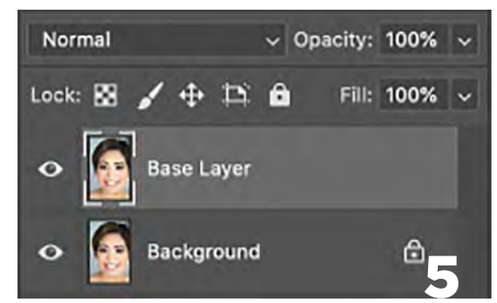
Working from a RAW file, I typically use Lightroom, since it's a lot faster than opening it directly into Camera Raw. Quickly, I can set my white balance and exposure—keep in mind we will use Photoshop later for most of the heavy lifting for toning. (1) One important setting is profile, as this will make sure the correct color is applied to the image. Typically, I leave this at Adobe Color unless I am applying a creative look. (2) Next, I use lens correction to fix mostly the vignette and any distortion with the lens. (3) Most importantly, I have to consider export options when rasterizing my RAW file.

Image © Jessica Briggs Lucas





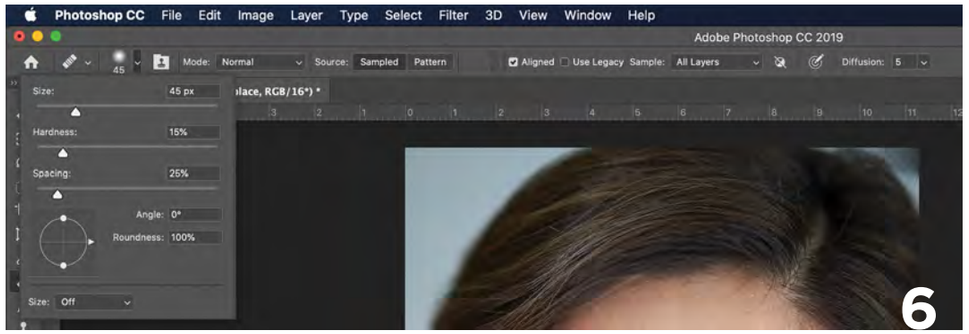


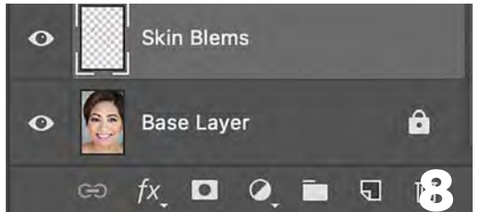


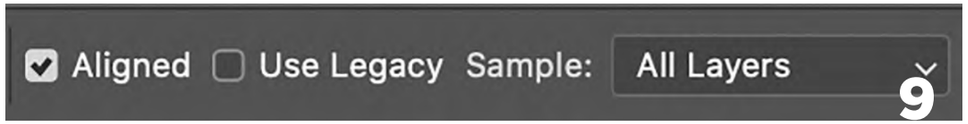
I usually set the file type to .tiff and the bit depth to 16 bits/component to get the most out of my image when editing in Photoshop. Color space is important as well, and when I need to do further work I use Adobe 1998 (RGB). (4ab) Only if I am ready to post or deliver will I convert to sRGB. Once I have my file open, it's very important that I prepare to work non-destructively. Always work from new or duplicated image layers to ensure you can go back and correct any mistakes. The last thing you want to do is make a mistake and have to start all over. It's simple to do, just hold option and command while striking the "j" key. (5)

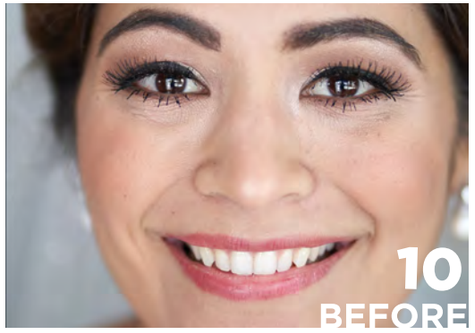
2. HEAL YOUR BLEMISHES, STRAY HAIRS AND CROSSHAIRS

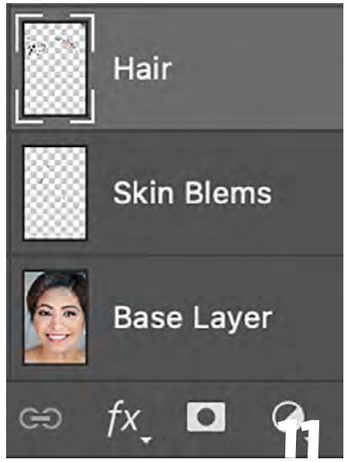
Healing brush is by far the best tool for fixing a majority of issues tied to skin blemishes, skin flakes, stray hairs and crosshairs. You will definitely want to know what type of settings to use in different situations, like for feathering, diffusion and sampling. Focusing on skin blemishes and flakes, we will need to adjust the feathering for a softer edge and set diffusion to 5. (6) Striking the "j" key will open the healing brush tool, but be sure you don't grab the Spot Healing Brush Tool, because this doesn't let you sample. (7) Before you start healing the skin, you will need to create a new layer by holding shift and command while striking the "n" key. We can name this layer "Skin Blems" and start removing blemishes. (8) One last tip would be to check the aligned box so that when you sample, it moves with your cursor versus picking from the same spot repeatedly. (9) It's all in those details where you want to focus on this type of cleanup. (10 before & after)



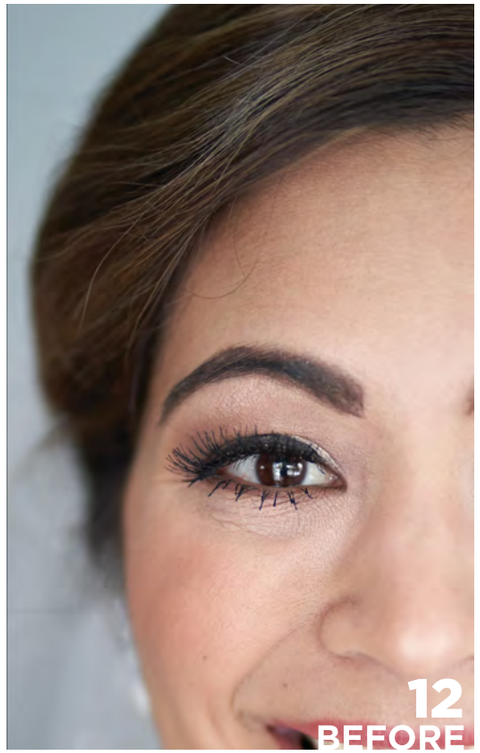


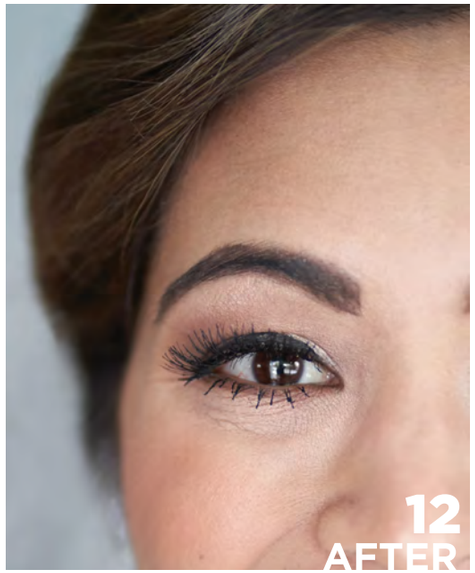


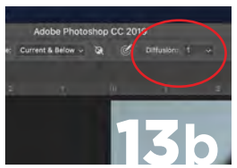


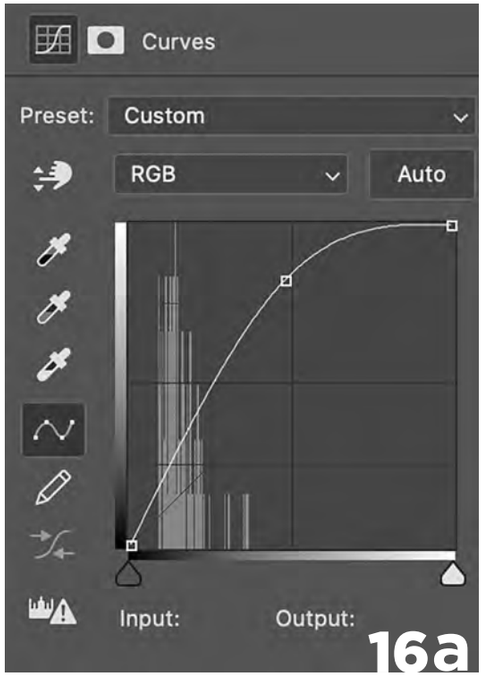


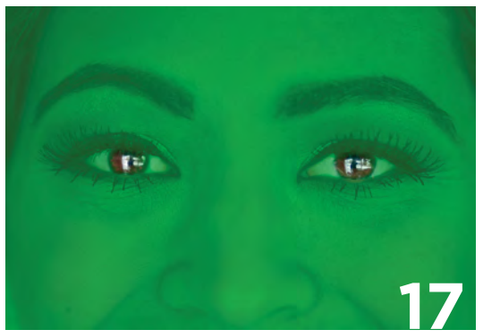
Removing stray hairs takes a very similar approach as with blemishes. You will have a softer brush, so it blends in with the background. (11) The Clone Stamp Tool can be used as well when you start to get smudges from the Healing Brush Tool. You can blend the two and maintain the integrity of the image. (12 before & after) In this case, once I am finished working around the bride's head, I can move to the hairs on the forehead. This is where I change the brush to a harder edge and lower the diffusion to 1. (13ab) This will reduce the smudging effect and keep the texture of the skin intact. You can sample surrounding areas where you want to use the heal brush and continue to resample so the result looks natural. This will let you remove hairs quickly and accurately.(14 before & after)





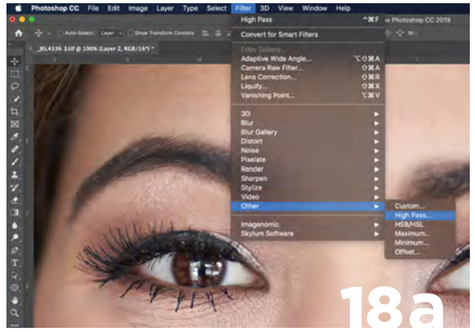


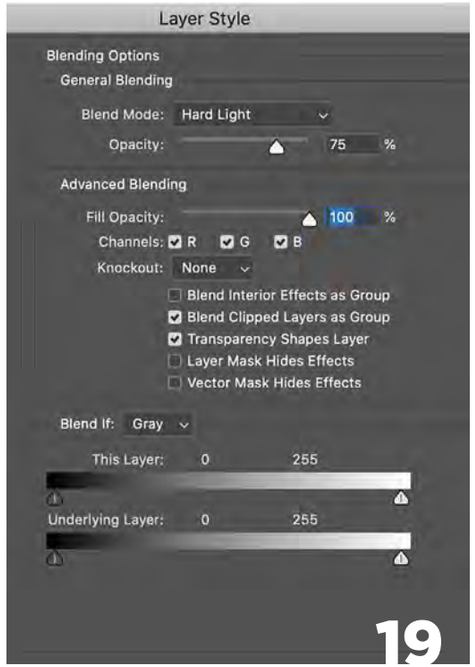




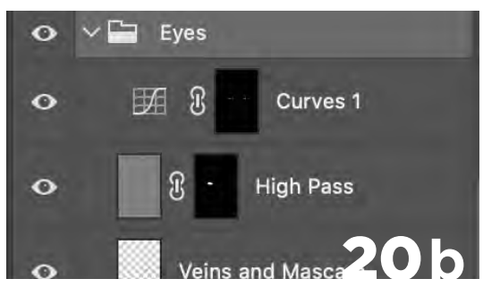
3. BRUSH UP EYES, LIPS AND TEETH

Moving on to the eyes, we can see this is not the best image to demonstrate eye work, but we can still clean up veins and globs of mascara. (15) Typically, I would start with a curves layer, adjust the image to be very bright, and invert the layer mask to paint in some dramatic effects. (16ab) To remove the veins, this is a similar process as we used the healing brush for, with a hard edge and lower diffusion. Also, if I want to add some sharpness to the camera left eye, I can do so with some high pass sharpening. (17)



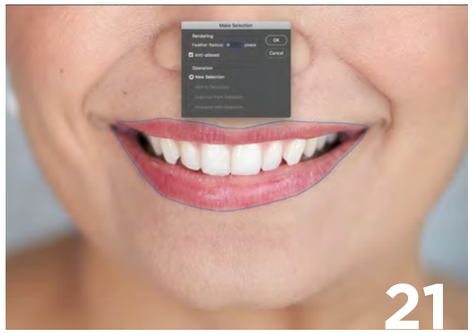


Start by adding a new action, naming it "High Pass," and then clicking record. I highly recommend for useful tools to always create actions to make editing faster. Now create a new image layer, click on Filter in the top menu, choose Other>High Pass, and set the radius to 10 pixels. (18ab) Then we can double click the new layer to open Layer Styles, set Opacity to 75% and Mode to Hard Light, and click OK. (19) Then name the layer "High Pass," and hold option while clicking Add Layer Mask to invert it and stop recording. Now you can take the brush tool, set the foreground color to black and white by striking the "d" key, and then strike "x" to bring white to the foreground. Paint with the white brush on the inverted later mask at 100% to apply the effect to the left eye. Once you are done, you can toggle the "\" key to see where you've painted and adjust the layer opacity as needed. Now to finish off the eyes, we can group all layers and name this "Eyes" for organization. (20)



Moving on to the lips, we need to clean up the lipstick and boost the saturation. I typically start by selecting around the lips with the pen tool. Then we can right click, leave feather at 0, and click OK. (21) To see our mask, we can strike the "q" key and add a gaussian blur to soften the edge. This is a little trick to see the mask edge so we can clean up around the lips with the healing brush. (22) Before we get started, we need to save a path to use later as well. (23)

With the lips selected, add a new blank layer, invert the selection, and use the clone brush around the lips to better define their shape. (24 before & after) After that, we can invert the selection again, add a new layer, and clone the inside edge of the selection. (25 before & after) Once you are done, select both layers and reduce opacity to make this look realistic. Now we can add a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer to help with the right side color. Also, to fix smeared and chapped lips, we can simply clone to fill in these areas. Let's move on to a quick teeth-whitening technique. (26)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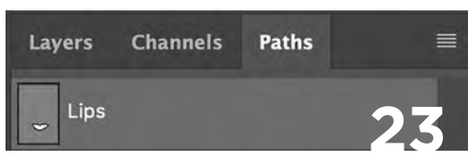

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24 BEFORE

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25 BEFORE

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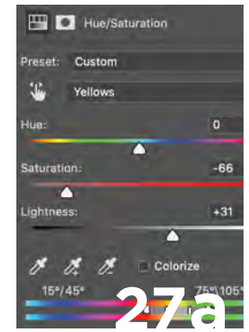

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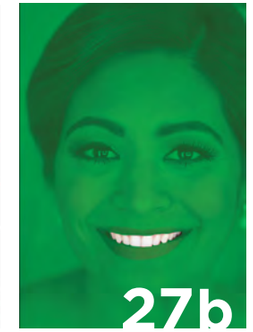
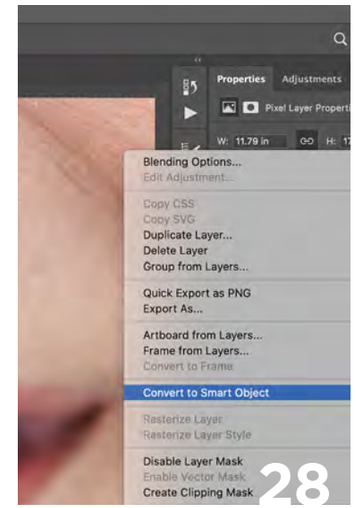

27b

This part is simple—choose the lasso tool, and draw around teeth to make a selection. Once selected, add a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer. Click on Master to choose Yellows to specifically target these colors. (27) Then lower saturation to -80 and lift lightness to +25. That's it, and now we are ready to move into a simple Liquify

4. SIMPLE LIQUIFY, SOFTEN SKIN AND SHARPEN FEATURES

When it comes to Liquify, I tend to only do light changes to correct for lens distortion or if they are requested specifically. To start, I create a smash layer by holding shift, option, and command, and striking the "e" key. This smashes all layers into one new one, which I name "Liquify." Before I jump into Liquify, I make this a Smart Object so it's non-destructive. (28) Then I can go to Filter in the top menu bar and choose Liquify. I really like the Face-Aware tool for quickly reshaping facial features. Mainly, I mess with the lips and the jawline, but overall this needs to be used with caution. Retouching should not transform the person to the point they don't recognize themselves. (29 before & after)



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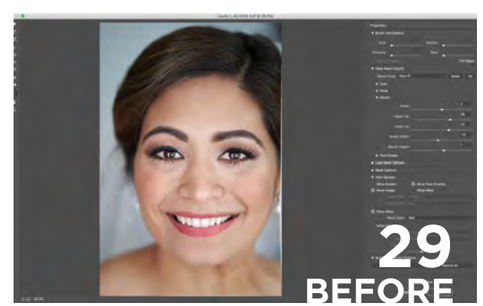
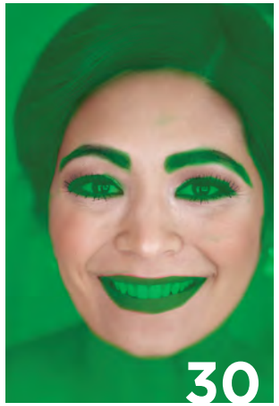
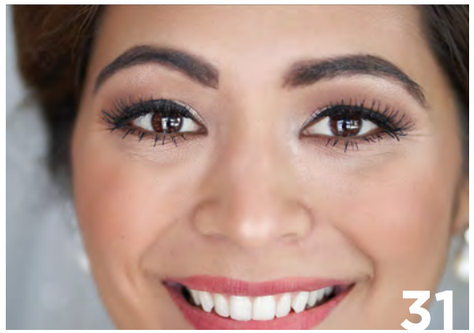

29 BEFORE

29 AFTER

Image © Jessica Briggs Lucas

Now we are ready to soften the skin, and I gotta say Portraiture is still the faster option to use. I have an action set up already that creates a smash layer, applies a standard amount of smoothing, inverts a layer mask, and sets opacity to 75%. This is all I need to then paint on the smoothing and adjust the opacity as needed. (30) Then I apply my High Pass action to sharpen and bring back details. (31) These three steps really elevate this beauty portrait, and my bride will be happy. (32)





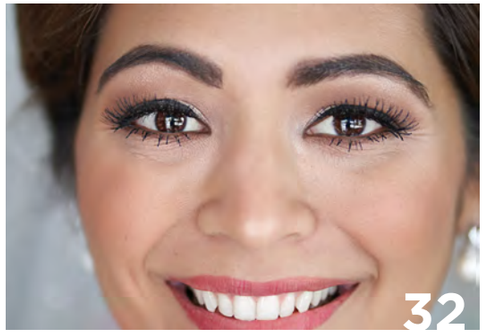


Image © Jessica Briggs Lucas

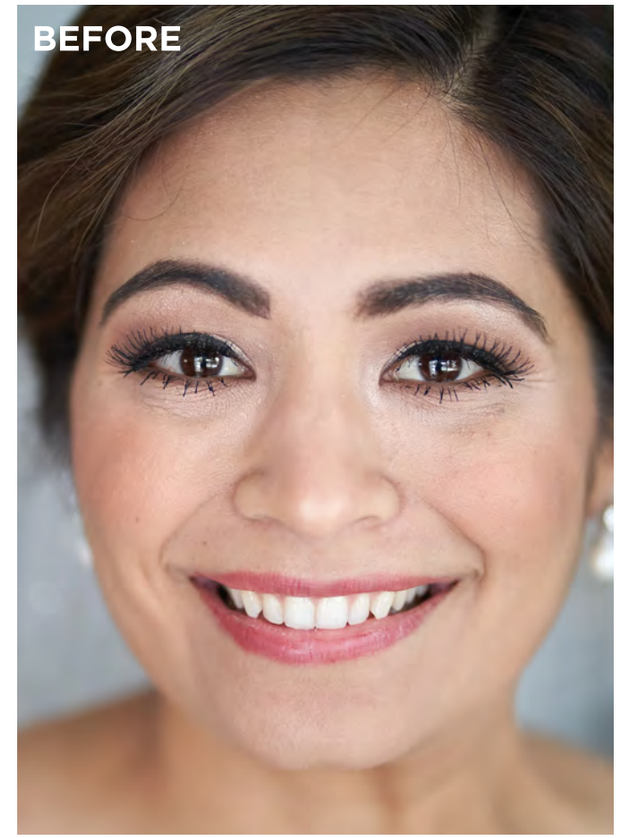
5. DODGE & BURN

When it comes to the final output for my image, I want the dodge and burn technique to be subtle, but to direct the viewer to the eyes and accentuate the bride's features. Having actions for these makes life way easier, but making a dodge layer is simple. First, add a curves adjustment layer, and lift the curve to brighten the image. Then, hold option while clicking as a layer mask to invert the mask. Do the same thing for burn, except lower the curve to darken. I also like to create a white recovery curve, dropping the upper right point to flatten the white point. This helps with blown highlights. (33)

The goal here is to highlight the cheek bones and lighten any shadows under the eyes. (34 before & after) Then, we can either burn in the hot spots or use a painting technique to add color tones from the skin. To do this, select the eyedropper tool by striking the "i" key, and set the Sample Size to 5x5 so it grabs a larger average when sampling. Then, strike the "b" key to bring up the brush tool, and hold option, click, and sample skin tones you want to paint. Then set the brush opacity to 5% and start layering up to cover hotspots. This works so much better than the burn tool, which will take the color out and turn things grey.

Image © Jessica Briggs Lucas

Image © Jessica Briggs Lucas



THE RESULTS

There are definitely more than five steps here, but I think you get the point about how to brush up on your retouching skills. Now, I was working a little out of order. You would likely want to do all removals, skin smoothing, and Liquify first so you don't have to make multiple smash layers, losing the ability to go backward. You want to work fast, but also not waste a bunch of time if you have to fix a hair you remove improperly. This is definitely a good base to start from, and hopefully you grabbed a few new tips for editing. A lot of what I do is built on actions with masks inverted along with being subtle with my beauty touchups. Brush up on your beauty retouching in Photoshop, and offer professional imagery to your client. ■

sm
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youtube.com/btsShutterMagazine

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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THE SENIOR EDITION

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Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

THE EVOLUTION OF

SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHY

with **Sal Cincotta**

Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

High school senior portraits have evolved over the years to some incredible new heights. Gone are the days of sitting in the studio and posing behind a fake ivy wall. Today's seniors want style, fashion, hair and makeup. They want an experience that they will never forget. Remember, we are living in the experience economy. Consumers are willing to shell out big bucks for that one-of-a-kind experience. We have been shooting high school seniors for almost 15 years now. In order to stay relevant, we have to adapt to today's consumer. We live in a Snapchat, Facebook, and Instagram world. These teens want to live that influencer life, and my job is to give them amazing images that make their friends jealous, but most importantly to provide them and their families with an experience they want to brag about.

So what does the Senior Experience look like for us?

STOP SELLING PHOTOGRAPHY

If you believe you are selling 8x10s or canvas or any other product, you are living in la la land. In addition, you are not selling your photography prowess. Yes, of course, we need to master our craft, but increasingly it's becoming more and more subjective. "Good enough" is what will win people over. I'm sorry to break it to a lot of you—99 percent of your clients have no idea what broad or short lighting is. They don't understand color theory. Bokeh, what?

Seriously. You need to get this through your head. They either like your pictures or they don't. This is where it begins. So yes, work on your craft. Master it. Learn lighting. Learn posing. Learn sales. You and your business will benefit from it. But you have to realize, and I am sure many of you have seen it already, that customers don't see what we see. They see social media. They see movies. They see magazines. They either like what they see or they don't.

Get consistent with your work, your editing, and your website, and you are well on your way to attracting the right clients.

CREATE AN EXPERIENCE

We live in an experience economy. We have to give clients something to brag about. Believe it or not, in many cases, that's more important than the actual final product. Think I'm kidding? If you have kids, you have probably had a birthday party or attended a birthday party at Chuck E. Cheese. Do you want to tell me that the product they serve in the form of pizza and cake is top shelf? Of course not. You are not going to these places for the pizza or the cake, you are going for the overall experience for your kids and their friends.

Experiences can range from the low-end to the ridiculously high-end. This is up to you to define. For my studio, we have created a luxury experience for the kids and their families. When they show up, we have a dedicated hair and makeup station. We have music playing. We offer everyone drinks. Everyone on my staff is super high-energy and excited for the kids to be there. This becomes something memorable for all involved.

On-set or on-location, the experience continues during the shoot. Don't confuse experience with expensive. When it comes to creating an experience, everything matters. How long does it take to return their initial phone call or email? How long does it take for them to see their pictures? In our studio, we show them pictures in two weeks or less. That is an experience, and a great one at that. Are you taking four weeks or longer? That too is an experience. It's just not a very good one, and it's one most people won't brag about in a good way.

Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

OFFER SOME STYLE

Remember, we live in a social media world today. Today's teens are just as likely to list a career choice of "social media influencer" as they are to list any of the professions we are all so familiar with. To that point, kids want to be larger than life in their pictures so they have something to show online.

In order to achieve this, we rent dresses from EnceptionRentals.com. We offer this to our teens, and they love it. It creates a truly one-of-a-kind set of images for them. These are dresses and stylized shoots that they will never have a chance to experience again. Mix one of these unique dresses with outfits they bring to the shoot, and you have a recipe for success. And when their friends see their pictures all over the internet, they will be banging on your door for the same type of shoots.

Parents want unique. Teens want unique. And in the world of photography, it's going to take a little more than a 50mm 1.2 lens to give them that. Stylize their shoots, and it will go a long way in creating an unforgettable experience.

Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Stop shooting the same shot, in the same place, with the same lighting. It's boring! Do something different. Find a way to bring out the personalities in all your clients, and that will take you down the right path. There is nothing wrong with experimenting. Some of my best shots are happy accidents. I find that teens love to try new and different things. And if you nail it … they are equally as ecstatic. Why? Because they know that no one else will have a shot like that. And guess what? That will translate to bigger sales and more referrals.

For us, I love finding out what our seniors are into. What sports they play. What extracurricular activities they are into. Music? Equestrian? These are all unique activities that—if shot with any uniqueness—will be gold for them.

Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

ENGAGE SOCIAL MEDIA

You have got to learn to embrace social media on your shoots. We all have excuses, but again, this is the world we live in. During our shoots, I use Instagram for behind-the-scenes shots. We feature these on our stories, and we know they will expire in 24 hours. And that's the point! The kids are using Snapchat, Instagram, and yes, Facebook. (Side note: yes, I know I keep referring to them as "the kids").

Want to take it to the next level? Grab a kid's phone and start hamming it up on their social media channel. Not only does this show your personality, it shows how much fun the kids are having on the shoot. We have found this to be extremely beneficial to the overall brand and again, it screams "experience."

You have to figure out your social media strategy. How will you use your Instagram feed? How will you use Insta-Stories? Facebook? You need a strategy. You can't just wing it. So many photographers still can't figure out how to use social media to their advantage. You have to invest some time in this and be diligent and consistent with your strategy. This is where your customers are, and you must be there also, leading the way. It's the easiest way to generate free leads for your business. ■

Sal Cincotta is an international award-winning photographer, educator, author, Canon Explorer Of Light 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

TAMRON with **shutter** magazine

product spotlight

Why the Tamron 28-75mm f/2.8 Lens?

When photographing people, you should be looking for a lens that can provide consistent quality, sharp results, and something that can add a little extra creativity into the final image.

The Tamron 28-75mm f/2.8 for Sony full-frame mirrorless provides just that.

This lens is reliable, lightweight, durable, and gives images a beautiful stylized feel with its shallow depth of field.

The close-focusing feature allows me to get a really unique perspective with portraiture that I wouldn't normally be able to create with a standard zoom lens. Match this with the f/2.8 aperture and the images being created from this lens are truly remarkable.

Main features of the Tamron 28-75mm f/2.8 for Sony full-frame mirrorless include:

- Superb optical performance, including both outstanding image quality and beautiful background blur effects (bokeh).
- Comfortably light weight 19.4 oz. and compact 4.6 in" — completely designed to meet the form factor of the mirrorless system: small camera + small lens = a perfect match.
- Close-focusing; Minimum Object Distance: 7.5 in at wideangle setting and 15.3" at the tele position.
- All-new "RXD" stepping motor AF unit is extremely quiet and therefore perfect for video capture.
- Moisture-Resistant Construction and Fluorine Coating for weather protection.

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LED LIGHTING FOR SENIORS

with **David Beckham**

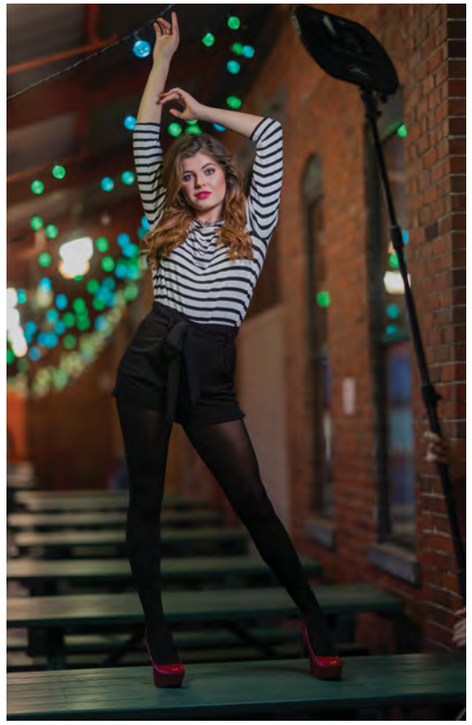
Image © David Beckham

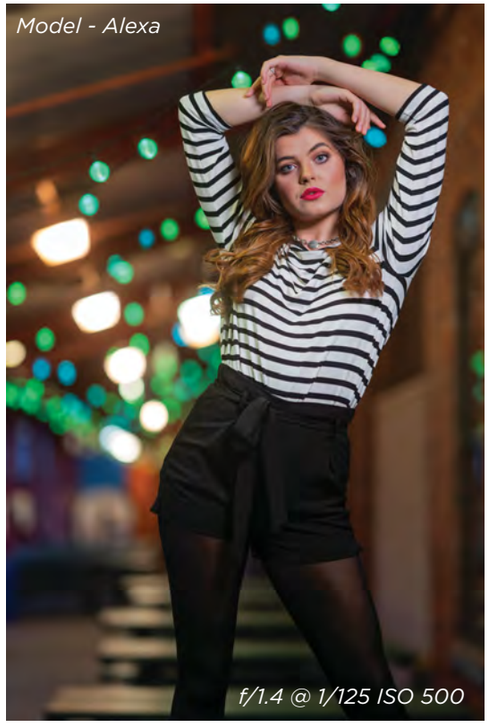
The lighting technology world is changing more rapidly than ever. LED is no exception. I absolutely love the advances—anything that makes my job easier, convenient, and more fun. But I won't sacrifice quality for any of that. If you know my work, you know I strive to get it right in the camera. I don't use presets or extensive Lightroom or Photoshop processing to get my finished images. The images shown here are almost straight out of the camera, save for removal of blemishes and clutter.

The LED lights I am using are the 6" diameter, 9"x12" Savage Universal Edge Lights. These have variable power and temperature, but I set it for 5500K. The Edge Lights have a unique design. Many small lights are mounted inside a channel that makes up the perimeter of the unit so that the LED lights shine in toward each other. There is a diffuser panel in front of them that creates a very soft glow instead of the hard light that is typically generated from the panels of tiny LED lights. They either use rechargeable batteries or can be plugged in. These are small and easily hand-held by a mom or assistant. They aren't powerful enough to replace typical OCF, but I'll show you how I use them.

The image below uses the 9x12 Edge Light. I hung it over the edge of the stairwell camera right so that there would be drop shadows under Alexa and Genavive's noses. All the colors you see were there already from the sun setting and the lights in the parking lot. I shot this with the G Series 24-70mm lens to get that killer perspective.

Image © David Beckham





Images © David Beckham

The next one, of Alexa on the table, uses the 9x12 as well. I have mine mounted to a Manfrotto Light Stand that, when closed, is very compact, so that I can take it easily inside places. Shooting with OCF is so tricky after dark or in low-light situations. It is difficult to find the right balance between light power and shutter speed. The problem with flash is that the light drops off and leaves the background quite dark. The beauty of continuous LED light is that you can see exactly what you are going to get *before* you take the shot. In this shot, the light head is about four feet from her face, and the light looks great!

We took the light inside to shoot Genavive and Alexa together. When you are in a location with overhead light, eyes disappear in the shadows of their eye sockets. Shooting with OCF would irritate everyone around us. Using the 9x12 created the perfect fill light to get great photos without taking away from the great bokeh of the surroundings. Of course, we asked for permission before shooting in this location.

Models - Genavive & Alexa

f/1.4 @ 1/160 ISO 500

Images © David Beckham

The close-up of Genavive was taken with an LED Wand. All we needed was a touch of light to fill her face, and this was perfect. Alexa could hold it just above her, about two feet away. It makes for cool catch lights too!

Model - Genavive

Image © David Beckham

f/1.6 @ 1/160 ISO 500

I used the 6” diameter Savage Edge Light for the outdoor shots of Caitlyn in front of a little shop in town. We had to keep the light lower to get under the rim of her hat, but it worked great. It was a partly cloudy day and the sun was setting behind her, which left us with nice rim light on her. You can see how dark her face was without the light. The key with this (and any) lighting is to keep it close. You wouldn’t put a flash 12 feet away in your studio, so why would you do that outside?

Images © David Beckham

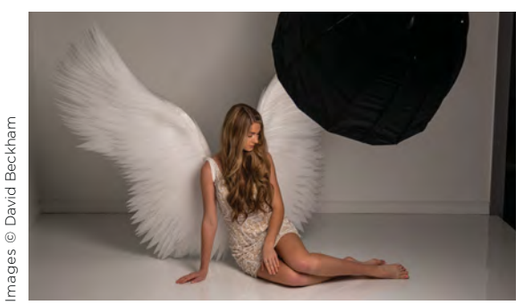
Images © David Beckham

My window light is magical until about 4 p.m. this time of year because the front of my studio faces west. If I were to use OCF, the light color wouldn’t match, and it is so obvious that flash is being used, the reflections of the light on the window become obvious as well. I used the 9x12 Savage to light Caitlyn’s face and get a great, natural look.

Image © David Beckham

The only light in this photo with Bailey sitting in the egg chair is from the LED fairy lights and the 9x12 Edge Light that I put on a boom stand. I centered the light source above her about four feet from her face. I shot this one with my G Series 85mm, which gives us perfect proportions and focus only on her. The floor in my white room is white high-gloss laminate, which is great for reflections in the image and for bouncing light around my subjects as well. The greatest advantage of using continuous lights is being able to see the results before you take the shot. I was able to shoot at f/1.8 at ISO 320 and 1/160 ss. Not typical studio settings, but this isn't typical light.

For the rest of the article, my tools of choice are the Godox SL Series 100, 150, 200 LEDs. They have variable power and are set to 5600K. The Godox has a Bowens mount, which means no new modifiers. I have always looked for strobes and lights that have the element protruding into the modifier, not recessed into the case of the unit. This makes the best use of the light filling any modifier. So far there aren't any 200w LED "bulbs," but the Godox flat LED element does go further into the modifier than the others I looked at. That way, it can fill any modifier quite well.



Images © David Beckham

I used a Godox SL 200 for the angel wing shot of Bailey. This gives us way more light, and when it is directed through a deep parabolic soft-box, it creates killer illumination. For the reflections in the floor to look as good as possible, I needed to have the light at a low angle and pointed at her face. If too much of the light were to bounce on the floor in front of her, the reflection would get blown out. As always, the closer the light source is to your subject, the better.

For the sports shots of Olivia, I used an SL150 and SL200. I put a 14x42 gridded strip box behind her and a 12x36 as the main. This allowed me to direct the light so the shadows were just right. The larger box behind gives you a more consistent rim light.

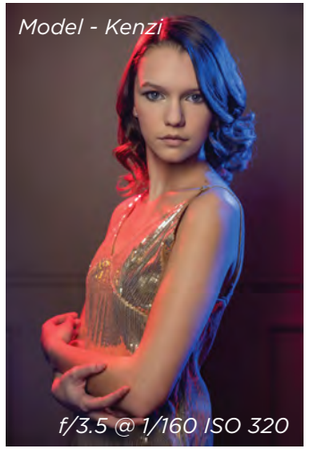
Images © David Beckham

With Kamya, we used two different three-light setups. The first one used a Glow 20" beauty dish (a much cheaper alternative to the Mola Demi) and it worked great. Paired with a Westcott Eyelighter, with the white panel, it makes for beautiful, even light across her face and nice catch lights too. I used the other two lights behind her at 45-degree angles to serve as hair and edge lighting.

Images © David Beckham

In the second image, we set the main opposite the kicker and used a 7" cone to put a light on the wall behind her. This gives her great separation and a natural vignette.

Images © David Beckham



Images © David Beckham

For the last shot of Kenzi, we put a gel over the two 7" gridded cones and used them as back-lighting to create the cool effect. I used a 12x36 gridded soft-box over the main to control the light on her face.

The obvious advantage to continuous LED light is that you see the shot completely before you take it. The handheld lights are more portable and very versatile. The two Edge Lights can never replace OCF or even work on a sunny day. But they are the best light to me for very low-light and night shooting. I have four Godox Lights and use them with every studio session now. They are great for teaching live demo classes so that everyone can see how the light affects the subject, and they can take photos without sharing triggers as well. Another advantage is you never have to clean your sensor! I rarely shoot higher than f/4.0, and the dust doesn't even show up. The downside to LED is that they just aren't bright enough yet. It means you are always shooting soft, and often at ISOs from 200-640, or maybe higher. When I'm in the studio, I typically shoot at ISO 80 and anywhere from f/8 to f/18 with flash units. ■

David Beckham has a studio in Pickerington, Ohio, and he photographs over 100 seniors a year. David speaks all over the country, and this will be his fifth time speaking at ShutterFest. He also has workshops from his studio four times a year. Join his education Facebook group "ASKDavid" to keep up with where he is and what he is doing. David recently received his Master's of Photography from the PPA and won the Grand Imaging Award in the Senior Category.

davidbeckhamphotography.com

5 STEPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL SENIOR MODEL PROGRAM

with **Jessica Robertson**

Image © Jessica Robertson Photographic Artistry

Image © Jessica Robertson Photographic Artistry

I often hear things like, "What theme are you doing with your senior models this year?" And simultaneously I am hearing, "Senior model programs don't work!" I believe the process of creating a theme and requiring each senior to dress in a certain way is confusing to your clientele. On the one hand, you are marketing a unique senior experience, yet you are lumping those same people into a concept of *your* choosing. The desired result does not match the process. Most senior photographers consult with each senior about who they are and what aspects of their personality they want to show visually. The goal is to create a customized session that reflects the senior. However, the group model shoot concept, in its essence, denies seniors the opportunity to be unique or even themselves, because a theme has been established and they must conform. When we established our Senior Model Program, we wanted it to be true to our brand and consistent with our senior portrait style. The Program was intended to be an extension of our business, and in line with our brand. We photograph about 200 seniors a year, so a good start to the season is critical. Like with many programs, our goal was to have our Senior Models introduce us to their friends. With this goal in mind, we created our process.

We have found that we have a much greater chance of converting a potential client into a client if we can simply get face time with them. If we can get them into our studio to experience what we offer, there is a much higher likelihood of gaining them as clients. As a result, the five-step process detailed below was our answer to how we could create a Senior Model Program that actually works.

1. MODEL CALL

So how do you get models? Here are our top ten ways:

1. Ask previous senior models/clients to recommend their friends.
2. Make daily posts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, including videos and photographs. And be sure to personalize them by including yourself and some of your best accolades/qualities.
3. Reach out to yearbook classes for referrals and applicants. We pay for an advertisement and teach a few classes each year, so we have good relationships with each of the advisors.
4. Use the front page of your website to let everyone know you are looking for models. We photograph more than just seniors, so we want to spread the word to all of our clients that we are looking for models.
5. Ask family and friends in your community. It is not just about who you know, but about who your contacts know as well.
6. Encourage siblings of previous clients to apply. We keep a running folder of siblings for the future, so each year we reach out to those first.
7. Create a mass email blast to all previous clients.
8. Request referrals from teachers, club sponsors, and coaches that you know. Students who are involved in their school community are typically our best models.
9. Talk about your search for models throughout your daily activities, like at daycare/school, at church, the grocery store, the gym … wherever you go, ask if anyone knows a rising senior. People feed off of your excitement.
10. Ask for referrals from your local and regional businesses and business groups. If they don't have kids themselves, they typically know someone who does. Small businesses naturally want to support other small businesses.

2. MODEL MEETING

Prior to the meeting, all models have applied, but they are not obligated to be a model with us until after they attend this meeting. The goal of the Model Meeting is to ensure that everyone is aware of what is required to be a model and to build their excitement. At every step, we always want to have clear communication about the process as well as complete transparency about our pricing and products.

For a time reference, this meeting takes place in early January so that the entire Model experience concludes in March. Our goal is to build the excitement and start photographing in April.

Images © Jessica Robertson Photographic Artistry

3. FRIEND SESSIONS

For three years, we have been doing Friend Sessions. To be clear, these are real friends and not just models grouped together to pretend they are friends. Ultimately, the Friend Sessions are where we get most referrals from our models. Our belief is that most seniors decide to use us because they have been able to view our work, experience our team, and have fun, and because they get familiar with our process.

Our Friend Sessions are tailored to the style of the group, and each one is unique. Again, this matches our storytelling brand and our business model. We ask each model to bring in at least five friends who are their grade level or younger. (We have stopped marketing to those above their grade level.) Each group can determine their own theme or concept. Therefore, the image we create will be a reflection of their friendship together. What brings them together? Maybe they are all on an athletic team, or maybe they have a common interest like theater or band. Maybe they have a certain style of dress or they associate themselves to be more boho, grunge or preppy. The options are limitless!

On the day of their assigned session, the friend groups arrive fifteen minutes early, dressed and ready to photograph. While they wait, they watch a video of our favorite images and get to view albums and other products. In the studio, we play whatever music they prefer and help guide them with posing that is most flattering for their body style. Most seniors really appreciate this aspect, and it helps to establish us as true experts. With each group, we do several compositions, but ultimately we select our favorite composition for the gift image we give to each senior who attends. It is a small thank you, but people really appreciate getting the printed image. Those images are distributed by the model, with our information on the back.

Before each friend group leaves, we give them a printed piece that further describes our services and includes answers to commonly asked questions. It is a quality publication, and it matches our high standards. We also give each rising senior an invite to our upcoming Senior Party.

To further market, we also create Friend Session videos with behind-the-scenes video clips and still images. This helps other potential clients get to know our style, because everyone shares them through social media. It is a great marketing push to kick off the year, and it is something the students really love! Once again, we are continuing the excitement and educating the new class that the spring of their junior year is when they should get started with senior portraits.

4. ELITE SESSIONS

Elite Sessions are another added benefit to being a senior model with us. This is an additional session where each female model gets her makeup professionally done by our makeup artist to match the agreed-upon portrait concept. This session does not take place in lieu of their main senior session; it is simply an extra session. It is only 20 minutes in the studio, with only one look. We are very focused on telling one aspect of a senior's story. A model may want to highlight a passion of theirs or even celebrate an aspect of themselves that makes them unique. For example, a senior may want to do an athletic look for their Elite Session, where they have their hair and makeup done differently than what they want for their main session. This is a wonderful benefit for the senior and it aligns with our storytelling brand.

Image © Jessica Robertson Photographic Artistry

An Elite Session is not a given. Students must qualify to get this added benefit. They must have five friends attend the Friend Session, submit a concept that they would like to execute for their Elite Session, and turn in a guest list of rising seniors whom they have invited to the Senior Party.

We once again create a behind-the-scenes video to highlight the experience of the session. Our Elite Sessions are really just a mini version of what we try to do on a daily basis with our seniors. The images we create are used for marketing and printed portraits in the studio. All models use the images for social media as well. With parents and seniors sharing the images, we get an awesome buzz in the community, and this is ultimately how the upcoming classes learn about our services.

Image © Jessica Robertson Photographic Artistry

Image © Jessica Robertson Photographic Artistry

Image © Jessica Robertson Photographic Artistry

5. SENIOR PARTY

This is the kick-off to our new senior season. Prior to this event, we do not book any upcoming senior sessions, so those who attend get first pick of dates. (Senior Models get to book in advance of this meeting as a model benefit.) Leading up to the event, we close down the studio and change out all of our imagery in the studio to highlight the previous year's seniors. We also display our Senior Model images in our front window and throughout the studio.

We do request that all rising seniors who attend our party also come with a parent. The Senior Models distribute tickets to the event, and each receives credit based upon the admission tickets turned in at the party. The Senior Party is an educational event to show how we are different, demonstrate how we make people feel welcome, establish our value, and ultimately convert interested individuals into booked clients.

During the Senior Party, we give away prizes and offer tiered discounts on our sessions in April, May and June.

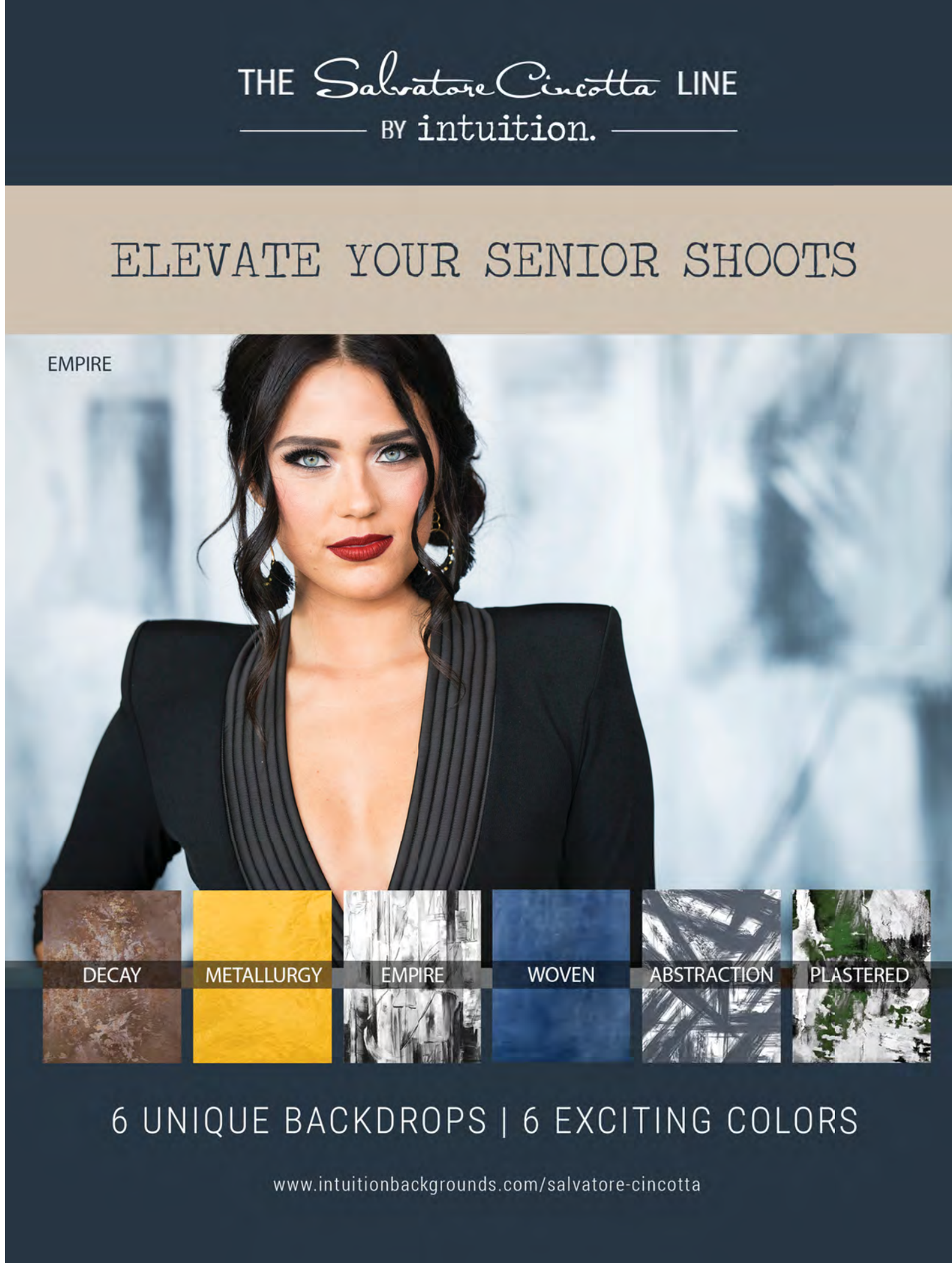
Image © Jessica Robertson Photographic Artistry

5 RESULTS OF THE 5 STEPS

1. Through our Senior Models, we have created income in our off-season.
2. The Senior Models have become a strong base of advocates for our brand through quality, consistent imagery.
3. There is a positive marketing buzz in the community about our senior portraits.
4. We photograph about 200 seniors a year, and 50 percent of our clients are secured through our Senior Models, their Friend Sessions, and the advertising from the Elite Session images.
5. Our new clients get a glimpse into our style of photography, and best of all, we have stayed true to our brand! ■

Jessica Robertson is an award-winning photographer, educator, and business coach. She owns and operates Jessica Robertson Photographic Artistry in Ashland, Virginia. She started her photography career professionally in 2000 after graduating Guilford College with a degree in Art with a Concentration in Photography. She personally photographs over 200 seniors a year. You can find out more about Jessica through her Facebook group, Shoot it Straight with Jessica Robertson, and her Instagram: JessicaRobertsonPhoto.

jessicarobertson.com



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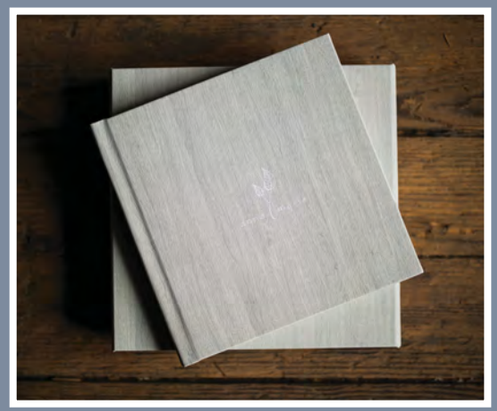

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5

WAYS YOU CAN INCREASE YOUR

Senior Sales

with **Amanda Holloway**

One of the best things you can do for your bottom line is not to learn how to photograph a better portrait or how to edit a cleaner image. It's actually to study how to educate your potential and current clients on your end result ... your portrait product offerings. Most photographers I've taught are missing out on pre-sale product education, and when it comes down to the ordering session, they're left wondering why they didn't make more. The following strategies are specific ways that you can increase your sales starting today, by diving deep into your clients' psyches and finding ways to better motivate higher sale averages.

1. SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Do yourself a favor and commit to a quick audit of your social media presence with the following question in mind: When was the last time you posted about your portrait products? If you're like most photographers, the answer may be longer than a month ago ... if at all. The very first method that you can begin to put into practice today is to start marketing your tangible portrait products on your social media platforms. I don't care what it is—Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Tick Tok, it doesn't matter. If your target market doesn't know that you offer beautiful products, then that's not going to be one of the reasons they hire you, and therefore, they won't be spending money on you when it comes down to it. Diversify your social media feed! If all you're marketing are digital images across your platforms, don't be surprised when you attract clients who only want digital images from you. Start taking behind-the-scenes videos of your clients the first time they flip through their very own album. Take some professional images of your products, and put them in your IG stories. Showcase a client's canvas collection in their own home. All of these are great ways to prime your clients' minds to lean toward more product sales rather than just digital images.

Images © Amanda Holloway Photography

2. CLIENT EDUCATION

In line with marketing products to your target social media audience, you must market your products to potential and booked clients with plenty of front-loaded client education. Let me ask you a question: How are you responding to client inquiries? When a potential client e-mails you or calls you to inquire about a session, how do you respond? If you are only responding with your prices or a verbal explanation of your brand's experience, you are leaving money on the table. If you educate these potential clients with images of your gorgeous portrait products upon inquiry, you are showing them that you are a photographer who can give them stunning products to display in their homes. You are telling them that the experience doesn't end when the session is over. And once your potential client becomes your booked client, the education should never stop there. You still have work to do. When the session is over, it's always a great idea to send your clients home with tangible or digital resources that remind them of one of the reasons they booked you in the first place: your product offerings. I like to send my clients home with a small magazine displaying my top collections using images of products. It really gets them excited for the ordering session as they begin to think about what products they are going to fill their home with.

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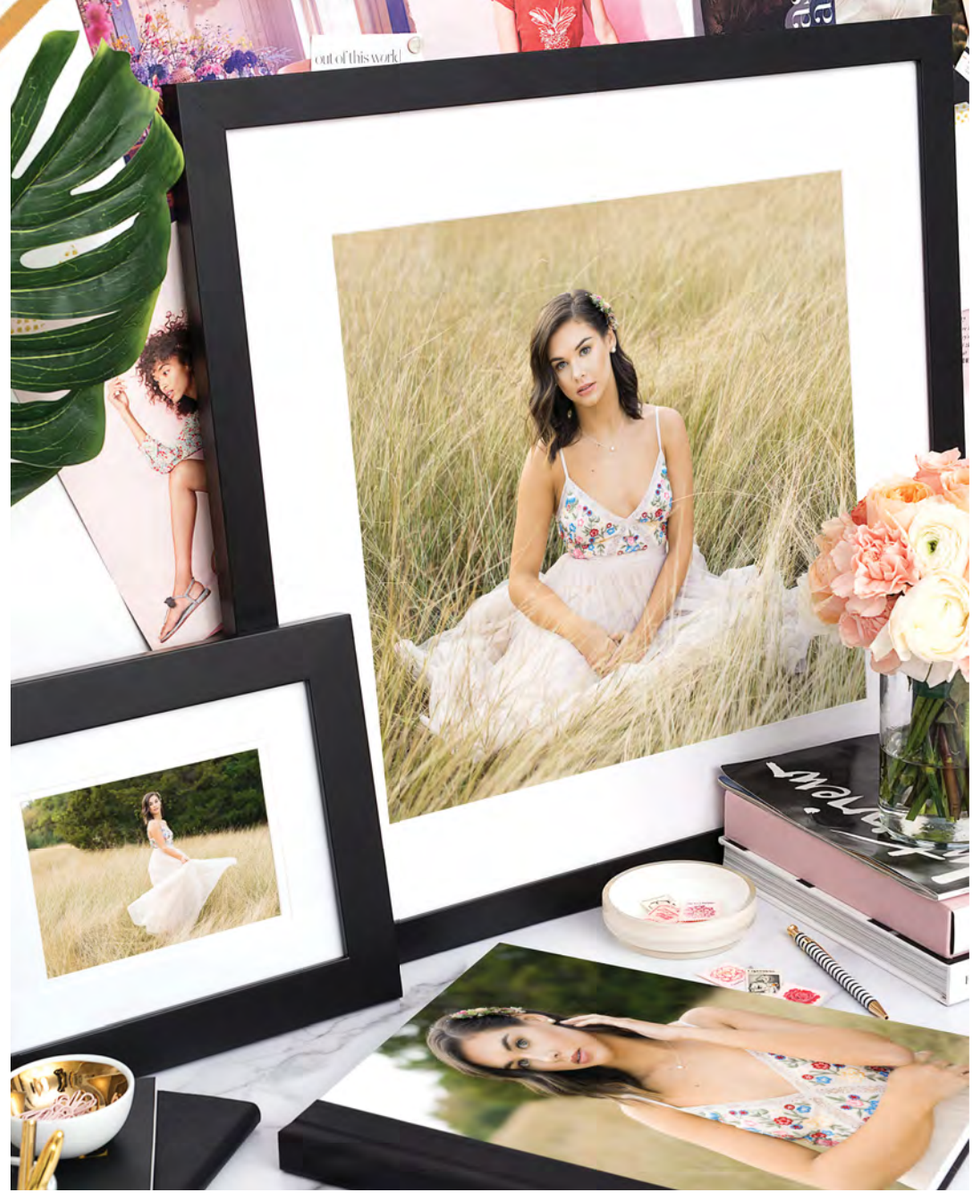

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3. PREMIUM PRODUCTS GET PREMIUM PRICING

The last time that you purchased a vehicle, were you able to get leather seats and DVD players for the base vehicle rate? Probably not. The same should be the case for your photography business. Your clients should not be able to purchase premium products at base prices. What's a premium product? Any specific product that the majority of your clients love ... anything that you see them purchasing over and over and over again. For most photographers, premium products are either digitals, albums, or canvas collections. These products should not be available on your a la carte menu, but rather should be your top collection offerings. Go back and read that sentence one more time, and process it for a bit. The products that your clients love and want the most should not be available individually, but rather used as a tool to motivate them to purchase your higher collections. That right there, my friends, is consumer psychology, and it will result in increased sales every time.

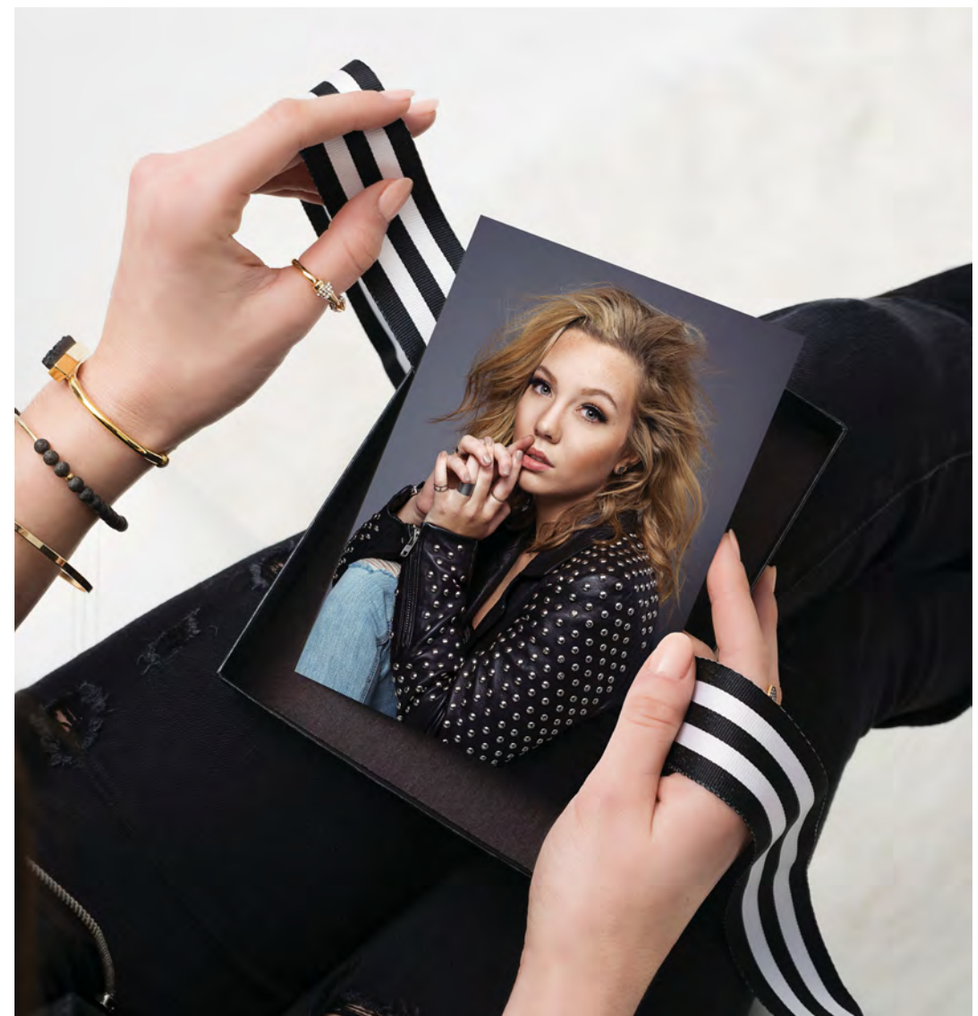
Images © Amanda Holloway Photography

4. SAMPLES FOR EVERYONE

Once it's time to showcase your products during an ordering session, you need to have a sample for everyone present. This means that you should have more than one sample in your studio. You need at least two. Why? Because you never want your client to feel like they have to share a sample. If a client wants to spend more time looking through an album while drooling over each page, you don't want that momentum to be interrupted by the need to have to share it with the person sitting next to them. You want them to fall in love with your products and not have to share that love. While you're at it, show your products to your clients with hands that showcase the value of the product. When you're handing an album to a client, delicately pass it to them with both hands, and treat it with the utmost care. This action will actually be mimicked by your client, which will place an immediate value on that product for them. This helps your client understand that it's a very important product with a lot of worth.

5. STUDY SALES METHODS

Studies have shown that consumers are more likely to purchase a product the longer that product is held in their hands. Read that one more time—the longer a product spends with a client, the more likely they are to purchase it. So let's apply this to an ordering session by making sure that the products we want to sell the most spend the most time with our clients. I do this with a little method I like to call the "lap load." When I showcase my products at an ordering session, I make sure that the very last thing I show them is the collection I want to sell them. So I load them up with an image box full of mounted prints, a thumb drive and slide box, and a pre-loaded app on an iPad with my client's gallery and let them marinate with those products for much longer than with the other products. And guess what? Ninety-five percent of my ordering sessions go for that collection or higher, with average sales of $5,500 per client. Think about other ways that you can motivate higher sales for your ordering sessions by using specific methods that put your products front and center. When I showcase my three storyboard wall print options, I take the largest one off the wall and put it right in front of my clients for the rest of the session. Guess which one I sell the most? You guessed it ... the one I pull off the wall. Little tweaks like this can have a huge impact on your bottom line.



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Notice that every single one of these factors is a thing that you can start doing today to increase your sales and income immediately. I truly believe in small methods that create a big impact, and over the past decade, these practices have been proven to work for not only my brand, but hundreds of other photographers as well. So start by marketing more of your portrait product offerings to both your potential and booked clients, because when it all comes down to it, product education is the name of the game, and it will always end in increased sales. ■

I fully believe that every single person in this industry has the right to make an incredible income and be the breadwinner in their family. I've done it. I went from making $36,000 a year in law enforcement to seven figures. By focusing on consumer psychology and sales strategies, I took a budding business and created the dream career that I never thought I'd have, and as clichè as it may sound, I can teach you how to get off the struggle bus too.

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5 ELEMENTS OF A ROCKSTAR SENIOR EXPERIENCE

with **Jaimy Ellis**

Here's how it goes—you're being introduced to someone new and they ask you what you do. Your heart sinks a little because you know when you say, "I'm a photographer," the response will be something like, "Oh my gosh, my sister is a photographer too!" or "I know tons of photographers!" making you feel like your passion isn't unique and your skill is something everyone and their brother's uncle can do. What if your response was more like, "I create killer portraits of modern seniors through rockstar experiences"? Now you're legit! Here are five things you can do to take your senior portrait experience to the next level, whether you have a brick-and-mortar studio or not.

Image © Jaimy Ellis

1. IN-PERSON STYLING ADVICE

Before I started helping my clients style themselves, I was constantly feeling disappointed with the outfits they chose. They would show up to the session with great clothes, but something was missing. I chalked it up to them not having that kind of style or wanting to look a little simpler. Turns out that's not true ... they just don't know how to put it all together. That's when I started including a styling consultation one to two weeks prior to the session in their own home. They already know how many outfits they need to choose, and when I show up they usually have their favorite items laid out, and I help them finish the looks by choosing pieces right out of their own closet. I always make sure that every outfit has some kind of layer or accessory to polish it off and provide interesting posing options. The senior has a sense of ownership and will be confident that they look amazing because the items they are wearing came out of their own closet. This is also a perfect opportunity to get to know them more, making them feel comfortable when it's time to shoot.

Don't forget to ask about hair and makeup! You might include professional hair and makeup with the session, or maybe they are already planning to make their own appointments—that's great! In my area, it's most common that they are doing it themselves. I give tips to prevent frizziness and ask if they want to switch up the style during the session. I always have them bring pins and hair ties in case we decide to put the hair up or braid it last minute. I usually have them choose straight or curly, not both, unless they get two sessions on different days, but you could spin this however you want. If they don't wear much makeup on the daily I tell them that bare minimum is mascara and lip balm. A lot of my clients like my work because it looks authentic and I keep it that way by not requiring professional hair and makeup, and actually prefer it that way.

Do you feel like you don't really get that whole styling thing? You might be thinking, "How will they trust me if I don't even know about current fashion trends?" Send out a client questionnaire ahead of time (I use JotForm for this) and ask them where they like to shop. Then go lurk on those brands' websites and Instagram accounts. Take note on accessories and how they combine pieces and layer outfits in the ads they use. Also study how they pose the models and how the model is interacting with the clothing. Put together a Pinterest board of outfit inspiration for yourself to refer back to when you need ideas. Maybe they've even sent you their own Pinterest styling board in the questionnaire mentioned previously—this will help to know what they like for locations and posing too.

Don't want to travel to a client's home? Schedule a styling consult ahead of time and have them bring the clothes with them to your studio. Lay everything out and make a list of things they could add to each look (if needed). Make sure this appointment happens far enough in advance for them to go shopping for last-minute items if they need to.

Pro Tip: First, *always* make sure to remind the senior (and parent) to get proper undergarments for each outfit! Second, have a few accessory items on hand like cute blankets, oversized denim jackets and a pile of different hats. You never know when they will come in handy.

2. CUSTOM-DESIGNED SESSIONS

The styling consult is also a great way to get a feel for what kinds of backgrounds and locations the senior envisions for the session. For me, each outfit is a new location. Sometimes the locations are within walking distance and other times we drive around within a certain mileage range. I can usually tell what they are thinking by the outfit choices. I ask them what they are dreaming of, whether they picture themselves more urban or more natural and if there are any locations that are a hard pass or must have. I have a ton of locations up my sleeve to pair with the outfits and they usually trust my ideas. I also ask them if they have any specific location ideas so I can scout the spot ahead of time. Throughout the styling consult, I'm talking to them with confidence, taking away any doubts that the session won't be 100-percent perfect. Since I am in their home for this, it's also the perfect time to get pictures of walls for IPS and start pre-selling products. If you have a studio or don't want to meet in advance, have them email you pictures of their walls before the IPS appointment.

Custom-designed sessions can be interpreted in a few different ways—all on-location like stated above, in studio by switching up backdrops and lighting, or a mix of the two. You can put your own spin on it depending on what fits your business model and client needs.

Images © Jaimy Ellis

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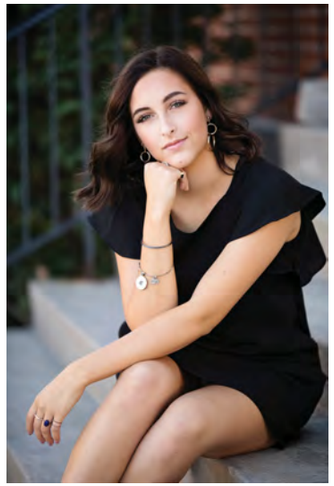

Images © Jaimy Ellis

3. EDITORIAL PHOTO EDITING

Everyone wants to feel like they stepped off the pages of a fashion magazine, which is why I make sure each image is print-ready the very first time it is viewed at the IPS appointment. I want the senior to feel like they look amazing in every image, in turn making them want to order as many as possible. Figure out how you want your images to look and stick to a consistent vibe, whether you do your own photo editing or not—that way, each image is on point with your brand and people can spot your work before everyone else's.

4. KILLER IMAGERY

All of the previous tips will fall flat if not combined with flattering, modern posing and technically correct shooting. All of the elements should come together to create images that not just any Joe Schmoe could create. Take the time to further your posing and lighting skills and develop a style that you love. Invest in continued education at conferences, in classes, and through online materials. When you love your work, it's easier to sell, therefore increasing your sales averages. You will become the most sought after photographer in your area (and you should probably raise your prices).

Image © Jaimy Ellis

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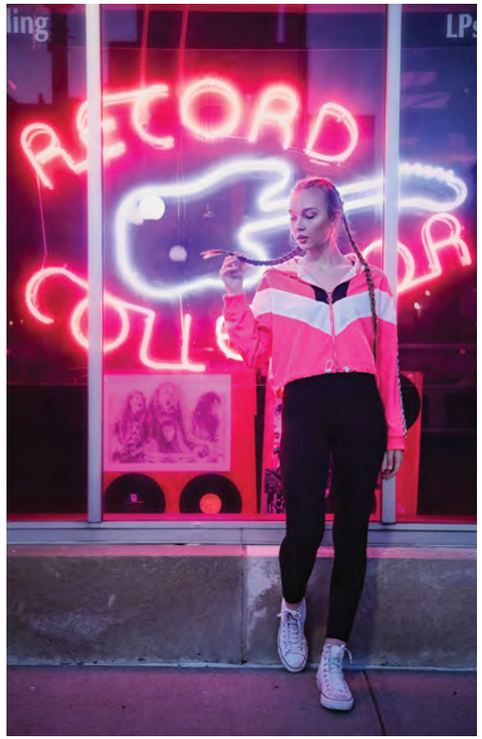

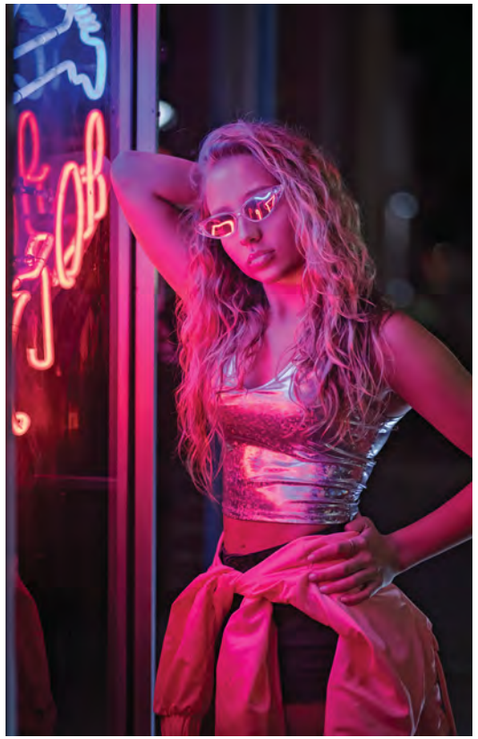

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5. HIGH-END PRODUCTS

Offering products to your clients is the icing on the cake. Curate a product menu that fits your brand and shows off the unique imagery you've taken so much time to perfect. Your clients won't be able to live without that custom-designed album or acrylic wall art grouping, and not only will your sales increase, but you will have created a product and experience that your ideal client will value and return to time and again—oh yeah, and tell all their friends about.

Combine these five elements and you will have created a life-changing, rockstar experience that your client will never forget. ■

Jaimy Ellis, M. Photog., graduated with a degree in professional photography in 2006. From 2006 to 2013, she ran a full-service portrait studio, and she opened her current business focusing solely on senior photography in 2014. In 2017, she became a Master of Photography through Professional Photographers of America and is currently working toward earning her Craftsman degree. She serves on the board of directors for Professional Photographers of Iowa and on the advisory committee for the Professional Photography program at Hawkeye Community College.

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5 TIPS TO TAKE YOUR SENIOR WORK FROM VOLUME TO CUTTING EDGE

with **Richard Sturdevant**

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Many in the photography industry know me for my competition work where I have been blessed with much success, but I am my happiest when I see a senior boy's face light up when he sees the unique art piece that has become his senior sport art or the senior girl smiling ear to ear when she first views her themed concept image for her senior art come to life in a canvas print.

When I first started in senior work, it was primarily the standard book - location/studio - cap and gown type shots. I found that I was making more money then because of the volume of work, but I didn't profit as much. In 2006, I began to think there had to be a better way. I started to hunger for something different and began my journey to break out of the box and stereotypical shots to launch into a bigger than life experience, not only for myself, but also for my seniors and for their paying parents.

Utilizing my background in graphic design, I had the idea to start creating art pieces to offer something different than everyone else. An idea that evolved and has taken me to new heights in my photography career.

1. WORK SMARTER, NOT HARDER

In 2003, I decided that I needed to find a way to integrate art into my senior work, which was the basis of my business, to stand out from the crowd of senior photographers. I believed the integration of the art would make me stand out from the crowd and get my work noticed. After all, it seemed logical that if I got noticed more, I would have more clients and therefore more profit.

I slowly began to integrate art, all of the sudden I started getting noticed and was looked at differently as a photographer. I got more clients. I made more money, but I didn't profit as much as I thought I would due to having so many clients and having to hire others to assist me. It was the most exhausting time of my photography career. That year I photographed 350 seniors. I was working harder, but not smarter. I wanted to work less, specialize more and to be able to concentrate on speaking and competitions. I needed to do something differently to ensure that I could work smarter, not harder and be profitable.

You have to know your numbers for the your time investment, the products offered against the amount you are charging and ensure you are being profitable. Otherwise, you will never be successful. If you don't know your numbers, how can you know if you are working smarter or harder or if you are truly profitable?

I ultimately perfected my process so I could easily create unique images for my seniors and offer a variety of high end products. The first tip for success is knowing your numbers so you can work smarter, not harder.

2. STRIVE TO BE MORE CREATIVE THAN YOUR COMPETITION

I strived to be uniquely creative with every senior. I pushed myself to develop art rather than a simple portrait. I developed a reputation as an artist, being known as that creative guy who came up with unique images for seniors and sports teams. My design background helped me quite a bit to be able to create unique art pieces. My clients and coaches felt lucky to have me as their photographer/artist, since at that time, no one else was doing that type of work.

I started getting calls from all over the place. I decided which schools I wanted to shoot for and then was offered other sports work from those schools. When the girls would come to the studio, they wanted to do other themed shoots, which led me to be even more creative. This increased the types of products I offered which increased sales.

I really began to push peoples thinking to be not just senior photos for the year, but rather looking for beautifully artistic images that excited the seniors and their parents as canvas art they could hang prominently in their house. All of the sudden the simple wallets and 8x10 wall photo to be hung in the hall or set on the fireplace mantle became art that they were willing to get in larger format on canvas to be a timeless piece of art of their senior. Senior photos come down after a while, but a work of art has longevity and becomes a family heirloom. Determine to offer higher end products that are so knock-your-socks-off gorgeous that the client has no choice but to purchase.

Image © Sturdevant Studio

3. INDIVIDUALIZATION FOR THE WIN

Being able to provide the experience of a unique image specific to the individual quickly became my reputation. I was invigorated by the freedom from the mundane type of senior shots I had previously offered alone. People are interested in themselves. They light up when you simply remember their names. Being able to provide the individualized theme style of image rather than a cookie cutter cap and gown was quickly becoming the buzz about my business. I had found a way to get people excited about my work and the focus on the uniqueness of the individual was key.

This is a time to listen carefully and encourage outside the box thinking, for myself I decided to Crush the Box. You will need to help them visualize what truly represents who they are and what depicts their journey.

By doing something uniquely individualized to that one senior athlete or dancer, they truly appreciate it. It makes them stand out from the crowd.

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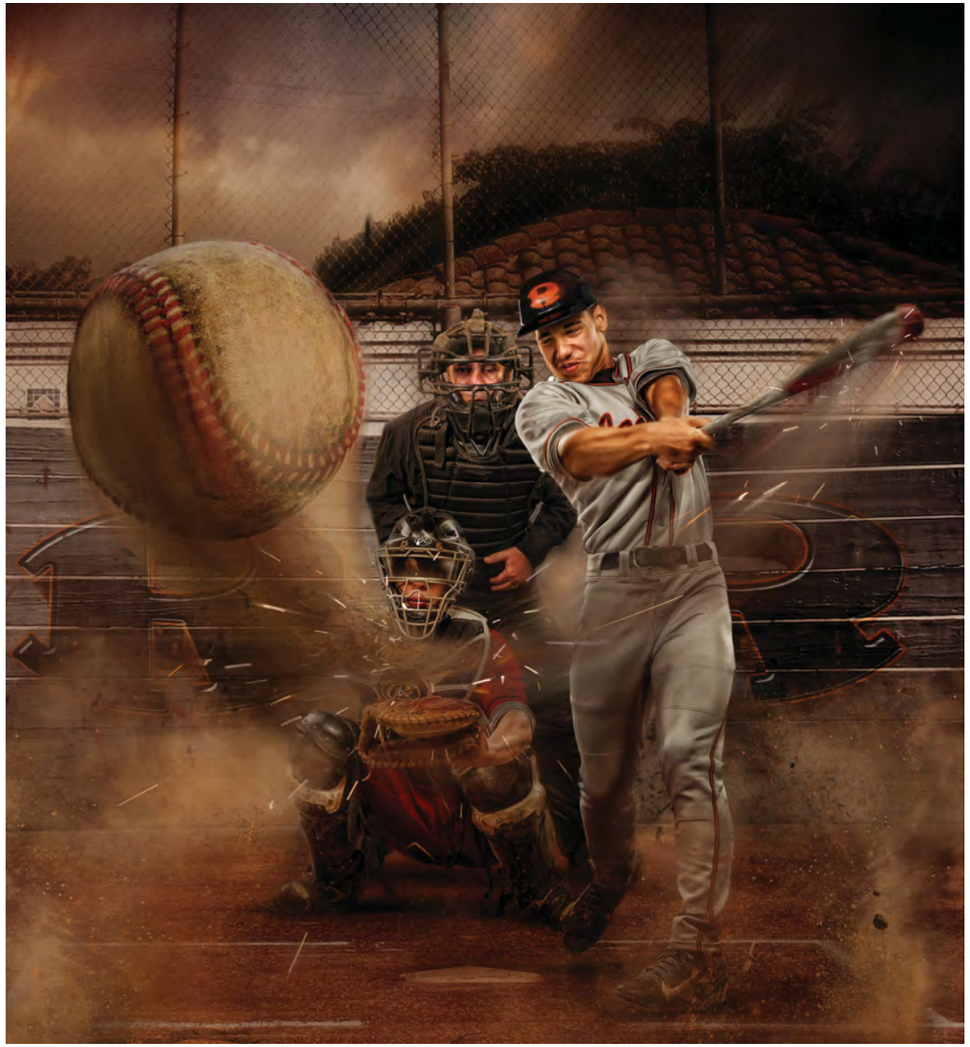

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4. REMEMBER IT IS A COLLABORATION

Collaboration with your senior and their paying parent is vital. Take the time to talk to the senior about what they are excited about and what theme interests them. Get to know what they like and what their parent's are expecting and talk about how that all pulls together. Even the high school boys get excited when they talk about their sport. Let your creative juices flow! Make sure everyone is heard and remind them that all ideas should be voiced.

This is not the time to prove your creativity, but to nurture the senior's ability to express who they are. You are the guide in this collaborative process who will ultimately produce the artwork that they will treasure with vested interest.

Image © Sturdevant Studio

Image © Sturdevant Studio

5. Keep the Hunger for the Cutting Edge

Push yourself to stay on the cutting edge. If your art becomes successful, you can offer products that will increase your sales and help you to work smarter and not harder. Keeping your bottom line without losing your mind. You don't want to feel like you never have time to expand and nurture your creative flow. As creatives, we are typically only as good as our last print. The clients are always looking for that product that is new and unique. You must feed your creative side to be able to stay on the cutting edge and produce artwork that will become the sought after product for years to come.

Strive for higher averages by continually pushing yourself to provide that different product, look or experience. Remember that the expectations grow along with the growth of your talent. Embrace growth. Stand out from the Crowd. Find something unique to offer that makes you the one they associate with being on the photographer/artist on the cutting edge. Specialize in your own unique artistic style and the clients will come to you. ■

Richard owns and operates Sturdevant Studio - a thriving portrait studio in Loretto Tennessee . He specializes in fine art composites, seniors, families, wedding, and commercial photography. He was featured on the cover of Professional Photographer in Dec 2012 with his Award winning image Time Traveler. Richard is a member of PPA, ASP, WPPI, TPPA, DPPA and is PPA Master of Photography, Master Artist of Photography and Photographic Craftsman.

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THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION TO ASK SENIOR CLIENTS

with **Cathy Anderson**

Image © Cathy Anderson

Remember getting your picture taken as a kid? Everyone dressed the same and was herded like cattle into the local big-box studio. It was a scripted experience that involved the same poses, a cyclical recipe regarding what to wear, and a cold and distant approach to create quick pictures in large quantities. The quicker the better—creating revenue was more important than the client. Fast pictures meant that quantity was king and that squeaky toys were more heavily relied upon to create smiles, rather than establishing a personal connection with clients. Is that what truly defines a positive and memorable client experience? Absolutely not! The old formula made clients feel like a number—like they weren't important. That strategy eventually led to a collective negative attitude toward portraiture, making it harder for modern photographers to create positive memories. The words "take your picture" are often associated with bad experiences from the past, allowing clients to assume that all future "picture" or "photo" experiences will be the same.

Most of us have been there, so this means that we possess a powerful set of tools that we can use to tailor a more positive and meaningful experience for our current and future clients. Negative experiences from the past make it more difficult to convince a client that the experience with your studio will be different. However, a little hard work can help you break that barrier and gain the trust of clients who will become fiercely loyal to your brand.

Where do you begin the process of turning the tide? It begins with a powerful question you must ask each client:

"WHAT DO YOU WANT?"

I know this may seem straightforward, but how will you know how to turn a negative experience into a great one if you don't have the basic knowledge of what your client wants? First, ask and *actively listen* to their answers. Client responses to this question are the key ingredients for crafting a wonderful experience for them, transforming unpleasant memories from the past into a solid rapport with your studio. Once you have a firm understanding of your client's vision, needs and desires, use that knowledge to form a great experience with your client. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines "experience" as "the conscious events that make up a personal encounter." Each event and memory a client experiences throughout their time with you will determine how they feel about your studio—positively or negatively. Take each informational nugget they give you, listening intently to their responses, and leverage that knowledge to bring their words to life. The most powerful item in your toolbox that will cultivate client satisfaction is *your* active effort to transform negative experiences from the past into a positive experience with your studio. Author Jim Kwik once said:

"Information with emotion is remembered. Clients don't buy based on logic; they buy based on emotion."

When a client equates a great experience with your studio, they will remember positive emotions and reach out to you in the future as a loyal client.

Image © Cathy Anderson

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What does a great experience look like for portrait clients? We must first help clients understand the difference between portrait artists and regular photographers. The biggest challenge we face as portrait artists is re-educating the public about the definition of portrait art versus a simple snapshot or photo. The advent of advanced smartphone and digital camera technology, combined with easy access to both, has severely diluted the art of our industry and the title "professional photographer." A friend of mine once said:

"If people perceive you as an artist, they will buy art. If they perceive you as a photographer, they will buy photos."

A client's perception of you is extremely powerful; the words you use to describe your photographic style will dictate the clients you attract and whether the journey will be effortless or difficult. First, understand that you are a creator of memories—artwork proudly displayed in client homes that illustrates their story and history. Strive to call yourself a portrait artist and separate yourself from other photographers. Even if this notion sounds egocentric, understand that it is not. Imagine the amount of time and money a surgeon invests in learning to operate on a human body; their title is not seen as an arrogant moniker, but one that was earned. An artist creates a work of art, requiring education, apprenticeships, and investment of time, money, heart and skill. Photography is a profession made of artists; we spend years learning our craft, using light as our primary foundation and source of creation, *not* technology. Our duty is to *portray* (to define or describe a person in a work of art) a client's genuine personality in a *portrait*. That includes learning how to be comedians, psychologists, light-shapers, seamstresses, problem-solvers, etc. We invest ample time getting to know a client's needs and personality, resulting in gaining their trust. After that is achieved, our journey will be comfortable and fun, fostering a strong portrait artist-client relationship that will produce organic portraits tailored for each client.

After you identify as a portrait artist, the next step is to define your own style. Seek out words that describe your personal style, vision, and beliefs. If you can't find your own words, ask your friends and clients about their ideas to describe your portrait art. Once you define who you are artistically, clearly communicate it throughout your reach—social media, art displays, and marketing. Broadcasting your artistic persona, style, and vision will help you educate and attract the right clients. I know that Google will have plenty of choices for price shoppers who seek a quick photo session like the ones we endured as kids, but I want to be sought after within my community as the unique artist who is worth the investment.

Images © Cathy Anderson

Image © Cathy Anderson

Image © Cathy Anderson

Transitioning into the senior portrait experience, how do we translate this information into a positive encounter with your studio? Here are some tips to follow:

• Before you interview potential clients, practice identifying as a portrait artist, and consistently use the correct vocabulary that will differentiate your studio.

• Call potential clients on the phone and meet with them at your studio, asking what they want. Actively listen to them as they describe their needs and vision, and make it clear that you are excited to collaborate with them.

• Make sure you include both mom and the senior; even though mom is paying for portraits, she still wants her child's personality captured in the end product. The most effective way to do so is to build a comfortable environment where seniors can express themselves and have fun.

• Connect with seniors and ask about what they love most, including it in the portrait session. When a session focuses upon a senior's passions, they settle into a familiar environment with genuine expressions.

• Be an expert and don't be a salesman; offer suggestions and guide them through the process, discussing details regarding clothing, pricing, portrait finishing, etc.

• Talk *with* them and help clients know they are important to you; transparency and great conversation are two big ways to earn trust.

Gaining a senior family's trust is paramount, and it begins with collaboration. It is our job as portrait artists to create a shared vision with our clients and to make it clear that the journey is a team effort. Start by creating a relaxed environment for communication and letting your client know that their thoughts are important. Don't forget to ask the golden question—"What do you want at your session?" Encourage your clients to freely share their thoughts, giving you the answers you need to translate their vision into stylized portraits that they will love. Finding out what to photograph is just as simple as asking a client what they want. Generally, moms want close-up, smiling portraits. Seniors want to look epic and stylish, creating something totally different compared to their classmates' senior portraits. At my sessions, I make sure to photograph both types of portraits so that everyone will be happy, while still illustrating it through my style of portraiture. Most importantly, treat problems with grace and don't panic. Business 101 teaches that great customer service is about the client, not you. If the unexpected happens, listen and address the problem with patience. Work hard to resolve issues *with* the client so they know their satisfaction is your top priority.

Images © Cathy Anderson

Image © Cathy Anderson

As you listen, you will unlock exactly what you need to craft personalized art for your clients. Human beings naturally align with companies that create personal, client-focused experiences, paired with great service and expertise. To produce the best client encounter possible, spearhead a collaborative effort with them to help them feel valued and provide expertly tailored service and craftsmanship. This mutual approach will differentiate your studio from other photographers and illuminate you as an expert portrait artist who cares about more than just the bottom line. ■

Cathy Anderson is a second-generation photographer and educator based in North Carolina. She earned her Certified Professional Photographer, Master Photographer, and Photographic Craftsman degrees from Professional Photographers of America (PPA), and her award-winning work has been featured in national news media, magazines, art galleries, and the PPA Loan Collection. She is a speaker and educator who has taught at regional, state, and national conferences, including ShutterFest, SYNC, Canon Corporation, and Imaging USA. Her photographic specialties include adventure, extreme sports and landscape photography, "sportraits," in-camera artistry, and dynamic lighting.

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THE SENIOR *Experience*

with **Curtiss Bryant**

Image © Curtiss Bryant

Image © Curtiss Bryant

The senior photography industry is constantly changing. Looking through the history of senior portraits, it seems that each decade represents a new trend in the industry. In the 80s, we saw "Glamour Shots" as senior portraits—feather boas, leather jackets, bright backgrounds, and a soft glow on the images. The 90s brought in more casual studio portraits complete with large numbers to represent the graduation year, high key backgrounds, fake brick walls, and those lovely folios that held six or eight or more wallet-size photographs. The 2000s started the trend of casual outdoor portraits in addition to the studio options. The studio portraits also included more options such as sports. The 2010s saw a big push into model programs and high fashion looks complete with hair and makeup options, with outdoor portraits being the norm.

We are now in a new decade, and we are starting to see a new trend—experiences. What exactly are these experiences, and how can we capitalize on them? We will get into that shortly. First, let's look at some other industries to see how this experience trend is influencing consumer decision-making.

First, we will look at Disney. Why do people spend thousands of dollars to travel across the country and world to visit Disney? Is it to ride rides? Eat expensive food? Wait in long lines? Stand around in the heat? Isn't it true that they can do most of that at their local fair for a lot less money? So why spend all that money just to go to Disney? It's the Disney Experience.

Disney has a way of making people feel good. Kids' faces light up when they see Cinderella's castle. It's the one place in the world they can see all their favorite characters in real life. Their staff is always going the extra mile to help create a magical experience for their guests. With Disney, everything is about creating an over-the-top environment, and frankly, no one does it better. Look at their newest offering at their parks—Star Wars Galaxy's Edge. This is a new experience created within Disney parks that allows their guests to enter a Star Wars world and experience what they see in the movies. They can build a light saber. They can meet their favorite characters. They can battle storm troopers. Yes, there are a couple of rides, but the rides help create the Star Wars experience. Experiences are exactly what guests are paying for when going to Disney.

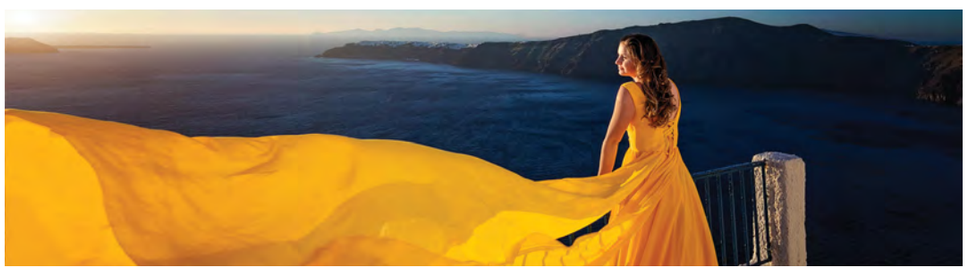
Next, let's look at the music industry. The music industry has always been about doing more than just producing music people can buy on records, CDs, mp3s, etc. There have always been concerts and world tours. Why do people go to concerts in the first place when they can just listen to the music at home? Hint: the experience.

But what trend are we starting to see in the music industry? Festivals. Coachella, Lollapalooza, and EDC are some of the bigger music festivals, drawing thousands of people each. And that doesn't include the smaller festivals. Yes, there have always been festivals as well. Woodstock was in the late 60s and had 400,000 attendees. But we are seeing more of these festivals each and every year. Why? Because people want that experience. They want to be around thousands of other music fans. It is something that they will always remember.

So how do these things relate to senior photography? We need to create experiences for our clients. If we are just taking pretty pictures of our clients, we will begin to see a slowing business. Seniors can take their own pretty pictures with friends. The photographers down the street can take pretty pictures. We need to focus on the experience that we provide. How can we do that? Here are some options for creating the ultimate senior experiences.

1. YEAR-LONG EXPERIENCES

We created an option for our clients to do multiple sessions a year with us. This allows them to capture the different seasons and really incorporate their entire senior year, with different looks throughout. On our end, it allows us to sell more images, since they are doing more portraits—win-win.



Images © Curtiss Bryant

2. TRAVEL/DESTINATION SHOOTS

We are big on offering destination sessions for our clients. We have been to Italy, Iceland, France, Costa Rica, Aruba, Puerto Rico, Barbados, Sweden, Ireland, Turks & Caicos, Mexico, and several places within the US. These sessions are all about creating experiences for our clients. Do you think a senior doing portraits in Italy in front of the Colosseum will ever forget that? No way. Travel these days is pretty cheap, so it's not that expensive to the client. Truth be told, these are our easiest sales as well. They want every single image. It's literally an experience of a lifetime.

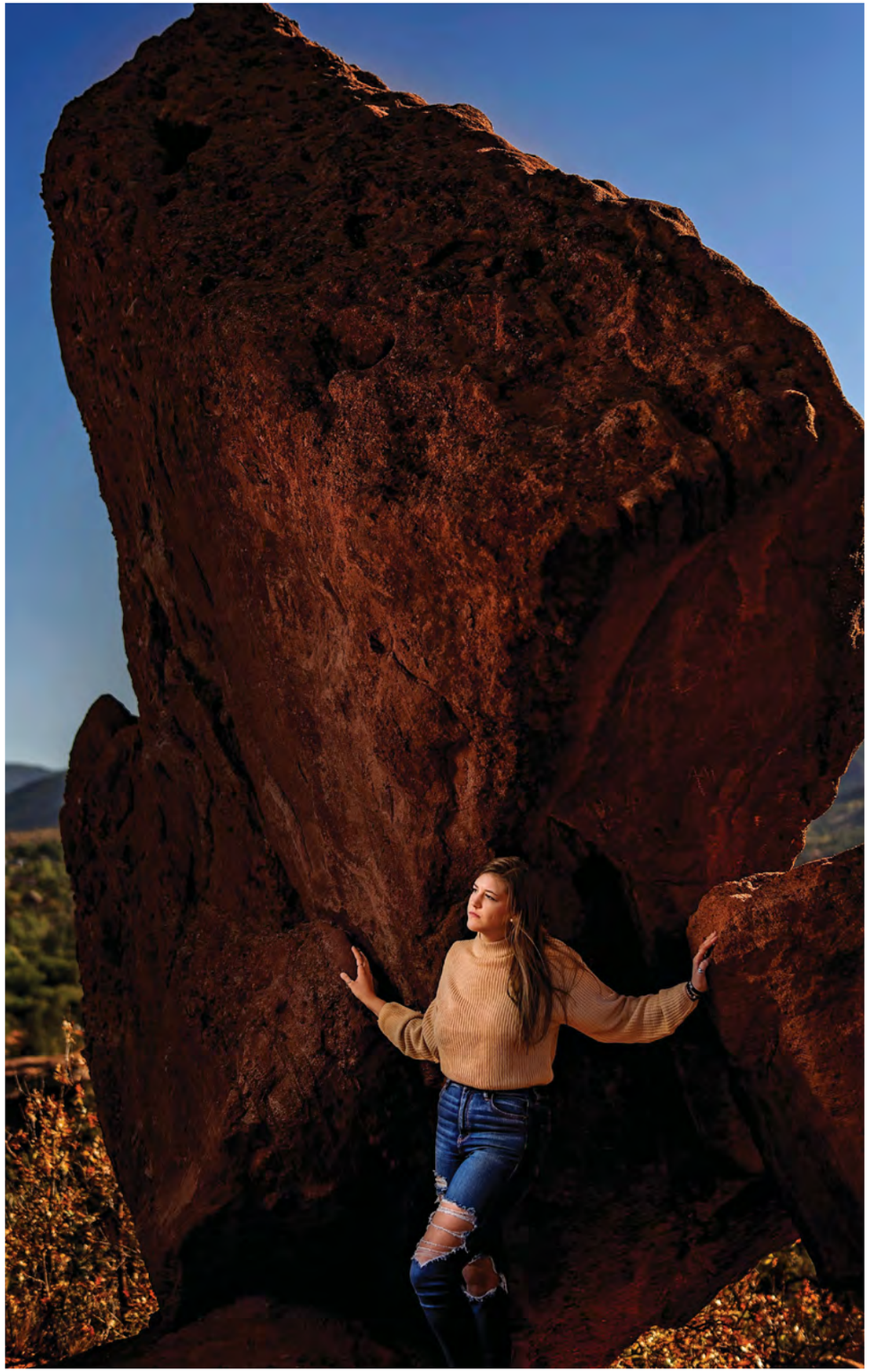


Image © Curtiss Bryant

Images © Curtiss Bryant

3. MODEL FOR A DAY

This experience allows seniors to do what they see all over social media and in magazines. It puts the focus on them for an entire day. They get to be front and center. Full hair and makeup styling and applications. Wardrobe. Multiple shooting locations. Add more to this experience by providing rental gowns for the client to wear. This is all about being over the top and creating a portrait experience the photographers down the street aren't taking the time to do.

Image © Curtiss Bryant

4. TEEN PROGRAM

Why just limit yourself to seniors? What about juniors? Sophomores? Freshmen? Do you think they want the same type of experiences? Do you think they want amazing portraits too? This is a big market that is largely ignored. Create a program that allows those other than seniors to participate. This also allows you to build relationships with a group that will be seniors one day. Who do you think they will come to when it's their time for senior portraits?

Images © Curtiss Bryant

These are just a few ideas to get you started. Gone are the days when pretty portraits were enough to bring in clients and thrive as a studio. Everyone is a photographer and everyone can take a pretty picture, even on their phone. We need to do more. We need to create experiences that our clients can invest in. We need to create experiences that our clients *want* to be a part of. In the 2020s, it's time to re-invent ourselves and create these senior experiences for our clients. ■

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.

curtissbryantphotography.com

3 EASY TIPS FOR STARTING A SENIOR MODEL PROGRAM

with **Karen Stenseth**

Image © Karen Stenseth

Images © Karen Stenseth

Have you heard that the high school senior photography market and model programs are dying? I have … many, many times! Even from a photographer-specific business coach I once paid—needless to say, that didn't last long. Let me tell you, those rumors have been around for several years, and they're *still* wrong. So if you've heard that before, I have great news! As long as there are teenagers graduating high school, parents seeing their babies growing into adults, and professional photographers willing to provide a phenomenal experience for the senior and parent, there *will* be a market for high school senior photography and model programs!

I started my business in 2009 with little league teams and quickly branched out into portrait sessions and weddings. A friend of mine asked me to photograph his son's senior portraits, and then before I knew it, I had several people contacting me to photograph their seniors. I quickly fell in love with the fun I was having because of their personalities and willingness to be photographed.

Within a year or two, I started hearing a lot about how other photographers were running successful Senior Model Programs. I figured it couldn't be *that* hard, so I started my own. I was excited about the idea of having models for my creative ideas and teenagers who were happy to share my pictures. After scouring the internet to read blogs and watch webinars about how to launch a Senior Model Program, it seemed that if I would provide them with pretty pictures, then they would bring in a load of referrals. Sounds easy enough, right? Well friends, if you're just starting a model program, let me save you a few *years* of frustration, because that's not how it works.

One thing I'd like to address is that there are just as many ways to run a Senior Model Program as there are photographers in the world, so just as you've found your shooting style, you have to find the path that is right for you when running a model program. If you're like me, you'll get bored easily, and your program will change from year to year to keep things fresh and unpredictable anyway.

My program revolves around community and fun—no matter what we're doing! When juniors apply for my program, I tell them in the information on my website and on the application that I want them to invite their friends to apply because "it's not a contest, it's a party"! This is one easy way to put them at ease from the beginning—you want them to bring friends along for the fun, and it's not about competing against each other.

Alright … let's get to the tips!

1. ATTRACT TEENAGERS AND PARENTS

Word of mouth and your online presence are likely the top two reasons teenagers and parents would even know about your business. There are many keys to marketing that we don't have space for here, but I can tell you the one thing that's most important is that you're showing up regularly and constantly working on your online existence. Most teens are on Instagram, and they actively use it to check out local businesses, whereas parents typically use Google and Facebook, so make sure your profiles and pages are inviting and engaging—but also make sure your work and information stay current. You'll want to make sure your website, search engines and social media channels tell seniors and parents that you're open for business and want to photograph teenagers.

So what if you don't normally photograph teenagers? Well, the simple answer is that you need to get teenagers in front of your lens so you can show what you want to sell. If you don't currently have teen clients, it may seem a little difficult to get going, so you'll need to put on your thinking cap in order to have work to present to attract more.

Image © Karen Stenseth

Pro Tip 1: Make a list of people you know who have teenagers—high school juniors and seniors to be more specific. Current seniors would be the obvious first choice, because not only are they already in the perfect position to be clients, but their social media accounts are being watched by other juniors and seniors who will see the photos. It's your choice whether to shoot sessions for free or to charge a fee, but whatever you decide, make sure you communicate clearly about how it will work.

Pro Tip 2: Something to keep in mind is that if they've already had their senior pictures taken or they're a model for another photographer, don't tread those waters. There are plenty of seniors out there, so use the Golden Rule and don't step on the toes of your fellow photographers.

2. PLAN A FANTASTIC EXPERIENCE

Let's talk about some of the things that will keep your senior models excited about your program through graduation. I offer things for them to be involved in as individuals and as part of a small group or large group. My team is quite large, so I find it important to do things on a large and small scale throughout the year. These things are on the group calendar when they sign on, and then as the dates get closer, we plan the specifics.

Each senior receives their own personal session and is invited to take part in the group shoots and meet-ups throughout the year. Notice I said 'invited'—their presence is hoped for, but not required in my program. I know it seems a bit backward compared to most model programs, but making things optional is one of the keys that I learned a few years ago. It makes having a large team less stressful and a lot easier to manage.

For the group shoots, I take the creative reins on outfits, hair & makeup, location, etc., but I also try hard to keep costs to a minimum and let them have input and opinions.

Meet-ups can be anything from a team meeting to plan something or just sitting around chatting. Community events are always rewarding and well-attended. This year, we collected food, medical items and clothing for the homeless, then took the donations as a group to the collection point. When we arrived, we realized they were struggling with dispersing the items to their places, so we all pitched in to help. My heart was beaming seeing how much they enjoyed helping out and serving others.

For the personal session, we work together to execute their perfect senior shoot. This is different for each kid, and I hear some wild ideas sometimes. Whether it's showcasing their extra-curricular activities, their vehicle, or a cool location, or just simply wanting something different, I try hard to deliver images that the kids and their parents will love … plus create some things they don't expect.

Image © Karen Stenseth

Pro Tip: Let them help you plan! Whether it's a group shoot, a meet-up, an event, or just their own session, they'll take ownership and will be more excited about the outcome.

Image © Karen Stenseth

3. PUT THE ICING ON TOP

A photography session can be similar to baking a cake—bakers can vary a recipe to their liking and as long as the cake tastes good, their customer will be pleased. But should they stop there? Heck no! When the cake looks beautiful and tastes even better, that's giving them something to talk about! Photography, like all art, is subjective so there *will* be clients for every style and level of expertise, but the one thing that should be present in every business is treating people right and providing them with great service and products. Those are simple business practices to start with, so don't stop there.

I prefer to use in-person sales for my senior families, because it allows me to go the extra mile to hand-hold them when purchasing the products for their home and gifts. With each product order, I include a simple 'thank you' gift that is always unexpected and appreciated—and usually makes the mamas cry.

Pro Tip: Constantly look for ways to improve, and don't be afraid to change course mid-stream if something isn't working.

Images © Karen Stenseth

I hope these tips help you to start your own successful Senior Model Program. Remember, this is an important time in your clients' lives—senior year is a big deal for both the kids and the parents. The best compliment I hear year after year is that they are ready to graduate, but they're not ready to leave Senior Crew. That's the best compliment I could ever ask for from my seniors! ■

Karen Stenseth is a PPA Certified Professional Photographer working from her 90-year-old two-story studio located in Hazel Green, Alabama. After high school, she realized college wasn't for her, so she worked behind other people's desks for several years before she realized she had more potential as a creative business owner. She has been in business since 2009 specializing in high school senior portraits, business headshots and sports team photography. She uses her life experiences as a mission to help her seniors discover their purpose and find joy in a life they love!

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9 TIPS TO CREATING AN AMAZING CLIENT EXPERIENCE FOR SENIORS

with **Jenn Lewis**

Image © Jenn Lewis

Want to have high school seniors telling all their friends about their amazing experience with you? Follow these tips to give them something to talk about!

Image © Jenn Lewis

1. TAKE THE TIME TO MEET THEM IN PERSON

When a client inquires with you, start by offering to meet them for an in-person consultation! Whether you treat them to coffee at a local coffee shop or have them come by your studio, they'll feel important because you want to take the time to get to know them before they book. If you're meeting at your studio, they'll also have a chance to see your working space, product samples, and more, which can all help you create value in what you're offering.

Pro tip: If you're meeting at your studio, offer them a beverage upon arrival (I keep sodas and water in a small fridge). If you're meeting them at a coffee shop or similar, avoid that awkward "Who buys?" moment by arriving early, and purchasing your beverage of choice along with a gift card for your client. When they arrive, hand them the gift card and tell them to help themselves to whatever they'd like, and you'll be there waiting for them when they're ready.

2. PAMPER THEM

I love having a professional hair and makeup artist to pamper my girls before their shoot. They love this part of the experience, and it gives them time to relax if they're nervous (most of them are!). My hair and makeup artist comes to my studio, and while my girls are in her chair, I chat with them about their locations and outfits, and we fine tune our plans for the shoot day. We also take that time to get to know each other better. The girls feel so much more confident and camera ready after they have hair and makeup done! Make sure you and your HMUA are on the same page with the look your senior is going for and that it matches her outfits and locations.

Pro tip: Ask your artist not to use anything too shiny on the skin that might have to be fixed in Photoshop (glare from lights can be a pain!). A great job from a hair and makeup artist will save you so much time with post-processing. I show my clients their images straight out of camera, so this is super important to me.

Image © Jenn Lewis

3. PROVIDE A STYLE CLOSET

I have a style closet in my studio, and any of my senior clients are welcome to borrow from it. I keep things that they may not normally purchase as everyday wear (think bling, sparkles, leather, and fur), and I have a variety of styles and sizes, from XS to XL. My always-growing closet consists of coats, dresses (boho style is very popular), tops, skirts, and jewelry. I order from places like Forever 21, Urban Outfitters, and Shein. Many websites will give you a discount for your first order with them, and once you're on the list, you'll get an email for every sale they ever have. I hit up Plato's Closet on the reg too, as I always find a ton of great deals on super-cute clothes and jewelry there, so make sure you're checking out your local secondhand shops.

Pro tip: Keep clothespins, safety pins, and double-sided fashion tape handy to ensure a great fit.

Image © Jenn Lewis

4. HELP THEM PREPARE

My seniors always have questions before their shoot, and I want them to feel prepared so that they're more excited than worried or nervous. Instead of them having to text me questions (or being too worried about asking a "silly question" to text me at all), I send them guides before their session. The first one is sent after they book with me. It's called "10 Tips for Planning Your Session" and includes lots of ideas for locations, things to bring, outfit choices and more. A few days before their session, I'll send them another guide called "Preparing for your Session." This guide is filled with tips and reminders such as making sure their clothing is wrinkle-free, bringing appropriate undergarments, and avoiding sunburn or crazy tan lines.

Pro tip: I created these guides on my Photobiz website, and I keep them as hidden pages, only accessible by the link I text to my seniors. This makes it super easy to update.

Image © Jenn Lewis

Image © Jenn Lewis

5. FEED AND WATER THEM

One of the tips I include in my Preparing for your Session guide is to make sure my seniors eat lunch before their session. Hair and makeup typically lasts just over an hour, and the shoot takes around three hours (more if I'm feeling inspired), so it can be a long day. We live in North Carolina and shoot in late summer and early fall, when the temps can reach 100+ degrees. I keep plenty of soda and water in my fridge, and lots of salty and sweet snacks in the studio as well. We pack a cooler with snacks and water to take on location to make sure our seniors are staying hydrated and feeling great during their shoot. If at any point they need a break, we will stop at a convenience store or drive-thru to let them get whatever they'd like, and I always pay for it.

Pro tip: We always begin our sessions with the studio as the first location to capture our client with fresh hair and makeup, then move to any indoor location that might be on their list, and finish up at their outdoor location after the heat of the day lets up, just in time for sunset.

Images © Jenn Lewis

6. SHOW THEIR FRIENDS THE FUN THEY'RE HAVING

We always take behind-the-scenes photos, videos, and boomerangs during their photoshoot and post them to our Instagram stories. They love getting to relive their day watching it later, as just like a wedding day, at the end it's all kind of a blur. They know that many of their friends watch my stories as well, so they are always up for doing something fun for social media. Many of my Instagram followers love getting a glimpse behind the scenes of a shoot, so we'll showcase our locations, our lighting setups, our seniors' outfits, and more.

Pro tip: If you tag the senior in your Instagram stories, they will be able to share to their own IG stories!

7. BRING AN ENTOURAGE

I always have an assistant working with me during senior sessions. I don't want to entrust expensive gear to the mom or friend that my senior brings with them (no one needs that type of pressure), so I have my assistant carry equipment, set up lighting, man the light stand and strobe, and sometimes take behind-the-scenes photos for me. But my assistant is there for my client as well. He brings her water and snacks, fluffs her dress, fans her in the heat, holds things for her (sunglasses on a sunny day or a jacket in the winter), and does whatever else she may need. We make sure our girls feel like rock stars on the day of their session. Whatever they need, we're there for them.

Pro tip: If you shoot in the summer, keep small fans in your gear bag … you can pick up a small, battery-operated fan, and I always keep a folding accordion fan. But reflectors work perfectly too, and you may find that you love that windblown look for a few of your images.

8. SHOW THEM THEIR IMAGES IN PERSON

After the excitement of the shoot day itself, the seniors can't wait to see their images! In-person sales sessions are the way to go to be most profitable while providing the most valuable thing to your client—printed products. Even in these days of digital images and social media, teens still love choosing images for their albums and wall art. I recall one of my seniors recently saying at her order pickup, "Seeing them on the TV was cool, but seeing them in the album is completely different. This is absolutely amazing."

Pro tip: When they pick up their order, take photos of them with their new album and wall art to post on Instagram stories.

Image © Jenn Lewis

9. MAKE THEM FAMOUS

After the ordering session, my seniors love getting to choose which photo is posted on social media, because they know their friends follow. I then continue to periodically post images from their session. Seniors love for their friends to see their images, but don't want to look narcissistic by always being the ones to post them.

Pro tip: When I post the first image after the ordering session, I mention the products the senior ordered. This helps set expectations for future clients.

Image © Jenn Lewis

Bottom line, this is their day to be the star of the show. Make them feel important and amazing, and they'll be your biggest fans. ■

Jenn is an award-winning portrait photographer based in Clemmons, North Carolina who concentrates on seniors and headshots. With 12 years in business, a determined work ethic and a tenacious personality, she grew her part-time business from her living room to her full-time 1600-square-foot studio while multiplying her sales average by 10. She is an army of one, but her ADHD helps her to multitask like a boss. Jenn is easily recognized by her crazy curly hair, which has been rumored to give her superpowers in her sales room. She enjoys road trips, long walks on the beach, and pink Starbursts.

jennlewisphotography.com

INSPIRATIONS

Inspiration can come when you least expect it. As photographers, we are visual artists. We express ourselves through our camera and the images we create. Inspirations represents a sampling of our industry and the vision of professional photographers from around the world.

Congratulations to all our featured artists. Be inspired and create something that is *you.*

Sal Cincotta, *Publisher*

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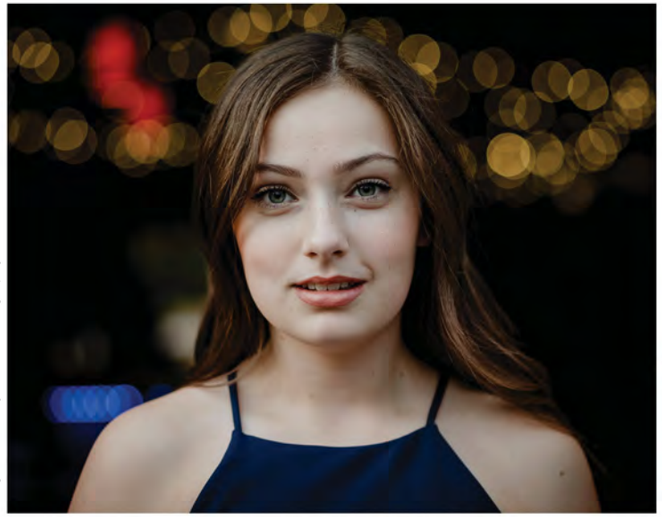

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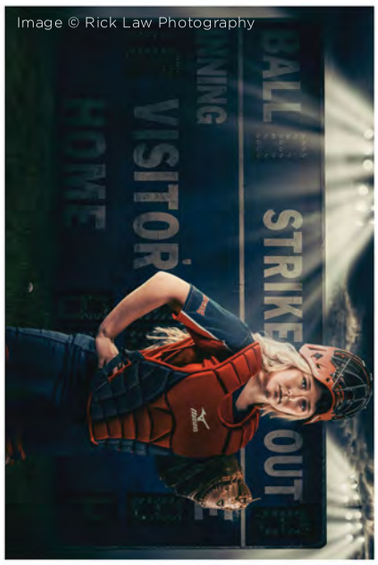

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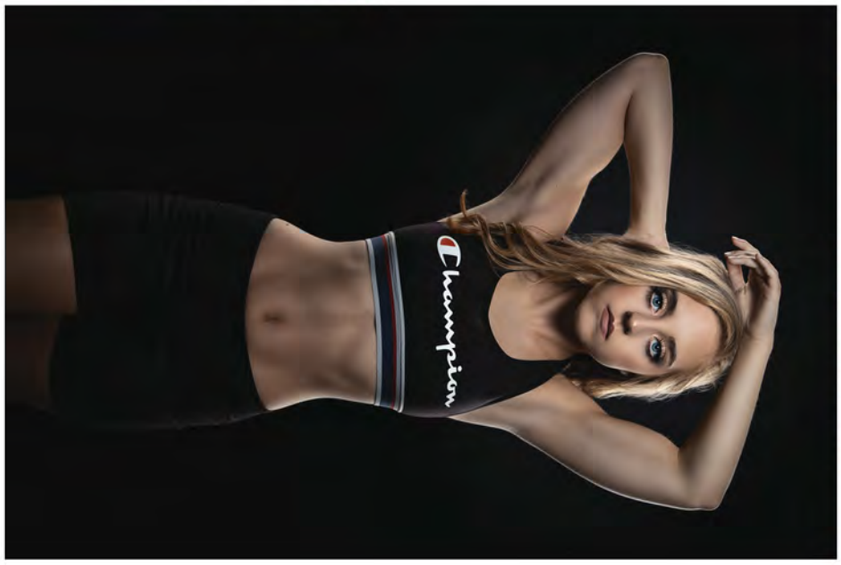

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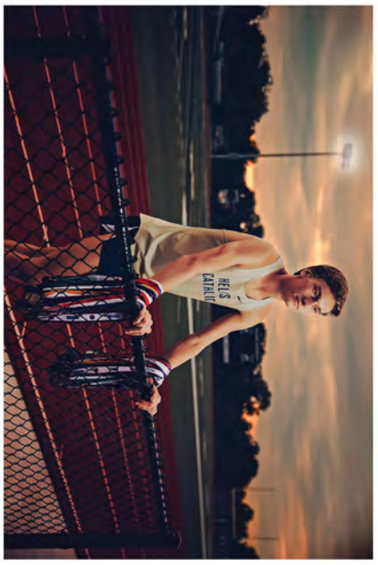

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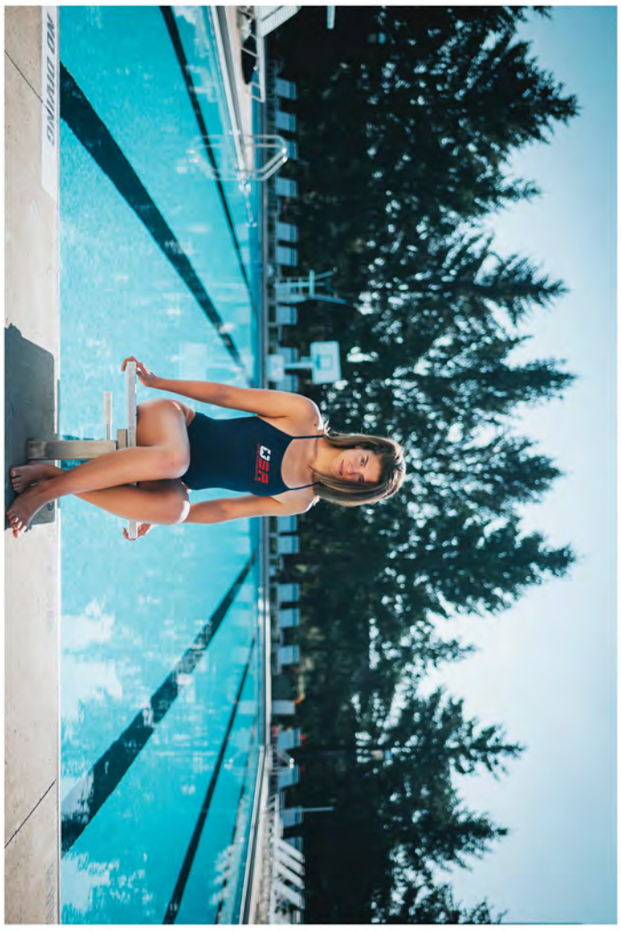

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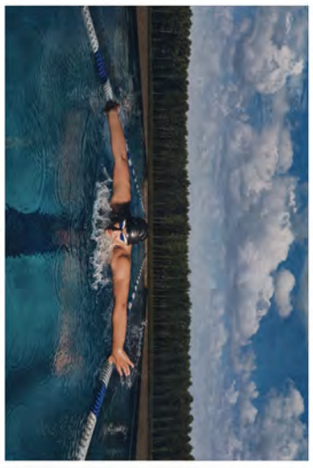

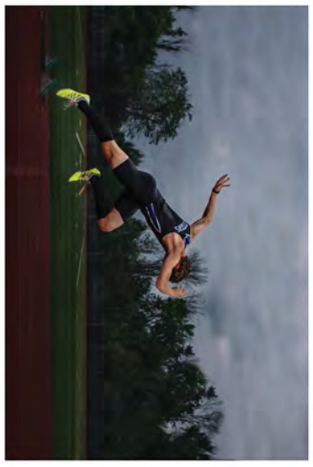

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5 THINGS YOU CAN'T DO WITHOUT A LIGHT METER

with **Michael Corsentino**

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Readers of this column know that I'm a big booster for the use of handheld light meters. I use them daily in my own photography and recommend them to every photographer interested in better lighting. In fact, if you want to take your lighting to the next level in addition to taking your light off your camera, learning to use a handheld light meter is the next best step you can take in that direction. I know what you're thinking! "My camera already has a built-in light meter. Why do I need another meter, another expense, and another tool to worry about?" Those are each great questions.

Despite being incredibly advanced and capable of many amazing feats, the light meter in your camera doesn't hold a candle to a standalone, dedicated, flexible, purpose-built handheld light meter. They each do very different and essential things, and neither one is a replacement for the other. If TTL metering is your preferred method of working, your camera's built-in light meter will have you covered in most scenarios. That said, even TTL can prove inaccurate and unpredictable in certain situations. What then? You need a backup plan, and that's where at a minimum knowing how to use a handled light meter can be a life-saver. The deeper you delve into off-camera location and studio lighting, the more limiting a built-in light meter becomes and the more useful a handheld light meter becomes. Let's look at five things you can't do without a light meter:

1. OBTAIN A PROPER FLASH EXPOSURE BEFORE CLICKING THE SHUTTER

This one is huge. With a handled light meter set to Shutter Priority, you simply dial in the ISO and shutter speed settings to match those used on your camera. The meter will then indicate the aperture setting needed for a balanced exposure based on the amount of flash measured. This method is particularly useful with off-camera manual flash either on location or in the studio. You simply dial flash power up or down until the meter gives you a reading that matches your desired aperture setting. Since you already know what your desired aperture setting is and already have it set on your camera along with the same shutter speed and ISO already set on your meter, all you need is a meter reading that matches your desired aperture. Once you have a reading matching the aperture setting on your camera, you're guaranteed a balanced exposure before you've ever captured your first image. This is a tremendous time saver compared to making repeated exposures and strobe adjustments until stumbling onto the right exposure, aka chimping. Get it right the first time, look like a rock star, and spend more time shooting!

2. ESTABLISH A RATIO BETWEEN LIGHTS

The ability to determine the precise difference between key and accent light output is extremely useful in multiple strobe scenarios. Best-in-class flash meters such as Sekonic's L-758 and L-858 permit photographers to determine the ratio from one strobe to another. The process is simple—first you meter the key light, then save that reading into the meter's internal memory, and finally press the meter's Delta EV button to put the meter into ratio mode and meter the accent lights. The meter will indicate +/- readings based on the difference between the two lights. For example, -1 indicates 1 stop less light than the key light, +2 indicates 2 stops more light than the key light, etc. That's about as complicated as ratios get, so don't overthink it and unnecessarily intimidate yourself. This is a really killer feature, because it allows repeatable, predictable and consistent results regardless of distance and other factors that can change from one set up to the next. What this means is that you can recreate lighting setups from one studio or location to the next quickly, accurately and easily.

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Image © Michael Corsentino

3. TAKE AN INCIDENT LIGHT READING

While TTL is a wonderful development and great for working quickly when distances between subject and flash are changing rapidly, it's also prone to the vagaries of Reflective light readings. Your camera's built-in light meter works by reading the light reflected from whatever is in front of the lens. Naturally, different surfaces, subjects and objects reflect light with different intensities. The classic example of a challenging situation for TTL is a groom in a black tux and a bride in a white gown. Both of these colors reflect light with dramatically different intensities and therefore can confuse a TTL meter. Complex backgrounds containing a variety of elements with different levels of reflectivity can be problematic for TTL. Handheld flash meters can be used to take both Reflective readings, good for landscape work, and Incident readings, good for just about everything else. With Incident readings, the meter measures the light falling onto the subject rather than the light reflected from it. As the light falling onto a subject is a constant unaffected by different reflective intensity, it's much more accurate, consistent, and rock-solid reliable both in the studio and on location, regardless of subject complexity.

4. DETERMINE THE PERCENTAGE OF FLASH CONTRIBUTED

One of my favorite things you can do with a flash meter is obtain a numerical percentage for the amount of flash being contributed to an exposure. This is particularly useful when mixing flash and ambient. Most often in this scenario, ambient light is the dominant light source and flash is used as fill light. That said, in some cases you may need to overpower the ambient light. With a flash meter, you can see the exact percentage of light being contributed by the flash and season to taste. This allows you to work quickly and repeatably. If your favorite fill light percentage is 20%, using this method, you can accurately and easily get it every time. Conversely, if you want a more flash-heavy look, you simply increase flash power and determine a percentage balance that better fits your needs.

5. METER MANUAL FLASH

Due to the way mirrored SLR cameras work, they're unable to meter manual flash—end of story, full stop. This is due to the mechanical limitation of the way the a built-in light meter, camera mirror and shutter work together during meter readings. With an SLR camera meter, readings are obtained by reflecting the light from the scene into the meter prism sitting on top of the camera body. When the mirror raises and the shutter curtain opens to make the exposure, metering is no longer possible. The manual flash fires when the camera's mirror is up and the shutter is open, and therefore no meter reading can be taken. Not so with a handheld flash meter, which can be used anytime, anywhere to obtain an accurate manual flash, thus bypassing the SRL meter limitation. If you want to incorporate manual flash into your photography (especially useful in the studio), a handheld flash meter is the way to go.

I could have made this list even longer, but my goal was to keep it broad and general. Meters can be used to measure color temperature, determine flash duration, remotely control flash power and strobe groups, and accurately meter blow-away white backgrounds, among many, many other uses. In short, they allow fast, accurate, consistent, predictable, and repeatable results every time. A quick YouTube search returns dozens of helpful videos explaining myriad uses for handheld light meters, from beginner to advanced. For those interested, I encourage you to dig deeper—you won't be disappointed. ■

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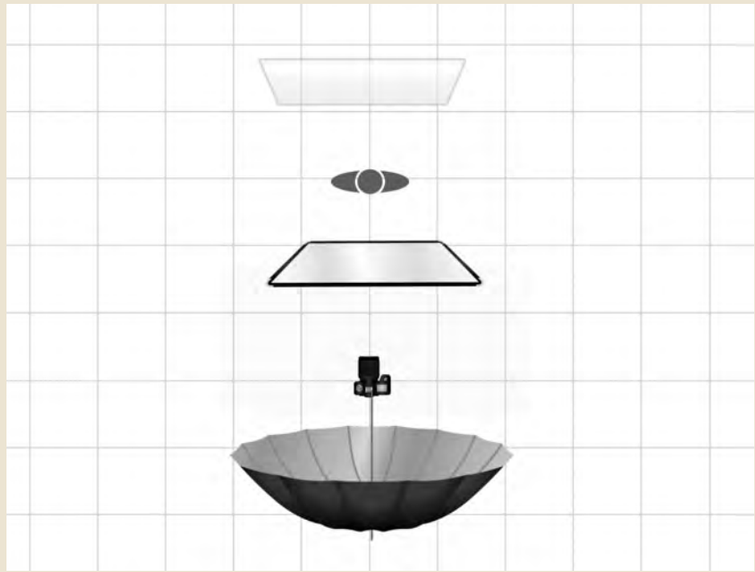
Michael Corsentino is an Orlando, Florida-based editorial fashion and portrait photographer. In addition to his busy shooting schedule, Michael is a passionate educator, teaching workshops domestically and internationally. He is an author of two books, writes a monthly lighting column for *Shutter Magazine*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

michaelcorsentino.com

final inspiration

photographer | amanda holloway
image title | zoe



exposure	f/8 @ 1/60 iso 250
lighting	1 profoto b10 photek softlighter II - 60” (8mm shaft)
location	amanda holloway studio
gear	nikon z7 camera nikon z 24-70mm 2.8 s lens
website	amandahollowayphotography.com

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The studio light for smartphones

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