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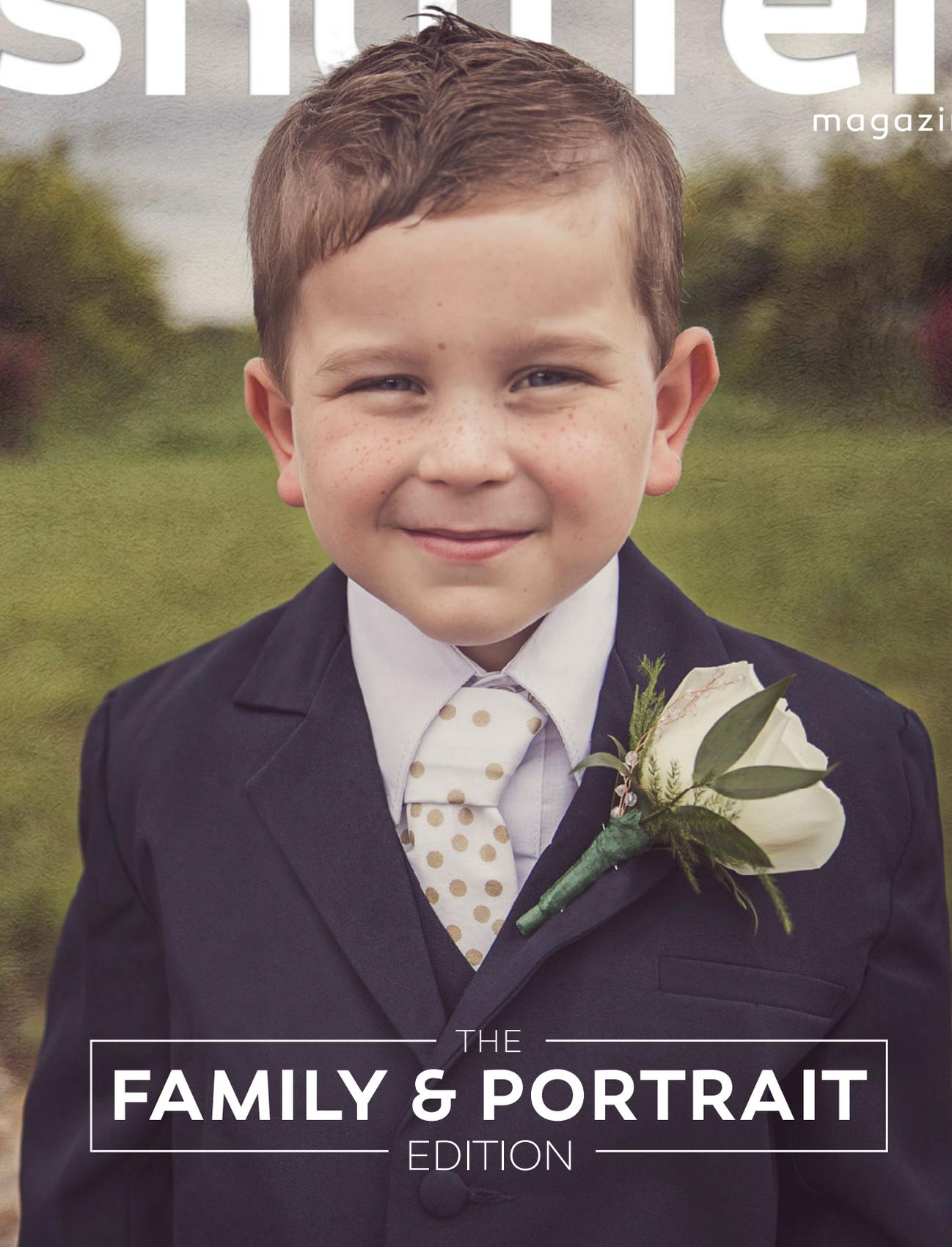
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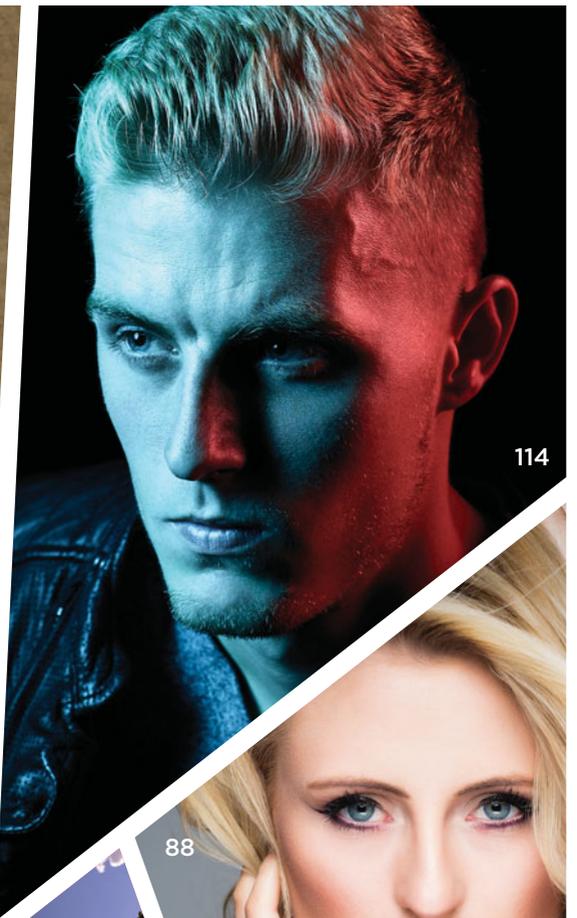
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TURNING THE ORDINARY INTO EXTRAORDINARY:

MASTERING SPEEDLIGHTS

FOR THE WEDDING & PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHER
with Michael Anthony

As a full-time wedding and portrait photographer located in Southern California, rarely do I get the luxury of shooting in perfect light. When I started out, I knew that to stand out from the crowd, I needed to differentiate my portfolio using creative light. That sent me on a mission to learn how to master flash.

In 2011, I purchased my first two speedlights: Canon EX 580II's. Like many of you, I was overwhelmed by the technical knowledge I needed to make the most of the flashes. So I picked up all of the books I could on the subject of flash, and began to learn the ins and outs. Not long after, I invested in the Canon 600EX-RT system because of the radio controllers integrated in the body of the lights. I still use this system.

It may come as a surprise to most that 95 percent of the external lighting our studio uses comes from our Canon Speedlites. Speedlights are portable and inexpensive, and can turn an ordinary image into something extraordinary. With the extensive list of modifiers available, you can shape light almost any way you need to. Photographers fail at lighting when they don't see beyond the obvious.

Your speedlights, like all of your photographic tools, have strengths and limitations, and understanding them is the best way to create images that stand out. Let's look at a few ways you can use your speedlights to create incredible images.

FLAG & BOUNCE

This technique allows you to use your speedlight to create both soft and controlled light in almost any situation. A telltale sign of an image that is “flashy” is that the light quality does not match the quality of ambient light. If you are shooting images inside in poor but even lighting, the light on your subject should be soft. If you are outdoors in 12 o’clock sunlight, your light should be hard. This makes for images that are believable to the eye.

If you are like me, you hate carrying a lot of gear with you on shoots. You can carry softboxes and umbrellas, but why do it if you don’t need to? On a wedding day, if I am shooting inside a dimly lit room but I want to use soft light, one of the best ways to do that is to use a close wall to bounce a speedlight off of. You can do this inside or outside, and both yield incredible results. When in brighter light, just remember that bouncing your flash will cost you some power, so when using speedlights, keep your subject close to the light source (wall).

It seems obvious, and it is a fairly basic technique. The reason it doesn’t often look good is because while the soft light hits your subject, it also spills uncontrollably throughout the room.

In order to control this, you need to flag your flash. You can buy fancy modifiers to do this, but a large gray card or the black side of a reflector works perfectly. By flagging your light, you can control exactly where you want light to go, without causing distracting light spill everywhere else in the room.

This works wonders during bridal and groom prep, and allows you to leave the heavy modifiers in the car until you need them.



Image © Michael Anthony



CREATE MYSTERY OR SEPARATION WITH BACKLIGHT

I stay away from the word *backlight* because it contains a connotation that I hear every other Southern California “natural light” photographer use when describing how to make bad light better. So there is no confusion, backlight does not fix blown highlights or crushed shadows. Now that we have established that, let’s talk about the best times to use backlight with a speedlight.

By placing your speedlight behind your subjects, you can create a bit of mystery in your images. Backlight also allows you to create separation between your subject and the background, and can add a dynamic feel to an already well-lit image.

I use backlight in a dark environment for the last image in an album spread. This way I create a quick, well-composed image that I can rely on as an album closer every single time. Backlight should not be a distraction. You need to consider both the power of the light and the placement, as backlight can spill onto the front of your subject’s face. By offsetting your couple, you can use the same bounce techniques described above to create a bit of light on one of your subjects’ faces, even if the light is completely behind them.

When using backlight with a subject with long hair, place all of the hair on the subject’s back to avoid the appearance of hair growing out of the subject’s chin, and emphasize the subject’s shape.

Add a backlight to a front-lit subject for a dynamic portrait that allows for a beautiful halo on your subject.

Use a speedlight to backlight water, smoke or any other semi-transparent material to create a pattern to shoot through, adding depth to your composition. Whatever you are shooting through has to be lit on the opposite side of your camera. We use this technique all the time to take our subjects out of otherwise boring or cluttered backgrounds.

STACK LIGHTS TO ADD OR CONSERVE POWER

Flash power can be cumulative, meaning that if you need more power out of your flash, you can add an additional one to double your power. This way you can overpower the sun or conserve battery power for your light when either outcome is needed.

While I highly recommend shooting with a single light source, the cost of investing in a system like the Profoto B1 could be prohibitive. By combining multiple flashes, you get additional power out of your small AA-powered speedlights. In addition, you can use four flashes set to one-quarter power, and conserve battery power and recycle time to get more efficient use out of your flash. For bonus points, spread out the flashes to simulate a larger light source and get softer light on your subjects. To do this, you will need one or more assistants, or a flash bracket that can hold multiple lights, like the Westcott Triple Threat.

Every flash you add increases your power, but remember that the same system for calculating your F-stops applies. So, if you want to double the flash power of one light, you need to add another light. If you want to double the power of two lights, you need to add two more lights. If you want an additional stop of power, you need to add four lights or invest in a powerful moonlight, such as the Profoto B1 or B2.

SANDWICH YOUR SUBJECTS TO CREATE SHOWSTOPPING LIGHT

It's rare that I use more than two lights on a subject outside the studio. When using multiple lights, I employ a cross light 90 percent of the time. Natural lights all look similar because our planet has only one sun, and natural light falls from east to west (when rare circumstances like reflections do not apply). This means that if you want dynamic images that catch people's attention, adding a second light can help.

When experimenting with lighting, start by placing your second light directly opposite your primary light. Dial in the ambient exposure first, and then your primary light, and lastly your kicker. This creates separation and three-dimensionality that is sure to give you a beautiful photo if you nail the pose and composition.



BLEND YOUR AMBIENT LIGHT WITH FLASH

When you get that flash out for the first time, you may be tempted to crush that ambient light into oblivion and blast your subject with flash so that when you look at the back of the camera, you can see the results of your hard work. I've been that guy way too often.

When you develop your skillset, you begin to understand that the difference between ordinary and extraordinary images comes down to the subtle details: hand placement, shadow length, dress position, etc.

One of the other telltale signs of flash use is an imbalance between flash and ambient light. While there is no straight rule for proper ratio of flash to ambient light, there are guidelines. Generally, if you leave enough ambient light to show detail in your shadows, you are in better shape than underexposing significantly. Use your histogram when shooting your ambient light test shot to avoid clipping your blacks. Conversely, your flash power has to be stronger than the ambient light in the scene; otherwise, you won't see the flash. A darker ambient exposure gives you a more dramatic look so you can make your subject the brightest part of your image. A more balanced exposure gives you a more natural appearance.

Your style of photography dictates which way to balance light. Make sure your balance is closer to even than it is to unbalanced.

CONTROL YOUR SHADOWS

Shadows can give you drama and help shape your subjects or scene. Speedlights are small light sources that leave you with sharp shadows. Shadows from your flash can detract from your image. To control shadows, feather your light source up to take some light off the floor or walls. Add grids or snoots to your flash to pinpoint the light exactly where you want it. In the worst-case scenario, take a plate shot without your flash so you can paint out the shadows later in post-production. Just don't rely on this technique too often.





Image © Michael Anthony

You need to understand your tools. Portrait and wedding photographers don't all have the luxury of time or assistants when lighting on location. Speedlights are important tools that are easy to use and learn. Even "natural light" photographers can get the bright and airy look using speedlights, while the edgy, fashion-inspired photographer can use them to create shadows and drama. ■

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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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BEING TRUE TO YOU

with **Sal Cincotta**



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The concept of “being true to you” can be confusing to photographers and artists, especially ones just starting out. What does it all mean? What is the meaning of life? Don’t worry, I wouldn’t put that kind of pressure on you, but most artists struggle with their identity as an artist. When we are just getting started, we are chasing affirmation, approvals, happy faces, satisfied clients. What we may fail to realize is that all those things can be temporary if we are not true to ourselves and our vision.

While we don’t know enough about who we are as artists in the beginning, we have to at least be aware of that artistic identity crisis, or we run the risk of spending our entire career trying to be something we are not and never will be.

So what does it even mean to be true to you? Here is some advice on how to find out.

What do you love?

Sure, we all love photography. That goes without saying. But what do you love about it? What is it that gets you excited? When you think about going out to shoot, what do you dream of?

That is where you have to start your journey.

Every day, I wake up looking forward to going to work. I love what I do. I can’t say it enough. I truly love it. I have the best job in the world. I get to create something for people, and those people pay me for it. What could be better? Nothing.

So, what do I love? I love weddings and high school seniors. That is my passion. Equally as important is knowing what you don’t love. I don’t love (*hate* would be a stronger word) baby photography. Not a thing I like about it. (To those out there who do it and do it well, wow! You are an incredible talent and you have the patience of a saint.) Knowing what you don’t love is equally as important. It’s part of the process. With this understanding, I know where to invest my time and energy. Why chase clients in a niche that just doesn’t work for me? It makes no sense. So why do so many photographers and businesspeople do this?

Know what you love and go after it with everything you’ve got.



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Define your audience.

Once you know what you love to do, the next important thing is to connect with those who see the world the same way. What am I talking about? Who is your client? If I decided I love baby photography, I would not define my client as a 17-year-old high school senior. This seems like common sense, but I meet so many business owners who can't figure out this part of it.

Ask yourself these questions:

Who is my target client? How old are they? Are they male or female? Do they have children? Where do they shop? What brands do they lust after? What brands resonate with your clients? This helps you understand consumer behavior and what marketing will motivate them.

Once you understand who your potential client is, you are armed with the information you need to start marketing to this group of like-minded people.



Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Market to your audience.

Marketing? Sal, have you lost your mind? I have to actually do work for my clients to find me? Uh, yeah, Captain Obvious! Your clients don't know you exist. And the competition is fierce. So, you'd better get your head out of the sand and implement a marketing plan.

We need to home in on our potential clients. If your target audience lived on an island without the Internet, would you run a Facebook campaign to connect with them? Sounds utterly ridiculous, doesn't it? As it should. But so many businesses just make those kinds of rookie mistakes. And then they're completely confused when the phone doesn't ring. It's never going to ring if your marketing efforts don't connect with your target.

We need to understand their behavior. Where do they shop? What do they watch on TV? What do they do for leisure? What is their income? How much of it is discretionary?

Now it's time to figure out how to reach them. It's about more than just understanding the channel we are going after, such as Facebook, direct mail, TV or Instagram. We need messaging for this channel. If you are marketing to Mexican-Americans for quinceañera photography and you show a picture in your ad of a white 4-year-old girl, there is a very good chance your ad will fail miserably. It's common sense, but I see it over and over again in our industry and many others.

Your marketing has to be solid and resonate with the audience you have defined. Not sure if it will? Take a poll among your client base. Show them the ad before you run it, and ask them if they would call. If not, why? Ask them how the ad makes them feel. What comes to mind? If the answers you are getting are not what you were hoping for, adjust the ad accordingly.



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Be flexible but firm.

Remember, this is about being true to yourself and your vision. That does not mean you should be an ass. Artists are a funny bunch. They are either extremely humble about their talent or extremely overconfident for no apparent reason. I am reminded of a peer's photo session I was watching in Las Vegas a few years ago. I was embarrassed for him and our profession when it was all done.

The creative director kept changing her mind based on what she expected versus what she was seeing on the back of the camera. Frustrating for the photographer? Of course. But at the end of the day, the client is paying you money to deliver, whether a wedding client, senior, family, corporate. The photographer was having a meltdown because the sun was setting. He shouted, "I cannot work in these conditions!" I remember being there watching and thinking, what an ass.

So, what does this mean for you? Not every client is going to see the world exactly the way you do. That's okay. I would settle for 80 percent. That means I'd rather have a client who's in the ballpark of my vision than one who is on the other side of the planet. My style of photography is architectural-based. I love a big sweeping landscape with a grand architectural feature and then the couple smaller in the frame. That's more art than a true portrait. But clients want to see their faces in portraits. So of course, I am flexible. During shoots, I capture both what they want and what I want. The end is a happy client who gets the best of both worlds.

Stuff like this has to be flushed out during the initial consultation with the client. Let's look at our high school seniors consultations. Our style is very much like a fashion shoot. If a client wants indoor photography where they're peaking around a tree with fake lattice in the background, we tell them that's not what we do, and to check out our website and portfolio to understand what we do. If I take this client on, there is a high probability I will not make them happy and they will leave our studio with a bad taste in their mouth and ultimately give us a bad review. In reality, it was just a mismatch. So, while you have to stay true to your vision, you also have to find that balance and be flexible.

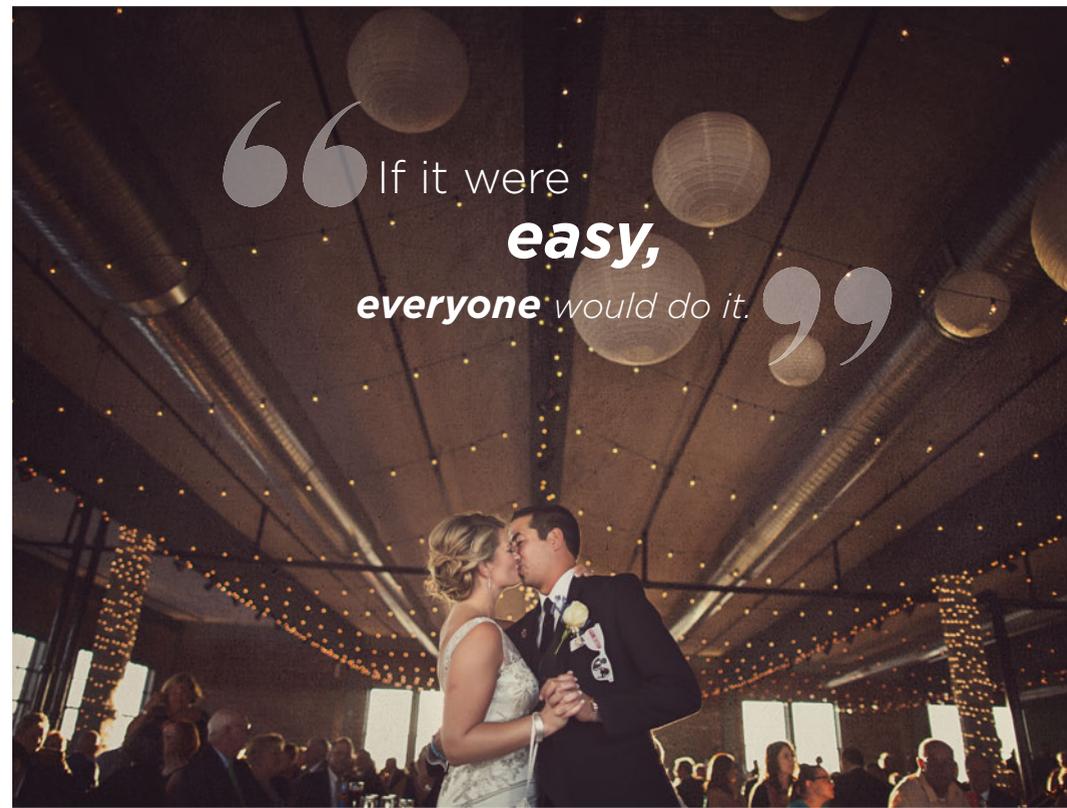


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“If it were **easy,** *everyone* would do it.”

Chase your dreams.

We have an incredible opportunity in life to do what we love and get paid for it. What is your dream? Whatever it is, chase it with everything you have in your being. Don't let anyone tell you it can't be done. That doesn't mean it will be easy. There will be struggle. If it were easy, everyone would do it. Remember that when things get tough.

Being a professional photographer is an incredible opportunity. Every day, I wake up and do what I love. Imagine how incredible life would be for you and your family if you were truly happy and doing what you love. Go get it. ■

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

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2 LIGHT PORTRAITS

with **Craig LaMere**

In my previous articles, I've talked about how light patterns are the building blocks of what I do and how I create those patterns. With a firm understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each pattern, you can create any look or mood you want, using them singularly or combining them. I've talked about the way different light modifiers work in conjunction with light patterns to create specific looks. This month, I show you how to use the same two-light setup with different light patterns, modifiers and thought processes to create very different images.

The two-light setup we are going to use is one light directly overhead on a boom and used as either the main light, the hair/fill light or the main. The other light is down below and is used as the fill or the main, depending on the image. I interchange lights as the main and fill, with different modifiers and thought processes, while keeping the position of the top light pretty much stagnant, and moving the light below more liberally.



THE DRAMA
SHAPE SHOT

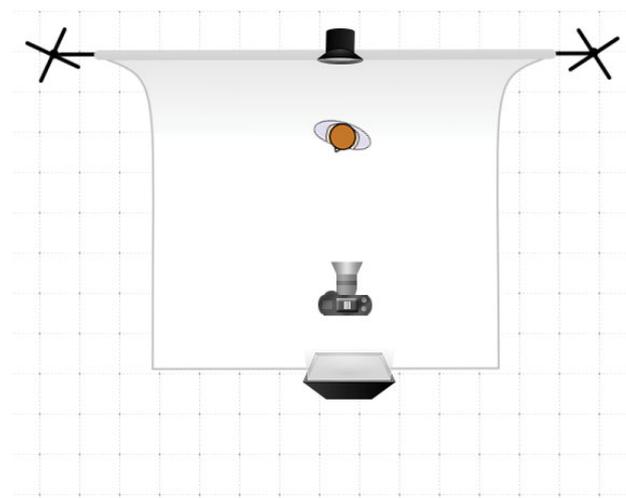
Once you have your light where you want it, meter it at the highest point to find your exposure. Because the light is direct and pointed, your subject must not move. Add fill to bring back the detail in the shadows. Because of the small light source and the grid, the light will not spread very far; where it does not directly hit, there will not be a lot of spread, so there is a tendency to clip the shadows. This is where artistic taste comes into play. How much or how little you fill in the shadows is totally up to you. In a lot of cases, you would use a reflector placed close to the subject and bounce back the light to add fill.

You can't do that in this case because the light is coming straight down. The best way to add fill is to bring in a second light.

The best fill is a very broad and soft light. I use a 4x6 or 3x4, or, when I'm on location, a shoot-through umbrella. When you use the umbrella, remember that the farther away the inside of the umbrella is, the softer the light will be. I place my fill light directly behind and above me so it shoots a butterfly pattern at the subject. Even though it is a fill light, I match the pattern of the main as best I can so they don't fight each other. Add a little more than what you feel might be right since it is easier later in post to subtract light than it is to try to pull detail out of the shadows later.

You have three choices for the look of the image. One is to keep your subject's head lower. This blackens the eyes and gives your image an ominous shape. If you bring your subject's head up, you have a choice of patterns. If the light is directly above and you bring the head straight up, you make a butterfly pattern. If you bring the head up and turn the chin to one side, you make loop light. When I shoot a male and female together, I keep one of the subjects' heads down and bring one to the light, creating great contrast.

This two-light setup is best for athletes, fitness competitors and other clients looking for something badass.

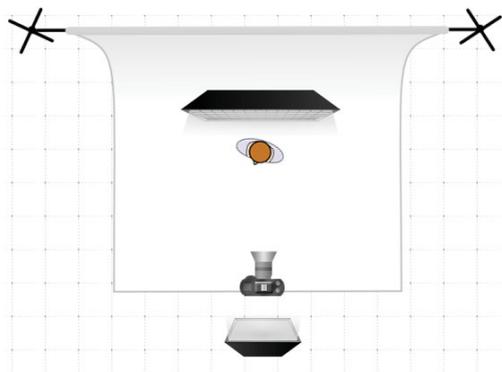


One of the principles of portrait shooting is to focus on the eyes. There must be a great catchlight. In the two-light shot we will set up, we will be concerned with capturing a shape, an idea and the mood of your subject. I call this a "shape shot."

This setup is pretty simple. You will need a boom arm to get the main light directly above the subject. The light modifiers I use for the main are either a 7-inch reflector with a grid or a small strip light, around 9x24. I use the 7-inch reflector when I'm shooting a single person, and I use the strip when shooting two people. I have never shot more than two people with this setup.

Place the main light directly over your subject. The height of the light determines the spread and coverage of the light. Turn your modeling lamp up all the way so you can see the light better.

THE FULL-BODY GLAM SHOT



I use almost the same setup for full-length lying-down glam images. The only change is in the main light modifier. Where I used the 7-inch reflector to pinpoint the light on a standing subject, this time I use a 16x60 gridded strip light to spread the light all over a lying subject. When using the strip, it's key how far to the front or to the back of the subject you put the light. If the light is closer to the front of the subject, there will be less light on the background and more on the subject, and vice versa if the light is moved closer to the back of the subject.

The more forward the light is, the more of a butterfly pattern you create. The farther back, the more of a split light pattern you create on the body of your subject. When the light is more to the back, you need more fill from the second light, and you will have less light on your subject's face. If you want more light on the face from the main, have the subject lift her head more toward the light. This is a very pretty wrapping light. I use this setup in boudoir to show off curves.





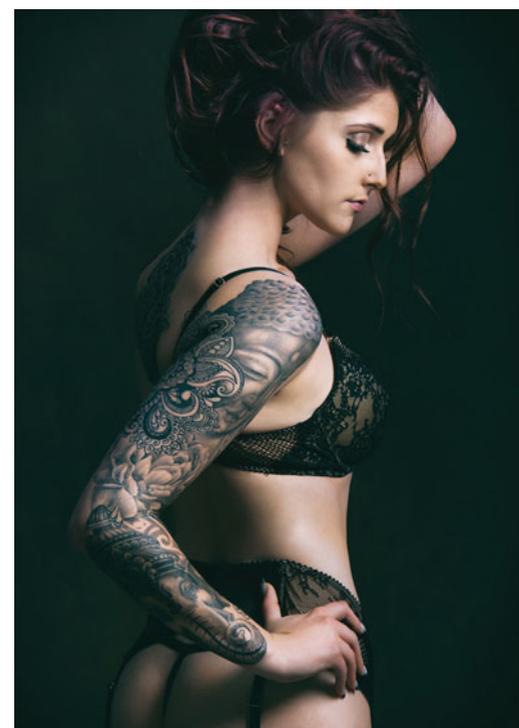
The two-light setup is the same as the other setup, but the feel, look and philosophy of this shot is the polar opposite of the previous two shots. Where the last shots were hard, edgy and dramatic, this shot is soft, airy and light. In the other two setups, the light on the boom was the main; now, we are going to switch the role of the overhead light.



You will still use the same overhead light hung on the same boom. This time, instead of the light being very direct (because you used a 7-inch reflector as the main light), the light will be used as the fill/hair, along with a much larger and softer modifier. Use a 22-inch socked beauty dish or a 3x4 box. The sock softens and spreads the light. I want the dish to work more like an octabox than a beauty dish.

The overhead light now has three roles: hair light or separator; fill light; and the kick on the drop. One creative choice you have to make is how far away you place the light from the drop. If you're closer to the drop, you get a brighter image; farther away, and the darker, more saturated your image will be.

The light on the ground is the main light. For this setup, I want the image to have a soft feel, so I use a softer directional modifier, like a strip with the grid taken out. I want the strip because, at a closer distance, it is very directional.



Images © Craig LaMere



Image © Craig LaMere

With this setup, you can do just about whatever you want with the main, and come out with killer images. ■

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Craig LaMere is an award-winning professional portrait photographer from Pocatello, Idaho. As well as running his full-time studio in Idaho, Craig is an international educator and speaker specializing in lighting and posing. He has two dogs named Logan and Steve and two cats named Emit and Martin.
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20X20	\$94.00
20X24	\$99.00
24X36	\$195.00

Prices are subject to change



THE
FAMILY & PORTRAIT
EDITION

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5

— TIPS FOR —
INCREASING YOUR
FAMILY PORTRAIT SALES
— with Alissa Zimmerman —



Family photography is far from our primary genre at Salvatore Cincotta Photography. In fact, until a recent shift in our portrait model, we offered these types of sessions only to past clients (brides or high school seniors). Family sessions, when done right, are a great source of income—with little to no headache involved. Whether you're new to offering family portraits or are a seasoned vet, here are five tips to help increase your family portrait sales.

1. PROVIDE THE FULL EXPERIENCE

Family sessions are quick, painless and don't require as much energy as, say, a wedding shoot (assuming you're booking the wedding client over a year out, shooting their engagement session, working on their timeline, etc.). But this does not mean your family clients should not get the same level of service, from booking to final delivery of product.

When an initial inquiry comes in, the easy thing to do is copy and paste a draft response. We have found much more success in bookings by taking the time to read the requests in the inquiry and start building a relationship from the beginning. Answer any questions that came in with the inquiry, address any key points, then copy and paste the draft response below your more personable introduction. You don't want these people to get a cold feeling from your response. You want them to *want* to work with you.

Be available. Be prompt in your responses to any questions along the way. Offer suggestions on locations that best fit the look and feel they want for their family portraits. Do they want unique and dramatic, or do they want more traditional photos of the family posing in a park? Get a feel for who they are as a family, and be the trusted advisor from there. Getting to know your client in this scenario is best done with a phone call. There's only so much that can be determined about someone via email without any unintentional misconceptions.

Take notes throughout the process and store them in your client's profile in whatever studio management tool you use. This is extremely important because the little details are the easiest to forget for clients who book months in advance. It's always impressive to families when you arrive the day of the shoot and know everyone's name before ever having met them in person. We use 17hats for this, which integrates with our calendar appointments. With it, Sal can easily pull up the shoot on the calendar and see all the notes I have taken throughout the booking and planning process.

After the shoot and sales session and delivery of the product, don't forget to follow up with your clients. Send a simple email checking in to make sure they love everything and enjoyed their experience with your studio. This is also a good time to request a client testimonial that you can use on your website.



Images © Salvatore Cincoita Photography



2. PRICE YOURSELF CORRECTLY

For a long time, we were booking family sessions at \$300 for the session fee, with the highlighted benefit of “No Minimum Orders!” This started to backfire on us. We were booking like crazy, but the overall spend from these family portrait sessions wasn’t making up for the time Sal was out of pocket. Before we changed our pricing model, the majority of the families coming through our studio were spending \$500 or less, all in. That’s just not a sustainable business model, especially when I could be filling Sal’s calendar with senior sessions at a \$2k average.

So what do you do? Pivot. We decided to weed through the tire kickers. Knowing the average we needed to hit to make sense of family portraits, we decided to start booking family sessions at \$1,500; \$1,200 of that counted toward print packages after their shoot. Now, families coming in for sales sessions have no problem adding on another \$1,000 to \$1,500 to that. It’s a no-brainer.

This price point makes it easy to see who your client is and who is just looking for Sears family portraits. Don’t be afraid to charge what you’re worth. Family sessions are easy (most of the time), but your time is still worth money.

3. SUGGEST MULTIPLE LOOKS

We used to do one outfit for family sessions, and found that it didn’t give us much to work with. Now we run our family sessions just like we do our engagements. Suggest two different looks: one casual, one a little dressier. Always have them start out in their casual outfit and build their confidence so their photos in the dressier outfits are the best.

If you are working with your family clients from the beginning of the process, you can help them with color coordination, outfit and jewelry ideas, etc. We send our clients to a Pinterest board where they can see a handful of unique outfit and color inspirations.

Don’t be afraid to be upfront with your clients if they want to do or wear something that won’t photograph well. Remember: You are the expert. They are coming to you for guidance. Guide wisely. Your final sale relies on the success of the overall shoot, and if they don’t like the way they look in their images because of something that could have been avoided from the beginning...well, you’re the only one to blame.

4. SHOOT TO SELL

Understand the products you sell in your packages, and shoot with the intention of filling those packages. If you offer products like a 15x30 print, take multiple images that can be cropped to fit that aspect ratio. Don't forget to isolate each family member, especially the kids and a few of just Mom and Dad together (because I'm sure they haven't had their photos taken together by a professional since their wedding).

Most families tell us they want just one good family portrait. Yeah, okay. We can definitely do that for them, but we are also going to get every variation of grouping and individual shots in each outfit and in every scene so we can overwhelm them with incredible images. Sal always tells our clients: "It's our job to make great images for you, and it's your job to resist" — meaning resist the urge to buy them all, of course.



Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



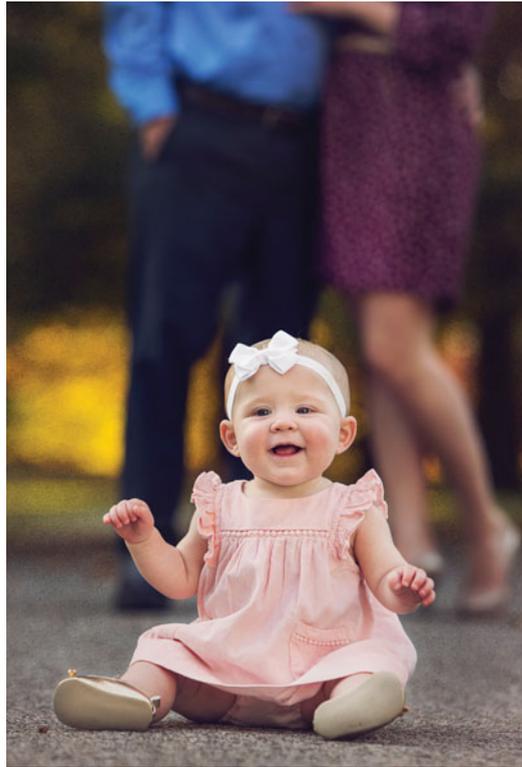
Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

5. OFFER UNIQUE PRODUCTS

Anyone can get an 8x10 printed at their nearest Walgreens kiosk. I'm pretty sure Walgreens sells canvases now, too. Your job as a full-service studio is to offer products they can't get on their own. And take it a step further—you want to be in control of making sure their images are perfect before they ever go to print (removing blemishes, stray hairs, skinny-ing arms, etc.).

We offer one-of-a-kind products that are meant to be artwork in our clients' homes. A 30x40 framed acrylic is in our top package. It's meant to go over a mantle, the centerpiece of their home.

Offer canvases and explain why yours are so much better than what Walgreens offers. Show it to them in person during their sales session. They have to be able to see these products to visualize size and what they will look like on their own walls. This is why it's so important to have studio samples. How can you sell something to your client if they can't see it in person?



Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



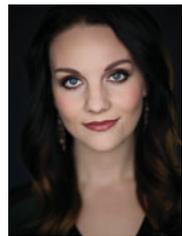
Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Family sessions are a fun and easy way to generate extra income if you're primarily a wedding or senior photographer. In today's digital world, printed family photos are hard to come by. Use that to your advantage in marketing this part of your business. What good is a family heirloom if it's just going to sit on a disk or thumb drive in a drawer collecting dust for years? ■

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



How is it possible that one of our studio's major income earners, the family mini-session, isn't even represented on our website? Visit us online, and the only families you'll see are extremely young ones—newlyweds. But you have to show what you want to shoot, right? Isn't that a basic principle of marketing? Let's put that theory to the test.

I'm going to show you how easy it is to book quality family clients without paying a penny for marketing—whether or not you feature family portrait work on your site. Then we're going to talk about maximizing your portrait sessions for record profits. How does \$10,000 on a short weekend sound? No wonder this is one of our favorite topics to teach, a simple lesson that has attracted our biggest crowds and best reviews at Blume workshops across the country.

Now imagine if you applied these same principles to all your portrait genres. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

Let's start with the unique structure we create around family mini-sessions at Blume Photography. You can visit our Blume blog right now, while this issue is on shelves, at BlumePhotography.com/blog, and you'll find one rare mention of mini-sessions on our otherwise wedding-focused site. Yet that blog post isn't even geared toward our family clients. It's there for you, a free video replay of our entire Maximizing Mini-sessions short course. I think you and your clients will be glad you checked it out.

But before you go uncover all the nitty-gritty details, here's the gist.

MAX QUALITY! MAX PROFIT! MAX FUN!

My wife and I originally fell into the mini-session model by necessity. Weddings had us so booked up, we no longer had time to photograph our friends and their families, which we always had enjoyed doing in our studio's early years, and missed a lot. So despite our own misgivings and classic objections to doing minis ("They'll undercut our full-length sessions," "They're too brief to provide a good experience," etc.), we gave them a try. And boy, are we glad we did.

Today, our average 20-minute mini-session earns us over \$850. But even the first time we devised this system, we averaged over \$500, which is why we aren't surprised to see photographers we teach regularly make \$1,500 per hour as soon as they put these gears in motion. Others astound us by knocking it even farther out of the park. But don't take this stuff for granted. It takes motivation.

Are you up for it? If so, get ready, get pumped, and do it like a boss.



Images © Phillip Blume



1 MAKE THAT MESS GO VIRAL: STRATEGIC SOCIAL MARKETING

For us, marketing minis begins with two things that no one ever looks at: a blog entry and a post to our Blume Photography Facebook page.

The reason people don't look at many of your posts online is that you don't ask them to. Asking is a powerful thing, and there are many ways to do it. It isn't enough to blame Facebook's latest algorithms for limited shares. Create value for your audience. Give them a reason to click.

We create one graphic: a simple collage of three or four of our favorite past images adjacent to some basic date/time/cost info. Take your time choosing your images, and build the graphic with Photoshop or another editor. I want potential clients to see themselves in these images, to feel an emotional impact when reminded how fun and loving their own family can be. They cherish interactions, not stodgy smiles toward a camera.

We post this graphic to our blog with a brief introduction and, importantly, a list of dates and available times below it, just typed into the blog: 30-minute increments, allowing us just 10 crucial minutes between each 20-minute session. Write the word Available beside most of these openings, and write Taken beside any spots where you might need a lunch or bathroom break. You're gonna need some downtime, and artificially filling your schedule this way helps to jump-start the sense of limited supply when clients view it.

But who's going to visit your blog and see this today?

Time to recycle your spiffy new graphic. Post the same infographic (not a link alone) to your Facebook page with a link back to your blog post. The blog is where they'll have to go to register for their session, and where you can include instructions to simply "email us and request a preferred open time slot." See what you're doing here? You're limiting information on social media so the legitimately interested parties are driven to your website, where they will invest a little time getting sold on your work and brand.

But don't stop yet. Share the post via your personal profile. FB friends will actually begin seeing it while noting it came from your business. Tag every person (or the parents of kids) who show up in the graphic images you chose. (Did you choose the more popular people on Facebook? It helps.) This begins spreading the word. The personal connection families have to your prior clients is much more important than the sheer number of people who view your ad. On social media, it's just as powerful as word-of-mouth recommendations.

Finally, email a link for mini-session sign-ups to your entire audience—past clients, their families who placed online orders (easy to grab from ShootProof or your online gallery service), personal friends. I email the direct link to our Facebook post (get it by clicking the date on the individual post, then copy/paste the URL), not the link to our blog (you'll see why). But most importantly, email last year's best family clients, reminding them how great they looked in their portraits and how nice it would be to share that experience with their friends who need a photo update.

The language in these emails is very important. You don't want to annoy or lose anyone from your email chain; you do want to express why it's worth sharing. We gift a free sitting to past families whose friends sign up with us. It's valuable to them and no cost to us. In fact, it serves to fill up our schedule and increase our profits. When past clients open/share the unique Facebook link you emailed them, your post gets more action and looks more enticing—and you can track how it grows.

Learn more about our email language (plus how we grow huge email lists through local charities) in the free 90-minute video on our blog now.





2

NO, YOU DID NOT JUST STUTTER: COMMUNICATION AND MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Clear communication for minis is essential. Potential clients see every detail of our pricing before we let them confirm their booking. Our minis start at a low \$49 session fee—a completely different model than typical mini-sessions being advertised by every aspiring photographer in America in early autumn.

We actually received hate mail from an anonymous source accusing us of undercutting the market. That photographer clearly didn't go to marketing school, and definitely didn't understand how powerful a couple of well-written emails are in helping clients realize the value of investing in physical artwork for their homes and family's heritage.

Yes, we make physical prints and artwork available to our clients. And if I can do so without hurting your feelings, I'd like to suggest that—if you aren't doing the same—you are doing a disservice not only to yourself but to your clients as well. But you are doing Walmart a great service, since they are profiting from your hard work while your client gets a poor-quality finished product and zero experience.

Beyond the artwork itself, the strategic packaging sells itself without any need for high-pressure sales, which we hate. That is a topic in itself, which we discuss in depth in our video.





Images © Phillip Blume

3 YOU AIN'T GOT TIME FOR THAT: MAKING EFFICIENCY YOUR MANTRA

Starting with your prewritten chain of emails (booking email, reminders, directions to your chosen location and tips for wardrobe), all your clients should have an identical experience with you. You are a brand. Create consistency. This means less “original” work out of you; it prevents all the “creative” emails you have to write because your clients have questions you didn’t already answer.

It goes beyond communication. Consider filling your openings by announcing only Thursday and Friday mini-sessions first. Once these are full, open Saturday when you know you can fill it up more easily. Limit your mini-sessions to once or twice a year. It keeps them exclusive and in demand. The point is to make just one car trip to your location for every six to eight families you photograph. You’re packing up your gear one time, not eight times. This is the beauty of minis.



Image © Phillip Blume



Image © Phillip Blume

It goes without saying: There's an art to creating amazing variety in a short timespan. But it's easy to learn. Practice role-play and our "balloon posing" methods for greater shot variety every time. If you aren't one of the thousands who've already downloaded it, you can download our eBook that teaches these posing concepts, along with the video, at BlumePhotography.com/blog. ■

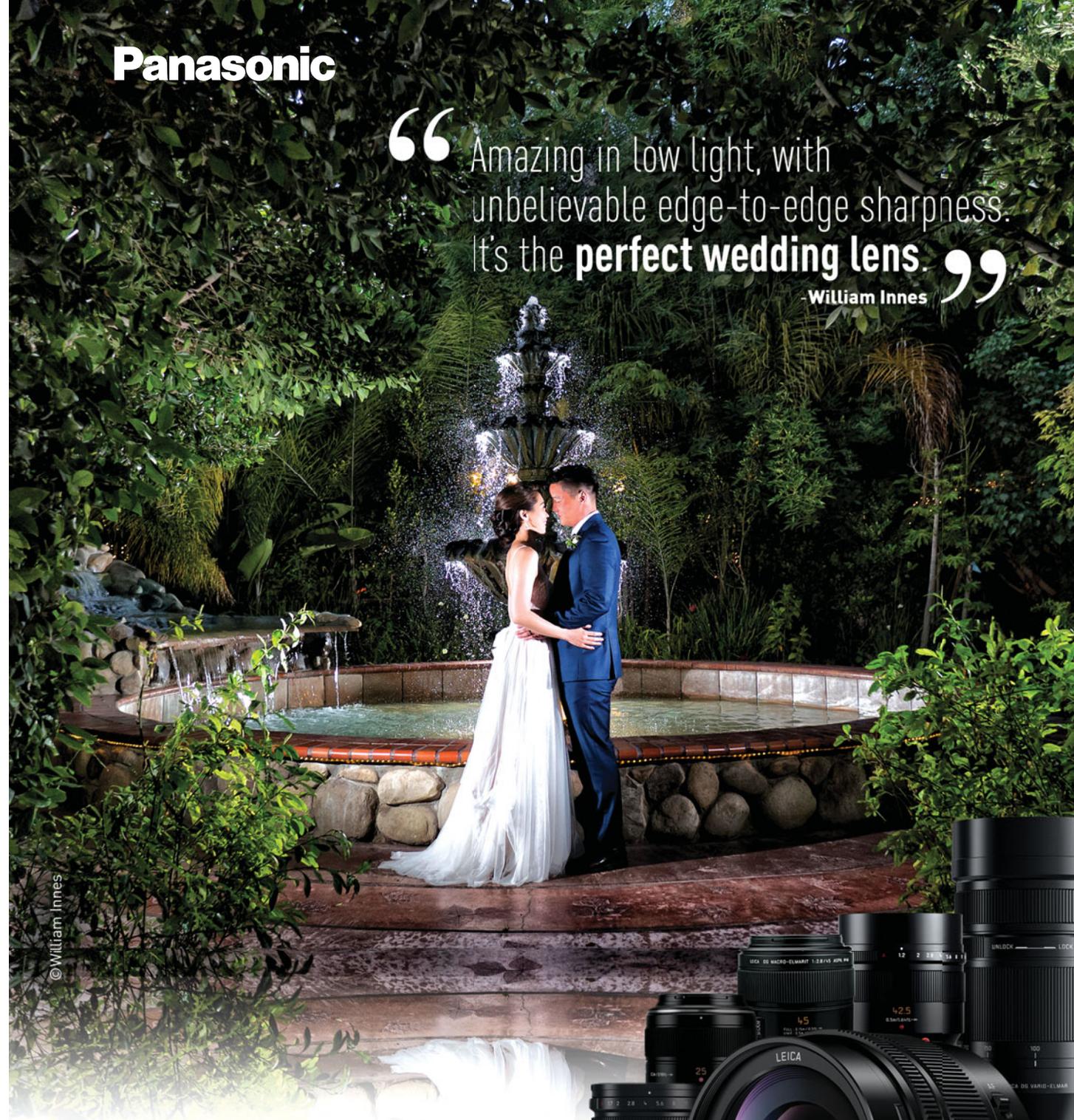
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Phillip Blume is an international award-winning photographer and, with his wife, Eileen, cofounder of Blume Photography Studios and ComeUnity Workshops. In addition to photographing weddings and portraits worldwide, the Blumes focus their efforts on personal projects to help those suffering extreme poverty. As educators, the two have appeared on CreativeLIVE, and speak to thousands of photographers every year. They live with their children in rural Georgia. blumephotography.com

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product review

Panasonic with *Salvatore Cincotta*

Why Lumix LX10?

Panasonic is once again bringing the heat with the new Lumix LX10.

It's about power and portability all in one nice form factor. 4K video is not only all the rage, it's quickly becoming the new standard. 4K video allows you to capture incredible detail that benefits your final production. In addition, with 4K, you can pull still images right from the video—images you can use for social media, websites and even printing.

And low-light performance? Yep, they nailed it with their 1.4-2.8 Leica lens. This gives you that shallow depth of field that allows your subject to jump off the background and perform well in low-light conditions.

Specs:

- The 1" 20-megapixel sensor delivers brighter, colorful photos with fewer image artifacts.
- A 3x (24-72mm) F/1.4-2.8 LEICA DC Vario-Summilux optical zoom lens performs well, with superbright F/1.4-2.8 aperture for impressive background defocus effects.
- It has 4K Ultra HD video recording, plus exclusive Lumix 4K Photo and 4K Post Focus and internal Focus Stacking modes.
- A premium lens-mounted control ring brings DSLR-like exposure control to a compact point-and-shoot camera body.



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FAMILY
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FOR
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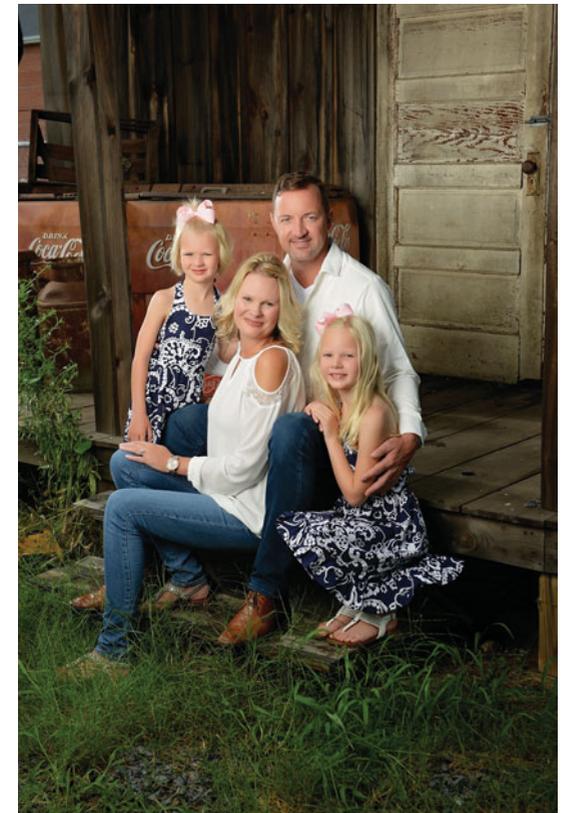
Image © Blair Phillips

It's easy for families to become disconnected and completely lose the importance of family portraits. Your sell can be greatly impacted by the relationship they have within the home. There are tons of families living under one roof that just can't seem to get along very well. This is where the photographer plays the biggest role in creating an environment that will help sell larger wall portraits.

I always help build the relationships within a family during the session. I tell them it is okay to get close to one another, to hug or to simply put their arms around each other. With the continued subtle encouragement of this behavior, it will at least look like they still love and like each other.

One must be careful not to force those relationships if there is any sense of resistance or discomfort. For this reason, I find it imperative to allow time before the session to casually hang out for a short time with the family. We sit in the lobby, where I get to know the dynamic between the family members. There will be one person you feel you can joke with, followed by someone more on the shy side. You will gravitate toward the person who matches your personality the closest. Getting to know the family and creating a comfort zone allows you to sell larger family portraits.

Some families come in already knowing exactly what they want. Other families come in with no idea what they are looking for. I like to get an idea of what their print objectives are. It's good to know what sizes and quantities they are looking for before you just start blindly shooting. If clients provide you with that information, you have already sold at least that quantity before you ever take the first image.





From there, it is your job to be creative and motivated enough to create images they cannot leave on the table. I sell more wall portraits by photographing the family, then combinations that complement the family portrait. Photograph siblings individually, together, and then Mom and Dad together. This leaves clients little to no choice: They'll want multiple wall portraits to create a sequence in storytelling. Little things you suggest while shooting can help build your sell on the backend. I give constant encouragement: how well they look together, how beautiful the family is, how great the portraits are going to look on the wall. Creating a positive environment is a big piece of the puzzle.

There seems to be a huge disconnect with some photographers who can't sell their work very well. The one thing I hear the most is that people feel they want to just give everything away. Another popular comment is that clients just don't buy portraits. Those are excuses that allow you to escape the reality that you should be paid well for your hard work and creative vision.

Many clients look only at the price and are never able to focus on anything else. This is where you should never be afraid to validate yourself or your pricing. In my case, we have a large, very nice studio full of an amazing variety of set options and equipment. I constantly remind clients of just that. They are constantly reminded of all the variety they have access to. We educate them that there is a whole lot more work involved than just pressing the shutter button, like the constant expensive education we undertake. This shows clients how complex our job is, and hopefully earns us a little more respect.

How you have your sales area set up can make or break you. We have 30x40's hanging everywhere in the studio and sales room. I figure that if I can get them used to looking at the really large prints, they will not be happy with anything smaller. We used to have the same print in all different sizes lined up along the wall. For some reason, most clients gravitated toward the middle. So we sold much smaller wall portraits, and our bottom line suffered. ProSelect's Room View is selling software designed for photographers. One of my most favorite features allows clients to see the images to scale on their wall before they even make the purchase. This tool has helped us sell larger family portraits.

Most families do not update their wall portraits each year. One of the biggest reasons is that the experience can be excruciating. Constantly remind the family just how important it is to update. I thank them several times throughout their session for allowing me to create such amazing images for them. I remind them how important my family is to me. I always ask them to share their experience with any friends they think would love to have images created. If you have the audience before you, do not let them escape without the tools they need to help find new clients.

Making the parents feel special is a huge step in selling large wall portraits. It's rare for parents to even remember that last time they were photographed together. I take a few moments with Mom and Dad alone. I build up their relationship with one another and create an environment they will remember for a long time to come.

When I am working with siblings, I encourage Mom and Dad to leave the room. Children change the moment their parents are not around. You can get them to loosen up by directing all of your focus on them.

I encourage Mom to come alone to the sales appointment. This allows her sole focus, and keeps Dad out of the loop on how much this costs. If there are small kids running around during the sales appointment, you can cut your order in half. Parents shut down and are ready to leave if the sales environment is the least bit chaotic.

Simply arranging a convenient time for a family to assemble for a session can be daunting. Work schedules, school schedules and naps are enough to put off the dreaded family session for one more year.

You will find that most families want an appointment in the late evening. They do not want to disrupt their workday. This leaves you abandoning your family for work. We began opening up on Saturday for families that couldn't seem to get to us during the week. We offered outdoor mini sessions that were 15 minutes long. This works out perfectly for families that have limited time and patience. Families dread having pictures made, but a session lasting just 15 minutes makes it a lot more bearable.

We shoot every session in the same outdoor location all day long. It makes for a long day, but we are able to service a ton of families that would not make it to us otherwise. I don't like working Saturdays, but I am willing to sacrifice for financial gains that help my family.



Image © Blair Phillips

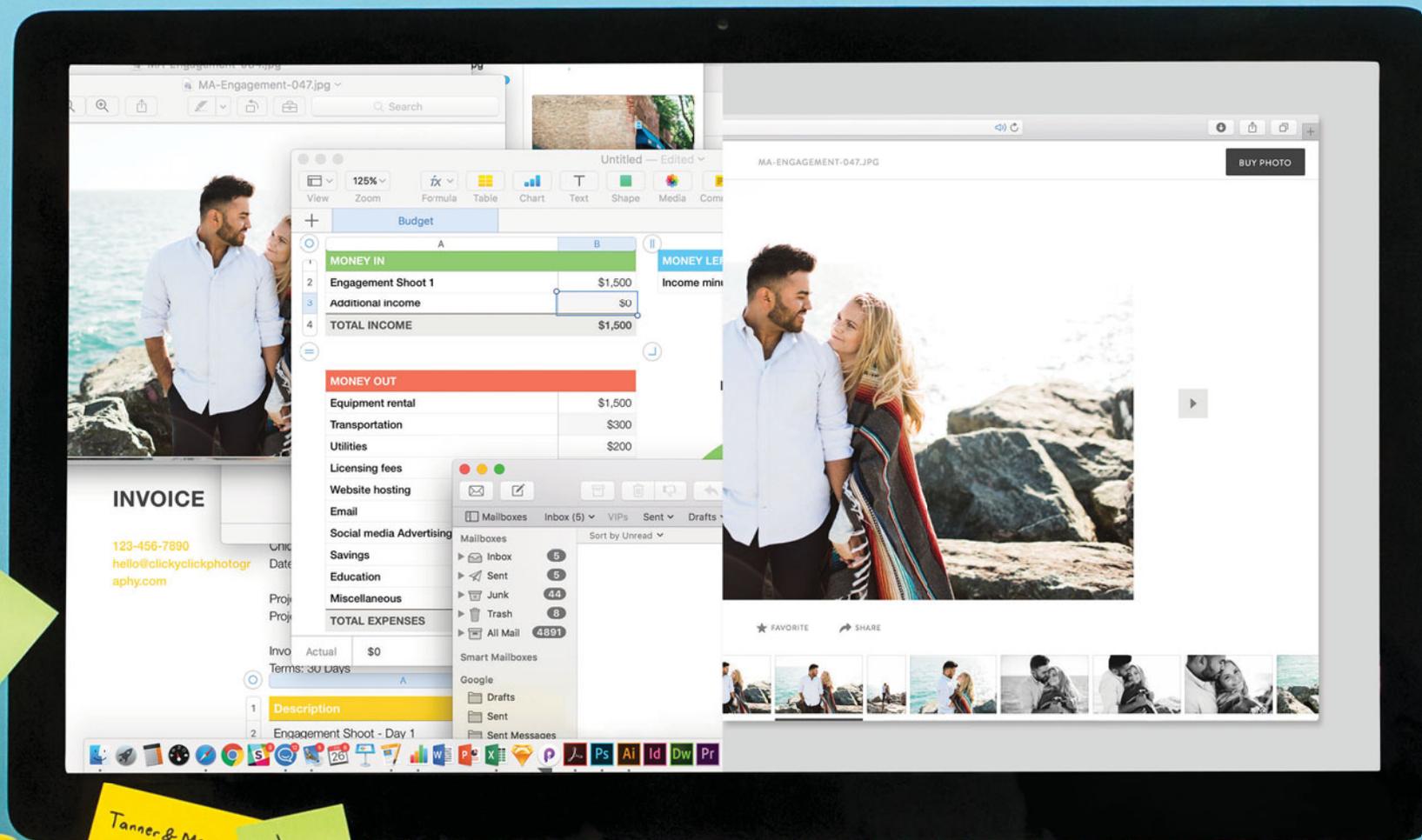
Selling large wall portraits to families involves great photography and great personality. If you can get clients to genuinely like you, they will be a lot more willing to spend more. Their budget plays a large part in the sale, but you can take the focus off the money and put it on which images speak to their heart. ■



Blair Phillips launched his business nearly 10 years ago in a small town. Since then, Blair Phillips Photography has become a beloved household name to its many fans and clients. Each year, Blair photographs up to 30 weddings and over 600 high school senior, newborn and family studio sessions. He has educated photographers all over the United States at events by WPPI, WPPI U, Imaging USA, SYNC Seniors and various state PPA groups.

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THREE STEPS TO PERFECT HEADSHOTS

with Moshe Zusman

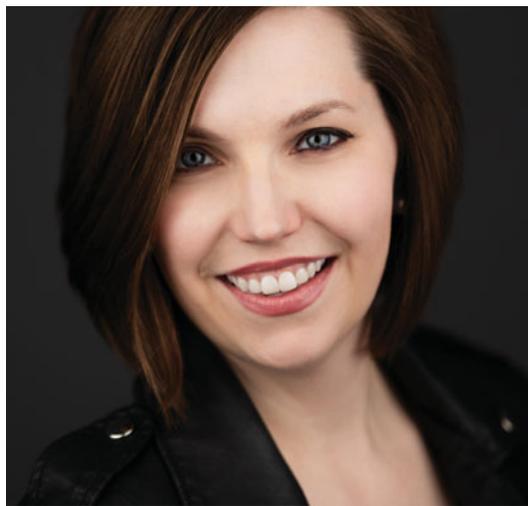
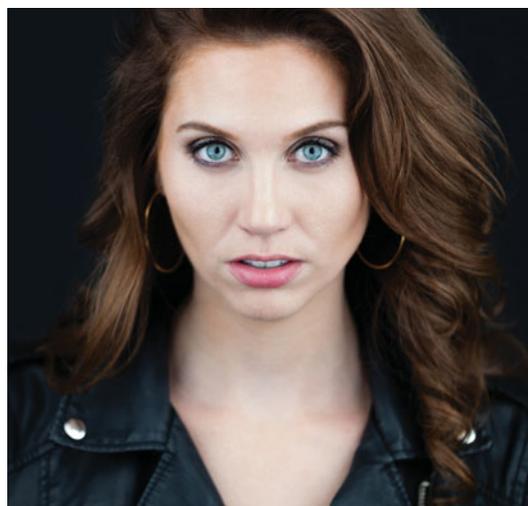


LIGHTING, POSING AND READING FACES

When I moved from photographing mostly weddings to doing what I do now—mainly headshots, portraits and fashion—I hit a learning curve. Trying to figure out on my own how to control light in a studio was very different from shooting on location. I learned from as many people as I could, gathering inspiration from photographers like Peter Hurley. I looked to fashion magazines, and experimented on my own.

Headshots are basically about lighting and posing, but we're photographing people, not things, and what works with one person may not work for another. That's where reading faces comes into play.

My average client is not a model. In my workshops, including Headshot Bootcamp (www.headshot-bootcamp.com), I train photographers to shoot the everyday people who will ultimately be their clients. I want them to be more ready than I was to do a great job for any face that walks through their door.



Images © Moshe Zusman



Image © Moshe Zusman



Image © Moshe Zusman



Images © Moshe Zusman

READING FACES

When a new client comes into my studio, I welcome her in, offer a drink and start small talk to loosen her up. At the same time, I'm reading her face. I'm looking at her eyes, nose and mouth to find her better side and the one that I'll likely photograph.

I have the client look at me, and then look to the left and to the right. I'm looking mainly at her eyes and nose to see how they line up over each other, which tells me which side of their face is more open. Whichever side is more open or shows less of an imperfection, like a crooked nose or blemishes, is the side I photograph.

The rest of reading faces comes a bit more easily, and comes into play when we start talking about lighting and posing. I make a mental note about whether the client has wrinkles or a double chin that will either be accentuated or minimized by the lighting and posing I choose.

ONE-LIGHT SETUP (WITH SECONDARY LIGHT)

After having experimented with multiple lighting techniques, from one to four lights, I've arrived at a one-light setup with a backup light source. This setup includes a Profoto D1 Air 500 and a 3x4 softbox. I use a D1 Air 250 with a zoom reflector to brighten the background if needed. My fill light source is a Profoto D1 500 with a 2x3 softbox attached, not turned on, with the main light reflecting off the baffle (the white front of the 2x3 softbox). I could easily use a reflector, but if I want a little fill, I can just turn on the light since it's already in place.

TRUE ONE-LIGHT SETUP

My one-light setup is similar to what you'll see in Vanessa Joy's article this month, on the 1,774 headshots she photographed recently. I use one Profoto D1 with an umbrella (with or without a baffle), and use it for the main light and to light the background. You have to play with the distance between your light to the subject, and then to the background, keeping the light falloff in mind and rationing your light where you want it. This is a great setup for on-location shoots when you're looking to bring minimal equipment.

BROAD AND SHORT LIGHT

I light my subject exactly how I want the photo to look. There are pros and cons to broad- and short-lighting a client, so I take that into consideration. If I short-light them (photograph the shadow side), it's slimming, but it accentuates wrinkles. If I broad-light them (photograph them on the light side), it smooths the wrinkles but isn't as slimming. Photography is about choices and making them with your client's best interests in mind.

Occasionally, the client likes something different than I do, and I don't have a problem catering to their desires over my own. After all, they're paying me to work for them, so I'm happy to go with what they want.



Images © Moshe Zusman

POSING

You have to gain your client's trust to get good poses. Everything I tell clients to do feels awkward and unattractive to them, so trust is key.

The first thing I do is literally put myself in their position. I stand where they're going to stand, and show them how I'm going to ask them to pose. Once they're in place, I mirror them behind the camera and instruct them how to pose.

In a nutshell, I tell them this:

"Stand in a skateboard position, with your feet pointed 20 to 30 degrees away from the camera. Feel comfortable in your pose. If your feet feel awkwardly placed, chances are you'll look awkward."

"Hold your shoulders back, head and chin pushed out toward the camera. The idea is to extend the distance from the chin to the chest, elongating your neck but not posing it too far up or down."

Once my clients start doing what I ask, they all say the same thing: "It feels awkward!" I actually like this because it gives me the chance to show them why it's better. I have them take one picture standing normally, and then another listening to what I tell them to do. Then I have them come over to my tethering station, where I show them the before and after images. Once they see the difference, they're all mine and trust me 100 percent.

From there, I tell them to look at me like I am at 12 o'clock. Then I have them turn their shoulders to 1:30 and their head to 1 o'clock. As I start shooting, I have them turn their head in small increments, left and right, to get a variety of angles and find their perfect pose.





Image © Moshe Zusman

Lighting, posing and reading faces all work together much like the exposure triangle. What you do with one affects the other, and they can't really be altered independently from one another.

Being a photographer is about making choices and decisions to achieve the outcome that both you and your client are looking for. Check out the video to see these three easy steps come to life. ■



Moshe Zusman is recognized for his innovative, bold use of light and color with a distinctly modern edge. The Washington, D.C.-based Moshe has been shooting for more than a decade, and specializes in weddings, portraits, headshots and events. He has been featured at numerous workshops and conferences, including WPPI, PhotoPlus Expo, ImagingUSA and ShutterFest, and also hosts his own workshops at his D.C. studio.
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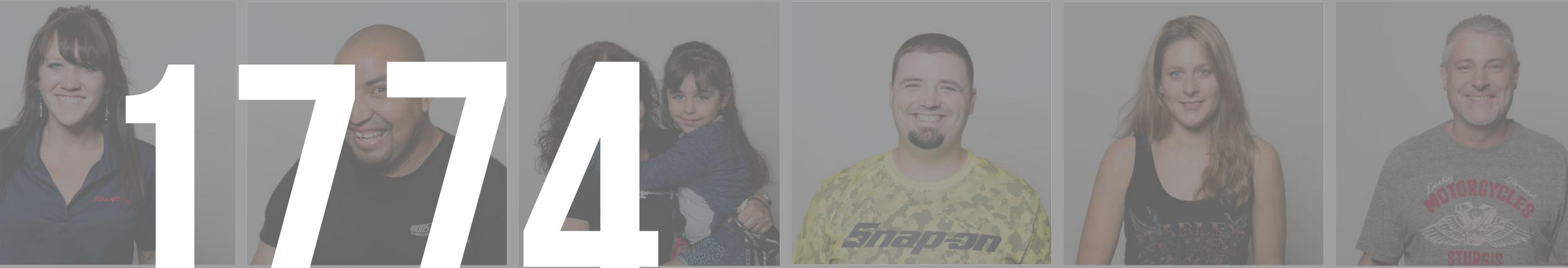
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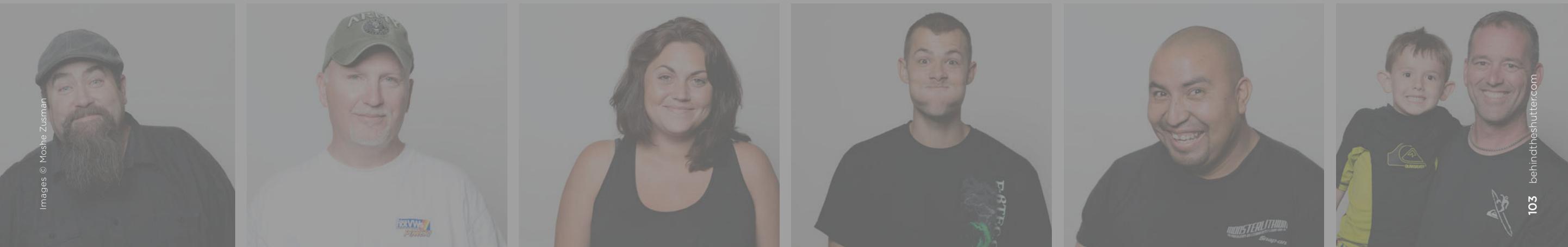
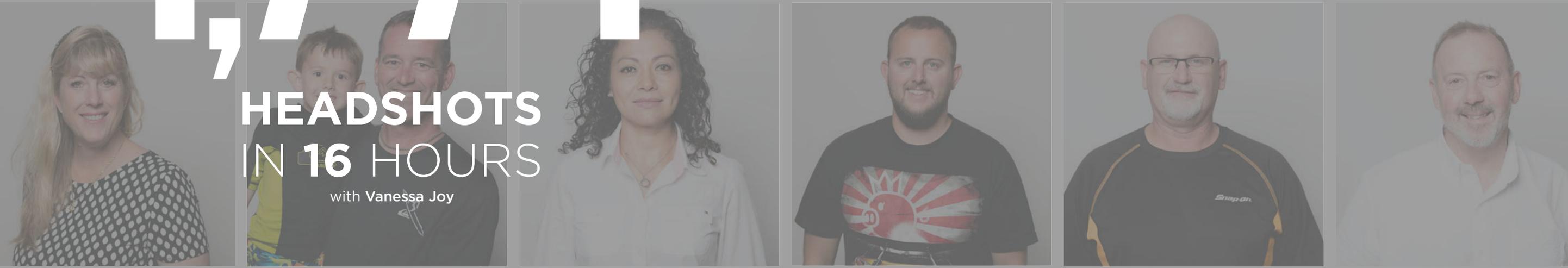
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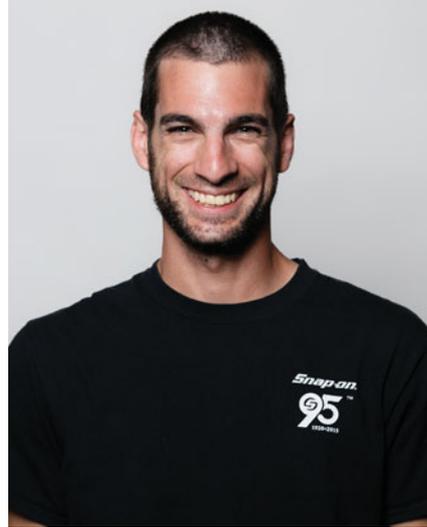


1,774

HEADSHOTS
IN 16 HOURS

with Vanessa Joy

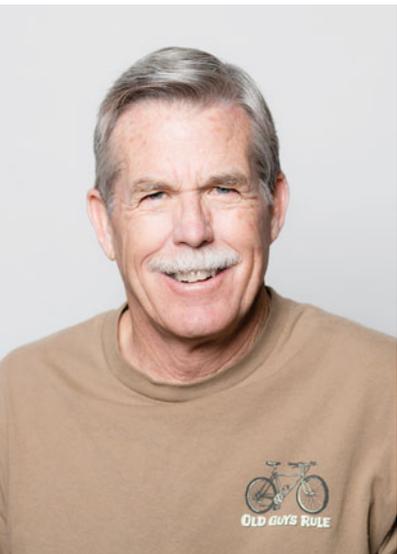




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As a wedding photographer, I envy portrait shooters who work inside a studio and not on location. They get as much time as they need to set up the perfect lighting and settings, and do everything else that goes into a studio photograph.

But when I shoot weddings, I usually have to figure everything out on the fly, factor in a hundred different variables and take the picture within seconds.

When I was invited by Moshe Zusman (headshotdc.com), a portrait and fashion photographer in Washington, D.C. and a ShutterFest speaker, to help at a conference

he was covering for Snap-on Tools, I was all for it. He needed me to help him shoot headshots of as many franchisees as possible. What I didn't know about the three-day conference in Orlando, Florida, was that thousands of franchisees awaited us.

How were we going to be able to shoot that many pictures in such little time? Although the conference was three days long, we realistically had two days to shoot it—and they weren't full days since there were other events and classes to cover.

I ended up assisting Moshe in shooting 1,774 headshots in only 16 hours over the course of two days. That is incredible.



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So, how do you shoot so many people consistently and quickly, keeping everything in order and moving along smoothly? For starters, you need the right tools. Here's our gear list:

- Profoto D1 1,000-watt strobe
- Profoto umbrella with diffuser light shaper
- Profoto Canon wireless transmitter
- Tether Tools JerkStopper camera support
- Tether Tools JerkStopper "A" clamp 1" black
- Tether Tools USA 3.0 SuperSpeed Micro-B cable
- 15" MacBook Pro
- Canon EOS tether
- Lightroom
- Canon 5DS
- Canon EF 70–200mm f/2.8L (set around 90–100mm)
- Manfrotto 548B Neotec tripod with Manfrotto MA468MGRC2 ballhead
- 6' white paper backdrop on stands

Thankfully, it was all fairly portable equipment (other than the backdrop, which we borrowed from a photographer there), which was good because the conference was a flight away from Moshe's studio.



105 behindtheshutter.com

HOW TO SHOOT PORTRAITS ON LOCATION

First, set up and break down everything. The entire area that you can see pictured below took about six minutes for three people to set up and another six minutes for three people to break down when they were done.



Image © Doug Van Sant

Our exposure settings were ISO 100, 1/160th at f/5.0, with a white balance of 5100K. Moshe wanted to shoot at a high enough aperture that everything was easily in focus, and at a lower ISO so that the quality of the image was as good as it could be. Once he had those settings, he turned on the Profoto light and set it to 6.2 to start. He took test shots and adjusted it manually, going to 6.5 power, which was the sweet spot.

We marked an “X” on the floor with gaffer tape where we wanted everyone to stand. Slowly but surely, as people saw that we were setting up, a line started to form. There’s no pressure like tons of people watching you work and waiting for you to open so they can rush in and get their picture taken.

Another challenge was that because it was a Snap-on convention, we weren’t photographing guys in business suits. Not that there’s anything wrong with that, but we weren’t going to require anyone to take off their hats, and couldn’t request they wear something a little less busy—those things you would normally do for a portrait session. It was also challenging having to shoot people with caps on because they cast a shadow. We asked people with glasses to tilt their faces down a bit so we didn’t get the glare of the umbrella in the glasses. There was a whole bunch of little things that we had to think about very quickly on the fly that became a part of the process of photographing everyone.

We asked each attendee to take off his name badge, place it on the table and then put his left foot on the black X and smile. That sounds nice and easy, but after you’ve said, “Please take off your name badge, walk around the table and put your left foot on the black X” over seventeen hundred times, it starts to wear on you. I started losing my voice, and had to drink honey to coat my throat so I was able to speak without coughing on everyone.

We told them to look at us and smile, though not everyone listened or wanted to smile or had the same definition of smile that we did. We took their picture, and if they blinked, we’d take one more. Then they would walk over to me and take their badge. As soon as their picture popped up, I changed the file name to the name that was on their badge, thanked them and sent them on their way.

And on and on and on.

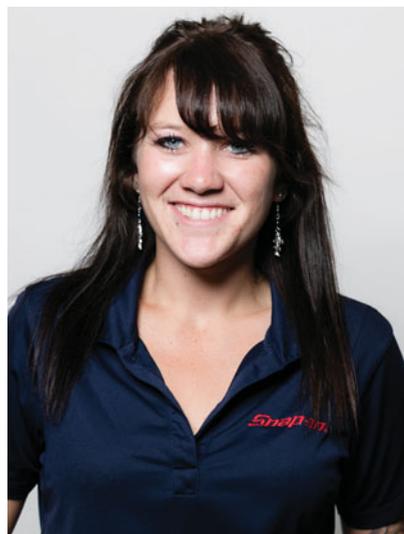


Image © Moshe Zusman

TWO STATIONS

We had two stations set up. Moshe took the photos while I tethered to Lightroom and renamed the files. We always had at least four people at a time put their name badges on the table so the second that one person was done, he could come over to me while the next person got their picture taken, and I was renaming the file of the person who just finished. This way, both stations were running simultaneously and efficiently.

I'm known as a gearhead, and I want to have the best of everything. Is it necessary to have the top-of-the-line lens, camera and strobe all the time? No, but this is one of those cases where we needed to have the best in order to make everything run seamlessly. When you're taking 1,774 headshots, the last thing you want is lighting inconsistency or strobe misfires. Thankfully, because we were using the Profoto D1 to light these portraits, there were zero misfires. That's incredible. Then, to top it off, the consistency in the color and light output from one picture to the next was flawless. This eliminated almost all post-production work.



Another key component was having a simple lighting setup that Moshe knew could work for everyone. Light is everything, and when deciding on light shapers for strobes, we are usually looking at subjects' facial structure and skin tones. At this shoot, we did not have the time to change modifiers or lighting positions depending on subjects' facial features, so we had to go with something that would be even and soft and flattering for most everyone. To do this, we had the light set up with the umbrella and diffuser so that it would cast very soft light onto the subject. We had it fairly close to them, 3 or 4 feet away from their faces. It was about 20 degrees off to camera left, where it wouldn't cast any harsh shadows as the light wrapped around the face.

The final ingredient was fun. Whenever someone with a fun personality came over, we let them play it up and took a few fun shots. Or, if a franchisee with young kids came by, even though it wasn't required, we had them take a few daddy shots. It helped keep everything fun and energetic through a long two days of standing in one place.



Image © Doug Van Sant

I'm happy to say that this was a great learning experience. I have a newfound respect for any photographer who works intense volume jobs like these. I'm not going to compare it to weddings because it's a completely different beast, but I can say that after the two days and 16 hours' total shooting time, I was wiped out even though I was mostly only typing, talking and smiling.

Check out the video to see some of the shots. ■



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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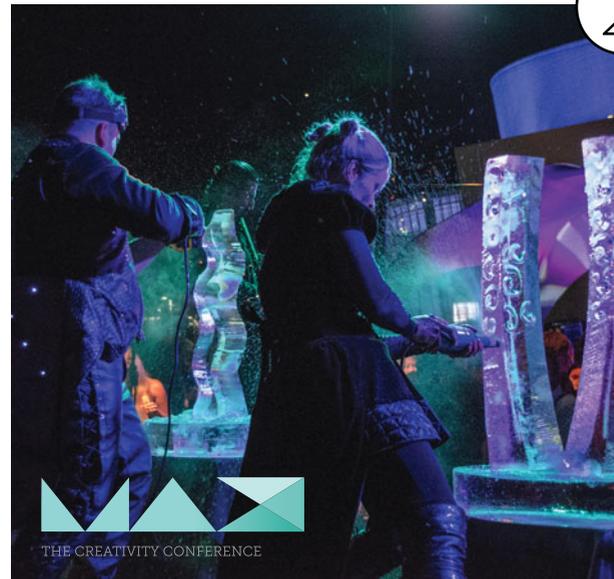
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LIGHTING
MALE
PORTRAITS
with Michael Corsentino



Phase One DF+ & IQ250, Schneider Kreuznach 150mm lens f/3.5. Settings: f/11, 1/125sec, ISO 100.



In this BTS image, you can see the height, angle and light placement used for both the black-and-white and color headshot finals.

Here the soft egg crate grids have been removed and the lights have been repositioned to create the flat lighting effect used in the three-quarter-length final.

Images © Michael Corsentino

Men and women are lit in very different ways. With men, there is more flexibility with hard light, deep shadows, a harder look overall. The goal with women is to portray them beautifully and softly. A stronger, more masculine, powerful portrayal is more applicable to men. But as roles shift and blur on both sides of the gender divide, there are no hard and fast rules.

There are women with bone structure and bodies that can handle even the harshest light and still look beautiful and strong—think Helmut Newton. But a pretty look wins the day with women and a strong look with men.

These are a few of the basic considerations in my thought process when I'm working with the genders. The previsualized lighting and styling for a set of portrait images is always dictated by subjects and their environment. We're talking strictly about light and style, while an environmental portrait takes this approach one step further, capturing the subject in his or her typical environment. The overall concept is the same: The image should help tell the subject's story or convey a message about them to the viewer.

When shooting a portrait for a young up-and-coming male actor and model, my mission was clear: Create iconic portraits that deliver drama, show off his strength and intensity, and showcase his star-worthy good looks. My initial concept was for black-and-white images with strong dimensional light, a high degree of contrast, deep shadows and a modern twist on the classic Hollywood portrait style. My goal with the lighting was to sculpt the face, accentuate bone structure and create drama. Along with a more contemporary, edgy lighting plan and a solid idea of what was to come in post, I decided to give the classic Hollywood portrait a modern twist by adding color with gels.

When I shoot, I'm thinking editorially, working with a layout in mind. This helps me create a flow and a narrative with the images. I do this by shooting a variety of poses—both tight and loose, three-quarter length, full length, seated and standing, and perhaps some detail images. I also try different lighting arrangements to create a variety of looks that work well when paired together. In addition to the dimension light planned for this shoot, I had a flat light setup in mind that I knew would be easy to quickly transition into using the same tools I already had on set.

STRIP BOXES

Designing the look for portraits is always my first step. This happens before the subject ever steps foot in the studio. I always request sample images so I know what they look like, what kind of bone structure they have. Take the time to incorporate this step into your work. When you work this way, your images will always be better than when you simply wing it. Never be afraid to deviate, but having a solid plan and lighting look will help you be more deliberate and thoughtful, and provide a roadmap that dictates the tools and methods needed to reach your destination.

When I designed this portrait, I knew I wanted dimensional light with a lot of deep shadows and quick fall-off. I also knew I wanted the face divided in two, with tightly controlled vertical slashes of light on either side of the face. Again, the goal was to sculpt the face, accentuate bone structure and create drama. I wanted a specular (high contrast) look that worked well for black and white, but also translated well for the color gel version. Having a clear concept made it easy for me to pick the tools and map out the techniques I'd be using.

For the second look, I decided to go in a completely different direction and create a flat-light look that resembled a ring flash effect but that would require no additional tools or setup to pull off. Pairing images together with opposing lighting styles creates variety and counterpoint. My weapons of choice for both looks were two Elinchrom 14x35 strip boxes. These would deliver the side-to-side vertical slashes of light I needed for the first look and the right amount of top-to-bottom illumination needed for the second three-quarter-length look.

GRIDS

I outfitted both strip boxes with Lighttools 30-degree ez[POP] Soft Egg Crate Grids for both the black-and-white and color headshots. These allowed me to constrain and precisely control where the slashes of light created by the strip boxes fell. This kind of control just isn't possible with grids. For the second flat light look, I removed the grids, which weren't necessary. The strip boxes alone, placed equidistant left and right from the subject, were all I needed to create a punchy overall wash of light without any shadows.

MODIFYING THE QUALITY OF LIGHT

I wanted a punchy, specular light for the images. It would be easy to assume that softboxes would be the wrong tool for this. Remember, though, that softboxes are versatile tools with exterior diffusion and internal baffle material, and, in the case of Elinchrom, numerous plastic deflectors that can be placed over the flash head to further modify the quality of light. So even though I was using two strip boxes, I was able to coax the punchy light I wanted from them by simply removing the interior baffle material. This gave me the look I wanted. I could have gone even further if I wanted to by also removing the exterior diffusion panel.



Phase One DF+ & IQ250, Schneider Kreuznach 150mm lens f/3.5. Settings: f/16, 1/125sec, ISO 100.

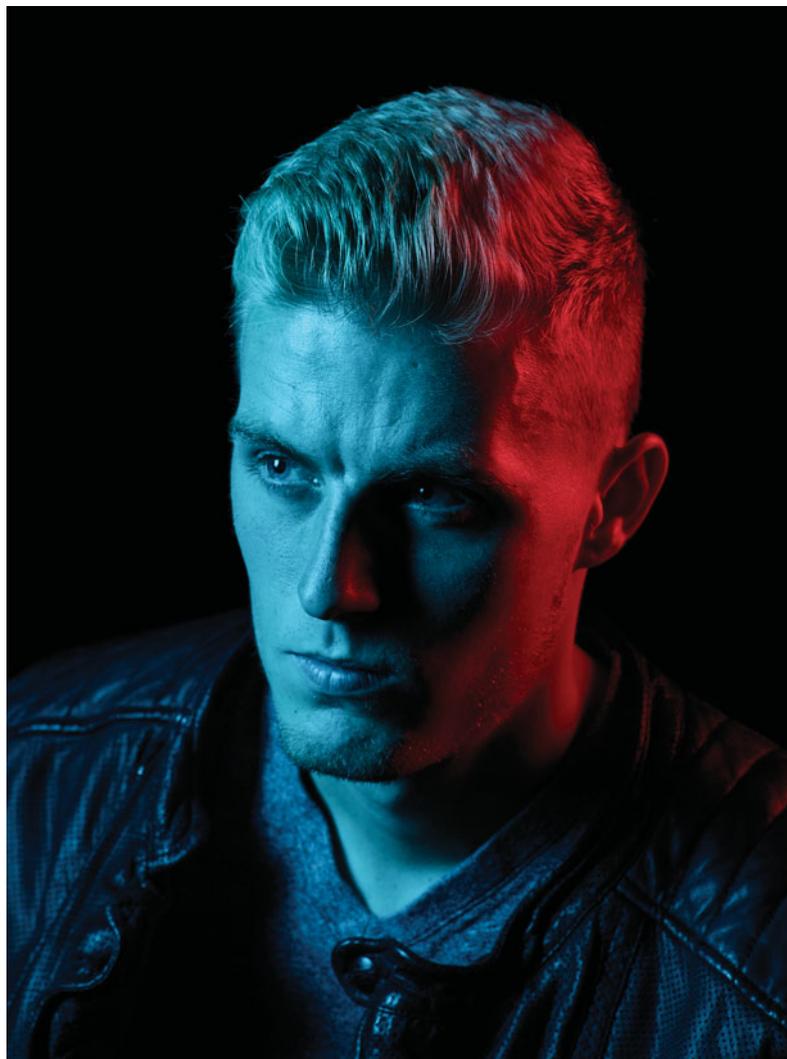


Image © Michael Correntino

Here, you can see the effect of colored gels used at their full intensity without any white light from the strobe mixed in. For my money, the effect is too strong.

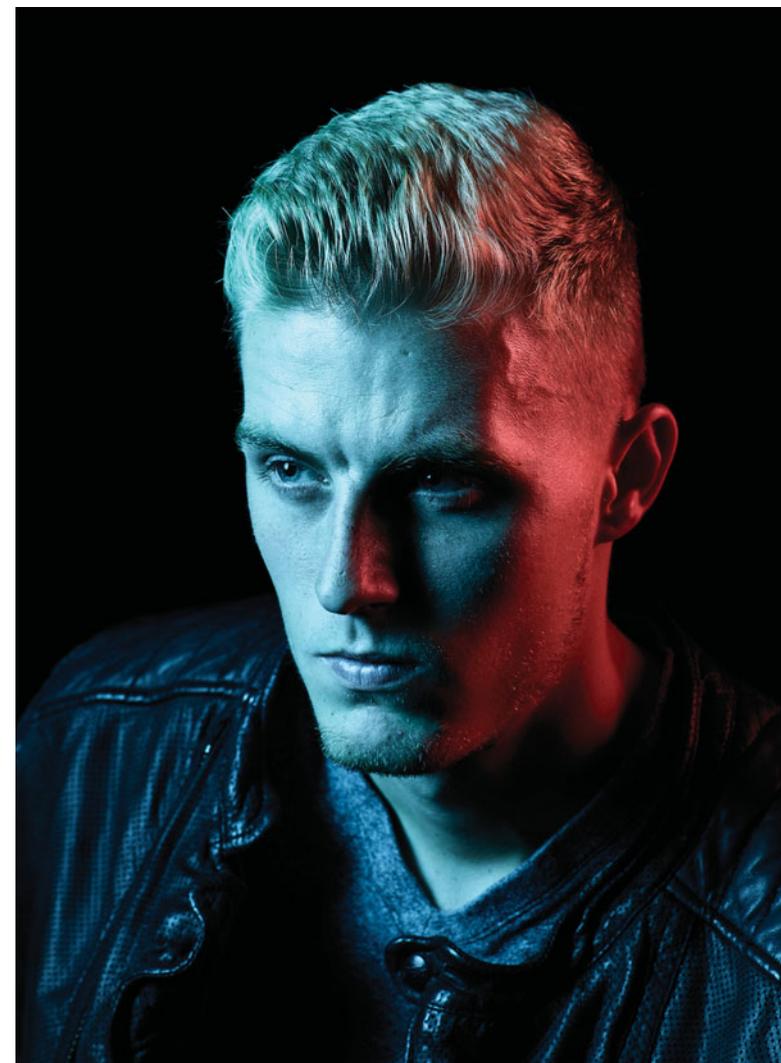


Image © Michael Correntino

In this next image, you can see the results of my “ghetto gel technique,” where I mix both color from the gels and white light from the strobes to create a more subtle effect.

MY GHETTO GEL TECHNIQUE

Adding color by gelling your lights is a great way to bring additional emotion and mood to your portraits. That said, gels are tricky. The first step is to find the right mixture of colors—primary, secondary, etc.—and making sure they convey the mood you’re after. Think about it: What do these colors mean in real life? Where do they exist?

The next and most challenging step is to find the right balance of color and white light. This is one of those Goldilocks propositions, looking for what’s “just right.” This means experimenting with strobe power, distance and the amount of gel covering your strobes. These factors contribute to the amount and intensity of color produced.

Completely gelled strobes can create too much color and look intrusive and unnatural. I prefer some of the white light from the strobes to mix with the colors from the gels, creating a softer effect. Since I use Rosco 12x12 Gel Kits instead of their larger rolls of individual gels (which could easily be taped to the front of my softboxes), I’ve developed what I call my “ghetto gel technique.” I gaff-tape the gels inside the softbox, partially covering the flash head. I adjust the amount of color and white light until I get the desired effect. If you opt for this method, do not use your modeling lights, or you’ll melt your gels in the blink of an eye.

Keep in mind that gels may reduce the amount of light delivered by your strobes. You’ll need to account for this by adjusting strobe power, moving your strobes closer or adjusting your aperture. When I added the gels for these portraits, they cut a full stop of light, requiring me to open my aperture from f/16 to f/11.

DIMENSIONAL LIGHT VS. FLAT LIGHT

Lighting that has direction relative to the subject creates shadows, and shadows create a three-dimensional sense of volume and shape, hence the term dimensional light. The black-and-white and color headshot portraits get their drama and intensity from this style of lighting. As you can see from the BTS images—and, to lesser extent, from the lighting diagram—this was essentially a modified cross-light arrangement. Call it cross light 2.0. The strobe in front of the subject and camera left was placed at approximately 45 degrees to the side and angled down, while the strobe on the right was placed lower, with little to no angle.

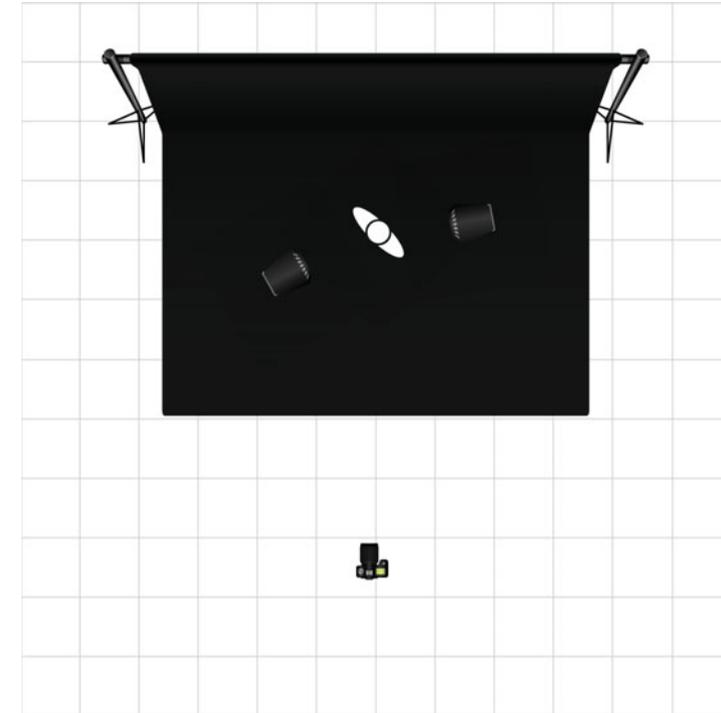
You'll need to experiment with the angle of both lights to dial in this look. Work with one light at a time to see the individual contributions being made. It's much easier to see exactly what's going on with each light this way.

Flat light, on the other hand, is dead simple and something I knew I could easily knock out with the two strip boxes I was already using. I simply removed the grids, moved one strip box to the left of my subject and one to the right, angled both toward the center of the background where my subject was standing, took a new meter reading, dialed in the desired power, metered again and started shooting. I always use a handheld light meter: a Sekonic L-478. Nothing can get you shooting faster, more accurately or more consistently than a handheld flash meter. I'm assured a perfect exposure the first time I click the shutter, no chimping, no guesswork.

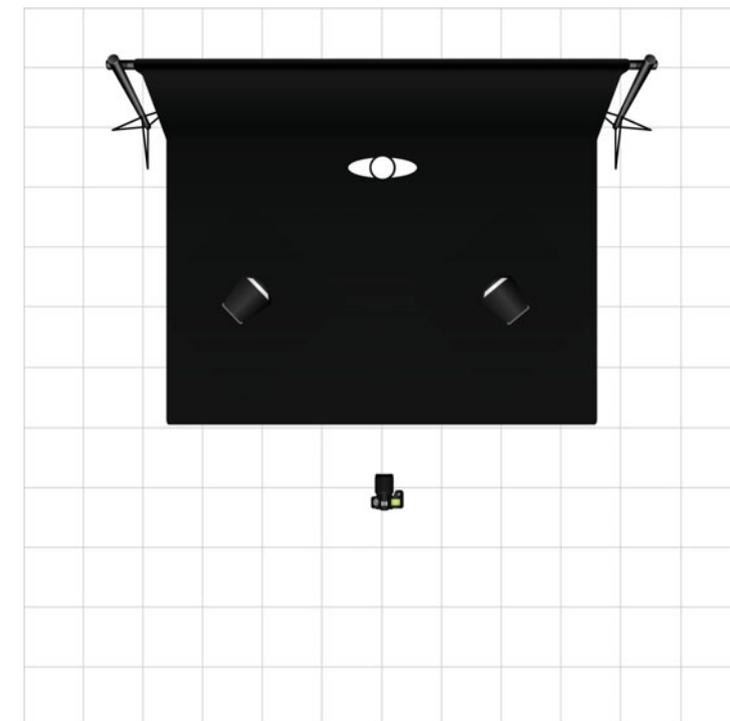


Building your lighting patterns one light at a time makes it much easier to judge the effect each light is having. Here, I'm dialing in the desired amount of light and adjusting where it falls on the subject's face.

Images © Michael Correntino



In this overhead view, you can see what was essentially the cross light pattern used for both the black-and-white and color headshot finals.



By simply removing the soft egg crate grids and repositioning the strip boxes, as illustrated here, I was able to quickly set up the second flat light look.

Images © Michael Correntino

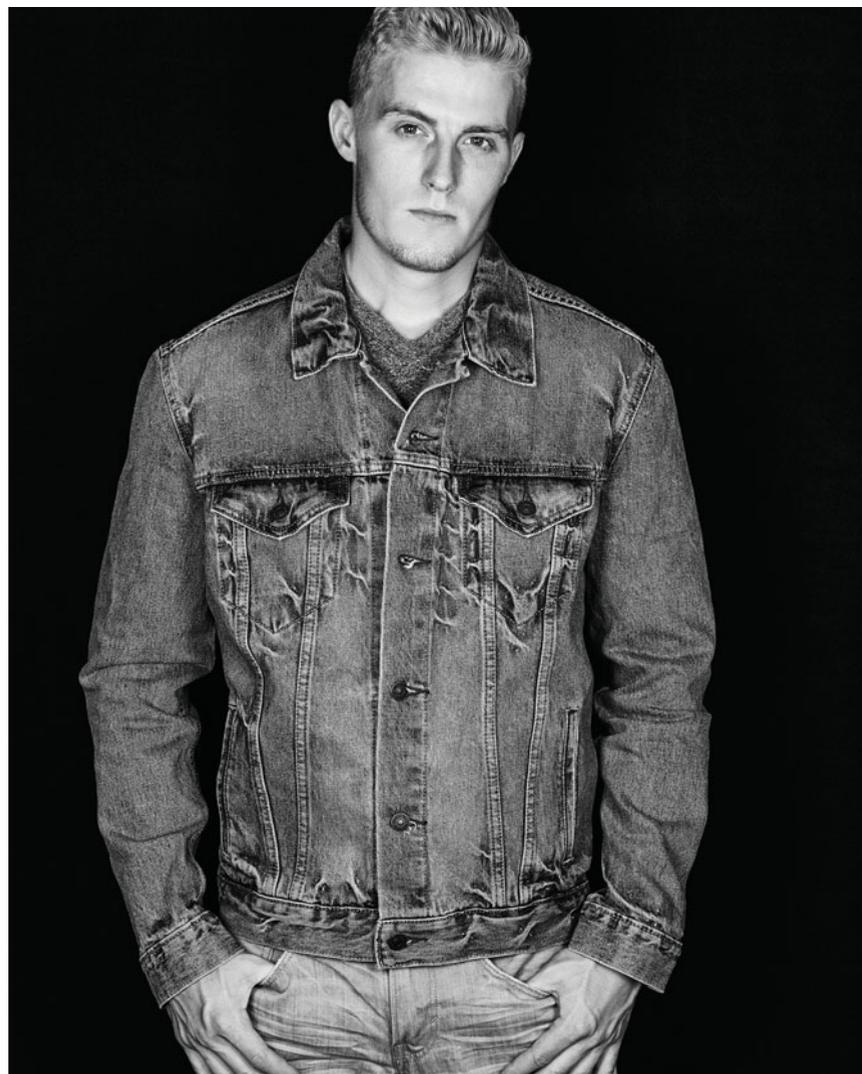


Image © Michael Correntino

Phase One DF+ & IQ250, Schneider Kreuznach 80mm lens f/2.8. Settings: f/16, 1/125sec, ISO 100.

Try both of these setups. They're easy and fairly light on gear, plus they're fun and deliver the goods. ■

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

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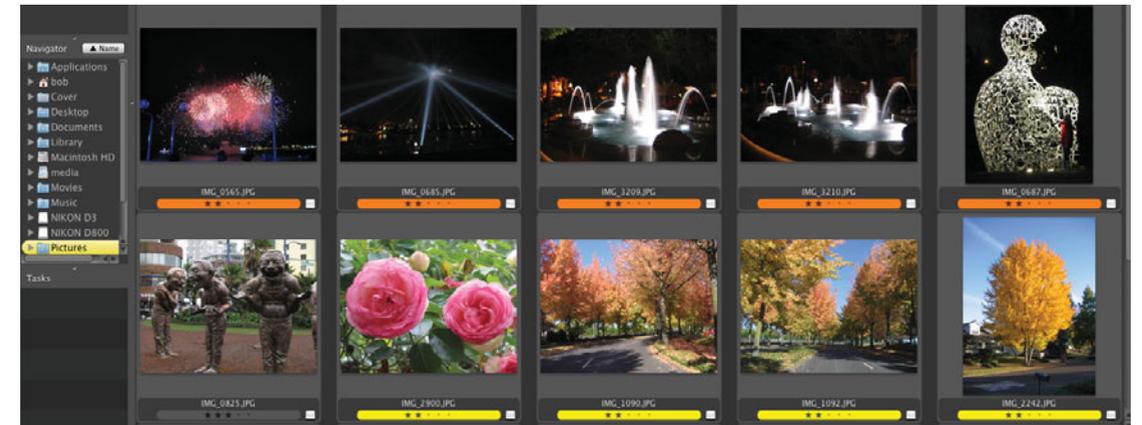
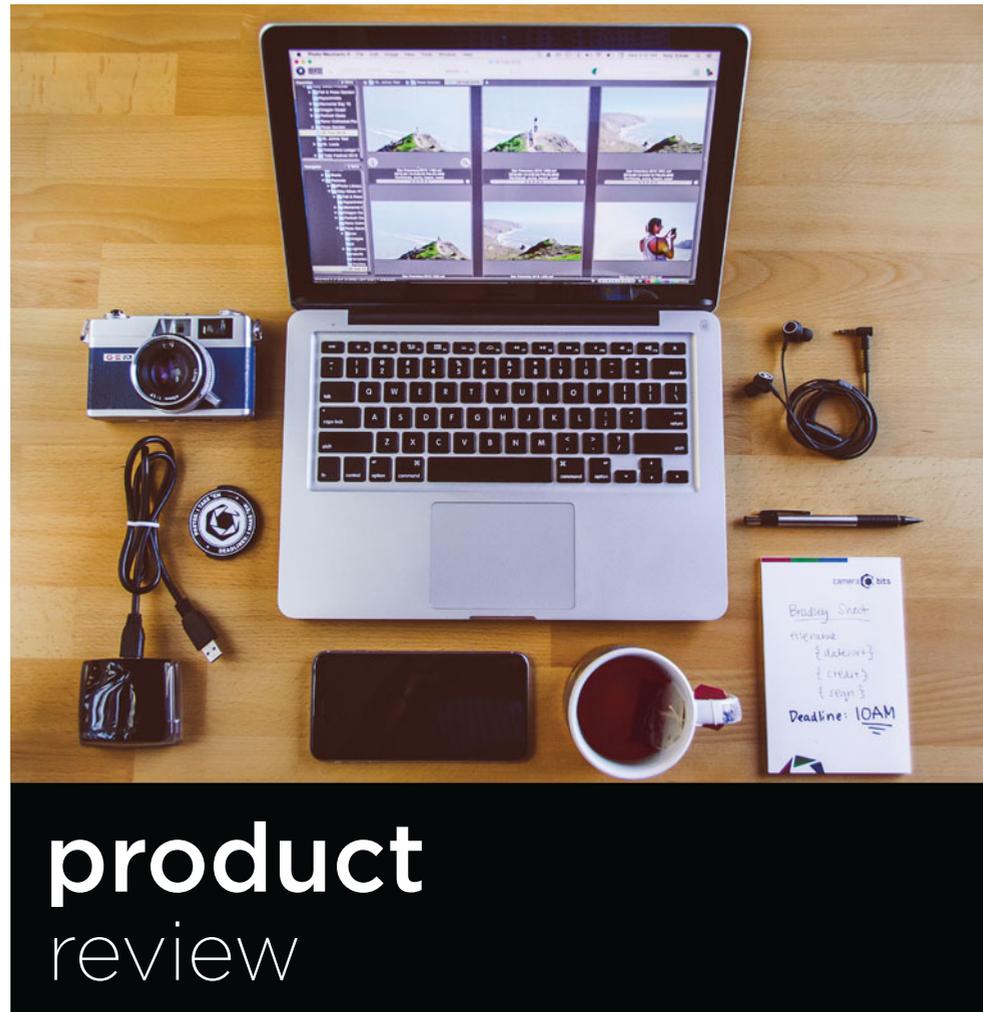
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Take a Step Back:
A PERSONAL APPROACH OF
PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY
with **Melanie Anderson**

For this month's theme of families and portraits, I want to share some new ideas for how to capture images of your family. Whether traveling or enjoying a day out, document your favorite times with your family—but take a step back, and capture from behind.

While traveling in Paris and Italy recently with my oldest daughter, Sarah, I took tons of photos with my iPhone, using filters to create cool effects and appeasing my ADD by being able to upload instantly to Instagram and Facebook. I wanted to share this experience with everyone. This was my first time in Europe, and I was blown away by the culture, landscapes and architecture. Breathtaking.

There were moments when I would take a step back and watch as my daughter took in the sights. I came up with a new idea: Showcase her within the sites we were visiting. Document our time seeing these locations through her eyes, all from behind.

The images in this article are very personal to me. They are intimate, creative, artistic. They remind me of our time together. These photos take me back to this time in a way that other vacation photos I have taken do not.



Images © Melanie Anderson



Image © Melanie Anderson

Emotion

Family portraits are meant to be personal, to reflect the family bonds that tie us together. I have taken hundreds of family portraits for clients, and dozens with my family and extended family—in studio, on location, urban and traditional. Every aspect of the shoot—clothing, posing, groupings, locations—were either discussed prior to a session, or devised in the moment.

Most of the family portraits I have taken are more thought out—I spaced and posed family members, ensuring hands, chins and smiles were all as they should be. The approach I took with Sarah was about taking a step back and seeing her within the scenery, making these some of my most treasured images. These are the types of images I want on my walls.



Image © Melanie Anderson

Capturing the Moment

Whether you are on vacation, taking a walk or enjoying a day trip, take a step back. Watch the interaction. Capture a moment with your child in her favorite places—strolling through the city, interacting with a sibling, taking time to smell the roses. Whatever it may be, take a step back and soak it all in. Document this moment. Create with this moment. Celebrate this moment.



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Image © Melanie Anderson

More Candid

Family portraits tend to seem very posed. Let's step out of this style and create differently. This trip with my daughter gave me a new idea for documenting the moment—breathing the air, capturing her from within, allowing me to enjoy these moments over and over again. If I'd had my DSLR with my many lenses, not only would I have been burdened with the weight of all the gear, but I think my mindset would have been more about documenting the beauty I was seeing, as opposed to being “within” the beauty. Without all my equipment, we were able to travel much lighter, walk faster, be more intentional about the locations we were visiting, all while living in the moment. Sure, there were many times that I stopped to capture a doorway, some scenery, a sunset, but I was able to do so quickly and artfully.

Nontraditional

Would you consider these images to be portraiture? To me, many of these images represent a subject, my daughter, in a moment that captures the essence of so many things. They stir emotion and a beauty that I would not have captured if she'd been posed facing my camera. Notice that not one of them is of her looking at me, no smiles, no controlled emotion in her face. The emotion I captured was told in the creation of the final image. The story and how I want you to feel about each image were determined by the processing of each one. I was able to blend landscape, architecture, art, creativity and a person, all in one image.



Images © Melanie Anderson



Images © Melanie Anderson

Tools

My favorite iPhone photo app is Snapseed. It allows me to create art with the click of a few buttons. Most of the images here were created with Snapseed. The filters I used were a combination of HDR Scape, Drama, Black & White, Vintage, Retrolux and Lens Blur. Another photo app I like is Mextures. Even the Instagram filters are great. Play around till you find the look and feel you are after.

Instant Sharing

In a world of instant gratification, iPhone pictures and apps are wonderful tools for capturing a moment in time that you can jazz up and then upload immediately. I love creating this way. I don't always have the time to download images and fiddle with them in Lightroom or Photoshop. But by the time you begin that process, the moment and inspiration have often passed. iPhones shouldn't replace DSLRs or film cameras, but a camera phone offers an ideal way to capture and share life moments.

When I look back at these pictures, although I now call them portraits, I think about how special this time was with my 20-year-old daughter. I can't help but relive the day, the experience and how grateful I am that I took a step back. We only get one chance at this life—experience and document it to the fullest.



Image © Melanie Anderson

Action Plans

- Take your family for a walk, take a step back and watch your children interact. Document the bonds they have created with each other.
- Next time you take a day trip or a vacation, document from behind. Travel light, and create instantly with filters. ■

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Melanie Anderson is an award-winning photographer and wife to her husband of 20 years, Bill, and a mother to their four children, Sarah, Emily, Kayla and Billy. Anderson Photographs is located in the Arts & Entertainment District of downtown Hagerstown, Maryland. Melanie is a Certified Professional Photographer who received her Photographic Craftsman degree in February 2015. Melanie is passionate about one-on-one mentoring and works diligently to provide educational resources and workshops to fellow photographers through Anderson Education. Learn more at AndersonPhotographs.com.

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BUILDING A
MOBILE
PORTRAIT STUDIO

with Miguel Quiles

If you have a studio portrait business, you've probably had potential clients who wanted to do business with you but couldn't make it to your studio. I decided to maximize my sales opportunities by creating our Studio-to-You package: I literally take my studio to them.

In the beginning, I brought all of my studio equipment, which was exhausting and ineffective. With experience and research, I found an awesome combination of studio gear that I can transport easily, and set up and tear down without breaking a sweat.

Here's what I have in my mobile portrait studio.



Image © Miguel Quiles

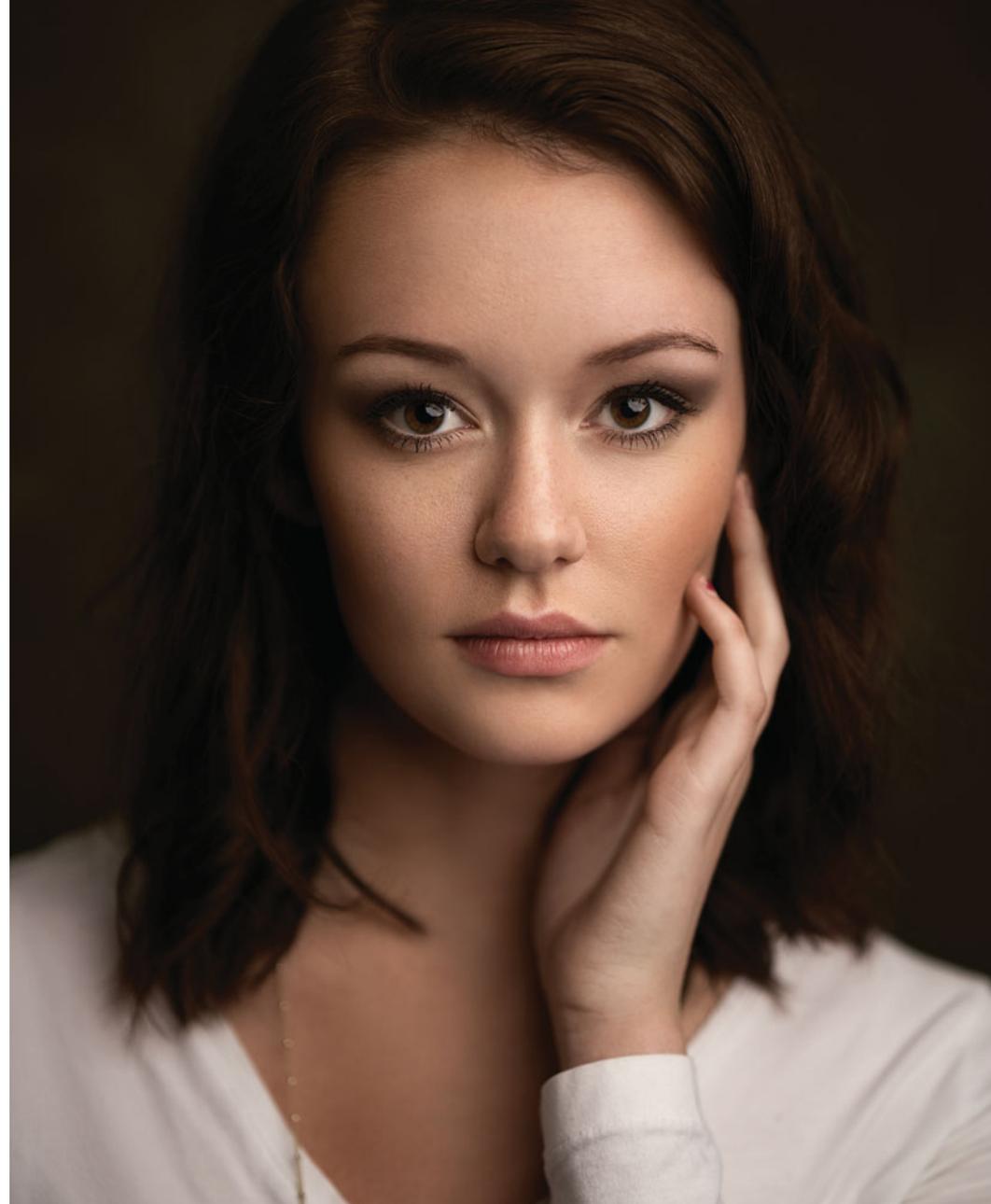


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BACKGROUNDS

I use a variety of backgrounds in my studio, but most of them aren't meant to be portable, and take some time to set up. To be as light and nimble as possible, I use the Savage black/white collapsible backdrop. Unlike traditional seamless paper backgrounds, these open and close just like a reflector. They come in a zippered case and weigh just a few pounds. They are double-sided, so you have two options that can be quickly and easily switched out.

Along with the solid white-and-black collapsible backdrop, I use Savage's textured backgrounds for my Dramatic Portrait series. These backdrops come in two sizes that can be used for both individual and group portraits. They come with a light stand and take seconds to set up. These have been essential to my mobile portrait studio.



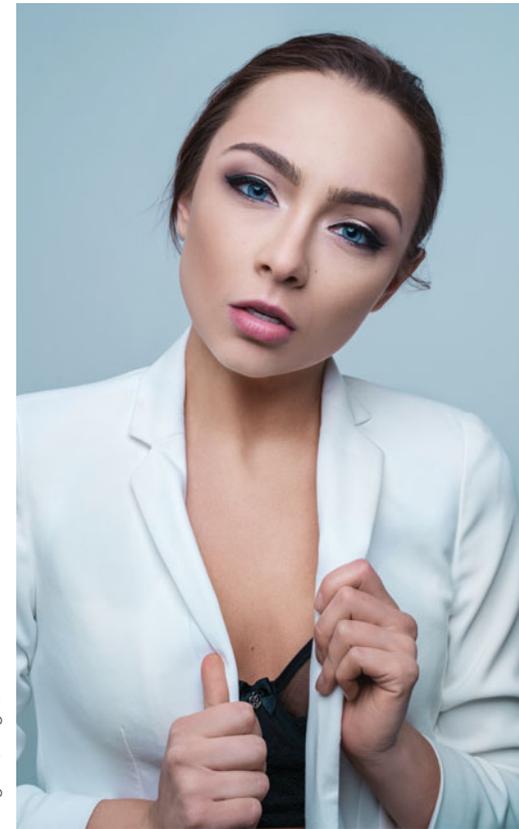
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LIGHTING & MODIFIERS

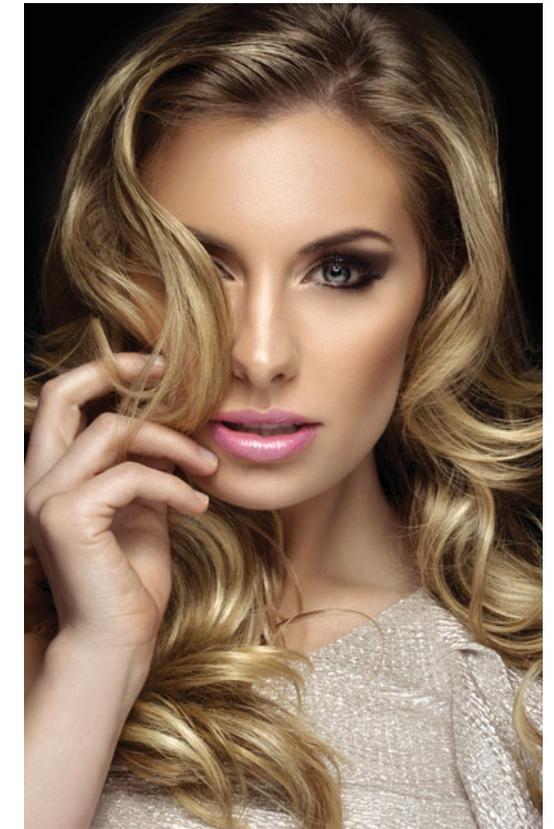
The majority of my portfolio images were shot using a studio strobe. Strobes are my preferred lighting because they are very powerful and allow me to use any of my favorite light modifiers. For portrait work, I use the Phottix Indra500 paired with the Phottix Luna Octa. The Indra500 is a studio strobe that offers high-speed sync (HSS) and through-the-lens metering (TTL). It works off a portable battery pack, which is great for using it in the studio or outdoors. If you're planning to shoot thousands of images or for several hours in a day, get the optional AC adapter.

Another lighting option is to bring a hot shoe flash instead of the strobe. I have a set of Phottix Mitros+ flashes that I use in combination with the Speed Mount II. With that combination, I can use all of my modifiers with my flash, just as I would with my strobes. The only downside is that they run on AA batteries and don't have a modeling light, which can come in handy. The upside is that you can pack them in your bag without much hassle.

For modifiers, my go-to pick is the Phottix Luna Octa. For portraiture, it gives you a beautiful, soft light that flatters your subject's skin. The main reason I choose it for my mobile setup is that it opens and closes quickly and easily, in less than two minutes. The entire Phottix Luna line of modifiers set up in the same manner, so if standard softboxes are more your style, they have options for you. Pair these items with triggers, such as the Phottix Odin II, and you're all kitted up and ready to shoot no matter what the lighting situation.



Images © Miguel Quiles



STANDS

You're going to need quality stands to hold your backdrops, lights and reflectors. Get stands that are not only sturdy but also light. I recently started using Kupo Click Stands. These click into one another, which makes them easy to carry around. You can even connect a strap for added portability. At a minimum, you'll need one for your lights and one for your background. If you want maximum versatility, consider a reflector holder as well.

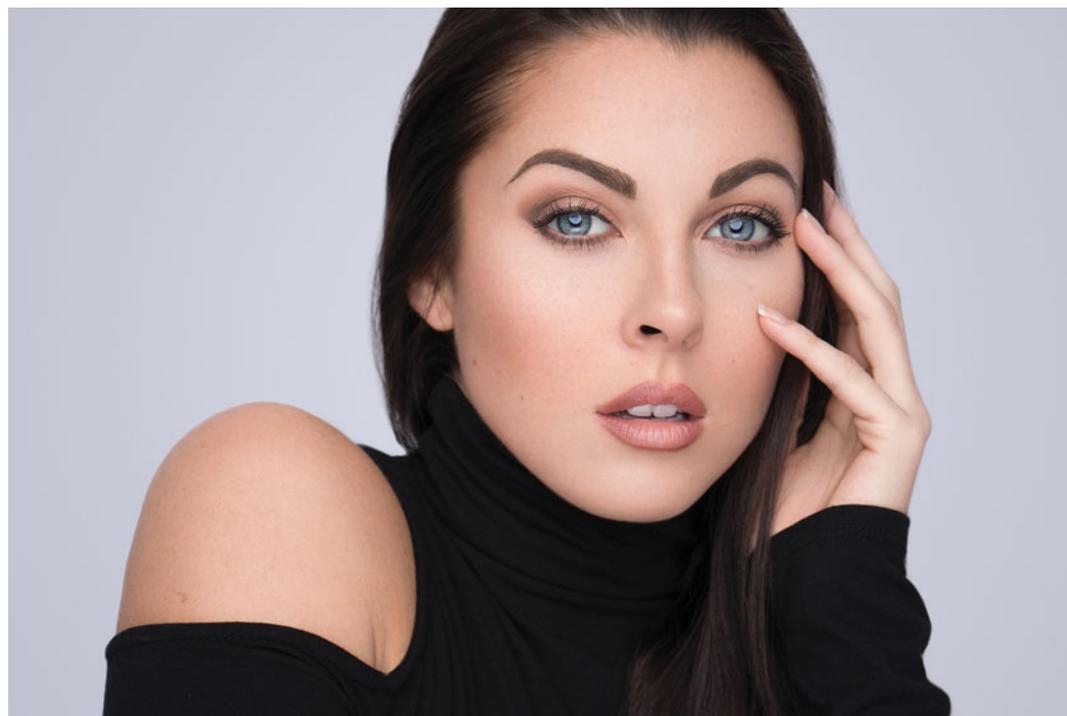


Image © Miguel Quiles

REFLECTORS

A good versatile reflector is an essential part of a mobile portrait studio. You can use it in place of an additional light anytime you need some fill. Get something like a 5-in-1 (or 7-in-1 if the budget allows) reflector that has at least a white and silver side. Some fancier reflectors have silver stitched with white, which gives you a nice in-between option if you need more light bounce than the white side or less than the silver side can provide. One of my favorites is the Phottix Premium Triangle Reflector. It has handles, making it easy to hold with one hand when I'm using it for portrait work. I don't always use one for my portraits, but I never leave home without it. Find a quality reflector that works for you, and bring it with you every time.



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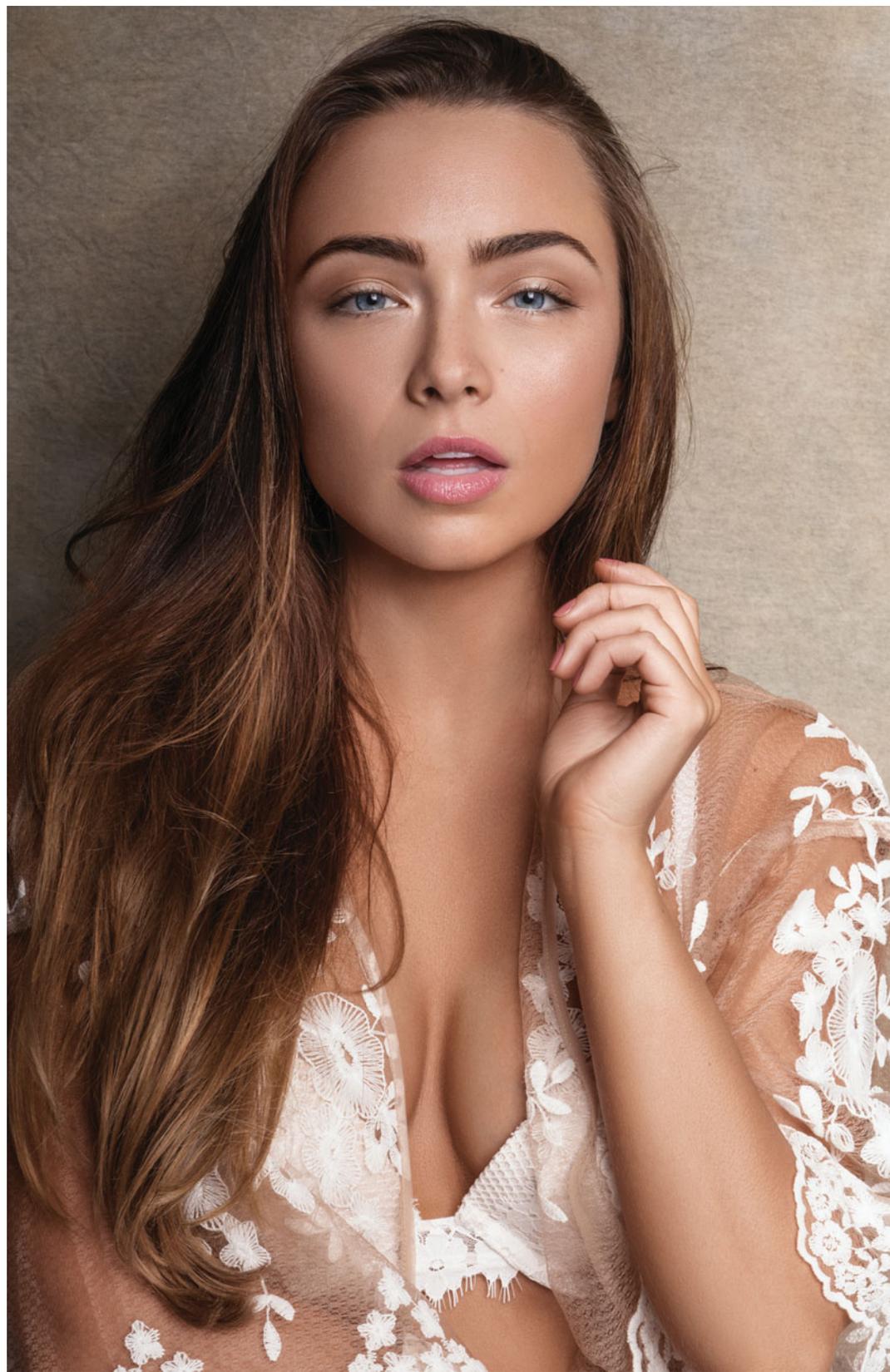
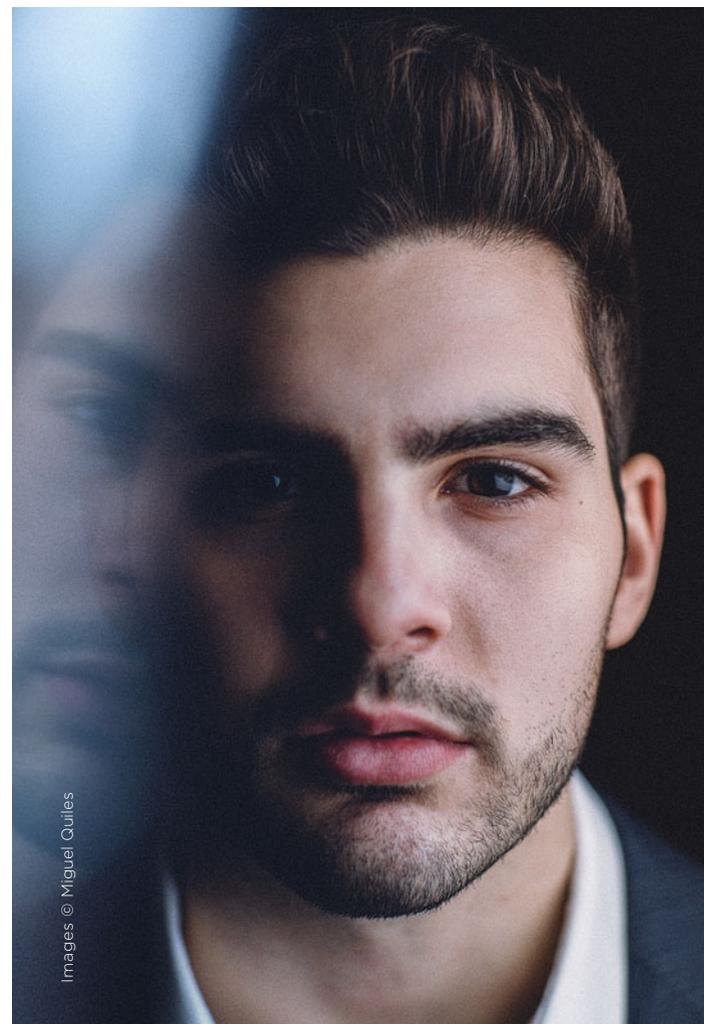


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CASES

Shooting portraits and headshots at a client's location requires me to have all of my gear easily accessible and protected. The ability to be able to take all of your studio gear on location in one trip is vitally important. Time is money. If you have to take multiple trips back and forth to your vehicle, it cuts into your setup time, which cuts into the time you have to work with your clients.

For years, I've been transporting my camera equipment inside the Tenba Roadie Large. It has plenty of space for all your lenses, several camera bodies, as well as batteries and any other accessories. It also has space for my laptop and tethering gear, which I set up to allow my clients to preview their images after the shoot. The front of the roller has a pocket that is great for storing light stands and small reflectors.

If you happen to have more gear than you can fit in one case, pair the roller with a messenger bag, such as the Tenba Cooper 15. For a long day of shooting, I bring a messenger bag filled with snacks and drinks, plus my keys, wallet and phone.



Images © Miguel Quiles

THE MOBILE STUDIO COMPLETED

This has been my mobile setup for the last four years. I can't recommend it highly enough. Everything packs up easily so you can carry everything in and out of your shooting location in a single trip. With a little time and practice, you can arrive on location and be ready to take your first shot in 10 minutes or less.

If you want to explore new opportunities for portrait clients, incorporate these mobile studio tips and take your portrait business to new levels. ■



Miguel Quiles is a New Jersey-based commercial wedding and portrait photographer who's been involved in the industry for over 15 years, starting off first as a salesman at a local camera store. Since then, Miguel has been refining his skills and pushing the limits of his creative abilities. As a self-taught photographer, Miguel hopes to share his experience and knowledge with new and upcoming photographers who wish to take their work to the next level.

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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, *Editor-in-chief*



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Q + A

WITH *Salvatore Cincotta*

- + Negotiating contracts with wedding planners.
- + Tips for photographing group portraits.
- + Marketing to your clients on a budget.
- + Getting your clients out of the "Shoot & Burn" mindset.

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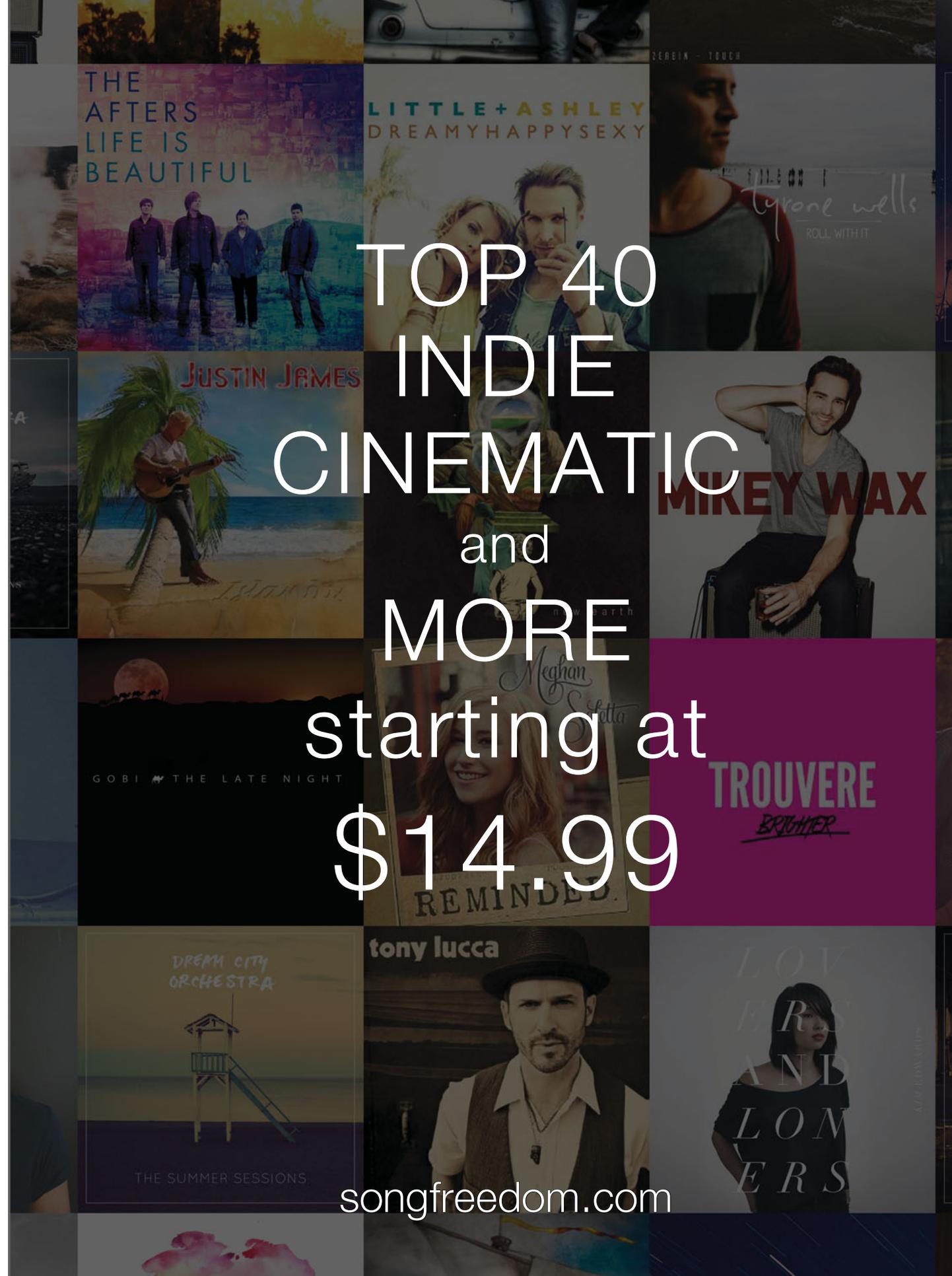
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WHAT'S IN YOUR BAG OF TRICKS FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON?

with **Skip Cohen**



The two major holiday seasons for photographers in the United States are the November-December holidays and, in the spring, Mother's Day, graduations and Father's Day. While there are a few isolated blips around Valentine's Day, Easter, etc., it's these two major periods that account for your greatest potential sales.

Here are the big questions of the day: What are you doing to create excitement and get your target audience thinking about professional photography? What are you going to offer them that's different from what your competitors offer?

CREATING BUZZ

I want to get you thinking about creating a little buzz first. So many of you run your business as if people magically appear on your doorstep. The truth is, with all the noise in our lives, it's harder than ever to reach our audience. That means you've got to consistently be out there with interesting content on your blog, posting on social media and sending out a press release at least once a month.

WHAT ARE YOU OFFERING THAT'S DIFFERENT?

Everything should start with a call to your lab and album company. It's an easy question to ask: "What's new this year?" Every lab has a constantly growing list of new products. They're printing on just about everything, and they're printing in different sizes, with and without frames. They're creating image boxes and every album size imaginable.

Next, presentation products. I've got two personal favorites: slideshows from Photodex, and physical storage and presentation products from PhotoFlashDrive.com. They're two completely different products that offer you the ability to create some serious excitement.

Photodex is all about slideshow presentations. There's not very much that can top a consumer's excitement more than a 30- to 90-second hybrid video holiday card, especially if you've surprised them with it. It all starts with the portrait session, followed by a combination of still images, a short video clip or two from the shoot, and great music.

Need some examples? Wander over to YouTube and find Suzette Allen's channel. You'll have no problem envisioning a client's excitement over a family holiday card that wishes friends, "Happy holidays!"

If you were at ShutterFest or any other major convention this past year, you hopefully met Brian Campbell and the crew from PhotoFlashDrive.com. One of my favorite of his packages was a rustic box that holds a bottle of wine or champagne along with a flash drive and prints. They also have a stunning lacquered box with a lock—the perfect gift to enhance a boudoir session. It holds a flash drive and a small stack of prints. Your clients haven't seen anything like them.

GIFT CARD PRESENTATION

With just a little effort, you can jazz up that boring old gift card or certificate.

What companies come to mind when you think high-end products? Tiffany's? Godiva Chocolates? Dom Perignon? Even though Dom Perignon isn't considered as top shelf as it once was, it still comes in a heavyweight dark green box with the gold label on the top. Tiffany's has its turquoise bags and boxes, and Godiva's packaging is equally as slick.

Have a gift card custom-designed and printed on quality material. Next, package it in a classy gift box with your logo on the top. Your goal is to give it a level of upscale value—it's not a certificate for a sitting, but a ticket to creating a stunning fine-art heirloom.

USE YOUR BLOG

Your website is about what you sell, and your blog is about what's in your heart. Creating buzz starts with great blogging. Just like publicity helps legitimize advertising, your blog posts help clarify the products and services you sell.

This is where you get to shine with great content for your readers. Remember, in the portrait social categories, women make 98 percent of purchase decisions. In most cases, that means Mom. While brides obviously make up a big part of your target audience, because we're talking about after-event marketing, this is mostly Mom's turf.

Write posts that get your clients thinking about photography. Here are some ideas.

- **Blog about the importance of printed images.** Michele Celentano wrote an amazing piece several years ago titled "I Believe." She gave photographers the right to reprint it and use it for their marketing.
- **Give your clients ideas for things to do with images.** This is where you can show some great ideas from that call you made to your lab or album company. Show images in their final presentation, be it canvas, metal, etc.
- **Don't forget frames!** I'm a huge fan of custom framing with a nicely matted print. The education process starts with you planting the seed with your target audience.
- **Blog about great gift ideas.** Again, you have to get your clients thinking about new ideas. While canvas prints might be old to you, they might be new to your clients.
- **Create a marketing hybrid video of still images together with video clips and music.** Get your audience thinking about a video holiday card this season.
- **Write a post about your gift cards.** Title it something like, "What Do You Get That Special Person Who Has Everything?"
- **Blog about the importance of capturing memories.** This is why I always suggest using the "Throwback Thursday" theme on your blog. Old photographs, especially professional ones, demonstrate the value of photography. Share your images with a regular reminder of how fast kids grow up. Great moments become cherished memories.
- **Blog about storytelling.** You might take it for granted how you cover an event with scene-setter images, details and a mix of more formal portraiture together with a photojournalistic series of images. Share the key elements you look for when telling a story. This reinforces your skill set.



Over the years, I've heard so many photographers blame the decline in business on everything from the "Uncle Harrys" of the world, to the economy, to consumers' "that's good enough" cell phone photography.

Stop believing people who say, "Consumers don't know the difference!" The truth is, they might not initially, but that's where you have to start the education process. When you put an outstanding image next to a mediocre one, they do see a difference. And if you bring creative ideas to their attention, you can build a stronger business.

Whenever somebody tells me they're having a great year, they always add, "But I've never worked so hard in my life!" Business is out there, but it's up to you to find it and remind people what makes your work different.

“ People don't buy what they *need*.
They buy what they *want*. ”
-Seth Godin



As Seth Godin wrote, “People don't buy what they need. They buy what they want.” So, there it is: The hardest part of marketing is educating your customers and creating things they want. ■

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

FOR BUILDING
YOUR **FIRST**
PORTFOLIO
with Jeff Rojas





Image © Jeff Rojas



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Putting together your first portfolio can be intimidating. What photographs should I choose? What type of paper should I use? Should I bind my portfolio? Should I stick to digital instead of print? Things will start to feel a bit overwhelming. I encourage you to stop, breathe and think, because it's really not as complicated as it seems. In fact, there's a really practical way to think about building your first portfolio.



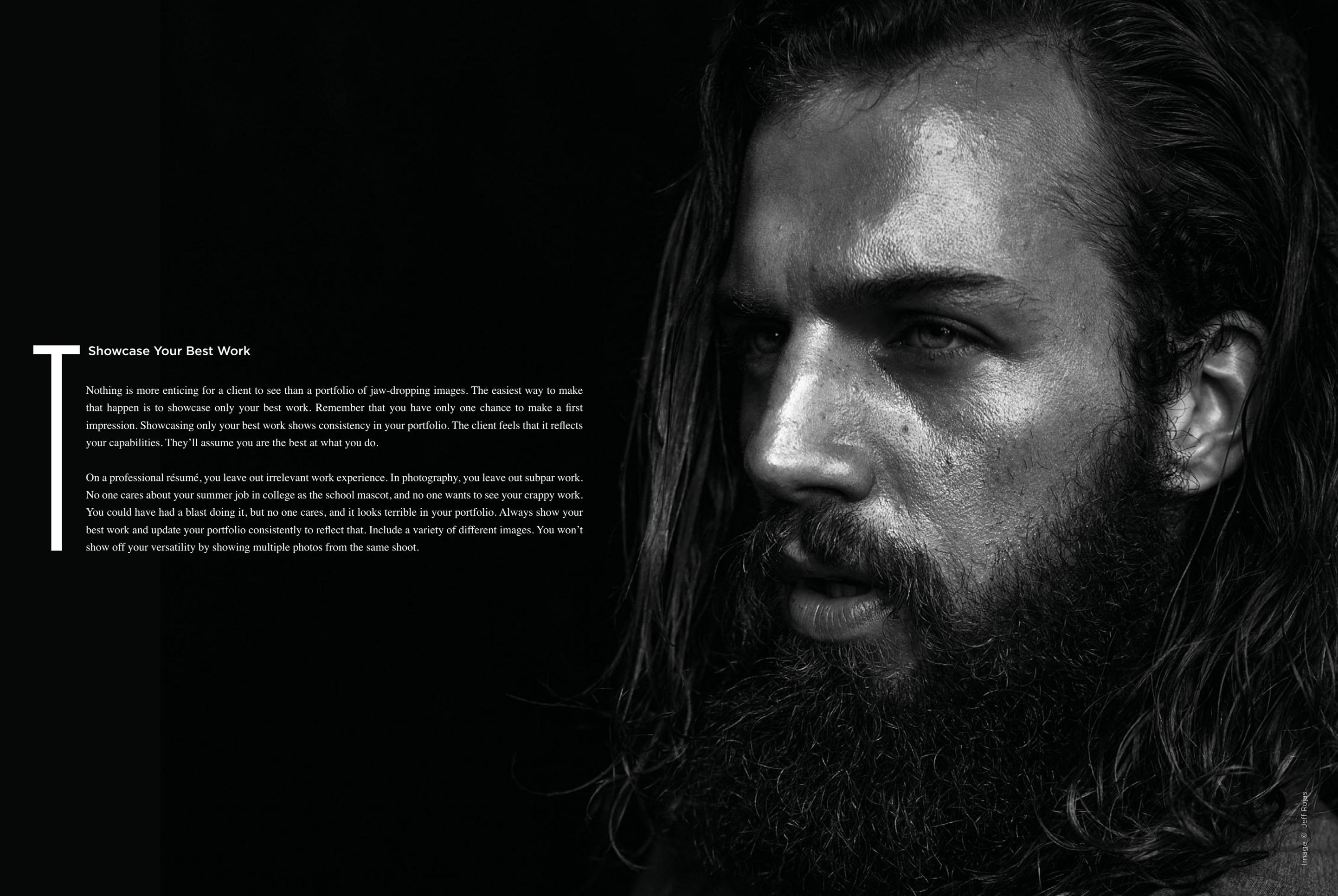
Research Your Market & Photograph What You Want to Be Hired For

Your portfolio is like an artist's résumé. It's a visual representation of your work, your experience and the services you provide. When you think about it that way, you should start constructing a portfolio that fits your ideal "job." Doing the opposite is like heading into a job interview for a marketing position and presenting the interviewer with a résumé that outlines your qualifications as a chef. It just doesn't make sense.

Remember that your potential client is deciding whether or not they're going to hire you based on whether your work fulfills their needs. Photographers have a mindset that they should "shoot the work that they want to be hired for." More often than not, photographers misunderstand that statement and fail to land assignments. So, let me be extremely clear: Figure out what genre of photography you love (and one that has a market), and shoot content that a client expects to see in that marketplace.

Think about it this way. If you love fine art photography but you live in Amboy, Indiana (Population 378), you could have the greatest fine art portfolio in the world and not land a single client. Maybe you could sell prints online or move to a bigger city, but chances are that creating a portfolio in that city isn't the wisest decision. Think about what you like to shoot, and research to see if there's a market for it long before you start to put your first portfolio together.

Get to know what that market expects from a photographer. You may be interested in photographing stylized portrait sessions, but maybe there's simply not a market for that in your area. Maybe your market is slightly more traditional and prefers classically styled portraits. If that is the case, you're going to have to spend more time trying to convince potential clients to take up your idea. Focus on creating work that gets your foot in the door.



T Showcase Your Best Work

Nothing is more enticing for a client to see than a portfolio of jaw-dropping images. The easiest way to make that happen is to showcase only your best work. Remember that you have only one chance to make a first impression. Showcasing only your best work shows consistency in your portfolio. The client feels that it reflects your capabilities. They'll assume you are the best at what you do.

On a professional résumé, you leave out irrelevant work experience. In photography, you leave out subpar work. No one cares about your summer job in college as the school mascot, and no one wants to see your crappy work. You could have had a blast doing it, but no one cares, and it looks terrible in your portfolio. Always show your best work and update your portfolio consistently to reflect that. Include a variety of different images. You won't show off your versatility by showing multiple photos from the same shoot.

Digital or Physical Print?

Digital portfolios can be easily updated to reflect your best work, but physical prints reflect your work in a tangible way. Think about it this way: You're out at a restaurant you found online. You're greeted by the hostess, who walks you to your table. The waiter hands you a couple of iPads to order with. Or worse, the server advises you to check on your own personal phone to access their menu. Where's the magic? Where's the romance? It's gone.

If you would never go to a job interview without a physical résumé, don't greet a client without a physical portfolio, especially if you specialize in print work. A physical portfolio allows your client to see your final product. You're not at the mercy of an electronic device. You can manage the final output and quality of your print, from paper type to luster and exposure, things you can't always control with a digital portfolio.

Don't misunderstand my point. I love my digital portfolio. (See Figure 1.6) With great SEO and branding, your digital portfolio can quickly turn into a great source of lead generation, but it should not be the only way you showcase your work.

Size, style and design are subjective among photographers and industries. As a rule of thumb, I recommend that photographers stay between 8x10 and 11x14. Your work should be large enough so that your audience can appreciate your work, but not so big that it's too cumbersome to travel with. My personal custom-bound portfolio by The House of Portfolios, seen in Figure 1.7 and 1.8, holds 11x14 prints.

Portfolios can get expensive. Mine was around \$600. They can run twice that much for a similar bind. Of course, you don't need to spend that much. You can easily pick up a print portfolio book for under \$100 online.

Size, design and style depend on your industry. In commercial photography, most creative directors expect you to have a portfolio with printed images. Plastic sleeves are viewed as cheap, and most commercial photographers stray away from them. Buy what fits your budget, and know the pros and cons for each option. Plastic sleeves are less expensive, but they're also more fragile, retain dirt (see Figure 1.8), leave fingerprints and can harden due to temperature changes, but the prints can be easily interchanged. On the other hand, on-demand printed portfolios are more forgiving, but the prints are bound within the portfolio and can't be removed. Another option is a screwpost book, which can be slightly easier to change, but you have to spend the time to score and punch the pages.

JEFF ROJAS

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Fig. 1.6

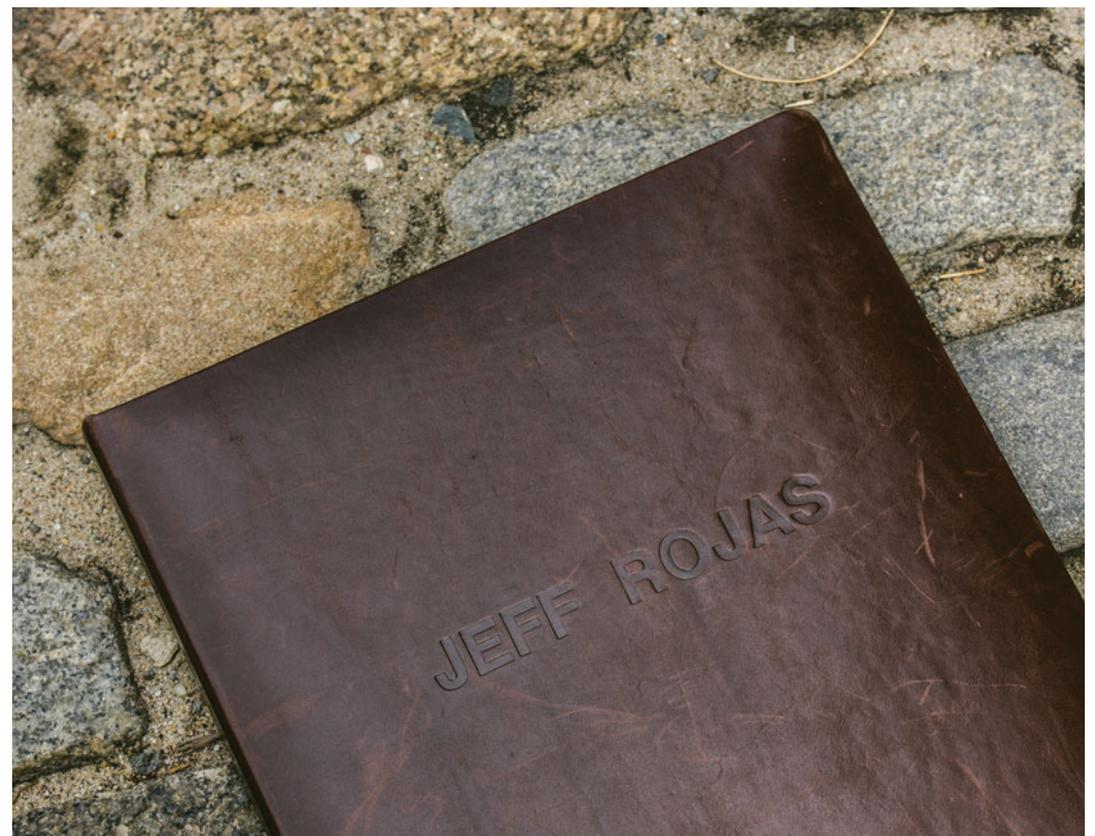


Fig. 1.7

Images © Jeff Rojas



Image © Jeff Rojas

Fig. 1.8

Whichever route you decide should ultimately reflect how you want to be perceived by your client, but you should always keep your budget in mind. ■



Jeff Rojas is an American photographer and author based in New York City. His primary body of work is his portrait and fashion photography that has been published in both *Elle* and *Esquire*. Jeff is a heralded photography instructor at platforms like CreativeLive, WPPI, the Photo Plus Expo, Imaging USA and APA.

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WAYS TO
**GROW
YOUR
CLIENT
BASE**

(AND MAKE MONEY IN THE PROCESS)

with Laurin Thienes



When you are getting started, growing your client base is the most challenging and important task. If you're a portrait photographer, you're probably focusing on one or all of the following areas: families, seniors, children, babies. Reaching these different demographics can be difficult if you don't have a big network of friends or associations through another job or an organization. Experts say to advertise, use social media and spend tons of time networking to get your name out.

These are good ideas. But what about low-cost revenue-generating ways to grow your client list?

SPORTS ACTION

While I was building my first post-production business, I used senior photography as a means to support my entrepreneurial goals. But living away from all connections I had to my previous high school made it difficult to reach an audience that would generate the leads I needed to photograph seniors. As I struggled to do much more than get referral business, I seemingly struck gold: A senior I had worked with wanted me to come photograph one of his varsity football games so he would have pictures of himself in action.

As I photographed his game that evening, I not only captured him but many of his teammates as well. The next day, after I had culled the images, I posted the keepers online and enlisted my client to get the word out. I immediately started getting orders for prints and digital downloads, followed by inquiries from other families about pricing for senior sessions. I was pumped—my client list had grown overnight.

I planned to attend other games where I would capture more action images. For each game, I printed a handful of cards with the website link where people could view the images. Everyone loves looking at sports action of themselves, so I figured at worst, I was driving traffic to my site. But it wasn't just traffic. It was revenue from the orders of digital downloads, images that took very little time to produce. After a few weeks, my client list had grown significantly. I immediately had recognition from parents and students as the dude with the big lens at the games. Life was good.

KEYS TO EXECUTING

Size. Size matters—the size of your lens, that is. Today, everyone has a 70–200. Rent something that helps you stand out, like a 300 mm 2.8 or 400 mm 2.8, depending on the sport.

Online gallery. Today's online galleries are much more eye-catching than they were 10-plus years ago. Think about your audience.

Facebook. Post a few teaser images to Facebook, but not too many. You want to drive them to your site.

Practice. Sports action photography is not easy. It's hard to watch a game through the lens, but if you're not watching through the lens, you will not get the hero shots. It takes practice. Lots of practice. Get out there and shoot.



SMALL-SCHOOL PORTRAITS

If you want to reach multiple families spanning multiple age groups, do school photos. I am not talking about your run-of-the-mill public school with a bazillion kids—don't waste your time unless you are calling in a major favor. Most of the time, those schools are locked up in multischool contracts anyway. But what about those small private or charter schools? These usually need just a little coaxing—especially when your pitch includes a mini senior portrait session for each kid. This offering is so different from the boring blue background that many independent schools will jump at the opportunity.

To an extent, this is run-and-gun shooting, but outdoor portraits at the school are a game changer from what everyone is programmed to expect. Choose a spot where you have two or three different scenes within a few feet from each other—school steps, a trailing brick wall, a tree. These are all cliché, but remember that parents have been programmed to expect boring backdrop images with nothing to choose from. When they see that they get to choose from multiple poses, they are ecstatic. Colleagues of mine have turned this model into a six-figure business line, directly from the school portraits, all generated within the first couple months of the year. Just remember that you're reaching an audience that you've never had access to before, an audience to which you can market full-fledged portrait sessions.

KEYS TO EXECUTING

Organization. The quickest way to run screaming to the nuthouse is to show up disorganized. Have your folders printed with all necessary info—how you're going to keep track of each kid, tracking deliverables, and anything else that requires OCD-level organization.

Help. Enlist a friend (or two) to help keep people in check, feed students to you, write details on order envelopes or just be there for moral support.

Prepare. If photographing younger children is not your strong suit, do a run-through or two before you show up on picture day. Remember, the quality and experience of working with you will help sell you down the road.



The two main ideas here are tied to working with students, but the difference in demographics can help you narrow your focus to a specific line of portrait photography. While these ideas can be great for someone looking to increase their client base from zero, it is also a great way for established photographers to keep fresh new faces in front of the lens, especially given the new crop of students at the different grade levels every year. This gives you access to grow your client base at a significant rate.

ADDITIONAL TIPS

Don't be a creeper. Whether you are working with high school or elementary kids, running around with a huge lens on your camera can weird out some people. Reach out to the appropriate people—coaches, athletic directors and the like. If a parent asks you not to photograph (or post) their child, whether or not you have carte blanche access, oblige them. You never know a family's backstory.

Donate photos. Schools always need photographers for school pictures, games, dances and other events. If they ask you to cover something and you can do it, do it. Don't send them an invoice, just do it. The school administrators will become your best friend or worst nightmare depending on how you treat them.

Collect data. If you drive everyone to your site (especially to view images you shot on your own time), get passengers' information. You want to be able to market to these individuals. Use this contact info to advertise holiday pictures, mini-sessions, senior specials, wedding photography—whatever you want. Your mailing list is key to having repeat access to everyone who comes to view your work. ■



Laurin Thienes is the cofounder and director of operations for Evolve Edits, the leading post-production house for wedding and portrait photographers in the U.S. He studied photography at the Brooks Institute of Photography, and has been photographing weddings for 15 years. The native of Portland, Oregon, currently lives in O'Fallon, Illinois, with his wife, Melissa, son Lukas and red-headed 4-year-old daughter Sophia.

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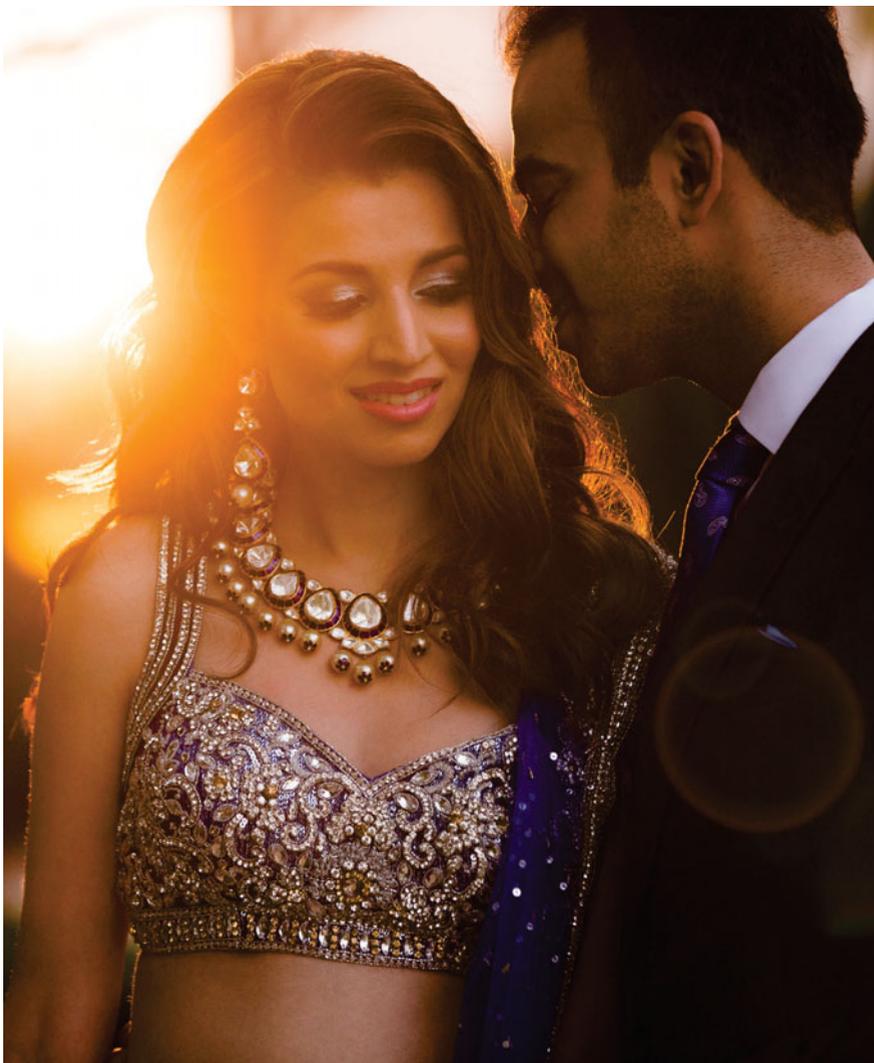
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