

# HOW TO SHOOT PORTRAITS

## SIMPLE SET-UPS

# Light With a Single Source

**THE ALLURE** of the one-light portrait is obvious: Not only do you get drama and shading, but a single light is easy to set up, simple to use, and generally affordable.

Lighting novice? Avoid strobes, and practice instead with a continuous light source, such as the Westcott Photo Basic's uLite tungsten kit (\$90, street, for the light and softbox).

Place the light on a stand slightly to the left or right of the camera, raise it above your seated subject, and aim it down at a 45-degree angle to light the face. Experiment with its position (up, down, left, right, closer in, farther back), making sure that the nose doesn't cast a long shadow. And always try for a bright catchlight in the eyes. Often the light is more flattering if you don't aim it directly at the subject, but "feather" it slightly to the side.

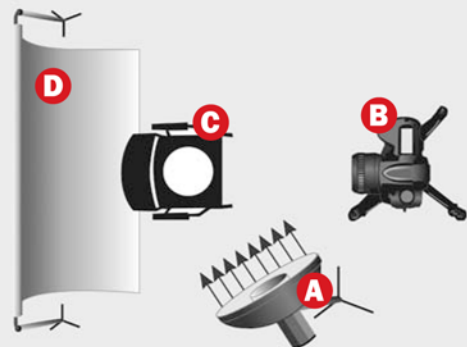
The next step is to brighten any shadows that your main light casts. Do this with a reflector, which can be a simple sheet of white foam-core or cardboard. Position this so it reflects the main light back onto the other side of your subject. Don't have a board? Place the person next to a white wall, which can often do the trick.



### QUICK TIP

No umbrella or softbox to soften the light on your portrait subject? Aim your light at a white wall or reflector to keep it indirect.

**GET THIS SHOT** For this simple, straightforward portrait, photographer Casey Lee chose simple, straightforward lighting. He used a single AlienBees beauty dish on an AlienBees B800 monolight **A**, feathering it slightly to the right to avoid bright highlights on the cheeks, forehead, or glasses. The strobe was fired with a remote trigger mounted on the camera **B**, and the subject **C** posed in front of a gray seamless backdrop **D**. Shot with a Mamiya RB67 and 80mm f/2.8 Sekor lens.





## GROUP SHOTS

# Expose Multiple Skin Tones Correctly

**MAKING A PORTRAIT** of a multi-hued group can be tough. If you set exposure for the people with darker skin, the light-skinned wash out—and vice versa.

**The trick is in the posing and the lighting.** Place subjects with darker complexions close to your main light and paler people farther from it. Specifically:

**1** If you're shooting a typical indoor portrait using an on-camera flash, place the darkest individuals toward the center of the group, where they will receive more light from the flash. As you move the camera closer the group, this technique becomes more effective.

**2** With a couple, ask the darker person to take a small step toward the light, and the lighter person a small step away. While you may not get perfect images, you will minimize the flaws that haphazard posing and lighting can produce in these circumstances.

## SOFTWARE FACELIFT

Use Adobe Photoshop to tone down wrinkles: Create a new blank layer, then get the Healing Brush tool.

Set the mode to Normal and choose Sample: Current & Below. Sample a smooth area, then paint over the wrinkle.

The initial pass creates a Botox effect, so go to Edit > Fade and dial down the opacity of the healing until the wrinkle is present but subtle.

JAMES OLIGNEY PHOTOGRAPHY, OLIGNEY.COM



## CLOSER SUBJECTS

# Limit Depth of Field

**PORTRAITS ALMOST** always benefit from an out-of-focus background. To limit depth of field, do as many of these as possible: Use as large a sensor or film format as you have—digital compacts are out. Use a lens with a long focal length, and set a large aperture (small f-number). **Remember that the closer you are to your subject, and the farther your subject is from the background, the shallower the depth of field will be.** Finally, focus on the eye—if the eye is unsharp, the whole face will appear unsharp.

## FACIAL BASICS

# Find Your Subject's Best Side

**NOT EVERYBODY** has a "best" side, but you owe it to your portrait subjects to try to find theirs. Your challenge is to scan the face for flaws, and when you spy them, try to conceal them in shadow or pose the subject so the camera can't see or exaggerate the differences.

**Look first at the eyes. Is one larger, more rounded, or blessed with a more nicely arched brow? That could be a best side, so pose your subject with that eye closer to the camera and in good light.** Be careful: With strongly asymmetrical faces, it can be better to have your subject turn so that the larger eye is farther from the camera, which has the beneficial effect of equalizing the size of the two eyes.

Next, the lips. Ask your subject to smile. If one end of the mouth curls in a cuter way, turn that side of the face closer to the camera.

GINO SANTA MARIA/FOTOLIA.COM



JAMES RUBIO, WWW.JAMESRUBIOPHOTOGRAPHY.COM



## RULEBREAKER

# Use Backlighting Effectively

**ONE OF THE OLDEST** saws in the photo rulebook: "Shoot with the light at your back." Like all rules, it's meant to be broken—often it works best to put the light at your *subject's* back. For example, the flare that swoops around a backlit portrait subject can cause serious complexion problems to magically vanish. One caveat: All that light streaming around your subject and into your lens will cause your meter to underexpose. **TO PREVENT THIS, DIAL IN YOUR METER'S SPOT READING MODE, AND PUT THE METER'S CENTRAL SPOT DIRECTLY OVER YOUR SUBJECT'S FACE.** Take a picture at these settings and adjust exposure up or down as the LCD image dictates. When you find the right exposure, lock it in with manual mode, and let the session begin.





HOW • TIPS & TRICKS

QUICK TIPS

# Powerful Flowers

ERIN ENNIS

Get better blooms every time you shoot

**OFTEN, PHOTOGRAPHERS** see a beautiful flower bed and, stimulated by the intense colors and shapes, start firing away. And just as often, when we

examine the images later, the pictures have nowhere near the impact we'd hoped for.

Here are four tips for getting the most from flowers, whether

in planted garden beds, growing wild, or even, depending on the arrangement, in a vase:

■ **Choose a low vantage point.** Shooting from above and aim-



Shot with a Nikon D60, 18–55mm f/3.5–5.6 lens.

ing down on flowers often gets you more leaves, stems, and ground than blossoms. Instead, kneel down on the flowers' level, putting your camera's imaging plane immediately opposite your subjects. A low vantage point also lets you include a distant, defocused background, which can add an important sense of depth to your shot.

■ **Use a wide-angle lens and get in close.** Wide-angle lenses with close-focusing distances and powerful subject magnifying capabilities (1:5 or stronger) can introduce the linear distortion that will exaggerate the floral shapes in exciting ways.

■ **Find a focal point.** Compose the scene to make one flower stand out as the center or visual anchor for your shot. But don't necessarily put it in the actual center of your photograph—use the Rule of Thirds to help you place it. Without this focal point, the bed can appear a chaotic, undifferentiated mass of color.

■ **Choose the flowers with care.** Avoid flower beds in which spiky leaves pop up distractingly between the flowers, and instead look for tightly bunched blooms that form a uniform blanket of color.

—Peter Kolonia

## What's This?

### Creative Auto

This relatively new exposure setting is found on the main

command dial of some Canon EOS DSLRs.

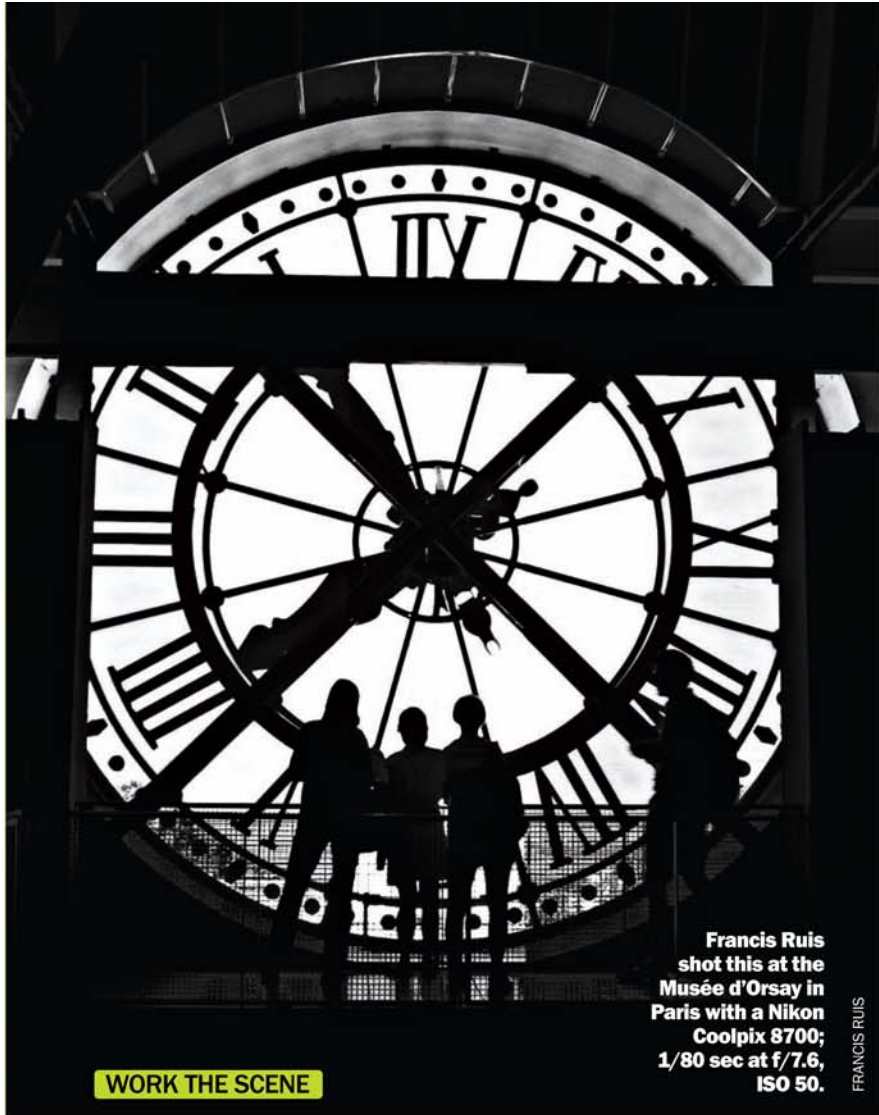
**What it is:** Creative Auto (CA) is literally and figuratively between the full Auto (a.k.a. the “Green Zone”) and Program exposure modes. It gives inexperienced shooters control over simplified camera settings that are typically not adjustable in the Auto mode and confusing in Program.

● **Who it's for:** Beginners who want to experiment with depth of field, selective focus, custom color palettes, and their camera's flash modes.

● **How it works:** Using Canon's Quick Control screen, the CA mode simplifies some camera operations by avoiding potential confusion. Setting depth of field, for example, doesn't involve apertures, but is achieved by adjusting a sliding scale that goes from Background Blurred to Background Sharp.







Francis Ruis shot this at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris with a Nikon Coolpix 8700; 1/80 sec at f/7.6, ISO 50.

FRANCIS RUIS

WORK THE SCENE

# Bold Vision

For silhouettes, meter the background, not the subject

**HIGHLY CONTRASTY**, graphic, sharp-edged, and bold: Black-on-white silhouettes are among the most visually stimulating photos you can make. The challenges? Lighting and exposure. The best require lots of backlight behind your subject, with zero ambient light up front. These conditions can be hard to find or create.

Exposure is also critical. You want absolutely black shadows and absolutely white highlights. If you overexpose, distracting shadow detail shows up in the

black areas and diminishes the graphic clout. It can also cause flare, which softens the edges of a silhouetted subject. Underexposure, on the other hand, weakens the high-contrast snap of a great silhouette by rendering the whites as dirty shades of gray.

How to achieve the perfect exposure? Unlike most photos, which require you to meter the subject, for silhouettes you start by metering the background. Take a reading of the bright area around your subject, and then open up your aperture another stop. Once you have a base exposure, bracket up and down by half a stop to be sure. —Peter Kolonia

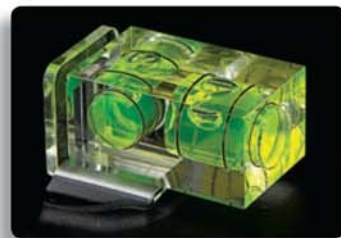
## What's This?

### SPIRIT LEVEL

Sometimes called a bubble level, it slides onto a standard SLR hot-shoe. Its inner cylinders are etched with leveling lines, and they're partly filled with a green, non-freezing "spirit" (e.g., ethanol). **How It Works:** Just like the carpenter's tool. Adjust your camera until the bubble is centered, and you're set.

**When To Use It:** When you need to keep horizon lines straight or vertical lines parallel to your image's frame edges.

**Which To Buy:** Single bubble levels have two feet—one levels horizontally, the other vertically. Get a "double bubble" (like the one shown here) to level both axes at the same time.



### 30-SECOND PHOTOSHOP ELEMENTS

**IF YOUR IMAGE** needs some color correction, but you don't know where to begin, try Variations. In Elements, go to Enhance > Adjust Color > Color Variations. Turn down the Adjust Color Intensity slider so your changes happen slowly, then click on the versions that look better, and click OK. This is useful even if you use, say, a Levels Adjustment Layer to fix color—the dialogue can help you figure out which adjustments to make with another tool. Full Photoshop users who still work on a 32-bit version of the program can use a similar Variations tool.

