

PHOTOGRAPHERS GUIDE TO LIGHTING



JOEL GRIMES

Photographers Guide to Lighting

Master The Light	3
Building Blocks Of Lighting	4
Where to Start	5
Inverse Square Law Made Easy	5
Rembrandt/Cross Light	7
Top-Down Over The Camera Light	10
Edgy Three Light Approach	13
Ultra Soft Three Light Approach	17
Simulating Sunlight	21
Short Light	25
Broad Light	29
Ring Light	33
Spot Light	36



Mastering The Light

- 1 Definition:** My goal as an artist/photographer is to achieve any end result I envision. Lighting can play such a key ingredient in the whole creative process, and I believe it is paramount to mastering the photographic process. Mastering lighting is no different than any other discipline; it takes a ton of practice and repeating the process over and over. My goal in creating an image is not to necessarily replicate everyday real-world lighting conditions but to create the most flattering or, in some cases, the most dramatic light on my subjects.
- 2 Disclaimer:** This photographer's Guide to Lighting is by no means an exhausted breakdown of the multitude of different lighting techniques available to photographers. However, it covers a select set of lighting techniques that I feel are important to someone new to photography portraits and needs a starting point. When it comes to learning lighting, one thing you will discover is there can be multiple terms that describe the same thing. For example, Short light can be referred to as Edge Light or Rembrandt Light can be referred to as Cross Light. What name or term you attached to a particular lighting technique is not as important as achieving the outcome of the desired end result. Master getting to your end result, not the glossary of terms.
- 3 You Are An Artist:** The single biggest asset you possess as an artist is working from your intuition. You have been making millions of decisions your whole life; why question your intuition now? Our uniqueness is what separates us from others. Stick with what feels right to you and take the risk of being criticized. Your intuition may lead you down a path that will ruffle a few feathers but don't give in to the critics; there's one around every corner.
- 4 Objective:** The purpose of this quick guide is to give you a go-to reference to check occasionally to keep you familiar with a few go-to lighting techniques and ideas. With time, you can subconsciously dive in and start creating without hesitation. Like anything else, the more you make mistakes and practice, the better you will get. Set a goal of getting a subject in front of your lens as often as possible. At 65 years old, I am still setting up test shoots and seeking to learn something new every time I go through the process.



The building Blocks of Lighting

★ **Here are four essential building blocks to understanding lighting.** Used in conjunction, you can replicate or emulate any lighting scenario on the planet. You can also master lighting without plotting lighting ratios, calculating mathematical fractions, memorizing the glossary of lighting terms, or using a flash meter or histogram.

- 1 Source:** The source is anything that admits or reflects light. It can be a modifier such as a Softbox, umbrella, beauty dish, etc., or the sun, a wall, or flat reflecting light. In the real world, we generally have a multitude of lighting influences coming into the environment around us. The bigger or smaller the source in relationship to the subject the softer or harsher the light. The edge of the shadow is a telling indicator of how broad the main source is to your subject.
- 2 Distance:** Take any light source, move it towards your subject, and it will soften the light; back it up, and it will harshen the light. If you take a seven-foot modifier, which you would generally think is a soft source, back it up 30 feet from your subject, and it will produce a harsh light. The same goes for a small light source, such as a standard 10-inch reflector. Place it a foot from your subject, and it will produce a relatively soft light. As you back up any light source, it will get weaker in value and will also spread the light over a greater surface.
- 3 Ambient or Bounce:** How much ambient or bounce light you introduce into any given scene will soften the overall look onto your subject. Reflector cards or white foam core is often used to fill in the shadows, flattening the harshness onto your subject. Dragging your shutter speed for longer times will allow the ambient to fill in the shadow as well. There is a limit to how slow you can go with your shutter before you risk having the subject move or introduce camera shake if you are hand-holding. One technique I currently use is introducing a large modifier into my scene to soften or flatten the overall look.
- 4 Direction:** The direction of your light can not be measured but observed. No flash-meter or technical instrument will aid you in where to place your light. The secret is in the shadows. Watch where your shadows fall, and make adjustments accordingly. It takes years observing the masters and creating thousands of portraits before it becomes second nature. If you have a modifier two feet from your subject, moving it a few inches can have a dramatic effect, whereas a modifier ten feet from your subject, moved three inches, has little to no impact on the overall scene.



Where to Start

If you are new to photographing portraits and learning to work with strobes and modifiers, it can be a bit overwhelming where to start. As a general observation, I look at it this way: the light we view people in the everyday world is not very flattering. So if you are trying to replicate the natural world around you, you won't get too many people to hire you to take their portrait. My goal is to master the light to where I can make a living with my camera and have my subjects say, "that's the best image anyone has ever taken of me."

One of the statements that makes me chuckle is when I hear someone say, "unless you are a Natural Light photographer, you're not a purist or a true artist." Generally, this is someone who knows nothing about using strobes and is a cop-out. To be a successful "Natural Light" shooter, you still have to understand lighting and make your subjects look amazing. I love the idea of using Natural Light, but mastering light using strobe gives me a better chance of making a living with my camera and outperforming my competition.

For years I struggled to figure out lighting, so if you are frustrated, you are not alone. To get started, take just one light, grab a subject (I used my kids, friends, and anyone willing as subjects), and start playing around. With time, you can add a second light, and then one day, you will set up multiple lights without hesitation.

For my approach and creative style to creating portraits, I simplify things by using two primary lighting techniques and then modify those two approaches as needed. If you learn these two approaches to lighting, you can rock the world.

Rembrandt Cross Light is the most beautiful classic lighting on the planet.

Master painters have used it for over 500 years, and it will never go out of style. With time you can add an edge or Short Light on the opposite side of your primary source to add a bit of drama.

Over the camera, Clamshell or Top-Down Lighting can be a beautiful flattering portrait approach. Often I use a Beauty Dish or a 24 to 36-inch source right over the camera. The term Clamshell indicates using a reflector or bounce source below the camera to fill in the subject's face and chin's shadow or underside. This is an excellent approach to beauty headshots or images where you want to hide as many flaws as possible. With time you can add an edge light or two coming from the sides to build ultra drama. I used this approach for years with my sports and character-driven subjects.

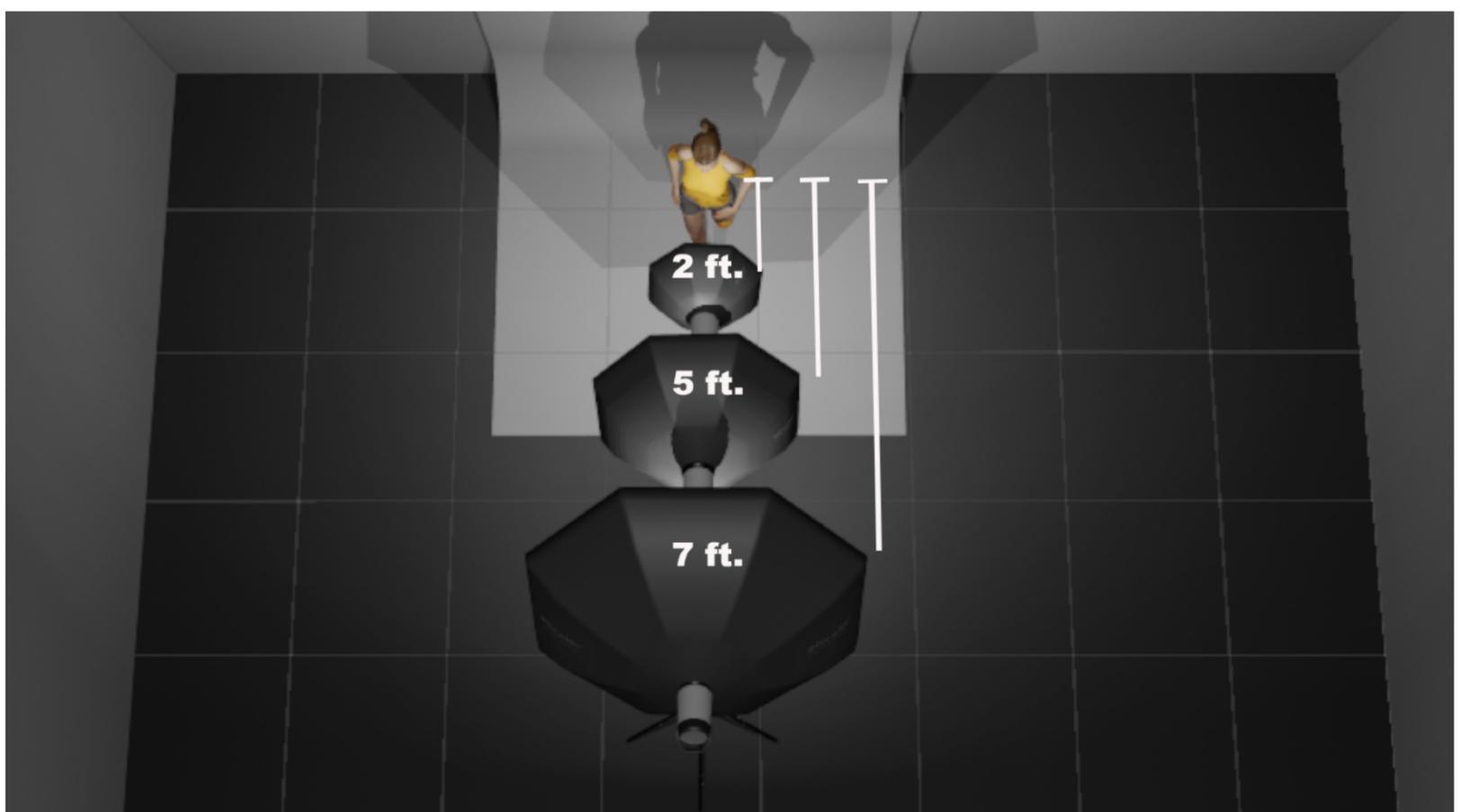
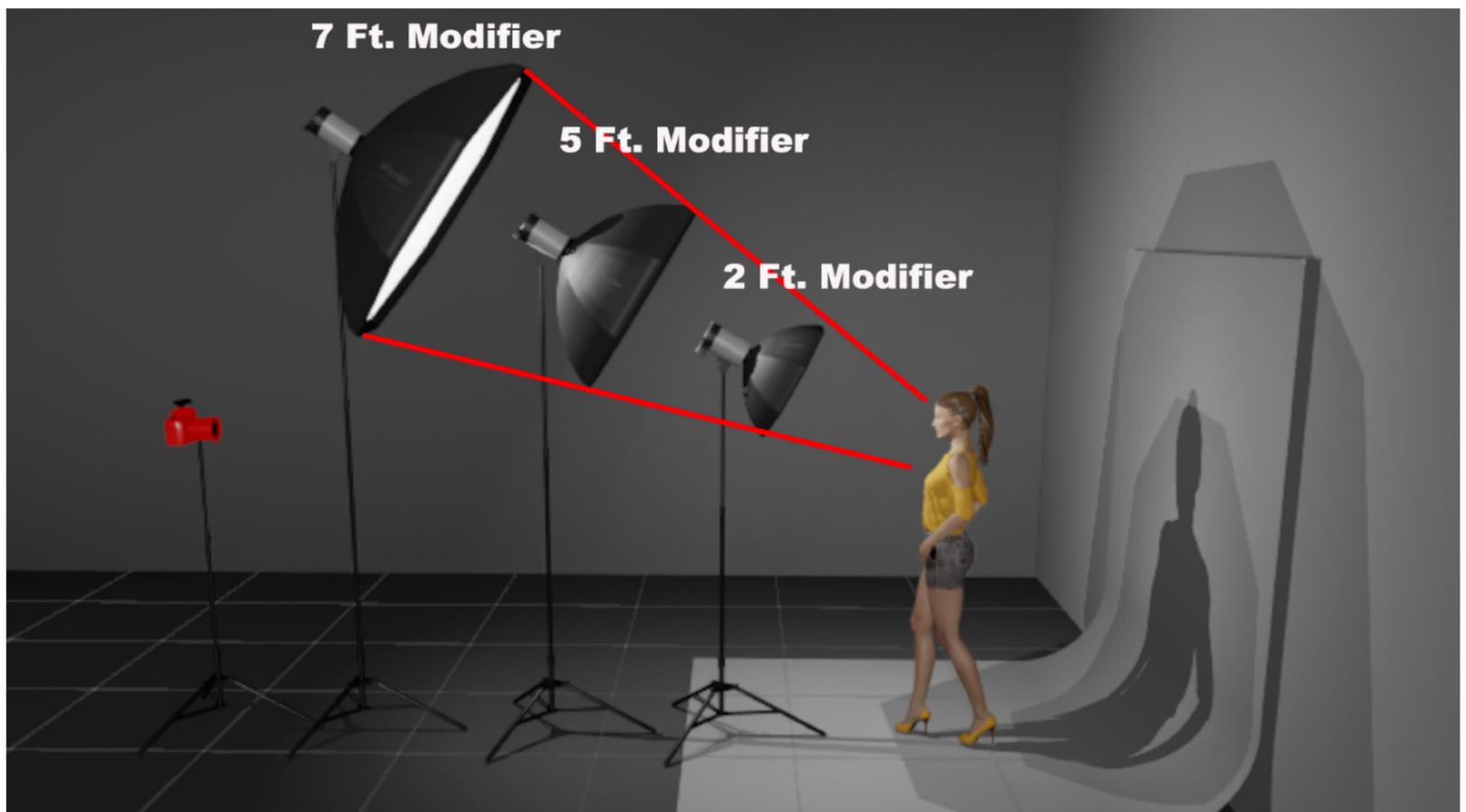
Rembrandt Cross light simulates window light or outdoors in the field, early-to-late light, when the sun is low on the horizon. Crosslight creates a light-to-shadow effect on the face giving a greater sense of depth. These two lighting approaches work well because you are emulating two lighting scenarios we find every day in the real world.

Over the camera light or Top-Down lighting simulates a skylight, open above the light source, such as standing in an ally or overcast open sky. Top-Down light creates a slight shadow under the eyes, nose, lips, and chin, building depth.

You can build a career by mastering these two lighting techniques or approaches.



Inverse Square Law Made Easy



Joel Grimes 2022 ©

We can visually understand the Inverse Square Law as it applies to choosing the correct modifier without using a mathematical equation. I will keep repeating this one statement, “The bigger the source (Modifier) in relationship to the subject, the softer or harsher the light.” One day I was reflecting on this concept and had this revelation that literally rocked my understanding of lighting and has transformed the way I now choose my modifiers. (Please refer to the two illustrations above to visually follow along.)

If you take three different size modifiers, for this example, we use a two, five, and seven ft. circular-shaped modifiers. If I place the two ft. modifier, two ft. from the subject, the five ft. modifier, five ft. from the subject, and the seven ft. modifier, seven ft. from the subject, then take a picture with each scenario starting with the two ft. modifier, then remove it and snap an image with the five ft., remove the five ft., and then snap a picture with the seven ft. (Keep in mind that you have to adjust the light output on each modifier to match the correct exposure on the subject.)

If you were in an environment with a black floor, walls, and ceiling, the light striking the face on your subject would be the same **quality** of light in all three scenarios. Mind-blowing! Of course, we don't live in an all-black environment, so as you back up a light, the angle of coverage will spread wider, thus, reflecting or bouncing light back into the subject, causing the overall image to soften. But the principle is there for us to use as a guide in choosing the size and distance we should place our light source.

Lastly, one additional phenomenon, as you back up the light from the subject, your background value will lighten. This can be calculated using the Inverse Square Law, but as a general rule of thumb, I know I can lighten the background by backing up my lights.

Rembrandt/Cross Light



For this image of Elena, I used one Westcott seven foot Octabank camera left. In the place of a seven foot Octabank you can use Westcott seven foot Umbrella with silver interior with a front diffusion. Make sure you use the strobe with the bare bulb and push the light as far back on the umbrella post as possible. This helps spread the light into the umbrella.

Rembrandt/Cross Light is universally regarded as the most beautiful light on the planet.

I used this approach exclusively for over 25 years, shooting hundreds of National Ad campaigns before I began mixing it up using more than one light. The photography degree I received from the University of Arizona gave me zero instruction or education on lighting or the use of strobes and light modifiers. However, I believe I received something much better, a foundation in Art History.

Yes, learning how the Baroque Renaissance master painters worked became my inspiration and launching point. This caused me to hack, scratch, and claw my way through learning how to get an end result. I have learned to have an attitude of constant experimenting and testing, giving me an open door to developing my own lighting personal techniques and approaches.

The key to mastering Rembrandt/Cross Light is getting the light to wrap around the face just enough to catch a hint of light on the opposite side of the light source to create a triangle shape. Thus the term, Rembrandt Triangle.

Most students are instructed to place the light 45 degrees to the subject, but after shooting over 10,000 portraits, I can tell you by placing the light 90 degrees to your subject, you gain a greater gradient tonal range of light, and the best triangle shape on the shadow side cheek.

To get the perfect placement of your light source, move the modifier towards the access of the camera until the light begins to strike the shadow side of the cheek. You will find the perfect spot by moving the modifier towards or away from the camera access. Remember that if your subject moves their head towards or away from your modifier, you will have to make a slight adjustment.



Rembrandt/Cross Light

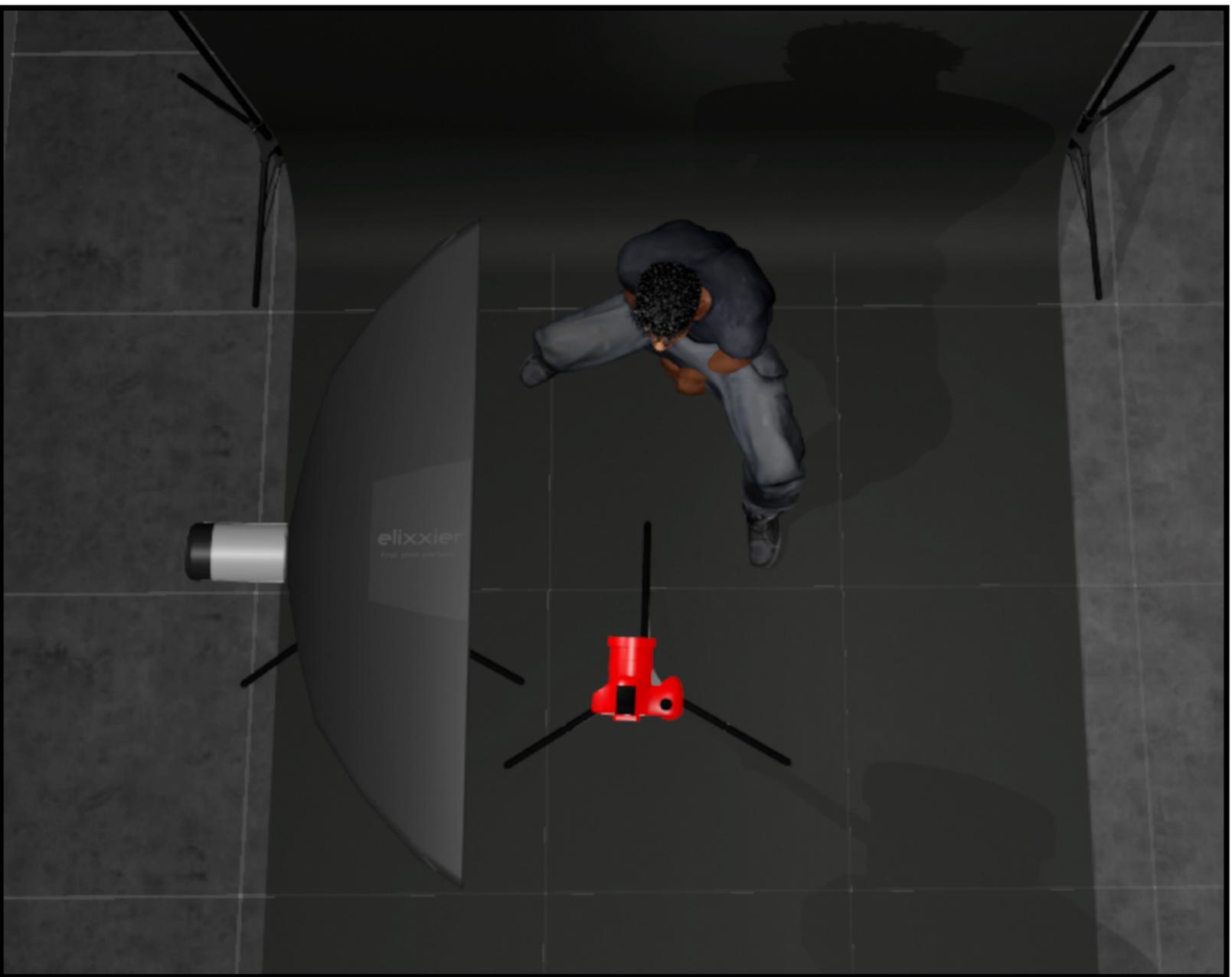


Illustration of Rembrandt/Cross Light set up 90 degrees to the cameras and subject.



Rembrandt/Cross Light

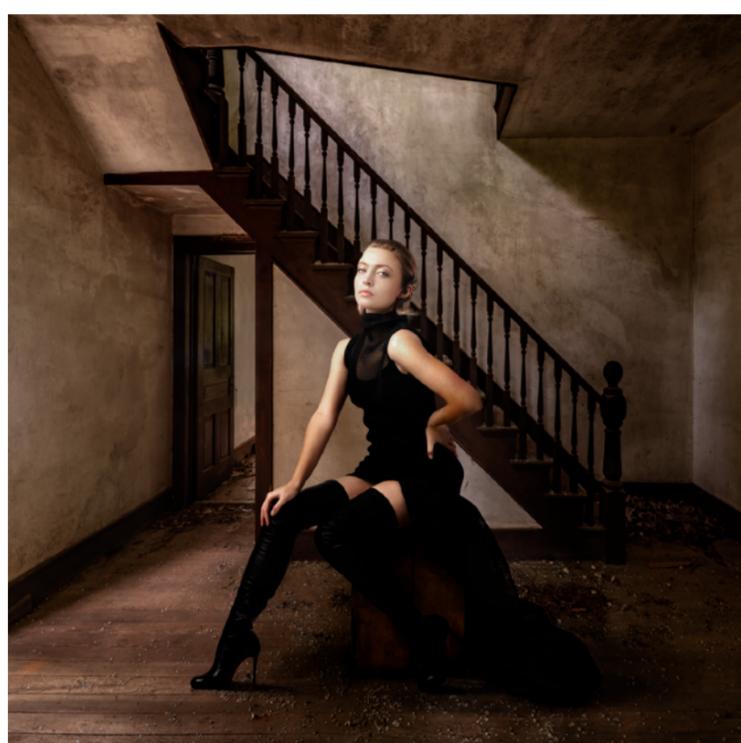
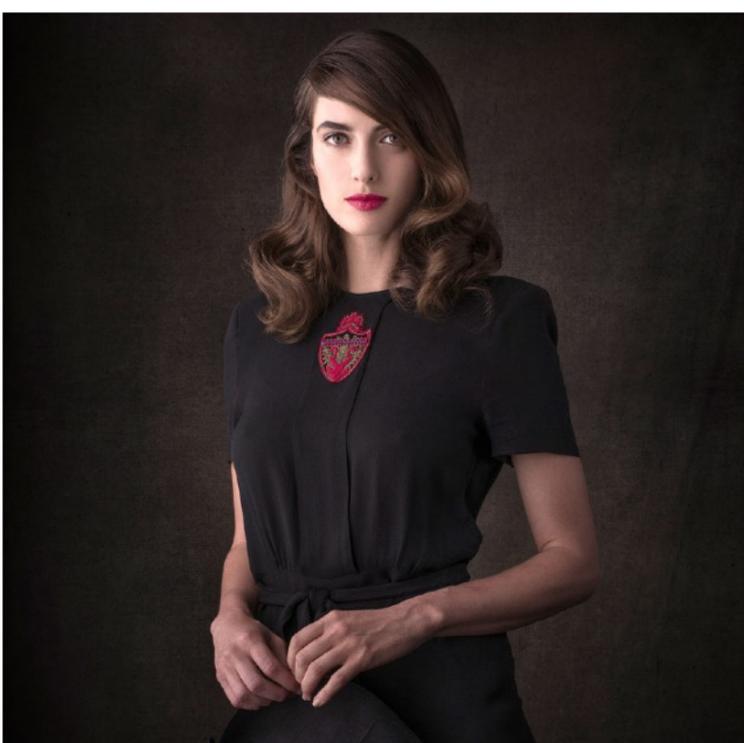


Both these images were shot using the Westcott 7ft. Octabank.



Both these images were shot using a 3x4 foot Soft Box.

Joel Grimes 2022 ©



Both these images were shot using the Westcott 7ft. Octabank.

Modifier Options:

For years I used a 3x4 ft. medium Soft Box for all my cross-light portraits. Remember, the bigger the source in relationship to the subject, the softer the light. So for beauty portraits, I often use a 4x6 ft Soft Box or a 7 ft Octabank. You can also use two modifiers side by side to create a larger light source. What brand name you have on the outside of your modifier, has little to do with the quality of light on your subject.

Top-Down Over the Camera Light



For this image of Olympic Gold Medalist Kerron Clement, I used a Westcott 24-inch Beauty Dish. I placed the modifier 24 inches from him on a boom just over the camera. As a rule of thumb, or what I call a starting point for an Over the Camera, Top-Down lighting approach, I take the diameter of the modifier and use that distance from the subject. So a 24-inch modifier at 24 inches, a 36-inch modifier at 36 inches, and so forth.

Soft light that falls from the Top-Down just over the camera can be very flattering to your subject.

You can observe Top-Down light in many scenarios in an everyday environment. One great example of this is in a downtown alley, and one side is in the shade, and the other is getting sunlight to strike the top of the buildings. By placing your subject against the shaded side of the wall, will produce gorgeous Top-Down light on your subject.

When simulating this Top-Down or Clamshell Lighting using strobes, I place the light so that the shadow under the nose reaches around 1/3 distance from the upper lip.

This is of course a personal preference, but if the shadow is too long, encroaching onto the lip, I find it distracting. Moving a modifier such as a 24-inch Beauty Dish 24 inches from your subject will enhance or hollow out the cheeks, thus the term “Beauty” Dish.

Adding fill from below can help with the shadows under the eyebrows, nose, lips, and Chin. If I am doing a waist-up or full-length portrait, I will often take two exposures, one with a fill chest level and one exposure with it out of the frame. Then in Photoshop, I remove the fill using layer masks, giving me a perfectly filled-in face.



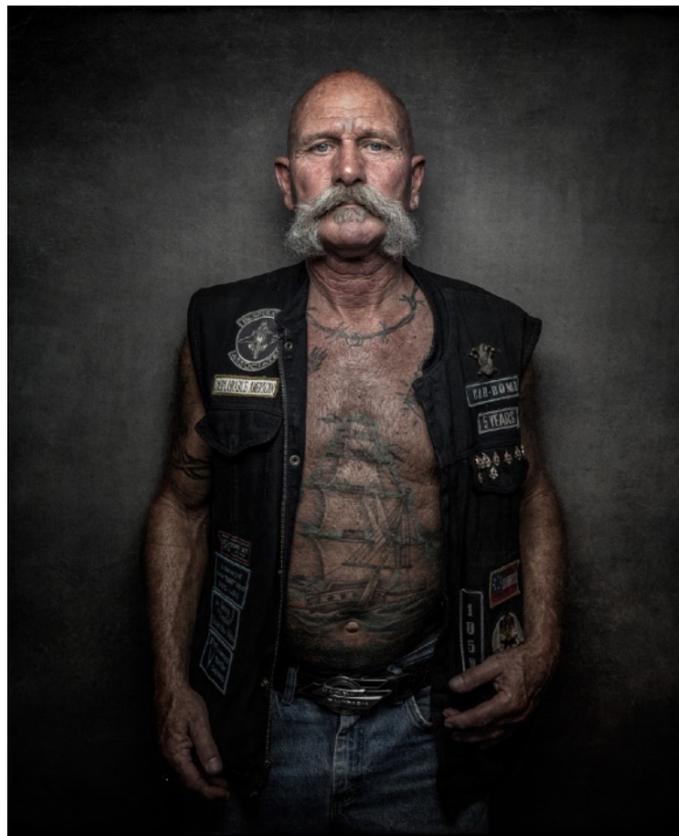
Top-Down Over the Camera Light



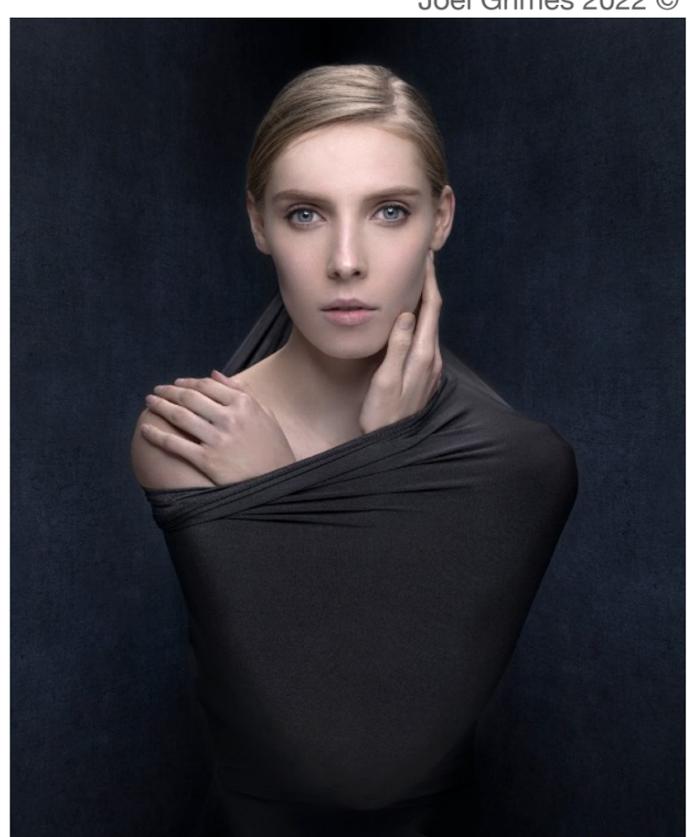
Illustration of Top-DownLight set up over the cameras. I normally use a small boom to offset the modifier.



Top-Down Over the Camera Light



Joel Grimes 2022 ©

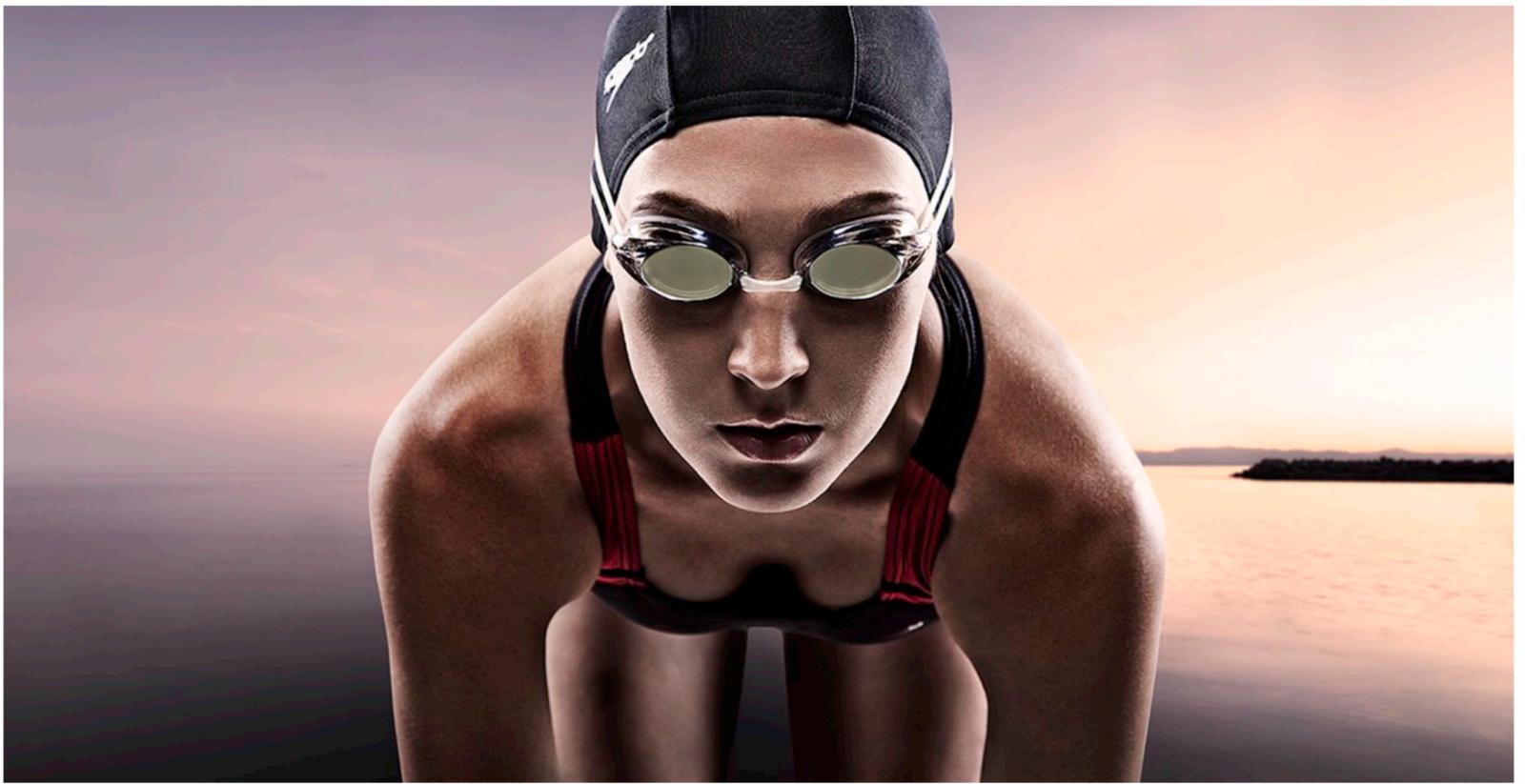


All of these images above were shot using a Westcott Beauty 24 inch Dish.

Modifier Options:

My current go-to modifier for this type of portrait is the Westcott 24-inch Beauty Dish. I was fortunate to be a part of the development of this modifier. Keep in mind, that the shape of the modifier, has little to do with the the quality of light to your subject. On occasion I use a Westcott Switch 36-inch Octabank to achieve a softer look or if I need to back the light up a bit from the subject.

Edgy Three Light Approach



For this image of Jenifer was one of the first images I shot using this Edgy Three Light approach. I used two 3x4 soft boxes as my edge lights and one 22 inch Beauty Dish.

This Edgy Three Light Approach is a perfect way to create drama in your portraits.

It's hard to find a technical name for this lighting approach. Around 15 years ago, I decided to reinvent myself and take my lighting skills to the next level. I took every modifier I could purchase and just started playing. I had never really used a "hair Light" or "Edge Light" in my portraits, but I thought I would do some tests. I also purchased a Beauty Dish but had no idea what to do with it. So out of the blue, I set up two edge lights just off the back sides of my subject and then placed the Beauty Dish just over the camera. Within a few clicks, I got my edges lights positioned to strike light across each cheek, and I then turned the power down on the Beauty Dish and like magic, there it was. I immediately told my wife I had developed a lighting look that would change my life. I had no idea how prophetic that statement was. I soon started grabbing every athlete/sports subject I could find, and before long, I was shooting ad campaigns for some of the biggest brands in the industry.

Critics often say this Edgy Three

lighting technique or approach is not a realistic representation of the real world. True. This is precisely why I believe it has been a successful lighting approach. I have often stated that my goal is NOT to represent the real world exclusively but to blend the real world with the touch of fantasy. In truth, no photograph will ever accurately represent the real world. It is, at best, an illusion or representation.

In the end, follow your intuition, play around with your lights, and see what comes of it. Then one day, you will develop a look that will rock the world.

The key to getting the right blend of mixing the two edge lights with the over-the-camera light is changing the overhead light's power output until it fits what you like. For a grungy male sports scenario, I would down the power of the overhead light. For a female beauty portrait, I would up the power the fill in the middle zone to blend the edges lights. You still need the edge lights to have a slightly higher value in the overhead light.



Edgy Three Light Approach



Illustration of Top-DownLight set up over the cameras. I normally use a small boom to offset the modifier.



Edgy Three Light Approach



Joel Grimes 2022 ©

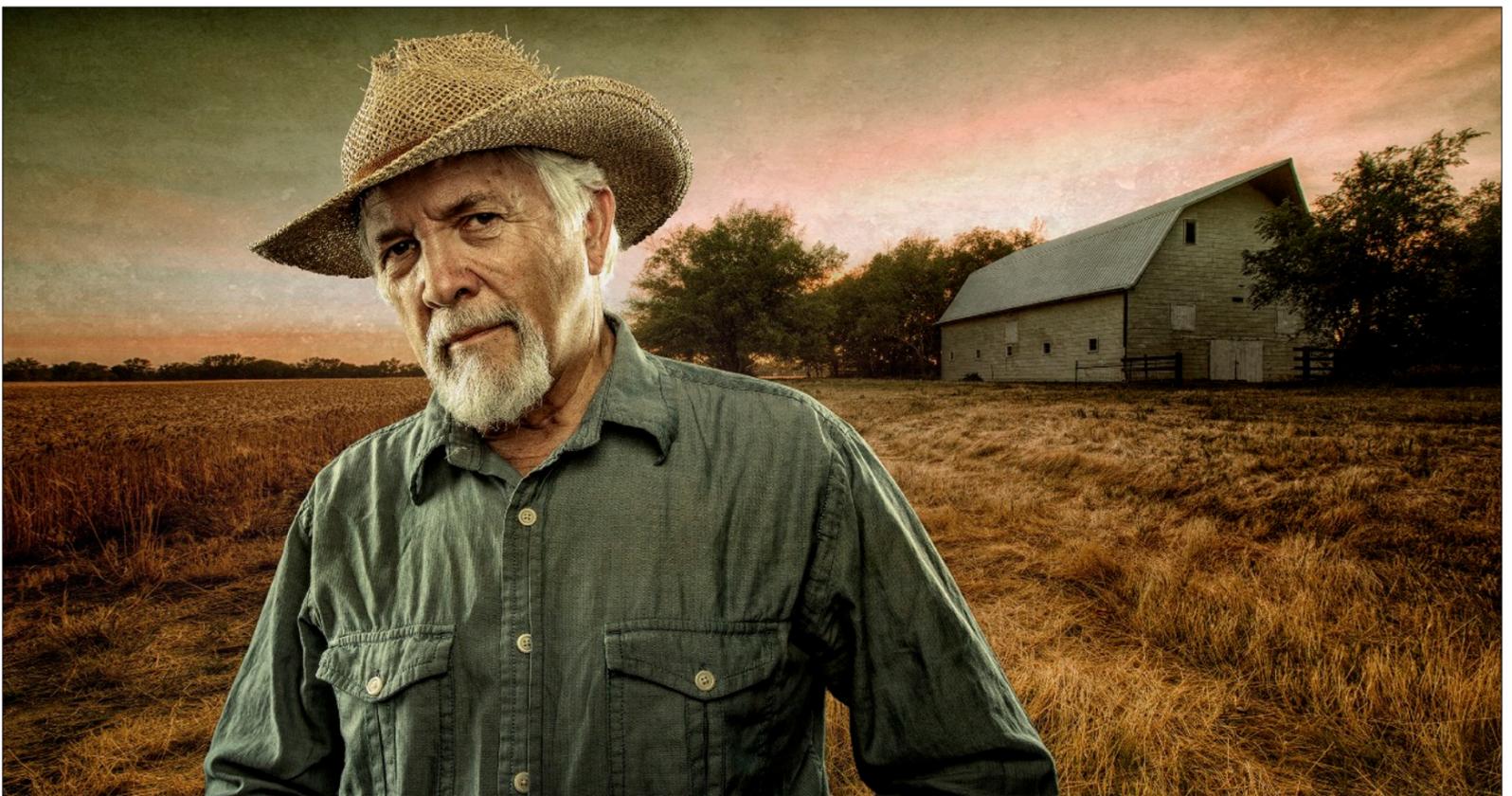


All of these images above were shot using two Westcott 3x4 Soft Boxes as my edge lights and one 5 ft. Octabank as my overhead light.

Modifier Options:

I mix the sizes of my modifiers with different combinations depending on how harsh or soft I want my final image. In some cases, I will go as large as a 5 ft. Octabank as my over-the-camera modifier. Once again, this is worth repeating, the larger the modifier in relationship to the subject, the softer the light. So to produce a harsher look, you need to back up your modifiers. Use a smaller option if you are limited to how far you can back up your modifiers. I have three main softbox sizes for my edge lights, 1x2 ft., 2x3 ft., and 3x4 ft. I always have the grids over my soft box edge slightly to minimize flair into my camera lens.

Edgy Three Light Approach



Joel Grimes 2022 ©



Both images were shot using two Westcott 3x4 ft. edge lights and One Westcott 24 inch Beauty Dish as my overhead light.

Modifier Options:

I often get the question about using strip lights as my edge light modifiers. Yes, this is a good option, but as a general rule, they will be a bit harsher than a standard softbox. It comes down to testing your modifiers to see how they work with your style of shooting and your vision as an artist. Start using what you have available and then decide from there.

Ultra Soft Three Light Approach



For this image of Jenifer was one of the first images I shot using this Edgy Three Light approach. I used two 3x4 soft boxes as my edge lights and one 22 inch Beauty Dish.

This Ultra Soft Three Light Approach is a perfect way to create delicate High Key portraits.

I thought adding this lighting approach as a separate profile would be important for two reasons. First, to illustrate that you can mix things up drastically by changing your modifiers' size. Second, for a photograph to be successful, it has to emotionally impact your viewers. I often use music as an analogy to illustrate how changing a song from a major chord progression to a minor can drastically change the song's overall mood.

Photography is no different in that my job as an artist is to connect to my views and create something that provokes an emotional impact. When setting up a shot, ask yourself what your end result is. What emotional hook can you work towards to make your image more successful? It comes down to a form

of language or communication.

To create an Ultra Soft Three Light approach, you need to get the biggest modifiers available. In this case, I use a 7 ft. Octabank or what I call the poor-mans Octa, the 7 ft. silver umbrellas with front diffusion. When using the umbrellas, ensure you back your light as far from the umbrella's center to give the light the widest spread possible. To get your strobe light to cover as much of the umbrella as possible, ensure you remove the strobe's reflector hood and use the strobe with its bare bulb.

You will notice that I have not mentioned using grids for your edge lights. As far as I know, they don't exist for any 7 ft. Modifiers. So what about flare into the lens? Well, it does exist, but because your light source is so large, it actually creates an overall softness that helps add to the overall look of this approach.



Ultra Soft Three Light Approach

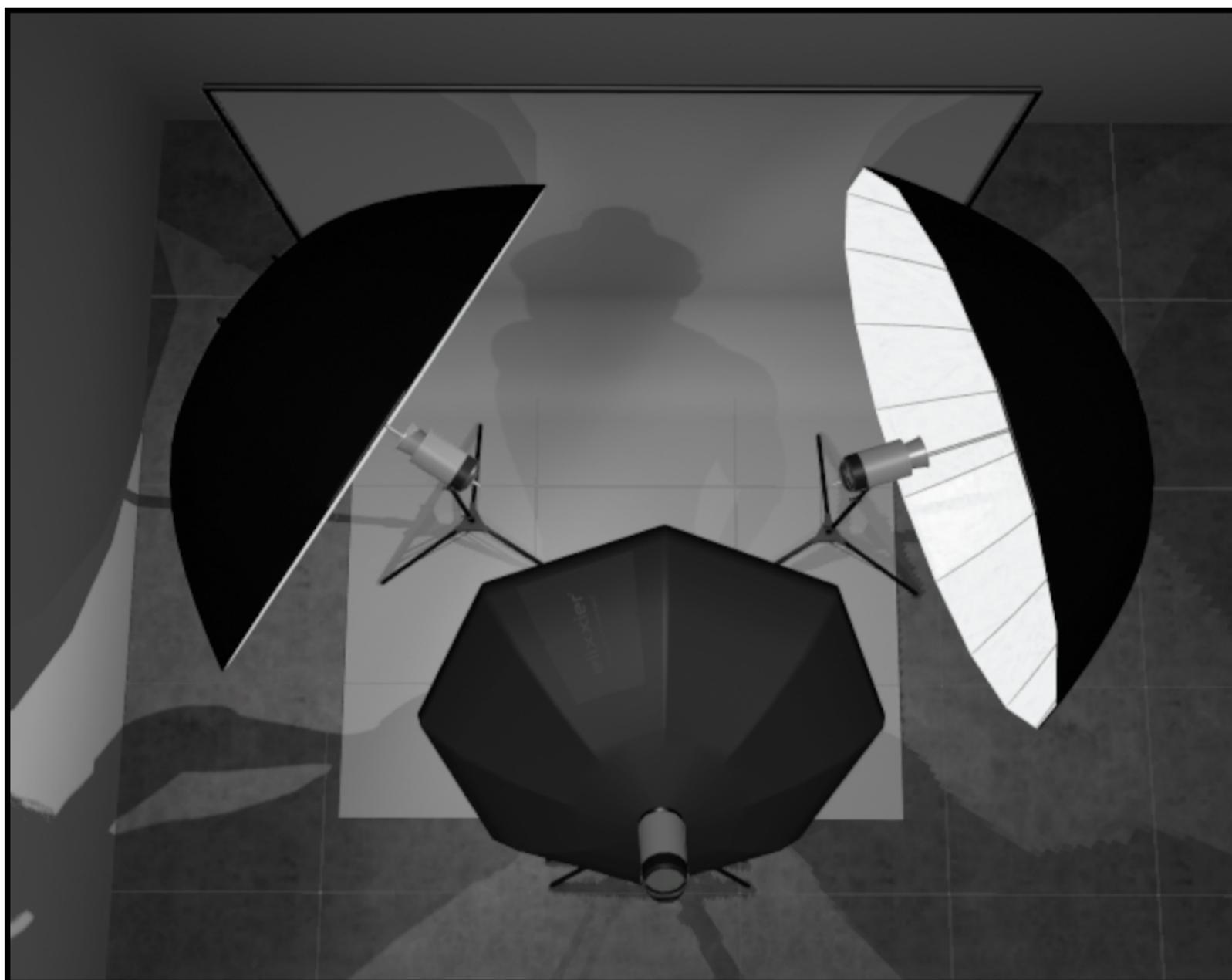


Illustration of Ultra Soft Three Light Approach. Does not show the front diffusion.



Ultra Soft Three Light Approach



Joel Grimes 2022 ©

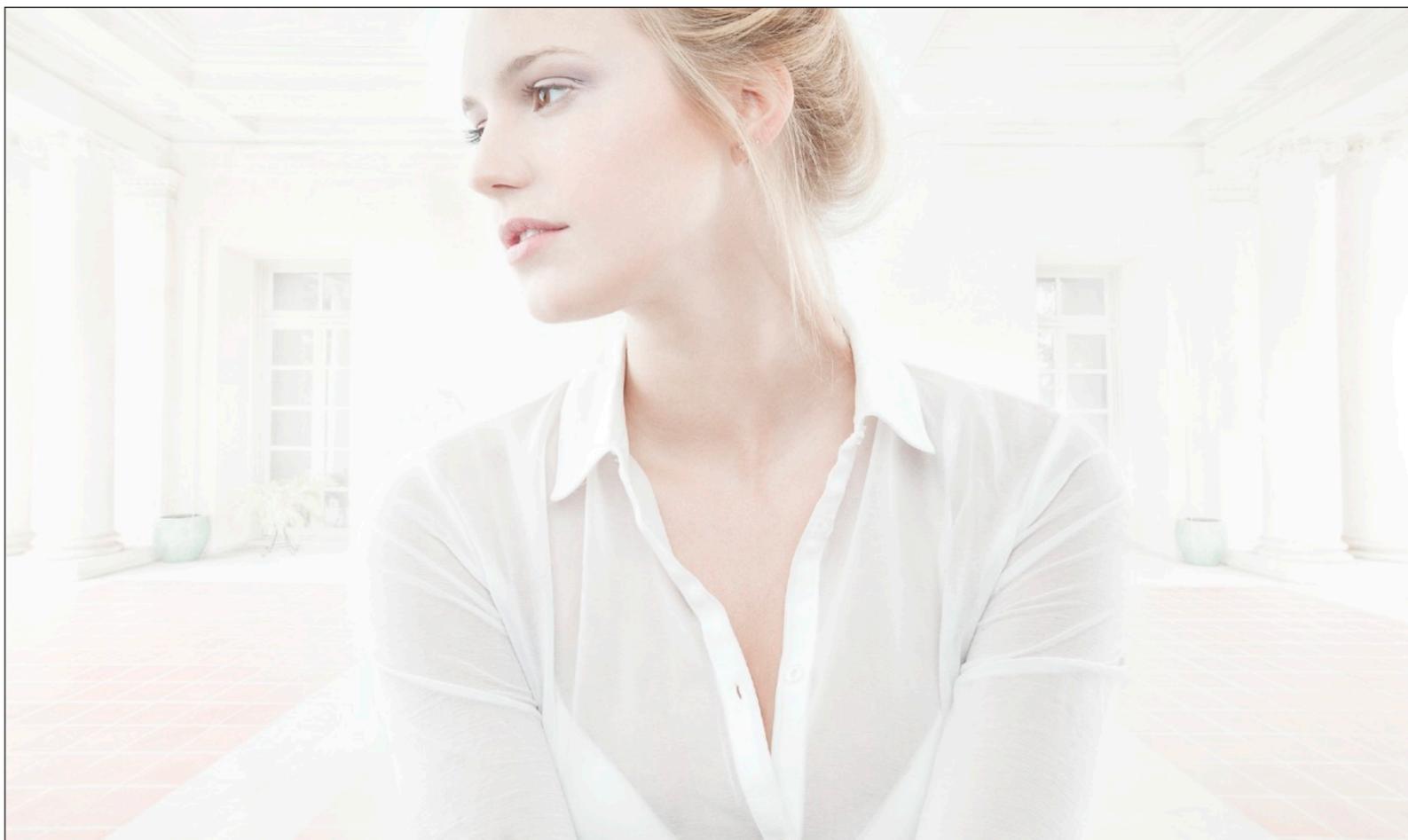


Both of these images above were shot using a two Westcott 7 ft. Octabanks as my side lights and one 5 ft. Octabank as my overhead light.

Modifier Options:

To produce the softest light possible, get your biggest modifiers and move them close to your subject. If you don't have ultra-large modifiers, you can stack your modifiers side by side. It comes down to spreading or breading the light as wide and close to your subject as possible. If you have a large scrim or sheet of diffusion, you can project light through the material and broaden the light.

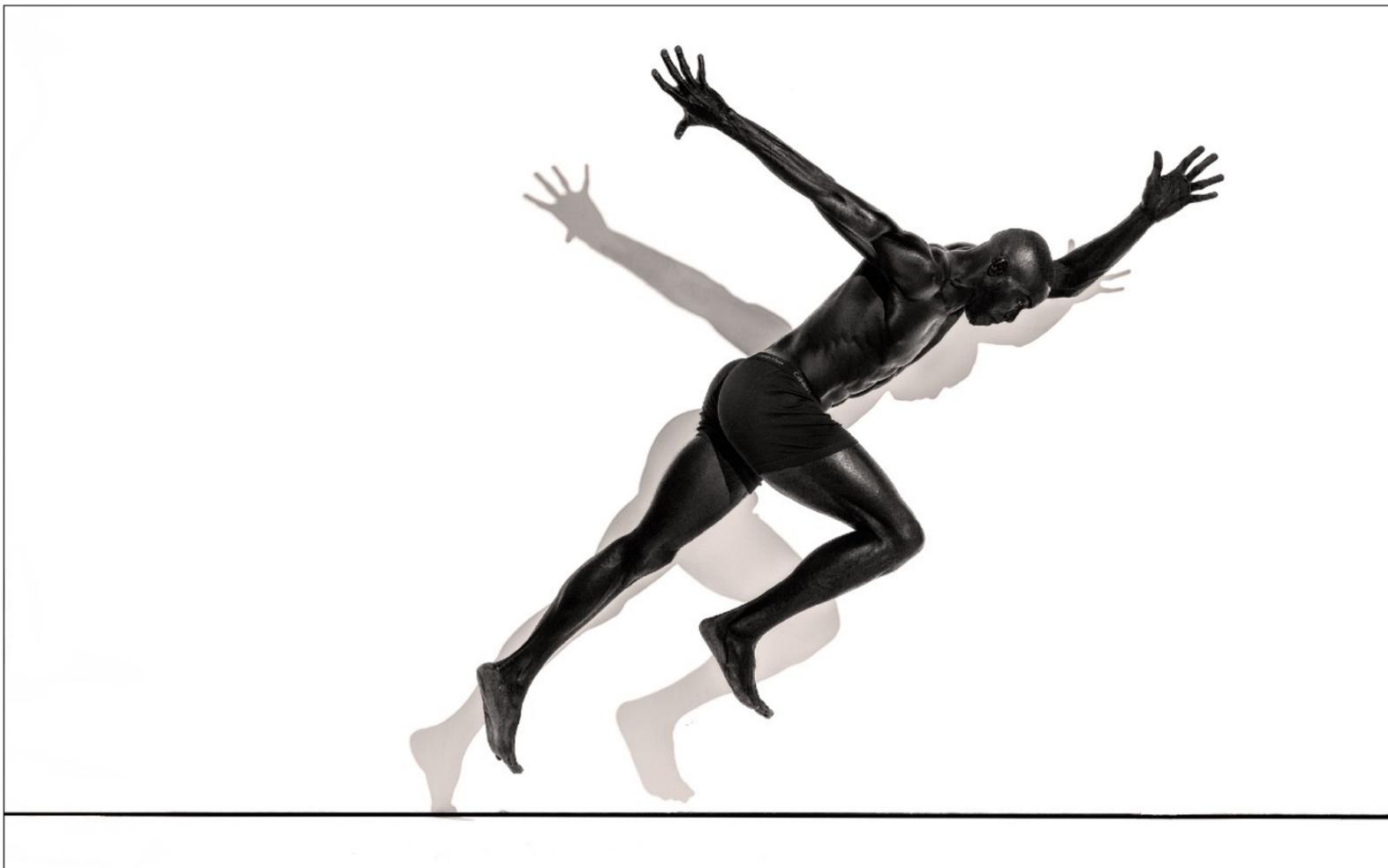
Ultra Soft Three Light Approach



Both of these images above were shot using a two Westcott 7 ft. Octabanks as my side lights and one 5 ft. Octabank as my overhead light.



Simulating Sun Light



This image of Olympic Gold Medalist Kerron Clement was created using one light with an 8-inch standard hood off the side set at 22 ft from my subject. For the fill, I used a white floor and two 4x8 sheets of foam core off camera left.

Simulating Sun Light can be an excellent option for dramatic but pleasing portraits. As a photographer, working with the sun can be a love-hate experience. It can be amazing when the sunlight is diffused, such as early morning or late afternoon light, or when you have a slightly overcast day. But it is a nightmare to work with when that sun is high on the horizon and very contrasty. I look at working with light as a teeter-totter effect. Take a harsh light on one end of the spectrum and soft light on the other end, and power one up and the other down to complement each other.

Because the sun is generally a very harsh source in the real world, you need to find a way to reduce its intensity. The first or last light in the day is generally softer due to the atmosphere enlarging the sun's diameter and defusing it. Also, the direction or angle is low, cutting across your subject. Once the sun starts climbing on the horizon, it gets

smaller and thus harsher, and eventually, the angle is overhead and not very flattering. In the real world, the sun often bounces off objects like building, mountains, sand, etc., or with the introduction of clouds, or fog, this can help soften the light.

The key to simulating sunlight in a studio environment is relatively simple. For starters, you need to emulate your source to be the same size as the sun. I take the standard hood that comes with my strobe; in this case, the Westcott FJ 400's is 5 inches. Back it up until it (approximately) is the same size as the sun at sunrise or sunset. For me, that distance is around 12 feet for my subject. If I use an 8-inch hood, that distance is around 22 ft. Then you need to fill in the overall scene to flatten the shadows. I used to use foam core off to the opposite side of my main strobe, but I found a better and more controlling way to introduce a large modifier over the camera so that I can dial in the value of light as needed.



Simulating Sun Light



Illustration of Simulating Sun Light.



Simulating Sun Light



Joel Grimes 2022 ©



All these images above were created using a One Westcott FJ 400 with the standard 5-inch Hood set at around 12 ft. From the subject. To fill in the shadows and soften the overall harshness, I used a Westcott 7 ft. Octabank.

Modifier Options:

If I have a small working space, I will position the strobe light simulating sunlight with an 8-inch reflector at about 18-22 from my subject. However, If I have a tight space to work with, I use the smaller 5-inch hood with the Westcott 400 strobe and set the distance to my subjects at around 12 ft. If your standard hood is too large, you can always cut out a 5-inch hole in black card stock and tape it to the front of your hood.

Simulating Sun Light



Joel Grimes 2022 ©



All of these images were created using two Westcott FJ 400 lights. For my main light source, I used the standard 5-inch hood 12 ft from my subject light to simulate the sun. For the overhead light, I used on Westcott 7 ft. Octabank.

Modifier Options:

The overhead modifier that fills in the shadows is not as critical as you might think. You could use any modifier, including a large umbrella. You can also take a foam-core flat and bounce light into it, filling in the shadows. Remember our basic building blocks; introducing bounce into the scene will soften the overall feel to your subject.

Short Light



This image of Moses was shot using three modifiers, two were the Westcott 3x5 Soft Boxes with grids and a 24 inch Westcott Beauty Dish. For the Short-Side light I increased the value to create a strong edge light and with the second 3x5 Soft Box I lowered the power output to give a subtle value of light on the back of his head and neck.

Short Light can be an excellent option for dramatic, edgy portraits.

I have already mentioned that the name we associate with a particular lighting technique is not as crucial as producing a result that meets a creative artistic end vision. We start mudding the process when we approach lighting from an overly technical mindset and forget our primary goal of creating something that moves our viewers on an emotional level.

Short Light, emphasizes the Light striking the Short-side of the face, creating a brighter value of light than the Broad-side of the face. This can be a variation of the Edgy Three Light approach we have covered earlier by just turning the subject's face to expose the Broad-side, letting the edge light highlight the Short-side. In the example of

Moses above, I still have an edge light on the back of the head and neck. But I have powered down the value to further emphasize the edge light on the Short-side of the face.

How do I know what value to dial in to create the correct exposures from each light? Well, you could use a more technical approach, plotting this out using lighting ratios and the aid of a flash meter. (I have not used a light meter during a photo shoot in over 35 years) Or you could approach it with your intuition, emotions, or feelings. This might be a stretch for someone who leans toward a more engineer mindset. You may lean toward light being plotted, measured, and defined. Please don't take it from me; I would experiment by trying both approaches and see which final outcome you like best. My guess is the latter will prevail.



Short Light



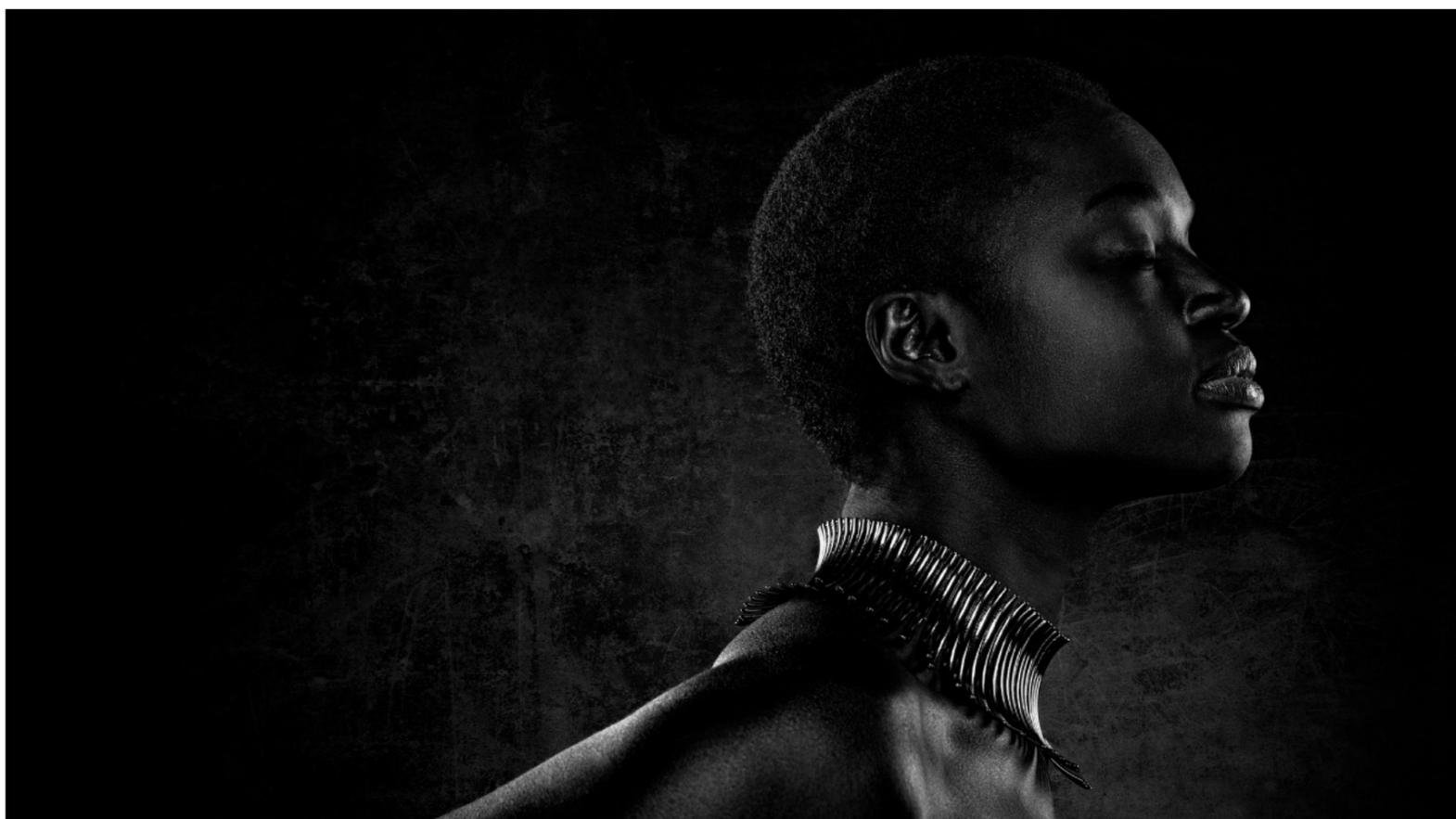
Illustration of Simulating Short Light.



Short Light



Joel Grimes 2022 ©



The top left image was created using two Westcott FJ 400's, one in a 3x5 Westcott softbox with grid and one Westcott 7 ft. Octabank over the top of the subject. The other three images were created using my standard EdgeThree Light approach but tuning up the light striking the Short side of the subject.

Short Light



Joel Grimes 2022 ©



The image at the top was shot on location. I positioned a small 18x24 softbox on a boom to project through the front windshield. I then set up one 24-inch Beauty Dish just over the camera to fill in the subject's face. An added benefit to the side light was it created highlights on the raindrops on the window.

Modifier Options:

Depending on the softness or harshness I want on my subjects. I generally switch between the 24-inch Beauty dish and the 5 ft for my over-the-camera modifier. Octabank. For my edge lights, I switch between the 1x2 ft., 2x3 ft., and 3x4 ft. I always have the grids over my soft box edge to minimize flair into my camera lens.

Broad Light



This image of Faith was shot on location using one 24-inch Westcott Beauty Dish. You can see that I placed my subject so that sun creates a highlight on the short side of the cheek. To achieve the shallow depth of field, I used the strobe in High-Speed-Sync mode to allow my shutter speed to reach 1/8000 of a second and set my aperture to f/1.2.

Broad Light can be an excellent option for character revealing portraits. It is worth repeating; master Top-Down Over-The-Camera and Rembrandt/Cross Light, and there are an infinite number of variations that you can mix up to change the overall feel of your images. This is why I believe having a set-in-stone glossary of lighting terms can be dangerous or detrimental. Let the glossary of terms and lighting definitions become a starting point for developing your personal style.

Broad Light is meant to be less dramatic than Short Light and is often used when photographing beauty portraits. Broad Light emphasizes the Light striking the Broad-side or the extended or open side of the face. Generally, the Light is evenly lit from the ear to the end of the jaw. If I am using the Rembrandt/Cross light approach, I have my subject turn into the main Light, thus broadening the face line. The same effect can happen while using Top-Down Over-The-Camera lighting by increasing the value or

output of light over the camera.

As you raise your primary Light source, you will begin to create a shadow under the chin giving a slight depth separating the chin from the neck. With time you will start to see these subtle nuances that can enhance or create a more flattering look. It would be difficult even to guesstimate the number of portraits I have shot in my 40-year career; tens of thousands, no doubt. I always watch where the light strikes a subject and make adjustments as needed. It's part of the challenge knowing that every subject is created differently, and my goal is to build the best possible portrait of any given subject in front of my lens.

Keep in mind that deciding which lighting approach you should choose often falls on a personal preference and what final end mood or feel you want to achieve. If I struggle with where to start, I just start the process and let the magic begin. If something isn't working, I punt and move on to another approach.



Broad Light



Illustration of Simulating Broad Light.



Broad Light



Broad Light



Both of these images above were shot using one modifier. For the top image I used a Westcott 36 inch Rapid box and for the bottom images I used the Westcott 24 inch Beauty Dish.

Modifier Options:

By now you have probably guess that modifiers are just banks of light that come in different sizes and shapes. With so many options on the market I believe in the end this just confuses the learning process. Lighting is a mystery but that mystery fade as we learn and apply the basic building blocks of lighting. I would start to three modifiers, a small circular 24 inch Beauty Dish type for over the camera, a 3x4 Softbox for Rembrandt/Cross light and a 7 ft. Parabolic silver interior Umbrella with front diffusion.

Ring Light



This image of Moses was shot using a 18-20 inch Continuous Ring Light in a studio environment. Note the circular highlights in his eyes.

A Ring Light can add an interesting look to your portraits. I can't say I have done a ton of work using a Ring Light. But it has a unique look this can make for some compelling images. It can smooth out the skin and hide any flaws. I have used a Ring Light to fill in shadow and flatten out the contrast of harsh light. I have used two types of Ring Lights. Several years ago, I picked up a continuous 18-20-inch diameter Ring Light. I believe they are a dime a dozen now, but I was one of the first to get my hands on one at the time.

The challenge of using any continuous light is the ambient light has to be very low, or it will overpower the effect.

However, I have used it at night with a battery pack at night on location, which has worked out nicely.

The second Ring Light I have used is a Paul C. Buff strobe flash unit. Your camera mounts directly onto the Ring Flash, making it a challenge if you want to hand hold it. Like with any technique, it comes down to experimenting with subjects and seeing what works for you as an artist. Often, I take a piece of equipment and find a way of using it that may differ from its initial use or what others are doing. As with the continuous Ring Light, I shot a few HDR portraits shooting three images, one stop under, normal and one stop over. I found the skin tones take on a smooth, clean look.



Ring Light



Illustration of how to place a Ring Light.



Ring Light



Joel Grimes 2022 ©



All four of these images above were created using a 18-20 inch continuous Ring Light in conjunction with shooting a three exposure bracketed HDR.

Modifier Options:

While I was putting this E-Book together, I Googled Continuous/Strobe Ring Light, and several options came up. For best results, I have found that getting the Ring Light as close to your subject as possible is best. Remember that you will get a very distinct round highlight in the eyes.

Spot Light



This image of Daniel was shot using one Westcott Optical Spot and one Westcott 7 ft. Octabank as the overhead fill light.

A Spot Light can draw your viewers eye to your subjects face. There is a variety of ways to achieve a spotlight on your subject. Over the years, I used tried a variety of methods. One way is to take a 10-degree grid on a standard hood, and then, by using black gaffers tape, you cover the front grid leaving a half-inch slit to allow a narrow band of light to pass through. It would be best if you got the light close to your subject to make this work.

The easiest way to achieve a controllable spot is by using an Optical lens. There are a few options on the market that will connect to your existing strobe, but most recently, I have been using the one recently released by Westcott. This unit comes with a lens, but you can also use Canon EF mount lenses to give you some additional control.

It also includes inserts with various patterns to project onto your subject or surface. I have also similarly used the old-school photo snoots, but again, you must get the light close to your subject to keep the light as narrow as possible.

Lastly, there is one additional technique I have used. The Westcott FJ 400's strobes come with a Masking Mode that allows you to program the strobe to fire every alternate frame. By setting one light to illuminate the background that fires every time and then having one light that illuminates the subject but goes off every other frame. By taking two images, one with both the background and the subject lit, and one with the subject silhouetted, but only the background is lit. Then in Photoshop, using layers, I can paint or select the area on the subject I want to be revealed or illuminated. It sounds complicated, but it is quite simple.



Spot Light

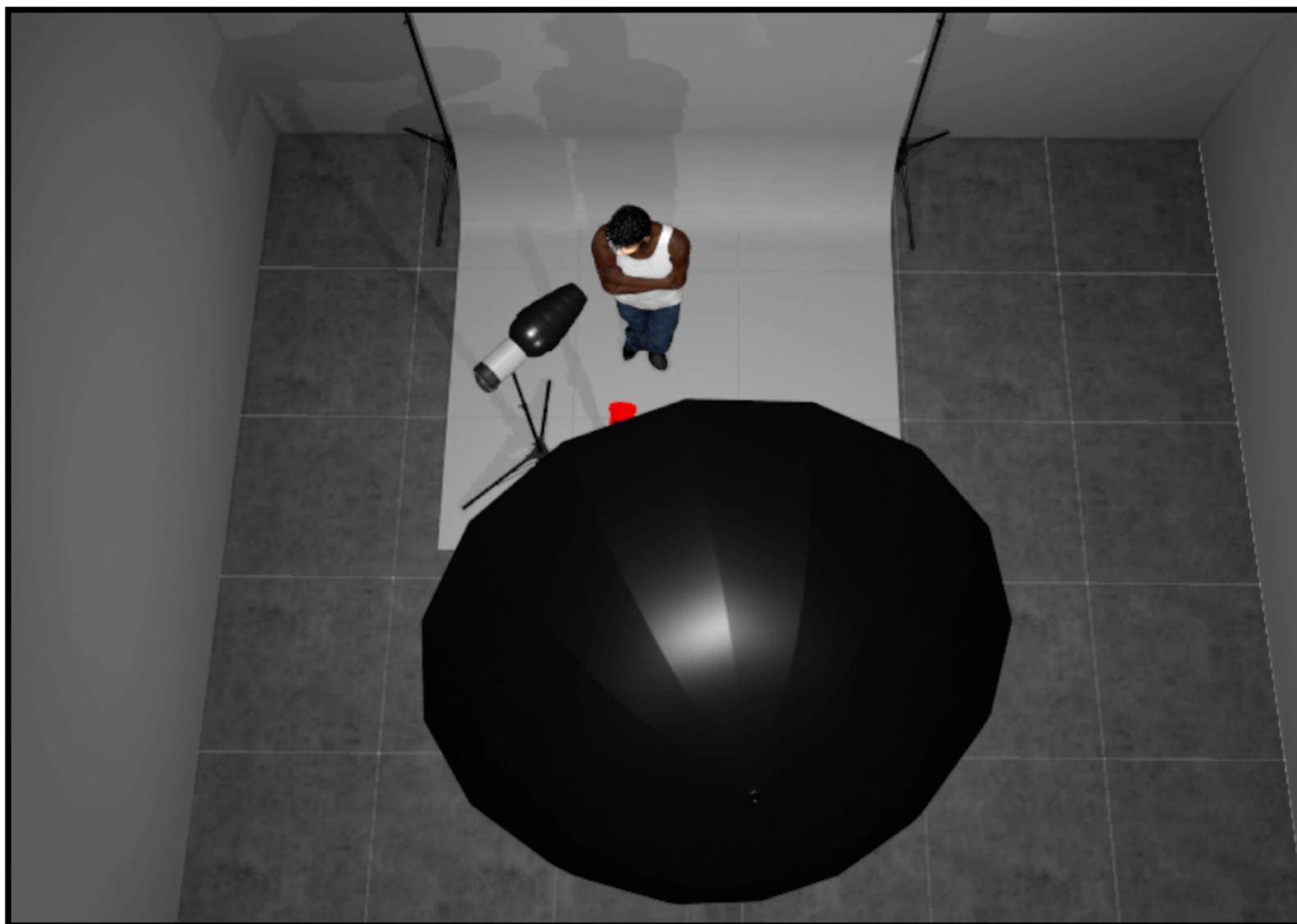


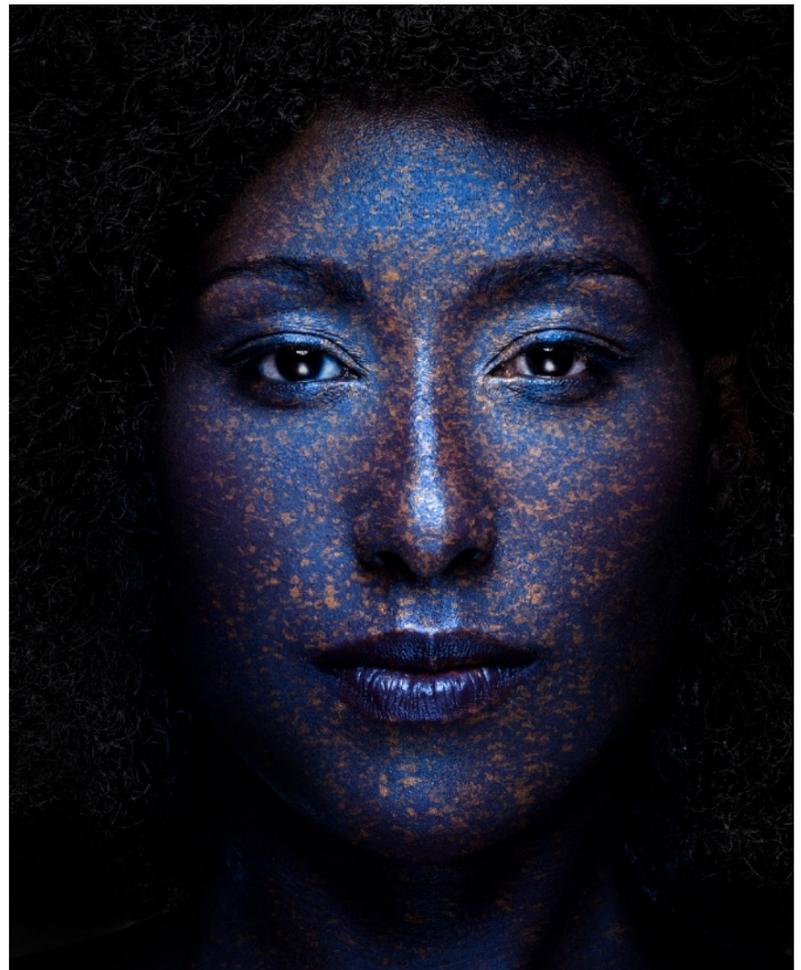
Illustration of how to place a SpotLight.



Spot Light



Joel Grimes 2022 ©

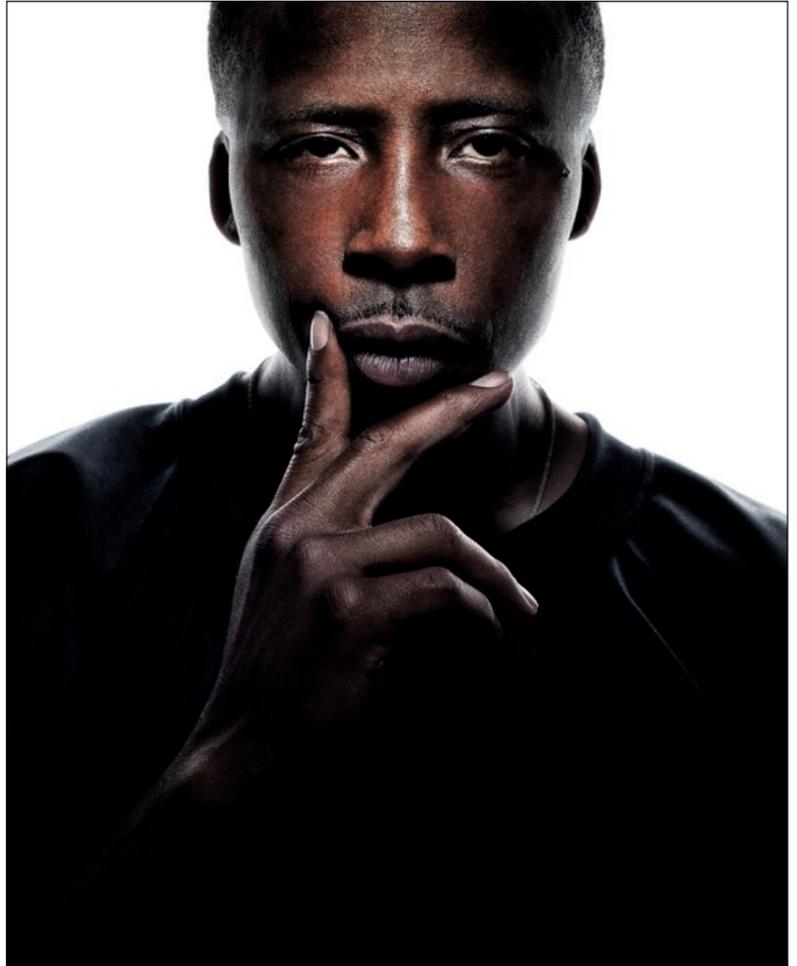


The two top and bottom left images were shot using the double exposure masking technique I explained on the previous page. It is crucial that you keep your subject as still as possible.

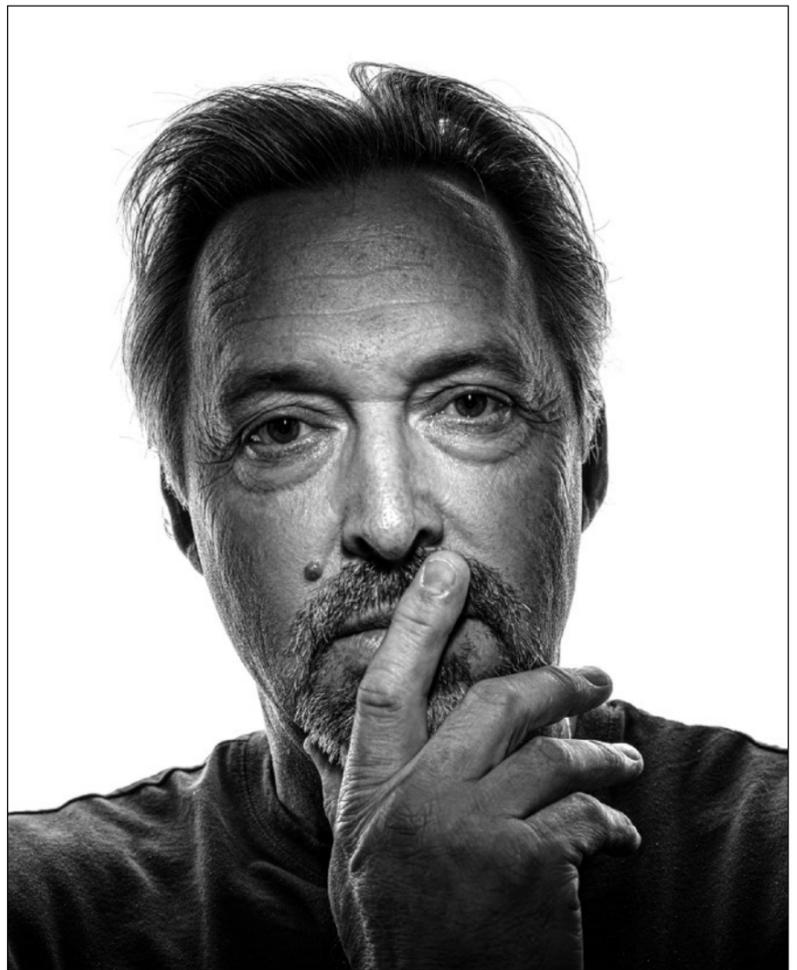
Modifier Options:

To have the most control over the subject, I normally have an additional modifier to fill in light to the overall scene keep the power value down. For the image of Daniel on the previous page, I used a Westcott 7 ft. Octabank over high over the camera's top, pointing down to produce a soft topdown light, giving value to the overall scene. For the Spot, I was able to direct it to his face off camera left. You can adjust the softness of the Optical Spot by focusing the lens. In this case, I keep the edges as soft as possible.

Spot Light



Joel Grimes 2022 ©



The top left image was shot using the Westcott Optical Spot. The other three images were shot using a standard 8 inch hood with a 10% grid taped to leave a 1/2 inch slit to narrow the light.

Modifier Options:

For the white background on the top right and the bottom two images, I used a 7 ft. Octabank placed about one foot behind the subjects. I normally increase the power on the Octabank until the wrinkles in the fabric disappear. You have to be careful you don't set the output on the background light to bright or it will start to create flare into the lens.

“The single greatest opportunity you have to reach your goal and rock the world has little to do with talent. Hard work will outperform talent any day of the week. Get off the couch, put down the potato chips, pick up your camera and start practicing.”



For more education materials and content from Joel Grimes, visit to joelgrimes.com

To see more of Joel Grimes images, visit to portfolio.joelgrimes.com