Facial Analysis

This article belongs completely to Ed Shapiro, a professional photographer, who contributed a lot to the art. It is based on the content of a topic of forum where Ed generously describes aspects of Facial Analysis that should be performed before each session. I have to thank Ed for answering this difficult question. I could not find any place where Ed gathered and published his knowledge, so I decided to extend the audience of the forum where he posted this topic. So here it goes…

Facial Analysis In Fine Portraiture

There is not that much literature today on the subject of facial analysis. In certain circles, portraiture is now a more casual practice, but the same old "rules" still apply if you intend to create flattering images for your clients, There are so many automatic and digital cameras in today's consumer market, that there is now little or no need for customers to patronize a professional photographer simply to record images of the family or themselves strictly for souvenir purposes. They come to the professional and plunk down their hard earned money when they want or need something special - something that they can't do themselves - create a truly flattering, aesthetically pleasing image - devoid of flaws and "defects" or shall we say, an idealization and realization of their self image that still looks natural. Having these corrective skills will increase you sales and bring you many referrals. It's a simple marketing matter - most people do not like bad pictures of themselves and will spend good money to have good ones made.

Before you can study and master the art of facial analysis you need to have a fairly good grounding in the classical method of fine portraiture as discussed in the Zuga lessons, better video-taped lessons and publications. If you can attend a class that offers parallel training in basic methods and facial analysis, both as integral parts of professional portraiture - that would be a best of both worlds scenario - somewhat rare these days remember. Years ago there was quite an emphasis on glamour portraiture which entailed facial aesthetics to a fault. But that was long ago and here we are today in 2002.

To cover everything to do with facial analysis would require a tome filled with literature, illustrations and photographs - much more than even one of my long-winded overly protracted articles could include. The operative words here are GUIDANCE from an experienced mentor and PRACTICE in order to hone your skills in recognizing problems and quickly correcting them without putting your subject ill at ease. What follows here is a condensed set of facts and guide lines to help you out. When I refer to normal camera angles, I am referring to the issues of "a good likeness" as discussed in the free lessons (by Joseph Zeltzman). Since there are also aesthetic issues concerning the body as well as the head of the subject and all portraits are not restricted to head and shoulders views - I will touch a bit on those elements as well. I am also assuming that the proper lens focal lengths (for portraiture) are in use, thereby not introducing intrinsic distortion to your images, even before you get started.

The Tools Of The Trade

Tool #1 - The Pre Sitting Consultation.

I always hold pre-sitting consultations with every client. Besides the fact that these consultations improve the bond between me and my subjects, it gives me a chance to do my analysis of each subject and spells out what the clients should expect in terms of quality and what I need from them to insure their expectations. At the consultation we can discuss cosmetics, hair style, clothing styles and colors that will affect the final results. At that time so many potential problems can be prevented, negated and precluded, thereby making our work in the camera room much easier. These points will be mentioned as we go along and you will see how many of them are attributed to the pre sitting session.

Tool #2 - Posing And Camera Position.

This refers to the actual positioning of a subject as to stance, position on a seat, placement of the legs, feet, legs, arms, and hands. Also the subject's posture and carriage of the head - right up to the facial expression and the look in the eyes. All that and how the camera is placed in relation to that subject in a given pose, as to camera height, lateral movement, forward tilt of the camera and point of view. For head and shoulders portraits we can start off the camera at the subjects eye level or slightly higher, tilting the camera slightly down when needed.

Tool #3. Lighting.

The use of lighting as a corrective tool in portraiture is a major methodology. With the proper use and control of light and shadow, the photographer can "shape the face" - obscuring or highlighting or obscuring various facial features. Lighting combined with posing techniques are the main tools in corrective portrait techniques.

Tool #4. "Optical Retouching"

The use of soft focus lenses and filters.

Tool #5. Retouching.

After we have done everything we can, in the camera, to produce the best image, certain corrections may still have to be made by an expert retoucher. The traditional method of negative and print retouching is my favorite. Digital retouching is very good as well once all the tools are mastered. I have observed lately that traditional retouchers make the best digital retouchers because they sometimes have more knowledge of facial structure and know what to retouch and what to leave alone - they know when to stop retouching.

In Actual Practice

If, at the pre-sitting consultation, I detect a significant problem. I will ask the subject to let me make a few Polaroids for my own use. Oftentimes, the client will tell me about certain problems that they have noticed in previous photographs of themselves such as an uneven smile or squinty eyes. A few test shots will hint at the corrections I have made and are going to make thereby putting the client at ease for the upcoming session. Even if the client shows up at my door for a rush business portrait, without a presetting consultation, in order to accommodate their needs, I have to begin analyzing at once - creativity on demand! So let's start looking at some of the most common problems and their remedies.

Face

I will seat the subject, facing forward with the head and shoulders facing in the same direction. I observe the face with flat lighting and start with the symmetry of the face. Most faces are asymmetrical so I try to keep the larger side on the shadow side of the lighting. At this point I turn on the main light and check out my findings - to be sure I bring the light on that side and the other side, just to make sure. One of my first important teachers was Adolph "Papa" Fassbender, he professed that "everybody would like to have an oval face like an egg". That does not mean literately that everyone wants to look like Humpty-Dumpty. It implies that oval is better that overly thin, or very round photographic renditions of the face, and are considered to be more aesthetically pleasing to most portrait clients. Ergo, when creating a pose, deciding on a camera angle and a lighting pattern, I try to get near that oval shape. To shape the face that is:

Very Thin

Use [butterfly](#), modified butterfly or [broad](#) lighting. In certain cases [short](#) lighting can be used if the highlight to shadow ratio is not too high. Kicker lights can also be helpful. Full face and 2/3 camera positions can work. Using the subject's hands, near the face cab help hide or broaden a weak chin-jaw line.

Very Round

Use [Rembrandt](#), Double Main, Modified [Butterfly](#) or [Split](#) Lighting. [Short](#) lighting and a 2/3 views of the face make a good combination for very round faces. Put the heavier side of the face on the shadow side of the [short](#) lighting pattern.

Very Heavy And Round

Here we need to look out for jowls, double chins, and sagging cheeks or puffiness caused by excessive fat on that part of the face. The same treatment as round faces is in order with some other precautions. To avoid double or multiple chins, have the subject lean forward at the waist, using an adjustable posing table to support the elbow and forearm - all of which do not show in the composition. Have the subject lift their head and shoot from a higher camera position - tracking with the mask of the face. Bringing the hand up to the chin in a pleasing position, will further obscure the chin and neck and may not require as high a camera angle as when the hand is not present. Also watch out for squinting when the subject is smiling. This is more prevalent in subjects with heavy faces. The squinting can be lessened by simply asking the sitter to open their eyes a bit more when smiling or having them look slightly above camera level by directing their gaze with your hand. Lowering the main light a bit to make sure there is adequate shadow detail and catchlights also helps to counteract the effects of squinting. Do not discourage smiling altogether because smiling has a way of stretching the facial muscles thereby eliminating other problems like an uneven mouth or other sagging parts of the face. Also make sure collars, ties, scarves and other accessories are well fitting and do not bunch up around the neckline. Often times, heavy set folks develop a no-neck look which can be improved with a v-neckline and a necklace, scarf, or ascot can be used to further enhance the neckline. This method is what I use for stout or heavy set individuals as well.

The Eyes Are The Windows Of The Soul

That being the case, the rendition of the eyes is of the utmost importance in fine portraiture. In tight close-up shots a place the eyes about 1/3 into the composition, which is the strongest point in the competition. The expression in the eyes and the rendering of the eyes become the motif of the entire portrait - so here's the info about the orbital part of the face - the eyes and eye sockets.

Deep Set Eyes

This is where the eyes are set deeply into the sockets - and the sockets serve as an awning to the eyes not allowing the main light to penetrate into the eyes in such a way as to produce enough shadow detail in the negative, thereby underexposing the eyes. The results are very poor rendition of the actual color of the eyes, little or no catchlights , and a dark shadow forming in the sockets (sometimes called raccoon eyes) that cause the eyes to look sinister, vacant or blackened. This problem can be easily remedied by simply lowering the main light to get under the brow revealing the eye color and getting that catchlight which may end up at the 3 O'clock position instead of the traditional 2 O'clock position. Sometimes I use an old cinematographer's technique where by the key light it placed in a normal position to shape the face and a small slightly weaker light is mounted on or close to the camera to "open up" the eyes and place the catchlight where it belongs.

Protruding Eyes

this is a less common problem than deep set eyes. Very large eyes, which show a lot of white surrounding the pupil are usually just a hereditary feature, where as markedly protruding eyes may result from glaucoma, a serious eye

disease which nowadays can be controlled with medications. I cases like theses, I am usually more successful with frontal views of the face with modified butterfly lighting - again, controlling the subjects' gaze by having them follow my hand movements. Another approach is to make a 2/3 view of the face with the shoulders forming a dynamic diagonal line and the head and eyes pointed downward. By having the subjects' eyes follow you hand with their eyes, you can find a disposition of the eyes, where some of the eyes are partially covered by the lid, thereby reducing the apparent size of the eyes.

Asymmetrical Or Crossed Eyes And Lazy Lids

Very few people have totally symmetrical faces. The folks that do, oftentimes grace the front pages of fashion magazines. A common problem is subjects with one eye appreciably smaller than the other. I find that this is easily remedied by doing a 2/3 face and placing the smaller eye furthest from the camera. The will appear as a more normal perspective to the viewer in that objects further from the camera (or point of view) normally seem smaller as in landscape paintings or photographs. With a longer lens, intended for portraiture this works constantly well for me. Crossed eyes and lazy lids are problems caused by weaknesses in the musculature of the eyes and the face. In certain cases crossing of the eyes occur when the subject is tired or is trying to focus on something without their eyeglasses or contact lenses in place. You might get normal eye positions if the subject is relaxed and not asked to focus on anything. If I am doing a 2/3 face I do nor use my hands to direct the gaze - I stand off camera at talk to the subject and tell the that the needn't focus on me and just carry on a conversation. If that does not work, the subject is better to wear their corrective glasses - prismatic lenses will cause the eyes to normalize in certain cases. Profile views might work our nicely if that view is appropriate for your subject. If all else fails, I sometimes can lick the problem by directing the subject's gaze with my hands - the eye positions may normalize briefly but long enough for me to get in a couple of good shots. I none of this works we solve the problem by just shooting for good expressions and retouching the heck out of the prints to reposition the eye or eyes - surely the job of a highly skilled retoucher. Some of the same methods apply to lazy lids, where one eye is almost closed. This is very hard to control during the sitting and is best treated as a function of retouching.

The Nose

Rhinoplste (the medical term for nose-job) is probably the most popular form if elective plastic surgery today. That indicates, to me, that people will go through the pain and suffering and pay the big bucks to alter the appearance of their noses. Being the most prominent feature of the face a lot of folks have issues with the size, length, roundness, angle of slope, wideness, thinness, nostril size and shape and angularity or lack thereof of there noses. It's hard to believe that so much cosmetic attention is given to an organ that is essentially designed for smelling and sniffing in air. A lifetime of being on the receiving end of derogatory name calling like schnozzle, beak, hook nose, Pinocchio, and being compared to Serrano Dievergeiak can drive anyone to the plastic surgeon. The folks who can't afford surgery or don't think it is that important, come to see a photographer for a portrait for a special occasion or gift and want al least a little "plastic surgery" done on their portraits to minimize or at least no worsen the appearance of their nose. The first thing hat comes to mind is to make full face portraits only - no 2/3 or profiles, but that is not necessarily true in all cases. If the nose is very long, that is, it seems to come very close to or seeming to intersect with the upper lip, a full face view from a slightly lower camera position will minimize that problem. If the nose is not too angular, a 2/3 face might be nice at that lower camera angle. Modified butterfly lighting works well. If the nose is very short a normal to slightly higher angle will be better because it tends to minimize the space between the tip of the nose and the upper lip. Short noses will tolerate a wide range of lightings even a kicker, or the so called angles touch lighting. All angles including profiles are doable.

Racial Attributes

African Americans and Oriental people might have wide or very flat noses. These are not defects and it is up to the photographer to make a flattering photograph of all people as they are. With flatter noses lighting should be "sharper" to better define the features of the face. The use of parabolic (metal) reflectors rather than light modifiers should be used-they really separate the planes of the face better and with feathering can yield excellent textures. In the case of oriental people profiles don't usually work the planes of the face are fairly flat, while frontal views can render the face as very round. I find that 2/3 face with modified butterfly lighting shapes the face very nicely in that this combination brings out the high cheek bones. Adding a kicker light, carefully placed, can put

a lovely rim light on the contour of the cheek and better define the nose. For a more dramatic effect, wider noses take nicely to [Rembrandt](#) and [split](#) lighting.

Angular Noses

Angular noses are very interesting in portrait studies, in the commercial end of the portrait business however, clients will usually opt for poses that do not feature their nose. Full face and 2/3 face images from normal to slightly lower camera heights will fill the bill. Dramatic portraits of men with angular noses do well at print competition judges but when it comes to bread and butter portraiture, the client is the ultimate judge - shoot from various angles and see what goes over well with your client - the rejects might yield a great salon print.

Bulbous Noses

[Split](#) or [Rembrandt](#) lighting helps. Print retouching to remove multiple or even a single highlight from the very tip of the nose will take some of the roundness away.

Broken Noses

Noses that have been broken will sometimes heal in such a way that the nose takes on a slightly twisted look or an irregular curvature. Place the main light on each side of the face and see which direction looks better. Oftentimes the curved appearance will disappear when you discover the right lighting. Full face and 2/3 views can both work with this method of lighting.

The Mouth

The most common aesthetic problem of the mouth is an unevenness. Clients will say that they have a crooked mouth or smile. In most instances this is just a function of the natural musculature of the face. Sometimes a marked asymmetry of the mouth is caused by disease. Stroke patients, even after recovery can have some latent paralysis of the face. A disease called Bell's Palsy (a temporary paralysis of the face) can leave a telltale irregularity of the mouth. People suffering from these afflictions may be very self-conscious especially when having a portrait made. Try this, when there is a noticeable slant to the mouth, turn the subject to 2/3 face position placing the side of the face where the distance between the end of the mouth and the ear is grater - the longer side. A smiling expression can stretch the muscle of the face to the point where the asymmetry becomes hardly noticeable, The 2/3 position causes the same sort of perspective that works when one eye is smaller than the other.

Bad, Missing Or No Teeth

Smile! You're on Candid Camera"...A hackneyed but familiar phrase when pictures are being taken. Not a very good plan, the smile, that is) when the subject is adontic, a dental term for being toothless. This condition is problematic because when all the teeth are gone and no replacements are provided, the jaw will eventually collapse leaving the chin-jaw line of the face in a disfigured condition - a chewing palsy often accompanies theses problems. Using a well placed hand to support and cover the chin line helps. I have used a double main light method - I place a barndoored spotlight at about 45 ([Rembrandt](#) lighting degrees and emphasize the eyes and nose. My second main light at a lower power, lights the entire face (a modified [loop](#) position). This does not put the lower part of the head in shadow but lowers it by about one zone thereby de-emphasizing the problems on the jaw line. A few missing teeth, discolored, broken or overlapping teeth can be filled in by retouching. Malocclusions, commonly called buck teeth, and protrusion of the lower jaw and teeth, can be photographically minimized by avoiding profiles, asking for "softer smiles" and avoiding harsh lighting that would tent to give the offending part of the jaw more prominence. Most Orthodontists with whom I have spoken, take a dim view of removing appliances, mid treatment, for a photo session, even a wedding or a Bar Mitzvah. The procedure is costly and painful. That being the case I encourage my subjects to let it all hang out - having braces is just part of life. I will do smiling and non-smiling expressions and see how thing work out. Holding back smiles does not necessarily hide the braces because

the spaces taken up, in the mouth, by the braces and/or the pre-existing condition might show up as a slight protrusion of the mouth.

Big Ears

Use 2/3 angle of the face with short lighting. You will have only one ear to contend with and it will be on the shadow side of the lighting pattern. In extreme cases, consult with your client about the use of 2 sided tape. Young children oftentimes do not grow into their ears for a few years - the ears develop faster than other facial features - same methods apply.

Full Or Partial Baldness

Some clients shave their hair - they like the look - others are not particularly pleased with their baldness - the go for hair replacements of various kinds. Most of my clients wear the high foreheads very nicely but don't exactly want their lack of hair emphasized. Unless I am making a character study or theatrical image, I usually kill the hair light and might even gently barn door or gobo the head. I find that I get better results with short lighting in that I have more control in shaping the face. Feathering the main light down prevents hotspots on the head and forehead in all portraits.

Eyeglasses

On this subject - one can write a small book. To simplify things here are a few tips that work. Subjects who wear glasses all the time are best photographed with their glasses on - this will make a more indicative portrait. If the client also uses contact lenses he or she might prefer to not be photographed in conventional eyeglasses - always consult with your client before well in advance of the sitting incase arrangements have to be made for blank frames. If the client wants to be photographed with the glasses on we oftentimes request that the see their optician about borrowing blank frames in or close to the style that they wear. We do this when the lenses can not be positioned without flash-back and glare, distort the eyes (very big or very small) and in the case of bifocal lenses having distracting lines and various optical surfaces. Today's optical technology offers progressive lenses - bifocals and even trifocals with no apparent demarcations. Some lenses have "anti-reflection coatings" which like camera lenses offer better contrast and vision to the wearer, especially for night driving. They control flare and extraneous light entering from the back and front of the lens for better vision. They do not however, quell visual reflections that occur during photography - in fact the reflections appear with a green, purple or magenta cast which makes them even harder to retouch later. Sometimes reflections can be controlled by simply tilting the lenses slightly downward and/or raising the main light - a bit. Raising the main light too high can rob the eyes of shadow detail and catchlights and throw optical patterns on the cheeks. Tilting the glasses too much can become noticeable and may restrict the scope of the sitting to full face poses in that the temples of the frames will show an unnatural diagonal position when a 2/3 angle is used.

Bad Skin

Some blemishes can easily be removed by means of negative and positive retouching - even severe acne or pock-marked skin. To reduce the amount of retouching needed, softer lighting, diffused images and lower lighting ratios should be considered. Lighting that skims the surface of the skin, like kicker lighting or very close and feathered lighting from spotlights or undiffused parabolic reflectors will bring out more texture is inappropriate for subjects with skin problems. I generally get out my soft focus lenses and use a couple of umbrellas to light the subject. Too many dense shadows will make the retouchers job difficult for the retoucher to do her work. This may sound wild but sometimes I have the subject apply a very-very thin coat of Vaseline the their face and I use a comparatively flat ratio. The specular highlights are helped along by the Vaseline and the pimples or blemishes are still easily removed in retouching. The results are outstanding whereas as various cover-up preparations render the skin as dry and flaky - harder to retouch. We go through all theses procedures to clean up skin conditions because these blemishes, in most cases will disappear or be treated later in life, and we don't want to make important momentous images, like graduation portraits showing an ailment of the skin. Excessive wrinkles are also an issue. Yes, certain lines and wrinkles are a sigh of ageing and are legitimate element to include in a proper portrait study.

Some correction however, is in order when those marks become distracting. Very few of my feminine clients tell me that the wish to see every pore and line on their face even if they have a prized collection of Yosef Karsh books in their library and adorning their coffee tables.

There Is Lots More, But

I'm gonna get CTS in both hands and I can't look at this screen anymore! Suffice it to say that the rest is up to the reader. It is probably apparent to most readers by now that there will be compromises, combinations and exceptions to any and all of the suggestions and "rules" posted above - that's where the fun begins. Oftentimes I make a portrait that is very well received by the client - where I seemingly have broken all the rules and honestly, I don't know why or how. After a lot of practice it will become second nature for you to make all of the corrections as you set up your shots. Of course, somebody is going to say - "Why do any of this? My clients are happy being just as they are!" Denis Reggie has pronounced this philosophy in many of his seminars and writings - and that is not a bad idea - for him! As a celebrity wedding specialist, he operates in a word where high fashion is a daily working environment - image is part of the lifestyle. In these circles cosmetics, hairstyle and even plastic surgery in commonplace in everyday life - theses folks no how to "work" the camera. When theses people make a public appearance or step in front a camera they are ready to rock an' roll. It oftentimes takes me an hour to cut through the shyness and self - consciousness before I can get one shot. Even some of my high-profile business executives wither in front of the camera especially if the feel that they have non-photogenic issues. In all cases we are very kind and gentle with all of our clients and in most cases they do not even realize that that much analysis is going on. When the customer is seated or standing, it is best to encourage good posture. When the spine is at full extension the rest of the body falls into place. Clothing will fit better and it will be easier to build the poses correctly. I some cases I physically guide the subject into a pose. Most folks don't mind being touched gently - I always ask "can I help you with this pose" and I always get a positive answer.

Good luck and best wishes to all.
Ed Shapiro