

## Feathering

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. I have to thank Ed for covering this topic. 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...

### Feathering Is Ticklish Business.

Strictly speaking, as it applies to classical portrait lighting, "feathering" is a function mostly applied to raw parabolic light sources and spotlights - not lighting modified by a soft box or an umbrella. Yes, it does mean using the periphery the light beam rather than the centre (or so called hot spot) however that is not a softening effect - quite the contrary. By feathering the light you are creating MORE texture because you are preventing the defuse and specular highlights from "blocking up" or washing out. Some classic portraitists use a method called "very close and very feathered". The closeness of the light source contributes to a softer impression but the feathering still maintains the detail in the highlights. Some workers prefer to do "hard light-soft focus". This means using raw parabolic units in the feathered position in conjunction with a soft focus prime lens or a diffusion filter to achieve softness. When doing this, the highlights will flare into the shadows creating a more ethereal mood in the final portrait. The use of kicker or accent lights also works well with this method. By the way - when the lights are feathered, this is called the aesthetic position - so all test for exposure and ratios have to be carried out with the lights in that position.

Soft boxes, especially those that are recessed (having flaps on the side to prevent the spillage of light on the camera or background) will not feather well because the fall off of light will be too abrupt, Umbrellas can be feathered to some degree bet the results are not the same as with (metal) parabolic reflectors.. If umbrellas are feathered too much they can cause lens flare or the raw light from the lamp head can begin to fall on the subject.

Slight feathering of light from umbrellas or soft boxes is useful when using a simple but effective combination of 1 main unit and a reflector. The main (and only) light source has to be feathered so that some light falls on the reflector- in tern the reflector is feathered to provide fill for the shadows without showing as a secondary light source. This is a careful procedure but can produce window light like portraits of the highest quality.

The use of parabolic reflectors is much more critical than that of light sources that have been modified with umbrellas or soft boxes. Mistakes show! - Lighting patterns need to be very precise. It is however worth the time it takes to master these techniques. There is a multitude of moods and effects that can be had by feathering, barndooring and altering the lighting ratios. Try it- you'll like it!

*Ed Shapiro*