

## More About Light

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...

### More About Light...

Last time we discussed the sun and some very basic lighting situations. We compared photographing people by sunlight and the similarities, in the studio, when we use a simple parabolic flood lights. In portraiture, raw sunlight and raw artificial light are not always the best sources. Over the years many experienced portrait photographers preferred hazy sunlight, open shade, overcast lighting and window lighting as a more ideal sources of lighting for their work.

When we work out of doors, Mother Nature supplies all of these effects for us, however not on cue - we have to wait for the right conditions to appear. For professional photographers working in the field, it is not always commercially practical to wait for the ideal outdoor lighting situation. We can not necessarily call our clients on demand and do a portrait sitting on a moments notice. In most cases, we are called in to do a session on a certain day and time and we have to make do with the outdoor lighting and modify it with some simple tools - the key is in the know-how. For some of us there is always the studio, but if the clients want environmental portraiture or if it is a wedding assignment, we have to improvise and come up with good lighting under any and all circumstances.

The tools we need to control outdoor lighting situations are as follows:

- 2 Silver reflectors (metallic)
- 2 Black gobo
- 1 Translucent diffuser (scrim)
- A deep compendium type lens shade
- A good quality skylight filter
- 1 Warming filter 81a.
- 1 Cooling filter 80a.
- A good portable flash unit with bare bulb capability.
- An accurate exposure meter.

For the scrims, gobos and reflectors, I recommend the Monte Illuminators or similar spring loaded disk reflectors. All of these light modifiers can also be made of Foam Core™ which is available in white and black, aluminum foil (adhered to Foam Core or Core-Plast™). There is a wide array of reflective material made by Rosco™ and a simple white plastic shower curtain can be fashioned into a scrim. All the reflectors will work in about a 1 meter (or 30-36 inches) in size. The black gobos and the scrims are handy in a 40 inch size. Buy 'em or make 'em - they will all work equally as well.

With this equipment in hand, there are dozens upon dozens of possibilities. For the sake of brevity, I will list some typical scenarios:

- Directional sunlight (morning or afternoon) Use the sunlight to create your main lighting form and fill in with metallic reflector or flash. Establish a 1:2 to 1:4 ratio, depending on the mood you wish to achieve. Do not over fill or cause the reflector to cause a secondary lighting pattern on the face. When using flash fill with early or late lighting you might want to place an acetate warming filter in front of the flash reflector or around the bare flash tube, to match the warm natural light- check your Rosco sample book.
- Allow the directional sunlight to put brilliant highlights in the hair and use the silver reflector as your main light- held in a high position and allowed to scoop some light, you can create any number of familiar lighting patterns. Watch for those facial landmarks and the catchlights in the eyes. A second reflector can

be used to fill the shadows- make sure it's effect does no register on the film as a second main light. If the subject(s) are in a profile position or facing each other - a beautiful rim light will appear.

- If you are stuck working at noon time or thereabouts you can still achieve nice lighting. Head for the shade but make sure there are no shadow patterns, projected through trees, poles or buildings, on the subject's face or clothing. Oftentimes, white wall or buildings will send you some nice reflected sunlight to work with. Lacking that, you can place a silver reflector in the sun and "throw" some light onto the subject(s). You will achieve a warm glow - look out for those landmarks and lighting patterns.
- If you end up in hazy sun or direct directional sun, you can still use the sunlight as a main source, but if you still find it too harsh - hoist up that translucent panel (scrim) - the difference is amazing! It works like a diffuser or soft box in the studio.
- Cloudy or Overcast days can be an ideal time for making portraits. In certain circumstances this type of natural light can provide beautiful portrait lighting with no other enhancement. This sometimes occurs on sunny days when some clouds pass in front of the sun. There are some cloudy or overcast days that are lighting nightmares.
- Significant cloud cover can diffuse the sunlight to where it becomes flat and non-directional- This can also happen on cloudy-bright days. In effect there is ample illumination, but no aesthetically pleasing lighting. The bulk of the light lands on top of the subjects head and diminishes as it slides down the face, usually leaving vacant eye sockets. You might get away with some shots where the subject(s) are not facing the camera, but it's still lousy lighting. Gobos to the rescue - Block the light that is coming from directly above the subject and on the camera side of the subject. Amazing! - a fabulous short lighting pattern will become apparent. If you have no time for the gobos, an overhang or a porch can act as a gobo. LOOK for the light.
- Filter Tips - When working outside always use a skylight filter to block some of the ultraviolet rays or atmospheric haze that can cause a bluish or cyan cast in your photographs. This especially occurs in wedding gowns and veils because some of the fabrics have ultraviolet brighteners which can fluoresce under light that contain a great deal of ultraviolet. On very overcast days or where there is a lot of blue sky, I use a UV16 filter. In the early morning I find that the lighting can be very "yellow" and I employ a slight cooling filter. When working with open shade or north window light I use a slight warming filter to counteract the bluishness that sometimes occurs with this kind of light.
- You can also use the sun as a back or hair light and create your key lighting with an electronic flash unit with an umbrella or a bare bulb. This entails some practice because you will not see the effect of the flash lighting and you will have to estimate the position of your main light. If you can establish a ratio of 1:3 using your shutter to control the natural light, the effect will be very natural.

These are just some of the methods you can use to "harness" sunlight for professional portraiture. Next time- we will examine some studio lighting tools.

*Ed Shapiro*