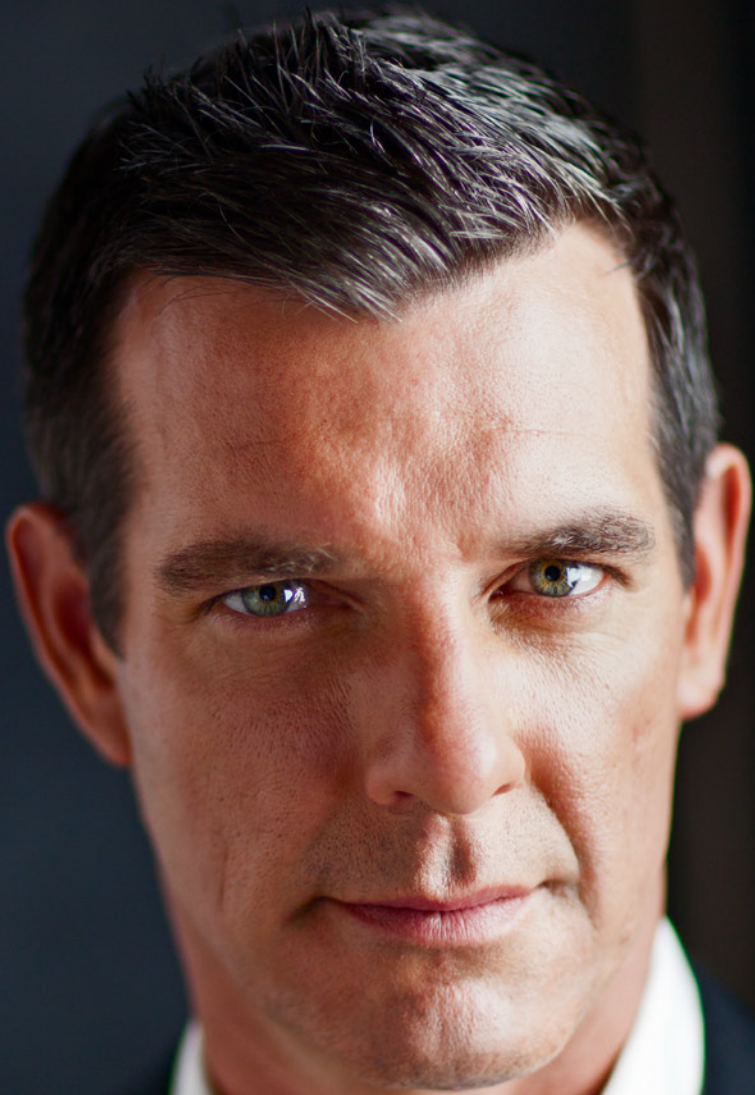# GREAT LIGHT, EASY LIGHT

STROBE TECHNIQUES THAT DON'T LOOK LIT

BY KEVIN CLARK

CRAFT&VISION

About the Cover Image

Here is an example of the one-light setup (you'll learn more about that later) with some modifications. I used my large Chimera softbox vertically to create drama and texture. Typically, I will setup my softbox to create the most flattering light., but in this case, I was more interested in creating character. An example of my typical setup is shown on the right.

It's the same softbox, and the same background and subject, but very different results. So what did I do differently? The "typical" setup I use puts the softbox slightly in front of the subject with the softbox at a 90-degree angle to the subject. In this case, I angled the softbox slightly towards Matt to light the dark background a bit more. In the cover shot, I moved the light to the camera right side of Matt, a difference of about 24-inches. Same angle, just to the side of Matt instead of slightly in front. The change in the position of the light is slight, but the results are very obvious. These subtle variances are how I fine-tune the look of all the lighting I create.

Introduction

I love the look of natural light. The summers where I live the sun is up at 5:30 AM, and goes down at 10:00 PM, so for that brief season, I shoot outside a lot.

When winter comes, the days get short, dark and rainy for the next eight months. I have spent many winters in frustration trying to get the kind of glorious look inside that I could so effortlessly find on a beautiful summer day. Strobes and softboxes were blunt and unruly instruments, incapable of generating the delicate subtle nuances I could obtain with natural light.

I am a working photographer and have made my living shooting actors, musicians, bankers, engineers, realtors and food for 12 months of the year for the last 23 years. I want my clients to get the best possible photographs any time of the year, not just the summer. Living and working in a temperate rainforest has forced me to figure out how to create fabulous natural looking light anytime, anywhere, with strobes.

A little bit about the "look" of Natural Light

When I reference "natural light", I should probably say natural-looking light, as the examples I've given you don't necessarily look like the natural light of the sun. By "a natural look", what I mean is that it looks like the people and the scene are lit the way you would see it if you were actually there, just looking at the scene, and the subject was lit by the environment; the window, the light bouncing off the walls, the incan-descent light. Of course natural light is not always enough, in that natural light may not be flattering, or interesting, or in the case of Vancouver in the winter, enough.

I guess the best example of natural-looking light that is, in fact, artificially lit, is what a D.O.P. (director of photography) does for movies. More often than not, movie lighting tends to look natural. A good D.O.P. has the ability to make the source of the lighting disappear into the scene. The lighting may be beautiful, or ugly, but it looks like it's supposed to be that way. It isn't distracting, and it doesn't call attention to itself. That being said, I have been accused (by my wife, no less, among others,) of making the light look too slick and polished, and the subjects I'm photographing look too perfect. That's the danger of shooting mostly ac-tors for the last 20 years. I'm in the process of trying to break free of this by shooting with my eyes closed and using overhead fluorescent lights as my light source.

Mixing flash and ambient to achieve a natural look

Here's an experiment that will give you an illustration of what I mean. You will need a flash that has variable manual settings like a Canon 580EX or a Nikon SB-900, a way to shoot off-camera like a Pocket Wizard or sync cord, as well as a small or medium softbox. Find an area where there is diffused natural light, like outside in the shade, or a fairly bright room with lots of windows but no direct sun. Place your subject so you have a bit of distance from the background. Position your softbox about eye level a foot away and slightly in front of (approx. 6-12 inches) your subject's face. Set your flash on manual at full power and do a test shot to determine the proper exposure for your subject. Start at f/16, shutter at 1/160 of a second, ISO 500 (see the first image in sequence below). Once you determine the correct exposure with your flash on full power, drop your flash to

half power and find the proper exposure by opening your aperture one stop. Repeat this process for 1/4, 1/8, 1/16, 1/32, 1/64, and 1/128th. Now do the same thing again, but this time play with your shutter speed to give you a background exposure that looks natural with your subject (see the second sequence of Andrea). Play around with each exposure until you get one that pleases you. Remember, this is digital: you're not paying for film and developing. This should give you a good overview of what looks and feels real, or natural, and what looks artificial, or "lit". Learning to manipulate the balance between exposing for ambient and exposing for the flash is crucial for creating the look and feel you're chasing. The general rule is that shutter controls ambient exposure and aperture controls the flash exposure (assuming you don't change the ambient or flash levels themselves).

Mixing flash and ambient to achieve a natural look - CONTINUED

1 F/16 @ 1/160, ISO 500

2 F/11 @ 1/160, ISO 500

3 F/8 @ 1/160, ISO 500

4 F/5.6 @ 1/160, ISO 500

5 F/4.0 @ 1/160, ISO 500

6 F/2.8 @ 1/160, ISO 500

7 F/2.0 @ 1/160, ISO 500

8 F/1.8 @ 1/160, ISO 500

Mixing flash and ambient to achieve a natural look - CONTINUED

1. F/16 @ 1/6, ISO 500

2. F/11 @ 1/10, ISO 500

3. F/8 @ 1/15, ISO 500

4. F/5.6 @ 1/30, ISO 500

5. F/4.0 @ 1/50, ISO 500

6. F/2.8 @ 1/125, ISO 500

7. F/2.0 @ 1/200, ISO 500

8. F/1.8 @ 1/125, ISO 500

I have tried to break down the process of my hard-earned knowledge into this book. Included are several lighting styles that I find provide me with a good range of tools for most subjects and backgrounds.

The setups have diagrams and pictures to show you how I did them. You can set them up exactly the way I did and you may be able to achieve a similar look to the pictures in this book, or you may not. Every subject is different, and every scene is different. The secret to getting consistently great results is in the subtleties. I am continuously tweaking my lighting throughout a shoot, making small changes until I get the results I am looking for. I am often surprised by what one seemingly minute change can do to bring life into a person's face. The beauty of shooting digitally is that you can say "what if? " by trying new techniques and playing with ideas, without wasting time, money, or your reputation, because the results can be seen immediately. If it works, great, you've discovered something new! If it sucks, it didn't cost you a thing, and you're a step closer to knowing what works for you by ruling out what doesn't.

Don't rely on formulas. Start with the basic setup and tweak to suit the subject, the background, the feeling you're trying to achieve. Don't just assume this is the best it can be: play around. Experiment. Make mistakes. Really look at the images

> **The beauty of shooting digitally is that you can say "*WHAT IF?*" by trying new techniques and playing with ideas**

on your camera and try something new. The set-ups in this book are only starting points. The differences between the photographers who grow in their craft and create beautiful and unique work, and those who do not, lies in the time spent playing, deviating from the templates and rules and

looking for their voice in the subtleties of the craft. Of course, that's a long and overwhelming process, so for now start small, play with these set-ups, and pay attention to the light.

There are other elements to crafting a good picture besides lighting. I have an uncomplicated way of working with everything I shoot. I figure out what the most important element is in the photograph and use lighting, color, contrast, and texture to accentuate that one element. Equally important is the ability to enhance or alter the photos to solidify the look I want. Because I shoot in digital and the developing is instantaneous, I can progress easily into software such as Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop to fine-tune it all.

Our modern world is full of clutter; I prefer to make it easy for the viewer to understand what I am trying to express with the photo. A simple tweak in lighting can say "look at this" with greater impact and subtlety than nearly anything else.

Mixing flash and ambient to achieve a natural look

Because much of my work involves people, and so many of you will use this book to photograph people, I want to take moment to divert the conversation to an aspect of photographing people that is as important as lighting and composition. Often, I've seen beautifully-lit and well-composed pictures that are completely unbelievable because there is nothing in the eyes of the subject, or the pose is totally unnatural. Since I shoot a lot of actors, it's very important that they look credible in their headshots or they won't be given a second look. Some actors are brilliant at connecting with the camera and can look natural no matter what position you put them in, but most aren't. The average accountant, lawyer, or soccer mom is even less comfortable. They need to be coaxed out of their nervousness and put into a comfortable environment that allows them to do what they would do naturally under normal circumstances. The studio is not a normal environment for them. Through many years of experience, I've discovered that the easiest way to get a subject to feel comfortable is to place them in a position that grounds them. Give them something to lean on or sit on or lean against, like a wall. Standing poses tend to look best with natural contrapposto, which is an Italian term meaning "counterpose", or to stand with most of the weight on one foot,. Once I get the client into a comfortable contrapposto, I start talking to them not just as a photographer, but also as a

friend: asking questions about their life, movies they've seen lately, etc. At the same time, I'm gently guiding them through the process by suggesting different angles and expressions. As photographers, we must also remember the effect our energy and direction has on the process. I find the thing that makes the most difference in a shoot is my own enthusiasm. I can see my subject becoming more relaxed and focused as I give them more positive and sincere feedback. I italicized sincere to make a point: I really believe I'm getting great shots of my client and they, in turn, start enjoying the process instead of hating it. They start playing and having fun, letting go of their insecurities, coming out from behind their masks, getting into character and opening the door for something real to come through the lens. Once that relationship is established, the importance of lighting becomes even more evident.

I've separated this book into several different lighting styles which I use and modify on a daily basis. I start with one-light setups using softboxes and bounce cards, then progress to two-light, three-light, and finally something altogether different in what I call "bounce-the-light-off-whatever-I-can-find" setups. I'll be explaining why I do what I do as well as how I do it. Also included are lighting diagrams of various setups. Keep in mind that these definitely aren't rules and you shouldn't be limited to these setups alone. Rather, consider them to be guidelines to help you better understand the impact of light on your subjects, supplement their natural luminescence, and ultimately, make you a much stronger photographer.

CASE STUDY 1

Here is a simple one light setup I did with multi-talented actor and ukulele virtuoso Sheldon Elter. The background is once again my studio window on a dark winter day. I used a large Chimera softbox for this particular session, but I find the octabank and this large Chimera have a similar look.

CASE STUDY 2

This simple, powerful shot of actress Madison Simms is natural light, shot in the doorway of my studio. This kind of light inspired me to dig deep and figure out how to mimic it in the studio.

One-Light Setup

You can do a lot with one light source. The sun is one light. Window light can be one light. An overcast sky is one very big light with the clouds serving as a natural softbox. My preference is a one-light setup when I am trying to achieve the most natural-looking lighting using strobes. I photographed my Studio Manager, Andrea, for this series of setups. She has very light skin and dark black hair. I wanted detail in both her skin and her hair with a twinkle in her eye. I didn't need a hair light, a rim light, or a fill light to get great results. My frequent light of choice is a 7-foot Chimera octabank: I like this light for its beautiful, soft character and versatility. I understand that not everyone has the space or wants to invest the money in one of these monsters, so I experimented with alternatives. I went totally in the opposite direction with several of my examples by using an extra small Chimera lightbank (softbox) to try and achieve the same effect.

I once believed that the only kind of good light came from a huge source, but my experience has taught me that relying on formulas as a creative person can quickly put you in a box

that's hard to get out of. You stop growing and start getting bored. You lose interest in what you're doing and end up using the tried-and-true to get through the day. This creativity-killer robs you of what you love about photography, and if you make a living at it as I do, it will sooner or later kill your career as well. Staying fresh is what sustains you in this ever-changing and challenging field. So, that being said, and knowing first-hand that you don't always have a large light source at your disposal, I played with the tiny light source and was more than thrilled at the results.

I found that the softbox needs to be very close to the subject for the results I wanted to achieve here (I haven't tried using the little lights at a distance from the subject but that's an experiment for another day). The closeness of the light provides you with a great deal of control over the sculpting of the shadows, or the ability to direct where the shadows fall and create depth in the photograph. I also use large 8' x 4' white foam core bounce cards for fill, or the black ones to take light away and add contrast. These large sheets of foam core

are great. You can find them at most hardware stores and they only cost about $15. I use gaffer's tape to attach two of them together down the middle like a book so they are free-standing (called "V-flats"). This also allows me to open them as wide or as narrow as I need to, directing light precisely where I need it.

My first subject is Andrea, who's been working with me for more than five years. You could light her with car headlights and she would look great. We used one light on both her photographs. In one I used the 7-foot octabank, in the other, I chose the extra small, and much less expensive, Chimera lightbank. The lights powering everything aren't expensive, high-powered Profoto lights, but entry-level Elinchrom D-lite 2s. I bought these lights because I wanted to be able to shoot at very low power. They have a 5-stop range from 12-200 watt seconds and they only cost $300 each; a great deal considering their versatility. While big lights with big power get all the glory, I prefer the less powerful, but more maneuverable, lights.

SHALLOW DEPTH OF FIELD

My studio isn't huge, and I don't like my pictures to look like they were shot in the same place all the time, so I typically make sure that my backgrounds are really blurry. A blurrier background becomes more suggestive, allowing the subject to take prominence.
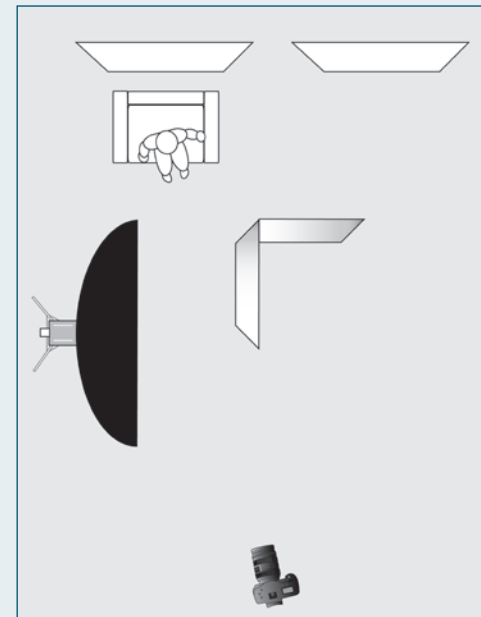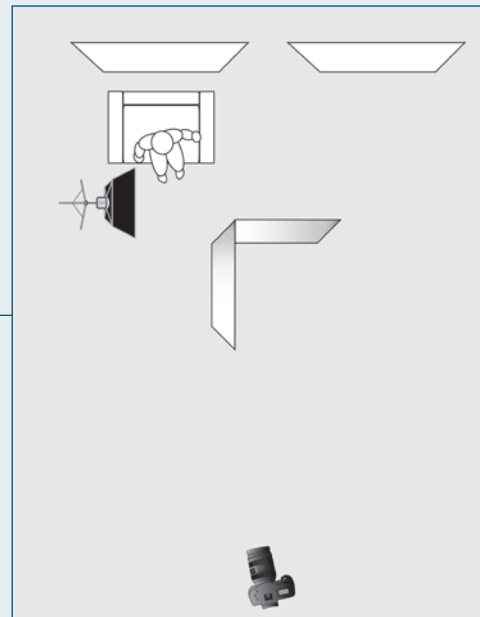
BRINGING THE LIGHT REALLY CLOSE

Once again, this is not a hard-and-fast rule, but I find you can get more character/contrast out of a light when it's close to the subject, and using low power means I can still shoot at wide-open apertures.

Here is the first one-light setup with Andrea. The one on the left is lit with the small Chimera, and the one on the right with the 7-foot octabank. They actually look quite similar. I'm using the large white foam core (flat) as a reflector, which really fills in the shadows. I've also placed both softboxes at a 90-degree angle in front of the subject, thus providing maximum fill from the reflector.
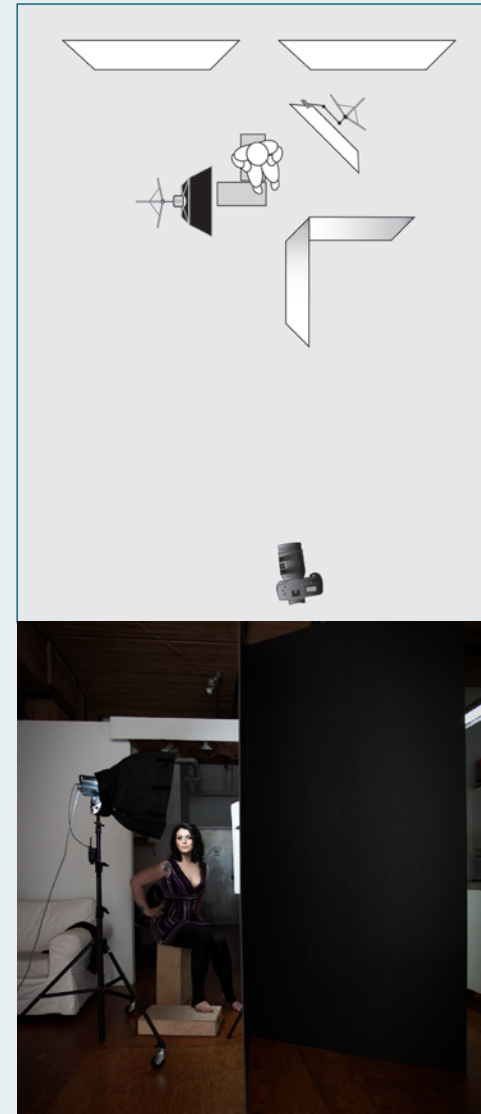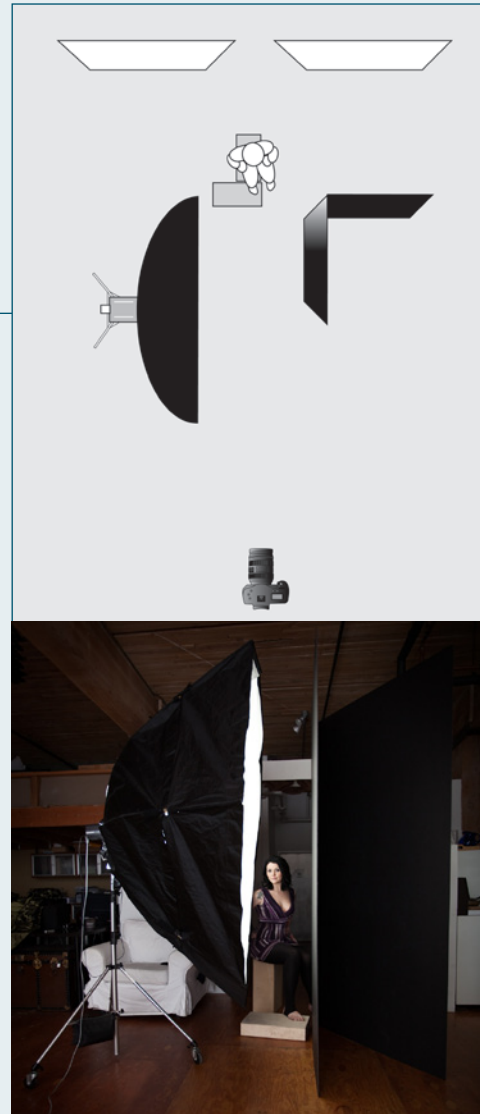
F/2.8 @ 1/100, ISO 250

F/2.8 @ 1/160, ISO 400

Here is the second one-light setup with Andrea. The one on the left is the 7-foot octabank, The one on the right is the extra small Chimera. The large light source softens the skin texture and opens up the shadows. The smaller source brings out the specular highlights in the hair and texture in the skin. It also appears to make the fine details sharper, such as eyelashes and eyebrows. I see a lot more of this style (smaller light sources) these days than I used to. I've been experimenting lately with a small light source as the main light and a large soft fill light; try it and see what you think.

F/2.2 @ 1/160, ISO 125

F/2.8 @ 1/160, ISO 100

CASE STUDY 3

This shot of the fabulous singer Audri is actually lit with my Home Depot special. Four four-foot daylight balanced fluorescent tubes actually bought at Home Depot supplied the keylight. The rim and background light are from two small Chimera softboxes bounced into two white foam core V-flats.
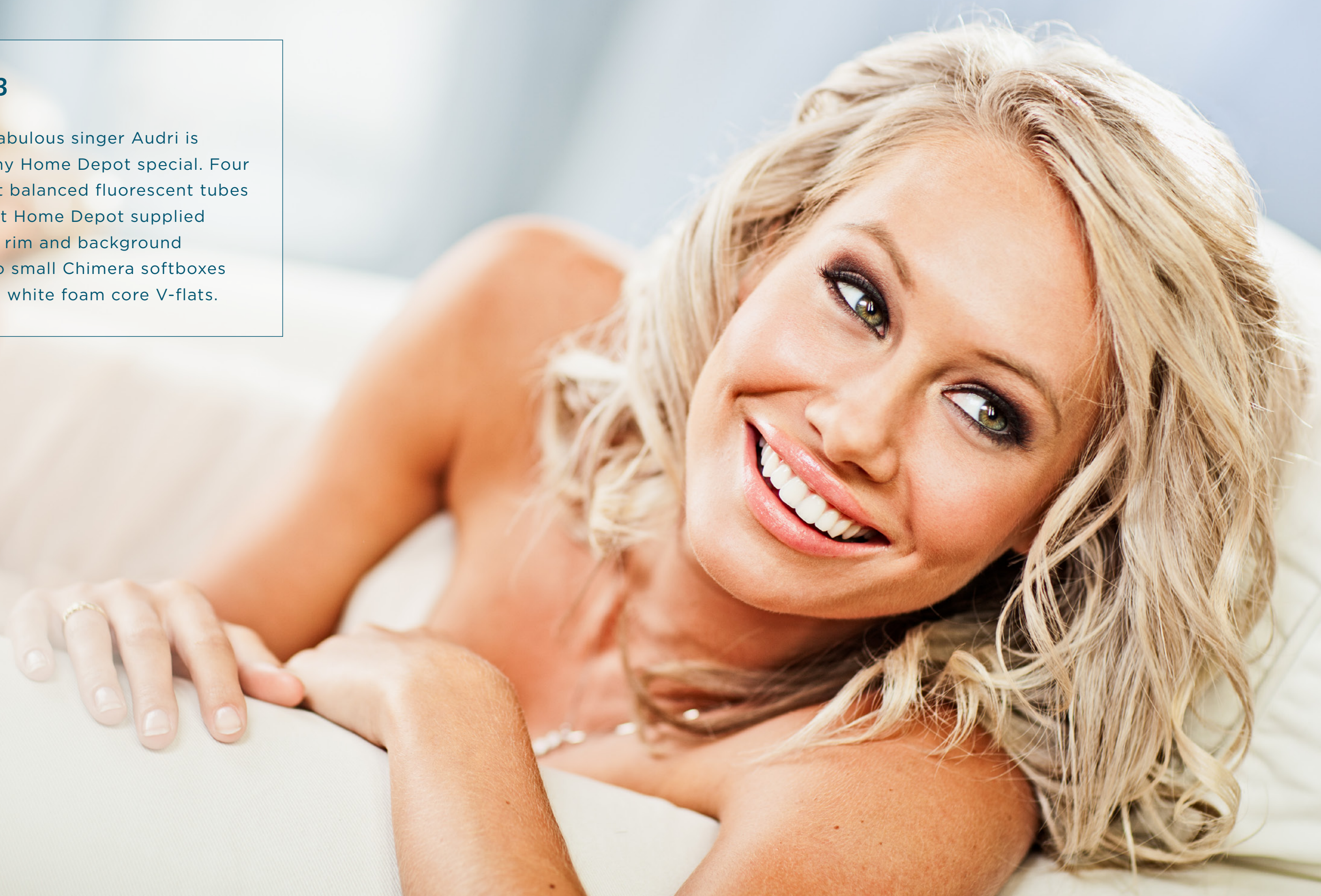
CASE STUDY 4

This shot of Actress Sydney Imbeau, star of "Really Me", is a two-light setup and an example of feathering the light. I used the 7-foot octabank as my key light, and a large Chimera for my rim light. The large Chimera is behind Sydney and to camera right. I will often use a rim light on the opposite side of the key light to illuminate the shadow side of the face; however, in this case, I wanted to highlight Sydney's cheek and loved the way her hair swept off her face and fell on her opposite shoulder. Notice the subtle way the key light falls off from her (camera) right cheek. This helps to define the shape of her face and put the focus on her eyes, nose and mouth. It also allows the rim light to be more prominent, further shaping and giving dimension to her face.

Two-Light Setup

I've used Andrea's brother Nicholas as our model for this series. I am basically using a key light and a rim light for this setup. A key light is the main light that illuminates the subject, and a rim light usually comes from behind or a little to the side and is used to separate the subject from the background. This isn't rocket science, but there is a lot you can do within these simple parameters that can really influence the look of the light.

The position of the key light, reflector or black card make all the difference. I like to have the key light slightly in front of the subject. I can then turn the softbox toward or away from the subject depending on the look I'm trying to achieve. I will often have the softbox not pointing at the subject at all, but instead at a 90-degree angle just in front of the subject, sort of skimming the face. This way, the front of the face gets lit, but the light falls off at the sides of the head. The effect is more dramatic with a smaller softbox, but also works with my 7-foot octabank in a subtle but still pronounced way. This technique works great when you're using rim lights and you want a more subtle effect, because the light on the sides of the face falls off, you can use a lower power rim, making it look less "lit". That being said, I don't think I went that subtle with my lighting on any of the examples in this book, but often do. Note: Check out my headshot website at *www.kevinclarkheadshots.com* to take a look.

Though I'm not into formulas, but for clarification, let's talk about settings. Let's say you use two 580 EX's, or SB-900s inside two small softboxes. For this exercise, start with your key light at say, 1/4 power. Then set your rim light at 1/32nd power, except bounce the rim light off a large white card or wall, or an 8x4 foam core panel. If you were to do a meter reading off of the rim light I'm sure you would find that the light hitting the subject is substantially less than that of the key light (I don't know how much less, as I don't use a light meter anymore, but less). As an exception, high key photos (the ones that make your subject look like they are swimming in an ethereal bright white cloud, to be discussed later) can have stronger rim lights than the key light. You may have seen, one of the current fads in commercial photography where strong rim lighting is used on both sides and a ring flash for the key light. This style looks very "lit" but it is popular and has its uses. This book, however, focuses on a more natural look.

Two-Light Setup
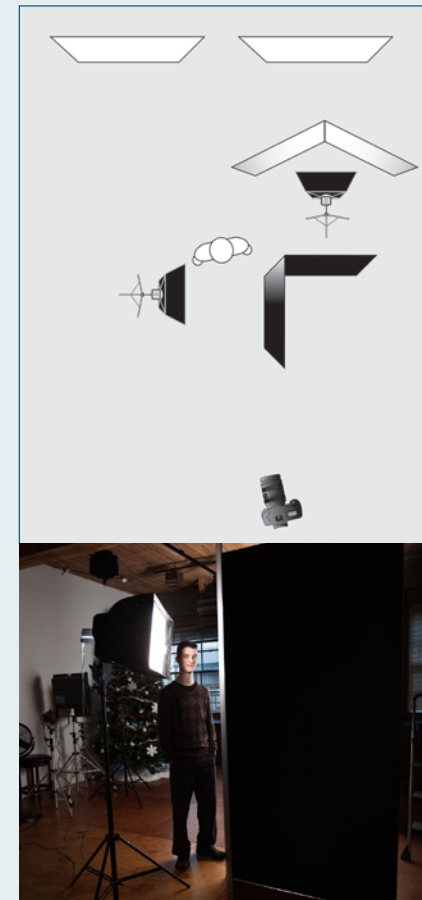
Here are my first two-light setups with Nicholas. I've lit the one on the left with the 7-foot octabank and a Chimera extra small softbox bounced into my white 8 x 4 foam core V-flats, giving me a nice soft rim light; the one on the right has the same lighting with the Chimera extra small softbox as key light. Notice the deeper shadows and faster light falloff with the smaller light. Once again, the smaller light produces more specularity and contrast, as well as the appearance of crispness in the image. The larger light source produces a softer, more even light with broader specular highlights. I often use a window or open doorway with natural light spilling in to light the background and to create the subtle, out of focus shapes like you see here. In this case, a rainy Vancouver day delicately illuminates the otherwise dark studio.
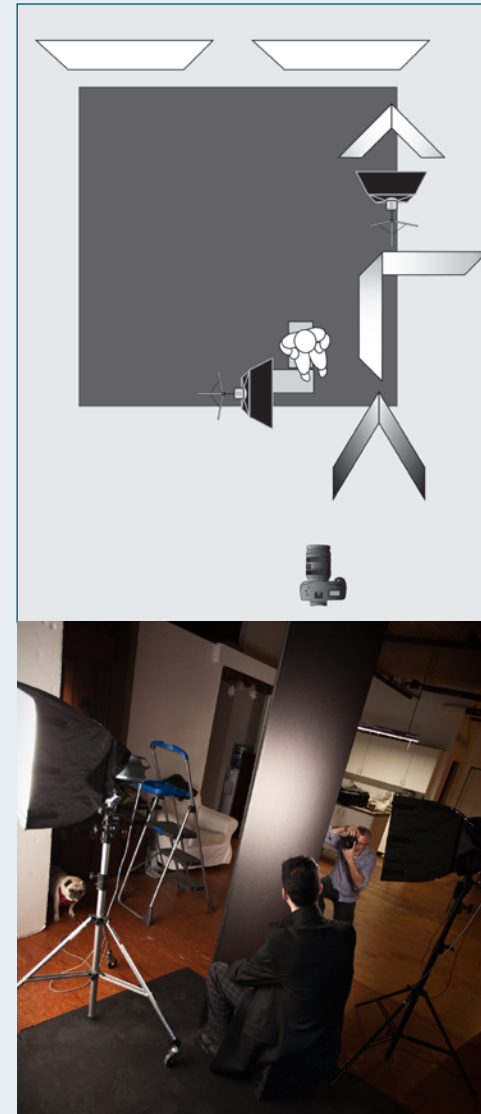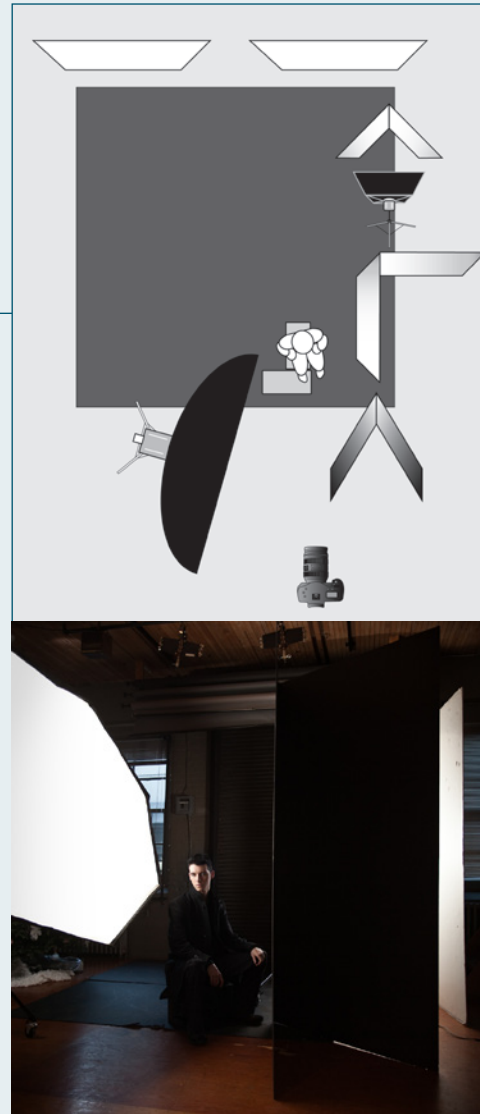
F/2.2 @ 1/100, ISO 500

F/2.2 @ 1/60, ISO 100

Can you tell which portrait is lit with the octabank and which is lit with the small Chimera? Look at the harder, darker shadows on Nicholas' face in the picture on the right, especially under his nose and chin. Once again, both the octabank and the small Chimera are slightly in front and at a 90-degree angle to Nicholas' face. The feeling of these shots is very dramatic and moody. In this case, I think the small Chimera does a better job of emphasizing that mood. What do you think?

F/2.2 @ 1/50, ISO 160

F2.2 @ 1/50, ISO 125

CASE STUDY 5

Here is an example of a subtle fill light illuminating the shadow side of the face of very funny actor Peter New. The "key" light is the window just out of view camera right. Without the fill, the contrast range is way too high: the shadow side of his face would be in total darkness. Using a softbox up close was way too powerful and flattened the light out completely, even when turned down to the minimum setting. I chose instead to put a 52 inch Photoflex diffuser three feet from the subject, just off of camera on the left. That provided a bit of fill but the shadows were still way too dark. I then took a softbox turned down to minimum power, backed it up about 12 feet, and aimed it at the diffuser. The diffuser flagged any direct light from hitting the subject, so the fill that hit him was just the right amount to soften the shadows without losing the character of the light. Often times, less is more. So why didn't I just put the softbox way back behind me at low power and not use the diffuser? Small light sources, and when you move even a large softbox far from the subject it becomes a small light source, produce specular highlights. Specular highlights tend to make faces look artificially lit, especially on the shadow side of the face. You see this often in wedding pictures where an on camera flash has been used as a fill light. Nothing wrong with that, but it just doesn't look "natural."

CASE STUDY 6

This shot of Jennifer is a simple one light setup using the octabank camera right, a white V-flat camera left and a 52-inch silver light disk under the octabank in front of Jennifer. The background is a bunch of white fabric piled on a couple of studio chairs lit by natural light.

Three-Light Setup

My model of choice for this setup is Dean, an actor and a stuntman. He's got a great build so we thought we would focus on a solid body shot. I included two separate examples with basically the same lighting.

The first shot was created with my octa-bank, and two small Chimera softboxes. Dean is standing in front of a hallway in our studio to create a sense of depth in the shot. This position also gives me the ability to bounce the two small softboxes off the walls on either side of the doorway, creating a nice rim light that really shows off Dean's physique when positioned properly. This setup works great without a shirt as well, accentuating abs etc., with the rim light.

The second lighting setup is designed to mimic the first, but without the expense of a 7-foot octabank. I used two of my white foam core V-flats put together,

creating a box to bounce a strobe into. You decide which one is better. One cost $60, the other $900. I will stress again that you can manipulate both of these setups to produce very different results by subtly changing positions of the light, the bounce card, the position of the subject and camera in relation to the light. It's no fun to do the same thing over and over again. Experiment. Play. Gone are the days of painstaking technical testing with different film stocks and development processes. Take a picture and look on the back of your camera. If you don't like the results, go ahead and change it up.
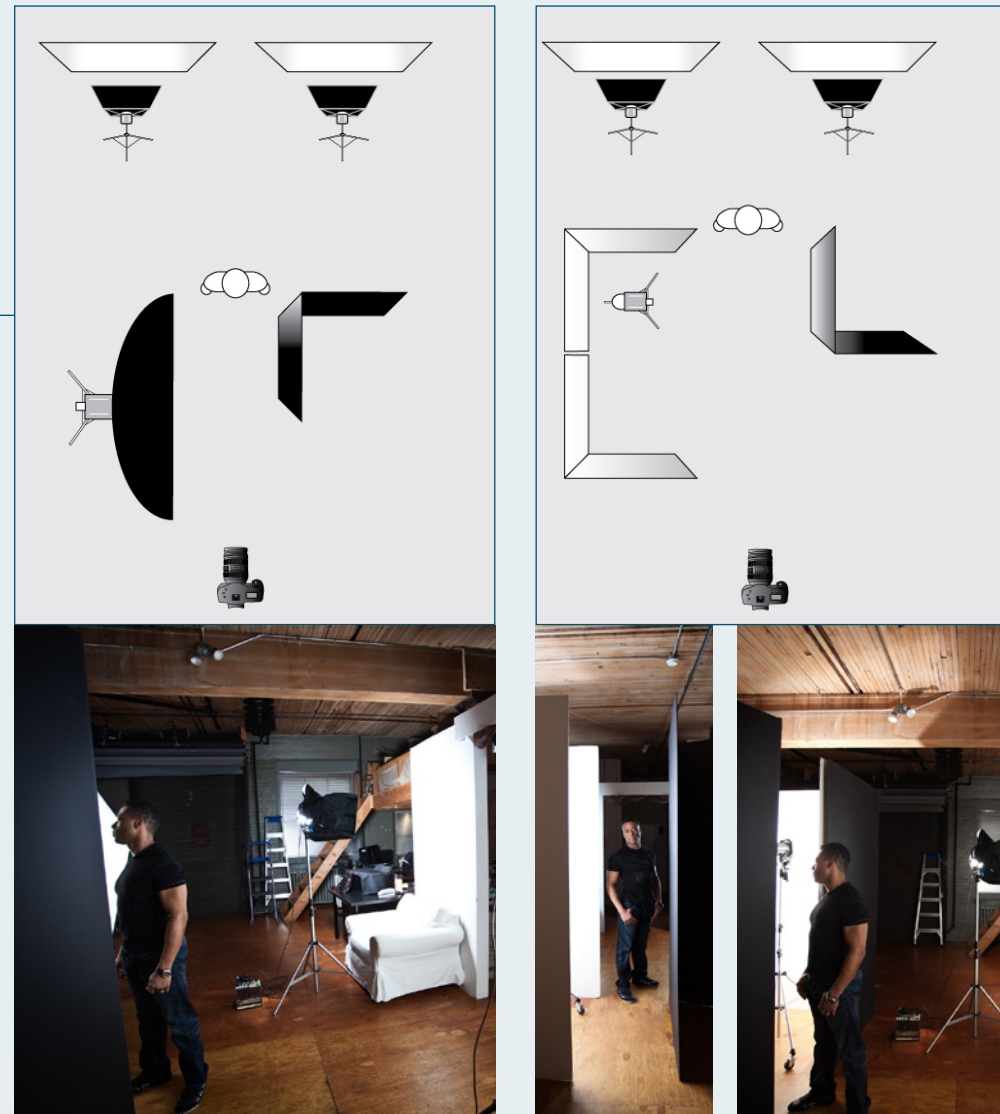
The picture of Dean on the left is the one shot with the 7-foot octabank. I placed the softbox so Dean is just on the edge of the light. Notice how the light is beginning to fall off on his right (camera left) cheek. That's because the light is slightly in front of him and angled slightly away. Now if Dean steps forward six inches the light would illuminate his right cheek and the rim light would disappear. The photo on the right is lit practically the same, except the key light is my foam core V-flat setup: $900 (octabank) versus $50 (V-flats). You don't need to spend a fortune to light like a pro.

F/2.8 @ 1/160, ISO 160

F/2.8 @ 1/100, ISO 320

CASE STUDY 7

This fun pic of young actor Sean Kyer is a variation of the two-light setup. I've used the Chimera octabank slightly in front and to camera left of Sean. I also used a black V-flat camera right to deepen the shadows and create a bit more drama. The background is the very out of focus windows, floor and wall of my studio, lit with ambient daylight.

CASE STUDY 8

This shot of Craig is actually a one-light setup with a couple of variations. I've used my octabank with a 52-inch silver light disk just below the octabank to bounce a little fill into the model's face. The subtle rim light on Craig's camera left cheek is natural light from my open loading bay door. The background is window light diffused by a sheer white curtain.

Bounce-The-Light-Off-Whatever-I-Can Setups

I've included three different versions of this setup with Natasha, an actress client. I will often use setups like these on location when I am trying to get the most natural (unlit) look as possible. My basic concept is to use a bare bulb head or heads bounced into a wall, or the corner of a room, or a combination of bounce cards and walls . . . and the list goes on. You'll hear me echo this statement many times: remember to play around and find what works best for your subject. The only regulation I usually impose on myself is to avoid any of the direct hard light from the flash hitting the subject. I came up with this idea by shooting outside in shade on a sunny day and noticed the light was coming from the diffused reflection of the sun off the buildings, roads, cars, sky, etc. The light had direction and character, but was still soft and flattering. So go outside on a sunny day and observe how the light reacts in the shade, where it comes from. Is it bouncing off the road? Is it bouncing off the building across the street? Is it coming from the clear blue sky? It might take some practice and learning the subtleties of light is not easy, but you'll become more adept at noticing the source, strength, direction, temperature, and falloff of light in no time.

One of the things you will probably notice first is that the color of the roads, buildings, trees, etc. that are reflecting the light back to your subject aren't necessarily a neutral tone. When I started copying the effects of sunlight bouncing around outside with strobes inside, I thought everything I bounced the light off had to be white. I had this idea stuck in my head from the old days of shooting slide film and having to be so careful about color contamination. Slide film, as beautiful as it was, was a pain in the butt. Shooting digitally in RAW is so much more flexible and forgiving. I mean, you can't bounce a strobe off a bright red wall and not expect to have some color contamination, but maybe that will look cool. It's worth a shot! And hey, if you use a grey card to white balance your camera as I always do, it may end up looking like you used a white wall. Probably not, but why not try and see what happens?

Now that I've blabbed on about how I came up with this stuff, I'll tell you how these shots were achieved. Recognizing opportunities and learning how to use the surrounding lighting resources will help you better deal with many diverse lighting conditions. For example, I have a kitchen in my studio that is all white (not that it has to be) and I will often use it as a giant reflector. I bounced two of the barebulb strobes (in this case my Elinchrom D-Lites) directly into the kitchen, spreading them out so the light is reflected over a wide area. I had the strobes on light stands at about 7 feet high. I left those two lights stationary for all three examples. This kind of setup is very flexible and can yield many different effects. Variations on the white setup is something I use quite often.
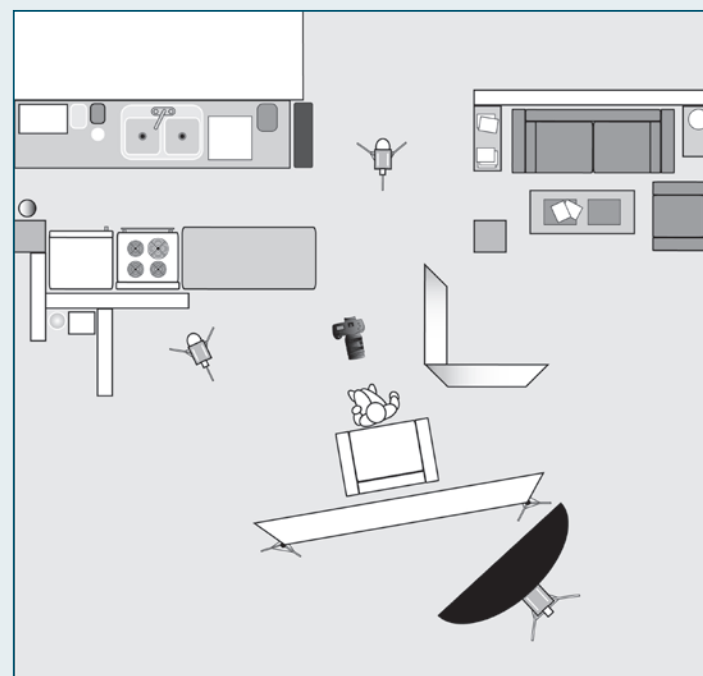
Bounce-The-Light-Off-Whatever-I-Can Setups

VARIATION 1

Natasha was placed in front of a white chair on the floor in front of me. I draped pieces of white patterned translucent curtain material between a couple of light stands behind the chair and placed my octabank behind the material to camera left, to create a subtle rim and hair light, as well as lightening the background. The key "light" here, the walls and cupboards of the kitchen, was behind me. The two bare bulb heads in this shot are behind me and slightly to my right, pointed away from me into the kitchen. Now here is an example of the "high key" look I was discussing earlier. We haven't gone crazy and made her disappear into the white cloud, but we have increased the power of the rim light. I'm probably 1:1 now if you were to do a reading with a meter between the rim and key light.

Notice the slight shadow on Natasha's face camera left, as well as the subtle rim light. You can really manipulate the light with this technique by (a) moving the lights closer together (to reduce the spread, creating higher contrast), (b) moving the lights directly behind the camera (making the light shadowless), or (c) moving the lights closer to the bounce source (i.e., the wall, making the source effectively smaller to create more specularity/shine). Experiment; the possibilities are endless.


F/2.5 @ 1/125, ISO 100

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VARIATION 2

The lights bouncing into the kitchen are still in the same place. I am close to standing in the same place, but Natasha has moved, put on more makeup, and a leather jacket. She looks a tad tougher in this shot than the last photo. You'll notice she is leaning against a wooden post - a great object for grounding the subject, and textured wood always provides interesting interactions with light. The kitchen is now camera left and in front of the post - so that's where the light is coming from. That post is good to lean on and looks kind of cool and earthy, but it's actually being used to block light from the camera left side of Natasha's face and body. I will often use this technique of blocking light to focus the light on the area I want to make most prominent: in this case the eyes, mouth and nose. I do basically the same thing with a softbox, by positioning the box so the light feathers off and kind of skips across the front of the face. Without movement, it's like the subject is stepping into the beam of light, I suppose. As a rim light, I used the octabank behind Natasha, to the right of the camera, to put a few highlights in her hair, and bring out the texture in the beam. You may notice the shadow camera right on Natasha's face.

My light source is very wide and soft, but I wanted a bit of punch in this image, so I placed a large black foam core panel to the right of the camera, in front of Natasha, to give some contrast to the shadows.
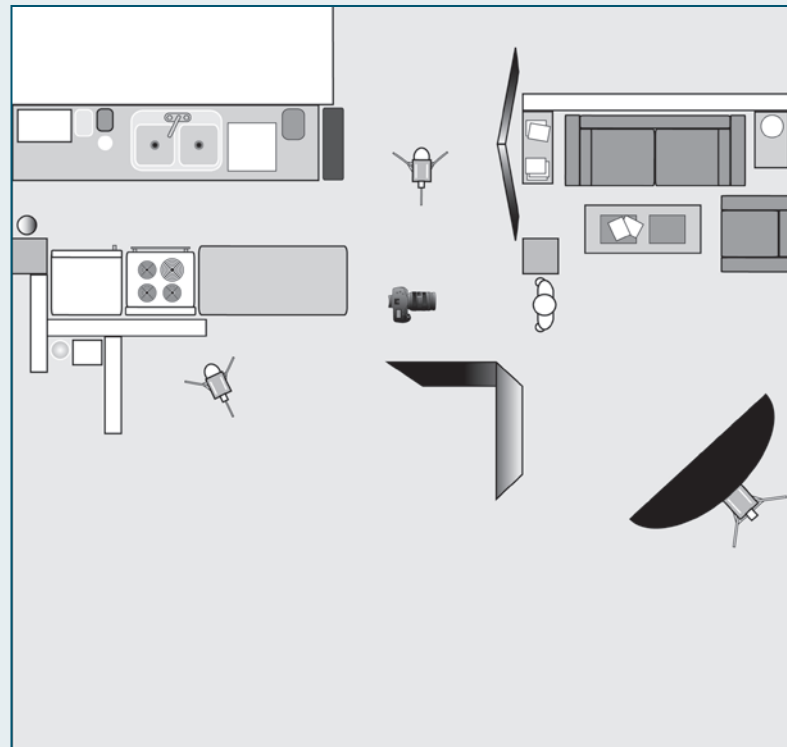

F/4.0 @ 1/200, ISO 250

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VARIATION 3

Back to the first position with the white setup, but with Natasha now siting on a high stool. The white curtain material has been removed so now you can see the back of the studio. It was a dark and gloomy Vancouver day, so the light coming through the window behind Natasha camera left is quite subdued. Our key light source, the kitchen, is once again behind me and to camera right. I placed two large black foam core panels on either side and in front of Natasha to add contrast, as well as flag (partially or completely block) the rim lights from the camera. The rim lights are two white foam core panels with bare-bulb Elinchrom heads bounced into them behind and on either side of Natasha. The key light is basically the same as the Variation 1, but notice the difference in the way the light looks. I used subtractive lighting techniques to suck the light out of the shadows with black cards instead of reflecting light into the shadows as I did with Variation 1 by using white reflectors.

These images use the same key light source as Variation 1 with Natasha. The one on the left is close to the same position as the white setup.

I added two small softboxes bounced into two V-flats behind and to either side of Natasha to create the rim light. The shot on the right uses the same bounced light source from my kitchen, now behind me and to my left. I placed my 7-foot Chimera behind Natasha to her right to create the rim light on her right side. This light looks very natural to me. A subtler rim light would, in my opinion give an even more natural look.
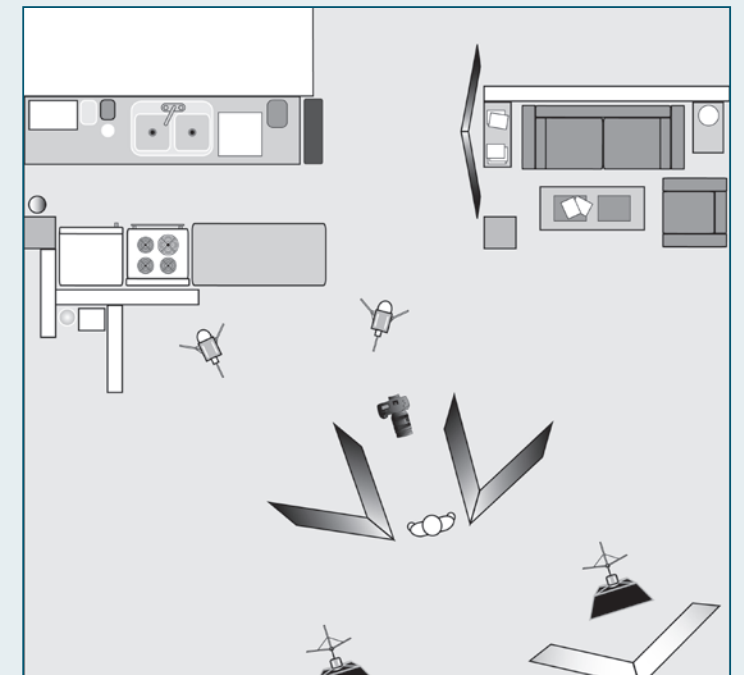
F/3.2 @ 1/40, ISO 125

CASE STUDY 9

This is an odd mix of hard and soft: fluorescent and strobe. - I have a Chinese-made copy of a Kino Flo Diva light 400. This is a fluorescent light bank that has four 55-watt, 21-inch compact fluorescent tubes. It produces a specular, semi hard-edged light. I used this light directly above my camera in combination with my octabank, camera left, feathered away from the subject and bounced into a 4x8 white V-flat on camera right. I also used two small Chimera softboxes bounced into two white V-flats behind and to the left and right of Sarah, creating the soft backlighting. The last bit was a 52-inch silver light disk as bounce directly in front and below Sarah's elbow. So why bother with all this fuss? It does create a unique look in that the overall effect is very soft, but the Diva light brings out a certain sparkle and contrast that is missing from a large soft source. I've done the same thing with a small Chimera softbox and my 7-foot octabank.

CASE STUDY 10

This shot of Amy has a nice sense of movement that was caught on the fly in the studio, hence the slightly out of focus eyes. I think this adds to the overall feeling of movement. The light sources here are the octabank camera left, V-flat camera right for bounce, and my Diva light directly in front and slightly above my camera. I also used two small Chimeras behind and camera left and right of Amy directed at her back. Notice the harder edge of the rim light from the smaller light source of the Chimeras. Bouncing the Chimeras into the V-flats softens and makes the rim light more subtle. Background is lit by natural window light.

Conclusion

I remember when I first moved to Vancouver from Edmonton to attend art school, I would wander around my new city with a feeling of wonder. I had a Bronica SQ medium format camera and a 35 mm Canon AE1. I shot everything from sunsets to rainy streets at night to door handles of old apartment buildings.

I was in awe of my surroundings and took advantage of every opportunity to explore and photograph them. I almost never shoot pictures just for the love of it anymore. When I started shooting professionally I had to buckle down and develop systems for achieving consistent results. The problem with systems, at least for me, is that you can get lost in them. They can take over and suck all the creativity from your life. I'm sure there are people out there that would disagree with me and say that being creative within constraints pushes you to greater creativity. That's fine, and in many ways I would have to agree with them as well. The problem arises when you become comfortable within those boundaries, especially if you have success within them and you stop trying; you forget about the wonder.

I have never been totally satisfied with my work, so although I have and still do fight with complacency in my craft, I can't

rest there long. Progress always passes you by if you don't keep pace. The thing I've learned from doing this for a long time, and this is a recent revelation, is there is no end to learning. No end to experimenting, no end to the challenge, and if you keep challenging yourself, there is no end to the wonder and passion you can have in being a photographer. As I mentioned earlier, I almost never shoot pictures for the love of it any more, Fact is, I still love shooting, probably more than ever. What keeps me excited is the immediacy of digital. I love seeing the results of what I am doing in real time. I love the ability to constantly refine my vision on the fly, reacting immediately with the subject and the environment. Sometimes when I'm shooting I get stuck and realize I need to mix it up. I will do something right off the wall - mess with what I know (or think I know) about lighting-composition-exposure-color balance, etc. and do something that doesn't make sense. I would never do that with film on

a real job because I need to get the client what he or she wants and the costs of time, film, and developing were much higher. Digital frees me, even on a real job, to play, to take risks.

My challenge to you is to use the examples in this book as a starting point, but only as a starting point. Play with everything, and use anything, to get something that excites you. There are guidelines in photography that can bring you to a certain place, which is useful, but the fun is going someplace new, someplace unknown, and discovering that the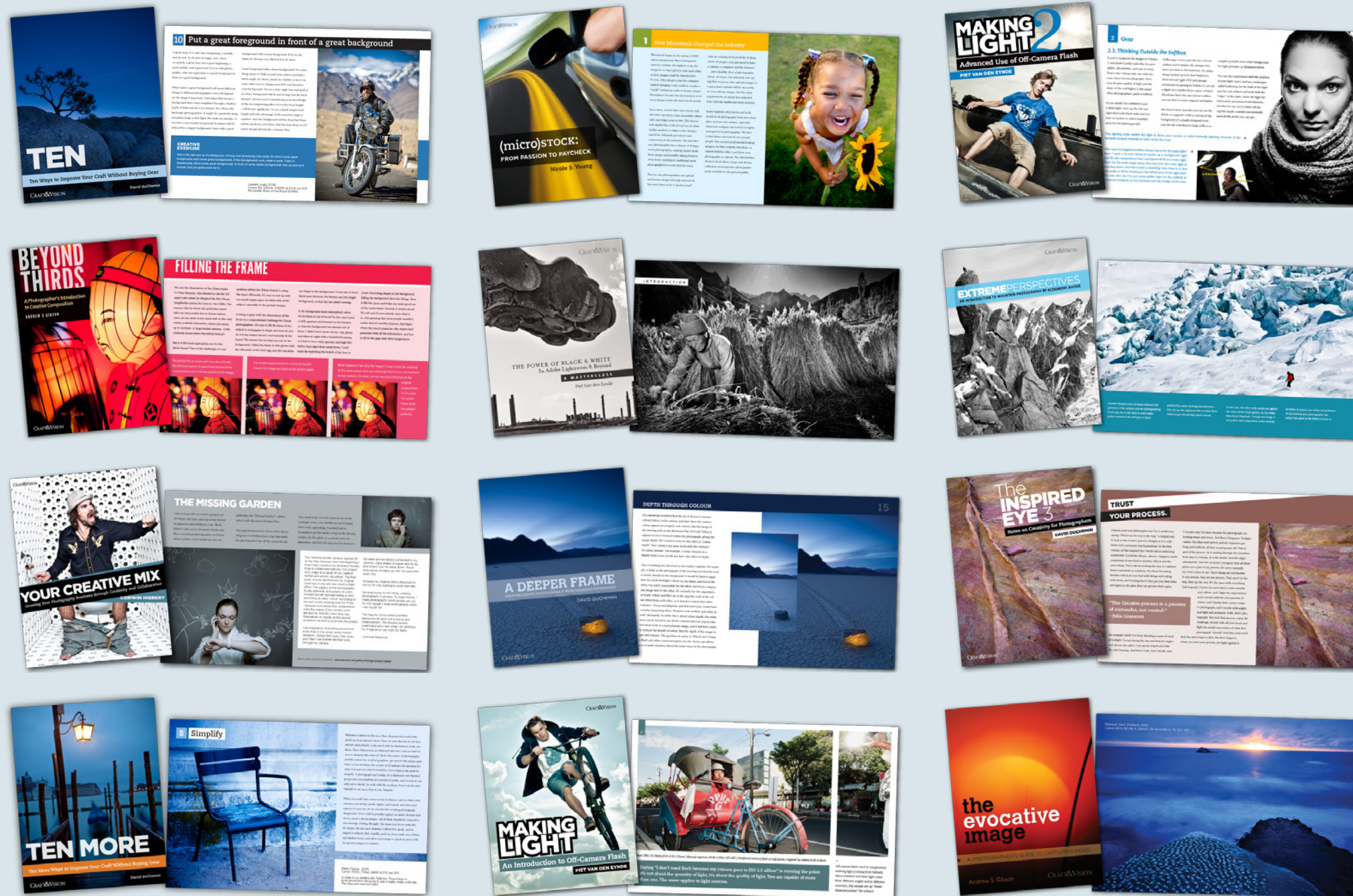re are still surprises out there.