

*Prologue: For the December 1991 issue of PEI, I wrote about creating a compact, highly portable two-light system from off-the-shelf components. When I first laid eyes on Adorama's tiny DigiPopper monolights, I knew they could serve as the basis of an affordable kit for location portrait or wedding photographers who wanted better lighting than shoe-mounted flashes. Here's a fresh look at an affordable system, updated for the 21st century.*

## Traveling light

Inexpensive two-light system for the photographer on the go

Adorama's DigiPopper 200 and 300 model monolights are mostly plastic, but have metal reflectors that can handle any umbrella with a diameter of 8-10mm.

(These Comet lookalikes are a tad smaller, so Comet accessories won't fit.) The DigiPoppers deliver 200- and 300-watt-second output, respectively, with three power settings (quarter, half, full), or four if you count *off* and have built-in switchable slaves. Adorama offers lots of accessories, from barn doors to snoots and bundles, everything from reflector to power cord to flash tube and modeling lights, as well as a surprisingly rugged 15-foot synch cord (with mini-audio type plug) with each light. I wanted to improve Adorama's already excellent lights by making them easier to carry to locations. ([www.adorama.com](http://www.adorama.com))

The key to making it work is **the bag**. I wanted a small, rugged carrying case that would take up little space, yet hold all the components of a versatile two-light system. At 18 x 8 x 11.5 inches, Lightware's Mid Size Soft Side case is made of black ballistic material that's puncture- and abrasion-resistant, yet soft as cotton. I was concerned about heat absorption with the back interior, but the bag's DuraLight lining has the same R-factor as a picnic cooler.

The case unzips fully to lie flat, so you can use it on location as a ground cover to protect your gear. With its high-tech foam

construction, the bag weighs just 2 pounds, and like all Lightware cases is built to a standard, not a price point. But unlike many Lightware cases, the Soft Side Kit case is not airline shippable, though it will easily fit into an airliner's overhead compartment. ([www.lightwareinc.com](http://www.lightwareinc.com))

The bag is not long enough to hold a typical light stand or umbrella, but I didn't let that stop me. I selected two 43-inch F.J. Westcott umbrellas that collapse to 14 inches, and easily fit the DigiPopper's reflector for typical applications. For fill, I selected the Westcott 2001 Optical White umbrella, and attached the 2002 Soft Silver version to the main light. The Optical White can also be used in shoot-through mode, creating diffused light-bank style effects. ([www.fjwestcott.com](http://www.fjwestcott.com))

Manfrotto's sturdy aluminum Nano Stands (code 3353 from Bogen Imaging) fit tight in the Lightware case, but because fabric cases can expand, it works just fine. The top of the five-section stands fit the DigiPoppers as though custom made. Fully packed with the entire lighting system—500 watt-seconds of power in two monolights, power and synch cords, two light stands and two umbrellas—the case is so light a 6-year-old could carry it. ([www.bogenimaging.com](http://www.bogenimaging.com))

### Icing on the cake

The synch cord plug for the DigiPoppers is mini-audio, so Bowens Pulsar wireless control units connect perfectly. These small, lightweight radio triggers slip onto your hot shoe, and can control an array of photographic equipment, including



Mary Farace shows off her new compact lighting kit. Two Adorama DigiPopper monolights sit atop Manfrotto lightstands. An F.J. Westcott Soft Silver Collapsible Umbrella is attached to the main light, and an Optical White Umbrella provides fill. All this, plus the Bowens Pulsar wireless remote controls in the Norazza bag in her left hand fit into the Lightware Mid Size Soft Side case in her right hand.

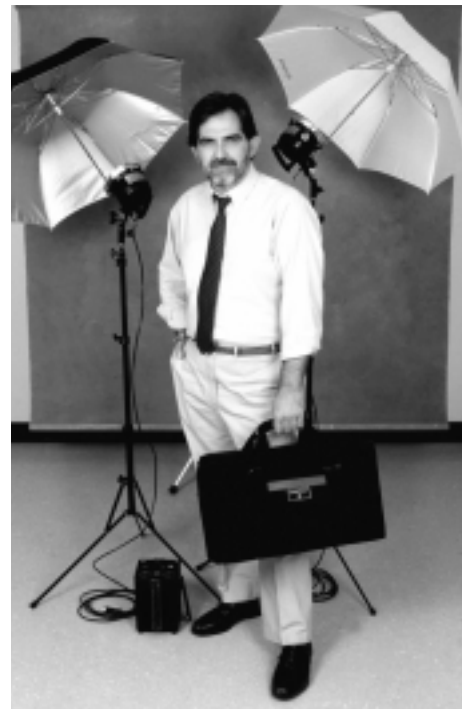
studio flash, cameras, and light meters. Pulsars operate at three volts, so they're perfect for digital cameras circuits, which will fry if the synch currents get too hot. They worked perfectly with my

## The sum of the parts

There may be better and cheaper two-light systems, but you won't find a more compact system at these prices anywhere. Here are the ballpark prices for the individual parts, culled from an informal Internet survey; actual prices may vary:

1—Adorama DigiPopper 200	\$130
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1—Lightware Mid Size S.S. Case	\$143
2—Manfrotto Nano Stands	@ \$108
2— F.J. Westcott Umbrellas	@ \$66

**Total \$791 (approximate)**



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In this 1992 photo, a younger, bearded Joe Farace shows off the original compact lighting kit. This Soft Side Kit case is slightly longer and slightly taller than the sturdier Lightware Mid Size Soft Side case. No wireless remote controls in this black-and-white 1991 version.

Canon EOS digital SLRs and a borrowed Fuji FinePix S1. Unlike sometimes unreliable infrared flash synch devices, which can't shoot through a wall or around corners, Pulsars operate on radio frequencies that allow them to function up to 100 meters (or 333 feet, which *sounds* longer), distance enough for most photographers. You don't have to worry about flash synch anymore and you never have to use synch cables again. ([www.rtsphoto.com](http://www.rtsphoto.com))

### Hit the road, Jack

It may surprise you to hear that all this stuff doesn't even fill up the case, so there's room for power cords, a brick of film or stacks of memory cards, a light meter, and other small accessories. The key to making any lighting or equipment suitable for location work is having the right equipment cases. As a fringe benefit, Lightware's soft-exterior cases are kind to your car's interior; their being flat when unzipped saves setup and knockdown time; and you need just one small bag to carry all your lighting gear. Happy trails. □