

No one ever learned from doing things the same old way every time. Play with your lighting and discover dramatic new dimensions—and just maybe a brand new market.

BY STEPHEN A. DANTZIG

# Fashion Lighting

SOFT LIGHT, HARSH LIGHT: A WINNING COMBO

Portrait photographers usually work with large soft boxes, which even out the lighting and create a wonderful wraparound effect. Placed at the proper distance from the subject, such lighting creates a gradual, smooth transition from the highlights to shadows.

But don't overlook the effects of using smaller, more direct lights in your setup as fashion photographers do. The high-contrast effect might not result in a "classic" portrait, but it can open the doors to a whole new market.

Fashion photographers use light sources of many kinds and sizes arranged in various combinations. They commonly use soft boxes, but not necessarily in the usual portrait position. They often use a small soft box as a main light, rather than its more common use as a hair light, and sometimes employ spotlights to great effect.

The way to create a whole new look—and possibly a new client base—is to play with your lighting. One of the greatest of my lessons-learned came from a friend and former assistant, who was always saying, "Yeah, I get that, but what if...?" What a liberating approach to photography! It has helped me to discover my own version of beauty lighting.

The main light for my beauty clients is usually a 30x40-inch soft box fitted with a Circlemask for round catch lights. For cosmetics or hair product shots, the lighting has to be broad and shadowless, yet the image must still pop off the page. I



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It is likely that the cropping in this editorial beauty photograph of Christine would get hammered at a print competition, but it is perfect for a client who will drop in text on the left side of the image.

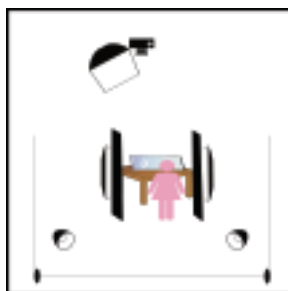
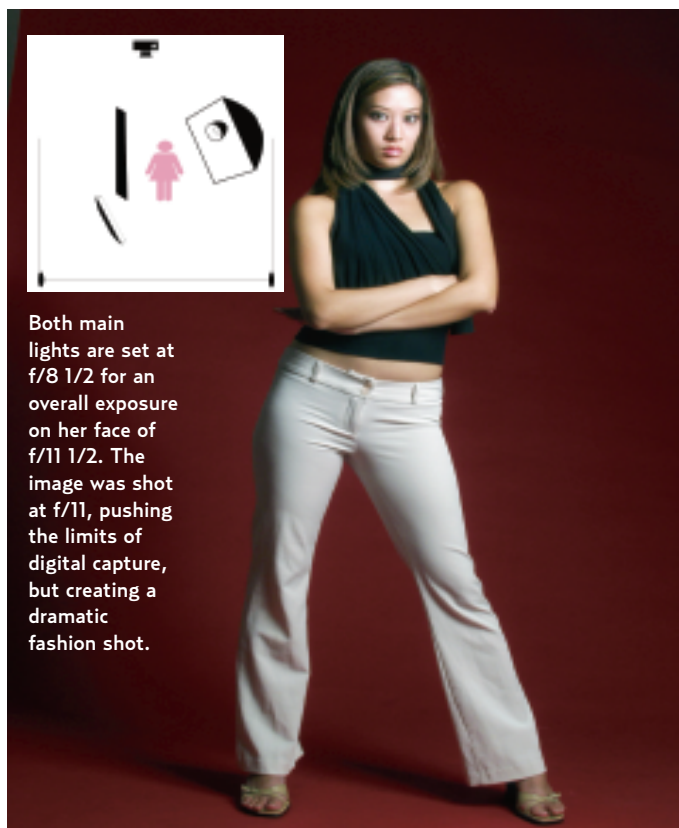


Diagram icons courtesy T.J. Walker, CommandZ Inc.



The color temperature of your light sources can have a dramatic effect on your images. With digital capture, we often use a custom white balance setting to ensure neutrality, but try selectively modifying the color temperature to create a desirable effect.



Both main lights are set at  $f/8 \frac{1}{2}$  for an overall exposure on her face of  $f/11 \frac{1}{2}$ . The image was shot at  $f/11$ , pushing the limits of digital capture, but creating a dramatic fashion shot.

This hard-soft lighting setup—one of my favorites—can create an effective fashion scheme. The large soft box creates an overall ambience, while the harsher light defines the shadow lines and patterns.

place the light directly in front of the model, fairly high up and angled down. I take out shadows and add snap by placing a silver card on a table at about chest level. This technique carries the risk of creating an overly flat image—you want it shadowless, but not boring. I place black flags on either side of the model for subtractive fill, an effect that coupled with the make-up creates a falloff and adds dimension. Christine's hair is lit by two medium Photoflex StripDomes; to add shine, I usually overexpose the hair up to one stop, depending on the light source.

What if we used the StripDomes as main lights? I lit Monica Ivey (*left*) with two Medium StripDomes, one on each side. For fill, I placed a spotlight with a 20-degree gridspot along the same axis as the camera. To slightly warm the look, I placed a 1/4-color-temperature orange gel on the fill light to drop the color temperature of the fill light and add a slightly warm cast to the image.

Spotlights used in conjunction with large light sources can create a variety of interesting effects. One such combo is called a *hard-soft* setup. In this image of Brooke Tanaka (*bottom*), the spotlight is a monohead fitted with a 20- or 30-degree gridspot placed directly in front of a 30x40-inch soft box. The pants are slightly underexposed, and the falloff from the soft box puts the shoes in relative shadow. The effect directs your eye to the point of highest contrast, Brooke's face.

You do not need to pair a large light source with a spotlight to create a dramatic image. The image of Teresa Bringas (*facing page, left*) was lit with a 20-gridspot placed next to a small StripDome. Both lights create contrast, so there was no need to overexpose for snap. In this case, I set the spotlight at  $1/2$ -stop less than the StripDome and exposed it accurately at  $f/11$ .

Spotlights used singly can create distinctive fashion images. The harsh light casts deep shadows that, when properly controlled, add a graphic dimension to the image. Proper light metering is critical with single spots to avoid losing detail. For the photo of Stephanie Reibel (*facing page, right*), I placed two spotlights very close to the camera axis. While a double spotlight can produce interesting shadows on the backdrop, the effect can be create an annoying distraction in close-ups. I used the Heal and Clone tools in Adobe Photoshop to eliminate the double shadow on Stephanie's nose. ■

*Award-winning commercial photographer Stephen Dantzig of Honolulu is the author of "Lighting Techniques for Fashion and Glamour Photography" (Amherst Media, \$29.95), which covers the techniques mentioned here and many others. To order a signed copy of the book, visit [www.dantzigphotography.com](http://www.dantzigphotography.com).*



The light sources in hard-soft setup do not need to be evenly exposed. It's often more effective to set the smaller, harsher light to a lesser value. This image of Teresa Bringas was created with two fairly small light sources, but the small StripDome is a good deal larger than the spotlight.



This image of Stephanie Reibel is the cover of my new book, "Lighting Techniques for Fashion and Glamour Photography." Two spotlights close to the axis of the camera create a dramatic effect, but also inconvenient double shadows on the nose, which I eliminated in Photoshop.