

Light is such an integral part of our lives, yet paradoxically, many photographers are oblivious to it unless they're actually shooting. If you're going to be a great photographer, you need to be aware of light.

LIGHTING

By Rick Souders

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If you're going to be a great and inspiring photographer, you need to be aware of light every day, everywhere you go. Notice how it illuminates objects, creates shadows and specular highlights; study reflections, translucence, color and shape. To really see and understand light is to begin to see life. When you appreciate the properties of light, you are constantly inspired to try new techniques, to turn your concepts into great images in the studio.

The manipulation of light is the essence of successful photography. A glistening drop of water on a frosty beverage glass stimulates taste appeal. Light shimmering through a model's hair generates sex appeal. Dark shadows and moody contrast in images of misfortune or devastation inspire us to give generously. Every day in my studio, light sets the stage for marketing a product or bringing awareness to a cause.

Here, with three images, I can demonstrate how it's done in my studio. About 80 percent our work is for food and beverage clients, including people and lifestyle photography. We are 100 percent digital, and we shoot with a Leaf Valeo 22 wireless digital back on both 4x5 and medium-format cameras.

First, a simple splash of blue liqueur in a glass. Two lights created this

Light of your life

Observe light in every aspect of your life to learn how to use it

BONUS CONTENT: Lighting diagrams of the images in this feature can be viewed at www.ppmag.com.

multiple award-winning image. The scrim material in front of the key light on the left gives us control over the intensity of the light and the highlight on the glass. The background is lit separately for two reasons: to afford control over the intensity of the light and the luminosity of the liqueur, and create contrast between the glass and the background. A fill card to the right of the glass slightly reduces the contrast. The glass is sitting on the corner of a brushed metal picture frame.

Second, a simple food shot with three lights. The seafood forks receive the primary light, again coming from the left through a scrim. There's a medium soft box above and slightly behind, but it's used for base fill light, not the main key light. A third and more directional small reflector creates nice backlight and illuminates the texture of the brushed steel. We used this image in a studio mail promotion.

Third, a fun people image shot during an experimental lighting day in the studio. The model's hair and make-up (silver paint and all) were styled by a professional from the Maximum Talent Agency. The set is a simple paper backdrop. A 22-inch reflector with a grid is positioned over the camera. A 4x6-foot soft box sits to the right of the camera. A small strip soft box above and behind the model illuminates her hair.

As you can see, it doesn't take a lot of equipment to create a great photograph. But it does require a knowledge

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and understanding of light to execute an effective visual statement. If you take the time in your everyday life to study the qualities of the light wherever you are, you'll soon be efficient in recreating color, warmth, contrast and mood in your studio.

We use daylight-balanced strobes to light the majority of the subjects we photograph. But we also introduce tungsten, or warm light, into scenes to give us a completely different mood, color palette, and even a different visual experience.

When you admire other people's art, whether it is photography, painting or sculpture, define what you like about it. Chances are that part of why you like it is the way in which light was used.

When you can look at an object and see the direction of the light source, know what's causing the reflections or shadows, understand what's creating the contrast, then you have mastered the art of seeing light.

Great inspiration comes from great light. That's what draws us to rainbows and sunsets. It's why we subconsciously choose to look at or ignore photographs wherever they appear. When we stop seeing, we stop learning. When we stop learning, we stop growing. See light, enjoy life and start creating great photographs! ■

Souders Studios is a commercial house of photography in Denver, Colo. Rick Souders' food and beverage imagery appears worldwide in advertising print campaigns, cookbooks, annual reports, and the Internet. His most recent book is "The Art and Attitude of Commercial Photography" (Amphoto Books). To see more of Souders' work go to www.soudersstudios.com.



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