

Tap the power of wireless portable flash with Nikon's AWL system. Use Speedlights to shape light with finesse.

BY ELLIS VENER

Versatile light

NIKON ADVANCED WIRELESS LIGHTING SYSTEM

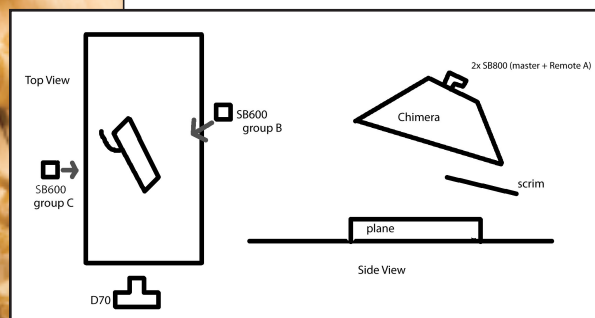
©Ellis Vener



In commercial photography we daily strike a tricky balance. Get overzealous with new techniques and risk losing the *why* of the photograph; stick to the known and your work grows moldy faster than bread in a basement. Creative types must balance the desire to break new ground with the need to satisfy the client. And always there's an urgent need for efficiency. Thus the eternal search for new and better tools.

As an integral part of the iTTL system in the newest Nikon cameras, the Nikon AWL system is worth a pause in your search. Built for the Nikon D70, D2H, F6, and D2X digital cameras, the AWL system expands your lighting options and simplifies the setup and control of complex lighting setups. By sorting the lights into separate channels and groups, the AWLs neatly controls any number of SB-800 and SB-600 Speedlights from a single master flash. Thanks to this technology, advertising and editorial photographer Joe McNally regularly uses some 20 SB-800s at a time. You can get performance specs on SB600 and SB800 Speedlights at www.nikonusa.com so instead, let's look at how AWL and iTTL work in a real-world studio.

The assignment was to create images for a brochure and Web site for English master carpenter Matt Gardner. For props, we chose an old trying plane, wood planks and thin, translucent wood shavings, symbols of his craft. For the top light that would create the overall character of



the image, I set two SB-800 Speedlights in a Chimera Super PRO XS soft box boom mounted on a Bogen Avenger C-stand with a 40-inch arm. One of the Speedlights was the master, which connected to a Nikon D70 camera through a chain of three SC-17 cables. The other SB-800 was programmed to be a remote in Group A. Combining two SB-800s into one diffused source not only doubled the maximum output, but also allowed finer control over the intensity and quality of the output. The second head, zoomed to a tight beam spread and angled toward the edge of the soft box closest to the camera, created a subtle highlight inside the broad light.

To highlight the wood shavings and the bottom of the plane, I placed two SB-600 Speedlights on the left and right sides of the set, designated to Groups B and C, respectively. Using separate groups, you can set different output levels for each flash, as well as isolate and check the effect of the light from each group by temporarily deactivating the master and other groups.

The lights were set but the shot didn't feel alive—too monochromatic. From a Roscolux lighting gel swatch book I chose a No. 08 pale gold gel for the left and a No. 09 pale amber gold gel for the right. I used a small Matthews full-stop scrim under the back edge of the top light to darken the rear of the set, and a small hand mirror for hard fill brought out more detail on the end of the plane. I set the D70 to NEF capture mode, and processed the files on a Power Mac G4 in Adobe Photoshop CS, and applied the Capture and Output sharpening tools in Photokit's Expert Sharpener plug-in.

Total elapsed time from setting down the wood planks to the final upload to the client: about 2.5 hours. The goal was to be creative, in control and efficient, and this setup aced it. ■

THE GOODS: NEW PRODUCTS

XTREMEPOWER

XtremePower energy packs are lightweight, long-lasting and versatile. They provide ample power for your camera, flash, laptop and more, giving you the freedom to roam. The packs come in two models: the XtremePower 10 powers mobile office equipment, such as laptops, portable printers, PDAs, portable storage devices and cell phones; the XtremePower 20 handles all that, plus several digital camera models and portable flash units. Both packs have dual output ports to power two devices at once, and an LED indicator for monitoring remaining power and charging status. They charge in just 4 hours, and come with a worldwide AC adapter and smart cables that automatically detect the correct voltage for your devices. Rated capacity is 6,000mAh/66.6WH. Both units measure 4.3x8x1.2 inches and weigh 1.3 pounds. Auto/air DC charger optional. The XtremePower 20 sells for \$399 and the 10 model for \$360. Details: www.xtremepowerusa.com.



WESTCOTT SPIDERLITE TD5

The TD5 in the new Westcott Spiderlite stands for tungsten/daylight, five lamps. Insert up to five lamps using a standard E26 base and run five 150-watt (3200° K) halogen lamps or five 23-watt (5100° K) fluorescent lamps. There are three separate controls, one pairing the top and bottom lamps, one pairing the right and left lamps, and one for the center lamp. You can run any combination with no shift in color temperature, allowing you to set up lighting ratios using multiple heads on one set. The Spiderlite TD5 is \$399. A Location Kit includes two lights with tilter brackets, two soft boxes, two stands and a carrying case for \$1,264. Go to www.fjwestcott.com for details.



ELINCHROM STYLE 400 BX PORTABLE FLASH

The Elinchrom Style 400 BX portable compact flash unit has a power range of 25- to 400-watt-seconds, and works with 5 f-stops, ranging from 1/16 to 1/1. The 400 BX weighs just 4.3 pounds and measures roughly 8.3x5.5 inches. It features automatic voltage detection from 90 V to 260 V, and a rapid recycle time of 1 second.

Elinchrom markets two inexpensive kits that include two Style 400 BX heads, an umbrella reflector (16cm), a carrying case, and silver and translucent umbrellas (83cm). Basic kit: EL 400 BXECON, \$995. Big kit: EL 400 BX KIT, includes two Manfrotto light stands and a stand bag, \$1,098. The new flash units are available through Bogen Imaging, exclusive North American distributor of Elinchrom products. Visit www.bogenimaging.us.

