

LIGHTING ESSENTIALS

tech sheet



CREATING A NATURAL AMBIENT LOOK

TWO LIGHTS AND MIXED AMBIENT

FOR THIS PHOTOGRAPH:

- two speedlights (am using a 550 and 430 Canon)
- 1 medium or large umbrella (biggest you have)
- two stands
- tripod recommended

We will examine an ambient light look in this tech sheet. There are times when we have some wonderful ambient to work with and then there are times when we have to all the light ourselves. These three shots represent ways of working to provide a natural look to an image without having any naturally occurring light to work with.

I am using a 60" umbrella with a 550 Canon Flash and a bare 430 Canon flash for the light in the first picture. And I wanted the image to look natural, relaxed and not look like it was strobed or overly lit. It is barely out of frame to camera left.

Without the flash, there were some large spots in the ceiling and I looked at how they lit the room. I had some ambient so I wanted to make sure that I provided a look that would be somewhat consistent with the look of the room.

Below you see the room with only the back light firing. You can see the spotlights in the ceiling and also how dark it is to Briana's front. The addition of the umbrella and its soft light makes the shot look more natural. And having the background be brighter also gives the shot a sense of light in two distinct areas... the way it would be naturally.

It is so important to really think about the outcome when doing a shot like this. Look at light, all the time, notice how it does things to subjects and spaces. When you are then trying to work out a shot, you can pull those images out of your mind and recreate the look.

Creating Ambient Light

In the first shot we are going to create the ambient light with a second speedlight. I have mine on a stand and it is pointed up at the ceiling at an angle toward camera right. Look at the shadows from the drawer pulls behind Bri. You can see the angle of the shadows. That tells you where the light was coming from. I also wanted it to be at an angle so the image would look a little more natural. Coming straight down could

have looked a little contrived. The slight angle is more convincing.



I took a meter reading of that light and dialed it to give me f4.5. That is 1 and 1/3 stop over the main light which was going to be f-2.8 as discussed on the right.

I moved Bri into position and made a few shots to get the angle of the light just right. Notice that there is no spill of the ambient strobe onto the shadow side of her face.

Two reasons:

1. I wanted her to be separated from the back
2. The feeling of light coming from the front.

LIGHT: See It.



The effect of the large umbrella is very easily seen in these two images. The power of the light in the umbrella isn't very high. I wanted the spotlights to stay a part of the image, even though they may not be offering too much. The light on the camera left of her head shows how a little punch from the spotlight in the dining room can help add some 'texture' to the shot.

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FOR THIS PHOTOGRAPH:

- one speedlight
- one stand
- tripod recommended

The shot of Bri near the shower is a great example of how to create a natural light look with some strobes, in this case only one strobe.

This is a large, walk-in shower in the condo we use when doing the Mexico workshops. The shot was taken late at night so there is no sunlight coming through the large block glass window to camera right. I had to create a feeling of that beautiful sunlight with my strobes.

I took a speedlight and put it inside the shower with a medium shoot through umbrella and made some shots. They looked alright...but didn't have the look of the light flooding in that window. So I took the bare strobe and placed it right inside the shower and blasted the walls with it. That huge lightsource nearly replicated the light that would be normally filling that shower on a beautiful Mexico morning.

I had Bri lean forward so there would be light flowing on the wall behind her head and then blocked by her body leaning against the moulding. The tungsten lights in the bath area added some warm fill and the shot ended up looking quite natural. I had seen this shot in my head from the first morning, so it was cool to make it happen... and it looked exactly like I had it in my head.

FOR THIS PHOTOGRAPH:

- one speedlight
- one stand
- tripod recommended

Bri on the phone is a great example of finding a shot on the spur of the moment. She was doing her hair in the mirror there and the makeup lights all around the mirror were creating a wonderful light.

She turned her back to the mirror and all the light on her face went away. But I wanted to recreate that cool look of the mirror lights and the natural ambience of the dressing room.

Directly in front of Briana, to camera left, is a walkin closet. It is painted white. Perfect. I took a speedlight and placed it in the closet. Aiming it at the back wall provided a very large, soft light source coming out the double doors of the closet.

I metered the lights at ISO 800, and found a shutter speed that placed them at f-4. I made sure the light coming out of the closet was f 2.8 and shot at that exposure. This made the makeup lights brighter.



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FOR THIS PHOTOGRAPH:

- two speedlights
- one umbrella
- two stands

This was a fun shot we wanted to do with the computer in the living room of the condo. We had all the lights on in the kitchen to provide at least a little light back there.

The walls of the condo are a warm tan and green and the ceiling is about 30 feet up there, so there is not a lot of light bouncing around.

I wanted Bri to look like she was sitting in the living room with a computer with some lights on.

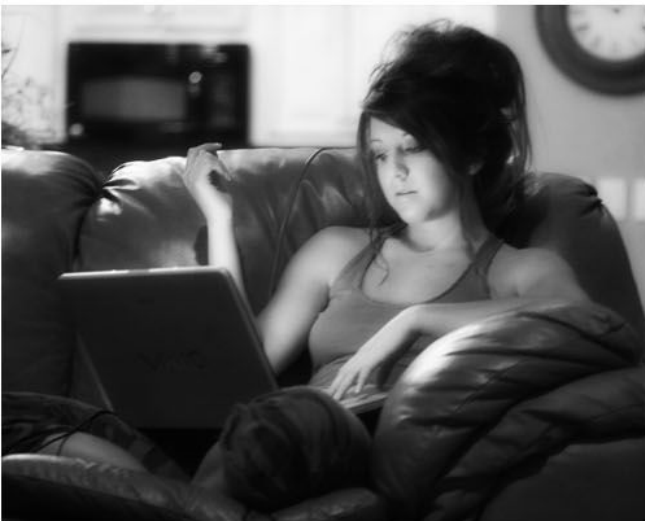
You can see in the set up picture that I used a speedlight for the backlight. In this case, I made it one stop brighter than the umbrella light at the front. This added a specular component that was quite nice.

The umbrella (60") was brought in as close as possible to give a nice, soft and smooth light. The result is the look we were after. Seems like a natural, ambient shot.



For the shot below, all you need is a model who understands what 'don't move' means and a tripod. This shot has all the lights on in the condo and Bri is being exposed by a white screen on the laptop. Shutterspeed was about 1/10 at f2.8 with an ISO of 800.

As the newer cameras are providing better and better images at lower ISO, making shots like this won't involve graininess, and degradation of the image. This image is quite noisy, but I don't mind. It reminds me of pushed Tri-X from, you know... back in the day.



This shot of Briana was done with soft window light as a main source.

I am still using a tripod, something I seem to be doing more and more of these days.

The background was very dark, so I added a strobe to the back to lighten the bricks just a little.

You can see the dark edge of her shoulder here as it falls off into the dark room.

Sometimes the strobe you bring doesn't actually light up the subject, but the background for a natural look.

