

STUDIO ANYWHERE

A Photographer's Guide to Shooting in Unconventional Locations

NICK FANCHER

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This book is dedicated to anyone starting with nothing. Let no one tell you that you can't create your own path or that you need to follow a certain formula to achieve success. Rules are constantly being broken, rewritten, and broken again. Enjoy your journey.

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Introduction

What's your definition of a photo studio? Is it having a white seamless backdrop or a cycl wall? Maybe it's anyplace where you have total control of all light. Perhaps it's a place where you can create dynamic product shots. In a perfect world, where every day is a breezy 72 degrees with partial cloud coverage, we would all have a 5,000-square-foot studio in New York or Los Angeles. We'd also have the entire catalog of B&H in our equipment lockups. But that isn't reality.

Reality is that you have an outdated DSLR with two decent lenses (which took you several years to save up for), and you managed to sneak out of your office job an hour early to shoot an underpaying client in a public park on a gray, 45-degree rainy day. Or maybe all you have at your disposal is an unfinished basement. Or a garage. Or the empty conference room at your office day job. That's the point of *Studio Anywhere*: to show you how to achieve the shot of your dreams while working in some of the most problematic scenarios imaginable.

No Studio? No Problem

Over the years, I've slowly discovered that a traditional photo studio isn't necessary to get studio-like results. If you are shooting a portrait of someone, for example, you need only a few feet of blank wall (especially if it's a cropped shot, such as a head shot). Recently, I was in New York City on a shoot, and I decided to take an extra day to do a few test shoots with models. Because I didn't know the city well, nor did I have a permit to shoot on the street or the budget to rent a studio, I thought it would be easiest to just meet the models at their homes, shooting both in their apartments and around their buildings. I liked the element of unpredictability. When I punched the addresses into my GPS, I didn't know whether I was walking into a penthouse suite with an amazing view of the city (it happened) or an unpolished art living space, occupied by seven artists in Williamsburg (also happened). I knew that I had the tools to overcome any lighting issues, however, so I welcomed the challenge and was excited to see what kind of scenarios I'd encounter.



The shoot that started it all. I took this shot at one of my first shoots in New York City and realized that I was better off meeting my subject at his place rather than renting a studio.

This book is a diary of sorts, of my experiences in working without the use of a traditional photography studio. Whether shooting a corporate portrait, a test shoot with a model, a promo shoot with a band, or a wedding, I always seem to be on location—even back when I *had* a studio. Staring at those rent bills each month, I came to realize the time I did spend in that expensive space was spent sitting in front of my computer, editing, or meeting with clients, which could just as easily be done at coffee shops. So, I ditched the traditional studio. Now when I need to shoot a portrait on a blank backdrop or I need a place to shoot production shots, I get creative, as you'll see in the chapters ahead.

My goal in writing this book is not to teach you how to replicate one of my photos. My goal is to get you to think outside the box, or studio, in our case. This book is a place where I share the techniques, tips, and shortcuts that I've learned along the way. Remember the end of *The Last Crusade*, when Indiana Jones tossed the fistful of dirt across the invisible bridge to make it visible? This book is my fistful of dirt.

I see this book as a resource where photographers can glean technical info from behind-the-scenes photos and lighting diagrams from my photo shoots. However, I don't stop there. Because picture taking is only half of the process, I also lay out what my Lightroom and Photoshop workflow looks like. Finally, I let you in on the aesthetic decisions I made; directing a photo shoot is more than simply knowing how to wield a camera or process a raw file. This book takes a holistic view of the photographic process, starting at conceptualization through the execution and post-production to completion.

Take Control: Gear

Whether you are working with a harsh, sunny day, a gray rainy day, a small hallway with a white drop ceiling, or a large, dark room with a black ceiling, you must be able to overcome less-than-ideal scenarios. Once the shoot is over, you need to know how to take the raw images and polish them, using editing software such as Lightroom and Photoshop. This means that you need to have the right gear to accomplish these things, and you need to know how to properly use it. Thankfully, there's far less gear required to accomplish this than you may think.

My perspective has always been one of using what you have. If you are just starting out, you have nothing or next to it. I bought my first DSLR at Best Buy, back in 2005: a Canon 20D with a kit 18–55 f/3.5–5.6 lens and a 1GB memory card. It's a joke of a setup now, but I made it work. I used that setup exclusively for three years, until I could afford to get a Sigma 70–200 and a 430EX strobe. I still couldn't afford a decent wide-angle lens or even triggers for my flash (this was before the market was saturated with cheap wireless triggers). Still, I used what I had. Occasionally, I would book a gig where I needed better gear, so I would rent the additional gear from a fellow photographer, billing the client for the expense.

I often receive an email from someone asking me to recommend what gear a beginner photographer should purchase. My response is always the same: It depends. What's your budget? \$500? Save up your money. If you manage to book a paying gig and need gear for it, use your \$500 to rent the gear for the shoot and bill the client for the expenses. You need at least \$1,000 to get a halfway decent startup rig, in my opinion. Buy a used, full-frame sensor DSLR, if possible, such as a Canon 5D Mark I, and buy a decent lens, like a Canon 85 1.8. Your next goal should be to purchase a decent wide-angle lens, such as a Canon 35 1.4L or a nice zoom lens, like a 24–70 f/2.8L. After you have a decent body and a couple of reliable lenses, you can start to consider purchasing a flash setup. That may be odd to hear, since I am a strobe guy, but honestly, you can accomplish quite a bit with a reflector and some sunlight.

I don't have a ton of gear, but I have all the tools that I need to get the job done. Like David against Goliath, I forgo larger weapons and opt instead to use something simpler with which I am familiar and accurate. Almost every piece of gear I own can fit in my Pelican 1510 case, which at 22x14x9 inches can fit into most airplane overhead compartments ([Figures I.1](#) and [I.2](#)).



- A.** Powerex AA batteries and backup batteries
- B.** Backup battery and charger
- C.** Backup camera (Canon Rebel XS)
- D.** Memory cards (86GB)
- E.** Canon 70–200 F/4L IS
- F.** Sustenance
- G.** Gel kit
- H.** Butterfly clips for styling
- I.** 1/8 to 1/4 sync adaptor
- J.** Sync cords and flash stands
- K.** LumoPro LP180s
- L.** PocketWizard Plus X Transceivers
- M.** Canon 35 F/1.4L
- N.** Card reader
- O.** Canon 5DII
- P.** Rocket Blaster air blower
- Q.** Polarizing filter
- R.** Honl grid
- S.** Tripod mount
- T.** Variable ND filters

Figure I.1 My gear. It may not look like much, but I've got it where it counts.



Figure I.2 Almost all of my gear fits in my Pelican 1510 case.

As you can see, I have two good lenses: one wide prime and one long zoom. I have a full-frame, DSLR camera body and a cheaper backup DSLR. For lighting, I have three LumoPro LP180 strobes, which are durable, manual flashes (*no E-TTL*). I also have two neutral-density filters (one for each lens size), a colored gel pack, a strobe grid, a polarizing filter, an air blower to remove sensor dust, and a ton of AA batteries. Besides what you see in the case, I also have a couple 15-foot light stands, an umbrella, a 5-in-1 reflector, and a tripod that I rarely use.

Tip

Although I prefer Powerex rechargeable batteries, I also keep a backup stash of disposable batteries in my case. Better to have them and not need them than the alternative.

Whether you're a seasoned pro or just beginning, as a photographer, one of your main priorities should be to get past the novelty of your gear. Whether you don't know how to properly use your gear or you are more focused on getting the image technically immaculate, you will likely miss out on the whole purpose of the shoot: to connect with your subject and capture their essence as you perceive it.

To illustrate my point, consider [Figures I.3](#) and [I.4](#), which feature the same subject photographed with two different camera bodies. For [Figure I.3](#), I used my semi-pro body: a Canon 5DII. I shot [Figure I.4](#) with a Canon Rebel XSi (which currently goes for just under \$200 on eBay) that I keep in my case as an "Oh, shit" body. The 5D has a full-frame sensor and 21 megapixels; it's an all-around badass piece of equipment. Weighing in at just over 10 megapixels, the Rebel is a starter camera with a cropped sensor. If I were to pull that out of my case at a commercial shoot, the art director would laugh at me. When used to capture good light at a low ISO, and in combination with a decent lens, however, the camera bodies provide comparable results. Even when viewing the images at 100%,

it's hard to tell the difference between the two files, other than the 5D's larger file size.



Figure I.3 Shot with a Canon 5DII. Take a close look at it, and then compare this image to [Figure I.4](#), which was shot with the Rebel XSi.



Figure I.4 Shot with a Canon Rebel XSi. Although the XSi is a far inferior camera body to the 5DII, you'll have a hard time telling the results apart when you use a good lens in good light.

Deconstruct the Lighting

When it comes to lighting, a small flash is typically more than sufficient to get the job done well. The lighting diagrams included in this book will let you in on how I light a variety of situations with nothing more than small flashes. Unfortunately, a lighting diagram or behind-the-scenes photo won't be available for most images that you come across. For this reason, knowing how to properly deconstruct the lighting in an image, sometimes referred to as reverse engineering, is an invaluable skill. If you know how to read the quality of light in a photograph, you'll be able to tell quite a bit about how it was created, such as how many lights were used, whether the light source was soft or hard, and whether it was large or small.

Some photos can be rather easy to deconstruct, especially when you can discern the light

modifier in the *catchlight* (the specular highlights) in a subject's eyes or on the shiny surface of a product. The task gets trickier if multiple light sources are involved or if the subject is in a scene with mixed lighting—not to mention photos that are composites, which open a whole other can of pixels. But pay attention to a few of these constants:

- Height and direction of the light source
- Hardness or presence of any shadows
- Number of apparent light sources

Once you've sharpened your skills at reading light, you'll be able to glance at a photo and know, for example, that it was lit with an umbrella overhead and a reflector underneath, or with two softboxes sandwiched together in front of the subject. Then, if you or your client wants similar results to a photo you see, you have a head start on ideas, knowing at least where to begin with the lighting.

Consider [Figure I.5](#). This is a one-light portrait with a hard light source: just a bare-bulb strobe on a light stand. The flash head is zoomed out to 24mm, which allows for a wider, more even light spread. Note the tiny catchlight, the hard quality to the light, and the defined shadows on the subject's face. The similar shadows on the background mean that the subject is also close to the background, as well. In [Figure I.6](#), the distance of light to subject and from the subject to the background as well as strobe output level are all the same, but the zoom is now set to 70mm. As you can see, the spread is not as wide, leaving the center of the flash hotter, or brighter, than the edges of the light. This technique of zooming the flash head in can be useful if you are shooting a subject outside or in a setting without a backdrop, where light falloff is not apparent. In other words, it allows you to get the most out of your flash, because it's focused into the area where your subject is standing, rather than off into no-man's land.

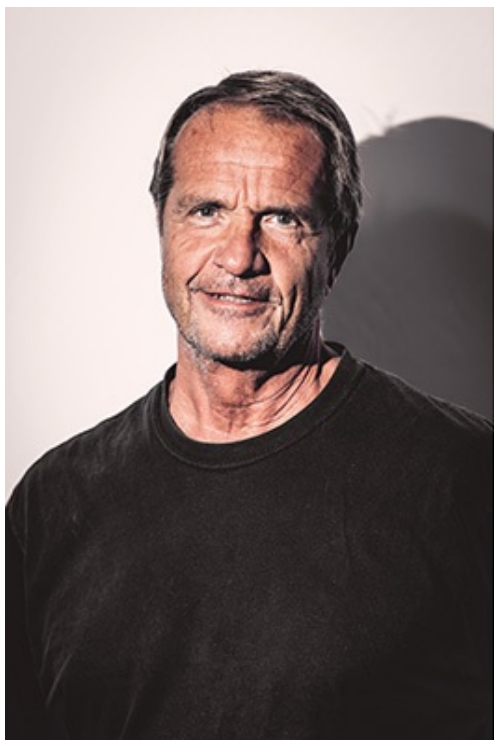


Figure I.5 The subject is standing in front of a white background, while the light source is a bare-bulb flash, zoomed out to 24mm. Note the tiny catchlight, the hard shadows below his jaw, and how defined and close his shadow is to him.

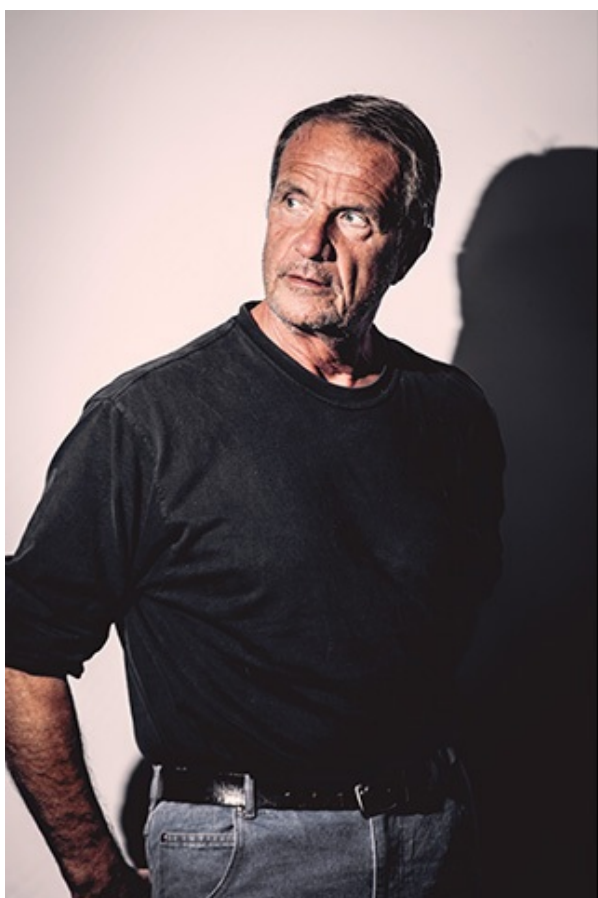


Figure I.6 The subject is standing in front of a white background, while the light source is a bare-bulb flash, zoomed in to 70mm. There are still hard shadows on the subject, and his shadow is still close and defined. The light spread is starting to fall off in the corners of the image, however, leaving a slight hotspot in the middle of the frame.

Figure I.7 shows the flash zoomed to 105mm, while **Figure I.8** zooms to 105mm with a

grid added. The quality of light is still hard, but with the focus all the way to the middle, so there is almost no light spread, and the center of the light is now two to three stops brighter. Again, this is helpful to keep in mind when you are outside, trying to overpower the sun and your flash needs all the juice it can get. Not to mention, if your subject is outside and not against a backdrop, using a wide flash zoom is just a waste of power. Instead, focus the zoom in and just worry about properly lighting the subject.

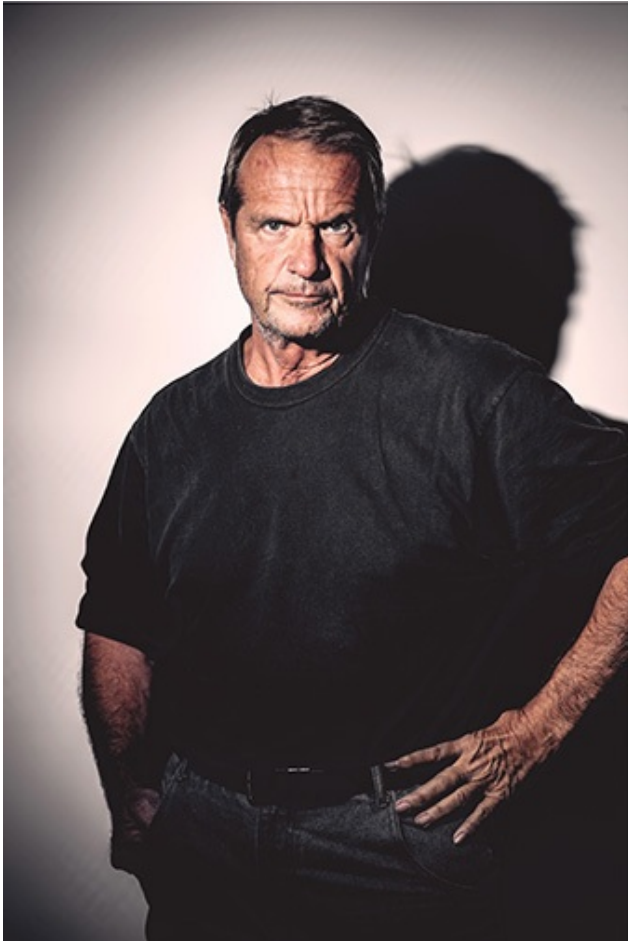


Figure I.7 The subject is standing in front of a white background, while the light source is a bare-bulb flash, zoomed in to 105mm. The light falloff in this image is much more apparent.

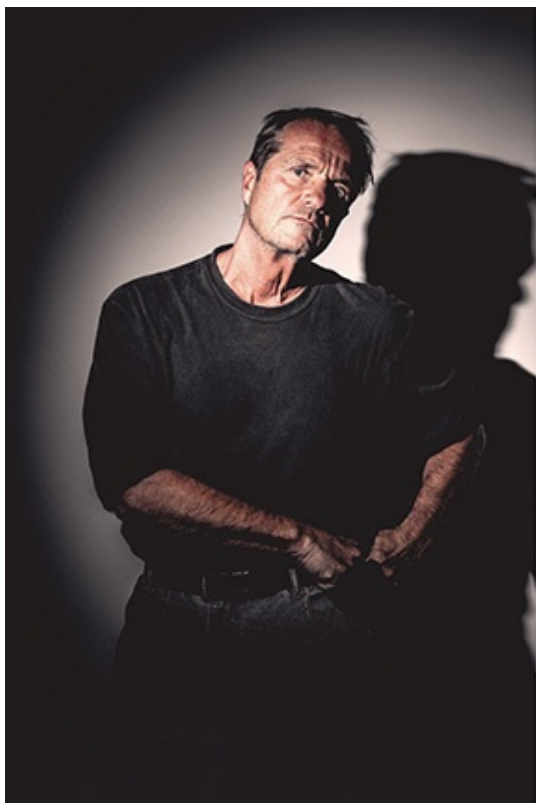


Figure I.8 The subject is standing in front of a white background, while the light source is a flash zoomed in to 105mm with an added grid. The light is now almost like a spotlight.

When it comes to softening your light source, you have several options. [Figure I.9](#) was lit with a strobe zoomed to 24mm, just like in [Figure I.5](#), but with a white umbrella added to the light. When deconstructing the photo, look for a circular shape in the subject's eyes (the umbrella) and also note the quality of any present shadows. When the light is diffused by an umbrella or another modifier, the shadows will appear softer, with the edges feathered rather than defined. [Figure I.10](#) was lit the same as [Figure I.9](#), except that the subject's shadow is no longer visible in the background, which means that he's no longer standing right in front of the backdrop.

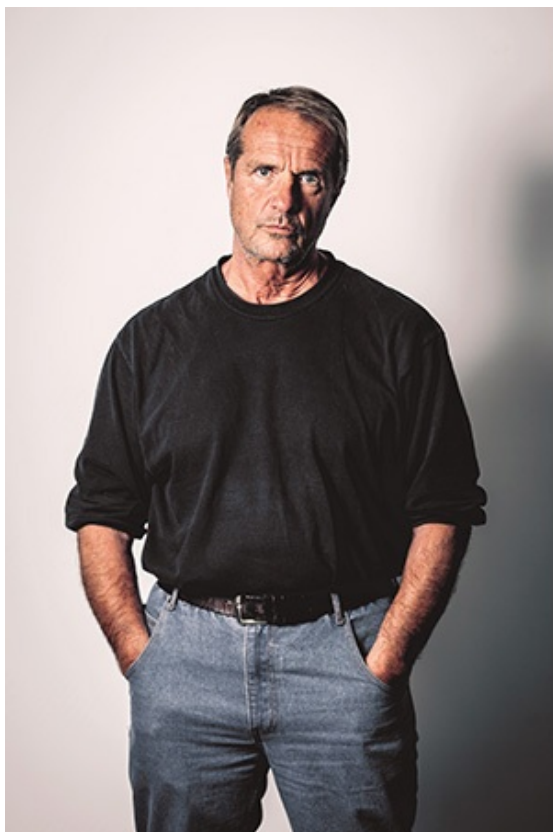


Figure I.9 The subject is standing in front of a white background, while the light source is a flash zoomed out to 24mm with an added umbrella. The catchlight is a bit larger, and the shadows are much softer.



Figure I.10 The subject is 3 feet away from a white background, while the light source is a flash zoomed out to 24mm with an added umbrella. His shadow is no longer visible because of the increased distance between him and the backdrop.

If the catchlight is a square or a narrow rectangle ([Figure I.11](#)), you can deduce that the light source was a softbox or a strip light, respectively. Add a second light on the other side of the subject, leaving a small gap between them, and you have a lighting effect similar to the one Martin Schoeller has made famous, as seen in [Figure I.12](#).

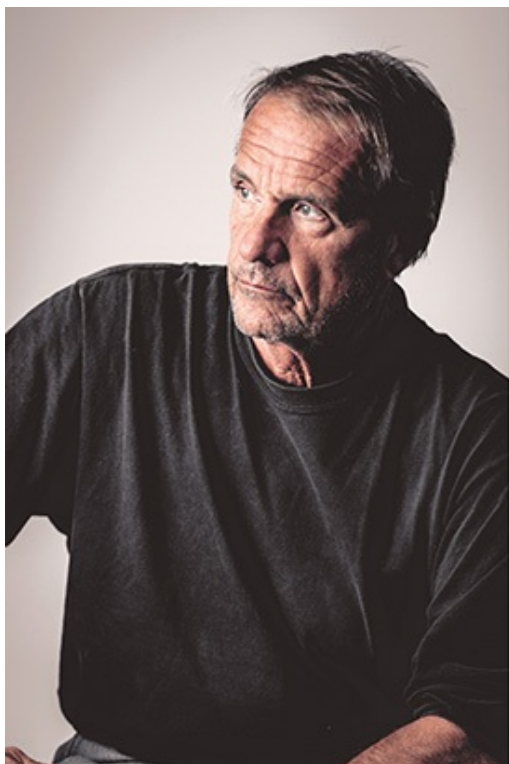


Figure I.11 The subject is 3 feet away from a white background, while the light source is a flash zoomed out to 24mm and bounced into a 40x60-inch white board to create a large light bank. The catchlight is a bit larger and is shaped like a square.

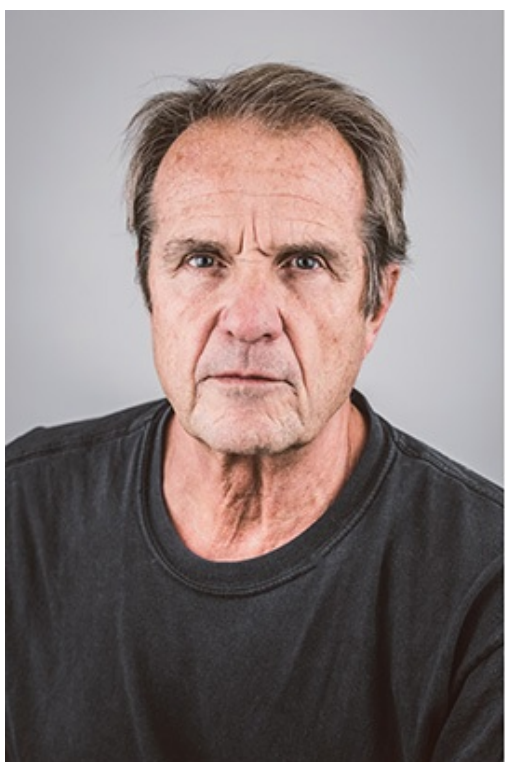


Figure I.12 This setup is similar to the one that Martin Schoeller made famous: two softboxes placed in front of the subject, about 2 feet apart. It's a soft, flattering light that leaves a cool catchlight in the subject's eyes.

Sometimes there may be two catchlights, one brighter than the other, as is the case in [Figure I.13](#). The brighter catchlight is the light, and the less vivid shape is just a reflector. If you move the subject several feet off of a white background, the main light won't spill onto it as much, turning the white to a medium gray tone, as seen in [Figure I.14](#). Also,

note the addition of the hair light in the shot, which helps to separate the subject from the darker background. If I aim the second (hair) light at the background, powering up the output so that it's higher than my main light, I now have a pure white background, as seen in [Figure I.15](#).



Figure I.13 The subject is 3 feet away from a white background, while the main light is zoomed out to 24mm and shot into an umbrella, with a fill reflector below the subject's chin. There are now two catchlights: one circular and bright, and one wider and less vivid.



Figure I.14 While similar to the previous setup in [Figure I.13](#), this has an added hair light, which separates the subject from darker backgrounds.



Figure I.15 Here you see a large main light and an illuminated, white background. Of course, all this deconstructive advice is not to say that you can only achieve certain results by replicating the lighting or techniques that another photographer used, or by replicating what you see in the pages of *Studio Anywhere*. Rather, once you understand how light works and how to manipulate the light that's available to you (be it natural or

manufactured), it's your prerogative to use that information in fresh and creative ways. Just remember to always check the directional and quality of the light, and especially the eyes, because the eyes don't lie. Only Photoshop does.

Part I: The Living Room Studio



Every home has a white wall. And quite often, that's all you need. Think about it. What's a studio, anyway? It's a big, open room with a white sweep for shooting seamless, full-body portraits, amongst other things. But how often do you actually need to shoot seamless, full-body portraits? Typically, I shoot only a head shot. Or waist up. Or the subject sitting in a chair. So now instead of needing a white sweep, I need only a white wall. And every

home has a white wall.

This first section focuses on the many scenarios that you can execute within a home. Whether you have access to spacious, exotic homes filled with mood-setting furniture or to only the world's smallest apartment surrounded by piles of laundry, find the white wall and use the tips in this chapter to help you. And I'm not just talking head shots on white, either. I'll be covering full-body shots, fashion lighting, natural light, and strobe flash—pretty much any scenario that you would typically encounter in a controlled environment.



I photographed musician Chelsea Wolfe on location at Sargent House, her record label, in Los Angeles. As you can see, all I used was a white wall in the living room.

1. White Light, White Wall

Brian has a big beard. But Brian has a small apartment—300 square feet small, and that’s empty. I conducted the shoot in his bedroom/living room accompanied by his bicycle, a gigantic console stereo, a twin bed, stacks of records, and mounds of clothing. I had about 20 square feet left to work with, so I needed to be extra creative.

I had brought along four 40x60-inch sheets of 1/2-inch-thick white foam core, which I bring to most of my home shoots, because I don’t know what I am walking into. If Brian turned out to be the founder of the Team Edward Fan Club, with every inch of wall space covered in *Twilight* movie posters, I’d need to use those panels as my blank backdrop.

As can see from the setup in [Figure 1.1](#), Brian’s apartment was a vampire-free zone but a tiny one. My back was against one wall, and just out of the frame on the right was the closet. Because there was no room to set up a backdrop, I propped up a couple of the 40x60-inch white boards against the door to the kitchen.



Figure 1.1 The setup is in an apartment living room/bedroom. As you can see, space was so limited that I couldn’t even move the light stand out of the shot.

When it came to setting up my light, I didn’t have enough space to move the flash more than 2 feet away from Brian. I wanted a soft light source for this shot, which requires a large, diffused light source. I tried using an umbrella for a bit, but in the close quarters I couldn’t get the light stand out of the shot. Ideally, I would’ve had 2 or 3 more feet to the left of the subject so I could back off the stand, lighting his whole figure. As it was, the light was falling off around his chest and I was needing to crop in to a head shot to avoid having the light stand in the shot. I decided to remove the umbrella and turn the flash away from the subject to bounce it into the wall by his bed ([Figure 1.2](#)). Bingo. I now had a large, soft light source. Because there was a bit of space between Brian and the white panel behind him, the sole sidelight was able to light both him and the background without

shadow ([Figure 1.3](#)). Lesson learned: If the walls close in too much to place your equipment, use a wall instead.

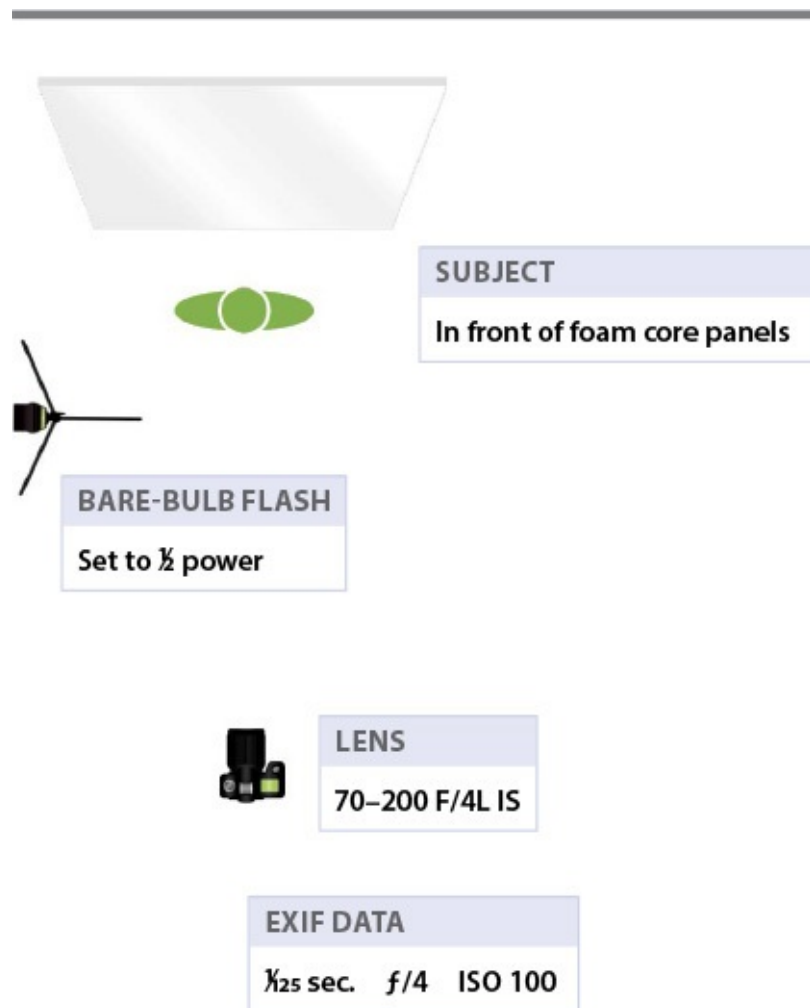


Figure 1.2 The lighting diagram. The bare-bulb flash was aimed at a nearby white wall to soften and enlarge the source.



Figure 1.3 The raw file. It ain't pretty. Yet. But a few quick tweaks in Lightroom and Brian will be floating on pure white.

Edit for Effect

I wanted to have a nice contrasty feel to the image to highlight Brian's beard and general ruggedness. To accomplish this, I headed to Adobe Photoshop Lightroom 5. I slid the Contrast slider almost all the way to the right and bumped up the Clarity to +59. As usual, I did the majority of my editing in the Curves, going into each channel, tweaking the shadows, midtones, and highlights until I got the overall balance that I wanted ([Figure 1.4](#)).



Figure 1.4 The Lightroom settings. My initial color grading on the image brought up the detail in the shadow areas and corrected the white balance. I also made a few gradient adjustments to the white background, bringing it closer to pure white.

If I get a look that I really like, I will often save it as a *preset*. This way, the next time I want a similar look, I click on that preset as a nice shortcut. To create a preset, click the plus sign (+) icon at the top of the Presets panel. In the New Develop Preset dialog box that opens, select which features to include in the preset ([Figure 1.5](#)). I generally uncheck features that are specific to the image, such as graduated filters and lens corrections, and I focus instead on mainly preserving the color grading. Note that when I use the preset on a different shoot, it won't work as perfectly as it did for the original image. It merely will be

a starting point, and I can tweak it from there.

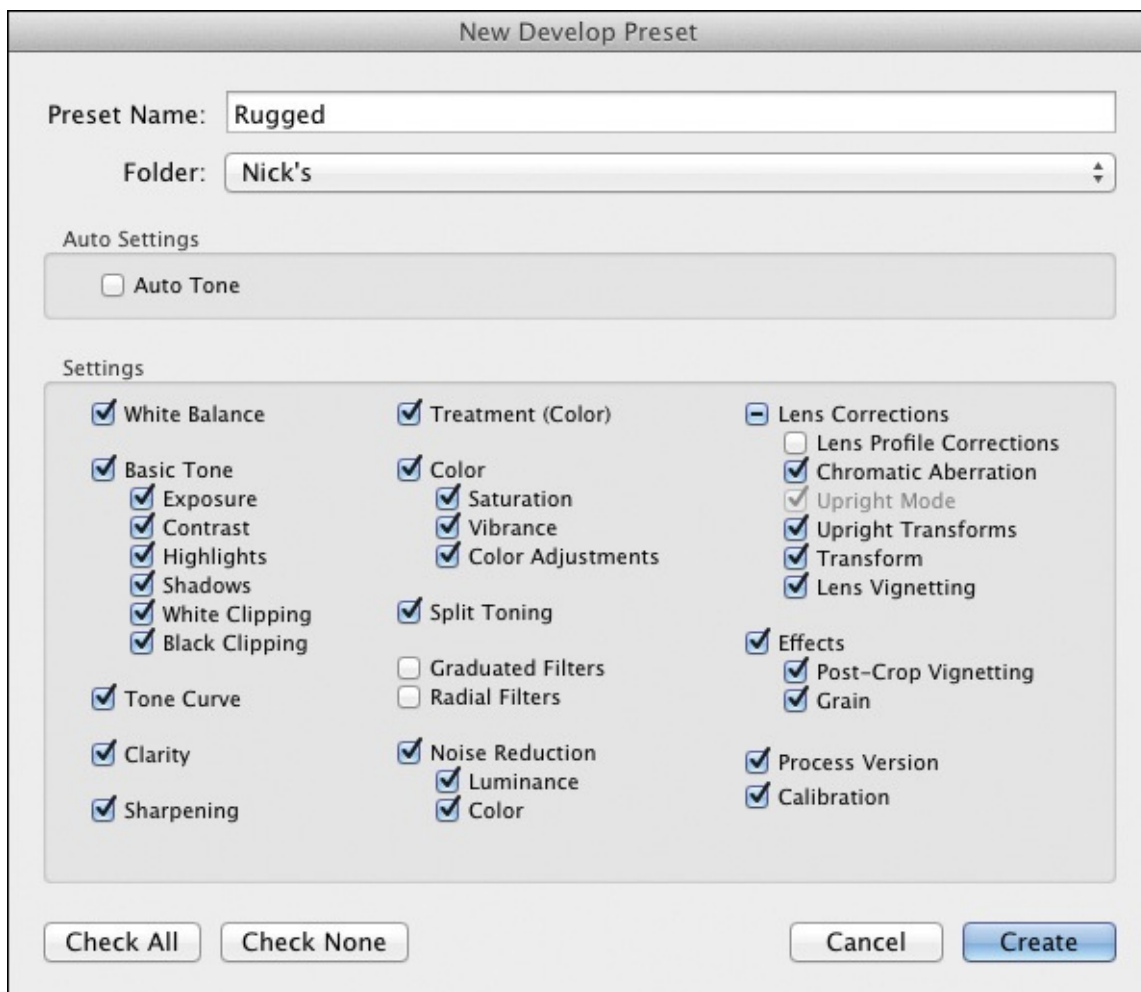


Figure 1.5 When creating a preset, focus on saving the color grading you achieved and want to replicate, rather than including features that are specific to the current image.

As you can see, the overall image is rather dark and muddy, but I like the way Brian is looking. Because the background is white, I can easily bring up the shadows and eliminate the blue color cast by using the Graduated Filter. Note in [Figure 1.6](#) that I set the gradient adjustment to +45 Exposure. To make the adjustment, I clicked just outside the picture and dragged the gradient over to the edge of Brian, overlapping ever so slightly. Lightroom 5 is great at detecting the edge of an area, so my adjustment doesn't affect Brian's shirt, causing it to blow out.



Figure 1.6 Use the Adjustment Brush tool to paint specific areas of the background to a clean white.

After I have that first adjustment laid out and still active (inactive adjustments appear as a gray dot while active adjustments appear black), I can tweak the sliders if I want to increase or decrease any settings. Once I'm happy with the first adjustment, I can add more adjustments to the other white areas around Brian. Lightroom will apply the same setting to each additional gradient filter—cool stuff. If I ever want to remove an adjustment, I click its gray dot to make it active, and then press the Delete key. Done.

The image is getting closer, but a soft halo still surrounds Brian. I actually kind of like it, but for the sake of education, I will show you how to remove it with a brush adjustment. Because I want to take the white all the way to white, I crank the Exposure and Highlight sliders all the way to the right. I also select the Adjustment Brush tool's Auto Mask option, so that I can quickly paint around the subject without painting onto his clothes or body.

Check Your Work

After you finish painting out an area, you want to make sure that you got every spot. You may not be able to tell by simply looking at your monitor, because it is illuminated. It'd be awful to get a print of the image back from press with subtle brushstrokes on the backdrop that you failed to catch. To begin a safety check, select the triangle at the top right of the Histogram panel, better known as the Show Highlight Clipping Indicator ([Figure 1.7](#)). Now any area that is pure white will show up as red ([Figure 1.8](#)). There is a catch, though. If, like me, you messed around with the highlight levels in Curves, you won't have any pure whites. To work around this, toggle off the switch at the top of the Tone Curve panel. Now you can see if you missed any spots, which you probably did. Paint in those areas so that all the white now shows up as red. When you are finished, toggle the Tone Curve back on and you're good to go ([Figure 1.9](#)).

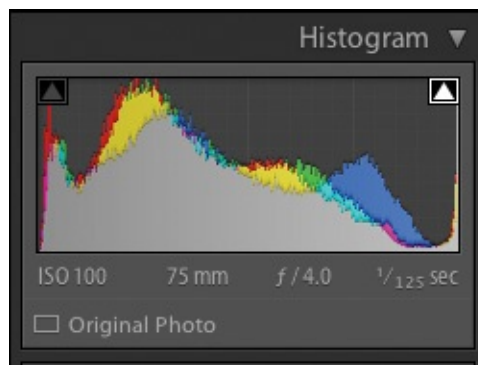


Figure 1.7 Click the triangle in the top-right corner of the Histogram panel to turn on the Show Highlight Clipping Indicator.



Figure 1.8 When the Show Highlight Clipping Indicator is turned on, areas that are pure white will appear as red. This allows you to make sure that you didn't miss any spots when removing information from your white background.



Figure 1.9 The final image. Our man, Brian, is now isolated on a clean, white background and no one could ever guess that this was shot in his bedroom.

Lit Background

When you only have a small amount of space to work with, keep in mind that you aren't able to have both space between you and the model and the model and the background; you have to opt for one or the other. This is typically a problem if your plan was to blow out the backdrop behind the model to a pure white (but isn't an issue if your plan is to make it pure white in post, as I did with Brian). Let me explain.

If I was going to light the background separate from the subject, I would've placed her about 5 to 10 feet in front of the background to keep the light from spilling onto her. (Light spill can not only create discoloration and washed-out areas on the subject's clothes, but it can also cause lens flare.) I would also need about 10 feet to back away from her, allowing me to use my long lens, in order to avoid any wide-angle distortion. That would mean I would need about 20 feet, where in reality, I had about half that in [Figure 1.10](#). So I decided to put my subject, musician Olga Bell, right against the wall.



Figure 1.10 This is the setup for shooting a subject on a lit wall in a small space.

Normally I set up my main light at a three-quarter angle to the subject, which keeps the lighting from looking flat. But if, as in this case, the subject is right against a wall, that three-quarter light will cast a shadow on the background. If I don't want a shadow, my other option is to place the light head-on, which can create flat, uninteresting light—unless it's from a high angle. I decided to get really high and light her from directly above, creating a dramatic image on a pure white background.

Notice in the setup shot that I have the flash directly over Olga, who is leaning against the white wall. Because Olga was wearing a translucent, hooded white jacket in a white room on a white wall, light bouncing was in my favor. Shooting the flash onto the wall behind her and onto the top of her jacket bounced the light off of her jacket and the walls to illuminate her. I attached a grid on the flash to keep direct light from spilling onto her face, because I wanted only soft, bounce light on her face. [Figure 1.11](#) shows the finished result.



Figure 1.11 The final image. All white everything.

2. It's the Mood That Makes It Good

For this shoot, I met Chelsea at her modest, one-bedroom apartment. Again, I brought four 40x60-inch white boards with me to the shoot, in case I needed them as a backdrop. Although (lucky for me) she had a large, blank beige wall in her bedroom, the floor was carpeted (not so lucky). Because I wanted these shots to have a clean, high-fashion look, I needed to use the white boards after all. I wanted a white or reflective surface for her to stand on, so I stacked all four white boards in front of the wall. Why use a stack? They were sitting on carpet, so the extra boards added stability to the surface, plus the heels Chelsea was wearing punched through just one or two boards. Finally, the added height of the stacked boards helped to block out the dark baseboard ([Figure 2.1](#)).

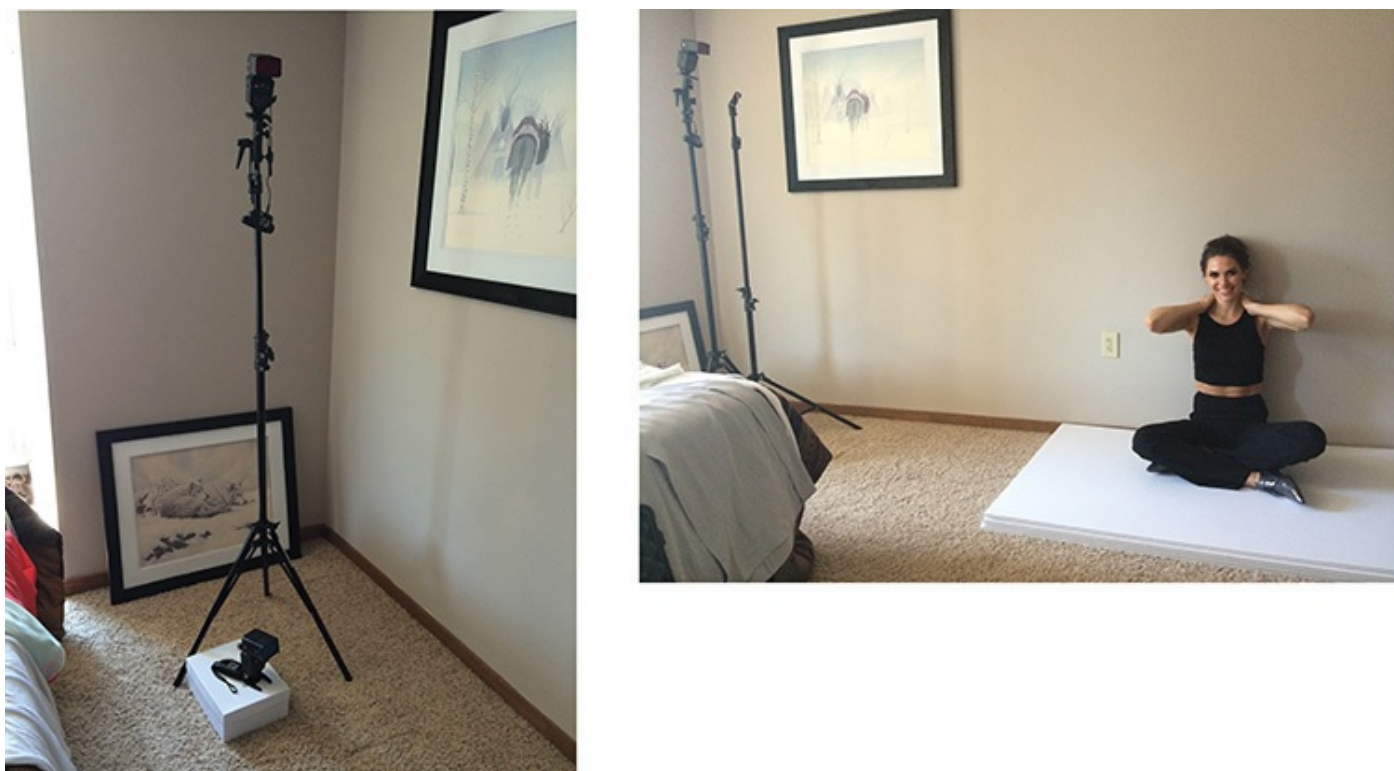


Figure 2.1 The setup. Once again those white panels come in handy, this time as a floor.

Aesthetic Decisions

Often when I am doing test shoots, which was the case in this shoot, I don't have a concrete concept in mind going into the shoot. I never tell my subject that I have no idea what I plan on doing, of course. Putting your client and subject at ease is important, and if they see you stuttering about, the shoot is already off to a poor start. Because of this, quite often I begin simply, just setting up a light and getting a good exposure, talking to the subject as I go. What often happens during these first 5 minutes is that my subject will loosen up a bit, I will gain a bit of confidence (and maybe even get an idea), and I get a nice candid shot or two in the process.

When I arrived at this shoot, the makeup artist had already begun working on Chelsea's hair and makeup. Chelsea has a vast, amazing wardrobe, so I began picking through it, looking for nice textures. Once I had a few looks picked out, I started to get ideas of how

to light them. For example, hard directional light would add drama to the image and would nicely highlight the textures in the clothing. Not to mention it worked perfectly within the space constraints, because I needed her to stand right against the wall.

I set up a bare-bulb strobe, which tends to be my starting point. I decided to add a red gel to the light; the clothing was black, and creating a mood was more important to me than accurately documenting the appearance of the garment, as I would for a product shot of a garment. I placed the light against the wall, near where she was standing, so there would be a nice aura of light that gradually increased from the source to the subject. The convenient thing about having your subject right in front of the backdrop is that you can rake your light across both the subject and backdrop at the same time. If she had been several feet in front of the wall, I would've needed to light the subject and the wall individually, thus requiring more lights.

I added a second, ungelled light to the other side of her legs. It appeared quite harsh in comparison with the red light, so I added a cyan gel and placed it in front of her legs to match light directions. The output and zoom of the second light was the same as the first (See [Figure 2.2](#) for the lighting diagram.). When I zoomed the strobes out to a wider setting of 35mm, the two colors slightly overlapped in the middle—just what I wanted ([Figure 2.3](#)).

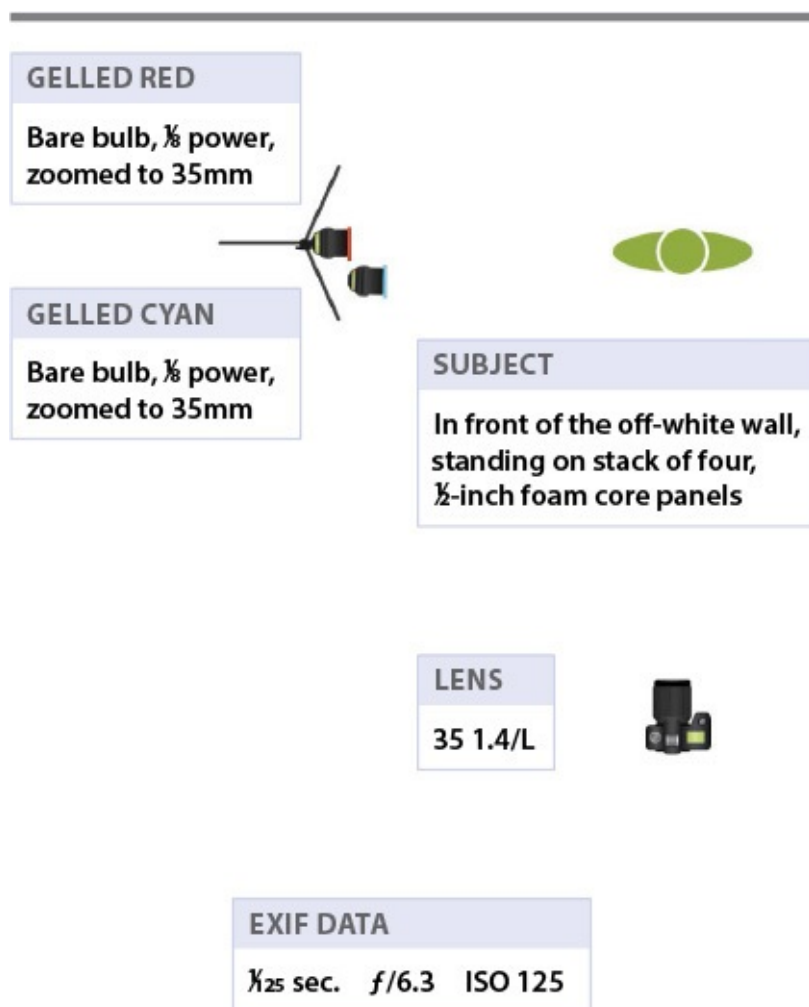


Figure 2.2 The lighting diagram. The flash on the stand was gelled red, while the blue-gelled flash sat on the ground at the base of the stand. They were positioned next to the wall in order to light both the subject and the wall.



Figure 2.3 The raw file. There are some problem areas in the shot, such as the picture frame and the ceiling, but the colors and light are looking good.

Finishing Touches in Post

As you can see in [Figure 2.4](#), my Lightroom adjustments were relatively straightforward. I cranked the contrast all the way over to the right, which naturally boosts the saturation. This made the shadows and blacks far too dark, however, so I slid those over to the right as well. I wanted to add a clarity adjustment to enhance the texture of her skirt, but making a gradient adjustment across the whole image would've made an ugly aura (think bad HDR) around her body. I opted instead to make a brush adjustment to the desired area. Beyond that, I made a couple of Curve adjustments in the RGB, Blue, and Green channels, before adding some warmth to the shadow areas and adding a lens correction.

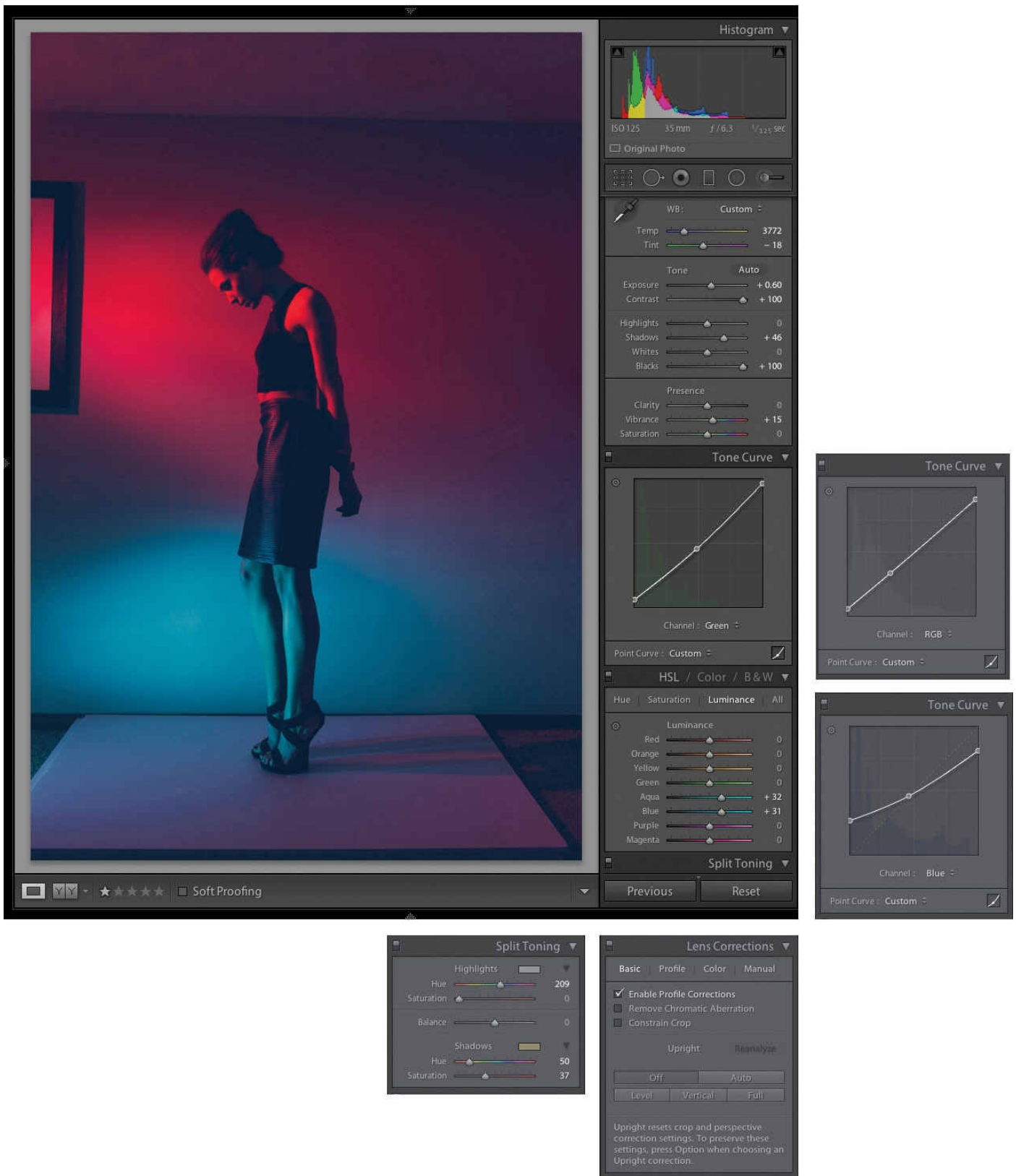


Figure 2.4 The Lightroom settings. I boosted the overall saturation in the image by increasing the Contrast slider. I also upped the luminance in the Blue and Cyan channels to keep it from looking dull.

Now the image was color graded how I liked, but I needed to do a bit more extensive clean-up before the image was finished. Some of the shadows on the white board crossed over dents that were created by her heels, which weren't easily corrected with the Spot Removal tool in Lightroom, which is effective for large areas but hard to use on small, detailed areas. There were also some fly-aways in her hair that needed to be carefully

removed, so I exported the image over to Adobe Photoshop to make these changes. [Figure 2.5](#) shows the result.

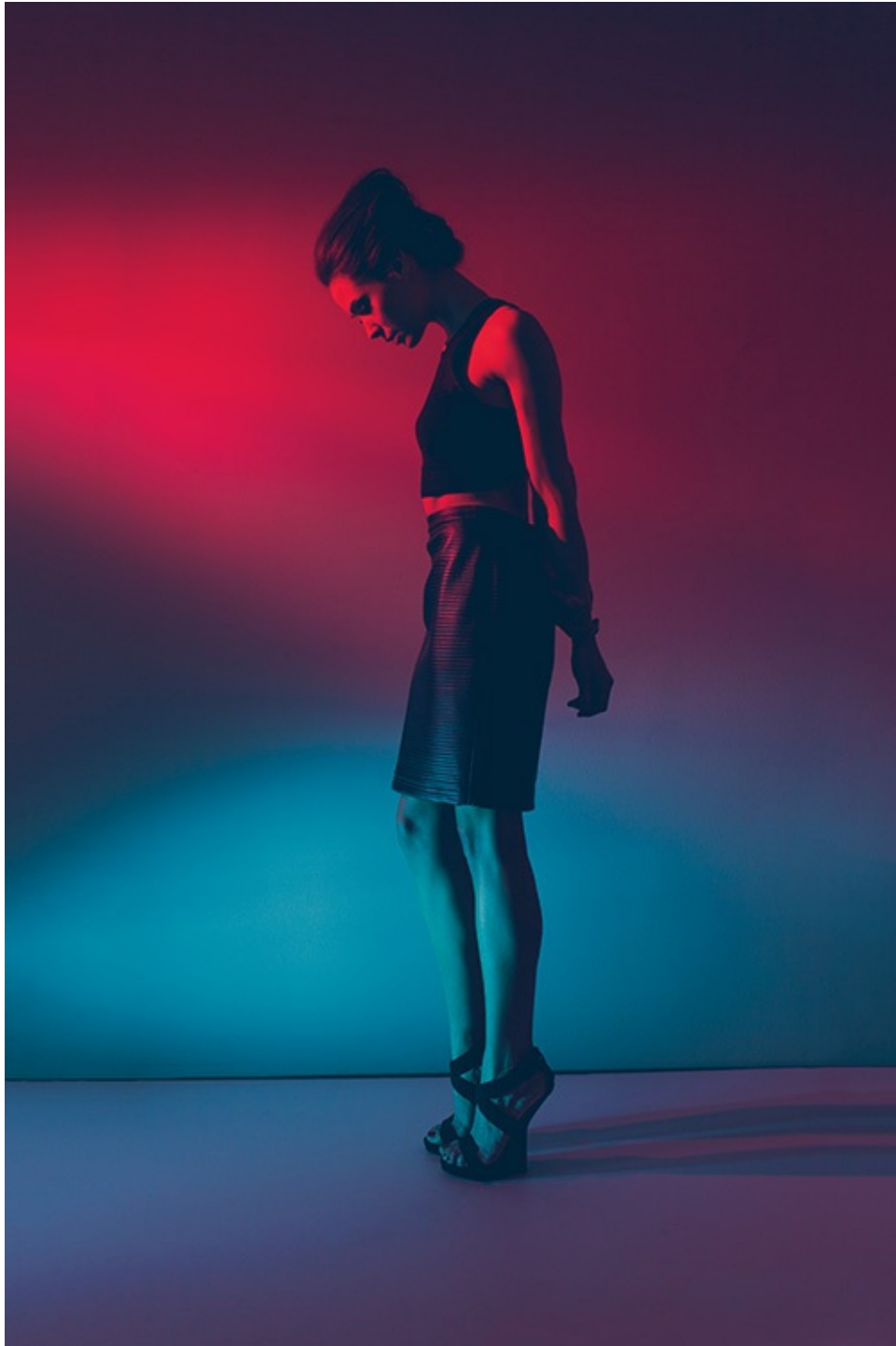


Figure 2.5 The final image. Bye-bye, bedroom.

Once More, With Feeling

Not unlike my shoot with Chelsea in her small apartment, I recently photographed Priscilla in her living room. Although it had more square footage, the space was occupied by her niece and her niece's toys. Once again, I decided that my best approach to shooting in this small space was to put the subject right against the blank wall. I didn't bring the white panels with me this time, and the floors were once again carpeted (not exactly synonymous with fashion portraiture), so these portraits would be taken from the knees up.

My first setup was lit with an umbrella on the main light ([Figure 2.6](#)), which resulted in [Figure 2.7](#). When shooting [Figure 2.8](#), I replaced the main light's umbrella with a grid and added a bare-bulb strobe, gelled red, to the background. I hid the bulb strobe behind a pillow on the floor (to the right of the subject), which also served as a flag, keeping the light from spilling onto the model's face. With the help of a throw pillow, I was able to execute two very different lighting scenarios in one rather small (and occupied) living room.



Figure 2.6 The setup. Another day, another white wall. Note the throw pillow on the floor to the right of the subject. It's serving as a flag for the red-gelled flash hiding behind it.



Figure 2.7 The result of shooting with one light and an umbrella.



Figure 2.8 A two-light setup. The main light has a grid on it, and the background light is a bare bulb, gelled red and flagged off of the subject, with a pillow borrowed from the couch.

Be open to adapting to what your space provides, and always try lighting your subject and space in more than one way. The time it takes you to reset your lights and change exposure will allow your subject to get a bit more comfortable. Meanwhile, you'll gain some time to think about your next scenario: Distance yourself from your role as photographer for a moment to remember why you are there, with this subject, in the first place. Did you notice her hair looked a bit better from the other angle? Did you catch that her jacket has a cool liner detail and that it may look better half off her shoulder than all the way on? Did you think about how a hard sidelight might make a better accent for the silhouette of her modern dress? It's better to take a few minutes and get some perspective before proceeding than wrapping the shoot early and possibly missing a better shot.

Pro-Tip: Quickly Extend Backgrounds in Post

Newer versions of Photoshop offer an amazing feature called Content-Aware Fill.

Make a selection, choose Content-Aware Fill, and Photoshop will, rather quickly, match your selection to the areas around it. Although it isn't always perfect, it quite often works well, saving you a considerable amount of time in editing and clean-up.

[Figure 2.3](#), for example, needed cleaning up, such as removing the picture frame and extending the floor and wall. Normally, this task wouldn't have been too difficult, but the angular light and shadows made it harder. Instead, I simply cropped into the image, past the problem areas ([Figure 2.9](#)), to leave a tall and skinny composition. Next, I grabbed the Crop tool and extended the canvas back to the original dimensions, leaving a black border around the image ([Figure 2.10](#)).



Figure 2.9 Crop in past trouble areas.

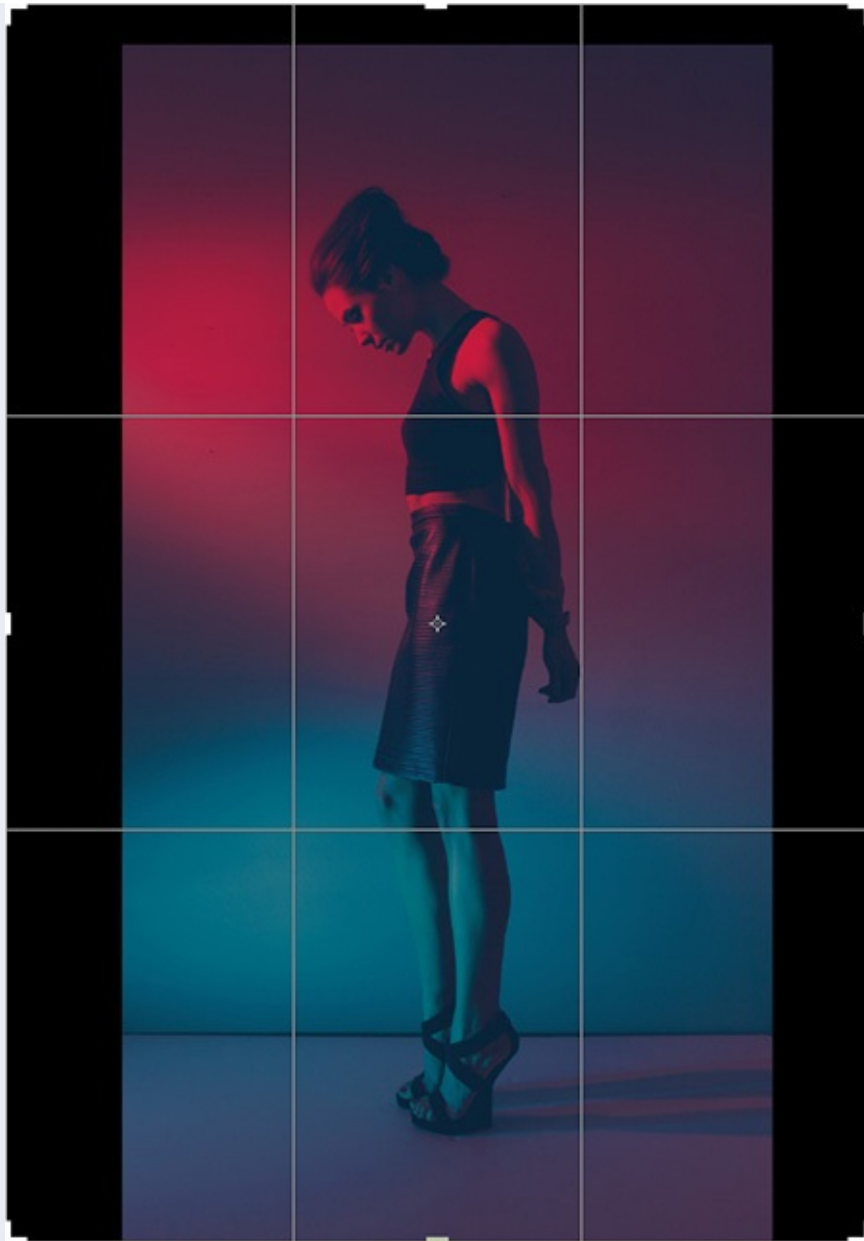


Figure 2.10 Extend the canvas to your desired dimensions.

After I selected the black area, I pressed the Delete key, making sure to select the Content-Aware Fill option ([Figure 2.11](#)). Content-Aware worked splendidly ([Figure 2.12](#)), leaving only a couple of rough spots, which I easily cleaned up. This whole process took less than a minute, whereas previously it would've taken considerably longer.

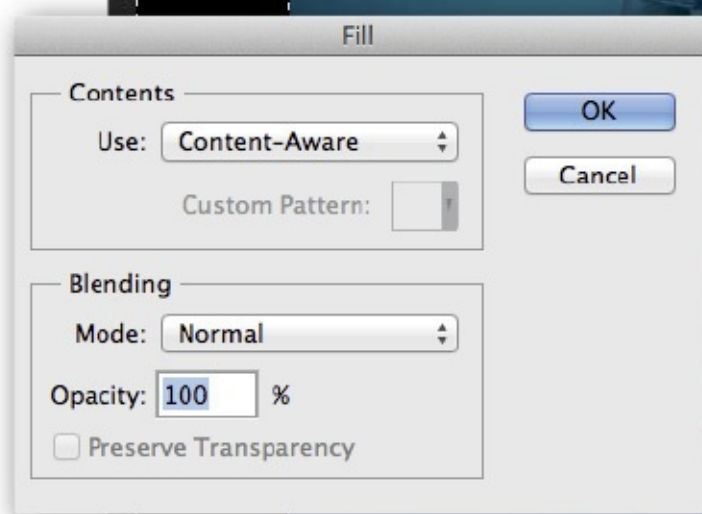


Figure 2.11 Select the new blank areas and press Delete, selecting Content-Aware Fill option.

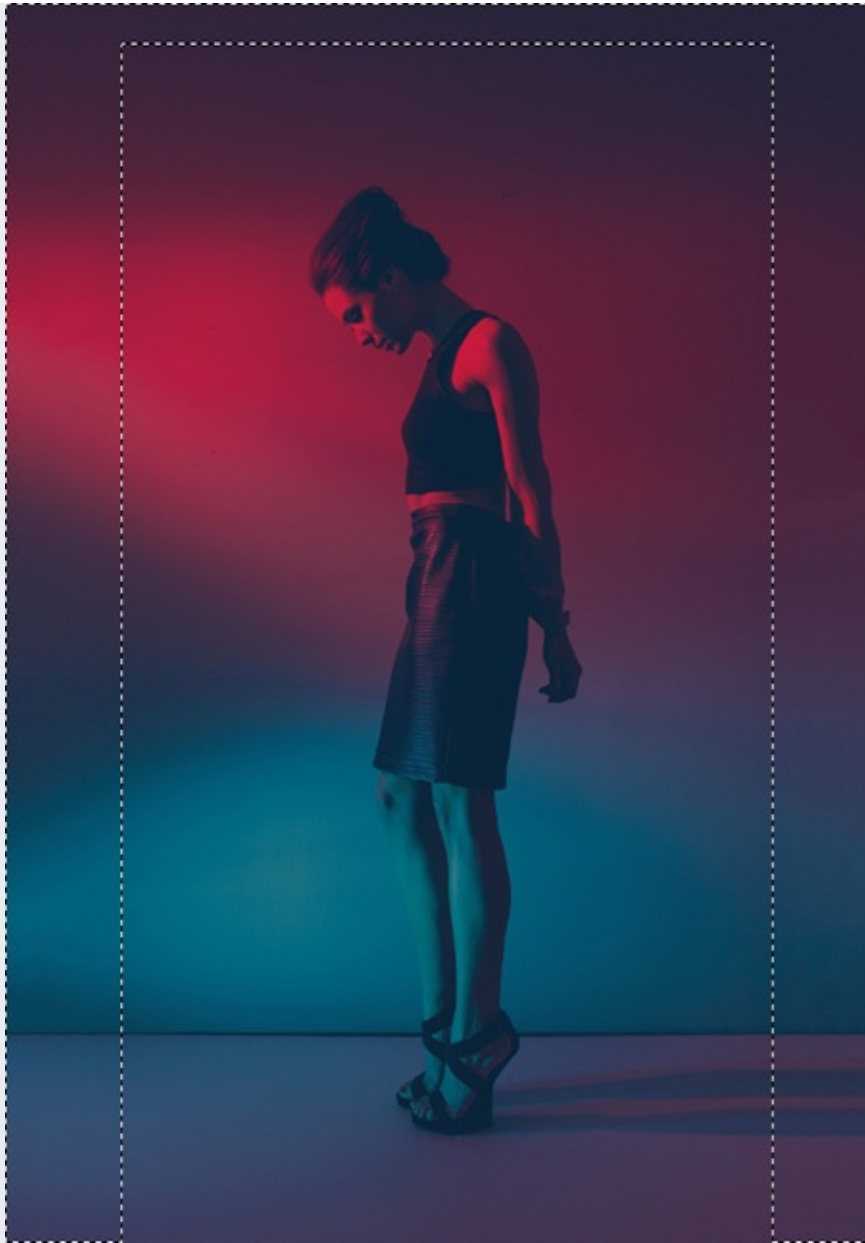


Figure 2.12 Voilà! You've successfully extended your background in about 10 seconds.

3. Window Light

Nothing beats a large, indirect, natural light source. For a staff portrait shoot of the filmmaking crew at Old Machine, I took advantage of their studio's bank of large, East-facing windows by timing my shoot for the afternoon, when the light would be overhead ([Figure 3.1](#)). I planned on shooting waist-up portraits of the subjects on a black backdrop, so all I brought with me, besides my camera, was a black V-flat and a 40x60-inch, silver sheet reflector. This reflector is part of a reflector panel kit made by LumoPro. I didn't need the whole stand, however. Just the sheet, which folds up quite nicely in my camera bag.



Figure 3.1 The setup. A large window, a reflector, and a black background—could it get any simpler?

I sat the subjects on a stool, about 3 feet away from a window, placing the black V-flat 2 feet behind them. At 60 inches, the backdrop wasn't quite tall enough, so I set it on one of the studio's dollies. I draped the silver sheet over one side of the flat and positioned it about 2 feet from the dark side of the subject ([Figure 3.2](#)). As usual, I opted to use my long lens, which is my go-to for portraiture. I backed up about 20 feet from the subject, zooming in to suit my needs, and I was rockin' and rollin'.

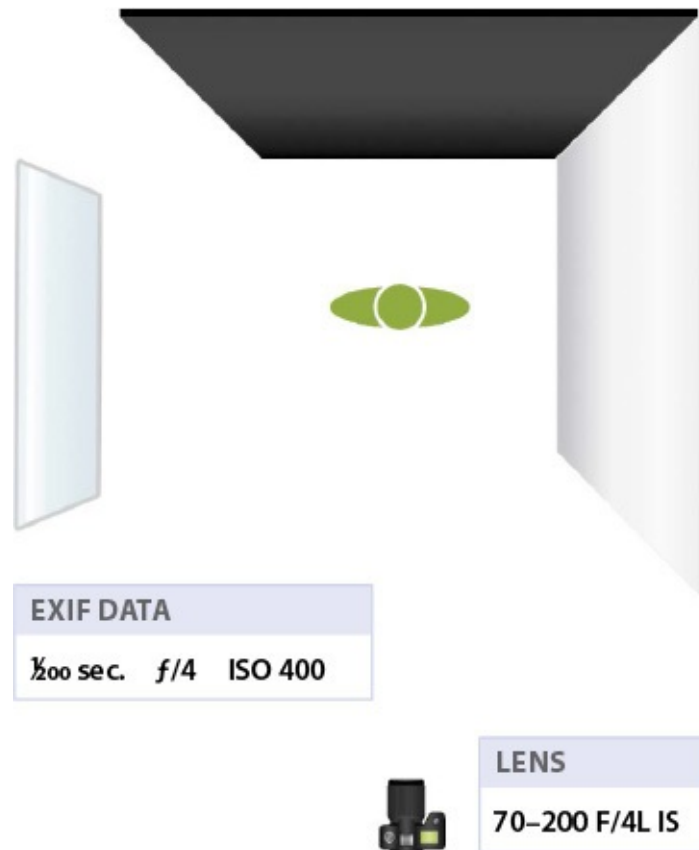


Figure 3.2 The lighting diagram. It’s all about distance from the subject to the window and from the reflector to the subject.

Subject Direction

When it comes to directing a portrait session, I don’t think there is a set way of going about it. Every photographer handles it a bit differently, and “be yourself” is a good rule to follow (unless of course you’re a creep or an asshole). No matter what your style, figure out how to read your subject’s mood. Is he in a bad mood? Is she in a hurry? Shy? Nervous? Adjust your demeanor accordingly. I find that talking to your subjects for a bit, before you even start shooting, can help to put them at ease.

George Lange is a wonderful, seasoned portrait photographer, whose clients have included *Entertainment Weekly*, The Learning Channel, and *USA Today*, and he is an expert at this. During my five years as his local assistant, I learned quite a bit from watching how he interacted with his subjects. If they were nervous, he’d reach out and hold their hand while snapping pics, all the while talking about his two young sons, or his favorite ice cream flavor, or the latest indie rock band that he was listening to. When George (or you, or I) can distract a subject from the tension of the situation, she is able to forget herself for a moment, and that’s when you strike, er, click.

Whatever you do, avoid “chimping.” You know, staring at the back of your camera after every frame and exclaiming “Ooooh, ooooooh” like an escapee from *Planet of the Apes*. It slows down the shoot, breaks any momentum you’re building with your subject, and, generally, just makes you look like an amateur. So once your exposure and lighting is set, shoot for a minute or so, just focusing on your subject, talking with him as you go, without looking at the back of your camera. After a minute, quickly flip through and see what you’re getting. That gives you some perspective as to whether you need to change the

pose, adjust the lighting, or simply proceed as you've been shooting.

Most of the advice I just gave isn't needed when your subject is sitting there sipping bourbon, as was the case in [Figure 3.3](#). I wanted these portraits of the filmmakers to feel professional yet accessible, so when Andy asked what he should do when it was his turn to sit in front of the camera, I said, "Just keep doing what you're doing." I snapped about 20 frames with his glasses off, then I scrolled through the images. I told him that they were looking great, but opted to try some shots with his glasses on. I snapped a few more, and that was that. [Figure 3.3](#) was an unposed frame I shot right after he put his glasses on, and it ended up being my favorite.



Figure 3.3 The raw file. It's already looking like a studio shot. Now all I need to do is add some color grading.

Rugged Sophistication

When I sat down to edit the photos, I knew that I wanted them to feel rugged, yet sophisticated. Because these images had a good deal of contrast straight out of the camera, thanks to the rim lighting of the window and reflector, I didn't have to add much clarity or contrast in Lightroom. As usual, I did the majority of my color grading in the Curves, specifically in the shadow portion of the RGB channel ([Figure 3.4](#)). I slid the Shadow slider almost all the way to the right to keep a bit of separation between Andy and the background. I also desaturated the blues and lowered the overall vibrance a bit, giving the image a warm, slightly desaturated look, which I typically associate with manly cultural items such as whiskey, cigars, worn-in leather, denim, and the like ([Figure 3.5](#)).



Figure 3.4 Lightroom settings. Slightly desaturating the overall image and then adding a bit of warmth gives the image a bit of rugged sophistication, not unlike a whiskey ad.



Figure 3.5 The final image. This classically lit, unposed portrait of a filmmaker has a timeless feeling to it.

4. Using Existing Environments

I always walk into a home shoot with the expectation that, if nothing else, I can shoot the subject in front of a blank wall. Even if a picture frame or two need to be removed, a blank wall isn't hard to find. Usually, this is as close as I have to a plan; I rarely arrive at a shoot with a previsualized idea of how I will photograph the subject. Because I know how to light a blank wall in several different ways, I know that I can still get an interesting portrait, even if nothing more interesting presents itself.

Sometimes, however, I am lucky enough to walk into interesting and amazing homes full of possibilities, as was the case in this shoot with Helena. Helena is a model as well as a photographer, who lives in an artfully ornate Oakland, California, apartment with her husband, Laurent (who is also a photographer). When I walked into their home, the first thing I saw was an amazing love seat sitting under an intricate gold frame. I knew immediately that this is where we were going to begin shooting ([Figure 4.1](#)). The scene brought to my mind images of old Hollywood portraits and lighting. I asked Helena if she had any classic-looking gowns that would fit that vibe; another bonus of shooting at the subject's home is having access to all of her wardrobe. As she went off to her closets, I started setting up the lighting.



Figure 4.1 The setup. Sometimes, you just get lucky. When I walked into Helena's home, I saw this amazing, vintage love seat and immediately knew I was going Old Hollywood with the theme of the shoot.

Okay, time for a little disclosure: Finding Helena wasn't entirely luck. I was headed to San Francisco for a relatively boring commercial shoot, and while I was in the area, I wanted to squeeze in a shoot for myself. About two weeks before my trip, I searched Model

Mayhem (www.modelmayhem.com) for actors in the San Francisco area. To weed out amateurs and save myself hours of search time, I narrowed my criteria to very experienced actors who would work only for compensation. After about 45 minutes, I found five candidates. I emailed each, explaining who I was and what kind of shoot I wanted to do, then asking their rates for a 1-hour shoot at their home or a location of their choosing. Helena quickly became my number one choice. (The love seat and mirror *were* pure luck, however.)

Aesthetic Decisions

We were shooting at night, so I knew that I'd need to supplement the dim light. Because of the ornate design of the environment, I was thinking "Old Hollywood" for the lighting (think George Hurrell). I wanted mystique and glamour, which called for contained, moody light. If I were to stick with an umbrella and light the whole scene with a large, soft light source, most all of the drama of the scene would be lost ([Figure 4.2](#)). I opted instead for my trusty Honl grid, but found one grid light was far too dark ([Figure 4.3](#)).



Figure 4.2 The scene lit with an umbrella lacks drama.



Figure 4.3 A single grid light leaves the scene too dark.

I didn't want the uniqueness of the scene to be lost, so I added a second accent light. I had only one grid, so I just used a bare-bulb flash, which I zoomed in to 105mm to make the light more of a spotlight, like the gridded light. I also had only one light stand with me, so I set the accent light on a stool and aimed it at the picture frame over the couch ([Figure 4.4](#)). Now I was ready for Helena. (See the lighting diagram in [Figure 4.5](#).)

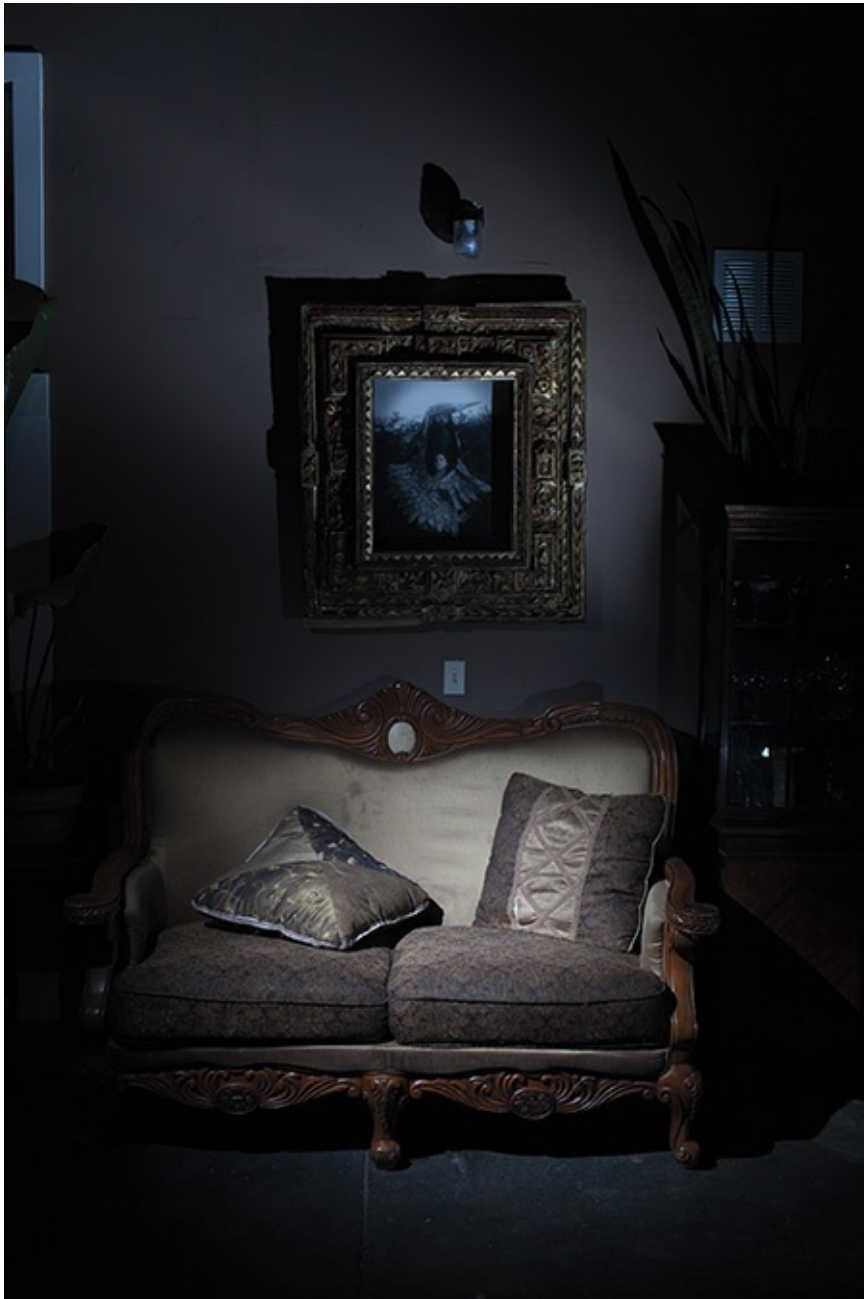


Figure 4.4 After I added a second accent light the scene improved.



Figure 4.5 The lighting diagram. The grid on the main light contained the light to the subject and the low-output accent light added emphasis to the ornate frame above the couch.

Helena is so good at modeling that all she had to do was plop down on the couch and we were golden. I snapped [Figure 4.6](#) about 20 clicks after she sat down, and I knew that I had The Shot. That didn't mean that the shoot was over, though. Shooting your subject from different angles, in different scenarios, or with different lighting is always worth a try. Doing so allows you to back up from your work a bit, much like a painter does, and see things that you may have previously missed.



Figure 4.6 The raw file from the first scenario. It had the drama that I wanted. All it lacked was a bit of warmth, which I could add when color grading.

After I had the shot that I wanted from the first scenario, I took a brief break to walk around their apartment. I immediately noticed an ornate door that led to one of their roommates' bedrooms. I asked Helena to stand in front of the door, then moved the gridded light to use it as the main light for this new scenario ([Figure 4.7](#)). Once again, the grid made the light a bit too focused, causing most of the ornate door to go dark. So I hid a background light behind a potted plant, just out of frame to the right. Not only did it add light to the background, but it also cast a nice, moody shadow.



Figure 4.7 The raw file from the second scenario. The light and mood was very similar to the first scenario, which made the process of color grading the whole shoot much faster.

Editing

The main reason I started using Lightroom years ago was its ability to batch edit similar photos. No matter how vigilantly you keep your exposure the same, a subject will move slightly closer to or farther from the light source throughout the shoot—not to mention the inevitable minute fluctuations in light output from one click to the next. Despite your best intentions, your images will have slight differences in exposure levels as well as color temperature. Even when using Actions in combination with Adobe Bridge, Photoshop offered no easy way to fine-tune the settings in each slightly different frame. Lightroom changed all that. With Lightroom, I can quickly color grade a group of similarly lit photos to look cohesive, like the two different scenarios with Helena.

The process is relatively simple. I first browse through my images in the filmstrip at the

bottom of the Develop Module (as seen in [Figure 4.8](#)). I quickly narrow down my selection by ranking each image that I like with a star rating. (Press the Right Bracket key to add a star, Left Bracket to remove one.) I then filter by star rating (note the star icon in [Figure 4.8](#)) to see only my selects.

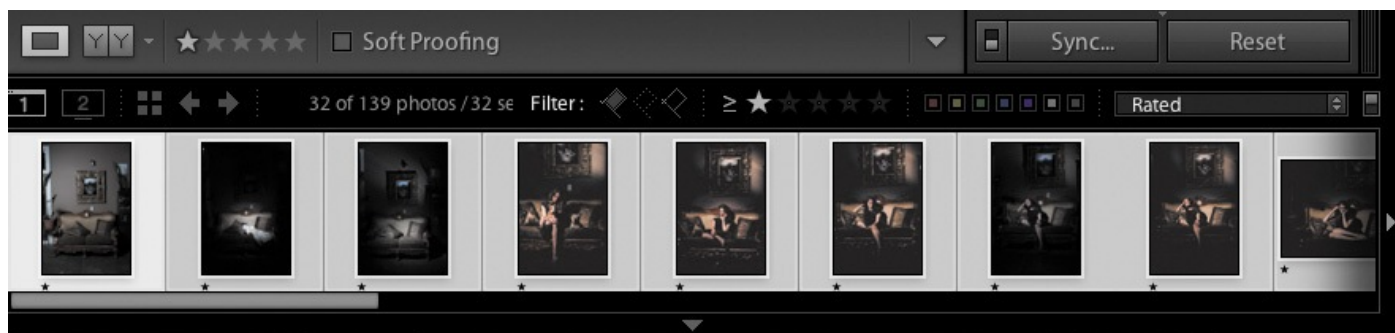


Figure 4.8 I quickly narrow down my selects from a shoot by using the Right and Left Bracket keys to add or remove a star rating to files. Then I use a filter to show only the images with a star rating.

Next, I browse the various presets that I've made for the best starting point (see [Figure 4.9](#)). As I move the cursor over each preset, I can see a preview of how it would look in the thumbnail at the top of the panel. After I find one that I like for the image, I click it to apply it. Now that the first image is color graded to my liking, I can quickly apply my settings to the other images in the filmstrip by one of two methods. The first method is to select the color-graded image, as well as all the other images you want in your selection, then click the Sync button (top-right corner of [Figure 4.8](#)). The second option is to copy the settings (Cmd/Ctrl+C) and paste them (Cmd/Ctrl+V) on each file, one at a time. I prefer the latter, so that I can ensure each image looks its best and isn't made too dark or too light by the pasted settings. No matter which method I choose, I always uncheck the Spot Removal, Brush Adjustment, and Crop options, because these adjustments vary from image to image and are best done one at a time, rather than synced (see [Figure 4.10](#)).



▶ Lightroom Video Presets

▼ Nick's

- ▢ B&W Grain
- ▢ B&W Grain 2
- ▢ B&W- Wedding Creamy
- ▢ barbarella
- ▢ CCAD
- ▢ Clarity
- ▢ Cold
- ▢ Concrete
- ▢ Corbijn
- ▢ dust bowl
- ▢ editorial
- ▢ Foil- Blue
- ▢ Foil- Two Tone
- ▢ KANDER
- ▢ Kander 2
- ▢ Kander 3
- ▢ Kander BW
- ▢ Kander subtle
- ▢ Levi's
- ▢ Lynch
- ▢ Lynch Less
- ▢ matrix green
- ▢ Matte
- ▢ Matte BW 2
- ▢ matte luxe
- ▢ Matte Tintype 2
- ▢ Matte wonky
- ▢ Redford
- ▢ Sigg
- ▢ Signature
- ▢ solarize
- ▢ Solarize black
- ▢ Tintype
- ▢ Tintype brighter
- ▢ washed

▶ User Presets

Figure 4.9 The Preset panel is where I often begin when color grading my images. I browse through the different presets that I've created, noting the preview thumbnail at the top to see how my image would look with the selected Preset.

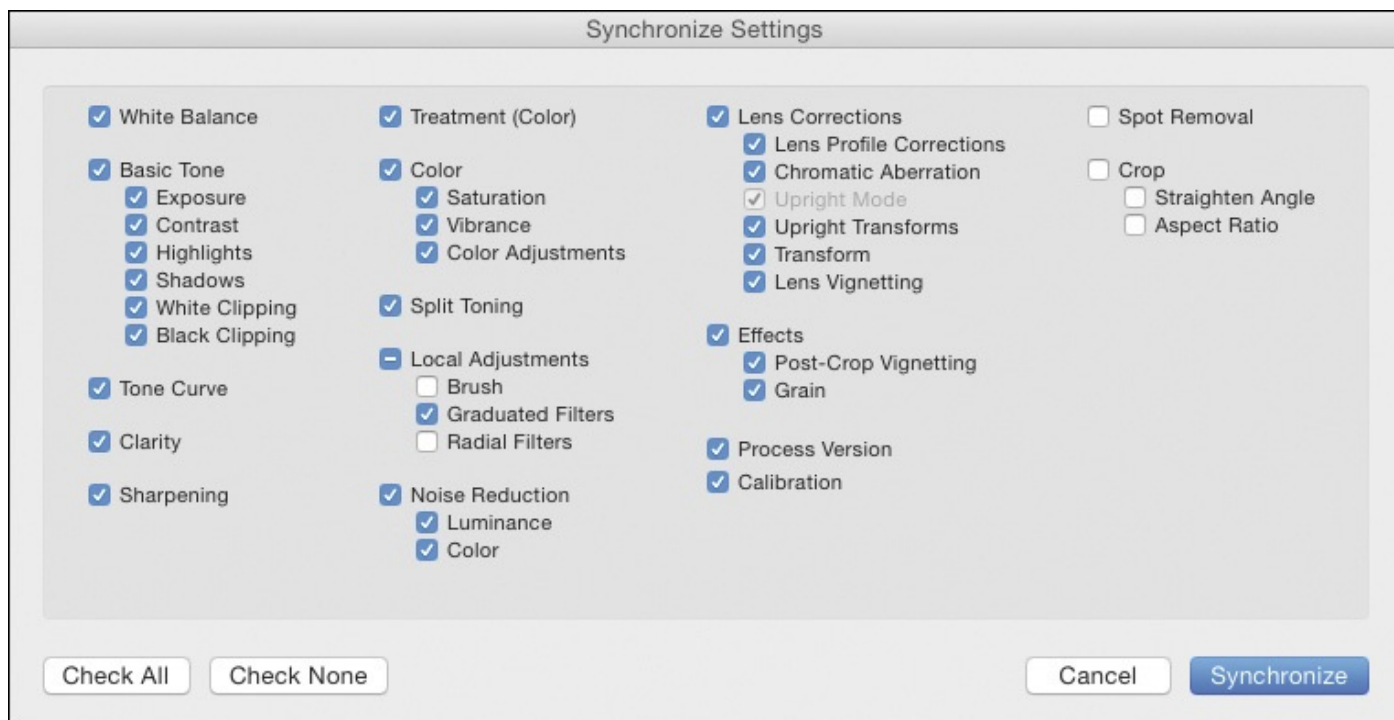


Figure 4.10 When you are ready to synchronize your settings, select which attributes you want to apply to the other images using the Synchronize Settings dialog box. I always make sure to deselect the Brush Adjustment, Crop, and Spot Removal options and opt to do those manually, one image at a time.

Processing the second scenario shots was even easier. The Lightroom settings didn't change much from the first scenario to the second, because I hadn't changed the camera or flash settings ([Figure 4.11](#)). I bumped the Exposure slider slightly to +1.10 ([Figure 4.12](#)), and I was good to go. I edited the whole shoot in about 30 minutes, much to Helena's surprise and disbelief.

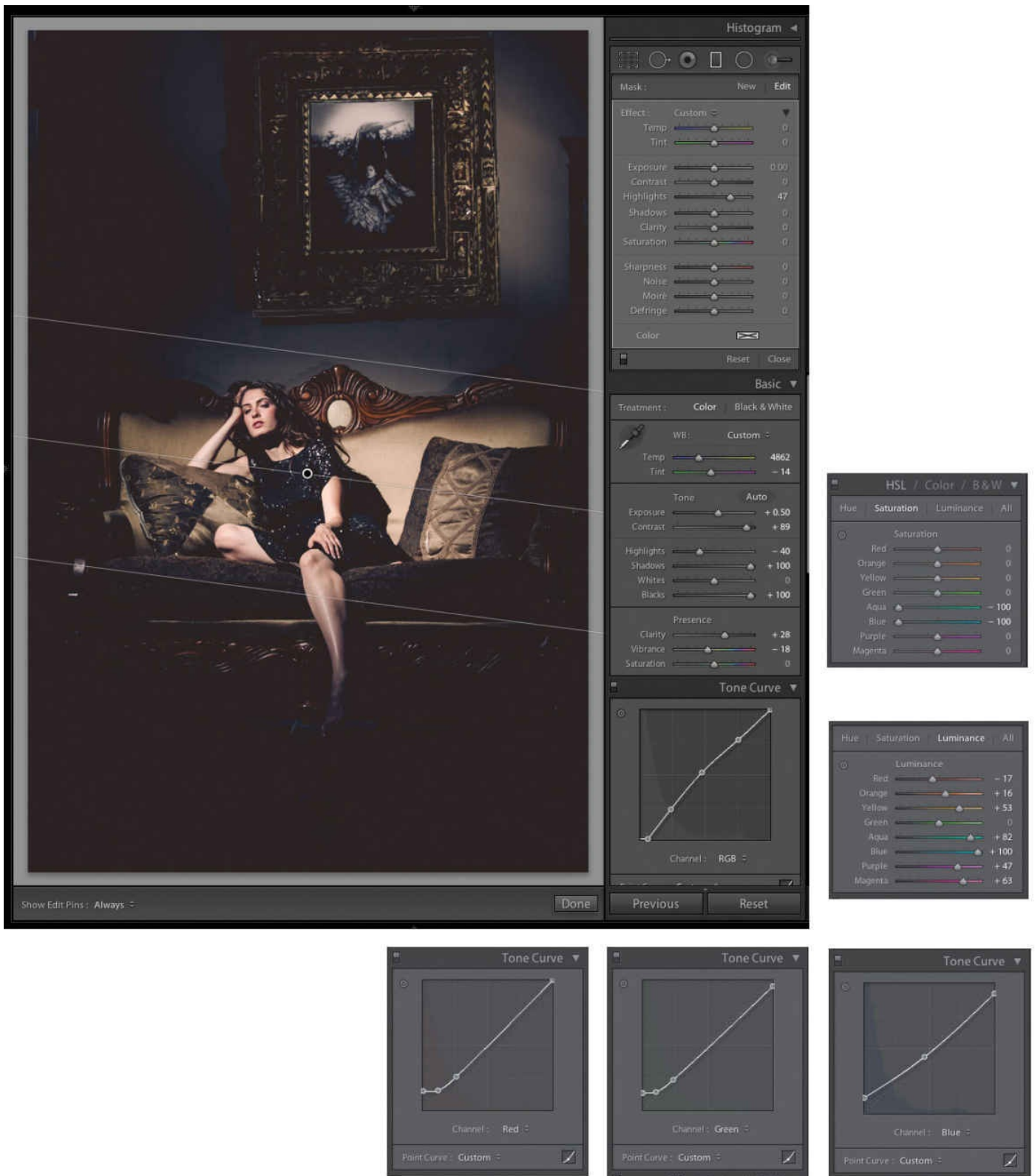


Figure 4.11 Lightroom settings for Helena’s shoot. I added the blue tones from the image and added warmth by using the Tone Curve panel to increase the overall warmth in the image.

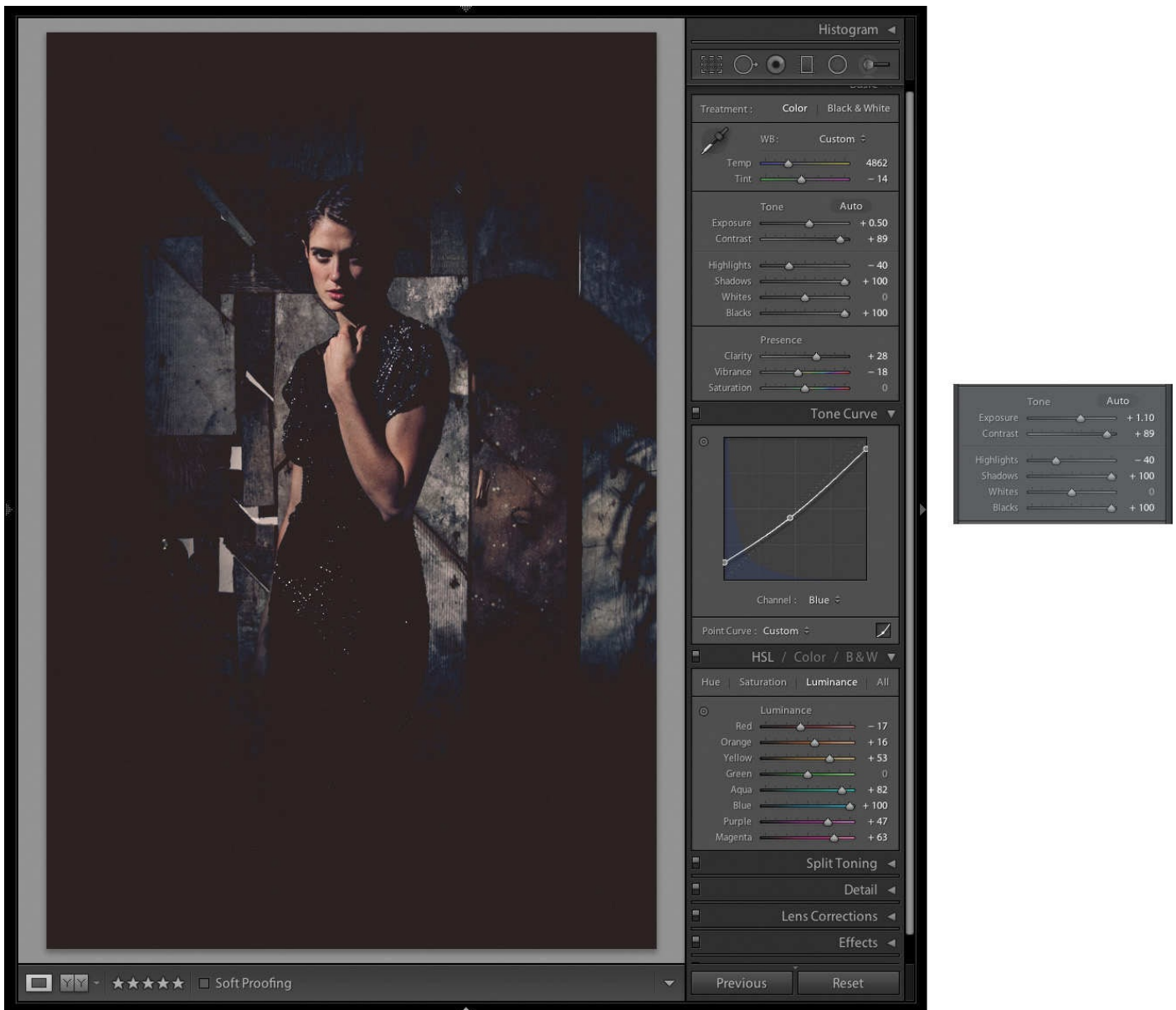


Figure 4.12 After syncing the settings from the first scenario to the second, I could see that the second scenario was much darker. I made a quick adjustment to the Exposure slider, and the image looked great.

One final note: I so loved both scenarios that in hindsight I wish that I'd had her change into a second look for the second scenario. As it stands, I wouldn't dare put both images in my portfolio because her outfit is the same ([Figures 4.13](#) and [4.14](#)). Variety is important in your portfolio. As I mentioned in the Introduction, you should narrow down your favorite images from a shoot, putting ten or fewer in a blog post and no more than one or two on your website. Also, make sure that the same subjects aren't appearing too many times in your portfolio. Clients want to see good variety in your portfolio.



Figure 4.13 The final image from the first scenario. It now has the mystery and warmth that I visualize when I think of Old Hollywood.



Figure 4.14 The final image from the second scenario. Although the setting in the shot is completely different from [Figure 4.13](#), the consistent color grading adds a cohesion to the images.

Quiz 1: Deconstruct the Lighting

Test your deconstructing abilities by identifying the light sources in [Figure Q1](#), then flip to the answer key at the back of the book to see how close you were. Always remember to check the eyes. Good luck!



Part II: The Backyard Studio



Sometimes the best place to shoot is, well, in your own backyard. Now that you've begun to photographically think outside the box, you will find that every location offers a new possibility. That spot of light below the fire escape in the alley? Use a reflector to light your subject, so the lighting color and intensity match. It's raining outside, and the only

place you have to shoot is in the client's house? No problem. Move that table out of the way, and shoot on the wall. You see what I mean? Your clients will love your versatility. You're a slave to nothing and no one. All the tools that you need to overcome any scenario can fit into one small camera case.

The Backyard Studio focuses on the scenarios that can be executed outside and around any home or apartment, specifically without the use of a light. Yes, that's right. Au naturel, baby. Whether we are talking about shooting portraits or product, fashion, or kids, all of it can be done—and done well—in your backyard.



By placing your subject in front of a piece of white or black foam core in the shade of a building, you have the perfect light for a nice head shot. Now all you need is a reflector.

5. Head Shots

This scenario, like all but one of the Backyard Studio scenarios, was done in available light, with nothing more than a piece of foam core and a reflector ([Figure 5.1](#)). As you can see in the setup shot, I placed Trent just inside the shadow of a garage, mostly blocking the morning sun. The bit of the sunlight just peaking over the top of the garage served as the main/hair light. I used a 30x40-inch piece of white foam core with a 6-inch hole cut out of the center as a reflector. The hole allowed me to shoot through the board while keeping the reflector fully upright and close to the subject. This reflecting method is more effective than a handheld reflector, as it allows for a straight-on light source. A traditional reflector, which has no hole cut out, would need to be angled below the camera lens, thus lighting the subject from underneath, which is unflattering for head shots because it can make the subject appear to lack a defined chin.



Figure 5.1 The setup. The kiddie table is not necessary, although absolutely perfect.

Soft Light

The method of shooting through a reflector produces a broad, even light, which is very forgiving and thus ideal for head shots. It softens out wrinkles and blemishes and produces a fantastic catchlight in Trent's eyes ([Figure 5.2](#)). When shooting head shots, make sure to use a longer lens, as wide-angle lenses can distort features at close distance. For this shot, I used my 70–200mm f/4, shooting at 70mm ([Figure 5.3](#)). The long lens helps to not only flatten out Trent's features, but also create a nice separation between him and the background, due to lens compression.



Figure 5.2 The raw file. The hair and the eyes look good, but his skin looks a bit muddled and needs to be opened up in Lightroom.



Figure 5.3 The lighting diagram. By cutting a hole in a reflector and shooting through it, you can light the subject from head-on, rather than from underneath.

During editing, I took the background to a rich black by making a Brush Adjustment and reducing the shadows to -100 ([Figure 5.4](#)). I also reduced the overall red/orange cast to his skin, but you may be surprised how I went about doing that.



Figure 5.4 The Lightroom adjustments. The black background was easily changed to a pure black by making a quick Brush Adjustment.

To target the exact areas of Trent’s skin that were too red/orange and in need of desaturating, I used Lightroom’s wonderful Targeted Action tool (TAT). To activate the Targeted Action tool, click the small circle-and-arrow icon that sits in the top-left corner of the Curve or HSL panel; the cursor transforms to look like the TAT icon. Now, click and hold on the area that you want to adjust, then drag it up or down to make changes ([Figure 5.5](#)). If you want to adjust another area, just click and drag again. When you are done with the tool, click the spot where you first activated it, and your cursor will return to normal.

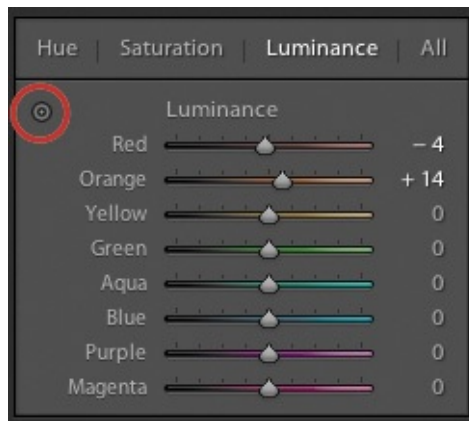


Figure 5.5 The Targeted Action tool (TAT), which is circled in red, enables you to target an exact area for which to quickly adjust such areas as Curves, Hue, and Saturation.

For example, suppose you want to adjust the saturation in your image. Simply click the TAT icon in the Saturation section of the HSL panel, click the area you want to adjust, pull the mouse down, and watch the color channels that are represented in your selection decrease in the Saturation panel. This tool is amazing because it pinpoints the exact areas, or color channels in this case, that you want to adjust. It's no longer just guesswork. For example, when I was adjusting Trent's skin, both the orange channel and a bit of the red channel were affected by the TAT to produce [Figure 5.6](#).



Figure 5.6 The final image. A soft-light head shot, complete with hair light, all from the convenience of my backyard.

Directional Light

Sometimes we want more drama than a soft, even light source can give us. For that you need some good ol' fashion directional light. The best part about a Backyard Studio is that totally different light can be just a few steps away. For example, I was able to get a completely different-looking image of Trent by walking 20 feet from where we shot in the shade. Instead of setting up in the shade, we were in full sun.

I positioned Trent perpendicular to the sun, so it became a hard sidelight. I personally liked the high contrast and what it brought to the portrait ([Figure 5.7](#)). If I had wanted to, I could have neutralized the bright light a bit by adding a reflector to fill in the shadow area and make the light/dark ratio a bit more even.



Figure 5.7 Directional light is much more dramatic and can be easily created by changing the subject's position to the light source. In this case, it was coming from the right.

It's a good discipline to consider shooting at least one more scenario, even after you think the shoot is a wrap. Often, just in the time that it takes to move a light or change a backdrop, you will get a new idea or remember one that you'd forgotten. Sometimes that

last-minute idea ends up being the best shot from the shoot. It's better to ask for 2 more minutes than to spend the next week regretting you didn't shoot more images when you had the time.

6. When It's Good to Be Shallow

A shallow depth of field is more than just a bit of pretty bokeh (you know, those dreamy spots of out-of-focus color and light). Think of it as makeup or cosmetics for your environment: It can cover a multitude of sins. It can transform a messy background into nothing more than splotches of color. It teaches you to start looking at possible backgrounds like an impressionist painter might. Try it out. Pick up your camera with a lens longer than 50mm, and crank the focus to its most shallow point. Now look around you. Everything that you see is a possible backdrop for you. Having a shallow depth of field frees you from the limitations of what is simply visible to the naked eye.

Legendary Pink Dots

In the setup shot, [Figure 6.1](#), you can see Minna on her phone in my backyard. Minna is a hospital surgeon who decided to moonlight as a model (talk about winning the genetic lottery). She hired me to shoot a handful of outfits and scenarios to jump-start her modeling portfolio, or book. After shooting a few scenarios in my basement on a variety of backdrops, I decided to add some airy outdoor shots to the mix. It was still early spring and rather cold and wet outside. Moving in and out of a thick cloud cover, the sky was noticeably overcast for the most part. But the tree in my backyard had begun to bloom, and that meant pink flowers. A lot of them. So that's where we moved to next.



Figure 6.1 The setup. Minna is a surgeon, moonlighting as a model. Here she is in my less-than-dramatic backyard, taking a work call as I prepared to shoot.

I told Minna to stand about 15 feet in front of the tree and face me. I backed up another 15 to 20 feet and crouched down, in order to fill the frame behind her with the blurred tree petals. She was still on call with the hospital and was taking a call in the yard, but I used that time to get my exposure. I knew that I was going to shoot zoomed in as close to 200mm as I could get. Although my lens opens only to f/4, I still can achieve that sexy

bokeh when I shoot at 200mm because of lens compression ([Figure 6.2](#)).

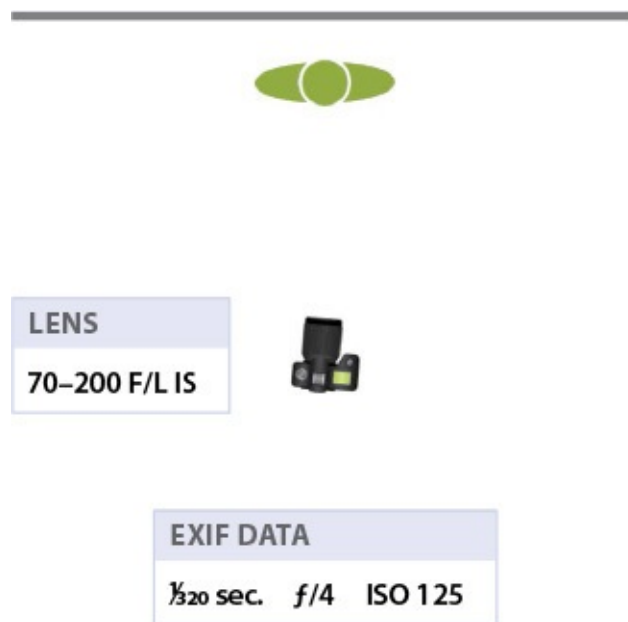


Figure 6.2 The lighting diagram. Even though my lens only opens up to $f/4$, by backing off of the subject and zooming in, I still get a nice soft background.

When she hung up from being a doctor, she removed her hood to return to modeling work. She had been wearing the hood only to keep warm, but I said that I actually liked it up—a happy accident. I snapped a few frames when the sun peeked out for a moment, snapped a few more with a faster shutter speed, and that was that. When I looked down at my camera screen, I saw that the fuchsia highlights in Minna’s hair perfectly matched the dots of pink from the flower petals in the background ([Figure 6.3](#)). That’s right, another happy accident.



Figure 6.3 The raw file. The shallow depth of field not only concealed the chaos of my backyard, but it also transformed a tree into an abstract pattern of pink and blue spots.

For editing the shot, I began, as usual, with one of my custom presets. Again, as usual, I then deviated from it a bit to custom fit the color grading to the subject and her background. In the photo, I thought that the bit of blue in the sky peeking through the trees complemented the pink and red tones in the image, so I wanted to push that a little more. To add a color wash over a whole image without affecting the white balance, use the Split Toning panel in Lightroom. For Minna's shot, I needed to add a bit of cyan to the overall image without changing the look of the shadow tones, so I concentrated on the Highlights controls ([Figure 6.4](#)). I first slid the Highlights Saturation control over to +30, and then

clicked and dragged the Highlights Hue slider until I got the exact hue that I wanted. After I had matched the hue overlay with the sky, I backed down the saturation to +10 so that the hue blended nicely. You can see the final result in [Figure 6.5](#).

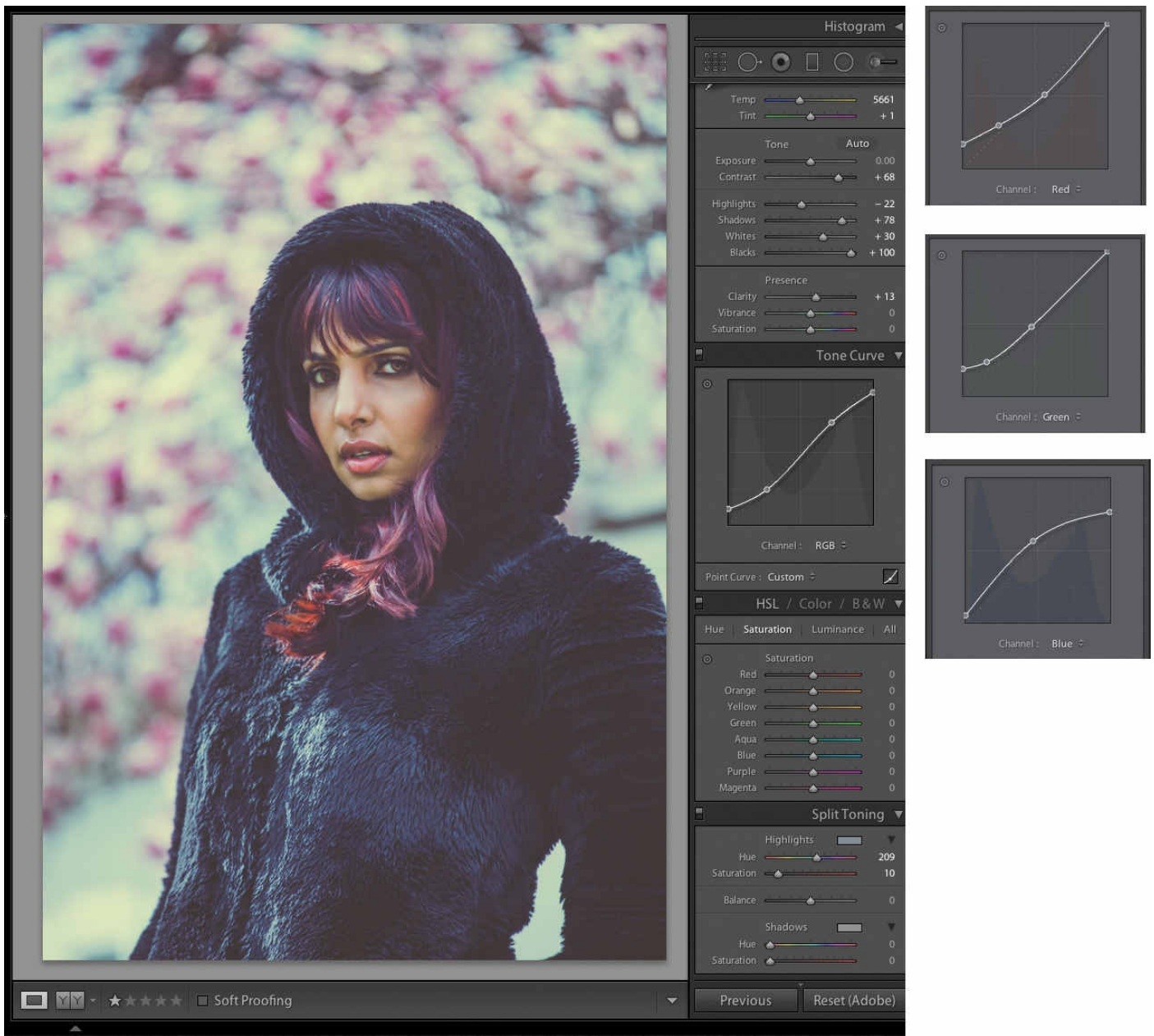


Figure 6.4 The Lightroom settings. By adding a subtle cyan overlay in the Split Toning panel, I was able to mimic the subtle blue in the sky and unify the image.



Figure 6.5 The final image. Bye-bye, backyard.

Alley Cat

I've conducted a number of shoots in my backyard and the alley behind my house. That background can read as a clean neutral background in the winter to a winding path through green woods in the summer, all due to the wonderment of depth of field. In [Figure 6.6](#), for example, you might see a little girl, alone, on a walk down an endless road, having what appears to be a moment of self-realization and acceptance of a recent diagnosis of a life-debilitating illness, which inevitably will leave her with a newfound purpose and reason for living. Actually, it's just a little girl, zoning out between takes, in the alley behind my house. But it works. Likewise, when I say "alley," your first thought probably isn't "beauty." With the help of a shallow depth of field on a sunny day, however, that's precisely where I shot [Figure 6.7](#).



Figure 6.6 I photographed this image of Aubrianna in my alley in the summer.



Figure 6.7 Brittany was photographed in the alley behind my garage in the winter. Thanks to depth of field, the garage in the background isn't even legible in the final image.

Pro-Tip: Getting the Most Out of One Location

People like options. So do clients. So when I book a magazine cover shoot, I know

that I need to provide the art director with as many different backgrounds and poses as I possibly can. But what if the client is in New York, you are in Ohio, and the subject you need to photograph is 3.5 hours away in Louisville, Kentucky?

When I found myself in this geographic predicament, I knew I couldn't scout ahead of time, nor could I sit down with the client—a New York-based art director—to chat before the shoot. I had to do all the planning over the phone and through email. The creative direction that I was given was that the art director wanted a “power pose” of the subject, but also I was to make sure to capture the down-to-earth side of him.

Per usual, when working with someone as important as this subject, I needed to work quickly to avoid wasting too much of his time. I made sure to arrive at the office building early to scout for shoot locations. The building was right downtown, and it was a perfect sunny day outside. Shooting on the sidewalk was going to be a great option. The lobby of the building had a beautiful classic look to it—a second good option. When I got off the elevator, I saw that the lobby to his office had some fantastic, large, West-facing windows (which meant soft, indirect light, because the sun was still overhead), so I knew that I had a solid third option. In case the art director didn't like any of those options (or I was less lucky with weather and locations), I also brought a white backdrop with me to photograph him on a seamless background, if needed. [Figure 6.8](#) illustrates my results.



Figure 6.8 Here are five unique poses and locations that I provided for the magazine's art director.

Wouldn't you know it, the client opted to use the shot on white seamless ([Figure 6.9](#)). My point in telling you all this isn't to discourage your creative eye, but instead to point out that you can achieve a variety of results in a single location just by turning around and facing another direction. Or by shooting an image first with ambient light and then with a strobe. As you move from one scenario to another, be sure to make changes to your subject's pose and wardrobe as you go, so that all your hard work in creating different environments isn't made null by having the subject looking exactly the same.



Figure 6.9 After I photographed the subject in five unique scenarios, the client opted to use the shot on white seamless. Oh, well.

7. In the Garage

In the garage, I feel safe. No one cares about my ways. If I want to take dramatic portraits on a black backdrop (without even needing a single light), the garage is my go-to spot. It's quite similar to the setup in [Chapter 5](#), and is probably the simplest and most makeshift setup in the book. As you can see in [Figure 7.1](#), I have a piece of black foam core, folded into a "V," set inside a garage on a sunny day.



Figure 7.1 The setup. This is my most, ahem, modest setup to date.

Although you can accomplish this setup on overcast days, a sunny day helps to increase the brightness of everything outside the garage and, thus, increase the catchlight in the model's eyes. The sunny daylight scene outside the garage essentially acts as a giant reflector, mimicking the reflectors you use in the studio to reflect light under the model's chin or add a catchlight during a beauty photography session.

A garage is fantastic for head shots because it allows you to place your subject closer to or farther away from the bright outdoor light, depending on how much catchlight you want in your subject's eyes or how even you want the light. For example, if the subject is right at the edge of the garage, just out of the sun, the exposure will be very bright, requiring a very fast shutter speed, a small aperture, or both, and it will give the subject's eyes a large catchlight. Note that a smaller aperture will cause the subject to appear sharper, from the tip of his nose to the back of his head. Also, the closer the subject is to the bright outside, the darker the background will be once you've adjusted your exposure for his skin tone. Alternately, placing your subject deeper into the garage allows you to use a wider aperture or slower shutter, which can create a flattering, softer depth of field, though the catchlight and overall light quality will change.

For head shots like [Figure 7.2](#), you will want to use a lens of at least 50mm or longer. Anything wider angle will lead to distortion of the subject's features. Because you are shooting outdoors, you have unlimited space to back off from the subject. So, I like to use my 70–200mm lens for this sort of head shot ([Figure 7.3](#)).



Figure 7.2 The raw photo. At first glance, there isn't much about this shot that is dramatic. After I convert it to black and white and start playing with the color channels, however, it'll really come alive.



Figure 7.3 The lighting diagram. By placing the subject just inside the opening of a garage, out of direct sunlight, he will be well lit with soft light, specifically his eyes.

When it comes to processing a black-and-white image, you can control the contrast by tweaking the color channels. First, toggle over to Black & White mode in the HSL panel; the panel's title will change Black & White Mix ([Figure 7.4](#)). Now, experiment by sliding the different channels left and right and seeing what areas are affected. The Orange channel typically controls most skin tones and the Yellow channel typically controls hair (for Caucasians). The Green and Blue channels typically affect the eyes. If I want to add drama to the eyes, I make a brush adjustment, sliding the Shadows and Highlights sliders to around +60 and the Exposure setting to around +10 ([Figure 7.5](#)). [Figure 7.6](#) shows the results.

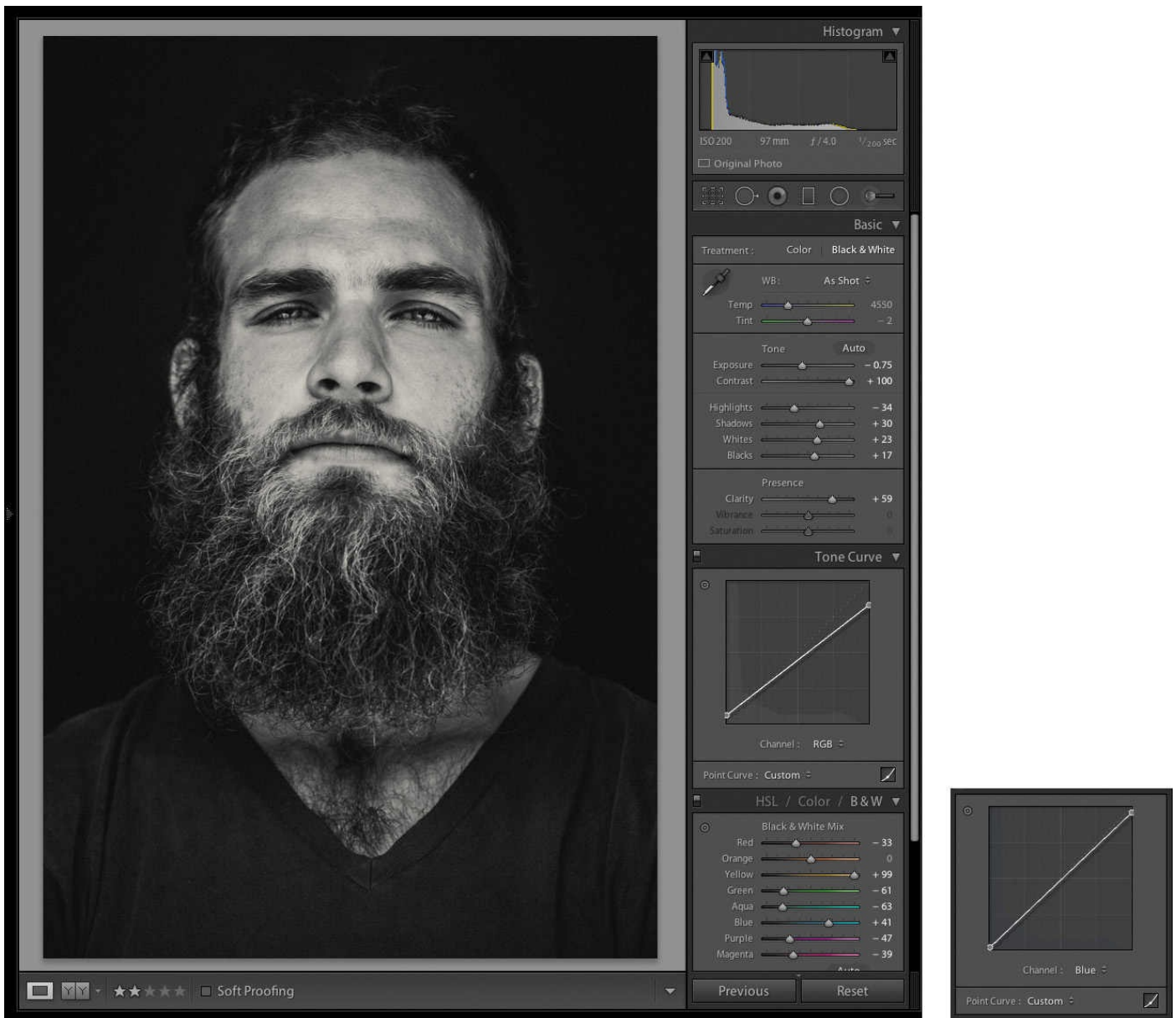


Figure 7.4 The Lightroom settings. By playing with the Black & White Mix in Lightroom, you can vastly control the tones in an image. For example, increasing the Orange channel opens up the skin in most subjects.

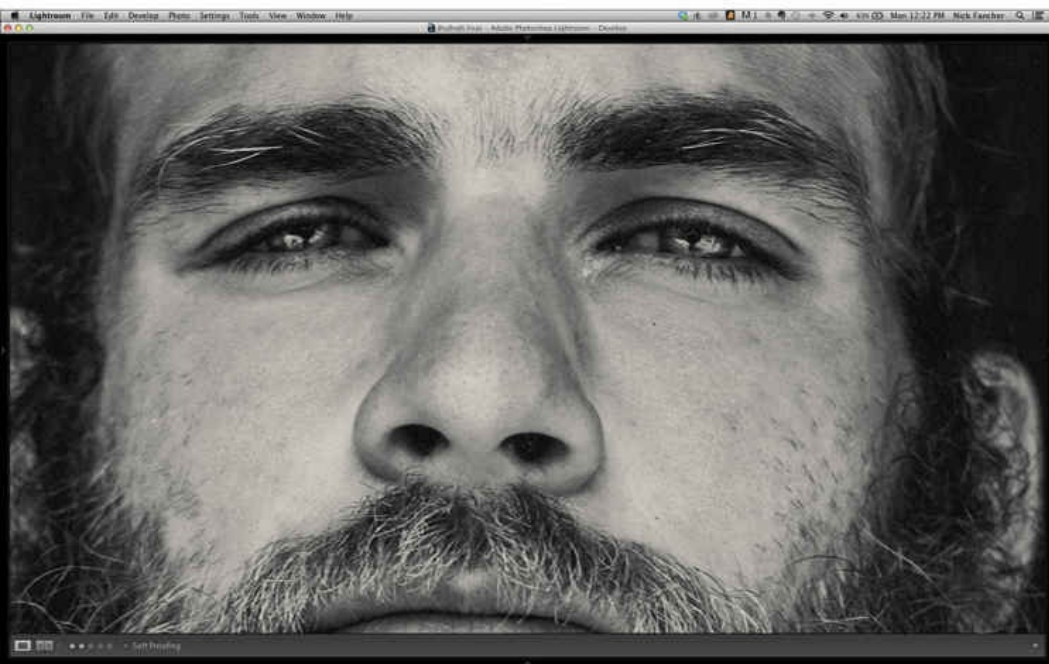
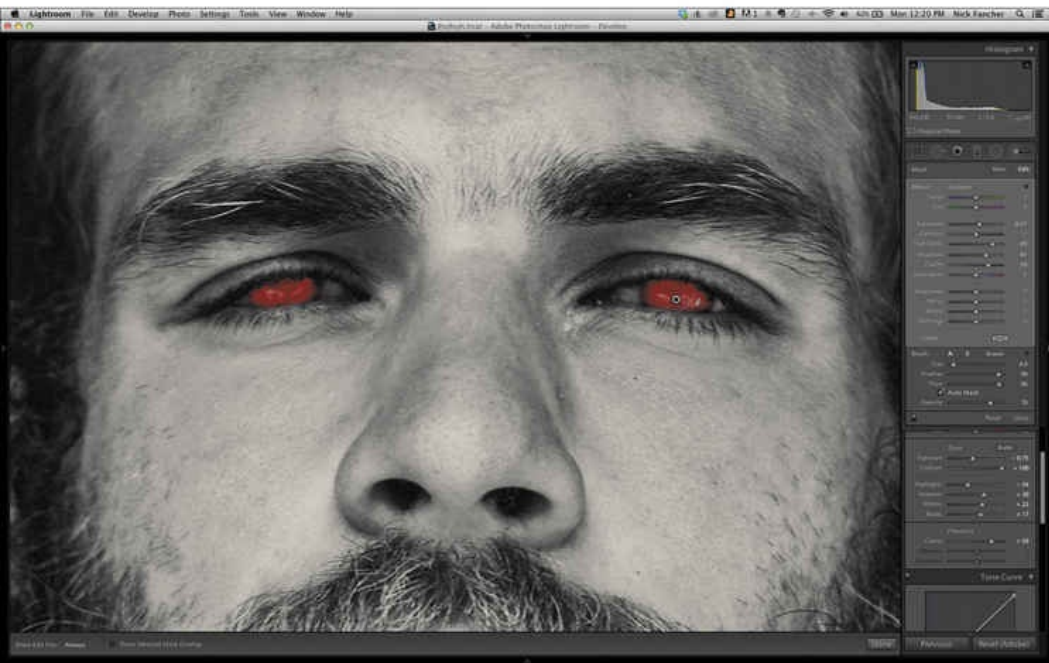
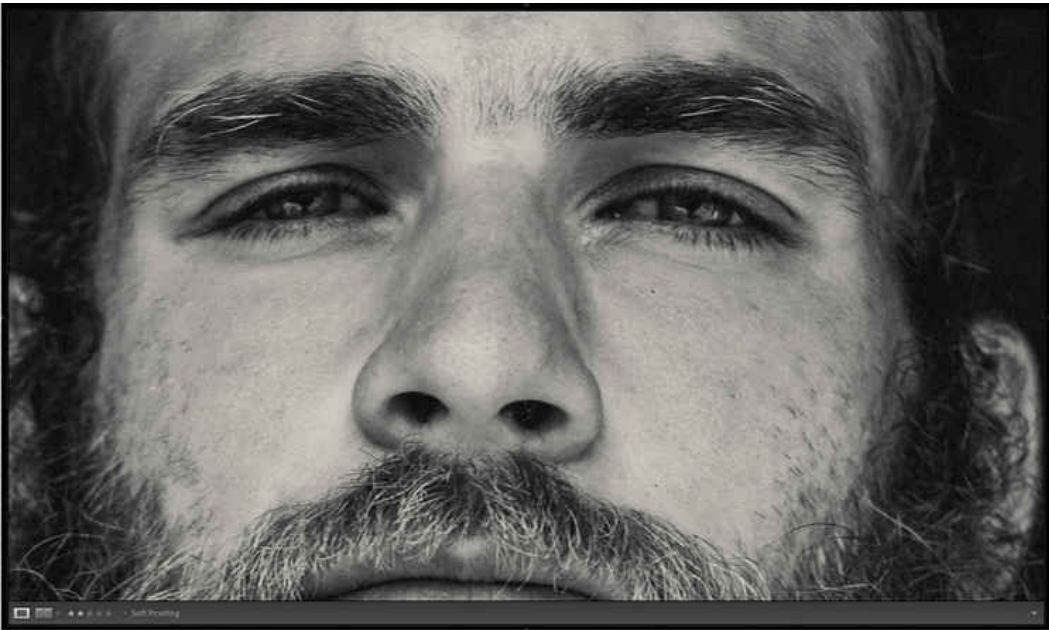


Figure 7.5 If you want to punch up the drama in the eyes, make a brush adjustment, increasing the Clarity, Contrast, and Shadows settings.

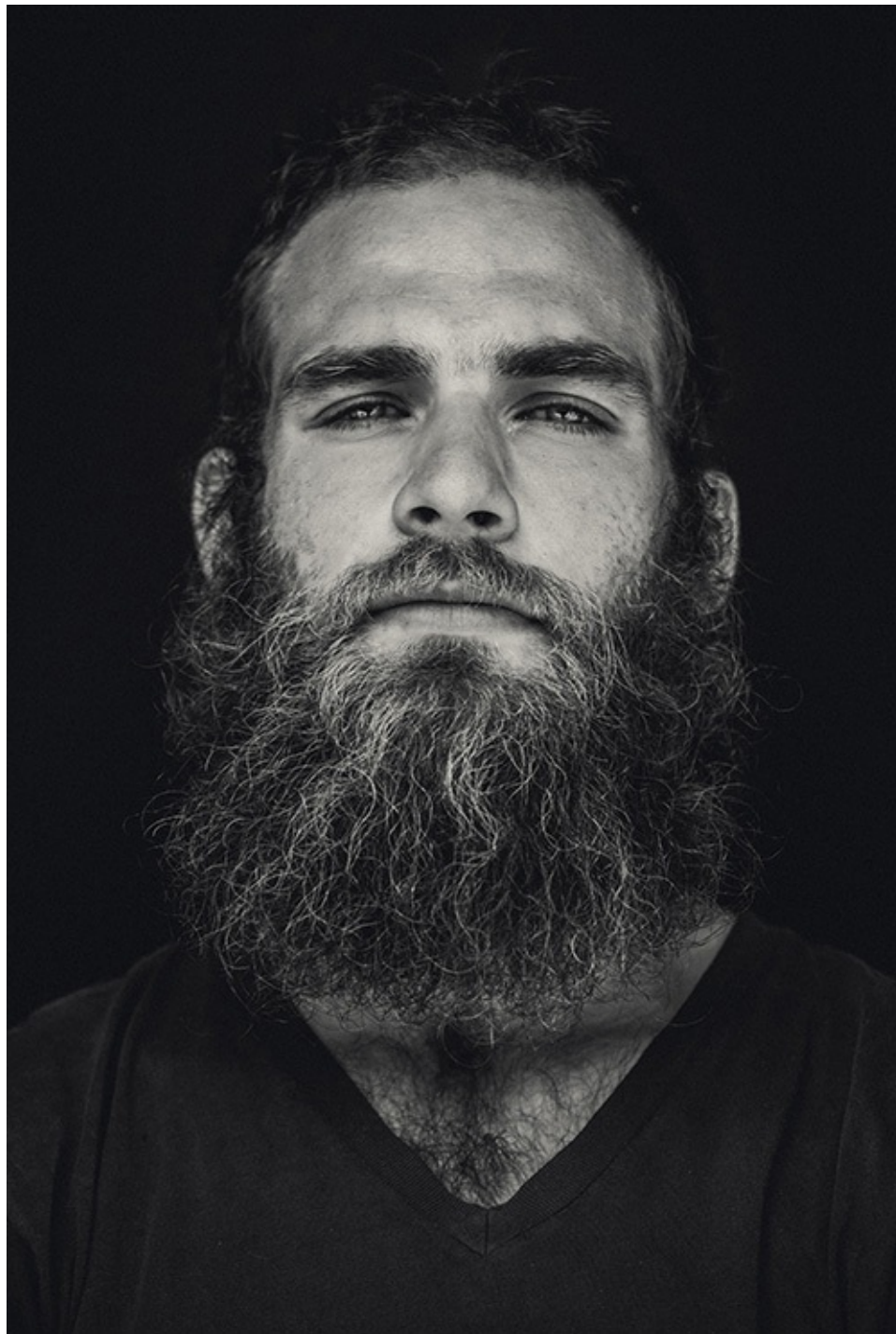


Figure 7.6 The final image. More dramatic, don't you think?

Directional Light

The one downside to sitting your subject in front of an open garage door is that you are essentially lighting them with a head-on, massive wall of soft light, which can appear flat or boring. To add drama, you need a more directional light source. Because we can't move the available light source, we move the subject. For [Figure 7.7](#), I placed my subject perpendicular to the open garage door. I then opened the side door, shooting through it, which gave me the extra space I need to back off of the subject, because I had to use the shorter width of the garage instead of the length. ([Figure 7.8](#)).



Figure 7.7 The setup. By changing the subject's position to the main light source (the large open door), you add more drama to the image.



Figure 7.8 The final image. The nice directional light is courtesy of an open garage door.

8. Kiddie Pools. Who'd a Thunk It?

Ohio is not an island. We don't have access to exotic beaches. Hell, a good number of Ohioans probably don't even know what the word *exotic* means. So when I want to construct a dreamy water scene for a portrait here, I need to get creative ([Figure 8.1](#)).



Figure 8.1 The setup. By blacking out a kiddie pool, you can get the most out of the ripples and colors of reflections.

For creativity, I can think of no better source of inspiration than the fashion industry. Although I hardly consider myself a fashion photographer, I regularly study the photography in fashion magazines, which contain some of the best lighting and storytelling techniques. I have always found it useful to look at those who are doing better work than me, so that I may glean from their work and apply it to my own. A word of warning, however: Studying photographers further along than you can also be discouraging. When you topple from the heights of inspiration down the slippery slope of “I’ll never be that good,” catch yourself by comparing your work to what it was one year prior. As long as you’re growing, you are doing more than okay!

Which brings me to this next scenario. Awhile back I came across the dreamy fashion work of French photographer Bruno Dayan. In particular, he had done a beauty shoot featuring jewelry on a model partially submerged in water. I had never seen colors and tones quite like his. They were simultaneously some of the most beautiful and also the most discouraging images I had ever seen. I was determined to figure out how he had done it—so that I could do it.

Blackout

Ideally, I would have liked to see a behind-the-scenes photo of the tools and location that Dayan used. Alas, I could find none. So, I tried to read the light in the photo and make up the rest as I went along. Clearly, I needed water, so I started there. Lacking a beach and exotic body of water to experiment with, I turned to the next best thing: an inflatable kiddie pool. I set up the pool in the shadow of my house, making sure to keep it out of direct sunlight, because it was a cloudless summer day. I set up my lights and began shooting a few frames to check the light, before the model even entered the water. The first issue that I encountered was that no matter how I angled the light or set the exposure, the water wasn't appearing black like in the inspiration pictures. So I added a bunch of black towels and sheets to the bottom of the pool. Now I was on the right track.

I did this shoot back when I was still using High Speed Sync (HSS) to kill my ambient outdoor light. Because of the light output that is lost in HSS mode, I had to gang all four of my Canon 430EX flashes on one light stand to get sufficient output. (I've since converted to using variable neutral-density, or ND, filters instead, as you'll learn in [Chapter 21](#).) Using a FourSquare bracket from Lightware Direct, I attached the four flashes to the pole and set them all to half power, allowing for a decent output without killing the refresh time. I was shooting through a white umbrella, so a bit of the output was lost, but I was still at a shutter speed of 1/3200 with an aperture of f/1.4. This exposure allowed me to squash the ambient light and sufficiently light the model. [Figure 8.2](#) shows the lighting diagram.

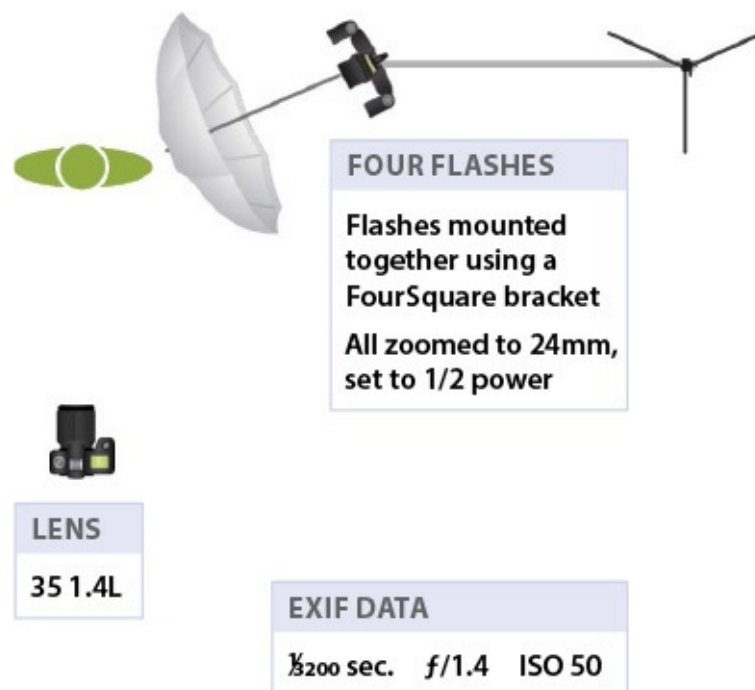


Figure 8.2 The lighting diagram. For this shot, I used High Speed Sync (HSS) to kill the ambient light. Because of the light output that is lost in HSS mode, I needed to gang four flashes on one stand to get a sufficient output.

I had my exposure, but I needed movement in the water. I've since deduced that Mr. Dayan must have been shooting in a lake or pond, where the water is naturally dark with naturally occurring ripples and water movement. At the time, however, I was halfway into the shoot and all the way committed to getting a good shot. I began kicking the edge of

pool, which sent ripples across the surface of the water. Now I was getting somewhere, as you can see in [Figure 8.3](#). Note that the patches of soft blue light in the waves are reflections of the sky.



Figure 8.3 The raw file. To get ripples in the water, I had to kick the sides of the kiddie pool. The patches of soft blue light in the waves were reflections of the sky.

I made sure to snap several frames with good ripples before I called it a wrap (which I never say out loud at a shoot). When I imported my files and started to compare them with Bruno's (not recommended), I was feeling pretty down that the experiment had failed. But the truth of the matter was I shouldn't have been so hard on myself. The shoot was not only my first attempt at blindly emulating his work, I was also working solo using a minimal setup in my backyard, while a whole team of creatives with much better resources had been at his disposal. After all, it was just a fun experiment, and I still had Lightroom up my sleeve.

Once I began playing with the Levels and Curves controls in Lightroom, the images really started to come alive. Dayan's images looked like he had essentially pulled up the shadows in Tone Curve, which created a nice texture in the water ripples. So, I spent most of the editing time in these areas. I also wanted to push an overall blue tone on the image, so I added a +64 blue tone in the Split Toning panel and a +58 warm tone to the highlights, to retain a warmth in the skin tones ([Figure 8.4](#)). Finally, I decided that I liked the image better with a vertical orientation. I cropped, making sure to retain the original canvas dimensions, and my experiment was complete ([Figure 8.5](#)).

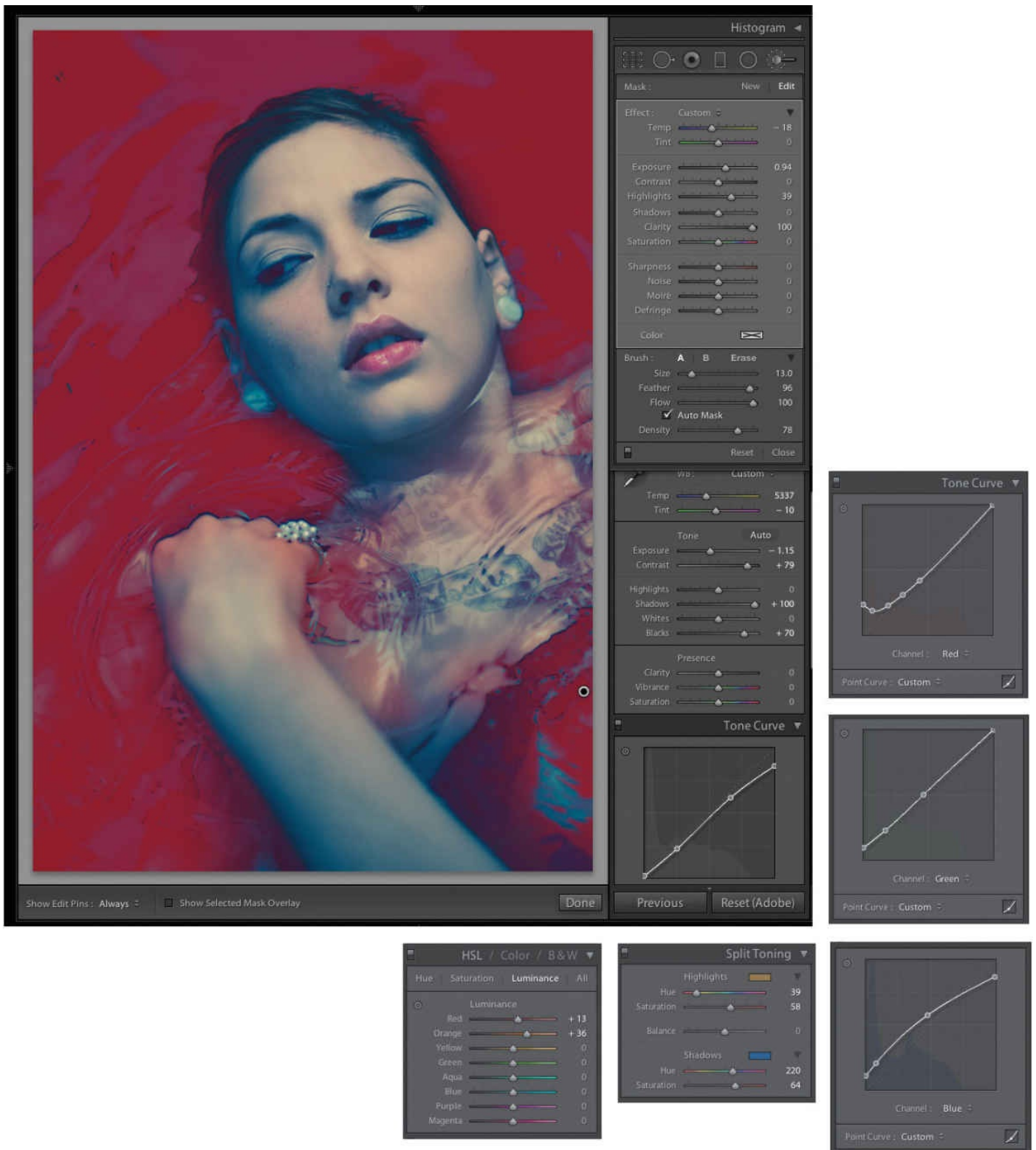


Figure 8.4 The Lightroom settings. I did most of my color grading in the Tone Curve panel, while also imparting an overall cool feel by adding a Split Tone overlay.



Figure 8.5 The final image. Although it's a bit different than Dayan's, I am still happy with the result. Plus, now I have more knowledge about working with lighting and water, so the next time around will be smoother sailing.

Applying the Experiment

Now that I was more familiar with shooting water and making it appear black, I decided to apply the skills to my product photography. (These are the types of things that I do for fun, by the way.)

I was in the middle of a series of experiments for which I shot the same bottle of cologne in as many ways as I could come up with, in order to sharpen my product photography skills. This shoot ended up being my third experiment and began much like the pool shoot, but on a smaller scale. This time, I used a shallow glass dish, one black towel, and less water. I first tried placing the towel below the glass dish, but the glass created an awful

glare. Moving the towel into the dish helped with the glare, but changed the water level. I wanted just enough to cover the towel and the bottom portion of the cologne bottle, without fully submerging it.

Note

If you're curious about the rest of the experimental product shots, my eBook, Run and Gun Lighting Resource (Peachpit), details the entire series.

I dialed in the lighting (and the water), then agitated the dish to create water ripples around the bottle. In the process, I also produced air bubbles. Tiny, little air bubbles. Like thousands of them. They were all over the inside the dish, including inside the cologne bottle lid ([Figure 8.6](#)). I tried removing them, one at a time, using the Spot Removal tool in Lightroom but gave up after 10 minutes, with another hour or two of work ahead of me. Now what?



Figure 8.6 The shot looked good—or would, minus a few (thousand) air bubbles.

My bubble solution may be the most important lesson of the shoot: Know when to outsource your work. We've all been there, with several jobs shot and waiting to be edited, when a painstaking, time-sucking moment like the removal of thousands of air bubbles comes along, and you have to make a decision. Fall behind on other work or speed up the process by outsourcing portions of a job?

For the bubbles, I outsourced the cleanup work to my retoucher friend. I know some photographers who hand off all of their editing and color grading to employees, interns, or coworkers, while they stick to shooting. There isn't anything wrong with this, but I prefer to have my hand in the whole process. I find that my photo shoots are done almost equally in the camera and the editing. I let the mood of the images influence how I color grade

them; I'm not comfortable leaving those decisions up to another person. After I've already put my signature color grading on the image, however, I have no problem sending the file off to a retoucher to have them remove all the air bubbles ([Figure 8.7](#)). Decide how much of your hand needs to be involved and how much you're comfortable handing off to someone else, so you're not left buried in bubbles.



Figure 8.7 I applied what I learned in the previous water experiment to my product photography. Same principles, just on a smaller scale.

9. Shooting Product

When it comes to shooting product, specifically reflective product, large light sources are ideal, if not necessary. But, that does not mean that you need strobes. Whether you're doing a food shoot next to a large, north-facing window (which creates soft light at any time of day) or, as in this case, a bottle of Gucci cologne in your backyard, available light works just fine.

In [Figure 9.1](#), you can see my, ahem, modest setup. It's essentially two white V-flats, taped together to make a square. In the bottom I laid a 12x18-inch sheet of black plexiglass, which creates a nice reflective surface. I prefer using black plex over white because it's a bit more forgiving: It's dark while still being reflective, which helps keep it from being such a mirror image and allows the focus to remain on the product itself.



Figure 9.1 The setup. I essentially constructed a light tent out of a piece of white foam core and a bed sheet.

The back of the light box, which faces the sun, is covered in a light-gray bed sheet, which not only helped soften the light but also added a nice soft texture to the background and surface reflection. It ain't pretty, but it worked.

Keep in mind that depending on the angle and position of your camera in relation to the product and plexiglass, the reflection will change considerably. When I shoot from an elevated angle looking down into the black plexiglass, much more of the fabric backdrop is now visible, as you can see in [Figure 9.2](#). The black plexiglass almost acts like a ND filter, darkening the otherwise blown out fabric, allowing the details to be visible.



Figure 9.2 Depending on the angle of the camera to the product and plexiglass, the reflection will change considerably.

The light tent created a soft, even light that surrounded the entire product. The nice thing about shooting with available light rather than flashes is that what you see is what you get ([Figure 9.3](#)). There is no guesswork like there is with flash use. Therefore, I simply positioned and repositioned the angle of my camera until the product was evenly lit and my reflection was no longer seen ([Figure 9.4](#)).



Figure 9.3 The lighting diagram. The light tent kept the product surrounded in soft, even light.



Figure 9.4 The raw file. When shooting a reflective product, your main challenges are to create a large light source that illuminates the surface and also keep your reflection out of the shot.

Once I got my file into Lightroom ([Figure 9.5](#)), I really cranked the Clarity over to the right, which complements the angles of a product (for portrait shots, not so much). A bit of grass was still visible in the metal surface, but I desaturated the Green channel and shifted the hue to a warmer color in the HSL panel, so it no longer read as grass ([Figure 9.6](#)).

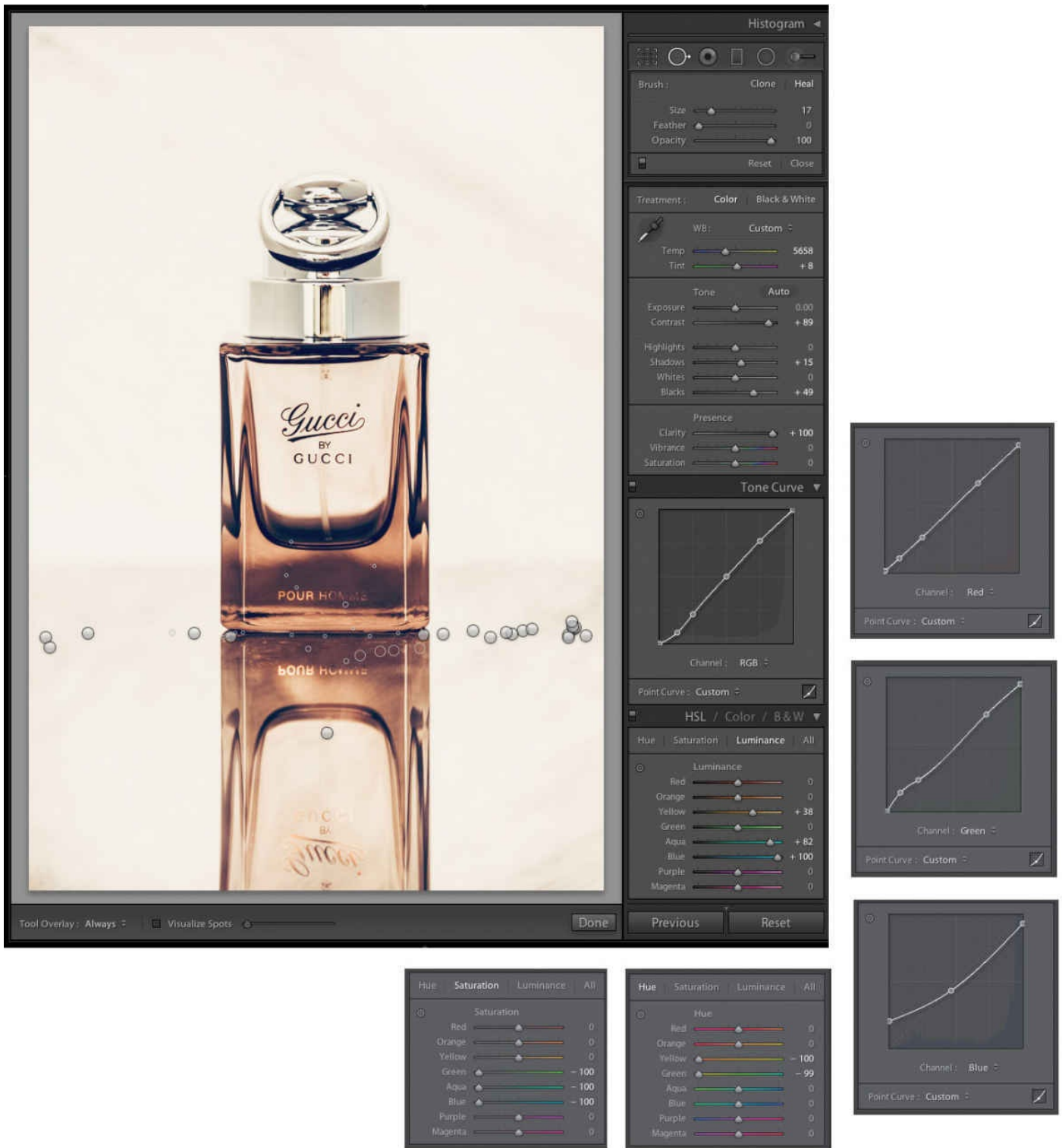


Figure 9.5 Lightroom settings. Not only did I quickly remove dust spots from the bottle by using the Spot Removal tool, but I also de-emphasized the patch of grass reflected in the bottle by shifting the Green slider in the Hue and Saturation panels.



Figure 9.6 The final image. The patch of grass reflected in the metallic lid is no longer recognizable or distracting.

If this shoot had been for a client rather than just an experiment, I may have cloned out that minor reflection, but it didn't bother me too much. Not to mention, on some shoots art directors (ADs) have sat beside me, looking at the images popping up on a tethered monitor, and not cared about minor imperfections like this reflection. Even if the AD or clients did decide they didn't want it in the shot, quite often when shooting commercial product work, they'd employ the use of a retoucher to clean up small details like that, rather than waste an extra half hour trying to tweak the reflectors until it was perfect.

Quiz 2: Deconstruct the Lighting

Test your deconstructing abilities by identifying the light source(s) in [Figure Q2](#), then flip to the answer key at the back of the book to see how close you were. Remember to check the eyes and the direction and quality of the light. Good luck!



Part III: The Basement Studio



I can see it in their eyes. When I escort first-time clients down my claustrophobic stairwell while warning “mind your head,” they’re worrying “what did I get myself into?” My basement may be a musty, low-ceilinged, concrete hole—er—studio, but it works and works well. True, the ceilings are under 7 feet high, and the room is barely over 10 feet wide. *But*, I have 20 feet of space to back up, and that’s all I need. I’ve used this space to shoot everything from full-body portraits of 6-foot-plus businessmen to classical clarinetists, from commercial fashion sessions to product photography. Once a shoot is underway, however, my clients begin to relax, and when I show them the first few frames, they are sold. Honestly, I think that shooting in the shabby scenario makes the reveal of the final images that much more potent. That’s my world—legitimizing creepy basement

photographers, one shoot at a time.



10. Soft Light

Modifiers are a great way to create soft light. Unfortunately, commercial modifiers, such as umbrellas, softboxes, and octabanks, can be large, and my basement setup is pretty bare bones. I don't have the width or the height to allow for large light modifiers, so I have to get creative. Basically, anything that you can do to make your light source larger will help to soften your light; even bouncing your light off a wall or ceiling gets the job done.

Note

You can see more on the techniques that I've implemented to maximize my small basement studio in the Epilogue's "[Using What You Have](#)" section.

In [Figure 10.1](#), you can see that I placed a 40x60-inch white panel on a table near the model. Although the panel was opaque, prohibiting me from shooting through it, it still served as a fantastic light source by being a reflector. To use this technique, place the light several feet in front of the subject, flagging the side of the light to keep light spill off her, and bounce the light into a large reflective surface in front of her. It's basically the same approach as using a reflector and the sun to light your subject, only instead of the sun, you use a \$200 piece of plastic.



Figure 10.1 The setup. By bouncing a flash into a piece of white foam core, you can easily make a large soft light source.

On White

There's something so classic and timeless about a single soft light source on a white backdrop. It will never look dated—whether you're looking at Richard Avedon's portraits from the '60s and '70s, Timothy Greenfield-Sanders's work in the '80s and '90s, or Inez and Vinoodh's contemporary fashion work. And there's so much versatility within this setup. Depending on how close you place your subject (and light) to the white background, the photo's background can go from white to gray to black. Case in point is [Figure 10.2](#), a shot of actor Jeff Querin that I took several years ago on a white backdrop. He was standing about 15 feet in front of the sweep, and I was lighting him with one flash shot into a 40-inch umbrella. Although the background was white, it reads as a charcoal gray, and I could have easily pushed it to black in post.



Figure 10.2 Actor Jeff Querin is standing 15 feet in front of a white backdrop in this shot. If your subject and light are far enough away from a white backdrop, the background can go to gray or even black.

More recently, I used this technique with Aubrianna, a 7-year-old powerhouse. She is simultaneously a model and child. Therefore, the shots that I get of her are equal parts expressions and poses that are beyond her years and silly faces. She's amazing, and I can't wait to see what comes of her career. When I was setting up for my shoot with her, I wanted a simple scenario, one that would allow both sides of her personality to shine. So I went with one soft light on a white sweep ([Figure 10.3](#)) and got the result shown in [Figure 10.4](#).

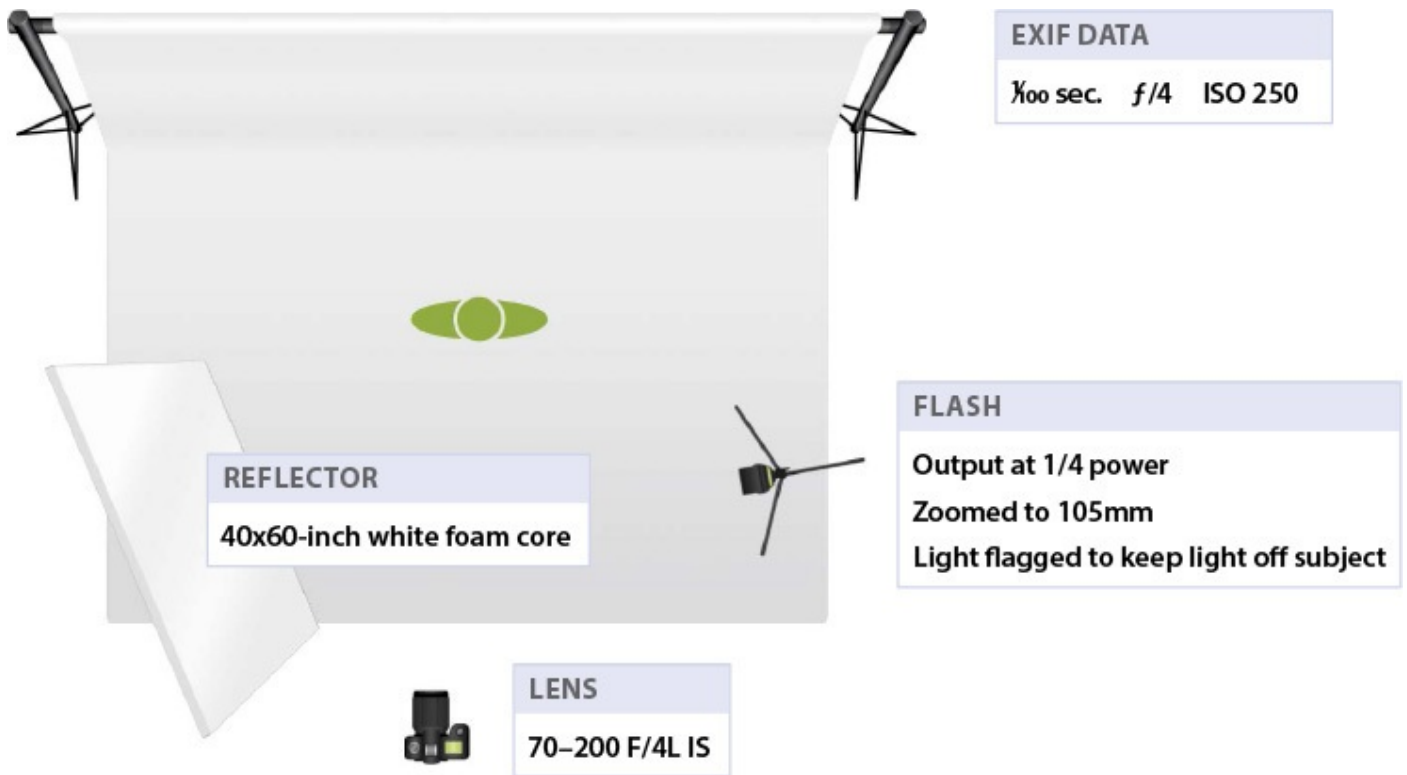


Figure 10.3 The lighting diagram. The distance of the light and subject to the white background determines how dark or bright it will appear.



Figure 10.4 The raw file. The light appears soft and lights Aubrianna’s full body, rendering the white background a light gray.

I also kept my Lightroom treatment pretty simple ([Figure 10.5](#)). I didn’t want to interrupt the even and clean lighting with harsh clarity adjustments and too much detail. As usual, I cranked the Contrast slider all the way to the right, which gave the colors a nice pop of saturation. I then brought up the Shadow slider to counter the effect of the increased contrast on the shadow areas. I also played around with the Blue and Cyan channels, using the Luminance and Saturation sliders, to get a warmer overall feel to the image.

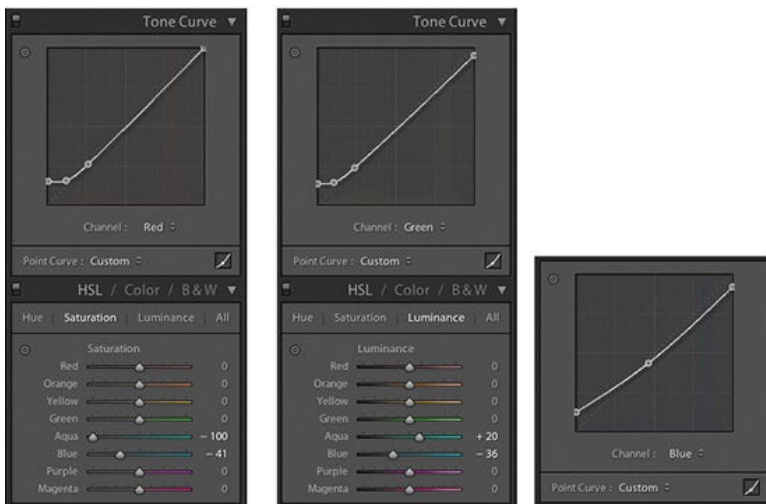


Figure 10.5 The Lightroom settings. I made a few gradient adjustments, raising the exposure on the sides of the image to even out the white backdrop.

Finally, I added a few gradient adjustments to the right side of the backdrop, helping the white to appear more even from left to right and producing the result in [Figure 10.6](#).



Figure 10.6 The final shot. A classic white backdrop was just what I needed to bring out the maturity and character in Aubrianna.

On Gray

After shooting on white for a bit, I switched to a charcoal gray backdrop. As with white, you can coax a decent variety of shades and colors from a basic gray backdrop, just by placing your lights and subject closer to or farther away from it. I positioned Aubrianna about 3 feet in front of the sweep for the next scenario ([Figure 10.7](#)). To decrease the light spread, I switched from using a panel reflector to an umbrella. I then added a reflector to the right side of her face to soften the overall light on her ([Figure 10.8](#)).



Figure 10.7 The setup. I swapped out the white sweep for a charcoal gray and traded my white bounce for an umbrella and a reflector.



Figure 10.8 The lighting diagram. Once again, I had my light and subject close to the backdrop to allow the light to illuminate it.

For the editing, I made only minor exposure adjustments to the Lightroom settings I used for the first scenario, which made the editing process twice as fast. I had the whole shoot edited within an hour ([Figure 10.9](#)). That's why it's so important to get a consistent, good exposure in camera. This means that you need to keep an eye on your flash output as well. Depending on the kind of light you are using, the consistency can range from one output to another. Higher-end systems, such as Profoto, give a nice consistent output of both

color temperature and intensity. Cheaper systems often have fluctuations in their intensity and color temperature from click to click, creating variances from one raw file to the next and making the editing process much more tedious. Some lights will even output before they are fully recharged from the previous output. For this reason, I turn on the audio indicator on my flashes, which emits a beep when the flash is fully charged and ready for the next shot. This way I can be sure that I am getting the most consistent output possible, from one shot to the next.



Figure 10.9 The final shot. The gray backdrop helped Aubrianna's red hair and blue shirt stand out.

11. Moody Light

Moody light is my absolute favorite type of light. It can be so cinematic and theatrical. It's like placing my subjects on a stage and letting them become a character, someone else. The term moody light encompasses a number of different techniques—colored gels, flash grids, blacking out the scene except for the subject—and I'll cover all of these scenarios in this chapter.

The First Rule of Moody Lighting...

... is you don't talk about moody lighting. Okay, I'm kidding, but I was seriously aiming to invoke Tyler Durden from *Fight Club* in this shoot I did with model Alex Prange. Although we weren't re-creating a particular scene from the film, we wanted to capture the character's badass presence. Alex has the body of Brad Pitt in the movie as well as the swagger, so all I needed to do was get the light nailed down.

As you can see in [Figure 11.1](#), Alex was about 5 feet in front of a white vinyl backdrop. The nice thing about a vinyl or fabric backdrop as opposed to a paper sweep is that it has a nice, wavy texture. Although the texture can be played down or outright eliminated depending on the direction and intensity of light on it, I decided to highlight the texture in this shot.



Figure 11.1 The setup. Alex is pumped up and ready to get his *Fight Club* on. It's kind of fitting that we were shooting in a creepy basement.

I placed my background light low and close to the backdrop, aiming upward (it's hidden behind the small, black V-flat). I also made sure that the background light output matched

the output of the main light, in order to retain some detail in the white backdrop. (Usually, I make the background light 2 to 3 stops brighter than the main light to blow out the background to pure white.)

After setting up my background and background light ([Figure 11.2](#)), I asked Alex to step into the scene. I placed him about 4 feet in front of the backdrop—close enough to get a little bit of kickback light falling onto the edges of his arms and profile. One of the perks of having small quarters to shoot in is that light can bounce around, accenting the subject. (Bouncing light can quickly become more curse than blessing when you want to contain your light, however, as you'll learn in a bit.)

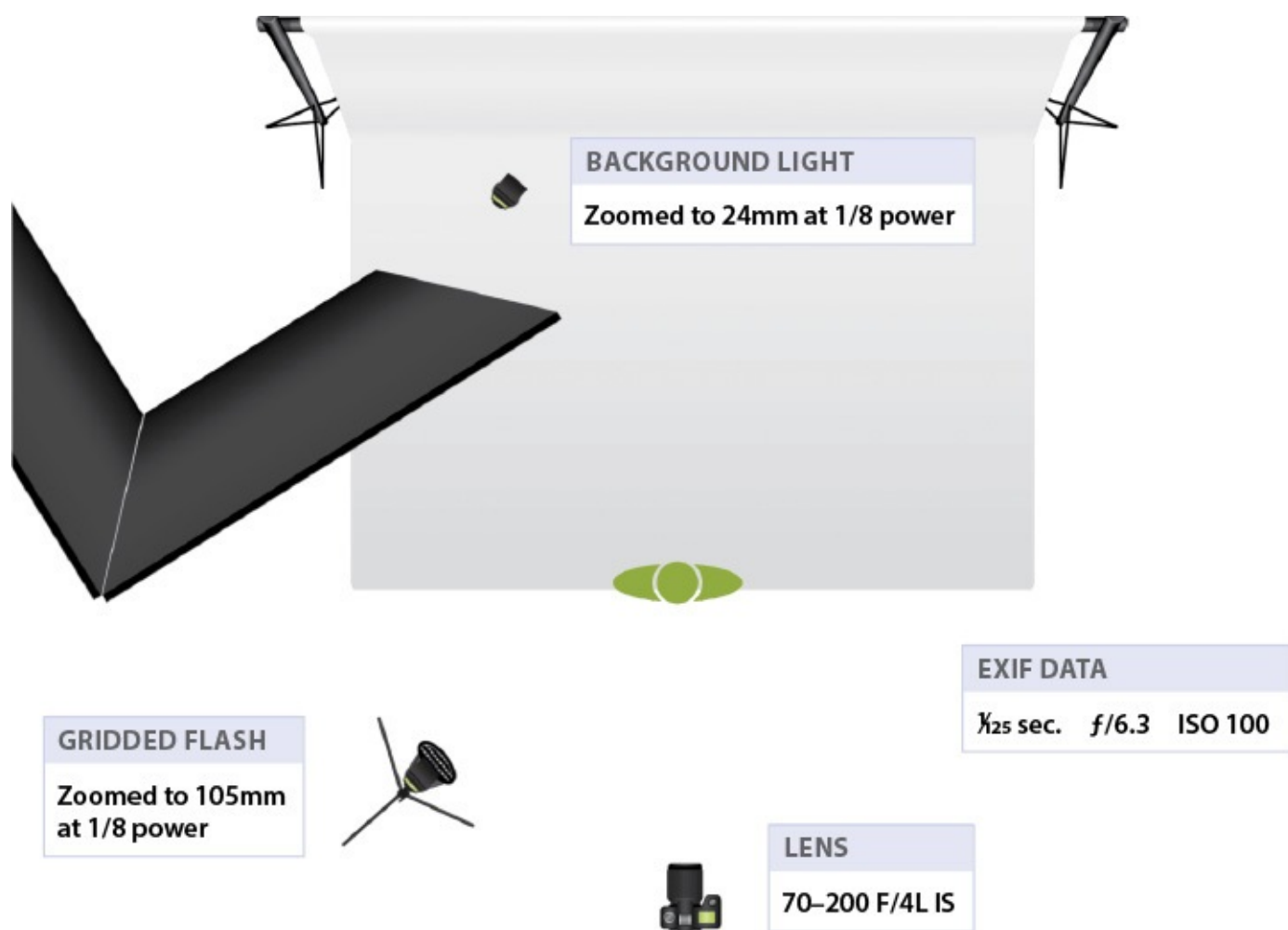


Figure 11.2 The lighting diagram. My background light had the same output as my main light, in order to retain detail in the white sweep.

For my main light, I opted to use my trusty Honl grid to get contrasty, hard light. Hard light, which creates hard shadow and bright highlights, was just what Alex's many muscles needed to really stand out ([Figure 11.3](#)). One thing to keep in mind when lighting a subject with a grid is that if he moves much at all, the small area of light will quickly fall off of him. Sometimes this can make for cool, unintentional shots where the subject's face goes to shadow while his torso is lit, and so on. But if you want his face to be lit, as most portraits require, you need to instruct the subject to stay within the confined area of the flash output.



Figure 11.3 The raw file. The hard main light helped to define his muscles.

My post work on this image was pretty similar to my normal color-grading routine, except for this shot I wanted to outline the hard lines of his muscles. To do so, I slid the Clarity to +63. I also wanted the shot to have a warmer look, so I desaturated the Blue and Cyan channels ([Figure 11.4](#)). After making a slight crop, the image was finished ([Figure 11.5](#)).

Histogram

Tool: **Crop & Straighten**

Aspect: Original Lock

Angle: 0.00

Constrain To Warp

Reset Close

WB: Custom

Temp: 4908

Tint: -9

Tone Auto

Exposure: 0.00

Contrast: 0

Highlights: +35

Shadows: +32

Whites: +28

Blacks: 0

Presence

Clarity: +63

Vibrance: 0

Saturation: 0

Tone Curve

Channel: Blue

Point Curve: Custom

HSL / Color / B & W

Hue Saturation Luminance All

Luminance

Red: 0

Orange: 0

Yellow: +78

Green: 0

Aqua: 0

Blue: 0

Purple: 0

Magenta: 0

Done Previous Reset

Tool Overlay: Always

Channel: Green

Point Curve: Custom

Channel: RGB

Point Curve: Custom

Saturation

Red: 0

Orange: 0

Yellow: 0

Green: 0

Aqua: 0

Blue: -100

Purple: -45

Magenta: 0

Figure 11.4 The Lightroom settings are much like those for my normal color grading, save for the extra Clarity, which highlights the hard light and muscles of the model.



Figure 11.5 I am Jack's final shot.

Black on Black on Black

To paraphrase Samuel L. Jackson in *Jackie Brown*, "Grids: When you absolutely, positively got to kill every lumen in the room, accept no substitutes." Have a room that you want to make black? You don't even need a black backdrop or the dark cover of night. All you need is a flash, a grid, and a room. As long as your subject isn't standing within 5 feet of a wall, you will have no problem killing all of the ambient light.

Case in point. I was doing a shoot with Dani, who was in black body paint, wearing all black above the waist. I wanted the whole scene to be black, save for Dani and the textures

of her outfit. It was a conceptual fashion shoot, this portion being the Hell portion of a Heaven/Hell-themed shoot. (The as-yet-to-be-shot Heaven scenario will, fittingly, be all white.)

I met Dani at the makeup artist's house, about an hour after they got started on the makeup, to give them a head start with the lengthy application. I knew that the basement was going to be an optimal shooting space because it was windowless but wide open and barren ([Figure 11.6](#)). I quickly set up the sole flash ([Figure 11.7](#)), and then waited another hour while they put the finishing touches on the makeup and hair (so much for the head start).



Figure 11.6 The setup. This time we were shooting in the basement of my makeup artist's home. Even though it lacked a black backdrop, I had no problem creating a black environment with the use of my flash settings.



Figure 11.7 The diagram. A moderate flash output of 1/8 was enough to knock out the ambient light in the basement. The added grid on the flash contained the light from spilling onto the nearby walls, helping to create a black environment.

The shoot actually went rather quickly (15 minutes). As you can see in [Figure 11.8](#), Dani was wearing a crop top. Although her unpainted abdomen and sweatpants are visible in the shot, this wasn't a big issue. Because the light falloff was so dramatic from her bust to her torso, a quick adjustment in Lightroom would have the image looking right as rain ([Figure 11.9](#)).



Figure 11.8 The raw file. Dani's midriff and sweatpants are visible but can easily be removed in post.

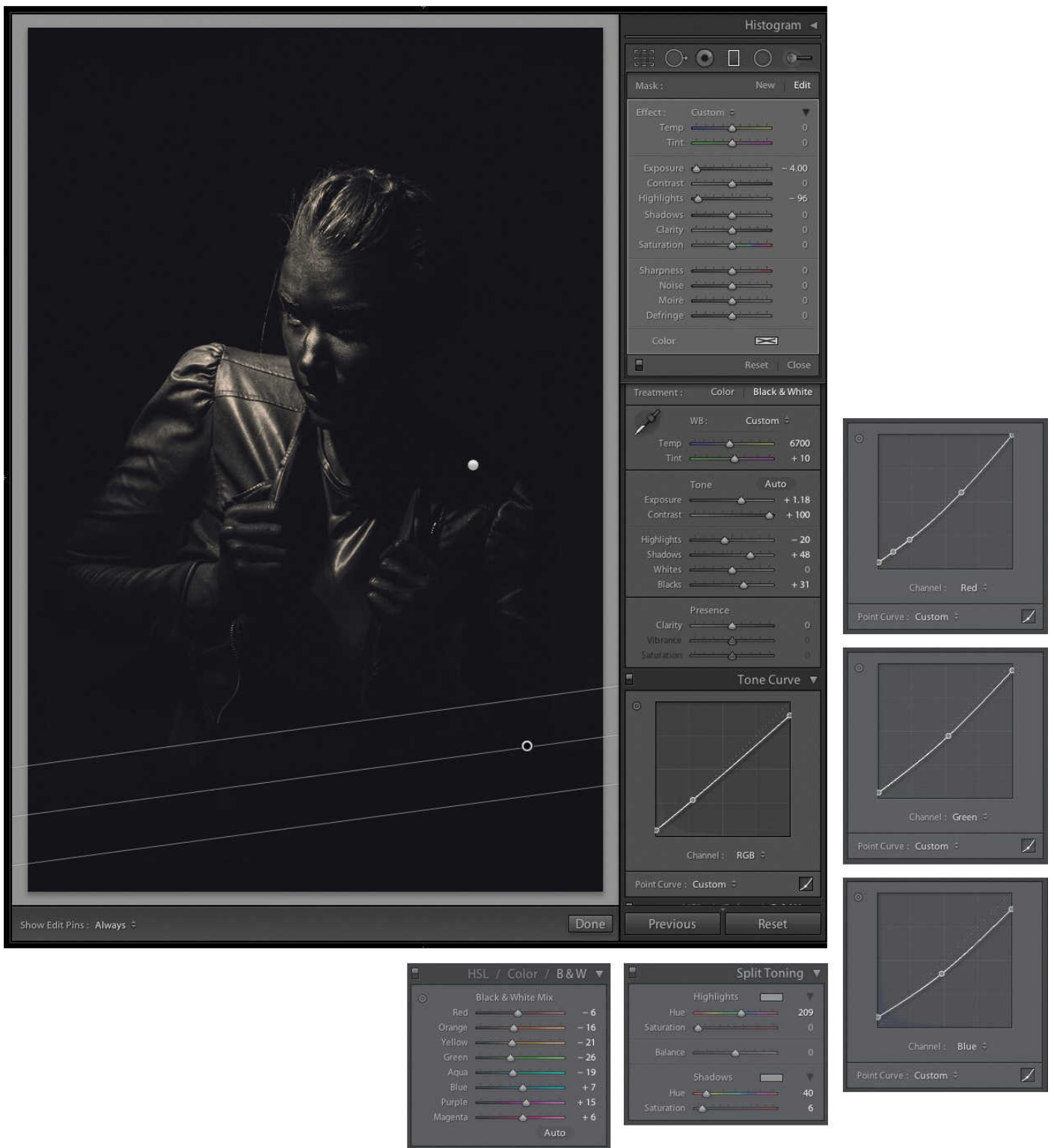


Figure 11.9 The Lightroom settings. Because the image was, for all intents and purposes, black and white, I toggled over into Black & White mode to allow for a quicker editing process.

When I got the file into Lightroom, I thought that the editing would go a certain way (easily), but it turned out to go a totally different route (hard). The hard light and the too-good camera sensor captured far more orangey skin tones than I expected. I was fortunate that the image was relatively colorless, so I toggled over to Black & White mode. The nice thing about editing a file as black and white is that the color channels only control luminance. This way I could lower the Orange, Yellow, and Red channels (her skin color) and control the way the highlights, shadows, and midtones appeared. This method of tweaking specific color channels is a bit more focused adjustment than just sliding the

global Highlights or Shadows sliders. Now I had details in both the shadows and the highlights, and Dani was looking perfect in purgatory ([Figure 11.10](#)).



Figure 11.10 The final image. Once I brought down the highlights and brought up the shadows, Dani looked exactly how I had envisioned she would look in a hopeless, black void.

Are You Gellin'?

Gels and moody lighting go together like a wink and a smile. Even better, flash gels are one of the cheapest, yet most powerful and valuable items that you'll put in your camera case. Nowadays, you can get a pocket-sized pack of over 50 different-colored gels to accompany your flash for under \$20. At 1.5 by 3 inches, these tiny pieces of nylon sure pack a wallop. That's because gels can do more than just colorize an accent light. If used on a main light, they allow you to change the white balance in your camera, thus allowing you to control your entire scene (more on that in [Chapter 20](#)).

The more light you pump through a gel, the more washed out the color will be, so keep your output lower for a nice rich hue. [Figure 11.11](#) is a fashion shot I did with Sebastian. I liked his tailored suit and wanted to capture it in a number of different ways, to see which I preferred. I shot it with direct light on a white background, subtle lighting on a black background, and as you can see here, with an accent color on a white background. [Figure 11.11](#) ended up being my favorite take on the subject. Although the background was lit, I positioned Sebastian about 6 feet away from it, which was far enough in front of it that his body went into shadow. I lit him with a red-gelled flash with a grid on it to constrain the light. The red face, paired with a silhouetted body, gave him a nice ominous mystique.



Figure 11.11 Gels are small but extremely effective. For instance, the red gel in this image provides an accent color and adds an ominous mood to the fashion shot.

Gels are also effective at changing silhouetted color. I own a variety of colored backdrop rolls, but my options are much greater when paired with the use of a gel. Combine a red gel with a yellow background, for example, and you get a beautiful, rich tangerine color. Pair a red gel with a blue background and you get purple. A red gel on a white or gray background can vary from red to pink, depending on how high the output is on the flash (lower output is more red, higher output is more pink). [Figure 11.12](#) is a red gel on a white background. The main light was a gridded flash to the right of the model, which created the spotlight on the model and backdrop. The red-gelled background light was on the floor to the left of the model, aimed at the backdrop, with a piece of cardboard next to it to flag the light off of the model. The crisscrossed lights along with the gel created the trippy double shadow, giving the image a '60s vibe, which was the direction for the shoot.



Figure 11.12 Gels are great for changing your background. The red gel in this shot changed the backdrop to a bright pink color.

You can also shift a colored backdrop to a totally different color. If you aren't familiar with color theory, do a quick Internet search for *subtractive color mixing* to see what will happen when you mix one colored gel with a different colored background. In [Figure 11.13](#), you can see what happens when you use a red-gelled flash on a blue background: You get a beautiful shade of fuschia. Now go out and get crazy with it!



Figure 11.13 A red gel on a blue background creates a beautiful fuschia.

Pro-Tip: How to Pursue Editorial Work

I have always wanted to shoot editorial work—assignments for magazines and newspapers. To me, seeing your own work in print is the mark of having “made it” as a photographer. The problem is, how do you get your work in front of the right people to even be considered for an assignment? You’ve no doubt read articles in industry photo magazines about how to make brilliant and eye-catching marketing materials to nab that client you are after. But that doesn’t help you very much if you don’t know which person you should be sending it to, let alone how to get his or her contact info.

Wonder no more. Yodelist.com is a service for photographers who want to buy email and mailing addresses for industry contacts, such as the photo and art directors at your target publications. Once you become a member, which isn’t free, you have access to an enormous directory of industry contacts. In my case, I was interested in magazine and newspaper publishers, specifically on the East Coast, because I live closer to it than to the West Coast. Once you narrow down the list of

publications that you want to contact, you can purchase the emails of the contacts at each publication for 10 cents apiece.

Next, go through your list of addresses, and send a short email to each publication; simply introduce yourself and provide a link to your portfolio site. Note I didn't suggest linking to your Flickr or 500PX page. Get a website, or at least a clean-looking Tumblr blog, that shows a few of your best, most diverse images, rather than a smattering of all the work you've ever done. I have several galleries on my portfolio website, with less than 30 images per gallery. Less is more. Save the rest for your blog.

The important thing to keep in mind is whether or not your photography fits well with the style of the publication that you are contacting. I recently read an interview on aPhotoEditor.com (another amazing resource you should check out) with Jodi Peckman, the director of photography for Rolling Stone magazine. In the interview, she mentioned that she receives hundreds of emails per day and that the vast majority were from food or lifestyle photographers (not the kind of photographer that Rolling Stone needs). Hundreds a day! When you reach out to photo editors, make sure to show them work that fits with their publications.

After you send out your emails, all you can do is wait and understand that you won't hear back from the vast majority of them. Be patient. If they respond at all, it won't be immediately. I once personally emailed over 900 people; about a dozen responded. Although I didn't hear back from most of the magazines, I did see huge spikes in my website analytics on the days that I sent emails, so I knew that people were reading them. I didn't lose heart, and you shouldn't either.

About a week after I had sent out the emails, I received an offer from *ESPN Magazine*: Would I be interested photographing an athlete's family that lived on the east side of my city? Yes! I was ecstatic. More than that, I was validated. Not only had my emails been reaching the right people, but I now had a photo shoot for a huge client.

Even though I wasn't sending out pretty little marketing pieces to these publications, I was still getting my work in front of them. The right people were seeing my images. And convenience is a powerful thing. If you can save these photo editors and directors some time and make their lives easier by being their go-to source in your region, then it's a win-win for them and for you. Since then I have added *The New York Times* ([Figure 11.14](#)) and *Forbes Japan* ([Figure 11.15](#)) to my client list.



Figure 11.14 I shot the Ohio State Reformatory for an article on the 20th anniversary of The Shawshank Redemption for The New York Times.



Figure 11.15 This shot of the founders of Nottingham Spirk is from a job for Forbes Japan.

12. Creative Backdrops

Now that we've covered how to shape, control, and color light, let's talk about your options regarding backdrops. If ordinary paper or fabric backdrops are what you want, you know you can simply order some from B&H. But by now you also know that sometimes you don't even need a backdrop at all, like when you're blacking out a room or blowing a blank wall out to white. In this chapter, you'll learn a third approach: Armed with a cheap inkjet printer and Google, you can transport your subject anywhere.

No Paris? No Problem.

This first technique is an elevated version of a tourist trap staple: the large, timeworn print of the landmark for visitors to pose in front of. The concept is simple. Print out a large picture, shoot it out of focus in the background, and get a shot that looks realistic. When I brought the Eiffel Tower into my basement, I wanted to take it a step beyond the vacation photo op. I wanted to create a slightly surreal, atmospheric portrait with the iconic scene as a backdrop.

The first step was getting a large print of a scene. This is easier to achieve than you may realize. The first option is a wonderful thing called engineering prints. These are large, thin, high-quality black-and-white prints that you can get at Staples for cheap—like under \$8 for a 36x48-inch print kind of cheap. The second option is to use the Rasterbator wall art generator (rasterbator.net) and your own printer. Simply upload any image to the Rasterbator site, including lo-res images, and pick any output size. Rasterbator then creates a PDF that you can download and print in sections. Select the print size for each section (8x10 or 11x14 inches), and the site tells you how many sheets of paper that you'll need. Although convenient in that you can do it from your home, this option is more time-consuming because you have to assemble all of the individual sheets of paper into one large image. However, if you don't have a hi-res file for the background image, Rasterbator is your best bet. Resolution isn't an issue because the site converts the pixels into large dots—think pop artist Roy Lichtenstein.

You can browse images on an Internet search engine, but it's always good to get permission from the image owner before using the image—even for non-commercial uses. I bought the image of the Eiffel Tower, used in my background, from iStock for \$12, so creating a legal, aboveboard, custom backdrop is still a very affordable option to explore.

After printing and assembling the enlarged version, I went about lighting the image. I used matte paper to cut down on glare, but I still wanted an even light across the whole image. To accomplish this, I set up my light about 2 feet in front of the backdrop, bouncing the light off of the white ceiling. The bounce light helped create a large, even light source ([Figures 12.1](#) and [12.2](#)).

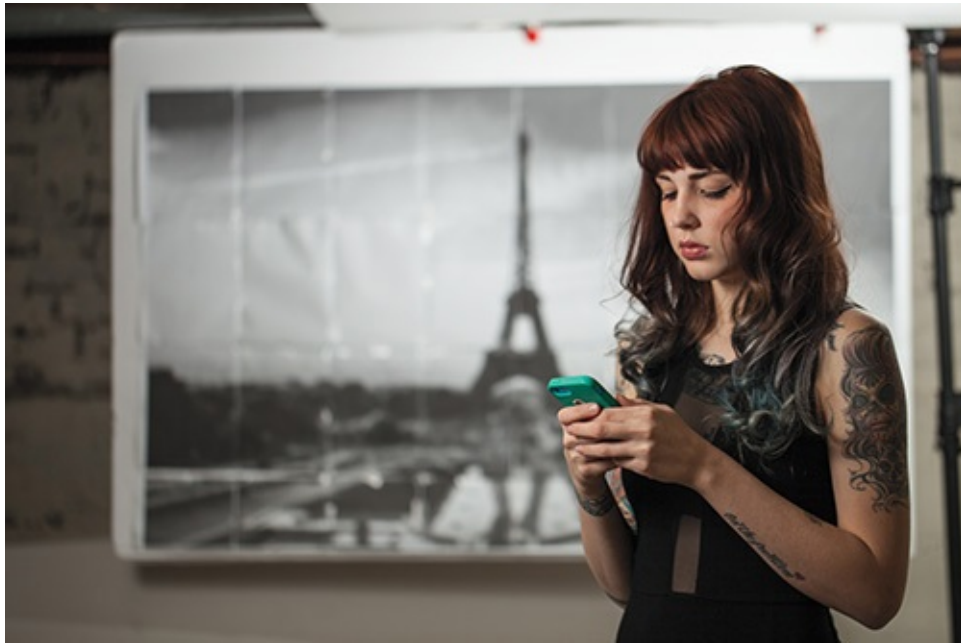


Figure 12.1 The setup. With the help of the Rasterbator, you can turn an image of any resolution into a viable background. That's how I brought Paris to my basement.



Figure 12.2 The lighting diagram. By lighting the backdrop with an even light, I avoided any glare on the paper. I added a grid to the main light to keep the light from spilling onto the background.

As you can see in [Figure 12.3](#), the raw file didn't look quite ready. I knew, however, that color grading would help to unify the subject with the background. And take a tip I learned the hard way: When assembling your background image, use glue or tape *behind* the printouts. Taping on the side of each print (as I did) comes back to haunt you in Photoshop as you tediously work to eliminate little tape-sized light glares from the background.



Figure 12.3 The raw file. You can see how I had hastily assembled the backdrop, with visible wrinkles and tape marks on the pages. Although I removed them in Lightroom without much difficulty, next time I will be sure to do a better job in the assembly.

After I removed the many tape marks from the background, the issue of the wrinkles in the left part of the image remained an issue (I had assembled the backdrop a bit hurriedly). Removing the wrinkles was quick and easy, though. I made several gradient adjustments to the backdrop, moving the Clarity slider to -100 . Once the backdrop looked clean, I adjusted the White Balance to a cooler tone to help set a mood to the image. I also lowered the Whites slider and made a few other minor adjustments. The other big thing that helped to unify the overall image was employing the Split Toning slider. I set a warm tone to the shadow areas to counter the overall cool white balance. [Figure 12.4](#) details the Lightroom settings, while [Figure 12.5](#) shows the results.

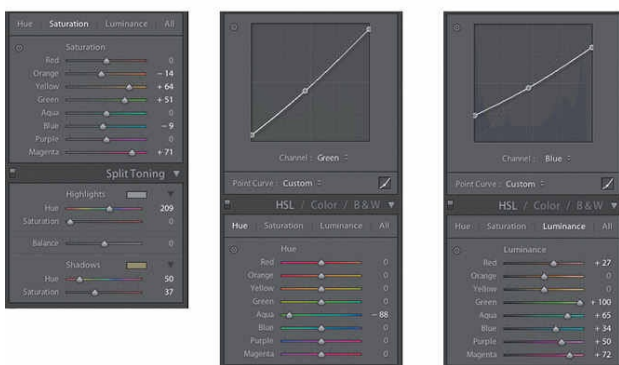
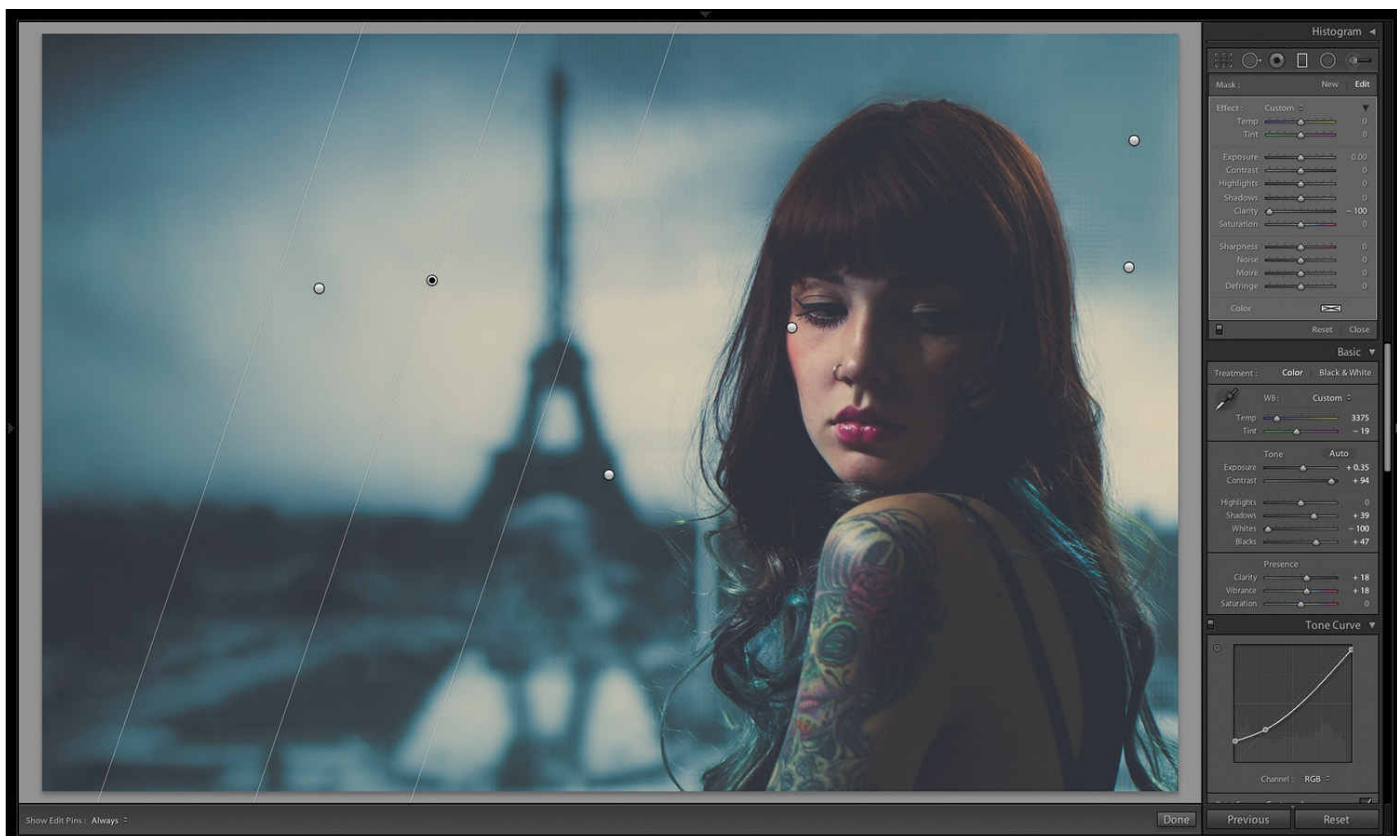


Figure 12.4 The Lightroom settings. After I added several gradient adjustments to the background and lowered the Clarity, the wrinkles in the backdrop were softer, making cleanup easier. Color grading the image helped to unite the subject with the backdrop.



Figure 12.5 The final image. Although not an entirely realistic scene, the image has a nice cinematic feeling to it.

Channeling the '80s

The '80s are back, in case you haven't noticed. And not just the music and fashion, but the photography too. Whether it's faux-vintage Instagram filters, laser backdrops, or ironic eyewear, it's in vogue. As a child of the '80s, I get a certain amount of pleasure and closure by getting back to my roots. So I decided it'd be fun to do a series of portraits of girls in '80s sunglasses, a la Patrick Nagel (the artist whose work you probably recognize from the covers of Duran Duran albums).

For whatever reason, window blinds were a huge prop in '80s photos, so that's where I started. As you can see in [Figure 12.6](#), I have a two-light setup on a white backdrop with white window blinds clamped to a C-stand. The background light is gelled magenta, placed behind the blinds and aimed at the white backdrop. The main light has a grid on it to keep the light from spilling all over the white blinds. [Figure 12.7](#) diagrams the setup.



Figure 12.6 The setup. Cheap white window blinds can make for a picture-perfect ‘80s background.

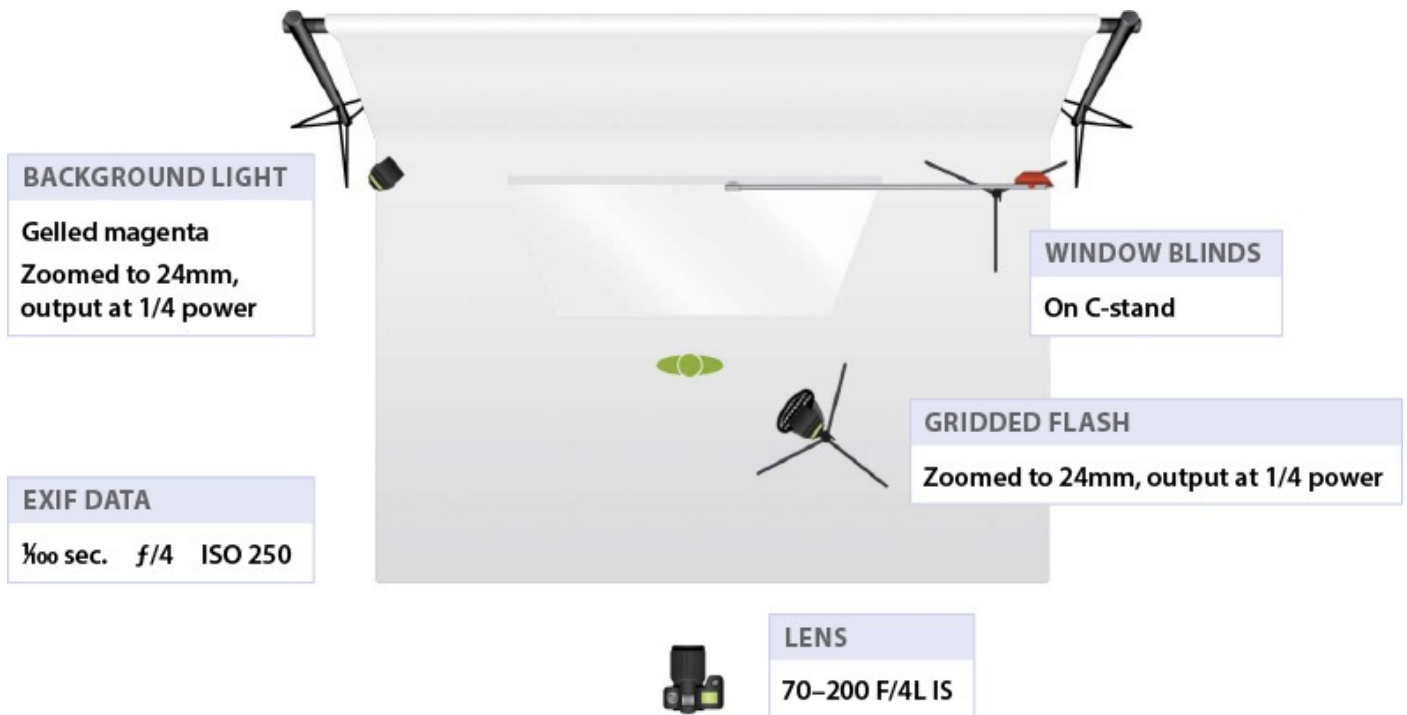


Figure 12.7 The lighting diagram. The window blinds are hanging on a C-stand about 3 feet in front of a piece of white foam core. The background light is gelled magenta, and the main light is gridded to minimize light spill, keeping the front of the blinds unlit.

The raw file looked pretty good, but a bit of cleanup was still needed ([Figure 12.8](#)). No matter how I had positioned the blinds in the background, the strings that run vertically through them were visible, so they needed to be removed in post. I also didn't like the catchlight in the sunglasses, so I removed it. (I might have left it, however, if it had been a nice rectangular reflection, like a softbox or strip light.) Beyond the color grading, which

was on a par with my normal processing, I wanted to give the image an extra '80s vibe, so I started hunting for textures that I could overlay in Adobe Photoshop.



Figure 12.8 The raw file. The colors and lines are already looking nice and '80s. Now all it needs are a few finishing touches.

I wanted to transfer the file from Lightroom into Photoshop to add some texture to the image, so I right-clicked on the file, chose Edit in Photoshop from the context menu, then selected Edit a Copy with Lightroom Adjustments in the resulting dialog box ([Figure 12.9](#)). [Figure 12.10](#)'s compatibility warning popped up, and I clicked Render Using Lightroom, because that option retains the edits you've made to your file in Lightroom. Lightroom then created a new TIFF version of the file, which opened in Photoshop.

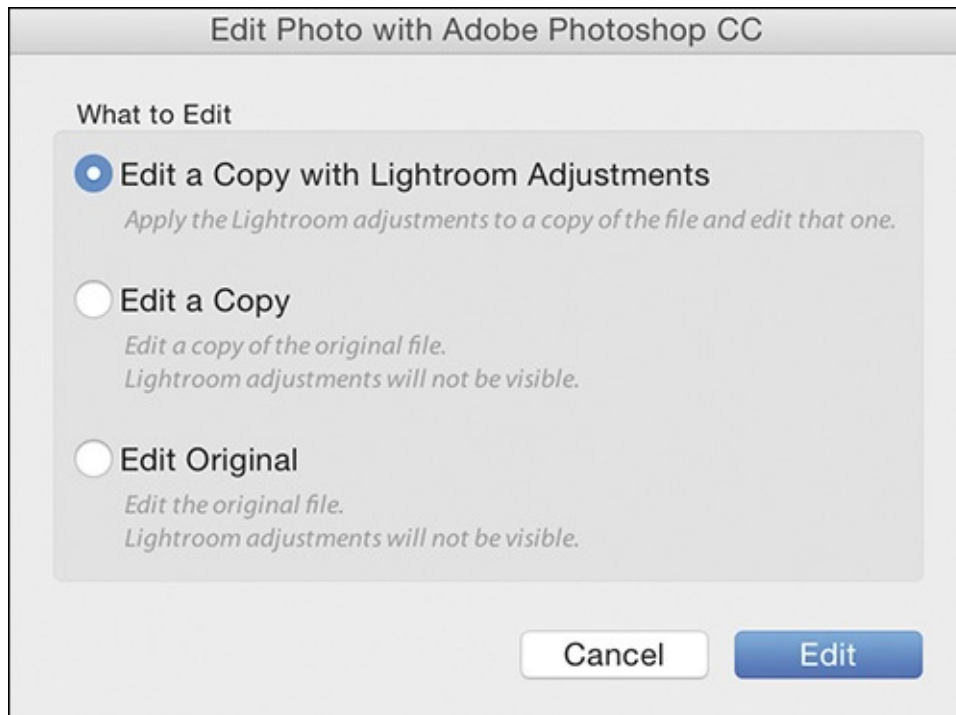


Figure 12.9 To take a file from Lightroom into Photoshop, while retaining the edits that you already made in Lightroom, right-click the file and select the Edit in Photoshop option, and then select the option Edit a Copy with Lightroom Adjustments.

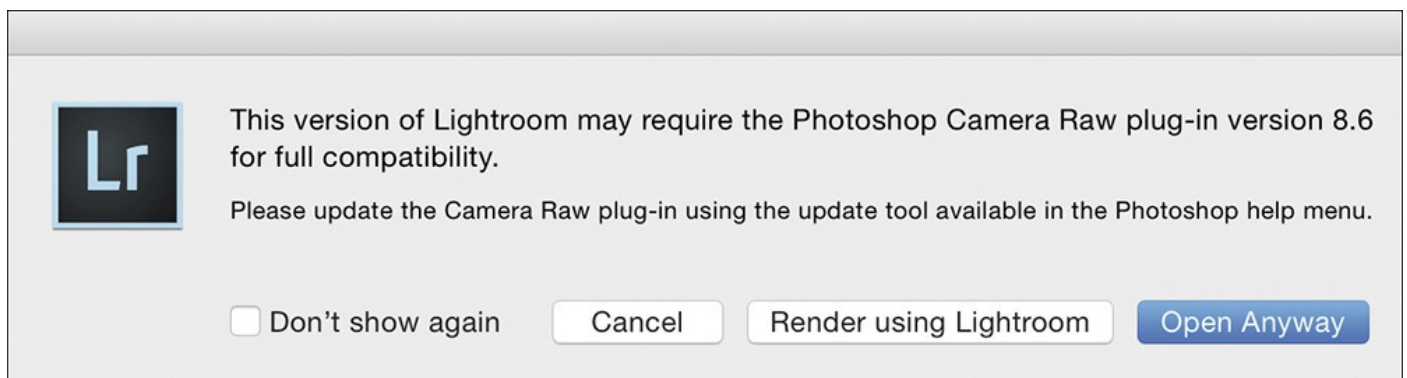


Figure 12.10 Next, you will be asked if you want to Render using Lightroom. You do. When you want a truly custom backdrop, create one yourself. For example, I wanted a texture that looked like something on an old VHS box, so I made one with the help of Google. I was hoping to find a nice blank cover, so I began with the search term “VHS cover,” then narrowed the search by selecting only black images with a higher resolution. [Figure 12.11](#) shows a near-perfect result.

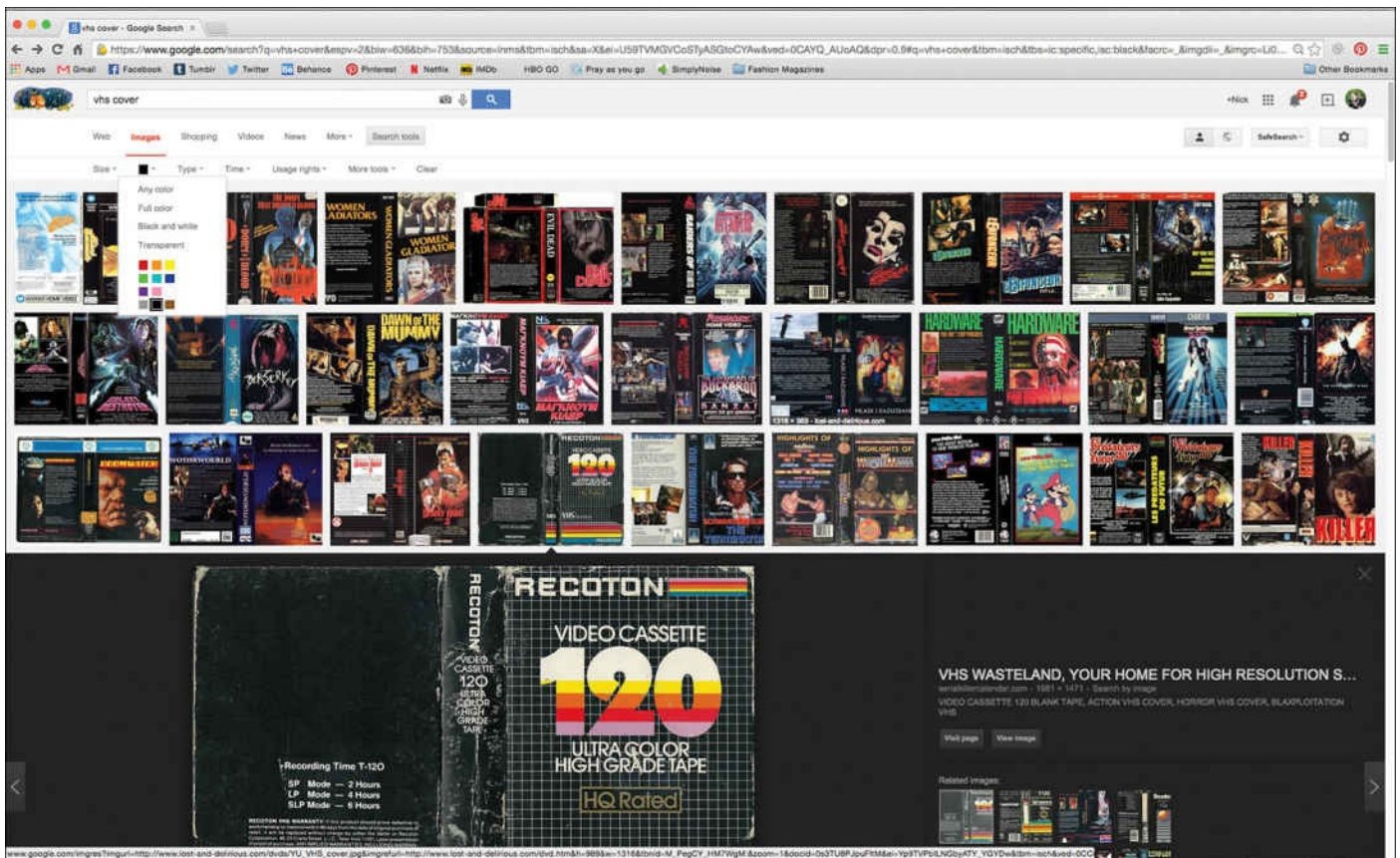


Figure 12.11 Narrow your search parameters by size and color to narrow the results.

In Photoshop, I cropped the file down to the primarily black portion of the image (the back of the box) and used the Patch tool to remove the text ([Figure 12.12](#)). Then I filled in the missing texture on the left side of the image by using the Clone Stamp.

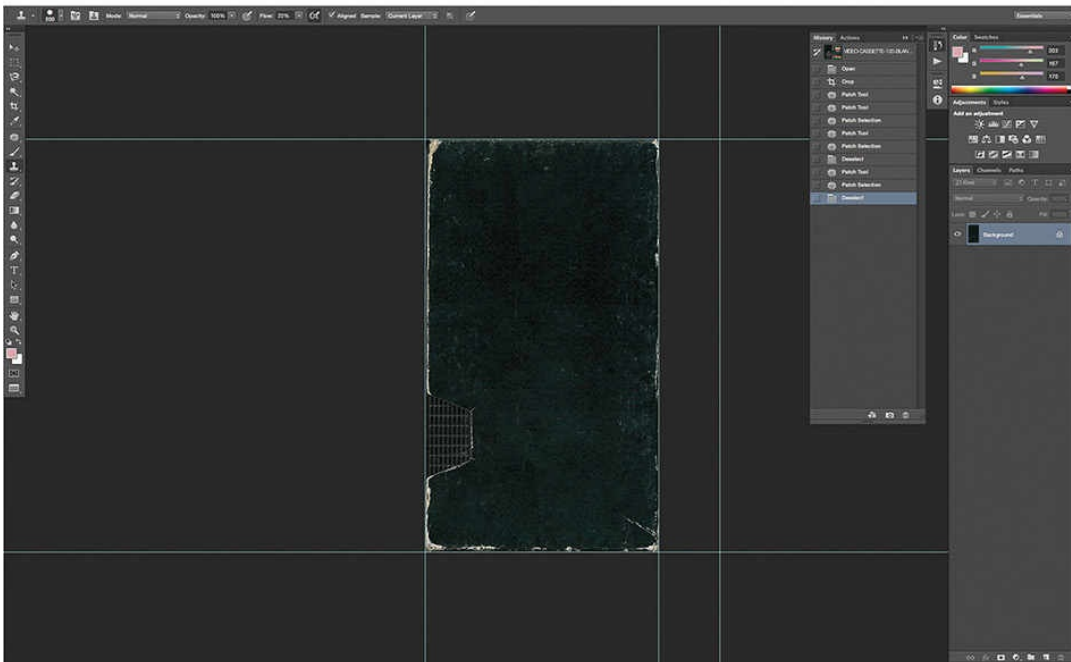
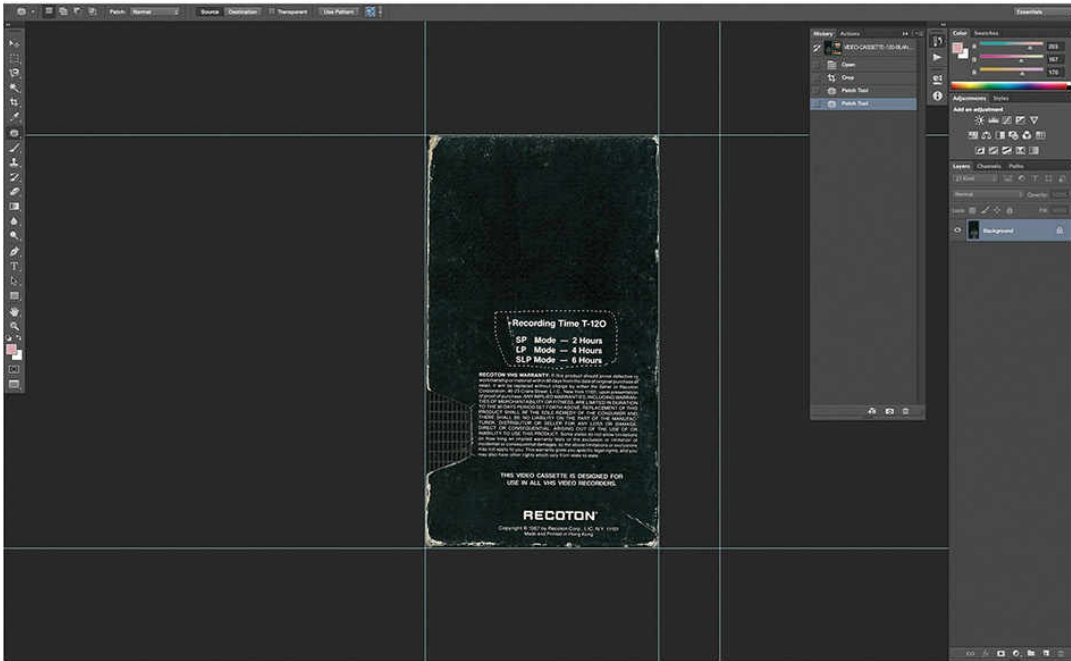
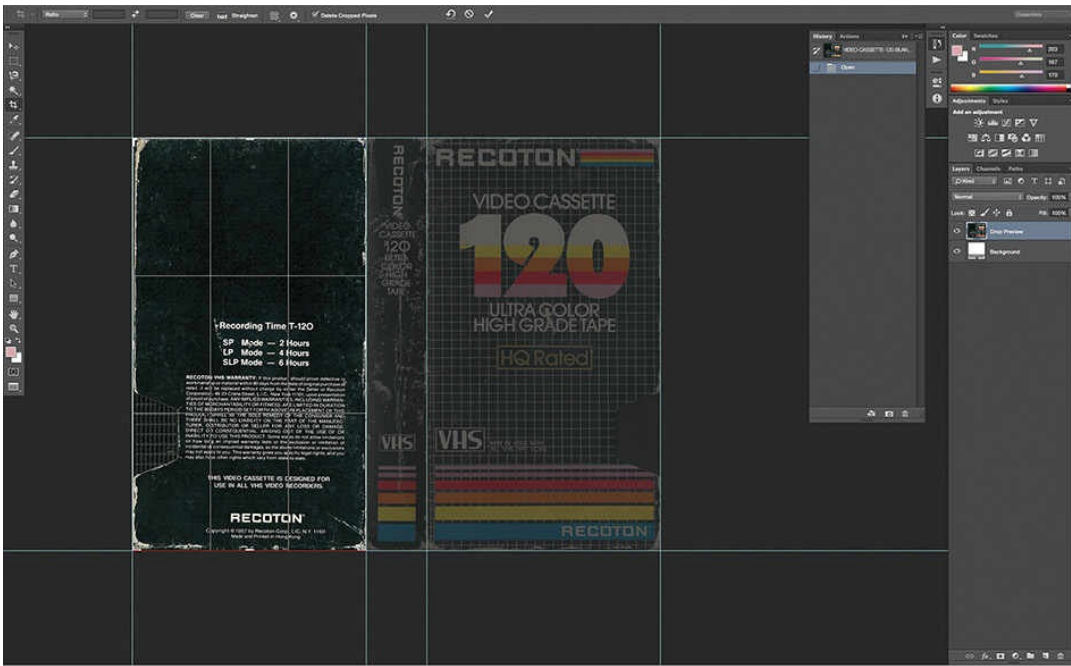


Figure 12.12 I cropped the file down to the black portion only and removed the text with the Patch tool.

Now I had a nice texture on plain black, albeit on a relatively small file. Because I needed the texture only, the low resolution wasn't much of an issue. After pasting the texture file onto my image, I used the Transform option to resize it and modify the dimensions. Now the texture file perfectly covered my picture, so I could see the texture on all four sides and no part of the background image was visible. I set the Layer to Lighten, allowing me to see both the texture and the background image ([Figure 12.13](#)).

Figure 12.13 The Transform tool in Photoshop allows you to quickly resize and proportion an image to match a destination file. By setting the overlaid texture layer to Lighten, I could see both the texture and the background image.

The image was almost ready, but I wanted to bring out more of the texture. I made a quick Curves adjustment ([Figure 12.14](#)), pulling up the midtones until the texture was visible but not too overpowering.

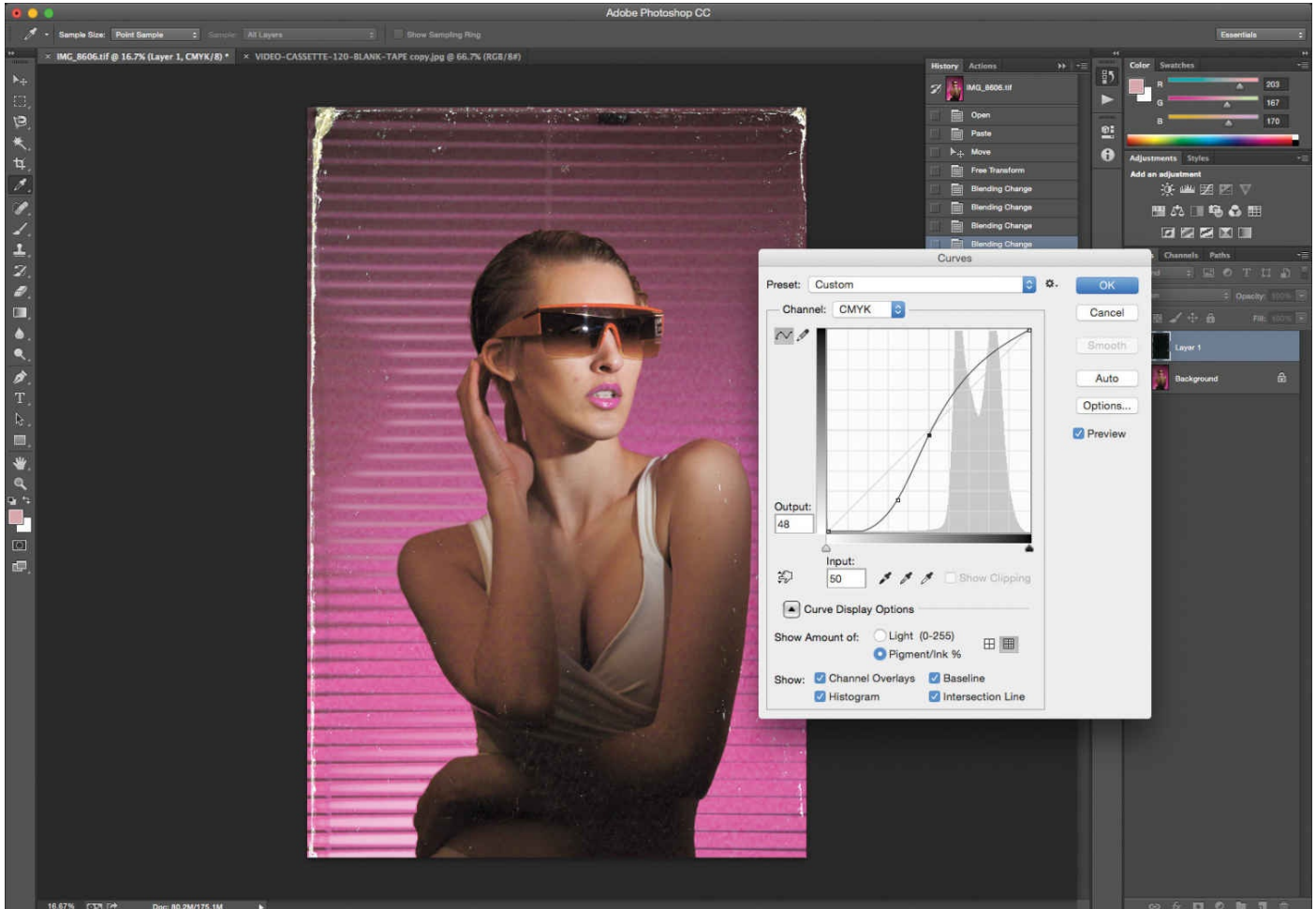


Figure 12.14 A Curves adjustment enables you to bring out more of the texture layer.

Once I overlaid my texture, I was ready to take the updated file back over to Lightroom. I simply saved the file, overwriting the TIFF copy that Lightroom originally created. I opened Lightroom again, and there was the updated TIFF file with the added texture, ready for any final color grading and exporting the finished image ([Figure 12.15](#)).



Figure 12.15 The final image.

Pegboard Pinlight

You can create another amazing textured backdrop by using a sheet of pegboard. Pegboard is not only cheap, but easily found at most hardware stores. I prefer the sheets that are white on one side and brown on the other, because it gives me a white option and a black option. The brown side will easily go to black when it's unlit.

Now to create the pinlights. All you need to do is set the pegboard about 3 feet in front of a wall or backdrop, placing a light between the pegboard and the wall ([Figure 12.16](#)). You can add an accent color to your pinlight by gelling the background light ([Figure 12.17](#)). Now place the subject several feet in front of the pegboard and light them separately. If you want a black backdrop, make sure that your main light doesn't spill onto the brown side of the pegboard ([Figure 12.18](#)). Note that by using a longer lens or a wider aperture, the pinholes will get larger and start to blend together, creating a nice trippy effect.



Figure 12.16 The setup. By placing pegboard about 3 feet in front a light-colored wall, you can shoot a light into the wall, creating a beautiful backdrop of hundreds of pinlights.



Figure 12.17 In this shot, the subject is in front of white pegboard with a cyan-gelled background light. A slightly smaller aperture will create defined pinlight circles.



Figure 12.18 In this shot, the subject is in front of brown pegboard with a red-gelled background light. By keeping the main light off of the pegboard, the brown color easily goes to black. By using a wider aperture, the pinlight circles go further out of focus and start to blend together.

13. Shooting Product

The nice thing about photographing a product, rather than a person, is that your setup is (usually) much smaller. For me, this means I can experiment with new lighting and processing techniques much more easily—and without the stress of having a subject waiting while I tweak lights, and so on. So, when I want to try a new lighting technique, I run to Target to buy a cool-looking bottle of cologne or to DSW for an equally cool pair of shoes. When I am done, I return them and get my money back.

Lighting a Product with a Reflective Surface

Case in point: On a scouting trip to Target last year, I found a bottle of Versace Man cologne that had both glass and metallic surfaces. Reflective surfaces are tricky to light, so the bottle presented a good challenge and the opportunity to update my portfolio with some creative product shots.

Tip

Use the time in your slower seasons to update your portfolio.

Over the span of a few weeks, I photographed this bottle in half a dozen ways. For the session in [Figure 13.1](#), I was trying to emulate the blue crystal meth from *Breaking Bad*, because I was shooting it the week of the series finale. Spanning two chairs with a 2x4-foot sheet of glass gave me a transparent platform to work on. I first tried using shards of ice around the bottle, but they kept looking cloudy, so I switched to fragments of broken glass instead. On the glass top, I positioned bare-bulb flashes on either side of the bottle. I then placed a piece of blue cardboard on the floor below the glass. Aiming the two lights down into the board allowed the light to catch the edges of the glass shards as well as illuminate the bottle from the ground up ([Figure 13.2](#)).

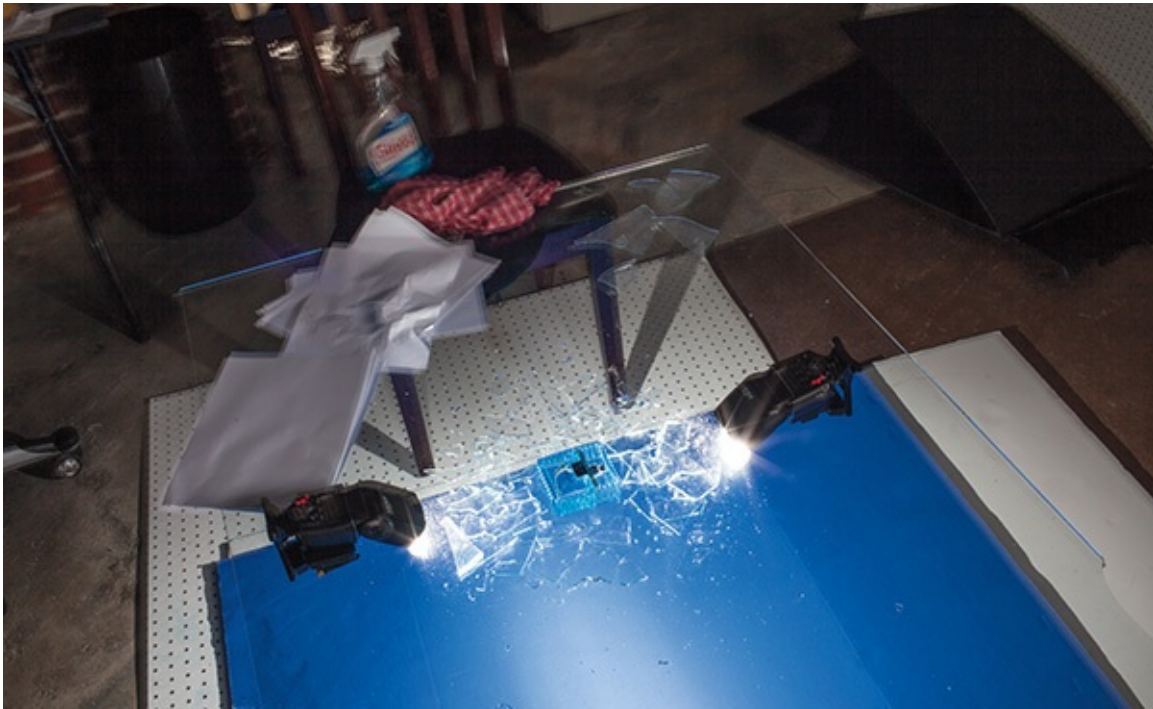


Figure 13.1 The setup. I used shards of glass to represent the blue meth as an homage to *Breaking Bad*.



Figure 13.2 The lighting diagram. By placing the flashes next to the shards of glass, the minor light spill was enough to illuminate the glass, while the light reflecting off of the floor was enough to also light the front of the bottle, once I added a fill reflector.

The product and the glass were now well lit, but the front of the bottle was still dark. I needed a relatively small reflector to bounce the background light back onto the front of the bottle. Because the product was small, a sheet of ordinary printer paper did the job ([Figure 13.3](#)). The paper not only served as the main light, but it also was what ultimately illuminated the metal label on the bottle. If I had been lighting a larger object, I would have opted for a similar setup but used a larger reflector, such as a white V-flat. [Figure 13.4](#) shows my initial results.



Figure 13.3 I used a piece of white printer paper to reflect the backlight back onto the bottle. Making a reflector out of something somewhat larger in size and without detail, such as paper or foam core, is necessary when lighting reflective surfaces to avoid a visible reflection on the surface.



Figure 13.4 The raw file. It actually looked pretty good, straight out of the camera. The cardboard wrinkles in the background, however, needed to be eliminated.

Tip

With a reflective surface—even one as small as the 1-inch logo plate on the Versace bottle—you will likely see your reflection in it. To help alleviate this, place a large piece of foam core between you and the product and cut a hole in it for your camera lens to shoot through.

When it came to editing the photo, I didn't do too much of note, save for playing with the HSL panel ([Figure 13.5](#)). Mostly I concentrated on the Blue and Aqua sliders in the Hue, Saturation, and Luminance channels. Because the bottle was blue and the background was blue, I had a tremendous amount of control by modifying just those channels. By increasing the Luminance in the Blue channel, I was even able to get rid of the cardboard wrinkles that were visible in the raw file—bonus! Judge the results for yourself in [Figure 13.6](#).

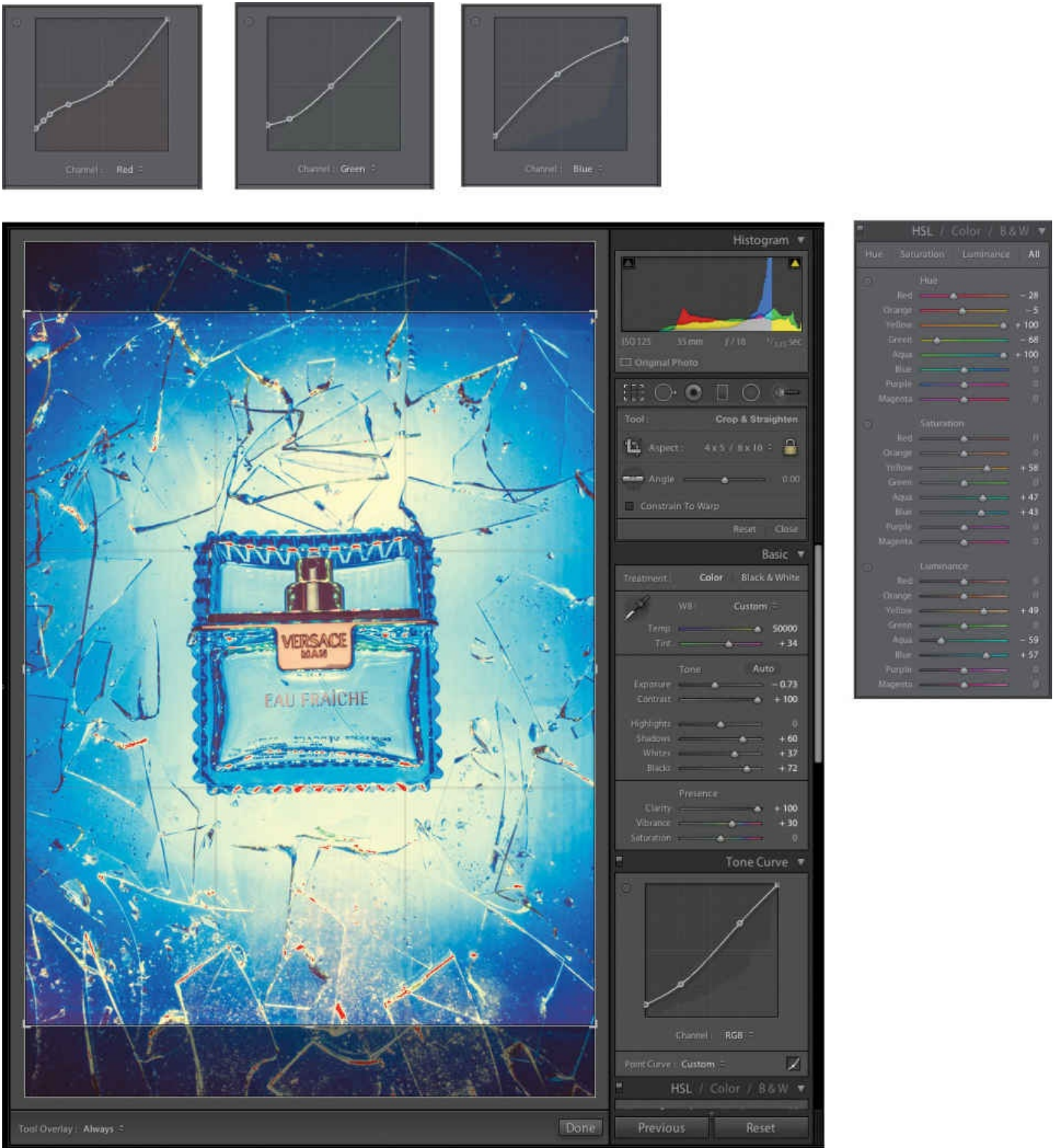


Figure 13.5 The Lightroom settings. By tweaking the Blue and Cyan Luminance sliders, I easily eliminated the cardboard wrinkles. I also tweaked the Hue sliders until I got a color grading that I liked.



Figure 13.6 The final image. A purity level that I think even Heisenberg could approve of.

Shooting a Product on a Reflective Surface

Shooting a product on a tabletop is the way to go. It allows you to set your background light below the plane of the product, which helps cut down on backlight spilling onto the product. When you photograph on a reflective surface, such as plexiglass, however, every blemish shows up twice. This increases the need to nail the shot in camera, so you aren't spending twice as long cleaning up the file in Photoshop.

The shoes in [Figure 13.7](#) were another one of my portfolio-building shoots. I liked the vibrant colors and the cool hollow soles. I messed around with the arrangement of the shoes, before settling on this vertical pose. It's typically a faux pas to show the inside of a shoe, so I positioned the soles facing each other, with a side facing the camera. Running a heavy-duty spring clamp up through the holes of each heel held them together and left only a small bit of the clamp visible in the lowest holes in the soles ([Figure 13.8](#)).

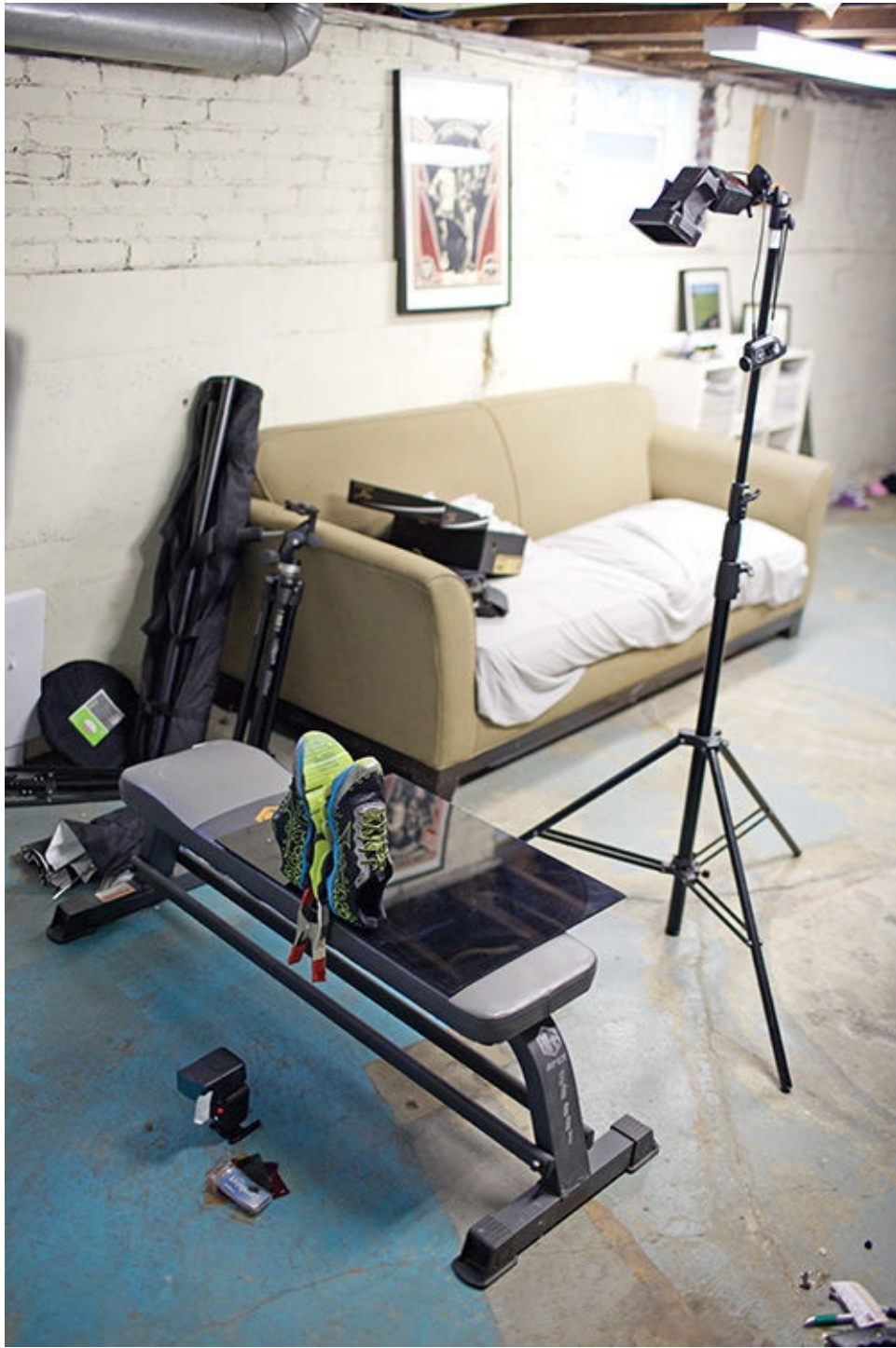


Figure 13.7 The setup. I used a spring clamp to hold the soles of the shoes together, in a vertical position.



Figure 13.8 The raw file. The clamp is visible in the bottom-most holes in the soles, and will need to be removed in Photoshop.

I kept the lighting simple, because the shoes were already so busy. The light on the white background was gelled cyan and placed on the ground. The main light was gridded and placed over the shoes, just slightly in front of them, allowing the light to cascade downward, catching the edges of all the detail ([Figure 13.9](#)). The last thing I wanted to do was overlight the front of the shoe, which would kill any drama that I had been building, not to mention diminish the surface reflection on the plexiglass.

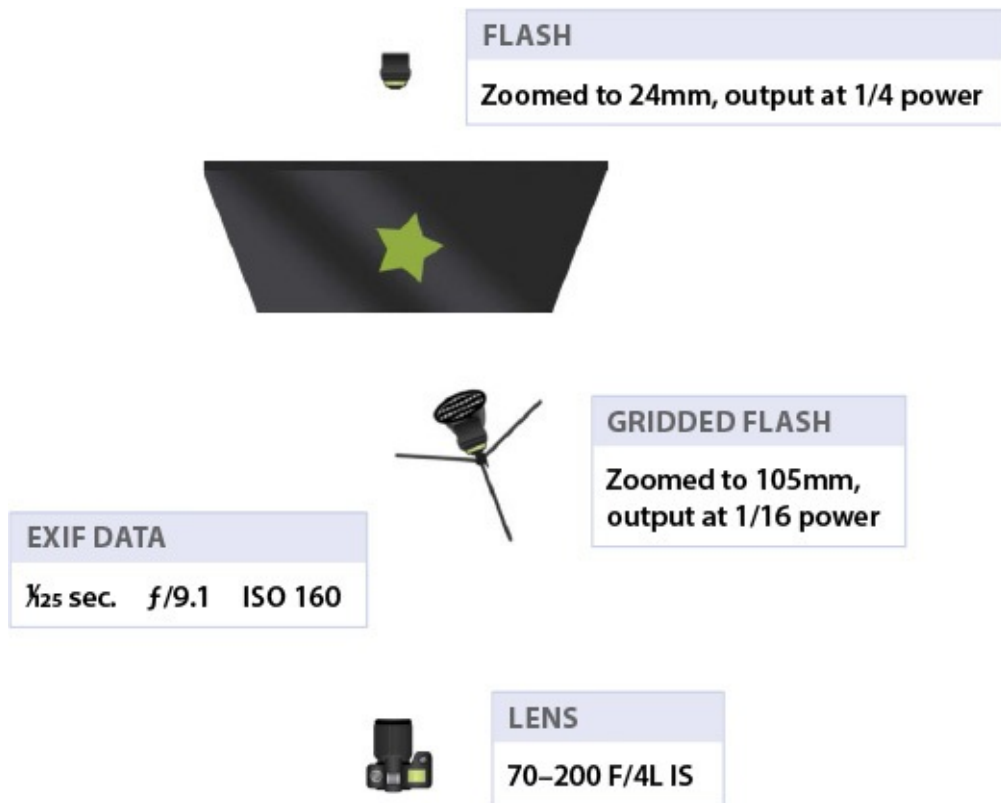


Figure 13.9 The lighting diagram. By adding a grid to my main light, I minimized light from spilling on the foreground, which helped retain drama in the image.

Although I made sure to wipe down the plexiglass before the shoot, many spots still showed up in the raw file. Thankfully, Lightroom has a great feature for removing spots. Activate the Spot Removal tool, and notice the Visualize Spots option in the bottom-left corner of the screen. Check Visualize Spots, and Lightroom converts your shot to an inverted, black-and-white image, making the spots much easier to, uh, spot ([Figure 13.10](#)). You can adjust the slider to narrow the selection of the types of spots that it highlights. Pretty cool, huh?



Figure 13.10 While using the Spot Removal tool in Lightroom, click the Visualize Spots option to more easily select and remove problematic spots.

After removing the spots and color grading the image, I exported the file to Photoshop to remove the clamp. The Spot Removal tool in Lightroom is much better than it used to be, but it is still not adequate for detail-oriented work like this. Instead, I lucked out: Because the clamp was visible in the bottom-most holes of the soles and the holes just above them were not identical, I simply copied the clean holes and pasted them over the problem holes. Some minor blending of the edges of the pasted layers, and the clamp was removed—finished ([Figure 13.11](#)).



Figure 13.11 The final image. It's now a clean-looking scene for a busy-looking shoe.

Re-creating Window Light

Re-creating window light (soft and directional) isn't as hard as you might think. You are basically creating a large, soft light source, such as you learned how to do in [Chapter 10](#). Besides portraits, the setup is fantastic for tabletop scenes, such as food photography, as well as lifestyle-oriented product photography (think Bed Bath and Beyond catalog).

[Figure 13.12](#) was the setup for a product shot for a men's clothing company. The company wanted a shot of a neatly folded shirt in a gift box, complete with tissue paper, on a tabletop, preferably made of reclaimed wood. Fortunately, I had a 4x6-foot mock tabletop that I had made for a shoot a few months prior. I set that by a wall, propping a piece of white foam core next to it and aimed a flash into the white board at an angle that would reflect the light onto the product, and—voilà—I had [Figure 13.13](#). The whole setup and execution of the shot took less than 10 minutes.



Figure 13.12 The setup. Tabletop product shots with soft directional light tend to pass as window-lit images.



Figure 13.13 The final shot. No, I didn't remove the plaid with Photoshop. [Figure 13.12](#) was a recreation of the original scenario I used for this product shot.

Quiz 3: Deconstruct the Lighting

Can you guess the lighting setup for this one? Hint: It's not unlike the second scenario in [Chapter 10](#).



Part IV: The Office Studio



The one thing this cramped Chicago office had going for it was its cool concrete support beams, which separated the workspaces from the hall. I reclined the model on one, placed a light behind the beam, and blew the back wall out white to give the image a nice outdoors feel.

Don't be misled. This section isn't a list of scenarios for office employees to use while they moonlight as photographers. Instead, the chapters contained here discuss how to approach common situations that you may find yourself in when photographing clients at their places of business. Clients are thrilled when you say that you can shoot at their place, rather than having their employees come to your studio. It could even win you the job over another photographer who isn't as flexible. It's to your advantage to be able to travel lightly, knowing that any scenario that you are likely to encounter can be easily transformed into a working studio with minimal gear. Minimal gear translates to fewer trips to your car to grab things, which translates to a fast setup and teardown. And, as everyone in the business world knows, time is money.



14. Portraits on White

As you may have noticed by now, isolating your subject on white is much easier to accomplish than most people realize. All you need is a whitish wall, an uncarpeted floor, and about 20 to 30 feet to allow enough space to light the background and subject separately. Tile, glossy wood, and even concrete floors actually work rather well when you are blowing them out to white.

Travel Light

As you can see in [Figure 14.1](#), the subject is standing on a glossy brown concrete floor in front of a white wall, complete with a black baseboard. This job was in Little Rock, Arkansas, which meant that I had to fly to get there. Space was therefore limited, and I couldn't (nor did I want to) take a lot of gear with me on the plane. I wasn't worried, though, because I was confident that somewhere in the office building I'd find a white wall and a concrete or tile floor, which meant I needed only two flashes and an umbrella.



Figure 14.1 The setup. All I needed for a portrait on a seamless white background was a white wall and a concrete floor.

I did, in fact, find a fantastic white wall. The hallway that led from the lobby to the security area featured the white wall and even a glossy concrete floor. The downside was that the space was only about 15 feet wide, when I could have really used an additional 10 feet. Because of this, the subject was a bit too close to the background wall, which was blown out white for the shot ([Figures 14.2](#) and [14.3](#)).



Figure 14.2 The raw file. Note the blue color cast in the subject's clothing. It was caused by a lens flare, due to the close proximity to the background flash.

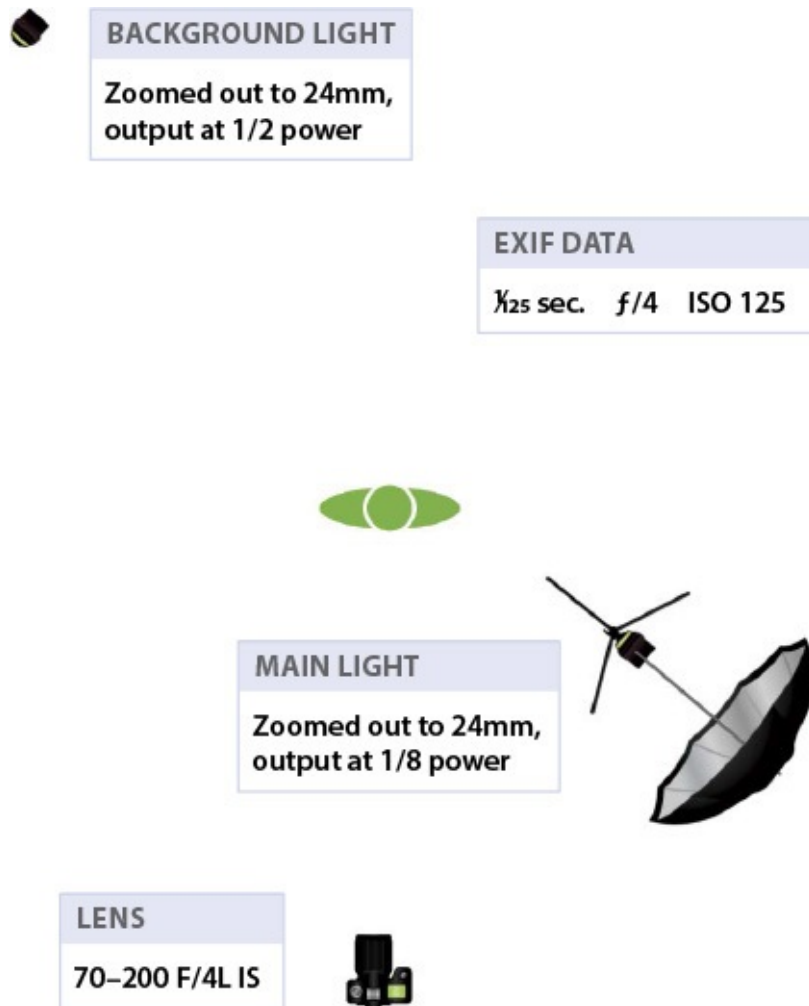


Figure 14.3 The lighting diagram. The lack of space in the hallway meant that the subject was a bit too close to the background light, leading to some lens flare and discoloration.

This resulted in some light kicking back off of the wall and onto his legs, as well as a slight blue color cast—not the end of the world, just not ideal. Thankfully, a full body shot was not required, just a bonus. The main shots that were needed were head shots, such as [Figure 14.4](#), and environmental portraits of him in his workspace.



Figure 14.4 This head shot was more along the lines of what the client needed—and the subject’s close proximity to the background light was not a factor.

The main issue that I needed to fix in Lightroom was the blue color cast that appeared on his gray suit. The blue cast was caused by the proximity of my lens and the subject to the background light: It’s lens flare. Thankfully, getting rid of it was easy. I simply desaturated the Blue channel in the HSL panel, and that was that ([Figure 14.5](#)). In addition, I did a small bump to the Red and Orange Luminance channels to open up his skin tones a bit, because they looked rather flat, and then the image was looking right ([Figure 14.6](#)).



Figure 14.5 The Lightroom settings. I was able to quickly eliminate the blue color cast by desaturating the Blue channel in the HSL panel.



Figure 14.6 The final image. Although the client didn't end up using a full body shot, it illustrates how easily you can achieve a seamless white shot.

It's the Wood That Makes It Good

I have been photographing the theater troupe 34 West for several years, but the troupe recently moved its studio from Ohio to Charleston, South Carolina. When I was asked about flying down to shoot portraits once again, I didn't hesitate to take the job.

As usual, I didn't want to lug a bunch of gear with me on the airplane. (It's my goal to never check a single bag.) Instead, I found an art supply store near 34 West's building. A few days before the shoot, I called the store to make sure that it carried 4x8-foot sheets of white foam core, which it did. I put four sheets on hold, which I picked up when I arrived in town.

My advanced planning was almost torpedoed by my rental car: a compact. No way was I fitting the sheets in the car as they were. So, I borrowed a knife from the store, scored the boards into thirds, and easily folded them down to fit in the trunk. Once I got to the troupe's building I unfolded the boards, taping two boards vertically to the wall as a backdrop. I laid out the two remaining boards lengthwise from the backdrop to where I was to be standing to shoot. These were to serve as bounce boards, which would help maximize the sole background light ([Figure 14.7](#)). I was also able to position the background light behind one of the side panels, keeping it out of sight and reducing lens flare ([Figure 14.8](#)).



Figure 14.7 The setup. I bought a few sheets of white foam core from a local art supply store and quickly converted the space into a makeshift studio.



Figure 14.8 The lighting diagram. Note that the background light is hiding out of sight behind the left reflector panel. Keeping it out of sight helps to reduce lens flare.

Even though the studio had a wood floor, it easily blew out to white because of its glossy finish. The nice thing about the space was that it was long enough for me to position the subjects 10 feet in front of the background light and for me to get their whole bodies in the frame at 70mm ([Figure 14.9](#)).



Figure 14.9 The raw file. The only thing that needs attention, aside from color grading, is making sure that the white backdrop and the horizon both go to a pure white.

The straight-out-of-camera files looked really good. There was no blue color cast in the images as in the office session, because the subjects were farther away from the background light, which eliminated light bouncing onto them. Also, by having the background light out of the camera's line of site, lens flare was eliminated. The only thing

that needed to be done in Lightroom, aside from color grading, was a quick brush adjustment, upping the exposure to the area where the background met the floor. [Figure 14.10](#) shows the final result.



Figure 14.10 The final image. Although the woodgrain of the floor is visible, it blends in seamlessly with the white background.

15. Environmental Portraits

The direction I received from the art director was very specific: Make the scientist (or model portraying a scientist) look like a superhero. The shoot was for the American Chemical Society's first-ever marketing campaign. No pressure, right?

So, how do I make a model looking like a scientist look like a superhero—without a mask or cape? Dramatic lighting combined with having the subject stare off in the distance, possibly looking for the next civilian in need of saving. Easy! Well, not quite.

Getting the Drop on Narrow Spaces

The next problem to be solved was how to implement that dramatic light in the narrow hallway where I needed to shoot. To create a bit of theatrical lighting, I knew that I wanted to light the subject from above and to the side. I started by placing the model, not yet in wardrobe, in the center of the hallway while I set up the lights. I considered placing the main light on a stand, but that would require shooting past the light stand and effectively cropping out the entire right wall from the frame. That option was no good, because I wanted to keep the subject centered between the walls to achieve a vanishing point in the middle of the image for added drama. Once again, the solution was to use the environment rather than more gear: The hallway's low drop-ceiling panels were easy to push aside, providing me with a spot to mount my flash ([Figure 15.1](#)). Win!



Figure 15.1 The setup. Sometimes space is tight and you have to get creative. Like putting your light in a drop ceiling, for example.

With my main light figured out, I needed to light the rest of the scene. The floor in the hallway was a nice shiny tile, which would be fantastic at reflecting light. Moving a bit of the clutter out of the way, I placed the background light on the floor, aiming it at the back wall. I set the output at half power instead of the normal quarter power to brighten the light enough to fill the vast space between the subject and the back wall. I showed my final light setup ([Figure 15.2](#)) to the client and art director, getting approval of the lighting setup before moving forward with shooting. From previous scenarios I'd shot that day, I'd learned that even though they said they wanted *dramatic* lighting, what they really wanted was more along the lines of *moderately interesting* lighting ([Figure 15.3](#)).



Figure 15.2 The lighting diagram. The background light is set at a higher output than normal because the subject was so far away from the background.



Figure 15.3 The raw file. By hiding my main light in the ceiling, I was able to make full use of the narrow hallway, using the lines to create a nice vanishing point behind the subject.

Because my client was the American Chemical Society and not The Chemical Brothers, I kept my adjustments pretty conservative. I could always go back and add more drama if that's what they wanted. Note that in [Figure 15.4](#) I even left the Tone Curve panel closed. Besides a slight bump to the contrast and an exposure adjustment, I only softened the depth of field a bit more. I did this by making a gradient adjustment to each of the four sides of the image, reducing the Clarity to -60 . This allowed the subject in the middle to pop off the background a bit more ([Figure 15.5](#)). The client was happy with the shot, so I was happy with the shot.



Figure 15.4 The Lightroom settings. Because this work was for a corporate client, I kept the adjustments pretty conservative.



Figure 15.5 The final image. The final image has the realism of being shot in an actual science lab hallway, while also having the bit of drama the client wanted.

Curtain Call

While in Chicago to shoot a wedding recently, I decided to squeeze in a test shoot as a personal project. I have a relationship with a small modeling agency in town and asked if it had any models who would want to test. After lining up Lucy, a super-sweet young talent, I asked her mother if she had a space we could shoot in, because the weather outside was less than favorable. Lucky for me, her mother worked in the beautiful Tribune building in downtown Chicago.

When I arrived, however, I saw how small the space was. I couldn't even find a blank wall, which is my normal go-to, but I was not yet defeated. I spotted a set of large white curtains in front of a balcony window. Although the view was blocked by concrete pillars, there was still a shot to be had. I set a bare-bulb flash (with no gel) out on the balcony, aiming it inside toward the curtains. I then pulled the curtains closed to block the unscenic view ([Figure 15.6](#)). For the main light, I added a half-strength orange gel and a grid to my flash ([Figure 15.7](#)). Then I set my camera's White Balance (WB) to tungsten to counteract the orange gel.



Figure 15.6 The setup. I took advantage of the large white curtains in the office, shooting a light through the back of them to give the image a homey feeling.

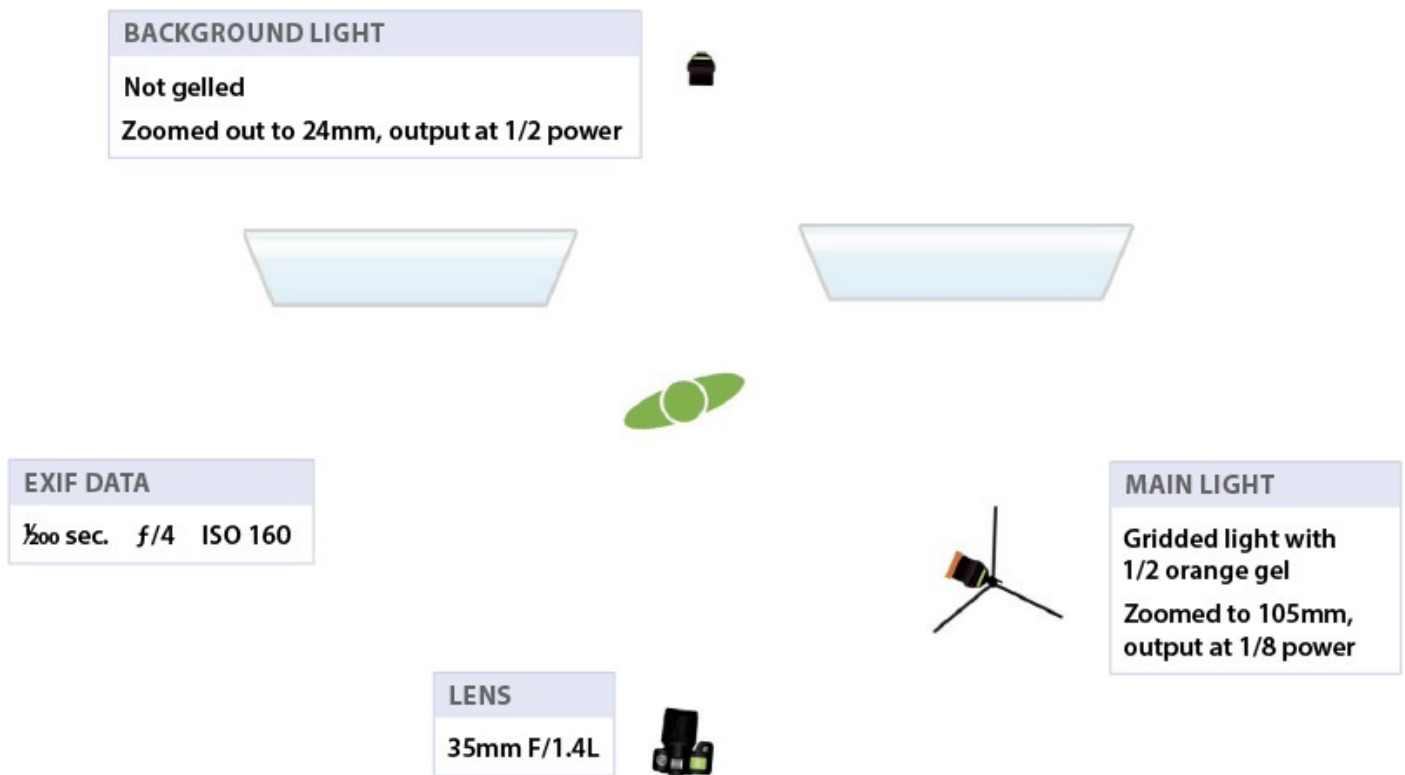


Figure 15.7 The lighting diagram. By gelling the main light orange and choosing Tungsten for the camera’s White Balance setting, I ensured the background light gave the scene a cool color.

Why bother with the gel if I’m just going to counteract it? The tungsten white balance has a blue hue to counteract orange-looking tungsten light. Because the room and background light were naturally cooler in temperature than tungsten light, the ambient light would appear blue on my camera, which was now balanced to see warm light. The only parts of the image that would hold a neutral color temperature were things that were lit with the orange-gelled main light, such as the model.

The shifted white balance added a nice mood to the shot—like a night scene in a home, rather than the crowded office on a rainy morning that it was ([Figure 15.8](#)). Although the light looked nice, I still needed to get a good shot of my subject. I started out by getting tighter shots, using my long lens. But because space was so tight in the office, the composition was pretty tight (think head shot) and totally left out the best parts, which were the full-length curtains and overall moodiness of the scene. I decided to switch to my 35mm, which I rarely use in portrait shoots because of the lens distortion. This time, it was perfect. I backed off her as far as could go (about 5 feet) and shot vertically with the wide lens. The vertical composition not only cropped out the desks on either side of her but also displayed the full glory of the curtains ([Figure 15.9](#)).



Figure 15.8 The raw file. Lucy's skin is the proper color and now the ambient light is nice and cool, passing as a night shot.



Figure 15.9 The final image. Tell me that doesn't look like a night scene.

16. Shooting Product

At one time, [Figure 16.1](#) was my magnum opus. It was a bare-bones setup: just three bare-bulb flashes and the product laid out on a tile floor in the JackThreads office hallway. It was the birthplace of my whole run-and-gun, make-it-work ethos. I was the lifestyle photographer for JackThreads during the company's first couple of years in Columbus, before it moved to New York City.



Figure 16.1 The shot that started it all. I took this shot on a tile floor in the JackThreads office hallway in 2011, using nothing but three bare-bulb flashes.

Of course, now all I see when I look at that old photo is how blown out the highlights are and how extreme the processing was; my eye has surely refined with time. For the sake of

this book, however, I decided to revisit my old stomping grounds and see how I'd approach the same scenario now. In [Figure 16.2](#), you can see the setup. (You may notice that I am using the same shoes from [Figure 13.7](#). The shoes were fairly similar to the Reeboks in the original shot, plus I still hadn't returned them to DSW, so they would do just fine for the exercise.)



Figure 16.2 The setup. This is in the exact same spot as the original shot, taken three years earlier. The differences are that this time I used two lights instead of three, and I added a grid to my main light.

Time to Reflect

The setup is in the same spot as the original, only years later. As I mentioned in [Chapter 14](#), as long as the floor you're using in your shot isn't carpeted, you can typically blow it out to white pretty easily. A reflective finish, like on the linoleum flooring in this hallway, helps. The back wall off of which I was bouncing the background light wasn't even white; it was blue, but still not a problem. All it meant was that the ratio between the main light and the background light would need to be a bit greater.

This time I chose to only use two lights rather than three, and I added a grid to my main light. I placed the shoes about 5 feet in front of the back wall, setting the light on the ground about 3 feet in front of it. This placement allowed the product to hide the flash, which was still far enough from the wall to allow for a decent light spread. Don't forget that it's important to keep a decent distance between the product and background in order to maintain defined edges on the product and minimize lens flare ([Figure 16.3](#)).



Figure 16.3 The raw file. Even though the back wall was a medium shade of blue, it blew out rather easily when I increased the ratio between the main light and the background light.

As I mentioned, the back wall was a medium shade of blue—not even close to white. By adding an additional stop of output to the backlight (1/2 power instead of 1/4 power) to increase the ratio between the two lights, however, the background blew out rather easily. I added a grid to the main light because the light was on the ground and not elevated, as it usually is ([Figure 16.4](#)). The grid helped keep too much light from spilling onto the floor in the foreground, which would take some of the focus and drama away from the product.



Figure 16.4 The lighting diagram. The background light is halfway between the product and the background so that it could hide behind the product, yet still be far enough away from the wall to create a decent light spread.

In Lightroom ([Figure 16.5](#)), I really cranked the Clarity slider over to the right, defining the edges of the shoes and allowing the details to pop. Because adding this amount of clarity typically desaturates an image, I played with the Yellow, Green, and Aqua Luminance sliders in the HSL panel until the shoe colors returned to a decent level. I also removed imperfections in the tile floor with the Spot Removal tool. The only thing left was to open the image in Photoshop and remove the clamp, just as I did in [Chapter 13](#). [Figure 16.6](#) shows the final result.

Histogram

WB: Custom

Temp: 7594
Tint: -24

Tone: Auto

Exposure: 0.00
Contrast: +46
Highlights: -71
Shadows: +55
Whites: 0
Blacks: +39

Presence

Clarity: +96
Vibrance: 0
Saturation: 0

Tone Curve

Channel: RGB

Point Curve: Custom

HSL / Color / B & W

Hue Saturation Luminance All

Luminance

Red: +100
Orange: +100
Yellow: -11
Green: -38
Aqua: -61
Blue: 0
Purple: 0
Magenta: 0

Split Toning

Detail

Lens Corrections

Basic Profile Color Manual

Enable Profile Corrections
 Remove Chromatic Aberration

Previous Reset

Soft Proofing

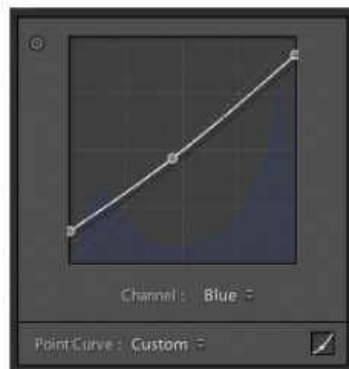


Figure 16.5 The Lightroom settings. By cranking the Clarity slider to the right, the edges and details of the shoes really popped.



Figure 16.6 The final shot. This shot has the same spirit of the original shot, though a more technical and efficient execution.

It was nice to revisit that old hallway and lighting scenario several years later. It felt like closure, seeing how far I've come in the intervening years since I took the first shot. My

eye had refined a bit, and I am no longer satisfied to move on once the light looks decent. I now need the light to look excellent. The original scenario used three lights, imperfectly at that. This time I needed only two lights, simply placed a bit differently, to get better results. The novelty of my gear has worn off, and now I can see the shot as it really is, allowing me to work without my emotions getting in the way.

Put ‘em on the Glass

JackThreads was still rather small in 2011, when I served as lifestyle photographer. The whole company, including the founder and president, shared one 1,000-square-foot room. My shoot/desk space was a 4x10-foot space next to the printer. Although my setup was modest, my workload was not. On an average day I shot anywhere from 8 to 15 clothing brands in 4 hours. I had to work not only quickly but with great variety from one scenario to the next, because no two brands could look the same.

You can see in [Figure 16.7](#) exactly what I was working with. I used this scenario daily, shooting everything from shoes to watches to sunglasses. It was a simple rig that was easy to set up and tear down, which I did daily because of space constraints. All I needed were a pair of benches (borrowed from the kitchen area), a sheet of glass (which was stored up against the wall behind my desk), and a sheet of white paper that stayed affixed to the wall next to the printer by a strip of gaff tape. If I wanted a black backdrop instead, I propped up a black board along the back side of the glass, half above the surface and half below.



Figure 16.7 The setup. This was a daily setup that I used in my cramped JackThreads office quarters. Though it was a simple rig, it was a versatile one—easily changed from a white to a black background.

Time and space were luxuries I didn't have. I worked fast and loose, as seen in [Figure 16.8](#). It was easier and faster to clamp the background light on the boom arm, blasting the light right over top of the product, than it was to shimmy under the glass platform to adjust the output as it changed between products. For scenarios for which I wanted a shallow

depth of field, I simply used a smaller flash output to complement the wide-open aperture required. From this one setup, I produced many variations, as you can see in [Figure 16.9](#).

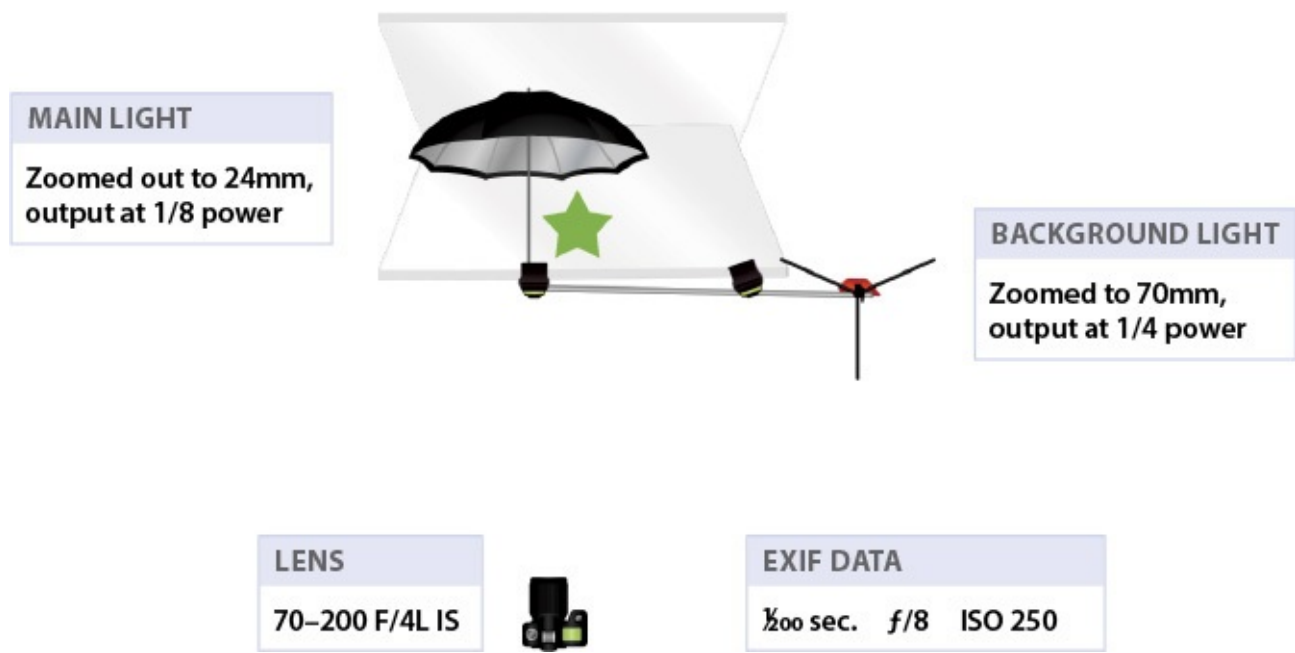


Figure 16.8 The lighting diagram. For shots on a white background, I attached my background light to the boom arm, blasting the light right over top of the product. This setup was more convenient than crawling under the glass to adjust the backlight on the floor.



Figure 16.9 The final shots. Although the setup was nearly identical, the result looked completely different, which was necessary since I was typically shooting a dozen brands in the span of a few hours.

Quiz 4: Deconstruct the Lighting

Test your deconstructing abilities by identifying the light source(s) in [Figure Q4](#), then flip to the answer key at the back of the book to see how close you were. Consider the direction and size of the light source(s). Good luck!



Part V: The Park Studio



Parks make for some fantastically diverse shoot spots. No two parks are the same, so get familiar with several in your area. The park in this shot offers a view of a bridge, a creek, and a wooded area all within 50 square feet, making it a spot that I use often.

Parks are good for more than just natural-light senior portrait sessions and oversized wedding parties. Once you have the tools and knowledge to manipulate any weather condition, you can use almost every square inch of a park to your advantage. In this section, we will delve into everything from shooting cologne bottles in rain puddles, to dialing down the high-noon sun with a single flash and a variable ND filter, to even making a cold, rainy day look like a day at the beach. Once you learn to overcome inclement weather, there's nothing you can't do.



17. Still Waters Don't Need to Run Deep

Implementing water in a shoot ratchets up the drama in the images but also the difficulty in the execution. Like lighting metal objects and other reflective surfaces, lighting water ain't a quick learn. Be patient with yourself—the results will be worth it.

After the Rain

Rain puddles are awesome. Run out after a storm to hunt for decent puddles, and you can add some drama to your shots for free. That's what I did for [Figure 17.1](#). The first thing I looked for was a puddle on a patch of blacktop or dark asphalt. Typical asphalt or concrete is much lighter in color, and I need something darker to really make this work. Because I was shooting a small cologne bottle, the puddle didn't need to be very wide or long. For a larger subject, like a person, you would need a much larger puddle to pull off this technique.



Figure 17.1 The setup. I was working with a rain puddle in a parking lot on a patch of blacktop. I added a grid to my flash to keep light from spilling onto the foreground.

The next thing to keep in mind is the height of the flash. Notice I placed it on the same level as the product: the ground. If I were to instead light it from a higher angle, the light would illuminate too much of the ground around the product, resulting in a less-than-dramatic image.

Because the day I photographed this was particularly drab and dark, I had no problem dialing down the ambient light with a moderate exposure. With a flash output of 1/4 power, I had all but crushed the ambient light, leaving me with an exposure of 1/60 at f/7.1

([Figure 17.2](#)). On brighter days, I'd likely need a neutral-density filter to kill the extra ambient light. Although I lowered the ambient light to an almost nighttime quality, some reflections of the sky and trees still were visible in the puddle. The lower shutter speed allowed these tones and shapes to remain. Although the puddle was not especially wide or deep, it sufficed in allowing me to achieve the glassy surface that I was going for ([Figure 17.3](#)).



Figure 17.2 The lighting diagram. The dark, overcast day allowed me to easily overpower the ambient light, as noted in the moderate exposure of 1/60 sec. at f/7.1.



Figure 17.3 The raw file. The puddle may not have been particularly wide or deep, but it was enough to create the glassy surface that I was after.

Now it was time to open the image in Lightroom to pump up the drama. In [Figure 17.4](#), the first thing that you may notice are the dozens of Spot Removal pins, scattered about the image. Even though I was careful to not leave any smudges or fingerprints on the bottle, there were still plenty of imperfections and tiny air bubbles that became glaringly apparent once I cranked up the Clarity slider. Remember, boosting the clarity is awesome when you are wanting to define the edges of your product or subject.

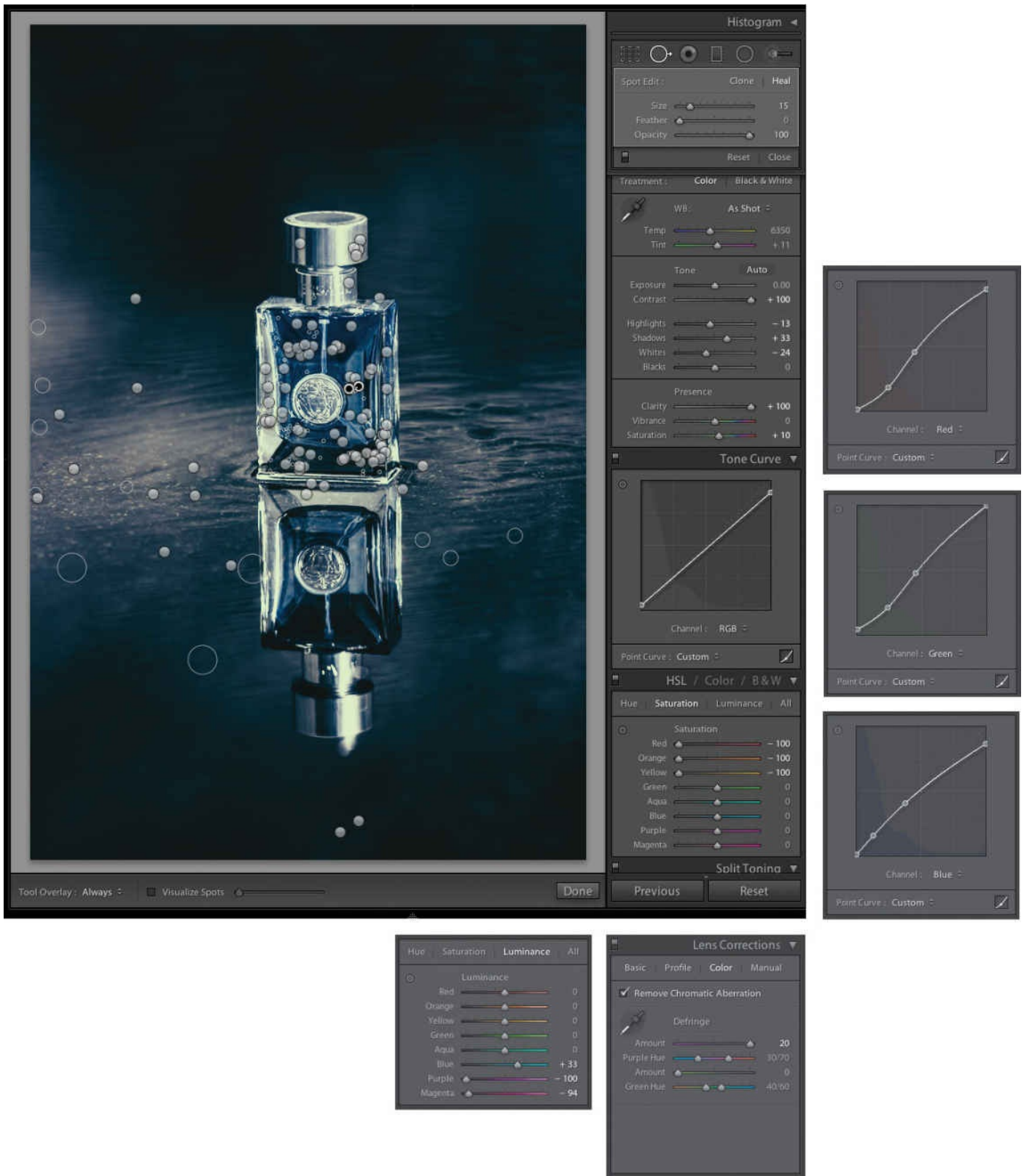


Figure 17.4 The Lightroom settings. To bring out the blue of the cologne, I upped the Blue slider in the Luminance panel. To define the contours of the bottle, I upped the Clarity slider.

The image is essentially a duotone, with the only real color being blue. To flush out that color a bit, I upped the Luminance in the Blue channel. There were a few faint warm tones in the concrete and a reflection of the yellow blanket I was laying on while shooting (to keep dry on the wet concrete), as you can see in the bottom corner of the bottle. I quickly removed those distracting tones by desaturating the Orange, Yellow, and Red sliders in the Saturation panel. [Figure 17.5](#) shows the result.



Figure 17.5 The final shot. This rain puddle, shot on a drab, gray day has been transformed into a dramatic, glassy surface.

If the sky had been clear, rather than a dark gray, the surface of the puddle would've been a vibrant blue, as seen in [Figure 17.6](#). Although the blue tone is nice, the shot's illuminated foreground is pretty distracting, not to mention the dozens of small rocks. Because my light was elevated, it lit the concrete in front of the shoes as well, illustrating why it's important to lower your lights, so that they're parallel to the ground.



Figure 17.6 When the sky is clear, the surface of the puddle changes to a lovely blue color. Don't light from above, however, because the illuminated concrete makes for a distracting foreground, as you can see here.

Bridge Over Dappled Waters

Unlike puddles, creeks are just fine when shooting larger subjects, such as people. They don't even need to be very big; the deepest point of the one I used for [Figure 17.7](#) was about 3 feet.



Figure 17.7 The setup. This creek is located under a footbridge at a park near my house. The deepest point is about 3 feet.

Crammed under a footbridge, the figure's setup was in an average park creek, at the peak of fall. My plan was to have Curtis fully submerge himself in the water, leaving only his

face above the surface, which I'd shoot in a portrait composition. I wanted the image to have a surreal feel to it, as if he was emerging from a wall of water. I picked a spot under a bridge because it was out of the direct sunlight, allowing me to easily light Curtis. When I exposed for the ambient light of the reflections in the water, Curtis was left in shadow, but I remedied that by adding a flash. The leaves on the nearby trees provided a gorgeous orange-yellow reflection on the surface of the water. The downside of shooting under the bridge was that the low clearance made it difficult to set up a light on a stand. The upside was that the ceiling of the bridge was a lighter, neutral shade of concrete, which meant I could easily bounce the flash off of it ([Figure 17.8](#)).

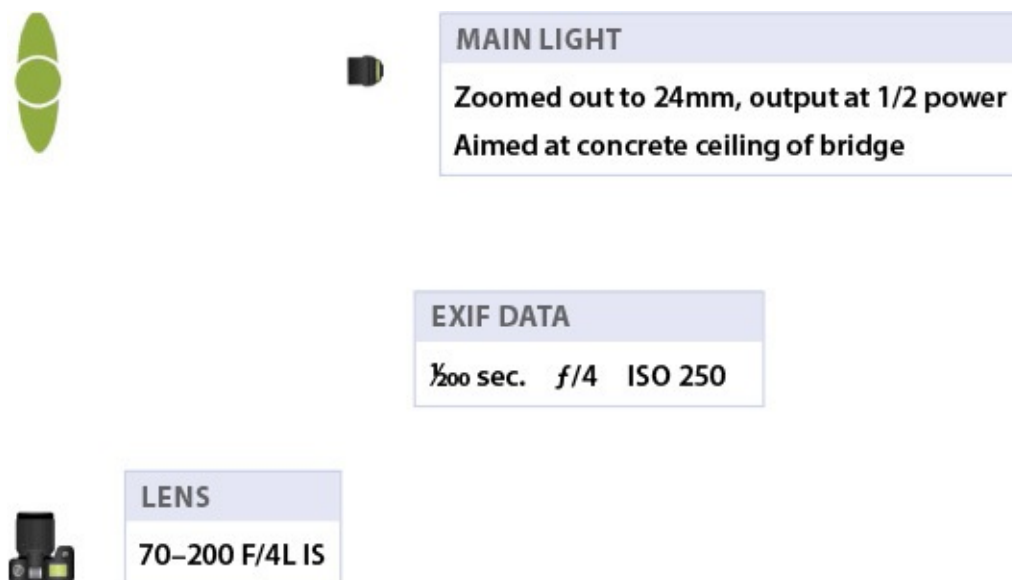


Figure 17.8 The lighting diagram. By bouncing the flash into ceiling of the bridge, I was able to have a large, soft light source.

The only problem with putting your subject in a creek in middle of fall is that the water is cold. Like really cold. So cold that Curtis could only stay in it for about 5 seconds at a time. The first time he got in the water, I had just enough time to lock in my exposure before he ran out, shivering. After he had a chance to warm up, I had about 7 seconds to get a decent shot before he was totally done. Because Curtis's ears were underwater, he couldn't hear me yelling at him to put his arms below the water surface. His floating hands were distracting in the shot, but I knew I could remove them in post ([Figure 17.9](#)).



Figure 17.9 The raw file. Because the water was so cold, I had only about 7 seconds to get a shot of Curtis. I planned to remove his hands in post; they were distracting above the surface of the water.

In Lightroom, I made the colors come to life by heavily tweaking the warm channels in the HSL panel ([Figure 17.10](#)), but I didn't stop there. I also added a warm Split Tone to the shadow areas and further tweaked hues in the Camera Calibration panel. After I had the image color graded to my liking, I cropped in on Curtis's head a bit, in order to make it feel more like a portrait ([Figure 17.11](#)).

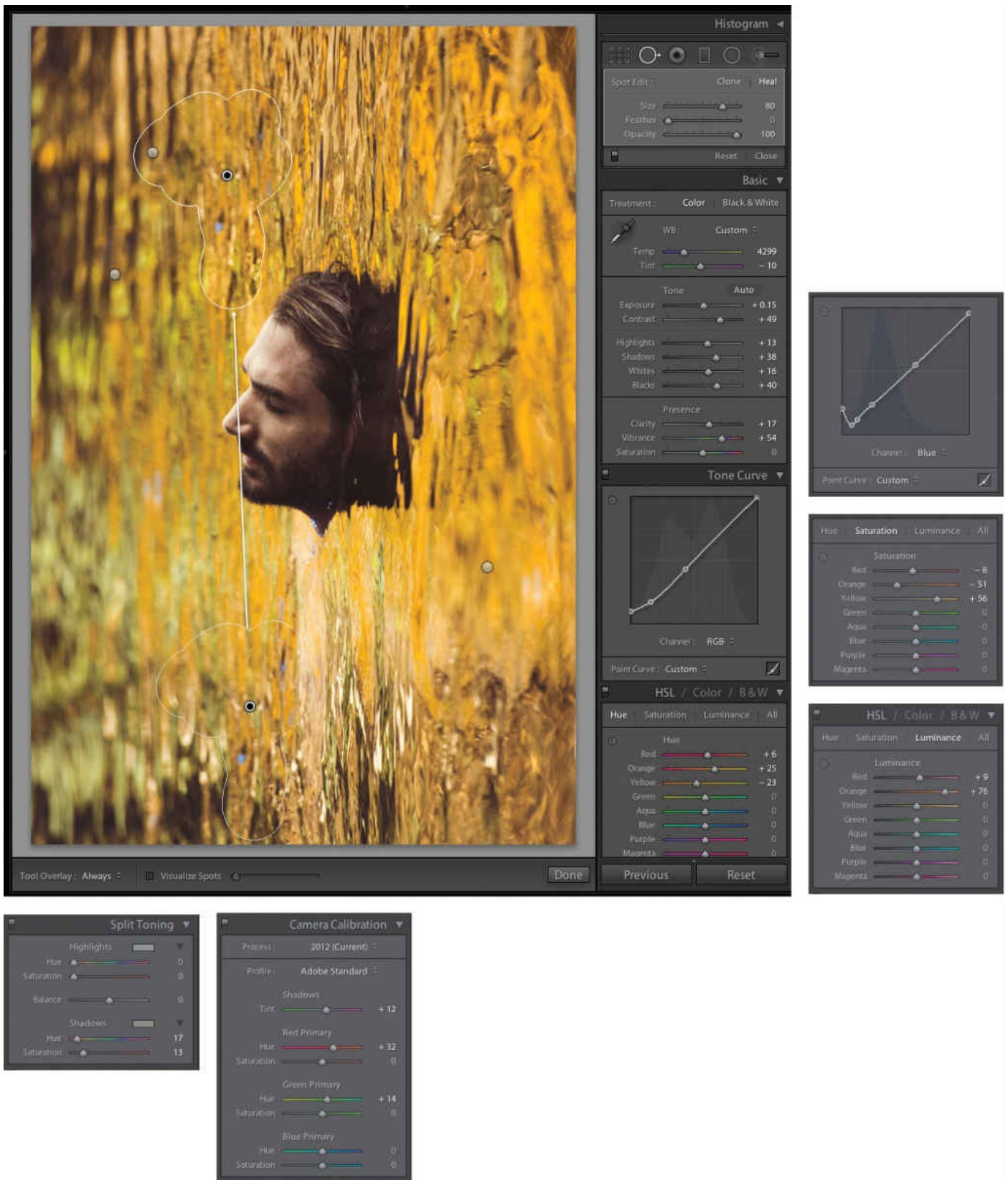


Figure 17.10 The Lightroom settings. I used the Spot Removal tool to easily remove his distracting hands from the shot. I also tweaked the Hue, Saturation, and Luminance of the reflected leaves until I got the colors I wanted.



Figure 17.11 The final shot. The cropped final image now feels more like the vibrant portrait that I intended.

As you plan for your own water-based shoot, think about wide but shallow bodies of water in your area. Next, consider whether the spots are surrounded by trees, in the shade, or out in the open, because these conditions factor heavily into the sort of reflections you'll get when shooting water.

Pro-Tip: Balance Hard Light Without Using Modifiers

Light modifiers are great. They can make a small light source appear larger. They can make hard light appear soft. They can even focus light down to a narrow shaft of light. When you are shooting outdoors, however, light modifiers can quickly become cumbersome. Umbrellas can turn your light stand into a sailboat when the wind picks up. Unless you have assistants to lend a hand, carrying sandbags to anchor your lights is not an easy task.

This tutorial will lead you through how to balance a hard light source with your

ambient light to achieve the appearance of soft light. Note that I am not claiming that this *is* soft light, merely that it *appears* softer when balanced with the ambient light. If you have the luxury of an assistant to carry or hold all your gear, by all means use your softboxes and umbrellas.

When using an unmodified flash, your first goal is to make your light spread larger. To do so, back the light off of your subject several feet to enable the light spread to cover more of your subject ([Figure 17.12](#)). Because of the inverse square law (which I won't go into), you will lose a substantial amount of your light output before it reaches your subject. This isn't exactly a bad thing, however, assuming you aren't trying to overpower the sun. Besides increasing the spread of light from the top to the bottom of the subject, this extra distance also helps even out the light from the front to the back of your subject. In other words, her right arm, which is closer to the light, is lit just as evenly as her left arm, which is farther away from the light. If you are using a strobe, set the zoom as wide as it will go, such as 24mm. If you are using a studio strobe, such as a Profoto head, pull the zoom reflector all the way back to allow the widest possible spread.



Figure 17.12 The setup. My light was a single unmodified flash on a stand.

Next, get a reading of your ambient light. As you can see in [Figure 17.13](#), the ambient is considerably darker than the strobe light, making it appear very harsh. I brought up the ambient by lowering my shutter speed from 1/200 to 1/80 and opening my aperture up from f/8 to f/5.6 for [Figure 17.14](#). Note that if lowering the shutter speed alone had brought the ambient light to a good level, I wouldn't have needed to adjust the flash settings. Because I needed to also open up the aperture several stops, however, that meant I also needed to lower the output of the strobe. Because it was a rather gloomy day outside, I lowered my already low flash output of 1/8 even further to 1/16.

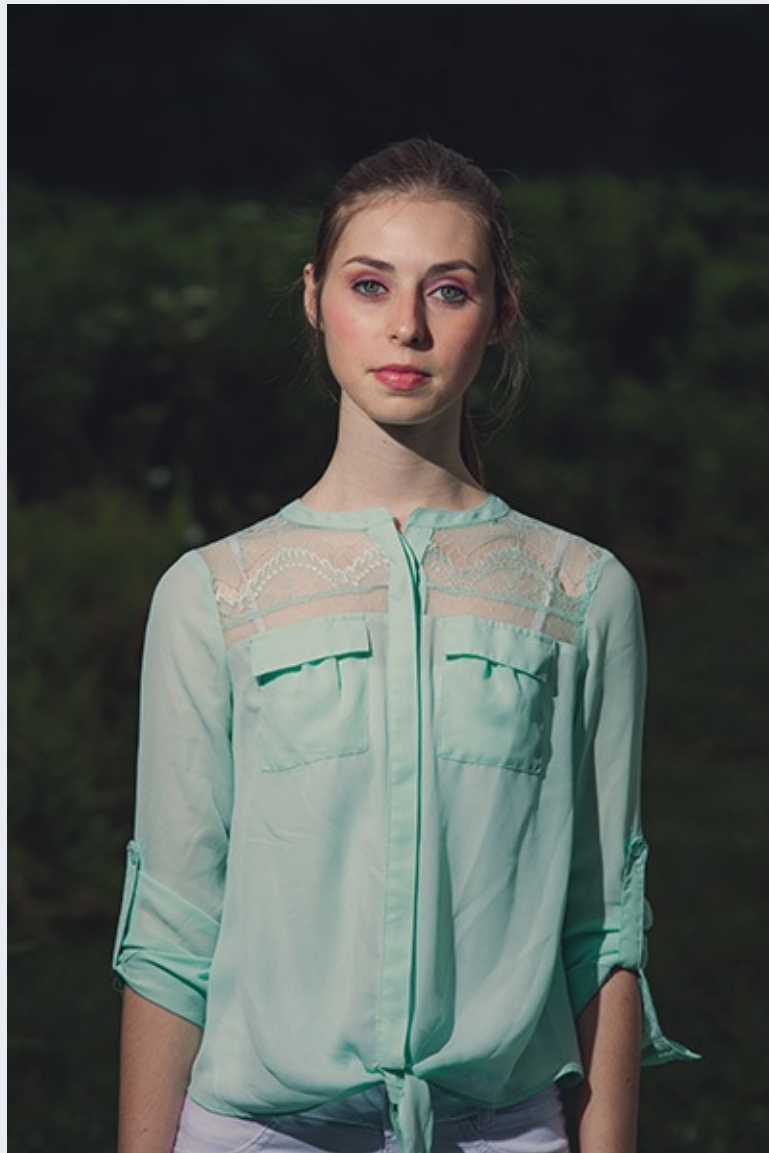


Figure 17.13 Here the flash output was at 1/8 power. My exposure was 1/200 sec., f/9, ISO 50.



Figure 17.14 To even out flash output with the ambient light, I changed the flash output to 1/16 power. My new exposure was 1/80 sec., f/5.6, ISO 50.

After the ambient light is brought up, you can see that the hard shadows on her face begin to fade, making the strobe light appear a little less harsh. The next thing you need to keep in mind is the direction of the subject to the light. Notice that when the subject turns away from the light source, the light creates harsh shadows on her face, as in [Figure 17.15](#). By having the subject turn into the direction of the light (or moving the light to a more frontal location), you eliminate some of the unflattering shadows ([Figure 17.16](#)).



Figure 17.15 If the subject is facing away from the light, it can create harsh shadows.

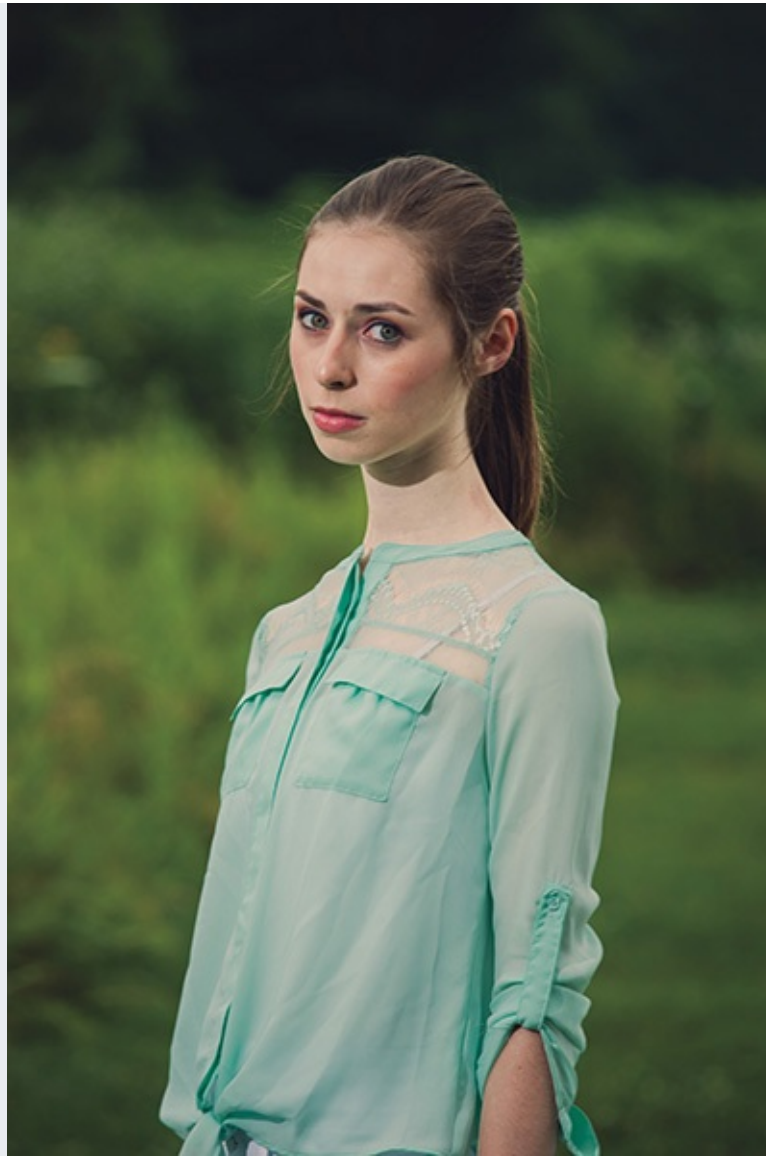


Figure 17.16 By turning the subject in the direction of the light, many of the harsh shadows are alleviated.

I also recommend using a longer focal length lens, such as a 70mm to 200mm. Having a 2.8 aperture isn't important either. I have the 70–200 F/4L IS, and I prefer this, not only because it is half the price and lighter in weight, but because I would be shooting around $f/4$ anyway. The added depth of field from the smaller aperture allows my subject to be sharp, from the tip of her nose to the back of her head. Yet I am still able retain a nice, soft depth of field in the background, due to the lens compression created by shooting at 200mm. This softening of the background further creates the impression of soft light.

Now that the light is balanced and the subject's general direction has been determined, the shooting can commence. Note that my final composition is a wider one, allowing the flowers and more of the park to show in the shot. This wider composition helps take the focus off any remaining hard shadows, such as the one below her jaw ([Figure 17.17](#)).



Figure 17.17 The final image. Although still a hard light source, the ambient and strobe light is now balanced, leaving a more natural-feeling final image.

18. Transform the Weather

As you saw with the cologne bottle in the previous chapter, an entire mood can be created or shifted, just by adding the element of lighting to a scene. For example, a flash allows you to pull out details in the highlights of the sky, details that wouldn't normally be visible when you're exposing for midtones or shadows in a scene. What you may not have known, however, is that by placing a colored gel on your flash and shifting your camera's white balance to match it, you can transform the colors of the entire scene. Shooting on a dreary day? Put a blue gel on your flash and adjust your White Balance setting to Cloudy. Now anything lit with the flash will appear neutral, while the rest of the scene is warm. Or go the other way. Want an otherwise sunny day to appear icy and cool? Gel your flash orange and set the white balance to Tungsten to cool down your scene.

Gettin' Shifty with It

As in [Chapter 17](#), I again found myself using a puddle as a dramatic setting—a rather wide puddle, to be exact, that was large enough to allow me to isolate my subject, Max ([Figure 18.1](#)). I was shooting right after the sun dropped below the skyline, dusk for all intents and purposes. This is the time of day when the sky gets all purpley and blue. The problem is that not all sunsets are amazing and vibrant. Unless you have a particularly gorgeous sunset to work with (I didn't), you'll need to boost the naturally existing colors (I did).



Figure 18.1 The setup. This time, a large puddle is the setting for this portrait. The shoot took place right after the sun dropped below the skyline.

All I needed to shift the color of the ambient light was a half-strength green gel for my flash, which is the kind typically used to correct fluorescent lighting. I didn't have one with me, however, so I used a full-strength green gel instead and covered only half the flash with the gel to cut down the intensity of the green ([Figures 18.2](#) and [18.3](#)).



Figure 18.2 By adding a half-strength green gel to your main light and adjusting your camera's White Balance setting to the Fluorescent Light option, anything lit with the flash will appear neutral, while the ambient light will shift to a magenta tone. Because I had only a full-strength green gel, I covered half of the flash to feather the intensity of the color.



Figure 18.3 The lighting diagram. The green gel allowed me to shift the camera's white balance while the grid on the flash contained the light from spilling onto the puddle.

Now that my main light was green, I needed to set my camera's White Balance setting to the Fluorescent Light option to cancel out the green tone on the subject. Everything lit with the strobe appeared a natural color, while the remaining ambient light became magenta; for instance, notice the sky in [Figure 18.4](#).



Figure 18.4 The raw file. Though the white balance appears to be a bit cool, I can easily correct it to a warmer tone in post.

As you can see in [Figure 18.4](#), the raw file still looks a bit cool, but a quick white balance tweak in Lightroom can easily correct it to a warmer tone ([Figure 18.5](#)). Using the HSL panel, I adjusted the Hue, Saturation, and Luminance sliders until I got the colors looking like how I remembered them in the scene.

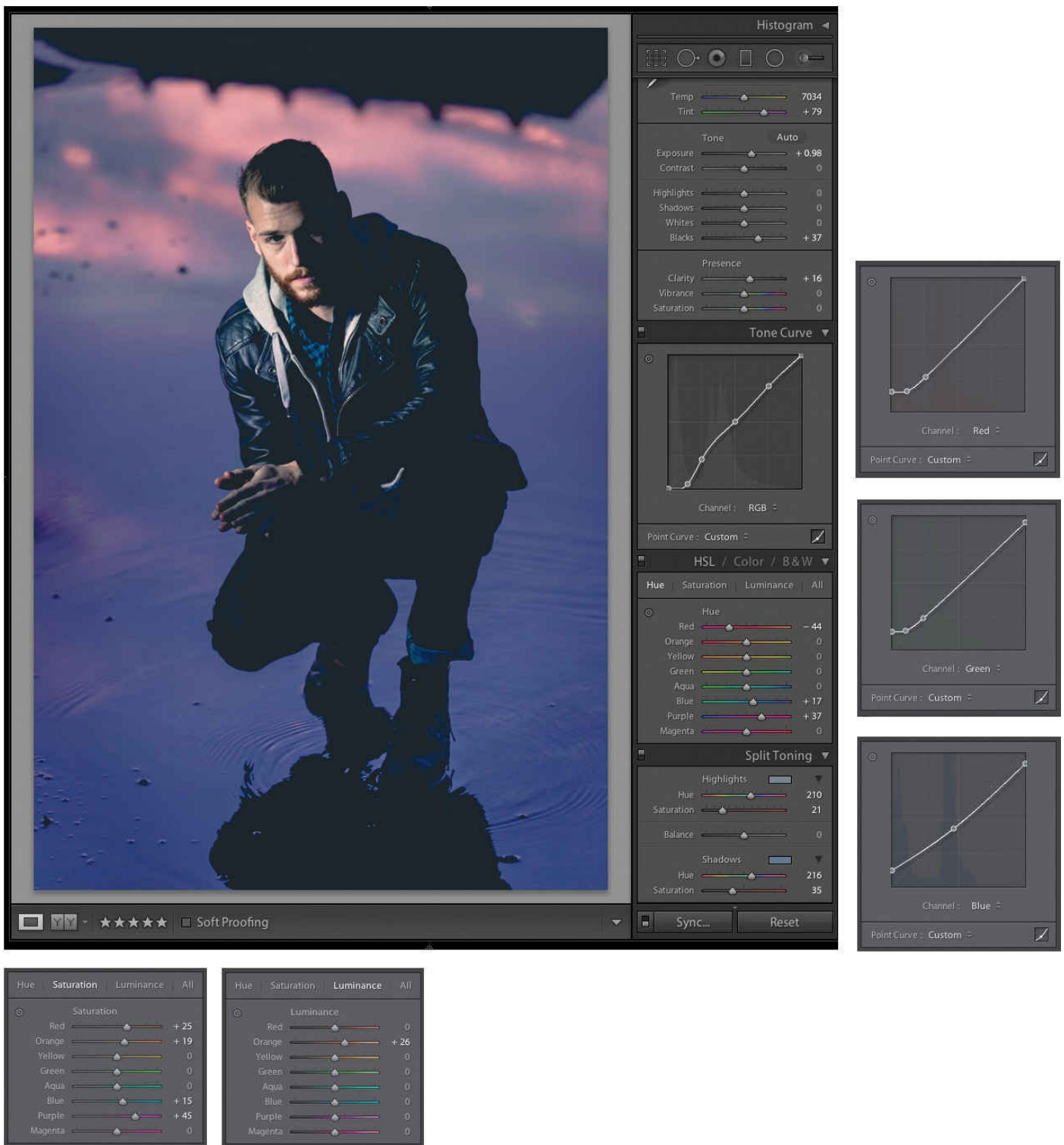


Figure 18.5 The Lightroom settings. I tweaked the colors of the sky by using the Hue, Saturation, and Luminance sliders in the HSL panel.

After color grading the image came the task of removing the distracting reflection of the building in the puddle. Because it was a rather large area, using the Spot Removal tool in Lightroom would be too time-consuming. Instead, I used the Content-Aware Fill option in Photoshop that I discussed in the Pro-Tip in [Chapter 2](#). Now I had a horizonless image that gave the impression of Max walking on the water ([Figure 18.6](#)).

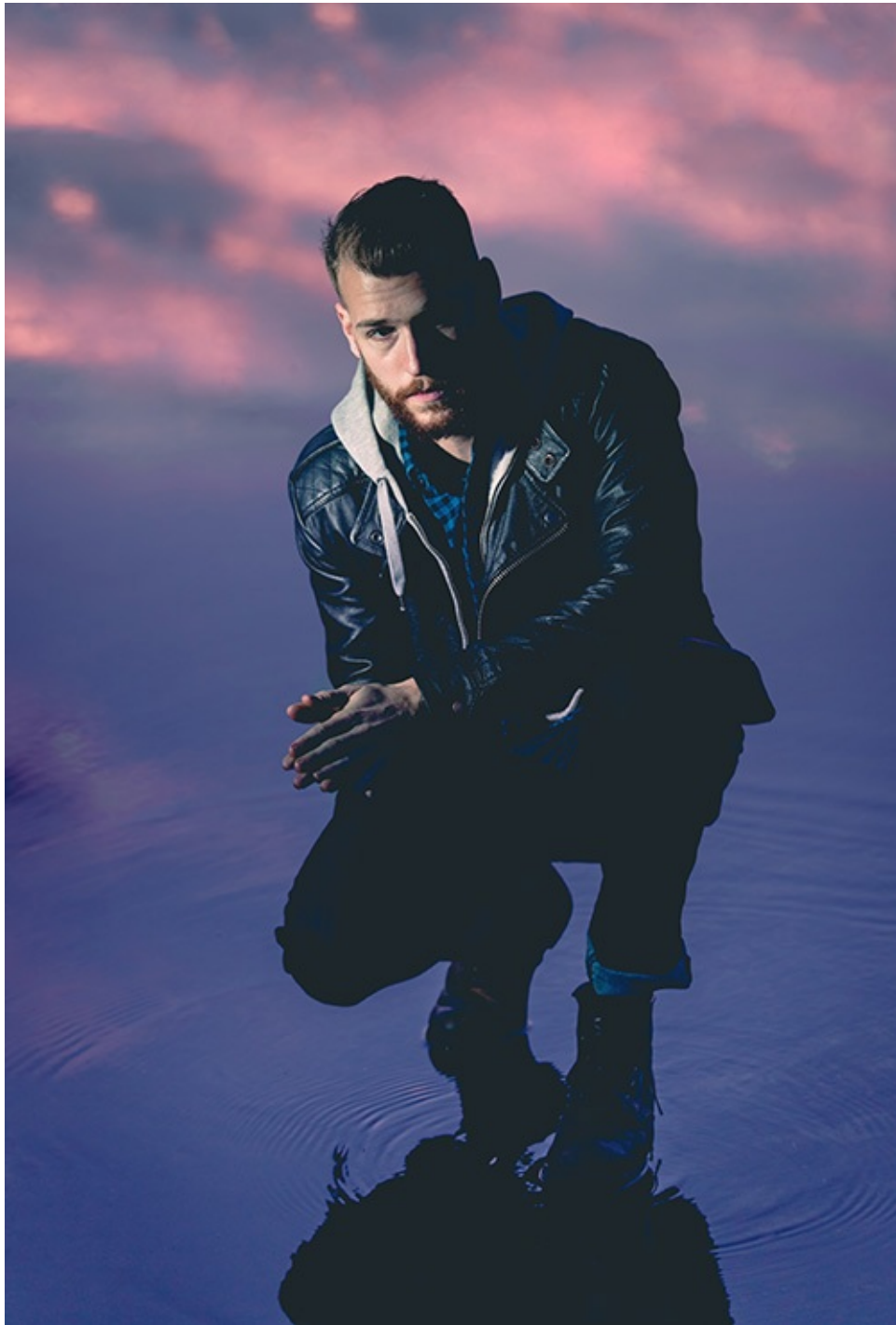


Figure 18.6 The final shot. With the white balance corrected and colors adjusted, the ambient light in the image looked closer to how I remembered it in the scene.

Fake It ‘Til You Make It

This time, I didn’t need to shift the colors, but rather warm them up. I essentially needed to make a cold rainy day in Ohio pass for sunny Los Angeles, California. Let me explain. For a brief period of time I was the lifestyle shooter for HOMAGE, a Columbus, Ohio, clothing brand. The company had just created a line of tank tops, each one based on a popular city in the U.S. The direction given to me for the shoot was to create a unique backdrop for each design, reminiscent of the city depicted on the shirt. The problem, once again, being that the day of the shoot was cold and rainy.

Fortunately, Ohio has a couple of beach-like areas. When I say beach-like, I really mean a moderately sized, highly polluted lake just north of the city—not exactly the ideal LA vibe

([Figure 18.7](#)). While I couldn't do anything about the lack of surf in the lake, I could do something about the lack of sun. By having my assistant boom an ungelled flash over the model at a high angle, I was able to mimic the direction and hardness of sunlight ([Figure 18.8](#)). I didn't even need to gel the flash to shift the white balance, as I did in the previous scenario. Because the color temperature of a strobe flash was already cool, all I needed to do was adjust the camera's White Balance setting to Flash, and the ambient light shifted to a nice warm tone. I also had the model wear some sunglasses; the flash glare reflected in them, further pushing the idea of sunlight ([Figure 18.9](#)).



Figure 18.7 The setup. My task was to make a cold lake in Ohio pass as sunny Los Angeles.



MAIN LIGHT

Zoomed out to 24mm,
output at 1/4 power

EXIF DATA

1/200 sec. f/4 ISO 100



LENS

70-200 F/4L IS

Figure 18.8 The lighting diagram. Because of the naturally cool color temperature of strobe flashes, I didn't even need to gel it to warm up the white balance.



Figure 18.9 The final shot. I asked the model to put on some sunglasses, and the flare glare showed up in the reflection, further pushing the appearance of sunlight.

19. Eclipse the Sun

After several years of using high-speed sync (HSS) to light portraits in full sunlight at a wide aperture, I decided to compare the HSS approach against shooting using a variable neutral-density filter (ND). The setup in [Figure 19.1](#) was the perfect challenge for both techniques: a bright day made brighter by reflections. Before I get into the details of the shoot, though, let's review how each technique works.



Figure 19.1 The setup. I was shooting during the brightest part of the day, using a combination of a cloudless sky and snow on the ground as a reflector. It was bright.

A Gun at a Knife Fight

HSS allows you to shoot at shutter speeds that are higher than 1/250 of a second while still using strobes. The reason this ability is so enticing is that you can shoot strobe-lit images at wide-open apertures in full sunlight, allowing for a shallow depth of field. Normally if you were using a strobe, your max shutter speed would be 1/250 sec. or lower, meaning that you would need to use a high flash output and a small aperture to pull down sky detail ([Figure 19.2](#)).



Figure 19.2 In this shot, I used a bright flash output and a small aperture to dial down the bright environment.

With HSS, the strobe begins pulsing light just before the shutter opens, because the exposure is so short. Because much of the light output is lost in the pulsing process, however, you need more lights ganged together to achieve a decent output. For example, when I am shooting at $1/8000$ of a second, I need to gang four flashes on one light stand to light a subject that is about 5 feet away ([Figure 19.3](#))—and that is without using any light modifiers, such as an umbrella or soft box. If I were to add a modifier, the light on the subject would be further diminished.



Figure 19.3 This image was lit using high-speed sync, which allowed me to shoot at $f/2.8$ at $1/8,000$ of a second.

The other issue with HSS is that not just any strobe and trigger system will do the trick. You need specialized (read, expensive) gear that will communicate information from the camera to the strobe, such as the PocketWizard Flex TT5 and MiniTT1 system and the RadioPopper PX system. Because the PocketWizard Flex system for Canon is super glitchy, I opted for the RadioPopper system, which isn't exactly ideal either. For one, it's a real battery hog. I need 27 to operate the necessary four strobes and triggers. Even though most are rechargeable, the Canon ST-E2, which served as the master flash, transmitting the E-TTL information from my camera to the flashes, required a hard-to-find 2CR5 battery. For another, imagine trying to troubleshoot a misfire. Do the batteries need to be changed in one of the transceivers, or is a strobe misaligned, obscuring the sensor? Or suppose that one of the strobes' batteries is slightly more drained than another, causing only three of four lights to fire and making the overall exposure fluctuate with every frame.

By comparison, neutral-density (ND) filters are the essence of simplicity. ND filters screw onto your lens and cut down the light that hits the sensor, thus allowing for a wider aperture in bright light. This means that your shutter speed can stay at or below the $1/200$ cutoff, allowing the full strength of the strobe to light your subject. The filter approach, therefore, requires fewer strobes, meaning fewer batteries and less troubleshooting. (Not to mention, it eliminates the need to transmit E-TTL information, so I could sell the sometimes-unreliable RadioPoppers.)

After setting my ISO as low as it would go (50), my shutter speed as high as was allowed ($1/160$), and my strobes at their full output, I dialed down the variable ND until the

ambient light was perfectly balanced with the strobe light and shot. This combination was more than sufficient at completely obliterating all the ambient light. It turned the white-out into a solar eclipse ([Figure 19.4](#)). [Figure 19.5](#)'s lighting diagram details my exact setup for the ND filter experiment.

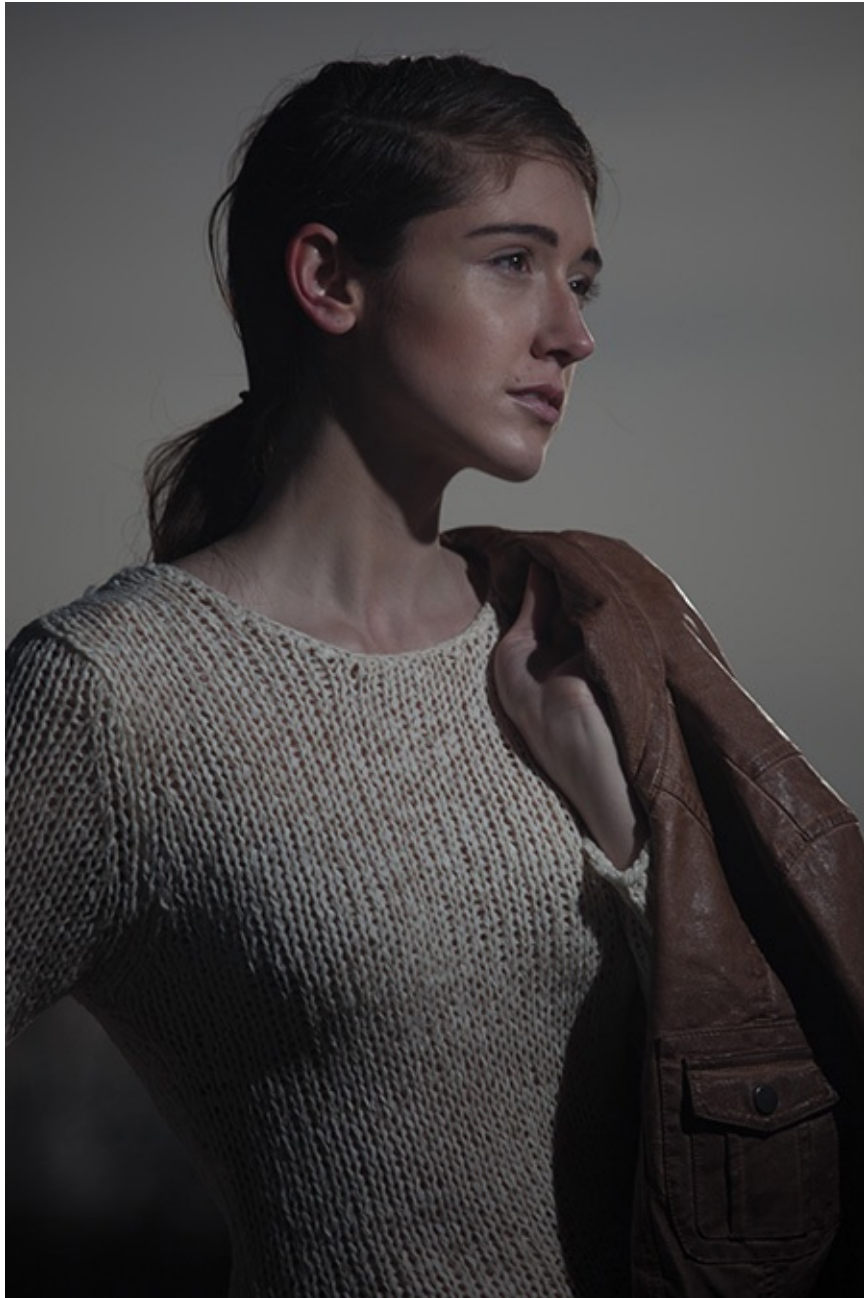


Figure 19.4 The raw file. Here, I killed the ambient light by using a variable ND filter.

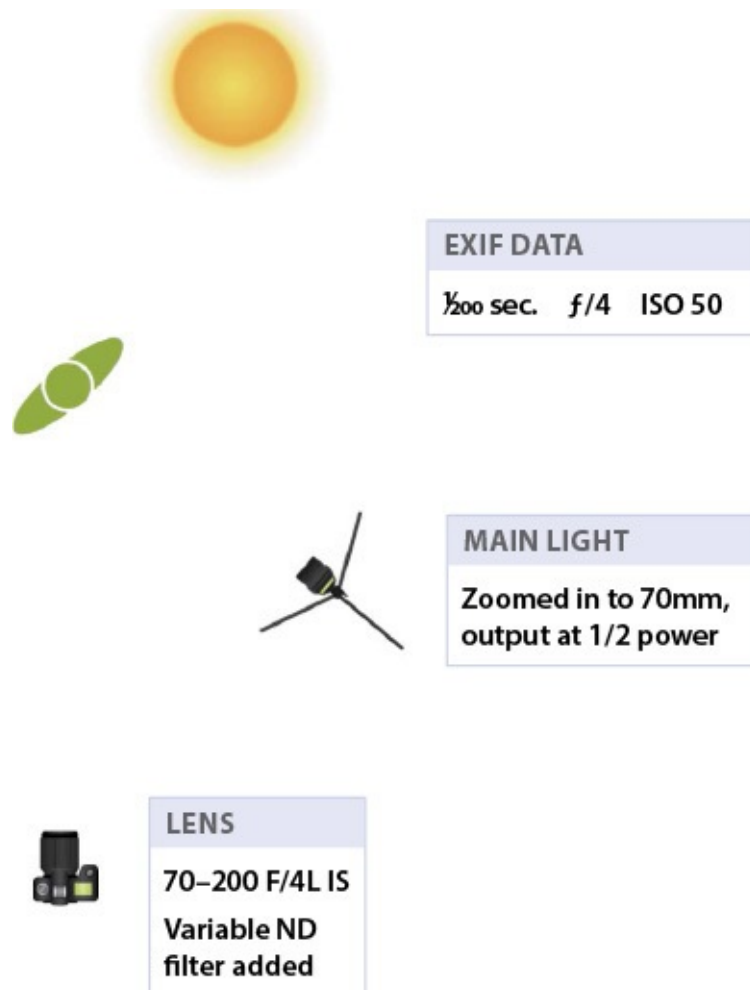


Figure 19.5 The lighting diagram. Wide-open aperture and an average shutter speed on a super-bright day is no problem when using a variable ND filter to control the extra light.

Some people point out the issue of a color cast with certain brands of ND filters. I have not experienced any issues with the ProMaster brand. Keep in mind, however, that if you are shooting directly into the sun, your image will likely contain glare, causing a possible color cast, or for the image to appear washed out.

Note that the HSS shot in this experiment was done using Canon 430EX strobes with RadioPopper PX triggers. I've since sold them all, opting for the cheaper, sturdier and more powerful LumoPro LP180 with PocketWizard Plus X triggers. Now with one bare-bulb strobe and a variable ND filter, I can effectively cut the ambient light while fully lighting a subject at f/1.4 in full sunlight.

In Lightroom ([Figure 19.6](#)), I wanted to flush out some warmth in her leather jacket while also retaining a cool overall vibe. To do this, I tweaked the hue of the Yellow slider in the HSL panel. Yellow was the predominant color in the leather, and I wanted to bring it to a warmer appearance. To retain a frosty vibe to the image, I gave a nice arc to the Blue channel in the Tone Curve panel. I finished the editing by cleaning up her hair flyaways in Photoshop, because the task was too detail-oriented for Lightroom's Spot Removal tool.

[Figure 19.7](#) shows the final result.

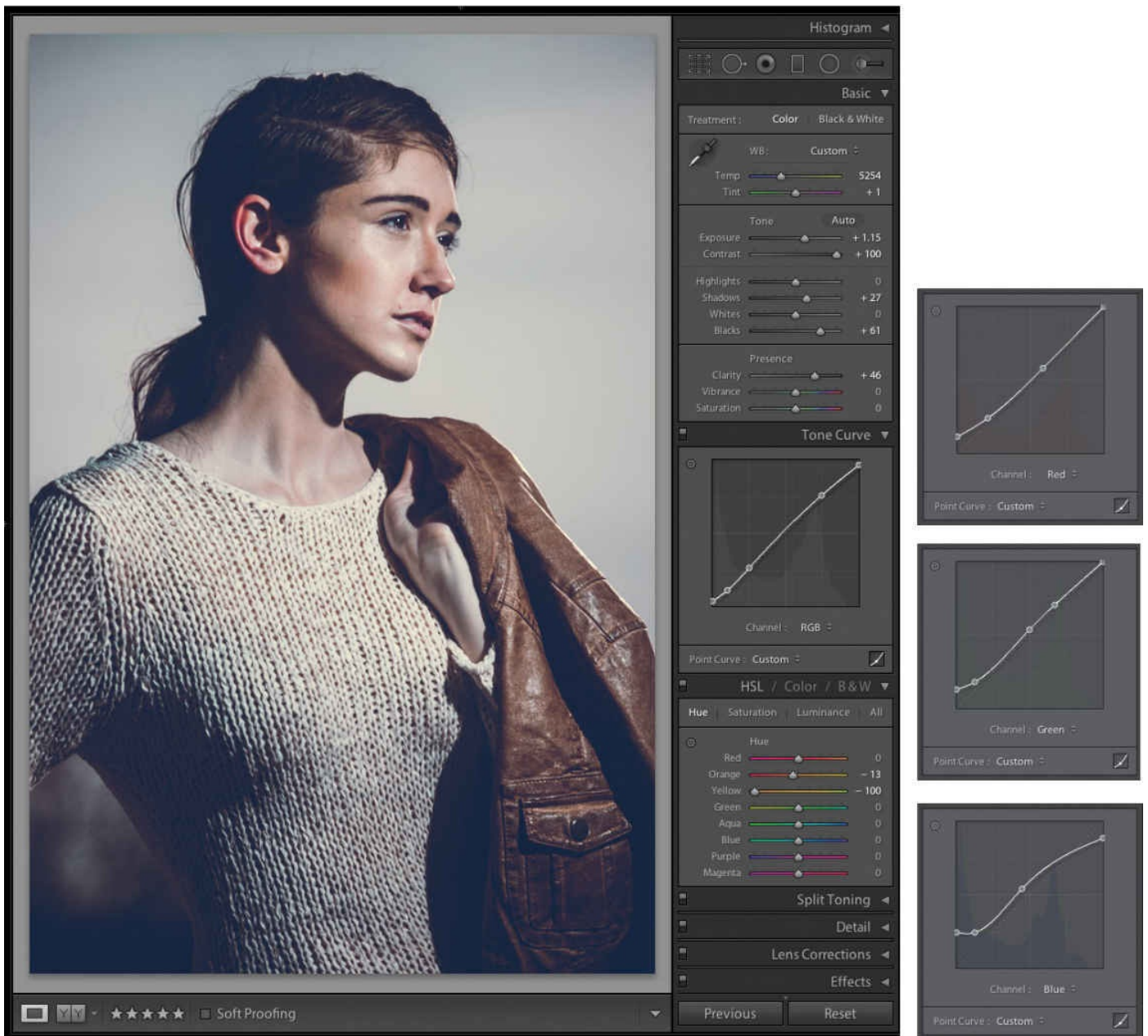


Figure 19.6 The Lightroom settings. I tweaked the Curves to flush out the warm tones in the leather while maintaining an overall coolness to the image.



Figure 19.7 The final shot. A lit portrait in a shallow scene, shot on a sunny day with nothing more than one flash and an ND filter—it's a beautiful thing.

Tip

If the thought of trying to clean up messy hair in Photoshop overwhelms you, employ the use of a retoucher. A retoucher will do it faster and better than you and is much more affordable than you may think. At the end of the day, you want a finished, polished-looking image—not one that is nearly perfect, minus one obvious flaw.

Quiz 5: Deconstruct the Lighting

Test your deconstructing abilities by identifying the light source(s) in [Figure Q5](#), then flip to the answer key at the back of the book to see how close you were. Remember to look at the size, hardness, and direction of the light. Good luck!



Part VI: The Street Studio



Behind-the-scenes photo by Katya Grishanova

Everything is fair game when you are running and gunning. When I'm out driving or walking, I am always on the lookout for cool locations, such as this mural located in a construction area. With the minimal setup I was using, I was in and out before anyone yelled at me.

The street. Photographers have had an obsession with it since the days of Cartier-Bresson. The streets are the pulse of a city. The street is where things happen first—where Bill Cunningham catches first looks at the latest fashion trends, where Philip-Lorca diCorcia shot his infamous portraits of strangers.

The street is not only full of energy, but it's packed with a variety of backdrops, nooks, and textures. And now that you know that you can get the shots you want with minimal gear, these amazing street environments are your proverbial playground. Even if you're

shooting in New York, where you typically need a permit, these run-and-gun techniques will allow you to get in, get the shot, and get out before anyone even knows you've been there. When you're running and gunning on the streets, just act as if you're doing exactly what you're supposed to be doing; 9 times out of 10, no one will question your presence. Remember, it's always better to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission.

This section will cover everything from blacking your environment to using parking garages as prime shoot locations. The streets are where the *anywhere* possibilities really start to get exciting.

20. On the Beaten Path

It's actually not too difficult to create an all-black environment right there on the street. The main thing that you will need is a spot in the shade and enough space to allow at least 10 to 15 feet between the subject and the background, preferably a dark-colored background ([Figure 20.1](#)). As long as you can keep your strobe light from falling on the ground, background, or other objects in the scene, only the subject will be illuminated.



Figure 20.1 The setup. If you want to black out your environment, look for shaded areas with enough space to allow at least 10 to 15 feet between your subject and the background. The darker the background wall is, the better.

Dancer in the Dark

It was a particularly windy day when I photographed ballerina Kristie Latham, and my strobes were in danger of falling on the ground in an entirely different manner. If I had added an umbrella to the light stand without it being sandbagged or held by an assistant, it would have blown over onto a nearby car within 5 seconds. Because I didn't have an assistant and sandbags were too heavy to lug around by myself (I was already pulling my case and carrying two light stands), I had to shoot without light modifiers. Although an unmodified flash on a light stand can still be blown over, it's much less likely to happen. (That said, I still made sure that it wasn't too close to any nearby cars.)

I wanted to highlight Kristie's form and the details of her outfit—specifically the tutu—so even though the light was going to be hard without modifiers, that would actually work to my advantage. I placed the main light about 8 feet high to create dramatic, directional light. After taking a test shot, I saw that the light fell off below her tutu, because it came

out about a foot from her body, causing her legs to go into shadow. To remedy this, I added a second light on the ground but aimed it up slightly to avoid lighting the ground. The second light successfully illuminated the lower half of her body ([Figure 20.2](#)). By zooming the flashes into a medium setting of 70mm, the light spread just enough to cover her without spilling too much on the environment around her ([Figure 20.3](#)). Although a bit of background detail was visible in the raw file, I knew I could easily remove it once I got the file into Lightroom.



Figure 20.2 The raw file. If you look closely, you will see that there is a bit of background detail, which can be easily eliminated in Lightroom.

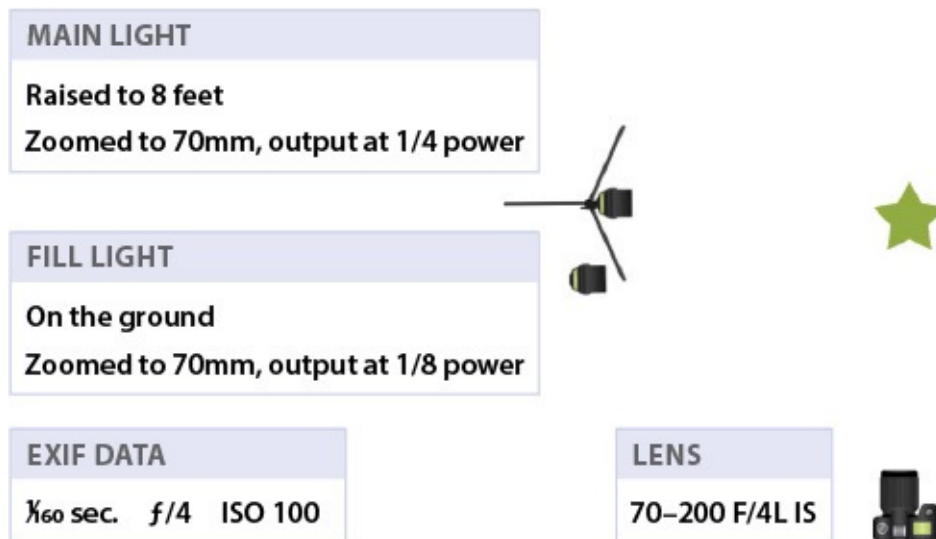


Figure 20.3 The lighting diagram. The moderate flash zoom of 70mm allowed enough spread to illuminate the subject while not spilling onto her environment.

The first thing I did in Lightroom was crank the Contrast slider all the way to the right ([Figure 20.4](#)). That singlehandedly eliminated almost all of the background details that were lurking in the raw file. Because my image was about only the lines of her form, rather than, say, a formal portrait of Kristie, the added contrast actually enhanced the image. Next, I needed to ensure that the blacks were true black (it's not always obvious by looking at the computer screen). I quickly did this by making a brush adjustment to the black areas with the Exposure, Highlights, and Shadows sliders cranked left and the Contrast slider cranked to the right. To make sure that I didn't accidentally paint over Kristie, I held the cursor over the activated adjustment pin, which illuminated the adjustment area in red. If I had accidentally painted over a lit detail, I could easily remove it by selecting the Erase brush, while the pin was still active.

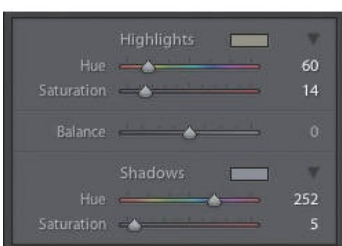


Figure 20.4 The Lightroom settings. The area highlighted in red shows the coverage of the brush adjustment I made, pulling the shadow areas down to a full black tone. Once the blacks were black and Kristie was floating in the void, I completed the editing by

making a second brush adjustment to the lit areas, slightly bringing up the Highlights slider. I also tweaked the Tone Curve and added a slight Split Tone to give the final, black-and-white image a bit of warmth ([Figure 20.5](#)).



Figure 20.5 The final shot. Kristie is now completely isolated in the void. Poetic.

Homage to Street

Before HOMAGE hired me full time, the company contracted me to shoot its vintage sports apparel for a major fall campaign that featured both on-figure product shots as well as lifestyle scenarios shot in an actual environment. Ten models would be coming and going throughout the day and time was very tight; shooting everything in a studio, and then going out to a location to shoot everything all over again in lifestyle scenarios, made zero sense. The clothing was university-themed, so I suggested we set up on a white background on a sidewalk in the heart of the Ohio State University campus ([Figure 20.6](#)). This would allow us to shoot the product shots, then hop over to some of the campus landmarks for the lifestyle shots, saving time and ultimately money (much to the client's delight).



Figure 20.6 The setup. For an on-location shoot with HOMAGE, I needed to shoot both on-figure product shots as well as lifestyle shots in actual environments. Setting up a white background in the heart of a college campus seemed like the obvious choice. By using a thicker foam core backdrop instead of a paper or cloth sweep, I had a sturdy setup that could endure the windy outdoors.

I set up the backdrop in the shade, out of direct sunlight, and as far away as I could get from the wind. Wind is your main concern when shooting with an outdoor backdrop—especially paper backdrops. For this shoot, because I was photographing only one person at a time, I didn't need a large white sweep. Instead, I opted to use two 40x60-inch sheets of white foam core, taped together with white gaff tape and clamped to a C-stand. This made a nice, sturdy backdrop.

In [Figure 20.7](#), you can see that although the color cast was a bit cool, due to the shade,

the subject was nicely isolated on the white. The white gaff tape on the backdrop was visible, but would quickly fade out once I raised the highlights in post. Beyond adjusting the brightness and white balance and tweaking the Curves in Lightroom, the image was pretty much ready to go ([Figure 20.8](#)). I was able to start sending completed image files to the client the next day, which was important because the job was a rush.



Figure 20.7 The raw file. Besides a slightly cool white balance and visible gaff tape, the image was looking pretty good.



Figure 20.8 The final shot. After adjusting the Curves, straightening the composition, and a few other minor tweaks in Lightroom, I had the images ready to hand over to the client the next day.

The next time you or your client needs shots on black or white, remember you aren't tethered to shooting at an off-site studio. Depending on the nature of the shoot, it could be actually be more convenient to go guerilla style, shooting right on your neighborhood

sidewalk.

21. Get on Up

What do you do when you're photographing a subject outdoors in a particularly uninteresting part of town? You stand her on the roof of your car and use the sky as a backdrop, of course! If the clouds are as epic as they were the day of my test shoot with Michaela, I promise the shots will be well worth the climb.

Up on the Roof

For this session, I met Michaela behind a nearby shopping center. These are great shoot locations, because the backsides of the buildings are large, blank, and typically white or light-colored, as well as also typically empty. Not to mention, they are surrounded by parking lots, so the horizon line is often relatively clear of trees, houses, and tall buildings, making it perfect for shooting the sky.

I parked my car at a 45-degree angle to the sun, so I could use the sun as a fill light on the side of Michaela. I easily hoisted my bird-boned subject up onto the car roof, cautioning her to be careful. I maxed out my 15-foot light stand, in order to get the light slightly higher than the model ([Figure 21.1](#)). As usual, when shooting in the bright sun, I used a bare-bulb flash, setting the output to half power to get the most out of my light without completely killing the refresh time ([Figure 21.2](#)). I also used a variable ND filter to cut down the excessive ambient light and still allow a lower aperture for a softer depth of field ([Figure 21.3](#)).



Figure 21.1 The setup. The clouds were particularly nice, so I put the model on the roof of my car and used the sky as a backdrop.



Figure 21.2 The raw file. I used the sun as a fill light by positioning Michaela so that the sun was at her side and back. I added a bare-bulb flash as the main light, filling in the shadows.

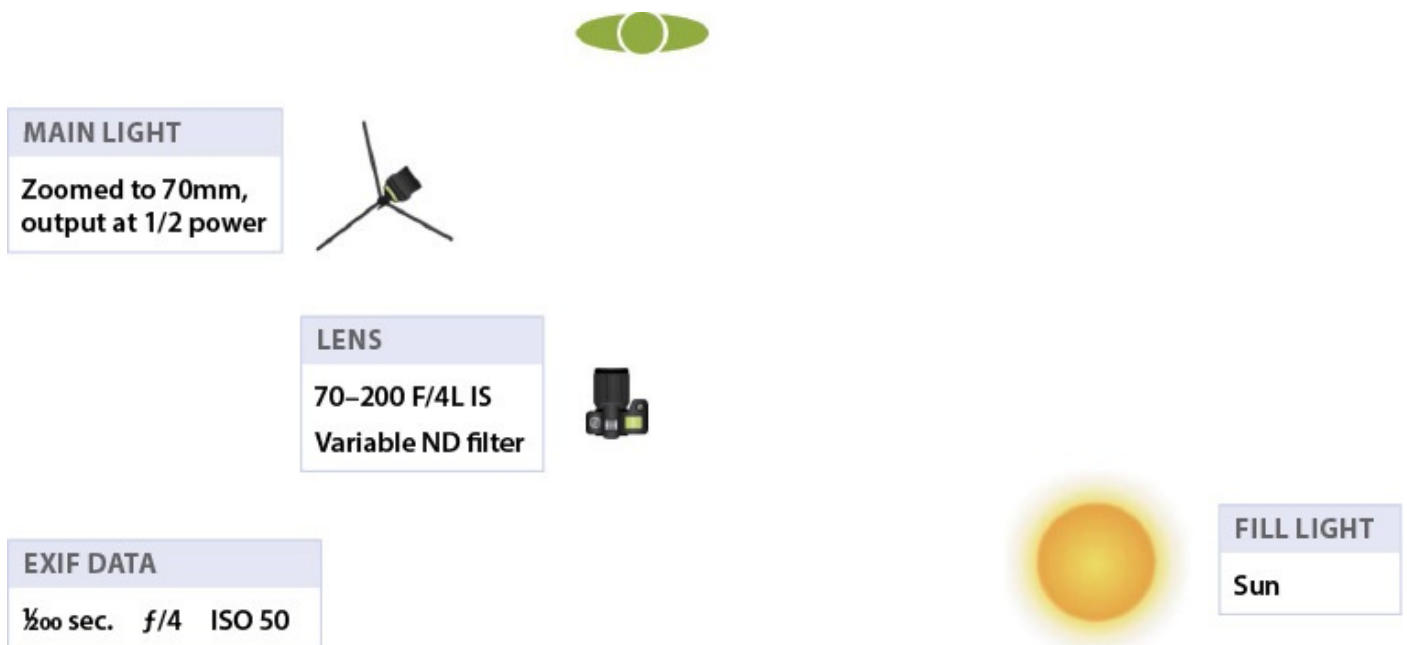


Figure 21.3 The lighting diagram. I added a variable neutral-density filter to my lens, allowing me to dial down the excessive ambient light and maintain a shallow depth of field with a larger aperture of $f/4$.

Once in Lightroom, I first darkened the visible portion of the car roof. Making a brush adjustment to the area, lowering the exposure, shadows, and highlights, and raising the contrast sent the car to full black. I removed the slightly visible trees in the background in Photoshop, as well as used the Clone Stamp tool to smooth out the surface of the roof. Next, I added a bit of drama to the sky. By lowering the Blue slider in the Luminance panel, I started to improve the sky. This technique can get a bit problematic if your subject is wearing blue, however, because those areas would darken as well. I also raised the Luminance in the Orange channel to open up her skin tones a bit ([Figure 21.4](#)).

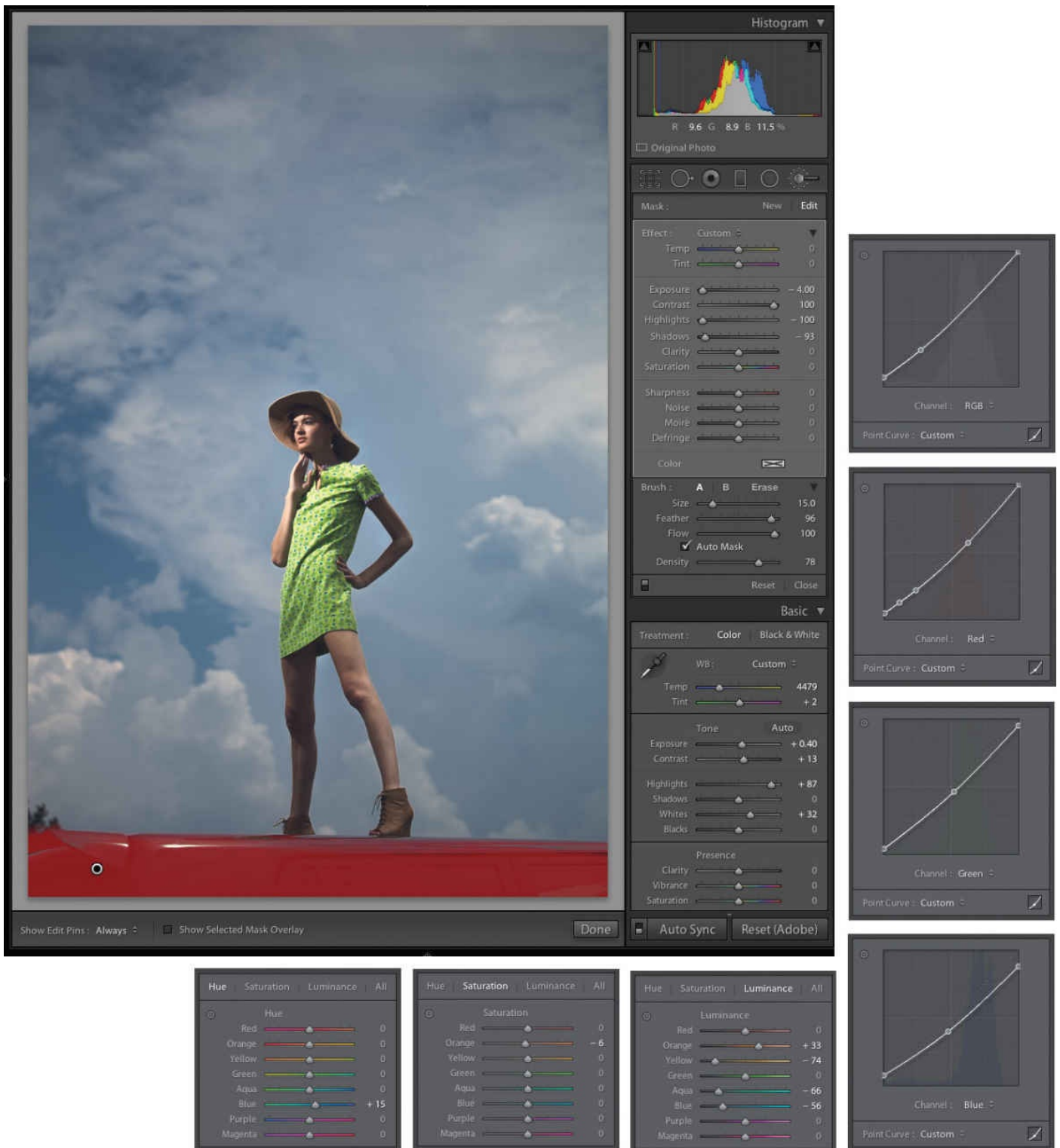


Figure 21.4 The Lightroom settings. By adding a gradient adjustment to the car roof, I lowered the exposure and quickly took it to an all-black surface. By lowering the Blue and raising the Orange sliders in the Luminance panel, I added drama to the sky and opened up Michaela's skin tones, respectively.

I now had a beautiful backdrop in what was a rather uninspiring part of town. The thing to remember is that you never have to be a slave to your surroundings. Look at what's around you, and figure out how you can use objects (even your car) as a prop to get the better shot ([Figure 21.5](#)).



Figure 21.5 The final shot. With the help of my car, I pulled off a dramatic image in a less-than-dramatic location.

Welcome to the Thunderdome

When your vision is a *Mad Max* theme, you head for the desert, California's El Mirage desert, in my case. My plan was to get a good shot on location, then ramp up the drama to mad levels in Black and White mode in Lightroom. Although shooting in the desert afforded plenty of cool backdrops, I decided that one of the shots would look great set against the blue sky. So I told Mariel to hop up on top of my rental car ([Figure 21.6](#))—to hop gently and stand toward the side rather than the center. I didn't want to return the rental car with a crater in the middle of its roof.



Figure 21.6 The setup. I was doing a Mad Max-themed shoot in California’s El Mirage desert. I wanted a shot, isolating my model against the sky, so I used my rental car to get the necessary added height. Behind-the-scenes photo by Jenna Enns.

Even though the sun had started to go down a bit, the day was still bright, with the sun reflecting off the white sand. To kill the ambient light this time, I opted to close down my aperture ([Figure 21.7](#)), rather than use an ND filter as I did for Michaela’s session. I positioned Mariel perpendicular to the sun, using it as the main light, and added a flash fill to the shadow area of her face ([Figure 21.8](#)).



Figure 21.7 The lighting diagram. Instead of using an ND filter to kill the bright, ambient light, I opted to close down my aperture.



Figure 21.8 The raw file. I placed Mariel perpendicular to the main light (the sun) and used a flash fill to the shadow areas of her face.

Here comes the fun part: transporting my rental car to a post-apocalyptic scene, by way of Black and White mode in Lightroom. After you toggle an image to Black and White mode in Lightroom, the HSL panel reads Black & White Mix ([Figure 21.9](#)). You now can control the tones in the image almost as if you were shooting black-and-white film and using a colored filter on your lens, such as a red filter to darken blue skies. For example, lowering the Blue slider for Mariel's image made the blue sky read as black. The more I lowered the Orange slider, the muddier and dirtier her skin looked. And that was just while adjusting the image as it was shot. I next started sliding the White Balance sliders around; with the Blue slider at -100 , the sky went from black to white. After making a few dramatic changes to your image, it's fun to toggle back over to Color mode to see how crazy the white balance now looks.

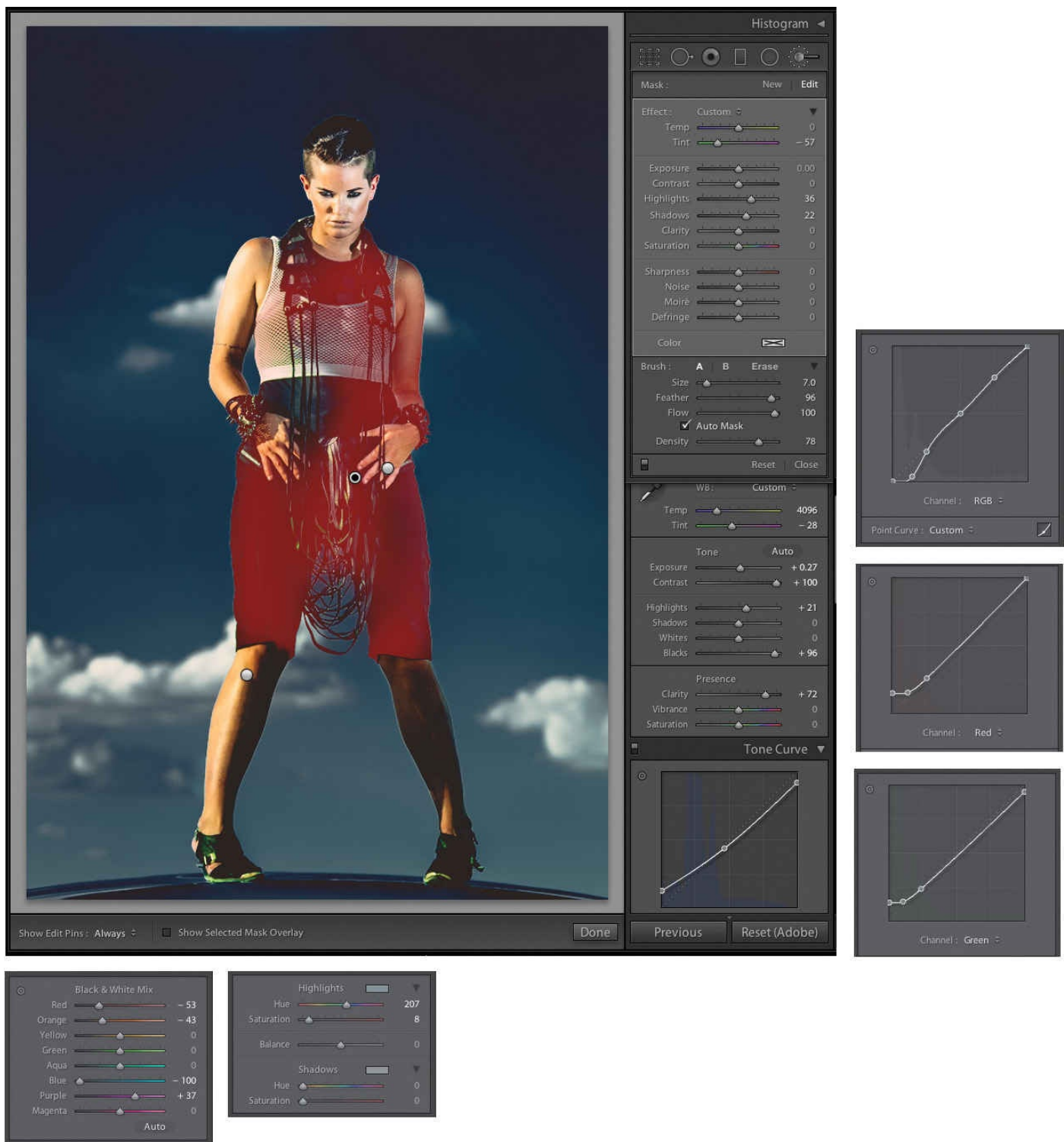


Figure 21.9 The Lightroom settings. Black and White mode offers an endless number of options as to how you can process the tones. The HSL panel now read Black & White Mix, and you can shift the different color channels to varying results.

To take the technique even further, you can even “paint” areas of your image by making a brush adjustment with a shifted white balance. For example, in [Figure 21.9](#), you can see that I made a brush adjustment with the White Balance Tint set to -57 , making the image more green. For whatever reason, green areas read as lighter when the image is toggled to Black and White mode. So, by painting darker areas green, I brought up the detail without having to crank up the Shadows or Exposure sliders, which can sometimes be destructive. Alternately, for parts of the blue sky that were less blue, causing them not to be fully black in Black and White mode, I simply made a brush adjustment with the white balance

shifted more blue and painted those spots into blackness.

Now Mariel was isolated against a brilliant, scorched-Earth sky, just like a *Mad Max* character should be. More importantly, now you know just how much control you can have over an image simply by tweaking the white balance. Try cranking two random color sliders to +100, lower two sliders to -100, and then slide the white balance back and forth to watch how the image changes. It's pretty fun stuff. You can see the final result in [Figure 21.10](#).



Figure 21.10 The final shot. Mariel is now isolated against a scorched-Earth sky, ready or her close-up.

22. Concrete Jungle

It was a dark and stormy night. Clichés aside, it actually was. And I was under a bridge in Long Island City with a couple of Bulgarian models, trying to stay dry. The shelter of the bridge was the best shoot location that we could come up with, given our limited options of their too-small apartment and the nasty weather.

Creating a Story

While quickly scouting locations, Kristian Vasilev and I had found the spot under a highway overpass, about a block from the apartment he shares with his fiancée, Valentina Dimitrova. The spot was dry, which was the most important issue, but it was still windy and lit with bright, sodium-vapor streetlights ([Figure 22.1](#)). We went back to the apartment to get Valentina and formulate a concept for the shoot. We decided to go with a story about a guy leaving a bar at night and seeing a knockout girl across the way. It was a simple idea, but one that gave the models direction for their acting, because that's what models are essentially: actors.



Figure 22.1 The setup. The dark, wet streets of New York City were the backdrop for my shoot with model Kristian Vasilev and his fiancée, Valentina Dimitrova.

While Valentina tried to keep warm, I started with Kristian. I set up my main light with a wide zoom and a moderate output of 1/8 ([Figure 22.2](#)). Getting a proper exposure was tricky in this scenario, because the lights under the bridge were so bright and so orange. I wanted to make sure to burn the orange-colored streetlights into the wet streets in the background, which meant I needed to have a lower flash output to allow for a brighter exposure. The ambient light couldn't be so bright that it overpowered my strobes,

however, because that would result in an orange-faced Kristian.

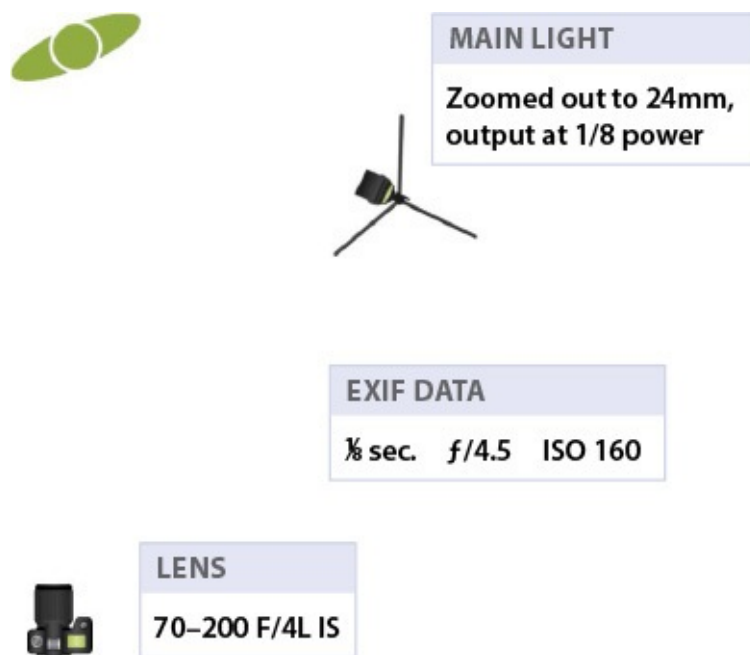


Figure 22.2 The lighting diagram. Note the low shutter speed, which allowed the orange ambient light to be properly exposed.

I kept the ISO low, so that the image didn't get too grainy, and I let the ambient light burn in through a low shutter speed of 1/8 of a second. This shutter speed is too slow to avoid camera shake, but I wasn't concerned. The strobe was the main light, and it would freeze Kristian in his tracks. I even pushed the shake a bit more by moving the camera around as I clicked the shutter. This gave the orange ambient light some nice motion blurring, adding an energy to the image ([Figure 22.3](#)). Because the raw image was already strong, it needed only a bit of color grading in Lightroom ([Figure 22.4](#)). You can see the results in [Figures 22.5](#) and [22.6](#).



Figure 22.3 The raw file. I used the slower shutter speed to my advantage, shaking the camera to get a nice motion blur with the orange ambient light.

Histogram

Mask: New Edit

Effect: Custom

Temp: 32
Tint: 0

Exposure: 0.91
Contrast: 0
Highlights: 0
Shadows: 0
Clarity: 0
Saturation: 0

Sharpness: 0
Noise: 0
Moiré: 0
Defringe: 0

Color

Reset Close

Basic

Treatment: Color Black & White

WB: Custom

Temp: 4863
Tint: -11

Tone: Auto

Exposure: +0.01
Contrast: +55

Highlights: 0
Shadows: +44
Whites: 0
Blacks: +72

Presence

Clarity: +54
Vibrance: 0
Saturation: 0

Tone Curve

Channel: RGB

Done Sync... Reset

Show Edit Pins: Always

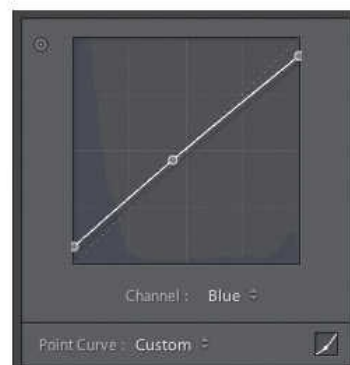
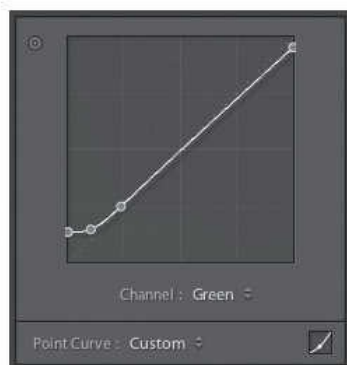
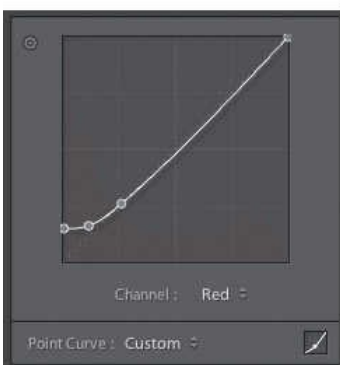


Figure 22.4 The Lightroom settings. The file looked pretty solid straight out of the camera, so all that I needed to do was a bit of minor color grading.



Figure 22.5 The final shot. Kristian's shot has warmth and energy—the opposite of the cold, dark underpass where we conducted the shoot.



Figure 22.6 Valentina played her role of the knockout girl well.

One Wall, Two Looks

After capturing the amber glow of the wet street, I wanted to capture a second scenario with a different look. Lucky for me, the wall behind us was a vibrant red metal door that covered a closed storefront. The door was composed of horizontal ridges that stuck out about 2 inches, meaning that depending on where I placed my light, the surface would read in very different ways. Unfortunately, it was not under the bridge, meaning Kristian and Valentina would get wet.

I started with Valentina, lighting her with a frontal light source. I kept the flash on the stand, still not using a modifier, and I raised it up to 8 feet and slightly to the right. This created hard shadows below her hat and jaw, which enhanced the already stark black lines of her jacket ([Figure 22.7](#)). This kind of stark direct light is synonymous in fashion photography (think ring flash), so it fit Valentina well. For Kristian's set in front of the wall, I created more of a mysterious environment. I didn't need to change the height or quality of the light, just the angle ([Figure 22.8](#)). When placed flash close to the wall and angled parallel to it, the flash became almost a spotlight ([Figure 22.9](#)).



Figure 22.7 I used direct light with Valentina, which had more of a fashion vibe to it.



Figure 22.8 The setup. When lighting Kristian, I opted to use a more angular sidelight, which created a mysterious mood to the scene.

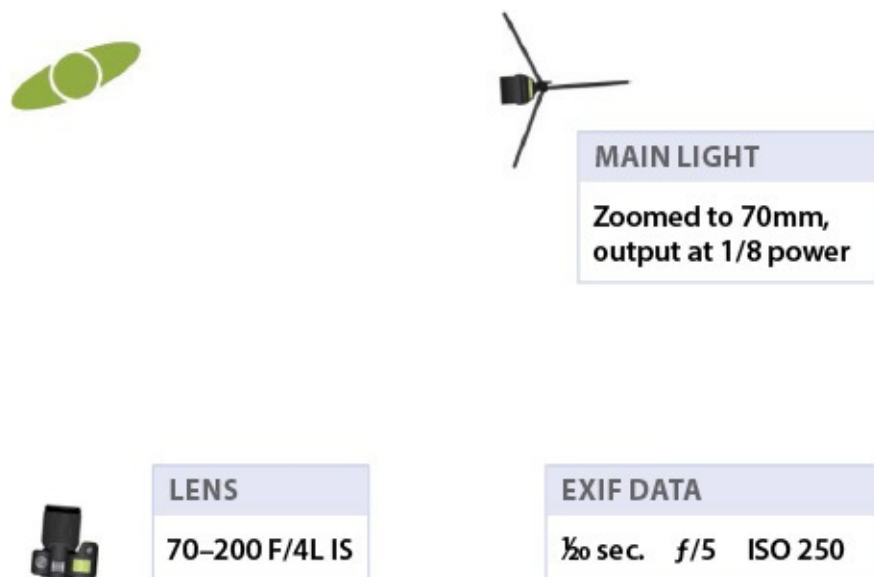


Figure 22.9 The lighting diagram. The light settings were the same for both Valentina's and Kristian's shots. The only difference was that I moved the light to the side for Kristian.

The angular sidelight not only highlighted Kristian's flawless bone structure (I'm not jealous, really), but it also created a totally different look on the red background ([Figure 22.10](#)). The reds appeared deeper and the black lines were thicker. And because I backed up more for this shot, the light falloff further added to the dark vibe. Had I backed off in Valentina's shot, the visible light falloff would have detracted from the stark fashion vibe.



Figure 22.10 The raw file. This angular sidelight was much better suited for Kristian's shots.

Because these images were from the same shoot as the previous scenario and used very similar settings, the Lightroom adjustments were also pretty much the same. I did some minor Curves adjustments to color grade the image as well as boosted the clarity a bit ([Figure 22.11](#)).

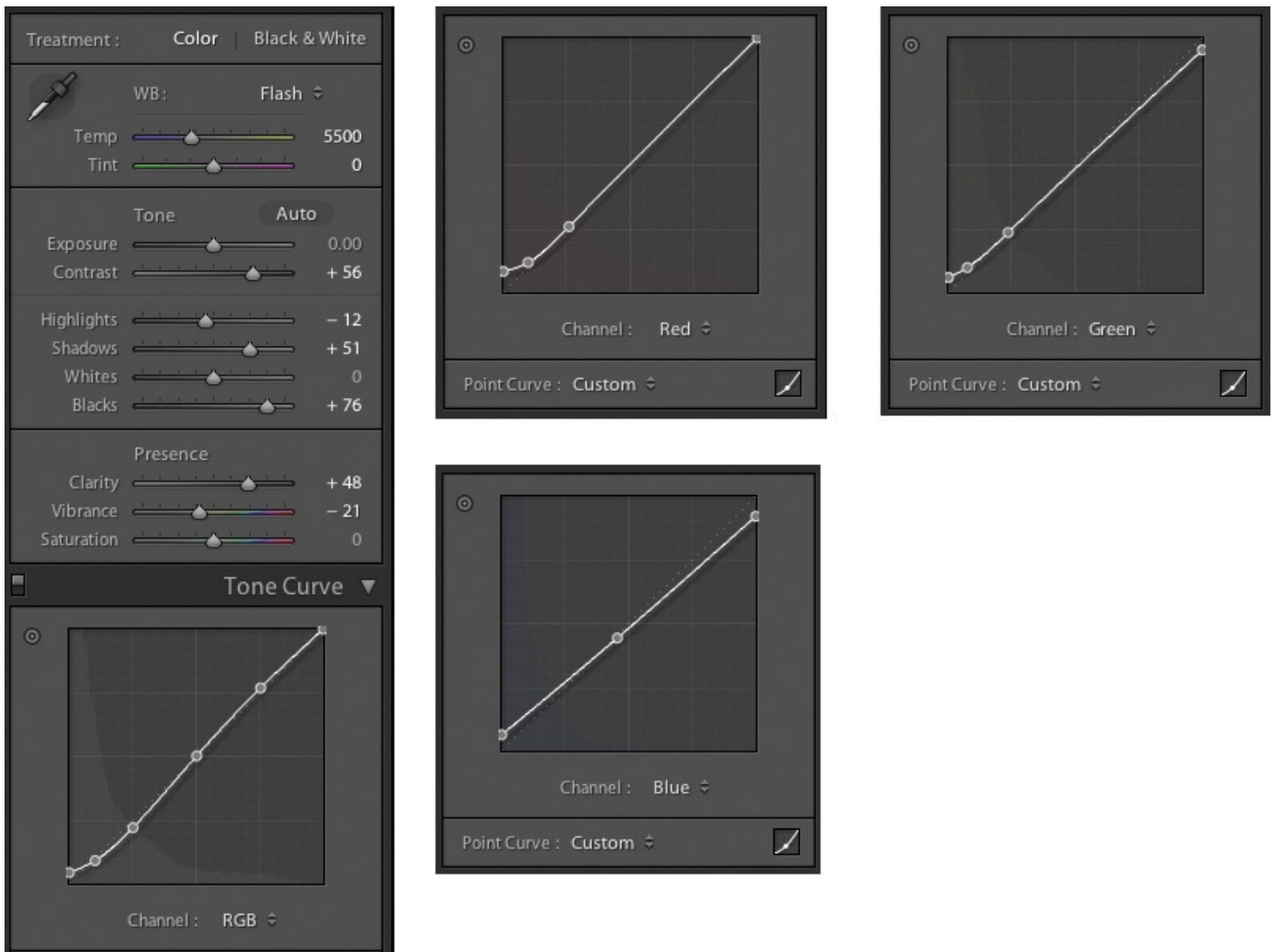


Figure 22.11 The Lightroom settings. Because these images were from the same shoot as the previous scenario and the camera settings hadn't changed, the Lightroom settings were also nearly identical—just a bit of color grading and added clarity.

If you only remember one thing, let it be this: You can literally change the way a person or a scene looks just by changing the direction of the light. This one wall passed as two different environments, all because I switched the angle of my flash. This amount of versatility is vital when all you have to work with is the underpass of a bridge on a cold, wet night ([Figure 22.12](#)).



Figure 22.12 The final shot. Kristian is looking nice and mysterious (and wet), thanks to the hard sidelight.

Pro-Tip: Scout Locations from Your Computer

Location scouting is just one more facet of the photographic process that takes time and money to accomplish. It can get especially difficult if you are planning an out-of-town shoot. You could arrive at the shoot location a day early to check out your options, but time and budget don't always allow for that. Lucky for us, Google can come to the rescue, as it did for my shoot with the Japanese metal band Boris.

I was offered the opportunity to take a portrait of Boris, before its show at The Grog Shop in Cleveland, Ohio. The band normally doesn't agree to portraits, so I knew I would need to be quick and efficient. I hadn't been to the venue in a very long time, so I needed to get a view of the location ahead of time to create a plan of action and bring the right gear. Unfortunately, Cleveland is a couple hours away by car, and my schedule wouldn't allow for multiple trips.

When I looked up The Grog Shop on Google Maps, I noticed the See Inside option ([Figure 22.13](#)), which enables you to view the interiors of many venues and public spaces. Although this isn't a new feature, I'd not thought to use it for location scouting before. Between See Inside and Google Maps' Satellite view, I discovered there were no good locations within a 10-minute drive of the venue. I would need to shoot inside The Grog Shop. Quickly, I digitally navigated the space to find [Figure 22.14](#)'s perfect little corner; the fantastic red curtain would make a great backdrop, and it was out of the way of the stage and the other bands that would be sound checking there.

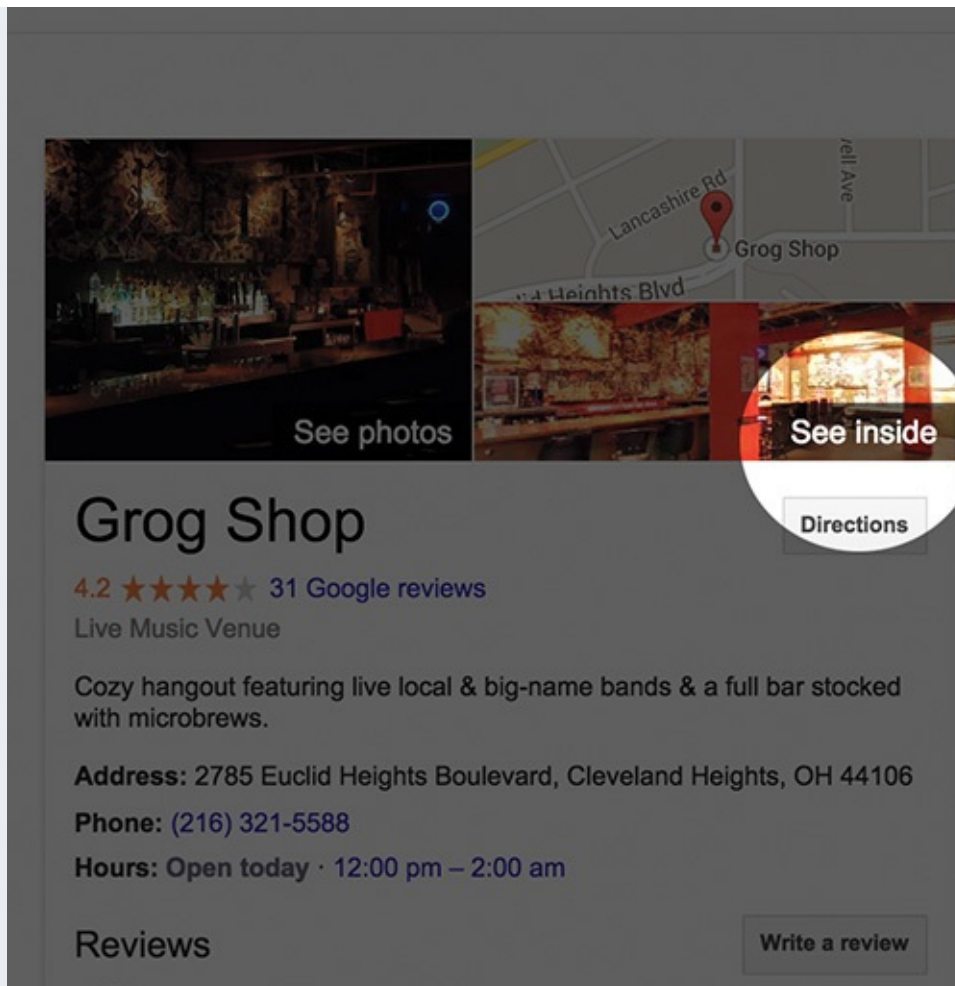


Figure 22.13 A great tool for location scouting, the See Inside feature on Google Maps enables you to see inside many venues and public spaces.

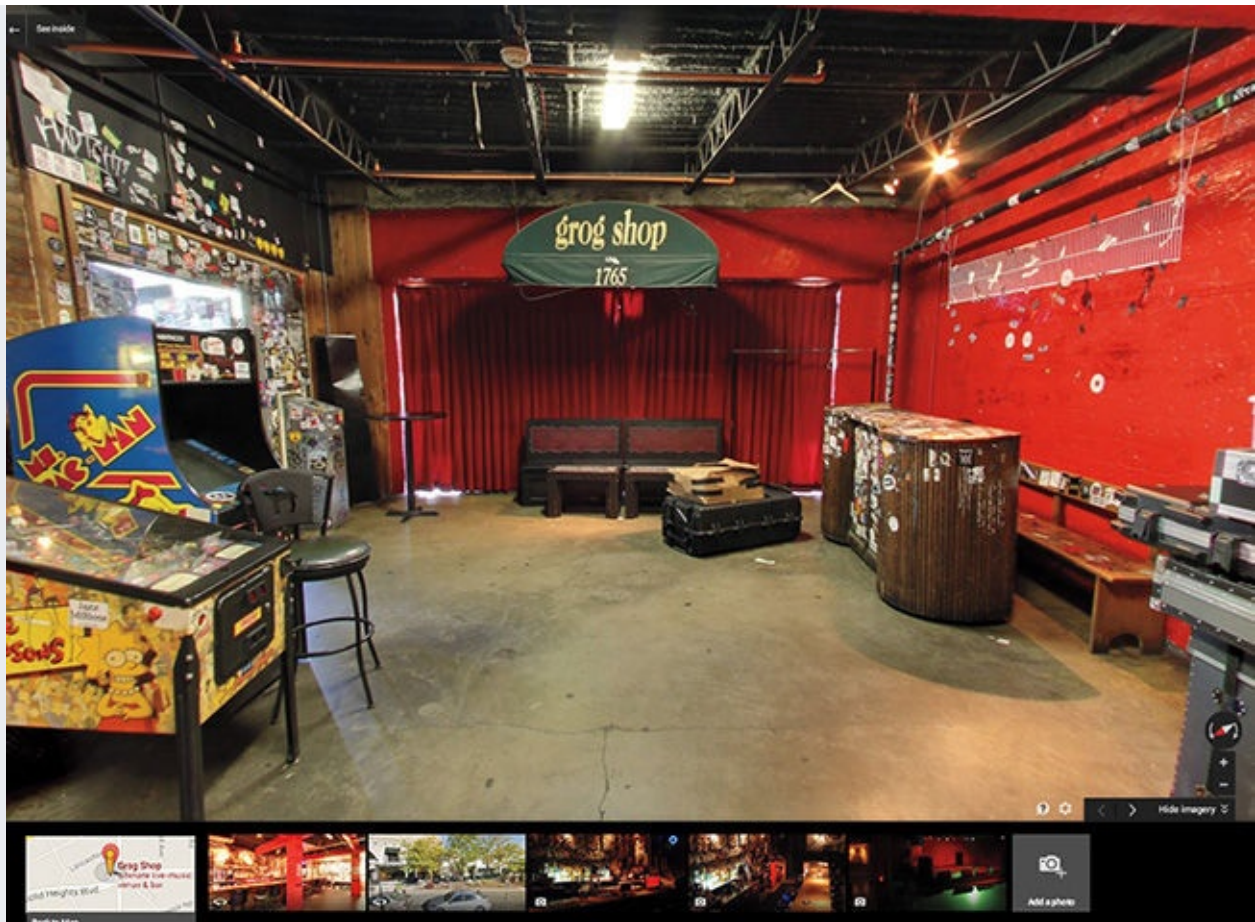


Figure 22.14 This open space in front of the red curtain would make a great spot for the shoot.

The day of the shoot came, and I headed up to Cleveland. I arrived at the venue just 10 minutes before our shoot time (not recommended). Normally, I prefer to have a solid hour to prep for a portrait, but having the scouting already done meant I was prepared. I walked in the side door, straight to the spot in front of the red curtain. It looked exactly like it did online, save for some extra benches that were easily moved. Within 10 minutes, a spot was cleared, lit, and ready to go. I had Boris for a total of 11 minutes, which proved to be more than enough time to get the shot ([Figure 22.15](#)).



Figure 22.15 The final shot. The band, Boris, looks badass in front of the red curtain.

23. Parking Garages

Parking garages may be one of the most overlooked resources for photographers shooting in the city. They are tall, which means no distracting trees or power lines in the background. They are free to use, as long as you aren't parking there, and they provide you with an up-close and personal view of nearby buildings, which is my favorite aspect ([Figure 23.1](#)).



Figure 23.1 Downtown parking garages are probably one of the most overlooked resources for the urban photographer. No matter which of your city's garages you choose, you will almost certainly be afforded a fantastic view of the surrounding buildings. This image was shot on top of a garage on the east side of downtown Columbus, Ohio.

If your city is anything like mine, it has more than a few garages located throughout the downtown area. Depending on which garage (and which side of it) you choose, you can get a number of varying views, as seen in [Figures 23.2](#) and [23.3](#).



Figure 23.2 This image was shot on top of a garage on the south side of downtown Columbus.



Figure 23.3 Garages provide more views than just adjacent buildings. I used the height of this garage on the west side of Columbus to capture the vacant weekend streets and set the mood in this wedding portrait.

A GQ View

I first discovered parking garages as a resource during my time as the lifestyle photographer for JackThreads. My days were hectic, often I was shooting and editing anywhere from 8 to 15 brands every day. Needless to say, I had little to no time to plan my shoot locations ahead of time. Instead, I packed my car with gear, two to four models, and several outfits to photograph, and then drove around looking for spots that I hadn't shot in recently. It was a bonus if I could make one location pass as several different spots, because no two brands could be photographed the same way. Parking garages helped immensely with this task: Depending on the direction I faced, I could get two to three different-looking backgrounds from one location.

In [Figure 23.4](#), you can see one of these older scenarios that I shot while at JackThreads. I was shooting Andrew Marc apparel, a dressier clothing label, so conceptually I was thinking downtown, businessman, *GQ*, and so on. This was back in 2011, before I had discovered the wonders of using a variable ND filter to dial down the ambient light in order to light my subject and keep a wide aperture.



Figure 23.4 The setup. The combination of high elevation and low walls makes parking garages a fantastic location to use a city as your backdrop. Behind-the-scenes photo by Andy Newman.

Because I was using high-speed sync (HSS) instead, I needed four lights ganged up on one light stand to get a decent light output at 1/2000 of a second, ([Figure 23.5](#)). I don't miss those days—or the amount of batteries that were required to pull it off—but shooting at a low angle, combined with a shallow depth of field, created a clean, urban backdrop that was perfect for the brand ([Figure 23.6](#)).

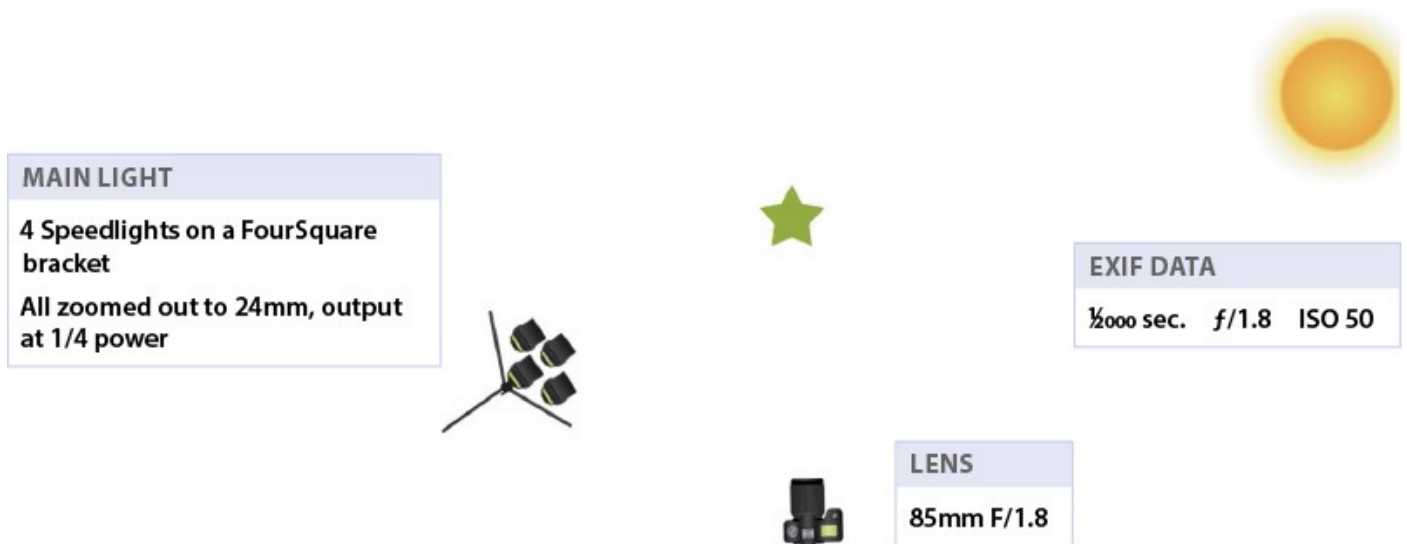


Figure 23.5 The lighting diagram. This was shot in 2011, before I learned about the wonders of ND filters, so I used four Nikon Speedlights and high-speed sync to kill the ambient light.



Figure 23.6 The final shot. A dramatic urban backdrop was perfect for the Andrew Marc brand.

Always the Sun

If you shoot on the roof of a parking garage often enough, you'll eventually be faced with lighting in bright sunlight. The sun is such a powerful light source, that you're better off treating it as an ally than as an enemy you must overpower. Sometimes you may find it makes the most sense to use the sun as a fill or even as your main light, positioning your subject accordingly and adding flashes as needed, to fill in the shadow areas.

For [Figure 23.7](#), I perched model Destiny Strudwick on a parking divider, which was much safer than having her sit on the edge of the garage wall. Not only did this position add enough height for an obstruction-free view of the horizon, but it also enabled me to use the late afternoon sun as a fantastic accent light. Positioned perpendicularly to the sun, Destiny's face went to shadow while her torso was lit by the sun. All I had left to do was add a flash to the shadow area, creating a balance between strobe and available light ([Figure 23.8](#)).



Figure 23.7 The setup. I asked my model to perch up on a parking divider to get a clear view of the sky in the background.

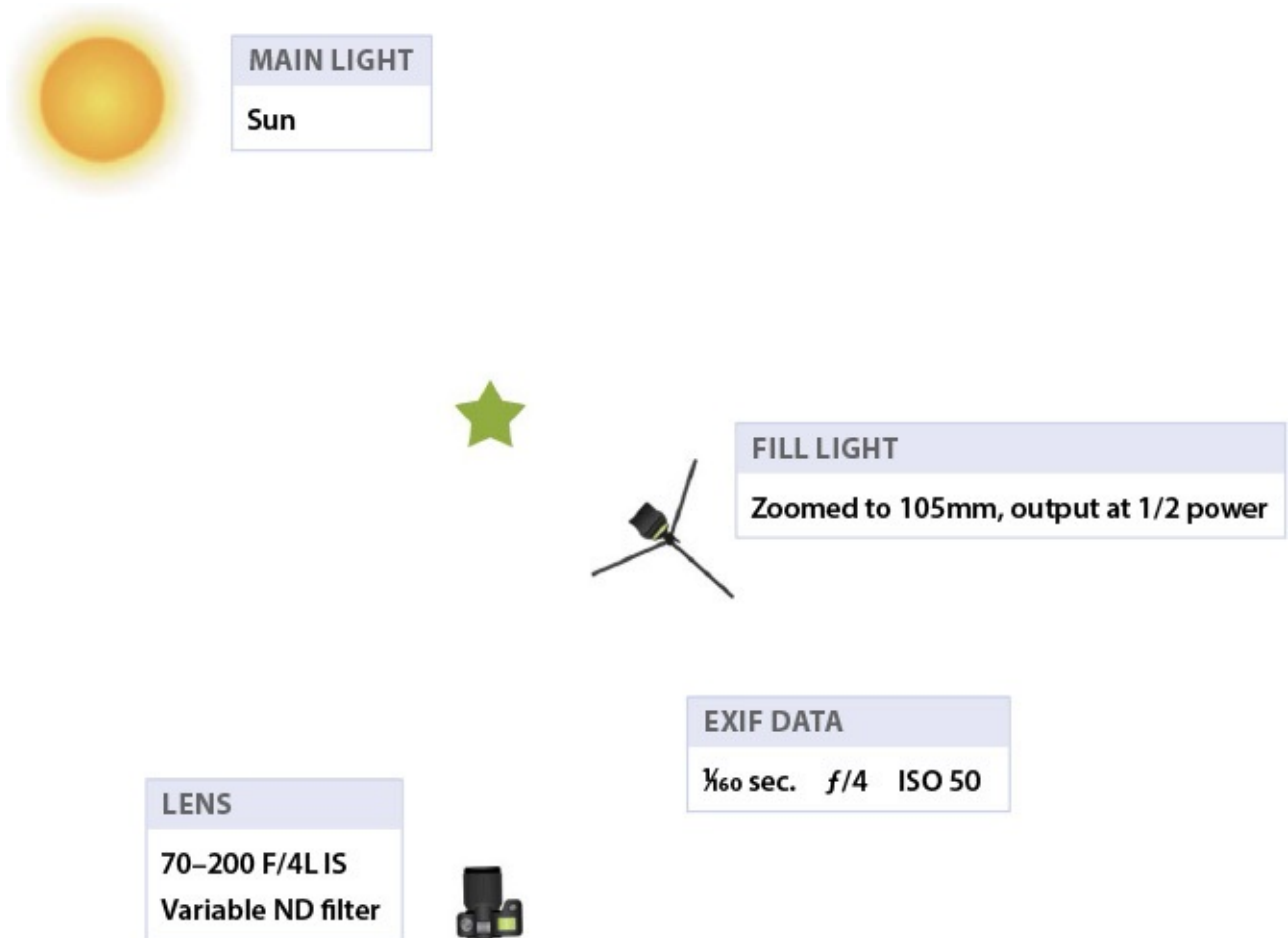


Figure 23.8 The lighting diagram. By positioning Destiny facing slightly away from the sun, her face went to shadow while the sun lit her torso, therefore acting as an accent light. I then placed my flash in the shadow areas of her face to create balanced light.

Hard light is often viewed as unforgiving and thus, not ideal for portraiture. When you balance that hard light with your ambient light and use a soft depth of field, the hardness is much more acceptable, as you can see in [Figure 23.9](#). The weather was a bit chilly the day of the shoot, so her nose had a slight redness to it in the raw file, and her skin had a slight shine. Both issues were minor and would be easily fixed in Lightroom ([Figure 23.10](#)).



Figure 23.9 The raw file. When I balanced my flash with the ambient light and used a soft depth of field, the hard light looked great on Destiny.

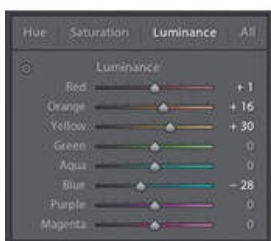
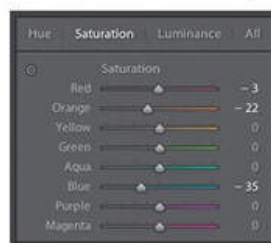


Figure 23.10 The Lightroom settings. I softened the redness and the glare on Destiny's skin by making a brush adjustment, shifting the white balance, and lowering the Clarity slider.

Note

For more advice on taming hard light, see “[Pro-Tip: Balance Hard Light Without Using Modifiers](#),” in [Chapter 17](#).

By making a brush adjustment, lowering the clarity, and raising the Brightness and Shadow sliders, as well as shifting the white balance to a slightly blue-green color, I was able to soften Destiny’s skin and remove the redness. Next, I made a global adjustment, raising the Orange and Yellow Luminance sliders, allowing her skin tones to open up. Then I slightly desaturated the Orange Saturation slider and shifted the Green and Yellow Hue sliders to get the overall colors looking good. Finally, I added a Split-Tone adjustment, adding a warm tone to the Highlights slider and a cool tone to the Shadows slider to round out the color grading ([Figure 23.11](#)).



Figure 23.11 The final shot. Destiny is sitting pretty at the top of the world.

Often the best resources are right in front of us. Whether it's the top of a parking garage, the roof of your car, or just the shade of a building, once you have the tools and the know-how to manipulate your environment, your options of where to shoot are limitless.

Quiz 6: Deconstruct the Lighting

Test your deconstructing abilities by identifying the light source(s) in [Figure Q6](#), then flip to the answer key at the back of the book to see how close you were. Remember to look at the size, hardness, and direction of the light. Good luck!



Epilogue: What's Next?

Who am I? This is a question that I ask myself all the time. What kind of photography do I do? Because I am inspired by so many different photographers across multiple genres (fashion, portrait, photojournalist, product, commercial), it can be hard for me to remember that I can't be all things to all clients. For the sake of time, I've had to learn to narrow down the types of photography that I will pursue. It takes a considerable amount of time and energy to pursue new clients, to test the waters of a different area of photography.

Now that you are a master of light, slave to no environment, what are the next moves that you'll make? Who are *you*? Is there a new market that *you* want to try out?

Testing New Waters

When considering a move to a new market, assess your local competition. Take special note of the sort of images you need in order to be a viable contender in this new market. Is your portfolio lacking in any key areas? If so, plan shoots to round out your portfolio with these new types of images. But that's just the start and, in some ways, the easy part.

Let's say that you've been photographing weddings and families primarily, but now you want to break into the commercial market. It will take a lot of time and hard work. To start, there's a whole other language to the commercial world, plus the shooting process is different. In all likelihood, you will be working with a creative director before you ever even talk to the client. You also won't get paid in advance. In fact, I typically have to wait 30 to 60 days after I shoot a job to receive payment. You'll probably need to know how to shoot with your camera tethered to a computer. You'll need to learn how to put together a quote, including usage fees, as well as to assemble a team, including a hairstylist, makeup artist, and stylist. You'll want a separate website for your non-wedding photography with effective SEO (search engine optimization; more on this later) so that new clients can find you and your work. Of course, that non-wedding site will also need a decent commercial portfolio to entice creative directors, which means doing unpaid test shoots to build up your non-wedding portfolio ([Figure E.1](#)).



Figure E.1 I took this image while doing a test shoot with a new model. In other words, it was an unpaid shoot, done to update my site with new images.

It's a lot to think about, but you can find help out there. For example, aPhotoEditor (www.aphotoeditor.com) and *Photo District News* (www.pdnonline.com) are fantastic resources for learning much about the commercial photography world. Both often conduct interviews with art buyers and directors and even sometimes post redacted quotes so you can see how photographers itemize their costs or bill for usage.

Beyond choosing what areas of photography you are going to pursue (and researching the process and lingo), you need to consider how you're projecting yourself to the world. If new visitors were to come to your website or blog, what would they see? Would they see a random smattering of subjects, styles, and executions? Or, would they see a focused, signature style in the way you compose, light, and edit your images? Take photographer Nadav Kander, for example. He's a portrait and commercial photographer based in London, England. Not only is he one of my favorite photographers, his portraits are also some of the most easily recognizable because of his unique lighting and processing. The same applies to Neil Krug, Martin Schoeller, and Dan Winters, some of my other favorite photographers.

Edit Yourself

Determining which markets you want to focus on and developing a signature style to your work may help you answer "Who am I," but that's only your first step. You also need to factor these elements into the types of clients you take, the kind of unpaid work you shoot for leisure or for your portfolio, and which images you show to the world, via social media and your website. For example, suppose you have the opportunity to shoot for a shoe company or a hair salon or your kid's soccer team. The money is right (as in, you're hard up for cash and it pays the same day), so you take the gig.

Just because you executed it well, however, don't automatically post the images on your website or blog. Ask yourself whether the images fit in with your other work or an area of photography you want to delve into regularly. If they do, post. If they don't, then it's okay not to include them ([Figure E.2](#)). Taking the job doesn't make you a sellout, but including the images in your portfolio may send potential clients conflicting signals about the work that's most important to you. You know you took the shoot to cover the brake job on your car, but those fashion magazine editors you're targeting may be left wondering: "Who is this guy?" when they see Suzy's game-winning goal featured on your site next to Dan Winters-inspired portraits.



Figure E.2 This is from a shoot I did for a well-paying, super-kind client. Because it's not the type of work that I want to pursue, however, I didn't post any of the images.

Let's say, for example, that you are trying to transition to the world of fashion photography. You aren't going to start landing gigs with agencies and magazines just because you updated your bio to list yourself as a fashion photographer. You need images—great images at that—in your portfolio to show magazine editors or modeling agencies. This means that you will need to shoot these in your own time, and possibly, for little or no money. And once you get those shoots under your belt, pick a select *few* images (read: less than 10) to put on your blog and/or social media, and then pick a *single* image from the each shoot to put on your website ([Figure E.3](#)). If clients go to your site and see multiple images that are obviously from the same shoot, they may assume that you aren't very experienced in the area of fashion photography and have done only a couple of shoots. You also want to make sure to shoot in a variety of settings, using a variety of different models while showcasing a variety of techniques. Choose carefully, because those unpaid shots you post could turn into paying jobs ([Figure E.4](#)).



Figure E.3 Although I shot several hundred images on this unpaid test shoot, I blogged only these three images (one from each scenario) and posted just one of them to my portfolio website.



Figure E.4 After seeing one of my unpaid photo shoots—[Figure E.1](#), actually—the Charles Penzone Salons hired me over another photographer for this shoot.

This process of focusing your photography path and carving out your signature look is not a quick one. It's been almost 10 years since I graduated from college with a fine art photography degree, and only within the last three to four years have I been able to start to narrow down what makes up my signature look, or figure out the type of work I want to pursue. I can't be all things to all clients. Nor do I want to be. The thought of conforming each photo shoot I do to the whims of a client's mood is exhausting. Instead, now that I know who I am and what my style is, I can be confident that people are approaching me to shoot a job because they want *me* specifically. Another way to ensure that you are being chosen for your style is that your prices are competitive with other photographers in the market. If they are, then the client likely isn't choosing you simply because you're the most affordable.

Now that I have a tightly edited portfolio, full of images that show a range of the work that I am willing and able to do, I can more easily say "no" to a job if it doesn't fit in with my vision for my *brand*. Meanwhile, I'll stick to the kind of work that I'm passionate about.

Building Your SEO

If you are like me, the phrase “*search engine optimization*” (*SEO* for short) brings a shudder to your bones. If you are a photographer with a website, you have no doubt received countless emails from sites offering to optimize your site for a fee. But, guess what: You can do some things for free or next to nothing that can help push your photography website to page 1 of organic Google searches, at least they helped me push mine there.

Although SEO is a very controversial topic, everyone can agree that the best thing you can do for your site is to post regular, original content. The next step would be to point traffic to your site from good sources, such as industry blogs. This isn't the be-all and end-all, though; I already had more than 600 external sites linking back to me (I was able to check this by using Google Webmaster Tools), but none of them really helped me, because my site was severely lacking in keywords, metadata, page headings, and alt tags on images. So, my 10- year-old, non-Flash website was showing up on only page 4 on some keyword searches and as deep as 7 or 8 on others. Clearly, it was time for me to optimize.

Keep in mind that while optimizing your site will absolutely help you rise in organic searches, the pace at which it rises will be determined by several factors, including the age of your site. The steps that I recommend and that worked for my site are:

1. Get SEOquake for your browser.
2. Optimize your website.
3. Identify your desired keywords.
4. Build external links to your site.

You like your site, but do search engines? To find out, download SEOquake ([Figure E.5](#)), a free plug-in for Chrome and Mozilla that enables you to see websites the way search engines see them. With this tool, you can also browse what keywords and descriptions your top-ranking competitors are using. This information can be important, because search engines like alt tags on images, meta keywords, and short, succinct descriptions.

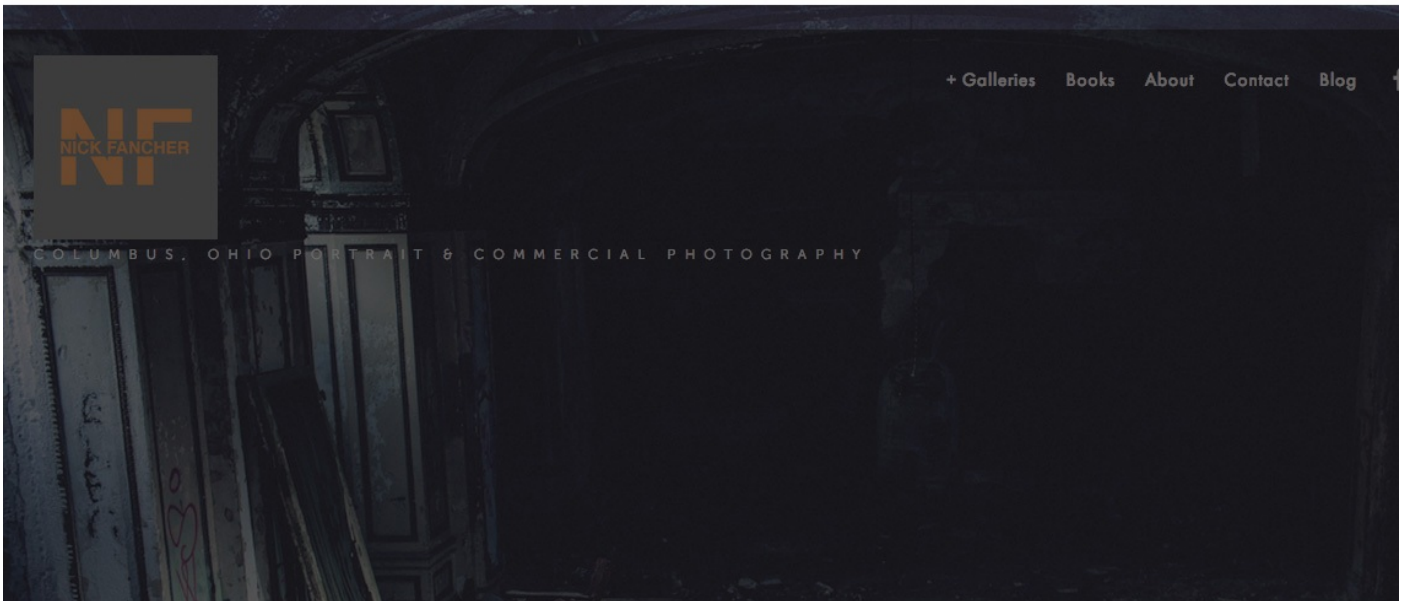


Figure E.5 Adding the SEOquake plug-in to Google Chrome let me see my website the way a search engine sees it.

SEOquake’s Page Info tab shows the age of your site as well as how it ranks throughout the country and world (**Figure E.6**), while the Keyword Density tab shows you the words most commonly found on your website. For example, the most used word on my website—combining headings, metadata, and keywords—is *galleries*, followed by *nick*, and then *apparel*. Not to mention, there are several big keywords that are altogether absent, such as *photography*, *ecommerce*, and *fashion*. Ideally, the most commonly used words would be something like *photography*, *photographer*, *Columbus*, and *Ohio*, so I still need to tweak my site a bit. The Analysis tab gives you an overall summary for how your page tests according to search engine standards, and you can click the Show Advice button for improvement suggestions.

SEOquake Page Info

Page Info: [Print](#)

URL: <http://nickfancher.com/>

Title: Nick Fancher | Columbus, Ohio Portrait Photographer

Meta keywords: columbus, ohio, photographer, apparel, photojournalist, commercial, photographers, fashion, eCommerce

Meta description: Nick Fancher is a Columbus, Ohio based portrait photographer that specializes in commercial, eCommerce, apparel and product photography

Internal links: 10 (0 nofollow)

External links: 7 (0 nofollow)

Server: Unknown

Parameters:

Page:
[PR: 3](#) [Cached: n/a](#) [Tw: 22](#) [F: 93](#) [+1: 106](#)

Domain:
[I: 1,380](#) [I: 68](#) [Dir: n/a](#) [Rank: 2548980](#) [Age: February 9, 2010](#) [whois](#) [Rank: 2914592](#) [Traffic: 38](#) [Costs: 109](#) [C: n/a](#)

Backlinks:
[L: 5](#) [L: 526](#) [LD: 583](#) [LD2: 1484](#)

Others:
[I: n/a](#) [Dir: n/a](#) [I: n/a](#) [source](#) [CY: 0](#) [I: n/a](#) [YCat: 0](#) [I: n/a](#) [L: n/a](#)

Figure E.6 Your page analysis shows the age of your site as well as how it ranks in your country and throughout the world.

After you pinpoint the areas of your site that need attention, optimize them. I am by no

means a tech guy, but I was still able to do some of the optimizing myself. I have a Squarespace website, which has clearly labeled sections for metadata, a site description, header titles, and code embedding. What Squarespace doesn't offer is the ability to enter alt tags for images. So I had to cheat a bit. I pasted some alt tags in the coding (even though they don't relate to any particular image on my website) in order to satisfy this area of my optimization. WordPress does, however, have a spot for alt tags for images. If you are completely lacking in the technical arena, find someone who knows coding and ask them to help optimize your site according to the SEOquake summary. I paid a guy \$100 to do this for all three of my websites; he was done in an hour.

Although Google AdWords charges a premium for you to advertise, its tools are free to use—and they are some powerful tools ([Figure E.7](#)). Once you create an AdWords account, you can use the Find Keyword tool to discover which local and national keyword combinations are the most popular. It will even tell you how strong the competition is for certain phrases. If your site is a newer one, it may take longer to climb in ranking under certain phrases. It is good to identify keyword combinations that are less competitive, but still relevant to your style of photography. It is extremely important to consider what types of visitors certain keywords bring you. For example, even if your website were to show up as a top-ranking entry with the broad search of *photographers*, you would almost certainly find that paying clients were not using those search terms. My potential clients, for example, would be more likely to use a search like *Columbus, Ohio photographers* or *portrait studio Columbus, Ohio*. More specific variations, like these, are the search terms where you want top listing.

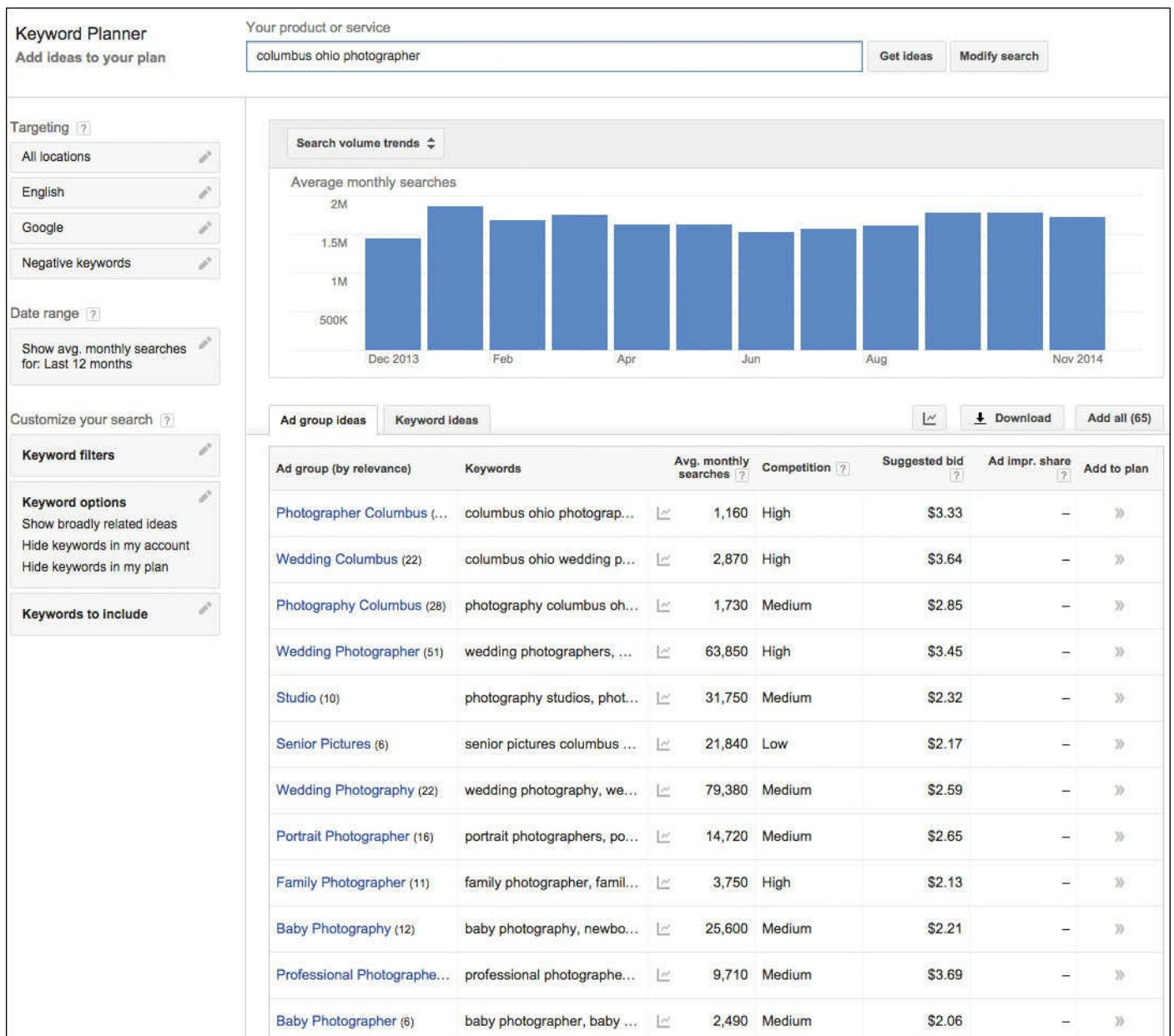


Figure E.7 Google AdWords is a great tool to check out the most commonly used keyword strings.

Now that you have determined what keyword phrases you want to conquer, you need search engines to see these words from multiple sources, in association with your site. This means link building. If you are already a web-savvy photographer, you may have a number of industry blogs or businesses linking to your site. That's great. It's even better if their link includes some of your desired keywords, as in *Columbus, Ohio Photographer Nick Fancher*. But even if you don't have many external sites linking to you, all is not lost. You can start creating some when you post work on your blog, forums, or social media. If the site includes a spot to add tags or keyword phrases to your post, be sure to include your desired words and phrases with the your URL.

Another good idea is to make sure that you are taking advantage of the free Google-run platforms out there, such as Google+, which recently merged with Google Places. With a free Google+ account, you can post portfolio images, list your business hours, and have clients review you. All of this works hand in hand with Google recognizing your URL as a content-rich site, thus giving you a better page rank.

After all this work and even more patience, my page is on page 1 for several keyword strings, and page 2 or 3 for the rest. Go ahead and look me up.

Pro-Tip: Using What You Have

Several years ago I had a studio for 6 months. It was nice to have a space that I knew was always there, waiting for me to shoot in, should the need arise. The problem was that most of my shoots took place outdoors or on location. When my trial lease period was over, I couldn't rationalize staying on at the monthly rental rate. What didn't occur to me at the time was that I had a perfectly good, albeit small, basement at my disposal. Due to the low ceiling (80 inches), the narrow shoot area (10 by 20 feet), and the generally dark ambience of an unfinished basement, the thought of shooting down there had never crossed my mind. It wasn't until I moved out of my studio and no longer had a place to store my gear that I even ventured down with my equipment.

The setup began simply enough, with me doing little more than editing at a table down there. Over the months that followed, I did the occasional head shot or product shoot, quickly realizing that I didn't need as much space as I originally thought I did. Sometimes a problem would arise, like when I needed to shoot a full-body portrait of a guy who was over 6 feet tall. I began modifying the space accordingly, such as adding white panels to the overhead joists to reflect light. I was learning to use what I had.

I wanted a white seamless setup, but the backdrop stand legs were too wide to allow for the 8-foot white vinyl roll. Instead, I discovered that I could run a rod from the top of the air-conditioning duct to a C-stand and just barely fit it in the space, where I could pull the sweep out to the edge of my desk. This allowed a depth just long enough to light the subject and background separately, which meant I could accomplish a pure white background ([Figure E.8](#)). If the space was any shallower, the subject would be stepping into the backdrop light, blowing them out with the light.



Figure E.8 My two-light basement setup makes the most out of a small space.

The other issue with a small shoot space is that you don't have the space to back your lights off of your subject. As you may know, if you want soft light on your subject, you need to make your light source large and diffused or indirect. The problem was that if I added even a small umbrella to my strobe stand, it meant that I'd have to lower the light the length of the radius of the umbrella, leaving my light at a max height of around 5 feet (too low). The narrow width of the shoot space also meant that I couldn't simply hang up a white sheet and shoot through it, which is a common workaround in making a small light source larger.

What I eventually figured out as a solution was to place a 40x60-inch white board on my desk, beside where the subject usually stands, and shoot light into the board, several feet in front of the subject ([Figure E.9](#)).



Figure E.9 I shoot into this 40x60-inch white board to create a large, soft light source.

By securing a credit card, or something of a similar size and opaqueness, to the side of the strobe and zooming in the flash to 105mm, I was able to get my light stand out of my view of the subject as well as create a large, reflected light surface that could run all the way up to the ceiling ([Figure E.10](#)). This large light source was fantastic in creating a giant catchlight in the subject's eyes, sunglasses, or any reflective surface. I also added a small white V-flat to hide the background light, which served to reflect some of the light onto the opposite white wall, as well, and helped to further light the subject ([Figure E.11](#)).



Figure E.10 A credit card makes a great flag to prevent harsh, direct light from spilling onto the subject.



Figure E.11 A small V-flat placed in front of the background light helps to keep light from spilling onto the subject or creating lens flares.

The setup isn't ideal, however. Because the space is so tight, the subject is pretty much fixed in one spot. If she were to move forward at all, the cross light would create odd shadows on her face, or if she moved backward, she would get caught in the harsh background light. But it's great for test shoots, like [Figure E.12](#), because it's not only conveniently located inside my home, but it's also a lot more affordable than renting out a studio out for what is essentially an unpaid shoot. All this to say that before you commit to a studio lease, consider what you already have available around you. If you're anything like me, most shoots don't require the use

of a larger studio space. When a shoot comes along that requires one, rent it for just one day and bill the fee to the client.



Figure E.12 The final image. The model is completely isolated on a white background.

Quiz Answer Key



Figure Q1 How close did you get? As you can see in the behind-the-scenes photo, I used one light, softened with an umbrella, and a reflector below the subject to fill in the shadow. The telltale indicator in deciphering the lighting setup are the two shapes in the subject's eyes. Note how the right side of the subject goes into shadow. If there had been a second light, either to the right of the subject or overhead as a hair light, there would be a separation between the subject and the black backdrop.



Figure Q2 Did you guess it? From the final shot, a good guess would've been a strip light, due to the catchlight in her eyes. The large, even, and frontal light source, however, is synonymous with the garage setup, as discussed in [Chapter 7](#).



Figure Q3 I'd be thoroughly impressed if you guessed this. It was kind of a trick. But I wanted to include this to show that there are a number of ways to get the look of two light sources, such as this one light and reflector setup.



Figure Q4 Because of the high angle of my light, it gave my subject raccoon eyes and has the appearance of hard light. So you may have been surprised to see that an umbrella was used. One way to tell that the light source was larger was that the light illuminated both the subject and the backdrop the same, indicating a single, large source.



Figure Q5 You may have guessed this one, because it was similar (with the same model, too) to the Pro-Tip in [Chapter 17](#). The light spread illuminates the model's entire body, which would normally indicate a larger, and thus softer, light source. But the telltale is in the shadows under her jaw. Hard light.



Figure Q6 The sun was the main light with an accent flash on the right. But you already guessed it, right? By golly, you're good.

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