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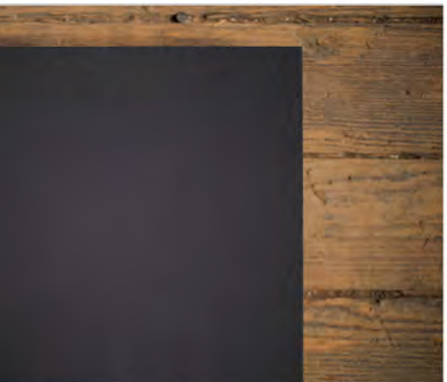
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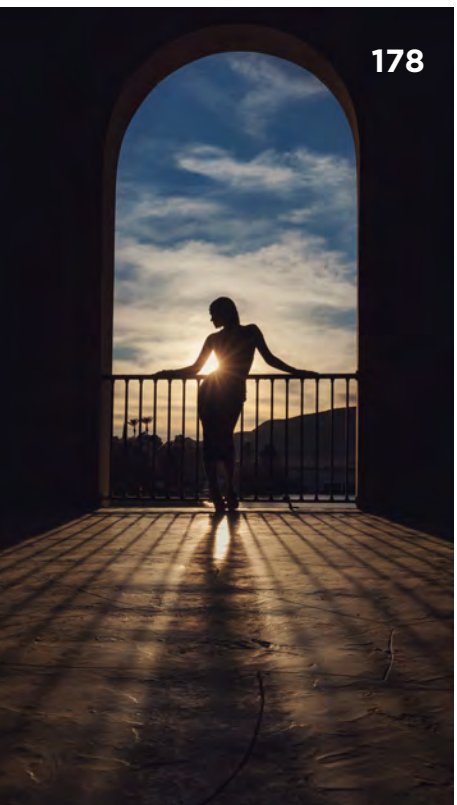
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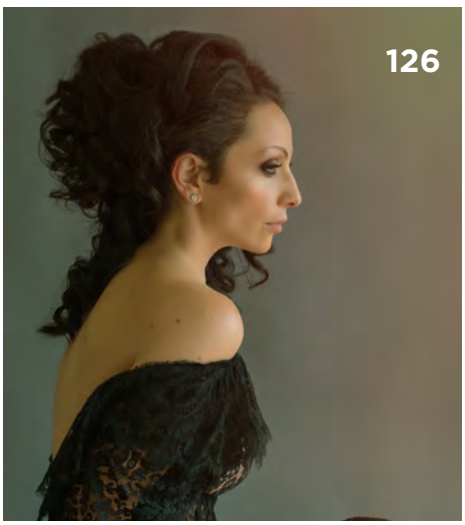

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shutter magazine

MISSION **STATEMENT**

Shutter Magazine's focus is on photography education. Our goal is to provide current, insightful and in-depth educational content for today's professional wedding and portrait photographer. *Shutter* uses the latest technologies to deliver information in a way that is relevant to our audience. Our experienced contributors help us create a sense of community, and have established the magazine as one of the leading photography publications in the world.

Shutter Magazine: By photographers, for photographers.

PUBLISHER
Sal Cincotta

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Alissa Cincotta

SENIOR DESIGNER
Ellie Plotkin

COPY EDITOR
Allison Brubaker

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Aham Ibeleme, David Beckham, David Byrd, Dustin Lucas, Eli Infante
Heather Larkin, Jess Hess, Karen Bagley, Tanya Smith, Vanessa Joy



THE **COVER**

PHOTOGRAPHER: Alissa Cincotta | behindtheshutter.com
CAMERA: Canon EOS R5
LENS: Canon RF 50mm f1.2 L USM
EXPOSURE: ISO 50, f/2.5, 1/200
LIGHTING: Westcott Flash System
ABOUT THE IMAGE: This creative portrait session was brought to life with three lights: The Westcott FJ400 with the Rapid Box Switch Octa-M as the main light, the Westcott FJ200 as an edge light, and the FJ80 on the background to create a natural vignette. I photographed Violet on the Noelle Mirabella fabric backdrop from Intuition Backgrounds. Hair and makeup by Brandi Patton of ReFine Beauty.
MODEL: Violet Deardorff

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~Sal



message from **sal cincotta**

publisher

ARTISTIC RETOUCHING WITH PHOTOSHOP

with **Aham Ibeleme**



Image © Aharn Ibeleme Studios

Retouching is an art just like painting or even sculpting. In all honesty, my retouching process has always been all over the place. I don't have one set "golden brown" tone that every single one of my images conveys. I always seem to start from scratch with every retouching process. It's never the same for two projects. One could look barely retouched today and another heavily color graded tomorrow.

My choice of retouching application today is Photoshop because of the creative control that it allows me. Retouching with Photoshop can be daunting but it quickly becomes a walk in the park when one knows what they're doing, and of course, this comes with years of experience. I remember when I first started learning to edit my photos. I started off with Adobe Lightroom at the time and loved its ease of use because I could install and almost effortlessly slap on presets to my photos and not have to do anything else after that.

I soon realized, however, that I wanted more out of my retouching. I needed to be able to do frequency separation, for example, but couldn't with Lightroom. So I decided to take a leap of faith and venture into the belly of the beast. At least that was exactly what I thought of Adobe Photoshop at the time. I was utterly terrified of that thing. Why did it have so many buttons? What's with all the layers? Why do I have to arrange these layers into groups? Can't I just apply presets like with Lightroom and be about my business? Suffice it to say that my retouching game never really took off until I mustered the courage to properly learn Photoshop.

I taught myself Photoshop and became quite the master at it. I can't retouch anything without Photoshop. It's my go-to application for retouching. I'm a portrait photographer and most of my retouching caters to portrait photography in a way that makes it cinematic yet painterly, so I tend to lean towards color tones that push that artistic narrative. A lot of my photos have a teal color grade. Early on in my career, I was a frequency separation buff. I was obsessed by it and I used to do a lot of headshot portraits just so I could do frequency separation on them. I also shot a lot of beauty portraits back in the day. I quickly got bored of it, however, and moved on to other styles of retouching.

Today I'm known mostly for my heavily color graded teal painterly portraits. I'm also known for my very contrasty black and white headshot portraits. My process is quite simple to be honest. I always start out in camera raw, as I work only on the raw files. Raw files can only be opened in Photoshop via camera raw. I do not do anything in camera raw to adjust white balance or brightness or anything like that. It's just a pathway to Photoshop for me.

The first thing I do in Photoshop is clean up the image, whether it's a beauty image or fashion image, whether it's a studio image or outdoor image. By cleaning up the image, I'm preparing it for further elaborate retouching by taking out any abnormalities or distractions that I may not want in the final edit—things like spots, stray hairs, dark patches, etc.

The next step is to smooth the skin using the frequency separation technique. Now, depending on the subject's skin texture, I can either over-smooth or under-smooth the skin, whilst making sure that it doesn't look too fake or too porcelain. There are a million and one frequency separation techniques out there. I use a technique that always keeps the skin looking natural and evenly smoothed out.

The third step is usually to enhance the image. For example, if it's a beauty image, I would then need to enhance the makeup a little more to make it stand out and bring the face to life. With my trusty dodge and burn tools, I would carefully contour the face by darkening things like the eye liner, the eye lashes, some parts of the hair, while brightening things like the eye makeup, the blush, the lipstick and basically the highlights in the image.

The final step would be to color tone the image to taste. For example, for beauty images I would do a subtle color tone, while for a studio editorial portrait I might go heavy on the color toning or grading.

Now let's do some editing!





1. Go to "Create new adjustment layer" > Color Lookup

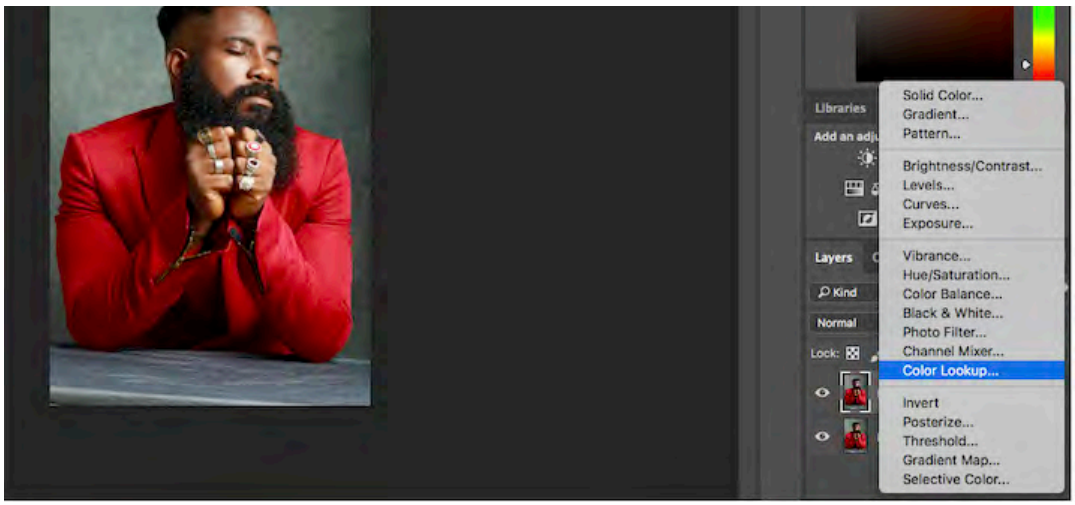


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2. Go to the “Load 3D LUT” dropdown menu and select “FoggyNight.” Set the opacity of the layer to 50%.

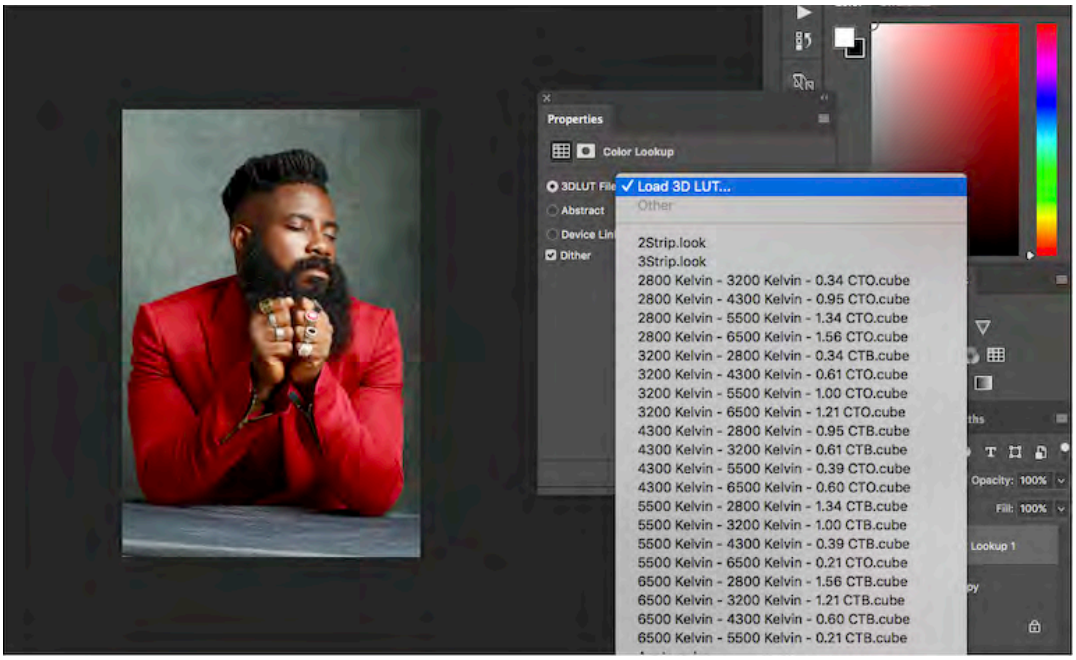
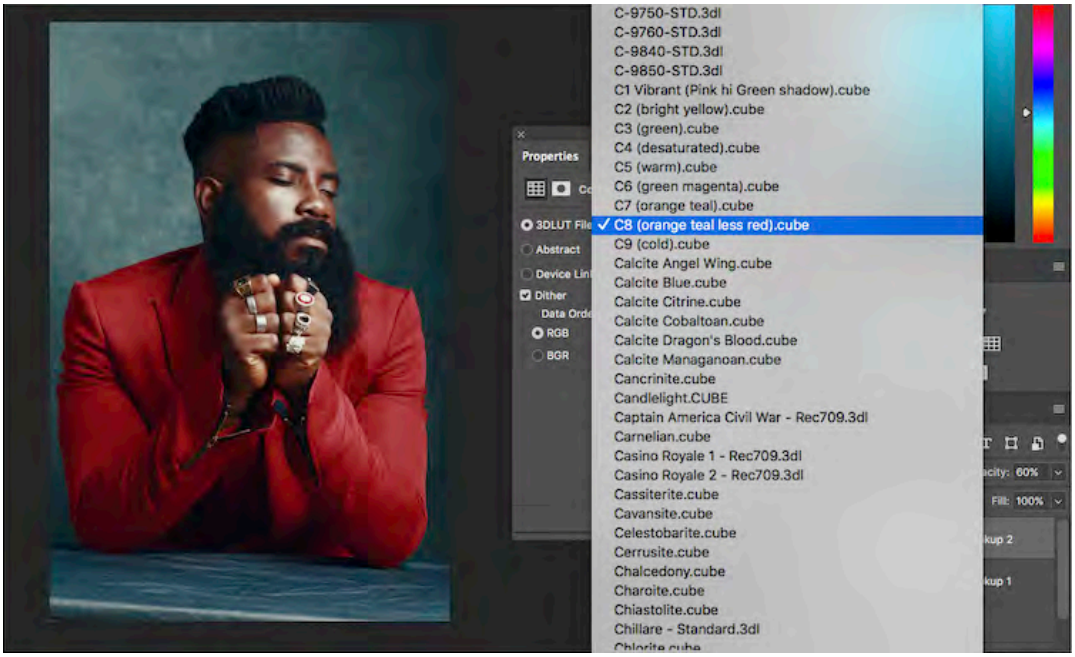




Image © Aham Ibeleme Studios

3. Go to the “Load 3D LUT” dropdown menu and select “C8 (orange teal less red)” and set the opacity of the layer to 60%.



4. Go to the “Load 3D LUT” dropdown menu and select A7(Greenish fade fuji)”. Set the opacity of the layer to 60%.

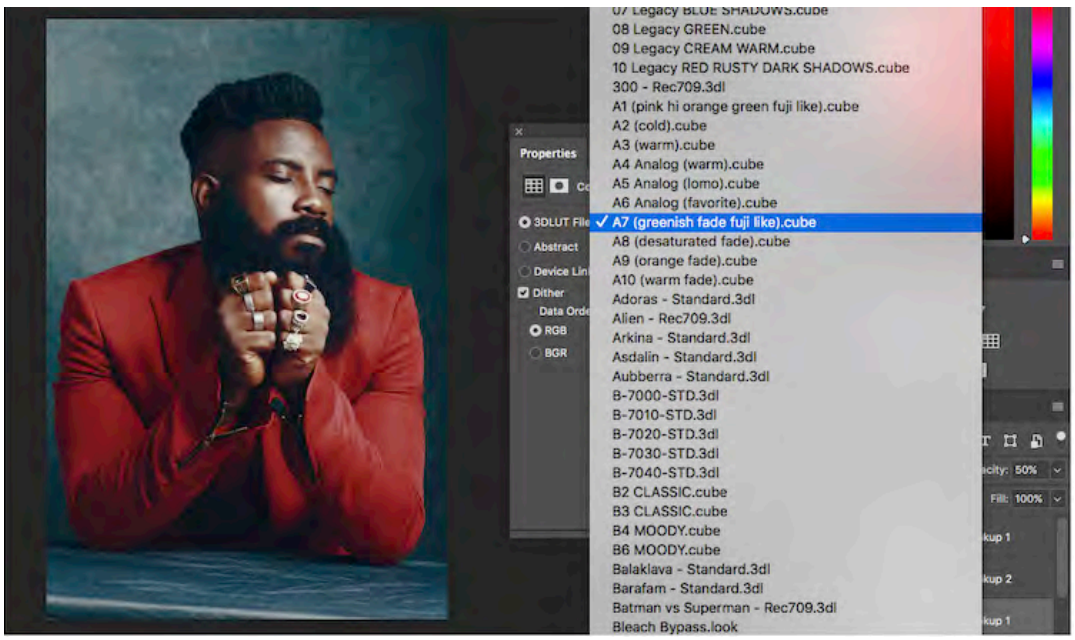


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5. Go to the “Create new adjustment layer” and select “Hue/Saturation.” Set saturation to -25.

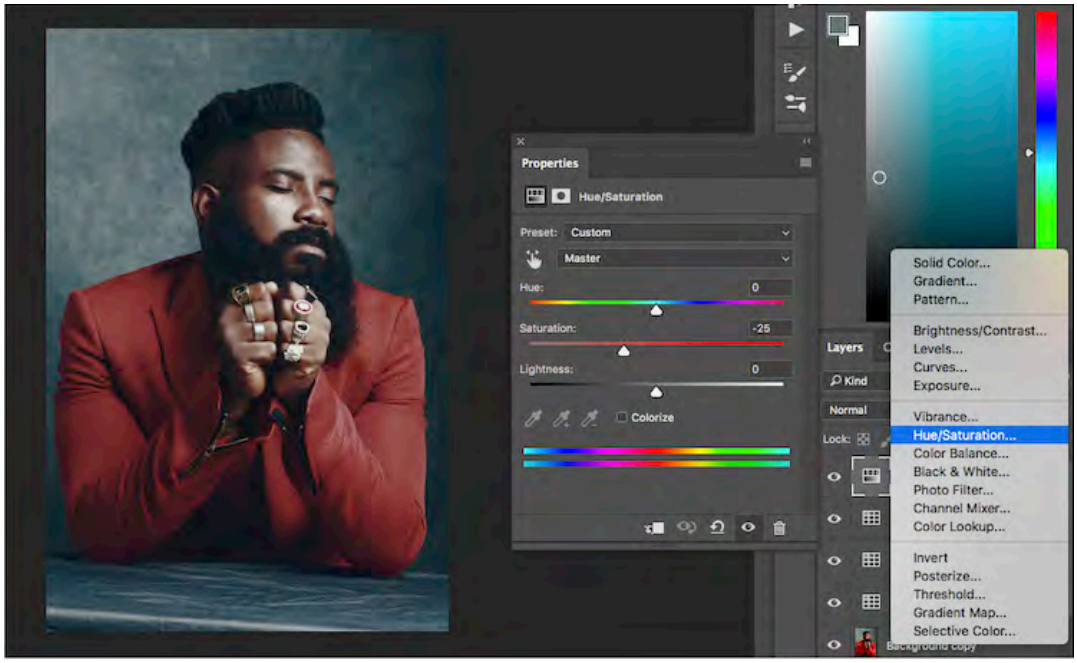




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1. Go to “Create new adjustment layer” and select “Black & White.” Set the reds to -87 to give it that rich contrasty black look.



Image © Aham Ibeleme Studios



2. Take your brush and mask out the yellow color in the photos.

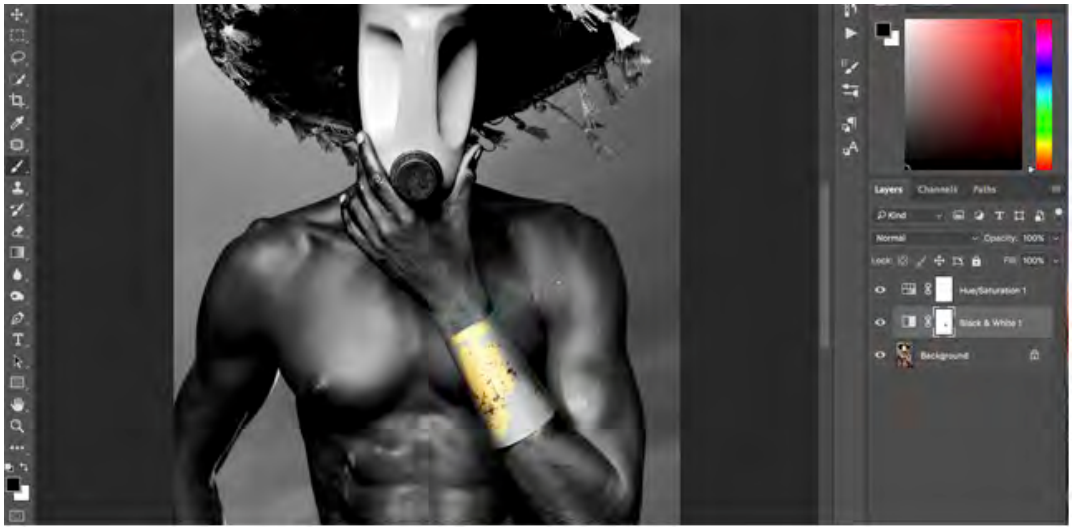


Image © Aham Ibeleme Studios



3. Go to “Create new adjustment layer” and select “Hue/Saturation.” Set saturation to +47.

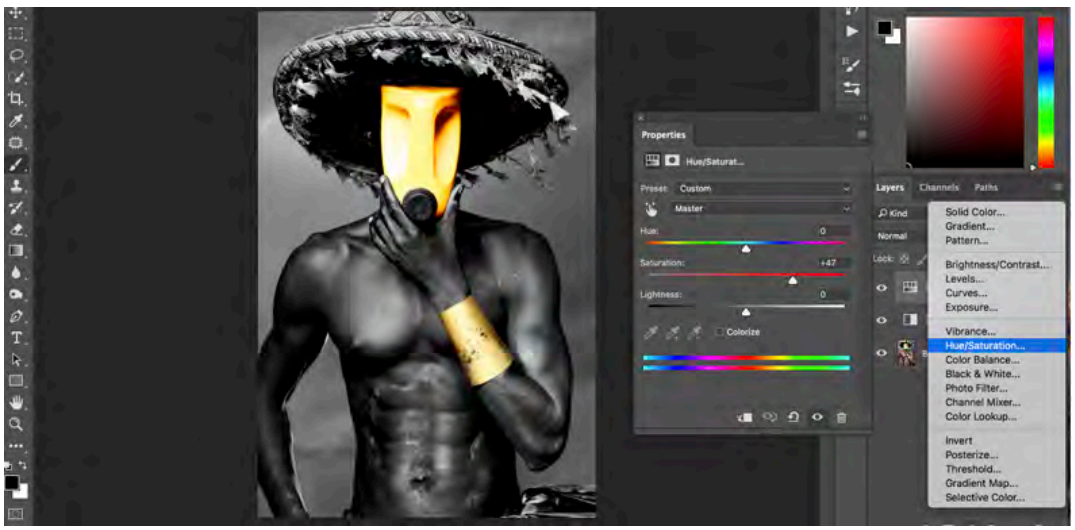


Image © Aham Ibeleme Studios





1. Clean up the image by using the “Spot healing brush” and the “Patch” tool to remove as many skin blemishes and spots as possible.

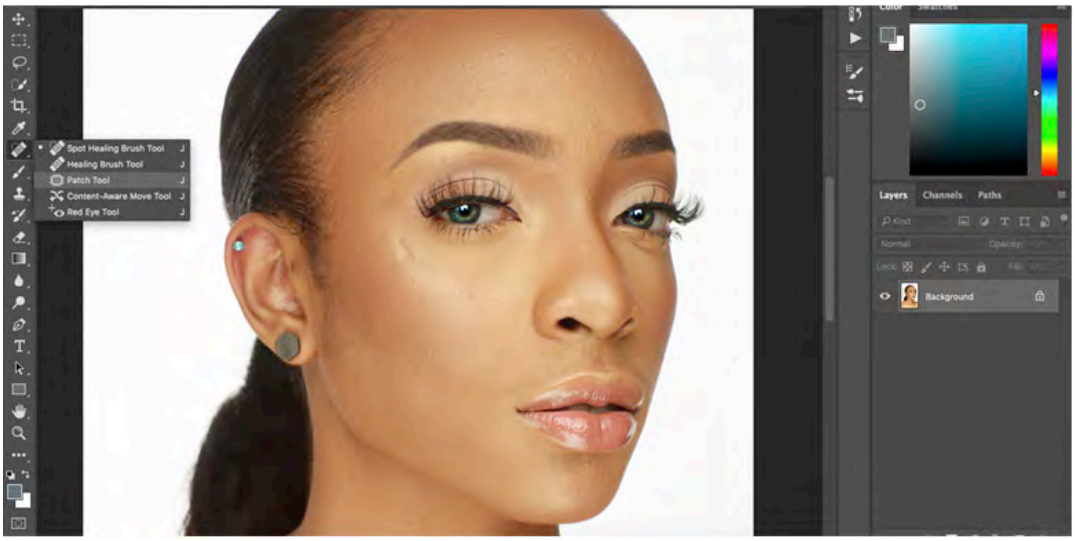
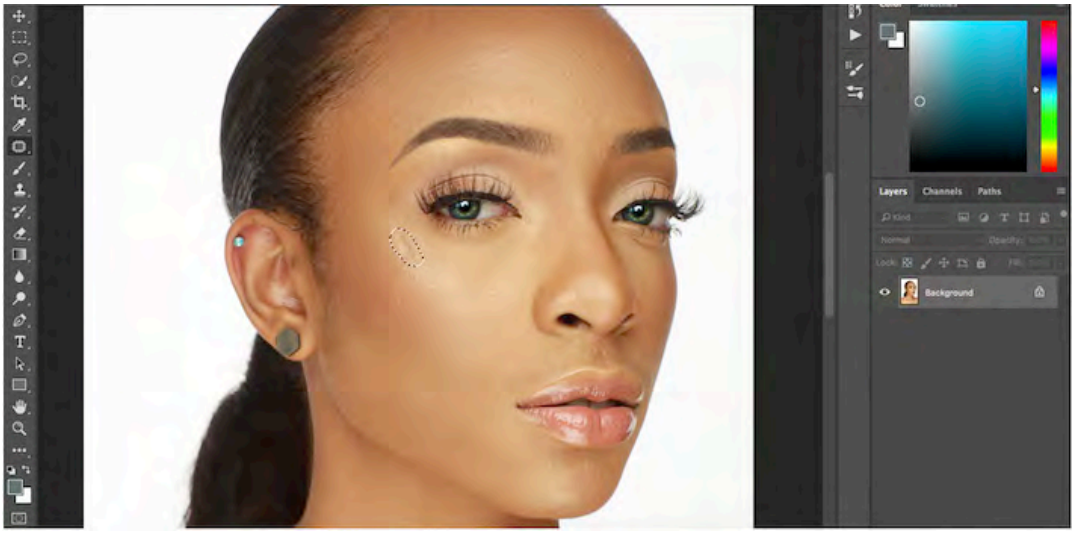


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2. Create two layers of the background layer, making three copies.

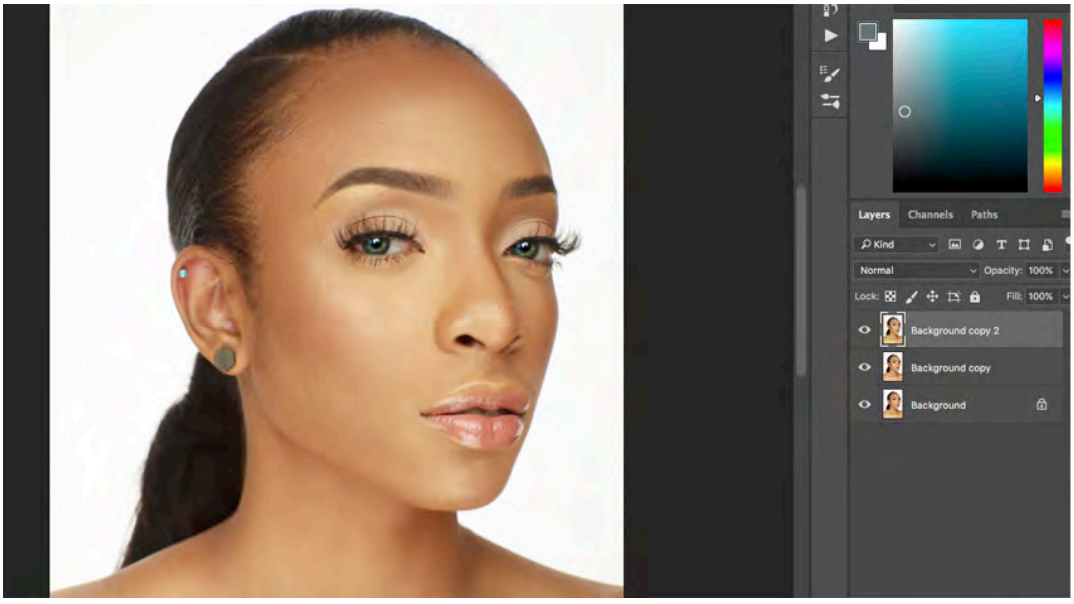
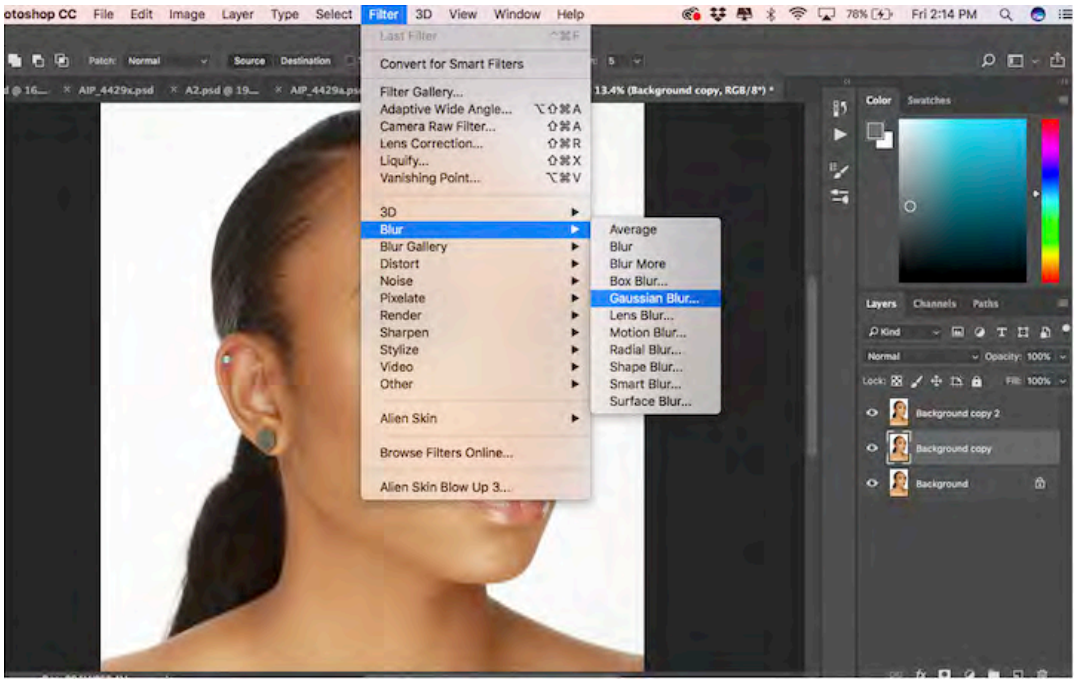


Image © Aham Ibeleme Studios

3. Click on the second layer, “Background copy,” and go to Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur. Input any number divisible by 3. The higher the number inputted, the smoother the skin will appear. For this edit we will use a radius of 60.



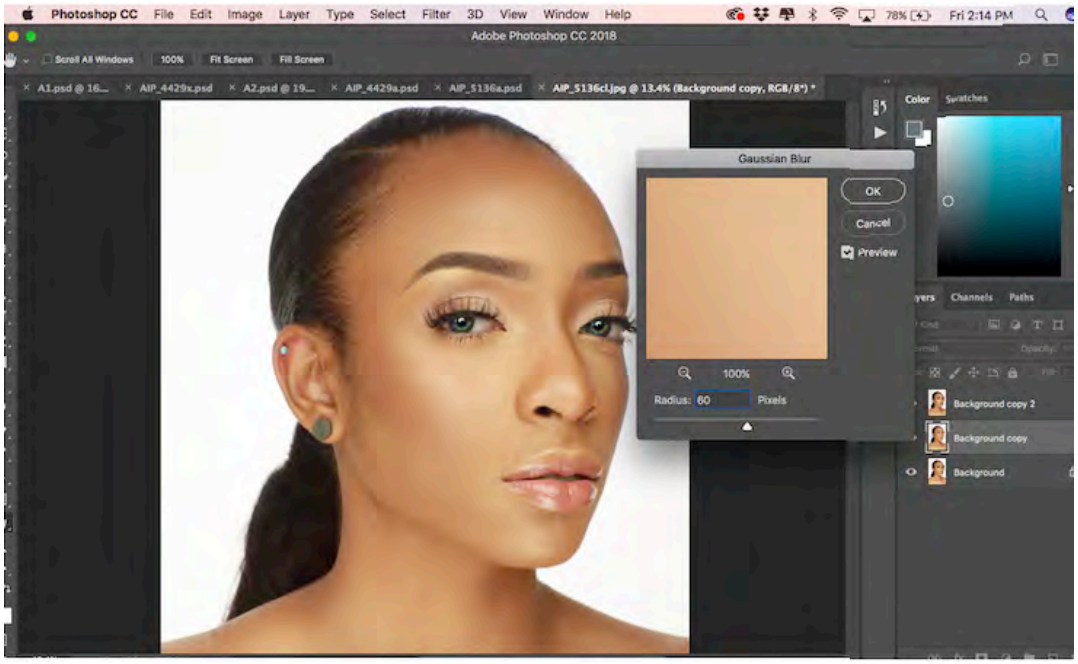
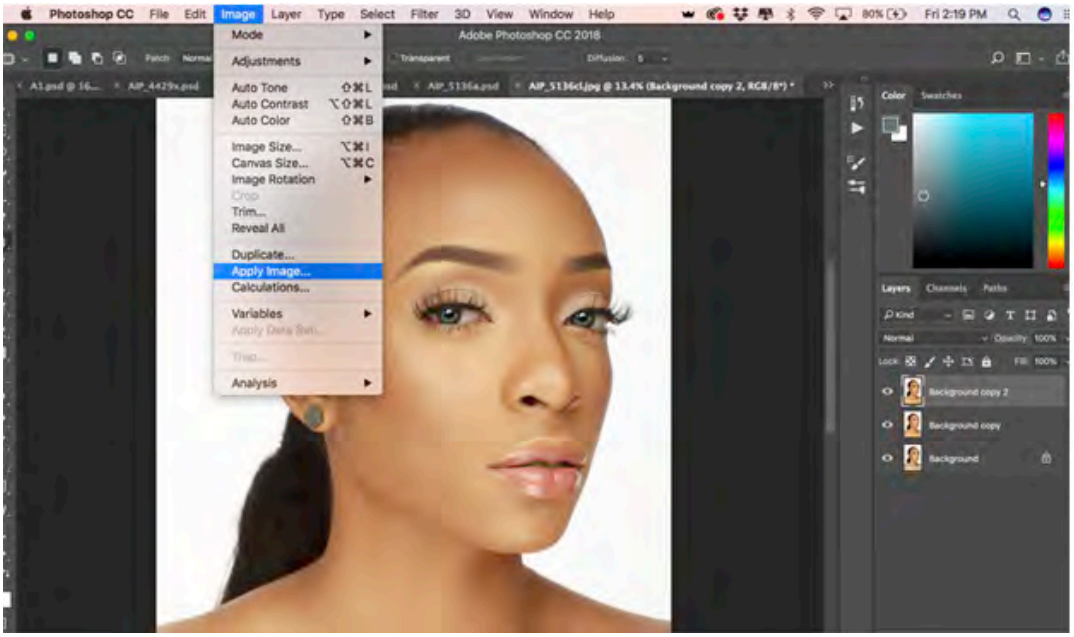


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4. Click on the first layer, “Background copy 2.” Go to Image > Apply Image > Layer. Set layer to “Background copy.” Set blending to Subtract, Scale = 2, Offset = 128, Opacity = 100%.



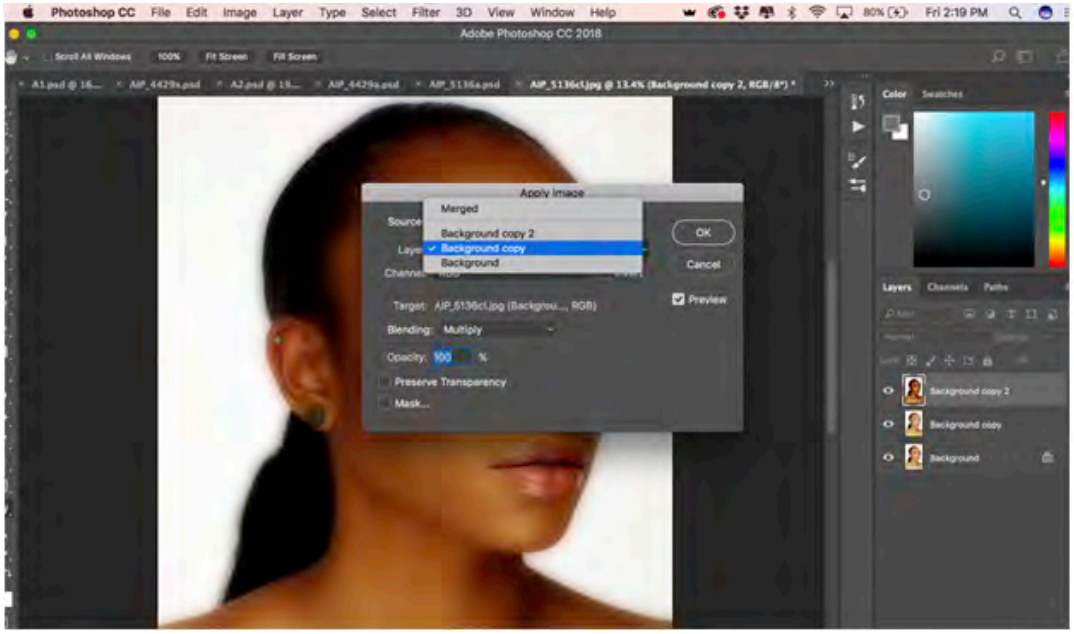
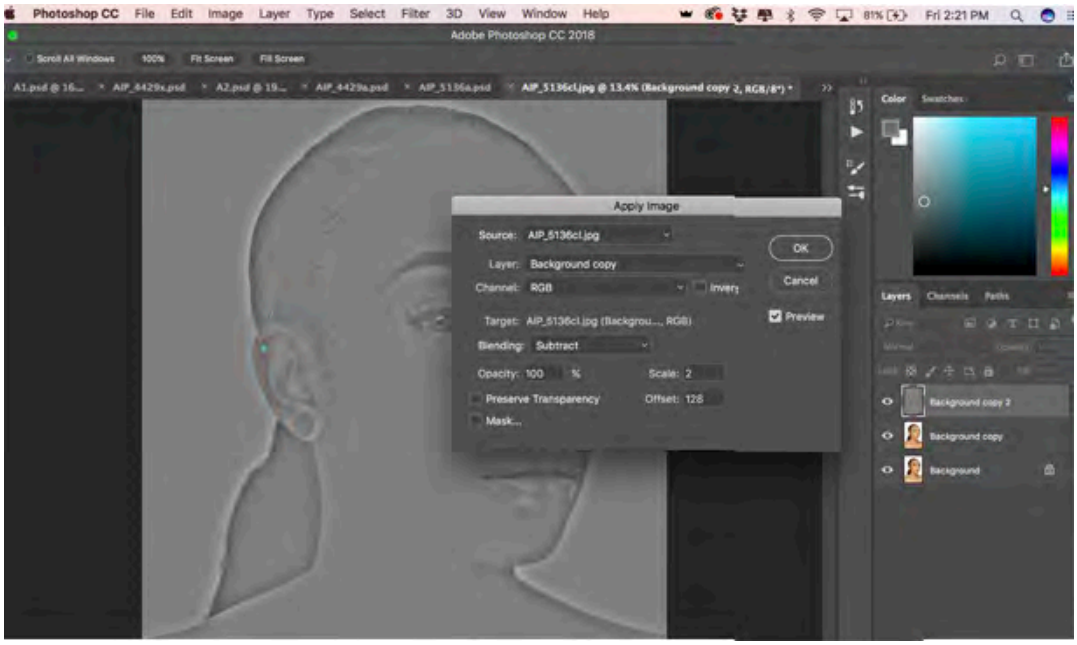
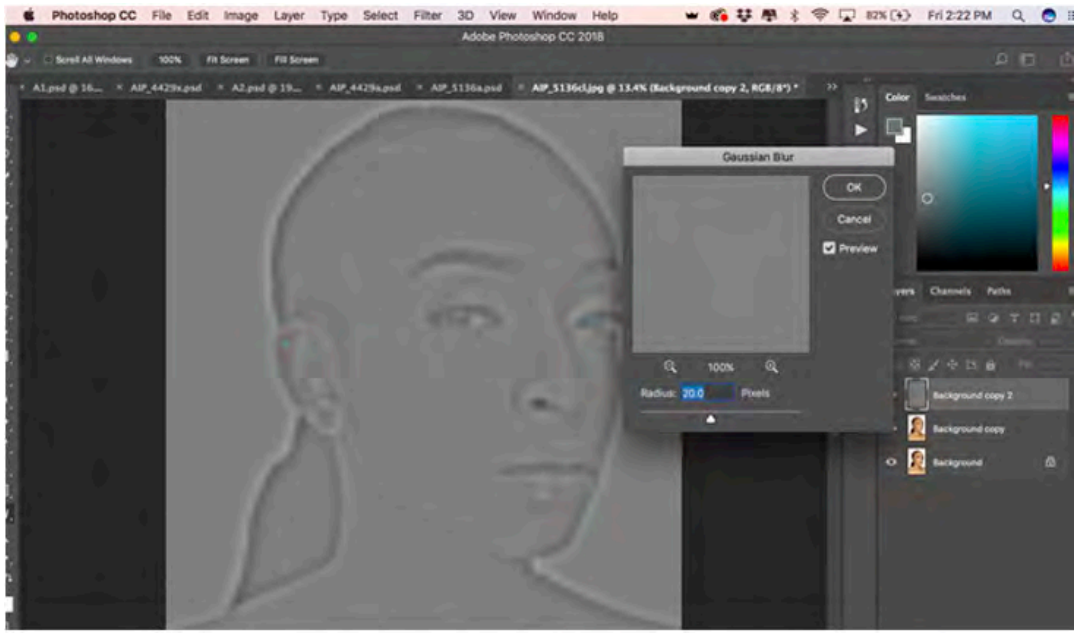


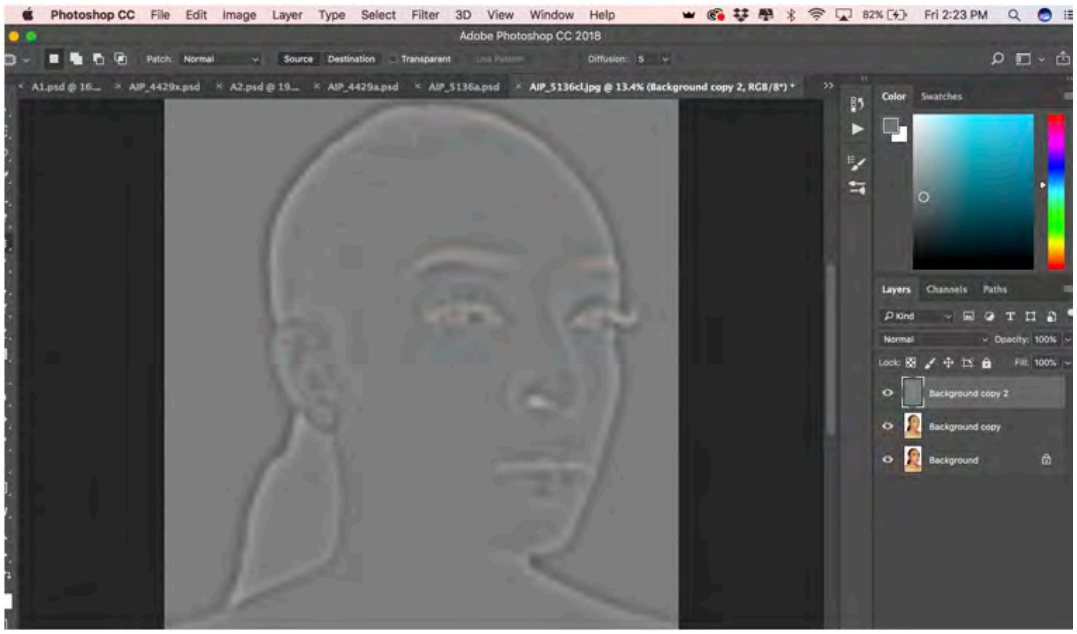
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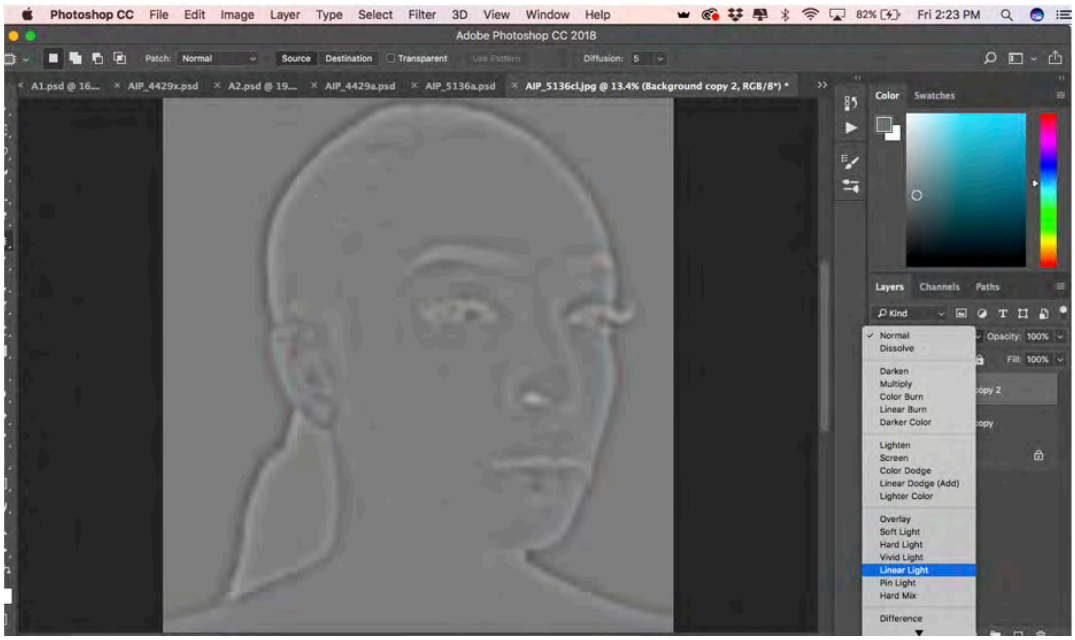
5. Click on the first layer. Go to Filter > Blur > Gaussian blur. Always divide whatever radius that was inputted initially by 3. 60/3 = 20. So set radius to 20.

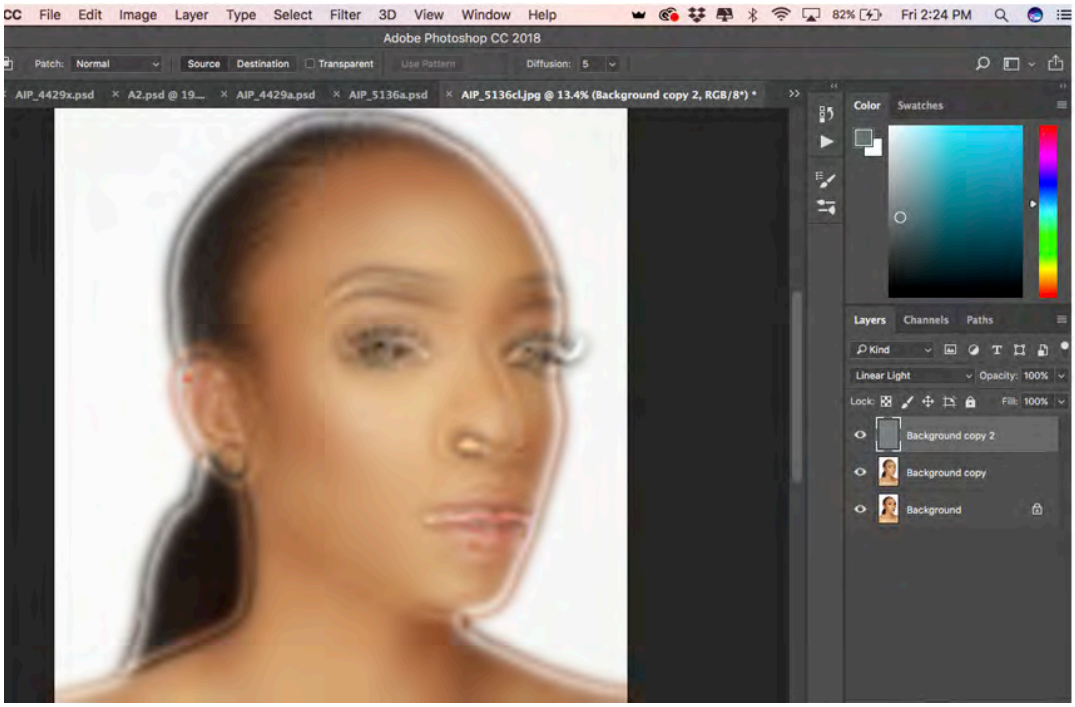


6. Invert (Cmd + 1) for Mac or (Ctrl + I) for Windows.



7. Change the Blend Mode from Normal to Linear Light.





8. Mask (alt + mask).

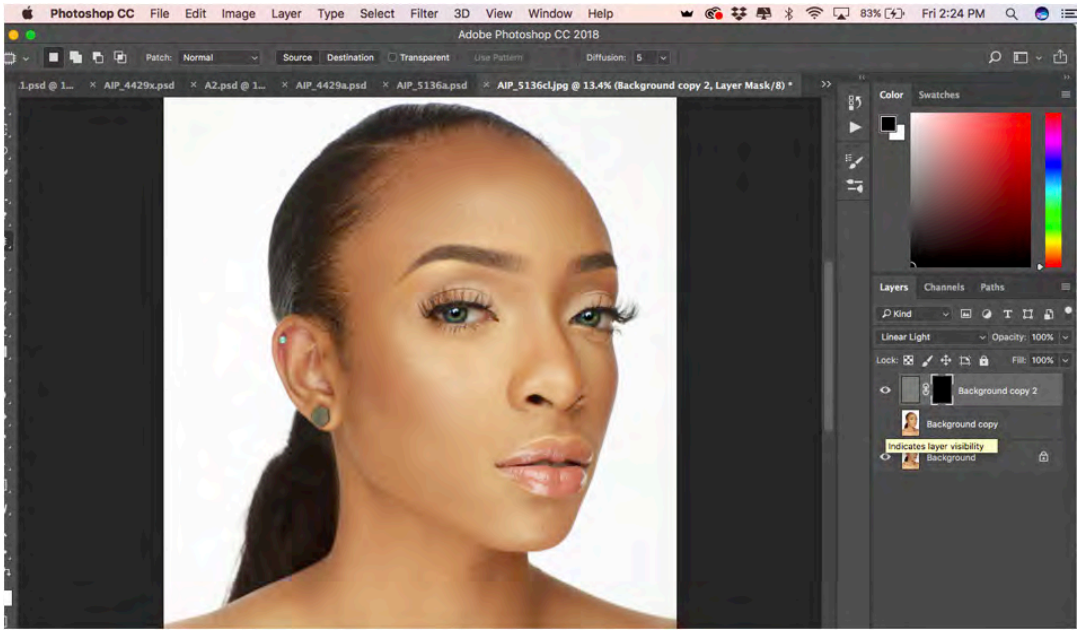
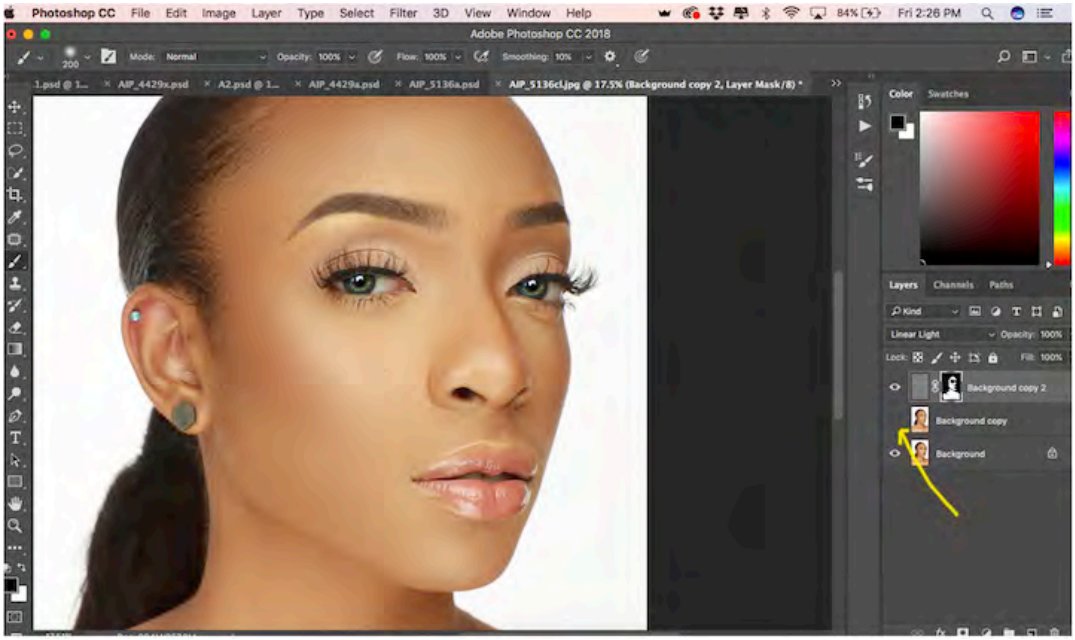


Image © Aham Ibeleme Studios

9. Turn off the middle layer, pick the brush tool, set opacity to 100%, flow 100% and simply brush the face and skin, carefully avoiding the eyes, nostrils and lips.



To whiten the eyes, simply select the “Black and White” adjustment layer, invert (Cmd + 1). select the Brush tool and then paint just the whites in the eyes.

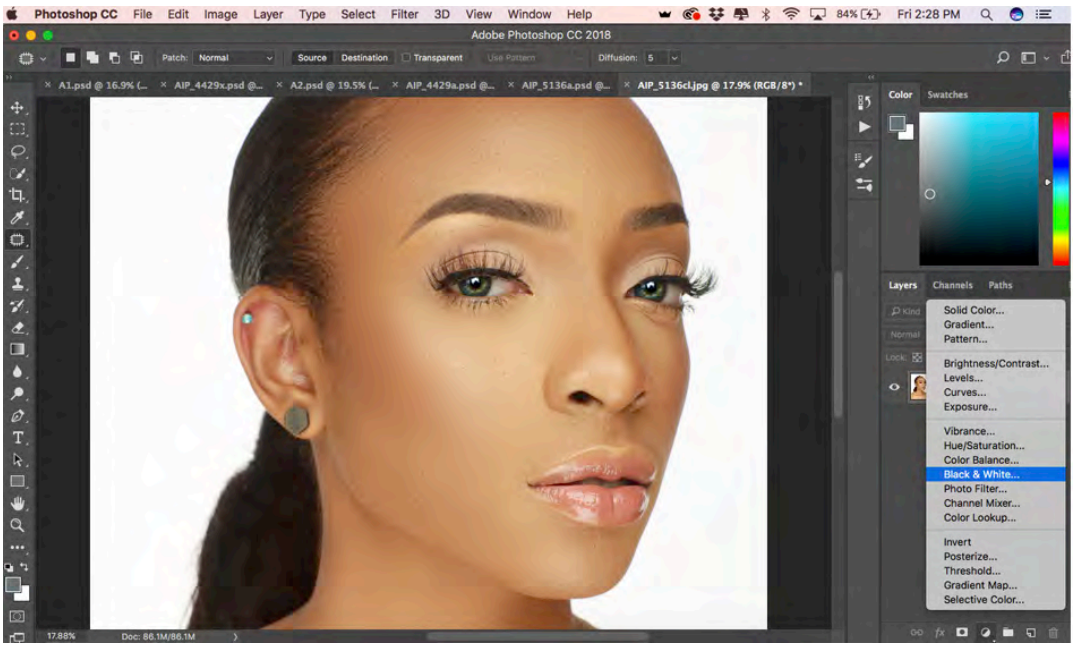
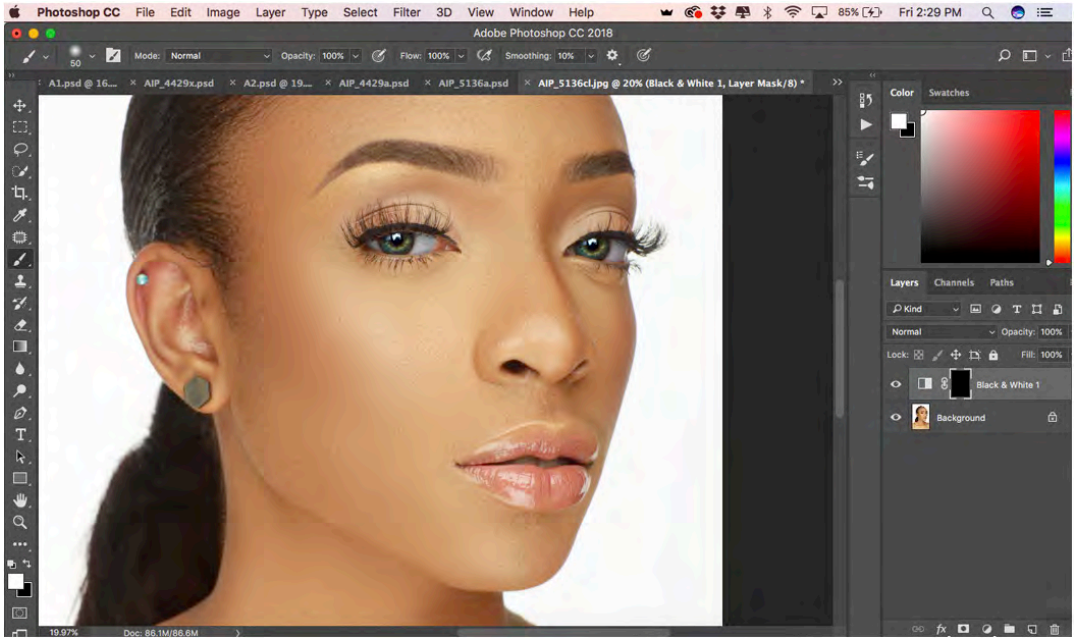


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Enhance the eye makeup by darkening the eye liner, lashes and eyebrows with the Burn tool.

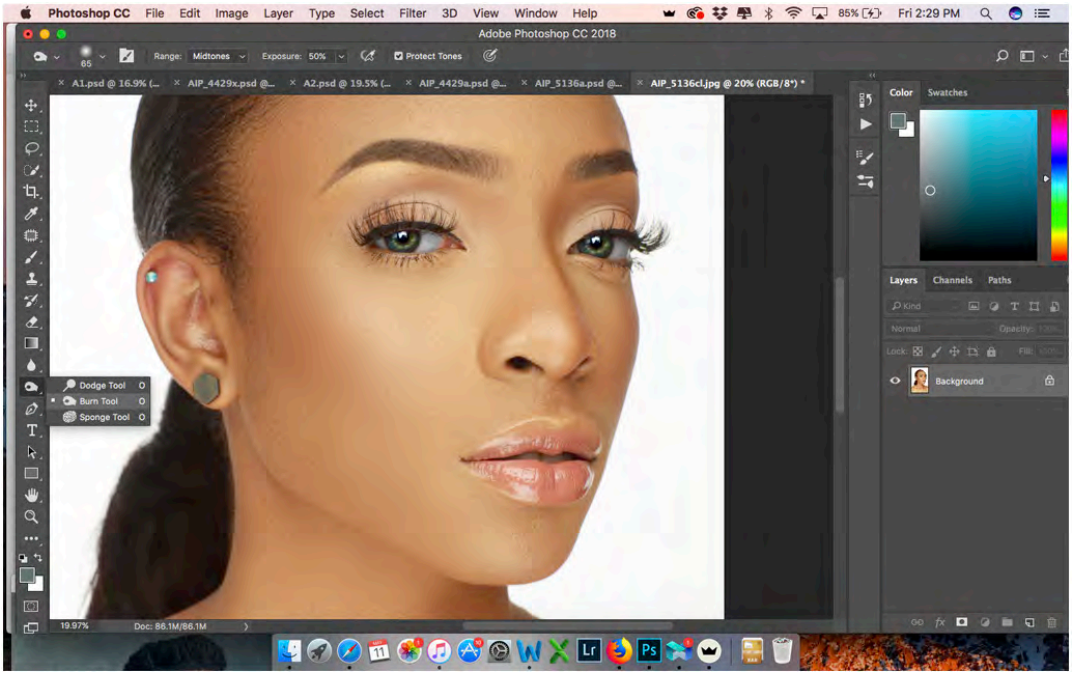


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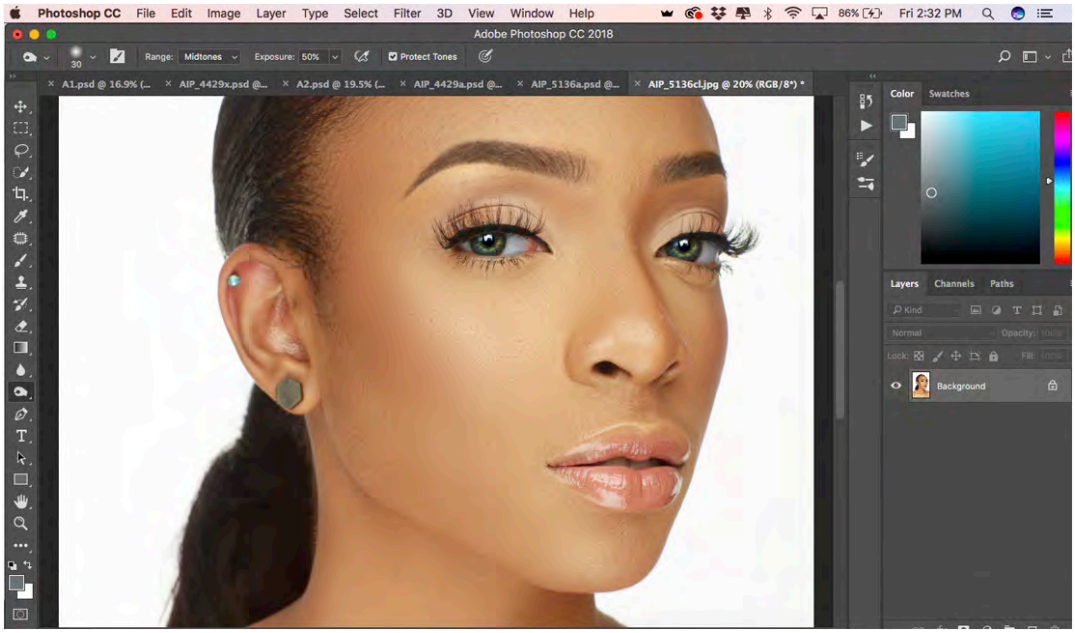


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Note: A Gaussian blur radius of 60 might not work for every image that you use it on. The smoothness and evenness of the skin is largely dependent on the radius you choose. So the higher the number, the more porcelain the skin will look depending on the model's skin texture. For this image I started with a small radius, say 24, but went up to 60. A radius of 60 gave me the skin finishing that I wanted. ■



Aham Ibeleme began his career as a professional photographer in Lagos, Nigeria. Upon his return to Nigeria after bagging an MSc degree from the University of Greenwich, UK, Aham bought his first camera and settled into becoming a freelance amateur photographer. In 2012, Aham decided to take his career professionally and focus on portrait, beauty and fashion photography. His commercial clients include Union Bank, Access Bank, Guinness, London Business School, XIAOMI, Campari, AMVCA, Genevieve Magazine, Vanguard Allure, T.A'La Mode Makeup, JZO Fashion, Dudu Osun, and House of Tara. Aham lives in Lagos with his wife and two kids, but follows his work around the world.

website: ahamibeleme.com **instagram: instagram.com/ahamibeleme/**

DYNAMIC POSING & LIGHTING FOR HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

with **David Beckham**

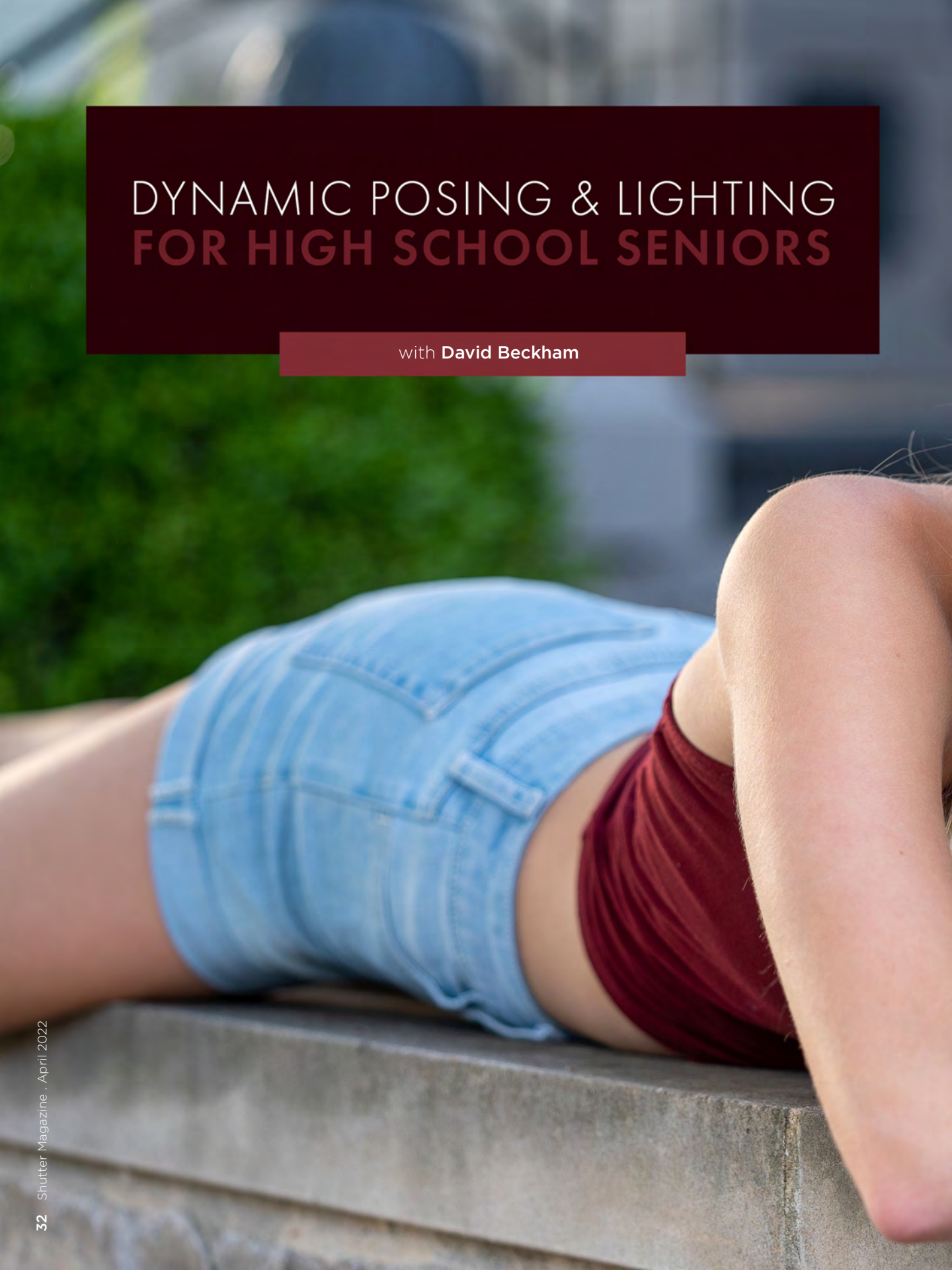




Image © David Beckham Photography



Image © David Beckham Photography

So much is going on in senior photography. It seems like there are as many senior photographers as there are seniors. Fewer and fewer seniors are getting formal portraits during their senior year. Sixteen-, seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds who want professional photos expect more. These young people are exciting, on the move, self-aware, involved and more socially driven than ever. The 2023 Seniors are dynamic.

As professional photographers, we need to be dynamic also. We need to be able to change and flow with what teens are doing like we do with our industry's technology. We need to understand that if you are staying the same, you are falling behind. We are going to look at nine lighting and posing setups that will help you become more dynamic with your posing and lighting. Four of these will include quick videos—because we are so good at keeping up with technology. :)

DYNAMIC

ADJECTIVE

1. (of a process or system) characterized by constant change, activity, or progress.
"a dynamic economy"
2. (of a person) positive in attitude and full of energy and new ideas.
"she's dynamic and determined"

NOUN

1. a force that stimulates change or progress within a system or process.
"evaluation is part of the basic dynamic of the project"

Dynamic posing means it looks like or it is moving. To get that, we need to really change our point of view (POV) and use a variety of lenses: 24mm, 35mm and 50mm. These aren't typical portrait lenses, but we aren't shooting typical seniors. I met Thomas Nguyen a few years ago and we did a shoot-out together and I completely changed my perspective on shooting!

POSING ELEMENTS

These are things you can do to build poses for yourself with any body type, so you don't have to remember "poses," but you will actually learn how to pose.

- Using arms to reveal or conceal
- Longest distance between knees and toes and fingers and elbows
- Eyes centered in her face with her nose pointing in the same direction as she is looking
- All your weight on your front foot to appear taller
- Twist hips away to flex abs, accent curves and thin waist
- Elbows behind spine for great posture
- Edge of hands not back of hands or palms
- Whatever is closest to the camera will appear larger (for good and bad)
- Parallel lines, triangles and leading lines with arms, legs and body
- POV effects height and length
- Arms and legs that are perpendicular to the lens will be the longest
- Keeping neck and spine in line when lying on back
- Bending knees when lying down flexes abs, thins waist and accents curves





Images © David Beckham Photography



RETRO DYNAMIC

Ring lights have been around for a long time. Probably long enough to have forgotten you still have one. Twelve years ago, I paired a Vagabond battery with the AlienBees™ ABR800 and it was my everyday OCF unit for shooting outside. Depending on the wind I would use the 36" octa beauty dish or the 16" ring reflector that came with the unit. It gave wonderful light, but HSS and smaller, more powerful self-contained units have replaced them.



Images © David Beckham Photography



Image © David Beckham Photography

In studio I like the Paul Buff 60" Octa Beauty Dish. These photos of Kensley are shot with the camera lens placed through the center of the light source. Like bell bottoms and tube tops, the seniors LOVE the fresh new look! Shhh, we don't have to tell them neither are new.

Keep the light source close for these results and center the light at eye level. I'm using the Sony A7 IV with a Sony G 50mm f/1.2 lens at ISO 100, 1/160, f/9.0 light at 80% power. I left the hood on the lens to keep spill light from affecting the shot.

I had Kensley stand with all her weight on her left foot facing her body to the right. She twisted her upper body back toward me which flexes her abs and accents her curves. Her hands are slid to her sides with her fingertips at the hemline of her skirt. This bends her elbows behind her spine which forces excellent posture. Then I had her step her right foot back and bring it 10" closer to me. That gives us the elusion of her being even taller and flexes her calves and other leg muscles. She kept her body in that same position as she put her arms above her head. I offset them because I knew I wanted her in the last third of the frame. You can see that "ring light" effect in her eyes and that soft glow shadow that shooting through the light creates.

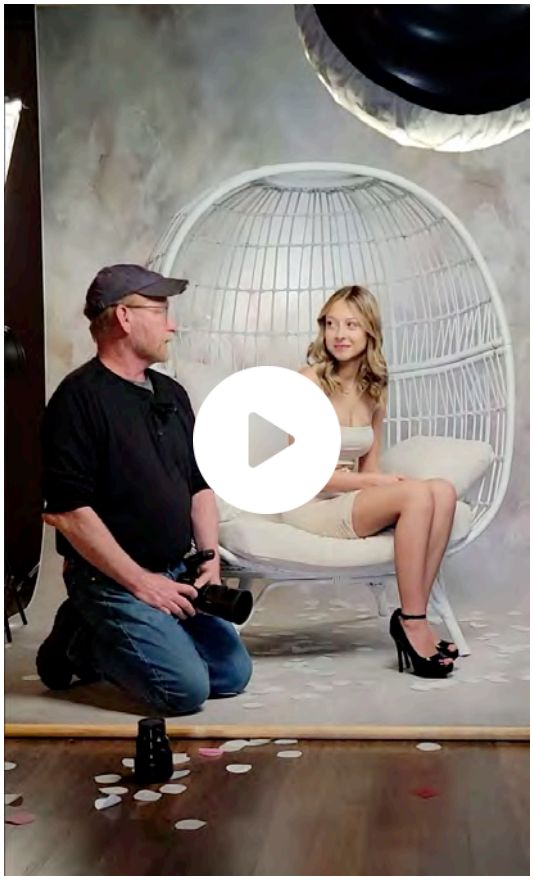




Image © David Beckham Photography

EGG CHAIR

I ordered this chair from Target a couple years ago and painted it white. It has become my favorite prop ever as I decorate it with flowers, lights or just leave it plain. The Intuition Background is ideal for this setup too, perfectly wrinkle free, heavy canvas and beautifully created. I used four Godox AD400s with this setup, one with a Mola Demi Beauty Dish, two with 12”x36” Paul Buff Softboxes and the last one with a 7” reflector and a 20-degree grid. The video talks about the four-light setup and goes into the details of posing. I used a Sony G 50mm for the first photo and a Sigma 35mm for the second. I love shooting at 35mm at low angles as it really shows off her legs.


Image © David Beckham Photography







Images © David Beckham Photography

LOW POSING

For the photos of Kensley in the tennis skirt we used a Godox SL200 LED with a 30”x42” softbox as the main and a Godox SL100 LED with a 12”x36” softbox as a kicker. The shadows help tell the story too. These are shot at ISO 100, 1/200, and f/1.8. The light was at 78% power.



Images © David Beckham Photography

When shooting this way, you need to remember that the closest thing to the lens will appear longer/larger. We want to use this to our advantage. You can see in the samples how dynamic it is. The other thing to remember is to keep her face centered near the middle of the frame. It means cropping after but it will keep it from getting stretched like the objects near the edge of the frame.

When crouching you need to be strategic about placing the front leg for obvious reasons. The closer her foot is to you the longer her leg looks. Her playing with her skirt gives the shot motion. When she leans in you really get her face in proportion to everything else and the longest legs.

When kneeling, make sure their feet are down flat. This creates the best posture in her upper body and creates a flattering curve in her back. You also want the longest distance between her knees and toes. Use her arms to reveal or conceal. If they look like Kensley, keep their elbows behind her spine and show off her waist. If they are bigger, use her arm to hide part of her body to thin her out. When you pop her leg toward you, you want it perpendicular to the lens. This will keep her leg as long as possible. When she pushes her right knee back further her legs appear even longer. Keeping her arms out to her side really creates a nice triangle with leading lines to her face.

STOOL POSING

The lighting on Sophie consists of just an AD400 with a 30”x42” softbox. The white floor and walls create great reflective fill and interesting shadows. The light is at 1/8th power. The camera settings are ISO 100, 1/800, f/1.4 using the Sigma 35mm lens. The video talks about all of it and the posing.

We wanted a high fashion look for Sophie, so the posing was extreme and fun. The posing elements to note are the longest distance between her knees and toes and fingers to elbows. Her foot pointing down on the edge of the chair adds to the elegant length in her look. Her left foot closer to the lens gets a little blurry at that aperture and that is OK because it draws you back to her face. When she stands, she twists and turns as well, which flatters her body.

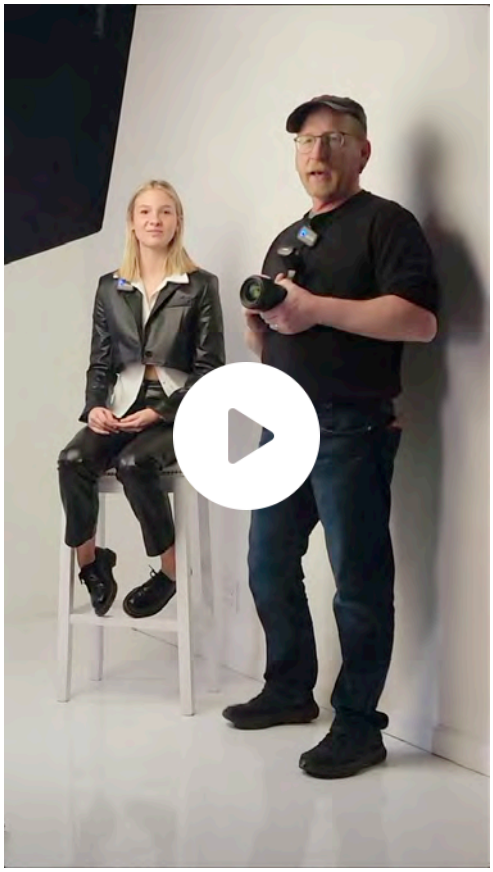






Image © David Beckham Photography



GLAM DYNAMIC

I'm using a Godox LED LC500 wand for these photos of Kendra. These are great lights for low-light shooting. Both shots use the 35mm lens at ISO 400, 1/250 and f/1.4. When shooting in a dark room you only need minimal power on the light wand. I like the LC500s because they have barn doors, and you can really control where and how much light you want. The POV is everything on these two shots. You can completely change the mood by dropping the camera to the floor and shooting up at her. Both photos have one leg closer to the camera to create longer length. They both have triangles leading back to her face. On the first one her elbows are behind her spine so that it enhances her posture. She holds her upper body as she leans forward, bending at her hips, not rolling her back.

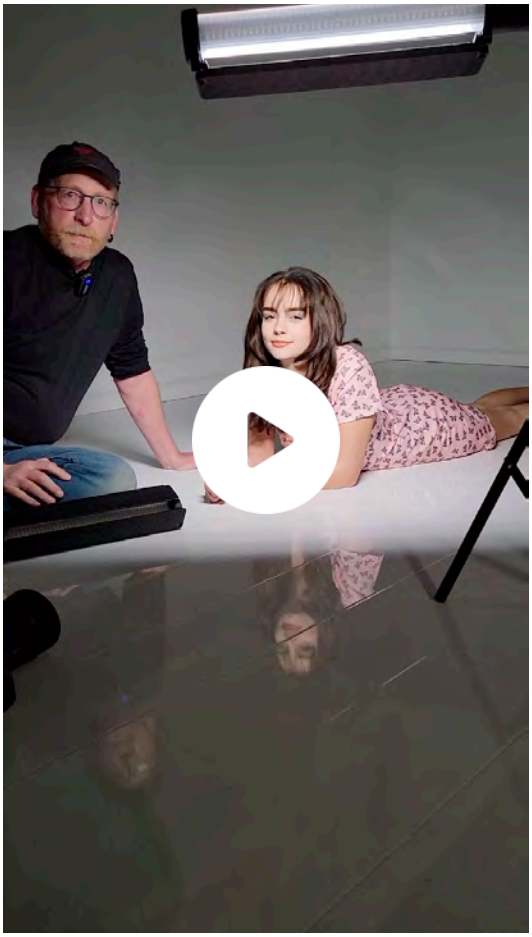


Images © David Beckham Photography

LYING ON THE FLOOR

The video really hits the details of posing and lighting while lying on her tummy and back. The keys are keeping the main light source direction coming from the top of her head toward her body to give drop shadows that look like pro portraits. The lighting in the sample comes from two Godox LC500 wands; one camera left on a very low tripod and the other camera right, to her left, laying on the floor. This creates wonderful light on her face and a distinct rim light as well. Both lights are set at very low power, 10-15%. I used a Sony G 50mm f/1.2 lens with camera settings of ISO 200, 1/250 f/1.3.

The posing elements that matter most are keeping her neck aligned with her spine, then lifting her chin. This keeps her looking normal. Even though you can't see it in the photo, bending her knees flexes her abs, thins her waist and accents her curves in a flattering way. If you are going to put one or both hands above her shoulders, put her palms under her head or hair to keep them from drawing attention away from her face.





Images © David Beckham Photography



Images © David Beckham Photography

OCF

I make my living shooting outside with off-camera flash (OCF). My weapon of choice is a Godox AD300 with a Mola Demi Beauty Dish. I typically use a Savage MultiFlex Stand, but for these shots I needed to have my light almost 12 feet in the air, so I used a Paul Buff Heavy Duty stand. This light is fully capable of shooting in full sun as you can see in the first sample using only 1/2 power at ISO 100, 1/4000 (yes 4000) at f/2.0 with a Sigma 35mm lens. It is also excellent when you only need a tiny bit of fill as in the squatting photos at ISO 100, 1/4000 f/1.4 at 1/16th power.

Alli is 5'9" but we still want to pose her to look longer and taller and naturally enhance the way she looks every chance we get. The elements being used are weight on her front foot for height and elbows bent behind her spine for posture and revealing her curves. Notice her left hand is forward, not out to her side so that her arm and skirt can be seen. Her hips are turned away and her right foot is pointed down and extended toward the lens with a slight bend back. The light hits her face nicely as she looks back across her body with her nose pointed in the direction she is looking. The light also cuts across her tummy accenting her abs.

The next shot is almost SOOC, except for a blemish. This is to exemplify that using OCF and f/1.4 can still have wonderful soft light on her with wonderful skin tones and BLUE sky. When you show them the back of camera on a shot like this, they know they are with the right photographer and are excited for everything they are doing.



Images © David Beckham Photography

FASHION STANDING

Two Godox LC500 LED wands are the only lights being used. The double shadows and dark lighting add to the dynamic nature of these shots. She can turn her face and a different light becomes the main. In some cases, they will want the shot where her face is in shadow… 2023 seniors are different. The EXIF on these are ISO 250, 1/200, f/1.4. Keep the wands above her head and use the barn doors to control where the light shines. In the first two shots we are camera right of both lights. In the second two she is between them.

The POV is critical for the dynamic feel of the first two. Both are shot with the Sigma 35mm lens. The posing elements of hips turned away, edges of hands, longest distance between knees and toes and elbows and fingertips, and elbows behind spine all come into play and are carefully set up to get that fashion feel she and her agent love. The second two were shot with the Sony G 50mm. The body language of the smile and playing with her hair draw you in. In the second image, her left leg closer to you increases her height and the dead stare pushes you right back.









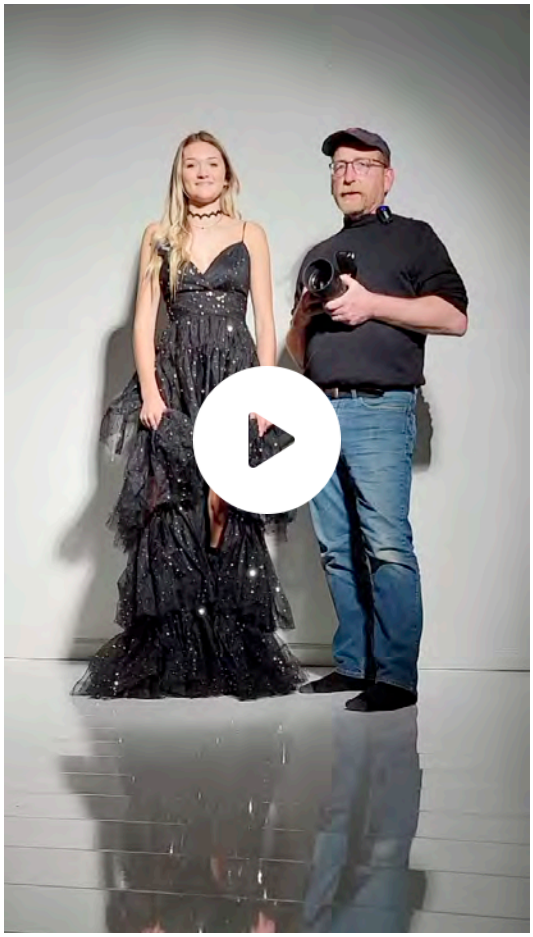




Images © David Beckham Photography



Image © David Beckham Photography



LOW BUDGET STOP ACTION

I'm all in on Godox flashes; great price, HSS, batteries last forever and most importantly, the bulbs extend past the speed rings and light fills the modifier. But there are sacrifices in having them priced that way. The main one is recycle time. It just can't keep up with my high-speed shutter. Even when shooting at low power, it still misses shots. So taking a spray of action shots and picking and choosing the perfect one can be a drag when the light doesn't fire at the right shutter trip. Enter Godox SL series LED studio lights. In the action shots in the video we are using the SL200 with a Molight MoThro Parabolic Reflector with a grid. This creates one tight light source and gives us a fashion hard-light feel. That is all you need when you have amazing continuous eye-focus technology like with the Sony A7 IV.



Images © David Beckham Photography



Image © David Beckham Photography



Images © David Beckham Photography

The video talks you through the posing, but the key is to let the model know how you want her to finish the shot. There is nothing worse than getting a great dress spin, but her legs look like they're broken. Direct them how their feet should be at the end of the pose and let them practice it in front of you. I usually say "whenever you are ready" for them to begin and just hold the camera still and fire a burst of shots. Show your model right away if it worked or didn't. It's so much easier to communicate and get what you want if they can see themselves. The feeling of creating together becomes more obvious to them too.

The last image of Alli flipping her skirt is my fave. Her posing and attitude were perfect, and the setup captured everything I wanted, first take!

The beauty of these lights is you won't miss a shot! Godox makes better studio LEDs than these now too. One even has infinite color options so that you never need to use gels again!

If you can't get into my classes at ShutterFest '22, stop me anytime and we can talk about anything in this article or anything else! I have created an app called The Elements of Posing with over four hours of video education and hundreds of detailed photos to help you learn how to pose anyone. You can save $50 by using coupon code: BTS50. It can be found here: http://www.davidbeckhamphotography.com/the-elements-of-posing-app ■



David Beckham has a studio in Pickerington, Ohio and he photographs 90 to 100 seniors a year. David speaks all over the country, recently at Imaging 22 and it will be his sixth time speaking at ShutterFest. He also has workshops from his studio four times a year. Join his education Facebook group "ASKDavid" to keep up with where he is and what he's doing. David recently received his Master of Photography and Master Craftsman from the PPA and won the Grand Imaging Award in the Senior Category. He can be contacted at davidbeckhamphotography@yahoo.com or by phone at (614) 519-4794.

website: davidbeckhamphotography.com IG: instagram.com/davidbeckhamphotography/



Image © Reality Reimagined



CREATING A PLAN TO **CURATE ARTWORK FOR YOUR NEXT SHOOT**

with **David Byrd**

THE SAME STORY, ALL OVER AGAIN

"Okay, so I've got the new camera or the new lens. I know how to use it (mostly) and I'm ready to work. Wait, I've got that new light too and that new modifier that I'm sort of sure that I don't know how to use, but how hard can it be, right? Plus, that new clothing piece that I found at the thrift store would be so cool to use in a shoot. Not sure what kind of shoot—maybe fashion, maybe boudoir, maybe just, well, whatever—I want to use it in a shoot. Oh, there was that tutorial I saw on YouTube from some middle-aged white guy that talked about storytelling—yeah, I want to do that too! But I need to remember to shoot for the IPS session, so I can make all the money. Did I ever get that sample ordered from H&H Photo Lab? Did I pay my taxes yet? Well, whatever, I'm here at the location for the shoot, time to set up and get to snappin'!"

And then my favorite part: "Okay, so, um, model/subject, um you know—just do your thing and look cool and I'll take some pictures!" How many of us are very familiar with this typical scene in our photography travels? We spend the time before the session thinking of all the "stuff" we can shove into the shoot. We greet the client and while they suit up we adjust the lights and the camera for that new lighting pattern we want to do. We spend valuable, crucial, creative time focusing on the technical, giving no care to the art. Then it's time to create the art and we fall back on basic poses and other tropes that get the shoot moving but really don't innovate the experience or add a new layer to what you offer your clients.

I know that sometimes this "auto-pilot" feels necessary, depending on how much time you have for the shoot or how busy your studio is at the time. However, this is where a philosophy comes into play that we often reject and for understandable reasons. Do you value quantity over quality? We all intellectually think we value quality, for sure. But when we are standing in the photography bay, subject waiting and all that technical garbage is running through our brain, suddenly quantity becomes the driving force to the shoot—for at least the first half. Then suddenly we remember we are artists and quality is key to our IPS session/brand experience and we suddenly reinvent the wheel. If that effort is successful, then rad. And I bet some of the images you sell are from that quality part of the shoot. If it isn't successful, we finish the shoot and get frustrated because we had all these plans and they all were tossed out without realizing it.

Speaking of plans, that's how I got past that issue in my work—most of the time.

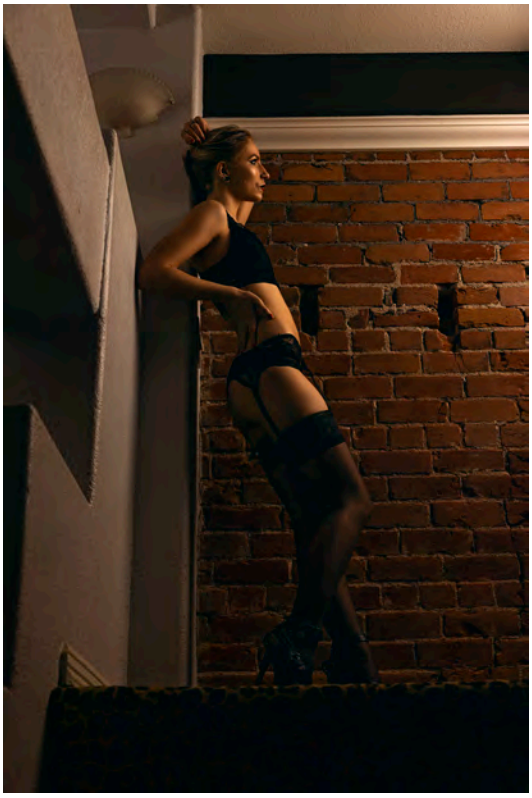
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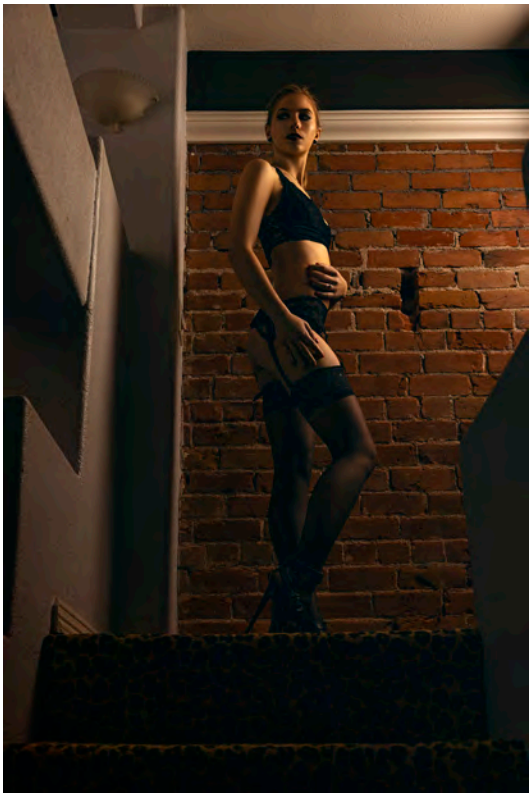
CREATE A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO THE SHOOT

When I approach most of my sessions, I begin the plan with Microsoft OneNote. It's a wonderful resource to use for all types of note-keeping and planning. I love it because it syncs to all of my devices and is always at my fingertips when some random idea runs through my mind.

I start a page labeled as the session/client name and immediately write down three emotions that I want to capture with this subject. Now for my upcoming boudoir line, part of this decision will be focused on what type of style the client has selected. If they want natural light and soft, simple lingerie, then chances are we aren't going to explore the more intense emotions. If the client wants strobes and dramatic style, then one of the three emotions I choose can be in that arena.

Those three emotions become the entire foundation of the session. I know what lighting patterns to choose. I know what poses will help to communicate those feelings. I even know what compositions to make to potentially help tell that story. While I do this, I listen to my Boudoir playlist on Spotify—it's filled with music that I've curated that entices that part of my imagination where stories can be born for this type of shoot. I'm an artist—why not stimulate my senses while I make a creative plan for a systemic photography session? I've even opened a bottle of pinot noir and let my mind wander a bit while I drafted the plan.





Images © Reality Reimagined

The next step is to source some spec images that you can put into the OneNote page that align with the emotions you've selected. I often will go back to my previous work and find images that visually have an impact and I will analyze why. Is it the lighting, the pose? Was the session "successful" and did it represent quality over quantity? I drag those images from Adobe Bridge into OneNote and put them below the emotion they represent. Then I write notes underneath the image that identify what I like about that piece.

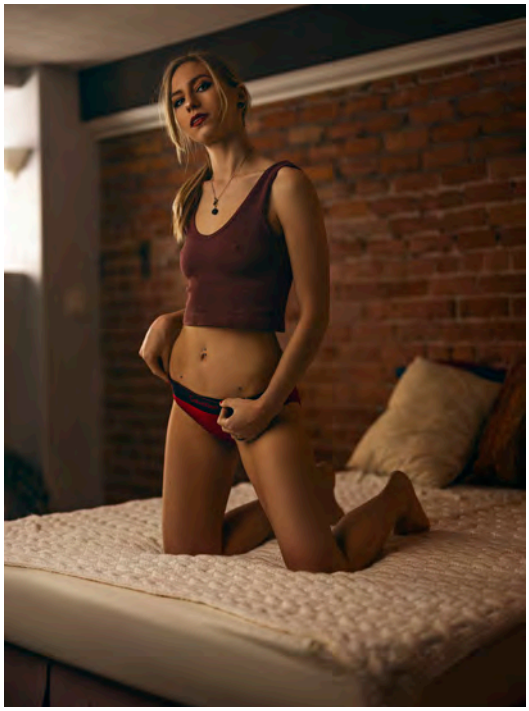
While holding my favorite wine glass and sniffing the notes, I suddenly am reminded of props and then I go on a creative hunt for more images that can help suggest a pattern of the story I want to tell. If my portfolio doesn't have what I seek, then I turn to the bottomless pit of spending all my money: Pinterest.

Pinterest is wonderful to use, but can be the bane of a professional photographer's existence (hello wedding photographers who get the 17 boards from the bride), so tread lightly as you navigate this space. This effort is truly the first test of quality over quantity, is it not? We see so many ideas laid out before us and our mind can race. Train yourself to focus on seeing past the images to those that leap out and speak to the emotion you are trying to represent.

For each image you add to the OneNote page, write notes beneath it as to what drew you into it and how it can fit into your style and your session. I strongly encourage you though, to innovate on the image and make it your own. Do not just carbon copy the entire thing and call it your art—because it isn't, in my humble opinion. Dare to be different and add something new atop the foundation of what you see in another person's work.

Once the images have been curated (generally four to six images per emotion) I then spend some time reflecting on what images will fit best into the products that I offer my clients. Shoot for the cover of the album, knowing its shape and size. Shoot for the spread in the album or the right framing on images that go into the image box. What's a good teaser image for this session that you can show the client in an email? What image can be the thumbnail for the app you provide to them for their devices? Is that image a candidate for a wall portrait? What size do you want to sell? Remember this when you shoot it by writing notes in the plan to tell yourself this at the shoot.

Image © Reality Reimagined





Images © Reality Reimagined

CONFIDENCE IS NOT BEING AFRAID TO SAY "I DON'T KNOW"

My father told me long ago, *"Never be afraid as a leader to look someone in the eye and tell them you don't know the answer to their question or problem. Then tell them that you both can find out the answer, together."* He was a great man and a great leader in corporate America—wisdom for the ages that I've held onto all of my life.

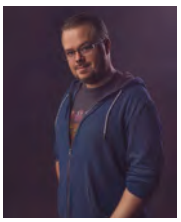
And just like quality over quantity, I abandoned that beautiful wisdom the moment I started photographing clients for money. They are giving me money; I have to know everything and look like it's all under control. I can't look like the light isn't working or spend a minute moving it around and fixing it—if that new lighting idea doesn't work in 10 seconds, then screw it and go back to boring flat lighting and make them do the Captain Morgan pose with the chair.

Then one day I decided to tell the truth to my client: "I'm trying this new idea with my lights that I've never done before. I think it's going to be really beautiful and I just need a minute to dial it in." The client looked at me with excitement because I just told them that they are going to be the first to do something special – no one else has an image like this yet. After that minute, I was ready to go and captured a few frames and ran to show the client, because I still was not confident that my lame ass excuse was believed. They loved the image and said to me, "This is beautiful artwork!"

That's the key, right there. You have an opportunity to capture artwork and when you take the time on set to adjust your lights, to fiddle with your camera, to look at your OneNote to remind yourself of where the adventure is going next, you are curating artwork. Never apologize for that, never feel insecure about that. Rise in the confidence that you are taking the time to provide your client with the art they deserve—quality over quantity.



At the time of this publication, ShutterFest 2022 will be just a couple of weeks away. I strongly encourage you to practice quality over quantity. You've scheduled a bazillion shoots and have a bazillion cans of full-sugar Monster to get you through. I challenge you to capture 20 frames of each shoot. The model has already dedicated the time; they are there for you. Tell them you want to create some artwork that means something to you and hopefully to them. Stand in the space you've set for the shoot and SEE the art all around you. See the light coming in through the windows, the soft glow of the lighting further down the hallway. See the reflections of the surfaces in the space. Have the model walk around a little bit in the space and see how all of the lights move around them, how the space moves around them. Feel the texture of wood on that stairwell and imagine what it must feel like to them as they walk down the same stairs in the clothing, the emotions and the story you've set for this shoot. Then take a deep breath and—begin. ■



David is an award-winning photographer, Photoshop artist and educator who specializes in unique portrait and photo manipulation art. Through his brand Reality Reimagined, his artwork spans the genres of fantasy, glamour, fashion and all the stories found therein. In 2018, he received the Grand Award from the ShutterFest image competition and is currently nominated for a Grand Imaging Award through Professional Photographers of America. The center of his universe is his wonderful wife Bethany, who reminds him to never be afraid to fly. Together they have traveled the world and continue to explore all the possibilities of Reality Reimagined and the imagination it is based on.

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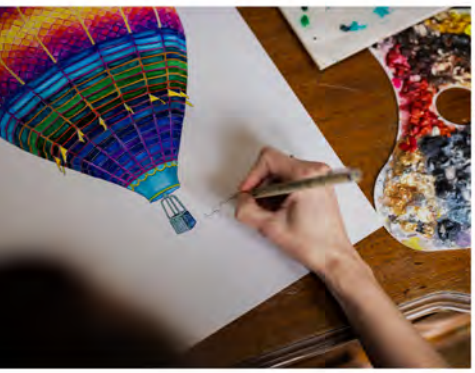
ALYISSA JOHNSON
GRAPHIC ARTIST



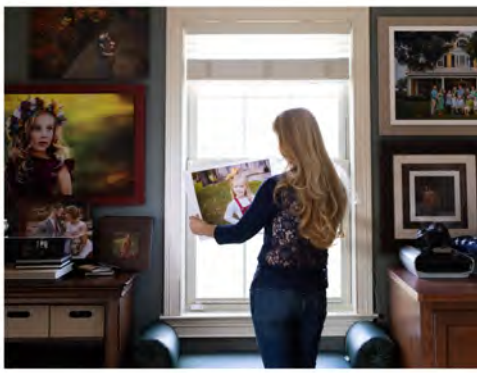
JENNY POLLITTE
PHOTOGRAPHER



EMILY MERCEDES
ARTIST



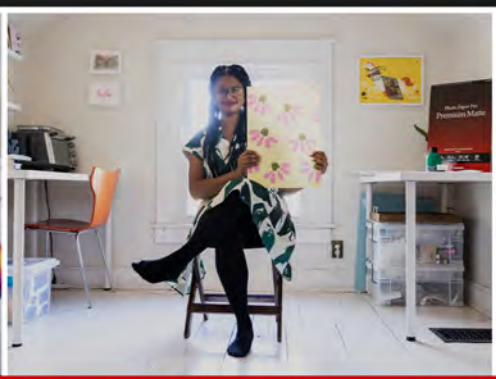




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3 STEPS TO PROTECT YOUR DIGITAL ASSETS

with **Dustin Lucas**

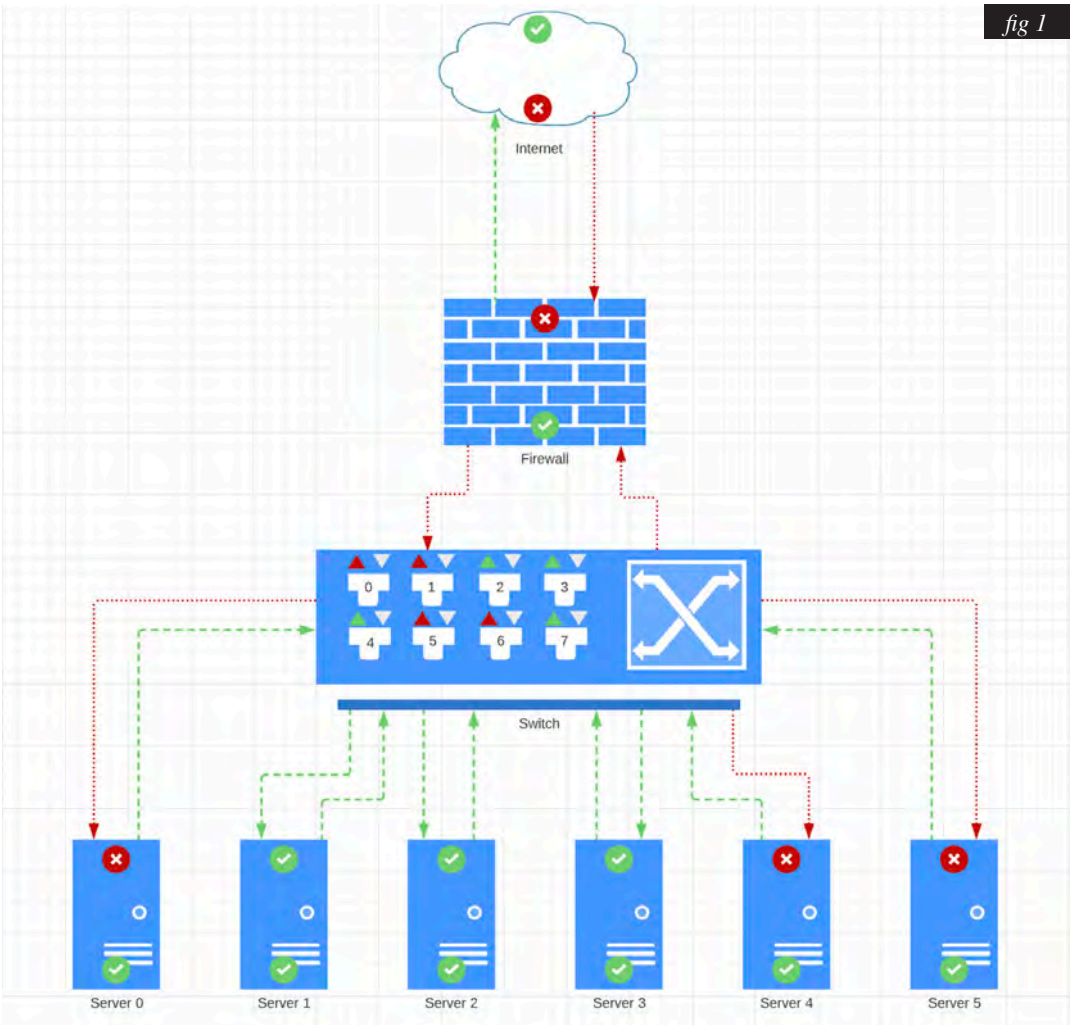


As a photographer getting your network hacked, having a hard drive crash might be something you hear about online but don't experience firsthand. What's the point of paying money for more hardware so you can have a secure network if you're all backed up on external storage and to the cloud, right? Well, that's key regardless of how you choose to secure your network. Always backup files in three places. More specifically, have two copies onsite and one offsite, but we'll get to that later.

Keep in mind if your data is online it's susceptible to being stolen, or worse, held ransom for Bitcoin. All hard drives fail and you need copies of your files. End of the day, you need a plan to put a barrier between your digital assets and the disasters that can destroy your business. In this article, you'll learn three steps you can take to protect your digital assets.

Step 1 is building a secure network with companies like Cisco, Netgear, and Fortinet that offer software and hardware. Just buy a damn firewall at the very least. Step 2 is getting a file server for storage and more specifically the device you and or your team work off directly. Step 3 is creating a file backup plan and sticking to it. Backing up files should be your first thought when it comes to your business' exposed data getting compromised and ransomed for Bitcoin, a client suing you for losing files from their wedding day, etc. You protect your business in a multitude of ways that seem obvious. Digital assets should be on that list too!

fig 1



STEP 1: BUILD A SECURE NETWORK

Network security can seem like a daunting task if you don't know anything about IT, and trust me, I was there myself. Hire a friend or colleague to help you lay out your network security so you can simply be cross-trained to maintain it in the long run. (Fig. 1) If you don't have the time to do it yourself then pay someone. Outsource it and give them a topline budget for a realistic approach to protecting your business. Be prepared to spend $1K-$2K for hardware and roughly $200-$500/year for management software. Maybe outsourcing is cheaper and better for scale. I'll let you decide what makes the most sense for your business. For me, I am not hiring a body to do this, I would only need them sporadically and I evolved my role to prioritize this. If you are wondering why you should spend $2K plus $500/year to maintain your security, look at the cost of risking all your data or worse, your entire business. If you can't budget this into your business expenses you might need to rethink your financials. Let's dive into the hardware first as this is the simple part.

You'll want to stick with the same brands, so whether you go unmanaged or managed everything works seamlessly. I chose Cisco's Meraki product line and it's expensive. My needs are likely different than yours. Start with getting a firewall to put a barrier between your internal or local network and the external network, commonly called the internet. This is a critical piece of hardware, and the best option for a small business in my opinion would be a Meraki or Fortinet system. (Fig. 2)



FortiGate 100E

Threat Protection Throughput – 250 Mbps

SSL Inspection Throughput – 130 Mbps

Next-Gen Firewall Throughput – 350 Mbps

FG100E datasheet



FortiGate 100F

IPS Throughput – 11.6 Mbps

SSL-VPN Throughput – 750 Mbps

Next-Gen Firewall Throughput – 800 Mbps

FG100F datasheet



FortiGate 60E

Next-Gen Firewall Throughput – 250 Gbps

IPS Throughput – 1.4 Gbps

SSL/VPN Throughput – 150 Mbps

FG60E datasheet



FortiGate 60F

Next-Gen Firewall Throughput – 1 Gbps

SSL VPN Throughput – 900 Mbps

Threat Protection Throughput – 700 Mbps

FortiGate 60F datasheet



FortiGate 200F

IPsec VPN Throughput – 13 Gbps

Threat Protection Throughput – 3 Gbps

SSL VPN Throughput – 4 Gbps

FortiGate 200F datasheet



Meraki MX64/W

Advanced Security Throughput – 200 Mbps

Stateful Firewall Throughput – 250 Mbps

VPN Throughput – 100 Mbps

Meraki MX series datasheet

fig 2

Before you buy one, find out what your internet speed is at www.speedtest.net so you can still maintain full bandwidth. (Fig. 3) This is important because each firewall model features a specific maximum throughput. Essentially this means if you have fiber internet and a bandwidth of a gigabit or 1000Mbps, you have to get a firewall with a throughput that matches or exceeds this bandwidth as you scale. If you have gigabit fiber already, a gigabit firewall to handle that is expensive. (Fig. 4) You'll likely want to get the same brand/model family for wireless access points (WAPs), or more commonly called wireless routers for secure WiFi, a 10Gbe network switch if you have a network attached storage (NAS), and a battery backup for power surges. (Fig. 5)

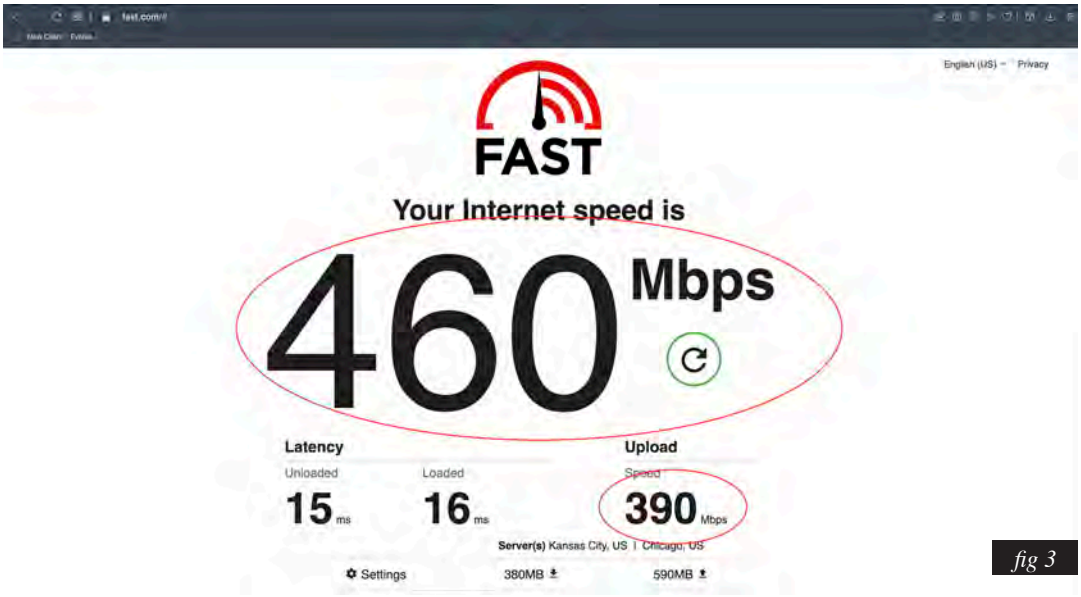


fig 3

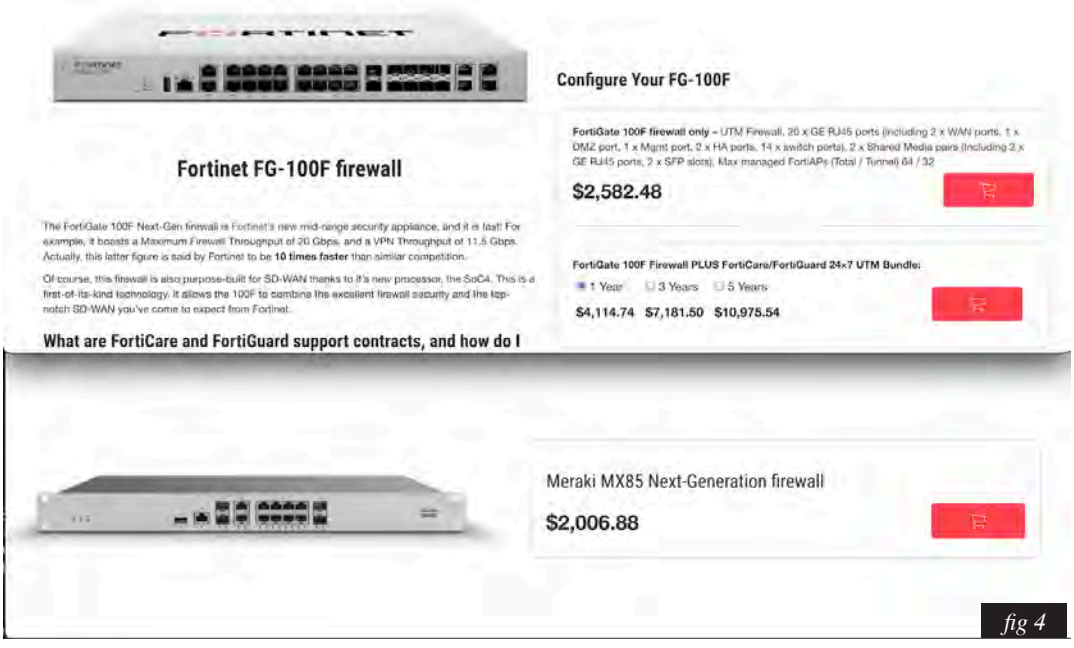


fig 4

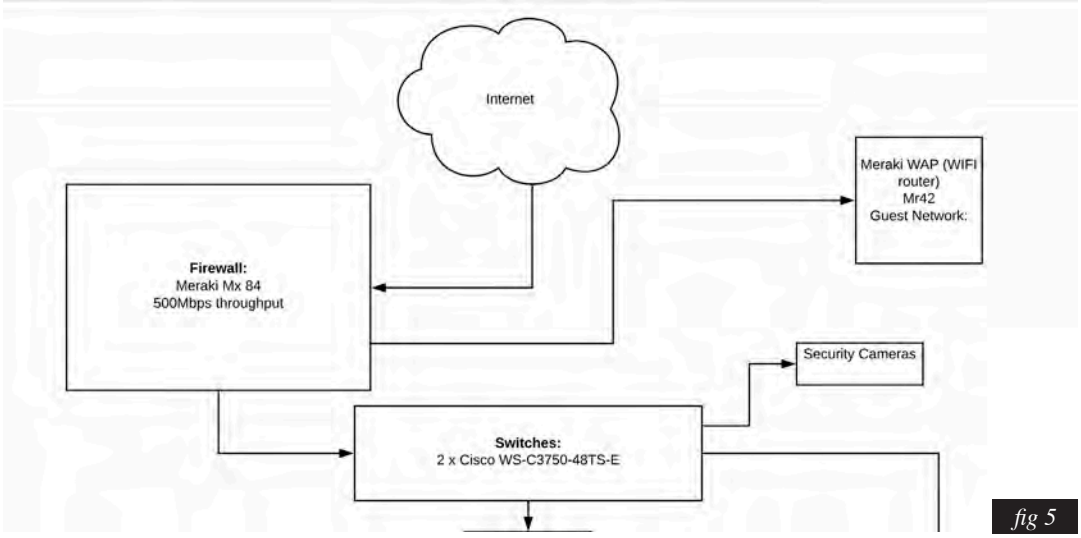


fig 5

Your network security layout would be the internet modem connected to a firewall's Wide Area Network or WAN port, then you'd connect the wireless routers, network switches to the additional ports. (Fig. 6)

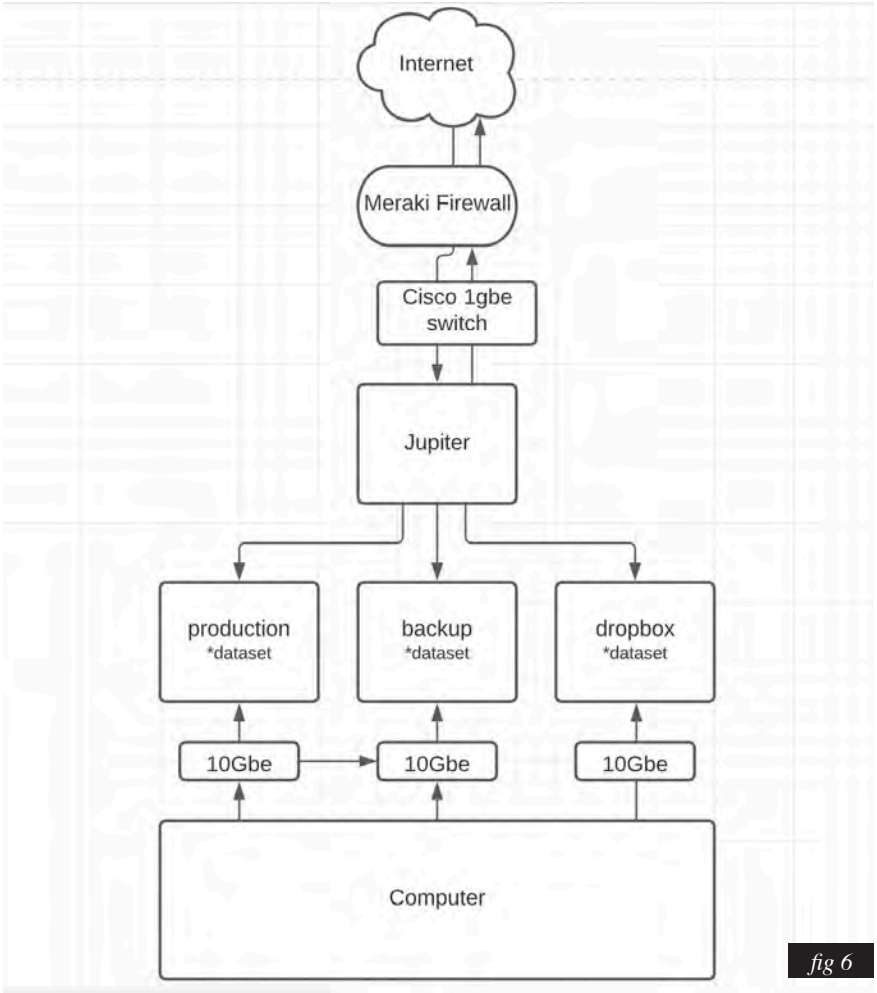


fig 6

Everything coming into your studio and going out is protected with the firewall. Unfortunately, I cannot go into depth on how to set up the firewall settings. That's why you need an IT person to do it or show you the ropes.

Another added benefit of setting up a firewall at your studio or home is you can have a VPN so your personal data and daily use is trackable. Take this a step further, with a VPN you can access your file server more securely from anywhere, not just in your studio, so you have more flexibility in access to your assets. Let's move into getting a file server as you'll likely be more interested in faster file sharing.

STEP 2: GET A FILE SERVER FOR STORAGE

Storage devices range from direct access storage (DAS) to an external hard drive connected via USB or thunderbolt or DAS, to a network attached storage (NAS) with five hard drives, all the way up to an enterprise storage area network (SAN). It's important to understand how these work and for the majority of you a DAS or NAS would be the way to go. If you have one production machine that serves as a desktop and never plan to add others, you can get away with DAS. This would mean the same computer is plugged directly into the same drive all the time. You can utilize your firewall's VPN capabilities to remotely access this computer from home. Meaning if your production machine stays at your studio and you want to access something from home, simply log in through your VPN and screen-share to the studio machine to get what you need. Of course, this all relies on the computer being powered on and the thought of leaving it turned on all the time seems like a bad plan, right? Or worse, it's impossible or too slow to transfer anything from that computer to yours. I'm an Apple guy through and through, but I will say Apple is terrible at managing files and being a file server. That's where a NAS system would perform better for file management and is an actual file server.

Now keep in mind, going with a NAS system requires in most cases a network switch, more ethernet cables and learning a new graphic user interface (GUI). You might be thinking, I don't have time to manage all this shit, right? Well, you absolutely should be in control of your file server if nothing else. This is a liability for your business. Since this is a network-based file system you would be able to access it internally or in the studio or externally through the internet. There are many options like Qnap, Synology, Drobo, OWC, etc. and I'm not going down a product review rabbit hole for this article. Stick with brands or software you already know and get a system with at least five to eight bays for expandability. (Fig. 7)



fig 7

What's important with this setup is to consider your network like a two-lane highway. You will want to access your files on one side of the highway and surf the internet on the other. This might require two ethernet cables if you plan to plug directly into the back of the NAS, which you can. Your other cable would go out to your switch, which is plugged into the firewall to go out to the internet. (Fig. 8)

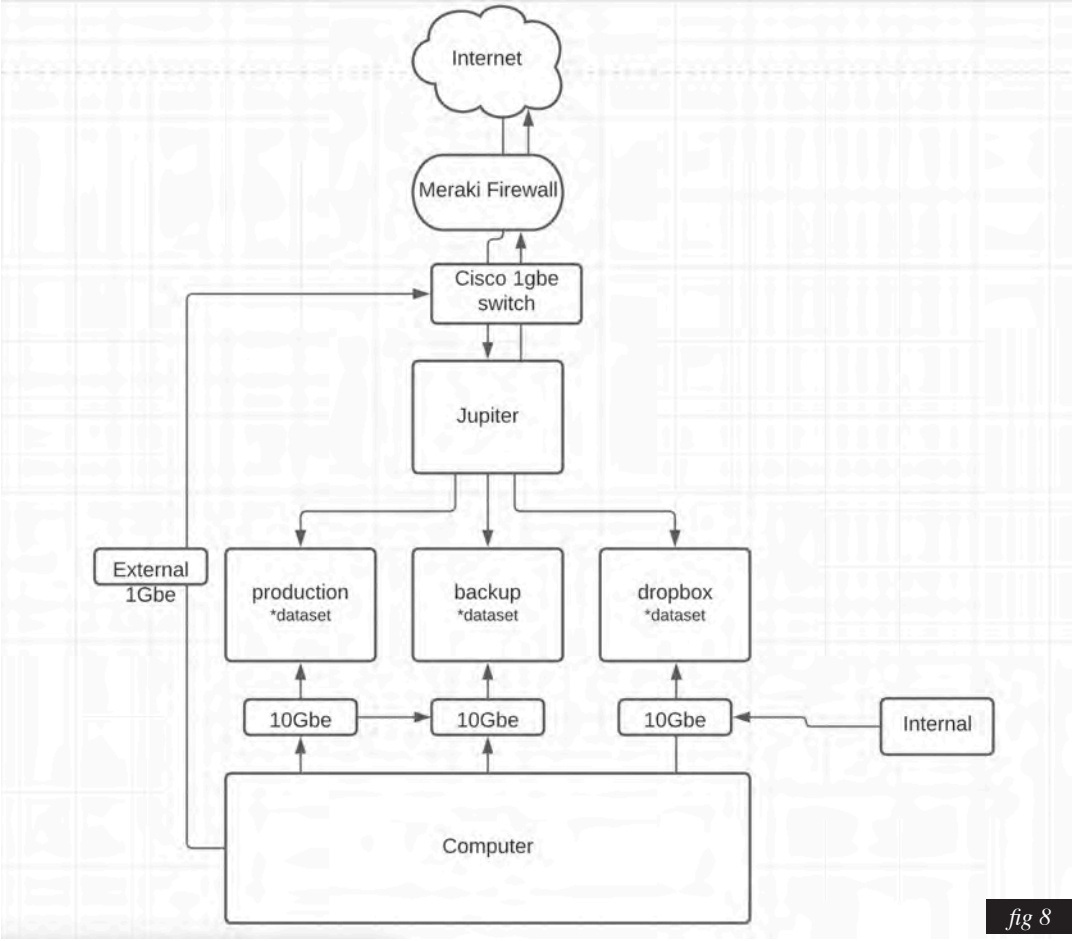


fig 8

Now you need to understand that networking is similar to making roads accessible for cars. What's the path of least resistance for getting from point A to point B? It is important to map out a plan or diagram to fully understand how you can have a centralized file server accessible internally and externally with the most performance. If budget is a concern because you just maxed out a $5K computer with a 10Gbe network card, well, you might consider getting a five-bay NAS drive with at least one 10Gbe ethernet port and one 1Gbe port. So you would plug directly from the computer to the NAS 10Gbe port to access files in studio and set up a true 10Gbe with an MTU of 9000. (Fig. 9)

The 1Gbe port on the NAS has to plug into either your 1Gbe switch or if you don't have one, directly to the firewall. This is so you can access files externally. Essentially you are creating two types of connections, 10Gbe for performance use and 1Gbe for public use. You would also need to buy an ethernet-to-USB dongle for your computer since you likely want a hard line connection for internet or WiFi if slower speeds aren't a concern. (Fig. 10) In many cases a switch would be your best option if going with a NAS. 10Gbe ones are getting cheaper and I would invest in this as it's more scalable. Do some research in this area as you might not need as beefy of a setup as explained above. (Fig. 11)

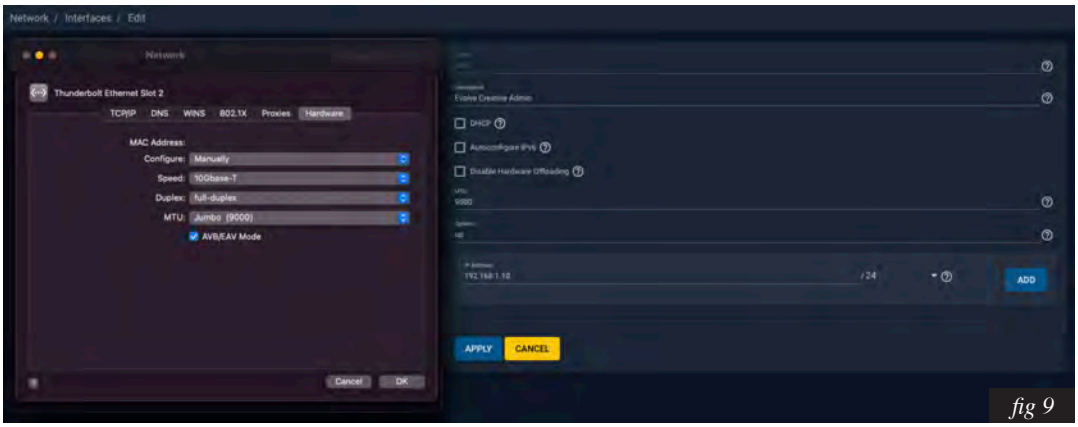


fig 9

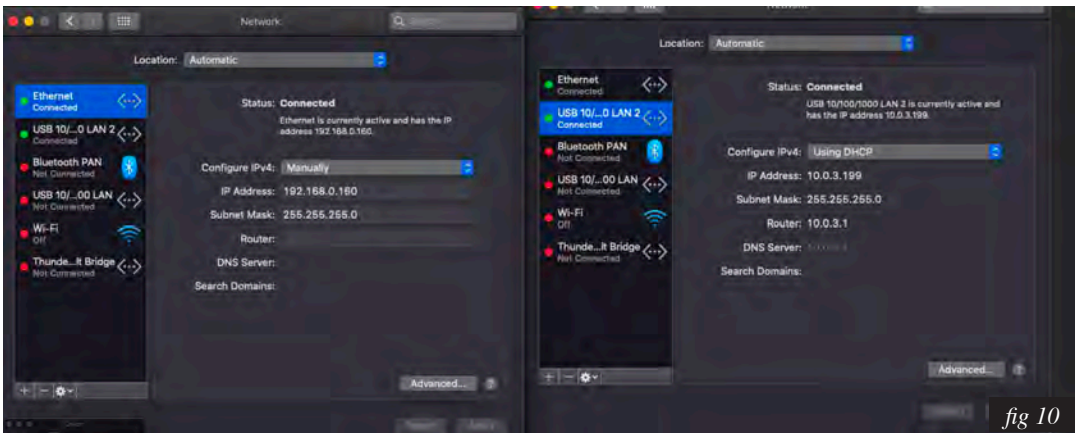


fig 10

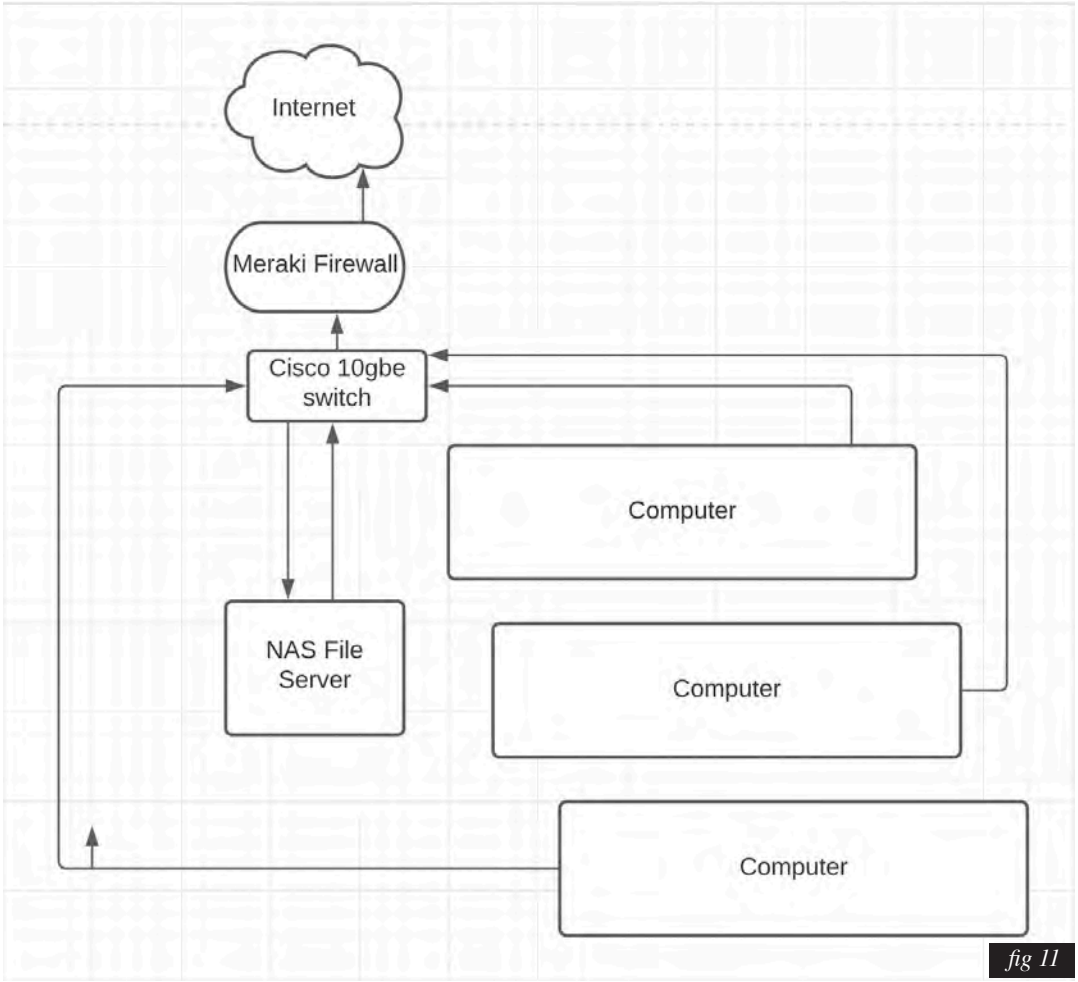


fig 11

I do want to quickly run through the types of drives to buy as well as RAID configuration for digital asset protection. There are a few common types of drives you'll need: mechanical or common desktop hard drive, solid state or SSD, and flash storage like NVMe, which most computers now come with. SSD would be ideal for faster transfer speeds, but you will be surprised how fast mechanical drives can be in different RAID configurations. Mechanical is the way to go when you need more than 10TBs. If you buy a diskless NAS drive, be sure to get NAS ready drives like Seagate Ironwolf, Western Digital Red drives or simply get enterprise drives rated for higher data rates. A 12TB drive averages $275 each and you'll need to get at least five of them depending on what system you buy.

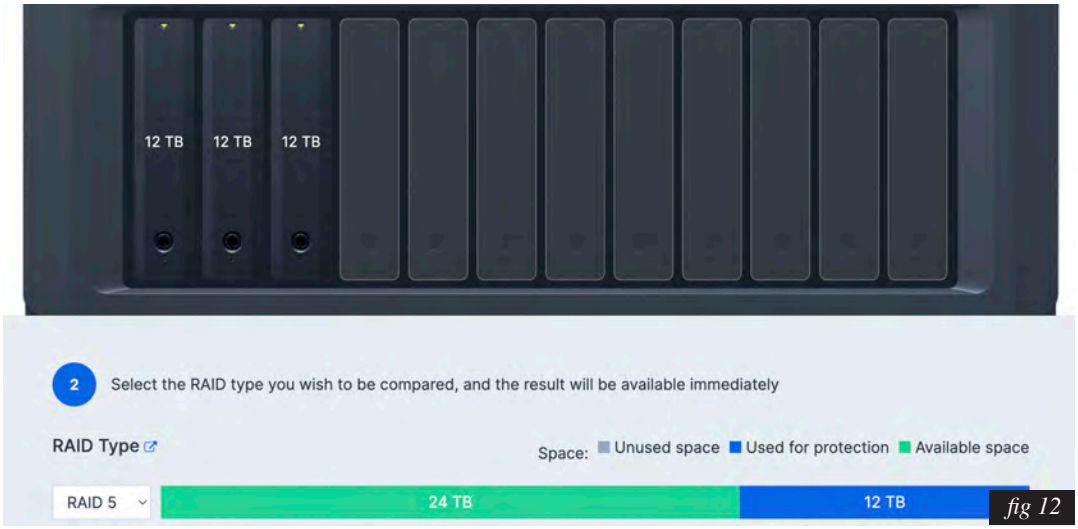


fig 12

RAID is part two to this and understand it's meant for drive failure. So if you have five drives and are using RAID 5 or 6 for instance, you don't lose all your data, your RAID software would rebuild the data once a new drive is installed. This is key for having what is called redundancy with your data. Keep in mind if you use RAID you don't get to keep full capacity of the drives you buy. For budget users, RAID 5 is best and you only need up to three drives as it's a good balance of performance and capacity. (Fig. 12) If you buy three 12TB drives, that's 36TB total, but using RAID 5 you get 24TB of usable space because the other 12TB is for redundancy protecting you from drive failure. I recommend going RAID 10 and getting four 12TB drives to get 24TB of usable space—the best option for protection and performance. (Fig. 13) Figure out what your capacity needs to be and get a system that protects you.

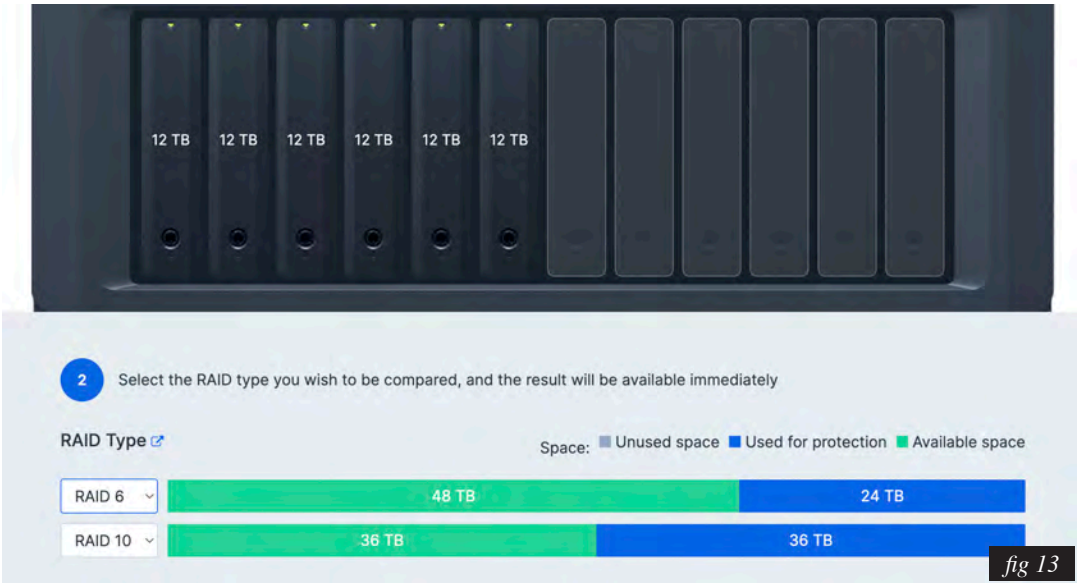


fig 13

STEP 3: CREATE A FILE BACKUP PLAN

In my experience, creating a file backup and archive plan is critical to making all of this work well. Otherwise you fill up a file server, buy a new one and just stack them in the back of the office forever. That's not a plan at all and quite lazy for managing your digital assets. To start, you need to follow the standard backup strategy of 3-2-1, which means you have a copy of a file in three places: two onsite and one offsite. (Fig. 14) So if you have cloud storage and receive files from associate photographers, you have the offsite part already. Using cloud storage companies like Dropbox, Back Blaze, AWS, etc. are cheap to store cold and typically cost when you download files. Again, to spend $500-$1,000 per year on cloud storage and never worry about losing a file is a smart investment to insulate yourself from getting sued by a client because your hard drives at the studio crashed. All their wedding pictures gone. Good luck navigating that.

Step 2 above, you should have a working file server built for performance and another storage system for storing only. You can use software like Time Machine or Carbon Copy to schedule backups between your NAS and the other storage you have. Again you should have two onsite and one offsite. Most of you will likely have a NAS file server with RAID as your onsite and that is sufficient along with using Backblaze to upload at night.

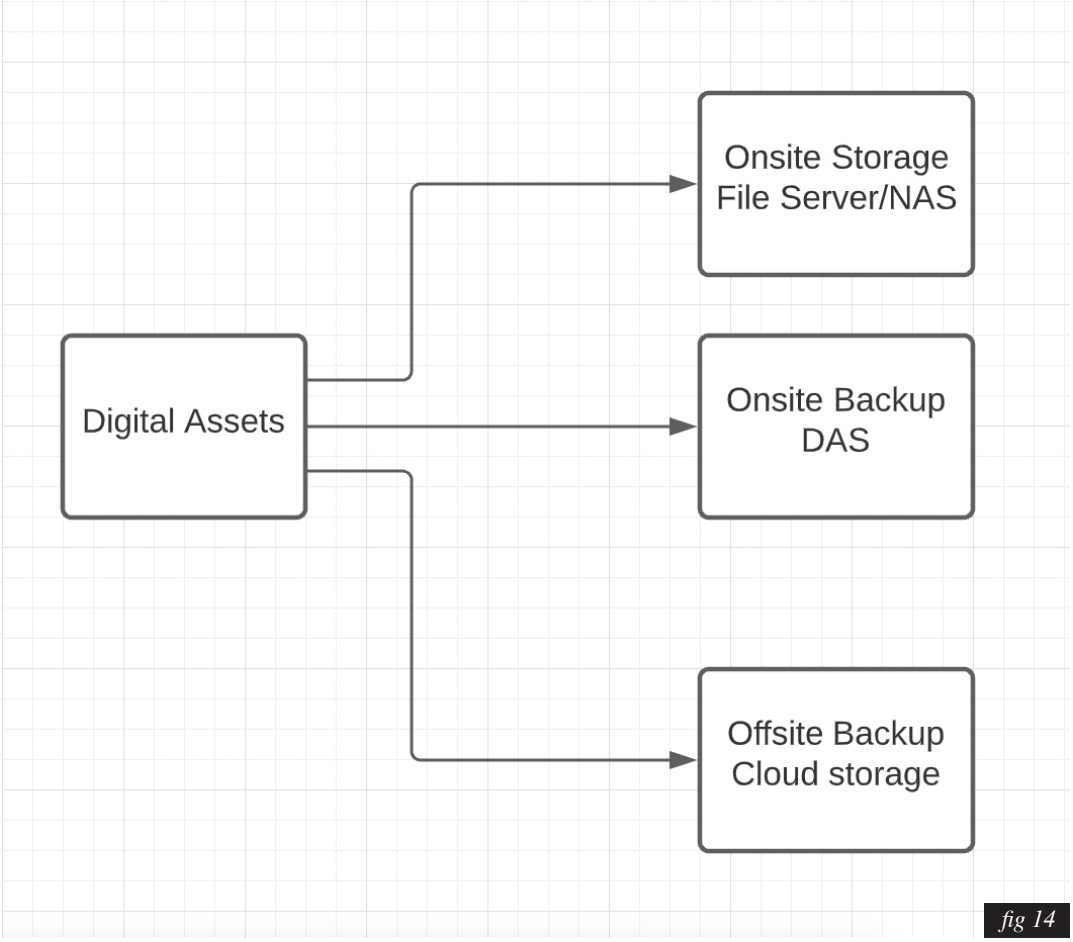


fig 14

Backup is only half of it. How are you going to archive files for customers? How long are you storing raw files locally for a delivered event? Both are really good questions and many photographers sneak this in their contract that they dump the work after so many days to put the responsibility on the customer. Sure you can storage deliver high-resolution JPGs online, but why keep the raw files forever? Well, from experience, you might have a client asking for more images of their relative that died a year after the wedding. Or maybe you missed a section and the client notices it six months later, etc. Storage is cheap and you should 100% store raw files offsite in cold storage where you pay a low monthly fee to store the files there and only pay extra to download. It's a solid what-if plan and could be massive for your client experience. I would say after you rename, export and deliver all products, keep the raws onsite for 12 months. Then push the Raw + .xmp files to cloud storage, that's cheap. If you create a folder tree structure based on /Volumes/production/year/month/client name and event/asset folders, you can simply move them off your NAS RAID system to the hard drive that transfers to your cold storage. (Fig. 15) Maybe instead, do this at the beginning and you'll already have the 3-2-1 in place! (Fig. 16)

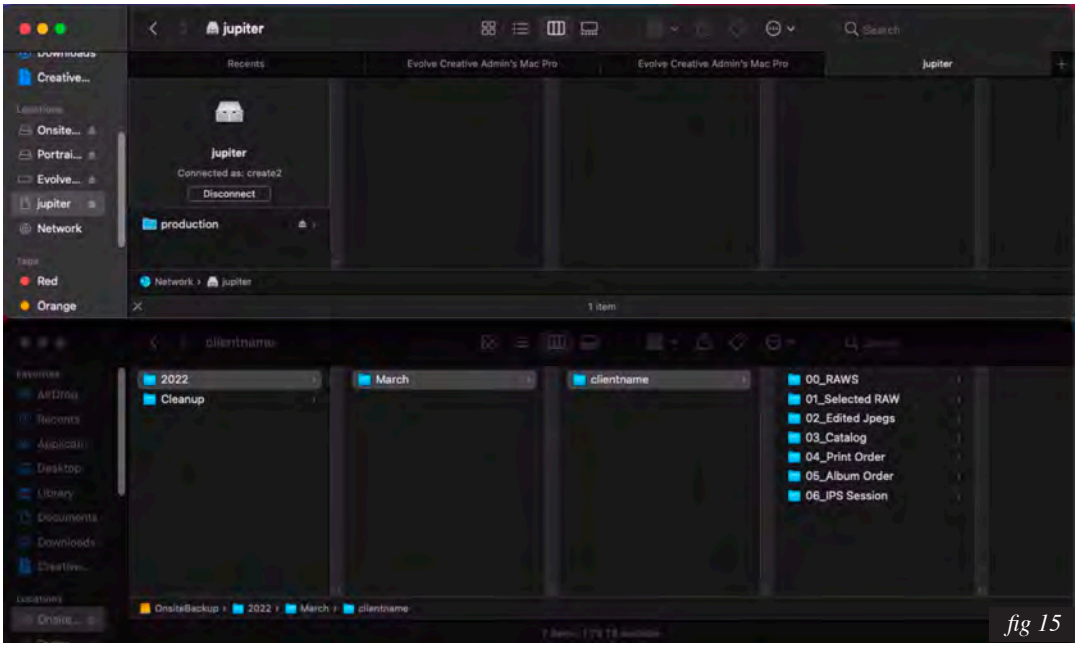


fig 15

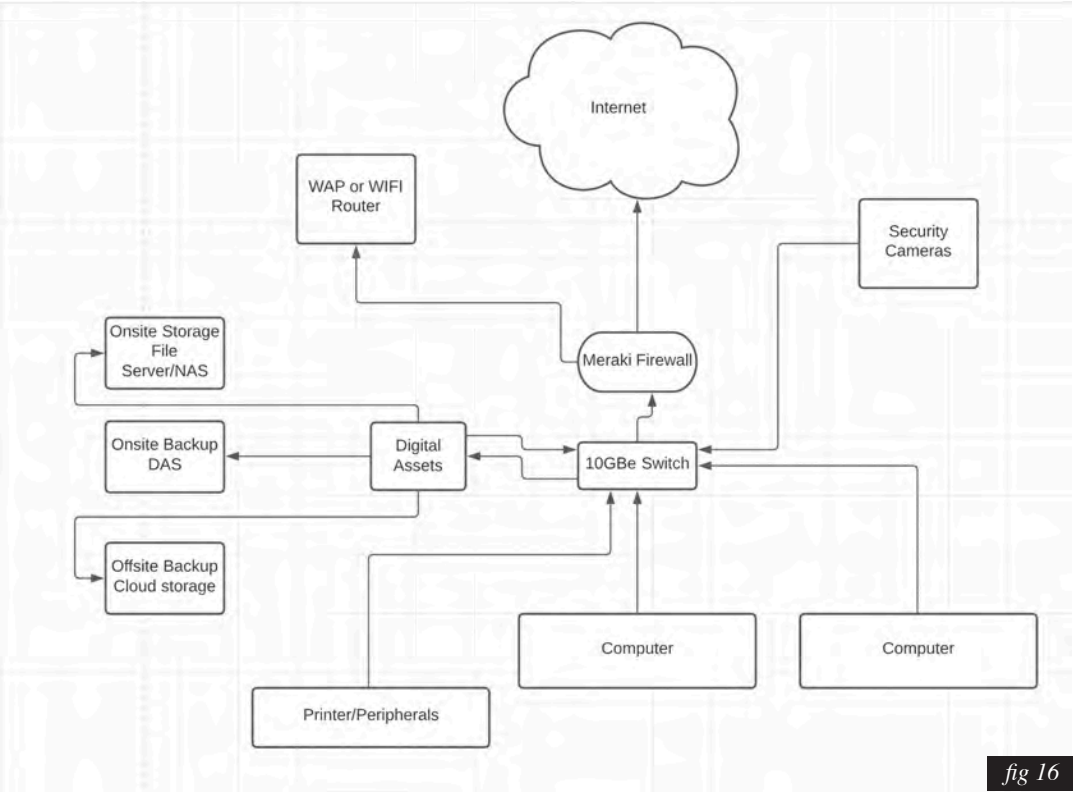


fig 16

THE RESULTS

I cannot stress enough how important it is to make a plan and protect your digital assets. With these three steps you can at least consider the vulnerabilities you weren't aware of and prioritize this for your business. I would enlist professionals to help with securing your network if you don't have the capacity to learn. Get with a colleague for storage needs and compare what they do to my suggestions. Maybe you can create a hybrid option for DAS and NAS based on your needs. Last but not least, back up your files using the 3-2-1 strategy along with creating an archive plan so you don't fill up 24TB in two years. Plan better for your business and don't let disasters destroy your digital assets. ■

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Dustin Lucas is a full-time photographer and educator focused on the wedding industry and the academic world. After achieving his Master of Fine Arts degree, a career opportunity opened once he began working with Evolve Edits. Through teaching photography classes and writing about photography, Dustin continues to expand his influence on art and business throughout the industry.

website: evolveedits.com instagram: instagram.com/evolveimaging/

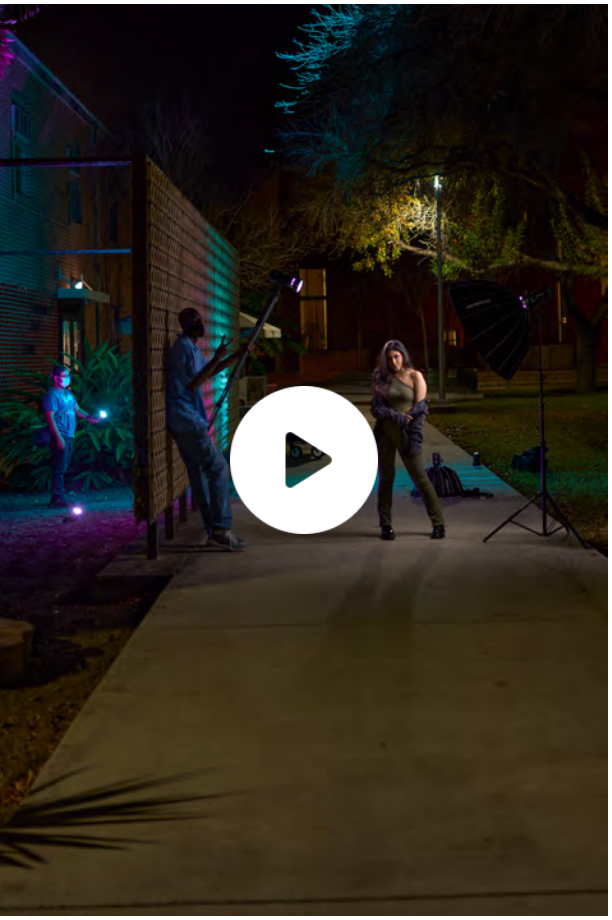
SEEING THE LIGHT: OUTDOOR LIGHTING VS. STUDIO

with **Eli Infante**





Image © Eli Infante Photography



When setting up a photoshoot, one of the most significant decisions a portrait photographer can make is the stylistic choice between shooting outdoors or in the studio. Each has its advantages and disadvantages, but the lighting can offer extraordinary results. That's why I follow a few philosophies for each approach. Here are a few tips to get creative with lighting, whether you're outdoors or in the studio.

OUTDOORS

When planning a shoot, I think about how important the setting is to the concept. One of the most significant advantages of outdoor lighting is capturing dramatic scenes. We have gorgeous locations in South Texas, such as South Padre Island and Sal Del Rey. I've also had the chance to capture some of my most thrilling photographs with beautiful Texas sunsets in the background.



Images © Eli Infante Photography

Another reason to light outdoors is the opportunity of working with the environment to create a good photo composition. Here is an example of using framing with the building in the background. On location, shooting can provide variety and is one of the key factors I look for when scouting. I found an interesting wall pattern at the location, so I placed two speedlights with color gels to create a one-of-a-kind photo using a four-light setup.

The most important lesson I've learned about lighting outdoors is how many possibilities there are to work with the environment at the location. Finding a great location can set the mood for your shoot and can play a significant role in your artistic vision.

Image © Eli Infante Photography

AMBIENT EXPOSURE

NO FLASH

ISO 100 - F/2.5 - 1/5000

TIP -THE SHUTTER SPEED CONTROLS THE AMBIENT LIGHT AND THE FLASH IS USED TO EXPOSE THE SUBJECT.



Images © Eli Infante Photography

CAMERA SETTINGS AND GEAR OUTDOORS

When lighting outdoor portraits, you have two exposures. You first set your ambient exposure (available light) with your camera settings. For most of my work outdoors, I'm using ISO 100, Aperture f/2.8 and below, and using the shutter speed to control how dark or bright I want my background to be. Once I've dialed in the appropriate exposure for my ambient light, then I turn on my flash. The flash only affects the subject's exposure and is set to high-speed sync when added. High-speed sync is a technique that allows me to go above my flash sync speed to capture shallow depth of field portraits, which is my personal stylistic choice.

My go-to strobe for on-location work is the Westcott FJ400 and FJ200 because they pack enough power for my photographs. I try to pack light and keep my softboxes to 24 to 36 inches if there is wind or heavy foot traffic. I used large modifiers when I started shooting, which was a huge nightmare on windy days. My go-to lenses for outdoor work are a 35mm and 85mm prime. The 35mm allows me to create environmental portraits to showcase the location, while the 85mm is super useful when creating that beautiful bokeh when the opportunity arises.





Images © Eli Infante Photography



LIGHT SETUPS - OUTDOORS

When it comes to lighting outdoors, I narrow it down to two simple setups: butterfly lighting and Rembrandt. Butterfly lighting is excellent because it's easy to use and looks great on most subjects. To create butterfly light, place your light above your subject angled down until you get the catchlights in the upper-middle part of the eye. The Photoflex LiteReach Plus is an excellent boom for this setup.

The other classic staple is Rembrandt lighting, where you place the light 45 degrees to the subject. I use the sun as a rim light to add dimension to improve this light setup. I cover more in-depth about these setups in the January '22 issue of *Shutter Magazine*.











Images © Eli Infante Photography







Images © Eli Infante Photography





STUDIO

The best part of a studio setup is working in a controlled environment. When shooting outdoors, you must consider the blistering heat, wind and weather that can ruin a shoot, so access to a studio is imperative. I enjoy the studio when I know I want to get multiple looks in a short span. You can also fine-tune your vision with color backdrops or custom-built sets. Your mindset is the only limit to your creativity in the studio. Here is an example where I captured three different looks with three different modifiers. If I want various looks, the studio is the way to go.

Lighting in the studio also provides unique opportunities to work with modifiers like the Westcott Optical Spot. The Optical Spot unlocks creative showstopping results. It adds another dimension of lighting possibilities because of the gobos. Here are two examples using the Westcott FJ400 and the Optical Spot for a unique look.





Images © Eli Infante Photography

CAMERA SETTINGS & GEAR - STUDIO

In the studio, the approach is much different. My goal with my camera settings is to kill all ambient light in the studio. That way, I will have a completely blank canvas to sculpt the light with my flash. The one setting that usually remains consistent is my shutter speed, which I set to my flash sync speed of 1/200 and disable high-speed sync. The main difference in the studio is the aperture. When shooting outdoors, I create shallow depth of field portraits, but I use aperture f/5.6 and above in the studio to create more depth to showcase the makeup and styling.

For ISO, there are many variables to how I set it. If I need fast recycle times with my strobe, I'll increase it to lower the power output. When I'm working with modifiers such as the optical spot, the ISO will increase because that modifier reduces the power output as the light travels through the lens and gobo. The lens that never comes off my camera is the Canon RF 24-105mm because it offers the flexibility to reframe your shot on the fly. As for modifiers, I love the 24" or 36" Westcott Beauty Dish because it offers the perfect blend between hard light and soft light.



Image © Eli Infante Photography



Images © Eli Infante Photography

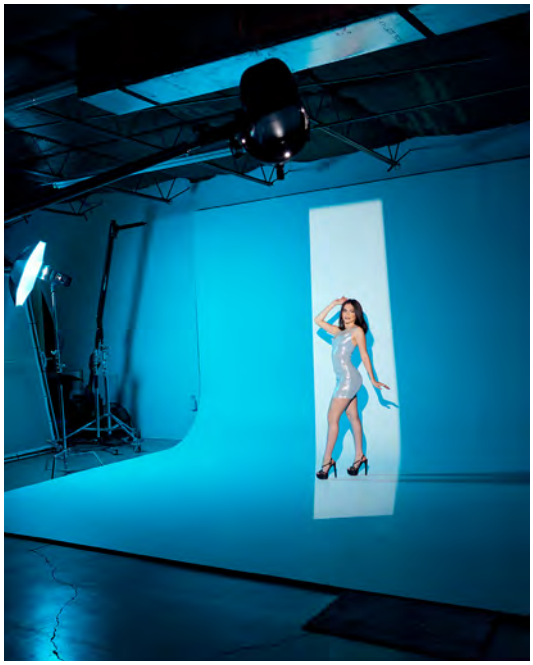




Image © Eli Infante Photography

LIGHT SETUPS - STUDIO

My favorite light setup in the studio is butterfly lighting using the Westcott 36" Beauty Dish with a 48"x72" Silver Reflector on the floor. This light setup produces an excellent quality of light with minimal post-processing needed. I use this setup whenever I'm working with a new model because they have creative freedom when posing.

The optical spot is a great modifier to create images that set you apart. The lens and gobos that come with the optical spot become this ever-growing toolbox of creative possibilities. For example, I love using the circle gobo to create a light pattern around my subject. Another great look is using the leaves to create a slice of light. The leaves allow you to control the portion of light you want by moving each leaf. When I post on social media, it never fails that this modifier will draw attention.

The next time you're deciding on your lighting outdoors or in the studio, make sure your concept matches your vision. I hope these tips and light setups can offer new possibilities to your creative toolbox. Please check my YouTube channel for more in-depth content. ■



Eli Infante is a Westcott Top Pro and native-born resident of the Rio Grande Valley who draws most of his inspiration for photography from unique South Texas landscapes and historical structures. When he is not out shooting utilizing the gorgeous South Texas sunset as his background, you can find him educating hungry young minds at a charter school teaching none other than, you guessed it, photography! Eli also shares his skills and talents with other eager photographers via YouTube and in-person workshops.

website: www.eliinfante.com instagram: instagram.com/eli_infante_



Image © heather larkin photography



HOW MACRO PHOTOGRAPHY CAN HELP YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

with **Heather Larkin**



Image © heather larkin photography

As a portrait photographer, my photo sessions can often be somewhat stressful, especially since I work with kids a lot. I have long been in the habit of taking some time off to go explore the local botanical gardens and as a photography nerd, I always take my camera with me. Over time, I started not only paying attention to what was easy to see, but looking for things that aren't always easy to see. It became a sort of hunt or game for me to see how many species of flowers or bugs I could see in a typical morning.

During the pandemic, macro photography became sort of a sanctuary for me. When we were all stuck in our houses, I could go outside and still feel a little bit normal. I found that especially in the later months it helped my mental stability quite a lot. When I was feeling hopeless or anxious or generally upset with the world, I would go do macro photography in my garden or at the local botanical gardens and come back in a much better mood. Why is that, and how can we use it to our advantage?



GETTING OUTSIDE

We as humans don't do well when cooped up in the same place for too long. We are not meant to exist in places without trees and plants and dirt. Extensive research has clearly shown the requirement for being outside in the sun. Not only do our bodies need actual sunlight to work properly, but our minds need green as well.

Scientists have proven that getting outside can be a great mood booster. Gardening releases serotonin because our brains respond to a certain smell in the soil. It's all interconnected, and humans need the outside to function well. We get anxious and depressed without it.

Going outside for a couple of hours and just wandering around and looking at the plants can help break the cycle of anxiety or depression. I call it "breathing the green." Getting outside and breathing the green is one of the shortest, fastest ways that I can reliably feel better if I notice that I'm being too hard on myself or worrying too much about things that don't actually matter for real life.



Image © heather larkin photography

SLOW DOWN

Humans live in a fast-paced world. We expect instant gratification, and in general we become irritable or anxious when we don't receive something immediately. Macro photography is something that you can't do at velocity. You must slow down and take your time, or you won't see anything. You'll just get more and more frustrated and angry. When I teach macro classes, this is the most important thing and I repeat it often. You absolutely MUST go slow. Macro is the art of making the little bigger, and in order to see the little things out there to be seen, you have to take your time.





Images © heather larkin photography

ALONE TIME – SELF CARE

If you're an introvert like me, being alone is a crucial form of self-care. Going out to wander the gardens and look at lizards for a few hours definitely works on recharging those social batteries.

Even if you're not an introvert, being alone is a great way to avoid your thoughts (or avoid your overthinking). Because you have to slow down and focus on looking for things, you can't be thinking about what you're going to do for dinner or who you need to email. You have to be present in the moment or you'll walk right on by pretty much everything.



Image © heather larkin photography

LOOK LITTLE

Looking for macro subjects actually takes two things. You need to be going slow enough to see things, but you also have to have a mind shift where instead of seeing a whole plant, you see the leaves. Instead of looking at the flowers, you look for what's causing the holes in the petals. You lean close, watch for movement or something that doesn't belong. Because you're doing this, your mind learns to focus on the smaller details instead of the bigger whole. It's a huge help in balancing mental health because keeping things small and breaking them into pieces means you're not overwhelmed by the big picture. Take it slow, make it small, see the little things.



MAKE IT A GAME

Because you're looking for little things, it can become a sort of hunt or game you play with yourself. How many critters did you see today? Maybe you saw one that's a new species for you. It's something you can accomplish and feel good about doing. Not only are you out breathing the green and ignoring the world, but you also get to win at finding spiders or getting a lizard to hold still long enough for a great picture. Sure there's no trophy, but I'll bet no one else at the gardens saw that jumping spider in the daffodil I saw last week. I win! Winning is an important part of the human experience, and when you can win at something that hurts no one else, your brain likes it even more.



Images © heather larkin photography

CURSE AT THE LIZARDS

Also, sometimes you don't win. I have seen many more lizards than I have photos of, because they see you coming and run away. I whisper curse words at them as a form of personal therapy. If one runs away before I get the camera up, I whisper-yell, "Oh, you little shit!" at it. It's funny, and research has proven that people who curse feel less pain in a painful situation. I am pained by missing that shot since I'm a bit of a perfectionist. But if I can call it names, it makes it more funny than upsetting. It remains a positive experience. I also thank the subjects that stay still for me long enough to get my shot, because that's nice and polite.



Image © heather larkin photography

PRACTICE BREATHING

Mindful breathing is a mediation or relaxation technique. Guess what else you get to do while out doing macro photos? Since the depth of field is razor thin when you're that close to your subjects, the simple act of taking a breath can put the whole image out of focus. So I find myself holding my breath, or even clicking on the exhale. If I need to stay in one area for a while, regulating my breathing keeps me in the macro mood instead of letting my brain wander to things I shouldn't be thinking about.

MOVE WITH THE WIND

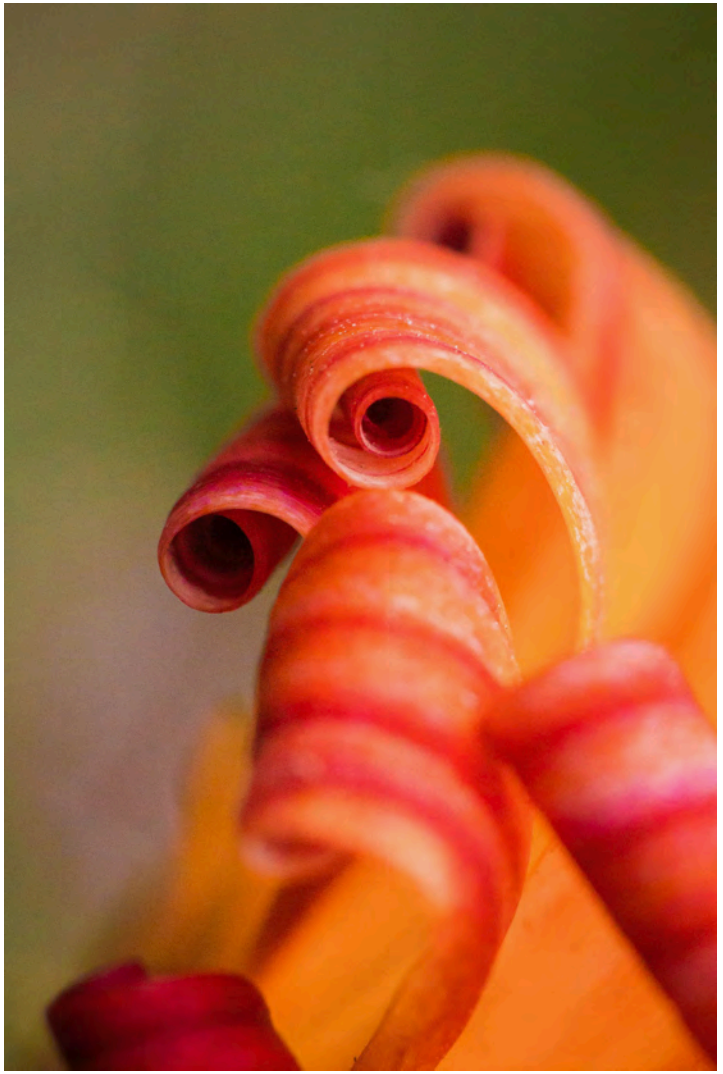
Taking pictures of things in nature is a big challenge anyway, but never more so than when the wind is blowing around something you want to capture. I don't often go out on windy days because it makes me frustrated, but a slight breeze can be fun to work in.

Suppose you're taking a photo of a flower blowing around in a slight wind. You have to anticipate a little on when it's going to blow around that flower, then you have to move with it as it wiggles to keep things in focus. Not only is this a mindfulness skill, but you can also win at this game too.



Image © heather larkin photography





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Image © heather larkin photography

IT'S EDUCATIONAL

Did you know that the vast majority of adults over 25 haven't read a book since college? We're living in the information and digital age! With the amount of apps and Wikipedia and Google out there, we can find out just about anything we care to know. It's incredible. So that jumping spider that you slowed down to see, you leaned in close to find, you hunted, you won at seeing that day... well, what kind is it? It's not going to be everyone's idea of fun to look up plants or bugs to identify them, but if you're as much of a nerd as I am, then it might be.

The brain gets rewarded when it learns something new, so by researching all of what you see, you're not only being more educated, but you give your mind a boost too. It's been proven that learning throughout all of life is critical to continued brain development and mood, so do yourself a favor and start looking up what interests you.

As you can see, macro photography can be extremely beneficial for our mental health. I know you'll feel a whole lot better if you go out and breathe the green, hunt some bugs, and win some pictures no one else saw. Slow down, look little, and your mind will thank you. ■



Heather is a photographer in Athens, Georgia and a SIGMA America Ambassador. She is internationally known for fairytale images and has been published in many magazines. She lives with her husband and two fat blind cats and spends her hobby time gardening and taking macro photos.

website: www.heatherlarkinphoto.com **instagram: www.instagram.com/heatherlarkinmacro**


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THE ART OF CONCEPTUAL PORTRAITS

with **Jess Hess**


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Portraits have been important to humans for as long as anyone can remember, starting with cave drawings, etchings and sculptures, then moving on to paintings and eventually numerous types of early-stage photography. Photographs these days can be important for all sorts of reasons, but long ago the largest reason to have a portrait was to remember or immortalize a person of significance. A person of significance back then would have been the leaders, healers, heroes of a community. Effigies were created for these people so their likeness could be captured and saved for all time.

As the years moved on and portraiture evolved, "people of significance" became your families, your local business owners, etc. People started having paintings done of themselves and their families. They started having multiple portraits done showing their various homes or hobbies or loves.

These days, a portrait doesn't have to be so serious, nor does it have to be important to a person to be captured. It's perfectly commonplace these days to take 30 photos of your new haircut only to post one, or to take a bunch of photos of your cat licking your face, solely because "Biscuits looked so cute!" Portraits today are so easy to take that they don't need to have a reason to be taken, other than simply wanting to take them. This allows us as individuals to get super creative. Without needing a reason to create and without needing a foundation for something to be allowed to exist, we started turning portraits into something that was fun. We started doing our makeup, getting dressed up, putting on wigs and capturing ourselves as these alter egos. We started becoming these characters that we were making up in our own heads and portrayed those characters by dressing up and taking photos.





Images © Wurmwood Photography

So, what are conceptual portraits? What is the difference between them and traditional portraits and typical conceptual photos? Normal portraits portray a person as themselves, whereas conceptual portraits portray a character that the person is playing, or an inner part of themselves that they are bringing out. Classic portraits are very "what you see is what you get," very surface level in terms of theme. A traditional portrait says, "This is me; this is who I am and what I look like." A conceptual portrait, however, says something different. It might say, "This is how I feel" or "This is who I want to be."

Typical conceptual photographs portray a concept or theme but aren't entirely focused on the relation to that concept from the subject. I like to think of conceptual portraiture as something that tells a part of a story, focusing only on the subject, and that the story is secondary to that subject. So the theme or idea is there, but you're really just seeing a character in that story rather than the whole story itself. As an example of this, picture a photo of Rapunzel in a tall tower, with her suitor climbing her hair. That would be a conceptual photo, for sure. Now take that idea and only show Rapunzel sitting on her floor, posed gracefully in a bed of hair and flowers. That isn't telling a story, but it is showing the character in a story and would be considered a conceptual portrait more so than just a conceptual photograph. It isn't a conceptual photo showing the tale of Rapunzel being saved, it is rather just a portrait of her, this imaginary character, as she is.

Conceptual portraits aren't anything new, but they have certainly gained traction over the years as fashion, culture and social media boomed, and we are seeing so many new and creative ideas emerge every day.



Image © Wurmwood Photography



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In a lot of my work, my themes are simply “otherworldly” or “abnormal,” and those are concepts I reuse over and over. You can look at many of my photos and not be able to tell what kind of story they are telling, but you can tell that they are set in a place or dimension not of our own, and that there is something off or abnormal about them. The entire concept in these portraits is that there is a place beyond reality where beings exist that live and think and feel a plethora of emotions, and the photos are showing those characters and shining the tiniest light onto the slightest crevasse of that person’s existence. We don’t wield magical powers or cry blood or have bright yellow eyes, but the characters in a story might, and that story doesn’t have to exist anywhere outside of your own head for you to make a character in it come to life.



Images © Wurmwood Photography

Are conceptual portraits different than traditional portraits in other ways? Sure! Traditional portraits are almost always made to be flattering, whereas conceptual portraits don't necessarily need to be. When showing raw emotion or portraying a less-than-Hallmark story, your subject might not look dressed up or polished, or even beautiful. There will be times you want to show the darker parts of fantasy or the harsher realities of the world.
Another difference can be seen in pre-planning and post-production. Since there is more to factor in aside from the subject and their outfit, setting up a conceptual portrait might entail a bit more work than a traditional portrait, and a lot more planning. You may need to build a set, get a specific wardrobe, set up a plethora of intricate lights, or edit a photo for six hours to get it just right. For the most part, I will use one or two lights in a traditional portrait but might use three to six lights and modifiers for a conceptual portrait, and it takes time to get each light exactly where it needs to be in relation to my subject.

A traditional portrait photo might take 10 to 20 minutes to edit, and a conceptual portrait photo might take an hour or even several. With conceptual portraits, I can make changes to everything because realism isn't exactly the goal. Blending fantasy with reality is my personal goal, so I try to keep the photos clear and technically sound, but then I also add a lot of intricate details to make it unique and make it my work—and those are things you can't usually do with traditional portrait work. I might add glowing halos, a disorienting background, light rays or face paint to get the look that I want. While editing I don't have to pay attention to the rules of portraiture as much, so I can experiment with color balance, exposure and more in unconfined and unique ways.



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People might ask, "Why would anyone want to pay to play dress-up?" Beats me, I don't have the answer! All I know is that they do. And even though I can't explain why they do, I am absolutely one of them. I love dressing up and playing a part as well, because it's genuinely fun! I think that deep down we all want to be something unique, or we want to explore who we already are. Maybe it's the grace you saw in a ballerina or the stoic contemplation of a character in your favorite show; somewhere along the line you saw these traits and wanted them for yourself, even if only to try them on for a brief moment. The kids that walk around on a crisp fall day and pretend to be controlling the wind grow up into adults who want to see what they'd look like as powerful sorcerers. The people who enjoyed art-based card games or science fiction movies grew up to be adults who still love the magic and the lore and the stories they were raised on and want to see themselves on those cards and in those roles.

We all want to be a part of a cool story, and we all want to explore the emotional bonds we form between us and the traits of our most beloved characters, whether the characters are those on print and TV, that we meet in real life, or the ones in our own heads. And the extra fun thing about having a subject portray someone else is that you are still capturing a part of them, because the character resonates with them in personal ways. You may be taking a photo of them as someone else, but you are still capturing a part of them and who they really are. To me, it makes the extra work behind each of these images more fun and more meaningful than some of the other styles I shoot. ■



Jess Hess is a professional fine art and conceptual portrait photographer based out of Dayton, Ohio. At her Wurmwood Photography studio, she blends vibrant colors and unusual ideas with classic portraiture for her own unique take on portrait photography. Her studio is located in a large 200-year-old church called Castle Morningstar, situated in the middle of a graveyard, making her client experience unique from start to finish (and the clients even more unique!). She spends her spare time educating other photographers, renting out her space to local artists, making costumes and props, and hosting photographic events in "the castle."

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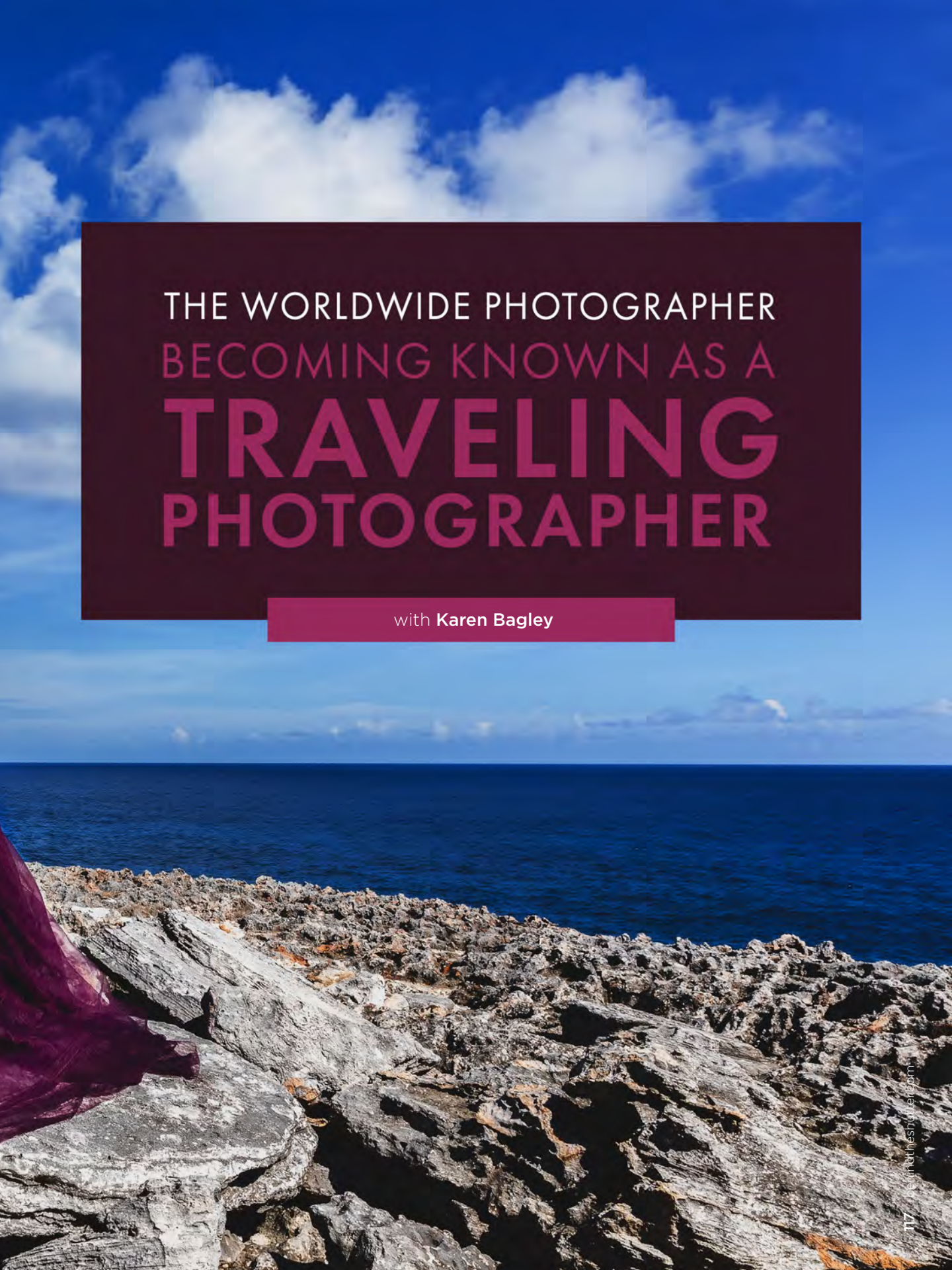
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THE WORLDWIDE PHOTOGRAPHER

BECOMING KNOWN AS A TRAVELING PHOTOGRAPHER

with **Karen Bagley**



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Right out of the gate, the first thing we should do in this article is list the breakdown of the different types of traveling photographers.

1. You have the destination photographer who travels to another location from their home studio to wherever their client lives.
2. You have the photographer that has clients travel to the photographer's location.
3. Then you have the photographer who travels WITH their clients to whatever destination they desire to be photographed at.

If you are wanting to fit one or possibly all three categories, this article is for you! For me personally, I do all three.

1 GETTING STARTED: BECOMING A DESTINATION PHOTOGRAPHER

In the beginning of my traveling career, it started as me just going to any destination outside of Atlanta to photograph. Typically, when you start this journey you photograph model calls outside your area and usually this is done on your own dime. I had to have the portfolio to back up the fact that I could and was willing to travel for anyone who needed me to.

I used EVERY opportunity to photograph out of state. Trips with my family to Florida or trips we took to the west coast to visit family. EVERY time I was out of the state, I photographed on my own dollar so that I had the marketing material to back up the fact that I did, in fact, travel and more importantly… I was MORE than willing to get up and go. I also wanted to be able to start hashtagging new locations on social media. To do that I made sure I had the work to prove I photographed in these places. In the beginning, like I said, it started with easier places like Florida. Not too far, I was super familiar with the locations and it was easy to incorporate the hashtags for Florida because again, it wasn't too far.

Now that I had some solid traveling experience and the marketing material, I made it EXTREMELY KNOWN that I travel. In every portal of marketing, SEO, social media, really everywhere it was made clear I TRAVEL. I also got in the habit of announcing ahead of time when and where I would be traveling to. That way potential clients in other cities would know in advance and could book a session while I was in their city or close to their area. I have done this for Washington, Florida, Texas, Turks and Caicos, and the Bahamas.

If people can see your travel schedule in advance it gives them time to book you while you are there. I started this on social media mainly by tagging areas outside of my local area to make sure my following was more than local to Atlanta. Eventually I had people calling me from Hawaii, New York, California, Tennessee, and even internationally to be photographed.

Eventually, after working and becoming fairly well known for my niches, clients would pay me outside of my already made traveling schedule because they wanted my eye, in my fields of photography, to photograph them. Generally, when this happens the clients pay for our flight and lodging to come to them AND for the time I will be gone not photographing in my own home town. We usually end up going to a nice dinner together because I love spending some time with my clients, non-work related, especially somewhere new. They can show me the local flavor and we can connect even more.

2 CLIENTS TRAVELING TO YOU

Now we have the photographer that has clients travel to them. This is where your brand recognition along with the experience you provide will reign SUPREME over other forms of marketing. For example, the fact that I photograph underwater is such a specific niche that people nationwide and even worldwide (pre-Covid) would travel to me for it. The best thing you can do is to really take the time to work on your craft. Become as close to the best in that field and the work will follow. There will always be room for us to improve but we can get ourselves pretty darn close to the BEST in the industry.

Again, marketing will now and forever play a huge role in getting clients to travel to you, but if you do not have something unique to offer with your services… Not even all the marketing in the world could make a client want to book you. So, make sure you continue to really connect with your own creativity and how you perceive the field you photograph in. BE DIFFERENT. STAND OUT! When you have the brand recognition and the art work to back up your expertise in a field, clients WILL come to you.

Social media is where I get a solid majority of clients who travel to me. I make sure I have a large presence in many areas. They usually will find me through hashtags I use for specific regions. I target high-end areas I know my ideal client would most likely be. I also target to areas more likely to travel or willing to travel for unique images. I also book clients that have followed me, possibly for years, but have since moved away and they are hell bent on having me as their photographer. I see this a lot with clients waiting to get pregnant and they have finally gotten that positive test. Or the clients wanting a motherhood session with me because they have observed my work for years and knew I was the photographer for them. I also have the clients that move but they want to stick with me as their photographer. Another scenario is clients who have family in town and were photographed by me before and now they want to come down to be photographed.

That's why your experience is SO VERY IMPORTANT! You always want to leave every client with an amazing experience that they will remember and want to refer their friends and family to. These clients market for you outside of your area without you even knowing.

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LAST, BUT CERTAINLY NOT LEAST: THE PHOTOGRAPHER WHO TRAVELS WITH THEIR CLIENT TO A SPECIFIC DESTINATION

While I love each of these categories equally, I really LOVE this category! This is the client who has booked you because of your brand recognition and marketing. Or maybe it's a return client but they really want to go above and beyond with this session's portraits by going to an entirely new place for us both!

Having a different photographer just isn't an option for them. They want YOU. Either way, you can see how your craft and experience are very large factors when it comes to having someone hire you to travel with them. It would probably be easier to find a photographer where they are going. BUT if you have exactly what they are looking for and your experience is beyond top-notch, of course they will travel with you. This is the client who wants the ultimate unique session.

This client will pay for our flights and our stay. I have clients that love to travel, and as I mentioned, I enjoy getting to know my clients outside of work. Here I can develop a relationship to where I have already scouted out amazing locations around the world for them (because I know them so well) and will plan a session just for them. These are super fun because not only are you getting paid to travel for work, but this is with clients who you genuinely have come to love and enjoy spending time with. My sales on these are through the roof because of the time we put in to make something incredibly special, and it's something no one else can do for them.



Image © Significant Moments Photography

Another side to the category is to do a preplanned trip, organizing all the details. You find the best flights, places to stay, travel, transportation and lodging and then invite clients or market to potential clients you know would be interested at a group rate. That way you can do several sessions on the trip and create many different works of art because you are using different clients and locations during this one trip. This is great for everyone, but it does take a lot of planning on your part. So, preparing well in advance is a must and it's a win for everyone. This way they get a group discount on a trip, a beautiful unique session, and you are able to create so many unique pieces while also shooting several sessions instead of just one while you travel.

There is no better feeling than doing what you love all over the world. Now maybe you can start your journey in the traveling photography world! ■



Karen Bagley is a Fine Art Maternity, Motherhood, and Underwater Portrait Photographer based right outside of Atlanta, Georgia. She has become known for her dramatic and powerful maternity portraits which have become a staple of her business. While photographing for clients will always be a strong love of hers, she also loves teaching! She speaks nationally on her maternity portrait craft, and absolutely loves the idea that she may have helped someone come one step closer to living their dreams.

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SIMPLE PRICE LIST GUIDE FOR HIGHER SALES IN PHOTOGRAPHY

with **Tanya Smith**

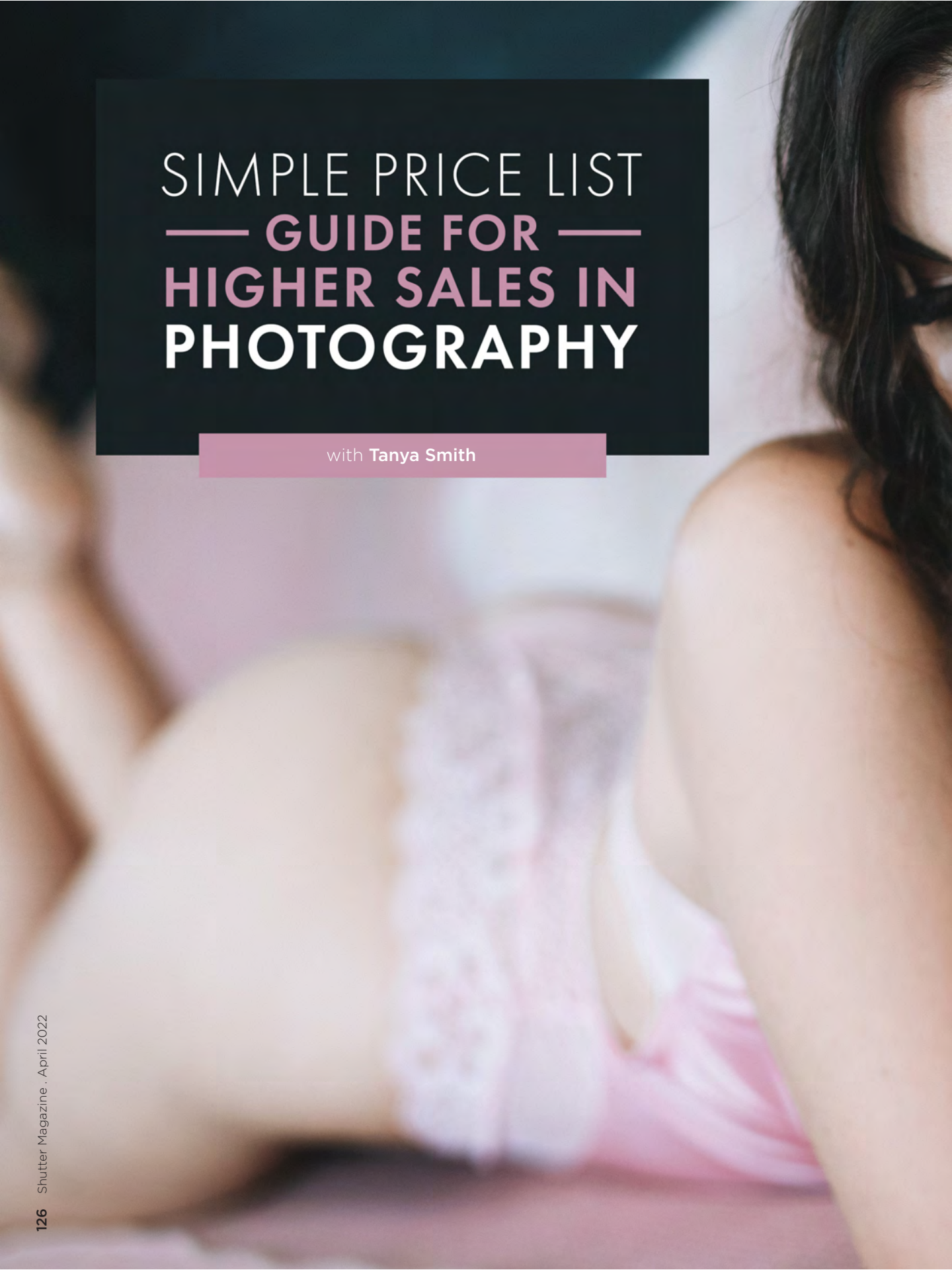




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If you are a portrait photographer looking to increase your sale amount per client, one of the best things you can do is to restructure your price list so it is SUPER simple.

A CONFUSED MIND SAYS NO

Remember, a confused mind says no, and we want our pricing to be easy for clients to understand, AND easy for you to remember and explain to your clients.

And because it is so simple, it doesn't take too much time to set up or to tweak here and there as you are figuring out your rates…



Image © Tanya Smith Portraits

TWEAKING AND CHANGING YOUR PRICE LIST CAN TAKE DAYS!

I remember when I would spend DAYS working on my price list, figuring out how much my different labs cost to make all the things, albums, folio boxes, loose prints, matted prints, etc. I wanted to give my clients any product they may want. My idea was that the more choice they had, the more they would buy.

Then I would combine products together and put them into packages that would entice people to buy. Tweaking the numbers, moving things around constantly, pricing everything individually… gah! It was so confusing. I tried a la carte, and I tried packages.

Then I would get people asking me to substitute different things and "If I don't want the wall art, can I add an extra photo instead? Or can I take just the digitals?"

You've been there, right? Maybe you are still there, with that thinking and messing around over and over with your pricing, and having clients try and move things around to make the package suit them. Then you have to figure out if that price worked for you and if you will make a profit, and do all that on the fly, while still looking professional.



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IF THIS SOUNDS FAMILIAR, THEN YOU PROBABLY NEED TO SIMPLIFY THINGS

If this is where you are, changing your price list is really going to help you make more sales AND save you so much time on researching prices and designing your price list. It can change your BUSINESS.

Imagine how it will feel to be able to spout off your pricing without even looking at your list, knowing you are giving your clients a good experience and selling them products that make sense to them, and have them thank you after they give you money.

This is what you want.

You want your clients to feel like what they purchased is worth it and has a value to them. You don't want them walking away confused about what they bought or wondering how they could get more and pay less by moving and substituting things around. Am I right?

If your pricing is a pain for you, if you are constantly tweaking and changing things around, then this is going to help you.

Now that we know what we DON'T want to happen anymore, let's talk about how to fix it and make it easier. All you have to do is sell by NUMBER of images, then everything else is an add-on.

Seriously. That's it.

They pick the images they love and pay for them. It does not matter what format they want them in—they can have them in an album, or matted prints in a folio box, or high-res digitals. It's all the same price.

Yes, all the same price.

So I have completely eliminated the question, "How much for just the digitals?" The answer is, it's the same price.

HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW THIS WILL WORK

You break down your images by a number of photos, so a price for 7 images, 14 images, 21 images and 28 images. You could even add another level and go to 35 images or you can just say anything over your highest package is X dollars for any additional images above 28, or 35, or whatever your top level is.

Then you just make those images cost less each, the more they buy. For example, 7 images could be $1,400 ($200 each) and 14 images costs $2,400 (which is around $171 each), 21 images is $3,400 ($162 each) and 28 images is $3,900 ($140 each).

If you are not ready to price that high, then go a bit lower. You could make the higher packages less per image, but I recommend making your lower package, or even your two lowest packages, much more per image. You want to make that package less attractive, or at least make it worth your while if they only choose the lowest amount.



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SWITCHING TO IN PERSON SALES IS THE WAY TO GO

Have your client come in to view their images in person. PLEASE be doing your ordering session in person! If you are not doing that then you need to start right now. I've said it before and I will say it again: Switch to in-person sales! Do it now and you will see your sales increase, and once you try it you will never go back.

Remember how I said a confused mind says no? A great way to overwhelm your clients is to send them a bunch of images online and tell them to choose. Do this part with them. They will appreciate your guidance and help with choosing. You are providing a luxury experience and it does not end after the shoot is done. Stay with them till the very end and include their ordering session in their experience.

THE CLIENT FEELS MORE IN CONTROL

When you are with your client reviewing their images, they can choose the number they want based on your simple price list. When you narrow the number down, then you will discuss HOW they want their images delivered to them.

Do they want them in an album, a folio box, or digitally? Make sure your pricing covers the most expensive option for you to provide. Obviously there is a bigger profit if they choose digitally, but don't change things around for that. Everything is the same price. Simple.

So there are no more "substitution requests"... You know what I'm talking about, right? Where they want to add a larger print and take away one of the digital images and add some wallets instead of the 8x10… NONE OF THAT WILL HAPPEN ANYMORE. Trust me. This makes it all super easy.

PRICE YOUR IMAGES AND EVERYTHING ELSE IS AN ADD-ON

But what happens if your client chooses their images and they want them in an album AND they want them digitally? Well, that is simple as well. This is when your add-on price list comes into play. They choose their number of images, get it in an album then ADD ON the digital images for a set price.

Ideas for what you can include in your add-on list:

- High res digital copies of your purchased images
- A personalized smartphone app (I use sticky albums to build my client apps easily)
- Upgrading to a 12x12 album—you would have a base size that is included in their image choice (mine is a 10x10, so a bigger album would be an upgrade)
- Upgrading the album cover is an add-on price
- A duplicate box or album for a set price (I don't use that option because I shoot boudoir, but this could be a great option if you shoot families or babies, as they can have a matching album or box for other family members)
- A little black book



Image © Tanya Smith Portraits



These are things that you can still offer in your pricing, but it doesn't need to be introduced in detail until AFTER they choose their number of images at their reveal.

Showing them the add-on list before they even shoot or see their images will just confuse people and…? A confused mind says no… Remember that.

Does this help you see how making a price list super simple is the way to go? I hope this inspires you to rethink your pricing and maybe give yours a good makeover.

All I want you to do is to keep your prices simple. Simple for you and simple for your clients. If you give it a try, let me know what you think and how it goes, or reach out with questions. ■



I have been a women's portrait photographer since 2011 and fell in love with how a boudoir session can change the way a woman sees herself. I have a background in corporate banking and sales, but still, I tried to figure everything out on my own. After years of struggle, I started investing in my education and worked with mentors and took courses. I am constantly learning everything I can about running a successful boudoir business. I have grown my studio to bring in mid-6-figures in sales, and my average sale has grown to over $5,000 per client.

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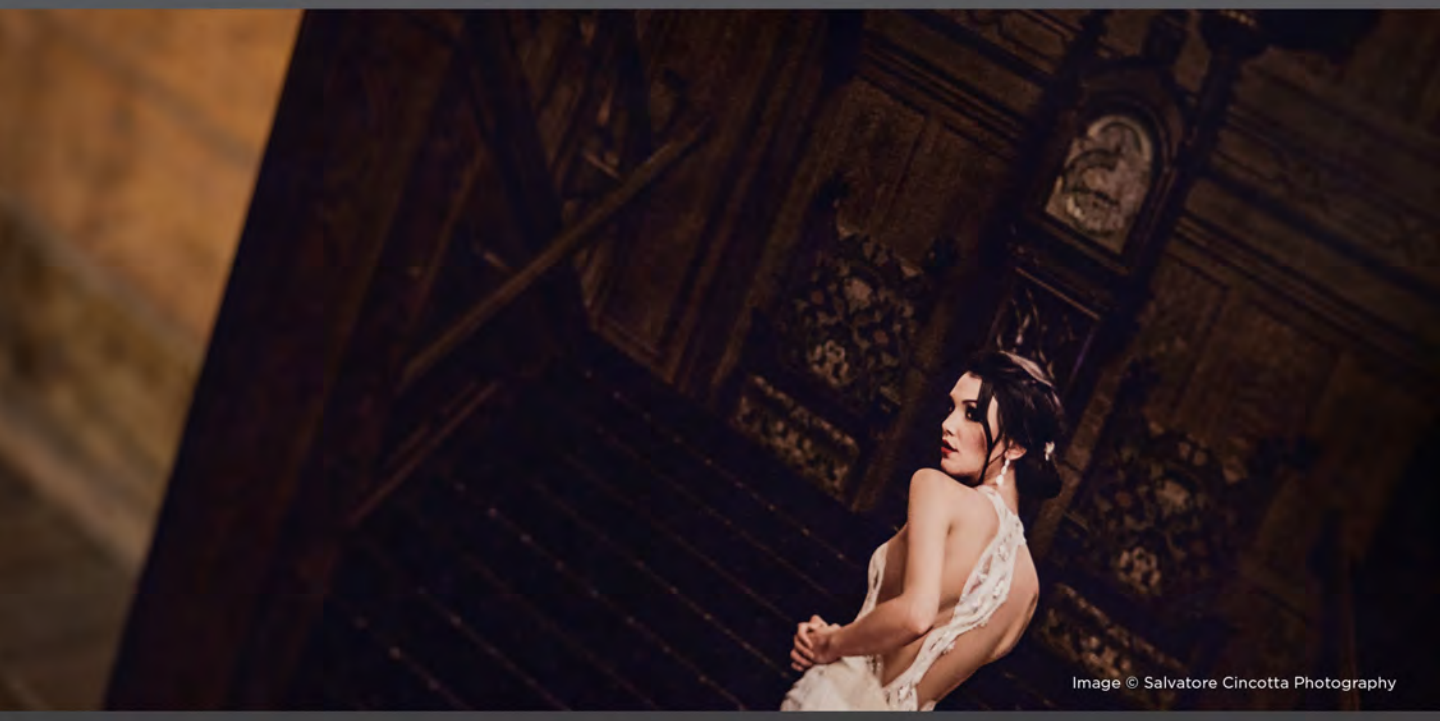


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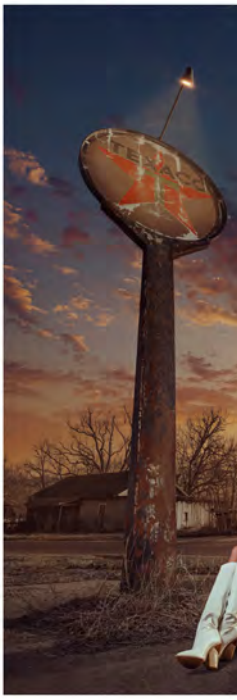


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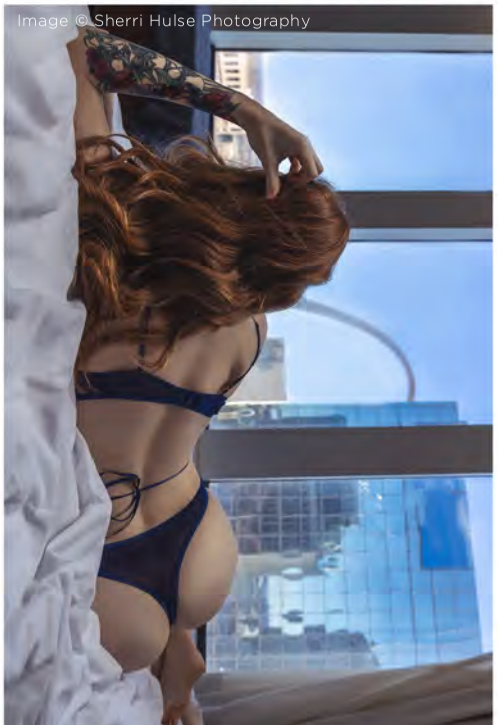

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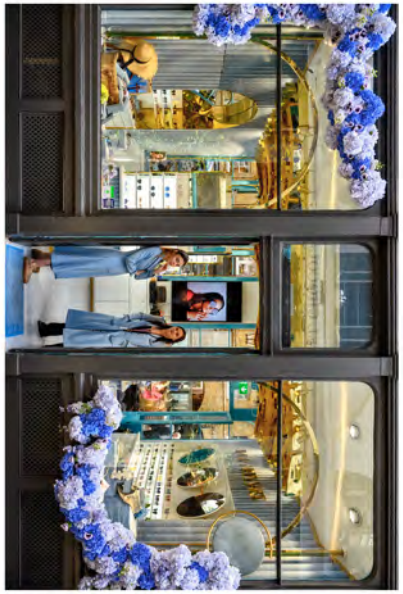


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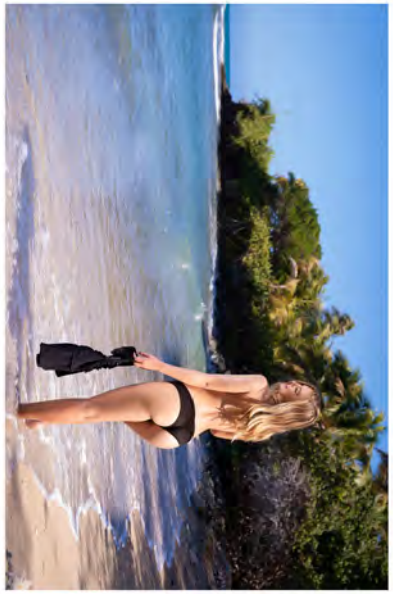




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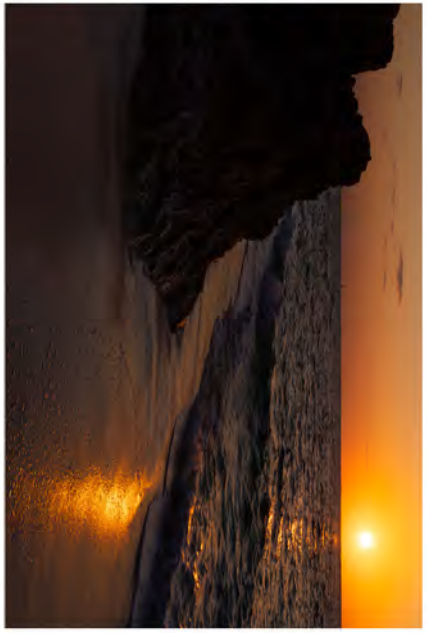


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3 INSTAGRAM
TRAFFIC TIPS
FOR PHOTOGRAPHERS
with Vanessa Joy
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If you're an Instagram user, you've probably noticed that lately engagement has been down. Don't worry. It's not you. I have been checking out so many different accounts, large and small, and I've noticed a 50% drop off in engagement overall, whether these accounts have 300 followers, 300,000 followers, or anywhere in between.

I can't really tell you why this is happening other than perhaps it's related to recent news. Facebook has admitted to losing a ton of followers in the last quarter. This might be because people are simply fed up with social media after almost two solid years of being on social media thanks to lockdowns and lack of social interaction in person. But whatever it is, there are ways that you can fight the system and still feel good about your Instagram following.

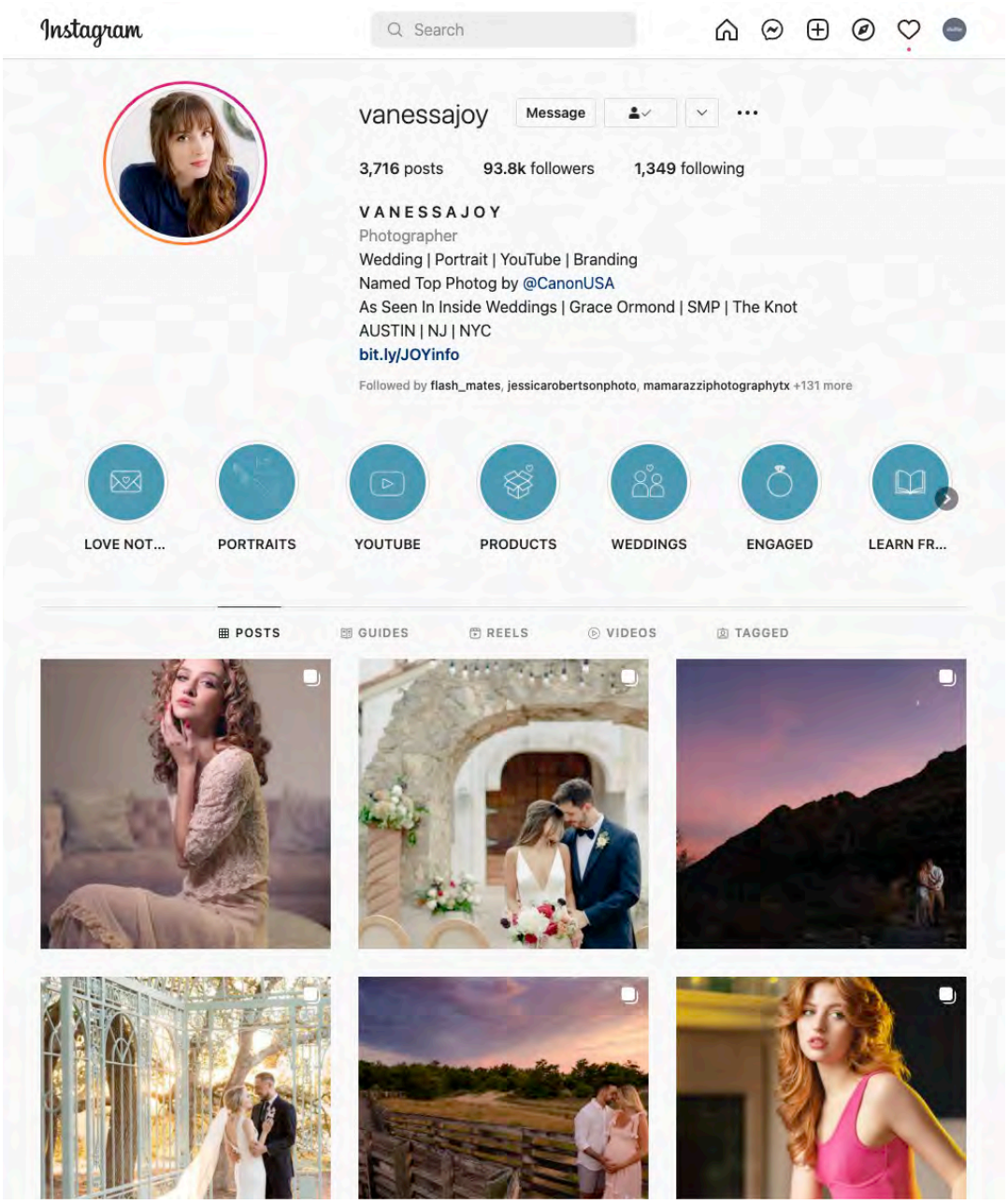
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1. KEEP IT CONSISTENT

The most important thing about any social media is consistency. You don't want to have people look at your profile and see you haven't posted in months or even weeks and it looks like you aren't a business anymore. It looks like you might be a hack or your business is going downhill. None of these things are messages that you want to send to your potential clients. You could, of course, change up your posting consistency. And instead of dedicating to one post a day, maybe you're going to do one post every other day.



2. SWITCH UP YOUR STYLE OF CONTENT

Most of us photographers are pretty good at just posting in general. But since we are fighting the algorithm and whatever is going on right now, may I suggest trying something different, something other than a regular feed post. Dare I say it, try making a reel. You don't have to dance around on a reel. You can simply do something that's trending, something that's funny, or something that gives information. The best way to start making reels is to go watch reels yourself until you find ones that make you laugh or teach you something. And then make your own version of it. On Instagram, you can save reels so that later you can go back and reenact them for your own account.

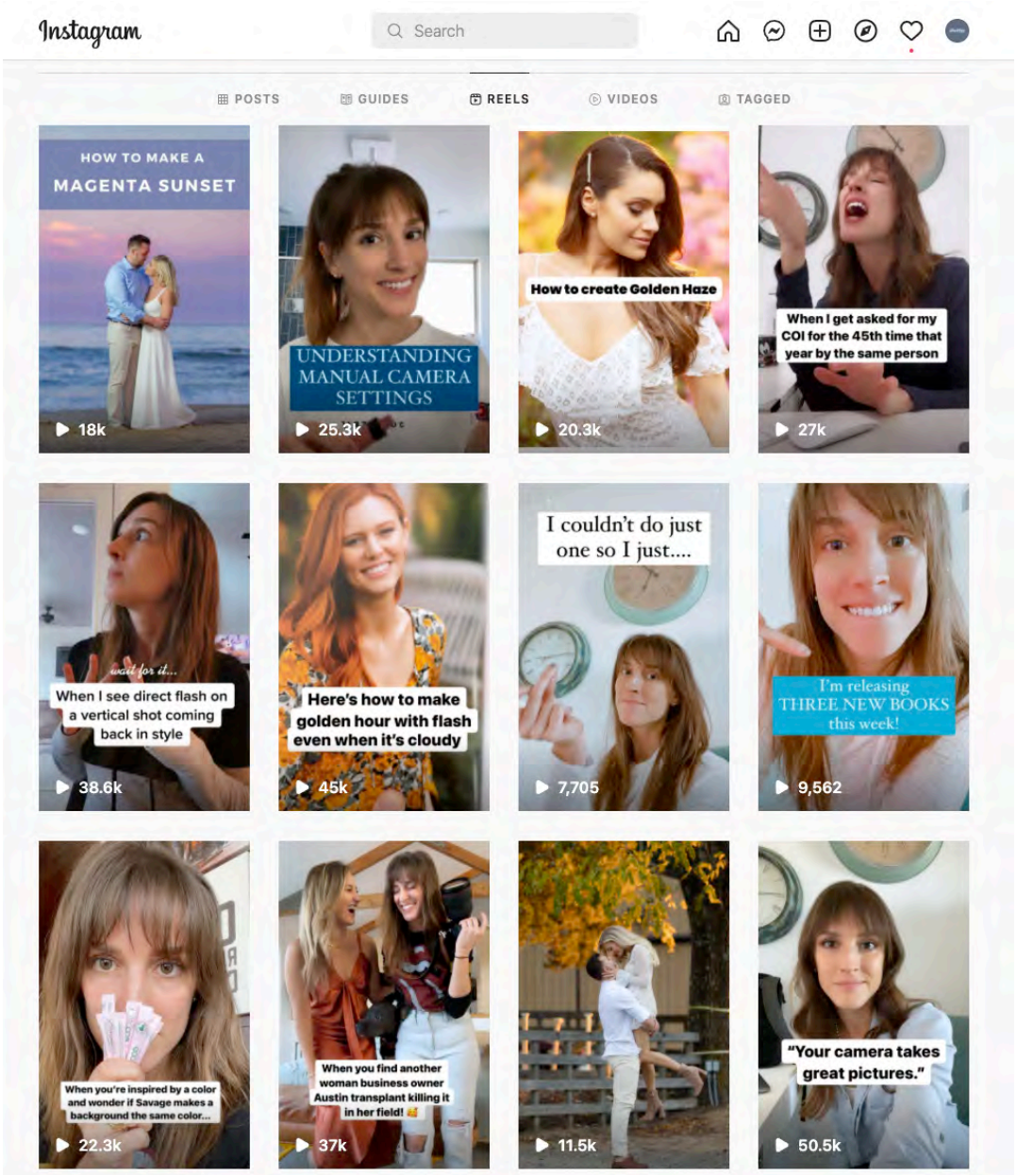



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3. TRY OTHER FORMS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Falling behind on what is happening in the world is one of the biggest problems that we face as business owners. And especially those of us who are getting older. While I still believe Instagram is very valid, there's no denying that TikTok has become a competitor as one of the biggest social media platforms, especially if you're trying to target a younger demographic, anyone 30 years old or younger.

But don't worry. It doesn't have to be difficult. It's the same exact thing as Instagram reels. So to play off the previous tip, go ahead and make an Instagram reel. And then in the drafts, download that reel. It's going to save without the audio, but that's not a huge deal. In fact, you don't want it to save with the audio.

What you want to do is upload it to TikTok and grab the sound off of TikTok. One of the big things with reels or TikToks is the audio itself and using trending audio. So if you save an Instagram reel from Instagram and you want to download it and put it on TikTok, it's actually going to hurt you if you have your own original sound. It's much better to attach a native sound within TikTok to your TikTok. Same goes for the other way around. If you're doing a TikTok and you screenshot it in the preview so that you can send it to Instagram without a TikTok logo bouncing all over your reel, you want to make sure that you're not using the audio from the video that you screenshot. You want to attach audio from Instagram to it. Your reel will perform better.

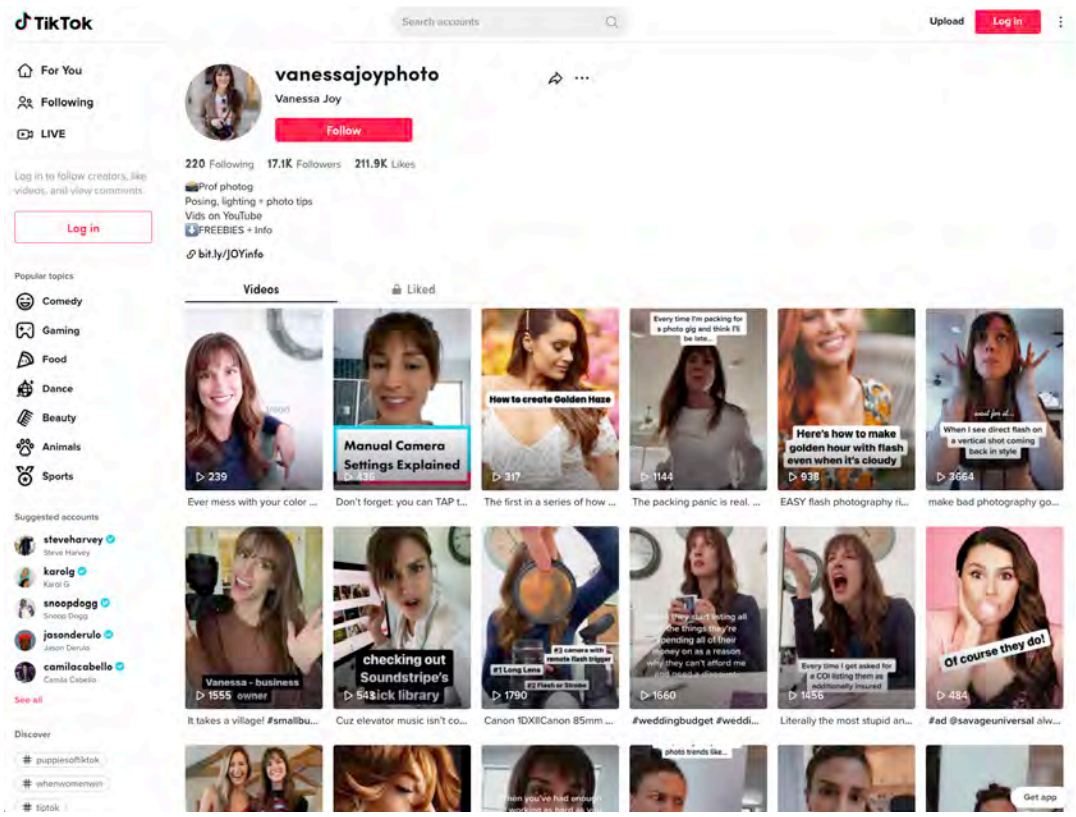




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Finally, remember that while social media is an incredible way to drum up business and to show off the work that you do as a photographer, it's not the end all be all. So much of the marketing we do is all just drops in a bucket and you have to cast a wide net.

Since social media isn't working so well for anybody right now, it would be a great time for you to experiment with other marketing methods. Try building or strengthening relationships that you already have with friends and colleagues. Try doing a styled shoot, try doing some form of traditional advertising, maybe even direct mail. Or hey, try Instagram ads, even though we're technically mad at them right now.

Whatever you decide to do during this time of Instagram frenzy and everybody wondering what to do about their lack of engagement, just remember you're a photographer. You're here to take photos. And if you can't find the number of followers that you typically find on social media, go find them somewhere else. "Innovate or die," as Alison Kata says. ■

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Vanessa Joy has been a professional wedding photographer in New Jersey since 2002, and an influencer in the photographic community for years. Since starting VanessaJoy.com in 2008, she has taught photographers around the globe at almost every major platform in the industry (LearnPhotoVideo.com). Vanessa has been recognized for her talent and business sense at the renowned industry events CreativeLIVE, Clickin' Moms, WPPI and ShutterFest. Her peers love her informative, open-book style of teaching.

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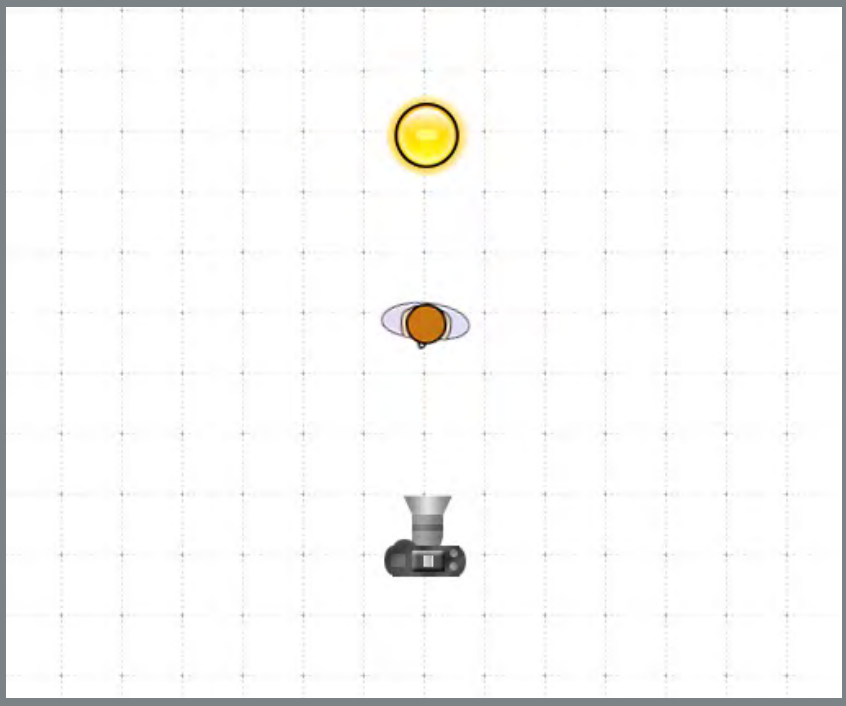
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