THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CREATING EXTRAORDINARY WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY

Captured by the Light

David A. Ziser

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*To all my mentors who have shared their
knowledge with me over the years, all my
friends who have encouraged me and challenged
me to always give it my best, and especially to
my wife and devoted friend, LaDawn, who has been
by my side throughout the entire creative process.*

Foreword & Acknowledgements

Every photographer has his own unique story as to how he became involved in one of life's most interesting and exciting professions. My interest in photography hit me in 1960, when I was 12 years old. I was rummaging through the basement of our home and stumbled on some old photo processing trays, a contact printing frame, a ruby red safelight bulb, and a few books on processing your own film that my dad had used as a hobbyist. These small books were not the latest, greatest editions—I remember that they were published in the early to mid-1940s. Nevertheless, that early discovery was my entry into photography.

But that is only part of the story. Coincidentally with my discovery of my father's rudimentary photo processing gear was the fact that I had a keen interest in a TV show titled "Man with a Camera" that starred Charles Bronson as Mike Kovac and ran 29 episodes, from 1958 until 1960.

I remember lying on the floor in my family's living room watching those black-and-white episodes every week. I enjoyed the story, the drama, and how photography was used to help solve the mystery. But what I remember most are those moments near the end of every show when Mike Kovac would put the exposed paper into the developer and the image would slowly appear—to me, it was magic!

Now, I could possibly work Mike Kovac's magic, too. I still remember my first visit to a local camera store, Provident Camera, when I purchased a quart can of Kodak Dektol developer, a quart of fixer, and 25 sheets of Kodak Azo contact printing paper. I couldn't wait to process my first image. Back in those days, my parents shot with a Brownie Hawkeye camera, an inexpensive, fixed-focus, medium format camera that shot large 120 or 620 rolls of film. The negatives were pretty big: 2¼ x 3¼".

We set up the trays, processing chemicals, and ruby red safelight in my buddy Russ Rigdon's mother's kitchen late one night, and were ready to go. I had "requisitioned" a few of my family's 620-size negatives for our first tests. Under the dark red glow of the very dim safelight, I loaded a negative and Azo printing paper into the contact printing frame and closed the back tightly.

Russ was on light switch duty. On my command, he hit the wall switch and turned the kitchen light on, I counted off a number of seconds, and signaled him to turn the lights back off (very scientific back then). I still remember removing the photographic paper and looking at it in that dim ruby-red light. It was totally blank, but somehow the magic solutions in front of me would reveal the secrets it contained.

I pushed the paper into the developer just like Mike Kovac, and waited...and waited...and waited. It seemed like forever, but it was only about 30 seconds before I saw the faintness of an image slowly appear on the paper. After a few more seconds, the image came into full view. I remember being transfixed by what I saw before me—it was Harry Potter magic, long before the days of Harry Potter! After moving the paper through the stop bath and fixer, we turned the lights back on. There it was, my first real photographic image. I was hooked.

Our next experiment involved making images larger than the original negative size, all the way up to a 5x7" print. One more trip to Provident Camera for some Kodak Kodabromide enlarging paper, but where was I to get an enlarger? Coincidentally, Kenner Products, located in Cincinnati, Ohio, had just announced a brand new toy: the Give-A-Show Projector. It was a battery-operated projector in which you inserted a filmstrip of cartoon characters and projected them on the wall.

Where could I get one? My little sister! She had received one as a gift. I carefully "borrowed" it one evening, cut out one of the cartoon characters from the filmstrip, and added one of the family negatives. You guessed it—success—we had created our first enlargement. It was a "Eureka!" moment, and the rest is history.

By age 15, I managed to book my first wedding. A friend of my father's, whose daughter was getting married, was looking for the best price in town. I offered and was hired. I barely remember shooting that wedding, but I do remember knowing I had to be sure to get the bouquet toss. The rest of the day is a faded memory.

As I amped up my photographic hobby with bigger trays, print dryers, better safelights, enlargers, etc., I caused quite a stir at home. I kept blowing the fuses in our older home and my father was not happy. I had a mutual high school friend, Bill Donnermeyer, who was also involved in this magical hobby. His father was upset with him because he was using too much water when washing his processed prints. (His dad was a plumber—that might have been part of the problem.)

Anyway, we, two 18-year-olds, together with our fathers, who were not happy at all with our photographic endeavors, decided we needed a change of venue if we were going to pursue our interests. We decided to open a photo studio. Yes, at age 18 we found a space for $75/month, split the rent, and opened London Photo Studio. Now I was a studio owner shooting portraits and weddings!

This lasted for the next three years or so, as we completed high school and started college. Although we eventually closed the studio, I continued to support myself with photography, paying the rent, buying the books, etc., until I graduated with two degrees—one in physics and the other in engineering.

My love of photography never left me, though. I continued to shoot for friends and family long after my college graduation in 1971. With so many requests from friends and acquaintances, in 1978 I decided to leave engineering and strike out on my own in photography. Now I'm in my 31st year of owning my own studio. My father always wanted me to get a "real job" after leaving engineering, but I never did. Instead, I have constantly and consistently strived to offer my clients the absolute best wedding photography possible. And, yes, the passion is still there.

I always wanted to learn more about photography. I continued to study with the wedding masters of the time—Bill Stockwell, Rocky Gunn, and the legendary Monte Zucker. I attended every program, seminar, and workshop I could, honing both the craft and art of wedding photography. I continue to do that even today. We can never stop learning.

So, how did I end up here, writing a book? It was about two-and-a-half years ago when I invited my friend, Scott Kelby, to come to Cincinnati and cover a wedding with me. He, too, is the consummate student, wanting to learn all things photographic, including wedding photography.

After the wedding, we headed back home to drop the gear and crash. We ended up talking about many things, but eventually the topic of blogging came up and we continued our discussion until about three o'clock in the morning. He was the master blogger and I was "grasshopper." Anyway, a week later I started my blog, *DigitalProTalk.com*.

I took Scott's advice from that evening to heart: "If you don't feed the monster, it will die." And, I have continued to feed the "monster" daily—five days a week, week after week, month after month, and two-and-a-half years later, year after year.

It was during a quick email check early one Sunday morning before heading out to church that I received an email from Scott. It read simply: "So, are you ready to write your book yet?" The message stopped me cold. Was I ready? I had never thought about it, but now I did. I wrote Scott back and said I was.

With the help, encouragement, and support of Scott's team at Kelby Media Group and my wife LaDawn's patience and support, the book project was put into motion—unfortunately, I think slow motion at times. As I look back over these past several months at what has transpired, I can't believe it's finally finished. Since writing the book, I tell people, "It's a lot like cross-country skiing; it sounded like such a good idea at the time." But now the book is complete, and as I look back over the words, pages, and chapters, I think, "Wow! I did it, and it looks pretty good!" But, folks, that is only the beginning of what goes into writing a book.

The rest of the story needs to include those defining moments in my life that first set me on a life course of not just shooting weddings, but also training others to take better photographs. Who were those people instrumental in that process for me? First, I would have to thank my father for letting me "borrow" those first processing trays, the safelight, and the contact printing frame.

(Continued)

Next, I want to acknowledge my lifelong friend, Russ Rigdon, who hung in there with me during those very early, formative years, helping me with my experiments in processing and printing. We were even doing our own color processing in 1968 when, after booking a high school prom and promising to deliver two 5x7s and four wallets, we worked until the very early hours of several mornings trying to complete the job.

I want to thank Bill Donnermeyer for taking the chance with me of opening our first photo studio in the late '60s. We were teenagers, but heck, what did we know? We were confident we could pull it off, and we did. Our first studio—London Photo Studio—was named after the London music invasion of the mid- to late 1960s.

When I opened my first solo studio in 1978—a pretty scary time in my life—I looked for an assistant to help me on my wedding jobs. My girlfriend at the time recommended her 15-year-old brother. I want to acknowledge Steve Bitter, who was with me through thick and thin in the early learning/business years. Steve was the perfect assistant. He could read my mind and, many times, it seemed that he had three hands as I was changing lenses and film backs during the shoots.

My studio continued to grow and I had to hire more help. My next employee was Don Moore, one of the most talented photographers I know. Don was my studio manager and covered the business as my lecture career started to gain traction in the mid-1980s. Don and his wife Lona continue to be good friends and trusted confidants today.

During those early years, I met two people also in the beginning stages of their photography businesses: Kent Smith, from Columbus, Ohio; and Mark Garber, from Dayton, Ohio. We three were equally passionate about our work and wanted to do anything we could to make our work exceed that of our competition. We formed what Mark called "our brain trust," and constantly challenged each other to be the best. We continue to remain close friends and today all of us own very successful studios.

I also want to acknowledge those photographers I have trained under and who helped me understand nuances of technique, style, and creativity: First, the legendary, Monte Zucker, one of my first photography teachers. He gave me a solid grounding in the classical techniques of lighting and posing that photographers and painters have used for years to flatter their subjects. Next, Rocky Gunn, master pictorial wedding photographer, showed me how to see differently and how to use the beautiful surrounds to create a distinctive outdoor wedding portrait. Finally, Al Gilbert, one of the top photographers in Canada, showed me how to use wide-angle optics to create wonderfully innovative and dramatic portraits.

My thanks, too, to so many other photographers, teachers, instructors, and trainers who have helped me gain a greater understanding of all facets of the craft and art of this profession.

As my studio gained popularity in the greater Cincinnati area, my work started to gain some attention and receive accolades at state and regional conventions. I began to get invitations to lecture about wedding photography. My thanks to Wayne Byrne and Bill Duty, who together provided my first opportunity to do just that in 1982, traveling to 10 cities throughout the Midwest, from Buffalo, New York, down to Memphis, Tennessee.

My thanks to Lisle Ramsey, founder of the International Professional Photographers Guild, who had the confidence to invite me to speak and present my program to photographers in New Zealand and England. His invitation, after only being in business for four years, was quite a thrill.

I can't forget to mention my friends at Eastman Kodak Company, Paul Ness and Terry DeGlau, who several times over these many years have asked me to represent Eastman Kodak at some of the most exciting venues around the world.

Also, thanks to all the wonderful people at Professional Photographers of America, Wedding and Portrait Photographers International, and especially the National Association of Photoshop Professionals, whose legions of instructors have continued to hone my photographic and digital skills.

I also want to thank Cindy Snyder, my editor at Kelby Media Group, who, as Scott says, is simply wonderful. When I had no clue what I was doing, no clue how to tie things together, just no clue how I was going to get the book together, Cindy offered her calming advice that always gave me the confidence to write another chapter. If any author ever needs a psychiatrist, Cindy is the best at helping you get through the challenges of writing a book.

My thanks, too, to Jessica Maldonado at Kelby Media Group, who somehow pulls all the words, images, diagrams, and notes together, so that they reach an understandable cohesion in the final result. I am

amazed at the entire Kelby Media team, as they work in what seems an almost effortless fashion to complete the many publishing projects they produce each year.

I can't miss thanking Peachpit/New Riders, my publisher, who also agreed to be part of this project. There have been many others involved in the process who have taken time to review, edit, and suggest improvements to it. Those special folks include my staff (Sharon, Jennifer, and Martha), my good buddy, Michael Jonas, and so many others that helped me tie together all the loose ends to bring the book to completion.

I've reserved my biggest thank yous for last. As we talked that late July evening after the wedding in 2007, Scott Kelby gave me that indispensable piece of blogging advice: "If you don't feed the monster, it will die." I took it to heart and started to do what I have always found the most difficult of disciplines for me—writing.

I thank Scott for recognizing the fact that I might have a book in me, and also thank him for encouraging me to write it. More importantly, I thank Scott and all the people in his wonderful organization, Kelby Media Group, for supporting the project and giving me the encouragement along the way to press on. Without that one short email on that special Sunday morning, this book would never had been written. Thanks Scott.

Now, I want to thank that special person in my life that has given me her love and support throughout this entire book writing process. Without her insights, suggestions, recommendations, and most of all, her patience throughout the many, many months of the process, the finished work would not be what it is today. I love you LaDawn.

Finally, I want to thank all the readers of this book. I sincerely hope it gives you a road map to take your wedding photography to a brand new level. Whether you shoot weddings or find your interest in other types of photography, I hope the information contained within these chapters will open the doors to your own creativity, bringing a sense of adventure, excitement, and possibility to your joy of photography.

Thank you all.

-David

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About the Author

David Ziser, an internationally renowned portrait and wedding photographer, has shared his knowledge with tens of thousands of photographers in five languages, and in 14 countries worldwide. He has been one of the leading trainers in the industry for more than 20 years, and his Digital WakeUp Call tour was acclaimed as one of the best-ever seminars on digital photography.

David is a regular featured lecturer at the Photoshop World Conference & Expo, Wedding and Portrait Photographers International (WPPI), and Imaging USA/Professional Photographers of America. He also provides training classes on DVD and online through Kelby Training.

In July 2007, David launched *DigitalProTalk.com*, a blog dedicated to the aspiring professional photographer looking to enhance his/her photography, Photoshop, Lightroom, and business skills. It has been called one of the best photo blogs out there. Readership continues to grow and is in excess of 110,000 page views per month.

He is a regular monthly contributor to the award-winning *Professional Photographer* magazine, has been honored as a Kodak Mentor, and is one of 98 people worldwide who holds the distinguished honor of Fellow, bestowed by the American Society of Photographers.

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Kicking Your Lighting Into High Gear

Off-Camera Flash Lighting Techniques

One thing I learned a long time ago is that, in the profession of wedding photography, I need to differentiate myself from the competition. One of the easiest ways to accomplish this is by doing what Uncle Harry and Cousin Mary do not do: Use a second flash. With the proliferation of wedding shooters these days, a lot of wedding photography is looking pretty much the same. The reason is that most people just use their on-camera flash as their primary light source and shoot away. Within the last year, every photographer I saw working a wedding was using just his or her on-camera flash for their primary illumination.

❖

Why do we want to differentiate ourselves from the competition? The main reason is this: if I am just one of many photographers out there shooting weddings, then the primary reason my clients select me as their wedding photographer is price. But, if I differentiate myself from the competition in both style and technique, my clients will seek me out for those differences—price is no longer the primary consideration in that decision-making process. The bottom line is that you can charge a whole lot more for "differences" than you can for "samenesses." So, in this chapter, I will walk you through flash techniques that can really make your lighting look exciting and different from the competition.

You Don't Have to Break the Bank

First of all, the equipment I use is important. My most important piece of gear is my off-camera flash: a Quantum T5d-R flash head powered by a Quantum Turbo 2x2 power pack. It's fired with Quantum's FreeXwire radio control system. This is my basic setup—we'll get into my additional equipment later in this chapter.

For now, let's discuss how I add zing and sizzle to my photographs with an off-camera flash (❧ *Figure 1*). To fire it, I attach my radio transmitter to the top of my on-camera flash with Velcro. The transmitter is wired directly to the camera sync. You can see the setup in ❧ *Figure 2*.

My Camera Rig

❧ *Figure 2*

Quantum T5d-R Flash Head
Turbo 2x2 or smaller power pack
FreeXwire radio controls—FW9T, FW7Q & FW8R

❧ *Figure 1*

Whenever I'm producing portraits of the bride and groom, I fire my off-camera flash through a 42" translucent or shoot-through umbrella (see ✤ *Figure 1*). The term "translucent" is important to understand. There are many white umbrellas on the market, but many of them are not truly translucent. They use a denser fabric and don't have the ability to pass the light through them as efficiently as the more translucent white umbrella I use. I always used the most inexpensive shoot-through umbrellas I could find (typically in the $15–$16 range).

Then, I asked my buddy, Tom Waltz, the owner of Westcott, if he would make me a collapsible umbrella with the very translucent Westcott Halo fabric. He finally obliged, and the Zumbrella was born. We started shooting with it in April 2009.

Since it's collapsible, we hardly ever need to take it off the monopod while shooting any of the bridal portraits. If I need my assistant's help to "floof" and straighten the gown, he just collapses the umbrella, lays it on the ground, adjusts the gown, grabs the flash again, pops open the Zumbrella, and we are off and running. Before the Zumbrella, we often damaged the umbrella because it wasn't collapsible. Not anymore—it works like a charm.

Umbrella Lighting

I use my off-camera flash in many different configurations, but this is one of the most important. We have to be sure to get very beautiful and flattering photographs of the principal players on the wedding day: the bride and groom, their parents, grandparents, additional family members, the wedding party, and friends.

The Zumbrella is available through my Digital Resource Center, which you can access through my blog at www.digitalprotalk.com.

✤ *Figure 1*

✎ *Figure 2*

✎ *Figure 3: The flash is too close to the umbrella*

✎ *Figure 4: The flash is at the right distance*

Step One:

Attach the flash head to a monopod with an umbrella adapter. I use the Bogen Manfrotto 2905 Swivel Umbrella Adapter. ✎ *Figure 2* shows a close-up of my setup.

Step Two:

Open the umbrella and insert it into the adapter. The secret is to not push the umbrella too far down the shaft. If you do, the light from the flash head won't spread out enough and will give you a very small light source (see ✎ *Figure 3*), which creates a harsh pattern on the subject. The idea is to keep the light source broad, creating a softer shadow outline. Push the shaft forward so you are at the very end of it. This lets the flash spread out across the full umbrella head area (✎ *Figure 4*), and gives you a very soft light source on your subjects.

Step Three:

I use my Quantum in manual mode—no TTL here. The main reason is so I can more accurately control the light that's falling on my subject.

Step Four:

Each power setting represents a different radius I work from the subject. With my camera set to ISO 800, I typically set my flash to one-eighth power. My working distance with these settings is about six feet away. This means that as my assistant is illuminating the subject, he or she can be no more than a six-foot radius away from the subject.

If I want to move further from my subject to photograph them in a full-length view or capture a wide-angle shot, my assistant needs to back up so they are not in the photo. This means they must increase the power output of the flash as they move away from the subject. If the power output is increased to one-quarter power, then the new radius is about 10 feet (see the main image at the beginning of this technique).

I always shoot at f/5.6 (✎ Figure 5), which I call my "aperture of convenience." By using a fixed aperture all the time, I can easily calculate the power settings and distances when working quickly at a wedding. Remember, the further the working distance from the subject, the greater the power output from the flash needs to be. Keeping your aperture at f/5.6 helps you pick up this technique quite quickly.

✎ *Figure 5*

Keep Your Assistant in the Perfect Position

Here is another very important part of the last technique: It is my assistant's job to put a loop lighting pattern (we covered that in Chapter 2) on the subject. For me, it's always about the loop lighting pattern, regardless of the view of the subject's face—full-face, two-thirds, profile, etc. Too often, my assistant is worried about where I, as the photographer, am positioned, instead of where his or her light needs to be correctly positioned. But if your assistant can remember the following instructions, his light will be perfect every time:

Step One:

Have your assistant rotate around the subject's face, away from the camera, until they can no longer see the "camera side" of the subject's nose. I say the camera side, because that's the side that the camera sees when taking the photograph, not your assistant. If your assistant is illuminating the same side of the nose as the camera sees, then he/she will not be putting a loop lighting pattern on the subject's face, but instead, a broad lighting pattern illuminating too much of the face. Check out ⁑ *Figure 1* to see what your assistant needs to see from their position.

Step Two:

This second part is just as important as the first: as your assistant rotates around the subject's face and just loses sight of the camera side of the nose, he is pretty well in the correct position. Many times, they travel further around the subject's face, creating first a Rembrandt lighting pattern and, if they continue around the subject, a split lighting pattern with very harsh shadows on the camera side of the face. They need to rotate around the axis of the subject's face until just the camera side of the nose disappears *and* they still see as much of the far side of the subject's cheek as possible.

⁑ *Figure 1*

(Continued)
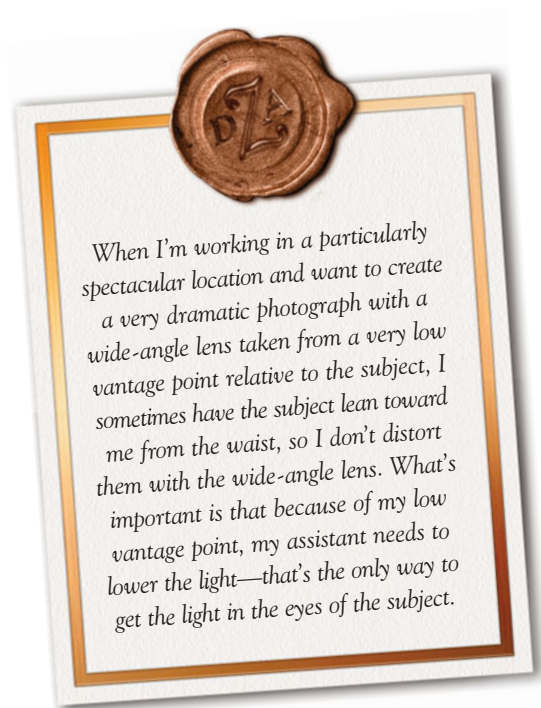
When I'm working in a particularly spectacular location and want to create a very dramatic photograph with a wide-angle lens taken from a very low vantage point relative to the subject, I sometimes have the subject lean toward me from the waist, so I don't distort them with the wide-angle lens. What's important is that because of my low vantage point, my assistant needs to lower the light—that's the only way to get the light in the eyes of the subject.

Step Three:

See what happens as my assistant rotates around the axis of the subject's face? It creates shadows on the camera side of her face (see ✤ *Figure 2*). My goal is a loop lighting pattern, but if my assistant goes too far, then the nose shadow will connect with the cheek shadow—that's a Rembrandt lighting pattern, and is often too harsh for wedding photography. When the assistant moves too far around the subject and doesn't see much of the camera-side cheek, you can see it's almost in shadow. The light was a bit high, too (notice how the eyes are starting to pocket). If my assistant continued farther, we would have a split lighting pattern on the subject's face (again, see Chapter 2 for more on the different lighting patterns).

The assistant must be aware that he or she also needs to see as much of the camera side of the subject's face as possible, and the problem is solved. We have a nice shadow cast by the nose on the camera side of the face and still have plenty of the face illuminated with our key light (✤ *Figure 3*).

Step Four:

Be sure your assistant is not holding the flash too high over the subject, either. If the light is coming in from too high an angle, it will cast the eye sockets in shadow, creating the "raccoon" look, again spoiling the beautiful portrait. The easiest way to instruct your assistant for the correct positioning of the light is to tell them to keep the light slightly above the level of the subject's eyes. That will guarantee the proper light direction about 99% of the time.

✤ *Figure 2*

✤ *Figure 3*
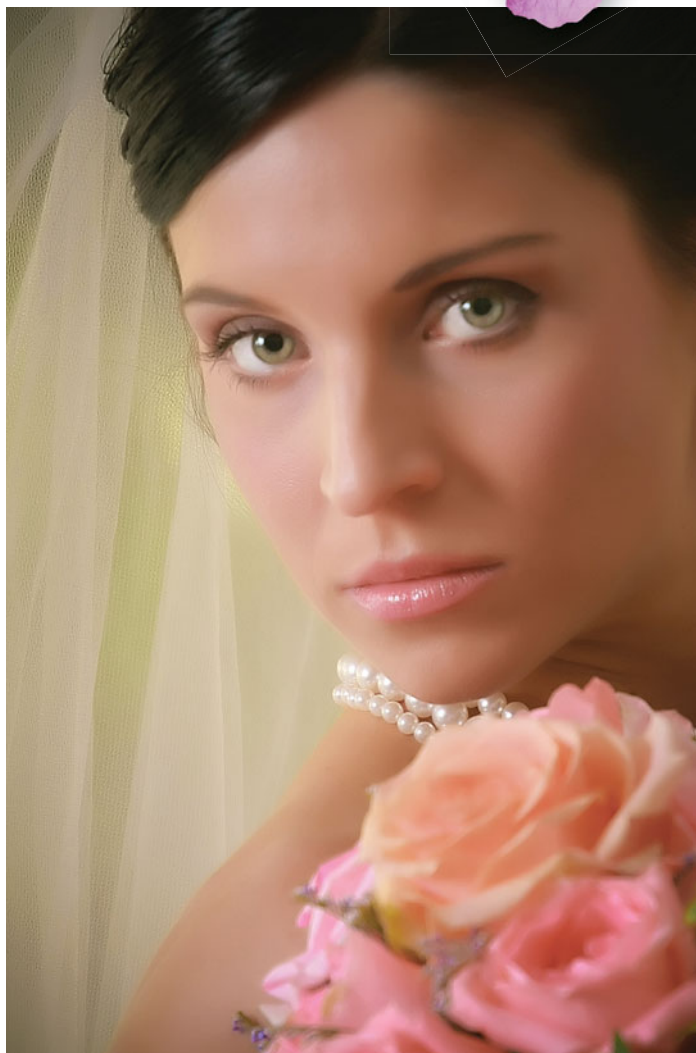
Loop Lighting Is Your Friend

It's important to keep the lighting consistent from image to image. That's why I resort to a loop lighting pattern about 95% of the time. As I said before, this is about the most flattering light we can place on our subjects, and as long as your assistant follows the instructions I outlined earlier, you should be able to nail the loop lighting pattern every time.

There may be times when you want a more dramatic lighting pattern, and that's just fine, but I'm really stressing the fact that we stick to the loop lighting pattern for most of our images. So, here's a quick list of dos and don'ts when using your off-camera flash with a shoot-through or translucent umbrella to get a loop lighting pattern:

* *Do* push the umbrella shaft as far forward as you can, without it coming out of the adapter, so that you get the greatest spread of light.

* *Don't* push the umbrella too far down the shaft in the umbrella adapter. The resulting light spread will be too small to adequately flatter the subject.

* *Do* memorize the various power settings and respective distances for the correct exposure on your subject.

* *Don't* let your assistant forget that as you reposition your subject, his/her working distance with the flash needs to be consistent with the power setting on the flash. If your assistant changes his/her working radius to the subject and doesn't make the corresponding adjustment to the flash power setting, it changes the exposure on the subject. Always have your assistant work at the same radius to the subject to assure consistent and accurate exposures.

(Continued)

Figure 1
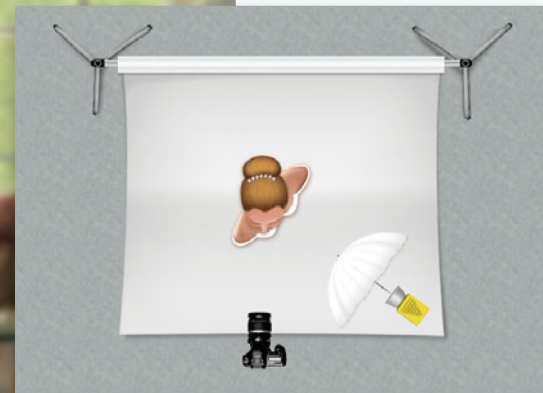
Figure 2

Do make your assistant practice the proper lighting position and emphasize where he or she needs to be to see the camera side of the face, but none of the camera side of the nose.

Don't have your assistant rotate around the subject too far. If he/she doesn't see the camera side of the nose, but can't see much of the camera side of the subject's face, then he or she has gone too far.

Do stick with the loop lighting pattern when illuminating your subject.

Take a look at this first image (*Figure 1*). It's a simple, but still beautiful bridal portrait taken just moments before she was to leave home for the ceremony. I basically had five things to consider in making this photograph: the setting of the scene, the lighting on the subject, the ambient light, the exterior light, and any expression of the subject.

Step One:
First, I quickly surveyed the scene to see how my bride might work in the composition.

Step Two:
Then, I evaluated how much daylight was coming in the windows in the background.

Step Three:
I determined my aperture should be f/5.6 (my aperture of convenience), and selected a shutter speed that would be fast enough to maintain the detail of the foliage outside the picture window in the background.

Step Four:
Then I positioned the bride on the sofa and placed her in what I'll call the bottom-left quadrant of the scene.

Step Five:

I asked my assistant to bring the light in from the right-hand side to illuminate her face (see ✏ *Figure 2*).

Step Six:

The positioning of the lighting was important in order to get the most flattering light on her face. My assistant, using my off-camera flash shot through an umbrella, was positioned to the bride's right, and could no longer see the camera side of her nose, but could still see plenty of the far side of the her cheek.

Step Seven:

Since the flash exposure is independent of the shutter speed, I was able to use the shutter speed to balance the ambient light in the room and the illuminated foliage outside the picture window in the background with the flash exposure on my subject.

Step Eight:

Once things were set, I took several images, ranging her expression from a soft, subtle smile to a big grin, giving me plenty of variety for when I presented them for her final selection (see ✏ *Figures 3a*, *3b*, and *3c*).

✏ *Figure 3a*

✏ *Figure 3b*

✏ *Figure 3c*

Shooting Without the Umbrella

Shooting without the umbrella in place is pretty much like shooting with it in place, as far as determining your exposure and the proper location of your off-camera flash. When do I not to use the umbrella with my off-camera flash? Sometimes, when working with very large groups, my assistant is at a distance that is far from the subjects, and the light output from the umbrella/flash combo is not strong enough to carry the distance.

The umbrella soaks up two stops of light intensity when the strobe fires through it. That means when we shoot through an umbrella, we only deliver one-quarter of the amount of light to the subject vs. using the strobe without the umbrella. So, there are many times when I decide to not use the umbrella with my off-camera flash unit. Here's my quick list:

❀ When I'm photographing a large group where the flash simply needs to be at a greater distance from the subjects (❀ *Figure 1*).

❀ When I'm shooting outdoors where the flash needs to be a good distance from the subject(s), say 25 feet (❀ *Figure 2*).

❀ When I need maximum light output because of a bright, sunny day. Removing the umbrella delivers two more stops of light, giving me maximum light output from my flash (❀ *Figure 3*).

Any time I'm shooting regular wedding candids, I shoot the off-camera strobe without an umbrella attached. This is particularly true in the case of wedding receptions, where using the umbrella would be way too conspicuous.

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Shooting Large Groups

When shooting groups with an off-camera flash, particularly large groups at a wedding, you need to pay attention to how the shadows are falling from one group member to the next. You don't want anyone to wind up in the shadows.

When working with large groups, my assistant is typically to my right at an angle of about 25° around the group from me. Let me rephrase that: if we consider the center member of the group at the middle of the face of a clock, and we consider me, the photographer, at the six o'clock position on the clock, my assistant is positioned at four o'clock or eight o'clock (see ✾ *Figure 1*).

Here's the slightly tricky part: if I have a large wedding party or family group, I try to pose them in what I call a "shallow" group—one where the people are posed no more than two or two-and-a-half people deep (see ✾ *Figure 2*).

The problem arises when we pose a larger group, say four people deep. When we bring the light in from the side, we may produce serious shadows from the group members in the foreground that fall onto the group members standing behind them.
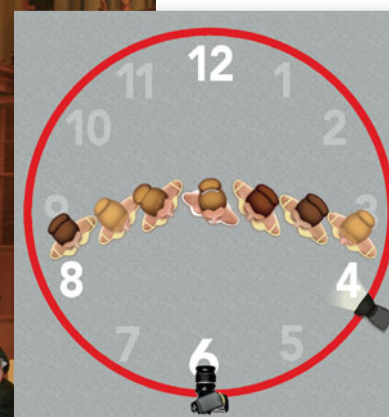
✾ *Figure 1*

Figure 2

Figure 3

It is important that my assistant, from his/her lighting position, can see every single face in the group in its entirety. My assistant must constantly be aware that if he or she can't see one of the faces in the group (or can only see part of a face), then he or she will be throwing a shadow on that person. Check out the wedding party acting a little wild in *Figure 3*. See how the one bridesmaid (circled in red) was caught in the shadow? This shot is more the exception than the norm, but be sure your assistant can see all the faces. It'll save you tons of time in Photoshop trying to save the shot.

Protect yourself against those instances when you might have a shadow problem. I set my on-camera flash to 1²/₃ stops less light than the off-camera flash, so that the on-camera flash supplies reduced illumination to the shadows. This creates a nice ratio with the off-camera flash, giving me a roundness and depth to the scene (see *Figure 4*).

Figure 4

To ensure that we don't have any major problems when shooting large groups, I use my on-camera flash as a fill flash in E-TTL mode (on my Canon, i-TTL for Nikon). I could just use the ambient light to create a fill, but the ambient light in a church is generally much warmer than my off-camera flash, therefore the shadows will be warmer looking when compared to the highlights.
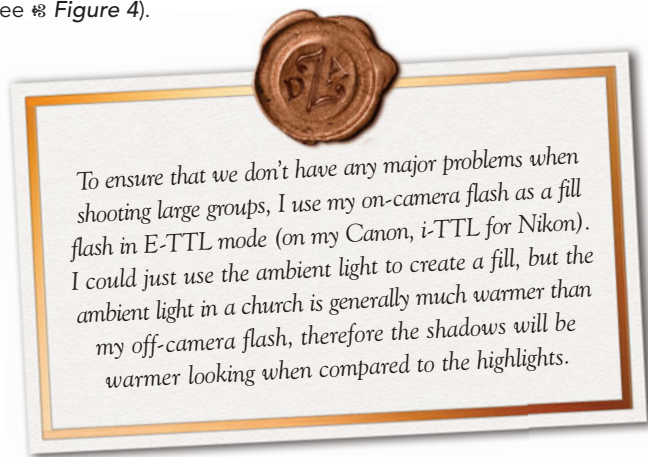
Posing Groups

This is one of the most critical parts of the wedding shoot. You have to get everybody together quickly, be able to pull the different groups together efficiently, get perfect exposures and great expressions, and do it all while everybody is ready to party.

Here's how I pose the wedding groups quickly and efficiently:

Step One:
Pose a shallow group (⚜ *Figure 1*). You can actually get people at three levels when posing a group. If steps are unavailable, then these levels are standing, seated in available chairs, and kneeling on the ground.

Step Two:
Have your assistant positioned at the four o'clock or eight o'clock position on the clock (the group will be at the center of the clock face).

Step Three:
Be sure your assistant understands—this is really important—that he or she needs to see every single face in the group. If your assistant can't see all the faces, be sure that you are notified immediately,

⚜ *Figure 1*

so you can reposition people in the group who may be shadowed. Remember, we need to have everyone in the group fully illuminated.

Step Four:

Have your assistant point the off-camera flash *not* toward the center of the group, but slightly left of center if he/she is standing in the four o'clock lighting position (*Figure 2*). If they are positioned at eight o'clock, then the light is feathered slightly to the right of center.

We do this because the illumination falling on the right side of the group will be brighter than the illumination falling on the left side of the group. Why? Because your assistant is closer to the right side of the group than the left side. So, we "feather," or direct, the light a bit more to the left of center, which causes the light to fall off in intensity ever so slightly on the right side of the group and still carry effectively to the left side of the group. This evens out the illumination across the entire group, as seen in Figure 1.

 Figure 2

Step Five:

After setting up the lighting, I want my assistant to remain in the same location while I finish all the group photographs. Things happen too quickly on a wedding day, so just nail the flash position down, and the exposure will stay the same. Then, move the groups in and out of position.

Step Six:

To save time in establishing the proper exposure for my group photographs, I make several test exposures as a group is coming together. That way, when everybody is ready, my lighting and exposure are perfect, and I can shoot quickly through the series. Never have the group wait for you to fuss with getting the exposure right. Be prepared, be professional, and work efficiently and correctly.
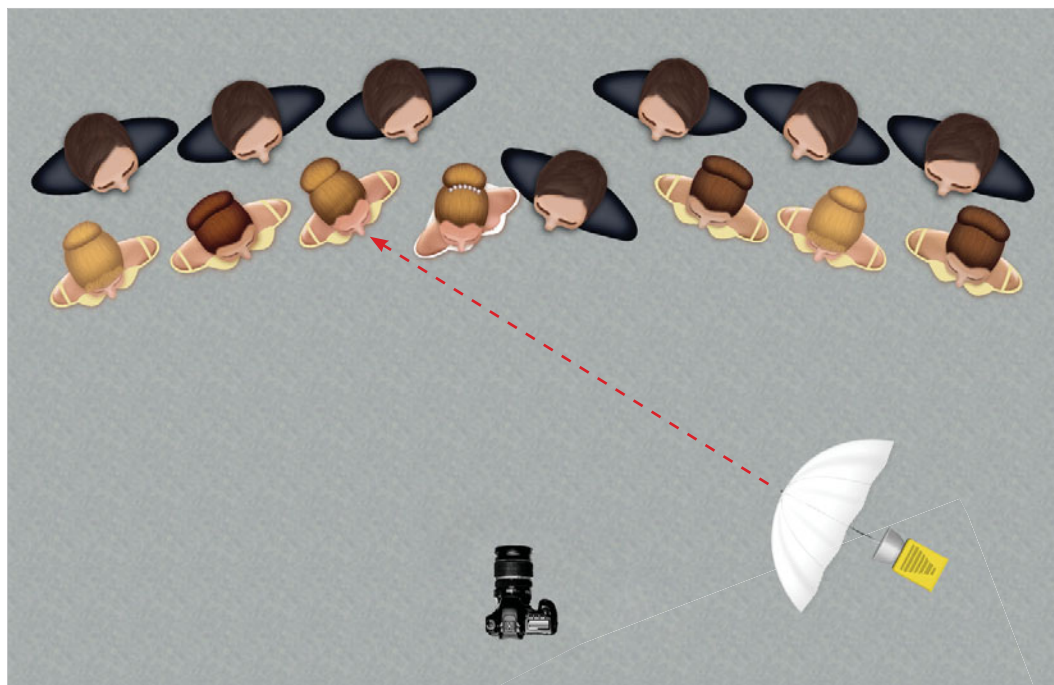
Controlling the Contrast

There are times when I'm trying to create beautiful images of the bride and her gown, and the lighting doesn't fully co-operate. This often happens while photographing near the back of the church. Here's how I handle it:

If the lights at the back of the church aren't turned on, I don't get much fill from the ambient light (see ❀ *Figure 1*), so I have to add some supplemental fill with my on-camera flash. But, I don't want the on-camera flash to overpower the beautiful direction of light from my off-camera flash, so I dial down the power output for my on-camera flash. I determine the amount of fill light by how the test photos look on my camera's LCD after the flash adjustment. A good starting point with my Canon 580EX II is typically about $1^2/_3$ stops less light than the default setting. Look at ❀ *Figure 2* to see what my flash settings look like.

Over-filling the shadows will give you the not-so-great-looking result you see in ❀ *Figure 3*. Take a look at the next photograph (❀ *Figure 4*). You can see here that the finished result is much better with the proper fill light illuminating the scene.

When adding an on-camera fill light and rotating the camera to a vertical position, be sure you don't cast any "ugly" shadows on the background (rotating the camera places the flash to the left or right of the lens). If you do need to rotate your camera, make a test exposure and check for shadows on the background.

Generally I'm working in a large church and the background is pretty far away. The ugly side shadows, many times, will blend in with the church background and are not a big problem. Still, be aware of them. If I'm working in tighter locations, closer to a wall, the side shadows will definitely rear their ugly head, which means I've got big Photoshop problems on my hands. Instead, I look for open areas where the shadows will tend to fall off unnoticed. As you can see, the addition of the fill flash improves the image substantially, as shown in ❀ *Figure 5*.

My best advice is to always know how the shadows are going to fall on the background, should you decide to turn your camera sideways with an on-camera flash. (I've got a whole section on this topic later in the book.)

❀ *Figure 1*

❀ *Figure 2*

❀ *Figure 3*

> *I've never been a fan of flash brackets, especially flash brackets with all the rotating contraptions. With all those robotics in front of my face, I think I look more like robo-photographer than a wedding photographer. I prefer to have as much eye contact with my subjects as I can, without the distractions of camera equipment.*

❧ *Figure 4*

❧ *Figure 5*

Major Wall Bounce

In Chapter 3, I discussed how I use my on-camera flash, rotating the flash 90°–120° to bounce/ricochet the photons off the wall. There are times, though, when the on-camera flash doesn't have enough "oomph" to get me all the light I need to illuminate the scene. So, why don't I just shoot through my umbrella? Sometimes, in very close quarters, the umbrella can actually be a hindrance, because my assistant can't get far enough out of the scene and the lighting gear may show up at the edge of the image.

That was the case in ✣ *Figure 1*. As I was trying to bring my off-camera flash in from my left to give me that beautiful direction of light on my subject, my assistant wasn't able to back up far enough and the umbrella was still within my wide-angle view.

The simple and quick remedy was to have my assistant remove the umbrella and rotate the flash 180°, pointing it directly into the corner at the white wall (see ✣ *Figure 2*). Hitting the white wall gave me a nice, widely spread source of illumination, bouncing back toward my subject, and giving me a very large, soft, white light.

It emulates the direction of light I would have with my umbrella in place to create my beloved loop lighting—the light falling on the subject was the same quality and direction, giving me the beautiful result you see in ✣ *Figure 3*.

Let's take a look at another example: One of my favorite places to photograph is at The Phoenix, a popular reception venue in Cincinnati, Ohio. Built in 1893 by renowned architect Samuel

✣ *Figure 1*

✣ *Figure 2*

✣ *Figure 3*

Hannaford, it's a fine example of Italian Renaissance architecture, and provides an elegant turn-of-the-century ambiance with its magnificent staircase (❧ *Figure 4*). Brides and grooms love this location because of its incredible architecture, and the staircase gives us the opportunity to create beautiful compositions.

When working at this location, I know I'm always going to be bouncing my off-camera flash off the wall to my right for several photos, because of the size of the space that I need to capture. It's also important that I have a very soft light illuminating the bride when I position her on the staircase. Sure, I could use an umbrella, but when using it at this larger distance, the lighting isn't going to be as soft on the subject. Here are the steps I follow when photographing my subject in this type of location:

Step One:

Position the subject—in this case, the bride—within the scene in a way that allows for the best composition (❧ *Figure 5*). By the way, there is an entire chapter on composition coming up (Chapter 7).

Step Two:

Now, I have my assistant position the flash so that he/she can't see the far side of the nose, but can still see plenty of the far side of the cheek (we've discussed this many times already).

Step Three:

We have three choices for illuminating our subject: The first choice is with the flash pointing directly at the bride. This would be my least favorite choice, because of the harsh lighting and the distracting shadows that would be cast throughout the scene. The second choice is to shoot through the umbrella. But, in this case, with the umbrella about 15 to 20 feet away from the subject, the softening effect is not so evident.

❧ *Figure 4*

❧ *Figure 5*

(Continued)

Bouncing the light like this creates a very beautiful quality of light on your subject. The large light source also illuminates the rest of the scene. You only need to balance the ambient light appropriately with the light bouncing off the wall to produce some stunning images.
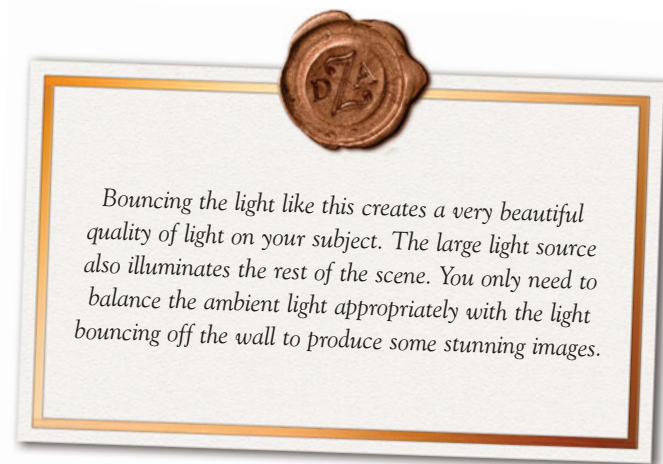
Step Four:

Our third choice is best. My intent is to create a "wall of light" to illuminate my subject. With my assistant in the optimum position, I have him/her remove the umbrella and turn the flash 180°, pointing toward the light-colored wall and maintaining a 5- to 8-foot distance from the wall. Now when I fire the flash, it emulates the same direction of light I had with my umbrella, and creates a very broad, directional light ricocheting from the wall and illuminating my bride. You can see how big the reflected light source is in ✺ *Figure 6*. This is a great way to get beautiful directional light on your subject.

Step Five:

It's at this point that we can explore many compositional possibilities within the setting. Try some close-up telephoto images (see ✺ *Figure 7*), and even back up and try to do some wide-angle images, as well (see ✺ *Figure 8*).

✺ *Figure 7*
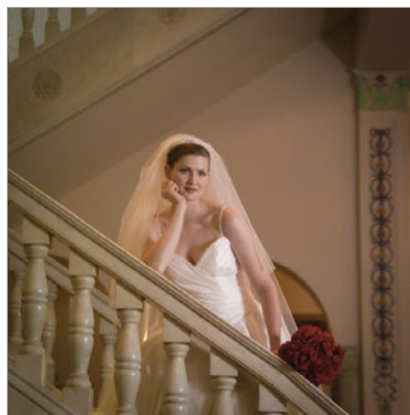
✺ *Figure 6*

✺ *Figure 8*

Figure 1: Using a shoot-through umbrella

Figure 2

Hollywood Lighting

I love this lighting technique. I call it Hollywood lighting, because it mimics the lighting that famous photographer George Hurrell used when photographing Hollywood stars in the '30s and '40s. Simply stated, he created a small cone of light to illuminate his subject's face, thereby isolating the individual from the darker surrounds—like putting a spotlight on the subject, but the spotlight never fell off onto the surrounding scene. Consequently, the result gives us a clearly defined illuminated area of the subject, drawing the viewer's eye directly toward the essence of the portrait—the face.

While Mr. Hurrell worked in a large photographic studio with assistants to carry all the lighting gear on location for shoots, we, as wedding photographers, can create the same type of lighting. How can we do it quickly and easily on the wedding day and still get the same great result? Let me show you:

Step One:
Find a nice setting for your subject, in this case the bride. The setting should complement the final image, and could be the bride's home, a hotel suite, or even the church.

Step Two:
Now, just for fun, let's illuminate the bride with our shoot-through umbrella flash technique (⚜ *Figure 1*). Notice how the flash has illuminated the entire surroundings, as well. It's a nice image, but let's see how the "feel" of the image changes with Hollywood lighting.

Step Three:
For our Hollywood lighting, first we need to create a very small cone of light to illuminate the subject. We're going to do this by simply rolling up a magazine, pulling off the reflector for the off-camera flash, and wrapping the magazine around the flash tube (see ⚜ *Figure 2*).

(Continued)

Step Four:

Set your camera's aperture to f/5.6, and the shutter speed at a value that will underexpose the ambient light at least one stop. You may have to fiddle with the power settings on the strobe to get the exposure correct on the subject. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, I use my Quantum flash on manual for just this reason—the ability to dial in the light to its proper exposure.

Step Five:

Now have your assistant point the flash/magazine combo at the subject very precisely, so that that small cone of light falls only on the subject's face. This is a great lighting technique for spotlighting the illumination (see *$ *Figure 3*).

Step Six:

Because we're working with such a small cone of light, your assistant's aim is critical. Remember the big rule, too: you want a loop lighting pattern on the bride's face, so your assistant needs to rotate around the subject, so that the camera side of the nose cannot be seen, but most of the far side of the cheek is still visible.

Step Seven:

The assistant also must be aware that he/she is not throwing the subject's shadow on any of the surrounds that may be included in the image area. Actually, the moment I take a photograph, I can tell if my assistant was in the right location or not.
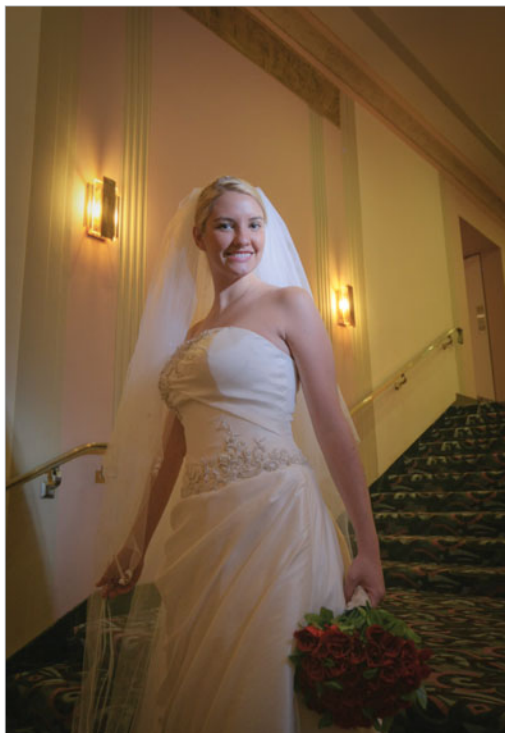
❧ *Figure 4a*

❧ *Figure 4c*

❧ *Figure 4b*

Step Eight:

Now, adjust your shutter speed to control the exposure of the ambient light of the scene. I happen to be a big fan of underexposing the rest of the scene by about 1 to 1½ stops. Again, you may have to fiddle with it a bit to get the result you are looking for (see ❧ *Figures 4a*, *4b*, and *4c*).

By the way, I haven't discussed much about power settings, because so much depends on the distance of the assistant to the subject, the ambient light, how tight the magazine is rolled, and so many other factors. As we're setting up a shot, I'll simply give my assistant a couple of educated guesses for the power setting on the flash, and quickly make my adjustments along the way to nail the exposure.

Done right, this technique can give us some really cool results that are completely different from what we normally see in wedding photography.

Cheating the Sync

Here, we're going to talk a little bit about native sync speed and how to use it to our advantage.

All cameras that we use come with a set native sync speed. Native sync speed is the fastest speed at which the camera can sync with the flash. The native sync speed, for example, of a Canon 40D/7D would be $1/250$ of a second. The maximum sync speed of the Canon 5D and 5D Mark II is $1/200$ of a second. Nikon is running at $1/250$ of a second, as well.

What this means is that when the shutter is set to $1/250$ of a second, the CMOS sensor is fully exposed to the flash. The shutter curtains are fully opened, revealing the entire CMOS sensor at the moment of exposure (see ❧ *Figure 1*).

Let's say I increase that shutter speed to $1/320$ of a second. Now the CMOS sensor isn't fully exposed, as the shutter curtains cover part of the sensor during the exposure (see ❧ *Figure 2*). So, what happens here is that the bottom half of the CMOS sensor is all in darkness. That's not the reality, actually, because when I'm making my exposures, I have another light source illuminating the scene.

The other light source would be the ambient light. With it still hitting the CMOS sensor during exposure, the bottom portion of the CMOS would not be completely unexposed, but would still receive some illumination from the ambient light, thereby not fully darkening the sensor but making it look more like it does in ❧ *Figure 3*.

Since we know that only the top two-thirds of the image is going to receive flash exposure and the bottom one-third receives only the ambient light, we should really be able to have this work to our benefit. We can use this to our advantage outdoors when we need to be working with faster shutter speeds, so we can put a directional light on our subject.

I'm going to be using my Quantum flash. The Quantum flash doesn't talk Canon talk or Nikon talk in this situation. I'm using the Quantum radio transmitters, Quantum receiver, and the flash itself. So, let me walk you though my process of "cheating the sync."
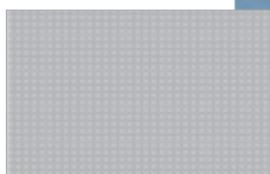
📷 *Figure 1*

📷 *Figure 2*

📷 *Figure 3*

📷 *Figure 4*

Step One:
As soon as the shutter contacts hit, that tells the radio to fire the flash. When I'm using a third-party flash like the Quantum, it's going to give me a blast of light exposing all or part of the CMOS sensor, depending on the setting of the shutter speed, as we discussed earlier.

Step Two:
To reap the benefit of this technique, select ¹⁄₃₂₀ of a second. This means that on my Canon 40D/7D, the top two-thirds of the CMOS sensor will be exposed to the flash, as shown in Figure 2.

Step Three:
Knowing which part of the sensor is exposed is important. The easiest way to determine that for your particular camera is to point your camera at a white wall with a shutter speed faster than the native sync speed and see which part of your LCD screen goes dark. Now just be sure to keep the subject out of that part of the image area.

When you do this, always have the bride hold the bouquet slightly behind her. If the bouquet is in front of her, it's going to cast a shadow across the entire gown—not a pretty sight.
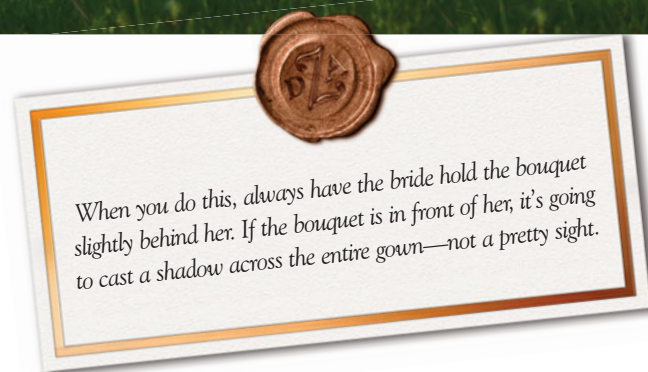
Step Four:
I'm going to have my bride in the top two-thirds of my image area. The flash is going to illuminate her from my left side, lighting her face and approximately two-thirds of her body. The bottom one-third of the image (the bottom of the gown here) will have a slight vignette, or be slightly darkened, because we aren't going to have any flash exposing it (📷 *Figure 4*).

(Continued)

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7a

Step Five:

You'll notice that, from about the knees up, the bride is receiving the exposure from the off-camera flash at this ⅟₃₂₀ of a second exposure. But from the knees down, and into the grass, there's no flash illumination. This gives us a nice vignette on our bride with a beautiful direction of light.

Step Six:

You can use a higher shutter speed to darken the sky on a bright sunny day, but remember, less of the CMOS sensor will be revealed during the flash part of the exposure. That means you really have to be careful as to where you position your subjects in the viewfinder.

Step Seven:

Let's take a look at a couple more images. Here is another example (⚙ *Figure 5*), where I've shot at ⅟₄₀₀ of a second. You don't see the light fall off as much in this example. Why? Because the camera was oriented vertically and the bride was in the "flash sync" part of the viewfinder.

Step Eight:

Look at ⚙ *Figure 6*. It's a great shot, with the light falling off nicely, giving me exactly what I want. But you might say, "David, I want the bride and groom to be fully illuminated. I don't want that fall-off. I think it looks cool and everything, but I want full illumination

over the whole scene. How do I do that?" Good question. How do we pull it off?

Step Nine:

The easiest way to do that is to—pay attention now—turn your camera upside down. That way, when you take the photo, your subjects will be in the "flash sync" area of the viewfinder, which happens to be the top section of the CMOS sensor (see ❧ *Figure 7a*). Pretty cool, eh? Then rotate the image 180° in Photoshop to get the shot you envisioned.

Notice how when we flip the image back upright (❧ *Figure 7b*), we can see that the subjects were completely in the "flash sync" area of the viewfinder. You can't even see the light fall off because the flash is completely exposing the subject area of the image. Figure 6 is probably my preferred image—the light gradually and ever so slightly falls off the couple, creating a slight vignette, and bringing the viewers' attention directly to them. But, if you do want the entire subject illuminated, rotate the camera, and shoot away.

❧ *Figure 7b*

What if…? Sometimes we need to ask ourselves the question, "What if I try this, or what happens if I try something different?" This was my first attempt and I was really happy with the result. An amazing benefit we have with digital is the ability to experiment without out-of-pocket costs to ourselves. It allows us to challenge ourselves, to play, to explore, to test ideas. So, ask yourself, "What if…?"

Let's take a look at the first time I tried this technique (❧ *Figure 8*). I remember wondering, "What if I just increase the shutter speed? Is my camera going to blow up if I use a flash sync higher than what the manual stated?" My camera didn't blow up, and I was really happy with the result. This Cheating the Sync technique takes a little practice, so how about starting today?

❧ *Figure 8*

Adding Color Gels to the Flash

Here is another technique that gets very little discussion in any of the photography books, especially wedding photography books: adding color gels to your on- or off-camera flash. I'll walk you through four scenarios and the methods of determining why and when you may want to add color gels to your strobes while photographing an event.

Figure 1a

First Scenario

I first experimented with the gelled-flash technique several years ago while photographing party interiors for an event planner friend of mine. My friend asked me to photograph the room setups he designed at a large hotel for a major corporate client. I thought it would be an easy assignment, so I just grabbed my camera and headed for the hotel. I thought I would mount my camera on a tripod, set it to tungsten color balance, and shoot away.

Well, the hotel banquet room had been transformed into an amazing vision. It was magnificent. Sea grass replaced carpeting. Soft sofas and settees replaced many of the tables and chairs. White sand, shells, and a color palette of pale blue, camel, beige, and off-white invited the corporate attendees to a tropical oasis in the middle of downtown Cincinnati.

My lighting challenge was that the illumination throughout the room was not totally balanced. Nevertheless, I set my camera on tungsten mode and started making some exposures (see *Figure 1a*). Because of the lack of uniform illumination, the foreground of many of my photographs was dark and underexposed. Here's how I handled the situation:

Step One:

The foreground needed added illumination, and I did have my camera fitted with my on-camera flash, but the on-camera flash would add a blue cast to the scene, since the camera was set to tungsten mode.

Step Two:

What if I somehow turned my on-camera flash into a tungsten-flavored light source? I looked throughout the hotel for a colored piece of plastic that I could use to cover the flash head and give me light that more closely resembled the color balance of the room—no luck.

Figure 1b

Step Three:

I happened to have a gold pocket square in my jacket pocket, so I covered my on-camera flash with it (✿ *Figure 1b*). See? It does pay to dress up for a job.

Step Four:

Next, I rotated the gold-pocket-square-covered on-camera flash 90° toward the ceiling and ran a test. It worked perfectly.

Step Five:

Take a look at ✿ *Figure 1c* and you will see the improved photograph. This image is the result of two separate light sources on the scene, the first being the lighting set up by the lighting technician to illuminate most of the room, as seen in the background. The illumination on the foreground was created by my on-camera flash covered with my gold pocket square. Since the filter, in this case, was gold, it gave me a reasonably close color balance to the tungsten setting on my camera, thus balancing the lighting throughout the photograph.

I occasionally have to use a variation of this technique when shooting reception venues. I always want to get some shots of the main

Figure 1c

Figure 1e

room before all the guests enter. Many times, the tables are lit with pin spots—very bright lights that highlight the centerpieces (✿ *Figure 1d*). In order to get a good shot of the room, I bring up the room lights a bit to minimize the contrasty lighting effect of the pin spots.

In some cases, because of time or technical constraints, I don't have the option of bringing up those lights, so I go to Plan B: gel my Quantum flash (✿ *Figure 1e*) with a tungsten-flavored gel and bounce my own light off the ceiling. The result is a great shot of the room (✿ *Figure 1f*).

Figure 1d

Figure 1f

(Continued)
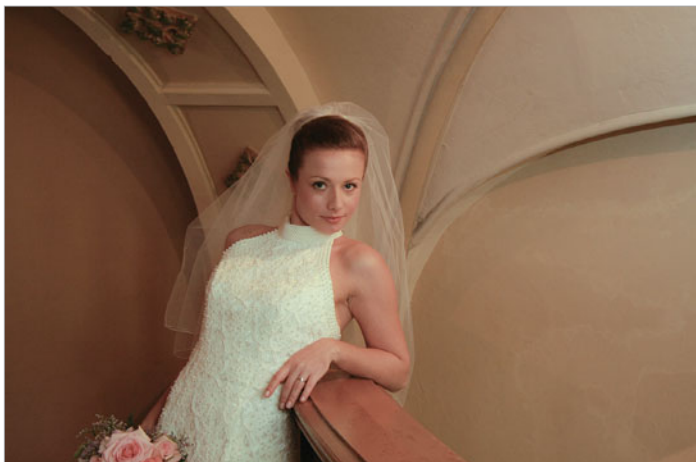
Figure 2a

Figure 2d

Second Scenario

After that, I started thinking about other possibilities for gelling my on-camera flash. I had a situation in which the primary illumination on the bride was a small tungsten bulb that was overhead and on her left, and provided a very contrasty light source. What if I wanted to use this as my primary light source? The problem wasn't getting my nice loop lighting on the bride, and I loved the location. The challenge was to control the contrast lighting. Here's how I did it:

Step One:

The first thing I needed to do was orient the bride's face to the direction of light. I certainly couldn't move the light, so I needed to orient the bride for the best illumination on her face (see *Figure 2a*).

Step Two:

Okay, I've got a nice lighting pattern on her face, but the contrast of the scene is quite high. I determined that I could easily rectify the situation with my on-camera flash. But, just as in the last scenario, since my camera was going to be in tungsten mode when I made the photograph, I needed to create a tungsten-flavored fill flash on the scene.

Figure 2b

Step Three:

This turned out to be pretty easy to fix. You can pick up a sampler pack of Roscoe gels inexpensively from B&H (www.bhphotovideo.com). From the sampler pack (see *Figure 2b*), I've selected several colors that allow me a range of options when photographing a wedding. In this case, I used the tungsten orange gels.

Figure 2c

Step Four:

The nice thing about the Roscoe gels from the sampler pack is that they are just the right size to cover up the flash head of our portable strobes, like the Canon 580EX II or the Nikon SB-800 (see *Figure 2c*).

Step Five:

Next, I pointed my tungsten-gelled on-camera flash toward the ceiling (*Figure 2d*), dialed down the power of the flash 1²/₃ stops, and ran the test exposure. Things looked good—the contrast
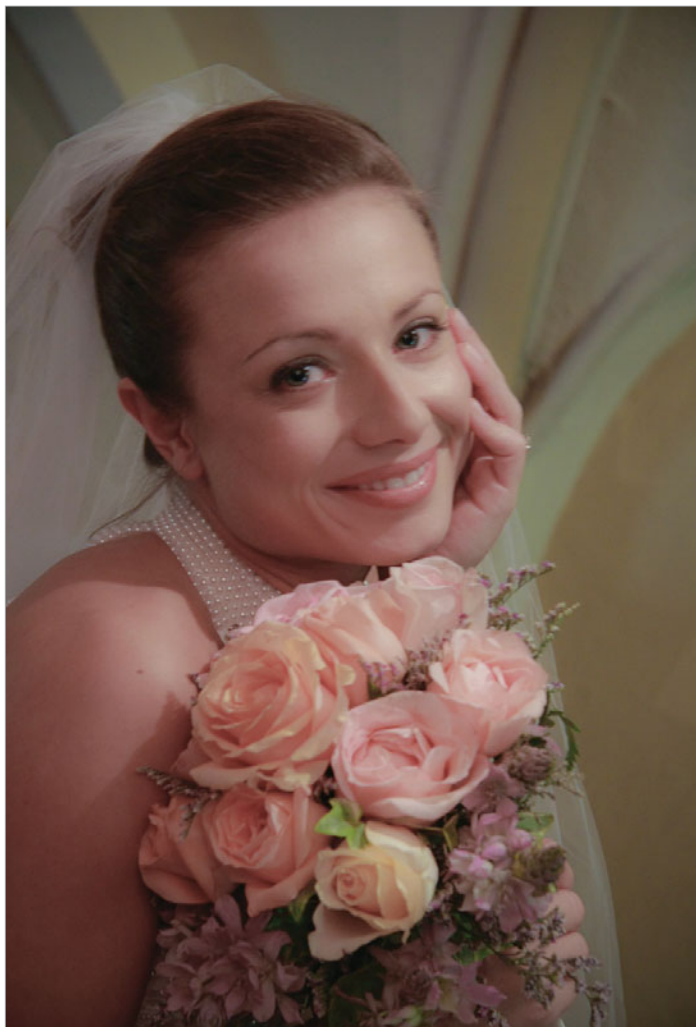
Figure 2e

Figure 3a

of the scene was right where I wanted it to be—and I was pretty happy about the shots I got (see *Figure 2e*).

Third Scenario

What happens if you're working outside on a cloudy day? Here is the original scene (*Figure 3a*). What if I change my off-camera flash into a tungsten-flavored off-camera flash by adding a gel to it, then photograph my subject (in this case the groom) with the camera set to tungsten color balance? Once again, let me walk you through what I was thinking and show you the end result:

Figure 3b

Step One:

In my mind's eye, I envisioned the color balance on the groom's face to be normal. He would be illuminated with a tungsten-flavored light source—my gelled flash (see *Figure 3b*)—and the camera would be set to tungsten to give me the correct color balance.

(Continued)

❧ *Figure 3c*

❧ *Figure 3d*

Step Two:

But what happens to the surrounds, especially that cloudy sky? The color temperature of a cloudy day is pretty darn blue—a much higher Kelvin setting than the tungsten color balance that my digital camera was set to capture. In my mind's eye, I thought all the surrounds would go very blue because of the extreme difference in color balance between my gelled flash and the cloudy day.

Step Three:

I took the photograph and got the great result you see in ❧ *Figure 3c*. I love how the subject is surrounded by all those blue tones. It's just another way to separate your subject from the scene, to draw the viewer's attention even more closely to the subject. What would have happened if I tried the same thing on a bright, sunny day? I don't know—never tried it. I'll save that one for my next book.

Step Four:

Here is one more image from the shoot (❧ *Figure 3d*). This was the groom's idea. He thought it would be cool to catch him midair, jumping from the railing. Hey, what was I to do? I took the shot and loved it.

Fourth scenario:

After playing around with these gelled flashes for a while, I asked myself, "What happens if you use different color gels on the off-camera flash—say a red gel—and start aiming it at the background during a wedding reception?" Well, I gave it a try and, again, was really pleased with the results. Let's walk through my steps for this:

Step One:

I asked my assistant, with my red-gelled off-camera flash, to see if he could direct the light toward the dance floor behind a couple that was really groovin'. After a couple of tries, we nailed it. I love the final result (see ❧ *Figure 4*).

Step Two:

Now, you might be asking, "How did you keep the on-camera flash from overexposing the vibrant red color of the off-camera flash?" The answer is simple: I was using a very wide-angle lens (my 10–20mm) when I created this photograph. It was racked out pretty wide—to the 10mm setting—and was pretty close to the couple—only a few feet away—as I made the exposure.

Step Three:

The light from my off-camera gelled flash behind the subjects was much further away. Therefore, the ratio of the distance of

Figure 4

my on-camera flash to my subjects was much shorter than the distance from my off-camera flash to the floor behind the subjects. Consequently, the light from my on-camera flash fell off substantially before it even reached the floor, and didn't wash out the light from my red-gelled flash hitting the floor behind them.

This is a great technique for bringing a wonderful party feeling to your wedding candids/dance candids. Yes, I have many other colored gels in my bag and I am constantly trying different flavors of light.

Using colored gels is just another way to keep things interesting, fun, and exciting when photographing wedding after wedding, weekend after weekend. We owe it to ourselves to constantly strive to keep our images fresh, new, and innovative—not only for our clients, but especially for ourselves.

Bouncing Light Off the Floor

When using an off-camera flash, you can point it anywhere and get a pretty creative result. I was taking some wedding images at a local church, and as I was setting up for the shot, I triggered the camera inadvertently with my assistant out of position. The flash was resting down the side of my assistant, pointed at the floor, but when I looked at the resulting image, I really liked the light coming up from that lower direction and illuminating the bride's face. I thought, "What if I could work the accidental lighting into a pretty cool photo?" Here's how I did it:

I composed my bride against the beautiful stained-glass window of the church, and dramatized the pose by asking her to turn toward her left, leaning on the communion rail, which was close by and a comfortable resting place.

Once I had the composition just the way I wanted it, I showed my assistant which part of the floor to illuminate. The reflected light needed to be consistent with the lighting pattern I wanted to place on my bride (⚜ *Figure 1*).

Once we were set, I started making images, varying the composition and zooming in and out on the subject. We got some great shots (see ⚜ *Figure 2*).

Too many photographers don't follow any rules at all when making photographs, which leads to some pretty ordinary looking imagery. On the other hand, we sometimes get so wrapped up in following every single rule that we forget to play, experiment, or try something new. We need to take a chance and break those rules every now and then to see what new result can be obtained. It's really cool when it produces a result that's exciting, fresh, and sets us apart from photographers who simply follow the rules.
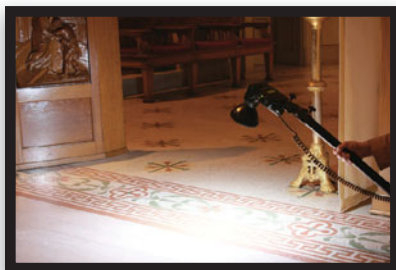
That's part of the fun of having an off-camera flash: we can place the light anywhere we want to create a trajectory of light coming from any direction to illuminate our subject. The results are vastly superior to what many photographers capture with their on-camera blast flash.

I know I step on a few toes when I say that too many photographers do too much of the same thing at every single wedding. If we don't shake it up a bit, then we relegate ourselves to the same low-paying wedding jobs that so many other photographers find themselves shooting week after week. So try something different, experiment, gel, get your flash off your camera, and really make the lighting sing.

⚜ *Figure 1*

⚜ *Figure 2*

Step One:

Have your assistant adjust the power on your off-camera flash (in my case, my Quantum T5d) to half-power.

Step Two:

Next, have your assistant move to the opposite side of the dance floor, positioned either to the right or left center of the shot, as viewed in your viewfinder—I use hand signals to direct my assistant to the correct position. This light position works best when it coincides with nodal point #2 or #3, as we'll discuss in Chapter 7.

Step Three:

Then grab a really wide-angle lens, like a 10–22mm lens, and rack that puppy out to its widest setting (10mm here). You want the widest field of view you can possibly get for this shot.

Step Four:

Frame up the scene with the revelers at the top of the image area and a lot of the dance floor at the bottom part of the image area. When your backlight fires, you'll create these wonderfully long shadows in the foreground (see ✽ *Figure 2*, where I used a Rayburst filter on my lens).

Long Dance Shadows

This is a great technique for getting a series of images that really capture the party flavor of the wedding reception. It is also one of the easiest techniques to execute. Take a look at ✽ *Figure 1*. See how the backlighting created very long shadows coming back toward the camera? The image just says "party time" and adds to the celebratory feeling of the wedding reception. Let's walk through the simple steps for this technique:

I think this shot works best when there aren't too many people on the dance floor. This typically means later in the evening, almost near the end of the wedding reception. Too many people on the dance floor means that some will be blocking the shadows of others. Separate shadows look better than a big clump of shadows—they are much more distinct and dramatic.

✽ *Figure 1*

✽ *Figure 2*

Adding a Third Light at the Reception

Okay gang, this is where we separate the men from the boys in wedding photography. We talked about how most shooters just use on-camera flash as their main light source at weddings, often creating flat, unflattering images. We talked about how using a second flash can really create some dramatic lighting. So, let's pull out all the stops and really get those photos singing, let's add a third light to our setup. Its primary purpose will be to add more of an ambient light feel to our reception coverage.

In many wedding reception photos, the people in the foreground are properly exposed, but the light falls off quickly, so the guests look like they are standing in the black hole of Calcutta. Off-camera flash does a good job of creating nice dimensional lighting on the scene. But, even with two lights firing, that light still falls off over the longer distances in a large reception venue.

That's where the third light comes in. We find a suitable space for the light—in a corner, or behind the band or DJ—place it on a tall light stand, attach a FreeWire radio unit to it, set the power, and we are good to go. What kind of light are we talking about? Generally, a fairly strong studio light—about 600 watt seconds, with a fast recycle rate that lets us shoot quickly to capture all the action at the reception. There are several good ones on the market. Just be sure that they can take the rapid firing of your motor-driven DSLR without blowing the fuses on the strobe.

If you don't want to spend the bucks on a big flash unit, you can use a smaller wattage portable unit. The only reason I suggest this is because of the high-ISO DSLRs coming onto the market. We don't need nearly as much power now to light up the rest of the room. Frankly, with the new high-ISO cameras, I'm thinking I can get by with a second Quantum strobe working as my room light.

Here's a cool thing: if we shoot reception candids routinely at 1600 or 3200 ISO, that means we only need a "wink" of light from all three flashes to get a correctly exposed image. That also means our charged flash units seem to work forever on the built-in battery power, because each flash is such a minimal dump of energy.

Let's walk through the steps I take when setting up a room light at a wedding reception:

✥ *Figure 1*

✥ *Figure 2*

Step One:

Take your room light—your third light source—and place it in a corner or next to one of the band's or DJ's speaker stands. With your light stand almost fully extended, point the strobe back at the center of the dance floor.

Step Two:

There are two other configurations you can use: If the room space is quite a bit smaller, you can pull the reflector off of the room light and use it in a bare-bulb configuration. The second configuration, if your room light is powerful enough, is to point it at the ceiling, spreading the cone of light out even more, and creating a nice, soft, ambient splash of light over the entire room (✥ *Figure 1*). You need at least 600 watt seconds of power to pull this off.

Step Three:

As a safeguard, I try to keep my light stand as close to the speaker stands of the band or the DJ as I can, so that people don't bump into my equipment. A balcony is also a great spot to place the light, if that's an option for you.

Step Four:

The next step is to set the correct exposure of the room light. I do this by having my assistant stand in the middle of the dance floor, facing the room light. Then, I have him pull back or remove his jacket, exposing his white shirt to the light as I make some test exposures (✥ *Figure 2*). I adjust the power on the room light till I just see "blinkies" on his shirt—shown in black in Figure 2—then decrease the power till the blinkies disappear, and decrease the power setting slightly more. I want the room underexposed about a stop.
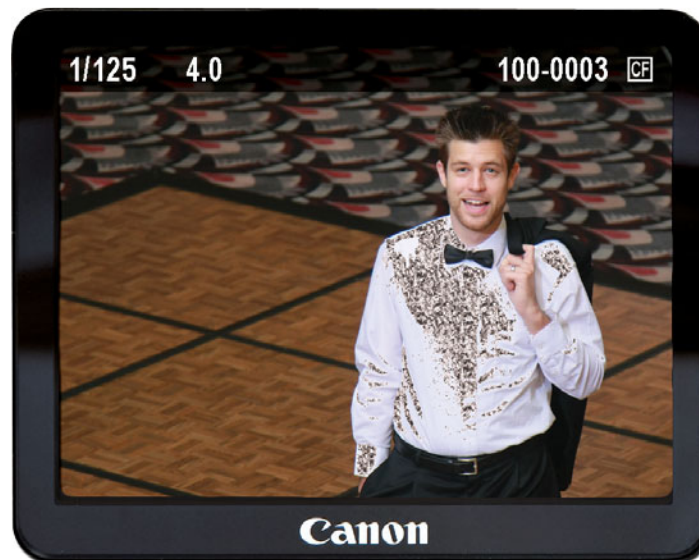
Step Five:

By the way, my preferred aperture when shooting reception candids is f/5.6. This gives me plenty of depth of field and assures a quick recycle time on all strobes—remember those high ISOs I'm using—so I never miss a shot because of a miss-fire from the strobes.

I prefer using a tall light stand (12 feet) with a broad footprint (at least 36 inches). This ensures the stability of the setup. My choice for many years has been a 12-foot stand made by Manfrotto.
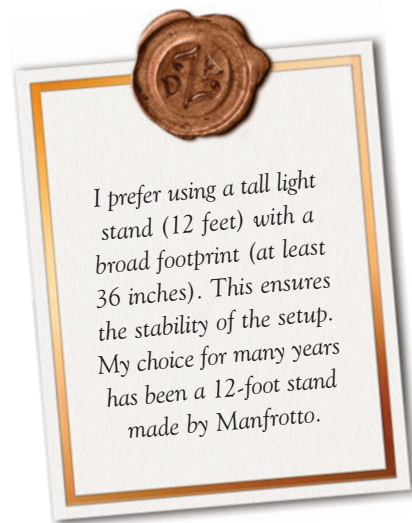
(Continued)

Figure 3

Figure 4

Why do I set the ambient light for the room at one f-stop less than the normal exposure? Because I want the room light to supply an overall feel of the lighting in the room—opening up the shadows, showing the expressions of the friends and family in the background. But, I also want the main subjects I'm photographing (the bride and groom here) to pop out of that ambient light setting (Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 5

If the overall ambient light is just as bright as the subjects, they will simply blend into the background. But with the background slightly darker, one stop underexposed, the bride and groom (or any other subjects I photograph) will pop out of the scene because of their added brightness. Remember how we balanced the lighting at the church earlier in this chapter?

Also, look at the depth the third light brings to the scene. The way the third light accents the bouquet toss shot just adds that much sizzle and pizzazz to it (*Figure 5*).

Step Six:

Now, let me introduce you to my "three-point lighting" concept. Imagine the face of a clock. All the action (dancing, bouquet/garter toss, cake cutting, etc.) takes place at the center of the clock face. I always define my position as being at the six o'clock position. The room light is positioned at either the ten o'clock or two o'clock position. It is my assistant's job to be in the remaining triangular position (in this case, two o'clock). So, we have created a triangular area of light illuminating the scene, and all the action takes place within that triangle (*Figure 6*).

Since the room light is stationary, it is my job, and that of my assistant, to always create the triangular three-point lighting system. Obviously, due to the action of the wedding events and activities, I can't always be at the six o'clock posi-

tion. So, if I move to the two o'clock position, and the room light is in the ten o'clock position, then my assistant needs to move to the six o'clock position.

When considering the distances between all three light sources, we obtain wonderful light patterns and accent lights, filling the "action" space, creating exciting candids, photojournalistic images with pizzazz, images that just have a lot more punch, as well as dramatics, than the basic on-camera blast flash.

Anyway, you can see that it takes a little more effort to set up a room light at the wedding reception, but it makes a big difference in your reception candids. I've been doing it for most of my photographic career and my clients can recognize the difference.

The main rule we follow when using our three-light setup at a wedding reception is this: both my assistant and I have to be constantly aware that we never line up under the stationary room light. The room light never moves, and if we line up in the same direction as the stationary room light, we double the light coming from that particular direction, negating the nice lighting we are trying to get. This can cause some really big exposure problems.

Just as important is the fact that your assistant needs to be aware of where you are, know what lens you have on your camera, and not be in the shot, as my assistant was in ✤ Figure 7.

✤ Figure 6

✤ Figure 7: Notice how my assistant and his flash made it into this particular shot

Shadow Problems with On- and Off-Camera Flash

I can sit here all day long and say how great it is to use your on-camera and off-camera flashes in all the different, creative ways that we discussed. But, I'd be doing you a disservice if I didn't point out some of the problems you can encounter along the way. There are really two main problem areas when using your on-camera or off-camera flash: shadows and reflections.

Avoiding Side Shadows #1: On-Camera Flash

Generally, side shadows can be a big problem if you use your flash on-camera, especially when you turn your camera sideways. Now your on-camera flash is either to the right or left side of the lens—bad news. If you take a photograph with your flash to the side of your lens, it will throw a big ugly shadow onto the background of the scene, particularly if that background is fairly close to the subject (see ✱ *Figure 1a*). Pretty nasty shadow, isn't it? I know all this sounds obvious, but I see it happen all the time.

My regular shooting routine means never tilting the camera unless, of course, turning the camera to a vertical position guarantees that I will produce no ugly shadows on the background. Those instances include when I'm working with the bride, say, about two-thirds down the center aisle of the church, where any shadows cast to the left or the right of her will fall off and be camouflaged and disguised by the background (see ✱ *Figure 1b*). The other instance is when we are work-
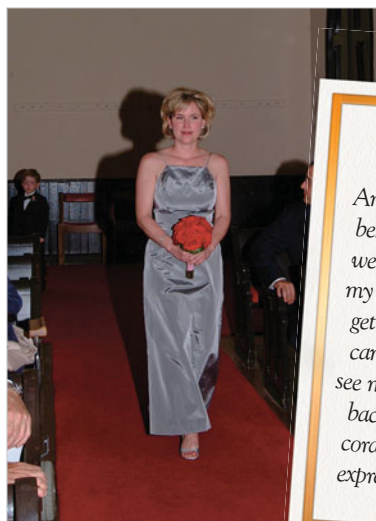
✱ *Figure 1b*

✱ *Figure 1a*

Another thing that I do to avoid being a robo-photographer at a wedding is to put the camera to my eye, frame up the subject(s), get a good focus, then drop the camera down so that they can see my face. They see me smiling back at them and respond accordingly with great smiles and expressions—works every time.

ing outdoors and there really isn't any obstacle for the shadow to land upon (✱ *Figure 1c*).

As I said, I prefer to keep my camera in the horizontal position for most of my photography. Today's DSLRs have plenty of pixels, so even if I do need to crop a horizontal shot into a vertical image, I still have plenty of pixels remaining to create a good vertical image. Follow my logic: I'm shooting with my Canon 5D Mark II. Its full-frame 36x24mm sensor gives me 21+ megapixels. If I shoot horizontal and discover later that it needs to be vertical

Figure 1c

Figure 2

Figure 3

for the wedding album, I can just crop it vertical and still end up with a 24x16mm slice of the sensor. That's half of what I started with. Yep, 10.5+ megapixels still left over.

Avoiding Side Shadows #2: Off-Camera Flash

This is something you really have to watch out for. You need to train your assistant to watch for these ugly side shadows, be- cause he/she is the one creating them. The biggest problem comes when photographing large groups. Read my lips: If your assistant can't see *all* of the faces of *all* the people in the group, then he/she will cast shadows on the individuals they can't see.

Remember our group shot from earlier in the chapter (see *Figure 2*)? I remember years ago when I had another photographer shoot a job for me. His assistant was so far to the right of the group that

the shadow completely covered up one of the wedding party members—you could hardly spot them because of how deep and dark the shadow presented itself. That was a big custom job back in the film days.

Halloween Shadows: Off-Camera Flash

This is kind of a weird one. Here is how it happens: You've got the wedding party posed on the church steps, taking the big group shot. Your assistant holds the off-camera flash in just the perfect position— well, almost. It seems the group on the steps is much higher than the height to which the assistant is extending the off-camera flash. What happens? Halloween shadows (shadows that are larger and higher than the group). It's time to call your favorite Photoshop guru in for the fix. I added the shadows in this shot to give you an idea how bad the problem can be if you aren't careful (*Figure 3*).

Figure 4a

Figure 4b

Five More Times Shadows Won't Be Your Friend

1 Watch for shadows whenever shooting people standing under canopies, flower arches, etc., inside a church. They will show up every time if you are not at least shooting through an umbrella. You can still see the shadows here, although they are quite soft and not too distracting, thanks to my assistant shooting through an umbrella (❧ *Figure 4a*).

2 Watch for shadows when working in smaller churches where there isn't much distance from the altar area to the back wall. This is especially a problem if the back wall is white, and often happens if the area has rows of white pews for the choir. This example shows our shadow problem cropping up because my staff photographer had the bride and her grandmother too close to the white altar in the background (❧ *Figure 4b*).

3 Watch for shadows when shooting in front of a fireplace, often at a country club, hotel lobby, or family home. I generally shoot at an oblique angle to the fireplace to avoid the shadows (❧ *Figure 4c*).

Figure 4c

❧ *Figure 4d*

❧ *Figure 4e*

❧ *Figure 4f*

4 Watch for shadows cast on the bride during the cake cutting, because the assistant is out of place. In the rush of the cake cutting activities, your assistant can easily find himself to be out of place, as in ❧ *Figure 4d*, where he is casting the groom's shadow on the bride. As you can see in ❧ *Figure 4e*, he quickly got into the proper position.

5 If the wedding cake is placed close to a wall, watch for shadows when shooting the cake cutting activities. This can become a very difficult situation to control (❧ *Figure 4f*).

The bottom line is this: you and your assistant have to be "shadow aware" when shooting a wedding. Know where the light is coming from, and where the shadows are falling, before you take the shot— 'nough said.

Reflection Problems with On- and Off-Camera Flash

The other flash problems we need to avoid are reflection problems. There are three kinds of reflection problems: (1) specular reflections, (2) diffuse reflections, and (3) a combination of both.

Figure 1b

Specular Reflections

Specular reflections are direct mirror-image reflections of the light source reflected back into the camera. All really shiny surfaces will create a specular reflection. Common sources in wedding photography include mirrors, windows, shiny marble, or highly polished wood paneling. All of these can cause problems with reflections, as you can see in this shot of the head table in *Figure 1a*. The same problem popped up again when the bride and groom were cutting the cake in *Figure 1b*.

The easiest way to solve a problem with specular reflections is to be aware of the surface characteristics behind your subjects. Once we know we might have problems with reflections, we can determine how to reposition ourselves and our subjects for the shot, or find a better location for the picture.

Check out *Figure 1c*. See the reflection of the umbrella in the group shot? We had to fix it in Photoshop because we missed it during the shoot.

Figure 1c

Diffuse Reflections

A bigger problem with reflections happens with diffuse reflections. This worst-case reflection scenario happens when you photograph into polished wood paneling or large polished wood pieces of furniture, or even fireplaces. The situation is worsened when using an off-camera flash.

Here's why: when the light from the flash(es) hits that kind of surface, it just spreads out like crazy. Check out *Figure 2a*. See how the reflection is spreading out in the background behind

Figure 1a

Figure 2a

Figure 2b

Figure 2c

the groom's left shoulder? The quick fix in this case was to change position and shoot into the paneling at an oblique angle, and we ended up with a pretty cool shot (✺ *Figure 2b*).

I remember photographing a dinner celebration at Morton's The Steakhouse for a client. The entire banquet room was paneled in this beautiful, polished, cherry wood paneling. It was a reflection nightmare. Wherever I positioned my off-camera flash or my on-camera flash, the reflections just spread out everywhere (✺ *Figure 2c*).

I had to be very judicious with the use of my off-camera flash. I also had to try to orient the shot at an oblique angle to the paneling to reduce the specular return as best I could. Part of the solution was to also slightly lower the camera position, so that the subjects would block the large reflections that tended to appear behind them. A few of the images still required a little Photoshop magic to eliminate the reflections.

(Continued)

❧ *Figure 3a*

❧ *Figure 3b*

Specular and Diffuse Reflections Together

I was photographing a bride and groom with grandma in front of a large marble altar and, at first, didn't notice the specular and diffuse reflection bouncing off the marble right behind them. This time it was my on-camera flash causing the problem (❧ *Figure 3a*). Fortunately, I noticed it in time and was able to correct the problem for the rest of the shots by lowering the camera position ever so slightly, so the subjects blocked the light from hitting the background (❧ *Figure 3b*).

Five Steps for Avoiding Reflections in Your Wedding Photography

1   Before you set up your subjects for the shot, run a few test flashes and watch the background for reflections.

2   If you do see some reflections, analyze the surface characteristics where the reflections are appearing and determine what kind of reflections—specular or diffuse—you're dealing with.

3   If it's a specular or smaller diffuse reflection, you know that you can alleviate the problem by lowering your camera position slightly. This keeps the light from hitting the surface and allows your subjects to block the reflection, thus resolving the problem.

4   If you're dealing with a larger diffuse reflection, as when working in a church with highly polished wood paneling, try to reposi-

tion your light so that the reflection does not appear within the frame of your image.

5   If it appears that the diffuse reflection is going to be a problem, try to minimize it as best you can. Try repositioning yourself and/or your subjects at an angle to the surface. Then, ask yourself if it's a relatively easy fix in Photoshop. If it is, shoot away and handle it in postproduction.

Let me just give you one last piece of advice: When shooting in a situation that could create some of these problems with reflections, if you're aware of the problem, you'll be able to solve it much more easily without creating a monster to be fixed in Photoshop later.

A client once commented, "Your [photography] studio is the master of light." The client could see the difference in our lighting and recognized just how beautiful our lighting looked in all of the weddings and Bar/Bat Mitzvahs that we had photographed for his family over the years. It points out that people can indeed tell the difference between Uncle Harry's on-camera blast flash and the professional use of lighting, which really makes a difference in one's photography.

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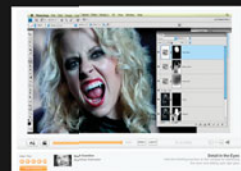NAPP Member Price: $103⁹⁹

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