

For those of you interested in such things, there is another thread that started about Gap style, and degenerated into a name-calling session. However, there was a lot of interest in shooting with white backgrounds, so I thought I'd throw in a sample and a setup of how i do it. Keep in mind others will do it differently, so I'm not the final word on this.

Another question was regarding the reasons we'll shoot on white, raising the point that if these are going to be knocked out anyway, why bother with all the convolutions of lighting with such precision? Why not just Chromakey green for that matter?

The answer is that other backgrounds will affect the appearance of the model. If you shoot on a chromakey green, you will likely end up with some bounce contamination on your subject, particularly if it's a full length shot. You'll be able to see some green tone in the shiny areas of the subject, whether it's shiny skin or shiny clothing. Legs and shoes are critical areas, as are cheeks of any variety.

Second, a model shot on a dark background will not "feel" right when stripped out onto white. There will be little or no light areas around the perimeter of the subject, no spectral highlights on shiny areas, as they will be reflecting the background, which is not white. Make sense?

Further, if one shoots a hot white in the set, when the image is knocked out, transparent areas around hair and other fine details will go white and look "right". Of course that will work against you if the image will be stripped onto another color, so I try to anticipate the final use, and stick with a background that most closely matches the final destination. The most versatile of these is a neutral grey.

Here is a sample you may have seen before from the other thread:



Not the most spectacular image, but it pays the bills. I think her hair is a little hot, but this setup is used for a lot of models in a day, so I let it go and fix it in post production. Here is the way I set this shot up:

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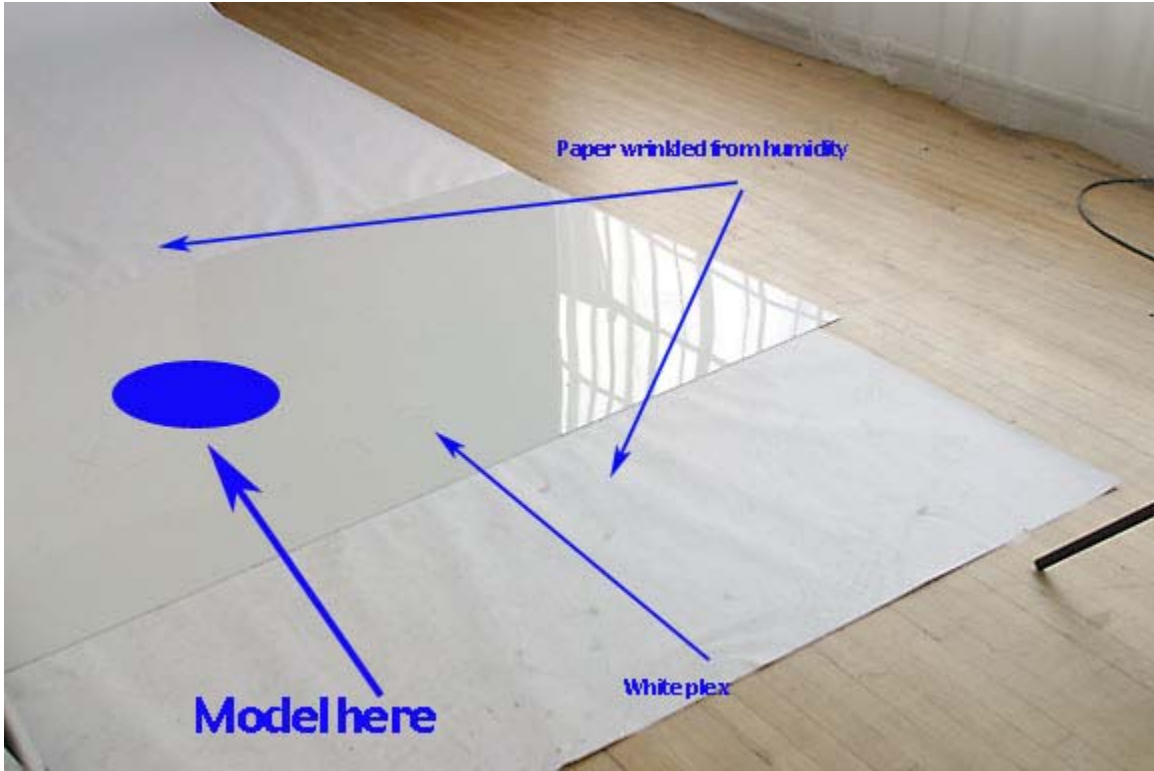
The main light is a Plume Hexoval without any diffusion- almost a bare tube effect. Don't try this without a pro model with a good face and good makeup. It's pretty harsh. But I know the makeup will help, and the post will help even more. It gives the face and clothing a lot of "snap" and these images will be printed on a web press on cheap paper, so they need all the help they can get.

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This light could be two (or four) lights on either side of the background on floor stands, but I like the bounce because it also gives the model a little hair, shoulder and rim light that looks pretty natural. If you shot the model with only this light working, it would be a pretty good general light all on it's own, albeit flat, sort of like a cloudy day. But the front light establishes the shape and detail of the face, as well as a definitive light direction for the shot.

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Here is the floor on which the model stands. This permits many models on and off the surface in a day without making smudges on the background. It also adds a little reflection at the floor- see the above model shot and look at the model's feet.

I'm sure others will add to this thread- but please keep it civil. And yes, I could do this in a garage, but it would be tough. I could not, however, welcome two art directors, 12 models, a studio teacher, minor model's parents (many) a makeup and hair stylist, a clothing stylist, a stylist's assistant ironing and pressing, two clients, a photo assistant, three computers, a lounge area, a bathroom, a dressing room and a production area in the same garage.

Just something to consider.

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OK, its a slow week, why not? And people have been so kind, both on and off the forum, I thought I'd do a little more "sharing". I learned (and learn) an awful lot from dpreview, and hope I am returning the favor.

Please, if you've not already seen it, refer to:

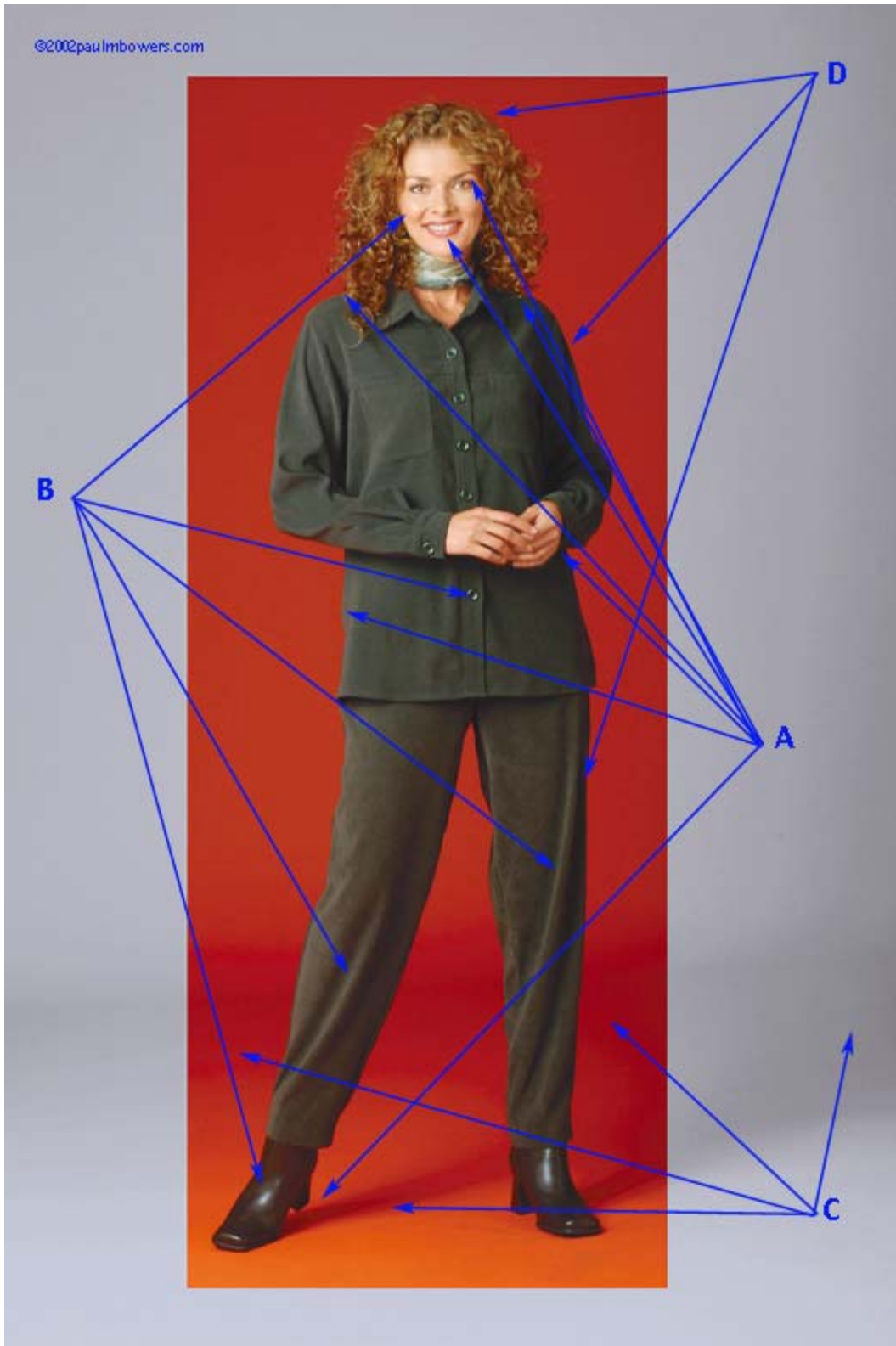
<http://forums.dpreview.com/...../read.asp?forum=1025&message=3985885>

and if you like product photography:

<http://forums.dpreview.com/...../read.asp?forum=1025&message=3946212>

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I don't have a setup shot for this one, but it's incredibly simple. On camera left is my old standby (I am, after all a commercial hack/prostitute) the Plume Hexoval, but this time I used the front panel to soften the effect. It's probably set

at about 150w/s and the camera is a D60 with either a 50 f1.4 or a 28-70 f2.8 either at around f8. You could easily light this way in your garage or living room with a single Alien Bee, if the walls are dark enough. There is a white foamcore reflector fill on camera right. The background color is pumpkin orange, and accurate near the tips of her toes. I moved the model away from the backdrop to darken the orange down a lot, because it was BIG ugly when evenly lit top to bottom.

A:

The model is what makes this shot work. Look at the feet position, one heel slightly lifted, hip off-center, hands counterweight the diagonal of the legs giving a fluid feeling, shoulders square but feminine, the smile and eye contact makes you feel like she's talking to you. For those trying to do this with high school seniors, your wives, girlfriends, whoever, this is typically where the shot falls flat. This model, Jo, is so easy to photograph, I hardly give her any direction. In this case, I just told her that we wanted primarily an on-camera look, happy but not giddy. I can get this shot in about 3 frames if I wanted to, compared to 30-50 for some other models, and even more for non-models. She is quite a talent.

Again, the makeup and hair is perfect here, but does not shout out to you. It looks very natural. The clothes are perfect, just pressed, probably clips up the back to make it fit right, and accessorized with the perfect scarf. No more than 6 feet away from this model are the clothing and prop stylist and the hair/makeup person, watching their area of expertise, waiting for something to fall out of perfect alignment and put their%#@*&^%# butts in front of the camera to fix it. The result is really a team effort, I take very little credit.

B:

The light is, however, hard enough to produce specular highlights. Specular highlights are little shiny areas that reflect the lightsource as you see on the buttons. Technically, specular highlights are supposed to be absolute white with no detail, that's 255,255,255 on your info palette. However, specular highlights refers to the tendency of the light to shine, as in the shine you see on her face. Some folks will use so much makeup that it will kill any shine- I'm not a fan of that. The right amount of specular highlights gives a healthy "glow", like she has here. Any more, and she will begin to look oily or sweaty. Which is fine in the appropriate context- look at some fashion images to see it. The boots would look very flat and dark without the shine, and the buttons would fade into the clothing. A good rule of thumb (from Dean Collins, and I don't want to hear about it, CLTHRS) is that black objects are defined with specular highlights, white objects are defined with shadows. It works for people, too. Some people will tell you to open up a little when shooting a dark-skinned person. No. It only makes the dark skin lighter gray. Use a more specular source, and the skin will be better defined.

C:

These soft shadows indicate a softer, more diffused source than the last example. It is far more forgiving a source, but the resulting image has a different nature, or quality of light. These shadows are more like cloudy day rather than a sunny, clear day. You can see that the shadow continues way out of the primary crop to the far right of the frame. The model is about ten feet from the background so her shadow never hits the vertical part of the seamless.

D:

Should there be a rimlight here? Maybe. I sure have the urge. But this is a fall fashion tabloid, and I "felt" like letting it go dark. I "felt like it" means that I'm an artist, and I'm guided by my passion to produce visual Haikus that help my client sell merch. Aack. This ain't art, it's commerce, plain and simple.

You can see on her hands, boots, and shadow side cheek some "bounce" from the orange background color. Not much, but if it was Chromakey Green, it would be more apparent. That's why we don't shoot a model that will be knocked out to white on a colored backdrop.

Enough for now.

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Here's today's business headshot:

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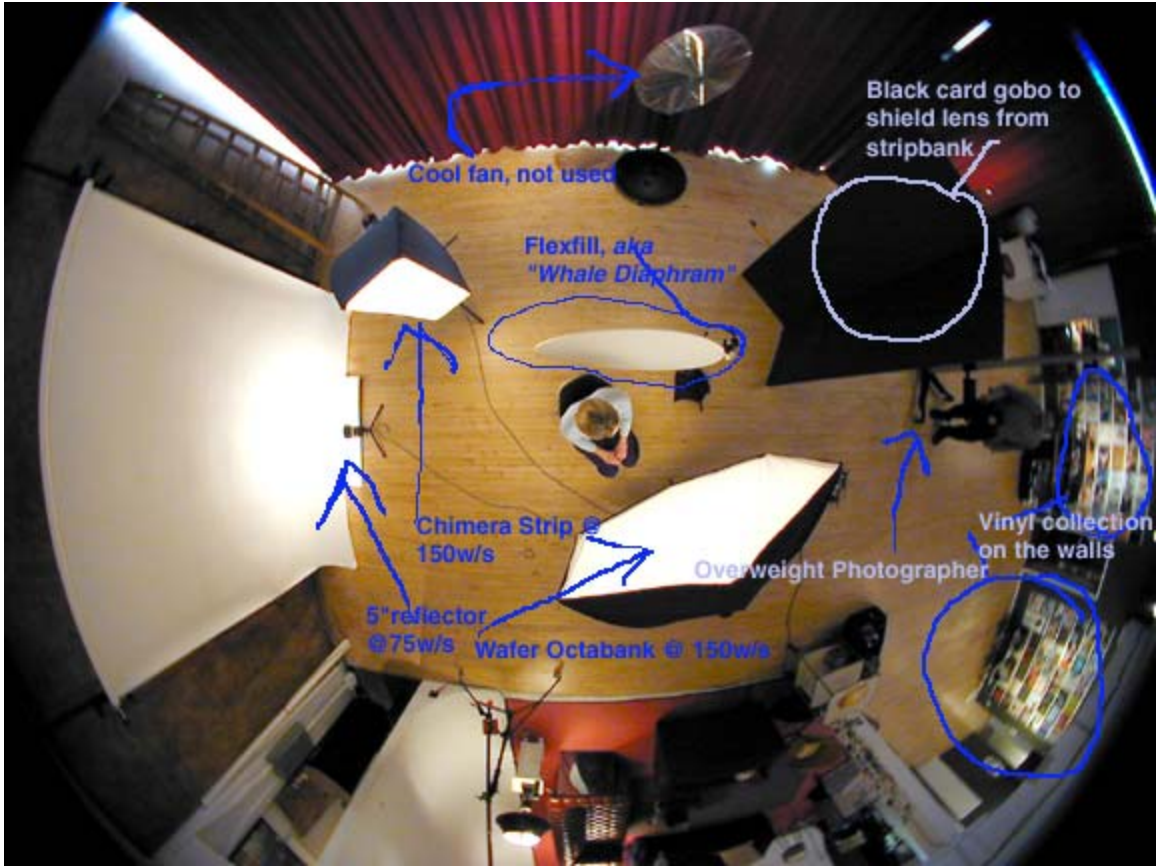


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and here is the setup- it's not embedded, as it's a little large, no problem for broadband users, and not too bad for 56k.

<http://www.paulmbowers.com/hsdiagram.jpg>

Both these images are optimized for Mac, so on a PC it might read a little dark.



Cool fan, not used

Black card gobo to shield lens from stripbank

Flexfill, aka "Whale Diaphragm"

Chimera Strip @ 150w/s

Vinyl collection on the walls

Overweight Photographer

5" reflector @ 75w/s

Wafer Octabank @ 150w/s