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PORTFOLIO: TONY BECK

Images of Nature

MICHEL ROY

The Magic of Slow Shutter Speed

MICHAEL DEFREITAS

What's in My Bag?

FRANÇOIS DESROSIERS

Portrait Lighting Technique

KRISTIAN BOGNER

Lighting on Location

PLUS:

DR. WAYNE LYNCH

Iwokrama - The Green Heart of Guyana

MICHELLE VALBERG

Antarctic Adventure

and more!

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PORTRAIT LIGHTING TECHNIQUE

BY FRANÇOIS DESROSIERS

THE CACTUS REVOLUTION

When I do conferences and workshops on portable flash techniques for portraiture, the subject of compatibility between different brands of flash and the various Nikon, Canon, Pentax, Olympus, Sony and other camera systems always becomes a topic of conversation.



Bio

François Desrosiers is Director of Workshops at Lozeau, where he has worked since 1987. He specializes in portrait and infrared photography. His passion is to experiment and share the thrill of discovering new photographic techniques.

At last, there is a solution for inter-brand flash conflicts! As I prefer to work in manual mode to control lighting situations with my flash equipment, I can now mix any brand of flash with any of the camera systems using the Cactus Radio System 6. I could do this before with the Cactus 5, but the new Cactus 6 lets me change the power of my remote flashes from a distance. For this series of pictures, I worked with my Olympus OM-D EM-1, Olympus 40-150mm F2.8 lens and three different flash units—one Cactus RF 60 flash with integrated radio sys-





tem, one Nikon SB 800 flash, and one Canon 580 EX flash. I had a Cactus 6 in transmitter mode on my camera, and Cactus 6 receivers on my Nikon and Canon flashes. The key is to have the whole system on the same channel, in this case I used channel 1. I placed the Cactus RF 60 flash in group A, the Nikon flash in group B and the Canon flash in group C. That way I could control each flash from the camera position.

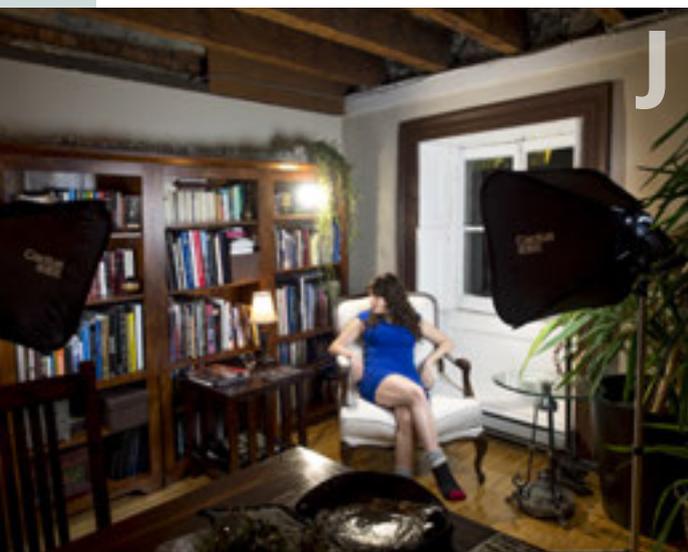
To light photo "A", I worked at 1/100 second, f/2.8 and ISO 200 and set my Cactus RF 60 flash to 1/8 power. Sara is correctly exposed, thanks to my flash, but the rest of the scene is too dark. In photo "B" I decided to change my speed to 1/50 second in order to capture the mood lighting from the lamp. My basic exposure guideline is to always blend my flash with the ambient light. In order to light the right of the face, I adjusted the Nikon flash to 1/16 power, and this also helped to light the plant. I used both flashes in Cactus CB 60 diffusion boxes (see photo "C"). These 60 cm boxes let me have better control over my light.

For the second series of photos (photo "D") I started with my flash group A to my left, set to 1/8 power, 1/50 second at

f/3.5. The overall result is dark, but the right side of the face is correct. I missed the hair light and the other side of her face. The addition of flash group B at 1/16 power makes all the difference (see photo "E"). In addition to giving volume to the hair, and adding detail to the skin, it adds to the overall impact of the picture. Photo "F" shows the position of the flash - not right behind Sara, but from the side, to reduce contrast and increase image brightness.

For photo "G" I set my Cactus RF60 flash to 1/8 and moved the flash to change the detail and contrast of the hair light. The flash to subject distance remained the same. With the Cactus EP 1 battery pack, I was always ready to trip the shutter. I shot at 1/40 second, f/3.2. I stayed with the same settings





as the light is quite similar throughout the loft. The first shot lacks a bit of light on the right side of Sara, so I added my flash group B at 1/32 power (see photo “H”). The result is good and depending how Sara is posed, I always have a lighting set up that uses contrast to make the subject stand out.

I wanted to create a shot that used the ambient lighting effect on her hair, and at the same time use light to separate the subject from the background. For this photo I added my flash group C to light the library with a Cactus amber filter. I did not need a lot of power, because too much light from this group would have lost the warm tint. I adjusted my shutter speed to 1/125 and dialed-in +2/3 exposure compensation. It's not much, but it makes all the difference. We can see the layout (photo “J”) showing the flash positions and the way the set is arranged so the model is comfortable.

For the final image, I went with three flashes for a beautiful atmosphere and detail throughout (see photo “N”). My flash group gave me a good exposure for Sara, but the lighting set up lacked detail on the left of the photo,



