



Fashion:

Three Advanced Lighting Techniques

by Lindsay Adler

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This image is of a beautiful little girl who comes to my studio every year for her portraits. It was taken in the summer in bright sunlight about midday. The girl was squinting and the harsh shadows on her face were unattractive, so I had my assistant hold up a diffuser between the model and the sun. The result is this lovely, glowing, soft light that illuminates the entire model. I was very careful to watch my background and to make certain I placed a slightly darker scene behind (or the background elements would have become distracting highlights).

Technical: Canon 5D, Canon 85mm lens, f 1.8 at 1/5000, ISO 400

location with direct, harsh sunlight hitting the model's face. Then hold up a

Once you've mastered the basic natural lighting techniques for fashion and portraiture (explained in a previous article), you may want to try more "advanced" techniques for additional beauty lighting and to add drama to your images. These lighting techniques include shooting in diffused sunlight, backlight, and backlight with a reflector.

Diffused Sunlight

Using diffused sunlight is extremely easy and lets you shoot in the middle of the day, no matter how harsh the light. People generally think that the best times to shoot are early or late in the day, but that's not necessarily true in fashion photography--depending on the artistic effect you're attempting to achieve.

To use diffused light, place your model in the desired

diffuser (comes in the 5-in-1 reflector/diffuser) between the model and the sun, creating a giant soft box of natural, glowing light. This softbox is great for beauty lighting techniques.

When diffusing sunlight, you must be careful of several pitfalls. First, watch for bright highlights in the background that may distract from the subject. Because you're shooting in the middle of the day, you're much more likely to get overexposed highlights or distracting background elements. In the example included, I made sure to place green fields and shadowy woods in the background to avoid distraction. If I had moved to either side, I would have gotten bright highlights from the dry dirt field nearby.

Second, when diffusing sunlight, watch for hotspots on clothing or in the foreground. If you attempt to shoot a full-length image, your circular diffuser may not be able to diffuse the light around the subject completely, and sunlight may seep into the edges of your frame creating undesirable highlights or blown-out detail in clothing. There are several ways to work with this problem. You can choose to crop more tightly, although this may not be desirable. You can also purchase a large scrim. A scrim is a frame that allows you to attach a variety of materials to it, including diffusion material. I own a 96" square diffusion scrim (Scrim Jim from Adorama) I use when I need to diffuse more sunlight or shoot models full length. Scrim come in a variety of sizes and options for portability.



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Technical: Canon 5D, Canon 85mm lens, f 2.8 at 1/40, ISO 200

angle. The resulting light sculpts the model's face, placing highlights on the back rim of her body and wrapping around her face. This type of lighting can be used with or without reflectors. If you choose not to use a reflector, you can retain some of the drama of the image by creating harsher shadows and more defined shapes. You may also run into a problem of lens flare in this light (*read more below to see how you might solve this problem*). For this image, I liked the wistful expression in the model's face accompanied by the heavenly light pouring onto her.

Backlight (or Backlight at a back 45 degree angle)

Strong, directional light can be used to create drama in your images. A photographer can utilize backlight (or light coming from a back 45 degree angle) to add shape, dimension, and a bit of drama to an image. This image was shot later in the day (near sunset), so the light was low in the sky. The light is pouring around the side of a wall at a back 45-degree



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lighting situation, I had one of the students point a silver reflector at the model, catching the light from the backlight sun to illuminate her face. I used a silver reflector because the sunlight was already rich and warm in tone.

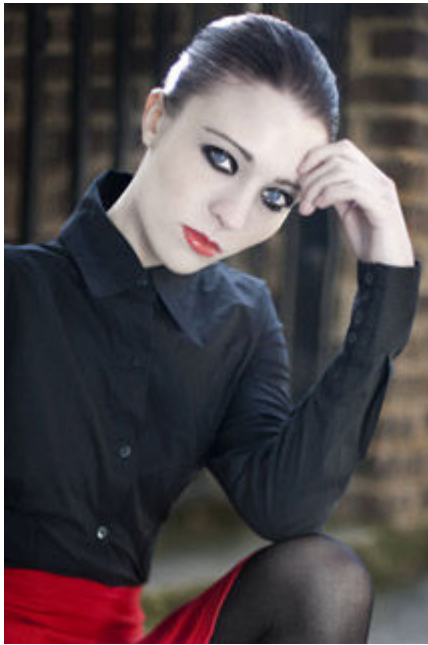
When posing the model, I watched for hot background highlights and positioned the left of the frame so that it showed the dark shadows under nearby trees. The silver reflector gave a bright, glowing, crisp look to the light on her face.

In the accompanying image of my students working, you can see the silver reflector catching the light on the right of the frame. The large white circular panel you see one student holding is a diffuser. In this case, the highlights from backlight on the model were very strong, and we utilized the diffuser to soften some of the light falling on her arms and hair. The resulting image gives separation between the model and the background due to the highlights on the top and sides of the hair, as well as the softer highlights on the arms.

Backlight with Reflector

This image was taken during one of my fashion photography workshops in London. Here I wanted to demonstrate how to use backlight and a reflector to create beautiful fashion images. I had the model sit on the ground with bright sunlight hitting her back. This position created harsh highlights on her hair and shoulders and shadows on her face. To remedy this

In this instance, I again used backlight with a reflector to illuminate my model. You can see the highlights on her hair and the soft rim light on her shoulders (separating her from the background). I had my assistant use a silver reflector to catch some of the sunlight pouring over the wall behind the model. I used only partial reflector (feathered the reflector away from the light so as not to use full intensive of reflection), so the light on the model was a bit softer and less crisp than in the previous example.



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When shooting in these backlighting situations, you should be aware of the possibilities of lens flare. There are a couple of ways to handle this. First, you can utilize the lens flare for artistic purposes and incorporate it into the image. Second, you can try using a lens hood to see if it blocks out some of the surrounding light that's entering your lens. Third, you can have an assistant hold up a diffuser or foam core card to block off the sunlight hitting the lens. Lastly, you can increase contrast in your image in Photoshop (since lens flare decreases mid-tone contrast). I don't recommend this method in most cases (as it has a lesser quality of image), but sometimes you don't have an assistant or a way to block the sunlight. Some companies sell little attachments for the camera that act to block out lens flare if you don't have an assistant on hand.



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Backlight Setup

If you utilize these additional lighting techniques, you'll show more control you're your lighting. You'll also create diversity in your portfolio by adding a variety of looks to your beauty images as well as to your more dramatic scenes.

Be sure to watch for my "People & Portraits...." online class through the [Apogee Photo Online Campus](#). I hope to see you there.

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*Lindsay Adler is a professional photographer and photo lecturer living in New York and London. She teaches workshops and classes through her business, Adler Photo Workshops ([www.adlerphotoworkshops.com](http://www.adlerphotoworkshops.com)). She enjoys all types of photography, including fashion, travel, nature, and photojournalism.*

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