

THE
LIGHTING
ISSUE

Artistic brilliance

How predominant looks across genres are sparked with strategic lighting.

BY LIBBY PETERSON

Photography is nothing without light, and as photographers evolve their respective looks, they continue to experiment with tools, refine their lighting and build on their portfolios. We present six image-makers from varying fields who prevail in interpreting popular lighting looks as defined within their own aesthetics.

Daymon Gardner excels at freezing his subjects' personalities in engaging color and mood with pops of brightness, while **Nick Tucker's** stark, bold black-and-white spotlights frame a wedding's offbeat glamour. **Richard Tuschman's** meticulous light pays painterly homage to Edward Hopper and other artists, as **Marko Marinkovic** envelops his newlyweds in a warmth that channels the glow of the Dutch masters. **Nick Fancher's** velvety radiance leans emotive and dramatic, and **Felix Kunze's** is softer, polished, balanced.

These six photographers have championed styles of lighting within their genres—from wedding and portrait to fine art and commercial—and while categorized here, they are equally adaptive and experimental. They've fused personal touches to create signature styles, and in their own words, here's how they do it.



PHOTO © DAYMON GARDNER

DAYMON GARDNER

New Orleans, LA

Genre: Commercial/editorial
Style: Poppy, bright, energetic
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My lighting style has evolved over the past eight years into what I consider to be poppy portraits with a sense of energy. I think that evolution can be attributed to several factors, the most important being the photographers from whom I draw inspiration.

Portrait photography originally grabbed hold of me with an introduction to the work of Irving Penn, and my admiration and curiosity of portrait lighting has motivated me in my work ever since. I became drawn to a harsh style of lighting that highlights the texture of a subject's skin. The early work of Helmar Lerkski shaped my current style, to a degree; I found his tight portraits using tiny mirrors to reflect light fascinating, a technique that scraped harsh light across skin to create beautiful textures.

Keeping a lighting setup simple allowed me to move more freely and capture fluid imagery with a sense of spontaneity.

After working in the editorial world for a period, I continued to draw inspiration from contemporary photographers such as Dan Winters, Peter Hapak, Nadav Kander, Peter Yang and Emily Shur. I began using multiple Canon Speedlites as a way to shoot an assignment with a documentary approach while maintaining that poppy style I came to love. I was shooting portrait work early in my career but was often tasked with shooting in a documentary style for several assignments, and it became clear to me early on that keeping a lighting setup simple allowed me to move more freely and capture fluid imagery with a sense of spontaneity.



ABOVE

This portrait of two George Washington Carver High School marching band members was shot on assignment for *ESPN The Magazine*. It entailed capturing a day in the life of football players and band members, so I knew we'd be moving constantly and I'd need a lighting setup that allowed me to react to the changing scene. The image was lit with two Canon 580EX II flashes, one on camera acting as fill and the other mounted on a monopod held by my assistant for key, at camera left about 35 degrees from the subjects.

RIGHT

Talk show host Seth Meyers was shot in a studio in New York against a white cyc wall. I used a Profoto Acute2 1200 with a Magnum reflector as my key light, placed camera right and 45 degrees from Seth, and a 74-inch Elinchrom Octa placed directly behind the camera as fill. We also used a black floppy flag on either side of Seth in order to create more contrast and control spill onto the background. The lighting setup was broad enough to allow for movement and energy (we had a few shots of him squirting mustard out of condiment bottles and freezing the stream mid-flight—I still have mustard splatter on my shoes).

FOLLOWING PAGE

This portrait of the comedian Kevin Hart was shot for *Bon Appétit*, poolside at the W hotel in New Orleans. The magazine wanted to shoot him against that particular wall, which was 10 to 15 feet from the pool. My crew and I had to boom our key light (a Profoto Pro-7b with a Magnum reflector) over the water, at camera right and 45 degrees from Kevin, and I shot on a ladder in the pool in order to get the necessary full-length portrait without having to use a wide lens. A Profoto Acute2 1200 with a Ringflash was used for fill, boomed out center above and slightly in front of the camera, which helped maintain a harsh, sunlit look.

SETUPS ARE ONE THING, BUT...

Don't walk into an assignment with tunnel vision. I had a shoot for *GQ* a few years ago, and the shot list was a stylized portrait on grey seamless and an environmental portrait with the same lighting. My crew and I spent the morning lighting the shot and executed it as planned. The portraits looked great, but the magazine wound up running a candid I captured of the subject taking a smoke break in the courtyard in between setups. It was nothing but natural light, completely different than what the photo editor and I had discussed, but it was one of the better images of the day.



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD © DAYMON GARDNER



PHOTO © DAYMON GARDNER

NICK TUCKER

London, England

Genre: Wedding

Style: Punchy, raw, direct

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I came across Larry Fink, and I loved the results he got with his use of flash mounted on an L-bracket: simple, stark, punchy and bold black-and-white images. Using the flash this way has allowed me to have control over my lighting, creating an atmosphere of my own. A bride standing with her dress perfectly fanned out, lit by soft window light and looking beautifully composed doesn't contain any real truth, I find, because it really only speaks to the language of wedding photography, of all the other images just like that one. The bride is about to get married: She's nervous as hell and her room is probably a mess of bags, shoes, body contouring underwear, makeup and friends. That perfectly composed shot is almost the denial of the drama and emotion of the wedding day.

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With a flash, you're shooting what's in front of you and giving it a heightened sense of emotion and life. There's also something quite raw and amateur about using a flash—it's how most people take an indoor photo, after all. I figure if I can shoot like that but tweak it to create a "high-end snapshot" feel, then it has a certain kind of democratic sensibility to it—shooting a little awkwardly, with or without flash in a way that somehow feels close to the way we experience life as moments and memories. It feels more real, somehow. It's more immediate and instinctual, and I find that haphazard aspect exciting. It's not clumsy, but it's not tidy and pretty. It's chaotic and flawed. It fits perfectly with the drunken dancing, and also it fits perfectly with life.



LEFT

This is Jen, Lone and Olivia, three sisters outside a wedding venue called The Asylum. It's crumbling and beautiful, the kind of venue that would be just as home to a fashion shoot as a wedding. The scene has a fashion feel anyway—three striking sisters, glammed up and smoking. The flash adds the look of raw immediacy and dynamism to a scene that already had that.

BOTTOM LEFT

Out of these images here, this one—shot at a high-end wedding in the heart of London—is probably my biggest nod to Larry Fink. It's awkward and angular. The shadows are very pronounced and there is a mess of things happening, including the un-readability of the bridesmaid in the center with the bride leaning down toward her. So many wedding images make you smile and go, "Oh, that's beautiful. Look at the sunset as they kiss." I like how strange and intriguing this is.

THE SYSTEM

A Canon Speedlite 580EX flash, set manually, with a Canon 5D Mark III at ISO 800, f/8 and 1/200th of a second.



This was shot on the dance floor at my last wedding of 2016. I just love the faces and the mood—it's almost confrontational. By using a strong, direct flash, I've eliminated anything else in the shot, giving it an abstract quality. You can't tell they're in a wedding marquee. You can't really tell where they are. Their faces just float out of the dark.



RICHARD TUSCHMAN

New York, NY

Genre: Fine Art

Style: Painterly, staged, cinematic
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I started out as a painter. The inspiration for how I think about lighting comes primarily from Old Masters like Leonardo da Vinci, Rembrandt, Vermeer and Caravaggio, as well as more modern painters such as Edward Hopper and Giorgio de Chirico. They were all masters at using light in an emotionally expressive manner, and this is what I am trying to do in my photography. I have

also been influenced by lighting techniques from theater and cinema—I want the light to act almost as another character, illuminating the inner lives of the subjects as well as their physical forms.

All of the backgrounds in these images are dollhouse-size sets and dioramas that I built, lit and photographed in my studio. The human models were all lit and photographed separately in the studio, one at a time, and then composited together with the diorama shots in Photoshop. I like the control this technique gives me over all aspects of the composition and lighting.

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ABOVE

THE POTATO EATERS

From my series "Once Upon A Time In Kazimierz," a photo novella about a Jewish family living in Kraków, Poland, in the year 1930, this is based on Van Gogh's painting of the same name—a poor family eats their meager supper under the glow of a single kerosene lamp. I created a subtle tension with the lighting: a moment of sustenance and fragile warmth amidst a harsh life of struggle and privation.

The Portraits: The figures were photographed in my dining room, sitting at a table lit by a single overhead continuous standard fluorescent bulb diffused by a standard lampshade.

The Scenery: The key light was the standard dollhouse chandelier in the image. An off-camera speed light, placed about 18 inches to the left of the table at low power and diffused by a piece of tissue paper placed over the front of the light, was shot through a window in the diorama—you can see shadows cast from this light in the right corner of the room.

RIGHT

GREEN BEDROOM (MORNING)

This was taken for my series "Hopper Meditations." I wanted to emulate the light from one of Edward Hopper's most famous paintings, *Morning Sun*. One of the challenges was properly balancing the light inside the room with that outside the window—the exterior had to be believably bright but clearly enough defined to depict the urban environment.

The Portrait: The model was lit with two side-by-side off-camera speed lights bounced into a silver umbrella about 7 or 8 feet off the ground and 10 feet away to the right of the figure. The light on her back is reflected light bouncing from a wall on her left.

The Scenery: The key light was an off-camera speed light placed just behind and at the top of the building model seen out the open window. It was pointed down into the window and slightly diffused by the plastic diffuser built into the speed light. Another speed light was placed to the left of the open window and pointed straight up, bouncing off the ceiling to provide ambient and fill light, and especially lighting the building model seen out of the window.



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD © RICHARD TUSCHMAN



PHOTO © RICHARD TUSCHMAN

COUPLE IN THE STREET

In this scene from "Once Upon A Time In Kazimierz," which takes place toward the end the story, this couple is on the verge of splitting apart. I wanted the overall scene to be pretty dark with the figures lit from the side in sharp contrast to the background, casting long shadows to underscore the mood of loneliness and isolation. This lighting effect is especially influenced by the paintings of Giorgio de Chirico.

The Portraits: Each figure was lit the same way in my home studio. There is a white wall about 6 feet to the right and an opposite wall about 8 feet to the left. The key light was an AlienBee strobe placed a foot away from the wall on the right, about 7 feet high and pointed to where the wall meets the ceiling. An off-camera speed light was placed next to the strobe but pointed directly at the figure to provide some hard fill.

The Scenery: A single Nissin Di866 speed light was placed a few feet to the right and above the set with a grid modifier to provide some fall-off. I had a reflector set up on the left of the scene to give some fill on the dark side of the building. The window light in the building is another speed light placed inside the building with a warming gel, backlighting the small cardboard cutout figure.

MY GEAR M.O.

I have the Nissin Di866 Speedlite tethered to my Canon 7D camera with a 25-foot sync cord, and any additional speed lights or strobes are slaved to that, like my Yongnuo YN560 speed lights and AlienBee B400 strobe.



MARKO MARINKOVIC

Dubrovnik, Croatia

Genre: Wedding

Style: Textural, expressive, natural
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Living in a Mediterranean country means being exposed to a lot of open spaces bathed in harsh sunlight. I started shooting in the shadows, but often I didn't know how to control the light. I turned to Pinterest and quickly put together a board of painters who studied light immensely throughout their work—Rembrandt, Vecelli, Vermeer, Rubens and Francisco Goya. I got drawn to a certain mood and warm palette of colors that this painterly light often produces, and I noticed those images were rarely composed with more than one light, two at most, which made me think about how to control the lighting situations I'm in.

I know that a singular source of light will give me that painterly look, so I search for it. A room with one window (or more, with shades on them) where I can control the amount of light coming in or out is great. Walkways, passages and building entrances work as well—you can control the light by opening the entrance door. I always expose for the brightest spot and take it from there; shadows are easier to recover in post.

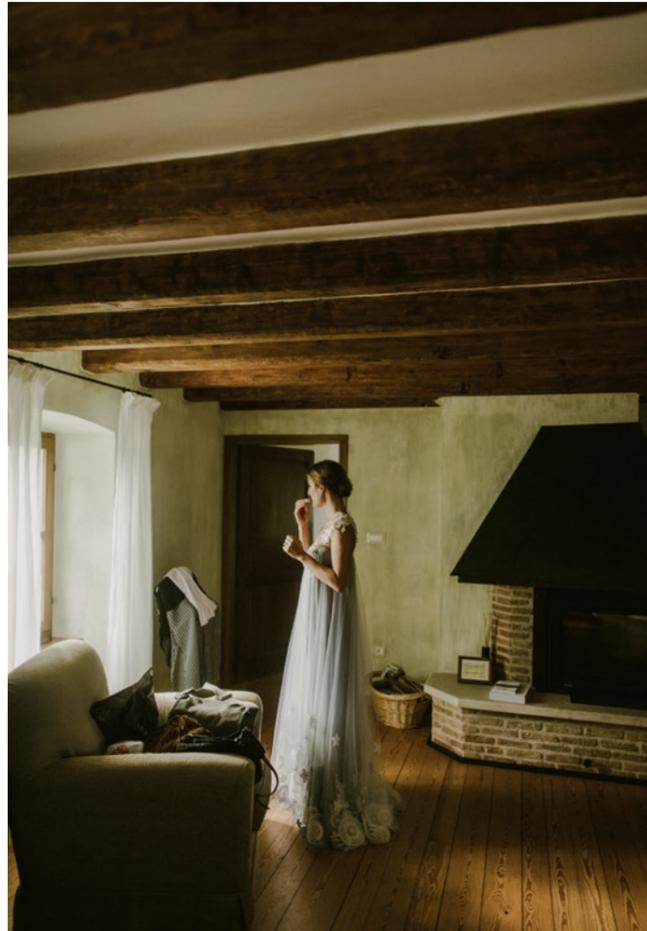
Sometimes it's hard to translate a painterly look into images, especially in weddings when you have situations you can't control. Anticipation is the key. Once I find a great pocket of light, I'll keep an eye on it and wait for someone to go by while I cover other aspects of the day. I use the light like a trap. It makes me a hunter, in a sense.

ABOVE LEFT

It was an overcast day. If I had shot this in the open, the overcast light would have reflected from all sides, leaving me with flat, even light that would lack in texture, but I was lucky to find a spot sheltered from three sides. I managed to get the groom's hands partially lit and combined them with slightly softer blacks in post.

ABOVE RIGHT

I didn't set this up; I was just waiting to be on the right spot with my exposure at the ready on my Nikon D750 (ISO 400, f/1.8 and 1/400th of a second). This was mainly inspired by Edward Hopper and Richard Tuschman's homage [pg. 49]; the quality of the singular light, painting over the dress as the bride gets ready, blends beautifully into the interior.



TO GET YOU STARTED

- Analyze the work of great painters. They are true shapers of light. Picture yourself standing in front of a blank canvas ready to form light the way you see it.
- Wake up early in the morning and shoot in the sunrise, and then again in the sunset. Golden hour time, apart from cloudy overcasts, renders the easiest and most flexible light situations.
- Try shooting outside first, and once the sun gets too high, move inside and look for dark areas with a single window or door through which light comes in.



I noticed a wide side window with this warm, pastel light as we entered the wedding hall on an overcast day. Right after the ceremony, I intentionally let them walk away ahead of me instead of shooting them from the front with guests included in the shot. Avoiding that safe front shot is a risk you need to take sometimes. I used a 28mm lens here to get the most of the beautiful interior and capture the movement.

PHOTOS: THIS SPREAD © MARKO MARINKOVIC

NICK FANCHER

Columbus, OH

Genre: Portraits

Style: Dramatic, emotive, evolving

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My lighting usually yields vibrant colors and dark, monochromatic tones. I'm not sure why I go to such visual polar opposites (this may be something that I need to go over with my therapist), though I am told that they are immediately recognizable and fall within the "Nick Fancher" signature look. This is something that I arrived at after years of obsessively shooting and pushing my techniques in both lighting and post-processing.

I try to figure out the best way to interpret my subject. Perhaps the wardrobe has a cool texture that I want to flush out, using a hard light at a severe angle in order to create shadows and drama. My techniques are constantly evolving as I make small changes to each shoot. If in the last shoot I had overlaid a soft light source with a hard light source, I might try two soft lights and gelling one of them.

If in the last shoot I had overlaid a soft light source with a hard light source, I might try two soft lights and gelling one of them.

I go through phases; last summer I spent a few weeks experimenting a lot with red and cyan gels, then I moved on briefly to cyan and gold before moving away from color and on to mixing light qualities, where I explored fluorescent and tungsten light sources and balancing colored strobe with shutter drag.

I learn by trying new things. Don't just light your subject with an umbrella at a three-quarter angle because you know it will look decent. Think about what you're trying to convey.

Lighting: Cactus RF60
Wireless Flash, Cactus CB-60
Softbox with egg crate grid
Camera: Canon 5D Mark III
Lens: Canon 35mm f/1.4L
Exposure: f/5 at 1/160 sec.
ISO: 160

ABOVE

Placing a white seamless behind the model, I put the flash in a softbox with an egg crate grid to minimize the light on the backdrop.

FOR MORE...

I wrote a few books on the topic of using small flash in unconventional locations, the latest of which is *Studio Anywhere 2: A Photographer's Guide to Shaping Hard Light*.

RIGHT

I made a gobo out of black foam board, cut a 3-inch wide gap that was about 18 inches in height that I placed close to the model, and a white seamless was behind her. The hard, unmodified flash went about 5 feet away from the gobo to ensure a crisp shadow line. I wanted to shoot at a low ISO in order to keep my aperture wider, creating a fall-off in focus and making for a softer image.

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD © NICK FANCHER

Lighting: Cactus RF60 Wireless
Flash, handmade gobo
Camera: Canon 5D Mark III
Lens: Canon 85mm f/1.2L II
Exposure: f/2.5 at 1/160 sec.
ISO: 50



Lighting: Two Cactus RF60 flashes, Neewer Round flash diffuser
Camera: Canon 5D Mark III
Lens: Canon 85mm f/1.2L II
Exposure: f/6.3 at 1/160 sec.
ISO: 160

The main light was an unmodified flash placed to the left of the subject and slightly behind her, aiming almost back toward the camera. The model was far enough away from a white seamless to keep from over-lighting it. I used a Neewer Round flash modifier on my camera with a cyan-gelled flash to get a soft blue fill in the shadows.



FELIX KUNZE

New York, NY

Genre: Portraits

Style: Soft, polished, graceful
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I get hired for shooting images that feel softly lit, rather than the commercial punch. In the early days of my career, I was shooting a lot of portraits in the UK. Dealing with the cloudy conditions and shooting regular people meant I had to develop a style that would work

universally. Over the years I've become known for my particular style of shooting. What was at first a desperate chase for a universal lighting setup has turned into an obsession for making subtle lighting look beautiful.

I tend not to use lighting diagrams or ratios, and while I have a couple of "go-to" setups, I try to vary them each time. I get bored with my own work so quickly that I'm always tinkering. This is why I tend to tell students, "This is how I light—by no means should you aim to use the same exact setups." Don't get bogged down in numbers, ratios, stops. Just test, test, test, and if you don't like how the image looks, change something. That approach has gotten me far.

MY FAVORITE TOOLS

- **Elinchrom ELB 400 packs and heads.** They are battery-powered, light and small enough to fit into my hand luggage, yet powerful enough to use in the studio and to overpower the sun.
- **Oliphant backdrops.** I've got a costly obsession with them, but I just can't help myself—their painted backdrops make everything look beautiful. I use them for 90 percent of my portrait work, including on location. I am known for "that Oliphant look" and I have gotten jobs because of it.
- **Phase One's Capture One software.** Shooting tethered into it was one of the biggest jumps forward in my career. Not only does Capture One do such a better job at RAW image interpretation, it also has powerful color-manipulation tools I use to get the look I'm known for. I have been working with them to spread Capture One to photographers around the world via my AMBFELIX promo code at captureone.com.



Don't get bogged down in numbers, ratios, stops. Just test, test, test.

ABOVE LEFT

The wonderfully charming John Douglas Eason, an interior designer I met at a dinner party, graciously agreed to pose for me. I shot him in the studio nook in my old apartment in front of an Oliphant backdrop, with my Photek Softlighter umbrella and Elinchrom ELB 400. The sun was streaming through the window, always finding a crack in my scrims. Eventually I gave up trying to control the sun and simply let it bounce off the wood floor onto him. He already had that kind of Renaissance Man vibe going on, so the light really played into that beautifully.

ABOVE RIGHT

This image is of Avalon Petersen, an L.A. model I used on a lighting class I taught (I do small classes on occasion). We actually ended up in Sue Bryce's studio and used her dresses and backdrops, a wonderful challenge for myself and the students. The soft pink of the backdrop inspired me to light this with very soft light. With Elinchrom's Rotalux Deep OctaBox pointed into the ceiling and the Rotalux Mini Octa Softbox feathered onto her, I was able to make a soft and dreamy image using the same tools I usually use for more dramatic light.



The ZEST Collective, a dance company based in New York City, had a rehearsal on a sweltering summer day, and I had probably 45 minutes to shoot about ten dancers. I had gotten to know most of them in the preceding months when I would turn up at rehearsals and try not to get in their way. Mustering the courage to put up an Oliphant backdrop smack dab in the middle of their rehearsal space, I hardly had time to turn on my lights before dancers started to appear (including Selina Shida, pictured here). Their movement demanded to be photographed, so I went with wherever the lights had ended up. I had two Elinchrom ELB 400 heads, one as a bare bulb facing the ceiling with a 1/8-stop CTB blue gel and the other in a small Rotalux Deep OctaBox, also with a blue gel. No light test, no meter reading, barely a chance to check exposure—sometimes that's the kind of shooting that works out the best. *Rf*