



THE
LIGHTING
ISSUE

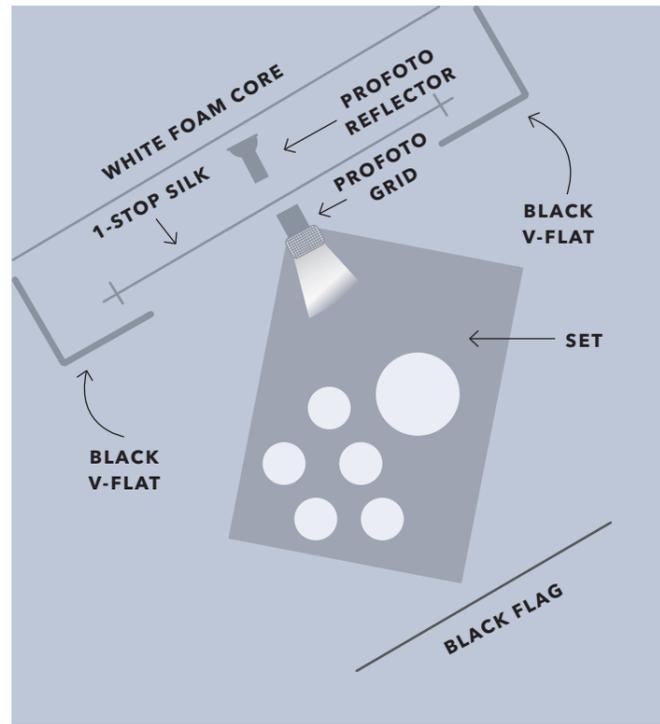
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FULLY LIT

BY CHRISTOPHER TESTANI

ACT NATURAL

I try not to adhere too much to one particular style or look. I like to use both natural and artificial lighting, sometimes mixing both when necessary. In general, I'm trying to take into account all the elements in place—the art direction, the props, the food, recipes, etc.—and then I try to figure out how lighting can create that mood that brings it all together.



Sparkling Bubbly

➔ This was from an assignment for *Bon Appétit*, photographed at their studio. It was for one section of a larger Thanksgiving feature, what we were considering the “pre-game” to the big dinner, and one of the main tips was to always have Champagne on hand for guests. With that in mind, I was envisioning a scenario where it was late afternoon on a November day, some cool ambient daylight was still inside the house, and maybe a warm ray of late afternoon sun was coming through a window or curtain somewhere nearby, adding some beautiful highlights and long, directional shadows to the scene.

I did this with a two-light setup. The base light source was a Profoto head with a standard 7-inch reflector and a ¼ CTB gel. The light was placed approximately 6 feet high, bounced into a white foam core wall and diffused by a 6 x 6-foot 1-stop silk. Black V-Flats were added on both sides of the silk to help shape the light. The second light was another Profoto head, close to set, with a 5-degree grid and ½ CTO gel. This head was aimed at the center of set, taking care to just light the area of the glasses and Champagne and create the long shadows from the glassware. Lights were adjusted to get the ideal length and direction of shadows, and negative fill in the form of black flags and foam core were used around set as necessary to strengthen the shadow areas and increase contrast.

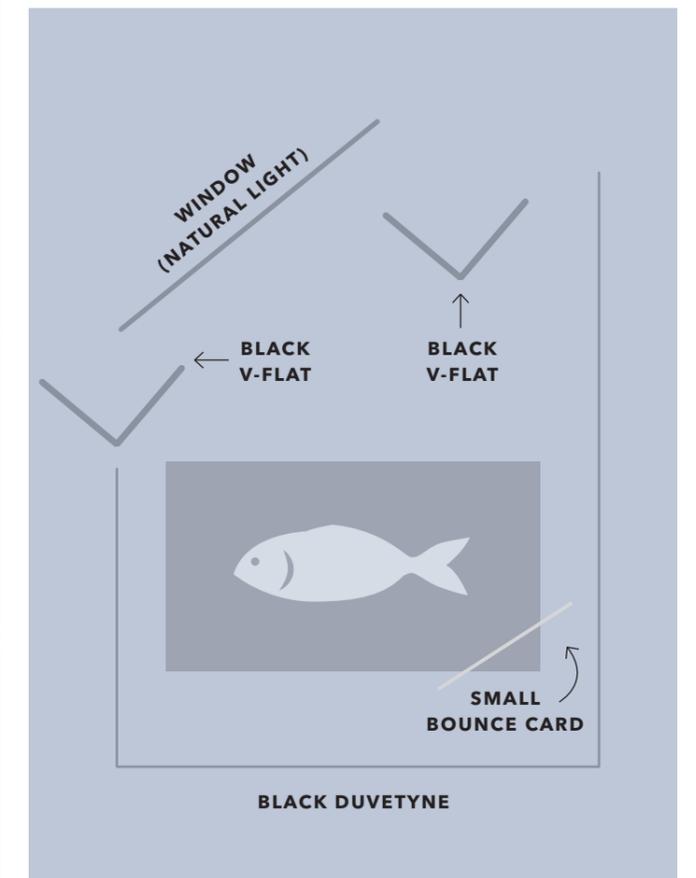
CAMERA: Canon 5D Mark III LENS: 50mm f/1.4 EXPOSURE: f/11 at 1/160 of a second
ISO: 100 LIGHTING: Profoto Pro-8a, 7-inch reflector, 5-degree grid, ¼ and ½ CTB gel,
1-stop silk, white and black foam core, black V-Flats, black flags



Salt-Baked Salmon

➔ This image was from an assignment for *Bon Appétit*, a feature on “holiday centerpiece” recipes, dramatic presentations for your dinner table. Sometimes, the natural light that’s available just looks perfect, and I find myself putting away the artificial lighting. This was one of those instances. I had overcast skies and a studio with a north-facing window, and the cool diffuse light gave me exactly the quiet, wintery mood I was looking for.

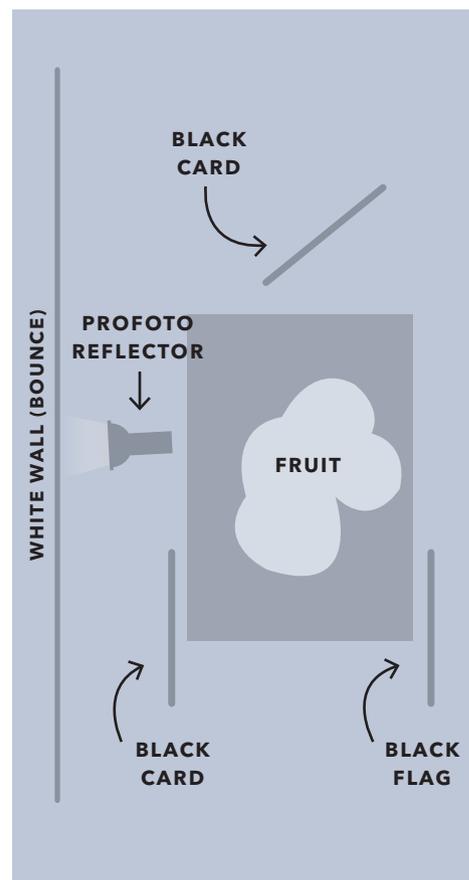
But the principles behind using natural light are the same as when I’m lighting a subject: decide on the light source, then work to shape it and modify it to get the desired look. In this case, that meant blocking out all the surrounding windows and ambient light using black duvetyne, and creating a narrower shaft of light from one of the available windows. Once my small “window” of natural light was created, I was able to add some light to the food with a small, soft silver bounce card, just to get the food to pop a bit more against the dark background.



CAMERA: Canon 5D Mark III LENS: 50mm f/1.4
 EXPOSURE: f/16 at 1.3 seconds ISO: 320
 LIGHTING: Natural daylight, soft silver bounce card



The plan here was to mimic directional window light and create a really natural, fresh look.



Ripe Harvest

➔ This image was the opener to a feature for *Martha Stewart Living*, based on canning, jarring and preserving techniques. The basic concept was to create a colorful, organic still life that showcased the variety of fruits and vegetables that could be used.

The plan here was to mimic directional window light and create a really natural, fresh look. Lighting was kept minimal: one Profoto head with a standard 7-inch reflector, approximately 7 feet high, bounced off a white wall. Lighting and set position was then adjusted to get the ideal shadow length and depth. Black foam core V-flats were brought in on both sides of the light, near set, to darken the edges and create more shape and direction to the light. Black flags were added as negative fill overhead and around set as necessary to enhance the shadows and cut down on unwanted fill light. *Rf*

CAMERA: Canon 5D Mark III LENS: 50mm f/1.4 EXPOSURE: f/16 at 1/160 of a second ISO: 100 LIGHTING: Profoto Pro-7a, 7-inch reflector, black foam core V-Flats, black flags

Christopher Testani is a food and editorial photographer, and in 2012 he was selected as one of PDN's 30. He shoots for *Bon Appétit*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Esquire*, *GQ* and *The New York Times Magazine*, among others.

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