

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO PORTRAITS

THE SKILLS, IDEAS & INSPIRATION YOU NEED FOR PROFESSIONAL-LOOKING IMAGES

EXPERT ADVICE

SECRETS OF THE PROS
STEP-BY-STEP GUIDES
IMPROVE YOUR SKILLS
ESSENTIAL PHOTO KIT
AND MORE!

INSIDE



MASTER BASIC
CAMERA SETTINGS



TOP PORTRAIT
TECHNIQUES



URBAN & RURAL
LOCATIONS



USING FLASH &
STUDIOFLASH



Welcome...



"I enjoy all aspects of photography, but nothing matches the passion and enthusiasm that I have for shooting portraits. Whether it is photographing family or friends, taking contemporary lifestyle images or capturing candid, I always savour the challenge of delivering high-quality, creative and appealing portraits. I've been lucky in my job to work with many of the UK's leading portrait photographers, who have provided me with a wealth of expert advice, techniques and skills that have improved my own photography. Many of these leading professionals are involved in the tutorials and guides in this *Essential Guide to Portraits*, so you too will benefit from their mastery of portraiture. As you'll discover, taking great portraits doesn't require the most extensive camera kit: a modest outfit made up of a camera and 50mm lens is all you need to take brilliant images. More important is having a good eye for composition and detail, choosing the right location, knowing the basic techniques of lighting, whether it's daylight, flashguns or studioflash, and above all, developing strong interpersonal skills with your subject. Don't underestimate this latter point – a relaxed, happy subject will always make for better portraits, so ensure you are confident, friendly and have fun while you're taking pictures. All the best!"

DANIEL LEZANO, EDITOR

Meet our portrait experts

All our portrait experts are regular contributors to *Digital SLR Photography* magazine. For further advice and inspiration to help you improve your photo skills, pick up the latest issue, available on the second Tuesday of every month. For more information, visit: www.digitalslrphoto.com



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An enthusiast photographer for over 25 years, Daniel specialises in portraiture and is author of several books, including *100 Ways to Take Better Portrait Photographs*.



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COVER IMAGE: GIBBON/WANDY-KUHN

The Essential Guide to Portraits (Vol.5)

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The Essential Guide to Portraits ISBN 1-78106-280-3

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Printed at Benham Goodhead Print (BGP)



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PORTRAIT
ADVICE



Setting up your camera

Your digital camera has a bewildering array of features and while this is great in some respects, the choices can be confusing. Here we explain the tools that you need to know about when photographing portraits

Exposure mode Don't think about using the Portrait program mode – you're more than a happy snapper if you're reading this guide. Instead, select aperture-priority AE mode (A or Av), which lets you choose the aperture, while automatically setting the appropriate shutter speed. For most types of portraiture, you'll want to use a wide aperture to throw the background out of focus. To start off, use f/5.6, as this gives enough depth-of-field to keep the entire face (eyes, nose and ears) in focus. By selecting aperture-priority, you'll be using ambient light only. While flash has its uses, controlling daylight will give you more natural results and help you learn to manipulate available light.

ISO rating & the reciprocal rule In terms of quality, the lower the ISO the better, so start by setting ISO 100 or 200. Handholding your camera allows you more freedom to move and shoot candid, but watch out for camera shake. The simplest way to do this is to use the reciprocal rule. All this means is you shouldn't let your shutter speed drop below the reciprocal of the lens you're using. For example, if you're using the lens at 100mm then ensure the shutter speed is above 1/100sec to reduce the risk of shake. If you're using the lens at 200mm then make sure the shutter speed is above 1/200sec, etc. Increasing the ISO rating is an easy way to achieve a faster shutter speed to avoid shake. Try not to go above ISO 800 as otherwise you'll notice increased noise in the image. In low light, whenever possible, we'd recommend you use a tripod. It allows you to use a lower ISO rating as shutter speeds aren't such a concern.

White Balance You should set the White Balance to match the lighting conditions you're shooting in. If you're working in mixed light and are a little unsure, then Auto (AWB) is the best compromise. Of course, if you're shooting Raw, you can always change the White Balance when you open the image on your computer. Something to bear in mind is that setting the wrong WB preset can be used to purposely shift the colour balance. For instance, setting Cloudy in daylight adds warmth to the tones, while selecting Tungsten will result in a very cool, blue cast – so be creative.

Image quality We would recommend you shoot Raw, as it allows you to play with settings, particularly White Balance, later. If your camera has a facility to shoot Raw + JPEG, use it with JPEG set to Small/Basic. Then when you're reviewing images, you can go through the small JPEGs quickly, choose your favourites and work on the appropriate Raw files. If you're confident in your ability, and don't expect to need to make tweaks to the exposure or White Balance in post-production, opt for the best quality JPEG for optimum results and to save room on your memory card.

Autofocus With the vast majority of portraits, it's important that the subject's eyes are in focus as, more often than not, they're the focal point. Your camera most likely has multi-point AF, which allows you to choose between leaving all the AF points active or to select individual AF points. You could leave all the AF points active to ensure you don't miss a great shot, but you run the risk of missing the eyes and focusing on the nose as it's the nearest object to the camera. A better option is to select a single AF point and use this to focus on the eye. The central AF sensor is usually the most sensitive, so you can use this to lock the AF by placing the point over one of the subject's eyes, then pressing the shutter button halfway down. Once the AF is locked, recompose and fire. It sounds tricky, but with practice it becomes second nature. Another option is to select the AF point that sits over the subject's eye – this means you don't have to recompose, allowing you to work quicker. If you intend to rattle off a sequence of shots with a very similar composition, this is the best option. If you do intend to lock focus, make sure your camera is set to single-shot AF as otherwise you won't be able to lock on your subject's eye.

Metering Your camera's multi-zone metering should be capable of exposing portraits perfectly in most situations. Take a test shot, check the screen and use the exposure compensation facility to add/subtract a little exposure if you feel the shot is too dark or light. Where your camera's multi-zone meter may falter is if your subject has very light or dark skin tones, is wearing light or dark clothing, or is strongly backlit. In these situations, use exposure compensation or select the spot meter and use the AE-L (Autoexposure Lock) button to take a reading from a mid-tone in the scene, or from an 18% grey card that you place near the subject.

Setting up your digital SLR for portraits

A little unsure how to select the exposure, White Balance or AF on your DSLR? Let us show you the way via five popular cameras

CANON EOS DSLRS

Earlier models eg Canon EOS 450D:
(1) Set the top-plate dial to Av to select aperture-priority.
(2) Press ISO button to set a rating.
(3) Use WB button to choose WB and the AF button to set One-Shot AF.
(4) Press MENU and select the metering option on the second tab: we recommend Evaluative.
(5) To set image quality, press MENU and select Quality in the first tab.
 Later models eg Canon EOS 600D: Press Q and use the four-way control buttons as a shortcut to all these key functions.



NIKON DSLRS

(1) Set the top-plate dial to A to select aperture-priority.
(2) Press the info (i) button and scroll to metering mode and select your choice with the four-way control. We'd suggest you start with Matrix. Press the info (i) button again and select AF Mode to AF-S.
(3) Set the ISO rating, White Balance and image quality using the same procedure.



PENTAX K-SERIES

(1) Set the top-plate dial to Av to select aperture-priority.
(2) Press the Fn button and press right on the four-way control to select an ISO, followed by OK to set.
(3) Press left to set the White Balance in the same way.
(4) To choose the AF mode, press MENU and the Rec. Mode tab, go down to AF mode, then right to set (we recommend AF-S). Set the metering mode in the same way (we recommend multi-zone).



SONY ALPHA: MOST MODELS

(1) Set the exposure dial on the top-plate to A for aperture-priority.
(2) Press MENU and select Image Quality (preferably Raw & JPEG).
(3) The following settings are selected using the Fn button and the four-way control. Press Fn, go to Metering and select Multi segment. Press Fn, go to AF mode and set AF-S. Press Fn, go to White Balance and choose a setting.
(4) Press the ISO button and set the ISO rating you wish to use.



COMPACT SYSTEM CAMERAS

(1) Not all CSCs have an exposure mode so you may need to set A/Av via the Menu button or touchscreen. Many models locate the WB and ISO buttons on the four-way control dial, while the image quality settings is via the Menu.
(2) With cameras boasting a touchscreen display, you can find and adjust all of these functions on the LCD monitor's on-screen menu via the appropriate icons.





**OUR RECOMMENDED
CAMERA SETTINGS
FOR SHOOTING PORTRAITS**

Exposure mode: Aperture-priority
set to f/5.6 to begin with

Metering Pattern: Multi-zone

Autofocus: Use a single AF sensor
with AF mode set to single-shot (AF-S)

White Balance: Match lighting
conditions

Image Quality: Raw + JPEG
ISO rating: ISO 100 or 200

The basics of exposure

Our jargon-free guide about exposure provides everything you need to know to get to grips with apertures and shutter speeds

IF YOU'RE NEW TO photography, you need to understand exposure. Every exposure you take is made up of a combination of an aperture and shutter speed that determines how much light reaches the sensor. The aperture is the iris in the lens, much like the pupil of the eye, which can widen to allow more light through or contract to restrict the amount of light that enters the lens. Use a wide aperture and more light is able to pass through during a set time span than if you had selected a small aperture.

The shutter is a barrier in front of the sensor that moves out of the light's path when you press the shutter release, allowing light to reach

the sensor and expose an image. The duration of the exposure is determined by the shutter speed. There is an obvious relationship between the aperture and the shutter speed in determining the correct exposure and this is selected by the exposure mode. While full-auto mode provides point-and-shoot simplicity, the beauty and enjoyment of photography is to take control over how your final picture looks.

The first step is to select one of the exposure modes that allows for far more creative photography. Before you know it, you'll be creating imaginative images rather than just shooting snaps.

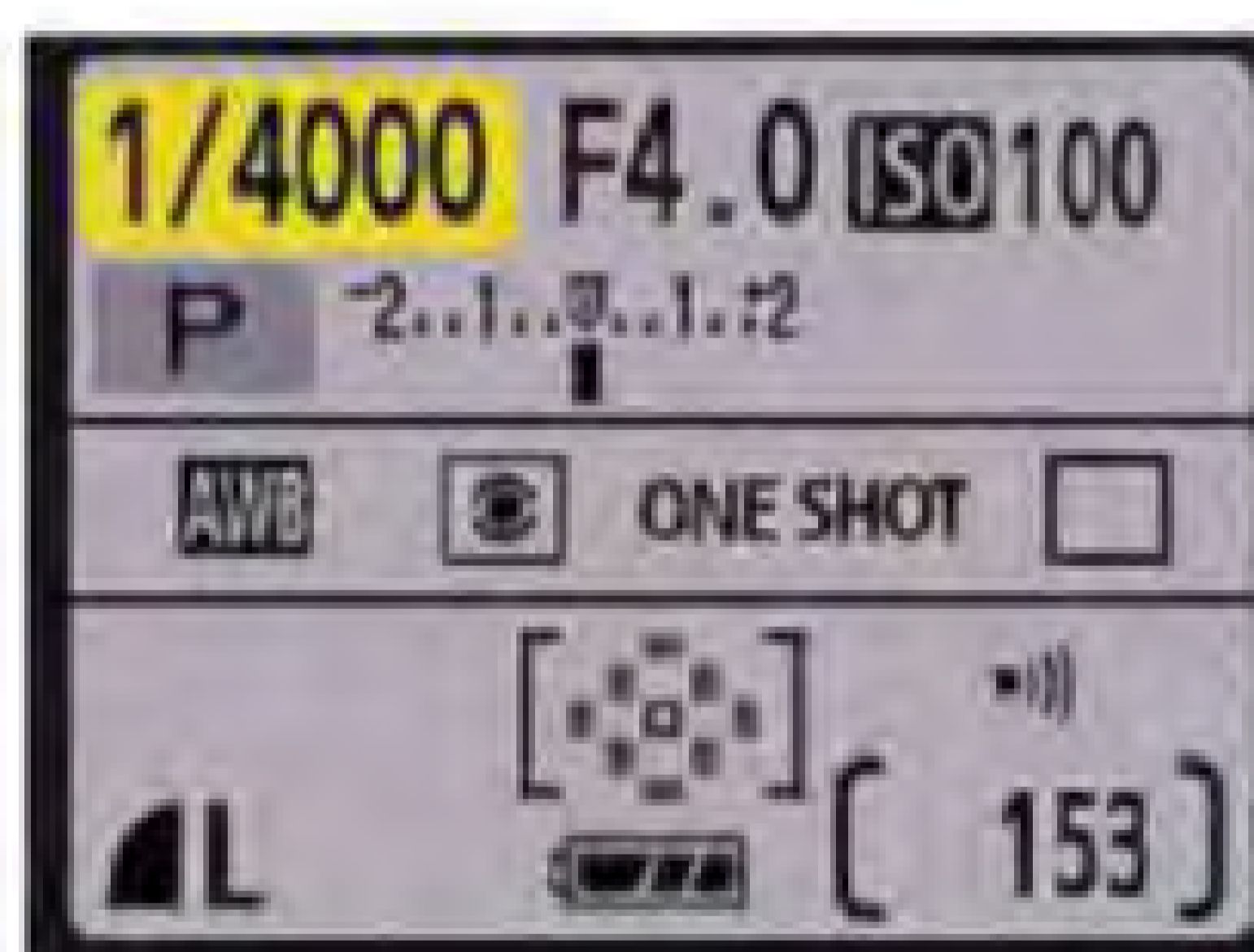


Exposure controls

Many beginners believe it's difficult to use aperture- or shutter-priority mode, but in fact it's very easy to do. Once you've selected the exposure mode (1), it's simply a case of rotating the input dial (2) until the aperture or shutter speed you'd like to use appears on the top-plate (or rear) LCD (3). Depress the shutter button halfway and the camera works out the rest. Easy!

● UNDERSTANDING SHUTTER SPEEDS

Exposure settings are made by changing either the aperture or the shutter speed. The increments at which you change these settings are normally referred to as 'stops'. When you change a setting by a 'stop', you are either doubling or halving the exposure. So, for instance, changing from 1/500sec to 1/250sec doubles the duration of the exposure. As well as full stops, you can also vary exposure in 1/2 or 1/3 stops depending on the camera model you use. The diagram below shows shutter speeds from one second to 1/4000sec.



Full stops	1sec	1/2sec	1/4sec	1/8sec	1/16sec	1/30sec	1/60sec	1/125sec	1/250sec	1/500sec	1/1000sec	1/2000sec	1/4000sec
Half stops		0.7sec	1/3sec	1/6sec	1/10sec	1/20sec	1/45sec	1/90sec	1/180sec	1/350sec	1/750sec	1/1500sec	1/3000sec

● UNDERSTANDING APERTURE SETTINGS

The illustration below shows the iris at one-stop increments, ie each step from left to right halves the amount of light passing through the lens. The maximum aperture setting refers to the iris wide open (in this instance f/2.8) and the minimum aperture is the iris at its smallest setting (f/32 in this case). An explanation of where the f/number derives from would require an extensive scientific explanation, but the key to your understanding apertures is to learn how f/numbers correlate with the size of the aperture.



Full stops	f/2.8	f/4	f/5.6	f/8	f/11	f/16	f/22	f/32
Half stops		f/3.5	f/4.5	f/6.7	f/9.5	f/13	f/19	f/27



Perfect exposure
Learning the basics of exposure is key to ensuring your portraits have the perfect combination of shutter speed and aperture.



Understand your camera's metering system

Before you can influence the exposure, you need to understand how your camera's metering works. Here are some essentials that you need to know to pick the best metering mode for different shooting conditions

DIGITAL CAMERAS BOAST complex exposure systems and offer a choice of metering patterns, each working out the exposure in a way to suit various lighting conditions. A camera's exposure system works on the assumption that the area of the scene that is being metered is a mid-tone, or 18% grey to be exact; the average if all dark, lights and mid-tones were combined. It's a tried-and-tested method and the basis of all metering patterns. It's important to be aware of this when you're taking pictures as it helps you to know when you may have problems with exposure.

While this system is fine in the majority of shooting situations, it can lead to incorrect exposures when the scene or subject is considerably lighter or darker in tone than 18% grey. For example, very dark subjects or scenes can fool the metering system into thinking that the general scene is much darker than it really is and, as a result, overexpose the image. Similarly, very light subjects or scenes can fool the camera into underexposing them – making them appear darker than they are – as the lightmeter takes a reading designed to render them as a mid-tone. It's in these trickier lighting situations where the popular multi-zone pattern, which provides the correct exposure for around 90% of shots, struggles as it tries to meter the entire scene. It's in cases like this where using the other patterns such as partial and spot are useful as they offer more control.

As a camera is trying to render an image grey, it's your job to ensure you compensate to keep the tones true to life. To do this you have to overexpose the camera's reading to give a lighter result than the camera wants, or underexpose to give a darker result. With a portrait in a dark scene, for instance, the camera will overexpose the image, bleaching the face, therefore you will need to reduce the exposure. With a light scene, it's giving less exposure than you need, darkening the subject, so you have to add exposure to make it record correctly.

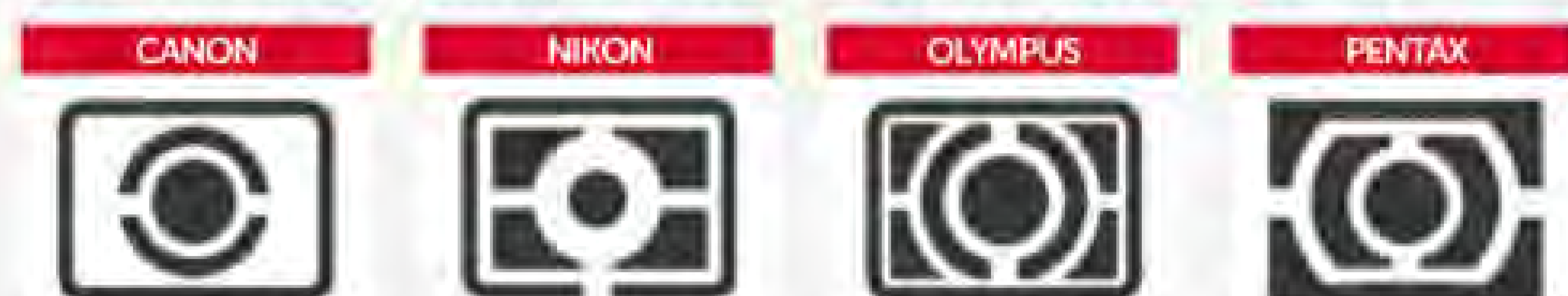
If you're still unsure, don't worry – when you start shooting light or dark scenes and then try to override the camera's readings, you'll soon get to grips with it. By following our expert advice you should also increase the chances of keeping any exposure errors to a minimum.

Multi-zone metering

In theory, you could take every picture using multi-zone metering and never have a bad exposure – well almost... The multi-zone pattern is the newest and most sophisticated type of metering pattern and the one most photographers stick to for the majority of their shots. While every manufacturer has their own type of multi-zone meter, each with varying numbers and shapes of zones, all work in much the same way. The entire image area is divided into a number of zones and, when activated, individual meter readings are taken from each one of them. The camera's microprocessor then evaluates all these individual readings and uses complex algorithms to calculate the final exposure. To improve accuracy, many cameras also boast a library of tens of thousands of images taken in various lighting conditions, which are compared in a micro-second with the new scene to produce the exposure value. This system has proven highly reliable and gets the exposure correct more than 90% of the time. Its weak spots, however, are unusually light or very dark scenes or subjects. Multi-zone meters can also have trouble with very high-contrast scenes, in particular backlit subjects. This is why there are other metering patterns available, as well as a choice of exposure overrides, to help you ensure the perfect exposure.

RECOGNISING THE MULTI-ZONE PATTERN ICON

Every camera brand has their own icons for metering patterns and below we show you what to look for on four popular brands



How to choose metering patterns

Selecting a metering pattern is a straightforward procedure, but we've provided a guide on how to do it for a number of leading digital SLRs from the six most popular brands

CANON EOS DSLRS

For older models, like the EOS 1000D and EOS 450D, press the metering button on the four-way control. EOS 500D users press the SET button, while for EOS 550D and EOS 600D users, press the Q button and select the metering icon.



CANON EOS 30D/40D/50D

Some older EOS models, such as the EOS 20D and 30D, have push-button controls. With these models, (1) press the metering button and (2) rotate the dial until the top-plate LCD shows the relevant metering pattern.



SONY ALPHA MODELS

Press the Fn button (1) and select the metering mode icon by pressing the AF button (2). Choose the pattern you'd like to use and press AF again to set.



NIKON DSLRS

For newer models like the D3100: Press the info (i) button and scroll to Metering and select your choice with the four-way control. Some older models like the D80 have a metering button you press to set your choice.



PENTAX K-SERIES

Most Pentax DSLRs select the metering mode in the same way as the K100D. Press MENU to get to the Rec Mode display and use the four-way controller dial to go down to AE Metering, select the required pattern and press OK.



COMPACT SYSTEM CAMERAS

With most CSCs, press the Menu button (1) and scroll to Metering Patterns. With cameras boasting a touchscreen display, you can find and change the metering pattern via the LCD monitor's menu.



Metering options

Understanding how metering patterns work can help you when shooting in tricky lighting conditions, such as backlighting.



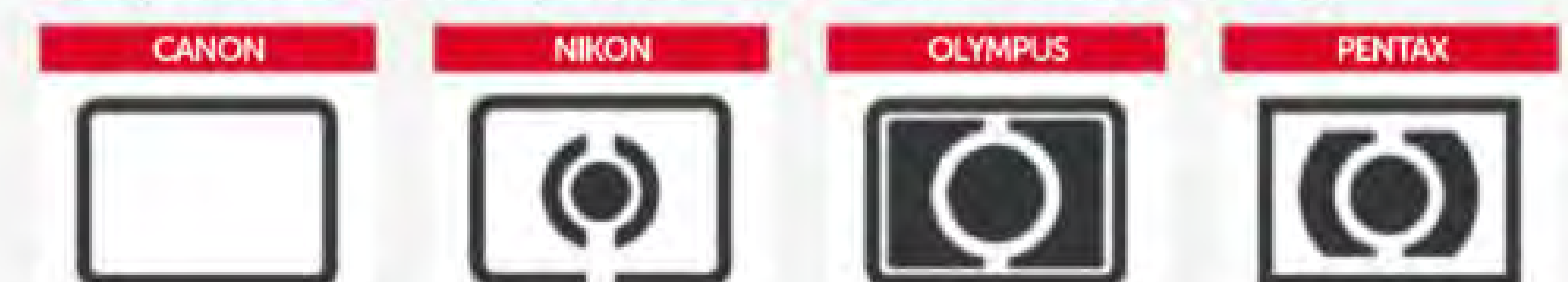
STOCK PHOTO

Centre-weighted average

Despite the arrival of newer patterns, this veteran still has its place on DSLRs and CSCs. This is the oldest metering pattern and was the number-one choice until the multi-zone pattern was introduced. As its name suggests, it takes an average reading from the entire frame, with a slight emphasis given to the central area. While less sophisticated compared to the more recent patterns, its past popularity means it is still featured in most digital cameras, as many experienced photographers feel more comfortable using this pattern. It is a good option when used in combination with the AE-Lock exposure override (which is covered in more detail later), but if given the choice, we'd recommend that you stick to multi-zone metering.

RECOGNISING THE CENTRE-WEIGHTED ICON

You will find the centre-weighted pattern on your camera but you rarely need to use it in preference to multi-zone metering



Spot and partial metering

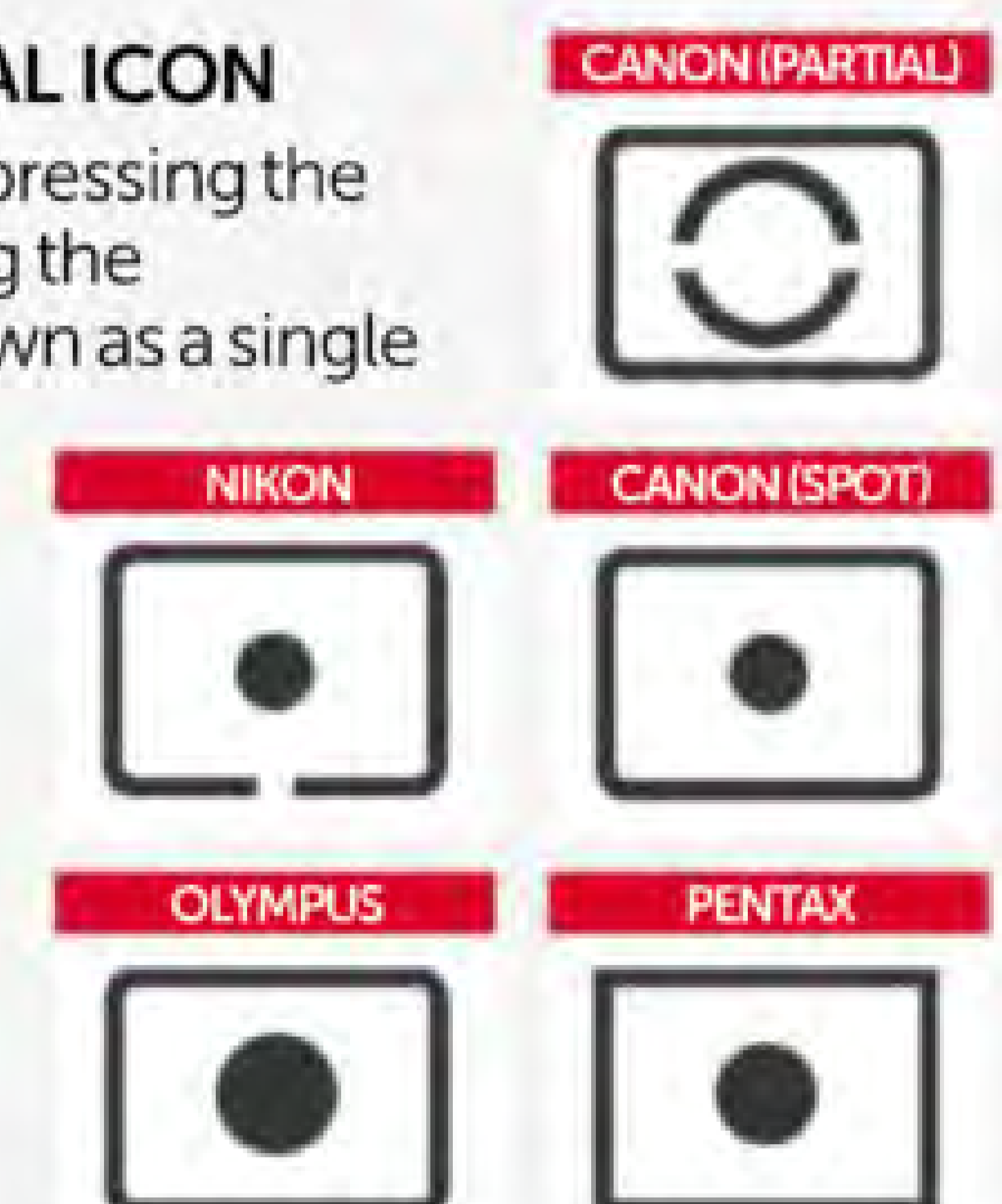
This is a great pattern when you want to take a reading from a specific area of the frame – but it must be used with care. While multi-zone metering takes measurements from the entire image area, spot and partial metering concentrates on the central area of the frame (you can see the measuring circle at the centre of the viewfinder screen). This allows you to precisely control where the exposure reading for the scene is taken from, as only the area of the frame within the measuring circle will be used to determine what the 'correct' exposure is.

Spot and partial metering is a great way to ensure that you get the proper exposure when you're shooting in difficult lighting conditions. Spot and partial are very similar in how they work. The main difference is spot offers a very precise measuring circle (usually around 3% of the image area), while partial usually measures the central 9% of the frame. The more precise spot meter is found on most cameras, while partial is less common, and a handful of cameras boast both. You must take great care when using spot or partial metering: always take a reading from a mid-tone, like grass or concrete, and not a light or dark subject, otherwise you will get an inaccurate reading.

RECOGNISING THE SPOT/PARTIAL ICON


You need to select spot or partial by pressing the metering selector button and picking the respective icon. The spot icon is shown as a single dot at the centre of the rectangle, while partial is two small curved lines that form the outline of a circle. Some models offer both metering options

Remember: Position the spot/partial meter over a mid-tone to get the correct exposure. Spot-meter off a dark subject and you'll overexpose it and vice versa. Try some practice shots to get used to how it works.



Exposure eompensation

Master the easiest and most commonly used override for increasing and decreasing your exposure

 ONCE YOU ARE AWARE of how metering systems work, and had some experience with using your camera, the times when the exposure system is likely to make mistakes becomes easier to recognise. The simplest way to override your camera's metered exposure is to use exposure compensation, allowing you to dial in a set exposure increment to increase (+) or decrease (-) the exposure. For instance, a subject that is significantly lighter than a mid-tone, like a white wedding dress, is likely to be underexposed by your camera, so you need to select positive (+) compensation. If the subject is much darker than a mid-tone – ie is wearing very dark clothing – then it is likely to be rendered overexposed, so negative (-) compensation is needed. Applying exposure compensation is quite straightforward and with experience you'll be able to judge how much is needed. All DSLRs have a dedicated exposure compensation button to make it a quick process in automatic or semi-automatic exposure modes. The compensation you set is often shown as + or – EV (Exposure Value) – ie if you add a half-stop of exposure it will display as +1/2EV.



PAUL WARD



PAUL WARD

How does exposure compensation work?

Exposure compensation functions differently depending on the exposure mode that you are using. In aperture-priority, the compensation is applied by changing the shutter speed, but when using shutter-priority, it's the aperture that's adjusted. In program mode, the camera automatically decides between the aperture and/or shutter speed depending on the light levels to minimise camera shake.



Exposure compensation

This is a typical example of when a subject deceives a metering system. The camera attempted to record the scene as a mid-tone and as a result it's underexposed. Positive compensation of +1EV was applied to correct the exposure in the adjacent shot.

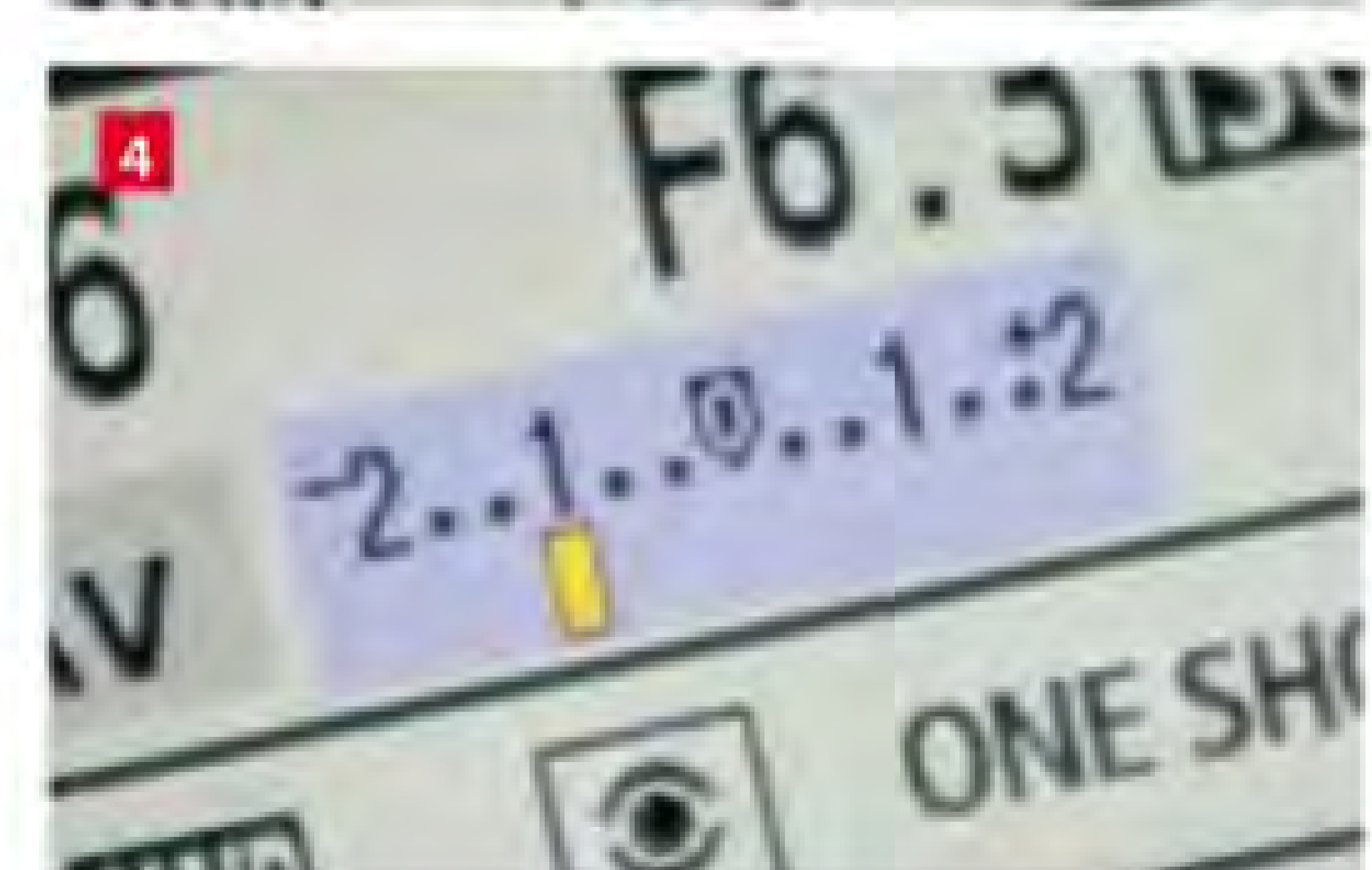
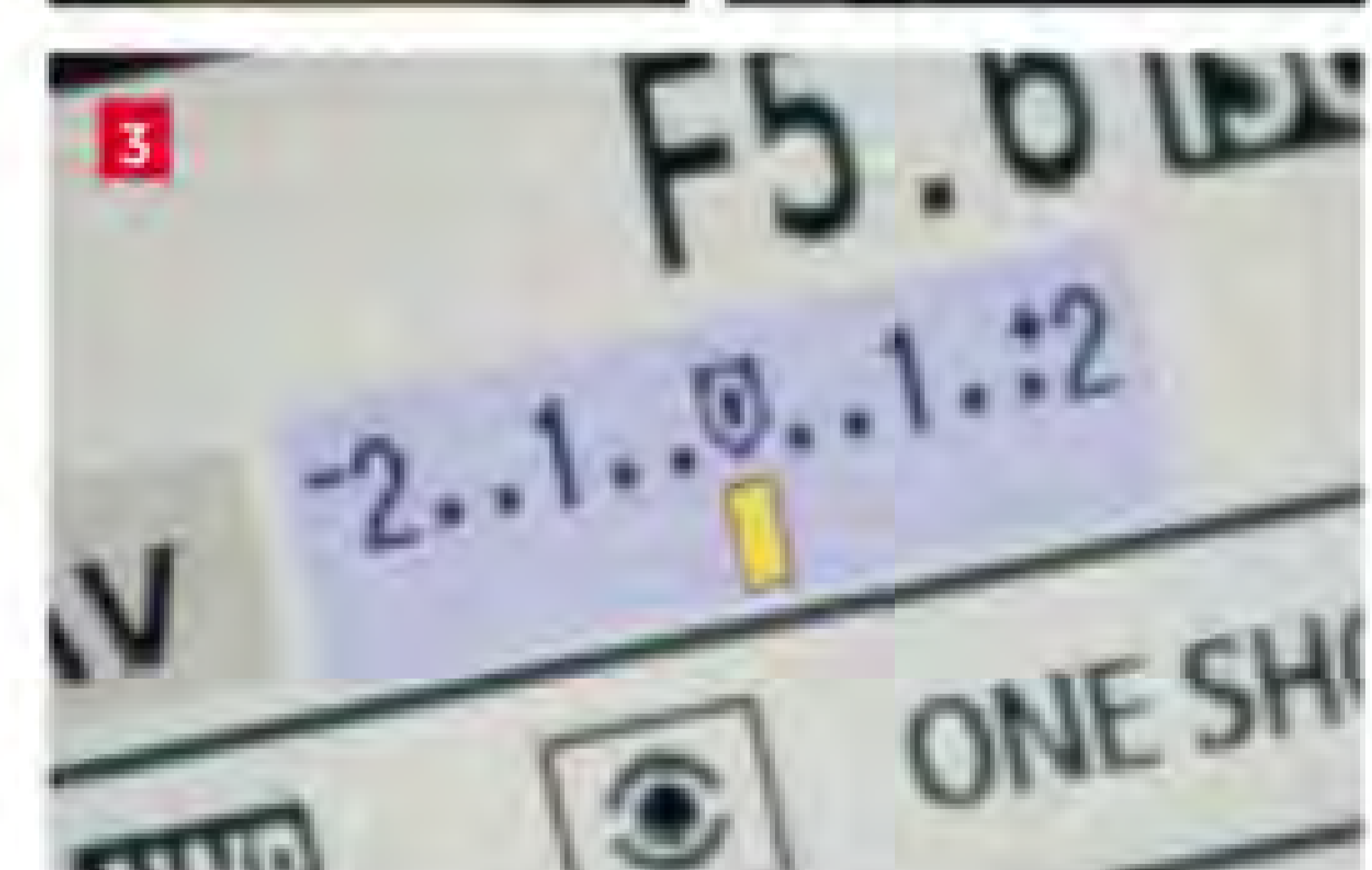
Exposure compensation

- Set a **+ value** to compensate for an underexposed scene, eg if it's a light-toned subject.
- Set a **- value** to reduce the exposure, eg when shooting a darker than average scene.

Using exposure compensation

Your camera's exposure compensation facility is useful when you wish to make a picture brighter or darker than the exposure set by the camera. While exposure compensation is designed for corrective purposes, the effect can be used creatively. It's extremely easy to use: try applying '+' and '-' settings on subjects with different tones and see the effect it has. Here's how to do it:

- 1) Press and hold your camera's exposure compensation button (normally indicated by a +/- icon).
- 2) Rotate the input dial to select the amount of compensation. A negative value means you're decreasing the exposure, a positive value means you are increasing it.
- 3) The exposure compensation scale is displayed in the camera's viewfinder and/or control panel.
- 4) The compensation you apply will affect all subsequent shots unless you reset it to +/- 0 EV.



Autoexposure Lock (AE-L)

Use this function to 'lock' your exposure independently from the focusing system to help avoid exposure error

AE-L PRACTICALLY EVERY DSLR AND CSC has an AE-L button, which is normally found on the top right of the camera's rear, or near the LCD monitor. AE-L is an abbreviation for Autoexposure Lock. It is designed to secure the current exposure setting so that it doesn't change when you recompose your image, even if the incoming light levels change. AE-L can be used in any exposure mode, although it is pointless if you are shooting in manual.

When you press the shutter button down halfway, you engage the autofocus and the metering system to take a reading. This is ideal most of the time, but what about when you want to focus and meter from different subjects or parts of the scene? This is where AE-Lock comes in. It allows you to take an exposure reading independently of where you're focusing, which is ideal if your subject is very dark or light, or positioned in a bright or dim area of the scene. AE-Lock is most commonly used with the spot or centre-weighted metering pattern to secure the reading taken from a specific area of the frame. This is particularly useful in tricky lighting conditions that can fool your metering system, such as backlit objects or subjects with very dark or light backgrounds. For instance, if you are shooting a scene containing a bright light source, your camera's multi-zone metering mode could be fooled into reading the scene as brighter than it actually is and will underexpose as a result.

To achieve the correct exposure, you want to take a meter reading that excludes the light region. This is possible by taking a spot/partial meter reading from the subject itself or an area of the scene that is a mid-tone and saving the result with the AE-Lock button, before recomposing the shot and taking the picture. Using the same principle, AE-Lock is useful when shooting subjects that are positioned off-centre or when you want to photograph a series of images using exactly the same exposure settings. An instance of this might be if you want to stitch together several shots to create a panorama; it is important that the shooting parameters employed for each frame are consistent – using the AE-Lock facility ensures constant exposures for each shot.

The AE-Lock button is an essential exposure aid when shooting subjects with very dark or light backgrounds that can easily fool your camera's multi-zone metering into over- or underexposure. In this instance, the very dark backdrop fooled the camera into thinking the scene was darker than it actually was. As a result, it has set a shutter speed longer than was required and so the subject is overexposed. In order to achieve the correct exposure, a spot-meter reading was taken from a wall to the side of the stairs. This reading was then locked using the AE-Lock button. The picture was recomposed and the image taken. The result is perfectly exposed.

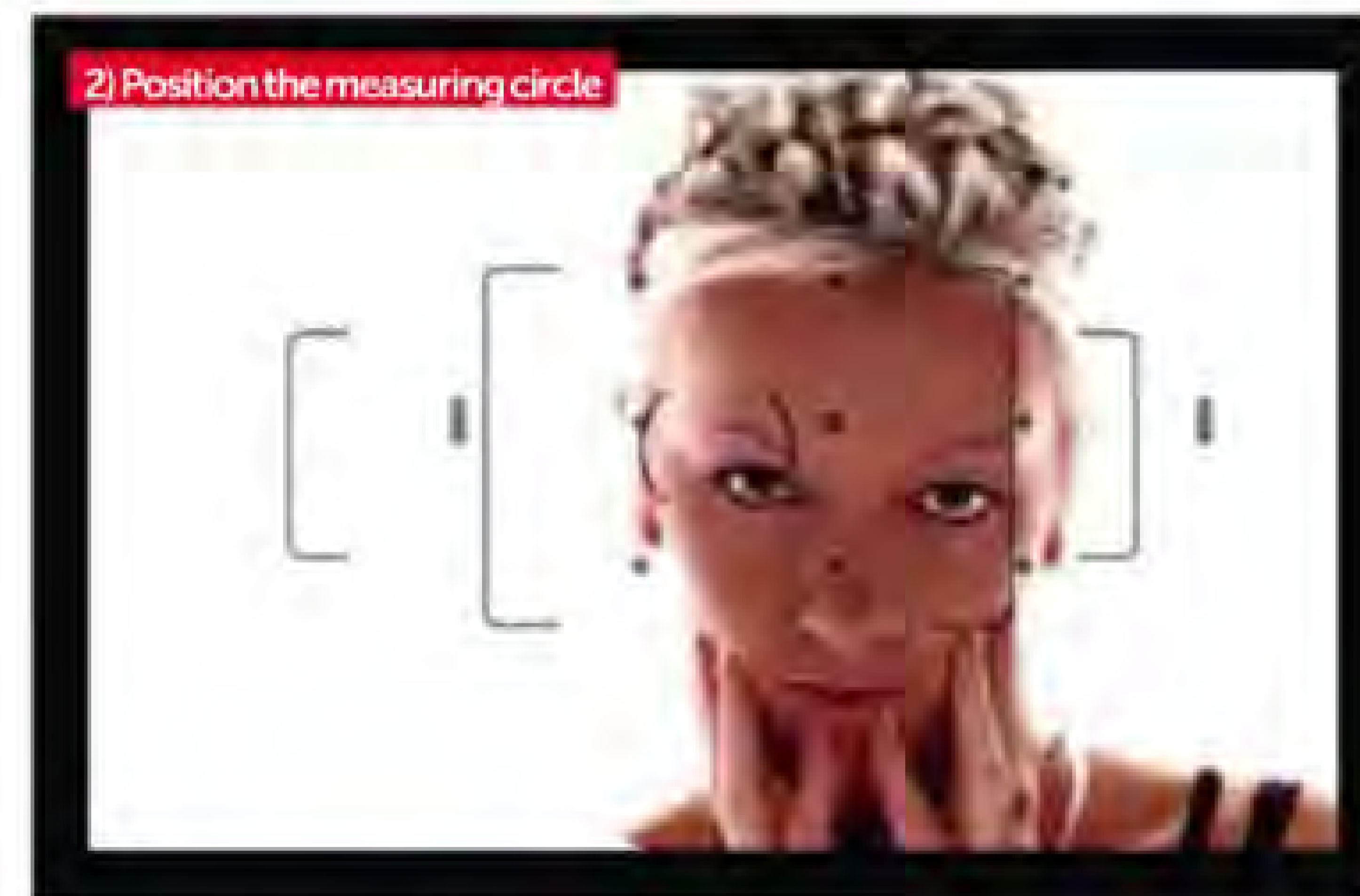
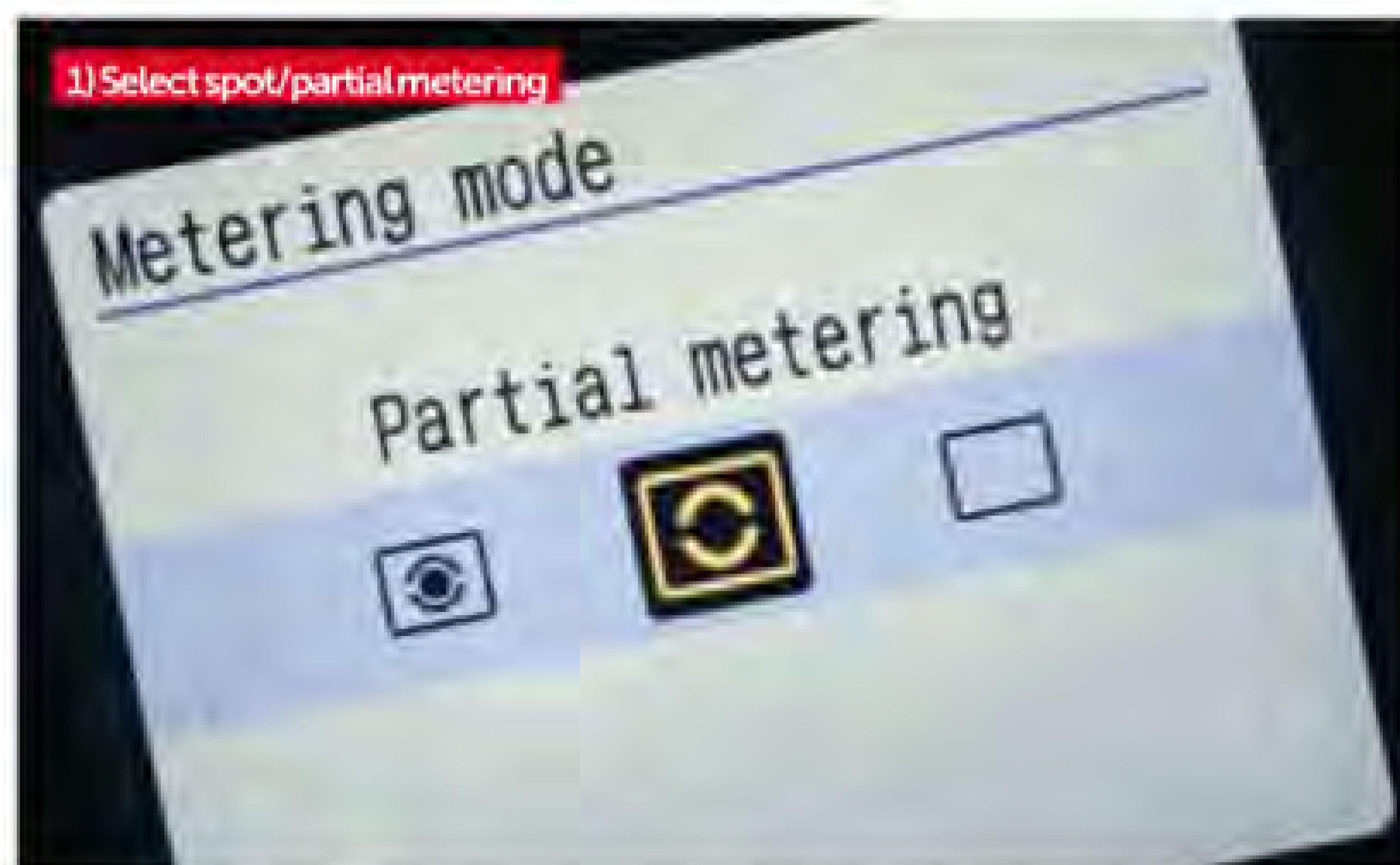


BJORN THOMASSEN

Using AE-Lock

The AE-L button, combined with spot or centre-weighted metering, is one of the most accurate ways to achieve the correct exposure settings for any given subject.

- 1) Select your camera's spot (or partial) meter.
- 2) Direct the camera so that the metering circle is positioned over the area you wish to meter from.
- 3) Activate AE-Lock by pressing the button. On some models you have to keep it depressed, so consult your user's manual. AE-L may display in the viewfinder to indicate the lock is activated.
- 4) Move the camera and recompose the image as you want. Your exposure settings will not change, even if the incoming light levels alter as a result of changing composition.
- 5) Finally, fully depress the shutter release button to take the shot.



BJORN THOMASSEN

SHARPNESS & EXPOSURE

WANT TO LEARN HOW TO TAKE GREAT PORTRAITS? THEN LET'S GET BACK TO BASICS. YOUR FIRST STEPS ONCE YOU'VE SET UP YOUR CAMERA CORRECTLY SHOULD BE IN MAKING SURE YOUR PORTRAITS ARE EXPOSED CORRECTLY AND FOCUS IS SPOT-ON...

CAPTURING GREAT IMAGES of people is one of the most popular and diverse forms of photography. From lifestyle to formal, fashion to candid and weddings to children, shooting portraits well requires a wide range of techniques, ideas and skills to be mastered. This magbook aims to cover all the major areas that you will need to help you take your best ever portraits.

The most talented photographers make taking great pictures look so deceptively easy, but as we're all aware, making an image truly stand out takes effort, skill and attention. With most forms of portrait photography, there is the additional challenge that as well as ensuring the best camera settings, lighting and composition, you also have to manage your subject. By learning the fundamentals so they become almost second nature, you can concentrate

on making sure the subject is relaxed and exactly as you want them in the frame, so that when you press the shutter, you're confident of capturing great results.

Before jumping into specific camera settings, it's worth us briefly mentioning the fundamental factors that determine if your portraits are successful or not. In the majority of cases, the best portraits exhibit limited depth-of-field with eyes perfectly sharp and background beautifully thrown out of focus. In this section, the key areas we cover are how you focus on your subject and control depth-of-field to ensure your daylight portraits are always perfectly exposed. Here we look at the core fundamental areas of focusing, exposure and depth-of-field to ensure that you have mastered the basic skills required to capture perfect portraits. ●



Focusing for perfect portraits

THE EYES ARE the most important element of a portrait and so you should ensure you focus on them so that they are pin-sharp. Your camera's AF system is more than capable of locking focus on to an eye, but you do need to set it up correctly. While multi-point AF systems are useful for most subjects, they're not ideal when shooting portraits. This is because when multiple AF points are active, the AF system is designed to lock focus on the nearest subject. With portraits, this can result in the nose being in sharp focus with eyes slightly soft. If your subject is wearing a cap, then you might find times when their face is slightly out of focus.

This problem is very easy to get around. You simply need to set the camera so that only one AF sensor is active by switching to single-point autofocus. You have a choice of selecting the central AF sensor, which is usually the most sensitive, or any of the other AF points. Both have their merits.

With most cameras, the central AF point is more sensitive, often boasting a cross-type sensor as opposed to a normal line sensor, which improves AF accuracy when used in low-contrast situations. Therefore, if you're

shooting in low light, use the central AF point. When using single-point AF, you want to ensure that the autofocus is single-shot AF rather than continuous AF. This is because when you focus, you place the eye in the centre of the frame, then after pressing the shutter button halfway down to lock the focus, you recompose the image before firing the shutter. In single-shot AF, the focus won't shift, but if you have it in continuous AF, the lens will change focus as soon as you move away from the eye, resulting in unsharp results.

Because you're moving the camera between focusing and firing, using central-point AF isn't the best choice if you have the camera mounted on a tripod. In this situation, it's best to select the AF point that falls over the subject's eye and, with single-shot AF selected, focus before shooting each frame.

The other time when using an off-centre point is best is when you're rapidly shooting several frames and don't want to have to use the focus-lock facility with the central-point. Normally this is when shooting groups with the subjects off-centre, or

How to set AF

By selecting the AF mode setting, you can switch between multi-point and single-point autofocus quickly and easily. Depending on which camera you use, you access this screen via the Menu or the AF mode button. Some older models have a physical switch to select modes. If choosing single-point, use the four-way control or input dials to select a specific AF point. The central point is the most sensitive and therefore usually the best option.



when using the camera in an upright position and firing short sequences with the subject making slight variations in pose or when you're shifting position.

Ultimately, the choice is yours; some prefer the focus-lock method, others choose to use the appropriate off-centre sensor. Try out both methods and use whichever works best for you.

The following two sets of images provide examples of when switching from one AF set-up to another can lead to better results.

Focus past obstacles

1) Set to multi-point AF, the camera has locked focus on the tree in the foreground, resulting in our subject appearing very out of focus due to the shallow depth-of-field.

2) Selecting single-point AF, the subject rather than the tree is placed in sharp focus. The result is a portrait with the subject nicely framed by the two trees.



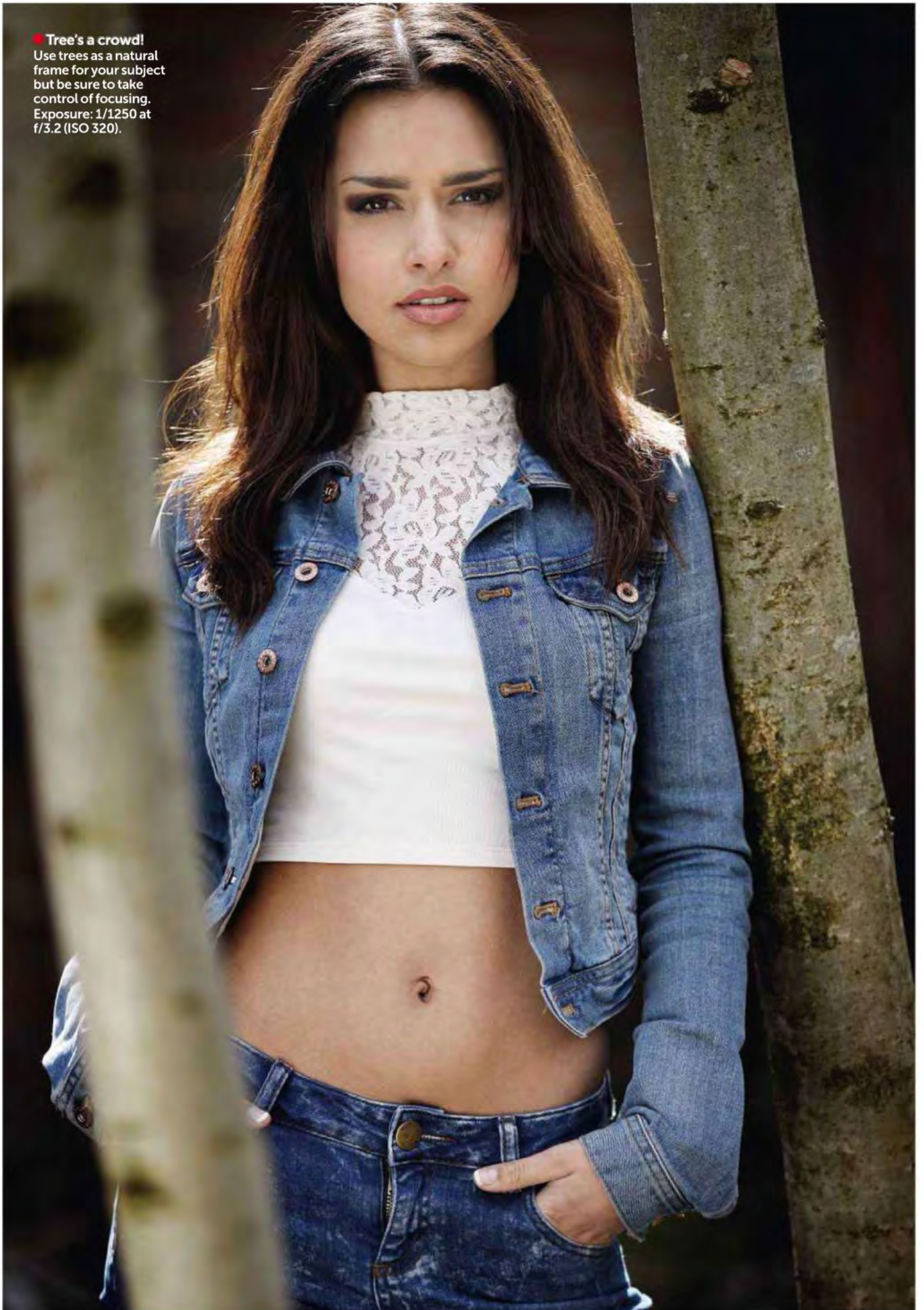
Focus on the eyes

3) Set to multi-point AF, the hat is detected as the closest subject to the camera and so this is where the AF locks on. Due to shallow depth-of-field, the face is unsharp.

4) Setting your camera to a single AF point is the solution. Take care to either select the AF point over an eye or use the central AF point and focus-lock over the eye. Here the AF point locked focus on the tip of the nose.

5) Using the central AF point, focus is locked on the eye and the image recomposed. A reflector was introduced to fill in shadows and lighten skin tones.

● **Tree's a crowd!**
Use trees as a natural
frame for your subject
but be sure to take
control of focusing.
Exposure: 1/1250 at
f/3.2 (ISO 320).



How to expose for portraits

HOW YOUR CAMERA is set up to expose the scene is vital to the success of your portraits. On a practical level, while in most shooting situations you can trust your camera to give you perfect exposures every time, there are times it needs your help. On a creative level, your choice of exposure setting will determine the aesthetic quality of the image you produce. Therefore, it's essential you're always aware and in control of the exposure when shooting portraits to ensure you get the best possible result. Everything you need to know is covered over the next few pages.

Your choice of exposure mode dictates the level of control you have over your portrait, making your choice of mode a paramount consideration. The vast majority of amateurs and enthusiasts use aperture-priority mode as it's ideal for quickly

changing the aperture setting (and depth-of-field), while many professionals use manual, as it lets them control shutter speeds as well as apertures quickly and easily. Aperture-priority is without doubt the most popular mode used for shooting portraits as it concentrates attention on how apertures affect depth-of-field (covered in more detail shortly). Many photographers, including contributor Brett Harkness, prefer to shoot in program mode and use the 'program-shift' facility to quickly adjust apertures to their liking (check out our *Pro Insight* panels for details). There are situations when using manual mode is more appropriate, such as when shooting in difficult lighting situations or when using a lightmeter (also covered shortly). Try each mode and use whichever is your favourite!

Remember to use ISO!

While the aperture will be foremost in your mind when shooting portraits, be aware of the importance of shutter speeds and ISO ratings. You'll mainly be using telephoto focal lengths when shooting portraits, so camera shake is a potential risk when lighting conditions are anything but bright. The common rule is to ensure the shutter speed is at least the reciprocal of the focal length, so if the lens is a 55-200mm zoomed to 200mm, ensure the shutter speed is at least 1/200sec. If your camera or lens has an image stabiliser, you can get away with speeds that are two or even three stops slower, but be careful and regularly review magnified areas of images on the LCD to be sure. To ensure maximum image quality, you'll normally be shooting at a low ISO rating like ISO 100. If shutter speeds are slow enough to risk shake, you're far better off raising the ISO to 400 or even 800 to ensure images are free of shake. At these speeds any increase in noise or loss in sharpness and colour rendition will be minimal, especially if your camera is only a year or two old, so any slight loss in image quality is better than an image ruined by shake.

Metering: Watch out for tricky shooting situations!

Your camera's multi-zone metering pattern is the default setting and is incredibly accurate, with a success rate in excess of 90%. It takes an individual reading from each zone, compares this information with an image database in its memory, and then sets an exposure – usually with high accuracy. Therefore, when shooting portraits, making sure you get the correct exposure isn't something you should be too worried about, allowing you to concentrate on working with your subject and composing the best possible image. However, while it's very reliable, it's not infallible, so there are times when you need to be aware of assisting the metering system to ensure perfect results. The following are the most common situations that can cause problems, along with the easiest ways that you can ensure good exposures.



BRETT HARKNESS

● VERY DARK SKIN OR CLOTHING

Very dark subjects or backdrops can cause overexposure, resulting in bleached-out results. If photographing head & shoulder portraits of subjects with very dark skin, or scenes that are darker than average, be prepared to apply negative exposure compensation of -0.7 to -1.5EV or meter from a mid-tone instead.



BRETT HARKNESS

● VERY LIGHT SCENES

Scenes that are lighter than normal can result in dark images being recorded due to underexposure. This is a particular risk for wedding photographers, in particular, who often shoot scenes where a bride in a white dress fills much of the frame. The fastest way to avoid this problem is to add positive exposure compensation of +1 to +1.5EV.



BRETT HARKNESS

● BACKLIGHTING

A subject with the sun behind them is at risk of being grossly underexposed unless you take action. Either use the spot meter with an AE-Lock reading off a mid-tone in the same lighting as the subject, or apply exposure compensation from +1 to +2EV. It's a tricky lighting situation to master, so review images on the LCD monitor carefully.



Useful accessories



Grey card:

The most low-tech and affordable accessory in the photographer's gadget bag is a life-saver in tricky lighting conditions. Have your subject hold it, lock a meter reading from it using the spot meter and you're ready to shoot.



Lightmeter:

More high-tech than a grey card and far more versatile, allowing you to take very accurate readings in all sorts of ambient lighting conditions, as well as flash with most models. Hold in front of your subject's face, take a reading and you're sorted!



Reflector:

With backlit subjects, consider using one of these to bounce light back on to your subject, removing unwanted shadows, revealing detail and adding a catchlight too!

Pro insight

BRETT HARKNESS

"When shooting in daylight, I prefer to use program mode along with the exposure compensation facility. I find it to be a very fast way to work – I can change apertures by using the input dial and override exposures quickly with exposure compensation. This allows me to interact with the subject rather than worry about camera settings. Once I've taken a test shot and applied any necessary exposure compensation, I can use the program-shift facility to set the aperture to my preferred setting and start shooting. In terms of metering pattern, I usually stick to multi-zone, which is very reliable, switching to spot for very high-contrast scenes."



Metering options



● **Exposure compensation** Use this facility to override the indicated exposure by a set amount. A positive value increases the exposure; a negative value reduces it. Most cameras allow up to +/- three or five stops in 0.3 or 0.5-stop increments. One of Brett's favourite features.



● **Spot-meter with AE-Lock** The spot meter takes a very precise reading from around 3% of the image. Place the central 'spot' in the viewfinder over a mid-tone, lock the reading using the AE-Lock, recompose, then shoot for perfectly exposed results.



● **Histogram** This facility allows you to review an image and note the distribution of tones from highlights to shadows. This allows you to see if the exposure is good or needs adjustment. Your aim in general situations is to have the peak at the centre.

Popular ways to take control of exposure

THERE ARE VARIOUS methods you can use to take perfectly exposed results. Ask most enthusiasts and professionals how they expose for portraits – in particular, in tricky lighting conditions – and you'll find no one answer. Here we'll cover two popular methods that involve using an exposure aid, as well as cover the most common method

of using experience and the LCD monitor to establish the correct result. As mentioned earlier, in theory any exposure mode can be used, with the most popular being aperture-priority, program or manual – use whichever you feel most comfortable with. For this example, we're placing our subject outside a large open doorway that provides

a near-black backdrop – a scenario that leads the vast majority of multi-zone systems to poorly expose the scene. There are a few ways to establish the correct exposure and we start by showing you how to use a grey card or lightmeter to work out the exposure and follow this with the most popular method – using the LCD monitor.



● MULTI-ZONE METERING

Using the camera in multi-zone metering is normally a reliable method for capturing well-exposed images. However, the multi-zone pattern results in the subject being overexposed due to the large expanse of black in the backdrop. The solution is to use one of the three methods covered here.



1) USING A GREY CARD

Set your camera to manual exposure mode and the spot-metering pattern. Have your subject hold a grey card in front of their face. With the spot-meter area filled by the grey card, adjust the exposure until the indicator sits over the 0. Take a test exposure and check it – you should find it's spot-on.



2) USING A LIGHTMETER

Ensure the ISO rating on the camera and the lightmeter are the same. With the white dome over the light-measuring sensor, hold the meter in front of the subject's face and take a reading. With your camera set to manual exposure mode, set this exposure, take a test shot and check it's okay.



Exposure scales when shooting in manual

When using a grey card or lightmeter, you'll find that once the established exposure has been set with the camera in manual, the marker on the indicator scale may not be over the 0. Do not worry – when using manual mode, your camera's metering system still functions, so the indicator scale in the viewfinder and on the LCD monitor shows the camera's recommended settings. If you've used the grey card or lightmeter correctly then you'll have set the correct

exposure – the marker is effectively indicating how far out the camera's metering system is from giving the correct exposure. So, for instance, with this particular scene, the marker on the exposure indicator scale sits over the -1.3EV mark. This shows you that the camera would have overexposed your subject by 1.3 stops. This may all sound complicated, but it's a system you will learn and understand in no time at all.





3) REVIEWING THE LCD MONITOR

The third option, regularly used by the vast majority of photographers, including pro Brett Harkness, is to take a test frame using aperture-priority or program, then check the image on the LCD monitor and, if necessary, apply exposure compensation to give the correct exposure. It's a method that works very well but you need to be aware of how accurate the image on the LCD is to the actual recorded image. Some LCDs provide a darker or lighter review image than the actual file, so it's worth also reviewing the image histogram to be sure. You'll find that more recent generations of camera boast much better LCD monitors than those that are two or more years old.

Pro insight

BRETT HARKNESS

"I can understand why grey cards and lightmeters are used by some photographers, but I prefer to use my experience to gauge exposures and check results on the LCD monitor. I usually quickly review the image and check both the focus and exposure before continuing. If you use this method, it's important to learn how closely the brightness of your camera's LCD matches your computer's monitor to ensure accurate results. Match them up as best you can and switch off your camera's Auto LCD Brightness mode if it has one. Histograms can be useful, but you do need to know how to read the graphs properly. Bear in mind, too, that when shooting fashion and weddings, you won't have time to use it."



Depth-of-field and portraits

PORTRAITS, MORE THAN any other type of subject, benefit most from having a shallow depth-of-field. With head & shoulder shots, this is a classic way of keeping the eyes pin-sharp while the face and shoulders slip away gradually from focus, while with full-length shots it allows distracting backgrounds to be blurred out of all recognition. It's also a wonderful technique to use when shooting nudes or photographing subjects against window light as the highlights diffuse to produce a wonderful glow. It's amazingly easy to achieve: you simply need to select a wide aperture and ensure that you focus on the subject's eyes. Lenses with fast maximum apertures obviously offer the benefit of being able to produce more shallow depth-of-field than slower lenses, which is a reason why many pros use f/2.8 optics. These are expensive to own, however, so if you're on a budget, invest in a 50mm f/1.8 lens; one of the most affordable primes you can buy and one of the fastest. Used at f/1.8,

fall-off from focus to blur is incredible. Alternatively, use a telezoom at the longer focal lengths, as this also gives very shallow depth-of-field when used wide open.

You do need to take great care when using very wide apertures as if you do not focus correctly, you run the risk of unsharp results due to the limited zone of sharpness. Also, a very shallow depth-of-field isn't always desirable – often you will want detail to be visible beyond the subject's face, in which case, a smaller aperture is better. The great thing about depth-of-field is that it is easy to control and by quickly changing aperture settings and taking test shots, you can find the effect that best suits what you are trying to achieve with your portraits. We'll be covering depth-of-field in greater detail in another article, but being aware of how apertures affect the amount of the scene that is in focus is key to great photography and essential for improving your portraits. Take test shots at different apertures and study the results.

Pro insight

BRETT HARKNESS

"In general, portraits work best when depth-of-field is shallow, but this isn't a hard and fast rule. When shooting groups or small children moving around, I'll use a shallower aperture like f/11 to ensure lots of the scene is sharp. I'll use the 70-200mm at f/8 when the clothes need emphasis, as this keeps the body sharp but blurs the background. Mostly, I'll shoot at a wide aperture to add drama and isolate the subject from the backdrop. For the ultimate in shallow depth-of-field, I'll use an f/1.2 optic and hold my breath as I shoot for perfect focus!"

BELOW: This set of images illustrates the effect of aperture choice on depth-of-field and how it affects the aesthetic quality of an image. Wide apertures work best to separate the subject from the background, while smaller apertures suit images where the entire scene is important.





Pier pressure!

Piers can look unsightly but using a relatively shallow depth-of-field blurs it enough so as to make it an interesting backdrop without being distracting.

Put your skills into practice

AS ALREADY EXPLAINED, you'll find that for the vast majority of shooting situations, you can rely on your camera to give the correct exposure, while there will be times when you'll need to use some control to ensure good results. But what about really tricky shooting situations when scenes boast bright highlights and dark shadows? We encountered such a scenario in an old wood mill, where the very dark interior was punctuated by beams of light through windows and holes in the roof. The high contrast demands that the photographer take control of the exposure. Looking at these images, think about how you might have handled the situation and compare with Brett's method, explained below.



ABOVE & RIGHT: A series of roof lights lets sunlight into this mill. Brett placed Emma close to the blind, using the strong horizontal and vertical lines to aid the composition.



Brett's settings

"Exposure compensation (EC) is key to how I handle very tricky lighting situations like this one. By leaving the camera in program and adjusting EC, I can make changes very quickly. Because I know the subject will be overexposed, I take a test shot with EC at -1EV and check the result on the LCD monitor. Because it's so dark, I'm aware that I need to keep an eye on the shutter speed to avoid shake – raising the ISO rating if need be. With both of these images here, I set exposure compensation at -1.33EV for perfect results."



ABOVE: Brett found setting -1.33EV exposure compensation gave the best results. LEFT & RIGHT: A dark corridor is punctuated by a pool of light coming in through holes in the roof.



Background interest

No point using an interesting location if you can't see it! This window reveals background detail and is an interesting element in itself.

Positioning the subject

For this image to work, the main subject must be perfectly lit. Positioning Emma within the pool of light ensures she's bathed in sunlight.

Exposing to perfection

Whichever metering method you use, ensure that the face is perfectly exposed. This image was taken at 1/100sec at f/3.5 (ISO 400).

Watch for shake

In low-light situations, camera shake is a risk when shooting handheld. Raise the ISO and shoot at wide apertures to minimise the risk.

COMPOSITION

A VITAL PART OF PORTRAITURE RELIES ON GREAT COMPOSITION. IT CAN ADD DYNAMISM, ENERGY AND GIVE A WHOLE NEW TAKE ON AN ORDINARY SNAP. LEARN TO VIEW THE WORLD IN A DIFFERENT WAY, SEEING OPPORTUNITIES WHEREVER YOU MIGHT BE SHOOTING

TAKING GREAT PORTRAITS requires a multitude of skills to be mastered. You've already learned about all aspects of sharpness and exposure, from making sure you're focusing and metering correctly, to ensuring your digital SLR is set up for pin-sharp, well-exposed images every time. Next up, we'll tell you why composition is also a very necessary skill to master.

Get your composition right and you can make a regular image appear much more interesting to the viewer. It's all about noticing details in your location that can add a new dimension to your portraits. Normally when talking about

composition, terms such as the rule-of-thirds and lead-in lines take precedent, but in this section, we also concentrate on how your subject interacts with other elements in the frame and how you can add balance or imbalance for visual effect.

It's a skill that, over time, will become instinctive – as with everything, practice makes perfect. So every time you're taking portraits, be mindful of your surroundings and how they can add something special to your images. As you'll see over the next few pages, there are some key ideas that you should lean on for good results... ●



The basics of good portrait composition

THE ART OF COMPOSITION for the portrait photographer has many factors in common with other forms of photography, including landscapes, but also many differences, too. Fundamentals like the rule-of-thirds and lead-in lines still play a major part in the success of a portrait image, but other more unique considerations also apply. Unlike landscapes, you're in control of the subject and how they relate to the surroundings, and for most forms of portraiture, getting both to work together is key to great results.

Every scenario offers different possibilities and challenges for the photographer, so in this guide we provide a broad overview of the considerations you need to make when shooting portraits. As you'll discover, while close crops of head and shoulders require you to only concentrate on the subject's position in the frame, wider views also require you to determine their position and relationship within their environment.

A question that is commonly posed by newcomers to professional portrait photographers is: 'Where should I position the subject in the image, and how should I crop them in the frame?'

There is no correct answer to this question as there is no right or wrong rule that can be applied, only broad guidelines. Ultimately, a variety of variables ranging from the location to the pose to the purpose of the image will all influence how best you should pose your

subject. The easiest answer we can give is that before the shoot, have some idea of the type of image you want to capture so that once you're on location and your subject is ready, you can put these ideas into practice. However, you should also spend some time changing focal lengths and viewpoints, experimenting with wider shots that include plenty of the scene and tighter images where the head and shoulders, or even only the face, fill the frame.

Try different approaches and regularly review images, working hard on your favourites. While your priority will be your subject, always be aware of elements in the location that can be used to improve the overall composition of the image.

While fashion photographers often include the entire subject in the frame to show off their clothing, the face is relatively small in the frame, so tighter crops are preferable for more general portraits. Take care where you crop the subject – cutting them across the stomach or knee will result in awkward, unbalanced results. Normally, you'll find tighter crops across the hips work well, as do crops across the breast for strong head and shoulder portraits. If you're feeling adventurous, try cropping the top of your subject's head from the frame. While this might sound drastic, it's a commonly used tactic and, whether you're shooting tight head and shoulder shots or wider



ABOVE: Placing your subject centrally in the frame can lead to strong, energetic compositions.

compositions, works to place emphasis on the subject's face.

As with other forms of photography, applying the fundamental rules of composition will usually lead to better portraits. Follow our advice and techniques and you'll soon develop the skills required for perfectly composed portraits.

RULE-OF-THIRDS IN PORTRAITS

THE MOST IMPORTANT aspect of portrait composition is the rule-of-thirds, which involves placing the key focal point in the most suitable area of the frame to give the most balanced and impactful results. It's a simple concept to understand: visualise the image area split by two horizontal and two vertical lines equal distance apart. Where the lines intersect is generally regarded as the strongest position in which to place the main point of interest.

If you're shooting close-ups of the face or head and shoulder crops, the recognised way to go is to ensure that you focus on one of the subject's eyes and then ensure the image is composed so that the eye sits on one of the two upper intersections of thirds. When shooting full-length and three-quarter shots, the face is usually placed on or close to one of the intersections. This is the general rule and works well the majority of the time, but remember it's a guideline and not set in stone – as you'll discover, breaking this basic rule of composition can often deliver brilliant results, too. So use it, but

ABOVE RIGHT: The sofa leads the eye through the frame towards the subject, who is positioned on the lower left third of the frame.



always look for the potential to try out alternative compositions, too.

The most obvious way to break the traditional rules of composition is to place your subject slap-bang in the centre of the image frame. Forget thirds and intersections

– setting your subject so that they dominate the middle of your image can work a treat in certain situations. When taking portraits, experiment with the position of your subject in the frame, capture a series of images that you can study and learn from later on.



Be bold with composition!

Rules are meant to be broken, so don't be afraid to try out radical ideas like cropping part of your subject out of the frame.

LEAD-IN LINES

USING LINES TO lead the viewer's eye into the scene is very popular for landscape and architectural photographers, and has its place within portraiture, too. Both the shape of the subject and elements within their surroundings can be used individually or together to act as lead-in lines.

It's common practice when the subject's body fills the frame to position the arms and legs so that their shape and angle draw the viewer's gaze into the frame. Therefore, as well as ensuring the subject's pose is natural and relaxed, look to see how the position of the limbs can work as lead-in lines. This technique is particularly popular when shooting nudes, as the shape and form of the human body can be manipulated to lead the eye around the image.

When the subject shares much of the frame with the location, look for elements within the frame that can help lead the eye towards your chosen point of focus. Some are obvious to find, such as railings, walls and patterns on the road, others can be more subtle, such as shadows, staircases, textures in the backdrop or clever use of shallow depth-of-field to influence the viewer's attention towards the main point of focus.



● LEAD-IN LINES IN AN URBAN SCENE

Lead-in lines often work best when they're subtle, subconsciously leading the viewer's eye into the frame, so it's worth quickly checking your location for potential lead-ins. Take a look at these two images taken in the same location for an example of how employing lead-in lines adds depth and extra visual interest to the image.

- 1)** This is a perfectly good portrait – bright and colourful with an interesting backdrop. However, it is a little two-dimensional.
- 2)** By asking the subject to lean against the wall and adopting a slightly lower viewpoint, the railings above and behind the subject, along with the wall on which she leans, both help lead the eye towards the subject while adding depth to the image.

Pro insight

BRETT HARKNESS

"When you want to force the viewer's eye towards the subject, lead-in lines are a great compositional tool. They're ideal for environmental portraits where your subject is quite small in the frame. I personally like using diagonal lead-in lines with landscape-format images, especially if breaking the rules by, say, placing the subject in the middle of the frame. You'll find lead-in lines everywhere, with staircases, cars and floorboards being among my favourites!"



Steps to success
The strong lines of each of these stairs draw the viewer's eye towards the subject.

BACKGROUNDS

LOCATION SHOTS WORK so well for the reason that pretty much any background can be used for portraiture. While some backdrops are more suitable than others, the simple truth is that any can be used. The best photographers can work anywhere and take great images, often shooting in locations like junkyards or derelict buildings where you'd not dream to venture, yet using the unique character of the scene to complement the portraits and add to their success. By controlling the lighting, composition, viewpoint and camera settings – in particular apertures – you can determine how prominent or subtle it is integrated into the image. Therefore, when considering the background, do it from the point of view of how it can be used to help add to the final image, rather than being concerned about whether it will ruin it.



● USE AN INTERESTING BACKDROP

Pretty much every location offers the potential for an interesting backdrop. Using a little imagination, you can make the most of interesting textures and patterns to add appeal to your portraits.

- 1) Our first 'test' shot reveals Emma in front of a poorly maintained wall with broken plaster, revealing the brickwork behind.
- 2) By asking Emma to place her hand on her hip, the shape of her arm mirrors that of the broken plaster behind her, with the crack running from the top of the frame also providing a lead-in.
- 3) An alternative is to crop in tighter on Emma, including the texture to a lesser extent but emphasising the number 4 at Emma's eye-level.

Pro insight

BRETT HARKNESS

"I learned long ago that anything can be used as a backdrop, which is why I never take backdrops with me. Skips, rusty doors, staircases... You name it, I've used it as a background. It's important to understand the relationship of subject and backdrop. The closer you have the subject to the backdrop, the more the background becomes part of the image. The further they are from each other, the more the backdrop becomes a texture rather than a point of interest."

COLOUR IN COMPOSITION

THE USE OF COLOUR in the frame plays an important part in the success of your portrait photography, so it's an element of your composition you need to pay attention to. Primary colours, in particular red, dominate the image so must be used with greatest care. Even when taking up only a very small area of a frame, red will grab the viewer's attention – if you are including it in your image, aim to make the most of its strength. Various colours contrast and complement each other, so their relationship and placement within the frame is important and shouldn't be left to chance. In many circumstances, it's best to limit the number of colours within the frame, so have subjects wear plain rather than patterned garments and choose locations that won't detract from the subject. Of course, there are exceptions to the rule – brightly coloured clothes with patterned, striped and spotty prints are perfect for photographs of children as they add energy to images. The easiest way to learn, as always, is to spend time trying different scenarios and colour combinations and review images to see which work best or worst and understand why. Start with monotone backgrounds and slowly introduce colour via clothing, then head to more colourful locations and again experiment with wardrobe choices. You'll soon understand the influence colour has on your image and how you can use it for best effect.

Passing with flying colours: Each of these images owe their success to the use of colours in the composition. Red is eye-catching and dominant, as is the warm glow of sunset. Colour works well too when you marry two or more objects with similar tones in the frame.



Pro insight

BRETT HARKNESS

"I used to shoot extensively in black & white and was questioned on returning from India with nothing but mono images why I didn't shoot colour. On my next trip, I went with 'colour vision' in mind and it opened my eyes to the possibilities. While colour can add impact it can be too much at times, so be careful with how you use it. I aim to have colours in the scene either contrast or complement my subject. I usually look for backgrounds first, then have the subject wear clothes that work well with it. Sometimes it's the other way round; for instance, with a red-haired subject I'll look for a green backdrop. The best way to learn is to try out colour combinations for yourself!"

SHOOT AT A SLANT

A TECHNIQUE THAT has proven incredibly popular in recent years, in particular with lifestyle, wedding and fashion photographers, is shooting portraits with the camera tilted at an angle. While this technique may sound a little odd, images taken when the camera is tilted rather than held perfectly vertical or horizontal can often add energy and visual friction to portraits.

The principle behind this technique is as simple as it sounds – compose the image as you would normally do, then slightly tilt the camera either clockwise or anti-clockwise so that the scene is slanted in the frame. How far you slant the camera is personal preference, but go too far and the results won't look good. You'll usually find between 15° and 25° is about right, but as there's no hard and fast rule you should experiment to see what angle works best.

This technique can be used whenever you fancy but works particularly well when the backdrop has strong lines running through it, as the diagonal lines add energy to the overall image. This is why you'll often find lifestyle photographers shooting portraits with the subject against metal shutter doors – the added visual interest works a treat.

A word of warning: use this technique in moderation. If used too often you'll find the impact of its effect is reduced.



Pro insight

BRETT HARKNESS “Angling the camera is a popular technique for adding energy to images and is also ideal to soften horizontal lines passing through a subject's head. However, it's used by many to disguise a poorly composed image. If you imagine the digits on a clock face, when angling the camera, I tilt it to either ten-to, ten-past, twenty-to or twenty-past, with the shutter button at 12 o'clock. While I used to regularly shoot at an angle, I use this technique far less frequently now.”



HOW TO USE HORIZONTAL LINES

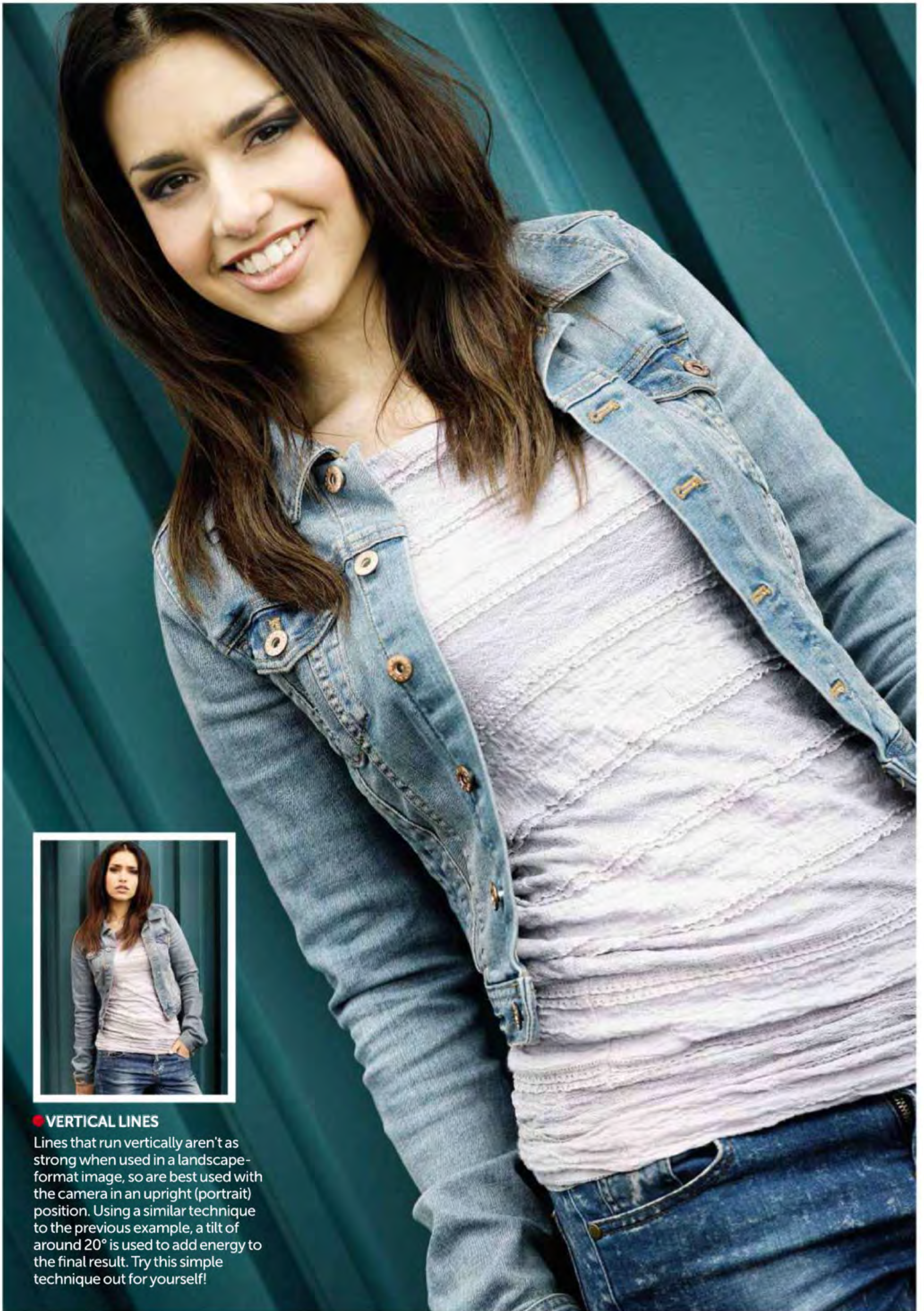
1) Even this straight composition is effective, with the pattern of straight lines perfectly horizontal and Emma placed along the right-hand third.

2) Shifting the composition so that Emma is dead centre of the frame and moving in for a tighter crop improves on the original frame and is an example of when not following the rule-of-thirds can lead to a more dramatic composition.

3) However, all those horizontal lines are crying out to be used to add dynamism and energy to the image. By recomposing the image so Emma's to the left and tilting the camera, the image suddenly has more energy and visual impact. However, the tilt of 45° is too much.

4) Adjusting the tilt to closer to 20° produces a better effect with the lines providing a strong visual lead-in to the subject; the tilt doesn't prove so overpowering.





● **VERTICAL LINES**

Lines that run vertically aren't as strong when used in a landscape-format image, so are best used with the camera in an upright (portrait) position. Using a similar technique to the previous example, a tilt of around 20° is used to add energy to the final result. Try this simple technique out for yourself!

NEGATIVE SPACE

IT'S A PERFECTLY natural assumption to think that filling the frame with your subject adds to its impact. It usually does, but that's not to say you have to do it all the time. A popular alternative is to allow much of your frame to remain empty, or as it's more commonly termed, filled with negative space. Contrary to what you might think, an image boasting lots of negative space can actually provide more rather than less emphasis on your subject. Because so much of the frame lacks anything of visual interest, the viewer's eye is instinctively drawn towards your subject. You can easily create empty space by throwing the background out of focus, but a better technique is to use a background that features a single colour. The technique works particularly well when the image is landscape format and the subject is to one side of the frame. It's also particularly effective when the amount of negative space takes up around twice as much area as the subject; in other words, the subject occupies one-third of the area and negative space two-thirds. One other important note is to make sure your subject is looking directly at the camera or towards the negative space – if they are looking out of the frame, the effect is greatly weakened.

As with the rule-of-thirds, you can twist this technique and add an additional element that invades the negative space to provide a touch of visual conflict. By having this extra visual element occupy only a small portion of the frame, it provides an intrigue factor for the viewer rather than proving a distraction. It's a technique that needs to be fine-tuned but once you get the hang of it, you'll soon spot everyday subjects from flower pots to cars that can occupy a small part of the frame.



USING NEGATIVE SPACE

In the following step-by-step guide, we see how including negative space offers an alternative approach to standard portraits.

- 1) Taken close to a large doorway, this portrait is strong in its own right.**
- 2) Slanting the camera, as explained earlier, adds energy but doesn't quite work here.**
- 3) A wider viewpoint includes negative space and give more emphasis to the fantastic textures of the flaky paint.**
- 4) Switching to a landscape format provides far better balance. We could stop here, but decide to experiment further.**
- 5) Including an object on the right side brings further visual interest, with the vertical slats of the wooden palette contrasting well with the brickwork.**

Pro insight

BRETT HARKNESS

"When using negative space, I always shoot in landscape-format as vertical images aren't nearly as effective. From a commercial point of view, I include negative space with a view to how my images will be printed for clients. For instance, if going into albums, negative space allows the seam to run through the image without dissecting the subject. It's also ideal for magazines that want to run full-bleed images with text on. Weathered walls like the type in this image are ideal for negative space, but my favourite is a stormy sky."





DAYLIGHT CONTROL

ONE OF THE TRICKIEST ASPECTS TO MANIPULATE IS DAYLIGHT. IF YOU'RE SHOOTING PORTRAITS OUTDOORS, SOME CLEVER ACCESSORIES WILL HELP YOU OVERCOME THE ISSUES THAT DAYLIGHT CAN PRESENT. HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW...

The versatility and accessibility of daylight makes it a wonderful source of lighting for portraits, whether used on its own or along with artificial light sources such as flash. The fact that the characteristics of daylight varies depending on factors including the weather, the time of day and your location means that you need to know how to manipulate and control daylight to your advantage in order to produce the best possible results.

The easiest way to do this is through the use of reflectors and diffusers. These inexpensive and versatile lighting accessories are indispensable and every portrait photographer should own some. We've used a selection of aids in this guide to illustrate how their use can make a major difference to the quality of light in your images. If you're serious about taking up portrait photography, place lighting aids at the top of your kit wishlist. ●



The basics of daylight portraits

AS HOBBIES AND pastimes go, photography is one of the more expensive choices, what with cameras, lenses, accessories and travel potentially burning a hole in the pocket. Therefore, it's refreshing to know that one of the very best elements to great photography is free to use. We're talking about daylight, of course – that natural resource that is overlooked or underused by so many, yet which provides a day's worth of illumination and inspiration every day of the year. Daylight offers so much potential for the portrait photographer and is unique in the sense that while it can be used and manipulated to your needs, you're never

completely in control. While you can set the power and position of a flashgun, you have no such control over the sun, so to make the most of ambient light, you must understand its characteristics and how best you can harness available light for your portrait photography. While much of this is through the use of reflectors and diffusers, first you need to know how the various forms of daylight each have their own characteristics, challenges and benefits. So before looking at how to use lighting aids, we'll first cover the main types of daylight that you'll encounter so that you know what to do when shooting in these types of conditions.



● DIRECT SUNLIGHT

It's a common misconception that bright sunshine is the best lighting for portraits – in fact, it's probably the most difficult to get decent results with. The strong directional nature of sunlight means that portraits taken in sunlit conditions usually suffer from one of a number of problems. When the sun is behind the photographer and the subject faces the light, subjects tend to squint and harsh shadows can be cast around the nose and neck. With the sun behind the subject, flare is a real problem, as is exposure, with subjects often underexposed due to the high contrast. You can use direct daylight to purposely create harsh lighting with strong shadows for dramatic effect, but it's a tough skill to master. As we'll discover later, the easiest way to capture great images in strong sunlight is through the use of diffusers.

1) Shooting from a shaded area reduces the risk of flare spoiling your shot.

2) Take care when shooting in direct sunlight and use strong shadows for visual interest.



White Balance



The White Balance setting determines the colour reproduction of your images. Most amateurs and many professionals leave their cameras set to Auto White Balance rather than set it to specific lighting conditions. AWB works well, so amateurs are usually satisfied with the results. Professionals often aren't concerned about White Balance at the picture-taking stage as they are shooting in Raw, so can select the best WB setting when processing images. We'd recommend whenever possible that you select the WB preset to match the conditions, even if shooting in Raw, as the image on the monitor screen that you're reviewing gives a good representation of tonal reproduction.

Pro insight

BRETT HARKNESS ON... WHITE BALANCE

"I completely understand the reasons behind setting the WB preset to suit the conditions, or making WB changes to Raw files in post-production. However, I've developed my own style of shooting with JPEGs and that involves leaving the camera set to Auto White Balance (AWB). My Canon EOS cameras are very accurate when it comes to colour reproduction and I've very rarely had any problems. That said, there are a few times I would take it off AWB. Sometimes I'm shooting in scenes where the primary lighting is tungsten, with some daylight, too, in which case I'll take a custom WB reading. The other main time is in winter, when the ambient light can have a very cool colour temperature, when I'll set WB to Shade or Cloudy to warm up the images."

● WARM SUNLIGHT

While the colour temperature of light varies according to the season, it's the time of day where its effect is most noticeable, in particular in the latter hour of the day when light is very warm and ideal for atmospheric portraits. The golden hour around sunset is a landscape photographer's favourite period, but it's also wonderful for portraits, too, with skin taking on an attractive glow as well as the chance to backlight hair with the sun's orb. Reflectors are very useful aids at this time of the day! If you're looking to add mood and romance to your portraits, then you could do far worse than to wait until the golden hour when the warmth of light bathing your subject and the wonderful golden backdrop provides the perfect conditions. It's no surprise sunsets are so popular with wedding photographers!



SHADE

It may surprise you to discover that shade is a wonderful choice for shooting portraits. Light is very soft and nondirectional, leading to supple skin tones and a low contrast that prevents burnt-out highlights or deep shadows. That said, you will usually need to use at least one reflector when shooting in shade, as the light can be incredibly flat, potentially leading to dull results. Angling a reflector to inject some light, therefore, can help reveal shape and form in facial contours. One thing you'll need to learn with shade is understanding where the light source originates – while indirect, there is a subtle direction to shaded light, so knowing its source helps you best position the subject.

1) Our model, Emma, poses against an unusual metallic backdrop in a corner of a mill's yard. The potential for an interesting portrait is spoiled by dim, flat lighting.

2) The introduction of a Lastolite Soft Silver reflector fills in shadows and reveals details for a far more pleasing result.



Pro insight

BRETT HARKNESS ON... THE WONDERS OF SHADE & CLOUD

"I'll regularly use shaded areas, in particular contained shade, such as passageways and doorways. The sunlight bouncing off surfaces provides a flattering and fairly nondirectional light, with concrete pavement giving the best reflectance. My favourite technique, which I use with kids and brides, is to place them about 3ft from a doorway – the light here is fantastic. It's worth roaming locations close to home for possible shaded sites. There is a car park near mine with corrugated metal walls that offers amazing light in its shade. When shooting in shade, I'll often walk around subjects and ask them to turn towards me, until I find the best light to shoot from. Using a reflector helps bounce a little extra light on the subject, while also adding an attractive catchlight to the eyes.

"When there is a lot of cloud cover, I'd recommend you look to the sky to see where the light is coming from. Even when it's very overcast, you can still see the brightest area, so position your subject so that they're facing in that direction. I love shooting outdoors on cloudy days – the effect it gives is like a giant softbox and there are no hassles with highlights. When it's very overcast, I'll look for white walls as these reflect a surprising amount of light. Reflectors prove very useful even in such diffused conditions, with a Sunfire surface being my favourite type."

Other lighting situations



● DAPPLED LIGHT

Light passing through trees and vegetation creates dappled patterns on the surfaces they reach, which can be used to your advantage. Place your subject near a backdrop that has dappled patterns and use a reflector to remove the effect from your subject to produce a clean portrait light, or include shadows for creative effect.



● INDOOR AMBIENT LIGHT

It's worth remembering that daylight isn't restricted to outdoor locations – it can be used indoors whether your subject is placed in the centre of a room or close to a window. There are a variety of techniques you can do to get the best from available light indoors – try our step-by-step guide on page 48.



CLOUDY CONDITIONS

Cloud is a portrait photographer's friend, diffusing sunlight to reduce or remove shadows and providing a nondirectional light that is ideal for portraits. Days with lots of fluffy white clouds are the trickiest to work in as the light is constantly changing, while very overcast days present the problem of lower light levels. Mildly overcast days are ideal, providing reasonably bright but diffused lighting that rarely changes. You won't need a diffuser when shooting on your average overcast day as the cloud cover acts as the perfect softbox. However, keep those reflectors close by as, just like shade, they'll still prove very handy!

1) Cloud cover provides an attractive diffused light but can leave faint shadows on the face while also making colours and skin tones appear a little flat.

2) Using a larger metallic reflector placed low and close to the subject boosts colours and subtly adds warmth to the scene for a far more pleasing result. We used the Zebra/White reflector by California Sunbounce, which while injecting some warmth, doesn't add the full glare of a gold surface.



Choosing and using lighting aids

They're not glamorous by any means, but lighting aids are a mainstay in the portrait photographer's arsenal of tools. While being relatively inexpensive, reflectors and diffusers make a major difference to how light falls on your subject. Here are the basic facts and techniques you need to get to grips with when using lighting aids

REFLECTORS

IF YOU DON'T ALREADY own a reflector, then hang your head in shame. These versatile lighting aids can make or break a portrait, are as suitable on location as they are in a studio and can be used with daylight, flash or studioflash. There are various types available (see panel below for details) in all shapes, sizes and reflective finishes to suit different uses and all of your photographic needs. In this guide, we provide an overview of the basic ways you can use reflectors in daylight, but as you'll discover over the coming months, these highly affordable aids offer incredible versatility in a variety of lighting situations.

If you're looking for your first reflector, then we'd recommend you consider a low-cost, high-quality 5-in-1 kit. These can be had for under £10 in some cases – see the panel below for details. For anyone just starting out taking portraits, these kits represent the best value, boasting a translucent disc that can be used as a diffuser, along with a reversible sleeve that offers silver, gold, white and black surfaces, covering everything you'll need in a reflector.

As you'll discover, it's incredibly easy to use a reflector. All you have to do is angle it towards your subject to bounce light towards them. However, a reflector can be a



Reflectors come in all shapes and sizes

crude instrument, so it's worthwhile taking the time to understand how reflectors work and what they can do for your images so that they improve rather than degrade the quality of your portraits. To really make the most of reflectors, it's important to understand how various factors, such as the distance to your subject, different lighting conditions and the colour of the reflective surfaces all strongly influence the intensity and colour of the light falling on the subject.

Different photographers have their own preferences as to which reflector they enjoy using most, so there is no definitive answer. However, there are some guidelines you can follow that will help you make the right choice (see panel below).

Pro insight

BRETT HARKNESS ON... SHOOTING IN SUNLIGHT

"In direct sunlight, I'll generally always have the sun behind the subject and expose for the face. I'll almost always use a Lastolite Sunfire/Soft Silver reflector to fill in shadows. On very sunny days, I'll use a white/silver reflector and aim it down to bounce the light off the ground, as this gives an effect that is cooler and more flattering than direct reflectance. I'll never use solid gold or silver as I find its effect too obvious. When shooting in sunlight, I expose for the highlights and avoid having the subject look towards me as they'll be squinting. I'll often use this technique at weddings – using sunshine as a background makes it more of a fashion shot than a standard portrait. I don't use diffusers that often, but they are useful when shooting in open areas with no shade. While there are large, expensive options available, I find a diffuser panel from an inexpensive 5-in-1 kit fine for tight head and shoulder crops."

Which type of reflector is best?



● ROUND COLLAPSIBLE REFLECTORS

By far the most popular due to their low price (prices start under £15) and choice of reflective finishes. They're available in different sizes with 80cm and above being the best choice for portraits. Those on a budget may want to consider the 5-in-1 kits made up of a diffuser disc and reflective sleeve with four colour options. One such model made by budget brand Neewer comes in at less than £10 for its 110cm (43in) 5-in-1 kit – who can argue with that?



● GRIP REFLECTORS

If you're regularly shooting solo, a reflector with a handle makes life so much easier. The biggest range is the TriGrip series by Lastolite, which pioneered this type of reflector. For portraits, a medium size (around 75cm) is a good choice, although the wider coverage of larger sizes is preferable if you can afford one. Those on a strict budget should check out bargain brands from the likes of CowboyStudio and Neewer – both offer great value for money products.



● FRAMED REFLECTORS

Expensive, but the ultimate in size and versatility. They are usually handheld, but dedicated booms are also available that allow you to angle them to your needs. California Sunbounce and Lastolite are the two main brands, each offering an excellent choice of options. For most, the small or medium sizes should be suitable. They're very well made and offer a wide range of reflective finishes – just be prepared to pay upwards of £150 for decent kits!

Different reflector colours

More important than the type of reflector is the colour of the reflective surface. As well as influencing the colour of the light being reflected back on to the subject, the reflector's finish also determines its efficiency – or, in other words, the intensity and range of the reflected light. Here we cover the most common reflective finishes.



● WHITE REFLECTORS

Less efficient than metallic finishes, meaning they must be placed closer to the subject to have an effect. It makes them a good choice in strong sunlight if you're able to use them close to the subject without intruding on the image area. The light they bounce is softer, too, so they do produce a very flattering effect, filling in shadows and adding a pleasant sheen to skin texture. The subject's eyes benefit from a nice catchlight without the side effect of squinting.

● METALLIC SURFACES

These bounce light much further than white, making them a better choice if the subject is some distance away or when working in overcast light. When used in shade or on very cloudy days, metallic finishes can bounce a remarkable amount of light back on to your subject. However, because they are so efficient, they can be overpowering in sunlight if used too close to the subject, so greater care must be taken. Also, the strong hotspot on their surface is more likely to cause your subject to squint if they're in their line of sight. Silver is by far the most popular metallic choice, providing a very clean and bright effect. Used at the right distance, its effect can really lift tones and bathe subjects in a very clean, neutral light. Gold has a similar efficiency to silver but produces a warm effect similar to light just before sunset. It's ideal if you are shooting in shade and the colour temperature is cool, or when you want to replicate warm evening light, but it's a colour you must take care with as it can be overpowering and create very artificial results.

If you want to add an injection of colour into the light you bounce, the best option is to go for a hybrid-reflective colour such as Sunfire. These have been developed to provide a high-efficiency reflective light that adds warmth to subject's skin tones that are more natural and less intense than gold. You'll find a variety of these hybrid-metallic finishes generally based around different mixes of gold and silver.



DIFFUSERS

ALTHOUGH NOT AS commonly used as reflectors, diffusers are an important and useful lighting aid when you are working in harsh lighting conditions, such as in strong directional sunlight. Diffusers are made of translucent material and placed between the light source and the subject. As well as reducing the amount of light reaching the subject, the diffuser softens the light so that they are bathed in a soft, flattering light and free of shadows. Diffusers come in various efficiencies that determine their light-stopping capabilities, with 2/3 to 1.5 stops being the most popular. The larger the diffuser panel, the easier it is to ensure the entire subject is under cover of diffused light, although in windy conditions they are more difficult to hold steady. If you're on a tight budget, the collapsible disc in a 5-in-1 reflector kit is suitable for use, although its relatively small size limits the area it can throw into shade.



● USING A DIFFUSER IN HARSH LIGHT

You're less likely to use diffusers than reflectors, but they're ideal aids when you want to shoot on location on very bright, sunny days.

- 1) Place your subject facing the sun and this is the result – unsightly shadows across the face and dark sockets where the eyes should be!
- 2) Placing a diffuser panel so it sits between the light source (the sun) and the subject results in a far more pleasant and flattering result.



Recommended diffusers



● DISC IN 5-IN-1 REFLECTOR KIT

www.amazon.co.uk

The cheapest diffuser you can buy. Its small size makes it suitable for smaller subjects like kids or for head and shoulder shots of adults. The diffuser material cuts out a fair amount of light, but in very bright conditions this shouldn't be a problem. You can pick up a Neewer 5-in-1 kit for under £10 – bargain!



● CALIFORNIA SUNBOUNCE SUN-SWATTER

www.sunbounce.com

A firm favourite with pros, this is one of the most expensive aluminium frame diffusers on the market but also the most durable. Available in three sizes (1.2x0.9m, 1.82x1.22m and 2.44x1.83m) with a choice of fabrics, the frame can be fitted with a boom, allowing it to be held at height above the subject. Kits start at around £250.



● LASTOLITE TRIGRIP DIFFLECTOR

www.lastolite.com

A handy dual-purpose reflector panel with moulded handle that can be used as a 2.3-stop diffuser or bounce reflector (Soft Silver or Soft Gold). Available in three sizes (18in, 30in and 45in), these offer a useful all-in-one option. Prices start at under £50. If you're regularly shooting on your own, the fact it has a handle makes using it far easier.

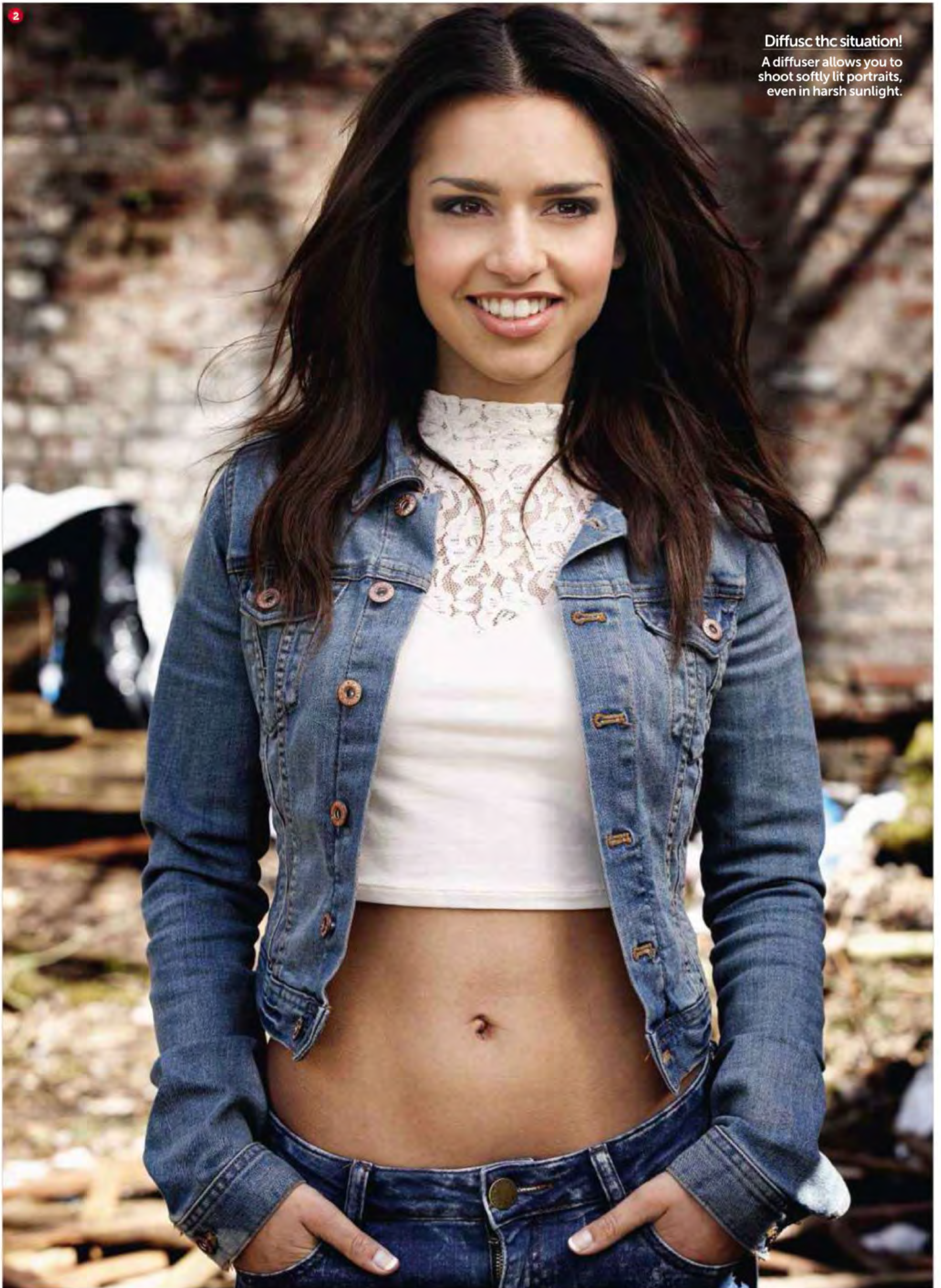


● LASTOLITE SKYLITE RAPID

www.lastolite.com

A popular choice with pros, the Skylite Rapid is made up of a lightweight aluminium frame with interchangeable fabrics. Choose between a 0.75 or 1.25-stop diffuser or a diffflector finish with 2.3-stop diffuser and choice of reflective surfaces. Available in three sizes: small (1.1x1.1m), medium (1.1x2m) and large (2x2m), from around £100.

2



Diffuse the situation!
A diffuser allows you to shoot softly lit portraits, even in harsh sunlight.

Keep it simple and use daylight

Daniel Lezano shows how – with a few little tricks to make the most of the daylight – you can create fantastic lifestyle shots in your own home...



DANIEL LEZANO: Many leading lifestyle portrait photographers use nothing more than ambient daylight for the vast majority of their portrait shoots. So, when we have the benefits of bright, sunny days at our disposal, we should use it to capture some simple yet effective portraits of family and friends. The best thing about shooting lifestyle portraits is that you can do it with the minimum amount of equipment – your DSLR or CSC with a kit lens is enough, although I'm using my favourite optic, the humble (and cheap!) 50mm f/1.8 lens. Due to the unpredictable nature of daylight, lighting aids such as a reflector and a diffuser can come in handy, too, but aren't essential. The key thing to remember is that you want to capture a 'clean' image: in other words, try to keep the subject and the setting as simple as possible. I've opted for the classic combination of having my subject, Bethany, wear a white top and jeans, and shot her lying on my dining room's laminate flooring.

Shoot at a slant

One compositional trick that most lifestyle photographers apply to their images is to slant the camera so that the images are captured with an uneven horizon. This simple technique adds a little energy into the image and is very effective – just take care not to tilt the camera too far.



1 Setting up My dining room is quite small, so I've had to clear it completely of furniture. As my subject will be lying on the floor, I vacuum it to ensure it's as clean as possible. Due to the cramped space, I open the patio doors in case I need to shoot from the patio. However, I'll start by shooting from within the room and use the white walls as a neutral backdrop. Using a wide aperture to give a shallow depth-of-field is ideal for this type of shot and I'll be trying out my 50mm's maximum aperture of f/1.8, although I'll take most of the images at f/2.5-3.5 as it will improve sharpness.

Diffused daylight

For flattering portraits, the light should be as diffused as possible to avoid your model squinting in direct sunlight or having the light on their face too harsh. In this instance, try to reposition them so they're in the shade or use a diffuser to shade the scene (inset right). If neither of these work, you may need to wait until the sun's position changes or shoot when the sky is more overcast. A silver reflector is handy, even when shooting in non-directional light, to fill in shadows.



2 Test shot My first frame is just to test composition and exposure. I've a clear idea of the type of shot I'm looking to get with Bethany lying down with her lower legs and feet bent back towards her head. This shot isn't bad, but the side-lighting causes her right side to be too dark.



3 Use a reflector I place a silver reflector to Bethany's right, just out of frame, and it makes a noticeable difference; bouncing back enough light to even out the light on her face. The lighting's better, but the wall behind causes the whole scene to appear a little too cramped for my liking.



FOCUS WITH CARE!

You need to ensure your focusing is precise, as using a wide aperture – which gives limited depth-of-field – leaves little margin for error. Select single-point AF, lock the focus on the eye and recompose

Final image

My next shot is perfect and all I need to do is apply minimal post-production. I've boosted the contrast in Curves and cropped the image slightly to give me the result I set out to shoot. Give it a try – you'll be surprised just how easy it is to shoot a great lifestyle portrait at home.



4 Change backgrounds I shift Bethany and my position so that I'm now shooting into the room from the patio. I close the blinds in the room behind to darken the background. The empty space created behind her is an improvement over the original set-up, but my viewpoint is too high.



5 Different viewpoint I crouch down and the lower viewpoint is far better. However, the multi-zone meter has bleached Bethany's face due to the dark background causing it to overexpose the scene. To correct this, I dial in negative exposure compensation. I find $-2/3EV$ is ideal.

CHILD PORTRAITS

PORTRAITURE IS ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR TYPES OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND ALSO ONE OF THE MOST EXCITING AND FLUID, AS NEW STYLES AND TECHNIQUES ARE DEVELOPED AND INTRODUCED BY INNOVATORS IN THE FIELD. PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER BRETT HARKNESS HAS BUILT A STRONG REPUTATION AS ONE OF THE UK'S MOST CREATIVE PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHERS AND IN THIS GUIDE, HE SHARES SOME OF HIS FAVOURITE TECHNIQUES FOR CAPTURING WONDERFUL CONTEMPORARY LIFESTYLE PORTRAITS OF CHILDREN



How to shoot baby portraits

The ups and downs, techniques and tools for photographing those special bundles of joy

THE ARRIVAL OF A new baby is one of those special moments in life that any proud parent will want to capture and cherish. Before you know it they will be walking and talking, and those first months will be confined to memory. Babies stay small for a surprisingly short period of time, so take a moment to capture the details while they are tiny. Concentrate on hands, feet and facial features, such as their eyes, ears and nose, using a wide aperture to isolate the details. A nice touch is including the parents in some of these shots to give a sense of scale – for example, the baby gripping Mum or Dad's finger, or holding the baby's foot in their hands as our step-by-step over the page shows. You'll need patience, understanding and a bit of luck on your side, but persevere and you can capture some great images.

● WORKING WITH BABIES

When photographing babies, patience is a valuable asset. Rarely will you get the shot you want when you want it. Come prepared with a bank of different ideas and be prepared to change direction at any moment; very often, your session will not go to plan. Ultimately, the shoot will be dictated by the baby's mood, temperature, whether they are hungry, tired or need changing. Sometimes you feel like you are along for the ride, and the truth of it is, you are. The best you can do is be prepared, patient and work quickly within the baby's schedule.

Top tip

To keep the baby, or babies, comfortable, crank up the room temperature and avoid draughty areas. It's popular to photograph babies semi or fully naked, but check with the parents first to make sure that they are happy for you to do this.



Two in a bed...
Twins present an interesting challenge but can lead to some great results.

Choosing the correct lens



Prime lens: A 50mm prime lens is a must-have for any portrait photographer. The Canon EF 50mm f/1.8 II or original

Nikon NIKKOR 50mm f/1.8D AF can be picked up for £100, whereas the newer Nikon NIKKOR AF-S 50mm f/1.8G comes in at £150. For a little bit more, consider the £370 Sigma 50mm f/1.4 EX DG HSM, which allows you to shoot handheld in very low light. Prime lenses with large maximum apertures allow you to achieve a shallow depth-of-field, ideal for baby portraits.



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Zoom lens: A zoom lens is more versatile than a prime lens as you're not restricted to a single focal length, but if you want a high-quality optic with a large maximum aperture, equivalent to a prime lens, be prepared to part with some serious cash. The Canon EF 24-70mm f/2.8L is a popular choice but costs around £1,800. The £380 Tamron 28-75mm f/2.8 XR Di LD is a good alternative, but you can still get good results using your 18-55mm or 18-105mm kit lens; you'll just lack the extreme shallow depth-of-field.



JORDAN BUTTERS



ISTOCKPHOTO



Wide-angle lens: You can capture some really fun shots with a wide-angle lens, but you need to be careful because it can stretch perspective, which isn't very flattering for portraits. The £370 Sigma 10-20mm f/4-5.6 EX DC HSM is a popular choice and is available to fit most cameras. Other options include the Canon EF-S 10-22mm f/3.5-4.5 USM at £550 and the £640 Nikon AF-S DX NIKKOR 10-24mm f/3.5-4.5G ED. All three offer a 24cm minimum focusing distance, so allow you to get nice and close to your subject.



JORDAN BUTTERS

My baby portrait...



Jordan Butters: Photographing babies is best suited to soft, diffused lighting conditions. If you are using window light, try to position both parent and child near a large north- or south-facing window to avoid direct sunlight. If necessary, use a reflector to bounce some light back onto the baby to fill in shadows. If you can't avoid direct light then you can use net curtains or hang some muslin or a bed sheet in front of the window to soften the light. Alternatively, some reflectors double up as diffusers, too. Avoid using on-camera flash if possible – however, if this is unavoidable, bounce the flash off a wall or ceiling.

Remember when shooting at wide apertures that your band of focus is very narrow, making it easy to miss your mark, especially if the baby moves and kicks their feet. Pick your moment and be prepared to take several shots before you get your final image.



1 Position the baby Babies tend to kick and wriggle when they are awake, so asking for the help of a parent or friend to occupy their attention is often a good idea, allowing you the freedom to concentrate on getting the shot. For this image, I asked baby George's mother to sit back with him in her lap, cupping his feet in her hands. Not only did being in his mother's arms put him at ease and stop him from moving about too much, it also helped create a sense of scale between her hands and his feet.



2 Experiment with apertures Using aperture-priority mode, select a wide aperture and single-point autofocus in order to selectively focus on the area of interest before recomposing the shot. Choose too wide an aperture and you run the risk of not getting both feet in focus; too small and the background could become distracting. I chose a final aperture of $f/2.8$ here, which allowed me to get both feet in focus while achieving a shallow depth-of-field, rendering the background nicely out of focus.



3 Be careful of the exposure As I wanted a low-key image, I asked George's mum to wear a dark top, which acted as the backdrop to the shot. If you choose multi-zone metering, the camera will try to compensate for the dark background, overexposing the image. If this happens, you can dial in a touch of negative exposure compensation to correct it, or use spot metering to take an exposure reading from the baby's skin, ensuring that the most important areas are metered for.



4 Finishing touches Use a Gradient Map in Photoshop to convert the image to black and white. In the Layers palette, click on the **Add new adjustment layer** button and select **Gradient Map**. In the Adjustments palette, choose the **black to white** gradient. You can alter the strength of the gradient to adjust the dark, mid-tone and light areas of the image independently. The mono conversion should hide most skin blemishes, but I also use the Healing Brush Tool to tidy up any remaining marks that are a distraction.

Baby details: More great ideas to try



ISTOCK PHOTO

● Try using props

Props are very on-trend in baby photography at present. Hats are a popular choice – not only do babies look adorable in them, but they can also help to disguise a misshapen head or patchy hair, common issues with newborns. Also consider sitting or laying the baby in items that add interest to your shots, such as a basket or an old vintage suitcase.



JORDAN BUTTERS

● Differential focusing

Try switching focus between two points from the same viewpoint by aiming at the area you wish to be in focus and half-depressing the shutter button before recomposing the shot. Use a wide aperture for a shallow depth-of-field. The results can be combined as a diptych to display both the baby's portrait and a detail shot in the same frame.



ISTOCK PHOTO

● Background

The best solution is often a soft blanket or throw draped over a settee for the baby to lay on. You could choose to inject some bold colour by laying them on a bright throw. Use cushions as support under the blanket, or ask one of the parents to sit with the blanket on their lap, so they can support the baby. A newborn's skin is sensitive, so choose a soft fabric.



JORDAN BUTTERS

● Include the parents

Remember to include the parents by gathering the family together to fuss over the child. People can quickly forget you are there when they are cooing over the new baby, allowing you to get some fantastic natural shots of the family together. Alternatively, try a wide-angle lens for a fun family portrait, or how about a black & white shot of Mum and baby?



Best feet forward!
After a bit of sharpening,
the result is a punchy
monochrome final image
with plenty of detail.

Get ready for lifestyle portraits

First things first, Brett reveals the professionals' tips to producing the best lifestyle portraits, so you can recreate the mood for yourself...

"SIT UNDER THESE LIGHTS in front of the white background and smile" may sound interesting and fun if you are photographing your grandparents, but in the manic world of children's photography, you should ensure the shoot is as far away from this scenario as possible.

At our studio just outside Manchester, we often get asked if we can do shoots in the studio, but once we have sat down with the clients and they see how much fun an outdoor shoot can be, their minds are usually changed. For me, shooting on location is all about getting the most out of the kids with the greatest of ease (or at least making it look that way!). That comes with knowing my equipment inside out, having faith in my assistant, being able to work with the kids and most of all having the ability to keep my patience no matter what happens. With some shoots, the best images may be taken at the end of a three-hour shoot! Because the secret to taking a great set of lifestyle portraits is spontaneity and thinking on your feet, there is no 'tried and tested' way of capturing great images – it's all in the relationship you build, having a sharp eye and knowing your gear inside out. You must work fast, so stick to using a couple of zooms for the majority of the shots. With experience, you get to know which focal lengths you need and when to swap so that you don't miss a shot.



ALWAYS BE READY: It's vital that you're mentally prepared to capture every opportunity that presents itself. This could be a wonderful facial expression, a candid moment or an incidental detail shot.

FAR RIGHT: If I am photographing babies, a great tip is to place them in a white bathtub. It's a great way of using reflected light to boost shutter speeds. Take the water out, maybe sit the baby on a white towel to make them more comfortable and shoot away!

BELOW: If your subject wants to play, let them! Lifestyle portraiture is all about capturing natural moments.

Biography Brett Harkness



Based in Bury near Manchester, professional photographer Brett Harkness and his partner Kristie run a highly successful photography business. Brett has made a name for himself over the years for his brilliant contemporary portraiture and is regarded in photographic circles as one of the most innovative and exciting talents to come from the UK. As well as taking pictures, Brett's studio runs a series of training courses both in the UK and internationally, covering a wide range of subjects including portraits, weddings and lighting. He also provides DVD tutorials. For further information, visit: www.bretharknessphotography.co.uk

Brett's portrait kit

Camera: Canon EOS-1Ds Mk II
Lenses: Canon EF 70-200mm f/2.8L IS; EF 24-70mm f/2.8L IS; EF 50mm f/2.5 macro.
Accessories: Lastolite reflector; Canon Speedlite 580EX flash





Lifestyle case study

Here, Brett recalls a lifestyle shoot that didn't go to plan, but turned out all the better for it...

I THOUGHT I'D RECOUNT a day out to give you an idea of how one session worked so well, even when the weather took a turn for the worse. We had a fantastic shoot on the hills above Yorkshire. We turned up, had a cup of tea and went for a walk to search out locations, so at least we could guide the shoot to another background if need be. The little girl, Molly, had plenty of time to get used to us while we looked around. We started off shooting pictures in a shed at the bottom of the garden. The light in its doorway was perfect and it was a great place to begin.

We then did a few shots by the front door of the house. Front doors give you a great opportunity to bring some colour into your shoot. Here, the step was used to sit the child down and Kristie, my assistant, chatted with her to take her mind off things. Another great way to distract children's minds is to get them to pick flowers – sometimes some of the best moments are when the kids aren't looking at the camera and when they wander off to another place in their minds. For me, photography of this nature is 60% ability, 30% psychology and 10% technical know-how.

It started raining, so we went back to the house to do a few shots inside. Choose a room where there is sufficient light coming through a window to enable you to shoot handheld. You will have to increase your ISO to at least 800 or above or use image stabilisation. This is when shorter focal lengths and faster f/2.8 lenses come into play. Indoors, I tend to use a 24-70mm f/2.8L and a 50mm f/2.5 lens. Once it stopped raining, we moved the shoot outside and headed for a farmer's field up on the hills. I could see the light was changing: the clouds were moving in and the sun was peeping through the gaps – the type of light you can usually only dream of in the UK. I reverted back to my 70-200mm f/2.8L IS lens and lowered my ISO to 400 to give the files better clarity and detail.

This part of the shoot was not planned, it just happened. Sometimes all the planning in the world can't prepare you for backgrounds and light like this. The series of shots were taken in about ten minutes as the clouds swept over and the sky turned black! I had to work quickly while keeping the shoot fun. I wanted to get some good depth-of-field, so used a mid-aperture setting of f/8. The exposure for all of these frames was 1/500sec at f/8 (ISO 400). These images are some of the best lifestyle shots I've ever taken as they encapsulate everything about Molly at this age. They show a time in her life when she is carefree, having pure childhood fun! All we did was put in her in the right light, the right background and let her do the rest!



Let your subject have fun – if they're free to play and enjoy themselves then you'll get better pictures. Here, a low viewpoint worked a treat.



Seize your moments

You don't need elaborate set-ups or amazing locations to capture great lifestyle portraits of children, just a keen awareness of their moods and behaviour.



TOPTIP

Pay special attention to the quality of light when shooting outdoors. Overcast conditions offer the most flattering light for portraits, so if you see lots of clouds in the sky, rejoice at your good luck!

Family fun on the beach

The secrets to success lie in the preparation before the shoot and building a rapport with your subjects, says Brett Harkness

I HAD A GREAT DAY at Fleetwood, which is an hour or so's drive from my studio near Manchester. As I always do for this type of shoot, I had the family come to the studio first, for a coffee and a chat and also to give a chance for the kids to meet me and my wife, Kristie, who assists me on this type of shoot. As part of our routine, the parents will have a coffee with Kristie, while I go for a quick wander around the studio with the kids. Their curious nature means they enjoy looking around, so it allows me to establish a bond with them. While walking around, I take a few shots of them, which gets them used to the camera. I'll always take their picture in a doorway by my studio, which I call my 'three feet of magic' as it's always beautifully lit.

When it comes to what the kids wear, I leave Kristie to run through the choices with the child's parents over coffee. When they come to the studio, they'll have been asked to literally bring the wardrobe with them! I'll spend a few hours taking pictures and will be looking at a change of outfit after an hour or so. Kristie knows what I like – I prefer strong colours or bold stripes on dark days, while in summer, I like more muted colours so that the clothes have less influence over the images.



The beach here is excellent as the kids are free to roam, allowing me to shoot candids using my Canon 70-200mm zoom. I don't have any preconceived shots in mind. The entire day's shoot depends on the light. If it's overcast I've no problems with harsh light, but when it's sunny, there's a great little pier that makes for an interesting backdrop and provides beautiful shade. To entice the kids here, Kristie places some shells in the shade and leads them there to play games with them. She'll be careful to stay out of shot, but her interaction is essential to take the kids' minds off me taking their pictures.

Another trick is to dig a hole in the sand and ask the family to walk towards it. I lie on my belly and take their picture and the shots look natural as their eyes are on the hole and not me. As they reach the hole I ask them to jump over it and capture them laughing and smiling as they're in mid-air.

There are no set rules, as every child acts differently, but I've learned the best ways to manipulate the situation to get the best pictures and I think that's been a key factor in my success at this type of photography. The most important thing is to capture images that the parents cannot produce themselves. A lot of people think they can take great pictures of their kids simply because they own a camera, but it's not that easy. You can't just plonk a kid into a location and get great shots. You have to push your creativity, try using tough lighting, change the backgrounds and so on. You have to make it hard for yourself as a photographer and that way you'll get the most out of your subject. Take the easy route and you won't produce anything different from what other people are doing.



TOP: It's easiest to 'Velcro' the kids to a spot by having the parents in the frame and taking a family portrait.

LEFT: Having a child in shade but backlit by the sun is great for rimlighting hair.

BELOW: Shoot toddlers exploring the location and don't worry if they're not looking at the camera. Parents love these types of images as they capture 'real' moments.



Once I've gained the child's trust, I swap the telezoom for a wide-angle and get in closer. If there's a good sky, I use fill-in flash and set -2EV on exposure compensation to darken the backdrop.





Shoot summary

- Base your shoot around the toddler's sleeping and feeding schedule. Have everything ready for when they're awake/fed so that you can make full use of the time you have at your disposal.
- A female assistant is ideal to have on hand to help choose clothes and for bonding with young children.
- Don't try to preconceive shots but be ready to grab the shots as they happen.
- Shoot a few family shots as the parents will treasure them!

Lifestyle inspiration

To conclude Brett's inspirational guide to kids' lifestyle portraits, he provides an insight into the techniques behind some of his recent shoots

IF THE WINTER IS rolling in, you must organise your lifestyle shoot earlier in the day to capitalise on any light available. Make sure that the kids are well wrapped up – colourful hats and scarves are a great way to frame faces and bring some colour into the shoot.

Allow the kids to do what they want. If you try to sit them down too early to get that 'close-up face shot', then they will be off; sit them down too late and they will lose interest! Timing is essential. You have to constantly change the goal posts and use other stimuli to keep them interested and give you what you need.

Bringing props into the shoot can also work, as in the shot below where we brought the young girl's moped into the frame to give her something to lean on. Using family pets is also a great way to keep the shoot rolling. They mean a lot to the owners and they will almost always love to include them in the shoot.

If you are really struggling with the weather and the kids/family just don't want to go outside, then there is a great way of getting some good indoor shots and keeping it in one room. Go upstairs to the bedroom and open all the curtains, allowing as much light into the room as possible. Clear away any clutter; make the bed! Get the family on the bed and using high ISOs such as 800-1600 and a short focal length lens like a 18-55mm, you will get some fantastic shots. Just let them play and have fun. It is testing for you as a photographer but the results can be fantastic.

You'll find the shoot almost becomes more like a documentary of the family or kids rather than staged, posed images. Sometimes I choose slowish shutter-speeds. I like 1/50 or 1/80sec to give me some movement within the image; any blur is the result of subject movement and not poor focus. This can give the images more atmosphere and emotion.

When I'm working like this, I'm going back to what photography, for me anyway, is all about. Letting the subject do the work, see how they interact with me and what they are willing to give is what makes it special. Making sure I am there, ready: right exposure, right lens, right light, right framing... Not much to get right really! But when I do, it is the best feeling ever.

“TIMING IS ESSENTIAL. YOU HAVE TO CONSTANTLY CHANGE THE GOAL POSTS AND USE OTHER STIMULI TO KEEP THEM INTERESTED”



If you're shooting indoors, have the family play on a bed and capture the fun. Also make sure to record every mood, from pensive thought to tantrums to playful activity.



TOP TIP

Make sure you include the whole family in shots as they will usually prove popular with the relatives. If you're shooting a commission, this could mean several extra sales in prints





Brett's lifestyle portrait tips



● **Have fun!** Keep the shoot fun. If it means you have to put down your camera for a while and become the entertainment then so be it! Shoot quickly: bored kids will give you nothing. Take their minds off the fact that they are having their pictures taken!

● **Minimise lens choice** Things happen so quickly when photographing children. If you are changing lenses all the time you will miss the best moments.

● **Use a reflector when you can** We will always use a reflector when we can on lifestyle shoots. Obviously when the subject is sitting down we can use it to throw some great light back onto their face. Small children can sit on it; not only is it a great way to illuminate the subject but it also acts as an imaginary magic carpet that can take you to fantastic places!



● **Try something different** Once you have taken the usual shots, try something different, either by the way you frame the subject, the lenses that you choose or the backgrounds or light that you use. It is keeping things fresh like this that will take your photography forward and mean that you are a frontrunner in the lifestyle portrait market and not bringing up the rear!



● **Keep it simple** Try to have a basic plan as to where you are going with the shoot. Look for different backgrounds and bring some colour in to your images.

● **Be quick!** Especially if you are working with babies, as they will lose interest after about 20 minutes if that – they will need to eat, sleep and poo... Maybe not in that order! Make sure you have a flexible plan in mind, although things can change. Know when to bring a shoot to an end as there is no point carrying on if you have the shots anyway.

● **Get dirty!** Part of the fun of the shoot and getting the most from it is if you join in and do most of what the kids are doing. If you lie down in the mud then you are going to get the kids on side quicker. You may end up forking out for the dry cleaning bills, but it will be worth it for the end result!



Props and locations play a very important role in lifestyle portraits and you should always be on the lookout for what you can include in the frame. When I'm out and about with my subjects, I'm always keeping an eye out for suitable places to have children sit or stand: front doors are a favourite of mine! And when it comes to clothing, have your subject change outfits during the shoot to add variety. Try a plain outfit for one session and a colourful or patterned outfit for another.



PHOTO LOCATIONS

TAKING PICTURES OF PEOPLE IS ONE THING; WHERE YOU TAKE THEM IS QUITE ANOTHER. ADD INTEREST AND ANOTHER DIMENSION BY CHOOSING YOUR LOCATION WELL AND USING ITS CHARM TO ENHANCE YOUR SHOTS. THIS SECTION OF THE GUIDE WILL HELP YOU SPOT THE POTENTIAL IN A LOCATION SO YOU CAN USE IT TO SHAPE YOUR PORTRAITS...

SHOOTING ON LOCATION gives you the opportunity to capture portraits with all manner of settings for limitless creative possibilities. There's far more potential for great portrait photography than working in a studio, that's for sure. The main benefit, of course, is the sheer diversity of backdrops available – you've quite literally the entire world at your disposal. In this guide we'll focus on both urban and rural locations and provide essential information on ideas, technique and lighting to help you capture creative portraits.

You needn't travel far either – there are great possibilities waiting for you in your local town or city. Firstly, we'll cover a range of urban locations to give you a taste of what's possible, from derelict buildings to canals and urban parks, but the reality is that every

location promises countless photo opportunities, so use our guide to give you the ideas, inspiration and know-how that you need to make the most of every location.

Following on from inner-city locations, we head out to a selection of rural locations to reveal some of the possibilities that are available when you head out from your home town or city. While urban scenes offer a high number of options, heading into the countryside or towards the coast arguably offers you even more scope for experimentation. And as well as the diversity of scenery, the wide-open spaces allow you to include the sky a lot more than shooting in cities and towns, so you're able to make more of the weather and the time of day, too, for interesting and atmospheric backdrops to your portraits.

MAIN IMAGE: PAUL WARD



Shooting urban portraits

UNLESS YOU'RE ONE of the lucky few living in a remote hamlet surrounded by acres of countryside, you shouldn't be far from an urban area, whether it's a village, town or city. Therefore, you're within touching distance of some fantastic photographic backdrops, which, while possibly not apparent at first, can be found if you're willing to spend just a couple of hours wandering the streets, parks, waterways and town centres close to you.

In this section of the guide, we cover the main factors you should be considering when shooting portraits in urban situations, while also looking at different types of urban surroundings. As you'll discover, while there are many similarities between different types of locations, each offers their own unique characteristics that you should look to exploit for maximum effect.

One of the key things to consider is the relationship between your subject and the location. It may be that you've chosen a location simply because it offers a striking backdrop and if this is the case, your main concerns will be the standard elements of what makes a good image, such as composition, lighting and exposure. If you're looking for more of an environmental portrait, where the subject is more closely associated with the backdrop, you'll also need to ensure their clothing, look and pose is in keeping with the location.

However you approach the shoot, you should have no shortage of options, so take a look around your local area, spot potential locations and return with your subject. Once you gain experience and confidence, venture out further to discover fresh locations and more opportunities.

Pro insight



PAUL WARD ON... URBAN LOCATIONS

"I love using urban backdrops for much of my portrait photography. Based in Birmingham, I'm only a short distance away from countless possible locations, so urban shoots are very convenient for city-based photographers like me. As with any city, there's no shortage of variety, so I'm usually able to find a suitable backdrop within minutes from my studio. While it's a bit of a cliché, I love placing my subject in front of battered and bruised backgrounds, such as grubby brick walls, especially when shooting DJs or fashion. I also enjoy shooting in unconventional locations such as underpasses and traffic islands – this works particularly well at night as I can mix long exposures with flash to include traffic trails and some ambient light in the results."

TOP TIP

Avoid the crowds
If you're shooting in financial areas of cities, avoid crowds by visiting at weekends when they're virtual ghost towns.



Six tips to scouting urban locations



1) BREAK DOWN A SCENE

Urban scenes are a mix of lines, textures and areas of shadows and highlights, which will appear cluttered and confusing to the untrained eye. Break down the scene into individual components and see how each could be used individually or together to provide an interesting backdrop. Look at buildings and examine walls, windows and doorways from different angles and heights.



2) THINK LIKE A LENS!

As well as using your naked eye, look through the viewfinder and vary the focal length – you may spot new angles that suit a wide-angle or telephoto focal length that may otherwise not have been obvious to you. Using an ultra wide-angle will suit tight spaces where backdrops will distort, while telephotos can help exclude distractions in the background.



3) INCLUDE TEXTURES AND FORM

Urban locations often play host to myriad interesting textures and patterns as well as intriguing shapes and structures which can be incorporated into your composition. Position your subject against a weathered wall for a straightforward gritty portrait, go wide to include surrounding architecture, or consider shooting through elements of foreground interest to add depth.

Go urban!

Bright colours and a dramatic backdrop make for portraits with impact.



PAUL WARD



ISTOCK PHOTO

4) CONSIDER THE TIME OF DAY

Think about where the sun will be when you plan to shoot, especially if you're shooting in narrow streets and/or close to tall buildings. If you find a location you like, try to visit it at different times of the day to see how sunlight affects it. And don't forget, the location is transformed at night, when floodlit buildings, street lighting and traffic can all play their part in the composition.



5) THINK ABOUT HOW YOU LIGHT THE SUBJECT AND THE SCENE

Lighting is an essential element to your images' success. There is no right or wrong answer as to whether you can rely on daylight or if you should use flash (or a mix of both), so take lighting aids and flash gear to cover every option. With the potential for the sun to be obscured by buildings, having flash as a back-up is recommended.



PAUL WARD

6) REMEMBER TO KEEP IT SIMPLE!

It's all too easy when shooting in urban locations to try to cram too much into the image frame. Quite often, singling out individual areas of interest in an environment can deliver a multitude of different images from a single location. Remember the shot can be just as successful with a minimal backdrop such as an interesting wall, fencing or a moody sky.

Urban parks

URBAN SPRAWLS AREN'T all about concrete, steel and glass. Parks offer a refreshing change from the various architectural backdrops you'll be shooting against and allow you to capture portraits that are more natural than your typical urban backdrop. The wide-open spaces, along with the grass, trees and vegetation, offer you a completely different urban scenario to capture, providing a very different set of pictures. Parks are recreational areas so you should look to bring out the feel-good factor in your photographs. Happy smiling portraits, relaxed candids and pensive moments are all suitable options along with your more traditional fashion and lifestyle poses. It's also an ideal location to photograph a couple and add a touch of romance to your images.

On bright days, have your subject lie on the ground and get on your knees to shoot from a low perspective. Shoot towards the sun to add an attractive backlight on long grasses and your subject's hair, while using a white (or possibly a silver/Sunfire) reflector to light up the face. Park benches are also suitable, you can shoot from behind with your subject looking over their shoulder or have them sit longways on the bench with their feet resting on it and shoot this from different angles. Of course, you can further add humour, fun and energy to your park portraits by having your subject run, jump or play. Whatever you do, with all these images try to have your subject smile and look as happy as possible – parks are enjoyable places to visit and you want this to be apparent in your photos.

● PAUL WARD SAYS...

"My local park in Birmingham provides a wealth of photo opportunities for great portrait pictures. Aston Park, where I shot these images, is much like any other, so the ideas and techniques I've tried out can easily be replicated by anyone. I kept things simple, taking along a couple of reflectors and flashguns and shooting mainly on 24-70mm and 70-200mm lenses. I'd suggest before shooting that you take a walk around the park and note (or snap on a smartphone) locations where you'd like to try shooting.

"I shot on a day that was overcast but with regular breaks in the sun, which worked in my favour. During cloud cover I shot in open spaces with the light naturally diffused, using a silver reflector to bounce back light to fill shadows. When the sun broke through, I moved a few metres and shot beneath the canopies of some trees. While you can shoot beneath trees when it's overcast, I much prefer waiting until it's sunny as the light levels are higher and the sunlight shines through the canopy, lifting the colours and adding attractive highlights. If the branches are low, consider interacting the subject by having them pluck leaves or peer through branches. If you've a long row of trees, use



Shooting at a park offers plenty of scope for capturing beautiful portraits. Use the surroundings to add interest to your images – low-hanging branches are ideal for subject interaction, and avenues of trees work brilliantly as natural frames.

the shapes of the trunks and the canopies within the backdrop as they can make for very interesting backdrops that also act as a natural frame.

"Bright sunlight also works well if shooting by a lake as out-of-focus specular highlights on the water's surface add interest. Shooting with the subject bathed in sunlight requires a diffuser to soften the light reaching your model, unless you're able to use natural cover like a tree. If it's quite dark beneath the canopies, consider setting up an off-camera flash behind a trunk to throw some light on the scene. Ideally switch it to manual and use a low power setting to keep the effect subtle."



Underpasses & arches

A COUPLE OF urban locations that offer great potential but are generally overlooked are underpasses beneath roads and arches beneath bridges and viaducts. These offer you the opportunity to shoot from beneath cover, making them ideal as shaded areas on sunny days or sheltered spots if the rain starts falling. By shooting at the entrances to the covered area, you can also make use of the contrast between shade and sunlight. Backlight your subject for a bleached white backdrop, turn them to the side for some simple yet effective sidelighting or shoot into the cover for a moodier effect.

You'll often find areas of graffiti with strong colours and shapes that can be exploited to add extra visual interest. If you're shooting underpasses under roads, you'll need to be careful with White Balance – setting Fluorescent usually gives the most natural colours, but you could also shoot in Raw and adjust colours later, or use flash. With archways beneath bridges, you'll most likely have a choice between ambient light or flash. Using daylight with one or two reflectors will give the most natural effect but you'll need to ensure you expose correctly so that the backdrop isn't too dark. Using flash allows you to create more dramatic effects as you have the chance to use direct flash on subjects to create long shadows behind them, and/or use secondary flashguns to light up the backdrop. By using flash gels on the background lights, you can create colourful effects that add extra visual interest to the surroundings.

These areas tend to be isolated and can be intimidating, especially if you're shooting later in the day, so it's worth taking along a friend to assist you with the set-ups as well as providing a little security and peace of mind.

● PAUL WARD SAYS...

"Birmingham has its fair share of road and canal bridges and I often head to this particular location when I'm shooting fashion portraits. It's a large area underneath railway bridges near the jewellery quarter that has lots of space to work in and rarely has people wandering through, so I can set up lights knowing I'm not getting in people's way. With archways in walls, it's worth experimenting with compositions as there are a number of angles to shoot from. You can get in close and low with an ultra wide-angle lens and exaggerate perspective or shoot straight on from a distance with a telephoto to have a section of arch blur in the background. I prefer to shoot at an angle so that the arches fall away to add depth to the image. This works particularly well when shooting landscape-format as I can place the subject off-centre and include a series of arches in the frame. These settings also offer great potential in terms of lighting.

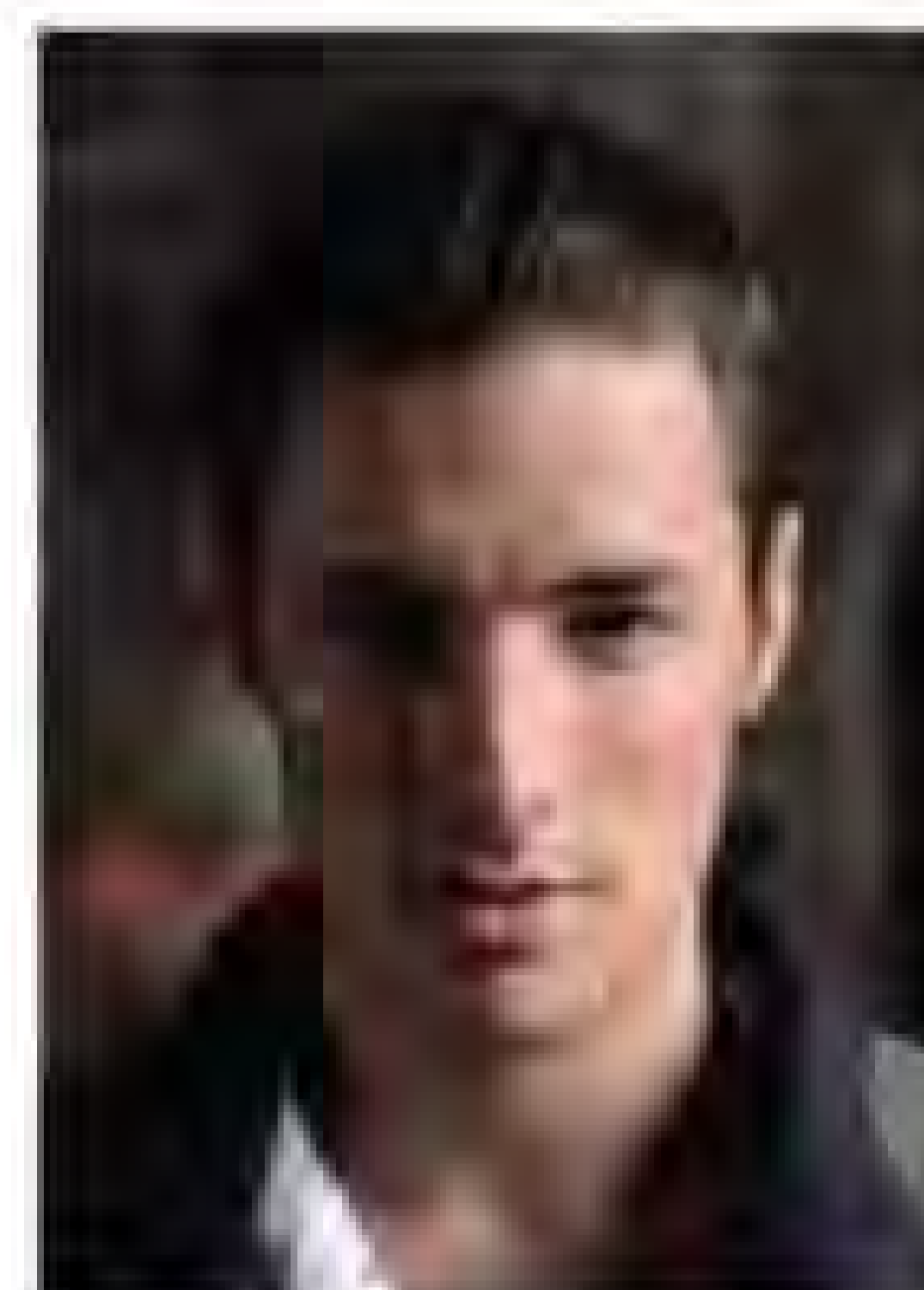


With a couple of flashguns or a portable studioflash kit, it's possible to light your subject and background in any number of ways. However, I really enjoy making the most of ambient light, often using a silver or Sunfire reflector placed in the sunlight to bounce light back into the scene. I'll often place subjects beneath where the cover gives way to the street as there is more light than you might think bouncing around, which can give a nice effect. It's worth resting a silver or white reflector on the ground to bounce up additional light, too.

"Because these types of locations are made up of brown brickwork, black shadows and little else, they will often lack colour, so I try to add visual interest in other ways. Shooting against graffiti is one option, as is using red, blue or green flash gels to add colour to backgrounds, but often I'll have the subject add the extra interest. This could be by dressing them in outlandish garments or taking on an unusual pose."



Underpasses and arches are great places to shoot urban portraits, but you'll need to work with the location to get the very best out of it. Shoot at the entrance where the sun meets shade and you can position your subject for side-lighting, aim towards the tunnel for a black backdrop or at the light for a bleach-white effect.



Canals

THE UK HAS thousands of miles of canals so it's quite possible that you live in one of the many towns or cities that these waterways pass through. If that's the case, you'll discover it offers the potential to be used for some wonderful portrait settings.

Colourful canal boats make for attractive backdrops, but you should also consider shooting from the opposite bank and use the colourful reflections of the boats on the water's surface.

Bridges over the canal are ideal, too. Have your subject stand on a bridge and use the handrail as a lead-in line, or instead have them stand beneath and use the bridge as visual interest in the backdrop. You'll often find arches, staircases and other features in the architecture around canals, so scout around and see what you can find.

● BRETT HARKNESS SAYS...

"As one of the major centres of the industrial revolution, Manchester is home to many miles of canals that traverse the city. With so much redevelopment of the city centre over recent years, this means that you can often shoot by canals that have spectacular modern backgrounds as well as more traditional architecture. You do need to take care, though, as some locations require permission first, so it's best to check in advance of when you plan to shoot. These images were taken along a short stretch of canal in central Manchester.

"The canal here is very well maintained and the location benefits from a mix of modern and more traditional architecture, as well as a couple of photogenic bridges. For these images, we simply walked along the canal, stopping wherever we spotted interesting elements in the scene that could make for interesting backdrops. As it turned out, this meant we only managed a few steps before spotting another possible shot, such as the potential of the scene. I'll often have the subject interact with the location, such as leaning against a post or wall, or sitting on a bench. Bridges are ideal – as well as providing natural lead-in lines, the subject can rest an arm or hip on the rail and take on a natural stance. Stairs are another useful background prop, as the subject can sit on one and the steps in the background can be used as visual interest.

"Regardless of the weather, I'll usually take along an Elinchrom Ranger Quadra portable studioflash kit with me to increase my creative lighting options. I'll usually use a main light with softbox attached to ensure my subject is beautifully lit and often I'll use another head – with a CTO (orange) filter attached – aimed at her hair to replicate the light from a setting sun. Having flash available allows you to vary the types of image you're able to capture as you're not limited to only using ambient light. Another easy way to change the look of your images



Location-wise, waterways can provide a variety of backdrops for your people shots. Bridges work well as lead-in lines, giving focus to your subject and adding strong structural shapes, while stairs by canals can give a gritty urban atmosphere when you're shooting glamorous fashion-style shots as we did here.

is with clothing and props – a change of tops/jackets, a hat or sunglasses can all be used to change the look of the image. This is where a stylist can make a major difference, too, as they're able to transform the appearance of your subject by changing their hairstyle or make-up. As you'll see from the set of images here, it's not just the backdrops that are different; the poses range from relaxed to more fashionable stances, while the hair ranges from a ponytail to loose to a more classic sculpted look. Using all these little tricks allows you to head to one location with one subject and produce a range of stunning portraits quickly and easily."



● **Take a soft approach**
Using a shallow depth-of-field can make the most of the surroundings, but still make your subject pop.



Streets

ARGUABLY ONE OF the best urban locations is also one of the most numerous. Streets are as diverse as they are bountiful, making them the perfect starting point for urban portraits. Head to older areas of town for more traditional architecture, where brown brick and ornate structures rule; or if you're looking for modern lines where glass and steel dominate, look for financial and business areas. Every major town and city has numerous districts boasting streets with their own characteristics, so whether you're looking for rundown desolate streets, cobbled lanes or plush avenues to shoot, you shouldn't have any problems finding them.

Streets offer great potential as portrait backdrops and there is no shortage of techniques to try. You're able to set up your subject against one side to include buildings as a backdrop, or place them so that the street vanishes off into the distance. With narrow streets, use a wide-angle lens with the latter technique to create strong converging verticals that add depth and strong visual interest to backdrops. Look for doorways where you can place your subject as these act as a natural frame, and get close to walls to shoot at a tight angle and have the foreground wall provide strong perspective.

Also be aware of the promise that the roads themselves offer, or more accurately the traffic. Use a slow shutter speed during the daytime and you can capture cars and buses as attractive streaks across the backdrop. Better still, wait until night starts to fall and use a long exposure with flash to capture traffic trails with a nicely exposed subject in the foreground.

● BRETT HARKNESS SAYS...

"When I'm shooting urban portraits on very overcast days, I add flash to boost colours and contrast. These images were captured on one short street in central Manchester and illustrate the potential available in many town and city centres if you're willing to look around. The beauty of urban portraiture is that you shouldn't have to venture far as most buildings are designed to be aesthetically pleasing. Even those designed for business or industry offer visual appeal, whether it's pipes and chrome or ornate brickwork.

"When shooting on streets, take care with traffic as well as pedestrians and always ensure you're not getting in the way; I prefer the quieter side streets to the main roads. One-way roads are ideal if you want to stand on the road while taking pictures as it's easier to be aware of oncoming vehicles. I love shooting from the centre of a road with my subject in a similar position – with a wide-angle lens you can have buildings in the backdrop leaning inwards for added effect, while the perspective of a telezoom at around 150–200mm gives a lovely result.

"One of my favourite techniques is shooting my subject in doorways, either sat



Backstreets can be particularly dramatic locations – they give a sense of desolation that works brilliantly when shooting portraits. Carry a wide-angle lens with you – it's a must for achieving great effects with perspective and you'll find flash is incredibly useful as lighting can be a real problem.

on the step or leaning with arms outstretched and hands pressed on the frame. With older industrial buildings, I'll look for worn doors with battered signs as these make for interesting backdrop elements, even when slightly out of focus.

"Try different viewpoints – get low with a wide-angle for dramatic leaning buildings or get close to a wall for accentuated perspective in the foreground when using a telephoto or skewed verticals and out-of-sorts scale if using a wide-angle. With narrower streets, lighting can be a problem so use flash to light your subject and scene."

Pro insight

BRETT HARKNESS ON... URBAN LOCATIONS

"I'm based on the outskirts of Manchester, so there is no shortage of backdrops to choose from. Within half an hour's drive I can be shooting by canals, in Victorian industrial areas or setting up my subjects against modern backdrops. Despite being a busy city with a large population, it's always possible to find relatively quiet areas to shoot in. Even when shooting on busy main roads, people are always in such a hurry that most pay little attention to what I'm doing, so it's no bother. The biggest problem is always finding a parking space!"



Dereliction

IT'S IRONIC THAT some of the most rundown, desolate and undesirable urban locations make for some of the best backdrops for portraits. Areas of dereliction make for interesting pictures in themselves, with the peeling paper, bare floors, remnants of furniture and signs, broken windows and general decay proving perfect for atmospheric and moody images.

Place a person in the frame and all of a sudden you have an added dynamic to the shot. Whether you're going for a fashion look, something sexy or a more standard type of portrait, derelict buildings are suitable locations, so head to the more rundown parts of town and check out their potential.

Needless to say, safety is paramount, so never take unnecessary risks. As well as broken glass, there may be sharp pieces of metal, rotten floors and collapsing walls to watch out for.

You should be able to stay well clear of potential dangers and still manage to place your subject in a suitably interesting setting. If you can't get too close, use a short telephoto focal length and shoot at a small aperture. The perspective compression will make the background appear closer than it is in reality.

In reality, though, you shouldn't encounter any problems – as long as you've gained permission and are sensible about the safety of your subject and yourself, you should have no problem setting up interesting compositions. In large open areas, use a wide-angle with your subject relatively close to the camera to heighten the impression of empty space and desolation. Shoot on overcast days and use flash to highlight your subject and darken the skies for powerful mood. Have your subject interact with the location, too. If there are any abandoned chairs, have your subject sit on one, or if you're in an industrial site with large chains hanging down or a metal fire exit, have your subject stand and lean or hold on to it.

As well as your standard colour shots, also consider converting images to HDR or mono to heighten the sense of mood.

● DANIEL LEZANO SAYS...

"Like most people, with no access to a studio, most of my portraits are shot in homes and gardens. No problem with that, but after a while a change of scenery is required to freshen up your shots. There is little doubt that derelict buildings offer great potential. My chosen building is a long-closed Little Chef on the A1 just north of Peterborough. It's a beautifully designed building but having been closed for years, has fallen into a state of disrepair. However,



TOP TIP

No trespassing!

As tempting as a location may seem, do not trespass on private property. Not only is it against the law, but should you have an accident, especially if it's a derelict or remote location, you may be unable to gain help. Seek permission in writing in advance, or stick to public areas.



the flaky exterior and graffiti all add to its derelict charm, making it a good place to shoot portraits. The evening of our shoot was very overcast, which meant the light was very dull and flat, so an Elinchrom Quadra head with softbox was used to illuminate our model, Bethany. Around the front of the building was a red stairwell that represented an ideal place for Bethany to stand. With the camera set to manual, a mid-aperture setting was used to underexpose the ambient light so as to darken the sky and add to the mood. The studioflash was then aimed at 45° to the left of the camera to illuminate Bethany and provide a soft spotlight effect. A flashgun fitted with a slave was held above the camera and aimed at the other side of Bethany to help remove shadows. A 17-40mm zoom used at its wide end on a full-frame DSLR (Canon EOS 6D)

Look past your first impressions of derelict buildings and you'll discover they're amazing places to photograph people. Flaking paint, crumbling walls and broken windows are ideal ingredients to shoot interesting portraits. Just remember to approach with caution and that your safety comes before brilliant pictures!

allowed for the full height of the building to be included in the frame.

"The other area of the building that caught our attention was the main entrance, with its mix of brickwork and painted walls. Here, we again used the single softbox aimed at 45° to the left of the camera to illuminate Bethany and the backdrop. We tried a number of compositions, from full length to head and shoulders, with Bethany standing against the wall and sitting on the steps, all including the interesting textures and patterns on the wall behind."

Prepare for outdoor portraits

WHILE MOST PHOTOGRAPHERS venturing out to isolated areas like the countryside or coastline do so to shoot beautiful landscapes, a fair number head out with the intention of using the stunning scenery for location portraits. While towns and cities offer all manner of buildings and brickwork to shoot against, nothing can match the diversity of a world shaped by Mother Nature over the millennia. Whether it's the tranquil setting of a gorgeous green English countryside in summer, hay bales at harvest time or a sunset reflecting off the sea on a long sandy beach, there is no shortage when it comes to choice of location.

So what's to stop you heading out with family members, friends or willing models to a glorious location away from the home town and spending a few hours exploring the location and capturing stunning

portraits against beautiful backdrops? If you're unsure of where to go, then don't be – pretty much any rural location can be used, you've permission to use it and you're able to compose the scene and light it how you want.

We've been a little broad in our definition of 'rural' so that we're able to include the coast in our choice of locations. As we live on an island, it was impossible to exclude the hundreds of miles of sandy, rocky and cliff-faced coastline as it offers such strong location potential.

Use the general guidelines covered on these introductory pages to help you prepare for shooting outdoor portraits in rural locations, then turn over the page for behind-the-shoot accounts from pro contributors providing expert advice and ideas for shooting stunning rural portraits.



PAUL WARD

Lighting options

● DAYLIGHT

The main advantage with using daylight is that it's free. Ambient light can be used as the sole light source or in combination with artificial light for fantastic results. Weather-dependent, you may have strong directional light or soft, diffused light to work with, so a selection of lighting aids (see right) is essential. The biggest problem is that, while you can manipulate daylight, it is never fully under your control so it's difficult to plan shoots too far ahead as the weather may change. For this reason, some form of artificial lighting is a good idea.

● FLASHGUNS

It was once the case that shooting with flashguns was complicated and expensive but that's no longer true. Flash systems are incredibly accurate and offer a high level of versatility while instant preview allows you to quickly check exposures and make adjustments. As well as the marque guns, various independent brands offer manual or dedicated control, while off-camera (and wireless) flash is easier and more affordable than ever before. Therefore using flash as a primary light source or combined with daylight is a viable option.

● STUDIOFLASH

Using studioflash on location is an option if you require more power than flashguns can offer. Portable studioflash kits are more expensive than flashguns but, if you can afford them, you'll find them relatively easy to use, with a number of available modifiers allowing you to shape the light much as you would in a studio.

Prepare for shooting rural portraits



EMMA TONGE

1) SEEK PERMISSION!

Avoid wandering on to private property without permission. Trespassing is an offence and so no matter how photogenic a location is, do not think it's okay to use private land to take pictures. Seek permission from the landowner in advance – most will allow you entry so long as you leave the location in the condition you found it.



2) RECCE LOCATIONS

It's quite possible to head to a fresh location with your subject and find several suitable backdrops. However, it's far more sensible to spend a little time visiting different areas and investigating the options. That way, on the day of the shoot, you can head from one place to another without having to waste time finding spots to shoot in.



PAUL WARD

3) WEATHER FORECAST

Keep an eye on weather forecasts for the days running up to your intended shoot. Knowing whether it will be cloudy or sunny will help you decide whether you need both reflectors and diffusers. Pay attention to wind speed – strong winds make holding lighting aids difficult, as well as playing havoc with your subject's hair and clothing.



Essential kit



CHOICE OF LENSES

You'll be shooting close crops as well as wider views, so you want a set of lenses that cover a wide range of focal lengths. A standard zoom (18-55mm) and a short telezoom (55-200mm) will cover most bases. You should also consider adding a 50mm f/1.8 into the mix, too – its fast maximum aperture allows for very shallow depth-of-field as well as handheld photography in low light.



LIGHTING AIDS

Reflectors are a must, with silver/white being the most popular option. Other metallic colours like Sunfire provide a slightly more appealing effect but are more expensive. Ideally look to have at least two reflectors to allow you to more effectively bounce light on your subject and scene. A diffuser is a good option if you're shooting in bright sunlight in exposed areas with little or no cover.



TRIPOD

You'll usually be handholding the camera so that you can move around quickly to change the composition. However, there are times where a tripod is useful, in particular when shooting at the long end of a zoom in light levels that risk camera shake. A ball & socket head is for many the best option when shooting portraits.

TOPTIP

Food & drinks

Be sure to take along bottles of water, sandwiches and snacks, especially if shooting in very isolated locations

PAUL WARD



BJORN THOMASSEN

4) TIME OF DAY

Having the sun where you want can be a major help in achieving the lighting that you're looking for, while the wrong time of day can spoil the shoot. When receiving a location, pay attention to the sun's position and use a compass (or smartphone app such as Sun Seeker) to determine the position of the sun at the time you're shooting.



BJORN THOMASSEN

5) NUDES IN PUBLIC PLACES

Nude photography is an art form to many, but in the eyes of the law, being nude in public is construed as lewd. Your best option is to gain permission to shoot in areas that are privately owned. If you do want to risk shooting in public, then use every precaution and shoot in remote areas that are rarely visited – you may face a hefty fine if caught!



BJORN THOMASSEN

6) CHECK TIDE TIMES

If you're thinking about shooting on the beach, check tidal times. Depending on the type of beach, you may find low tide reveals rockpools and rocky outcrops that can be used as foreground interest, while during high tides the crashing waves can make for energetic backdrops, especially if captured against a colourful sunset.

Woodland

THERE IS SOMETHING primal about dense woodland that gives it an atmosphere and presence all of its own. Perhaps it's the isolation you feel when you're wandering through it – you're cut off from civilisation, your view is restricted by the numerous trees, while the lack of any obvious signs of the modern world gives it a timeless quality that few other locations can match.

Portraits shot in woodland present their own challenges. The light will be relatively dark during daylight hours due to all the foliage, while the options open to where you can shoot from will be determined by the spread of trees. You'll probably need some form of artificial lighting, so be prepared to have to carry it up and down hills, over fallen branches and potentially through foliage, undergrowth and nettles.

When it comes to taking pictures, you'll find that the trees, branches and stumps can all look like a messy distraction unless you work out how to handle the scene. Try using flash to dictate where the viewer looks by lighting certain areas and throwing others into shadow. Or have the subject interact with their surroundings, whether they are leaning against a trunk, holding on to branches or even lying along fallen trees.

With the exception of spring when wild flowers are in full bloom, many woodlands are fairly monotone, being made up mainly of green and brown. For this reason, it's worth considering how your image might appear if converted to black & white and also possibly toned sepia or blue. Fine-art photographers have extensively used woodlands as a setting for shooting classic nudes, as the lighting, monotone colour and primal appearance makes it an ideal choice.



● BJORN THOMASSEN SAYS...

"While the Cornish coast is a popular tourist spot, this part of the country is remote enough to have its own fair share of dense woodland, which I visit a few times a year, in the main to shoot fine-art nudes, along with some editorial and fashion shoots.

"There are key considerations to make when shooting in woodland. The first is that lighting can be restricted, due to the sheer volume of foliage and canopy cover. If you plan to use ambient light only, then a tripod is recommended, as are metallic reflectors, such as silver, Sunfire and gold, as these are far more efficient in low light than white. I'd suggest you use supplementary light to help define the subject from the surroundings – if you're on a budget even a single flashgun can help. Rather than attach it on the hotshoe, fit it on a lighting stand and fire it through a brolly using a remote trigger or sync lead. I'll usually use one or two portable flash heads as these offer more power and scope to use different lighting attachments. By varying the level of flash output you can determine how much of the ambient light is recorded on the image, which is useful when you want to isolate the subject from its surroundings and minimise any distractions.

Pro insight

BJORN THOMASSEN ON... RURAL LOCATIONS

"I love capturing images in rural locations, with a particular preference for finding locations that are devoid of human existence. Shooting by lakes, within woods or on beaches allows me to capture scenes that are made up of natural elements only. The result is images of beautiful subjects in wonderful locations that captivate the viewer. With coastlines I'll look to the sea and the sky for inspiration, with my images having a strong sense of isolation. When shooting in busier locations such as woods, I'll look to see how I can use the intriguing shapes of the trees within the composition and how the subject can interact with their surroundings. Whatever the location, a key factor to the success of the image is the lighting, so it's important you have the right equipment and modifiers, as well as a clear understanding of how to balance artificial and ambient light for natural and effective results."



Balanced flash



No ambient light



There are a number of things to consider when shooting in woodland: how your subject interacts with the environment (a more successful image can come from getting them to mirror the way branches fall, for example); muted clothing is better than bright; and don't forget your lighting aids – you'll need them!

"When shooting general portraits in woods, clothing should be determined in advance. I'll generally ask my subjects to wear 'earth' colours such as green, brown and grey as this complements the setting. Strong colours like reds, blues and yellows push more emphasis towards the clothing, which isn't a problem on fashion shoots, but isn't ideal otherwise.

"The random and somewhat haphazard arrangement of trees means you do need to take care with composition and pose as it's easy for branches and leaves to point and poke and ruin an image. I've found the best way around this is to shoot from a distance with the long end of a telezoom at a wide aperture to separate the subject a little from the backdrop. I'll also try to have the subject's pose and stance mirror something in the scene behind, such as the angle and direction of larger branches or trunks. When working out the exposure, I'll set manual mode, choose an aperture I want to shoot at first, then try to get the flash exposure right by varying its power.

"Woods provide a wonderfully secluded setting in which to work, which is ideal if you do want to capture images of subjects who are partially or fully undressed. I've permission to shoot in woods on private land, which is useful as shooting nude subjects in public places can be described as lewd behaviour, regardless of how

Fine-art



tasteful the resultant images are. When shooting in public I try to avoid any unnecessary problems by shooting subjects who are partially dressed, then removing the clothing in Photoshop afterwards. My models normally wear stick-on bras that are small, skin-coloured gel-like covers, and thongs, as these are very easy to clone out. When shooting in private woods, my models have the option to wear these items or pose nude, whichever they feel most comfortable doing.

"With nudes, I'll seek a pose that looks relaxed and conceals as much as possible,

then once I'm satisfied, I'll set up the lighting to suit the pose. I'll normally set up one or two softboxes at a distance to give a gentle and natural lighting effect. Nude images tend to be very low-key, so there are no real areas of highlights, just mid-tones and shadow. This makes it far easier later on in Photoshop to clone out anything the subject is wearing, as the more private areas are usually bathed in shadow. I'll convert most of my nudes to black & white in Photoshop, adding a sepia or brown tone to finish it off."

Countryside

WE MAY BE a small nation, but we're not short of acres and acres of beautiful countryside. Whether it's agricultural areas, rolling hills or limestone pavements, the UK is blessed with some of the finest countryside in the world. Therefore, it makes sense to take advantage of Mother Nature's generosity and use it as a setting for portraiture.

You'll often find you don't have to go too far out of town to find suitable locations. In fact, heading just out from the suburbs and shooting in farmland allows you to include elements such as buildings, wooden fences, stiles and livestock in the frame.

The green grass of rural areas provides a relaxing and appealing backdrop, so use this to produce romantic images with a feel-good factor. The warm, rustic colours of crops like wheat make for attractive and soothing tones, too, while fields with strong, bright colourful blooms such as poppies and rapeseed oil can make for punchy portraits, especially if you saturate colours further using a polariser.

The wide-open spaces of the countryside mean that you're able to use sky as a backdrop, ideal when there are lots of puffy white clouds set against a deep blue sky, or stormy grey clouds brooding with intent. If you're very lucky, you might even catch a rainbow. Another benefit is the chance to use perspective and scale to good effect. If you spot a tree or farm building, shoot with your subject at a distance then closer to the object to vary its scale in the frame. These objects can also prove useful for providing shade or being used close-up as an interesting backdrop that fills the frame.

Found an interesting building? Make full use of it by including it in your images for scale, as a backdrop and to provide shade when you need it. Here, Paul used this windmill for all three – the dark, brooding sky with light filtering just tops it off, adding atmosphere and mood.



● PAUL WARD SAYS...

"Birmingham may be a bustling city, but head out to the rural areas around it and the landscape is varied and packed with potential. When I was briefed to shoot rural locations for this guide, I knew exactly where to shoot – on a long roman road called Fosse Way near Coventry. A windmill there had always intrigued me – I headed to it with my model, Gemma, noting the weather was unpredictable, with large areas covered by blue sky and others by thick grey cloud cover. Rather than shooting straight away, I wandered the area surrounding the mill, looking to see which viewpoint would be best to shoot from. As well as looking at the sun's position, I also considered any foreground interest that could add to the image. I was fortunate to find a small wheat/



Pro insight

PAUL WARD ON... RURAL LOCATIONS

"In the UK, the countryside is never too far away, so it's only ever a short drive to find fresh photo opportunities. Living in Birmingham, I'm surrounded by urban environments so it's very refreshing and inspirational to head out in the car and capture portraits in a rural setting. For me, the countryside sings of romance and happiness. Another reason I love the countryside is because the scenery transforms itself depending on the season, so I can return to the same place throughout the year and have the opportunity to capture very different results. Rural locations are a great choice for wedding couples as well as fashion and standard portraits. I love shooting in open areas with vibrant green grass but my favourite is poppy fields – it's such a powerful setting."

barley field to one side – this would prove far more appealing than having Gemma stand on the grass. From this position, the sun was to the right, providing an attractive side-light on Gemma and the scene. Better still, the dense grey cloud was behind the windmill, providing a dark, brooding backdrop. To make the most of the conditions, I needed to use some flash to illuminate Gemma, while at the same time adjusting the exposure to effectively underexpose the background a little and add contrast and drama to the image.

"To boost impact further, I decided during post-production to create three separate exposures from the file and combine them to create a subtle HDR effect. Merging the correct, -2 and +1.5EV exposures boosted the colours and contrast and warmed the image, too, producing a strong result. However, it also made skin tones unattractive, so I masked Gemma's figure and removed the HDR effect to make her far more natural, giving the final result.

"I captured a number of images in both portrait and landscape format using the windmill in the backdrop and having Gemma adapt her pose to suit. It wasn't too long before the sun emerged and bathed the entire scene in strong, directional light. Rather than use a diffuser or shoot contre-jour, I headed towards an area shaded by trees. The spot I chose, at the corner of a field, had some trees by a wooden fence that made for an idyllic setting, with the sunlit field in the backdrop. Here, Gemma was lit by a diffused, flattering light, but I leaned a silver reflector on a tree, angled to bounce some ambient light on her face and reveal a little more detail. This is an easy technique to use – you just need to be careful that the colour of the reflected light on your subject doesn't look odd compared to the rest of the scene."

● **Make use of the foreground**
Look for the best place to stand your model. The wheat field here proved far more interesting than if the model had stood in the short grass.



Beaches

WITH THOUSANDS OF MILES of coastline in the UK, there's no shortage of options for anyone wanting to place the sea in the background of their images. While there are areas that are unreachable or too dangerous to reach on foot, you'll never be short of beaches, be they sandy or pebbly, to use as a portrait location.

The wide-open spaces allow you to shoot at pretty much any angle, using the sky and/or the sea as a backdrop. Depending on the location, you could add extra colour by shooting at sunrise or sunset, with the colours of the sky being reflected on the water's surface.

You should be able to find elements that can be used to add additional visual interest such as groynes, boats and piers. The latter provides shade, too, when shooting on bright days. Beaches are ideal for various types of portraits. Take the kids along and you can capture great shots of them playing in the sand or running along the waterline. It's an ideal location, too, for capturing teenagers in hip fashion and surf gear. And, of course, it's the ideal place to capture subjects in beach sports and swimwear.

The fact that beaches are free from cover means you need to be in full control of the lighting. Overcast days provide a pleasant, diffused light that allows you to shoot in any direction as there's no direct sunlight to worry about. On clear, sunny days, however, you'll need to decide on where to place your subject. Have the sun behind and you can shoot contre-jour, resulting in an overexposed backdrop, with a reflector bouncing light on to the subject to light their face. Or use flash to light the subject and retain detail in the background. A great option is to have an assistant hold a diffuser over the subject to place them in shade.



Set-up

● BJORN THOMASSEN SAYS...

"Being based in Falmouth, on the south Cornish coast, it's no surprise to find that I regularly shoot portraits on beaches. It's one of my favourite outdoor locations with lots of scope for shooting a variety of commercial portrait styles. I'm regularly shooting fashion images for surf and beachwear clothing companies, brides and grooms looking for romantic images by the sea and more glamorous calendar shots of models. Sometimes I'll use ambient light only but I'll often use my Elinchrom Quadra portable flash outfit to either complement daylight or dominate the lighting.

"On days with strong sunshine, I'll use a large SunSwatter diffuser to place my subject in shade and bounce light to reveal detail using a California Sunbounce metallic reflector. The backdrop is usually a few stops brighter than the subject so without



the reflector they would appear dark or almost silhouetted. While the reflected light may be around two stops less bright than the background, it's enough to light them perfectly. The result is a strong defined effect, ideal for calendar or fashion work.

"When I want to bring an element of beach life into the image, I'll look for common beach objects I can include in the image. Sometimes I'll use beach huts in the backdrop but with some beaches this requires permission first. As my model, Carly, is athletic, I photographed her by a beach volleyball net. I used two studioflash heads for this image, with one high and behind the net and another in front.

"If you're shooting on sandy beaches, it's



ABOVE AND TOP RIGHT: To get a sense of isolation, Bjorn shoots the model in the water. These shots were taken with a 70-200mm lens. **LEFT:** A volleyball beach net was a good backdrop for the athletic figure of the model.



Set-up



ABOVE: Cropping in tight and adopting a low viewpoint works well for fashion and celebrity portraits taken on the sand.

RIGHT: Ask your model to take a quick dip in the sea – it adds a lovely sheen to their skin.

worth having your subject lie on the sand and shoot three-quarter crops. The contrast between smooth skin and coarse sand works well and is a popular style of photography with fashion and celebrity portraits. I find this style works best by adopting a very low viewpoint and cropping in quite tight. A softbox lighting the face gives a classic butterfly effect, with the head angled slightly upwards to prevent the sand in the foreground receiving too much exposure.

"One aspect I really enjoy is having my subject pose in the sea, rather than on the beach. By using the long end of my 70-200mm lens, I can compose the scene so that there is nothing in the frame but my subject, the sea and the sky. This gives a strong sense of isolation to the image



and, because there are no man-made elements in the frame, it takes on a timeless appeal. When shooting this type of image, my favourite technique is to kneel in the water to give a low viewpoint and use a wide aperture. The result is an image where the eye follows the softly focused water in the foreground without obstruction to the sharply rendered subject, isolated in the frame against the sky behind. I'll usually ask the subject to dip their body in the water to add a smooth sheen to

their skin, which is accentuated by the light from a softbox held high and angled at around 45° to the subject.

"One of my favourite times of day to shoot is at dusk, when I'm able to use a powerful sunset as a stunning backdrop, with my studioflash defining my subject in the foreground. I've shot countless fashion and glamour images using this technique and it's a very successful formula that I always go back to."

PORTRAIT LENS HEAVEN



LensPimp





THE BASICS OF FLASH

DOES FLASH LEAVE YOU FEELING FLUSTERED? FEAR NOT! WE'VE ENLISTED THE EXPERTISE OF PRO PHOTOGRAPHERS PAUL WARD AND BRETT HARKNESS TO HELP COVER THE BASICS OF SHOOTING GREAT PORTRAITS USING FLASHGUNS. IT'S A LOT EASIER THAN YOU MIGHT THINK AND YOU'LL NOTICE AN INSTANT IMPROVEMENT IN YOUR RESULTS

WE'VE FOCUSED HEAVILY on using daylight in your portraits up until now, but this part of the guide is geared towards getting you started with using flashguns. While in the past flash was expensive and required a fair degree of experience, that's no longer the case. With digital cameras offering users instant review of images, and both cameras and flashguns offering a wealth of features, taking great portraits with flash is now easier than ever! In fact, as you'll discover, we'll be showing you how using flashguns in manual rather than leaving them set to TTL will do wonders for your flash photography. By making changes manually you'll quickly learn the effect that each change makes to your images – it becomes second nature after some practice! What's even better is

that it's no longer the case that you need to invest serious amounts of money to buy top-end flashguns. As you'll find out on page 87, there are several flash brands out there which offer brilliant models at bargain prices. In fact, for less than £200 you can buy a full flash outfit consisting of two flashguns, a set of wireless flash triggers, softboxes and stands. In other words, for less than the price of a branded flashgun, you can kit yourself out with a wireless flashgun-based portable studio! So what are you waiting for? Turn over the page and start learning the basics of flash photography, then buy some kit and try out our simple techniques. You'll be amazed at just how quickly you'll develop your understanding of flash and improve your portrait skills.

The basics of flash photography

The modern flashgun is a portable powerhouse packed with a range of sophisticated functions. Be sure to know how to get the best from it

FLASHGUNS COME IN various shapes and sizes, with some offering a basic specification and low power and others offering a sophisticated range of features and modes as well as a more powerful flash output. Our anatomy diagram below covers the more sophisticated units, using the Nikon Speedlight SB-910 as an example.

Whichever models you use, most operate in a very similar way and are based around the same types of flash modes, as described in the panel below. Most models offer Through The Lens (TTL) flash metering, a sophisticated feature that in most general situations reliably provides the correct amount of flash without requiring your help.

TTL flash is incredibly popular with all levels of amateur photographer as well as many

enthusiasts and professionals, as it's so easy to use and has a small failure rate. However, while there is no doubt it performs brilliantly, when using TTL flash, you're leaving the camera and flashgun to determine the flash output, so you're never quite sure what you'll get. In certain situations, such as when the subject is set against a highly reflective surface, you may get an incorrect exposure. Therefore, we'd recommend you take full control and learn how to take pictures with both camera and flash set to manual. Doing so, you're guaranteed to know exactly how much flash is being produced every time as it will always give the same amount of output unless the power setting is changed. We explain how to take full control in the section 'Setting Your Flash to Manual' (far right).

Flash facts

USING OFF-CAMERA

Taking your flash off-camera is easier and more affordable than you might think, and allows for more creative results than on-camera flash.

When you have the flashgun sat on the camera's hotshoe and press the shutter, an electrical signal is sent through the hotshoe, which fires the flash. When using flashguns off-camera, there's no physical link between flash and camera, so you need something to connect the two. In the past, a cable was used, but nowadays a wireless trigger system is a far more popular choice. This works by fitting one wireless trigger to the camera's hotshoe, to act as a transmitter, while receivers are attached to each flashgun. When the shutter is pressed, a radio or infrared signal is sent from the transmitter to each receiver, firing each flashgun.

When using two or more flashguns, it's worth checking to see if they have a Slave mode. If so, you don't need a receiver for every flash. The receiver need only be on one flashgun, known as the 'Master' – when triggered, the flash is detected by the 'Slave' flashes and these automatically fire, too. All well and good, but the Slave guns have to 'see' the Master's flash, or they won't fire. In this situation, moving the flashguns so they have line of sight of the Master unit, or using wireless triggers is the solution.

One final note: it's possible to buy trigger sets that retain TTL (Through The Lens) flash control, but be prepared to have to pay extra for them – this facility doesn't come cheap! We'd suggest shooting in manual and giving our recommended flash outfit a try (see page 87 for details).

Main flash modes

The way your DSLR and flash work together is governed by the flash mode. Here are the most common flash modes that you'll find on dedicated flashguns.

Auto: In certain exposure modes, your DSLR will activate the built-in flash. It calculates aperture via TTL metering, but sets a high shutter speed to avoid camera shake. Convenient, but not very creative.

Slow-sync: Uses a slower shutter speed to record ambient light. Good for night-time portraits where the mood needs to be recorded too, but watch for camera shake.

Rear/second-curtain sync: The flash is fired at the end of the exposure, rather than at the start. Great for leaving a trail of light behind moving subjects.

Anti red-eye: Aims to prevent or reduce so-called red-eye in flash portraits by using a series of pre-flashes to make a subject's pupil contract before the exposure is taken.

Flash-off: Stops a camera from automatically engaging the built-in flash. It's only relevant if you shoot using one of the fully auto exposure modes.

Flash exposure compensation: Your DSLR automatically calculates the amount of flash needed for an exposure. Use this to increase or decrease the amount of flash output to your liking.

Anatomy of a flashgun

- Flash head:** Can be rotated or flipped to bounce light off walls and ceilings. Most zoom to match light coverage to the focal length.
- AF Assist:** Projects an infrared beam to help focus in dim light.
- Hotshoe:** The connection between camera and flash. Used to trigger the flash and communicate data for TTL light metering.
- LCD screen:** Shows the status of the flashgun. In this case the metering mode, range, zoom setting and f/stop are all visible. Here, we can see that the unit is set to TTL exposure mode for an aperture of f/4 and a 24mm lens, giving a range of between 0.6 to 6.9m.
- Buttons and control wheel:** Used to set advanced features, like flash exposure control, metering mode etc.
- Fold-away reflector and diffuser:** The reflector can be used with the gun in bounce mode to direct a small amount of light towards the subject. The diffuser is used to disperse light over a wider area when shooting with ultra wide-angle lenses.
- Power and mode switch:** Turns on power to the flashgun and, in this case, dictates how the unit behaves when used off-camera in wireless TTL mode.





BRETT HARKNESS

TOP TIP!

The hotshoe's okay, but...
You'll rarely find a serious photographer using their flashgun mounted on the hotshoe. Images taken with off-camera flash are almost always better so invest in a set of triggers and you'll notice an instant improvement.

Pro insight**PAUL WARD ON...
FLASHGUNS**

"Flashguns offer a great degree of sophistication and power, so are a viable alternative light source to studioflash. The biggest advantage using Speedlites rather than studioflash is their portability. I much prefer being able to head out on location with a couple of flashguns than two cumbersome studioflash heads. It's particularly ideal when I'm travelling light on overseas shoots. I can put the stands within the hold luggage and keep the flashguns in my carry-on. While there are fantastic portable flash kits available, such as Elinchrom's Ranger series, the option of using two flashguns is a far cheaper one. The biggest downside is that, while powerful, Speedlites can't match the output from a studioflash head, especially with a diffuser attached."

**BRETT HARKNESS ON...
USING MANUAL FLASH**

"With manual flash, I'd suggest you spend some time practising and getting to learn how much power your flash produces in different lighting conditions. For instance, I've used Canon Speedlite 580EX II flashguns for years and know instinctively that when the subject is around 5ft away, I'll set my camera to f/8, the flash to 1/4 power and get perfect results. Having this experience is a life-saver if you need to work fast, such as at weddings. I'm often asked why I don't use the flash in TTL mode but the simple truth is that while it's a pretty reliable system it's not foolproof and can get it wrong, which is something I cannot risk. Using manual, I know exactly the output of the flash and so I prefer to trust in my experience than the TTL flash's assessment of the scene."

● SETTING YOUR FLASH TO MANUAL

Less experienced photographers may deem switching from auto to manual a step too far, but it's not as difficult as it seems and you'll soon get the hang of it. With the camera in manual, set an ISO, choose the aperture to give the depth-of-field you want, then set a shutter speed at or below the flash sync speed. If need be, change the ISO or shutter speed to ensure the ambient light exposure is correct. Then set up and switch on the flash, choose a power setting and take a test shot. You can adjust the power settings to increase or decrease the amount of flash on your subject until you've got it right. Two of our leading pro contributors regularly use manual flash – here's what they have to say about it:

Paul Ward: "I always set my DSLR to manual as then I'm in control of the exposure. In the past I used aperture-priority but my DSLR kept setting the shutter speed to 1/200sec when I used flash, when I'd prefer a longer exposure. I've stuck to manual ever since. I've used TTL flash in the past but found it's fooled by very dark or light backdrops. While I can use the flash exposure compensation facility to compensate, I've found it quicker and easier to produce consistent results using everything in manual."

Brett Harkness: "Using your camera and flash on manual seems to frighten a lot of people, but on my courses I teach attendees my 'triangle of loveliness' and they soon discover it's easier than they think. Draw a triangle with ISO at its centre – ISO is at the control of everything. Place apertures in one corner, shutter speeds in another and flash-to-subject distance in the other. Change the aperture to vary the amount of flash that reaches the subject as well as control depth-of-field, and the shutter speed to control the ambient light. Take a test shot and adjust the triangle's 'corner' settings to suit. If you need to, raise or lower the ISO. The key thing with flash photography is that it's essential you get the ambient light exposure right first – if you can do this, getting the correct amount of flash is relatively straightforward."

Which flashgun is best?

There is a huge variety of flashguns available, from basic models to highly sophisticated units, so choosing the best model to suit your needs isn't straightforward. The general rule is that the more you spend on a flashgun, the better specified it is, so it's no surprise that photographers will try to buy the best that they can afford. Flashguns are packed with functions that can be used for all manner of creative flash photography. However, as you'll also discover, while TTL (Through The Lens) flash metering is accurate and reliable, many experienced photographers choose not to use it and instead set their flashguns (and camera) to manual. By using manual, taking test shots and reviewing images on the LCD monitor, it's possible to quickly set up the flash to give perfect lighting. (That said, for

weddings and portraits where you've no time to experiment, TTL is often best.) Using flash in manual isn't as difficult as you might think, so we strongly urge you give it a try when shooting portraits.

You'll also have one major added bonus if you shoot in manual – you'll save money on kit, as you can use pretty much any flashgun – there is no need to be brand specific. You can buy budget brands like Yongnuo, or even rival brands of flashgun. So if you use a Canon EOS, a Nikon, Pentax or Olympus flashgun is okay! You need to ensure that it has manual power settings – most flashguns offer a selection of manual settings, usually in full stop increments from full power (1/1) down to 1/128th power. If you're unsure check the instructions or the manufacturer's website.



Essential flash kit

Your flashgun is a sophisticated and versatile lighting tool but it's the modifiers that determine the lighting effect. Here we cover the main accessories you need to get the very best results

YOU'D NEVER SET up a studioflash system and light your subjects using the bare bulbs, would you? Of course not! Well that principle should apply to using flashguns whenever you're shooting portraits. Use direct flash and the results are harsh and less than flattering. Some flashguns have a built-in diffuser panel that can be pulled out and placed over the head and these soften the light somewhat, but for the best results, you should bounce the flash or use a modifier. Still unsure of what you need? No problem. We've taken a set of shots with the flash above the camera and then at a 45° angle to show you the effects of using flash with the most popular modifiers at the two most common lighting positions.

THE EFFECTS OF FLASH MODIFIERS

The following images illustrate the effects of the different types of attachments available for your flashgun. As you'll note, several give very similar results, so there's no need to buy them all!

1) Flashgun only

- Undiffused, direct flash: Very harsh and unflattering light. Not recommended!
- Undiffused flash, 45° angle: Very harsh lighting with strong shadows. Avoid!

2) Flashgun bounce card

- Direct: Less harsh than direct flash but still a little unflattering. Usable but not ideal.
- 45° angle: Far better than direct flash.

3) Large softbox

- Direct: Diffused and clean light.
- 45° angle: Softer light but deep shadows.
- 45° angle with reflector: The reflector adds a little light into the shadow areas.

4) Small softbox

- Direct: Soft light but still slightly harsh.
- 45° angle: Gives a nice diffused effect but deeper shadows than a bigger softbox.
- 45° angle with reflector: The white reflector fills in the shadows a little.

5) Brolly

- Direct: Placing behind and above camera creates a shadow beneath chin.
- 45° angle: Produces a flattering light with strong shadows. A nice effect.
- 45° angle with reflector: A very pleasing effect, soft light with slight shadows.

6) Globe

- Direct: A clean, even light but some shadow beneath the chin.
- 45° angle: Clean, diffused light but harsh shadows. Similar results to a softbox.
- 45° angle with reflector: A nice clean light with slight shadows.

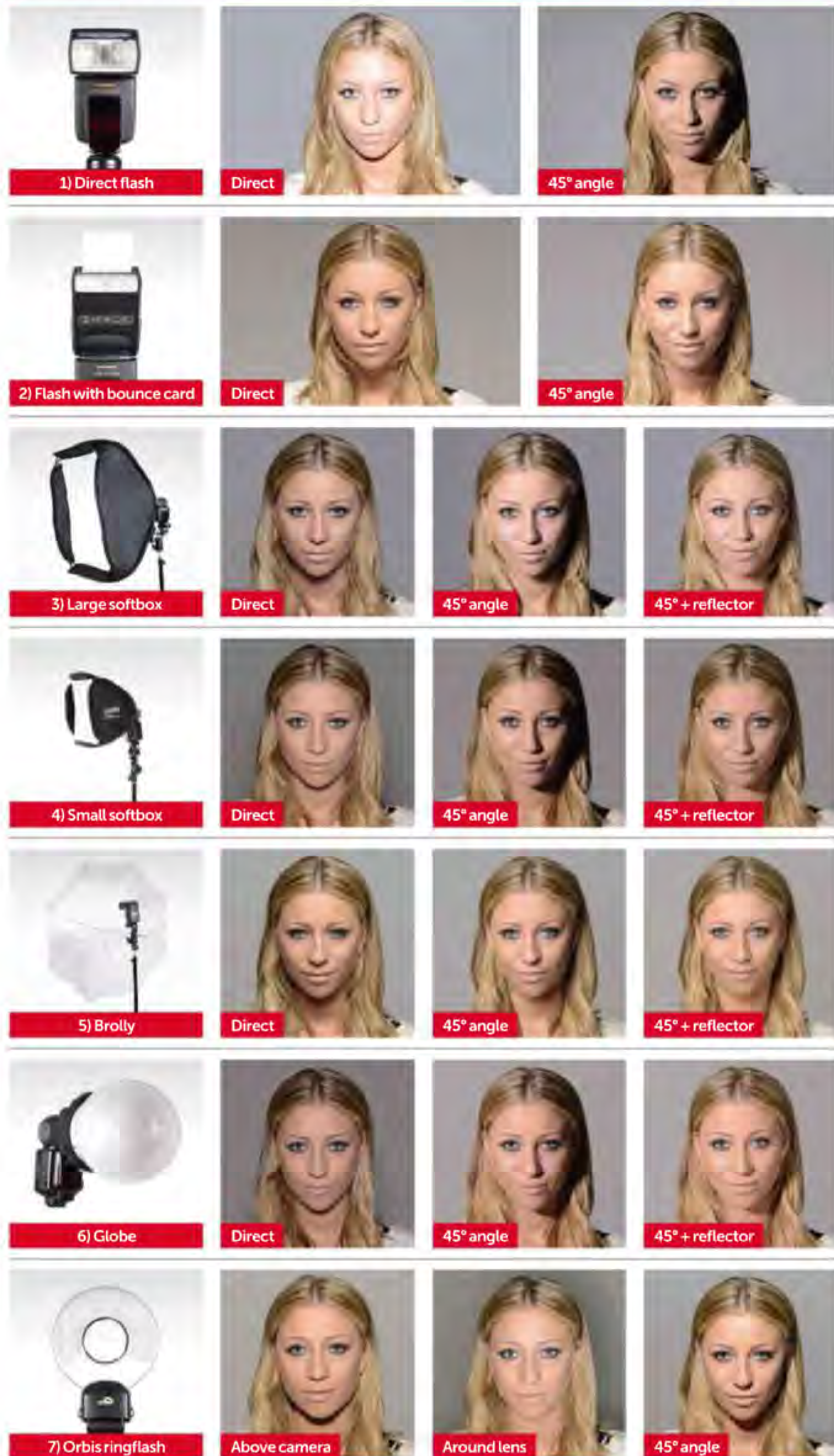
7) Orbis ringflash adaptor

- Above camera: Strong but even light, some shadows beneath chin.
- Around lens: Very even light, dark background due to light fall-off.
- 45° angle: Nice, diffused effect with deep shadows. A little similar to a softbox.

TOPTIP

One advantage with using flashguns is that virtually all run off AA batteries, so you should have little problem getting hold of spares should you need them.

Flash modifiers



Build your own multiple flash outfit for under £200

● OUR BASIC WIRELESS FLASH SYSTEM

In the past, investing in a decent flash system involved spending an excessive amount of money. That is no longer the case. Now, £200 is enough to get you a multi-flash system that's more than capable of carrying out the techniques covered in this guide. In fact, since we discovered the Yongnuo's range of budget flashguns and triggers, we've used them regularly on our magazine shoots. With the addition of a few extra budget options, we've a fully kitted multiple flash set-up at a fraction of the price of buying marque brands. If you want to try out our off-camera flash techniques, think about adding some or all of our budget outfit to your current kit.



1) 2x Yongnuo Speedlite YN-560 II flashguns £40 each

Don't let the price put you off – these flashguns are built to a very high standard and offer a very good range of features, including a zoom head, Master/Slave facility and second-curtain sync. Its one omission is TTL flash, but if you're happy using manual power settings, as described in this guide, then this shouldn't prove a major problem.

2) 2x softbox kits £26 each

These unbranded collapsible softboxes from eBay are 60x60cm and come supplied with a hotshoe mounting ball & socket bracket (6) for the flashgun.

3) 2x lighting stands £22 a pair

Also bought from eBay, these two stands can be raised as high as two metres. Their maximum load of 2.5kg means they're suitable for our flash set-up.

4) 3x Yongnuo RF-603 wireless triggers £32 for a set of three

These wireless triggers, bought from eBay, are both transceivers, meaning both have transmitters and receivers built-in, so you can slip any of them on the camera's hotshoe and the others beneath the flashguns. While not TTL-compatible, they're low-cost options for manual flash and double up as a remote shutter release too.

5) Cold hotshoe adaptors £9 a pair

These metal plates, ordered from eBay, allow you to mount the flashguns on to lighting stands via a standard tripod bush.

TOTAL COST OF OUTFIT:

£195

Pro insight

PAUL WARD ON FLASH MODIFIERS

"I generally only use the main types of modifiers with my flashguns – while there's a vast range of options now available, I find most give a similar type of effect. On general location shoots, I'll use either a small softbox or a brolly, while indoors when working in a relatively confined area, such as when shooting in nightclubs, I'll use a small Rogue FlashBender to bounce the light. I've also invested in a couple of adaptors that allow my larger Bowens softboxes to be used with my flashguns. One thing to always bear in mind when using a modifier is that they do absorb a fair amount of light, so you need to ensure you're using a high-powered flashgun to compensate – you can also raise the ISO rating to ISO 400 or 800 to boost the flash range."



Flash accessories



FLASH TRIGGER

When your flash isn't mounted on the camera's hotshoe, you need a way to get it to fire. Leads were

once commonly used and while still available, we'd suggest you invest in a set of wireless triggers. There are various inexpensive options as well as pricier models that allow full dedication, including TTL flash. While Pocket Wizard is the pros' choice, also check out models from Yongnuo, Interfit, Hahnel and Hama.



LIGHT STANDS

Unless you have a couple of helpers with you, you'll need some way of holding the flashguns in

position. Lighting stands are relatively inexpensive and versatile, and are a lightweight option too, although you could simply take along a couple of tripods instead. Ideally, look for stands with a screw thread at the top.



SLAVE CELL

If your flash lacks a Slave mode, you can either fit a trigger or instead buy a slave cell unit that slips onto the

hotshoe. Just be sure its sensor is in line of sight of the 'Master' flashgun's output otherwise it won't trigger the flash it's attached to.



FIXINGS

Many flashguns are supplied with a plastic shoe on which sits the flashgun, which can be rested on a

flat surface or mounted on a tripod or lighting stand. If you don't have one, they're readily available online or you can use a cold shoe adaptor instead.



COLOUR GELS

Place colour gels in front of the flash head and you can add colour and visual interest to backdrops or even

add colour to your subject's hair and face. Brands such as Rogue and Honl produce excellent colour gel sets and holders that fit most flashguns, or you can try making your own from colour acetate and using sticky tape or Blu-Tack to hold it in place.

Introductory flash techniques

There are numerous ways to light a subject with flash. Here are a few easy but effective methods

ONCE YOU DISCOVER the options that come with removing the flashgun from the camera, the possibilities for your flashlit portraits are quite literally endless. Using off-camera flash set-ups with one, two or more flashguns and the numerous available modifiers allows you to light not only the subject but also the background in any number of ways, from high-key to spotlight 'Hollywood-style'. Here we offer a few simple flash techniques that give very high-quality results. With all these techniques – with the exception of high-speed flash – set both your camera and flashgun to manual.

White wall as a diffuser

If your home or office has white walls, then you've the perfect surface to act as a large flash diffuser. While the common practice is to point the flashgun towards the subject, with this technique, you aim the flash head at the wall instead and allow the light to bounce off its surface and spread to cover a far wider area with a beautifully diffused light. You can use a single flashgun with this set-up, although being able to use a second flash, too, will double the output, increasing the range covered and your choice of exposure settings.

With this technique, after placing your subject in position, you set up the flash to the side of you on a stand and aim it towards the white wall that your subject is facing. If you have two flashguns, you'd place the second on the other side of you. The flash heads are aimed at the wall, although if you have a low white ceiling, you can also tilt it upwards at an angle. This will give a similar effect to using a huge softbox to spread the light. It gives a very flattering effect and is a particularly useful technique to use if your subject has bad skin.

You'll need to place yourself in front of the subject but keep a bit of distance so you're not obstructing the light bouncing from the wall from reaching the subject.

Because the light spreads so wide, you'll need to take care with your exposures, especially if shooting handheld. Thankfully the lighting effect suits shallow depth-of-field so using a very wide aperture improves the aesthetic nature of the image as well as helping to minimise the risk of camera shake. If there remains a risk of shake, raise the ISO rating to 400 or 800 and/or use a tripod or monopod to support the camera.

One thing to remember is that the colour of the flash is determined by the colour of the surfaces it bounces off, so avoid coloured surfaces unless you want your subject to take on a magnolia tone!



1) Above: Set up one flashgun on a stand to one side of you and aim it at the wall that the subject is facing (ie pointing behind you).

2) Below: The result of the flash bouncing off the white wall is a very attractive, diffused light that gives a very flattering effect.



3) Left: You can add a further dimension to images by placing a flash behind your subject aimed towards the rear of the head.

4) Above: Using a second flashgun for the hair adds a professional touch to your portrait. Adjust its position and power to vary the result.



Highly directional light

You can use your flashgun to create highly stylised portraits with an air of mystery. By having your subject lean against the backdrop, aiming the flash at a narrow angle and then shooting from the opposite side, you can capture images with the subject as a near-silhouette with a strong rim light around them. This is a popular technique for boudoir and erotic photography but can be applied to other forms of portraits too.

Because the lighting is so strong and directional, you need to be aware that the position of the flash and how your subject poses is critical to the effect. Some photographers prefer to get the position and angle of the flash right first, then adjust the model's pose, others prefer doing it the opposite way. Use whichever process suits you, then try making slight variations to both the flash and the subject to see how the effect changes. Moving the flash further away from the subject gives a sharper light, while moving it closer makes it more diffused. As the subject is generally in shadow, have them extend their legs and minimise the amount of contact with the wall to reveal their shape and create more attractive spreads of shadow.



1) This shot of the model against a purple wall is okay, but with strong colour backdrops, there's the chance to be a bit different with flash.



2) Set up the flash. Place the flashgun fairly close to the wall and angled so that the head points towards the wall rather than the subject.



3) Fire a test shot. Check (and adjust if necessary) the flash power and direction, as well as how the light falls on your subject and their pose.

4) Top: The final result oozes mood and mystery. Often, the best results are when the subject looks at the flash, giving a nice rim light around the face.

Standard 45° lighting

The most common form of lighting arrangement with a single light source is to place it slightly higher and angled at 45° to the subject. In many respects this gives a natural fall of light on to the subject, which is why it's so pleasing to the viewer's eye. When using this set-up, fire off a small selection of test shots, changing the angle of the flash slightly but also having your subject turn their face slowly from facing the camera to facing the flash so you're able to see how the face suits the light. Some faces look best at an angle, while others look better with the light more straight on.

One other consideration to make is the deliberate inclusion of shadows by how close your subject is to the background. Have them lean against the wall and you'll include their shadow on the backdrop, while having them stand a couple of feet away from it reduces or removes the chance of any shadow being recorded.

The type of modifier you use will affect how your subject and the shadows are rendered. Shoot without one and you'll have strong directional light and very defined shadows on the opposite side of the face (and possibly the wall too). Use a brolly or softbox for a far more flattering and even result, with softer shadows.

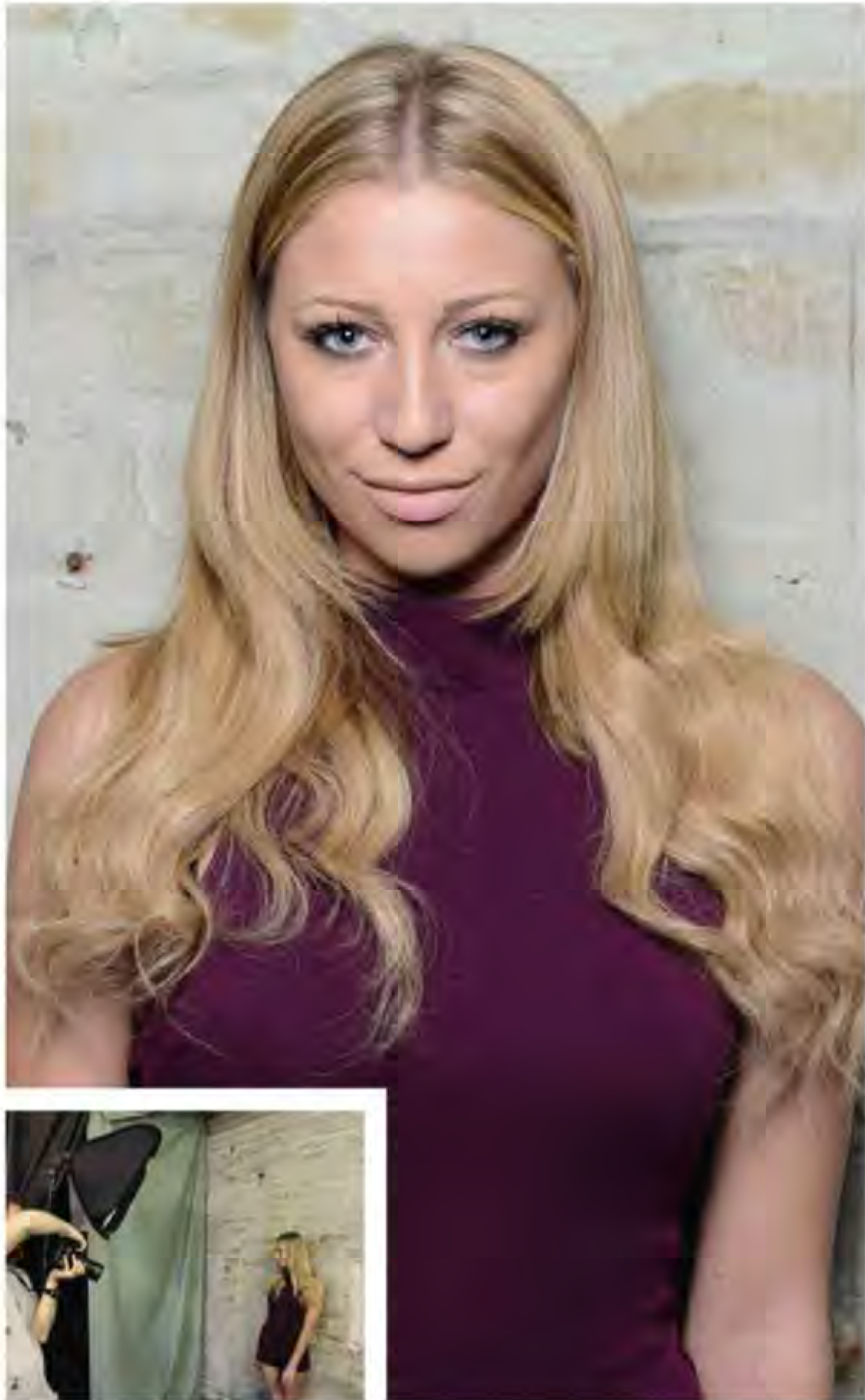


1) This set of images illustrates how easy it is to light a subject using one flashgun, fitted with a softbox. For the main shot, the flash is placed at eye-level and close to the wall.

2) The result of having the flash at such a tight angle is a strong shadow on the opposite side of the subject (above left). It's ideal for more dramatic effects but not overly flattering.

3) Moving the flash so that it is 45° to the subjects gives a far better result (above right). There is still some shadow on one side of the subject but the effect is more appealing.

4) For a far more even light, place the flashgun above and behind your shooting position. This provides an even spread of light over your subject for a more flattering result (right).



Essential technique

FASHION RINGLIGHT EFFECT

The ringflash has been a favourite with fashion photographers for many years. With the lens slipped through the aperture at its centre, the ringflash can provide a strong but even light that is incredibly flattering, giving bright, ring-shaped catchlights in the subject's eyes. Unfortunately it's a very expensive bit of kit, too, so for many, hiring one was the only option. In recent years ringflash adaptors have become available, which have an opening that snugly fits over the flash head. The flash burst then travels around the ring via a series of mirrors and out through a diffused panel on the front side. Depending which one you buy, you can leave the camera mounted on the hotshoe or use it off-camera. This image was taken using the Orbis, held in place around the lens and triggered via a wireless trigger. As you can see, the effect is close to that of a ringflash, but at a fraction of the price – see our test on page 160. The effect from ringflash adaptors works particularly well on female models but is very useful at reducing the prominence of wrinkles when photographing older subjects.



While they can't truly match the effect of a professional ringflash, adaptors like the Orbis mimic the effect closely.

High-speed flash syne

THE HIGH-SPEED flash mode on many flashguns was designed to allow flash to be used in bright conditions with a wide aperture. On bright days, even with the ISO rating at its lowest setting, the use of a fast f/stop like f/2.8 will often lead to shutter speeds much faster than the flash sync speed. Being able to fire the flash with faster shutter speeds has not only made it possible for sports and action photographers to freeze fast-moving subjects with flash in daylight, but also allow portrait photographers to shoot in daylight with flash and use a wide aperture to retain a shallow depth-of-field.



1

● BRETT HARKNESS

"While there's nothing wrong with using TTL flash to capture simple flash shots, your choice of exposure is limited by the ambient light when conditions are bright, due to the restraints imposed by the flash sync speed. If your flashgun offers a high-speed mode, it's worth trying it out by shooting images at a very wide aperture and comparing them with standard flash shots – you'll notice a distinct improvement. A hotshoe-mounted flash aimed directly forward can be used, but bouncing the flash off a wall or using it off-camera gives far better results. Just remember that because you're using a very wide aperture, you need to keep your eye on focusing correctly to ensure your subject is sharp in the image. These two images illustrate how high-speed sync can improve the quality of your flash shots."

1) This image was taken with TTL flash and an exposure of 1/80sec at f/5. It's okay in terms of exposure but the result is a bit dull.

2) This shot was taken with the high-speed mode engaged and the flash set to 1/16 power in manual. The aperture is set to f/2.8, giving a shutter speed of 1/320sec. The shallow depth-of-field gives a far more attractive result.



2

FLASH KIT USED

1x Yongnuo Speedlite YN560-II flashgun
2x Yongnuo RF-603 triggers
1x Softbox

Pro insight

BRETT HARKNESS ON... SHALLOW DEPTH-OF-FIELD WITHOUT HSS

"You can of course use flash to capture images with a very shallow depth-of-field when you don't have a high-speed sync mode. However, it is more difficult because you always have to work within the limits of the flash sync speed. What you need to do is to set the flash to as low a power as possible – for instance, 1/64 or even 1/128 power – and place the flash as close to the subject as possible. You'll also need to lower the ISO rating as much as possible. The result is subtle but again better than using standard TTL flash. This technique is only possible when ambient light levels are relatively low."



Lift your subject from the backdrop

USED VERY CAREFULLY, flash can subtly help improve an image without being very apparent. Sometimes it is used to lighten a background, but often a low level of flash is applied to a subject to lift them from the background or to mimic a particular lighting effect, such as late evening sunlight.

● PAUL WARD

"When shooting on location, I'll often use a subtle amount of flash to separate the subject from the background. This technique works best when both the subject and background are under the same lighting conditions and the overall image is relatively dark. By gently illuminating the subject with flash aimed at an angle, it's possible to 'lift' them from the backdrop, adding depth and definition to the portrait image.

"The lighting set-up I use came from an idea that I had while watching a video of a shoot by American photographer Dave Hill. By using two flashguns aimed at the rear/side of the subject and one to light the face, it's not too difficult to add clear definition and a subtle but effective rimlight around part of the subject.

"The first thing to do is to have the subject and the flashguns placed into their approximate positions. With the flashguns off, set the camera to aperture-priority, depress the shutter halfway to check the exposure for the ambient light. If the shutter speed is above the flash sync, lower the ISO and if need be, close down the aperture. Switch to manual, set this exposure and take a test shot to ensure the image is correctly exposed. Once you have this, adjust either the ISO or aperture so the image is one to 1.5 stops underexposed, using the scale on the LCD or in the viewfinder as a guide."



1



No flash



Rear flashguns

2



1) Choose a suitable location and position the flashguns so that two are behind your model to either side. Position the main flash (with softbox) in front of the subject and angled slightly to give a nice spread of light.

2) Switch on the secondary flashguns (ie the two that are aimed at the subject's back and her hair). Fire a test shot so you can check the effectiveness of the rimlight and make any necessary adjustments to the position and their power settings.

3) Switch on the main flash – because the softbox diffuses the light, you'll need to set this to a higher power setting than the other flashguns. Fire test shots and adjust the power until you're happy with the exposure. Three flashguns have been used to capture this exposure. One is aimed at her hair, another on her face and a third on her back to add the rimlight around her body.

4) Once you have a decent result, try switching off one of the rear lights and seeing the effect. In this case, switching off the light aimed at Gemma's back so only two flashguns fired also gave a pleasing result.

**FLASH
KIT USED**

3x Canon Speedlite
550EX flashguns
4x Yongnuo triggers
2x lighting stands
1x softbox


**FLASH
KIT USED**

1x Canon Speedlite
580EX flashgun
2x Yongnuo triggers
1x lighting stand
1x softbox

How to mix flash and flare from the sun

IT'S UNUSUAL TO want to add imperfection into images, but that is what this technique is all about. Flare is the result of a bright hotspot (usually the sun) in (or just outside) the image frame, which causes reflections within the lens optics, resulting in unsightly shapes or streaks, as well as a loss in contrast. The use of multicoatings on lens elements minimises this problem but it still occasionally occurs, especially if the optics aren't clean. While usually a distraction, flare can add a creative effect, as shown here.

● PAUL WARD

"The first thing you need to do is determine the position of the model. The multicoatings on the optics of current lenses are highly efficient at reducing or eliminating flare from the sun, so you'll need to try out your current lenses and see which delivers the worst (or should that be best?) flare. Alternatively, follow my lead and buy a very cheap, old lens from eBay – I used a manual focus Vivitar 28mm f/2.5 wide-angle bought for £15. It's an M42 screw thread, so I also needed an M42 to EOS adaptor to allow it to fit my camera. There are no electronics, so I've no AF and I need to turn the aperture ring to change f/stops while shooting in Manual mode. Because you're shooting into the sun, manual focus can be difficult and I regularly use the LiveView facility and magnify the image so I can focus critically."



1) Position the subject so that they have the sun behind them. Take a couple of test shots to determine the exposure for the ambient light. It's important to keep the shutter speed below the flash sync speed. Set a low ISO and close down the aperture until you have a suitably slow shutter speed. I used 1/200sec at f/11 (ISO 160).



2) I position the flash behind me and raise it so it's firing over my shoulder, angled at around 35° to the model. You do need to take care of your lighting when shooting in the wind. Don't risk your lighting stand blowing over – have a friend or assistant hold it. On this particular shoot, make-up artist Karen Hegarty is on hand to ensure our flash with softbox isn't blown over.



3) I adjust the manual flash power output until it gives a suitable exposure. As it's bright, I need 1/2 power to expose Gemma correctly.

Balanced tones using flash

SOME FLASH TECHNIQUES are distinctive and obvious, others are so subtle that unless you look closely for the tell-tale signs, their use may go unnoticed. This technique involves lighting a subject and their location so that the light is even within the scene and trying to balance out as many tones as possible. This often involves multitasking each flash so that each one illuminates the subject as well as the environment. It's a delicate process that requires being careful with the positioning and power of each flashgun.

● BJORN THOMASSEN

"It's far easier to use flash and make its presence obvious than to use it to capture images where its usage is far more subtle and I love being challenged to produce flash-lit images where the tones are even throughout the frame. This particular shoot was made more difficult in that we were shooting in quite a cramped setting, which meant we had to take great care in where the light from the flashguns would fall. I positioned our model, Jessica, in a narrow corridor of a friend's home, as I like the isolation awarded by the stark, clean walls. By balancing the flash correctly, the result would be a very clean and natural image with neutral tones.

"With this technique, it's important to set up one flash at a time and review the results on the LCD monitor. When balancing tones, you don't want any areas that are too high-key (light) or low-key (dark). In other words, as much of the scene should be midtone as possible.

"The key flash was fired through a small softbox and its primary aim is to illuminate the subject. Care had to be taken, however, so that the light passing by the model wouldn't lighten the wall and cause hotspots. To do this, the flash was angled slightly away from her so that she was lit by the edge of the light source rather than its centre, with less light falling on the walls around her. Due to the distance, this key light was used at 1/4 power.

"The second flash with softbox was placed out of view behind the model. Its role was to balance the tones by illuminating the wall to her side and also removing the shadow created in her hair by the key light. This light was also angled down slightly to provide a gentle rim light on her calves. This second light was placed closer to the model and set to 1/16 power."

1) Even cramped corridors in your home can make for suitable backdrops when shooting portraits if you compose and light carefully.

2) The main flash can be seen in the distance. The second flash that lights Jessica's back and the wall is in the foreground.

3) With Jessica positioned neatly within the corridor, carefully balanced flashguns produce a beautifully balanced and natural lighting effect.

FLASH KIT USED

2x Canon Speedlite 550EX flashguns
2x lighting stands
3x Yongnuo triggers
2x softboxes



3



1



2

Mixing flash and blue sky

UNDEREXPOSING THE AMBIENT light and using flash to illuminate the subject is a popular technique with lifestyle, wedding and fashion photographers, and can be used to bring detail and drama to a scene. It is most commonly used on overcast days when a drab, grey sky can be converted into a moody backdrop packed with drama and atmosphere. This transformation of the scene isn't that difficult to achieve either, so is well worth trying out the next time the heavens above are a blanket of grey.

Thankfully, you can apply a similar technique to blue sky days and produce punchy portraits packed with colour. So get ready to underexpose the ambient and fire up the flash for dramatic results...

● BRETT HARKNESS

"Whether I'm shooting fashion, kids or weddings, I'll regularly use the sky as a backdrop. Considering it's a permanent fixture in the landscape, I'm surprised that it's rarely used by many photographers.

"The principle behind this particular technique is simple – to darken the backdrop you need to effectively underexpose the scene, while using flash to ensure the subject is nicely exposed. With clear blue sky, the impact from mixing a flash-lit subject with a strong blue sky can give dramatic results.

"The first thing to do is to work out the exposure for the ambient light. You can get a quick idea of rough settings by selecting program mode, partly depressing the shutter release and seeing what reading the camera gives, then switching to manual mode and applying this exposure as a starting point. So, if the camera says 1/125sec at f/11 when in program, this is what to set once you've set the dial to manual. Because you'll be using flash, you need to ensure the shutter speed is at or below the flash sync speed, so if you need to set a slower shutter speed because the camera suggested, say, 1/500sec, close the aperture (or lower the ISO) by the same number of stops. Take a test shot, check to see if the sky is okay and adjust the exposure if it is too light or dark. Once you're happy, set up the flash.

"I prefer to use flash off-camera as you can angle the light to give areas of shadow

'Correct' exposure metered by camera



Scene underexposed by two stops



that add to the overall effect. Because you're shooting in bright daylight, you'll need to get as close to the subject as possible to allow the flash to illuminate your subject effectively. In very strong light, I try to hide the sun behind objects such as trees to reduce its effect, or shoot later in the day to give the flash more chance of lighting the subject. Needless to say, in very bright light it may not be possible, which is where the power of a portable studioflash head really comes into its own."

1) Establish the 'correct' ambient exposure, and then purposely underexpose by around two stops to deepen the blue of the sky. Your subject should appear too dark in the image.

2) Introduce the flash through a softbox aimed at an angle. You'll need to set the manual power setting quite high due to the bright light level. Position the flash close, being careful not to allow it to creep into the image area.

3) Shooting from a low angle with a wide-angle lens gives a dramatic effect, with the strong flash and dark blue sky adding real punch.

Our recommended kit for off-camera flash

While all major camera brands offer their own products, along with leading independent brands like PocketWizard, we've consistently used budget brands of triggers and flashguns to illustrate how affordable flash photography has become. The following models from Yongnuo lack TTL so you'll need to shoot in manual, but as you'll discover, it's easier than you think, so don't be put off trying out these brilliant bargains!



BUDGET TRIGGERS

The most convenient method for using flash off-camera is by fitting a trigger to the hotshoe of your camera and flashguns. Popular

brands include Hahnel, PocketWizard, Phottix and Interfit, but our favourite is the RF-603 from Yongnuo, available for around £50 for a set of four from eBay.



BUDGET FLASHGUNS

With marque flashguns costing hundreds, it may seem a fantasy to be able to own your own multi-flash set-up.

However, that's not the case. If you're happy to try manual flash, you can have your own portable studio by buying a few Yongnuo YN 560 II units from eBay, priced around £45 each.

**FLASH
KIT USED**

- 1x Calumet Genesis GF400 flashgun
- 2x PocketWizard Plus III transceivers
- 1x softbox



Adding subtle flash in daylight

ONE OF THE KEY differences between shooting with the camera and flash in automatic or using them in manual is your control over how the ambient exposure is recorded. While this may seem odd to newcomers, experienced photographers will understand why. With flash photography, leaving everything set to 'Auto' effectively means your camera tries to ensure that your subject is perfectly exposed by the flash. How the rest of the scene appears isn't factored in, which is why the background can appear dark.

However, with the camera and flash in manual, you're in total control of both ambient and flash exposure. The effect of the flash is altered by the power setting you select, and its distance from your subject, with your lens aperture affecting how it's recorded. Ambient exposure is determined by the shutter speed you use – a slower shutter allows more ambient light to reach the sensor, a fast shutter speed means less ambient exposure and therefore a darker scene. Here, Bjorn Thomassen uses this basic principle to shoot a backlit portrait late in the day.

● **BJORN THOMASSEN** "This technique is one that I regularly use when shooting outdoor portraits. It involves using flash in a subtle way to provide a good exposure of a subject captured in ambient light, with the ambient carefully manipulated to give good results.

"This particular shoot took place in a small wood late in the day, with the sun low in the sky. It's one of my favourite times of the day, as the sun gives a nice golden glow. I'll often shoot fashion and lifestyle images on the Cornish coast with the sunset as a backdrop using the same technique. The main difference is that with beach sunsets I use a faster shutter speed to saturate the sky's colours, while the use of flash is more obvious.

"With this particular shoot, the environment is quite dark due to the trees blocking out much of the light. While I can bump up the flash power to overcome this, the idea is that the flash should not compete with the sun. I want the sun to be the dominant light source, coming through the trees and almost bleaching the scene. I'll do this by setting the shutter speed so that the ambient light is slightly overexposed. I then want to balance this with a small amount of flash so that the scene is backlit but my subject appears well exposed. I need to ensure I select a flash setting that still gives enough exposure. This also prevents the flash illuminating the surroundings, which would degrade the effect.

"Achieving this requires careful exposure. You can try this by trial and error using your LCD monitor, but I prefer the old-fashioned method of exposure reading via a handheld meter. I start by measuring the difference in brightness between the sky and the shade area where my model, Carol-Ann, is positioned, which works out at around four stops. I use the meter to give an ambient exposure and set this on the camera, I then set a slightly slower shutter speed than recommended to give slight overexposure. I set the flash so that it's four stops lower than the ambient light to give a subtle exposure. In other words, with the ambient set at 1/60sec at f/16, I set the flash to give a correct exposure at f/5.6, which is effectively four stops lower. While this might sound complicated it's not, so give it a try – the key thing is to be subtle with your flash output. Work fairly quickly with light readings, as it will change as the sun passes between trees or is obscured by them."

1) Here's the first shot captured without flash at the recommended ambient reading. My aim is to improve it by slightly overexposing the scene, then adding a subtle amount of flash to illuminate the subject.

2) The set-up involved the use of two flashguns. The main flash is on a pole and fired through a softbox to softly light the subject's face and upper torso. Another flash is fitted with a Rogue Flash Bender to provide some fill to the lower torso of the model.

3) Flare is a problem when shooting into the sun, reducing contrast and highlighting any dust on optics. A hood can help, but a better solution is to choose a longer focal length of lens and use the environment to hide the sun from direct view, in this situation try to hide the sun behind a tree.

4) Here's the final result with the slightly overexposed backdrop and subtle use of flash. The location up a tree is unusual but far more visually interesting and also adds a strong sense of isolation that I like.



FLASH KIT USED

2x Yongnuo Speedlite 560 II flashguns
1x softbox and 1x Rogue Flash Bender
3x Yongnuo triggers
1x lighting stand





4



2



3

Use flash to fake the sun

Overcast and dull? Doesn't mean you can't add a bit of sunshine to your shots – follow this technique for fantastic golden-glow results...

Jordan Butters

Camera: Nikon D800

Lens: NIKKOR AF-S 70-200mm f/2.8G ED



IF YOU'RE ANYTHING like me, then it might feel like nature is conspiring against you. Often, I can be presented with a glorious sunset or beautiful light when my camera is either back in the car or at home on the shelf. On the flip side, every time I make the conscious decision to take my camera out with me, I'm faced with uninspiring light or a golden hour that never quite materialises. If I'm out shooting a landscape there's not much that can be done, except to try again another day, warm, golden-hour portrait are still possible on the dullest of days with a little help from a flashgun and an orange flash gel...

As you'll be using your flashgun to recreate a backlit sunset, you'll need to fire it off-camera. This might seem like a daunting

prospect, but it's actually surprisingly straightforward; plus, a pair of wireless transceivers can be had from Amazon or eBay for as little as £25. I used a pair of Yongnuo RF-603 triggers. Once you've established the correct ambient exposure, simply position the flashgun and adjust its power to suit your taste. You can use TTL-compatible flash and triggers, but it's just as easy to use manual flash and dial the power up or down as required.

You'll also need an orange flash gel. The most common are half-CTO and CTO (Colour Temperature Orange) gels. The gel sits in front of your flashgun, warming the flash's colour temperature to mimic the setting sun. Fit your gel before establishing your flash power, as a full CTO can reduce your flash power by up to one stop.

An extra pair of hands to hold the flash for you goes a long way here – it saves a lot of moving back and forth while adjusting power and flash position.



1 Work with the ambient light Identify the direction of any natural light in the scene – it's important that the flash comes from roughly the same direction as the natural light, otherwise shadows cast by the two light sources will clash, making the effect look false. For this reason, overcast and shaded locations are ideal, too.



2 Establish a good exposure Use aperture-priority mode and select a wide aperture. Choose an ISO that gives a workable shutter speed, bearing in mind your camera's maximum sync speed. Select Daylight White Balance and take a test shot. Adjust the settings as required to give a good natural exposure without the flash.



3 Introduce the flash Fit an orange gel to your flash – I've chosen a full CTO gel. Use a lighting stand – or even better ask an 'assistant' – to hold the flash behind your subject, just out of shot. Take another shot to establish the correct flash power, distance and angle, and adjust as required. Check the histogram for clipped highlights.



4 Use a reflector Depending on the ambient light, you may need to bounce light back onto your subject's face. As the flash is gelled orange, you may find that a gold reflector is too overpowering – silver or white reflectors work well. You can either hold the reflector yourself or bring in some extra assistance to help.

Final image

Who needs a beautiful setting sun when you've got flash?

Exposure: 1/100sec at f/2.8 (ISO 800)

Common problems



✗ Lens flare If the flash is angled towards the lens you may notice flare and a reduction in contrast. Angle the flash away from the lens until the flare disappears.



✘ Flash too low Position the flash too low and the effect lacks realism – we're mimicking the setting sun remember. Position your flash as high as you can within the frame.



✘ Ambient light underexposed Make sure that your exposure is correct, or your subject will be underexposed. Establish the correct exposure before adding the flash.



✘ Flash too bright If the flash power is too high you may blow the highlights. Check the histogram after your test shot. If so, reduce the power or move the flash further away.

Spotlight effect

IT'S POSSIBLE TO use a single flashgun and capture images that look as if they've been taken using studioflash. While some of this is down to improvements in the power of modern flashguns, the majority of the reasons why it's now possible to mimic studioflash using Speedlights is the wider availability of flash accessories. Triggers now make it easier than ever to use flash off-camera, while attachments such as snoots and softboxes allow you to better manipulate light from your flashgun than was possible before. As you'll discover, this technique yields professional-looking results and is easier to achieve than you might think.

● BRETT HARKNESS

"Using a single flashgun with a softbox to provide a 'spotlight' effect but with a gentler spread of light is a simple yet highly effective creative flash technique. This is a useful way of lighting a portrait when you want to draw full attention to your subject and isolate them from the scene. For this effect to work, the image must be exposed purely by the light from the flash – in other words, no ambient light must be included in the exposure. That's not to say you should only shoot in darkness, but rather you set the exposure so that only the flashgun's output is recorded. This is easily achieved by using a relatively fast shutter speed and a mid- or small aperture setting.

"The aid of an assistant is useful for this technique, as it involves positioning a softbox above a subject, angled down towards them. Trying to do this yourself is difficult and the angle means a lighting stand isn't suitable – although a boom is an option should you have one.

"To light effectively, you want to place it at a height that illuminates the subject while allowing as much of the area around them as possible to fall away into darkness. I'll normally set the zoom head on my flashgun to 70mm to minimise the spread of light, before fitting a 70cm softbox to give a soft yet focused light. My softbox of choice for this effect is the Lastolite Ezybox as I've found its bold edge gives a very attractive fall-off of light that produces a very attractive vignette.

"One thing to watch out for when shooting close to walls or polished surfaces are flash hotspots. Sometimes you can adjust your position or that of the softbox to eliminate it, or crop the image to exclude it. Occasionally you'll need to remove it in post-production."

1) The set-up for this is simple as only one light is used. Start by angling a softbox above the subject.

2) Set the flash sync speed and choose your preferred aperture – I chose f/11. Fire some test shots. Note whether the image is too bright (as in this case) or too dark and make adjustments to the flashgun's manual power settings. Also move the position of the softbox to ensure an attractive spread of light.

3) With exposure sorted, concentrate on poses. Having our model's face turned slightly towards the light ensures it is free of unattractive shadows. Have your subject try different poses to see what works.

4) As well as holding the softbox above the subject, try it at a lower angle as this illuminates one side of the subject and throws the scene into darkness.

5) Using a single light source in this way close to the subject isolates them from the background, giving a polished and professional result.



**FLASH
KIT USED**

1x Calumet Genesis
GF400 flashgun
2x Pocket Wizard
Plus III triggers
1x softbox



Flash gels

YOUR FLASHGUN IS daylight-balanced, meaning that its output is the same colour temperature as daylight (around 5500K). This means that images captured with flash exhibit natural colour reproduction free of colour casts. It may seem odd, therefore, to want to slip a coloured piece of plastic in front of the flash head to purposely colour the light. However, that's exactly what flash gels are designed to do, allowing you to use flash to either add colour to drab backdrops, add mood to a scene or to fire coloured light onto your subject.

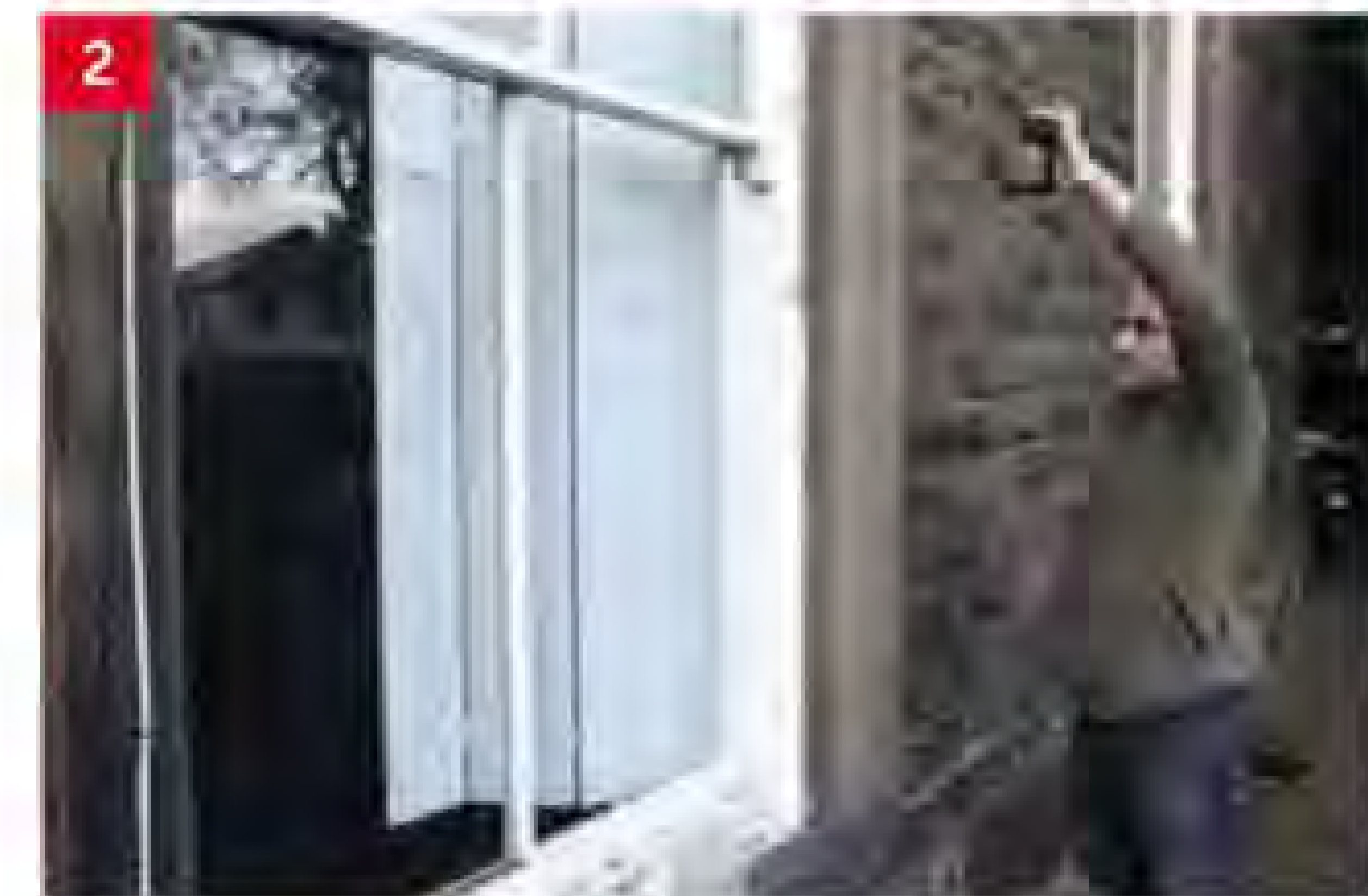
● BRETT HARKNESS

"Even though I rarely use flash gels in my photography today, there was a time when I often fitted off-camera Speedlites with flash gels to add a splash of colour to brickwork. While many people think it's best to use them on white walls, I find they work better on coloured walls, the darker the better. If it's textured, even better, as this helps add additional visual interest to the overall scene.

"There are two distinct ways in which flash gels can be used. The first and the most common is to keep the flashguns out of shot and illuminate the scene (and possibly the subject) with the colour gels. A less popular method, but one that can be very effective, is to include the flashguns within the image frame so that as well as bathing parts of the scene in colour, the flashing heads appear as coloured spotlights within the image. Whichever method you decide to use, remember that it's essential that your subject is lit by a flash with no gel to allow the subject to appear natural. For both the flash gel techniques covered here, I used gels from the Rogue Universal set.

"While adding colour via gels is normally reserved for boring locations that need additional visual interest, it can also be used

Adding colour to the scene



to add mood to a scene. While reds and greens are good choices when you want to produce a strong and dramatic effect, I prefer to use blues and oranges when I want the result to be more subtle.

"For this particular image, I wanted to mimic warm evening light coming through a window, so tried out a CTO and Rust gel, opting for the latter. I also wanted to add a little visual interest to the scene, so decided on adding another flash to the set-up with a blue gel attached."

1) Set up the main flash on a softbox close to the subject to expose the face correctly. The exposure was 1/125 at f/5 (ISO 125) with the flash at 1/16 power.

2) After deciding on a suitable viewpoint to shoot from, I had one person stand outside, aiming a flashgun fitted with a Rust gel high and into the room and set to 1/4 power. The result was a warm orange light being cast into the room.

3) A flashgun fitted with a blue gel was tucked into the back of a sofa and set at 1/4 power, projecting a cool light into the scene. The result is subtle but effective at adding mood to the scene.

Use gels and include hotspots

While the previous technique involves hiding the flashguns, this one includes them in the image. By having the flashguns included in the frame and aimed at the camera, you can include the actual bursts of the flash for effect. For this technique to work, you need to ensure that the power of the gelled flashguns are balanced so that the hotspots aren't overpowering and the colours from the gels are visible in the scene. Keep this in mind and set-up will be straightforward.

1) Find a location and pose your subject. Introduce the main flashgun and set up the manual power setting to give a decent exposure. We used 1/200sec at f/5 (ISO 125).

2) Frame to allow room for the hotspots to fit in. Placing the subject in the centre and shooting in landscape format is a good option. Introduce your first colour.

3) Once happy with the first, introduce a second colour – you can use stands or have someone hold the flashguns. Try to keep arms and hands out of the shot if possible.

4) Gelled flash adds colour and interest for unusual but attractive results. If hands can't be fully excluded (as here) you can easily remove them in Photoshop.





**FLASH
KIT USED**
1x Calumet Genesis
GF400 & softbox
2x Yongnuo YN-560II
flashguns
3x Yongnuo triggers
Rogue flash gels



Taken with the Canon EF 70-200mm f/2.8L IS II USM



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STUDIOFLASH

YOUR GUIDE TO LEARNING TO LIGHT PORTRAITS WITH STUDIOFLASH



Studioflash outfits

Some newcomers find studioflash intimidating, but the truth is, using it isn't as difficult as you think

ALTHOUGH THERE ARE VARIOUS studioflash kits available, ranging in price from under £200 to thousands, most of them have very similar features and all follow basic principles of operation. A studioflash head is designed to fire a burst of flash at a given power setting – the extra functions and accessories are all geared to allow the photographer more control of the flash output. Truly mastering a studioflash system can take years but, thankfully, getting to grips with the essentials is relatively easy. Much like using ambient light, the key factor to success is learning how to control the flash output so your subject is lit the way you'd like it to be. The big difference between studio and ambient light is your level of control – you are able to fine-tune the lighting's intensity and direction, as well as the nature of the light falling on the subject, far more accurately than you could ever achieve with natural light. This makes it an incredibly versatile form of lighting but, obviously, one that does take time to learn to use correctly. Here, we cover the basic workings of studioflash and how the various attachments, such as softboxes and brollies, can be used to control how your subject is lit.

Anatomy of a studioflash head

This illustration is of the rear of an Interfit head, but most brands will have a similar layout, with easy-to-use and well-labelled controls.



Rear of light

You'll normally find controls on the rear of the head, but some models have them on the side, too.

- 1) Sync socket:** Most studioflash outfits are supplied with a sync lead, which connects your camera to your flash output, to allow the flash to fire when you press the shutter button.
- 2) Slave cell:** This sensor detects any flash output, so if your camera is connected to one light in a multiple set-up, its output will trigger the slave cell on other lights, making them fire together.
- 3) Power settings:** A key function of studioflash heads is being able to adjust the power output. Basic heads have fixed settings, eg 1/4 power, 1/2 power and so on, while advanced heads have stepless variable settings.
- 4) Status lights/beeps:** Many heads have lights that indicate when the head has sufficient charge to fire.



Front of light

Removing the lighting attachment will usually reveal two bulbs, each with different uses.

- 5) Modelling lamp:** This tungsten bulb remains switched on to allow you to compose the image, focus on the subject and to assess the lighting effect.
- 6) Flash bulb:** These provide the powerful flash output. Most brands have specialised bulbs to fit certain heads or studioflash series. They're very fragile, so handle them with utmost care.

Too hot to handle

Flash heads heat up quickly, so take care not to burn yourself when swapping attachments. The metal mount, as well as the bulb, can get hot, especially when the modelling lamp is turned on

Setting up your camera for using studioflash

Set the camera to manual and the correct flash sync speed. Then fit a PC adaptor to your hotshoe to connect to the flash sync lead

CANON EOS DSLRS

- (1)** Set the main control dial to M to select manual mode.
- (2)** Turn the input dial behind the shutter button and set the flash sync speed.
- (3)** Once you've taken a flashmeter reading, press and hold down the +/- button, then turn the input dial to set the aperture you require.



MOST NIKON DSLRS

- (1)** Set the main control dial to M to select manual mode.
- (2)** Turn the input dial behind the shutter button and set the flash sync speed.
- (3)** Once you've taken a flashmeter reading, turn the input dial on the front of the handgrip to set the aperture.



PENTAX K-SERIES DSLRS

- (1)** Set the main control dial on the top-plate to M to select manual mode.
- (2)** Turn the input dial behind the shutter button and set the flash sync speed.
- (3)** Once you've taken a flashmeter reading, press and hold down the +/- button, then turn the input dial to set the aperture you require.



SONY ALPHA DSLRS

- (1)** Set the main control dial on the top-plate to Tv to select shutter-priority mode.
- (2)** Turn the input dial in front of the shutter button and set the flash sync speed.
- (3)** Once you've taken a flashmeter reading, press and hold down the +/- button, then turn the input dial to set the aperture you require.



COMPACT SYSTEM CAMERAS

Not all CSCs sport the exposure mode dial found on digital SLRs, but it's still very easy to select the exposure mode. With most models all you need to do is press the Menu button or the four-way control dial to display the exposure modes and rotate the wheel to M to select manual mode. With touchscreen models, simply activate the on-screen menu and press the M icon on the screen.



Studioflash accessories

Get the best out of your flash system with lighting attachments and accessories

STUDIOFLASH HEADS ARE DESIGNED to produce a high-power burst of light, but it's the lighting attachment you use that dictates the effect of the flash on the subject. If you've ever looked into buying a studioflash system, you'll no doubt have seen various types of attachments available, each having their own way of affecting the intensity and nature of light. While most basic kits are often supplied with a broolly or two and 'spills', there are a huge number of optional accessories available and getting to know which are best suited to your needs is important. In our comparison set below, we have used the most typical types of attachments available for most studioflash kits to give you an idea of how each affects the light.

As well as lighting attachments, other photographic accessories can play a big part in the quality of your final results, or just make the process a

lot easier. For instance, a flashmeter is useful to help you identify the correct aperture you need to set your camera to which will result in a perfect exposure, and a remote trigger is also handy. Which background you use also affects the final image dramatically: there are a variety available, from plain to coloured patterns, to paper rolls that fit on frames and collapsible backdrops. A reflector should not be overlooked either; it bounces light back onto the subject or background as an alternative to using an additional light. Silver is the most efficient, white provides a softer and more natural effect, while a black reflector can accentuate cheekbones! See our Buyers' Guide on page 155.

TOP TIP
When using studioflash, make sure the white dome (invercone) on your flashmeter is set over the sensor so that it takes incident light readings, which will prove to be the most accurate

Umbrella (broolly)
Available in white, silver and translucent, a broolly is one of the cheapest lighting accessories available. Silver is very efficient at bouncing light, white gives a soft, natural effect, while translucent broollies provide the most diffused light.



Softbox
A real favourite, as softboxes provide a very diffused effect that's ideal for flattering portraits. The larger the softbox, the softer the light it produces. The majority are square, but some are rectangular and thin (also called strip lights).



Beauty dish
Beauty dishes are often used, as you may expect, for close-up 'beauty' and make-up shots. They give off a very harsh light in the centre, which has the ability to enhance make-up, but also has the effect of highlighting flaws on a subject's skin.



Spill (spill kill)
Often supplied along with the flash head, a spill will help channel the light in to a concentrated beam. With portraits, they're useful for lighting backgrounds, but can have quite a harsh effect when aimed at a subject's face.



Snoot
This conical lighting attachment provides a hard edge and a directional beam of light that photographers often find is better suited for backlighting or as a hairlight – it can be unflattering if used to provide the key lighting for portraits.



Honeycomb grid
Honeycomb grids provide a soft-edged circle of light and are a popular alternative to a snoot. They act in a similar way to a spotlight, but provide a wider angle spot effect. Honeycombs are available with various sizes of grids.



How to set studioflash exposures

If you want to use studioflash, you'll need to set your camera to manual mode. Paul Ward explains the key factors to ensure that you get set up correctly

Paul Ward



For some photographers, the first time they need to switch their camera to manual mode is when they want to use studioflash. That's because, other than the sync, which triggers the flash, there's no information passing between the camera body and studioflash. It's down to you to set an ISO rating (usually a low 100 or 200), adjust the power of the studioflash, and set an aperture that gives a suitable exposure. The traditional

(and best) way to match the studioflash output with the exposure is using a lightmeter that measures flash. However, rightly or wrongly, digital photographers are increasingly doing away with the separate lightmeter and instead using the LCD monitor preview facility to work out the best settings via trial and error.

Both methods have their good and bad points so either technique can be used. Here, we explain what they are and show you how to use these techniques for great studioflash photography.

Histograms



In other photography genres, the histogram can prove a useful tool in the search for a balanced exposure. When it comes to studio photography, Paul suggests it's better to avoid always relying on the histogram: "If you're shooting in a white studio, you're going to get big peaks on your histogram that will look odd, especially if you're used to interpreting a histogram of a landscape image. I think it's much better to judge the exposure on your LCD monitor, or if you're shooting tethered, on your laptop." So, if you choose to use the histogram, be wary of overexposed peaks.

Contacts

Hähnel: www.hahnel.ie
Hama: www.hama.co.uk
Sekonic: www.sekonic.com
Yongnuo: www.amazon.co.uk

Get connected!

Your camera needs to be connected in some way to the studioflash heads before they can communicate and be told when to fire. There are a number of ways to achieve this and there is a solution to suit all budgets. The cheapest and simplest way to link a camera and flash is with a sync cord. Costing around £10, the lead plugs in to the camera's PC socket at one end and the flash at the other and is very reliable. However, the main drawback you should be aware of is that the photographer is tethered to the studioflash head, so mobility is limited.

A more flexible method is to use an infrared system. A trigger is placed on the camera's hotshoe, while a receiver plugs into the flash head's sync cord socket. No wires means the photographer can wander freely around the studio, but infrared systems can be unreliable if the trigger and receiver are not in sight of each other. They are more expensive than a sync lead, but models from brands like Hama and Hähnel start at around £50.

For the ultimate in flexibility and reliability, most professional photographers opt for a wireless radio triggering system. Like infrared, the radio systems have a trigger and a receiver, but unlike the infrared



versions, they don't suffer from line-of-sight issues as they're triggered by a radio signal. This convenience costs more, with top brands like PocketWizard costing a small fortune. However, third-party brands like Hama, Sekonic, Yongnuo and Hähnel offer more affordable options – the Hähnel Combi TF costs around £50 and should meet the requirements of most enthusiast photographers.

Studioflash: Why manual?

There is a good reason why we use manual mode when using studioflash. If you connect your camera to your studioflash heads with the DSLR set to shutter-priority (Tv) mode, the camera will try to select too wide an aperture for you, resulting in a horrendously overexposed image with blown-out highlights.

Similarly, if you select aperture-priority (Av) mode then you're likely to be rewarded with a blurry image as the camera automatically sets a long shutter speed based on the ambient light level. Only in manual mode can you control both settings to achieve a balanced exposure using flash.



Know your flash sync speed!

It's important to know your camera's flash sync speed (X-sync), because if you exceed it, you will be blighted by a black bar covering a portion of the image. This black bar is actually the camera's moving shutter curtain preventing the light from reaching the whole frame. Conversely, you can select a shutter speed that is slower than the maximum shutter speed without negative effects. Paul tends to keep his camera set at 1/125sec. Here are the typical shutter speeds for big-brand digital SLRs:

Canon: 1/200sec; **Nikon:** 1/250sec;
Sony: 1/250sec; **Pentax:** 1/180sec;
Olympus: 1/250sec.



Top techniques for metering studioflash

There are a number of ways you can make sure you get the exposure you want when using studioflash. Some take longer than others, some need a lightmeter, others not. Here are three to get you started...

IDEAL FOR BEGINNERS TO STUDIOFLASH LIGHTING

Technique one: Trial and error

The benefits of this method are that you don't need to buy a lightmeter, saving you money, and because you see the image on the LCD monitor immediately after firing the shutter, it's a very fast technique. If the image is overexposed, you need to lower the ISO and/or select a smaller aperture. If it's underexposed, you'll need to select a wider aperture and/or raise the ISO rating. You can also use the histogram to fine-tune the exposure. The main drawback of this technique is it's not as accurate as using a lightmeter and you're relying on the quality of the LCD monitor for accuracy. However, so long as you know how to read a histogram you'll get a good exposure. But when using two or more studioflash heads, you're not getting the benefits of metering each light separately.

- 1) I position my lights depending on the look I want to achieve. I then take an educated guess at the exposure settings – in this case 1/125sec at f/20 (ISO 160) – and take a test shot.
- 2) My camera's LCD screen allows me to review the image, which reveals it's underexposed and I need to open up the aperture.
- 3) I change my aperture to f/5.6, but it overexposes the image. You can see that highlights on the skin are what we call 'blown out'.
- 4) Finally, I change my settings to an aperture between the first two (f/11) and get a balanced exposure that is neither under or overexposed.

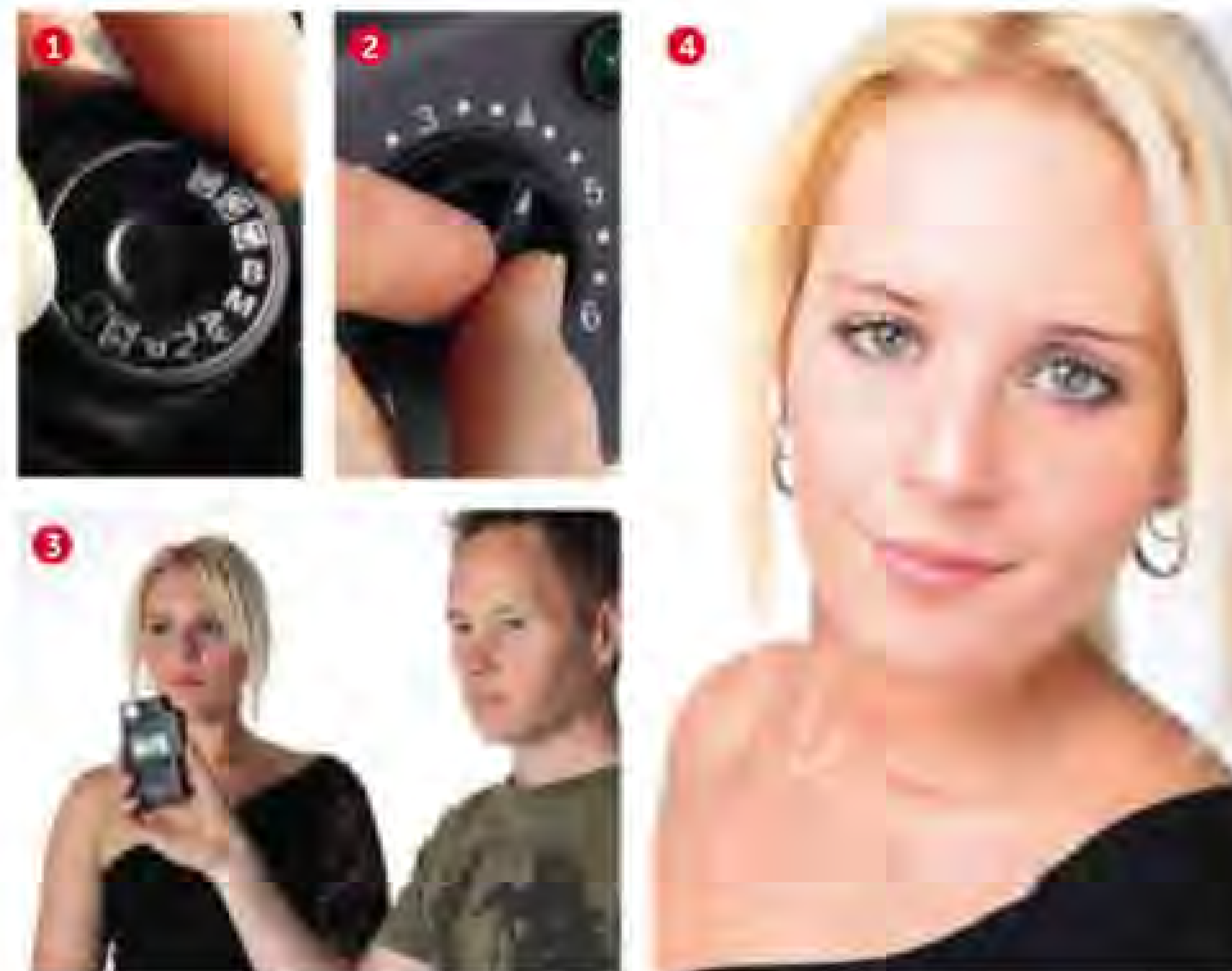


IDEAL FOR LESS EXPERIENCED PHOTOGRAPHERS

Technique two: Take a reading with all lights on

Most amateur photographers – and many pros, in fact – use this method to determine studioflash exposures. By taking a single exposure reading with the meter pointing away from the subject and towards the camera, you can quickly take a single meter reading that should give a correct exposure. It's a method that works really well, as you can view the result, then adjust the various power settings on each studioflash head, take another meter reading and set this new exposure setting. It's a less involved method but judging the lighting balance isn't as straightforward – it can also be difficult to judge how each light individually illuminates the subject. Paul shows us how it's done...

- 1) I make sure the camera is in manual mode and set my ISO (160) into the lightmeter so it can calculate an accurate reading.
- 2) I take a reading from Kate's face. The meter tells me I need an aperture of f/11 to get the correct exposure, so that's exactly what I do.
- 3) With the subject's exposure taken care of by the lightmeter, all I have to do to make the background darker or lighter is adjust the power setting on the studioflash pointed towards the background.
- 4) After balancing the background exposure by adjusting the power settings, I'm able to achieve a correctly exposed image of my model. After some cleaning up in post-production, the image is complete.



IDEAL FOR MORE EXPERIENCED PHOTOGRAPHERS

Technique three: Individual light readings

This is the method used by pros looking to get the best possible lighting effect. It involves using a lightmeter to take an individual exposure reading from each studioflash for very precise control of how each light falls on the subject to give the best possible effect. It's the most involved technique, so takes a little more time and effort, but if you want to master the craft of studioflash lighting, it's one you should keep practising as it's the method used by most professionals.

- 1) With my lights set up and turned on, I'm ready to go. Note that I have put a diffuser in place to bounce light back onto Kate's face.
- 2) Input the ISO you're using into the lightmeter and make sure it's in flash mode – usually indicated with a little lightning symbol. By doing this, the lightmeter will wait until the studioflashes have been fired before telling you what aperture to set on your DSLR.
- 3) I then take a meter reading from my model's face so I know what aperture will correctly expose the skin. In this case, it's f/11.
- 4) I take a reading next to the background, which suggests I set f/16. This smaller aperture tells me that, using f/11, the background will be bright, and help me create a high-key effect with the backdrop.
- 5) By taking multiple readings, I'm able to control both the foreground and background exposures, resulting in a perfectly exposed final image.



Studio set-up: one light

Start learning studio lighting by mastering a series of techniques using simple one-light set-ups

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN how to control your lighting, you're best off starting with just one studioflash. One light is more than sufficient to produce some stunning results and many great photographers still use a single head for their work. After all, outdoors we only have a single light source – the sun. This set-up is very easy to control and the smallest adjustment to the light on your subject has a clear effect, forcing you to fine-tune the light's angle and method of diffusion. And while you'll only have one source of illumination, you can also use reflectors in your set-up to bounce light and fill in any shadows.

The set of images below shows what happens when you position your single light at different heights and angles. As you can see, it's crucial that you learn the dos and don'ts of how to set up your single studioflash head to avoid some of the unflattering results shown below.

As mentioned earlier, you need to set your camera to manual mode and set it to its flash sync speed (if you don't know it, use 1/125sec as a safe bet or refer to the user's manual). The aperture is determined by the meter reading you take, which is easy to do with a one-light set-up. With the sync lead from the light attached, hold the meter in front of the subject's face and press the button to fire the flash and take a reading. By adjusting the power setting on the flash head, you can effectively change the aperture you work with, too. Add power to set a smaller aperture and reduce power to use a wider aperture.



One light: All you need to get started is your camera and a single flash head. With a bit of practice, you will soon find yourself getting great results!



1) Lit from above

With the light positioned high above the model's head the light looks natural but creates deep shadows under the eyes, nose and chin. For the best results, get the model to look towards the light. You could also ask her to hold a reflector on her lap to fill in the shadows.



2) Lit from below

Placing the light lower than the model's head, pointing upwards, eradicates any unsightly shadows under the nose and chin. For best results, get the model to look down towards the light, which, as you can see, also makes catchlights appear in the subject's eyes.



3) Lit from the side

Place the light to either the left or right side of your model's face for a strong, directional light, which will keep half of the face in shadow. To increase your chances of capturing catchlights in eyes, it is important to make sure the light is far enough forward.



4) One light & reflector

By holding a reflector close to the face, on the opposite side from the light, you will be able to reduce harsh shadows, much like using a second head. The closer you place it to the model, the stronger the reflection will be (though it helps to have an assistant!).



TOP TIP**Tilt the head**

When shooting portraits, especially of females, try asking them to tilt their head slightly. This adds an air of friendliness to the shot, making the image look far more relaxed.

Q&A: Studioflash**Q How much should I spend on a studioflash system?**

A We'd recommend you start with a two-head system, with a softbox and umbrella. Tests by *Digital SLR Photography* found several to be excellent, including the Interfit EX150 Mk II and the Elinchrom D-Lite RX ONE twin-head kit.

Q What advantages do more expensive outfits offer?

A General build quality (and reliability) will be better, but the key benefits are power, features and performance. More power is useful as you can set the lights up further away from your subject, while relative light loss from attachments like softboxes is reduced. You'll find that more expensive heads allow more control over flash output and faster flash recycling times.

Q Are attachments from different systems compatible?

A In general, different brands have their own fittings so aren't compatible. However, Chimera makes speedrings for its softboxes that are compatible with just about any system. Visit: www.chimeralighting.com

Q How should I set up my camera to use studioflash?

A You will need to set it to manual mode, as the metering system will not work with studioflash. Set the shutter speed to the flash sync speed and aperture to the flashmeter reading.

Q How do I take an exposure reading with studioflash?

A Use a flashmeter connected to a light via a sync lead. Once you've set up the lights, hold the meter in front of the subject's face, take a reading and set the meter's recommended aperture on the camera. Don't forget that the flashmeter and camera both need to be set to the same ISO rating!

Q How do I connect my camera to my studioflash system?

A The plug at the end of the studioflash sync lead connects to your camera's PC socket. If your camera hasn't got a socket, buy an adaptor (around £10) that slots on your camera's hotshoe and connect the lead to this. A more expensive option is a wireless trigger that sits on your hotshoe and triggers a receiver on the flash head.

**5) Classic one-light set-up**

This technique involves placing the studioflash slightly above and to one side of the model – approximately 45° to one side and down at 45°. The resulting lighting looks natural and provides well-placed catchlights for a really pleasing, flattering result.

Studio set-up: Two lights

When you feel ready, extend your creative options by introducing a second studioflash head into the mix

MANY KITS COME WITH two heads, so once you've mastered lighting subjects with a single light, experiment with a second. Often when shooting with one light, a reflector is used to fill in the shadows and provide even lighting, but, without an assistant, they can be difficult to position. A second head can be used instead, with the benefit that you can control the power output and add attachments to diffuse or precisely focus the light. The second light, usually called the slave, is triggered when it detects the flash from the primary flash head. Using two lights gives you more scope for different scenarios: you can light the model from different angles, or aim one light at the model and the other at the background.

So how do you meter for two lights? The simplest way is to set up the lights how you would like them, then take a meter reading from the subject's face and take a test shot at the recommended aperture. Consider moving the lights' position, adjusting the light ratio between the two or changing the power. Whatever you decide, take another reading to see what aperture you need and fire another test shot. A more accurate way of taking a reading is to check the exposure of each light in turn (ie only one light on at a time) and adjust accordingly. This will allow you to control the balance of flash between the two lights more accurately, but is a more involved process, so we recommend using the simplest method first and try the second method once you have a bit of experience.



Two lights: This is a typical two-light set-up. The lights are fitted with a softbox and an umbrella to produce a diffused flattering light.



1) Lit from above & below

This is a typical headshot set-up, with the key light at 45° to the subject to give the most flattering light. The second light fills in the shadows under the chin. This technique works for almost any subject. Set the key light two stops brighter than the second light.



2) Lit from above & rim light

The key light is above and to the left of the model. The slave light is positioned behind the model, opposite the key light. This throws light over her shoulder, adding a touch of light to her cheek. It adds interest to the shot, and gives her face more of a three-dimensional feel.



3) Lit from back & front

Here, we have one light in front of the model to light her face, and another behind her to light her hair, adding a bit of shine to it. This works well if your model has silky or colourful hair, and is a technique commonly used for 'hair' shots used in magazine advertisements.



4) Butterfly lighting

This is an old-fashioned technique that is not used very much in contemporary photography. By placing both lights above the model, pointing down at a sharp angle, to cast the shadows on her face, you create an interesting 'butterfly' shape under the model's nose.



TOP TIP**Brollies & softboxes**

Brollies are included with most kits as a low-cost diffuser. They do a decent enough job, but it's worth investing in a softbox as soon as possible as they deliver very flattering light for portraits.

**5) Lit from both sides**

Positioning both lights in front of the model, but off to the sides, is probably the most important two-light technique to learn. It helps to get rid of shadows and gives a very even light across the face. It's useful for eliminating wrinkles, so is commonly used for beauty and make-up shoots. This lighting technique works with just about any subject, and is seen as a 'safe bet' for studio portraiture.



Create a graphic studio portrait

There's a secret to studio silhouettes – Caroline Wilkinson reveals all here...

Caroline Wilkinson



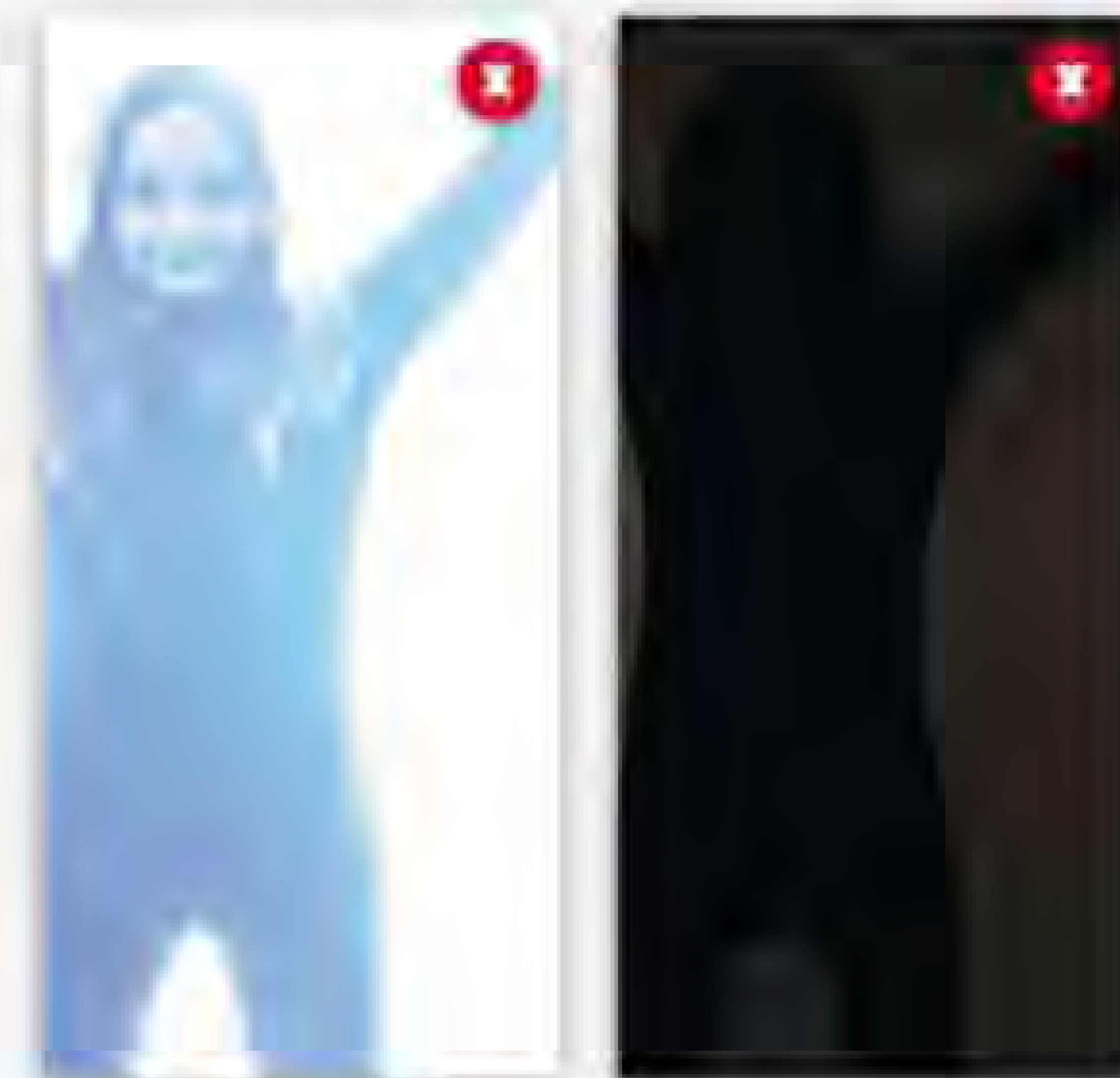
The simple lines and shapes of a silhouette are what makes them so appealing, but as simple as the images are and the technique may seem, getting a decent result is trickier than you might think. Aside from the lighting and exposure, as you're stripping the subject of character and features, the geometry of the pose and outline it creates has to be spot on to create any visual interest. Profile poses are a good place to start as they can accentuate curves, but also look for ways to stop your subject looking too static, such as adding movement and using dynamic shapes or graphic props. Finally, ask your subject to wear black clothing. And remember, if you don't have a studio, you can apply the same principles by shooting against a large window in direct sunlight.



Set-up: Place two studioflash heads, set to a mid-power, pointing in either side of a Lastolite HiLite, and have the subject stand in front of the backdrop. Simple. While a Lastolite HiLite is the ideal tool for the job, you can create a similar effect by placing two studio lights, set to full-power, behind and directed at a white paper or fabric backdrop. To avoid the light spilling on to the subject standing in front of the backdrop, attach spills to the studioflash heads to contain the light and try to block any space around the background.

Pick the right power

The strength of the studioflash heads greatly influences the silhouette: too high and you'll get glare that illuminates the subject; too low and the background will be too dark.



Settings & technique

Set your camera to manual mode, its lowest ISO rating, Auto White Balance and image quality to Raw+JPEG. You'll need to dial in your camera's flash sync speed (in my case, that's 1/250sec). Set an aperture of f/11 or f/13 for optimum sharpness. Ask your subject to stand a couple of feet in front of the backdrop for a test shot. If they're illuminated, try turning the studioflash's power down or if the background is too dull, turn it up. Focusing can be a problem in low light, so place the autofocus point over an area of contrast, such as the edge of the body. Or, focus on the subject and switch from AF to manual to stop it hunting between shots. If your subject moves closer or further away from the camera, you may need to refocus.



1 Improve the contrast Even if your exposure is spot on, the background may look dull. Open the image in Adobe Camera Raw and push the *Brightness* and *Contrast* sliders between +80 and +100, with a small tweak to the *Clarity* for sharpness. Then, in Photoshop, improve the result by adjusting the contrast via *Layer>New Adjustment Layer>Levels*. Finally, crop and convert the image to black & white (*Layer>New Adjustment Layer>Black & White...*).



2 Extend the background If you used a Lastolite HiLite, you may find that you need to extend the background a little. In Photoshop, duplicate the image by dragging the layer down to the *Create a new layer* icon at the bottom of the Layers palette. Select the *Brush Tool* and hold down *alt* to change the cursor into an eyedropper: click on an area of white to take a colour sample, release *alt*, and 'paint' over the areas where the background's not in the frame.

Have fun with different poses: here are a few suggestions to get you started...



✓ Add movement If your subject has long hair, consider introducing a fan to add movement to the image. It immediately stops the shot from looking too static.



✓ Strike a pose Use repeated patterns and shapes to add interest. Try to contain the viewer's eye within the frame and subject by connecting lines.



✓ Jump Ask the subject to leap or jump for an energetic image; keep an eye on the pose to make sure that there's space around the limbs for a defined outline.



✓ Be abstract Concentrate on the composition and zoom in on the curved lines of the body or details like the feet for less conventional but alluring images.



Final image

Introducing props, like this umbrella, can add extra visual interest to a picture. Experiment to see what effects you can get by adding semi-transparent fabric and/or a fan to your set-up, too.

Brilliant bokeh

Portraits missing a touch of sparkle? Learn how to add bokeh and give your images extra punch!

Jordan Butters

Camera: Nikon D800

Lens: NIKKOR AF-S 85mm f/1.4G

Software: Photoshop CS5



TRY TO EXPLAIN the concept of bokeh to any non-photographer and you'll more often than not be greeted by a general look of confusion. But anyone versed in the art of capturing light can attest to the allure of beautifully big bokeh – it can add magic and transform dull backgrounds into something with sparkle. In case there is any confusion, bokeh refers to the out-of-focus areas that are seen when images are shot at a wide aperture. More specifically, more

often than not it appears as soft circular and hexagonal shapes when highlights are captured out of focus.

In order to capture images containing large elements of bokeh out in the wild you need to put a reasonable distance between the object that you want in focus and the lights behind it. The further out of focus the lights are, the bigger the balls of bokeh appear, up until a point – remember that the further away from you a light source is, the dimmer it will be recorded.

Bokeh can also be added during post-processing to emphasise its effect, which is what I'm going to cover here. The best thing about adding bokeh during post-processing is that you can exaggerate its size for a

pronounced effect. Adding bokeh to an image in which there was previously none is also a great way to add interest. In fact, I'd recommend keeping a folder of out-of-focus bokeh on your computer for future use – you never know when you'll use them.

In order to give this technique a go you'll need a dark background to shoot against and a flashgun to illuminate your subject. Alternatively, you can use natural light, providing that your background remains dark – try photographing your subject standing in an outside doorway with a dark room behind them, for example. You'll also need some fairy lights to create your bokeh – this will allow you to control exactly how far apart the balls of bokeh are spaced.



1 Choose the right backdrop Position your subject against a black background. This will make adding in the bokeh much easier and save cutting your subject out in Photoshop. I've used a roll of black fabric – the background doesn't have to fill the frame as it can be extended later during post-processing.



2 Photograph your subject I'm using flash in a softbox to photograph Gabriella. This allows me to achieve a good exposure of my subject without overexposing the background. Dialling in my camera's sync speed of 1/200sec, I take a test shot to establish an aperture of f/4 at ISO 125.



3 Arrange the lights It's time to capture your bokeh. Plug in your fairy lights and space them out so that there is a bit of space between the bulbs. I found that if I photographed my lights on the floor the carpet was illuminated in the exposure too, so I choose to hang them from my background support instead.



4 Shoot the bokeh Set your camera to aperture-priority mode and dial in around EV-1 exposure compensation to ensure that the background is dark. Select ISO 200 and the widest aperture and switch to manual focus. Turn your focus ring to its minimum focusing distance and take the shot.

In Photoshop...



1 Convert to black & white Open the portrait image in Photoshop and go to *Image > Adjustments > Black & White*. If your background needs extending, select the *Brush Tool* and paint *Black* in the light areas.



2 Paste in the bokeh image Open your bokeh image and also convert this to black & white. Then go to *Edit > Copy* before closing the bokeh image and pasting it onto your portrait image using *Edit > Paste*.



3 Change the Blend Mode With your bokeh layer selected in the Layers Palette, change its *Blend Mode* to *Lighten* or *Screen*, depending on which works best. Then go to *Layer > Layer Mask > Reveal All*.



4 Mask your subject Select the *Brush Tool* and set *Black* as your *Foreground Color*. Paint over any areas where your bokeh overlaps your subject, taking extra care and using a harder brush near the edges.



Final image
This simple technique
makes capturing
stunning big bokeh
portraits a doddle.

Master the secrets of classic film noir lighting

Hollywood has given us many classics, not least its iconic lighting technique: a glamorous, low-key style that all portrait photographers can master using our expert advice

Bjorn Thomassen



When photographers think of the 'Golden Age' of Hollywood, most recollect the likes of Rita Hayworth,

Elizabeth Taylor and Vivien Leigh, not as on-screen sirens, but as iconic subjects of dramatic Hollywood portraits. The classic Hollywood portrait of the 1940s in particular was typified by its high-contrast black & white images, created using strong directional light, with strategically placed shadows to add depth and drama. Today, Hollywood lighting is considered an art form that many still love to recreate – including us. While its style might be seen as dated, it's an immensely useful technique to learn.

Compared to the portraits we shoot today, posing is quite rigid and, as it's not the most flattering style of lighting, it's best suited to people with good skin; the slightest imperfection will be amplified. Being able to control and focus the light is key, as you need to be very targeted with where the light falls. Here, I've used a studioflash with a medium reflector dish and barndoors attached to direct the light, but taping thick black card to all four sides of your flash can work just as well. The hard light from the studioflash is then

tempered by the light bouncing off the reflector on the opposite side, before reaching the model. A second light is also used on the opposite side to accent the edges of the subject.

While most Hollywood portraits are against a plain black background, some images show texture in their backdrop, which is why we've chosen to use a carefully hung white background to show you how to create this effect should you want to use it. One of the reasons we're using barndoors, too, is to stop the spill of light on to the background, as without it the white backdrop will turn black, but still retain some tonal detail.



Original



Camera settings

M Metering & exposure: The aperture you use for this technique depends on how much background detail you want in focus, how close the subject is to the backdrop and on the power of your lights. Here, the model is about a metre away from the camera, so f/5.6 provides enough depth-of-field to render her in focus but blur the backdrop. Hold the lightmeter by the face, but pointing towards the light source – not the camera – so it can accurately measure the amount of light falling on the subject. Now adjust the power of the studioflash until you get the aperture you want. With the camera in manual mode and the flash sync speed set, dial in your appropriate aperture and take your shot.

Lighting set-up

Place the main light close to the subject to have better control over the fall-off of the light: you want to avoid it illuminating the subject's lap. Position the main light 90° to the camera, pointing down 45° on the subject. Place the model in a 3/4 pose, so that the side of the face receiving the most light is turned away from the camera. By doing this, it casts a triangular shadow on the cheek closest to the camera, which is characteristic of the lighting style. The plane of the face needs to be relative to the main light for the shadow to be cast correctly. Every set-up is different, but when positioning the reflector to soften the main light and act as a fill-in, remember the law of reflection and avoid placing it too close to the model, as it may counteract the striking modelling and shadows you've created. Mine is placed approximately four feet away from the model. To add more dimensionality to the image, an accent light has been added three feet away from the subject and angled upwards at 30°, so light falls on to the opposite edges of the model. The set-up works on a lighting ratio of 3:1, as the accent light shouldn't overpower the main light.



Final image

Shot at 1/160sec at f/5.6, this Hollywood portrait looks even more striking with a soft sepia tone. After some skin retouching and small tonal adjustments using Levels, add a duotone effect by going to *Image>Grayscale* then *Image>Duotone*, then choose *Sepia* style from the *Preset* menu.



PHOTOGRAPHING THE FEMALE FORM

THE FEMALE BODY MUST BE UP THERE AS ONE OF THE PLANET'S MOST PHOTOGRAPHED SUBJECTS – BUT IT'S NOTORIOUSLY DIFFICULT TO GET RIGHT. WE SHOW YOU THE BASICS, FROM POSES AND LIGHTING TO ALL THE EQUIPMENT YOU NEED...

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE between an erotic image and a fine-art nude? Diverse tastes, tolerances and appreciation for the female form dictate the answer to this question, and it being so subjective means photographing intimate images of women can be both challenging and controversial. We hope, though, that this guide shows you how to create artistic portraits that tread that line between tasteful and tacky.

Photographs of semi- or fully naked women should be a celebration of beauty and geometry, stirring an appreciation in the viewer rather than a sexual reaction. Fine-art images are produced for aesthetic or conceptual reasons rather than utility, and knowing this can help guide your imagery in the right direction.

The reaction of the viewer plays a strong role in the success of a fine-art nude, so having a clear idea of what you want to achieve and elicit from the viewer from the start makes it easier to get. There's a fine line between sexual and sensual imagery.

A sensual image indulges the senses and emphasises beauty, but keeps the viewer on the outside as an observer by avoiding any sort of eye contact.

Once the subject looks into the camera, the subject is involving the viewer in what they're doing, heightening their engagement and running the risk of making the image

sexual. Eye contact, however, isn't the only contributing factor; the viewer's reaction is also influenced by the subject's expression, their pose, setting and the modesty of the model. Muted colours can also add to the artistic qualities of the image as it brings the shapes, composition, tonal range and lighting to the forefront.

There's no denying that the subject has a large role in the beauty of a picture, so picking a model with the right body for your concept can be one of the most important considerations when preparing for a shoot. Using regular women instead of professional models has its advantages if you want to portray 'real' women, but from a photographer's point of view, they'll be more nervous in front of the camera and need more direction. Whoever you decide to use, make sure you have them sign a model release form first.

Looking at the portfolios of other photographers' work is a good way to decide what it is that you like and dislike about certain styles of nudes and glamour photography. It's also an effective way to study the subtle differences but extremely different impacts of some images. The classic works of David Bailey, Ralph Gibson, Andreas Bitesnich and Ruth Bernhard are worth investigating. They're all different styles and modesty isn't always a consideration, but study the expressions and settings to see how they still make them work.

Part of the art of female photography is working well with shadow – it's just as important as light for giving depth and structure to your picture. They enable you to hide, shape and accentuate areas of the body as well as control the mood of an image. It's worth remembering that the transition from light to dark depends on the size of the light source relative to the subject. The smaller the light and further it is away, the crisper the shadows, and the opposite is true for a large light source that's close to a subject. So be careful when moving lights closer or further away to change their intensity as it can also change the shadow hardness. While shadows are ideal for disguising areas of the body, they can also make skin irregularities more pronounced, increasing your retouching work, so bear this in mind, too.

Learning how to work with shadows takes practice, but here are a couple of tips to get you started: if a shadow is too dense and you want to reveal some detail, use a fill light, whether it's from a reflector or a second light set several stops dimmer than the key light (main light source). But, if you can't create deep enough shadows, it's probably because there's reflective light nearby, so use black cloth, panels of black foam core or the black side of a reflector as close to the areas you want in shadow as possible, without encroaching on the shot.

Essential equipment

You don't need expensive or elaborate kit to take great portraits, but we do advise opting for the best lenses that you can afford. Fast prime or medium telephoto zooms such as the 24-70mm f/2.8, 24-105mm f/2.8, 50mm f/1.4 or 80mm f/1.4 are great options, but if you're tight on cash we recommend the 50mm f/1.8 – it's superb quality and can be bought for around £100. Opt for a longer lens like a 70-200mm f/2.8 if you want to put more distance between you and your subject. The shallow depth-of-field you get with fast lenses is invaluable with this type of photography as it softens skin, reduces the appearance of wrinkles and blurs the background and body beautifully. You can get by using only natural light, reflectors or a flashgun,

but invest in at least a basic studioflash set-up if you can afford it: Elinchrom and Bowens offer great selections of one- or two-head studioflash kits. Most of the lighting set-ups here can be done with one or two lights and reflectors – the difference is the light modifiers (see panel on page 125). To work with studioflash equipment, use a wireless flash trigger and a handheld flash meter. Using a lightmeter means you can measure the light falling on specific areas of the subject (known as incident light readings), allowing you to get accurate measurements and to work fast – important with nudes. We strongly suggest you avoid working out exposures by using the LCD monitor and trial and error as it's not accurate enough.

Top tip

There's a lot to learn when it comes to studio lighting, too much to pack in to this article, but we can offer some helpful hints to get you started. The 'inverse square law' is a useful principle to understand and basically dictates that an object that is twice the distance from a source of light receives a quarter of the illumination. For instance, if you move a light that's 6ft away from your subject to 12ft away, doubling the distance, a quarter of the light's brightness will fall on the subject. This is incredibly important for creating mood in an image, as the further the light is from a subject, the wider the spread of light and more even the lighting. The closer the light is to the subject, the quicker the fall-off and the darker areas of the scene further away will become.



Strike a pose

Symmetry is highly important in nudes so ask your subject to adopt unusual and even poses. In this image, the arms and legs act as lead-in lines drawing the viewer's eyes around the body.

IMAGE: ISTOCK PHOTO

Use diffusing material

Give your silhouette a different twist by stretching some silk cloth or thin net curtain over a scrim frame between the subject and camera to soften the image. If you find the camera's autofocus struggles, switch to manual focusing.



As skin is primarily matte, it can help to create or enhance highlights by having the subject smooth oil or body lotion into their skin to reflect light, accentuating the body's contours and adding dimension. A shimmering body lotion, Johnson's Baby Oil Gel or Light Oil Mist are good options, but also try combining types on different areas of the body to add varying definition. You could even use water in a spray bottle, but be aware that this will be absorbed quickly under the heat of studio lights.

Next to lighting, posing is the most important feature and there are hundreds of permutations; which ones work depends on the shape and size of the subject. As a guideline, try to create 'C', 'D', and 'S' shapes to accentuate curves. Try to keep all lines connected and leading back to the face to contain the viewer's gaze and avoid straight limbs by bending them to form a triangle or curve. Complement the simplicity of the subject by picking compositions with balance and symmetry, too, and be aware of your camera angles. To render a body proportionally, shoot at eye level to avoid altering the perspective and have the subject turn slightly away from the camera for a very flattering angle.

Unless you hire a professional model, chances are your subject will be anxious about posing nude, so plan your poses and lighting set-ups as thoroughly as possible before the shoot to limit the time that they're exposed. Communicate exactly what you'll be doing before they undress and during the shoot to put them at ease, perhaps play some soft music, make sure the room is a comfortable temperature and that there's a robe handy for in between set-ups. Whether you're male or female, respect the subject's boundaries: don't touch them, instead demonstrate the pose first, show them example pictures and even turn away while they get into position if it makes them more comfortable. It can often make the shoot more relaxed by having a third party present, too, be it their partner, a friend, make-up artist or stylist. If you're a male photographer, it helps if that person is female. It's a good idea to have the subject leave some loose clothing on while you practise poses, but ask them to go without a bra or elasticated socks at least two hours before the shoot to allow for strap marks to disappear. This gives you the basics to start with, now go ahead and try some of our lighting set-ups. Good luck!

Graphic nudcs



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The outline of a curvaceous woman is simple and soft, and isolating these lines can make for graphic imagery. The best way to capture the outline is to backlight the subject, either by using a white background to create a silhouette or rim-lighting the curvatures against a black background. For the silhouette, choose a graphic pose and point one or two naked studioflashes, set to full power, at the white background, being careful not to allow too much light to fall on the subject. Meter for the background to silhouette the body. Rim lighting is



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slightly more sophisticated as you need to control the light to place a highlight along the body's edge to pick it out from the background, but without it spilling on to the front or the backdrop. Use a striplight placed 45° behind the subject, as close as you can without it encroaching on the frame, to control the fall-off. Place the light and model at least four feet from the background to stop it illuminating the backdrop, set the studioflash to its lowest power and select f/5.6; narrow or widen the aperture to control the highlight.

Lighting modifiers



Softbox: Typically shaped like a rectangle or octagon, a softbox provides soft light that wraps around the subject, replicating the qualities of natural window light, but offering more control. The bigger the softbox, the larger the light source, giving less contrast and smoother tones.



Beauty dish: A large dish-shaped modifier that reflects light from the flash head on to the subject. Available in white or silver finishes – we recommend white for a soft, crisp light.



Striplight: A tall, narrow softbox that creates a soft but defined highlight; it works well as a rim light and when you need to restrict the fall-off of light on to a backdrop.



Snoot: It attaches to a flash head's silver dish to restrict the spill of light into a narrow beam.



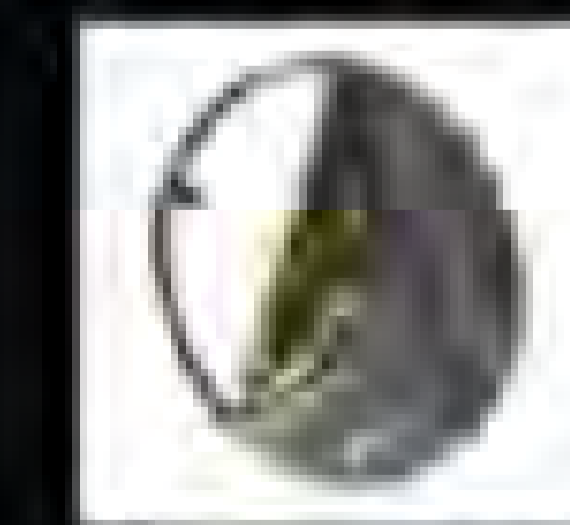
Barn doors: Another modifier that shapes the spill of light, barn doors have four panels of metal that can be moved to control the beam of light, restricting it to areas of the body.



Honeycomb grid: Works by concentrating the light so that only the centre beam reaches the subject with a smooth fall-off at the edges. It's a similar but more efficient modifier than the snoot, which can waste a lot of light, but is often a lot less expensive. There are also soft grids available that can be attached to softboxes for similar effects.



Umbrella: The quality of light brollies produce is very similar to a softbox, but they are much more portable, making them ideal for on-location shoots. A broolly acts like a large reflector, delivering a wide and soft spread of light. Reflective umbrellas come in opaque, white, silver and gold finishes for varying light intensities. There are also shoot-through transparent brollies that diffuse the flash output.



Reflectors: Able to bounce and direct light as a main light source or to fill in shadows, a reflector is an invaluable accessory. Available in various sizes, styles and colours – gold, silver and white, with varying combinations of all three. The light bounced off a gold reflector is warm and strong, a silver's is cool and harsh, and white reflectors produce subtle and softer results. Some have a black side, too, for shielding light.

Top tips: Golden guidelines for post-production

If you get the image right in-camera, there should be very little to do in post-production. However, unless you're opting for a raw finish for artistic reasons, there is some basic but essential editing to be done. The first thing is to make sure your computer screen is correctly calibrated, then address...

● **White Balance** If you're processing your image in colour, skin tones require some delicate care and attention. When there's too much magenta in the image, usually from mixed lighting, skin can look too red, while cool window light can make it blue and pale. Use a grey card to ascertain the correct White Balance or shoot in Raw and adjust the colour temperature later in post-production. Overexposing an image can also produce an orange and magenta cast, especially in warm light, which is why using a lightmeter to take an exposure reading from the skin is so important. Using Raw conversion software can help recover overexposed areas. Be watchful of your environment, too, as you may find that certain materials – grass, for instance – tints the light that reflects off the surface and onto the subject.

● **Retouching** Blemishes, cellulite and uneven skin tone are a few things to look out for if you want to sensitively retouch a portrait. Lighting can disguise areas your subject would rather

not reveal and reduce imperfections, but you can help it in post-production, too. Brightening the eyes and smoothing the skin are two basic techniques, as well as emphasising the highlights. See the portrait retouching feature on page 132 for the best ways to do this.

● **Exposure control** If you've shot in Raw, which we recommend you do, you can make global tonal adjustments using the Exposure, Recovery and Fill Light tools in Adobe Camera Raw. After you have got your base exposure, we suggest opening the image in Photoshop, creating a duplicate layer and using the Dodge or Burn Tool, set to a low Exposure, to brighten or darken areas of the image, accentuating highlights and darkening areas that need more concealment. Be careful not to lose too much tonal or skin detail, though.

● **Black & white** Toned or simple black & white conversions are often what elevate a nude to its artistic status. It's an effective way of detaching the image from reality, forcing the viewer to consider its artistic properties: its tonal balance, lighting, composition and elegance, rather than just the nudity. We recommend investing in Nik Software's Silver Efex Pro 2 plug-in (www.niksoftware.com) as it's packed with fantastic presets and adjustable settings that make strong and artistic conversions as

complicated or as simple as you want to make them. Alternatively, use a Black & White or Channels adjustment layer in Photoshop.

● **Sharpening** A little bit of sharpening goes a long way. Convert your image into a fully editable Smart Filter (*Filter>Smart Filter*) and then apply Unsharp Mask (*Filter>Sharpen>Unsharp Mask*), increasing the Amount slightly to draw out detail. The Clarity slider in ACR is also useful. A fundamental step for skin softening.

● **Vignetting** By darkening the edges of an image, it draws the focus to the subject. There are several ways to do this, but one of the easiest and quickest methods is as follows: use the Lasso Tool, with a Feather of 50–100px, to create a frame within the image, then go to *Select>Inverse*. Add a Curves adjustment layer (*Layer>New Adjustment Layer...*) and move the sliders to darken the edges. If the vignette encroaches on the subject too much, use the Brush Tool with Black paint on the adjustment layer's Layer Mask to reduce its effect.

● **Paper and inks** Don't skimp in this area after all of your hard work: opt for the best fine-art paper that you can afford and try to always use quality inks. Look at brands including Hahnemühle Fine Art, Innova, PermaJet, Canon and Epson.

Bodyscapes

When shooting nudes, don't be limited to full-length portraits. Focusing on the geometry of small areas creates striking bodyscapes. Draw your attention to specific parts of the body and their lines: the curves of the back, the buttocks, the slope of the chest, nape of the neck,

muscles of the abdomen or creases in bent and crossed limbs. Any area can create an interesting abstract if lit and composed well, with a strong tonal range. Get up close and use a wide aperture for a soft fall-off in focus and carefully place shadows and highlights to emphasise depth, lines and to

create interest. Part of the art of abstracts is evoking a mystery about the subject, so choose a balanced or frame-filling composition that makes the viewer look twice to figure out what it is. Converting to black & white can complement the simplicity of the shots.



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Give your nudcs a different look

There are many set-ups and poses you can try, but here are three of our favourites...



JAN DOEEF

NO EYES

Classical nude photography is rooted in the principles of Greek and Roman sculpture, where the artist emphasises form, line, simplicity, balance and technique, rather than emotive content. By framing this picture from the neck down, the viewer has no eyes or expression to connect with, so is forced to study the nude's form, shape and lighting rather than as a person, developing a distance between the viewer and the image. You can create a similar effect by photographing a person from behind or having their hair obscure their face, like in our opening shot. While it's an effective and classic approach to nudes, it's also a good pose if your subject would rather keep their identity hidden. This image is very simply lit using one Bowens Gemini 400W flash head and a 140x100cm softbox, approximately five feet high and away from the subject, so it's aimed straight at her back. The distance of the light to her and the background means the light spills on to the backdrop and illuminates it, but casts her torso into shadow. The top of her back was metered for f/8 and the image was processed using Nik Software's Silver Efex Pro and its 'Antique Plate 1' preset. The vignette was also added to darken the edges and her legs, to draw the focus to the sculpting of her back. To see more of Jan Doef's work, visit: www.jandoef.nl



BJORN THOMASSEN

AVERTED EYE CONTACT

Sometimes the simplest set-ups are the best. This image was shot against a white wall using two 130x50cm Elinchrom Rotalux Rectangular striplights fitted to Elinchrom heads. The key light is approximately six feet away from the subject to our left and a fill light is placed six feet in front of her at 45°, next to the camera. As she's angled towards the key light, a meter reading of f/8 was taken from her forehead, with a second reading from her knee to make sure that it didn't burn out as it's closer to the light. Working by a lighting ratio of 3:1, the key light was 1.5 stops brighter than the fill light and turned 10-15° away from the background so the main thrust of the light passes her and doesn't overexpose the wall. A household fan was set on the ground to the left of her to add lift to her hair. The beauty of this shot is in the model and how the lighting accentuates her curves and bone structure. Notice how the averted eye contact makes the image sensual as the viewer is still an observer and the tasteful pose doesn't show too much, while highlighting what makes her form photogenic. The impact of the image and viewer's reaction would be different if she was looking at the camera. To see more of Bjorn Thomassen's fine-art nudes or to contact him about training courses, visit: www.bjornofinspire.com



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DIRECT EYE CONTACT

Less is often more and this portrait arguably wouldn't be as elegant or alluring if more of her body was revealed. Similarly, it's the eye contact that makes this shot so impactful as it engages the viewer, but it's the pose that retains the interest by containing the viewer's gaze through the connected limbs: there's a continuous line running through the pose that keeps the viewer returning to the subject's eye contact. When working with nudes, it's best to work with low light so it's softer and easier to control. Umbrellas deliver a very wide, and therefore soft, spread of light that's typically low in contrast, especially with an opaque umbrella. To recreate this shot, position an opaque umbrella 20° to the right of the subject and the camera, at a height that's level with the crouching/sitting model. Meter the face for f/11 to get sufficient depth-of-field and adjust the flash head's power accordingly. The studioflash should be as near to the subject as possible, without encroaching on the shot, to control the fall-off of light. The light should fall softly on the subject so as to illuminate her front; if it's too strong, the light will fill the shadow that's wrapped around her. It can help, however, to deliberately overexpose the image to expand the tonal range and then use Levels or Curves to draw the exposure back to get a more gentle graduation of tones.



Master boudoir photography

The art of boudoir is not that different from nudes, but with a shifted emphasis on to the subject's sexuality

MORE AND MORE women want boudoir photographs, either nude or in lingerie – not just for their partners, but for themselves. Unlike nudes, boudoir images are meant to be alluring and connect with the viewer, but they're also different from erotic imagery in that they emphasise the aesthetic qualities of the subject and the photography over their sexually stimulating nature.

In many ways, you should handle a boudoir shoot the same as a nude, with taste, dignity and photographic prowess. The same lighting principles apply, depending on the mood you want to create, but a lot more consideration needs to be given to the styling of an image – hair, make-up and lingerie – as well as how you might use props and furniture. Unless you have a studio with various set-ups,

most boudoir sessions are done on location, such as at the subject's home or in a hotel room, giving you lots of options for posing them in different scenes and set-ups. While shooting nudes is a lot about the photographer's vision, boudoir-style imagery is often shot for the subject, who will want to look the best they can. And besides the correct posing, well-chosen lingerie, lighting and props can cover flaws and pronounce your subject's strengths.

We asked award-winning professional boudoir photographer Emma Jones about the way she works, the secrets behind her most popular lighting set-ups and the common errors novices make. "If you're starting out, research what works for various body shapes and sizes, and test them out to build up a

mental library of poses," says Emma. "If you want a delicate and feminine result, avoid a black backdrop, strong lighting that creates harsh shadows and bold colours. Opt for a soft, even spread of light that can be gained with softboxes and reflectors. For glamour images with more sass, opt for a large beauty dish or parabolic umbrella for sleek highlights and strong shadows. Use a reflector to avoid shadows underneath the eyes and a second light to pick the body out from a dark background. Get your client laughing to relax them as an uncomfortable client will ruin a photo. And steer clear of feather boas and cowboy hats. It depends on your tastes but I think they potentially turn great pictures into cheesy photos." To hire or see more of Emma's work, visit www.missboudoir.com



NATURAL DAYLIGHT

If your studio has a window, use it. Depending on the time of day, size of the window and the direction it faces in relation to the sun, the light can cast harsh shadows and produce vibrant colours or have soft qualities with flattering, barely there shadows. Diffused daylight through a small window is very directional with soft-edged shadows, while a large window like the ones used here work like giant softboxes with light that wraps around the subject. Regardless of the type of light, the challenge is photographing the subject against the window as they will be backlit, so you need to bounce as much available light back onto the subject's body as possible. In the above picture, a large rectangular floor-standing silver reflector is positioned to the left of the window about 6ft away and tilted upwards to reflect light back onto the subject. A silver Lastolite Tri-Flector in front evens out the light.

Exposure: 1/125sec at f/2.8 (ISO 1000).





FILL LIGHT VERSUS REFLECTOR

The point of this set-up is to create a sensual and softly lit setting to flatter all body shapes. The background is made up of unobtrusive damask wallpaper and a variety of soft netting over a satin base. Mixed in are a few petals to break up the colours. The set-up consists of a main light fitted with an octagonal softbox and a diffuser grid metered from the subject's torso at $f/4$. The light is placed directly to the left of the model, 6ft away and 5ft off the ground, pointing down at 45° . This lights the top-left side of the model, creating curvaceous shadows to the right.

In the left picture, a fill light metered at $f/2.8$ is placed high above the model, off to the right, pointing down to ease the shadows created by the main light. It is fitted with a silver 'Spill Kill' and covered with softbox fabric to take off a little of the sharpness. You can use a softbox or brolly for this if you'd prefer the light to be very soft.

The same set-up can be very easily adjusted to add more atmosphere by simply replacing the fill light with a large silver reflector to the right of the model (right image). In doing so, the light from the octagonal softbox is bounced back onto the wall, adding depth to the shot and highlighting the wallpaper's shimmery surface. Because there is no fill light, the shadows on the body are deeper, making the curvature more pronounced. If you'd prefer to bounce the light onto the model instead of the background, simply angle the reflector accordingly. Both these shots use Bowens Gemini 500W studioflash heads.



Left: Exposure: 1/30sec at $f/2.8$ (ISO 100).

Right: Exposure: 1/125sec at $f/3.5$ (ISO 100).



CHAISE LONGUE

When using furniture you need to consider how best to light your subject so she has the freedom to move into a variety of poses while remaining well lit. As the wallpaper and the chaise longue are ivory, I wanted to make sure the lighting and shadows are very soft and the highlights don't bleach out. The studioflash is fitted with a horizontal striplight along the main length of the chaise, creating darkened vignetted edges. It is placed 6ft away from the chaise, 5ft up and slightly angled downwards. A honeycomb grid is used to further soften the light.



Exposure: 1/125sec at $f/2.8$ (ISO 100).

BEANBAG

Here, the subject is laying on a satin-covered beanbag, backed by a black curtain. Her head is tipped back towards the camera, ensuring her face is well lit. The main light, metered from the face at $f/4.5$, is fitted with a vertical striplight and honeycomb grid, placed 5ft away from the subject and 4ft high, with a downwards angle. A snoot is placed at the bottom right, 6ft away, 9ft high and angled downward. Metered at $f/3.5$, this adds a little bit of light onto the bottom of the fabric and legs. A reflector bounces light onto the left side of the subject.



Exposure: 1/125sec at $f/4.5$ (ISO 100).





A THREE-LIGHT SET-UP

This is the perfect lighting to accentuate curves: it provides deep shadows and gorgeous smooth highlights on the skin. Again, we are using a black curtain backdrop and want to limit the amount of light reaching it, so a vertical striplight with a honeycomb grid is used. It's placed 5–6ft away from the model, 5ft high, with a slight downward angle and metered at $f/4.5$ from the torso. A snoot is placed high up behind the subject, slightly off to the left, 7–8ft away and metered at $f/3.5$ to catch the hair and shoulders, picking the model out from the dark background. On the opposite side to the softbox, a 70cm silver beauty dish with honeycomb grid is placed 6ft away and metered at $f/3.5$ to add a strong and smooth highlight to the left side of the model. If there are any unwanted shadows, use a reflector.

Exposure: 1/125 sec at $f/4.5$ (ISO 100).



Learn how to retouch your portraits like a pro

Always wanted to create polished portraits like the professionals? Well, now's your chance. The best-kept secrets of retouching are disclosed in this guide from some of the world's leading retouchers – read on to find out how to enhance the natural beauty of your subjects with expert tutorials and advice

OFTEN THE DIFFERENCE between average portraits and the polished images that you see by high-end pros or in glossy magazines is not only photographic prowess, but the skill of the retoucher. In many respects, the taking of a portrait is just one step towards a finished picture, but great lighting and photography are fundamental as Photoshop is not a miracle worker: it's an enhancement tool – and a powerful one at that. It can transform good photos into great images with impact, but you need a quality picture to begin with to get the most from post-production.

While how you originally lit the subject doesn't affect retouching, the lighting should be as close as you can get it to the finished look and your exposure needs to be spot on: if you can get the skin looking light and bright, rather than a muddy tone, retouching is going to be a lot easier. If you have to lighten up pixels, you'll have noise issues, the colour won't be as good and it'll take a lot longer to get a half-decent result. Some photographers mistakenly start with a bad image, thinking they can transform it in Photoshop, but apply so much manipulation that the picture loses any sense of realism.

There are some other things you can do to make retouching easier. Make sure you shoot in Raw rather than JPEG. Make-up is helpful, too: apply foundation that's the right tone for the skin to avoid any lines between the face and neck, as well as a light dusting of powder to get rid of shine caused by the heat of the studio lights. Lipstick should be applied perfectly: make sure the lips are sculpted properly and there's no bleeding over the edges of the mouth and the eye make-up shapes the eyes. Lighting and smoothing are essential for beautiful hair. Split ends are a nightmare to retouch, so try to make sure the hair is in good condition before you start and preferably lit well to create highlights. The more highlights there are to begin with, the easier they will be to draw out during editing.

Before you start retouching, you need to calibrate your monitor (we'd recommend X-Rite's i1Match, Datacolor's Spyder3 Elite or Pantone hueyPRO for easy-to-use calibration devices). Skipping this step could mean your printed image looks nothing like it did on screen and those hours of colour refinement and tonal tweaks were wasted. Then plan what you want to do to the image – it should stop you from over- or under-processing areas – make yourself a coffee and be prepared for a long time in front of your monitor. The most polished and subtle retouching takes an abundance of time, an eye for detail and plenty of patience to ensure natural-looking results. Retouching is not about changing a model beyond recognition or transforming them into a Barbie doll; you should be trying to enhance features and work with the person's natural beauty so the portrait presents the very best version of them and improves the overall image impact.

Start by assessing the overall quality of the skin: blemishes, under-eye 'bags', how even the colour is, the cleanliness of the make-up,



deep-set wrinkles, crow's feet and unwanted highlights created by shiny skin. Next, address the features: do the eyebrows need to be neatened? Can the shape be improved or stray hairs eliminated? Could the eyes be brightened and the colour intensified? Is the nose too wide or the teeth a little stained? There is so much that can be refined that even small tweaks make a huge improvement.

For the final image to look great, you need to work on the details, and that means zooming in and working on areas of pixels close up. Use lots of layers, but keep them organised and remember to save, save, save: it's easy to get engrossed and forget. Once you're finished, save the layered image as a .PSD file in case you want to come back to it, but also flatten the layers (*Image>Flatten Image*) and save the image as a TIFF to compress the enormous file size for print. This article was produced with the advice and insight of professional retouchers Fay Bacon, Amy Dresser and Chanelle Segerius-Bruce.

Retouching software

While manually retouching portraits offers unlimited control, there are a few automated software packages and plug-ins for Adobe products dedicated to retouching. If you're wanting one-click wonders with automated results, then check out these three: they're not cheap additions to your arsenal, so we'd advise giving each of them a trial run first in combination with these Photoshop techniques to see which ones you prefer.

- **Portrait Professional 12**

Free trial / starting from £59.90
www.portraitprofessional.com

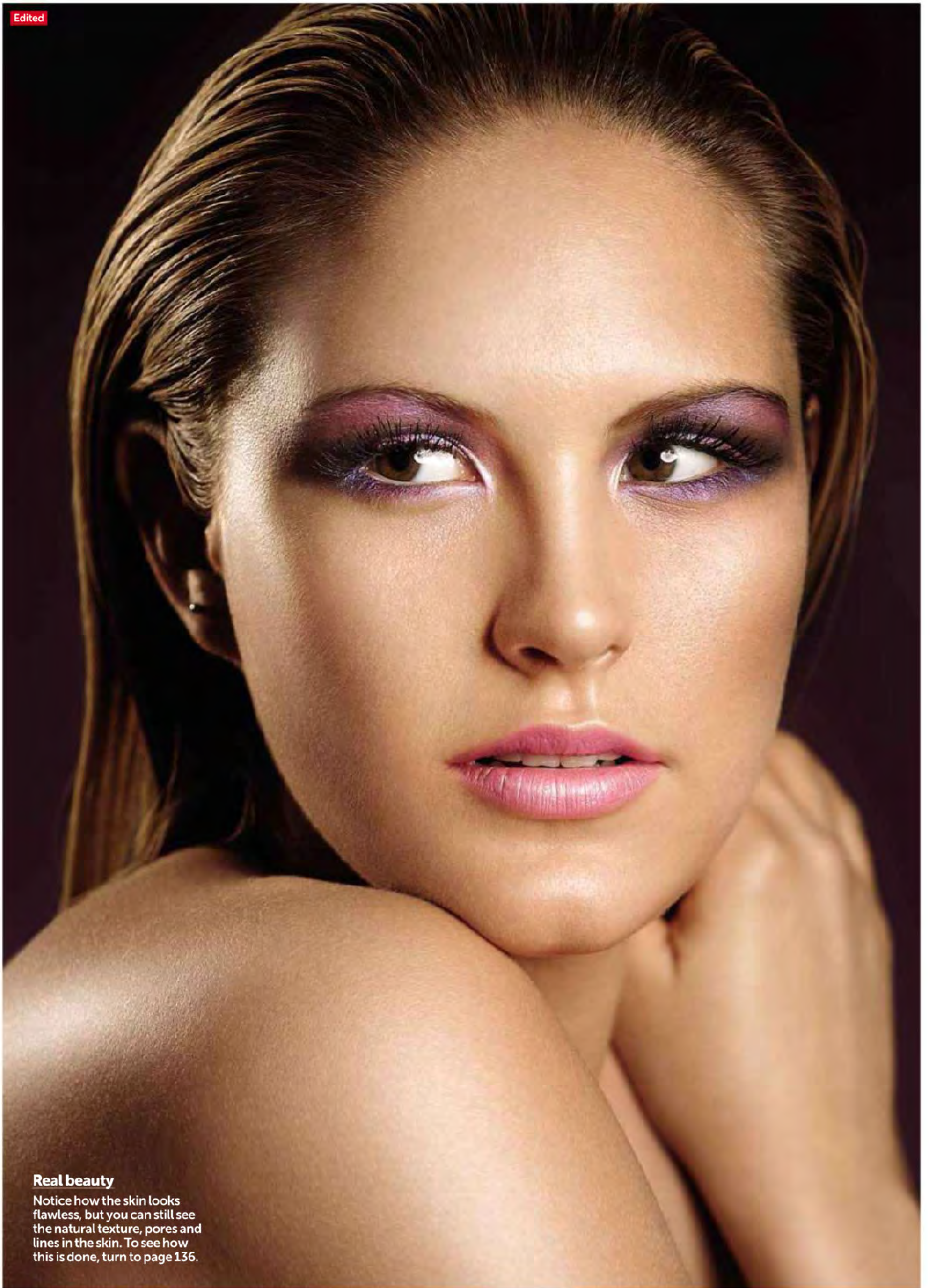
- **Portraiturc**

Free 15-day trial / \$199.95
www.imagenomic.com

- **Photo Suite 8**

Free 30-day trial / \$179.95
www.ononesoftware.com

Edited



Real beauty

Notice how the skin looks flawless, but you can still see the natural texture, pores and lines in the skin. To see how this is done, turn to page 136.



HAIR PAGE 139

Create styled hair that's glossy and full of body

EYES & TEETH PAGE 137

Add impact to a portrait by enhancing the eyes and smile

SKIN TONES PAGE 136

Retouch and soften skin to professional standards

NOSE PAGE 138

Refine the shape of the nose and draw focus to the eyes

LIPS PAGE 138

Create full, luscious lips for a smile with style

FURTHER READING

Buy the latest edition of our Photoshop for Photographers MagBook (www.magbooks.com) for in-depth explanations and advice about how to use the tools and features in this article, as well as so much more, to help maximise the potential of your pictures

ISTOCK PHOTO

Photoshop fundamentals

This entire guide is based on techniques that you can do in Photoshop CS3, 4, 5, 6 and, in some cases, Elements 10 and 11, but it's also been written for Mac users, so a few of the shortcuts might be different for PC users. As some of the tutorials are already quite detailed, we've kept them as concise as possible by avoiding explanations of the tools and features. If you're unsure how to access or use a feature, refer back to this list.

● **ORGANISATION:** Experienced retouchers sort their layers into groups in order to aid organisation, especially important when working with lots of layers. If you want to do the same thing, click on the Create New Group icon at the bottom of the Layers palette (looks like a folder), give the folder a name and then click and drag the appropriate layers into the folder. You can hide the layers by clicking on the arrow next to the group layer. Re. Mac v PC: Substitute Cmd (Mac) for Ctrl (PC) and Option (Mac) for Alt (PC).

● **LAYERS:** Layers are at the heart of successful retouching as they allow you to apply edits to separate layers so that you can return and edit them at any stage. There are three types of layers: a new layer (*Layer>New*), which is empty; an Adjustment Layer (see below) that enables you to apply nondestructive edits to your image, like contrast and colour adjustments; and duplicate layers (*Layer>Duplicate*), which allow you to create an identical copy of a layer and its contents.

● **LAYER MASK:** Use this to edit adjustments on a layer. Use the Brush Tool with Black paint to brush over areas to hide or minimise the adjustment and White paint to reveal it again. Vary the opacity of the brush to adjust the strength of the edit. You can add a Layer Mask to a layer by clicking on the Add New Layer Mask icon at the bottom of the Layers palette or going to (*Layer>Layer Mask>Reveal all/Hide all*). By default, the Layer Mask should be white, so you should use Black paint to hide the adjustment on areas of the image. You can also invert the Layer Mask (*Command & I*) to fill it with Black to hide the entire adjustment and then use White paint to selectively reveal adjusted areas in the image you want to show. To delete a Layer Mask, click on the link symbol to disconnect it from the layer and drag to the trash.

● **NEW ADJUSTMENT LAYER:** As your image editing should be carried out in stages and be nondestructive (never irrevocably affecting

the original image in case you need to use it again), Adjustment Layers are fundamental to your workflow. You can access them either via *Layer>New Adjustment Layer* or by clicking on the Add New Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers palette. Each Adjustment Layer has a Layer Mask attached, allowing you to use the Brush Tool to edit the adjustment on areas of the image.

● **BLEND MODES:** Accessible via the Blend Mode menu at the top of the Layers palette, these modes dictate how the layer it's applied to 'blends' with the layer below it.

● **CLONE STAMP TOOL:** One of the most used tools in Photoshop when it comes to retouching, the Clone Stamp copies pixels from one area of an image and replaces them in another. It works by pressing Alt on the area you want to copy from and then clicking on the area you want to replace, like a spot or blemish. We'd advise picking a 'source' area close to the area you want to replace for similar skin tones. Once you've selected this tool from the toolbar, you can adjust the size of the Clone Stamp Tool and its Opacity from the Options bar. We suggest, unless you're working on hairs where 100% opacity and a hard edge is necessary, set the Opacity slider to around 20% with 0% Hardness and gradually build up the effect for smoother and more forgiving results.

● **LIQUIFY:** Useful for sculpting the face, body and hair, Liquify can be a tricky tool to control, so use it carefully and as described in this guide, or check out the *Photoshop for Photographers* MagBook (visit: www.magbooks.com) for an in-depth look at how to use it. To use it, go to *Filter>Liquify*.

● **SMART OBJECT:** If you're opening a file you've edited in Adobe Camera Raw (ACR), we'd suggest opening it as a Smart Object by holding down shift to change the Open button to Open Object. At any point now, you can re-edit the Raw file by double-clicking on the image layer in Photoshop.

Using a graphics tablet & stylus

Making selections can be made much easier with a pressure-sensitive graphics tablet such as Wacom's Bamboo or Intuos4 (the latter is for the advanced users in need of more control over their editing). With practice, they're easier and more versatile than a mouse as they're ergonomically better for drawing. You can also assign shortcuts to different pressure points on the pen, such as brush Size and Feather. For details, visit: www.wacom.com



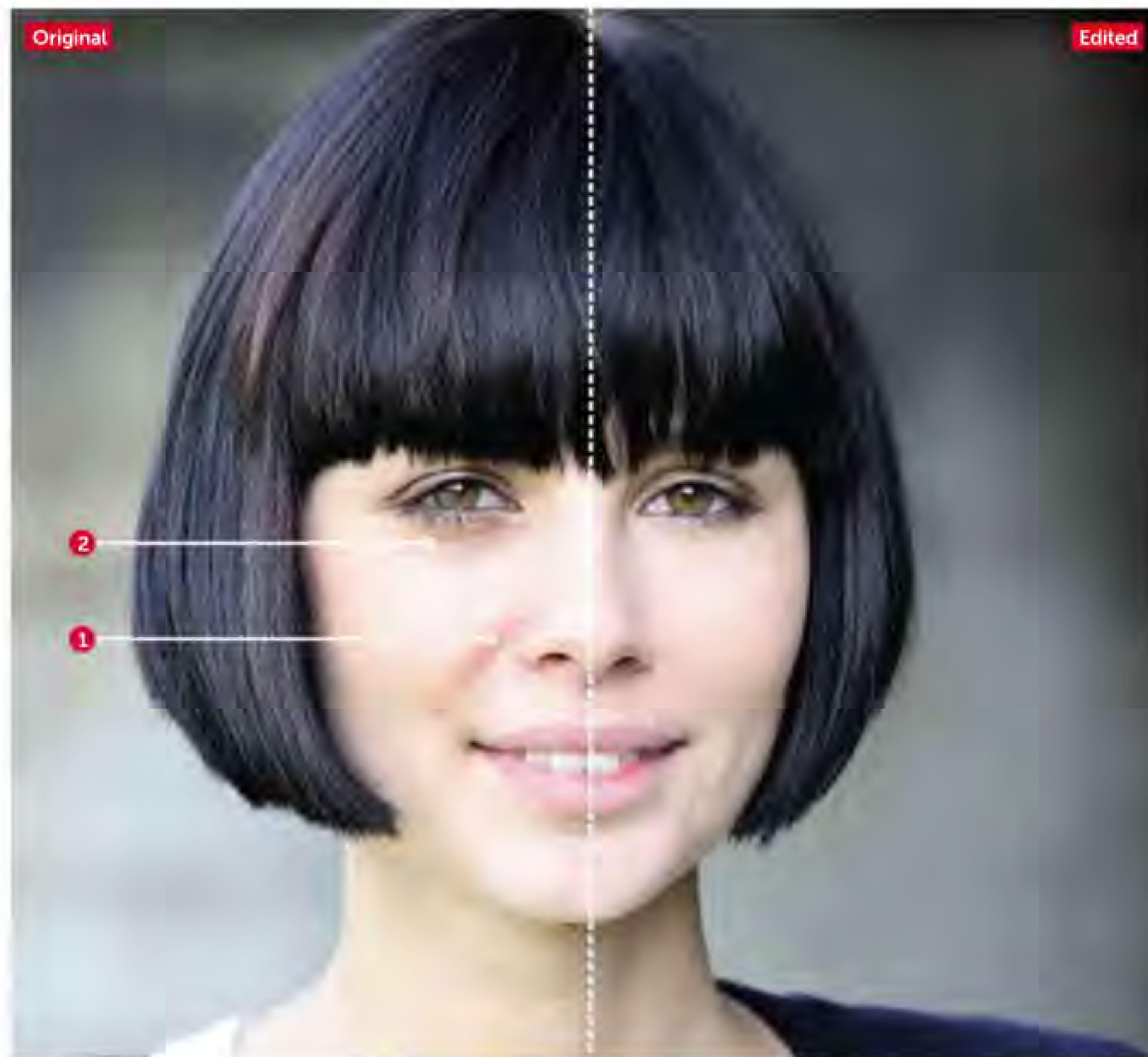
Skin

Learn the techniques that help the professionals to get portraits with picture-perfect skin

THE CLASSIC MISTAKE when retouching is to over-process the skin, hiding the natural pores, hair and texture. Applying Gaussian Blur to soften the skin is a popular technique with amateur photographers as it's quick and easy to do, but it's also very easy to 'overdo', causing you to lose the sculpting and fine details on the face that make it look natural. This can result in people looking a bit mannequin-esque and often ends up looking worse than untouched skin!

We'd advise spending as much time as possible retouching your subject's skin for the best (and most natural-looking) results and there are several techniques to try, depending on how much time you've got and how dramatic you want the finish to be. Naturally, experienced professional photographers and retouchers use a whole host of different methods, tips and tricks in their day-to-day craft (enough to fill this guide several times over) to perfect skin.

In this section, we've delved straight in to a few of the simpler steps to get you started in Photoshop, which alone can dramatically help improve your portraits.



Pro tip

● PATCH TOOL AND CLONE STAMP TOOL

First, use the *Patch Tool* to remove large blemishes and lines. Duplicate the image layer and then 'patch' away any lines. Add a *Layer Mask* and 'paint' over the areas you've 'patched' with a low opacity brush to bring back some of the texture, lines and wrinkles to a level that you want them visible. When it comes to reducing dark under-eye circles, use the *Clone Stamp Tool* with the *Opacity* set to around 20% and lightly blend in the new skin. You can go over it more until you get your desired coverage and use a *Layer Mask* to reveal details if you overdo it. To apply skin to an empty layer from the image layer, make sure *Sample* is set to *All Layers*.



Rapid retouching

1) BLEMISHES AND WRINKLES: Use the Healing Brush and Clone Stamp Tool (set to a large, soft brush with low opacity) to reduce the appearance of wrinkles and blemishes. Click the *Fade* command (*Edit>Fade*) after each adjustment to bring texture back, gradually building up coverage. The Healing Brush Tool is very good at covering wrinkles and if you set the Clone Stamp Tool's *Blend Mode* to *Lighten*, it works well to brighten as well as soften the skin. Make sure you work on a new layer for each major adjustment, so you can adjust or delete stages with ease.

2) DARK UNDER-EYE CIRCLES: Apply a *Curves* or *Levels* adjustment layer and brighten the image, focusing on the under-eye area. Invert the attached Layer Mask to hide the adjustment and use the *Brush Tool* with *White* paint to reveal the under-eye areas. You can then reduce the *Opacity* of that layer if the under-eyes look too bright compared to the rest of the face.



Airbrush with Gaussian blur



1) REMOVE BLEMISHES
Here we've used the *Patch Tool* on a duplicate layer and then the *Clone Stamp Tool* with a new layer to remove obvious marks, reduce the wrinkles and smooth out the skin.



2) ADJUST COLOUR
Use the *Lasso Tool* with a generous Feather to select sections of the skin where the colour needs to be adjusted using the Channels in a *Curves* adjustment layer.



3) APPLY BLUR
Select all your layers and click *Command+Alt+Shift+E* to create a combined copy of all the layers. Go to *Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur* and set a blur of between 20 and 30.



4) REVEAL DETAILS
Add a *Layer Mask* and invert it, then use the *Brush Tool* with an *Opacity* of 20% to brush over the skin to smooth it. Avoid areas like the eyes, mouth and nostrils.

■ ADD SHEEN BY ENHANCING HIGHLIGHTS

Create a duplicate layer and use the *Dodge Tool*, set to a low *Exposure* (2-3%) and a soft, medium-sized brush to enhance what natural highlights there are. Gradually build up the effect, varying the *Range* between *Highlights* and *Midtones* to brighten areas of the face and to create highlights where there might not be any to sculpt the face. Remember to work on a duplicate layer, in case you need to revert back to the original image or reduce the opacity of the layer to control the effect.

Features

Enhance your subject's facial features with these simple, yet very effective, steps

THE EYES, TEETH, lips and nose all require similar amounts of attention, and are just as important as the skin when it comes to trying to make a portrait more beautiful. Here are a few pro techniques to try...

Eyes & teeth



1) USE THE DODGE TOOL: Duplicate the image layer so you're not working on the original image's pixels. Select a brush *Size* a little smaller than the whites of the eyes, set the *Range* to *Midtones* and the *Exposure* to around 2-3%, then 'brush' over the whites of the eyes and teeth. You only want to go a couple of shades brighter, so be careful as they can quickly look unnatural.



2) USE HUE/SATURATION: Apply a *Hue/Saturation* adjustment layer and reduce the Reds and Yellows, then use the *Layer Mask* to hide the adjustment, just revealing the eyes and teeth. Next, select the eyes with the *Lasso Tool* and a Feather of 3px or 4px. Then apply a *Curves* adjustment layer and create an 'S' curve to boost the contrast in the eye.



IMAGES: ISTOCK PHOTO



3) USE SELECTIVE COLOR: Select the eye or the teeth with the *Lasso Tool* and apply a small Feather of 10px to soften the edges. Then add a *Selective Color* adjustment layer and click on the drop-down menu at the top of the dialogue box, select *Neutral* and adjust the sliders until you see the area/s selected gradually whiten. Do the same with *Whites*.

Pro tip

● ADD A SOFT CATCHLIGHT

As some eyes are quite deep-set, they often need a bit of brightening and life added. One way is to use a *Curves* adjustment layer to lighten the eye, then invert the Layer Mask and use the *Brush Tool* to paint in a half-moon shape, using *White* paint underneath the pupil to create a highlight similar to what you'd get if you'd used a reflector.



Change eye colour

Use the *Lasso Tool* to draw around the iris and set a small Feather to soften the edges. Add a *Selective Color* adjustment layer and then adjust the sliders via the colours/tones offered in the drop-down menu to alter the colour of the eye to suit your subject or image. Select the eye again in the same way, but this time apply a *Hue/Saturation* adjustment layer and make small tweaks to the intensity of the colour. Finally, add a *Curves* adjustment layer, if necessary, to boost contrast and enhance that twinkle!



Reshape the nose

1) SLIMMING A NOSE: The nose can be a very prominent feature and while we don't suggest you completely reconstruct someone's nose as it's a key aspect of their face, you can minimise its distraction from the eyes with a few simple tricks. Access *Liquify* (*Filter>Liquify*) and select the *Forward Warp Tool*, set a low *Density* and *Pressure* and a brush *Size* appropriate for the size of the nose, and carefully push in the side of the nose and nostrils.

Editing lips

2) MAKE FULLER LIPS: Once again access *Liquify*, but this time select the *Bloat Tool* with a low *Rate* and *Pressure*, then make small clicks along the inside of the lips to make them 'bloat'. Remember: less is more, so don't attempt to make it look like bad collagen injections – it won't flatter any subject!

3) ENRICH THE NATURAL COLOUR: Create a new layer and paint *Black* on top of your model's lips using the *Brush Tool* (you can use any colour here, but *Black* is good for enriching the natural lip colour of your model). Next, click *Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur* and set it to *4px* to smooth the edges. Change the layer's *Blend Mode* to *Soft Light* and reduce the *Opacity*, if necessary. Now use the *Dodge Tool* on the image layer, with its *Range* set to *Highlights*, and brush over the top of the lips to improve the highlights and give them a glossy appearance.



IMAGES: ISTOCK PHOTO

How to apply make-up

Ideally, make-up should be applied correctly before taking a picture. If not, a digital makeover can enhance features.



1) CREATE THE BASE Do what skin retouching you need to. Here, the model's lips are quite chapped, so we've zoomed in close and used the *Clone Stamp Tool* to smooth out the area, and then enhanced the colour. We used a different image layer for every adjustment in case we needed to go back to edit later.



2) EYELINER Create a new layer and zoom into the first eye so it fills the screen, select a small brush with *Black* paint and draw around the edge of the eye to add definition. Change the layer's *Blend Mode* to *Soft Light* and reduce its *Opacity*, if necessary. You can use the same technique to draw in eyelashes, too.



3) EYESHADOW Create another new layer and, using a larger, soft brush, 'paint' over the eyelid and slightly under the eye with your chosen *Foreground Color*. Then change the *Blend Mode* to *Soft Light* or *Color Burn*, reducing the *Opacity* of the layer to suit. Use *Hue/Saturation* to adjust colour.



4) ENHANCE THE EYES Give the eye more impact by selecting the iris with the *Lasso Tool* and then add a *Selective Color* adjustment layer and adjust the sliders to suit the subject. Brighten the whites using the *Dodge Tool* as previously explained or by using a *Curves* adjustment layer.



5) BLUSH Pick your colour for the cheeks and, using a soft, large brush, 'paint' over the cheekbone area onto a new layer. Next, go to *Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur* and set a *Radius* of *40px* to drastically soften the edges. Click *OK*. Change the layer's *Blend Mode* to *Color Burn* or *Linear Burn*.



6) SKIN TONE If you want to warm up a cool skin tone, apply a *Photo Filter* adjustment layer and set *Warming Filter*, adjusting the *Density* slider to control intensity. Invert the Layer Mask and reveal the areas of skin that you want affected by the adjustment, reducing the layer's *Opacity*.

Hair

Get glossy, healthy hair with this tutorial

YOU'D BE AMAZED at the time it takes to retouch hair at a professional standard; we're talking days or weeks for those retouchers preparing a picture for a shampoo commercial or competition. For straight hair, they would literally have to clone each stray hair so it was straight using a very hard 2px brush set to 100% opacity. You also have to reduce the amount of flyaway hairs to smooth out the surface, but if you eliminate too many, the hair can end up looking like a helmet.

To make the hair look fuller and thicker, some retouchers may even composite hair from various different shots into the picture and morph them together using layers and Layer Masks. It can be a huge amount of work, which is why we've picked up a few tips from our professional contributors, including retoucher Chanelle Segerius-Bruce (www.retouchme.co.uk), who has retouched images for Pantene campaigns and The Body Shop.

Notching up hair

To reduce those niggly little flyaway strands and smooth out the surface of the hair, start by adding an empty new layer and set the layer's **Blend Mode** to **Darken**. Now select the **Clone Stamp Tool**, set the **Hardness** to 100%, **Opacity** to 100% and the **Blend Mode** to **Darken**, too. Use a small brush, big enough to cover the strand of hair, and take a sample from the area just next to it and clone over the strand. While the **Darken** blending mode works on light flyaway hairs, if the strands are dark, set the **Blend Mode** for the layer and brush to **Lighten** instead. To get rid of hairs entirely, use the same technique by setting the **Blend Mode** to **Normal**.



Change hair colour

Only alter colour a few shades from the original: dramatic changes make it difficult to target flyaway hairs



1) The easiest way to select the hair is to use Quick Mask Mode (**Select>Edit in Quick Mask Mode**) and 'paint' over the hair area. When you're done, click **Select>Edit in Quick Mask Mode** again to remove the red mask and reveal the selection.



2) Create a new layer and use the **Brush Tool** loaded with your choice of colour. 'Paint' over the selection onto the empty new layer and change the **Blend Mode** to **Soft Light** to merge the colour with the texture and natural colour of the hair.



3) The tricky part is when it comes to targeting missed stray hairs of the original colour. Zoom in close and use a small brush to edit the obvious hairs and then use a **Layer Mask** to remove colour where needed.



Want shampoo eommcreial-worthy hair? Then follow thcsc fcw casy stcps...



1) **BOOST CONTRAST** Add a **Curves** adjustment layer and boost the contrast (concentrating on bringing out the natural highlights in the hair), click **OK**. Now invert the attached Layer Mask (**command + I**) to fill it with **Black**, hiding the adjustment.



2) **REFINE** Using the **Brush Tool** on the **Layer Mask**, 'paint' over the natural highlights to strengthen them. Reduce the **Opacity** of the adjustment layer if needed and switch the layer's visibility on and off to see the effects and to help judge where the highlights are.



3) **DODGE** Next, duplicate the image layer and select the **Dodge Tool**. With a large brush, target the highlights with an **Exposure** of 10-15%, varying the **Range** between **Midtones** and **Highlights**. Reduce the layer's **Opacity** if you overdo it slightly.



4) **SHARPEN** Duplicate the layer again and apply a **High Pass** filter (**Filter>High Pass**) set to 5px and change the layer's **Blend Mode** to **Soft Light**. As **High Pass** can be a little harsh on skin, add a **Layer Mask** and hide the skin, leaving only the hair looking crisper.



Lens used: Canon EF 70-200mm 2.8 L IS II USM



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KIT FOR PORTRAITS

Find out about the essential equipment that you'll need to get the best shots of your most accessible subjects – friends and family – by following this comprehensive gear guide for portraits

CONTEMPORARY PORTRAITURE has moved on from the days of sitting in front of a mottled brown background in a stuffy studio and smiling politely for the camera. As you'll have seen in this guide, portraits need to exude fun, energy, laughter and capture something of the subject's character. Known more as 'lifestyle' photography, these new style of portraits show a person living their life and doing the things they love. There's a massive market for this style of photography, so whether you just want to capture some great shots of the kids to put up on your wall, or you have more ambitious plans to earn some cash from portraiture, there are plenty of willing subjects around. What's more, you don't need to hire a studio and know how to operate studioflash – it's much better to get out and about, visit your subjects at home or shoot them in a location that's personal to them. This brings its own photographic challenges, however, and without the right equipment you run the risk of your portraits turning out like a snapshot.

So, in the first section of this gear guide, we walk you through the equipment you need to surmount the challenges location portraiture present. As well as cameras themselves, we'll look at the best lenses for portraiture and which ones will help you take pictures that stand out

Key contacts

Aretie Butterfly
www.visibledust.com
Canon
www.canon.co.uk
Cokin
www.intro2020.co.uk
Gitzo
www.gitzo.co.uk
Giottos
www.daymen.co.uk
Green Clean
www.flaghead.co.uk
Hähnel
www.hahnel.ie
Hiteeh
www.formatt.co.uk
Hoodman
www.newprouk.co.uk

Lowepro
www.daymen.co.uk
Kenko
www.intro2020.co.uk
LaCie
www.lacie.com
Lastolite
www.lastolite.com
Lexar
www.lexar.com
Lowepro
www.lexar.com
Manfrotto
www.manfrotto.co.uk
Nikon
www.nikon.co.uk
Op/Teeh
www.newprouk.co.uk

Panasonic
www.panasonic.co.uk
Rogue
www.daymen.co.uk
Samsung
www.samsung.co.uk
SanDisk
www.sandisk.co.uk
Sigma
www.sigma-imaging-uk.com
Slik
www.intro2020.co.uk
Tamrae
www.intro2020.co.uk
Tamron
www.intro2020.co.uk
Velbon
www.intro2020.co.uk

from the crowd. You'll also need some lighting to give your shots the wow factor no matter what the weather, but don't panic if you're daunted by flash: we've picked out flashguns that aren't complicated to use. For the more confident photographers, we'll show you the

advanced off-camera flash systems top lifestyle photographers use and there's advice on accessories and gadget bags, not forgetting the props, too! So, what are you waiting for? Dive in and start finding out about the gear you need to shoot cracking portraits.

Kit for enthusiast lifestyle portrait photographers

You're shooting friends, colleagues and even people you don't know, so you need a fairly sophisticated kit to improve results. You'll want 'fast' aperture lenses to isolate your subjects from a background, manual control of your flashgun for subtle lighting effects and gear to take your flash off camera. When you're shooting outdoors, you'll also need some filters to control bright light. Here's our choice of kit for your consideration.

Mid-range flashgun

As you get more confident with flash, a mid-range flashgun will help you experiment more. As well as TTL, they boast manual functions so you can reduce the power output for a more subtle effect when working close up. They also boast wireless capabilities for taking your flashgun off-camera and placing it to the side or behind your model for more impressive lighting. Models like the £210 Canon Speedlite 430EXII, £229 Nikon Speedlight SB-700 or £200 Metz 52 AF-1 have a slave function, which means they can be triggered by a burst of flash from your camera's pop-up unit. You can also control the output of each flash source in your camera's menu system to achieve the desired effect.

Mid-range DSLR

As you start to take your portraiture more seriously, you'll no doubt consider upgrading your camera. Generally speaking, mid-range DSLRs offer improved build quality over their entry-level counterparts, so they're equipped to handle a bit more hammer. They also boast higher resolutions for sharper images using low ISO speeds and they boast advanced features like wireless flash control: although some entry-level cameras feature this now, too. If you've already started investing in lenses from one brand, you'll probably want to stick with that manufacturer when you upgrade your camera body, but if you've not committed yet, the latest £700 Canon EOS 700D or £800 Nikon D5300 should go straight to the top of your list.

Fast standard zoom

Kit lenses are fine when you're starting out, but their general build quality and optical construction leaves much to be desired. When you're looking for a step up in quality, fast standard zooms are the way to go. They only cover the same focal length as your kit lens, but the fixed f/2.8 aperture at 50mm is perfect for portraits on an APS-C sensor and you'll appreciate the smoother zoom action and metal lens mount. Own-brand options can be expensive, but there's a range of third-party ones, too, like the £350 Tamron 17-50mm f/2.8 XR Di II VC or £450 Sigma 17-70mm f/2.8-4 OS HSM. Be prepared for some extra weight to carry, however, as the improved build and extra glass in these lenses makes them much heavier than your kit lens.

Fast-access camera bag

Lifestyle portraits involve grabbing those split-second moments, so you need to work quickly. Therefore, when you want to change lenses or swap memory cards, having a bag quite literally at your side is a real bonus. The £95 Speed Freak is the mid-sized bag in Think Tank's Speed convertible range, and allows you very fast access and lots of storage. It's an alternative to using a belt with separate pouches, such as the Tamrac Modular System or Lowepro's Street & Field series, both from around £10-£15.

Very 'fast' standard prime

The f/1.4 aperture of these lenses lets in twice as much as a f/1.8 lens, which is great when shooting in low light. Not only that, but the maximum aperture allows you to throw most of the image out of focus, just keeping small details like the lips and eyes in focus. For a more regular portrait, though, stopping down the aperture to f/2.8 provides cracking corner-to-corner sharpness. For around £300, Canon and Nikon have their own versions and third-party options include the £350 Sigma 50mm f/1.4 EX DG HSM or the £300 Tamron 60mm f/2 SP Di II, which, although not as 'fast', doubles up as a 1:1 macro lens, too.





Lighting stand, flash bracket and umbrella

Once you start taking your flashgun off-camera, a whole host of creative possibilities open up. One of the most basic and classic approaches is to place your flashgun at 45° to your subject and use a reflective or shoot-through umbrella to soften the light. To do this, you'll not only need the umbrella itself, but also a flashgun bracket to attach your flashgun and umbrella to, as well as a stand so you can position it securely without having to hold it. Westcott do a collapsible umbrella flash kit that includes a stand, umbrella and flashgun bracket for £65.

Wireless flash triggers

Using a lighting stand and umbrella can have its problems if you're using your camera's pop-up unit to fire the flash. The sensor on the flashgun needs to receive the flash in order to fire and if you position the flashgun where your umbrella blocks the line of sight from your pop-up unit, the off-camera flash won't fire. This is where wireless radio triggers – which send a radio signal from your camera to your flashgun – come into play. With one transmitter connected to your camera's hotshoe and one receiver on the flashgun, you can place your flashgun out of direct line of sight and it'll still fire. Hähnel's £50 Combi RF is a brilliant buy.

Reflector on stand kit

Unless you've an assistant or a willing volunteer to handhold your reflector in the right place, operating your camera at the same time can be a challenge. A good solution is the Interfit Flat Panel Reflector & Stand package for £90 that features a 35x75in reflector, making it suitable for close-up or full-length shots.



Grip reflector

A reflector is an invaluable lighting aid, but can be difficult to position when you have no one around to hold it for you. The £55 Lastolite TriGrip gets around this problem by boasting a solid handle that you can grip with one hand while shooting with the other.

Wide-angle zoom lens

It's not a traditional portrait lens, as the distortion associated with wide-angles will stretch the proportions of your subject's face. That said, a wide-angle lens will give you another option in your armoury, allowing you to capture more of the surroundings and get shots others won't. They're also essential if you find yourself in a small or enclosed space where you can't get far enough back from your model. Again, own-brand options are available, or take a look at the highly recommended £370 Sigma 10-20mm EX f/4-5.6 or £570 Tokina AT-X DX 12-28mm f/4 Pro.

In the bag



Flash gels

Coloured gels slotted over your flashgun can produce colourful and fun creative flash effects. Try the Honl HP-Filter 3 Colour Effects Kit, costing around £20.



Back-up body

A second DSLR body means you can have a telezoom attached to one camera and fast prime or wide-angle on the other, giving you multiple options without the inconvenience of having to keep changing lens.



White Balance aid

With most lifestyle portraits, you'll be mixing ambient and flash light sources, which makes it tricky for the camera to get the White Balance right. Shooting in Raw and taking a quick shot of a grey card at the start of the shoot will help make sure the White Balance can be quickly and easily corrected across all your shots later in software. Check out the £16 Lastolite 30cm Ezybalance Grey Card.



Lightmeter

These aren't essential and many digital photographers get by without one, but when you start using off-camera flash and manual controls, they can be useful for getting your exposures spot-on. The Sekonic Flashmate L-308S offers a digital display, incident and reflected readings and four different modes for £140.



Filters

Many filter effects can be achieved in Photoshop – however, some can't, and for these you'll need to use filters. Polarising filters are great for adding more punch to your shots when shooting portraits in bright conditions as they reduce lens flare, cut out reflections and help darken down the blues in the sky. Check the diameter of your lens to get the right size filter, but, for an example, the Tiffen 72mm Circular Polarising Filter costs £60. ND grads also allow you to balance the exposure between a bright sky and darker foreground when taking wide-angle portraits. Screw-on ND filters are available, but a filter holder system gives you more flexibility as you can use it across all your lenses. The Cokin Z-Pro ND kit costs £144.



Tripod

A tripod is an unlikely bit of kit for a lifestyle portrait photographer as you'll usually need to change shooting position quickly as your subject, particularly younger ones, move around. There are lots of tripods available, including ones that let you shoot very low to the ground, but a good model to start with is the £120 Manfrotto 055XPROB. As an alternative, you might also want to look at monopods for flexibility.



Remote release

For a more relaxed or spontaneous moment, a remote release allows you to set a shot up and then move away from the camera to interact with the subject. One of the best budget buys is the £20 Hähnel RC280 Remote Release.

HIRE, DON'T BUY!

Can't afford premium lenses? Then hire them instead for a fraction of the price. Various firms offer great day, weekend or weekly deals, including Lens Pimp (www.lenspimp.com); Hire A Camera (www.hireacamera.com) and The Flash Centre (www.theflashcentre.com).



THE BEST LENSES FOR PORTRAITS

The standard kit zoom supplied with your camera is a good general-purpose lens for shooting satisfactory portraits, but we'd recommend you consider one of these two types of optics for far better quality results

The 'standard' 50mm f/1.8

IN THE DAYS OF 35MM film SLRs, you'd invariably find a 50mm f/1.8 prime lens attached to the front of almost every SLR, and it remained popular until the late '80s. It was around this time that standard zooms started to appear. With their variable focal lengths ranging from wide-angle to short-telephoto, the 28-70mm (and similar) lens represented a step forward in terms of flexibility and sadly it led to the demise of the 50mm as the standard lens of choice. However, its popularity has recently seen a resurgence amongst photographers for a number of reasons.

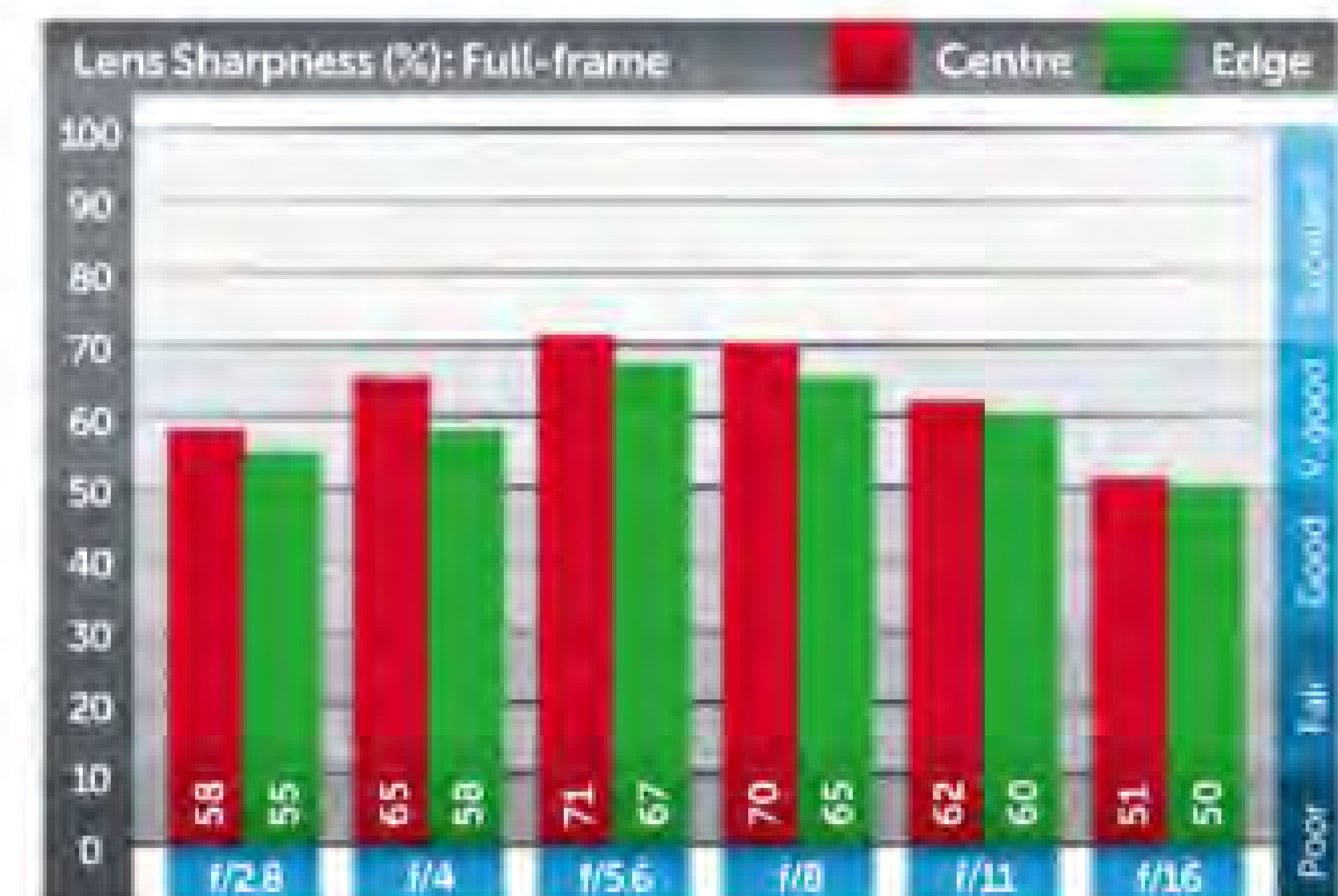
The first is that it's a very inexpensive lens to get hold of. With 50mm lenses from the likes of Canon, Nikon and Sony costing just over £100 new, and used versions available for a little over half that, they're an affordable choice for most of us. To add further credence to the value-for-money argument, consider this fact: The lens of choice for many portrait pros has long been the 85mm telephoto, which for an f/1.8 version will set you back around £300; if your DSLR uses an APS-C sensor, as most do, a 50mm that costs you £100 equates to a 75mm f/1.8 (or 80mm f/1.8 if you use Canon) – but with an effective saving of around £200!

Also, if you don't mind buying a used manual-focus lens, you can pick one up for around £25. So for the price of a decent memory card, you can get a high-quality piece

of glass that may be a few decades old and lack AF, but won't leave you wanting in the optical department. So, there's no denying a 50mm lens is an affordable bit of kit, but what else does it offer? Well, the biggest selling point must surely be its maximum aperture of f/1.8. Having a lens with such a fast maximum aperture offers stacks of potential. With your average 18-55mm having a maximum aperture of f/3.5-5.6, the 50mm is two to three stops faster, giving a brighter viewfinder image and allowing you to shoot handheld in low light, while using lower ISO ratings than you would normally get away with.

The most remarkable benefit of the wide maximum aperture is the extremely shallow depth-of-field when you shoot wide open, which helps isolate the main subject from its surroundings. This single feature provides significant creative opportunities, especially in the field of portraiture. The 50mm lens also scores better than virtually any other lens in the size and weight department. Weighing around 150g and measuring about 5cm in length, it's the perfect optic to keep with you, especially when you're travelling and when storage is at a premium.

The final benefit is possibly the most important – image quality. As with the majority of prime lenses, the optical quality from the humble 50mm lens is arguably better than all but the high-end zooms and, in terms of



HOW TO READ THE LENS SHARPNESS GRAPHS: Our bar graphs provide you with a visual representation of lens sharpness. Each graph shows the centre and edge performance of the lens at full f/stops from maximum aperture to f/16 at different focal lengths of the zoom. Centre sharpness is shown in red; edge in green. The higher the bar, the better the sharpness, with ratings as follows: Below 10: Poor; 10-29: Fair; 30-49: Good; 50-69: Very good; Over 70: Excellent. All our lens test analysis is performed using Imatest software.

sharpness, is superior to a standard zoom. For sharpness, distortion, light fall-off and contrast, and even when used wide open, you'll have little to complain about. So, there you have it: a small, lightweight and affordable lens with a super-fast aperture and razor-sharp optics. Is it not time you bought one?

What's the big deal about the 50mm's f/1.8 aperture?

You have to experience a lens as fast as the 50mm to really understand and appreciate its benefits but, trust us, once you've tried it you'll be hooked. The 50mm's f/1.8 aperture enables you to throw the background completely out of focus and isolate the main subject from its setting. This set of images shows the changes in depth-of-field at various apertures from f/1.8 to f/22.



● Canon EF 50mm f/1.8 II £82

HANDLING: The ultimate nifty-fifty, Canon's economy-grade standard prime is small and very light – half the weight of the Canon 50mm f/1.4. It feels cheap, but then, of course, it is.

FEATURES: In a word, spartan. The mount is plastic, and there's not even a focusing scale, just an AF/M button for switching between auto and the very lightly weighted manual focusing ring at the front. Inside, though, there's some good glass in a classic design of six elements in five groups.

AUTOFOCUS: AF drive is by micro-motor, no ultrasonic at this price level, and it's neither as swift nor silent as USM, but it has to be said the Japanese-made review sample was notably better than other copies we've tried from Canon's Malaysian plant – quieter and less prone to shunting and misfocusing in low light.

PERFORMANCE: Sharpness in the centre is always high, right from wide open, and that's where it counts at lower f/numbers when very often subjects towards the edges of the frame will be out of focus anyway. The edges lag considerably at f/1.8, though improvement is rapid on stopping down and by f/4 sharpness reaches excellent levels on both full-frame and APS-C formats. Sharpness at a glance – overall average MTF level from f/2 to f/11 measured 71%. Peak resolution was 112 lines-per-mm at f/5.6 (MTF 20%). Aberrations are generally well controlled on this Canon, with particularly good CA performance.



VERDICT: It's either cheap 'n' nasty or plastic-fantastic, depending on your point of view. While it's certainly not the best made lens, nor the most robust, it has decent optics and good overall performance for a totally bargain price. For low-light shooting and shallow depth-of-field fun, it doesn't get any cheaper than this. The real question is can you afford not to?

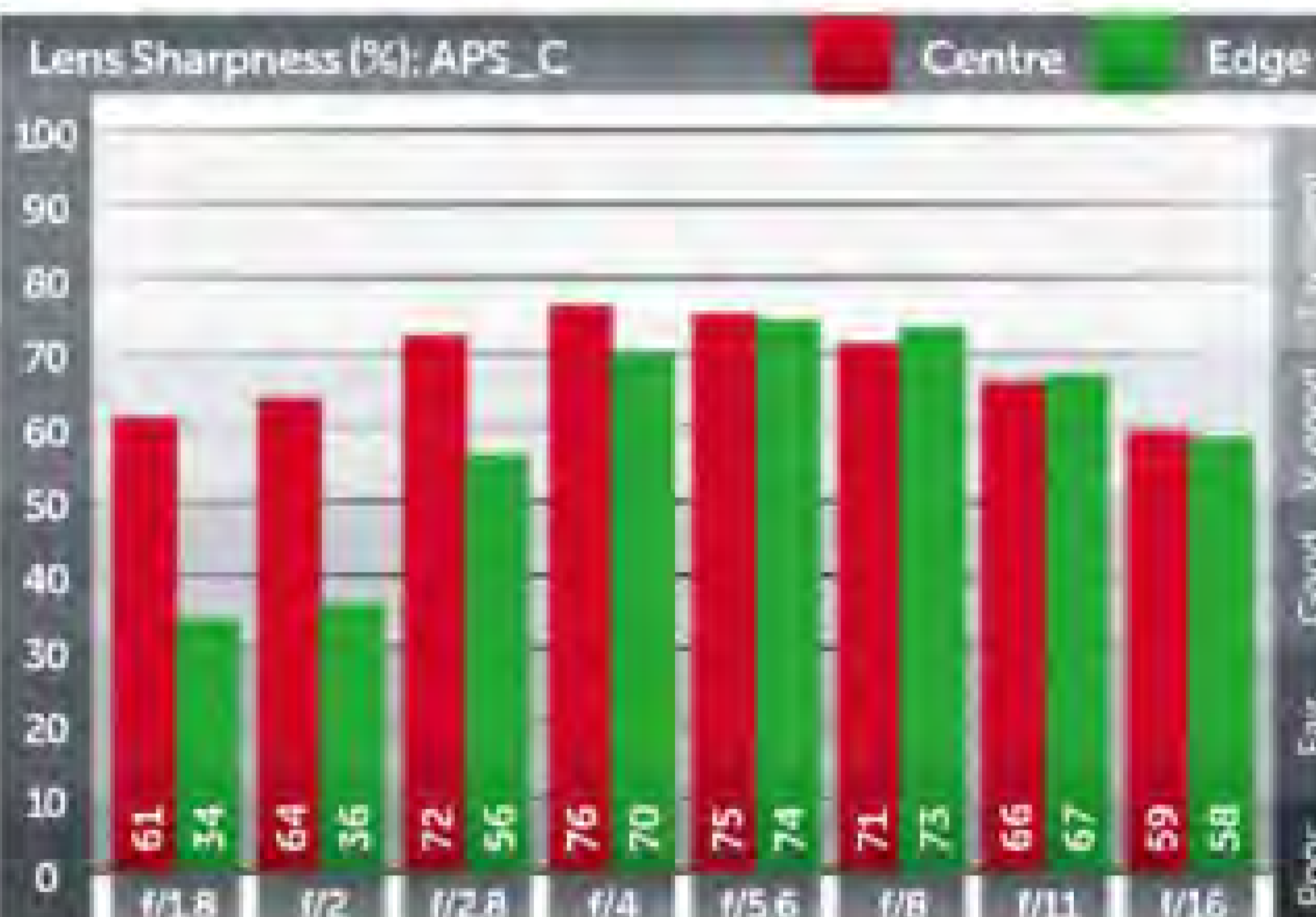
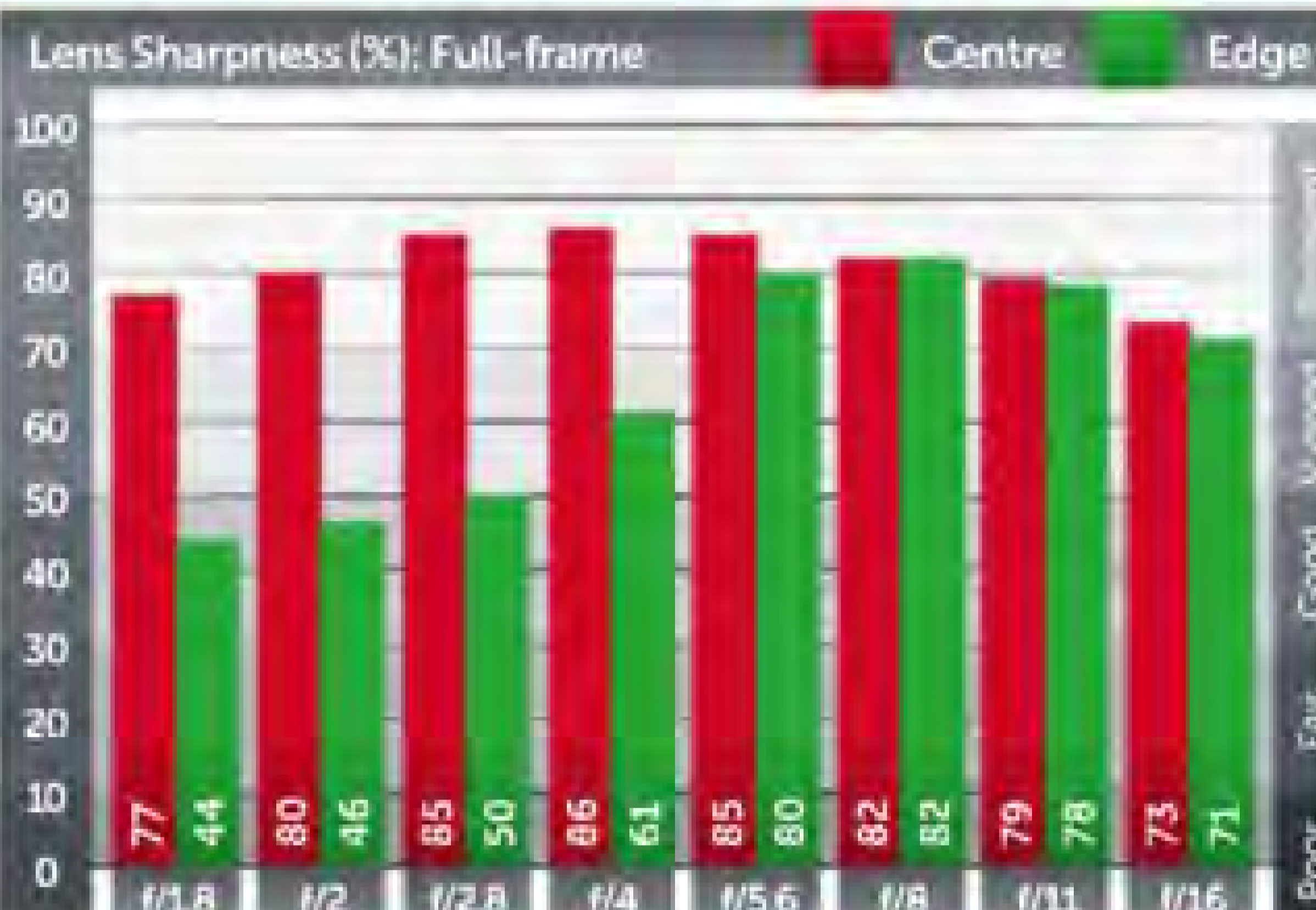
HANDLING	14/20
FEATURES	14/20
PERFORMANCE	36/40
VALUE FOR MONEY	20/20
OVERALL	84/100

DISTORTION (Full-frame): +1.5% (Good)
 DISTORTION (APS-C): +1.0% (Very good)

VIGNETTING (Full-frame): Fair
 VIGNETTING (APS-C): Excellent

CHROMATIC AB (Full-frame edge): Excellent
 CHROMATIC AB (APS-C edge): Excellent

Canon EF 50mm f/1.8 II



● Canon EF 50mm f/1.4 USM £280

HANDLING: Average size and weight for a 50mm f/1.4, and nicely made – a big jump up in build quality from the older Canon 50mm f/1.8. Manual focus ring is very light.

FEATURES: Ultrasonic USM focusing has full-time manual override, and the focusing scale has depth-of-field marks at f/22, to help with hyperfocal distance setting. Optical construction is seven elements in six groups. A lens hood is extra – Canon only supplies hoods with premium L-grade lenses. Poor show really.

AUTOFOCUS: USM autofocus is fast, and though not as quiet as some, that's nit-picking. Closest focus is a typical 45cm from the sensor, or 35cm from the front of the lens.

PERFORMANCE: Sharpness is very high, getting off to a great start with strong central performance from f/1.4. Edge sharpness is noticeably less good at maximum aperture, but catches up very quickly on stopping down. Overall sharpness reaches excellent levels on both full-frame and APS-C formats as early as f/2.8, and that is held to f/11. Distortion and vignetting is only fair on full-frame, recording +1.6% barrel and -2.5EV respectively, though that is countered by above average CA control. Since these aberrations are easily reduced or eliminated in post-processing, we don't mark them down too harshly. Sharpness at a glance – overall average MTF level from f/2 to f/11 measured 74%. Peak resolution was 114 lines-per-mm at f/5.6 (MTF 20%).



VERDICT: Canon's 50mm f/1.4 is a fine lens. Its great strength is overall performance, with particularly good sharpness wide open, certainly in the centre, making it very usable at all apertures. From f/2.8, global sharpness is excellent, by which time the vignetting is reduced to very low levels. At £280, it's good value, even without a lens hood.

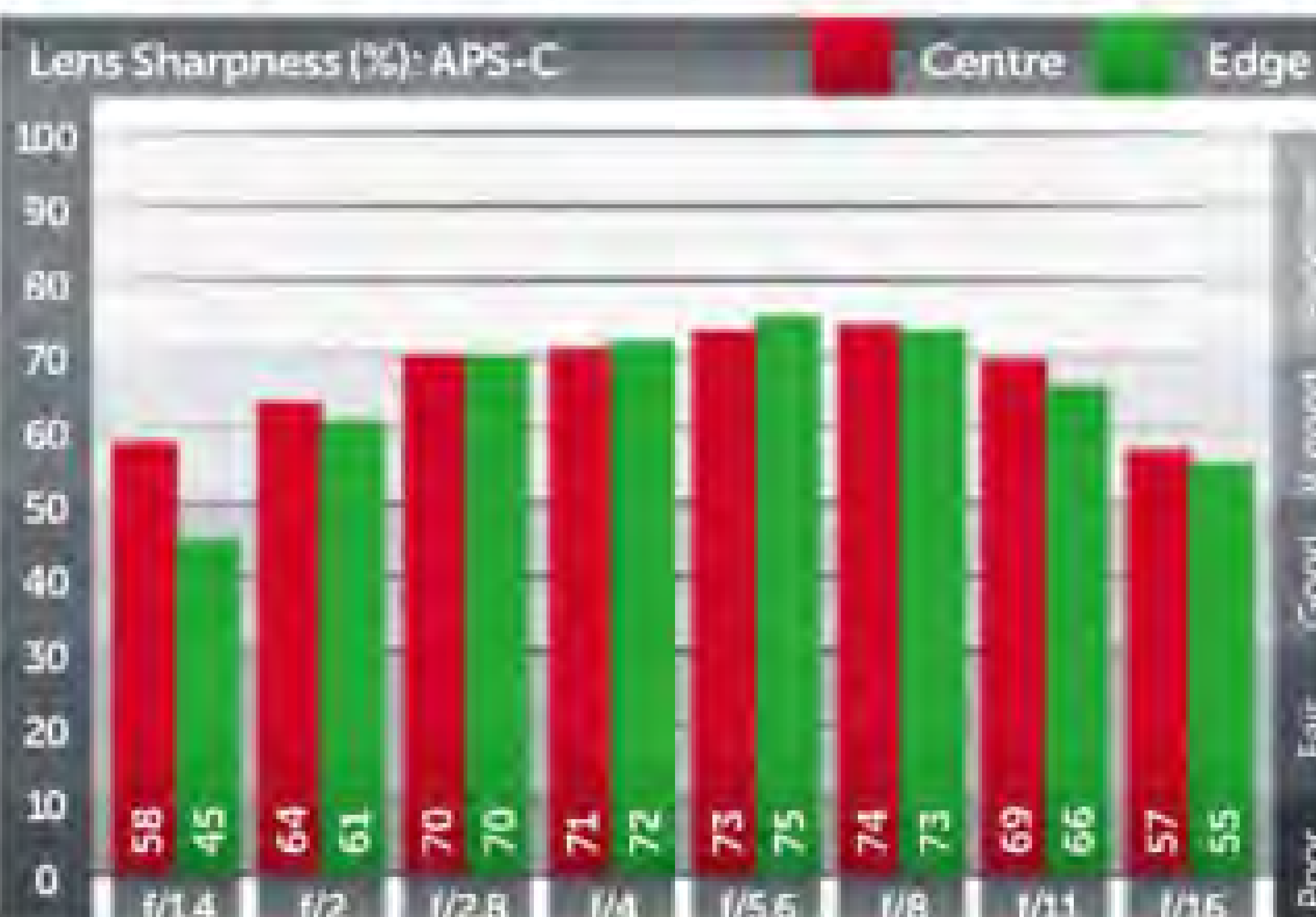
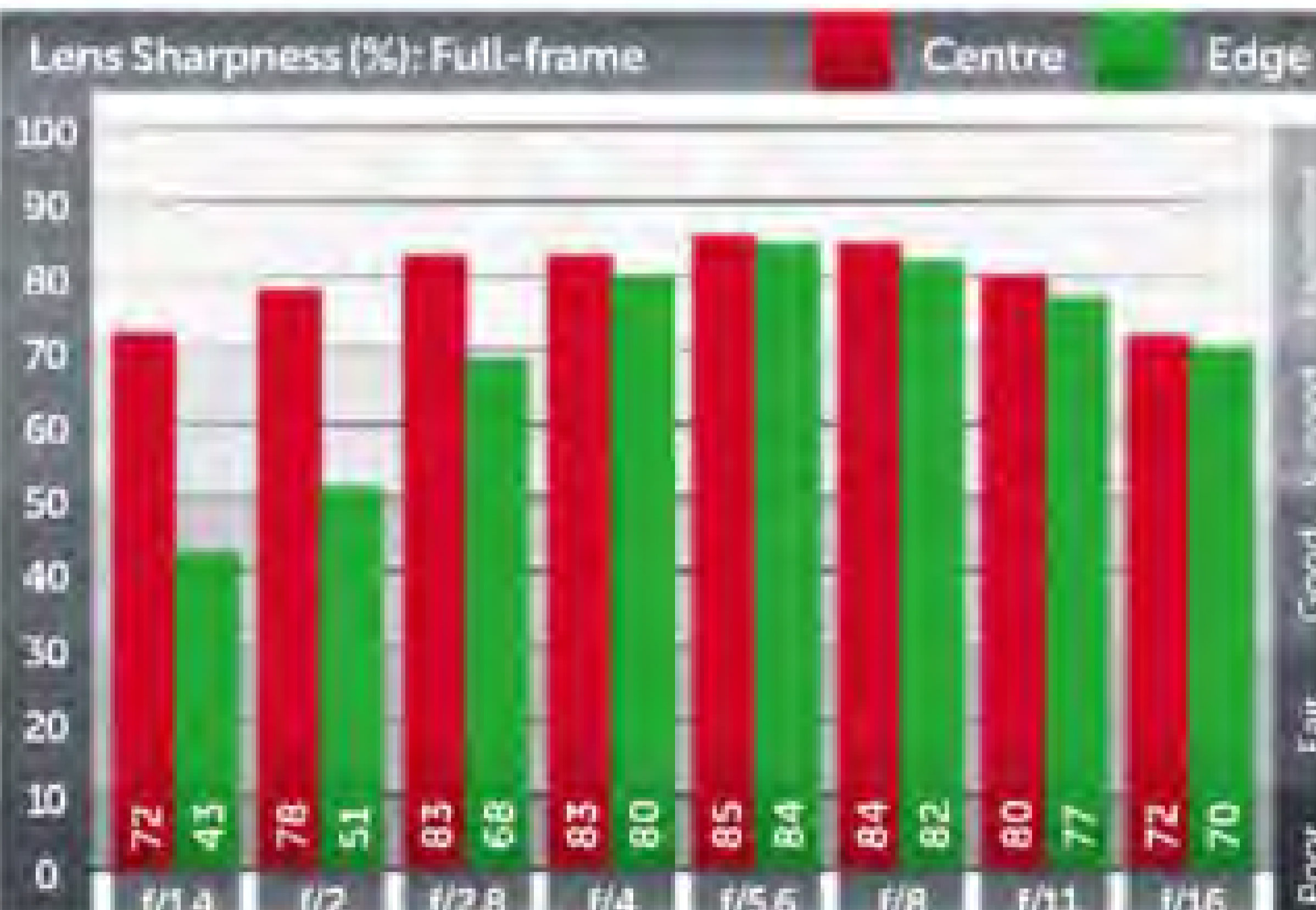
HANDLING	18/20
FEATURES	18/20
PERFORMANCE	38/40
VALUE FOR MONEY	18/20
OVERALL	92/100

DISTORTION (Full-frame): +1.6% (Fair)
 DISTORTION (APS-C): +1.2% (Good)

VIGNETTING (Full-frame): Fair
 VIGNETTING (APS-C): Excellent

CHROMATIC AB (Full-frame edge): Very good
 CHROMATIC AB (APS-C edge): Very good

Canon EF 50mm f/1.4 USM



● Nikon AF 50mm f/1.8 D **£110**

HANDLING: Compact and low weight, the nicely finished plastic barrel (with metal mount) has a smooth and light manual focusing ring. It extends a little at closest focus with a bit of play in the front section, though it feels more robust than the similar Canon.

FEATURES: The AF designation means focusing drive is via screw-coupling to the camera, as opposed to AF-S Nikkors with internal motors. Being a Nikon D lens, it has a manual aperture ring that is set and locked at f/22 for full auto control by the camera. There's a mini depth-of-field scale, marked at f/11 and f/22, for hyperfocal distance setting.

AUTOFOCUS: The AF drive works well, via mechanical coupling to the camera, and though not quite as fast or quiet as the Silent Wave Motor, it's perfectly adequate. It needs a suitably equipped camera for this, though, and many entry-level Nikon DSLRs don't have it.

PERFORMANCE: Optical construction is six elements in five groups. Performance in the centre is strong on full-frame, though the extra resolution demands of APS-C saw it lagging behind a little and global levels of excellent quality on both formats wasn't reached until f/5.6. Sharpness at a glance – overall average MTF level from f/2 to f/11 measured 66%. Peak resolution was 105 lines-per-mm at f/8 (MTF 20%). Distortion is commendably low, with about average control of vignetting and chromatic aberration.



VERDICT: Main consideration is the AF drive, especially since this budget lens is most likely to appeal to those with entry-level Nikons. That might rule it straight out, but on the other hand, the good news is the Nikon AF-S version doesn't have this problem and is the better performer all round; really good, in fact, and only costs £40 more.

HANDLING	18/20
FEATURES	18/20
PERFORMANCE	33/40
VALUE FOR MONEY	17/20
OVERALL	86/100

DISTORTION (Full-frame): +0.4% (Excellent)

DISTORTION (APS-C): +0.6% (Very good)

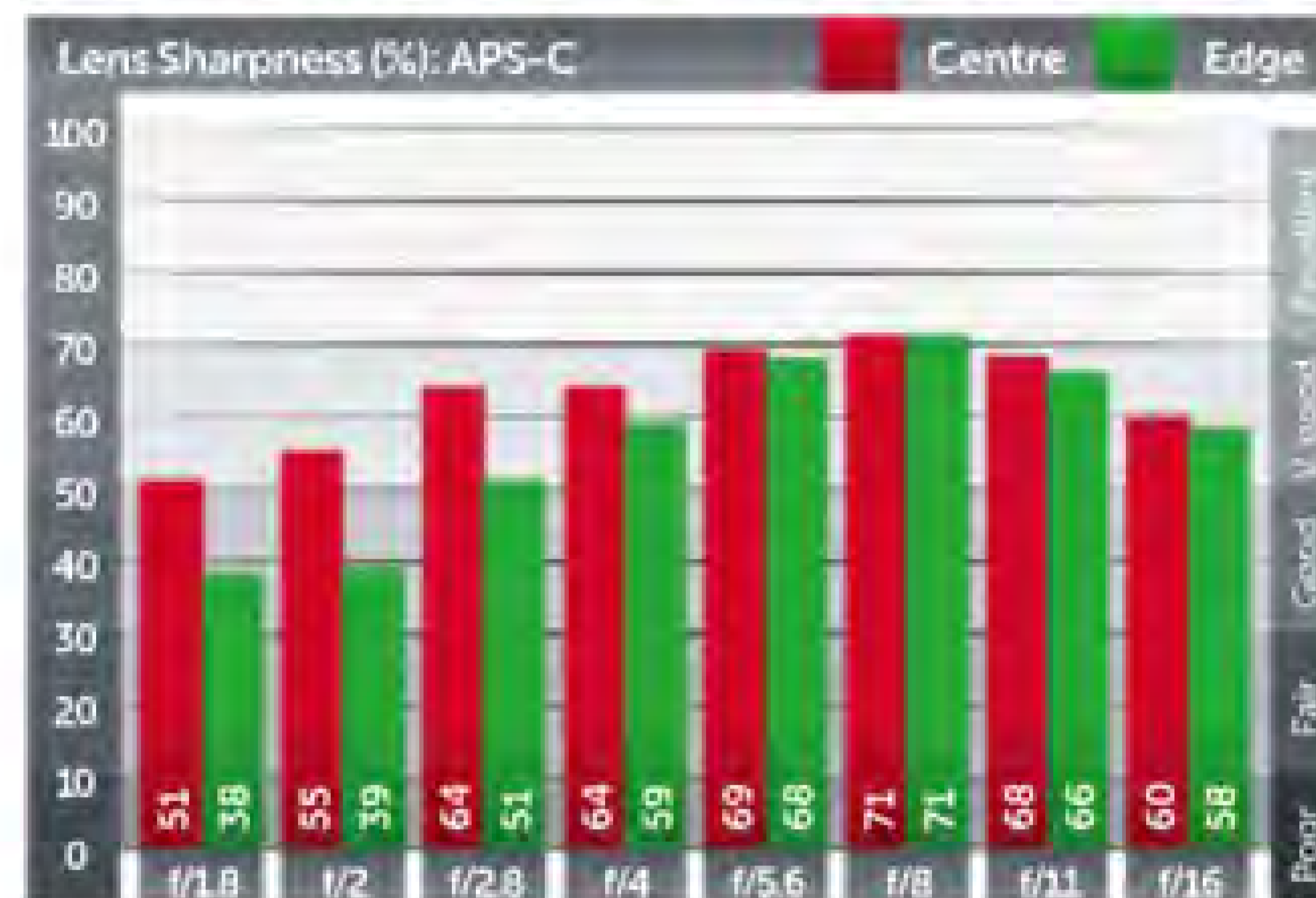
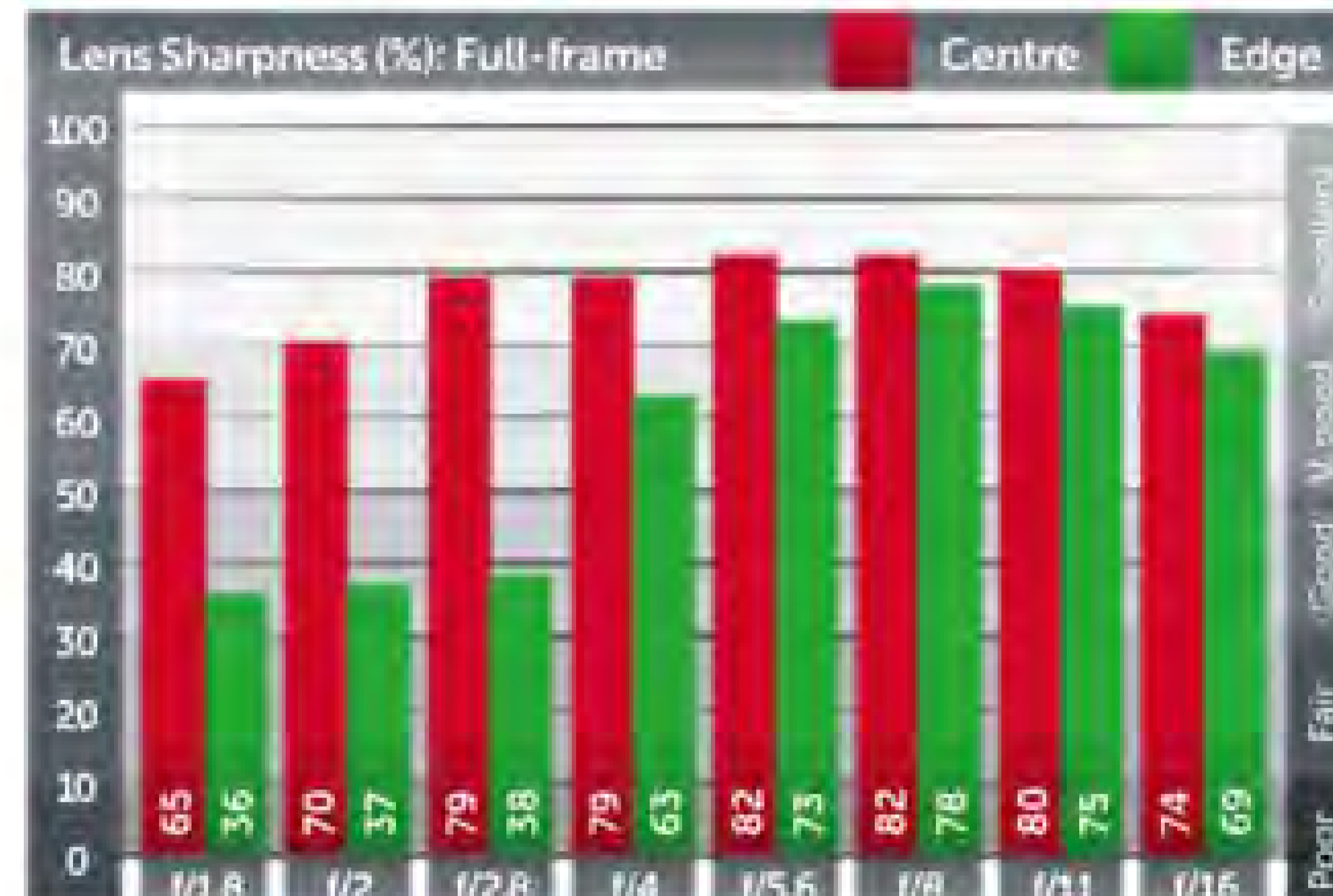
VIGNETTING (Full-frame): Good

VIGNETTING (APS-C): Excellent

CHROMATIC AB (Full-frame edge): Very good

CHROMATIC AB (APS-C edge): Good

Nikon AF 50mm f/1.8 D



● Nikon AF-S 50mm f/1.8 G **£155**

HANDLING: Not as heavy as it looks – at 185g it's more than the 50mm f/1.8 D, though one-third less than the f/1.4 G version. Manual focusing is smooth and one-finger light.

FEATURES: It focuses down to 45cm from the sensor, or 32cm from the front of the lens, with full-time manual override. There's a token depth-of-field scale with marks at f/22 for hyperfocal distance setting. Construction is mainly plastic, but the mount is metal and fitted with a weather-sealing gasket. Comes with a good quality hood and soft pouch. These little things add up.

AUTOFOCUS: Silent Wave Motor is smooth, quiet and swift. It's actually a bit faster than the much more expensive f/1.4 G version, possibly because the actual glass it has to shift is lighter.

PERFORMANCE: Optical specification is high for such a modestly priced lens, with seven elements in six groups, including one aspherical surface. This is reflected in very good sharpness, that beats the f/1.4 G at equivalent apertures. Right from the start it hits excellent levels in the centre on both full-frame and APS-C. By f/2.8, the edges have also reached the excellent standard. Sharpness at a glance – overall average MTF level from f/2 to f/11 measured 74%. Peak resolution was 110 lines-per-mm at f/4 (MTF 20%). Aberrations control – distortion, vignetting (corner shading) and chromatic aberration (CA) is about average for this class.



VERDICT: Nikon users are rather spoilt for choice in the 50mm sector, but this 50mm f/1.8 G-series is the cherry. It's barely half the price of its sister f/1.4 G, but overall it's better at most apertures, and produces very good to excellent edge-to-edge sharpness throughout the range. With excellent Silent Wave Motor autofocus, too, it's a great buy.

HANDLING	18/20
FEATURES	18/20
PERFORMANCE	38/40
VALUE FOR MONEY	20/20
OVERALL	94/100

DISTORTION (Full-frame): +1.3% (Good)

DISTORTION (APS-C): +1.0% (Very good)

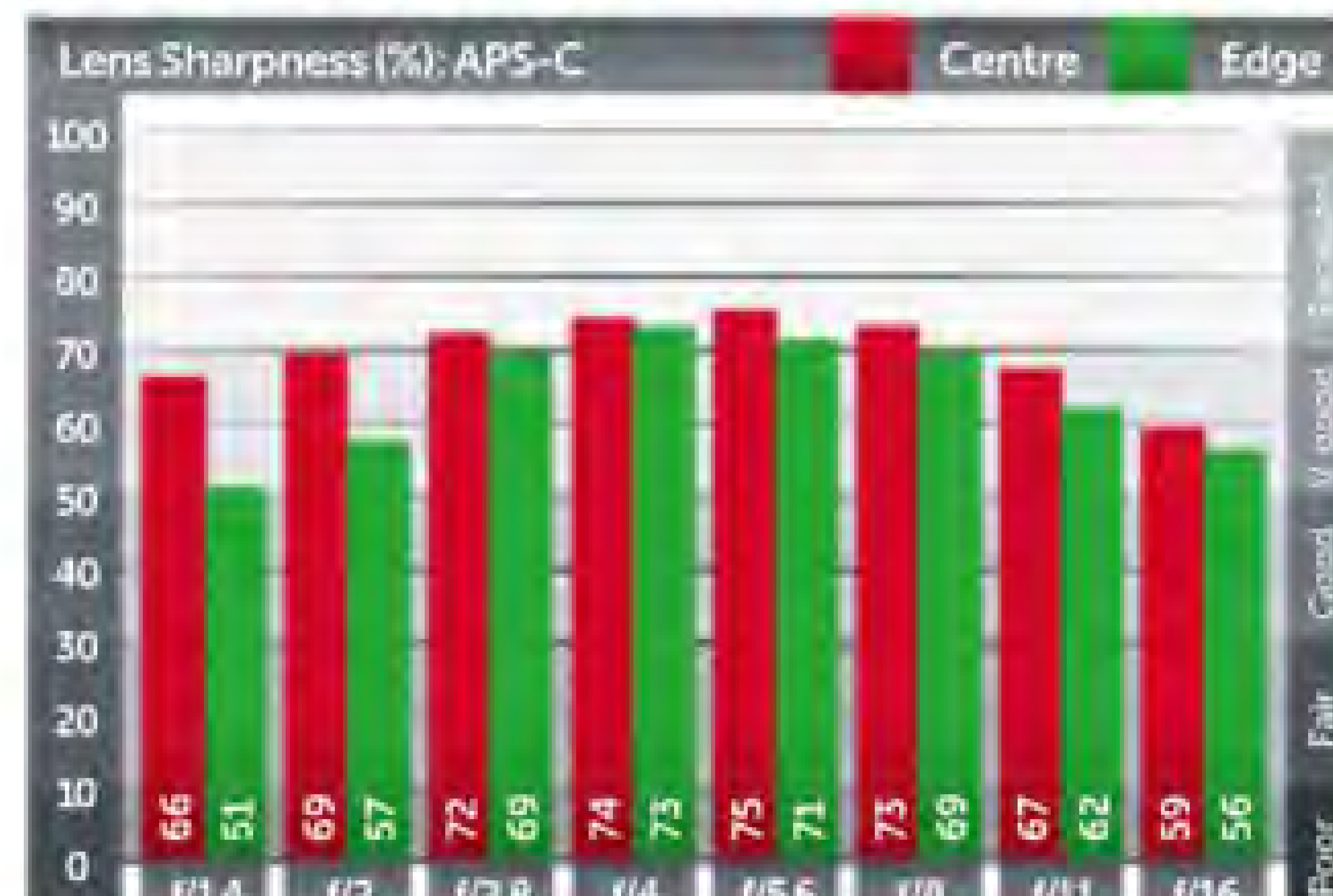
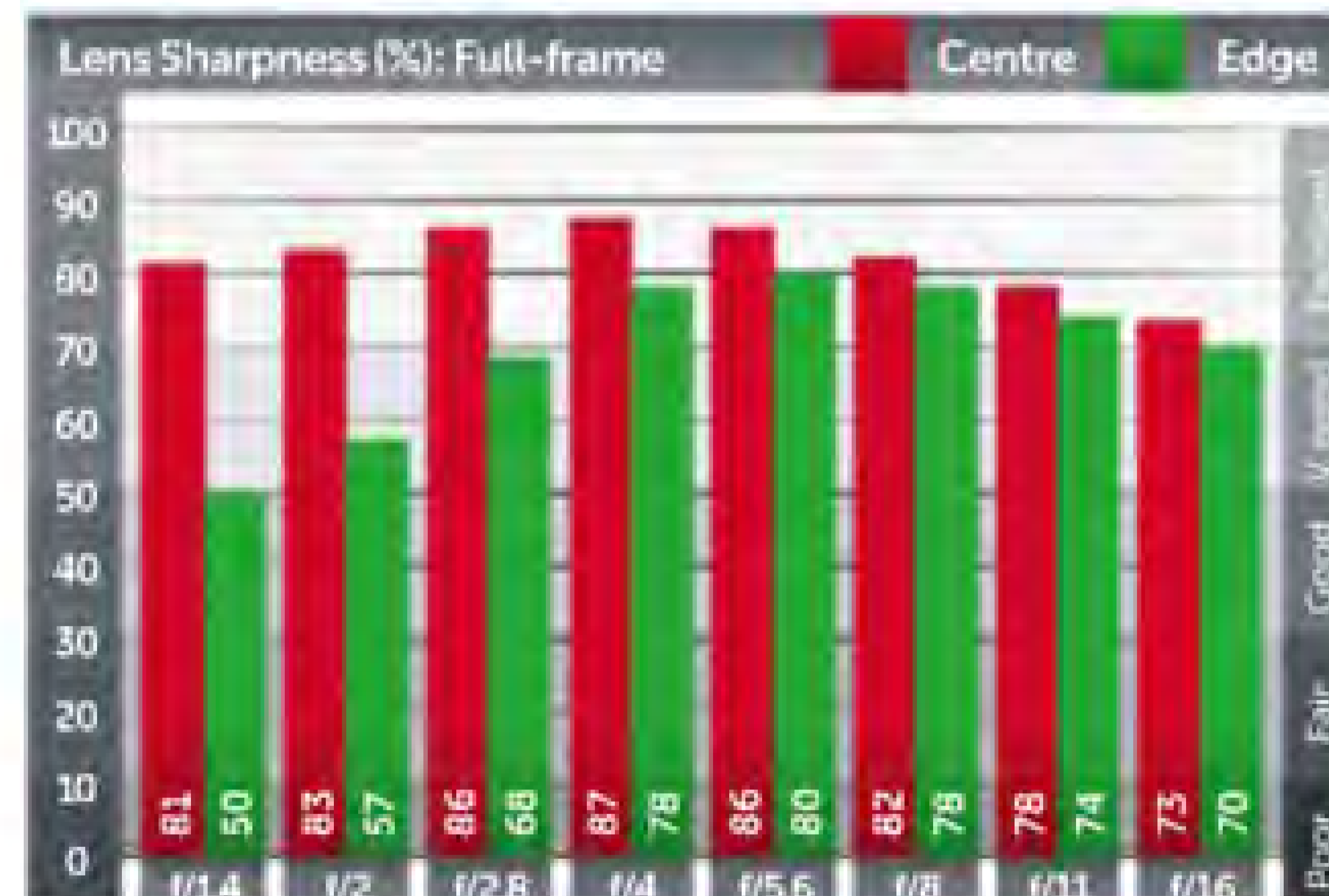
VIGNETTING (Full-frame): Good

VIGNETTING (APS-C): Excellent

CHROMATIC AB (Full-frame edge): Very good

CHROMATIC AB (APS-C edge): Good

Nikon AF-S 50mm f/1.8 G



● Nikon AF-S 50mm f/1.4 G £290

HANDLING: This is a nicely made lens, essentially identical to the f/1.8 G version. The f/1.4 is heavier, of course, and the manual focusing ring is just slightly more damped and a tiny bit smoother.

FEATURES: Ditto the 50mm f/1.8 G, including SWM focusing AF with full-time manual override, metal mount and weather-sealing gasket. Differences are minor, such as focusing down to 33cm from the front, and minimalist depth-of-field scale marked for hyperfocal-distance setting at f/11 and f/16.

AUTOFOCUS: Nikon's Silent Wave Motor focusing is always good – silky smooth and quiet, though not quite as nippy as the f/1.8 G version. The glass is heavier, and also most 50mm standard lenses focus by moving the whole lens back and forth, instead of just a few internal-focusing elements.

PERFORMANCE: No aspherical surfaces or other exotics inside, though with eight elements in seven groups, there is no shortage of glass. Sharpness is high, as you would expect, and it's only in the company of some excellent rivals that this lens gets pipped – just – by the Canon f/1.4 and also by its own kid sister, the Nikon f/1.8 G. Sharpness at a glance – overall average MTF level from f/2 to f/11 measured 71%. Peak resolution was 99 lines-per-mm at f/5.6 (MTF 20%). It's worth mentioning heavy vignetting at f/1.4, and a fair amount of barrel distortion for this class.



VERDICT: Only thing standing between this very good lens and a thorough recommendation is the sister 50mm f/1.8 G Nikon. There's not a great deal in it overall, but below f/2.8 – perhaps at the apertures you'd want to use a lens like this – the much cheaper version is clearly ahead. The Sigma 50mm f/1.4 also makes a challenging bid.

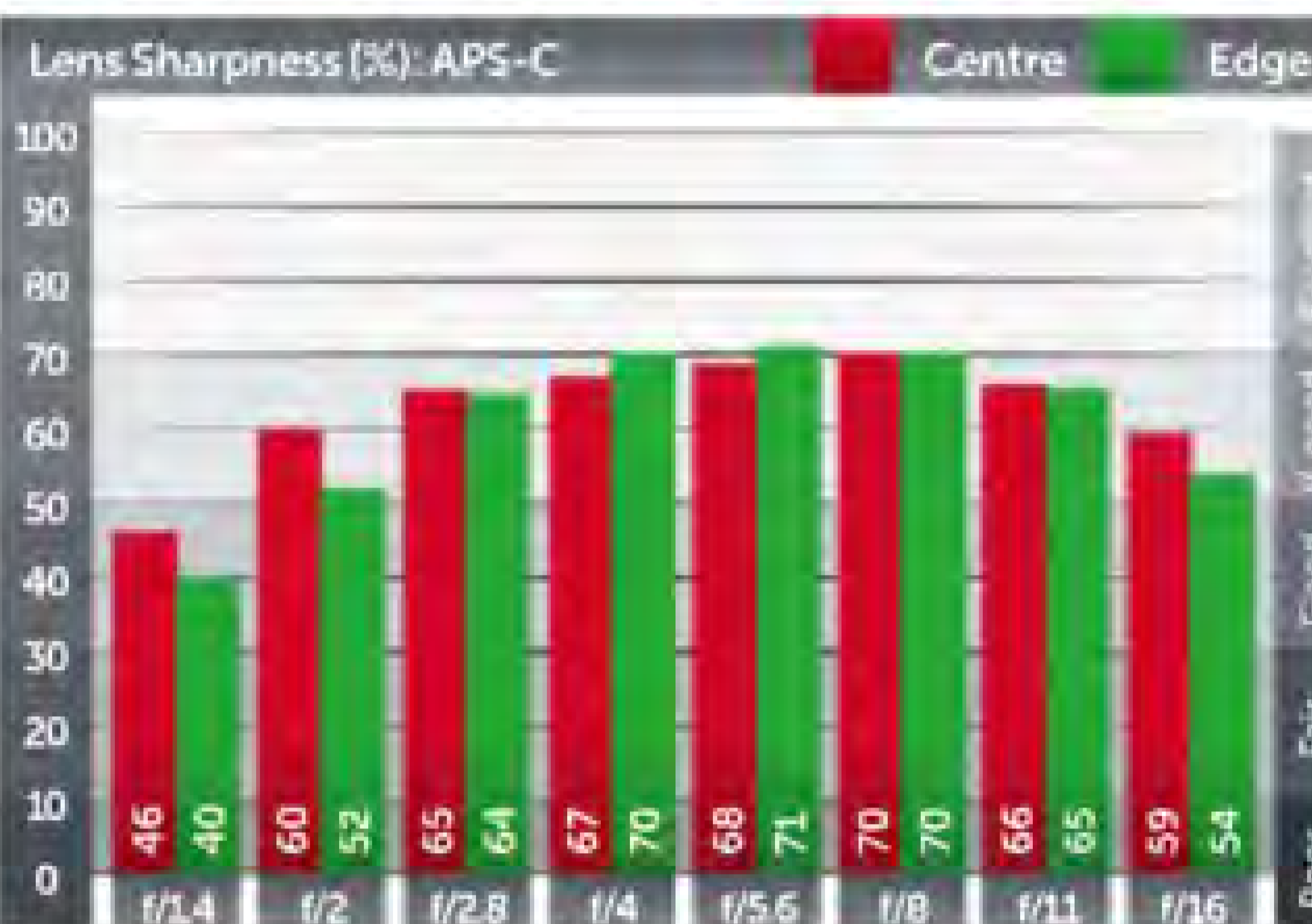
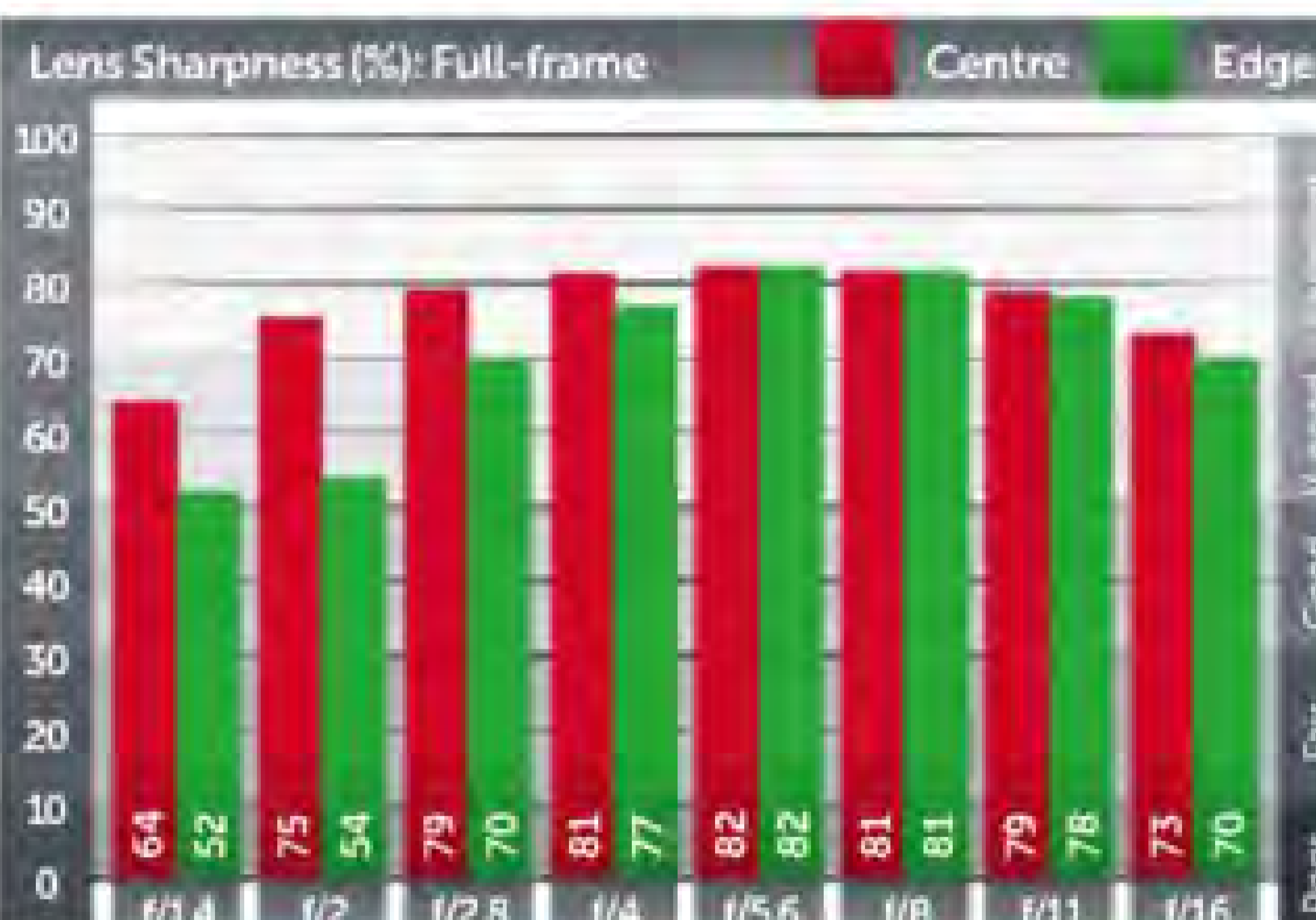
HANDLING	18/20
FEATURES	18/20
PERFORMANCE	36/40
VALUE FOR MONEY	18/20
OVERALL	90/100

DISTORTION (Full-frame): +1.7% (Fair)
 DISTORTION (APS-C): +1.3% (Good)

VIGNETTING (Full-frame): Poor
 VIGNETTING (APS-C): Excellent

CHROMATIC AB (Full-frame edge): Very good
 CHROMATIC AB (APS-C): Good

Nikon AF-S 50mm f/1.4 G



● Sigma EX 50mm f/1.4 DG HSM £350

HANDLING: This lens immediately stands out as bigger and heavier. Not a bad thing at all and it's good to use – chunky, and with a heavily damped but reasonably smooth focusing ring that you can feel moving things around inside.

FEATURES: With eight elements in six groups, including one aspherical surface, this is an advanced, modern design. The front element in particular is much bigger than the others, as is the 77mm filter size.

AUTOFOCUS: Hypersonic (HSM) focus is fast, especially considering the weight it has to shift. It's quiet, too, though can sometimes be juddery and indecisive around the exact focusing point.

PERFORMANCE: The Sigma recorded the highest sharpness peaks on both full-frame (89% MTF) and APS-C (80%), scoring levels that few other lenses of any class can reach. It's not all plain sailing, though, with a notable drop in sharpness below f/2.8, and also at f/16. The latter, which is always diffraction-limited, suggests the Sigma's aperture was actually closing down a little smaller than f/16; a slight mechanical error, pushing the numbers down unfairly. Sharpness at a glance – overall average MTF level from f/2 to f/11 measured 71%. Peak resolution was 121 lines-per-mm at f/4 (MTF 20%). The large front element helps give the best vignetting performance, and with -1.5EV at f/1.4, it's one whole stop or more better than the similar Canon f/1.4 USM and Nikon f/1.4 G.



VERDICT: If you want sharp, here it is. At mid-range apertures, the Sigma is stunningly sharp, though it does fall away at each end of the range. Build quality and AF performance are up to scratch, as you'd expect for the higher price, and it's worth noting this lens has a slightly wider field-of-view, more like a 46mm lens or thereabouts.

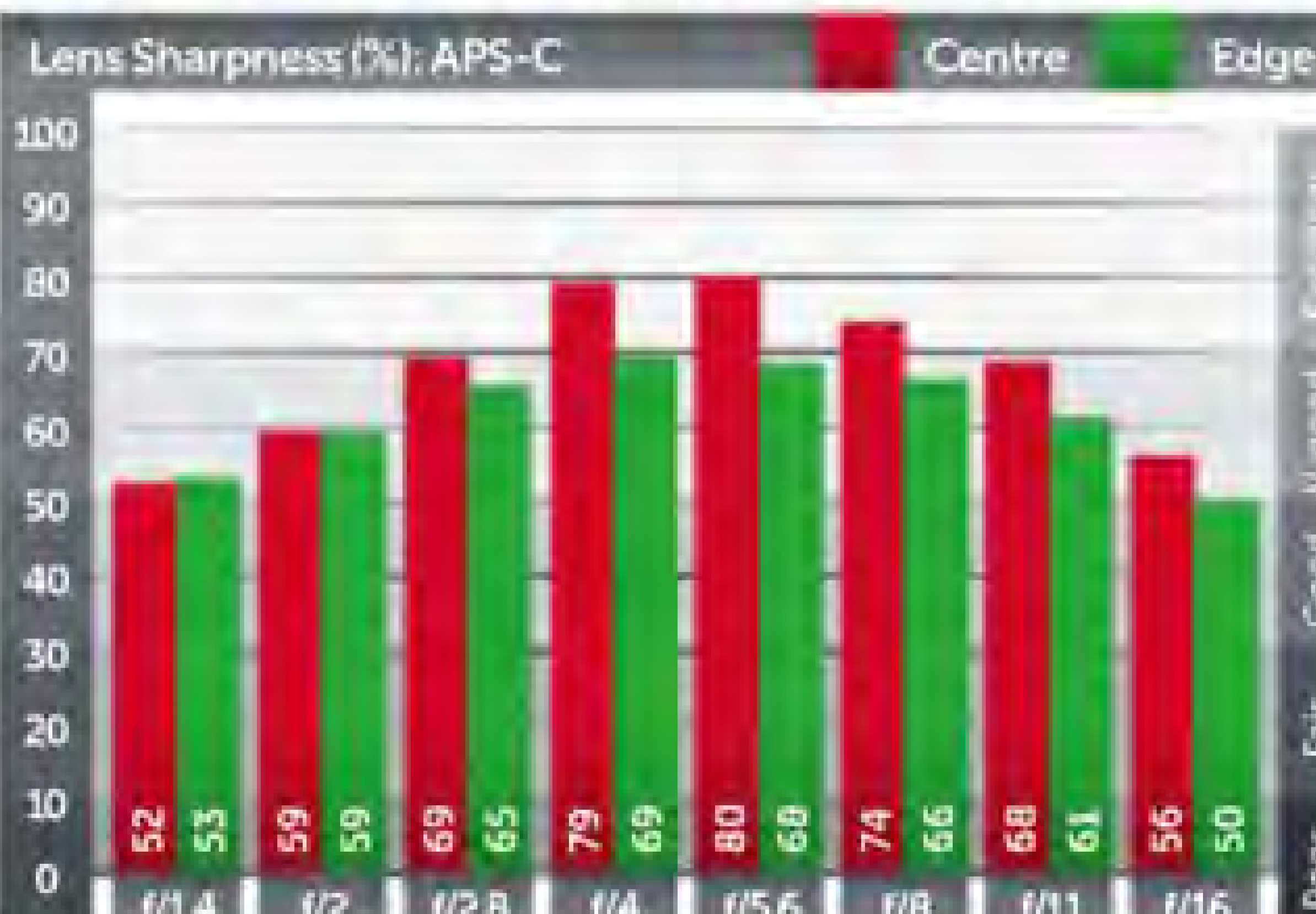
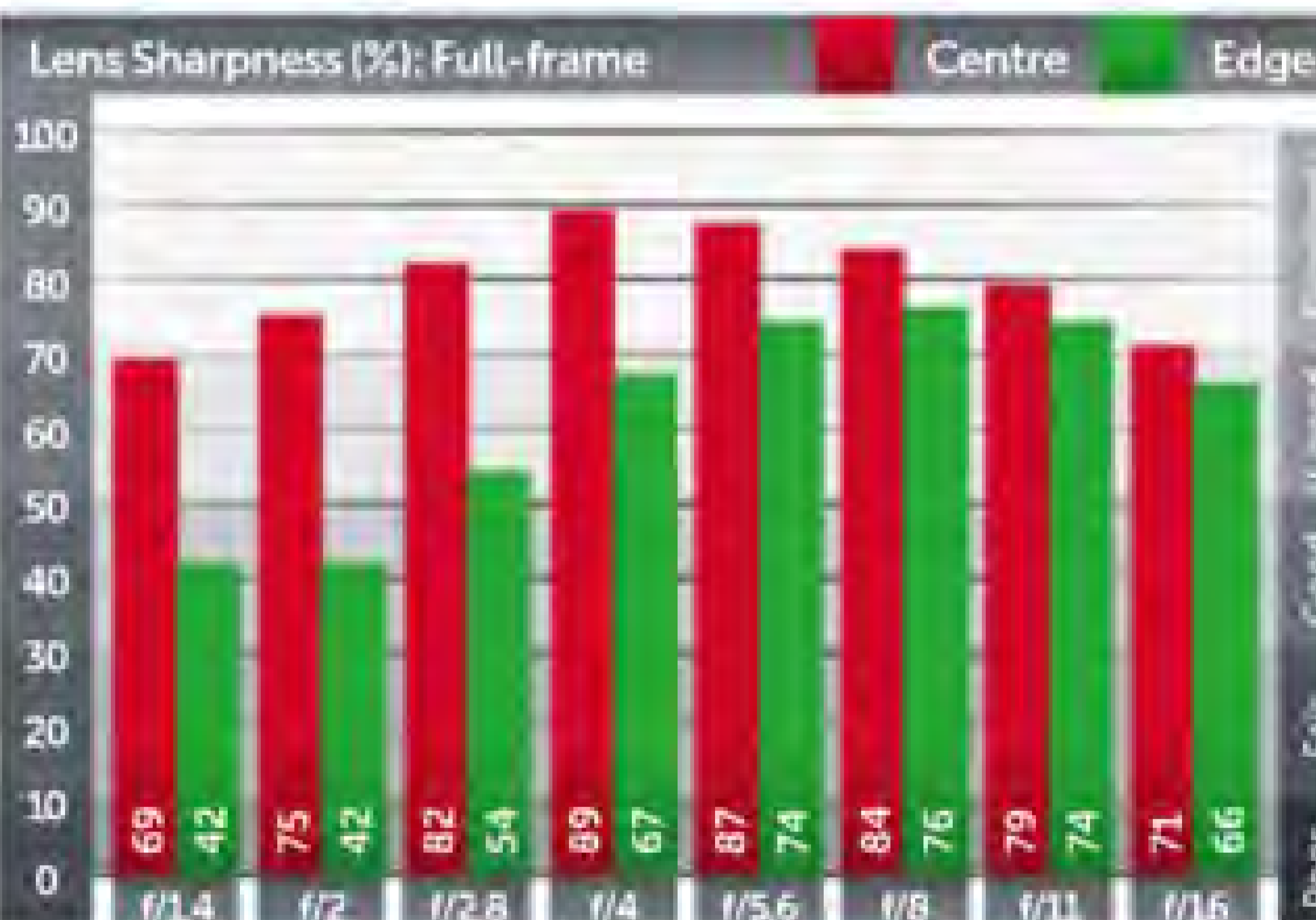
HANDLING	18/20
FEATURES	18/20
PERFORMANCE	37/40
VALUE FOR MONEY	17/20
OVERALL	90/100

DISTORTION (Full-frame): +1.2% (Good)
 DISTORTION (APS-C): +1.1% (Good)

VIGNETTING (Full-frame): Very good
 VIGNETTING (APS-C): Excellent

CHROMATIC AB (Full-frame edge): Very good
 CHROMATIC AB (APS-C edge): Good

Sigma EX 50mm f/1.4 DG HSM



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Digital SLR
photography

Why telephotos rule for portraits

If you're keen on shooting portraits, then for the very best results you need to invest in lenses with pulling power

WHILE THERE ARE countless focal lengths on offer to digital SLR photographers, ask any specialising in portraiture the type of lens they prefer and the answer is almost always, without exception, either a prime like a 50mm or 85mm, or a telezoom like the 70-200mm f/2.8. The reason for this is simple – these types of lenses have characteristics that are perfect for shooting stunning portraits.

One of the main reasons for using lenses with a telephoto coverage is that the longer focal lengths deliver a perspective that is highly flattering for portraiture. Because perspective is compressed, especially with longer focal lengths, the result is that faces appear more two-dimensional and free from distortion, producing far more attractive results. Plus, the narrower angle-of-view means that you can fill the frame with your subject for tight head and shoulder shots that excludes the surrounding area.

You can add further appeal to portraits taken using a telephoto focal length by choosing a lens with a fast maximum aperture. Because your subject is further away from you while shooting with a telephoto, you're able to capture images with a very shallow depth-of-field at a very wide aperture, which works wonderfully at separating the subject from the background, or when shooting very tight crops, for focusing attention on specific areas of the sitter, such as the eyes.

There are other reasons why telezooms are good choices. The relatively long working distance means that when using off-camera flash or studioflash, you're less likely to obstruct the light. The extra distance is also less intimidating to your subject, especially if they're inexperienced at having their picture taken.

Remember to keep an eye on shutter speeds to ensure they're fast enough to avoid camera shake. Switching on image stabilisation is recommended and use the reciprocal rule – setting a shutter speed that matches the focal length in use. For example, if shooting at 200mm, use a shutter speed of 1/200sec or faster.



EFFECTIVE FOCAL LENGTH

Focal length on lens	Full-frame	APS-C	APS-C (Canon)	Four-Thirds
	1x	1.5x	1.6x	2x
50mm	50mm	75mm	80mm	100mm
100mm	100mm	150mm	160mm	200mm
200mm	200mm	300mm	320mm	400mm
300mm	300mm	450mm	480mm	600mm
400mm	400mm	600mm	640mm	800mm
500mm	500mm	750mm	800mm	1000mm
55-200mm	55-200mm	83-300mm	88-320mm	110-400mm
70-300mm	70-300mm	105-450mm	112-480mm	140-600mm
100-300mm	100-300mm	150-450mm	160-320mm	200-600mm
80-400mm	80-400mm	120-600mm	128-640mm	160-800mm

Effective focal length: It's important to remember that the amount of the scene included in the frame will vary depending on the size of your DSLR's sensor. While smaller sensors are a disadvantage with wide-angles, the increased focal length can be a benefit for telephotos. Our chart provides a quick reference of effective focal length for telephotos used with different sensor sizes.

● Canon EF 70-200mm f/2.8L II USM IS £1,850

HANDLING: Big, fat and superbly constructed. Chunky zoom and focus rings are one-finger light and smooth. It's slightly heavier than rivals, but once it's on the camera that disappears. Great to use.

FEATURES: Everything you would expect of the most expensive 70-200mm f/2.8 zoom, including ultrasonic focusing, image stabilisation, weather-resistant build, detachable tripod collar and an excellent flock-lined hood.

The best bits are inside – 23 elements in 19 groups, including five of UD glass and one fluorite. Fluorite is Canon's magic dust, and while other manufacturers claim glass with similar properties, this is the real thing produced in a dedicated factory.

One advantage is the Canon's closer focusing, down to a magnification ratio of 1:4.8 at 200mm, compared to rivals' 1:8. Basically focal length is measured at infinity focus, and at closer range this often reduces – so-called 'focus-breathing' – and at minimum distance a marked 200mm may be more like an actual 150mm. This lens from Canon suffers much less with this.

AUTOFOCUS AND IS: Autofocus is smooth and quiet, and lightning fast. In the near-to-far speed test, the Canon averaged 0.45 seconds – the fastest of all the lenses here. It focuses quicker than you can think. There's full-time manual override, too, of course.

Image stabilisation claims four stops shake reduction compared to the normal handholding rule of thumb, with dual modes for normal and panning use. This checked out with a 60% success rate at four stops under, rising to 90% at three stops, which is very much the standard for the best image stabilisation systems these days.

PERFORMANCE: The MTF graphs say it all really. On full-frame, sharpness never drops below the 70% 'excellent' line, at any focal length or aperture, centre or edges. It's mostly running between 80% and 90% through mid-range apertures from f/4 to f/8 – remarkable performance. On the higher APS-C standard, it's not far behind either, never less than 'very good' and mostly well into the 'excellent' zone.

Aberrations control is not a problem, with distortion, vignetting and CA all scoring either 'very good' or 'excellent'. Peak resolution measured a high 117 lines-per-mm at 20% MTF, recorded in the centre at 70mm f/4.

VERDICT: For Canon users that want the best, and can afford it, look no further. This is a wonderful lens, delivering excellence on every aspect of performance. Even when looking hard for any weakness, the worst we could come up with was its slighter heavier weight. Apart from the price that is.

HANDLING	20/20
FEATURES	20/20
PERFORMANCE	40/40
VALUE FOR MONEY	14/20
OVERALL	94/100



DISTORTION (Full-frame) Very good

VIGNETTING (Full-frame) Excellent

CHROMATIC AB (Full-frame) Very good

Canon EF 70-200mm f/2.8L IS II (full-frame)

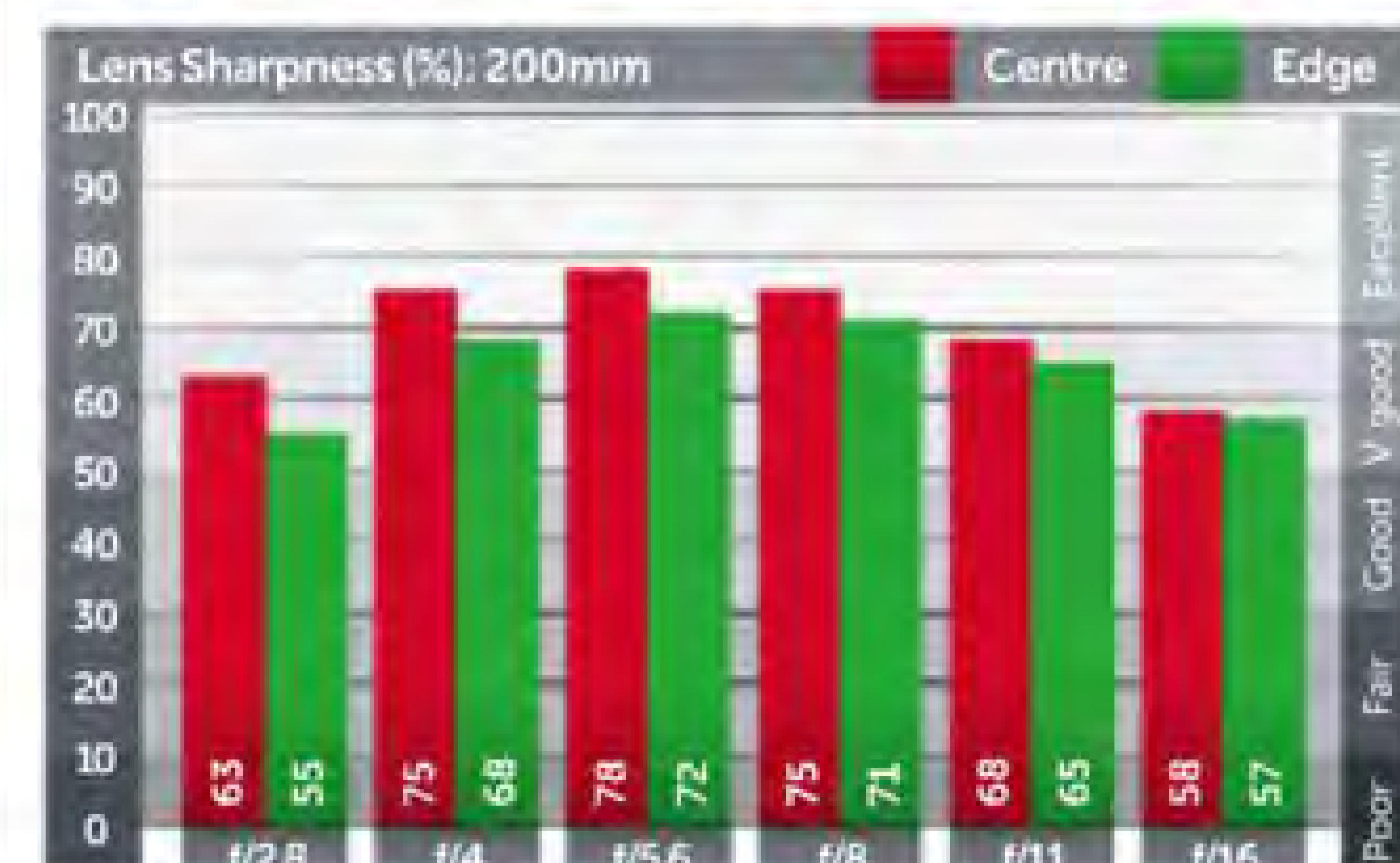
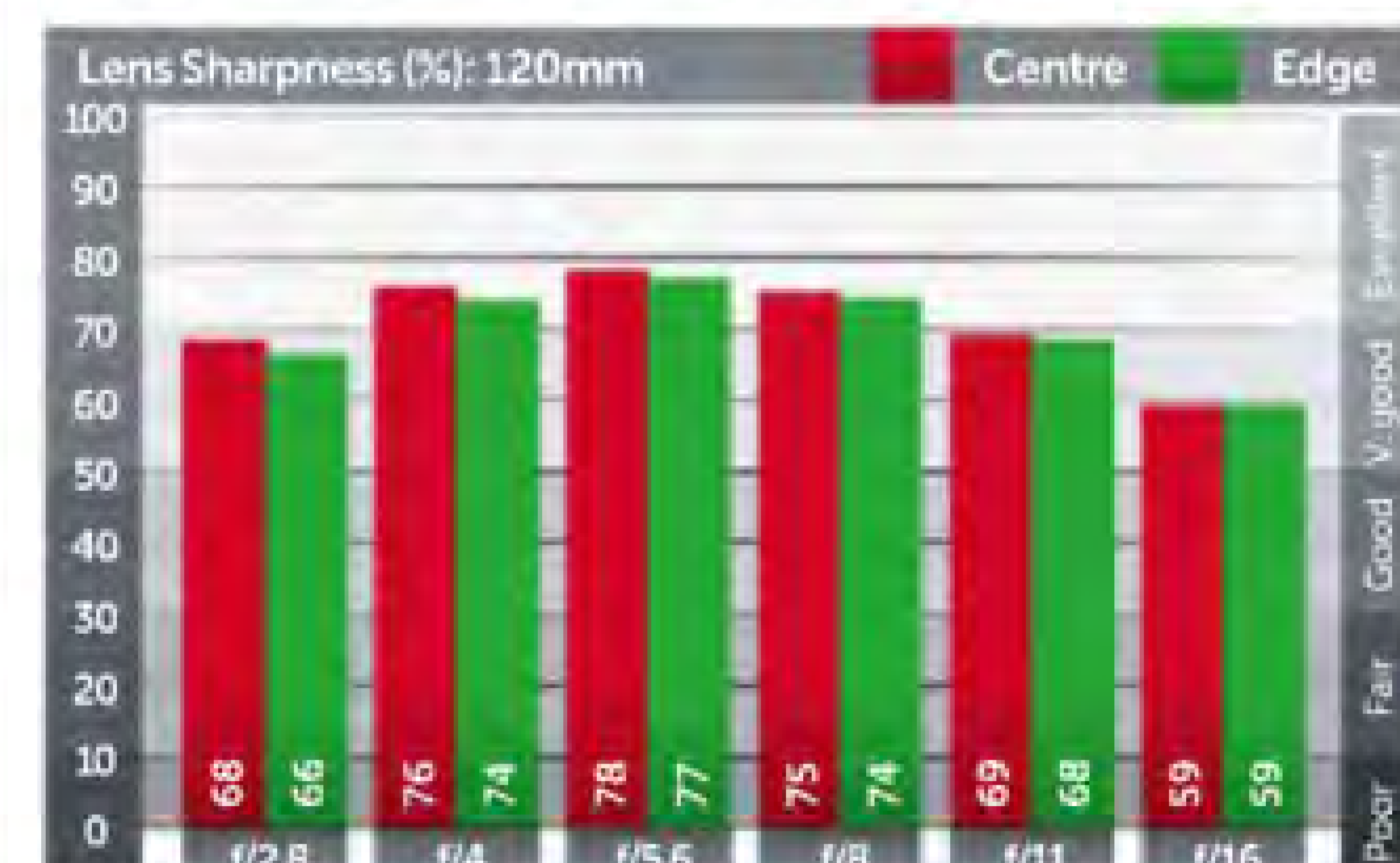


DISTORTION (APS-C) Excellent

VIGNETTING (APS-C) Excellent

CHROMATIC AB (APS-C) Very good

Canon EF 70-200mm f/2.8L IS II (APS-C)



● Nikon AF-S 70-200mm f/2.8G ED VR II **£1,610**

HANDLING: Like all high-end NIKKORs, this lens just feels right – a proper professional tool. Smooth, finger-light controls, rugged build, perfect. It's everything we look for in a lens.

The rotating tripod collar is fixed, though the foot slides off with a screw-locking clip. A small point, but the lens hood is not as deep as it should be, and it's not squared off so won't stand on end.

FEATURES: It's all here – Silent Wave Motor focusing with full-time manual override, Vibration Reduction, weatherproofing, tripod collar, hood and case. Optical construction is 21 elements in 16 groups, including seven ED glass elements.

All these lenses suffer from focus-breathing, the Canon least and the Nikon most (Sigma and Tamron are actually very similar). This reduces focal length at close range and at a marked 200mm the Nikon is more like 140mm when focused at 1.4m. The maximum magnification ratio of 1:8 means you can fill a full-frame image with an A4 magazine page, but nothing smaller.

AUTOFOCUS AND IS: Nikon's Silent Wave Motor autofocus is very quiet and efficient. Not quite as fast as the Canon in side-by-side comparison, averaging 0.6 seconds in the near-to-far test, but there's barely a tenth in it. More importantly, when it came to the servo-tracking test it performed immaculately.

VR image stabilisation claims four-stops of camera shake reduction against the handholding rule, and we scored 60% success at four stops under, rising to 90% at three stops. This is an excellent performance for the Nikon, and par for the course with modern top-grade lenses like these.

PERFORMANCE: If only by the smallest margin, overall the Nikon is the sharpest 70-200mm f/2.8 lens you can buy. The clues to best high resolution performance are in the fractionally better figures on APS-C, and also the peak resolution figure of 121 lines-per-mm that is just a whisker ahead of the others, recorded at 200mm f/4. In practice, the Nikon's advantage is barely visible, though at the long end it bodes well for use with a teleconverter. Like the Canon, sharpness on full-frame never dips below the 70% 'excellent' line at any time, and on APS-C it's mostly in the 'excellent' zone, too.

Aberrations control is to the usual high standard, though -1.8% pincushion distortion at 200mm is a little higher than some.

VERDICT: This is a very fine lens. Apart from minor issues like the close-up focus-breathing, it's almost faultless. It's wonderfully sharp, with excellent mechanical performance and superb build quality. On the other hand, £1,600 is asking a lot and we think it's erring on the expensive side.

HANDLING	20/20
FEATURES	20/20
PERFORMANCE	40/40
VALUE FOR MONEY	15/20
OVERALL	95/100



● Sigma 70-200mm f/2.8 EX DG APO HSM OS **£900**

HANDLING: Although the lightest lens of the group, it's still heavy. Zoom and focus rings are light and smooth, though, both turning in the same direction as Canon. They're positioned differently, with the focus ring nearest the camera, reflecting the arrangement of focus and zoom lens groups inside. Finish is Sigma's newer smooth matt.

FEATURES: There's a full features set with Hypersonic AF, full-time manual focus override, and two-stage image stabilisation. No weatherproofing though – a sign of Sigma cutting back on costs. It comes with a detachable tripod collar and lens hood with an APS-C extension.

Optical construction is 22 elements in 17 groups, including two of FLD glass and three SLD. The modest maximum reproduction ratio of 1:8 is clear evidence of the usual focus-breathing that reduces focal length when shooting at close distance.

AUTOFOCUS AND IS: The mechanical components perform well. While Sigma's HSM was slowest of the group, averaging 0.65 secs in the near-to-far test, that's still very swift. More importantly, it was plenty fast enough to deal with the tough AF-tracking test outlined on the opening page.

Sigma's OS (Optical Stabilisation) claims four stops of camera-shake reduction and we achieved a 90% success rate at three stops, and 60% at four stops. Excellent performance, on a par with the others.

PERFORMANCE: The big question is, can a £900 lens be as sharp as one costing twice as much? And the answer is yes. Almost. The one exception is edge sharpness at 200mm, where below f/8 it's considerably softer than at any other point.

This doesn't appear to be 'bad copy' syndrome, but a characteristic of the design that affects performance on both full-frame and APS-C formats. Sharpness jumps up with stopping down, and it's also quite likely that subjects towards the edges of the frame at longer focal lengths will be out of focus anyway, but the problem is there.

Apart from that, all other aspects of performance are in line with the other lenses here. There's maybe a touch of distortion apparent, but then it's no more than the Nikon. Peak resolution at 20% MTF measured a respectable 112 lines-per-mm, in the centre at 200mm f/4.

VERDICT: The Sigma looks the part, and does the business. It's sharp, very sharp, giving nothing away to more expensive rivals, apart from the edges at the long end. AF and image stabilisation perform very well, too, but weatherproofing is absent. Its best feature, though, is the unbeatable price – you can't quibble at that.

HANDLING	20/20
FEATURES	19/20
PERFORMANCE	36/40
VALUE FOR MONEY	20/20
OVERALL	95/100



● Tamron SP 70-200mm f/2.8 Di VC USD **£1,100**

HANDLING: Tamron claims the smallest lens in class (just!), though it's still a meaty beast. Solidly made and well finished, the smooth-operating build gives nothing away to marque rivals. Note for Nikon users is zoom and focus rings that turn in the same direction.

FEATURES: This new lens is in a completely different class to the older Tamron version, adding Ultrasonic Silent Drive focusing, image stabilisation and weatherproofing.

It's sharper, too, with 23 elements in 19 groups, including five of UD glass and one of XLD with fluorite-like qualities. There's some focus-breathing going on, reducing the maximum reproduction ratio to 1:8 (unlike the older lens's 1:3).

AUTOFOCUS AND IS: Tamron's USD focusing is a transformation, zipping though the near-to-far speed test in a very rapid 0.55 seconds, narrowly beating the Nikon. Excellent performance by this lens.

VC (Vibration Compensation) has unique three-axis correction. It can control both left/right and up/down directions simultaneously and detect persistent panning movement, switching out that plane automatically without needing a second mode.

VC works very well, despite our best efforts to fox it. Tamron claims four stops improvement against the normal handholding shutter speed yardstick and we achieved 70% success at four stops under, and 90% at three stops. That's as good as it gets.

PERFORMANCE: With all those elements and exotic glass, we were expecting this lens to be sharp, and so it proved. In the centre on full-frame, sharpness soars well above the 'excellent' line at all times, and the edges are not far behind, also rating 'excellent' for the most part.

On APS-C, the higher resolution demands inevitably push the numbers down, but here again sharpness in the centre is generally 'excellent' and the edges comfortably within the 'very good' zone.

Distortion, vignetting and CA are all contained to a very high standard, rating either 'very good' or 'excellent'. Peak resolution at 20% MTF scored the second highest of the group at 119 lines-per-mm, measured in the centre at 120mm f/4.

VERDICT: Tamron has done a great job with its new flagship 70-200mm f/2.8. Only at the edges towards the longer end of the zoom range does sharpness lag a little, but that's being very critical and you'd be hard pressed to notice it in practice. USD focusing and VC stabilisation performance are first-rate without doubt, and the weather-resistant quality build promises durability. It makes a perfect partner to Tamron's also excellent 24-70mm f/2.8 VC standard range zoom.

HANDLING	20/20
FEATURES	20/20
PERFORMANCE	38/40
VALUE FOR MONEY	17/20
OVERALL	95/100



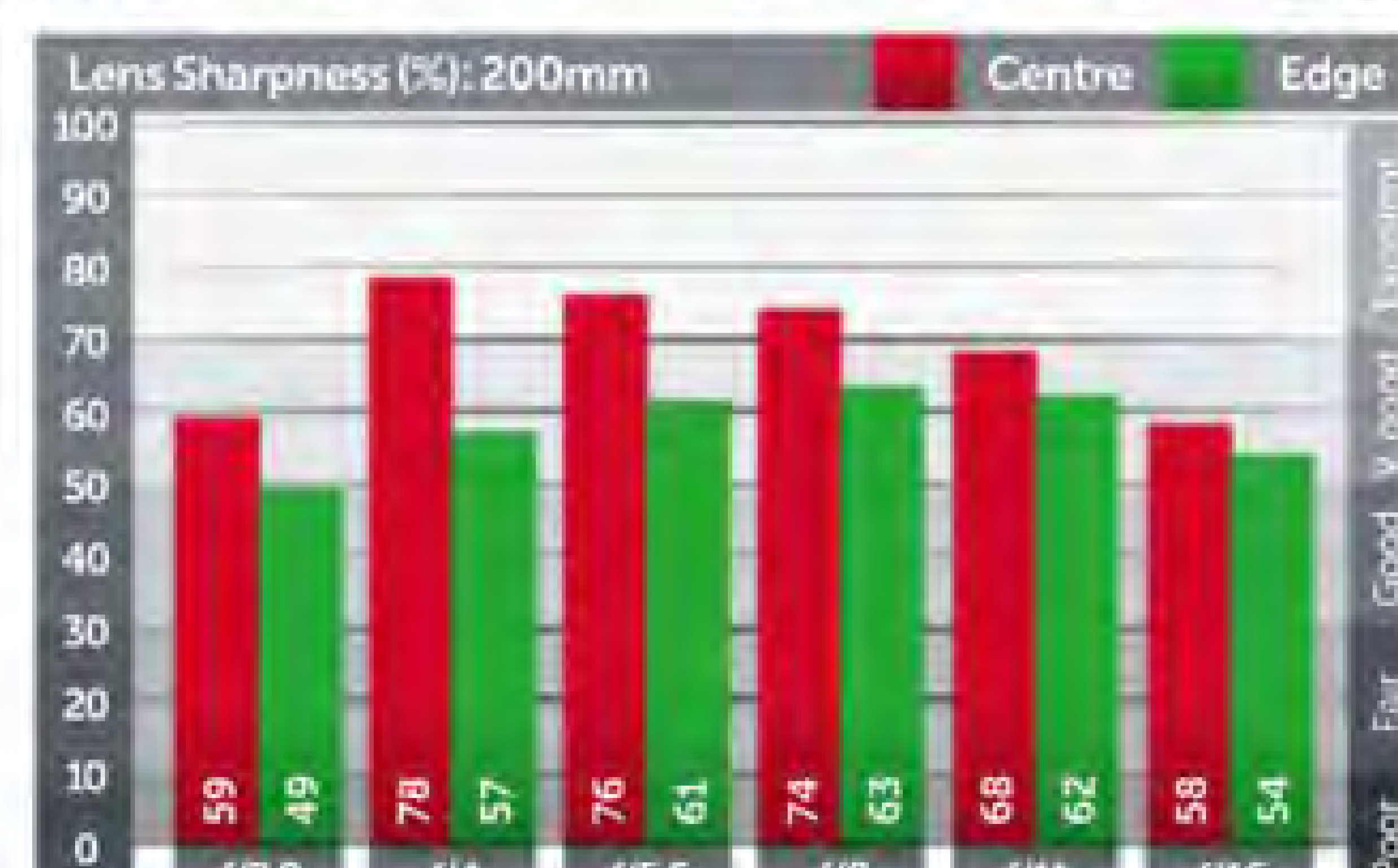
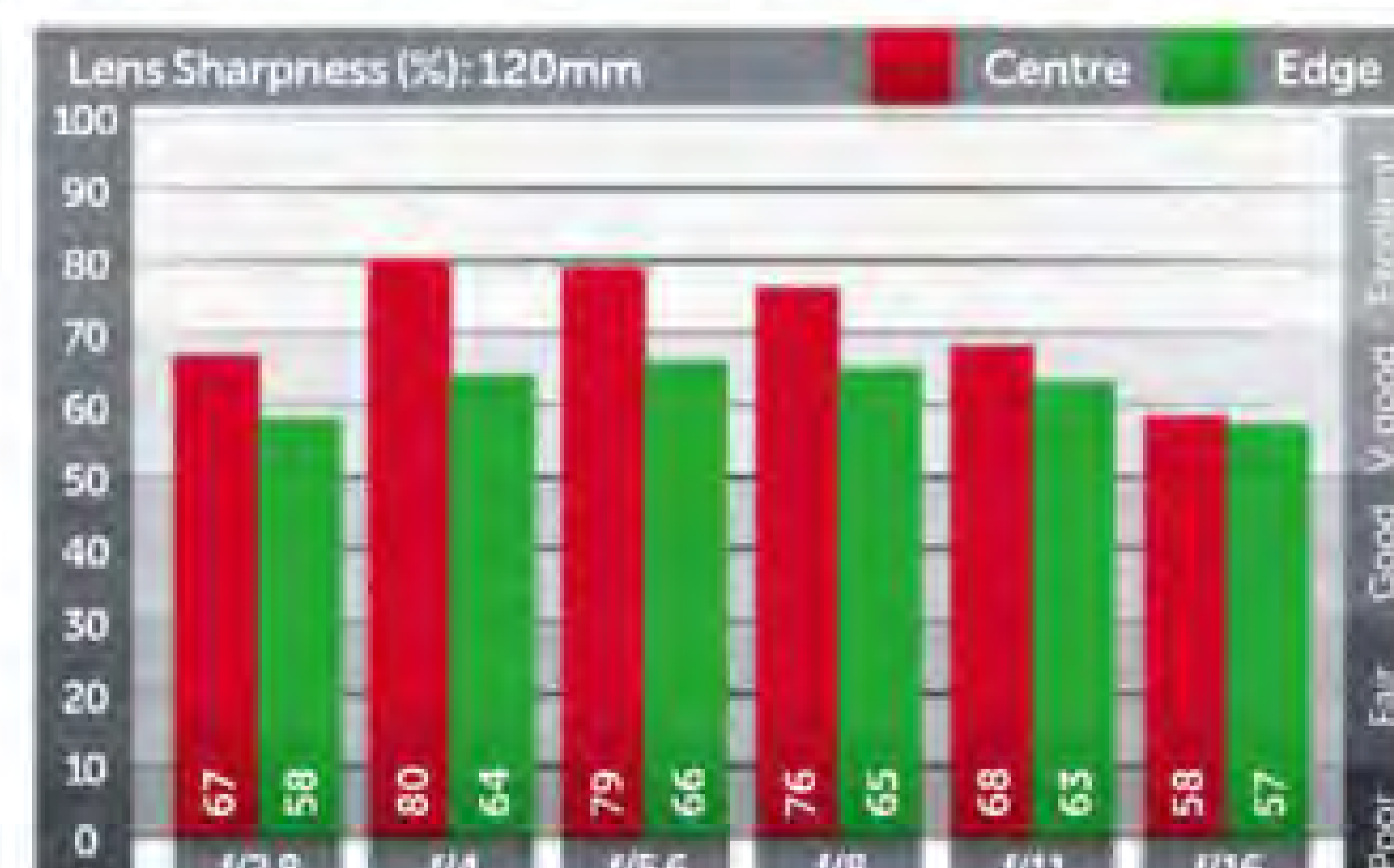
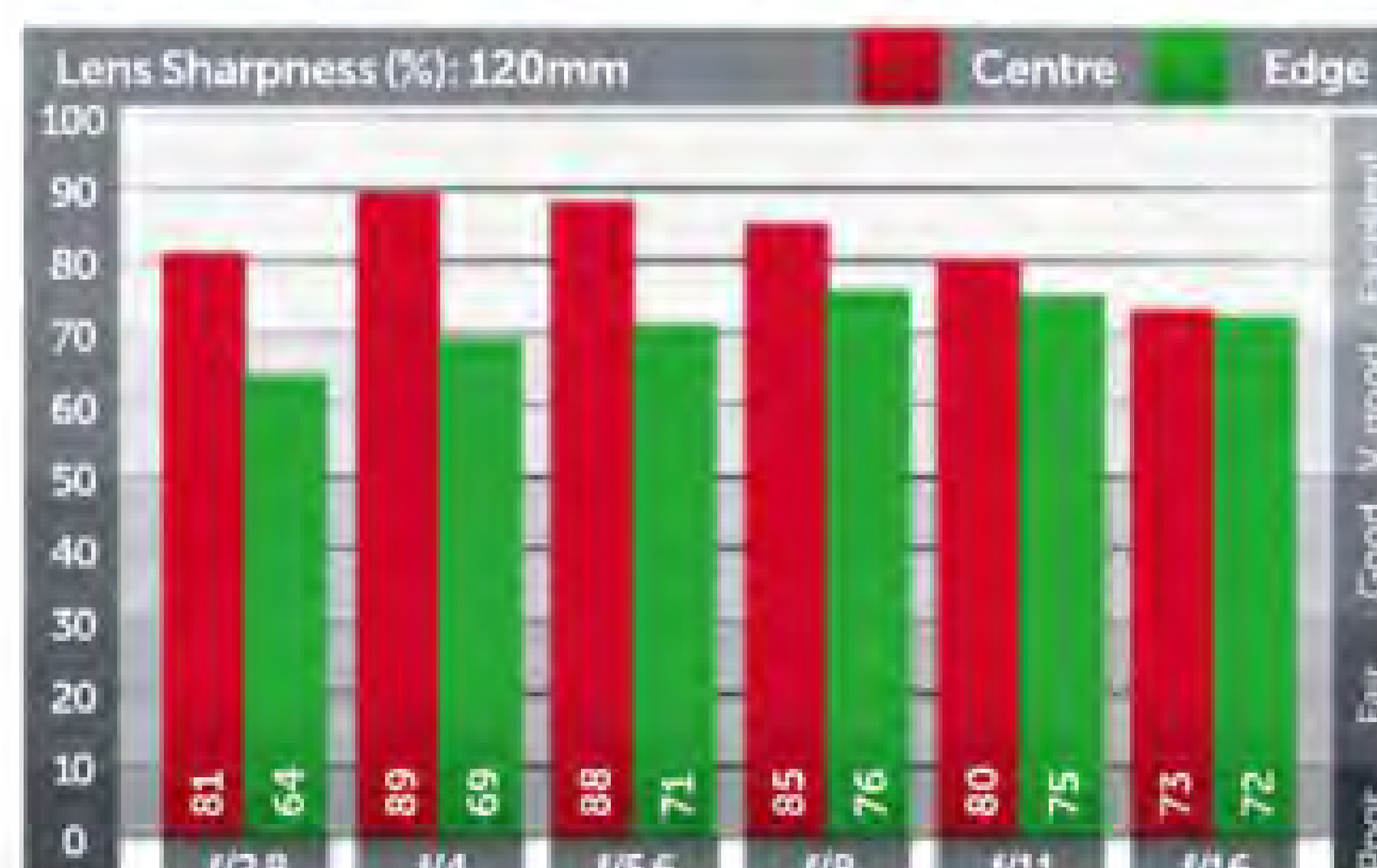
DISTORTION (Full-frame) Very good
VIGNETTING (Full-frame) Excellent
CHROMATIC AB (Full-frame) Very good

DISTORTION (APS-C) Excellent
VIGNETTING (APS-C) Excellent
CHROMATIC AB (APS-C) Very good

Tamron SP 70-200mm f/2.8 VC (full-frame)



Tamron SP 70-200mm f/2.8 VC (APS-C)



PORTRAIT LENS HEAVEN



LensPimp



Buyers' guide: Lighting aids

Whether working with ambient light or shooting in a studio with flash, reflectors and diffusers are an inexpensive and versatile aid to help manipulate light. We show you the main types to consider

THERE IS A COMMON misconception that you need expensive equipment to get professional-looking portraits. While a better camera and superior optics do make a difference, there are many affordable bits of kit that can lead to far better pictures if used correctly. Lighting aids – in other words, reflectors and diffusers – are two such items, proving useful whether you're using daylight, studioflash or any other form of lighting.

The various technique articles featured earlier in this guide provide some perfect examples of how and when to use lighting aids with daylight,

but it's worth remembering that they're also suitable for use with any subject that requires lighting control, so are great for still-lives or close-ups. And, of course, they can be used in the studio, too: a reflector, for instance, is often used to bounce light from the key light source to fill in shadows on the subject, negating the need for a second flash head.

There are several different types of lighting aids available in different sizes, shapes and colours, from small handheld options to those that require a stand or assistant to hold them. For the majority of amateurs and enthusiasts, a

small handheld option is suitable for most needs, while for the more avid photographers who like to dabble in money-making photography, larger reflectors and diffusers prove far more effective, especially when shooting on location.

Our buyers' guide covers a range of products from all the popular brands that are worth considering for everyday use, but check their websites for more specialist products, too. We've also a comparison test of a number of 5-in-1 reflector kits, which will help you make the right choice and save you money, too.



Reflector size guide

30cm.....	12in
50cm.....	20in
56cm.....	22in
81cm.....	32in
95cm.....	37in
107cm.....	42in
120cm.....	47in
70x110cm.....	28x44in
90x120cm.....	36x48in
100x165cm.....	40x66in
60x90cm.....	24x36in
90x125cm.....	36x50in
100x150cm.....	39x59in
130x190cm.....	52x76in
180x245cm.....	72x98in

California Sunbounce

www.theflashcentre.com

The California Sunbounce range of reflectors is a favourite with professionals thanks to their stability, build quality and light weight. The reflector panels are fitted to aluminium frames that come in various sizes and are quick and easy to assemble, disassemble and pack away for storage and transportation. There is a good choice of reflective panels available, although not every colour is suitable for every frame, but you still have several options open to you (the downloadable PDF catalogue has a very useful easy-reference table).

While you can buy extra panels to use with a frame, the difference in price for complete kits and individual panels isn't that wide, so it's often worth buying the complete outfit to save you having to swap panels while on location. As with other brands, there are silver/white and gold/white reflector options, but you'll find that there are other reflective finishes, eg zebra/white (zebra is a mix of gold and silver), as well as a number of translucent diffuser options.

As they're made for professional use, you'll find that they're relatively expensive, but they are made to last for years of professional use and are produced from the best possible

While a couple of translucent panels are available for the Pro and Mega panels, for diffusing purposes we'd recommend you check out the Sun Swatter. This is a large diffuser that is ideal for outdoor use as it can be held by a boom over the subject and outside of the image area. It's easy to assemble and designed to be used in windy conditions. There are two sizes available and a number of options for the light-reducing value of the translucent material (1/3, 2/3 or one-stop light diffusion). We'd recommend the smaller Sun Swatter with the 1/3 or 2/3-stop diffuser as a good first option.

Other specialist reflectors in the range include the Sun-Mover, which allows for additional control of the spread of light and the Sun Cage – a purpose-made mobile studio for location shooting.

Sun Swatter (130x190cm)
1/3-stop complete £230
Sun Swatter (130x190cm)
2/3-stop complete £240
Sun Swatter Giant (180x245cm)
1/3-stop complete £385
Sun Swatter Giant (180x245cm)
2/3-stop complete £400



materials. The Sunbounce system is extensive, so contact importers The Flash Centre if you require further details, or download the catalogue at: www.sunbounce.com.

Because the number of options is huge, we've listed the different reflector ranges below and stated the price of the two most popular reflective colours. While a number of sizes are available, we'd recommend the Mini or Pro as your first choice, and the Mega (stated as Big in the catalogue) if you're a very keen enthusiast. Here are the main options:

Micro-mini: (60x90cm)
Silver/white: £101; Zebra/white: £125
Mini: (90x125cm)
Silver/white: £156; Zebra/white: £190
Pro: (130x190cm)
Silver/white: £235; Zebra/white: £275
Big: (180x245cm)
Silver/white: £370; Zebra/white: £430



Kenro

www.kenro.co.uk

Kenro produces a circular and a rectangular 5-in-1 kit. The circular reflectors measure 12in, 22in, 32in and 42in, and cost £16, £30, £55 and £68 respectively. The rectangular kits measure 28x44in, 36x48in and 40x66in, and cost £56, £75 and £99 respectively. All the kits are supplied in a bag with a translucent panel and a reversible gold, silver, white and black cover.

Kenro also offers a range of reflectors and diffusers with handles called Easy Grips. It has three 60x90cm (24x36in) models in the



range: the £41 translucent and the £45 silver/white and sunlight/white variants. Each 5-in-1 reflector kit features a translucent panel over which a reversible gold, silver, white or black cover can be attached. It folds down into a handy round zip bag when not in use for easy transportation.



Calumet

www.calumetphoto.co.uk

Calumet is a major photo retailer and has an extensive number of own-brand photo accessories, including its ZipDisc range of collapsible reflectors. These include two colour reflectors, translucent panels and four-colour sleeves (gold/silver/white/black). The ZipDisc kits are as follows:

- **Translucent white ZipDisc panel**

The circular diffuser at the heart of its 5-in-1 kit is available on its own, too.

56cm £15; 81cm £26; 107cm £37; 130cm £46

- **Zigzag gold-silver/white ZipDisc**

The gold-silver side combines gold and silver for added warmth to the subject.

56cm £15; 81cm £26; 107cm £37

- **Silver/white ZipDisc**

The classic handheld reflector. Supplied with a zip case.

56cm £15; 81cm £26; 107cm £37

- **ZipDisc four-colour cover**

This four-colour (gold, white, silver and black) sleeve cover can be used on any round or oval reflector.

**56cm (22in) ZipDisc reversible: £13
81cm (32in) ZipDisc reversible: £15
107cm (42in) ZipDisc reversible: £16**

- **5-in-1 kit**

This is a combination of the ZipDisc translucent panel and the four-colour sleeve. We've tested the 81cm 5-in-1 in our comparison test.

56cm £21; 81cm £34; 107cm £41

Please note that if you visit Calumet's website, you may get a little confused about the product descriptions, so if you've any queries, phone the customer service line on 08706 030303.

Elemental

www.studio-flash.com

Budget studioflash specialists Elemental currently only has one collapsible reflector in its range, but we've included it in this guide as it represents excellent value for money. The

80cm 5-in-1 kit comprises a white diffuser with an interchangeable gold, silver and white reflector cover, all supplied in a black bag. The 80cm version costs £25, and Elemental also has a reflector arm available for £25. Visit their website or buy from their eBay store.



Interfit

www.interfitphotographic.com

Interfit is one of the UK's leading brands of studio equipment and has an extensive range of reflectors, from handhelds to larger stand-supported types, so you've plenty of choice!

- **Soft sun/white; silver/white and silver/gold**

Round, collapsible reflectors available in three finishes and four sizes.

30cm £10.50; 56cm £16.50; 82cm £27.60; 107cm £39

- **5-in-1 kits**

These feature a translucent reflector, with a four-colour overlay sleeve (gold, silver, black and white), supplied in a zip-up bag. They are available in three sizes, as follows:

56cm £26.50; 82cm £37; 107cm £44

- **Easy Grip**

Interfit's Easy Grip reflector has a thick handle for one-handed use and measures 90x60cm (36x24in).

It is available in the following colours: sunlight/white; gold/silver; silver/white and 1/2-stop translucent and costs £40.



- **Portrait Reflector Kit**

Interfit's Portrait Reflector Kit is essentially three reflector panels attached to a frame that fits easily on a lighting stand. Each 90x60cm (36x24in) panel can be individually positioned for improved lighting control. The kit is supplied with one silver/gold panel and two sunlight/silver panels, and costs £100.

- **The Large Flat Panel Reflector**

Studio-based photographers may be interested in these large reflector panels, made specifically for full-length portraits and fashion shoots. The Large Flat Panel Reflector measures 89x178cm (35x70in) and is supplied complete with a stand and a rotating/tilting bracket for using the panel vertically or horizontally. Silver/gold and white/black versions are also available for £82.

- **Flexi-lite 5-in-1**

This stand-mounted panel reflector is aimed purely at professionals and is designed to be used handheld or on location. The aluminium frame has a boom arm that can be positioned at any angle for complete versatility. Various kits are available in medium (100x150cm) or large (150x200cm). The INT303 has a gold/silver/black/white cover and costs £306.



Lastolite

www.lastolite.com

Lastolite is one of the world's leading studio accessory brands and is particularly renowned for its lighting aids, so it's no surprise to discover it has an extensive range of products. Many are designed for specific professional uses, so due to space constraints, we've selected the products most suitable for general portrait photography. A comprehensive brochure PDF can be downloaded from Lastolite's website if you'd like to check out the entire range for yourself.

- **Collapsible reflectors:** When it comes to collapsible reflectors, no brand has as many options as Lastolite. Its round reflectors are available in 30cm, 50cm, 76cm, 95cm and 120cm diameters and there is a huge 1.8x1.2m rectangular option, too. All of these are available in the following finishes: silver/white; Sunfire/white, silver/gold, Sunfire/silver; gold/white and Sunlite/soft silver. A two-stop diffuser is also available in all sizes from 50cm upwards. Guide prices for silver/white are as follows.

30cm £13; 50cm £24; 75cm £35; 95cm £58; 120cm £75; 1.8x1.2m £91

- **Bottletops 5-in-1 kit:** This includes a diffuser panel with elasticated covers. The kit comprises the diffuser panel and a gold/white and Sunfire/silver cover and comes in four sizes: 50cm (£41), 75cm (£47), 95cm (£57) and 120cm (£85).



- **TriGrip:** The original TriGrip was the first collapsible reflector to feature a handle and proved extremely popular. The design has been updated, with a new moulded handle improving handling and there are now three sizes in the range: the £47 Mini TriGrip (45cm); £62 TriGrip (75cm) and £77 Large TriGrip (1.2m). For each size, you can choose reflectors in silver/white, gold/white, Sunfire/silver and Sunlite/soft silver finishes, as well as a one-stop or two-stop diffuser.

Accessories for the TriGrip include a support bracket and the TriFlip, a set of seven reflector covers that can be placed over a TriGrip to offer the ultimate in versatility. You can also buy a £185 TriFlip 8:1 kit that supplies a two-stop diffuser (Mini TriGrip or TriGrip) with seven colour sleeves.



- **Triflector:** The Mk II kit consists of a support frame with three collapsible panels, all easily packed away in a case weighing a total of only 1.2kg. The panels are available in the following reflective finishes: Sunfire/silver, silver/white, gold/white and a 1/2-stop diffuser. A kit is £123; extra sets of panels range from £33-£45.

- **UpLite 4:1:** A set of self-supporting 120x90cm reflector panels for use by photographers working on their own, who need to bounce light at an angle from the floor. The angle can be adjusted from 30-80° and the two panels can also be separated for handheld use. The UpLite comes in two versions: the Cool Tone has Sunlite/soft silver and silver/white reflective surfaces; while the Warm Tone has gold/white and Sunfire/silver reflective surfaces. It comes supplied with a waterproof shower cap and a carry case, and costs £120.

- **Skylite:** Best suited for serious photographers looking for a lightweight, durable and large diffuser that can also double up as a reflector. The rigid, hollow aluminium frame supports a diffuser (0.75 or 1.25 stop) or reflector (gold/silver, silver/white, black/white or Sunfire/white) via secure Velcro fastenings. The Skylite can be bought in a number of kit forms and three sizes are available as follows: small 1.1x1.1m (1.3kg); medium 1x2m (2kg) and large 2x2m (2.3kg). The standard kit includes the frame, silver/white and translucent fabrics and carry bag, and are priced at around £138, £180 and £260 for the small, medium and large diffusers respectively.



5-in-1 reflector kits

If you're looking to buy your first lighting aid, make it one of these 5-in-1 kits. They offer silver, white, gold and (rarely used) black finishes to suit a variety of shooting situations. The translucent panel, which these reflective sleeves wrap around, can be used as a soft white reflector, although its efficiency is poor. You can also use it to shade your subject, but we'd recommend purchasing a purpose-built diffuser, too, as it works far better. As we discovered when conducting this test, in all areas including build quality, the kits are very similar, so for most photographers, the cheapest option may well be the best one. We've highlighted the major differences below, but in truth, they're all very similar products.



Elemental 5-in-1 (80cm)

www.studio-flash.com

Guide price: £26

Street price: £26

Better known for its excellent range of budget studioflash equipment, Elemental also offers a couple of 5-in-1 reflector kits that represent excellent value. This 80cm kit comes in its own black zip-up bag and, once removed, the 5-in-1 reflector looks and handles much like the similarly priced Interfit. The translucent panel is nicely manufactured and the coloured sleeve has a slot for the panel's tab to slip through when zipped up. The sleeve can be used to give a silver/black or gold/white effect, and is thick and well put together. This is a great budget option and excellent value for money.

Verdict

An excellent budget buy.

Build quality (panel)	★★★★★
Build quality (sleeve)	★★★★★
Versatility	★★★★☆
Performance	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

OVERALL ★★★★★



Interfit 265 (107cm)

www.interfitphotographic.com

Guide price: £43

Street price: £40

The white surface of the well-made translucent panel offers a 1/2-stop efficiency and has a thick black edge and small cloth tab for hanging off a hook. The sleeve is made from thick material and can be wrapped around to give silver/black or gold/white options. The zip has a smooth action and at its end, the sleeve has a gap for the tab to stick through. Interfit makes a large number of reflector kits, so you should have no trouble finding the most suitable size for you. Better still, they're available at an excellent price. A high-quality piece of equipment, supplied in a well-constructed zip-up black bag.

Verdict

An excellent, affordable kit.

Build quality (panel)	★★★★★
Build quality (sleeve)	★★★★★
Versatility	★★★★☆
Performance	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

OVERALL ★★★★★



Lastolite Bottletop 4896 (120cm)

www.lastolite.com

Guide price: £85

Street price: £80

This 120cm kit is the largest in Lastolite's range, and also the biggest and most expensive 5-in-1 in our test. It's also different in a number of ways. First, the 5-in-1 kit is made up of a panel and two reversible elasticated sleeves: a gold/white and a silver/sunfire. This has a number of benefits: it's quicker to change from one to another as there is no zip, and you can fit one over each side of the panel, allowing you to have different combinations to suit your liking. The build quality is first-rate, and spare panels are available so you can place a sleeve on each and have two reflectors at the ready.

Verdict

Versatile and made to last.

Build quality (panel)	★★★★★
Build quality (sleeve)	★★★★★
Versatility	★★★★★
Performance	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★☆

OVERALL ★★★★★



Top picks: Flashguns and studioflash kits

Photography is simply the manipulation of light. But, sometimes, natural light doesn't provide the effect you want, so we've selected our top flashguns and studio kits to help shed light on products that offer great value

Yongnuo YN-560-II flashgun

www.amazon.co.uk

MAIN SPECIFICATIONS

Guide Price: £90
Street Price: £50
Compatibility: Any
Guide Number: 58 (ISO 100, m)
TTL: No; manual power only
Power zoom: 24-105mm
Recycling time: Approx. three seconds
Bounce & tilt facility: Yes
Wireless flash: Yes, two modes
Accessories: Stand, case & instructions
Weight: 350 grams



At first glance, the Yongnuo Digital Speedlite YN560-II looks much like the models you'll find from the likes of Canon or Nikon. It feels similarly well made, too, with a robust casing, a smooth tilt/swivel head, a large LCD panel on the rear, surrounded by a cleanly labelled, neat arrangement of buttons. It's supplied in a high-quality case and includes a foot on which you can stand it on. In fact, apart from the unfamiliar brand name, you'd think it was a top-end flashgun. Except it costs less than £50. For anyone who has forked out £200+ on a marque flashgun, this will come as nothing short of a shock. But there is one major difference between the Yongnuo and better-known flashguns – it is a fully manual flashgun, lacking any form of TTL flash metering. That shouldn't put you off buying it, as it will help you learn the basics of flash photography more quickly.

Digital
BEST BUY

Yongnuo RF-603 trigger

www.amazon.co.uk

MAIN SPECIFICATIONS

Guide Price: £50 (set of two)
Street Price: £25 (set of two)
Range: Approximately 100m
Compatibility: Sets available for Canon and Nikon DSLRs
Channels: Four
Accessories: Instructions and dedicated flash lead
Weight: 40 grams
Power source: 2x AAA batteries
Size: 155x40x18mm



If you shop around, you'll find the Yongnuo Digital RF-603 Wireless Flash Trigger double pack for around £25. Other sets with three or four triggers are available too. The sets contain the triggers and dedicated cords, so you need to ensure you buy the correct set. All the triggers are effectively transceivers, meaning they can be used as a transmitter or receiver. One sits on the hotshoe, the other sits beneath the flashgun. When you switch them on, they communicate automatically so you've no need to set them up yourself. Every trigger features a hotshoe mount on which you can place a flashgun. Therefore, to set up a basic off-camera flash system, all you need to do is place one trigger on the hotshoe and slide the flashgun on the other trigger. You can use several together, allowing you an easy and affordable route into multi-flash photography.

Digital
BEST BUY

Interfit EX150 MK II outfit

www.interfitphotographic.com; 0121 522 4800

MAIN SPECIFICATIONS

Guide Price: £250
Street Price: £220
No. of heads: 2x 150Ws
Power: 19-150Ws
Guide number (ISO 100, m): 22
Modelling lamp: Full (100W)/Off
Fitting: EX type
Trigger Voltage: 5v

KIT INCLUDES

2x flash heads, 2x stands, 2x sync leads,
2x power leads, 1x white brolly,
2x spill kills, 1x softbox, 1x DVD



Replacing the successful EX150 kit, the Mk II version has brought some impressive new features to the table. The heads are a decent size, with a strong polycarbonate build, and are compatible with the full Interfit range of accessories. Though there is no storage bag with this kit, the box it comes in is sturdy and adequate for holding it. The modelling lamps give a useful amount of light and the flash power (1/8 to full-power) is very respectable and, when channelled by the spill kills, can add 50% to the Guide Number. Light temperature is a little on the cool side, so using Raw or a manual WB setting is advised. This is a great kit for the money and a good choice for the amateur. It may not be as extensive as some others out there, but the build quality of the equipment more than makes up for it.

Digital
HIGHLY RATED

Elinchrom D-Lite 4 IT outfit

www.theflashcentre.com; 020 7837 5649

MAIN SPECIFICATIONS

Guide Price: £730
Street Price: £550
No. of heads: 2x 400Ws
Power: 25-400Ws
Modelling lamp: Full (100W)/proportional/Low/Off
Fitting: EX type
Trigger Voltage: 5v

KIT INCLUDES

2x flash heads, 2x stands, 2x power leads,
2x softboxes (one medium, one small),
1x light bag, 1x stand bag



This update of the original D-Lite system is one of the best kits out there for beginners. The heads are compact but sturdy, and feature an integral Skyport wireless trigger. The heads are available in 200- and 400-Watt versions (D-Lite 2 IT & D-Lite 4 IT respectively) and, if possible, we recommend you buy the 400-Watt heads as the extra power is very useful. The control panel couldn't be easier to use. An LED shows the current power setting with two large buttons beneath allowing it to be changed. Other controls allow you to set the modelling light to be on at minimum or full power, off, or proportional to the power setting, which is set in 1/10th increments. There is also a button to switch the audible ready 'beep' on or off. The D-Lite kit has everything you need to get started and is worthy of a Best Buy tag.

Digital
BEST BUY

Ringflash adaptors

We test two 'budget' adaptors designed to mimic the flattering and funky effect produced by a ringflash. Find out how they did...

MANY PROFESSIONAL fashion and portrait photographers love using a ringflash to capture images with a distinctive shadowless lighting effect. With a basic ringflash kit costing several hundred pounds, a number of manufacturers have produced adaptors that, when fitted over the head of a standard flashgun, aim to mimic a ringflash effect. We test the two most popular models from Orbis and RayFlash.



Orbis

The Orbis is made from tough ABS plastic, which is able to withstand heavy general usage and seems durable enough to survive a drop, although we've not tested that fact! At 20cm diameter, the ring area is larger than the RayFlash (although the 86mm tunnel for the lens is smaller), and at 500 grams, it's also slightly heavier. The standard way to use the Orbis is to slip the flashgun into the housing and handhold the flash with your left hand, resting your thumb and forefinger on the grooved surface of the Orbis. The housing has a flexible grip that holds a variety of flash heads, so if you've a well-known brand of flash, it will most likely fit. With the lens poking through the tunnel, the set-up works well, but does become uncomfortable if you're shooting for a prolonged period of time. In this instance, we'd recommend the optional Orbis arm, an adjustable aluminium bracket that fixes to the flashgun's hotshoe and the camera's tripod bush. The £50 arm was unavailable for this test, but you should consider it if you plan to use the Orbis for extended periods of time.

The output from the flash travels straight up and around the ring, which has a diffuser around the entire front surface. Within the Orbis ring, the light is distributed to provide an even effect and to limit light loss.

Because the flashgun is handheld, flash exposures aren't straightforward. You can use Canon's infrared flash trigger or Nikon's CLS flash system for TTL flash, or independent dedicated off-camera cords. This has the advantage of providing more accurate flash exposures. If you use a third-party flash trigger, such as a PocketWizard, Hahnel Combi RF or Seculine TwinLink (used for this test), TTL flash information isn't communicated to the camera, so you need to set your flash to manual power settings. This involves taking test shots at 1/2 power, 1/4 power etc, and adjusting power until you have a decent exposure. It's also worth noting that because it's handheld, you can position the Orbis to shoot from an angle, much as you would a softbox or beauty light.

It took a fair bit of effort to fit our Canon Speedlite 580EX II into the Orbis housing, but once in, the grip was tight and secure. Our Canon 28-70mm f/2.8 lens fitted snugly through the tunnel, but occasionally we found the AF/M switch had been moved to manual by contact with the Orbis tunnel, so do ensure you keep an eye on this.

The output from the Orbis was excellent and it allows enough flash output through to illuminate subjects a few feet away.



Catchlights
The Orbis delivers a prominent catchlight and even spread of light.

Price: £200 (Guide) / £180 (Street)

Supplied accessories: Case, strap, self-adhesive pad

Website: www.orbisflash.com



Orbis users should buy the £50 Orbis Arm for better handling. It can be tripod-mounted too.

Verdict

Having to handhold the Orbis means it's more of an effort to use than the RayFlash, but it is versatile as you can position it at any angle. However, we'd suggest you buy the optional arm to improve handling. Ideally, use a dedicated off-camera lead for TTL compatibility, but even if using manual flash, you should be able to produce flattering portraits.



Like Well made, beautiful lighting effect, near-universal compatibility

Dislike Handheld without optional arm. No TTL flash without dedicated accessories

OVERALL



RayFlash

The RayFlash is a less chunky and lighter unit than the Orbis but just as well made, and has a considerably different design. The ringflash diffuser is smaller and thinner, although the tunnel through which the lens sits is wider. The RayFlash is designed to be used with the flashgun mounted on the hotshoe. Because it's so light, the flashgun's head supports its weight, so there's little undue pressure on the hotshoe. The end that attaches to the flashgun is angled so that the flashgun's head faces forward when fitted. This has the advantage of the ringflash adaptor being positioned securely around the lens and, unlike the Orbis, negates the need for the photographer to handhold the unit. The other major benefit is that because the flashgun sits on the hotshoe, it retains TTL flash functions, meaning you don't have to invest in an off-camera cord or worry about having to calculate the exposure. These two factors mean that the RayFlash handles better than the Orbis, but more importantly for beginners is far easier to use. It's also worth noting that you have the option of fitting a remote trigger/off-camera lead to the RayFlash and use the flashgun away from the camera much as you can with the Orbis.

When fired, the flash output travels through a series of prisms and reflectors that, like the Orbis, aims to distribute the light evenly around the ring. The output from the flash travels up and around the ring, which has a diffuser around the entire front surface. Within the RayFlash ring, the light is distributed to provide an even effect and to limit light loss. Where the flashgun's head fits is smaller than that of the Orbis and designed to fit particular models of flashgun. Therefore, you need to buy the correct RayFlash model for your flashgun, which is easy to do by referring to the table on the distributor's website.

The adaptor's flash housing has a locking pin that holds the flash head securely, but take care when tightening it as our sample cracked a little when we twisted it too far. Once the RayFlash is fitted, you can start taking pictures straight away with the comfort of knowing that the camera is taking care of the exposures. You should, however, regularly check the LCD monitor to ensure images are not over or underexposed. If you're not happy with the results, you can boost or reduce power using flash exposure compensation.

The RayFlash is easier to use than the Orbis thanks to it retaining TTL. However, you do need to keep an eye on exposures as getting too close will lead to overexposure. While the RayFlash is efficient, don't stray more than a couple of metres from your subject as you'll quickly lose its effect. Its output is very similar to that created by the Orbis.



Top tips for using adaptors

- Zoom the flashgun's head to its maximum setting to help increase the flash's range.
- Regularly review images and the histogram to ensure good exposures, in particular when you have moved closer or further away from the subject.
- Fit a colour gel to your flashgun's head if you want to change the colour temperature of the flash output.
- Write down your exposure settings for later reference.



Fun flash

The RayFlash is very easy to use and delivers great results.



Price: £170 (Guide) / £160 (Street)

Supplied accessories: Case, strap, self-adhesive pad

Website: www.flaghead.co.uk

Verdict

The design of the RayFlash gives it a couple of distinct advantages over the Orbis. Its lighter weight means it is easier to use and the advantage of TTL flash will prove a major benefit to those inexperienced with flash photography or wanting to work quickly. For these reasons, the RayFlash is a better overall choice to the Orbis.

Like Nice design, retains TTL functions, nice effect

Dislike Design of holding clamp; not as universal as Orbis

BEST BUY

OVERALL

★★★★★

Test conclusion

We were a little sceptical about ringflash adaptors before this test. Can a piece of plastic with a ring-shaped diffuser really match the performance of a proper 'pro' ringflash? Well, we found they can't, but they do a very good job nonetheless at getting close to replicating the effect. Sure, neither can match a true ringflash, but they do come near in some respects, delivering an effect that is sure to suit those who can't afford the high price of a ringflash but wish to capture images that reproduce its lighting effect. There is little doubt that a ringflash is easier and more enjoyable to use, but let's be honest, it's an accessory very few of us can afford to buy, especially as it's something that won't be used on a regular basis. The Orbis and RayFlash both offer a very good buy for those looking to add a modern, funky fashion feel to their portraits. Both deliver great results, but the RayFlash is the better buy thanks to its neater design, which offers TTL flash photography without the need for a dedicated off-camera lead.

**TOP TIP**

Be sure to bracket! Whether you use the grey card or not, in tricky lighting conditions, bracket your exposure by +/- 1 stops using your camera's exposure compensation or AEB functions to ensure you get the shot.

Metric to perfection!

Scenes with strong backlighting can lead to exposure error. Use a grey card and you should have no problems.

How to use your metering & White Balance cards

The 18% grey card can be used to ensure perfect exposures when you're shooting in tricky lighting conditions. Both reference cards can also be used to set a custom White Balance, but how you do this depends on your camera (refer to your camera's manual). In the meantime, here is a brief explanation to get you started

DIGITAL CAMERAS USE sophisticated exposure systems with a choice of metering patterns to suit different lighting situations. The systems work on the assumption that the area of the scene being metered is a mid-tone, or 18% grey to be precise; the average if all dark, light and mid-tones were mixed together. It's the basis of all metering patterns and works surprisingly well, but can render incorrect exposures when the overall scene or subject is considerably lighter or darker than 18% grey. For example, very dark areas can fool the metering system into overexposing the image, while very light areas can fool the camera into underexposure, as the light meter will take a reading that renders it as a mid-tone.

As a camera is trying to render an image 'grey', it's your job to ensure you compensate to keep the tones true to life. You can do this by either using one of your camera's exposure override facilities, such as exposure compensation, the AE-Lock button or by metering from an area of the

scene that has a mid-tone. And that's where our grey card comes in. Using it is very simple as our step-by-step guide below illustrates.

The key thing to remember is that you need to place the grey card in similar lighting to your subject, for instance, don't place it in a shaded area if your subject is bathed in sunlight. Also, make sure that the card fills the metering area – we would recommend you use spot or partial metering as the card won't need to fill the entire image area – but any is suitable. You can either lock the exposure using your camera's AE-Lock facility or note the aperture and shutter speed, then switch to manual mode and dial in these settings. This latter method isn't suitable on days where lighting is variable. The card has AF reference lines to help your camera's autofocus lock on to it. However, you don't necessarily need it to be in focus to work correctly. The grey card (as well as the white card) can also be used to take a custom White Balance reading from, too.



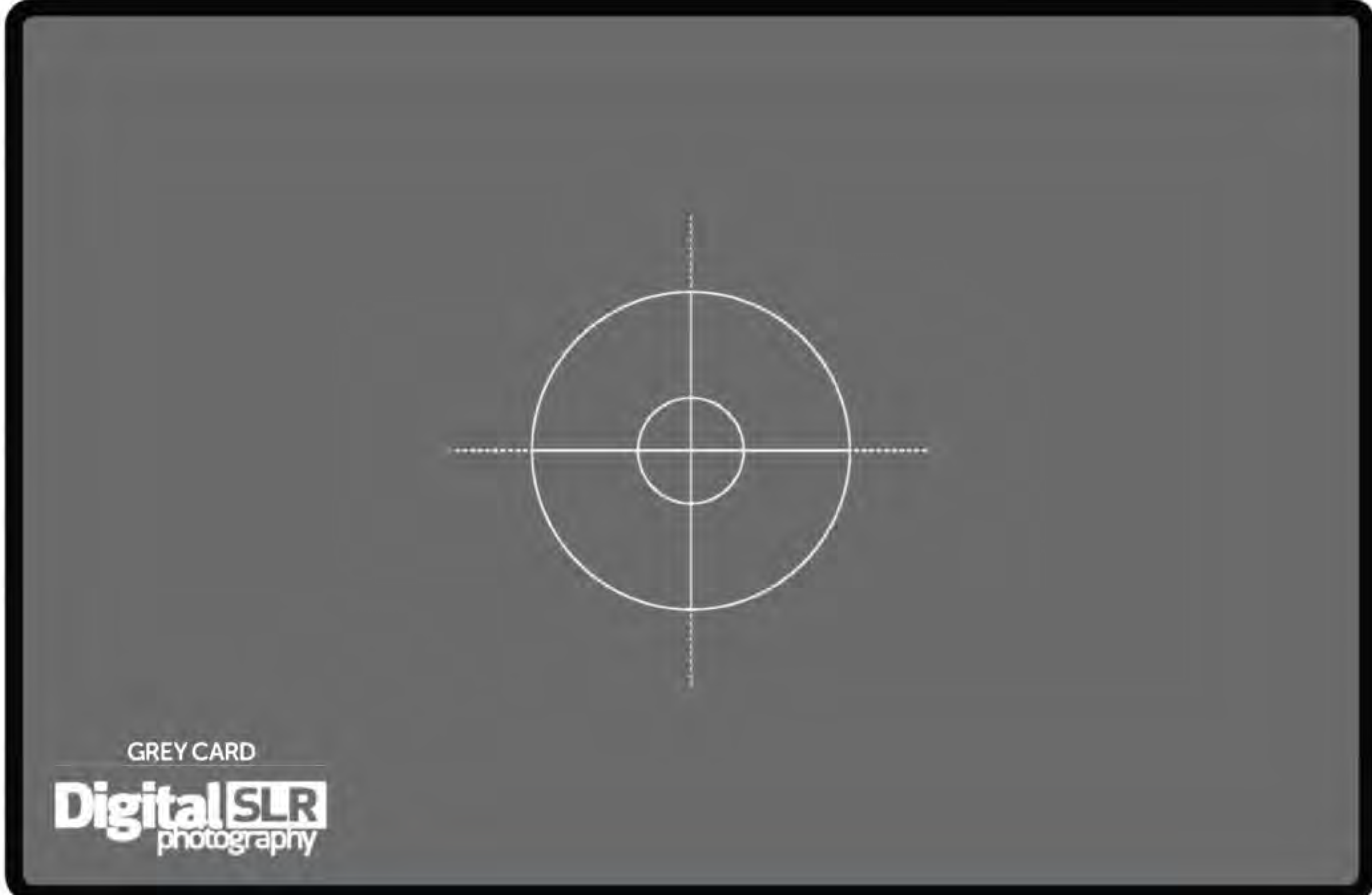
1 Getting started If you're shooting portraits in difficult lighting conditions, such as backlighting, give your subject the grey card and ask them to hold it angled towards you.



2 Take a meter reading Ensure that the entire metering area is filled by the grey card (in this instance we're using spot metering) and lock the exposure with the AE-Lock button.



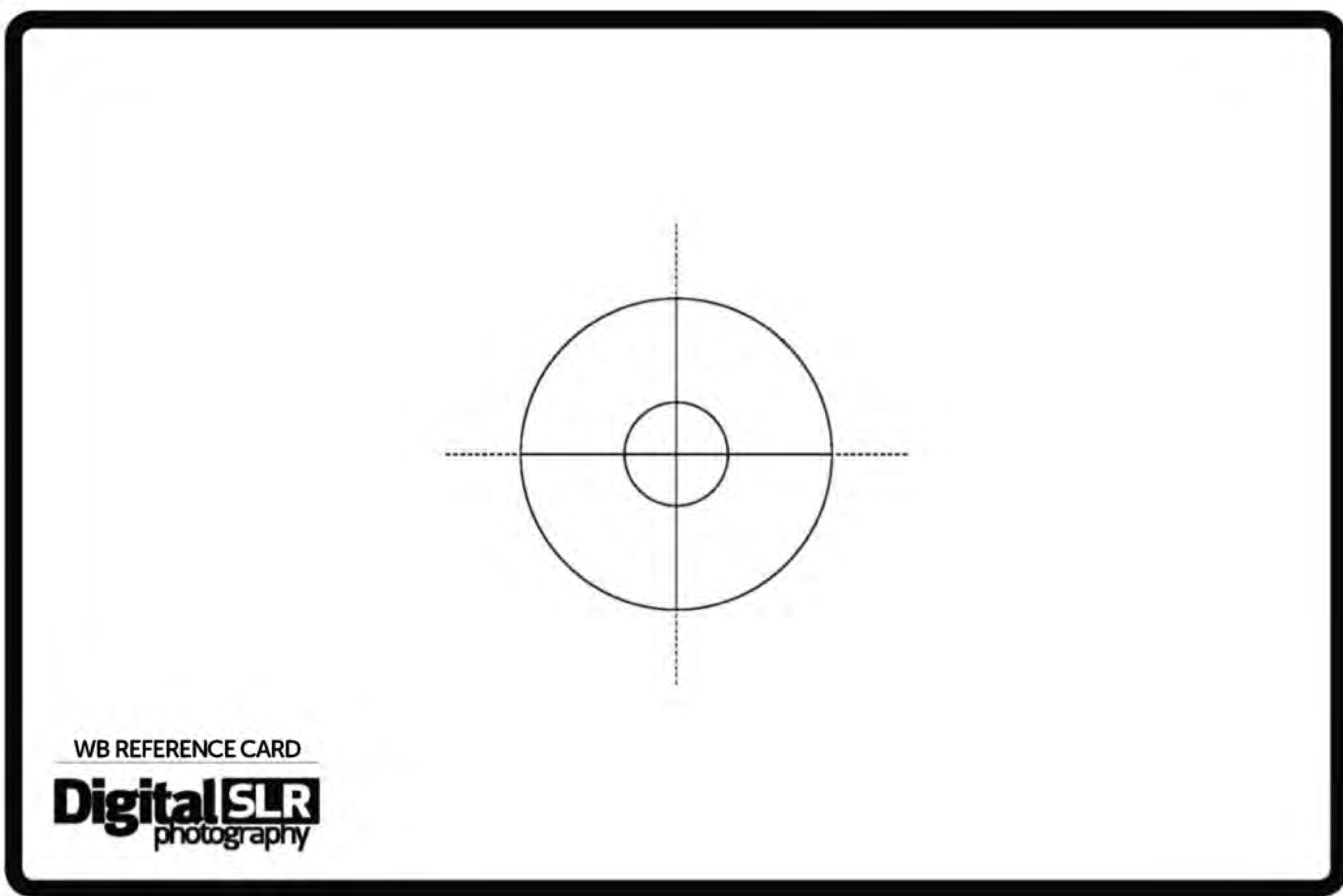
3 Compose & shoot With this exposure locked, you can compose your scene and take your shots. When you check it on your LCD monitor, the exposure should be perfect.



GREY CARD

Digital SLR
photography

CUT ALONG LINE



WB REFERENCE CARD

Digital SLR
photography

CUT ALONG LINE



THE IDEAL
COMPANION FOR
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