

A lens with a view to please the flashers... (vol 5)

"The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet." -Aristotle

Last month we tackled contrasts, but wait – there is more - this month we do it again....be pleased, it is not as complicated as last months!

You may not always give it a thought but the light outdoors is not always out of control.

Well, it is literally within your grasp (if your hands can move with the speed of light ☺) with a flash on board your camera – those (relative?) weak little pop up thingamies, they throw a bit of light around up to a few feet or a couple (2?) meters and may alter the amount of light reflected on your subject of your choice within spitting distance.

In most cases I use a longer than standard lens, actually my standard lens on medium format (6x7 cms Mamiya RZ67) is the 180 mm lens****, not the 90 or 110 lens as would be to be expected. About the same as a 135 lens on a 35mm SLR, or in digi speak a 32 mm lens (like on the Olympus 8080). So, working with a long lens, I am out of spitting distance and need a decent flash **GUN** (appropriate word?) so I can shoot it properly....

Trouble with these pop up thingamies is they sit right above the lens, absolutely inconvenient for the artistic inclined, the shadow it causes is diabolical if not used with care.

Plus those fantastic red eyes..... twinkle twinkle!

Some people just adore the flattening effect this flash produces, well, there are people and people....enjoy!

My advice – disable it and get a camera flash unit that moves your way so you can direct your light and put the shadow where it helps, not distracts. Not only you get a more powerful light, you can actually “dress it up” with reflectors or bounce the flash light and it becomes an asset instead of a “ooh what cute pop up window you have”.

I am starting to waffle, sorry.

Contrasts: In some cases the sun can place a shadow in certain areas where we want to see detail, like at noon with the sun straight overhead (typical – you should not even think about taking photos at this time but have lunch) deep sunken eye sockets and protruding noses create havoc shadows on a face. Some chins produce a black line under the bottom lip, it can all add up to a ghastly look.

Pop up, or attach your flash and use it to kill those shadows. If your flash/camera is digital, read your Adobe acrobat help files that say Fill in flash and all will be explained.

If you have a flash unit that you can program to your desired output in light (those are the best ones for slow working people, and fast workers will use an auto setting as long as you can program it...).

If you have a camera with programmable settings (or manual) this is how the principle works.

Your light meter has measured that ugly face at noon and worked out it likes to shoot it at F16 at 1/500 of a second with an 400 ISO film. (Shock, a portrait with F16, yuk!). Your shutter can fire only –in most cases - the flash if it set at a speed of 1/250 or slower. Please check your manual, it differs for some cameras.

Step one: slow down your setting to 1/250 shutterspeed (or your fastest synchronised shutterspeed for flash). More sunlight can get in, so you need to open the aperture to a higher number to let less light in so it balances again. F22 is your new aperture, this combination equals the previous setting. If you have no F22, sorry, that teaches you not to use fast film at noon on a sunny day...)

Step two: Program your flash unit to throw light on your subject (deep sunken eyes and cleft, shadow under nose) that is less bright than the sun. How much less? Depends on your taste, but 1 to 1.5 stops **less** light is a good medium start. If your flash puts out light to work with an aperture of F22 it is equally bright as the sun. If it puts out light to work with an aperture of F 32 (higher number – smaller lens opening) it produces more light than the sun (because it has to go through the next smaller hole ,32 instead of 22, and you need double the amount of light to make up for that).

We need less light, one and a half stop less, that means F11.5 (F22 was the setting remember?). Shock horror, does it not mean that if I program my flash to F 11.5 it puts out more light?

No my darling, it puts out less light because the hole in your lens is bigger and more light can easily slip through...) How is that for reverse engineering? Got it cracked?

Step three: keep the shutter speed at your “modified” setting of 1/250 (or your maximum fast shutter speed that your flash will fire with...please check your manual) and put the aperture setting on F 11.5 (or adjust to balance with your Max. Sync. Speed.).You may gather that all this requires a manual over ride of settings, unless your camera has a “fill-in-flash program function” that allows for these adventures.

Step four: Aim that camera lens at your choice face, fire the shutter and your flash will subtly light those dark areas the sun can not reach. A little like dental floss for shadows... ☺!

Mystery solved, no nasty deep shadows that block out detail, now keep this function switched on because in most daily situations shadows occur and this setting will eliminate them. Keep it on!

**** why a long lens as standard? Not only is the perspective more natural (imho), the background behind my subject is tight and small and controllable.

A standard or wide angle lens includes a heck of a lot of possibilities of all kinds of rubbish to enter my viewfinder, less is best and kiss (Keep It Simple Stupid). A long lens promotes the shallow depth of field, quite easily I can throw things in and out of focus, a standard lens suffers on a distance of 8 meters or more the problem of "hey why all is in focus", but I won't go hyperfocal this month.

No pictures this time, you can (pre)visualize what I am on about as all good photographers do ☺!

Viewing you next month, enjoy the snow if you are into snowboarding and do your plus 1.5 thingy to get the snow white ...

Flashy feedback to hotshot@ihug.co.nz, Cheers

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