

# USING FLASH IN BRIGHT LIGHT PART 2



## PART TWO OF RORY LAUBSCHER'S GUIDE TO USING FLASH IN BRIGHT SUNLIGHT — BE SURE TO READ LAST ISSUE'S PART ONE FIRST

In the first part of this article (*D-Photo* Issue No. 53) we looked at lighting a model that is posing in bright sunlight using our on-camera flash — now it's time to light her with a little more finesse.

### CAMERA SETTINGS

The following images were all shot in manual exposure. My first step was to achieve the

ambient exposure I wanted. Being mindful of sync speed (and the fact that that I notice a slight delay when using radio triggers), I selected a shutter speed of 1/160sec and experimented with apertures until I got an exposure on the background I was happy with. This usually varied between f/13 to f/16, depending on whether the sun was behind the clouds or not.

The flash power was always at maximum — essential given the fact I was shooting at narrow apertures. I adjusted my flash exposure on my subject by simply moving the light stand towards or away from the model. As a side note — making judgments on exposure by looking at the LCD screen is not always reliable, and very tricky to do when you're out in bright sun. Just be aware of that.

### OFF-CAMERA FLASH

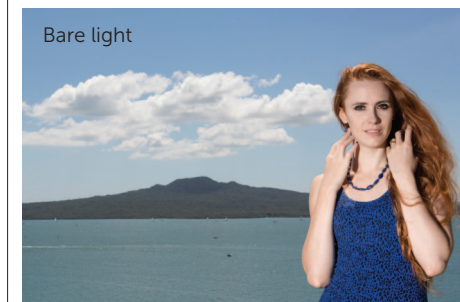
#### STEP 1:

Bare flash, camera left

In this case I've gone back to sync speed for a few reasons. Firstly, it's a starting point. Secondly, using off-camera flash at high-speed sync requires more expensive gear (have a look at the article I did on triggers in *D-Photo* 46 for more detail on using high-speed sync off-camera). Thirdly, I know I'm not going to use a bare flash, and adding an umbrella in front of a flash firing at high-speed sync is an option I know from experience to be ineffectual. The good things about this image are the light on the model is sufficient and the flash is doing its job just fine. The bad thing is the light is harsh, ugly and not at all suited to my model.



Bare light



Flash and umbrella



#### STEP 2:

Soften the light with an umbrella

Now the problems start creeping in. Like all modifiers, the umbrella results in a loss of light compared to a bare flash, and this combined with a narrow aperture has meant the flash exposure on the model is not what it should be. How can we fix this?

- Bring the light closer; this is a potential solution, but not viable here because the umbrella was just out of frame when I took the shot
- Increase the aperture; not feasible here. It would increase ambient exposure as well, and necessitate a faster shutter speed, which would go above sync and make flash useless
- Increase ISO; not feasible either, for the same reason
- Increase the flash power; this is our only option. However, seeing as the flash is already at full power, the only way to get more light is to add another flash (which is obviously not an option for everyone) >

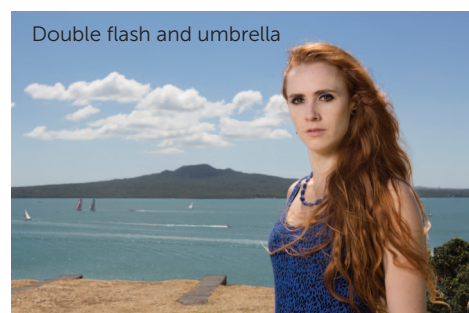
### STEP 3: Add more light

To overcome the problem above I added a second flash behind the umbrella. This is a set-up I've used quite often, and one I find quite versatile.

As you can see, it has solved our problem quite nicely.



Double flash and umbrella



### STEP 4:

#### Working with a studio light

I've switched the Speedlights for a 200Ws studio strobe for two important reasons. Firstly, I have greater options for modifiers with studio strobes and secondly, a more powerful light is a lot more versatile with regard to light position (or shooting at very small apertures if that was required).

Granted, not every photographer will ever feel the need to own a studio light, and this

option will likely be out of the budget of most readers of this article. However, it's important to know why you'd consider the expense in the first place. I've chosen a 200Ws light here because it is a good entry-level light, and significantly more affordable than say a 1600Ws light. A 200Ws light is roughly four times more powerful than a high-end Speedlight. Perfect for what I'm about to demonstrate.

The big problem with studio lights is one of power — they don't run on AA batteries. You

can buy lights with their own dedicated battery packs or, as I've done here, purchase a power source for them. In this case I'm using a sine-wave inverter (around \$900) to power the light. You'll notice that there is a definite difference in the quality of the light between a soft box and umbrella. This is fairly subtle to the inexperienced, but it's worthwhile spending time shooting with a variety of modifiers to get used to their own little nuances.

The reason I'm using the soft box is because it is a relatively more efficient modifier than the umbrella (less light is scattered and lost), while still producing a soft, pleasing light on my subject.

I don't need to use the flash at full power, which makes the set-up more versatile and allows me to move the flash away (to alter light fall-off) if I wanted to, while still being able to get the shot that I want.



Studio light and soft box



### A LITTLE NOTE ON EXPERIMENTATION

As an aside, I want to make the point that simply using a specific modifier does not guarantee a good image. The image (right) is a case in point.

Because the light has been placed too high, there is no light hitting the model's eyes, and subsequently the image is weak.

Don't underestimate the value of practice and experience, or the learning potential of a bad shoot.



### SOLVING THE DEPTH OF FIELD PROBLEM

So how exactly do we create a shallower depth of field without going above sync speed? Let's look at the problem logically. We cannot shoot faster than sync speed. If we open up the aperture to decrease our depth of field we will end up with an overexposed image. The way to solve this is to decrease the amount of light reaching the camera sensor.

We do this by adding density in front of the lens. In the case of the image below left, I simply used a polarising filter.

How does this work? Firstly, the filter cuts out two stops of light, so my image is globally darker than it was. I don't want it dark, so to counteract this I open my aperture by two stops (from f/14 to f/7.1). This keeps my exposure the same but the wider aperture means a shallower depth of field (plus I like the effect of the polariser).

It follows that you could drop the aperture all the way down to f/2.8 if you had a dense enough filter. In this case I'd need a neutral density filter of around five stops to go from f/14 to f/2.8. This will work regardless of your light source, provided your flash exposure was correct to begin with. The loss of light (both ambient and flash) caused by the filter is counteracted by opening the aperture, which lets more light in and therefore keeps the exposure where it was. And there you have it.

### A QUICK RECAP

- ▶ Shooting flash in bright sun means using small apertures or high-speed sync, each of these options has their own pros and cons.
- ▶ Modifiers can create a beautiful quality of light, but will make your flash less efficient.
- ▶ Modifiers plus small apertures may make it impossible for one flash to do the job properly, and necessitate a more powerful flash/more light — there are solutions to overcome this which require an unavoidable investment in gear.
- ▶ Get familiar with your modifiers and experiment with positioning.
- ▶ Experiment with neutral density and polarising filters to achieve a shallower depth of field.
- ▶ There is no substitute for practical experience.

As always, I hope this has taught you something and given you a better grasp of the fundamentals behind shooting in bright light. Any questions? Head on over to the blog post at [www.bit.ly/YuW3Pq](http://www.bit.ly/YuW3Pq) and leave them in the comments.

Happy flashing! **D**

Studio light, soft box and polariser



Rory Laubscher runs workshops on flash photography at his Firefly Photography studio in Auckland. Visit [www.fireflyphotography.co.nz](http://www.fireflyphotography.co.nz) for session times or to arrange one-on-one tuition.