Photography WORKSHOP

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Hands on PORTRAIT WORKSHOP.
July. 4. 2015.
Waterloo Park.

Notes

**Thank you for attending.
Here is what we cover today:**

**Envision the whole process;
planning, shooting, post processing:
In order to better control the
work flow + eliminate as much of
the guesswork, from Photography, as possible.**

"A good photographer picks a good background, then the subject."
- unknown.

The background, often overlooked, is an aspect of the image that can easily make or break the photograph. The background, ideally, should set focus onto the subject by means of contrasting with it. Ex: Dark background, when working with a light subject (brightly lit skin tones in a portrait, against a darkened background). To be avoided are busy backgrounds that can distract with patterns, or colours that clash with the subject colours. A good background is one that is of lower contrast than the subject (since higher contrast makes an element appear closer to the viewer). For that purpose, a wide aperture, that blurs the background can be helpful, but not always necessary, when one has a choice in what background to use.

Avoid a busy background means avoid distraction.

"[...] the light is like a perfume to the image [...]" (paraphrased)
- Henri Cartier-Bresson

Handling light properly appears to be a very tough thing to do, to many photographers, and for that reason many shy away from it and instead attempt to make the image look more to their liking in post processing. Available light, however, is very much worth studying, and using to one's advantage, because it can replace a lot of post processing work simply by being used properly for the desired results.

Types of light we shall look into:
harsh midday light, diffused light, golden light.

Avoid a busy background means avoid distraction.

Harsh mid-day light

This one produces strong shadows and contrast between lit and unlit areas, such as sides of the face; makes the model squint and is generally more difficult to work with. Since this type of light naturally produces strong contrasts, it can be used to the photographer's advantage when that particular look is desired. In order to avoid some of its disadvantages, such as the model squinting and uneven lighting on the face, the light source (the sun in this case) can be hidden behind an object, tree branches with many leaves for example, in order to filter the light and make it more even. Since this type of light is not poor in brightness, even when the model is placed in the shade, there will be plenty of brightness to work with and no harsh differences between the bright and dark areas on the face.

A great use for this, especially when using a tree to filter the source, is side-lighting: having the light source light up one side of the model (most of the time, the side and the behind of the model), leaving the face more or less untouched and therefore without harsh shadows. This is another good way to set the model apart from the background, especially when the background can be made darker than the model, and in this regard, when nature and the environment do not cooperate, there is always post processing.
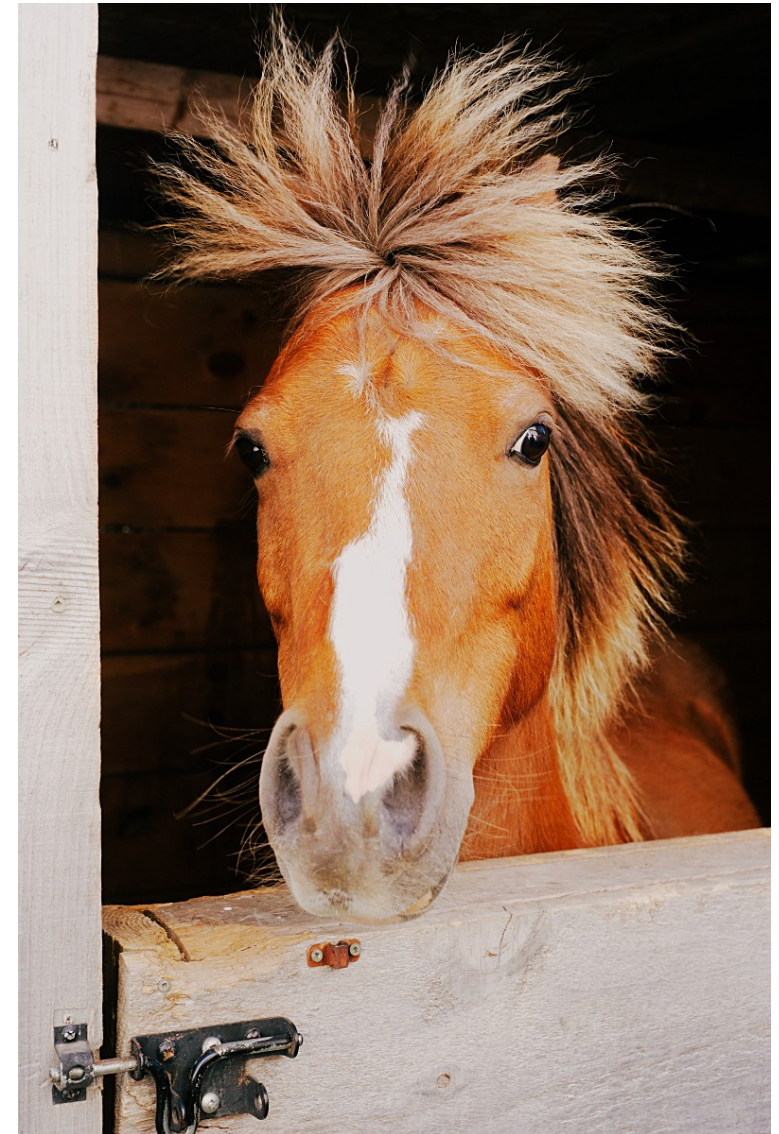
Diffused light

You will find naturally diffused light on a cloudy day, when the harsh sunlight is filtered by the clouds in the sky. The amplitude of the diffusion can vary, but generally regardless of how much brightness comes through, the light will be rather even, and as opposed to the harsh midday light, it will not cause harsh, or sometimes, any shadows, regardless which way the model is facing. This makes it easy to achieve soft, overall mildly lit portraits with plenty of details. Of course the human eye enjoys a good dose of contrast, so these shots often benefit from a bit of additional contrast in post processing, but the best part is, we get to choose exactly how much.

The light's colour is generally a bit on the bluer side of white balance, so a bit of tweaking in that aspect is often needed as well.

Diffused light: either caused artificially, or by clouds, or by residual light after sunset – balanced with little to no shadows.

Golden light

This is one of photographers' favourites. It is the golden orange coloured light produced by a setting sun on a clear cloudless day. You will have between an hour to half an hour worth of it on most summer days, when clouds are missing (since the clouds dampen the gold and give a cooler colour to the light). Some very good uses to this light include back lighting, creating a lovely golden glow around the model when the light source is hidden behind the model; full frontal lighting, where the golden light lends its golden bias to the skin tone and allows for the setting sun to be reflected in the model's eyes, as well as side lighting, similar to the harsh midday light. Using golden light filtered through tree branches will, as expected, soften and diffuse it, but it will still maintain its golden bias.

Although this light is not as abundantly available, it is considered by most well worth chasing, due to it's "wow" effect that makes most viewers love it, without knowing exactly why.

Golden light will lend its lovely golden glow to the skin tone and make everything look ...awesome.
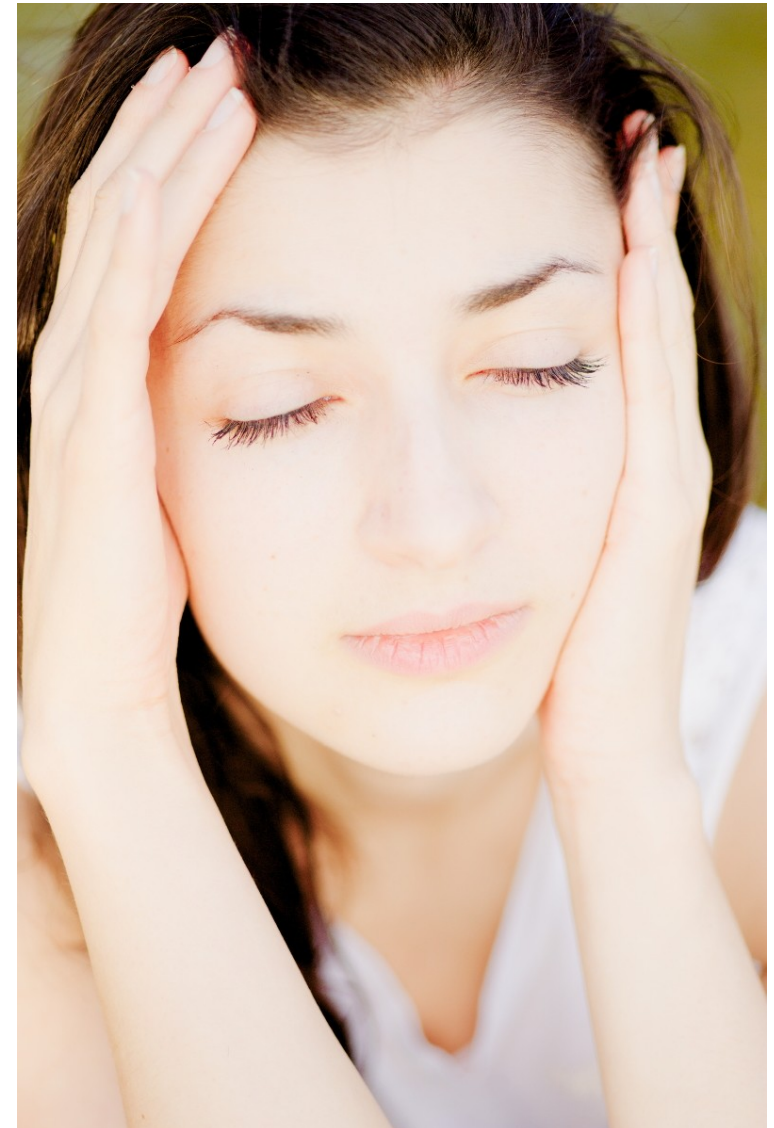
This is the perhaps the least standard of all the aspects; unless you memorize poses that work well for women, men, children, couples etc., you will need to improvise and use common sense to adapt to the location and the model's own personality and looks. It is important to remember that the point of posing is not to make them look some standard, socially dictated way, but to place the model within the frame in such a way that you achieve the following:

1. balance out the composition, the geometric relationship between the model and the other elements in the image, at the very least between the model and the background;

2. make the model look dignified, placing him/her in a position that advantages them, makes them look elegant;

3. bring out the message that is intended to be broadcast through the image. There usually is one, whether it is the model's personality, mindset, philosophy of life, momentary mood, for each there are matching stances and positions which can be more or less obvious depending on the situation.

Often times, the rule of thirds and the rules regarding centring objects come to the rescue. If the model is the main, and sole, element in the image, apart from the background, then centring is a viable approach, in which case, equidistant margins (distance between the edge of the subject and the edge of the image are generally constant), as well as symmetry are your best friends. Do not be afraid to research what poses have been proved to work well for the type of situation you are in. Fortunately, posing positions can not be patented… yet.

This is one of my favourites to think about. In the words of Ansel Adams, "photography is perception, the analytic interpretation of things as they are." In plain English this means that every photographer who has photographed for long enough, will come to understand that the camera has its shortcomings when it comes to depicting reality the way it is, it can not see the way the human eye can, in spite of the constant technological advances. The smart accept this, and cease to fight this reality, saving themselves a lot of grief, while the wise go a step further and even rejoice in it. Why? Because the moment you lose the battle to perfectly depict nature, you allow creativity to take over and to depict what the moment felt like, by means of exaggering reality slightly in order to make a point.

In terms of what you need to keep in mind, when planning how and where to shoot, here are a few basic post processing elements you will have to deal with that are greatly and directly influenced by the way you shoot:

Exposure:

The exposure usually affects brightness - a lighter exposure will yield more brightness, whereas a darker one less; however there is more to exposure when we consider the post processing of the image. When shooting in JPG, due to the restrictions of the format in terms of dynamic range and colour depth, a very bright exposure, where details get overexposed and perhaps blown out can be quite the catastrophe, since often times those details will be forever lost, which also applies to underexposing, where details can be lost in overly dark shadows; however when shooting in a RAW format, the details can often be recovered quite well, and we can look at what images can look like when shot at proper exposure, lighter than supposed to be, or darker.

OVER-EXPOSURE:

When shooting lighter than the intended final brightness of the image, we need to darken the image in post processing and we notice that the colours we start out with are lighter, softer and more pastel-looking than the ones of a properly exposed image. Depending on the way we choose to darken, using exposure compensation, or curves, or lightness compensation, the colours will be affected along with their brightness, in some cases still yielding brighter, softer, more creamy colours, which can be desirable, depending on the type of image you intend to produce.

UNDER-EXPOSURE:

When creating a **darker-than-intended image in the camera**, we will be forced to **brighten it in post processing** in order to make it look right. This process tends to yield a lot more visible implications than over-exposure. The first thing we notice is an **additional boost in contrast**. Shooting darker means we let less light into the camera, which in turn yields an image with less dynamic range overall than one where we allow all the light to enter, this in turn, when we brighten, means we stretch the little bit of dynamic range out to fill the entire spectrum that the final image can yield. As a result, we get an image with string shadows and strong highlights, quite the opposite from the right-in-mid-tones images we get from an overexposed image when darkened. Another thing we notice is how the colours are richer and stronger, anything but pastel. Gary McCurry, a National Geographic photographer known for The Afghan Girl portrait from 1984 is a great example for perpetual under-exposure in his shooting. His colours are strong and give a personal, honest and true-to-life feel to the images.

2. Shooting:

1. Exposure:
Perhaps it is not the most important one of the aspects to keep in mind right before pressing the shutter, but it is the first thing I am considering. The in-camera exposure will directly affect the outcome of the image, because it will dictate on whether there is a need to darken or brighten in post processing, which in itself adds a visual effect.

2. Aperture:
This dictates depth of field, but also the level of bokeh ...so if you want a very blurry background, make sure the lens is as open as possible!

3. Focal length:
A little less on the intuitive side things, the focal length of your lens will affect the perspective of the resulting image. A longer focal length will make distances between objects appear less substantial, especially the farther they are from you.

4. ISO sensitivity:
Do watch the ISO ...often times experienced photographers end up shooting at ISO1600 on a bright day and they regret the grain later...

5. THE BACKGROUND
6. The model's "good side" + the model's positioning
7. Composition (model + any other elements)

Thank you for attending.
Please direct any questions and feedback to:

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