**PHOTOGRAPHING
CONSCIOUSLY**

Hands on
Portrait Photography
Preview Session

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1. Planning:
A. The Background

"Most photographers pick a subject and then a background for it.
A good photographer picks a good background first, then a subject."

- unknown source

This is the best rendering of that quote, according to my best ability to remember. The point stands, however, the background of your image can either work for you or against you, which is why, when the luxury of choice is there, it is worth making the effort and choosing a matching background to match the intended emotion of the final image. In a best case scenario, the background can positively contribute to the message expressed by the subject; while in a worst case scenario it can distract or confuse the viewer.

Figure: 1 – (The subject is placed in the shade as to avoid the harsh contrasts between tones generated by harsh light)

Figure: 2 – (The background is blurred by a wide aperture in order to set the subject apart)

In the situations above, F*igure 2* shows a classical approach of using a wide aperture which blurs the background and sets the subject apart by doing so. Don't discredit it too much as the easy way out, since for it to work well it requires you to avoid busy backgrounds. When dealing with a busy background, at times, no amount of blur can save the situation.

1. Planning:
B. The Light

"[...] the light is like a perfume to the image [...]"

- Henri Cartier-Bresson

Light can be a tough ally in the photography battle, since it can drastically reduce the post processing work needed to be done later, but all too often it has a temperament that needs to be tamed and no two types of light can be treated the same. A few types of light to keep in mind are, *harsh mid-day sun*, *diffused* and *golden* light.

Harsh mid-day sun

This one is perhaps the nicest type of light to go for a walk in. The colours all around are bright and saturated, the air is likely warm, clouds are, for the most part, missing from the sky, and you will likely find yourself in a positive mood, eager to photograph. This light is, however, not such a good friend to you after all. It turns out that some of the repercussions of it are, harsh shadows – causing certain areas to be very bright, right next to very dark ones, a situation which, even though not a great stretch for the human eye to deal with, to the camera it can be quite the challenge to accommodate the entire dynamic range of light in the scene. If you happen to be using a film camera, you can have quite some fun with the

overexposed areas, asking your favourite lab to compensate for them and see how that goes; however, for the rest of us who shoot digital, harsh light needs special treatment and it goes like this.

Figure: 3 (harsh light dealt with by placing the model in the shade)

You can *underexpose*, or as some say, *expose for the highlights*, and then brighten your image in post processing. This usually ends up yielding higher contrast, more saturated tones, and in many cases noise (or grain, if you prefer a more stylish term).

Otherwise you need to somehow avoid huge differences in tones next to one another. An example would be the look of the bright area down the path in *Figure 3*. In this case, careful processing and highlights recovery has saved the image, but some situations don't yield such happy endings. Usually one wants to place the subject, especially when the subject is a model, in a *shaded spot* so that their face is evenly lit. There is really not much more to it. *Figure 3*, once again is the ideal example for that. Notice the lack of blotchy light on the face. This is important, because in case of a stronger over-exposure, one that can not be fully recovered by post processing, the model's face could end up lacking important details, such as definition on the nose. Another similar solution is to place the model under a tree, such as in *Figure 1*, and perhaps use the tree's specific aspect to your advantage by having the model look at or smell flowers in it, or hold a branch.

Diffused / soft light

Diffused light is a lot easier to work with. This is the light yielded by cloudy overcast, for example. When the sun is behind a cover of clouds, the light is being spread evenly across a very large area, which removes substantial shadows and allows for more freedom with exposure. Another instance of diffused light is the time after sunset, when light takes a bluer hue. At such time there is little to no direct sunlight available. Examples are *Figure 4* and *Figure 5*.

Figure: 4 – (diffused light)

Figure: 5 – (soft light after sunset)

Golden light

Figure: 5 – (golden light)

Golden light is the name given to the golden nature of sunlight at and around sunset, but so much was obvious. During the sometimes brief moments of golden light, heavily depending on location, weather and time of year, the sun's light, which is usually yellow, turns redder, and starts behaving strangely, in part like harsh light, providing saturation to the things it hits, but also soft, due to the fact that most of it is not straight above but bounced through the atmosphere. When used right, it is a tool that would make most amateur, who just happened to pull out their camera at the right time, like a pro.
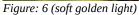

Figure: 6 (soft golden light)

Figure: 7 (golden light, side lit)

What to look out for:

When you get to shoot in golden light, be aware of whether the light is *reflected*, *direct*, or lighting your model *from behind*, since the approaches to each of these differ slightly. Reflected golden light is, as *Figure 5 and Figure 6* show, the light during the golden light period, but not looking directly at its source, perhaps somewhere in the shade. In this case it is soft, yet retaining its golden glow. When it is direct, as in the sunset light shining directly on the model, as usual when dealing with direct light, watch out for strong contrasts between highlights and shadows. I avoid that particular scenario, but *Figure 7* shows a similar case, when direct golden light is used as side lighting, as in it hits the model from the side.

Residual light

After golden light comes *residual light*. When the sun has found its way below the horizon, the light still left behind bouncing through our atmosphere is no longer golden, it is now bluer (less yellow) and more magenta (less green). The reason behind the colours belong to the realm of physics and I'm sure Wikipedia has a perfectly plausible answer for you if you have the time to look. For what it's worth, when many amateurs pack up their cameras and head back to their vehicles, the more experienced ones stay and take advantage of the aftermath of what was the the magical golden light.

Figure: 8 (residual light)

Figure: 9 (residual light)

Figures 8 and 9 display residual light in all its glory; it is soft and mild, with a tinge of a reddish glow to it. The only down sides to residual light are two; the fact that it does not last long (it lasts the longest in summer time, and least in winter time), and as it progresses into darkness it becomes… well… dimmer, causing you to need to recalibrate the exposure often. When done right, though, it creates intimate moods that are only with great difficulty replicated otherwise.

2. Posing:

Posing isn't the most straight forward to express in a few short sentences, unfortunately. There are, however, a few rules of thumb that you can follow when in doubt, which should point you in the right direction. Here they are.

1. The rule of thirds. First, imaging lines going through your image, between the top middle and bottom thirds, then between the left center and right thirds. Now place things of importance, such as your model, or the model's body along those lines, especially having points of interest, such as their eyes, at the intersection points of those lines. Doesn't sound like much, but it works ...most of the time. Remember, though, rules are made to be broken ...but only once mastered. An example would be *Figure 9*.

2. Make sure proportions are matching; such as in the case of centering a subject, make sure the same amount of space is left to either side of it. Works most of the time for centering. See *Figure 4*.

3. Leading lines is one of my favourites; trails, paths, long objects really, that lead the viewer's eyes from the edges of the image into its center will create interest. Try it. While at it, try S shaped winding roads, another one of my favourites. See *Figure 8*.

Welcome to the Workshop Preview

My name is Stefan Chirila; and I am the one who organized this session. This is a preview for the Photographing Consciously workshop that is to come soon. It is my hope that by attending this session you will find that you enjoy what you've learned and perhaps found renewed inspiration to tackle the harder issues of photography.

I would like to hereby invite you to be part of the Photographing Consciously Workshop and hear the rest of the presentation I have prepared. **Fill in your name and contact information below**, and hand in this sheet to receive updates and further information about my workshops. Make sure to **check with yes** the part where it asks you if you would like to sign up for the workshop in order to be contacted in regards to it.

Yours sincerely,
Stefan Chirila

My name is: _____

My email address: _____

My Telephone: _____

I would like to sign up for the Photographing Consciously Workshop: _____