

SUSAN STRIPLING

# CASE STUDIES

VOLUME ONE







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# A WORD OF THANKS

When I first began as a wedding photographer back in 2002 there were not many educational opportunities for me. We had conventions and local camera clubs but not many books or private workshops. The photography community now has so many extraordinary ways to learn. There are private mentorships, group workshops, online classes, conventions, and books galore. This is a wonderful thing because everyone learns in different ways. I have had the distinct pleasure of teaching photographers with my ThinkBooks, platform classes at WPPI, private workshops, and Creative Live courses.

It is an honor to present these Case Studies to you. I hope that the before-and-afters give you a good sense of what it was like when I was creating each of the images in this book. I hope that the things that I have gone through as a wedding photographer will help you grow as well. I know that I am always learning and striving to improve my craft and helping other photographers do the same brings me great joy.

I would be remiss if I didn't thank a few people for making these Case Studies happen. Jason Groupp and the staff at WPPI have given me a platform on which to speak and they were the first organization to trust me as an educator. The relationships that I have built with the extraordinary people at Creative Live have given me such happiness, both professionally and personally. Thank you to George Varanakis, Arlene Evans, and the entire team there for gracing me with the ability to reach a worldwide audience and help make a difference. To my clients - I would be nothing as a photographer without the moments that you allow me to witness and document for you. To Sandra Krauss, thank you for being my sister and partner in crime. To David Clumpner, thank you for proofreading this book with wise and fresh eyes. To Amanda Robinson, thank you for making this and all things that I do look so beautiful. And to my incomparable husband, Cliff Mautner, incredible daughters Emma and Olivia, and stepdaughters Samantha and Alison; thank you for filling my entire life with a beauty I never thought possible. I do love you so much.

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CASE STUDY 1 Details

Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/60 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/9.0  
ISO 6400  
105mm macro lens  
EV -1

The first thing that I look for when shooting any image is a light source. For details I prefer an open window or doorway. In a pinch I can use a video light to emulate that type of light, but I would always rather see if there is anywhere that I can work with natural light. Sometimes this means leaving the room you're in and looking somewhere else, be it in another room in the bride's getting-ready house, the end of the hallway in the hotel, or the lobby of the reception venue.

To be clear, I'm not looking for a window or door because I don't know how to use a flash or a video light. I simply prefer the look of natural light for these images and if there is a location that I can work with I'm always going to default to that before I pull out a video light or flash from my bag. Since I do most of these types of detail images at the start of the day it is usually still light outdoors and the getting-ready locations I work in generally have a window to be found somewhere on the property!



SET UP

I know that I harp on safety quite a bit when I speak and teach but it's very important to me. If a client is trusting me with her pricey engagement ring and wedding jewelry I need to make sure that it is kept safe when in my possession. I never shoot the rings or other jewelry near a radiator, air conditioning vent, open window, etc. The second I'm done with the rings I make sure they go back to my assistant and she keeps them in her hands until we're completely finished. Then we always put them back in the hands of the bride - not her mother, not a coordinator, but the bride herself. If the videographer needs the rings we will give them to him/her but then we go tell the bride so that we are free of the responsibility. I don't want anything to happen to a precious piece of jewelry and have the chain of responsibility stop with us.

In this instance I was photographing in the Union League in Philadelphia. I opened the window curtains entirely at my back to allow in as much light as possible. It was a cold, dim winter day so I even opened the sheers to let in as much light as I could. I put the shoes, purse and ring on a small table that I found in the corner of the room and positioned them so that the ring was catching the light. I placed the ring on the butterfly decor on one shoe and set the other shoe behind it so that the butterfly on that shoe became my background. You can see in the set-up shot how they were positioned. The purse is holding the shoe up and in place. I've also turned off the overhead lights in the room so that the light from the window is my only light source.

I am shooting the ring, as I always do with macro photography, with my 105mm Nikon macro lens. You'll notice that the aperture is set to f/9 so that the ring is entirely in focus yet the background remains both compressed (from the length of the lens) and "out of focus" from the f/9. Out of focus at f/9? That's right! Because of the magnification of the macro lens the depth of field at f/9 is not the same as say, your 24-70mm at f/9. I am also taking great care with my angle of vision so that I'm straight at the ring without having the diamond catch the light in a way that makes the facet "flat" or hazy-looking. It also bears noting that my shutter speed is 1/60 second, which is a speed much lower than I would usually use with such a long lens. But, I'm comfortable with this speed because my subject isn't moving and there is no risk of motion blur as long as I can hold the camera with a steady hand.



One of the most common questions that I get asked by photographers is “How do you know how far to put your rings from the background or foreground?” It’s a tricky question because there is no one mathematical equation or simple answer. It depends on how much of the foreground or background I want in focus - the closer to the ring the more definable the item and the further away the more abstract the item. For an image like the one you see here I have the purse about six inches from the ring and the jewelry in the foreground about four inches from the ring. I’ve also made sure that when I get level with the ring that I have a clear space between the jewelry so that I have a straight shot at the ring without the foreground actually crossing the ring itself.



You can see from the setup shot that I am still using the table with the window at my back. The purse has been laid out as a background and is positioned to catch the light from the window. The other jewelry has been carefully placed in the foreground to also catch the light. I had to be especially careful with the jewels in the foreground because if they were improperly positioned they caught the light and threw it back into my lens which was a distraction to the final shot. The watch and the small plastic bags to the right of the frame aren’t in the final image at all.

Even shooting at f/9 you have to be very careful when focusing and recomposing while using a macro lens. I always make sure that I have a focal point directly on the ring and never focus and recompose. I understand that autofocus on a macro lens is a difficult thing so I always try to focus where the prong of the ring touches the diamond or center stone itself. If that doesn’t work - which, let’s be honest, it often doesn’t when there are so many shiny things in the frame! - I will switch over to manual focus. This is really the only time of day when I use manual focus and it’s often quite a bit quicker than waiting for your macro to hunt for focus.

## CASE STUDY 2

# Details

THE CLOSER TO THE THE RING,  
THE MORE DEFINABLE THE ITEM  
...AND THE FURTHER AWAY,  
THE MORE ABSTRACT THE ITEM



Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/60 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/9.0  
ISO 6400  
105mm macro lens  
EV -1



CASE STUDY **3** Hotel Light

If you're looking at this image and thinking "Why, this looks just like an ordinary hotel room!" that's because it is just an ordinary hotel room. There is a big misconception when it comes to getting ready pictures that you have to be in a five-star hotel or a villa in the French countryside to make beautiful pictures. That simply isn't so. What you see here is a lovely hotel room with two windows, basic hotel room furniture, and basic hotel room getting-ready clutter. (You also get to see my friend Tim Sudall of Allure Films documenting the dress before the bride gets ready!)

We've already turned off the lights in preparation for Tina to get into her wedding dress, which is going to allow us to use just the light coming in from the windows to illuminate our getting-ready scene. If the lights in the room were on we'd have multiple different light sources and white balances vying for attention: the table lamps, the overhead lights, the lights in the foyer behind us, and the lights over the kitchen area to the right of the frame. We don't need those lights and were even met with a cry of "But now it's dark in here!"

All we had to do to explain our decision to turn off the lights was to tell the clients "I promise that it will be beautiful!" If you defend your lighting decision with clarity your clients will trust you!

Sometimes turning off the lights in the room does make it harder for elderly family members to see, especially if they're helping the bride get dressed. In this instance I will turn the lights back on if they need to see to button or lace the dress. No picture that I could possibly make would be worth upsetting my clients or making them uncomfortable, so if I have to sacrifice my ideal light a little bit to please them I will.

IF YOU DEFEND YOUR  
LIGHTING DECISION  
WITH CLARITY YOUR  
CLIENTS WILL TRUST YOU!



Nikon D4  
Shutter speed 1/160 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/1.4  
ISO 560  
85mm lens  
EV -.5

Do you see the mirror over the sofa in the set-up photograph for this image? That's what is making the reflection of Tina as she gets her veil put on. I stood on the sofa and leaned against the wall with the mirror. Then I placed my 85mm almost right up against the glass so that her reflection seamlessly melded with the rest of the frame. I was very careful to not show much of the window in my final shot because the bright light coming through, while doing a beautiful job of illuminating Tina's face, would have been an extremely distracting element in the final frame.

While I did shoot this image with my 85mm f1.4 I didn't shoot at f/1.4 just because I could. There was a very deliberate reason for choosing this particular f-stop. I wanted to focus on Tina's face primarily and have her reflection be a secondary point in the frame; therefore I knew that her face needed to be solidly in focus but the reflection didn't and shouldn't be or else it would draw attention from the primary subject. I also had to choose between two backgrounds for the image and neither were ideal. If I shot from Tina's left side I was shooting into the kitchen area of the room. If I shot into her right side I was shooting into the clutter of the empty room. I made the decision to shoot from this side, into the kitchen, because I had more room to move further back and use a longer lens and I knew I would be able to compress her off of the background more than if I'd shot from the other side. If I'd gone to Tina's right side I'd have only had a few feet of space to work within and would have had to shoot with the 24-70mm lens very close to 24mm, which wasn't the look that I wanted for the final frame.

I also chose the 85mm and shot deliberately at f1.4 to eliminate the distracting kitchen background. I placed Tina very close to the window so that by the time I had an accurate exposure reading on her face I knew that the rest of the scene would darken down naturally. That already began eliminating some of that distraction but when I shot the scene at f/1.4 the rest of the distraction was minimized to the point that it's not even recognizable what's behind her. The lighting, lens, and f-stop selections all work to push your eye directly to Tina's face and nowhere else in the image. Her reflection is secondary and everything else is not important.

Just remember to be very careful when shooting at f/1.4 and don't focus and recompose! Even a tiny movement at f/1.4 will make a huge difference. Move your focal point right on top of your subject and fire away!





Nikon D3s  
Shutter speed 1/160 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/2.8  
ISO 8000  
24-70mm lens at 24 mm  
EV -.5

To create the framework for this image I chose to keep the same lighting scenario. The focus of the image was always to be the bride's father's reaction which is why I placed her just to the side of the window so that the light would bypass her and illuminate her father as he crossed from the door to take her hands.

This image is another good example to show how I set the scene for a moment but then let the moment be the clients' own. It was important that I had Tina just to the side of the window so that when her father approached her there was no chance that the light would hit her head and cast a shadow on her father. The light on the bride's back is just falloff lighting from the window but she's not close enough to the light source to block it. I simply placed her in that spot, told her to enjoy the moment, and then the coordinator opened the door for her father to enter the room. Did I set the scene? Absolutely. Were the moments that followed their own? Absolutely yes.

I chose to shoot this scene with my 24-70mm for several reasons. I knew that once her father opened the door to enter the room things would start happening quickly and I didn't want to switch back and forth between two different camera bodies and risk missing a moment during a rapidly evolving scene. I wanted the ability to shoot both at the 24mm focal length

After Tina put on her dress (documented next) and veil she wanted to have a moment where she saw her dad for the first time. This is a common request and one that I always find especially lovely.

and at the 70mm focal length. Most of the time when I choose to use my 85mm I know that I'm going to be shooting it at f/1.8 or f/1.4, but it didn't make any sense to limit myself to that focal length when I knew that I was going to be shooting the scene with a minimum of f/2.8. While I absolutely love shooting at f/1.4 and f/1.8, it's incredibly difficult to keep a moving subject in focus at that f-stop so I often lean away from it unless it is my absolute only option (such as in a ceremony processional in a dark room where I can't use a flash).

Prior to taking the photo to the right, I stepped back for two reasons. One reason was to allow the videographer room to get his shot in the same space. I think it's extraordinarily important to learn to work together with the videographer at the event and I try my best to allow them to get their shots! Working together means that we can all create a beautiful product for our mutual clients and it also means that I'm establishing myself with them as a photographer who is easy to work with. I love the relationships that I've built with the videographers in my area and that we can refer work to each other. It's always great to show up to an event and know that everyone is on the same team and are really working for the benefit of the client instead of indulging in some strange power play.

The other reason I moved from my original angle was to vary the images taken during this scenario. While I truly loved the first shot taken of this scene, if I'd stayed in that location the entire time it would limit the look to the final set of images from this part of the day. I'm always trying to change my focal lengths, apertures, and angles of view so that I continue to strengthen the story that I'm telling. If I limited myself to one lens, one focal point, one viewpoint, or even one f-stop it would create a monotone feel to the gallery of images. It's a tough industry out there in a difficult economic time and every single thing that I can do to separate my work from that of my competitors is just another selling point to potential clients.

To create this image I put down the D4 with the 85mm lens and picked up my D3s with the 24-70mm lens. I chose to shoot it at f/2.8 so that Tina would be in focus but the rest of the image would not. Since Tina was sitting so close to the window, by the time I achieved a correct exposure on her face the rest of the scene darkened down considerably since the exposure of the scene by the window was vastly different from the rest of the room.

I am often asked how "set up" the images that I shoot are. This is an excellent example of how I set the scene but don't stage the moments. I asked Tina to sit by the window but the movements and actions are real. I held the camera to my eye and waited while her mother and hairdresser moved her hair and veil and waited until their hands were precisely where I wanted them before I clicked the shutter. I do not believe in machine-gunning the scene and hoping that I "get a good one", I'd rather be patient and deliberate in my approach and know that I nail the moment.



Nikon D3s  
Shutter Speed 1/160 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/2.8  
ISO 8000  
24-70mm lens at 24mm  
EV - 1





Nikon D3  
Shutter Speed 1/160 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/2.8  
ISO 6400  
24-70mm lens at 24mm  
EV 0

I kept the 24-70mm at the ready because I knew that I wanted a wide-angle view for this shot. Understanding my gear inside and out means that my lenses are chosen deliberately to help me achieve a final look to my images. While the Nikkor 24-70mm is a wonderful lens there still can be some wide-angle distortion at the edges of the frame if you're not careful, which is why I'm very conscious of the positioning of my subjects. Even if I'm not posing the scene I still have to position myself before clicking the shutter and I have to evaluate everything in the frame while composing the image.

When it came to exposing the scene I took an exposure reading off of the little girl's face right where the light falls on her cheek. I know that will darken down the rest of the scene because of the light fall-off around the window and will also result in a near-silhouette of the bride against the brightness of the window. I converted the image to black and white using Nik SilverFX. That is my personal favorite, most film-like option for converting a digital file to black and white and I use it regularly. I also sometimes use the Totally Rad Replichrome Lightroom plugin and I like their black and white options a great deal as well.

You can see by the lighting and the body positioning of the bride (in the gloves) that she is still standing where we last left her directly in front of the window. She had lovely white gloves to wear to her winter wedding and her sister was helping her put them on before we left for the church. I didn't do or say anything to set this scene because Tina was still standing exactly where I wanted her to be.

Even though the bride is in the same spot as the last image, the final shot here looks completely different. That is because I have changed my angle of view so that the light is falling on my subject in a different fashion. Instead of shooting straight into the window so that the light poured around my subject, I moved off to the side so that the light was coming from off-camera right instead of directly in front of me. This meant that in the final frame the light was coming at an angle and skimming across the top of the bride's hands and gloves. I also deliberately changed my positioning so that her hands would be against the curtain. In the image prior to this you can't see the light around the bride because she is against a white background. In this frame her hands are against the darker curtains so the contrast of light is more pronounced.



I deliberately chose to shoot this image at f/1.4 so that only the button and the very top of the gloves would be in focus and everything else would melt away into the foreground and background. Because the hands are in the center of the frame I didn't have to move my focal points around; I simply composed the image using the center focal point and fired without recomposing. I chose to shoot my camera on cloudy white balance to add an additional warmth to the image. Every camera system has a different color temperature and feel to each of their white balances and on the Nikon cameras I truly love the warm effect of cloudy white balance when using mostly natural light. The only thing done in Lightroom to post-process this image was to add a slight vignette that serves to push your eye to the center of the frame.

This last image in the series of Tina getting ready illustrates how beautifully the 85mm lens performs, especially at f/1.4. While I don't want any reader to think that anything I write is a commercial for the gear that I own, the truth is I am a Nikon user because I truly believe in the performance and quality of the equipment. I own every piece of gear that I shoot and I invest in quality glass and quality camera bodies knowing I can trust my tools to help me get the job done and create the images that I want to create.

Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/160 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/1.4  
ISO 1000  
85 mm lens



As you can see by this image we are still in the same room and still in the same lighting scenario but approaching the set-up in a completely different fashion. Instead of using the light coming from the open window as a sidelight or a main light I'm putting my client directly in front of the light source itself. I like to try to use the light from the window in multiple different ways during the getting-ready process so that the final look of the entire gallery is varied in tone. There are so many different ways to utilize that light source that it doesn't make any sense to not explore all of them to their fullest potential!

The first thing that I had to do was make sure that Tina was directly in the center of the bright white window. Because I knew that her upper body would become an almost complete silhouette I didn't want any part of her head, torso, or arms to cross into the curtains and ruin that effect. I also needed to make sure that her adorable niece was standing right where I wanted her; as well. This was relatively easy as I moved Tina into position first and then encouraged her niece to just "Go stand near your aunt and look at her dress!"



Sometimes we have to work hard to find beautiful light at the venues where we work. Sometimes it doesn't exist at all and we have to make it ourselves. Sometimes it's there but requires some serious searching to find it. But sometimes, that wonderful sometimes, you're in the right place at the right time and the gorgeous sunset light streams directly through the windows practically begging to be photographed.

This is the Mallard Island Yacht Club in Manahawkin, New Jersey and for about twenty minutes the sun sets directly through the windows. Cocktail hour guests hate it because it shines right in their eyes but it's a dream to photograph.

CASE STUDY 4



Just because you find beautiful light doesn't mean that you can just throw your subjects into it and call it a day; the basic rules of composition and lighting still apply. In years past I would have been so happy just to find that light that I would have been sloppy or less diligent in my execution of the final frame, letting the light be the subject. I strongly feel that every element of the photograph has to come together to create a compelling image and in this instance we certainly have compelling light - now what do we do with it?

Before grabbing Jaimee and Eddie and taking them away from their cocktail hour for a few images I tested the light with my assistant first. It was such a strong beam of light that I wanted to make sure I could manipulate it properly and still position my subjects in a way that would result in a flattering photograph. While I love to use the light to

illuminate my clients, sometimes you have to be careful that the light itself doesn't become the sole focus of the image. I had my assistant walk around in the light and sit in a few of the chairs so that I could see how it hit her face and body and how the shadows fell based on where she positioned herself.

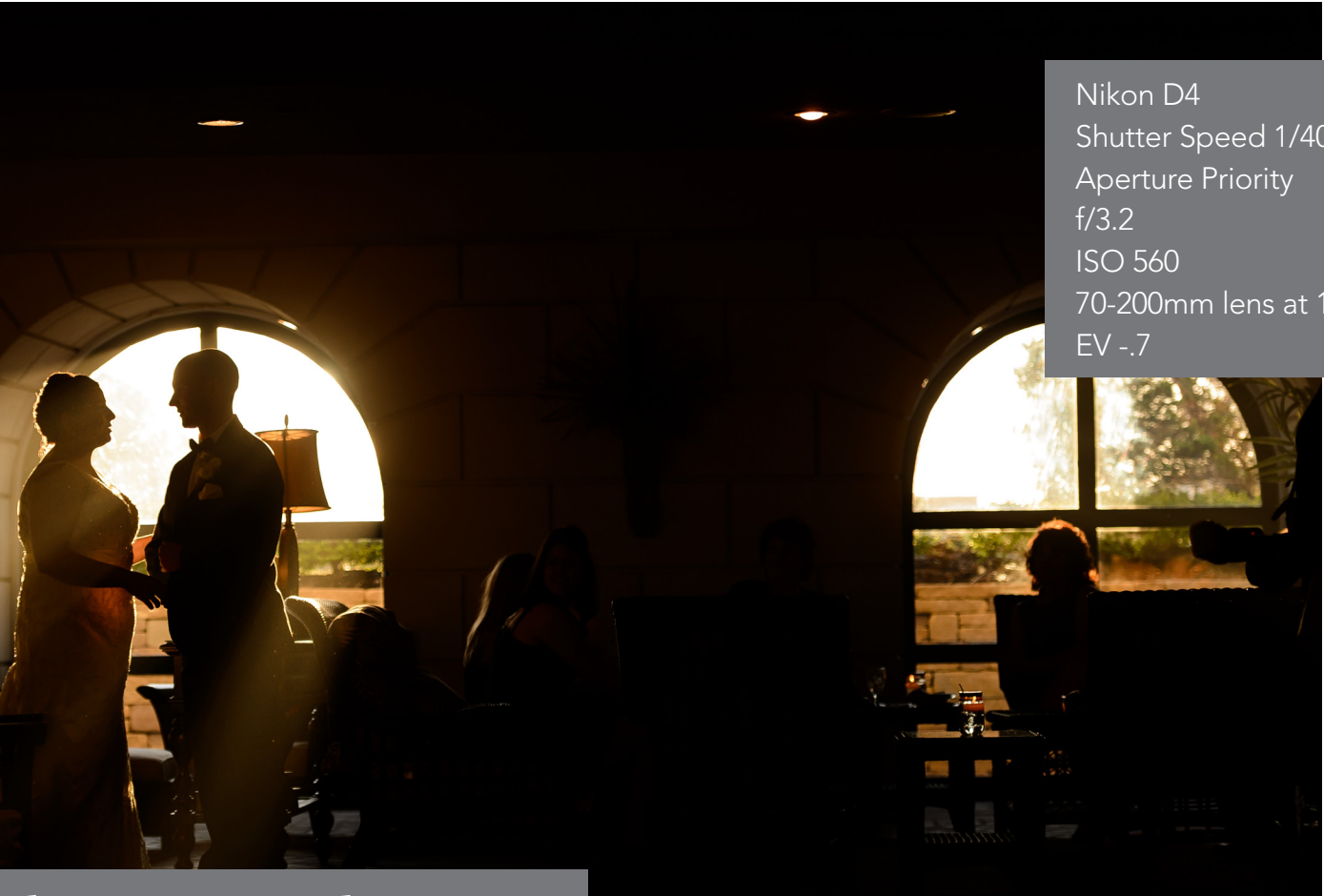
I decided to seat Jaimee and Eddie facing each other so that the light would fall across their bodies and create a beautiful rim of illumination around the person who sat in the chair on the left. My only instruction to Jaimee and Eddie was to "sit here and snuggle with each other!" I waited for Jaimee to raise her hand and touch Eddie's cheek and the second her hand lifted from her lap and moved towards his face I knew I had my moment.

Aside from positioning my clients I had to make sure that I was positioned correctly myself. Part of creating the image is putting your clients in the right scenario and the other part is putting yourself in the right location to capture it accurately. I knew if I were directly facing the window I would have an abundance of light directly in my lens and with the light source as bright as it was it would be impossible to control the haze and flare without blocking myself or blocking some of the light - which would completely

change the look of the final image. I chose to move slightly stage right of the window so that I would still see the beams of light but they would be out of my camera lens.

Exposing for this image was very difficult because of the quantity of bright light and also the extraordinarily dark shadows. I had already taken a test exposure on my assistant so I would have a good idea of where I needed to start. Since I was shooting in aperture priority mode I knew that I would need to adjust my exposure compensation to handle the bright light and I took a second to shoot a few test frames to see that -.7 would be a good place to start in order to achieve an accurate exposure. When Jaimee and Eddie sat down in the chairs I tested my exposure again while also looking at how the light was falling on their faces and bodies.

The Window



Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/400 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/3.2  
ISO 560  
70-200mm lens at 110mm  
EV -.7



Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/400 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/3.2  
ISO 560  
70-200mm lens at 110mm  
EV -.7



When photographing details I am always trying to find a way to show the scene in a new way. How can I use the light in a different fashion? How can I capture the detail in a way that means something to my clients and to the look and feel of their unique wedding day? At Kiara's Newport wedding my assistant and I went looking for an interesting backdrop for her rings, shoes, and invitation and we decided upon three mirrors we saw hanging on the walls. We simply removed the mirrors, positioned them in the light correctly, took the photographs, and promptly put the mirrors back on the walls of the Vanderbilt Grace!

If you look at the image of my assistant holding our “mirror box” setup you can see precisely where we are positioned in relation to the light coming through the window. We are turned to catch the light and also so that the mirror acts like a reflector, throwing the light back up onto our subject and also reflecting into the other mirrors. The first image we shot with that setup was the ring. I turned the invitation on its side and used the lace as the base to sit the rings on. While I loved the reflective surface of the mirrors I knew that I was going to use them for other detail shots and didn't want them all to look precisely the same.

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## I AM ALWAYS TRYING TO FIND A WAY TO SHOW THE SCENE IN A NEW WAY

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I also lifted up the scalloped sides of the invitation so that they show in the left and right of the final image. Even at f/11 the foreground and background are out of focus because of the magnification of the macro lens. You have to be careful when allowing items in the foreground of the image because you don't want any of that item to cross over your main subject and distract your focus. I have a little overlap of the invitation at the left of the ring but not so much that it covers the entire band.

To further push focus to the rings I enhanced the vignette of the invitation in Lightroom. I used an exposure brush to darken the edges of the frame where the invitation was and brought that exposure down about three-quarters of a stop. I also used a light clarity and contrast brush to make the ring itself more vivid and help it pop out of its surroundings.



## CASE STUDY

# 5

Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/60 sec  
Aperture Priority, f/9.0  
ISO 6400  
105mm macro lens  
EV -1





CASE STUDY 5

Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/60 sec  
Aperture Priority, f/9.0  
ISO 6400  
105mm macro lens  
EV -1



When moving from the rings to the shoes and invitations I switched to the 85mm lens because I no longer needed the macro. I chose to shoot the shoes at f/1.8 so that just one portion of the shoe was in focus and the rest of the image was softer in appearance. I placed the shoes precisely in the light and when I changed my exposure compensation to -1.0 the entire background of the image darkened down as well. This helps push your eyes right to the focal point of the frame - the very tip of the right shoe. I used my aperture and the light to bring the eye of the viewer to exactly where I wanted it to be.

WHEN COMPOSING A DETAIL IMAGE,  
THE LIGHT AND APERTURE USED  
ARE VERY IMPORTANT IN DRAWING FOCUS.

If you take a look at the settings from the last image to this image you'll see two things right away. For one, I changed my f-stop from f/1.8 to f/3.2 so that more of the words on the invitation are in focus. The other change was to adjust my exposure compensation from -1.0 to 0.0. This results in a brighter image with a brighter exposure, pushing your eyes to the bright white invitation. In the shoe image a darker exposure brings your eye to the small area in focus and in the light. With this invitation image the whole invite becomes brighter and more in focus, pulling your eye right to it. When composing a detail image the light and aperture used are very important in drawing focus and you can see a side-by-side comparison on how two different f-stops and two different exposure compensation choices result in two different but equally effective images.

Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/60 sec  
Aperture Priority, f/9.0  
ISO 6400  
105mm macro lens  
EV -1





CASE STUDY

6

Reception

To accurately show what Kiara and Peter’s Belle Mer wedding looked like this past summer what better device to record the scene with than an iPhone? I’m joking (mostly) but I did take a quick snap with my phone to show what most guests were shooting at the time and to show what the scene looked like with a naked, un-color-corrected eye. The gorgeous lighting added to the room made the entire scene a delicious purply-pink color and this image does a good job of showing how bright the room lighting was but how dim the actual room itself was. We were working with a videographer that day but he didn’t add additional lighting to the room (as some often do) so this simple picture is an excellent representation of what the room looked like before we got started shooting.

Before any reception events began in this room I took a few moments to document the room setup. As you can see there are many images in this illustration but one set of exif

data - that is because every image was shot with the same settings! I kept my shutter speed high enough to avoid blur in any of these images. Even with image stabilization on the lens it was later in the day and my arms were tired. Because of that I was worried about extra shake to the images so I raised my shutter speed to compensate. I was comfortable doing that and shooting at ISO 4500 because I knew that the D4 was capable of shooting beautiful files at that ISO level. I kept my f-stop at f/3.5 so that my details were in focus and I let the lens compression of the 70-200mm at 200mm take care of compressing my backgrounds and foregrounds. I also found that I didn’t need to change my exposure compensation at all in the scene, for any of the images.

You can see that in the first image (right) there is no additional light on the scene. The candle is the only illumination on the table and that’s what I wanted in this



SET UP



Nikon D4  
Shutter speed 1/200 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/3.5  
ISO 4500  
70-200mm lens at 200mm  
EV 0

frame. Adding additional light to the image would have changed the look and I didn’t want to do that. However when I stepped back and photographed the entire table (above right) I realized that the light on the scene was far too dark and my eye wasn’t being drawn to the centerpiece on the table. As gorgeous as Belle Mer was there wasn’t additional lighting added to each table which left them too dark. My assistant held an Ice Light just off to the left side of the table to help illuminate the scene. I didn’t change my settings because I was pleased with the overall darkness of the scene but the slight fill of light from the Ice Light pushes your eye right to the centerpiece. We try very, very hard to make sure that our video light work and flash work at the reception is as close to looking like natural light as we can. Was that light on the flowers put there by the reception staff or lighting team? Was it natural light? Was it flash? Video light? I want it to be so difficult to tell that the clients don’t even think “Oh wow, Susan lit this nicely” but “Wow, the room looks gorgeous!” We also try very hard to make sure that any flash or video light that we add to the reception scene doesn’t change the overall look of the room, no matter how cool the light we can make would be. I want my clients to recognize their actual wedding space when they look at the pictures, not see a space so overly and cleverly lit that they don’t even recognize their own room!



## CASE STUDY 6

This image of the champagne being poured just shows how a room can look totally different with a slight change of lighting! Using the same lens and a similar f-stop I photographed the wait staff pouring champagne into the guests' glasses during the setup of the reception room. My assistant positioned herself slightly behind the scene and off to camera right to give a little backlight using our Ice Light on very, very low power. All we were looking to do was separate the glass from the dark background and add a little light to the champagne as it poured from the bottle to the glass.

You may note that in this image my exposure compensation was lowered by a whole stop. The reason for this is very simple: my camera meter was confused. When the camera tries to assess the scene and convey an exposure reading to me it wants to equalize the scene. The very bright

Nikon D4  
Shutter speed 1/320 sec  
aperture priority  
f/2.8  
ISO 900  
70-200mm lens at 200mm  
EV -1.0



Nikon D4  
Shutter speed 1/320 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/3.2  
ISO 1800  
70-200mm lens at 200mm  
EV -.7



highlights and very dark shadows are confusing to the camera so it's looking to make them more even and give you a classic bell curve on your histogram. Since that's not the way that I prefer to shoot I have to be smarter than my camera meter and know that the bright light from the Ice Light will be tricking it into thinking the exposure should be different than what I'm looking for. I know that lowering my exposure compensation down an entire stop will get the right exposure on the glass and the rest of the scene will darken down in contrast. Had I not changed my exposure compensation the background would be brighter; yes, but the glass of champagne would be overexposed by an entire stop.

A slight vignette in post-processing simply helps bring the viewer's eye directly to the glass.

When photographing Kiara and Peter's cake I knew I wanted to photograph it in two ways. The first way would be to show the cake simply, in a well-lit fashion, and without further enhancement. The second way would be more of an environmental portrait of the cake, showing it in the scene and giving it a sense of time, place, and character. The first image of the cake (well-lit and simple) was shot earlier in the day, with natural light, and is lovely and slightly boring. So why did I shoot it like that? I knew that a nice, clean image would make the cakemaker happy, would serve well in the album should the more environmental portrait of the detail not resonate with the bride and groom, and would be just another way to show the scene in a different, clearer fashion. I'm not

showing that image here. Why? Because anyone can take a simple picture of a cake in natural light but the image I chose to illustrate in this book requires more skill and more thought and I felt would better serve to help you as photographers!

For this image I positioned myself directly behind one of the reception tables and dropped down so that I was nearly level with the tabletop. You can see that I am almost level with the table in front of me but lower than the cake (which was placed on a higher table). Our Ice Light is being held just off camera right at a very strong power to really coat the cake with light from a close distance. I wanted the light on the cake to be really bright and distinct so my assistant had to be super close at the highest power level possible. The light is coming almost directly from the side which means that the side of the cake closest to the light is well-lit but the other side is in almost complete shadow. Because of the angle of the light there will be no shadow of the cake on the wall behind it.

Once we lit the cake I simply exposed for the cake itself. I had to lower my exposure compensation by nearly a whole stop to compensate for the brightness of the cake. Had I not made this change the cake would have been overexposed and the shadow areas in the room would have been too bright. Shooting through the candles just added another layer of interest to the image as well as added a sense of place to the final frame. You can tell that the cake is in a room with candles and tables without the candles or tables having to be in sharp focus.



Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/60 sec  
Manual  
f/4.0  
ISO 1000  
72-200 mm lens at 200mm  
EV 0  
Off camera flash (M) at  
1/4 power

# CASE STUDY 6



I've been working with off-camera lighting long enough to be able to simply look at a dance floor and know what my off-camera flash needs to be set at but it wasn't always like that. I used to have to test and re-test my lighting and there is nothing wrong with that. I have time while the guests are entering the reception space and taking their seats to test the light if I want to or feel that I need to. That way I am totally prepared for the moment the introductions begin!

Based on the dimness of the room (which you can see in the original image) my assistant and I determined that the flash needed to be set on 1/4 power. We also came to this decision by looking at the size of the dance floor and seeing how far my assistant would most likely be able to stand when the bridal party and bride and groom began crossing the dance floor. My assistant (Sandra) is standing off to camera right and you can see that by how the shadow is falling behind the bride and groom as well as behind the floral arrangements. She is about six feet away from my right so that her light falls at a slight angle onto the bride and groom but not so far that the shadows are sharp. She stays in one position and doesn't move so that I know the light will be constant for every single shot! She also makes sure to hold the flash about nine feet in the air for these images.

I kept my f-stop at f/4.0 so that the bride and groom are both in focus and my shutter speed at 1/60 second so that I can bring in some ambient light. I couldn't go any slower than 1/60 second because even with the flash freezing my subject I would get motion blur at a slower speed. Our off-camera flash is a Nikon SB910 with an SD9 battery pack and a Phottix transmitter/receiver on a monopod held at about nine feet high.

Immediately after the introductions the bride and groom went into their first dance and I had to make a fast decision about what I wanted my background to be. Behind me was a staircase and ahead of me was the head table, mantelpiece, and candles. I made a quick decision that I wanted the candles to be the background of most of the first dance images because I wanted the warmth of the light to illuminate the scene. The stairs were a good background but because of the additional lighting on the mantelpiece I felt that it was a warmer, more visually interesting backdrop to the warmth of the first dance.

You can get a good sense of this background by looking at the introduction image - I'm shooting directly into the same scene. The difference between these two images, however, is the direction of the light. I moved my assistant to camera left instead of right - you can see that based on how the light is falling onto Kiara's face. I haven't changed any of my camera or flash settings, I simply moved my assistant to another location so that the light comes from a different angle. We are now making a triangle with my assistant, me, and the bride and groom. Since I know the light is coming from the side I have to wait until the bride and groom spin just the precise way so that the light will hit her face. If I had been a split second earlier or later the light would have hit the groom in the back of the head, causing a shadow on the bride's face.

Do I nail this shot every time? Of course not. It's tricky and people move fast. I always make sure I take a few safe shots so that I have the first dance documented cleanly and then I move on to more complicated lighting set-ups. This is in case the first dance is really quick and I only have a few shots to document it before they either stop or invite the rest of the guests onto the dance floor. If the dance is longer than fifteen seconds then I know I have some time to play and work with different lighting angles.

I chose my 70-200mm lens at 200mm for the first dance shot here so that I could compress the subjects from the background and really emphasize the intimacy of the moment.



Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/60 sec  
Manual  
f/4.0  
ISO 1000  
72-200 mm lens at 70mm  
EV 0  
Off camera flash (M) at  
1/4 power





# CASE STUDY 7

SET UP

At every wedding we try to make our reception detail shots as crisp, clear, and interesting as we can without changing the look of the room or space. Our clients have thought long and hard about what they want the venue to look like and while I can do cool things with lighting, the clients don't care about that if the reception doesn't look like they remember it! This iPhone snap of this detail set-up shows how we used the Ice Light to illuminate two champagne glasses sitting on a reception table. You can see that there are no up-lights in the room or pin spots on the tables and nothing other than the Ice Light is used to shoot the scene.

You can see from the setup shot that the table is about fifteen feet from the string-light backdrop. I knew that I wanted my background to be less distinct so I had two choices - I could use the 85mm at f/1.4 to create gorgeous bokeh or I could use the 70-200mm at 200mm and compress the background. I decided that I wanted the look of the lens compression so I went with the 70-200mm at 200mm. The distance of the subject to the background will help me "blur" the background away at f/2.8 and the compression of the long lens will add to the look.

Now that I have my subject separated from my background I have to do a bit more to help illuminate it. With no spotlights on the tables or additional light to bring out the champagne I knew that we needed to create the light ourselves. I had two options here:



Nikon D4  
Shutter speed 1/160 sec  
Manual  
f/2.8  
ISO 900  
70-200mm lens at 200mm  
EV 0  
Lit by Ice Light at full power

video light or flash. While each works perfectly well and each would have been fine, I opted for the Ice Light because of its simple, soft quality of light. I knew that it would mimic natural light in a way that would enhance the image and not leave my clients thinking "Where did THAT light come from?"

You can see in the set-up shot precisely where Sandra is holding the light. She's off to camera right and slightly behind the table, aiming the light at an angle towards the glasses. I used as slow a shutter speed as I was comfortable using with a 70-200mm and an inanimate subject and didn't need any exposure compensation changes. This is the image directly out of camera with only a slight vignette added to push your eye towards the center of the frame.





These two shots clearly illustrate the difference between a lights-on and a lights-off hotel room and they are important images. I used to shoot in any room no matter what and wouldn't think to do things like turn off lights or shut off lamps. If you look at the image with the table lamps on, your eyes go straight to the table lamps. They're bright, they're distracting, they add a weird color balance to the room, and they provide two extra points of illumination that I don't need in the space. I much prefer the look of the image without the additional distracting lights. I know that with the lights off I can control the one light source in the room - the window.

YOU AS THE PHOTOGRAPHER HAVE TO LEARN HOW YOU LIKE THE LIGHT

This is something that I discuss often and a practice that I picked up from watching my husband, Cliff Mautner, at work. With the table lamps shut off I can control the amount of light in the room by simply opening or closing the shades. I won't have multiple color balances in one room or unnecessary additional light sources pulling focus or casting shadows.

Whether or not I change the lighting in the room depends on the room itself. I need to assess whether or not the lamps and overhead lights help or hurt the ambience and there is no checklist or mathematical equation to come to that conclusion. You as the photographer have to learn how you like the light. How do you like to work with it? What do you want your final images to look like? Are you bothered by the other lights? Turn them off. Does turning them off make no difference to you? Then don't bother. I can tell you all day long how I like to do things and how I like my final images to look but if that doesn't resonate with you there is no reason you should have to do things that way!



CASE STUDY 9

When photographing the details of the rings for John and Erin I wanted to begin by illuminating the gold band in a way that was both plain and striking - much like the band itself. Erin had incredible shoes with gold laces and I thought that the stark contrast between the laces and the black background of the chair would create an ideal setting for a classic image. As you can see in the images prior to this one I had already made the decision to shut off all the lights in the room and work with only the light coming in from the single window. My assistant and I took the simple black desk chair and pushed it close to the window. The chair itself was positioned about two feet from the actual window and was turned sideways so that the light was coming in at an angle. You can see how the light is falling by looking at the shoe itself in the setup image.

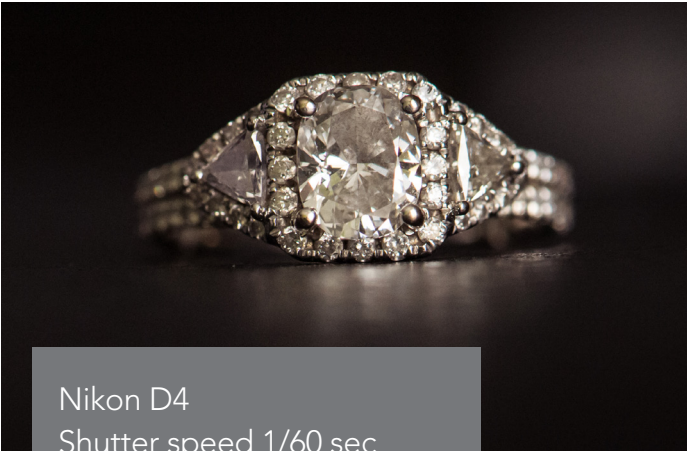
IT IS NO SECRET THAT I LIKE MY RING SHOTS TWO WAYS: CLEVER AND GLITTERY

When working with my macro lens I usually start with an f-stop of at least f/9. This is so the entire facet of the diamond is in focus. However, when working with a smaller ring with no diamonds I wanted the ring to be in focus but only the very front of the ring itself. I chose f/4 so that enough of the ring would be in focus to pull your eyes directly to it but not so much that the ring would be distracting. I also did not want the entire shoelace to be in focus so I knew that f/4 would be a good starting point.

I worked with my assistant to twist the shoelace into an architecturally interesting shape and then I had her hold the lace itself just off camera so that her hands would not show in the final image. The light is falling on the ring and lace from just off camera right and the black backdrop of the chair becomes extra stark when changing my exposure compensation to -1.7. If I had not changed my exposure compensation the camera would have attempted to even out that black background and I would have ended up with a grey-ish background and a totally blown out ring and laces



Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/60 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/4.0  
ISO 3200  
105mm macro lens  
EV -1.7



Nikon D4  
Shutter speed 1/60 sec  
Aperture Priority,  
f/11  
ISO 5600  
105mm macro lens  
EV -3.3

It is no secret that I like my ring shots two ways: clever and glittery. I love combining layers to make interesting scenes and piling shiny things on top of other shiny things to create compelling foregrounds and backgrounds. Sometimes, however, less is more and I try to balance the crazy with the quiet so that I don't end up in a photographic rut. If every ring shot that I take is layered and wild then that will become commonplace and I don't want to make the same types of images week in and week out.

Erin's ring was such a showstopper that I felt that any additional "stuff" in the frame would just distract from the beauty of the jewelry. I took the shoes off of the chair from the shot prior to this one and simply laid the ring on the black desk chair. The chair was

in the same proximity to the window as in the image before this one and the light is still coming from the window off camera right.

The real trick in this image was getting an accurate exposure. I've mentioned before that the way I shoot and the way I use light can trick your camera's meter - and this is a great example of how. I have two things going on in this image: a bright shiny ring and a dark, dark setting. The camera will try to equalize everything and as with the

image before this, if we were to trust the camera we'd have a wildly blown out ring sitting on a grey-ish background. We have to be smarter than our camera meter and either switch to manual and adjust accordingly or change our exposure compensation dial when on aperture priority. I had to change my exposure compensation all the way down to -3.3 in order to achieve an accurate exposure. I also had to change my f-stop to f/11 in order to have the entire ring be in focus.

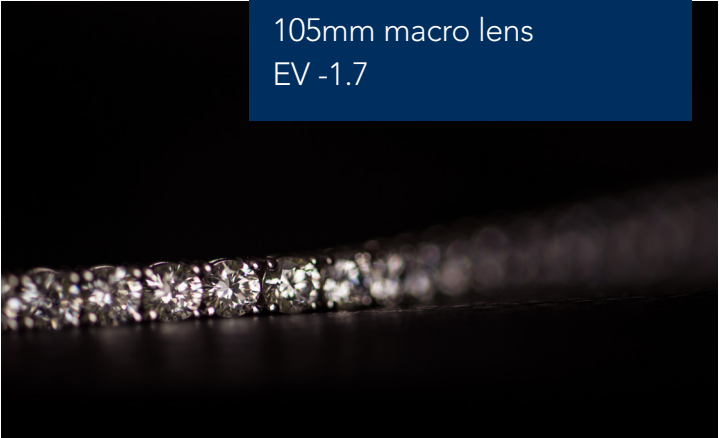
Same scene. Same lighting. Same lens. This image serves to show that a simple change in your f-stop will change the entire look of a photograph.

Erin was wearing this gorgeous diamond bracelet with her wedding gown to walk down the aisle and she included it in the details that she wanted photographed before she got dressed. After shooting John's plain gold band and Erin's amazing engagement ring I turned my attention to her earrings and then this bracelet. I wanted to shoot it in a way that showcased its elegant simplicity and I wanted just a few diamonds in focus and for the rest to melt mysteriously into the dark background.

If I had shot this scene at f/11 in the same way I photographed the ring I would have most (if not all) of the diamonds in focus. I changed my f-stop to f/3.2 in order to focus on only one facet of the scene. Instead of scattering my eye across an entirely-in-focus image I drew the eye of the viewer to only one spot on the bracelet; creating visual interest in the rest of the frame and leading lines that bring you both into and out of the capture.

I made sure that I positioned the bracelet so that when the out-of-focus areas to the right of the frame began blending into the background that it was also pushed backwards and out of the light. The depth of field and lighting change made that part of the bracelet not only out of focus but also out of light, meaning that the focus is even less drawn to that part of the image. Just a simple change in positioning and change in f-stop created a very different picture and one that is, in my humble opinion, more visually interesting.

Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/60 sec  
Aperture Priority,  
f/3.8  
ISO 320  
105mm macro lens  
EV -1.7





YOU CAN FIND BEAUTIFUL LIGHT  
IN ANY ROOM, ANY PLACE  
WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECT IT

## CASE STUDY

# 10

### SET UP



Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/160 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/3.2  
ISO 100  
105mm macro lens  
EV -2.3

I was so excited to include this image in the Case Studies because there is an interesting phenomenon that happens when I show images to photographers and try to explain where they were made. Most photographers say “Yeah, that’s great and all, but the rooms I work in never look like that.” The point I am always trying to make is that you can make great pictures anywhere. ANYWHERE. You can find beautiful light in any room, any place, when you least expect it. At John and Erin’s delightful wedding I found gorgeous light in a Crowne Plaza. It’s not the Four Seasons or the Ritz but who cares? Beautiful light is beautiful light wherever you find it and it does not matter whether your venue is “fancy” or not. I’ll take a suburban Crowne Plaza over a tiny, cramped, crowded, “fancy” Manhattan hotel room any day!

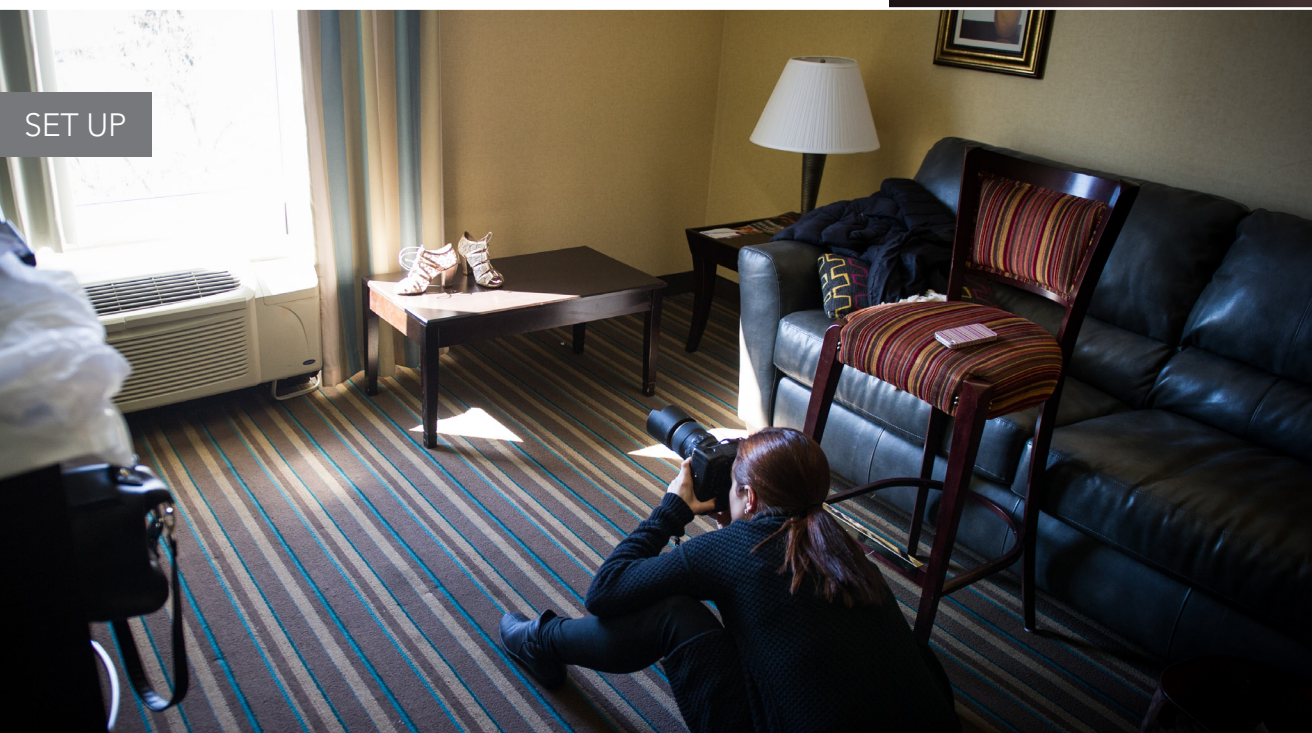
While waiting for Erin to be ready to put her dress on I had a few extra minutes alone in her room. I had already gone down the hall to document John getting ready and took the couple of extra seconds allotted to me to look around and see if I could find something I hadn’t seen before. I looked over by the window and saw that there was a sliver of light falling onto the floor - and when I moved the small coffee table in front of the window that light fell on a gorgeous wooden surface. I thought briefly about using the light just on the carpet itself but the stripes were distracting and moving the table gave me a nice clean surface for my image.

I toyed with the placement of the shoes for a few seconds to make sure the light fell on them in an attractive way. I wanted to show the excellent cutouts and the best way was to turn them towards the light and let it fall through the lace just so. I had been using my 105mm macro before this shot and it was a great lens to accomplish this image. Just because it is a macro lens doesn’t mean it’s not useful for other things as well. It has great compression and is a wonderfully flattering focal length.

Once I had the shoes set in the light precisely how I wanted them I knew that I needed to adjust my exposure compensation. The light was bright and the scene was dark (do you sense a common theme here?) so I adjusted to -2.3 which allowed me to accurately expose for the ring and also darken down the background. Do you see how bright the shoes are in the set-up shot to this scene? That’s what trusting my camera meter would have resulted in. I didn’t burn the background in post-production at all. This image is actually as it looks straight out of camera! The dark background is simply what resulted in correctly exposing the shoes in the bright light!







After taking the image of the shoe seen before this one I wanted to take a quick second and focus on the lovely knotting detail on the shoelaces. I felt that a “tie the knot” picture could be sweetly symbolic and the detail of the shoes in the background would help the visual interest of the final image.

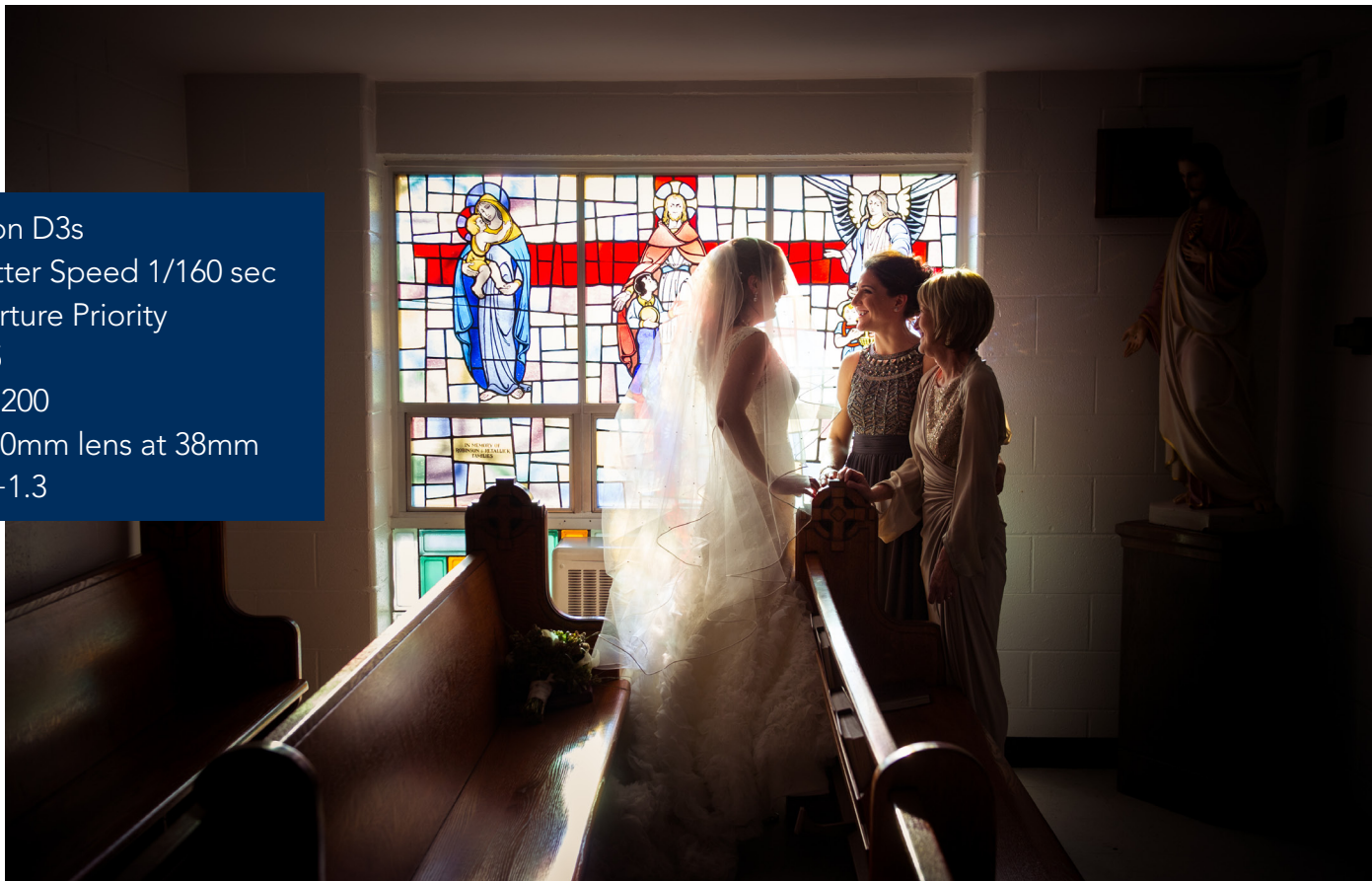
I am an Auto ISO shooter. This is not because I can’t set my own ISO but because I have tested this feature of my cameras many times and know that I can trust it to make good decisions for me. In this instance I’ve told the camera that any time I go under 1/160 of a second it needs to bump up my ISO level. I make the decision on what shutter speed I’m comfortable shooting at based on the lens I’m using and whether or not I’m shooting a moving subject or a still life. The shutter speed on this image is so high because my ISO is at 1000 due to the bright light on the shoes.

I chose to stay at f/3.2 so that the knot at the end of the shoelace is perfectly in focus and the rest of the shoe is not. I also chose to move myself so that I was approaching the scene from a different angle. In the first image the light is coming from behind the shoes and slightly to the side. In this image the light is still coming from the same angle but I’ve moved myself so that I am facing the light differently. This results in a completely different final look to this image versus the image prior.

Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/1000 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/3.2  
ISO 1000,  
105mm macro lens  
EV -.3







Nikon D3s  
Shutter Speed 1/160 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/3.5  
ISO 200  
24-70mm lens at 38mm  
EV +1.3

After we got to the church with John and Erin I went into the sanctuary to begin planning my approach and settings with regard to the processional. Within a few minutes I got a text from Sandra saying “Come see the light in this room!” This is yet another example of why a good assistant is crucial; she knows what I look for in terms of lighting and if we’re separated for any reason she alerts me if I might be missing a good opportunity to make an interesting picture.

Erin had been waiting in a small room off of the vestibule of the church and gorgeous light was pouring through the stained glass window. This set-up shot, taken on Sandra’s iPhone, shows exactly what the room looked like. Erin was sitting at the end of the pew talking to her mother and I was thrilled to have been

or flattering way. The lighting scenario was working against me and not with me and I knew I needed to find a better angle.

I talk often about how I love the look of a long lens but sometimes I need a wider angle to tell the story of the scene. The room was small and even getting as far back as I could wouldn’t allow me to use my 85mm or my 70-200mm. I wanted to include the pews, the whole window, and the statue in the corner to give the image a good sense of time and space and a longer lens would have only allowed me to focus on the bride and her family. While that would have been a lovely image in itself it wasn’t the look I was going for so I chose my 24-70mm (which was already on my D3s) and ended up, as I often do with this lens, near the 35mm range.



called to come in and see the light. I trust Sandra to stay in the back of the church with the bride and her parents before the ceremony starts and take pictures of whatever happens but she knows the point at which she needs to call me to take over - and this was one of those instances.

When I first came into the room I thought about using the light as a main light, putting my back to the window and using the light directly on Erin and her mother and sister. The second I tried this approach I knew it was wrong for many, many reasons. The light was too low, hitting Erin on the torso and dress but not reaching her face. The light was also mottled and oddly colored and speckled from the stained glass and I knew that would be not only nearly impossible to color-correct but would leave me with a speckled dress. The light also didn’t help set the scene at all. I want the light that I use to compliment the moments and the interactions and this was not helping me tell my story in a clear

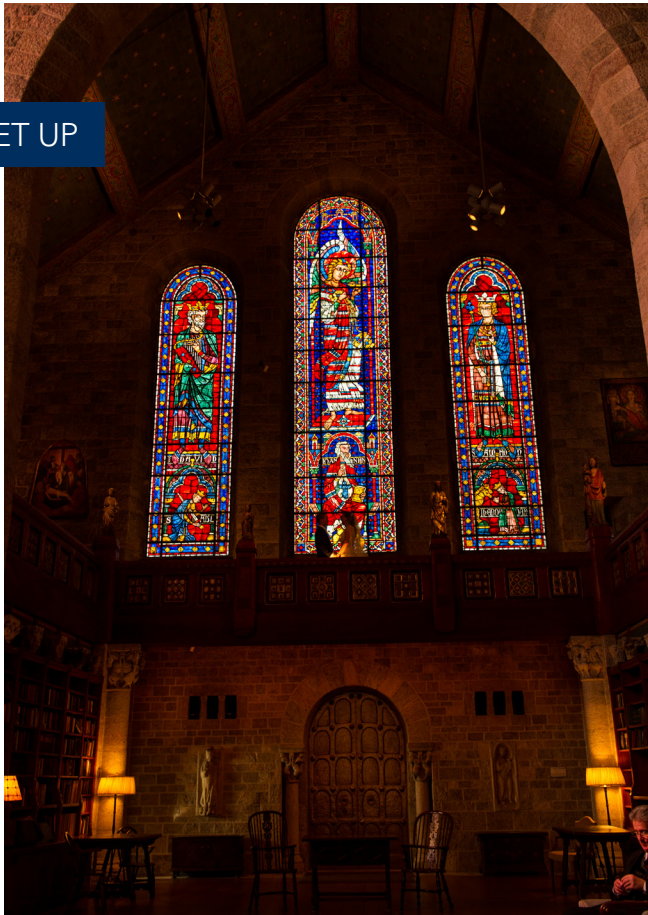
I kept my f-stop at f/3.5 so that the three faces, which were close to each other, would be in focus yet the window and the pews would be less crisp. I focused on her sisters’ face and recomposed slightly - I do my best to create each image in camera and rarely crop my images after the fact unless it’s to straighten a horizon. I also knew that my camera would be fooled by the light coming through the window so I would either need to switch to manual and change my settings or change my exposure compensation settings. I first tried this shot at +.5 on my exposure compensation but it wasn’t enough and the faces of my subjects were far too dark. I then changed it to +1.3 and was able to get a perfect exposure. The faces of my subjects were lit enough to illuminate their expressions while still being able to retain some of the detail in the stained-glass windows. Because the light from the windows was so strong, even changing my exposure compensation dial meant that the shadows in the rest of the room would be very prominent.

This is the image directly out of camera with only a slight vignette added.

As far as how I directed my subjects to create this photograph it was really rather simple. I started off with Erin sitting down and just asked her to talk to her mother and her sister. After taking a few frames of the scene I realize that by sitting the bride down it didn’t tell as clear a story as I wanted. So I stepped into the scene, asked her to stand up, and stepped back out so the moments could continue unfolding without my interruption. I did set the scene and ask them to stand there but after that I removed myself so that the natural interaction between the three women could play out. The expressions on their faces and the moments that they created are their own.



SET UP



Nikon D3s  
Shutter Speed 1/80 sec  
Manua  
f/5.6  
ISO 1600  
24-70mm at 62mm  
EV 0  
Off-camera flash - M at 1/2 power.

I love it when clients put great thought into where they want to have their family photographs taken. Erin and John procured a permit to shoot at the gorgeous Glencairn Museum in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania. We had free reign to shoot anywhere we wanted indoors or outdoors, but I chose to work on the family formals indoors for a variety of reasons. It was cold outside, and I didn't want any of the family members or bridal party to be cold and uncomfortable. I knew that I could make lovely images for them outdoors but it wouldn't be worth it if all they remembered was being miserable during that part of the day. I also knew that I would be taking a lot of photographs of the bride and groom outdoors and I wanted to vary the look of the portraits. It was easy to control the flash and background in the even light of the indoor space so I chose to stay inside for the family portraits.

If you take a look at the setup shot that details what the room looks like you can see that it's a huge, cavernous space. There are steps that lead down into the room and when I took the set-up shot I was standing on those steps.

When I first began the family formals I felt certain that I wanted to show the entire room and I felt that the only way to do that would be to use a wider angle than I usually would. Normally I like to shoot family formals with a long lens, but I simply couldn't see how to do that and show the entire room. I set Erin and her mother on the main floor and used my 24-70mm at 62mm which immediately displeased me. I didn't like the excessive amount of stone wall in the background and my inability to really show the stained glass window. I didn't like the golden door behind the bride and her mother and while I liked how the light looked, I was bothered by the rest of the scene. Is this a perfectly fine image? Of course it is. It's technically sound and well-lit, but I felt that I wasn't reaching my full potential in the space. It was time to look for something better.

When trying to figure out how to shoot a better photograph than the one I have shot already I know that I have to look harder at the space I'm in. I turned around in a full circle, looking at all walls as potential backgrounds, all lenses as potential tools, and every single thing that could go into making a new image. I immediately noticed that the room I was in was separated from another room right next door by just a set of steps. If I walked up the steps I stood on when I photographed the set-up image I could walk into the room next door and shoot from that room. Limiting myself to only shooting in one room meant that I was missing the huge potential from shooting from one room into the other!



Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/80 sec  
Manual  
f/5.6  
ISO 1250  
70-200mm lens at 145mm  
EV 0  
Off-camera flash - M at 1/2 power.



Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/80 sec  
Manual  
f/5.6  
ISO 1250  
70-200mm lens at 145mm  
EV 0  
Off-camera flash - M at 1/2 power.

I HAVE TO LOOK HARDER  
AT THE SPACE I AM IN  
WHEN TRYING TO SHOOT  
A BETTER PHOTOGRAPH

I brought Erin and her parents up onto the steps and shot straight into the room using my beloved longer lens. This eliminated the distracting stone wall, brought much more of the stained glass window into the final image, and let me light the clients in a way that illuminated them while leaving me with a darker, more dramatic background. There is a huge difference between the first image I attempted and the second image that it almost looks like it's in a totally different place.

My assistant is holding our family formal lighting set-up for these images. That consists of a monopod, an SD9 battery pack, a SB910 Nikon flash, a Phottix transmitter/receiver set, and a Rogue Flashbender attached to the flash. She is standing about eight feet from the clients and four feet to my left with the light on the monopod raised up to about nine feet from the ground and aimed slightly towards the clients. We didn't have to worry about casting shadows on the walls or floor because the clients were raised up the steps.



CASE STUDY 13



After photographing the family formals for Erin and John I had a bit of time to spend with the couple alone. While John was filming with his groomsmen for the videographers I took the opportunity to photograph Erin alone. If you look at the set-up shots of my assistant sitting at the piano bench and of Erin standing next to the piano you can get a sense of what the scene itself was like. A huge glass window stood next to a grand piano in a room not unlike the space we used for the family photographs. The light coming in from the window was extraordinarily strong and the light in the room was dim.

I had Erin stand directly in the rush of light coming from the window and positioned her so that she was behind the piano with the window at her left (camera right). You can see where the light is coming from by looking at how it falls across her face. I chose to position her this way so that we could see her reflection in the dark piano top and so that the light was striking her directly rather than from the side or back.

The room around her became even darker and the piano top blended into that blackness after I changed my exposure compensation to -1.7. I've included an example of what the image would have looked like had I trusted my in-camera meter and it's completely

Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/2000 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/2.8  
ISO 100  
70-200mm lens at 70mm  
EV -1.7



SET UP



SET UP



BLOWN OUT



blown out. I've mentioned many times that we have to be wiser than our camera bodies and know when the light that we are using is fooling our internal meter. When I changed my exposure compensation to -1.7 I achieved a correct exposure on Erin's face and the rest of the room faded into darkness.

I am often asked how I meter or if I use an external meter to take the light readings on my subject faces. In the past I have used a light meter but over time became so familiar with my different lighting conditions that now I simply meter in my head without even really having to think about it. How do you do that? It takes time. It takes time and experience with different lighting conditions. Eventually you will realize that you are thinking less about your camera settings and shooting more intuitively. The only way to truly reach this place in your shooting career is to keep trying. If you need an external light meter there is absolutely no shame in that! I would rather see you pull out a light meter and hold it in front of your subjects faces to achieve the correct exposure than not achieve the correct exposure at all!

Telling you my settings and showing you how I use exposure compensation should not be construed as saying that you have to become an aperture priority shooter. If shooting manual is the way that you prefer to approach the day, please don't change simply because I advocate a different shooting method! I truly don't care how you go about getting to the correct exposure to take a beautiful photograph - just get there!



Once John had finished with the videographer and Erin was done being photographed by the piano the three of us headed outside for some images of the two of them alone. I love shooting in the late winter light; it has a clarity and crispness that is rarely seen at other times of the year. We were outdoors at 3:45pm, which is a wonderful time of day in the winter months. It was mid-February so the sun was still setting at an earlier hour and by 3:30pm the sun was getting low in the sky.



SET UP

The set-up shots do a great job of showing precisely what the scene looked like. We walked outside of Glencairn and I found a lovely patch of light right on the concrete pathway. When there is snow on the ground or it's been raining I do my best to keep the clients off of the grass; the last thing that I want is to get a bride's dress wet if I can avoid it! I asked my clients to stand together on the pathway and "snuggle." I'm not the photographer for clients who want to be strictly posed all day long or clients who want their images to have that disaffected fashion tone that is so popular amongst some shooters. I prefer to capture my clients interacting as they normally would so I usually begin a portrait session by asking them to "snuggle" or "just be together!" Then I can gauge how comfortable they are in front of the camera and make adjustments to the scene from there. Are they totally awkward? Maybe I'll ask them to take a walk or give them a specific list of things to do. Are they completely comfortable? Then all I have to do is set the scene and know that they will provide the moments!

## CASE STUDY 14

Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/640 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/4  
ISO 100  
70-200mm lens at 200mm  
EV -.3





You can see where the light is coming from by looking at the shadow on the ground in front of Erin and John in the two setup shots. It's coming from directly behind them; just look at them and then look at me. The light is falling directly between us on the same line between me and the sun. I tell my clients that they will know they're in the right spot when they can feel the sun on the side of their face - but nowhere else.

SET UP



After setting the scene the first thing that I did was shoot through the branches on the tree in front of me. I loved the delicate texture of the branches and the leading line they provided. It created a beautiful pattern in the foreground that drew you directly to the couple. I then stepped just a bit to the side and continued to photograph their interaction with no branches in the front of the shot. This allowed me to have an unfiltered look at the scene and resulted in a crisper, cleaner final frame. I made sure that they were juxtaposed consistently against a dark background so that the light around their faces and bodies provided a strong contrast between the couple and the trees. In the final frame I asked John to step out and I photographed Erin alone in the same lighting. Three frames, three distinctly different images, same scene - this is why I love wedding photography so much! You can do many things without changing locations just by varying your plan of attack.



Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/400 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/4  
ISO 200  
70-200mm lens at 200mm  
EV -.3

I PREFER TO CAPTURE  
MY CLIENTS INTERACTING  
AS THEY NATURALLY WOULD



Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/400 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/3.2  
ISO 100  
70-200mm lens at 200mm  
EV 0



SET UP



On our way back from photographing Erin and John together I saw a patch of lovely light outside of Glencairn. I knew that it would make a lovely setting for a photograph but I wanted to do something different than just a standard portrait of the bride and groom together. Erin's sister had been with us outside, holding Erin's bouquet when we didn't need it, and I asked her if she'd be a part of our scene.

I had several decisions to make about how to use the light in this scene. If you look at the shadows on the ground you can see the direction the light is coming from. Did I want to put the light at Erin's back? Her side? Use it directly? In the end I chose to face her into the light for a variety of reasons. If I had put the light at her back I would have been shooting out into the courtyard which would have looked no different from the outdoor images we had already shot. By aiming away from the walkway all I would have seen was greenery and trees and that would have defeated the purpose of putting her in the archway entirely. If I had stood in the courtyard and shot into the archway, the distance from my subject to the back wall would have been

Nikon D3s  
Shutter Speed 1/1600 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/4  
ISO 200  
24-70mm lens at 36mm  
EV -1.7

short and I felt it would have distracted from the composition. In the end I chose to have Erin face out towards the light so that I could use it's drama to enhance the scene taking place under the archway.

I try to make sure that everything that goes into the composition of my images is deliberate. I positioned Erin in just the right spot to have her head juxtaposed against the window in the background and then positioned myself in the correct place to capture that angle. I also wanted the moment to feel genuine. I asked

Erin's sister to help her stand in that location and her sister naturally smoothed out her train and began fluffing her veil in preparation for what she thought was going to be a portrait of her sister alone. In fact, what I really wanted was the moments between the two women while the scene was contrived, the moments following was real.

I chose to photograph the scene with the 24-70mm lens.





NO MATTER HOW FANCY OR SIMPLE A VENUE,  
IT'S MY JOB TO MAKE SURE THAT IT LOOKS BEAUTIFUL

The misconception that a “good wedding” requires tons of details and tons of money spent on the various parts of the day is simply not true. A wedding is about the marriage, not the stuff. That said, is it nice when we show up to a reception to see thousands of dollars of up-lighting and pin spots on tables? Sure. But does it matter? It does not. I’m just as comfortable in a catering hall than in a castle and the work that we provide for our clients on their wedding day should be beautiful no matter where you are. Celebrations is a sweet catering hall in Bensalem, Pennsylvania and working there was an absolute pleasure. The staff was kind and helpful, the catering manager was caring and completely on-point, and the ambience was fantastic. It’s not fancy or fussy but it’s warm and welcoming and really, that’s all that matters. I could and would gladly work there every single weekend.

No matter how fancy or simple a venue, it’s my job to make sure that it looks beautiful. As far as flattering the space, the lens that I turned to was my 70-200mm all the way at 200mm. I’m sure many of you faithful readers are rolling your eyes at my unabashed love for this lens and this focal length but I’ve yet to find another that does the same job of flattering a difficult reception space. It brings the tables closer together in appearance, helps eliminate difficult backgrounds, compresses the details, and does a clean job of showing the scene. While I will sometimes use my macro lens for tiny details of each table the 70-200mm at 200mm is my go-to for larger table details. You can see how it compresses the floral arrangement right behind the “Table 17” framed number and the message book next to it. I believe this creates a sense of intimacy in the images and makes the entire space feel more cozy and inviting.



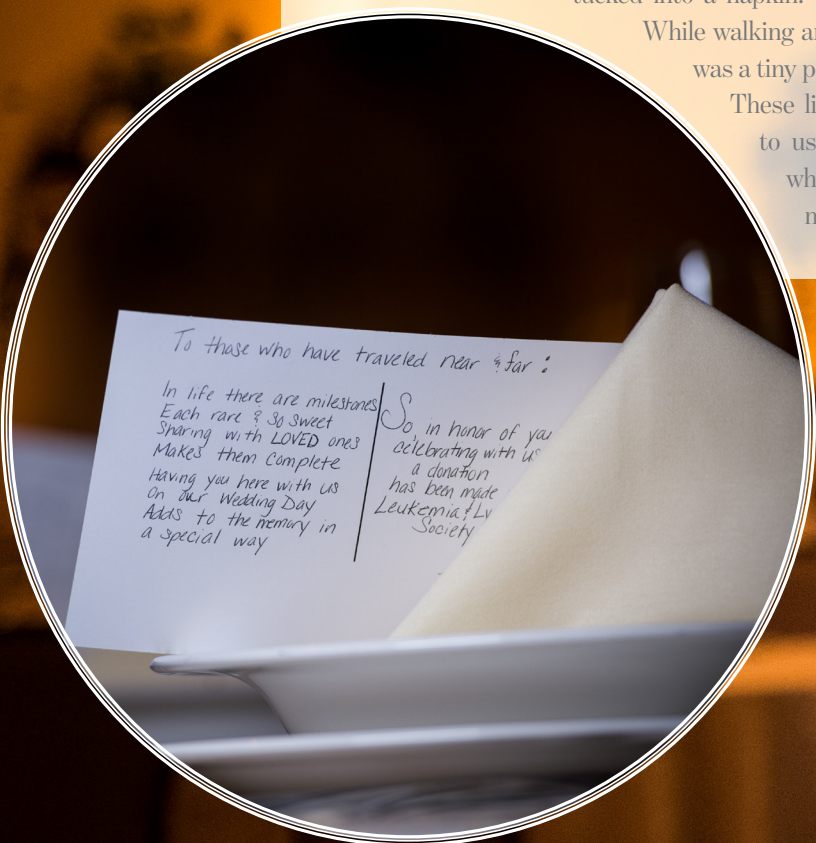
Since there were no additional lights added to the event space it was up to us to illuminate the scene without overwhelming it. My assistant held the Ice Light just to the side of every image here. The positioning of the light varied slightly but it was always about two to four feet above whatever we were photographing and just to the side of the focal point of the image. For the vertical image of the single centerpiece she was off camera left holding the light four feet from the side of the table and angled down from two feet above. This created a lovely wash of light on the centerpiece that didn’t spill onto the tables or surrounding scene, effectively isolating the centerpiece with light. The clients will never look at this image and say “Nice video light!” or “Is that flash?” They’ll simply remember that the reception hall was beautiful and each table looked incredible.

Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/160 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/2.8  
ISO 2000  
70-200mm lens at 200mm  
EV 0  
Lit by Ice Light at full power



I try to make my way from table to table and see if there are different elements at each setting. In this instance all of the tables had the same centerpiece so by the time I photographed one I had really photographed them all. I made sure to get a good tight vertical of the table settings and then I stepped back and showed more of the scene with a horizontal image. Working with the longer focal length I was able to make it feel like the tables were closer together while also compressing the centerpiece in the foreground off of the rest of the scene. We lit the horizontal image with the Ice Light from off camera right at the same distance as the vertical image so that the lighting was consistent from one table shot to another.

After working on the overall scene and each table individually I start scouring harder to find the little hidden gems in the room. An orchid on a place setting. The tiny menu tucked into a napkin. A small bud in a thimble-sized vase. While walking around Celebrations I noticed that there was a tiny postcard inserted into each table napkin. These little details might not seem like much to us - especially for those photographers who are not fond of detail shots - but they might be very meaningful to our clients.



Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/160 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/2.8  
ISO 2000  
70-200mm lens at 200mm  
EV 0.  
Lit by Ice Light at full power.





# CASE STUDY 17

If you've read this far into these Case Studies you'll have seen a recurring theme when it comes to ring shots. You'll often find me sitting by a window with the curtains open and sheers closed. I just love this quality of light and you can achieve it whether it's sunny or cloudy outdoors. I wanted to include this series of images to show that I don't always nail the ring shot right away! Sometimes it takes awhile for me to get it right and I have to work the scene for a bit.

I just want to reiterate that this cannot take up a huge part of your day. I almost always have less than five or ten minutes to accomplish these images before I have to move on and start documenting the getting-ready process so I have to work fast!

I started off by placing Rosanna's ring on the floral crown she wore the night prior for her rehearsal. While this image is completely fine I wanted more. I felt like I'd shot this image before and I couldn't seem to get the crown placed precisely right. The flowers, being a day old, were starting to wilt and I didn't like the droopy appearance of the blooms. Every time I sat the ring on the roses the petals slumped and didn't look fresh or new. I toyed with the scene by trying first including and then discarding the crown's ribbon but after a few seconds of working on it decided that wasn't the approach I wanted to take and I moved on.

I next took a mirror from the bathroom and tried to get a nice reflection shot. While the image was clear and technically sound I still wasn't thrilled with my results so I scrapped that set-up within seconds and moved on to my next idea. I knew that I had my lighting the way I wanted it and my camera settings were perfect but I had yet to find the perfect way to set the shot.

I took a brief look around the room to try and find something to add an extra pop to my image and found two beaded bells. I placed the bells on the mirror and struck out with shot #1. The bells were simply too close to the ring. If I adjusted my f-stop to make the bells more out of focus I would lose focus on the ring so I stopped trying with this shot and decided it was time to move the bells.

Ah ha! With this next shot I was getting closer and closer to what I was looking for. I placed the bells about six inches behind the rings and was able to achieve a beautiful background. Upon further inspection this looked way too much like images I had shot before so I took one extra moment to finesse the shot before moving on.

JACKPOT. I ditched the mirror and grabbed a marble side table, placing it precisely where the chair was in the set-up shot. This gave me a reflective surface with a bit of interesting texture and color to work with. I took the bride's earrings and placed them about seven inches behind the ring



1

2

3

4

5

Nikon D4  
Shutter Speed 1/60 sec  
Aperture Priority,  
f/11  
ISO 8000  
105mm macro lens,  
EV -1.3

to add dimension to the background of the frame. Then I took the bells and placed them an inch from my camera lens so that I would have a graphically interesting vignette that serves to push your eyes directly to the ring.

From start to finish this entire tableau of images took less than five minutes to complete and the settings remained the same for the whole series. In the early days of my career I could have never worked this fast nor this efficiently but over the years I was able to speed up my skills. How do you learn how to do this? Practice. And practice some more. I promise it will come to you if you're willing to put in the time!



SET UP



## CASE STUDY 18

If you look closely at the set-up shot for this scene you can see my assistant, Sandra, hiding behind the curtains. I can't stress enough the fantastic dynamic between her and I. We've been working together for almost five years now and she isn't just my assistant, she's my family. She knows precisely what I need and when and what a shot requires in order to succeed. I could work a wedding alone but it would be extremely difficult. I have often said that a good assistant is worth their weight in gold and Sandra is the best of the best.

What do you do if you don't have an assistant or don't have one that you trust fully just yet? You can shoot alone if you really want to, but the burden of everything will be on you and only you. Parking the car? You'll have to do it, even if you really need to just jump out and run. Changing a lens? You'll have to do it, even if it's in the middle of something important. Card error? You'll have to troubleshoot it no matter what. I'm not saying that you have to have an assistant but I know that having mine means I am free to shoot all day long and I have someone there to not only help but to have my back. That, to me, is crucial.



Rosanna wanted an image of her shoes and I was only too happy to comply. I knew that getting married at the Plaza had been a lifetime dream of hers and I wanted to bring as much of the room and the city into the shot as possible without distracting from the main subject. I set the mirror from the bathroom onto the window ledge so that I could have something to set the shoes on that would raise it above the windowpane. I also loved the gold accent of the mirror as a base for the shoes. I closed the burgundy curtain to give it a sense of place and juxtaposed the shoes against the city outside to further cement our location.

I had been working with the macro lens for the images prior to this one and felt comfortable using the same lens for this shot - even though it's not a macro shot! It's still a 105mm lens and the compression brought the city background right up behind the shoes, making it feel like the buildings were just behind them. I chose f/3.2 for my f-stop because I wanted a more shallow depth of field for the final frame.

Nikon D4  
Shutter speed 1/60 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/3.2  
ISO 560  
105mm macro lens  
EV -0.7





## CASE STUDY 19

Ah, the first look! I am quite vocal about how much I dislike this new trend - but I am only outspoken about it to other photographers. When it comes to my clients my job is to tell them the pros and cons of the first look and let them decide on their own what they want to do. At most Jewish weddings that I photograph they opt for a first look because they're going to see each other pre-ceremony at their ketubah signing anyhow.

New York is an especially tricky place to photograph because there are just so many people. The sidewalks are crowded, the parks are a mob scene, and anywhere iconic is thronging with pedestrians. The weekdays are impossible and Saturdays are epic disasters. Am I being melodramatic? Yes, a bit, but Manhattan is just such a crowded location it makes "quick portraits outside" really difficult and first looks outdoors nearly impossible to keep intimate and private.

If we are stuck indoors for the first look I always try to see if I can find a decent light source. I was so lucky to have these beautiful windows to work with for Rosanna and Brian! They had first mentioned possibly doing their first look on the stairs but when I took a closer look at the staircase I realized that there would be no light on the scene unless we added it ourselves and I am always cautious with flash during a first look because I can't be sure of the ways the bride and groom will twist and turn while hugging and enjoying the experience. We also had two videographers on the scene and I didn't want to add a flash or additional light to an already complicated mix.

Rosanna loved the staircase and I did too - but I knew I needed something more. I saw the windows at the bottom of the staircase and thought that would be a wonderful place to have Brian stand while waiting for Rosanna to come towards him. This accomplished many things for the final photograph. There was light on Brian's face. I was able to see the entire scene, not just the staircase. I was able to switch back and forth between Brian and Rosanna to get each of their reactions as she walked towards him. Lastly, I was able to show the scene in a way I haven't seen other photographers do. Most first looks I've seen at the Plaza have taken place on the stairs but I had yet to see one in front of the stairs.

My 24-70mm was acting a bit buggy that day so I pulled out a lens that I thought I regretted purchasing: the 35mm f/1.4. It's a sharp, gorgeous lens and I felt that this scenario would benefit from such a lovely lens. I ended up really loving it and it might not be such a bad purchase after all!

I WAS ABLE TO SHOW THE SCENE  
IN A WAY I HAVEN'T SEEN  
OTHER PHOTOGRAPHERS DO

Nikon D3s  
Shutter Speed 1/160 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/3.5  
ISO 8000  
35mm lens  
EV 0

SET UP





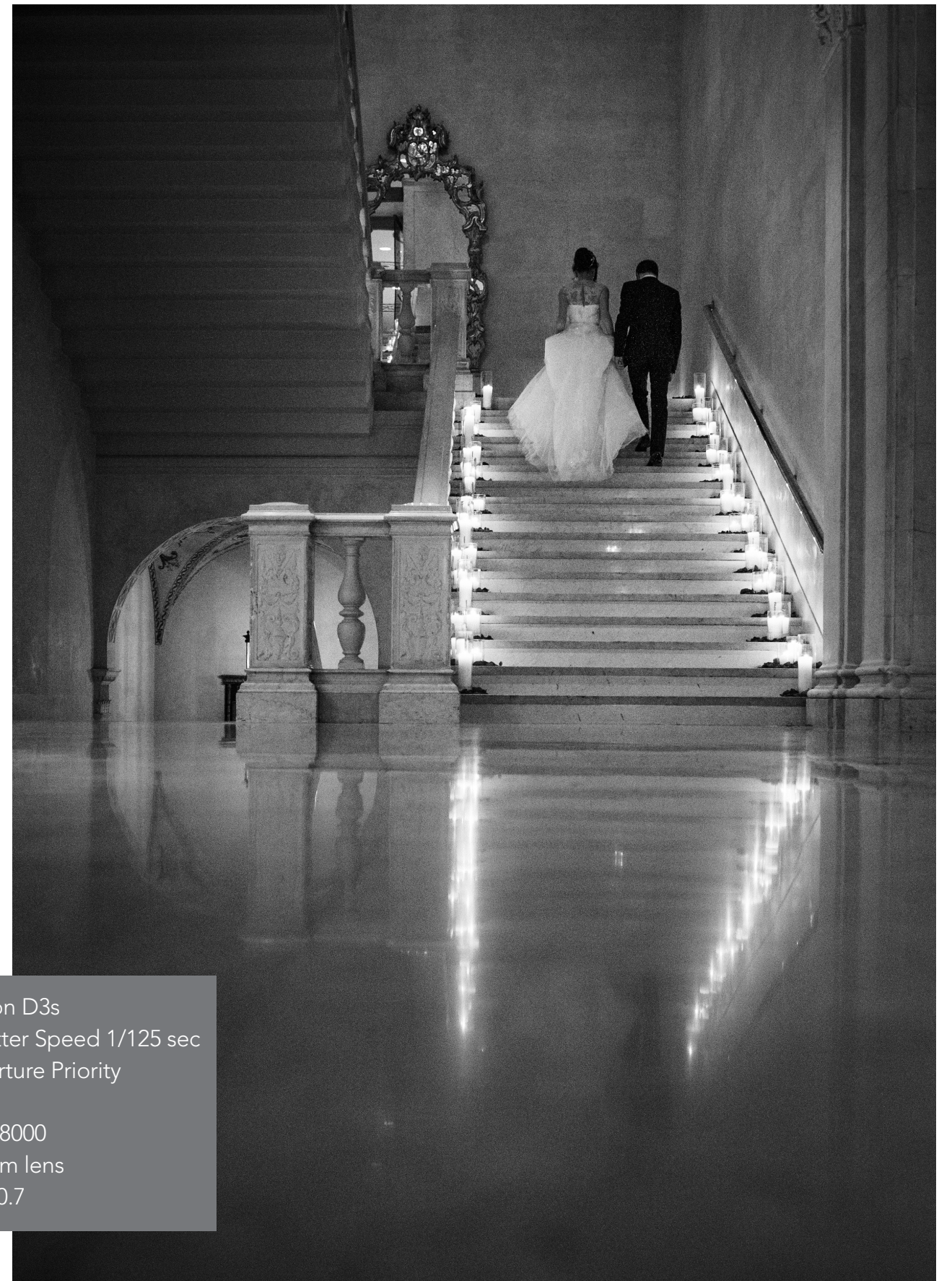
SET UP

## CASE STUDY 20

As you can see from this set-up shot there were many cooks in the kitchen for Rosanna and Brian's wedding day! Besides Sandra and me, there were two videographers (who were awesome to work with!), two coordinators from the Plaza, and a variety of family and bridal party members who showed up to watch the portraits. In the past this would have stressed me out but with time and experience I am no longer afraid to work with a crowd watching. How does one get over that fear? I'm not trying to be too simplistic with my answer but you just do. I don't have tips or tricks to be stronger in a group of people but the way I got through it was removing myself personally from the situation and continually thinking "None of this is personal; it's just business." I didn't worry about what people were thinking of me if it was just work. I wasn't afraid of having a client see me misstep if it was just business. That may sound like a little thing but divorcing my personal emotions from the interactions on a wedding day really helped me out. I'm not saying that I don't feel anything while I'm shooting - that's not it at all. I actually feel the emotions of the day strongly, it's just that I don't get nervous any more because I am confident in my abilities and even when I'm not, I'm confident in my ability to look like I am!

I mentioned this staircase in the previous section about the first look and discussed how I'd normally like to light the staircase were I going to shoot on it. I did photograph them on the staircase at one point in the day and lit it quite nicely but sometimes I just want a gritty, documentary image with a photojournalistic feel and adding additional light makes it feel almost too perfect. I loved the reflection in the marble floor and simply asked Rosanna and Brian to walk up and down the staircase and talk to each other.

We talk on and on about making complicated portraits in complicated light but sometimes simple is best!



Nikon D3s  
Shutter Speed 1/125 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/3.5  
ISO 8000  
35mm lens  
EV -0.7





# CASE STUDY 21

Nikon D3s  
Shutter Speed 1/160 sec  
Aperture Priority  
f/2  
ISO 3600  
35mm lens,  
EV -0.3

## BRIAN REACHED OUT AND TOOK ROSANNA'S HAND AND I KNEW I HAD MY SHOT.

I love the iPhone set-up shot of this image because I look like I'm literally just lying down on the job! In reality that could not be further from the truth!

After wandering around the Plaza and taking some truly delightful photographs of Rosanna and Brian we went back towards our original starting point to meet up with the family and bridal party for the formal part of the portraits. On our way back I was taken once again with the window that Brian stood by for the first look. When photographing the first look I had only seen the light from the side with Brian facing into it. Now less than an hour later I was seeing the light in a new way. As the sun made its way down in the sky the light came into the window at a different angle and attracted me to it in a new way. I didn't want to use it as a side light now but as a back light.



I checked out the window sill before asking Rosanna to sit down because the last thing I wanted was for her to sit on a filthy ledge and dirty her dress! I then asked her to “just perch” on the sill and talk to her husband. Brian reached out and took Rosanna's hand and I knew I had my shot. If they hadn't interacted naturally I would have asked them to reach out towards each other but they were lovely in front of the camera and needed no further instruction!

I framed the image as a vertical because I liked the composition with their reflections in the floor and the sconces on the wall. I liked the starkness of the symmetry juxtaposed against the softness of their interaction and her dress.

I am completely torn between the color and the black and white versions of these images. Each have their own strengths and powers. The black and white focuses on the symmetry and the light. The color adds warmth. If I'm stuck between the two I will always proof in color because it's much easier to convert to black and white later rather than have to fetch the RAW file out of my archives and convert it back to color from black and white.





Nikon D3s  
Shutter Speed 1/60 sec  
manual  
f/4  
ISO 1600  
28mm lens  
EV -0  
On-camera flash set to Auto



## CASE STUDY 22

SET UP

Can you see me at all in the behind-the-scenes shot for these images? No? I can't either! This shot accurately portrays what it's like to be in the midst of a wild and crazy hora. You're totally lost in the crowd, entirely buried in people, and working to get your shots without being knocked down!

I love ambitious lighting. I love off-camera flash. I love video light. But the hora is not the place for any of these things; at least not for me. The scene is moving so quickly that I can't control the angle of my off-camera flash unless I have a flash set in every corner and that is not a look that I favor. I don't like the entire dance floor to be lit to look differently than it looked to actually be there so I try to keep my off-camera flash work to a bare minimum; enhancing the light in the room rather than overwhelming it.

For something as fast and wild as a hora I am simply looking to capture quick and easy dancing images while keeping my gear to a minimum.

Because I knew the dance floor would be crowded I opted for the little, light 28mm lens to get a wider perspective. I had my SB910 mounted directly on top of my camera and tilted just a bit behind me to bounce the flash and achieve a more natural look. To compensate for the bit of bounce-back from the flash I chose an ISO of 1600. This and my 1/60 second shutter speed, which was still fast enough to freeze my subject, allowed me to let in a lot of ambient light.

During a hora all I can do is try to capture my fast-moving subjects and wait for the moments - and try to not get trampled!



## NOTES

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.





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