

TOTAL IMAGE

May 2004

Newsletter # 2

Flash Naturally.

Flash need not take over our night photography...Shelton Muller explains how...

While flash is a necessity for every serious photographer, it is being used with more success these days due to improvements in high-speed film and the advantages in digital photography. Faster emulsions mean that flash photography is less objectionable than it used to be. Digital offers the photographer the option to immediately check our results, something which was not available to 35mm photographers previously. So, how can we use flash more effectively and naturally in our photographs?

Balancing Day and Night

The key to making flash appear less obvious in your photographs is in balancing it with available light. This is a very successful technique used by professionals in wedding photography and location portraits, but is just as complimentary in your family photographs and general snaps.



Every SLR camera has a top sync speed for flash. At this speed, the camera can still allow for the entire burst of flash to expose the film before the shutter closes. These speeds will vary from camera to camera but usually go no higher than 1/250th of a second.



High tech flashguns make ambient flash techniques easier

However, just because this is the suggested flash synchronization speed, it does not mean that it is your only option. At 1/250th of a second, very little available light in a standard indoor environment is permitted to reach the film – and here is your first mistake.

Flash will synchronise at all speeds *up to* the suggested top speed, and so you can quite easily select a shutter speed slower than that – perhaps one that more closely reflects the actual ambient exposure. By so doing, you allow for more detail of your surroundings to burn in on the negative. By using faster films like 400 ISO or even some of the new 800 ISO emulsions from companies like Kodak, Fuji and Konica, your shutter speeds are not always impractical or impossible to hand hold. If they are, use a tripod or other means of support. You may even need to ensure that your subject doesn't move too much.



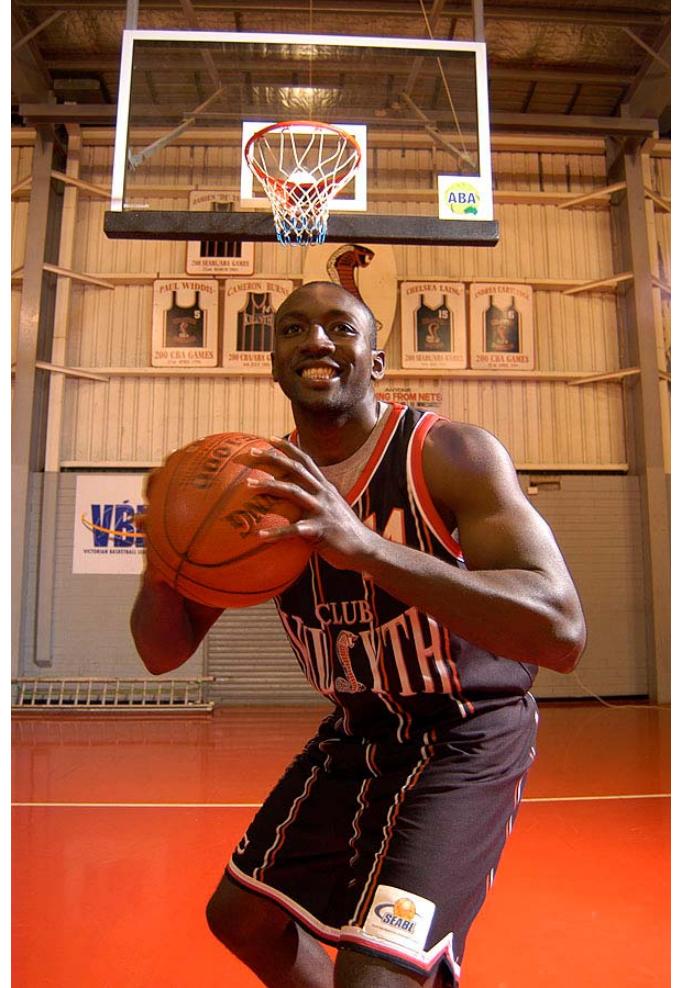
Balancing flash with ambient exposure is not difficult.

However, there is an added variable here you need to understand. Built in flash units such as those found in most modern SLR cameras will compensate for your change in exposure. It is the same with professional flash systems that are designed to work in conjunction with the camera's metering system. However, even in these cases, set your flash to 'rear curtain sync' mode so that the flash fires at the end of the overall exposure and does not overexpose your photograph – which it might do if it fires at the beginning of the exposure.

If you don't have a through-the-lens-flash metering system, your flash will not 'know' that you have used a slower shutter speed. It has been designed to be the chief source of light and so you will need to 'trick it'. Thyristor flashguns (flashguns which have their own 'auto' mode) can quite easily be used to balance well with ambient light. These flashguns work according to a selected aperture to correspond with the ISO film loaded.

If, for argument's sake, the flashgun suggests that f4 be used, simply set your camera to f5.6 or even f8, thus reducing its effect on your photograph. If your shutter speed is set to agree with your aperture for an available light exposure, your photograph will appear as a more naturally lit image. Your flash fires as usual, but because your aperture is smaller than it should be, its effect is visibly reduced. Using this principle and experimenting with it, your flash still enhances your picture, but is not the most predominant source of light. Vary your shutter speeds and apertures to find the balance you prefer.

Total Image Newsletter #2



Understanding the balance between your flash and available light can make your flash a far more beneficial accessory. It isn't hard. All it takes is a roll of faster film, some experimentation and a little know how.

Want More Photo Tips?

Go to www.total-image.com.au to receive this free photo newsletter regularly!

For more information, Shelton Muller can be contacted at shelton@total-image.com.au

Be sure to get your copy of Total Image, Better Pictures or Photo News from your local participating photo retailer. The autumn issue is out now and... The winter edition will be out soon!

