

Though a simple lighting setup will do, going the extra step adds extra punch, drama and dimension.

BY DON CHICK, M.PHOTOGR., CPP

Kiss of light

ACCENT LIGHTING FOR PORTRAITURE

Properly executed accent lighting can add so much dimension and drama to a portrait. Depending on your main light modifier, adding accent lighting can be as simple as positioning a reflector behind the subject to redirect the main light back into the scene and onto your subject.

Early in my career, I wanted to get dimensionality in my images. I adopted a simple lighting setup: for the main light, I mounted a 4x6-foot Larson soft box on a studio strobe unit; for a fill light, I used a 42x72-inch Larson Reflectasol reflector. Placed close to the background, the main light sufficiently lit the background, eliminating the need for separate lighting. I placed the subject close to the background as well.

Portraits I made in this basic setup were successful enough in print competitions to be accepted into the PPA Loan Collection. My clients, too, raved about their portraits, but I began to want even more drama and dimensionality. However subtly, my personal style was beginning to coalesce. Fast-forward to today. Now I'm using a background light, a hair light and an accent light, my favorite light by far. I enjoy the dimension and sense of shape and form that this kiss of light brings to the portrait.

If you're using a large light modifier on your main light, the easiest way to add accent lighting to your setup is to use a reflector that efficiently bounces light into the scene. A photographer friend of mine

uses a portable full-length mirror, the framed kind that you'd mount on a wall or door. The mirror is so efficient at reflecting light that he has to carefully feather or angle the reflection to get the desired amount of light falling onto the subject.

Another option is a 42x72-inch Larson Reflectasol made with metallic silver fabric (\$330). I've used one for years with excellent results. In **Figure 1**, the lighting diagram shows the accent light in a starting position. If you desire more light on the face, including the bridge of the nose, move the reflector toward the camera position. If you want the accent light to highlight only one side of the subject's face, position the reflector further behind the subject.

The Reflectasol (**Figure 2**) frame folds up for convenient transport and storage. A

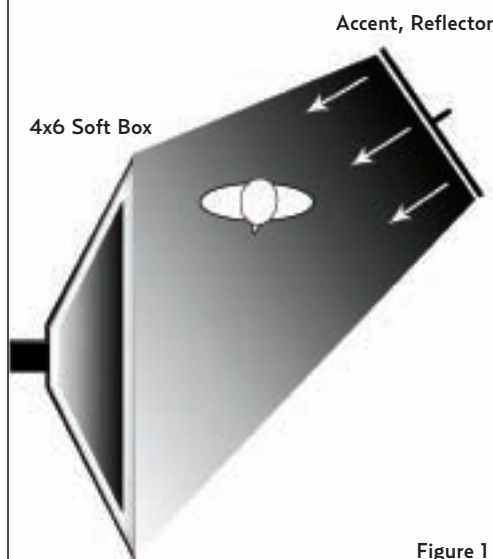


Figure 1

All images ©Don Chick

Figure 2

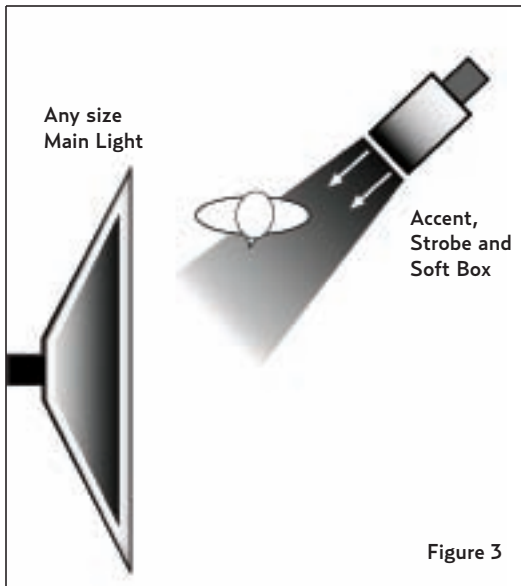


large reflector works well with a medium to large soft box attached to the main light. With a smaller reflector, you need a powered light to get the light onto the subject (**Figure 3**).

There are several options for accent lighting. The one I've used most often is a reflector with a set of barn doors attached (**Figure 4**). A 7-inch reflector (7AB/R) comes standard with strobes from Paul C. Buff. The four-way barn doors (LMBD4) cost an additional \$49. This setup has worked well in my small studio, but because it's such a small light modifier and I place it so close to the background, it doesn't spread the light vertically as much as I'd like in some instances. When I want the light to cover more of the subject, I use a 14x48 Larson Soft Strip (\$299) with an egg crate (\$195) attached (**Figure 5**). The egg crate constrains the light spread both horizontally and vertically, yet provides sufficient coverage for any portrait. You can use a soft box without an egg crate or louvers, but to avoid lens flare, I advise flagging the camera from any stray light.

The accent lighting options above are

THE GOODS: LIGHTING



meant to be set on the opposite side of the subject from the main light. Sometimes it's desirable to place accent light on the same side as the main light, and sometimes dual accent lighting—on both sides of the subject—is best. It depends on how you want the final image to look, and how the lighting will express your personal vision. Also, how much time and effort are you willing to invest in creating complex lighting setups?

It takes an additional strobe and light modifier to add a light on the same side as the main, but that little extra light may be all you need to take your image to the next level.



The portrait of Patrick (Figure 6) clearly shows the effects of a subtle accent light on the left side of his face (camera right). The telltale signs are the extra light on the left side of his temple and his fingers, and the subtle extra on the folds in the left side of his shirt. The accent light in this image was accomplished with a 42x72 Larson Reflectasol.

In my view, with an accent light, less is more. If the first thing that catches your eye in an image is the accent light, it's too strong. Accent light should be a member of the supporting cast rather than the star. The late Don Blair likened accent light to garlic—a bit makes a dish delicious, too much is ruinous.

Experiment with all of these methods, then compare the results in your images. You'll know when it's right for you. ■

