# Mastering Wedding Light

By Claude Jodoin

***Opposite:*** *I took this image on a sunny day with clouds moving in and out. The exposure had to be made to favor on-camera flash with variable background brightness in the resultant backlighting on the hair. This is the easiest way to deal with multiple group photos while quickly getting accurate exposures on the faces. In these situations one must rely on the accuracy of on-camera TTL flash for consistent exposures. I set the color balance on the camera to flash, and had to deal with any color variations occurring from intermittent cloud cover in post-processing. The full-frame camera was set to ISO 200 with a 24mm zoom setting. The exposure was 1/125 at f/8, which rendered the reasonable background brightness when a cloud diffused the sun and a reasonable hairlight/background overexposure when it didn't.*

***Above:*** *This is a close-up portrait of the bride and groom done by modified sunlight. I instructed my assistant to grab one of the many tablecloths that were used to make a white stage for the wedding ceremony. By having two people hold the large tablecloth at a horizontal angle, and by positioning the bride and groom so that they were both struck with the identical light intensity and quality, I was able to quickly create this portrait with the same quality as a large softbox in the studio. The Canon 30D was set to ISO 200, the lens set to 70mm and the exposure was 1/400 at f/5.6. A calibrated incident meter quickly determined the exposure, and the custom white balance was done using an ExpoDisc pointed at the tablecloth main light.*

No matter what style of photography you practice at weddings, the basics of lighting control are always necessary. As new photographers gain experience, they become more aware of lighting techniques. They develop the ability to recognize the characteristics of light and how to use those characteristics to create better images. Lighting masters certainly "see the light," but more importantly, they think it. By using both your brain and measuring instruments, you can create lighting effects that simply cannot be seen until the moment of exposure. Time exposures with flash come to mind here.

The digital photographer must understand the characteristics of both natural and artificial light to be able to work with either or both together. On- and off-camera flash can be used to enhance the scene. The color and light quality variables at weddings make commercial photographers cringe—it's a constant challenge to maintain control of it all.

Whenever you walk into a new scene, you must analyze the available light characteristics for intensity, color, direction and quality. The best photographers, even of the photojournalistic style, do this.

Many photographers prefer to take full

advantage of their cameras' automatic features, including electronic TTL flash as well as various program exposure modes. While this practice allows you to capture images with a reasonable amount of quality, it is certainly not always the best way to shoot. Manual methods still provide a greater range of control options. There's more to life than on-camera TTL flash for everything.

For example, it may be to your advantage in terms of efficiency to set up radio-triggered lights at the reception hall to light the entire room, thereby allowing you the freedom to capture without worrying about lighting intensity or quality. But, you need high ceilings to do that.

Working indoors, a photographer is faced with several types of light. Sometimes the dominant light source is artificial with some natural light entering through windows. Other times, the dominant light source is the one coming through the windows, while there is only weak artificial light in the room

***Left:*** *I created this photo using light from several large windows facing the couch. I positioned the bride in the corner of the couch and chose the camera angle to emphasize her eyes. No fill reflector was used. The exposure was determined by an incident meter. The color was corrected by the use of an ExpoDisc. The EOS 5D was set to ISO 800, and the exposure through the 85mm f/1.2 L lens was 1/500 at f/1.8. An Imagenomic Portrait/Glamour plug-in filter added punch to the shot and smoothed out the skin.*

***Bottom left:*** *This image was created with a full-frame EOS 5D and a short zoom set to 17mm. The available tungsten light in the room was metered by an incident meter set to ISO 100. With in-camera noise reduction custom set to on, any exposure beyond one second will automatically trigger noise reduction in a photograph like this, which means a tripod must be used. This option is much better than using a high ISO and hand-holding the camera. This image is an exercise in compositional symmetry and tangency. The exposure was two seconds at f/9.*

***Bottom right:*** *This image had only two AlienBees 400 W/s room lights positioned next to the band's PA speakers on either end of the stage. By turning the power way down and metering at the bridal table about 25 feet away, I was able to blend the flash and ambient together within one stop of each other as you can see from the dimensional look of the image. As always, the lights were triggered by PocketWizard radio slaves. No on-camera flash was used or necessary.*

*This photo was made entirely by available light. I did the initial metering in the back of the room by the arches to establish a target background exposure. I then chose a camera angle and a short zoom lens to include most of the room and the chandelier. The resultant diagonal lines on the floor and the intensity of the window light in the hotel lobby predetermined the position of the bride and groom. I moved back and forth with my camera and meter to determine the exact spot where the bride and groom should stand (this is critical), making them brighter than the room background. Shooting through the ExpoDisc created the gray frame for color correction of the bluish daylight by the camera's full-frame sensor. The camera was set to ISO 800, the lens was zoomed to 32mm and the exposure was 1/125 at f/5.6, handheld.*

(or none at all). The photographer can further modify the light quality and intensity by adding reflectors or additional light from an on- or off-camera flash.

The proper use of all of these lighting choices will ultimately determine the quality of the image. If the quality goal is not reached by lighting technique alone, then you may have to spend extra time in Photoshop to clean up the mess, which can be a real time waster when dealing with several hundred album images. Nailing a high level of quality in-camera as much as possible has a timesaving domino effect on your workflow. I don't know about you, but I would much rather control my image quality "layers" in the three dimensions of the real world rather than in the two dimensions of Photoshop.

All of the images shown were pulled directly from the camera, as shot. Several were smoothed out with a plug-in filter, and one was cropped as a square.

***Claude Jodoin will be presenting a platform program at WPPI 2008 titled "Easy Lighting, Great Results." The program will take place Sunday, March 16 at 1 p.m. in Bally's Silver Ballroom.***

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***Above:*** *I made this image with on-camera flash bounced up into the ceiling while holding the camera high over my head without looking through it. Since I was using a Canon 1D Mark II with a crop factor of 1.3, the 17mm zoom setting was equivalent to about 22mm on a full-frame 35mm camera. The automatic white-balance setting was selected to allow for automated color control of the variable flash power to ambient ratio that occurs when using electronic TTL. The built-in diffuser was put in place along with the small pullout white plastic reflector built into the 580EX flash. This type of on-camera flash lighting for groups on the dance floor is all about the balance to direct ratio of the flash and is determined by ceiling height.*

***Right:*** *I created this image by incident metering the tungsten light in the reception hall and positioning the groom by the doorway where most of the tungsten light illuminates the background and not his face. The exposure on his face and body was done by rotating the camera to a vertical position and bouncing the flash from a large Westcott pop-up white reflector. Setting the color balance on the full-frame chip camera to flash rendered the room lights very warm. The short zoom lens was at 19mm, and the exposure was 1/15 at f/7.1 at ISO 1600. The final color balance was achieved using the highlight eyedropper tool in Photoshop and clicking on the groom's shirt and tie with a 5 x 5 sample and a setting of 242.*