

Monday, January 18. 2010

2010.01.18: [De]thinking Lighting

Patrick Jacob of Inex Design Studio came to me with a table that needed photographing. The table has spent the past two weeks sitting around my studio as I agonized over how to light it. The more I thought about it, the worse the lighting got. Over the past few hours I started working with my really old, really basic, and extremely cheap used Norman lighting system. I finally got the results that I wanted. I'll blog again once the film is back from the lab and I am thinking of shooting some Ilford HP5+ and pushing it to ISO3200 in HC-110 dilution B for a few of the angles to see what happens. 4x5 Portra 160VC rated at ISO 100 used as the primary film type with some Fuji Provia 100F to be pushed to ISO 400 out of curiosity.

Lit with a Norman P500D power pack driving two LH4 heads. One set at 250Ws (channels A and B at 125Ws each combined to power one outlet) and one set at 62Ws (channel C only). The basic 5" Norman grid reflector with grid use to backlight the top glass. 18" beauty dish with a diffusion sock attached for foreground lighting. The "real" shots are being shot on a Horseman LE 4x5 monorail through the Schneider Symmar-S 210/5.6. The rail is tilted forward and the standards were leveled out to provide enough vertical displacement movement to properly proportion the table while still shooting from above the table to show more of the glass work on top. The camera is supported by a Gitzo GT1540 tripod and a Markins Q3 ball head. The head is under 1lbs including clamp (385g) and is rated for a 65lbs (30kg) capacity. And this is Markins' smallest ball head. It's lower profile than most pro ball heads thus helping to reduce impact on tripod stability due to addition of height and is rated for higher capacity and is lighter than any other ball head sold by Vistek or McBain Camera . . . and it's likely cheaper than any other ball head I have found. Markins' North American distributor is based in Langley, British Columbia.

Posted by Klyment Tan in Lighting at 00:28

Tuesday, September 30, 2008

2008.09.26: Photokina 2008: What's new from Bowens

I spoke with Mark Aherne, technical director of Bowens International that manufactures most of the lights that I use, about some of the new items to the Bowens line up. I'm most excited about the new monolights but the soon-to-be-released QX3 2500W/s power pack that will eventually replace the QuadX 3000 pack that has been the basic workhorse of my studio is interesting as well. First, a bit about the QX3:

The new specifications are definitely interesting - greatly improved recycle time, improved flash duration, three asymmetric channels (as opposed to four headers distributed over two channels on the QuadX) in a pack that is about the same weight but with slightly smaller volume. Furthermore, the interface has been simplified and the screen has been prettied up . . . a lot:

But it still wasn't the type of AC power pack announcement I was hoping for. What I was hoping for was a replacement to the Quad 2400 power pack with significantly faster flash duration and recycle time in a package MUCH smaller and lighter than what they are offering now. In the areas of compact AC power packs, Norman, Dyna-lite, and Profoto still rule. Anyhow, onwards to the monolights:

The analogue interface enhancements are almost revolutionary in the world of monolights. To get one tenth stop precision we used to have to resort to digital interfaces which often slowed down a photographer's or assistant's access to lighting setting changes. Analog dials, while quick, were often not very precise and were limited at best to one third stop precision. With Bowens' new dual-dial power control system a user can have the most intuitive control of his or her light with precision traditionally limited to digital lights. On top of this, Bowens has added an integrated option slot for Bowens Pulsar and Pocketwizard receivers and all of their lights now have the Travepak/Turbopak/Explorer style DC input plug for battery power.

Posted by Klyment Tan in Lighting at 22:47

Friday, September 26, 2008

2008.09.25: Photokina 2008: Broncolor's new Scoro power packs and UV light modifier

This video shows two of Broncolor's representatives describing some of the new features and enhancements of Broncolor's new flagship power pack. As noted in the video, the pack won't ship until the beginning of next year but it's an exciting new offering by Broncolor.

We also discuss Broncolor's new UV light mod.

Posted by Klyment Tan in Lighting at 02:16

Friday, December 16. 2005

2005.12.12: Leanna's studio test/Soft Egg Crate test

Leanna agreed to pose for me so that I could try out some lighting and light controls supplied by Stephen Pilby of Lighttools. I can't say that the lights themselves were spectacular since they offer no additional functionality over the Balcar gear that I'm currently using. However, I'm sure that most photographers will appreciate the high end, high quality, digitally-controlled monolights. Drop me a line if you are interested in knowing more about them. Photos were shot with two lights, one with a 1000W/s monolight directed at the backdrop and controlled with a set of barn doors and a 20degree grid and a yellow gel. The other was shot with a 1000W/s monolight modified by a 60inch octagonal soft box which in turn was made more directional by a 50degree Soft Egg Crate by Lighttools. The Egg Crates created lighting that, to me, was nothing short of spectacular. It makes shooting in a very tight space feasible . . . like the shoot the next day at the K-rock 97.3FM studio where I was given effectively 6' x 11' with an 8.5' ceiling and told to shoot a 5'8" non-model. And to top it off, there was a reflective 20% grey curtain on one side of the 6'. And I was shooting with the equipment that I just listed. Only edits were black and white conversion performed in Adobe Camera RAW in Photoshop CS 2. Taken with the 60/2.8 Micro-Nikkor on the D2X. Shot with similar specifications to the previous shot.

Posted by Klyment Tan in Lighting at 13:06

Thursday, December 1, 2005

2005.11.30: Jumbrella!

I spoke with Gary Regester, photographer and designer of the Plume Wafer line of soft boxes, regarding a Canadian dealer for his Jumbrella product. He directed me to the owners of Vistek Toronto and Lighttools in . . . Edmonton (*gasp*). The same day, I scheduled a visit to Light Tools in the south side of Edmonton. Stephen Pilby, owner of Lighttools, was a bit under the weather Tuesday so we met Wednesday. We spent about four hours together. I spirited Leanna away from work in part because I didn't want to go alone and I enjoy her company and in part because I wanted a model and a second eye to take snapshots of us playing around with this gigantic umbrella. Almost all photos taken with Fuji F10. The three sample photos were shot with the Nikon D2X and 17-55/2.8 lens. A big thank you to Stephen Pilby for his generous donation of time and knowledge. I still can't believe that I had been oblivious to this place's existence until two days ago. Picked Leanna up from her lab via the U of A Hospital. Her lab is in the Med Sci building. Heheh . . . cute hat. Stephen Pilby shows off some soft Egg Crates which have become essential gear for cinematographers around the world. Stephen offered to loan me an Egg Crate and a compatible softbox and let me review it for a while with my Balcar equipment. I'll take him up on his offer once I understand how (and why) the egg crates do what they do. An architectural adaptation of the Egg Crate design called "Lightttx". These were manufactured to the specifications of an architect that will be picking these up later to install in a commercial building. One of Stephen's octagonal low profile soft boxes, compatible with a Light Tools Egg Crate. This one is 2m in diameter and has similar area to depth proportions as many of Plume's "Wafer" products. Yeah . . . I really have no idea what I'm doing and the instructions aren't helping. Luckily Stephen knows what to do. We're putting together the 3m one first. There was supposed to be a 2m and 3m Jumbrella. Turns out that the 2m package contained a 3m and the 3m package contained a 4m. So the boom that came with the 3m was missing a pressure plate under a set screw. We ended up opening the other one up and hoping that it was another 3m with a complete boom. Standing back holding up some splines and pretending to be useful while Stephen does all of the hard work. One of the splines in what we thought was a second 3m had a broken joint so we are replacing it on the fly with a spare. One of the set screws locking one of the two spline bases to the hubs was missing so we're screwing it back in here. Here we realized that though the 3m Jumbrella was gigantic, this Jumbrella was obviously larger than the first and downright ridiculous. Locking the hubs into place is a two person job for the 4m. Adding a Balcar PowerZ 3200W/s head onto the boom. The 4m Jumbrella from behind without the black/silver liner. The black and silver liner is included with every Jumbrella and can be used to give a more specular lighting effect and increase efficiency of the light modifier. Experimenting with an umbrella to reflect light back into the the Jumbrella for more coverage. For comparison, I'm 6feet tall so you can see just how silly-big this thing is. Shot of me taking a shot. Hahah . . . makes a pretty cool-looking background, too. Shot of a broken spline hinge. It was believed to have been damaged while someone else handled it. It appears to be made of a tough nylon. Not sure how it broke like this. One of Stephen's puppies. This guy's four months old. His wife took this little guy's brother home. He stayed around and ate velcro once we finished playing with the Jumbrella. Leanna with boom at full extension and Balcar FX60 reflector pointed upwards into the top of the Jumbrella. Very smooth, even light. F/11 at ISO 100 from about 10feet away. The Balcar Nexus A3200 is pumping the full 3200W/s through the head for this shot to achieve this exposure value. The silver liner was not on but would have improved efficiency. Me . . . modeling with a can of Five Alive (Passionate Peach Citrus flavour) graciously provided by Stephen. A hard light example. This photo wasn't edited and I have the full-size photo available if anyone wants to see the effect. I could take a comparison photo with a regular umbrella or a soft box and pass it along as well. My skin is far from smooth and this is probably the smoothest I've ever seen my face with anything short of full frontal flash.

MSRP for the 3m Jumbrella is about \$1000US plus shipping. I think that I would like to have one but I have to figure out how to justify the purchase. Furthermore, I don't have a studio tall enough to even open it up properly, let alone elevate it off the ground. I'd have to use it in public places like City Hall and maybe the Muttart Conservatory and Citadel Theatre just to have enough room. Huy mentioned that his former drama teacher may be able to lend space to me to use this thing as his old high school. I'm hoping Jonathan takes interest because his studio has a 20foot plus ceiling. The quality of light from this light modifier is incredible. Controlled and soft, contrasty and flattering. It's so many lights in one just with the adjustment of focus and direction of the output of the flash. Not what I had expected but I can think of so many uses for this light. It's also easily large enough to handle full length fashion even at 2 or 3m. If I pick one up, it'll be the 3m or maybe a 2m. That means that the 4m will be left. A notable photographer from St. Albert with a very large set of studios (that should narrow it down a bit) is looking at getting a Jumbrella. If you think that you need a big light mod like this one, drop me a line and I could send you more sample photos or take some for you if you have a specific request. The 4m Jumbrella requires about a 17' ceiling so be warned.

Posted by Klyment Tan in Lighting at 03:22

Monday, August 29. 2005

Balcar AQ Location Lighting Test

This entry is out of chronological order - it should be before the entry with Jessica's shoot with an alleyway photo illuminated by the Balcar AQ Pack self-contained studio lighting system. Anyhow, here's a photo from my first shot with the Balcar AQ Pack. Nikon D2X, 2s, ISO 400, F/8, 17mm, one Iris head stopped down five stops on the Balcar AQ Pack, focused at 20degrees w/ Balcar LFX 30 12" reflector and area of illumination further reduced with large set of barn doors. Processed in Pixmantec RawShooter Essentials 2005 and scaled and exported in Adobe Photoshop CS2. I don't enjoy having my photo taken but without a proper model I didn't have much a choice. I composed this photo and chose to showcase it in this entry for a number of reasons: it demonstrates how one can have accurate, effective control of lighting anywhere (all lighting, camera gear, a boom stand and a tripod were hauled up to the roof of the studio, up a ladder and through this roof hatch without assistance); it shows that artificial lighting can be achieved without the inconsistencies of using a standard TTL flash and without the harsh and difficult-to-control nature of such a flash; the flash can be used to achieve sharp detail with perfectly white-balanced colour for neutral skintones thus eliminating the need to unnaturally-alter the white balance of the photograph to achieve this neutrality and; I look so damn good in my hat. I am making this Balcar AQ Pack (1200W/s) available for rent with one focusable Iris light head, your choice of Balcar reflector and your choice of umbrella or softbox plus a light stand or boom stand for \$150/day or \$400 per week for the package. The pack allows power adjustment over a six stop range in 1/10th stop increments throughout which the pack holds colour temperature consistent within 1-2% variance of the median. Refreshes to full power in about three seconds and has enough power for about 200-250 full power flashes. In realistic usage I have yet to fully empty the battery even hafter a 350+ flash discharge with ample use of the modeling light and lots of idle time with the pack and fan on.

Posted by Klyment Tan in Lighting at 03:41