



LIGHT IT SHOOT IT RETOUCH IT

Learn Step by Step How to Go from Empty Studio to Finished Image

SCOTT KELBY

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*To my dear friend Terry White:
Your wisdom, humor, insights, and advice
have helped me in more ways than I can
ever count, or ever hope to repay. Thanks T.*

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After writing books for 13 years now, I still find that the thing that's the hardest for me to write in any book is the acknowledgments. It also, hands down, takes me longer than any other pages in the book. For me, I think the reason I take these acknowledgments so seriously is because it's when I get to put down on paper how truly grateful I am to be surrounded by such great friends, an incredible book team, and a family that truly makes my life a joy. That's why it's so hard. I also know why it takes so long—you type a lot slower with tears in your eyes.

To my remarkable wife, Kalebra: We've been married nearly 22 years now, and you still continue to amaze me, and everyone around you. I've never met anyone more compassionate, more loving, more hilarious, and more genuinely beautiful, and I'm so blessed to be going through life with you, to have you as the mother of my children, my business partner, my private pilot, Chinese translator, and best friend. You truly are the type of woman love songs are written for, and as anyone who knows me will tell you, I am, without a doubt, the luckiest man alive to have you for my wife.

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I'm incredibly fortunate to have part of the production of my books handled in-house by my own book team at Kelby Media Group, which is led by my friend and longtime Creative Director, Felix Nelson, who is hands down the most creative person I've ever met. He's surrounded by some of the most talented, amazing, ambitious, gifted, and downright brilliant people I've ever had the honor of working with.

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OTHER BOOKS BY SCOTT KELBY

The Adobe Photoshop Lightroom Book for Digital Photographers

Professional Portrait Retouching Techniques for Photographers Using Photoshop

The Digital Photography Book, volumes 1, 2 & 3

The Adobe Photoshop Book for Digital Photographers

The Photoshop Channels Book

Photo Recipes Live: Behind the Scenes, parts 1 & 2

Scott Kelby's 7-Point System for Adobe Photoshop

Photoshop Down & Dirty Tricks

The iPhone Book

The Photoshop Elements Book for Digital Photographers

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Scott Kelby

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He is President of the National Association of Photoshop Professionals (NAPP), the trade association for Adobe® Photoshop® users, and he's President of the training, education, and publishing firm, Kelby Media Group, Inc.

Scott is a photographer, designer, and an award-winning author of more than 50 books, including *The Adobe Photoshop Lightroom 3 Book for Digital Photographers*, *The Adobe Photoshop CS5 Book for Digital Photographers*, *Professional Portrait Retouching Techniques for Photographers Using Photoshop*, *Photoshop Down & Dirty Tricks*, *The Photoshop Channels Book*, *The iPhone Book*, and *The Digital Photography Book*, vols. 1, 2 & 3.

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His books have been translated into dozens of different languages, including Chinese, Russian, Spanish, Korean, Polish, Taiwanese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Dutch, Swedish, Turkish, and Portuguese, among others, and he is a recipient of the prestigious Benjamin Franklin Award.

Scott is Training Director for the Adobe Photoshop Seminar Tour and Conference Technical Chair for the Photoshop World Conference & Expo. He's featured in a series of Adobe Photoshop online courses at KelbyTraining.com, and has been training Adobe Photoshop users since 1993.

For more information on Scott, visit his daily blog, *Photoshop Insider*, at www.scottkelby.com.

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11 THINGS YOU'LL WISH YOU HAD KNOWN BEFORE READING THIS BOOK

It's really important to me that you get a lot out of reading this book, and one way I can help is to provide you with these 11 quick things about the book that you'll wish later you knew now. For example, it's here that I tell you about where to download something important, and if you skip over this, eventually you'll send me an email asking where it is, but by then you'll be really aggravated, and well...it's gonna get ugly. We can skip all that (and more), if you take two minutes now and read these 11 quick things. I promise to make it worth your while.



1 You don't have to spend a ton of money to get these looks.

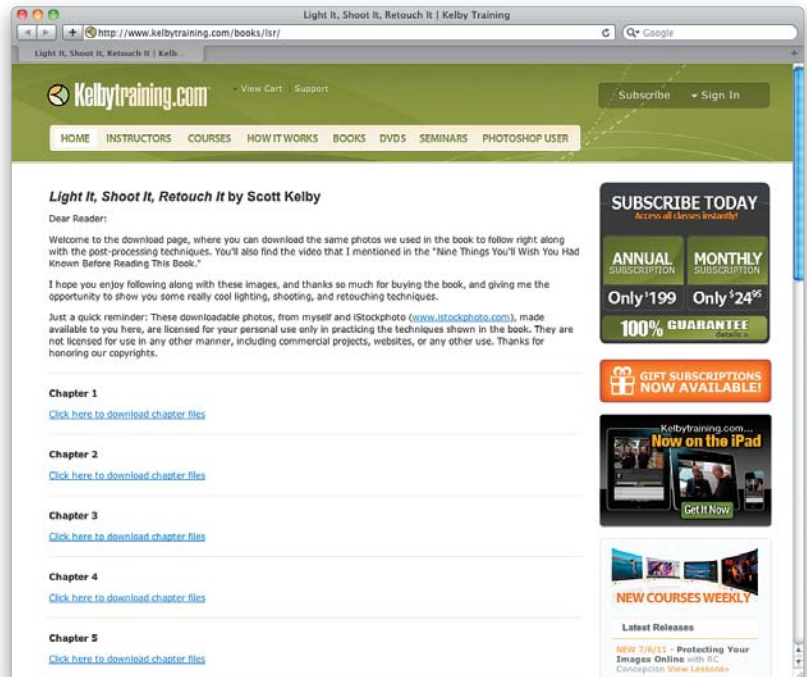
I didn't want to write a book where you need \$15,000 worth of high-end gear to get these looks. That's lucky for me, because I don't have \$15,000 worth of gear. In fact, I actually use value-priced strobes that I think are a great deal for the money. For example, you know those hot shoe flashes (like a Nikon SB-900 or a Canon 580EX II)? Well, the street price of those is around \$500. Here in the book (and in my own studio), I use studio strobes that cost only \$100 more (around \$600). Plus, they have wireless transceivers built-in, so that saves quite a few bucks not having to buy those. The reason I'm telling you this now is so you know that throughout the book I tried to really keep an eye on costs. That being said, to get certain looks, sometimes you need certain light modifiers. But, most of the ones I use here are around the \$100 range, and the most expensive modifier in the entire book is currently just \$315 (hey, did anyone tell you to get into photography because it was cheap?). Also, I tried to use as few lights as possible—usually one or two. Anyway, just wanted to let you know that I always try to keep an eye on the bottom line, and I always try to use gear that gives the most bang for the buck, while still being good-quality gear.

2 Download the practice images, so you can follow right along with me.

I've made all of the high-resolution project photos I used here in the book available for you to download, so you can follow right along with me as we do the post-processing. You can download them at <http://kelbytraining.com/books/lsr> (see, this is one of those things I was talking about that you'd miss if you skipped this and went right to Chapter 1). Also, the term "retouching" doesn't just mean removing blemishes, and brightening eyes, and stuff like that (known as "portrait retouching"). Here, retouching includes everything I do after the shoot in post-production in Photoshop to make the final image. So, while we do some portrait retouching to every image, I also include all the other stuff (toning effects, sharpening, desaturation, etc.) that goes into making a final image (which I know is very different for a book on lighting, but that's exactly why I wanted to include it).

3 You don't have to read this book in order.

I designed this book so you can turn right to the lighting setup you want to learn and start there. I explain everything as I go, step by step, and because of that, you might hear how to create a merged layer quite a few times as you read the book. But, that's because you might choose to start with Chapter 9, and in the post-processing section, I don't want you to read "Create a merged layer," and have you say, "Huh?" So, I spell everything out, so you don't have to go hunting for keyboard shortcuts or reasons why we do a certain thing a certain way.





4 I list all the equipment used in each shoot, but I keep it kinda generic.

In this book, I use my own studio equipment, which is all made by either Elinchrom (strobes and softboxes) or by Westcott (continuous lights and softboxes), and I'm telling you this up front, so that I don't have to mention their brand names and models in every chapter's Gear Guide (which would get old, fast). So, although you may see "STROBE: 500-watt unit," the exact make and model I use is the Elinchrom BXRi 500 model, with a built-in EL Skyport wireless transmitter (the one I mentioned earlier that's just \$100 more than a hot shoe flash unit). I included a complete Gear Guide in the very back of the book with the make and model of every piece of gear used in the lighting setups, but outside of that, I keep it generic. You absolutely do *not* need to use the same strobes I use to do any of the shoots in the book. You just need something that creates a bright flash of light, which is pretty much any strobe. It's not so much the type or brand of light, it's the modifier (softbox, beauty dish, strip bank, etc.) that you put in front of that flash, and how you aim and position it, that makes the difference.

5 Where are all the power cords?

You know those overhead shots near the beginning of each chapter that show you a bird's eye view of the lighting layout? Well, when we created the first one, one thing that immediately jumped out was how distracting it was seeing power cables and extension cords running all over the place. So, we used Photoshop's Spot Healing Brush to remove them. That way, you can focus on where the lights are positioned and not be distracted by all the annoying power cables that don't matter anyway (well, they matter in that the lights won't turn on without them, but you don't need to see them in the context of the book). Also, you may notice in some of the production shots (also near the beginning of each chapter) that part of our studio's floor is hardwood. In some of the shots, you'll see me standing on this floor, but you won't see it in the overhead shot. Why? Because I felt that it was also distracting, so we removed it from the overhead shots, as well. Just thought I'd mention it.





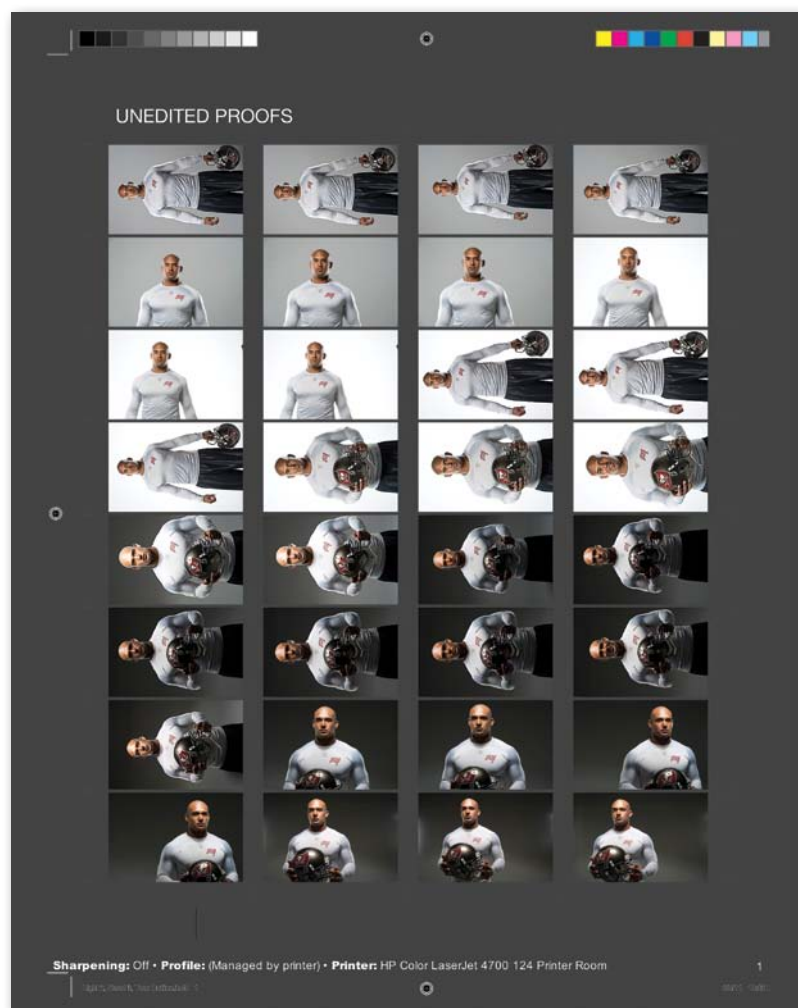
6 You'll see both Nikon & Canon camera bodies in the book.

I have a section near the beginning of each chapter that shows the exact camera settings used for each project, and I chose to show the back of a camera as a visual reference. The images I shot here in the book were taken with my Nikon D3s. But, I own both Nikon and Canon cameras, so I wanted to show both in the Camera Settings sections (so the book doesn't feel like it's for just Nikon shooters, because, of course, it isn't). I didn't take advantage of either of the D3s's special features that set it apart (its High-Speed Continuous Shooting mode or the low noise at high ISOs that is its claim to fame), so I would have gotten the same results with a \$600 Nikon or Canon camera (but I would have had to wrestle that one away from my son, so I just shot with my own camera). In short, you don't need an expensive camera for your shots to look exactly the same.

7 I trigger all the gear with a Skyport transmitter.

I don't include this piece of gear in each chapter's Gear Guide, because I use the same wireless trigger for every shoot, so it would get really redundant (and you'd get tired of seeing it over and over again). So, I'll just cover it here. I use Elinchrom EL Skyport SPEED transmitters, because with my Elinchrom BXRi strobes, it lets me raise/lower the power of the lights from right on top of my camera (like most wireless triggers, the Skyport sits in the hot shoe mount on top of your camera). It's about the size of a matchbook, and it lets you assign your strobes to different groups, so you can change the power of any individual light without leaving the camera (for example, you can put your background light on one group, and your main light on another, and then just flip a switch to change the power of either one in 1/10 of a stop increments). If you don't have an assistant helping you, these are huge time savers. One more thing: Although I use Elinchrom strobes (one of my buddies turned me on to using them), I don't get paid or get a kickback from Elinchrom for using their lights (or from any company, for that matter). I had a bunch of different strobes before I bought my first BXRi (I had everything from White Lightning to Photogenics to ProFoto strobes with Chimera soft-boxes), but I put them all on eBay once I used the Elinchroms with the Skyport transmitters. Anyway, I thought you'd want to know that I can use or recommend anything from anybody, but I only show the stuff I actually use myself here in the book. One more thing: I made a little video for you (my esteemed reader of this book) to show you how this Skyport triggering thing works, because describing it is nothing like seeing it. You can find it on that download page I mentioned back in #2.





8 What's with the contact sheets?

I thought it would be cool to include a contact sheet from each shoot, so you could kind of see the progression of the shoot, and I marked the frame that we actually use in the project that becomes our final image. Of course, if the flash didn't fire, or I took a totally out-of-focus shot (hey, it happens), I removed those "dead frames," so I don't look totally stupid (of course, I probably shouldn't have told you that, because I just admitted that sometimes my flash doesn't fire, and sometimes I take out-of-focus shots. Okay, forget I ever said that). Also, since I shoot both horizontal and vertical orientation during a typical shoot, you'll see both in the same contact sheet, which means some of the shots will appear sideways. When that happens, to see them upright, it's okay to: (a) turn the book sideways, or (b) turn your head sideways.

9 There's a special bonus chapter for hot shoe flash users.

So, can you do all the stuff I'm showing you using studio strobes, using just those portable off-camera hot shoe flashes (like the Canon 580EX II or Nikon SB-900)? Absolutely! That's why I added a special bonus chapter near the end of the book that shows each chapter's overhead shot recomposed using off-camera flash. The difference is really just the modifiers (softboxes, beauty dishes, grids, etc.) that you use with hot shoe flash. But, don't worry, there are versions of this stuff made for hot shoe flash, and it's all fairly inexpensive. Some of it comes from Westcott, some from Expolmaging, and some from other places, but I list all the hot-shoe modifiers I use for getting these same looks at the end of Chapter 13. See, I care.





10 Why I included the power settings.

In the chapter Gear Guides, I thought it might be helpful to include the power settings my strobes were set at for each shoot. Now, you might be thinking that if you don't have the exact same make and model of strobe that I used, that info would be useless, but it's actually still kinda helpful. Here's why: The strobes I use go from a power setting of 2.3 (its lowest setting, which is an output of approximately 30 watts) to 6.3 (its highest setting, which is the full 500 watts). So, you know if you see a setting of 2.3, that's your cue to set your power at, or near, the lowest setting your strobe can go (no matter which brand or model you have). Of course, that's just a starting point, but at least you have one. If you see my setting at 4.0, you know I'm around half power, and so on. My settings will put you in the ballpark if your strobe is around 500 watts, but of course, if your strobe is 1,200 watts, you'll have to do a little math, because your half power will be more than my full power. So, to get down to 250 watts (my half power), you'd set yours at a little less than 1/4 power. Got it? Cool.

11 Strobes vs. continuous lighting.

In my studio, I use two different types of lights: (1) flash strobes (that have low-power modeling lights built into them that stay on, giving you a general idea of where the flash from the strobe will be aiming. The modeling lights are also helpful in a dark studio, because your autofocus will have enough light to focus) and (2) continuous lights (these stay on all the time). I know a lot of folks these days have continuous lights, so I included a couple shoots using them. But, if you don't have them, don't sweat it—you can put your lights in the same exact positions and get the exact same looks (just power them at their lowest settings, which should be plenty). The advantages of continuous lights are: (1) What you see is what you get. Since they're always on (and don't really produce any heat), you can just move them at will and see exactly how moving them an inch or so in either direction affects your subject. (2) They create absolutely beautiful, very soft, wrapping light. (3) They're particularly great for people who are scared of strobes and dealing with watt seconds, strobe power, etc. (4) They're not as bright as strobes, so you can shoot at wider apertures, like $f/4$ and $f/2.8$, creating a shallow depth-of-field that puts your background out of focus. The downside of continuous lights is that they're not as bright as strobes, so they work best for things that stay pretty still—like when you're posing adults or doing product shots. I wouldn't recommend them for photographing children (who move a lot!), unless you're cool with shooting at a higher ISO, like 800, so you can get a fast enough shutter speed to freeze motion (you don't have to worry about that with strobes, because they freeze motion almost automatically).



10 THINGS I WISH SOMEBODY HAD TOLD ME WHEN I FIRST STARTED USING STUDIO LIGHTING

If you've been shooting with studio lighting for a while now, you already know this stuff, but I wish somebody had told me a few of these things when I first started—it would have saved me a lot of time and trouble, and would've gotten me better looking shots a lot sooner. If you're an old pro at this stuff, skip these 10 things and go check out a chapter that interests you. Of course, I know how human nature is—if you tell someone “this isn't for you,” then they want it 10 times more than if you had said “everyone needs to read this.” So, I kept this pretty short for that very reason. :)



1 Start with just one light.

A lot of people are tempted to throw up a bunch of lights, but honestly, this is usually an area where less is more. Start by setting up just one main light. Once you're happy with the quality and position, if you think you need to add a second light (maybe a hair light, or a background light), turn off the first light, and get the second light looking just like you want it before you turn the main light back on. Also, never lose sight of what you can create using just one light (remember, beautiful window light usually comes from just one window). So, build your look one light at a time, and you'll have better results.



2 If something doesn't look right, you're probably only off by a few inches.

If you've got your light in position, and it just looks either blah or bad, don't get frustrated, or think it's all messed up—you're probably just off by a tiny bit. Literally inches. Move the light around your subject in an arc, as if your subject was the center of your wristwatch, and your light circles around it like the hands of your watch. Try moving the light around that arc just two or three inches in either direction, and see what a difference that makes. Chances are, you're only a few inches from fantastic light.

3 Spend more on your modifiers than your lights.

You know the old saying: “Spend more on your lenses than you do on your camera body?” A similar thing also applies to flash. I’ve found that all flashes emit a bright flash of light when you fire them. Really expensive ones, really cheap ones, studio strobes, hot shoe flashes—they all do basically the same thing: they create a bright flash of light. So, spend more on your modifiers—the softboxes and accessories that shape and craft your light—than you do on the “bright flash of light” makers.



4 Buy lighting stands with wheels.

You’ll thank me one day. Plus, you’re more likely to experiment if all you have to do to reposition your lights is roll them. And, you’re less likely to accidentally tip one over while you’re moving them (since they’re top heavy by nature).





5 Shoot tethered to your computer.

It's really hard to judge the quality of your light on that tiny 3" display on the back of your camera. So, in the studio, connect a USB cable to your DSLR, plug the other end into your computer (or laptop), and start seeing your images onscreen full size. I guarantee you'll make better images, and have better quality light. You can shoot straight into Lightroom 3 (like you see here), or you can use one of a dozen free applications that let you tether, so you can view your targeted folder full-screen in Adobe Bridge. Do this once, and you'll always shoot tethered in the studio. Yes, it makes that big a difference.



6 When it comes to softboxes, bigger is better.

The bigger the softbox, the more beautiful and wrapping the light. If you get one that's 53" or even larger, it's like cheating. It's nearly impossible to make someone look bad with one of these huge softboxes, plus it makes lighting more than one subject a whole lot easier.

7 Closer is better.

If you want really, really soft, beautiful light, get it really, really close to your subject. Get it to where it's literally just outside your frame in the viewfinder. You'll love what getting it that close does.



8 You probably don't need high-wattage strobes.

Ninety-nine percent of the time, we run our studio strobes at 1/4 power or less. That's because we keep our lights fairly close to our subjects (again, closer is better), and if we turned them up a lot brighter, they'd be way too bright. Much of the time, we run our strobes down at their lowest power setting, and rarely do we ever get a chance to use the 500 watts of power our strobes may have. Now, if you're taking your strobes outdoors on location at 3:00 p.m. on a sunny day, then maybe you'll need a 1,200-watt strobe. But, if you just read that and thought, "I'll never be doing that," then don't blow all your money on high-powered strobes that will never get used at high power.





9 You're not going to change your ISO or shutter speed very often, if at all.

You'll notice that throughout the book, my ISO usually stays on 200 (which is the lowest native ISO for most Nikon DSLR cameras. For most Canon DSLRs, it's 100 ISO), because that ISO creates the cleanest, noise-free images. So, in the studio, ISO is kind of a "set it and forget it" setting. For shutter speed, with studio strobes, the fastest speed you can use (and still have your flash sync up to your camera) is 1/200 of a second (it's 1/250 of a second with hot shoe flashes, unless you turn on high-speed sync, which is an entirely different topic). If you change to a faster shutter speed, you'll see a dark gradient appear across the bottom of your photo (that's a good warning sign to let you know your shutter speed is set above 1/200). A lot of pros use 1/125 of a second for their shutter speed (don't worry, the flash itself will freeze your subject's motion). By the way, 1/125 is my starting point, but occasionally you'll see me use 1/160 of a second here in the book. That's because, at some point during the shoot, I accidentally turned the dial that controls the shutter speed. Now, 1/160 is perfectly fine, as is 1/200, so if I notice it changes, I don't worry about it—it won't change the look of my shot, so I don't sweat it (this rule is different when shooting on location with hot shoe flash, where you're using the shutter speed to balance the ambient [available] light with the light from your strobe. However, in your studio, there won't really be any ambient light—we keep the lights down low).

10 Picking an f-stop for portraits.

There is no really “right” f-stop for portraits, but a very popular f-stop for shooting studio portraits is $f/11$, because it keeps everything on your subject in focus. Plus, when you know your shutter speed is $1/125$ of a second, and your ideal f-stop is $f/11$, then all you have to do is power up/down the lights until the lighting looks right at those settings. By the way, you don’t have to get married to $f/11$ — $f/8$ works great and $f/9$ is lovely, but if you get down around $f/4$, your subject’s eyes might be in focus, but their hair will be somewhat out of focus. This is popular for glamour photography, but in most cases here in the book, you’ll see my f-stops up in the $f/8$ to $f/11$ range. Because of this, in the studio, it makes sense to set your camera to Manual mode, then just dial in your shutter speed, dial in the ISO and f-stop you want, and then you really don’t have to be messing with your camera settings all the time. Instead, you can work on what really makes a great photo (besides the light), which is connecting with your subject.

Okay, that’s your “pre-flight briefing” and now it’s time to get to work. Turn the page and let’s start lighting, shooting, and retouching.



