

How to Shoot Yourself by Len News

1. Inspiration

An essential ingredient for creative compositions is imagination; a good sense of humour is also an asset.

Len gets inspiration from photography magazines such as:

"Better Photography", "Creative Photoshop", "Advanced Photoshop",
"Photo Plus" (Canon) and "Practical Photoshop"

Photoshop tutorials on the web :

Adobe TV: The Russell Brown Show @ <http://tv.adobe.com>

Photoshop Cafe @ <http://www.photoshopcafe.com>

Photo.net community @

UTube video clips @ <http://www.youtube.com>

e.g. Gavin Huey, Topaz tutorials, Nik Efex tutorials etc.

Tutorial Man @ <http://www.tutorialman.com>

and sites like Photo.net and

Books:

"Photoshop's Layers" & "Photoshop Compositing Secrets" by Matt Kloskowski

Catalogues from international salons are always inspirational, too.

In fact, there is a visual world of advertisements, movies, tv programmes and websites that can trigger new ideas.

Set subjects for camera club competitions seem to challenge Len to discover original interpretations, for example he created "Master Chef" for Food and "Laddy of the Night" for the theme After Dark.

2. Background & Other Images

Any photograph that might be used as a background is placed in a library on his hard drive, along with items that might be used in the future, such as cars, fish and people.

Elements to be used in a composition are photographed as required; this usually requires trips to various locations, such as Parramatta Gaol or seeking out a barbed wire fence, a spotlight or a skeleton.

3. Props

Props such as clothing, hats, shoes etc. are sourced from op shops like Lifeline and St Vinnies, or from Spotlight's dress up kits. For "Great Escape" he bought a prisoner outfit, for "After Dark" he chose a chorus girl kit. It took a while to find a shop selling a pipe for "Great Escape" and a rubber chicken at a pet shop was the inspiration for "Sunday Roast".

4. Photography Equipment

Len sets his camera, either a Canon 50D or Canon 7D, on a Manfrotto tripod and holds in his hand a RPS Studio wireless remote flash trigger.

If he is unable to hide the trigger, he uses the camera's timer to take the photo.

His favourite lenses are a Canon 17-55mm 2.8 and a Tokina 11-16mm f2.8 wide angle.

5. Studio

Len sets up his studio in the kitchen with a white backdrop attached to a blind. Black fabric is added to contrast with his 'blond' hair! Objects to be cut out and inserted into an image are photographed against a blue background.

Sidelight from glass doors and a window provide natural lighting if required. He marks his place with coloured tape on the floor to remain in focus.

The studio is set up with two white studio umbrellas on stands holding two Canon Speedlites, a 580 EX11 and a 430 EX11, fitted with Yongnuo wireless flash triggers that respond to a controller fitted on the camera.

6. Post Processing

Post processing is carried out in Photoshop CS5 using multiple layers and Nik Effex and Topaz Suite plug-ins.

Objects to be cut out and inserted into an image are photographed against a blue background. For selections, Len mostly uses Photoshop's Polygonal Lasso Tool.

Topaz Remask does great work with fine details. Mostly he uses Photoshop's Polygonal Lasso Tool and Topaz Remask does great work with fine details such as hair.

Lighting is also important with montages and if an element can't be shot in correct light he uses Nik's Viveza II or paints on shadow in Photoshop.

7. Computer

All work is kept safe on two external backup drives, a LaCie 2TB (Raid-1) and a Seagate 1.5TB.

Since the working psd files tend to have many layers they become very large, so these are the only ones retained on his desktop hard drive.

8. Printing

Len uses an Epson 4800 printer with 8 x 220ml inks.

For a printing variety of sizes from 6" x 4" for family shots to 16" x 13" for competition entries and the occasional banner, roll paper has proved to be the most cost effective.

The printer is calibrated using a paper profile. Monthly use of a Spyder3 Elite maintains the consistency of color on the monitor to printer output.

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