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The Profoto Ringflash
A Tool for All Reasons

Photography is a world of trendy tools. And, for the last year or so, nothing has seemed more trendy than the "ringflash".

Not immune from the tool/toy bug, I finally got my Profoto Ringflash kit, about a month ago, and put it to work.

Will it replace a counter full of tools in our studios? Metaphorically, will it slice, dice, make calorie free ice cream and hot soups? Is it the only light that we will ever need?

No, it's not, and it wasn't designed to be used on every shot we take. Instead, it is a specialized light that does one thing very well and can be used in many situations – both challenging and creative.

What is that special thing it does? Basically, it works in any situation where we need "flat" or "shadow free" lighting.

Simply stated, the *Ringflash* is exactly what the name implies. It is a circular flash tube that surrounds the lens. One mounts the camera on the very substantial bracket so that the lens shoots through the ring. The flash is then connected to a power pack, in my case a **Profoto D4**, and it's off to work.

Some who have taken our lighting classes, will question why we would want "shadow free" or "flat" lighting. After all, we have spent hours learning how to use shadow to add the depth and dimension to an image that gives it shape. Another way of saying the same thing is that we use shadow to give a one dimensional image a multi-dimensional look. We spend so much time teaching this that some of our students have said that we teach "shadowing" more than "lighting".

But, there are times when we want to minimize the "shadow" on an image – or behind it – and for those situations, the *Ringflash* saves the day.

Here are some of those situations.

Product Photography: From what I understand, the first to take advantage of the ring concept were the product photographers who did not want shadows on either the image or its background.

To put the *Ringflash* to work in this arena, I returned to my old lighting nemesis – my *Emmy*. Hands down, it's the hardest thing I've ever had to light. I've already written about my past battles with this hunk of shiny metal – most of which I lost. The problem has been to capture the gold lettering on the black base while not blowing out the highlights on the body. And, no matter how it was lit, there were always bad background shadows.

My solution, in the past, was a tent and heavy diffusion. And, a bit of Photoshop merging.

So, it was natural that my first test of my *Ringlfash* would be my *Emmy*. To really put the light to the test, I did no special preparation. I mounted the *Ringflash* on my camera, metered and shot. What you see here is my first shot – totally unaltered in Photoshop. I was blown away.

Without any special effort, I was able to capture the gold writing on the black background. In the past, while trying to do so, without a tent, diffusion, and reflectors, I ran the risk of

blowing out the highlights on the body itself. And, it was almost impossible to keep the background from having distracting shadows caused by the "globe". Take that, Lighting Enemy #1, you're toast.

I've since used the *Ringflash* on other product shots; it excels.

People Photography: Like a staid book keeper who is transformed at night into a party animal, the *Ringflash* changes personality when used in "people photography". From the button down world of product photography to the cool world of fashion, the transition is amazing.

What does the *Ringflash* do in its funky clothes? A couple of things. First, it creates a very cool "halo" like shadow around an image shot close to a wall. Instead of fighting the shadow, we can turn it into a creative statement. I cannot tell you how many times wedding photographers have lamented the fact that they are forced to shoot up against a wall – and then had to fight, usually in Photoshop, the ugly shadows created in that shooting situation. With the *Ringflash*, the wall becomes a friend, not enemy.

To put the lens to the test, I grabbed a friend, Minerva Munoz, had her stand next to a white wall in my studio, and grabbed a shot. Again, no fancy pre-planning, no special set ups, no post production manipulation.

Set up, meter, shoot. And, here is the result – showing the "halo" shadow.

A couple of things about this image.

Another special thing about the *Ringflash* is that it creates a funky, circular catch-lights in the eyes. There isn't one in this image because I deliberately turned Minerva away from the camera. In a bigger copy of the image, you can see the catch-lights – but, truth be told, there were not important to this image.

(As I will mention later, I plan to do a portrait session of close up head shots, using the *Ringflash*. When I do, I'll include the images on my website and in the newsletter.)

One more thing about this picture of Minerva – it was shot with one of my favorite tools, the

Lensbaby.

As beautiful as Minerva is she, like many people, shuns the camera because she is not "model thin". As I've worked with her, I've used different techniques to give her the look she wants. The **Lensbaby** did exactly what I wanted it to do. It de-emphasized her body and shifted attention to her beautiful face. She was happy and so was I. From now on, I'll use the **Lensbaby** when faced with a similar challenge from my model/customer.

Crossing the Line Between Products and People:
In the world of "high fashion" photography, the *Ringflash* takes on yet another persona – it bridges the gap between product and people photography.

Simply stated, in a lot of high fashion photography the face becomes a product. In the hands of a skilled make-up-artist (MUA), the face is given dimension and shape by the make

up. There is no need to create depth with shadow. In fact, shadow may ruin the effect.

I was going to shoot an example to illustrate this concept but I could not coordinate the shoot in time for this newsletter.

That's probably a good thing, I plan to do a series of articles about working with a "team" and will start with discussing how to choose and work with a MUA. I'll make sure to use the *Ringflash* to capture the artist's work.

I am thrilled with my *Ringflash*. It is a great tool – one that I'll use frequently. You may want to try one out, yourself.

Photo Tools Pro Edition

Hi, my name is Steve. I'm a software junky. Here's my story:

A day of my life is gone. It's as if I fell into a black hole. A cool black hole, but a black hole none-the-less. Here's what I remember.

I started my day by downloading a trial version of onOne Software's new ***Photo* Tools Pro Edition.**

I opened some ordinary images into Photoshop. (I find that ordinary images best test the creative power of editing software.)

I went to the onOne menu in Photoshop and opened Photo Tools. Up came a Photo Tools tutorial. onOne products all contain learning tools; it's one of the things that make their products special.
I went through the 9 slides, quit the lesson, and voila – up came the Photo Tools window.

And, that's where my memory gets a bit hazy. All I can remember is a creative frenzy – a frenzy where I was pushing buttons, manipulating effects, trying new things, and producing images that made me feel powerful and creative.

I played for an entire day. When I was done I had a folder full of "whammy" images.

I am in love with Photo Tools.
Simply stated, Photo Tools is a set of "effects" – effects that can be added, manipulated and applied to images.

These "effects" are, in many ways, similar to "actions". And, they should be. The more than 250 effects are the joint effort of onOne, Kevin Kubota, and Jack Davis. Jack Davis is one of my Photoshop heroes. I own his How to Wow action set and can see his creative hand throughout the Photo Tools experience.

In essence, Photo Tools automates a series of complex steps so that all we need to do is push a button to have them applied. It then gives us the power to combine and manipulate the effects.

Yes, I know there are purists out there who will say that the only actions/effects we should use are the ones we create ourselves – but I don't buy that. I'm pretty good in Photoshop and can create my own actions. But, I don't have the time to create 250 of them – or the artistic ability of people like Jack and Kevin to figure out every possibility and permutation.

Photo Tools does not diminish my skills, it enhances them. Like any other tool, this is a starting place, not an end point. In fact, Tools allows me to create and store "Presets" so that the hybrids I create are ready for future use.

I think what makes Photo Tools special is the interface – which makes it much easier to use than simply applying actions in Photoshop.

The heart of Tools is the searchable
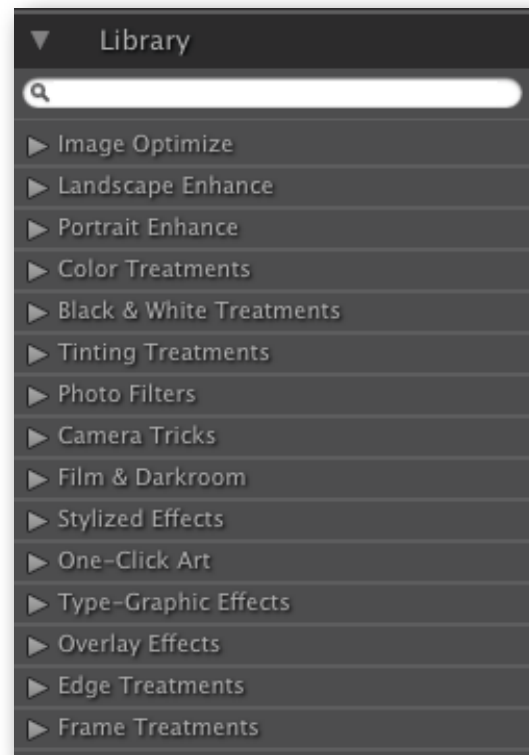
"Library" which contains effects organized into categories.

Here's a quick look at the organizing principle.

And, here's what an open category looks like. Now, things get cool. Before you make a choice, you can both learn about and preview an effect. For example, let's assume that we are not sure whether we want to use the Davis "general" or

the Kubota "secret formula". To help us decide, Tools gives us a "Description Window" that both explains and shows what the effect will look like.

Here's the Davis Description Window:
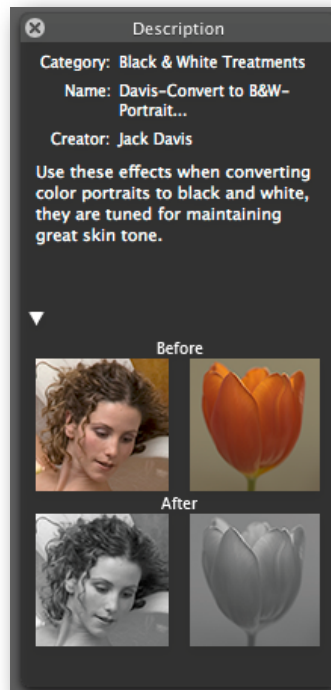

And here's the one for Kubota's:
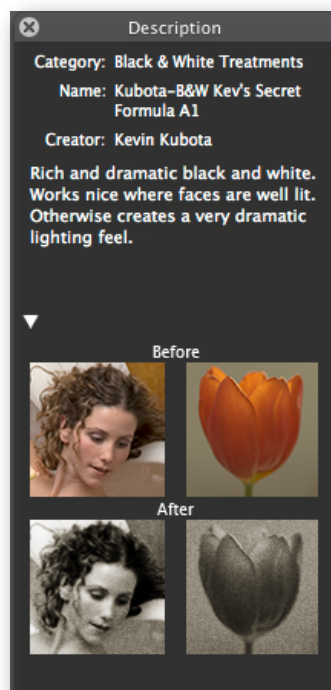
Choosing an effect is the starting point. Applying it is the next step. It is easily done. You simply push a button.

You begin to understand how complex some of these actions are and how much must be going on behind the scenes when you see how much computing power and time some of these effects take to run. I've got two powerful Macs, one a G5 tower and the other the latest MacBook Pro. Both are loaded with RAM. On both, some of the effects run for 20 or so seconds before they are complete. This is not a fault. Had I created my own actions to accomplish the same things, they would take just as long, if not longer. I mention this to make clear that each step is composed of a complex balance of the use and adjustment of Photoshop tools -- tools many of us haven't mastered and adjustments we aren't confident enough to make.

But wait – there's more.

Applying the effect is the start of the process, not the end. We now get to manipulate, add to and play with it.

Before executing, many effects give us "options" as to how they will be employed. For example, here's an options menu that pops up when one goes to execute the Davis Diffuse Glow effect:
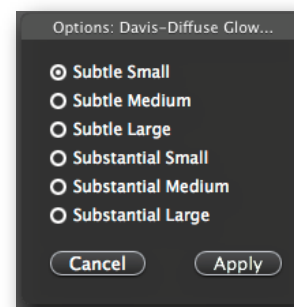
Once applied, we can "fade" the effect. This is analogous to the "opacity" slider in Photoshop.

Then, we can add and "stack" other effects. And, we can manipulate the stack by re-ordering them in the stack window. This is analogous to manipulating the layers in Photoshop. We can turn on and off the "layers" by clicking on the eyeballs. Notice how similar the "stack" is to what we know as "layers".
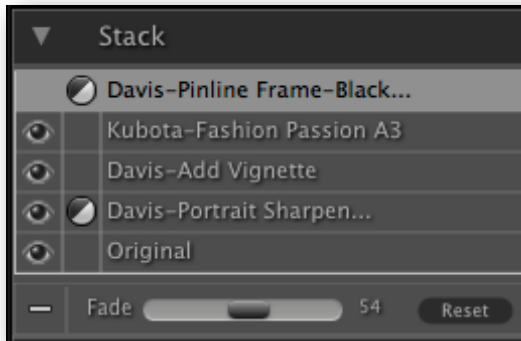
Once we have a set of effects we like, we have some more options. First, we can create and store a "preset" that incorporates the stack and makes it available for future "one click" use. And, second, we can use the new effect/stack to "batch process" a bunch of our images.

When you have what you want, you hit the "Apply" button, and Photo Tools creates a new layer in Photoshop. One thing I like is that it has the option of putting a new mask on that layer – either filled with white or black. I know that's no big deal, it's easy to add a mask, but I think it is a very thoughtful touch that saves another step.

So, back to my story – how did I lose my day?

Fiddling. Yes. Fiddling[1]. I tried every effect in an incredible array of configurations. I built stack after stack, wheedled and deedled it until I ran out of steam. And, then, did some more.

A Lesson from The Who
Making Sure Your Camera Fits Your Workflow

A few weeks ago, with the *Who's* "I won't be fooled again" ringing in my head, I thought about whether to put myself on the waiting list for the new Nikon D3.

What do the *Who* have to do with my choice of a new camera?

Simple. I was not going to be fooled again. I was not going to buy another expensive camera only to find that I could not process the images in the way that I wanted. I was not going to re-live what happened when I bought my new D2x -- and found that I could not easily process my RAW images in my Adobe based workflow because the Adobe products were not able to read the RAW data created by the Nikon camera.

I was one of the victims in the war between the Adobe and Nikon. The Adobe troops claimed Nikon had encrypted critical data in an effort to force the purchase and use of Nikon software. Nikon was saying that no product converted their .nefs as well as the Nikon software and that they were "protecting" the integrity of "their" images. They said it was up to Adobe to come up with a product that matched their quality demands.

I didn't care who was at fault. All I knew was that I was not able to process my images the way I wanted to -- and that pissed me off.

After buying my new D2x, I learned an important lesson: NEVER buy a camera without first exploring whether it is compatible with the software that you use. Never.

So, when the D3 was announced, I visited my favorite Nikon and Adobe websites. When I did not find any assurances that the "processor war" would not rage again, I opted off the D3 waiting list.

Good News: There will be no more war. Nikon and Adobe have decided to Give Peace a Chance.

With the recent release of ***Lightroom 1.3, Photoshop CS3 10.0.1*** and ***Bridge CS3 2.1.1***, Adobe has incorporated native raw support for both the D3 and the D300.

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[1] "Fiddling" is a a learning technique first developed by my daughter Jenny when she was 5 years old. Because of her interest in computers, I gave her a Mac. She soon became a wizard. When I asked her how she had learned the things she was doing, she said "I fiddled". "Fiddled"?, I said. "Yes" she replied "I went under every menu and tried every option." Fiddling is a great way to learn, even if you lose track of the time and waste a day or so. Jen is now my tech support and design/layout department.

I use Adobe Updater to keep my software current. You can find the upgrades by [clicking here](#).

I've yet to put myself back on the D3 list. Having seen John Woodward shoot with his Mamiya, I'm going to take a good look at the [ZD](#) before making another camera purchase. Look for a review, soon. (BTW -- The ZD comes with *Lightroom*.)

The Nikon and ZD are not fungible -- they are very different cameras tailored to different needs. In the best of all world, I'd own both. But, I don't see that happening, soon. In the review, I'll try to explain the differences and how they might impact what we all do.

Whichever camera I choose, the Who's advice will help shape my decision. My hardware decisions will have to work, hand-in-hand with my software decisions. I won't be fooled again.

HANDS-ON PHOTOGRAPHY SEMINARS
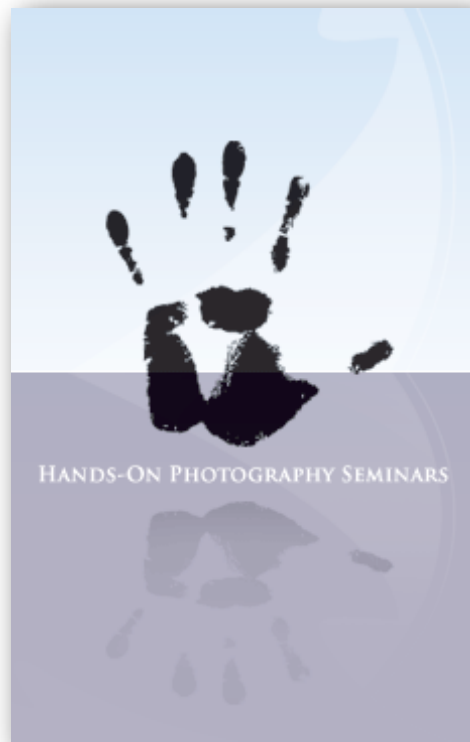
An Entire Year of Great Seminars
The Schedule for 2008

Over the last year and a half, the Hands On Seminars have taken root and prospered. What started as a simple idea has become one of the premier series of photography seminars in the country. Built upon an incredible teaching faculty and the support of great sponsors, we've been able to offer a wide variety of topics, each taught by a faculty member recognized for excellence around the world.

This year will be bigger and better. I've carefully read all of the class reviews, and found guidance in the suggestions you sent in response to the last newsletter. Here's what makes next year bigger and better:

We are bringing back ALL of last year's highest rated teachers. And, we are adding some new blood. In addition to Doug Box, Jim DiVitale, John Woodward, and Hanson Fong, we've added two new superstars to the line up: Janice Wendt and Tony Corbell.

I jokingly call Janice the Nik Diva. Most of us have seen her at trade shows doing the amazing demonstrations of Nik Software. What most of us don't know is that she is a great photographer and one of the world's best portrait and fashion "retouchers". Most of us shoot people – in some capacity. Janice is going to help us get better images, both in the studio and in post production.

Tony Corbell is an industry giant. When I was on a hunt for new blood, I asked three people that I trust a lot who they would suggest – and they all gave me the same answer, Tony Corbell. Tony's won too many awards to list. Want to see them? Go here. More importantly, Tony is a good guy. Like all of our other teachers, he likes to teach laugh and eat. What more can we ask?

We've made a couple of other major changes to the series. Over the last year and a half, we've taught more than 300 students our one day, "basic courses". We will continue to offer them.

To build upon that start, this year we are offering more two day, in depth courses. Open to beginners as well as advanced students, these courses will allow us to cover more material, at a slower pace. No more "rush to the finish", a bit more time for reflection and a better learning environment.

Finally, we've raised the price a bit – from $150 for one day to $175 and from $300 for two days to $350. Even at the increased rate, we are more than price competitive with national seminars and those in our area – some of which charge more than $300 for a one day class. We think you'll agree with one of our John Woodward students who said: "I got more out of these two days with John than I've gotten out of 5 days at other seminars."

Now, for those of you who have been loyal to the seminars, here's a big surprise: I've planned an entire year of seminars – up front, so you can make plans like a normal person. Right now, we only have active enrollment links for our January Seminar with Hanson Fong. But, soon, we will have active links to all of the seminars.

One thing that will change with the two day seminars – we will only offer 15 seats, total, for the weekend. Said another way, these seminars will fill more quickly. If you see something you like, it might be wise to sign up early.

Hands On Seminars 2008

Dates:	Teacher:	Subject:	Comments:
Jan 12 OR 13	*Hanson Fong*	**Lighting and Posing**	By popular demand, we are bringing Hanson back to teach his basic course. this course sold out both times we taught it – once within the first 8 hours it was posted, and the other time within a couple of days. If you want in, it's a good idea to enroll early.
Feb 2 AND 3	*Doug Box*	**Advanced Portraits & Making Money with Your Photography**	After teaching several basic classes – we are offering a first from Doug: An advanced course that focuses on both the art and business of photography. Perfect for those who want to start making money with their photography.
Mar 1 AND 2	*John Woodward*	**Creating Images that Demand Attention**	By popular demand, this is a repeat of a seminar that left everyone stuffed with knowledge.
Mar 29 AND 30	*Jim DiVitale*	**The Whole Banana: Light It, Shoot It, and Process It In Lightroom and Photoshop**	The complete course you've asked for. We will start in the studio and then work in the classroom. Bring your computers and work along with Jim as we create a workflow in Lightroom and Photoshop.
April	*TBA*		
May 10 AND 11	*Hanson Fong*	**Advanced Lighting and Posing**	An advanced course for anyone shooting events such as weddings. Lighting and posing techniques for those who must work quickly and on location.
June 21 AND 22	*Janice Wendt*	**Portrait and Fashion Photography: Capture and Retouching**	We've all seen her at trade shows and know her as the Nik Diva. Janice Wendt is actually one of the nation's best photographers and foremost image retouchers. We will start with capturing images and then, in the classroom, work along with her to make those images great. Bring your computers – this is hands on.
July			

Dates:	Teacher:	Subject:	Comments:
Aug 30 OR 31	*Doug Box*	**Eveything You've Wanted to Know About Lighting But Were Afraid to Ask**	This is the repeat of always-sold-out basic class. This is the only time it will be taught this year.
Sept 20 AND 21	*Jim DiVitale*	**Advanced Photoshop**	Bring your computer and work along with the master. All new lessons – tips and techniques.
Oct 25 AND 26	*Doug Box*	**Advanced Portraits & Making Money with Your Photography**	A repeat for those of you who could not get into, or make, the February classes.
Nov 15 AND 16	*John Woodward*	**TBA**	
Dec 13 AND 14	*Tony Corbell*	**The Power of Light: 2008**	One of the nation's most honored and respected photographers teaches his first **Hands On Seminar.**

But Wait, There's More

The students in our seminars get discount coupons for big savings on our sponsors' products. For many, the seminars "pay for themselves". So, if you're looking to buy some of our sponsors' stuff, you may want to take a seminar, first, to get those coupons.

Either way, these classes are a great deal.

We look forward to seeing you in class.

And Even More

Lately, I've received many calls from photographers frustrated by their inability to either find good website managers or their inability to create and manage websites on their own.

Here's a potential solution I want to run by you: While at Photoshop World, I took a class from Rafael Concepcion, the Information and Curriculum Developer for NAPP. Rafael taught a session on creating websites in Dreamweaver. He's willing to come teach a Hands On Seminar – if I can fill it.

Please, let me know ASAP, if you'd like a 2 day seminar in how to create and maintain your own websites. This will be a bring your computer and work along class. If 15 people want the class, we will have it. I just need to know, now, so I can put it on the schedule.

"Everything You Want to Know About Lighting and Posing, But Were Afraid to Ask"
with Hanson Fong

No one knows posing like Hanson Fong. His work has won awards and praise throughout the world. Prairie Fire Productions, Houston Camera Exchange and Mamiya America Corporation are excited to bring this San Francisco based photographer to Houston for a requested second seminar!

With over 30 years in the Art of Photography, Hanson will share his techniques that apply to both fine art and photojournalistic photography. He will demonstrate the 10 classic pose techniques he pioneered, which will allow you to handle every bride and groom anytime, anywhere. Live shooting demonstration with models and instant on-screen projection will help illustrate Hanson's flow posing and shoot around techniques. He will also show how to apply the same posing methods to group portraits.

Hanson will also cover lighting and metering techniques. Learn how to photograph in any lighting conditions, indoors and outdoors, any place, anytime.

Hanson's energetic shooting and teaching style will leave you breathless and wondering where all of his amazing creative energy comes from.

This Master Photographer will demonstrate working with the different spectrums of light sources: natural, strobe and video.

Some of the topics include…

Basic Lighting -
- The Tools and How to Use Them
- Lighting Techniques -- Everyday, Anywhere, and Special Problems

Posing -
- Facial Analysis -- The Best Side and The Best Light
- Body Analysis -- Classic Poses for Different Body Types
- Flow Posing -- Thoughtful Transitions from Pose to Pose
- Group Posing -- Who Goes Where and Why
    To learn more about Hanson Fong, go to his web site at www.hansonfong.com.

*A bonus hour will follow so that those attendees that wish to stay and ask questions will be accommodated. Although advanced students are encouraged to attend, this seminar will be taught at the Beginner / Intermediate level. This is a hands on course in which you will receive personal attention. We expect these seminars to fill up quickly. Please, protect your place in the class by enrolling soon!

Two 1 Day Seminars Will Be On January 12 or 13, 2008 from 9:00AM to 5:00PM Tuition: $175.00 Register at www.prairiefireproductions.com/seminars.

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