

# Part 3 The Digital Photography

The step-by-step secrets for how to make your photos look like the pros! **Book**



**Scott Kelby**

Author of *The Digital Photography Book*, volume 1,  
the best-selling digital photography book of all time!

The  
**3** Digital  
Photography

The step-by-step secrets for how to make your photos look like the pros! **Book**



**Scott Kelby**

# The Digital Photography Book, volume 3

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*For my in-house editor Kim Doty.  
One of the best things that ever  
happened to my books is you.*

## Acknowledgments

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## Other Books By Scott Kelby

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*Scott Kelby's 7-Point System for Adobe Photoshop CS3*

*The Digital Photography Book, vols. 1 & 2*

*The Photoshop Elements Book for Digital Photographers*

*The Adobe Photoshop Lightroom Book for Digital Photographers*

*The Photoshop Book for Digital Photographers*

*The Photoshop Channels Book*

*Photoshop Down & Dirty Tricks*

*Photoshop Killer Tips*

*Photoshop Classic Effects*

*The iPod Book*

*InDesign Killer Tips*

*Mac OS X Leopard Killer Tips*

*The iPhone Book*

## About the Author

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**Scott Kelby**

Scott is Editor, Publisher, and co-founder of *Photoshop User* magazine, Editor-in-Chief of *Layers* magazine (the how-to magazine for everything Adobe), and is the co-host of the weekly video podcasts *DTown TV* (the weekly show for Nikon dSLR shooters) and *Photoshop User TV*.

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

Scott is a photographer, designer, and award-winning author of more than 50 books, including *The Digital Photography Book*, volumes 1 and 2, *The Adobe Photoshop Book for Digital Photographers*, *Photoshop Down & Dirty Tricks*, *The Adobe Photoshop Lightroom Book for Digital Photographers*, *Photoshop Classic Effects*, *The iPod Book*, and *The iPhone Book*.

For five years straight, Scott has been honored with the distinction of being the world's #1 best-selling author of all computer and technology books, across all categories. 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 training DVDs and online courses, and has been training photographers and Adobe Photoshop users since 1993.

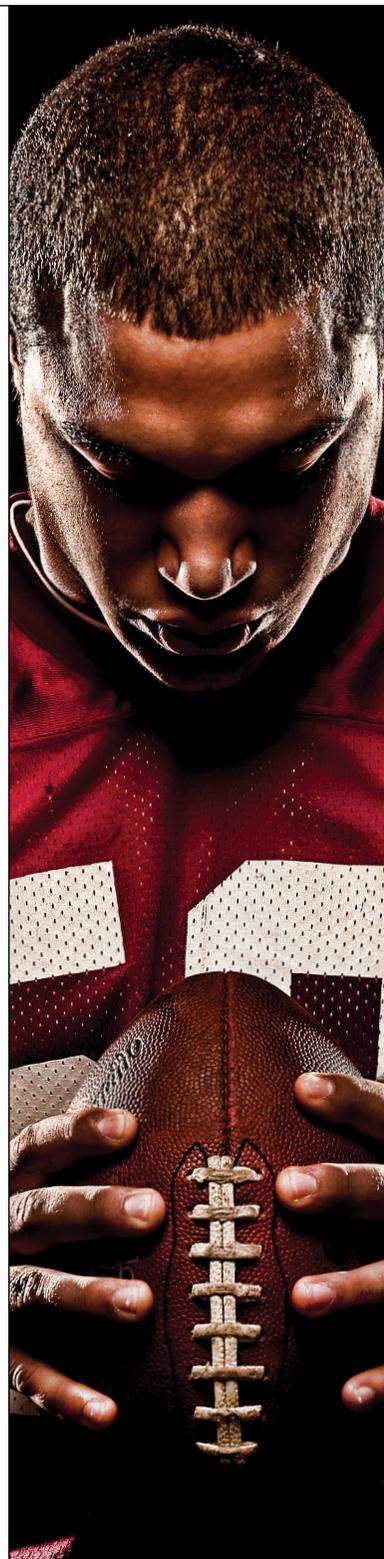
For more information on Scott and his photography, visit his daily blog at [www.scottkelby.com](http://www.scottkelby.com)

## Table of Contents

<b>CHAPTER ONE</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Using Flash Like a Pro, Part 2</b>	
<i>Picking Right Up Where the Last Book Left Off</i>	
9 Things You'll Wish You Had Known...	2
...Before Reading This Book!	3
That Was Only 6. Here Are the Last 3	4
Soft Light on Location (the Budget Way)	5
Controlling Softness with an Umbrella	6
Get More Control Using a Portable Softbox	7
What Your Flash's Groups Are For	8
What Your Flash's Channels Are For	9
Using a Transmitter to Fire Your Flash	10
How to See If All Your Flashes Will Really Fire	11
Shorten the Time Between Flashes	12
Recycle Faster with an External Battery Pack	13
Another Recycle-Faster Tip	14
Typical Power Settings for Your Flash	15
Firing a Second Flash in Another Room	16
Overpowering the Sun	17
Getting the Ring Flash Look Using Small Flash	18
What If Your Flash at Full Power Isn't Enough?	19
Lowering the Power of Your Pop-Up Flash	20
When Not to Use a Diffusion Dome	21
The Pro Trick for Better-Looking People Shots	22
Two Other Gels You Really Need	23
Sticky Filters	24
Tips for Lighting Your Background with Flash	25
Using That Little Flash Stand in the Box	26
Where You Focus Affects Your Flash Exposure	27
The Paid-Gig Flash Insurance Policy	28
How High to Position Your Flash	29
Which Side Should Your Flash Go On?	30
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Using Your Studio Like a Pro</b>	
<i>In Volume 2, We Built It From Scratch. Now, Let's Pimp It!</i>	
The Easy Way to a Pure White Background	34
Strobes with Built-In Wireless Rock!	35
Using a Set Background	36
You've Got to Have Music During the Shoot	37
The Beauty Dish Look	38
Using Grid Spots	39
Shooting Tethered Directly to a TV Monitor	40

## Table of Contents

Getting Your Laptop Nearby for Tethering	41
The Most Useful Inexpensive Accessories	42
Why You'll Love Rolling Light Stands	43
Why You Need Sandbags	44
Monolight vs. Battery Pack	45
One Background, Three Different Looks	46
Using a Ring Flash	47
Using V-Flats for Fashion	48
Catch Lights and Why You Want Them	49
Reflectors: When to Use Silver or White	50
Using a Gray Card to Nail Your Color	51
Don't Light Your Whole Subject Evenly	52
The Difference Between Main and Fill Light	53
Avoiding the Flash Sync Speed Black Bar	54
<b>CHAPTER THREE</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>The Truth About Lenses</b>	
<i>Which Lens to Use, When, and Why</i>	
When to Use a Wide-Angle Lens	58
When to Use a Fisheye Lens	59
When to Use a Telephoto Zoom	60
When to Use Super-Fast Lenses	61
When to Use an Ultra-Wide Zoom Lens	62
When to Use a Super-Telephoto Lens	63
Using a Teleconverter to Get Even Closer	64
Lenses with VR or IS Built In	65
Using Filters with Your Lenses	66
The Deal on Lens Hoods	67
When to Use a Macro Lens	68
When to Use a Tilt-Shift Lens	69
How to Clean a Lens	70
When to Use the Manual Focus Ring	71
Zoomed vs. Full-Frame Lenses	72
Lens Vignetting and How to Remove It	73
Why Some Lenses Have Two f-Stops (Like f/3.5–5.6)	74
Tips on Changing Lenses	75
When to Use an "All-in-One" Zoom	76
When to Use a Lensbaby Lens	77
What Makes It a Portrait Lens?	78
Fixed-Length Prime Lenses vs. Zooms	79
Shooting at Your Lens' Sharpest Aperture	80
But My Friend Has That Lens and He Shoots...	81



## Table of Contents



<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Shooting Products Like a Pro</b>	
<i>How to Get Them to Look Like You've Always Wanted Them To</i>	
How to Create Real Reflections	84
Mirrors for Those Hard-to-Light Places	85
Lighting From Underneath	86
The Advantage of Shooting Inside a Tent	87
Using Continuous Lighting	88
Mixing Daylight and Studio Lights	89
Enhancing Highlights and Shadows in Post	90
Making Your Own Product Table	91
Special Wire for Hanging Products	92
The Advantage of Using Strip Banks	93
Using Foam Core	94
A Dramatic Background for Products	95
Use a Tripod	96
Hide Distracting Stuff	97
Clean It Before You Shoot It	98
<b>CHAPTER FIVE</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Shooting Outdoors Like a Pro</b>	
<i>More Tips for Creating Stunning Scenic Images</i>	
Make a Packing List So You Don't Forget Anything	102
Show Movement in Your Shot	103
Getting the Star Filter Effect	104
Try Getting Creative with White Balance	105
Let Great Light Be Your Subject	106
Watch for Bright Spots	107
The Three Keys to Landscape Photography	108
Look for Clouds to Hold the Color	109
How to Shoot Underwater, Part 1	110
How to Shoot Underwater, Part 2	111
It's What You Leave Out of the Frame	112
Shoot at the Lowest ISO Possible	113
Not Sure What to Shoot? Try This!	114
Keeping Unwanted Light Out	115
Using a Graduated Neutral Density Filter	116
How to Shoot for HDR	117
What to Do with Your HDR Shots	118
Scout Your Dawn Shoot Location	119
Don't Always Shoot Wide Angle	120

## Table of Contents

Use Backlighting to Your Advantage	121
Why We Get There Early	122
Why You Should Shoot Panoramas Vertically	123
Getting More Vibrant Landscapes	124
Delete Now Instead of Later	125

### CHAPTER SIX 127

#### **Shooting People Like a Pro**

*Yet Even More Tips to Make People Look Their Very Best*

If They Look Uncomfortable, Hand Them a Prop	128
The Advantage of Having Your Subject Sit	129
Shoot From Up Really High	130
Shooting a ¾-View? Pick a Spot to Look At	131
Get Everything Set Before They Arrive	132
Super-Shallow Depth of Field for Portraits	133
Using a Triflector for Portraits	134
Using Scrims for Shooting in Direct Sun	135
Shooting at the Beach	136
Shooting on the Street	137
Get a Model Release	138
They Don't Always Need to Be Smiling	139
Overexpose on Purpose	140
Put Multiple Photos Together to Tell a Story	141
Get Out From Behind the Camera for Kids	142
Don't Shoot Down on Kids	143

### CHAPTER SEVEN 145

#### **Shooting Sports Like a Pro**

*How to Get Professional Results From Your Next Sports Shoot*

Auto ISO Lets You Always Freeze the Action	146
Using the Extra Focus Buttons on Long Glass	147
Shooting Night Games with Super-High ISO	148
The Advantage of Shooting From the End Zone	149
The Two Most Popular Sports Shots	150
Once You've Got the Shot, Move On!	151
Turning Off the Beep	152
Having Your Focus Auto-Track the Action	153
Freezing Motion Doesn't Always Look Good	154
Avoid the Fence at All Costs	155
Leveraging Daylight to Light Your Players	156



## Table of Contents

Shoot From a Low Position	157
Isolate Your Subject for More Impact	158
Why You Want to Get in Tight	159
Using a Second Camera Body? Get an R-Strap	160
Tell a Story with Your Shots	161
Full-Frame vs. Standard Digital Chip	162
Don't Have "Long Glass?" Rent It for the Week!	163
Still Players Are Boring	164
Another Reason to Keep Shooting After the Play	165
You Don't Have to Drag Around a Camera Bag	166
Start Shooting Right Before the Game	167
<b>CHAPTER EIGHT</b>	<b>169</b>
<b>Pro Tips for Getting Better Photos</b>	
<i>Tricks of the Trade for Making All Your Shots Look Better</i>	
Using Live View to Set Your White Balance	170
Spot Metering	171
Shooting Concerts and Events	172
Shooting Home Interiors	173
Shooting Time-Lapse Photography (Canon)	174
Shooting Time-Lapse Photography (Nikon)	175
Creating Multiple Exposures	176
Do You Really Need to Read Your Histogram?	177
Using an Online Photo Lab	178
Shooting in Tricky Low-Light Situations	179
Shooting Night Scenes Like Cityscapes	180
How My Camera Is Usually Set Up	181
What I Pack for a Landscape Shoot	182
What I Pack for a Sports Shoot	183
What I Pack for a Location Portrait Shoot	184
What I Pack for a Travel Shoot	185
What I Pack for a Wedding Shoot	186
White Balance vs. Color Correction	187
How Many Great Shots to Expect From a Shoot	188
If Your Camera Shoots Video....	189

# Table of Contents

## CHAPTER NINE 191

### Avoiding Problems Like a Pro

*How to Sidestep Those Things  
That Drive You Crazy*

Can You Trust Your Camera's LCD Monitor?	192
Resetting Your Camera to the Factory Defaults	193
Instant JPEG From RAW	194
When to Shoot JPEG; When to Shoot RAW	195
Built-In Sensor Cleaning	196
Shortcut for Formatting Your Memory Card	197
Make Sure You Have the Latest Firmware	198
Don't Get Burned by Shooting Without a Memory Card	199
You Need to Copyright Your Photos	200
Back Up Twice Before Formatting	201
How You Press the Shutter Button Matters!	202
Tuck in Your Elbows for Sharper Shots	203
Don't Let the Small Screen Fool You!	204
Avoiding the Memory Card Moment of Doubt	205
Shoot Multiple Shots in Low-Light Situations	206
The High-Speed Memory Card Myth	207
Do This Before You Close Your Camera Bag	208
Why You Should Download Your User Manual	209
The Photoshop Trick for Finding Dust Spots	210
Shooting in Bad Weather	211

## CHAPTER TEN 213

### Yet Even More Photo Recipes to Help You Get "The Shot"

*The Simple Ingredients to  
Make It All Come Together*

## INDEX 232





SHUTTER SPEED: 1/1000 sec F-STOP: F/4.8 ISO: 200 FOCAL LENGTH: 50mm

PHOTOGRAPHER: SCOTT KELBY

## Chapter Four

# Shooting Products Like a Pro

## How to Get Them to Look Like You've Always Wanted Them To



The first time you look at this chapter, you might think to yourself, “Why would I need to know how to make a great photo of a product?” There are tons of reasons (shooting products is surprisingly fun), but the most obvious might be having a great product shot is critical if you’re selling stuff on eBay.com. Now, you might be thinking, “But I’m not selling any stuff on eBay,” and if you just said that, that tells me one thing—that this is the first chapter of the book that you turned to, because although this book wasn’t designed to make you want to buy new stuff, the sad truth is, to get the same results the pros get, sometimes you have to buy stuff (sometimes it’s an accessory, or a light, or a filter, etc.). The stuff might not cost a lot, but still, it’s stuff you have to buy. Okay, so if it’s stuff you have to buy, some of it will probably be replacing stuff you already have, right? For example, if you bought a digital camera “kit” (where you got a camera body and a lens together), then when you read the chapter on lenses, you’re undoubtedly going to see a lens you’re going to want. But then you’ll think to yourself, “I don’t really need that lens. The lens I have is fine.” But the more you think about it, the more you start to think, “If I sold my old lens, and some other camera gear I don’t use anymore, I could probably buy that new lens,” and then you figure that the easiest way to sell your old stuff is to sell it on eBay (which was practically invented for photographers), and so now you think, “I need to do a product shot,” and it’s at that moment that you realize you’ve been sucked into the whole photography equipment merry-go-round. Once you’re on it, it’s easier to come off drug addiction, because they actually have rehab centers for drug dependency, but there is no rehab clinic for photographers, which is why the best thing you can do is just skip this chapter and get on with your life. See? I care.

## How to Create Real Reflections



In professional product photography, you'll often see a reflection appear below the product, and while you can add these reflections after the fact in Photoshop, it's easier to just have real reflections (plus, depending on the angle of the product, the job of creating fake reflections in Photoshop can range anywhere from quick and easy to a real pain in the %\*\$#, so you're better off doing it right up front). The easy way to get those reflections is to shoot your product on some plexiglass (either clear or white frosted). Just put a rectangular sheet of plexi right over your background (you can pick up these small sheets of plexiglass at your local Home Depot or Lowe's for around \$15) and it does the rest. Plus, plexiglass is handy for all sorts of other stuff (you'll see it used again in a couple of pages, and another in Chapter 10. To see a production setup using plexiglass, go to page 93).

### Faking Reflections in Adobe Photoshop

If you need to fake a reflection, here's how it's done: Make a selection around your product, then press Command-J (PC: Ctrl-J) to put that product up on its own separate layer. Go under the Edit menu, under Transform, and choose Flip Vertical. This turns your product upside down. Now press-and-hold the Shift key, and drag your product straight downward until the two "bottoms" touch, then in the Layers panel, lower the opacity of this layer to around 20%. That's it!

## Mirrors for Those Hard-to-Light Places



When you're shooting products, it's very important to make sure the product is really well lit, and sometimes it's hard to get into little nooks and crannies with your light, which is why you'll love this trick: buy a few little tabletop mirrors (the kind they sell at the local pharmacy or Walmart, but make sure they tilt). Position a couple of these right outside your frame, aim them directly at the area you need to light, and they will reflect your studio light into those areas (if you're using continuous light for your product photography, like I talk about on page 88, then you'll be able to use these mirrors like little spotlights—as you tilt the mirror back and forth, you'll see a small beam of light that you can aim right where you want it. The first time you see this, you'll be amazed. If you're using strobes, it's a little trickier, but what you can do is turn up the power on your modeling lights and then use that light to aim the mirrors. Just know that when you fire your strobe, the amount of light you're putting into those shadow areas will be much brighter). The great thing about these mirrors is they're inexpensive, lightweight, and small enough to throw in your camera bag or lighting gear case.

### Buying Your Little Mirrors

Make sure you don't buy too large a mirror, because you don't want to have to shoot around them, so keep them no larger than four inches around. Also, if you choose a mirror with a magnifier on one side, you'll have two different looks for your light.

## Lighting From Underneath



A really popular technique for lighting products is to include a light coming from below the product. You see this look fairly often in product photography, and if you're shooting a product that has see-through areas (like glass), it really looks great. Okay, so you're probably wondering how you get that light through the table to your product. Plexiglass! Instead of setting your product on a white background (and then putting the plexiglass on top of it), you remove the white background, and use your plexiglass as the tabletop (if you're going to be doing this often, make sure you buy thicker plexi from the hardware store). Just suspend the plexiglass between two light stands (or even between two sawhorses or two chair backs), and then position a light directly under the plexiglass—on the floor—aiming upward through it.

### Concentrating Your Below-Product Light

When you're lighting from underneath, you really don't want your light to spill out everywhere—you want it concentrated straight upward. One way to help with that is to use a grid spot attachment (see page 39), which focuses your beam, but a lot of folks will just put foam core or black flags around all four sides of the light, so the light doesn't spill out. I've even seen DIY projects where you put the strobe on a short stand inside a cardboard box, and then you cut a little door out so you can reach in and adjust your strobe.

## The Advantage of Shooting Inside a Tent



Product tents have become more popular than ever, because they allow you to easily wrap balanced soft light right around the product, while avoiding lots of nasty shadow problems you're likely to run into using multiple lights. Shadows are really a problem and soft light is a problem, so having a self-contained tent like this makes shooting the products crazy easy. The idea behind these is you put a light on both sides or either side of the tent (and perhaps one light below, aiming straight up, if you buy one that includes that feature, like the Studio Cubelite from Lastolite, shown above), and then the front of this is open for you to shoot. The light bounces around inside this box in a very wonderful way that lights the living daylights out of your product, and you come away with some surprisingly good results without having to be a master of lighting. If you're going to be doing a lot of this, and especially if you're trying to shoot things like watches or jewelry, you should definitely consider buying a light tent.

## Using Continuous Lighting



Although I've used strobes many times over the years for product photography, today when I need to shoot a product, I usually use continuous lights like the Westcott TD5 Spiderlite. These aren't flashes, these are lights that stay on all the time, and they give bright daylight-balanced light, but because they use fluorescent bulbs, they don't get hot, so you can even use them to light food (as I did in the restaurant shoot above). These work incredibly well for product photography, because you can see exactly what you're going to get—there's no shooting a few shots, and then tweaking the lights, and shooting again, and tweaking the lights, because exactly what you see is what you get. Outside of the fact that they stay on all the time, they're just like strobes, and have all the similar accessories, like softboxes in every size (including strip banks), and fabric grids, and all the other stuff, but since they're always on, you don't have to worry about a wireless trigger or flash cables. I always recommend these to my friends, and everybody I've recommended them to has fallen in love with them. You can pick up a one-light kit (which includes the fixture, a softbox, tilt bracket, and light stand—bulbs need to be ordered separately) from B&H Photo for around \$530. You can also get the fixture on its own (for around \$280), but again, the bulbs need to be ordered separately.

## Mixing Daylight and Studio Lights



SCOTT KELBY

If you've got a lot of space with a lot of natural light, you can shoot just using the natural light, but the problem is going to be getting light to wrap all the way around your product. That's why adding one light, and mixing that with your natural light, can make a big difference. I do this a lot when shooting food, or wine bottles, where I use the natural light for the backlighting (so it's really the main light) and then I use a Westcott Spiderlite continuous light for a fill light in front (after all, if the light is coming from behind my product, the front of the product will be kind of a silhouette. Bringing a little light in from the front makes all the difference in the world). The advantage of the Spiderlite is that it's daylight-balanced, and mixes really well with natural daylight. (To see the final image from this shoot, just go to the book's companion website at [www.kelbytraining.com/books/digphotogv3](http://www.kelbytraining.com/books/digphotogv3).)

## Enhancing Highlights and Shadows in Post



*Before*



*After*

Although we always strive to get as much right in the camera as possible, product photography is one area where it usually pays to do a little tweaking in Photoshop after the fact (called “post-processing” or just “post” by people who can only use one word at a time). When I shoot a product, what I’m looking to do in Photoshop (besides removing any specks, dust, or other little junk on the background or the product itself) is to enhance the highlights (the brightest areas of the product) and the shadows (the darker areas). Basically, I make the highlights brighter and more obvious, and the shadow areas a bit darker and richer. Once you see the difference this makes, you’ll want to be doing some “post” yourself. I did a little video for you (you can find it on the book’s companion website at [www.kelbytraining.com/books/digphotogv3](http://www.kelbytraining.com/books/digphotogv3)) to show you exactly how the Photoshop post-processing was done for most of the product shots used here in the book. I think you’ll be surprised at both how easy it is, and what an impact it has on the finished image.

### What File Format to Save Your Photos In

Even though we shoot in RAW format, once you open and edit your photos in a program like Photoshop, at some point, you’re going to have a duplicate of the same image (for uploading to a lab, or archiving, etc.), and that’s when you have to decide which file format to save your images in. I choose JPEG mode with a quality setting of 10 (out of a possible 12) for all my final images (I think a setting of 10 gives an ideal balance between maintaining great quality and still compressing the file size quite a bit).

## Making Your Own Product Table



If you're looking for a great surface to shoot your product shots on, look no further than your local hardware store for a large panel of white formica. This stuff works great for a number of reasons: (1) When you put a product on white formica, its surface is already a little reflective, so it automatically gives your product a little bit of a natural reflection (not a sharp mirror reflection like acrylic, but kind of a subtle satin-like reflection). (2) It's very easy to keep clean—you can just wipe it lightly with a damp cloth—so you don't have to replace it often, like you do with white seamless paper, and (3) because it bends pretty easily, you can lie one end flat on a table, and then attach the other end to a couple of inexpensive light stands with some A-clamps (see page 42 for more on A-clamps), and this gives you a smooth, seamless curve behind your product, which makes it perfect for product photography. A full 8x4' sheet costs about \$45–50 at my local hardware store, and believe it, it's worth every penny.

## Special Wire for Hanging Products



SCOTT KELBY

Invisible thread. It's not just for repairing your clothes—this incredibly sturdy stuff can be used to suspend products in midair so you can shoot them (well, of course, it depends on the weight of the product. It's not going to hold a car battery, if that's what you're thinking). Just put a boom stand arm up high—just high enough so you can't see it in your viewfinder—then tie one end of the invisible thread to the boom, the other end to your product, and fire away. Now, you can also use fishing line if you can't get hold of some invisible thread, and while it's pretty unobtrusive, you're probably going to have to remove that line later in Photoshop. That's what I used in the shot you see above, and I did a video clip on how I removed the fishing line using Adobe Photoshop (the clip actually aired on *Photoshop User TV*, a weekly video podcast I've been co-hosting for the past few years), and you can see that clip on the book's companion website at [www.kelbytraining.com/books/digphotogv3](http://www.kelbytraining.com/books/digphotogv3).

## The Advantage of Using Strip Banks



Have you ever seen a product shot of a wine bottle, or a piece of electronics, and reflected in the product you see a tall, thin, soft, rectangular reflection? Maybe even two of them? These wonderful highlight reflections are most likely from one of the mainstays of a lot of pro product shooters—a strip bank (also sometimes called a strip light). These are actually just tall, thin, rectangular softboxes (picture a softbox that's just 18" wide, but around 36" long), and they are very popular in product photography because of those wonderful tall reflections they create in products that reflect. (It's tough shooting products that are reflective, because you can see a reflection of everything in the product itself—even sometimes the photographer—so be careful when you're shooting reflective products.) You can buy strip banks for strobes, or even for the Westcott Spiderlite TD5 that I use for product photography, and the nice thing about them is that you can use them tall (vertically), or turn them on their side and use them horizontally for a really wide, wrapping light.

## Using Foam Core



While you'll find portrait photographers using white reflectors a lot in the studio (usually to reflect or bounce light from the main light into the side of the face that's in the shadows), when it comes to product photography, more often than not, you'll find the pros using a large sheet of foam core instead. Foam core tends to have a little more sheen to it than most reflectors and reflects more light. Plus, because you can cut a sheet of foam core (found at most craft stores or office supply stores) down to pretty much any size you need, you can make these small enough to sit right on your product table and get right up close to your product (but just out of your viewfinder's frame).

## A Dramatic Background for Products



If you want to go for a dramatic look for your product shots, try this: go to your local home supply mega hardware store and buy a single tile of black granite. This stuff is incredibly reflective and just sitting your product on it makes it scream, “Shoot me!” It looks like this stuff was made for product shots, and yet it’s fairly inexpensive (well, at least for one tile it is). Get as large a tile as they have in stock, but since it’s unlikely to be very large, you’ll use this for smaller items that you want to have a dark, dramatic look. Try this the next time you want to go a totally different direction from the standard white background that you see so often for products shots.

## Use a Tripod



Product shots are one of those things that if they're not absolutely tack sharp, they just don't work, and that's why the pros use a tripod every time. Having that super-sharp focus is critical and, although I will hand-hold when shooting people (if I'm using studio strobes or flash to freeze any movement), when it comes to product shots, my camera goes right on a tripod and stays there. If you're looking for a way to take your product shots to the next level, this is absolutely the first step.

## Hide Distracting Stuff



If you take a look at most professional product shots, you'll find that they go to great lengths to hide anything that would distract you from the presentation of the product, even if it's a part of the product itself. Perfect example? Headphones. You know and I know that there's a cord on headphones that plugs into our laptops, or our iPods, but in ads you rarely, if ever, see the cord—you just see the headphones (earbuds are an exception, but without the cords, they look like a couple of white peas). The photographer goes out of their way to hide things like cords, or cables, or anything else that would detract or take away from the product (like a camera strap on a camera. If you see Canons or Nikons, or, well....almost anybody's shot of their latest camera, you won't see a camera strap in the shot, even though in real life every dSLR we buy has one attached). Keep this in mind, and you'll wind up with cleaner looking shots. So, if you're shooting something with a cord that unplugs (like the headphones above), just unplug the cord and move it out of the image (as seen in the photo on the right). Otherwise, you'll have to remove the distracting object in Photoshop. I did a video for you on how to do this, and you can find it on the book's website at [www.kelbytraining.com/books/digphotogv3](http://www.kelbytraining.com/books/digphotogv3).

## Clean It Before You Shoot It



Before you shoot anything—clean it first. This is one of those things that, if you don't do it, I promise it will take you ten times longer to fix it in Photoshop than the 15 seconds it would have taken you to do it right in the studio. I can't tell you how many times in the past I've skipped this step, and I don't really notice all the fingerprints and little smudges, and specks of dust on the product until I actually open the shot later in Photoshop, and then I have to spend 10 minutes trying to retouch it all away. It's been so bad on a couple of occasions, that I actually went back, wiped down the product, and then reshot from scratch. You only have to do that a few times to learn the lesson—clean it thoroughly before you start shooting and save yourself a bunch of headaches after the shoot.

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# Index

## A

**about this book**, 2–4  
**A-clamps**, 42, 91  
**action shots**, 150, 215, 217, 225  
     *See also sports photography*  
**Adobe Photoshop**. *See Photoshop*  
*Adobe Photoshop Book for Digital Photographers, The (Kelby)*, 51  
**AE Lock button**, 147, 189  
**AlienBees Ring Flash**, 47, 223  
**all-in-one zoom lenses**, 76  
**ambient light**, 46  
**American Society of Media Photographers (ASMP)**, 138  
**anti-movement technology**, 65  
**aperture priority mode**, 117, 181, 214, 226  
**aperture setting**, 80, 158  
**architectural photography**, 69  
**athletic events**. *See sports photography*  
**Auto Exposure setting**, 189  
**Auto ISO feature**, 146  
**Auto white balance**, 105, 181  
**autofocus feature**, 71, 74, 75, 152

## B

**B&H Photo website**, 69  
**babies**  
     focusing attention of, 142  
     shooting newborn, 141  
     *See also children*  
**backgrounds**  
     black granite, 95  
     lighting, 25, 46  
     sets used as, 36  
     solid white, 34  
**backing up memory cards**, 201  
**backlighting effect**, 121  
**backup flash**, 28  
**batteries**, rechargeable, 14

**battery grips**, 165  
**battery packs**  
     external, 13  
     studio strobes and, 45  
**beach portraits**, 136  
**beauty dish**, 38, 221, 231  
**beauty-style shots**, 216, 231  
**black backgrounds**, 46  
**black bar/gradient**, 54  
**black granite**, 95  
**BlackRapid R-Strap**, 160  
**bracketing shots**, 117, 219  
**breath holding**, 61  
**bridal shots**, 228  
**bright spots**, 107  
**Burst mode**, 206  
**BXRi strobes**, 35

## C

**cable release**, 68, 180  
**camera gear**  
     author's website on, 3  
     downloading manuals for, 209  
     lens gear finder, 58, 59  
     modular belt system for, 166  
     packing lists for, 102, 182–186  
**Camera Raw**, 51  
**cameras**. *See digital cameras*  
**Canon cameras**, 4  
     AI Servo mode, 153  
     Auto ISO feature, 146  
     exposure compensation on, 140  
     external battery pack, 13  
     eyepiece cover, 115  
     firmware updates for, 198  
     Focus Confirmation Light on, 152  
     HDR bracketing on, 117  
     IS lenses for, 65  
     Live View white balance, 170  
     memory card lock feature, 199

- mini-light-stand, 26
- Picture Styles, 124
- reformatting memory cards on, 197
- resetting to factory defaults, 193
- sensor cleaning feature, 196
- time-lapse photography with, 174
- TTL feature, 27
- video capability on, 189
- zooming the LCD on, 204
- catch lights**, 49
- celebrations in sports**, 150
- channels**, flash, 9
- children**
  - focusing attention of, 142
  - grouping photos of, 141
  - handing props to, 143
  - perspective for shooting, 143
  - taking portraits of, 142–143
- circular polarizer filter**, 66
- cityscapes**, nighttime, 180
- cleaning**
  - lenses, 70
  - sensors, 196, 210
- clipping warning**, 177
- close-up photography**, 68
- color**
  - clouds for holding, 109
  - settings for vibrant, 124
- color casts**, 111
- color correction**
  - gray card for, 51
  - white balance vs., 187
- composing**
  - action shots, 215, 217, 225
  - beauty-style shots, 216, 231
  - editorial-style shots, 221
  - food shots, 229
  - landscapes, 214
  - portraits, 216, 218, 220, 223, 227, 230
  - product shots, 222, 224, 229
  - sports shots, 215, 217, 225
  - still-life shots, 226
  - travel shots, 107, 214, 219
  - wedding shots, 228

- computers**
  - backing up memory cards to, 201
  - viewing images on, 41
- concert photos**, 172
- continuous lighting**, 88
- Continuous-Servo mode**, 153
- copyrighting photos**, 200
- creativity**, 60, 77, 81, 120
- CTO gel**, 22

## D

- dawn**, shooting at, 122
- daylight**
  - portraits lit with, 227, 228
  - studio lighting with, 89, 222
  - See also* sunlight
- deleting bad shots**, 125
- depth of field**
  - for portraits, 133, 220, 227
  - for sports shots, 158
  - for still-life shots, 226
  - for wedding shots, 228
- Dfine 2.0 plug-in**, 172, 179
- diffusion dome**, 21, 25
- digital cameras**
  - checking before packing, 208
  - downloading user manuals for, 209
  - exposure compensation on, 140
  - firmware updates for, 198
  - full-frame, 62, 72
  - hand-holding of, 61, 179, 203, 206
  - HDR bracketing on, 117
  - most common brands of, 4
  - rain covers for, 211
  - reformatting memory cards on, 197
  - resetting to factory defaults, 193
  - sensor cleaning on, 196
  - sophisticated technology of, 191
  - suggested setup for, 181
  - video capability of, 189
  - waterproof housing for, 110
  - zoom factor of, 72
  - See also* Canon cameras; Nikon cameras

## digital photos

- backing up, 201
- combining in Photoshop, 173, 176
- copyrighting, 200
- deleting, 125
- recipes for shooting, 213–231
- See also* JPEG images; RAW photos

## distracting objects

- hiding in product photos, 97
- modern-day objects as, 107

## downloading user manuals, 209

## duChemin, David, 112

## dust spots, 210

## E

### edge vignetting, 73

### editorial-style shots, 221

### effects

- backlighting, 121
- movement, 103
- star filter, 104

### Elinchrom gear

- beauty dish, 38
- BXRi strobes, 35
- Ranger kit, 45

### environmental portraits, 58

### equipment. *See* camera gear

### evaluative metering, 171

### ExpoDisc, 187

### exposure compensation, 140, 177, 180

### external battery pack, 13

### eyeglass glare, 50

### eyepiece cap, 115

### eyes in portraits, 139

### Ezybox, 7, 225

## F

### file formats, 90

### fill flash, 20, 53

### filters

- circular polarizer, 66
- darkening, 103

### lens, 66, 69

### neutral density gradient, 66, 116

### UV, 103

### firmware updates, 198

### fisheye lenses, 59

### fishing line, 92

### flash, 5–30

- adding units of, 19
- backgrounds lit with, 25
- backup, 28
- channels used for, 9
- concert photos and, 172
- diffusion dome for, 21, 25
- fill, 20, 53
- focusing for, 27
- gels used with, 22–24
- group assignments for, 8, 19
- mini-light-stand for, 26
- outdoor portraits and, 17, 220
- pop-up, 20
- positioning, 29–30
- power settings for, 15, 20
- recycle time for, 12–14
- Remote (or Slave) mode, 16
- ring, 18, 47, 223
- softening, 5–7
- sync speed for, 54
- test firing, 11
- transmitter system for, 10

### Fluorescent white balance, 105

### foam core, 94

### focusing

- for off-camera flash, 27
- for sports photography, 147, 152, 153
- See also* autofocus feature

### food photography, 229

### football games

- action and celebration shots from, 150
- shooting from the end zone at, 149
- variety of shots from, 151

### *See also* sports photography

### formatting memory cards

- backing up twice before, 201
- immediately after backing up, 205
- on-camera shortcut for, 197

formica, white, 91  
 frames per second (fps), 165  
 framing shots, 112  
 freezing action, 154, 215  
 f-stops  
   star effects and, 104  
   zoom lenses and, 74  
 full-frame cameras, 62, 72, 162

## G

gaffer's tape, 42  
 gear. *See* camera gear  
 gels, 22–24  
   CTO, 22  
   essential, 23  
   Sticky Filters, 24  
 getting “the shot”, 213–231  
 Gitzo G-065 Monitor Platform, 41  
 glare in eyeglasses, 50  
 Glyda, Joe, 120  
 gold reflectors, 50  
 graduated neutral density filter, 66, 116  
 granite, black, 95  
 gray backgrounds, 46  
 gray card, 51  
 green gel, 23  
 Greenburg, Ed, 200  
 grid spots, 39, 230  
 groups, flash, 8, 19

## H

hand-held shots  
   low-light situations and, 206  
   super-fast lenses and, 61  
   tips for stabilizing, 179, 203  
 HDR (High Dynamic Range) images  
   camera settings for, 117  
   composing shots for, 219  
   creating in Photomatix Pro, 118

hiding  
   distracting objects, 97  
   modern-day objects, 107  
 high vantage point, 130  
 highlights  
   enhancing in Photoshop, 90  
   warning about lost detail, 177  
 High-Speed Continuous mode, 206  
 high-speed crop feature, 162  
 high-speed memory cards, 207  
 HiLite Illuminated Background, 34  
 histograms, 177  
 Hobby, David, 14  
 home interior shots, 173  
 hood, lens, 67

## I

Image Stabilization (IS) lenses, 65  
 intelligent-through-the-lens metering  
   (i-TTL), 27  
 invisible thread, 92  
 IS (Image Stabilization) lenses, 65  
 ISO setting  
   Auto ISO feature and, 146  
   landscape photography and, 113  
   low-light situations and, 179  
   sports photography and, 146, 148  
 isolating your subject, 158  
 i-TTL (intelligent-through-the-lens  
   metering), 27  
 iTunes iMix, 37

## J

JPEG images  
   instantly extracting from RAW photos,  
   194  
   LCD monitor preview of, 192  
   saving files as, 90  
   when to shoot RAW vs., 195  
 Justin Spring Clamp, 26

## K

- Kata Elements Cover**, 211
- kelbytraining.com website**
  - camera gear page, 3
  - video tutorial, 2
- knee pads**, 157

## L

### landscape photography

- arriving early for, 122
- backlighting effect in, 121
- clouds included in, 109
- composing shots in, 214
- covering the viewfinder for, 115
- deleting bad shots during, 125
- full-frame cameras and, 162
- graduated neutral density filter for, 116
- ISO setting for, 113
- lens selection for, 120
- lower-level perspective for, 116
- packing list for, 102, 182
- panoramas made from, 123
- scouting locations for, 119
- three keys to, 108
- ultra-wide zoom lens for, 62
- vibrant color settings for, 124
- wide-angle lens for, 58

*See also outdoor photography*

- laptop computers**, shooting tethered to, 41

### Lastolite gear

- Ezybox, 7
- HiLite Illuminated Background, 34
- Studio Cubelight, 87
- Trilite, 134

### LCD screens (on-camera)

- previewing photos on, 192
- zooming in on, 204

### lens collar, 70

### lens hood, 67

### lens vignetting, 73

### Lensbaby lenses, 77

### lenses, 57–81

- all-in-one zoom, 76
- changing, 75
- cleaning, 70
- creative use of, 60, 77, 81
- edge vignetting from, 73
- filters for, 66, 69
- fish-eye, 59
- f-stops on zoom, 74
- full-frame camera, 72
- gear finder for, 58, 59
- Lensbaby, 77
- macro, 68
- manual focus ring on, 71
- portrait, 78
- prime vs. zoom, 79
- renting, 163
- reseating, 75
- sharpest aperture on, 80
- super-fast, 61
- super-telephoto, 63
- teleconverters for, 64
- telephoto zoom, 60
- tilt-shift, 69
- ultra-wide zoom, 62
- VR or IS, 65
- wide-angle, 58, 120
- zoom factor for, 72

### LensPen, 70

### LensProToGo.com, 163

### light

- ambient, 46
- catch, 49
- fill, 20, 53
- main, 53
- metering, 171
- softening, 5–7
- as subject, 106
- viewfinder, 115

*See also flash*

### light stands

- lightweight, 5
- rolling, 43

### light tents, 87

**lighting**

- backgrounds, 25, 46
- below-product, 86
- continuous, 88
- daylight plus studio, 89, 222
- mirrors used for, 85
- sports, 148, 156
- strip bank, 93
- underwater, 111
- uneven, 52

**Limit focus setting, 74****Live View white balance, 170****location portraits**

- beach setting for, 136
- packing list for, 184
- street setting for, 137

**lower-level perspective, 116, 157, 225****low-light situations**

- hand-holding cameras in, 206
- super-fast lenses for, 61
- tips for shooting in, 179
- VR or IS lenses for, 65

**M****macro lenses, 68****main light, 53****Maisel, Jay, 137****Manfrotto gear**

- 131DD Tripod Accessory Arm, 41
- Justin Spring Clamp, 26

**manual focus ring, 71****matrix metering, 171****memory cards**

- backup strategy for, 201
- deleting bad shots from, 125
- formatting after backing up, 205
- lock feature for shooting without, 199
- myth of high-speed, 207
- packing multiple for shoots, 197
- shortcut for formatting, 197

**Memory Set button, 147****metering options, 171****Midsouth Photographic Specialties, 24****MiniTT1 Radio Slave Transmitter, 10****mirrors, tabletop, 85****model releases, 138****modern-day objects, 107****modular belt system, 166****monolights, 45****monopods, 63, 179****motion shots, 154, 215****movement effect, 103****Mpix.com photo lab, 178****multiple exposures, 176****music in the studio, 37****N****natural light**

- portraits lit with, 227, 228
  - studio lighting combined with, 89, 222
- See also sunlight**

**neutral density gradient filter, 66, 116****newborn babies, 141****nighttime photography**

- cityscapes, 180
- sporting events, 148

**Nik Software, 172, 179****Nikon cameras, 4**

- battery grip added to, 165
- Continuous-Servo mode, 153
- exposure compensation on, 140
- external battery pack, 13
- eyepiece cap for, 115
- firmware updates for, 198
- Focus Indicator on, 152
- gels included with, 23
- HDR bracketing on, 117
- high-speed crop on, 162
- ISO Sensitivity Settings, 146
- i-TTL feature, 27
- Live View white balance, 170
- memory card lock feature, 199
- multiple exposure feature, 176
- Picture Controls, 124
- reformatting memory cards on, 197
- resetting to factory defaults, 193

**Nikon cameras** (*continued*)

- sensor cleaning feature, 196
- Speedlight stand, 26
- time-lapse photography with, 175
- video capability on, 189
- viewfinder door, 115
- VR lenses for, 65
- zooming the LCD on, 204

**NiMH batteries**, 14

**noise**

- high ISO shots and, 148
- onscreen vs. print, 113
- software for reducing, 172, 179

**O**

**Olivella, Mike**, 157

**online photo labs**, 178

**orange gel**, 23

**outdoor photography**, 101–125

- arriving early for, 122
- backlighting effect in, 121
- bright spots avoided in, 107
- clouds included in, 109
- covering the viewfinder for, 115
- deleting bad shots during, 125
- framing shots in, 112
- graduated neutral density filter for, 116
- HDR images from, 117–118
- hiding modern-day objects in, 107
- ISO setting for, 113
- lens selection for, 120
- light as the subject in, 106
- lower-level perspective for, 116
- movement effect and, 103
- overpowering the sun in, 17
- packing list for, 102, 182
- panoramas made from, 123
- portraits and, 17, 135, 136, 220
- postcard images and, 114
- puddle reflections in, 112
- scouting locations for, 119
- shadows included in, 109
- star filter effect in, 104
- texture shots in, 114

three keys to, 108

underwater shots in, 110–111

vibrant color settings for, 124

white balance and, 105

*See also* **landscape photography**

**overexposing portraits**, 140

**overpowering the sun**, 17

**P**

**packing lists**

- importance of using, 102
- landscape photography, 182
- location portrait photography, 184
- sports photography, 183
- travel photography, 185
- wedding photography, 186

**panning**

- freezing motion by, 154, 215
- and shooting video, 189

**panoramas**, 123

**people**

- baby and child photos, 141–143
- high vantage point shots of, 130
- model releases for, 138
- props for shooting, 128, 143
- seating for comfort, 129
- street shots of, 137

*See also* **portraits**

**percentage of great shots**, 188

**perspective**

- child-level, 143
- high vantage point, 130
- lower-level, 116, 157, 225

**Peterson, Moose**, 115

**photo labs**, 178

**Photomatix Pro**, 118

**photos.** *See* **digital photos**

**Photoshop**

- Auto Levels adjustment, 111
- Auto-Align Layers feature, 219
- combining images in, 173, 176
- faking reflections in, 84
- finding dust spots in, 210
- gray card color correction in, 51

- highlight/shadow enhancement in, 90
- panoramas created in, 123
- removing edge vignetting in, 73
- Photoshop User TV*, 92
- Picture Controls/Styles**, 124
- plexiglass**
  - for portrait photography, 216
  - for product photography, 84, 86
- PocketWizard wireless system**, 10
- pop-up flash**, 20
- portable softbox**, 7
- portrait lenses**, 78
- portraits**, 127–143
  - beach setting for, 136
  - beauty-style, 216, 231
  - of children, 142–143
  - composing, 216, 218, 220, 223, 227, 230
  - CTO gel for, 22
  - depth of field for, 133, 220, 227
  - editorial-style, 221
  - environmental, 58
  - eyes looking away in, 139
  - grid spots for, 39
  - grouping together, 141
  - leg-up trick for, 130
  - lenses used for, 60, 78
  - model releases for, 138
  - natural-light, 227, 228
  - of newborn babies, 141
  - outdoor, 17, 135, 136, 220
  - overexposing on purpose, 140
  - overpowering the sun in, 17
  - packing list for location, 184
  - preparing the studio for, 132
  - props included in, 128, 143, 221
  - scrims for sunny day, 135
  - seating subjects for, 129
  - shooting 3/4 view, 131
  - smiling vs. non-smiling, 139
  - street-based, 137
  - triflectors for, 134
  - wedding, 228
- posing stool/table**, 129
- positioning the flash**, 29–30
- postcard images**, 114
- power settings for flash**, 15
- prime lenses**, 79
- product photography**, 83–98
  - below-product lighting for, 86
  - black granite for, 95
  - cleaning products before, 98
  - composing shots in, 222, 224, 229
  - continuous lighting for, 88
  - daylight plus studio lights for, 89
  - dramatic background for, 95
  - foam core used in, 94
  - hiding distracting objects in, 97
  - invisible thread used in, 92
  - light tents for, 87
  - mirrors used in, 85
  - Photoshop enhancements for, 90
  - plexiglass used in, 84, 86
  - reflections created in, 84
  - strip banks for, 93
  - tripods and, 96
  - white formica for, 91
- Professional Photographers of America (PPA)**, 138
- professional tips/techniques**, 169–189
  - concert/event shots, 172
  - general camera setup, 181
  - histogram vs. highlight warning, 177
  - home interior shots, 173
  - Live View white balance, 170
  - low-light photography, 179
  - multiple exposures, 176
  - nighttime scenes, 180
  - online photo labs, 178
  - packing lists, 182–186
  - percentage of great shots, 188
  - spot metering, 171
  - time lapse photography, 174–175
  - video feature, 189
  - white balance setting, 187
- props**, 128, 143, 221
- puddle reflections**, 112

## R

radio transmitter, 10

rain covers, 211

Ranger kit, 45

Raw + JPEG option, 194

RAW photos

gray card color correction for, 51

instantly extracting JPEGs from, 194

LCD monitor preview and, 192

saving in JPEG format, 90

when to shoot JPEG vs., 195

RawWorkflow.com website, 194

Ray Flash, 18

Rear-Curtain Sync setting, 181

rechargeable batteries, 14

recipes for getting “the shot”, 213–231

recycle time for flash, 12–14

reflections

creating in product photos, 84

faking in Photoshop, 84

removing from eyeglasses, 50

shooting in puddles, 112

reflective umbrellas, 5

reflectors, 50, 134

Remote mode for flash, 16

renting lenses, 163

reseating the lens, 75

resetting digital cameras, 193

Resnicki, Jack, 142, 200

ring flash, 18, 47, 223

rolling light stands, 43

R-Strap, 160

## S

sandbags, 44

scouting locations, 119

scrim, 135

sensor cleaning, 196, 210

set backgrounds, 36

Shade white balance, 105, 181

shadows

enhancing in Photoshop, 90

including in outdoor shots, 109

shallow depth of field, 133

shapes, shooting, 120

sharpness

checking LCD screen for, 204

hand-held cameras and, 61, 203

lens aperture setting and, 80

shooting tethered, 40–41

shoot-through umbrella, 5–6

accessories for using, 5

controlling softness with, 6

portable softbox vs., 7

shot list, 34

shutter button

cable release for, 68, 180

tip on pressing, 202

wireless release for, 142, 180

shutter speed

action shots and, 215

Auto ISO feature and, 146

low-light situations and, 179

nighttime photos and, 180

panning objects and, 154

silver reflectors, 50

Singh-Ray Filters, 103

skies, including clouds in, 109

Slave mode for flash, 16

smiling vs. non-smiling subjects, 139

Smith, Janine, 208

softbox

portable, 7

strip bank, 93

softening light, 5–7

portable softbox for, 7

shoot-through umbrella for, 5–6

solid white backgrounds, 34

Speedlight stand, 26

*Sports Illustrated*, 150

sports photography, 145–167

action shots in, 150, 215, 217

after-the-play shots in, 165

Auto ISO feature for, 146

backgrounds included in, 155

battery grip for, 165

before-the-game shots in, 167

celebration shots in, 150

- close-up shots in, 159
  - composing shots in, 215, 217, 225
  - focus setting to track action in, 153
  - football end zone used for, 149
  - full- vs. cropped-frame cameras and, 162
  - isolating your subject in, 158
  - JPEG mode used for, 195
  - lighting the players in, 156
  - lower-level perspective for, 157, 225
  - modular belt system for, 166
  - multiple focus settings for, 147
  - night games and ISO for, 148
  - packing list for, 183
  - panning objects in, 154
  - problem with static shots in, 164
  - reference photos in, 165
  - renting long lenses for, 163
  - R-Strap used in, 160
  - silencing the beep for, 152
  - storytelling through, 161
  - super-telephoto lens for, 63
  - teleconverters for shooting, 64
  - telephoto zoom lens for, 60
  - variety of shots in, 151
  - spot metering**, 171
  - spots and specks**, 210
  - stage events**, 172
  - star filter effect**, 104
  - starbrights**, 104
  - Sticky Filters**, 24
  - still-life photography**, 226
  - storytelling**
    - with children's photos, 141
    - with sports photography, 161
  - street-based portraits**, 137
  - strip banks**, 93
  - strobes**, wireless, 35
  - Studio Cubelight**, 87
  - studio photography**, 33–54
    - A-clamps for, 42
    - beauty dish for, 38
    - black bar appearing in, 54
    - catch lights in, 49
    - fast lenses and, 71
    - flash sync speed and, 54
    - gaffer's tape for, 42
    - gray card for, 51
    - grid spots for, 39
    - lighting backgrounds in, 46
    - main vs. fill light in, 53
    - monolights for, 45
    - playing music for, 37
    - reflectors for, 50
    - ring flash for, 47
    - rolling light stands for, 43
    - sandbags for, 44
    - set backgrounds in, 36
    - shooting tethered in, 40–41
    - solid white backgrounds in, 34
    - uneven lighting technique, 52
    - V-flats for, 48
    - wireless strobes for, 35
  - sunlight**
    - overpowering with flash, 17
    - portrait lighting using, 227, 228
    - positioning the flash as, 29
    - scrims used for portraits in, 135
  - super-fast lenses**, 61
  - super-telephoto lenses**, 63
  - super-wide zoom lenses**, 58
- ## T
- tabletop mirrors**, 85
  - Tapes, Michael**, 194
  - teleconverters**, 64
  - telephoto lenses**
    - renting for sporting events, 163
    - super-telephoto lenses, 63
    - telephoto zoom lenses, 60
  - television monitors**, 40
  - tents**, product, 87
  - test firing flashes**, 11
  - tethered shooting**, 40–41
  - texture shots**, 114
  - Think Tank Photo**, 166
  - thread**, invisible, 92
  - through-the-lens metering (TTL)**, 27

tilt-shift lenses, 69  
**time-lapse photography**  
with Canon cameras, 174  
with Nikon cameras, 175  
**Timer Remote Control**, 174  
**tips and techniques**. *See professional tips/techniques*  
**transmitter**, wireless, 10  
**travel photography**  
all-in-one zoom lenses for, 76  
composing shots in, 107, 214, 219  
deleting bad shots during, 125  
packing list for, 102, 185  
postcard images and, 114  
texture shots in, 114  
**triflectors**, 134  
**Trilite**, 134  
**tripods**  
HDR image creation and, 117, 219  
low-light situations and, 179  
nighttime photos and, 180  
product photography and, 96  
**TTL (through-the-lens metering)**, 27  
**Tungsten white balance**, 105

**U**

**ultra-wide zoom lenses**, 62  
**umbrellas**  
reflective, 5  
shoot-through, 5–6  
**underwater shots**, 110–111  
lighting considerations for, 111  
waterproof camera housing for, 110  
**uneven lighting technique**, 52  
**updating firmware**, 198  
**user manuals**, 209  
**UV filter**, 66, 180

## V

**V-flats**, 48  
**vibrant color settings**, 124  
**Vibration Reduction (VR) lenses**, 65  
**video feature on dSLRs**, 189  
**video instruction**  
on copyrights, 200  
on kelbytraining.com website, 2  
**viewfinder**, covering, 115  
**vignetting**, edge, 73  
**VR (Vibration Reduction) lenses**, 65

## W

**waterproof camera housing**, 110  
**weather considerations**, 211  
**wedding photography**  
composing portraits in, 228  
JPEG mode used for, 195  
packing list for, 186  
super-fast lenses for, 61  
**Westcott Spiderlite**, 88, 89, 222, 229  
**White, Terry**, 37  
**white backgrounds**, 34, 46  
**white balance**  
color correction vs., 187  
ExpoDisc for nailing, 187  
outdoor photography and, 105  
setting using Live View, 170  
**white formica**, 91  
**white reflectors**, 50  
**wide-angle lenses**, 58, 120, 214, 219  
**wide-open shooting**, 80  
**wildlife photography**, 64  
**window light**  
home interior shots and, 173  
product shots and, 222

**wireless flash**

- channel settings, 9
- dedicated transmitter, 10
- group assignments, 8
- See also* flash

**wireless shutter release**, 142, 180

**wireless strobes**, 35

**wireless transmitter**, 10

**Z**

**zoom factor**, 72

**zoom lenses**

- f-stops on, 74
- prime lenses vs., 79
- telephoto, 60
- wide-angle, 58

**zooming the LCD**, 204