

Creative Uses of Off-Camera Lighting



Photo by featured photographers:
DANIEL NORTON / SETH MIRANDA



Frio

Frio Photo is an off-camera lighting solutions provider that specializes in helping turn hard-to-light spaces into illuminating places. This Creative Uses of Off-Camera Lighting guide celebrates a handful of photographers who never back down from light constraints they encounter on their shoot. For the photographers in this guide, those hard-to-light applications include a New York City stairwell, a dark alley, Joshua Tree National Park, and much more. With the right gear and the right amount of inventiveness, any dynamic environment can get lit!



Lighting a Wedding Venue Without Stands

Multiple lights, in multiple places create more volume and more drama in your shots.

by Jared Platt

When you walk into any reception, you need to quickly assess the situation, and make a decision on HOW you are going to light it, and then set up your gear. It can be fast-paced at that moment, and there is no greater photography fear than walking into a reception hall and not being sure if you can capture the moments the way you envision them.

Photographer Jared Platt often chooses to light the entire wedding venue using no lightstands. “The problem with stands in a venue is they create trip hazards and they clutter up an already beautiful space,” says Jared.

In this shoot, Jared has mounted a speedlight to the thick curtain at the reception to create fill light in that side of the room. He also used a unique mounting setup to secure lights directly to a window to backlight the head table and room.



Jared Platt

Jared Platt is a professional wedding and lifestyle photographer from Phoenix, Arizona. He has been a professional photographer and college educator for the past 12 years and has been a speaking, debating and lecturing for nearly 20 years.

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Mounting Speedlights on Location

by Daniel Norton

I'm super excited to show the images Seth Miranda and I produced on this collaborative shoot. We had a very challenging location that we knew could be used to create some magic and just needed the right model, concept and gear to make it happen.

As a photographer out on location, bringing lightstands isn't an always an option. Space, power, and other factors can lead to those bulky stands from leaving the studio.

Thankfully, there's other ways to bring light to your shoot while out in the world. In this video we created beautiful, studio quality portraits with model Natalie Scarlett using battery operated speedlights and mounting gear that allowed us to place the light exactly where we wanted in this not-so-photographer-friendly location.

We took to the stairwell/chimney of my studio, in a precarious place where lightstands simply wouldn't work as the area couldn't be blocked with stands. We mounted a keylight with softbox to a pipe using a mounting setup that included the Tether Tools Rock Solid Master Articulating Arm and Rock Solid Master Clamp.

Then, a second speedlight with gel behind the model to help add dimension to the image using a smaller clamp setup.



Daniel Norton

Daniel Norton is a New York City based portrait and fashion photographer and lighting consultant for still and motion shooters.

dnphoto.com
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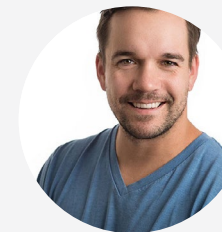
In collaboration with

Seth Miranda

lastxwitness.com
[instagram.com/lastxwitness](https://www.instagram.com/lastxwitness)



Photo: Adam Sanner



Jeff Carpenter

Jeff Carpenter and Readylight Media is a team of some of the most talented photographers, videographers, graphic designers and media professionals in the Nashville area.

[readylightmedia.com](https://www.readylightmedia.com)
[instagram.com/readylightmedia](https://www.instagram.com/readylightmedia)

We were able to achieve the look we were going for without traveling halfway across the world.

Greek Inspired Portrait Shot

by Jeff Carpenter of Ready Light Media

The concept of this shoot was to bring the streets of Santorini Greece into the studio. I wanted a vibrant outdoor feel for a fashion shoot, but unfortunately shooting on location wasn't an option. With just a few simple props and an extremely simple lighting setup, we were able to achieve the look we were going for without traveling halfway across the world.

The setup for this shot was extremely simple. I wanted the final image to look as natural as possible, so, I decided to just use one light to mimic the sun. I chose to use a single Paul C. Buff Einstein with a diffused silver beauty dish. This created a hard-light source that was still natural and beautiful. I placed my model in the corner of an L-Wall with a roll of blue seamless paper taped to one side to add some color to the scene.

The biggest challenge I ran into during this shoot was keeping the energy level up on set. I wanted to be able to shoot rapidly and have my model move around, but with the look, I was going for, my strobe was almost at full power

which made for a longer recycle time. I didn't want to wait for the strobe to fire again, so I bumped my ISO up to 800 and lowered the power of my strobe which allowed me to shoot fast without missing a single shot.

For this shot, I just did some basic skin retouching and slight levels adjustment in capture one. Nothing crazy, but I wanted the final image to look as natural as possible.

I had pretty minimal gear for this shot. Other than the L-Wall prop, and my actual lighting, there wasn't much other gear. I shot with a Tamron 70-200 f/2.8 lens because I wanted to be able to shoot a variety of looks and that lens is extremely versatile in my opinion.

In the spirit of keeping things simple, I had a pretty bare bones crew as well. My model styled and did her own makeup, and I just had one photo assistant. Sometimes I find that working with a small crew helps the shoot go faster and smoother.

Fire Whip

by Robert Trawick

The concept was to capture fire and movement in a dramatic portrait. I've always been fascinated by circus performers and see them as superheroes of public entertainment. The idea of a "femme fatale" ringmaster with a flaming whip wasn't that far from my previous shoots with the "Wall of Fire".

This was the very first time I've tried using a 6' bullwhip - on fire - in a shoot. Besides the unknown of how the leather would absorb and burn, I was concerned the speed of the whip would blow out the flame. Another technical challenge would be finding a balance between ambient exposure for the background with burning whip and a single flash pop to freeze the model. Amazingly enough, after practicing our timing, the first shot was one of the best images of the 30 odd frames exposed. We could have shot longer but the fire burned thru the inner cord of the whip. We only purchased two props for the shoot.

The setup was a simple cross light pattern to deliver enough power to light the model, freeze the moment but not overpower the dark alley. The Interfit Photographic S1 with XP PhotoGear A100 Speedbox was placed on camera left aiming slightly in front of the model. The front diffusion panel was removed to use the more specular silver finish - inside the modifier - to bring out the velvet texture of the ringmaster coat.

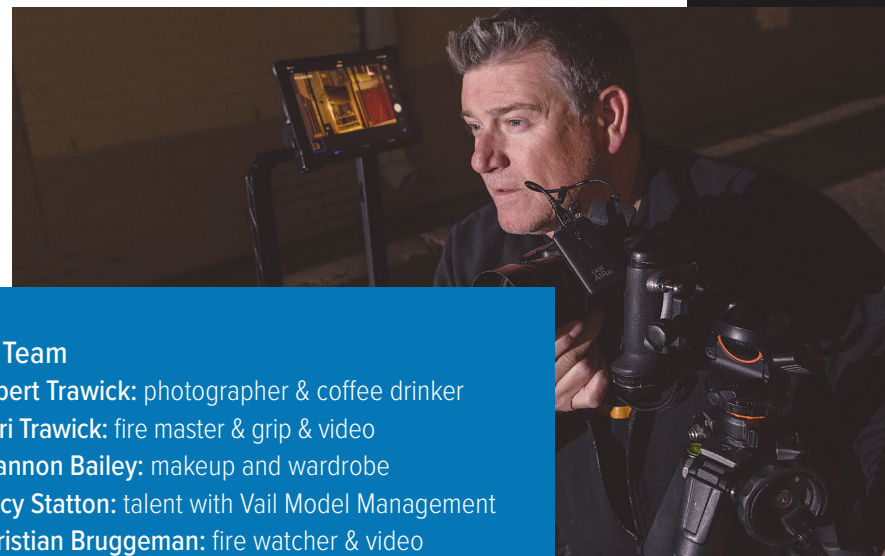
A small flash, Interfit TLi-N was mounted on flat metal downspout diagonal from the main light. Having the right mount for the flash was crucial to proper placement without using an extra light stand and removing it in post-processing. This cross backlight helped add separation of the model and her outfit from the much darker background.

After the light was set, we practiced the timing of the whip movement and settled with a shutter speed of one second. The aperture of f8 cut the available light down enough to keep bleeding to a minimum during the movement of the model. The flash was set to rear curtain sync and would flash to freeze the model at the end of the exposure. We gave a countdown and on 3, the model began the whip swing as I clicked the shutter to start the process. The slow shutter speed exposed the flaming whip, distant background lights and some movement of the model with the final flash freezing her in a forward aggressive pose at the end of the swing.

Tethering wirelessly into my Apple iPad allowed me to review the shots to make small tweaks and zoom in easily to judge the balance between the ambient and flash exposures. Using a tethered system helps the photographer, talent, and crew stay on the same page of the concept.

The images were imported into Lightroom, culled and edited using DVLOP tone curves. I used a curve and preset with low contrast blacks for a nice film-like look but still kept the vibrant warm tones. Using PhotoShop, I layered two of the best images and blended the flames on the whip to increase the fire and visible travel trail. I also used the dodge tool for brightening the fire.

We have a great relationship with Vail Model Management so one phone call to Eric Epperly and we got Macy onboard for the shoot. While the idea had been percolating in my brain for a few weeks, this shoot was worked out in about 24 hours. The fact our talent was a redhead, fit the ringmaster outfit perfectly and wasn't afraid to play with a whip on fire was a bonus. I guess it's hard to be stealthy shooting in a popular area, even if it's a dark alley in Oklahoma City and we were spotted by another photographer Christian finishing his shoot. He was wonderful in volunteering a hand with some BTS video. Special thanks to my wife Terri for being the fire master with soaking, adjusting, lighting and extinguishing the props. Never shoot fire alone and always use someone you fully trust because the pretty dancing flames can get out of hand quickly. No one was injured on this shoot.



The Team

- **Robert Trawick:** photographer & coffee drinker
- **Terri Trawick:** fire master & grip & video
- **Shannon Bailey:** makeup and wardrobe
- **Macy Statton:** talent with Vail Model Management
- **Christian Bruggeman:** fire watcher & video
- **John Doe:** bicyclist removed in post processing



Robert Trawick

Robert has been called "the most interesting photographer in Oklahoma", and loves sharing the knowledge, tricks and passion for the craft honed over a 30+ year career. A self-professed "time-traveler", Robert has been active in the industry since 1980 and received much of his formal training during a twenty-year career as an USAF photojournalist.

[trawickimages.com](https://www.trawickimages.com)
[instagram.com/trawickimages](https://www.instagram.com/trawickimages)

Get The Lighting You Want By Attaching Lights To Just About Anything

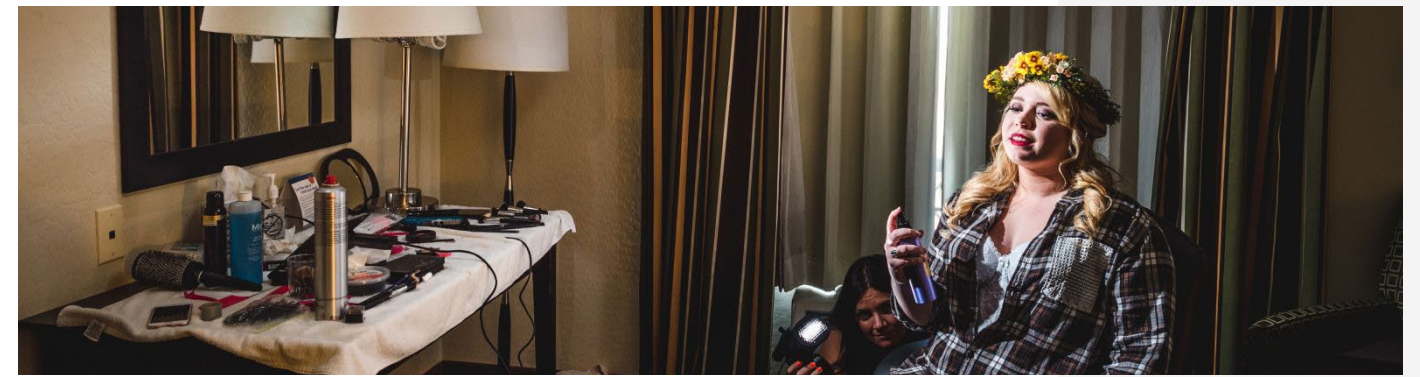
by Sunshine and Reign Photography

Despite being prime lens, off-camera flash wedding photographers, we try not to be gear heavy, and we don't like complicated. So, we choose to work with gear that makes things easier. At the same time, we still expect good quality along with tons of versatility for what we're buying.

One of the more extraordinary products we've found are vacuum mounts which we've used for several weddings. From capturing our clients getting ready to lighting receptions, these versatile light mounting tools allowed us to get the light where we needed it, despite challenging environments and situations.

They can be particularly useful for glass surfaces like windows and mirrors, but we also stuck it to a DJ's speakers when we needed to mount a light in a specific location in order to safely get the shot we wanted at a reception. Its uses are pretty endless, depending upon your own creativity and needs.

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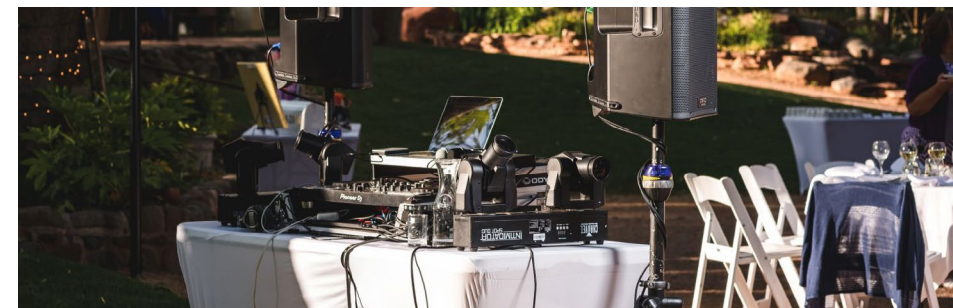
How We Shot It: Getting Ready

Because our lighting assistant can't always stand on a dresser while also holding a "kicker light", and because we can't always cram a light stand into small places, we love to use a variety of mounting systems in our kit. On one occasion, we mounted our light to a mirror to help us out while chasing the infamous hairspray/perfume/mist image. We mounted our lighting to a mirror, threw a MagMod MagGrid on our SB-910, and had at it. If you look closely, you'll see our lighting assistant crouched down behind our bride.



How We Shot It: The Gondola Lift

Very recently, we photographed a wedding in Telluride, Colorado. We knew we were going to have the opportunity to get in a gondola lift with our clients and wanted to create some memorable portraits inside the gondola lift itself. The vacuum mount proved useful here too, along with a bit of help from a MagMod MagGrid and A & M Film and Photo's Prism!



How We Shot It: Reception Lighting

One of our absolute favorite parts of a wedding is the reception because we love a party: the dancing, the joy, and all that celebrating well into the late night/early hours of the morning are right up our alley. And while our favorite option for securing our off-camera flash at a reception is our lighting assistant + a softbox (we prefer the Westcott Rapid Box – 26" Octa Softbox), it's not always practical and not always best practice to throw up a stand when people are dancing and children are running about. In the case of this reception, we got creative and mounted our light to one of the DJ's speakers.



Sunshine and Reign

Amii & Andy are full-time, professional portrait and wedding photographers, currently living on the Central Coast of California. When they aren't photographing at their studio, they're more than likely training jiu-jitsu or surfing with their crew of 5 children!

[sunshineandreign.com](https://www.sunshineandreign.com)
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Joshua Tree Engagement Session

by WASIO Photography

This shoot was an engagement session for our best friends - Camila & Chris. We met them a little over a year ago at the Creative Morning event here in San Diego and instantly became awesome friends. Camila & Chris have a social media marketing company and Camila is also a fashion blogger (@camilarpontes).

We are honored to photograph their wedding next year in Brazil and for their engagement session, we wanted to do something more special. We decided to go to Joshua Tree because Camila is a huge U2 fan and obviously the Joshua Tree National Park has a special place in each U2 Fan's heart (because of one their most famous album Joshua Tree).

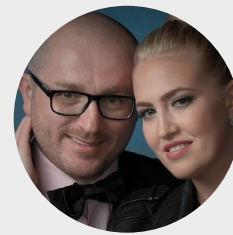
We planned to shoot for two days in the Joshua Tree National Park and the photos in this post are from the first day when we decided together to have a slightly more formal feel. Camila was wearing a beautiful red dress and Chris a nice blue suit. Camila also made her own bouquet out of silk and plastic flowers. Seriously, look at that bouquet and tell me it doesn't look 100% real! Camila did an amazing job creating it. During the first day of the shoot, we wanted to show Camila's

and Chris love toward each other, their modern chic feel and also their fun nature. Each of the four photos we selected has a slightly different feel to it and show Camila and Chris in a different way.

The first day when we photographed at the park we decided to go on the hike to the Barker Dam. It's not a long trail with only a couple of miles each way but we needed to travel light. My assistant and behind-the-scene video shooter was my wife Sasha who was also carrying our 3-month old daughter - Savannah! Check at the end of the video how this was handled!

So, because I had to carry everything, I decided to go very light - camera body (Canon 5D Mark IV), 3 lenses - Canon 24-70, 70-200 and Sigma 85mm f1.4 Art (big thanks to Hunt's for lending us this beautiful lens). For lighting, we used Phottix Indra 500 triggered with a Phottix Odin II for Canon.

We decided to go to Joshua Tree National Park because Camila is a huge fan of the band U2 and Joshua Tree has a special place in each U2 fan's heart.



WASIO Photography

Yaneck & Sasha are the founding partners of WASIO photography and WASIO faces. They've been serving Chicago & Midwest clients for over 10 years and recently expanded business to Southern California. WASIO has been selected as Top 3 Wedding Photographers in Chicago, Top 5 Wedding Photographers in San Diego, and Top 5 Portrait Photographers in San Diego.

wasiophotography.com instagram.com/wasio



We also used one simple modifier - Phottix Luna II Folding Beauty Dish. We love this beauty dish modifier on location because it's super easy to assemble, with nice quality of light and removable deflector to get more power when needed.

Our first main challenge that day was the quickly changing and decreasing light as we were shooting till sunset. The second challenge, especially toward the end of the day was the strong wind that made it hard for Sasha to hold the light and also shoot some behind the scenes shots. The third challenge was the fact that we had to feed Savannah a few times during the session.

This is our favorite set up on location because it's relatively light while giving us 500Ws of light and support of high-speed sync.

In the first two photos, we used the off-camera flash just to open up a bit the shadows without losing the beauty of natural light that afternoon. It was a bit cloudy so we had the nicely diffused natural light. We wanted to just slightly accentuate the light on Camila and Chris. In both photos, the light is actually feathered so only the edge of it lights the couple. For the first two photos, we did very little editing in Adobe RAW and Photoshop. Basically just adding a bit of contrast, delicate dodging and burning, and final selective sharpening.

For the two sunset photos, we wanted a bit more dramatic feel. For that reason, we underexposed the ambient light and used the light on Camila and Chris so they stand out more against the gorgeous sunset sky. For the sunset photos, we did a bit more editing in Camera RAW to get the details out of the sky and the rocks to enhance the natural sky colors. We also used NIK Color Efex Pro with Detail Extractor at very low opacity and Pro Contrast filters. We had to do a bit more clean up as there were some people around us and a small piece of cloud was distracting. Then we applied final selective sharpening.





Zach Gray

Zach Gray is half of the husband and wife photography and business coaching team, Zach & Jody, based in Nashville, Tennessee. Known originally for their striking and distinct wedding portraiture work, Zach and Jodi Gray have since found great success with photography business coaching and software, and their highly successful IN-CAMERA workshops.

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Speedlights on Location

by Zach Gray

Shooting out at the Red Rocks Amphitheatre in Colorado, with full day sun, caused us to look for areas with great shade. For my main lighting I used a speedlight with a Westcott Rapidbox and have a bare speedlight with a tungsten gel in the background that is two stops darker than the main light so that it's not overpoweringly bright.

I used this setup because the light is coming in but not in the direction we want it, the Rapidbox helps fill in that extra bit of light. This is a very simple setup, we're trying to recreate the beauty of the red rock and get beautiful light on the face.

The Rapid Box helps fill in that extra bit of light on the face, we get that beautiful sparkle on the eyes, and the rest of the light tapers off into the background.



On Set with Rapper Camm

by Rob Christian Crosby

For this shoot, I used gels, mixing ambient light with strobes to create hip-hop oriented portraits for hip-hop artist Camm's web content. The first shot you'll see is in-studio, I used a beauty dish that was above the subject with a blue gel. Then to the subject's right I used a strobe with a standard reflector with a red gel.

I do a lot of different colored lighting setups with long exposures. The biggest challenge for me when shooting these type of photos is getting the right movement and exposure and color all in one photo.

When it came time for post-processing on this shoot I spent a lot of time color correcting on Capture One and also skin retouching on PhotoShop.

Before the shoot, I spent time in pre-production creating mood-board for this shoot. When it came to gear I used a Canon camera with a 24-70mm 2.8, 1 DigiBee Strobe, 1 AlienBee strobe, MacBook Pro and a Tether Tools TetherPro USB Cable.



Rob Christian Crosby

Rob Christian Crosby spends most of his time either taking photos or thinking about it. It started as an interest, but now Rob has found in it a profession.

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