



dave MONTIZAMBERT'S creating with light

Part 30: Bordello Bride



In wedding photography today, it seems that couples are opting to balance the traditional puritanical bride images with some rather edgy, trashy ones. I wanted to have a little fun with this by creating images that take this concept to the extreme by placing a bride in a bordello. I also pushed the boundaries of the wedding-dress by showcasing the wedding gowns of an alternative wedding dress designer, Ric Yeunn. This image (see Image 001) entitled *Indecent Proposal*, depicts a scene where the mischievous bride-to-be, played by model, Renée Robyn, erroneously accepts a marriage proposal from 'The Mark', a dubious character played by Kristen Jones, who thinks s/he has just purchased a bride from the madame of the bordello. *Indecent Proposal* was one of three images from a series that my wife, Sylvianne and I concocted after a few cocktails, we named the trilogy, *Bordello Bride*.

The three images, *Stairway to Sin* (seen in article *Lighting For Digital Part 21*), *Indecent Proposal*, and *Parlour Room Tricks* were part of an exhibition at a Vancouver gallery. Art galleries usually include a description of the artist's intention for the piece; this is good because it prepares the viewer's mind for the work and it also gives some perspective. Unfortunately all too often the description is full of empty 'art-speak' trying to convince us that what we are seeing is not mediocre, just that we are too stupid to understand it and so it must be great (my opinion). Of course I could not resist having a little fun with this and so, with the help of a fine-art photographer friend, Rich Reynolds, the following 'art-speak' description for the *Bordello Bride* trilogy was included with my images:

David James Montizambert,
circa undefinable.

Bordello Bride *The Camouflage of Disorder*

Bordello Bride is an organic outgrowth of the liberalised ennui of the wedding photography milieu.

With a studied yet jaundiced eye, the once fairytale wedding of pristine white has been run over by the gestalt of a reality TV Zeitgeist.

The artist juxtaposes his moral ambiguity with a schizo-frenetic society ricocheting between Puritanism and Dionysian debauchery.

The shock of the lusciously lit images render us oblivious to the distinction between bride/whore and groom/John, forcing us to reevaluate the relationship between the primal urges and the societally sanctioned sexual union of marriage.

Wow!! I have to admit, I feel a little stupid after reading that, so I guess *Indecent Proposal* must be good!

I started the shot, as I always do, by placing the camera. It was positioned up high, in close to the action, in and around Renée (see diagram of Image 002), its zoom lens set to wide-angle. The camera's tripod sat at the edge of the opening from the living-room into the dining-room. The high angle and the mild distortion created by shooting close to Renée with a wide-angle lens, helped to create a humorous look.

When photographing a bigger scene like this, the question is always, how do you create great lighting over such a large area? Do you set up



1

a light from the front and let it wash over the whole scene? I usually think not because I dislike flat lighting, it lacks depth and drama and so light placement is really important to me. The use of the dining-room for this shot was generously provided by the aforementioned Kristen; when I saw this room I fell in love with the atmosphere it created, it was thematically perfect for a room in an early 1900s' bordello. To create a nice rich night-time look to the room, controlling the chandelier ambient light was paramount – I exposed the chandelier primarily with my shutter speed, and the studio strobe lighting with aperture. This is best done by first deciding on aperture for DoF, then setting the shutter speed relative to this aperture setting, and finally adjusting the power setting on the strobes relative to this aperture setting to create the desired ratio – all this calculated using my trusty Sekonic flash-meter. The final exposure had the shutter speed set to under-expose the room by 5 f-stops at f 8 at $\frac{1}{8}$ of a second, this was still bright enough to make the chandelier glow.

With the ambient light sorted I then concentrated on the strobe lighting. Renée is, of course, the main attraction in this image, and so gets her own main-light, a mono-block strobe fitted with a small Octabox light-bank with a directional soft-grid, this rig was placed on the camera left-side of Renée (see A of Image 002). The soft-grid narrowed the light-bank's wide 160° spread of light down to just 40°; without it the room would start to become over lit. The power of this light, measured with an incident meter placed against Renée's face and with its dome pointed at the Octabox, was adjusted to correctly expose her flesh. While the grid focuses most of the light on Renée, it does allow some to spill past onto the face of Kristen's

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A. Main-Light: 1200WS strobe with Octabox & 40" soft grid.

B. Sep/Hair Light: 1200WS strobe with strip light-bank & 30/50" soft grid.

C. Separation Light: 1200WS strobe with Octabox & 40" soft grid.

D. Sep-Light Gobo: Black-cloth clamped to bottom third of light-bank.

character 'The Mark' and a little bit on Sylvianne the madame and Pernilla Ahrstedt the smoking 'lady of the night' in the background; this is perfect since they are secondary to Renée's character. The grid makes it possible to get a good exposure on Renée and a ½ stop under on Kristen at the same time using only one light. This main-light was originally intended just for Renée, but I found that if I feathered the light a little off Renée and aimed it more directly down onto Kristen, I would be able to light both with just that one light. Renée is closer to the light, but she is on the edge of its light path. You would think that Renée's close proximity would cause her to be a lot brighter than Kristen, but this is not the case; the grid makes the light fall off rapidly at the edges of the light path.

In this image, like most of my images, liberal use of back-lighting was employed to separate the subjects from their surroundings. This is a perfect lighting solution for an image that needs to look like evening – the fronts stay in shadow while the lit edges show form. To that end, a second mono-block strobe fitted with a tall strip light-bank and a soft-grid for direction control, was placed to camera left-side at the back of the photo-set just out of camera frame (see B of Image 002). The fabric grid reigned in this light-bank's 160° spatter of light to 30° horizontally and 50° vertically. This 30/50° mix allows the light to spread more on the vertical axis and less on the horizontal axis, making it perfect for edge lighting tall objects such as humans without spilling too much on the rest of the scene. The exposure for this light, read with the Sekonic meter set to incident and placed at the back edge of Renée, was adjusted to 1 ½ stops below the camera setting. Notice the nice separation of Renée from the background, the table and chair from the floor, and how it also brings Kristen's face up a ½ stop so that it is fully exposed. Even the chandelier and Sylvianne benefit from this light-bank!

To separate the right side of everyone from their surroundings, a second back-light was clamped to the top of the cabinet on the camera-right side of the set. This mono-block strobe was fitted with a small Octabox light-bank and was pointed down directly onto Renée (see C of Image 002). To reduce the amount of light hitting the others, a black cloth was clamped to the bottom third of this light-bank (see D of Image 002). The exposure for this light, read with the Sekonic meter set to incident and placed at the back edge of Renée, was adjusted to one stop below the camera setting.

The final bit of lighting kit was a white fabric reflector panel, placed to the right side of the camera in front of the set-up – not shown in the diagram for obvious reasons (it would block our view of the set-up). Its purpose was to act as a 'specular fill' on the shiny laser-cut stainless steel corset graciously lent to me for the shoot by its creator, artist Stefan Rogenmoser. Before the addition of the white panel, the corset appeared black; it was reflecting the dark unlit surfaces of the living-room behind the camera. Once the panel was in place, the corset now reflected the white fabric of the panel over its mirror-like surface – the white fabric was illuminated by light from the light-banks spilling past the subjects. Placing it was a matter of directing first assistant Monty Noyes as he moved it back and forth while I viewed the placement change through the camera. Once we found the right spot (in technical speak 'when the angle of incidence equals the angle of reflection'), the corset came alive with the panel's reflection. Placing specular highlights or reflections must be viewed from camera angle – if you view the placement of specular highlights over your subject's surface from any other position other than the camera's, the resulting image will show these specular highlights in a different spot – specular highlights are angle sensitive, shadows are not. The reflector also added a little fill to the scene's shadows about four stops below the camera setting.

To create great location lighting, it is all about controlling the existing ambient light. Lighting with strobes or flash really makes this a lot easier since these electronic sources free up the shutter speed for controlling the ambient light.

When shooting indoors on location, more often than not, the walls and ceiling will be white or light in tone; this is great if you need low shadow contrast (shadows that are less dark). But if you want to create images with more drama, with high shadow contrast (darker shadows), then these light-toned surfaces work against you. My three most favoured controls for this are:

1. Use soft-grids on light-banks and honeycomb grids or barn-doors on direct lights. With soft-grids and honeycomb grids, their array of cells narrow the spill of light allowing less light to spill past subject(s) to the walls and ceiling. The further you move a light out of the scene, the greater the spread of light over that area, but fear not, there is a range of grids available, usually from 60° to 20° to narrow that wide spread of light.
2. Work with your lights in close to the subject(s). When you move your light further away from the subject, the amount of light striking your subject relative to the light striking the distant walls and ceiling starts to even out. Once you adjust exposure for the loss of light on your subject, a proportionally greater amount of light bounces off these surfaces and back into your subject's shadows making the shadows brighter. Conversely, as you move your light closer to the subject, the light striking your subject increases in brightness at a faster rate than the light striking the walls and ceiling – this is assuming that the walls and ceiling are further from the light than is the subject. Since these surfaces receive proportionally less light, they reflect less light back into the shadows, creating darker shadows. For a photographer who likes high shadow contrast, a large studio (wall and ceiling further away) with dark-toned walls is the bomb. Working with the lights in close was not an option on *Indecent Proposal* because the lights needed to be further away to be out of camera frame.
3. Use gobos, block the light reflecting off or onto these surfaces with dark-toned things like black fabrics and black panels.

And what's with the cat in the left corner of the frame? Why that's Mr Lucky, it's a cat-house after all.

Dave Montizambert lectures internationally on lighting, digital photography and Adobe Photoshop. He is also a published author having written two books on lighting and digital photography (www.montizambert.com) plus numerous magazine articles on these topics in North America, Europe, Russia and Asia. Dave also creates Lighting and Photoshop tutorial DVDs for www.software-cinema.com and www.photoshopcafe.com. Dave is available for lectures and workshops in your area and can be reached through www.montizambert.com.

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Shoot Specs *Indecent Proposal*

- Camera Exposure: f8 at 1/8th at 100ISO
- Camera: Full frame digital SLR.
- Lens: 28–70mm set to 28mm.
- Camera Distance: 6.3 feet or 1.9 metres from Renée's nose.
- Camera Height: 6.5 feet or 2 metres from floor to imaging sensor.

- **Main-Light:** Lightrelin LR12 1200 watt mono-block studio strobe fitted with a 2 foot or 0.6 metre Lightrelin Octabox light-bank with a Lighttools' 40" soft egg-crate.
- Main-Light Distance: 3.83 feet or 1.2 metres from centre of Octabox to Renée's nose.
- Main-Light Height: 6.5 feet or 1.9 metres from floor to strobe tube.
- Main-Light Exposure: +0 incident from Renée's position (f 8).

- **Separation/Hair Light:** Lightrelin LR12 1200 watt mono-block studio strobe fitted with a 2.3 x 6.5 foot or 0.7 x 1.9 metre Lightrelin strip light-bank with a Lighttools' 30/50" soft egg crate.
- Separation/Hair Light Distance: 5.8 feet or 1.8 metres from centre of strip light-bank to back of Renée's head.
- Separation/Hair Light Height: 6.3 feet or 1.9 metres from floor to strobe tube.
- Separation/Hair Light Exposure: -1&1/2 incident from Renée's position (f4 & 5/10ths).

- **Second Separation Light:** Lightrelin LR12 1200 watt mono-block studio strobe fitted with a 2 foot or 0.6 metre Lightrelin Octabox light-bank with a Lighttools' 40" soft egg-crate.
- Second Separation Light Distance: 8.6 or 2.6 metres from centre of Octabox light-bank to back of Renée's head.
- Second Separation Light Height: 8 feet or 2.4 metres from floor to strobe tube.
- Second Separation Light Exposure: -1 incident from Renée's position (f 5.6).

- **Specular Reflector:** 3 x 4 foot or 0.9 x 1.2 metre white fabric stretched over panel frame.
- Specular Reflector Distance: 6 feet or 1.8 metres from panel to stainless steel corset.
- Specular Reflector Height: 7 feet or 2.1 metres from floor to top of panel.
- Specular Reflector Exposure: -4 incident from Renée's position (f 2).

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