In Part 1 of this head shot selfie saga I created butterfly lighting on myself (see Image 002A) by positioning an off-camera-flash up high so that its light struck me as well as the background (the mid-toned green living-room wall behind me). To brighten the wall a circular panel covered with white translucent fabric was placed above and in front of my head. The light from the flash had to filter through this fabric to light me, this light modifier did not affect the light striking the green wall backdrop – the wall received the flash lighting directly. End result – a reduction of light on me with no change to wall brightness plus a more pleasing quality of light on my face (softer light). To make up for the loss of light on my face, the camera aperture was reset to a larger opening, this created a correct exposure of me and it brightened the wall background, the wall was brighter but still not bright enough, it read two stops darker than pure white.

Since I wanted to have a pure white background and not a light-green one for my selfie head shot, I covered the whole main-source panel with yet another layer of white nylon fabric (see additional fabric on panel in Diagram 003). This cut the brightness on my face by a further two stops which I made up for by increasing the camera exposure by two more stops, from f8.0 to f4.0. Now I'm not too big on doing a selfie-self-portrait at f4.0; f4.0 is pretty shallow Depth of Field (DoF) and since I'm the subject, I can't check focus very easily, so I turned the Vivitar's power up one stop to full power so that I could shoot with more DoF at aperture f5.6. Compare Image 002B with 002A, now that's a nice pure white backdrop!

By the way, you don't have to use white nylon fabric, you could use a clean white bed-sheet, a pillow case, or some other white fabric. Or you could use a large sheet of two-stop Neutral Density gel made by Lee or Roscolux. The point is to reduce the amount of light striking the subject by two stops.

But not all is well in the world… or at least not yet! I thought the shadows were too dark, and so decided to brighten them up, that is reduce shadow contrast – this would be especially necessary for a glamour portrait. To that end I could have used yet another reflector with silver-side 'out' to bounce light back up into the face by catching light from the top main-source panel. But since I've already used the only reflector available to me, I had to improvise. Searching my house for a suitable reflector, I decided on a bedroom mirror which I placed on the table in-front of the subject position (see mirror in Diagram 003).

Seating myself in the subject position, I took a moment to find the perfect reflection angle for the mirror. This was done by tilting the end furthest from me up until I could see as much of the panel as possible reflected in the mirror; this would ensure the brightest fill possible. To hold this tilt angle, a book was slid under the far edge of the mirror. Obviously if you want less shadow-fill brightness, you could angle the mirror back down a bit. If we had modelling lights or constant light rather than flash, and if I was shooting a person other than myself, then I would stand in front of the subject, look at their face, then angle the mirror or reflector up and down judging it visually until it gave me the brightness I desired relative to the main-lit parts of the face.

If you take a look at Image 002C you will see that my neat little mirror trick really filled in the shadows a lot! And take note of the new catch lights from the mirror reflector now present in the bottom quadrant of my eyes. My eyes really come alive with the addition of these new specular highlights! With droopy eyelids like mine, and with this kind of top-down lighting, it is easy to lose all or most of the top catch light, so the lower one is a real bonus! Image 002D is the final hero image, for this capture I chose to reduce the shadow brightness by tilting the mirror so that less light reflected off the mirror onto me, purely subjective as to whether 002C or 002D is better, but I prefer the shadow contrast of 002D.

Using a mirror as a shadow-fill reflector is a little more touchy than using a silver reflector – the surface of a mirror is smooth whereas the surface of a silver reflector is textured. This texture breaks up the light a little spreading it out more than the reflector's surface. For this reason, you don't have to be as exact with positioning the silver reflector. Also, as the subject's position changes as they naturally and invariably sway back and forth, moving in and out of the brightest part of the light path from the reflector, you will see a bigger variance from a mirror than you see from a silver reflector. So, a silver reflector is usually the better choice since it is more forgiving, more portable, and way less breakable, but at a pinch a mirror can do the trick!

To wrap this session up, I'd like to finish off with a few important points:

This set-up may seem complex to you and really time consuming to set up. And you are right – it is! But only the first time you do it. Also, you can do it almost anywhere, and usually you won't be faced with a mid-tone coloured wall, white walls are way more common in homes and offices so you won't need the extra layer of fabric over the panel. To speed it up and to make it commercially viable in terms of time and money when performing on location, it becomes a recipe, a formula:

- Chair and Subject: 1 metre from wall.
- Camera: 3m from wall (set to f5.6 ½₀₀s at 800 ISO).
- Lens: approximately 125mm (full frame sensor).
- Flash: mounted 2.3m high and 2.5m from wall (set to Manual and full power).
- Panel: 1.5m high and 1.7m from wall.

One thing I did find using the old Vivitar flash, even though it worked well and had enough power to make this shoot work, there was a pretty big trade-off with going cheap, the flash was really slow to recycle, meaning that I could only fire a frame every 20 seconds or so, making natural expressions much more of a challenge to capture.

I'd like to finish off by saying that I think our final image is not really a great work of art neither is it a really imaginative piece, what it is, is a good clean saleable image and I pulled it off using unconventional thinking, very little equipment all in my own front room. Now there's a concept, turn your front room into a profit centre… or at least that's a good way to pitch it to your significant other! Speaking of which, see Image 001 of Sylvianne posing for me using this set-up, you can see it does work as a great portrait lighting set-up not just a selfie set-up!

Thank You!

Those of you with keen eyes will have noticed that this is Dave's 80th edition of *Creating with Light*. We are indebted to him for his long-standing support, almost from the first issue of *Professional Imagemaker*. His wise words and detailed technical advice have long been sources of education (across almost 20 years – and that's just with *Imagemaker*!).

I can only thank Dave on your behalf and that of the team at The Societies – as readers, we are lucky to have such quality-expertise available to us.

MMcN

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WARNING!

Before you bolt any elderly flash gun onto your very young camera system you should ensure that the voltages are compatible. If you are not sure, don't do it. Alternatively you could use an equally vintage trigger and fire the gun remotely thus disconnecting the camera from any danger.
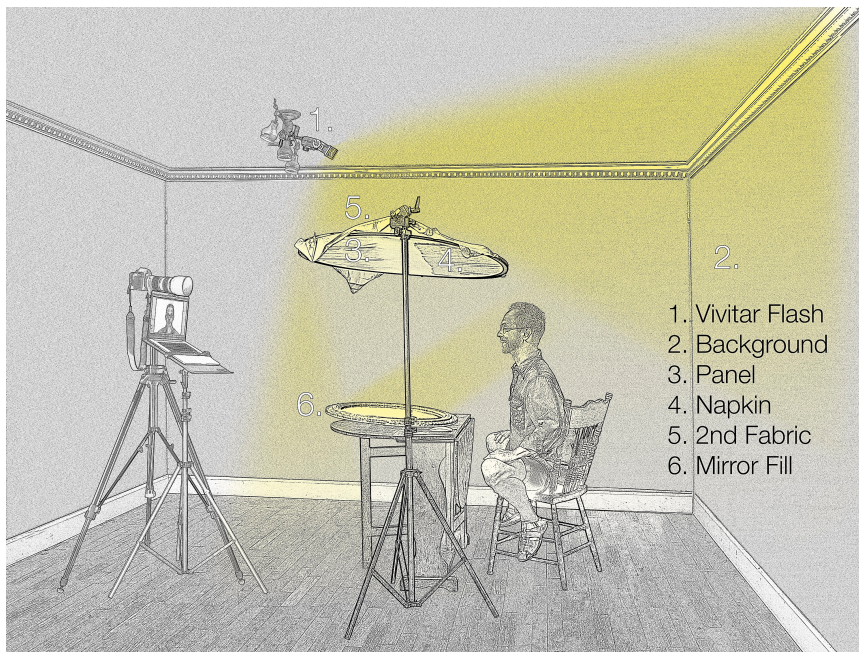
Bio

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 & www.PhotoshopCAFE.com/video and authors 'Dave On Demand' (www.montizambert.com) lighting tutorial based photo-training. Dave is available for lectures and workshops in your area and can be reached through www.montizambert.com.

A.

B.

C.

D.

1. Vivitar Flash
2. Background
3. Panel
4. Napkin
5. 2nd Fabric
6. Mirror Fill

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