

3 LIGHT FASHION PORTRAIT SETUP

THE IDEA

The goal of this setup was to create a **clean, polished fashion portrait** with strong separation from the background, while keeping the lighting simple and controlled.

Instead of using multiple strobes from different directions, I built the entire look around **one main source and two PavoTubes**.

The key light does most of the shaping. One tube creates separation from the background, while the second tube is used very subtly to control the shadows on the face.

The result is a look that feels **commercial, high-fashion and polished without looking over-lit**.



01 — KEY LIGHT

Nanlite FC-120C + Beauty Dish + Diffuser + Grid

The main light was positioned **just above the camera and slightly angled down towards the model.**

I used the **Nanlite FC-120C with a beauty dish, diffuser and grid.**

The beauty dish gives the light enough direction and punch to create definition across the face, while the diffuser takes away some of the harshness and gives us a softer, more flattering quality of light.

The **grid is particularly important in this setup.**

Rather than allowing the beauty dish to spread light everywhere, the grid keeps the beam controlled and concentrated around the subject.

This helps in two ways:

- 1. It keeps the background from getting unnecessarily illuminated.**
- 2. It gives us more control over the contrast and shape of the portrait.**

Because the key is relatively close to the camera axis, the light remains flattering and symmetrical, while the slight elevation gives some natural shaping under the cheekbones, nose and jaw.

The important thing here isn't simply using a beauty dish.

It's the combination of the beauty dish + diffusion + grid + placement.



02 — HAIR / SEPARATION LIGHT

Nanlite PavoTube II 15C

The first **PavoTube II 15C** was positioned **behind the model and above her head**.

Its job isn't to illuminate the entire subject.

Its primary purpose is **separation**.

With dark hair against a strong red background, there is a risk of the hair merging into the background.

The tube creates a controlled highlight around the hair and shoulders, giving the subject another layer of separation.

This is particularly useful in fashion photography because you don't necessarily want a bright, obvious rim light.

A subtle edge is often enough.

The light should be noticed without becoming the subject of the photograph.



03 — UNDER-CHIN FILL

Nanlite PavoTube II 15C

The second **PavoTube II 15C** was positioned **under the model's chin**, facing upwards.

This is probably the smallest light in the setup, but it plays an important role.

Because the key light is positioned above the camera, it naturally creates some shadow underneath the chin and around the lower part of the face.

Instead of adding another large softbox from the front, I used the PavoTube as a **very controlled fill source**.

The purpose is not to make the lighting flat.

It simply brings back a little information in the deeper shadows.

This keeps the face looking polished while retaining the shape created by the key light.

THE IMPORTANT PART:

Don't make the under-chin light too powerful.

If the fill becomes too bright, the face starts looking unnaturally lit from below.

You want just enough light to control the shadows — not enough to make the viewer notice where it is coming from.



HOW THE THREE LIGHTS WORK TOGETHER

Think of the setup as three separate jobs:

KEY LIGHT

Shapes the face.

The FC-120C creates the primary exposure, direction and contrast.

TOP PAVOTUBE

Separates the subject.

The tube gives the hair and upper body a subtle edge against the background.

LOWER PAVOTUBE

Controls the shadows.

The second tube gently opens the shadows underneath the face.

This is why you don't need six or seven lights to create a polished fashion image.

Every light has a specific job.



WHY I KEPT THE BACKGROUND CLEAN

I didn't want the background to compete with the subject.

The red background already has a very strong visual presence, so the lighting needed to keep the model clearly separated without creating unnecessary hotspots or distracting gradients.

The grid on the beauty dish helps maintain that control.

The result is a background that stays rich and saturated while the subject remains the brightest and most important element in the frame.



CAMERA SETTINGS

Camera: Canon R6 Mark II

Lens: 24–105mm f/4

Shutter: 1/160 sec

Aperture: f/4

ISO: 800

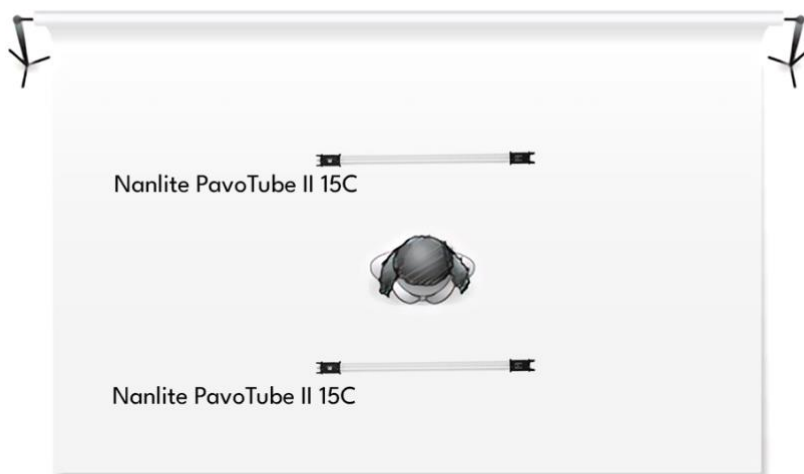
WHY THESE SETTINGS?

1/160 sec keeps the exposure consistent and is suitable for the lighting setup.

f/4 gives enough depth of field to keep the model's face and key areas sharp while still giving some separation.

ISO 800 was used to reach the required exposure while working with the available output from the continuous lights.

Since these are continuous LED sources rather than high-powered studio strobes, ISO becomes an important part of balancing the exposure.



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SetMyLight
by Siddology

[setmylight.com](https://www.setmylight.com)

THE TAKEAWAY

You don't need to keep adding lights every time an image feels incomplete.

First ask:

What exactly is missing?

More shape? → Adjust the key.

More separation? → Add a rim or hair light.

Too much shadow? → Add controlled fill.

Background too bright? → Control the spill.

In this setup, **three lights were enough** because each one had a clear purpose.

Lighting isn't about how many lights you own.

It's about knowing what each light is doing.

