

Sculpting a Moody Background with Fresnel & Colour

The Concept

This setup was designed to create a **moody, cinematic fashion portrait** with a controlled background rather than simply lighting the model evenly. The idea was to create separation between the subject and backdrop using a combination of **directional key light, a controlled Fresnel beam and ambient top light**.

The background is doing a lot of the visual storytelling here. Instead of keeping it uniformly lit, I wanted a defined **diagonal beam of light** cutting across the lower portion of the backdrop, while the upper area remained darker and more atmospheric.



Key Light: Octa with Grid

The main light is a **large octabox with a grid**, positioned on **camera right**.

The grid is important here because the background lighting is carefully controlled. I don't want the key light spilling everywhere and competing with the designed background pattern.

The octa gives us a relatively **soft, flattering light source** for the model, while the grid keeps that softness directional and prevents unnecessary spill.

This combination works particularly well for **fashion photography and editorial portraits**, where you want soft skin and clothing detail but still want the image to retain strong contrast and direction.

The key light is primarily responsible for defining the model, while the background lights are treated almost like separate visual elements.



Fresnel + Barn Doors: Creating the Diagonal Background Beam

The most distinctive part of this setup is the **Fresnel light with barn doors positioned on camera left**, aimed towards the lower section of the backdrop. Rather than illuminating the entire background, the Fresnel is being used as a **controlled, directional light source**.

The barn doors help shape and restrict the beam, creating that clean **diagonal strip of light across the backdrop**.

This is a great example of using a light not just for exposure, but for **composition**.

The diagonal line introduces visual movement into an otherwise static background. It also helps frame the model and gives the image a more cinematic, intentional quality.

With a Fresnel, small changes in the **angle, distance and focus of the beam** can significantly alter the shape and intensity of the light on the background, so positioning is critical.



Top Ambient / Bounce Light

There is another light positioned **behind the model towards the ceiling**, aimed to create a broader top bounce.

Unlike the Fresnel, this light isn't meant to create an obvious defined pattern. Its job is to add a subtle layer of **ambient illumination across the scene**.

This prevents the background from becoming completely dead while still allowing the directional Fresnel beam to remain visually dominant.

It also helps create a more gradual transition between the brighter lower background and the darker upper section.



Playing with White Balance

Another major part of the look was experimenting with **white balance**.

By shifting the white balance, I could change the overall colour relationship of the scene and push the background towards a **cooler blue tone**.

This creates an interesting contrast with the warmer skin tones and the green clothing.

Rather than relying entirely on colour grading in post, experimenting with white balance during the shoot allows you to see how the **light, skin tone, clothing and background interact in-camera**.

The same physical lighting setup can therefore produce noticeably different moods simply by changing the colour balance.



Camera Settings

The camera settings used for this setup were:

Camera: Canon R6 Mark II

Lens: Canon RF 24-105mm f/4

Shutter Speed: 1/160 sec

Aperture: f/4

ISO: 2000

The **1/160 sec shutter speed** provides a fast enough shutter for a controlled studio environment and helps minimise unwanted movement.

Shooting at **f/4** gives enough depth of field for the fashion portraits while still providing some separation from the background.

Keeping the ISO at **200** helps maintain a clean image while the studio lights provide the required exposure.



Camera: Canon R6 m2
Lens: 24-105mm f/4
Shutter: 1/160
Aperture: f/4
ISO: 200


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Why This Setup Works

The important lesson here is that you don't need a huge number of lights to create a complicated-looking image.

Each light has a specific job:

Octa + Grid: Soft, controlled key light for the model

Fresnel + Barn Doors: Defined diagonal beam on the backdrop

Top Bounce Light: Subtle ambient background illumination

White Balance: Controls the overall colour mood and helps introduce the blue atmosphere

The result is a **layered studio lighting setup** where the subject, background pattern and colour all work together.

Instead of treating the backdrop as something that simply needs to be visible, we're using **background lighting as part of the composition**.

That is often the difference between a photograph that is simply well lit and one that actually feels designed.

