Warm Cinematic Beauty & Product Photography

The Concept

The objective of this setup was to create a warm, premium visual aesthetic for a haircare product campaign. Instead of illuminating the entire scene evenly, I used three lights with distinct purposes: a soft key light for the model, a controlled hair light for separation, and a focused highlight to bring attention to both the face and the product.

The rich amber tones, deep shadows, and warm highlights help create a luxurious, intimate atmosphere that complements the product and its natural, earthy branding.



1. Key Light — Soft Umbrella with Bounce

The key light was placed on camera left, using a simple umbrella with a bounce setup to create a broad, soft source of illumination.

The purpose of this light was to establish the overall exposure and illuminate the model's face, hands, and outfit without creating harsh shadows. The broad source helps maintain smooth transitions between highlights and shadows, giving the skin a flattering appearance while preserving the texture of the subject.

The key here is to keep the light soft but directional. Softness gives you smooth skin transitions, while direction ensures that the image retains depth and dimension rather than looking flat.



2. Hair Light — Reflector with Grid

A simple reflector fitted with a grid was positioned behind the model on camera right.

This light adds a warm highlight along the hair and the edges of the subject, separating her from the dark background. Without this separation, the darker hair could easily blend into the background, particularly in a low-key setup.

The grid helps control the spread of light, keeping it concentrated on the intended area rather than allowing unnecessary spill across the background. This creates a defined edge highlight while preserving the dark, moody atmosphere.

The takeaway: A hair light isn't just about making hair brighter. It's about creating separation, texture, and depth.



3. Accent Light — Fresnel for Focused Highlights

The third light was a Fresnel positioned on camera left to create a concentrated highlight on the model's face and the product.

Unlike the broad key light, the Fresnel provides a more focused beam. This allows the highlight to be placed intentionally, drawing attention to the product label, the bottle's shape, and selected areas of the model's face.

In product photography, this distinction matters. The key light establishes the overall look, but the accent light helps guide the viewer's eye toward the most important elements in the frame.

Careful positioning is essential: the highlight should enhance the product's shape and visibility without overpowering the label or creating distracting hotspots.



4. Background, Shadows and Final Look

The dark background and controlled fall-off help maintain the warm, cinematic mood. Rather than filling every shadow, I allowed darker areas to remain, giving the frame contrast and a more premium advertising aesthetic.

The combination of soft illumination, warm edge highlights, and a focused accent creates a balance between beauty photography and commercial product photography. The same lighting concept can be adapted for hair oil, skincare, cosmetics, fragrance, and other lifestyle products.



The Lighting Lesson

Don't ask how many lights you need. Ask what each light is contributing.

- Key light: Establishes the subject's illumination and overall mood.
- Hair light: Creates separation and adds texture.
- Fresnel: Directs attention through focused highlights.

Three lights, three different jobs, one cohesive visual story.



Camera: Canon R6 m2
Lens: 50mm f/1.8
Shutter: 1/160
Aperture: f/4
ISO: 1000

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