Soft Directional Fashion Portrait

Two-light setup using continuous video lights

The concept

The aim was to create a clean, soft fashion portrait with gentle shadows, controlled contrast and a smooth transition between the subject and the background. Instead of using a conventional key-and-opposite-fill arrangement, I used two lights from different heights to control the light falling on the model.



1. Key light: camera left

The main light is placed on camera left, using an octabox with a grid.

The octabox creates a soft, diffused source that wraps around the face and body, giving the skin a flattering quality. The grid helps control light spill, keeping the illumination focused on the subject rather than spreading unnecessarily across the set.

This is what gives the images their soft but directional quality. The shadows are still present, which helps retain facial structure and dimension.



2. Separation and fill: overhead light

The second light is placed above the model, using another octabox with a grid. Its role is slightly different. It adds light from above, helping lift some of the darker areas and creating separation between the subject and the background. It also contributes to the overall exposure without removing all the shadows created by the key light.

This is an important distinction: **a fill light does not always have to be placed opposite the key light.**

We often follow the familiar convention of placing a fill on the other side of the subject, but lighting should be based on the result you want, not a fixed formula. You can use a top light, a frontal source, a reflector, or even a background light to influence the shadows and contrast.

In this setup, the overhead light does the job while keeping the lighting direction consistent.



3. Colour and white balance

Both lights were continuous video lights, set to a warm tone.

Rather than trying to get the final colour directly from the fixtures, I used the camera's white balance creatively to shift the overall colour towards the tone I wanted. The final colour was then refined during editing and colour grading.

This is a useful approach when working with continuous lights. The colour temperature of the source and the camera's white balance work together, so you can use that relationship creatively instead of treating white balance as something that must always produce perfectly neutral whites.



4. Camera settings

- **Camera:** Canon R6 Mark II
- **Lens:** 24–105mm f/4
- **Shutter speed:** 1/160 sec
- **Aperture:** f/4
- **ISO:** 4000



The takeaway

Don't think of lighting as a fixed arrangement where one light must always be the key and another must always be the opposite-side fill.

Understand what each light is doing. Look at the shadows, check where you need more detail, and decide where an additional source will help.

Sometimes the best solution isn't adding another light. It's using the lights you already have in a more intentional way.

