

High-Contrast Fashion Portrait | Sculpted Key + Controlled Fill

The Concept

This setup was designed to create a **bold, editorial fashion portrait** with strong definition, controlled contrast and a polished studio finish. The objective was not to make the light soft and flat, but to retain enough **direction, shadow and specular definition** to give the images a more dramatic and fashion-forward character.

The setup uses four main lighting elements: a **large octabox with grid as the key light**, a **bare rectangular softbox as a top hair/rim light**, a **powerful gridded fill light positioned below the camera**, and **black negative fill on camera left** to control unwanted bounce and increase contrast.



1. KEY LIGHT: LARGE OCTABOX WITH GRID

The primary light is positioned on **camera right**, slightly forward and above the model, using a **large octabox with a grid**.

The large octabox gives us a relatively broad and flattering source, which is particularly useful for fashion and beauty photography. It creates a smooth transition across the face and body while maintaining enough directionality to sculpt the features.

The **grid is important here**. Without the grid, the large octabox would spread light throughout the studio and create more unwanted fill. The grid narrows the beam and keeps the light focused primarily on the model.

This gives us:

- Defined facial structure
- Controlled shadow falloff
- Soft but directional skin light
- Better separation between subject and background
- Less unwanted light spilling into the darker areas

The camera-right placement also creates a natural **side-lit fashion look**, giving the face dimension rather than illuminating it evenly from the front.



2. HAIR / RIM LIGHT: BARE RECTANGULAR SOFTBOX

Behind the model, positioned **above and slightly behind**, is a rectangular softbox being used as a hair light.

Unlike the key light, this source is intentionally kept relatively direct. Its job is not to illuminate the face but to create **highlight and separation around the hair and shoulders**.

Because the model has dark hair and the background is also dark, this light becomes particularly important. It creates a controlled highlight along the edges of the hair, helping the hair separate from the background.

The result is a subtle but effective **rim-light effect**, especially visible around the upper hair and shoulders.

The positioning from above also helps maintain a natural direction to the highlight instead of creating an obvious artificial outline around the entire subject.



3. UNDER-CAMERA FILL: POWERFUL GRIDDED SOURCE

The most unconventional part of this setup is the fill light.

A **powerful light is positioned directly under the camera**, aimed toward the model. It is used without a diffuser and with a **grid**, creating a relatively concentrated and punchy source.

Rather than using the fill simply to eliminate shadows, this light is deliberately strong enough to become part of the visual character of the image.

The under-camera position fills the shadows created by the elevated camera-right key light, particularly around:

- The lower face
- Jawline
- Neck
- Chest
- Clothing folds
- Lower portions of the body

Because the source is undiffused, it retains more punch and contrast than a conventional soft fill.

This creates an interesting combination: **soft directional key light from above and the side, combined with a harder controlled fill from below.**

That combination gives the portrait a slightly unconventional, contemporary fashion-editorial quality.

The grid is again important because it prevents this powerful fill source from washing across the entire set.



4. NEGATIVE FILL: CAMERA LEFT

On **camera left**, a large black surface is being used as **negative fill**.

This isn't technically a light, but it plays a major role in the final image.

The black negative fill absorbs bounced light and prevents ambient illumination from filling the camera-left side of the model.

This allows us to maintain deeper shadows and stronger separation between the illuminated and shadow sides of the face.

In a studio with multiple lights, uncontrolled bounce can quickly make an image look flat. The negative fill counteracts that problem.

The result is a more controlled lighting ratio and noticeably stronger **contrast and dimensionality**.

This is especially useful with the teal outfit and dark background because maintaining deep blacks helps the brighter highlights and saturated colours feel more intense.



HOW THE LIGHTS WORK TOGETHER

The strength of this setup comes from the fact that each light has a very specific job.

Key light: Shapes the subject and creates the primary exposure.

Hair light: Separates the hair and shoulders from the dark background.

Under-camera fill: Opens the shadows while adding a punchy, slightly harder quality from below.

Negative fill: Removes unwanted bounce and protects the contrast on the opposite side.

Instead of simply adding more light, the setup is about **controlling where the light goes**.

The grids on both the key and fill are critical because they allow the lighting to remain intentional. The negative fill then gives us another level of control by removing light rather than adding it.

That combination of **addition and subtraction of light** is what gives the final photographs their sculpted quality.



CAMERA SETTINGS

Camera: Canon R6 Mark II

Lens: RF 24-105mm f/4

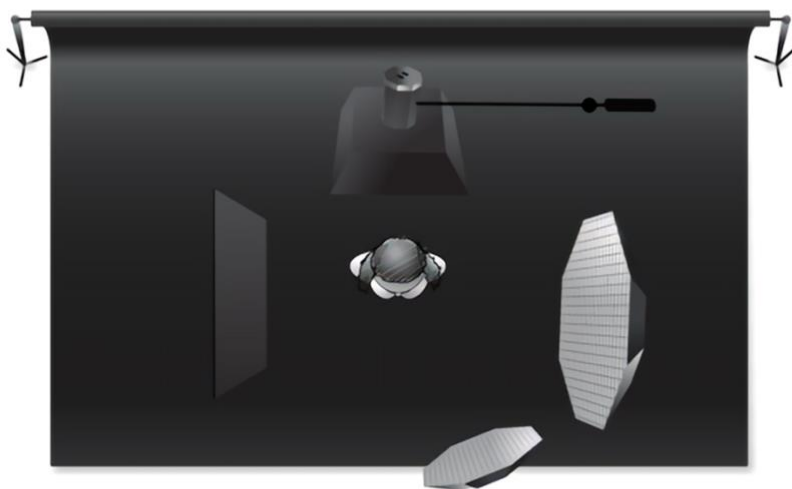
Shutter: 1/160 sec

Aperture: f/9

ISO: 100

Shooting at **ISO 100** keeps the files clean and maximizes image quality. The **f/9 aperture** also provides enough depth of field for fashion portraits while keeping the face, clothing and styling details crisp.

The 1/160 sec shutter speed provides a good working speed for studio flash photography and helps maintain consistency while the model moves through different poses.



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SetMyLight
by Siddology

 rlyghts.com

FINAL LOOK

The final result is a **high-contrast studio fashion portrait** with clean skin rendering, controlled shadows, strong hair separation and punchy colour. The important lesson from this setup is that dramatic lighting does not necessarily require complicated equipment.

A **large octabox**, a **controlled hair light**, a **hard gridded fill** and **negative fill** can create a sophisticated editorial look when each source has a clearly defined purpose.

The key isn't the number of lights.

It is controlling every light you add, and every bit of light you remove.

