Embrace change. Shed your fears. Acquiring a dSLR and two Speedlights is *potential* energy. What you do with them, all *kinetic.*

With color transparency film and Polaroid tests, we used to work so hard on ensuring just basic exposure. Carefully metering each light multiple times, writing f/stop values on paper, poring over those still sticky instant pictures, learning to translate Polacontrast to film contrast, exposure bracketing, clip testing… and you were never absolutely sure until you saw the processed film, in hand, on an industry standard light box a minimum of four hours later. I would often bracket exposure. Exposure bracketing would turn a 12-exposure roll into four usable frames. Too bad if the best expression was a 1/2-stop underexposed.

Exposure is a no-worry issue now. With digital, I confirm exposure as I shoot. Use the histogram. Exposure is technical. Maximize the usable information in the file. Exposure is literal, and digital lets me nail it then and there. It's easy.

Now I bracket contrast instead of exposure. It's contrast that is subjective. With Wireless TTL, I can adjust the contrast in the image at any time without worrying about changing the exposure. I discover more variety, and have more choices about emotional responses to the images. I can respond to my own feelings about an image as I shoot. I can make it softer and more open, or edgier with more drama and punch, or just see the difference, at any time, without interrupting the flow of the shoot. I take more risk now, knowing it is fluid. It's not nailed down and inflexible anymore. It's easy.

Steve

Light

Gaining enough facility with light so as not to be dependent on prevailing conditions is one of photography's rites of passage. Transporting your very own light to a location is a major style breakthrough. The next step, with Speedlights, is to realize you can use more than one with very little extra "muscle." Technology has made many of the complications moot. It enables us to be more spontaneous, change our ideas, attempt more variations, and have peace of mind with each successive exposure. Without introducing a stack of manuals, formulas, or calculations, we can intuitively juggle more than one light. And each one can be programmed to perform separate functions. Theoretically we could throw a handful of Speedlights in any direction, manipulate each individually, and without taking a step make them all work independently … together … wirelessly.

PHOTO 2.1 Construction worker (see lighting diagram on page 180).

PHOTO 2.1   *Construction worker*

We had our choice of dozens of culverts on the job site. But that was the easiest decision we had to make putting this photograph together. Working on deadline I needed this shot to go smoothly. My crew and I moved from concrete pipe to concrete pipe rejecting several different lighting schemes. Finally we mounted one Speedlight hidden just behind the rim on the left side of the cylinder. The second light was set up to backlight the worker, separate him from the background, cast a light inside the tube, and highlight the gravel mound behind him.

The "balancing act" was to put the dramatic rim light directly on the construction worker's face and have him maintain his uncomfortable position while pointing the flashlight directly into the camera lens. The overhead sun kept shifting and changing the background shadow. So it became a race against time and nature. We integrated the light in the sky with the output of the strobes but that was fairly easy. There was a bit of postproduction to punch a little more color into the man's shirt.

These kinds of shots require a lot of preproduction and timing. We had to coordinate the date and time with the foreman and conform to many safety regulations. The whole site was cleared two days after we did the shot and all the pipes disappeared.

Utilizing only one light is overcoming inadequate light. But when you introduce a second artificial light source you are imitating, supplementing, or improving the environment. As a result, you have entered the nebulous realm of *lighting*. Going on location with multiple lights is constructing your own reality.

Lighting

Lighting is the physical act of "sculpting" your visual environment — reshaping a three-dimensional space. This is done by elevating selected surfaces toward the "sun" and shading others from it. With lighting we decide whether objects of interest will be perceived as static or in motion. Lighting can lead the viewer into or out of the frame. We may not have the power to control what goes on in the world but, with lighting, we can control exactly what our audience sees of it. We can delineate between drama and melodrama. We can surprise and obfuscate. Lighting gives credence to what otherwise would not even exist. Unfortunately, most of the time, if the methods are obvious, we have failed.

But if it was easy, everybody would do it. Speedlights simply make it *easier*. With a smaller, lighter kit and with the new methods of checks and balances, the dedicated photographer has a head start.

Whether in the fields of commercial or fine art, because we are the sole architects, when we build with light, we reside in the netherworld of fantasy and dreams. When shedding darkness anything is possible. We can investigate inside our minds as well as the interiors of our monuments.

As photographers we can safely accept the *light* that nature provides us or we can take on the task of *lighting*. Everyone approaches it differently but there are stages that end up in most everyone's agenda:

Design
Execute
Review
Postproduction

Design

Lighting starts in the mind. Rather than trial and error, when you walk into a scene you should first survey and assess your surroundings. Then determine whether the light is sufficient or whether you have to supplement it. Imagine how you would like it to look. Previsualize what you eventually want your audience to see. This is the **Design** phase. You estimate what equipment you will need, the problem areas, and where you will position each light and its contribution to the final output. Take time to theorize the overall mood you want to create, whether bright and clear or dark and mysterious. You may have requirements to be formal or stylized. Even check where all the electrical outlets are before you have to drag equipment around. As you become more adept, much of the work is done in your head first. In elaborate productions you can sketch placement of camera and lights on graph paper to see if it will work. This phase can take place days or weeks before the actual shoot.