



Alison 2. This photograph was shot using both natural light and some strobe fill in the background with a Bronica ETRsi medium format camera.

Fashion Photography: The Addiction of Black and White

By David Mecey

Contrary to what appears to be the death of film by digital, there is still a core market out there of individuals who see film as the one true element of what photography is all about. In my mind black and white in particular is the type of a film that will never go away. It weathered the advent of color all those years ago and it will weather the storm of digital now.

There also seems to be another misconception that shooting with black-and-white film is *easier* than shooting with color. Although the film may have a bit more latitude when it comes to exposure, in order to shoot high quality black-and-white images you still need to adhere to the principles of good photography. You need to think about composition, exposure and, if working on a portrait or with models, you must also think about rapport, pose, and lighting. All of which, when you think about it, are the basics of photography.

When I shoot in black and white, I tend to think more in terms of sheer composition than when I'm shooting with color, since color lends so much description to an image simply by being color. With black and white you're stripped of that luxury and are faced with using only the placement of the elements in a photograph, along with the attitude of the subject to tell the story.

In the images that you see here, all were shot either for a job or for personal projects. In them I am trying to think in terms of creating a mood in black and white rather than thinking in terms of technical mumbo-jumbo. I tend to rate my films according to what I'm trying to achieve in effect rather than from a manufacturer's suggestion. I am absolutely adamant about the quality of light that always strikes my subjects.

All of these images were shot with either Ilford FP4+ or the new Fuji Acros negative films, the Fuji film now being my absolute favorite. It's a film of almost grain-



Jennifer. Jennifer was a student at UCLA when I first ran into her. I knew instantly that she had model potential. This photo was from a test she and I did on a dry lakebed about an hour and a half outside Los Angeles, CA. It was shot with natural light on a blustery day with the temperature hovering around 110 degrees! I used a Minolta Maxxum 9.



Angela. I shot this image in the late afternoon sunlight of Venice, CA with a Bronica ETRsi medium format camera.

less tonality, with gorgeous skin-tones of luminous gray. To me, it is the first film to come along in more than a decade that can give me the same quality of black-and-white tonality that the old Kodak Panatomic-X once did, yet even smoother. For all you old-timers out there like me, you must remember that superb film. To be able to simply think in terms of composition and mood, knowing that the film you're using is going to capture the scene in all its nuances of black and white is such a confidence-builder. It allows you the luxury of just thinking about the picture that is before you rather than considering what filters or lighting devices to use.

Speaking of filters, as we all know, by placing a red, yellow, or even green filter over the lens it heightens the density, or saturation, of various opposite tones in a photograph. Should you wish to really darken the sky while making skin-tones pale, red is the answer. But to simply make skin tones lighter while deepening the sky, yellow works quite well instead. More importantly, you have much less exposure compensation to deal with by using the lighter-colored filter. Yet, now that I've said that let me also say that I rarely use any filters over my lenses! I prefer to use the time of day, angle of the sun, and proper exposure (along with a superb lab for processing) to handle making my negatives look nice. Though there are times when I may throw a filter over the lens to produce an effect should the mood strike.

Although I find natural light being the absolute best when shooting with black-and-white film, and I feel

shooting with strobe is better for color and my reasoning is simple: when shooting a beautiful model in color you're trying to produce a smooth, gorgeous skin color, which when shot in daylight without care, tends to look a bit harsh, almost garish. But if you photograph that same face within a studio setting using a soft-box and strobe setup, her features will have that smooth and beautiful look. While in black and white, by exposing correctly as well as using reflectors for fill or accents, that same face will look just as beautiful in bright sunlight, which is probably part of the magic of that film's longevity and popularity.

Using sunlight as your key light source with only reflectors, or natural elements serving as reflectors, allows you the freedom to think more about the shot. I try to use the location as much as possible to help me achieve this. I look for areas that might have white walls or open shade that can serve as reflectors or scrims. I look for objects that might serve as props or create a shadow to heighten the mood of the photograph as well. Along with that, I try to form a good rapport with my models so that we're both in tune to the photograph and totally relaxed during a shoot. Keeping a photo shoot relaxed is so important in forming an atmosphere of creative fun, and that's how I like to shoot: having fun while creating beautiful images.

You should also plan ahead and make sure you have all the necessary items to make your shoot a success. Think about wardrobe, location, and the personnel needed to help you make your shot a success long be-



Chandra. This image was originally shot for JC Penny in-store displays and was done with totally natural light using a Bronica ETRsi medium format camera.



Leg Ave. This image of model Cara Michelle is a favorite of mine. Leg Ave. was a client of mine who is a manufacturer of lingerie and hosiery. I did this shot for their catalog at a house in the Hollywood Hills using one strobe for the key light source with the sun serving as my back-light fill. It was shot with the Bronica ETRsi medium format camera.

fore the day of the shoot. Sure, you can find a friend to serve as a model but make sure he or she is totally in tune with being in front of the camera. It's difficult to make beautiful pictures when your subject is feeling such anxiety he or she can't relax during the shoot. Also, if you can find a seasoned makeup artist and have someone along to help you with your gear and setting up your lighting, you will find your photographs becoming better still.

Many professionals work with assistants and makeup/hair people. Though they may be an expensive luxury for the non-pro shooter, there are many of those people out there willing to *test* for free in order to build onto their portfolios. This is something a photographer should try to exploit as much as possible. Exchanges of professional services between photographers, models, and other creatives are the backbone of this industry. Use it as much as you can and your images will show a marked improvement, I promise.

Next, plan to shoot either early in the morning or late in the afternoon, when the sun is at an angle rather than directly overhead, much like you've been taught when shooting color. Also, make sure you have the necessary reflectors, stands, and equipment along for those natural disasters that can occur, like wind and rain.

I normally rate my films at ISO 80 rather than the ISO 100 or 125 suggested by the manufacturers. That's just me and it is based on what I'm trying to achieve. There are other times when I might rate the film at 200

to allow for some under-exposure as an effect. You should experiment to see what you, as an individual photographer, might prefer.

Just remember this, when working with a model, especially a female, the face is the most important element in a photograph. So don't overlook it in your zeal to just get the shot. Be critical of your lighting. And I mean very critical. Think about how the light is really looking as it strikes the face. Become aware of any cross-shadows or other minor highlights that might cause the image to appear muddy or overly contrasty. With practice, this can and will become second nature to you.

Finally, make yourself aware of the feelings of the model. Be patient and professional in your demeanor when directing someone whether he, or she, is brand new to the industry or a seasoned professional. Use some of their ideas to help mold the shot and always be open to suggestions, whether you utilize them or not. And always share your enthusiasm with your crew. Your people love knowing they're all doing a great job, so let them know it.

I do hope some of these suggestions will help you on your next photo shoot. Learning to think in tones of gray is nothing that cannot be acquired with practice. Like anything, the more you do it, the better you become. So practice, practice, practice. Or in the vernacular of a photographer: shoot, shoot, shoot. And be prepared to become a black-and-white junkie with stacks of contact sheets strewn everywhere very soon.