

Apogee Photo Magazine



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Fashion: Beauty of a Beauty Dish

by Lindsay Adler

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Here you can clearly see the catch light created by a typical beauty dish. You see the round shape and the dark central spot.

When you're introduced to a photography studio, you're often shown soft boxes and basic lights with silver dishes. This equipment is common to every studio and offers the artist the flexibility to create endless varieties of beautiful photographs. In fact, many stunning portraits and/or fashion images are created with just one light source--often a soft box. However, it's time to introduce another great modifier for lighting an image with a single tool--the beauty dish.

Beauty dishes help the photographer achieve a variety of "beauty lighting" techniques. The light is relatively hard and somewhat wide (so it can shape the face). Another great aspect of this tool is that there is a nice fall-off in light. The center of the light is brightest, but it falls off at the edges (is less bright). This feature creates beautiful shadows to sculpt facial features.

Beauty dishes are used frequently in fashion photography. One way to identify their use is to check the catch lights in the eyes of the photographic subject. With traditional dishes, the highlight will be round with a small darker dot in the center (that's the source of the light that bounces back into the dish). It's possible to put diffusion material on a beauty dish so the light is softer--therefore, you won't see the dark center but a circular highlight instead.

Here are some examples of completed fashion model photographs, along with the lighting set ups for each of the shoots.



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Technical: [Canon 5D](#), Canon 85mm 1.8 lens, f/16 at 1/160, ISO 100

Background Color: White

Background Light: One silver dish strobe

Distance to Background: 10 feet

Hair Light: none

Beauty Dish Distance to

Subject: 4 feet, centered and angled downward

Other tools used: none



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Technical: [Canon 5D](#), Canon 85mm 1.8 lens, f/14 at 1/100, ISO 100

Background Color: Grey

Background Light: none

Distance to Background: 10 feet

Hair Light: none

Beauty Dish Distance to

Subject: 2 feet, centered and angled downward

Other tools used: none

Other notes: This type of light is often referred to as “butterfly lighting,” due to the shadows under the nose and lips.

Technical: [Canon 5D](#), Canon 85mm 1.8 lens, f/11 at 1/100, ISO 100

Background Color: White

Background Light: Two silver dish strobes

Distance to Background: 10 feet



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Hair Light: none

Beauty Dish Distance to

Subject: 4 feet, centered and eye-level

Other tools used: Three white reflectors (foam core) held very close to the face (one on the left, one on the right, and one sitting in the lap of the model).

Other notes: This “beauty box” effect is often used in cosmetic ads and is good for softening or eliminating shadows. The closer the reflector boards are to the face, the softer and less apparent the shadows become.



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Technical: Canon 5D, Canon 85mm 1.8 lens, f/8 at 1/160, ISO 100

Background Color: Black

Background Light: none

Distance to Background: 10 feet

Hair Light: one silver dish, angled from the back left of image

Beauty Dish Distance to

Subject: 4 feet, off to the right and angled straight forward

Other tools used: none

Other notes: Having the beauty dish off center helps to give additional shape to the face with more pronounced shadows.

This is a portrait layout I did for an artist at my university. On the left I used the beauty dish as the sole light source and on the right I used a beauty box effect to get the glowing/shadowless appearance. In



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both images, the beauty dish is the sole light source in the image.

If you are planning on getting serious about becoming a model photographer or just want to create astounding photos in your own studio, beauty dishes should be added to your equipment list. Then try the various techniques to enhance and "bring to light" the best features of your subjects.

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