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Lynne Walters

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Why you need a... reflector

By Karen Parker



Without reflector



With reflector

Reflectors can be used to fill in shadows, brighten features, highlight areas, bounce and diffuse. They are so good that they can be used without using flash and some of the larger sizes can reflect an awful lot of light and reduce contrast in a big way.

Reflectors are made of special reflective fabric (stay with me on this) and can be both collapsible and reversible. Many of the newer designs have double-coated reflective surfaces and just like me, when I've had a few shandies, can collapse to a third of its original size.

Anything goes

Of course, you can make a reflector out of anything from a piece paper or a bed sheet right up to a 2m x 1m 'flat' of expanded polystyrene. However, if you want to pack a reflector in a camera bag and want to use it time and again, it's best to stick the experts.

Lastolite - the most recognised names in reflectors - is constantly developing its range. All its reflectors now have a lifetime rim guarantee (so many jokes, so little time). The choice of reflectors may seem daunting, but it's worth getting to grips with what's available:



Silver/White

As the name suggests, the most popular reflector has one side bright white and the other silver. The silver can prove a little harsh so some photographers stick with the white area.

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Gold

This, as you probably would guess, warms things up and can add a glow to Asian and West Indian skin tones. You can choose from Gold/Silver and Gold/White. However, on pale British skins, that glow looks more like jaundice, so you might be better off with what's called a Sunfire.

Sunfire

A sunfire reflector has alternating stripes of gold and silver to bounce lots of reflected light around, while adding warmth. There are Sunfire/White or Sunfire/Silver options currently available. This is a great choice, but some Nikon cameras can pick up too much yellow with the Sunfire design, and Lastolite recommends a Sunlight reflector instead.

Sunlight

This new material is similar to Sunfire but the silver stripes are twice as wide as the gold stripes. As you might imagine wedding photographers love these bits of kit and a particular favourite is a brand new design which is a Sunlite/Soft silver combo.

If there's too much light around, you can also purchase diffusers which can reduce the light on a subject by up to two stops. Not a reflector as such but a handy bit of kit to have.

Shape shifter

Traditionally, fold out reflectors were circular. Circular reflectors remain the mainstay of portrait and wedding photographers, because they are so versatile. Unless you have a willing assistant to hold them, they are not so easy to hold as more modern designs.

Enter the TriGrip.

Lastolite, er, expanded from circular reflectors to fold-out designs that are triangular shaped with rounded edges - shaped a bit like a piece of melted Toblerone. TriGrips sport a moulded handle and a securing Velcro strap, which means that you can position the reflector in one hand while holding the camera in the other.

Some designs begin their lives as standard diffusers and come supplied with a range of elasticated covers (such as gold/white or sunfire/silver). These designs are called 'bottletops', because the gold reflector looks like a top from a bottle of gold top - Lastolite clearly has a long and milky memory. There's even a bottletop version of the TriGrip called the TriFlip, which offers eight different diffusive or reflective surfaces in one.

How to use it...

With such a profusion of styles and finishes on offer, you can sometimes get so bogged down in the design, you forget what a good reflector can do for your photography. Here's a brief reminder:



Under the chin

Dark shadows from strong lighting that can ruin a great shot. Telltale signs are heavy shadowing along the jawline, under the eyes and a particular tricky bit to the side of the nose. A reflector positioned under the chin can help reduce these dark shadows.

Side Fill

A small, deliberate amount of shadow can give a portrait modelling and add highlights. A side fill can bounce light back into one side of the face, which makes the other side appear more contoured.

Diffuser

Sunlight is a wonderful thing, but sometimes you can suffer from burnt out highlights and horrid shadows... and sunburn. A diffuser can cut down light by around two stops, enough to get a cracking shot in the bag.

Bounce

Bounced light is simply light that is reflected off a surface before reaching a subject. Light can be bounced off a reflector or a ceiling if shooting inside. One wedding photographer is so adept he can shoot a couple under the canopy of a tree and highlight their faces by sunlight. Now that's smart.

Conclusion

On reflection (make a groaning noise here) reflectors are a must-have purchase. There's a lot of choice, they're well-made, flexible and easy to add in your bag. I've been using my trusty silver/white for years and



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 **AyJayEI**

Posted: 09/08/07 16:45:20 20

A reflector is not just for Christmas, it's for life. :)

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