

Light up your life

Words: Bill Ellis

Pictures: Terry Ryan

Terry Ryan is a master of lighting in and out of the studio, and he explains how he set up three very different shoots

A LEICESTER-BASED photographer with a drive in 2000 square foot air-conditioned studio in the city centre, Terry Ryan has all the lighting and camera equipment in-house that one would expect from a business catering for a formidable client range. Along with the studio space, this self-contained complex features a reception area, offices, an 18 foot scoop, model changing room and a full kitchen facility, indicating the wide variety of work the studio undertakes.

Terry began his career with a large advertising agency, working for a couple of years in London and Paris shooting fashion and advertising for the likes of Omega. When he eventually opened his own studio he specialised in fashion, and found himself in the middle of the golden age of location photography, spending on average four months a year in the Mediterranean and America, with companies such as Jaeger, Pringle, Grattan and Pierre Cardin being amongst the fashion clients of the day.

Terry is more regularly studio-based these days which, given his premises, is no terrible hardship. Like so many other successful advertising photographers he has the ability to shoot a diverse range of commissions to a standard which indicates it was lit by a specialist, and his commissions include fashion, room sets and food. Proving the level he's operating at, his client list includes names such as Mercedes Benz, Subaru, Loake Shoes, Jessops Group, WKD, British Heart Foundation, Pedigree Pet Foods, Napolina, Tilda Rice, Ocean Spray, Carefree Italy, and Amtico International to name a few.

Diverse situations

In this feature we are going to cover three very different lighting situations which demonstrate the variety of jobs



that an all-rounder such as Terry is expected to tackle. The first assignment concerned a commission to shoot the brochure/web images for a luxury country house letting company, albeit fast in the middle of winter and up against testing natural lighting conditions.

Wellacres House was a recent addition to The Big Cottage Company's portfolio catering for luxury weekend breaks in the Cotswolds. Terry takes up the story: "They acquired the building

ABOVE & BELOW
Terry only had two days to shoot this luxury cottage for The Big Cottage Company

in late November and needed it photographing before mid December so that they could start marketing by New Year. I had two days to shoot the whole building. A vanload of furniture arrived and, for the next two days, a continual courier service ferried props to complete the styled shots. It was bedlam!"

The shot of the bedroom is a good image to illustrate the kind of thing that Terry was being asked to pull together



Case study Lighting Masterclass



on this shoot, and it illustrates clearly how lights can be positioned in another room to effectively light the main shot. It's a versatile lighting technique that can be applied to many locations.

As can be seen from the set up shots, Terry used a Broncolor Minipuls D160 with a P travel reflector to give some soft bounced fill to the right hand area, which helped to emphasise detail and to add texture to the bed. A Broncolor Minipuls C200 with a Pulsoflex C 80x80 cm softbox was used to give a soft general fill, and this was positioned over the camera.

When photographing a room as well as lighting to the level required, it's necessary to accent light the room to show depth. People like big rooms and, at the end of the day, The Big Cottage Company was in the business of selling rooms and so the requirement was for images which showed them as being spacious with a warm and comfortable feel.

Photographically a room could be thought of as a large still life: certain areas need to be emphasised with a particular quality of light to give a well-balanced striking image that holds the viewer.

"A three dimensional effect was created by placing a Pulsoflex EM

80x140cm soft box on a Minipuls D160 head, and this highlighted the doorframe and wooden beams," says Terry. "Also in the bathroom you can see a Compuls 165 head with a compact P70 Travel reflector, and this gave a general bounced fill."

The camera used was a Hasselblad 503 CW with a 40mm Distagon lens at f/8, and this was used in conjunction with a Phase One H25 back set at ISO 100, shooting directly into a Mac.

Moving outside there were yet more challenges. "We decided to photograph the cottage at dusk to get that 'welcome home feel,'" says Terry. "As there were few light fittings in place we simulated tungsten room lights by placing individual Bron heads in each room and using the modelling lights. The exterior was then lit using two Impact heads which I've had for over 20 years: incidentally, from time to time I do drop them and, I'm pleased to say, they still fix them!"

"I shot the image on a Nikon D2X with a 17-55mm f/2.8 G ED DX lens, using an exposure time of six seconds at f/5.6 on a setting of ISO 800 to allow me to keep some detail in the sky."

Into the studio

Terry is equally at home in the studio,



TOP
The final image for Triton

ABOVE
The set-up process for Triton, revealing the studio lights used to create this image

and the next shoot centred on a commission from Triton for images destined for use on packaging and promotional material.

Lighting was from above on this shot, the main area light being a Broncolor Mini 120 x 80 Cumulite on a Flamingo stand with Pulso 4 head and Pulso 4 pack. There was also a Pulsoflex EM 80 x 140 to the left with a Compuls 165 head. The camera Terry was working with was a Hasselblad 503 CW with 120mm macro, and this was fitted with a Phase One H25 back set to ISO 50, with an exposure of 1/125sec at f/11.

"The Pulsoflex EM 80 x 140 with Minipuls C200 head was placed to the right of the set," says Terry "From this position it not only illuminated the model's face, it also lit the 8 x 4 foot

FINAL IMAGE...



FROM THIS...

TO THIS...

TO THIS...

“An Impact case performed the vital role of stand-in for the dog while everything was being set up”

white reflector which was placed to the right of camera, and this was used as the reflection in the mirror. By pointing the Pulsoflex EM slightly down and utilising the skirt on the reflector the gradation in light on the mirror was achieved at the same time.

“The sets were designed with 8 x 4 foot sprayed panels in a range of colours so that we could easily create various bathroom effects by hanging them on freestanding supports. Although the product ranges had to appear in each shot it was the ‘lifestyle’ image of the models that was required. These were

used as an introduction in the brochure.

“At times there were up to three sets on the go - the monoblocs with Pulsoflex EMs were ideal for wheeling quickly across the studio.”

Large scale

The third of Terry’s images to be highlighted here was a shoot at a new barn conversion for a 48-sheet poster, with the camera employed being a Hasselblad 503 CW with 50mm used in tandem with a Phase One H25 back.

As far as props were concerned, one large carpet was purchased and the

chair, running machine and television were hired in, while the dog belonged to one of the principals at the agency. As you can see, an Impact case performed the vital role of stand-in for the dog while everything was being set up!

A Pulsoflex EM 80 x140 was used as the main light overhead on a boom stand with a Pulso 4 head and Pulso 4 pack, one of Terry’s favourite combinations. “Although it gives a soft



Have you got a **WDK** side?

light, this has the advantage in this situation that its projecting sides [a lip which extends for around 100mm all around the forward edge of the softbox} allow me to control the light more and reduce the spillage.'

A Pulsoflex EM 80 x 140 was used slightly forward of the TV to the left with a Compuls head, while a Pulsoflex 80 x80 acted as a fill over the camera on a Minipuls 200 head. One small Impact light with reflector and honeycomb grid was also used to light under the TV.

Single handed

I asked Terry about working with assistants, and his answer encompassed several very pertinent points - not all of them for the good in terms of nurturing

future top-flight photographers.

"I always had up to three full time assistants at a time until the dawn of the digital age when I found that you no longer needed a company van and assistant to run the hourly processing trip," he says. "Like many other photographers I had to acquire the computer skills necessary to control all the new software required. On the plus side it did put a lot of us back in full control of image creation and post-production, and it also meant that I learned how to use a kettle!"

Now it seems to be the norm to just employ a freelance assistant when needed, which is a sad reflection regarding future photographers coming through the system who are now not

able to pick up the skills they need for their own future career by being around established photographers.

It could be the odd bit of subtractive lighting or the addition of an extra reflector, the subtle change of light position or a power setting: these are all things established photographers do intuitively, but they need to be observed by the assistant to enable them to understand how the shot was improved by that action.

So much bubbles under the surface technically and logistically in the kind of commissions Terry undertakes. His passion for photography is infectious and, in common with the whole industry, he is always on his mettle to meet new challenges in any form. ☉