

THROUGH THE LENS OF DIXIE DIXON

A fashion insider's views on shooting like a pro.



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Dixie Dixon is a Texas-born and -bred commercial fashion photographer. At just 12 years old, she was given her first camera, which piqued her curiosity and became her sidekick in exploring the world. In her college years, she studied with a world-renowned London fashion photographer and became deeply inspired by the beautiful aura of fashion photography. Today, Dixie's career is unfolding one adventure after another.

Full of life, beautiful energy and—most of all—soul, her idealistic vision of the world is reflected in every single frame. Shooting for brands, TV shows, ad campaigns and editorial projects, she's on the go around the world, from Cannes, Ibiza and Barcelona to New York, Miami, Toronto, Vancouver and Los Angeles. Dixie is also one of just 16 U.S. Nikon Ambassadors, and we're proud to have her as an enthusiastic contributor to our G-TEAM.

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DIXIE DIXON



SHOOTING PEOPLE IS ALL ABOUT BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS.

As photographers, our success depends on finding ways to instantly put our subjects at ease, establish connections and get that much closer to capturing their true personalities. I check out their Facebook pages and see what they've been up to on Instagram or Twitter so I can connect with them on a deeper level when they arrive on set. I even figure out what kind of music they like and have that playing to create a comfortable, fun atmosphere.

I always hug people when I first meet them, to help break down barriers. I can tell from the hug just how hard it will be to get my subjects out of their shells. Moving from shoot to shoot, it's essential to learn how to establish relationships quickly—for both your art and your business—to make people feel comfortable and free to express themselves.

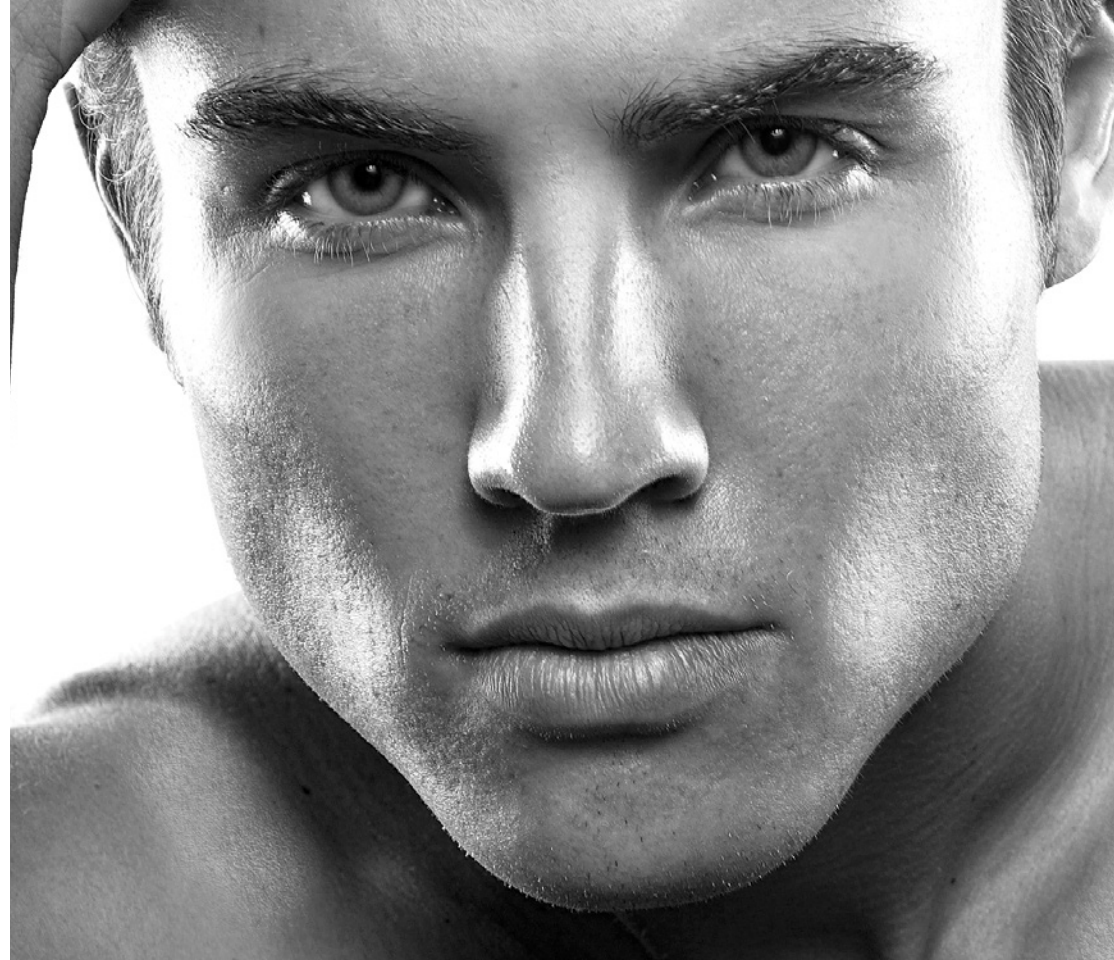
! LIGHTING TIP

Your connection with the person you're shooting is paramount, so get your lighting set up quickly and then focus on what's important—making a personal connection with your subject. You can have great light, but if she isn't comfortable, your images are going to be missing the most important element: soul.



THINK OF YOUR CLIENT'S BRAND LIKE A PERSON.

I've found there really is a personality within each and every great brand, so start by getting to know the brand as you would a person. Of course, you can't hug a brand to establish a connection, but you can research what makes that brand unique and effective. Look for small details—attitude, colors, language, fonts—and you'll have a much easier time bringing your brand's personality to life in images. I also ask my clients and art directors A LOT of questions, make it a point to capture exactly what they're looking for first—and then shoot my own vision at the end. That's how I give them what they didn't know they were looking for.





CREATING THE MAGIC MOMENT TAKES PREPARATION.

Pre-production can make or break a shoot, and the more you prep, the better your actual shoot will run. First, make a shot list to think through everything you'll need to make the magic happen. Scout the location beforehand and choose where and when you're going to make each shot, the time of day and the lighting you'll need.

I create an inspiration board for every shoot—with images of hair and makeup, wardrobe, lighting, mood and attitude to illustrate my vision. That's how I share my ideas with my team, because you can tell people what you want but it's hard for them to know until they see it. Along the way, build your own team of go-to makeup artists, hair and wardrobe stylists, assistants and digital techs. Every shoot depends on having enthusiastic folks on set who inspire you.

! LIGHTING TIP

Lighting is all about creating a mood. Happy, light-hearted images usually call for glowing, soft, even light. Dark, sexy images might call for a Rembrandt or side lighting and a dark background. Here's a little nugget to add to your lighting repertoire for a great cinematic effect. I hand-held a constant LED light to get this image. Shoot with wide-open apertures, say F 1.4 and ISO 400, to let in that beautiful ambient light of the room, and then spotlight your model with your LED.

IN BUILDING YOUR PORTFOLIO, LESS IS ALWAYS MORE.

It's tempting to show everything, but you must use only your very best images, expressing a common theme, style and vision. Think about what your clients really need. Art directors are usually under a lot of pressure to hire just the right person who will deliver for their client, and if your portfolio images are all over the map, they won't know what they'll end up with.

Your website and portfolio are expressions of you, so the more unique the better. I look at magazines for pacing ideas and have learned that opposites attract—a black and white image next to a color one, a beauty shot next to a full-body or wide shot. Thinking this way gives your portfolio balance and keeps viewers interested.

! LIGHTING TIP

First and foremost, you must master your gear. Whenever you're messing with camera settings or lighting on set, you're losing your connection with your subject. Experimentation is key, so practice a lot and know your gear, and you'll be ready to instinctively capture the moment when it happens.







DON'T LEARN ABOUT BACKING UP THE HARD WAY.

Your clients are putting a lot of money behind your images, so losing them to a gear failure is the last thing you'll ever want to happen. Always invest in the best-quality brands—for example, I rely on G-Technology. Start with an entry-level model, then upgrade as your business grows. You really do get what you pay for with hard drives, so get a terabyte drive you can rely on and buy more as you grow.

Always, always, always back up your images! On set, I'm usually shooting tethered to a computer connected to the G-DOCK ev™ with Thunderbolt™, which makes duplicate backups—so I have three sets of backups just in case something happens—because eventually, something will!

! LIGHTING TIP

I love finding the energy in a fashion shoot, and I've found that using a beauty dish works wonders—especially if you're looking to add that fashion edge. Beauty dishes give you a soft, yet contrasty light source. My favorite ones are the Mola beauty dishes—the Setti and the Euro. I use a smaller one for single headshots and a larger one for two people or full-body images.

YOUR STYLE IS ALREADY WITHIN YOU.

Focus on and shoot only what you love, and you'll begin to develop a body of work that speaks to your real vision and style. Style is not something you have to go out and find, because the more you shoot, the more you'll see a style unfolding that's uniquely your own.

With that in mind, shoot and show only what you love, and people will eventually start hiring you for that vision. I call it the law of attraction: When you only put out into the world the kind of work you ultimately want to shoot, people will eventually hire you to shoot that kind of work! So if you want to be a commercial photographer, you can shoot weddings to pay the bills, but only show the work you want to be hired for.

! LIGHTING TIP

Shooting into the sun is one thing you might be told not to do, but as you can see in the image shown here, using fill flash or reflectors will absolutely make your images pop. I used a gold reflector here and use them all the time on location and in studio. If the subject is in shade, my assistant will bounce light back in, and I use them in studio to soften and lighten shadows and add catch lights.





THERE'S A REASON SO MANY PROS CHOOSE G-TECHNOLOGY.

I love making connections with the people I work with and definitely have an idealistic worldview—but I'm not at all idealistic when it comes to protecting my work. That's why I rely on G-Technology for all my workstations and locations.

Speed and capacity are just as important as reliability, especially now that I've added video production to my repertoire. So, to complement my super-expandable G-DOCK ev's, I also put G-RAID® and G-SPEED® Q drives to work when I'm editing—I get blazing throughput and tons of room. Then, when my work is done, I archive each project on a high-capacity G-DRIVE®.

Okay, that's a wrap. I've been really happy to share a little of what I've learned in my passion for shooting people, and wish you huge success in creating your own magic, wherever it takes you. Keep it real—and please stay in touch.



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