



## Part I

# Studio Starter Kits

You don't have to use thousands of dollars of studio gear to get professional quality results—although, no doubt, it can make your photographs look more professional. In this chapter, find out how to shoot on a budget ... and still get professional results.



## Basic Home Studio

Here's a look at a very basic home studio. It can be set up in about 15 minutes for around \$700.

In the picture of my den (on the right), the light on the right side of the subject is a hot light (constant light source) mounted in a softbox (to diffuse the light). To the left of the subject is a reflector, which bounces light from the hot light onto the opposite side of the face. In the background is a black cloth, the kind you can pick up at a fabric store.

I took the photograph on the left with this simple and affordable setup.



Photo courtesy of FJWestcott



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## Basic Hot-Light Kit

Hot lights are called *hot lights* because, well, they get hot. They provide a constant light source so that you can see in real time the effect (shadows and highlights) of using one or more lights and changing their positions.

Hot light kits can cost thousands of dollars, but there's a three-light PhotoBasic kit from FJ Westcott that sells for about \$500. The 11-piece PB500 kit includes: two main lights, two umbrellas to soften the light, a background light, three stands, a background, a floor mat for easy light placement and a carrying case.





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Photo courtesy of FJWestcott

## Basic Strobe Kit

Strobe lights work like an accessory camera flash, firing in the blink of an eye. They have photocells that allow them to be fired from a main strobe that is tethered (attached by a wire) to a camera.

Professional strobe light kits can be pricy though, costing several thousand dollars. Rather than spending these big bucks, you might want to start with a three-light PhotoBasic kit from FJWestcott. The 12-piece Strobelite Plus 3 Light Kit #231 costs around \$700 and includes: three lights, two softboxes (to soften the light), two adaptor rings (to swivel the softboxes), three stands, a carrying case and a Westcott instructional DVD.





## Simply Beautiful

Here is an example of how you can create a beautiful portrait with a very simple lighting setup.

For the top left photograph, a strip light (no grid) was positioned in front of the model and to camera left. This provided the main light source. A strip light was positioned behind the subject and to camera right to provide the accent light on the model's left arm. Half of the model's face is in a shadow, which makes for a dramatic image.

For the top right photograph, a reflector was used in combination with the main light. We can see the model's face better in this image, but it does not have the drama of the image with the strong shadow. Still, we like it.

The bottom photograph shows the simple behind-the-scenes setup.

Try to keep it simple, or try to at least *start* with a simple setup like this. Good fun ... and good lighting.



## Garage Glamour

If you have a garage, or access to one, you can create a natural-light studio in just a few minutes. And your garage studio can produce soft and even lighting—with daylight from the large open door. All you need to add is a background (the more professional looking the better) and a large black cloth.

I took the photograph on the left in my garage. Check out the soft and even lighting on the models' faces. On the right is a picture of the garage packed with boxes of my books and boxes of construction materials.

A background is needed to create the impression that the portrait was taken in a professional studio. And the black cloth eliminates the effect of light bouncing off the cement floor, which is usually stronger than the light bouncing off the walls and ceiling of the garage.

You can control the brightness of the background by moving it closer to (brighter) or away from (darker) the subject.