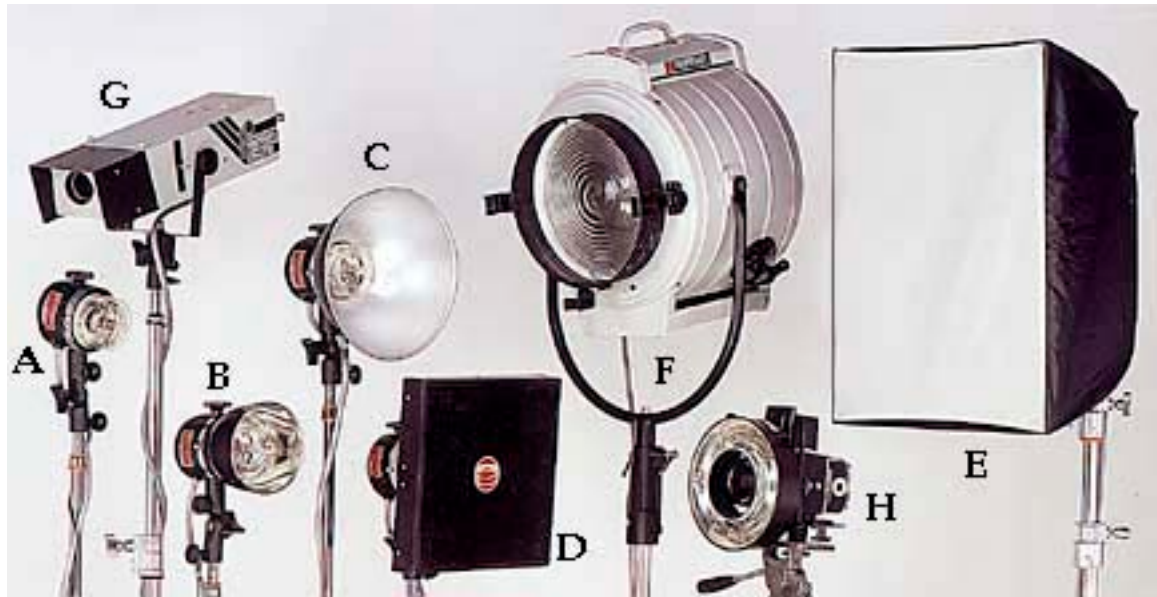


PHOTOGRAPHIC LIGHT SOURCES

Photographic Light Sources including electronic flash heads and electronic strobe lighting equipment

Photographic Electronic flash or electronic strobe lighting equipment is something most photographers will need sooner or later in their career as professional photographers. There are many different types of strobe and flash equipment, and this article attempts to explain the uses of the different types available today. Electronic flash heads (strobe heads) and other light modifiers will be explained in detail.



Lights are tools to be used by photographers to create their final products. There are many different kinds of lights, but for this article, we will explain those light sources related to studio strobe lighting.

(A) Bare Bulbs: is a strobe head without a reflector. Without a reflector, the light goes pretty much everywhere, including your lens, if you're not careful. The only time we use a bare bulb head is, on occasion, for a portrait background light. If you find yourself in a really tight space, and you don't have much room to work, you can put the bare bulb on a floor stand directly behind the subject, pointing toward the background at a distance of about two feet. By pointing the head at the background, you are essentially using the strobe housing as a gobo to keep light from pouring into the camera. At a distance of two feet, the light gives a very nice graduation effect (light to dark) on the background. If you don't own light boxes, you may not know this, but you use bare heads inside of light boxes.

(B) Small (wide angle) reflector: VISTA's standard reflector is 5" in diameter. Some light manufacturers actually build their light heads with a reflector built into the head. The light is reflected from the reflector in a relatively wide spray. We find ourselves using the 5" mostly with umbrellas on. They are also good for bouncing off of ceilings and walls and for shooting into "light walls" (large translucent material wall). If you're going to bounce light off of walls, let us warn you, Be careful that the walls are painted a neutral color. If you bounce light off a green wall, you end up with green light. Bounced light is a very nice source and the light quality can be controlled by changing the distance form the light to the wall. Another good thing about 5" reflectors is that they "nest" over the flash tube protector, and take up no additional space when you travel.

(C) Large reflector: VISTA make a 10" (diameter) reflector which we will use on occasion. Since the reflector is so wide, it isn't as good as the 5" when used with umbrellas. It ends up blocking a large portion of the umbrella, thus partially defeating its purpose. We like to use the 10" for bouncing into walls and off ceilings. The narrower spray of light makes this reflector more controllable and more efficient.

Umbrella: (you know what this looks like) Umbrellas are great for spreading relatively "soft light" over a large area.

(D) Grid spots: We think grid spots are the coolest things. If you've never seen one, it looks like a metal honey comb that you put over your light reflector. Each comb prevents the light from spreading out. The effect is that it creates many columns of light right next to each other, creating a spot light. Grids are really useful and we would recommend that even the beginner get a couple to be used for "hair" and "background" lights.

(E) Light box: After fire, the greatest invention ever created by man, was the light box. The light box will make even the rank novice photographer, at least mediocre. (especially in regards to product photography). A light box is most commonly, a fiberglass frame (tent poles) holding open a five sided tent created from four sides of black nylon and one side (the farthest from the light) from translucent white nylon material.

Soft boxes come in many sizes, shaped like octagonal, Square and round boxes too. What's great about the light box is that it is "controllable" The light goes where you point it, and doesn't go where you haven't pointed it (unlike an umbrella). Flare is less of a problem from a box

A strip light is nothing but a long skinny light box.

(F) Fresnel: They are actually "hot" lights converted to except a flash tube. They are adjustable spot lights and they are quite efficient. You can adjust the beam of light more or less wide, as desired. This is by far our favorite light for shooting food. The light projects a crisp shadow so it is easy to control and create shadows by sticking stuff (gobos) between the light and the subject. We also use this light a lot to streak light across a background and also as a 3/4 rear "sun" effect for more "illustrative" shoots. The only thing you have to watch though, is that this light seems to be a little "cool". We usually have to warm it up a little with a 1/8 or 1/4 cto filter. It's a great light, also for Fashion. If you're a commercial professional photographer, you gotta get one of these lights! They're GREAT!

(G) Optical spots: Basically this light is a slide projector with a flash tube behind it. You can project slides or you can take the slides away and place shapes in the slot and project them into your picture. This light also has the capability of adjusting down to cover only a very small area. We're talking dime size. The down side to this light is that it is VERY inefficient and you need to work the light in as close as possible so as to get a decent aperture.

(H) Ring Light: A ring light is a flash head that is shaped like a donut, and you shoot through the hole. The flash tubes creates a continuous circle around the lens, thus creating the ALMOST perfect fill light. Instead of creating no shadows, it actually creates shadows all around the subject. It is a really cool effect. If you use this light as a main light, you can create some very unusual effects. It's hard to avoid RED EYE with a ring light.