

GLAMOUR PHOTOGRAPHY

Review: **Danny Steyn's *Nude and Glamour Photography Workshop***

Saturday morning, 3:00 a.m. I'm wide-awake and scared. In just 6 hours, I will be attending Danny Steyn's *Nude and Glamour Photography Workshop* at the Bahia Mar Beach Resort in Fort Lauderdale.



Why am I so worried? I'm almost entirely new to photography, having just bought my first digital SLR a few months ago (a Canon EOS Rebel XT body, with an EF 28-135mm USM IS lens). More or less immediately, I broke the camera on a trip to England, and so it spent most of the next 6 weeks sitting on a shelf, before hastily getting shipped back to Canon for repairs (free of charge, thanks to Canon's no-questions-asked warranty). So I don't even know how to use it.

I spent a few hours the previous evening on wikipedia.org rather lamely trying to learn about apertures and focal lengths. And then a little longer flicking through the Rebel XT's user guide, before giving up and going to bed. A pathetic effort.

Now it's 3:05 a.m. In less than 6 hours I'll be humiliating myself in front of real amateur photographers and a few professionals. The advertisement for Danny Steyn's photography workshop stresses that each photographer "will pose, direct and photograph professional models, glamour, topless and nude" — there will be nowhere to hide, and no hiding my ineptitude. I have a quick hot shower to combat the cold chills in my neck, and I try to sleep.

I rise at 6:00 a.m. panicking, realizing that I've forgotten to charge the camera's battery pack. Should I pack up my laptop and take it with me? Maybe I just won't go. But I've paid a non-refundable \$399 sign-up fee. I really should go. I stumble around the house for an hour, wild-eyed. I skip breakfast. What shall I wear? I opt for canvas shorts and a large white cotton shirt. I hope this will make me look intelligent and harmless instead of like lascivious slime with a camera.

I leave the house in zombie mode.

I arrive early at the Bahia Mar hotel and find another photographer to talk to. A small group is assembling. I try to size-up each of the photographers. Everyone looks surprisingly relaxed.

The guy I'm talking to is a seasoned amateur photographer. I ask him about aperture settings and depth of field, and he looks at me like I have two heads.

An Introduction to Glamour Photography

9:00 a.m. arrives, we sign in, take seats, and get started. Danny gives an introductory talk on everything you ever wanted to know about glamour photography. He tells us a few amazing stories about how he got into the business in South Africa, and how it now easily pays for his life here in the USA. His totally professional approach to the subject puts me at ease to some extent, as Danny seems to genuinely care about the quality of his workshop, and that each student enjoys it, and gets what they want out of it. He doesn't seem too disturbed when I admit that I don't even know how to work my camera.

He discusses "the shoot" to come. There will be 2 sets: a "hot" set (continuous tungsten lights) and a "flash" set (lit with "Alien Bees"). For the flash set, I learn that each camera needs a sync connection, or a hot shoe, to trigger the set. This discussion seems to be code for everyone to pull out his or her camera. I glance around and quickly surmise that I have the smallest and cheapest camera in the room, by a factor of 10. I have the smallest camera bag by a factor of 20. I have the least experience by a factor of about 400. I reach the conclusion that I am the most terrified by a factor of 10,000.

Apparently the models have arrived and are "in makeup". Gulp!

Danny's lecture continues. We cover some legalities: 18 U.S.C. Section 2257 notices, ASMP model releases, image-use limitations, and then we move on to a discussion on how to treat, talk to, and respect the models, and how important it is to always have an assistant present at every shoot.

Danny claims to fall in love with each of the models he shoots — but only temporarily. Kim, his wife, who is one of the organizers of the workshop, doesn't seem to mind.

Then Danny brings in the hairdressers (2 stylists from a local salon) and the makeup artist, Christy. They each say a few words about their specific contributions to the process.

The models appear, one by one. At this point, a quick headcount tells me that (models included) Danny has brought a staff of at least 10 people, for a workshop for just 20 students.

The models are shockingly attractive.

After some final discussions, there is a lot of rapid-fire talk about apertures and shutter speeds, ISO settings, histograms and white balance, and at last the shoot begins on the hot set. At this point, things become rather a blur. In the middle of the action, Brian, one of Danny's assistant photographers, helps me set up my camera, which, after a bit of fumbling, is really easy to do after all.



Since we're shooting fully manually (mode M on my Canon), I take the plunge, go mad, and choose to use manual focusing, because I assume that using auto-focus is cheating. This is a decision I will later regret. However, I do have the foresight to turn on the Image Stabilization system on my lens, which I can only assume works extremely well, because not a single one of my shots was spoiled by camera shake — although I should point out that there are a myriad of other reasons that many of my shots were extremely poor, imperfect focus being one of the main culprits.

The Hot Set Shoot

Several of the photographers present, being real men, step up to the plate, one at a time, and take charge, directing the models as best they can. To me, these are the brave few, who know what they are doing, know what they want, and can call themselves “photographers”. Cowards, like me, hang back, and fumble with our equipment. Danny tells us that we “look like chimps”; i.e. we take a sneaky shot and then hunch our shoulders as we look down at the display on our camera to see what we've got.

Despite my stage fright, I pump up my courage to maximum, and go for it, and I do briefly take over directing the model for a very long 30 seconds... which is all I can handle for now. In those 30 seconds, I get at least half-a-dozen shots where the model is gazing directly into my lens, and for the first time, I experience the real thrill of glamour photography: it's all about connecting with the model's eyes.

Danny takes a group of 5 students away to the flash set.

The rest of us remain on the hot set.

Meanwhile, the 3 models rotate between the 2 sets, variously taking off their bras and panties (oh my God) and posing with parasols and fans.

Before I know it, it's lunchtime. I'm buzzed. It was nerve-wracking and exhilarating, and I've done it: I posed and directed one of the models... a major achievement.

And almost without realizing it, I've been shooting my SLR fully manually.



The lovely Mia – my best shot of the day

The Flash Set Shoot

After lunch, buoyed by success, I queue-up for the flash set. My confidence quickly ebbs away however, as this set has an entirely different atmosphere. Unlike the hot set, where, in the midst of the bright lights, maybe 10 cameras are shooting at once (though only one photographer is directing the model), this flash set is different. It is a solitary experience, under cold lights. Since only one camera can trigger the flash at once, only one camera can shoot, while the rest of the photographers stand and watch, waiting for their turn.

I find myself hanging back again. I'm not comfortable at all. Half an hour passes by. I look across the room, through the door, back to the hot set, where I can see that the model is now wearing a straw hat and white stockings, and seems to be having fun. But here, on the flash set, the model is wearing a fur coat and nothing else, and is responding somewhat reluctantly to directions from the guy who is "on". I start to think... I can't do this. I just can't do it. It's too intimidating. I think seriously about how I can retrieve my camera bag and slink away in defeat. But instead, with my confidence crushed, I decide to return to the hot set, where the most vivacious of the 3 models is keeping the crowd happy. Soon, I'm joining in, and within minutes, some confidence returns. Later in the shoot, still on the hot set, the model called Mia (my favorite) is back, and I take my best shots of the day. As mentioned before, Danny claims he temporarily falls in love

with each of his models — and while I can't say/admit the same, I definitely had a crush on Mia throughout the day.

Confidence boosted, I return to the flash set with some last-minute teeth-grinding courage, and as luck would have it, Mia rotates on to the flash set at the same time, and I finish the shoot as the second-from-last guy, with just a few minutes to spare.

The End

At 4:00 p.m. we return to the final discussion of the day, which covers techniques using Photoshop. Not surprisingly, everyone in the room uses Photoshop exclusively. I thought that I was a Photoshop expert, but in the final 40 minutes, I learn at least 3 major things I didn't already know.

And finally it's over.

I say a few goodbyes, but I don't hang around, as I want to leave on a high, and I fear that any postmortem talk will destroy the magic.

I return home (I live locally) satisfied that I've just blown \$400 the best way ever. It was a bit like a roller coaster ride: both exhilarating and terrifying. It still brings a smile to my face every time I think about it.

I'm not qualified to comment knowledgeably on the performance of the Rebel XT except in the broadest of terms. What I can say is that under these demanding conditions, operated by a dithering dummy, my Canon Rebel XT/lens combination performed admirably, in that it was extremely forgiving of my failings as a photographer. The few images shown here, while probably technically flawed, are good photographs. In my opinion, they make the model look beautiful — and isn't that, after all, what glamour photography is all about?

I can unequivocally recommend Danny Steyn's *Nude and Glamour Photography Workshop* to anyone interested in the genre. I have no affiliation to Danny Steyn Photography whatsoever.

For more information on this and similar workshops, go to www.dannysteyn.com.

Andrew Carson

July 29, 2006

Word Count: 1,700

Andrew Carson is a Glamour Photographer with a very small camera.

Attn. Andrew Carson
519A SW 5th Avenue, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33315

andrew.carson@d7s.com