

KELLY BROWN

GETTING LIGHT ON YOUR SIDE FOR NEWBORNS

Too many newborn shoots seem to concentrate on a warm *studio* and forget all about warm *lighting* – light with direction, glow, colour and life. We see so many photographers use soft, formless lighting and bland backgrounds for babies which almost lose outlines and merge into a magnolia marshmallow smudge. Well, baby skin has to look soft and

A HAPPY GLOW FROM DOWN UNDER!

little pieces by Kelly Brown
PHOTOGRAPHY

perfect, doesn't it? And newborns are not immune to skin care problems? So, light flat? But newborns have wonderful cheeks and chins and eyes, little noses and perfect lips. Rounded, dimensional, confident lighting can work!

Kelly Brown, the undoubted star of Australia's neonatal photography scene, has no hesitation using sidelighting and also a beautiful diffuse light from 'down under'. That's not being theatrical and unnatural, because in

real life babies are held up, lain down, seen from above, seen in cots where the light comes from a window or buggies and prams where it reflects into the shaded canopy. In Australia young skin is kept well out of direct rays but so often lit by the reflected sunshine of an outdoor lifestyle. And in the studio, Kelly Brown creates exactly that beautiful glow



A classic overhead shot, left, not too close and wide but still needing 35mm focal length on her zoom. On this page, two sibling and newborn studies which really caught our attention for their colour quality and the obvious appeal of this – a good way to make older children feel very much part of the new arrival's life, and just as important in the family.

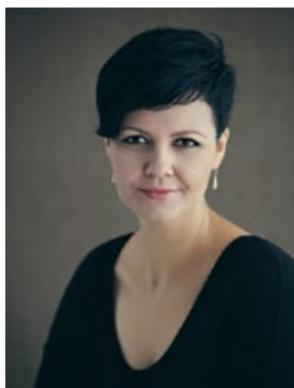




which sculpts baby faces in three dimensions. It's a joyous light, as hopeful as a clear sunrise, optimistic and also flattering. It's an approach to lighting which owes much to beauty and glamour techniques of the past and the recognition that diffuse light coming from below the chin, or from the side but absolutely not in the traditional Rembrandt overhead manner, has a wow factor.

Since this is often a type of light which will reveal texture, Kelly does retouch her babies much as a beauty specialist would. She uses a Wacom Intuous Pro Medium pad, a self-calibrating EIZO ColorEdge CG247 24-inch monitor, and works carefully to ensure a natural result.

Her favourite portable light is a Jinbei EFL-200 LED source, not often seen in the UK though available from one importer with a six-week order time. This looks like a large studio flash, but puts out an actual 200W of LED light which runs cool (from the subject side) despite matching a remarkable 2000W of 5600K daylight quality. It goes through a 50cm white perspex globe diffuser from the same Chinese maker.



Kelly Brown

We are sure you will see the benefit of this highly controllable continuous light in the photographs we have selected from Kelly's large and varied portfolio – she can do low key and muted equally well, but to inspire our UK newborn photographers and Cherubs studios it's this great use of a well-defined directional light we want to show you.

Kelly combines this with a free approach to camera angles and position, the reverse of the setup where a new baby is carefully posed and the camera remains on a tripod. She will move in as close to the baby as a mother would, letting mum and studio 'spotter' assistant do the handling and support while

watching constantly to ensure the baby is safe and happy. Most of her poses are natural and do not demand the supporting hand or retouched post production familiar from newborn 'template' approaches. This allows the lens close enough to catch the scent and warmth of the baby, and for the parent, the perspective and apparent eye position become their own.

Of course the special prop support, wraps and knits can still be a purely photographic confection – a means to swaddle a very little body in a photogenic fashion, cocooned or floated in fabric, nested or cuddled. She uses her own *Shoot Baby!* posing bag.

The settings are however all believable, with a simple laid-down blanket and coverlet for an overhead portrait which looks much better than any attempt to put baby in a vertical pose (see above). This natural repose flatters baby faces, gravity removing sag or squash, but it only works if the photographer is able to work from overhead. In this picture set you will see some poses which might look 'sitting', as with the older brother and sister on the previous page. These are lying-down poses not sitting

up and holding baby, it's the sidelighting and the camera angle which combine to make them look right.

"Knowing the best way to pose babies is definitely something which has developed over time," Kelly says, "along with understanding babies and how they move. I'm still perfecting things with every session, but I think the key is to be patient and never force a baby into any pose just for the sake of a shot."

Study Kelly's pictures carefully. She says that many entrants to the newborn field seem to have their focus all wrong. "I've noticed a lot of newcomers focusing more on the posing instead of the basics of photography, like lighting, composition, focus and learning about which lens is best for what situation."

On the facing page, two monochrome examples with that signature subtle wrap of directional light.

One of the most important pieces of advice she offers is "never risk the safety of a baby for the sake of getting a shot". She always uses a spotter while on a shoot (ensuring that the baby is safe at all times and not likely to roll off onto the ground. "Practice on a fake baby with





Light and colour – Kelly Brown choose her fabrics and props with great attention to the way that digital sensors (and her Canon in particular) render them. Warm shades, browns and pinks with never a hint of brilliant white, avoid highlight burn-out and harmonise with the skin tones she aims for. Small elements like moss green (lower left) are arranged so they do not cast green reflected light into these tones. On this page, a simple co-ordination of colour and two camera positions and angles from the same 'sitting'. She does not try to put the baby's face in an adult portrait orientation.





Black and white in a beautiful light – study the brilliant long-lashes angle above. If this was to be lit without skill, focused on the wrong point, taken at just one stop down and processed differently the baby's very new skin with its fine dotting of lanolin not yet absorbed could look unattractive or even rough. This treatment ensures it looks beautiful yet the neonatal texture is still there. Below, the same goes for toes – for a set of pictures, such close-ups may be difficult but work so well together.

On the facing page, a final example of that special below-the-lens level lighting which you can create using a diffuse light source or by bouncing a regular flash off a reflector. It's almost like the glow of a fire or a night-light, even in subtle monochrome.



different posing techniques," she suggests, "as well as how to wrap." When it comes to the technical aspects, Brown stresses the importance of learning to read light – both artificial and natural, and knowing and understanding all the fundamentals of composition, because it's only then that you can start to break the rules.

The business

Kelly launched her business *Little Pieces of Photography* in 2005. She has since travelled the world speaking at events and teaching newborn posing classes. In 2014 she photographed 139 newborn babies, mentored 23 photographers and held 19 newborn posing classes across 12 countries.

She has won many awards, nationally and internationally, including the AIPP Aus-

tralian Family Photographer of the Year (2014). She is also a Master of Photography with the Australian Institute of Professional Photography and Wedding & Portrait Photographers Association (WPPA), where she was awarded eight first place titles.

In her state, Queensland, she's been AIPP Family Photographer of the Year every year since 2012 and their overall Professional Photographer of the Year 2013 and 2014. With the healthy birth rate and economy of Australia (compared to most of the UK) she's been able to build a business centred just on newborn and baby photography, and considers herself lucky to avoid the problems of changing weather and venues faced by wedding specialists.

Kelly has her own family to look after too – three children. At the end of 2013,

her husband decided to join her in the business after 20 years in the construction industry. Designed and conceived (no pun intended) by the couple, The Baby Summit has been launched as a three-day conference, on the gold Coast in early August. It's the first of its kind: an event for photographers that specialise in the maternity, birth, newborn and baby genres, with presenters from all over the world.

Brown also sells *Photoshop* actions, provides one-on-one mentoring and does video tutorials, having appeared a number of times on *Creative-Live*, the popular US online platform.

And what is the secret, if there is one, behind all this success? "In the beginning," she says, "I believed it was all about taking amazing photos. Now I know that a

successful photography business is close to 70% business and only 30% taking photos – and the business aspect requires one to wear so many different hats."

As ever the one secret ingredient is hard work – "You have to work for what you want," Kelly says. "Every year, we set goals, make plans and then go about making it happen. We do whatever it takes to achieve them, and I don't allow fear to hold me back."

And for the camera gear of choice, she shoots on a Canon 5D Mark III with a 24-70mm *f*2.8 Mark II lens. "The lens is so incredibly versatile, it's practically on my camera full-time," she says. "It's not only great for close ups, but wide angles as well when shooting large props from above."