



TECHNIQUE

BABY STEPS

Considering newborn photography? Get to grips with the basics



KELLY BROWN



LISA CLATWORTHY

IN JANUARY, Australian newborn and maternity photographer Kelly Brown will be swapping the bright blue skies and golden light of Queensland for the grey, wet streets of London town. Thankfully, she'll be in the bright and friendly environs of the Societies' Convention at the Hilton London Metropole Hotel, sharing the techniques and approaches she employs to get her award-winning shots. If you can't wait until then though, read on. ▶



When Kelly Brown started out she travelled to client's homes to photograph newborns, but found that lighting was always a challenge. She now prefers to invite clients to her home studio, a converted garage, "with large windows covered by sheer curtains to create stunning diffused light". On the occasions she does shoot on location, she takes a Westcott Flex LED daylight mat to recreate the look of natural light.

Kelly stresses that natural light is important for the soft, gentle effect she prefers in both her newborn and maternity work. "My preference is to use beautiful, soft, filtered natural light. On overcast days I use continuous lights, but luckily in Queensland we often have lovely bright daylight! Primarily I just love natural light!"

Rather than complicate a session with lots of lights and reflectors, Kelly advises a KISS approach. She favours a very simple set-up for both her newborn and maternity sessions: "Just my large

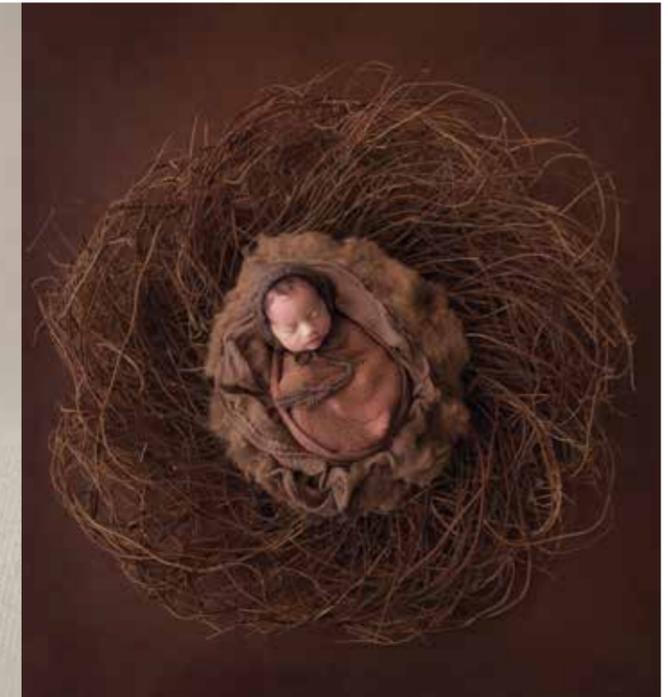
window with sheer curtains to diffuse the light, and I angle the subject partway towards the light." When deciding where to shoot, make use of the natural light, setting up so that your subject is in the optimal position for the duration of the session. If this isn't going to work, which is highly possible in the dull, northern hemisphere, then continuous lighting could be the solution.

Safe and sound

There has been some discussion over whether using flash for newborn work is a no-no, in case it damages the baby's eyes, something that Kelly acknowledges. "There have been concerns raised in the past, but according to paediatric ophthalmologists it is highly unlikely that a flash could cause this kind of damage," she says.

A baby's well-being is, of course, a serious consideration. "During a newborn session there are a lot of considerations towards the baby's

IMAGES: throughout a newborn shoot, the baby's well-being is of utmost importance; consider the temperature and sound levels, their position and comfort

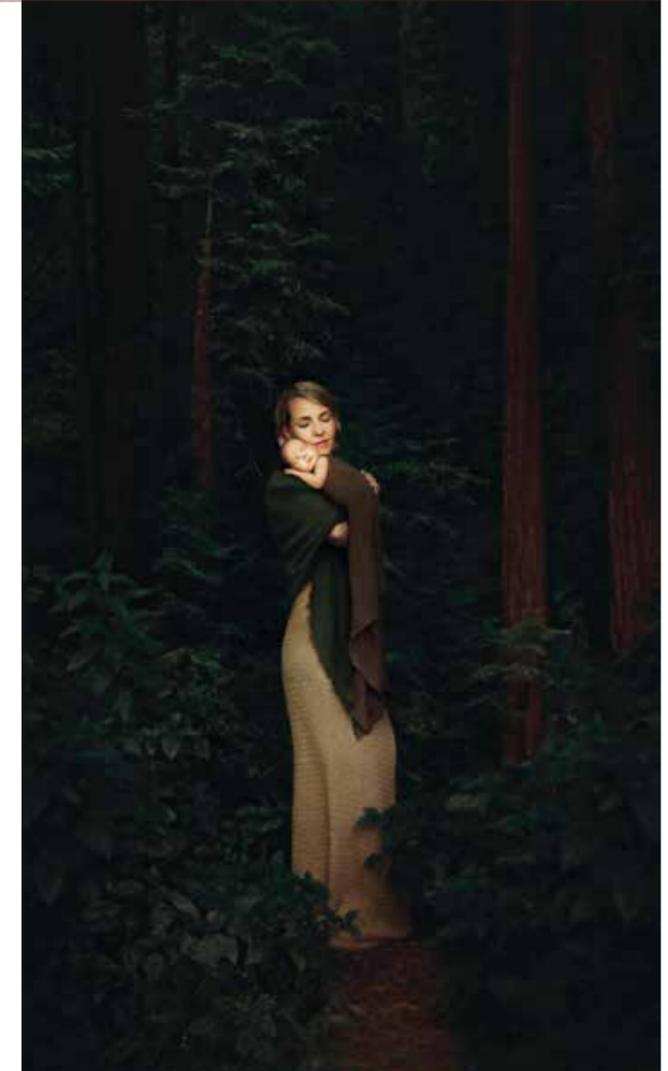


"PAY ATTENTION TO HOW THE BABY IS COMFORTABLE"

health and safety," Kelly says. "Newborn safety is the main reason I started teaching workshops. There are safety rules I have in place for my studio [see panel overleaf]. Sometimes a client will request a certain pose, but not all babies can move into all poses. It is important to pay attention to how the baby is comfortable. If they don't want to be placed on their back or into the taco pose [legs drawn up, on their backs] I won't force them."

The length of a session is another consideration, and Kelly stresses that it's important to be guided by the baby and parents. "Every newborn is different, meaning every session is different," she says. "The average time spent in a newborn session is two to four hours. Anything longer becomes uncomfortable for the parents, as the space is quite warm."

For Kelly in balmy Queensland, keeping the baby warm is easy, but here in the UK, it can mean turning the thermostat up to ensure a comfortable environment. "It is important when photographing babies to create an environment they are used to, taking into considering the warmth, sounds and calm soothing surrounding," she explains. "I use a machine to emulate



heartbeat, create a warm room and use lots of soft materials to wrap the baby to ensure they feel like they are back in the womb.”

Making the parents comfortable is equally important, and here sensitivity is key, particularly where breastfeeding is concerned. Kelly always approaches a session in the same way, welcoming clients into her studio and discussing how the session will go. “I then leave them to sit and feed baby quietly so they can concentrate,” she says. “They can relax and enjoy the environment. This works especially well for new mothers who aren’t so comfortable breastfeeding in public. I also let the parents know that at any time during the session we can stop to allow for extra feeding and cuddling.” When booking sessions, it’s worth asking new parents to consider their newborn’s schedule. There’s no point scheduling a 4pm start if that’s when baby regulars wakes from their nap – screaming.

Kelly advises taking a similarly sensitive approach to maternity shoots. Think about both the point in the pregnancy and the length of the session to ensure the pregnant woman is comfortable. “My maternity sessions go for between 30 and 45 minutes. I try to schedule the session when they are about 34-37 weeks pregnant, so mum isn’t too uncomfortable and can still

BELOW: Kelly Brown’s home studio, in her converted garage, is flooded with natural light and full of props for easy access during a shoot



“GO THROUGH MY FLOW POSING ON A POSING BEANBAG WHICH KEEPS BABY CALM, RELAXED”

move around. Making sure the client is on a stable surface at all times, and is safe and comfortable is the top priority.” In fact, Kelly’s approach for maternity sessions isn’t that different to a portrait photographer’s approach to a shoot.

Go with the flow

What is different between a normal portrait shoot and a baby one is, of course, posing. Babies don’t take

direction, so posing them is a more hands-on activity, and remember that many finished images are the result of judicious editing. Young babies can’t support their heads, so a helping hand is required – and can be cropped out later.

Kelly has an approach that stands her in good stead and ensures she gets a range of shots, without having to manhandle her subject too much. “When photographing a newborn, I almost ▶





SAFETY FIRST

Kelly's advice for ensuring the safety of babies during shoots.

NEVER...

- ... leave a baby unattended in a prop, on your posing beanbag or with a young sibling.
 - ... force a baby into any pose.
- Instead, adjust them to where they are comfortable.
- ... stand on anything above the baby in case you fall or it breaks.
 - ... put a baby inside or on an object/prop that could potentially break or fall.
 - ... use glass props.

ALWAYS...

- ... have a spotter or parent next to your baby when using props.
- ... use a support hand or finger when posing the baby and clone it out later in Photoshop.
- ... have your camera strap around your neck when shooting above the baby.

"YOU DON'T NEED A ROOM FULL OF KIT, JUST THE BASICS SUCH AS A BEANBAG AND SOFT BLANKETS"

always go through my flow posing on a posing beanbag which keeps baby calm, relaxed and with minimal disruption to get a variety of poses." She explains: "Flow posing takes me through the baby on their back, their side, bum up and finally chin on hands. It allows me to get four distinct poses with outfit and blanket changes, all without disturbing a sleeping baby." Before a shoot begins consider how you will manage the baby's position, your props and your shooting position. You don't want to be changing your mind about any of them halfway through a session.

Kitted up

While Kelly doesn't advise using lots of lighting kit for newborn shoots, she does have a favourite bit of kit: her posing beanbag. In fact, she never shoots without it, saying "it keeps baby safe and comfortable. It also allows a variety of poses and background blankets, so it helps me to give a diverse range of images to my clients." Investing in

similar props will help your sessions go smoothly. You don't need a room full of kit, just the basics such as a beanbag and some soft blankets.

Other key components of Kelly's kit are her Canon cameras and lens. She shoots with a Canon EOS 5D Mark III or an EOS-1DX Mark II, but nearly always choose the same lens, the Canon 24-70mm f/2.8L II. This is her favoured lens because of "its focal range, which allows me a variety of setups, angles and poses". With a zoom, she can work around the baby, adjusting the focal length without disturbing the child. It also avoids wasting precious moments changing lenses. 

 BLOG.LITTLEPIECESPHOTOGRAPHY.COM.AU



Kelly recently released her first book, *The Complete Guide to Newborn Photography*, which is available from her online store, as a digital download, softcover or hardback.