

# SEE THE LIGHT



IF YOU WANT TO TAKE GREAT PHOTOGRAPHS, YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND HOW LIGHT WORKS AND **TIM WALLACE** CERTAINLY DOES. HE TELLS US ABOUT HIS LATEST SHOOT FOR ASTON MARTIN, HIS NEW LIGHTING TUTORIALS AND WHAT MAKES HIS WORK SO DIFFERENT [▶▶](#)

**MAIN IMAGE:**  
"This picture of the modern and classic Vantage was shot at Simplon Pass, in the Alps. The light changes quickly here, so it didn't take long for the right conditions to appear. For this shot, I'm stood on the top of an elevation, on the edge of a rock, trying not to get too enthusiastic with a Hasselblad."





**ABOVE:** "The same lighting technique was used on all these detail shots. Basically, I pushed a huge amount of light through a strip-softbox, placed close to the car, to create a hard light. Then I had to position myself at an acute angle to the car and light to get a burst reflection, and then dial the exposure right down to capture the tonality and shape. If I was to show you the Raw files, they wouldn't look far different from the final images. All these shots were taken with a Nikon D3s; I don't always find a medium-format camera necessary for a shoot, so I often use a DSLR when it's appropriate. The above pictures are of the modern Vantage, while the others are from the classic range."

**T**HESE ARE SOME of my images from the new Vantage campaign for Aston Workshop; one of the largest Aston Martin Classic restoration centres in the world. Aston has been actively pushing into the Japanese market for more than a year now: last year it was advertising the new Aston Martins; this year it's centring on the classic DB5, so this shoot was about tying in the old with the new. I've been working with Aston Workshop for about five years, so I've got to know the cars quite well, and the chance to combine the new models with the classics in one shoot was brilliant.

"Each car has a character, a personality. The classic DB4 is a very pretty car – it's one of my favourites – and it needs to be shot in a delicate way. On the other hand, a brand new V12/V8 Vantage is aggressive, and should be shot accordingly. I have to shoot beyond the client, and for their customer. I've got to make you want that car. You know what that car looks like – you probably know all about it – but you need an image that's going to make you want to buy it, and the only reason you're going to is if it's an emotional decision. Renault people carriers are bought for practical reasons – miles per gallon, tax – not Aston Martins, though. With these, it's all about emotion.

"To be a successful photographer, you need technical ability. But that's something you can learn: you need to shoot as much as you can to teach yourself the skills so that it becomes second nature. Clients don't choose me for my technical ability though; 90 per cent of the time it's for my style. That's why I don't recommend copying other photographers' work. I try to avoid looking at other car photographers' images because as soon as I see something, it has an impact on me. If it influences me, whether I realise or not, I start to inject that influence into my work, which I cannot afford to do. My work has to be as

unique to me as possible, because from a business point of view, it's one of the most sensible things to do. You can't help but see other car photographs around and several people have adopted similar styles. It's great, it's really lovely work, but I can't afford to do that. It needs to be unique.

"I feel a similar way about learning lighting techniques, too. You can't learn about light just by sitting in front of a PC screen looking at websites and light diagrams, as they just teach you how to replicate an effect. If any variables are different, you're going to have to change something to make it work and if you don't understand light, then you can't make those changes. You can learn online, but you have to go about it in the right way. I've just made a series of films for Kelbytraining.com. The first one takes you through the process of lighting a car. There's no easy way to describe how to do that. You need to explain, step by step, the properties of light and how that changes. Look at these detail photographs of the old and new Aston Martins. You might be surprised how simply some of them are lit. But the knowledge of how shape, position and intensity of light can be used to create an effect has taken a long time to learn.

"If you attach a strip-softbox to a studio flash head close to the car, you're going to get soft light. But if you increase the intensity of the light and leave it close, it changes the properties of that light. It suddenly becomes a lot more focused, almost like it's got a grid on the front. If you understand that one basic thing, you can do a shoot. If you need a harder light or you need to control that light, you shouldn't obsess about the different modifiers that you can use. You just need to understand the properties of that light.

"Light is crucial. Light is everything. And that doesn't mean just working with studio lights; that can mean working with available light. I'm a huge fan of available light; it's vastly underrated. And again, it's literally just intensity



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and position. You can't change the position of the sun, unfortunately, but you can change your position and you can change the position of the thing you're shooting.

"Take the opening image in this feature, for example. I had to understand the direction of the light and the roads, picking the right time of day so there wouldn't be any cars when the light would be right. I had to know how the light was changing as the sun moved and I had to be tuned in to the weather. Thankfully, the weather in the Alps changes every ten minutes, so you don't have to wait long if you pick

the right day. I watched the forecast to avoid clear skies and a bright sun as that kills a shot. I wanted atmosphere, mist and cloud, but not too much that it impaired the scene.

Over the five years I've been in business, my skills and confidence have definitely improved. Three years ago, I would have allowed a day for a shot like this. Now I'd expect to get it in two hours." 🍷  
To see more of Tim's work, visit: [www.ambientlife.co.uk](http://www.ambientlife.co.uk) or to watch his step-by-step lighting tutorials at [www.kelbytraining.com/author/twallace/](http://www.kelbytraining.com/author/twallace/)

**ABOVE:** "Every brand of car has different paint with different reflective properties and defects that you have to disguise by lighting them differently. Thankfully, with Aston Martin, there's very little issue with this. However, its blue paint is a mixture of green and blue, and while it appears blue to the eye, it renders green in the camera. It can be corrected with White Balance, though."

**LEFT:** "Most people think it's easy to shoot cars as they're sexy – how can you fail to take a good shot, right? But they're basically huge mirrors and every little mistake you make is exacerbated ten-fold, which is why you have to be very careful with detail shots."