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Fresnel Spotlight Attachments

A Fresnel Spot attachment produces a very special light, bright in the centre and fading out to the edges. This type of lighting became famous in 1920s Hollywood and is now the light shaping tool of choice for fashion, glamour and portrait photographers who have moved beyond soft lighting and who want to emphasise high cheekbones and good complexions.

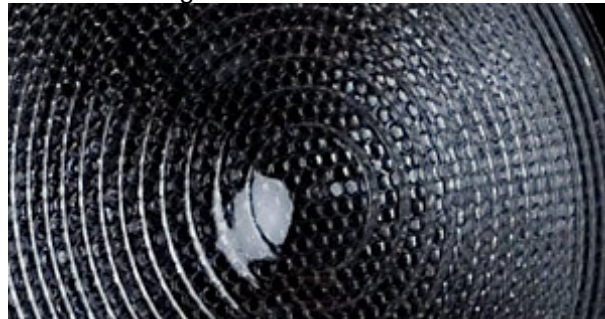
A fresnel lens shapes the light into an organized beam of mostly parallel light rays. It can be focused to produce a tighter smaller spot or a looser, wider spot of light

Used at a distance, it's a harder light that creates a sharper, yet still smooth shadow edge transfer. When used close to the subject, as in a still life shot, the relatively large size of a 9" fresnel lens positioned just 10 inches from the set creates a mix of hard and soft light. The shadow edges are still very distinct yet there is some wrap of light as well.

Fresnel spot attachments are available in a range of sizes, starting at about 3" diameter but frankly, the very small ones only have a very limited use, providing accent lighting on still life subjects. If you're photographing people you need something much larger.



As with other light shaping modifiers, the Fresnel Spot attachment simply fits onto the front of the flash head. It will fit on to any flash head fitted with the Bowens S-fit lights.



The light is harsh, it's meant to be. Soft lighting can be good for people whose complexions are less than perfect but soft lighting doesn't bring out the best when people have good features!

It's the shadows under the eyes, nose, lips and chin that produce the 'pop' and it's the shadows under the cheekbones that emphasise the quality of our models' bone structure

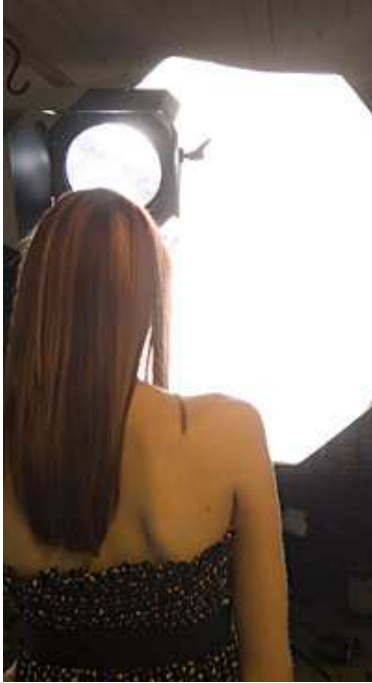


Because the light from a Fresnel Spot becomes progressively less bright towards the edges, light tends not to spill on to the hair, allowing the hair to be lit separately and very precisely if required.

In this shot, I used a reflective umbrella to light the hair, and I also added a softbox in the fill position to reduce the drama of the lighting, whilst still keeping the 'Fresnel Spot effect'



This shot shows the setup for the hard (fresnel) and soft (softbox fill) combination



People sometimes wonder whether a honeycomb grid, which is relatively cheap to buy, can produce the same sort of effect as a Fresnel Spot.

In fact they are quite different tools, and neither can do the job of the other.

The honeycomb grid produces a soft-edged circle of light, and the light falls off very abruptly and not very smoothly, unlike the fresnel, where the transition is much smoother.

A fresnel spot offers a smoother shadow edge transfer and produces a single shadow edge when cut with a flag(s) or shot through a cukoloris. A honeycomb grid fitted to a reflector with a silver interior will create a secondary shadow edge from the reflection of the light source off the silver inside of the reflector. A fresnel spot produces a quality of light similar to slightly diffused sunlight.

Fresnel Spots are also heavily used in still life shots. Its purpose here was to concentrate the eye on the action and the cartridges, simulating sunlight from a window at the same time.



There's nothing unusual or wrong about combining a hard lighting source with softer lights, adding hair lights or mitigating the effect of the hard light with other tools such as reflectors...

But, with care, it's possible to get truly stunning results using a fresnel spot as the only light source, as in this prizewinning fashion shot by French photographer Marc Gougenheim



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