

Photolearn

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Photographing a very shiny subject

This is a pair of flash tranceivers, used to trigger my studio flash. The only problem is that they came in shiny boxes, so I decided to make the subject even more difficult and put them inside one of those fancy metallic foil bags, wrapped up in fancy paper and with a shiny ribbon bow. Because of this I needed to arrange lighting to suit (and tone down) the highly reflective surfaces.

Well, a classic way of getting soft, diffused highlights (that you can see through to the subject beneath them) is to use overhead and back-a-bit and off to one-side-a-bit softboxes, which can do a good job with highly reflective surfaces, provided that they're close enough and big enough.

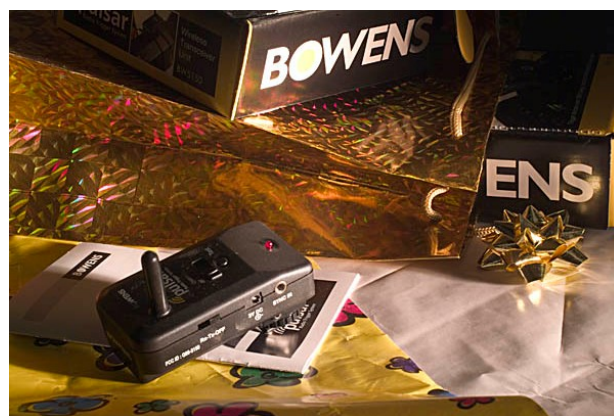
The softbox used here was a medium (48" x 36") and only just out of shot, it was just about big enough to deal with the worst of the blown highlights and put a bit of detail into the metallic foil bag. A scrim could have been used as an alternative to a softbox. So too could a piece of foamcore, with light bounced from it.

The positioning was about right for most of the subject.



Overhead softbox only for soft fill light

Honeycomb light only for hard light



With both lights combined

But there's a small twist in the tail of this project, because although the diffused lighting suited the packaging, it wasn't ideal for the subject, which is far less shiny and, left to its own devices, would have looked very flat.

The solution? Simply wipe it over with an oily rag. The first shot (previous page) is with just the softbox. Very flat though with just this one light, with large areas of shadow. Not very Christmassy. I could have used a fill card front right, but I thought that a bit of morning sunlight would be better, so I used a honeycomb at low level, to the front and well to the right instead. (2nd pic) A snoot or an old slide projector could have been used instead. This type of lighting is very harsh and unforgiving .

The 2nd shot shows up the crumpling on the wrapping paper quite well and also produces a strong specular reflection of the fancy bow. Note too that it projects strong reflections of the colours from the wrapping paper.

And the shot below shows the setup. As you can see, the whole lot fits nicely onto a small coffee table, which I used because I thought that the softbox might need to be at a more acute angle than I actually used, and my normal shooting table would have been too large to allow this.



So far so good but do I really want to advertise the makers name? Well, I might have done if they were paying me, but I'm taking this shot just for illustration so no, not really.

So I'll open up from f16 to f4 to leave only the subject in focus. The thought that I might want to do this motivated me to put the actual flash trigger well in front of the props, so that I could get them out of focus. (Please see the final shot, next page).

The final step might be to use a crosshatch filter on the lens to introduce controlled flare to the highlights, this would work with the f16 shot but not with the f4 shot because sharply-defined flare lines only appear with small apertures. Using this filter would make the shot more Christmassy but I decided against it because I thought it better to stick to lighting effects only.



I had to reduce the lighting power by 6 stops to allow the wide aperture and many flash units simply don't have this much adjustment, but the workaround is to use neutral density filters on the lens and/or neutral density gels on the lights.

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