

# CREATE AMAZING PORTRAITS WITH YOUR SMARTPHONE CAMERA

By Kent DuFault



Image 001 – Photograph by Kent DuFault  
Shot on an iPhone 8 Plus and processed  
in Snapseed and TouchRetouch.

When reading about portraiture, there is often a discussion about lighting. You will also often see recommendations for using a shallow depth of field.

A smartphone photographer can utilize great available light for their portraits. They can also use artificial light sources.

However, I resist the use of artificial light sources because it goes against the immediacy of the moment, which I view as the primary strength of smartphone photography.

**Critical Thought:** A smartphone photographer should be a student of natural light when creating portraits. However, in today's digital environment, you don't need additional lighting **if** you understand ambient

lighting (often referred to as natural light), **and** you like doing a little post-processing magic.

Image 001 was a portrait created at a wedding reception with an iPhone 6 Plus. The room was large, with many windows and off-white walls. It was beautiful light for a portrait. My wife turned and smiled at me. I immediately took the picture. Immediacy!

In photography guides or blog posts on portraiture, it is often suggested to use a very wide aperture to minimize the depth of field and therefore 'isolate' the subject from the background. This advice can be a bit of a stumbling block for the smartphone photographer.

Smartphone cameras have a fixed aperture with a wide lens (in most cases). Plus, the smaller sensor size and digital technology used in a smartphone camera tend to make everything in the picture in focus. But a minimal depth of field effect can be achieved with software, and that has its place.

**Key Thought:** My mantra for smartphone portraiture is to get the shot first. I concentrate on expression, lighting, and unobtrusive backgrounds. Later in post-processing, I can worry about special effects like the minimum depth of field (DOF).



## Assignment:

Spend a few days creating portraits with your smartphone camera. For this first creativity prompt, concentrate on the lighting. Try many types of lighting so that you can learn from different results. Start with a well-lit room of soft light (Image 001) and then move to a spotlight, backlighting, or sidelight. Train to become a master of identifying light and using it creatively for your portraits.



Image 002 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

*Image 002 has all the attributes of a high-end, professionally produced DSLR portrait with multiple artificial light sources. This shot was taken on an iPhone 8 Plus (see below for editing apps).*

Guess what! Image 002 had no artificial light sources. The available light was from a single overhead room light.

The lighting and minimal depth of field were created in post-production!

**Critical Thought:** As a smartphone photographer that wants to create professional-quality portraits, you need to be very good at post-production. With a few editing apps, a critical eye, and a deft hand, you can create any type of portrait that you want with just your smartphone camera. You don't even need a desktop computer or laptop!

The editing apps used to create Image 002 were Snapseed, Instaflash Pro, LensFlare, Mextures, and Lens Distortions. Of these five, only Lens Distortion has what I would consider a small investment as it is a subscription app. But if you are into smartphone photography for the long haul, I think it's worth it.

Here are some editing apps that lend themselves to portrait smartphone photography. I believe all are available for IOS and Android.

- Snapseed – Free and a must-have for all smartphone photographers.



- TouchRetouch – Currently USD1.99 and the best money you'll ever spend as a smartphone photographer! It does have a learning curve, but once you get there it's more potent than Photoshop for removing objects from photos.
  - InstaFlash Pro – Lighting effects and critical localized control over tone, color balance, color saturation, and various other effects. It is well worth the current price of USD 4.99.
  - Lens Flare – Creates exciting lighting effects, and it's free. You can also buy the photo editing bundle from this company, which is called 'Visual Effects Complete,' for USD 7.00.
  - Lens Distortions – I like this app; however, it is the only one with a yearly subscription.
  - Mextures – Creates numerous lighting and texture effects. This one has a steeper learning curve. It costs USD 1.99 at the time of writing, and it does have additional in-app purchases.
  - Photoshop Fix – This app is free and comes in handy at times. There are also the Photoshop and Lightroom apps, which are also free.
- Let me demonstrate a speedy portrait session. I want you to see the pro results of using smartphone immediacy followed by fast photo app editing.

**Let's go!**



Image 003 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

*I ran downstairs and took this portrait of my Maine Coon cat, Oliver. What do I love about smartphone portrait photography? The immediacy! This was shot on an iPhone 11 Pro.*

This image is an excellent example to illustrate the step-by-step process of turning an average-looking smartphone camera portrait into something memorable and profitable using app technology!

Here we go.





Snapseed - A beginning crop of the original frame. Time: 10 seconds.



TouchRetouch - Removed two flower pot labels and cleaned up flower pot scratches. Time: 2 minutes.

Image 004 - Photograph and post-processing by Kent DuFault

- 1 I applied an initial crop to the original camera file using Snapseed.
- 2 I removed the labels on the two pots using TouchRetouch. They were eye snags pulling attention away from my portrait subject.



Instaflash Pro - Reduced the exposure and color saturation of the plants, pots, and flooring. Increased color saturation of the cat. Time: 60 seconds.



Lens Distortions - added lens flare highlights. Time: 30 seconds.

Image 005 - Photograph and post-processing by Kent DuFault

- 3 I switched to Instaflash Pro and reduced exposure and color saturation on the plants, pots, and flooring. This editing helped to give more visual weight to the cat, who is now situated in the brightest location within the frame.
- 4 Using Lens Distortions, I added some lens flare and a localized diffusion effect in the foreground. Before I'm done, all of the plant foliage will become a frame to my subject.





Lens Flare – Added a lens flare from the window. Time: 30 seconds.



Snapseed – Placed localized edits for exposure, color saturation, and contrast to create lighting effect. Time: 60 seconds.

Image 006 – Photograph and post-processing by Kent DuFault

- 5 Using the Lens Flare app, I added a starburst in the upper-left corner. This edit was done to create interest (up in that upper-left corner) and also make that portion of the frame the well-established subject location.

- 6 Finally, I took the image back to Snapseed. I did some localized exposure and color saturation editing to make the cat stand out significantly from the plants, which now serve as a frame for my portrait subject!



The original image file is on the left, and the edited file is on the right. Total time from taking the shot to a finished professional looking image - 6 minutes.

Image 007 – Photograph and post-processing by Kent DuFault

*From the moment I got up to take the picture until I had my finished product ready for upload, it took six minutes. I also have excellent pronounced portrait lighting that was 'created' using app technology! That is the beauty of smartphone photography portraits. In my old days of film photography, creating something like this would have taken hours, just to take the picture.*

Despite my hurried pace to create this portrait photo for the creativity prompt, I am pleased with the result. I also do not doubt that my stock photo agencies will accept this picture with open arms and sell it numerous times!



### Assignment:

Acquire some of the previously mentioned photo editing apps. At a minimum, get your hands on Snapseed (free), TouchRetouch (USD 1.99), Lens Flare (free), and Photoshop Fix (free). If you are comfortable buying the other recommendations, go for it. Once you have your apps, I want you to create five portraits with your smartphone camera. Here is the fun part. Set a timer for each portrait session. You have 15 minutes to complete each picture and edit it to completion. Don't worry if your resulting portrait doesn't work out the first few times. Practice makes perfect, and it's fun!

(I'd love to see you post your results over on the Photzy Facebook page!)





Image 008 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

*One of the more straightforward portraiture methods to master as a smartphone photographer is to become a connoisseur of light. An advantageous type of light for portraiture is called 'slivered light.' This image was shot on an iPhone 6 plus and processed in Snapseed.*

Image 008 is a fine example of slivered light. This type of lighting occurs when a light source is cut-off by opaque objects. Only a sliver of light is allowed to continue to illuminate the subject.

For example, when the sun is low in the sky and its rays pass by buildings in a crowded downtown area, this creates a large sliver of light.

For Image 008, the sliver of light was created by partially closed curtains on a window.

Slivered light helps the smartphone photographer overcome the fixed aperture and lack of control over depth of field issues.

It does this by concentrating all of the visual weight within the frame to the area illuminated by the sliver of light.



### Assignment:

Create some portraits with your smartphone using only slivered light. Try finding slivered light and also creating it yourself.

**Note:** There are editing and shooting apps out there that create depth of field (DOF) effects. For the most part, I don't like them or use them because they look fake to me, more often than not. When I do turn to an app for a DOF effect, my app of choice is Focos. This app has a free version. It also has a paid version, which costs USD 14.99 for lifetime access at the time of writing. (The free version is probably all that you need!) Here's why I like the Focos app. It allows you to adjust the appearance of DOF after the fact – in other words, after you take the picture. This feature is essential to me as it doesn't interrupt the immediacy of creating a shot!

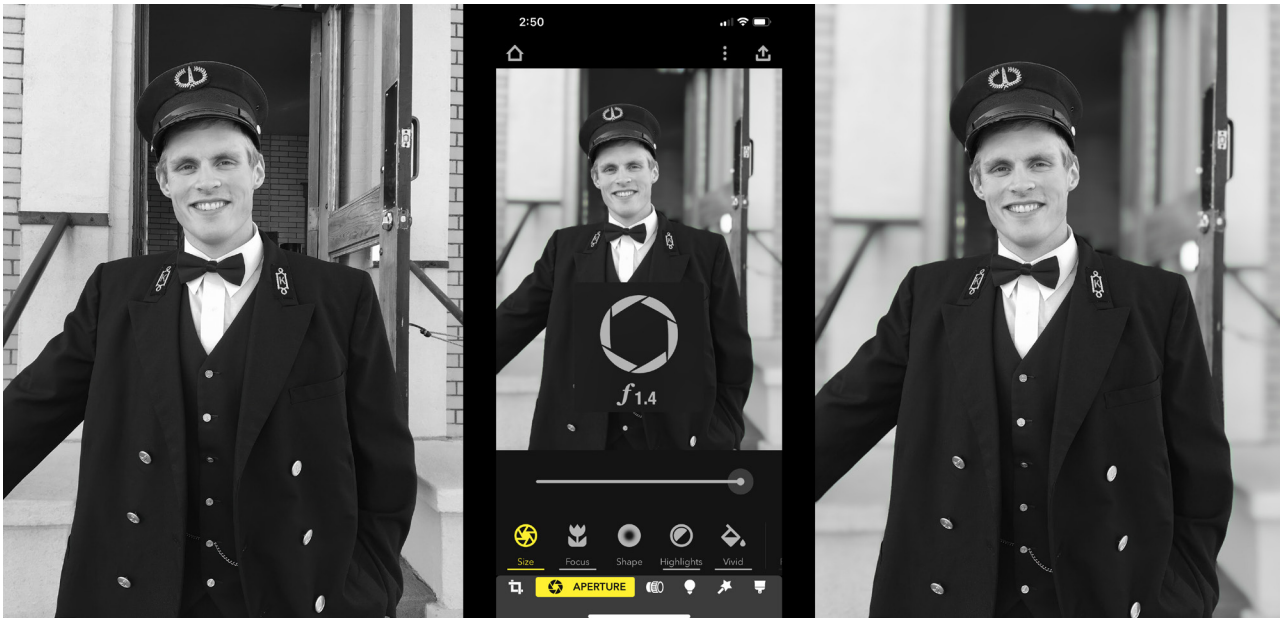


Image 009 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

*I encountered this lighthouse keeper and immediately took his portrait. I don't dislike my original version on the left. However, some minimal depth of field blur might help him stand out from the background a bit more. This image was shot on an iPhone 6 Plus (see below for editing apps).*

Image 009, on the left, is the original camera file as it emerged from my iPhone 6 Plus. In the center of Image 009, you can see the workspace for the Focos app. I have set the aperture to f/1.4. On the right, you can see the resulting depth of field background blur. Pretty cool, huh?



### Assignment:

Download the free version of Focos from either the Apple App Store or the Google Play Store. Create some portraits using the immediacy of smartphone photography. Concentrate on the subject and the lighting. After you're done, use the Focos app to see if you can improve your portraits by minimizing the background with depth of field blur.





Image 010 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

*No discussion on smartphone portraiture would be complete without the inclusion of black and white smartphone photography. This image was shot on an iPhone 8 Plus and processed in Argentum and Snapseed.*

Black and white portraits are some of the most famous pictures in the history of photography. A black and white image boils the visual experience down to a more fundamental level. The elimination of color concentrates a viewer's eyes on the subject and the lighting.

In most cases, with my smartphone portraits, I like to create my images in color and then convert them to monochrome to have the option of both black and white and color.

Occasionally, I use a couple of apps that image directly in black and white for special effects.

Image 010 was created with one of those apps.

This app is called Argentum. Argentum has an exciting feature. They evaluated great black and white film street photographers' work and created presets that mimic their style.

I selected the *Garry Winogrand* preset, which is what was used for Image 010.

The app is free to download. Each photographer preset is USD 1.99 at the time of writing, and it is only available for IOS.

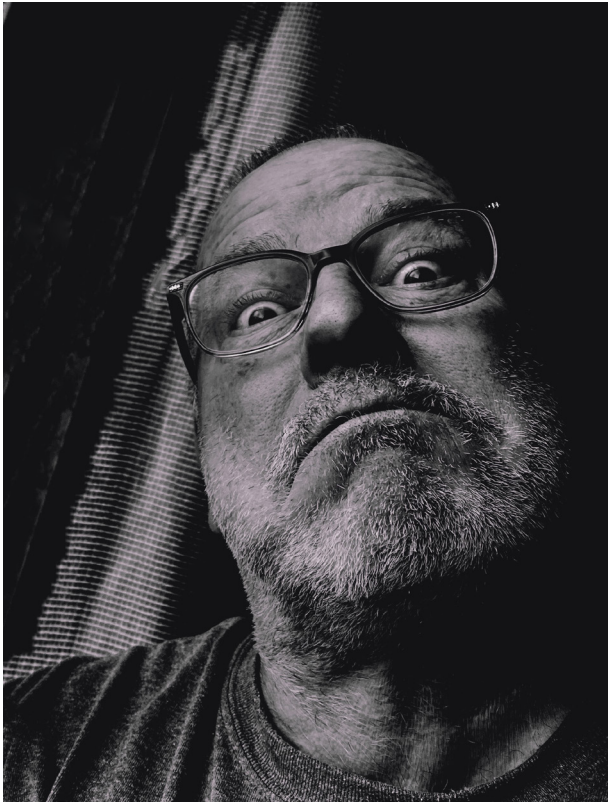


Image 011 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

*I took this self-portrait using the app Contrast by Hornbeck. It was shot on an iPhone 11 Pro.*

Another black and white imaging app that I use frequently is called Contrast by Hornbeck. This app creates very attention-grabbing artsy-looking portraits that I find quite captivating. The images created with this app have higher contrast and exaggerated texture. It's free and available only on IOS.

Don't despair, Android users. There are many black and white imaging apps out there for you as well. You'll merely have to do a little research to pick some that appeal to you.

My point is, don't ignore black and white portraiture with your smartphone. Not only are these monochrome images exciting to look at, but they are also enjoyable to create, and the resulting pictures often garner more attention than a color image.



### Assignment:

Acquire a few black and white shooting apps. I recommend finding apps that create a specialized look versus merely creating a standard black and white conversion. For that part of your black and white imaging, simply shoot in color and convert using Snapseed or another full-featured editing app. If you're shooting with an iPhone, I highly recommend trying out the two black and white shooting apps that I have discussed here in this creativity prompt.

*All photographs in this creativity prompt (created by Kent DuFault) were shot with either an iPhone 3Gs, an iPhone 6 Plus, an iPhone 8 Plus, or an iPhone 11 Pro.*

*Kent DuFault's post-processing toolbox includes Snapseed, Instaflash Pro, TouchRetouch, Polarr, Focos, Light Distortions, Instagram, Hipstamatic, Focos, Contrast by Hornbeck, and LensLight.*