



MASTIN LABS

# The Ultimate Guide to Light & Airy Photography



# Create beautiful images you and your clients **love**.

Hey! I'm Kirk Mastin.

As the founder of Mastin Labs and the creator of authentic film presets, I'm excited to help you nail the light and airy look so you can create consistent work and thrive as a working artist.

Over the past decade or two, I've seen the light and airy look become a go-to style for everything from wedding portraits to food photography. It's used by world-class film photographers and published in magazines like Vogue, Dwell, Harper's Bazaar, and Grace Ormonde Wedding Style.

And it's also a tough style to master; no preset in the world can make a photo light and airy if it wasn't shot that way to begin with.

But by learning the essential steps we're outlining in this guide – and applying the right preset to complete your look – you'll be shooting, editing, and delivering light and airy photos like a pro in no time.

Rooting for you,



Kirk Mastin  
Founder of Mastin Labs

# How to Shoot Light & Airy Photos

Follow these steps to create the foundation for a light and airy look.



**Light:** Use backlighting or open shade



**Wardrobe:** Dress subjects in neutrals



**Location:** Choose a neutral or natural backdrop



**White Balance:** Start at 5200K and up



**Aperture:** Shoot F2.2 or wider



**Mode:** Shoot in manual mode to compensate for backlighting



# LIGHT

## USE BACKLIGHTING OR OPEN SHADE

You can fix a lot of things in post, but light isn't one of them. To set the stage for a light and airy photo, look for soft light without harsh shadows.

Backlighting is the most classic way to get this look. Shoot when the sun is low – in the morning or afternoon – and position your subject so they're completely blocking the light and standing in the even shade of their own body.

If backlighting isn't an option, like when the sun is directly overhead, you can opt for open shade by moving your subject into a doorway or under semitransparent fabric and positioning them so they're facing out toward the light.

And if you're indoors, use a large light source and fill in shadows.



# WARDROBE

## DRESS SUBJECTS IN NEUTRALS

An old photo teacher of mine once told me that the darkest thing in your photo is like a black hole – it sucks all the attention toward it. And that's exactly what happens when your subjects wear dark or busy clothing in what could have been a light and airy photo.

So before your session starts, guide your subjects away from clothing with patterns, graphics, and any pieces that are dark, high-contrast, or ultra-contemporary.

Encourage them to wear neutral tones, like beige, white, champagne, and peach to achieve the timeless, classical look you're going for. They'll thank you later.



PHOTO: DAVID HEIDRICH

# LOCATION

## CHOOSE A NEUTRAL OR NATURAL BACKDROP

The perfect setting for a light and airy photo is simple and sophisticated.

That's why you can't truly achieve this look outside a mall, in a cafeteria, or at a busy office building. Instead, look for a location that's mostly white or neutral, or natural scenery like a forest or an open field – preferably with cooler-toned foliage.

Creating a light, uncluttered backdrop will tie your image together and help you get that dreamy, ethereal vibe you're going for.



# WHITE BALANCE

## START AT 5200K & UP

A lot of cameras tend to shoot cool – but the light and airy look should be just a tad on the warm side.

Since you'll be shooting backlit, the shadow side of the subject will need to be warmed up a bit compared to direct sun. Start at 5200 Kelvin and go up from there if you need to.

And as you're positioning your subjects, watch out for ground reflection, like a lawn that blasts green light back up onto them. This is almost impossible to fix in post, so keep an eye out for it and move your subjects onto more neutral ground if you need to.



PHOTO: DAVID HEIDRICH

# APERTURE

## SHOOT F2.2 OR WIDER

Chances are, the light and airy images you love were shot wide open to separate the subjects from the soft and blurry background. We subconsciously associate that shallow depth of field with film and, in particular, light and airy photography.

To achieve it, choose a normal to telephoto lens – 50mm or longer – and shoot as wide as you’re comfortable with. We recommend F2.2 or wider when all subjects are in the same plane of focus.

Any shallower than F2.2, you’ll need to shoot with live-view to make sure you nail your focus.

If you’re photographing multiple rows of people, you’ll want to switch to a telephoto lens, back way up, and open up to F4, F5.6, or even F8 to create a deeper area of focus with a blurred background behind your subjects.



# MODE

## SHOOT IN MANUAL MODE TO COMPENSATE FOR BACKLIGHTING

When you're shooting backlit, you'll want to shoot in manual mode so you can tell your camera to expose about two stops further than it wants to.

As you're setting up the shot, use live-view to adjust your settings and make sure your lighting looks exactly the way you want. Then, you can turn it off and shoot without worrying about it until you move to a new light situation.

You can also turn on your histogram and use it to make sure you're not under- or over-exposing as you go.

It's not about adjusting your camera to a specific setting – it's about figuring out what's right for the lighting you're working with in the moment.



# How to Edit in a Light & Airy Style

Complete the look with just a few quick adjustments.



**Preset:** Apply a light & airy preset



**Exposure:** Push it higher than normal



**White Balance & Tone:** Adjust for a warm, neutral look



**Bonus:** Select a tone profile to take your image further



# PRESET

## APPLY A LIGHT & AIRY PRESET

While you can get 90 percent of the way to a light and airy look in-camera, the right preset can help you bring your images across the finish line.

Call us biased, but we recommend post-processing with our

[\*\*Fujicolor Original\*\*](#) or [\*\*Fujicolor Pushed\*\*](#) preset packs.

The presets in the pack – especially Fujicolor 400H – are perfect if you want the classic light and airy look with a creamy pastel palette, low contrast, and muted, cool greens. It's also one of the most versatile presets for complementing a variety of skin tones.

Our Fujicolor Pushed pack gives you a little more punch and vibrancy, drawing on the same films developed in a different way.

Every preset we make follows the same [\*\*Mastin 3-Step Workflow™\*\*](#) to make your editing process as fast and easy as possible. You can simply apply the preset, adjust exposure, and adjust white balance and tint to get a timeless, true-to-film look every time.

[\*\*SHOP FUJICOLOR ORIGINAL >\*\*](#)

[\*\*SHOP FUJICOLOR PUSHED >\*\*](#)



# EXPOSURE

## PUSH IT HIGHER THAN NORMAL

When you're editing for a light and airy style, don't be afraid to push your exposure higher than you usually would.

Our presets are based on film, which retains highlight detail much better than digital, so you can bring everything up and get that true light and airy look without blowing out your highlights.





# **WHITE BALANCE & TINT**

## **ADJUST FOR A WARM, NEUTRAL LOOK**

Adjust your white balance first, then your tint. The light and airy look should be just on the warm side, so go ahead and sweep your white balance slider back and forth, making smaller sweeps each time, until you land on what looks right.

For tint, find several neutral points in your photo and keep an eye on those as you adjust. If you notice green or magenta popping up in neutral areas like a black tuxedo, a strip of pavement, a white wall, or the bark of a tree trunk, then you probably need to dial it back.

Once you've nailed the white balance and tint in those neutral points, everything else should lock into place.





# BONUS

## SELECT A TONE PROFILE TO TAKE YOUR IMAGE FURTHER

To really dial in your look, use one of the tone profiles that come with all our preset packs.

You can increase detail and range in your highlights without affecting the rest of the photo by applying the “highlight soft” profile.

Or, you can use “all soft” to soften the look of the entire image and scale back high-contrast scenes for that dreamy light and airy vibe.

# Get the light and airy look in seconds with our Fujicolor preset packs for Lightroom, Adobe Camera Raw, and Capture One.

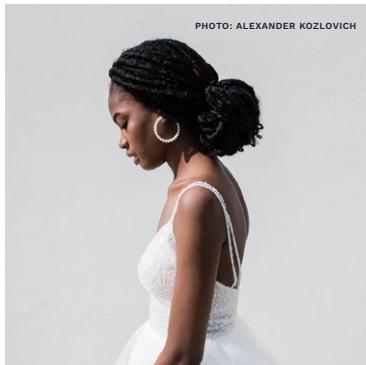


PHOTO: KIRK MASTIN



PHOTO: VIKTORIYA BOGDANOVA



## Fujicolor Original

The classic light & airy look



“Mastin has made my life so much easier. Literally 3 steps and my photo is perfect. I could not live without these presets!”

-Kaitlyn Blake, Wedding Photographer  
Raleigh, NC

Presets included: Fuji 400H, Fuji 400H Blue, Fuji 160NS, Fuji 800Z

[SHOP FUJICOLOR ORIGINAL >](#)

## Fujicolor Pushed

Vibrant and airy with extra punch, color, & depth



“Fujicolor Pushed gave my work the look I was searching for! The contrast, the color, and the overall feel of these presets give my images exactly what they need.”

-Chassidi Johnson, Family & Wedding Photographer  
Cheyenne, WY

Presets included: Fuji 160NS+1, Fuji 160NS+2, Fuji 400H+1, Fuji 400H+2, Fuji 400H Blue+1, Fuji 400H Blue+2, Fuji 800Z+1, Fuji 800Z+2

[SHOP FUJICOLOR PUSHED >](#)

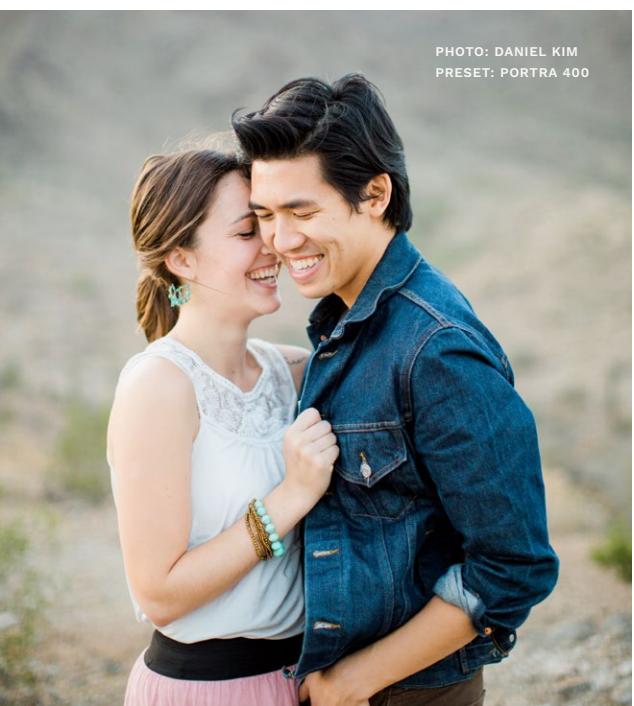
*All presets include custom white balance, lens correction, tone profiles, and grain.*



PHOTO: KINA WICKS  
PRESET: FUJI 800Z



PHOTO: DANIEL KIM  
PRESET: PORTRA 400



We're Mastin Labs—

# Born from film. Made for you.

We're here for the underdog. The amateur. The everyday artist and the seasoned pro.

Our film emulation presets have helped more than 55,000 photographers create consistently beautiful images, reclaim time for their businesses and lives, and thrive as working artists.

And wherever you are on your journey, we're honored to support you, too.

## JOIN THE MASTIN LABS COMMUNITY

Catch live edits, find your crew, and test out the presets on your photos inside our free Facebook community.

[JOIN >](#)

## CONNECT WITH US ON INSTAGRAM

And use the hashtag #MadeWithMastin for a chance to have your photos featured.

[FOLLOW @MASTINLABS >](#)

## SHARE THE LOVE

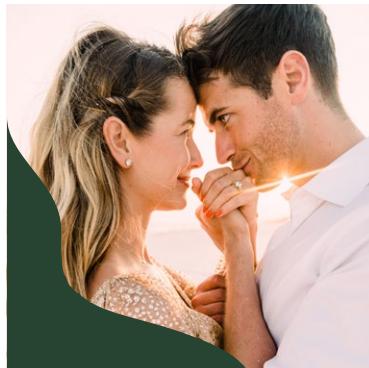
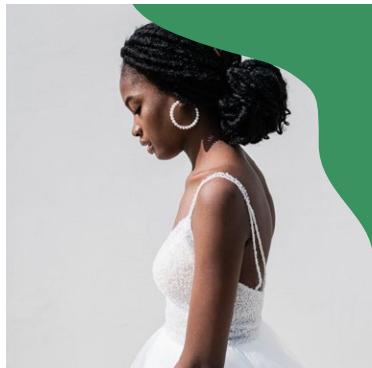
If you found this guide helpful, we'd love it if you'd send the signup page to a friend to keep the light and airy vibes going.

[SHARE NOW >](#)

# Make clean, consistent images. Every time.

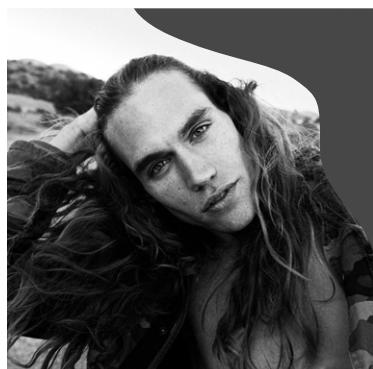
Say goodbye to hours of tweaking and discover the magic of an authentic film look with our preset packs for Lightroom, Adobe Camera Raw, and Capture One.

Shop the presets and find your new go-to.



## [Fujicolor Original >](#)

Light & airy



## [Portra Original >](#)

Clean & warm

## [Ilford Original >](#)

Classic & deep

## [Portra Pushed >](#)

Dark & moody



## [Fujicolor Everyday >](#)

Bold, real-life color

## [Adventure Everyday >](#)

Vibrant, modern, fun