# THE Painterly PORTRAIT

## RE-CREATE CLASSIC PAINTINGS FOR A FUN, ARTISTIC SPIN ON PORTRAITURE
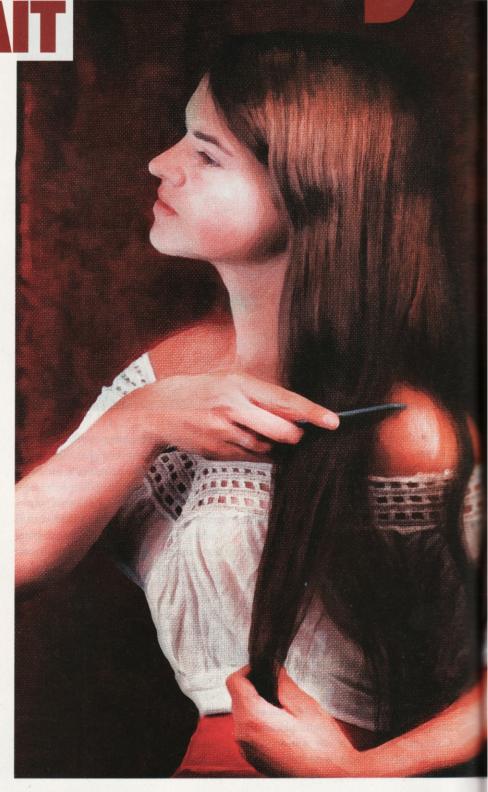
**TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICK SAMMON**

**M**y guess is that most readers of *Digital Photo* don't rent a studio for thousands of dollars a month and don't have thousands of dollars invested in studio lighting equipment. Me, neither!

That, however, doesn't stop me, and shouldn't stop you from making studio-quality images. All you need is basic lighting equipment, an understanding of light and some digital darkroom skills. Here's what I'm talking about.

I made all of the portraits in this article in my home office, which measures about 10x15 feet. The idea was to try to re-create, or emulate, if you will, works by master painters.

The Renoir painting "Young Girl Combing Her Hair" was the inspiration for this portrait. While studying the painting, I observed the shadow and highlight areas of the painting, as well as the highlights on the girl's hair and arms. The overall lighting in the painting was relatively even, so the first step was to set up my lights to re-create that. I used two Westcott Spiderlites, which are daylight-balanced fluorescent lights in softboxes that have recessed diffusion panels. The recessed diffusion panels are important because they let you shape and mold the light rather than spreading the light like non-recessed diffusion panel softboxes.

You'll notice that the softboxes are relatively close to the subject. Here's

YOUNG GIRL
COMBING
HER HAIR

why: the larger the light, the softer the light; the closer the light, the softer the light. I wanted soft light. Both lights are the same power. Because I wanted to light the model's face more than her hair, I moved the light on camera-left closer to the model.

My picture was soft and pleasing, but it didn't have highlights on the girl's face, arms and hair, as you see in the painting. I added those highlights using the Dodge tool in Photoshop. I also used the Burn tool to darken some areas of my photograph.

Then, as a final step, I applied the Oil Painting filter in Topaz Simplify

## PAINTERLY LIGHT

As photographers, our ability to capture and shape light is what makes or breaks an image. While we now have many master photographers from which to learn lessons about light, a lot can be gained by heading to a museum and studying master painters, sketchers and sculptors.

For instance, Renaissance portrait painters such as Leonardo da *Vinci shaped realistic anatomy using* highlights and shadows to emphasize angles and fullness. East Asian ink wash art used varying ink densities to provide shadows, capturing the spirit of the subject instead of a realistic reproduction. Impressionists, such as Monet, worked very quickly, emphasizing lighting patterns through the movement, tone and shape of brushstrokes. Even the modern-day graffiti art of Banksy and chalk art of Eduardo Rolero rely on key lighting edge placement to make 2D art pop to perception-fooling 3D.

Using the highlights and shadows in every art piece, it's possible to imagine the light source (the sun, a lamp, a reflection) and discern the proximity, strength or additional sources.

By observing these details, you can better understand how each artist perceived light and its relationship to the subject. While you may find one artist whose style best matches your own aesthetic, you may also discover a variety of looks to experiment with in different situations.

GIRL WITH
A PEARL
EARRING

to create a more painterly-like image.

The image that I call "A Photograph of a Girl with a Pearl Earring" is my favorite in this series of re-creations. It's based on Vermeer's famous painting "Girl with a Pearl Earring."

To light my subject—a friend's daughter—I mounted a Canon EX Speedlite flash inside a Westcott Apollo softbox and positioned the unit slightly in front of and to the side of the subject. I also positioned the softbox above eye-level.

To prevent light from bouncing off the white wall and filling in the pleasing shadow created by my light, my wife held a Westcott 6-in-1 reflector with the black panel attached. That black panel subtracted light. The idea: We can add and subtract light for interesting portraits.

I'll end this article with some of my photo philosophies about portraits, in general.

Light illuminates, shadows define. Shadows are the soul of a photograph. Shadows add a sense of depth and dimension to a photograph. Shadows are your friend.

If you want an interesting portrait, don't light the entire subject.   DP