

The DIY photographer: building a foldable bounce board

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When photographing people using window light or direct sunlight, a bounce board is an essential item you should add to your gadget bag. Typically you'll position your subject with his or her back to the sun, then reflect light into the shadowed areas using the bounce board.

The reason for doing this is that you're able to (almost) equalise the intensity of light falling onto the background with that now falling into the shadowed areas of your subject's face. This, in turn, means that you don't have to compensate much for strong background light that "blows out" detail on your film or digital images – that is, an intensity of light so strong that it does not allow you to record detail in these areas.



You can use a polystyrene sheet to do this, but they tend to be hard to handle outdoors, being so light. A better option is a foldable bounce board. You can buy these commercially, in various finishes, namely white, silver or gold. But they are quite expensive.

What does the DIY photographer do? Build his own!

You'll need: a length of spring steel, typically 1cm wide and around 4m long. This will give you a bounce board of about 1.3m in diameter when bent into a circle and covered in material. Ask the spring steel supplier to join the ends for you. This is done with a special crimping process.



Now head off to the fabric shops and find the thickest, least porous, most reflective material in white, enough to cover your 1.3m diameter. Also try to find some reflective gold lamé fabric to stitch to one side of the board, so that you have the option of using the gold or white side. The gold is very flattering (warming) to skin tones when used on overcast days.

Next, cut both pieces of material into a circle to fit your steel circle, while allowing an overlap big enough to fold over the steel and stitch up.

Now you have a bounce board that's easy to carry and store, at a fraction of the price!

Until next time.

Jaco Wolmarans