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Behind the scenes of "Beauty with Mi," Refinery 29's YouTube show created by Mi-Anne Chan, beauty writer for Refinery 29, and Holly Fischer, cinematographer for Refinery 29. Read more about how they've elevated the show with creative lighting design on page 12.

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NOT YOUR AVERAGE BEAUTY LIGHTING

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE BRAINS BEHIND REFINERY29'S "BEAUTY WITH MI"



It was all a learning process—sometimes we'd do what I refer to as the Rembrandt style (named after the painter), which is when one side of the face is lit about 45 degrees up and away, creating that light triangle under the eye opposite to the key. I find this technique shapes the face in a flattering way and also allows you to shift the mood of the image through the intensities of the light ratios.

Overall, the key light's angle changes based on what we're shooting. If we're doing a traditional makeup tutorial, normally I apply butterfly beauty lighting.

PDN: And why is butterfly lighting good for beauty?

HF: Butterfly lighting in portrait photography is when a subject is more or less lit above their head at 45 degrees. It helps to accentuate the subject's cheekbones, and it creates a fall-off shadow that shapes the face really nicely.

Commonly I see beauty videos with dark neck shadows, which I try to avoid by filling in with a soft light from below. I follow up with adding a hair light since we're working with seamless backdrops in the studio—I like to differentiate her from the background to avoid a flat image. Lately we've started playing around with background lights shot directly at the seamless. They're more staged, but a lot of fun! Every episode we mix the lighting up.

PDN: What is your collaborative process?

MC: Well, for example, when we began working together, we communicated about whether we wanted to make everything look true to color. For the period pieces, we made a conscious decision to have the glamorous Hollywood lighting only at the end when I transform into character. At the beginning I wanted it to be true to color so that the audience can see how the makeup performs. I also wanted the viewer to go on the journey with me as I discover, for example, Marilyn, and I discover what makeup was like in the '50s. The lighting transforms as I transform, rather than having the glamorous Hollywood lighting throughout episode.

PDN: So lighting is an essential tool to the storytelling?

MC: It definitely is one of the biggest tools to help establish a look and feel if we're trying to transform into something that is so wildly

Stream Refinery29's YouTube show "Beauty with Mi" and you'll be exposed to next-level beauty tutorials, historical reenactments of trends and fringe treatments (think: vagina facials, CBD facials, Cardi B nail art and dumpster diving for makeup). Mi-Anne Chan launched the show two and a half years ago after working with Refinery29 as a beauty writer. Since then, the show has caught fire, attracting more than two million subscribers.

We caught up with Chan and Holly Fischer, cinematographer at Refinery 29, who came on board a year into the show's launch to elevate the segments with creative lighting design.

PDN: How did you hone in on the lighting style for the show?

Mi-Anne Chan: It's based on what each episode is about. We meet once a week to discuss ideas for shows and what the lighting style might look like. For example, for historic re-creations of looks, like for our Marilyn Monroe episode, we wanted to reproduce Old Hollywood red-carpet glamour, complete with a strobe light to make it look like someone was taking photos of me.

And then across the board we began changing the lighting. This is when Holly started doing more of the butterfly setup: glamorous beauty lighting but still really approachable.

Holly Fischer: I try to match the lighting to the concept. For the Marilyn Monroe episode, we wanted to have the glam shots full of contrast and dark shadows.

And the historic Anna May Wong episode was a similar style. Now we're doing a series of episodes about the makeup of different decades. For the '50s, we're trying to match the color palette of the decade and we're using very basic, flat lighting. Because there were no sharp lenses in the '50s, we use filters to soften the look and to give it a vintage feel.



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LEFT: FISCHER USED A STYLE THAT SHE CALLS "REMBRANDT" DURING THIS SHOOT WITH CHAN. THIS TECHNIQUE IS ACHIEVED WHEN ONE SIDE OF THE FACE IS LIT ABOUT 45 DEGREES UP AND AWAY, SHAPING THE FACE IN A FLATTERING WAY. **BELOW:** THE FINAL RESULT.



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different from my day-to-day. Lighting makes the biggest difference.

PDN: Were you responding to anything in particular when you got more creative with the lighting?

MC: YouTube is a very personable space, and we're trying to toe this line between making the show accessible, while also pushing the boundaries and doing different things than everyone else on YouTube. We make it personal by employing *cinéma vérité* and not making things too dramatically all the time. We also try to give viewers something they won't see—the lighting really helps with that. When we transform, we try to really transform, and that's a huge lighting effort. For the historic episodes, we look at old photos of the stars, and Holly studies them and tries to re-create them. For the Anna May episode, she used lighting to re-create this moonlike halo.

HF: I needed to make a pinpoint of light.

MC: It was amazing—it looked exactly like the photo!

PDN: How did you get there?

HF: Besides shifting around the key light, I like to play with the background: not make it too distracting but match the vibe and aesthetic of what we're shooting. For Anna May I took an antique empty frame and created my own cookie, short for *coloris* [to produce patterned illumination]. Then I used a light to shine through it—gelled red and orange—to create a fun color gradient.

You can get really creative with background lighting when using cookies. For instance, for the Anna May episode I studied Chinese windows to design my own in an empty frame. Other methods for lighting seamless backgrounds are as simple as placing a plant in front of a light so that the silhouettes of the leaves create a nature vibe. For the 1960s episode, we bought this string of paper circles and we used that to block the light and create shadows and shapes.

PDN: Mi-Anne, what's your favorite thing about working with Holly?

MC: I've shot with a lot of different people and Holly goes above and beyond. I feel like it's easy to slap up a seamless. But she gets how much I hate seamless! It's so repetitive and not personable. It instantly says, "I'm in a studio." It's not the relationship I want to have with my viewers. Holly will go in and change the background and make it feel intentional to the subject of the episode. If we can, we shoot in my apartment and Holly's created this great setup.

PDN: How is the home lighting setup different from the studio setup?

HF: In the studio, I often have four to six lights set up: **Astra 1x1 Litepanels**, **Fiilex LED lights** (which are small; great for hair lights and travel), **Kino Flo 4ft 4Bank** and **Arri S60 SkyPanels**. In the studio there's the opportunity to do cool things with motion. The **Arri S60 SkyPanels** have effects like fireworks or strobes—I use them for tricks, keying and filling. We can also change the colors on them across the RGB spectrum. They have beauty gels installed in their firmware—you can choose various **Roscoe** or **Leeds** filters. One of my favorites is called **LEE 749 Hampshire Rose**; it has the slightest pink glow and looks good with all the different skin tone I've lit. Everything I use is primarily **LEDs**, except for the **Kinos** and **Leko**.

The home setup is basically what we use in the studio, but downsized. It's usually Rembrandt lighting using diffused light as the key light and then a fill light from either underneath or from the side. Sometimes I bounce the fill off the wall to make it more soft and diffused.

PDN: When do you shoot at home, Mi-Anne?

MC: When we're shooting historic episodes, we shoot in the studio. If we're doing straight-up makeup tutorials, sometimes I prefer to be at home because I think it feels better to see me in my space. When we do anything that involves my wardrobe or my makeup collection we shoot it in my house for a more personal, documentary feel. +

MI-ANNE CHAN'S *TOP 5* DIY BEAUTY LIGHTING TRICKS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

1 KEEP IT REAL

For my Instagram account, I like my style to feel real and accessible. I don't have fancy equipment or the knowledge to set up lights on my own, so I improvise.

2 PUT A RING (LIGHT) ON IT

For makeup tutorials and indoor selfies, I use a ring light on a boom arm that we drilled into my wall. It opens out and sits in front of my window. Because it's on an arm, I can move it around or I can put it away and use natural light.

3 WORK WITH THE ELEMENTS

I think my tutorials look best on an overcast day. I typically supplement with a little of the ring light on the coolest setting. If it's really bright, I don't use additional light at all—I just sit at the window.

4 GET CREATIVE WITH TRAVEL

When I'm traveling I use an LED mirror called the **RIKI SKINNY**. It's super compact, rechargeable and has a magnetic strip so you can slap your phone on it for selfies. It's great for traveling because you don't have to bring any additional lights with you.

5 LET THE SUNSHINE IN

On the street I usually use sunlight. I think it looks the best. When you mess around with lighting or editing too much with beauty, it's hard to tell what the products look like. I want to be as natural as possible since we're recommending products.