

The FinnBounce and the Smelfen

Thanks to ShayTech of Sony Talk for the idea.

The pop-up flash on the EOS-10D is actually pretty powerful for its size. Unfortunately, it's only good for fill-in or slow-sync duty, if you don't want that frozen-in-the-headlights flash look. There is a solution, however: a bit of creativity and home crafts can provide you with an ugly but quite serviceable way to bounce the flash or diffuse it, for more pleasant illumination. Introducing the FinnBounce and the Smelfen!

A flash diffuser is basically a milky, translucent box put around the flash head. It turns the directional, point-like flash into an omnidirectional, larger source. The gain is in more even illumination and slightly softer shadows. The loss is in flash power. An even better solution is to bounce the flash off a white or neutral-colored ceiling or wall: this will effectively move the light source away from the camera, at the same time making it diffuse and much larger: the result is lighting that could be mistaken for natural light. The Smelfen and FinnBounce are the solutions for the 10D's on-board flash. I'm sure both can be easily adapted for just about any similar flash. The 10D pop-up flash is quite powerful enough to fully illuminate a smallish room. Crank the ISO up to 800, and it's quite serviceable for surprisingly demanding purposes.

The Smelfen

The Smelfen, invented by Adam-T, is a quick-and-dirty flash diffuser. Find a translucent, white, slightly flexible plastic cap about the size of the flash head, and pop it on it like a hat. Adam uses the cap off his girlfriend Rachel's deodorant -- Palmolive Soft & Gentle... hence the name.



The Smelfen ready for action! (Photo by Adam-T.)

Since my wife uses the wrong brand of deodorant, I was forced to search for other solutions. I managed to get something workable from a translucent film jar. I had to cut it, though, which reduces the diffuse effect somewhat, but it still works pretty well.



The Dog-Ugly Knock-Off Smelfen: made from a film jar.

So, what does it do?

Well, it does what a diffuser does: evens the lighting and softens the light. See for yourself.



Without.

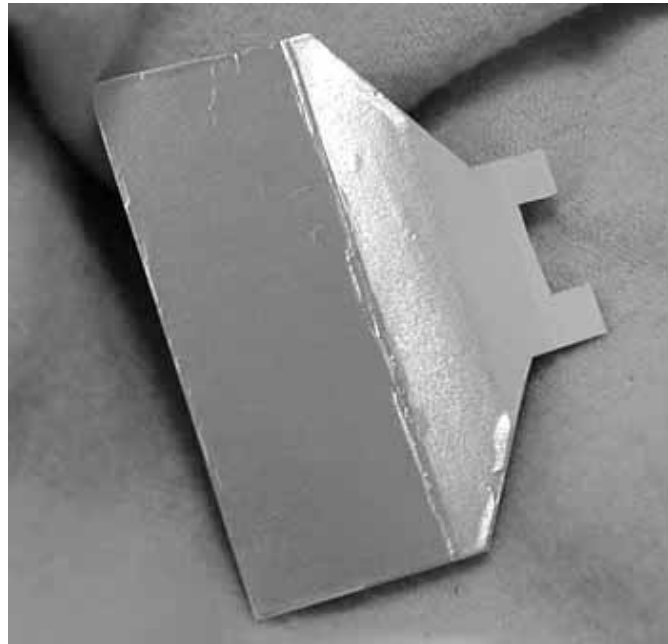


With.

But wait! It gets even better:

The FinnBounce

OK, so a flash is occasionally unavoidable, a diffuser is better than no diffuser, but bounce is way better than a diffuser. (Off-camera flash is even better, and multiple flashes with umbrellas are the best, but those are a bit of a tall order for the perky little pop-up on the camera.) Enter the FinnBounce. The FinnBounce is simply a bit of cardstock with aluminum foil rubber cemented on top, stuck under the pop-up flash. It deflects the flash away from the lens. If there's a wall or ceiling nearby, it bounces. It actually works pretty well with any old postcard-sized bit of white cardstock... except not with focal lengths much shorter than 50 mm -- the light "spills over" the card and into the frame, making for a white band at the top of the picture. The FinnBounce works with all of my lenses, including the 17 mm Tokina.



The FinnBounce.

Here's what it does:



Before.



After. Nice, eh?

Construction Instructions

So, you want to make your own FinnBounce? Have no fear, it's easy. Here's how:

1. Find a piece of cardstock about A4 size. I used the one bracing a package of inkjet photo paper. (US Letter will do for our trans-Atlantic friends.)
2. Cut a rectangle about 12 x 15 cm out of it.
3. Cut a slot 2.5 cm wide and 1.5 cm deep in the center of the long edge.
4. Shape the rest of the edge as you see on the picture: the "tabs" are about 1.5 cm wide and 2 cm deep.
5. Grab your scissors and a straightedge, and using the blunt side of the scissors, make a straight-line dent into the FinnBounce where you see the fold on the picture. Bend experimentally to see that it bends cleanly.
6. Get hold of some rubber cement, preferably in stick form (easier to handle). I used UHU PowerStic.

Bounce the Pop-up

Grab a piece of aluminum foil. Lay a very, very thin layer of rubber cement evenly on it, and another on the side of the FinnBounce soon to be covered by it. Allow to set for a minute or so.

7. Gently unroll the piece of aluminum foil on the FinnBounce, and press flat. Don't muff it too badly, because once it's there, it's there.
8. Trim edges of foil along edges of FinnBounce with scissors.
9. Get some clear, adhesive book-cover plastic, cut a piece a bit bigger than the FinnBounce, and cover the aluminum part with it, folding the edges underneath just as if you were covering a schoolbook. Voilà, the FinnBounce is ready for action!

Using the FinnBounce



The FinnBounce ready for action.

Using the FinnBounce is really easy. Just pop up the flash, and slot it under it. Take a test shot. If you see a white area near the top of the frame, you need to bend the FinnBounce up along the fold line: light is spilling over it and into the frame. If not, you can adjust the angle to control where the flash is going to bounce. E-TTL works as usual; depending on your technique, you may or may not need to adjust FEC. All done!



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