

# Night Color Without Flash

In this bumbling world, few things approach perfection as closely or efficiently as state-of-the-art flash lighting. The ease and consistency of its performance compounds its efficiency. With contemporary automated electronic-flash units and cameras, even the untrained beginner can hit ideal exposures shot after shot. If he is shooting color film, the transparencies will almost always be of the proper density and consistently glow with the properly engineered color temperature of their light source. The direction of the flash head can be changed, and the direct quality of the light may be diffused or bounced off flat surfaces, but its color temperature remains constant unless it's altered with

Although results may be unpredictable, today's high-speed films make it easy to explore the after-dark world

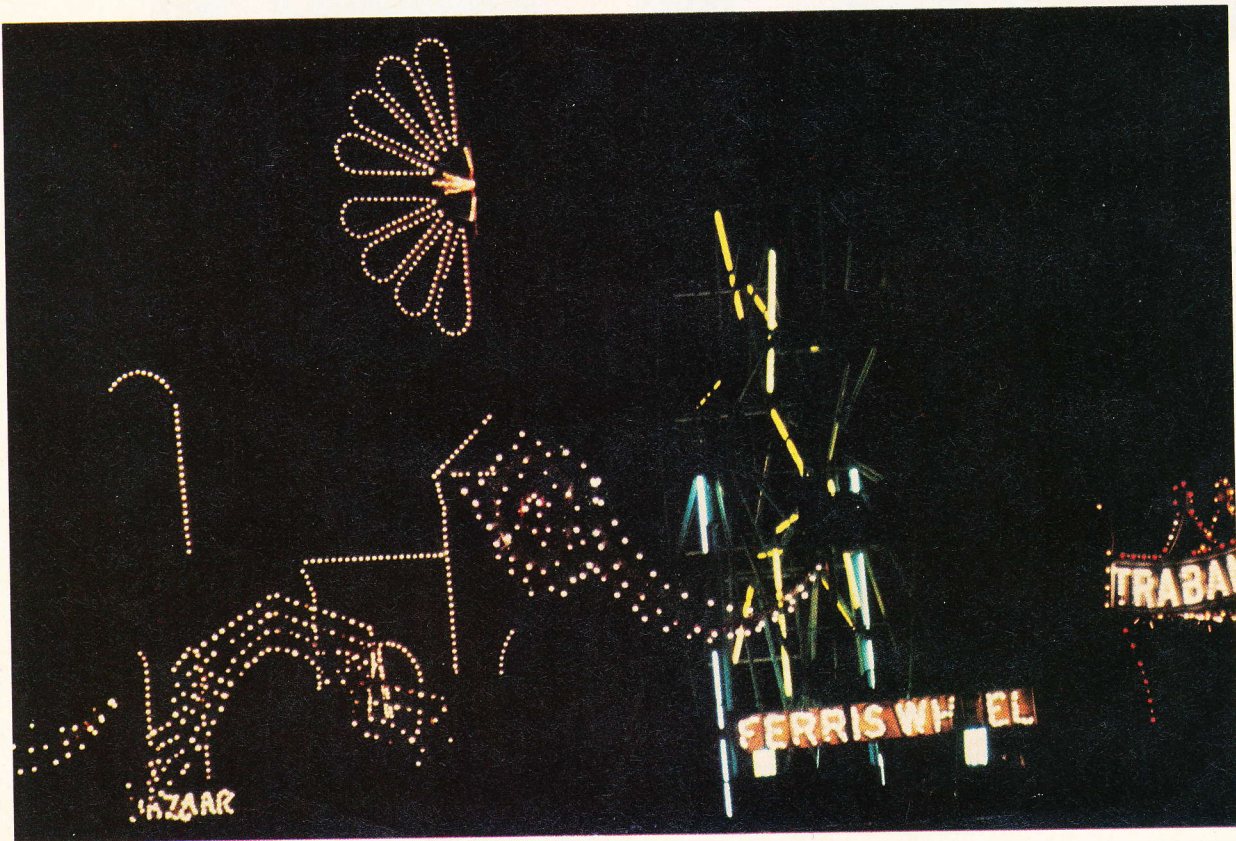
By Albert Gruen

the use of color filters.

However, the real world is messy, unpredictable, and incredibly diverse. The light by which we perceive its changes shifts around the clock, and never more so than at night. There are times when we wish to abandon the safety and predictability of flash for adventures with the light that is.

After dark, for most practical photographic purposes, sources of available light are makeshift and wildly inconsistent in color temperature. Few of them are precisely alike in any of their qualities.

Even your basic 75-watt tungsten light bulb differs one from the other because of varying factors such as coat-



Lights decorate the night around a street fair. They stitch up the black sky with random dots and patterns. Here the exposure

on 3M Color Slide 640-T was left to camera's automatic-exposure system, which caught only the bulbs.

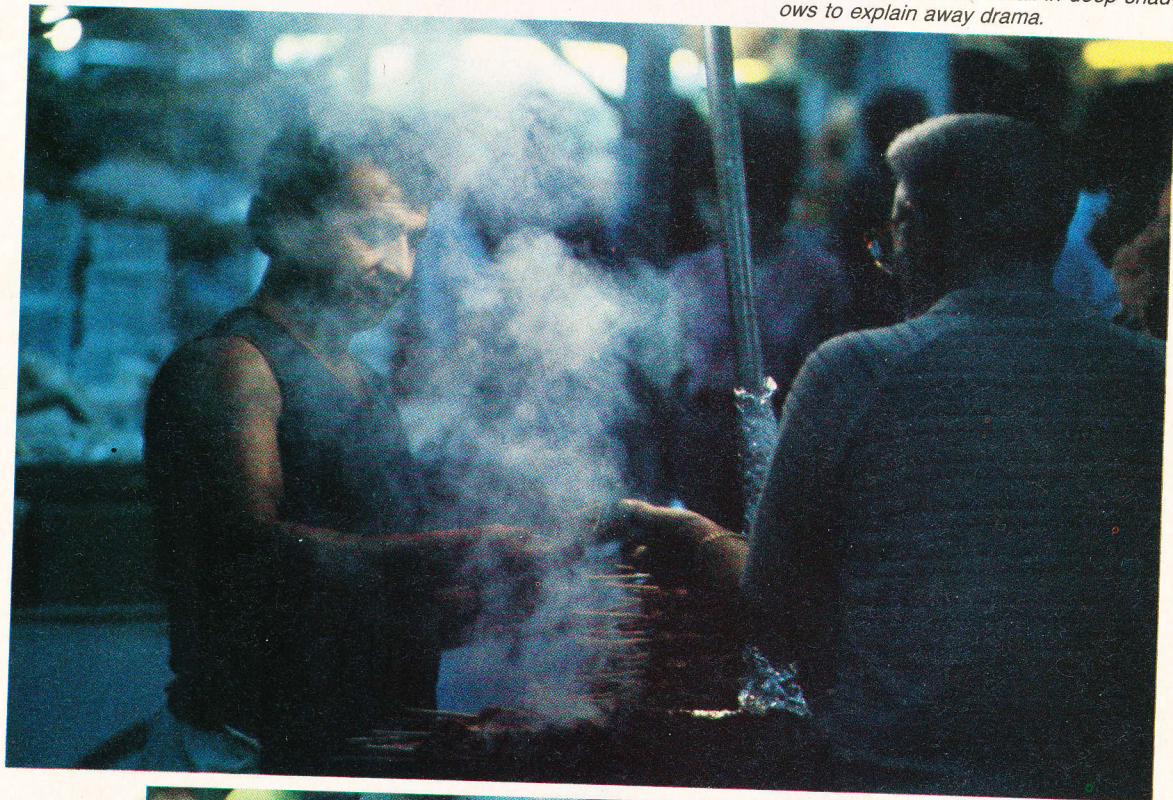
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For available-light street portraits, move your subject in relation to the light source for the effect you want. Here the girl was carefully posed under a spotlight to avoid black shadows under the eyes and to catch her reflection.



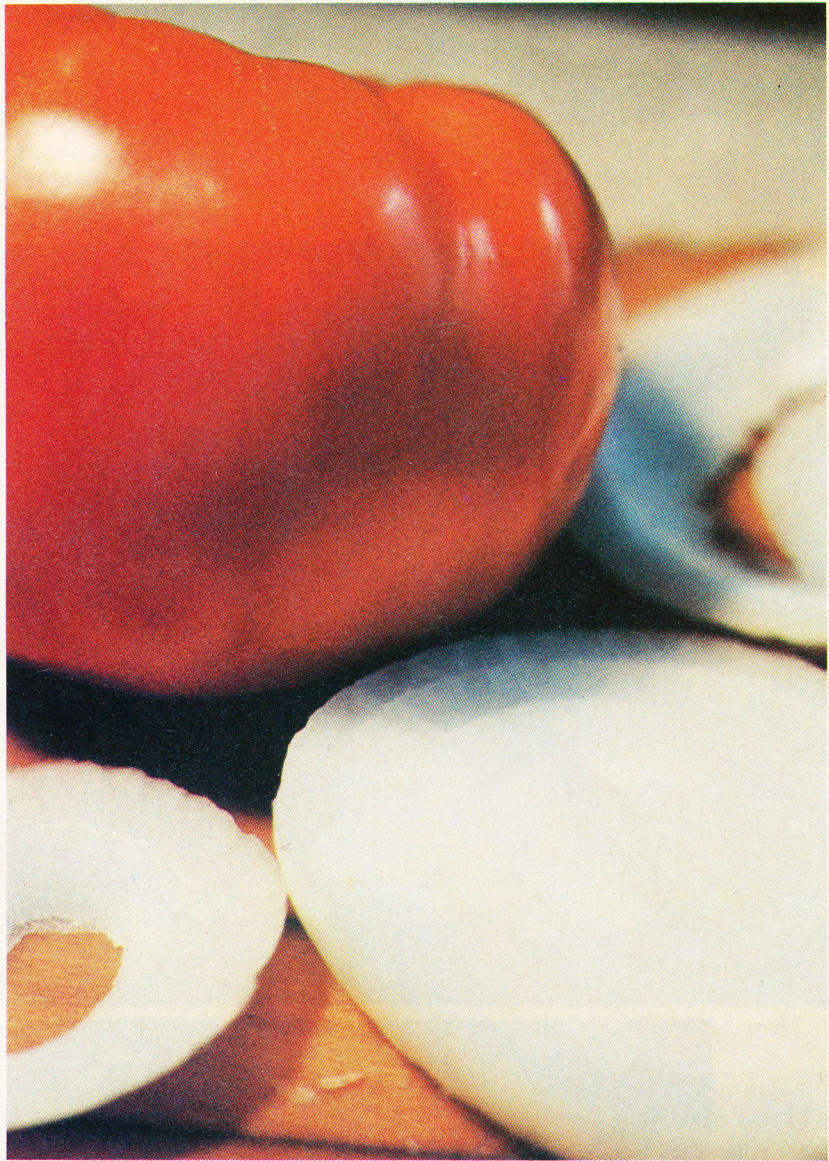
The light here was minimal: two tungsten spotlights. The reality is stated by the highlights; the mystery is deep in black shadows that carry barely a hint of detail. For accurate focusing at low light levels, use bright highlights as targets.

*Surreal quality of urban street fair was caught with ASA 640 tungsten film and f/2 105-mm lens, relying on the 35-mm SLR's auto-exposure system. The effect can be total theater, with no detail in deep shadows to explain away drama.*

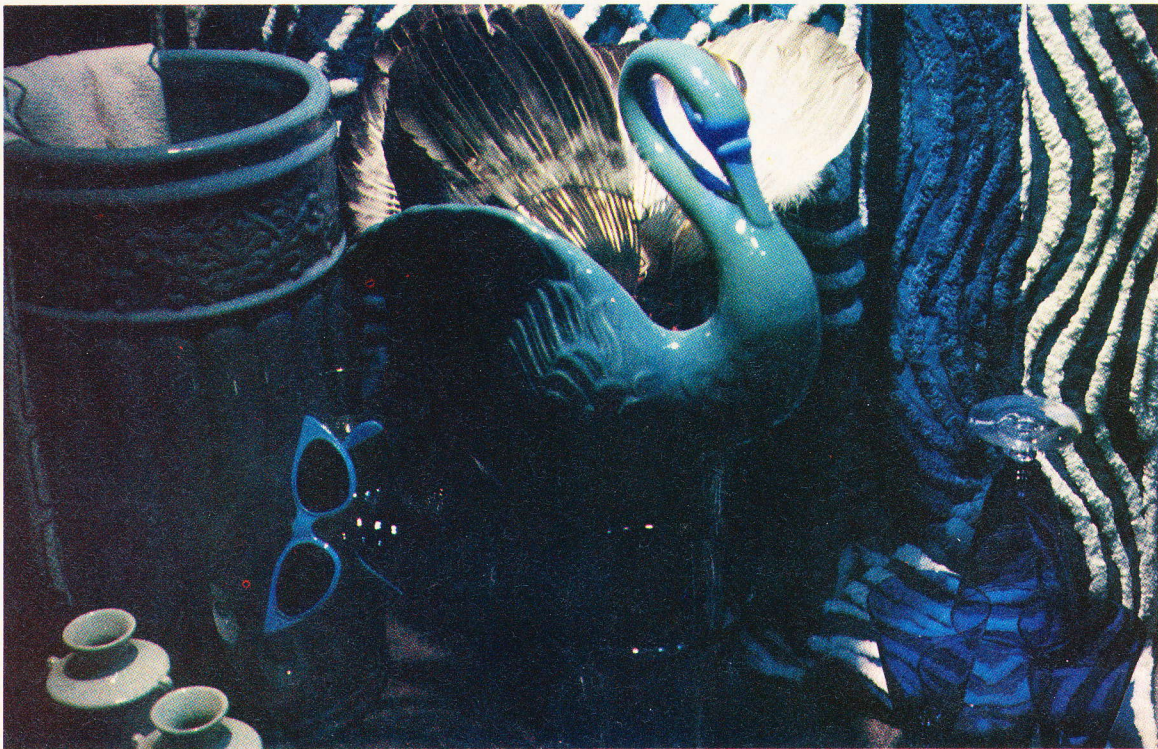


*Even with pushed high-speed transparency films and fast lenses, available-light color photography like this often requires very slow shutter speeds. Use any support you can find (car, railing, etc.) brace yourself, and gently squeeze off shots.*

*This still life was shot on a kitchen counter by the light of a 100-watt tungsten bulb in a standard fixture. Fill came from an additional light fixture on the other side of the small room. Camera was tripod-mounted for 1/2-sec exposure.*



*For interesting still lifes, shop windows are repositories of objects and visual essays on their relationships. A random stroll past the many window displays lit for the night will bring you all sorts of picture-taking opportunities.*



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ings, manufacturing techniques, length of burning use, etc. And, of course, fluorescent and neon emanations run their own ghastly gamut.

However, all these diverse light sources and their interactions have one thing in common: they illuminate reality as we see it. They color our lives. And it's fascinating to attempt to record them on film.

The changes in our very flesh tones as we move through the changes of light are so very much part of our visual environment that we register them unknowingly without analysis or appreciation as we do with the rest of the world of marvelous images—the things we waste by not actually looking at them; as we waste people by not really listening to them. Our vision seems to be frozen at noon.

For example: it is night. You are at dinner. A friend is facing you across the restaurant table. The table is next to a window that faces a street corner. There is a street light and a traffic signal at the corner. The street light has a bluish cast that falls almost imperceptibly on your friend's cheekbone. The side of her neck and cheek are molded lightly red or green according to the mode of the traffic signal.

Inside the restaurant there is a yellow fluorescent tubing hidden behind a narrow strip reflector that runs around the room at the junction of wall and ceiling. Its reflected glow adds color to her hair and forehead. She asks, "Can you really

take color pictures in this kind of light?" You shrug.

The primary light source is a bank of tungsten spotlights, each recessed in the ceiling behind circular lenses. Their interaction models her face firmly and warmly.

With a camera loaded with high-speed 3,200 K color film you could photograph your friend at 1/30 sec at f/3.5—along with an atmosphere of ambient light that flash would destroy.

The lighting of most living rooms is, or should be, warm and pleasing. Generally, the light sources are tungsten bulbs subdued by various types of lampshades. It is a relaxed, flattering light, familiar and evocative. Surely an infant, a grandparent, or any other member of a family are more at home in a photograph lighted by sources that are part of the scene, rather than by a transient flash—even if the intruding light imposes a commercially acceptable flesh tone while blackening the background.

Technically there is no reason why 3,200 K color film cannot be used in many available-light circumstances. That is what they were created for. There are tungsten-balanced emulsions like Ektachrome 160 Professional (tungsten), rated at E.I. 400, that can be pushed to 1,000. 3M has a new high-speed tungsten transparency film (Color Slide 640-T) rated at ASA 640 that can be raised with special processing to E.I. 1,400. The color rendition of these

films, even with fluorescent sources, is remarkably good, although you will pay for your push with grain.


Photographing anyone or anything only by available light in the night of city streets can be made an intriguing exercise. The possibilities are mind-boggling if the photographer has the kind of imagination that can cut images out of clutter; the sort of eye that can analyze the combined product of crazily random light sources. He must have a biting sense of drama because the city is a place of drama—particularly at night when shadows abound.

According to traditional rule of thumb, acceptable hand-held exposure time for adequate image sharpness is a transposition of the camera-lens focal length. For example, a 50-mm lens would demand a 1/50-sec exposure for reasonable acuity.

When exploring after-dark color shooting without a flash unit, this rule often must be abandoned. In many night situations, even with superfast film, the required exposure may be 1/5 sec. Obviously, without a tripod, you've got a problem.

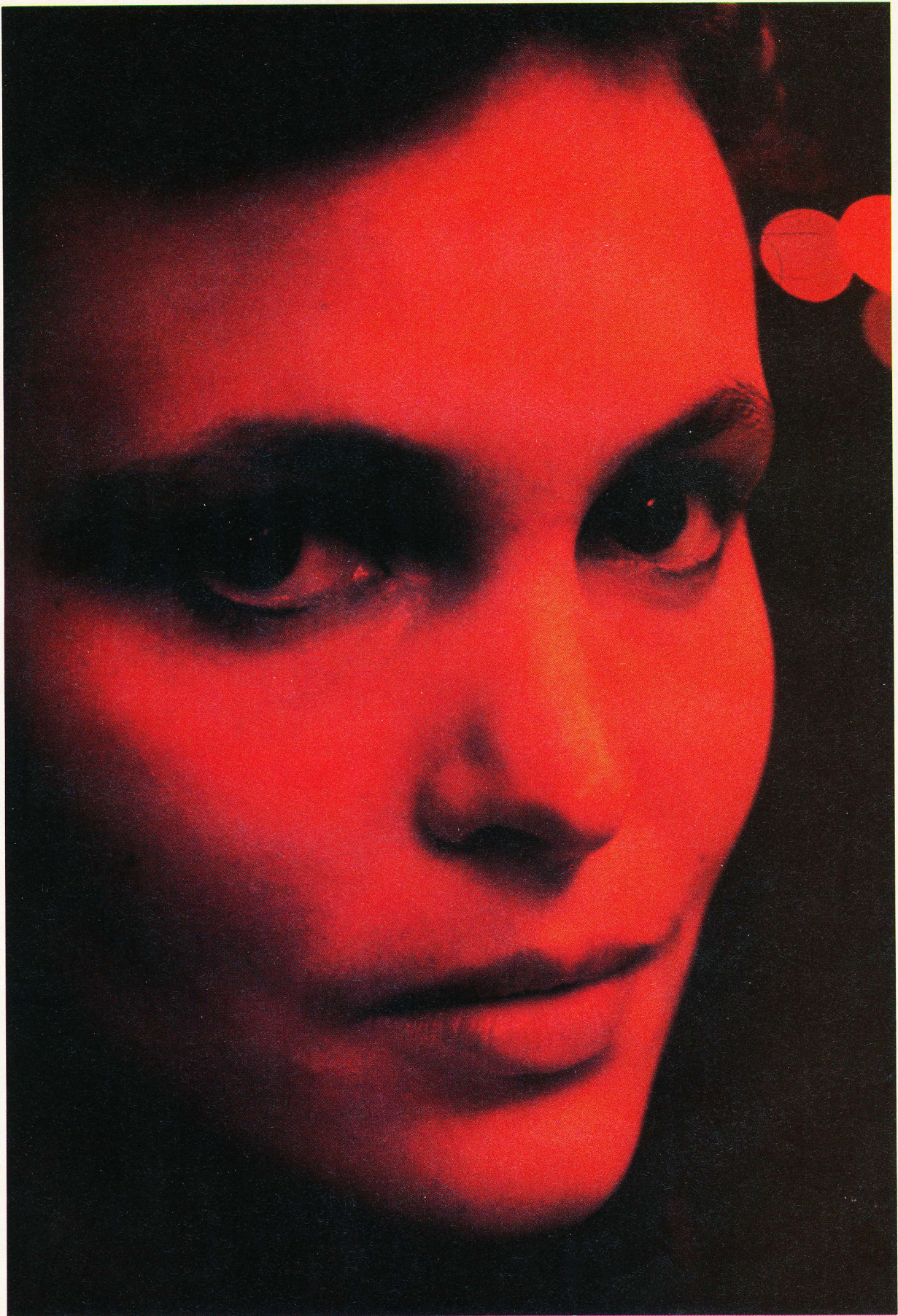
Many photographers, while admitting a tripod's value, resent the nuisance of lugging one around and setting it up. It seems restrictive and antithetical to the marvelous moving freedom of the 35-mm instrument.

There are familiar methods of steadying the camera for hand-held exposure at slow speeds—making the photographer himself a kind of tripod. One way is to firm your elbows, spread like the legs of a tripod, on any convenient, firm base: a table, a railing, the hood of an automobile, or the top of a mailbox. Or you can press yourself against a wall and your arms against your body. Take a breath, let out a little, and relax your body into stillness, squeezing off the shutter release at the absolute static moment.

As the accompanying photographs demonstrate, "natural" color, "realistic" color, or "correctly balanced" color will not necessarily be the result of a freewheeling exploration of night photography without flash. But it need not be your goal. In fact, you may even wish to heat up the colors of night by photographing with a daylight-balanced emulsion. 

### Suggested Exposures for After-dark, Available-light Photography

Kodak Ektachrome 160 (Tungsten)*		3M Color Slide 640-T*	
Brightly lighted city streets at night	1/30 sec, f/2.8	Bright street at night	1/60 sec, f/4
Lighted signs	1/60 sec, f/4	Shop window at night	1/60 sec, f/5.6
Store windows at night	1/30 sec, f/4	Night sports events	1/125 sec, f/4
Fairs, amusement parks	1/30 sec, f/2	Fair, brightly lit parks	1/60 sec, f/2.8
Brightly lighted theater districts like Las Vegas, Times Square	1/30 sec, f/4		
*Special processing from Kodak available for exposing this film at ASA 320; some independent labs will process for even higher speeds.		*Push-processing also is available from some independent labs.	
Suggested exposures are based on manufacturers' recommendation. Lighting conditions vary, so it is advisable to bracket exposures by one full stop either way. For exposures slower than 1/30 sec, a firm support is recommended.			



*This night portrait was made with a 50-mm macro lens and Ektachrome 160 Professional (tungsten) film rated at E.I. 800. The*

*hand-held exposure was f/3.5 at 1/5 sec. The blood-red color came from neon signs outside a nightclub.*