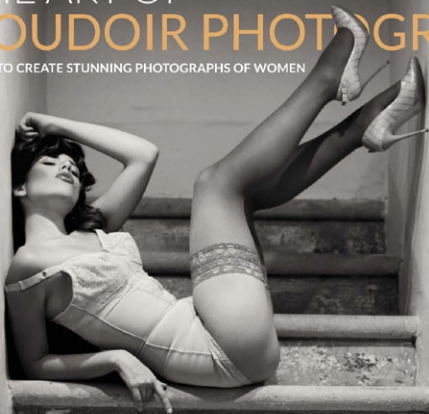


THE ART OF BOUDOIR PHOTOGRAPHY

HOW TO CREATE STUNNING PHOTOGRAPHS OF WOMEN



CHRISTA MEOLA

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**New
Riders** | VOICES THAT MATTER™



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CHRISTA MEOLA

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*For every woman,
with the courage to be vulnerable:
You inspire me.*

*For all artists,
who expose and celebrate beauty:
You strengthen me.*

*And for our lovers,
who adore and appreciate us:
You free us to be real.*

Here's to feeling great naked!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christa Meola is an internationally recognized photographer who travels the world for portraits, speaking engagements, and teaching.

She believes that honoring our bodies, emotions, choices, and impulses through photography—whether in front of or behind the camera—is empowering and profoundly sexy.

A self-declared sensualist, she has been infatuated with visual storytelling since childhood. She has enjoyed life behind the camera since the age of six, when playtime included dressing up with friends and taking pictures.

Christa is on a mission to empower women to adore their bodies. She offers private one-on-one shoots in New York City and destinations around the world. She has a penchant for capturing sensual escapades, black and white bodyscapes, and adoration in motion.

Christa has taught thousands of photographers the secrets of her successful boudoir business. She is the founder of the Boudoir Workshops, a six-week online course she designed for new and experienced photographers to ignite their creativity, sharpen their shooting skills, and create a successful business. She is also the creator of *The Money Shots*, a posing and coaching guide of the best-selling shots.

Learn more about Christa on her popular blog at cristameola.com.



Photo by Carla Coulson



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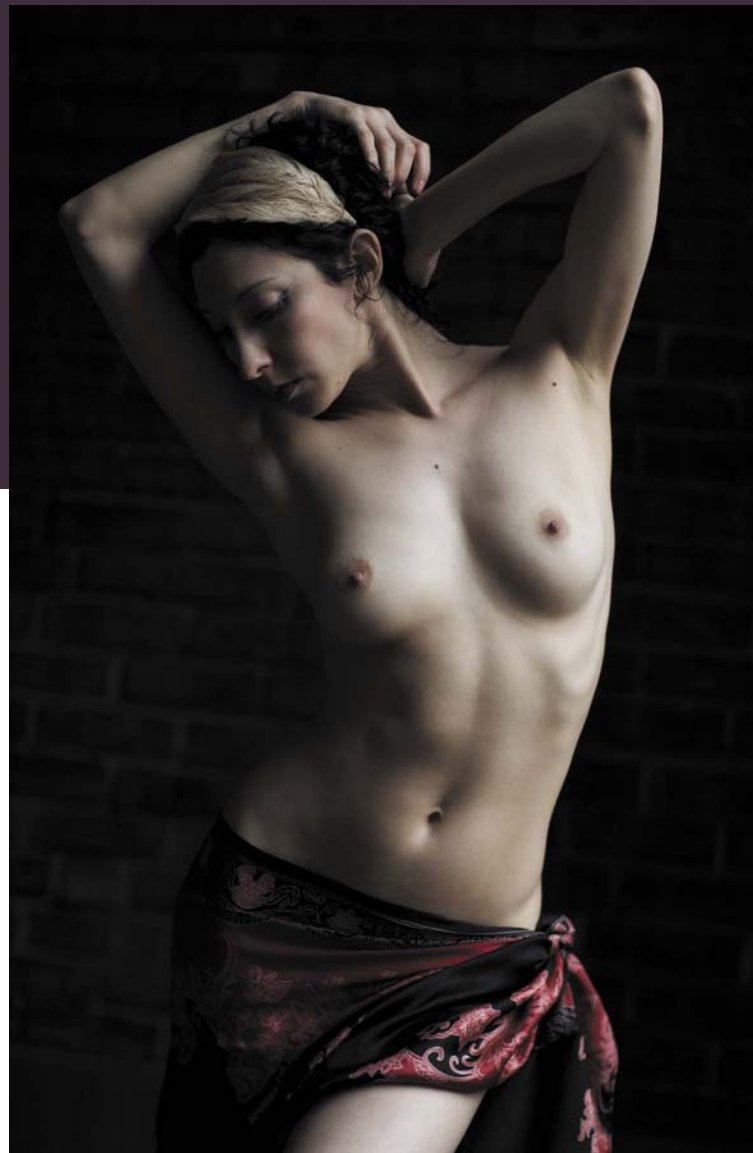
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INTRODUCTION

Hey you. If you're reading this book, you're ready. You know what I'm talking about. You've been considering either having a boudoir photo shoot or photographing one. Either way, you're in the right place.

I've been photographing women for years. I received my first Canon film camera as a Christmas gift when I was a little kid. My friends and I would play dress-up and I'd take pictures. Considering my current career specializing in photographing women, those memories make me giggle, and those early photographs make me laugh even harder.

In Chapter 1, "Working with Women," I share with you the process I use for discovering how my subject feels about her body and sensuality. Hundreds of shoots have taught me a few things for certain about how women think and feel about their bodies.

I've been moved to tears, audible *awws*, and cheers by their stories. I've been inspired and moved by each one of them. The women who are interested in being photographed are not just professional models, but also the everyday girls next door, the housewives, soccer moms, entrepreneurs, and business owners. Many of them have feelings of inadequacy, grief, and even sorrow regarding their body and their sensuality.

But the overriding emotion I get from each woman I shoot is that she is ready. So ready. To make a life change, to celebrate her sexiness and being a woman—alive and joyful and happy with herself and her body. To get in touch with her core desires and bring back intimacy with herself or her partner where it's been missing, and to move on in a big badass way!

Most women will put their full heart and soul into this endeavor, and so should each photographer who's fortunate enough to have a beautiful woman in front of her camera—a woman who may just need a little coaxing and direction along with a few tips and tricks to uncover and capture the genuine, unique, sensual woman inside.

That's where you, the photographers, step in.

Boudoir photography is a fulfilling activity whether it's a rewarding hobby or lucrative career. There isn't anything really complicated about what I do or how I do it, and you can do it, too.

My mission as a teacher is to create a brigade of boudoir photographers whose primary goal is to help make women look and feel confident, beautiful, and downright sexy! That's why I created the Online Boudoir Workshop, and it's why I continue to teach. I want each woman to have the feeling of being seen, felt, appreciated, and glorified. As well as feeling like a sexpot who can strut into a room and turn heads.



It's my goal for you to be able to photograph women more beautifully and easily. To have confidence in your skills, joy in your work, and creativity on all your shoots.

Recently, I put up a post on my blog that invited women to write to me for an opportunity to have a boudoir photo shoot with me and share their story in this book. I wanted to show the transformative power of boudoir photography. You'll see four women's stories highlighting their experience and how the shoot has transformed their lives. I'm grateful to each of them, as well as all the women who reached out to share their stories, for allowing me into their lives and exposing their bodies, heart, and soul.

Writing a book about boudoir photography has reminded me why I do what I do, and how much I love it.

With lots of love and gratitude,
Christa

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50mm lens, ISO 200,
f/2, 500 sec.

2

CREATING SENSUAL MOVEMENT

Sensual movement is the distinct factor that takes a boudoir moment from good to great. Before we get to equipment, lighting, and shooting, it's vital to take a step back and discuss how to create authentic moments with sensual movement. To me, this is the most important aspect of boudoir photography. You can learn simple lighting easily, but for many photographers, creating gorgeous movements that have sensuality, emotion, mood, feeling, and authenticity remains elusive. Gestures such as the ones in this figure are all that's needed to create movement, which gives photographs emotion and life.

Likewise, for the real woman who is interested in doing a photo shoot, choosing her wardrobe may be easy, but moving naturally

in front of the camera and communicating sex appeal may be her biggest struggle (FIGURE 2.1). So let's take a few pages to discuss the art of sensuality and sex appeal for any woman who wants to look and be stunning.

The following section can serve as a great primer for all women on how to feel comfortable with their bodies and cultivate sex appeal, whether at a photo shoot or in daily life. For photographers, make sure to share this section with the woman who plans on stepping in front of your camera, and feel free to pass it along to all the women in your life. We could all stand to benefit from feeling great about our bodies.



FIGURE 2.1 Shot in Los Angeles with a 40-year-old nonmodel mother of two. I directed the fan toward her and coached her to “close your eyes, run your hands along your body, and make yourself feel good”—a simple yet powerful step toward creating sensuality.

50mm lens, ISO 250, f/2.5, 250 sec.



FIGURE 2.2 Shot in downtown Los Angeles with a 30-something self-described shy girl. She told me things about herself that I hear often before a shoot: very nervous about the shoot, doesn't even get naked with the lights on, has no idea how to "be sexy."

28–135mm lens, ISO 1600, f/3.5, 80 sec.

SENSUALITY AND HOW TO CULTIVATE SEX APPEAL

Sensuality is in a woman's attitude. She may be a beauty on the surface, but no amount of visual perfection can create sensuality and sex appeal. Whether you are a photographer striving to create stunning photographs of women or you are a woman who wants to look and be stunning, the foundation is a woman enjoying herself and her body (FIGURE 2.2).

That begins with focusing on the unique body parts each woman loves and addressing her fears and doubts, which earns trust, as we've discussed in Chapter 1. For the image in Figure 2.2, I gave the subject the same tips I'm giving you here, and made sure our focus was on having fun.

PROJECTING CONFIDENCE

I know being confident is easier said than done. As you move through the rest of these tips and techniques, being confident becomes easier. It's a useful and effective habit to develop in all areas of life, whether you're the photographer or the one being photographed. In truth, no one feels 100 percent confident, ever. We all have insecurities and fears.

A useful tip that has always worked for me is, if you don't feel 100 percent confident, then fake it. Merely pretending to be confident will often be just what you need to manifest the real deal. Faking confidence begins with relaxed breathing, set shoulders, and a smile.

Now let's take the next steps in cultivating sex appeal. In the process, respect your subject's individual comfort level and taste (and your own). Remember that each person is different.

Here are some of my favorite tips for the women I photograph. It's best to talk about them well in advance of the shoot so your subject has time to try some of them out.

BE CONFIDENT

Step one in creating allure is to brim with confidence. In fact, confidence is the sexiest thing a woman can wear (FIGURE 2.3). Confidence in how you move, how you look, how you feel, and what you do. If you feel like a fool, you'll look like one. Remember to stay focused on your positive attributes and know that you can pull off nearly anything if you do it with self-assurance.

HAVE FUN

Men (and women) are attracted to women who are genuinely enjoying themselves; that quality matters more than any individual physical attribute. Although this seems simple, it's often neglected. Have fun! Enjoy being a woman. Enjoy being admired. Be playful. Have fun while strutting around.



FIGURE 2.3 Shot in Seattle with a gal who loves her curves. She's absolutely brimming with confidence, so we're drawn to her expression and she looks stunning!

24–70mm lens, ISO 100, f/2.8, 200 sec.

Especially during a photo shoot, it's important to remember to not take ourselves too seriously. After all, we're posing in our underwear. Make sure any doubts or concerns take a backseat to having a good time.

Once again, sometimes a shortcut to having fun is simply smiling. This woman's inner beauty radiates through her brilliant smile and the sparkle in her eyes (FIGURE 2.4). Yes, she has certain body parts that she feels aren't completely gorgeous due to childbearing, but you can feel here that she's playful and enjoys being a woman, and we're both focused on what she loves.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

Comfort with your body takes practice. Get very familiar with your body, paying particular attention to the parts you love. Practice being naked. Walk around your home naked. Try posing in the mirror naked. Appreciate and admire your body from all angles. Make sure you focus on the good stuff, and be grateful for the gift of your body.

KNOW THE INNATE POWER OF ATTRACTION

Men and women have enjoyed looking at women since the dawn of time, certainly well before Photoshop. Stretch marks, cellulite, or some extra pounds are not going to change that. A woman's attitude is the most important aspect of feeling and looking truly beautiful and appealing, not physical beauty. Trust that your viewer loves it all. Know that any boldness, playfulness, and enjoyment of your body will be appreciated and enjoyed.

FOCUS ON FEELING

When a woman feels sexy, she looks sexy. When cultivating sex appeal, make sure to focus on pleasure and feeling good. How you move and how you flirt, dress, undress, and touch yourself—even how you breathe—should be guided by what feels good to you. Sometimes putting on your favorite music or closing your eyes for a moment can help you focus on feeling good.

TAKE YOUR TIME

I was photographing a world-famous burlesque dancer in Los Angeles, and when I asked her to perform a few dance movements faster for me, she refused. Slower is sexier, she said. She's right. Sensuality has a slow tempo. Take your own sweet time with your movements and gestures. Walk slowly and deliberately. Move your hands along your body languidly.

TIP: TAKING OFF CLOTHES

Tease! Do it slowly, and take your time in between each piece. Hint at removing the item before removing it. Enjoy yourself! Teasing out your movements is not only more sensual, but also gives the photographer more time to catch a movement she loves.



FLIRT!

Move like you can barely contain your desire. Be playful and allow a bit of shyness to come out now and again. Look at your viewer or the camera with a teasing glint in your eye. Let your inner good girl and naughty girl come out to play (FIGURE 2.5).

KNOW THE TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Finally, cultivating sex appeal is not about a crash diet or Photoshop. It's about working what you've got and knowing a few tricks of the trade to enhance what's already there. We'll cover these tips and tricks on how to find flattering wardrobe, poses, and lighting in upcoming sections that enhance a woman's sex appeal even further.

FIGURE 2.4 Shot in New Orleans with a 20-something nonmodel mother of two. My direction was to cross her arms in her lap to create a bit of appealing cleavage, and when I playfully coached her to squeeze her arms in tighter for even more cleavage, she let out a laugh (opposite).

85mm lens, ISO 400, f/2, 250 sec.



FIGURE 2.5 Shot in New Orleans with a 30-something nonmodel and friend of mine, who truly enjoys the art of flirtation. My direction to her was simply to let her naughty girl out to play a bit and flirt with the camera.

50mm lens, ISO 800, f/2, 160 sec.



FIGURE 2.6 The action I coached here was, “Close your eyes and slowly pull down your strap, enjoying every moment of it.”

50mm lens, ISO 400 , f/2.0 , 160 sec.

COACHING ACTIONS TO CREATE NATURAL MOVEMENT

“Motion creates emotion,” according to Tony Robbins. I agree. I’m a big believer in the notion that how you move is how you feel. I would like to borrow that idea and apply it to photography. Movement goes a long way in communicating authentic emotion. That’s one of the reasons I enjoy coaching actions: big or small movements and tasks that I direct my subject to perform during the shoot (FIGURES 2.6).

With real women who have never professionally modeled before, offering an action to perform instead of asking for a pose makes it easier for them to be real and look natural. A nonmodel’s biggest challenge is most often her self-consciousness and the fact that she doesn’t know go-to poses that both flatter and look natural. In fact, many photographers also struggle with the fear of not knowing how to pose a subject. You can overcome all of these hesitations by simply giving your subject easy actionable directions, such as “toss your hair,” “shake your booty,” or “twirl” (FIGURE 2.7). The results look more emotive and authentic than when your subject is just standing there wondering what to do or striking a static pose where she seems disconnected from herself and the moment. For this image, the direction I gave her was to simply run across camera from point A to point B several times until I nailed the shot that created mood, mystery, and movement.

There are further benefits to coaching actions as well, which all go a long way in bringing out the best in any woman who steps in front of your camera.

FIGURE 2.7 The lovely swirl of her red dress helps illustrate movement.

24–70mm lens, ISO 100, f/2.8, 100 sec.



First, you disable any self-consciousness by transferring her focus to performing the action instead of trying to look good. Second, you create natural movement to capture instead of a lifeless pose. Third, you begin to exhaust her nervous tension by keeping her in motion and repeating the action. This gets her blood flowing and revives her expressions when her energy has waned.

The following are four essential techniques to maximize the effectiveness of coaching actions:

KEYS TO COACHING ACTIONS

1. **Demonstrate the move**

If your subject is unsure of how to perform the action you're coaching, always provide her with a quick demonstration. While you're shooting, without putting your camera aside, briefly demonstrate the action you're asking her to do. By seeing you perform it first, she'll feel less silly doing it herself and will be more likely to commit 100 percent to it.

2. **Repeat as needed**

When you ask your subject to repeat an action over and over again, it gives you multiple opportunities to capture something gorgeous (FIGURE 2.8). The action I coached for this image was to hold the scarf taut over her head and shimmy it back and forth. I had her do this multiple times until I lucked out when all the pieces came together: her breast, lips, and eye were visible, the scarf's fringe showed movement, and her legs were crossed, forming a nice curve at the end of frame.

By doing an action several times, your subject will embrace it more, relax and get into it, and laugh when she messes up. Each of those are unique and awesome captures. Repetition is also a secret ploy to consume her nervous energy. It's hard for someone to be nervous when she's tired out.

3. **Commit fully**

Ask your subject to commit 100 percent to the action. Leap high, laugh big, sigh deeply. Then coach her to push the action to the extreme. Coach her to "kick your leg higher" or "toss your hair with more abandon."

4. **Use in tandem with posing guidelines**

Coaching actions guarantees that you create natural, authentic movement, even without knowing additional posing guidelines and even with a woman who has never stepped in front of a pro's camera before. In the next chapter, we'll discuss how to incorporate posing guidelines into coaching actions, a powerful combination of techniques.

FIGURE 2.8 Shot in Big Sur at Edward Weston's estate, Wildcat Hill, with one of my favorite nude models (opposite).

24–70mm lens, ISO 400, f/3.2, 60 sec.



TOP 10 ACTIONS FOR STUNNING RESULTS

1. Brush your hair out of your eyes

This is a great one to start with. Even though it's a natural, everyday action that will be supereasy for your subject to perform over and over again, some nonmodels are hesitant to do something as simple as brushing their hair out of their eyes without the photographer's permission. So go ahead and give her this little direction from the beginning. In fact, it will be a necessity when you direct the fan at her, ask her to toss her hair, or have her moving a bunch.

2. Shake out your hair

This is the easiest direction to shake the nerves loose and have some fun, so it's another great action to begin with. I like to ask my subject to shake her head side to side with her eyes closed and a slight smile (FIGURE 2.9). An alternative is to have her look directly at the camera and mess up her hair with her hands.

3. Jump, run, skip, or bounce

Any of these actions will help deplete her nervous energy when she's asked to repeat it over and over again, helping her relax. So these are actions that I like to coach early in the session. Depending on the location and wardrobe, I have my subject either jump (FIGURE 2.10), run toward or away from the camera, skip toward me, or bounce playfully on the bed. Here, I asked the model to do a silly cheerleader jump. We repeated it a few times, and I was thrilled that we captured a genuine and joyful emotion.

4. Play with your clothing

Suggest to your subject that she simply play with an item of clothing that she's wearing, whether it's a bra strap, garters, shirt collar, or a hat. This is



FIGURE 2.9 The simple instruction “Shake your hair and head side to side with your eyes closed and a slight smile” works with every woman I've shot. It's a brilliant tool for easing nerves while creating authentic emotion and sensual movement that looks stunning.

24–70mm lens, ISO 100, f/2.8, 200 sec.

easy, flirtatious, and a great way to get partially dressed shots with some natural movement.

Directions could include: Pull down your strap a bit (FIGURE 2.11), flirt over your collar, peek out at me from under your hat, unzip your dress, and so on.



FIGURE 2.10 Shot in Florence with a young model, who was struggling to give an authentically joyful expression. I wanted to loosen her up a bit and create a happy mood that matched the flirty and fun dress.

50mm lens, ISO 200, f/1.8, 2000 sec.



FIGURE 2.11 Shot in New York City with a young aspiring model. I coached her to lift her shoulders a bit and slowly pull down both straps while looking down her body. I coached my subject to continue pulling down the straps of her dress (or lingerie), revealing as much or as little as she likes depending on her comfort level.

85mm lens, ISO 100, f/2.8, 160 sec.

5. Shake it

Turn on some music and ask your subject to jam. This is mostly to loosen things up and have some silly fun. I like to coach my subjects to shake it if they've got it because it usually creates a fun atmosphere and some laughter and lightens everyone up. It also leaves it up to your subject how creative or daring she gets with it.

6. Twirl around

This action can be useful, depending on your subject's wardrobe. Whether she's wearing a dress, skirt, nightie, or silk robe, it's easy to get a shot of movement and a twirl of fabric,

sometimes showcasing a gorgeous pair of high heels or a sexy peek of thigh and bum. Plus, this is another fun action for your subject to perform and another nervous energy buster.

7. Yell “Hey!”

Ask your subject to vocalize and really let it out. She'll release some tension and probably laughter along with it. It's a great way to loosen her up, get the blood flowing, and keep her present on the shoot. I also might direct this action if I see my subject's energy is waning in order to wake her up a bit.

8. One, two, buckle your shoe

Most women love shoes, and any action involving women's shoes is generally a good idea. Taking one off, buckling the sides, running her hands along them—these are all actionable directions that are easy for a nonmodel to perform and that elicit fun shots.

9. Run your hands along your body

This action is my favorite, and I direct this one on every shoot whether it's with a model, a muse, or a real woman. Since it's a little more intimate, you may want to do this one once the shoot has progressed a bit. Direct your subject to use an elegant touch with her fingers barely touching her skin and to keep her hands moving slowly. I also often coach her to not move her hands parallel to each other, but to have one up and one down. It's important to note that wherever the model places her hands is where the viewer's eyes will go. So be specific about where you ask her to place and move her hands.

10. Close your eyes and...

I let this direction be more of a suggestion that trails off so she can fill in the blank. Usually, this action provokes either a blush, a sigh, a smile, or some other genuine expression unique to your subject.

CREATING AUTHENTIC EMOTION

Photographs that depict emotion have become my trademark. Before we get into flattering lighting and composition, let's focus on nailing a wonderful expression. Cultivating sensuality and sex appeal, as discussed earlier, is the first step in creating sensual movement. Coaching actions, the second step covered, is geared toward generating natural movement regardless of a woman's experience in front of a pro's camera.

Now, the third step puts the icing on the cake. This is how you ensure that each movement and emotion captured is authentic.

EMOTION IS IN HER EXPRESSION

Step one in creating authentic emotions is recognizing the real deal when you see it. You can always tell an authentic smile if it rings true in her eyes, as in FIGURE 2.12. Other emotions could get a bit trickier to suss out, but more often than not, you can feel authenticity by looking at her expression. Ask yourself: Is your subject connected to the moment and what's happening? More often than not, I feel more authentic emotion when a subject is looking down at her body, at the light source, or has her eyes closed rather than directly at the camera (FIGURES 2.13, 2.14, and 2.15). Although this is a matter of personal taste, I feel that eyes looking directly at the camera take the viewer out of the voyeuristic feel.

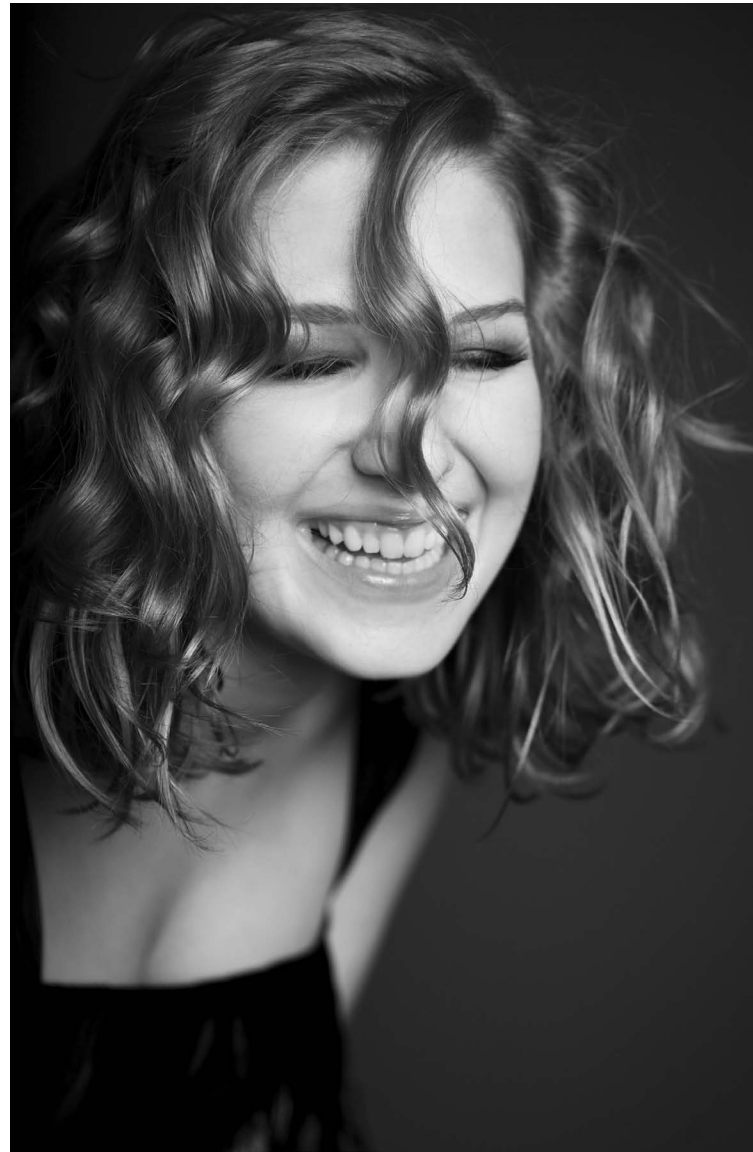


FIGURE 2.12 Shot in my Los Angeles studio with a young and curvy nonmodel. You can always tell real laughter when you see it. The curl over her face adds to the impromptu little giggle from a nervous subject whom I was just warming up. 24–70mm lens, ISO 100, f/2.8, 200 sec.



FIGURES 2.13–15 Shot with a nonmodel in New York. This woman was a bit nervous, so I started by asking her to let her hair down and mess it up, which prompted some real giggles, as in 2.13. Then I coached her to flirt over her shoulder, imagining her biggest crush (2.14). Well that provoked genuine laughter and blushing (2.15). It's up to you to direct, evoke, and select the genuine moments.

85mm lens, ISO 160, f/2, 100 sec.

TIP: CAPTURE REAL LAUGHTER

The more you laugh and crack yourself up, the more she laughs. Use her nervous energy to work for you. Tease your subject. Ask for fake laughter and it usually ends up in real laughter. Nobody can fake laugh without feeling like a total ass, so it always provokes real laughter from both of you. Just make sure you press the shutter while you're doubling over.

SHOOT THE IN-BETWEEN MOMENTS

Unplanned outtakes are awesome (FIGURE 2.16). That's the good stuff. When your client falls over or cracks up, make sure to capture it (FIGURE 2.17). Those are often the most beautiful, honest, and emotionally true moments. You can even try telling her that you're just shooting a light test so she drops her guard and can move and feel more truthfully.

Cultivating sex appeal, coaching natural movement, and creating authentic emotion is the essence of what boudoir is all about. Without these essential ingredients, your photographs will lack the sensuality that is the foundation of this genre. By sharing with your subjects the keys to sensual movement, you will not only bring out their best, but you'll bring out your best as well. It's so exciting and rewarding for both photographer and subject to experience a woman really opening up and enjoying herself and her body, as well as the shoot and resulting pictures.



FIGURE 2.16 The flower kept falling out of this woman's hair. Even though she was still prepping and wasn't ready, I grabbed this in between moment because of her joyfulness and authenticity.

50mm lens, ISO 400, f/3.2, 100 sec.



FIGURE 2.17 In a 30-minute mini-session shot in Italy with a 40-year-old nonmodel, I directed her to shake her hair from side to side. I asked her to do it again and again until she busted out laughing. Is the composition perfect? No. Do I love the emotion, spirit, and beauty in her and this picture despite that? Yes!

85mm lens, ISO 200, f/2.0, 1/60 sec.

ACTION PLAN: A CHEAT SHEET TO CREATE EMOTION

If your client is overwhelmed by nerves, can't relax, and is therefore unable to provide different emotions, here is an action plan:

1. Ask her to regroup and reconnect

Ask her, "Close your eyes, relax, breathe, and reconnect with yourself. Run your hands along your body and let it feel good." This action alone provokes loads of different emotions and great shots.

2. Get her moving a ton

Coach a series of actions to exhaust and annihilate her nervous energy. Have her jump up and down on the bed, twirl her skirt, flip her hair, and more until she laughs, which happens sometimes after only a few minutes.

3. Give her a prop

This will get her to immediately transfer her focus from herself to the prop. Often, women feel safer "hiding" behind a prop. Plus, playing with it is fun and can be silly, which is just what is needed to take the tension out of a situation.

4. Turn on some tunes

Music can make some women feel sexy in an instant. The type of music is up to her individual taste. Some women prefer slow and sultry, whereas others go for fast and funky. Try both, and choose the songs that will evoke the mood you are going for. Every woman should have a playlist of songs that make her feel instantly hot. Ask her to bring her tunes, and if she doesn't have any, give her the assignment of finding some. My current favorite playlists and recommendations are on my website, www.ChristaMeola.com/resources.

5. Change up the energy

Sometimes, the energy in the room just needs to change in order to effect a change in your model. I will sometimes have someone either enter or leave the room. For instance, I'll ask the makeup artist to come to the set to do a touch-up. Or conversely, if friends or assistants are present, have one exit to grab a cup of coffee so the energy in the room changes. Often, this is all that's needed to get the subject to relax.

6. Add the fan!

The fan is an absolute must-have on set. Okay, I admit this one is the biggest cheat. It's the most foolproof way to add emotion when all else fails. Turn a fan on, blow it toward your client, and watch the emotion pour out of her—or just look like it is. Try it. The fan creates motion and sensuality, even when sometimes it's not there.

7. Shoot body shots

If nothing you try is working, and your subject still won't give you anything but a stiff pose, try focusing on shooting body shots and details for a period of time. Wait until she gets more comfortable with you or you can show her a good shot on the back of your camera so she can breathe a sigh of relief and perhaps relax a bit more.

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