



I would love to concoct some frightful tale of light bulbs exploding, chickens flying, cats scurrying, and trying to remember where the fire extinguishers are, but in the interest of self-preservation, I want to make it abundantly clear that I created this shot in a very safe, controlled environment. No cats, chickens, groundhogs, furniture, or martini glasses were harmed during this production. Light bulbs? Well, now, about that. It's possible that a few light bulbs gave their lives in pursuit of this image.

Hopefully, this makes up for the candles, notepads, and aluminum foil. I wish I could take credit for the idea, but I saw a photo of it online and then researched how to shoot it. As soon as I saw the photo, I knew I had to get my own shot.

Did you know a lightbulb filament would burn like this? I didn't. And the fact that it burns in colors makes it even more fascinating. An incandescent light bulb works because the filament is encased in a vacuum, so there isn't any oxygen for the fire. But if you could somehow break the seal on that vacuum without breaking the filament, voilà!

The trick is breaking the seal without breaking the filament. Wearing a full face shield and leather gloves, I held the bulb in one hand, while tapping it with a hammer. As you might imagine, I went through several bulbs before I got one that worked.

This is a 250-watt bulb, which produces more fire than a standard household bulb. I screwed it into a closet fixture I had in the shop and set it up on my acrylic light table with a sheet of black fabric draped over it. The single flashlight is clipped onto the edge of the

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table, shining at an angle.

Obviously, there are no do overs with a shot like this, so I was very careful to make sure everything was set up properly. I did a test fire on a smaller bulb to help nail it down. The shutter advance was set to continuous high, and I used a corded shutter release so I didn't have to touch the camera.

I ran an extension cord to the tripod. The plan was to hold the shutter release in my left hand and the extension cord in the right. Then I took the lamp cord with my left hand, still holding the shutter release, and plugged into extension cord. I had to press the shutter release almost immediately after the lamp came on, since an exposed filament burns up in only a couple seconds.

Remarkably, and to my great delight considering that I didn't have any more 250-watt bulbs, everything worked perfectly and I got three frames that had nice flames.

One thing I would do differently next time is plug the lamp cord into something that has a switch, like a strip outlet. That would make it easier to turn it on and press the shutter release at the same time.

Specifications

Gear: Tripod, Nikon D780, Nikon 70-180mm at 70mm, flashlight, LightClip.

Exposure: f/11, ISO 400, 1/250 second.

Post Processing: Stacked the three frames as layers, changed the blend mode to Lighten, and applied basic adjustments.