Architectural light in CGI

Creative standpoint:

- Natural (atmospheric)

- Artificial (fixtures, Studio setup,..)

- Any mix possible in CGI (two suns..)

Technical standpoint:

- Analytical [Direct, Area, Point, Systems (sun/sky)]

- Image based [HDRi]

- Any mix of above possible

Best results comes from starting as simple as possible

- Most of my (daylight) scenes are lit by single light source, analytical Sun/Sky system, or image based HDRi environment. Covers 90 perc. of our portfolio

- Single light source = 1000 possible looks

- I only add additional lights once I have very specific look in mind that's not achievable simply.

- I first add these lights emulating reality as we know it, placing them in fixtures, in studio setup (reflectors, barn doors, soft boxes, etc..)

- Only as last option and scarcely, I use "fake" light sources, invisible area and point lights if I didn't get desirable result others or if situation requires

Simple can be very robust

Instead of needlessly going for complex scenario, it's better to get the most out of single light's quality:

- Overall brightness/intensity and color

- Directionality (affects ratio between direct and indirect; size, tone and softness of shadows; defines shapes, textures, specular reflections and overall readability of the scene

I always see lot of people ignore it and just 'drag'n'drop' premade default solution and expect unique look out of the box. Default Sun/Sky, random PeterG's HDRi,

Etc.. Lazy approach. It shows.

No best magical solution, everything is pretty equal

Needless fishing for 'Holy Grail' of lighting in CGI, answer is, 'solution depends'

Analytical vs Image Based (HDRi)

Analytical:

- As simple as it gets. Create default Sun/Sky system

- Plenty of flexibility (Bigger Sun=Softer shadows, Weaker Sun= More diffuse lighting

- Covers 90perc. of daylight situations, from Dawn/Dusk through Happy midday to fully diffused overcast

IBL(HDRi):

- Single, simple to use, 'All in one' package (light, reflections, background, environment,.)

- Weaker flexibility (need to adjust in external application, but then offers benefits)

- Covers 100perc. of all imaginable scenarios (Daylight, Nightime, Studio, Space, etc..)

I use equally both, depending on conditions, neither provides better 'visual' quality as other