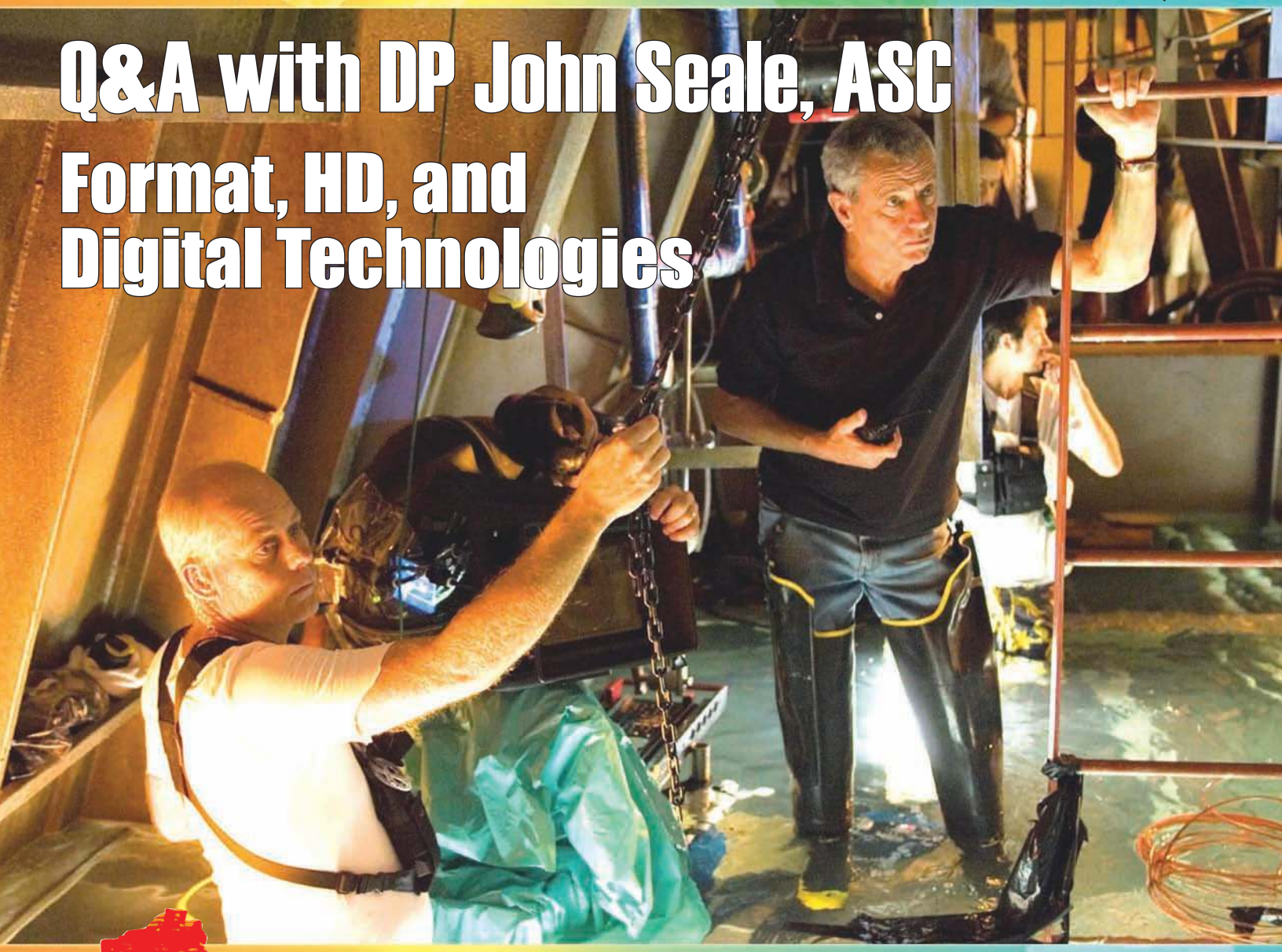
April 2008

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Q&A with DP John Seale, ASC

Format, HD, and Digital Technologies





Day-for-Night: Here's How It Works

Shoot Cinematically, Regardless of Format

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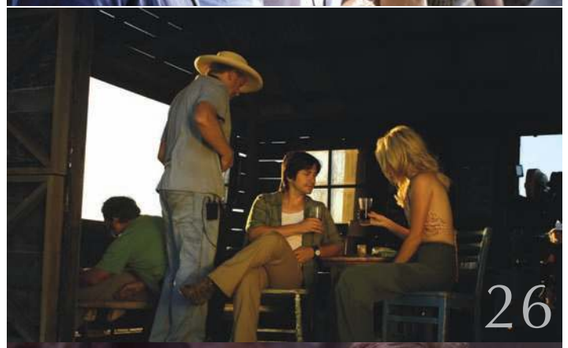
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Table of Contents April 2008









Cinematography
6 Day-for-Night: Here's How It Works by Ira Tiffen
8 Digital Cinematography: Shoot Cinematically, Regardless of Format by Kevin Burke
10 Five Techniques for Creating a 'Film Look' when Shooting Video by Anthony Q. Artis

Lighting
12 Lighting Period War Film, *Shades of Hope* by Kevin Zanit
17 Involving your Gaffer by Frank DiPaola

Close-Up
20 A Conversation with Cinematographer John Seale, ASC
Format and Digital Technologies
by Jacqueline B. Frost
26 *Bottle Shock*: *Independent Spirit in Full Bloom*
by Mary Ann Skweres

Directing
24 Developing the Common Language between a Director and DP by Adam Matalon
30 Composing the Frame: Let There Be Light by David K. Irving

Production
34 Planning is Key to Creativity and Success by Myrl Schreibman

Screenwriting
36 A Hero's Place in Parables and Legends by Dana Dorrity

Actor's Perspective
38 A Quick, Mini Guide to Running Efficient, Effortless Auditions
by Vanessa Daniels

Music & Sound
40 Audio for Television: Mixing the Basic "Event"
by Fred Ginsburg C.A.S., Ph.D., MBKS

Tech Focus
42 The Digital Stereoscopic Renaissance by Michael Karp, SOC

Film Business
46 Starting Your Own e-Media Business by George Avgerakis
50 Putting On a World Premiere by Sam Kauffmann
52 Planning the Workflow of Your Next Production
by Leonard Guercio

Filmmakers Networking
56 This Month's Featured Networkers

Event Preview
51 StudentFilmmakers Magazine NAB 2008 Best Choice

On the Cover
(Far right) DP John Seale, ASC, ACS on the set of *Poseidon.*

Photo by Claudette Barius SMPSP
Special Thanks to Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.



This month in Las Vegas, Nevada, *StudentFilmmakers* magazine will be celebrating its anniversary in exhibit booth C10105 at the 2008 NAB Show with this edition of the #1 Educational Resource for Film and Video Makers. I hope you can join us. I will be at our booth on the show floor opening day of exhibits if you would like to stop by and say hello.

A lot of love, passion, and hard work goes into the production of the *StudentFilmmakers* magazines and so it did with this 25th Issue, Anniversary Edition. I am sure you will find this issue insightful and an inspiration.

Please welcome our new contributing writers Kevin Burke ("Digital Cinematography: Shoot Cinematically, Regardless of Format," page 8); and Frank DiPaola ("Involving your Gaffer," page 19). Read all the great articles in the Cinematography and Lighting Departments.

And, in this time of unprecedented digital changes in cinematography, our cover story, "A Conversation with Cinematographer John Seale, ASC: Format and Digital Technologies," (page 20) by Jacqueline B. Frost is a must-read for all levels of filmmakers. Also, be sure to read, "The Digital Stereoscopic Renaissance" (page 42) by Michael Karp, SOC; "Audio for Television: Mixing the Basic 'Event' (page 40) by Fred Ginsburg C.A.S.; and "Planning the Workflow of Your Next Production: A Backwards Look at the Planning Process," (page 52) by Leonard Guercio.

Of course all of the articles are great and as you read this, you might be trekking the NAB show floor. Enjoy and learn from this fascinating edition, and explore all of the new and changing technologies exhibited on the show floor. Be sure to visit (and give a shout out) to the NAB exhibitors whose technologies are the "*StudentFilmmakers* Magazine NAB 2008 Best Choice."

Upcoming events to mark your calendars for include Hi Def Expo 2008 to take place June 5th in Chicago, Illinois. And, we look forward to meeting you again at the UFVA Conference, which will take place this year in Colorado Springs, Colorado, August 12 through 16, 2008.

Truly,
Kim E. Welch
Publisher/Editor-in-Chief

studentfilmmakers

The # 1 Educational Resource for Film and Video Makers

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BPA WORLDWIDE

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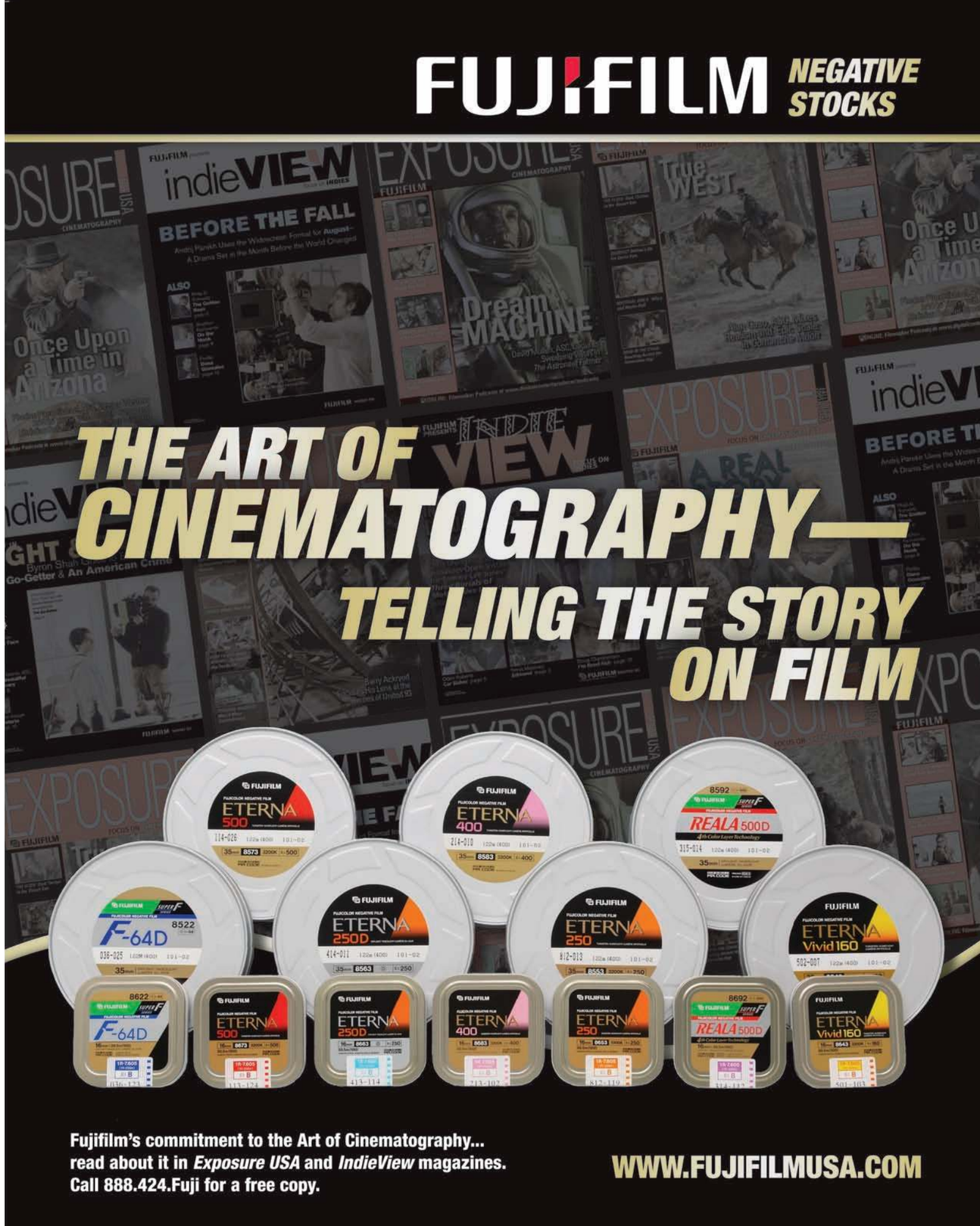
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Day-for-Night: Here's How It Works

DFN Filter FX

by Ira Tiffen

It happens that we sometimes need to capture action that occurs at night. The general lack of light, and the need to somehow provide more, becomes especially difficult when the area in view is too large to readily illuminate artificially. Long ago (in cinematic years) a technique called Day-for-Night (DFN) was conceived to assist in these situations.

The idea for DFN centers on the fact that it *is* dark at night and that this can be visually approximated by underexposing about two stops. From there, different paths emerge. Today, we will address one that has seen use in many productions. It involves using a DFN filter with a blue hue to it.

Here's how it works. The underexposure reduces the luminance level to simulate night. Now, we are psychologically inclined to consider nighttime, after the warm sun goes down, as having a relatively cooler temperature than daytime. In addition, we are also so inclined to consider 'blue' suggestive of a cooler temperature than any other hue. So, by connecting the two inclinations, you can see how we can successfully simulate moonlight with both underexposure and the introduction of blue.

Effective DFN depends on other things to keep in mind. The features of the image should also fit our conception of what you can (and can't) see at night. An important example: unless you can significantly darken the sky with a polarizer or a graduated filter, leave it out of your image – a bright sky is a sure way to destroy the effect.

The light source should preferably emulate moonlight, or sometimes streetlamps or other night-friendly sources. For moonlight, the more frequently-used approach, you want to have a single point of primary light, as if it was coming from that small white disc in the sky. Fortunately, bright sunlight can do this quite well.

Use the light to provide enough detail, as in the bark on the tree trunks in the DFN image shown, to give depth and positioning cues to the audience, but without revealing more than would seem appropriate with nighttime; there are dense featureless pools of darkness as well. One benefit of DFN is that there *is* light available over a wide area, but don't show too much of it – just enough is just right.

The two images were taken moments apart, and the filter, which absorbs about two stops by itself, was not compensated for, thus providing the underexposure needed.

There are other roads to effective DFN; we'll get to them another time.

Photos taken by the author.

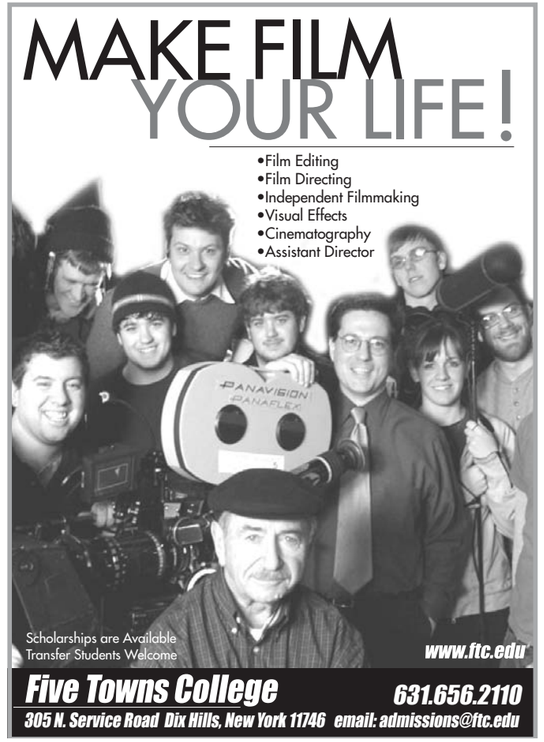
Day-for-Night filter.



No filter.



In over 30 years of making optical filters, Ira Tiffen created the Pro-Mist, Soft/FX, Ultra Contrast, GlimmerGlass, and others, netting him both a Technical Achievement Award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and a Prime-Time Emmy Award. Elected a Fellow of the SMPTE in 2002, he is also an Associate member of the ASC, and the author of the filter section of the *American Cinematographer Manual*.



Digital Cinematography:
Shoot Cinematically, Regardless of Format

Contrast Control, Optics, and Color Correction

by Kevin Burke

Stop Worrying and Love Video

Growing up, I wanted to be Vilmos Zsigmond. I went to film school when everyone I knew was looking to become lawyers and stockbrokers. It was the eighties. Fax machines were still fascinating inventions. Editors still cut movies on a Steenbeck. Back then, video was mostly used for TV news and sitcoms, and it seemed to produce only ugly, flat pictures. Most of the film crowd I went to school with thumbed their noses at it.

My major required that I take a few video classes, so I took a course in experimental video (I remember thinking what an oxymoron that was). I'm really glad I did, though, because I was introduced to the work of guys like Nam June Paik and Bill Viola, and I started to really appreciate what you could do with the medium. In the right hands, video is actually delicate, visceral, and downright beautiful. Best of all, it's really cheap.

You're probably reading this article because you want to know how to make video look like film. Let that notion go. These days, video images rival those shot on film. What we're really after is how to shoot cinematically, regardless of format.

There are three important items to think about when shooting video—contrast, optics, and color correction.

Contrast Control

Video still doesn't have as much *dynamic range* (sometimes called *exposure latitude*) as film, meaning that highlights will blow out and shadow areas will go black much quicker for video than for film. Still, *both* mediums require that you, the DP, control the contrast in a shot.

Here's a typical example. An actor is sitting in a dark room, her back to a bright window. Your director wants to see the actor's face *and* the big oak tree that's outside the window. A spot meter reading on the actor's face reads f2.8, but the light coming through the window reads f11. That's a four stop difference! If you expose for your actor at f2.8, the window will blow out, and you won't see a tree, just blaring white haze.

Vice versa, if you stop down on the iris (from f2.8 to f16) and expose for the tree, your actor becomes a silhouette. How will you see the expressions on her face?

With video, I always look to control the brightest part of the shot, because once you blow out, you can't get detail back, and you might not be broadcast legal. Also, I think it's always better to underexpose your video overall by a ¼ stop—you'll have a denser image and can more easily pull your levels up in post during color correction. More on that dangerous statement in the last section.

First off, set your stop at f.4/5.6 (right in the middle). Put some neutral density gel on the outside of the window (.6), and maybe warm it up with some 1/2 CTS (straw). Lovely. You've just taken the window light down by about 1 and1/3 stops.

Give your actor a nice key light, and bring her face up to an f.4. She'll be a ½ stop underexposed, while your window light is about 1 and 1/2 stops overexposed; it's hot, but you'll have detail. You've compressed your subject contrast from *four* stops to *two*. Sweet!

Optics

Lenses are the most important part of making an image, so don't think the cheap ENG lens (or worse, the fixed auto focus lens) on



HD Clear Soft Effects Filters offer perfect softening with a minimal loss of detail and contrast.
These filters allow light to pass through mostly undisturbed, however, a small part of the surface area of the filter has a series of tiny perfect hemispheres acting as small, high quality planar convex lenses. These hemispheres defocus the light, producing a slight softening of the image within a very small area of view. The filters soften facial images perfectly, even in the harsh conditions encountered when shooting HD.

HD Soft Gold Enhancing Filter offer a subtle softening of the image with skin tone enhancing.
This refractive filter uses the latest developments in camera filter material technology to soften outlines, enhance flesh tones and remove facial blemishes without distortion. Tiny particles within the skin tone enhancing matrix bounce incoming light onto the reverse face of the glass filter. Total internal reflection projects light into the camera lens, refracted by the glass, thus softening and enhancing the tone of the image without losing contrast or creating a strong color shift. Available in grades 1, 2 and 3.

Also available: HD Supersoft Gold Enhancer for the ultimate softening and skin tone enhancing.
Supersoft Gold filters combine the softening effect of the HD Clear Soft Effect Filter with the subtle softening and warming of the Soft Gold Enhancing Filter. The result is the ultimate in facial enhancement producing a very soft image with enhanced skin tones and removal of hard lines and blemishes. The standard filter provides a HD Clear Soft Effect grade 3 with the Soft Gold Enhancer grades 1, 2 or 3. (Other combinations are available upon special request)

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your camera is good enough for the task. If you're shooting a film, you need to step up to better optics. If the budget allows, rent (or borrow) a set of video primes. They are sharper and faster than a standard ENG zoom lens. Definitely not cheap, but your finished film will look noticeably better.

The first thing I do with the set is put away the 9mm lens and never use it, unless I'm tight for space or I want a wide look. Video has way more depth of field than 35 film (it's closer to 16mm), and this lens will produce a very static look with little depth. I like the 24mm for master shots, and the 35mm for medium and over the shoulder shots, because the reduced depth of field those lenses produce separates the actors from the background. The right lens can make a nice shot spectacular.

Color Correction

Color correction is not for hiding your mistakes! Use the monitor when you're shooting, and get it right the first time. Color correction should be called *color timing*, because it's essentially the same procedure as timing an answer print with film. Your job is not complete until you finish this part, and it's the last thing you do after the picture is locked. Here, you polish the look you started to create during production.

Every non-linear edit system has color correction software (Apple's *Color*, for instance), and there are high end (and expensive) systems for doing digital intermediates from film (like the *Spirit 2k*) that are usually housed in fancy post houses, where for hundreds of dollars an hour you can tweak to your heart's delight (or to the limitations of your budget). Get to know how these systems work, even if you never use them. The more you understand about the process, the better. It's your job. Read. Google. Wiki. Take a DP out to lunch—they all like to eat.

Kevin Burke is a twice Emmy-nominated cinematographer (Disney's *The Book of Pooh*, 2001; *Sesame Street*, 2005). His work as a director of photography includes *It's a Big, Big World* and *Seemore's Playhouse* (both airing on PBS); as well as new installments for *Sesame Beginnings* home video series, which Kevin served as co-producer and DP. His camera work has been seen on the Sci-Fi Channel, ABC, ESPN, PBS, the History Channel, Nickelodeon, several film festivals, and in theatres near you.

Five Techniques for Creating a 'Film Look' when Shooting Video

by Anthony Q. Artis

(1) Shoot with a 24P Camera
This is probably the single easiest thing you could do to get that elusive film look. Basically these cameras shoot video at 24 frames per second (fps) or electronically mimic 24 fps, which is the same speed that film runs. (Normal video is shot at 30 fps.) Those few extra frames can make all the difference in the world. 24P prosumer cameras are very capable of delivering a great film look right out of the box when set in their 24P modes. Better yet, you can go 24P and HD with the newest generation of HDV cameras.

(2) Light It Like Film
Just because a camera is capable of shooting in low light does not mean that it shoots the best images in low light. A *big* part of the reason film looks better than video is the lighting. Avoid low-light situations when possible and use professional lighting gear for controlled setups.

(3) Shoot with a Telephoto Lens or Use a 35mm Adapter
You can rent or buy special adapters that will allow you to use professional 35mm lenses (as in the same lenses used for 35mm film) on your camera. These lenses offer much greater depth of field than the standard prosumer video lens. Beautiful, crisp professional lenses and greater depth of field translates into a more filmic look for any footage.

(4) Use Filters
There is an entire arsenal of filters that can enhance the look of your DV footage to appear more like those beautiful frames of film. The most common are 1/4 and 1/2 Black Pro Mist Filters, Warming/Enhancing Filters, Polarizing Filters, and Fog FX Filters.

(5) Use Film Look Software in Post
There are several different software programs and NLE plug-ins out there that will allow you to apply a film look to video footage in post-production. Programs such as Magic Bullet (an After Effects plug-in), Tiffen DFX Digital Filter FX, and most-recently Color, which now comes bundled with Final Cut Pro, all allow you to use a variety of preset film looks that mimic different film stocks and/or film post-production processes or customize your own film look.

Anthony Artis (prn. Ant-ny Art-iss) is a veteran guerrilla filmmaker, television producer, and author of the "The Shut Up and Shoot Documentary Guide" (Focal Press, September 2007). He is also the host of the Down and Dirty DV podcast on iTunes and CEO of the guerrilla filmmaking website, DownAndDirtyDV.com.

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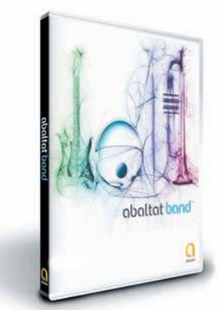


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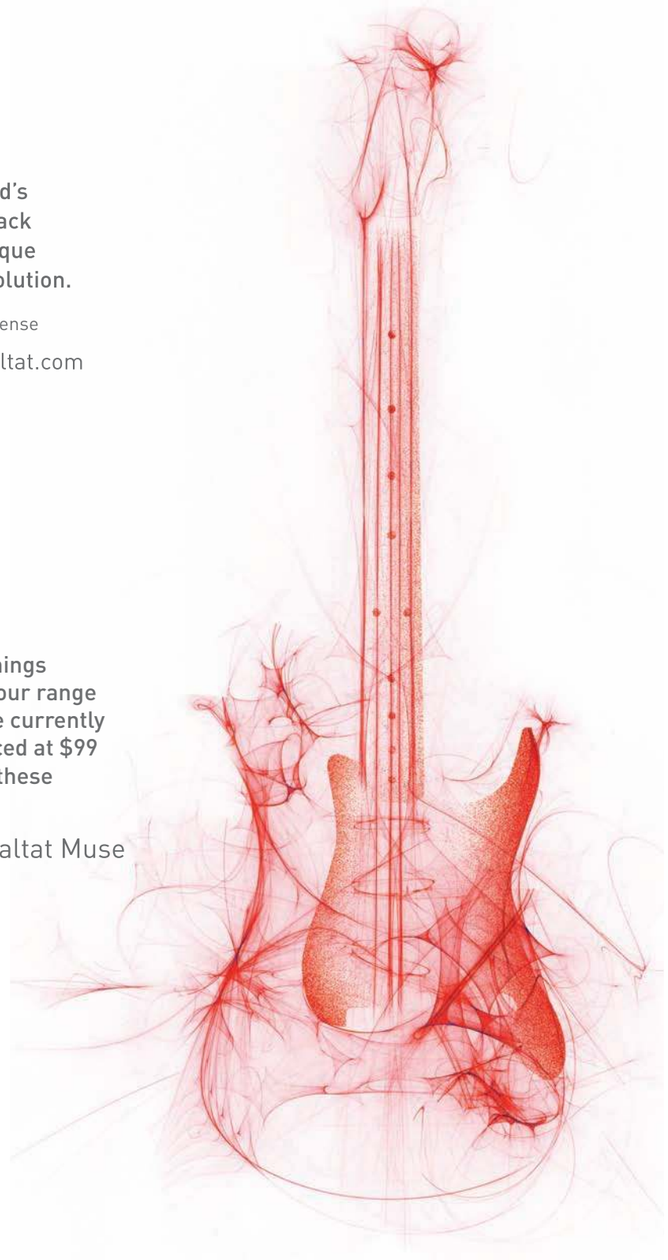


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