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LOCATION UPDATE

The Magazine of Film & Video Production

Partners in Production: *The future look of film*

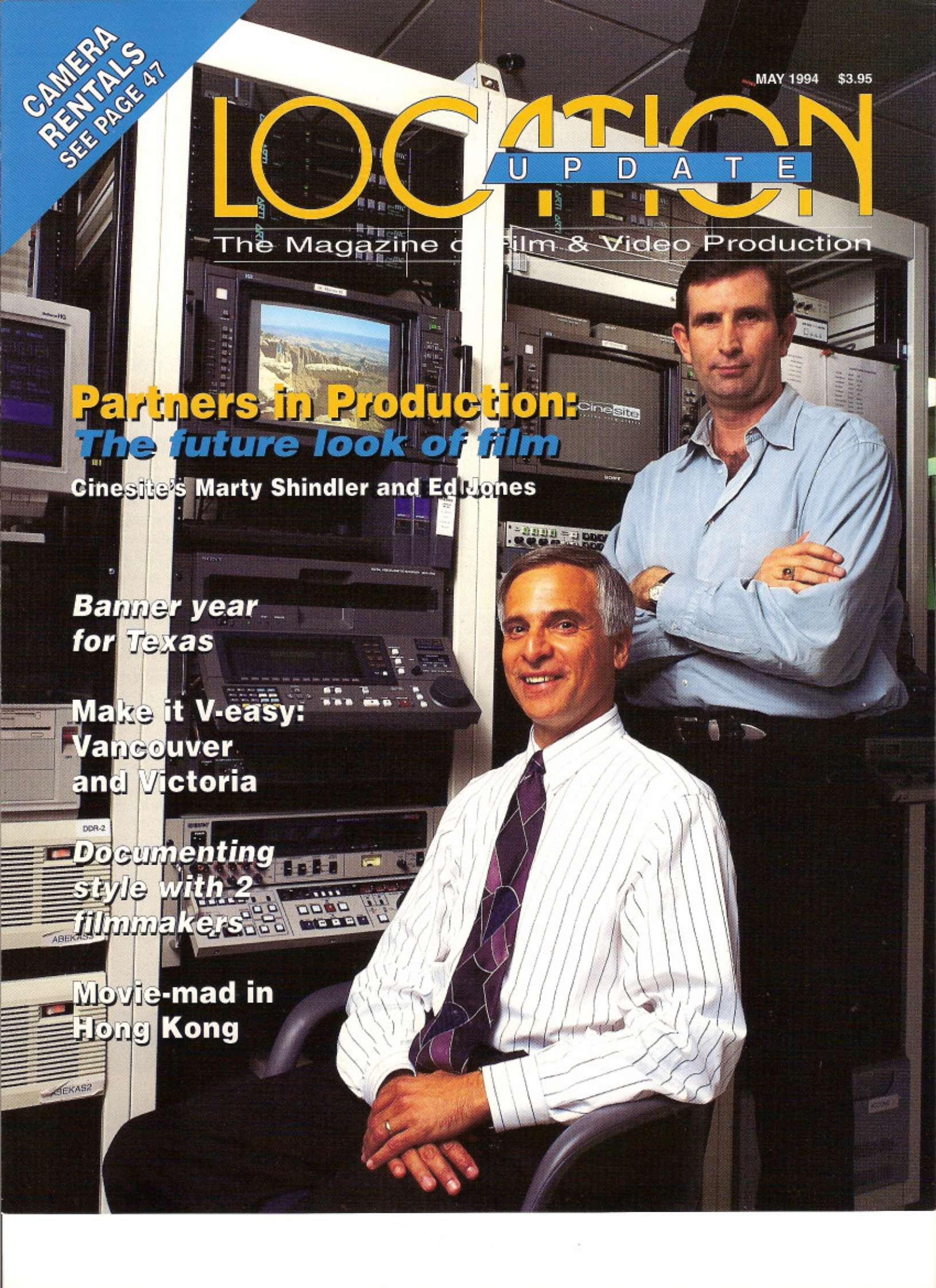
Cinesite's Marty Shindler and Ed Jones

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After relocating its world headquarters, the film center offers "one-stop shopping" — with scanning, recording, digital image manipulation, 2D, 3D, restoration and wire removal.

Cinesite Digital Film Center, which opened its doors a year and a half ago, has quickly built its reputation as one of the most sophisticated and efficient digital imaging centers for feature film work in Hollywood. Below, Cinesite President Ed Jones and Vice President Marty Shindler discuss the company's growing role in the burgeoning "Digital Hollywood."

Bring us up to date on what's been going on at Cinesite in the last few months.

Ed Jones: First of all, we've moved from Burbank to our new world headquarters in the heart of Hollywood. Now we're in a facility specifically designed for us. We're also in a complex with the Kodak Motion Picture TV Group Marketing and Distribution departments, the PRO-TEK Vault and FPC, another Kodak company. We've got all the services a Hollywood cinematographer, producer or director would want in one central site.

Cinesite has expanded several aspects of our post services since January. We have been doing 2D work for months, and now we've formally opened our 3D studio, with several really talented people on board who have a great deal of experience and a lot of creative ideas about how to generate great images and perhaps solve some of the challenges of production.

The anchors are Sean Schur, who joined us from Metro-light Studios, and Derek Spears, who came from Silicon Graphics Inc. We expect to utilize our 3D capabilities, especially in support of 2D work, more and more as that market continues to grow.

We're also up and running on Kodak's new Cineon 65mm scanner, which gives that group of filmmakers all the tools that have been commonplace for years in the 35mm arena. With new owners at IMAX, for example, the range in the type of products being produced industry-wide is going to expand considerably, and we are well positioned to assist.

And soon we will have the Eastman Exchange in house, so producers can take a look at many different locations when deciding where to "shoot" desired scenes.

Overall, we've continued to build our capabilities with the digital backlot, which allows producers to realize scripts

that were previously impossible to produce.

We've also had some really interesting projects in house that really illustrate how Cinesite's creative talent works with great technology to satisfy our customers. Recently, we turned around 37 green screen shots for a film that is soon to be released — the team did a tremendous job in about 10 days. We also are completing several shots using the new 3D department.

And we have been successful in bringing a wonderful new marquee film project in house — I can't reveal it just yet but it will allow us to use both our 2D and 3D capabilities to do really innovative work.

When will you have the Eastman Exchange location service available? Who will use it?

Jones: We just brought Eastman Exchange in-house a few days ago. Now we can tap into an online database to view locations from all over the world. We also can get all kinds of information about the location, including what kinds of productions have been shot there. The service is for anyone involved in the production process — producers, directors and cinematographers who want to take a look at a location and get the full rundown of what's possible to do there.

Won't the "digital backlot" and the Eastman Exchange, coupled with access to stock footage libraries, bring down the number of location shoots and limit the creativity of cinematography?

Marty Shindler: Not at all. In fact, I think a digital backlot only gives producers more options. Our ability to temporize and combine stock footage allows filmmakers to shoot films that were impossible or too expensive to produce not too long ago. I don't think anything will ever take the place of real location shooting, but Cinesite offers creative alternatives for filmmakers who don't have the resources to ship their production crew to Australia or China for a few shots.

Eastman Exchange and the stock footage houses we work with are just more tools we can use to produce the best shot possible within the resource constraints everyone is up against.

Lots of our customers are already enthusiastic about this digital backlot. It lets them fine tune their original photogra-

Cinesite: Hollywood

phy by making adjustments in contrast and colors at a digital workstation. It also gives them the option of testing different backgrounds and locations to gauge how they affect the overall complexion of their work. I don't foresee a future when a director would hire a cinematographer to light and shoot a film, and then have a digital workstation operator second-guess their decisions.

So you don't think digital will limit Hollywood?

Jones: On the contrary, I think digital technology will help expand the film industry. As production becomes more digital, we can help bring the cost of production down so that money could be used to fund more films.

What about on the creative side?

Jones: Creatively, we're opening up a lot of avenues and breaking down a lot of barriers that limited cinematographers in the past. I believe filmmaking will become a more collaborative process with the evolution of this technology. It's not just a question of gathering people — the director, cinematographer and production designer, for example — around a workstation monitor and manipulating or compositing images in an interactive environment. It's a matter of using this technology to stimulate the imagination.

What's the best way for producers to work with Cinesite?

Jones: We like directors and visual effects supervisors to come to us when they are still in the idea stage, so we can walk them through the facility and give them all the creative options to help them achieve the vision they have for their film or commercial. We want them to think of Cinesite as the home of "one-stop shopping" — as a digital film center that has all the capabilities they require — scanning, recording, digital image manipulation, 2D, 3D, restoration and wire removal.

Cinesite also can work globally, given our London office and growing European presence. Whatever the digital need, we can fulfill it.

We recently won a large job where we worked very closely with the visual effects supervisor on a test to determine the best look for a shot. Then we worked through all the possible technical difficulties that might arise — things that if not solved, would have caused the picture to be dropped. We sorted out those problems, as well as others that they hadn't anticipated, and now the project is getting under way.

Shindler: We often fix things that must be turned around really fast and efficiently.

This includes fixing selected shots — and film trailers — to assist in last-minute ratings issues. When we are involved in the early stages of the process we can help minimize these types of problems, however, we seem to always turn out high-quality work on deadline even when we're under enormous pressure.

What are the major growth areas for your business?

Jones: On the feature film front, Hollywood is just beginning to understand what we can do. And from what I've seen come across my desk in the last six months, a lot of people are getting excited about the potential Cinesite offers them — cinematographers and visual effects supervisors are thinking bigger, wilder and finding out that we can make what they thought was impossible a reality.

Incorporating old footage into new productions will continue to grow. With Eastman Exchange and our relationship with big stock footage houses, I think we'll see this type of work expand in the next few years.

Theme park rides and location-based entertainment (or LBE) are on the upswing as well. We've seen a great deal of interest for this type of wide-screen format work, and we envision LBE will grow significantly within the next few years. If you look at what's going on in Las Vegas and New Orleans — we did some work for the Luxor hotel — you'll see evidence of this.

Shindler: Another area that is beginning to understand digital technology is the insurance industry. Insurance people are starting to see us as a godsend in terms of preventing hefty insurance claims for production companies. Instead of reshooting a scene because of a scratched negative, sick or injured actor or a destroyed set, we can digitally eliminate the problem and salvage the shot.

How do you feel about artists' concerns regarding digital image manipulation?

Jones: This was the topic of many discussions at the Artists Rights Symposium in Los Angeles at the end of April, and it will continue to be an important issue as digital film technology develops. I think the most important thing to discuss is how digital technology can be used in an ethical way. We need to understand how the medium of digital imaging, whether for preservation or manipulation, can be utilized to enhance storytelling. We have to be responsible for what we do. The Artists Rights Symposium is a great vehicle for expressing what laws, rules, regulations or standards we are all comfortable with, if not agreed upon. We look forward to continuing to support the movement. ■

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