

Academy Honors Rosco Backdrops

At this year's A.M.P.A.S. Scientific and Technical Awards ceremony in March, Phil Greenstreet was honored by the Academy for the concept and development of the Roscolight Day/Night Backdrop.

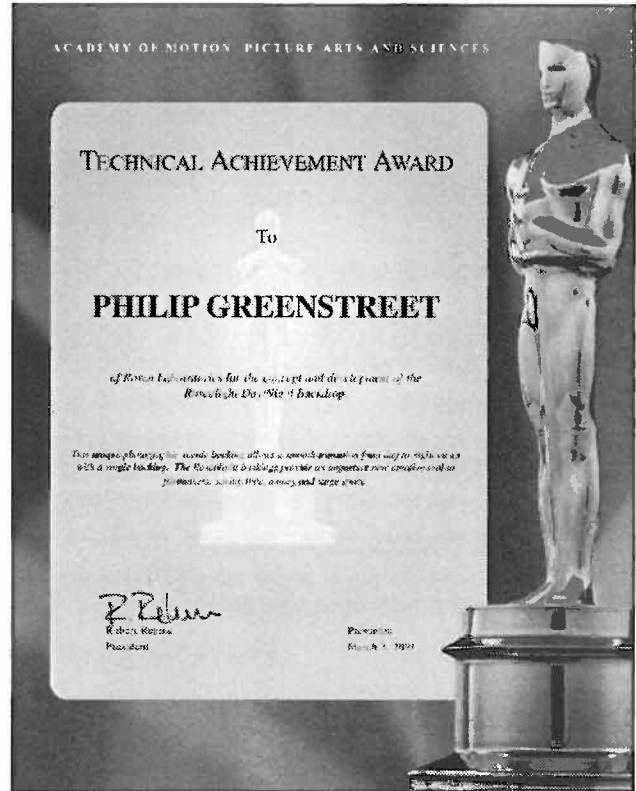
The citation reads "This unique photographic scenic backing allows a smooth transition from day to night views with a single backing. The Roscolight backings provide an important new creative tool to filmmakers, saving time, money and stage space". This marks the first time in over 50 years that the Academy has recognized a development in scenic backdrop technology.

During the ceremony a short video illustrating the use of a Roscolight was shown and the transition from day to night elicited a collective "Ahh!" from the audience of leading industry engineers. Clips for the video were provided by "Changing Lanes", "The Practice", "Family Law" and "Once and Again".

In accepting the award, Phil said, "I'd especially like to thank all of the many Art Directors and Cameramen who have supported us over the years, particularly Paul Eads and Michael Corenblith who got the ball rolling. Thanks also to Vittorio Storaro, who drew the drops to the attention of his fellow Cinematographers." He also thanked his father "who showed me that it's okay to be an engineer *and* an artist".

Rosco created the first computer painted day/night drops in 1993 for the television series "NYPD Blue". These were closely followed by a Roscolite produced for the feature film "Apollo 13". Since then, Rosco backdrops have been used in hundreds of shows, spread over four continents.

This represents the fourth time that Rosco Laboratories has been honored by the Academy. Previous winners include Jim Meyer for CalColor® filters and Stan Miller for Rosco Fog Fluid.



Phil Greenstreet holds a B.Sc. in Physics from Imperial College, London, and a Diploma in Computing from Hatfield University. An accomplished photographer, Phil shoots many of the images which are digitally manipulated to create the Roscolight backdrop.

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Photography Q&A

Some common questions regarding Rosco photography.

Q: What camera format do you recommend?

A: 4" x 5" or 8" x 10" transparencies are good. However, we really like the Fuji GX617 camera. The 6cm x 17cm (2.25" x 7") format is excellent for backdrops, and the use of 120 or 220 roll film makes the shoot go much more smoothly.

Q: Transparencies? Don't translight guys usually shoot negatives?

A: Back in the last century, yes. However, since Rosco has always produced their drops digitally, we prefer transparencies. They yield much more information to the scanner.

Q: So what kind of film do you suggest?

A: We generally shoot Kodak Ektachrome E100 VS. The grain structure is good, and the highly saturated colors look great. We find it is easier to remove saturation in the Mac than to add it – you sometimes get some strange effects showing up if you have to boost saturation.

Q: Can I take my own photographs?

A: Absolutely! We can fax you over a list of instructions.

Q: Will there be any extra charge for that?

A: Generally, no. However, be advised that the use of photographers unfamiliar with day/night drops can lead to extra retouching charges if they don't follow the instructions.

Q: I know a really good professional photographer we can use. He's a real artist.

A: They are often the worst. Find a competent technician instead.

Q: So what makes for a good Day/Night shot?

A: Shoot early and shoot often. If possible, try to get the morning "Golden Hour" shot. That way you have a good "Shadow Neutral" shot, regardless of how sunny the day gets. Make sure to get your tilt-ups and other peripheral shots in as shadowless conditions as possible. Then point the camera at the main image of interest, and lock it off for the rest of the day. Don't even change the aperture.

Q: You mean don't move it?

A: Especially don't move it! Bring a good book – you are there for the duration.

Q: Couldn't you just shoot the evening Magic Hour?

A: Yes, but starting early offers the opportunity to capture maybe five different "daylight" looks. Plus, if you make a mistake you still have the evening as a fall back.

Q: Why is it so important to lock off the camera?

A: Because that way it is so much easier to align the day and night images, eliminating costly overruns on retouching time.

Q: So how much do you charge to shoot these things?

A: The price for a shoot where Rosco gets to keep the imagery is \$1000 per day, plus \$250 per camera per day. We pay for film and processing, and agree not to re-use the images while your show is still in production. The production company pays for transportation, accommodation, per diem, and other expenses.

Q: Suppose we want exclusive rights to the images?

A: Then the fee is \$2000.00 per day and you pay for film and processing.

Q: So presumably you have a large stock of images available?

A: Yes. We generally charge \$500 usage fee per drop for stock images (even if we use more than one to make the drop).

Q: How come all this seems so much cheaper than the other guys?

A: Because we charge less than they do.

Changing Lanes



Production Designer: Kristi Zea, Director of Photography: Sal Totino, Art Director: Steve Graham

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...

Initially it seemed like just another inquiry, one of the many which Rosco receives each day. Art Director Steve Graham needed pricing information for a day/night backdrop, including the shoot. Then it became a most unusual inquiry...the drop would be twenty eight feet high by three hundred and sixty nine feet long, a 270 degree wraparound for a large set to be built in the Marcy Street Armory in Brooklyn.

This 10,332 sq. ft. behemoth became the largest day/night backdrop Rosco had ever produced. The shoot from the top of 450 Lexington in Manhattan required dealing with eight cameras, but this was only the first of several daunting challenges:

Challenge #1. The Pan Am building was in the way. Fixed digitally by moving a section of the East River to double for the Hudson.

Challenge #2. The Chrysler Building. Only the "boring bits" were in the shot. Fixed digitally by moving the gargoyles captured by a tilt-up shot and altering their perspective.

Challenge #3. Handling 10,000+ sq. ft. of reinforced PVC. Fixed by painting the drop in four pieces which were assembled on stage.

Challenge #4. Painting and delivery schedule. Digitalizing and processing of the image was performed by computer artists at Rosco Digital Imaging working staggered shifts through several days. Painting was done on several drums, each producing panels up to 16 feet by 60 feet, thus ensuring on-time delivery.

Challenge #5. When assembled and hung there were tinting issues in some areas and windows. Painters applied mist coats of tinted Rosco flat acrylic, and created a "liquid filter" to use where needed.

Challenge #6. Monolithic appearance of a large black foreground building. Fixed by cutting out the building and replacing it with one altered in Photoshop.

The Final Result. The backdrop was completed on time and on budget to the satisfaction of Production Designer Kristi Zea. In fact, the work was so successful that the production company decided to retain the use of the backdrop for their next feature, "Marcie X."

roscoworld

Ivan Dorado at Rosco Mexico, working closely with the Hollywood office, now offers the full range of Rosco products to local production companies including both custom and rental backdrops.

Ian Baseby of Rosco Australia has a small number of rental backdrops in stock for film and television use.

Stephen Spendiff of Rosco Toronto, already a competent photographer, is being trained in the techniques of Rosco-style backdrop photography. This will enable us to more easily provide this service to the Canadian market. A former scenic painter, Stephen also has a solid understanding of traditional backdrop composition.

Gordon Tomkins of Rosco London is starting to build a rental stock at our Sydenham facility. Production rental backdrops created for UK productions may now be returned to this office in order to minimize saving on shipping costs on returns.

Zoë Castle of Rosco Netherlands is currently working with production companies in Eastern Europe. Graphic preparation will still be done at Rosco Digital Imaging in California, but backdrops will be painted in Europe to facilitate handling and reduce costs.

Congratulations to Jeremy Conway for his Emmy for the design of the NBC Olympics set, which featured a large day/night Roscolite.

RECENT PROJECTS

Foolproof (Feature)

PD: Stuart Wurtzel
Art: Tom Valentine
DP: Luciano Tovoli

The One (Feature)

PD: David Snyder
Art: Paul Sonski
DP: Rob McLachlan

Philly (TV)

PD: Paul Eads

Beautiful Mind (Feature)

PD: Wynn Thomas
DP: Roger Deakins

Citizen Baines (TV)

PD: Maxine Shepard
Art: Ken Creber
DP: Ernest Holzman

Bad Company (Feature)

PD: Jan Roelfs
Art: Steve Graham
DP: Darius Wolski

ED (TV)

PD: Chris Shriver
Art: Jonathan Arkin
DP: Joe Pennella

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