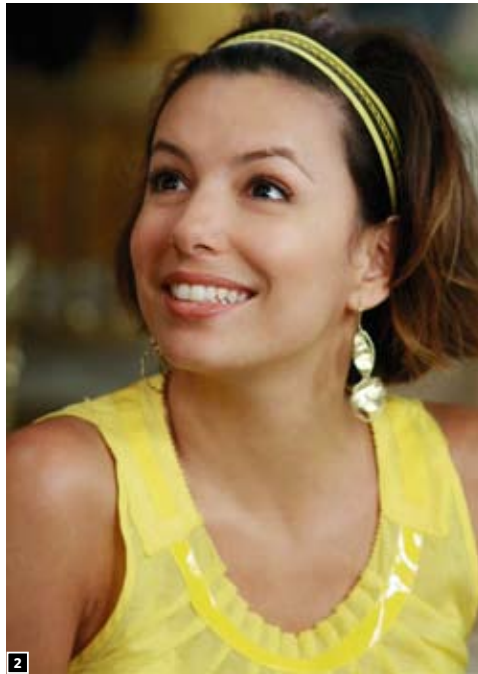




1



2



3

Lighting the women of Wisteria Lane

Desperate Housewives is a television phenomenon, seen by an estimated 115 million viewers worldwide each week. “*Desperate Housewives* is pop culture, but it’s also exploring a viewpoint and a commentary about how we live and who we are,” says cinematographer Lowell Peterson, ASC. “It’s interesting how TV shows can catch on and mean something to people living in different cultures.”

Desperate Housewives follows the lives of a group of women through the eyes of their deceased neighbor. The cast includes Teri Hatcher, Felicity Huffman, Marcia Cross, Eva Longoria Parker and Nicollette Sheridan. Peterson and Eric Van Haren Noman, ASC shoot alternate episodes.

In general, both Peterson and Van Haren Noman use large source lights through multiple layers of diffusion placed as close to the actresses as possible. In exterior scenes, the lamps are often 18K HMIs used with 12-by-12 or 20-by-20 silk or light grid diffusion. In interiors, Peterson and Van Haren Noman often use Barger Lites with triple diffusion, or the ARRI X Light.

“I believe in good character lighting, to allow the strong

performances to really come through,” says Peterson.

To visually connect interiors and exteriors, the front rooms of the characters’ houses are built into the colonial street facades on the Universal backlot. These sets have permanent walls and ceilings, so the cinematographers often bounce light to maintain their big source strategy in the tight sets.

“I use a ¼ Black Frost filter on the whole show, and Glimmerglass filters on the actresses’ close-ups,” Peterson says. “They are Tiffen filters that disperse light unevenly. They work especially well in combination with selective softening of the image that we do in color correction.”

“Shaley Brooks, my color timer at Modern VideoFilm, Inc., and I came up with this approach,” he says. “The producers want a very sharp look, so we had to find a way of softening close-ups without creating halation and softening overall, because the general look of *Wisteria Lane* is sharp. Shaley isolates skin tones as a secondary color, and makes a mask of that. Then we apply electronic defocusing to just that part of the image. That way, the eyes, eyebrows and lips stay sharp, but

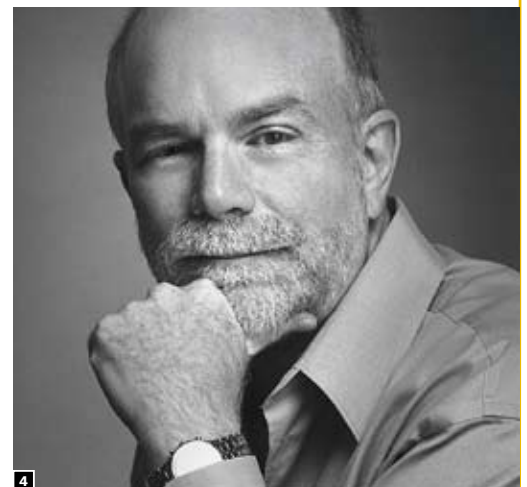
the skin softens. We can precisely control diffusion, graduated density and color. Shaley is like another member of my crew.”

“The cast of *Desperate Housewives* expects me to take care of them because I know their faces,” Peterson explains. “We have different directors every episode, so Eric and I, along with the crew, are the constant the actors rely upon. Our cast loves the crew and feels very comfortable with them.”

Peterson uses two Panavision cameras and KODAK VISION3 500T 5219 film. “On the colonial street, we often have scenes in doorways in shadow, with full sun across the street in the background. We have found that the 5219 has tremendous exposure range, especially in the top end. The nature of the show, and the availability of the actresses, means

that we can’t really schedule for time of day. So we are often in those high contrast situations. The 5219 has tremendous top end, and is great at handling that kind of extreme exposure range.”

“The 5219 also handles skin tones very well,” he adds. “The *Desperate Housewives* look also includes some vibrant colors. With 5219, you can pump up the color in post without the images looking electronic. We feel that the 5219 is the perfect stock for our show.”



4