

The Montecito Resort & Casino is a fictional setting for the hit television series *Las Vegas*, featuring James Caan as the CEO with an emphasis on the security aspect. The weekly episodes are filmed on three amazingly convincing sets on stages at Culver Studios in Los Angeles. The sets were redesigned and rebuilt after the first season by production designer Richard Toyon who collaborated with cinematographer John Newby, ASC.

The setting is a riot of colors and textures, with dominant indigo blue and rich golden hues. It's filled with large chandeliers holding hundreds of tiny lightbulbs that can be raised and lowered. There are also chrome-trimmed slot machines that sparkle and flicker coupled with spotlights aimed straight down on the gaming tables.

that all react differently to the various colors. You want to embrace those rich colors, not fight against them. The stock (5229) has a very clean response. We transfer the negative to HD format with a Spirit DataCine at Riot digital studios in Santa Monica. The control is phenomenal. Shooting film for high definition is a joy."

Newby composes images in 16:9 aspect ratio. *Las Vegas* airs in that format on HD and NTSC channels. He says the wider frame gives him creative leeway to compose more compelling images that embrace the program's ensemble cast.

"Blocking scenes is so much easier in 16:9, especially when there are three or four people in a shot," he explains. "You don't need to go to a very wide lens to get a three-shot. It's a much more natural aspect ratio than 4:3."

Newby earned an American Society of Cinematographers Outstanding Achievement Award-nomination this year in the episodic television category for his work on *Las Vegas*. "It was great to be recognized," he says. "I work with a terrific, talented crew, and the nomination is really a tribute to their hard work." ■

Below: DP John Newby, ASC on the set of *Las Vegas*.

# Recreating *Las Vegas* on a Hollywood Soundstage

"I wanted to hone in on two complementary colors," says Newby. "We found materials that spread and diffuse the light, and we chose a variety of fixtures including point sources, fluorescents and neon to create interesting backgrounds. It required a lot of experimenting to find the right bulbs and distances. All the lights are on dimmers with more than 1,000 circuits linked to the control board."

Newby explains that the sets and lighting are designed to enable him to shoot all the scenes staged in the casino and hotel environment at T2.8 with the Kodak VISION2 Expression 500T 5229 film.

"One of the challenges we faced was finding a way to record all the chroma on the sets along with the natural looking skin tones of the actors," he says. "While all that extreme color in the environment looks cool, it can get tricky with the range of skin tones in the cast

Newby occasionally brings in backlight from 20K units on the greenbeds high above the set floor. Both 10K and 12K units aimed through diffusion are also used occasionally for close-up lighting of the actors. Other times he uses a Barger-Baglrite.

In the rare occasions he uses fill light, it's often with a cooler tint. Newby usually has subtle black diffusion on camera lenses. "It gives a little more texture to the light," he adds. "It grabs hold of the color and breaks it up in a subtle, interesting way."

Newby avoids front light when photographing Caan. "He has a great face from many angles," he explains. "I like the way he looks with a lot of contrast and very little fill. His face is so expressive. I like to get him in situations where the light is warm and low – near a desk lamp, for example. With male characters, you can embrace their faults as well as their glamorous aspects."

