

Hi-Definition and It's Impact on Makeup

By Bradley M. Look

Recently, I received an email from a friend of mine in England, John Woodbridge. In his email, John asked if I had any pointers on the impact of hi-definition on makeup. After all, we had started season four on the series Star Trek Enterprise, shooting all principal photography in this new format.

I have to tell you that when I had first heard during our hiatus that we were going to start shooting in HDTV, I had extreme reservations. Every production that I had ever worked on was shot on cellulose (film). I thought back to an excursion I had made to my neighborhood Circuit City store where I firsthand got to see an example of a program on hi-definition television. It was truly amazing. There was such clarity to the image! As I stood there marveling at a lifelike image, a HDTV program on a loop was already in progress.

A woman on the screen was talking about the virtues of HDTV over those of regular television sets. While the quality of the image was truly impressive, the application of the woman's makeup was painfully obvious. Every section of the actress' makeup application was noticeable to the naked eye! Even a non-makeup artist could see where the makeup stopped and started. The HDTV image was like looking at hyper reality. Pores in the skin were visible. Unevenness to the lipstick application couldn't be missed. There were even a few strands of hair that hadn't been smoothed into place by the on-set hairdresser that stood out.

Back in September 29, 1996, TV GUIDE featured an article, "A New Wrinkle in Video Technology," in the Robins Report (page 57). Author J. Max Robins wrote about a new technology that would greatly impact how an actor would appear on camera. 60 Minutes, 20/20, and Dateline NBC had already been using it regularly on their anchors. What is it you ask? A camera system that makes wrinkles disappear. In fact, the technology was deemed so successful that special Emmy awards were given to its developers. "A good technician operating one of these cameras can really take years off someone's face," stated a veteran network news technician in the article.

The technology revolution is upon us as we have moved into the next century. The cost differences between shooting an episodic series on film versus digital hi-definition are enormous. While there is a budgetary balancing act going on with production companies, the end results must still be high. Filmmakers such as George Lucas (STAR WARS: The Phantom Menace, Attack of the Clones, and Revenge of the Sith) and Michael Mann (COLLATERAL) are also embracing this new medium as they shoot their respective features. A bonus of this techno marvel is that you can film in relatively low light levels and still get amazing clarity of image.

With a continuing growing number of productions adopting the hi-definition digital medium, makeup artists and hairdressers have had to do a lot of experimenting to learn what works and doesn't in HD. Of course this isn't unlike the process that artisans went through when color was first introduced to television. *

As the old adage goes, "Less is more," and this is quite true when applying makeup for this medium. Traditionally, a makeup artist will apply concealer to the dark areas

under the eyes. The challenge is to use only enough to conceal the defect and still not be detectable on HD. This can be quite challenging considering that many manufacturers of under eye concealers can have a higher percentage of pigment in their product that can appear to be dense on camera unless properly blended down. Unlike film, in HD everything shows.

Because HD cameras are more sensitive to reds than standard film and video equipment, some makeup testing might be in order to determine if a blush you have in mind to use will photograph correctly. On STAR TREK ENTERPRISE we used Plus 8 Digital (<http://www.plus8digital.com>) cameras. The makeup department soon discovered that cool reds became more highly saturated. So we found that warmer or neutral colors worked better. For example, coral lipsticks and blushers photographed more lifelike or real, whereas cooler lipstick colors became more "neonish" and could look more like Rocky Horror lips!

While it is possible to apply a traditional beauty makeup using sponges and brushes, extremely great care must be taken in the blending of the product on the face. Beauty/corrective makeups can be given a more natural, polished look if an airbrush foundation is carefully hazed over the finished makeup. The airbrush also helps in removing any potential blending problems.

Another issue that becomes much more critical in HD is the correct matching of makeup to the actor's skin tone. You shouldn't be aware of where makeup starts and stops. This is especially crucial when working with darker complexioned actors such as African-Americans. If you go too dark or too light it will be obvious on HD.

Besides just straight/corrective makeup, ENTERPRISE routinely used character prosthetics (or commonly referred to in the industry as "appliances") and special makeup effects, such as cuts, bruises, and burns. One of the first things I discovered is that if your actor has any facial hair or peach fuzz next to an appliance edge, the HD cameras will create a line where none exists to the naked eye! Once I was studying the Dr. Phlox makeup that I routinely applied on one of the HD monitors and was horrified to spot the complete line to the edge of the appliance around the actor's left eye. How could the edge have completely lifted? I raced onto the set to examine the problem closer. To my relief I soon discovered that the edge hadn't lifted at all, but that my actor had a little peach fuzz on his cheek that the HD cameras were reading as an edge! The problem was remedied quickly by running a personal hair trimmer over the spot.

Further problems can arise if an appliance edge isn't properly blended off onto the actor's skin. A texture jump becomes very apparent on the HD monitor. It's important to blend off the edge of the appliance onto the skin using a product such as Duo Adhesive. Traditionally, makeup artists have always been able to salvage a bad appliance edge using some artful coloring to mask the problem. Such isn't the case with HD. While attending the second annual Oscar® nominated Makeup Artist & Hair Stylist symposium, makeup artist Bill Corso--who applied Jim Carrey's LEMONY SNICKET'S Count Olaf character makeup--mentioned this very problem on the feature. As he stated, color alone could no longer be used to correct an appliance flaw, as the camera would still see it. Other means were necessary. Even the successful sculpting of appliances is determined by the complete matching of pore texture to that of the actors. Some sculptors will even create rubber donor texture stamps taken directly from the life cast that they are working on.

When making up an appliance, use base shades that are closer in value to each other as the HD camera can read a jump in the coloring. For example, with blush color I will mix some of the base color into it so as to give a more natural appearance. Again, I find that some controlled airbrushing can help with any potential problems. Also, using Iwata's Hi-line airbrushes to spatter some light breakup of color imparts a more organic appearance.

And this brings me to one final problem area for HD cameras: lace fronted wigs. Lace resembles a fine mesh material (similar to that of, say, bridal tulle), of which the fronts of wigs are constructed. Each hair is individually tied into the lace so as to create a very realistic hairline. Unfortunately, we discovered that the lace would read on camera as a texture jump. This was also the same problem that Michael Mann ran into with Tom Cruise's wig on *COLLATERAL*, which is why they went through four hairdressers to find a solution to this difficulty. We discovered on our show that two things would help to remedy this dilemma. First, cut excess lace off the front. And secondly, a light spatter from our Iwata airbrushes (like the Hi-Line model) over the lace and onto the actor's surrounding skin would give a subtle breakup so that the HD cameras were less likely to catch the edge.

When all is said and done, you can apply the most perfect makeup in the world, but if it isn't properly lit there's not much you can do to salvage it. That's why you always want to make a friend with the director of photography on the set because he or she can make or break your work.

So the next time you think to yourself those immortal words spoken by Gloria Swanson in *SUNSET BOULEVARD*, "I'm ready for my close-up, Mr. DeMille!" check the HD monitor first to make sure your actor looks like Swanson and not Burnett.

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