



The Backgrounder

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Fall Issue 2004

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Two Years in a Row!

SPECTRAVUE 300 GETS TOP PRODUCT AWARD BY PPA

The new Spectravue 300 was awarded the HOT1 Award for 2004 by the Professional Photographers of America. Spectravue 300 is the newest virtual background projector. It operates with most cameras, film or video. It follows the Spectravue 200 which received the same award in 2003.



We'll Miss You, Big Daddy!

WE LOST A SPECIAL FRIEND AND EDUCATOR

The passing of world famous photographer/teacher, Don Blair, is something that touched the hearts of many thousands of photographers around the world. Also known as "Big Daddy," Don was truly an icon in the portrait industry. He taught hundreds and hundreds of workshops throughout the world. His portraits were truly distinctive with his special attention to detail.

Although Don first used virtual backgrounds a little over ten years ago, he didn't get really serious with the process until 3 years ago. A broken hip made going on location difficult for him, but Don found virtual backgrounds to be the answer. Ever since, we were proud to be his sponsor for workshops. His last major presentation was for WPPI last Feb-

ruary. But, it was only a few weeks before he died that he did a week-long workshop with Trevon Baker for the East Coast School in North Carolina.

Don was able to finish and see his new book, *The Art of Seeing Light*. It is an excellent publication that you will see in camera stores and book stores for years to come. The book is available from Virtual Backgrounds.

Because so much of Don's life was devoted to teaching, Virtual Backgrounds is planning a method to raise funds to support a Don Blair scholarship program. Details will follow in the next issue of *The Backgrounder*.

At the upcoming WPPI and PPA conventions, we will also display many of Don's timeless prints made with the Scene Machine.



"We are saddened by the loss of our dear friend, Don Blair. We ask that each of you keep Gary and the entire Blair family in your thoughts. The best tribute to Don is to put his methods to work everyday."

-Henry J. Oles
VB Chairman

VB Brings Slide-Making In-House!

In an effort to offer the highest quality background images possible, Virtual Backgrounds has invested in the most sophisticated slide making equipment available today. Rather than duplicating backgrounds on a

traditional slide duper, we now produce every slide on our new film recorder which enables us to better control image quality including sharpness, density and color balance. The film is then processed on our E6

film processor so we can maintain maximum control. This also means no more back orders on slides. For those of you who had to wait in the past, we apologize and thank you for your patience.

SNEAK PREVIEW: New Background Slide Sets to Be Introduced

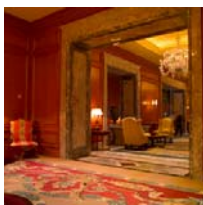
Virtual background photographers can view at more than 1000 background images on our website (www.virtualbackgrounds.net). In addition to these, soon we will be introducing 30 new sets of backgrounds with many more to come. In

most cases, a set is an assortment of 6 theme related backgrounds. The new sets also include a new set of "Old Masters" backgrounds which brings the total number of Old Masters backgrounds to 30 plus the 15 we call New Masters which have a

contemporary look. We will also be releasing the Trevon Baker collection consisting of 15 background slides. Keep an eye on our website for these and many more new slide sets!



Machines 1



Grand Hotels 4



Lacaille



Desert



Old Masters I

Got an Idea?

If you have something new and exciting that you have created with your virtual background system, [let us know about it](#). No one photographer can come up with all the new ideas, but by working together, we can all prosper. Show us what you've done so we can share it with our readers!

New Simone DVD

Joseph & Louise Simone have created a short DVD that shows how they work with clients in their Montreal studio. It also shows samples from their new book, *The Portrait... Mirror of the Soul*. The DVD is **FREE** upon request. Simply call, write or [email](#) Virtual Backgrounds for your copy today!



Recommended Websites to Visit

No two photographers use virtual backgrounds the same way. You can learn a great deal by looking at the websites of other photographers who use virtual backgrounds. With this in mind, we invite you to visit the following websites:

[Simone Portraits](#)
www.simoneportrait.com

[Harding Studios](#)
www.hardingstudio.com

[Gabriel's Rose](#)
www.gabrielsrose.com

[Keepsakes Studio](#)
www.keepsakestudio.net

[Dean McDonald](#)
www.deanmcdonald.co.uk

Three New Books to Guide Your Way

BACKGROUND POWER!

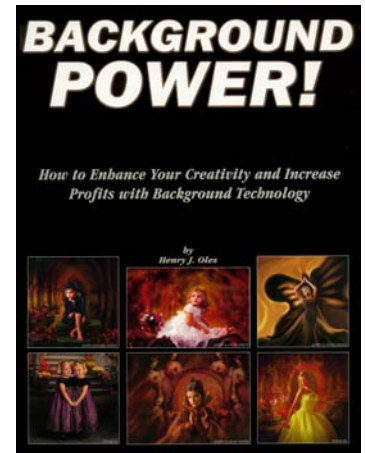
by Henry J. Oles

This book is the most comprehensive book ever written on backgrounds. It's finally done! After several years of writing and rewriting, Virtual Background's Founder and Chairman, Dr. Henry Oles, has published a 220 page full color book devoted entirely to backgrounds.

Although *Background Power!* covers all kinds of backgrounds, it places major emphasis on optical virtual backgrounds. In addition to the normal technical aspects, *Background Power!* places a great deal of emphasis on marketing and promo-

tion through backgrounds. The book reveals the 10 basic secrets of virtual backgrounds.

A special highlight is an entire chapter on "Featured Photographers" which shows the work of a number of highly respected users of the virtual background process including Joseph and Louise Simone, Don Blair, Trevon Baker, and others. They have all made virtual backgrounds a centerpiece of their studio operations. *Background Power!* can be ordered directly from Virtual Backgrounds. The price is \$39.95 plus shipping and handling. It will also soon be available from major internet book suppliers.



The Portrait...Mirror of the Soul

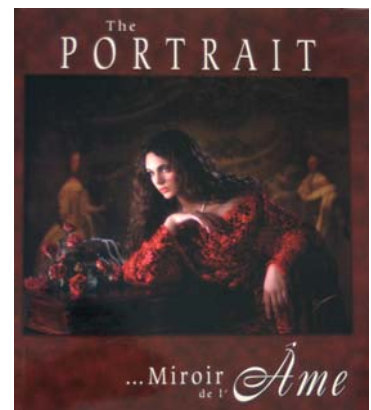
by Joseph and Louise Simone

This publication sets new standards in books for the portrait photographer.

Published earlier this year, the Simones get nothing but the highest accolades for this magnificent work. The book is a presentation of nearly 20 years of work by two of the most talented portrait photographers in the world today. It is such a beautiful, artistic book that many copies are being purchased by non-photographers as a "coffee table" book for display in their homes.

Portrait photographers can profit by studying the Simones' many different artistic poses, their lighting, and their choice of backgrounds and their implementation. Most of the images created during the last two years were created with the Scene Machine virtual background system. The Simones clearly demonstrate the quality and artistic value of virtual backgrounds. They have taken virtual backgrounds to an entirely new level, beyond normal realism.

The Portrait...Mirror of the Soul can be ordered directly from Virtual Backgrounds. The price is \$119, US shipping and handling included.



The Art of Seeing Light

by Don Blair

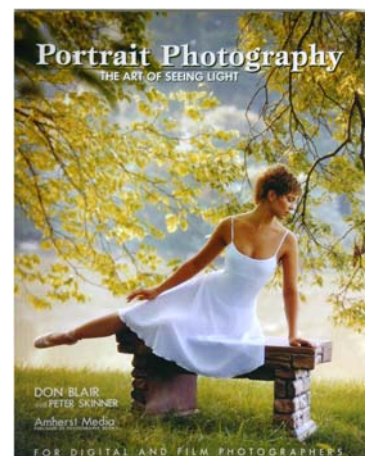
Don's book, which was recently published by Amherst Media, draws on over fifty years of experience from the master himself. Don Blair shows the lighting techniques he relied on when creating his timeless images. You'll learn to really "see the light," and how to harness its best features, both in the studio and on location.

Packed with practical tips and images that span Don Blair's legendary career in portrait photography, including a chapter on his use of Virtual Backgrounds, this is a valuable

tool for all photographers. In the book "Big Daddy" offers a considerable amount of narrative to explain his methods of lighting, posing, and background selection.

This 125 page full-color book presents a wide variety of images created by "Big Daddy," as Don was affectionately known by thousands of photographers. Don was probably the world's best known portrait photographer and teacher.

The Art of Seeing Light is available from Virtual Backgrounds. The price is \$29.95 plus shipping and handling.



PHOTOKINA – The World’s Biggest Photography Show

Every two years, more than 100,000 photographers gather in September in Cologne, Germany for the king of all photography shows...Photokina. Anyone who is anyone who manufactures products for photographers exhibits at Photokina. If you haven't been to Photokina, you can't imagine the size of this show. The show takes up as many as 12 huge buildings, many of which have two floors.

The entire PPA national trade show might be about the size of the Kodak booth! The conscientious attendee can easily spend the entire 6 days of

the show looking only at products that have to do with their main interests. Photokina draws attendees from every part of the world.

Virtual Backgrounds has been exhibiting at the last 12 Photokina shows.

The next Photokina is scheduled for September 26-October 1, 2006. If you want an experience you won't forget, mark those dates on your calendar and plan to attend. You can get current information on Photokina by going to www.photokina.de.



Images by Trevon Baker taken in Germany while attending Photokina 2004.



Workshop Schedule for 2005 Released

We have released our two-day workshop schedule for 2005 in San Marcos, Texas. We still have one remaining workshop for 2004 (November 15-16, 2004), but for those of you who like to plan ahead, here are the dates for 2005.

The regular price for the workshop is \$450.00 (which includes two full days of instruction, three meals and a lifetime of experiences) and is free with the purchase of a Virtual Backgrounds System!

2005 Workshop Schedule

- January 10-11
- February 7-8
- March 7-8
- April 18-19
- May 16-17
- June 13-14
- July 18-19
- August 15-16
- September 12-13
- October 17-18
- November 14-15



"We learned a lot in your workshop and cannot wait to get our machine, so that we can put our lessons into practice."

-McDermott's Photography

Advanced VB Workshop

Several years ago, we conducted an advanced 3-day workshop in San Marcos, Texas for serious users of the virtual backgrounds process. We brought in speakers from England, Mexico, and the US and it was highly successful.

We are starting to think about doing another advanced workshop in 2005. If you have an interest and want your name to be in the list for advance notification of dates, send an e mail to Jim Wilson at jim@virtualbackgrounds.net.

VB People Spotlight: Jim Wilson

In each issue of *The Backgrounder* we will spotlight one employee at Virtual Backgrounds. We'll begin with Jim Wilson. Jim has been with Virtual Backgrounds for 17 years but his work with the virtual backgrounds process goes back to the very earliest days when he was a photographer at Abey Studios in Youngstown, Ohio. Abey studios purchased one of the very first background projectors made, the Nord Gallery. This was back when the process was really difficult to use. Washout was a big problem, so Jim worked it out using light polarization and was able to get exceptional results.

Ever since joining Virtual Back-

grounds, Jim has concentrated on facilitating the workshop program and heading up customer service. Although all VB consultants are extremely knowledgeable about the virtual backgrounds process, when they feel they are unable to help a customer, the call gets directed to Jim.

Jim loves to teach and share his knowledge and experience with virtual backgrounds and photography in general. He is certainly highly qualified. He has a degree in photography from Brooks Institute and has 40 years of experience. It is interesting to note that when Jim worked as a photographer for Abey Studios in Youngstown Ohio, Abey Studios was a primary

competitor with Henry J. Oles and Associates, especially in the area of candid wedding photography. Years later, Oles founded EPS Photographic (now Virtual Backgrounds) and Jim joined the company.

If you have a problem with anything involving virtual backgrounds, contact Jim Wilson. He'll be there to help!



FEATURED PHOTOGRAPHERS

The Simones and Virtual Backgrounds

Not only are they recognized as the two best photographers in North America, but the Joseph & Louise Simone are also the most sought after teachers. They present their special methods to photographers from the Philippines to France to San Jose. Their portraits win one national award after another, both in Canada and in the United States.

With all this success and acclaim, what could the Simones possibly do differently? The answer is, they have discovered virtual backgrounds. The Simones had already developed a style of portraiture that made extensive use of backgrounds. Their backgrounds were either hand painted by Louise or they projected slides using multiple Kodak Carousel projectors. Obviously, the methods worked but they were cumbersome, time consuming and limiting. When they heard about virtual backgrounds and the Scene Machine, they traveled to San Marcos, Texas to take a look. It was an instant success. The

Scene Machine was like moving from snowshoes to a snow mobile. The very first portraits the Simones made with the Scene Machine were "loan collection" quality. In fact, one of those very first prints is being displayed by Kodak as a 40 x 60 in the Kodak booth at various trade shows.

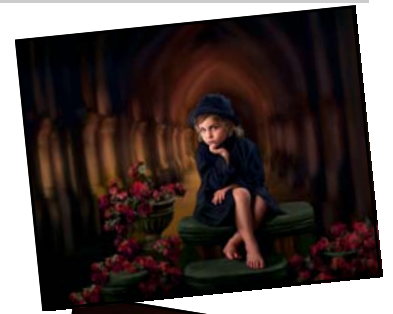
The Simones immediately began creating their own background slides to fit their style. They found ways to incorporate Scene Machine backgrounds with their props and then quickly found ways to extend their range of creativity with its many special features.

Now, nearly three years since first discovering the Scene Machine, the Simones use it for much of their studio work in Montreal as well as a key part of their teaching. No one teaches more week long classes and makes as many one day presentations as the Simones. They love to share their methods and concepts with other professional photographers.

In addition to everything else, the Simones have published their newest book, titled *The Portrait...Mirror of the Soul*. They already have available a variety of video tapes, and a DVD. Many of the portraits in the new book were created with the Scene Machine.

Check out their web site at www.simoneportrait.com. You'll find a listing of their upcoming presentations and week long schools. If you have never attended a Simone presentation or school, you don't know what you're missing.

"We're thrilled to have the Simones using the Scene Machine virtual background system," says Henry Oles, developer of the product. "The Simones have shown us that there are no limits to what can be done with this product. We thought we had seen it all but now that the Simones are using it, there is a lot more to be seen."



Tech Tips

by Henry J. Oles

GET RADICAL!

One of the lessons Joseph and Louise Simone taught me is to dare to test the limits with background images. They took some of the background slides that I created and added huge amounts of color using various color filters.

My first thought was, "Hey, what are they doing to my background slides?" But then, I saw the results and realized that I too have been stuck in the box. Since then, we have been experimenting with a great deal of background slide manipulation. With digital, it's so easy. When you don't like what you see on the monitor you can instantly erase it with nothing lost except for a few seconds of time. But, you may also come up with ideas that are distinctively different from anything you have ever done before.

The moral of the story is this: let your creative juices flow and see what you can come up with. You won't know until you try!

VB Announces Print Competition Winners

In the Summer 2004 issue of *The Backgrounder*, Virtual Backgrounds announced that we were resuming our annual Print Competition. We encouraged all owners and operators of virtual backgrounds projection systems to send us an 8x10 of their best work using virtual backgrounds. The winner of the print competition is to receive free tuition to a Joseph & Louise Simone class. Second place gets a \$200 credit toward background slide libraries and third place receives a \$100 credit toward background slide libraries.

After reviewing the numerous outstanding submissions, we are happy to announce that Carrell Grigsby of Carrell Grigsby Photography located in Austin, Texas is this year's winner. Second place is My Khuu of Khuu Photography and Bridal out of Houston, Texas. And third place is Iva Yoder of Precious Memories Photography from Sugar-creek, Ohio.

Congratulations to our winners and thanks to all of you who submitted your prints. We plan to make this an annual event, so keep an eye out in upcoming newsletter editions for the announcement of the next competition!

