



The Backgrounder

News and Information About Turning Backgrounds into Profits!

A publication of Virtual Backgrounds - ©2006

June 2006 Issue

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2006 Virtual Backgrounds Workshop Schedule

July 17-18-19
August 14-15-16
September 18-19-20
October 16-17-18
November 13-14-15

Click [here](#) to view our workshop brochure containing valuable information on our Virtual Backgrounds training workshops.

Amateurs Capture Time in a Moment.

Professionals Capture a Moment in Time!

Props Play a Key Role w/ Virtual Backgrounds

Occasionally we hear from Virtual Backgrounds system users that their results just don't look real. They see phenomenal work

from other photographers but just can't seem to achieve it themselves. Here are the possible causes: (1) the background slide is improper for the purpose, (2) the posing is poorly done or inappropriate for the background, (3) the lighting is inappropriate for the background or (4) props are not used or inappropriately used.

Props play a very important role with Virtual Backgrounds. Without props, the photographer has only two dimensions in the photograph, the background and the subject. No wonder this arrangement can look fake. If the photographer were working in a REAL environment, he most likely would be using some appropriate props, some in front of the subject, some behind the subject and something else might be even further behind the subject but still in front of the



distant background. These items would all have different levels of focus.

What makes a good prop? In some ways, we can't answer that question, at least not specifically. The possibilities when using props are infinite. The only real answer is a very broad one: *use whatever props that make sense and add dimensionality to the photograph.* Very often this can be as simple as an artificial potted Ficus tree. Beyond that, the possibilities are limitless. Many of the best props can be found around your studio. It can be a chair, a table, other potted plants, or a vase.

Photographers should work as set designers for a stage plays. They have to quickly come up with a few well-chosen props. This doesn't have to take a lot of time or cost a lot. In fact, some photographers make sure they decorate their entire studio area with items that can also double as props. If furniture is going to be used as props, it becomes tax deductible.

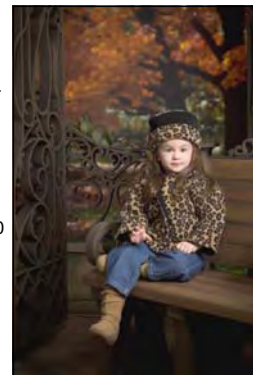
The photographer can also purchase props from Off The Wall and Denny Manufacturing which have a huge

variety of possibilities. Now, since you have Virtual Backgrounds, you will only need to buy individual pieces rather than entire expensive sets which can be cumbersome to move around and store. Virtual Backgrounds is also now starting to offer specially created props such as a brick garden stairway with matching side retaining walls. The prop has two sides, a brick surface and a stone surface.

It is important that props not dominate a photograph by being too bright. Props should be painted a little on the dark side in order to look real and not be dominant.

Using props also helps to make the whole experience for the subject more exciting. They can be made to feel like "movie stars." The sitting becomes a WOW-ing experience like they have never had before.

In addition, it all becomes more fun for the photographer as he finds his creative instincts unleashed, enabling him to produce photographs that are totally his. That's the beauty of using Virtual Backgrounds.



All Images by Trevon Baker

It's Time to Submit Prints for Our Annual Print Competition!

Virtual Backgrounds is holding its Annual "Best Of" Print Competition. This competition is open to any professional photographer who uses a Virtual Backgrounds system. The only criteria is (of course) that images submitted must have been created using a Virtual Backgrounds system. It is an Open Category only.

The top three prints will be awarded valuable prizes from and the owner of the winning print will also be a Featured Photographer in the October 2006 edition of *The Backgrounder*.

Entry Deadline: October 1, 2006
Maximum entries: 5 per studio

SUBMIT 8X10 PRINTS TO
Virtual Backgrounds
c/o Jen LaGrange
101 Uhland Road, Suite 106
San Marcos, TX 78666

We are really excited about the generous sponsors that will be part of this year's competition. So far, prizes are being contributed by the following:

Albums Inc.
Buckeye Color Lab
Nichols Photo Lab
Photogenic
The Levin Company
Virtual Backgrounds
Web Photo Supply
The F. J. Westcott Company



albums inc.



nichols
PHOTO LAB | film • digital
The Professional's Choice
Since 1979



Photogenic
professional lighting



STUDIO PRO
WWW.WEBPHOTOSUPPLY.COM
SAN MARCOS, TEXAS



Dave Filler Brings Texas to Montana

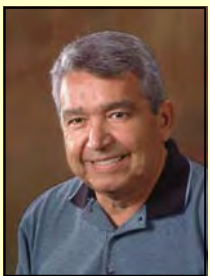
While Dave Filler of Kalispell, Montana was in San Marcos speaking as VB's May "Guest Photographer," captured a variety of images near our local university river which is lined with Cypress trees. He modified the overall color and then used this background for a client in Kalispell. Dave has discovered one of the most "fun" parts of using Virtual Backgrounds ...capturing your own backgrounds wherever you go and bringing them back to the studio. Great work Dave!



VB People Spotlight: Jesse Contreras

In this month's VB People Spotlight we highlight a valuable member of our production team, **Jesse Contreras**. If you have purchased a Virtual Backgrounds system within the past year or so, it is likely that Jesse's excellent craftsmanship has played some part in manufacturing your system.

Jesse joined the VB family just after retiring from his previous career. He started out as a part timer and has quickly moved into a high status position within the production department. His hard work and dedication are un-matched here at Virtual Backgrounds. Jesse is always ready and willing to go the extra mile for the company, and no matter how many things are on his plate, he helps each person at the company with individual needs. Jesse is a valuable employee and we thank him for his loyalty!



Lighting for Perfection with Virtual Backgrounds

What is photography? The word photography means "painting with light." That is exactly what a photographer does. He manipulates the lighting to enhance the subject. Many photographers, however, do a very poor job of lighting. They buy a set of lights and light modifiers and they find what they think is the best arrangement and then they literally nail them down. Everyone, (male, female, young, and old) is photographed the same way. This is not painting with light, it's slopping enough light on the subject to get an exposure. As a result, all the photography takes on sameness.

A professional photographer who has studied lighting, works with several different lights including a main, a fill, an overhead separation light, and possibly a "kicker" light. When time is available, the photographer adjusts these lights in order to enhance the contours of the subject's face and body while minimizing other parts of the body.

This is exactly the way a Virtual Backgrounds photographer should work although there is an extra factor. With many Virtual Backgrounds, the background will show a **direction of light**. Therefore, lighting on the subject should match the direction of light shown on the

background, otherwise it looks fake. For example, if the background has a window on the right side with light obviously coming in through the window, it would



Incorrect Light Direction



Correct Light Direction

be inappropriate to have the maximum light on the subject's left. After all, where would that light be coming from on the left

when the lighted window in the background is on the right? When this happens, the photographer has two choices. He can either switch the lights or he can flip the slide. Either method will work unless the background slide has printed text which would show up as a mirror image if the slide is flipped.

Many photographers make lighting a big time-consuming deal when in fact it doesn't really have to be. Watch a true professional photographer work with a

subject. He can usually adjust lighting in 30 seconds or so. The trick is simply knowing what to do with the lights to get the desired effect.

We recommend that every photographer have a realistic looking manikin to practice with. Using a digital camera, you can see the results immediately and can make various adjustments until you get what you want. After a while, adjusting the lighting becomes almost second nature.

When working with Virtual Backgrounds, proper lighting is actually often a compromise between perfect studio lighting and realistic lighting. When working in the true environment, the photographer has limited control over the lighting. He has to work with what he has unless he brought his whole set of studio lights on location, which sometimes does no good. When working in the studio with Virtual Backgrounds, however, the photographer is really in charge and can create quality studio lighting modified to also look real. For example, a subject may be posed with a projected window with light apparently coming through the window. The photographer does not have to light the subject as though the window were the only light source. The light can be blended, just so long as it still looks like light striking the subject is at least partially coming from the projected window.

There are plenty of courses on good portrait lighting and literally hundreds of books. Learning lighting is an absolute must if you expect to produce professional results. After all, you are **painting with light!**

Doubters Doubt the Perfect Storm

The new book, *The Professional Photographer's Perfect Storm* has caused many photographers to take a look to see if there really is a storm. The opinion is mixed. Some say it is just a rain shower and a little wind. Others see the storm as a monster that threatens their existence. Which is it? Noah is building a boat. Others are laughing at him.

If you can't see the storm in your own



backyard, maybe it's time to do a couple of things. Call friends in the photographic industry and ask them how things are at their place? Turn on the computer and pull up the weather radar. See how much "red" is coming at you. You might be surprised.

One reason some photographers don't yet see the storm is that they are driving their business so hard that they haven't had time to notice. The new business they are gathering is covering up the problem. Others, whose business was more or less stable before the storm started are seeing the decline. They know from first hand experience that the storm is having an effect.

If you look at the weather radar, it is obvious that the storm exists. The key

to survival is to understand the nature of the storm and make plans to deal with it. Not everyone will die!

Of course, the main cause of the Perfect Storm is the advent of digital cameras which make just about everyone think they are photographers. The results they produce are "good enough" so why bother going to a professional photographer. The storm is now hitting wedding photographers and children photographers. The only answer is to offer the customers a style of photography and products that not only are highly attractive but also of such a nature that they cannot produce the results by themselves.

This is what the new book, *The Professional Photographer's Perfect Storm* is all about. **Contact us** to get your **FREE** copy today!

The "Prom King" Strikes Gold Again!

Rick Harding, widely considered the "Prom King" of San Antonio, has outdone himself again! Rick recently created a specially-made "Wonderland" background to match the theme of a local prom where each of the high school teachers dressed up as characters from *Alice in Wonderland*.

Rick works very closely with prom committees to help them create the perfect background. Because of his efforts, Rick was contracted to shoot this 300+ couple prom that brought in *thousands of dollars in profits!* Rick took the time to share with our readers how he came up with this background. [Click here](#) to see how Rick worked his Prom Magic!



Project a Really BIG Image

Even though research has shown for years that projecting big images for selection definitely enhances sales, most photographers still show their clients small video images or even worse, they just send their clients their images over the internet to look at when they please. Sure, that's the easy way but it isn't the way to sell more and larger prints.

Today's technology makes it so simple to show clients their preview in really large sizes. There are programs available to help the sales person make a really professional presentation and to take orders.

Doing anything less is costing you money...money you can't afford to lose. Virtual Backgrounds makes your images even more dramatic. So, show off your stuff.

Choosing the Best Projector for Your Photography Needs

At one time, Virtual Backgrounds offered only one projector. There was no choice. As interest in backgrounds has grown, Virtual Backgrounds has created 5 different projectors, each designed to suit particular needs. These include the Spectravue 100, 200, 300, the Scene Machine Digital and the Scene Machine Universal. The price and features of each system vary considerably. The projector that is right for you all depends on your planned application. Let's take a quick look at each model.

The **Spectravue 100** unit is considered a starter system. It uses a fixed focal length projection lens instead of a zoom lens and there is no control over the light intensity of the power supply. It is ideally suited for very basic applications like passport photos.

The **Spectravue 200** is a very portable

system and considerably less expensive than others. Unlike the Spectravue 100, it includes a zoom projection lens. The photographer using the Spectravue 200 has to be a bit further away from the subject than with the Spectravue 300 and the power supply is not as powerful.

The **Spectravue 300** has a more powerful power supply than the 200 but a lower power output than the SM Digital and the power is adjustable in 1/4 increments. It is an ideal mid-level system.

The **Scene Machine Digital** is an enhanced version of the Spectravue 300. The system is portable and accommodates most digital cameras. The power supply is adjustable in 1/10 f stops increments giving the user more background light control. Alignment is fixed. The SM Digital is a very portable and versatile projector.

The **Scene Machine Universal** allows the photographer the greatest control over every aspect of projected backgrounds. It requires the photographer to make some adjustments that some find difficult and it isn't as portable as other machines, so keeping it stationary in the studio is recommended. The Scene Machine Universal is designed for both film and digital cameras.

In making a choice of a projector, you should evaluate your intended application and then choose the appropriate projector. All of our projectors produce excellent results. The difference is in the flexibility and cost of the unit.

Virtual Backgrounds consultants can help you choose the best system for your needs. [Contact us](#) today to get started on a very exciting and profitable future in photography!

Washout: What Causes It? What Fixes It?

A old complaint about using Virtual Backgrounds was that you had to be extremely careful to not spray studio light on your projection screen because if you did, the background image would look all washed out. To an extent, that was true. However, if the photographer maintained reasonable control over the lighting, it wasn't a problem. Today's projection screen new technology actually makes it somewhat difficult to wash out the background with studio light. Most regular studio lighting is compatible with using Virtual Backgrounds.

The main or fill light cannot be behind or very close to the camera. Fortunately, most studio photographers never place their lights near the camera so this isn't an issue. The fill light can be well above the camera or to the left or right. It is also better if the light source has some control. For example, a giant soft box has less light control than a smaller soft box or parabolic reflector.

Another way to put it, Virtual Backgrounds requires that the photographer have control over the lighting. You can't

just splash light just anywhere. Then again, photography comes from two Greek words meaning, "painting with light." It doesn't come from "splashing light around." Artists don't randomly splash paint around. They control it.

With the advent of digital cameras, the photographer sees the results of what he has done, instantly. If by chance he has been too loose with his lighting, the results will show on the monitor and a fix can take just a few seconds

Photographs of Backgrounds w/ People or Vice Versa?

What's the biggest mistake photographers make when they start using backgrounds? Instead of using the background to complement the subject, they place way too much attention on the background, making it the important part of the photograph. This happens not only with projected Virtual Backgrounds but also with polystyrene backgrounds such as those from Off The Wall and Denny Manufacturing. It seems that when a photographer gets a background, he wants to show it off too much by making it dominant. This almost never should be the case.

The beauty of projected Virtual Backgrounds is that the photographer has such complete control over the domi-

nance level of the background. This is because the projected Virtual Backgrounds is almost like a layer in Photo Shop. It is totally separate from the subject layer. This isn't the case with a polystyrene background set. With a polystyrene background, the subject is usually positioned relatively close to the set. The same light that lights the subject is also falling on the set and, therefore, it is pretty much impossible to have the subject brightly lit without also brightly lighting the background. With projected Virtual Backgrounds, however, the subject can be lit normally and the brightness of the set behind the subject can be totally separately controlled.

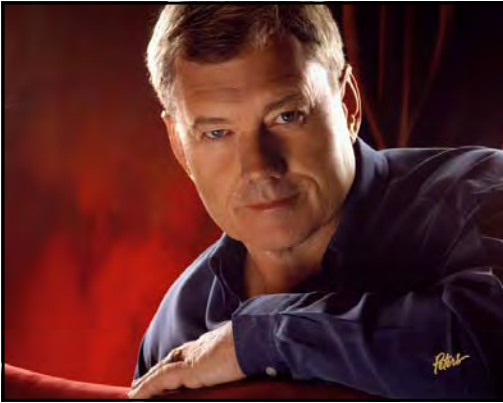
In fact, the photographer not only can

independently vary the brightness of the set but he can also vary the perspective size of the set, the position of the set, the focus of the set, and even the color balance of the set without having any direct effect on the subject. It's what we call **"total background control"** which is a fundamental advantage of using projected Virtual Backgrounds.

The key to success in using backgrounds is to make certain that the background complements the subject but does not dominate the image. Think in terms of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*. Yes, there is a background there but it is soft, somewhat dark, and a little out of focus. It complements the painting. It does not dominate the painting.

FEATURED PHOTOGRAPHER: Larry Peters, Peters Photography

A Totally New "Look" for High School Seniors



If you think about high school senior photography, the name Larry Peters should instantly come to mind. Larry Peters is widely recognized as the most creative and sophisticated photographer of high school seniors in the country. Working in conjunc-

tion with other members of his family, Larry operates three highly successful studios in central Ohio. He is constantly in demand to give programs and schools to help train other photographers about his highly successful methods.

One reason Larry is so successful is that he is continually looking for new ways to please his clients. Last year, when a senior asked him if he would go underwater to do her senior portraits, he agreed and did the photographs in his backyard swimming pool. She loved it! Of course, after that, everyone was

talking about Peters Photography.

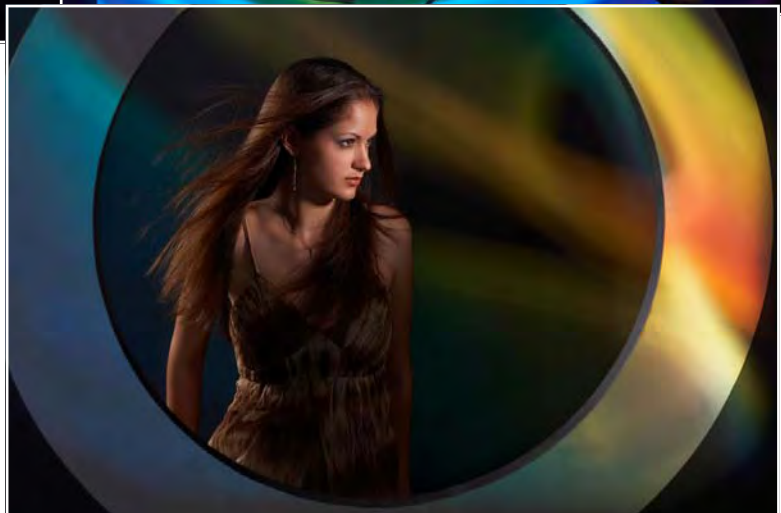
Larry says, "We as professional photographers have to create a need for the public to come to our studio. We have to have unique products that others, including amateurs, can't do or we will lose the business."

This year, Larry discovered the power of Virtual Backgrounds, but now, he has given it his own "Larry Peters twist." For years, Larry has manufactured innovative studio props that are sold under the name J & L Originals. Now, Larry has attached reflective material to the props and projects abstract images with his Scene Machine projection system directly on to the props and also on a large projection screen in the background. The props can now take on an infinite variety of colors and design patterns that result in a

totally new look—a look seniors love and one that amateur's can't do no matter what camera they own. It is all made possible because of the Virtual Backgrounds concept.

Larry calls the effect "CHAOS." Obviously it is only one component of the wide array of work Larry delivers to every senior. Larry is also now using Virtual Backgrounds to create backgrounds for his proms and he plans to incorporate the method into more of his work. It's no wonder that Larry reports that business is up 30% over last year. That's a problem that most any photographer would love to have.

For more information on Larry's props, including the reflective props, contact J & L Originals/Peters Photography at 1-800-446-1922 or visit his website at www.petersphotography.com.



"We as professional photographers have to create a need for the public to come to our studio. We have to have unique products that others, including amateurs, can't do or we will lose the business."

FEATURED PHOTOGRAPHER: Larry Peters, Peters Photography

A Totally New "Look" for High School Seniors



Upcoming Schools & Conventions

Are you interested in seeing the Virtual Backgrounds system up close and personal but can't come to San Marcos to attend a workshop? Check us out at one of the below events. Chances are we'll be coming to a town near you!

For more information click on the title of the event!

Kerrville Summer Seminar
June 25-28, 2006
(Kerrville, Texas)

Houston—Simone Seminar
July 11, 2006
(Houston, Texas)

Image Explorations in Canada
July 16-20, 2006

Terry Deglau in Tampa
August 8, 2006
(Tampa, Florida)

Florida State Convention
August 27-28, 2006
(Florida)

Photokina
September 26-October 1, 2006
(Germany)



July 16-20, 2006 Vancouver Island Canada

July 16-20, 2006, **Joseph & Louise Simone** and **Larry Peters** will be teaching classes at the highly acclaimed **Image Explorations School of Photography**.

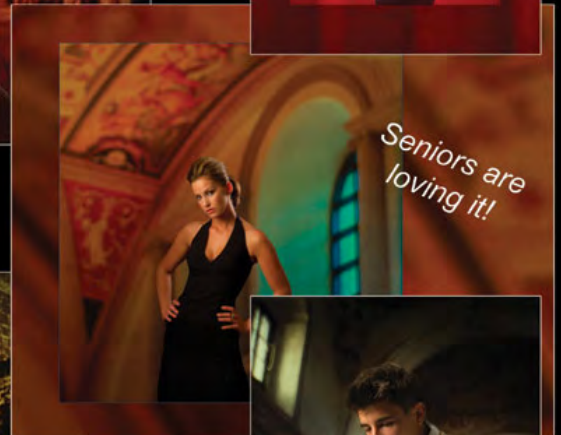
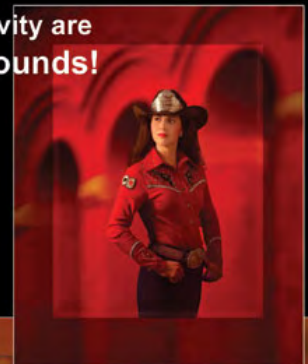
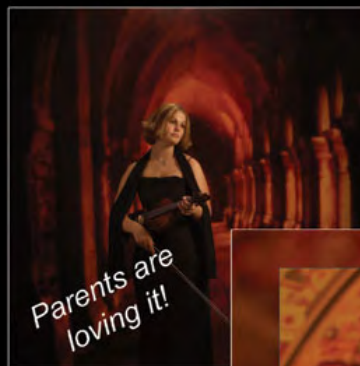
Located on Vancouver Island (approximately one hour north of Victoria), this school will include excellent classes coupled with professional networking, adventure and fun! It is a beautiful area and the facilities are amazing.

Tuition is only \$599 (Canadian), and the lodging package includes 4 nights plus all meals for only \$325 (Canadian).

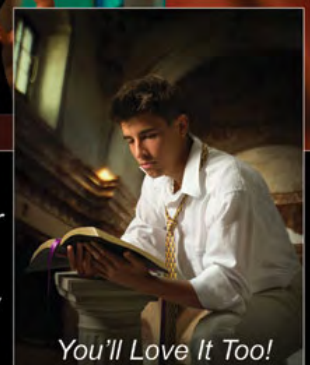
As a special event, on July 15 (Saturday night) several chartered high speed zodiacs will head out into the ocean for a three hour tour giving photographers the rare opportunity to photograph killer whales and beautiful oceanic scenery.

Limited space is still available in the Simones and Larry Peters classes, so make plans to attend! More information can be found on the Image Explorations [website](#) or by [emailing](#) the school's coordinator, [Don MacGregor](#), directly.

Look Whose **Business** and **Creativity** are
Growing with **Virtual Backgrounds!**



Images by
Dave Filler
from
**Stillwater
Photography**



Visit the **Featured Photographers** section of our [website](#) to see more of Dave Filler's, Larry Peter's and the Simone's work as well as other talented photographers who are finding phenomenal success with their Virtual Backgrounds Systems!