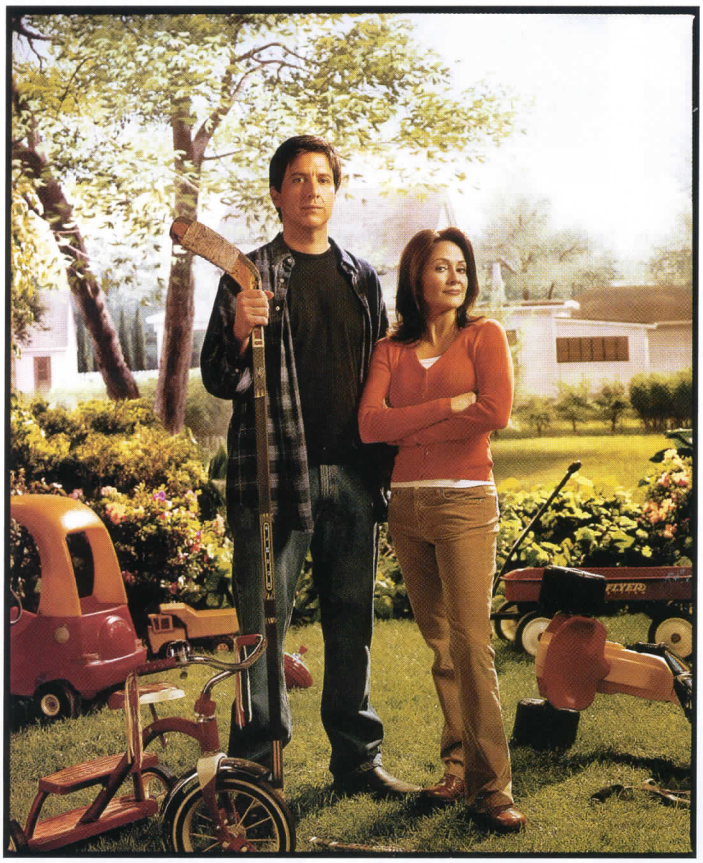
ART STREIBER PUTS A SOPHISTICATED SPIN ON A MASSIVE TV CAMPAIGN.

REALLY BIG SHOW



Home Box Office may have created a trend by hiring the likes of Annie Leibovitz and fine-art phenom Gregory Crewdson to create advertising photos for edgy TV shows like *The Sopranos* and *Six Feet Under*. (See On Set, March/April 2003.) Now, major networks are apparently moving beyond the slap-happy group portraits that are *TV Guide* grist for each new season of prime time programming. But it's one thing to bring a skewed perspective to cult TV shows and quite another to do so with an entire slate of network programs—a task that CBS recently assigned to L.A.–based Art Streiber. Streiber photographed the casts of 21 prime-time CBS shows, from the ever-popular comedy *Everybody Loves Raymond* to the dark, quirky crime drama *CSI,* last year's most-watched television program. To find out how he accomplished this Herculean photo feat, see On Set, page 90. —RUSSELL HART

Right: Art Streiber's portrait of the cast of *CSI* (from left): Jorja Fox, Paul Guilfoyle, Gary Dourdan, William Peterson, Marg Helgenberger, Eric Szmanda, Robert David Hall, George Eads. Above left: Ray Romano and Patricia Heaton of *Everybody Loves Raymond.*

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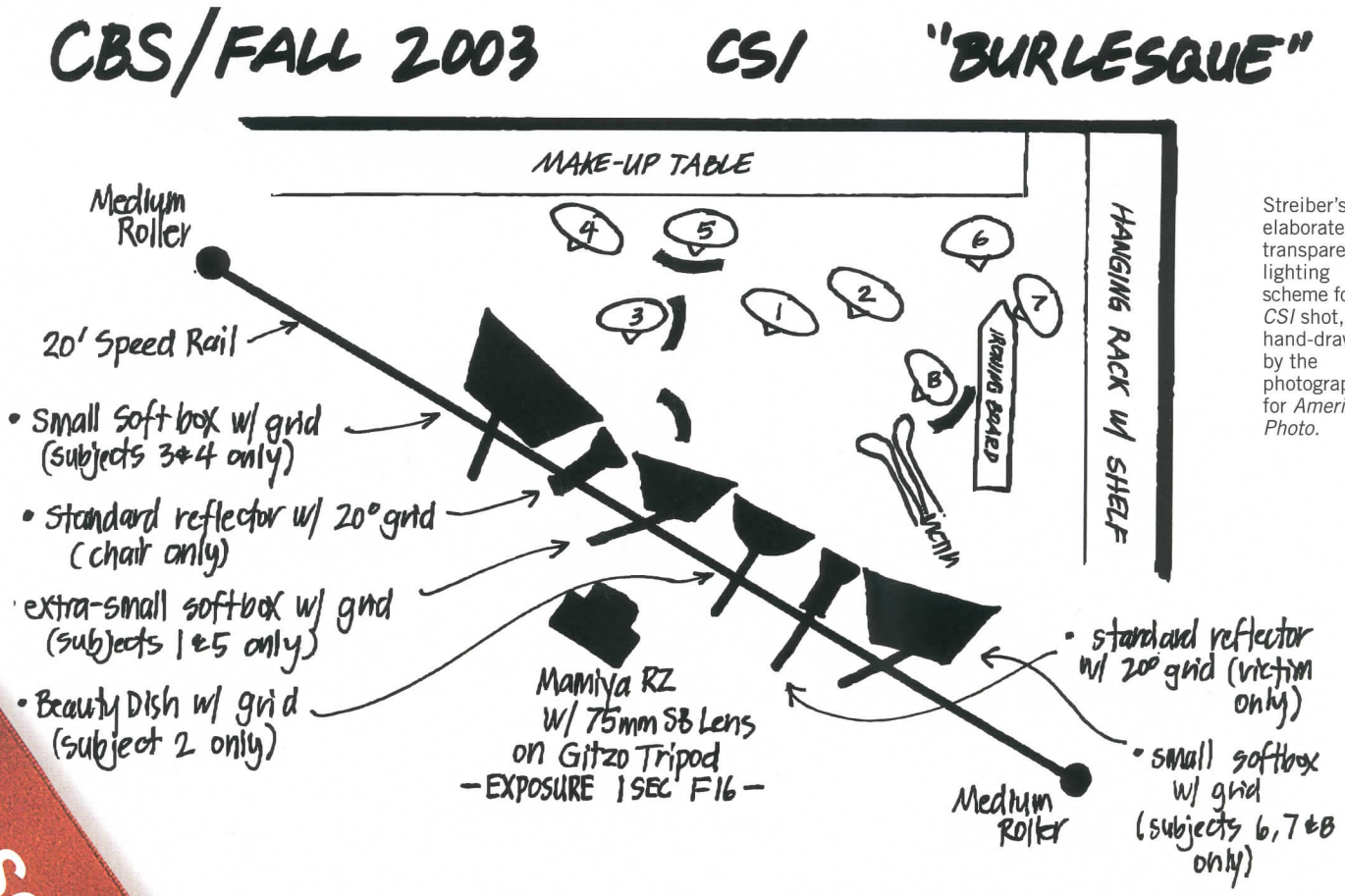
MURDER MOST ARTFUL

HOW ART STREIBER SHOT THE CAST OF *CSI* AND LIVED TO TELL THE TALE.

Because photographer Art Streiber is as well organized as he is imaginative, he can tell you with utter precision how many pieces of gear he used to shoot promotional photos for a dozen prime-time TV shows in the CBS fall lineup. Last March he rented it all from L.A.'s Smashbox studio: There were 2400 watt-second Profoto strobe power packs (40 of them); Profoto heads (65), softboxes and strip boxes (41); umbrellas (35) sandbags (75); and so on. But even those backbreaking numbers don't convey the full scale of Streiber's shoot, which produced this darkly humorous



Streiber's elaborate but transparent lighting scheme for the *CSI* shot, hand-drawn by the photographer for *American Photo*.

On Set

image of the cast of the CBS crime drama *CSI*.

"CBS wanted a narrative, editorial look to the pictures, not the typical TV gallery look in which everyone's lined up in a V-wedge and staring at the camera," says Streiber. "So we had to design and light the sets to look legitimately environmental but at the same time hyperreal." Streiber's shot depicts the *CSI* cast investigating the death of a Las Vegas showgirl, whose legs occupy the lower right corner of the frame. Its highly crafted lighting and mise-en-scène belies the fact that it was created under intense time pressure. All together, Streiber shot 12 different casts in equally elaborate sets (plus individual shots of almost 50 actors) in the space of three days.

"We prelit Saturday's shoot on Friday, shot all day Saturday, prelit Sunday's shoot on Saturday night until three in the morning, shot all day Sunday, prelit Monday's shoot on Sunday night until four in the morning, and then shot all day Monday," recounts Streiber, who ran 231 rolls of color negative film through his Mamiya RZ67 on the job. Built from sketches he had prepared with art director Nick Tortorici and CBS, the sets ranged from city rooftops (for the drama *The Agency*) to desert islands (for *Survivor*). Fortunately, Streiber had *nine* assistants.

Working on two big soundstages at an L.A. movie studio, Streiber had up to 12 sets going at a given time, moving rapidly from one to the next. "If you've done your homework—researched everything and designed and lit the set carefully and choreographed it all ahead of time—you only need five or ten minutes of tweaking once the actors are in place," he says. "We were able to get the cast in and out in 15 minutes. You lose the group if you take much longer than that."

You might not guess it, but Streiber's *CSI* set was lit with seven Chimera softboxes placed around the eight-member cast. (He asked the actors to hold still for a second after the flash burst so he could "burn in" the tungsten lights around the makeup mirrors.) The softboxes were fitted with collapsible grids to give the light a more directional quality akin to indoor ceiling fixtures. "The trick was to get the light to look like a dark dressing room," says Streiber, "but still be able to shoot at f/16 or f/22." A single spot highlighted the victim's legs, which were provided by the art director's girlfriend.

"One key to making it seem like a real moment, as opposed to a scene where everybody just standing there, is grouping people within the group," says Streiber, who points out that the shot has a 2-1-2-2-1 grouping pattern. Another key has to do with eye contact: Streiber had all but the two main characters look away from the camera. "When you have someone in the group break eye contact," he explains, "they become their own little island."

By the time you read this, the photographer will have done a second round of CBS shows, including all its new ones. "I like shooting groups," says Streiber, now something of a specialist in photographic crowd control. "I like the challenge of trying to get beyond the conventions of group portraits." —RUSSELL HART

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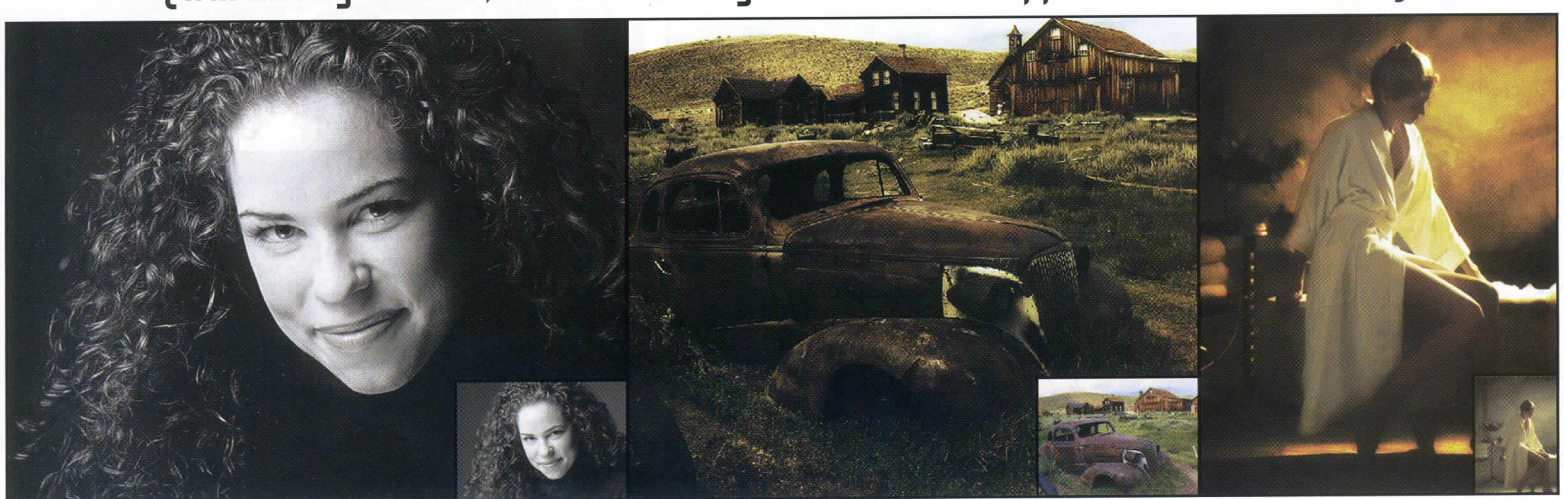

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