

TECHNOLOGY & VISION

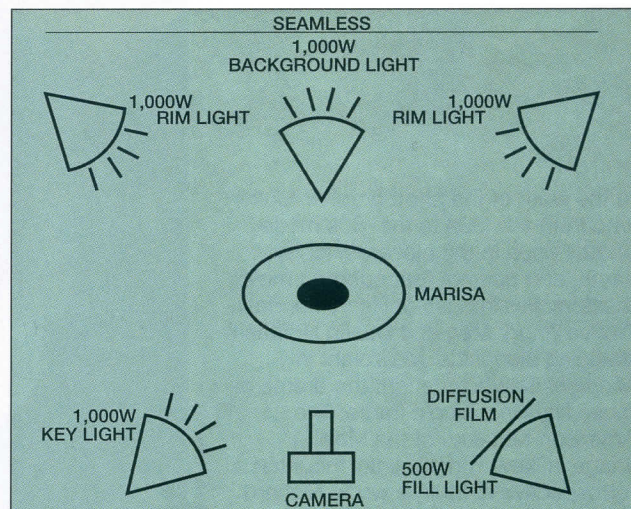
It comes as no surprise that **Rocky Schenck's** photographs look like paintings. Schenck's great-great grandfather and his brother, who immigrated from Germany to the Texas Hill Country where Schenck grew up, were both romantic painters. Schenck himself was selling his own paintings by the time he was 13, and he went on to major in art at North Texas State University. But when Schenck left college to move to Hollywood, photography became his sole medium. He used it to make portraits of stars such as Nicole Kidman and Uma Thurman, often with the soft-focus, haute-glamour look of 1930s studio glossies, on assignment for such clients as Columbia Records, Gilbey's Gin, and *Vogue*. All the while, though, he was creating his own dark, mysterious photos, the cream of which are collected in *Rocky Schenck/Photographs* (University of Texas Press, \$45), due in November.

Schenck fashions his shadowy world by old-school pictorialist means, diffusing the scene with various lens attachments (including homemade filters) and heavily manipulating the surface of his negatives and the prints themselves. "Each print requires hours of hands-on attention," he says. "I do it in the privacy of my own home, sometimes with a margarita and an old film on the TV." Schenck has a self-deprecating good humor that he attributes in part to his photography. "If I am sad or depressed or melancholy," he says, "I can wander somewhere with my camera and usually turn my mood around by stumbling upon something unexpected and wonderful." —RUSSELL HART

84
PHOTOFILE

86
WORKSHOP

90
ON SET



Left: Schenck gave the glamour treatment to Marisa Tomei after studying the angles of her face. Above: A bird's-eye view of his lighting strategy.

ROCKY SCHENCK

the foggy, highlight-smearing filters used by most still photographers. Instead, he places pieces of fine-meshed black silk over the lens, which soften the subject without causing highlights to flare out. Here, he actually used two layers for extra diffusion.

The picture's lighting, and the light in most of Schenck's portraits, is strictly hot—and high wattage. ("Movies are lit with tungsten," he explains.) A 1,000-watt Mole-Richardson focusing spot (ordinarily a movie light) was placed above and to the left of Tomei; a 500-watt photoflood, softened with a sheet of diffusion film, filled the resulting shadows. "Double rim" light, provided by 1,000-watt spots behind and to either side of Tomei, added highlights to her hair. Another 1,000 watts brightened the background.

To control and create shadows, Schenck often avoids fixed "flags"—light-blocking cards attached to stands or booms. "It takes time to set them up, which can destroy the rhythm of a shoot," he says. "So if I want a certain area to go dark, I have assistants stand next to the key light and hold their hands in its path." A well-placed hand might darken a subject's neck and shoulders by a half-stop or more, for example, making the hard light on the face all the more dramatic.

Why hard light? Isn't it less attractive than soft light? "Hard light is totally flattering if you use it properly," says Schenck, seconding the view of Hollywood's photographic masters. "You just have to know how to position it. You have to study the face carefully, and tailor the light's angles to the person you're shooting."

—RUSSELL HART

HOT LIGHT

HOW ROCKY SCHENCK RE-CREATES THE AURA OF HOLLYWOOD'S PAST

Photographer Rocky Schenck grew up watching old movies on TV and remembers being entranced by their dramatic light, classical composition, and moody black and white even as a preschooler. So when he left his family's ranch in Dripping Springs, Texas, in 1977, he headed straight for Hollywood.

Today, Schenck is in constant demand, making music videos, films, and occasional TV shows. Since the mid-1980s he's also shot over 100 album covers for such bands as Guns n' Roses, done editorial and advertising photography for clients from *Vanity Fair* to Gilbey's gin, and pursued his own fine-art photography. He's known as a connoisseur and expert interpreter of Hollywood glamour.

Just last year, for example, Australian

Vogue asked Schenck to take native daughter Nicole Kidman through all the major periods of movie style. He started with a silent-screen-star approach ("an homage to Lillian Gish"), cruised through the early '30s ("a Jean Harlow influence"), and pegged the 1950s with a leggy, campy color portrait ("a Cyd Charisse look").

This portrait of Marisa Tomei, made at the actress's request and later used in *Interview*, is more typical of the late '30s. "As the decade progressed, photographers relied less on diffusion and more on retouching," Schenck says. "That may have been an adjustment for the fact that makeup became less hard-edged."

Though Schenck often has portraits retouched, this image does rely on diffusion. But the photographer dislikes