



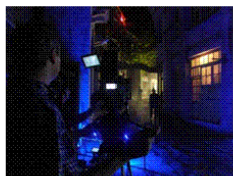
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Michael Dinetz on Working in China

February 2, 2011 | By Scott Esaman



Makeup effects artist Michael Dinetz hails from the East Coast and has been working in California on film projects for more than seven years. Looking to expand, he has constantly been on the lookout for additional opportunities.

But the last place that he thought he would end up living and working was on the other side of the earth.

As he tells his story, it is clear that he is equally surprised and fascinated by his own plight and good fortune. "This is one of the funniest Craigslist stories ever," he said. "One day I saw this ad that a studio in China needed a makeup effects quote for a project. The next day the same ad popped up, but for one month to teach a Chinese crew how to be makeup effects artists. I put in a quote and I got this call from the writer-director-producer of *From Lust til Dust*. I told him that he would need to buy ovens, kitchen mixers, and other necessary items from various countries."

Said producer decided in December 2007 to visit California for a week where Dinetz had a workshop in his house. It turns out that this producer, Henry Luk from Hong Kong, had grown up in the Hong Kong film industry, got an education in the U.S., and now was opening a film studio. "After five minutes, he asked if I could handle a month of Chinese food," Dinetz explained. "I had to get a visa and a list of materials that we needed to buy."

According to Dinetz' instructions, Luk bought all of the mandatory equipment and materials from three different suppliers. "We bought \$8,000 worth of stuff for a month of training," said Dinetz. "Henry's U.S. intern was coordinating the purchase and sending me the pictures. This occurred over three weeks. I touched down in Guangzhou, China on Jan. 7." Dinetz has spent 10 months of the year in China ever since.

Traveling about 15 hours from L.A. by plane when he arrived in January 2008, Dinetz first settled in at Ace Studios in Guangzhou, mainland China. "I had to train 12 people with the help of a wonderful translator, Fred Sun, who was a mainland Chinese kid who had studied film at university," he said. "He took every piece of technical information I had and accurately translated it. The training went on from January to February of 2008."

Thinking that the end of the training also signaled the end of his tenure in China, Dinetz flew back to the U.S., but he soon went back to Ace Studios and did another month of training, ordering more materials.

"The stateside film that I had been involved in got shelved, so I ended up back in China at the end of March 2008," said Dinetz. "Henry wanted to start a crew of U.S. department heads." Soon, Dinetz saw a new studio blossoming under Luk's leadership.

But Luk was no stranger to Americans. After working on Wall Street for 21 years doing commodities training and hedge fund managing, Luk went back to Hong Kong and started one of the first internet-based ticket booking agencies. After the 9/11 tragedy, he transformed the travel business into an IP outsourcing firm. Then in 2007, he wanted to produce a musical. He had gotten a little frustrated with the process of having to find a crew and rent equipment, so Luk decided to start his own studio. Ground was broken, and within nine months, the studio was built, including three sound stages from 4,000 to 12,000 square feet and a small backlot.

Aware of successful film production methods, Luk quickly brought in a production designer, script supervisor, stunt coordinator, and assistant cameraman to train the lighting crew and camera crew, cycling through a few of them since the initial startup. "Right now, the U.S. crew is myself and the production designer," said Dinetz. "We did four months of training and shot the first film in June 2008. The whole plan was that the studio would make its own films and also cater to outside productions. Henry is pitching a package where we give you up front cost savings."

As shooting in Hong Kong is pricey, Ace Studios was getting scripts sent in from many locations. To date, in less than three years, they have had 30 producers tour the studio, shooting five features, and an assortment of pickups as two features decided to change directions in post. Also on their slate have been industrials, commercials, and music videos for the Chinese market. *Shadow Guard*, Ace's first Hong Kong action film, produced by Bey Logan, is being released in Hong Kong theaters Jan. 27. Also, recently added to Ace's upcoming slate is a 1970s Japanese-style slasher film from Hong Kong. Currently, Ace is in pre-production on two films – the first mainland Chinese sci-fi film and a Hong Kong action film. One potential producer-director based out of LA has Asian-themed project for which he will build the practical elements at Ace, as well as utilizing Ace for location shooting in Hong Kong and near the studio. In addition, he will rely on Ace's 40-person computer graphics team for any greenscreen and digital effects shots.

Dinetz now spends 10 months out of the year heading the makeup effects and makeup department at Ace, though he maintains his presence in LA with his Diabolic Design Studio, which in his absence is run by his partners, George Troester, an effects artist and Elissa Prager, a makeup artist and self-taught effects artist. "If people know I'm in L.A., I get calls as a subcontractor as a moldmaker," Dinetz stated. "I also do some producer duties for Ace when I'm in LA – analyzing scripts, creating preliminary budgeting and breakdowns, and talking to people at the studio."

According to Dinetz, what remains unique about China is that it is diverse and everything can be manufactured in the region, including props and custom equipment. "For instance, building a small frontier town is not a challenge," he said.

"If you've got a project, let us see it," said Dinetz. "Our guys at the studio are still fledgling, but they have handled just about anything that you throw at them quite well."

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Month: February Year: 2011 Go

February 2011

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1 Annual VES Awards	2 AMPAS	3	4	5 Aonix Awards VISA Awards
6	7 AMPAS	8	9	10	11	12 AMPAS
13	14 HDA Tech Retreat	15 HDA Tech Retreat	16 HDA Tech Retreat	17 HDA Tech Retreat	18 HDA Tech Retreat	19 EGS Awards ACE Egg Awards
20	21 MPSE Awards	22 13th Annual CDG Awards	23	24	25	26 Independent Spirit Awards Makeup Hairstylist Symposium
27	28 AMPAS					

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