

Post

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High Jump

**Studios clear
technical hurdles
for *The Avengers***

**PLUS: GREEN INITIATIVES
MIB3'S BARRY SONNENFELD
THE ART OF COMPOSITING**





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Green initiatives

This is the fourth year *Post* has tackled the topic of "greening the industry." Previously, we've spoken to big-time movie studios, big-time producer Lesley Chilcott (*An Inconvenient Truth*), and a handful of individuals who were making a difference on movie/television sets. This year, I am very happy to say we spoke to post studios only. There are now a good amount of post houses that have picked up the mantle.

Matt Peterson runs the Website Veratique (<http://veratique.com>), which focuses on greening tips and research regarding the post, broadcast and IT industries. He says, "Our analysis of national and global corporate sustainability rankings show that IT and communications companies typically outnumber media companies five to one in the top tiers. This is now changing, meaning more pressure is on media service operations to adopt sustainability specific to production and post workflows. Over 30 percent of facilities tell us that they already have such sustainability programs. These include requirements for hardware vendors, primarily focused on energy consumption and hazardous waste reduction."

He says the easiest way for a post house to start is to "look at your workflow and identify where the energy consumption is, because that drives your carbon emissions, and a lot of other issues."

Greg Milneck of Digital FX, one of the people we spoke to for this issue, is working his way to Gold LEED certification. And on page 20, he walks us through a lot of what his studio in Baton Rouge has done to achieve this standard. These are things that go beyond gear and plastic bottles. "We were looking into a cistern system, but budget and practicality wouldn't allow. With it you maintain all that water and use it in your building internally — you have pumps or a natural draining system using water accumulated from rainfalls. I do that at my house with wine barrels placed under the gutters. It has a drain at the bottom and we use it to feed our vegetable garden."

Chop House Post's Stephen Hens just built a new space for his post studio in Santa Monica using reclaimed materials in the build and design. "We realized there is very little in a building that you can't reclaim these days, and it's very aesthetically pleasing. There are companies out there who work with reclaimed material. I would just dig through things and figure out how can I turn that into something to use at my facility. And if you walk through it, it doesn't look like a post facility, it looks like a someone's art space, and that's the experience I wanted people to have. Ironically, design drove embracing green and that drove even better design."

■POST

Green Initiatives

**Post studios
are finding
their way.**

By Randi Altman

No one says it's easy, and no one says it's not initially costly, but little by little, post houses are starting to see the light — hopefully through environmentally-friendly bulbs.

Green practices are starting to take hold at post production companies around the country. Some are making sure everything they bring into their facility is then recycled properly or donated, others are going paperless or installing solar panels, others are using almost all reclaimed building materials and air conditioning their space efficiently. Regardless of their efforts, their action is key and hopefully inspires others.

CHOP HOUSE POST

Chop House Post (www.chophouse-post.com), a full-service post house that takes projects from conception through delivery, has opened a new office in Santa Monica, one that reflects the owner's belief that with a little hard work, research and ingenuity, a company can significantly reduce its carbon footprint.

And in doing so accomplished exactly what owner/creative director Stephen Hens wanted in terms of the design: a big, open area where everyone could work together — only the edit bays are enclosed.

Another goal was to build and fill the space with reclaimed materials "from local artisans using local materials or, even better, local reclaimed materials."

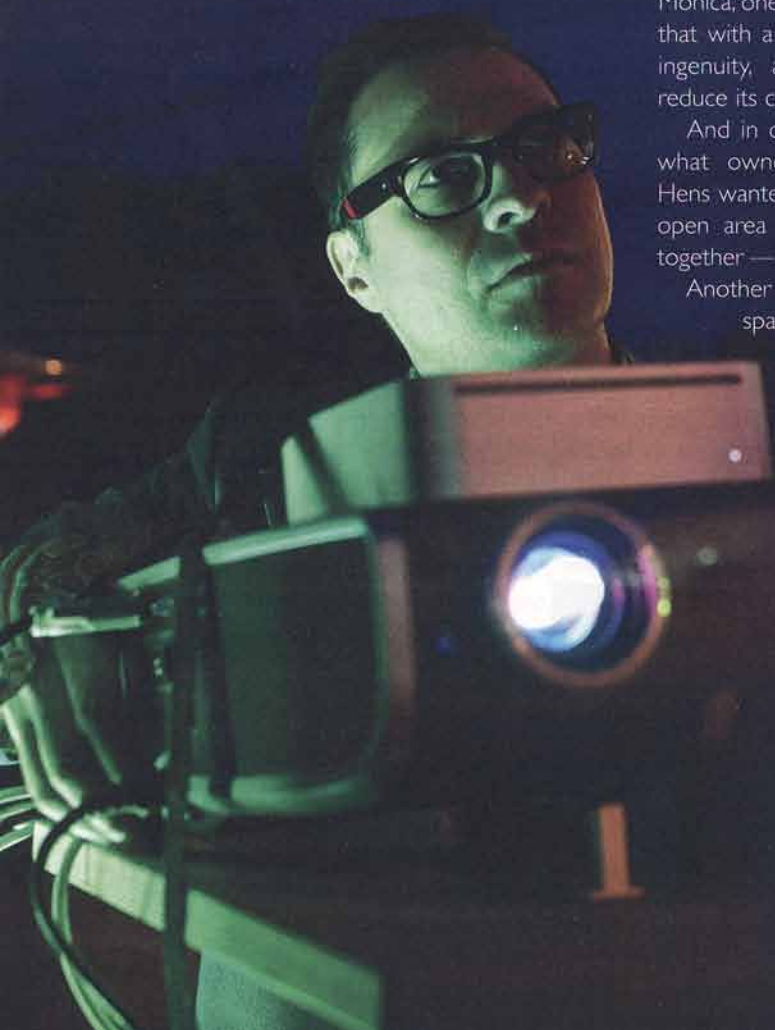


Stephen Hens of Chop House Post made sure to use reclaimed materials when designing his new studio. All work surfaces are made of 100-year-old Douglas fir.

Hens recognizes that the initial cost of going green is high. "Some things are very difficult to do green from a cost and execution standpoint, but after I did a little research, and working with my architect, Brian Mullinix of Forma Design Build, it's amazing what you can find if you do your legwork."

One of the "basic" things Chop House tackled, according to Hens, was air conditioning. "We started with an open floor plan and zoned air conditioning so less-trafficked areas don't have to be on all the time — bathrooms, kitchens and open areas are on their own thermostats and only cooled up to 10 feet, even though we have almost 26-foot ceilings. We let that heat rise. A lot of the open areas are fed by bypass valves, so when the edit bays, which have to be quiet, dark and cold for the equipment, reach a certain temperature that extra cold air blows out to the main room. You don't even have to turn on the thermostats in 50 percent of the building because it's just being fed by bypassed cold air. We have over 4,000 square feet, and our utility bills are shockingly low."

Next on the list was lighting, which takes up tremendous amount of heat. They decided to go with either CFL or LED lighting throughout the building; almost all the light fixtures, except for track lighting and recessed lighting, are reclaimed materials. "Our



giant light fixtures, which feed the public areas, are reclaimed 1920 Olive baskets I found at the Rose Bowl flea market. I turned them upside down and put a 300-watt CFL in it. It looks cool, it's efficient and it's reclaimed," reports Hens.

The desks and work surfaces are made of almost 200-year-old reclaimed, local Douglas fir. "We have planking that is used in all of the rooms, for platforms and ceiling panels, that is 100-year-old reclaimed Douglas fir from an old Victorian House in Los Angeles. Those types of approaches help keep your costs down, but more importantly lets you source materials locally and gives a lot of character to your studio."

Hens spent about six months scouring Southern California for things to use in the new space. Other reclaimed items include furniture (what isn't made of reclaimed material was reclaimed industrial carts from the Rust Belt); toilet paper and paper towel dispensers as well as towel racks (made from reclaimed gas pipes from Los Angeles); lighting fixtures; door hinges; and joist hangers from a factory in the Old West. "We used the joist hangers for architectural and aesthetic reasons, and I didn't have to buy them from a manufacturing company in China that doesn't use green practices, and it didn't have to be shipped across an ocean," explains Hens.

When it came to insulating the thousands of square feet of their space, Chop House used reclaimed denim from a company called Ultra Suede Denim, just one of the companies, sources as well as practices suggested by architect Mullinix.

In terms of day-to-day green initiatives, Chop House Post is completely file-based. "We don't do tape, we don't do film; we think it's toxic and don't want to put it back in the environment." For digital archiving they call on LTO tape, which is said to last for 30 years, according to the LTO Consortium.

The post world has been "a pretty messy business for a long time," says Hens. He points to gear as the big offender. "Everything we have is the latest and the most compact systems possible; we do everything on the desktop, Mac-based for the most part, and we stay software-driven as much as we can because it takes less electricity to drive that equipment." He points to Resolve on Mac in all their color bays and Smoke for Mac for finishing as examples.

"There is a bigger impact when you start thinking green more than you realize," acknowledges Hens. "At first you think, 'Wow, that's going to be really expensive and a challenge,' then you start rethinking how you do business and you realize you are becoming more efficient and more competitive."

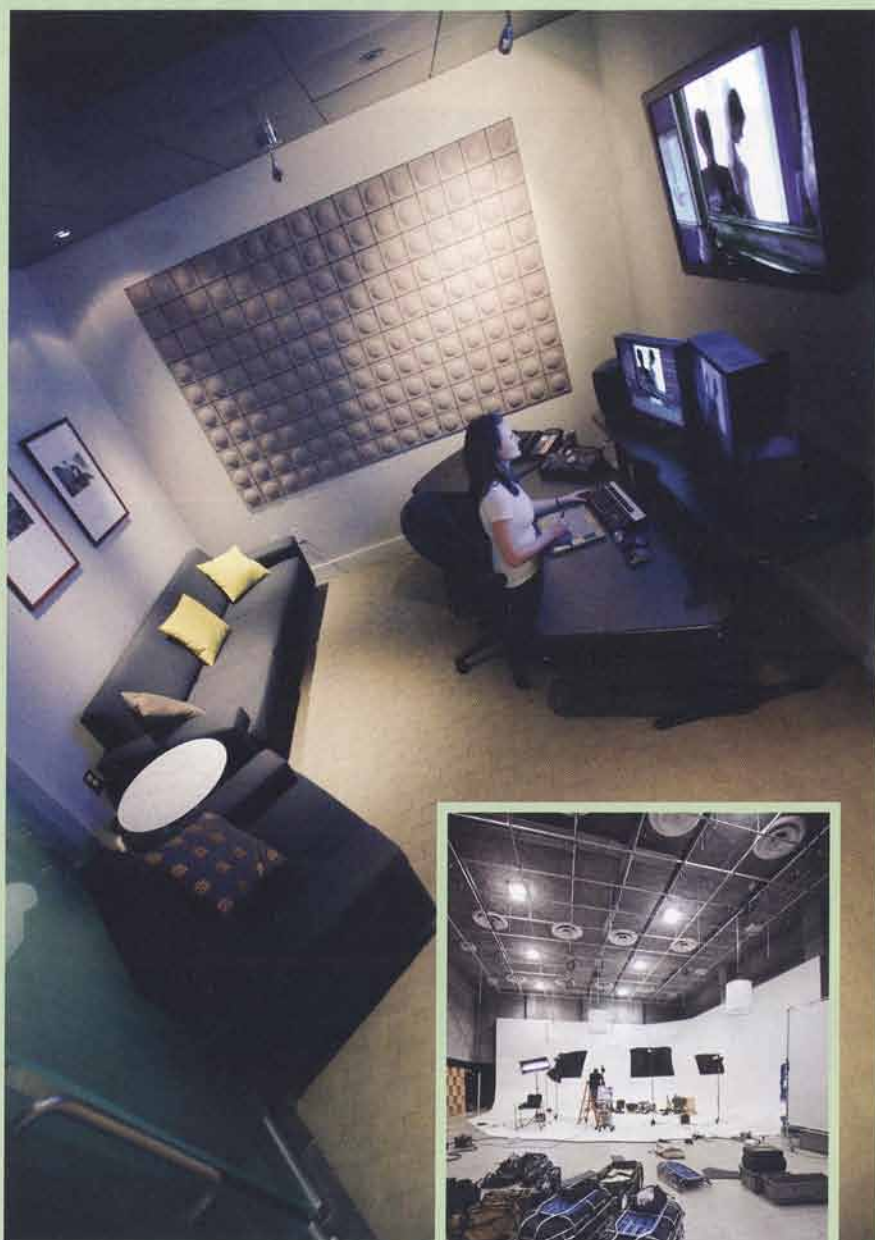
DIGITAL FX

Greg Milneck, president of Baton Rouge's Digital FX, has always been environmentally conscious, but a recent expansion of his space allowed him to start from the ground up. Digital FX (www.digitalfx.tv) began as a post house, but later added production services to handle new work coming into Louisiana thanks to aggressive tax incentives. Their growth continued recently with the addition of a new studio and camera department, housing make-up suites, a kitchen, offices, stage, cyc and greenscreen. The new building is in the final stages of getting its LEED certification.

LEED certification was established by the US Green Business Counsel Building (www.usgbc.org/LEED/), and according to its site provides building owners and operators with a framework for identifying and implementing practical and measurable green building design, construction, operations and maintenance solutions. "We are probably at the minimum LEED Silver, but hoping for Gold," reports Milneck.

He acknowledges that achieving Gold status is difficult because of the costs involved, noting that is one of the big challenges of going green. There are tax incentives for solar panels and such, but Digital FX still found it too expensive. "Solar panels were on the list, but we had to cut it. While you do get tax credits, you still have to lay out the money, and it could be years before you get the payback."

While always green sensitive, Milneck and Digital FX wanted to take it to the next level with their new construction, so they hired an architect and contractor who were familiar with LEED certification. But he admits it's challenging for a production company because there are things that go against the current norm of the industry. He offers up florescent lighting as an example. "This is especially hard to pull off in a post facility because there is only so much you can do to maintain what you have to deliver, but it's one of the things that helps you get that LEED certification: it means retrofitting existing fixtures and ensuring new ones are compact fluorescents. You could use LEDs, but they are just not there yet and the cost is prohibitive." Milneck admits that compromises



Digital FX is aiming for LEED Gold certification with the addition of its new building as well as green practices within its older space.

In addition to investing in scanners to eliminate prints, Digital FX has targeted production books — call sheets, production

A photograph showing two workers installing solar panels on a flat rooftop. One worker is kneeling and working on a panel, while the other stands nearby. The rooftop is surrounded by urban buildings, and a white sign is visible in the background.

The film begins with an energy audit of Futuristic that analyzed the current state of their building to serve as the benchmark (energy consumption, heat leaks, etc.). Afterwards, Stellar began making improvements by doing air sealing (sealing up all “leaks” around the building where interior air exchanges with the outside), installing and insulating a new roof, and installing a 9.2kW solar power system.

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guides, etc. The first step, double-sided pages, cut their paper consumption in half. Creating all of their booklets in half-page formats brought that number to 75 percent with the goal of digital documents only. "That is going to take time and acceptance with the crew, but we have come a long way," reports Milneck.

Digital FX recycles coffee grounds with a different employee taking them home for their garden each week. In expanding its fleet of vans, they chose Mercedes vehicles, which have high MPGs and run on biodiesel. Generators used for shoots also run on biodiesel. They even purchased an addition diesel vehicle to be used for errands. Bike racks are next, offering employees encouragement to bike to work. And when allowed by clients, sets are donated to local theater groups and schools.

Milneck and Digital FX have a lot to be proud of, but they aren't resting on their laurels. They are continually looking for ways to aim higher. "There are always ways to improve!"

HOOLIGAN

There is a perception that folks in LA take green initiatives more seriously than New Yorkers, but that is not the case, at least not at Hooligan (www.hooligannyc.com), a film editing company based in NYC's Flatiron district.

Rosemary Quigley is managing director at the studio, which takes recycling very seriously, even when the city of New York has limits to what they will accept. "We can't recycle certain kinds of take-out or yogurt containers, but we can do cans, bottles, paper, milk cartons, all that," she explains.

"As a post house, the biggest issue we are faced with is a lot of older tape stock, media and equipment," she says. "We found a company that accepts all of our old stock, cassette cases, any kind of disc or media. We send it to them and they will recycle it by the pound. We pay for that to happen, but we think it's important. We let it accumulate and then try to ship stuff out four or five times a year."

The equipment is a bit trickier. While Hooligan's first step is to donate usable equipment to schools and non-profits, some gear is just at

[Cont. from 23] the end of its shelf life. This is when they drop off old equipment at e-waste recycling initiatives around the city. She credits local Apple reseller Tekserve in helping make this easier as well. "They partner with Lower East Side Ecology Center at least four times a year and host drop-offs. We had some beta decks we didn't need so we gave it to them. I believe they take all usable parts and re-use them. That is their first step; they don't just discard it."

Quigley says things got easier for all when New York State passed an electric equipment recycling and reuse act in May 2010. It's supposed to ensure that every New Yorker has the opportunity to recycle waste in a responsible way. Now they provide drop-off days and information about e-waste, and they have created drop-off points in all five boroughs.

"It's important," she says, "because there are so many hazardous materials in these machines — you don't want it to sit in a landfill and get into the environment. It's dangerous, and I don't think people understand that. Hopefully, with this new initiative, people are getting educated."

Hooligan's green initiatives go beyond hardware and media recycling. In the post world, you have clients in-house for days at a time and that means offering certain amenities. "You have to have a refrigerator filled with soda, beer, wine, and everybody orders lunch in. So one of the things we are trying to do is have group lunches, which will help minimize the amount of containers you are throwing out every day." Quigley also personally makes sure that all of those bottles and cans find their way to the recycling bin.

Water bottles are a huge offender, so the edit house has a filtered water system and glasses are used. The last person out each night is required to shut everything off. And where they can, according to Quigley, they use compact fluorescent bulbs. "But it's not as much as I would like because of the aesthetic. People are very particular."

While the studio itself doesn't compost, individual employees do, and they take advantage of being near NYC's Union Square, which hosts a farmer's market four times a week where employees can drop their composting. Some employees ride their bikes to work, which are kept in edit suites, offices or supply closets.

A few tips offered by Quigley include using cleaning products that are better for the environment, "like 7th Generation, so you are putting gentle things into the water system rather than toxic stuff; and when you get a CD or DVD, reuse or recycle all the packaging. "We open stuff up, pull out paper, put that in paper recycling, we send the balance to trash recycling, we make sure as much as we can we are reusing something or sending it to properly be disposed of."

Quigley says the key is considering all the choices we make. "Some people don't think about it a lot. They just throw something in the garbage. You personally have to care about it."

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