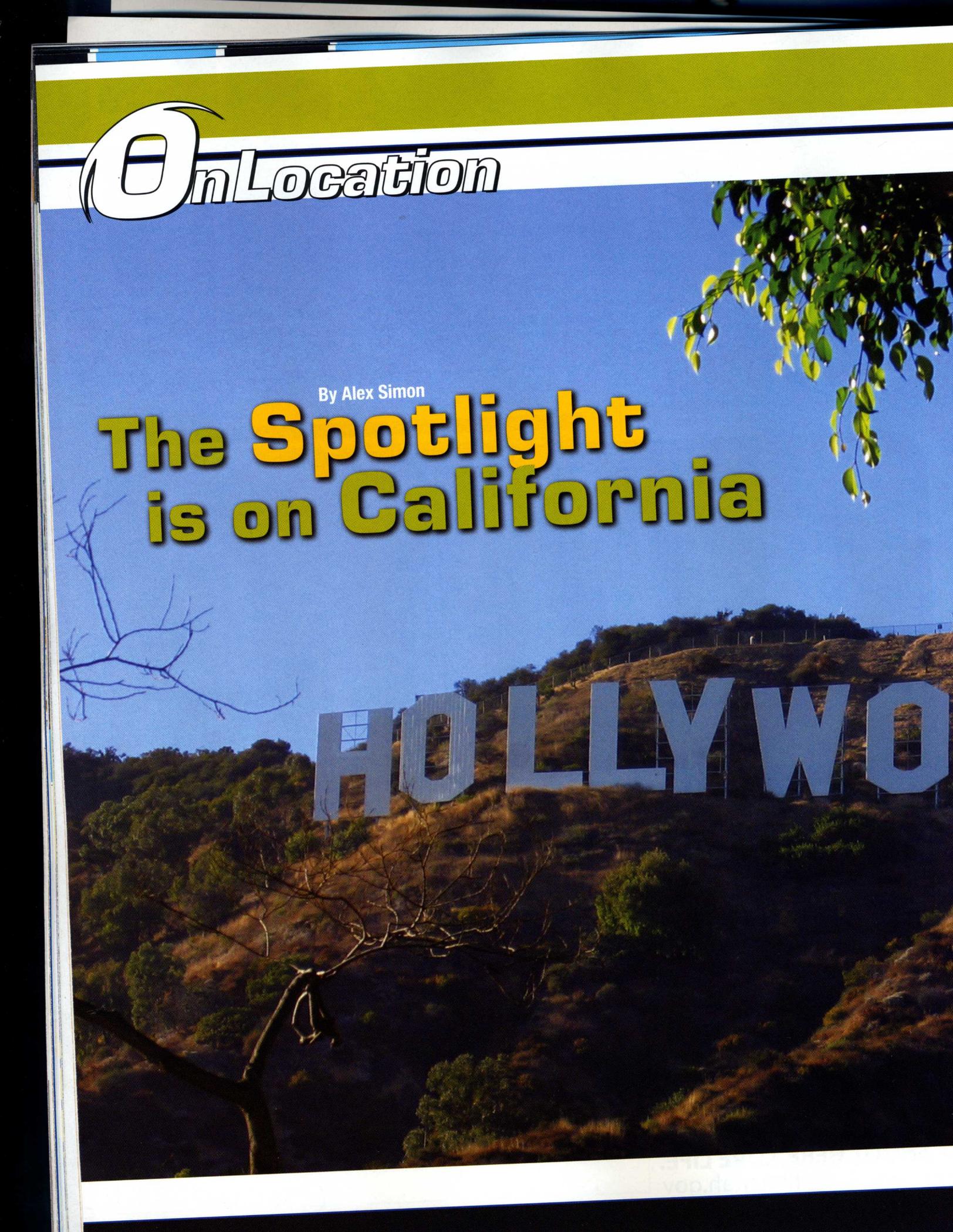


OnLocation

By Alex Simon

The Spotlight is on California

A photograph of the Hollywood sign on a hillside. The sign is made of large, white, block letters and is set against a backdrop of a clear blue sky and a hillside with sparse vegetation. The sign is partially obscured by the branches of a tree in the foreground. The overall scene is bright and sunny, suggesting a clear day in Los Angeles.

HOLLYWOOD



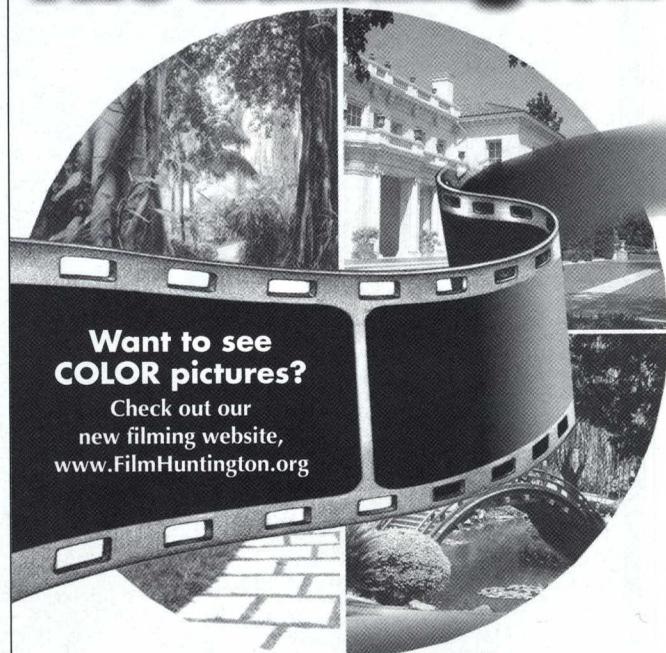
"Hooray for Hollywood" is what filmmakers, actors and production crews are hopefully going to be saying again. For a while there, the Golden State was having problems keeping filmmakers interested in shooting in California because of competitive incentives being offered all over the world. But this wasn't named "Tinsel Town" for nothing.

The California Film Commission and a coalition of industry groups is working with leadership in Sacramento to institute a production tax incentive in order to keep this vital business shooting in the state. Businesses are offering producers, directors, and cast and crews more reasons to want to shoot in this amazing state. After speaking with some location managers, producers and film commissions in California, the locals have put their best foot forward, and have realized that it's time for the industry professionals to step up to the plate, and help bring back what Hollywood is best known for, its production.

Amy Lemisch, director of the California Film Commission emphasizes that the Golden State still has a unique situation, in that it remains the home base of the entertainment industry. Almost all the projects shot in the country are still generated from California, where approximately \$34 billion in production spending takes place annually. "We're working on passing legislation in Sacramento to get a similar program involving tax incentives for motion picture production established," Lemisch says. The incentive program would target those productions that are most likely to leave the state due to incentives offered elsewhere.

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Lemisch says that most producers want to keep their productions in California, which has the deepest talent pool, both in front of and behind the camera. However, economics have forced them to do otherwise in recent years. "It's just easier to work here," Lemisch explains. "It's one stop shopping. But now it's to the point where people aren't even doing a comparative budget for California anymore, and they used to always

do that." Lemisch broke down her reasons for why current and future productions should stay home, as California offers:

1. The most plentiful crew and talent base, and production infrastructure in the world.
2. Best stages, post-production facilities and equipment.

3. Beautiful weather all year around.

4. The California Film Commission coordinates with a network of over 50 film offices throughout the state, divided by county and city.

5. The California Film Commission offers free permits, troubleshooting and a database of locations.

On a local level, the city of San Francisco passed the state's first film and television incentive package back in April. Sponsored by city supervisor, Michela Alioto-Pier, the incentive provides a rebate of city fees and expenses for productions that shoot 65 percent or more of their principal photography in San Francisco. Low budget or independent films that cost less than \$3 million must shoot 55 percent of their principal photography in the city to qualify. "This incentive will allow our crew members and small businesses to compete for the work that has been flowing to Canada, New Mexico and New York," Alioto-Pier said.

According to Jack Keiser, chief economist for LAEDC (The Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation), San Francisco's incentive is a step in the right direction, but if California is going to stay competitive in the motion picture production game, the changes need to start at the top.

"Everyone is looking to Sacramento. The film incentive package has been put on the table," Keiser explains. But, he says, "You have to be a little pessimistic. The rest of the year is a political year. The race for the governorship, lots of bond initiatives and other initiatives will be on the ballot, so anything that smacks of assistance to business might get caught in the crossfire between various political candidates."

One question that always seems to pop up is an obvious one. Why has it been so difficult to pass legislation to aid film production in the location where it's based? Keiser responds, "It's internal squabbling that's holding us back and anyone who's in the industry or cares about its future, like the people in travel, tourism and apparel, they've got to call their representatives in Sacramento and say 'We need to pass this incentive package. It's more than going to pay for itself.' Like someone once said 'When it's a political year, don't expect anything rational to happen.' The industry is not the stars you see up on the screen, the industry is the people you see below the line, so they need to tell the story better if this is going to happen."

Several other Southern California areas are doing their best to attract production over their borders, sometimes with limited resources. According to Janice Arrington of the Orange County Film Commission, the O.C. offers limited, yet helpful incentives, as does a few cities that do not charge for permits. Most notable of these is the city of Irvine. Arrington added that the commission is working with local hotels to offer crew discount packages. Aside from those, the O.C. has no incentive packages in place, but still remains a popular location for production, hosting corporate videos, episodic and reality series, such as "MTV's Laguna Beach," "The

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Real O.C.," "Real Orange County Housewives" and independent features such as "The Death and Life of Bobby Z." Currently, Orange County's largest amount of production comes from TV commercials, and the county currently generates more than \$500 million a year in expenditures and payrolls from the major studios.

From a below-the-line standpoint, however, the current state of production could improve. Beth Tate, a location manager who has been in the business since 1981 says, "Around 1997 everyone was coming to L.A. to film, and I was getting about five calls a day for work. It was a great way to make a living. Never in my wildest dreams did I think it would be outsourced." Tate remembers the big change started happening right before the commercial actor's strike of 2001, which happened almost in tandem with 9/11. The combination of those two things really drove a lot of work out of California and into Canada. "It's funny, it was almost like people being in denial about the amount of carbon monoxide that's in the air. Nobody really wanted to admit for a long time how bad it was getting. Recently, I've finally started to hear people say 'My God, it's really changed.' Now if I can get 20 days to scout in January, which used to be the busiest month, I'm lucky."

Bob Craft, another location manager, and 19 year veteran of the business, who has worked on films such as "Pulp Fiction" and "Jackie Brown" is more optimistic, but thinks that people in film production need to start looking at the way they behave in their own backyards. "We need to become more aware of the people who live and work in Southern California who are not in the film biz," Craft explains. "Neighborhoods are being used as back lots, and many of them have been shot-out, because they've been used so frequently. We have to be very aware of that fact, and very sensitive to neighborhood concerns. People have become very jaded. The LMGA (Location Managers Guild of America) is addressing that need currently."

Some of the business' top producers echo those sentiments. Neil Canton, who got his start on Peter Bogdanovich's "What's Up Doc?" in 1972, and produced the "Back to the Future trilogy," among other titles, says "Getting the most out of your dollar is a positive, but the negative is that you're not able to take people you've worked with in the past, the top people in the world at what they do in the crew, so you find yourself working with a lot of people you don't know," Canton says. "Plus," he adds, "you're forced to be away from your family, because you're on location. There's no greater feeling than working in California, and coming home after a hard day's work."

Producer Doug Claybourne, who most recently delivered the hit "North Country," is even more blunt, "Because of rebates and tax incentives all over the world, almost every state in the union has become a rebate center [such as] 25 percent in New Mexico and other states. Everybody's doing it but California hasn't been able to



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get it together to keep production in [the] state. It's hurting the state and the business. California is now the last stop of the places to be able to work."

Neil Canton puts it best when he says "Here's what I don't understand: Hollywood is an enormous employer in the state of California. I don't see why the state isn't doing everything in its power to keep production here." 🗣️

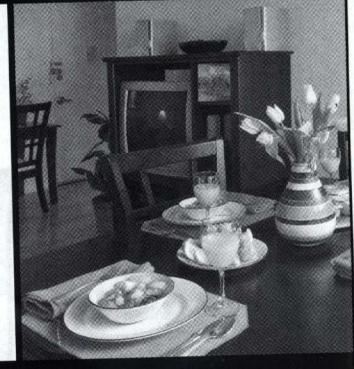
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