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THE
APES
ISSUE

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in his magnificent career

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Planet of the Apes

Anniversary of an iconic franchise

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ORIGIN OF THE SPECIES

BY JOE NAZZARO

AS **PLANET OF THE APES** CELEBRATES ITS 50TH ANNIVERSARY, THE FILM'S ORIGINAL MAKEUP TEAM SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS ON A CULTURAL PHENOMENON

As the swinging sixties came to an end, 20th Century Fox announced plans for a feature film adaptation of Pierre Boulle's 1963 sci-fi novel, *La Planète des Singes*, better known as *Planet of the Apes*. The story, about a group of human explorers who find themselves on a planet where apes are the dominant form of life, was a risky proposition for the big screen, notably because it meant putting large groups of actors in prosthetic ape makeups, something that had never been done on that scale.

The task of creating those makeups fell to John Chambers, an industry veteran who had recently created a series of elaborate disguises for some of Hollywood's biggest actors in *The List of Adrian Messenger*. Chambers was reportedly in Madrid when he got a call from then-studio makeup head Ben Nye, but wasn't all that enthusiastic

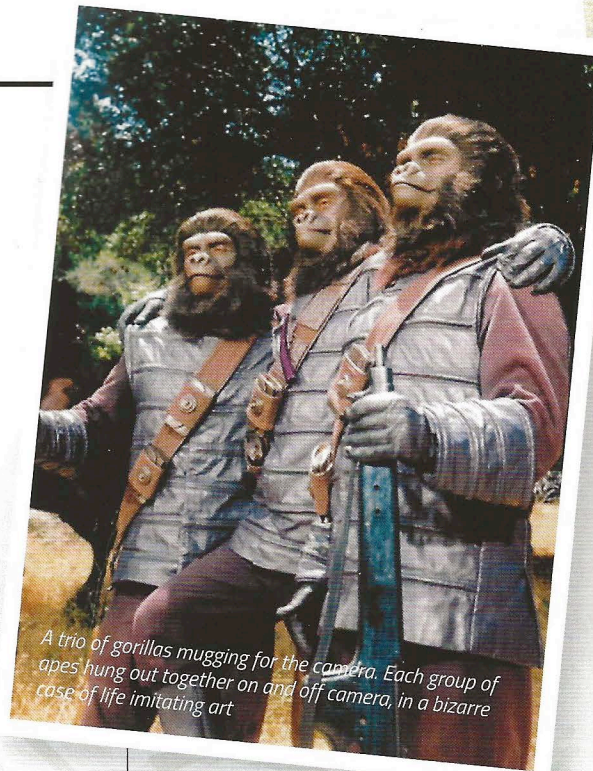
about the project. "They had tried a lot of guys already," recalls Chambers, who passed away in 2001, "but they had all turned it down. People like George Bau, Dick Smith (who was at Fox and no relation to Dick Smith in New York); they were all afraid of it. Few of them had done extensive lab work, so that's how it got to me."

Tom Burman, who had recently landed a studio apprenticeship job thanks in part to a recommendation from Chambers, remembers things somewhat differently. "I was cleaning up Ben Nye's office," Burman remembers, "when he came in with his lab man Dick Smith. They had just come from a meeting where they were talking about this movie they were going to do. They wanted Bud Westmore to come in, because he had done *The List of Adrian Messenger*, and my ears pricked up, because I knew John and I had seen the work he did on *The List of Adrian Messenger*, so I knew he was the one who really did the work. But I was still an apprentice, and shouldn't have been listening let alone talking, but I had a Tourette's moment and shouted out, 'He didn't do it!' They asked me who did and I said, 'John Chambers!' I had a phone number, so they said, 'Call him and ask him to come in; we've got a script for him!'

"John said, 'I can't do it, Tommy, I'm casting



"He handed me the Planet of the Apes script and said, 'I'm going to win the Academy Award!'"



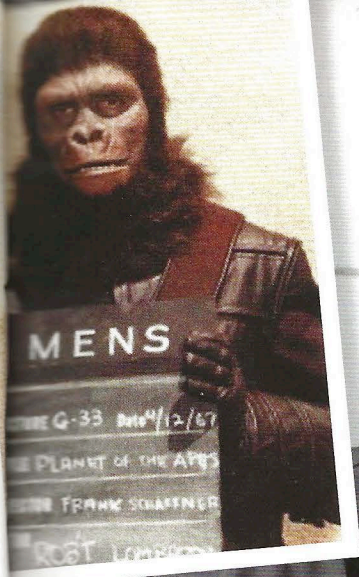
A trio of gorillas mugging for the camera. Each group of apes hung out together on and off camera, in a bizarre case of life imitating art

Spock's ears!' I said, 'But they want Bud Westmore!' and John *hated* Bud Westmore, so he came in immediately to pick up a script. The following Monday, I saw him drive up to the department, and he called me over and said, 'Tommy, it's you and me!' He handed me the *Planet of the Apes* script and said, 'I'm going to win the Academy Award!' so that's how it began."

Nye had overseen an early makeup test featuring Edward G. Robinson as an early version of Dr. Zaius, as well as contract players James Brolin and Linda Harrison (studio chief Darryl Zanuck's girlfriend) as Cornelius and Zira. The results got a green light from the studio, but Chambers was underwhelmed. "It was really Mickey Mouse as I called it, so they were really up a tree. Ben Nye tried to do it, with Edward G. Robinson instead of Maurice Evans as Dr. Zaius. He was a good actor, but wanted to keep his beard."

"I was still straightening up the place," Burman continues, "and John was busy working, when

Roddy McDowall as Cornelius. The actor went on to play several ape characters for the film and television sequels



Above: Actor Robert Lombardo, who ironically played the uncredited gorilla photographer.

This image: A trio of apes trying out a bit of product placement. The original film spawned several sequels and a short-lived 1974 TV series.

Image Courtesy of Mike Smithson, MakeUpMedia

Below right: Ape actors were notorious for ruining their prosthetics over lunch. As Chambers recalls, "I used to tell them, 'Drink more liquids, don't eat any of the normal foods,' and they would go off and eat a steak!"

Image Courtesy of Mike Smithson, MakeUpMedia



somebody knocked at the door. John said, 'Tell them to get out of here!' So I opened the door and it was Edward G. Robinson! He came in and started telling John, 'I'm not going to shave off my goatee and moustache!' John said, 'That's okay, we'll work around it.'

"He then said, 'And I can't see myself wearing all this makeup every day, all day long; they're going to have to shoot around it, because I'm only going to give them so many hours a day!' John was very agreeable about it, but when Edward G. Robinson left, John turned to me and said, 'He's off the picture!'"

Not everybody was thrilled by the prospect of hiding their face under ape prosthetics for the

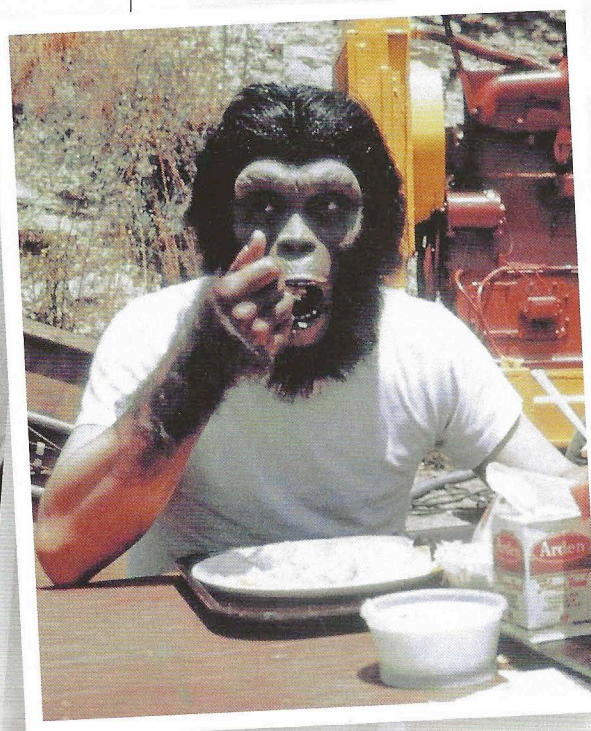
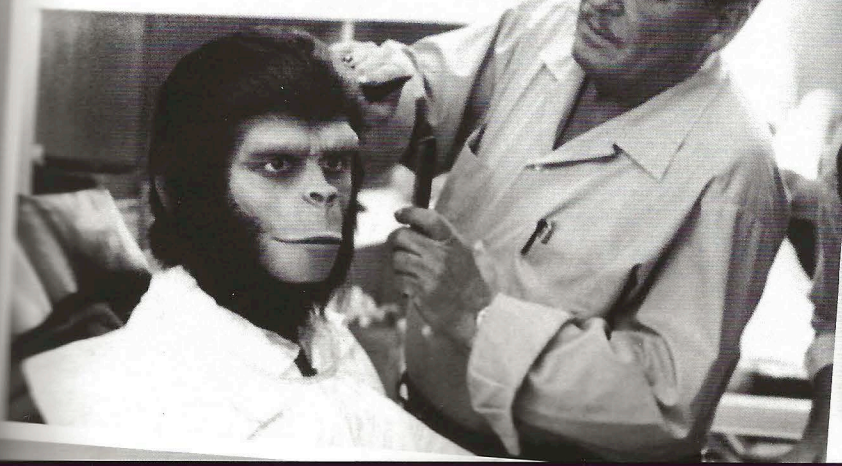
next several months. "There was a famous actress brought in before Kim Hunter," claims Chambers, "and I sat down with her and said, 'You realize you won't ever be seen except as a monkey?' She looked at me stunned and said, 'John, I can't do it; I've always depended on my features to help me!'"

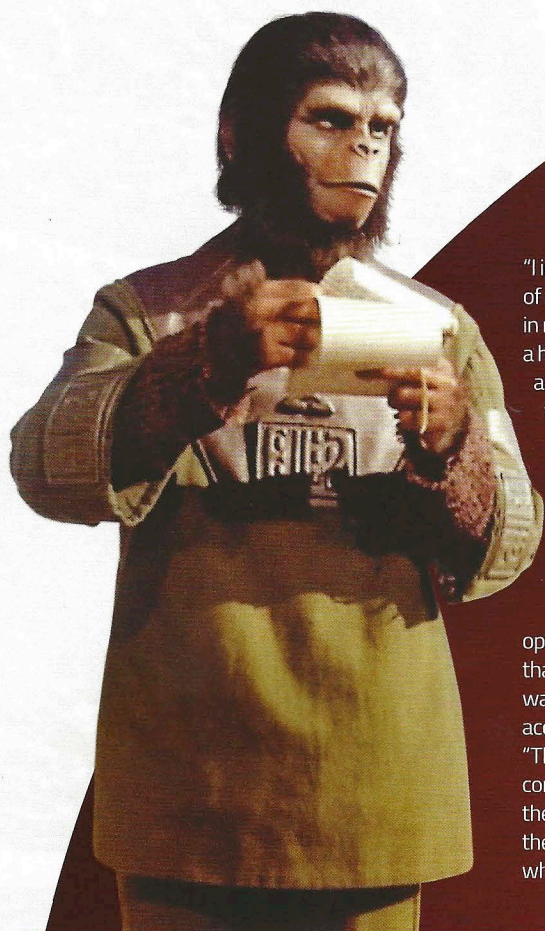
Fortunately, once those actors dropped out, it was pretty much smooth sailing. "There were no prima donnas," offers Chambers.

"Kim Hunter was one of the most pleasant people I've ever worked with and so was Roddy McDowall; they were all marvellous. We never had an

argument, people being tired; nothing." One of Chambers' biggest allies was Dan Striepeke who took over as studio makeup head during pre-production. Striepeke had just come off an exhausting season of *Mission: Impossible* when he got a call from a soon-to-retire Nye, asking if he wanted to be considered as successor. "I'm sure John had some influence, but I got the job over a lot of favourites, so I'm sure a lot of people were shocked.

Don Cash Sr, former Ringling Bros. clown-turned-makeup artist, doing touch ups on Roddy McDowall's ape coiffure





"I sat down with her and said, 'You realize you won't ever be seen except as a monkey?'"

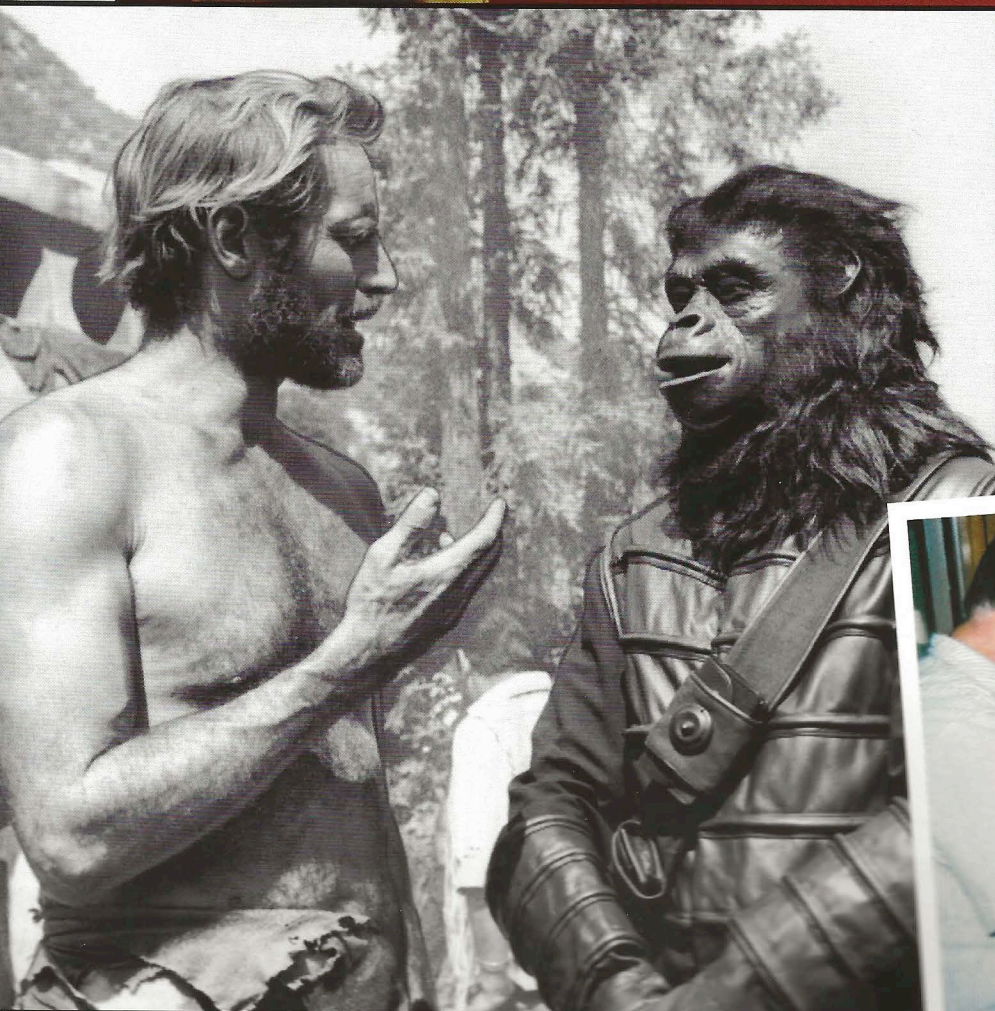
"I immediately ran into a maelstrom of different problems that were involved in making the film. I immediately contacted a hair vendor I knew from *Mission: Impossible*, and started buying hair by the bus-load for *Apes*. I also brought in Josephine Turner, an absolutely magnificent wig maker. There was a lot of hair work on *Planet of the Apes*, so that was another part of the equation to deal with."

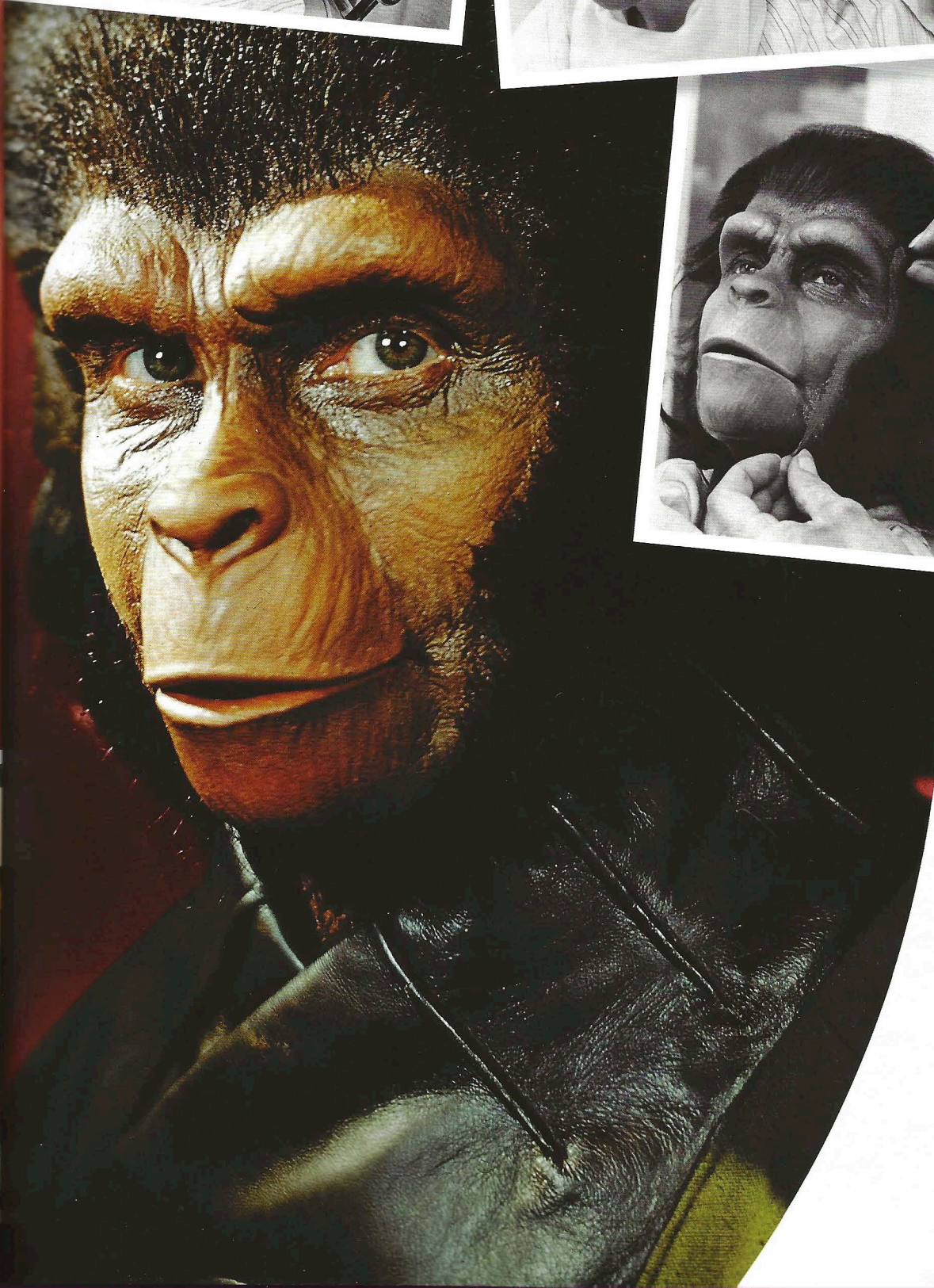
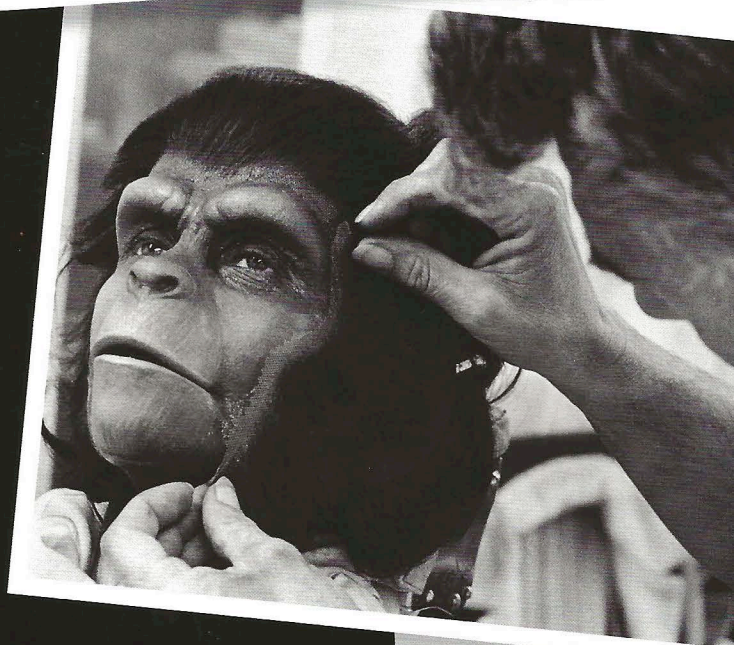
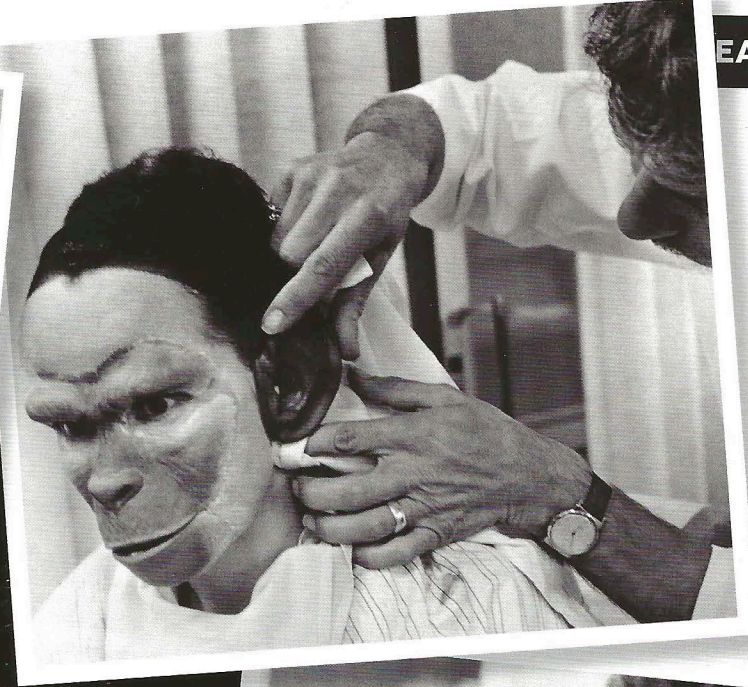
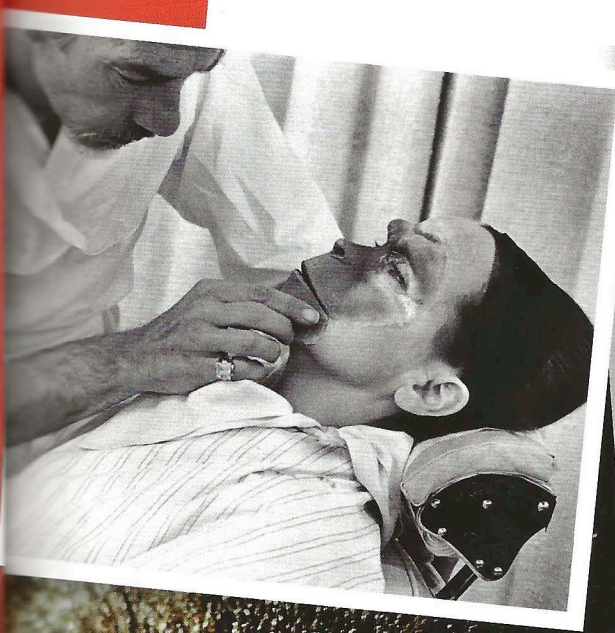
Since Chambers was creating a carefully choreographed ape production line, he opted to hire promising newcomers rather than established veterans who had their own way of doing things. "Their minds were free to accept anything given to them," he elaborates. "The older makeup artists had their own concepts, so no matter how well you showed them how to do it, they were still going to add their own ideas. The young guys accepted what we told them and did marvellous work."

"We had people like Verne Langdon, who was great at airbrushing, so I brought him in for that. Ken Chase was a new guy with a limited background, but when I saw what he could do, I gave him Maurice Evans, who played Dr. Zaius."

"I believe John hired 12 brand new people to come in," recalls Burman, "so Ken, for example, had never really done makeup before; he had worked in a beauty store, and we had people like Eddie Butterworth, who were not part of that initial group, but that group of 12 did the principal characters that worked almost every day all the way through the show. There were people like Leo Lotito, who did Kim Hunter's makeup, while Don Cash did Roddy and Ken worked on Maurice Evans."

As Chase recalls, "There was a category called 'permits,' so when the roster was full and they needed extra help, they were allowed to hire those of us on that list. When I was given the assignment of doing the makeup on Maurice Evans, it was a controversial decision on John Chambers' part. It engendered a lot of resentment from some members, but he didn't care, and liked what I was doing. We were given the opportunity to attend classes at Fox, and John watched us as we were being trained. In fact, I was savvy enough that I caught on when some of the other instructors gave us bad direction. I won't mention any names, but there were some who purposely tried to





Opposite page top left:
Roddy McDowall
as Cornelius

**Opposite page
bottom left:**
Charlton Heston and
a background gorilla
(note the immobile
background mask)

**Opposite page
bottom right:**
John Chambers
airbrushing a series
of ape prosthetics

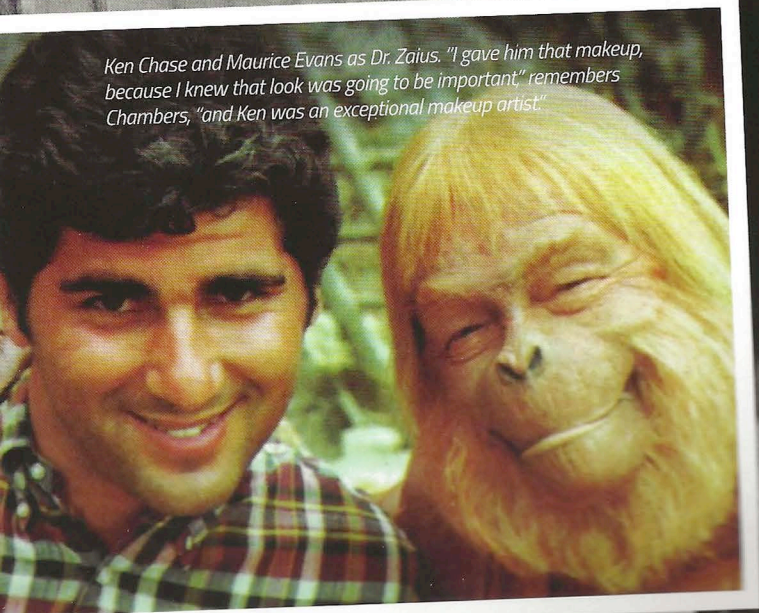
Above: Makeup veteran
Leo Lotito Jr. applies Kim
Hunter's Zira makeup

Left: Kim Hunter as Zira.
The actress would
eventually reprise the
role in two sequels



Edward G. Robinson as Dr. Zaius in one of the original makeup tests. Chambers reportedly persuaded him to turn down the role, citing the actor's heart condition and the difficulties he would have shooting in high altitudes.

Image Courtesy of Mike Smithson, MakeUpMedia



Ken Chase and Maurice Evans as Dr. Zaius. "I gave him that makeup, because I knew that look was going to be important," remembers Chambers, "and Ken was an exceptional makeup artist."



Kim Hunter as Zira. The brush in the background most likely belongs to her makeup artist, Leo Lotito Jr.



Maurice (Dr. Zaius) Evans catches up on a bit of reading material from his native England

give me bad instruction, but I just had an amazing intuition, so every time it happened, I found John and said, 'Is this correct?' and he said, 'No!'"

"I was working at Fox at the time," remembers Eddie Butterworth, one of the film's more seasoned artists, "so that's how I got in. I had also been in touch with John Chambers, so if I wasn't doing something else, I would help out with *Planet of the Apes*. I worked in the lab as well, but was better with hair work. I didn't do much of the airbrushing, but I did some painting of the faces and put them on, applied the pieces and put the hair on afterwards."

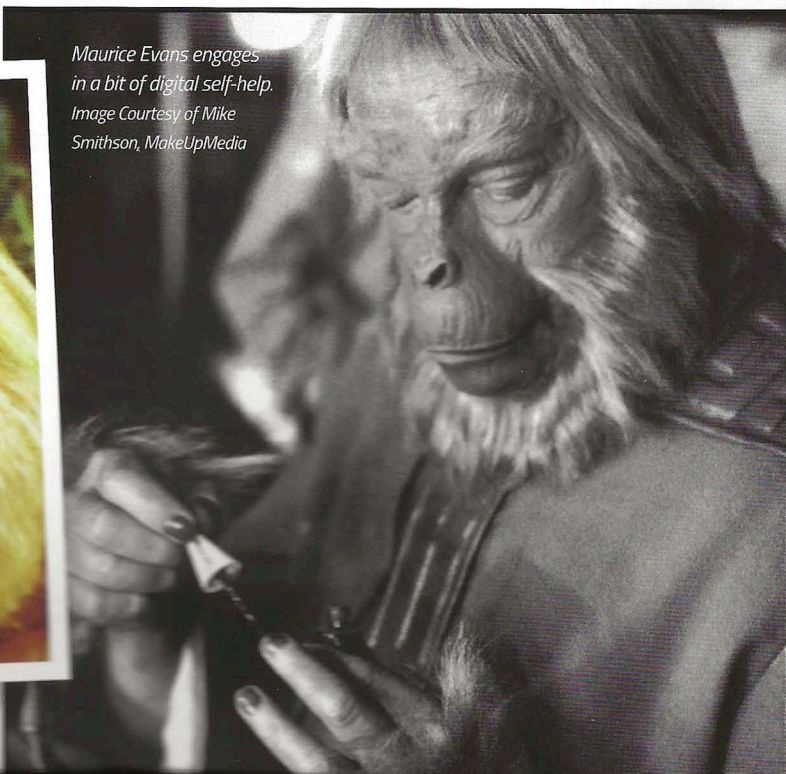
"They had two big 4-foot trailers at the front

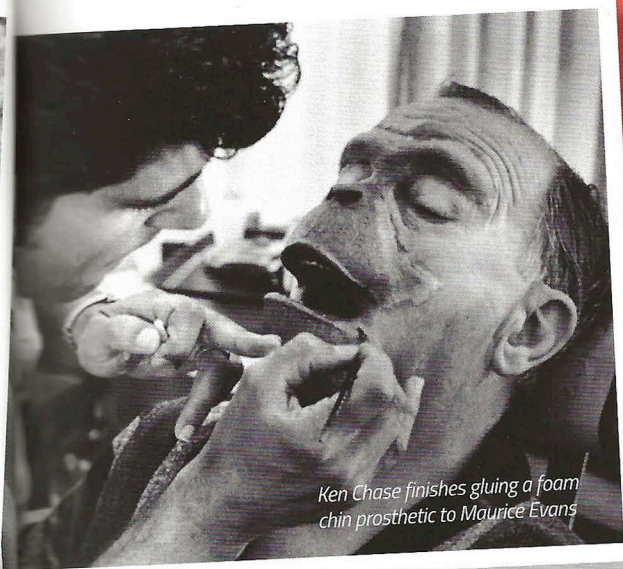
lot at Fox," adds Darryl McIntyre, who had apprenticed under Perc Westmore, whose former assistant was Burman's lab mate, Werner Keppler, who threw McIntyre's name into the hat. "We practiced putting on an orangutan, a gorilla or a chimp, and for some reason, I ended up in the gorilla department. It was easy, because they were so dark, you could've put it on with tire glue and nobody would've noticed!"

"In those days, we only had spirit gum to apply it with, and I remember Kim Hunter became allergic to the spirit gum so they had to put her appliance on with Duo adhesive. And Roddy McDowall, after a few weeks of shooting, after they said, 'That's a wrap!' he would go over to the director and say, 'Are you sure?' and rip his makeup off in one piece. He wouldn't sit there and let us bathe his face in acetone, which is what we did in those days, because it cut the spirit gum right away!"

Maurice Evans engages in a bit of digital self-help.

Image Courtesy of Mike Smithson, MakeUpMedia





Ken Chase finishes gluing a foam chin prosthetic to Maurice Evans

"...no matter how well you showed them how to do it, they were still going to add their own ideas"

Perhaps inevitably on a production of that size, there were the odd bumps in the road. "There was one point when we were only one appliance ahead on Roddy McDowall," remembers Striepeke. "We got him so late to take the impression of his face, make moulds and run the rubber, and the first run didn't come out well. We finally got a full run the next day, so we had one extra appliance before he started working, and some son of a bitch stole it. He was out in the Valley, showing everybody what a great makeup artist he was, so I found out who he was and had the police escort him off the lot at Fox."

Tension between veterans and newcomers also arose from time to time. "There was one journeyman I actually invited to step outside and fight me, I was so angry," offers Chase. "It was a risky thing to do for somebody in my position, but I've always had a temper and he pushed me too far. I had been working awfully hard, and John Chambers was with us on location; before he left for the studio, he came over and said, 'You've been working long hours; take the day off tomorrow and rest!'

"I was thrilled, so I was lying in my bed the next morning when there was a banging on the door. It was this journeyman, who said,

Maurice Evans as Dr. Zaius



"Everything they needed was there, so they didn't need anything from their makeup cases apart from brushes and combs."

'Get dressed, you're going on set!' I said, 'John told me I could have the day off!' and he said, 'Well, John isn't here!' They had a scene in a boat on the water and needed a makeup man to stand by the camera for touch-ups, and that's where they stuck me for the day. So I said to this guy, 'Let's step outside!' and he wouldn't go, but he left me alone after that."

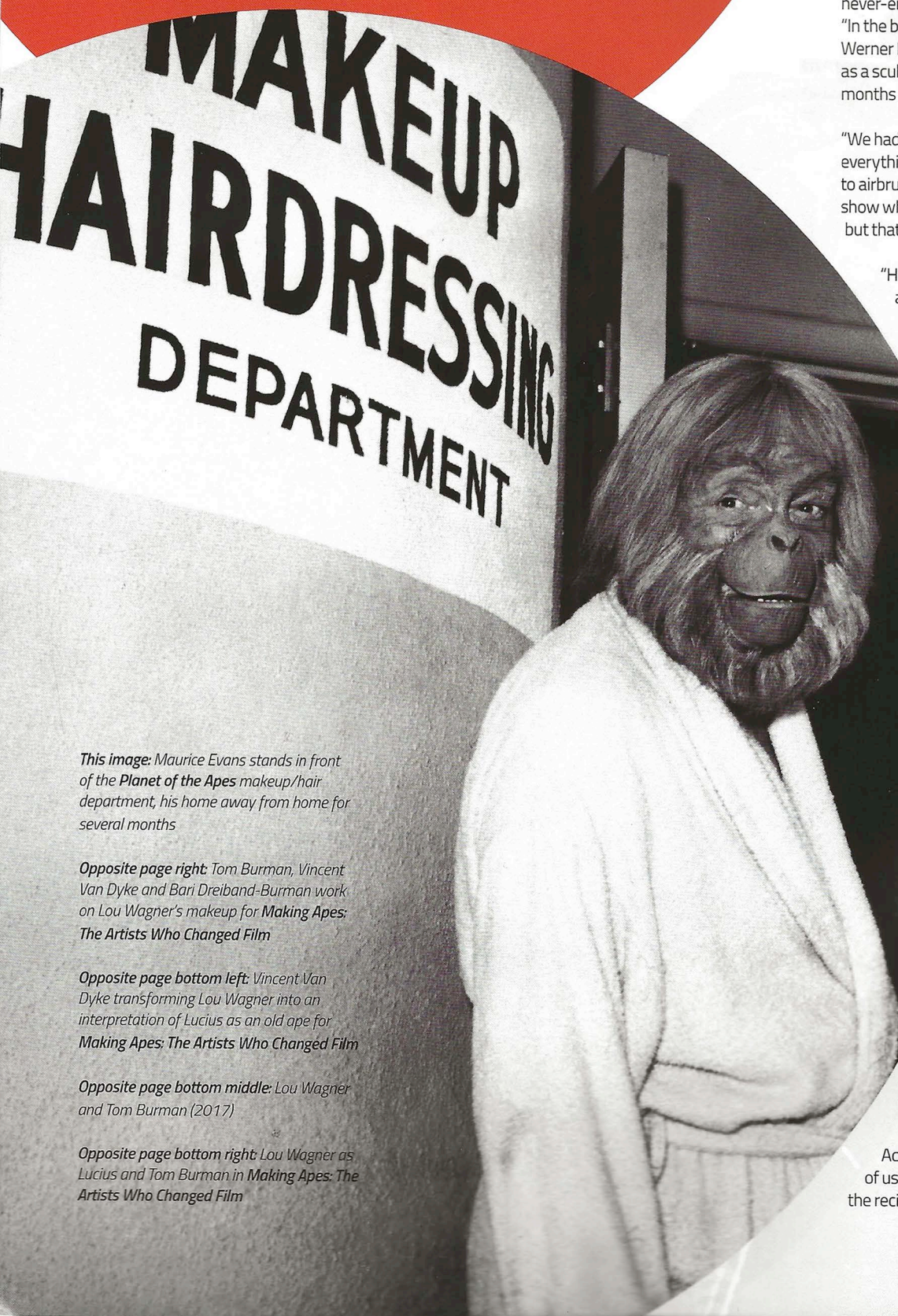
While a veritable army of makeup artists and hairdressers were working on their actors, Tom Burman was back in the lab, overseeing a never-ending production line of ape appliances. "In the beginning, it was just me, John and Werner Keppler and then he hired Pat Newman as a sculptress. We probably did that for two months before we brought anybody else in.

"We had to figure out how to airbrush everything, because nobody knew how to airbrush back then. I don't know of any show where they airbrushed appliances, but that's what John wanted to do.

"His idea was to make *Planet of the Apes* a paint-by-numbers process, so he had strict instructions on how he wanted things adhered to and how he wanted them painted. One of my jobs was to line up appliances on vac-u-forms for the artists, with the pre-painted colours on them, so they had the colours there, the right glues and their hackles and hair ready. Everything they needed was there, so they didn't need anything from their makeup cases apart from brushes and combs."

The groundbreaking makeup work of *Planet of the Apes* ultimately earned Chambers an honorary Oscar, only the second time in Academy history that makeup had been recognized with that accolade. "I originally told Danny Striepeke, 'You deserve an Oscar just as much as I do for all the work you did!' but they could only award one Oscar and Danny said, 'I couldn't think of taking an Oscar; you earned it all!'"

"Since John got a special Academy Award, the original 12 of us including John were in essence the recipients," claims Maurice ▶



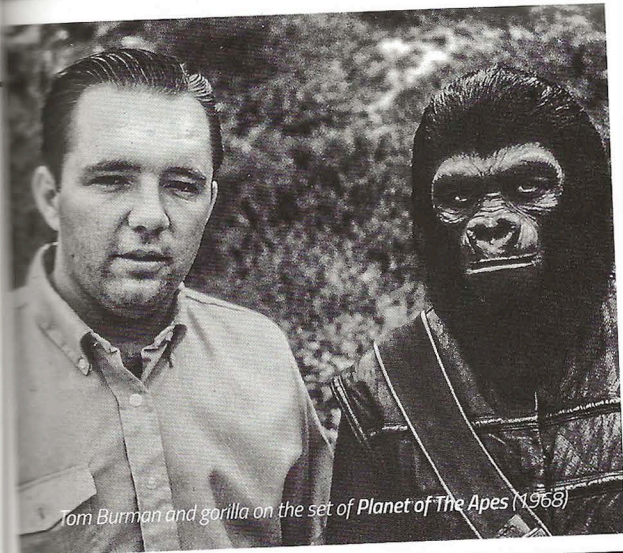
This image: Maurice Evans stands in front of the Planet of the Apes makeup/hair department, his home away from home for several months

Opposite page right: Tom Burman, Vincent Van Dyke and Bari Dreiband-Burman work on Lou Wagner's makeup for Making Apes: The Artists Who Changed Film

Opposite page bottom left: Vincent Van Dyke transforming Lou Wagner into an interpretation of Lucius as an old ape for Making Apes: The Artists Who Changed Film

Opposite page bottom middle: Lou Wagner and Tom Burman (2017)

Opposite page bottom right: Lou Wagner as Lucius and Tom Burman in Making Apes: The Artists Who Changed Film



Tom Burman and gorilla on the set of *Planet of the Apes* (1968)

DOCUMENTING THE APES

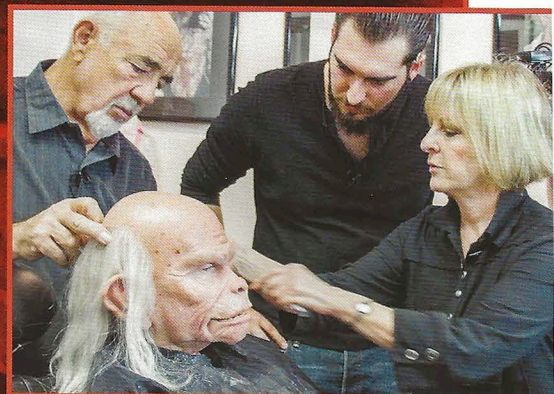
As a member of the original *Planet of the Apes* makeup team, Tom Burman is the perfect person to document the film's significance to the makeup effects industry...

His upcoming documentary, *Making Apes: The Artists Who Changed Film* not only tracks down virtually all of the surviving *Apes* artists, but also talks to a number of industry leaders about the influence the film has had on them. Burman is writing and executive-producing the project, which is also executive-produced by Bari Dreiband-Burman and directed by William Conlin.

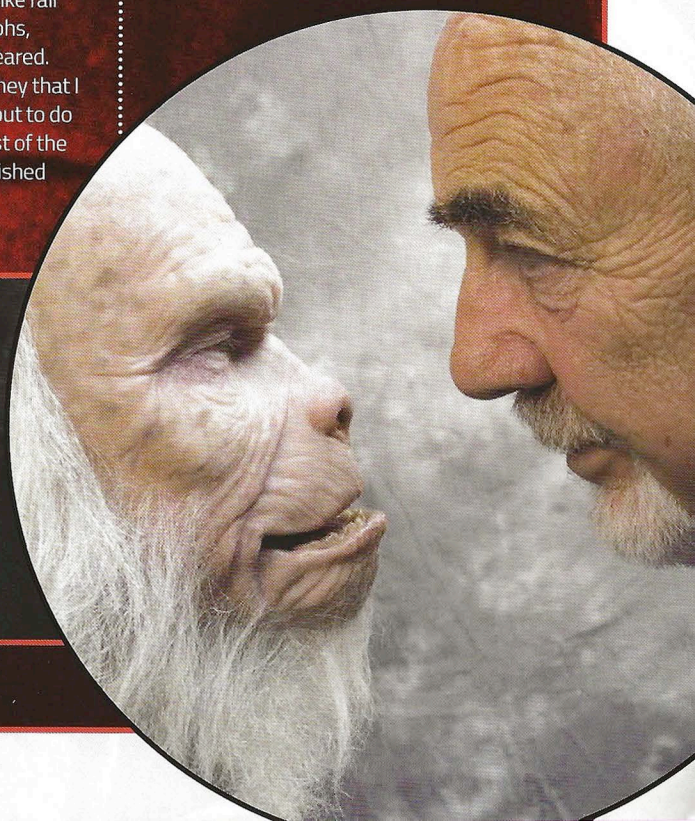
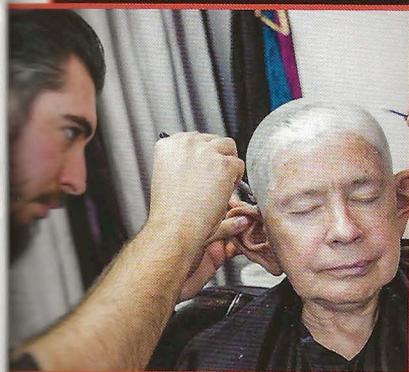
As Burman explains, "*Planet of the Apes* was a turning point of my life, which took me from poverty to being in fat city. I began thinking about all the people I knew that worked on it and I thought, 'I wonder who's still alive?' And then I realized: nobody has ever given credit to the people who actually did the work, nor do they know their story. There's been a lot on *Planet of the Apes* but not a lot about the people who actually did the work, how they actually got the job, what it did for their careers and how it was life-changing for all of us, so I decided to give a few of those people a call.

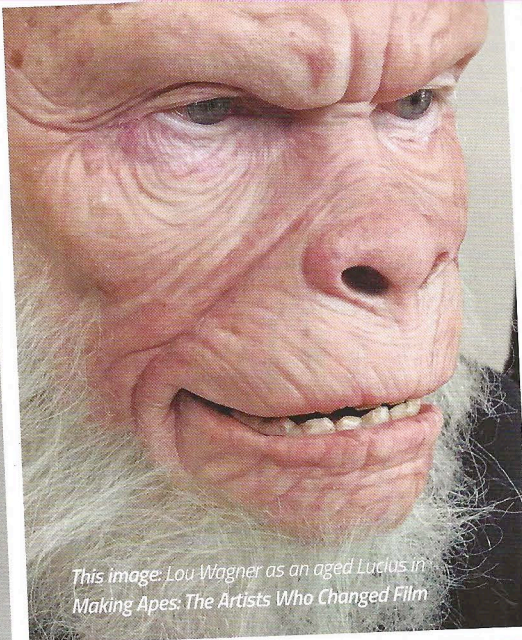
"I wanted to find as many people that were still alive that would allow me to document them, and then I also decided to find other people who were affected by *Planet of the Apes* and their reason for getting into makeup; people like Greg Cannom and Howard Berger; people who were so profoundly moved by the film that it got them into makeup, and that's when I began to realize it had such an effect on so many people.

With most of the interviews now in the can, Burman and his production team have moved into the next stage of production on the documentary, which is scheduled for an autumn release. "I didn't realize how much these things cost," he concedes, "and although I've been funding it so far, we're now getting into things like fair use of film clips and photographs, where everything has to be cleared. I've now realized it's more money that I wanted to spend, so we're about to do a crowd funder to raise the rest of the money, and hope to have it finished sometime in late September.



Right now, we've spoken to everybody including Guillermo del Toro who was the 35th interview, and now we've probably got 40 hours of interviews to edit down."





This image: Lou Wagner as an aged Lucius in *Making Apes: The Artists Who Changed Film*

LUCIUS

50 YEARS LATER

Vincent Van Dyke, on bringing back the classic *Apes* character

One of the highlights of the *Making Apes* documentary is actor Lou Wagner reprising his role as Lucius from the original film but half a century older. While the reason for Wagner's presence remains a secret, the task of recreating an older version of his classic makeup fell to Vincent Van Dyke, who teamed up with producer Tom Burman for the unique challenge.

As Van Dyke explains, "Tom asked me about doing this old age ape makeup on Lou, which was a really interesting combination of an ape and an old age makeup. I was elated by the idea of creating this character at his age now, so Tom, Bari and I started brainstorming ideas. Tom is brilliant at laying hair for example, so we talked about doing some lace around his jaw line and beard that Sasha Camacho tied. We wanted to incorporate hand-laid hair, because it was so prevalent in the original, and with Tom being so brilliant at it, it was cool to bring that to the character as well.

"Tom was adamant about not only bringing back the original Lucius but also making it a new version in terms of technology and materials. He wanted us to make our molds the way we make them today, and run the pieces in silicone; being an old age makeup, he saw the benefits of giving it that translucency and movement but still paying tribute to the original look and aesthetic."

The aging Lucius makeup, applied by Van Dyke and Ian Von Cromer, was custom-made for Wagner. "We really wanted to go through the entire process," Van Dyke explains, "much like Lou went through on the original film, and it was an amazing experience to have somebody who played an ape in *Planet of the Apes* come into the shop and go through the process of being

life cast and having the makeup applied to him.

"After the life cast, we created a positive of Lou's face, and went into the sculpture. When I'm sculpting an old age makeup, in this case an older ape, I'm already trying to establish where things are going to fall with the folds and forms I think are going to work with the old ape, so we went right into it as if Lou's anatomy had melded with that apes and then aged."

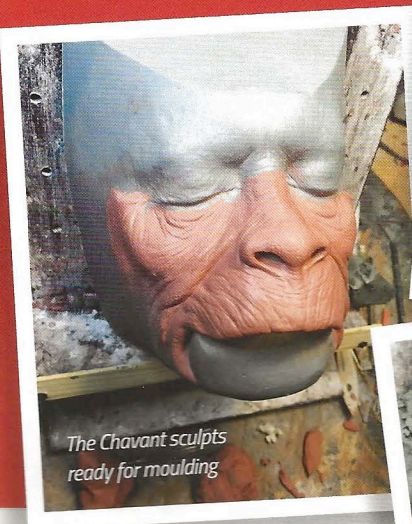
While Van Dyke tried to incorporate several elements of the original *Apes* look, his makeup on Wagner is even more extensive. "It's a large face piece that includes an upper muzzle with teeth built into it, which is a lot like the original makeup, as far as staying true to the build-out from the mouth with the false teeth in it, which were dental acrylic inset into the silicone. And because the weight of the silicone was a bit of an issue, we made little poly foam plugs that went behind the silicone to keep the weight down.

"So we've got the large facial piece with the upper muzzle and nose, which wrapped underneath the eyes with full cheeks on it. The lower lip and chin are a separate piece, and finally, a forehead.

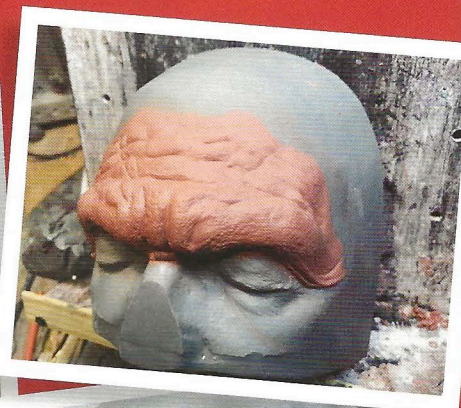
We're actually recreating that makeup at the *Making Apes* booth at Monsterpalooza, but for that demo, I'm doing the lower chin piece in foam, which allows us to use the best of both materials."

Van Dyke is also one of several makeup artists interviewed for the documentary about the influence that *Planet of the Apes* has had on their career. "It was a film I saw early in my childhood," he reflects, "and watching a movie in which more than half the cast is in prosthetic makeup to create these believable ape characters is something that really drove me. I've always been fascinated by apes and makeup effects, so any time you can combine two things you love, it sticks with you for the rest of your life.

"One of the great things about the documentary," finishes Van Dyke, "is it shines a light on the unsung heroes who were part of our childhood and whose work was so inspiring. To give those people a platform to speak and tell stories about some of those amazing events has never been done before. That's what makes it so special."



The Chavant sculpts ready for moulding



◀ Stein. "John carved a little one-inch gorilla face and made 12 of them in solid gold that he paid for out of his own pocket, and made another 36 out of silver. He gave the eleven gold ones to Dan Striepeke, Ben Nye, himself and the first six or eight of us that started with him."

Planet of the Apes became one of the most successful franchises in sci-fi history, spawning a wave of sequels, a TV series and in recent years, a string of newly-rebooted features; but it was the original film that remains a bona fide classic. "It was a makeup artist's dream," Striepeke declares. "It was a lot of work, but that's what it's all about, which is out of this world creativity. How often do you get to do that?"

"I didn't think about it at the time," Butterworth reflects, "but we made several movies and then went to a TV series, so it gave us all a lot of interesting work."

"I didn't have those lofty thoughts at the time," agrees Chase. "I was just a young kid, thrilled to have a job making more money!"

"It was huge!" says Burman. "I was so jazzed at the time, I wanted to do anything and everything I could, so it was a dream come true. I couldn't imagine anybody getting a better start than I got."

As for Chambers, "I'm still proud of the fact that I helped so many of those people get their start and guide them along the way. 'I'm always gratified when I see one of them get an Oscar or Emmy and say, 'I worked with that guy!' *Planet of the Apes* is second to what that has meant to me."

"John was larger than life," says Stein, "because he represented everything that every makeup artist wanted to be. He might have been old school because of the period he lived in, but he was modernistic in his attitudes. There were a small handful of us during that period that he more or less took under his wing, and if you look at each one of them, they all became very successful in their own right!"

"It was a lot of work, but that's what it's all about, which is out of this world creativity"



Maurice Evans as Dr. Zaius