

# CANADIAN CINEMATOGRAPHER

CANADIAN SOCIETY OF CINEMATOGRAPHERS

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## 12 MONKEYS

**Boris Mojsovski CSC**

SIMMOD Lenses  
CSC Specialty Awards



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# SIMMOD

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## Firmly Focused on the Future with Vintage Lenses



*Looking at vintage lenses re-engineered by Sarorn “Ron” Sim CSC, you realize they are the perfect example of the circular economy. In the linear economy, we manufacture, sell, consume and discard, but in the circular economy we repair, re-manufacture, reuse or re-engineer things at the end of their life cycle. Aluminum cans and steel get melted down again, plastic is shredded into pellets for reuse, and even waste wood is processed into chipboard sheets, mulch or stove fuel.*

BY IAN HARVEY



Ron Sim csc

Photos of lenses and of Sim are courtesy of Ron Sim csc

And that's exactly what SIMMOD LENS are all about – the rebirth of vintage lenses by re-engineering them and using their quality glass for cinematic capture at one-tenth the price of new. In the case of vintage 35 mm still film lenses, whether Leica, Nikkor, Canon or Zeiss, it's not that the glass itself has deteriorated or even that the mechanics of the lenses are failing, it's that demand has dropped off a cliff. Yet, they're too precious to be thrown away, so Sim re-engineers them for cinematography.

First, he disassembles the lenses, then “de-clicks” the aperture mechanism. Next, he installs a custom 32-pitch follow focus gear, adds an 80 mm front ring and installs an EF Leitax hard mount. The process also allows him to thoroughly clean, lubricate and adjust the lenses to optimum working condition.

Sim, who is originally from the Windsor, Ontario, area and cut

his teeth behind a camera in Toronto, is currently based in Los Angeles and says he's always been a tinkerer. “It really started as a hobby, something to do between gigs as a DP,” says Sim, who has a small CNC machine set up at his shop. “I'm from Windsor and my dad was a mould maker. We didn't have a lot of money, and a lot of the stuff I bought when I started out came from Goodwill stores and had to be repaired.”

Sim – no relation to the folks at SIM International – either buys vintage 35 mm lenses from a network of dealers he's established relationships with or has clients send him their own lenses which he will convert. A conversion runs from US\$200 to US\$550, depending on the level of service specified.

Drawn by the allure of the vintage look, California-based director and DP Matt Devino bought two modified Leica lenses to test drive them. “I thought for \$1,200, why not? If they were





## “I thought for \$1,200, why not?”

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Frame grabs from sci-fi film *Nereus* shot on Sim's modded lenses.

junk, I could flip them,” he says. “But when I got them, they were like brand new.”

In upgrading his RED rig, Devino’s overarching goal was to stay as light and compact as possible. “I had some Canon glass, but when you start adding focus to them they get big and heavy,” he says. “Also I remembered the quality of Leica from my college days when I worked in a camera store and the owner let me take a Leica out to shoot stuff and I’d spend hours in the darkroom afterwards.”

He’s since bought another lens, a 24/2.8 to go with the 28/2.8 and 50/2.0, and says that while they’re not the fastest glass, the quality more than offsets any loss of speed. “They are so beautiful,” he says. “Other glass can just be so clinical, too clean. With these, I was out shooting a professional mountain biker in northern California and every time the sun popped through the trees, the flare was amazing. Beautiful.”

“These lenses have amazing coatings and provide for great capture,” Sim says. “But obviously they were made for stills. But now with 35 mm sensors, they can work and create great cine motion images. The sensor plane is huge; you can go right up to 8K with them.”

Since the initial acquisition prices for these lenses has



Ron Sim csc

dropped so dramatically, even after Sim recovers his investment in time and materials from the conversion, the resale prices are still spectacular. His site – [simmodlens.com](http://simmodlens.com) – lists a set of Leica R primes for US\$12,000 and a Leica Elmarit 100 mm APO Macro for US\$2,100, for example.

There's something special about vintage lenses, says Sim, who has won CSC awards using his own vintage glass. "I'm not going to knock the lens manufacturers, but with many of those new lenses shooting digital, the first thing a lot of DPs do is stick a filter in front to soften the image and bring some character to it," he says.

He adds that he can convert almost any lens made, and works on Nikkor, Canon, as well as Leica and Zeiss, including Zeiss Contax and Jena. "I don't buy directly from eBay because you never know what you're getting," he says. "The dealer network I have knows the lenses I am looking for and what condition I want. I don't want them too beat up."

He's also hit a sweet spot in the market place: "Before I began my business, there was only one prominent company providing such services, Duclos Lenses out of L.A. Canadian DPs had to send their lenses across the border for servicing and had to transact in U.S. funds. My company has offices in Canada and the U.S., which makes it easier for Canadian DPs to get the services needed for their lenses." 📷

