



GALE ZUCKER'S GOT A PROBLEM. THE LOCATION photographer has just signed a book contract that requires her to shoot at sheep, goat and alpaca fiber farms in Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Montana and other locations. But she can't fly with a lot of lighting gear without getting gouged with excess baggage fees. And how much gear can she and one photo assistant realistically lug around once they reach their rugged destinations anyway? (If you've ever pushed a fully loaded location cart up a rutted slope dotted with sheep dung, you know as well as Zucker does that wheels aren't always a photographer's friend.) Pre-light days? A nice fantasy, but here's the reality: when Zucker gets to each location, she'll have less time than she needs to light an environment she's only just laid eyes on with her meager stash of strobe equipment. But (herein lies the rub): she really wants the lighting to look good.

If you think this all adds up to an exercise in futility, then you haven't met Zucker, a plucky, 5-foot, 2-inch dynamo who could write a book about successful lighting setups under trying conditions.

Zucker approaches challenging assignments with admirable fortitude. With a lot of stamina, a sense of humor (a must for any location photographer, she says), and a talent for solving technical snafus while simultaneously charming subjects who haven't spent a lot of time in front of a camera, Zucker has the right personality for her "run and gun" shooting style. She's adaptable enough to court the "happy accident" in her lighting.

"I like thinking on the fly," says the Connecticut-based photographer, "and I like things to be a little unpredictable. I don't feel a need to control everything that happens. In fact, on some shoots I will purposely let things get a little chaotic. My favorite shots—and the ones that get me the most work—are always the ones that are a little odd, a little off-kilter, a little out of control.

"That's true of my lighting too," she says. "I love it when something odd happens—like a beam of light coming into the frame that I didn't expect. I'm a very optimistic person, so my response is usually, 'I can make this work.' If I were rigid with my lighting or I had a locked-in way of doing things, this kind of shooting would be torture!"

Whatever the circumstances—even when she

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LIGHTING "LITE"

Gale Zucker's "Run and Gun" Location Lighting. **By Susan Reich**

ZUCKER SHOT THIS IMAGE (PREVIOUS PAGE) OF A ONE-DAY-OLD cashmere kid nestled against a woman wearing a cashmere scarf in April 2007 for *Shear Spirit*, a coffeetable travel/lifestyle/knitting book, to be published by PotterCraft in Spring 2008.

Beguiled by the beautiful diffused light streaming through the translucent roof and walls of a greenhouse on the grounds of Goat Knoll, a cashmere farm in Oregon, Zucker set this shot up inside of the greenhouse. But by the time she was ready to shoot, the skies had become dark and stormy and the ambient illumination was meager and muddy.

To increase the overall exposure and “crisp up” the slightly muddy illumination, she bounced an Alien Bee 320-watt-second compact flash into a 30-inch silver fabric umbrella.

“I used this umbrella as my key source because it was very crowded in the greenhouse,” Zucker explains. “This umbrella is small enough to stick into tight spaces, and it also has a very nice quality of light.”

She positioned the umbrella to the side of the model, about 7 feet from the ground, and angled it slightly downward so that the light wrapped around the front of the woman and the kid.

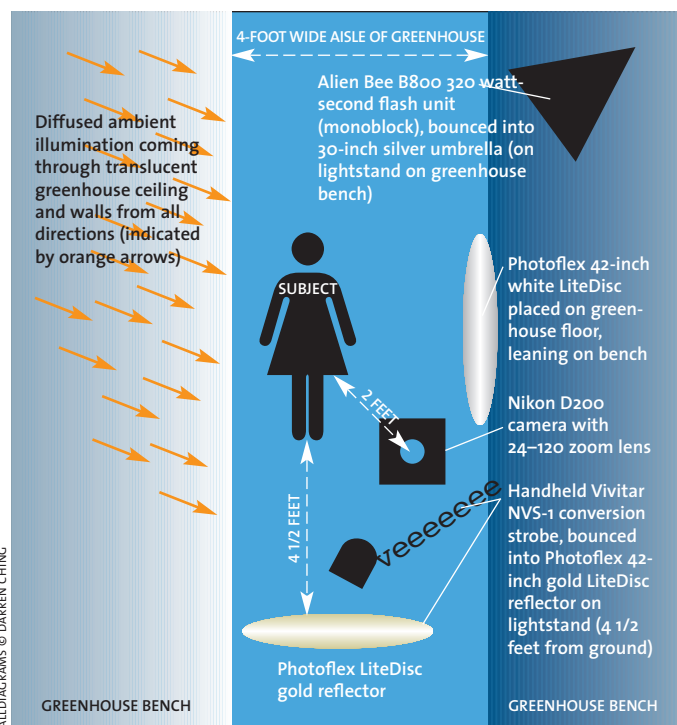
“I purposely side-lit this shot because I wanted to bring out the texture and the pattern in the cashmere scarf,” she notes.

To create a warm frontal fill source and counteract the slightly green cast of the ambient daylight filtering through the trees surrounding the greenhouse, Zucker bounced a handheld Vivitar NVS-1 conversion strobe into a 42-inch gold Photoflex LiteDisc reflector. Clamped to a light stand, the reflector was positioned behind and slightly to the left of the camera about 4.5 feet from the ground and 4.5 feet away from the subject. The bounced illumination was about 1/2 stop down from the key source.

Finally, she leaned a 32-inch white Photoflex LiteDisc reflector against the dark wooden greenhouse bench on the right side of frame.

“I did this just to create another white surface that would bounce a little more light back into the image,” she explains.

Zucker digitally captured the image at 1/50th of a second with a Nikon D200 set at ISO 640 and a 24-120mm lens set at f/9.



finds herself straddling the back of an elephant to get a bird's eye view of a circus act—this veteran photographer always gets the shot.

A native of Rochester, New York, she recalls that “photography was everywhere” when she was growing up.

“My friends’ fathers all worked for Kodak or Xerox or RIT,” she notes. “I remember getting my first camera in third grade and signing up for my first darkroom class in fifth grade.”

Photography remained an avocation, however, until the summer after her freshman year at the State University of New York in Binghamton, where she was enrolled as an environmental science major. Back in Rochester between semesters, she once again fell under photography's spell.

“I had this horrible summer job testing Xerox copiers in a climate-controlled chamber,” she says ruefully. “Every day, I'd go into a room that was the equivalent of a walk-in cooler and spend eight hours recording the number of times the ma-

“I’m usually not interested in trying to change the reality that’s in front of me. I just want to make it look a little better.”

chine jammed.”

To relieve the tedium, she enrolled in a night class in photography at RIT and attracted the attention of a professor who took her aside and said, “You really should be studying photography in college. Someday, you’re going to be doing this for a living.”

That was all Zucker needed to hear. She decided to pursue a degree in photojournalism because, as she puts it, “I was always less interested in photography as a fine art and more interested in using my camera as a storytelling tool.”

But, needing to spread her wings, she was reluctant to return to Rochester to take advantage of the impressive photography resources in her own backyard. So she enrolled in the School of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of Minnesota.

After earning her B.A., Zucker spent two years with her husband in Israel, where she shot for the *Jerusalem Post* and a variety of local and international magazines. Back in the U.S., she worked briefly for a stock photo agency and then embarked on a multifaceted freelance career that included a three-year stint as a stringer for *The New York Times*.

Today, she shoots for a wide range of ed-

itorial, commercial, advertising and non-profit clients, including *Newsweek*, *USA Weekend*, *BusinessWeek*, *Forbes*, *The Wall Street Journal*, Harper Collins, Scholastic Publishing, Century Capital Fund, Yale University, Brown University, Planned Parenthood and United Way. Her work has been exhibited on both coasts and she has won numerous awards, including the ASMP's “Best of” Series in 2006 and the National Child Welfare Pro Humanitate Award in 2005 for her images of children aging out of the foster care system.

When we caught up with her, the indefatigable photographer was on the road, zigzagging across the United States shooting for her book. Zucker (who often picks up a pair of knitting needles when she sets down her camera) dreamed up the concept for *Shear Spirit*—which combines magazine-style spreads depicting life on American fiber farms and ranches with original knitting patterns by fiber artists profiled in the book. She joined forces with a book packager and a writer to pitch it to various

publishers. The book is slated for a Spring 2008 release by PotterCraft, so she's spent most of the summer of 2007 working on it.

It's one of those assignments that Zucker relishes: an opportunity to photograph ordinary people whose lives bear little resemblance to her own. Even when she shoots sheep (a species that tends to look dim-witted and drab when channeled through the lens of a less gifted photographer) her woolly subjects seem to take on personality. The images are quirky, sometimes comical and often infused with endearingly human qualities.

“During this shoot, I learned that a sheep's range of vision is 360 degrees,” confides Zucker. “No wonder they have such weird looks on their faces!”

The disarming photographer manages to establish an almost instant rapport with her two-legged subjects as well, from a reserved CEO to the wary teen in foster care to an elderly Native American woman working on a churro sheep farm in Arizona.

The slogan on her Web site <www.gzucker.com>, “Real People in Real Places,” is about as close to truth in advertising as it gets.

PDN: You referred to your shooting style at one point as “managed reality.” What does

that term mean to you?

Zucker: My images are often lit in some way and then shot photojournalistically. I would probably call my style a hybrid between portraiture and photojournalism. These are not grab shots; they are shots that are lit and composed. I'm usually not interested in creating my own reality or trying to change the reality that's in front of me. I just want to make it look a little better.

PDN: You regularly use a souped-up Vivitar 283 flash called an NVS-1 conversion. Can you tell us more about this light source?

Zucker: It's a Vivitar 283 flash that was tinkered with so it has twice the power. Instead of a 283 head, it has a flash tube with a 5-inch diameter circular reflector. A lot of photojournalists bought these when they were being made. But the guy who used to make them is retired now, so you can't find them anymore. I'm down to my last one and I don't know what I'll do when it goes. I'll probably try to find some electronics wizard who can make me one. It really is amazing what you can do with one of these when it is bounced off a gold reflector. I mentally draw a triangle between the camera, the subject and the reflective surface and then bounce the NVS-1 into the reflector.

PDN: What's the deal with that funky lime green

Alien Bee you seem to take everywhere?

Zucker: I always get teased about that one. I've had assistants snicker and say, "I can't believe we are shooting for *Newsweek* and you are using an Alien Bee." They are a completely underestimated light source. They're mono-blocs that come in these crazy colors like bright green and magenta and they're great for people who are just starting out because they're very value priced. You won't look like the fashion photographers from the movies using them, but the quality of light is incredible. When I first started out, I was very aware of wanting to look professional but, at a certain point, I thought, "I don't care what they look like, I want the result." At 320 watt-seconds, the Alien Bee is a great little light to add my kit. I can hide it under a lamp or in a corner for a little kick of light. And you can dial it way down (imagine 1/32nd of 320 watt-seconds) for the tiniest little kiss of light. They're great when I'm traveling outside of major cities, because the modeling light is a household light bulb. I broke a modeling light recently in the middle of nowhere and I went to a five and dime store in Oregon and picked up a 60-watt standard-base household bulb to replace it.

PDN: What's your standard lighting kit for the road?

Zucker: My basic kit includes my Dyna-Lite system (which is really old, but I use it more than

anything else because it's powerful and dependable), my Elinchrom monobloc, the Alien Bee monobloc (because it's small and light), my Vivitar NVS-1 conversion, two Jackrabbits (portable power packs that I can carry on my shoulder to power the NVS-1), an assortment of different sized umbrellas, Cinefoil, grids (although the grids don't fit the Dyna-Lites, so I use Cinefoil to make snoots), a medium and a small Chimera, a 42-inch gold/white Photoflex reflector and a 42-inch gold/silver zebra reflector that is white on the other side, and a folder full of color and ND gels and diffusion material (though I'm not using the warming gels as much now that I'm shooting digitally; I usually warm up the light in Photoshop unless I'm going for a special effect).

PDN: What happens if you need a piece of lighting equipment that you left at home?

Zucker: I get creative. If I need something to bounce light off of, I'll grab a newspaper or even some guy in a white shirt. I'm not afraid to improvise!

PDN: If you could take only one light with you on an assignment, what would it be?

Zucker: My NVS-1 conversion and my gold reflector.

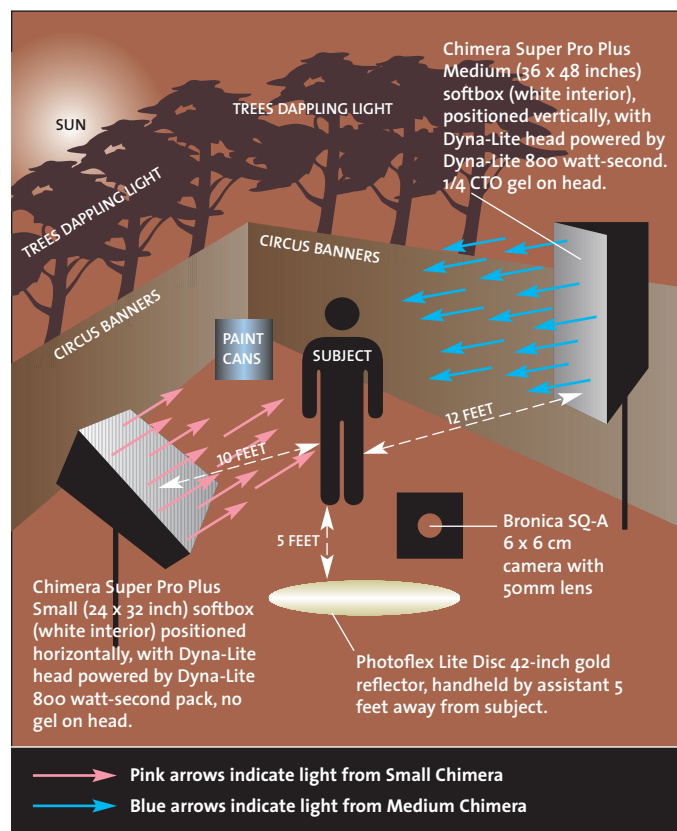
PDN: You seem to have an affinity for the “happy accident.” Would you like to share one with us?

Zucker: One year, just for fun, I decided to photograph people from a traveling circus. I was still shooting medium-format color chromes then, and I brought my Dyna-Lite system and a softbox. I was using a 1/2 CTO gel and I had the key and the fill perfectly balanced to get this very evenly lit picture. My power pack was plugged into a long cord that ran to a big generator that powered the entire circus. I shot for two hours whenever performers came by with their animals. It was really fun, but I didn't realize that the generator was surging the whole time and the ratios were totally out of control. At one point, I was shooting with only one head and the fill became the main light. Then the generator blew out the Dyna-Lite's capacitor altogether and there was this big blast, with sparks flying. Later, when I picked up the film at the lab, the guys said, “Gale, you're going to be really upset when you see these, because some of the rolls are two stops under.” But I ended up with some frames that had this beautiful golden light on the subjects and dark backgrounds. That's how I came up with the technique that I used on the Johnny Meah shot, with the strong, warm, dramatic side lighting.

PDN: How important is the lighting in your images?

Zucker: It's extremely important, but I don't want it to look that way. I know other photographers looking at my work would know that the images were lit, but I don't want the lighting to be what you notice first.

The first thing I'm thinking about when I walk into a location is, “How am I going to light this to tell the story I want to tell?” Lighting has a huge impact on the way you feel when you



THIS ENVIRONMENTAL PORTRAIT OF JOHNNY Meah (above) reflects the photographer's penchant for the quirky. It was recently featured in a group exhibition titled “Carny Art: Contemporary Artists at the Circus and Carnival” at the Bedford Gallery in California.

“Johnny is the last of the great sideshow banner painters,” explains Zucker, who shot Meah for a feature story in Delta Airlines's *Sky* magazine in 2001. “I really love sideshow banner art, so I had approached the magazine about doing a feature on him.”

On assignment, Zucker shot Meah in his outdoor studio.

“I hung out with Johnny for a couple of days,” she recalls. “He lived in a huge community of off-season and retired circus people and carnies near Sarasota. There's also a legendary midget town near there. At one point during the shoot, we had to take a break because of a sudden rainstorm. Johnny brought out a sword and a bottle of mouthwash. He soaked a rag in the mouthwash, cleaned the sword with it and then shoved the sword down his throat. I just loved this guy.”

Zucker keyed the image with a Dyna-Lite head and a Chimera Super Pro Plus medium softbox positioned vertically about 12 feet away from the subject on camera right.

“I used a strong sidelight because Johnny has

this wonderful, craggy face and I wanted to emphasize the lines on it,” says Zucker. “I also used a 1/4 CTO gel to warm up the key source because there is so much warmth in his banners. Orange is such an important color in his artwork.”

To add some warm frontal fill, Zucker's assistant held a 42-inch gold Photoflex LiteDisc about 5 feet in front of Meah.

To illuminate the banners and paint cans, Zucker positioned a Chimera Super Pro Plus small softbox with a Dyna-Lite head horizontally on camera left, about 10 feet away from the subject.

“The small softbox was angled very slightly toward Johnny, to edge light his shoulder and separate him from the background,” notes Zucker. “But the main reason for this second source was to throw some light on his artwork.”

Zucker exposed the image on Kodak E100SW film with a Bronica SQ-A medium-format camera and a 50mm lens set at f/5.6.

“I bracketed the shutter speed from half a second to 1/250th of a second to get varying amounts of ambient light,” she adds. “Some of the exposures were more balanced and you could see more detail in the shadow side of Johnny's face, but I didn't like those frames as much. When the ambient light levels were higher and the shadows were more filled in, the image felt less mysterious and enigmatic.”

look at an image. It gives emotion to a photo. And you can make someone look hideous or beautiful, depending on the light source you choose.

PDN: You shoot some pretty interesting characters—from aging Munchkins to circus performers who pound nails up their noses. Do you ever try to make your subjects look more bizarre with your lighting?

Zucker: I could have done that with Johnny Meah, but I didn't want to make him look weird for the sake of weirdness. It's really easy to make someone look strange or ugly or scary in photography, but I think that's kind of a cheap shot.

PDN: How did you get started in location photography?

Zucker: When my husband and I were living in Israel, I shot for the *Jerusalem Post* and variety of magazines. After we came back to the States, I worked as a photo researcher at a stock agency for a year, which made me aware of how many gazillion publications there are that use pictures. When I started freelancing, I decided that I would show my work to anybody who used pictures and shoot anything that anybody asked me to shoot. Before long, I was shooting for the *Hartford Courant*, *The New York Times*, the *Weekly Reader* (a newspaper for children), and some smaller

women's magazines. I started shooting for *New England Business* magazine, and one of the reporters there suggested that I show my work to *BusinessWeek*, which led to *Forbes*, which led to *Newsweek*. Once you start shooting for the big business magazines, that leads to a lot of corporate jobs shooting CEOs and annual reports.

PDN: You mentioned that you didn't learn much about lighting when you were studying photojournalism in school.

Zucker: That's true. And I never worked as a photo assistant, so I had never really seen lighting setups in use. I would look at *PDN* and be terribly intimidated by the lighting articles! For a long time, I shot with mostly available light. When I did use strobe, I didn't really have control of it. Then I had two big breakthroughs. First, I took a weekend workshop at the International Center of Photography on everything you can do with a Vivitar 283. If I needed multiple light sources, I'd use as many as eight Vivitar 283s on a set. I used them with umbrellas and bounced them off of different things. I even put gels on them. It was crazy, but I just didn't know about the bigger lighting picture. Then I took a location lighting workshop taught by a *LIFE* magazine photographer. After this workshop, I realized that the light sources that had intimidated me so

much in the past were just bigger, more powerful, more reliable sources that would give me more control over my lighting. After that, I became a lot more comfortable with lighting and began to see it as another tool at my disposal to make pictures and tell a story.

PDN: Your assignments are pretty eclectic. Is there a consistent thread that runs through your lighting style?

Zucker: My lighting is always directional. You will very rarely see anything of mine that is evenly lit.

PDN: When did you segue from film to digital capture?

Zucker: I started shooting digitally in 2002 and converted fully to digital capture in early 2003.

PDN: Has the conversion to digital capture changed your shooting or lighting style?

Zucker: I experiment more on each shoot than I used to. With digital, you know when you've got the safe shots and then you can just play around instead of shooting rolls and rolls of film and worrying that the client is going to freak out if you do something unusual. It has also loosened up my lighting. In low-light situations, it's easier to get the details in the shadows and bring out little nuances.



CREATED IN MARCH 2005 FOR SCHOLASTIC PUBLISHING, THIS SHOT OF a schoolboy (left) showcases Zucker's photojournalistic sensibilities, as well as her knack for creating natural-looking light with artificial sources.

"This was created for a marketing campaign for Scholastic's middle-school classroom books," Zucker explains. "Even though Scholastic was using professional talent, the client wanted the models to look like real kids. They didn't want smiling, posed-looking model shots—which is why I got pulled in for the assignment."

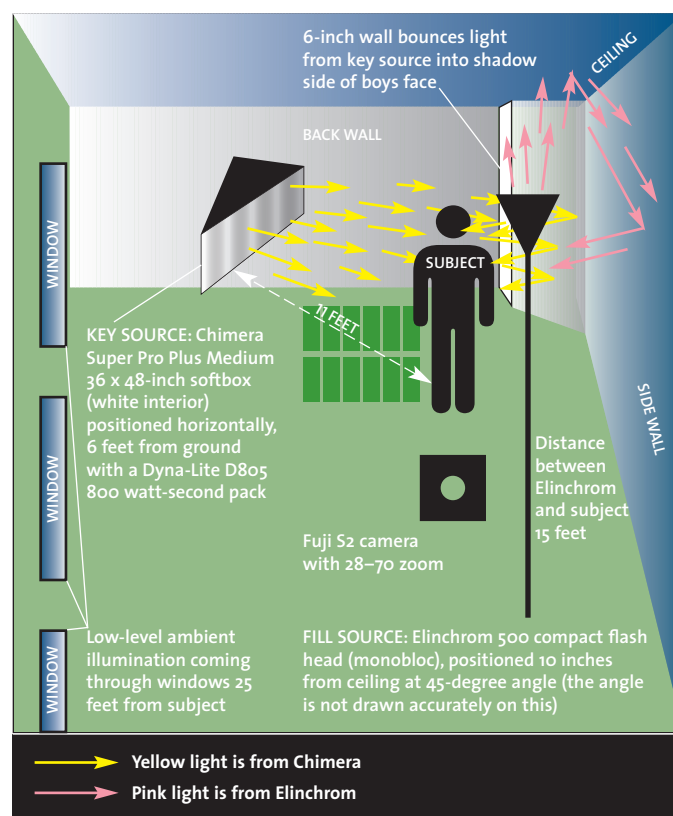
"My goal with the lighting was to make the shot look interesting, but natural," she adds. "I didn't want sculptural shadows and I didn't want images that looked like they had been carefully composed and lit. And I had to work really fast and set up in a lot of different places that day, so I didn't have a much time to finesse the lighting for each shot."

Zucker keyed the image with a horizontally positioned Chimera Super Pro Plus medium softbox with a Dyna-Lite head powered by a Dyna-Lite D805 800 watt-second pack. The key source was placed 11 feet away from the subject and 6 feet from the ground on the left side of the set.

"Sometimes you need to add lighting to make it look like there's no lighting, and this was a case in point," Zucker points out. "There was some low-level daylight coming in through the classroom windows, but it wasn't spilling all the way into the room. So I used the medium Chimera to create the feeling of illumination coming in through the large windows. I intentionally placed the boy next to a wall that jutted out about 6 inches so that the wall would bounce the light from this key source back into the shadow side of his face."

To provide some soft fill for the directional illumination from the key source, she positioned an Elinchrom 500 compact flash head behind the camera and about 10 inches from the ceiling on camera right. Then she angled the head so that the light would bounce off of the ceiling, into the white wall on camera right, and into the room.

Zucker captured the image digitally at 1/90th of a second with a Fuji S-2 camera set at ISO 200 and a 28-70mm zoom set at f/9.5.



PDN: Has your lighting changed a lot over the years?

Zucker: I used to worry a lot more about it when I first started out. I think my lighting wasn't as good then because I was too tight with it. It's gotten better over time because it has become looser and more intuitive. Today, I don't have any hard and fast rules about what's right or wrong with lighting. What's right is what will convey the right message for my client and make my client happy.

PDN: How do you feel about the lighting trends that come and go in the photo industry?

Zucker: I prefer to stay away from the trends, because they look and feel artificial to me. If a client mentions a certain lighting trend to me, it's usually a negative, rather than positive, reference, such as "I really don't like that super hard lighting that a lot of photographers are using." I never went in for the ring-lighting or the Hosemaster or the big beauty dishes—some of the really trendy things that were hot for a while. I don't want my lighting to control what I'm doing for a shoot. It has to be a tool to help tell the story. Otherwise the picture will look too stilted to me. □