

When it comes to lips, the first thing to check for (after proper mouth closure) is natural roundness. Embalming sometimes causes the lips to dehydrate slightly and this can cause them to “deflate” or flatten, which looks very unnatural. A small amount of Dodge Feature Builder injected into

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the lips and palpated into shape can correct this. Don’t overdo it, however, or you will end up with “duck-lips” which look even worse. Once you are satisfied with the curve of the lips, carefully glue them into place. I really like the new Tech-Bond Blue adhesive and the Tech-Bond Activator that Dodge now offers for lips and eyes.

I still use the tried and true brush method for applying cosmetic to lips. I think this is more precise and easier to control than the airbrush for this application. Lip cosmetics for women are generally easy. The family will often suggest a lip color or bring in a favorite lipstick of the deceased. If not, it is generally just a matter of choosing a shade that goes well with the clothing and overall look of the deceased. Lip color for men can be a different matter. On male lips I apply the foundation shade sparingly as a base then work in some natural looking color variegation, a bit of the warm highlight color and a touch of medium brown often works well. There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all male lip color. Lip color varies from person to person. Still have those photos handy? Good, use them. I prefer to brush vertically when adjusting lip color on men in an attempt to recreate the tiny natural lines and wrinkles of the lips. Don’t leave a sharp demarcation at the edge where the mucus membranes join the integumentary lips. I also lightly powder men’s lips after the cosmetic application to dull the shine a bit.

I finish the cosmetic application on both men and women by taking a dark gray or dark brown eyebrow pencil and very slightly touching it along the edge of the upper eyelid where the lash enters the lid. This should not be done to the point of becoming eyeliner, but just enough to make the eyes stand out. The cosmetic penciling should not be noticeable in its own right. Use an eyelash brush to remove any cosmetic and shape the lashes. If a woman used eyebrow pencil to draw or define her eyebrows, you should do that also. Complete the cosmetic application with a light mist of non-shiny hairspray over the face. This gently seals the cosmetic against accidental smudges and adds just enough sheen to look very natural.

A final comment about lighting is appropriate here. I advise applying cosmetics in the same lighting conditions

under which the body will be viewed. Some embalmers have become very adept at compensating for various lighting conditions but in most cases, cosmetizing under the fluorescent lights of the prep room and then moving the body to the subdued lighting of the chapel can wreak havoc on the appearance of your cosmetics. If you must cosmetize under different lighting than which the body will be viewed, such as at a church, I advise taking your airbrush kit and lip cosmetics along so that you can make last minute corrections as required.

Good cosmetic application can mean the difference between a peaceful, beautiful memory picture and one that looks so....dead. Make it a habit to study living faces and notice the variations in skin color, texture, shadows, and highlights. I believe that every embalmer can improve their skills through practice and a willingness to try new techniques. The future of our profession depends on demonstrating the value of viewing, not only for psychological benefit but also for the money spent on embalming and cosmetology. With the rise in direct disposition and more and more people questioning the need for visitations and viewing, good enough is just not good enough anymore.



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## Why Do They Look So...Dead?

by Shane A.S. Ritchie, CFSP

I recently made the three hour trek to attend the visitation and funeral for my wife’s aunt. Her name was June. The funeral home the family had chosen was an old, well-established business in their hometown. The owner was a nice old fellow, a little rough around the edges, a fourth generation funeral director who personally took care of nearly every one of the 100 or so cases that came through his doors each year. Several years ago when my wife and I lived in the area, I had done a few trade calls for him and found him to be very old school in his approach to embalming and funeral directing in general.

“Never turn that machine to more than 5 pounds of pressure. The human heart only puts out about 5 pounds and any more than that will swell the face,” was one of his mantras.

“Don’t use more than 8 oz. of fluid to a gallon of water or you’ll burn them up,” was another.

“One bottle of cavity fluid is plenty. The gas from the fluid

will take care of everything,” was one of his classics.

And his ode to cosmetology, “They look good enough. Why, they’re dead. People don’t expect them to look like they’re gonna get up and join the party!”

Of course, my experiments and experience had taught me long ago that this outdated way of thinking had been the cause of numerous embalming failures, disappointed families, and is

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no longer considered proper protocol, but I knew I could never change his mind. His “standards” were established in his mind and to him were gospel. This introduction sets the stage for what followed.

When I arrived at the funeral home, June’s son greeted me at the door. I offered my condolences and we began to talk. He asked me to go to the chapel and take a look at his mother and offer my opinion. As I approached the casket I could immediately identify my old funeral director friend’s handy-work. Having known his modus operandi I knew that his cosmetic effort consisted of a heavy application of his one-size-fits-

all color of mortuary foundation, some lipstick that also doubles as rouge, and a final application of powder.

“Why does she look so...dead?” her son asked.

At that moment a light bulb went off in my head. How many other embalmers follow poor, outdated techniques and how many families have paid good money to be able to view their loved one for the last time only to ask themselves this same question? Could this be just one more reason that people have begun to forego viewing and opting for closed caskets or direct dispositions? While I couldn’t prove the point, I felt certain that it was. After a brief discussion about the appearance of his mother, I dismissed myself and joined my wife for the rest of the evening, all the while thinking about what had just transpired.

After speaking with many people about their viewing experiences, I am quite convinced that this same scene plays out day after day at funeral homes across the country. Why is this? The answer, in my opinion, is twofold: poor and/or outdated embalming skills and poor and/or outdated cosmetic skills.

The foundation of any viewing is proper embalming. A poorly embalmed body is not only a liability issue waiting to happen, but is also very difficult to properly cosmetize. One reading of my old time embalmer friend’s case protocol should explain the embalming problem relating to June. I suspect that her body was under-embalmed and it was obvious that no fluid dye was used. Add to this his “standard” cosmetic application and it is no wonder that her son was disappointed with her appearance.

This article will concentrate on the cosmetic side of the viewing equation. While I have stated that good embalming is the foundation for good cosmetic application, I will leave most of the details for another article. This article will assume that good embalming has taken place and a good quality fluid dye, like Dodge Icterine, was used in the mixture and that the features have been properly set. One to two ounces of dye per gallon in the fluid mixture helps to restore some of the normal color lost due to the lack of blood circulation and creates a much more natural appearance as a foundation for cosmetic application. Using the cosmetic application that the old funeral director used on June as an example, I will attempt to give some tips on what could have been done to improve her appearance.

The first thing that I noticed when I viewed June’s face was the lack of any variegation in her complexion. The funeral director had applied a fairly thick coat of cosmetic that completely obliterated any subtle variation in color that is always present in human skin. This alone was a major reason she looked so artificial...so dead.

The second problem was the complete lack of any shadows on the face. When viewing any living face, we see the appearance through the prism of light and shadow that is apparent at the time. Some areas appear lighter while others appear darker. This gives the face depth and dimensionality. Without these shadows and highlights, the face takes on a mannequin-like appearance. These two factors were the major cause of her son’s unhappiness with June’s appearance.

So how can this situation be corrected? The first consideration is the choice of cosmetic base that is to be used. Except in cases of trauma and/or discoloration, an opaque foundation is never called for. In the past few years I have adopted the use of airbrush cosmetics and have never looked back, although the techniques I describe apply equally to traditional cosmetic application. Airbrush foundation goes on so smoothly and perfectly with a natural look that is difficult to achieve with any other method, dries almost instantly, and doesn’t need powder. It can be applied lightly in normal cases to allow the natural markings and variegation of the complexion to show through or more heavily to cover discoloration, all without looking caked on. Of course, if a heavier application is called for, variegation needs to be accomplished through cosmetic means to recreate the subtle variations in the color of the skin. A single color application will tend to create the “mannequin” look we are trying to avoid.

After the foundation has been applied, a technique that I have used quite successfully to recreate the natural variants in skin color is to dip a toothbrush in a bit of Dodge Perma Cosmetic (or any alcohol-based cosmetic) and “riffle” through the bristles with a finger or thumb to impart an extremely fine color pixilation onto areas of the face. With a bit of practice, this method can create very natural color variegation that is difficult to achieve any other way. The use of clear, recent photos can

help when choosing a foundation and variegation colors.

Secondly, shadowing is very important. We are most used to seeing people in a standing position where light creates natural shadows on areas like just below the supraorbital area and the upper eyelids, the septum, the nostrils, and under nose area (philtrum), along the lower border of the jawline, under the chin (submental sulcus), the hollow below the lower lip (mentolabial sulcus), the temporal area, and possibly the nasolabial folds. Because we are not used to seeing someone lying on their back, as they are in the casket, and because the light on the face will be coming from different angles than we are accustomed to, the natural looking shadows that we are used to seeing are lost. I believe that the lack of shadows is the biggest reason that the face of the deceased often looks so unnatural. Therefore, the second area we must address is shadowing on the face through the subtle use of a darker shade of airbrush cosmetic such as a dark brown or chocolate brown, to recreate the look of the natural shadows that we would see when looking at a person’s face under normal conditions. Again, the use of clear, recent photos can be very valuable in determining natural shadow areas.

It takes practice to become proficient at shadowing but the results are more than worth the effort. With the airbrush, I suggest practicing by first shadowing the concha, scapha, fossa and external auditory meatus of the ear to get a feel for the amount needed and to gain a feel for control of the airbrush. I generally reduce the air pressure when shadowing

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but some excellent cosmeticians I know apply foundation and shadows at the same pressure setting. If you find that you have made the shadows too dark, simply overspray with a bit of your foundation color to lighten

until you reach the desired results. Again experimentation and practice will lead to good results.

The next step is to highlight the warm areas of the face with a color that is somewhat redder than your foundation. Some people have very reddish or ruddy areas while others have just slightly redder or pinker color variations. Using a good photo as your guide, lightly apply the highlight color to the warm areas of the face: the cheekbones (it is important to note that often with age, the highlight or warm colors of the cheeks will tend to recede below the cheekbone area. This is especially important when cosmetizing men, as they normally do not “blush” their cheekbones as women do), the bridge and tip of the nose, the tip of the chin, above the eye orbits on the forehead, the helix and lobe of the ear. The airbrush, a blush brush, or the “toothbrush technique” can be used for this step. Be sure to use those recent photographs for reference.