

# Jim Passé's magic tricks

By Thomas Beam

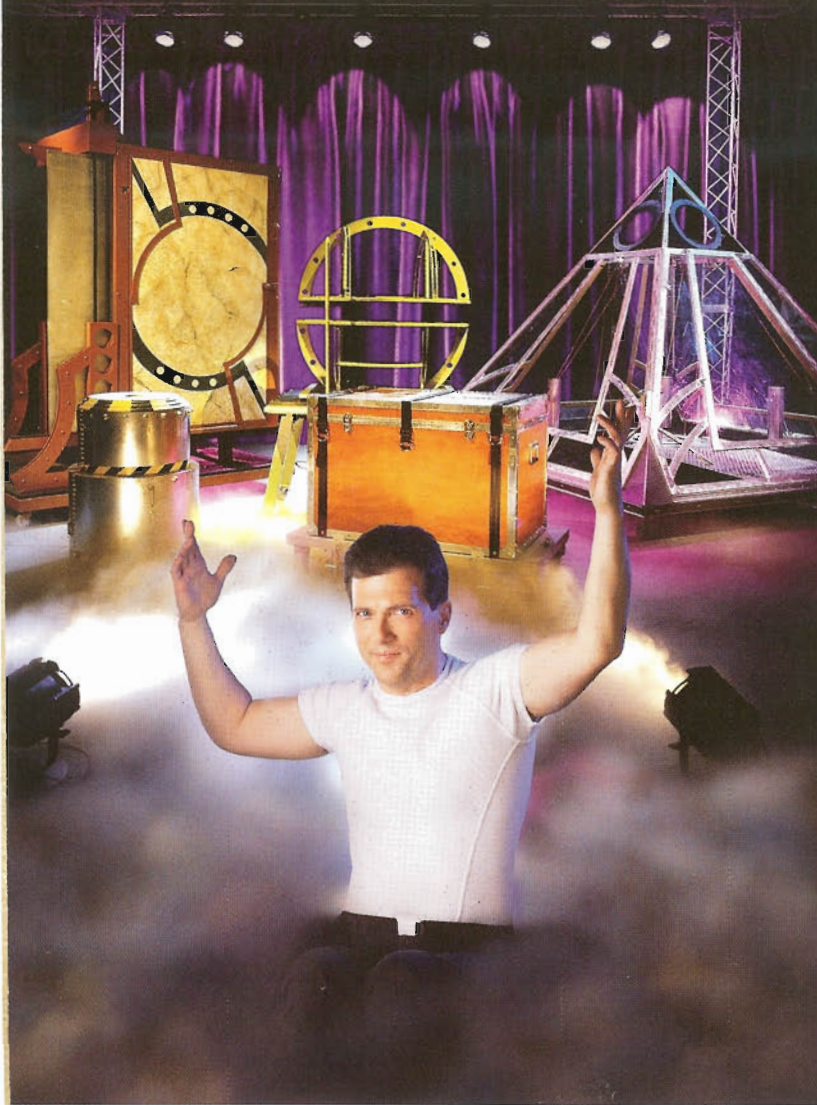


Photo courtesy of Jim Passé

**B**y day, mild-mannered attorney Jim Passé helps clients secure patents for their inventions and handles trademark and copyright cases. By night, he morphs into an illusionist in the tradition of David Copperfield.

The stage is dark before his show, and music plays in the background while audience members chat. Lights come up, the music gets more intense and the audience quickly quiets as fog and lights creep across the stage.

A booming voice introduces Passé as he arrives on stage, followed by a male assistant who brings out what appears to be a mummy case standing on its end. Passé moves to the case and opens the door, and a female assistant comes out. The assistant then opens another door and spins the case around, clearly showing that no one else is inside. The doors are closed, and Passé spins it again and opens the door. Another female assistant comes out. After another spin, two more assistants appear.

After a dance by the assistants to open the show, Passé takes center stage and addresses the audience before his next illusion. "Many people compare me to David Copperfield," he says. He glances down and then back at the audience, letting the anticipation build. "I'm the good-looking one." The audience laughs, and Passé is in control.

What is completely ignored by all is the wheelchair he has used since 1995.

"When you first get around Jim, you feel that thing where you're not sure what to do or what to say," says Melissa Bauguss, the lead dancer, choreographer and assistant in his show. "But he's very comfortable with himself, and that takes all the pressure off. Once the show gets going, the audience doesn't even notice it. He comes out, and he's OK with it, so the audience is OK with it."

## Putting on a show

The Magic of Jim Passé has entertained thousands, but it originated with a woman's desire to buy a toy for her five-year-old nephew.

"I had a favorite aunt who would take me out and buy me a simple magic trick if I was good," says Passé, who was born and raised in Chicago. What began as a simple gesture by his aunt soon turned into something more.

"The guy at the store would demonstrate a trick for me whenever I went in there with my aunt," he says. "Pretty soon, I was hooked. I still have all those tricks ... they're antiques now." Those tricks, as well as much of the other equipment for Passé's shows, currently are stored in a 4,000-square-foot warehouse.

As his collection grew, Passé demonstrated his tricks to some of his friends and put on little shows. The performance bug really bit when he was 10 years old and a magician volunteered him to come up on stage and be his assistant. The magician pulled coins from his ears, nose and mouth to roars of laughter from the audience. Passé then improved his own act and began performing at small parties.

After high school, he graduated from the University of Illinois with a degree in pharmacology, received a law degree from the Illinois Institute of Technology and went to work. But he kept performing his magic, transitioning from simple tricks to a more elaborate stage show.

"I continued to do magic throughout my childhood and my teens," Passé says. "I never thought about making a living at it until I saw David Copperfield on television."

In 1994, Passé moved to North Carolina. He performed his first true illusion show at a fundraising event at Memorial Auditorium, which was a resounding success.



"We have many audience members who leave the show shaking their heads in disbelief. It's great to bring that sense of wonderment to people that there is something beyond. They can set aside what they believe in and go somewhere else." – Jim Passé, patent attorney and magician

"At the beginning, the kids were paying attention and some of the parents were sitting back, and occasionally they would turn away to say something to someone," he recalls. "As the show went on, they were all on the edge of their seats, paying close attention. There was applause, even when we didn't expect it."

That performance led him to do more shows around North Carolina and throughout the Southeast. He continued to develop new illusions and improve the show, even taking suggestions and input from his assistants.

"Jim creates a real family atmosphere in the show," says Bauguss, who has performed with Passé since 1999. "He is the type of guy who will take suggestions from other members of the show, and that's rare for the star to do that. He's also willing to provide opportunities for you to try new things."

As he continued to improve his show and develop new illusions, Passé entered a competition sponsored by the International Brotherhood of Magicians (IBM), and his reputation continued to grow. He soon was playing in front of packed houses.

That all changed on March 15, 1995, when a heavy shipping crate containing an illusion he designed for the IBM competition fell off a truck and struck Passé, damaging his spine. The incident paralyzed his legs and put him in a wheelchair for the rest of his life, forcing him to stop performing for a time.

"Most of my work as an attorney is done at a desk, so that was no sweat," Passé says. "I didn't think I could do the act in the chair, but after a while I knew I had to start performing again."

He chose a smaller venue for his comeback. The show began slowly but, by the time it was over, he had the audience in the palm of his hand.

"Jim is very inspiring," Bauguss says. "He really captures the audience's attention, so they don't pay much attention to the wheelchair."

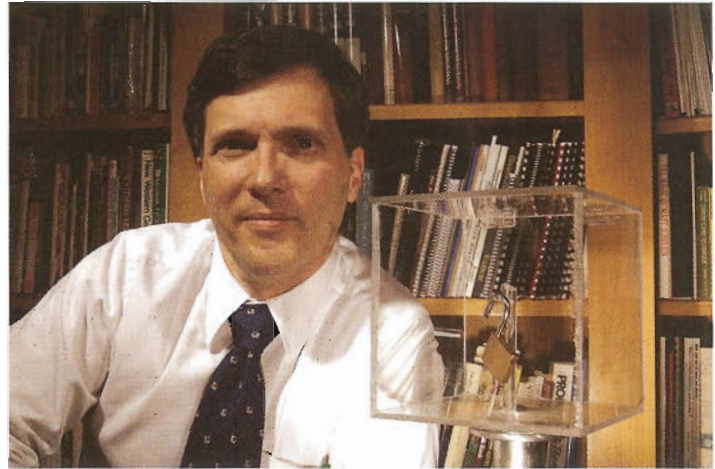
His performing career took off once again, and in 1997 he returned to the IBM competition with two new illusions that he designed. Up against magicians from 80 countries, he tied for first in voting and came in second on the flip of a coin. Later, he appeared on NBC's "World's Greatest Magic" as one of the headliners, firmly establishing himself as a top illusionist.

### A trick ... or an illusion?

What sets Passé apart from other magicians is the difference between a trick and an illusion.

"When someone sees a trick, they know something's not right ... that there is a 'trick' to it," he says. "When a person sees an illusion, their eyes are telling them that they're seeing something that can't happen. They get sucked into a story that's so engaging, they see something they can't believe."

"Kids are never not going to love a magic show, but it's great when parents come up to us and say, 'How'd you do that?'" Bauguss says.



Jim Passé, a patent attorney and magician, is inspired by David Copperfield and other world-famous magicians.

The Paradox Sphere, one of the illusions designed by Passé after his injury, has baffled thousands of spectators and has been honored as the best new illusion by Magic magazine.

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### Why magic?

Passé performs approximately 20 shows per year, including six larger events. He says his career as a patent attorney keeps him from performing on a full-time basis. He is a widower and has a grown daughter who lives in California. He remarried recently; his wife, Jana, used to perform in his show, and the couple is expecting a baby.

His wheelchair barely registers in the audience's mind until the end of his show, when Passé makes a speech about how he enjoyed playing in the snow as a child. He then points out that you can't get out in the snow in a wheelchair because there is no traction. He tells you how his friends were such a great support to him during his recovery from his accident, and concludes by describing how they helped him get outside one wintry day and play in the snow.

"It's a wonderful way to end the show," Bauguss says.

So what draws a patent attorney to magic? In Passé's case, it's an interest in how things work. "As a patent attorney, I have a real curiosity for what makes things tick, and I think my interest in magic, especially in designing new illusions, is intertwined with that interest," he says.

When asked whether he is a magician or lawyer, there is no hesitation.

"I'm definitely a magician who happens to practice law," he says. "Absolutely."

Bauguss agrees. "Jim is Jim, always," she says. "What makes his shows special is that the audience is getting him, a magician, not someone pretending to be a magician. They're getting the magic of Jim Passé." PG