July 2008

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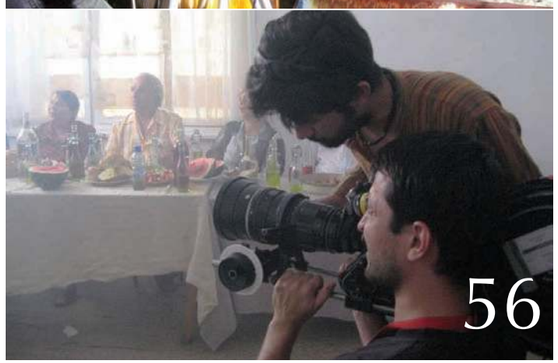
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On the Cover

Actor Rob Corddry is framed by DP Daryn Okada, ASC on the set of Harold & Kumar 2. Photo credit: New Line Cinema 2007; Jaimie Trueblood.



StudentFilmmakers magazine returns from a successful show at HD Expo in Chicago. Everyone from fellow exhibitors, motion picture equipment company owners, filmmakers, videographers, producers, editors, animation professionals, writers, professors, educators, and students came by the SF exhibit booth. Our staff enjoyed meeting each and every one of you who took the time to stop by, introduce yourselves, and learn about the magazine and StudentFilmmakers.com's free-to-use interactive tools for filmmakers on the website. These free tools include the Filmmakers Networking Community online, the Video Showcase, the interactive industry forums online, and more.

This edition's Cover Story is an exclusive interview with Daryn Okada, ASC, which was conducted immediately after the ASC announced Mr. Okada will be serving a third one-year term as president of the American Society of Cinematographers. In this very inspiring Q & A, Okada discusses the direction of the ASC and what the ASC is doing for student filmmakers. He also talks about the future of digital acquisition, and he shares his tips, techniques, and insights on cinematography, lighting, and capturing movement on film.

Turn to page 6 and read about working with neutral density grad filters in "Effectively Balance the Brightness of Different Scene Elements" by Ira Tiffen. Join us in welcoming new contributing writers Richard D. Pepperman ("Editing Structure: Avoid Over-Cutting – Cross-Cutting, Parallel Editing, and Inter-Cutting," page 38); Catherine Ann Jones ("Can Films Make a Difference? Writing Consciousness-Raising Stories," page 42); and Dr. Linda Seger ("Find, Capture and Create an Endless Flow of Ideas," page 44). Every article in this edition is a must-read, so sit back and enjoy this edition from cover to cover.

And, don't forget to join in and participate in StudentFilmmakers.com's free Call for Entries this summer for the "Annual Summer Shorts 2008" film and video competition. The contest is open to all independent filmmakers, videographers, and animators from around the globe. Please also join SF in giving a very special thanks to the contest's sponsors: Sony Creative Software, Fujifilm USA, Edgewise Media, Focal Press, ARRI CSC, Lowel, *American Cinematographer*, Chimera, and Gorilla Software.

Truly,
Kim E. Welch
Publisher/Editor-in-Chief

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BPA WORLDWIDE

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Effectively Balance the Brightness of Different Scene Elements

Neutral Density Grad Filters

by Ira Tiffen



Image taken with no filter.



Image taken with ND 0.6 Grad filter.

Balance. An important concept. The balance of gravitational forces keeps the Earth revolving around its polar axis. The resulting balance between day and night keeps our environment at a livable temperature. And the balance between the luminance of the sky to that of the earth in the foreground keeps our images at their most interesting.

Our eyes are able to accommodate significant changes in brightness levels. The adjusting iris opens in dimmer light, and shrinks in brighter light. This allows us to look up at the sky, for instance, see the clouds in full detail, and then, after a short adjustment time, see the full detail in the foreground below it. In contrast, a camera captures both areas simultaneously, at the same setting, so no adjustment is made for the difference in luminance. Yes, there are techniques currently evolving that make more than one concurrent exposure of a scene, each at a different setting to accommodate a particular scene segment, and then these are combined digitally to produce an image of potentially impressive balance and detail.

Short of that, though, there is a time-honored technique that is regularly employed for introducing balance between the foreground and the sky. It is referred to as the 'graduated neutral density (ND)' filter. A mix of ND and of clear, with a gradual transition between, the grad is an ideal way to effectively balance the brightness of different scene elements in an easy-to-use, low-tech way.

Typically, the luminance level of a mid-day sky is about two stops over that of the foreground beneath it. If you were to expose properly for the foreground, the sky would be two stops overexposed. Conversely, if the sky were properly exposed, then the foreground would be two stops underexposed. Either way, a key part of each scene would look out-of-place, either too light or too dark, with much detail missing. Definitely out of balance.

Positioning a ND 0.6 (two-stop) grad filter so that the ND half is aligned with the sky, and thus the clear half leaving the foreground unaffected, will make the necessary adjustment between exposure values for each area. Expose for the foreground and the sky will join in at the right level. Of course, different situations may require different filter densities, but you can calculate that easily enough with a meter.

That transition area, referred to as the 'edge,' also has some degree of available variation. 'Soft' edge filters are the most often used; the transition allows for its use with many focal lengths and situations. It is wider than the 'hard' edge, used especially because its more narrow transition works well with longer focal lengths and straight horizon lines, like at sea. The third type is the 'attenuator,' which changes density gradually over most of the filter's length. This allows balance between one side of an image and the other, where the transition must appear gradual so as to not draw notice to itself over the range of detail in between.

You can use ND grads for other situations, as well; anything where you can differentiate sufficiently with the half-clear, half-ND arrangement of the filter. This can include bright windows and a darker interior; a view down a hallway with a door open to the light at the far end; and many others. While you may be able to gel windows or induce balance in some other way, if you can use an ND grad, it may be the most effective means for the least effort.

And isn't balancing effort with effect a key part of imaging success?

Photos by Brian Austad.

In over 30 years of making optical filters, Ira Tiffen created the Pro-Mist, Soft/FX, Ultra Contrast, GlimmerGlass, and others, netting him both a Technical Achievement Award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and a Prime-Time Emmy Award. Elected a Fellow of the SMPTE in 2002, he is also an Associate member of the ASC, and the author of the filter section of the *American Cinematographer Manual*.

Tools and Accessories for the Camera Assistant

Must-Have's for Your Ditty Bag or AKS case

by David E. Elkins, SOC

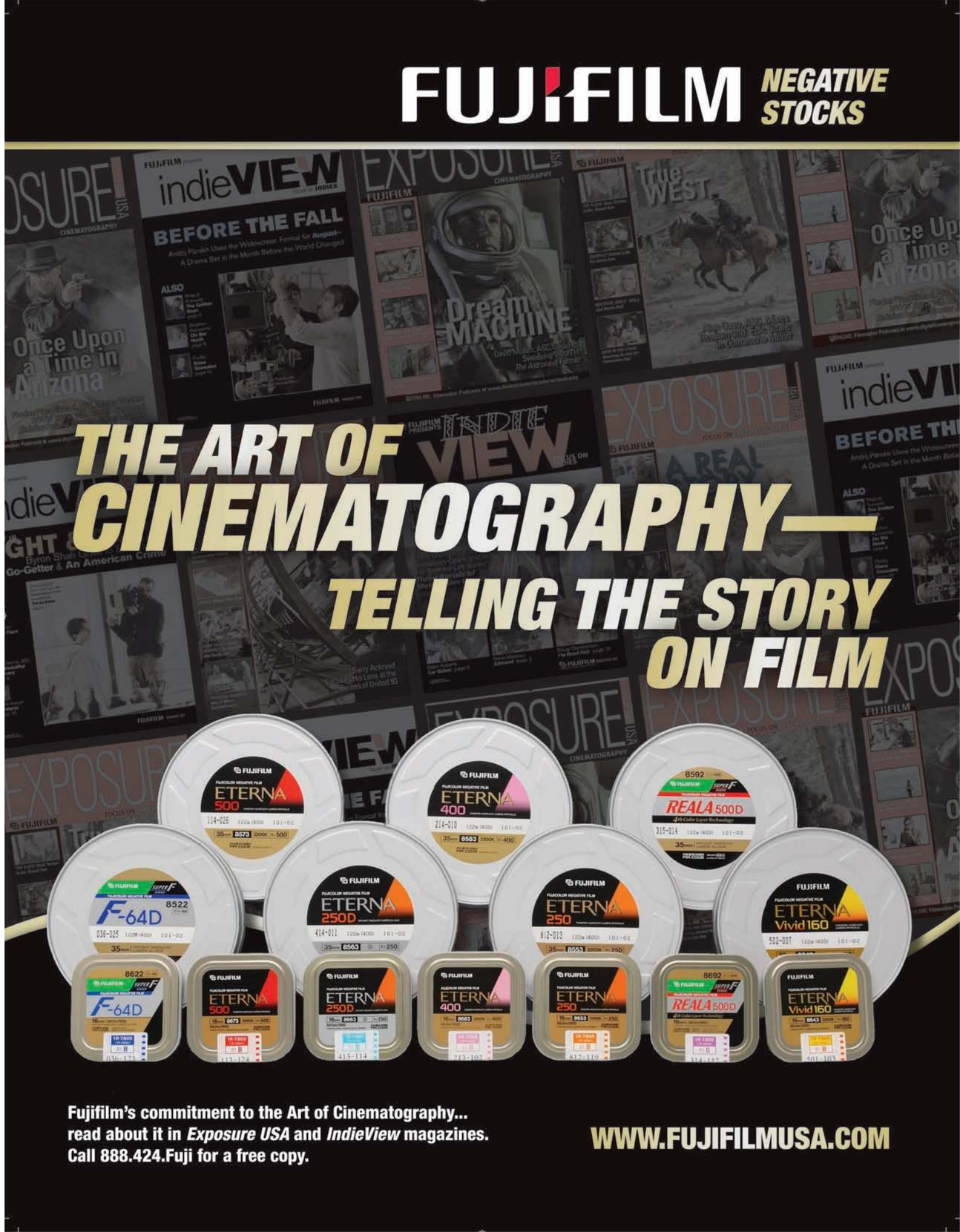
There are many jobs that require specialized tools and equipment, and the job of an assistant cameraman is no different. Without the basic tools you will not be able to perform your job properly and as a result may not get hired for future jobs. Many of the tools used are basic everyday hand tools such as screwdrivers, pliers, wrenches, scissors, tape measures, etc. But there are quite a few specialized items that are unique to the film industry, and if you are an assistant cameraperson, you are expected to have these as part of your tool kit or as we often call it, our ditty bag.

You should start out with some type of tool bag or case so that you can keep everything neat and organized and so that it can be transported easily if traveling to jobs. You can pick up some very nice tool bags or tool cases at your local home center, or you may purchase a bag or case from a company specializing in tools, equipment and accessories for the film industry. Many of these tool bags contain different size compartments for the storage of your tools and equipment. As you work more, and gain more experience, you will eventually have more than one bag or case to keep your tools protected. Some assistants prefer soft-side cases and some prefer hard side cases. The choice is yours, and there is no right or wrong, simply what works best for your situation.

Once you have your bag or case, you should start outfitting it with the items you feel you will use most often. As you continue to work you will discover other tools and items that may be useful, and you will add them as necessary. The important thing is to have the basics to do the job so that you will be hired back for that next job and referred to as someone who is a professional and comes prepared to work. Having the right tools and equipment to do the job, along with the right attitude, will take you a long way in your career.

One of the most important items that most assistants own is a rolling cart or dolly in order to move camera equipment around on the set. Once you start working you will discover that even the most basic camera package consists of many cases. There are cases for the camera body, lenses, magazines, filters, accessories, and more. Having a rolling dolly or cart will make it easier to move things around from shot to shot.

The following list contains a basic set of tools and accessories, and it is by no means complete. Your situation will dictate what tools or equipment you should have to do the job.



- Ditty Bag or Tool Case
- Screwdrivers (Slotted and Phillips)
- Jewelers Screwdrivers
- Adjustable Wrench
- Pliers (Regular and Needle nose)
- Allen wrenches (American and Metric)
- Razor Knife
- Scissors
- Tape Measures (Cloth and Metal)
- Extension Cord, Electrical Adapters and Electrical Cube Taps
- Flashlight
- Lighted Magnifier

The following are some specialized items that are unique to the film industry and especially to the camera assistant.

- Slates (Sync and Insert)
- Changing Bag or Tent
- Color Chart and Gray Scale
- Depth of Field Calculator
- Space Blanket
- French Flag with Arm
- Small Grip Clamps
- (Red, Green, Blue, Orange, Yellow)
- Lens Tissue
- Lens Cleaner
- Orangewood Sticks: to clean emulsion buildup from the gate
- Permanent Felt Tip Markers (Red, Black, Blue)
- Ballpoint Pens
- Dry Erase Markers (Red, Black, Blue)
- Camera Wedges
- Compressed Air with Nozzle
- Cotton Swabs or Foam-Tip Swabs (Q-Tips)
- Batteries (AAA, AA, C, D, 9-volt)
- Trash Bags

And finally, be sure to have the basic supplies needed for loading and unloading film, labeling film cans and keeping an accurate inventory of film. This includes the following:

- Spare Cores and Daylight Spools
- Extra Boxes, Film Cans and Black Bags (100′, 400' & 1000')
- Camera Reports and Inventory Forms

In addition to the basic tools, you should also have some of the basic expendable items in your bag so that you can properly do the job. Many of these items are unique to the film industry but there are some very basic items as well.

- 1-Inch Wide Cloth Camera Tape (Red, Yellow, Black, White)
- 2-Inch Wide Cloth Gaffer Tape (Gray, Black)
- ½-Inch or 1-Inch Wide Paper Tape

The above is only a very small and basic listing of the items you should have to start working. I have many specialized items that I have only used once or twice but many of those items were worth it because without them we may not have been able to get certain shots without a great deal of time and money spent. You never know when you may have exactly the right item that enables the production to do a shot that it otherwise would not have been able to do.

As you gain more experience as an assistant, you will find other tools and accessories that you will keep in the ditty bag or AKS case. An AKS case is any case that contains a wide variety of tools, equipment, and supplies. Its literal translation is All Kinds of Stuff.

David E. Elkins, SOC is a Camera Operator and First Assistant Cameraman with over 20 years experience, and more than 125 production credits on feature films, television series, commercials, music videos, and educational films. His credits include the television series, *The Wonder Years*; *Star Trek, The Next Generation*; *Gabriel's Fire*; *Dream On*; and *Tales from the Darkside*. He is the author of "The Camera Assistant's Manual" and "Camera Terms and Concepts."

