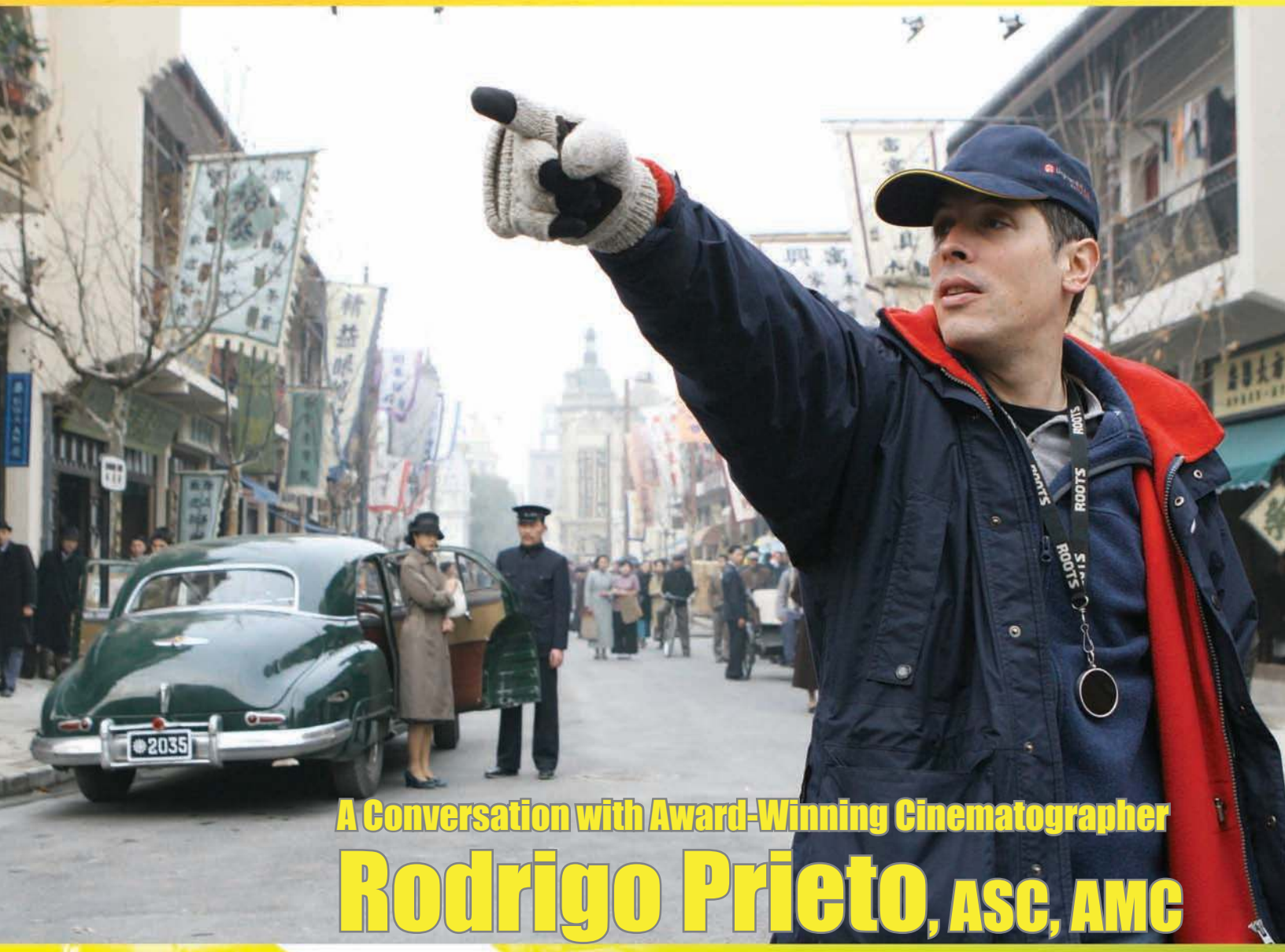
October 2007

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A Conversation with Award-Winning Cinematographer
Rodrigo Prieto, ASC, AMC



Clearing the Haze about Fog Filters

Lighting for Various Outdoor Shoots

Graphic Filmmaking Techniques

Documentary Interview Do's & Don'ts

Auditioning and Booking Commercials

Exploring Sales & Distribution Trends

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Table of Contents October 2007









Cinematography
6 Clearing the Haze about Fog Filters by Ira Tiffen

Lighting
8 Working with the Sun for Various Outdoor Shoots
by Carl Filoreto

Filmmaker Spotlight
14 A Conversation with Award-Winning Cinematographer Rodrigo Prieto, ASC, AMC
"Lust, Caution" Wins Best Film and Best Cinematography at the 64th Venice Film Festival
by Jacqueline B. Frost

Directing
24 Directorial Chutzpah 101 by David K. Irving

Documentary
26 Tips for a More Successful On-Camera Interview
by Sam Kauffmann

Acting
30 Understanding the Commercial Audition
by Vanessa Daniels

Production
32 Graphic Filmmaking Techniques: 'Light and Rhythm'
by Dana Dorrity

Tech Focus
36 Selection and Use of Lavalier Microphones
by Fred Ginsburg C.A.S. Ph.D. MBKS

Music & Sound
44 Internet Audio Production: Clarity and Loudness
by Bryant Falk

Props & FX Make-up
46 Creating Prosthetic Appliances with Gelatin
by Todd Debreceni

Film Business
52 Exploring Sales & Distribution Trends 'Before' Making Your Movie
by Adam Matalon

Networking
54 Filmmakers Networking Community
This Month's Featured Networkers

On the Cover
Rodrigo Prieto, ASC, AMC on the set of *Lust, Caution*



We are very proud to announce the completion of our second BPA audit, which reflects our readership and growth over a six month period. Circulation grew from 15,822 in January 2007 to 18,408 in June 2007. This month's circulation is well over 20,000 with bonus issues going to the major tradeshows in the Entertainment Industry.

We are very excited to return to Denver, Colorado, for the Annual Rocky Mountain VidExpo 2007, the largest event in the Rocky Mountain region dedicated to providing a forum for new and changing ideas and technology, networking with industry leaders, and building relationships with customers and manufacturers. Drop by our exhibit at Booth # 1311, and sign up for a complimentary subscription to StudentFilmmakers Magazine, the #1 Educational Resource for Film and Video Makers.

This month's cover story is an in-depth, informative, and inspiring interview with Rodrigo Prieto, ASC, AMC. Read Jacqueline B. Frost's Q & A with the award-winning cinematographer who wins Best Cinematography at the 64th Venice Film Festival for Ang Lee's "Lust, Caution," which also wins Best Film. Rodrigo talks about his process for preparing for a film, as well as collaborating with Ang Lee, Alejandro Inarritu, Oliver Stone, and other renown directors. Rodrigo discusses a variety of topics, including film versus digital technology, the digital intermediate, and formats.

We welcome new contributing writer Adam Matalon, who offers film sales and distribution tips in his article "Exploring Sales and Distribution Trends 'Before' Making Your Movie". Actress and writer Vanessa Daniels returns after shooting four national commercials this summer with her article, "Understanding the Commercial Audition." Read Carl Filoreto's excellent lighting tips in "Working with the Sun for Various Outdoor Shoots." And, don't miss Ira Tiffen's "Clearing the Haze about Fog Filters."

In the upcoming months, we will be exhibiting at the HD EXPO in Burbank, California, November 7th & 8th. We will be exhibiting at GV Expo 2007 in Washington, DC, November 15th and 16th. And, we will be exhibiting at DV Expo West in Los Angeles, California, December 5th through 6th. Please stop by our booth and sign up or just to say hello. Enjoy this issue and be sure to keep checking our website at www.studentfilmmakers.com for the most up-to-date information on trade shows, events, and other breaking film and video news.

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

studentfilmmakers

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BPA WORLDWIDE

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New Intensity Pro introduces HDMI with analog editing in HD and SD for $349



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Clearing the Haze about Fog Filters

When Atmosphere is the Effect

by Ira Tiffen

White. Impenetrable. Fog. Atmosphere we can see, fog is capable of inducing an array of emotions from somber reflection to fear incarnate. A powerful image element. Yet, controlling fog is a bit like nailing Jello to a wall – tricky even at the best of times.

As with most weather-related effects, fog doesn't come when called – you may need to fudge things. The original 'fudge factor' for fog is a filter that creates misty flare of highlights, and a modest degree of contrast reduction. As it happens, it also softens sharpness. When they were first introduced, 'Fog filters' were the closest things to simulating fog. Today, highlight flare is their main goal.

There is generally too much contrast and not enough sharpness when using Fog filters, especially in the stronger grades, when compared to the look of natural fog. Use them for that warm, romantic glow around candlelight, but not for a convincing fog effect.

Double Fog filters are not industrial strength Fog filters, but they are two effects in one – a mild flare plus what becomes a strong contrast reduction, especially in the higher grades. The combination can very closely simulate the look of natural fog in many situations.

We look today at a situation where it does not. Natural fog has the ability to shroud the distance within its dense mantle. Get up close, though, and you can often see more clearly. As the distance to the subject increases, so does the accumulative amount of water droplets suspended in the air that comes between, causing the thickest fog at the farthest distance. A good example of this is in the image made in a natural fog without a filter. The wooden structure in the foreground is darkly silhouetted against the pale farther shore, which itself is visible only as a faint outline.

With a special exception, optical filters have no such ability to differentiate with distance when simulating fog. Returning to the same scene some months later, the unfiltered scene, also in overcast light, but without the natural fog, shows the farther shore in dark detail, blending with the foreground structure.

The Fog 3 filter produces a misty flare, but remains too contrasty to look like a natural fog. While not a great example, in this scene the Double Fog 3 filter does produce a more natural fog effect, reducing contrast more realistically, with reduced flare, when compared especially to the same, unfiltered image. Yet it does not have the ability to differentiate foreground from background, near from far, as does a natural fog.

The aforementioned exception, the Harrison Scenic Fog filter, employs a gradient fog effect that allows one part of the image (preferably the background) to appear in a greater fog than the other (preferably the foreground), more accurately emulating reality in certain situations.

It's when you *don't* want to 'clear the air' that it helps to be clear about the capabilities of Fog-effect filters.

Photos by Ira Tiffen.

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.









Figure 1. Natural fog, no filter.
Figure 2. No fog, Double Fog 3 filter.
Figure 3. No fog, Fog 3 filter.
Figure 4. No fog, no filter.



Working with the Sun for Various Outdoor Shoots

Ways to Make the Sun an Ally Rather Than an Enemy

by Carl Filoreto

Control. It's the reason producers and DP's like to scurry inside to a well-appointed hotel suite when they face capturing an important interview for video posterity. Need to shoot a vital on camera segment with the host of an hour long documentary? Well, the first instinct is to look for a nice, cozy indoor location. Why? Simple. It's easier to control the many elements that can adversely affect the shoot. Factors like harsh lighting, extraneous noise and foot traffic.

The art and science of video production though, often means going outside and working in the natural environment. This scenario is fraught with risks and danger and can throw a shudder through even the most seasoned camera practitioner. Moving outside literally opens the door to a variety of factors that the video crew now must handle with dignity and grace, but most importantly, without any loss of quality. The two primary culprits are the sun and noise. Urban settings come replete with a staggering assortment of unwanted and uncontrollable sounds like traffic, horns, sirens, construction noise and loud voices rising above the general chaos. I've even encountered bizarre noise problems in pristine natural settings located far from the concrete jungle. Let's focus for now on how we can come to terms with handling the sun for various on camera outdoor shoots.

Fortunately, there are ways to make the sun an ally rather than an enemy. And if you're working with a limited, or in some cases a lack of, a budget, then you'll be delighted to know there are some low cost solutions available. Now my primary rule when handling outdoor interviews and on camera segments is to make sure the person on camera is always facing away from the sun. During many years in the business, I've yet to find anyone who enjoyed looking directly into that fiery orb in the sky. It's unpleasant, it makes people squint and it induces lots of sweat. And if you're not shooting during the "magic hour" period when the sun is low on the horizon, it can cause the dreaded black hole look. This condition occurs when shadows are created under the brow line as a result of a high sun angle, thus bright vibrant eyes are transformed into dark empty shadows. These results are not good for the production, or your career.

Of course, the simplest solution is to put the subject in the shade, and proceed from there. Unfortunately, things are usually more complex. So if you can't get the subject out of the sun, situate the subject so that his or her back is to the sun. This simple maneuver accomplishes two very important things. One, it creates an instant natural backlight, and that's always a positive step. Second, the background has a good probability of also being shaded. If you think about it conceptually, and contemplate the angles involved, you'll see that for the same reason that the subject's face is in the shade, the background will be in the shade. This makes it much easier to control exposure, and prevent any problematic hot spots in the background.

A 6x6 china silk is used to diffuse the sun as MSNBC's David Shuster interviews singers Amy Grant and Vince Gill. An 800 watt and a 400 watt HMI act as the key lights. The location is the plaza at Snowmass Village, CO. Photo by Carl Filoreto.



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Sometimes, though, you're going to have overexposed areas in the background, and you have to somehow get more light on your subject in order to equalize your exposure. Reflectors are an elegant solution. They're usually oval or round, light, have a handle so you can carry them around, and come in a variety of colors, textures and finishes. They're small enough that a producer or handy production assistant can hold them in place, and quite cleverly most are made with a different colored surface on each side.

Optimally, I'll use a white-sided reflector since it creates the most natural look. Hopefully, the light generated by the sun will be intense enough that a white reflector will bounce back sufficient amounts of light to fill in any facial shadows. In reality, I've found that's rarely the case, so I've grown fond of reflectors that are often billed as being a "sunlight" color. When you look at these closely, they have a weave of gold, silver and reddish-hued threads that in combination often offer a decent match to the ambient outdoor color temperature. Lots of folks like to use a gold or silver reflector. Keep in mind, a gold or silver reflector is going to reflect, well, a gold or silver hue. Too much of a good thing can result in an unnatural look. So when using these colors, try to check skin tone in a monitor, or use a discerning eye, and make sure you're not creating an uncomfortable metallic glow.

Several years ago, I was hired by a political action group to shoot a ten-minute video highlighting one of the burning issues of the day. A principal interview location was a large park located in the middle of downtown Denver. The state Capitol was located on one end of the park. The iconic City and County Building of Denver was situated on the opposite side. And, the Denver skyline peered over the trees in another direction. These are all fabulous backgrounds for politically focused interviews. During a site survey, the prospect of shooting in this seemingly wonderful location was shattered by one critical detail: there wasn't any power available. None. To muddy the waters a bit more, two of the interviews were scheduled as two camera interviews. And to ratchet up the degree of difficulty, the first interview was scheduled to begin at 11:30 in the morning.

Lighting two people sitting opposite each other in the great outdoors when the sun is directly overhead is a serious production problem. In this case though, one of the most versatile outdoor lighting controls, a collapsible modular product made by Westcott called a scrim jim, came to the rescue. It consists of aluminum tubes which attach together to create frames that are 4'x4' or 4'x6' or 6"x6" in size. The tubes have Velcro attached to one side enabling you to mount a dizzying array of scrims, silks and nets. On this particular day we deployed a variety of 6x6 frames using sunlight reflectors and china silks to bounce light into and remove light from the participants in the interview. When we finished, we were all pleasantly surprised at the quality look of the interviews. It almost appeared to look like we were lighting the set with a bank of HMI's attached to a generator truck.

In this configuration, I'm partial to china silks, which are made from a white fabric that cuts down on the intensity of the sun, and gently diffuses the light that does penetrate it. I often use a 4x4 china silk to remove the harsh shadows created by the sun, and then fire up an HMI and direct it into the locations that need to be "punched". In the scenario I depicted earlier, I'll use it to cut down on the amount of sunlight hitting the back of a subject's head, and mold a pleasing backlight with it.

Now suppose you eye up your shot, and everything is fantastic, but you notice the background is brighter than your subject. Black nets are a simple way to cut down on the amount of light generated in your background. Position the net far enough behind the subject so that the lens can't see it, and voila, the background is muted. Both china silks and black nets can be purchased or rented according to f-stops. A two stop black net will, you guessed it, cut down the amount of background light by two stops.

So what happens when you're in a

A 6x6 china silk is used to diffuse the sun during the taping of this stand up delivered by Tom Brokaw.Two 400 watt HMIs act as the primary light sources. Both lights were powered by inverters. Tom Levy mans the silk while Steve Dalton handles audio duties. The stand up was an element in an NBC News Tom Brokaw Reports broadcast during primetime on NBC. Photo by Carl Filoreto.




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