



# How Rob McLachlan celebrated *Black Christmas*

**Above:** (L to R) Director, Glen Morgan and Robert McLachlan ASC, CSC after a long day of meticulous mayhem

**Inset:** The sorority house, present day.

Horror film fans remember *Black Christmas* as the granddaddy of the slasher movies. The 1974 film was directed by Bob Clark and photographed by Reginald H. Morris. It made an impression on Rob McLachlan, ASC, CSC, who was a film student then. "I was struck and frightened by the darkness of it," McLachlan recalls. "That was very uncommon at the time."

McLachlan recently filmed a remake of *Black Christmas* in collaboration with director Glen Morgan and producer James Wong. The cinematographer had worked with Morgan (*Willard*) and Wong (*Final Destination 3*) on other fright films. The filmmakers wanted to update the story and answer some questions left open by the original film, including why Billy came back to kill all those sorority girls.

During pre-production McLachlan and Morgan decided to frame in Super 35 film format, which results in a 2.4:1 widescreen aspect ratio. "The wide frame is better for a horror film," McLachlan says. "There's more screen space around the characters, which allows the audience to sense the environment and atmosphere."

The filmmakers designed the visuals to contrast the clean, pleasant, upper-class sorority house with the moral decay of Billy's family and their physical surroundings, as seen in a prologue/flashback sequence set 15 years prior to the main action.

"When we first meet the main characters, the house feels very warm and inviting," says McLachlan. "The lighting is extremely flattering and there aren't a lot of deep, shadowy areas where secrets or harm could be lurking. As things get weird, and people

are getting killed, we progressively shifted the lighting back to the dingy, unforgiving feeling of the prologue. It becomes very dark, harsh and menacing. By the end of the movie the blacks are crushed and color is almost completely drained out of the film."

McLachlan knew before they began the 40-day shoot that he would be able to manipulate colors, contrast and other visual elements during digital intermediate (DI) timing. "I shot the entire film on KODAK VISION2 Expression 500T 5229 film, which records lower contrast than the other Vision films," he says. "We wanted a lot of contrast in some areas and low contrast in others. Using this film, I could easily add in the right amount of contrast while timing the film in DI."



The planned DI also factored into McLachlan's decision to make extensive use of the KODAK Look Manager System (KLMS), which uses software and a laptop computer to simulate the effects of various film stocks, filter packages and post processes. "KLMS is the best new tool for cinematographers in 25 years," says McLachlan. "It allows me to take a digital still and emulate what the final images will look like under a given set of

circumstances. Since we were planning to change the images quite a bit in DI, it was critical to give the director an accurate idea of where we were going to end up."

"Also, I sent that data to the lab so that our dailies looked as much like the finished film as possible," he says. "On the set, at any time, I could print off an image of what a scene would eventually look like. I made prints for people to take back to decorate their offices and such. It gave them a comfort factor, knowing that the finished film would look really great."

*Black Christmas* is an independent feature produced in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. It is slated for international release in late 2006. ■

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