

AMC's Hit Show Breaking Bad

Film stocks

KODAK VISION2 500T 5260, KODAK VISION2 200T 5217, KODAK VISION2 50D 5201



1

"Breaking bad" is a colloquial term that means turning off from the straight and narrow path. It is also the title of an award-winning television series that airs on the AMC cable television channel in the United States. The main character, Walter White, played by Bryan Cranston, is a struggling high school chemistry teacher. His child is handicapped, his wife is pregnant, and he has just been diagnosed with terminal lung cancer.

White decides to use the time he has left to live to build a nest egg for his survivors. He feels his circumstances leave him no choice but to begin to illegally make and sell crystal meth.

John Toll, ASC and series creator Vince Gilligan were each nominated for Emmys for the pilot episode. Michael Slovis is filming the second season of *Breaking Bad* in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

"AMC encourages us to create dramatic storytelling of the highest quality," says Slovis. "They want this television series to feel like a film you would see in a theater. For the most part, we play things in slightly wider, more cinematic shots. Sometimes, though, we do go in very tight, depending on the scene and the characters. I light with a chiaroscuro approach and I don't worry about lighting up faces all the time. My main concern is to convey the emotions of the scene.

I'm free to use color and different kinds of interesting shot structures in an effort to express the story in the most graphically interesting and refreshing way that I can."

At least 90-percent of the show

"With 5201 the shadows hold up, the highlights have detail, the colors are vibrant, rich and saturated, and it all adds up to beautiful pictures."

is done with handheld cameras, usually two ARRICAM Lites mounted with Cooke S4 lenses. The format is three-perf Super 35mm film. The show is aired in a letterboxed 16:9 aspect ratio.

Slovis makes extensive use of KODAK VISION2 50D 5201 film. "The desert is the logical place to use the 50D daylight-balanced stock," he says. "The 5201 has such tight grain, and its range is so applicable to what we're doing. The shadows hold up, the highlights have detail, the colors are vibrant, rich and saturated, and it all adds up to beautiful pictures.

I try to use the sun as backlight, but there are times on a television schedule where you just can't. The film holds up beautifully."

In night and tungsten-lit interior situations, Slovis uses KODAK

VISION2 500T 5260 film. "This is my workhorse stock," he says. "One of the great things about shooting film is the way the highlights are rendered, which is important on a show that takes place in New Mexico. I do a lot of little hot spots and let things burn out. Film handles that in a softer way that is very pleasing to the eye. I try to use the entire sensitometric spectrum, keeping something very bright and something very dark in each frame."

Slovis also keeps a supply of KODAK VISION2 200T 5217 film

on hand for high-speed, daylight exteriors and for one specific daylight interior set. "We shoot scenes in a Drug Enforcement Administration office at a practical location on the ninth floor, where I constantly have to balance interior light levels to the hot exteriors," he says. "The film holds highlights outside the windows as well as the low-end interiors extremely well."

The exposed film is shipped to FotoKem in Burbank, California, which processes the film, handles dailies and performs the final transfer in a 2K workflow.

Cranston recently won the Emmy for Best Actor in a Dramatic Series. "This show is extremely rare," says Slovis. "I feel lucky to be a part of it. The writing is extraordinary; the performances are excellent. Everything we do in terms of the photography is to give the actors a chance to work without restrictions."



2

1 Actor Bryan Cranston on the set of Season 2 of *Breaking Bad* where cinematographer Michael Slovis tries to keep something very bright and something very dark in each frame. Photo courtesy of Michael Slovis 2 Cinematographer Michael Slovis reads the light meter on the set. Photo by Andy Voegeli