

# Brokeback Mountain

## home version true to the filmmakers' intentions

**Below left:** Actors Jake Gyllenhaal and Heath Ledger in a scene from *Brokeback Mountain*, shot by Rodrigo Prieto, ASC.

**Below right:** Director Ang Lee and DP Rodrigo Prieto, ASC on location preparing to shoot a scene from the film.

**B**rokeback Mountain chronicles the relationship between two cowboys who met at a rodeo in Wyoming during the early 1960s. The film follows their relationship for some 20 years. It earned eight Academy Award nominations. Ang Lee took home best director awards from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the Directors Guild of America (DGA), the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA), and the Independent Spirit Award competitions. Rodrigo Prieto, ASC, AMC earned Oscar, BAFTA and American Society of Cinematographers (ASC) Outstanding Achievement Award nominations.

"Ang Lee and I want people to experience this film at home the way we made it for the cinema," Prieto says, "but timing DVDs is not an exact science. Cinematographers and directors tend to talk in abstract terms, so it is easy for colorists to misinterpret our intentions if we're not with them in the telecine suite."

Lee and Prieto timed the HD digital master used to generate DVDs and all other video releases at LaserPacific in collaboration with Mike Sowa, a senior colorist.

visual language they envisioned for the story.

The cinematographer chose a diverse palette of stocks, including Eastman EXR 50D 5245, Kodak Vision 250D 5246 and 500T 5279, and Kodak VISION2 500T 5218 films. He used Cooke S4 lenses. Prints for theatrical release were made in the traditional way with optical timing at Deluxe Labs in Toronto, Canada.

Sowa initially timed a screener that was made for members of the Motion Picture Academy. He watched a timed film print made by the lab. The conformed negative was scanned and converted to D-5HD video with a 2K Spirit DataCine at a LaserPacific facility in Los Angeles. Sowa fine-tuned the look of the screener by referring to notes from Lee describing his intentions for shots.

He timed the digital during two 12-hour days with Lee and Prieto. It was a completely interactive process. The corrected screener was displayed shot-by-shot on a 16:9 HD monitor; the way audiences will see the film in their homes in optimum conditions. There was no need for letterboxing because of the earlier decision to frame 1.85:1.



Prieto says that he and Lee used paintings and photographs as visual references during pre-production. They looked at Richard Avedon's portraits of people whom he photographed at 20-year intervals. They also looked at Ansel Adams' photos, and paintings by Andrew Wyeth and Edward Hopper for insights into filming landscapes.

They decided to produce *Brokeback Mountain* in Academy aperture 1.85:1 aspect ratio. The cinematographer explains, "The more vertical composition allowed us to focus attention on body language, how the actors stood and used their hands. It was also right for mountains in the backgrounds and small towns in the story."

Prieto shot wardrobe, hair and make-up tests using different lenses, films and lighting, including moonlight and fire effects, to record subtleties in textures, colors and grain that are part of the

"He (Sowa) had the ability to show us a split screen with the original and the corrected images, but we didn't do that a lot," Prieto says. "We had clear ideas about matching the digital version to the moviegoing experience, but sometimes we decided to darken or brighten a shot or make some other subtle changes. Your perception is different when you are looking at images on a television screen. Mike Sowa was a big help. He has a good eye, a great attitude and understands color space."

Sowa concludes, "It was a big advantage having the cinematographer and director in the telecine suite together. It saved time, and resulted in a DVD that reflects their intentions. They both wanted the DVD to look like the movie, but two people can want the same thing and describe it differently. They were speaking with a single voice." ■