

Canterbury's

designing a look for a new television series



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Canterbury's Law is a legal drama premiering on the Fox television network this season. Julianna Margulies stars as Elizabeth Canterbury, a savvy, intense defense attorney who pushes the envelope to best serve her clients.

The pilot episode was directed by Mike Figgis and photographed by W. Mott Hupfel III. Tom Houghton is handling cinematography on the series.

The original plan was to produce the series in digital video format, but Hupfel and Figgis shared a different vision. They convinced the producers to allow them to film the pilot in Super 16mm format with minimal lighting and at least two handheld cameras for every shot.

"Mike and I felt that Super 16mm would give us a unique look, while allowing us to do less lighting than video would require," says Hupfel. "We agreed that film would handle the highlights better than video and make something more beautiful of the shadows."

They covered most of the pilot with two or three handheld ARRIFLEX 416 cameras mounted with short zoom lenses. Images were recorded on KODAK VISION2 500T 7218 and

250D 7205 films, depending on the situation.

"Mike never let us settle into anything even slightly normal or boring," says Hupfel. "He always had interesting ideas, and was always pushing me to make the show look more edgy and unique."

Houghton has embraced that concept as well, and adds that the look is still evolving. "You're always exploring the grammar of a television series from week to week," he says. "They are in the process of editing the first few episodes, and are learning what they need from the cinematography to make it work with the other elements. We hear feedback from them and apply it on the set."

Houghton describes the camera movement as having a degree of arbitrariness without being too "in your face." The frame is rarely static. There are usually three ARRI 416 cameras available, including one for Steadicam use. Images are framed in 4:3 aspect ratio and protected for 16:9 for future airing in HD format. The lead operator is Bill Coleman.

"First AC Geb Byers was relentless about finding the right configuration for handholding the 416," says

Coleman. "The camera is ultra-light and so versatile. We found a lightweight setup that allows me to comfortably handhold all day, while enabling him to have wireless focus, zoom and T-stop control, and a small on-board monitor."

"The 416 switches from handheld to studio or Steadicam mode, and vice-versa very quickly," Coleman says. "This is a big plus for production because time is always a factor on a TV show. I appreciate the adjustable ground-glass orientation and the variety of ARRIGLOW colors in the finder. The camera makes my job a breeze."

The cameras are usually mounted with short zoom lenses. Houghton uses KODAK VISION2 500T 7218 film in most interior situations, and KODAK VISION2 100T 7212 film for most exteriors.

Fast stocks

"The look includes a degree of grit and grain," says Houghton. "I think grain is organic. It's photochemical, and it fluctuates and moves around. If you want grain you've got to put it in the negative."

Canterbury's Law is set in Providence, Rhode Island, but produced mostly at locations in New York City. "The fast stocks are a great help at practical locations," says Houghton. "The other day we had a scene in an interior where we covered the windows with ND9 filters. There were buildings outside that were a couple stops over with the ND9, but it just looked a little dull. I was using only an 85 filter on the camera, with final corrections made in the lab. The resulting images looked terrific. The windows were hotter, creating an interesting ratio and a mood, rather than just evening things out. The

colorist was able to maintain some detail. There were buildings, and greenery and a very realistic texture visible outside the windows. That would have been trickier with HD cameras, because if you clip anything it won't come back."

Simulating sunlight

The location work includes plenty of courtroom scenes, many of which are done in a real courthouse in Yonkers. Houghton, who calls the courtroom scenes "classic theater," says that the courtroom has only one door, which has an impact on his decisions.

"It takes time to move equipment in and out," he says. "We're doing the courtroom scenes from two separate episodes over the course of four days to simplify the logistics. The cameras see in every direction, which means I can't keep many lights on the floor."

Houghton often has a 20K and a Maxi-Brute on a lift outside the windows simulating sunlight. The windows are gelled with half-85 and fitted with working shades. He uses as many as three balloon lights inside the courtroom.

Gaffer Mark Schwentner explains that the balloons are made by SourceMaker and use 8K tungsten lamps. One is a 6.5ft cube with masking on five sides, and another is a 12ft tube with a reflector and black masking to make it directional. Each has two circuits with four 1000-watt bulbs that are dimmable.

"The balloons are very helpful," says Houghton. "The ceilings are 30 feet high. You can tuck the balloon lights in and control them with skirts to keep spill off the walls."

Colorist Ken Rubenfeld at PostWorks in New York works with Houghton to help set the initial look, while final color correction and

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timing on the cut shows is done at LaserPacific in Los Angeles.

"I asked him to make some shots contrast-ier, with more guts," says Houghton. "But you can't make the final decisions about the look until you see the context of each cut, and where you are in the arc of the story."

Seamless visual effects

Houghton, whose resume includes extensive second unit work on effects blockbusters like *Stuart Little 2* and *Spider-Man 2*, has been using green screen techniques on *Canterbury's Law* to help place the story more firmly in Providence. "If you've got the time and the money, you can create any sort of illusion," he says. "It's a little trickier on a television schedule, but there are ways of doing it."

As a test to prove how simple and seamless visual effects can be, Houghton placed a green screen at the top of the grand exterior staircase at Borough Hall in Brooklyn, and asked a crew member to stand in front of it. The visual effects company was able to drop a plate shot at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., into the background that made a convincing illusion.

Canterbury's Law is produced by Sony Pictures Television.

- 1 Actors Julianna Margulies and Terry Kinney in a scene from *Canterbury's Law*, shot by DP Tom Houghton.
- 2 Actress Julianna Margulies in action in the Courtroom.

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