



Lab Cité Lab

Post-production Vision Globale Montreal

DP Michel La Veaux

# Photographing in the Arctic for **Ce qu'il faut pour vivre**

**The literal translation of *Ce qu'il faut pour vivre* is "what one needs to do to survive." That's the name of the first narrative feature film of Benoît Pilon, a French Canadian who had previously directed seven documentary films, all photographed by Michel La Veaux.**

"We share a common approach to telling stories, whether in documentary reality or with a fictional script," says La Veaux. "The humanism of the characters is fundamental in our work."

*Ce qu'il faut pour vivre* (*Necessities of Life*) takes place during the early 1950s, and begins on Baffin Island, which straddles the Arctic Circle and is part of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. An Inuit hunter (Natar Ungalaaq)

contracts tuberculosis and is shipped to a big-city hospital, where his alienation reminds him of the simple necessities of life. Loneliness leads him to a decision to die, but eventually his taste for life is revived.

La Veaux says that capturing the story on film was essential. "It was important to communicate the immensity and beauty of the hunter's native land, and the crystalline northern light," he says. "HD video could not give me the resolution I needed for those wide shots on sunny days. Video's lack of range in highlights and whites made our decision easy."

To communicate the emotional arc of the hunter, La Veaux went against the normal depiction of the frozen north in colder color temperatures. "We decided to do the opposite because the north is his homeland, and the city and the hospital are hostile territory," he says. "The film starts and ends with warm tones, when he is home. The city and hospital are depicted with cooler, less inviting chroma."

La Veaux achieved these color temperatures using lighting as well as camera filtration. His filters went from an 85 to LLD to 81EF and eventually back to an 85. The northern segments of the story feature natural exterior light, while the hospital scenes were lit with brighter and harder illumination. "I used 18K and 12K HMI units to create a more metallic and almost surgical feeling in the light," he says.

The camera was a Moviecam SL to facilitate quick changes from studio to handheld mode for maximum flexibility when shooting the scenes with children. La Veaux chose KODAK VISION2 500T 5218 and VISION2 200T 5217 films "to recreate a classic 1950s movie look, without over-softening or taking the look too far in a 'candy' or pastel direction," he says. "They also provided the latitude I needed, especially with the LLD filter."

Another crucial aspect of the look was focal length and distance from the camera to the actors.

"That's one of my main concerns, along with lighting and colors," he says. "During years of making documentaries, I learnt that one foot too close or too far away from the character can kill the shot."

La Veaux chose to use a handheld camera to get close to the actors for a scene in which government doctors examine frightened Inuits for traces of tuberculosis. "We needed the shots to be dramatic, yet with a high degree of realism," he says. "My experience in documentary was a great help there."

Lab work was handled at Cité Lab, and post-production, including a digital intermediate at 2K resolution, was done at Vision Globale in Montreal. The colorist was Marc Lussier.

La Veaux credits his crew with terrific support and collaboration. "I believe that cinematographers need a vision of how the images will carry the emotions and poetry of a film, so the director has more than words to tell the story," he says. "Their work becomes part of the soul of the film."