

# Curve of Earth

## a renaissance of the Techniscope format

Film stocks

KODAK VISION2 500T 5218 and KODAK VISION2 250D 5205

Format Two-perf, 35mm widescreen



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Lee Madsen watched a number of classic motion pictures for inspiration as he was preparing to direct *Curve of Earth*. The title is a metaphor for people who live in parallel worlds flowing into each other's lives.

Madsen's script is set in an urban environment where a former rock-and-roll photographer named Stewart (William Forsythe) has mastered the art of taking erotic portraits of women at a studio in his home. The other main characters are Stewart's wife Donna (Ursula Brooks) and his young assistant and aspiring photographer Wade (Shaun Sipos). There is a beautiful, young and naïve model named Queenie (Zoë Hall), the reclusive, heavy-drinking neighbor Gloria (Dee Wallace) and her nephew Chris (Lew Temple) who is a lonely detective who keeps a wary eye on her and the strange goings on at Stewart's house.

"During our first conversation, Lee described his vision for using 35mm widescreen (2.4:1 aspect ratio) images in a non-traditional way," recalls cinematographer Ben Kufirin. "There are no sweeping vistas like you typically see in widescreen movies. The story involves still photography, and mainly takes place in people's homes, where things are happening in deep space in the background and foreground, with characters playing on the edges of the frame."

*Curve of Earth* was Kufirin's second co-venture with Madsen.

Their first collaboration was *Players* starring Freddy Rodriguez, which was another low-budget, independent feature produced on Kodak 35mm film and released by Universal Home Video in 2007.

"I really liked the script and the aesthetic that Lee described," Kufirin recalls. "I told him that I could see what we could do to make it affordable to produce the film in 35mm anamorphic format within the restrictions of a very modest budget."

### Super 35mm

That plan for anamorphic proved impractical when Kufirin was told that the lenses needed for the close-in, wide-angle shots that he and Madsen envisioned weren't available due to the limited supply and heavy demand for the lenses by other motion pictures already slated for production.

Kufirin suggested following an alternative path from anamorphic or traditional Super 35mm after he read an article about the renaissance of Techniscope, a two-perf, 35mm widescreen film format developed by Technicolor

in Italy in 1963. Techniscope was embraced by Sergio Leone who produced a series of "spaghetti western" movies, including *A Fistful of Dollars*, a 1964 film featuring Clint Eastwood at the dawn of his career. Jim Roudebush at Panavision in Los Angeles confirmed to Kufirin

video format and create a master for previewing and for festivals that accept HD projection, as well as for DVD and television distribution. If there is a cinema release, we could either go back to cut and rescan the negative in DI, or just use the HD master for film-out release printing."

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that in fact a few Panaflex GII cameras had been modified with Super 35mm two-perforation aperture movements. That provided an affordable alternative for producing *Curve of Earth* in Super 35 format, using Panavision spherical lenses, which provided the flexibility Kufirin and Madsen needed to compose close-in, wide angle shots in 2.4:1 aspect ratio.

"We could record two images on every four-perf frame, which would cut our film and lab costs in half," Kufirin says. "The processed negative could be transferred to digital files in HDCAM SR 4:4:4 format. That would allow us to color-correct the edited film in high-definition

Madsen, producer Kirsten Wagner and production manager Christian Clark all embraced the concept after they saw a test that Kufirin shot in two-perf format. "You use almost all the space at the top, bottom and edges of the frames when you compose two-perf 35mm film in 2.4:1 aspect ratio," Kufirin observes.

Kufirin and Madsen didn't have to convince the producers that the film "look" was the right aesthetic. He explains that there is a line in the script where Stewart answers an editor who asks him about digital still photography.



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**"Today's generation is all about quick, dirty and cheap and we'll fix it later."**

### Art form

In the movie, Forsythe's character quips, "Today's generation is all about quick, dirty and cheap, and we'll fix it later," Kufrin says. "That's affecting everyone's attitude about photography as an art form."

*Curve of Earth* was produced at practical locations in Los Angeles, including private residences in the San Fernando Valley and nearby Sun Valley, a photography school in Hollywood, a coffee shop in Venice, and exteriors on the Malibu coast.

At the beginning of the film, the audience meets Stewart's assistant Wade when his application is rejected at a prominent photography art school. Wade is told that he has one more chance to apply but he doesn't have money to pay the application fee. Wade posts a job-wanted note on a bulletin board at a coffee shop. Stewart's

wife sees the note, calls and hires him to assist her husband.

There was an ambitious 23-day production schedule. Madsen and Kufrin decided to cover scenes with a single camera, using naturalistic lighting and fluid camera movement to give members of the audience a subjective point of view.

Much of the story unfolds in Stewart's house, which features elegant, old, Spanish-style architecture, including high ceilings. There is a large backyard with foliage and a big swimming pool as well as a private studio in the guest house where Stewart does much of his erotic portraiture.

Kufrin chose a two-film palette of KODAK VISION2 500T 5218 film, which he used for night interiors and exterior scenes, and KODAK VISION2 250D 5205 film for daylight exteriors.

### Painterly touches

"The latitude and resolution that 35mm film offers is an obvious big advantage," he says. "We used Primo lenses as much as possible. That combination gave us tremendous imagery in creating natural looks that augment moods. When we used a 1,000-foot magazine, we were able to shoot scenes for 22 minutes without changing magazines."

Madsen and Kufrin weaved additional painterly touches into the fabric of the story by shooting a number of flashbacks and point-of-view shots in Super 8 film format. Pro8mm and Spectra Film & Video provided the Super 8mm film and processing and Kufrin used his own personal Nikon and Elmo Super 8 cameras.

Deluxe Laboratories and Deluxe Digital Media processed and transferred the two-perf 35mm film and did telecine on a Spirit 2K directly to HDCAM

SR 4:4:4 and simultaneously to Simo DVCAM format for offline editing. Modern VideoFilm transferred the Super 8 film to HDCAM SR format.

"A lot of love and effort from the tireless cast and crew went into producing *Curve of Earth*," Kufrin says. "It means a lot to us because film is the only proven archival medium; there is a chance the movie will be there for future generations to see, including our children and grandchildren."

