

Gavin Smith captures a new generation for

Degrassi

"If your life was a TV show, this would be it."



That's the tagline of **Degrassi: The Next Generation**. The program carries on the **Degrassi** television tradition started in the 1980s by **Degrassi High**. The kids on **The Next Generation** are in some cases the children of characters in the original show, which earned big ratings in its native Canada. The show deals with the problems of teenagers like dating, drinking, homosexuality and self-abuse.

Epitome Productions produces **Degrassi: The Next Generation** for broadcast in both high definition and standard definition. Cinematographer Gavin Smith, CSC photographs the show in the Super 16mm format.

"Transferring from Super 16mm to high definition ensures that we get the best image quality possible from film," says Smith, who shares photography credits with cinematographer Thom Best, CSC on the popular show **Queer As Folk**.

Smith, who joined the show at its inception in 2000, says executive producer Linda Schuyler asked for a realistic, artifice-free look without gimmicks, in keeping with the style set by the original show. Lighting is carefully designed to look simple and natural.

"The original show was quite raw," says Smith. "I don't want our photography to interfere in any way with what is going on. There's nothing polished or glossy about the rest of the show – often the kids don't wear a lot make-up – so the photography should be consistent with that aesthetic."

Smith's intention is to make the camera itself feel like another kid on the show. "The camera isn't just capturing

lights with daylight-balanced light and keeps an 85 filter on the camera. On sets depicting the homes of the children, he lights with tungsten lamps and shoots with tungsten-balanced stock.

The story plays out on the faces of the characters, according to Smith, and as a result he pays particular attention to skin tones. "During my first year of shooting the show, I used a chocolate filter instead of an 85 correction filter," says Smith. "I found that once I got to the tape-to-tape color correction, I could bring the very wide range of skin tones back to a comfortable level. Since then, film stocks have improved, especially in underexposure.

"Now I use the (Kodak VISION2 200T) 7212 film, and I find it to be the perfect stock," he says. "I don't need to use the chocolate filter anymore. I simply correct it properly. I find that stock to be very easy to control, with natural color reproduction even in underexposure."

Smith has also made a shift in lens choice. During the first couple of seasons, he used zoom lenses, whereas now he generally uses Zeiss primes. "I'm much happier with using the primes," he says. "We often use longer focal lengths, and we do a lot of focus racking. With the longer zooms, you can get breathing. In post, it's always better to start with a cleaner and sharper image."

Smith credits camera operator Mark Hroch, focus puller Kaelin McCowan and colorist Mark Cooper with helping to achieve the show's consistent look. "My goal is for the story to feel like it's taking place at this time and place," says Smith. "Our entire approach is designed to make it not look like there's a lot of lighting imposed." ■

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what's going on," he says. "There's a bit of nervousness to the camera movement. It's never locked down. Sometimes it's just very fluid, moving around like the other kids. If the situation is agitated, the camera can become agitated. If the kids calm down, you can feel that in the camera movement as well."

Most of the show is photographed with a single camera at Epitome Studios in Toronto, Canada. The sets have been adapted with transom windows and skylight atrium sets to help motivate lighting. Thanks to gaffer Terry Banting, overhead fluorescent fixtures in classroom situations are individually switched for extra control. Smith brings "daylight" through classroom windows using 18K HMIs, and sometimes augments this with Kino Flo fixtures. In the school set, he generally

Top Right: Actress Lauren Collins in a scene from *Degrassi - The Next Generation* shot by Cinematographer Gavin Smith.

Below: Cinematographer Gavin Smith taking a meter read on the set.

