

# FACE stretching the ties that bind

In the independent drama **Face**, John Inwood's cinematography helps tell a powerful story that spans several decades.

The film, directed and written by Bertha Bay-Sa Pan, examines the struggle of immigrants to bridge cultures as they assimilate into a new world. In order to survive in their adopted country, familial bonds must overcome the urban threats to traditional values. On one level, the title refers to the Asian belief of personal honor expressed in the phrase "saving face."

"**Face** was a great opportunity to express emotion through the basic tools of cinematography: lighting, composition, lens choice, camera movement— the nuts and bolts that make up great filmmaking," says Inwood. "Some of the greatest films ever made use these in-camera techniques to tell their stories. **Face** was done in a very straight-ahead and solid, but effective way."

Inwood's feature credits include **The Daytrippers**, **Going Nomad**, and **Six Ways to Sunday**. He is currently shooting his fourth season of the NBC television comedy **Scrubs**.

## Hong Kong films

His participation on **Face** began with a generous pre-production period during which he and Bay-SaPan, who is Taiwanese-American, watched and discussed Hong Kong films like **Chungking Express** and **In the Mood for Love**, among others. "We both felt inspired by (Cinematographer) Christopher Doyle, and we wanted to capture strong, painterly compositions with beautiful faces in

carefully chosen surroundings," says Inwood.

The production had about 25 shooting days. Most of the film was done in tight practical locations, like the apartment of the grandmother. For the scenes that took place in the 1970s, Inwood lit for a noir feeling, with harder, more directional light, sometimes with an amber color.

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"We made extensive use of windows and doorways as compositional devices," he says. "That apartment had lots of doorways and long thin hallways, which I was able to light with very bright and very dark areas. We used strong foreground/background compositions."

## Rack focus

To visually tie the generations, the filmmakers repeated one rack-focused scene, once with the grandmother and the mother, and later with the mother and daughter. "Echoing those shots communicates the continuity that is such a strong part of the culture, and yet shows the distance and lack of understanding between the generations," says Inwood.

Rack focus was also used later in a scene between the daughter and the grandmother that had no dialogue. The girl is distraught, and she comes to the grandmother, who is doing kitchen work, and lays her head on the table. "It's this nice little moment between them," says Inwood. "The camera pulls back. We did a take or two and I said, 'Just let them go out of focus! We pulled the camera back again through a doorway, so they were framed, repeating this visual theme that we'd been doing. It was beautiful and Bertha was very pleased. It captures the power of the moment and made it resonate somehow, like it almost becomes a memory before your eyes."

Inwood shot using a Moviemax camera and Zeiss prime lenses. The camera was usually loaded with Kodak Vision 500T 5279 film. For exteriors he used Eastman EXR 50D 5245 film. For daylight interiors he shot the 5279 with a correction filter.

"**Face** was a great experience for me," says Inwood. "We had a great team of producers, and Bertha and I communicated very well. That's one reason the film has such a strong look because we were visually on the same page, which makes for terrific filmmaking." ■

**Below left:** (L to R) Actors Bai Ling and Will Yun Lee in a scene from *Face*.

**Below:** (L to R) Director Bertha Bay-Sa Pan and DP John Inwood on the set of *Face*.

