

Zombies in suburbia

Zombies don't normally show up in heartwarming, wholesome stories set in otherwise idyllic 1950s North America. But *Fido* is not a normal movie. The Canadian feature film begins with a black-and-white public service announcement that explains how an entity called ZomCon rescued humanity from the Zombie Wars by barricading towns and giving zombies control collars that turned them into docile servants.

Fido was directed by Andrew Currie and Jan Kiesser, CSC, ASC was the cinematographer. The film was produced in British Columbia.

Jan Kiesser and *Fido*

Currie and Kiesser were inspired in part by the films of Douglas Sirk, who specialized in creating a veneer of normality that plays in opposition to a disturbing, dysfunctional society. Sirk's style influenced Kiesser's choices about everything ranging from the color palette to composition and camera movement.



1 Actors Carrie-Anne Moss and Billy Connolly dance in a scene from *Fido*, shot by cinematographer Jan Kiesser, CSC, ASC.

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Kiesser and Currie controlled colors and contrast by leveraging digital intermediate (DI) technology. Production designer Robert Gray collaborated with them on the development of a limited color palette that helped express the town's normalcy. With Kiesser's encouragement, he designed sets with layers and depth in mind.

"It depends on the dramatic intentions for the story, but I generally approach a film by considering the environment almost as a character," says Kiesser. "That was particularly applicable in *Fido*, since the colorful and idealized environment is juxtaposed to the dysfunction in the community. To facilitate this inclusion of environment, I gravitated toward using wider angle lenses. Wide angle lenses combined with the right framing enabled us to capture the body language of the characters, which was important to the comedic undertones of the story."

Kiesser mainly worked with ARRIflex cameras with three-perf movements, and Cooke S4 prime lenses. He sometimes employed a four-perf ARRI 435 camera at unusual frame rates used to punctuate story points. He recorded footage for a faux classroom educational film with a 16mm ARRI SR-2 loaded with black-and-white EASTMAN Double-X 7222 film. For the

majority of the film, he chose KODAK VISION2 250D 5205 and VISION2 500T 5218 negatives, citing the way they cut together seamlessly and their color accuracy, which was especially crucial given the importance of the color palette to their overall visual strategy.

The filmmakers tested a variety of DI facilities before deciding on a 2K scan at Motion Picture Imaging, an in-house DI facility at Warner Bros. in Los Angeles. The DI combined with three-perf film enabled them to avoid the need for an optical blow-up and the inherent loss in image quality. It also made combining the various formats simpler and gave Kiesser distinct control over shades of colors. Kiesser also used DI tools to adjust for slight variations in the gray zombie makeup. He made adjustments over the course of about eight days.

"The color manipulation in the DI process worked out well," says Kiesser. "We were able to intensify the saturation of certain colors and intensify the idealized nature of the environment by greening up the foliage without adversely affecting skin tones. We had erratic weather, and while I was often able to effectively control exposure on the set by riding the iris, I used the DI to adjust for cooler color temperatures as the sun dipped behind clouds and the ambient sky light became prominent."