

Bill Roe devises supernatural look in

For Sale by Owner

The artistry of Bill Roe, ASC has been recognized by his peers in the American Society of Cinematographers with nine Outstanding Achievement Award nominations. He has claimed top honors twice in the annual competition. His recent credits include the telefilm *Faith of My Fathers*, which earned him one of the three Emmy® nominations he has also collected.

Roe recently shot the independent feature *For Sale by Owner*, which takes place on a Virginia plantation with supernatural connections. It was the site of the Jamestown massacre in 1622, where almost 350 English settlers were killed in a series of surprise attacks by Native Americans.

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The cast includes Kris Kristofferson, Tom Skerritt, Rachel Nichols, Skeet Ulrich, and Joanna Cassidy. The production was filmed almost entirely on the Magnolia Plantation, a Civil War-era cotton farmstead in Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana.

The leading character is a preservationist who is interested in purchasing the old plantation home for the purpose of restoring it. He meets a man who says he is the owner and signs the deed. Later, he finds out that the owner has been dead for years. A succession of clues, visions and flashbacks reveals connections to the massacre.

A decision was made to compose the story in a 2.4:1 aspect ratio in Super 35mm format. After a series of tests, Roe decided to make KODAK VISION 500T 5279 color negative his primary stock.

“The 5279 was just fantastic,” he says. “There was a little more grain, a slightly softer feel, and it wasn’t as clean as the newer stocks. Those characteristics fit the story perfectly. The audience should always have the slightly uneasy feeling that something is wrong here.”

The production was scheduled for a brief 18 days, and the budget was tight. Roe and his team kept a sharp eye out for opportunities to save money and time. One example was the use of aircraft landing lights instead of more expensive HMI fixtures.

“Gaffer Jono Kouzouyan and I had used these lights on *Daybreak*,” says Roe. “They come in a variety of sizes and configurations, with individually controllable banks. They produce a hard and extremely narrow beam, which cuts down on the grip work and saves time.”

Interiors were mostly lit through the windows using the aircraft lights, because the age and condition of the house ruled out hanging fixtures inside. Very slow camera movement, mostly accomplished with a dolly, enhanced the creepy, ominous tone.

For subjective flashback sequences, Roe used a favorite technique to generate impressionistic images by using a hand-cranked 16mm ARRI M camera.

“Dan Sasaki (at Panavision) converted the camera for hand-cranked operation,” Roe says. “I had my own 17-200mm zoom lens on it. We created a different look and feeling by speeding up or slowing down in tune with what was happening in the scene. Sometimes we created double-exposures with a stuttering effect by running the camera backwards. It’s an organic effect, and it’s fun to do. Everyone on the set really got into it.”

“I used (KODAK VISION2 500T) 7218 film on those scenes, partly because the latitude can handle the light changes gracefully,” says Roe. “We used a quick, inexpensive DI-type process at The Post Group to fine tune the images.”

Next up for Roe is the sequel to the 1998 feature film *The X Files*. Roe, who shot more than 80 episodes of the hit television series, will re-team with creator Chris Carter to bring Mulder and Scully back to the big screen.

