

On the set with John Flinn and the **Gilmore Girls**



Above: (L to R) Actors Scott Patterson and Lauren Graham in a scene from *Gilmore Girls*, shot by DP John Flinn, ASC.

Right: (L to R) Actors Alexis Bledel and Lauren Graham in a scene from the film.



John C. Flinn III, ASC may be new on the streets of Stars Hollow, but he is no stranger to successful television series. The seven-time Emmy nominee is now focusing on **Gilmore Girls**, an hour-long comedy series that airs on the WB.

Flinn has filmed such milestone television series as **Hawaii Five-O**, **Hill Street Blues**, **Magnum, P.I.**, **Jake and the Fatman** and **Babylon 5**. He earned top honors in the American Society of Cinematographers Awards competition for **Jake and the Fatman**, an episode he also directed.

Gilmore Girls is set in Stars Hollow, Connecticut. It centers on two of the town's residents, 30-something Lorelai Gilmore (Lauren Graham) and her college-age daughter Rory (Alexis Bledel). The town's small population is more than made up for by the big personalities of its quirky residents, including the dance teacher Miss Patty (Liz Torres), the hoity-toity inn concierge Michel (Yanic Truesdale), and the eccentric Kirk (Sean Gunn) who discovers a new "career" nearly every week.

Amy Sherman-Palladino, who serves as executive producer with Daniel Palladino, created the show.

"**Gilmore Girls** is a dialogue-driven show," says Flinn. "It is very well-written and expresses day-to-day life and a family that we can all relate to. It is bright, cheery and a different type of show for me."

Downtown Stars Hollow and the homes of its loveable residents are brought to life on three stages at the Warner Bros. Studios in Burbank, California.

"They didn't pull any punches when they built these sets," says Flinn. "They are very work-friendly. The walls of the houses are on pulleys. You press a button and all of sudden that wall is 30 feet in

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the air. It's very efficient. We don't spend a lot of time waiting around. We also have exterior sets on the back lot."

Flinn uses ARRiflex SR-3 cameras from Clairmont set up for Super 16 format.

"It's amazing how good it looks," Flinn says. "Somebody came into the bay where we were timing a program, and they were just blown away. They couldn't believe it wasn't 35mm because of the depth and richness of the colors and look. The sets are rich looking with pictures on walls and huge, beautiful arrangements of flowers. We are lighting to bring out details and colors, and to capture the feelings on the sets."

The show is primarily shot on Kodak VISION2 500T 7218 film with daylight exteriors captured on Kodak VISION2 200T 7217 film.

"We have a full frame with the Super 16 format," says Flinn, "and I'm not having any problems with grain. You have to understand how to expose the film and when you are pushing it too far."

Dailies are made at LaserPacific and delivered to Flinn on DVD.

"I'll call Jaynee Thorne, the night time colorist, and tell her exactly what I did and what I want," explains Flinn. "I'll tell her if I changed stops going from an exterior to an interior scene. I also relay what I don't want. Jaynee was with me on **Hunter**, so she also knows how I shoot, including what I like and what I don't like. There are no question marks. Final timing is done by John Potter."

One of the challenges of shooting episodic television is the revolving director's chair. Flinn, who directed several episodes of **Magnum, P.I.** and **Jake and the Fatman**, as well as 10 episodes of **Babylon 5**, understands the importance of allowing each director's individual style to come through while maintaining a consistent look.

"On a series, you are making 22 little movies a year," says Flinn. "As a cinematographer, I want an opportunity to sit down and talk with the director. I listen to what they want to do, and tell them my ideas for the look and why. Everyone working on a show is like a spoke in a wheel. The writer is hired to tell a story with words. I'm hired to visually put it down on film, working with the director and my crew. There's no better feeling in the world for me than when the writer, executive producer, director and everyone else is saying, 'Oh yeah, we got it. This is what we wanted to do.'" ■