

# Gomorra

## Onorato on Garrone



Even before shooting began, *Gomorra* created a huge buzz. Adapted from Roberto Saviano's best-selling novel, the feature relates the story of the untouchable power of the Camorra, the Naples' mafia. "I don't want to be a moralist or demonstrate the difference between good and evil, so don't expect a film that makes a statement or incites an inquiry," says director Matteo Garrone. "Instead I explored the characters in the Vele di Scampia as the author describes them and emulated his fine brush strokes. The study of humanity interested me most," he says.

Authenticity has always been an irrefutable prerequisite for Garrone. In a film that deals with the System, as defined by its members, he wanted to ensure that characters' facial expressions were accurate and believable, so he brought former criminals and members of the police into several sequences.

Garrone and his director of photography Marco Onorato first joined forces on *Silhouette*, the director's debut short film, and they have worked together on most of his features. *InCamera* spoke to Onorato about his lighting choices for *Gomorra* and the complex challenges the pair faced in their raw portrayal of urban decline.

**Q** Marco, why did the director begin his research for *Gomorra* long before shooting started?

**A** Matteo began his scrupulous preparation more than four months before the 11-week shoot, spending each week in the anticipated locations to get a feel for the most veiled atmospheres and savouring the intense odours so that he could translate them in the best possible way. His meticulousness and care is an innate characteristic and he leaves no stone unturned in the realisation of his creative vision. Matteo was emphatic about securing sound designer Leslie Shatz who worked on *Elephant* and *Paranoid Park* because he wanted a suitably environmental soundtrack with the sounds and noises of children shouting, whistles of 'guards' warning dealers, and the people's neo-melodic background music. Matteo didn't want to sweeten or falsify the harsh reality.

**Q** Saviano's book combines fiction with reportage. How did you determine your key storyline items?

**A** We shot entirely on location. Matteo adapted and intertwined five stories from *Gomorra*, paying particular attention to the description of the characters and their human side, and giving each story a beginning and an end. Journalistic reporting was not his intention. The camera witnesses events without making judgement by objectively narrating situations.

**Q** Which format did you use?

**A** We initially intended to use Super 16mm in 1:2.35 CinemaScope format and blow it up to Super 35mm, but initial tests lacked three-dimensionality. We selected Super 35mm in the knowledge that if we lost something of the immediacy and flexibility of Super 16mm, we still had the ideal image for the big screen – and *Gomorra*

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was primarily destined for the big screen and cinema in its purest state.

**Q Did you choose a handheld camera from the visual storytelling viewpoint?**

**A** We didn't use a Dogme-style handheld camera; on the contrary, we chose a simple camera that moved fluidly, yet was sometimes stationary, and was almost always invisible with respect to the visuals. It was the right stylistic choice and perhaps the only one to properly express the 'Dante-esque inferno' of the drug-dealing environments. Vele di Scampia is an ideal cinematic location and the people were very accommodating, but we couldn't consider dolly shots. We could only shoot for a couple of hours in the morning because the effects of crack made the people aggressive and our safety would have been compromised. Consequently, Matteo and I only had a small team comprising two assistants, production manager Gianluca Chiaretti and a sound technician.

**Q How did you select the lighting?**

**A** We decided to use 'dirty' lighting, which was almost sickening from the colorimetric point of view. It brought us into a territory of total realism, without betraying our original spirit of fidelity to harrowing events and sometimes cloaking them in an irony appropriate to the southern part of our country.

**Q How did you make a decision on film stocks?**

**A** Once Matteo and I defined the atmosphere for *Gomorra*, I had

to work against the extreme cleanness and colorimetric balance of Kodak stocks to obtain the grainy filthiness and dominating colours for the 'evil' images so that they would mesh well with the story. I often used KODAK VISION2 500T 5218 without filters on exteriors and occasionally under-exposed by a half or one f stop to make them look dirty and create dominating hard-working images, without balancing them out in the lab.

**Q Who collaborated with you on camera operation?**

**A** In addition to directing, Matteo was chief camera operator. He had undertaken that role for part of *The Embalmer* and all of *First Love* and managed very well with a handheld camera in sequences that made it difficult for the assistant to handle the focus. Matteo loves to use selective focus to capture emotion in certain narrative passages. I just operated the second camera or the Sky King cranes.

**Q Shooting in real environments can present complex challenges. How did you adjust to the situation and what lighting did you choose?**

**A** I rarely bring artificial light sources on a shoot and almost always rely on ambient natural and artificial light. Turning lights off is the very essence of my lighting philosophy. Film sees like the human eye and, at times, more so because parasitic light sometimes acts as a catalyst upon the eye, so it doesn't pay to fill an environment with additional light to tell a story. True environmental light is not usually blinding and there are often areas of total shadow;

it shines very closely onto environments, yet does not dominate them. In *Gomorra* we respected the natural lighting in each location through which the protagonists moved without disturbing their intrinsic authenticity. For example, the film opens in an almost lunar atmosphere with yellow-green neon lights and long shadows outside the cocaine market, then it changes to the cold metallic light of the industrial environments, and finally to the warm dusty tones where crack sales take place. It's a collage that won't leave the audience indifferent.

**Q In which sequences did you really take risks?**

**A** In one case I used a 4000W floodlight which I positioned to create a moonlight effect, or rather diffused moonlight, in a full shot with ambient light. Then with Matteo's support, I took some topical magic hour shots at 2.8 when the light meter indicated 1.4, to darken and harden the image. We shot in a non-traditional manner in almost complete darkness and with only pale blue illumination as trucks transport toxic waste into a quarry. In that scene, blinding headlamps suddenly appear and

move across the screen with a deafening roar; the presence of vehicles is only revealed at the end. Elsewhere in the film, we waited until after sunset to shoot a conversation between several characters with only the sunset line in the background and a weak diffused light that became pale blue as it verged on darkness. We selected the take with the least light.

**Q How important was post-production on this project?**

**A** I chose not to do DI in post-production because it would have brought an artifice to images that I wanted to be raw and direct. We created a well-defined look while shooting and, in the few instances when we intervened in post-production, we did it from the viewpoint of conserving and reproducing the original lighting. We're executing a partial ENR (the proprietary process that leaves more silver in the print when it is processed) with the help of chemist Carlo Magagni. Then we'll print the film on KODAK VISION Premier with my grader, Tonino Salvatori at Technicolor Rome. Premier will be the ideal stock to restore body to the negatives and many of the under-exposed sequences in *Gomorra*.

