

# Nivea spot requires layers of soft light

Director of photography Pete Konczal recently photographed a commercial for the skin and beauty product company Nivea. In the following conversation, Konczal reveals the thought process behind his photographic choices.

## What did the client ask for in terms of the look of the spot?

Well, to begin with, they asked that we shoot the spot on film. I think that many savvy clients are realizing the amount of work it takes to beat an HD image back, in order to feel the subtleties of the light and the make-up, and to achieve smoothness. They understand that film immediately puts you in that place where the women are going to look great. The client did consider high-def formats, and they came back to us and said, 'There's nothing we've seen that make us feel that shooting HD is going to be better, and it would put us in a much more difficult place.'

## What was the approach you took to photographing the spot?

The product is called Nivea Calm & Care, so half of the spot is about lifestyle. There's a woman who is taking a dance class which we shot at Baryshnikov Dance Studio in New York City. It has floor-to-ceiling windows. In much of their advertising, Nivea prefers to maintain a look where things are very white and glowing, often

with a daylight feel. The feeling of soft light and the natural light that a dance studio would produce was important.

## How did you create the layers of soft light?

My gaffer Marcus Ray and I built our own umbrella lights. We found a Broncolor Umbrella, about 5-feet in diameter, and bounced Joker HMIs into it. That result was similar to a strobe umbrella light like you see in still photography. We used that light in combination with large bounce surfaces, which we used to reflect either HMI light or actual daylight. I really enjoy knocking sunlight around.

## How did you treat the buildings and sky outside the windows?

I wanted the buildings to be overexposed, even to the point where they were glowing. But I still wanted detail in those buildings as well. The film really helped us there because film doesn't clip. So we knew that in shooting against two giant banks of windows, we could create a wall of soft light inside, underexpose, and there would still be detail inside and outside. That glow was a big factor from the start.

For me, the magic of light is when you subtly create layers of light, blending multiple sources to achieve a look that is actually simple.

## Which film stock did you use in the dance studio situation?

Even though it was a daylight situation, we used KODAK VISION2 200T 5217 film, which I am in love with. I feel it's a softer, smoother look. Something interesting happens with the combination of an 85 filter and a tungsten-balanced stock that, to me, feels very natural.

## What's your experience been with digital cameras?

I often tell people that if film came out today as a new method for capturing motion pictures, everyone would say, 'Wow, there's this amazing new technology, and it's organic and it looks better than anything we've been using! ... Its dynamic range is unbelievable; it captures all the subtleties of light ... shadow detail is amazing ... and best of all, it feels like magic.' Digital is great for its immediacy, but I'm still in love with film.

1 A scene from the Nivea commercial shot by Pete Konczal. (Photo courtesy of Pete Konczal.)