

# How **Ben Dolphin** tells stories on film one frame at a time

Director/cinematographer/choreographer Ben Dolphin has created hundreds of commercials that have grabbed the attention of television audiences on five continents. Dolphin was a gaffer for 12 years before stepping up to directing and shooting commercials, occasional documentaries and independent feature films. He also taught choreography for the camera, a course he created at his alma mater NYU.

His New York-based company, Arising Film & Digital, has produced many TV commercials and two dance films. "Recently I shot several television commercials in Costa Rica for local production companies and sponsors. On the first one, Rock Ice Golden Monkey Beer, I shot the new KODAK VISION3 200T Color Negative Film 5213. Wow! The colors popped, the grain structure was awesome, and the whites were much cleaner. It delivered enhanced highlight detail as well as producing a velvety, rich black.

"We shot a live-action scene on a small set with an ARRI 435 camera," Dolphin continues. "I was using eight to 10 HMI lights and a number 85 filter on the lens. I rated the film at E.I. 100 and pulled one stop at the lab for a richer photochemical look. The richness of the colors and almost 3-D resolution of the combination of this new 5213 stock and Zeiss lenses produced a home run for the client.

"We shot the beer pouring into a glass at 150 fps. Here I rated the film 200 E.I. and developed normally. There is a tactile feeling when beer or other liquids are pouring into a glass in slow motion that the grain structure and contrast ratios of film fully support."

Dolphin has mastered the art and craft of shooting with high-speed cameras. Whether it is moving liquids or wet, moving people, he understands what is necessary to create unforgettable slow-motion images. If he is shooting fewer than 425 fps,

Dolphin sometimes uses a 1.5:1 ratio of HMI and Unilux lights if the budget allows. He explains, "There is a crystalline sharpness with the Unilux strobes, while HMI light induces a degree of motion blur that appeals to people's appetites."

Otherwise, he will simply reduce the adjustable shutter angle on cameras, effectively shortening the exposure time to increase the clarity of each frame. However, he emphasizes that there is no formula, each project's creative determines the specific camera and technique used.

"Every commercial presents its own creative challenges depending on the message, the audience and whether it will be seen in a cinema or television screen," Dolphin stresses. "The good news is that we're shooting commercials on film around the world, because the technology and anticipated imagery are well established within the film workflow.

"The Photo-Sonics 4ER Plus shoots 35mm pin registered at 425 fps and is a magnificent tool," he adds. "It's a reflex camera with a beam splitter that lets you shoot full gate, which I believe is the best way of taking high-speed images on film."

Additionally when offered the opportunity recently to shoot high-speed moving liquids either digitally or on 16mm film, he chose the latter. Dolphin acknowledges that the 16mm film images had greater highlight and shadow latitude, as well as a broader color space for color correcting images than the best high-speed digital cameras would have offered him.

A longer version of this article is available on the Kodak website, follow the links to *InCamera*.

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