

# Prieto, Iñárritu use the medium of cinema for **Biutiful**



Rodrigo Prieto, ASC, AMC and Alejandro González Iñárritu have forged a unique filmmaking bond. Their first three films together, *Amores Perros*, *21 Grams* and *Babel*, have led the renaissance in Mexican cinema. *Babel*, which featured bold, arresting imagery and unique story structure, was nominated for seven Academy Awards®, including Best Director and Best Picture. Their most recent collaboration is *Biutiful*, which stars Javier Bardem as a man whose life is falling apart. Facing death, he learns to forgive, to let go, and to love.

Prieto says that he and Iñárritu never considered a digital format. "Alejandro loves the texture of film," says Prieto. "We have played with film grain as a storytelling tool in the past by using different film stocks and formats. In the case of *Biutiful*, in order to set the proper mood, we wanted to stick with a strong and readily apparent level of grain for the majority of the film."

**"We have played with film grain as a storytelling tool in the past by using different film stocks and formats."**

After extensive testing, Prieto settled on using KODAK VISION2 500T Color Negative Film 5260, combined with a one-stop push in the development and printing on KODAK VISION Premier Color Print Film 2393.

For certain night scenes, Prieto switched to KODAK VISION3 500T Color Negative Film 5219, and for bookend scenes that call for a clean, transparent look, he used KODAK VISION2 50D Color Negative Film 5201.

Prieto and Iñárritu also manipulated the aspect ratio to underscore story points. Bardem's character begins the story as an uptight, controlling person. These scenes are presented in a 1.85:1 frame and

feature tighter compositions, more frenetic camera movement and longer lenses. After a pivotal sequence, the character begins to let go, and the frame expands to a looser, 2.40:1 widescreen aspect ratio. Other shifts in the character's perspective are marked by a change from spherical to anamorphic lenses. For a surreal scene in which the character goes out to a club and returns home after having too much to drink, Prieto used specialized lenses designed to enhance flares.

"In some aspects, *Biutiful* is a departure from what Alejandro and I have done before," says Prieto. "We are grounded in naturalism. It's handheld, and it feels like you are right there with the actors. But there are certain things that happen that are slightly outside the realm of normal. Javier's character sometimes hears the voices of dead people, for example, and we wanted to represent that visually, with out-of-sync reflections in mirrors, and shadows that don't move quite right. Those elements give the audience a subjective experience, and they allowed me to be a little more playful visually."

The post was handled at Deluxe Barcelona. The negative was scanned at 4K and the images were down-rezzed to 2K for the DI. "I use the DI as if it were photochemical," says Prieto. "I rarely tweak contrast and saturation, because I am extremely careful in pre-production to choose the proper combination of film stock, print stock and exposure. In the DI, I do like to take advantage of windows to darken or brighten certain spots. That is a fabulous possibility that still photographers have always had in the darkroom. Now we have that possibility as cinematographers, too.

"We have these incredible tools," says Prieto. "And we are given this incredible palette. Alejandro and Javier put this story in front of the camera, and it's great to be able to add another layer with the cinematography. It's exhilarating to work with Alejandro because he really understands the use of every single aspect of the medium of cinema. When I propose an idea, he gets it."

*Biutiful* was named Mexico's official selection in the 2011 foreign language Oscar® race.