

East meets West in

Weissensee

Weissensee is lauded as the first sympathetic portrayal of life in East Germany since reunification in 1990. Set in the former German Democratic Republic during 1980, the acclaimed television series features two warring families linked by a pair of star-crossed lovers.

With only 11 shooting days for each episode, detailed preparation and precise planning were vital in the first collaboration between director Friedemann Fromm and director of photography Michael Wiesweg, BVK. "We needed to focus on the actors in this dramatic and touching story; the technical processes had to be as unobtrusive as possible" says Wiesweg. "I set out to achieve a contrasty, organic and grainy look, not in an exaggerated flashy way but very subtly. A digital look would have been too clean, sharp and modern."

"We followed a natural, realistic approach and didn't fall into the trap of capturing picturesque images of a dirty brown, grey or monochrome East Berlin. It wouldn't have suited the huge emotional spectrum of the story, so we used a more sophisticated approach with a wider palette."

Wiesweg shot the entire series on KODAK VISION3 500T Color Negative Film 7219, filming from summer to December, from early morning until evening and often with two cameras. "Thanks to the extreme flexibility of 7219, the grain, contrast and colour palette are consistent. The car chase around the dark streets of East Berlin in episode one was shot almost fully open without lighting. It worked fine, because I could trust the stock."

By December Wiesweg was shooting in a second-floor apartment in Berlin. "Daylight was gone by 3pm, so we rigged 20-foot scaffolding outside the windows to accommodate a 65 x 16 feet working platform. Gaffer Justus Hasenzahl and his crew built a huge black tent on the platform, inside which we placed 12 x 12 UltraBounces and HMIs to bounce light into the gelled windows. We also used the platform for night interiors. It was like shooting on a sound stage; very concentrated and with few distractions."

"I constantly shoot on film. I'm familiar with it; I like the structure of it; and I know that I can shoot whatever I want with it. It's very difficult for digital formats to achieve the flexibility, latitude and vivid look of film stock," states Wiesweg.

ARRI Film & TV Services Berlin processed the entire exposed Super 16mm footage. Branch manager Mandy Rahn notes that "due to the dye-layering technology, the footage features a very

good signal-to-noise ratio which makes it possible to shoot in different conditions and situations." It was therefore unnecessary for ARRI to use noise reduction techniques in the creation of the dailies. Rahn continues: "SD dailies on Beta SP were created by a 2K Spirit using a 2K da Vinci colour correction system, then make-up/costume tests were undertaken to help Michael

Wiesweg and senior colourist Silvia Kubisch define the dailies look. After completing the creative cut, the original negative passed through an overlap negative cut and was telecined on HD with technical lighting parameters, and recorded on a Clipster® system. Certain scenes were selected for a moderate

de-grain via ARRI Relativity. The decision to treat only sections of footage was a creative one. The story reflects the 1980s, so film grain was used as a creative tool to support the look of that period; the film footage didn't require an overall de-grain."

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"The high quality of the original film footage became obvious once again during the final colour correction by senior colourist Petra Gescher. Many sequences had been shot during the evening or at night, but despite a low luminance level, skin tones could be properly graded by keying. Sufficient colour information with a high percentage of grey, even in dark areas, allowed a satisfying colour correction. Stronger pushing did not cause heavy grain. The response of the green tones is worth mentioning, particularly on the exterior shots," concludes Rahn.