

Hoping to strike it rich in

Highland Park



When Danny Moder decided to sign on to photograph *Highland Park*, he did so in part because he felt the indie feature told an important story. "It's a microcosm of our national situation right now," he says. "It's a good message."

The film focuses on a once-desirable Detroit neighborhood whose prosperity was built on the auto industry, but which is now run-down and emptied of hope. At a local high school, a group of faculty members gathers weekly to play the lottery, and they have reason to believe they have finally hit a huge jackpot. The film looks at the different ways each character would spend the money if they had the chance. A twist of fate intervenes - a teacher uses the money to restore the local library, and in the process energizes the community. The moral of the story, according to Moder, is, "Leap and the net will appear." The cast includes Danny Glover, Parker Posey and Billy Burke.

In devising their visual strategy for the project, Moder and director Andrew Meieran did some tests that revealed weaknesses in the RED One digital camera's ability to handle the necessary range of exposures in exterior situations. "We had a fair amount of running and gunning to do in Detroit to meet the schedule, and I felt more comfortable and intuitive with film," says Moder. "I wanted to feel untethered while shooting our many driving shots, and the Super 16 format seemed better suited for that."

"Andrew has a very classic approach to filmmaking," Moder continues. "Our conversation kept coming back to film grain, visual depth and dimension, and mobility."

Moder says that the tight schedule often required quick adaptation. "During production, sometimes our plan two hours into the day was very different from our plan at the start," he says.

The camera was an ARRI SR3 from Fletcher Camera, usually



with a Canon zoom lens, although a set of Zeiss Primes was also on hand. Moder chose KODAK VISION3 500T 7219 film for the maximum dynamic range, and KODAK VISION2 250D 7205 stock for most exteriors. In a few high key situations, he used KODAK VISION2 50D 7201 emulsion.

The movie's climactic scene was filmed in Dodge Mansion in Rochester Hills, Michigan, a palatial estate that is now a museum. Moder lit and shot to accentuate the contrast with the world seen earlier in the film.

"We spent a couple of days there and had an opportunity to cover the scene from a variety of angles," Moder explains. "We pumped lots of light through the beautiful stained glass, illuminating the dark oak and vintage leather surfaces. Inserts of taxidermy were used as reminders of the strange clubhouse feel. I like moving the camera just enough, but not enough to call attention to it. The clubhouse scene starts with static shots, moves into some tracking dolly shots, and ultimately whips to the departure in a variety of Steadicam shots."

Moder will use the Digital Intermediate process to desaturate images overall, increase contrast and accent certain colors. The plan is to output the images to 35mm prints that the producers hope will generate interest from film festivals and distributors.

Key Data at a glance

Director	Andrew Meieran
Cinematographer	Danny Moder
Camera	ARRI SR3
Format	Super 16
Film stocks	KODAK VISION3 500T 7219 KODAK VISION2 250D 7205 and KODAK VISION2 50D 7201

1 Cinematographer Danny Moder on the set of *Highland Park*.
2 Billy Burke stars on location. (photos by Mike Crouch)