

Post Mortem evokes vintage Chile

It's one thing to make a period film set in the distant past. But what if the story unfolds during a more recent past ... a time that many people still remember?

That was the challenge facing Chilean director Pablo Larrain and cinematographer Sergio Armstrong when they collaborated on the production of *Post Mortem*. The movie is set against the backdrop of the 1973 coup in Chile, which had enduring political and personal repercussions. The leading character is a morgue worker, a role that ensures he will not escape the bloody fallout that ensues when Pinochet comes to power.

With such highly charged subject matter, Larrain and Armstrong could have been content with filming a straightforward narrative story. But, they wanted to take it to a higher level by creating a 1970s cinematic look.

They produced *Post Mortem* in widescreen film format, using vintage anamorphic lenses and naturalistic lighting with the goal of transporting audiences to that time and place in history.

Larrain and Armstrong agreed that digital production would have

required far too much time and money during post-production to get the look they wanted. After shooting tests, they decided to produce *Post Mortem* in the 16mm format on KODAK VISION3 500T 7219 color negative film. "It gave us the colors and brightness we envisioned with very low contrast, along with the ability to shoot with minimal lighting," Larrain says.

Consistency was another key factor, adds Armstrong. "Shooting on film also gave us the latitude to shoot interior and exterior scenes in just about any kind of light."

Film also paired perfectly with the vintage lenses they used. "We bought a set of six 1970s Lomo lenses from Russia," Larrain says. Armstrong shot the entire film with 30mm and 50mm lenses. "They were used lenses, but the glass was perfect," he notes.

"Using those anamorphic lenses with 16mm film gave us the vintage visual language we wanted," adds Larrain. "It's a diffused look that is smoky and almost whitened."

With the softened look rendered on film by the lenses, Armstrong says that he didn't need filters. He

shot the entire film with the same 500-speed exposure index, leaving the stop wide open whenever he wanted.

Most of the outdoor scenes were shot either in early morning before sunrise or at dusk. "We used natural light, but without the sun," notes Larrain. For interior scenes, the lighting was directional — from overhead, to emulate ceiling lights.

The overall aesthetic goal was to evoke *luz fiscal* — a Spanish idiom best translated as "state lighting." "It's the lighting you find in public places like hospitals and train stations," Larrain explains. It sounds easy to mimic, he adds, but it isn't.

Armstrong achieved that look by clustering groups of four or

five bulbs and covering them with frosted paper. "It worked great," Larrain says. "The light was so pure and direct and there was no contrast on faces."

The overall effect, Larrain says, is exactly what he and Armstrong envisioned — a look that anyone who lived through that period in Chilean history will immediately recognize.

"If you ask anyone how they remember those days, they will think in images as they are captured on film that was used then; you see the same slight grain and low contrast. The combination of Lomo lenses and Kodak film worked perfectly for telling this story."

1 (L-R) Actors Alfredo Castro, Amparo Noguera and Jaime Vadell on the set of *Post Mortem*. (Photo Pablo Larrain)

Key Data at a glance

Director	Pablo Larrain
Producer	Juan De Dios Larrain
Cinematographer	Sergio Armstrong
Format	16mm
Film stock	KODAK VISION3 500T 7219
Image transfer	Cinecolor Chile
DI	HDCAM SR 4:4:4