

Messitt helps define *Irreversi*

Film stocks
DI colorist

KODAK VISION2 500T 5218 and KODAK VISION2 200T 5217
David Cole

Front-end processing
Post production

Cine Art Laboratory, Kowloon
LaserPacific, Los Angeles



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Irreversi was produced in Hong Kong by Bigfoot Entertainment, which is headquartered in the Philippines. Executive producer Michael Gleissner, who co-authored the script, also took his first turn at the helm.

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Gleissner brought Los Angeles-based cinematographer Jack Messitt onto the project in the dual role of cinematographer and script consultant. They met in 2006 when Gleissner recruited Messitt to teach lighting and cinematography techniques at a workshop in the Philippines.

Messitt explains that *Irreversi* is a play on the word Irreversible, which aptly describes the emotional flow of the story. The film opens with two young men collaborating on the invention of a high-tech surveillance camera. After one of them dies in what appears to be a tragic accident, the other one (Adam) sells their invention and becomes a millionaire. The story takes a romantic twist when Adam marries his former partner's sister (Linda). They move into a majestic house and are living an idyllic life until the story takes an unexpected twist and the feeling of suspense becomes palpable.

"Michael wanted an experienced cinematographer with him as a second pair of eyes while scouting for locations that worked on both aesthetic and practical levels," Messitt says. "Hong Kong is a combination of New York and San Francisco with an Asian flair."

Messitt and Gleissner spent five weeks in Hong Kong during pre-production. In addition to scouting locations in consultation with production designer Second Chan, Messitt interviewed and hired local crew members, arranged to rent cameras, lighting and grip gear from Salon Films, and established a relationship with Cine Art Laboratory in Kowloon, which handled front-end processing and film dailies. The lab is an accredited member of the KODAK IMAGECARE Program.

"Seeing the locations reinforced our feeling that the surest way to create an organic look that feels right for the story was to produce *Irreversi* in 35mm film format," Messitt says. "The superior dynamic range of film also allowed us to work faster."

Messitt says it took about two weeks to find a house that looked and felt right for the story. The house had to provide a majestic setting on a grand scale to reflect the new wealth of the couple. They found the perfect house on top of a hill with a scenic view. After meeting the lead actress, Messitt asked Chan to paint walls dark in rooms where he planned to use soft light

on her face to visually punctuate romantic scenes.

Other locations included a taxidermy shop, a bar, city streets and highways, and a warehouse with a one-wall set where a fashion show scene was filmed.

Visual homage

Messitt brought his regular A camera operator Greg Collier, SOC from Los Angeles and gaffer Lee Walters to Hong Kong from London. He knew from experiences at other off-shore locations that they would enable him to work quicker without compromising production values. When Walters had to leave during the final two weeks of production, Brad Draper came from Los Angeles and stepped into the breach.

The camera package provided by Salon included two Panaflex Platinum bodies with a set of Primo Ultra Speeds and Super Speeds and a 15:50mm macro zoom.

Messitt chose a modest palette consisting of KODAK VISION2 500T 5218 and 200T 5217 films. He routinely overexposed the negative by a third of a stop. Messitt explains that this enabled him to render richer black tones

with no noticeable grain, because that look felt right for the time, place and evolving mood of the story.

"*Irreversi* is kind of a visual homage to Alfred Hitchcock," he says. "Michael (Gleissner) and I watched some of Hitchcock's films while discussing the script. The idea for one very important shot came straight from his film *Suspicion*."

They had a 42-day production schedule. Messitt estimates that they shot about 60-percent of the film in the house, using virtually every room. He says that the latitude of the film enabled them to record nuanced details in the darkest shadows and brightest exterior backgrounds without having to stop shooting to gel windows.

"Michael and I discussed what was at the heart of every scene while we were reading the script," Messitt says. "If a scene didn't advance the story or say something about the characters, then it was superfluous. We also discussed camera angles, composition and movement that felt right for different sequences, and took advantage of Hong Kong's city lights every night. The city comes alive at night."



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“Film has a rich, vibrant look that inspired everyone.”

They covered most of the action with a single camera. Messitt explains that this allowed him and his gaffer to optimize lighting for every shot. He adds that it enabled them to work faster and more efficiently because it takes time to finesse lighting for two angles. The exceptions included a scene where they used two Panaflex cameras to film running footage of characters driving on a Hong Kong highway.

The visual grammar devised by Messitt and Gleissner called for the camera to be mounted on a dolly about 90-percent of the time, either static or tracking with the action. There were occasional handheld shots when they wanted the audience to feel a tactile sense of energy, including a scene where Adam and Linda are running on the beach.

“Greg was handholding the camera,” Messitt recalls. “When the actors spontaneously followed their passion into the

surf, he tracked with them until he was chest deep in water, running through the waves while supported by two assistants. You can feel Adam and Linda falling in love as they run through the waves.”

4K digital file

He notes that Gleissner was open to those types of spontaneous interpretations of the story by the actors, which led to “happy accidents” that enrich the story.

Messitt also used a camera crane for several days for sweeping shots used to establish settings, including one where Adam and Linda are in the foreground with their new house behind them. He notes that the shot captures the grandeur of the setting.

Gleissner and Messitt watched film dailies together in a screening room at the lab.

“Everything kind of fell into place while we were watching dailies,” Messitt says. “It was a different experience to watching digital dailies. Film has a rich, vibrant look that inspired everyone. We also caught a focus problem in the 40-50mm area of a macro zoom lens, which wouldn’t have been noticeable with digital dailies.”

Messitt added painterly touches to the visual grammar while timing *Irreversi* with digital intermediate (DI) colorist David Cole at LaserPacific in Los Angeles. After the film was edited offline, the negative was scanned and converted to a digital file at 4K resolution to capture nuanced details recorded on the negative. The digital master file was down-sampled to 2K, which enabled Messitt and Cole to work faster in an interactive environment.

“The majority of things we changed in DI were designed to push the eye to where we

wanted it to go to enhance storytelling,” Messitt says.

He cites a tracking shot outside the house looking through a window at Adam and Linda. Some flowers were reflected in the windows. Messitt asked Cole to tone the reflections down until the eye was drawn to the characters rather than the flowers.

There is a flashback montage scene of the accident where Linda’s brother died. Messitt instructed Cole to desaturate that scene “just enough” to give it a different feeling that sets the stage for the breathtaking conclusion.