



## Insight into the making of *Land of the Blind*

*Land of the Blind* was the first venture into narrative filmmaking for Robert Edwards and Ferne Pearlstein. He wrote and directed the independent feature, and she served as associate producer, editor and second unit director/cinematographer. Edwards and Pearlstein are a husband-and-wife team, both graduates of the documentary program at Stanford University.

"I've always been interested in history, and I'd been gathering information about totalitarian regimes for years," Edwards recalls. "I wove the threads together into the script for *Land of the Blind*, which Ferne encouraged me to sit down and write while we were editing our last documentary."

The story revolves around the relationship between a playwright who is a political prisoner and his jailer. They plot to overthrow a despotic ruler and eventually succeed. The story takes a surprising turn after the former prisoner becomes the ruler.

Pre-production began in London with a predominantly British production team and crew. Ralph Fiennes was cast as the prison guard and Donald Sutherland portrays the playwright. Emmanuel "Manu" Kadosh, a cinematographer from Israel, was brought onboard.

*Land of the Blind* takes place in a non-descript urban area in an undefined period of history. Edwards described his

vision for a surrealistic look in discussions with Kadosh and production designer Mark Larkin. They agreed that the story called for a widescreen 2.35:1 aspect ratio and decided to shoot with spherical lenses in Super 35 format. Their camera package included a Panaflex Millennium, Panaflex Millennium XL, a full set of Primo Prime lenses and an 11.1 Primo zoom lens.

"(Location manager) Helene Lenszner found amazing locations like an RAF hospital that had been shuttered for eight years, a Guinness brewery that was scheduled for demolition, different museums and private homes," Edwards says.

They had a 33-day shooting schedule, including ten at Pinewood Shepperton Studios where most of the early scenes take place in the main jail cell set. It had wild walls that enabled Edwards and Kadosh to cover the action from virtually any angle.

"We only had two Steadicam days," Edwards says. "The rest of the time Manu was tracking on a dolly or shooting handheld. He generally covered the action intuitively with a lightweight Panaflex camera and prime lenses."

Images were recorded on KODAK VISION2 Expression 500T 5229 film. The negative is designed to render relatively low contrast images and less saturated colors, subtle skin tones and nuanced shadow details.

"Most of the lighting set-ups were simple and elegant," Edwards says. "Manu wasn't afraid to let things fall off into shadows or have an actor's face obscured. We shot a complex 10-page dialogue scene with the main actors walking and talking in one large room in the presidential palace set. We had less than a day to shoot it, in a room full of mirrors, with windows with bright daylight in the backgrounds as the main source of motivated lighting. We didn't block it, and Manu shot it with a handheld camera."

Front-end lab work was done at Deluxe Labs in London.

Pearlstein observes, "Bob and I both were surprised at how similar it was to cutting a documentary, especially a film like this with a lot of unconventional storytelling including the way we used voice-over vignettes. It's not a very linear story."

Digital intermediate (DI) timing was done at Molinare in London. In addition to timing the film for continuity and adding final touches to the look, visual effects and archival footage in various formats were seamlessly integrated. The timed digital file was used to master 35 mm release prints, DVD and other television deliverables for the international market place. The film is playing at festivals and art house theaters. ■

**Above:** Cinematographer Emmanuel Kadosh (behind camera) and Robert Edwards (far right).

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