

When Chris Manley, ASC took over the cinematography of *Mad Men*, he and his collaborators held a marathon viewing session in which they watched the pilot and all 13 episodes of the first season. The American Movie Classics (AMC) television series had earned 10 Emmy nominations, and took home six of the awards including Best Drama and Best Cinematography for Phil Abraham. Based on what they saw, the filmmakers came to a consensus about which episodes best represented the look of the show, and used those as a starting point for the second season.



# Mad Men

Series creator Matt Weiner wanted to introduce a little more color saturation and warmth, and there were other adjustments for the second season, which takes place in 1962, two years after the first season.

"I also worked with gaffer Michael Ambrose and key grip Pat O'Mara, going through every set and every lighting set-up, discussing what worked well and looking for ways to improve," Manley says. "In the Sterling Cooper offices, one of the main sets at LA Center Studios, Mike wired all the overhead fluorescents to give us individual control over every ceiling fixture. We also replaced a number of smaller backings with a very large one that covered all the office windows. That helped improve efficiency."

The changes included a new post facility, LaserPacific in Hollywood. Color timer Tim Vincent was in on the marathon viewing session. "Matt (Weiner) didn't feel like we had to make the show identical to the first year," says Vincent. "The images are a little less contrasty

this year, saturation levels are slightly higher and skin tones are more natural. I'd say there's a bit less of a period feel and a little bit more realism, so rather than feeling like they are watching something photographed in a period, the audience feels like they are in the period."

Manley photographs *Mad Men* in three-perf Super 35 format, which trims about 25 percent of raw stock and lab costs without sacrificing image quality. Manley uses KODAK VISION2 500T 5218 film in most interior situations and KODAK VISION2 200T 5217 film for most exterior situations. The show is seen in the 16:9 aspect ratio.

"Our palette is basically dictated by the colors of the sets and wardrobe, which re-create what would have existed in 1962," says Manley. "We don't use the post-production to desaturate or to create a Technicolor look. We play it pretty straight. In the lighting, if things go a little bit too theatrical – if a backlight is a little too hot

– it still feels right in terms of the period. That's kind of exciting and liberating."

The film is developed at LaserPacific's laboratory. The dailies transfer is done by Mace Johnson to 4:2:2 HDCAM SR format using the MTI dailies system, which expedites the process. Images in full HD 1920x1080 4:2:2 format are loaded on the Lustre local drive, where a timeline is assembled using the offline Edit Decision List. Vincent usually has two days to time the show. Then, Weiner and his team supervise a trim pass with Vincent, which usually takes one to three hours. The trim pass usually includes post-production supervisor Nathaniel Smith and producer Blake McCormick, and Manley if time permits.

Manley documents set-ups with a Canon EOS 40D digital still camera. He does a simple color correction with his laptop each night, and emails the images to Johnson. LaserPacific color specialists set up his monitor to match the monitors at the facility.

Manley also shoots gray scales to give the dailies timer a point of reference.

Earlier in the season, Manley would occasionally participate in timing sessions with Vincent prior to going to the set in the morning. Once production was winding down, he had time to sit in on color correction sessions more often.

"It's really exhausting, but color correction is one of my favorite parts of the job," says Manley. "It's my reward for working on the set. The images look their absolute best in that room. Tim uses the Autodesk Lustre color grading system, which is very sophisticated."

Vincent notes that the Lustre was designed as a digital intermediate tool for doing feature film work in log space. "Then they developed the high definition side, so now it has color correctors built in for both log and linear space," he says. "But once you choose which color space you are going to work in, it's the same tool set. So you have D.I. tools at a television level.



# dedicated to perfection

You have 12 layers of unlimited windows in any shot, and three different built-in tracking systems – hand tracking, point tracking or shape tracking. You can do more refined moves, instead of having to build a ton of mini-dissolves as you would with a traditional hardware-based system. The tracking is the smoothest I've ever seen."

"As a result, it's easier for me to color a show without leaving the footprint of a colorist on it," he says. "I can manipulate the light and it feels like it was shot that way. You have the ability to turn your trims on and off, and you can apply them on a shot-by-shot basis instead of choosing a group of shots or having to make the same adjustment over and over again. It's all nonlinear, so we can bounce between two different points in the show, comparing or grabbing colors. The trim and tweak pass is literally 10 times faster."

"We learned during the second season that Matt loves to put a particular feel or accent on each episode, depending on the

story and the time of year," says Vincent. "He uses every tool at his disposal, and the Lustre makes that all possible within the time constraints. It's just a phenomenal tool."

Manley appreciates what Vincent brings to the project. "Tim makes an enormous contribution to the show," he says. "He is dodging and burning in a way that is so far beyond circles and squares. By the time we are doing the trim pass, we are getting down to the nitty-gritty. We are so on target with my original intentions that we're almost splitting hairs."

"Matt has a good eye, and he is very visually sophisticated," Manley continues. "I'm lucky to work with a creator-producer with such good taste. I never feel like he is undoing something I sweated over, which does happen in this business. His is the final word, but he respects my opinion, as well as Tim's."

Vincent agrees. "The expectation level that Matt Weiner brings filters down from top to bottom," he says. "The level of perfection is beyond

any other show I've worked on, and that raises the level of everyone's work. It's a neat thing, to work with a group of people so dedicated to perfection."

Recently, AMC announced it would exercise its option for a third season of *Mad Men*.

