

# CinemaScope look for M & S commercial

Film stock KODAK VISION2 Expression 500T 5229

The new high-profile Xmas commercial for M&S features Antonio Banderas in a recreation of the old classic movie look of the 1940s and 1950s. It was achieved in camera on 14 sets and three stages without any blue/green screen work or CGI.

When Ben Davis, BSC (*Stardust, Layer Cake*) first discussed the brief with director Dawn Shadforth he was given a mood DVD and stills from a large number of classic films. *How to Marry a Millionaire*, Jean Negulesco's 1953 classic feature, was his main reference. "The intention was to create a spot in both black-and-white and colour footage that would feel like a film trailer of that period," says Davis. "The colour footage was to resemble the old CinemaScope and Technicolor® look; something akin to a two or three-strip colour palette."

The pair have worked together on numerous occasions, including H & M and Rimmel commercials, as well as Kylie Minogue's *Spinning Around* video. "Dawn is one of the UK's best and most original directors," says Davis.

"Ben was very thorough. He really took the brief on board that we were trying to be as true to the original cinematographic references as possible and was rigorous in his pursuit of that goal," remarks Shadforth. "We tested lenses and stocks, as well as art direction tones and colours, to

**"We tested lenses and stocks, as well as art direction tones and colours."**

ensure they would appear on film exactly the way we wanted. Ben's technical approach to the lighting was amazing and unlike anything I've ever been able to achieve on a commercial before. The lighting on every scene was quite different, but in a lot of cases it was highly controlled with many layers of diffusion, flags and gobos. There was a great deal of detail and subtlety in this approach, with the aim of achieving the complexity of light and shadow typical of some of the films we were referencing. Ben's total engagement with the project, attention to detail and artistry was really impressive and incredibly valuable."

After viewing numerous early films and recent recreations, Davis investigated the technical aspects of early colour cinematography. "There are many different opinions on what two or three-strip looked like," he notes. "That look changed quite radically over a short period of time and very much depended

on the DP and whether it was an American studio picture or had a more European approach."

Davis shot on low-contrast KODAK VISION2 Expression 500T 5229 which he pulled by a stop to further reduce the contrast. He used early E and C series anamorphic lenses and lit with HMIs to match the early arc lamps. On the black-and-white shots he replaced the HMIs with smaller tungsten units. "The art direction and design featured a lot of greys with a pastel colour palette and were key to the look. Thanks to art director Alison Dominitz the sets were superb," he says.

"Matching lighting scenarios from masterpieces such as *To Have and Have Not* (1944) and *Now, Voyager* (1942) were a real challenge and a reminder of the standard to which cinematographers should aspire," muses Davis. "One particular high mid-shot of Lauren Bacall in the former film is a breathtaking example of black-and-white photography. She moves around and, whenever she is in shot, a perfectly-positioned and modelled key light falls on her face. When I started to light our spot I thought a simple key light in the right place with a little soft shadow would work, but I ended up with three lights, eight flags and a yashmak. There was a lot more to many of the scenes in the M&S commercial than meets the eye."

"Ben was dedicated to making the film as authentic as possible and put passion and time into making it just so," says producer Lucy Sherwood. "Dawn communicated her vision well and, together with Alison, they've replicated it exactly. It's not often you have a chance to be so visually creative in a commercial."

"The experience was one of the most enjoyable of my career," states Davis. "I now realise the wonderful quality of early films and applaud the skills of the cinematographers who didn't have the lightweight equipment and high speed film stocks we enjoy today."

The spot was post-produced at The Moving Picture Company.