

# Caleb Deschanel turns LaserPacific for dailies

## My Sister's Keeper

Post-production Scanner LaserPacific Hollywood Spirit 4K

System accuratIMAGE™ (aIM)  
D.I Colorist Mike Sowa.

**My Sister's Keeper is an independent feature film based on a novel by Jodi Picoult. Caleb Deschanel, ASC filmed the story in widescreen anamorphic format and guided the images through a digital intermediate at LaserPacific in Hollywood. The filmmakers used that facility's proprietary accuratIMAGE™ (aIM) system for dailies. "I never had high-def dailies where I felt like I was looking at film until I saw the aIM system," says Deschanel.**

Deschanel and director Nick Cassavetes brought to the screen the story of a family struck by tragedy. A younger sister is brought into the world as a bone marrow match to help keep her older sister, plagued by leukemia, alive. As the younger sister matures, she discovers the truth and begins to resent her secondary support role, which entails countless surgeries and transfusions despite her perfect health.

"Emotionally, it's very powerful," says five-time Oscar® nominee Deschanel. "The themes go beyond that basic description of the story. I knew Nick would be able to tell a story like this without making it too saccharine. He brought truth and a real understanding to a real-life situation. Nick elevated the material, making it affecting without being sappy."

The cast includes Abigail Breslin, Cameron Diaz, Alec Baldwin, Jason Patric and Sofia Vassilieva. The budget was relatively modest.

During pre-production, Cassavetes described a look that included some aspects of magical realism. "It's hard to take the amount of emotion that occurs over the course of the story," says Deschanel. "We didn't want it to feel like a documentary. Much of it takes place in hospitals and the like. I wanted to give each of these places its own realistic life in terms of lighting but at the same time, things were exaggerated somewhat towards the idyllic rather than the ordinary and everyday. We

wanted the movie to have a dreamlike feeling, where things slow down and you feel that you are existing out-of-time."

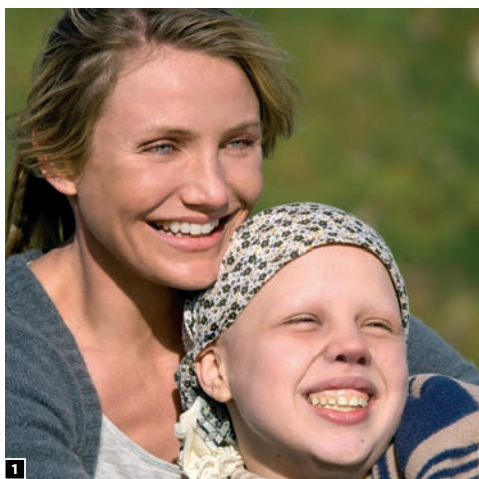
The filmmakers chose to frame the story in an anamorphic 2.4:1 aspect ratio. "The clichéd notions of how Hollywood movies are made would seem to indicate that an intimate

story told mostly in hospitals should be shot 1.85," says Deschanel. "But we just like the look of anamorphic. There is detail there that we weren't going to get any other way. There are moments where the story opens up and becomes a celebration of life. We wanted to represent those moments with archetypal imagery. We made the right decision."

Deschanel used Panavision camera equipment with a variety of lenses including C Series, E Series, and Primo anamorphic lenses, chosen for their individual characteristics. He used a fine net behind the lens made of a certain type of women's stocking. "The nets are mostly invisible, except in

some highlights," he says. "I just wanted to take the edge off everything."

Deschanel used KODAK VISION3 500T 5219 film for most situations, and KODAK VISION2 200T 5217 film for some day exterior scenes. "I love the new 5219 stock," he says. "It's remarkable. It holds details in the shadows and highlights even better than (KODAK VISION2 500T) 5218, which I liked a lot. The new film never gives up, at either end of the spectrum. I had seen the tests that Daryn Okada shot, and I was really blown away."



1 (L-R) Cameron Diaz and Sofia Vassilieva in a scene from *My Sister's Keeper*. 2 Cinematographer Caleb Deschanel, ASC on the set. Photos by Sidney Baldwin/distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures

to  
on

Deschanel says that the extended latitude and detail in highlight and shadow areas translates into creative freedom on the set. "It gives you a lot more leeway in making decisions about what the audience sees and doesn't see, particularly in situations where you don't have total control, and when you want to hold off on the amount of light you use," he says. "It's really fantastic the way you can use darkness in scenes."

One example is a scene for which production designer Jon Hutman chose a chocolate brown color for the walls of a living room. "Even though it was way down in the shadows, you still sense the wonderful color in that wall when you see it on film," says Deschanel. "It doesn't go to black. It's a warm brown-black."

Deschanel says he chose LaserPacific after seeing tests demonstrating the aIM dailies system, which is designed to provide consistent, calibrated images throughout post-production. Dailies were seen on a Kodak digital cinema server platform. Creative color decisions are faithfully carried through the process and into post using the ASC Color Decision List (CDL).

"Since film dailies went away, I've usually been forced to bite the bullet and watch flat, ugly dailies," says Deschanel. "I've had to explain my way out of dailies screenings, assuring my colleagues that all the images aren't overexposed and out of focus, and that they will actually look good when printed on film."

"Kodak and LaserPacific have developed the aIM system so that it matches the print stocks, to the extent that you feel

like you're watching film in terms of the way it represents shadows and light and overexposure," he says.

The digital intermediate was used to affect colors and contrast only sparingly. The images were scanned on a Spirit 4K. The scanning process was adapted to maximize image quality from the squeezed anamorphic frame. The DI colorist at LaserPacific was Mike Sowa.

"Mike was great," says Deschanel. "Most of the initial passes we made were pretty similar to what I would have done using traditional timing in the lab. But then at the end, I found myself starting to obsess over things. In some of the flashback scenes, we would vignette the edges and sometimes darken an area of the image slightly to subtly direct the viewer's attention within the frame."

Deschanel scoffs at the notion that the budget should determine the format. "As far as

I'm concerned, the best decisions are made on the basis of what's right for the picture," he emphasizes. "People have created these hierarchies that make no sense. Tim Orr shot a movie for (director) David Gordon Green in North Carolina for a million dollars, and they did it in anamorphic. Saying that you can't produce low-budget films in anamorphic format is silly. Every project involves some compromise, which is true on a \$200 million movie as well as on a \$1 million movie. It's where you make the compromises, and what the compromises are, that are the difference between ending up with a great movie and a not-so-great movie."

"I love the new 5219 stock. It's remarkable. It holds details in the shadows and highlights and never gives up, at either end of the spectrum."

2