

# Obsessed:

an exclusive world invaded

Ken Seng prepared carefully for an interview for the role of cinematographer on the feature film *Obsessed*. He met director Steve Shill and producers at Screen Gems, the independent production wing of Sony Pictures, in Los Angeles. "I had tons of images for my presentation, and about 15 pages of notes on the script," he says. "They were pleased that I understood the complexities of the characters and the narrative."

Seng suggested framing the film in widescreen 2.4:1 aspect ratio on three-perf 35mm film to trim raw stock and processing costs. "The story often consists of two characters interacting," he says. "We also envisioned a 1970s thriller aesthetic, and I thought the widescreen look fitted well with that."

*Obsessed* features Idris Elba and Beyoncé Knowles as Derek and Beth Charles, a thriving professional and his beautiful wife who find their comfortable world invaded by an office-temp who becomes a stalker, played by Ali Larter.

For Derek's office, production designer Jon Gary Steele created an elegant 5,000 sq ft environment that communicated success and exclusivity. "We wanted to create a place that felt top-of-the-world," Seng explains. "I decided to try to light the entire set with overhead 20Ks just out of frame, to get clean shadows coming down the walls and to build a lot of contrast into the images."

Their approach also included a constantly moving camera and extensive use of zoom lenses. Two Panaflex cameras with zoom lenses, one a Primo 4:1 and the other a Primo 11:1, were often on dollies rolling on dance flooring.

"We used camera movement to tell the story, often with foreground objects layered into the composition," says Seng. "We chose zoom lenses in part because they allow freedom to make tiny

adjustments, which is especially important with two cameras, because you are constantly riding the edge of each other's frame line. The ability to bump framing by as little as 3mm can sometimes make the difference between getting the shot and moving the dance floor or reconfiguring a dolly."

Among his considerations in choosing film stock were the cast's wide range of skin tones and the need to work efficiently on a 40-day schedule.

"After seeing projected tests, I chose KODAK VISION3 500T 5219 film because I wanted a little more range," he says. "There's more reach in the highlights and in the bottom end, and I knew that latitude would help me work quickly. I soon realized that I could light almost everything by eye. The stock would replicate everything just as I saw it. That helped me give the actors the freedom to move around and not hit their marks every time. I often rated the film at 320, and I could let faces go four stops under and still read expressions if there was an eye light. For day exteriors, I chose KODAK VISION2 250D 5205 film."

Seng plans a digital intermediate post path at Technicolor in Los Angeles. "Most of the look is accomplished in camera," he says. "I'll use the D.I. to sweeten things, and to make small adjustments based on seeing the edit and how that affects my original vision. Another goal is to make the release print feel more organic, as if the movie were finished photo-chemically."

"Shooting film allows you to be artistic and impressionistic," Seng concludes. "You can reach deep into the negative and pull things out. I can take two Dinos, pound them through a window with sheer curtains, place an actor in front of that, and it will look amazing."

*Obsessed* is slated for a February 2009 release in the United States.



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