

# Recount focuses on history in the making

Director of photography:  
Jim Denault

Film stocks:  
KODAK VISION2 250D 7205 and KODAK VISION2 500T 7218

Processing:  
Cineworks Digital Studios Inc. Miami

*Recount* is an HBO drama that probes behind the scenes of the aftermath of George W. Bush besting Al Gore in the popular vote in Florida in 2000. That victory gave Bush the majority he needed in the Electoral College to become president of the United States. The Democratic Party petitioned for recounts in various Florida precincts, but the U.S. Supreme Court subsequently denied that request.

*Recount* is the first screenplay written by actor Danny Strong whose research stretched over several years.

It is the first collaboration for cinematographer Jim Denault and director Jay Roach. "We were on the same page from day one," Denault says. "Jay and I watched films that provided useful visual references, including *United 93* and *Bloody Sunday* and D.A. Pennebaker's documentary *The War Room*. We agreed that we wanted the audience to feel like they are looking through a window watching history happen."

Close to 200 scenes were planned with a large, ensemble cast, including Kevin Spacey, Laura Dern, Ed Begley, Jr. and John Hurt. Denault scouted locations, mainly in Jacksonville, Florida, which stood in for Palm Beach and Miami; and Tallahassee, for exteriors where the real-life events occurred, including the Florida Supreme Court. The chamber where the Jacksonville City Council meets filled in for a state senate conference room.

"The decision to produce *Recount* in Super 16mm format was made before I came on board," Denault says. "The costs are about the same as digital HD production when everything is considered, and HBO was happy with other Super 16 movies."

Denault shot tests rating KODAK VISION2 250D 7205 film at 500 ISO. The film was processed at Cineworks Digital Studios Inc. in

Miami, where front-end lab work was done.

"They telecined the processed film and projected it digitally at 2K resolution," he says. "The 7205 at 500 ISO was finer grain than the KODAK VISION2 500T 7218 film at 500 and didn't seem to lose any detail in the shadows. Since we had so many daylight balanced fluorescents in our office scenes, this seemed like the way to go."

"The new ARRI cameras are lightweight, compact and the viewfinder is incredible," Denault says. "The new prime lenses for 16mm have amazing optical qualities."

Denault generally covered the action with two cameras. The main exceptions were big crowd scenes staged at the Florida Supreme Court, and the Clark Center "Brooks Brothers Riot" set. Jim McConkey

on tripods, dollies, handheld and a Steadicam depending on the scene and feelings that Roach and Denault wanted to evoke. Denault also lauds the contributions of gaffer Lou DiCesare, key grip John Cassidy, key rigging grip Thomas "Popcorn" Lowry, and their crews who designed some incredible rigs which enabled him to cover scenes with multiple cameras from any angle.

## "I wanted to be able to use edge, side and key light."

Denault decided to use a blend of 7205 and 7218 depending on whether the scene was lit tungsten or daylight.

Camera gear was rented from CSC in Miami, including two ARRI 416s and an ARRI 416 Plus camera, along with a set of Zeiss T1.3 Ultra 16 primes, and T1.9 Ultra Primes, and Canon 11.5-138 and 7-63mm zoom lenses. The ARRI 416 Plus camera provides a capability for remotely controlling frame rates, ramping and focus.

was the A camera/Steadicam operator, Patrick Rousseau was the B camera operator, and Mark Kohl handled the third camera when it was needed.

"Many scenes were filmed with no or minimal rehearsals," he says. "Although we usually had specific shots in mind, we gave the camera operators the freedom to follow their instincts in order to create a sense of immediacy in spontaneous environments."

They framed images in 16:9 aspect ratio with the cameras

"I wanted to be able to use edge, side and key light from any angle," he explains. "There are many scenes where the cameras are moving through and around spaces, which made lighting from the floor very difficult. I was able to convince the producers to bring Lou and John in a few days earlier than they had initially planned, so that we could look around at all the locations and decide where to rig which lamps. Because of this pre-production, our lighting set-ups on shoot days were consistently remarkably fast."



1 DP Jim Denault lines up a shot for *Recount*.