



Dion Beebe takes classical approach to **Rendition**

Cameras and lenses

Panavision Platinum, G-2 and lightweight cameras, as well as Primo prime lenses and 11:1, 4:1 and 3:1 zooms.

Film stocks

KODAK VISION2 200T 5217 and VISION2 Exp

Dion Beebe, ASC, ACS was thrilled by the possibilities when he first read the script for *Rendition*. "It was one of the best scripts I had read all year," he says. "It's a complex, multi-layered, character-driven story with a contemporary edge that manipulates time and space in a very clever and unusual way."

The mystery at the heart of the story is the disappearance of an Egyptian-born terrorism suspect on a flight from South Africa to Washington, D.C. The suspect's wife, played by Reese Witherspoon, travels to D.C. to solve the puzzle.

Meanwhile, a CIA analyst at a secret detention facility outside the U.S. (played by Jake Gyllenhaal) begins to question his assignment during the unorthodox interrogation of the suspect (Omar Metwally).

Beebe won Oscar and ASC Awards for his cinematography of *Memoirs of a Geisha*. He earned an Oscar nomination for his work on *Chicago*, and shared an ASC nomination with Paul Cameron, ASC for *Collateral*. His other credits include *Miami Vice* and *In the Cut*.

Rendition is an independent feature film directed by Gavin Hood. Hood says Beebe was perfectly suited to that project. "Dion's superb control of light, as well as his genuine love of cinematic storytelling, made him an ideal collaborator on a film with the complex visual demands of *Rendition*," says Hood. "With multiple storylines cutting between different worlds, it was important for me to work with someone who understood the need to clearly differentiate these worlds visually, while at the same time keeping an overall continuity of cinematic style."

Principal photography on the project began after a brief three-week prep period that was mostly devoted to locking down locations in Morocco and Los Angeles, which also at times had to double for Chicago and Washington, D.C.

"I spent a good amount of time in prep and scouting, shooting stills, and settling our visual ideas," says Hood. "Having a clear understanding early on of the visual style you're going for saves both time and money. On set, we were very in sync visually, and

this allowed everyone to concentrate on the dynamics of scenes and performances rather than on general questions of style."

The filmmakers decided on a classical approach, defined by Beebe as "strong compositions and camera movement designed with purpose. The alternative would have been to use a loose, handheld style that suggested realism. We wanted to give the film a more formal, composed, cinematic feel, in order to lure and seduce our audience into the story."

Cinematic and composed

"When considering a stylistic approach, it is all about story," says Beebe. "Style is a means to an end, and regardless of the technology, what remains most important is the integrity of the story. I would happily shoot a movie on Super 8mm film tomorrow if I thought it would effectively tell the story."

"When I've used HD cameras, the images feel very immediate and very 'now,'" he says. "I could not have visualized *Geisha* in HD, and yet it was the right format for *Miami Vice* and *Collateral*."

In the case of *Rendition*, the complexity of the script, with multiple characters and shifting timelines, also affected the decisions about the look of the film. "We chose to keep our visual language cinematic and composed in order to avoid over-complicating how we told the story," says Beebe. "Scenes taking place in D.C. took on a cool, stark, almost sterile look, which was juxtaposed against the warm earth tones and more chaotic pace of scenes in Morocco."

Hood and Beebe worked closely with production designer Barry Robison to delineate the various backdrops. "This idea, combined with the decision to have a clearly different color palette for each world, helped enormously in differentiating worlds in a clean and visually exciting way," says Hood.



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DN2 Expression 500T 5229

Hood and Beebe chose to frame the story in a widescreen 2.41:1 aspect ratio. They combined Super 35mm film format with a digital intermediate timing. “We felt that the widescreen format would help emphasize the environment,” says Beebe. “Even when we were in Washington, D.C., we kept looking for the opportunities to explore and exploit the landscape, and to create tension. You can compose a close-up and still incorporate a second character or an architectural detail. We had a number of scenes in an interrogation room, and the wide frame allows you to be on someone’s face and to use the presence of another character in the room.”

Camera movement tended to be controlled and formal, and usually accomplished with a dolly. Even when tight spaces – car interiors, for instance – dictated a handheld camera, the frame was kept steady.

“Hoodian over”

Camera operator Peter Rosenfeld coined the term “Hoodian over” to describe one type of framing Beebe and Hood often employed. “A Hoodian over is an over-the-shoulder shot where two-thirds of the frame is filled by the shoulders, back and head of the character we were shooting past,” Beebe explains. “The effect was to create an overbearing sense of intimidation of the character being photographed, which is very much in tune with the theme of the film.”

Beebe chose to film *Rendition* with two film stocks: KODAK VISION2 200T 5217 and KODAK VISION2 Expression 500T 5229. “I had used the 5229 for some night work on *Miami Vice*, and was very impressed by the stock’s extended midrange,” he says. “I find the 5217 to be such a versatile stock. I use it for all of my day work, and it can transition into late afternoon and early evening, and I can push it to 400 ASA for night work. I also use it for all of my interior location work, as well as on stage.”

Lab work was handled at Deluxe in Los Angeles and London. When the production was filming in Morocco and Cape Town, the filmmakers relied on DVD dailies. Closer to Los Angeles, they were able to see selected printed dailies.

One of the final scenes of the shoot also proved to be one of the toughest. The location was a dry dock in the harbor of a Moroccan port town. The shot was planned to play out against the backdrop of monolithic hulls perched in the slip.

“My gaffer, John Buckley, and I had decided to create an artificially lit environment for the scene,” says Beebe. “In this case it was the cool green of mercury vapor lamps. What made the night so tough was not the language barrier, or the lack of lifts or cranes for lighting, or the fact that we were working with large fishing trawlers on water. What made it hard was the wind. A gale blew nonstop from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., which slowly drove us all crazy. We felt like we were standing in a wind tunnel, and it became so hard to concentrate and communicate. But to the credit of my crew, we got through, and it is a strong scene in the finished film.”

Beebe plans to use the DI to subtly enhance the look he created on set. “We’ll enhance and reinforce our visual ideas,” he says. “We’ll keep the Washington, D.C., scenes slightly cooler and desaturated, and the Morocco sequences will be slightly richer and more saturated. Those ideas play out in the production design as well.”

He notes that accepting difficult challenges has been a crucial part of his success as a cinematographer. “Anything is possible,” he says. “Figuring out how to do it is the fun part. If there’s anything I’ve learned from my years of shooting and working with great crews and directors, it is to not be afraid when ideas don’t work. There is no rule book, no right or wrong way of doing something. Failure is so often self-imposed. In the end, if something feels right, then that is what you do!”