

ICG

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THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

ELLEN KURAS, ASC ILLUMINATES
*THE ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF
THE SPOTLESS MIND*



75th
Anniversary
• 75 YEARS OF LIGHTING THE WAY •



w w w . c a m e r a g u i l d . c o m

ON THE SET WITH DANTE SPINOTTI, ASC • FILM VS. DIGITAL DAILIES • ROBERT RODRIGUEZ & DANIEL PEARL DEBATE

on the set

After the Sunset

Dante Spinotti, ASC

by Pauline Rogers

Late Afternoon. Nassau, The Bahamas. Cinematographer Dante Spinotti, ASC is taking one last look at the Seven Seas Navigator. For the past several days, the opulent rooms and sumptuous meals of this beautiful Italian designed vessel built in the late 1990s has been the “home” for most of the cast and crew of *After the Sunset*, allowing them to literally live in their location. It is the third picture that Spinotti and his crew have done with director Brett Ratner and the chance to enjoy the ship’s hospitality is just an added perk to working with what they collectively say is a director who fosters “camaraderie, enthusiasm and a lot of positive energy.”

“We’ve captured a lot of beautiful visuals in the five days that the ship has been available to us before sailing on to their next stop,” says Spinotti as he looks to the top level (12th floor) of the luxury liner. “We’ve done everything from a complex shot across the top level where our hero rappels into the

Cinematographer Dante Spinotti, ASC is on the set of the Seven Seas Navigator, a beautiful Italian designed vessel built in the late 1990s. The vessel has been the “home” for most of the cast and crew of director Brett Ratner’s *After the Sunset*.

water below, to a number of interior scenes where we use many of the ship’s levels as locations. Later, on stage in Los Angeles, some specific sets will be built to integrate into the shots done on the ship.”

Spinotti watches as one of the crewmembers carries the last of the lighting equipment off the ship. “We could only do so much in such a short time because we really didn’t need a lot of lighting equipment for these shots, even though they were both interior and exterior and mostly at night.

“A few weeks ago, my gaffer Jeff Peterson, key grip Mike Popovich and I met director Brett Ratner, first AD Jamie Freitag and production designer Geoff Kirkland in Freeport to look at the ship.

“As we toured the beautiful interior, I realized that I didn’t feel like using movie lights inside. It was so beautifully lit, I wanted to go back to the old days of movie making and keep the lights the way they were. Available light.

“We brought Brett Ratner’s personal Arri IIC and the 5218 stock with us on the scout,” he adds. “This allowed us to see exposure and the rendering of uncorrected colors. We found that the stock is so extended in latitude that all we had to do was push it one stop. It holds up

CREW

Cinematographer
Dante Spinotti, ASC

Operators
Duane Manwiller (A-Camera/Steadicam)
Chris Moseley (B-Camera)

Assistants
Michael Weldon (A-Camera 1st)
Paul Santoni (A-Camera 2nd)
Jim Apted (B-Camera 1st)
Thom Lairson (B-Camera 2nd)

Film Loader
Giulio Magnolia

Underwater D.P.
Peter Zuccarini

Still Photographer
Glen Wilson

Unit Publicist
Cid Swank

Director
Brett Ratner

Writers
Paul Zbyszewski
Craig Rosenberg

Producers
Beau Flynn
Jay Stern

Executive Producers
Tripp Vinson
Patrick Palmer

Cast
Pierce Brosnan
Salma Hayek
Woody Harrelson
Don Cheadle
Naomie Harris
Mykelti Williamson
Rex Linn
Obba Babatundé
Troy Garity

so well, I knew we wouldn’t need to augment the interior locations with lights.

“The other reason we were able to do this was because we are doing a digital intermediate. To me, the process is more than fixing visual effects shots when needed. When I use it, I feel as if I am bringing 35mm color photos to a fine printer instead of a one hour photo or printing black and white shots in a darkroom where I can vary the contrast, burn and dodge.”

Spinotti looks up at the top deck. “Our main lighting off the ship for the interior/exterior sequences was a Musco light that Jeff placed carefully on solid ground.

“We tested the position one night during the scout, placing a Nine-Light on land to make sure that the light would reach what we needed. Jeff would have liked to have it on a barge inside the harbor. But, given the winter situation with the ocean even inside the harbor, moving a barge around could be complicated. So, he carefully picked a spot some 3000 feet away, knowing that we couldn’t change it for the four or five days we were using the equipment.

“He also rigged bounce lights and PAR lights into the Kiosks on shore, to give us reference along the dock’s slips.

“For one of the stunt shots, done by second unit director and stunt coordinator Conrad Palmisano, we asked the captain to turn the ship around so we could photograph the lamp house at the mouth of the harbor in the shot.

“For this shot, the Musco provided a minimum fill and we rigged a few PAR lights bounced into a mirror in the Lamp House to create the effect. Jeff then used a Dino crossing the bow and an 18K from the left. A few PAR cans under-lighting the many Bahamas’ palm trees.

“On the ship’s exterior, we had fluorescents adding some lighting up the bow towards the command deck and shining out of the holds and about 10 or 12 PAR lights raking the side of the ship looking down, putting kicks into the water so we could see the stuntman rappel down the huge ship, cross in front of the windows and then go into the water.

“The camera work was interesting and challenging for Duane Manwiller and Mike Weldon, who are incredible at what they do,” he adds as he takes one last look at the upper deck. “We had the camera on a Technocrane flying across the top deck. The first part of the shot catches the secu-

rity personnel through the porthole. As the camera swings out towards the water, the 21mm lens sees the whole ship from a three-quarter high angle and the thief getting away, rappelling into the water.

“For the shots of Pierce walking across the upper deck at night, where he stops to make radio contact with his partners, we used existing light (fluorescents). When he stops in close up, we use just a little cross light on his face to get his features from a Diva light and added a little eyelight with a Kino Flo on a dimmer for his eyes.”

Spinotti moves into the magnificent interior lower deck and looks around, thoughtfully. “It is so beautiful, we didn’t want to mess with the lighting,” he says as he points to the multi-level interior heart of the ship that features three bright transparent elevators in a dark vertical tunnel.

“In this sequence, Pierce (as Max) and Salma (as Lola), come to see a jewel exhibition, without knowing that the other is there. They cross the heart of the ship, each other’s path, pretending not to see each other.

“It’s an interesting shot that reminds me of a French movie, Godard’s *Alphaville*,” he explains as he looks up several levels.

“Dante was really excited about doing this sequence,” says Manwiller as he joins Spinotti for one last look at the location. “This is my 15th picture with him. He loves to do huge set ups and is known for his beautiful supplemental lighting. He’s become one of the biggest fans of the digital intermediate, which he knew would play a big part in making this picture as beautiful as possible.”

“But here, he was even more excited about doing the sequence with available light, to retain the beauty of the location. He knew, as long as the sequence read well on the monitor, the DI would be there to help him make it look even better.

“He also decided to shoot with a relatively new tool that operators are really embracing,” Manwiller adds. “It’s the Hot Gears. The first day he began using it, we used the equipment on six out of the eight shots we were doing. We all love using the equipment because, unlike other heads, which can be a big deal to set up, the Hot Gears attaches to the camera quickly and is easy to manipulate without having to look through the camera.

“On this sequence, which involves several complicated moves, the equip-



According to operator Duane Manwiller, Spinotti loves to do huge set ups and is known for his beautiful supplemental lighting. “He’s become one of the biggest fans of the digital intermediate, which he knew would play a big part in making this picture as beautiful as possible,” says Manwiller, who has done fifteen movies with Spinotti.

ment was perfect. I could be out of the way of the actors and assistant Mike Weldon as he pulled focus, but still manipulate the camera through a series of complicated moves.”

“We started with the camera, which is positioned on a dolly (operated by Mark Meyers) on a platform at the stairway, tilting way up to see the three beautiful elevators that are lit with a blue/green fluorescent from the top,” Spinotti explains. “As the elevator comes down, Pierce looks away. The camera then tilts down and we see the back of Salma’s head, as she faces toward the elevator. The camera then frames her as she turns toward the camera, walks across the lobby and up a set of stairs.

“We had the camera on a sheet of plywood so that we could dolly away from her extremely quickly, beginning on the elevators and tilting down to a close up on a 40mm lens, seeing her hiding her face with her chin down. We then follow her up the stairs into the gem exhibition, seeing her walk down the hallway.”

“That meant we started with the camera straight up, fully boomed, followed the center elevator down to straight on Pierce and then to Salma, racking focus as she walks by the camera to a 180,” Manwiller explains. “If I had been operating off a monitor or through an eyepiece, I would have had to jump over the dolly and around to the side of the camera. But, with Hot Gears, the two motors take the place of the operator and I could be in a comfortable position, out of the way.

photos by Glen Wilson





Spinotti moves into a magnificent interior lower deck and looks around, thoughtfully. "It is so beautiful, we didn't want to mess with the lighting," he says as he points to the multi-level interior heart of the ship that features three bright transparent elevators in a dark vertical tunnel.

ate allowed us to make these shots quickly on the real location," he says, confidently. "This was a key sequence, but we had many more elements to capture. I loved the idea of the real existing light. We could maintain our schedule.

"If we had lit them, it would have been a major rigging effort to correct the matching lighting. A major rigging effort. A lot of changing out and pre-rigging.

"But, with these tools, all I cared about was getting the information we needed the way we needed it. I knew that we could fine-tune it later.

"We were able to make things easier, speed through the shooting process, and get some wonderfully exciting beauty shots and a lot of story information in the four short nights we had a real luxury liner as our home and location.

"I hope that studios will understand the value of allowing directors and cinematographers to use this process," he adds. "For us, the perspective of having the digital world saved a lot of labor intensive time during production." ●

"Of course, there is the good and bad attached to using this equipment," Man-willer adds, candidly. "In the reveal of Salma's face, we had to be super tight. It's hard on an assistant, but," he shares a look with Spinotti, "we know Mike Weldon, one of the best career first assistants in the business can do the impossible. He nailed it, as expected!"

Spinotti nods, then looks down to the floor of the location. "The only 'lighting,' if you could call it that was a layer of bleached muslin on the floor under and around the camera," he explains. "It was not really for lighting, but to give her face a little bounce fill. Probably six stops from the elevator to her face.

"The 5218 and the digital intermedi-

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