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JENNIFER WOLFE

UNMISTAKABLY WES ANDERSON

The Director Translates His Sensibility to A Car Campaign



Earlier this year, filmmaker Wes Anderson brought his trademark visual style to the small screen, directing a pair of television commercials for Hyundai Motor Group that aired during the live broadcast of the 84th Academy Awards ceremony. Clearly aimed at film-going audiences, the 30-second spots “Talk to My Car” and “Modern Life” feature Anderson’s typical quirkiness, filled with what *The New Yorker* called “a magnificent meta-ness” of adventure fantasy blended with pop culture iconography and dandyish accoutrement.

Many high-profile feature filmmakers occasionally direct commercials (witness Federico Fellini, Ingmar Bergman and Jean-Luc Godard), but few put their own stamp on them quite so boldly as Wes Anderson has. “Talk to My Car” is



an homage to beloved films of the past, while “Modern Life” includes signature Anderson moves such as the 90-degree whip pan, the tracking shot and the cutaway set, as well as the exquisitely curated clutter that serves as a constant element of Anderson’s visual style.

Anderson worked with production company Moxie to create the cinematic ads, which utilize a combination of 35mm, digital and stock footage. Venice, Calif.-based post house Public VFX, which collaborates regularly with such notable directors as Lance Accord, Stacy Wall, Tim Godsall, directorial duo Dayton/Faris and Todd Cole, was brought on board to handle visual effects, including preproduction planning, effects supervision and greenscreen compositing.

Public creative director Tony Smoller collaborated closely with Anderson both on set and off, while Public lead Autodesk Flame artist James Allen provided on-set VFX supervision. “Everyone involved, especially Wes, was interested in making the film and ARRI Alexa footage work seamlessly side by side,” says Public executive producer Kim Nagel Christensen. “It’s a challenge that comes up again and again in the commercial world.”

Live-action footage for the commercials was acquired entirely with the Alexa over the course of a four-day shoot, with stop-motion and go-motion plates shot with a 35mm camera and still images captured with a Canon EOS 5D. “There was going to be a lot of color correction and keying, so we wanted to shoot with a camera that would give us as much raw data as possible,” Allen explains. “Over the past year or so the majority of the work we’ve done has used the Alexa, and it performs very well. When we shoot raw files, it gives us everything a film camera could give us.”

The Canon 5D proved the ideal tool for capturing still images, providing more than enough resolution for Allen to work with during compositing. “In terms of cinematic qualities, the 5D is a great starting point,” Smoller comments. “It shoots extremely high-res stills and captures an enormous amount of data, which allows an artist like James, using a tool like Flame, to make a digital image look more cinematic by adding film grain, depth of field and other anomalies that are more consistent with 35mm film.”

“As long as the elements you need are just a single frame, the 5D is perfect for that sort of thing,” adds Allen. “It served its purpose for being quick, easy and inexpensive to use. While Wes was busy filming the main part of the commercial, we were



“Talk to My Car”

able to stay on the sidelines and shoot the elements that we needed.”

Stitching together the various elements for the two commercials, including stock footage for sky and background replacements, became Allen’s main task. “We had a two-week schedule, so the timetable was very much compressed,” he relates. “We had a number of people working on it, including two additional Flame artists.”

For the *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* sequence in “Talk to My Car,” Allen and his team took the live-action foreground elements shot on the Alexa and composited them into the 35mm stop-motion plates of the car with flying wings and whirling propellers against the stock footage backgrounds. “It’s all about giving it that film quality, adding grain and vignette and depth of field,” Allen says. “We’re trying to bring these totally separate

elements together to make it look like they have been shot at the same time.”

“What we did was marry an analog sensibility over the top of a digital foundation,” Smoller adds. “There was a lot of scrutiny based on creating and capturing the look. The agency assembled a wealth of reference material for us to go through and analyze, and that certainly helped get to the final goal.”

Smoller describes the process as one of generally degrading the footage from the Alexa. “Everything shot by the Alexa is beautifully in focus and sharp, and when you look at this old footage, there are anomalies and it’s off and blown out, with color temperatures and hues that sort of tell you when it was shot. It becomes all about matching the reference material to give it that same feel.” **dv**