

THE MINDY PROJECT

Making A Modern-Day Rom-Com

The *Mindy Project*, a biting single-camera comedy from writer/producer Mindy Kaling (*The Office*), follows Dr. Mindy Lahiri, a woman who manages a successful career as an OB/GYN while she undermines her personal life with unrealistic expectations fueled by romantic comedies.

The scrappy new series, which stars Kaling alongside cast members Chris Messina, Ed Weeks, Anna Camp, Zoe Jarman, Amanda Setton, Stephen Tobolowsky and Ike Barinholtz, premiered on FOX in September. Created, written and executive produced by Kaling, the show is produced by 3 Arts Entertainment and Universal Television, and executive produced by Howard Klein (*The Office*, *Parks and Recreation*), Matt Warburton (*The Simpsons*) and series director Michael Spiller (*Modern Family*, *Scrubs*).

Director of photography Marco Fargnoli (*Childrens Hospital*, *NTSF:SD:SUV*) arrived at *The Mindy Project* following the completion of the series pilot, which was shot by cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond, ASC. "It was an incredible thrill to come into something he had started," Fargnoli says.

Shot with ARRI Alexa digital cameras employing a combination of Panavision's new lightweight 19-90mm and 7-200mm zoom lenses with an older Panavision 11:1 lens for close-ups, *The Mindy Project* has the heightened look of classic romantic comedy grounded by the day-lit scenes inside the clinic where Mindy works.

"The Alexa is the strongest choice

out there. It was the first camera for me that delivered on the promise of what a digital camera could be, and it's just the best all-around choice for the type of show that we're doing. Under the constraints of shooting a TV show these days, there's no other digital format that really touches it," Fargnoli comments, citing the camera's dynamic range and color reproduction.

"The Alexa does a great job rendering skin tones, which is really the Achilles' heel of video," he continues. "It still can't hold a candle to film, but for the first time you don't have that fear of putting a leading lady into a big HD close-up—you don't have to worry that it won't come out looking great."

From the beginning there was a mandate from Spiller, who has a background as a DP on NY shows such as *Sex and the City*, to embrace newer technologies. "Michael insisted that we needed to bring newer technology into the mix to be more environmentally friendly, or faster and more efficient," Fargnoli emphasizes. "It was like, if we're starting a new show from scratch in this day and age, we should look to be doing anything that we can differently."

Almost immediately the production team began looking at alternative lighting solutions. "We knew we would be shooting in the heat of summer on stages with big translites, and we had a definite desire to keep the actors cool and comfortable. The last thing we wanted was to plow through a lot of translite lighting with giant sky cams with big tungsten heads," says Fargnoli.

"The first decision we made was to



Mindy (Mindy Kaling) is a skilled OB/GYN navigating the tricky waters of both her personal and professional life in *The Mindy Project*.



Danny (Chris Messina) and Mindy watch a romantic comedy together.



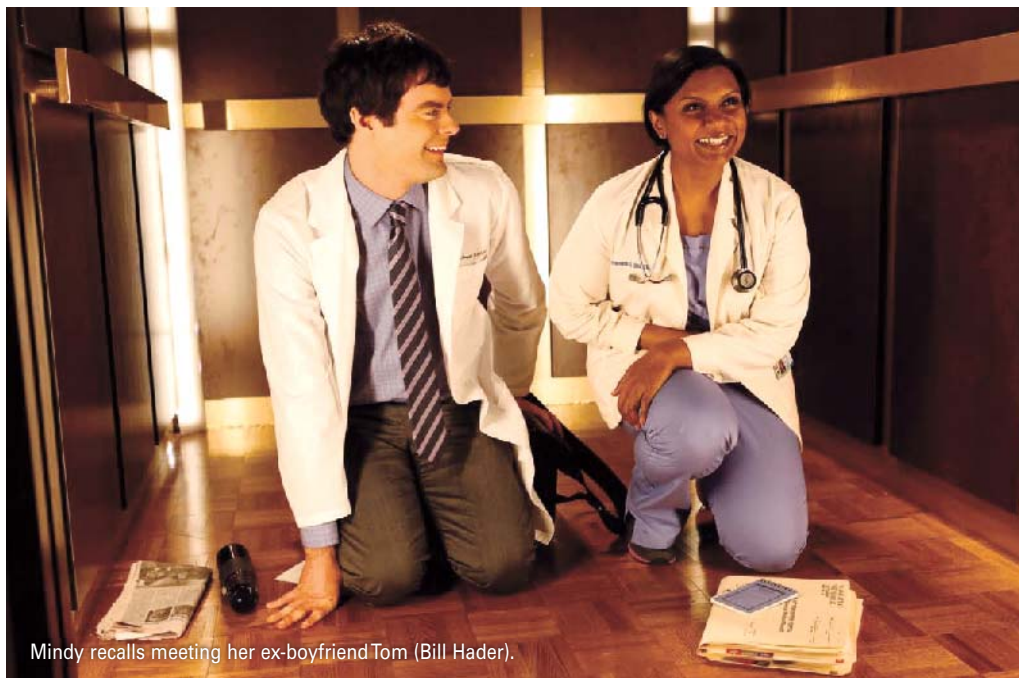
Jeremy (Ed Weeks, center) and Danny discuss dating with Mindy.



Mindy and Danny interview nurse candidates.



Mindy gives a toast at her ex-boyfriend's wedding.



Mindy recalls meeting her ex-boyfriend Tom (Bill Hader).

go daylight-balanced on our main clinic set. To help achieve that, we employed a lot of fluorescent and LED solutions for translite lighting, which was a completely new experience for me,” Fargnoli details. “We found a great friend in Lumapanel. Our skylight, for instance, is a combination of LED Lumapanel and Mac Tech LED translite lighting.”

One of the biggest challenges Fargnoli and his crew face is maintaining the slightly heightened romantic comedy look of the show while allowing for the improvisational style of comedy that is the

“The Alexa does a great job rendering skin tones, which is really the Achilles’ heel of video.”

—Marco Fargnoli, director of photography, *The Mindy Project*

strength of many of the actors. “Trying to keep everyone looking great—making the lighting really nice and really pretty but with enough flexibility that you can cross-cover two actors who are improvising through a lot of the dialogue without them having to hit specific marks—was probably the most challenging and the most fun,” he says.

Fargnoli credits his experience shooting series for Adult Swim with providing many of the techniques he and his crew deploy on *The Mindy Project*. “I was able to bring my whole crew with me, and it’s been really great to keep familiar faces around and have that shorthand,” he says. “*Childrens Hospital* was a show pretending to be *Grey’s Anatomy*—which is about 70 percent of this show—and *NTSF* is primarily a location show, which is the other 30 percent. The most useful thing from *Childrens* has been the hospital and clinic lighting, while what has carried over from *NTSF* is the ability to very rapidly create locations from scratch.”

With the show set in New York, the production team strives for a NYC vibe. “We keep trying to discover these little pockets of New York here in Los Angeles,” Fargnoli says. “It would be really great if no one ever figured out we were shooting in L.A.” **dv**