



Newlyweds Brady (Sean Hemeon, left) and Cheeks (Brad Bell) navigate the challenges of cohabitation in the second season of the Web series *Husbands*, shot by Benjamin Kantor.

## Honeymoon Hangover

By Jennifer Wolfe

Directed by Jeff Greenstein and shot by Benjamin Kantor, the lauded comedic Web series *Husbands* explores the relationship between Brady (Sean Hemeon), a major-league baseball player who has recently come out of the closet, and celebrity personality Cheeks (Brad Bell). The men married in Las Vegas after overindulging, and the show gleams much of its comedy from their marital woe.

Kantor captured the first season of the series with handheld Canon EOS Rebel T2i cameras, creating visuals that often mirrored the instability of the new couple's relationship. A successful Kickstarter campaign led to a higher budget for season two, allowing the production to upgrade to Red Scarlet and Epic cameras and Steadicam rigs, but Kantor says he still appreciates the usefulness of the Canon T2i. "It's a good camera for a cinematographer to have on hand. I use it as a viewfinder on set, and it gives me a tremendous advantage. With a traditional viewfinder, you can find yourself curled up in a corner, looking at the perfect shot and trying to describe it to the director. With the Canon, you can take a still or video and actually show them."

The T2i also proved invaluable during rehearsals, when Kantor used it to record shots that could then be handed off to the

Steadicam operators as references. "It allowed a level of specificity that made the whole set run more efficiently," he says. The production also used the camera during prep. "Before production started, we ran through all the scenes in the house with the cast, and I shot stills of all the potential setups. Those were then used to create our storyboards and shot lists."

Upon switching to Red cameras, Kantor shot the show with Red 18-50mm and 50-150mm zoom lenses. "We almost always ran two cameras, each with a different lens," he says. He and Greenstein originally planned to use one Steadicam rig and a dolly, but when they saw the location, a three-story house in Los Angeles, they realized the dolly would be impractical. Throughout the shoot, Kantor kept the A-camera and B-camera designations fluid, switching the tasks between Steadicam operators Jason Goebel and Niels Lindelen as the production day advanced.

The location and the five-day production schedule forced other choices as well. "Early on, I made the decision not to use a generator or tie-in," Kantor says. "We needed to be able to move quickly, and having to move large units and heavy cables into a three-story house built into the side of a hill would have been a nightmare."

The cinematographer used Arri 1.8K HMI Pars for hero-lighting setups, supplementing with 1.2K HMIs and a variety of

Joker HMIs in different strengths. "The Arri lights have as much output as a normal 4K HMI," he observes. "The show's action takes place mostly during the day, with soft natural light coming through windows, so there weren't many scenes where we didn't use them as a key light. It worked out really well, but we got off to a rough start because the wiring in the house wasn't completely reliable. Our gaffer, Justin Kemper, figured out which circuits were stable and wired up all the different areas of the house so we could shoot anywhere we wanted without any hassles."

Kantor also made regular use of Rosco LED LitePads. "We used them almost everywhere. They're the only LED lights we found that were small enough and light enough to tape to a ceiling or a wall without any rigging."

Kantor says Janusz Kaminski's cinematography served as an inspiration for the look of season two. "He always does something really interesting visually to subtly underscore the arc of the story. Take *Funny People*, for example. On one level, it's a high-key comedy, but it also has these moments of complete despair, so he created a baseline comedic look and then diverged from it in order to make an emotional point in a really intelligent way."

Describing the baseline look of *Husbands*, Kantor says, "Season one offered a trajectory from multihued, saturated lighting — I would almost call it contaminated — to a more singular, almost enveloping light. The first season ended with a key scene that featured bright light coming in from a window. It's a very contrasty yet beautiful light, so bright that their faces are almost blown out. What we're saying with that look at the end of season one is that this is where their relationship is headed. In season two, that look became our baseline.

"It's a classic comedy setup wherein both characters are trying to achieve different things. Each tries to put on a different show for the live-TV crew interviewing him, but by the end of the second season, each realizes what the other is doing, and they make up on national TV. By that final interview, we end up back at our baseline look. There's a bit of an arc, but it's subtle.

"If this were a feature, the differ-



**Top:** A-camera/Steadicam operator Jason Goebel frames a shot of Hemeon and guest star Jon Cryer as 1st AC Heather Roe keeps the action in focus. **Middle:** The crew shoots an exterior interview with the famous couple. **Bottom:** Script supervisor Jess Kraby (far left) and series creator/writer/executive producer Jane Espenson (seated) confer with Kantor (center) and director Jeff Greenstein.



ences between the two looks could be extreme, because you typically have more time and liberty to make stronger visual points," he continues. "But with *Husbands*, we're referencing television. You can have a progression of looks, but they can't be too extreme; they have to stay within the same bubble so it looks like the same show week to week."

Regarding camera movement, Kantor says, "We always tried to cover the scene in some kind of moving master, but sometimes what would begin as a moving master ended up as something else. Jeff really liked the idea of doing scenes in passes, with maybe one camera getting a moving master and the other getting a certain piece of coverage; that would be

our entire side of that scene. When we turned around, we would have one camera doing the matching piece of coverage and the other camera getting something else."

Greenstein tried to avoid breaking up a scene even if it involved complicated blocking. "Jeff liked big, fluid moves," Kantor recalls. "Some of the tense moments on set were when I told him we'd have to break it up a little in order to make it work, like if we needed to be inside a wall or something. We'd work together to figure out the best way to keep it as fluid as possible while still getting all the pieces we needed."

The production recorded 4K R3D files to SSD cards, and Kantor worked closely with digital-imaging technician Drew Moe on set. In addition to securing all the production's footage, Moe was responsible for creating dailies of select takes. Using an Elgato Turbo .264 HD hardware video encoder to compress footage, he loaded circle takes onto a purpose-built GoFlex hard drive attached to a wireless router. These takes could then be reviewed on any iPad or other mobile device within range possessing the URL and login credentials.

Noting that low-budget productions often require crewmembers to fill many different roles, Kantor stresses the importance of creating good reference materials, such as the stills he took with his DSLR. "Everyone is pulled in so many different directions on a low-budget shoot, and having a strong visual reference eliminates ambiguity. You can turn to the art department and show them precisely what you're doing. You can turn to the gaffer and say, 'This is the frame, so let's talk about where to move the lights.' On a more traditional set, you often have time to put the camera in place before you start to show people what you're going to do. With small budgets, a lot of things happen at a much faster pace."

## TECHNICAL SPECS

- 1.78:1
- Digital Capture
- Red Scarlet, Epic
- Red lenses

