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**OUTLANDER**  
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A man in a brown suit and hat stands next to a vintage car in a field. The car is a dark color with a red interior. The man is looking towards the right. The background is a grassy field with a stone building in the distance.

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# CASTLES, CANDLELIGHT & DIGITAL CINEMATOGRAPHY

The Reality of Producing the Fantasy Series *Outlander*

BY JENNIFER WOLFE

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Tobias Menzies as Frank Randall and Caitriona Balfe as Claire Randall in 1945



Starz' new original series *Outlander*, adapted from the hit time travel books by Diana Gabaldon and headed up by *Battlestar Galactica* showrunner Ronald D. Moore, had its debut in August, inevitably drawing comparisons to HBO's long-running fantasy epic *Game of Thrones*.

Shot on location in the Scottish Highlands, the lushly photographed *Outlander* follows Claire (Caitriona Balfe), a married British combat nurse from 1945 who mysteriously falls back in time to 1743 Scotland, where she is torn between her husband, Frank Randall (Tobias Menzies), and Jamie Fraser (Sam Heughan), a Scottish warrior who comes to her rescue. Featuring gorgeous scenery and an equally appealing cast, the show delivers beautiful interludes set alongside military intrigue and visceral action sequences.

Cinematographer Neville Kidd shot eight installments of the first season's 16 episodes—the season is split into two runs; the second half will air in early 2015—using up to three ARRI Alexa Plus cameras outfitted with Cooke prime and ARRI/Fujinon Alura zoom lenses.

"We chose the Alexa because of its phenomenal filmmaking look for digital cinematography," Kidd explains. "The Alexa has a fantastic latitude and sensitivity, which helps us when filming in low-light conditions."

The production team developed separate looks—daytime, nighttime, interior and exterior—



When Claire Randall, a married combat nurse from 1945, is swept back in time to 1743, Jamie Fraser is forced to marry her to save her life.



At a banquet in 1743, Colum MacKenzie (Gary Lewis), Claire Randall (Caitriona Balfe) and Dougal MacKenzie (Graham MacTavish)



for the two time periods using custom LUTs created with the input of DIT Grant McPhee. The looks were applied to the footage during color correction. “We made 1945 slightly desaturated—the opposite of what you would think—and we made 1743 more saturated, kind of a richer experience than 1945,” Kidd says. “I think we wanted to make 1743 a bit rawer than 1945, like you were really living and experiencing it, almost like all of your senses were slightly overstimulated.”

Capturing 2K footage shot at 4:4:4 resolution in ProRes format, Kidd and his team strived for an immersive level of authenticity, whether inside a real Scottish castle, out in the countryside or on a local soundstage.

“We wanted the overall look of the show to feel like you are living this Scottish experience,” the

Scotland native says. “It was important, as a DoP, to make viewers feel like they are in the castle that the characters are in, to make them feel they are in 1743 Scotland.”

The logistics of filming inside a castle presented a unique challenge. “The main thing was making everything fit,” Kidd relates. “When we’re filming inside the real castle, we’re limited by real 15th century architecture. You can’t move the walls—they’re 6 feet thick—and you can’t change a door that’s only 5 feet tall. Or you want to bring horses through the gateway that’s too small. So we’d have to be clever in the way we filmed things. We’d have to work around the architecture.”

For lighting, Kidd relied on a combination of candlelight and flickering LED lights. “We used a lot of real flame, but obviously you can’t get real flame



too close to the actresses, so we developed other light to mimic flame and fire,” Kidd says, adding that one of his trademark touches is to ensure that not all the candles are lit. “Scottish castles are kind of drafty places; some of the candles would have been blown out, or perhaps not all of them would have been lit, so I always made sure that a few candles weren’t lit to make it feel authentic. I would give the art department a percentage of candles to keep lit. If it’s 100 percent of the candles, sometimes it seems too much like a studio show.”

To meet the challenge of matching a studio set with the look and feel of a Scottish castle, Kidd frequently employed a Steadicam. “A lot of times when we would do shots with a character going from one part of the castle to another—from the Great Hall into a corridor, through the storeroom and into the kitchen—the camera would follow them all around so you would get a feel for castle life,” he recounts. “So we’re mainly using Steadicam, showing a 360 view of the castle. And I was quite keen to employ this kind of method to keep it authentic. So you enjoyed seeing the castle as you would have seen it in 1743. And when you’re seeing it from all directions, it takes away from any studio set.”

Kidd also sought to bring the Scottish environment into the castle through lighting. “We plan things out to keep as much realism as possible. When we had an exterior scene and were going straight into the studio, the castle interior, it was important to match the daylight from one scene to the next so it felt like Scotland, not like a studio shoot,” Kidd says. “As storytellers, you really try not to pop the bubble.” **dv**