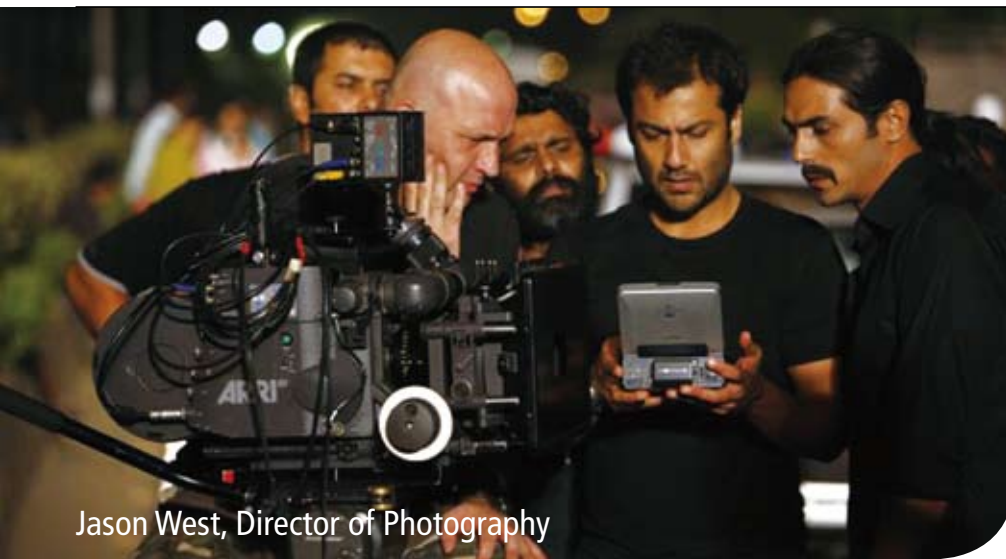


“Film is the best imaging medium”

Jason West was born in Australia, brought up in the UK, and started his career in Africa. He married pop star Suneeta Rao in India, and now works in different cities around the globe.

India



Jason West, Director of Photography

Which was your first film?

It was called *Rock On!**

How do you choose your work?

I suppose I select the script pretty much depending on whether I like the story or get an opportunity to do some nice visuals. I would like to have an opportunity to shoot in Antarctica, but if the story is good enough I wouldn't even mind shooting in somebody's backyard.

In the lighting stage, how do you start?

I always make it as simple as possible, with no complications. Basically, I try to indicate a mood connected to the time of the day.

Do you believe in the natural, realistic kind of lighting?

It depends. I don't like to light up the star's face so that there is no shadow. I don't mind if 50-25% or even more than 50% of their face is in the dark, depending on the situation. Sometimes in an ad you may fill it in nicely or do some stylistic lighting.

How do you select a particular photographic emulsion or brand?

Well, sometimes it depends on how much control I have over the lighting or physically how much light I can fit in to the location.

Which is your favorite film stock?

My favorite stock at the moment is the ETERNA Vivid 160 tungsten film, but I also like ETERNA 500. Vivid 160 suits me well with its speed, saturation and good contrast.

Are you equally versatile in Video/ Digital?

I haven't done much in video, but film is the best imaging medium. I tested Red and Viper, and there was nothing in the highlights, though it is adequate for certain work. When the situation comes I can easily switch over.

Which contemporary cameramen do you like or admire?

I like Darius Khondji and Roger Deakins, the cameraman of *No Country for Old Men*. In India, I like Ashok Mehta and Anil Mehta.

Do you find any difference in the film-making styles in the East and West?

Intrinsically, both are same, to be honest. The same types of cameras and lights are used on both sides. The gap between the two worlds is narrowing. The Western Gaffer system is already here. My Gaffer, Rishi, and his team work professionally and fast. I have one assistant, Murzy, who helps me in coordinating things before the shoot without any language barriers. Like in the West, I have a professional focus puller.

Do you operate the camera yourself?

Yes. That has an added advantage in composing, balancing and then moving the camera with a certain rhythm and pace.

How is the DI quality in India?

I have worked with Pixion**, who have state-of-the-art equipment like anywhere else in the world. DI helps to correct the varying skin tones to have a contemporary or consistent look. You can't do that in the traditional way. The other thing I use it for is adding some details in a barren sky when the script demands.

Have you become used to the harsh light of this tropical region?

Actually, Mumbai is a very difficult place to shoot because the light here is very bad. The place in India where I got the best light was in Ladakh, where the sun is always at an angle throughout the day. Here in Mumbai you get only a few hours in the morning and in the evening, but that's nature. ■

* The Best Cinematography Award was awarded to Jason West for *Rock On!* at the 54th Filmfare Awards in Mumbai on February 28, 2009.

** Pixion is a leader in design, production, post-production and technology services for film and television in India. Please refer to the article on page 12-13 in *EXPOSURE International* Vol. 15.