

“For me, for color it was Fujifilm stock”

Interview with
Jean-Louis Bompont
Director of Photography



Internationally known Director of Photography Jean-Louis Bompont travels from country to country according to collaborations which are proposed to him. His talents are as well appreciated in advertising and video shooting as in long feature films. When Sallie Aprahamian, the English Director, organized her team for the production of *Broken Lines*, she asked him to join her. They decided to shoot on F-64D, ETERNA 250D, ETERNA 500 and ETERNA Vivid 160 for both an artistic and aesthetic result.



How did you decide to work together?

The Director, Sallie Aprahamian, and the Producer, Douglas Cummins, had seen *The Science of Sleep* by Michel Gondry, and then they saw the Paul McCartney video, also shot by Michel Gondry. On both movies, I was Director of Photography, and they appreciated my style. And it just so happened that Douglas knew my American agent. He called him in June 2007 and sent him the scenario of *There for Me* (the early title of *Broken Lines*). I found it a bit austere, but I received a note from the Director, a very kind person, who told me “I’d like to shoot the film in Cinemascope.” I had never filmed in Cinemascope and I found the idea very exciting. I was ready to go to London. The budget of the movie was not so huge; hardly two million dollars.

I was very well welcomed by the production, which allocated me a superb apartment in the Portobello district. The wages were not so good, but

the Producer did everything he could to make my stay pleasant and I thank him for that. We started making preparatory meetings. Considering the budget, the Producer told us that the film could not be done in Cinemascope but rather in 1:85.

What was your reaction?

I told them there might be a solution. I had heard that in France, an assistant cameraman had managed to fiddle with a system, allowing him to make Cinemascope in S16mm and to blow it up to 35mm. I went to Paris to meet him, and I came back to London with all this equipment that he had lent me to begin the tests. Once developed, the optical adjustment was not perfect. We were obtaining focusing errors and vignetting. I told Sallie that I couldn’t commit myself to doing it.

Then my English assistant told me about Joe, an American established in London, who had been tinkering with S16mm optics to make Cinemascope. After having met him, for the second time we started tests in black and white and in color from both Kodak and Fujifilm stocks. Fujifilm stock carried the day! Between the shooting and the intermediate film, I tried all configurations using Kodak and Fujifilm. For me, for color it was Fujifilm stock.

What were the reasons that justified your choice for Fujifilm products?

The fine grain, high definition of colors, and perfect contrast. And the optics arranged by Joe were wonderful and perfectly adjusted. Both the Producer and the Director were delighted, and Joe offered us absolutely unbeatable prices. While watching the tests, the distributor definitively refused black & white.

How did you firmly make your artistic choice, in particular on lighting?

When I asked the Director, “What do you want for the lighting?” she answered, “There are plenty of talented DOPs here in England. If I asked you to

come over from France to make my movie it’s because I want you to go ahead and do as you please! Have fun!”

What was your feeling once the movie was over?

We shot when the weather was nice outside with F-64D stock. We mainly used ETERNA 250D for both the inside and outside scenes. For night scenes, I used ETERNA 500, which I was the first to use in *The Science of Sleep*. And it just happened that representatives from Fujifilm UK came to see us while we were shooting, and gave us a 400 feet roll of the new emulsion, the ETERNA Vivid160 tungsten film stock. I used it on night scene, on a beach, with a light balancing filter 85B, and was astonished by the quality.

During all the shooting, I was happy with the results, because we were shooting in negative Super 16. Negative film was converted to telecine, which was done according to my wishes. I have a particular way to work; for each shot, I start by shooting a color chart (“Lily”), and I ask that, either for telecine or for printing, the grader does not take any personal initiative, considering that I know my job. After the first day of shooting, I found that I had not been listened to, so I went to the lab, furious, supported by the Producer, and I told them, “I’m the boss! Just follow my color chart, and that’s all!”

Eventually, once the film was assembled, we had to proceed to blow it up to 35mm through an intermediate film, and then to print a positive. That was not so easy. Because of aggressive competition and in spite of a specific purchase order, the intermediate film had not been done on Fujifilm. The producer supported me again, and we won the case; if we had not, we would have lost 20% on the final quality of the image.

Regarding creativity, did you have all the freedom you wished on *Broken Lines*?

I had 800% creativity! And the atmosphere was really excellent during all the shooting.

In *Broken Lines*, we have the feeling that you attached particular care and a particularly strong artistic key to the framing, with a “poster” effect which we can find in many scenes. Compared to the austerity of the scenario, it even seems that this work saves the movie.

But that’s the reason why people choose me. Sometimes they nicely call me a “dinosaur”, by claiming that I am a maniac. But we cannot make things by half. It’s much to Sallie’s credit. She co-wrote her scenario with Doraly Rosa and Dan Fredenburgh, and fully achieved her film. She didn’t work randomly. When

she hired her Director of Photography, she also knew what she wanted. You don’t make a movie by yourself. Sallie and Douglas managed to bring together a sensational team. Lastly, my Director relied on me and by doing this, she inspired me.

In the first half part of the movie, the main character, Jake, is in an awkward situation and he is lighted in the same way, always between blue and orange lights. Was this a personal suggestion you made to the production or the result of a dialogue?

I first suggested it to the production and I asked her what she thought about it. I knew the story. I was there to serve the scenario and what I proposed there was just my job.

How long have you been using Fujifilm products?

At the end of the 70’s, Fujifilm negative film stocks were rather bad. It was an unstable emulsion, not so certain. And then I saw a movie in 1985, the long feature film *Flagrant désir* (by Claude Faraldo) shot in south-eastern France. The credits mentioned “Fujifilm stock” and the images were fantastic! That’s the way I started shooting on Fujifilm stock, with Michel Gondry, besides. We were delighted with the results. The trade relations were also excellent, and Fujifilm carried on already permanently, continuing the research on its silver-halide products. Now, I use Fujifilm stock for almost all my shootings. For whenever I need something, wherever I am in the world I just call: “Allo Fujifilm? Jean-Louis Bompont speaking. I need this and that.” ■

