

Range of formats is the right choice for hip hop clip

For the latest DJ Khaled music video, director David Rousseau and cinematographer John Babl chose to create images in a variety of formats including Super 8, Super 16 and 35mm. That decision allowed them to efficiently capture impromptu street scenes out of car windows, moody interiors in an abandoned house lit only by flaming wads of newspaper, and edgy shots of rappers using nonstandard shutter angles and handcranking for eye-catching cameo portraits.

The music video features hip hop artists Pitbull and Casely. The visual idea was to portray the authenticity of the neighborhoods where Pitbull and his friends grew up. The images are interspersed with film of other artists associated with south Florida.

For the street scenes, the filmmakers drove around Dade County and aimed the camera at picturesque street scenes with the right feeling. Babl used his personal Super 16 Aaton camera, and kept magazines loaded with a variety of film stocks on the seat next to him, changing magazines as night fell.

"We shot guerrilla-style and depended on the film to gracefully handle all lighting situations," Babl says. "We also did some time lapse of an outdoor basketball game using the intervalometer on the camera."

Babl owns a rebuilt, pin-registered 35mm Mitchell/Fries camera with a pellicle reflex viewing system. He can take out the motor assembly by removing four screws, and uses a hand crank to drive film through the camera to create interesting speed effects and unusual strobing in the exposure.

"There were a lot of cameos in this clip - portrait-type shots with various hip hop artists just grooving in front of the camera," he says. "We used the Mitchell to keep things visually engaging. At night, we sometimes augmented existing light with one or two Litepanels 1x1™ lights."

For some of the portraits, Babl used a 45 or 22-degree shutter angle and KODAK VISION2 500T 5260 film, an emulsion that combines the rich color reproduction and contrast of Kodak's VISION family with the grain and latitude characteristics of VISION2 film technology. He also used the 5260 for a scene in an abandoned crack house designed to show the darker aspects of life in Dade County. The house where they filmed was not a set; it was an abandoned house, complete with squatters.

"There was no electricity, and it was the end of the day, so there wasn't much natural light," Babl says. "We took a chance. If you burn a wadded-up ball of newspaper, it will give you a few seconds to capture flickering, faint images of a figure skulking around the house, casting weird shadows and silhouettes. We got some pretty interesting images."



The images were transferred at Continental Film Lab in Miami, where Babl has had a warm relationship with Nestor Garcia since he was in film school. The colorist was John Palmisano.

Babl, who was born in Brazil and lives in Miami, is always looking for new challenges. "I can't wait to shoot a feature film in 2-perf format," he says. "I love the widescreen frame, and 2-perf can save the production a lot of money. Advancements in film technology and in the post workflow are making film even stronger."

"With film, you can go from unbelievably clean and pristine, like images shot on (KODAK VISION3 500T) 5219 film, to crazy images with twisted color schemes, if that's what works for your project," he says. "You can shoot at night under nothing but streetlamps, and get beautiful results. Film handles highlights and sees in the dark where you really need it. Digital is trying to replicate what film can already do. It's a facsimile. But there is no substitute for film."

Key Data at a glance

Director	David Rousseau
Cinematographer	John Babl
Cameras/Lenses	Super 16 Aaton, 35mm Mitchell/Fries
Formats	Super 8, Super 16 and 35mm
Film stock	KODAK VISION2 500T 5260 film
Image transfer	Continental Film Lab, Miami
Colorist	John Palmisano

1 John Babl shot DJ Khaled's new music video *Defend Dade*, featuring Pitbull and Casely. (Photos by John Babl)