

{ first look }



POLLY MORGAN

by **Valentina I. Valentini** photo by **Nicola Goode**

Cinematographer Polly Morgan knows it's a luxury to have access to so many of the new technologies flooding the cinema tech market. In the last few months she's used the Blackmagic Design Cinema camera and the just-introduced (at NAB 2013) MōVI remote camera system, and has lit sets with ARRI's LED Fresnels.

"Everything's pushing [cinematographers] toward sharper and more polished imagery, but maybe there's something we're missing," Morgan ponders. "Something more poetic, softer, prettier, like the images we grew up with."

To support that notion, Morgan likes to pair new - and old- school technology, explaining that, "with higher resolution cameras you lose the organic quality that film grain and older lenses produced." Like on *The Pretty One*, where Morgan paired the ALEXA with Bausch and Lomb Super Baltar lenses created back in the 1950s for a warm and vintage feel. At the other end of the spectrum was a Bollywood production, *Ghanchakkar*, where Morgan used Master Primes with a 5K sensor to achieve a flawless image, saturated with detail. "The decision comes down to what best fits the story and the feeling the director wants the images

to convey," she shares.

New-school technology Morgan has embraced includes LED lights and remote camera systems that offer more choices with format and lenses. "These new generation s of LED lights are incredible," she exclaims. "They're available as Fresnels with focusing capabilities, plus and minus green adjustment, color and intensity control."

For her Sundance-lauded *Emanuel and the Truth About Fishes*, Morgan used ARRI's Caster LED series; she also consulted on the design for Rosco's New "Loop" ringlight used on *The Pretty One*. More recently, while filming additional photography for *American Horror Story* (shot on 35 mm), Morgan utilized the 1 × 1 Litepanel, where she says, "I light the space for the show's dramatic and moody atmosphere, and then help the actresses by filling them in quickly and controllably with the LED."

Her favorite new design is the MōVI - a remote three-access head co-designed by her Steadicam operator on *Emanuel*, Hugh Bell. "It does not replace the Steadicam," she cautions. "It is merely another option for creating dynamic moves, and one that is less restricted by tight budgets and schedules." On *Mobius*, the

film Morgan shot for Canon's C300 launch, the camera had to be rigged on different platforms "With the MōVI," she explains, "they took the technology behind their remote helicopter camera system, CineStar, and made it into a handheld rig that is fast and flexible."

Morgan remembers things being different when she came up through the ranks more than a decade ago. "It was a struggle to get films made and seen since there were no HD cameras, no Vimeo, no YouTube," she recalls. Her six years as a camera assistant were for many modern masters of cinematography: Harris Zambarloukos, BSC, Caleb Deschanel, ASC, and Wally Pfister, ASC. At their behest, she even attended AFI in 2008.

"When I was a PA," Morgan concludes, "someone said it would take 10 years to realize my dream of becoming a cinematographer. I was horrified as I was so hungry to shoot and I promised myself I would do it quicker. That was when I was 21, and I shot my first feature at 31! Looking back, I wouldn't change a thing. In those 10 years I learned from so many great cinematographers who helped shape the way I shoot today." 🍷