

Oscar Cinematography Survey: Here's the Cameras and Lenses Used To Shoot 35 Awards Contenders

The world's best cinematographers explain how they created the visual language of “Roma,” “A Star Is Born,” “Black Panther,” “Vice,” and more.

Chris O'Falt



Director of Photography Joe Anderson on the set of “The Old Man & the Gun”
Photo by Eric Zachanowich

Format: Super 16mm film cropped to 2.35:1 aspect ratio.

Camera: Arri 416.

Lens: Cooke S4s and 3 Canon zooms: 8-64mm, 6.6-66mm (which we called the devil zoom) and the 11.5-138mm.

Joe Anderson: I wanted the cinematography to be fun in “The Old Man & The Gun.” I wanted the camera to be light on its feet and unselfconscious.

Curious and expressive enough to whip and zoom around spontaneously. We chose to shoot on Super 16 because the film is set in the early 80s and Super 16 is the best time machine. But you have to be careful because sometimes the format can come off looking like your grandparents’ home movies. We wanted the movie to stand up well on the big screen, so I choose to shoot with a slower film stock. I shot with 200 speed film which I underexposed a bit. This created a lovely amount of grain while still having a solid high definition image.

The slower film stock and the story itself inspired a different lighting approach than we are accustomed to using today. Film seems to like having a little bit softer contrast than digital cameras do so I lit scenes more flatly and used more light than I typically do. This approach really made our cast look great and also served as a bit of a nod to the lighting style typical of the time when our movie was set.

I don’t necessarily love relying on crazy old lenses to create a look. I shot with Cooke S4s which are my favorite lenses. A lot of newer lenses use aspherical elements to cancel out distortion, but this creates unnaturally flat images. A big part of the cinematographer’s job is to create dimension and because of 16mm’s smaller field of view, separating a subject from the background can be difficult. The Cookes did a great job of helping to make our characters stand out and be larger than life.