

NEWTON THOMAS SIGEL, ASC
X-MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST

DION BEEBE, ASC, ACS
EDGE OF TOMORROW

NATASHA BRAIER, ADF
THE ROVER

American Cinematographer

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Short Takes

Co-producers/
directors Peter
J. Haas and Keif
Roberts utilized
the Digital
Bolex D16
camera to shoot
the short
documentary
*Peter Pan
Bakery*.



Tasty Treats That Never Get Old

By John Calhoun

Peter Pan Donut and Pastry Shop has been serving its eponymous handmade goodies — along with coffee, bagels, eggs and other diner fare — to residents of Greenpoint, Brooklyn for more than 60 years. Sprinkled among the longtime regulars at the shop's counters are younger artists like Peter J. Haas and Keif Roberts, who recently produced and co-directed the short documentary *Peter Pan Bakery*, shooting with a Digital Bolex D16 camera.

The filmmakers had been collaborating since they met several years ago in the camera department of Devour.tv, which programmed food content for the Web. "Very early on, we were able to get our hands on [a D16], and we thought we would like to shoot a documentary on it," says Haas. "We developed a good relationship with Joe Rubinstein and Elle Schneider at Digital Bolex, and they were interested in getting the camera to as many filmmakers as possible to put it through different styles of production. We got one of the first 100 cameras, and we were racking our brains thinking about what would make a [good] short film. Then we thought, 'Everyone loves doughnuts!'"

Digital Bolex is a joint venture between the venerable, Switzerland-based Bolex International, S.A. and Cinemeridian, Inc., which developed the D16 camera in Toronto with Kickstarter funding. The 5-pound camera is modeled in many ways on the H16 Bolex film camera, with its sleek design, handhold-friendly removable pistol grip and trigger, and C-mount lens mount. But it records 2K raw CinemaDNG files, with a resolution of 2048x1152 in Super 16mm mode, which Haas and Roberts used, capturing 12 stops of dynamic range

in 12-bit color. (The camera records to an internal enterprise-class SSD, with the option to copy that footage via two CF card slots.) The sensor is a CCD chip with a 1:1 ratio to Super 16mm film.

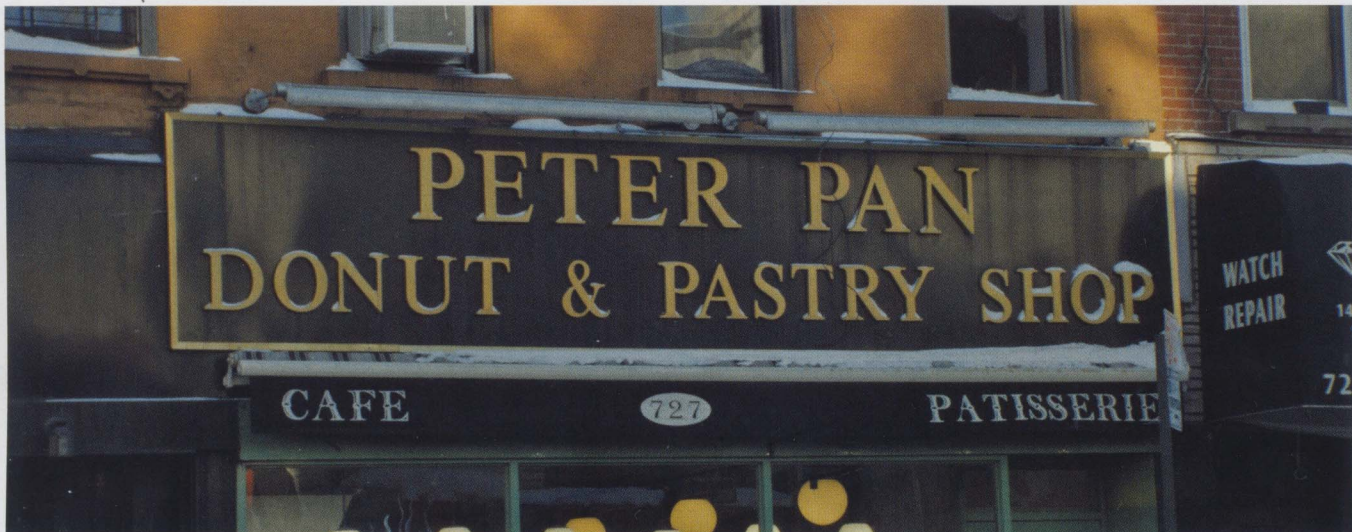
"It's close to film in dynamic range, and it's got a great, organic [film-like] structure, even in low light," Roberts says of the Digital Bolex. "We just like the look of it. And for this [bakery], which has a vintage look, the camera was a perfect match."

The filmmakers also used vintage primes, including Switar 25mm and 75mm primes for exterior establishing shots, and a 1960s-era 16mm Schneider consumer lens that was employed to shoot interiors. "This lens has a unique personality," Haas enthuses. "It's a little softer, and the way it captures colors has a good mojo to it. It also opens up really wide, to f1.9, which was helpful when shooting in the back room [where the doughnuts are made], because there's not a lot of space in there for [lights]."

"I looked to rent some zooms," he continues, "but the one zoom that you could close-focus was gigantic — it would have knocked someone's coffee over! That was one big challenge of the shoot, having to use your body to get the close-ups."

Another challenge was to not interfere with business, says Haas. "We knew there was no way we were going to be able to interrupt the flow of what goes on here, so we decided to go completely handheld. We had a Zacuto Z-Finder electronic viewfinder attached to [the D16], which I operated like a shoulder camera — I used the handgrip and pushed the camera against my shoulder for longer takes." (Both filmmakers agree that the D16's built-in LCD is only for reference and isn't suitable for finding fine focus.) Haas adds, "For a few moments early in the film you can see that the camera's a little bouncy. I was still getting my sea legs." ➤

Photos and frame grabs courtesy of the filmmakers.



Top: Peter Pan Donut and Pastry Shop has been serving the residents of Greenpoint, Brooklyn for more than 60 years. Middle and bottom: Roberts (left) and Haas used a vintage 16mm Schneider lens on the Digital Bolex for a softer image.



Haas frequently operated the camera while Roberts interviewed subjects, recording sound externally. Roberts explains, "The sound in this camera is pretty good, but we did dual-system sound with a recorder so I wouldn't be tethered to [Haas]." Haas and Roberts also used an external battery pack, which added a couple of pounds to the camera's weight.

Lighting, of course, was another major consideration during the shoot, which was split across two days this past February. "We were familiar with the space, having come here so much," Haas says. "But when you go somewhere to get a cup of coffee it's very different from thinking about where all the light is coming from."

With a large window to the street fronting the tiny counter, balancing the light was especially difficult. Haas recalls, "It had snowed the day before and it was snowing [while we were shooting]. It was already a 19-stop split between outside and inside. On top of that, there's all this light bouncing off the snow. And even though we were shooting at f1.9, the camera's highest ASA was 400. If possible, I would have shot at 500 or 800." (A proposed firmware update should soon allow the D16 to offer ISO settings of 100, 200, 400 and 800.)

One solution was to use a daylight-balanced 12"x12" Rosco LitePad Axiom LED, which could be easily positioned for fill; this was sometimes augmented with a 4"x3" CN-LUX560 LED mounted on the camera and diffused with Rosco Tough White for eyelight. In many instances,



Top left: Roberts frames a patron inside the bakery. Top right: Donna Siafakas owns the bakery. Bottom: The filmmakers utilized a 12"x12" Rosco LitePad for fill light during an interview with Donna's son, Dimitri.

though, the image needed to be digitally pushed up to three stops in post. Shots of the doughnuts being prepared in back needed a particular boost. "We moved the LitePad around, but it's very dark back there, so to get a decent exposure we had to push it in post," says Roberts. Haas adds, "What was mind-blowing was how well the image stayed together. All of this extra information was there that we knew would have been

lost had we shot DV or even HD."

Adorama provided the filmmakers with valuable digital cinema storage and helped them develop an offline post workflow, which incorporated the LightPost transcoding software that is included with the D16, as well as DaVinci Resolve for color correction. "It's funny, because the workflow for this camera is very similar to film," says Haas. "You have your digital negative, which

you set aside, and then you have to make a [digital] 'work print,' because if you were just to take the DNG and make it uncompressed, you'd need a supercomputer to edit it. So we had our work print, and then we cut the digital negative to match it all back. The more we think we're advancing with digital technology, the more it just reflects the old workflow. We still call it 'footage!'"

After the initial coloring pass, *Peter Pan Bakery* was accepted to the Brooklyn Film Festival. In anticipation of its official premiere, the filmmakers remastered the film at Technicolor-PostWorks New York, where colorist Sean R. Smith worked on a Nucoda Film Master for a 1080p HDCam deliverable.

Given the vérité nature of the project, the shooting ratio was high, about 30:1, "which you're more aware of when you're shooting raw, because that storage space is precious," says Haas. But since *Peter Pan Bakery* is only eight minutes long, the formula was acceptable. "It's great to be able to shoot raw, because it's gorgeous, and it really gives you a lot of options," Haas adds. "But if I were to use this camera for a longer vérité doc, I would wish it were a little bit compressed, even 1.5, just to save on space."

So far, Digital Bolex has reportedly been very responsive to users' needs and suggestions. "They really made a grassroots effort to promote the camera," says Roberts. "They took a lot of input from the Kickstarter [backers] who had purchased the camera, and that went into the development process. It was very democratic, which you don't see with most camera companies."

Peter Pan Bakery can be viewed at www.peterpanbakeryfilm.blogspot.com. ●