Super8 cameras and offer affordable starter packages, including camera, film, processing, and transfer to video. Super8 Sound also manufactures Pro8mm cartridges by slitting all of Kodak’s 35mm color negative motion picture film stocks into 8mm widths, re-perforating the film with Super8 sprocket holes, and then loading it into brand new Kodak Super8 cartridges.

I’ve been lucky enough to have shot a fairly large number of Pro8mm cartridges, including 50ASA daylight film, which the clients sometimes couldn’t distinguish from 35mm, and Vision 800ASA film properly exposed at a restaurant table lit by just two candles. It really is amazing stuff that opens up the Super8 palette and makes the format incredibly versatile. Indeed, many people (myself included), that use Pro8mm negative film for the first time, are so completely blown away by the quality, that they rarely go back to shooting Kodachrome and Ektachrome.

Fortunately for users of Pro8mm film, company president and chief telesene colorist, Phil Vigeant, had the foresight to set up two state-of-the-art Rank Cintel film-to-tape transfer suites at their Burbank facility, both of which have been specially modified and engineered for all types of 8mm film. They also offer camera rental packages, custom loaded film emulsions, and same-day process and tape transfer, if required, to allow cinematographers to really push the 8mm format to its limits, with the reliability and high quality they require. Vigeant explains, “When someone has us transfer color reversal Super8 footage (Kodachrome or Ektachrome) then we can expect to see a fairly small amount of well-exposed usable material relative to the amount of film shot. But when we’re transferring color negative Pro8mm film, the percentage of usable material is always much higher. When the clients see how many more good quality shots they’re getting from Pro8mm film, they quickly realize that there’s just no point in making life difficult for themselves by shooting reversal film again.”

By Giles Musitano

For the last eight years, Super8 Sound in Burbank, California, has been offering a fantastic range of Pro8mm products and services to professional users, as well as supporting the large number of student and independent filmmakers. In their offices, they recondition

And if it’s good enough for ASC cinematographer John Toll to use in the film Simpatico, director Michael Bay to use in Armageddon, and the forthcoming Pearl Harbor, and Jim Jarmusch to use in Year Of The Horse, then Phil Vigeant and his Pro8mm team must be doing something right.

Vigeant continues, “Color negative film is much more forgiving than the traditional Super8 reversal stock, and offers a greater flexibility for the cinematographer because it can render detail

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home movie style images. What we needed was an edgy, hard look, to contrast with the 35mm. There was no need to use squeeze lenses or step effects, because the Pro8mm was good enough on its own to show a different point of view - an altered state. In some sequences, we desaturated all the chroma except the red, which you might think is a very bold thing to do in a major motion picture; but we wanted to take a few risks and maximize on the effect of the Pro8mm footage, and the audiences responded to it really well."

"At the time when we shot Why Do Fools Fall In Love, there was a run of films being released, like Trainspotting, that dealt with some kind of drug culture. In our film, the main character, Frankie Lymon, was a heroin addict, and we needed a way to show his point of view when he was actually on heroin. It didn't make sense for us to spend days creating a digital effect, because the film is set in the 1950s, so we felt that audiences would respond better to a visual effect that didn't seem so out of place for the period. Actually, in a movie theater, 8mm film is really more of a visual experience than a visual effect, because there's a language to the organic medium of Super8 that people respond to without even being aware of it."

Martinez-Jitner used the digital post-production route for both feature, avoiding the traditional path of optical printing from the 8mm direct to 35mm film. "In the telecine suite you can play with color and grain very precisely to create a specific look for an individual character, time, or place, so we always transfer the Pro8 to digital video, and then bump it up to 2K resolution just so it's sharp enough for theatrical screening."

So now that you've heard it from one of the serious players in the movie industry, if you're about to shoot a project, or part of a project, on a pint-sized format, then whatever you do, don't waste your cash on a thousand dollar MiniDV camera. Most serious filmmakers who've flirted with MiniDV will have realized by now that it's pretty useless as an origination format, but really handy for zapping transferred film footage into your desktop editing program through a Firewire cable - and with nearly all movies these days being shot on color negative film, transferred to tape, and then edited on computer, it makes perfect sense to follow the example of the industry professionals. Pro8mm allows you to do all that from day one without compromising on quality, so you're much better off hunting down a decent quality Super8 camera, originating on film, and then editing from MiniDV.

Of course, there will always be experimental filmmakers and home movie fans shooting traditional reversal Super8 so they can project it on the living room wall or down at the local underground film club. And while that kind of filmmaking takes just as much energy and commitment, let's face it, those 8mm users very rarely break into the major movie industry. There's no doubt that practicing the real craft of cinematography by shooting Pro8mm film in your Super8 camera will give you a much better appreciation of what it takes to make it out there with the big guys. <<

For more information on Pro8mm film and the other products and services offered by Super8 Sound, visit www.Super8Sound.com or call them at 818-848-5522 (8am to 8pm Monday to Friday).

Giles Musitano's 250 page fourth edition of The Super8 Guide, published by Focal Press, includes photos and specifications of 500 Super8 cameras and 200 projectors, interviews with Super8 guru Lenny Lipton, Brooklyn based experimental filmmaker Eve Sussman, and with the genius inventor of the Super8 format, Evan Edwards.

The Super8 Guide will be available from all good book stores around Christmas 2000. For more information visit www.focalpress.com.