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SCRATCH Powers Monaco's New DI Suite

The underpinning technology of Monaco Digital Film Lab's metamorphosis from a film lab into a quality DI film post-production facility is ASSIMILATE's SCRATCH Data-Centric Workflow Solution. SCRATCH is enabling a streamlined 2k DI workflow for Monaco's first DI project, *The Darwin Awards*, earning high praise from Finn Taylor, writer/director and DP, Hiro Narita.

Sundance Film Festival 2006: The Darwin Awards, U.S. premiere

Steeped in a rich history of quality film processing and photography dating back to the 1800s, Monaco Digital Film Labs continues to evolve and expand its capabilities and business model to serve a constantly changing entertainment industry. Monaco's new business divisions reflect this expansion, and the debut of its Digital Intermediate Color Grading Studio is underway with some impressive projects in its pipeline.

With a long-standing reputation for operating a quality and clean film facility, Monaco has a long list of credits for digital film preservation, including the Lucas Archive, the Academy Foundation, and the UCLA Film and Television Archives. Monaco's restoration work can be seen in such projects as Canis Major's *Grateful Dead* film, *Sunshine Daydream* and director John Sayles' *The Return of the Secacus Seven* and *Matewan*. They have also provided film and video dailies for many feature films, most recently the Chris Columbus film *Rent*. Now Monaco's foray into offering digital intermediates (DI) puts the Company at the forefront of a rapidly developing trend for digital film post production.

"ASSIMILATE's SCRATCH™ fits our needs with the right post-production feature set and price."

"We've been planning this transition into 2k post production for some time and wanted to offer the best



Hiro Narita ASC and Director Finn Taylor on location for *The Darwin Awards*.

post solutions, including a 2k color grading theater for client reviews. We concluded a few years back that DI was not ready for prime time and the reigning half-million dollar solutions to a \$50,000 problem were not a practical consideration," said Jim Moye, Vice President of Digital Operations at Monaco. "But DI has come a long way in the short time since then, and ASSIMILATE's SCRATCH™ fits our needs with the right post-production feature set and price. By incorporating SCRATCH into our facility, we've expanded our business model and now offer regional and west coast clients one-stop shopping with full-service post-production capabilities in a quality, streamlined, end-to-end pipeline."

"Creating a DI studio is a natural progression for us," adds Moye. "We have the front-end services with two telecines providing high-quality film to tape transfer, as well as the back-end for print and film out. Adding SCRATCH to the mix gives us the DI feature sets we need to take on the post work for features like *The Darwin Awards*. This film has been an exciting and rewarding experience for us, from both creative and technical perspectives. We believe the quality of work will speak for itself."



Director Finn Taylor with actors Joseph Fiennes and Winona Ryder on location for Taylor's *The Darwin Awards*.

In setting up their DI studio, Monaco found they could offer clients more creative latitude and control as was the case with *The Darwin Awards*, an independent film production starring Winona Ryder and Joseph Fiennes, and which was accepted by the Sundance Film Festival 2006 for its U.S. premiere. "*The Darwin Awards* presented us with interesting post-production challenges in order to create the look and feel that Finn Taylor was striving to achieve," said the film editor Rick LeCompte. "It's always a real kick to satisfy clients, and with this project we were able to easily incorporate multiple formats, do the color grading, add myriad special effects, experiment with numerous versions, test them all, and finalize a film version that was positively received by the client."

"Our investment in SCRATCH definitely paid off since we were able to make all this happen in a very streamlined, smooth DI workflow, completing the post-production process on schedule."

Finn Taylor, who has worked with Monaco on two of his previous film projects - *Dream with the Fishes* and *Cherish* - turned to the company for the complete DI process of *The Darwin Awards*. "Monaco was able to provide all the pre and post production resources needed for this film with excellent results," said Moye. "We were able to give Taylor the 'kid in a toy store' experience. It was fun to bring together all the special effects, wildly different looks, and different media to create this film. Our investment in SCRATCH definitely paid off since we were able to make all this happen in a very streamlined, smooth DI workflow, completing the post-production process on schedule."

The Darwin Awards was shot in film and HD formats. These elements were scanned and then imported into the SCRATCH Data-Centric Workflow Solution™. Moving all this content into the digital realm enabled all the post work to occur within one unit rather than spreading it into many separate elements. All visual elements were stored as a stream of 2k images within a data-centric workflow that included data management and a CONstruct timeline. This made for instant and unlimited maneuvering through numerous images. By utilizing the 2k color grading theater, color correction and grading, transition effects, dissolves, and wipes were adjusted on the fly, giving instant feedback to the colorist, DP, editors, and client. "DI clearly is the wave of the future for post production," says Moye. "The benefits of working in a real-time, data-centric workflow are endless. The technology is very powerful - the full spectrum of creativity takes place in one environment, changes are easily made, and feedback is instantaneous. It's a real thrill."

Freelance colorist for the project, Gary Coates, well known for his color grading work on many agency spots and such projects as *Young Indiana Jones* also gives SCRATCH high marks. "To be in a 2k theater, making intricate touches to images, adjusting subtle color hues, creating any number of shapes, and then viewing the results in high resolution just as you would in a large-screen movie theater is a magical experience," says Coates. "The fact that these capabilities are affordable for cost-sensitive films and post houses just further adds to the amazement."

Director of Photography Hiro Narita A.S.C., explains another positive aspect of the DI technology and SCRATCH. "With DI, I had the opportunity to make



adjustments and enhancements that I couldn't make on the set, such as altering the contrast of a shot that was affected by the shifting of natural light. Working with Gary in Monaco's 2k theater allowed me to instantly see the changes I was asking him to make. No haste, no waste, no delay, just great results."

"ASSIMILATE has been there for us every step of the way and they've earned our confidence in helping us move into the future of film with DI."

The cost of SCRATCH and ASSIMILATE's commitment to their client has proven satisfactory to Monaco as well. Monaco is using six workstations with twelve terabytes of storage, which eases the storage issues inherent in big-iron systems. "We know there's an update path for the SCRATCH software that will just strengthen the product and its post-production feature set," says Moye. "We're in this for the long haul so this is an important factor for us. Simply put, the overall experience with ASSIMILATE™ and SCRATCH has exceeded our expectations and has been a very rewarding process for the Monaco team. ASSIMILATE has been there for us every step of the way and they've earned our confidence in helping us move into the future of film with DI."



Monaco's Kristin Russell, ASSIMILATE's Lucas Wilson and Colorist Gary Coates put finishing touches on Finn Taylor's The Darwin Awards.