

SCRATCH perfects the balance of extreme lighting on Cannes 2011 winner 'Las Acacias'

The Facility: Alta Definición Argentina

"We keep moving forward on solid ground with our SCRATCH DI work," says Gonzalo Rodríguez Bubis, president of Alta Definición Argentina. "Our SCRATCH is now used to process films made across Latin America – from Argentina, Peru, Ecuador, Chile and Uruguay. Many of the films we've graded in SCRATCH have won awards, but we are especially thrilled that Pablo Giorgelli's *Las Acacias* won the prestigious Camera D'Or at Cannes 2011. What more could we want?"

Bubis established Alta Definición Argentina in 2000 to satisfy the need of independent filmmakers wanting to make

high-quality films, but without the budget for 35mm.

One of the first films the company worked on in 2003, *Play*, by Chilean filmmaker Alicia Scherson, won the top prize at the Tribeca Film Festival. This success was quickly followed when *Iluminados Por El Fuego (Blessed By Fire)*, by Argentinian director Tristan Bauer, took the Films In Progress Award at the San Sebastian Film Festival in 2004, and the Special Jury Prize the following year.

Since then, the company's reputation for delivering excellent imagery has evolved to providing camera rental and post services for more than 200 feature films, hundreds of commercials, prime-time TV series, music shows, documentaries and short films - all with SCRATCH at the very heart of the DI workflow.

“In Latin America there is very little money for feature film productions,” says Bubis. “Clients come to us for camera services, others ask for post production, others want everything. But the one thing they have in common is they all come to us because they want the best possible image quality at the best possible cost. Of course, we always give them what they want, and SCRATCH plays a big part in the equation.”

The Project: *Las Acacias*, winner of the Cannes Film Festival 2011 Camera D'Or

Directed by Argentinian-born Pablo Giorgelli, and shot on RED ONE cameras, *Las Acacias* (2011) is a touching road movie. Its focus is on two lives: Rubén, a lonely, middle-aged truck driver who first picks up a load of lumber bound for Buenos Aires, and Jacinta, a country woman headed for the city in search of employment, along with her five-month-old daughter. As the miles slip by, they slowly dip into each other's souls. Neither of them talks much about their lives, nor asks much either. It's a journey of few words, but it is not a silent one.

Along with the Camera D'Or (Golden Camera) which is awarded each year to a director for their first feature film, *Las Acacias* also went on to scoop the OFAJ Young Critics Prize and the ACID (Association of Independent Cinema for its Distribution) / CCAS (Main Fund of Social Activities) award during the Cannes Film Festival 2011.

Project Leader: Maximiliano Pérez, SCRATCH DI colorist Maximiliano Pérez, the lead SCRATCH colorist at Alta Definición Argentina, has an enviable reputation for delivering beautifully graded features to Latin American filmmakers. He started at the company in 2005, assisting freelance graders who were using the company's SCRATCH system. However, his talent and dedication rapidly became obvious, and within less than two years Bubis gave him the opportunity to start grading himself.



Image courtesy of Alta Definicion Argentina

Today, his output is prolific, and he is responsible for all the films and TV programmes that come into the company. In addition to *Las Acacias*, Pérez's credits include *Los Labios* (*The Lips*) by Argentinian directing duo Santiago Loza and Iván Fund, which won a trio of awards for its three lead actresses in the Un Certain Regard category of the Cannes 2010 Film Festival. He also graded *Las Malas Intenciones* (*Bad Intentions*), directed by Rosario García Montero, a Peruvian/German co-production featured at the Berlin Film festival in 2011, and *El Ultimo Verano de la Boyita* (*The Last Summer Of La Boyita*) by Julia Solomonoff, a French/Argentinian production that scooped awards at the Cartagena, Sofia and Miami Film Festivals in

2010. Most recently he graded *Iván Fund's Hoy No Tuve Miedo* (*Today I Wasn't Scared*), which earned the Best Cinematography in 2011 at the Buenos Aires Film Festival.

The Challenge: Balancing the light with the shade. As most of *Las Acacias* happens inside a truck, by far the greatest grading challenge for Pérez was to achieve what he describes as, a harmony in the coexistence between the truck's interior and exterior throughout the film. “The truck is on the move on a highway, and I knew that matching the chromatic levels of the shots was not going to be simple, and that the most complex process would be in keeping the levels for the exterior,” says Perez.



Image courtesy of Alta Definicion Argentina

“The director Pablo Giorgelli was happy throughout the whole color grading process on ‘Las Acacias’, not only because he was very pleased with the results, but also because he saw how fast and agile SCRATCH is at solving problems.”

The Solution: SCRATCH

From an early stage it was decided that the color grading would be done on the RED ONE camera’s native raw R3D image files, without applying any external LUTs. From these images Pérez started working with the director in SCRATCH to begin defining the look of the film. To echo the film’s narrative, Perez chose a warm and luminous look throughout the film, although he says he took particular care with the skin tones of each character, introducing subtle variations towards yellow as required.

“I find SCRATCH’s Vectors option extremely useful in controlling the dominant colors in a subtle yet precise way. By combining Vectors and selective area Keying, SCRATCH enabled me to concentrate on those dominant colors without affecting the rest of the image. This was a huge asset.”

But SCRATCH proved much more vital in the DI of *Las Acacias*

in balancing the highlights of the exterior background with the truck’s interior, which Perez accomplished by combining SCRATCH’s Scaffolds and Qualifier tools.

“In any given shot, I was able to first treat the background highlights, then color correct the interior and the exterior of the truck separately, and finally, level off the overall exposure and grade of the shot. These are very powerful tools, and extremely useful in cases like this.”

Pérez also used SCRATCH’s Tracking Masks capability to selectively grade areas of the image, mainly to retain luminosity/brightness and skin tones on the characters faces. This was especially helpful in selecting and then brightening the darker areas of some of the brighter, more sunny shots.

Although SCRATCH has long been optimized for performance with RED workflows, Pérez is still impressed with this capability. “If we talk about native R3D files, SCRATCH’s great advantage is how fast it conforms RED material, and the sheer level of manipulation and control you have. Being able to simultaneously see and compare, in real-time, the off-line reference with the conformed and color-graded master (including audio) is very impressive.”

“Throughout the entire DI on *Las Acacias*, SCRATCH was a joy to use. It has many fast, precise and versatile tools that you can apply on several different types of shots, and I used these all together to achieve a pleasing chromatic coherence between shots on the film.”

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