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## Case Study: Creating a High-Caliber DV Short Film

Proponents of DV technology often argue that the medium opens up moviemaking to anyone who can afford a camera and a computer. Detractors of DV technology similarly argue that the medium opens up moviemaking to anyone who can afford a camera and a computer. Truth be told, miniDV format cameras and inexperienced moviemakers have produced a monumental volume of very bad movies. But, what happens when the time-honored production techniques of filmmaking are applied to the medium? The nature of the story, of course, and the way that story is told represent a key part of the equation. The other side of that equation involves the techniques used to capture light and sound, to acquire images and then manipulate them, to weave music and sound effects into the mix. What if skilled lighting technicians are employed to achieve the optimal lighting in each scene? What if high quality lenses and a cinematographer oversee the production to create the desired visual effects? What if the audio is properly miked, monitored and mixed by audio specialists? Will the resulting DV content rise to professional standards?

Victor Muh, a Paris-based moviemaker and digital video production specialist, thinks that DV is undervalued as a professional tool and he set out create a short movie that would push the boundaries of the medium. *The Chinese Shoes* was videotaped on a Canon XL1 camcorder, taking advantage of the interchangeable lens feature of this camera to achieve exactly the visual properties that he wanted. A Mini 35 Digital lens adapter from P + S Technik allowed high-quality 35mm Cooke lenses to be used in the production. Through collaboration with cinematographer Pascale Marin, Victor was able to manipulate depth of field and focusing more creatively

than is possible with the stock Canon XL1 zoom lens. Throughout each stage of the production process, Victor overcame a shifting array of obstacles to achieve results that clearly indicate the potential of DV as a movie-making tool.

## Filmmaking Roots

Victor grew up in Hawaii and California and he gained an interest in filmmaking when very young, prowling through the stacks in local libraries during the summer months when grade school was not in session. He was particularly intrigued by special effects and the techniques used by well-known filmmakers and read everything he could find on the subject. “*Star Wars* had just come out,” Victor said, “and I was already a fan of *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *The Bionic Woman*. I read all the books about how movies were made and how special effects were done, but I didn’t take it any further through my high school years. When I graduated from high school, my Mom bought me an 8mm Canon video camera. I started to make my own videos that my friends loved, but I really didn’t know where to go to develop this interest more.”

While still in college, Victor took a trip with a friend to Austria to visit someone they had first met in L.A. “I pretty much ended up staying there,” Victor said. “It was my first experience in Europe and I was completely enchanted with Austria. I was reading a lot of the beatnik philosophy and poetry and staying in Austria seemed like the thing to do.”

Victor went to the University of Vienna to learn German and then decided to pursue moviemaking by enrolling at the Vienna Film Academy. “As part of the entrance requirements, we had to make a short film based on a generic script they provided. We had to interpret the script in our own way. At this point, I had saved up and bought a Hi-8 Canon video camera and I was going to shoot my entry film with that. But the camera got stolen in Paris. My whole idea to enter the academy kind of went up in smoke. The camera actually got stolen not far from where I live today.”

The camera disappeared at the conclusion of a trip to the U.S. “I had all these packages,” Victor said, “and I was tired and jet-lagged. I put everything down for a moment and just looked around. When I picked up my bags again, I noticed that the smallest bag, which was my camera bag, was missing. At this point, I had business contacts in the States and I decided, ‘If I have to save up again to buy a camera to make my college entrance movie, I might as well try to do some business instead of working odd

jobs or under-the-table jobs in Vienna.” As a result, Victor spent the next two years in Austria, distributing snowboards and streetwear.

### **Moonlighting in Paris**

Since Victor settled in Paris, he has focused his energies on creative moviemaking, but he also makes a living doing audio-visual work. He produces reports for both American and European cable TV, including CNBC and Eurosport, and making action sports and music videos.

“I am pretty new to Paris,” Victor said. “My background is in surf films and surf videos. I’ve always worked with really low-budget projects. I know how to shoot and how to edit and how to produce and everything like that. All wrapped into one. I moved to Paris to do more of my own creative work.”

### **Honoring the Memory of a Friend**

“I’m always open to new ideas,” Victor said. “This led me to making connections in the surf and the snowboard business in Europe. A friend of mine in Hawaii—Mark Foo—was a very well-known surfer with a TV show called H3O TV. It was a surf TV show from Hawaii that was aired locally and on the Fox Sports Network on the mainland. Mark died while surfing. During his life, Mark always wanted to spread the joy of surfing to the world. I wanted to honor his wish and this inspired me to contact H3O and offer to distribute their show and market it in Europe. H3O agreed and I actually got the first surf show on European TV.”

As a forerunner of many TV surf shows that are now popular on European television, the H3O shows proved slightly ahead of their time and only gained a marginal following. Since then, market tastes have shifted considerably. “Actually,” Victor said, “the whole surf, skate, and snowboard action scene in Europe has really boomed in the last couple of years.”

Victor quickly went from distributing the H3O shows to producing segments for the show. “From that,” he said, “I started to make surf videos and to work on a 35mm action sports film that was very similar to a Warren Miller ski film, but it was targeted for the European market. It was called *Nuit De La Glisse (Night of Surf)* because they would only play the film at night. It was all action sports: surfing, skating, snowboarding.”

## Gaining Experience in DV Techniques

The early video work that Victor accomplished was done in Beta SP, but he watched the development of DV technology with keen interest. When the original Canon XL1 camcorders became available, Victor was one of the first in line to buy one. “I have always enjoyed Canon cameras,” Victor said. “I don’t know if it is their lenses or what it is exactly. The colors seem so much more rich and vibrant than what I see with Sony cameras and the others.”

Victor hears people criticizing the color handling capabilities of most DV equipment and doesn’t agree with the harsh judgements that are sometimes voiced about the medium. “I personally don’t have any trouble with the color handling. Technically, it is not supposed to have this quality. If you talk to an engineer, he will tell you that DV doesn’t reproduce colors as well as DVCAM or BetaCam. But, especially with Canon’s color pixel-shift technology, I feel the colors look fine. It also depends on what you compare the image to. I’ve noticed that if you mix footage, people really notice, they’re more aware of the color differences. If you shoot everything from a single format and the same type of camera, people aren’t usually aware of the image differences.”

### Using DV for Broadcast Work

The miniDV camera has proven versatile for a wide range of applications. “I’ve used it for everything,” Victor said, “from music videos to surf videos to TV reports that are broadcast on European television. I just got back from Evian, France, where the woman’s golf tournament, the Evian Masters, took place. The report that I did there was shot on DV.”

“Most broadcasters prefer DVCAM,” Victor acknowledges. “The report that I did, my cameraman was using a Sony PD-150. But, since I don’t have any DVCAM machines in my editing suite, we just had him shoot it in miniDV (which you can specify on the Sony PD-150).”

Victor notes that, “There is virtually no difference between DVCAM and miniDV formats—they use the same compression. The DVCAM heads spin faster than miniDV and the tape itself moves faster, which, in theory, means that you get fewer dropped frames. Also, the audio is locked in DVCAM to minimize audio drift.” MiniDV and the small DVCAM tapes can be interchanged; DVCAM tapes are generally considered to be more robust.

“Sometimes,” Victor said, “if a project is very important, I will use the small DVCAM tapes instead of miniDV tapes.”

Many moviemakers get attached to particular software that meets their needs and Victor is no exception. “I have a Macintosh G4 machine,” he said, “and I am running an outdated software program called *Cinestream*. It was originally made by Radius and called *EditDV*. Radius sold it to Digital Origins and they sold it to Media 100, who changed the name to *Cinestream*. *Cinestream* recently sold the program to Discreet and Discreet just stopped developing it. As far as DV editing is concerned, it is the most intuitive and the fastest editing program out here. If I work with mixed media, I will work with *Final Cut Pro*, if I work exclusively with DV format, I usually go back and use *Cinestream*.”

Victor first moved to France (considered the surf capital of Europe) to further his efforts with H3O TV after he had given up the notion of attending the film academy in Vienna. Recognizing that the film academy credentials can be a helpful entry into the competitive moviemaking industry, he still doesn't regret having taken a more direct path into the business. “I just jumped into it,” Victor said. “I am just a self learner. A lot of that comes from my experience hanging out in libraries, so I buy books and learn from them. Now, with the Internet, I have access to this enormous library of information. I read and then I learn from my mistakes.”

## Overcoming the Bias Against DV

The traditionalist film community in Paris has trifling respect for works produced using the DV format. As filmmakers who are often subsidized by the government for their creative work, as a community they are less interested in creating films that have box office appeal and more interested in exploring human dramas and psychological conflicts. Because the art form is steeped in tradition and married to decades of long-standing convention, DV enjoys little respect from so-called serious filmmakers. From the time that Victor first started working with DV tools, he was determined to show that with a professional approach DV can deliver surprisingly strong imagery and that it can be used effectively as a story-telling medium by anyone willing to master the craft.

Victor has worked with different film and videotape formats, including 16mm, Super 16mm, Sony BetaCam, DV, Hi-8 and 8mm, as well as working on a Super 16mm production that was blown up to 35mm.

“I still see people looking down on DV,” Victor said. “They are very stuck with tradition and tradition says that film is what you take seriously. Almost all projects are financed by the government through the CNC and so there is a healthy, thriving film community, but it is not based on people being creative or taking risks—it is very bureaucratic.”

Part of the difficulty of getting financing for a creative moviemaking project is overcoming the entrenched attitudes that prevail in the French film atmosphere. “The CNC has this view of what French film should be,” Victor said. “If you work within that envelope, you are OK. It usually favors introspective works, based on people and situations and emotions. It is hard for me to describe. You just have to watch some French films to understand.”

Nonetheless, some of the edgier creators are breaking the strictures of the form and moved in other directions. “You have Luc Besson, who did *Nikita* and the *Fifth Element*, for example. He is one of the few (and he is really not liked by the French film industry) who has broken away and said, ‘You know what, I’m going to make something that is French, but appeals to a greater audience.’ He is one of the few who actually makes films that work at the box office. *Amélie Poulain* was another film that works at the box office. It is a French film, but it is not very typical of French films.”

### **Finding a Balance and Gaining Acceptance**

“I enjoy being in Paris, because of this cinema auteur atmosphere, where the creative process is very important. When you are working on a film, it is considered more of a work of art that has nothing to do with business. Storytelling in film tends to be more narrative, more about what is going on inside of the characters. Coming from an American movie background, it is more about the action and what is happening around the characters. I like more of a balance. But I do like the fact that here you can shoot a film that reflects the director’s vision, whatever that vision may be.”

Given the somewhat insular nature of the French film community, Victor maintains a fairly independent stance in his working environment. “I work with technicians. I work with good sound engineers and good directors of photography, but otherwise I feel pretty much on my own here,” he said.

In the quest for support and recognition, Victor has circulated his short film to production companies and producers. “I another short film that I have written,” he said, “called *The Tao of Surf*. It is about a young surfer who learns important lessons of life through nature, the ocean, waves, and surfing. I also wrote a feature film, it is called *Digital New World*. It combines extreme sports with virtual reality and it all takes place in the future. Somehow, this doesn’t fit into the typical French mold. Luc Besson’s production company likes the short film, *The Tao of Surf*, but that is why I use him as an example of a company that doesn’t fit into the French structure. I sent them the short film and they are considering it, whereas everybody else just doesn’t want to hear about it.”

## Making the Movie

Tinged with martial arts mystique, *The Chinese Shoes* relates the story of a young boy, Lao, whose attraction to a girl in the neighborhood leads him into a humiliating encounter with a local bully. Lao finds a pair of Chinese shoes in an antique shop and dons them in the hopes of gaining the power of a kung fu master. The seed for this idea came from Victor’s martial arts instructor in Paris, who described two fights that he was drawn into when he was wearing Chinese shoes. “Never wear Chinese shoes,” his instructor warned ominously. The idea percolated in Victor’s brain for a time until he decided to fill in the details of the story in a movie. The protagonist in the movie discovers that the misuse of power can be devastating and learns a lesson in the process, which causes him to return the shoes.

“I am treating my short film as if it is a Hollywood blockbuster in the sense that I believe in promoting it,” Victor said. “I believe that I shot it as well as I could. Everywhere along the line, I am treating it as if it were a big budget production. This comes from my business background. I have to take a step back. It is my film, but it is also product that needs to be marketed and promoted. I found a niche (the fact that I shot it using the Mini-35 adapter and used professional cinematography techniques), based on this point of interest in the film. I am going to be targeting Asian-themed media afterwards and maybe martial-arts themed media. But the first marketing step was based on the technical aspects of this short film.”

## Freedom from Film

The attraction of the DV format to many new moviemakers is the freedom from the tyranny of film—both the expense associated with purchasing and processing film, as well as the greater difficulty in assessing daily

results of a project and editing the content. Inexpensive non-linear editors and video that can be monitored and corrected at the source lead to more experimentation and more precise results in many cases. “The reason that I pushed to do this in miniDV was because I was making surf videos at the same time as I was reading a magazine called *Res*. *Res* was really talking about the art of DV filmmaking, about how DV was such a liberating format. I just loved the idea. I want to liberate kids, or anybody who is like me when I was a kid and wanted to make films, but I didn’t know where to start. You can just buy a inexpensive camera to start and with the DV format, you can make something that is respectable. You just have to free your mind. Once you learn the techniques, it can lead in any other format. It is liberating in the sense that you can learn the techniques, and you don’t have to worry about buying these expensive rolls of film. You can concentrate on making your movie and making it in the best way possible.”

Victor also sees advantages on the distribution end of the process where the need to duplicate expensive reels of 35mm film is eliminated. With more theaters adopting digital projection systems, such as Landmark theaters as discussed in Chapter 18, distribution of movies can be handled by means of broadband networks or even DVDs. Anything that makes it easier for an independent moviemaker to get work shown on the screen is a positive factor in Victor’s judgment.

“When movies eventually go digital,” Victor said, “it will be even more accessible for the independent filmmaker, because you won’t need to have big rolls of film that you need to produce and ship around to theaters. Jean-Marc Barr who was making *Dogme* films, did all his films with on DV.” *Dogme* films are the creation of Lars Von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg. In 1995, they set up the rules they considered valid for creating uncorrupted movies. As part of this aesthetic, the DV content is sometimes degraded to give it a more harsh video look.

A good example of DV’s potential, Victor believes, is Danny Boyle’s work, *28 Days Later* ([www.28dayslaterthemove.com](http://www.28dayslaterthemove.com)). Victor said, “It is a feature shot with a Canon XL1 while maintaining professional cinema techniques.”

The accessibility of DV is also its Achilles heel, Victor believes. “One thing that gives DV a bad name is that all of a sudden it has become so accessible. People think that being accessible means that you can do whatever you want without learning the craft. But, you have to take DV and treat it with respect—then you’ll get quality images.”

## Struggling to Complete a Film

A classic tale of the obstacles encountered making a film, Terry Gilliam's *Lost in LaMancha* ([www.smart.co.uk/lostinlamancha/](http://www.smart.co.uk/lostinlamancha/)) should be mandatory viewing for anyone interested in independent filmmaking. "Terry Gilliam didn't have enough money to make his film," Victor said, "and there wasn't any margin for going over budget and over schedule. So, of course, that is exactly what happened. They just had a couple of days of hard rain and then one of the actors, the person who was going to play Don Quixote, came down with a prostate infection. That sent the whole project over schedule and the budget just buckled. They had to fold up production."

Like Terry Gilliam, Victor struggled with actor not showing up and also dealt with unpredictable weather and other kinds of unexpected contingencies that cause directors to lose sleep in the middle of production.

"The weather and the actors vexed me," Victor said. "The main actor couldn't get off of work, because he is only a part-time actor. So, we were shooting around his working schedule. Luckily, he worked near the neighborhood that we were filming, so he would sneak out of work, come and do his scene. When we were setting up for the next shot, he would go back to work. The actor who was going to play the role of the shopkeeper just decided not to show up. I called him later and asked him, 'why didn't you show up?' He says, 'I just changed my mind. Everybody who knows me knows that I am like that.' Well, I had rented the shop. I had paid the employee of the shop to be there to supervise us so we didn't break anything. I had already put out all the money for the equipment and gotten all the crew together. I had rented the equipment for exactly five days. So, if a day of shooting fell through, that meant I would have to re-rent the place and add another day to the shooting schedule. I could have had a nervous breakdown right then and there. The whole crew was just looking at me like, 'What are we going to do now?'"

Victor scoured the neighborhood for someone to fill in for the missing actor. Somehow, he knew he would find somebody. As Victor describes it, "I found an Asian art gallery owner who said he had acting experience. I didn't even bother to check. I just asked him, 'Do you want to do it?' He said, 'Yeah, sure.' So brought him into the production."

Throughout the production, obstacles kept popping up one after another. "There were so many things that came up that I thought were going to just kill the project," Victor said, "but there was always an exit. When we wanted to do the fight scene, which was an outdoor scene, it was always

cloudy and then it just started raining. I eventually had to postpone the shoot for a month.”

A clothing company that had agreed to sponsor the film, Netherlands-based G-sus, was late in shipping the clothing to be worn by the main character and other cast members. “If you look at the characters in the film,” Victor said, “other than the shopkeeper and Lao, the main character, all of the other characters are dressed in G-sus clothes. The late delivery didn’t affect me too much, because the scenes that we were able to shoot didn’t involve any of the other characters; it was only just Lao and the shopkeeper. I had to postpone until September to shoot the fight scenes and by then the clothes had arrived.”

### **A Compact Crew**

Victor worked with a compact, but experienced crew consisting of a cinematographer, a sound engineer, boom operator, grip, gaffer, script girl, and behind-the-scenes videographer. Curiously, the cinematographer, Pascale Marin, was someone that Victor met by chance in Luxembourg park in Paris. Pascale was practicing martial arts moves. Victor approached her about starring in his movie. It turned out that she was a graduate of the well-respected Louis Lumière School of Cinema and after some discussion, Pascale agreed to oversee the technical aspects of the video work in the movie. She worked closely with Victor on taking maximum advantage of the Cooke lenses and Mini 35 adapter to achieve optimal images and the desired effects.

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**Figure 15 - 1**      **Filming begins (photo credit: Katrin Gunterhausen)**



A production manager would have been a helpful addition to the crew, Victor reflected. “I was completely swamped with responsibilities and a production manager could have taken a lot of the load off my shoulders so that I could concentrate on making my movie without worrying about the logistics of the shoot.”

Sound was routed directly to the Canon XL1 rather than to an accessory DAT recorder, a factor which saved a significant amount of time in post-production. The sound engineer monitored and adjusted the audio being miked by the boom operator. An audio post-production house added sound effects, but did nothing else to the audio content.

Victor licensed a 70's song, *Kung Fu Fighting*, for a musical backdrop, negotiating a limited license that allows use of the music for film festival purposes. Once the movie goes into distribution, Victor will pay additional rights on the song.

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Figure 15 - 2

Lao flips bully (photo credit: Katrin Gunterhausen)



### Audio Work in Vancouver

Because of the Internet, Victor was able to accomplish many of the audio post-production tasks remotely. As Victor explains it, “I had nine tracks of audio and I just exported them as AIFF files. Bundled them into a folder and compressed the folder with Stuff-It. I uploaded this file to the Vancouver-based sound mixer’s FTP server. He then did the mixing and he would send me an MP3 file of each version of his work.”

The synchronization of the audio and the video was handled by inserting a one-frame beep at the same time as there is a single-frame of color bar, which occur three times. “If the beep and the color bar were synchronized,” Victor said, “that meant that the audio and video tracks would be synchronized.”

The sound mixer, David Raines, sent him successive version of the files, Victor would sync them with the video and send back comments for handling the next round of changes. After several rounds of changes, Victor had the audio tracks exactly the way that he wanted them.

The process was facilitated by the use of a DSL Internet connection. Although the initial file sent to David consumed 400MB, the interim MP3 files during the reviews and revisions only required 12MB—the storage size of a 15-minute MP3 file. The download of this file at DSL transfer rates only required about 5 minutes. The audio mixing was done using Pro Tools.

Victor gained the benefit of less expensive audio mixing rates in Vancouver, plus the expertise of David Raines ([www.screensoundinternational.com](http://www.screensoundinternational.com)), who has worked fairly extensively with DV and DVD sound tracks. “I picked David Raines,” Victor said, “because of his experience with 5.1 surround sound. He was offering a price that was better than anybody could offer me in Paris, as well as outside of Paris. And, he was familiar with working over the Internet, so, that clinched the deal.”

The initial meeting with David occurred through a Web site geared to bringing people in the audio-visual industry together: [www.mandy.com](http://www.mandy.com).

## Creative Financing for Independents

Independent filmmakers without deep pockets often have to get creative about how they handle the expenses that accompany any creative project. Victor relied on ideas he had developed during years of low-budget production work as well as some tips that he gained from a book called *Film and Video Financing* by Michael Wiese. “That book gave me a lot of ideas about how to make *The Chinese Shoes*. The author talks about different approaches, like the deal I cut with the clothing sponsors. Product placement is one key idea—I used that technique to help finance the film.”

### Catering on a Shoestring

If you’re making an independent movie, cast and crew need to eat. Catering expenses can be considerable, even on a short five-day shooting

schedule. Thinking in terms of the product placement techniques Victor read about in *Film and Video Financing*, he approached a number of restaurants in the Paris area hoping to exchange exposure in his film in return for catering services. “First I contacted the big chains, like Pizza Hut and McDonalds, but I ended up with a small falafel restaurant near the Bastille. I told them that I would include a shot of their restaurant in the film in exchange for them providing the catering. That saved me a good deal of money. At least I didn’t have to feed a dozen people per day.”

Victor worked the product placement into the movie sequence in a natural way. “There is a scene when the main character is prancing down the street, showing off his new Kung Fu skills,” he said. “He prances around right in front of the falafel restaurant, *L’As Du Falaffel*. There are a couple of patrons who come out and he startles them.”

Victor felt that the restaurant primarily wanted to support an artist in their own way, but that the additional exposure for the restaurant was also a plus, in their estimation. They also received a mention in the credits for the movie.

## Shooting with a Mini 35 Adapter

The Canon XL1 is one of the few prosumer DV camcorders that lets a filmmaker interchange different lenses. This feature turned out to be a major benefit for Victor to accomplish the precise effects that he wanted to create in his movie. Once again, some creative bargaining was involved, since the cost of the Cooke lenses and Mini 35 adapter that Victor wanted to use exceeded the purchase price of the Canon XL1 camcorder.

“To get the lenses and to get the use of the Mini 35 rig,” Victor said, “I basically suggested to them that they needed footage to show off their new system. So, the deal was that I would provide them with footage they could show in the trade shows.”

## Technical Aspects

*The Chinese Shoes* was shot in widescreen 16:9 aspect ratio on the Canon XL1, which Victor feels works very effectively on this camcorder despite the 3:4 image ratio of the camera’s three charge-coupled devices (CCDs). However, the standard Canon 16x zoom lens didn’t offer a wide enough angle for some of the shots that Victor had planned, including some crucial interior shots in the antique shop. The widest angle on the zoom was the equivalent of a 38mm lens (in 35mm terms) and even the standard

Canon 3x wide angle lens (with the equivalent to a 24 to 72mm range) wasn't sufficient to handle the scene as envisioned.

Several of the shots planned also required very specific focus and depth of field settings, something that is especially difficult to achieve with the standard Canon lens and the servo-controlled zoom ring. Even at maximum aperture settings the depth of field was not adequate and using rack focusing techniques in a shot proved extremely frustrating due to the lack of markings on the lens barrel. Certain adapters, such as Canon's EF lens adapter system, could open the camera up to a wide range of EOS photographic lenses, but at a cost. The adapter produced a 7.2x image magnification because of the differences between the camcorder's image plane (measuring, in this case, 1/3-inch, the size of a CCD) as compared to the conventional image plane in a 35mm camera. This adapter also would not produce a solution to the depth-of-field problem.

A solution was found in the Mini 35 digital lens adapter, manufactured by P + S Technik, a versatile system that could accommodate a set of Cooke S4 Optics while preserving the depth of field and focal lengths associated with a 35mm camera. An added bonus in this situation is that Victor was also able to attach a follow focus device, which enables the lens focus to be controlled precisely when the distance changes between the camera and the central point of interest. This added one more professional element to the range of options available during the shooting.

Victor would like to be able to use this system for future projects, but he said, "I'm not planning on investing in the equipment. The Mini 35 system costs about six thousand dollars. The lenses themselves are also in the thousands of dollars. This is something that you would normally rent; at least something that I would rent, because I don't have that much use for it. Although I would like to shoot everything with this system, right now it is not worth the investment."

The arrangement with the rental agency worked out well for everyone involved. Victor only had to pay the insurance on the Mini 35 system and Cooke optics and the P + S Technik obtained some video footage demonstrating the considerable capabilities of their system. The insurance for this equipment turned out to be about 10 percent of what the actual rental price would have been, somewhere in the range of three hundred dollars.

## Project and Distribution Costs

In the spirit of independent filmmakers everywhere, Victor negotiated every chance that he could to get better prices and terms for this project. Obtaining the use of the Mini 35 adapter and Cookes optics was a major coup that had a substantial effect on the results of the movie. The clothing provided by G-sus was used as a token payment to cast and crew. The falafel restaurant handled the catering. Out of the pocket expenses were primarily the lighting and sound equipment and the rental of a truck to transport all the gear. Victor estimates that the actual production costs came to somewhere under \$1000. Post-production costs, including the audio mixing, will total somewhere around another \$1000. Shooting the same short film in 16mm or 35mm format would cost several times this amount. However, Victor is considering transferring the digital video content to 35mm film, which would entail conversion costs of somewhere around \$5000. The alternative is to look for film festivals and other venues that are more open to non-film formats, such as miniDV or DVD submissions.

### Gearing Up Promotion

If all goes well, *The Chinese Shoes* will be hitting the film festival circuit at the end of 2003. Victor has already begun promoting the film through a Web site and magazine articles that have been published in *MovieMaker* and a French periodical.

The five-thousand dollar conversion cost to 35mm is daunting. "I have to decide if the film festivals that I am entering are worth the investment of having it blown up to 35mm. But the thing you have to understand is that I shot this 15-minute film for about \$2000. If I had done this on film, it would have been easily three times or four times that. So, what is five thousand dollars if you look at the big picture? If you are nickel and diming your film, it is just so out of proportion, you tend to lose track. It is still a healthy sum of money," Victor reflected.

Victor is still investigating film festivals that encourage DV entries, hoping to gain some additional funds to bootstrap his production and perhaps enter the film in other festivals.

### Bringing in an Editor

As another concession to mainstream professional practices, Victor brought an editor into the project who normally works on cinema auteur films to help shape the story presentation and pacing. "I chose him," Vic-

tor said, “because I come from more of an action background. I knew that I would need somebody to work with to make the movie really tell a story.” This editor also writes and directs film projects, so Victor felt he could rely on the additional expertise on sharpening the storyline.

The editor worked from a rough cut of the movie and listened to Victor describe what he wanted to achieve with the story. The editor’s work had a significant effect on the tone and character of the movie.

“The editor’s influence was especially evident in a scene in the antique shop, where we didn’t have a lot of time to shoot,” Victor said, “There was a missing actor at one point and the main actor was taking off from work. That particular scene was saved by the editor and my director of photography. We started in the morning. We ended up filming until three or four o’clock the next morning. Pascale had to transform the lighting in a night scene and a day scene. We ended up shooting with very poor light conditions, but she really did some magic with the lighting. She kept the scene looking like it was shot at the same time the whole day and into the beginning of the evening. It was something where I would have just given up, but she really worked with just very limited lighting to create the illusion that we were shooting at a certain time of day, that everything was happening in one specific moment in time.”

Victor has strong ideas about his work, but he also recognizes when a project can be improved by bringing in additional expertise to add depth and dimension to a movie. As he describes it, “I had very positive experiences with my cinematographer, editor, sound person and sound mixer. I enjoy working with other people and, generally, I am pretty laid back. I choose people to work with because I respect what they do. So, I should listen to them. I have my own vision of how my film should look and I will have the last say. But I am not so fixed on the notion that I’m the director and it is my film. I see so many talented people and the reason that I am working with them is because they are talented.”

## Getting Into the Festival Circuit

The festival circuit represents an avenue by which an independent movie-maker can achieve recognition, but so far the festivals that accept native DV format for submissions are few and far between. Although eventually Victor would like to get *The Chinese Shoes* transferred to 35mm film for the moment he is seeking festivals that accept DV format or BetaCam. “The San Francisco International Asian-American film festival will accept BetaCam or 16mm or 35mm,” Victor said. “So, I am shooting for 35mm,

but if I can't afford it (since it is going to cost about \$5000 US), I can always give it to them on BetaCam."

The quality differences between DV and BetaCam are somewhat equalized by the fact that some degradation of BetaCam content occurs once it is transferred into a digital editing suite. Victor, who has worked extensively in both formats, explains it in these terms, "When BetaCam images are originally captured on tape, we can say that the quality is better than DV. But, when you transfer out of the master tape and into the editing suite, it generally gets transferred out in analog format, which will, in my opinion, degrade the signal a little bit. Then, you put the video into a computer, which either applies one form of compression to it or captures it without any compression (which takes a lot of disk space). It captures the content in its degraded format. When you edit it, there is more loss in the edit. And when you output it again, you usually output it using analog cables, back out onto the BetaCam deck."

"With DV," Victor continued, "if you use FireWire, when you transfer the rush into your editing suite, there is no loss. When you edit, there is no loss. When you output it back onto DV, there is no loss. That is the magic of working with DV. Your finished product is not going to have any image degradation. It is an exact copy of what you originally shot. Unless you have adjusted the colors or added special effects or things like that."

The Canon XL1 includes a Frame mode of shooting, which is similar to 24p format, but for filmmakers intending to have their work transferred to 35mm, you should check with the lab you intend to work with first to see what their requirements are.

"Frame mode is an aesthetic choice," Victor said. "I shot *The Chinese Shoes* with the goal of transferring it to 35mm. I talked to the lab that I decided would do the 35mm transfer and asked them how they preferred the DV. They wanted it interlaced, so I shot it interlaced. With their process, they interpolate the frames themselves and they get a better resolution than if I shot it in Frame mode, which isn't that bad. Frame mode, when I shoot in PAL, it is 25 fps, which is very close to the 24 fps of film. The Frame mode on the Canon is not supposed to be a true progressive scan frame, so there is a drop in quality. It is an aesthetic choice. You have to decide if you want your video to look like film on a video screen or if you want it to look like film on a real screen. If you are never going to put the movie on film, it would behoove you to maybe shoot in progressive mode or frame mode. You can then go back and either use After Effects or any of the other programs that add that film look. Understanding that the video is

never going to go on film, but you want it to look like film. If you want it to go on film, you want to keep the resolution at the highest possible level. Contact the lab that is going to do the tape-to-film transfer and ask them how they want the video.”

The benefits of entering the film festival circuit can be intangible and elusive, but it is one means of attracting notice and establishing credentials in a crowded field. “I don’t think people land major films from winning in festivals,” Victor said. “Because of my background, I don’t have any formal schooling or degrees in filmmaking. My experience is based on surf and sports productions. I don’t know what the situation is like in the States, but I know that when I came to Paris, I could have said that I was making movies with Martians. They would just look at what I had done blankly. They might be intrigued by surfing, but they wouldn’t take it seriously. So, being on the film festival circuit could give me the credibility that I need to launch other projects with other people. If I want to work by myself and self produce my own works, which is not out of the question, it is still good to be able to talk with sponsors and financiers. Something to consider: there are a lot of people who say ‘I want to make a movie,’ but they don’t actually follow through. If you have a product that is completed and that is being shown, then you have gone the full loop. People will take you more seriously.”

## Putting The Chinese Shoes on DVD

“I want *The Chinese Shoes* on DVD, but I don’t yet see a market for a 15-minute short film on DVD,” Victor said. “I don’t know who would buy something like that. I want it on DVD, but it needs to be packaged with other short films, along in the same genre. If a distributor came up and said, ‘Listen, we loved your film and we want to put it on a DVD with other short films, I would jump at the opportunity.’ I already did a DVD last winter and I’m in pre-production for the next one. It is an extreme sports movie that actually tours movie theaters, something like the Warren Miller film tour. Last year, the movie theater distributor wanted us to do this project on DVD, so that it could be projected from DVD, just as Warren Miller is doing in the states. This year we might just transfer it to 35mm, because it is easier to distribute to a wider range of theaters.”

“I am excited about the new HD DV format,” Victor said. “I am looking at it as a way of capturing video and then converting it to DV and editing it and coming out with a DV video that has much higher resolution.”