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Indie Filmmakers Find Partner in Post Production at Monaco Labs

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Filmmaker Guido Muzzarelli on the claymation set of *Island of the Gondoliers*

Indie filmmakers are on a roll. The number of high-quality indie films produced annually continues to grow dramatically within the US, and this growth extends throughout the world as well, from Mumbai to Soho, to New York, LA, Korea, and Jakarta. International [Film](#) Festivals abound, with indie filmmakers being acknowledged for the quality content and execution of their films. And the growth of the indie filmmaker community is taking off with help from the numerous film schools who are using the latest digital cinema technologies in their curriculum.

Indie filmmakers have always had the great scripts and hot talent, and now

they have a host of affordable, high-performance digital cinema tools -- [cameras](#) to workflows -- that help make their filmmaking dreams come true. These digital tools are also coming to the aid of filmmakers who want to work outside the realm (and larger budgets) of the big Hollywood studios.

Digital cinema is also making for big business at boutique post-production houses, who can now afford powerful digital workflows with the needed feature sets for color grading and finishing a variety of formats, with results comparable to 35mm productions. Case in point is Monaco Digital Film Labs in San Francisco. They updated their facility five years ago with a full-blown digital intermediate (DI) suite and installed ASSIMILATE's real-time SCRATCH Digital Process Solution as the hub of its data pipeline. They also built a calibrated 2K theater to accommodate working sessions and client reviews in real time.

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Scene from *Island of the Gondoliers* (animation and claymation)

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Building a DI suite was a natural progression for Monaco Labs. Servicing the professional film market for more than a century, Monaco has a complete film processing and developing lab, along with two telecines to provide high-quality film-to-tape transfer, as well as digital scanning, recording, print, and output to a variety of deliverables. Adding SCRATCH to the mix has given filmmakers a one-stop studio for the post production and deliverables of their projects. *"Since we offer an all-inclusive post facility, filmmakers can move more quickly through the post process, client reviews, and mastering, which means they save enormous amounts of time and money. Clearly this has great appeal to any filmmaker,"* says Jim Moyer, vice president of digital operations at Monaco Labs.

During the last five years, Monaco has worked on over seventy DI projects -- indie features, shorts, trailers, restoration -- within the SCRATCH data [workflow](#). *"We're giving indie filmmakers a high-end post facility experience at a reasonable cost,"* says Moyer. *"No matter the project format -- film, video, digital film, data capture -- the end result from color grading and finishing in SCRATCH is outstanding. And the SCRATCH workflow is ideal for the latest digital cameras, like those from [Panasonic](#) and RED. With respect to RED, SCRATCH is the only software that seamlessly handles the native REDCODE 4K files, direct from the camera to conform, color grading, and finishing -- a significant bonus for both the filmmaker and us."*

Moyer adds, *"We're fortunate to have Will Smith, a first-rate colorist, on our staff. He knows SCRATCH inside and out and can bring out the best in any film or imagery project. He uses layers of the SCRATCH scaffolds tool to do the secondary color grading and finishing -- the detailed polishing that makes a film shine. But in our studio, filmmakers can also do their own color grading in SCRATCH if they choose to do so. Either way, they'll be amazed with the creative latitude and control they experience."*

Indie Projects

Pig Hunt

Director **Jim Isaac**, one of the most talented, gore-specialized icons in the film industry, decided to work outside the confines of the big studio, taking the production of *Pig Hunt* (2008) north to San Francisco. The film is loaded with the required action and violence of the horror genre, and according to on-line reviewer Anton Bitel, ". . . *Pig Hunt* is viscerally exciting enough to wake the dead, and yet politically and morally engaged enough to gore its way right into your brain. . . ." *Pig Hunt* had its U.S. premiere at the San Francisco Film Society, and has been well received at several film festivals like Northwest Film Forum, Santa Cruz Film Festival, Brooklyn International Film Festival, and WorldFest Houston to name a few.



Scene from James Isaac's *Pig Hunt*

Scene from James Isaac's *Pig Hunt*

Isaac turned to Monaco Labs for the full post-production of *Pig Hunt*. Moyer explains the process, noting, *"The feature was shot on super 16mm. We then did the scan and conform, and the color grading was done by Will Smith. The project had 170,000 frames with 1800 shots so there was a lot of conforming. SCRATCH has a top-notch conforming tool, which definitely eased the process. There were numerous VFX shots from ILM and Kerner Optical among others, which we scanned and then easily dropped into the SCRATCH timeline. The clients loved the real-time workflow of SCRATCH, as well as the ability to review the film and make changes in real-time in our 2K full-screen theater. They were truly amazed that the post process was done so quickly and smoothly."*



James Isaac's Pig Hunt

Moye adds, "Isaac was also impressed with the secondary color correction in SCRATCH, using scaffolds for masking, highlighting, and tailoring the imagery to his desired look. In this genre, the color of blood is really important, and we got it right."

Island of the Gondoliers

Filmmaker Guido Muzzarelli recently completed his film short, *Island of the Gondoliers* (2009), a labor of love for Muzzarelli who also works full time as an animator of other films, such as *Enchanted* (2007), *Charlotte's Web* (2006), *Matrix Revolutions* (2003), *The Spiderwick Chronicles* (2008), "9" (2009) to name a few.

Island of the Gondoliers is a mythical piece written, directed, and produced by Muzzarelli. The look is *City of Lost Children* meets Fellini's *La Strada* in a Venetian adventure about a bookish Italian historian whose obsessive quest to find the last survivors of a forgotten genocide leads him into a frightening confrontation with a sinister circus.

Action for the film was shot in 16mm by Director of Photography Robert Donald and 2nd cinematographer D.W. Lech. Muzzarelli digitally created the animations and claymation. Monaco ran the 16mm through its telecine to create an uncompressed Quicktime file, which Muzzarelli loaded on his hard drive, along with the animations and claymation. Muzzarelli then combined all the elements in an edited file for hand off to Monaco. "The film had some edge artifacts and dirt but I was able to easily clean all this up in SCRATCH," says Moye. "I used SCRATCH scaffolds to isolate and enhance the detail, degrain, lessen noise, and sharpen 33 shots that were soft. The result was cleaner edges, finer detail, and vivid imagery. Guido was able to view the color correction live, see his suggestions take place in real time, and was quite enthused about and impressed with the process. We were able to achieve far better results than he originally thought possible for this project."

"Since this film was my personal project I was definitely cost sensitive, yet I wanted to achieve the best quality deliverables as possible," says Muzzarelli. "Monaco Labs has the SCRATCH workflow, which offered the right set of DI tools to color grade and enhance the project's content. I'm definitely a perfectionist and SCRATCH allowed me to refine all the details to achieve the look I had envisioned. It's been hugely gratifying to have this life-long goal come to fruition and Monaco gave me tremendous support in this endeavor."

Film Restoration

Monaco Labs also excels at film preservation and restoration, as well as digital formatting, and most often it's done within the SCRATCH data workflow. One such example is *Screen Snapshots: 7th Series* (July 2009), a 1924 nitrate print with a hand-tinted section that features Hollywood stars of the time Clara Bow, Ethel Shannon, and more.

In this joint project overseen by Ed Stratmann of Eastman House's Selznick School of Film Preservation, the San Francisco Silent Film Festival, Monaco and Interformat worked with recent Selznick graduate Anne Smatla to preserve the film. A 4K capture was followed by color correction using SCRATCH software; it was recorded to a fresh color inter-negative that yielded a print with the closest match. The color section was then spliced in with the print from the black and white preservation negative.

"As with a McCall's Fashion News filmed on two-color Kodachrome, the film can be so brittle that we need to use a re-hydration process to allow the film to be transported through our equipment," says Moye. "This work requires in-depth knowledge of film processes, patience, and a delicate touch."

Monaco takes on the "little" restoration projects as well. *"A customer from Waverly, Tennessee wanted to create a video for the town's 200 year celebration from reels of 50+ year old 16mm film," explains Moye. "We transferred the film to digital to create a new master; edited it all; did the clean up and color correction in SCRATCH; inserted audio and titles; and the result was a quality two-hour show and high customer satisfaction."*

Market Futures

"We're seeing more films from the international market," says Moye. "We recently wrapped up the post production for two Brazilian films: Haroldo Calvacanti's All Or Nothing and Claudio Fernandes' A Country Doctor. Both were shot with Panasonic digital cameras and the output was to 35mm film. For both films, we did the color grading and the finishing with several layers of scaffolds to define and enhance the productions."

Moye adds, *"For A Country Doctor we did over thirty hours of color correction for a twenty-minute short. It was beautifully shot and included a lot of candlelight. Matching all the elements required intense precision to achieve the director's vision for the project."*

"SCRATCH gives us a streamlined, cost-effective data workflow that enables us to support the growing number of indie filmmakers, worldwide," says Moye. "No matter their format of choice, we're able to give them first-rate color grading and finishing at a reasonable cost."

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