

'21 Bridges' DP Seeks New York-Style 'Street' Cred in Philadelphia

By [DREW TURNEY](#)



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In director Brian Kirk's "['21 Bridges](#)," Chadwick Boseman plays a very different kind of hero than T'Challa in "Black Panther": He's an intense New York cop tracking a pair of killers throughout the city one fateful night, trying to box them in by closing the titular connections between Manhattan and the mainland.

Along with Kirk, one of the touchstones cinematographer Paul Cameron ("Man on Fire," "Collateral," "Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales") had in mind was the Sidney Lumet-Alan J. Pakula school of New York film. But the most surprising thing that came out of their scouting was that Cameron thinks locations in Philadelphia are soon going to look more like New York than New York does.

"It doubles very well for New York," says Cameron, who's midway through his new project, Lisa Joy's "Reminiscence." "We're on the cusp of [New York's] urban landscape changing. They're taking all the sodium and metal-halide lights out and putting in white LEDs. So those older-style, interesting color temperatures are going away."

With his director, Cameron spent countless hours scouting New York locations they wanted to replicate. In one example, after inspecting plants in the meat-packing district, they toured 10 such plants in Philadelphia to find one that had the same vibe.

It was the sharp end of a whole ethos to re-create the iconic moods of the Big Apple. "I gravitated to the bolder color temperature of a New York street feel, specifically the older orange lighting and the greens of the metal high line we've seen in a lot of movies," Cameron says.

But aside from looking and feeling like Manhattan to audiences, it was about the mood on set, too, with Cameron saying the director wanted to make it feel right for the actors and crew.

There also was a creative effort to make “[21 Bridges](#)” look like it was shot on film — virtually impossible on its \$33 million budget for a feature that calls for a lot of action and movement.

The production used the small, lightweight and anamorphic Scorpio lenses in Sony Venice 6K digital cameras. Cameron built a lightweight system suited to Steadicam work, which was great for running, gunfights and driving scenes — something he says suited not just the action, but the mobility needed for rapid setups.

But he adds the “Bridges” trailer can be a little deceiving. There’s quite a bit of Steadicam and handheld that permeates the action beats, but something he’s proud of is Kirk’s choice to use a lot of long masters and longer takes without a lot of frenetic cutting. An application to digitally add the quality of film grain was the last step.

It all combines in an homage to films Cameron says have “street cred.” “Probably the simplest one to mention is a movie like ‘Taxi Driver,’” he says. “It’s about a real combination of the neon signs and old fluorescent signs that don’t exist anymore.”

It’s a grittier and darker aesthetic that Cameron says is challenging to build in a commercial, contemporary cop story, and there were concerns it would be too dark for the studio, STX Entertainment. The team spent three days lifting faces and sharpening eyes just enough to make everybody comfortable with the level of darkness.

“I think we got away with it,” he says with a laugh. “The challenge is that everybody’s looking at dailies on their phones in bright lighting and Brian was very firm about making sure the darkness made it all the way through to the end of the process.”
