



Hitchcock Blonde

John Pardue lends a classic-cinema look to *The Girl*, which explores Alfred Hitchcock's obsession with Tippi Hedren.

By Stephen Pizzello

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Alfred Hitchcock famously preferred blondes. “The perfect ‘woman of mystery,’” he once declared, “is one who is blonde, subtle and Nordic.” His fixation on this ideal has been well documented by critics such as Roger Ebert, who noted that the director’s female characters “reflected the same qualities over and over again: They were blonde. They were icy and remote. They were imprisoned in costumes that subtly combined fashion with fetishism. They mesmerized the men, who often had physical or psychological handicaps.” Hitchcock once wryly observed that his preoccupation was entirely justifiable aesthetically: “Blondes make the best victims. They’re like virgin snow that shows up the bloody footprints.”

The director channeled his muse through many of the industry’s most striking fair-haired beauties, but according to HBO’s telefilm *The Girl*, which begins airing this month, his compulsion took a troubling turn when he discovered Tippi Hedren.

Hitchcock and his wife, Alma, spotted Hedren in a TV commercial in the fall of 1961. The auteur immediately summoned her for a meeting and soon cast her as the lead in his next feature, *The Birds* (1963). Their collaboration began cordially but allegedly turned sour when Hitchcock began making romantic overtures that Hedren rebuffed. Frustrated, Hitchcock reportedly forced her to endure sadistic treatment on the sets of *The Birds* and his next film, *Marnie* (1964). Hedren refused to work with him after that.

For *The Girl*, which was directed by Julian Jarrold, cinematographer John Pardue was tasked with creating a classic-cinema look that would dramatize the conflict between the director (played by Toby Jones) and the actress (played by Sienna Miller). Born in New York, Pardue holds dual citizenship in the U.S. and U.K. and has worked on projects all over the world, including some in South Africa, where HBO’s production was based. “*The Girl* was a great opportunity for me as a director of photography, and it gave us all wonderful insights into the period of those great Hitchcock movies,” he enthuses. “Julian embraced the Hitchcock style in his directing, just as I did with the cinematography.”

During prep, Pardue carefully studied the photographic strategies employed on *The Birds* and *Marnie* by Robert Burks, ASC (portrayed in *The Girl* by Sean Cameron Michael). Hitchcock's fascination with Hedren is certainly reflected in the cinematography of both movies. The camera seems voyeuristically complicit in the travails she faces throughout *The Birds*, and Hitchcock biographer Donald Spoto reported that on *Marnie*, the director gave Burks "unusual instructions about photographing her face — the camera was to come as close as possible, the lenses were almost to make love to her. For a scene in which she is kissed by Sean Connery, the close-up is so tight, the frame filled so fully with pressing lips, that the tone is virtually pornographic."

"The overall style of *The Girl* is quite naturalistic, but when I shot scenes that were homages to Burks, I tried to light them the way he would have," says Pardue. "This is very evident in our depictions of Hedren's screen tests, the *Birds* attic scene and the *Marnie* seduction scene. I looked at many photographs from the sets of those two movies to try to get into the mindset that existed back then. We even sourced some old lights, old stands and other vintage lighting gear. The older lights had softer Fresnel lenses, which really helped. I used a lot of 10Ks, some 20Ks and quarter Wendys to create a big-source feel for our studio scenes."

Pardue took particular pains while re-creating Hedren's screen test for *The Birds*. In the original test, Hitchcock paired her with actor Martin Balsam for a series of playful exchanges the duo performed on a wood-paneled set. "I really studied that footage, and I think we got our scene very close to the look of the original test," Pardue says. "We shot our test in a restaurant, copying the furniture arrangement and the positioning of the two lamps against a wood wall. We used half of the restaurant for the test and the other half for the first part of the sequence, when Tippi walks in to meet Hitchcock. We



Opposite: Tippi Hedren (Sienna Miller) auditions for Alfred Hitchcock after he selects her to star in *The Birds*. Cinematographer John Pardue went to great lengths to emulate the look of the original screen test. This page, top: Hitchcock (Toby Jones) and his wife, Alma (Imelda Staunton), study Hedren's test. Bottom: Pardue (right) frames a shot for director Julian Jarrold.

also had to find a contemporary lens that would match the look of the test. We chose a 32mm Cooke S2, which enabled us to capture the essence of the original perspective.

"Burks' lighting for the screen test was quite simple," continues Pardue. "He lit Hedren with a classic, frontal, slightly off-camera key that was quite directional, probably with a softener in front of the lens. Then, he had an eyelight right next to the camera and some backlight, of course. That was the basis for our approach. Sienna walks all over the set in the test, so she was walking into a couple of preset backlights and keys."

Pardue shot most of *The Girl* digitally with an Arri Alexa, but for the

screen test and all footage replicating scenes from Hitchcock's movies, he shot Fujifilm Eterna Vivid 500 with an Arricam Lite. "The idea was that whenever we cut to a shot that re-created a scene from *The Birds* or *Marnie*, we would go a little bit further into the texture of those films," he explains. "We thought the color saturation in the Fuji stock might help us approximate the look Burks got from the negatives of that period. Because we were shooting those scenes on film, I was able to use heavy Mitchell Pancro filters to emulate the heavy diffusion Hitchcock and Burks used on their close-ups. With the Alexa, we used Pancro filters on our S2 primes, but they weren't as heavy as the filters we used for our film scenes. The



Top: While rehearsing dialogue from *The Birds*, Hitchcock instructs Hedren on how to calibrate her voice for maximum dramatic impact. Pardue observes, "We kept their early scenes together very bright and optimistic, with the feel of sunny California outside the windows. The look of our interiors gradually gets darker as Hitchcock's mood grows darker." **Bottom:** Pardue sourced vintage equipment for shots of Hitchcock on his sets.

Alexa has a lot of latitude, but digital will only take so much diffusion before it starts to break up.

"Julian was very worried about the digital footage looking too sharp to be true to that era, so we decided to use the S2s for the entire show," he continues. "They gave us a slightly softer look, but their resolution was still quite good.

The problem was that S2 lenses are in limited supply. To supplement, I added some S4s because I felt they were the nearest match. I used a 14mm S4 for our opening shot of the movie studio's car park. I also had a 100mm S4 on hand, because our S2 100mm looked a little cloudy. Then, I had to find a 10:1 zoom and a compatible doubler for

exteriors. It was difficult to find one that matched the S2s, but in the end I went with an older Angenieux lens. It matched our S2s fairly well for exterior shots, but we used it a few times in our *Birds* attic scene and it was colder, sharper and a bit more contrasty than our S2s. That's one of the compromises of using an older, unusual prime-lens package, but we were able to adjust the look in the grade. We also had a 200mm Leitz in our arsenal that matched very well with the S2s."

Pardue's approach to Miller's close-ups was calibrated to reflect classic Hollywood lighting. "Sienna looked fantastic in that Hitchcock-style beauty light, and I used a more frontal key on many of her close-ups throughout the film. Directional light really suits her features. For those classic glamour shots, I used one of our older Fresnels as the front key. I dimmed it down and then brought back some of the color with ¼ CTB. I sometimes added a small diffusion frame if I felt she required more wrap.

"Early on, we did a quick test to see how that classic front key would work on her, and we added a little eyelight by the matte box after noticing that it was always present in set photos from *The Birds*. Whenever I used an eyelight, whether it was a 650-watt unit or an older period 1K, I'd put some Depron foam right in front of the barn doors. It gave the eye reflections a really nice falloff."

In other situations, Pardue used more modern fixtures for Miller's close-ups. "To create a low ambient light for some of her close-ups, I used Kino Flos fitted with Depron, which softened the tubes to create a more shadowless soft light. The Depron allowed us to use the smaller Kino systems closer to Sienna in more intimate locations without it looking like we'd added too many sources. I also used the Kinos and Depron for close-ups in night interiors, but my main source in those situations was a China ball; I could raise or lower it very quickly to create the appropriate look. We also had some 'covered wagons' containing

100-watt Photofloods with Depron attached over a wire mesh. We normally had three of those sitting on the floor; they were wired to dimmers, which allowed me to dim them down to match table practicals.”

Close-ups of Jones also required meticulous work because of the elaborate prosthetics he wore to transform into Hitchcock. “Toby’s prosthetics took 4½ hours to apply every day, which was a tough turnaround on a 26-day shoot,” Pardue observes. “The makeup artists did a great job with the prosthetics, but it’s still something a cinematographer has to light very carefully. Digital, even on the Alexa, shows a lot of skin detail, but the softer S2 lenses and diffusion filters helped. Julian wanted big close-ups of Toby, and that’s where you start seeing blemishes in a prosthetic. I used soft light on him as much as I could. In the studio scenes I lit him with a strong, hard, three-quarter backlight, but I softened this considerably for the corresponding close-ups.”

The Mitchell filters were recommended to Pardue by Joe Dunton, BSC, who also provided him with some vintage film equipment (including the original process camera used on *The Birds*), invaluable advice on period lighting, and insights about the ambience that prevailed on early-1960s film sets, where arc lights created a smoky atmosphere. “Joe shipped the process camera to South Africa, and we actually used it as a prop for studio scenes that show process photography against sodium-lit screens,” recalls Pardue. “Panavision U.K. sent over some mag belts so we could get the mags running. It’s worth mentioning that all of this was mobilized very quickly. I feel very lucky that Joe helped us sort everything out.

“I got very involved in obtaining the correct film props for our studio sets,” the cinematographer notes. “In South Africa, we sourced an old Mitchell camera that still had its blimp and all of its accessories. We built a dolly based on a set photo from *Sons and Lovers*, which was shot in 1963, the same year as *The Birds*. The jib dollies



One of the production’s most ambitious undertakings was to create a large exterior set that could double for Bodega Bay, the California coastal town where Hitchcock had shot *The Birds*. “South Africa was a perfect match for California, and Julian sourced some great locations,” Pardue says. “We turned an old crayfish factory into Bodega Bay. Our first day of shooting was a big exterior rain scene, which was very tricky. The problem with the rain in South Africa is that you have this really bright sun, so if you shoot out to sea, you’re not going to see any rain — it’s that old conundrum. We managed to contain the rain between two buildings, and I just screened off the sunlight as best I could.”

we use nowadays, I discovered, weren’t invented till much later.”

The production’s main location was Cape Town’s 3 Arts Theatre, which the filmmakers transformed into the movie studio where much of *The Girl* takes place. “The location actually functioned as a real studio after we built a lighting grid in the roof, and it was also a great location for our period backlot. The corridors, Hitch’s office and Tippi’s dressing room were all linked together as one huge set, and it had a projection room at the top that we used as Hitch’s screening room. The space was big

enough for our production designer, Darryl Hammer, to also build all the sets we needed from *The Birds* and *Marnie*. She did a fantastic job, and everything connected in a useful way. Our assistant director, Sebastian Ballhaus, also deserves a lot of credit for coordinating our very tight schedule.

“It was an interesting situation, because we were shooting period sets within our period soundstage. We lit the Hitchcock sets with vintage lights that we kept in shot; meanwhile, we lit the soundstage with modern lighting rigs kept out of shot. Our functioning period

To re-create the relentless bird attack Hedren suffered during production of *The Birds*, Pardue consulted with production designer Darryl Hammer on the construction of the attic set and the positioning of the bird netting. "All of our research really paid off," he says. "While we were doing that sequence, I really felt like we were shooting *The Birds*. The squawking birds created an eerie feeling when Sienna walked onto this very austere set. We filmed enough great footage to create a 10-minute assembly of the sequence. Like Tippi Hedren, Sienna was forced to endure a couple of live birds crashing into her — it was a strange case of accidental moments imitating the real story."



lights consisted of a 10K, two 5Ks, three 2Ks and a couple of smaller Fresnel fixtures. We also had two Brutes that were not functional, but our gaffer, Gilles Boisacq, put 500-watt bulbs in them to make them look like they were on. We had old period stands for all of these units, and I also provided Gilles with photos of old diffusion frames he and his boys could copy.

"We had to black out some of our

modern lighting rigs with drapes so they wouldn't be visible in our wide shots. The crew rigged various trusses and trapeze bars in all the areas of the studio where we thought we'd need lighting. I think I had about 15 5Ks, eight 10Ks, a 20K, some follow spots, 20 space lights, some Source Fours and even some Par cans with spot bulbs, in addition to the usual array of smaller units. Panavision South Africa gave us

everything they could."

One of the most ambitious studio setups was the re-creation of a climactic sequence from *The Birds* in which Hedren's character ventures into an attic and is attacked by a swarm of vicious birds. "That's the pivotal sequence in our film," Pardue says. "Hitchcock shot his sequence over five days, but we had to do our version in one! We therefore had to shoot enough footage to create the impression that time was passing; we needed to create some sense of the ordeal Tippi endured while filming the original sequence.

"Burks lit the attic scene very differently than we would do it today," he continues. "He made Tippi's keylight part of his mottled night look. There was enough dapple in the scene that Tippi's flashlight is brighter than the overall light. It's not a naturalistic approach, but the illusion works. In studying his approach, I finally sussed out what he did: he used one three-quarter key and placed an ulcer [a.k.a. cucoloris] in front of the light fixture to create all the dappled light."

Pardue also tried to determine where Burks' crew had hung the nets



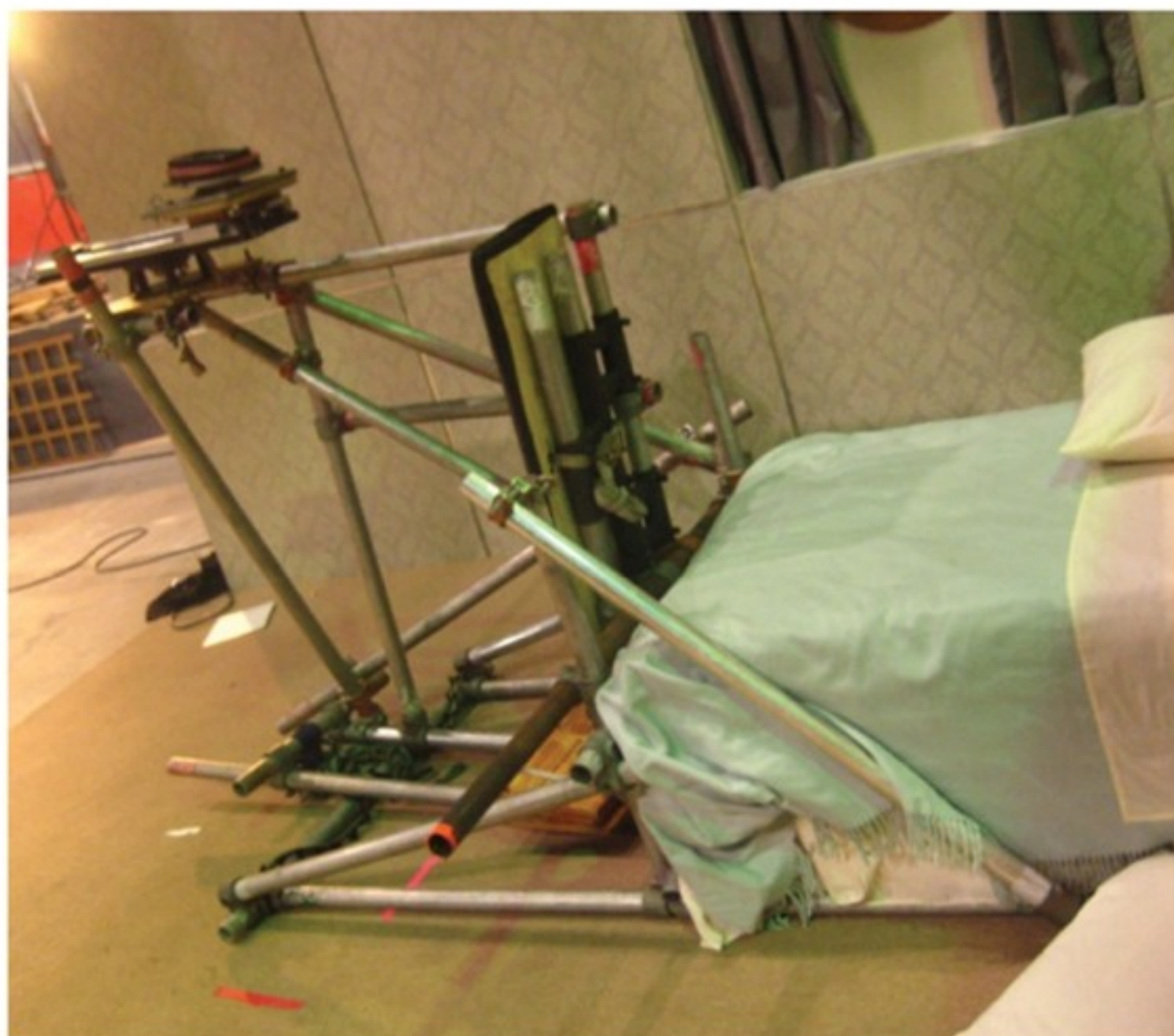
that contained the live birds during filming. “Darryl and I had quite a few discussions about that — I was trying to light through the nets while hoping that the shadows they created would be soft enough,” he says. “Obviously, the closer the nets were, the more I started feeling their shadows on the set. With looser nets, the birds were too sparse, and they would just fly off toward the top of the set. In the end, the nets had to be very close to Sienna so the birds could fly around her and still fill the frame. I found myself wondering if Burks had to deal with similar issues when he lit the original attic set.

“In many ways, the nets offered a visual opportunity for the whole scene and the lighting. Our frontal key was a very old 5K Fresnel that was really soft and dirty; it was one of my period lights, and it created a very nice direct light. I positioned it to the left of the set through an ulcer. Darryl really helped me by creating a dogleg in the roof of our attic so the set itself wouldn’t flag or cut our key. Hitchcock and his team created the idea that the roof of the house was a bit broken up so they could pop some additional light in; our set had a little space cut into the slanted roof that allowed us to throw some extra light down and create a bit of kick from one side. Then we put the bird nets in place, and we made sure the main 5K was close enough that it wouldn’t throw net shadows all over the set. For the illusion to work, Sienna’s flashlight had to feel brighter

Hitchcock Blonde



Top: Hedren recuperates at home after suffering a nervous breakdown on *The Birds*. "She escapes into this world after her ordeal on the attic set," says Pardue. "Tippi's house is her retreat, so we gave it a dreamy feel. The light often reflects this ambience, with low sunlight flickering through the curtains; we made the light for these scenes much more naturalistic, with less of the classic 'Hitchcock lighting.'" Middle: Miller prepares to duplicate the controversial "rape scene" from *Marnie*. Bottom: To re-create a unique shot from the sequence, key grip Rob Fischer designed a special tilting rig that was built by best boy Allan Gray. The camera was attached to a 2' slider (top left) and Miller stood with her back against the vertical platform, which was then lowered onto the bed.



than the set, so we dimmed the 5K down a bit. That gave it a softer edge that looked very nice on her skin.

"We then had to light the rest of the attic set and the surrounding soundstage, because we were essentially shooting a set within a set. I backlit the entire set with two 5Ks, and we had a 20K up on a Genie boom to sidelight everything. We placed some Source Four [Lekos] above the nets to pick out the pattern of the nets in a very theatrical way and throw the right kinds of shadows on Sienna. We also used Source Fours and some snooted, dimmed-down 5Ks to create pools of light on the stage floor in areas where Hitchcock's crewmembers would stand. As a final touch, we positioned two vintage Brutes to create the illusion that they were somehow involved in the lighting design. Because we had so many shots of Hitch and Tippi entering the soundstage, I also backlit the pathway from the studio door with snooted 5Ks."

Another key scene the filmmakers re-created was the notorious rape sequence from *Marnie*, in which the heroine's husband, Mark (Sean Connery), forcibly makes love to her while the two are honeymooning aboard a cruise ship. The sequence includes an unusual over-the-shoulder close-up of Hedren in which she seems to float downward onto the bed. "That shot is one of those 'Hitchcock moments,'" Pardue says. "It's much trickier than you think to emulate some of those famous shots, and we spent ages trying to figure out how they did that one."

Key grip Rob Fischer solved the problem by designing a rig that would support both Miller and the camera in a fixed position, allowing the crew to pivot both the actress and camera 90 degrees backwards and down toward the bed. Fischer explains, "When I watched the sequence in prep, it occurred to me that Hitchcock must have used some form of rig, like a tilting bed or a camera that Hedren was attached to, in order to keep the frame and focus constant. The shot starts a bit behind Connery's shoulder, and it tracks forward into a close-up of Hedren before she starts descending. I

Bottom photo courtesy of Rob Fischer.

Hitchcock Blonde



Pardue feels that the sequence depicting the *Birds* premiere “really captures the period. The original premiere looked quite bright with all the flashes from those old camera bulbs. The location we chose had these great, graphic-looking doors with lots of lightbulbs above them; those bulbs justified the light source of the entire scene, but I had to keep them from blowing out and looking too bright in our digital footage. To augment the bulbs, I positioned four quarter Wendys on the building’s rooftop. I just kept them out of frame, placing them at various angles so I could turn them on and off when shooting in different directions. Quarter Wendys are very nice keys; the light on Sienna looks really beautiful and ‘period’ when she steps out of the car.”

still have no idea how they managed that, but we came up with our own method.

“The day before we did the shot, I sent our best boy, Allan Gray, off to the parking lot to build a rig that could take Sienna from a standing position and then lower her onto the bed,” Fischer continues. “We built a speed-rail frame that pivoted at the same height as the bed, adding a backboard to support Sienna. The track-in move was achieved with a 2-foot slider positioned so that the camera could slide into position for the close-up before we started tilting the entire rig. Gravity did the rest by keeping the camera in place, and a few lengths of bungee cord helped us control the speed.”

The lighting for the sequence also required some homework. “As Hedren is moving down onto the bed, you can see the reflection of a keylight moving through her eyes, and that helped me work out how Burks did it,” says Pardue.

“He seems to have lit her from the side with a couple of small sources in an attempt to keep his beauty light constant; he probably had to do that because the camera was in the way and very close to Tippi. I imagine that the focus was tricky, so they would have had to build the stop up to maintain good focus. I tried to copy what Burks did, using three small sources positioned on Sienna’s right side at three-quarter angles, but I ended up using more diffusion frames so the light would wrap a bit more on Sienna. Our version has the same sort of feel as the original, though. I used the heaviest Mitchell Pancro diffusion filter, because Burks had some very heavy diffusion on the shot that made it feel slightly out of focus.

“Because we couldn’t really show the actor who was playing Connery in our film, we shot in one direction,” continues Pardue. “There’s a sense of moonlight coming from the porthole in the room, and we gave it more of a theatrical feel with a small unit that we

blued up and bounced back to create a subtle, cold edge. Sienna has a strong cosmetic backlight that we kept low so it would seem to be coming from the bedside practical lamp. I also added a 12-by-12 top bounce with a colder light to blend things in with a bit of the moonlight. Hitchcock’s crew would not have done that, but I wanted to add some coldness to the shadows.”

Pardue graded *The Girl* at Molinare in London with colorist Tim Waller, who helped him add finishing touches that approximate the Technicolor look of both Hitchcock films. “We all felt that the grade should be colorful and should mimic the feel of a film made in the early Sixties, and Tim was very committed to getting the correct look,” says the cinematographer. “It was quite interesting to grade shots from the Alexa and the same shots made on film. To my eye, the Alexa prefers a low-contrast grade, so we needed to add more contrast to get

those Technicolor hues we wanted. The problem is that when you add contrast to digital footage, the blacks start to block up a bit. The 35mm absorbed more contrast, so it was easier to find the right colors without pushing too much contrast into the grade. The Fuji 500 Vivid has vibrant colors, especially the reds, that worked well to emulate that Technicolor look. To get even closer to it, we added a bit of red to our blacks. That seemed to do the trick.” ●

TECHNICAL SPECS

1.78:1

Digital Capture and
3-perf Super 35mm

Arri Alexa, Arricam Lite

Cooke S2, Cooke S4;
Angenieux; Leitz

Fujifilm Eterna Vivid 500 8547