

The trend for vintage

Marketed as 'Boutique film equipment rental in East London', One Stop Films has made a name for itself as the place to go for a range of beautifully restored and carefully maintained vintage lenses, tapping into the trend for antique glass that generates images that soften and flatter, often recreating a 'period' look. **Jonathan Iles** of One Stop explains the choices involved for DoPs and productions when it comes to selecting the perfect lenses for their shoots.



Anamorphic Cineovisions

DREW TATE

"We want it to look like film"... how many times in the last few years has this been the go-to line for you as a cameraman? Whether it's from the producer, the director or the runner walking past with the lunchtime sandwiches!

Rewind 16 years to 2000 and we knew where we stood. Camera technology was changing at an alarming rate, BUT 16mm was no longer the preferred choice. Digibeta was the go-to workhorse for wildlife, war zones, documentaries and early reality TV. Grab a Canon J11 and a J22 and see you in three months when I get back from my travels with some fabulous rushes and a hangover from last night in a great bar!

Fast forward to 2010 and by now everyone was seeking this or that must-have look, musing over "This camera is slower" or "That one shoots 1080p with a 35mm adaptor."

The Canon 5D was the game-changer; with this you had an affordable, compact camera that was lightweight, worked with prime lenses and offered great resolution. All of a sudden you could approach camerawork in an entirely different way – and this was when the birth of "We want it to look like film" occurred.

Obviously this is a very short summary of how our industry has evolved but the incontrovertible reality is that camerawork as it was 20 years ago has changed completely. And today the range of options available is vast, so how do you know what to choose?

One major area of choice on which One Stop Films has concentrated since its foundation in 2009, is that of lenses and helping clients to find the perfect lenses for their shoots. With the advent of the 5D, and then other models that followed in its wake, shooting with a set of primes was no longer confined to features and dramas. People all over the world were suddenly using them on every type of project, using primes, whether it be the classic SuperSpeeds on a movie tube or searching online auction sites for rare Japanese stills lenses for their projects... I'm sure by now you get the point.

The quest for 'organic' imagery

So why did this happen? Of course, you could debate this endlessly, but one of the overriding themes is that vintage lenses became popular due to the increased resolution of modern digital cameras, which led to the feeling that the images they produce are *too sharp* and can be unflattering. Cameramen and cinematographers started to carefully select older lenses for certain productions, finding that the combination of old glass and new technology gives a natural, organic imagery with a depth of character that modern lenses can lack. This, in turn, complements production design, aesthetics, locations and actor closeups.

We are seeing this very often in Hollywood now, with cinematographers such as Greig Fraiser ASC choosing to shoot on vintage anamorphic lenses with the ARRI Alexa 65 for *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, and Hoyte Van Hoytema opting for vintage Canon K35s for his beautiful film *Her*. These are two of the biggest DoPs around, so if it's good enough for them...!

One Stop Films is an East London-based camera house and we have a wide variety of choices when it comes to vintage lenses, whether they be anamorphic or spherical. We have everything from Canon K35s that were used on *Aliens*, *Her* and *American Hustle*; to Super Baltars as used on *The Godfather*, *Rush* and Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*; to Cooke S2s used on *Carol*, *Whiplash* and *Midnight in Paris*. The list goes on, including a rather large anamorphic inventory of Kowas, Todd AOs, Lomos, Cineovisions and modern Cooke 6i Anamorphics, plus a lot more interesting glass coming soon.

Human Universe

DoP Rob McGregor rented some vintage lenses from One Stop Films for the BBC Factual series *Human Universe* and here are his thoughts: "While shooting *Human Universe* with Professor Brian Cox for the BBC, I had the chance to be as creative as possible with an open-minded producer and director, Nat Sharman, who is extremely creative himself. He allowed me to indulge in moments and sequences of creativity with equipment a BBC1 documentary wouldn't usually allow.

"One of these sequences was when filming at NASA. We wanted to use anamorphic lenses on the key sequences and I chose vintage Lomo anamorphics. These had a beautiful, almost organic, look that reminds the viewer of the classic 70s and 80s movies, with wonderful flares, contrast and colour. Admittedly, they are not the easiest lenses to work with at times, but it was worth the struggle. Having no fear of shooting directly into the sun, these created an extraordinary look that would be hard to duplicate with modern glass.

"On the same episode, I also took a set of Canon K35s for a sequence in an underwater facility used to train astronauts in a mock space station sunk somewhere off Florida Keys. Again, these lenses have a lovely organic look. Within the 'space station', I found myself mostly staying on the 10mm. With their gentle sharpness, contrast and beautiful colour scape, they really added to the sequence giving it an almost surreal quality. I used it again on a 2½-minute piece-to-camera that needed to be shot as one continuous take on Steadicam. For an 'antique' 10mm, this lens has surprisingly little distortion and the piece developed from a closeup on Brian to wide showing the size of the NASA rocket and back to closeup again, repeatedly. Again, achieving this antique look reminds us of the 70s and 80s classics."

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THE CHOICE FOR THE NETFLIX ORIGINAL SERIES, *THE CROWN*.

"We tested many different lenses and chose Cooke Speed Panchro lenses, which were re-housed by True Lens Services. The combination of Panchro lenses, Glimmerglass™ filters and haze truly added to the visual style." ■■■

Adriano Goldman, DoP, *The Crown*

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Recent projects

Recently, One Stop Films has been involved in a range of high-profile dramas and features that have opted to film with vintage lenses. For the BBC drama *Rillington Place*, James Friend BSC chose an extended set of K35s, as the production was seeking a 'lower-contrast' look to enhance the sets. *The Limehouse Golem*, a feature film soon to hit the cinemas, shot by DoP Simon Dennis, and Netflix drama *Kiss Me Quick*, shot by GTC member Jamie Cairney, both used vintage Todd AOs, also for aesthetic reasons. And we can reveal that there is a very cool shot in the current series of *Sherlock*, where Benedict Cumberbatch is wearing the camera on his body with a 10mm K35 prime just 6 inches from his face!

The vintage drama look

Pete Allibone recently shot a period ITV drama and explains his choice of lenses for the project: "I recently shot a drama for ITV which, for the large part, was set in the 60s, 70s and 80s. I wanted a set of lenses that would add a little texture, perhaps even subtle aberration. And big fat juicy flares! With a bit of advice from One Stop, I opted to try out their Canon K35s on the front of a Sony F55. We shot a lot of night-time interiors and needed to use just practical lights for quite a few tricky scenes – so there were some challenging setups. I had to open the iris up more than I would have liked on older lenses on more than one occasion, but the Canons held the image well, even on extremes of focus and aperture. They've clearly been carefully chosen and expertly maintained. It's still early days in the edit and TX is still a way off, but I'm told the look has been well received by all, with 'a very welcome tone and genuine warmth to the show'. I can't wait to get into the grade and see for myself."



Anamorphic Kowas

We started this piece with the statement: "We want it to look like film" – and what we have hopefully demonstrated is that there are choices available to you to help you meet this brief other than just which camera to use.

Fact File



One Stop Films welcomes you to their test rooms at their base at Three Mills Studios, to talk you through their primes and zooms, and to advise on looks and what lenses might be suitable for your production. It is a small family-run company and has hand-picked its glass to give cameramen and cinematographers the looks they require. One Stop will tailor the camera kit to your production, offering a personal service. See more: www.onestopfilms.co.uk

Vintage Super Baltars



Retro lights

Also very much in on the 'trend for vintage' are GTC sponsors Shift 4, who not only offer an interesting range of vintage lenses, but have also put together a fun collection of vintage lights for use as in-shot practicals.

Vintage lights

Shift 4's 'Vintage Lighting: 20th Century Classics' collection includes carefully restored and refurbished original fittings, such as Strand Electric Patt stage lamps and genuine Furse Spotlights, supplemented with a few modern designer fittings, some of these more quirky in design, such as a lamp in the shape of an old bellows stills camera.

This collection was put together after talking to clients about their requirements, as Shift 4 Managing Director Alex Trezies explains: "We purchased our collection of vintage lights to facilitate the requirements of a selection of creative DoPs who discussed with us their desire to have good-looking lighting in shot to add pictorial interest and to help them achieve particular vintage, urban looks. We wanted to be able to deliver what a few specific clients were looking for. All of our vintage lights are aesthetically pleasing but also functional."

Shift 4 now offers 11 different models in their vintage collection, the most frequently hired of which is the Strand Electric Patt 123 (commonly known as a 'Rocket' for its classic vintage rocket shape and polished chrome finish).

DoPs and production companies hire the lights either as a one-off or as part of larger camera and lighting kits. The lamps are mainly being used on music videos, promos and for stylised pieces, but have also been used on period dramas. Essentially these are in-shot set dressing practicals rather than main lighting sources although all are supplied with a 2700K bulb and chrome/wooden tripod.

Since most of the lights are genuinely antique, they are quite fragile, so need to be handled appropriately. Whenever they are sent out they are carefully packaged in tubes or boxes. While the vintage lights are never going to become a main business line, as word spreads, they are becoming more and more popular as a niche hire and the range is likely to expand as Shift 4 comes across and acquires more unusual, hard-to-find items.

Vintage lenses

Meanwhile, as seen in the preceding One Stop Films article, the trend for vintage lenses is already well established. Shift 4 is also involved in this market and can currently offer: Canon FD primes, Zeiss Super Speed Mark III primes, Cooke Speed Panchro Series II and III, and an extended set of Canon K35 Primes.

Shift 4 finds these lenses are mainly hired out for high-end work such as features and commercials requiring a stylised look. Their oldest lenses are K35s, manufactured in the 70s, once owned by DoP Alwin H Kuchle (*Sunshine*, *Hanna*, *Steve Jobs*). The SuperSpeeds are particularly popular as they're fast, providing a shallow depth of field and high quality in low-light conditions.



Shift 4's Strand Electric Patt 123 Stage Light or 'Rocket': the most frequently hired lamp in the collection

Retro lights at home

Also on the vintage lighting theme, GTC member Dave Rimmington has lovingly restored a retro light fitting for his home – here's how.



Before and after: Strand Electric Patt 123 before restoration and after, mounted on wooden Miller tripod

Visit any high-street furniture store and you'll find lots of accessories to make your home look like a film studio: fake clapperboards, mirrors surrounded by bulbs like those in makeup rooms and 'film lights' on wooden tripods.

Recently my wife and I were in one of these stores and she said she'd like one of these lamps. I also liked the idea of a piece of film/TV memorabilia but was conscious I'd always view one of these furniture store lights as 'not the real thing'. A quick browse on eBay revealed lots of old (unrestored) tungsten theatre lights. The model I decided on was the Strand Patt 123 which, although it was manufactured from the 50s to the 80s, has a lovely art deco design. It was also one of the first lights I ever used to light a show, while at school, so it had nostalgic memories too.

When it arrived the 500W lamp had broken in transit, but I wanted to replace this anyway as it was a tad bright and warm for a domestic environment. Most people undertaking similar projects change the lamp-holder to accommodate a smaller lamp as the existing fitting isn't common but I was reluctant to do this as I wanted to preserve the integrity of the fixture as much as possible and also to have the option of using it

'in-vision' with a 500W lamp if a scene required it. Fortunately, more research revealed that the running lights on merchant ships use lamps with the same base but only rated at 60W. A local electrical specialist was able to source one for me and, with a dimmer plug, it's now possible to run it at about 20% and get a nice amber glow behind the lens.

One compromise I was happy to make was to have the fixture polished to the bare silver metal as the original gun-metal grey was a bit dreary for a family home.

Next was the question of what to mount it on and this is the second compromise I was happy to make. I had an old wooden Miller tripod, which had seen occasional use but had been tucked away in the shed for a while. I knew this was unlikely to be used again even though the fluid head is remarkably smooth, so a quick trip to the local ironmongers meant I was able to mount the light on a genuine piece of TV memorabilia.

It's very satisfying to have created something that is not only eye-catching but also has a direct connection to past experiences.

Summarising the trend for vintage glass, Alex Trezies says: "Vast advances in technology in recent years mean that digital cameras now produce a very clean image. To counteract this, vintage lenses are chosen to offer texture, character and depth to the images and to return character to the picture quality." Notably, Cooke Optics has recently announced that in response to the ongoing high demand for their vintage Speed Panchro lenses from the 1920s to 1960s, they are rehousing their Panchro Classics using the original design but with PL mounts for modern cameras. Shift 4 has a set of these on order, due to arrive in mid-2017.



Fact File

GTC sponsor Shift 4 is a facilities hire company, supplying cameras, camera accessories, lenses, lighting, grip and sound equipment to commercials, drama, broadcast TV and corporate productions. It also offers a crewing service and manages an extensive portfolio of freelancers. See more: www.shift-4.com



Left to right: Shift 4's Nautical Searchlight; Open Face Light; Strand Electric Patt 23 Stage Light; Furse Oval Spotlight