

Prayer of the Bone:

Wire in the Blood moves Stateside



Prayer of the Bone: Wire in the Blood is the latest iteration of a dramatic television series produced for the UK television channel ITV1 by Coastal Productions, and seen in more than 30 countries. Each feature-length instalment is based on a story written by Val McDermid. The main character is Dr. Tony Hill, an eccentric psychologist played by Robson Green who helps law enforcement solve bizarre crimes.

This time, Hill tries to get inside the mind of an Iraq combat veteran who claims that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder led him to murder his family, a claim that Hill is asked to prove fraudulent.

Prayer of the Bone is cinematographer Sam McCurdy's third stand-alone episode of *Wire in the Blood*, and the first to be filmed in the USA. McCurdy and director Declan O'Dwyer found practical locations in and around Austin, Texas.

"These mini-features offer fantastic opportunities for a director of photography, because often Tony Hill retraces the steps of the killer and tries to imagine how things looked from his perspective," says McCurdy. "That allows me to create the killer's world, as seen through Tony's eyes. Suddenly you're allowed to break a lot of the rules."

Prayer of the Bone was produced in Super 16mm format

and composed in 16:9 aspect ratio. McCurdy devised a special look for a sequence that takes place in Iraq. The filmmakers chose a disused quarry to stand in for the Iraq desert.

Feel of film

"We used a lot of flashframe techniques, turning the camera on and off," says McCurdy. "We also varied frame rates, often within shots and without compensating exposure. That gives you a fantastic flare and overexposed look."

McCurdy shot much of the Iraq sequence using a 45-degree shutter angle, adding intensity to the images. The cameras were loaded with KODAK VISION2 200T 7217 film rated at an E.I. of 125.

For the most part, McCurdy backlit and exposed for the shadows in these scenes, rendering blown out skies. There

was no correction filter, giving McCurdy additional latitude through his shooting day. He corrected for daylight in post, which was handled at The Finishing School in London.

"We were going for a very flat, stark, bleach bypass kind of look that took the detail out of the surrounding rock formations, placing these soldiers in a disorienting landscape," he explains. "We used many organic techniques that are native to film cameras. These are things you can't necessarily do with the mechanics of an HD camera, or if you can, it takes a lot of time and money in post-production. The producers at Coastal are interested in quality, and they appreciate the feel of film."

In night-time and low-light situations, McCurdy used KODAK VISION2 500T 7218 film, and for bright day exteriors, he chose KODAK VISION2 50D 7201 negative. McCurdy says that images photographed

on Super 16 film look "superb" broadcast on HDTV.

To place the story in Texas for the international audience, McCurdy and the director staged interior and exterior scenes in the state capitol building in Austin. Other sequences take place at a ranch house outside the city.

"For evening interiors, we lit from outside, with 18Ks on cherry pickers," he says. "The house had a huge veranda all the way around, which made placing lamps quite easy. We gave those scenes a warm peach tone, accentuating the oranges and golds with gels on lamps. The idea was to create a humid, yet pleasant feeling, in contrast to the horrific things that were about to happen."

McCurdy says his local Texan camera crew was terrific. "I've never worked with a harder-working crew," he says.

The telefilm earned rave reviews in the UK. It is slated to air in other markets throughout 2008.