



Film

A shooter's paradise

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Rob Millang in a scene from Fred Kroetsch's unnamed documentary for the NFB / Fred Kroetsch

Local filmmakers shed light on where to shine yours

While Edmonton doesn't have a functioning local film board, and the Screen Industries Office is still a work in progress, this isn't stopping filmmakers from creating.

Every once in a while, we get a glimpse of something exciting (Hopper Penn's *Puppy Love*), but most of the time, Alberta's capital is indie as hell when it comes to films. It is a hobby that every once in a while can make some money, but most of the time, it is done for the love of it.

The shoots have to be quick and dirty with a good part of the creativity going on behind the camera. Finding affordable places to set up for an extended period of time can be tough when your filming budget is based on how many returnable empties there are in your trunk.

To some this would be a hindrance. To others, it is part of the fun.

"I film at my house a lot, and the ravine," says creator Heather Hatch. "For locations, I'll phone around, until somebody offers it for free. Ask all your friends who work at establishments."

Hatch, who has recently done some work for the *CBC* as well as videos for local bands, takes a DIY approach to getting her shots.

"Shoot in parks and streets that don't jam traffic," Hatch explains. "Shoot first and



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apologize later.”

Darryl Merpaw echoes Hatch’s sentiment.

Merpaw recently left Edmonton to work on several *Netflix* projects in Vancouver, but he’d cut his teeth in Edmonton for more than 10 years before his exodus.

“The U of A campus and the downtown LRT stations are my favourites,” Merpaw explains. “Visually satisfying with reliable lighting make them choice for guerrilla filming. Keep your crew low key and you can get away with a lot.”

Both Mike Robertson and Ryan Byrne have separately done a lot of shooting in the city and don’t stop for seasonal difficulties. Most of their films, music videos, episodic television/webisodes have had to be shot indoors because, well, cameras can freeze.

“I don’t find it costs an arm and a leg to shoot in this city,” says Robertson. “For indoor scenes people are pretty happy to let you shoot at their places and they don’t expect a lot of money for it.”

“If you’re looking for a bar or restaurant location, try performance venues,” Byrne says. “Smaller, indie venues that are only open during shows tend to have a lot of available hours that can be used for filming and they typically don’t charge much. It’s a lot easier than lining up an actual bar or restaurant which is open 9 am to 11 pm seven days a week.”

Hatch also points out that you shouldn’t be shy about using your connections, especially when it comes to businesses.

“Most establishments are flattered to be featured on film,” she says.

Brent Felzien and his crew at Accidental Humour Co. (AHC) mainly create for theatre. With the shoots combining interactivity and stage, their work has to be extremely concise.

“We shoot primarily guerilla style as we have zero budget and very little time to beg favours,” Felzien says. “That being said, we have to give props to the many local businesses in Edmonton that will open their doors to you if you approach them respectfully and reasonably.”

A ‘go to’ place for AHC was Stanley Milner Library’s green screen in the maker space area. Currently, it is out of order while the building is being renovated. For other types of shots, they also use the NAIT parkade.

“We shoot in a lot of back alleys and parkades downtown to get ‘urban’ looks,” he says. “It is one of the quietest I’ve come across in the summer off season.”

But, of course, when all is said and done, our river valley is a boon for local shooters. With its forests being a backdrop, or using the top of the valley to drape the city behind a character, the middle city’s green space works well on many levels.

Fred Kroetsch has been all over the capital covering many topics. Currently shooting a yet to be named documentary for the National Film Board, Kroetsch points out that the valley isn’t just a one trick pony and adds, “I have a few scenic Edmonton shots I recycle sometimes.”

“There’s always ‘The End of the World’”, mentions Robertson. “If you want a good view of the river”.

Or a focus for a documentary. Just don’t let the city know.

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