



ZEROZEROZERO PHOTOS BY STEFANIA ROSINI, COURTESY OF AMAZON STUDIOS.

Don Damiano "Minu" La Piana (Adriano Chiamida), a boss of the organized crime syndicate 'Ndrangheta.

## ZeroZeroZero | Documentary Approach

*ZeroZeroZero* plays like a narco thriller, but feels as realistic as a documentary — and that was the intent from the beginning. Shot partly by newly elected ASC member Romain Lacourbas (see *Clubhouse News*, page 76), the eight-episode Amazon series is based on a book by Italian journalist Roberto Saviano, who has done extensive research on the international drug trade. The show's title, slang for the purest form of cocaine, plays off the top grade of flour used in Italian cuisine, "00." Lacourbas says, "When I was reading the script, it felt like a documentary. We wanted the show to feel as realistic and true as possible, so we adopted a documentary approach for the storytelling, but we wanted the lighting to remain cinematic."

Lacourbas attended film school in Paris and worked his way up the ranks of the camera department mainly on French productions. Doing some reshoots as cinematographer for director Olivier Megaton on *Transporter 3* led to his chance to serve as cinematographer on *Colombiana*, and then on *Taken 2*, "which was very successful and opened a lot of doors for me," he says. "I stopped being a stranger in the U.S. market."

Though Lacourbas has a background in shooting action films, he's

**“We adopted a documentary approach for the storytelling, but we wanted the lighting to remain cinematic.”**

also photographed the Netflix series *Marco Polo*, as well as four episodes of another Netflix show, *The Witcher*, on locations across Europe and Asia — a travel schedule not unlike the international production itinerary of *ZeroZeroZero*, which follows a \$60 million shipment of cocaine across the Atlantic. *ZeroZeroZero* was shot in Mexico, New Orleans, Senegal, Morocco and Italy. The show’s look was originally designed by director Stefano Sollima (whose credits include *Tom Clancy’s Without Remorse* and *Sicario: Day of the Soldado*) and cinematographer Paolo Carnera, AIC — with contributions from cinematographer Vittorio Omodei Zorini, who shot some scenes for Episodes 1 and 2. Lacourbas, brought in to shoot Episodes 3, 4 and 5, was tasked with maintaining the overall look of the show while also bringing a fresh eye to it — particularly for scenes shot in Africa, where the story takes an unexpected turn.

The series was shot with two Arri Alexa Minis and an Alexa SXT Plus, fitted with Arri/Zeiss Master Prime lenses. Lacourbas notes that “the narrative style established by Stefano and Paolo was about telling the story with the camera in the simplest way — only moving the camera when needed.” It took him a while to adapt. “You have to change your mindset, but after a few days I understood the grammar, the reasons, why these lenses were chosen. I don’t usually use Master Primes because I find them too perfect and clinical, but they worked for this kind of story. To achieve the desired realism, [in addition to the limited camera movement] we tried to stay as close to the characters as possible, using wide lenses to place them amid their environments — almost never tighter than 35mm or 40mm.”

Initially, Lacourbas stuck with the LUT Carnera had used on Episodes 1 and 2, but when the shooting shifted to Senegal and Morocco, “I asked to redesign the LUT just to enhance warm tones in the exteriors and to get a slightly different feel of primary colors. We worked with colorist Andrea Baracca at the Flat Parioli post house in Rome. Andrea designed the LUTs, and he created and managed the whole pipeline.”

To attain a “documentary feel with a cinematic look” — and at the same time ensure that each location around the world would look distinctive — “we did a lot of scouting with director Janus Metz, and we spent a lot of time walking the streets, seeing how the light changed over the day,” says Lacourbas. Much of the lighting for interiors was done with practicals. “In Mexico, there was more metallic metal-halide lighting, neon tubes and pastel tones; Senegal was more vibrant, primary colors; and Calabria had strong sun and desaturated colors with mineral tints.”

Not once did they use atmosphere. “That would have felt too much like fiction!”

— Terry McCarthy



**Top: Cocaine brokers Emma Lynwood (Andrea Riseborough) and brother Chris (Dane DeHaan). Above: Romain Lacourbas — a newly elected ASC member — confers with his crew in video village.**