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Haris Zambarloukos on Phedon Papamichael

Eye on the Oscars: The Cinematographer

By

What struck me about "The Descendants" was the power of subtlety. Hawaii is a particularly beautiful place to photograph, but Phedon Papamichael and Alexander Payne chose to show a different Hawaii -- a moodier, brooding and overcast setting. Sticking with that brilliant choice from the first frame to the last captures the audience's heart and focuses attention on the internal struggles and the human conflict.

"The Descendants" is such a performance-led film, and those performances are nurtured and enhanced by the subtle perfection of the portraiture, set against this muted backdrop.

The decision to not photograph Hawaii as bright, vibrant and colorful might be antagonistic to theories of beautiful, spectacular cinematography. But the result is a film that actually has greater power and beauty, because it comes from the soul of the film, rather than from the landscapes or pretty lighting. One mark of a great director of photography is the restraint to follow the psychological journey of the protagonist.

Something special happens when Phedon and Alexander work together. A cinematographer is hired for their opinion, and that opinion can be one of the strongest forces in the crafting of a film. The ability to make your opinion synonymous with that of the director is a huge talent that is very apparent in Phedon's work on "The Descendants."

Haris Zambarloukos, who shot "Thor," also was the d.p. on such films as "Mamma Mia!" "Sleuth" and "Venus."



Zambarloukos



'The Descendants'

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