



"The Aviator" cinematographer Robert Richardson, right, sets up a shot with director Martin Scorsese.

The finest eyes and ears in the business recount iconic movie moments in the making

By Todd Longwell

sequence gazing

FILMMAKERS ROLLED OUT THE WIDE-ANGLE LENSES AND PINPOINT needle-drops last year to create rich portraits of everything from grand historical figures (Miramax's "The Aviator," Newmarket's "The Passion of the Christ," Universal's "Ray") to the petit bourgeoisie (Focus Features' "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind," Fox Searchlight's "Sideways"), along with a few superheroes (Buena Vista's "The Incredibles," Sony's "Spider-Man 2") and an errant psychopath (DreamWorks' "Collateral"). Digital technology had an increasing effect on the entire creative process in 2004, from the stacks of .wav files used to craft nearly every film's soundtrack to the use of digital intermediates to the art of trimming images. No matter how big in scale or technologically complex, though, all of last year's films faced the same primary task: to tell a story and tell it well. Following is a look at how cinematography, editing and sound design played a central role in that process.

Cinematography

THE AVIATOR (Miramax)

"My cousin came up to me and said, 'I noticed there was a difference between the color that began the film and (that which) ended it,'" cinematographer Robert Richardson says. "And there seemed to be something distinctly wrong with the color of the grass; was that intentional?"

Yes. Director Martin Scorsese used a digital intermediate to make "Aviator's" color palette mirror the development of film stock as the movie's story progresses from the 1920s through the '40s — from Technicolor's primitive two-color process, which renders greens as aqua, to its three-strip process, which gives a hyper-vivid take on the full color spectrum.

"When it moves to three-color, I hope most people didn't notice the switch except film geeks," says Richardson, who also grappled with a plethora of greenscreen shots mixing live-action with models and computer-generated imagery. "I hope it blends cleanly enough that it simply supports the sense that you're in a period film."

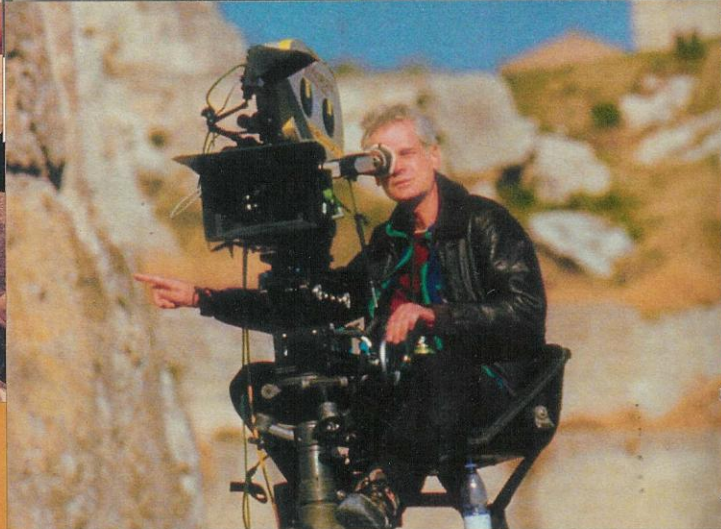
COLLATERAL (DreamWorks)

Director Michael Mann wanted nighttime Los Angeles to be a character in the film, and after serious research and development with cinematographer Paul Cameron, it was decided that the character would be defined by the glowing quality supplied by high-definition digital cameras.



ON THE COVER

"BODY AND SOUL" (1947) More than a half-century before Michael Mann used innovative and unobtrusive lipstick cameras in the ring for 2001's "Ali," the late cinematographer James Wong Howe shot "Body's" boxing scenes on roller skates with a small hand-held camera. Born Wong Tung-Jim in China in 1899, Howe was among the first to use "deep focus" photography, by which both the foreground and distant background are seen clearly. He was nominated for 10 Oscars and won two, for 1955's "The Rose Tattoo" and 1963's "Hud." — Sheigh Crabtree



Clockwise from above, Bruno Delbonnel meters Audrey Tautou for "A Very Long Engagement"; "Collateral" cinematographer Dion Beebe, co-credited with Paul Cameron, braces himself for a scene on the MTA in Los Angeles; Caleb Deschanel lines up a shot for "The Passion of the Christ."

"The digital format reads light differently and just responds differently," says Dion Beebe, who took over for Cameron three weeks into shooting. "It registers anything you add or do."

Mann did not want the light to have an identifiable source, so Cameron fashioned a modular, low-level system of electroluminous panels. "I put Velcro headliners in and put leads all over the cab so I could move all of the lights in the car in under a minute," he says. "It got to the point that Tom Cruise could slide over and move a panel with him."

ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND (Focus Features)

To capture the emotional turmoil of a couple (Jim Carrey and Kate Winslet) getting their memories of each other erased, cinematographer Ellen Kuras took an extreme *cinéma vérité* approach that at times borders on visual anarchy.

"This film in particular showed us how one can make a film as if one was putting together a collage — a montage of images and a montage of emotions, so to speak," says Kuras, who shot the entire movie hand-held save for one crane shot. "Being written the way it was and having the kind of syntax and emotional movement that it did enabled me to have a certain kind of freedom to say, 'OK, I'm going to go with (co-writer/director) Michel (Gondry) on some ideas that maybe I don't understand right now, but I have to trust it and know it will all come together and work as a whole.'"

THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST (Newmarket)

Cinematographer Caleb Deschanel prepared for this epic of suffering and salvation by studying not the Gospels but paintings by artists ranging from Raphael to Salvador Dalí.

"Because I had gone through so many paintings, it gave me a lot of freedom to make decisions on the spot based on all of the things I'd seen," Deschanel says. "It was different from (2003's) 'Girl With a Pearl Earring,' where (cinematographer Eduardo Serra) was trying

to exactly duplicate something."

Nonetheless, director Mel Gibson asked Deschanel to take particular note of Michelangelo da Caravaggio, an Italian baroque artist who explored a wealth of biblical subjects.

"I think as much as his use of lighting and composition influenced us, it was actually his casting," Deschanel says. "He would find people on the street and use them as his models, so they tended to have really great faces."

A VERY LONG ENGAGEMENT (Warner Independent Pictures)

Cinematographer Bruno Delbonnel faced the daunting task of unifying the look of a film that is alternately a brutal war movie, a bittersweet love story and a lighthearted comedy. To prepare for the World War I trench-warfare sequences, he studied classic Great War movies such as 1930's "All Quiet on the Western Front" and 1957's "Paths of Glory," as well as the 1998 World War II epic "Saving Private Ryan."

"I think 'Private Ryan' is maybe the best in terms of violence," Delbonnel says. "We thought, 'There is no way we can do better than that,' so we decided to avoid the same kind of violence and even the look, which was related to the footage they had from World War II. We have nothing in terms of footage from the First World War, so we could do whatever we wanted."

Editing

THE AVIATOR (Miramax)

Editor Thelma Schoonmaker had worked with director Martin Scorsese on 18 films dating back to 1967, but none had featured anything close to the nearly 400 special-effects shots in "Aviator," which forced her to assemble many scenes with previsualizations of CGI to be created later. The movie also features more humor and ensemble acting than a typical Scorsese project, as exemplified by the scene in which



Editor Matt Chessé sets the pace for "Finding Neverland."



"Million Dollar Baby" editor Joel Cox takes a timeout in his Avid bay.

Howard Hughes (Leonardo DiCaprio) has dinner with Katharine Hepburn's (Cate Blanchett) upper-crust family.

"Most directors make sure that the actors don't overlap each other so the editor can get it there and make edits, but Marty wanted it to be like those fast-talking scenes in (1931's) 'The Front Page' and all those films of the '30s and '40s," Schoonmaker says. "I was a little scared at first, but it all worked out beautifully."

ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND (Focus Features)

What plan of attack did editor Valdís Óskarsdóttir use to conquer the film's chaotic story line, which pingpongs between the past and present and the mental and physical worlds of protagonist Joel (Jim Carrey), who has decided to erase the memory of his ex-girlfriend Clementine (Kate Winslet)?

"I never think of what is lying ahead of me when I sit down at the computer to begin," says Óskarsdóttir, who began her career by cutting news segments for RUV, the state television station in her native Iceland. "I just start with one scene, and then I take the next scene and the next scene. I finish all the scenes, then I put the film together."

FINDING NEVERLAND (Miramax)

To prime himself for cutting this tale of playwright J.M. Barrie (Johnny Depp) and the clan of children that inspired him to write "Peter Pan," editor Matt Chessé binged on films featuring child stars of yesteryear such as Freddie Bartholomew and Hayley Mills.

"We wanted it to have that family-classic kind of vibe, so I tried to put it together as if it was one of those old-school greats," Chessé says. "It was just very easy to cut."

Budgetary constraints kept Chessé in Los Angeles as "Neverland" shot in the United Kingdom, but he believes the transcontinental divide was a blessing in disguise.

"Everything was sent to me across the seas, so it was sort of like getting a message in a bottle," Chessé says. "All of the magic that wound up in the movie was very magical for me because I didn't see any of the effort or strain."

MILLION DOLLAR BABY (Warner Bros. Pictures)

Editor Joel Cox had to deal with dramatic tonal shifts in Clint Eastwood's film, from the jokey banter of the first half to the brutal rush of the boxing sequences to the heartbreaking denouement.

"People always say, 'How do you know where to cut?' and I tell them it's something inside you," says Cox, a member of Eastwood's team since 1976's "The Outlaw Josey Wales" and an Oscar winner for 1992's "Unforgiven." "As an editor, you're trying to feel what the characters are feeling and put that emotion on the screen. That's done by the pacing of the dialogue and the cuts."

Cox says Eastwood tells everyone working for him to go with their first instinct.

"He loves to let it have the free form and see what you come up with," Cox says. "He says: 'Remember, this is a work print. We can fix anything.'"

SIDEWAYS (Fox Searchlight)

Editor Kevin Tent was given a story ripe with comic potential — sad-sack wine aficionado Miles (Paul Giamatti) and his womanizing, altar-bound actor pal Jack (Thomas Haden Church) take a drunken road trip through Southern California wine country — but there was too much of it.

"It was like a 140-page script, so we had to make a lot of cuts internally in scenes to keep them moving along and (also) drop a few scenes," Tent says.

For one sequence, Tent heightened the comedy and shortened the running time with a well-timed flash-forward.

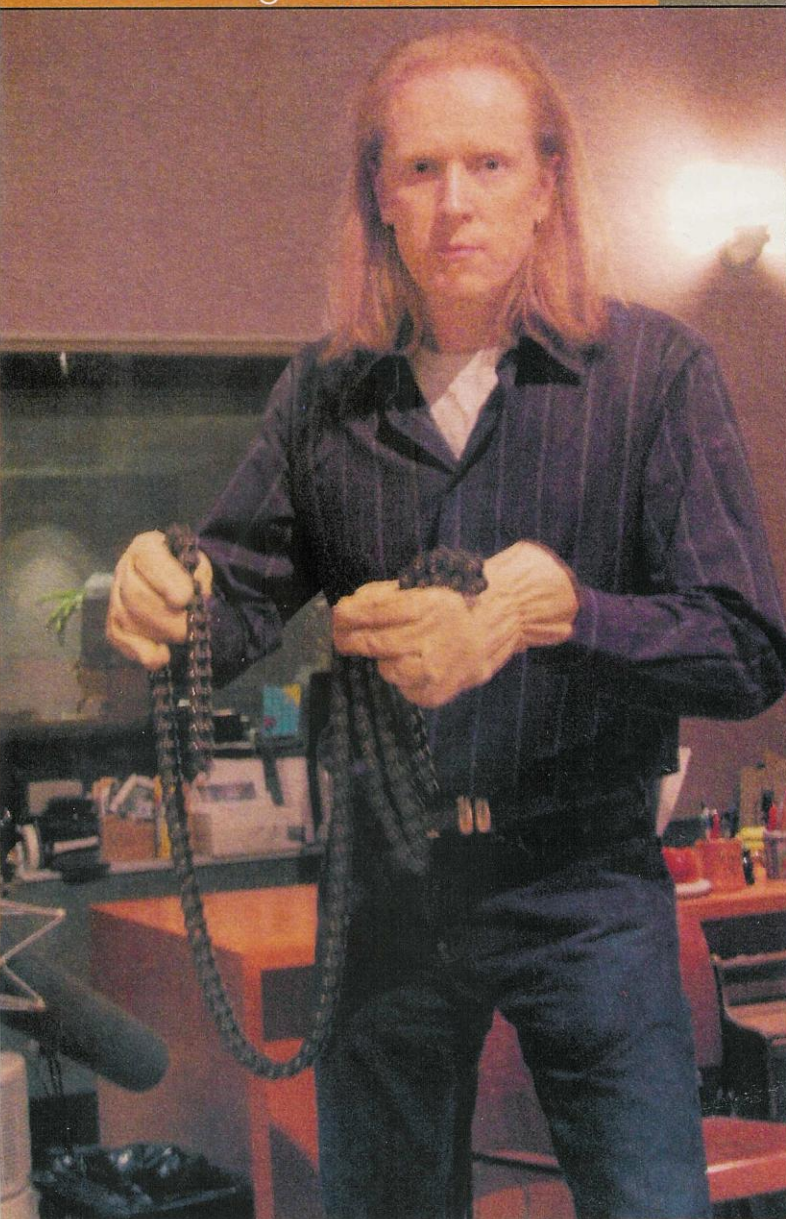
"It's the scene where the four characters are having dinner and Miles is slowly getting drunk," he says. "It's kind of a long sequence, (and) we start flashing forward to him making a phone call to his ex-wife. That was part of a much-larger sequence of events that we condensed into one big montage."

Sound Design

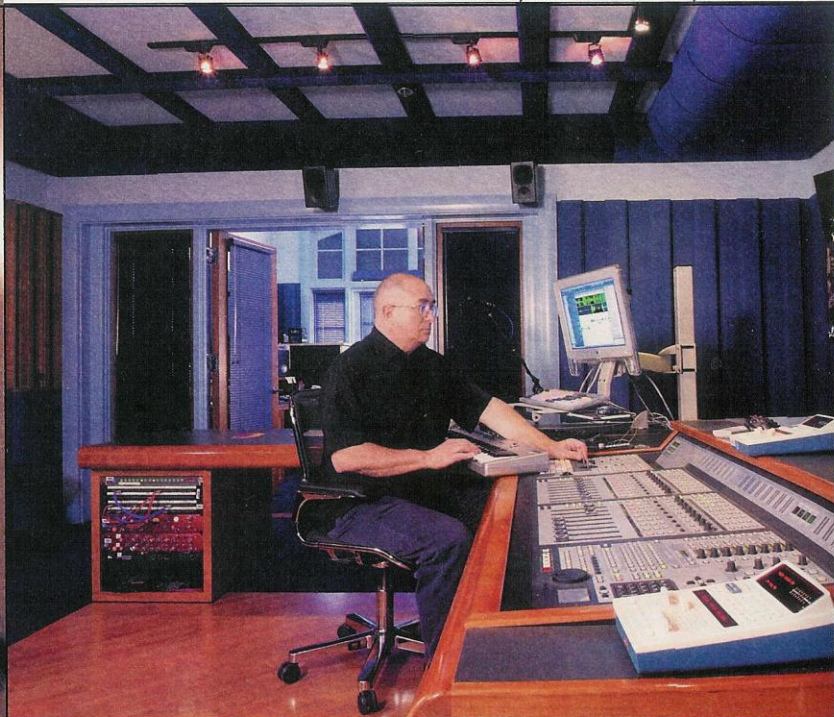
THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW (Fox)

From a tornado that trashes Los Angeles to a tsunami that submerges Manhattan, the film's epic eco-catastrophes are showcases for extreme cinema sound. But supervising sound editor Mark Stoeckinger says his biggest challenge was more subtle: portraying a wave of superchilled air that freezes everything in its path, be it concrete, metal or people.

"What is that sound?" Stoeckinger asks. "We've never heard it. Somebody said: 'Remember when they used to have air-raid warnings? Maybe it could have that windup-and-wail sound.' So we took various wind and



"Spider-Man 2" sound designer Paul Ottosson tests tentacle sounds.



Randy Thom, a four-time Oscar nominee in 2005, lays down tracks at Skywalker.

vocal elements, trains and all sorts of things and processed them to come up with that sort-of envelope. It was a sound they liked so much (that) we pasted it in quite a few spots toward the end of the film."

THE INCREDIBLES (Buena Vista)

The film's digitally animated superheroes and supervillains are wacky, well-armed and simultaneously suburban and otherworldly, as is the sonic landscape they inhabit thanks to supervising sound editor/sound designer Randy Thom and his team at Industrial Light + Magic.

"There are probably more gadgets, devices, weapons, systems and processes in this movie than in any other movie that I've worked on," Thom says. "Since the visuals for all of them are created on a computer, we have to fabricate the sound almost out of thin air and go out and collect sounds, so it takes a long time. There are at least a half-dozen kinds of magical electricity in the movie, and I wanted all of it to be as original as possible so I spent a huge amount of time experimenting."

THE POLAR EXPRESS (Warner Bros. Pictures)

Supervising sound editor/sound designer Randy Thom wanted to give the titular computer-animated train a mystical and magical but thoroughly believable sonic character, from the clickety-clack of wheels on the track to steam blowing from its stack. He mixed recordings of

vintage steam trains with exotic aural elements such as sheet metal played with a violin bow and the clang of a giant metal-shearing machine that he previously had used to voice the Imperial Walkers' footsteps in 1980's "The Empire Strikes Back."

Thom, a four-time Oscar-nominee in the current races (for sound editing and sound mixing on both "Express" and "The Incredibles"), also makes a guest appearance on the "Express" soundtrack.

"We wanted to make the steam sound as varied as possible and make the steam almost like breathing, so when the train first shows up at the boy's house at the beginning of the film, one of the elements of the film is actually me breathing," he says.

RAY (Universal)

Supervising sound editors Karen Baker Landers and Per Hallberg use subtle shading to convey the vital importance of sound to Ray Charles' (Jamie Foxx) career and survival.

"He hears things before the audience does," Landers says. "Part of that is providing the right sound, like a horse and buggy coming in. He picks up on that."

With a story line that spans four decades and myriad locations, finding period-perfect sounds also was a priority.

"Making New York City sounds in the '60s a certain way — that was one of the biggest challenges," Baker says. "If you hear a siren in the background, it can't sound like a siren that you hear today."

SPIDER-MAN 2 (Sony)

Defining the sonic characteristics of singed fusion balls, flying webs and a swinging Spidey were labor-intensive challenges for supervising sound editor/sound designer Paul Ottosson, but none haunted him like the task of giving voice to Doc Ock's tentacles. Their specter hung over him like, well ... the giant poster of the character that graced the wall above his office at Sony Pictures Studios in Culver City.

"It was probably 25 feet tall, with Doc Ock standing on top of this hill looking down," Ottosson says. "We had temp mixes coming up, and I kept walking by Doc Ock, and I still didn't have the sound for his tentacles yet. He became as much of a villain to me as he was for Spider-Man at some point."

Ottosson settled on layers of unrolling motorcycle chains, composited with piano strings dragged across wood and metallic air whooshes.

"When we were done cutting it, I think the tentacles themselves were probably about 100 tracks," Ottosson says. ■