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The Importance of Camera Tests

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Many of the tests that I do on specific film stocks, cameras, etc. are not always available to share because of studio policy. I do my best to give you as much info as possible on the new tools and the best way that they can be used. The purpose of this blog is to educate you on how important it truly is to do the tests yourself and not just take someone else's word for it. There is so much information to go through with social media recommendations and other educational blogs, but you have to find your style, your emulsion.

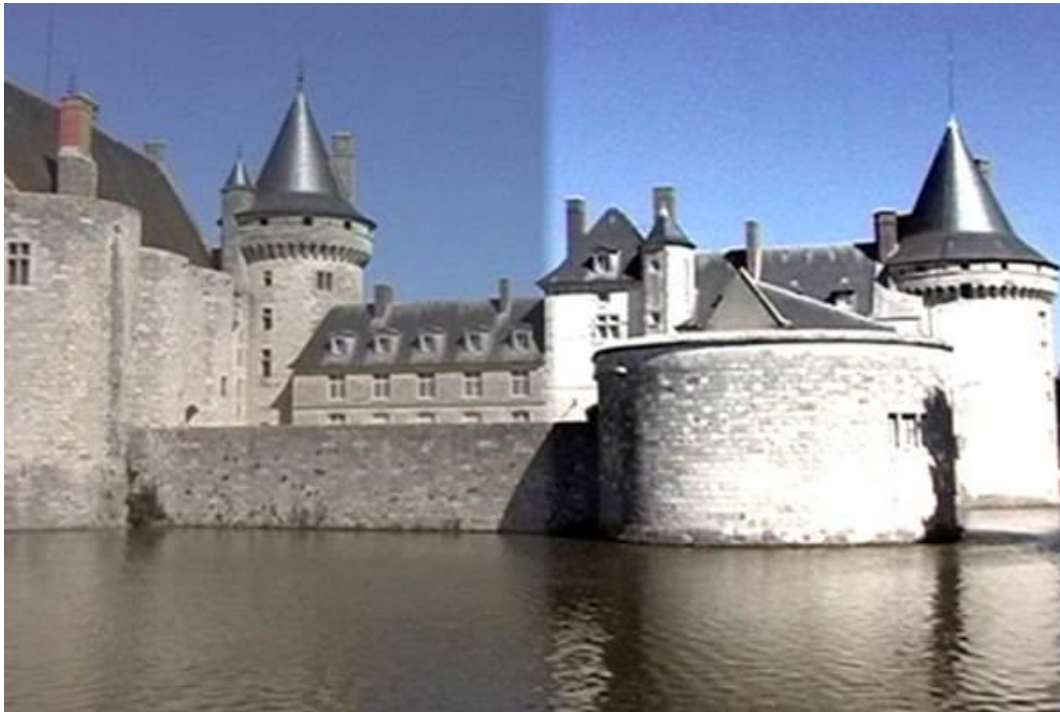
Push and Pulling, Stretching and Baking

Before the digital age, as cinematographers we tested new and old film stocks; we pushed them, pulled them, baked them, took them to the breaking point. Cross processed them, ENR'ed them, [skip bleached](#) them, developed color film with a black and white fixer. You name it, we tried to do it to get a unique look that would assist the story. I once developed my own super 8mm footage in my bathtub for a Smashing Pumpkins video. I bought the chemicals, read about how to do it, put it on some makeshift reels and developed an image. It was crazy. I quickly found out that by slowing down, I overexposed it, and when I went faster on the reel, I underexposed it. Chemical burns ensued, and the smell took some time to leave the apartment. Lydia was not happy! Ha, ha!

OZ Process

For [Terminator Salvation](#), we wanted to infuse a steely look to the image. I tested different film stocks with the OZ process, which two very talented photochemical artists from [Technicolor](#) came up with, Mike Zacaria and Bob Olson. They saw the potential of this unique process, which processed the color film normally. Then they sent this baby through a black and white fixer that added 100% of the silver back onto the negative, which de-saturated the hell out of the image. It was like a silver coating over the color, and the contrast

increased.



The [process of ENR](#) was also developed by Technicolor to make the process adjustable. The more silver left on the negative, the more de-saturation and contrast. You could do any level you wanted in percentages.



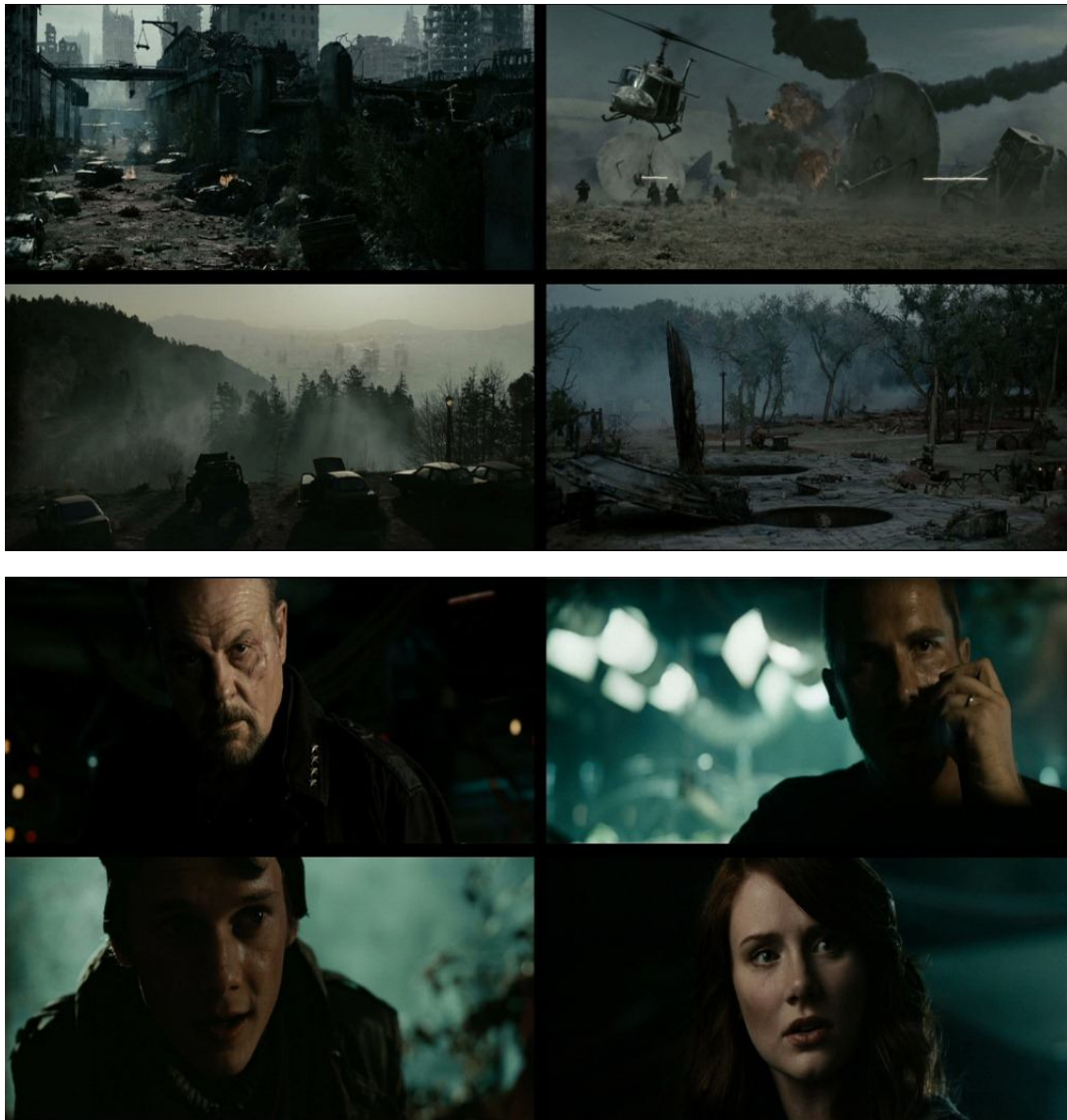
ENR process was used on Saving Private Ryan

Too Extreme

On *Terminator Salvation*, we loved the OZ look but thought it was too extreme with skin tones. So we chose to do this process in the DI bay where we were able to infuse the silver quality on the image without making everyone look like cadavers. The Resistance needed to feel alive, with warmth in their skin. They were fighting the silver machines. I started with photochemical first, before I went into the digital color correction bay. That grounding in the organic helped the unique look of the film. Stefan Sonnesfeld was our colorist out of [CO3](#), and he did an amazing job delivering this look.

Remember, the reason cinematographers were doing this was because we didn't have that Davinci Resolve bay back then. I hope I am

not dating myself! This was photochemical. You had to get it close, very close.



Find your Emulsion of Choice

I guess where I am going with all of this is that we have so many new digital tools at our disposal that you cannot just pick them up and start shooting with them. It is a disservice to the tool as well as to you, the cinematographer. Let's think about it in a totally new way. Treat your new digital camera like a new film emulsion that needs testing. Why? Because every sensor is different. They have unique qualities, different latitudes, color spaces, log files, BIT depth. How it rolls off with over and underexposure. If it has aliasing, or moiré, just to name a few.

The cameras have pros and their cons. Your job as a filmmaker is to find a way to show the pros in the camera that you discover, not the ones that others find. Hide the cons, those quirky things that might give away whatever is not ready for the screen, whether it be big or small. To each his own. One person's compression might be another person's digital grain.

99 Rolls

In the coming weeks, I will take you through the best way to find your new emulsions characteristics. This is what I do on every film I shoot. I remember that on [The Greatest Game Ever Played](#), we shot 99 400' roles of tests. We fell one short of breaking the bottle of

champagne out, which you do when you shoot your hundredth roll on the production of the film. It is not usually done on tests, but the look we were going for was so extreme that we needed to especially test wardrobe. This required us to go back to the drawing board many times when the clothes colors would not work with the process.



Originally, Harry Vardon was going to wear an olive suit. We immediately found problems with that. He was dissolving into the forest background. He needed to pop; he was the best golfer in the world. Yellow became Vardon's color of choice.







Find your voice and your new emulsion and figure out how it will best assist your story. Remember, you are part of a big creative team. The **look at me, look at me** photography might be good for your career, but is it best for the story that your director wants to tell? Does it bring out the best performance from your cast?

I have studied and continue to be inspired by my peers in reading about their process, but that is exactly what it is, their process. **Make it your own!**

Tags: [Cinematography](#), [Configuration](#), [filmmaking](#)



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