



Image courtesy of ShortCut.

Founded in 1906, Nordisk Film is the oldest film studio in the world. But its Copenhagen post-production facility, ShortCut, is one of the region's most modern and advanced post houses. Ivan Schmidt, CTO, has combined Nordisk's heritage of a century of film experience with ShortCut's pioneering approach to technology in his efforts to develop new ways of making feature films.

"We're constantly seeking higher quality—both to meet our clients' demands and to keep our talented staff satisfied," says Ivan. "We like to face new challenges, explore new options, and be pioneers in our field. This business is a technical race and we like being in front, choosing the direction, and shaping the future of post-production. We take pride in being at the top. It's this kind of innovation that attracts clients and staff to ShortCut."

Ivan also cites the competitive advantage of being on the cutting-edge. "Investments may backfire if equipment doesn't live up to expectations or when prices drop, but in this day and age, we can't afford to slack. Our industry is threatened by small, one-man shops using desktop kits. We have to constantly improve the film production, and one of the most effective ways of doing this is by innovating."

Key to Ivan's vision is a digital intermediate (DI) workflow. "When you have a whole film on disc, it's much easier to move around and makes post-production much more straightforward," continues Ivan. "We all know only too well how delicate a negative is. With DI, you avoid damaging the original negative as you don't need to handle it or cut it."

ShortCut spent over a year looking at various digital grading systems for its DI workflow. The conundrum facing Ivan and his team was to find a solution that offered the creative freedom and flexibility of an open system which could process anything thrown at it. "When we saw Lustre with Incinerator, we were amazed at what you could do without rendering. No other system could handle the same amount of secondaries and effects," says Ivan.

# ShortCut

By Kim Willsher

Autodesk®



Image courtesy of ShortCut.

ShortCut started alpha testing Discreet® Lustre® with Autodesk® Incinerator™ systems software products in April 2005, and became the first facility in the world to purchase Incinerator. “The Lustre system allows us to focus on the creative side of grading. It gives our client more efficient grading time,” says Ivan. “Lustre works in real time, in multiple layers, and with less rendering. It lets the colorist work on up to 16 scenes at the same time. As a result, the colorist and DoP can quickly form a general view.”

According to Lustre Colorist, Sandra Klass, “It’s very important to be able to work in real time with the DoP because it’s like giving a presentation; you’re selling an idea. Before using Lustre, I was working with real-time hardware grading systems, so waiting for rendering was really annoying. Incinerator gives me real-time performance of a hardware system but with the creative capabilities and toolset of a software grading solution.”

Lustre Colorist, Thomas Therschilsen, adds: “We like to work at full 2K resolution so we can see all the details. Using Incinerator allows us to do this in real time.”

According to Ivan, the most important factor in choosing a grading system is having a workflow that fit their facility. “We create all our effects work using Discreet® Inferno® and Discreet® Flame® visual effects systems and create 3D elements using Autodesk® 3ds Max® software. Lustre communicates with these systems. We can export effects shots straight to Lustre and view them in the same suite as grading is done. It’s a great advantage for the client and the colorist. It also saves time when we soft import from the SAN to Inferno for effects work because we don’t have to import all the material, only what we need.”

The next area of innovation that Ivan is looking to explore is the potential he sees in using Lustre and Incinerator for grading commercials. “We have clients who want to grade commercials the same way they grade feature film,” explains Sandra. “We’re very keen to explore this and we’re certain that commercials grading will move towards a DI workflow in future. It has amazing potential and we’re very excited about making the switch as soon as the demand is there.”

ShortCut has recently graded several films using Incinerator, including *Johnny Was*, *En Soap (A Soap)*, *Lotto*, *Tempelriidernes skat*, *Den rette Ånd* and *Rene Hjerter (Clean Hearts)*. “Our clients have been extremely impressed with the performance of Incinerator,” says Thomas. “They’re particularly impressed with the real-time capabilities with regards to the number of shapes achievable in each secondary.”

A co-production between Nordisk Film and Northern Irish production company Borderline, *Johnny Was* is ShortCut’s latest international production. The goal was to create a natural look with highly-saturated colors. “Our biggest challenge was time, so working in real time with Lustre was exactly what we needed,” says Peter Diemar, Lustre Colorist, ShortCut. “Once we boosted the film saturation, we needed to correct the color of skin tones. We were able to do this easily with the Lustre skin tone key. Using Lustre, colorists can find the look they need a lot more quickly.”

Another example of where Lustre shines is when grading an overexposed scene with a man in front of a burnt-out window. Peter explains: “We were aiming to achieve more textures in the window, but we wanted to make the man lighter. Normally we’d have to do two passes, which is extremely time consuming, but with Lustre and Incinerator, we could use a broader range of light and dark by isolating the window, enabling us to work on both problems on the same frame at the same time.

“The fact that we scanned the film logarithmic, combined with the creative possibilities of Lustre, made it possible to enhance scenes that would otherwise have looked flat on the big screen. We also used Discreet Flame and Discreet Inferno to create numerous effects such as gunshots, laser beams, and blue screen shots, as well as titles and credits.” “We’re very proud of what we achieved in such a short time. The producers and the DoP were very happy and agree that we achieved the best result possible.”

ShortCut finished working on the film in January 2006, in time for the Berlin and Irish Film Festivals in February. Their other production, *En Soap*, has just won two awards at the Berlin International Film Festival—Best First Feature Award, and Grand Prix of the Jury the Silver Bear.