



Dusty Cray appears in *Rancher, Farmer, Fisherman* by Susan Froemke and John Hoffman, an official selection of the Documentary Premieres program at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival. Courtesy of Sundance Institute photo by Beth Aala.

## How DP Bob Richman Captured the Stunning Big Sky Landscapes for *'Rancher, Farmer, Fisherman'*

// THE CINEMATOGRAPHER BREAKS DOWN HIS APPROACH TO CAPTURING THE LIFE OF A MONTANA RANCHER IN A NEW DOCUMENTARY ABOUT UNLIKELY ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS. // **Chris O'Falt, March 3, 2017**

**A** Montana rancher, a Kansas farmer and a Louisiana commercial fishermen might not necessarily fit our stereotype of environmental activist, but as the new documentary "Rancher, Farmer, Fisherman" shows the drastic changes to the earth's environment are directly affecting the professions these men love. In this epic documentary, based on best-selling author Miriam Horn's book, co-directors Susan Froemke, John Hoffman and Beth Aala had to rely on three different cinematographers to capture the three men's stories and the stunning landscapes they call their office.

Cinematographer Bob Richman's work was largely focused on the capturing the footage shot of ranching in Montana, while DPs Buddy Squires and Thorsten Thielow were tasked with shooting in Kansas and Louisiana.

IndieWire recently caught up with Richman to learn about how he approached capturing the majesty of "Big Sky" country and the life of a rancher.

### **What camera and lenses did you use?**

For most of my shooting, I used the Canon EOS C300. I started out using the Canon HJ11x4.7 IRSD

HD ENG B4 Zoom Lens with an HDx35 Mark II B4/PL Optical Adapter that I bought from Abel Cinetech. This adapter enlarges the B4 image so it fills the super 35mm sensor. It gave me a working range of about 12mm-135mm, which is quite incredible.

**I cannot say enough about the Canon CN-E 17-120mm lens. It has a nice focal length range, which is necessary for shooting vérité.**

**// Bob Richman**

At the time we started the film there was no 35mm zoom lens that would give me the range I needed for vérité work and was light enough to hand hold. Unfortunately, it also takes away 2.5 stops. But I have to say that 12mm really worked nicely on those big sky landscapes in Montana and Kansas. When Canon came out with their CN-E 17-120mm cine lens, I switched to that.

I cannot say enough about the Canon CN-E 17-120mm lens. It has a nice focal length range, which is necessary for shooting vérité. You want to be able to give the editor wide and close-up shots without having to stop and change lenses. Just because you stop doesn't mean the action stops. It's not as if you are working with actors. If you correctly shoot a variety of wides and close-ups the editor can cut a scene down to its essence and make it look as seamless as if it was scripted. The CN-E 17-120mm is also light enough to use if I went handheld and the rotation on the focus and zoom rings are short enough to work without a focus puller.

**Did you set out to create a specific look for "Rancher, Farmer, Fisherman?"**

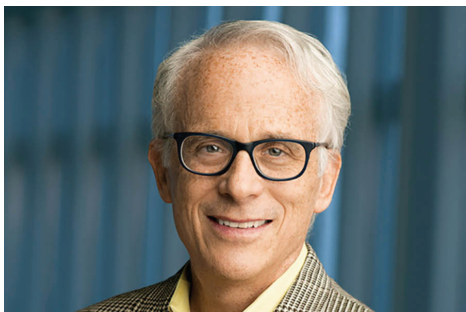


ABOVE Courtesy of Robert Richman

I'm often asked this question about creating a look for a film. The way I work there is no such thing as creating a look. To me, and I know Buddy feels this way too, shooting a documentary is an act of discovery. The great joy of it is that you do not know where it's going to lead you.

On a narrative film, sure, you know where you are going, you know how the characters develop, you know the theme and you pretty much know the ending. On a vérité documentary, you don't know any of these things and oftentimes you won't know it until the film is shot. So creating a look makes no sense and the reality is you have so little control out in the field it would be hard to achieve even if you had a crystal ball and could see into the future.

What we try to do is deliver the "fattest negative" we can, to use a film term, so we have control of the image in the color correct session and strive for the most natural look the best skin tones. We try to capture the essence of what is happening in front of



John Hoffman



Susan Froemke



Robert Richman

us. We don't control the action: the action controls us.

### How did you approach shooting the Montana landscapes?

When I shoot landscapes, I actually love when the foreground is either front lit or side lit so the exposure can hold the blue sky and the puffy white clouds can pop. I also tend to use the very wide end of the lens and inspired by Ansel Adams. I like to compose with a big sky, maybe three quarters of the frame.

Of course, since documentaries do not have the budget to spend a great deal of time waiting for the light, we also have to make due with what confronts us when we can shoot.

### What was your biggest challenge in shooting this film?

The biggest challenge for me was trying to shoot the Rocky Mountains. The light never quite seemed right for me. We kept coming back on different days and times and hopefully I finally nailed it. But as always, we were slaves to the schedule of our characters. Both Thor and Buddy had way bigger challenges than I did, like shooting and riding horseback for Thor and shooting the harvest at night for Buddy.

More importantly than the landscapes, although they are essential to the film, was to capture intimate portraits of our characters and to see them at work in their environment. With the help of the directors, Susan Froemke, John Hoffman and Beth Aala, who developed the kind of trust to make it possible I believe all three of us used our vérité experience to bring these amazing people to life on screen. And in the end, it's all about the people. //

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This article was part of IndieWire and Canon U.S.A. partnership at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival in Park City, where we celebrated cinematography at the Canon Creative Studio on Main Street.*



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