

'And Then There Were None' - Production Notes.



A tented Harefield House....

'And Then There Were None,' the Agatha Christie classic, was made for the BBC in 2015. It is one of the projects I am most proud of and involves a strong collaboration between myself, director Craig Viveros and production designer Sophie Beecher. Early in prep, Sophie took the project out of the limitations of Three Mills Studio and into a location that gave her production design the scope to tell the story; the depth of site lines in Harefield House perfectly characterizes the claustrophobia of the house, an integral character in the story.

During the prep of ATTWN, I shared an office with the 1st assistant director, Kristian Dench. He was having trouble making the schedule work because we were shooting so many night scenes in August. It seemed to him that the only way to achieve

this without asking for more days was to be able to shoot night and day and back to night again in the same day and not have to shoot at night at all. Of course, this strategy would only be possible if we were shooting in a studio, but we were shooting on location.

Harefield House was on a small bank surrounded by trees. The sea surrounded the house in the story, so we had no value in seeing the actual views presented through any of the windows at Harefield. To move equipment such as genie booms around the house would be difficult without some kind of built 'track-way' as the house was built on an incline with no hard standing surfaces. To see out of the windows, we would have needed endless green screen constructions for 20x20 drapes, a structure that would need to be of a size to be safe. The low-budget solution would be not to see out of the windows in a perpetually closed, curtained world. This approach would have limited the believability of an isolated house on a small island.

I tried to work out a way of turning Harefield House into a studio. I met up with my good friend and rigging gaffer Ian Barwick and a structural engineer on the Harefield site. It seemed that because of the flat Georgian-style roof and relatively low height of the building, a complete tent of the building was possible, and it would be safe. I spent most of my three-week prep getting quotes from various rigging companies both from the film industry and the entertainment/rock and roll suppliers. The quotes were huge, and the companies quoted 300k/400k pounds. This was never going to fly.

After trying almost every rigging company, I eventually found my guy who came by the unusual name of Buzz Lightning, otherwise known as John Buzz Cooling. He seemed to like the challenge, and his budget was 65k when all was done. He sent me the invoice and the breakdown, which I still have. This spend was still a lot and was not a figure that seemed to fit with the spread sheets of rigging costs from other TV shows that the company had made. So the next job was to try to point out the advantages to the production company.

The director wanted expressive lighting for the story. Coupled with the tight schedule, I felt we would have major problems moving the equipment around the building. One production solution was flat blacking, but this would have negated the ability

to light through windows at night. The script had lightning, moonlight, dusk, dawn, and even rain. The windows needed to work for all the elements of the script and the scenes relating to the changing weather.

There were so many meetings about the proposed tenting of the house, which must have seemed like a hugely extravagant thing for a DOP to want to do. Nevertheless, I stuck to my guns, knowing that the alternative could be a disaster considering the full schedule, the show's expectations, and the director's vision.

Buzz built the tent, and we could shoot day and night in any order. The 'turn-arounds' from day to night and back to day were fast, and our biggest lights were two 4k Fresnel's. There were no machines needed to light through the windows. The flow banks (soft fill lights) were rigged with a night setting and day setting, and all other lights were on stands (4ks on 'Long John' wind-ups)

I worked closely with VFX supervisor Simon Frame to pioneer some photo backdrops of landscapes he had taken in Cornwall in different light and weather conditions. We tested these for the percentage needed for de-focus. We had these on truss to be instantly dropped down for key windows and optional blue screens ready to swap out if, for some reason, we could not contain the photo backdrop in the window. The system was fast, and it took minutes to pull these down. Lighting was fast as all lights through the windows could be pushed around on light stands. We ate up that very tough schedule.

There was a genuine desire to shoot the schedule 'as given' without asking for more days. We comfortably finished all our days and did not have to compromise on the production value or photography. Sophie Beecher's design, inspired by Syrie Maugham, is fabulous, and Craig Viveros's direction is spot on.

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