

Newly widowed Lady Susan Vernon (Kate Beckinsale, right) confides in her friend Alicia Johnson (Chloë Sevigny, left) as colorful rumors swirl about them both in *Love & Friendship*, the feature adaptation of Jane Austen's novella *Lady Susan*.



## Costumed Comedy

By Patricia Thomson

If ever there were a perfect match, it would be Jane Austen and Whit Stillman. Both possess a droll wit, a mastery of clever repartee, and a bemused view of romance in the genteel class. All these fine traits are on display in *Love & Friendship*, Stillman's first feature in five years, after a side trip into episodic drama with Amazon's *The Cosmopolitans*.

The film is an adaptation of *Lady Susan*, a novella written by Austen circa age 20 but left unpublished until five decades after her death. Using the epistolary form popular in the 18th century, Austen sketched out a comedy of manners that centers on an unscrupulous flirt, Lady Susan Vernon (played by Kate Beckinsale). Newly widowed, she arrives uninvited at her brother-in-law's castle to let a scandal blow over and to snag husbands for herself and her daughter, Frederica (Morfydd Clark). The novella, being both obscure and short, served Stillman well: He wouldn't be paring down a beloved tome, but fleshing out something new to the Austen film canon.

The Irish-Dutch-French co-production called for a Dutch director of photography, and Richard van Oosterhout, NSC, SBC got

the job. "When I read the script, I was eager to do it," says the two-time Golden Calf winner. "It's funny, modern, and the dialogue is so witty."

Van Oosterhout came to cinematography in his late 20s and got his break in 1998 as director of photography on *Rosie*, directed by his wife, Patrice Toye. Today he is a member of the NSC board and the European Film Academy, and he's served as co-editor of the 2012 book *Shooting Time: Cinematographers on Cinematography*.

When interviewing for *Love & Friendship*, van Oosterhout had one big advantage: He'd just shot *The Legend of Longwood* at Howth Castle, the same location that would serve as Churchill, the estate of Lady Susan's relations, in Stillman's film. Just as important, he knew how to handle a tight 28-day schedule — during which, on a single day, the production would shoot a dance scene with extras, a wedding and reception, a tête-à-tête inside a church, and an establishing shot of the DeCourcy in-laws. "It was really a tough day, yet he managed to get that lit," says Stillman. In fact, *Love & Friendship* finished a day early.

"I was trained in Holland," van Oosterhout notes. "Budgets and time are really an issue there. All the Dutch

[cinematographers] are trained in working fast and being forced to be very creative." He adds that he takes Robert Bresson's credo to heart: "'Simplicity and lucidity.' Sometimes it's not necessary to come up with 10 trucks, to control everything and every moment. If you only have one light, you can make a whole film. If you can shoot a scene without any lights, then shoot it!"

Van Oosterhout came to *Love & Friendship* relatively late and without time to do much more than a makeup and wardrobe test with Beckinsale and co-star Chloë Sevigny. But, the cinematographer says, that was okay. "I like to work using my intuition," he notes. "If you have a lot of prep, you think and rethink. I like to work in the moment."

The only visual references Stillman provided were his earlier films: *Metropolitan*, *Barcelona*, *The Last Days of Disco* (AC June '98) and *Damsels in Distress*. He wanted this one to be as "gorgeous" as possible, with camera subservient to the actors and the atmospheric Georgian mansions in and around Dublin. *Love & Friendship* was shot entirely in these practical locations, including Newbridge House, "a real hero location," says Stillman.

Though wickedly funny, Stillman's dialogue-heavy script made van Oosterhout gulp. "You think, 'Oh my god, how are we

Right: A camera crane was utilized only once, for the opening sequence of the film. Below: Cinematographer Richard van Oosterhout, NSC, SBC (right) frames a shot through a window.



to “go in really tight, as if you had a different camera position. She jumped in really close and got away with this cut. It’s a funny scene and it’s in the trailer, so all’s well that ends well.”

Van Oosterhout eschewed customized look-up tables. “I never use [custom] LUTs on my films,” he states. “For me, a standard [Rec 709] LUT is accurate enough. It’s only when you have an edit that you know what the exact feel of the film is. On set, my light meter is still my most reliable tool.”

For lighting, the 1790s setting meant van Oosterhout had three motivating sources at his disposal: daylight, candlelight and firelight. Variety was important in recurrent locations, such as the Golden Room — the castle drawing room where the Vernon family gathers to read or converse. “Rhythm is so important,” van Oosterhout says. “The idea was to look natural but different every time you’d come into this room.”

Daylight was tricky, given Ireland’s notoriously fickle weather. “That country has four seasons every day,” van Oosterhout laments. Compounding the difficulty, “every scene was long, sometimes shot over one or two days. If you have big windows facing south in a place like Ireland, continuity in lighting is really a challenge. Outside, it was a jungle of stands and lights and flags and screens.”

Shooting in February and March

going to shoot this?” the cinematographer says. As always, Stillman wanted traditional coverage and limited camera movement. “Normally, I like to work with a floating camera,” van Oosterhout relates. “This was completely different. Whit has very outspoken ideas about how to make a film. You have the shot, the reverse shot and maybe an establishing. That’s how he wants to see a scene. He doesn’t like movement at all. In the end, I think we ended up with much more moving camera than was his intention.” Even so, *Love & Friendship* has just one crane shot (for the opening) and one Steadicam scene (a walk-and-talk with Beckinsale and Sevigny); the rest is divided

between dolly moves and static frames. Van Oosterhout adds, “That aesthetic gave me the opportunity to be very subtle in lighting and really dive into that aspect.”

Film stock was never an option, but Stillman insisted on capturing raw files. Framing for 1.85:1, van Oosterhout used an Arri Alexa XT coupled with Cooke S4 primes and Schneider Hollywood Black Magic softening filters. The ability to reframe the 12-bit ArriRaw files saved the day when Stillman began dispensing with dialogue during the edit, leaving an awkward jump cut in the Steadicam scene. “Sophie [Corra, the editor] was writhing in agony every time she saw it,” Stillman recalls. Their solution, he adds, was

Right: Catherine Vernon (Emma Greenwell) reads a letter as her brother Reginald DeCourcy (Xavier Samuel) looks over her shoulder. Below: Director Whit Stillman (center) discusses the scene with Greenwell.



Following Bresson's maxim, van Oosterhout didn't hesitate to grab a shot with actual sunlight. "We were blocking a scene in the Golden Room and had beautiful sunlight coming in. I decided that, okay, maybe we'll have this light for half an hour; we could do one angle with no added light at all," he says. "I like that combination of things. If you're at the moment of shooting and have a beautiful light, it's nice if you can shoot right away, thus serving the [actors' performances]. Then, for the reverse, you have to light completely, but you got the first part for free in a very short time."

For close-ups, Fletcher notes, "we used a combination of poly boards, often complemented with a 19-inch Jem Ball with CTB correction, plus a 3-by-3 216 diffusion frame, which allowed us to create natural texture and fill."

If there's a defining look to *Love & Friendship*, it's the simultaneous use of daylight and candlelight. Double-wick candles were tested, "but for us, the difference was not much," says van Oosterhout. Single-wick candles sometimes did their own work and sometimes were augmented with Lowel Rifa 44s or 55s, dimmed low. "We also had some Chimera Triolet fixtures with a 24-by-32 Video Pro Plus soft box, which I really liked," says Fletcher. "Very durable!"

Fireplaces were always outside of frame. "We didn't have the money to have a proper firelight we could control," says the

under a winter sun, the crew controlled light with Ultrabounce on 12'x12' and 20'x12' frames placed on Genie booms. "These were mostly sun blockers, but they also had the ability to reverse quickly, so we could use them in conjunction with our HMI as bounce," explains gaffer Tim Fletcher.

The majority of setups positioned 6K and 12K HMIs outside the windows, bounced and/or direct through frames. According to Fletcher, "On large setups like the Golden Room — a long, linear room with multiple rooms off into the deep background — we augmented our larger heads with 4Ks and M18s to pick out specific areas, on occasion with some quite saturated color: 134 Golden Amber, 147 Apricot or CTOs. In

all, we used two 12Ks, three 6Ks, three 4Ks and three M18s at any one time.

"Internally, we complemented the lighting using Richard's own BBS Lighting Area 48 LEDs and smaller 400 and 200 HMI units combined with 3-by-3 frames with Lee 216 White Diffusion," the gaffer continues. "We used the window shutters to control and shape light using silk textiles and diffusion filters. The Golden Room lent itself particularly well to this because of its linear nature and many windows. It was quite a satisfying environment to react to, particularly with the quality of light the weather conditions blessed us with: bright and golden. It inspired us to mimic, re-create and enhance what the natural world was doing."



**Top:** Van Oosterhout crafted a look that combined the use of daylight and candlelight. **Middle:** Lady Susan discusses the ideals of marriage with her daughter, Frederica (Morfydd Clark). **Bottom:** Cast and crew capture a dance scene.

cinematographer, "and in places like an old castle, you can't make actual fire — it's too risky. So all of the firelight was made by using a couple of lights on a flicker system. Very simple, very old-fashioned."

Fletcher elaborates, "We had a

couple of DIY soft boxes with 500-watt photoflood bulbs. Dimmed down with a flicker generator, they gave a nice warm glow without needing any gel. Flicker was kept to a minimum."

In a crowded night interior like the

dance scene, the crew relied on candelabras plus dimmed Rifa 55s and 66s in the four corners, mounted on lightweight booms with stands running up behind the curtains, thus granting space for the characters to cavort. In contrast, the dinner scene where Sir James Martin (Tom Bennett) marvels at the peas ("Tiny green balls. How jolly!") was set in a larger dining room with characters remaining in their seats. "In that scene, we were not moving camera at all, so we could place the soft boxes really on the edge of the frame," says van Oosterhout.

During color correction, which was performed at Filmmore in Amsterdam, van Oosterhout showed Stillman candlelit scenes from *Barry Lyndon* (shot by John Alcott, BSC). "My idea was, if you only have candles, you don't see that much; colors fade into the red part of the spectrum," says the cinematographer. Stillman, though, wanted to retain the color definition — and the spirit of comedy. "If you're going to talk about green peas, you have to be able to see them," the director notes.

Van Oosterhout and Stillman worked with colorist Fernando Rodrigues, who utilized FilmLight's Baselight 4.4 during their 14-day color grade. The final 4K DCP master "looks extremely crisp," says Rodrigues. For van Oosterhout, "the main thing was rhythm: If we had a scene that was cloudy and soft-lit and the next scene was a candlelit atmosphere, going from one to the other shouldn't be a big shock, but it should be different."

As a costume drama, *Love & Friendship* stands out for its mix of period authenticity and modern esprit. "It helped that we lit in a natural way, because it's an interesting contrast to the modern aspects of the film," says van Oosterhout. "The visual style, especially the light, feels very authentic. The combination is nice: The dialogue is so witty and modern, but still you have the idea that you're in 1790."

## TECHNICAL SPECS

**1.85:1**  
**Digital Capture**  
**Arri Alexa XT**  
**Cooke S4**