

Park Road teams up with Pablo for post

Leading filmmaker hugely increases workflow for dramatic effect



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From ‘The Frighteners’ to ‘The Lord of the Rings’ trilogy and ‘King Kong’, New Zealand’s Academy Award-winning director Peter Jackson has a long history of innovation. It was no different when it came to the establishment of his Wellington-based facility, Park Road Post Production.

Designed in DI

During the construction of Park Road Post Production, it was decided the facility would need a DI infrastructure more suited to the wide range of work it would be asked to undertake. This led Park Road to become one of the earliest adopters of Quantel’s iQ system which, in four years, saw service on many productions, including the comedy ‘Black Sheep’ and land-speed biopic ‘The World’s Fastest Indian’.

In 2006, Park Road sought to extend the capabilities of its DI department and, following extensive comparison testing, decided to install Quantel’s Pablo next generation non-linear color corrector. It took pride of place in Park Road’s DI Theater, a purpose-built room with a six meter screen and 2K digital projector.

Installed primarily for color grading, the Pablo was chosen with more than just traditional color correction in mind and was quickly put to work on Walt Disney Pictures/Walden Media’s ‘Bridge to Terabithia’.

Finally, in late 2007, the company decided to dramatically boost its workflow by upgrading the iQ to be a second Pablo, along with Genetic Engineering – Quantel’s revolutionary teamworking infrastructure.

Out of the box

Adam Scott, Park Road Head of Digital Intermediate says, “Since October of 2006, when the first Pablo and I arrived at the same time, we literally took it out of the box, plugged it into the wall and have just gone for it. In the last 12 months we have completed seven feature films, and these haven’t just been local New Zealand films. Four have been from the U.S., one from China and one from Australia. We bought the Pablo knowing all this was coming up and we needed a tool with which we could hit the ground running. We knew this would be guaranteed and it hasn’t been off since we put it in.

Front cover: The Water Horse (Revolution Studios/Walden Media/Beacon Pictures). Photo Credit: Pierre Vinet. Copyright: © 2007 Revolution Studios Distribution Company, LLC. All Rights Reserved.

Right and far right: The Tattooist (Eyeworks Touchdown Films Limited/New Zealand Film Commission)





“The prime reason why we chose to have a Pablo at Park Road is that DI is much more than just color correction. It’s the i/o, it’s the conform, the editing, the titles, the sub-titles, the end credits and playing out every different deliverable you need to.” Scott says he would be limited by the tools available in a conventional color correction suite.

“There are other color correction systems, but that’s all they do. In a conventional suite,” Scott continues, “I might have to employ four or five different people and have invested in four or five different pieces of kit, plus have different technicians and engineers to maintain equipment and move data around, but with the Pablo I’ve cut that down to a core team of people. We still have traditional colorists and we have our ‘DI editors’, if you like.”

Road trip

A purpose-built facility in Miramar, a suburb of New Zealand’s capital Wellington, Park Road is neither a post production company crammed into a sterile office building nor a ‘groovy recreation room’ in some renovated warehouse. With the look and feel of a luxury lodge, it is, quite simply, tasteful and functional.

The Park Road complex houses all the facility’s operations, including film laboratory, foley room, sound mixing theaters, administration, one-bedroom apartments, editing suites, a preview theater, the former iQ suite housing the second Pablo and, of course, Park Road’s original Pablo DI suite, complete with digital projection.

“It’s been our hero suite,” says Scott. “You walk in there and, it’s like, this is where all the magic happens. Because we’ve had the two rooms, we could do two jobs at once.

“We would do all the conform and resize, and make sure everything works, and then just pipe that through to the Pablo. Or, we would use the iQ for TVCs, which we do a lot of here. We also do a lot of short films, and smaller budget projects which would be in HD, for instance. We would do those in the iQ suite with an HD monitor. Even though it can go all the way up to 2K, we were using the iQ like a smaller version of the Pablo.”

Now, with the second Pablo and Genetic Engineering infrastructure, Scott says he is looking forward to connecting the two Pablo suites so that two operators can carry out different tasks on the same material at the same time. The infrastructure will also allow easier interface with Macs running Shake, Combustion and Final Cut Pro, as well as an Avid suite.

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Left: 30 Days of Night (Ghost House Pictures/Columbia Pictures)
Photo Credit: Kirsty Griffin

Workflow

It is no exaggeration to say that the work of Director Peter Jackson, effects company WETA Digital and Park Road Post Production has helped to shape modern digital film making techniques and workflows. 'Wellywood', as the New Zealand capital Wellington is now known, has become a center of excellence for digital filmmaking with Jackson and his associated companies not only attracting international projects to the country, but also 'putting back' into the local industry by way of passing on digital content creation skills to emerging New Zealand talent, and giving homegrown projects access to cutting edge technology. "We are a boutique facility and carefully select our projects. In saying that we can be working on a few projects at the same time," says Scott, "but if we're working on a major project, it's all hands on deck."

With the arrival of its second Pablo and Genetic Engineering infrastructure with the Sam data server, Park Road is connecting the two suites together so they can share the same 32 Terabytes of online storage. "This enables the two Pablo suites to work on the same clips at the same time, moving jobs between suites, without exporting and importing any data," says Scott. "Both Pablos can be working at 4K at the same time without slowing down the other guy. This is a very elegant way to share projects between the two Pablos."

Park Road's second Pablo will be used primarily for cutting material and VFX fixes while the original system will be used chiefly for color grading in the DI Theater. The Sam data server will enable third party products like Shake and Combustion to access the files directly off the GenePool and be put back when finished.

The result is a huge saving in time and data transfers. Future options include scanning directly into the GenePool from Park Road's Spirit datacine, as well as linking via fibre to the ARRI scanner and recorders at sister company Weta Digital.

Right and far right: Crossing the Line (Wingnut Films/ RED)





“Our facility’s flexibility receives a massive boost,” says Scott, “as we can be working on the same job at the same time on two Pablos. This will help us to finish projects in the minimum time, at the best quality and with the maximum creativity. The whole workflow is boosted dramatically. Maximum operation, minimum interruptions. The clients will love it! Pablo is a huge time saver,” Scott continues. “When it comes down to it, if I’m working on a big film and the director is in there, we can make snap decisions on the spot about shots. We can trim shots, we can swap shots, we can replace shots. We can do all of that while we’re grading, while we’re in the DI all at the same time.

“One of the big things when you’re in that DI process is you can try things then and there. You don’t have to say ‘when you come back tomorrow I can show you what that shot looks like in there’ because that’s literally what it’s like in a traditional facility. Likewise, if there’s a bit of dirt on the negative or something else that needs to be repaired, you can just fix it on the spot because you’ve got the tool available; I’ve got Paintbox on board. In fact, I’ve got all those tools and they’re just a pen-stroke away. You just grab it and go for it. And, when you’ve got the director in there, it’s just seamless. They don’t even know.”

Future directions

According to Scott, part of the Park Road brief is a commitment to exploring the possibilities of emerging film technologies – such as digital cinema, 3D stereoscopic and 4K workflow. “For instance, we were the first kids on the block to work with the Red Camera,” he says. “The result was a short film called Crossing the Line. It was shot by Peter Jackson and we did all the final output on the Pablo.

“Regardless of acquisition – scanned film, HD or something shot in 4K – once it’s in the Pablo nothing in the DI process really changes apart from storage. 4K files just take up more space and more time to move around the building. When it comes to the difference between 2K and 4K, there’s no real difference in the operation of the machine. As an operator, you notice you’re working with a larger canvas, but actual operation, there’s no difference. I could be working in standard definition for TV or 4K, it performs exactly the same.”

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So, where does it all end? Well, according to Scott, there is no end. The sky is the limit and Park Road is confident Quantel systems will help the company push that limit. “The rules have all changed with this sort of technology,” he says. “Next there’ll probably be the Blue Camera with photoscopic, 3D whatever. It’s a really cool time to be where we are in this place because in the timeline of motion pictures, everything is changing. Park Road is a world-class boutique. And we have everything here: lab, three sound mixing theaters, plus the DI department, and it’s all under one roof. Literally up the road are the studios where they shot King Kong, and WETA Workshop and WETA Digital are just down the road. It’s all here. It’s Wellywood as they call it.”

At a glance

- New Zealand-based Park Road Post Production is a pioneering center of excellence in DI
- One of the first users of Quantel’s iQ DI system, Park Road now has two Pablos and a Genetic Engineering teamworking infrastructure
- The Quantel systems form the hub of the company’s DI post production and color correction chain
- Park Road has radically improved its workflow with the installation of the new Quantel technologies

Above: Adam Scott at work on one of Park Road’s Pablos

Right and far right: Park Road Post Production

