

On Location

Montreal

Mindfield

Early morning on the indoor set of Allegro Films' *Mindfield*, the ranks have not yet filed into order. Publicist Lisa Mighton takes me through and quickly introduces me to plenty of people, but their roles aren't entirely clear to me. I pick out one man to be the director of photography, another to be the director, but apart from them, it's a hodgepodge of coffee-swilling activity awaiting cues. There's a lot of hammering to prepare the set. Lights are tested and retested. I discover the soundman, Don Cohen, because he's fiddling with sound equipment.

Bit by bit this union shoot falls into the conventional film hierarchy: men are in charge. Jean-Claude Lord directs, Bernard Chentrier is the DOP, and Mike Williams runs interference as the first assistant director. A bevy of boys hovers around the 35mm Arriflex, and women deal with hair, clothing, make-up, and prop details. Sandy McGiffert, the third assistant director, jokes with Lord about her imaginary Winnebago.

It's a closed set without a ceiling, so there isn't much space for onlookers. It takes a moment before I can find a place to be innocuous so I can watch the goings-on. The action is rapid. Shots are done with very little hesitation, and average about three takes. Two days previous, *Mindfield* had a much less productive day because of a local TV news team trying to film the filming. Today, though, it's clockwork. "I'll rush you now so I don't rush you tonight," says Mike Williams in the midst of a set-up.

For Bernard Chentrier, being a director of photography is what he wanted to do since he was a boy. He just celebrated 30 years in the business and says, "Since I was 12, everything has led me to where I am now. I started out as an assistant, then cameraman. It's difficult to say when one becomes a director of photography... it must be about 15 years or so for me."

Mindfield is his first feature film in 18 years. After his last feature, Denis Héroux's *Quelques arpents de neige*, he turned to advertising, "a good training ground," he says. "It's very touchy work. You need to be very precise - a flare on a bottle, a particular shadow on a particular place. It's not at all the same work. You have a whole day to shoot 30 seconds. Here, we do three minutes. And for *Lance et compte* you did seven or eight minutes a day."

After advertising, he did *Lance et compte*, the Quebec French-language series that English Canada saw as *He Shoots, He Scores*. Jean-Claude Lord was the series' first director. He and Chentrier have worked together for about five years. Tom Berry, *Mindfield*'s producer, says *Lance et compte* "was enormously successful. It routinely drew a bigger audience in Quebec than the CBC ever drew nationwide (for *He Shoots, He Scores*) - millions, out of a (Quebec) population of six



Jean-Claude Lord directs Lisa Langlois at Montreal's Olympic stadium in *Mindfield*.

million." Chentrier used a zoom for the whole series.

Mindfield's screenplay is a fictional psychological thriller written by Canadian author and lawyer William Deverell, a work inspired by Dr. Ewen Cameron's notorious experiments at the Allan Memorial Institute in the '50s and '60s. As Berry explains, "Set in the present, it's about a Montreal homicide detective (Michael Ironside) who has a psychiatric problem that he's been keeping a secret because he's afraid he might lose his job if anybody finds out. He has delusions and hallucinations. At the beginning of the movie there are a series of murders which he's

investigating. He gradually develops the conviction that the solution to these crimes lies in understanding his own hallucinations. The background is that he was the subject of experiments that took place in the early '60s in Montreal, and were CIA-funded. The story is very plausible."

Chentrier finds *Mindfield* an intriguing project. "The story is sombre, the actors are sombre, so the images must be sombre as well." By and large, he prefers to use an Arriflex camera, and Zeiss lenses because they have the least amount of diffusion. Other lenses "have a little bit of diffusion. It's very little, of course, but I would rather start off with a

very crisp image, as crisp as possible, and then create any diffusion later."

The bulk of the real time scenes are shot with an aperture of f2.8. "I also underexpose almost a third of a stop, sometimes more," he says. "In a pharmacy, however, where we've already shot, it'll be lit as a pharmacy. That's natural, of course. Generally, though, the interiors are quite dark with very high contrasts. I play around a lot with gels, and I lower the colour temperature, the degrees Kelvin as well. And I use a lot of yellow-based lighting to dramatize the action."



Bernard Chentrier shooting his first feature 18 years ago: *Quelques arpents de neige*.

"The angle has an effect on the mood too. To add to the drama, I like keeping the camera low in order to increase the angle. It gives more importance to the characters. I put a 14mm lens on. The result is monstrous. The actors become a crushing presence."

When the Ironside character has flashbacks, Chentrier has chosen to have bright lighting, to contrast the overall *film noir* feeling. "It's very foggy with diffused lighting. It provides an enormous contrast with the 'reality' of the film. Because of the subject, this film lends itself very well to experimentation - lenses, lighting, all of that."

Most of the rushes for *Mindfield* have come back on 3/4" video because it's a much less expensive process than getting the rushes in 35mm. Chentrier doesn't much care for the video rushes. "It does nothing for me to see them," he says. "Maybe one out of five times I'll see them, but the framing is all wrong because of the different ratio, and the depth of field is destroyed. It's demoralizing! But every now and then, we do get 35mm rushes. That's our little treat."

"In any case, I'm not worried about finding any serious mistakes - after 30 years you begin to make fewer errors," he laughs. "The important thing is to make sure that the style of cinematography corresponds to what the director wants. That's the main concern of the cinematographer."

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