


color
by
deluxe



Toronto-born high school dropout, producer, cinematographer and budding entrepreneur Bob Crone had a problem in 1962. After shooting his footage, he was forced to black bag his exposed film and take it to New York to be processed. In those days, Toronto didn't have a first-class lab, and Canada's best labs were in Montreal, owned by the National Film Board, and therefore inaccessible to a working filmmaker like Crone. Surviving a plane crash during one perilous trip south, he decided to open his own black-and-white film processing lab in Toronto in 1964, which he called Film House. Now known as deluxe toronto, the firm has become the largest film lab and post-production facility in North America outside of Hollywood and is the world's third largest stand-alone film processing lab.

Film House/deluxe toronto has developed and grown along with the Canadian film industry. There was virtually no feature film scene in Toronto during the early 1960s. The original Film House on Front Street worked on the odd documentary and programs for CBC-TV. Primarily, it focused on TV commercials—sometimes 200 a year. Stan Ford, deluxe's Vice-President, Post Production Sales, and longtime employee recalls that their first feature film project was Canadian director David Secter's Toronto gay classic, *Winter Kept Us Warm*. Film House would later work with many emerging Canadian filmmakers in the early 1970s including Don Shebib, Ivan Reitman and

David Cronenberg. The story almost ended in 1973 when the lab went into receivership, but it was kept alive after being purchased by a local ad agency.

As more commercials were shot on video in the late 1970s, Film House began to do more feature film work during the infamous tax-shelter years. That period proved helpful to train many in house staffers. Most of the films were awful, but at least the business was good. When the tax shelter boondoggle ended in the early 1980s, Film House began to provide services for many of the U.S. productions shooting in Toronto because of the lower Canadian dollar. Soon it was making release prints for Universal Pictures and doing more television work for new Canadian production companies like the emerging Atlantis. In 1986, Film House was bought by Drabinsky's Cineplex Odeon. This marked the beginning of major growth period and the expansion of its sound facilities in 1987.

Director and producer Norman Jewison remembers the lack of high-calibre, Toronto-based sound facilities prior to the Film House expansion. That's when he began bringing projects to Film House. He has since worked with the firm on all of his films, including his latest, *Bogus*. "It's highly specialized work, and they've really come through for us." Jewison recommended Film House to several people in Hollywood, which has helped the firm expand into servicing major feature film projects.

British-based The Rank Organization took control of Film House in 1991. Its name was changed to deluxe toronto in 1995, as part of Rank's reorganization of its North American operations after purchasing the L.A.-based deluxe. deluxe toronto is currently busier than ever with the recent wave of Toronto-shot American productions. With few film labs and sound facilities elsewhere in Canada, deluxe has also become one of the primary post-production facilities for Canadian film and TV productions. Ironically, deluxe now does film and sound work for the NFB, which recently closed its lab facilities in Montreal. Bill Townsend, deluxe's Vice-president, Laboratory Sales, explains the firm's success this way: "We try to stay away from fad

technology. We have low staff turnover, and we give clients what they want."

Film House/deluxe has played a prominent role in the Canadian film and television. It has fostered, close and long-term relationships with many filmmakers such as Egoyan and Cronenberg and production houses such as Nelvana and Alliance. Nelvana's Director of Post Production, Rob Kirkpatrick, says animation is very complex to dub, but deluxe has always got the job done. "It's a mutually supportive arrangement," says Kirkpatrick. "They help us to meet deadlines, and we get great support from their engineering staff. deluxe people get into the projects we're working on, and they often provide us with creative input."

deluxe is actively helping student and first-time filmmakers in Canada. Along with offering an NFB-subsidized rate to student and some first-time filmmakers, deluxe provides its facilities at a reasonable cost to several film schools and has become a participating producer on Canadian Film Centre (CFC) features, such as *House* and *Rude*. "We do all the lab work on the films and sound mixing," explains Ford. He considers this an excellent way to build links with future directors and producers.

Norman Jewison, founder of the CFC, says deluxe toronto has been integral to the success of the advanced film school. "We would be in trouble without them," he says. "deluxe has really come through and have been a great help to young and upcoming filmmakers."

Stan Ford candidly admits one day the film processing and printing side of deluxe's business may end when "people will just use high definition video." But he stresses that this is a long way off noting film is still of a higher quality than high-definition video. More importantly, film can outlast videos limited 30-year lifespan. "Film will be here forever and ever." If its track record is any indication, deluxe toronto will likely have the same fate. ■

