PLANNING YOUR SHOOT

A HAPHAZARD INSTRUCTION MANUAL FOR GETTING READY FOR YOUR SHOOTS

FROM YOUR TRUSTY DOP, GYÖRGY LÁSZLÓ

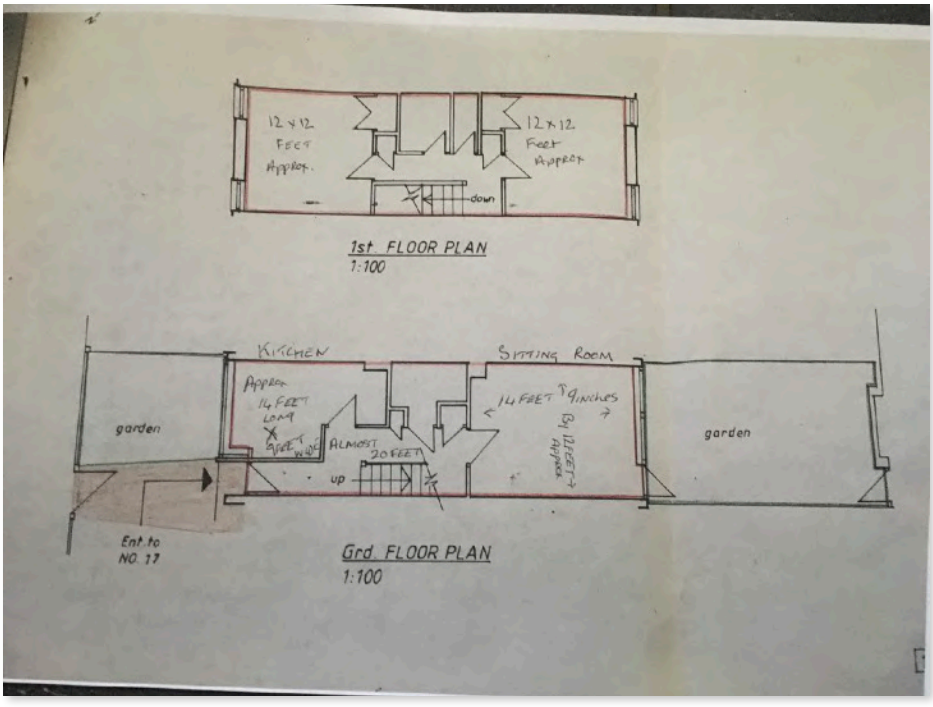
I. Shooting on Location - Going on a Recce - Location Photos

This may or may not apply to your shoot. It may apply only to a part of your shoot. But having the right kind of location photos is a very important tool for communication with the DOP. Ideally, the DOP will go on the recce, but sometimes you will be working with locations scouts before that happens.

So here are a few guidelines on what you need as recce photos. It might seem absolutely basic to you but you'd be surprised how often one receives a flood useless recce photography.

For each location you will need:

1. **A floor plan** - it does not need to be an official one, but it needs to be a drawing to scale showing the size of the location, where windows and doors are and where major pieces of furniture are located. It needs to provide measurements either in feet or metres. If you do not have an official floor plan, a hand-drawn one will also suffice. If it's not provided in digital format it needs to be scanned or photographed directly from above (i.e. not at a slanted angle). The floor plan should also indicate if the location is ground level or first/second floor and show any adjacent rooms or spaces where lights can be place (garden, street, balcony, terrace, etc.)



This is a pretty dismal floor plan that was sent to me. It's the "better than nothing" kind. I had to spend about 45 minutes cleaning it up. Why? So that it could be used later on as a background layer in Shot Designer for preparing blocking and lighting plans.

2. A **wide angle photo from all 4 corners** of the location. The photo must be in landscape orientation and not in vertical, portrait mode. Provide only one photo from each corner. Take these photos without crew members blocking the view. It's usually best to wait until everyone has looked at the space, ask them to leave and then work quickly.

In case you have the time an additional panoramic shot or a short video panning slowly (!) can also be useful.

3. Any other photos of relevant details or creative angles are welcome.

4. Notes on **available electricity on location**. Number and location of electric circuits, location of fuse box on the property, number of 13A or 16A or even 32A circuits. This is important for all units using electricity, but mostly for the Gaffer.

The generic equation for how much power you can draw is

Amper x Volts = Watts

e.g.: on a 13A household circuit you can have
13A x 240V = 3120 W

5. The floor plan and its respective photos should be clearly named to indicate what location we are talking about.

6. All of the above information is to be shared asap with the 1st AC and the gaffer. The 1st AC also will need to know where camera gear will be stored and accessed and the gaffer needs to be informed about where lights and stands will be stored.

DO

PROVIDE MEASUREMENTS FOR EACH SPACE

SCAN DRAWINGS OR TAKE PHOTOS DIRECTLY FROM ABOVE

TAKE ONLY AS MANY PHOTOS AS YOU NEED

RENAME THE FILES YOU'RE SENDING FOR EASY REFERENCE, E.G. LIVING ROOM 01.JPG

DON'T

FORGET TO PROVIDE MEASUREMENTS FOR EACH SPACE

TAKE PHOTOS OF PRINTED MATERIAL AT A SLANTED ANGLE

FLOOD YOUR CREW WITH DOZENS OF REPETITIVE PHOTOS

SEND PHOTOS WITH NAMES LIKE IMG00984.JPG

Shooting on a Studio Set

The process is the same. Creating a floor plan for a studio shoot requires exactly the same steps.

II. Prepare a shot list

Once you have your shooting script start thinking about and preparing a shot list. Do it as soon as you can! Unless you start to break down scripts into setups and shots, it is easy to overestimate how much you'll be able to shoot in a day.

This is a highly creative process, so involve the DOP from the very beginning. The shot list will also depend on the style you choose. A long, continuous take on a steadicam as opposed to six or seven short shots on sticks demand very different amounts of time in your schedule.

If you have a 4-page script and you end up with 45 setups for a 12-hour shooting day, you might need to reconsider your choices.

There are a number of professional shot list generating (and very comprehensive production) apps, programs, suites. But you can always create your own templates for simple projects.

SHOT LIST DATA

SHOT NUMBER

SHOT DESCRIPTION

SHOT SIZE (LEARN THE TERMS, PLEASE: WS, CU, LS, OTS…)

CAMERA MOVEMENT (LEARN THE TERMS PLEASE: PAN, TILT, DOLLY IN/OUT, TRACKING SHOT…)



A LINED SCRIPT

LOOKS CRAZY.

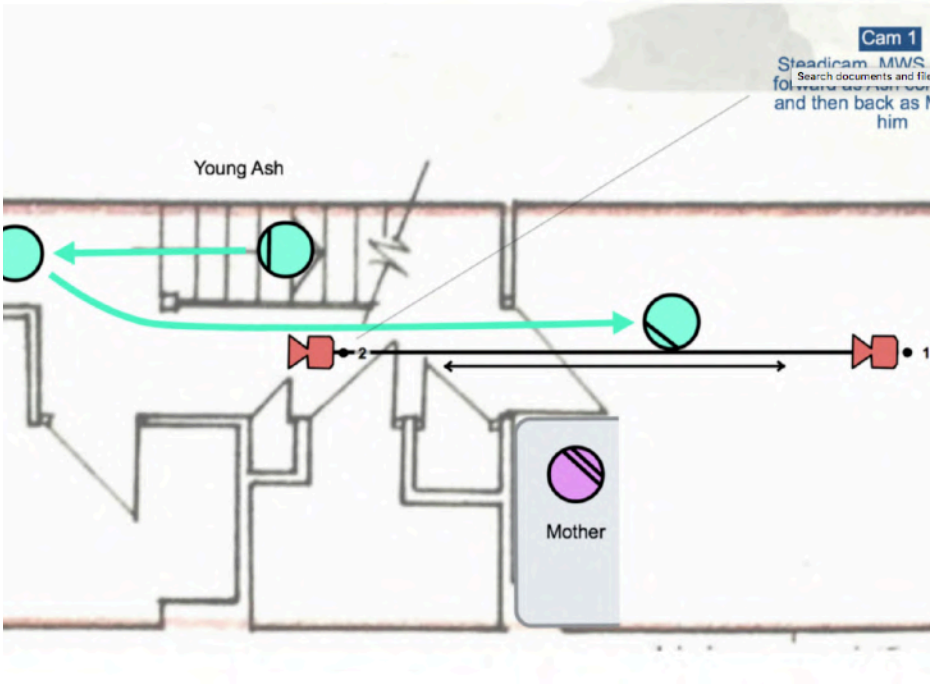
COULD BE TIDIER, BUT AS LONG AS YOU KNOW HOW YOU'RE COVERING YOUR SCENE IT DOESN'T MATTER.

III. Blocking the action

I love using a small piece of software called Shot Designer by Hollywood Camera Work. It works on your phone, tablet and laptop. The basic version is free and fully functional, the paid version adds a few perks, like syncing and sharing.

It's great for blocking out scenes. It's great for planning camera movements. It's great for lighting plans and communicating with the Gaffer and Grips.

The drawing below is using the floor plan we've seen at the beginning.



Part of a blocking plan created in Shot Designer. What I love about this software is its simplicity. It's an amazing tool when you have to discuss blocking via the internet as it is easy to share and makes communication really efficient.



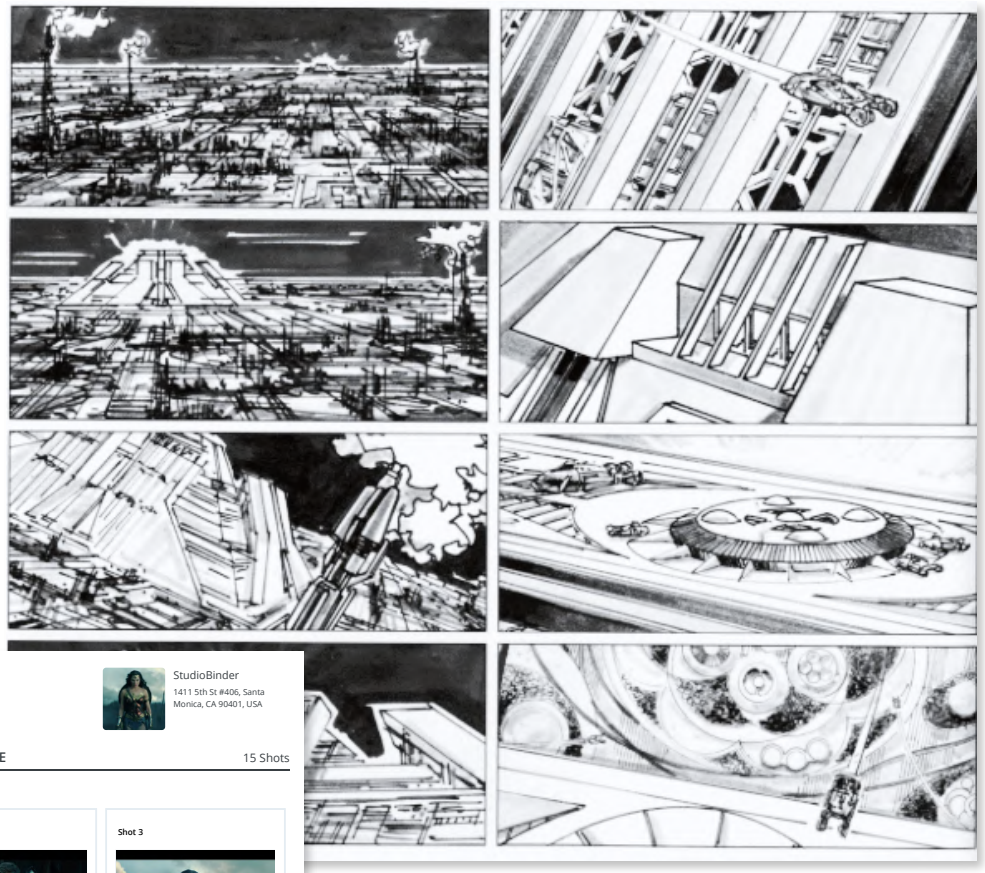
Part of a slightly more complex scene describing camera movement, blocking and lighting.

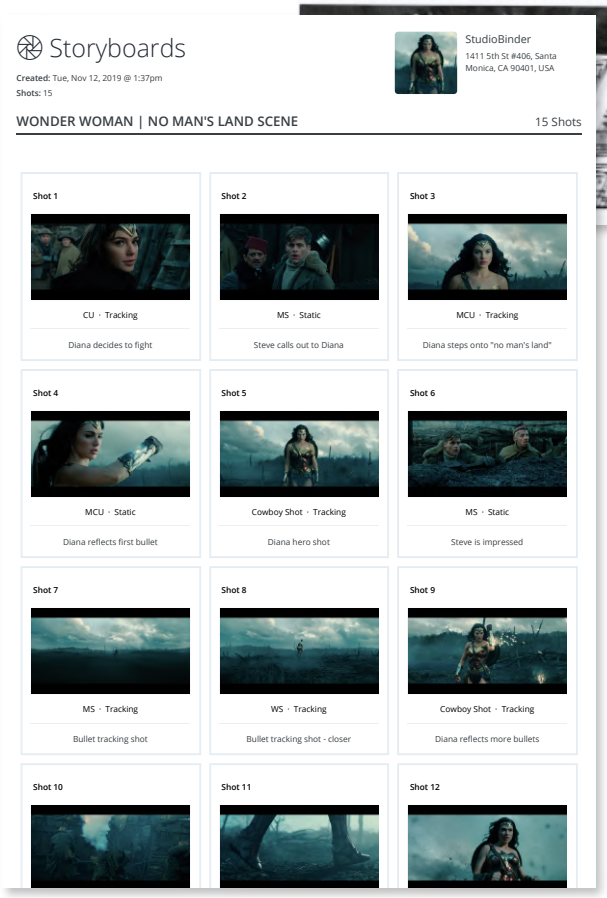
IV. Storyboarding

For simple, short and low-budget projects there is usually not enough time or womanpower to created a storyboard. As long as you are clear about your shot list and your blocking you will be fine.

This is not to belittle the power of storyboards. They are amazing previz tools and one piece of software you should definitely check out is Frameforge Storyboard Studio. As building a virtual set takes time, I prefer to use it for studio shoots with ample prep time.

A storyboard can be in itself a work of art giving you the power to previsualise your framing, blocking, pace and edit points months before sets get built or a camera is turned on.





It can also be generated using software. Artistic drawings can be replaced by photos or frames generated in previz software.

V. Mood Boards

Very useful to communicate atmosphere, colours and feelings. Great for inspiration. Just do not let yourself be misled: a mood board based on medieval frescos, high-end photographic images and framegrabs from Hollywood movies my plant expectations in your mind that are simply beyond your budget. Use them as a source of inspiration, nothing more, nothing less.



As always, just keep in mind that all these tools are to facilitate communication between HODs and crew members as communicating about images is shockingly difficult to do without images.