

# The Cinematography of Néstor Almendros

By Sareesh Sudhakaran | wolfcrow.com

This is a supplement to my video on the cinematography of Néstor Almendros you can find here:

- YouTube: <https://youtu.be/xKPUoxO8lnE>
- Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/201103833>

## The style

Néstor Almendros' style can be called naturalistic. He always avoided the superficial and unnecessary:



*"When there are no limits, there is no style" - Néstor Almendros*

## Strategy for exteriors

The primary strategy of exteriors was to backlight actors and then fill in with cards or bounce material like Griflon, etc. He also shot in daylight hour and tried to keep his actors in the shade:



### **Bounced lighting in Interiors**

He was a consistent user of mirrors to bounce sunlight into a room:



He also used practicals as motivated light and just bounced off them to wrap faces:



## Color

He did play with color temperature and film stock, like *The Collector*:



and *The Last Metro*:



### Camera, format and lenses

He usually opened up the aperture as wide as possible. He shot at a time when film stock wasn't very sensitive. He used the entire range of focal lengths, even telephoto lenses when it was called for.

In his latter work he mostly stuck to Panavision cameras and lenses. He almost always shot spherical, and rarely anamorphic (exception being *The Valley (Obscured by Clouds)*). He preferred the Academy (1.37:1), 1.66:1 and 1.85:1 aspect ratios, and his stock of choice was almost always Eastmancolor from Kodak.

Painting referenced in the video - Andrew Wyeth's "Christina's World":



This was a direct inspiration to Days of Heaven.

### How he lit faces

He predominantly favored the Paramount and three-quarters lighting style with point catchlights. He used hard lights, and the contrast ratios varied:



He was clearly influenced by the classical style of paintings and cinematography, though he worked with tight budgets and schedules. If you want to learn how to light for low budget features, he was one of the best in the business, and his work in Days of Heaven is considered one of the greatest feats of cinematography ever.

Also, don't forget to read his book [A Man with a Camera](#). I haven't read it yet, but the reviews are excellent.