

Production Notes: The Old Metal Workers from Chilling

By Sareesh Sudhakaran | *wolfcrow.com*

This is a supplement to my mini-documentary on the old metal workers from Chilling. You can find the video here:

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8NL7ZS74aBU>

Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/200167688>

Please also read [the detailed blog article](#) on my tour and the circumstances surrounding the production.

Production

Camera and Lens

I used a Sony a7R II, which I had just reviewed and published the morning of my flight to Ladakh. The primary lens for the interviews was my trusty Nikon 50mm f/1.2, but I also used a couple of other lenses for the timelapses and B-Roll.

Audio

This trip was a vacation, and I was hoping to scout for some interesting projects so I can return later. For this reason all I carried was a wired lavalier microphone that I won't recommend.

Unfortunately, 15 minutes into the first interview the lav died, so I was forced to use the in-camera microphone. This is why the audio sucks. But there was nothing I could do. I realized when I made the trip to Chilling (which takes a whole day to and from from Leh) these metal workers might not be around when I come back (though in all honesty they are as tough as they come!).

The correct way to have done this was obviously carry my shotgun, lav and external recorder.

Camera shake

I only carried a Pedco Ultrapod, which you can see in the blog article, along with a link to the review. Luckily, the a7RII had 5-axis internal camera stabilization so the shots aren't horrendously bad.

Yet if I were seriously shooting this with prior knowledge I would definitely have carried my tripod and fluid head (Cartoni Focus HD). I'm really not a fan of shaky footage, of any kind.

Sensor spots

I didn't know at the time how the sensor was a dust magnet. If you stop down the lens you will get sensor spots, and they are hard to remove or hide in post. Today I have cleaning solutions, but at the time I couldn't see the spots on the back LCD.

How I went about it

All I knew from Sonam, my fixer, was that these metal workers were practicing a tradition that was dying. I had no clue what to expect when I got there.

Unfortunately, the first metal worker didn't want to give an interview, so I was left with the other two. When we spoke to him he agreed and I had about 10 minutes to set everything up. We were obviously intruding his private space (he also slept in that room) and I wanted to be out of there as quickly as possible.

Without knowing any background it's impossible to formulate the perfect questions. But there are guidelines that all reporters follow, and that's what I did. Ask Who, what, how, when, where...and so on.

I wanted to know how they started, how hard/easy it was for them to do this work, whether they could train students (for posterity), and how business was like right now, etc. I believed I could get as much information as possible so at least I'd have a story.

The worst problem was that I didn't know the language, so Sonam was translating my questions and asking them. I didn't know from the answers if they were editable or useful. I couldn't ask follow-up questions to gain further insight. In fact, all my skills as an interviewer were useless in that situation. I took what I got.

The second interviewee was in Leh, where he had set up shop. This was more relaxed because I had some idea what to ask and expect.

Ultimately though, I didn't know if I had a whole story from just the interviews. I spent a few hours on another day shooting some extra B-Roll but I didn't have the time to go deeper into their story.

Lastly, Sonam I sat down for dinner and he graciously translated everything for me in Hindi and I did my best to write it all down on a piece of paper. We played back the footage on the camera and went along.

To be honest, I was disappointed with my effort, which is why I didn't edit it until now (It was shot in September 2015).

Post Production

It took about a month revisiting the footage to formulate a plan of action. I wanted to keep the documentary at around 7-10 minutes, but I didn't know how it would pan out.

The first step in putting the material together is organization. I first organized the entire content into the following logical groups:

1. Bookend: Introduction to Ladakh and the road to Chilling
2. Who, What: Who they are, what they do, where are they from, etc.
3. Their work at monasteries
4. How? Raw materials, tools, quality of work, etc.
5. Students and the future
6. Bookend: The takeaway, what I learned

It was obvious I'd have to narrate to fill in the gaps. I wanted to keep the narration as minimal as possible.

The next step was to write a preliminary script. Here's the first draft:

Section	Visuals	Sound
1. Ladakh, and the road to Chilling	Ladakh the landscape, its beauty and harshness. The desert, mountains, etc.	Music THIS IS LADAKH – AS SUBLIMELY BEAUTIFUL AS IT IS DEADLY. HOME TO HUNDREDS OF MONASTRIES, SOME PRECARIOUSLY PERCHED ON MOUNTAIN SIDES, ISOLATED FROM PRYING EYES. OTHERS ARE MORE ACCESSIBLE, AND ARE POPULAR TOURIST ATTRACTIONS. BECAUSE IT IS TOURSIM THAT SUSTAINS THE ECONOMY OF LADAKH.
	Leh, capital.	LEH, THE CAPITAL, THE HEART OF LADAKH. AT AN ALTITUDE OF XYZ FEET. SUMMER IS IMPORTANT. WINTERS ARE HARSH.
	Roads, working on the road, slowly leading up to the	THE TWISTING AND TURNING ROADS ALWAYS INVITE DEATH AND AWE. IT DOES NOT DETER THE

	way to Chilling, getting lonelier and lonelier.	THOUSANDS OF VEHICLES THAT PLY THESE ROADS DURING THE SUMMER. MANY ROADS LEAD AWAY FROM LEH TO ITS POPULAR DESTINATIONS, THE LAKES AND PEAKS. ONE SUCH LONELY ROAD TAKES US ALONG THE RIVER XYZ. ROCKS OF DIFFERENT COLORS, A LANDSCAPE THAT CHANGES RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOUR VERY EYES.
	Chilling, the village, its unique elements.	AFTER X HOURS AND Y KILOMETERS, WE REACH CHILLING, PICTURESQUE AND SERENE.
	Three faces. Working.	HOME TO THE LAST THREE REMAINING METAL WORKERS AND SCULPTERS FROM A LONG LINE OF ARTISANS.
Section 2: Who, what and history.	Chilling Man	"Name." "I make silver and gold objects..."
	Chilling Man, slowly showing Town man listening.	"5 years, started with metal sheets, then moved on to spoon, teapots..."
	Town Man	"Name" "Since 12 years" "From Nepal, settled in Chilling."
		WORD IS THEIR ANCESTORS WERE BROUGHT IN FROM NEPAL, TO CREATE STATUES FOR
	Chilling Man	"From Nepal, bought by King for statue at Shey Palace..Offered space, farming, settled in Chilling, expanded to Kyoo Ganga (verify)."
	Town Man	"Demand for work in Monastries in Leh" "I enjoy village, health is better in Chilling...make food in Chilling"
		TODAY THESE MEN SIT IN ONE PLACE, QUIETLY WORKING AWAY, UNRELENTING. STILL MORE ACTIVE AND DEDICATED THAN MANY YOUNGSTERS WHO HAVE MOBILE

		<p>PHONES AND THE INTERNET IN THEIR HANDS.</p> <p>“Foreigners appreciate effort”</p> <p>YOU WOULDN’T THINK MUCH, BUT THESE MEN AND THEIR ANCESTORS WERE VERY MUCH IN DEMAND.</p>
Section 3: Monastries	Chilling Man, cut with images from some of these monasteries. If not available then places on a map.	“Lumayuru, Tseskarmo, Chemedy, Themisgam, Thiksay, Stakna”
	<p>Town Man, cut with images from some of these monasteries. If not available then places on a map.</p> <p>Note: Maybe try to find a way to intercut with each other.</p>	“Hemis, Stok Castle, Chemday, Spituk. Made muldung for Stakna. Father made for Hemis”
	Chilling Man	“Names of gurus”
Section 4: Raw materials and tools	Chilling Man	“I make my own tools (shows). Like this..shows how he works”
	Chilling Man	“Stuff is fragile (other), but mine will last generations – THROWS, other stuff will break.”
	<p>Chilling Man, cut with shots of statues if available.</p> <p>Note: Can also be used at the end.</p>	WHETHER OR NOT HIS POTS BREAK, THE IMPRESSION WE GET IS THAT <i>HE</i> WILL NOT BREAK.
	Town Man	<p>“Raw materials are expensive. From Leh, limited quantities. Travel for more. The price of copper, coal.</p> <p>Copper, silver and gold. The latter two for statues in monasteries</p> <p>I don’t make Kaons for weddings”</p>
	Chilling Man, if Town Man’s	“Kashmir, Delhi, Ambernath, sourced from Leh.”

	account needs extra information.	
		SURELY SUCH AN ART MUST BE PRESERVED. SURELY THERE ARE STUDENTS READY TO TAKE UP THESE WORKS?
	Chilling Man	“I have 8 students. They make up to teapots. Can’t handle complicated work.”
	Town Man	“Students leave me to join army”
Section 5: Students and future	Chilling Man	“Income isn’t high, raw materials are expensive. When he started only Rs. 5 per day. (RAW materials -) silver coal gold. Work is difficult, handmade. Students want to study. Every village has a school.”
	Town Man	“Initial investment is high, you can’t earn fast. XYZ of his work, takes a month.” “Disappearing problem, it will end in chilling soon.”
	Chilling Man, Shots of third man	“Only 2 left in Chilling. Will not survive.”
Section 6: Takeaway		THESE MEN WILL NOT GIVE IN UNTIL THEIR DYING BREATH. IT’S NOT JUST AN ART, IT’S A WAY OF LIFE. TO QUIETLY SUPPORT THE NEED FOR SPIRITUALISM IN AN UNFORGIVING LANDSCAPE, TO BUILD LASTING OBJECTS THAT PEOPLE CENTURIES FROM NOW WILL MARVEL OVER. WHAT I LEARNED FROM THE METAL WORKERS OF CHILLING IS THAT YOU DON’T HAVE TO RUN AFTER THE NEWEST SHINING OBJECT. LIFE WILL TAKE ITS COURSE, BUT YOU CAN STAND LIKE A ROCK.
	Chilling Man, if not used before. Interspersed with shots of walking.	“One has to be determined. (From students) – religious statues more difficult, proportions are important, more calculations. You are only considered professional if you make silver and gold work. Newcomers needs history, appreciation – it’s hard if

		you don't have talent."
	<p>CLOSE WITH TITLE OVER (the point of the whole story):</p> <p>Metal working is not a unique art. But the stories and techniques these men use, that will be lost soon.</p> <p>The world will probably not be devoid of spoons and pots at their passing. But the world will lose them.</p> <p>In Chilling, these men are art.</p> <p>CREDITS</p>	<p>Music, finish with swell...</p>

Then came the process of editing.

The first job was to get the subtitles in. I used the captions option in Premiere Pro and baked it in and rendered both the interviews to Prores 422. The project is in 4K.

The next job was to start placing the footage on the timeline to get a sense of the length. The first cut was about 25 minutes long!

I recorded a temp voice over track and used it as a guide. It dawned on me the script needed some corrections.

Once I was happy, I settled on this final version:

Section	Visuals	Sound
1. Ladakh, and the road to Chilling	Ladakh the landscape, its beauty and harshness. The desert, mountains, etc.	<p>Music</p> <p>THIS IS LADAKH – SUBLIMELY BEAUTIFUL ... AND DEADLY.</p> <p>HOME TO HUNDREDS OF MONASTRIES, MANY PRECARIOUSLY PERCHED ON MOUNTAIN SIDES, ISOLATED FROM</p>

		<p>THE CASUALLY CURIOUS. OTHERS ARE MORE ACCESSIBLE, AND ARE POPULAR TOURIST ATTRACTIONS.</p> <p>BECAUSE IT IS TOURSIM THAT SUSTAINS THE ECONOMY OF LADAKH.</p>
	Leh, capital.	<p>LEH IS THE CENTER, THE HEART OF LADAKH. AT AN ALTITUDE OF ELEVEN THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED FEET.</p> <p>THE SUMMERS ARE CRUCIAL. THE WINTERS ARE CRUEL.</p>
	Roads, working on the road, slowly leading up to the way to Chilling, show Zanskar	<p>FROM LEH STARTS A THOUSAND JOURNEYS.</p> <p>THE NARROW TWISTING AND TURNING ROADS ALWAYS INVITE DEATH. YET IT DOES NOT DETER THE THOUSANDS OF VEHICLES FERRYING AWESTRUCK TOURISTS CONTEMPLATING THEIR MORTALITY.</p> <p>EACH ROAD LEADS TO A STORY OF A LIFETIME. THE BUSY ROADS ARE THE LIFE BLOOD TO POPULAR TOURIST HOTSPOTS. THE LAKES AND PEAKS. THE LONELY ROAD WE ARE TAKING GOES TO A REGION FREQUENTED BY TREKKERS, BUT NOT MUCH BY CARS. THROUGHOUT WE ARE ACCOMPANIED BY THE MIGHTY ZANSKAR. WHEN THE ROADS ARE NO LONGER OPERATIONAL IN WINTER, THE ZANSKAR FREEZES OVER BECOMING THE LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR THOSE LIVING BEYOND.</p> <p>IT IS A MIRACLE AND A GIFT WE ARE ALWAYS AT THE MERCY OF.</p>
	Chilling, the village	<p>AFTER FIFTY-FIVE KILOMETERS, WE REACH CHILLING, PICTURESQUE AND SERENE. A</p>

		POPULAR TREKKING WAYPOINT.
	Shots of Chilling	IT'S HOME TO THE LAST THREE REMAINING METAL WORKERS AND SCULPTERS FROM A LONG LINE OF ARTISANS. AS A VISITOR TO LADAKH YOU CAN'T MISS ONE OF THEIR WORKS, BUT YOU CAN MISS THEM.
Section 2: Who, what and history.	Chilling Man	"Name." "I make silver and gold objects..."
	Chilling Man	"5 years, started with metal sheets, then moved on to spoon, teapots..."
	Town Man	"Name" "Since 12 years" "From Nepal, settled in Chilling."
	Chilling Man	"From Nepal, bought by King for statue at Shey Palace..Offered space, farming, settled in Chilling, expanded to Kyoo Ganga (verify)."
	Town Man	"Demand for work in Monastries in Leh" "I enjoy village, health is better in Chilling...make food in Chilling"
		EVEN TODAY THESE RESILIENT MEN SIT IN ONE PLACE, QUIETLY WORKING AWAY, SHAPING METAL LIKE THE LAND SHAPES THE ROCKS. I MARVEL AT THEIR ENERGY, THEIR VITALITY, AND THEIR LIFELONG DEDICATION.. "Foreigners appreciate effort"
Section 3: Monastries	Chilling Man, cut with images from some of these monasteries.	"Lumayuru, Tseskarmo, Chemedy, Themisgam, Thiksay, Stakna"
	Town Man, cut with images from some of these monasteries.	"Hemis, Stok Castle, Chemday, Spituk. Made muldung for Stakna. Father made for Hemis"
	Chilling Man	"Names of gurus"
Section 4:	Chilling Man	"I make my own tools (shows). Like

Raw materials and tools		this..shows how he works”
	Chilling Man	“Stuff is fragile (other), but mine will last generations – THROWS, other stuff will break.”
	Town Man	“Raw materials are expensive. From Leh, limited quantities. Travel for more. The price of copper, coal. Copper, silver and gold. The latter two for statues in monasteries I don’t make Kaons for weddings”
		THESE INTRICATE WORKS OF ART DRAW STUDENTS KEEN ON TAKING THE TRADITION FORWARD. BUT THERE ARE ROADBLOCKS.
	Chilling Man	“I have 8 students. They make up to teapots. Can’t handle complicated work.”
	Town Man	“Students leave me to join army”
Section 5: Students and future	Chilling Man	“Income isn’t high, raw materials are expensive. When he started only Rs. 5 per day. (RAW materials -) silver coal gold. Work is difficult, handmade. Students want to study. Every village has a school.”
	Town Man	“Initial investment is high, you can’t earn fast. XYZ of his work, takes a month.” “Disappearing problem, it will end in chilling soon.”
	Chilling Man, Shots of third man	“Only 2 left in Chilling. Will not survive.”
Section 6: Takeaway		THESE MEN DO NOT INTEND TO STOP UNTIL THEIR LAST BREATH. IT’S NOT JUST ART; IT’S A WAY OF LIFE. THEIR LIFE LONG MISSION HAS BEEN TO QUIETLY SUPPORT THE NEED FOR SPIRITUALISM IN AN UNFORGIVING LANDSCAPE, TO BUILD LASTING OBJECTS THAT PEOPLE CENTURIES FROM NOW WILL MARVEL OVER. WHAT I LEARNED FROM THE

		METAL WORKERS OF CHILLING IS THAT MAN CAN BE AS TENACIOUS AND UNWAVERING AS THE MOUNTAINS AROUND HIM. LET LIFE TAKE ITS COURSE, BUT YOU CAN STAND LIKE A ROCK.
	Chilling Man - shots of walking.	“One has to be determined. (From students) – religious statues more difficult, proportions are important, more calculations. You are only considered professional if you make silver and gold work. Newcomers needs history, appreciation – it’s hard if you don’t have talent.”
	CLOSE WITH TITLE OVER CREDITS	Music, finish with swell...

The format of a corporate video/documentary script is unlike a regular feature film script. You can have 2-4 columns, depending on what you’d like to add. You have visuals and sound, but can also add title overs, effects and music if you like. Since this was a small mini-documentary I kept everything as simple and lean as possible.

Finally, the hardest part was fixing the poor audio. I used Audition, but I’m not good at it. The music was from Premiumbeat, and I added a few sound effects from freesound.org. That’s about it. After about a week of editing and re-editing, it was done!

Overall, all said and done, I’m happy how it turned out.

I hope you found this useful. Let me know if you have any questions!