

ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE

# Stills to movie: a pro's story

*Chris Frazer Smith is an award-winning people photographer, with a long and impressive client list. His passion for image making has led to non-commissioned work in stills and, increasingly, video. Chris shares his journey to moviemaking, focusing specifically on the hardware he relies on*



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MY PRIMARY CHALLENGE as an environmental portrait photographer is to shoot clear, graphic portraits that resonate with the audience. I have to grab their attention and pretty much tell them what the subject does and where they might be in the world, then capture a moment that I feel needs to be shared as best as I can. So, essentially, my main influence comes from wanting to share a story via the narrative of my visuals.

With the arrival of digital and, in particular, mid-generation DSLRs – the Canon EOS 5D Mark II, for example – filmmaking was put into the hands of stills photographers, whether they liked it or not, and in an entirely new technical way.

I shoot a great deal of non-commissioned photography, and my desire to tell a story through stills has opened up the canvas of moving images, largely thanks to progress in the camera world. For me, it's been a very natural progression from stills to film. I am passionate about photography, video, painting and typography; I know my strengths as a stills photographer, and my approach to filmmaking has been for the most part driven by the aesthetic of my stills compositions, allowing the subjects I film to play out in front of the camera. There's often very little movement from the camera, although

**“Keeping the kit really tight means that I can control these personal projects by myself, to an extremely high-quality standard”**



**A WORLD-BEATER** The NINJA V+ (right) is the world's first 8K RAW HDR monitor/recorder enabling continuous recording in Apple ProRes RAW. Its bright 5.2in monitor is fully featured, including focus peaking, zoom and vectorscopes

that is evolving as I utilise gimbals, tracks and a drone.

Strangely, as I think about this, I have been on projects in the past few months where going from motion, back to stills, was more challenging. Some subjects work better in the medium of moving images.

I make my living predominately as an advertising photographer, so my background comes from being involved with big productions, and I have a wealth of pre-production

experience, as well as creative collaboration with art directors. I plan carefully, and recce as much as possible, but allow the subject matter to play out with minimal direction.

My most recent short, *The Residency*, was the realisation that I could film a young, talented painter on the journey of her parting residency at a gallery, capturing a portrait at this time in her life. (Check out the short film on Chris' website.)

The challenge was to be invisible and still have the ability to move very quickly with the technical set-up, capturing shots in one take. Using the Canon EOS R5, with the ATOMOS NINJA V+ and Azden mics, allows me that freedom to anticipate, while not worrying too much about equipment.

Keeping the kit really tight means that I can control these personal

projects by myself, to an extremely high-quality standard.

The NINJA V+ is my canvas first and foremost. The features within it simply provide me more assistance compositionally than the camera's rear monitor on its own, although running the screen live on the EOS R5 is also very important.

Without the NINJA V+, I would be running from shot to shot at a slower rate, and there would be a danger I would miss crucial moments. I allow the action to take place naturally without interference, although will

direct certain scenes that I feel are crucial elements to the work that's being created.

The EOS R5 was a game-changer for me. No single camera system is perfect, but my move in recent years as a stills photographer from medium format to only Canon 35mm kit has been a great experience. I went from a Canon EOS 5D Mark II, then onto the Mark III and EOS 5DS, and now to the EOS R5 – my first mirrorless camera. What it offers both in RAW stills and 8K and 5K video capture with the NINJA V+ is remarkable.



**ESSENTIAL NINJA** With its large, high-quality screen, the support of SSD and extensive feature set, the NINJA V+ is an essential device for moviemakers wanting to take their work to the next level

I am quite patient when it comes to gear, and had waited for another groundbreaking camera to emerge from the fog of kit. This came to me in the form of the mirrorless EOS R5.

The NINJA V+ lets me take that camera to another level of image quality. I can, of course, film incredible 4K to a memory card – but why would you, if you can produce an even higher standard using a bigger monitor, and have the support of SSD?

For me, the NINJA V+ is essential equipment, not a luxury add-on. It's as important as the lens on the camera. Some add-ons I do cherish include the SmallRig cage and shotgun/stereo Azden SMX-30V mic. I run a separate Azden SGM-250 shotgun mic into a Zoom recorder too, and have the PRO-XRe lav set available.

I will build on kit to wrap around the camera in the coming months, just so long as it adds to my craft.

My workflow from camera to final edit starts with the format and resolution. I record in Apple ProRes RAW and take footage into Apple Final Cut Pro X, knowing that I will edit in 4K.

The NINJA V+ is at the centre of it all. It has features any filmmaker or photographer could use in their own unique way. Monitor image quality is stunning, and I shoot with assist, focus peaking and vectorscopes. Having the safe area and runtime on-screen with an LUT are my go-to features.

All this gives me greater confidence in the set-up, leaving me to worry about cinematography and sound. Knowing I can deliver 8K ProRes RAW up to 30fps is just incredible, albeit memory-hungry. I was known for shooting and framing with no cropping in editing, but this has changed. Now, I can shoot in 8K and crop into the frame for any 4K edit with no quality loss.

The monitor playback is superb, helping me make sure the framing is right. Seeing what should be (and shouldn't be!) in shot is so much easier on the larger screen.

Tutorials on the ATOMOS site are a must – and there are many out there on YouTube; some are more helpful than others, so the online community is a big help for sure. My main tip is to test, test, test. It's best to go into any filming situation without worrying about the camera, lens choice, and how that all feeds into your recording device: in my case the NINJA V+. All other technical, logistical and creative choices are done in pre-production, plus on-the-ground shooting. If plan A doesn't work, plan B needs to kick in.

Advance testing and taking time to triple-check your technical set-up is what it should be on the day of filming is an absolute essential. The NINJA V+ can run dirtily off your hotshoe, a camera cage, or even

the camera itself when it needs to be placed in a tricky situation, and running a longer HDMI lead is allowing that to happen.

Keep the kit as light and tight as possible – that is part of the beauty of filming to such high levels using something like a Canon EOS R5.

Don't update software the night before a shoot. Be patient and check it out when you have time to see what it offers, then test after.

Finally, the most important tip is to continually learn. I am always asking myself: 'Is this best it can be with the constraints of my kit versus the budget?' Getting out of your comfort zone is an important reminder of what can be achieved.



**TOP GUN** Ideal for mounting on the camera, Azden's SGM-250CX comes complete with a shock mount



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