

# Production Notes

## THÉ FINE DINING BAKERY

The world's first independently produced Apple Immersive Video project by Main Course Films featuring Master Pastry Chef Christopher Thé, creator of the most Instagrammed dessert in the world.



From Director Clara Chong and Cinematographer Ben Allan ACS CSI, Co-Founders of Sydney based independent production company *Main Course Films*, a new Apple Immersive Video (AIV) project featuring Master Pastry Chef *Christopher Thé*, creator of the Strawberry Watermelon cake, described by *The New York Times* as “the most Instagrammed cake in the world”. Today, Thé runs the fine dining bakery *Hearthe*, located in Sydney’s Inner West, showcasing his modern Australian desserts using native Australian ingredients.

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# Writer/Director Statement

CLARA CHONG



Ben & I on set circa 2002

Photo: John Slaytor for Main Course Films\*

Photos from Main Course Films unless specified

## A 23 year Creative Partnership

As a Writer/Director who also edits, working with Ben a Producer / Cinematographer who also color grades and sound mixes, we are long term collaborators who have a track record of successfully testing technology and new workflows. But we've never used tech just for its own sake. What we love most is when technology allows us to do new creative things that we couldn't do before or when it helps make the process even better.

## Our Apple Immersive Journey

While we have each worked professionally in the industry for three decades, it was when we established the independent production company, *Main Course Films* together in 2016 that our immersive journey began. We didn't know it at the time but our live-action family adventure film "*Wild Squad Adventures*" for the then widest widescreen cinema in the world (80 feet wide) for Sydney's iconic *Taronga Zoo* was the beginning of our Apple Immersive Video (AIV) journey where we deep dived into resolution, motion, peripheral vision and perceptual size. We developed "The Trident", the world's first multi-camera array with *XM2 Aerial*, flown on a specially modified heavy-lift octocopter to achieve both the 270° and enough resolution for the massive screen. XM2 has continued to develop the concept, providing aerial array services for films including *Star Wars*, *James Bond*, and *Mission Impossible*.

Although AIV is different from the format of our 270° film, there are enough parallels for us to have had a huge head start in

P2



The massive 270° 80 foot screen which curved around the audience in cinema



The world's first three-camera array

understanding this new format. The biggest challenge I think for filmmakers is that while in conventional filmmaking today there are seemingly no creative limits to what you can do or show, but with AIV, the creative limits aren't technical, they're biological, and this poses important new challenges for storytelling.

### **Borderless Storytelling**

Since cinematic storytelling was invented some 130 years ago, filmmakers have told stories within a frame. The shape and size of the frame has evolved over time, but the concept of telling a story within it has not. AIV removes this frame ...but it doesn't replace traditional formats - it's a new storytelling tool, like choosing between Scope or Academy or IMAX, and the AIV format will suit some stories and styles more than others.

### **The First AIV Project**

Choosing a subject and theme for our first AIV project was an extensive process. As an independent production company, we wanted to choose a project that was a realistic test for independent filmmakers. Ben and I both wanted to create something that was more intimate and driven by human connection, to show the potential for these types of stories within AIV. It was easy to decide on fine dining as we hadn't seen food being covered in AIV yet... and as foodies, we believed showing someone creating food at a high level could be just as compelling as extreme sports or exotic locations in this new format.

While Australia boasts an abundance of fine dining culinary talent, I ultimately chose Master Pastry Chef Christopher Thé as it was clear



Behind The Scenes on the 4am baking shoot



Ben & I with Christopher Thé and cake

that his ease in front of the camera, depth of knowledge about baking, genuine love of fine dining and use of native Australian ingredients in all of his baking was extraordinary. It also helped that a good friend had worked with Chris many years ago at the renowned fine dining establishment *Claudes*.

For me, desserts are the ultimate fusion of culinary skill and art, and learning about Chris's journey from studying psychology to pivoting into fine dining before creating the Strawberry-Watermelon cake whose popularity continues to grow and now focusing on native Australian ingredients to showcase in original and reimagined classic baking was inspirational.

### **Our Apple Immersive Workflow**

We are using the whole Blackmagic-Apple ecosystem to take this project all the way through. It has been shot with the Blackmagic URSA Cine Immersive camera, been edited and color graded in Resolve and audio has been mixed with the Fairlight's dedicated toolset for Apple Spatial Audio Format (ASAF). This ecosystem is essential for this format because it's the cohesive set of systems that work together to create the unprecedented level of realism and quality that AIV is capable of.

### **Understanding Apple Immersive Video (AIV)**

In AIV, a person's micro-expressions, timing and character movement are powerful tools because of their proximity to the viewer, with the camera mimicking the human eye in 1:1 world mapping which is extremely close to the experience of seeing an unfiltered view of the



Test shooting with the Cine Immersive



Testing with Sydney University Motus Labs & fxguide



Testing with Sydney University Motus Labs & fxguide

world, allowing the viewer to pick up on everything, just as they would in real life. The superpower of this new format is its authenticity which intensifies emotional truth, and with Chris, I believe we've created something very special - an intimate, emotional journey into his world of fine dining desserts - and viewers can experience it for the first time in AIV on the Apple Vision Pro.

Working with AIV has been both easier and harder than traditional filmmaking. Many of the same skills and principles apply, but with AIV, you also need to factor in the physiological limits and requirements of the audience. For example, unlearning the concept of depth as something to be created through shallow depth of field and understanding depth as a three-dimensional "reality" for the viewer watching inside the Apple Vision Pro. Another example is the concept of the viewer's gaze. Unlike traditional storytelling, where the screen is fixed and the filmmaker is able to show the viewer exactly what they want them to focus on in the story (eg through close up), in AIV, the viewer has the freedom to look wherever they choose, so as a Director, I had to learn how to direct the viewer's gaze within this three dimensional space by using movement and location amongst other tools.

In AIV, while the specs sound familiar, it's the combination of ultra-high resolution, extreme field of view (180° both horizontally and vertically), true stereoscopic depth, high frame rate, and 1:1 spatial world mapping that makes AIV something very new and very very different. It's more intuitive, but simultaneously requires a greater level of precision and professional skills. AIV removes the frame which filmmakers are used to composing in. Without a frame, the concept of framing doesn't exist, but the composition of the shot is defined by the position of the viewer's presence inside the scene which is determined by where the camera is placed, and the perspective of the camera is still essential to the creative process.



Behind The Scenes of "Thé Fine Dining Bakery" shoot



Studio distance test shoot



Studio distance test shoot

## Project Goals

1. As an independent production company, we were looking to do something small and intimate so that filmmakers without the budget of Apple can realise their own Apple Immersive project - that is one without action or spectacle or exotic locations;
2. We wanted to test low-light shots - including night timelapse;
3. We wanted to run a full on-camera interview and highlight the superpower authenticity of the Apple Immersive format with the right subject;
4. We wanted to experiment with proximity and real spaces - including small ones!; and
5. We wanted to show how the format can present food in an emotionally compelling way.

## Our Testing Process

We undertook several test shoots before beginning work on "Thé Fine Dining Bakery", in order to analyse proximity, movement and how storytelling without a frame functions. Beginning with simple scenic shots, we then experimented with actors moving within the scene. We collaborated with Dr Mike Seymour from Sydney University Motus Lab & fxguide to then analyse distance - how close or how far to place subjects and whether this changed for one or more actors.

What was immediately apparent was how the viewer experiences proximity varies according to individual comfort and that age, gender, height, culture and background can factor heavily into how they feel - so the filmmaker needs to decide what proximity works best for the story they want to tell.

We also decided to use a modified film emulation LUT to get a more filmic look along with a custom scaling algorithm that prioritised



Recording ambisonic atmos with the Sennheiser AMBEO



Ben helping Chris with his mic



BTS "Thé Fine Dining Bakery"

smoothness over video sharpness.

### **Authenticity**

I really wanted AIV's superpower of authenticity to shine, so I decided early on, I didn't want to 'manipulate' the story in any way by placing an emphasis that I created through scripting. I wanted to tell this story through Chris's own words to maximise the feeling of intimacy.

I prefer the authenticity of audio in situ for talent, so Ben and I decided that what we captured with Chris in camera would serve as the basis for this project. I prepped for his interview by asking questions that would prompt conversations rather than simple 'yes or no' answers and then adjusted in real time as Chris opened up new avenues to explore. My primary goal with this project was to make this as intimate feeling and emotional as possible. As part of this, I wanted to push the limits of proximity into the closest "close up" for AIV I could, so you can really get sense of who Chris is both as a fine dining professional and a person.

From our studio tests, we determined that the preferable range for AIV close-ups were between 80cm and 100cm, so we shot Chris's interview at a distance of 80cm. I then used Chris's interview as a

base to work out the type of shots we would need as overlay vision. I like working with a temp music track to create the style/mood I want for the project, so I cut together V1 of my edit this way.

### **Visual Approach**

Visually, I was keen to use a mixture of some day/night and also interior/exterior as while this was an intimate shoot, I also wanted to open it up to not feel claustrophobic. This was a look inside the secret world of a fine dining pastry chef - but also one that grows his



BTS Thé Fine Dining Bakery



The Unforgettable Cake



BTS with Tom Ah Kuoi

own native Australian ingredients, so I wanted to make sure the viewer saw that!

AIV is not just a another format, it is a new medium representing a foundational shift in cinematic language - one that reconstructs the relationship between story, camera, and viewer from the ground up.

Storytelling in AIV activates the same parts of the brain that help us re-live and not just observe. This realisation impacts on everything - from performance, to pacing, to editing.

With just one camera and one lens - albeit stereoscopic - Ben and I decided to focus on maximising movement within the scene so I watched Chris move around the kitchen, then incorporated this natural movement into how to compose his scenes. We had to be careful to track our shots so that there would be edit points for me to use to get in and out of a shot. The 180° FOV meant walking from camera right or left would take far too long in real time, so we quickly discovered movement from behind and towards the camera not only worked most efficiently but gave the viewer a visceral sensation which we were keen to enhance. We used the Sennheiser AMBEO ambisonic mic to record atmos for the 360° ASAF for the Apple Vision Pro.

### Iterative Editing

With new tech it's always important to check as you go, so as we shot in overlay footage, I cut in the new material so I could ensure that we were getting the right footage for the edit. We ended up with four similar but distinctly separate versions of the edit - all the while rendering up multiple versions of the work in progress edit to preview in the Apple Vision Pro. In V1, I originally paced the edit too quickly - even allowing for 'breathing' spaces. V2 I expanded too far, so the edit became too long. V3 was almost there. V4 was the sweet spot.



First day of shoot, last shot

The Blackmagic URSA Cine Immersive camera

Last day of shoot, last shot

One of the biggest takeaways with AIV in the edit is that while you start to gauge what will and won't work in the Apple Vision Pro, the only way you know for sure, it to check the actual shot for yourself as

you need to see how it cuts within the sequence and how it flows within the mental model of the world you create with your edit.

### Looking Ahead

AIV is an exciting new format and “Thé Fine Dining Bakery” is just the beginning of our projects using AIV. It is both an evolution and a breakthrough of filmmaking as we know it - blending familiar tools to

create an entirely new form of storytelling. A new visual language is evolving for this format and we are only at the beginning of the AIV technology journey. The task ahead for filmmakers is not just to adapt old rules, but to begin the process of creating and expanding this new language.

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