ALONG THE DIVIDE



COLOR BY
AMELIE MICHEL

DIRECTED AND SHOT BY
AUBREY BABAS

FINAL PERSONAL PROJECT
COLOR GRADING ACADEMY 2026

Along the Divide had already been completed and professionally graded by Aubrey Babas when she generously gave me access to selected raw footage for this project. This gave me the opportunity to approach the material from a completely different creative perspective and explore how the same footage could be shaped through my own grading choices.

I would like to sincerely thank Aubrey for her incredible generosity and kindness.
After I reached out to her about using the film for my final project, she graciously agreed to share the footage with me and took the time to provide valuable insight into her original grading process. Her openness and willingness to support my work made this project possible, and I am truly grateful for the opportunity.

SYNOPSYS

For the first time, a cinematic documentary takes viewers on an unprecedented journey across the entire 2,000-mile U.S.-Mexico border, capturing the stark realities of migration, policy, and the communities caught in between.
Through stunning cinematography and an in-depth investigation, Along The Divide reveals the human cost, political battles, and ever-shifting landscape of America’s most contested boundary.



CREATIVE VISION

Although Along the Divide is a documentary, I saw the project as an opportunity to step outside of my usual approach and explore a more cinematic and filmic visual language. Rather than simply aiming for a naturalistic documentary look, I wanted to treat the footage with the same creative intention I would bring to a narrative film.

My main references were Saving Private Ryan and The Covenant. Rather than recreating the look of these films, I drew inspiration from their sense of atmosphere, restrained colour palettes, earthy tones, and immersive image texture.

The final grade aims to create a grounded and timeless feeling while preserving the authenticity of the documentary footage. I focused on building depth and density in the image, with controlled saturation, warm and muted highlights, earthy greens and cooler shadows. The goal was to make the landscape feel tactile and cinematic, while allowing the environments and subjects to remain at the centre of the story.



INSPIRATIONS · SAVING PRIVATE RYAN











INSPIRATIONS • THE COVENANT



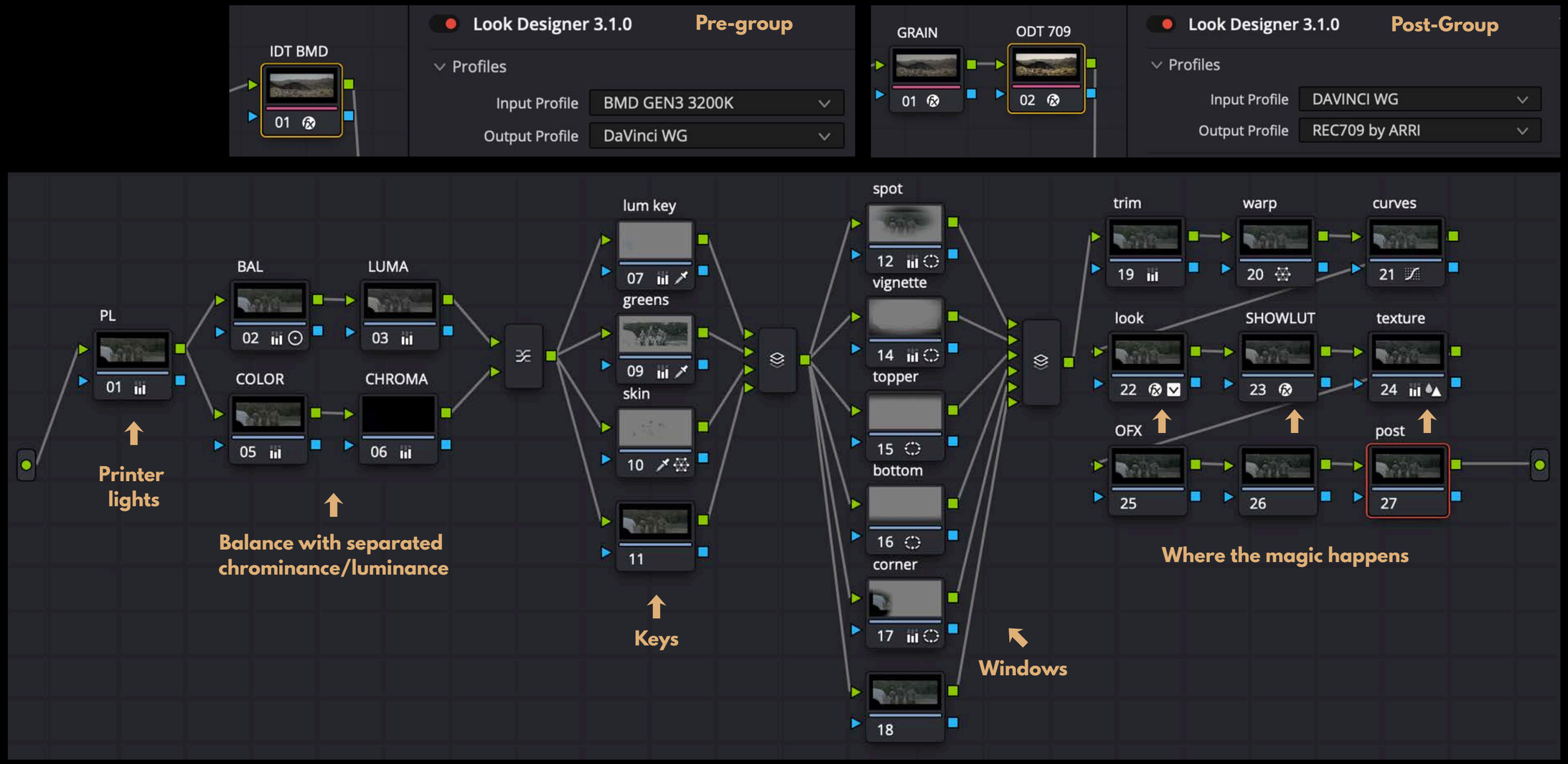








WORKFLOW


IDT BMD
01
Look Designer 3.1.0
Pre-group
Profiles
Input Profile
BMD GEN3 3200K
Output Profile
DaVinci WG
GRAIN
ODT 709
01
02
Look Designer 3.1.0
Post-Group
Profiles
Input Profile
DAVINCI WG
Output Profile
REC709 by ARRI
PL
01
Printer lights
BAL
02
LUMA
03
COLOR
05
CHROMA
06
Balance with separated chrominance/luminance
lum key
07
greens
09
skin
10
11
Keys
spot
12
vignette
14
topper
15
bottom
16
corner
17
18
Windows
trim
19
warp
20
curves
21
look
22
SHOWLUT
23
texture
24
OFX
25
26
post
27
Where the magic happens

TECHNICAL APPROACH

Modern colour management provides powerful tools for transforming and normalizing footage from different cameras and colour spaces. However, for this project, the original camera information was not available, so I chose, through trial and error, an input profile that I felt provided a balanced starting point across the different sources (**BMD GEN3 3200K**). From there, I relied on manual adjustments to bring the footage into a cohesive Rec.709 image, rather than trying to reconstruct an exact technical transform for each camera.

This approach was also inspired by Aubrey's philosophy that "footage is simply footage" and that, with the right techniques, the image can be manipulated toward a desired end result. I adopted this mindset throughout the project, allowing the image itself to guide my decisions rather than being strictly bound to a predefined technical workflow.

My purpose was to demonstrate how thoughtful colour grading can unify diverse source footage into a cohesive cinematic experience while enhancing the emotional and visual storytelling of the film.

This document is accompanied by a video export featuring selected shots from the documentary.
The different scenes are separated by fade-to-black transitions to highlight the evolution and consistency of the grade throughout the project.

EAGLE PASS









RIO GRANDE (LAREDO)









ROMA









CALEXICO









JACUMBA SPRINGS









BROWNSVILLE









BOCA CHICA BEACH









SHOWLUT

A contemporary Kodak-inspired film look with controlled contrast and rich, deep shadows. The palette favors earthy greens and deep blues, creating subtle warm/cool separation while maintaining an organic and cinematic feel. A restrained print-film response and gentle texture give the image added density and character without becoming overly stylized.

Look Designer 3.1.0

Negative Options

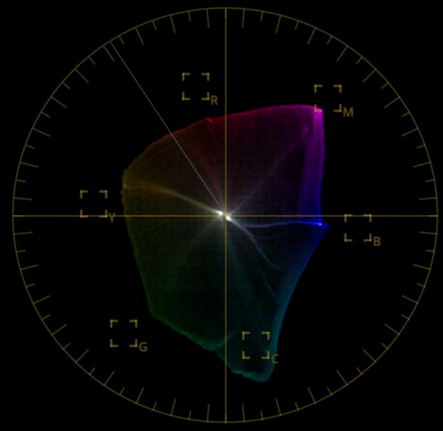
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Negative Stock GEN 2	Kodak 5279 rev2
Negative Intensity	0.473
	Bypass Negative Options

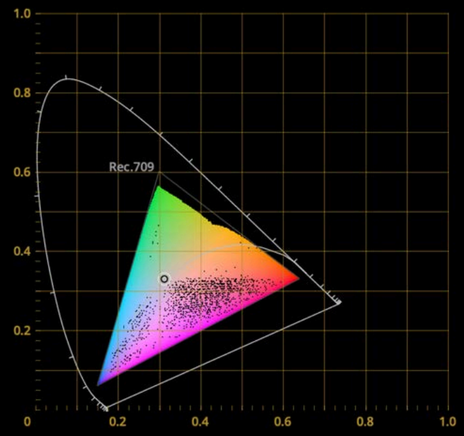
Print Options

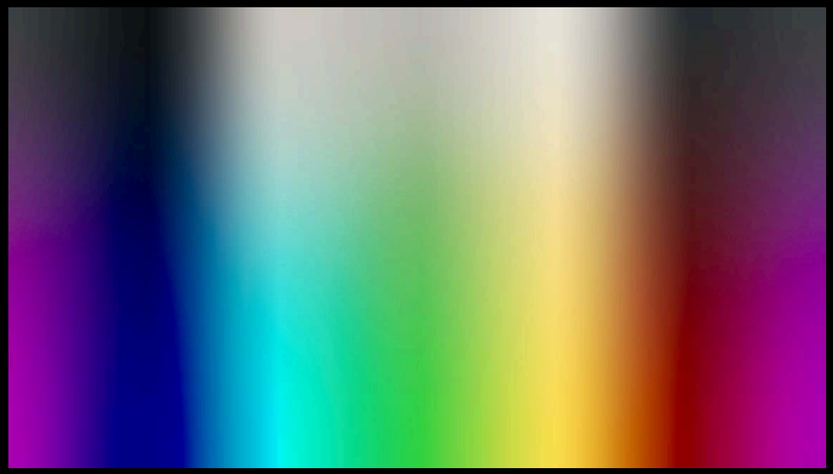
Contrast Option	F1
Contrast Intensity	0.651
	Bypass Contrast Options
Crunch	0.078
	Bypass Crunch
Print Stock	Kodak 2383 by MPF
Print Intensity	0.496
	Bypass Print Options

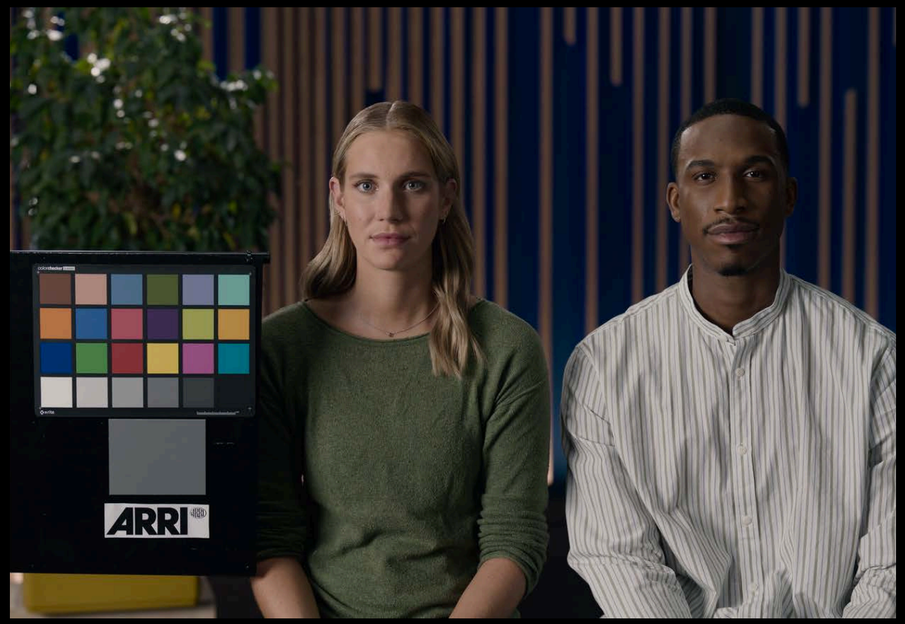
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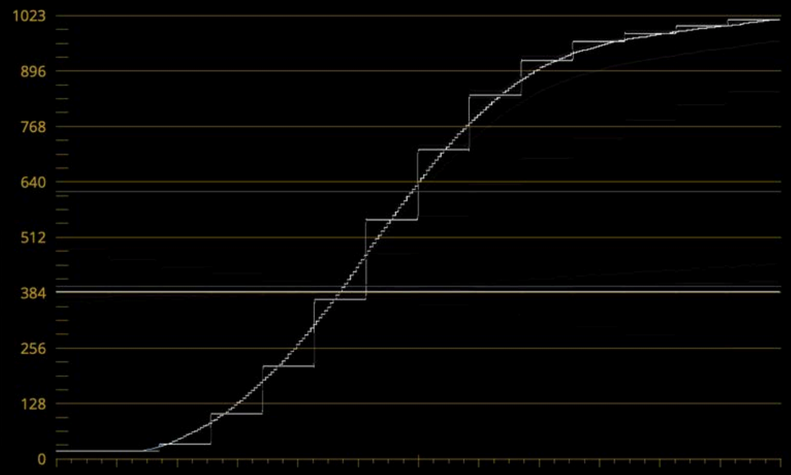
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PP Options	FPE
PP Intensity	0.217

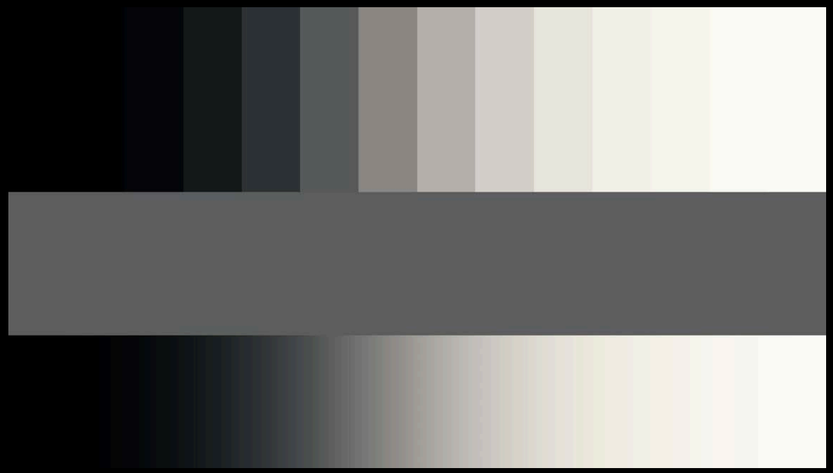












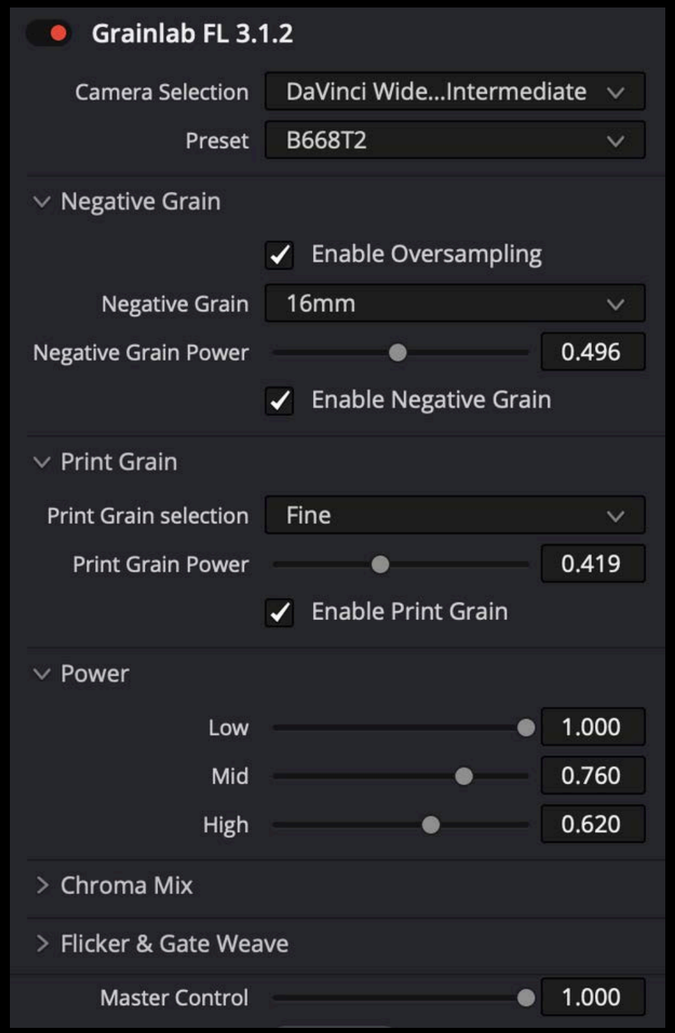
LOOK

In addition to the LUT shown on the previous page, the look was built using Primaries and Log grading, with a subtle bleach bypass treatment created with DaVinci Resolve's Film Look Creator.

I also added film grain using FilmLab, combining a 16mm negative grain with a fine print grain to introduce a subtle, organic texture and move the image further away from a clean digital appearance. The grain was kept relatively restrained to preserve detail while adding a more tactile, filmic quality to the image.

Depending on the shot, I also used sharpening and midtone detail to enhance texture and definition where needed.





BEFORE/AFTER







BEFORE/AFTER







BEFORE/AFTER



“log”



“normalized”



“grade”

BEFORE/AFTER



“log”



“normalized”



“grade”

This process reinforced my belief that technical knowledge and creative intuition should work hand in hand to serve the image and the story.

The training I received throughout this program has expanded my technical understanding, challenged my approach to colour, and ultimately made me a more thoughtful and versatile colourist.

THANK YOU!

AMÉLIE MICHEL

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