

“
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In the harsh dark of the day

One of the stars in this psychological thriller is a 1876 Queensland heritage mansion which takes on a persona all of its own

GEOFF SHEARER

Out west, the sun is unforgiving. It falls sharply on exposed orange-red soil, casting black, precision-focussed shadows of those who stand upon it. It both enhances and blanches the scrubland greens.

Indoors, it turns windows and entryways into shining light portals, obliterating the interior to shadow.

Poetic, yes, but potential disaster for filmmaking. But when you’re on a budget and the script is ripe with juxtapositions, then it can pay dividends to not be afraid of the shadows.

Brisbane-based filmmaker Mairi Cameron took it one step further and embraced the shadows for the psychological thriller *The Second* which has been selected to open the Gold Coast Film Festival on Tuesday night.

Filmed at the heritage-listed Jimbour House, 240km northwest of Brisbane, and neighbouring rural locations around Jandowae and Lake Broadwater, *The Second* stars Rachael Blake as the daughter of a famous writer who is retreating to her family’s estate to pen her second book. Her publisher and lover (Vince Colosimo) is accompanying her, while a friend from the past (Susie Porter) arrives unexpectedly, contesting that the writer’s first book – a celebrated erotic memoir – is stolen from her life.

“Shooting wise I was really inspired by the kind of overarching theme that is in the script – that is even talked about in the script – about living in the shadow of someone else, and the idea of shadows and light,” says director Cameron (*My Mistress, (S)truth*) who collaborates closely with writer/producer Stephen Lance and producer Leanne Tonkes.

“Knowing that we have that harsh Australian sunlight, I wanted to use that. Combined with a very low budget (\$1 million), I thought, well, let’s use the Australian sun and let’s not be afraid of the shadows.

“There’s the juxtaposition of the two worlds, of this very formal, beautiful, isolated mansion



BRIGHT SPOTS: Actor Rachael Blake (main) shines in the shadows in the psychological thriller *The Second*; (far left) Susie Porter and Brisbane-based filmmaker Mairi Cameron discuss a scene during filming; and the privately owned homestead of Jimbour House located northwest of Brisbane where much of the film was shot.

where the writer has grown up in the shadow of her parent; but contrasting is the world beyond that, the vast harsh hot Australian landscape that exists beyond the gardens of this property.”

Cameron’s cinematographer on *The Second* was 20-year industry veteran Mark Wareham (*Jasper Jones, The Straits, Hoges*).

“We mostly avoided complex lighting setups and used a lot of available light,” Cameron says. “In a way the aesthetics were driven by the story – because they have to be – but also by our budget. But it works. It is such a beautiful location and we had a good team that was so passionate about it – we’ve got a really good-looking film.”

The 1876-built Jimbour House was home for most of the crew during production, with cast staying in nearby Dalby. The privately owned 25-room mansion is a character in its own right in *The Second*.

“We were in awe of it, all day, every day,”

Cameron says. “We always said we wanted the house to be a character. I got that 10-fold by getting Jimbour. At first I was thinking, it’s a bit too amazing, can I make this believable.

“So we were careful in the way we shot it as well, to not reveal its full glory until later in the story where it makes more sense, where the film evolves.”

To have Blake, Porter and Colosimo flesh out the roles made her the “luckiest director in the world”, Cameron says.

“Rachael is unique in that she’s got that elegance, restraint, intelligence; but there’s that dark underlying edge.

“And she’s not afraid of the shadows.”

Gold Coast Film Festival, April 17-29. *The Second* premieres on opening night at HOTA, Surfers Paradise. It will be available on Stan and screen in cinemas later this year