

Jon Fauer, ASC

FILM AND DIGITAL TIMES

Blixt Camera Rental
Special Report



Blixt Camera Rental



This is Björn Blixt. In Swedish, Björn means bear. Blixt means lightning. So he is "Bear Lightning," and maybe Crazy Horse is one of his ancestors. The Norse God of Thunder and Lightning is Thor, and the Norse God of Cinematography is surely Sven Nykvist.

Björn doesn't have a farm in Africa, but he does live on a farm outside Copenhagen, where he is a constant gardener, growing much of the food he brings in daily for the staff to feast on at lunch. As we shall see in this report, he began as a cinematographer and became an accidental tourist in the world of camera rentals, and in Caribbean sign painting, below.



We recently visited Björn Blixt and Blixt Camera Rental in Copenhagen, Denmark. Björn is a fellow cinematographer with a wicked wit, cunning at punning and an enthusiastic entrepreneurial spirit (like Denny Clairmont, Otto Nemenz and other cameramen who began with a few cameras and rented them out to their friends on the side.)

Rune Ericson, the legendary Swedish cameraman and "father of Super 16," often joked about how most of the world thought he lived at the North Pole. Blixt Camera Rentals may not be on the North Pole, but it certainly feels like Santa's workshop.

Housed in a huge, sunny, skylight sky-lit loft, formerly a Danish TV Studio, it's among the elite rental houses that are so clean you can almost eat off the floor, the Nespresso machine is ready, and the equipment is first class.

With an inventory that includes Aaton, ARRI, Angenieux, Cooke and Zeiss, Blixt equipment is used all over Scandinavia and is also shipped worldwide.

Since Björn lives on a farm and grows what he eats, the following report is titled "The Constant Gardener," with apologies to Voltaire and John Le Carré.

The Constant Gardener by Björn Blixt

My first cradle was in a small apartment above the "The Mirror," a non-stop Cinema in Malmo, Sweden. All day and night (I presume, I don't remember) I would hear the wacky sounds of Woody Woodpecker, Laurel and Hardy, Donald Duck. My father could hear it too—a post-man, he was up early and needed to sleep during the day. He definitely couldn't, so we had to move.

During college I got interested in photography. I had no cash for a camera, but I read all the books on photography at the local library. On the last day of college, I was awarded a cash prize for "best combined marks in History and Latin." Now I could buy a camera.

I worked for some years as an assistant for still photographers, Applied to the Swedish Film School, got in, and graduated as a DP in 1977.

One of our guest teachers at the film school was Rune Ericson. That's how I got first-hand experience with the Aaton camera. I purchased my first Aaton in 1980, and used it extensively on documentaries and shorts. In between jobs, I rented it to other DPs. In 1985, I bought the new Aaton XTR. In 1995 people wanted cameras equipped with color video assist. I got two XTRprods. They got popular, and

Air Blixt: first class all the way. Coffee, tea and FDTimes.



Team Blixt, left to right, above: Nuno Lourenço, Christian Lee, Emil Mikkelsen, Björn Blixt, Rez Farsangi.

my inventory became bigger. At that time I had all the gear in my basement. That could not go on. I leased a small but practical office space. Good move – two months later my basement was flooded during a thunderstorm.

There was no business plan; I slipped into the rental business on a banana peel. After purchasing the Aaton 35 III and 35mm lenses, I realized I had a rental company. But some clients were asking for ARRI cameras, so I purchased Arriflex 435, 535, and Arricam cameras, along with Ultra Primes, Master Primes and Cooke S4 lenses. We were first in Scandinavia with 3perf. The quality, knowledge, huge inventory and the open ambiance of Clairmont Camera and ARRI Rental Munich have been inspirational to us.

We are also going digital, but so far only with cameras that will take our PL mounted lenses.

It is hard to cope with the constant stream of smaller digital cameras that change faster than models changing outfits at a fashion show, not to mention the graveyard of obsolete video formats.

Film production in Scandinavia is a lot smaller than in the UK, the US, France, Italy, Germany and India. But think about it: Norway, Sweden and Norway has a population of 18 million people. In our part of the world, approximately 80 feature films are produced each year. That's one film for 225,000 people. That makes film production in our region the biggest in the world per capita.

The camera crew on a Scandinavian feature will usually only take one camera and one set of lenses. That's what the producers can afford. But our crews are effective, inventive, and go a long way making a lot out of little. We don't use camera operators, the DP is the operator. Here we are in 2009. With our inventory, crew, new office space and rental department in Oslo, Norway, probably we have been doing something right all these years.





The well-stocked library is larger than most university film studies collections, and includes Vittorio Storaro's trilogy (background, left).

Below: Expendables, library and reception area.

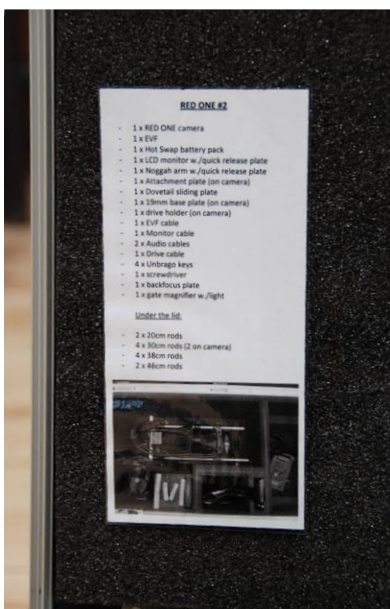




Björn has presciently predicted that the future of camera rental is not only providing perfectly packaged packages, but also in wrangling the data. Emil Mikkelsen shown here, with location laptop: MacBook Pro connected to CalDigit RAID array and UPS power supply.



Equipment storage area: Aaton, Arricam, Red, Angenieux, Cooke, Zeiss and much more.



Here's a very good idea, right and left:

Take a picture of how the case is packed, and make a list of what's inside.

Every rental house should do this.



Resa Farsangi prepping an Arricam Lite.

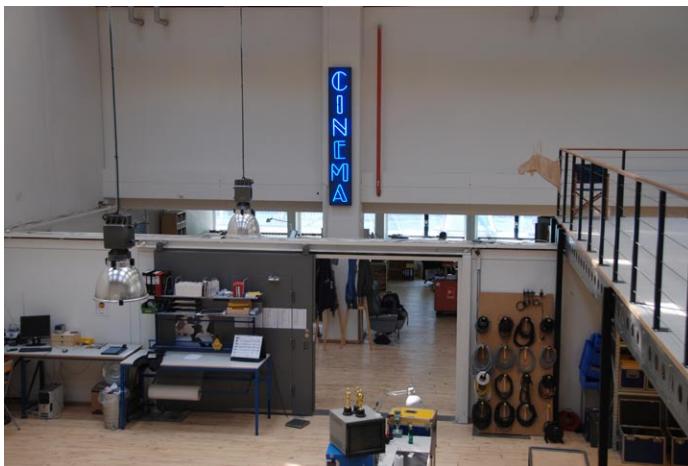




Blixt's library includes the largest collection of "American Cinematographer" in northern Europe.



Ball of sticky labels scraped off of cases. Blixt the Great Dictator...er...Decorator?



Camera prep area at Blixt.



The very cool Blixt expendables department carries these sci-fi looking, but actually very useful, grip gloves with built-in LED flashlights. Sewn into the prehensile fingers are LEDs and batteries. Perfect for night shoots or dark Scandinavian winter days.

Blixt Salad Dressing

Lunch is usually home-made at Blixt. Salads and vegetables come from Björn's farm. The staff takes turns preparing the meal. The tuna salad with Blixt dressing is outstanding. Here's Björn's secret sauce for the salad; he writes:

It is a french way of making a dressing. Its real easy, if you do it right. Do it like this.

Ingredients:

French Dijonnaise mustard
2-3 tablespoons of Olive oil (not motor oil...)
1 tablespoon Balsamic vinegar
1-2 teaspoons Honey
Ground black pepper
A sip of water
(Garlic is optional)

Put 1 tablespoon of Dijonnaise in a cup.
Pour small sips of oil in the cup, stir until absorbed by the mustard, a sip more, stir, a sip more, stir.
If you pour all the oil at once it will not be absorbed by the mustard.
When oil is fully absorbed you should now have a kind of mustard cream.
Stir the balsamic in the cream.
Now comes the honey.
Ground black pepper.
A sip of cold water.

If you want it spicier you can add 1-2 cloves of crushed garlic.

This would make a dressing for a big salad serving four.
More guests ? Double all ingredients.

Cheers, Björn





Blixt Camera Rental ApS
Gyngemose Parkvej 88
DK-2860 Søborg
Denmark

Tel: +45 70 20 59 50
Fax: +45 70 27 59 50
blixt@blixt.dk
www.blixt.dk