



e.on | Kettle

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PULSE

Introduction

What grabs me straight away about this script is that there's a great story. It's made up of lots of familiar moments, but with some clearly thought out and keenly observed filmmaking we can make it incredibly involving, and even, dare I say it, pretty epic.

What we don't want to do is make this a film about a camera technique. If we try and squeeze our story in around a visual effect we'll weaken both. If our audience notice the way we've made the film before they notice the emotion of the story, then we're not doing our job right. It should feel like real moments, keenly observed, and gracefully orchestrated into a story that has the message we want to communicate front and centre: E.ON is always there... reliably, day in, day out, keeping all those little bits of everyday life running smoothly. And not everyday life for some actors in a film studio -- you. Real customers.

Approach

We're not going to try and do this all in one shot. There's a softness to those transitions, a fraction of a second where you're doing the visual equivalent of gluing two scenes together. We need to be a bit crisper here, more real, for this to have the emotional effect it should. I want to watch it and think I'm seeing real people's lives and kitchens, and however slickly you do that kind of choreography the audience can still sense it. That would just seem at odds with the message at the centre of this film - an insight into how real people use energy all over the country. Let's make it feel real. Beautifully made, elegant, clear, involving, but real.

That said, I'd like to start very smoothly, moving the camera gently, using wider shots to set up the scenes and the characters, and setting a precedent for the audience, letting them know we're going to be covering lots of different stories, but with one common element that we all use everyday -- the kettle.

This kettle isn't going to be the same one, handed between scenes, but one type of kettle -- a classic, something that can be found in kitchens across the land, from Buckingham Palace to a semi in Crystal Palace. Some will be clean, some might have a few splashes of paint from where the builders have been. Others will have some greasy fingerprints on. But it's a strong visual anchor between all our scenes, and one that becomes the visual representation of "the same electricity" that we all use. At the end, we give it a name -- E.ON



The Film

We open on the kettle, steam is pluming from the spout. The whistling noise blurs together with the gentle crying of a young baby. A hand grabs the kettle, and we see a tired father in his dressing gown as he prepares a bottle. His partner sits at the kitchen table, rocking their son on her shoulder. The father looks up, so tired, but on autopilot - he doesn't even have to look as he puts the kettle back onto its base with the familiar thud.

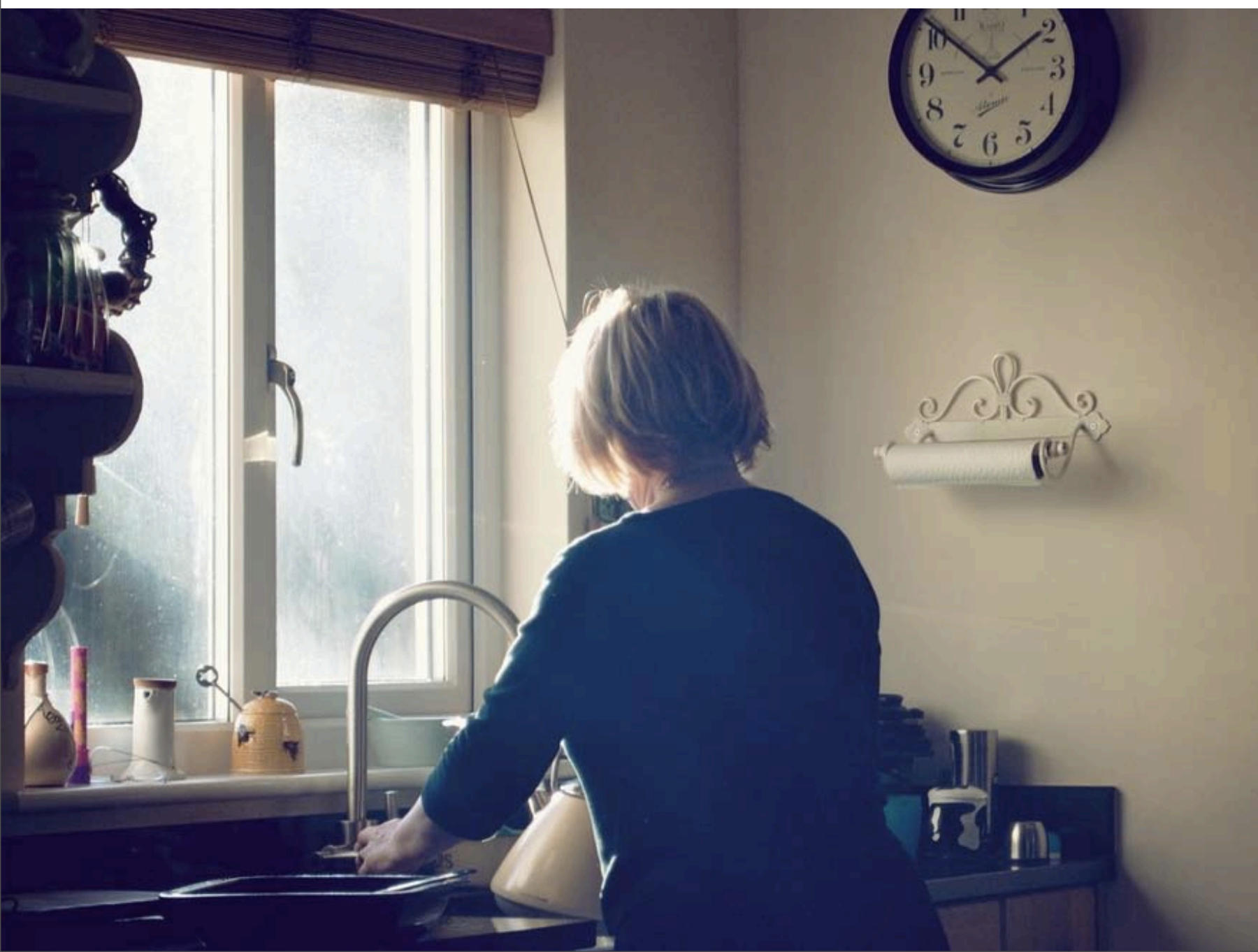
We cut to the kettle again, just as it's put down -- except now it's sitting in a similar, but slightly different kitchen. We might not notice that much in this close shot, but the contrasts will get more noticeable...

A female hand picks up the kettle, and we cut wider -- it's a completely different kitchen. A middle-aged woman fills a lasagne dish with boiling water as she clears up after a dinner party. Another figure wipes a frame -- more people are in the kitchen helping to tidy up. In the wide we see the woman hold out the kettle to her assistant.

We cut closer, and see the kettle being passed between hands -- only something is different about this shot -- it's daylight. The kettle starts to pour boiling water into a mug.

We cut wider to see that what we're now watching is a woman in her thirties is making lots of cups of tea, probably for all those builders hanging around in her half-built kitchen.

She gets to the last mug in the row, and is really tipping the kettle up now, to get the last drop of water out.



We cut closer in to the spout, and see the last few drops trickle out. The kettle swings out of shot, and we pull back quickly to reveal that those last drops were going into a bowl of water. Behind it -- a husband, red-eyed and cold-ridden, looking generally sorry for himself, with a towel over his shoulders ready to stick his head over the steam. We cut to a reverse and see his wife, looking at him with a look of pity and maybe a little bit of amusement. He is making a meal of it... She's looking over her shoulder at him as she puts the kettle over the sink and turns the tap on, a movement so familiar she doesn't really have to look while she's doing it.

The pace of the cuts starts to pick up now...

We push back in to the kettle. The water streams from the tap. Her hand turns it off. We see her thumb push the switch down, the little light comes on. Instantly we cut again, at the same pace, to another identical kettle boiling.

We see a student's hungry face as he fills up a pot noodle. He breathes the lovely smell just as a plume of steam rises in front of his face filling the frame.

A hand wafts the cloud of steam away, but it's no longer our student, it's an indian woman doing exactly the same thing, smelling the food bubbling away in front of her. She has the kettle in her hand, and as her kids run around in the kitchen behind her. Standing next to her, on a stool, on tip-toes, is her youngest daughter. The daughter looks at the saucepan of rice that her mum has just filled up.



“MORE!” the little girl says --

Her mum smiles...

And we're back into it again, a little bit faster, and a little bit closer, building towards the end. We see a close up of more water pouring, we see the kettle clicking back into its base, the switch coming on, the water gauge on the side bubbling as the water boils, water being poured in, water pouring out, the lid clicking shut, the faces of different characters, cuts one after the other...

In between the shots of our kettle we see a series of mugs, bowls, washing bowls, foot-bowls, all with steaming water being poured in from our trusty kettle. There's a run of them, and we go from big to small, so that the sound of the water pouring gets higher-pitched as we go on, matching the various shots of the receptacles filling up...

We see a series of even faster shots -- tea bags, chocolate powder, bath salts, powders and potions being poured in, sachets being ripped open, muddy clothes being scrubbed and inspected, the click of the kettle being turned on again and again, mixtures being stirred... And then...

The TING TING TING of a tea spoon being tapped on the edge of a mug. What a familiar sound --

And with that, we cut back to a wide. Calm. There is the mum from the start of the film, leaning against the kitchen, cup of tea in hand. She reaches across, picks up the heroic kettle, and puts it back on its base. We're back to the close-up, with the kettle at the centre of the frame - the same shot that started the film.



Design

As we want our audience to feel like we're showing them real stories of E-ON customers, the locations should have the ring of authenticity to them. I'd like to show kitchens and house interiors that cross a range of demographics, from grand houses to small ones, new to old.

We don't want them to all feel too clean and tidy either -- they should feel pleasant but lived in, with real kids drawings on the fridge, and some laundry drying in the corner. The kind of details that you might not miss in their absence, but by adding in we can make our audience feel right at home.



Photography

The considered approach to the camera language in this film will be integral to the story telling. When we move the camera it should have a smoothness to it, we don't want to draw attention to it by having too much movement or going handheld -- in this instance a little bit of detachment in our viewpoint is exactly right. The authentic look of all our cast and locations should be supported by the way we shoot each scene, using natural or natural-looking light, and using practicals and other real light sources where we can to make sure that it feels like our characters are really interacting with these spaces, and that we're in amongst the real lives of our characters.

The transitions between each section of the story will use a number of different techniques. We want each of them to feel natural and effortless in the way it takes us between two different moments or environments, and by mixing them up it makes the transitions more invisible -- I think it'll serve the film well if we do this in a way that doesn't become visually predictable.

Most of the transitions will use cuts -- cutting in to a closeup of the kettle in a way that makes complete sense in one scene, but then finding that it's actually the first shot of the next sequence. We're not physically moving the same kettle here, but using the familiarity of its shape, and the harmony of the action between each scene, to take our audience's eye seamlessly and enjoyably into the next one.

To make this work we'll need to carefully consider our set design and location choices, to enable us to shoot these closer shots in a way that leaves the background quite abstract -- it's only when we step further out in each location we can see that we've moved on. It's amazing how much you can change between two shots without it jarring, if we know where the audience is looking -- by utilising this sort of visual "sleight of hand" we can journey through lots of different homes and have it seem very smooth.

I like the idea of introducing other techniques in here to keep the journey from becoming predictable -- using a cloud of steam as a transition between the student kitchen and the mother cooking with her daughter is one example. We could also do an in camera transition when the kettle is being passed from the woman cleaning up after dinner, only to find that as the camera swings around to follow the kettle we're now in the kitchen that's halfway through a re-build, with lots of thirsty builders. By building a set that has these two kitchens back-to-back we could give this move a seamlessness that would be hard to beat.

It's only by doing lots of careful planning that you end up with a film that looks this spontaneous and effortlessly natural.

Music and Sound

The many transitions that make up this story, and the way they build in tempo and find a pleasing rhythm, mean that we should be using sound design to flesh out each of these worlds, letting our audience enjoy and understand how we're moving from one to the other. The close-up noises, clicks and clunks, the rumbling of bubbles as the kettle boils, the hiss of steam, all go to place our viewer right in the scene -- it's what they'd be hearing if they were standing there themselves.

Juxtaposing these sounds with each other will help us make all these scenes really hang together as we jump between them, as well as allowing us to layer in backgrounds of atmosphere for each story to flesh them out a little - the radio on in the background in one kitchen, or kids playing in another for example. Creating soundscapes like this can communicate a lot about the feel of a location, allowing us to keep the visual storytelling as nimble as possible as we move on.

Casting

As we're traveling throughout the country and meeting lots of UK E.ON customers we want this selection to feel representative, so we'll be looking for people of various ages, ethnicities and backgrounds.

I would like to cast all real families for that extra layer of genuine familiarity, this will help to capture the most authentic interactions. Keeping an open mind throughout the casting process will mean we can slightly adapt our scenarios to fit people that we really like, rather than trying to find our very fixed ideas of characters. Being open minded and flexible here always ends up with a better fit between character and action, and as we want this to be a very real and believable set of stories that can only be a good thing.





Conclusion

It's exciting to read a script that makes you think this much about the craft and the technical considerations of the filmmaking, but has such potential for beautifully observed and characterful moments. With a carefully struck balance between detailed preparation, and a really open minded approach to aspects like casting, we can create a film that really rings true for our audience, and that's a joy to watch. It takes them on a journey through different people's lives, but ties them all together at the conclusion to leave one thought -- the way E.ON is there to help their customers.

It's a great project, and I'm looking forward to discussing it all further.