

MIES RELOADED

NATHAN CROWLEY
PRODUCTION DESIGNER
THE DARK KNIGHT



CHRISTOPHER NOLAN'S NEW BATMAN FILM IS SET IN AN EXTREME VERSION OF CHICAGO.

TEXT TINO SCHAEGLER AND ALICE CHARLOTTE
PHOTO WARNER BROS

'The Dark Knight', a box office triumph and one of the most compelling and popular of the Batman films, is the second to be directed by Christopher Nolan. Unlike his predecessors, Tim Burton and Michael Bail, Nolan strips Batman of all its comic-book aesthetics and portrays the iron-clad superhero in a contemporary and familiar American city. In this follow up, needless to say, our hero takes on a psychotic bank robber known as The Joker, whose crimes and motives get more and more deadly.

In 'The Dark Knight', Batman (played

by Christian Bale) has moved from his secluded mansion to the dark streets of Gotham City, which borrows its main architectural features from current day Chicago. The references to Mies Van der Rohe and modernism are hard to ignore. The film's designer Nathan Crowley tried to take Mies to his extreme edge of minimalism and radical modernism. Crowley plays with contrasts and the dualism of the world and its characters is represented in the use of light and materials. The rather utopian architecture often chastised for its inhumane coolness serves our story of Batman rather well. Batman's cave is replaced by a slick underground space. A vertically moving podium recalls the visionary spaces of Ken Adam's creations for the Bond films. This space seems to be the mirror of Christian Bale's character. It is a combination of a slick, stylish and elegant backlit ceiling juxtaposed

with a tough concrete bunker or intimidating underground car-park style walls. The reference here is clearly from the slick billionaire and playboy Bruce Wayne, and Batman, his troubled, brutal and harsh alter ego.

Overall we have here a film that is shot using a city as a metaphor. We also see much manipulation of the city, using contrasting vistas, creating drama with bird's-eye views looking down streets and in between sky-scrapers. We have no choice but to accept Nolan's vision that Gotham is a city of extremes. But there are moments of elegance and beauty, too, and the director deals with light and space with aplomb. Surely one of the most beautiful shots of the film shows Wayne and his butler Alfred Pennyworth (Michael Caine) standing on the podium slowly moving up, while the light of the backlit ceiling goes off as if it were a light sequence by Jenny Holzer.