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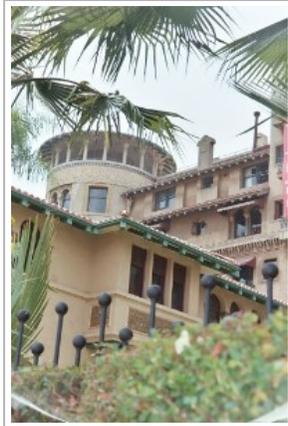
Meanwhile, Back at Stately Wayne Manor

November 12, 2006

Christina Hamlett

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It's one of those things we usually don't think about until we're randomly channel-surfing and stumble across a familiar façade by accident. Only a few weeks ago, in fact, my husband called me one evening on a business trip to say he was watching an Alan Rickman movie that was supposedly set in the South. Mark knew better, however, having spent sufficient time with me during the Museum of the Arroyo's Lamplight Tours to know that the opening scene wasn't any farther than Avenue 43 off the 110 freeway.

That's the beauty of movie magic, of course. Put a camera on an actor and he instantly becomes Thomas Edison. Put a camera on Castle Green (pictured) and it becomes the Hotel Nacional de Cuba in BUGSY. Likewise, the wizardry of cinema has us believe that Robert Redford thought up his INDECENT PROPOSAL at "home" in the Huntington Library, Christopher Lloyd (BACK TO

THE FUTURE) conjured time travel in a DeLorean behind the doors of The Gamble House, and Keanu Reeves' Napa winery romance mysteriously took A WALK IN THE CLOUDS by way of the courtyard at Pasadena City Hall.

Since 1912, filmmakers have recognized the economic advantage of shooting portions of their movies on existing properties rather than building a set for every single scene. In the 20's and 30's, some of them even went so far as to disrupt a shoot so that their camera crew could chase fire trucks, later incorporating footage of the burning buildings into the storyline in an effort to hook their audiences with breathtaking realism.

By the 1980's, Pasadena was hosting over a hundred productions per year, a situation that called for the formation of an official film office through which such functions as permits, road closures, calendaring, marketing and property scouting could be coordinated. Today, the number of film and television projects shot in the San Gabriel Valley has quadrupled, a testament to its desirability in terms of architecture, landscape and blissful weather.

For a look behind the scenes, I chatted with Ariel Penn, Director of Filming and Special Events. I started out by asking her what was the oddest request her office has ever received.

Probably the most unusual one," she replied, "was from THE BEVERLY HILLBILLIES. To show what misfits the Clampetts were, they wanted to do a scene with a cattle drive down the middle of South Oakland Avenue."

With real cattle?" I interrupted.

Real cattle," she confirmed. "The neighbors actually planned picnics around the day of the shoot and invited their friends and neighbors to come and sit on the lawn and watch all the cows run through."

Unfortunately, she revealed, the scene got cut from the script at the last minute, leaving a lot of really disappointed residents.

For the most part, the majority of requests they get from film companies are approved, pending the availability of dates and the amount of anticipated disruption to commercial businesses, traffic patterns, and noise levels. The type of movie, she adds, is another consideration.

As a community," she explains, "they know Pasadena has restrictions and public ordinances that would limit the filming of movies involving explosions, street chases, potentially

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dangerous stunts and so forth."

So what film location has generated the most interest from the general public? Penn tells us that it's the FATHER OF THE BRIDE house on South El Molino. "The homeowner told us she would only host the filming as long as her home could remain anonymous after the shoot."

By and large, Penn went on, most moviegoers aren't as interested in knowing about residential properties as they are in picking out city landmarks and favorite restaurants. "For some unusual reason, though, I was suddenly getting calls from all over America from people saying they absolutely loved the house and they wanted to get copies of the blueprints for it so they could build a home exactly like it in their own neighborhood."

How good is your film memory? The following is only a partial list of films that have used local residences, businesses or background scenery to convey a different place and/or time: TOPPER, CITIZEN KANE, GONE WITH THE WIND, IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT, THE STING, THE LAST SAMURAI, DEAD AGAIN, PULP FICTION, DEVIL IN A BLUE DRESS, BEVERLY HILLS COP & B.H. COP II, BOWFINGER.

The mention of BOWFINGER tweaked my curiosity about indie filmmakers who attempt to emulate the Steve Martin character's determination to make a movie on the cheap. "Let's say," I offer as a hypothetical, "that someone picks out a mansion exterior that's ideal as the residence for their film character. Can they casually stroll by, pretending to be tourists, and shoot that image with a camcorder for later inclusion in their film?"

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Penn explains that no one is allowed to trespass on private property without permission. "If it's a scene where they're just driving down the street and a house or a neighborhood is visible in the course of the drive-by, it has been ruled by the courts that that's allowable. If the house is prominently featured, however, permission from the homeowner has to be obtained."

Is your own house ready for its close-up? A visit to the film office's extensive and impressive website at www.filmpasadena.com will not only give you the particulars of how to register your abode as a future movie location but also

let you view their photo library of exteriors and interiors. Penn and her staff are continually on the lookout for fresh locations to match up with industry needs.

As far as the use of public venues such as government buildings, city parks, etc., the rules are a little different.

Real estate agencies, for instance," Penn says, "will often pose their staff in front of City Hall and then use the shot in their commercial advertising and brochures." As long as there are no implied defamations of character regarding the building itself or the city—nor disruptions to the operations of either one in the context of filming—there have thus far been no repercussions regarding misuse.

If they want to include a city logo, however, or, as in the case of Robert Altman filming THE PLAYER and wanting to use actual Pasadena city police officers, clearance from the proper authorities is required in advance."

In concert with Penn's interface with law enforcement pertinent to traffic management street closures and crowd control, the film office also has an excellent relationship with the American Humane Association. Its diligent protection of animal actors and its recognized clout with the movie studios requires that representatives be onsite during the filming of any production involving animals to monitor their care and treatment.

In addition to feature films, a number of TV episodes have employed local settings. Among them are THE WEST WING (with Caltech as the Italian Embassy), BOSTON PUBLIC (Rose City High School), and C.S.I. (the Pasadena Mayor's Office).

Penn shares that the Church of Angels on Avenue 64—an English style chapel—has been used in J.A.G., as well as an episode of THE X FILES. For the latter, the crew needed to generate a lot of eerie fog, "so much," she says, "that it really looked like an alien ship might land there at any moment!" For the episode of J.A.G., set during the Christmas holidays, a fresh blanket of snow was needed. "The neighbors were so excited to look out and see this man-made winter wonderland that they all ran over to take pictures."



The snow, she explained, is either made with ice or a biodegradable foam. A native of the East Coast, Penn swears she can't tell the difference. Apparently neither can some of the youngsters who have found these winterized shoots a great opportunity to start a snowball fight...in August.

She whimsically recalls the occasion of Hallmark Cards wanting to shoot a commercial with a young girl making a snow angel in her front yard. "The day of the shoot, it was 104 degrees and this poor thing was bundled up in a winter coat, mittens, the works. Because of the heat, they had to keep spraying the snow with liquid nitrogen to keep it cool. In the meantime, local kids in shorts and T-shirts were having a blast in the 'summer blizzard'."

She also recalls an episode of *BUFFY, THE VAMPIRE SLAYER* in which the title character was running from a gigantic snake. "It's amazing what they can do today with digital technology," she remarks. The storyline involved one of the characters having residence in Castle Green and Buffy trying to get inside before the snake could make a quick snack out of her. "In the top frame," she explains, "you saw Castle Green and in the bottom you saw Griffith Park. When it was actually shot, Buffy was running across the park, Castle Green was filled in as background, and the computer generated snake was added in later."

As our lunch wrapped to a close, I asked her what her favorite movie was. "Definitely *AN AMERICAN PRESIDENT*," she says, yet another movie shot locally, this one at the Elks Lodge on Colorado Boulevard. "The story, the chemistry, the dialogue." She gives a deep sigh. "It really is all about making magic, isn't it?"



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