

FILMMAKER™

THE MAGAZINE OF INDEPENDENT FILM



KNOCK OUT!

Quentin Tarantino's
Pulp Fiction

SKETCHES OF SPAIN
Whit Stillman's Barcelona

FAMILY VALUES
David O. Russell's
Spanking the Monkey

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT!
Special Supplement on
Interactive Media

STAND AND DELIVER
Life After Postproduction

\$4.50 SUMMER 1994 VOL. 2, #4

MARK
ZINGARELLI



your face, overdone. Almost like another character in a film, the design should come to life and linger in the minds of the audience."

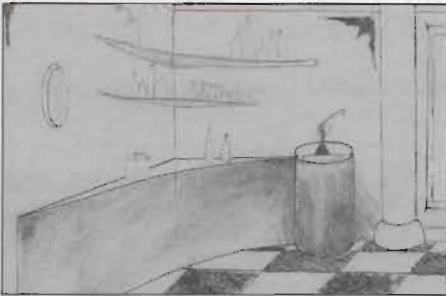
Selected credits: *Sister Island* (in progress), *Sleep with Me*, *Equinox*, *Tryst*, *Cabin Boy*.

—Victoria L. Tilney

Martha Fay was bored designing houses, so she put her two degrees, one in architecture, the other in art history, to use on stage and film.

When she began designing sets for summer stock in New Hampshire, Fay quickly realized that she was more interested in set design than in housing design. "I moved to New York and got hooked up in the avant-garde theater world. I started doing my own set design and also set lighting. Then I got a big commercial deal with Playskool. I ended up doing their industrials and print work. At some point I decided I wanted to start doing movies so I moved to Los Angeles. I've been in L.A. two years now."

In those two years, Fay has designed several commercials and videos; *Minotaur*, now in theatrical release from Headliner, is her latest and



MICHAEL KRANTZ'S BAR SKETCH FOR MINOTAUR

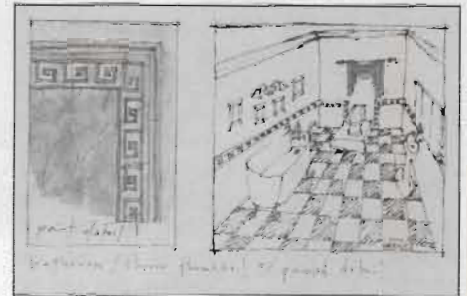


THE BAR AS IT APPEARED IN MINOTAUR

Michael Krantz, who recently co-designed Dan McCormack's *Minotaur*, said of working with his grade-school pal, "I had gone through months and months, in fact 20 years of friendship, cultivating the ideas for what the sets would look like...so we had a lot of ideas from the get-go."

It makes sense that the 25-year-old production designer's first major project would take on the themes of celebrity and excess, the major themes of the late '70s and '80s, his formative years. Krantz began his professional life in Massachusetts where he spent a couple of years at Boston University as an advertising major before switching over to the film department. When the department hesitated to give him a camera, Krantz transferred to the Museum School, which is also in Boston and is affiliated with the Museum of Fine Arts.

"They were nice enough on the very first day to thrust a Bolex into my hands and let me run amok," Krantz recalls. "That was a bit too photographically technical and at the time I wasn't as interested in that — I was a little bit more of



A SKETCH BY MARTHA FAY FOR MINOTAUR

largest project to date. Working with director Dan McCormack and co-designer Michael Krantz, Fay had to create a complete world for the film's minotaur to inhabit.

"We built the entire space on a small stage out in Sun Valley," explains Fay. "There's not a single location in the entire show. The champagne glass was built for us, everything." The first sequence was set in the 1950s. "It was a very deep red room, of which you actually see very little in the film, but the whole place was dressed 1950s. Then we had four days downtime during which we repainted and redressed everything to be the yellow and green vomit colors of the '70s. We shot for five days, then we cleared out and redressed for the final, all-white room."

Because *Minotaur* had been brewing in McCormack's mind for so long, he was very clear about what he wanted. "While Dan didn't always know the specifics, he knew how he wanted the design to work and he knew what he needed to get from the set. Considering that you are in the same space for the entire film, it was a big challenge to avoid a feeling of claustrophobia and boredom. And that was really fun."

much. And that's a good thing." For Fay, the drawings were crucial. "Without drawings, without a basis in reality, everybody's talking just fluff," she claims.

Creating the look of a film is the real motivation behind Fay's career choices. She won't design a film where she is a glorified secretary, merely overseeing people and a budget, because she feels compelled to be part of the storytelling process. That desire is currently leading her into lighting. "I really, really like lighting. I'm the best boy electric on a feature right now, *Nature of the Beast*. I look at the art department on this show and I wouldn't trade my job for any of their jobs. They're dealing with locations and a paltry budget and trying to put in an ashtray or two that tells something about the character. It's just, to me, totally uninteresting. Unless I get an art department project where I'm really designing something, it doesn't interest me. With gaffing, I have more control over the way something looks than the art department does."

Selected credits: *Half Way House*, *Minotaur*.

—Jaq Greenspon

a dreamer." Instead of becoming a filmmaker, Krantz experimented with a variety of media. "I got into doing sculpture, wood sculpture primarily, and metal sculpture. I also played music and did some performance art." These eclectic activities formed the basis of Krantz's style. "My influences are more disparate than architecture or graphic design," he explains. "A good book or a good record can easily generate a notion for a graphic idea."

Once Krantz found his way back to film, other influences crept into his life, specifically, production designer Therese DePrez, with whom he worked on Gregg Araki's *Doom Generation*. "I've worked with Therese a couple of times as her art director and she's one of my heroes. She is particularly inspiring in terms of her grip on the organizational aspect of being a designer — it really is a sort of double-sided job."

On *Minotaur*, Krantz worked very closely with Martha Fay, who was initially brought in as art director and then became the co-production designer. The two had previously worked together on *Half Way House*, Krantz's first stint as production designer, during which Krantz and Fay developed a mutual respect for



RANDY ERICSEN SKETCH FOR SISTER ISLAND

each other. "Martha taught me a lot of the ways to get around. She taught me the 1 x 3 and luan techniques. She taught me the vernacular for set building. And on *Minotaur*, she brought her fine drafting skills. She made me lock down a lot of the decisions that I wanted to make. I had some pretty grandiose ideas and she made me stick to my guns."

Krantz found that working with Fay allowed each designer's skills to complement the other's. "Two heads are usually better than one," he comments. While they worked well together, the two have very different ways of working. "It's nice to know that there's someone else taking care of the intricacies and the logistics and what not," notes Krantz. "I did my renderings and Martha came on with the drafting from my renderings, which made things a lot easier." The drafting made the designs very clear for the producers and the DP. "Renderings can be abstract, they can be kind of loose in form. For me, they get a little dreamy, a little too abstract for people who are wanting to get down to nuts and bolts, dollars and cents," continues Krantz.

For Krantz, part of the fun of designing is physically creating a world. "I'm more inclined to do the building, to be the kid in the sandbox. If I was offered a huge film, I'd throw my coveralls on and jump right into it with the carpenters and the scenics — that's my greatest pleasure."

Selected credits: *Minotaur*, *Half Way House*, *Doom Generation* (art director).

— Jaq Greenspon

Ina Mayhew's lament: "There's never enough money. Whether I have five dollars or \$100,000 to spend, the dilemma of visually expressing words is the same. The expectations are just higher."

A brave statement for someone in any branch of the filmmaking process, but even more so, perhaps, for a production designer. Shouldering the task of creating the entire look of a film is an awesome responsibility no matter what kind of budget you might have to work with. New York-based production designer Ina Mayhew, however, sees the issue in an entirely different light. Coming from a diverse artistic background, her approach towards a project

is geared to achieving the most creative design regardless of budget.

A Brooklyn native and the child of two professional artists, she originally attended SUNY/Purchase intent on gaining a fine arts degree, but was side-tracked early on by an interest in theater and travel; it was the latter that led her to Africa, and to a wealth of artistic influences that would color her later work and finally land her in the prolific theater scene of mid-'70s

New York. While attending Parsons School of Design, she cultivated her skills in painting, prop and set design, and metalwork, as well as doing hair and makeup for local theater companies.

Armed with the technical theater degree that is a starting point for so many production designers, Mayhew headed to L.A. post-grad, where she spent some five years working in various art department capacities on music videos and commercials, as well as doing scenic design for several L.A. opera companies.

Her foray back into film as a creative medium resulted from a chance meeting with former SUNY classmate, director Charles Lane, in 1989. Mayhew convinced him to entrust her with the job of designer on *Sidewalk Stories*, and the work kept coming from then on.

"I had a lot of luck, but also a lot of skills that made people want to keep hiring me," she reflects. "Every little skill I acquired early on in my career helped. It enabled me to do everything from making a specific prop or piece of jewelry to painting and constructing sets myself if need be." It is perhaps this practical approach that has made her increasingly invaluable as a designer and has allowed her to work creatively within the confines of a limited budget as well as an abundant one.

Her first film with Charles Lane was followed by *True Identity* in 1991 and *Hallelujah*, which was completed for PBS this past December. Working with Lane provided a path into features, culminating in her selection as art director for Spike Lee's current film project, *Clockers*. Lee selected Mayhew after viewing her work on the futuristic thriller, *The Drop Squad*, a Forty Acres' collaborative project that he executive produced. While she remains a designer at heart, the opportunity to work with Lee and production designer Andrew McAlpine, as well as her chance to use her graphic art skills, made *Clockers* an impossible offer to refuse.

"*Clockers* has a strong anti-violence theme that is represented through posters and graffiti," Mayhew explains, "and I'm also creating a great deal of products towards that underlying theme." Though it is the largest budget she has worked with, the process is still as hands-on as

ever.

Mayhew agrees that working on a Spike Lee film marks a high point in her career and will hopefully lead to steadier feature work in the future. At some point, however, she'll find the time to work on *Les Bon Temps*, which will be produced through a company she co-founded with actor/dancer Kevin Ramsey.

Selected credits: *Above the Rim*, *The Drop Squad*, *Sidewalk Stories*, *True Identity*.

— Rachel Nicotina

Fast-paced decision-making keeps Dan Ouellette working in independent film. "A low budget asks you to make one choice. It's going to be a puke-green bedspread and that will do it," he says, and although this production designer is responsible for the minimalist ennui of both Hal Hartley's *Simple Men* and *Trust*, green puke is much more his style.

A graduate of indie science fiction, horror, and fantasy sets, Ouellette says that on a limited budget, collaboration with a film crew is what's most important to a production designer. "You don't have the money and time to completely transform a space," he says, "so the essential thing is that there needs to be an active dialogue between the designer, the cinematographer, and the director." At times, he does go unappreciated. "You dress the location and when a crew gets there, they can't tell what you've dressed and what you haven't. Sometimes it's like a bull in a china shop."

Years of designing sets for commercials and videos taught Ouellette that although coffers of cash allow production designers more flexibility, the end result is not necessarily better. "There's a natural equation between money and design, but not necessarily between money and creativity," he says. "I've always felt creativity comes out of somebody's ability to maneuver in very tight spaces." Such was the case with *What Happened Was...*, the Sundance award-winning feature which shot entirely on one set.

As a child, he had vast exposure to the films of Bergman, Polanski, and other European directors ("I'm only now finding people like Douglas Sirk"), and he learned carpentry from his father. This skill led to set designing while studying illustration at SUNY/Purchase, and once in New York, professional work beginning with Frank Henenlotter's *Frankenhooker* and *Basket Case 2* and Hal Hartley's *The Unbelievable Truth*.

Currently Ouellette divides his time between production designing and pursuing his provocative art work — drawings and paintings influenced by fetish and fashion photography as well as the work of H.R. Giger — of which there will be a solo exhibit at New York's Alexander Gallery sometime this year. Both career paths fill different needs, he says. "When I have done artwork for months at a time, it tends to result in a creative implosion. Then I go away and do a set and refuel myself with the process of col-