

Cannes Diary 2011: 3,544 words

Tuesday, May 10

Arriving for my fourth trip to the 64th Cannes Film Festival on the Cote d'Azur, I am picked up by Sebastian, my Brad Pitt look-a-like driver. We head to the Carlton Hotel on the Coisette smack in the middle of the action.

The festival is the world's most prestigious twelve day convention of cinema, giving us the perfect excuse to slip on an evening gown nightly, strut our stuff on the red carpet, network till dawn with endless flashbulbs in our face and chat with reporters posing as friends. I fall into that category of overdressed film aficionado, fan and friend with a pencil.

Wednesday, May 11

I am flying down the Carlton's stairwell in a Dennis Basso spectacular sequined and fur get-up overloaded with mother's inherited diamonds and head to Woody Allen's premiere of "Midnight in Paris". I accidentally crash into Barry Levinson coming from a financial meeting on "Gotti:Three Generations" that he'll be filming in New York this winter with John Travolta as John Gotti, Jr. and Al Pacino as his mentor. Three years ago Barry's "What Just Happened" starring Robert De Niro, this year's jury president, closed the festival. Barry walks me to the paparazzi infested Palais. He has no tuxedo or tickets for tonight. I tell him to meet me at the dinner and Sony Classics' distributors Michael Barker and Tom Bernard will get him in. My date Jean Pigozzi arrives by boat from his villa.

There's total Woody-mania on the red carpet. Woody is very calm. This is his 42nd film and his first filmed in Paris. It's about the struggle to deal with the present while romanticizing the past. Owen Wilson, Rachel McAdams with her real-life lover Michael Sheen, Adrien Brody, starlet Lea Seydoux and Woody climb the mythic red steps and are greeted by festival director Thierry Fremaux and president Gilles Jacob, who receive every actor every evening in the exact same spot.

Notably absent are French First Lady Carla Bruni, who is pregnant with twins and Oscar winning Marion Cotillard who gives birth to a boy, Marcel, a week later.

French actress Melanie Laurent serves as M.C. Introducing the jury at the opening ceremony. The first recipient of the Palme d'Honneur, an honorary career achievement award goes to Bernardo Bertolucci, who declares the festival officially open.

Lady Gaga, oblivious to the Woody worship is performing on the adjacent beach.

Thursday, May 12

I attend the 8:30am press screening at the Palais of the eagerly awaited "We Need to Talk About Kevin" directed by Lynne Ramsay. Tilda Swinton gives a tour de force performance as a mother whose life is shattered after her teenage son goes on a killing spree at his high school.

That night Sony Classics' "Restless", Gus Van Sant's latest exploration of smart but troubled young people premieres. Dennis Hopper's 20-year-old talented son, Henry stars as a moody kid obsessed with death in a quirky relationship with luminous Mia Wasikowska. Ron Howard's pregnant daughter Bryce produces.

At the Martinez beach, the Independent Filmmaker Project and Calvin Klein party is being hosted by Francisco Costa and IFP's Joana Vicente. The event honors women in Cannes including jury member Uma Thurman, "Tree of Life's" Jessica Chastain, "Sleeping Beauty's" breakout actress Emily Browning, Julia Leigh and Jane Campion.

Friday, May 13

Press run to a mid-day screening of the controversial documentary "Unlawful Killing," the unapologetically one-sided view of conspiracy theories about the death of Princess Diana and her boyfriend Dodi Fayed in the fatal 1999 car crash in Paris. At the press conference at the Carlton journalists yell questions challenging the accuracy. Mohamed Al-Fayed paid five million dollars to underwrite the entire film which tries to prove Prince Philip murdered Al-Fayed's son because he was a Muslim. The film is banned in England.

The Weinstein Company throws a packed cocktail party for buyers and media at the Martinez to showcase the clip reel for their 2011 slate. Victoria Parker greets me. COO David Glasser introduces Harvey Weinstein who describes Quentin Tarantino's "Django Unchained," Paul Thomas Anderson's "The Master", Simon Curtis's "My Week with Marilyn" and David O. Russell's "Silver Linings Playbook". Sarah Jessica Parker shows scenes from "I Don't Know How She Does It".

Harvey highlights his last-minute Cannes competition entry "The Artist," a stylish black and white silent movie about 1920's Hollywood.

TWC's acquisition of "The Iron Lady" starring Meryl Streep as Britain's only female Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher has early Oscar buzz for Streep based on a four minute trailer showing Meryl's extraordinary ability to assume Mrs. Thatcher's tone of voice and pattern of speech. Would one expect less from the world's most gifted actress?

Saturday, May 14

Another 8:30am press screening and it's blockbuster "Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides." Captain Jack Sparrow is back and this time he's looking for the Fountain of Youth. (Who isn't?)

Jerry Bruckheimer has invited me to tonight's premiere, which is the same time as English entrepreneur Charles Finch's dinner. So, the trick is how to be in two places at once. The answer, see Jerry's entire film at 8:30am and repeat half the film at 6:30pm.

Russian billionaire Len Blavatnik and Harvey Weinstein host a lunch on board Len's yacht My Odessa to celebrate the festival. Tenders ferry us on choppy seas from the Carlton dock to the mother ship.

Skinny Melanie Griffith is in skinny jeans accessorized with sparkling light blue stone and diamond earrings, matching necklace and ring just gifted from Antonio Banderas for their 15th anniversary.

I ask Jane Fonda why she didn't respond to my email about being the surprise finale at Naomi Campbell's Fashion for Relief for Monday night. Naomi is on the boat ready to kill me for pushing Jane. Jane says her emails are down and that's a very interesting idea. A nano second later Naomi and Jane are organizing fittings and it's a done deal.

It's another night of bedlam on the red carpet for the "Pirates" premiere. I sit next to Jane who is wearing a Chopard 53.5-carat diamond necklace with a whopping 160-carat cushion-cut blue sapphire pendant. We are right in front of the cast's reserved seats, watching their arrivals on the huge screen. Johnny Depp (no one cooler), Penelope Cruz (no one more beautiful), Ian McShane, Geoffrey Rush, Rob Marshall, Jerry Bruckheimer (no one richer) and Keith Richards (he could be cooler than Depp but not richer than Jerry) dutifully pose and smile.

This is the off year for Graydon Carter's biennial Vanity Fair shindig so Sydney and Charles Finch fill the slot for their Finch's Quarterly Review filmmakers' dinner. Guests include Quarterly's Nick Foulkes, honoree Jeremy Thomas, Paul Allen with a new book out "Idea Man," Mick Jagger hinting at releasing new music in the fall, producers Cassian Elwes and Ed Pressman, directors Simon Curtis and Bertrand Tavernier, Lawrence Bender, Vanessa Hudgens, Boris Becker, Kevin Spacey, Christian Louboutin, Dominic Cooper, Glen Close and Emily Browning and Max Irons canoodling on the terrace.

Back at du Cap's bar, Art Linson and Bob are ensconced in De Niro's favorite corner. Art is Bob's best friend from producing "The Untouchables" and is the writer/producer on Bob's next film where he portrays a washed up stand up comic. Art's other best friend is Sean Penn from producing "Fast Times at Ridgemont High". He is rumored to direct. Bob has been seeing two films a day in town, attending numerous dinners at night and now he relaxes with Jane Fonda and Antonio Banderas. Grace Hightower is by his side at all times.

In walks Linda and Jerry Bruckheimer...followed by Rob Marshall and Johnny Depp. The lounge is heating up.

DeNiro is the Godfather, but mysterious and beautiful Depp is the matinee idol. Depp settles on the terrace with Rob Marshall and Disney Studios chief Rich Ross. Producer Graham King oversees the scene because he's got Depp on a plane to London the next day to start shooting his blockbuster, "Dark Shadows," directed by Tim Burton.

After 2:00am a gang of young come off Steven Spielberg's new yacht. My first kid-to-adult kiss comes from director Jake Paltrow and wife, art-photographer, Taryn Simon. They are headed to London shortly because she has a show at the Tate.

Sasha Spielberg also gives the kiss. She tells me it's her 21st birthday and her boyfriend of two years, Max Winkler (son of Henry and director of "Ceremony") has given her a little jewelry...nothing like Antonio's gifting to Melanie or Jane's Chopard stuff, but it's real.

The Godfather's circle, the Pirates entourage and the children of the beloved famous are having so much fun and are saddened when the hotel bar tenders blink the lights at 3:00am and throw everyone out.

Sunday, May 15

I bump into Jessica Chastain in the Carlton lobby. She has made 11 films in the past four years. I hop into her huge black van to go one block to a screening of Sony Classic's "Take Shelter" where she co-stars with Michael Shannon who portrays an anguished husband experiencing apocalyptic visions.

Lunch around the pool overlooking the Mediterranean is at Jean Pigozzi's Villa Dorane, where Mick Jagger is the annual house guest. Jean is a large eccentric Italian investor who chronicles his every social move with a tiny camera. Italian Vogue Editor Franca Sozzani, L'Wren Scott and Mick Jagger lounge on double outdoor day beds. Others chatting are Lawrence Bender, Bob De Niro, Denise Rich, Mia Wasikowska, Henry Hopper and Google CEO Eric Schmidt.

Bob, Grace and their 13-year-old son Elliot, Fiona and Art Linson, Brian McNally visiting from Bangkok and I get a private tour from Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen of his 414 foot boat M.Y. Octopus. In his screening room, Paul shows us films of his explorations including melting glaciers in the Arctic and Antarctic. De Niro cannot resist climbing into the yellow submarine, resting in the hull, and sitting in the captain's seat.

Later I see "Martha Marcy May Marlene" starring 22-year-old ingénue Elizabeth Olsen, sister of 24-year-old billionaire twins Mary Kate and Ashley. Elizabeth plays a young woman who escapes from a cult and is never the same. Fox Searchlight's Nancy Utley and Stephen Giulia know they have a serious hit.

Monday, May 16

It's the morning screening of Terrence Malick's artistic "Tree of Life." This is the film to see. The press jumping barricades in a punching frenzy, arrive early enough to take a power nap in their

coveted seats. The film is a visual sensation set in a small town in Central Texas in the mid-1950's about a family led by a stern father, Brad Pitt, and a beatific mother, Jessica Chastain, raising three boys.

At the press conference the beatific Brad Pitt, dressed in white is charming as he uncomfortably explains that his famously private director is just too shy to come talk to them. Producer Bill Pohlad explains Sean Penn is en-route from his humanitarian work in Haiti. The press is pissed.

Lunch is at the du Cap. Sean Penn, just off a plane, eats on the terrace with his agent fashion-icon Bryan Lourd sporting a seersucker suit and straw hat.

Wendi Murdoch hosts a cocktail party at the Carlton to promote "The Snow Flower and the Secret Fan," a timeless portrait of female friendship in China in the 19th century she produced for Fox Searchlight. Wendi poses for photos with Gwen Stefani, Gavin Rosdale, Shala Monroque and her best friend Dasha Zhukova, wealthiest Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich's significant other. Dasha and Roman have recently restored the white washed Chateau de la Croe, next door to Jean Pigazzi, where Edward VIII lived with Wallis Simpson after abdicating.

Bedecked in a Luisa Beccaria organza gown with an impractical flowing train and escorted by Angus Aynsley, producer of last year's "Waste Land," we charge across the Coisette to The Film Society of Lincoln Center's cocktail party on our way to the "Tree of Life" premiere.

Amid red carpet hysteria, again minus Malick, Brad leads Jessica Chastain and Sean Penn up the Palais steps. He surprisingly turns on his heels, descends and treks back to the street. Out of nowhere Angelina emerges onto the carpet in a low cut strapless Versace brown gown slit to reveal her entire perfect leg.

As the king and queen of fame they slowly work the walk and give their adoring subjects every ounce of drama and glamour they have been panting for.

Angus and I slip out to Naomi Campbell's all-star Fashion for Relief show benefiting those affected by the devastating tsunami in north Japan. Leave it to super model Naomi to pull off a Cannes red-carpet event opposite "Tree of Life."

Co-host Franca Sozzani helps style the models backstage. The girls include Karolina Kurkova, Yasmin Le Bon, Nadja Auermann, Sesilee Lopez, Japanese model Tao Okamoto, Rosario Dawson and Grace Hightower. It is 73-year-old Jane Fonda, 50 years older than any runway girl, who steals the show as the surprise finale in a white see-thru lace Marchesa gown. The crowd erupts as Jane sashays past Harvey Weinstein who is pointing to his wife Georgina Chapman and proudly mouthing, "this is the designer!"

Tuesday, May 17

Tonight on a launch to Paul Allen's annual party on M.Y. Octopus Ryan Gosling is sitting next to me with his "Blue Valentine" producer Jamie Patricof. Their next film, "The Place Beyond the Pines" will be directed by Derek Cianfrance and is shooting in Schenectady this summer. Ryan co-stars with Bradley Cooper. He is a motorcycle stunt rider who robs banks. I ask him for a walk-on as an innocent bystander in the bank who he throws to the floor before yelling, "Stick um up." Ryan loves it. Patricof agrees.

Wednesday, May 18

At the morning screening of Magnolia Picture's "Melancholia" where wedding guests witness Melancholia, a planet hidden behind the sun and is now on a collision course to Earth....and that is the good news. At the press conference, Danish director Lars von Trier announces, "O.K., I'm a Nazi." sending shock waves through the media. He was asked to comment on a recent interview in which he expressed interest in the Nazi aesthetic. His mother, on her death bed, revealed the Jewish man he thought was his father was not. Lars then found out he is German. Making matters worse, he says he has an "understanding" of Hitler. Co-stars Kristen Dunst and Charlotte Gainsborough (Jewish) are horrified. Possibly Lars's English is rusty. Reuters later prints that the comments were made in jest. What a sense of humor this guy has. He could do stand up. Festival officials promptly throw him out of town and cancel his post-premiere party that night. What a sorry mess for such a good film.

This story is as crazy as the other hot gossip of the day that Arnold Schwarzenegger aka "The Terminator" aka "The Sperminator" was sleeping with the maid of twenty years and had the love child around the house so Maria Shriver could watch the half-brothers (her son with Arnold born days apart) grow up together. This is the reel to real suspension of disbelief.

The Hollywood Reporter's editorial director Janice Min and publisher Lori Burgess host a cocktail party at the Martinez beach for Jodie Foster in honor of her directing "The Beaver" with Mel Gibson. Keeping with the Nazi theme, Holocaust denier's son Mel Gibson got a standing ovation the night before at the Palais for his profound performance as a tortured soul. Not a stretch.

Countess Nathalie von Bismarck (an Israeli Jew) married to Count Carl, throws a cocktail party at the Carlton to celebrate a screenplay she has written about his Swedish grandmother, Ann-Marie Tengbom aka Princess von Bismarck-Schonhausen and her sympathetic efforts to help displaced people after the war. Can't wait to see the film. I've never been to a cocktail party for a script.

Cinema for Peace holds its inaugural Cannes dinner and auction at the Carlton where Sean Penn's humanitarian work in Haiti is acknowledged. Sean hosts an impressive oval table in the middle of the room with Leonardo DiCaprio, Harvey Weinstein, Roberta Armani and Vladislav Doronin who each pledge \$75,000 to the \$750,000 total. Also sitting with them is Robert De Niro, Ryan Gosling, Uma Thurman, Naomi Campbell, Rosario Dawson and Faye Dunaway. Leo tells me he is excited to go to Australia to start work on Baz Luhrmann's "The Great Gatsby."

Oddly there is another Haitian cocktail and auction on the same night at the same time. This one hosted by Paul Haggis to benefit Artists for Peace and Justice. Milla Jovovich, Ryan Kavanaugh, Karolina Kurkova and Jane Fonda co-host at the Chopard Lounge at the Martinez. Celebrity supporters include Peter Fonda, Kenneth Cole, Patrick Dempsey, Angela Lindvall and Michelle Rodriguez. Haggis raises \$450,000 to support the first free high school, where children's education is terminated in the sixth grade.

Thursday, May 19th

Yet another early morning screening on four hours sleep. Beloved Pedro Almodovar's "The Skin I Live In" screens starring Antonio Banderas, as a wealthy, cultured and respected Madrid plastic surgeon. This highly anticipated film explores themes of sexuality and identity. I immediately campaign to Sony Classic's that I need to promote this film, being somewhat of an authority on anti-aging.

The worlds of film, fashion and music unite at amfAR's annual Cinema Against AIDS gala at the Hotel du Cap hosted by Bold Films, Chopard and The Weinstein Company. AmfAR sets a new record by raising \$10 million. Every celebrity I have mentioned is here. The evening's highlight is Prince Albert of Monaco and fiancé Charlene Wittstock offering personal tennis and swimming lessons with lunch at the palace thrown in for \$1.4 million (it was sold twice). I wonder if they play doubles.

De Niro is back at his favorite corner in the du Cap bar with Naomi Campbell and Brooke Shields. It's fascinating to see two of the most famous faces in the world discussing the longevity of their careers.

Naomi talks about her 41st birthday on Saturday and tries to figure out Vlad's surprise destination celebration (it's Capri). Last year, for her 40th, he played host to 300 of the world's chicest fashionistas at the du Cap, which I crashed (only because I didn't know her) and wrote about. This year, Vlad has his security guard hand me a 30 pound lavender and pink coffee table book of the black and white party photos, I pray I'm not in. This limited edition is presented to the 300 cherished guests.

Friday, May 20th

I have invited Debra and David Reuben (normal people, not in the business) to the premiere of Sean Penn's "This Must be the Place." Sean daringly plays a 50 year old American former rock star who still dresses as a cross between Kiss and Alice Cooper. He is living in a castle in Ireland. The death of his father, a holocaust survivor, brings him back to his Jewish roots in Brooklyn. He discovers his father was obsessed with a German guard living in the Mid-West who he tracks down for revenge.

I take the Reubens to the after-party at Cherie Cheri Beach where Courtney Love explains to us Sean's character is based on a friend of Bono's. They also meet co-stars David Byrne and Judd

Hirsch, who plays the Nazi hunter. It's a bit overwhelming for non-pros, so we bolt to the Croisette for steak frites.

Saturday, May 21st

Last lunch on the du Cap terrace, Harvey Weinstein walks by and gets Jane Fonda and the Reubens tickets to "The Artist," his hottest film. Finally a screening we can wear jeans. Harvey introduces the film and warns me not to hype it. Ok, it's sensational. We end up at the famous Michelangelo's in Antibes for pizza, where the walls are covered with signed photos of international movie stars. Jane sits under a young Al Pacino and swears to me it's not him. She talks about her new book "Prime Time" published in August about love, health, sex, fitness and friendship. If she's so healthy, how come she doesn't recognize Al?

Sunday, May 22nd

Jane gets me a backstage pass to go with her to the closing night ceremonies, at the Palais, where she introduces an award in perfect French. Kirsten Dunst wins best actress for "Melancholia" in spite of her director's Nazi comments. Famous French actor Jean Dujardin wins best actor for "The Artist," a silent film by Michel Hazanavicius. Best director goes to Nicolas Winding Refn for the brilliant but bloody FilmDistrict's "Drive." His star Ryan Gosling grabs his face and plants a wet kiss on his lips. Best screenplay goes to writer/director, Joseph Cedar, for "Footnote". The big award of the night, the Palme d'Or, goes to Terrence Malick's epic visual poem, "The Tree of Life," which took four years to shoot.

I have seen 14 movies that expand my imagination, mirror our society and make us think they are the very best reasons to come to Cannes. Twelve days of four hours sleep a night leaves me in a state of total cinematic euphoria and social exhaustion. Next stop, Al Pacino's being honored at the Venice Film Festival in September and I'm packed...and then there's always Telluride and Toronto.