

MovieMaker's TOP 10 MOVIE CITIES '07

MIM'S SEVENTH ANNUAL COUNTDOWN OF THE 10 BEST AMERICAN CITIES TO LIVE, WORK AND MAKE MOVIES

BY LILY PERCY

IN A 1982 INTERVIEW with *American Heritage* magazine, legendary moviemaker John Huston was asked to explain what he meant when he referred to “the basic grammar of filmmaking.” His reply: “Once you’ve found the right shot to introduce the scene—written your first declarative sentence—then the rest flows.”

What Huston didn’t say explicitly, maybe because he thought it went *without* saying, is that a moviemaker needs to find the right place for that shot to happen, and he was one Academy Award-winning director who understood the art of choosing a location. From Mexico to Morocco and most places in between, Huston insisted on going wherever he needed to go in order to be sure he had the right shot in the right place. His greatness as a moviemaker came in part from never underestimating the importance of setting in a scene—of building a dis-

tinct mood in a time and place captivating enough to win over an audience.

So much of a film’s success lies in whether or not we as viewers believe what unfolds before us, and the wrong location can destroy any credibility within a film’s first frames. Would Woody Allen’s *Annie Hall* be as iconic without New York City as its backdrop? Would Cameron Crowe’s *Singles* have been as compelling had it been set, say, in Orlando instead of Seattle?

A lot of factors go into choosing where you will ultimately shoot your film, including such intangibles as a sense of loyalty to your hometown, the locations dictated by a script or simply a desire to spend weeks or months of your life in a particular area. Then there are the much more tangible reasons, such as incentives to shoot in a certain city, a desire to be in said city and the cold, hard cash that it will cost to film there.

The latter will often be the most important aspect of an independent moviemaker’s decision, as many of the cities includ-

ed on this year’s list, such as Albuquerque, NM, with its one-of-a-kind film investment loan program, and Las Vegas, NV, where free is a state of mind, undoubtedly prove. The term “moviemaker-friendly” has taken on a whole new level of meaning with this year’s new inductees of Shreveport-Bossier City, LA and Salt Lake City, UT, and Memphis, TN is climbing up the list, thanks to its tireless film office and commissioner.

Some of the cities recognized this year will come as no surprise, as New York, Austin, Philadelphia, Portland, OR and Miami all make triumphant returns; some exclusions will, however, be conspicuous in their absence. (Nope, you didn’t blink and miss it—Los Angeles is not on the list this year). After months of late-night research, countless interviews and more than our fair share of film office harassment, this year’s list reassures us once again that the best locations in the U.S. aren’t exclusively red or blue, but red, white *and* blue, because moviemaking is thriving in cities all across the country.

CITIES ON THE RISE



Cleveland, OH

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the city, and even recently established an agreement with Mayor Frank Jackson that allows motion picture producers fee-free use of the Convention Center and its facilities, which includes a public hall, an on-site kitchen and 22 additional rooms.

"We were a low-budget independent film, but one that was not your typical talking-heads indie," says producer Amy Salko Robertson, whose *The OH in Ohio*, starring Parker Posey and Paul Rudd, filmed in Cleveland in 2006. "We needed to shoot in Jacobs Field, plus we had driving shots and all sorts of things that aren't in your typical low-budget indie. [The film office] really accommodated us. You couldn't get a ball stadium the way we did—Chris Carmody made that happen for us. We would not have been able to get that on our own."

GREATER CLEVELAND FILM COMMISSION
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CLEVELAND, OH

A Moviemaker's Commune

SINCE THE TEAM BEHIND *Spider-Man 3* first used the Cleveland Convention Center as its production facility last spring, there has been a lot of buzz surrounding Cleveland and its film community. *The New York Times* quickly took notice and ran a feature on the area, focusing in particular on The Hyacinth Lofts, a one-of-a-kind moviemaker live/work space dedicated to encouraging creativity. Many of the lofts (52 apartments in total) feature editing suites and sound-proof booths for recording—all free and available 24 hours a day to Hyacinth residents, such as Kevin Kerwin, who sold his movie, *Filmic Achievement*, at the 2005 American Film Market.

Kerwin, who runs Authentic Films with his wife, went to film school at Columbia University and shot a feature while living in New York. Tired of "getting priced out of places," Kerwin chose to move to Cleveland after discovering Hyacinth Lofts and its tight-knit film community.

Kerwin also praises Chris Carmody, president of the Greater Cleveland Film Commission, for his hard work and support of local moviemakers. Carmody has been a driving force in getting many high-profile films to come and shoot in



Hampton Roads, VA

HAMPTON ROADS, VA

Not Quite NYC or LA... Yet

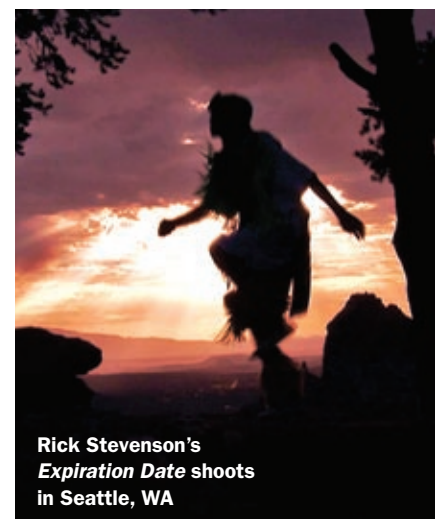
HAMPTON ROADS IS THE name for the southeastern region of Virginia that encompasses many cities and counties, among them Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Portsmouth, Hampton, Newport News and Williamsburg. In the past couple of years, Hampton Roads has become "a powerhouse of independent and low-budget media production" according to the Virginia Film Office's communica-

tions manager, Mary Nelson.

"There are lots of small-budget and independent films shot there, and the area also has quite a business in music videos, educational videos, documentaries and cable television programming," notes Nelson. "One of the secrets of the region is New Dominion Pictures. For more than a decade this company, which started in Virginia Beach and is now located in Suffolk, has been one of the top producers of cable television programming for The Discovery Channel, The Learning Channel and also for National Geographic. The reason that this company has had such an impact on the indie film scene is that, over the years, it has hired and trained hundreds of young crew and filmmakers and thousands of actors. It has been known for giving new talent a start, and for that reason has been responsible for bringing a large quantity of talent to the area and offering training opportunities to those who graduate from local training programs."

Roads, so we have a bit of everything here. We have a great mix of old and new. One of my favorite streets is Freemason Avenue [in Norfolk], which is still a cobblestone street, and I love the Naro Expanded Cinema, an old theater from the 1930s that shows first-run movies and works very closely with our film community, hosting several film festivals a year. We are not LA or NYC, so we really have some ingenuity working here. But we always deliver—and often with better results."

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Rick Stevenson's *Expiration Date* shoots in Seattle, WA

SEATTLE, WA

Where \$25 A Day Goes A Long Way

LONG BEFORE STARBUCKS and Microsoft put Seattle on the corporate map, the city was a haven for artists, musicians and moviemakers. Since 2003, the city has helped 62 independent films get made in the area, due largely to the Northwest Film Forum, a 12-year-old organization with nearly 1,000 members which aids local moviemakers in getting their movies made by co-producing projects through their "Start-to-Finish" program. This kind of support has brought many new moviemakers to the city and kept even more homegrown talents enthusiastic about shooting their films in Seattle.

"We chose to shoot *G.P.S.* in Seattle

HAMPTON CONVENTION & VISITOR BUREAU

BRUCE WORRALL