



# Cannes-did tales from the film festival!

*Julie Eagleton has been where the action was at the 51st Cannes Film Festival...*

I was the envy of all my friends when I told them that I had managed to gain an invitation and press pass to the 51st International Festival of Film in Cannes held in May. They were more concerned with my choice of wardrobe: 'take plenty of little black dresses for all of those parties that you will be invited to' came the sound advice.

The only thing that I could think about, however, was how I was going to cram in all of the screening, interviews and press conferences in such a short space of time. The festival runs for twelve days every year but I would be in Cannes for only six of them. Although I had visited the chic resort of Cannes twice before on holiday, and stayed once in neighbouring St. Raphaël, this would be my first time at the actual film festival. The challenge was on.

Waiting outside Nice airport under a cloudless blue sky for the 50 minute bus ride into the centre of Cannes, I spotted fellow journalists straight away. Some had opted for smart tailored suits whilst others went for the more casual look in jeans, trainers and baseball cap. Whatever the attire, the main thing in common was the incessant chattering on mobile phones, planning that next *super*, all important meeting or exclusive interview. Of course nothing is ever exclusive during the festival when over 2,000 journalists descend on the resort to record every single movement.

Finally arriving in town, I was pleased to find the *Hotel Villa de l'Olivier* which was situated a couple of blocks away from the main harbour. The family-owned

hotel managed by a lovely German couple, Simon and Joseph Schildknecht. When they realised that I had arrived for the festival they wished me luck and said that Cannes 'turns crazy' at this time of year. The quiet location proved to be my little oasis amidst the chaos of the festival.

After a quick shower and change it was off to the grand, imposing *Palais du Festival*, the epicentre of all events and the place where films in competition are premiered. Nothing had prepared me for the heaving masses that congregated around its hallowed red carpeted staircase. Tourists in sun hats eagerly awaiting a glimpse of their favourite star, journalists all wearing different coloured laminated badges showing their accreditation and order of importance (the festival is huge on hierarchy!). Tying my big yellow badge around my neck, I was ready for action. People, people everywhere, the building was a hive of activity. Each floor had been taken over by film production companies, distributors, huge video screens showing the day's press conferences, several cinemas showing films of the day and cavernous auditoriums to facilitate the press conferences, not forgetting truck loads of festival literature. There was even a stall selling popcorn making machines. Everything that is connected to the film business can be bought or sold here. As actor Bruce Willis commented to several journalists 'the festival isn't just about entertainment, it's about commerce.'

After my first exciting but exhausting day I took time out to watch the anchored white cruise ships and bob-

bing yachts as the light faded in the harbour. I met two fascinating, perfectly coiffeured elderly ladies and long time residents of Cannes. I asked if they viewed the festival as a disruption to Cannes' usual peaceful equilibrium? They both proclaimed that it was 'the most exciting event of the year' for them and they loved the fact that it brought 'famous names and glamour' to the resort. I then asked what was the best thing about living in Cannes. One of the ladies (from California) declared that the view from the harbour 'was unbeatable, even by Californian standards' and the 'special light'. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, many great artists

relocated to this region as they thought the light and natural outstanding beauty of the cobalt blue sea backed by the red Esteral mountains was conducive to their painting. Matisse, Renoir and Chagall all frequented the Riviera; the latter two having their own museums in nearby Nice.

Decidedly thirsty, I ventured on down the Croisette (main tree-lined boulevard running the length of Cannes) until I came to the grand *Belle Epoque* entrance of that legendary and most famous hotel in Cannes, the Carlton. Somewhat defacing the hotel frontage was a huge green banner proclaiming 'He's longer than the Carlton' - a reference to the







born in England to French parents but who divides his work as a journalist between London and Paris. I asked him why he thinks Cannes is the ideal place to hold a festival of this stature?

'The Riviera has always been the playground of the rich and famous from the 20s onwards. It has always had that glamorous association that has stuck throughout the years. Apart from the attractions of the climate, it also has amazing facilities, from cinemas that can hold up to 3,000 people, beautiful hotels and beaches, first class conference facilities and of course the French people have a passionate love and appreciation of the arts.' Having worked in both England and France, I asked Jean-Louis if during the festival, the French media have an advantage over the English? He broke into laughter and said light-heartedly 'On the contrary. So many British actors come to Cannes and they stay faithful to their reporters and photographers. Seriously, it doesn't come down to nationality, if you're a good journalist, you'll get the story.'

I took heed of these words as the next five days blurred into each other as I pounded the Croisette from dusk until dawn (good job I brought a pair of comfy shoes) from meeting to movie to photo call and back

again.

The movies I saw blurred into one and I was forced to write a diary every evening summing up the whirlwind events of the day. From Sharon Stone to Johnny Depp; I saw them all.

As for the little black dresses; well they did come in useful when for instance I was invited to a party hosted by *Moving Pictures* magazine. A beautiful chateau in the mountains where 40ft blow up tequila bottles were perched on the turrets, golden catherine wheels lit up the sky, champagne was on tap and the sweet scent of rosemary wafted through the air out over the black, silent Mediterranean. Parties don't come much better than this!

My first festival had been a resounding success, apart from the blisters of course. I had enjoyed every single exhilarating minute of it. But I had seen a different Cannes this time. I preferred the old Cannes I know so well. A place to unwind and relax. Take a stroll down the Croisette, free of movie posters, advertisements and the sound of mobile phones. A Cannes where you can order Socca accompanied by a nice glass of local rosé, watch a leisurely game of *boules*, appreciate the beautiful light and admire the stunning views across the harbour.

*Photo opposite: Sharon Stone at the Cannes Film Festival*

*Photographs by the author*

blockbuster movie *Godzilla's* star. This was the film that formed the climax of this year's festival.

Entering the aptly named *Bar des Célébrités*, I ordered a G & T (costing 80F - this is the Carlton after all!), when I suddenly

spotted movie star John Travolta, in a black suit, holding court in the corner. Probably doing a spot of PR for his forthcoming movie *Primary Colours*.

I was here to meet a French journalist, Jean-Louis Cavalie, who was

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