Emily Maskell

WES ANDERSON

ICONS OF CINEMA

Unofficial and Unauthorised

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First published in the UK in 2025 by Studio Press,
an imprint of Bonnier Books UK,
5th Floor, HYLO, 105 Bunhill Row,
London, EC1Y 8LZ

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

ISBN 978-1-83587-151-5

FSC DUMMY

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Printed and bound in China

The authorised representative in the EEA is Bonnier Books UK (Ireland) Limited.
Registered office address: Floor 3, Block 3, Miesian Plaza
50–58 Baggot Street Lower,
Dublin 2, D02 Y754, Ireland.
compliance@bonnierbooks.ie

www.bonnierbooks.co.uk

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EMILY MASKELL

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Introduction

Wesley Wales Anderson, known professionally as Wes Anderson, is one of the defining cinematic auteurs of our time. The prestigious corduroy-suit-wearing director has crafted a cinematic aesthetic so unique it has its own label: Andersonian filmmaking.

Approaching four decades of filmmaking, Anderson has made a name for himself as a writer, director and producer whose eccentric stories and distinctive visuals brought an essence of independent cinema to Hollywood. He remains one of the most original filmmaking voices today, with five Academy Awards, five BAFTAs and two Golden Globe Awards to prove it.

His films are adored by audiences, lauded by critics and cited as inspiration for his fellow filmmakers; the Andersonian influence on contemporary cinema is as wide-ranging as it is stylish. Anderson is also a filmmaker who loves not only the story but storytelling, which is abundantly clear from unravelling his filmography. Though his rise to greatness was not without challenge, Anderson has maintained a youthful creative spirit throughout his filmmaking and unfolding narratives, with wonder shining through even the most pessimistic chapters of adulthood. Navigating animation and live action, as well as tears and laughter, Anderson imbues his films with visual beauty and deeply nuanced thematics that offer something new to discover with every watch.

OPPOSITE: The corduroy-suit-wearing writer-director Wes Anderson.

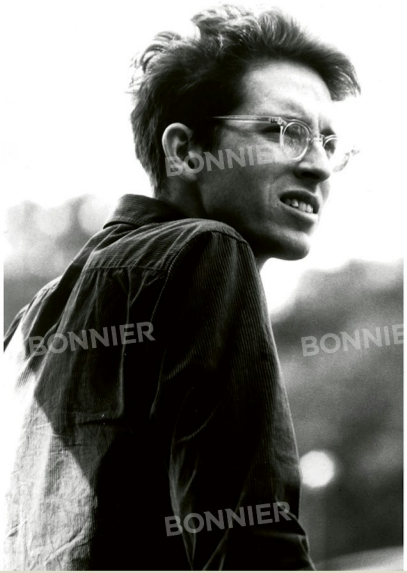
The Eccentric Filmmaker

Anderson was born on May 1st, 1969, to a mother who was a realtor and archaeologist and a father who worked in advertising. Raised in Houston, Texas, he is the second of three boys, sandwiched between older brother physician Mel and younger brother Eric, an artist whose paintings have featured in Anderson's films.

His love of cinema began with a childhood obsession with *Star Wars* and developed into making short films with his father's Super 8 film camera. Then, when Anderson was eight, his family life was shaken up by his parents' divorce. Anderson regards this as a crucial childhood event that profoundly impacted him. At school, a teacher spotted his potential and allowed Anderson to channel his energy into putting on plays for the class. This creative outlet set the stage for the close but subtle relationship between Anderson's life and artistic endeavours.

Anderson may not have gone to film school – he studied philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin, which explains his fascination with the human psyche – but he is a student of cinema. He is a self-educated cinephile who spent his youth watching films created by arthouse directors and Hollywood greats. Discovering the likes of François Truffaut, Satyajit Ray, Jean Renoir and Orson Welles would inform his filmmaking style. Anderson carried forward these cinematic lessons and has remarked that each of his films includes a cornucopia of cinematic references.

RIGHT: Anderson in 1997.



OPPOSITE: Anderson directing *The Royal Tenenbaums*.

ABOVE: Anderson directing Murray in *Rushmore*.

OPPOSITE TOP: Anderson shooting *The Royal Tenenbaums* with Owen Wilson and Paltrow.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Anderson directing Murray and Blanchett for *The Life Aquatic*.

Anderson's Cinematic Universe

The Anderson cinematic universe is an expansive array of tales from underground to out to sea, close to home to outer space, told via live-action and stop-motion. To date, Anderson has made 11 feature films and 10 shorts.

Anderson's feature debut was the crime comedy *Bottle Rocket* (1996), an adaptation of his short film of the same name. Anderson's sophomore feature followed, the now cult classic *Rushmore* (1998), which earned him his first major award nomination: a Golden Globe.

Entering the 2000s, Anderson's familial comedy-drama *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001) led to his first Academy Award nomination. *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004) took the director deep underwater, while *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007) took him to India on a sleeper train.

Then, the director swapped humans for puppets in his stop-motion animation *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (2009), based on the Roald Dahl novel of the same name.

Anderson's seventh film was *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012), a story about a boy scout's first experience of love. Then came *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014), Anderson's greatest commercial and critical success, renowned for its pastel aesthetic and symmetrical cinematography.

He revisited stop-motion with *Isle of Dogs* (2018), once again exploring the inner lives of anthropomorphised animals. *The French Dispatch* (2021) followed as a love letter to journalism. With *Asteroid City* (2023), Anderson introduces extraterrestrials to a Junior Stargazer and Space Cadet convention.

Most recently, Anderson's *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Three More* (2024), an adaptation of four of Dahl's short stories, was released on Netflix.

OPPOSITE: Anderson directing *Moonrise Kingdom*.

ABOVE TOP: Anderson directing *The Grand Budapest Hotel*.

ABOVE: Anderson directing *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar*.

What makes an Anderson film?

Anderson's filmic canon transcends easy categorisation, but the director's cinematic identity of surreal whimsy, off-the-wall humour and idiosyncratic thematics is distinctly Andersonian. Anderson is renowned for his directorial hallmarks, including symmetrical frames, sherbet colour composition, stylish camera movement and unrelenting attention to mise-en-scène detail. These quintessentially Andersonian nuances have been present from the outset of the homegrown auteur's career and continue to be essential to his storytelling.

As well as his distinct visuals, Anderson's films are united thematically. He has carved out a distinct tone of quirky comedy and poignant drama. His original filmmaking voice repeatedly tackles themes of brotherhood rivalry, dysfunctional families and troubled adolescents. All his films operate in a realm of heightened realism where storybook motifs (vignettes and stories within stories) are layered. These tales often play out with characters experiencing intense breakdowns and breakthroughs as they transform, yet remain unresolved. Very rarely are these stories tied up with a neat bow.

OPPOSITE: Anderson directing *Moonrise Kingdom*.

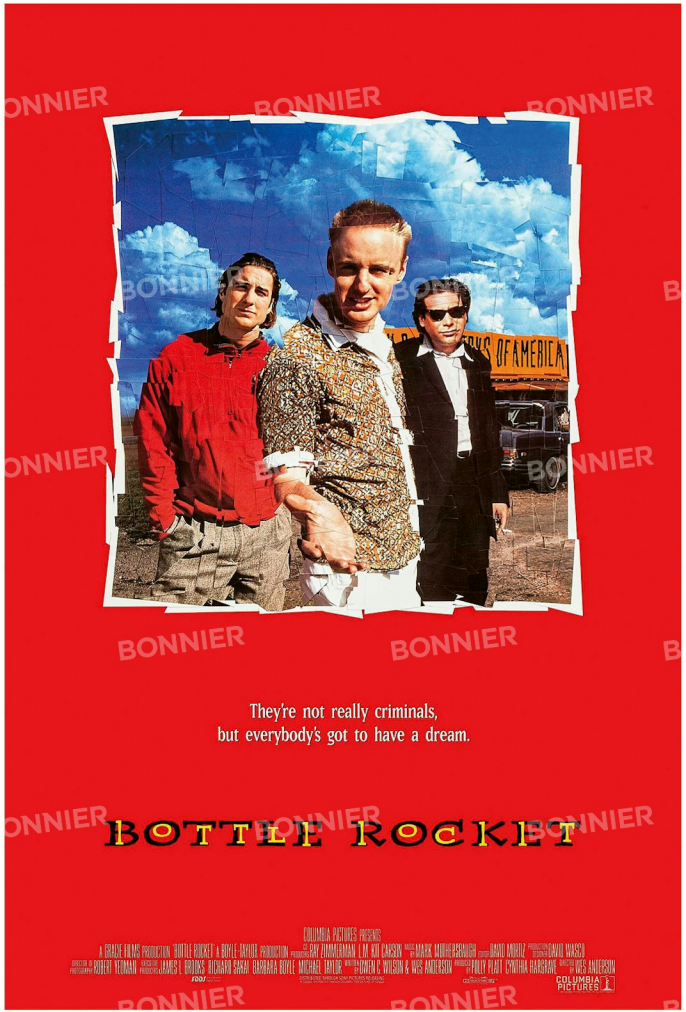
ABOVE: Anderson directing *Asteroid City*.

Like Baz Luhrmann and Nicole Kidman or Greta Gerwig and Saoirse Ronan, Anderson is a loyal director who repeatedly works with the same faces. His creative partnerships in front and behind the camera inform the director's visual and narrative style. Some of his most frequent acting collaborators include Bill Murray (the godfather of Anderson's daughter, Freja), Jason Schwartzman, Tilda Swinton, Adrien Brody, Anjelica Huston, Willem Dafoe, Jeff Goldblum, Edward Norton, and the Wilson brothers (Owen, Luke, and Andrew).

These close-knit collaborations continue behind the camera. Cinematographer Robert Yeoman has worked on all of Anderson's live-action feature films and four of his shorts. Anderson admired Yeoman's work on *Drugstore Cowboy* (1989) and wrote him a letter to join the *Bottle Rocket* team, after which he stayed. Similarly, Randall Poster has been the music supervisor across Anderson's films, with Mark Mothersbaugh composing the soundtrack for his first four films and Alexandre Desplat taking over from Anderson's sixth film. The director has also maintained a close team when it comes to writing – he frequently co-writes with Noah Baumbach, Roman Coppola, and Hugo Guinness.

OPPOSITE: Anderson in *The Life Aquatic*'s Submarine.

ABOVE: Anderson directing Murray for *The Life Aquatic*.



Bottle Rocket

Anderson exploded onto the film scene with his first foray on the big screen. *Bottle Rocket* marked an exciting new cinematic voice in its infancy, yet it contained hints of what would become Anderson's trademark style.

Co-written with actor Owen Wilson, Anderson's crime comedy captures a trio of bored Texan misfits – Anthony (Luke Wilson), Dignan (Owen Wilson) and Bob (Robert Musgrave) – setting out to commit a string of heists to become rich and escape their mundane lives.

This directorial debut, however, was a box-office flop. The buddy-comedy indie heist gained recognition years after its initial release, garnering a cult fandom with even legendary filmmaker Martin Scorsese declaring *Bottle Rocket* a top-ten film of the nineties. It's no coincidence that Scorsese identified with Anderson's debut; Anderson has shared that Scorsese's first commercial and critical breakthrough, *Mean Streets* (1973), was an integral influence on *Bottle Rocket*'s visuals, with both films aligning viewers with the troublesome young men at the centre of these crime dramas. In the same way that *Mean Streets* served as an outline for Scorsese's filmmaking style, Anderson's *Bottle Rocket* established the foundations on which Andersonian universes would be built.

OPPOSITE: *Bottle Rocket* poster.

Bottle Rocket Version 1

Anderson's feature debut is the second iteration of *Bottle Rocket*. The first version of the film was a 13-minute, 16mm black-and-white short. The project dates back to 1989 when Anderson met his college roommate, Owen Wilson, who would become a long-time creative partner. Alongside their studies at The University of Texas at Austin, Anderson was a cinema projectionist at Hogg Memorial Auditorium while Wilson worked at a Blockbuster in Dallas. This broad access to global cinema was a factor in their bonding and also enriched their cinematic ambitions.

ABOVE: Owen Wilson and Anderson.

OPPOSITE TOP: Bob (Musgrave), Dignan (Owen Wilson), Anthony (Luke Wilson).

Anderson shot *Bottle Rocket* in 1992 and the film is the product of a fresh-faced filmmaker itching to transform the ideas in his head into moving images. The short's lower stakes see two scrappy young friends (the acting film debuts of the Wilson brothers) embark on a series of petty burglaries with their dysfunctional friend Bob. Though there are earnest imperfections, the offbeat humour and insular characters are early hints at an auteur in the making.

Bottle Rocket premiered at the 1993 Sundance Film Festival and The Sundance Institute invited Anderson to its Screenwriters Lab to transform his short into a feature. Several notable producers, including Polly Platt, James L. Brooks, Barbara Boyle and L.M. Kit Carson, championed the short. In just 13 minutes, the seeds of Anderson's and Wilson's careers were planted.

From Texas to Hollywood

After growing up and studying in Texas, Anderson's feature debut allowed him to spread his wings. He moved to California with Wilson to write the screenplay over 18 months. Ironically, the pair would return to shoot the film in Dallas, Fort Worth and Hillsboro, Texas. Nevertheless, *Bottle Rocket* was their Hollywood calling card.

Their short had impressed producers, and Brooks helped the team garner a bigger budget of $5 million, allowing them to invest in 35mm colour film. Though Sundance unexpectedly rejected the project and it was a box-office failure, garnering only $500,000 at the domestic box office, *Bottle Rocket* impressed many at the time (and years after) with its understated comedic sensibility.

The Wilson brothers and Musgrave reprise their roles from the short as a trio of friends executing a series of heists that are a step up from the house robberies of the short. Self-elected leader Dignan proposes an elaborate 75-year plan of criminal activity that will lead them to riches beyond their wildest dreams. They team up with the elusive part-time criminal, Mr. Henry (James Caan). This character could be transplanted into various Anderson films with his eccentric look: an animal-teeth necklace paired with socks and sandals.

The fledgling director's tale of young men with big dreams is representative of Anderson and the Wilson brothers, whose ambition fuelled the making of this film. Simultaneously, early collaborations in Anderson's first films set up working relationships for life. Like the lifelong bond between skittish Dignan and pragmatic Anthony, Anderson and Wilson's creative partnership would span decades.

ABOVE TOP: Dignan (Owen Wilson) and Anthony (Luke Wilson) in a hotel room.

ABOVE: Dignan (Owen Wilson), Mr Henry (Caan) and Anthony (Luke Wilson).

Boys and Brothers

In *Bottle Rocket*, friends are family. The bonds of brotherhood are prevalent throughout Anderson's filmography, and they can be traced back to his debut, where the tested bond between three friends is an entry to exploring the pitfalls of young masculinity. These coming-of-age sentiments are present in the film's opening moments where Anthony 'escapes' from his voluntary stay at a psychiatric hospital, sweetly letting Dignan believe he's helping him out. This kickstarts a series of childish antics from Dignan and Anthony that Anderson chases with a handheld camera.

Throughout *Bottle Rocket*, Dignan, Anthony and Bob are at each other's throats, having arguments that even result in them wrestling one another to the dirt, yet their brotherly bond doesn't waver. They are brazen dreamers who shy away from adulthood, entertaining their criminal ambitions. Consider how Dignan occupies himself when bored: shooting in a field, celebrating after a theft and launching fireworks while hanging out of a car.

In contrast to Dignan, Anthony is the more sensitive one who learns to tap into his vulnerability. A romantic subplot between him and hotel maid Inez (Lumi Cavazos) further separates the brothers in arms. While Anthony is in the clouds, Inez is pragmatic, grounding him in the real world as the pair navigate their language barrier. Inez's presence is a spanner in Dignan's plotting; nevertheless, the crew marches towards the heist they've been building up to.

OPPOSITE: Dignan (Owen Wilson) hanging out of the car with fireworks.

RIGHT: Dignan (Owen Wilson) shooting.

RIGHT BOTTOM: Anthony (Luke Wilson) and Inez (Cavazos).

The crew gather to rob a safe in a cold storage plant for the big finale. Cinematographer Yeoman and production designer David Wasco utilise the long empty corridors and industrial setting to create amusing images of the gang – joined by Mr Henry's accomplices, Applejack (Jim Ponds) and Kumar (Kumar Pallana) – in whimsically garish yellow jumpsuits.

Dignan soon loses control and the plan falls apart: the safe can't be cracked, radios malfunction, a gun is accidentally fired and chaos ensues. The ragtag bunch scatters around the building with bitter arguments breaking out, ambition devolves into survival as they make individual bids to escape. *Bottle Rocket*'s young men experience a coming-of-age journey as they face the reality of adulthood, a mirror to the young creatives who made this film.

Bottle Rocket is the perfect name for Anderson's debut, referencing a cheaply made firework that is uncontrollable. A bottle rocket may not make a colourful explosion everyone admires, but it grabs attention – it's a spark that could become a fire.

ABOVE: Anderson directing the heist.

OPPOSITE: Anthony (Luke Wilson) and Dignan (Owen Wilson) mid-heist.

Rushmore

Anderson's sophomore film follows a precocious teen boy braving the adult world. Fifteen-year-old Max Fischer (Schwartzman, in his film debut) is a playwright scholarship student at the prestigious Rushmore Academy, but to distract himself from his depleting grades, he participates in practically every extracurricular activity.

An assembly from wealthy businessman Herman Blume (Murray) shatters Max's schooling routine, speaking directly to his experience as a middle-class student who feels lonely among his affluent classmates. The pair grow close in a mentor-mentee relationship, but a test of their loyalty comes when they fall for the same woman, teacher Rosemary Cross (Olivia Williams).

The film rests on the unusual character dynamics of Max and Herman, so casting was integral. After auditioning over 1,000 teenagers, Schwartzman was discovered at a Los Angeles party thanks to an introduction from his cousin, filmmaker Sofia Coppola. In his audition, Schwartzman impressed Anderson with his homemade school uniform. Meanwhile, the film saw Murray sidestep into independent cinema after his roles in *Ghostbusters* (1984) and *Groundhog Day* (1993) after his agent urged him to take the role, having loved *Bottle Rocket*. Following *Rushmore*, Murray and Schwartzman became recurring collaborators of Anderson's.

OPPOSITE: *Rushmore* poster.

OPPOSITE: Murray, Schwartzman and Anderson.

ABOVE: Herman (Murray) and Max (Schwartzman).

Back to School

Rushmore was Anderson's return to school in more ways than one. Written before production began on *Bottle Rocket*, the initial concept was simply a 15-year-old and a 50-year-old man becoming unexpected pals. While *Bottle Rocket* is a playful first venture into filmmaking, *Rushmore* sees Anderson begin to refine his framing of eccentric outsiders.

This development of cinematic tone comes with a patchwork of filmic references; *Rushmore* includes a nod to one of Anderson's favourite filmmakers, Mike Nichols. A scene where Dustin Hoffman's Benjamin sinks to the bottom of his family pool in *The Graduate* (1967) is referenced in Anderson's film when Herman jumps into the pool from the diving board, cigarette in mouth, after watching his wife flirting with her tennis coach. Cannonballing into the green pool, Herman lets himself sink deeper and bask in a brief moment of muffled underwater silence.

François Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* (1959) was another essential reference point for Anderson. Both coming-of-age films follow troublesome boys failing school. Max's lies about his father's occupation to fit in with Rushmore's upper-class students are reminiscent of Truffaut's film when Antoine (Jean-Pierre Léaud) lies about his mother's death to excuse his absence.

Alongside the sharpening of Anderson's cinematic eye, *Rushmore* marked a literal return to school for the director. Anderson cited *Rushmore* as a loosely autobiographical project but only realised this when scouting for a shooting location. He had a vivid image of the fictitious all-boys prep school Rushmore Academy that took him far and wide in search of a perfect location. His vision of Rushmore Academy sprouted from his memories of Houston's St. John's School, where he graduated in 1987. St. John's was selected as a shooting location, and some students and alumni were cast as extras in the film.

Rushmore is close to Anderson's heart with its schooling connection, but to some degree, the story is also a creative excavation of writer Owen Wilson's youth. Mirroring Max, Wilson was cast out of school and experienced a crush on an older woman as a teenager. Despite all these cultural and personal references, *Rushmore*'s geeky hero goes on an emotional journey soundtracked by British pop (including Faces, John Lennon and The Who), creating a wholly unique viewing experience.

OPPOSITE: Max (Schwartzman) on a go-kart.

ABOVE: Max (Schwartzman) with Rushmore students.

An Odd Triangle

Following *Bottle Rocket*'s focus on Anthony, Dignan and Bob, Anderson navigates the relationships of a trio of characters again in *Rushmore*. The film's heart is an odd triangle of infatuation between Max, Herman and Rosemary, the latter a widowed teacher in her first year at Rushmore who becomes the subject of Max's unrelenting obsession – resulting in a series of plans, including an aquarium on the school grounds, to impress her. The unconventional trio's relationships fluctuate from love to hate in frantic succession. Anderson foregrounds Max's connection with the adults while Herman and Rosemary's romantic affair evolves in the background.

ABOVE: Herman (Murray) and Max (Schwartzman).

Max's discovery of the adult romance is a heartbreaking betrayal that triggers his revenge plots – Max releases bees into Herman's hotel room, and Herman retaliates by destroying Max's bike, only for the latter to sabotage his car's braking system. The ridiculous fight between Herman and Max stalls with the reality that Rosemary is in the throes of grief with the recent loss of her husband. Loss and loneliness are quietly entangled in *Rushmore* as this odd trio of characters seek companionship. With Max, Anderson shows his fascination with young perspectives breaching the adult world and testing the waters.

ABOVE : Max (Schwartzman) in a hotel lift with bee hives.

Heaven and Hell

Rushmore's pièce de résistance is Max's elaborate set-piece school production, a Vietnam War-themed play titled *Heaven and Hell* that comes with the warning: "You'll find a pair of safety glasses and some earplugs underneath your seats." Though Max's play is absurd and awe-inspiring – with soldiers lowered from the rafters, puppeteered helicopters and a flamethrower – it's not what Anderson pays attention to. *Heaven and Hell* is the frame in which Max reconciles with Herman and Rosemary and meets a girl his age, the sweet Margaret (Sara Tanaka).

Amidst the play's dramatic flair, Max's artistic endeavour hits a touchingly melancholic beat. Anderson makes sure to centre the playwright as he holds up a peace sign and declares: "Maybe we'll meet again someday… when the fighting stops." The line has Herman misty-eyed as, beside him, Rosemary witnesses Max graduate from childishness. *Heaven and Hell* is an outpouring of bottled-up emotion for Max, whose expression through art reunites those he'd pushed away.

The sentiment of a creator speaking through their creation also applies to Anderson, who, like Max, staged plays like *The Battle of the Alamo* and *The Five Maseratis* in his youth and penned his own stories. *Rushmore* concludes in a mundane high school gym with *Heaven and Hell*'s after-party. It's a humble celebration, but as Herman, Rosemary and Margaret gather to sing his praises, Max's final curtain call is one of reconciliation and growth.

OPPOSITE: Rosemary (Williams) and Herman (Murray).

ABOVE: Max (Schwartzman), Margaret (Sara Tanaka), Herman (Murray) and Rosemary (Williams).

ABOVE: *The Royal Tenenbaums* poster.

The Royal Tenenbaums

The Tenenbaum family possesses a genetic predisposition for dysfunctionality. The gene lies dormant until the Tenenbaum children graduate into adulthood and face a period of upheaval, which is the basis of Anderson's third feature, *The Royal Tenenbaums*. The offbeat comedy, co-written by Anderson and Wilson, is an achingly emotional portrait of a strained family unit.

The family lives in the shadow of their former glory. Royal (Gene Hackman) and Etheline (Huston) are divorced, and their children are in a period of collective uncertainty. One winter, the family is unexpectedly reunited when the neglectful Royal comes crawling back with the declaration: "I'll be dead in 6 weeks." His one wish is to compensate for lost time with his ex-wife and children.

Anderson solidified his cinematic stylings of a warm-toned colour scheme and fastidious production design with *The Royal Tenenbaums*. The director has shared that the feature was conceptualised from his parents' divorce but took on a life of its own. He also drew from cinematic influences, including the dysfunctional family in Orson Welles's period melodrama *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) and Louis Malle's *The Fire Within* (1963), which chronicles a suicidal man visiting his friends one last time.

Family of Geniuses

The dynamics of the Tenenbaums' three adolescent children are central to Anderson's film. Business mogul Chas (Aram Aslanian-Persico, then Ben Stiller) spent his childhood managing real estate. Since his wife's death, he's on high alert and upon discovering his fire alarms are ineffective, he moves back home with his two sons (Grant Rosenmeyer and Jonah Meyerson). Margot (Irene Gorovaia, then Gwyneth Paltrow) was adopted at two and became an awarded playwright. Married to neurologist Raleigh St. Clair (Murray), Margot has become an extreme recluse who secretly smokes in the bathtub.

Tennis champion turned wannabe painter Richie (Arianna Turturro, then Luke Wilson) returns home after travelling the world on a cruise ship to confess he's in love with Margot. Alongside the trio is their neighbour and Richie's best friend, Eli Cash (James Fitzgerald, then Owen Wilson), effectively a fourth child. While the Tenenbaum trio are in a slump, Eli has had major success as a writer but is silently battling drug addiction.

Building this family began when Hackman was convinced to sign on to the film. His casting aided the involvement of the other stars. Bringing the Tenenbaum family to life started with Anderson's brother Eric sketching character concepts that inspired Karen Patch's costume design: Richie perpetually wears a tennis headband and sunglasses. Chas is always ready to run in his red Adidas tracksuit. Meanwhile, Anderson styled Margot on German singer Nico. Nico's song 'These Days' plays when Margot, draped in her iconic vintage fur coat and clutching her Birkin, reunites with her brother in one of the film's most iconic slow-motion moments.

LEFT: Chas (Stiller) and his sons (Rosenmeyer and Meyerson).

BELOW MIDDLE: Margot (Paltrow) and Raleigh (Murray).

RIGHT: Eli (Owen Wilson) and Richie (Luke Wilson).

Crying with Laughter

The Royal Tenenbaums shifts quickly between absurd humour and moving thoughtfulness – one minute, there is laughter and the next, there are tears. This emotional dichotomy is Anderson's playground as he explores the nuances of intergenerational trauma. Despite the warm colour palette and pleasing visuals, *The Royal Tenenbaums* is about the possibilities (and impossibilities) of reconciliation.

The Tenenbaums' negligent father is quick to re-establish his presence in the family home, busying Richie's room with medical equipment for his stomach cancer 'treatment'. After a screaming match in the kitchen, Etheline's new beau, dapper accountant Henry Sherman (Danny Glover), suspects Royal's foul play. He goes snooping through Royal's hospital records and medication to discover his doctor is fake and his tablets are just TicTacs. Royal makes one final bid before he's cast out, as Anderson's script reads: "'The last six days have been the best six days in my entire life.' A strange, sad look crosses Royal's face."

Anderson pens the Tenenbaum family with familiarity. So much so that Huston checked with Anderson to ensure she wasn't unknowingly playing a version of his mother. Anderson assured her that was not the case. *The Royal Tenenbaums* fundamentally rests on the inner family conflict, nearly always returning to Royal. He is one of Anderson's most memorable fathers. For instance, upon meeting his estranged grandsons, Royal shares condolences for their mother's death in a way that is distinctly his: "I'm sorry for your loss. Your mother was a terribly attractive woman."

OPPOSITE: The Royal Tenenbaums and their extended family.

BELOW: The Tenenbaums family around Royal's (Hackman) bed.

Another core relationship of *The Royal Tenenbaums* is the secret tryst of Richie and Margot, the siblings (albeit not by blood) who have fallen for each other. Richie accepts Margot is emotionally betraying her husband with their connection but is devastated at the discovery of Margot's 'relationship' with Eli. Richie goes to the bathroom and cuts his hair and beard with nail scissors. The sepia visuals dissolve into melancholic blues as he looks straight into the camera, positioned in the mirror, declaring, "I'm going to kill myself tomorrow," before he attempts suicide there and then. The line is a direct quote from *The Fire Within* but translated into English and with an altered context.

Richie survives and wakes in a hospital bed surrounded by his family. He escapes to confess his love to Margot. He finds her in his makeshift bedroom, a yellow tent in the living room, as Royal had kicked him out of his childhood room. Margot and Richie confess their mutual feelings while squeezed together in the tent. This simple, honest expression plays out in a child's tent, the antithesis of the Tenenbaums' wealthy world.

OPPOSITE: The Tenenbaum children and their father.

ABOVE: Margot (Paltrow) and Richie (Luke Wilson).

TOP: Etheline (Huston), Raleigh (Murray) and Margot (Paltrow).

BELOW: The Tenenbaum family home.

OPPOSITE: The family gathered in Richie's bedroom.

Making a House a Home

Set design is always crucial in Anderson's films, but the family home is practically a character in its own right in *The Royal Tenenbaums*. Anderson found the Tenenbaum house on Convent Avenue in Harlem, Manhattan, when the script was half-written; the building's '80s style seduced him with its castle-like turret, ornate wooden mantelpieces and stained-glass windows. The house owner planned to renovate the building but delayed work for the film.

Art director Carl Sprague and his team changed local street signs to create a local mythology of the Tenenbaum family separate from New York City's landmarks. Each room inside the Tenenbaum residence has its own identity based on the different personalities of the sibling trio, each like a little galaxy in the Andersonian universe.

At the top of the turret, Richie's bedroom is painted pastel blue with detailed storybook mural drawings by Eric Anderson, complete with galaxy curtains and a toy car collection. Production designer Wasco and set decorator Carolyn Cartwright constructed Richie's room as the most childish of the trio, a reflection of the man clinging to memories of his youth. Similarly capturing a specific time in one's life, Margot's bedroom on the third floor showcases her love for African safaris. The vivid red wallpaper printed with jumping zebras was hand-chosen by Anderson – he sourced the trademark design from Franco and Flora Scalamandré, who designed the wallpaper in 1945 for the New York Italian restaurant Gino's. The set design not only helped externalise the Tenenbaums' rich internal lives but also helped cover some of the less favourable characteristics of the house. For instance, the slanted wooden stairway is distracted by children's crayon art of spaceships and animals drawn by Eric and local schoolchildren.

ABOVE: *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* poster.

The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou

The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou, known as *The Life Aquatic*, is Anderson's fourth feature film, a deadpan comedy that takes viewers out to sea. Anderson chronicles the adventures of the intrepid documentarian and oceanographer Steve Zissou (Murray) as he hunts down the elusive Jaguar Shark that killed his friend and colleague Esteban. The vicious attack was the subject of Zissou's documentary *Adventure 12: The Jaguar Shark: Part One*. Zissou announces *Part Two* of the documentary will follow his nautical expedition to enact revenge for his fallen comrade. *The Life Aquatic* was Anderson's first film without Owen Wilson in the writing room. Instead, he was joined by Baumbach, king of the Mumblecore, in penning this patchwork of personal grief.

Following *The Royal Tenenbaums*, *The Life Aquatic* continued to cement Anderson's style and remains one of the director's most tonally unique films. However, it divided critics and failed to meet box-office expectations. Still, it was a passion project for Anderson, with the character Steve inspired by one of his childhood idols, French oceanographer Jacques Cousteau, who made marine life documentaries about his adventures at sea.

The Zissou Society

Murray reunites with Anderson for a role penned with him in mind. Steve is a jolly but bitter captain (part homage, part parody of Cousteau) who heads up a ragtag crew of loyal explorers (fondly nicknamed The Zissou Society) on an oceanic adventure. Fully immersed in this career highlight character, Murray became a certified diver after logging over 40 hours during filming. Joining Steve's regular ship hands, including loyal first mate 'German' engineer Klaus (Dafoe), is pregnant reporter Jane-Winslett Richardson (Cate Blanchett) documenting Steve's voyage and Kentucky pilot Edward 'Ned' Plimpton (Owen Wilson), who claims he's Steve's son.

The awkward configuration of this trio is another tangled portrayal of romance and fatherhood that Anderson navigates. A battle for Jane's affection breaks out between Steve and Ned. Bonding over a strained relationship with fatherhood, Jane and Ned turn on Steve, who is preoccupied with appearing perfect in each documentary shot. Yet when Jane calls him out for the potential fakeness of the film, he reacts strongly, pointing a gun at her as a reflex. Steve is a complicated man – Anderson's favourite type of person.

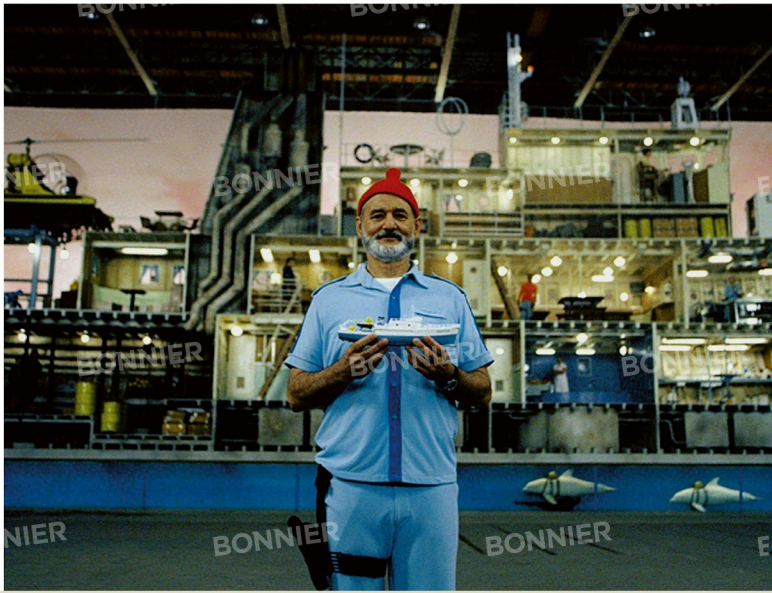
OPPOSITE: Steve (Murray), Ned (Wilson) and Jane (Blanchett).

ABOVE: Ned (Wilson) and Jane (Blanchett).

Anderson's aesthetic bleeds into the costume design. Milena Canonero styled The Zissou Society's uniform as seafoam blue work shirts, trousers, pyjamas and speedos adorned with the Team Zissou 'Z' patch. The look is topped off with a bright red hat, drawing inspiration from Cousteau's recognisable kit. *The Life Aquatic* started a long-term collaboration between Anderson and Canonero, with costume design a world-building extension of aquamarine cinematography.

Production designer Mark Friedberg's elaborate sets are also an essential component of *The Life Aquatic*, namely Zissou's research ship, *The Belafonte*. The ship is another reference to Cousteau; Cousteau's ship was the RV *Calypso*, *Calypso* being an album by Harry Belafonte, hence Zissou's boat's name: *The Belafonte*. Zissou's ship is a self-contained Andersonian universe with a library, laboratory, kitchen, sauna, helicopter, submarine and two albino dolphins as underwater lookouts. For a giant-scale dollhouse cutaway shot, Friedberg constructed a 150-foot ship that allows Steve to give a non-stop tour of the ship's geography. This interior cross-section diorama was a set. However, Anderson took his cast and crew out on the waves for boat exterior scenes, shooting around Rome, Naples, and the Italian Riviera on a retired Royal Navy minesweeper. As the film showcases, being at sea is no easy feat; Anderson's production went 20 days over schedule and $8 million over budget as lining up parallel boats on the choppy sea and filming in cold waters proved time-consuming.

OPPOSITE: The Zissou Society crew.



BELOW: Murray in front of *The Belafonte*.

War on the Water

As they set sail, Steve meets several characters on the water, including a band of pirates and a three-legged dog, alongside figures from Steve's past: his rival Alistair Hennessey (Goldblum), who is sleeping with his ex-wife Eleanor (Huston), the real brains behind Team Zissou.

Anderson has no qualms about exploring a protagonist as they become the villain of their own story; Steve is reminiscent of Royal. Steve leads his crew on a suicide mission through unprotected waters, which results in pirates taking the crew hostage at gunpoint. Cinematographer Yeoman's wide, sombre blue frames immerse the viewer in the crew's hopelessness and disappointment in Steve.

When Steve courageously chases the pirates from his boat (leaving a three-legged dog the crew adopt and name Cody), Anderson's classic sepia returns, a reclamation of Steve's self-aggrandising identity. But a new challenge emerges: a crew mutiny threatens the film. Steve is the star of his documentary and has become accustomed to reflecting a cultivated version of himself to the world. Yet, between stealing tracking equipment from successful oceanographer Hennessey (Steve hilariously insisting on also taking the coffee maker) and refusing to listen to his crew's basic demands, there's a comedic lightness to untangling the pitfalls of this complicated protagonist.

OPPOSITE: Eleanor (Huston) and Alistair (Goldblum).

BELOW: Team Zissou filming underwater.

The Jaguar Shark

The endangered Jaguar Shark in *The Life Aquatic* is deeply symbolic of grief. Steve loses a friend and a potential son to the ocean while hunting for the shark. However, the longer he searches, the less sure he is of the shark's existence. This intangible entity lurks below the surface and haunts his memories. A riptide of loss underscores all of Steve's dives.

Submerged underwater chasing this mystery creature, Anderson fleshes out the world of the deep ocean with colourful fauna and aquatic creatures, like the rhinestone bluefin, crayon ponyfish and sugar crabs. Visual effect animator Henry Selick brings these fictional underwater creatures to life, a taste of the stop-motion style Anderson would later employ in *Fantastic Mr. Fox* and *Isle of Dogs*.

Steve's ocean expedition concludes with a long-awaited descent in a claustrophobic yellow submarine, accompanied by his trusted colleagues and friends. On the ocean floor, he comes eye-to-eye with the Jaguar Shark. Here, Steve has an epiphany: this creature is not a monster but an emblem of death. His violent desire for revenge dissolves into a timely catharsis. Anderson locates Steve in a moment of unconventional stillness. "I wonder if it remembers me," Steve wonders aloud before everyone's hands rest on his shoulders in a silent gesture of comfort. Grief and existential dread silently float through *The Life Aquatic* and flow into the director's next film, *The Darjeeling Limited*.

BELOW LEFT: The Zissou team in a submarine.

BELOW: The crayon ponyfish.

The Darjeeling Limited

Anderson's fifth feature takes him to India on a train. A tale of harsh truths and healing, *The Darjeeling Limited* chronicles the estranged Whitman brothers Francis (Owen Wilson), Peter (Brody) and Jack (Schwartzman) reuniting a year after their father's death. The brothers set out on a train journey (and spiritual journey of self-discovery) across India with the hopes of reconciliation.

This highly aestheticised voyage, written by Anderson, Schwartzman and Coppola, began with a simple premise: three brothers go to India. Anderson and Schwartzman mined their personal lives for plot material. Anderson then brought Coppola in on the script before the trio travelled through India, incorporating their experiences and the places they travelled to with lived realism.

Additionally, it seems no coincidence that Anderson's experience of being in a brotherhood trio is implanted into *The Darjeeling Limited*'s script with personal resonance. As the middle child, you'd think Anderson would be aligned with Brody's Peter, but he has shared that Schwartzman's Jack is with whom he relates the most. Jack's experience of self-documentation, transforming what is happening around him into fictional stories, is particularly Andersonian.

OPPOSITE: *The Darjeeling Limited* poster.

A Visit to Hotel Chevalier

Anderson's *Hotel Chevalier* (2007) is a 13-minute prologue to *The Darjeeling Limited*, set two weeks before the three brothers travel to India. The short film distils the reunion between ex-lovers Jack and Rhett (Natalie Portman), and Anderson initially considered *Hotel Chevalier* a standalone movie. Then, he realised his male lead bore a distinct resemblance to Jack in *The Darjeeling Limited* script he was writing. After working together on *Rushmore*, Anderson and Schwartzman remained close, and before filming the short, the director was living in Schwartzman's Paris home. Portman and Schwartzman agreed to appear in the film for free, and Anderson self-financed the production. *Hotel Chevalier* was shot on-location in a luxurious room at the Parisian Hôtel Raphael, featuring props from Anderson's home.

OPPOSITE: Jack (Schwartzman) and Rhett (Portman) in *Hotel Chevalier*.

BELOW: Rhett (Portman) in *Hotel Chevalier*.

Jack pens short fictional stories remarkably similar to the brothers' lives throughout *The Darjeeling Limited*. His last story proves to be an exact retelling of his reunion with Rhett in *Hotel Chevalier* – Jack's feelings for Rhett span the short and the feature. *The Darjeeling Limited* also includes nods to Jack's time with Rhett with his Hotel Chevalier dressing gown and the warm yellow lighting of the hotel room glowing against his skin as he checks his messages for correspondence from Rhett.

Francis, Peter and Jack

In typical Andersonian fashion, a trio exploring their grief's emotional depths is at the heart of *The Darjeeling Limited*. Maintaining his intrigue in the lingering reverberations of grief, Anderson balances comedy and tragedy as the Whitman trio undergoes forced introspection while boarding the Darjeeling Limited sleeper train.

Schwartzman, Wilson and Brody are now staple actors in Anderson's universes – in a sense, this filmic bond has made them brothers. Francis, the eldest brother, arrives wrapped in bandages from a motorcycle 'accident'. He is the meticulous organiser of this soul-searching journey. Meanwhile, Peter leaves his heavily pregnant wife behind for this trip, and he's comforted by his father's possessions, such as his prescription sunglasses, car keys and razor. Finally, writer Jack is a recluse who has been living in Paris. He slinks away to bond with Rita (Amara Karan) over cigarettes and have sex in the train bathroom.

Indian filmmaker Satyajit Ray is undoubtedly the most significant influence on *The Darjeeling Limited*. Anderson pays homage to Ray with a portrait of the director hanging above the Whitman brothers on the train. Furthermore, Anderson's concluding shot, the brothers chasing after the Bengal Lander train, mirrors Ray's *Pather Panchali* (1955), where two young brothers run through a meadow to watch a passing train. Anderson also references Ray's *Charulata* (1964), using the film's soundtrack 'Charu's Theme' when Jack meets his love interest, stewardess Rita, and when he heartbreakingly departs.

ABOVE: Jack (Schwartzman), Francis (Wilson) and Peter (Brody) below Ray's portrait.

OPPOSITE: Jack (Schwartzman) and Rita (Karan).

BELOW: Jack (Schwartzman), Peter (Brody) and Francis (Wilson).

BOTTOM: Patricia (Huston) at her convent.

One pivotal scene of brotherly unity unfolds when, after being thrown off the train by the Chief Steward (Waris Ahluwalia) for fighting, the trio wade into dangerous waters to save three boys from a wild river. They rescue two boys, but one tragically perishes. Peter carries the deceased boy's body back to his blue-painted village, which has fallen silent in mourning. The brothers are embraced by the village and invited to pay their respects to a boy they don't know in a language they do not speak. Anderson replaces dialogue with a longshot of the brothers walking through the village scored to 'Strangers' by The Kinks, a song Dave Davies wrote about the loss of a school friend. As emotion spills out, it is impossible not to draw parallels between the boy's funeral and their father's wake.

Anderson's use of dialogue (or lack thereof) comes to a head when the brothers reunite with their mother, Patricia (Huston), at a convent in the foothills of the Himalayas. In lieu of a moment of closure and family unity, she leads the men, who turn to boys in her presence, in a circle of silence where they say what they need to without moving their lips. The following day, they wake to the news she has left, reiterating that this family may forever be fractured, but at least they have each other.

A Train through India

This colourful tale of three tourists travelling through India interrupted Anderson's mounting production budgets. The director predominantly shot in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, with a smaller crew and reduced budget of $17.5 million, compared to his previous films, *The Life Aquatic*'s $50 million and *The Royal Tenenbaums*'s $21 million.

Anderson utilises an organic approach in exterior scenes at marketplaces and temples but meticulously constructs the titular sleeper train sequences. The Darjeeling Limited is a character as essential as the three brothers; the train is a self-contained, moving capsule of India. For the shoot, Anderson acquired and renovated an Indian train, turning it into a moving set that ran on the country's national railway tracks. Set duplicates were made on opposite sides of the train, allowing for two-way filming. Also, Anderson's crew built lighting design into the train and installed ceiling dolly tracks to enable cameras to keep up with the action in narrow train corridors.

OPPOSITE:The Chief Steward (Ahluwalia) on the Darjeeling Limited train.

ABOVE: Anderson directing Brody, Schwartzman and Wilson.

Production designer Friedberg left behind Zissou's submarine to decorate ten customised train carriages for *The Darjeeling Limited*. From the blue and gold colour palette and elephant-stencilled teacups of the dining cart to the symmetrical tessellation print of the Whitmans' cabin, Friedberg's highly stylised production combined Rajasthan artisan-painted furnishings and Art Deco props. Art director Salim Shah and graphic designer Mark Pollard helped bring this vibrantly colourful world to life around the three brothers trying to blend in. The brothers' matching luggage, inherited from their father, also demonstrates Anderson carefully considers everything in his frame. The eleven pieces of luggage, Marc Jacobs for Louis Vuitton suitcases, feature palm trees and colourful wild animal drawings from Anderson's brother Eric; once again, the line between Anderson's personal and creative worlds blur.

OPPOSITE: The Chief Steward (Ahluwalia), Francis (Wilson), Peter (Brody) and Jack (Schwartzman).

ABOVE: Jack (Schwartzman), Peter (Brody) and Francis (Wilson) with their suitcases.

Fantastic Mr. Fox

Anderson makes his first feature foray into animation with *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, an adaptation of Dahl's 1970 children's novel of the same name. Moving effortlessly from live-action to animation, Anderson maintains a comprehensive focus on cinematic details as he builds the world of the anthropomorphic, eponymous Mr. Fox (George Clooney), a newspaper columnist who lives in a hole with his wife, landscape painter Felicity (Meryl Streep), and his son Ash (Schwartzman).

Ignoring his lawyer Clive Badger's (Murray) advice, Mr. Fox purchases a tree that overlooks the land of three cruel men: chicken farmer Walt Boggis (Robert Hurlstone), duck and goose farmer Nate Bunce (Guinness) and turkey and apple farmer Frank Bean (Michael Gambon). After Mr. Fox steals too much produce, the evil trio descend on the fox's home – they blow up his tree, dig after the burrowing animals and set up a stake-out to ambush the wild creatures.

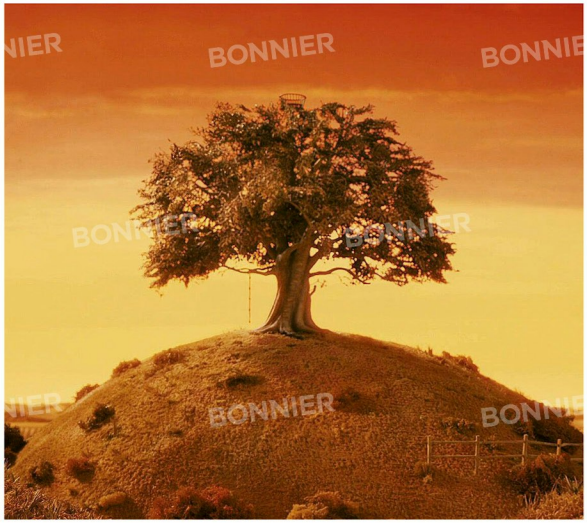
Anderson's first Dahl adaptation remains his most recognisable for its underdog (or underfox) story and iconic orange-toned autumnal aesthetic that blankets every scene. It's a new framework for Anderson that only furthered his auteur status.

OPPOSITE: *Fantastic Mr. Fox* poster.

Anderson and Dahl

Anderson's interest in Dahl dates back to his youth. The British author was one of his childhood heroes, and he remains enamoured with the writer's allegorically humorous storytelling. Co-writing with Baumbach, Anderson is faithful to the heart of Dahl's story with details like Great Missenden, the Buckinghamshire village where Dahl wrote many of his stories and is buried, inspiring the film's visuals.

Anderson extended Dahl's character backstories and world-building in the adaptation process. The original story makes up the film's second act, but *Fantastic Mr. Fox* features a new



beginning and ending that contextualises Mr. Fox's decision to steal from the three farmers. For instance, Anderson meets Mr. Fox in his younger years, stealing food from farms with Felicity. The film also establishes stronger threads of Mr. Fox's relationship with Felicity and Ash, both strained by his primal desire to hunt chickens. In the book, Mr. Fox has four children, but Anderson's film isolates Ash as the only child. However, Mrs. Fox's nephew Kristofferson (Eric Anderson), a talented silver fox who excels in every area Ash doesn't, complicates Mr. Fox and Ash's father-son relationship.

OPPOSITE: Mr. Fox's home, the tree on the hill.

ABOVE: Felicity (Streep) paints beside Mr. Fox (Clooney).

Talking Foxes

Shot at London's Three Mills Studio, animation director Mark Gustafson, production designer Nelson Lowry and director of photography Tristan Oliver headed up *Fantastic Mr. Fox*'s stop-motion animation process. The studio was home to 126 detailed sets for the puppets to interact with and exist within, alongside a puppet hospital for the maintenance crew to fix wear-and-tear repairs.

Puppet makers Mackinnon & Saunders created the anthropomorphic puppets. They have hard skeletons consisting of ball-and-socket joints, allowing for exact movements. Artists mould plasticine clay to the armatures, which acts as a base for the fleshy or furry top layer; the latter consists of artificial fur and goat's hair dyed for each character. The creatures' costumes resemble human looks, most memorably Mr. Fox's brown corduroy suit that mirrors Anderson's classic look.

Puppeteers created 535 puppets for filming, which included each character having multiple puppets of different sizes. For example, the Mr. Fox puppet was made in 17 styles, each with six sizes. These different scale puppets were often used in the same shot: a full scale for close-ups, a half-scale for wider shots and a micro-scale for extreme wides. Elsewhere, to visualise frantic digging, a six-armed Mr. Fox puppet was used to create his windmilling arms. Other tricks included using plastic and soap to make fire, cotton to make smoke and clingfilm to make water.

LEFT: Fox puppet being painted.

OPPOSITE: Anderson with Mr. Fox puppet.

Anderson insisted on shooting the stop-motion puppetry with a tactile approach. He deliberately made the medium's unvarnished nuances visible, like the animator's fingerprints from repositioning characters. Furthermore, Anderson's choice to shoot 12 frames per second instead of the more fluid 24 frames per second reminds viewers that they're observing a constructed medium distinguishable from reality.

However, Anderson conducted voice actor recordings to achieve audible realism. Anderson held numerous recordings at a Connecticut farm where actors performed scenes with their voice *and* body; when a character is running, the actor is running; when a character is speaking in the kitchen, the actors perform in a kitchen; when the characters messily scoff food, the actors scoff morsels with feverish hunger. Anderson also filmed the actors' bodies as reference points for the puppet animators. Sometimes, the director even recorded his physical interpretations for the puppeteers to emulate. This push for realism is also true of the three farmers blowing up Mr. Fox's tree home. Anderson's team evacuated for the detonation of a WWII bomb discovered near Three Mills Studio, but not before they set up an audio recording of the explosion to be a sound effect for the destruction of Mr. Fox's home.

OPPOSITE: Murray on the stop motion set.

LEFT: Streep and Anderson holding the fox puppets.

“I don’t want to live in a hole anymore”

An allegory of class struggle is embedded in Dahl’s original story and kept alive in Anderson’s translation for the screen. From the beginning, Mr. Fox aspires to rise above his station, from a hole to a tree, and be known as Vulpes Vulpes, the Latin name for a red fox. He announces his plan at the breakfast table to his beloved wife: “I don’t want to live in a hole anymore. It makes me feel poor.” Anderson’s script continues: “Mrs. Fox stops buttering the toast. She looks to Fox and says softly: We *are* poor – but we’re happy.”

This moment ignites Mr. Fox’s determination to revisit his criminal past, stealing from the rich to give to the poor. But the farmers retaliate by destroying their natural habitat, inflicting punishment on every woodland animal, killing and displacing them. The rich farmers, representing society’s most wealthy, look down on the lower class, the foxes, badgers and rabbits forced underground and into the sewers. Anderson adopts animal eye-level framing for Mr. Fox and his criminal companion opossum Kylie’s (Wally Wolodarsky) thieving escapades. This camera angle makes it clear whose side you should be on, making the kitchen appear like a vast hall and the cider cellar like a palace of golden treasure.

OPPOSITE: Felicity (Streep) gives Mr. Fox (Clooney) breakfast.

ABOVE: Boggis (Hurlstone), Bunce (Guinness) and Bean (Gambon).

LEFT: Kristofferson (Eric Anderson) and Ash (Schwartzman) emerge from the sewers.

BELOW: Mr. Fox (Clooney) leads the wild animals to revenge.

Additionally, Mr. Fox's tail becomes an important emblem in his existential fight for self-respect. So, when it's shot off and worn as a tie around Bean's neck, it's the ultimate disrespect. Mr. Fox's tail symbolises foxhood and a trophy Ash is desperate to reclaim to impress his father. Ash was once embarrassed by his small stature, but his mission to rescue Kristofferson was only successful because he was small enough to slip through the bars. In a final show of his newly discovered athleticism, Ash dodges gunfire to return the now-ragged tail to Mr. Fox. Like the young underdogs before him, such as *Rushmore*'s Max and *The Life Aquatic*'s

Ned, Ash's revelation of self-acceptance is grand. This breakthrough arrives alongside Mr. Fox's ultimate realisation that his pride has put his family in grave danger. Both father and son reach a point of reconciliation, seeing their flaws but choosing to love despite them.

While this rescue mission is taking place, the rest of the animals are waging war on the three farmers, fighting back to reclaim the ability to live in peace. Mr. Fox's charming leadership has championed the unrest as he plotted a distraction, which meant he could help Ash save Kristofferson and, subsequently, his tail. Desplat's tinkering soundtrack 'Mr. Fox in the Fields' begins again, marking a new adventure for this skulk family and their wild animal friends thanks to one ambitious Vulpes Vulpes. After all, he's not just any fox; he's Fantastic Mr. Fox.

ABOVE: Mr. Fox (Clooney), Kylie (Wolodarsky) and Ash (Schwartzman).

Moonrise Kingdom

Anderson turns his attention to the perspective of children for the coming-of-age comedy *Moonrise Kingdom*, a tender love story between two 12-year-olds set in 1965. The filmmaker's seventh feature follows 'emotionally disturbed' orphan Sam (Jared Gilman), retiring from his Khaki Scout camp, and Suzy (Kara Hayward), who is growing increasingly frustrated with her family, running away together. The lonely misfits explore the fictional island of New Penzance and make a home for themselves in an isolated cove.

Their vanishing triggers an island-wide hunt from the island's policeman, Captain Sharp (Bruce Willis), Sam's fellow Scouts, led by Scout Master Ward (Norton), Suzy's lawyer parents (Murray and Frances McDormand) and a social services worker (Swinton) who threatens to take Sam to a juvenile refuge for electroshock therapy treatment. The search ramps up as the Black Beacon storm approaches.

Moonrise Kingdom allowed Anderson to manifest a childhood fantasy for the screen. The film unravels with the power of a child's playful imagination, full of wondrous adventures and idealistic events. This gentle portrayal of pre-teen love sees Anderson bottle the magic of youth in a gorgeously simplistic and deeply felt manner.

OPPOSITE: *Moonrise Kingdom* poster.

Camp Ivanhoe

Anderson reunites with his *The Darjeeling Limited* co-writer Coppola, who helped turn his initial 15 pages into a feature script in just one month. The auteur has long been interested in the cinematic perspectives of children, but *Moonrise Kingdom* is the director's most overt exploration of young love. Anderson has cited George Roy Hill's *A Little Romance* (1979), Ken Loach's *Black Jack* (1979) and François Truffaut's *Small Change* (1976) as key inspirations for the juvenile romance. *Moonrise Kingdom*'s casting director, Douglas Aibel, conducted auditions over eight months to find the perfect Sam and Suzy; it was Gilman's sense of humour and Hayward's naturalism that stood them apart.

ABOVE: Suzy (Hayward) atop Summer's End.

Like *Rushmore*, *Moonrise Kingdom* is a tapestry of Anderson's school memories. For instance, the young lovers meet when Sam sneaks backstage during a church performance of Benjamin Britten's 1958 opera *Noye's Fludde*. Anderson's school also staged a production of the dramatised Noah's Ark story in which Anderson starred as an otter. His mother dug through school archives for photographs of Anderson's *Noye's Fludde* show, which the director used as costume reference points. Aspects of both these protagonists also echo Anderson. Sam embodies Anderson's attention to detail, while bookworm Suzy embodies the filmmaker's referential interest in literature. Additionally, Suzy's discovery of a 'Coping With the Very Troubled Child' pamphlet in her family home is a nod to a real moment in Anderson's childhood.

BELOW: Khaki Scout boys with Scout Master Ward (Norton).

Central to the film is Camp Ivanhoe, the Scout camp from which Sam escapes. Art director Gerald Sullivan garnered inspiration from Camp Yawgoog, an authentic Rhode Island Scout camp, for the site populated with military-esque camping gear. Costume designer Kasia Walicka-Maimone was inspired by sixties Boy Scout uniforms for Sam's costume, including a coonskin cap (with a raccoon tail), his maps of the fictional island and watercolour paintings.

Meanwhile, Suzy is neatly put together with her pristine suitcases, unblemished knee-high white socks and Sunday school shoes. She also carries her pet cat (Hayward adopted the feline post-production) in a wicker travel basket. Even when shown at a glimpse, each prop is part of *Moonrise Kingdom*'s wider world-building. Take Suzy's binoculars: she catches her mother's affair with Captain Sharp through them. Also, Sam's search for the missing binoculars is why the youngsters get caught up in the Black Beacon storm. This seemingly insignificant prop becomes key to production design and Anderson's wider plot. It's not the only item that holds transcendent meaning in *Moonrise Kingdom*.

ABOVE: Sam's (Gilman) camping equipment.

ABOVE: Suzy's (Hayward) beach equipment.

The Stories in Suzy's Books

The meta layers of a story within the story are a motif repeatedly implemented throughout Anderson's filmography, especially in the *Moonrise Kingdom: Animated Book Short*. The four-minute companion film begins with the narrator – New Penzance's omnipresent librarian (Balaban) – introducing each book before Suzy reads from them alongside animated visuals. The six bespoke book props – fictitious YA books Suzy stole from the library – appear as the only contents of the suitcase Suzy has been lugging through the wilderness.

LEFT: *Moonrise Kingdom*'s narrator (Balaban).

OPPOSITE: Suzy (Hayward) reading *Shelly and the Secret Universe*.

A different artist designed each unique book cover while Anderson penned short passages. Producer Jeremy Dawson paired each cover artist with an animator, and the couplings were based on matching styles to bring the drawings and paintings to life. "We're going to begin with the story of a young gymnast and her powerful amulet," the narrator explains, holding up *Shelly and the Secret Universe* by Nan Chapin. He continues through Suzy's mini library; *The Francine Odysseys* by Gertrude Price, featuring "a strong-willed girl and a troubled lion"; *The Girl from Jupiter* by Isaac Clarke "takes place on a foreign planet," which seems to have a map of Arrakis from *Dune* on the back cover; *Disappearance of the 6th Grade* by Burris & Burris; *The Light of Seven Matchsticks* by Virginia Tipton; and *The Return of Auntie Lorraine* by Miriam Weaver.

Young Love

At the heart of *Moonrise Kingdom* is a blooming romance. A year after their first meeting at the *Noye's Fludde* show and countless handwritten love letters back and forth, Sam and Suzy reunite in a wide-open field at opposite ends of Yeoman's expansive frame. Anderson's handheld camera joins their trek on foot until they reach an island cove, their own little universe. Here, the pair open their hearts with blunt sincerity while sitting on a small cliff with daisies in their hair as the sun sets.

Anderson's script articulates the moment: "Suzy: 'I always wished I was an orphan. Most of my favourite characters are. I think your lives are more special.' Sam frowns. Tears suddenly well up in his eyes. He shakes his head. Sam: 'I love you, but you don't know what you're talking about.' Long pause. Suzy says genuinely: 'I love you, too.'" The small scene is a microcosm of how Anderson tackles existential thoughts. The teenagers communicate their

ABOVE: Suzy (Hayward) and Sam (Gilman) reunite.

LEFT: Sam (Gilman) and Suzy (Hayward) hiking.

conflicting desires without curtailing conversation – they speak with an Andersonian bluntness. The writer-director cultivates the same intensity and seriousness for the 12-year-olds' love as he does for adults.

up with them. A biblical-esque downpour brings the story full circle, referencing Noah's Ark flood from the *Noye's Fludde* production as all the characters shelter in the church. However, unlike Shakespeare's lovers, Sam and Suzy are granted a chance to escape tragedy.

After this conversation, editor Andrew Weisblum cuts to the pair awkwardly dancing on the beach in a state of undress. Their youthful exuberance is evident as they play grown-up, their intimacy unpracticed and hesitant as they lay together in a children's yellow tent reminiscent of Richie's in *The Royal Tenenbaums*. Paltrow's Margot, who shared a similarly tender moment in the tent with Richie, inspired the cryptic nuances of Hayward's performance as Suzy.

Their relationship's playful yet dramatic elements reach Romeo and Juliet-level drama when Sam and Suzy get married in a makeshift ceremony before the storm catches

TOP: *Noye's Fludde* theatre performance.

OPPOSITE: The Scouts amidst the flood.

The Grand Budapest Hotel

For many, *The Grand Budapest Hotel* is Anderson's magnum opus. It's not unsubstantiated: Anderson received his first Academy Award nominations for Best Director and Best Picture, the film remains the director's highest-grossing feature to date and continues to top the rankings of Anderson's filmography. The film is a stacked display of Andersonian style; *The Grand Budapest Hotel* is Anderson's pinnacle of symmetry, shot on glorious 35mm, with an opulent pastel pink aesthetic and a 17-actor ensemble featuring many of his longtime collaborators.

The Russian doll story centres on famed concierge Monsieur Gustave H. (Ralph Fiennes), who presides over the Grand Budapest Hotel, a 20th-century mountainside resort in the fictional, candy-coloured Eastern European Republic of Zubrowka. He's framed for the murder of wealthy countess Madame D. (Swinton) but inherits the priceless Renaissance painting *Boy with Apple*. Gustave must prove his innocence with the help of junior lobby boy, Gustave's young protégé and dear friend Zero (Tony Revolori), while Madame D's son Dmitri (Brody), an agent of a fascist party, seeks revenge. This tale of resistance plays out against a backdrop of political upheaval and a mounting fascist regime in Europe.

OPPOSITE: *The Grand Budapest Hotel* poster.

Anderson and Zweig

Deeply entrenched references and homages to storytellers are in the layered narrative of *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. Still, there is no greater influence than the life and work of Austrian writer Stefan Zweig. Anderson became enamoured with Zweig's mythologised portraits of early twentieth-century Europe, including his novella *Twenty-Four Hours in the Life of a Woman* (1927), his novel *Beware of Pity* (1939) and his autobiography *The World of Yesterday* (1942).

Zweig is the inspiration behind two of Anderson's characters. The omnipresent author (Jude Law) arrives at the Grand Budapest Hotel in 1968 and meets an older Zero (F. Murray Abraham) who shares his journey from bellboy to hotel owner. This approach of a man telling his story to the storyteller is structurally Zweig-ish. As well as the author, there's Gustave, a fictionalised representation of Zweig. Fiennes developed an entire backstory (he's from a poor English family and worked in hotels throughout Europe), but the concierge's similarity to Zweig is inescapable in the final act.

After an exhaustive dinner with the author, Zero has one final remark before he departs: "I think [Gustave's] world had vanished long before he ever entered it. But I will say, he certainly sustained the illusion with a marvellous grace." This notion of existing in a time and place that has ceased to exist is central to Zweig's *The World of Yesterday*. He wrote with a nostalgic attachment to a world that now only exists in the memory. This wistfulness is also true for Gustave, who longs for the grandeur and principle of a world that is vanishing before his eyes.

BELOW: Anderson and the author (Law) on set.

Republic of Zubrowka

After *Moonrise Kingdom* premiered at the 2012 Cannes Film Festival, Anderson embarked on a European tour of Vienna, Munich, Berlin, old towns in Italy, Budapest and Karlovy Vary to scout for locations and conduct research for *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. The trip culminated in the creation of Zubrowka, a pastiche of central Europe in the 20th-century interwar period. Within Zubrowka is the charming town of Nebelsbad, based on the Czech Republic spa city of Karlovy Vary, and nestled in the snow-capped mountains sits the picturesque, pastel-pink Grand Budapest Hotel.

The United States Library of Congress's photochrom print collection of alpine resorts and Zweig's descriptive texts became the basis of Zubrowka's dream-like architecture. The film found its home in the Görlitz Department Store, a 1912 Art Nouveau building that contained the sets for the Grand Budapest Hotel's interiors. The art department constructed the 1960s set (Soviet era orange and yellow interiors as if it is beginning to rust, anticipating demolition) inside the 1930s set (the luxurious interiors depicting the hotel at its opulent zenith with affluent purple and seductive red accents). Production designer Adam Stockhausen led his team in turning the atrium floors into lavish rose-coloured hotel spaces. Additionally, they created two bespoke nine-foot hotel models for wide exterior shots; one designed as the 1930s hotel and the other the 1960s version.

ABOVE: 1960s concierge.

LEFT: 1930s concierge.

OPPOSITE: The Grand Budapest Hotel.

Anderson's partiality to handmade and tactile props – currency (Klubeck), newspapers (*Trans-Alpine Yodel* and *The Continental Drift*, with articles penned by Anderson), police reports and passports – adds a lived-in richness to Zubrowkian history. But the film's defining prop is the centuries-old painting *Boy with Apple*. English artist Michael Taylor made the faux Renaissance-era portrait. Anderson had a vision of this masterpiece that possessed an air of whimsy, citing 14th and 15th-century Flemish and Dutch painters as reference points.

Creating iconography that blends with the surrounding world was also pivotal for the Zubrowkian patisserie

Mendl's. The decadent French desserts are a visual motif, particularly Mendl's 'Courtesan au Chocolat', a tower of cream-filled choux pastries. A local Görlitz baker helped prop master Robin Miller perfect the signature desserts. The treats, too beautiful to be cut open, smuggle hammers, chisels, and sawblades to Gustave in prison to equip his cunning escape. Encased in graphic designer Annie Atkins's elegant patisserie boxes, these baked goods are practically a supporting character.

OPPOSITE: Zero (Revolori) and Agatha (Ronan) surrounded by Mendl's patisserie boxes.

BELOW: Agatha (Ronan) in the bakery.

Zero's lover Agatha (Saoirse Ronan, in her native Irish accent) is the baker icing these elaborate pastries. For her skill and bravery in saving Gustave, he awards her a pendant from the Society of the Crossed Keys, a network of loyal concierges to which Gustave belongs. Gustave proudly wears two Crossed Keys broaches on his waistcoat lapels. To conceptualise Zubrowka's fashions, costume designer Canonero cut the concierge and lobby boy uniforms in line with 1930s style. The regal purple fabric intrigued Canonero as a unique look for luxury hotel uniforms and became a visual staple of the film.

As little is known about Gustave's past when he dons the military-esque hotel uniform, he is part of something greater

than himself. He takes pride in appearing immaculately and carrying out concierge duties with rigid formality and discipline. Then, when arrested, the ill-fitting striped prisoner costume is a stark contrast that visualises his fall from grace. The attention to costume continues as Dmitri's hitman, J.G. Jopling (Dafoe), sets out to kill Gustave and Zero and steal back the painting in a Prada leather trench coat. This sleek, villainous look externalises the cruelty of the character's persona.

OPPOSITE: Gustave (Fiennes).

BELOW: The Grand Budapest Hotel lift.

Frame within a Frame

Throughout *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, Anderson implements a trio of different aspect ratios (1:1.37, 1:2.40 and 1:1.85) corresponding to each narrative layer. These changing frames indicate an alteration in setting but also reflect the popular aspect ratio of their respective era.

Anderson's film is a complexly entangled narrative as it moves from an interview with the elderly author in 1985 (1:1.85) to the young author meeting Zero in 1968 (1:2.40, anamorphic widescreen) to the central tale unfolding in the 1930s (the dominant 1:1.37 frame). In preparation for filming, Anderson and cinematographer Yeoman watched a host of films from the thirties and forties, including *Grand Hotel* (1932), *The Good Fairy* (1935), *The Mortal Storm* (1940) and *The Shop Around the Corner* (1940), to get to grips with this changing framing.

OPPOSITE: Zero (Revolori) and Gustave (Fiennes) on the train.

ABOVE TOP: Gustave (Fiennes) attacked.

ABOVE MIDDLE: Zero (Revolori) attacked.

Though there are grand shots to allow the audience to marvel at *The Grand Budapest Hotel*'s impressive sets, the action is shot with tighter frames, implementing classic shot-reverse-shot framing. When the police question Zero's refugee documents on the train and Gustave tries to defend him, they're both thrown against the carriage walls. The fascists' violence is explicit, but so is Gustave and Zero's partnership. Anderson pushes close to see both characters turning to check on each other. Their loyalty is forever rooted in the foundations of the Grand Budapest Hotel.

Isle of Dogs

A 12-year-old boy crash-lands on a Japanese island in search of his lost dog. He awakens surrounded by a pack of canine misfits who, luckily, have just vetoed eating him. This is where Anderson's story of man's best friend begins as the pack accompanies this little pilot on his heroic journey of fierce loyalty for his canine companion.

The year is 2038, and canine flu has spread through Megasaki, Japan. Mayor Kenji Kobayashi (Kunichi Nomura) banishes all dogs to Trash Island to contain the pandemic despite his political opponent, Professor Watanabe (Akira Ito), declaring he's close to finalising an antidote. The first exiled dog is Spots (Liev Schreiber), a short-haired, Oceanic speckle-eared sport hound mix, the very dog the little pilot is searching for. It turns out Spots is a highly trained bodyguard, and his owner, the little pilot, is Atari Kobayashi (Koyu Rankin), the mayor's distant nephew. As Atari and a gang of island dogs search for Spots, a pack of robot dogs are on their tail to capture and return the boy to his uncle.

Isle of Dogs saw Anderson draw on his love for Japanese cinema. The film includes references to Studio Ghibli – Hayao Miyazaki's environmentalist perspective served as an inspiration – as well as Akira Kurosawa, particularly *Dodes'ka-den* (1970) with its garbage dump setting, whose films bonded Anderon and Murray during *Rushmore*.

OPPOSITE: *Isle of Dogs* poster.

Canine Companions

When filming *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, Anderson spotted a sign for London's Isle of Dogs peninsula, from which this tale got its repurposed name. To make this story – developed by Anderson, Coppola, Schwartzman and Nomura – head of puppets Andy Gent led a team of over 70 puppeteers (several of whom had worked on *Fantastic Mr. Fox*) to create 1,105 dog and human puppets, 2,000 background characters and 20,000 faces.

With so many puppet pups, including Atari's island dog pack – German Shepard Rex (Norton), German Wirehaired Pointer King (Bob Balaban), Siberian Husky Duke (Goldblum), Akita Boss (Murray) and their de facto leader crystal blue-eyed stray Chief (Bryan Cranston) – differentiation was essential. Puppeteers cut and groomed alpaca, mohair and merino wool fibres to imitate dog fur. This hair was hand-poked into the puppet's foam body, so it moved naturally with the puppet.

BELOW: Trash Island's dogs.

ABOVE: Chief (Cranston).

Woof Woof

"All barks have been rendered into English," a title card reads before Anderson launches into this canine-human quest. Japanese dialogue is rarely translated in *Isle of Dogs*, relying on puppetry to radiate unspoken emotion. This is a point of contention, with some critiquing the director for dehumanising the Japanese characters with this othering.

The most transformed character in *Isle of Dogs* is Chief. The black stray is antisocial, refuses to obey human commands and has a history of biting the hand that feeds him. But with Atari, Chief finds a human for whom he'll fetch a makeshift stick. In return, Atari cares for Chief, washing and grooming him to reveal his white coat and black markings. He looks exactly like Spots. Chief's eyes widen at his reflection before squinting in confusion and widening again in panic. Through lifelike eyes, Anderson's canines communicate anthropomorphic emotion, framed in tight close-ups and occasionally looking straight into the camera. This emotional affinity with dogs over humans, informed by dogs being translated while humans are not, is enhanced by their soulful gazes.

OPPOSITE: Boss (Murray) and the pack watch an explosion.

These dogs can well up and cry like humans (real dogs cannot produce tears in response to their feelings), adding another layer to the film's most heartfelt moments. A flashback sees the moment Spots becomes Atari's guard after the young boy loses his parents. The Mayor's henchman, Domo (Akira Takayama), brings Spots to Atari's hospital bedside and provides them both with an earpiece to communicate. As these communicative devices flicker into action, Atari and Spots well up, the former muttering into the microphone as the latter's eyes sparkle with flowing tears: "Master Atari, I can hear you. I can hear you."

A similar moment of heightened emotion comes when Atari and Chief finally locate Spots, who's become the leader of a misunderstood pack. Their reunion sours as Spots declares he's Chief's older brother and requests to be relieved of his duties to Atari. Briefly, the film falls back on Anderson's familiar messy brotherhood arguments. Chief is furious that his brother will abandon his master before he accepts that he will inherit the role. In a ceremonial moment, Spots' headset is passed to Chief, and he wells up at the honour of becoming Atari's guard, fulfilling his destiny from stray to man's best friend.

OPPOSITE TOP: Atari (Rankin) hugging Chief (Cranston).

LEFT: Atari (Rankin) kneeling before the dogs.

“Whatever happened to man’s best friend?”

Dogs in Anderson’s films have historically met a sad ending: three-legged Cody is left on an island in *The Life Aquatic*, Buckley the Beagle is hit by a car in *The Royal Tenenbaums*, Snoopy the Fox Terrier is shot with an arrow in *Moonrise Kingdom* and Spitz the Beagle in *Fantastic Mr. Fox* is poisoned with blueberries.

The fate of the canines in *Isle of Dogs* turns a corner in the prologue: *The Boy Samurai and the Headless Ancestor*. Set 1,000 years before the main plot, the cat-loving Kobayashi Dynasty declared war on dogs until a child warrior

killed the Kobayashi leader, ending the war. Cut back to the present day, and the Watanabe’s Science Party takes a stand against Kobayashi’s dog exile plan. Professor Watanabe asks: “Who are we? And who do we want to be?... Whatever happened to man’s best friend?” This existentialism speaks to the collective versus the individual, the pack against a lone wolf.

LEFT: Mayor Kobayashi’s (Nomura) Trash Island Decree.

ABOVE: Chief (Cranston), King (Balaban), Atari (Rankin), Boss (Murray), Rex (Norton) and Duke (Goldblum).

The political stage is revisited in a full-circle moment as the presumed-dead Atari returns to the mainland with his canine crew on the night of Kobayashi's anticipated re-election. He delivers a haiku, *Atari's Lantern*, to the crowd: "Whatever happened to man's best friend? Falling spring blossom." Anderson's camera then enters a dream-like state where the curtained background behind Atari gives way to a landscape of cherry blossom trees that lose their leaves, a burning temple, a mushroom cloud and rows of dog skeletons. The past and the present collide, and the symbolism of rebirth that has lingered in *Isle of Dogs* (a presumed dead Spots returning, Atari like a reincarnated Boy Samurai, and the historical lingerings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki) comes to the forefront. The emotional resonance of Atari's poem finally sways his uncle from the anti-dog conspiracies, underscored by a visual patchwork of Japanese culture and history.

ABOVE: Atari (Rankin) and the dogs build a boat.

LEFT: Atari (Rankin) and the dog pack on a cable cart.

The French Dispatch

The French Dispatch – or *The French Dispatch of the Liberty, Kansas Evening Sun* – marks Anderson's tenth feature film. This obvious ode to storytelling revolves around the French news bureau of the fictional *Liberty, Kansas Evening Sun*. When Kansas-born editor-in-chief Arthur Howitzer Jr. (Murray) dies of a heart attack, the newspaper's final issue is readied for print per his will. The anthology drama's structure (consisting of a brief travel-guide, three feature articles and an obituary) mirrors the layout of the newspaper's farewell issue. With this format, Anderson can move between journalistic styles, themes and voices like flicking through a newspaper.

Set in 1975, *The French Dispatch* transpires in the fictitious French town of Ennui-sur-Blasé. The name roughly translates to boredom-on-apathy, but the journalists bring this town to life by highlighting the extraordinary occurrences in the mundane and everyday routines. At the centre of this journalistic spider web, Arthur is a committed editor who refuses to limit or censor his writers. Anderson is aligned with this intention to celebrate the purity of journalism and protect a writer's endeavour to tell a story while honouring a specific lived reality.

OPPOSITE: *The French Dispatch* poster.

Liberty, Kansas Evening Sun

The opening shot of *The French Dispatch* is a whirring printing press, a reminder of the physical process involved in producing print stories. Anderson's celebration of journalism guides viewers through each of the magazine's cultural stories, beginning with a short travel-guide edition titled *The Cycling Reporter*. Herbsaint Sazerac (Owen Wilson) tours Ennui by bike, citing the town's preserved history. This sequence admires the hilltop southwestern town of Angoulême, where Anderson predominantly shot *The French Dispatch*, home to cobblestone streets and historic architecture.

The first article from the newspaper's 'Arts and Artists' section is *The Concrete Masterpiece* by J.K.L. Berensen (Swinton). Berensen leads a symposium charting the career of the incarcerated painter Moses Rosenthaler (Benicio del Toro) and his lover and muse, prison guard Simone (Léa Seydoux). Moses's fellow inmate, Julien Cadazio (Brody), took a liking to his work and turned him into an art world sensation. Moses, a self-described 'tortured artist', bares his soul through painting and creates an unintended legacy. Anderson's story about the value of art poses two questions: what is it to love an artist, and what is it to create art because of love?

OPPOSITE: Ennui's newsstand.

ABOVE: Moses (Del Toro) behind bars with Simone (Seydoux).

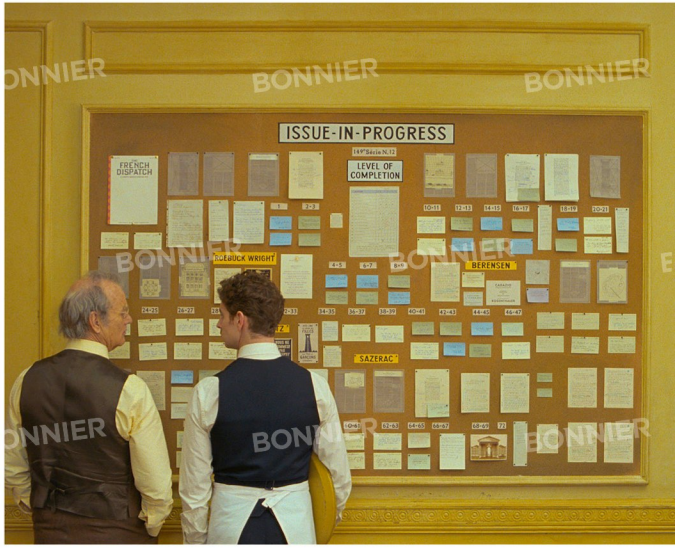
Finally, like an epilogue, Howitzer's obituary sits in the newspaper's 'Declines and Deaths' section. The writers gather in his office, Howitzer's body lying on his desk, all trying to help pen his obituary while obeying the 'no crying' sign that still hangs above his door.

LEFT: Juliette (Khoudri), Lucinda (McDormand) and Zeffirelli (Chalamet).

BELOW: The final issue of *The French Dispatch*.

The second article is from the 'Politics and Poetry' section: *Revisions to a Manifesto* by Lucinda Krementz (Frances McDormand). While reporting on student protests, Lucinda becomes enamoured with student revolutionary leader Zeffirelli (Timothée Chalamet). She claims to "maintain journalistic neutrality", yet writes an appendix to Zeffirelli's manifesto for which fellow revolutionary Juliette (Lyna Khoudri) chides him. Lucinda criticises the movement for its charming naivety. Anderson's films often invest in youthful ambition, but through this journalist, there's a harsher veil to the stories of growing up.

The third, from the 'Tastes and Smell' section, is *The Private Dining Room of the Police Commissioner* by Roebuck Wright (Jeffrey Wright). Roebuck attends the Police Commissaire's (Mathieu Amalric) dinner party, catered by the legendary police chef Nescaffier (Stephen Park). During the dinner, the Commissaire's son (Winsen Ait Hellal) is kidnapped but saved by Nescaffier's meal that poisons the boy's hostage keepers. This article marvels at the power of food to nourish and poison.



The Stories of Writers

The French Dispatch is an overt nod to Anderson's infatuation with storytellers, characters who frame and bookend his films. Anderson's passion for the American magazine *The New Yorker* inspired this love letter to journalists. Fiction and reality blur as Anderson spotlights the story behind the story, asking: Who is the person holding the pen?

Howitzer was modelled after *The New Yorker* founding editor Harold Ross, born in Kansas's neighbouring state, Colorado. Herbsaint was inspired by *The New Yorker* writer Joseph Mitchell, whose writing career centred around New York City's landscapes and characters.

ABOVE: The writers gather for Arthur Howitzer Jr.'s obituary.

The French Dispatch's articles also bear a resemblance to published features; *The Concrete Masterpiece* was based on *The Days of Duveen* by S.N. Behrman, the six-part *New Yorker* 1951 profile of Lord Duveen, one of the most influential art dealers of all time. *Revisions to a Manifesto* was directly inspired by *The Events in May: A Paris Notebook*; Mavis Gallant's two-part article chronicles the May 1968 student protests – however, Anderson's retelling of May 68 swings for entertainment rather than historical depth.

Food journalist Roebuck resembles a mashup of A.J. Liebling, *The New Yorker*'s resident connoisseur of French cuisine, and James Baldwin, a New York writer and activist who settled in Paris for a peaceful life. Furthermore, illustrator Javi Aznarez designed *The New Yorker*-style covers of *Liberty, Kansas Evening Sun* newspaper for the credits, showcasing the 'work' of the Ennui-based editorial team.

Reading and Watching

Anderson's film imitates the reading experience, soundtracked to pencil scratches and typewriter clacking. The director inserts moments of these stories being re-told (Berensen delivering a lecture, Lucinda at her typewriter and Roebuck reciting the story in a TV interview) to reinstate the ever-evolving nature of these narratives beyond the page. Anderson even spotlights the editing process as each story is punctuated by Arthur reviewing the articles, questioning Berensen's travelling expenses, quietly looking over Lucinda's first draft and instructing Roebuck to reinstate his deleted anecdote about how the chef marvelled over the novel taste of the poison.

The French Dispatch's stories are united aesthetically with black and white frames, though the medium's nuances differentiate them. Around 130 sets were created for filming, spread across Angoulême with a factory-turned-studio as a filming home base. French New Wave stylings inspired cinematographer Yeoman and production designer Stockhausen. The former has noted Jean Luc Godard's *Vivre Sa Vie* (1962) and *Diabolique* (1955) as key informants of dramatic lighting and aspect ratio framing, while the latter shared Orson Welles's *The Trial* (1962) and Albert Lamorisse's short film *The Red Balloon* (1956) inspired mise en scène.

OPPOSITE: Arthur (Murray) reading Roebuck's (Wright) article.

RIGHT: Chef Nescaffier (Park).

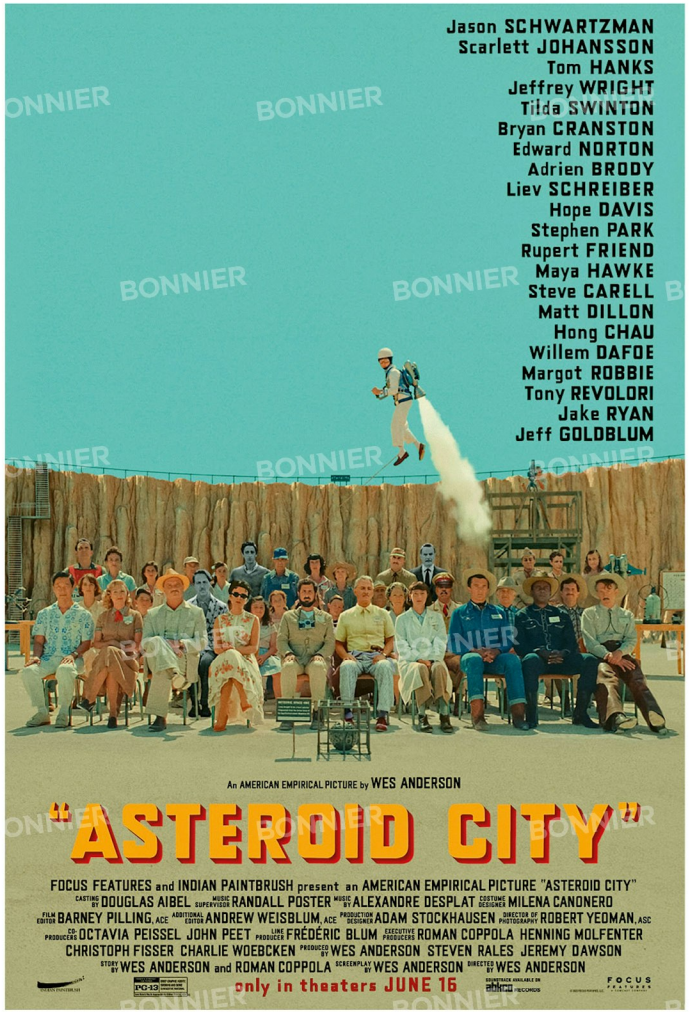
The Concrete Masterpiece is mostly monochrome but launches into colour, like a jumpscare, when Moses unveils his artwork. German artist Sandro Kopp is responsible for creating Moses's abstract paintings, the centrepiece being the ten huge prison wall frescoes. Illuminated by spotlights, the brightness of fiery yellows and oranges bordering abstract pinks is a visual breakthrough from monochrome to colour.

Revisions to a Manifesto has a visual flourish in its moodier colour palette with the insertion of a stage play. Lucinda's reporting highlights the subplot of Mitch Mitch's (Mohamed Belhadjine and Tom Hudson onstage) conscription to and escape from the army, which fuels the student protesters. Lucinda's play, set five years later, visualises this narrative thread. Anderson builds the world of Ennui's citizens, their revolution, and the historical importance of these unfolding events.

Finally, *The Private Dining Room of the Police Commissioner* pays homage to Angoulême's comic book culture by incorporating 2D comic panel chase scene animated by local Angoulême illustrators. Roebuck's TV interview in colour frames this story, but the image transforms into black and white as a younger Roebuck reveals his history with the police in Ennui. Roebuck was imprisoned for six days because of his sexuality. The only phone number he'd memorised is the newspaper editor's, and Arthur turns up to his cell to bail him out in exchange for a book review. This section on Roebuck's beginning at the newspaper is followed by the piece on Arthur's conclusion.

OPPOSITE: Zeffirelli (Chalamet) and Juliette (Khoudri).

ABOVE: Roebuck (Wright) narrates his personal history.



Asteroid City

In *Asteroid City*, several characters express that they would feel more at home outside the Earth's atmosphere. Anderson manifests this feeling of alienation literally when an extraterrestrial visits the fictional midwestern desert town of Asteroid City (population: 87), named after a meteor that famously crash-landed. Numerous straight-talking characters have gathered for the mid-1950s Junior Stargazer convention when this alien descends from a UFO and nabs the precious meteor. The otherworldly occurrence is a pivotal moment in *Asteroid City*, both the name of Anderson's 11th film and a three-act stage play by famed playwright Conrad Earp (Norton), the making of which is the subject of a 1950s TV documentary that frames the film.

The meta-narrative unfolds with wistful musings on grief and loneliness, while an alien visit shakes up the sleepy town. Anderson taps into a specific moment of heightened American political anxiety with the Cold War nuclear arms race and a pop culture paranoia about extraterrestrial beings. Alongside these references, Anderson's film contains an amalgamation of cinematic influences that range from '50s sci-fi B movies and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) to the Western canon of cowboy king John Ford. This patchwork creates a nostalgic but wholly original small-town story.

OPPOSITE: *Asteroid City* poster.

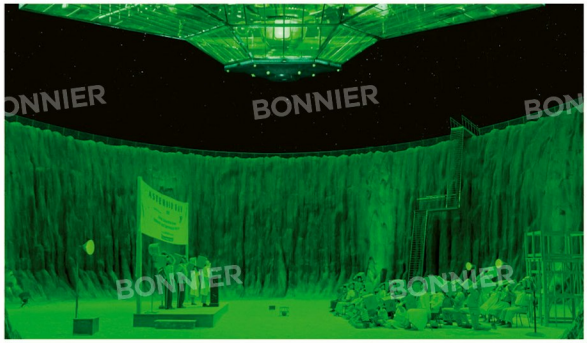
An Alien Invasion

Nearly every resident of Asteroid City has a passionate interest in the stars. Pipe-smoking war photographer Augie (Schwartzman) is accompanying his son Woodrow (Jake Ryan) as he is awarded at the Stargazer convention. Woodrow's infatuation for astronomy is shared by Dinah (Grace Edwards), a fellow stargazer with whom he begins a romance. Dinah's mother, Marilyn Monroe-like actor Midge (Scarlett Johansson), is the star that Augie is obsessed with. Then there's local observatory scientist Dr. Hickenlooper (Swinton), who oversees Asteroid City's astronomical research with wonder.

ABOVE: The Junior Stargazer convention crowd.

RIGHT: Asteroid Day celebration.

BELOW: The alien UFO arrives.



With three other teenage stargazer honorees and ten children on a school trip led by teacher June (Maya Hawke), a crowd gathers to celebrate Asteroid Day, the anniversary of the Arid Plains Meteorite crashing into Earth. They sit in the crater, but a glowing green UFO emerges in the sky and hovers above them. Then, a wide-eyed, long-limbed creature with awkward mannerisms hops out to steal the meteor.

Creating the alien and its spaceship led to a multi-department collaboration, including illustrator Victor Georgiev, designer Adam Stockhausen, props master Sandy Hamilton, model maker Andy Gent and animator Kim Keukelerie. Oddly, Goldblum is credited as the alien puppet; Anderson has explained that Keukelerie puppeted the extraterrestrial as if it embodied an eccentric performance by the quirky actor. This credit is later referenced with Goldblum in the alien gear as part of the TV re-telling of the events.

Real history and fantastical sci-fi meld in *Asteroid City*. For instance, the crowd looking at the stars through cardboard box helmets was an image inspired by a photograph of actual 1955 Stargazers Convention participants with makeshift helmets to witness a meteor shower. However, the three-foot stop-motion animation alien puppet then inserts an element of goofy whimsy, especially when the alien pauses to pose for Augie's camera.

ABOVE: Augie (Schwartzman), Woodrow (Ryan) and Stanley (Hanks) in front of Asteroid City's quarantine sign.

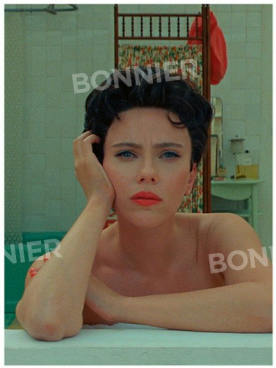
After the alien's visit, Asteroid City is placed under quarantine with a week-long mandatory lockdown. Anderson has shared that the COVID-19 pandemic inspired this element of the film. Each generation reacts differently to experiencing an alien visiting Earth; many adults obey the President's shutdown mandate and sudden army presence, while teenagers are excited by the possibilities and rebel against the demands to tell nobody about the alien. At the same time, the young children are inspired – one even composes a song about the alien.

ABOVE: The alien landing site is being examined.

Building a City

The creation of the municipal Asteroid City took place in Chinchón, Spain. Cinematographer Yeoman's Cinemascope frames capture the wide-open desert sets framed by mountains in the distance, scenery that towered over 25 metres high. The set was constructed as a real-life functioning town, allowing production to operate without resetting between shots.

Warmed by the overhead desert sun, with a saturated and sherbet-stylised colour palette, are the town's diner, gas station, vending machines (delivering cocktails and real estate), motel and observatory. They embody a heightened reality with their colourful, kitsch distinctiveness, a reminder that Asteroid City is ultimately a set in a play. The desert dirt also glows a reddish pink under sunlight, a deliberate choice based on Anderson's request for a Mars-like reddish look for the landscape.



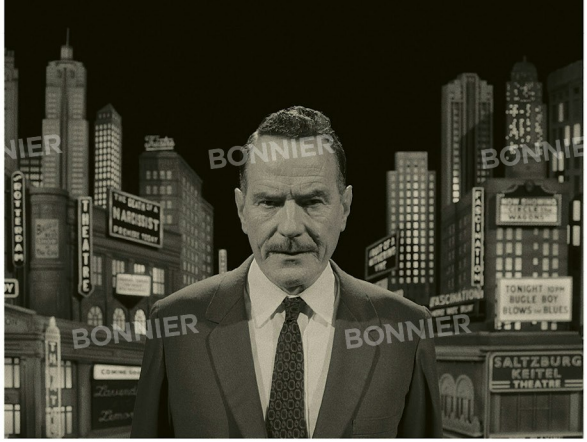
Asteroid City's pervasive focus on grief directly contrasts these bright visuals. At the heart of this film is a father and son in unspoken mourning. Augie arrives with his wife's ashes in a plastic container, calling his father-in-law, Stanley (Tom Hanks), to pick up his three daughters (real-life triplets Ella, Gracie and Willan Faris). Like the Andersonian fathers that came before him, Augie is a lax father who has neglected to tell his children about the death of their mother, who passed three weeks ago.

Augie clutches his feelings close to his chest, but his infatuation for Midge is apparent. Their motel cabins are opposite, and the pair spend their time chatting through the windows, which are literally windows into each other's lives. One day, Midge convinces Augie to help her rehearse her lines. "Use your grief," she instructs. Suddenly, the deepest layer of this play within a play within a play, the furthest from reality, feels the most true.

OPPOSITE LEFT: Midge (Johansson).

OPPOSITE RIGHT: Augie (Schwartzman).

ABOVE: Augie (Schwartzman) and Midge (Johansson) talking out their windows.

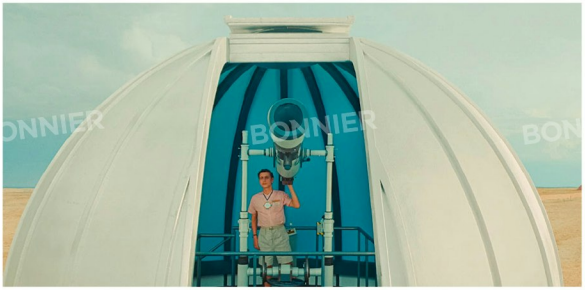


"Just keep telling the story"

Interspersed with the play's acts are cutaways to the 1950s retro TV host (Cranston) in black-and-white contextualising Conrad's writing – the scaffolding of this story. These moments reveal the play's conception, and Conrad garners inspiration from a local acting school led by Saltzburg Keitel (Dafoe).

Anderson's actors essentially play two roles – an actor in Conrad's *Asteroid City* and their *Asteroid City* character – yet the director has remarked that he views them as one person. However, the world of *Asteroid City* is uncanny, and the play's actors struggle to understand their characters' motivations. Jones Hall (Schwartzman), who plays Augie, finds play director Schubert Green (Brody) to confess: "I still don't understand the play." Schubert encourages him to continue despite not knowing everything; he replies: "Doesn't matter. Just keep telling the story."

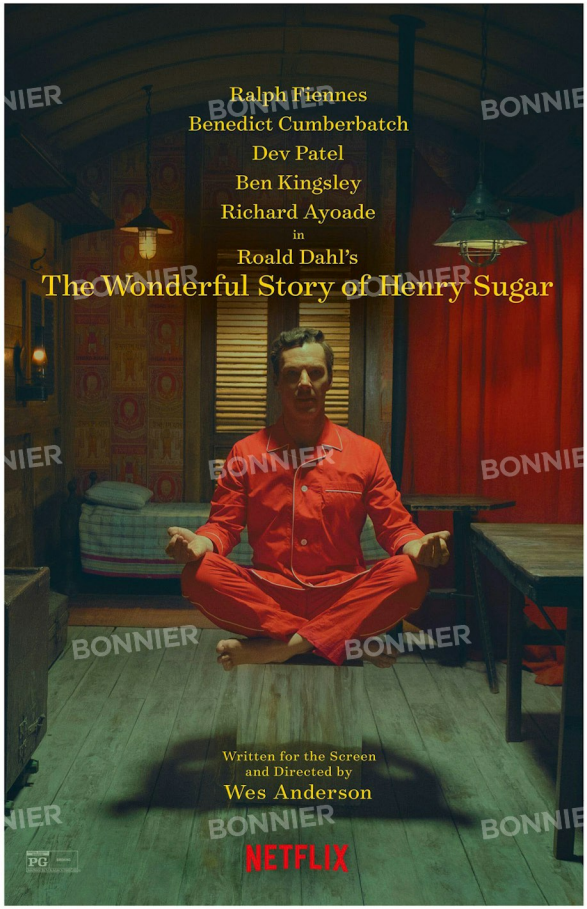
Jones walks out on the balcony to get some air. On an opposite balcony – framing reminiscent of Augie and Midge's parallel windows – is the actress almost cast as Augie's deceased wife (Margot Robbie). She recites lines from the script they had rehearsed, and it's as if they ignite something in him that transcends the fictional layers of himself as a character, actor and person. Jones is as confused about his character as Augie is about the alien. They're both searching for an answer, an ultimate truth they may never discover.



OPPOSITE TOP: TV host (Cranston) introduces the making of *Asteroid City*.

ABOVE: Woodrow (Ryan) stargazing.

RIGHT: Augie (Schwartzman) watching an atom bomb explosion.

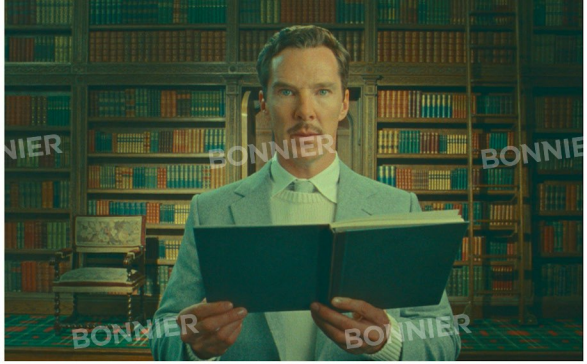


ABOVE: *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar* poster.

The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Three More

Anderson revisits his favourite childhood writer for the second time with *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Three More*. *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar* premiered at the 2023 Venice International Film Festival before a limited cinematic release in New York and California, then heading to Netflix. In the subsequent days, the following three shorts (*The Swan*, *The Rat Catcher* and *Poison*) debuted on the streaming platform. The four shorts were collectively re-released in a feature-length anthology movie a few months later.

While *Fantastic Mr. Fox* operated entirely in the world Dahl created, *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Three More* sees Ralph Fiennes play Dahl, perched in an armchair, often introducing and concluding the stories. Anderson handpicked these stories, which all focus on men and their ability to navigate empathy and violence. The shorts also have a theatrical element with a select but rotating cast playing several roles across the films and stagehands silently moving props and set pieces. These actors lift Dahl's prose from the page into Anderson's colourful universes, often articulating their movements in a meta-narration.



The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar

Dahl's 1977 short story *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar*, the fifth short in *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Six More*, is the basis of the first short. This Oscar-winning short, the longest of the collection at 39 minutes, was initially plotted as a standalone feature but became entangled with Anderson's anthology.

Dahl (Fiennes) introduces the film in his writing hut, breaking the fourth wall and staring into the camera. He sets the scene for the eponymous Henry Sugar (Benedict Cumberbatch), an affluent bachelor and fervent gambler who reads Doctor Z.Z. Chatterjee's (Dev Patel) journal on Imdad Khan's (Ben Kingsley) paroptic vision. Henry begins training to master this illusive meditation technique to cheat at blackjack and see through the cards.

It's as if Dahl wrote this story with Anderson in mind, appealing to the director with the story within a story within a story structure and a mystical connection to real-life happenings. Anderson imbues Dahl's narrative with meticulously designed moving sets of static backdrops, from a jungle clearing to a hospital ward. This meeting of magic and practicality is no more evident than the design trickery for Henry to levitate a few feet off the ground after mastering yoga. On-set artist Catherine Little's trompe-l'œil painting creates an optical illusion where an apple box seat for Cumberbatch blends into the background and becomes invisible, creating the levitation visual.

OPPOSITE: Henry (Cumberbatch) reading.

BELOW: Henry (Cumberbatch) meditating.

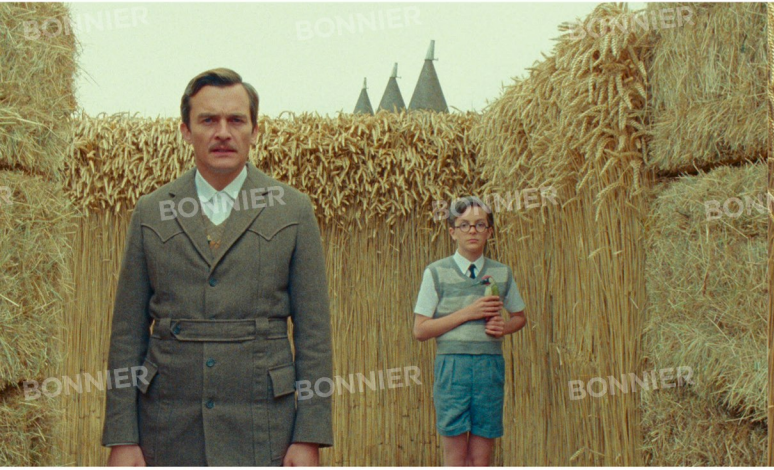
The Swan

While *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar* embeds viewers in a wondrous adventure, Anderson's next three shorts, all 17 minutes, take on a darker tone to explore the connection and conflict between humans and animals. Fundamentally, the message echoes *Fantastic Mr. Fox*: respect the natural world. *The Swan* (based on Dahl's fourth story in *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Six More*) is the tale of young bird spotter Peter (Asa Jennings), narrated by himself 27 years later (Rupert Friend). Bullies Ernie and Raymond (both voiced by Friend) corner Peter and make him wear the slaughtered wings of a swan and jump from a willow tree while being shot at.

From Anderson's co-writer to cinematographer, Coppola navigates the long, confined corridors of hedges with hidden doors amongst the foliage through which characters appear and disappear. The minimalist sets give way to nail-biting standoffs – Peter lying on train tracks and perching on the branches of a willow tree – tension exponentially mounting in the short runtime. Effectively, *The Swan* is as close to a horror film as Anderson has ever come. The charting of childhood trauma lingering two decades later continues Anderson's fascination with masculinity haunted by the past.

OPPOSITE: Narrator (Friend) and Peter (Jennings).

BELOW: Peter (Jennings) bird spotting.



The Rat Catcher

The third film, *The Rat Catcher*, is based on Dahl's *The Ratcatcher* from the 1953 *Someone Like You* short story collection. Anderson's short follows a newspaper editor (Richard Ayoade) guiding viewers through the interaction of mechanic Claud (Friend) and a pest exterminator known as the Rat Man (Fiennes), whose oversized incisors and hunched posture are curiously similar to a rodent.

The Rat Catcher asks for a suspension of belief as the Rat Man, Claud and the editor interact with varying non-existent rodents. The Rat Man pulls out an invisible rat and ferret before putting the creatures in his shirt and letting the latter kill the former. In these extended sequences, Anderson puts the viewers in the position of Dahl's readers, asking their imaginative minds to cultivate the absent imagery.

Like *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, anthropomorphism comes into play in *The Rat Catcher* with a taxidermy grey sewer rat puppet. This rat comes to life through animation, speaking with the Rat Man's voice. The Rat Man then fights with the rat, who Claud embodies. Here, the rat goes from puppet to animated creature to man, each jump adding further emotive resonance until the rat becomes equal to man.

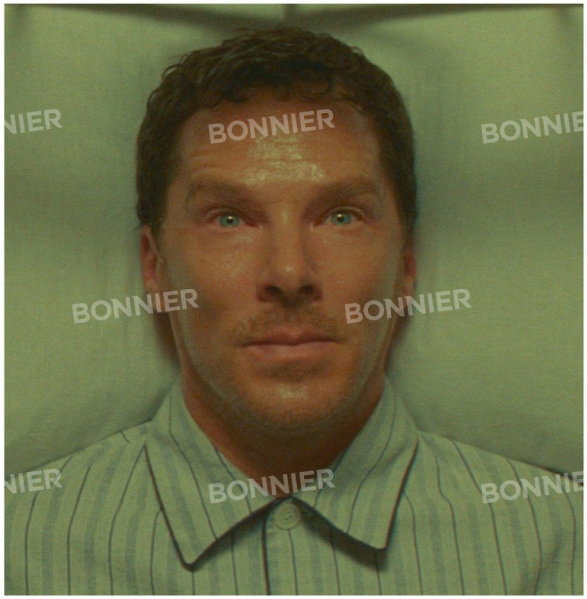
OPPOSITE: Editor (Ayoade) and Claud (Friend).

RIGHT: The sewer rat.

BELOW: Editor (Ayoade), Claud (Friend) and Rat Man (Fiennes).

Poison

The anthology concludes with *Poison*, based on Dahl's 1950 short, a tense thriller with staccato dialogue as Englishman Harry Pope (Cumberbatch) lays as still as a statue with a venomous snake on his stomach. Set in India, this story is narrated by Timber Woods (Patel), who watches Dr. Ganderbai (Kingsley) try to save Harry's life. But when the sheet is drawn back to reveal no snake, Harry's fear morphs into furious anger with a racist rant aimed at the doctor.



Like *The Swan*, *Poison* plays out with a mounting intensity underscored by violence. Set during the British Raj, this film is a period piece that comments on British Imperialism in India through the metaphor of a snake beneath the covers. Harry is terrified of something he perceives as dangerous, but the threat is nonexistent. The metaphor of racism is clear but only voiced in the film's final moments with Harry's outburst. Anderson elevates this story with various interesting camera flourishes – a split screen is implemented with Timber narrating on one half as his actions play out on the other as well as an overhead shot looking down at the panicking Harry – uniting Dahl's messaging with the director's intricate visuals.

OPPOSITE: Harry (Cumberbatch) panicked in bed.

ABOVE: Timber (Patel), Dr. Ganderbai (Kingsley) and Harry (Cumberbatch).

The Credits

Across feature and short films, Anderson has established himself as a singular voice in cinema. With each new film, the director continues to refine and redefine his cinematic offerings, making the Andersonian aesthetic an ever-changing visual patchwork. From the humble beginnings of *Bottle Rocket* to the highly stylised compositions of *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Three More*, Anderson's budgets have increased, his writing has matured and his filmmaking has evolved. Yet, the careful balance of playful hilarity and narrative poignance remains as prominent as ever.

With his whimsical locations densely populated by pensive characters and ricocheting dialogue, Anderson's cinematic worlds can be polarising. Criticism levied at the director often revolves around the unlikable nature of some of his characters and eccentric visuals. Yet, every Anderson film offers an entirely different world from the one before, meaning there is something for everyone in these Andersonian universes.

Anderson has already been the subject of countless books and this will be far from the last. Ultimately, celebrating the works of Anderson means celebrating a love for cinema.

LEFT: Anderson at the 2015 Rome International Film Festival.

Beyond the Big Screen

The influence of the Andersonian aesthetic has transcended the big screen. Anderson's visual style has become a pop culture reference, inspiring social media, photography and interior design trends. The Wes Anderson hashtag, which has amassed hundreds of millions of views, sees online users view their everyday lives through a makeshift Andersonian lens. The director's impact is visible with these romanticised vignettes, shot in portrait for social media with symmetrical frames and brightly saturated colours.

Anderson's aesthetic has also become a shorthand for interior and architectural design, from directly inspiring the likes of the retro pastels of Milan's Bar Luce to Hotel Belvédère in Switzerland, which has been branded an Anderson-esque location. Also, there are endless guides to making your home feel like an Anderson movie, with recommendations for quirky furniture pieces and pastel paint swatches.

Anderson has also directed advertisements for American Express, SoftBank, Prada, H&M and Montblanc without surrendering his Andersonian style. Take the 2008 SoftBank Commercial, inspired by Jacques Tati's film *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* (1953). In one continuous shot, the short follows Brad Pitt exploring a French seaside town that includes the appearance of a group of Boy Scouts four years before they became the subjects of the *Moonrise Kingdom*. Also, Pitt's yellow flannel ensemble is curiously similar to the Zissou Society's uniform in *The Life Aquatic*. Further, Anderson's *H&M – Come Together: A Fashion Picture in Motion* (2016) advert set on the Winter Express train seems to be a nod to *The Darjeeling Limited* as the train conductor (Brody) and assistant porter (Garth Jennings) try to prepare a Christmas brunch. Product placement with costume is a supplement, not a sacrifice, to the sentimental short.

OPPOSITE: Hotel Belvédère, Switzerland.

Anderson's Legacy

Anderson's legacy is still developing. His career has nearly spanned four decades, yet he still has many more stories to tell. At the time of writing, Anderson will follow up on his 2023 anthology film with *The Phoenician Scheme*, set for release in 2025. Co-written with Coppola, the film is an espionage comedy-drama thriller that follows Zsa-zsa Korda (Del Toro, who is said to appear in every shot of the film), one of the wealthiest men in Europe, his daughter (Mia Threapleton) and her tutor Bjorn Lund (Michael Cera) on a globe-trotting adventure. The cast includes Riz Ahmed, Johansson, Ayoade, Hanks, Cranston, Jeffrey Wright, Cumberbatch, Friend, Hope Davis and Mathieu Amalric.

Every film Anderson makes will inevitably see a reunion between him and his film family to craft tales of troubled souls searching for meaning in the world. Anderson's unique way of seeing the world inspires many, hence why actors and viewers repeatedly return to the director's stories. Just as Anderson continues honouring the cinematic heroes before him, he is destined to have a colourfully stylish spot in cinema history.

OPPOSITE: Anderson wins the 2023 Venice Film Festival Cartier 'Glory to the Filmmaker' Award.

Atari (Rankin) on Chief's (Cranston) back searching for Spots.

Image Credits

(t) = top, (m) = middle, (b) = bottom, (c) = centre, (l) = left, (r) = right

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