

Emily Maskell

WES ANDERSON

ICONS OF CINEMA

Unofficial and Unauthorised

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*.



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 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.



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*.