



FEATURE

MEET THE PROFESSIONALS

WHO DO YOU ASK FOR HELP WHEN LOOKING FOR THE RIGHT CALIFORNIA LOCATION?

LIZA FOREMAN SPOKE TO SOME OF THE PEOPLE WHOSE JOB IT IS TO FIND THE RIGHT PLACE TO SHOOT

ABC'S SCANDAL, SHOT IN LA, SET IN DC

THE STATE of California covers close to 164,00 square miles, and its population is close to 40 million – that's the same as Poland, more than Canada and almost double the population of Australia. Thankfully a lot of those people have a great deal of experience in filming across this vast area, and are ready and willing to help those who haven't.

Veronique Vowell is one such person. Over the past 12 years she has specialized in securing location in the Los Angeles area for TV series that aren't necessarily set there. For example the police series Cold Case which ran on CBS from 2003 to 2010. Cold case was set in Philadelphia, but shot in LA. Why?

"I think it's the facilities. I think the studios and the production companies, when they have multiple productions going, it's actually easier for them if they are in LA because they are able to have a more hands-on approach," Vowell says. "If the writers and showrunners are here in LA and there are problems on another show and it's in another state, there's more of a divide – here if there are issues you can have a meeting, you can have a face-to-face and you can be right there with the production almost immediately."

Recent work for Vowell has included ABC's political series Scandal, again shot in LA but set mainly in Washington DC – and for which she won the California On Location Awards (COLA) Location Manager Of The Year Award in 2013. "What I love the most about doing this series is the challenge, every week, that all of the locations have to look like Washington DC, Virginia or Maryland. Recent locations to feature in Scandal have included the Huntingdon Botanical Gardens in San Morino, and Exposition Park and Hancock Park, both in LA.

NBC's hit political series The West Wing is another Washington-based story filmed in LA – and Vowell has regularly turned to Mike Leon, location manager for that series, for advice on how to shoot LA for DC. And there is further help available, too: "Here in LA we have a web group called LocoList that was founded by a commercials scout years ago and there are probably 500 location managers that scout on this chat room," she says. "It's wonderful sometimes when you are at a loss you can post a request and there are 500 brains that can come up with ideas of places we might have forgotten."

Producer and location manager Joe Madalena is originally from Rochester, New York. Madalena worked in Los Angeles for 23 years, producing commercials, television and films, including Fritz Kiersch's Children Of The Corn, Joel Schumacher's The Lost Boys and Brian Levant's Beethoven.

In 1993, he moved to Santa Rosa, Sonoma County and launched Prime Film Sites, Northern California's largest locations database. It includes more than 4,500 listings, spanning thirty categories – including artisans and wineries – from Sonoma, Napa and Marin counties.

One of his jobs is to find places that double as Europe for the wellness-oriented Melaleuca Company and its Sei Bella cosmetics line catalogs. "The sites are mainly privately owned villas or wineries in Napa and Sonoma that can double for Italy or France," he says.

These sites represent only part of his knowledge base. "Having lived and worked in Northern California for the past twenty years, I have an encyclopedic memory of every location possibility in Sonoma, Napa and Marin Counties that can match a client's specifications," he says. "This part of the state offers a wide range of scenery that is available within a relatively short drive. In Sonoma County you have access to the Pacific, Redwood National Park, ranches, farms, world-class wineries and vineyards, all within a two-hour drive from the Golden Gate." //



SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA STANDS IN FOR SOUTHERN EUROPE FOR A SEI BELLA COSMETICS AD

In addition to the California Film Commission, Madalena cites chambers of commerce, film-permit offices and real-estate websites as good places to scout.

Gregory Alpert's career has taken him countrywide but some of his favorite locations are in California.

For Todd Phillips' *The Hangover Part III*, Alpert was awarded the COLA Location Professional of the Year Award – Studio Features for 2013.

Some of his favorite spots include La Casa Pacifica in San Clemente, the former Western Whitehouse of President Richard Nixon. Others include the Santa Anita Park, which served as the main home location

for the HBO series *Luck* starring Dustin Hoffman. He also likes the Foresthill Bridge in Auburn, which was used in the opening sequence in Rob Cohen's *XXX* with Vin Diesel

"It spans the north fork of the American river at the confluence of where the north and middle forks meet up. It is the highest bridge [deck height] in California and the fourth highest bridge in the US," he says.

Jeffrey T. Spellman, the location manager for the CBS series *Criminal Minds* was born and raised ///

in Seattle, Washington. As a child, he traveled the state with his father, John Spellman, who was County Executive and Governor of Washington.

“As an intern in the local film office, Hollywood producers discovered that I had a knack for knowing the area and having a creative eye,” he says.

While studying at The Evergreen State College, he managed his first pilot for Aaron Spelling Productions. “On graduation, I moved to Los Angeles and was lucky to manage my first big show, Airwolf. I am currently enjoying working on my ninth season of Criminal Minds,” he says.

In the series, the FBI Behavioral Analysis Unit investigates a crime in a different American city each week. Criminal Minds films regularly in Los Angeles, Glendale, Altadena and Santa Clarita.

“Somehow we are always inevitably filming our greenbelt shows (Washington, Oregon, Midwest and ‘Back East’) during the dry brown summer and our dry southeast shows during the moist and green winter,” Spellman says, letting readers into a small secret. “Our series carries plenty of cut brush, shrubs and trees to help us with the cheat.”

And the show has also made some friends, who have helped with an inevitable problem here: parking. “Being a ninth-season show we carry a tremendous amount of equipment and vehicles with us on a daily basis,” he says. “It is becoming more difficult to find nearby parking for our circus. Fortunately, neighbors are happy to rent out their yards and driveways for all of our accessories.”

A few seasons ago the Criminal Minds Alaskan episode shot in Fra-



KEEP IT IN CALIFORNIA

ANOTHER COLA winner this year is Caleb Duffy, who won Location Professional Of The Year – Independent Feature Film, for Steven Soderbergh’s Behind The Candelabra. Duffy recently served as location manager for Disney’s McFarland, set in the San Joaquin Valley in Kern County. In McFarland, directed by Niki Caro and starring Kevin Costner, a track coach in a small California town transforms a team of athletes into championship contenders. Duffy’s work has taken him to a range of locations including Palm Springs, Central California, Los Angeles and Long Beach. But some of his best new discoveries are indoors. Alongside favorite spots that include Black’s Beach in San Diego, he recently filmed inside The Getty Museum for Thor. “The Getty Museum had never had a production so there was an unknown there and it went off perfectly. Black’s Beach in San Diego is a State Park so there are always challenges including animal preservation issues; it is a California Condor habitat,” he says, but adds: “Anything that can be kept in California is an advantage.”

BLACK’S BEACH, SAN DIEGO: CHALLENGES INCLUDE ANIMAL PRESERVATION ISSUES

zier Park in California’s Kern County. “With snow on the peaks behind us, we worked with all of the merchants and neighbors in creating our fantasy. It seemed like the whole town came out. Our cast let the local kids hang out with them on the set and the crew enjoyed the hotels, dining and nightlife,” Spellman says.

The show may even have made local history: “For the obligatory docks and float plane arrival we filmed on Terminal Island in the Los Angeles harbor. With the assistance of the Port of Los Angeles, FilmLA and the Coast Guard we landed our plane in the harbor. No one locally could recall that ever being done before.”

For Spellman, some of the positives in California include adaptability. “We can be at Daytona Beach in Florida, the desert of Afghanistan, the Rocky Mountains and the National Mall in Washington D.C. all within an hour,” he says.

But filming here has had its problems. He recalls a day that he managed a film that was directed by, and also starred, Dennis Hopper.

“We shot in a very exclusive condominium in Marina Del Rey. Most residents didn’t even know we were there. A well-known sitcom actor who lived in the building came to the set and schmoozed with Dennis for several hours. The next morning we learned that he had actually complained about us filming there.”

The bigger the talent, the bigger the problem?

But as with filming in any part of the world, the local people and environment must always be the N°1 consideration of any production. “It is a fine high-wire balancing act filming in California. You must listen and address the concerns of all the affected neighbors and communities while still fighting to achieve maximum access and success for the show. It is not possible to make everyone happy, but that doesn’t mean that we should stop trying.”

Spellman speaks for many when he says that in recent years California’s production industry has seen some quiet – even tough – periods despite being the cinema capital of the world. But business is good right now. “It is now crazy busy here in town and we are back to the good old days of fighting for locations. When Criminal Minds finally finishes its tremendous run, I sure hope that it stays busy locally.”

And one of the reasons it’s “crazy busy”? “We have the best crews in the world. I hear this from countless directors and producers.”

“Los Angeles Mayor (Eric) Garcetti and the state’s newly appointed ‘Film Czar’ Tom Sherak, are showing great support for the film industry, according to Spellman. “Filming is just as important as other subsidized industries that maintain the California economy.”

Mike Fantasia worked for 13 years as a realty specialist for the US Fish and Wildlife Service as well as the US Forest Service, when one day Steven Spielberg visited the small town in Montana where he was based.

His career made a full turn. “Suddenly, I became a location manager,” Fantasia recalls – and his credits, which include Catch Me If You Can, Memoirs Of

PULL QUOTE PLEASE
“XXXXXXXXX XXXX SO WE
SHOT IT IN LA. WE COULD
HAVE SAVED MONEY IF WE
HAD SHOT (ELSEWHERE),
BUT IT WOULD NOT HAVE
XXXXXXXXXX.”

A Geisha, Indiana Jones and the Kingdom Of The Crystal Skull and The Amazing Spiderman, suggest that he made the right decision.

Today he works primarily in Los Angeles. But Fantasia’s career has also taken him to some “far-flung” and “magnificent” locations in the Golden State.

His favorite spots include the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve in Moss Beach, San Mateo County Park which lies south of San Francisco, and the Sierra mountains. “Moss Beach is one of the most spectacular locations anywhere,” he says.

As for Northern California’s beaches: “There is a mix of sand and rock outcrops that are some of the most beautiful in the world. Death Valley has a variety of looks that can double for arid locations worldwide,” he says.

It doesn’t stop there. From seashores to deserts, forests, dunes, mountains and a range of locations in Los Angeles and southern California, he is a big fan. “We have a fantastic diversity of locations, and

we have the best trained and most plentiful crews in the world.”

But such is the appeal that securing a permit can sometimes be a problem. “Some locations are over-shot and some are burned out,” he says. “But we’ve been filming in California for over a hundred years. If it’s in the script, we can find a way to do it in California.”

From the thousands of places one can research locations, which includes photo archives, historic photo databases and county and local film offices, he has a favorite: The California Coastal Records Project, which offers a breathtaking compendium of photos of the coastline from Oregon to Mexico taken from a helicopter.

He also points to the California Film Commission’s locations database as an important “one-stop shop” for permitting state properties. “Most importantly, they step in when we’re having problems and serve as an advocate for filmmakers when we need their clout.”

Other positives include California’s production services industry. “It is unparalleled and unmatched anywhere in the world,” he says. “If you suddenly find you need a need a crane, camera or prop, it’ll be delivered within hours.” The same goes for wardrobe, vehicles, grip and electric supplies. “It is a stone’s throw away.” ●