



Mool Hills

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News

Bringing Up Bobby

Silver Screen City

Pointes for Style
Fall Puts Fashion on Its Toes

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The Past in Perfect Present

Bringing Up Bobby



Milla Jovovich and David Johndrow at a cast and crew brunch at JRB Art at the Elms

By **Kent Anderson** Photos by **Erick Gfeller**

When David and Maryann Johndrow talk about how they came to be in the movie business, they have a very clear and succinct take on the process. “It’s about great relationships,” David says.

In the Johndrows’ case, excellent wine helps too.

The Oklahoma-based couple, owners of Napa Valley’s Johndrow Vineyards, are serving as co-executive producers of the film “Bringing Up Bobby,” which finished shooting in Oklahoma in August.

The project was written and directed by Famke Janssen, known to audiences for her work in front of the camera, particularly for her role as Dr. Jean Grey in the “X-Men” series of films.

The Johndrows’ initial foray into movies came about because of wine. They own a home in Sundance, Utah, home of the Sundance Film Festival, and in recent years their varietals have been featured at many cast dinners and other official Sundance events. David ventures the opinion that Johndrow Vineyards

wines have acquired something of a “cult following” in Hollywood. Those relationships led to the Johndrows being introduced by a mutual friend to the producers of “Bringing Up Bobby.”

Along with the Johndrows, other co-executive producers of the project are Phil Hunt, Compton Ross, Chad Burris, Steve and Renee Knox, Cole Frates and David Manning. Sofia Sondervan is serving as producer.

“Bringing Up Bobby” tells the story of Olive, a European con artist, and her



Milla relaxing with her daughter Ever



EXPERIENCING OKLAHOMA

Photos by Carolyn Rossow

To get a feel for what Oklahoma is about, you need to meet its people, so the stars of “Bringing Up Bobby” did it the simple way: by going to the people’s turf. Bill Pullman, Milla Jovovich, Rory Cochran and Spencer List enjoyed a dose of Nichols Hills hospitality by dropping in on the Randel Road Block Party and Pig Roast, hosted by Susan and John Frank, Leslie and Drew Schwartz, Gene Rainbolt, Brian Davis, Judy Federa, Peggy and John Philbin, Carolyn and Fred Wettengel, Cindy and John McCharen and Deborah Kersey.



10-year-old son Bobby, who find themselves in Oklahoma seeking to escape her criminal past. After Bobby is hit by a car driven by a wealthy businessman, Olive commits insurance fraud and is sentenced to prison. In an unusual story twist, Bobby lives with the businessman and his wife while his mother serves her prison sentence. When she is released, she is faced with the difficult choice of deciding what environment is best for her son.

For her screenwriting and directorial debut, Janssen carefully selected a cast of Hollywood veterans for the lead roles, augmented by one fresh face: newcomer Spencer List plays the title character of Bobby. His mother Olive is portrayed by Milla Jovovich. The role is an exciting departure for the Ukraine-born actress, who is best known for action-oriented roles in films such as "The Fifth Element" and the "Resident Evil" series. Bill Pullman and Marcia Cross were cast in the roles of Kent and Mary, the wealthy Oklahoma couple who takes in young Bobby. Pullman is a veteran character actor with major film roles in "Spaceballs," "The Serpent and the Rainbow" and "Independence Day," along with multiple theater credits in both New York and Los Angeles. Cross has worked extensively in television, with starring roles in "Melrose Place" and more recently, "Desperate Housewives."

"Famke has assembled a cast that is very high-level," David Johndrow says with notable enthusiasm.

"Once we got behind it and understood the story and Famke's vision, our thinking was, 'How can we assist in making this a huge success?'" adds Maryann. "We put a list of together of people we know, who could help to get things done."

Get things done they did. Local merchants donated everything from cars to dry cleaning for the production. More

than 60 local jobs were created. Filming took place in Nichols Hills, Guthrie and Arcadia, among other settings. Prominent local landmarks like POPS and Arcadia's famous Round Barn are featured.

"I want to show Oklahoma's beauty and its people through the eyes of the foreign protagonist, Olive," says the Dutch-born Janssen, who has her own connections to the state: her partner, Cole Frates, is an Oklahoma native, and Janssen recently served on the faculty of the Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute at Quartz Mountain. "On the one hand I



Milla Jovovich and Ever with co-star Spencer List

wanted to try and explore America's Jeffersonian distrust of Europe – as a place burdened by history, full of corruption – and on the other I wanted to examine European perceptions of America as a naïve place that values money and is deeply religious. Above all, however, I want the film to entertain in the broadest meaning of the word. I want people to have fun with the characters, enjoy the setting of the movie and feel torn about Olive's decision at the end."

For the Johndrows, it is about not only the quality of the storytelling, but

the sense of community – relationships again – that prevails in Oklahoma. "The difference in this film from others that have been shot in Oklahoma is that we are involving the community, instead of just coming in, shooting a few scenes, and leaving again," David says.

With local businesses and individuals involved on both the logistical and creative sides of the production, it was also important to David and Maryann that those coming to the state from elsewhere have the ability to "experience Oklahoma." They hosted multiple events during filming for the out-of-state cast and crew to get a solid feel for what Oklahoma is about, which should translate well into the final on-screen product.

"Bringing Up Bobby" worked on a very tight, intense 30-day shooting schedule this summer. Most of the editing and post-production work will take place in the Netherlands. The next stage of the film is expected to go equally quickly, aiming for a January release. The Johndrows hope to debut the film at Sundance, later taking it to Cannes and Berlin. Their expectations are high.

"People are connecting with the plot," David says, "and the people who are involved in this project are doing it for passion."

"Passion" describes David and Maryann's feelings about wine, the movie business and Oklahoma – all inextricably linked in "Bringing Up Bobby." David is a native Oklahoman, born in Norman and raised in Edmond. Maryann is originally from Boston, but has lived in the state for 10 years and now says she can't imagine living anywhere else.

"It's not what you expect," Maryann says of both the state and the film. "When it gets up on the big screen and people see what it's like in Oklahoma, it will open a lot of minds of people who have never been here." ■