



LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

AROUND
TOWN

A mantra-like aphorism usually associated with New York City’s ever-burgeoning real estate market, the oft-repeated adage of “location, location, location” takes on an entirely new meaning for 30-year old Louis Zuppardi. Employed as a scout responsible for locating TV and movie production filming sites, he travels extensively throughout the five boroughs of New York City and around Long Island in search of the perfect visual backdrops for America’s favorite television shows and motion pictures.

“I graduated from Columbia High School in Maplewood, New Jersey, where they had a first rate media production curriculum,” Zuppardi states, “After that I attended Essex County Community College in Newark; their TV production lab is one of the best.” Like so many others eager to begin working in the entertainment field, Zuppardi launched his career through an internship. “Back in the nineties, I started out as an unpaid intern in the production office of the ABC comedy series, Spin City, where I worked for six months,” he recalls. Zuppardi’s stint on Spin City served as a springboard to paid positions in the television and movie industry. In 2001, he worked in the costume department for the Jacqueline Susann biopic *Isn’t She Great?* Building on that experience and gaining valuable professional contacts along the way, his growing behind the scenes expertise gave him the opportunity to work on the 1999 Denzel Washington murder mystery movie thriller, *Bone Collector*.

Like other seasonal workers, employment as a location scout can be spotty and varies from one production to another. “Sometimes I’ll work for only two days on a television show, like *Mad Men*, but a major motion picture can stretch out over several months and require numerous filming sites I’m responsible for locating. Prime time television shows are pretty dependable for working projects; I’ll go back scouting for them in the fall when production starts up again,” he says.

With an average workweek of 50 to 60 hours, he is continually on the look out for the perfect backdrop for some of America’s best-loved TV shows. “Although the story line is set in the Chicago area, exterior and interior shots for the CBS show, *The Good Wife*, are often filmed right here in Queens,” Zuppardi observes. “One of the best filming areas we’ve had for this show is in the Rego Park section where we’ve used a variety of Tudor style homes and neighborhoods.”

Working with the production designer and scriptwriter of a television or motion picture project, Zuppardi reads the scripts and visualizes the type of background needed to flesh out the story. Based on his own experience and utilizing a photo catalogue containing images of various communities and buildings, he and his team begin scouting prospective sites. After taking up to a hundred photos of a given location, Zuppardi and his associates then present, on average, 10 photos to the show’s director. Based on the director’s acceptance of a given site, Zuppardi contacts property owners to arrange a filming schedule and negotiate payment for property usage.

“What we pay,” he says, “depends on how long we use a given location and what changes, if any, we make. Sometimes we paint the property or erect temporary

structures for filming. As a rule, television production generates less money than movies. For motion picture filming, we’ve paid people to move out of their homes for a few weeks at a time.” While Zuppardi does not mention specific dollar amounts paid for location usage, one property owner received a fee quote of \$2,500 for two days of filming for the production of a television program. “We often engage a given site for a 12-hour shoot; 6 AM to 6 PM is not uncommon,” he states. “Property owners should also remember that for a television production up to 60 people—actors, technicians, directors, special effects staff, the production crew—can be traipsing through the house doing set ups, applying makeup, arranging props and adjusting lights. For the more elaborate work and preparation associated with filming a movie, up to a 100 people can be running in and out of someone’s home.”

Safety is a critical issue in on location entertainment production. Every television program and motion picture production is required to have a permit from the Mayor’s Office of Television and Motion Picture Production. Described as a “real bargain” at only \$300 for a license, the licensing procedure insures that safety guidelines are in place. “If we have a scene where a building or car explodes, or if the story line calls for a fire, we are required to have a New York City Fire Department truck present to control any potential danger,” Zuppardi explains.

Securing usage of property can be a minor art form in some instances. “It’s no secret in the industry,” Zuppardi observes, “that the actors involved in a given production can often be a bargaining chip for us. I was in a depressed section of Brooklyn scouting for a movie location and not having any luck with the property owner. However, once he found out that our motion picture included having Wesley Snipes in the neighborhood for a couple of days worth of filming, that cinched the deal and we were able to use his building.”

As a sidebar to working in the entertainment field, interacting with celebrities can be a two-edged sword for staff members. “One individual from television and movies, who will go unnamed,” Zuppardi notes, “wanted a gym, a private dining area, recreation room and assorted other perks. On the other hand, Anthony Hopkins, a major talent, came on the set for one movie I worked on and made one request, a reading lamp.” The experience of mingling with celebrities on a daily basis provides Zuppardi with a rare perspective on and diplomatic guide to evaluating their stature and status in today’s celebrity driven culture. “Some people really are superstars, others would like to be and still others just think they are.” And that’s a wrap.