

FYNBOS

DIRECTED BY
HARRY PATRAMANIS

A
FOUR LETTER WORD
PRODUCTION



FYNBOS
PRODUCTION NOTES

A real estate developer, on the brink of bankruptcy, travels with his wife to a lavish and remote glass house bordering an informal settlement on a sweeping landscape in the Western Cape of South Africa. He is desperate to sell it. When his wife goes inexplicably missing, stifled by a sense of looming distrust and financial pressure, he is caught in a maze of missteps and uncertainty. What transpires within the walls of this glass house then has little to do with money and everything to do with the human condition: souls are left pondering the line between what is real and what is perceived.

FYNBOS is the first full-length feature film by director Harry Patramanis. Shot in the Western Cape of South Africa with an entirely South African cast, this atmospheric mystery-drama is produced by Patramanis and his wife and partner Eleni Asvesta through their company A Four Letter Word.

**Fynbos ("fine bush") is a term used to describe the abundant plant life that dominates South Africa's Western Cape. Most of the seeds from these plants can only germinate after the intense heat of a fire.*

NOTES ON CHARACTERS

What we know about **Richard** is that he's a hardworking striver who has managed to acquire *Fynbos* Estate. Now, in hard times, he must sell the property or face financial ruin and personal shame. His focus is singular, humorless, heartless, an increasingly numb routine based in strategy and performance. He cannot communicate with Meryl, his wife, nor can he see her unhappiness. He is angered easily by her mood swings. We sense he could be near a breaking point. But is he capable of violence?

Meryl gives us little in the way of concrete information, but her complex emotions are an echoing presence, especially when she's gone. We see her mislead Richard about her "robbery," and yet clearly she's more wounded in love than pathological liar. Still, we don't know if the accusations she makes about Richard in her diary are fact or fiction. There is so much we can project onto her. Too conflicted inside to expose her true sentiments, she opts for silence and occasionally, passive subterfuge. She seems beyond co-existence with anyone. The question is, can she exist at all?

Ann and Lyndon, our sister and brother duo from London, are outsiders. They are one way into the story for us. When they arrive we see the poor township through their eyes, we see the disparity between this community and the walled sanctuary of the *Fynbos* property. And we see how Richard tries to gloss over anything that might detract from the possibility of a sale. But Ann is easily spooked. We sense her isolation, her fear. She is drawn to this place, this vacuum, and is terrified by it once Meryl disappears.

Officer Toni Bengu is another outsider, but she knows this place better than anyone. She has no fear; she has seen it all. Her clarity helps us to see the dark side of Richard and Meryl's shaking personality. It's her job to find out the truth, but she gets involved with Richard because she is moved by his circumstances. She is the only character who can see immediately when she's wrong. She may mislead us, but she corrects herself – something the other characters struggle with.

Renee and VJ are blissfully youthful, unencumbered by ambition and alienation. Soon Renee looks at Richard with fascination. She supports him, possibly seeing security and a future that

holds more than VJ's vague rock and roll dreams. And Meryl both loves and hates Renée. She sees herself, her youth, her freedom. She smokes Renée's cigarettes as if to inhale the essence of her former self. Renée's youth further alienates Meryl, pushing her away from the past, the present, the future – into a void.

And of course the house, **Fynbos Estate**, is a character too: a desirable dream that becomes a cage or a fishbowl. Nature and sky are blossoming like paradise then they get angry and darken. The water is experienced as a refreshing surface, then as a dark hole that can swallow you in. Can we handle our projections?

HARRY PATRAMANIS
DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

With *Fynbos* I set out to make a film that was an exercise in minimalism. Not as an artistic end, but as a way of allowing seemingly specific things that happen in the film to remain open to multiple interpretations. I wanted to invite people in to a realistic world that is full of red herrings and difficult questions without clear answers. A viewer's imagination is far stronger than any plot point or revelation a director can conjure. The audience co-creates the film.

While it is always said that filmmakers are storytellers, what I think that they actually do is build environments. You create a place that doesn't exist. You choose and compose circumstances where the deep, natural soul of a story sparks to life.

Along the journey, there must be trust. The audience, the actors, the crew, the director, the story itself – all have to believe in the particulars of the world you create. And I saw how it was contagious, how the collaboration flowed, and how a kind of group fearlessness emerged. *Fynbos* was shot almost entirely chronologically. Though the script was tight, I never used a shot list. We were open to improvisation. We more or less followed the story as it unfolded in this environment – this house, this nature, this country – and our job was to find the best way to explore and capture its nuances.

The opening scene had been with me for years: A woman, walking alone, willfully unloads her passport, her money, her material identity into a trashcan. Why? What is her story? It was an incredibly compelling image.

I wanted to make a film where the POV switches from one character to another half way through. When Meryl disappears the story shifts and becomes Richard's. The tone changes radically. She disappears and he enters a void. I knew we would be exploring vacuums as a kind of structure for the film. It is a story of absence, of leaving, of empty space. Those moments where you feel you've lost everything, you have nothing, you feel nothing. There was possibility, and suddenly a window closes; there is no more possibility. That experience taps a kind of loneliness that no communication can bridge.

And of course these characters are all facing great difficulties in communicating. In connecting. In overcoming their isolation. The vacuum swallows them up; in the case of Meryl, quite literally.

But before she leaves there is another kind of emptiness. Clearly Richard and Meryl have secrets. We see this in all relationships. Even if there is a kind of oneness, there is only so much we can ultimately share. In reality we find ways of holding back our full inner self. The secrets preserve the illusions of our daily life. And so you walk away. You stay silent. Things are left unspoken.

Which is of course the structure of the film as well. We get the atmosphere, not the information. The mood, not the secret.

The Western Cape has an incredible visceral energy. The wilderness came right up to the edge of this house with an almost aggressive beauty. I was amazed at how the fynbos roots turned the water deep red.

When Meryl smokes Renee's cigarette, a huge wind blew up, as if on cue. Ominous clouds appeared at strategic moments. Nature was always a key collaborator.

Eleni and I have been coming to South Africa for twenty years. We feel we connect to this part of the world. We wanted to hear the silence as we were shooting. As we drove through Johannesburg before the shoot, I saw painted on a wall, "Speak only if you can improve the silence." This supported the idea of an exercise in minimalism. We learned again and again that a restriction of choices often buys you incredible freedom.

CREW BIOS & NOTES

Harry Patramanis Director / Writer

Harry Patramanis was born in Athens Greece and studied at the University of Film and Television in Munich, Germany (HFF). His first short films and story-driven television commercials around the globe won him international recognition at numerous festivals. Fynbos is the first feature film from Harry Patramanis, produced by Eleni Asvesta, through their company A Four Letter Word. The Los Angeles based outfit has a mission to work fearlessly in telling original stories with international filmmakers for whom the process of making a film is as important as the final product. He lives and works between USA, Greece and South Africa.

Eleni Asvesta Producer

Eleni Asvesta, was born in Patras / Greece, studied at the Sorbonne, Université de Paris 1-Department Art et Cinema.

She has worked as assistant director and producer in various films, TV documentaries and commercials in Europe. In 1995 she started Eggs&Bacon, an award winning commercial production company with director Harry Patramanis.

In 1999 she moved to the US to continue producing for Patramanis and later they founded A Four Letter Word in LA.

Jonathan Kyle Glatzer Writer

Jonathan Glatzer attended Columbia University's Film School, where his short Prix Fixe won the school's best film award. He began his career in theatre as a director, staging productions at such venues as the Oxford Playhouse in England, the Shakespeare Theatre Company in Washington, D.C., and the Ensemble Studio Theatre in New York. Glatzer's first feature film as director, co-writer and producer was What Goes Up, 2009 and was distributed by Sony Pictures.

Dieter Deventer Cinematographer

Dieter Deventer was born and raised in Munich. With his father's Kontax and Robot he discovered his passion for taking pictures and in his own darkroom he experimented with black&white photography. After his graduation from school he started his ski-freestyle career participating in ski acrobatic contests all over the world while shooting super 8 films that caught the ski industry's attention.

He studied at the University of Television and Film in Munich (HFF). His student film 'Sorcerer's Apprentice' gained him first prize at the Festival of Fantastic Film in Munich. Since then Dieter Deventer has been working around the world as a director of photography for commercials and feature films. He has worked as a DOP on several short films, feature films for the cinema and television, among them 'Vaya Con Dios' by Zoltan Spirandelli starring Daniel Brühl, which was awarded four Bavarian Film Prizes.

Yorgos Mavropsaridis Editor

Born in Athens in 1954. Studied The Art and Technique of Film in the London International Film School at that time directed by John Fletcher. Graduated in 1978. Served his military service in the then army television, now NET. Since 1982, he works as a freelance film editor in the field of TV commercials and feature films, amongst them The Enchantress (best editor award in the 1986 Thessaloniki Film Festival and State award), Love Me Not, (official competition in the 1989 Venice Film Festival), Politiki Kouzina (best editor award and State award in 2004), Kinneta (competition in the 2005 Toronto Film Festival) Dogtooth (best film in the competition "Un Certain Regard" 2009 in Cannes, Oscar nominated for best foreign film 2010), Alps (official competition 2011 Venice film festival, best film in Sidney's film festival 2012). He continues working in the same fields and since 2000 teaches editing at the New York College in Athens.

COTI K. Soundtrack Music

Costantino Luca Rolando Kiriakos, known as Coti K, was born in Milan, Italy in 1966 and moved to Greece at the age of 6. He has been involved in various Athens pioneering electronic bands (Ricochet, Dada Data, Raw, Spiders' Web). Working as a record producer, musician and sound engineer, he has collaborated with many artists including Tuxedomoon, Blaine Reininger, Stereo Nova, Raining Pleasure, Bokomolech, Ilios and others. He has released various solo records, written music for film, theatre, dance theatre, TV adverts, and since 2000 he has been involved in the creation of various audiovisual installations. A member of free music improvisation club 2-13, he has played live electronics with many musicians including Evan Parker, Phil Durrant, Nikos Veliotis, Rhodri Davies, Steibruchel, Andrea Neumann, Jason Kahn, Mark Wastell, Matt Davis, and others.

CAST BIOS & NOTES
(In order of appearance)

Jessica Haines Meryl

Jessica Haines made a name for herself internationally as a breakthrough South African talent in Steve Jacobs 2008 film *Disgrace* alongside John Malkovich. She frequently works in Johannesburg and currently lives in Kenya. She has acted in a string of theatre productions including *Macbeth*, *Sleeping Beauty*. Her film credits include *Outcasts*, BBC (2011), *The Bang Bang Club* (2010) *The Lost Future* (2010), *White Wedding* (2009), *The Prisoner* (2009)

Fynbos is for me a bold, revolutionary film that goes against the grain of most commercial and art house films. Its filmmakers moving forward, regardless of reputation and consequence, taking risks and exploring new boundaries without the confines of rules. Before meeting Harry and Eleni, It felt as if I was very much wallowing in the shadow of my previous, and rather dark, character of Lucy Luri from the film Disgrace, which I did some time ago. Good rolls for woman are hard to come by in the patriarchal world of film, brilliant rolls are almost unheard of, especially in Africa, where the film industry is still fairly young and on a continent where woman are still finding their voices, whether it be politically, domestically, or artistically. Fynbos does just that - embraces the journeys of four, very different generations of woman. The beginning of the film throws you into the turning point of one particular woman, Meryl, grappling with the cruel questions of a life in crisis and the power she wields to try and make sense of it all. Meryl's past is questionable but one that suggests beauty, love, devotion and possibly cruelty.

Warrick Grier Richard

Warrick Grier is a South African actor, director and writer known primarily for his work in theatre, with an extensive film and television resume. He has garnered numerous national and international awards for his work including : *Fleur Du Cap* (Best Actor Award 2002) for *Open Couple*, Best Actor Nomination 2003 for *A Midsummer Nights Dream*.

I approached Richard focusing on his emotional state. In the story we meet Richard as he rolls his last dice for success, with everything riding on the pending deal – his marriage, his business, his sense of self worth and his social standing - a pinnacle of his life to this point. He has

extremely stressed and held in himself, desperately trying to keep everything together, before he dramatically unravels.

So I began by finding that tension in myself, fraying the emotional strands and then holding them together so nobody would notice. Then as the character's world collapsed around him, I began to let go of these emotions piece by piece until there was nothing left but my raw self. This was the place I wanted to go to....to a man who has nowhere to go and nothing to hold onto within himself. To try and be truthful to the characters state of emotional being, step by step, and let the exterior take care of itself.

Susan Danford Anne

Susan Danford is an award winning actress who has worked locally and internationally in stage, film and television, for over two decades. In 2006 she won the Fleur Du Cap, Best Actress Award for her portrayal of Emma, in Harold Pinter's Betrayal. In 2008 she was nominated for Best Performance in a One Person Play in I, Claudia and in March of this year (2012) she was nominated for Best Actress as Sylvia in Arthur Miller's play, Broken Glass.

Feature Film credits include: Invictus directed by Clint Eastwood, Catch a Fire dir Philip Noyce, I Dreamed of Africa dir Hugh Hudson.

International projects include Fleisch, dir Oliver Schmidt. Ace Lightning and Woman in Love (BBC), The Triangle (Eric Stoltz and Sam Neill). Disney's, NAACP and Emmy Award winning, The Color of Friendship, dir Kevin Hooks.

ANNE enters the film as the prospective buyer of an exclusive home nestled in the untamed, wild landscape of a unique property. Anne's internal landscape is reflected in this external world. She deeply desires to investigate /excavate and ultimately take full ownership of the unexplored territory. Whether Anne, or any of the other characters, succeed in their attempt to get nearer the truth, their attempts to connect are directly influenced and affected by their perceptions and rapid-fire judgments of each other.

Sthandiwe Kgoroge Officer Toni Bengu

Sthandiwe Kgoroge Actress / general creative person is regarded one of the South Africa's most talented entertainment personalities. She is currently part of the cast in the "Long Walk to Freedom"

When I auditioned for the character of Toni there was an immediate connection. Here was a strong woman who just happened to be a policewoman. I knew that Toni was a true daughter of African soil. She could have been a community leader, a nurse, a housewife. In Fynbos, she is the guardian of truth. Toni for me represented what "true Africa" is about, UBUNTU ("I am, because you are"), a well-known South African saying.

Her concerns in the case of Richard and Meryl go far beyond the call of duty. She becomes a concerned human, even more than a police officer. It was honor to play such a grounded character who shows so much balance. It truly meant a lot as an actress and as a South African. There is still hope, and we as a nation, must never give up on each other. We still have a lot of Toni's amongst us.

Cara Roberts Renée

Cara Roberts makes her acting debut in Fynbos playing Renée.

Whatever happens from now on, Fynbos will always have a place in my life. Not only was it my first lead role in a feature film, but it also allowed me the pleasure of stealing an incredibly expensive car-without consequence. The film, to me, was an insight to relationships. It showed me how everyone who comes into your life has a reason to be there. It allows one to examine raw human relationships without the frills, to appreciate the moment and what we miss when we aren't looking. Renée allowed me to explore many aspects of myself freely, without even realizing it. We are very similar, which was both challenging and a privilege at once.

John Herbert Lyndon

John Herbert trained at Central School of Speech and Drama in London, UK. He worked extensively in the theatre in London. He was the winner of the BBC/Sunday Times Acting Prize. After returning to South Africa, his roles in television and in international projects include Rough Diamond (ITV-UK), The Devil's Whore (ITV-UK), The Philanthropist (NBC-US) and Young Leonardo (BBC-UK).

John's film work has included Where Others Wavered with Danny Glover (SA/Namibia), Zama Zama (SA)

No actor would have turned down this role. His honesty and lawlessness are traits that all people aspire to, but few possess. Exploring these liberating characteristics was an anarchic rollercoaster.

Chad Phillips Vj

Chad Phillips acquired his Diploma in Acting from the London School of Dramatic Arts. His feature films and theatrical plays credits include "Casting Me" (2011), "Judge Dread", (2011), "Sisters" (BBC / Moonlighting Films) 2010.

Credits

Warrick Grier Richard
Meryl **Jessica Haines**
Anne - **Susan Danford**
Toni - **Sthandiwe Kgoroge**
Renee - **Cara Roberts**
Lyndon - **John Herbert**
VJ - **Chad Philips**

Directed by **Harry Patramanis**
Written by **Jonathan Kyle Glatzer** and **Harry Patramanis**
Produced by **Eleni Asvesta**
Co Producers **Stefanos Fotiadis, Marios Fotiadis, Philip Key**
Director of Photography **Dieter Deventer BVK**
Casting **Director Moonyeenn Lee**
Editor **Yorgos Mavropsaridis**
Sound Design **Leandros Ntounis**
Music **Coti K.**
Production Designer **Jeremy Argue**
Costume Designer **Diana Cilliers**
Make up **Carla Fourie**
Line Producer **Nicole Ford**
Production Services **Moonlighting South Africa**
Production Company **A Four Letter Word**

(South Africa, Greece)

Language English
Format 1:85
Shot on ARRI ALEXA HD color
Duration 1 hour and 36 min.

**Shot entirely on location in the Western Cape South Africa
and at the Fynbos House designed by Sarah Calburn Architects.**

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