

IN PROGRESS

By Design

Some of the richest moments in life are those full of contrasting, even contradictory elements. Consider the following: a backdrop of the hyped-up, fast-paced world of high fashion; two leading characters who are intelligent, attractive and deeply in love with each other—and who also happen to be women; a hilarious series of escapades that unfolds as the two women set out to find the perfect man to father the child they want to raise.

Call it a romantic comedy with a light-hearted touch. Either way, *By Design* is based on the type of screenplay that most filmmakers (and financiers) would refuse to touch. The few who might risk it would have to have a considerable amount of skill and conviction to pull it off. Just the sort of task for producer Beryl Fox and director Claude Jutra—the dynamic duo who brought *Surfacing* to life with their technical finesse and human understanding. Add the talents of Patti Duke Astin as fashion designer Helen Hunter, and Sara Botsford as her not-to-be-out-designed lover Angie Olavson, and the result is predictable enough—an interesting, if unorthodox, treatment of a most controversial subject.

On location at the fashion designers' workshop that art director Reuben Albert Freed had skillfully put together in the back of an old warehouse in Vancouver's commercial district, everyone was breaking for lunch and scuttling about for sandwiches or coffee at the small cafe next door. Sitting in the midst of bolts of fabric, cutting tables and big splashy photo collages, Beryl Fox described her reasons for producing this film. "For me, it's a political thing. Even though I'm not a lesbian, I believe women have a right to love each other. I don't know why, but in this society, there's no acceptable outlet for a woman to express affection towards another."

Her toughest critic was her husband Doug Leiterman, who didn't think it was a good idea to get involved with a script that was so unorthodox, so un-Hollywood. However, several elements made Fox see beyond the obstacles that would no doubt arise: one was the fact that the subject matter was approached through comedy. "Like George Bernard Shaw said, 'If you've got something to say, make it funny.' I never would have touched this in a million years if it hadn't been funny."

Fox also recognized that the script had a highly appealing commercial element to it, not only because of the comic twist, but even more so because of its setting in the glamorous world of high fashion. There would be lots of opportunity for sparkle and pizzazz—especially considering the flashy \$150,000 wardrobe that Vancouver designer Trish Keating put together for the production.

But most importantly, Fox placed faith in Claude Jutra's involvement as director. "Werner Aellen (co-producer) had

been working on the idea in Vancouver for three years. But nothing really moved along until Claude got involved in 1979," she explained. That was the catalyst that turned the idea into a workable screenplay; for, as Fox put it, "Claude had it all in his head."

Taking Fox's seat in the bright yellow director's chair while she dashed to the phone, Jutra explained his initial involvement in the production. "At first, I wasn't attracted to the script because it felt remote. Then I heard there was room for change. They wanted the director to do a second draft. In ten days, Joe Wiesenfeld and I had rewritten it."

Everything was go from there, that is if you knew how to jump hurdles. And one of the big ones was financing. "People were reluctant to get financially involved," Jutra commented. "A puritan outlook, I suppose, in spite of the feminist movement. The originality of the script didn't fit in with the usual... In the end, it was Beryl's tenacity and persistence that raised the money." In mid-December, half of the 280 units for this \$2.8 million production had been sold.

Another problem was finding two leading ladies who could handle the characters of Angie and Helen. Fox said that initially a number of women turned down the roles, and now she is grateful they did, for the Astin-Botsford combination turned out better than anyone had hoped.

By Design has some nude scenes (the first either Astin or Botsford have done) and what Fox described as "some kinky sex scenes, done with a sense of humour, between a man and a woman." But there are no scenes of love-making between the two women. In fact, production manager Hugh Spencer-Phil-

lips feels that the movie downplays the lesbian aspect and focuses more on the problems facing any single parent.

Shooting, which started November 17 and wrapped December 20, was done entirely in Vancouver, with the exception of two beach scenes shot in Los Angeles for obvious reasons. One chilly December evening saw Jutra and director of photography Jean Boffety organizing the crew to film a scene in the underground parking lot of a huge hotel. Botsford, wearing a stunning royal blue velvet cape and matching satin pants, took her position in a crumpled heap at the base of a concrete pillar. She had been searching for her car when she was nearly run down by a cocky young man driving a sleek black sports car. First assistant director Don Granbery calls for action, and the cameras roll as Sven jumps from the car to see if Angie is hurt. He offers her a ride to look for her car in the labyrinthine tunnels and, after a sarcastic retort, Angie reluctantly accepts and slides into the passenger's seat.

After three takes, Boffety has what he wants. The crew breaks for coffee, with Botsford mumbling something about a desire for cream of mushroom soup. It's a clean, uneventful shoot, and, according to Spencer-Phillips, par for the course in this production. "This is one of the calmest sets I've worked on," he said, speaking from 12 years of experience with the CBC. "I attribute that to Claude—his calm emotional state and sense of organization. Even on the touchy, closed sets, the crew hasn't been edgy. There's been nothing spectacular about the shoot, and that in itself is spectacular."

All things considered, it's pretty spectacular that *By Design* ever got off the

ground. But then, Beryl Fox was in the pilot's seat and, as she puts it, "When I read the script, I knew it was a film that had to be made."

Glenda Bartosh ●

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p.c. B.D.F. Productions Ltd. exec. p. Douglas Leiterman, Louis Silverstein p. Werner Aellen, Beryl Fox assoc. p. James R. Westwell d. Claude Jutra p. man. Hugh Spencer-Phillips a.d. Don Granbery (1st), Derek Gardner (2nd), Scott Mathers (3rd) p.a. Catherine Leiterman loc. man. Fitch Cady cont. Monique Champagne p. sec. Anne Mathisen (Vancouver), Yvette Cutrara (Toronto) p. acct. Bernard Ross, Sandra Palmer (asst.) d.o.p. Jean Boffetty cam. op. Peter McLennan asst. cam. Tim Sale (1st), Phil Linzey (2nd) stills Alan Zenuk art. d. Reuben Freed, Graeme Murray (asst.), Jim Erickson (asst.) art dept. trainee Lorrie Russell props Wayne McLaughlin set dress. Kimberley Richardson (dept. hd.), Sandy Arthur (best boy), Annmarie Corbett, Sean Kirby, Jennifer Hinde (trainee) painter trainee Shana Fox ward. Trish Keating (head), Linda Langdon (asst.), Tish Monaghan (asst.), Phillip Clarkson (asst.) make-up Phyllis Newman hair Sali Bailey gaffer Don Saari best boy Leonard Wolfe elec. David Grinstead gen. op. Barrett J. Reid, Ray McCurrach key grip Roger Cadieux, Thomas (Paddy) Holleywell (asst.) dolly grip Dave Gordon grip Alan Campbell, Jim Hurford craft service Maureen Young sd. Larry Sutton boom Graham Crowell transp. co-ord. Brian Boyer drivers George Grieve (capt.), David Bowe (co-capt.), Bill McCurraugh, Jan Boyer, Peter Lassen, Andrew Neville, Scott Irvine, Danny Johnson construc. man. Barry Broly scenic artist Foyd Gillis d.o.p. (2nd unit) John Seale cam. op. (2nd unit) Rod Parkhurst cont. (2nd unit) Pattie Robertson gaf. (2nd unit) John Bartley p.a. (2nd unit) Tom Braidwood casting Clare Walker/Walker Bower, Bette Chadwick/Lynne Carrow ed. Toni Myers, Steve Withrow (asst.) pub. Glenda Roy, Les Wedman C.F.D.C. observer Gail Singer l.p. Patty Duke Astin, Sara Botsford, Saul Rubinek, Robert Benson, Clare Coulter, Alan Duruisseau, Jeannine Elias, Jan Filipis, Joseph Flaherty, Jim Hibbard, Mina Mina, Sonia Zimmer.

● 'Model' photographer Saul Rubinek taking advantage of a sneak preview in *By Design*

