



ALFRED HITCHCOCK

Born: Alfred Joseph Hitchcock, August 13, 1899 (Leytonstone, London, England); died 1980 (Los Angeles, California, U.S.).

Directing style: Venerated master of thriller genre; genius of suspense; trademark cameos in his own films; fluid camera takes; detailed social observation.

When he died in 1980, Sir Alfred “Hitch” Hitchcock had completed 57 feature films without ever winning an Academy Award. For some, Hitchcock is among the greatest of all filmmakers; he was indisputably the master of suspense. From early in his career he was eager to dispel the notion that suspense and surprise are similar. With surprise, the audience discovers something it does not know. With suspense, the audience knows something the character does not know, and watches to see what will happen as the character learns it.

Hitchcock grew up in Leytonstone, in London’s East End, and received a Jesuit education. He wrote macabre short fiction, became terrified of jails and the police, was deeply bonded to his mother, and was intrigued by railway timetables, especially for far-off places. After drafting advertisements for an electrical firm, he made title cards for Famous Players-Lasky in the 1920s, and then assisted on set, where he met Alma Reville. They were married in 1926, a harmonious union, with Alma loyally assisting Hitchcock on scripting and editing. She also served up formidable cooking, her husband’s appreciation



RIGHT: Joan Fontaine is wide-eyed as the second Mrs. de Winter in the eerie *Rebecca*.



ABOVE: Hitchcock directs the action from above on the set on the thriller *Rear Window*.

for which helped shape his world-renowned figure. Hitchcock was generally sober and businesslike at work, chummy to his confederates, yet so demanding that more than one writer was dismissed following long sessions of collaboration when, on a vital matter, he did not see eye to eye with the moviemaker.

Filmmaking was principally an optical matter for Hitchcock. He would envision shots and sequences, and frequently worked from detailed sketches. After a sour experience working with the testy producer David O. Selznick on *Rebecca* (1940), his first film in the United States (he was naturalized in 1956), he devised a shooting system that made it impossible to edit in any but the way he wanted. His British films, including *The Lodger* (1927) about serial murder; the first British sound feature *Blackmail* (1929); the espionage thrillers *The 39 Steps*

“The length of a film should be directly related to the endurance of the human bladder.”

Top Takes...

- Frenzy* 1972
- Topaz* 1969
- Marnie* 1964
- The Birds* 1963
- Psycho* 1960** ☆
- North by Northwest* 1959
- Vertigo* 1958
- The Man Who Knew Too Much* 1956
- To Catch a Thief* 1955
- Rear Window* 1954** ☆
- Strangers on a Train* 1951
- Rope* 1948
- The Paradine Case* 1947
- Notorious* 1946
- Spellbound* 1945** ☆
- Lifeboat* 1944** ☆
- Shadow of a Doubt* 1943
- Saboteur* 1942
- Suspicion* 1941
- Rebecca* 1940** ☆
- The Lady Vanishes* 1938
- Sabotage* 1936
- The 39 Steps* 1935
- Blackmail* 1929
- The Lodger* 1927

In the Background

Alfred Hitchcock's highly acclaimed 1960 suspense/horror film *Psycho* was based on the novel of the same name by Robert Bloch, which was in turn inspired by the real-life crimes of a Wisconsin serial killer. Janet Leigh starred as Marion Crane, the secretary on the run, and Anthony Perkins as the lonely psychopath Norman Bates.

- Hitchcock bought the rights to the novel from Robert Bloch for \$9,000.
- The film was shot in black and white as Hitchcock wanted to keep the cost down. It cost only \$800,000 to make and has earned more than \$40 million. It is also said that Hitchcock thought the film would be too gory if shot in color.
- Bosco Chocolate Syrup was used as fake blood in the shower scene. The syrup is still on sale throughout the United States and Europe.
- Janet Leigh had to cover her private parts with a moleskin suit while filming the shower scene to avoid "obscenity."
- When the shower scene was being filmed, Anthony Perkins was actually in New York, preparing for a play.
- Alfred Hitchcock's traditional cameo role occurs about four minutes in, when he appears outside Marion's office, wearing a cowboy hat.
- *Psycho* was Hitchcock's last movie for Paramount, although much of the film was shot at his new offices at Universal.

(1935) and *The Lady Vanishes* (1938); and *Sabotage* (1936) brought him a huge reputation. In the United States of the 1940s, he made a number of stylish black and white films: *Suspicion* (1941); *Saboteur* (1942) with its compelling finale on the Statue of Liberty; *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) about a troubled family in a California town; *Spellbound* (1945) about psychoanalysis; *Notorious* (1946) about a Nazi cadre in South America; and *The Paradine Case* (1947) about a beautiful woman accused of murdering her husband.

By the late 1940s Hitchcock was producing his own work. *Rope* (1948) is shot with 11-minute masters, and carefully edited so as to seem a single fluid camera take. Given the cumbersome Technicolor camera of the time and the intense lighting it required, the production required moving sets and strategically choreographed movements, as well as performances of the highest quality, since each actual take was very long and difficult to repeat.

The work of a movie master

Beyond technical experimentation, Hitchcock's true mastery lay in his melding of dense philosophical reflection on themes of universal significance to brilliant, often scathing, detailed social observation. Viewers can gain a deep appreciation for Hitchcock's work by noting its profoundly visual nature: meticulous camera placement and movement, use of insert shots to detail objects and views, and a profound sense of color and form. On top of this, Hitchcock's dialogue is not only witty and apt, but refined and often stunning.

To see that Hitchcock enriched the cinema, one need only recall the photographer paralyzed in a cast in *Rear Window* (1954); the U.S. tourist screaming during a concert in the remake of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956); the deeply disorienting dolly/zoom combination in the tower of *Vertigo* (1958); Grant diving into a cornfield to escape an attacking crop-duster in *North by Northwest* (1959); Leigh blithely showering in *Psycho* (1960); Hedren being attacked by gulls in the finale of *The Birds* (1963); or thieving in *Marnie* (1964). **MP**

RIGHT: Lobby card for Alfred Hitchcock's highly praised horror movie *Psycho*.

