

The Glory of Gold

Über publicist Peggy Siegal has been attending the Academy Awards for three decades—not to mention the oodles of parties and sensational events leading up to the ceremony—and chronicling



her escapades with stars and star-makers for *AVENUE* has become a tradition. This year, she sets the stage for the big night with the behind-the-scenes scoop on the fierce competition that ends when Oscar

is presented. Here, she reports on the Hollywood glamour, excitement and social shenanigans, including celebrating with Colin Firth, Jesse Eisenberg, Elton John, Oprah Winfrey and many more.

photographs by PATRICK McMULLAN

Qaddafi is hunkering down in Tripoli, giving press interviews, denying that rebels are taking over Eastern Libya. Oil prices are shooting up over one hundred dollars a barrel. The U.S. government is on the verge of a shutdown. These are not the top-secret opening lines of **Aaron Sorkin's** new script, but the global headlines of a world spinning out of control as I head to Los Angeles like an overdressed lemming to attend the 83rd Academy Awards and attempt to make sense of artists thrust into combat.

For the second year, nearly 6,000 Academy members have nominated 10 films and the battle seems to be pared down to 2. The beloved instant classic, *The King's Speech*, marches into the arena as the frontrunner, but passionate supporters of the edgier (critics' darling) *The Social Network* have not conceded. The ballots are counted, the party invites are out and still the feelings are raw. Nominees are exhausted from campaigning.

Woody Allen and **George Lucas** tell me they are no longer members of the Academy because pitting artists against each other to determine the quality of their work is insane. They are right. My event and publicity company is considered Switzerland by the studios, as we help every filmmaker to present his work. However, this year, against my better judgment, I am somewhat emotionally sucked in.

In 2005, I met the unknown 32-year-old English director **Tom Hooper** on his first film for HBO, *Elizabeth I* starring **Helen Mirren**. Helen later wins an Oscar for portraying Queen Elizabeth in *The Queen*. Queen Elizabeth is the daughter of King George VI, portrayed by Oscar-winner **Colin Firth** in *The King's Speech* directed by Hooper. No degrees of separation.

At the Telluride Film Festival, Tom Hooper bathed in the glory of a hysterical standing ovation alongside Colin Firth and **Geoffrey Rush** at the very first public screening of that film. Two weeks later at The Toronto Film Festival, **Harvey Weinstein** stood with his filmmakers witnessing the same reaction. The film won The Audience Prize. Their strategy was to say nothing, do nothing. They have a possible Oscar winner—four out of five past Best Pictures have premiered in Toronto.

Cut to New York City at the end of September. It's opening night at The Film

Society of Lincoln Center. One of America's most important and prolific producers, **Scott Rudin**, along with **Jesse Eisenberg**, **Andrew Garfield** and **Aaron Sorkin**, are in a brightly lit box waving down to their equally hysterical audience who have just seen *The Social Network*. The film opens the next day to rave reviews and endless publicity. **David Fincher** is off making *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. **Aaron Sorkin** becomes the face of the film and an immediate shoo-in for the adapted screenplay Oscar.

The Hamptons International Film Festival in October suddenly becomes a launching pad for *127 Hours*, where star-cum-Yale/NYU student **James Franco** appears. More Oscar buzz. Producer/director **Danny Boyle** (Oscar winner for *Slumdog Millionaire*) stays in London all fall directing the play *Frankenstein*. *Black Swan* also unspools there in a tiny theater as **Madonna**, **Alec Baldwin** and **Harvey Weinstein** slip in the back. **Darren Aronofsky** is hailed a genius. **Natalie Portman** is instantly the hot nominee for Best Actress. Both films are sensations, but it's *The King's Speech* that wins The Audience Prize.

Mid-November: **David O. Russell** and **Mark Wahlberg** sneak *The Fighter* in Manhattan. As their audience erupts in cheers, I tell producer/actor Wahlberg, "Clint Eastwood is going to kill himself for not directing this." He says, "You're wrong. He turned it down because he's done it. He's seen it and he loves it." David O. Russell becomes my new Clint Eastwood. **Christian Bale** and **Melissa Leo** are hailed the supporting actors to beat.

True Grit, directed by the **Coen Brothers** and also produced by **Scott Rudin**, finally throws its cowboy hat in the ring in mid-December at the Ziegfeld as the last serious Oscar contender for Best Picture. It gallops off to box office gold.

The Social Network now cements its battle cry with one word: relevance. **Mark Zuckerberg** lands on the cover of *Time Magazine* as "Person of the Year." A smart and extensive ad campaign positions the film in the lead. Critics and pundits proclaim the race is over. Everyone goes on holiday.

This is one of the few times in Harvey Weinstein's life that he's caught off guard. He quickly mobilizes an inner team of 15 and conducts strategy meetings 7 days a week, including Christmas. They're like a Chinese restaurant: always open. He sends screenwriter **David Seidler** and Tom Hooper to every corner of the country doing Q&As until they are both blue in the face from "finding their voice." SAG voters begin seeing the film two and three times.

In January at the Golden Globes, about 88 foreign journalists give awards to *The Social Network* for Best Drama, Director and Screenplay. The film is still perceived as the Oscar winner and nobody can stop the steamroller. Only Academy voters disregard these awards.

The King's Speech wins the PGA in L.A. Everyone is totally surprised when Tom Hooper goes on to win the DGA. After a tremendous amount of hard work by team Weinstein, the actors win for the SAG Ensemble. The BAFTAs reinforced their lead; the film is now the frontrunner. It takes the media a few weeks to catch on.





Steven Tyler and Liv Tyler

Kevin Spacey

Melissa Leo

Jennifer Lawrence

Steve Martin

Leslie Mann and Judd Apatow

George Hamilton and Kimberly Blackford

Wren Scott and Mick Jagger

Marisa Tomei

I whisper to Harrison [Ford], "That looks just like Johnny Depp." Harrison rolls his eyes and reluctantly introduces me to his friend . . . Johnny Depp.

The Daily Mail announces Her Royal Highness **Queen Elizabeth** has enjoyed a private screening of *The King's Speech* and is "moved" by the film. With no proof the Queen has actually seen the film, press agents send out a global press release thanking her Majesty for the endorsement.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24

Mid-day, I arrive at The Beverly Hills Hotel. As the housekeepers unpack my bags upstairs I peek into the Polo Lounge and find **Warren Beatty** in a booth. I tell him I'm rooting for his wife, **Annette Benning**, and love her film, *The Kids Are All Right*. Warren says *The Social Network* will win.

This year I am two days late arriving to Oscar weekend. I am shown to a very, very small room—the size of a broom closet. Uncharacteristically, I have a slight melt down. I am moved. The housekeepers run down the hall with my clothes flying. The hotel is sold out, so I get someone else's room. Another unsuspecting victim checking in downstairs will get the broom closet.

It is cold, grey and rainy. Taffeta, organdy and embroidered silk evening clothes hang in my closet. I stay in my sweaters and fur coat, and head to **Arianna Huffington's** home in Beverly Hills where she and **Wendi Murdoch** are hosting a party for **Tom Freston's** wife, the beautiful, blonde **Kathy**. Her book is called *Veganist: Lose Weight, Get Healthy, Change the World*—perfect for monks.

Arianna has just sold the Huffington Post to AOL for \$315 million dollars and is rumored to have personally landed around \$20 million. She is euphoric as she greets **Nicole Kidman** and **Keith Urban** at the door. Other drenched power players include Disney's **Bob Iger** and wife **Willow Bay**, Fox's **Jim Gianopulos**, **Candice Bergen** and journalist daughter **Chloe Malle**, Google's **Eric Schmidt**, **Oliver Stone** escorting his daughter **Tara** and avoiding questions about **Charlie Sheen**, **Moby**, **Jamie Niven**, **Brian Grazer**, **Vivi Nevo**, CBS's **Les Moonves** and **Julie Chen**, **Rob Reiner**, Paramount's **Brad Grey** and fiancé **Cassandra Huysentruyt** and **Jeff Bezos**. Hors d'oeuvres include pigs in blankets—a food group not mentioned in Kathy's book.

The action migrates to UTA **Jim Burkus'** home for a party for *True Grit's* **Ethan** and **Joel Coen**. I pass **Ron Howard** on the way in and he says, "Keep me on your list." Is he kidding? **Sunrise** and **Mark Ruffalo**, Focus Feature's **James Shamus**, **Nancy Meyers** and **John Goldwyn** mingle. Adorable **Hallie**

Steinfeld is there with her parents. I am trying to fix her up with **Justin Bieber**. She giggles, "Peg, I am only 14."

I am face to face with **Harrison Ford** and stupidly tell him I love him in *Morning Glory*. He's looking at me in utter disbelief, but I will not shut up. A gorgeous guy is inches away in a hat and glasses. I whisper to Harrison, "That looks just like **Johnny Depp**." Harrison rolls his eyes and reluctantly introduces me to his friend . . . **Johnny Depp**. I babble a bit about his great work then run for cover in a corner next to my buddy, **Jerry Bruckheimer**.

I head over to the CAA/**Bryan Lourd's** "Friday Night Party." Torrential rains and horrific winds cause a traffic jam that makes it impossible to get near the house. The world's most famous faces cower under black umbrellas and make a run for it. **Bryan Lourd** and **Bruce Bozzi** receive friends at the door all night.

Inside, **Uma Thurman** tells me she finally moved into a doorman building in New York after being terrorized by stalkers for years. **Ben Walker** talks about *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*, which he is about to shoot, while his fiancé, **Mamie Gummer**, looks sexy shivering in a white satin gown. Producer **Jon Kilik** mentions he oversaw a new cut of **Julian Schnabel's** *Miral*, to be released in March. **Bennett Miller**, standing with **Kristin Gore**, says Sony loves his new film, *Moneyball*, and **Brad Pitt** is terrific. (When is Brad Pitt not terrific?) **Sandy Gallin** tells me he has an actual job decorating **Jeffrey Katzenberg's** home. I congratulate **Barry Levinson's** son **Sam**, a director, for winning the writing award at Sundance for his first film, *Another Happy Day*.

Also seen floating around are **Taylor Swift** and **Jake Gyllenhaal**—but not together—**Sean Penn**, **Tom Cruise** and **Katie Holmes**, **Anderson Cooper**, **Hilary Swank**, **Kelly Ripa**, **Paul Haggis**, **Marisa Tomei**, **Kate Beckinsale**, **Demi Moore** and **Ashton Kutcher**, **Kate Hudson**, **Gerard Butler**, **Renee Zellweger** with **Bradley Cooper**, *Biutiful* director **Alejandro Gonzalez-Inarritu**, **Kathryn Bigelow** and **Mark Boal**, [REDACTED] (who is headed to Broadway in *The Normal Heart* this spring) and CAA's **Kevin Huvane**, **Richard Lovett** and **Hylda Queally**. Sony Classic's **Michael Barker** tells me *The Social Network* will win.

Tired celebs try to go home, but limo lock is at a standstill. Cell phones don't work in the area. Two hundred swells become party prisoners and happily hang out till 5 a.m.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26

Out comes the sun and dries up all the rain. IAC chairmen and owner of *Newsweek/The Daily Beast* **Barry Diller** and his wife **Diane Von Furstenberg** (with her kids **Alex** and **Tatiana**) host their 15th annual lunch for **Graydon Carter** in their Coldwater Canyon home. Barry introduces me to his star guest, Gov. **Jerry Brown**, just elected to his third (nonconsecutive) term as California governor.

Like last year, enormous clear plastic tents are erected on the hill near the house. Long wooden picnic tables sit on oriental rugs covering the soggy ground. VIPs wears winter clothes, comfy sweaters and sensible shoes. I arrive in a fur coat.



Stephen Gaghan and Minnie Mortimer

Arnie Hammer

Charize Theron

Kate Beckinsale

Scarlett Johansson

Lourdes Leon and Madonna

Aaron Sorkin

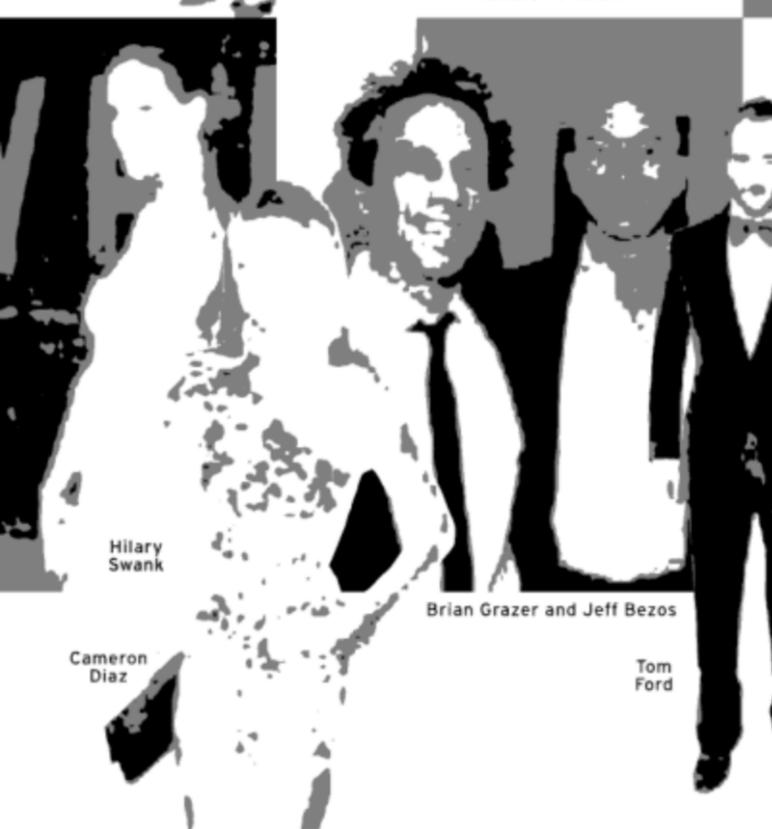


Wendi Murdoch, Kathy Freston and Arianna Huffington



Georgina Chapman

Natalie Portman



Hilary Swank

Cameron Diaz

Brian Grazer and Jeff Bezos

Tom Ford

Everybody knows everybody, and it doesn't matter if you have a hit film or T.V. show this season. **Oprah Winfrey** kisses **David Geffen**, casually chats with former Disney C.E.O. **Michael Eisner** and current Sony Chief **Sir Howard Stringer** and **Rob Weisenthal**. **Brett Ratner** arrives with his houseguest **Jean Pigozzi**, who is allowed to take photographs. Graydon greets people with chic wife **Anna** by his side.

Ingrid Sischy and **Sandy Brant**, **Rupert Murdoch**, **Ron Meyer**, **Francesco Clemente** with his twin boys and **Tom Ford** chat each other up. People to watch include pregnant **Victoria** and **David Beckham** with **Lynn Wyatt**, **Fran Lebowitz**, **Larry Gagosian** and **Shala Monroe**, **Ben Silverman**, **Debbie** and **Allen**

I head over to the CAA/Bryan Lourd's "Friday Night Party." Torrential rains and horrific winds cause a traffic jam that makes it impossible to get near the house. The world's most famous faces cover under black umbrellas and make a run for it.

Grubman, Sotheby's **Tobias Meyer** and **Mark Fletcher** and **Stephen Gaghan** and **Mini Mortimer** wearing her oversized cat glasses.

Bruce Cohen has invited me to the Oscar broadcast rehearsal. Inside the Kodak Theater's massive auditorium, I find a seat next to his proud parents. I watch **Josh Brolin** and **Javier Bardem** come out in white dinner jackets and flub their lines as they pretend to present Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Original Screenplay. Josh will later tell me that their acting methods are completely opposite: he's a quick study and is very creative and comfortable ad-libbing; Javier, whose mother tongue is Spanish, likes to have every syllable printed out to study with a dialect coach. Life-size photos on cardboard plaques are taped to each nominee's chair. I memorize their location so when I return Sunday I can quickly kiss them all.

Back at the Beverly Hills hotel I slip into my black tulle **Dennis Basso** cocktail dress with a plunging neckline and put on my mother's jewels. **Jim Coleman** takes me to the "Night Before Party" in the

hotel. This is **Jeffrey Katzenberg's** 9th annual A-lister event benefiting The Motion Picture & Television Fund where they raise \$6.5 million dollars in 1 night. I walk into **Valentino**, who gives me an approving once-over. I tell him and **Giancarlo Giammetti** that **Woody Allen's** new film, *Midnight in Paris*, is opening the Cannes Film Festival and they must bring the yacht.

Elton John and **David Furnish** join our conversation so of course we ask for intimate details about baby **Zachary**. I segue over to **Amy Adams**, who, like them, mentions she hates leaving her baby in the hotel room. Next stop is **Kate Capshaw** in a black bowler hat chatting with **Steven Spielberg's** god-daughter, **Gwyneth Paltrow**. I have known Steven for years (in 1982 I was a publicist on *E.T.*). I now tell him I'm going to the Lincoln Center opening of *War Horse* with **Kathy Kennedy** and **Frank Marshall** and cannot wait to see his movie version.

I meet sweet **Jennifer Aniston**, her new haircut and her perfect little body. Her date tells me her secret is a half-hour on the treadmill everyday—such an understatement. I tell **Jesse Eisenberg** I was on his plane home from the Baftas last week, but he was hiding under his hoodie. He says innocently, "You should have said 'hello.' I always cover my head because I think my curls make me look like a girl."

The charity gives us a coupon booklet redeemable at various booths. Rich people run around like lunatics, collecting gifts for their housekeepers. Among the shoppers are **Steven** and **Heather Mnuchin**, Viacom's **Deborah** and **Philippe Dauman**, **Tamara Mellon**, **Christine Taylor** and **Ben Stiller**, **Cate Blanchet**, **Susan** and **Robert Downey Jr.** and **Debra** and **Hugh Jackman**.

Next stop is The Weinstein Company's party at the Soho House sponsored by MontBlanc. Long gone are the funky Miramax Saturday night soirees where nominees spoofed their own films in homemade costumes and ad-libbed hilarious skits. No more grown men dressed as **Anna Paquin** playing the piano in hopes of winning a Max Award.

As I come in, a 400-pound gorilla refuses to let me on the elevator. Once on, I see **Jennifer Lopez** in the corner and remind her we met on **Len Blavatnik's** yacht in Cannes. She graciously pretends to remember me. Her manager, **Benny Medina**, is kicking me.

I slip into Colin Firth's booth to have a tête-à-tête with him and his wife **Livia Giuggioli**. Jokingly, I suggest he say "I'm speechless" when he wins. Colin patiently assures me many people, far more clever than I, thought of this. He then says that others are wagering bets on whether he might subconsciously stutter. I grill him about his wardrobe, assuming he will be wearing a new **Tom Ford** tuxedo. He tells me both he and Ford will be in older Ford models. I tell him I made rich-but-thrifty **Charles Ferguson**, director of *Inside Job*, spend \$6,000 dollars for a new Tom Ford tux.

In the back room, Jennifer Lopez is now seated with Weinstein's wife, **Georgina Chapman**. **Helena Bonham Carter**, her live-in-lover **Tim Burton** and her mother **Elena** circulate. Star power includes **Adrien Brody**, **Mary-Kate** and **Ashley Olsen**, **Cameron Diaz**, **Camilla Belle**, **Chace**



Adrien Brody

Claire Danes and Hugh Dancy



Hailee Steinfeld

Vera Farmiga

Andrew Garfield

Taylor Swift

Oliver Stone and Tara Stone



Barry Diller

Chloe Malle and Candice Bergen

Donna Karan

Anderson Cooper

Diane von Furstenberg

Lynn Wyatt

Jon Hamm and Jennifer Westfeldt

Tory Burch

Crawford, Claire Danes and Hugh Dancy, Darren Aronofsky, director John Wells, Kerry Washington, Piers Morgan, Rachel Zoe, Sean Parker, Zack Braff and Leonardo DiCaprio with Bar Rafaeli. Speech filmmakers are functioning on high anxiety.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 27

Producer **Donna Gigliotti** is my date to the awards. We are both so nervous we arrive at the Kodak Theater at 3 p.m. and nobody is there. We are driven around for an hour. When we arrive back at the world's most famous red carpet, I guide Donna through security check-in to the extreme right to make sure we get on camera. I teach her the red carpet hustle, which is five steps forward, three steps back, one inch behind a couture-clad nominee. We greet **Kevin Huvane** as **Sandra Bullock** is talking to ABC-TV and a billion people see me wearing a black Marchesa gown. Five steps forward, three steps back, we next meet **Gwyneth Paltrow**, and I hook up the back of her dress while another billion people see me correct the fashion malfunction. Five steps forward, three steps back, we're now posing behind Nicole Kidman and Keith Urban. Our Blackberrys begin buzzing; the world has seen us.

James Franco and **Anne Hathaway** are hip hosts. This is the year of no surprises. But it isn't until **Hilary Swank** yells out Hooper's name for Best Director that Harvey's gang finally realizes they are getting the Oscar for Best Picture after all. Harvey is sitting in Spielberg's seat as Spielberg announces the win from the stage. Producers **Iain Canning**, **Emile Sherman** and **Gareth Unwin** leap up and kiss each other. Six months of grueling work have finally paid off. King George VI and Harvey Weinstein now share the journey of a single man who triumphs over adversity.

At the Governor's ball, held above the Kodak Theater, the winners triumphantly sachet around the room holding their heavy eight-pound gold statues.

An hour later there is a migration to the *Vanity Fair* party hosted by Graydon Carter at **Jeff Klein's** Sunset Tower Hotel. The invitation features a gold hologram that transmits a radio frequency of a photo and details about the guest to *VF* staff as they arrive. The next day "Page Six" will report that the backup private security firm is run by a former Israeli operative, when in fact they are Irish Catholics from Staten Island.

There's a hierarchy of arrival times. At 5 p.m. the inner circle of Graydon's 141 best friends attend a seated dinner. They include Barry Diller and Diane von Furstenberg, **Francis Ford Coppola**, **Jon Hamm** and **Jennifer Westfeldt**, **Betsey Bloomingdale**, **Tory Burch** and **Lyor Cohen**, **Carolina** and **Reinaldo Herrera**, **L'Wren Scott** and **Sir Mick Jagger**, **Naomi Watts** and **Liev Schreiber**, **Wendi Stark**, **George Hamilton**, **Judd Apatow**, **Jackie** and **Joan Collins**, **Donna Karan** and **Steve Martin**.

The best and the brightest talent in town arrive at 9 p.m. Every single winner shows up. Also there are Justin Bieber and his date **Selena Gomez**, **Michelle Williams**, **Emma Stone**, **Steve Tyler** and **Liv Tyler**, **Andrew Garfield**, **Jude Law**, **Armie Hammer**, **Vera Farmiga**,

Kevin Spacey, **Charlize Theron**, **Anne Hathaway**, *Winter's Bone* star-of-tomorrow **Jennifer Lawrence**, **Taylor Hackford** and **Helen Mirren**, **Scarlett Johansson**, **Isla Fischer** and **Sasha Baron Cohen**, **Tom Hanks**, **Sean Penn**, **Renee Zellweger** and **Bradley Cooper** and **Jane Fonda** after her play, *33 Variations*. I introduce **Melania** and **Donald Trump** to **David O. Russell** as *The Trumpster* gushes about *The Fighter*. David tells Donald he used to be a waiter/bar tender at many of Trump's parties. Donald smiles as if looking at yet another apprentice. He then offers me a ride home on his plane; he's leaving in 10 minutes. Too bad James Franco didn't know because he is presently sitting on a commercial flight back to school, skipping his own after-party. The rest of the guests' social standings are determined by half-hour increments. *VF's* **Beth Kseniak**, **Matt Ullian** and **Jane Sarkin** tell me the list is cut down to 800 this year.

At 11:30 p.m. there is another celebrity migration up the hill to **Madonna** manager **Guy Oseary's** house. Earlier in the

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evening, Madonna came down the hill to pose in a risqué see-thru outfit with daughter **Lourdes**. Madonna and co-host **Demi Moore** are able to lure the crème de la crème with the promise of dancing and no cameras.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 28

A winner's work is never done. Colin Firth, Tom Hooper and David Seidler show up at 4:30 a.m. at The Four Seasons Hotel for a live broadcast on "The Today Show." Functioning on an adrenaline rush, they return to the Kodak Theater with Geoffrey Rush to appear on Oprah's live broadcast.

By the end of this year's thrilling race between two great producers—Scott Rudin and Harvey Weinstein—Facebook and Twitter are credited for aiding political justice from the streets of Cairo to Tripoli. But the British film with the most heart wins as one single human voice can still make a difference. The king has spoken. ♦



Donald and Melania Trump

Fran Lebowitz

Naomi Watts

Joan Collins

Chace Crawford

Ellen Barkin

Julie Chen