

Peggy Siegal (not Guggenheim) Does Venice Diary

This was the summer I fled to Europe five times starting with the Cannes and Taormina Film Festivals. I made my maiden voyage to the Paris couture shows, Valentino's Chateau de Wideville and Les Rencontres D'Arles Photography 2010. I partied in St. Tropez and Patmos and became a "yacht slut" amusing the rich on everything from 160' to 350' with exotic names like Audacia, Siren, Lady Joy, Luna and Baracuda.

Wednesday, September 1, 2010

Nautical travel is reduced to a water taxi which takes me to the island of Giudecca in glorious Venice for the 67th Biennale Cinema 2010.

I am greeted at the dock of the exclusive Cipriani Hotel with a flurry of Italian compliments and am compared to Peggy Guggenheim (in name only), the fabulously wealthy American avant-garde art collector. I mention I was at her Palazzo Venier dei Leoni two years ago to celebrate "Valentino: The Last Emperor."

In the lobby, Franca Sozzani, the powerful editor of Italian Vogue regales me with tales of her party the night before for jury president Quentin Tarantino (who awards the Golden Lion) at Countess Bianca Arrivabene Valenti Gonzaga's XIV Century Palazzo Papadopoli on the Grand Canal. Blue-blooded beauties Ortensia Visconti and Bianca Brandolini d'Adda attended along with Jessica Alba.

The porter shows me to a room in Siberia, which I call "the room test for stupid single women." I request something within walking distance to the front desk. In all the excitement—jetlag, spa visit, room upgrade—I have a premonition something is going to go wrong.

Greek film director Angela Ismailos and I race to the premiere of Fox Searchlight's sexy ballet thriller "Black Swan" on the Lido. In front of the Palazzo del Cinema's Sala Grande, director Darren Aronofsky (a previous Golden Lion winner), Natalie Portman and French actor Vincent Cassel face an army of paparazzi and screaming fans.

At the crowded after-party at the Hotel Excelsior, Darren takes me into a hidden private dining room for the filmmakers where Natalie Portman, with her choreographer boyfriend Benjamin Millepied, tells me she did most of the arduous dancing herself in the film.

I return to my room at Cipriani's and discover my Verdura white topaz ring that looks like a million bucks and was a gift from Jets owner Woody Johnson (for organizing his 60th birthday party) has mysteriously vanished. A sentimental sadness prevails. The hotel staff comes running and decides to investigate the next day.

Thursday, Sept. 2, 2010

Being a loyal fan and friend of Julian Schnabel's, I enthusiastically attend his press conference for The Weinstein Company's "Miral," a drama based on an autobiographical novel by Palestinian journalist Rula Jebreal, who is Julian's love interest. The film explores Rula's and three other Arab-Israeli women's lives from the 1948 creation of the Jewish state to the 1993 Oslo accords that briefly raised hopes of peace in the Middle East.

Rula, beautifully dressed in a white fitted sheath, speaks in flawless Italian and steals the show. Frieda Pinta, who portrays Rula, is sick and has stayed in India. Julian and his producer Jon Kilik wear headsets because the entire press conference is in Italian.

Back at Cipriani's, Leelee Sobieski is poolside with her husband, men's fashion designer, Adam Kimmel. He is the father of their nine-month-old daughter [REDACTED] who attended her parents wedding in Venice three days prior.

Supermodel Naomi Campbell, wearing Azzedine Alaia and a huge emerald ring from her Russian billionaire boyfriend Vladimir Doronin, creates a flash-bulb frenzy on "Miral's" red carpet. Julian has brought four of his five children: [REDACTED], who is in the movie, [REDACTED] and the 17-year-old twin boys, [REDACTED]. Olivier Sarkozy pretends not to be with [REDACTED]. Harvey Weinstein has just flown in from wife Georgina Chapman's hospital bedside in New York City and proudly shows a photo on his i-phone of two-day-old daughter [REDACTED].

Luca Dini, editor-in- chief of Italian Vanity Fair, gives a glamorous seated dinner in honor of Julian and Rula at the Gothic Palazzo Pisani-Moretta on the Grand Canal. The building dates back to 1470, but was restored during the 18th century. It's the only palazzo with chandeliers still illuminated by hundreds of tall white candles.

"W" Editor Stefano Tonchi with Shala Monroe, Stephen Dorff, John Turturro and Franca Sozzani in Alberta Ferretti all celebrate with 100 noble Venetians. Amy Sacco later leads the gang to her pop-up Bungalow 8 across the Canal.

I sit with Naomi and Vladimir and tell them I crashed Naomi's 40th birthday party in Cannes in May. Vlad is more shocked than amused I got past his expensive extensive security. Naomi thinks it is just hilarious and says I should have called her, she would have invited me. I tell her I didn't know her or her number. We become fast friends talking about Liya Kebede's film "Desert Flower" and the Somalian model Waris Dirie who wrote the book the film is based on. Naomi started modeling at 15 with Waris and says she was one of the most beautiful women she ever worked with.

My Verdura white topaz ring has still not been found by Cipriani's detectives, and the manager offers to take me to the chief of police the next day.

Friday, September 3, 2010

Sofia Coppola is the princess of Italy. At her morning press conference she says the inspiration for her new Focus Features film, "Somewhere," came from growing up with her father, Francis Ford Coppola, because they also lived in hotels. The press hangs on her every syllable.

Her film is about a movie star who sees the emptiness of his existence through the eyes of his 11-year-old daughter. It was filmed at the Chateau Marmont, the Sunset Boulevard icon of Hollywood excess.

It is the third day of the two-week festival. Sofia's film is already the front runner for the Golden Lion, which it eventually wins.

I spend two hours at the Venice police station with my translator/hotel manager, detailing the saga of the missing ring which was originally designed by Sicilian Duke Fulco di Verdura for Rita Hayworth. Was it the porter, the ladies in the spa or the chambermaids? The police give me a three-page, single-spaced report in Italian for the insurance I later find out I don't have.

After Sofia's premiere, Peter Brant, Tony Shafrazi, diamond dealer Laurence Graff, Naomi and Vladimir and the Russian editor of Vogue Ailona Doletskaya stop at Cipriani's for a private dinner. I sit next to my new best friend Naomi.

We head to the Louis Vuitton party hosted by Antoine Arnault for Sofia at the Renaissance 16th-Century Palazzo Contarini Polignac on the Grand Canal. Sofia, French rocker Thomas Mars, the father of her two baby daughters, brother Roman Coppola, and cast members Stephen Dorff and Elle Fanning pose for photos. Willem Dafoe and young European actresses Clemence Poesy, Elisa Sednaoui, Lea Seydoux and Zoe Cassavetes are the evening's eye candy.

Saturday, September 4, 2010

I take Peter Brant to Roberta and Luigino Rossi's Palazzo Curti-Valmarana to see their collection of golden shoes drawn by Andy Warhol. Coincidentally Luigino owns a high-end shoe factory and shoe museum near Venice. Peter has one of the world's most extensive collections of Warhols.

The Venetian Heritage hosts a ceremony at the San Salvador Church to celebrate the restoration of a gold altar piece from the 14th century. Sofia Coppola shows up for a photo-op. Top art restorer Toto Bergamo Rossi hosts a picnic lunch in the gardens of his 17th century Palazzo Gradenigo for Antoine Arnault and his sister Delphine Arnault, Princess Firyal of Jordan, Countess Marina Cicogna, Earl Rufus Albemarle and his wife Sally, Lawrence Lovett and others.

That evening Bulgari and W Magazine host a supper by the pool at Cipriani's. Stefano Tonchi and Nicola and Beatrice Bulgari greet Sir David Tang, Leelee Sobieski and Adam Kimmel, Franca Sozzani, Shala Monroe, Paz Vega and Sofia Coppola.

I go to the Lido for a midnight screening of John Turturro's enchanting documentary "Passione," billed as a musical adventure through Naples. The film combines archival footage with musical numbers and explores his family's cultural heritage.

Sunday, September 5th, 2010

Another day, another palazzo. American [REDACTED] (from [REDACTED]!) and her [REDACTED] invite me to their [REDACTED] [REDACTED], purchased [REDACTED] years ago with many of the original family's heirlooms. From the balcony, we watch the annual [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. The spectacle was originally conceived 700 years ago as a competition between the gondoliers.

While I am mesmerized by the procession of rowers wearing Renaissance costumes in ancient, brightly colored boats, two American films are exploding out of the Telluride Film Festival: The Weinstein Company/Tom Hooper's "The King's Speech" and Fox Searchlight/Danny Boyle's "127 Hours."

I'm on my way to the Toronto and New York Film Festivals to see Columbia Pictures/David Fincher's "The Social Network" and every other Oscar contender. Let the race begin.

And if you're in Venice and you see a porter wearing a huge white topaz ring on his pinky, tell him Woody Johnson is looking for him...but even worse, so is Peggy Siegal.