

UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN

HE: You have beautiful eyes, Francesca. I wish that I could swim inside them.

SHE (snorts with laughter): Wow – that’s exactly the kind of thing we American women think Italian men say. (When she sees he is stung by her wisecrack:) Forgive me, Marcello. I’m nervous. I was married for a long time. Since then there hasn’t been anybody. And I think... (Oh, why not?) Would you like to help me change that?

HE: You are asking me to sleep with you?

SHE: Yes.

HE (smiling): That’s exactly the kind of thing we Italian men think American women say.

The life of freshly divorced San Francisco writer Frances Mayes (Diane Lane) is about to take an unexpected but much needed upturn. Trying to shake Frances out of her lethargy and post-breakup funk, her friend Patti (Sandra Oh) offers Frances a gift that she hopes will do the trick: a ten day trip to Tuscany, in the heart of Italy. And right there, under the Tuscan sun, the unlikeliest thing happens: Frances impulsively buys a run-down villa named “Bramasole” – literally, “something that yearns for the sun” – and in so doing, plunges herself into a brand new life. As she embraces the local ways and devotes herself to the restoration of her new home, Frances finds herself forming close bonds with the people around her and slowly rediscovering the pleasures of laughter, friendship and romance. Even as she stumbles forward on her uncertain journey, one thing becomes clear: in life, there are second chances.

Touchstone Pictures presents “Under the Tuscan Sun,” directed by Audrey Wells. Screen Story and Screenplay by Audrey Wells. The film is based on the book Under the Tuscan Sun by Frances Mayes. Producers are Tom Sternberg and Audrey Wells. Executive Producers are Laura Fattori, Sandy Kroopf and Mark Gill. The film stars Diane Lane, Sandra Oh, Lindsay Duncan and Raoul Bova.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

“‘Under The Tuscan Sun’ is about someone taking a big risk and going to a foreign country and buying a house and changing her life. It’s about a transformation.” (Frances Mayes)

“‘Under The Tuscan Sun’ is a movie about a woman who takes a leap, changes her life, and finds that when you stop looking for love, love will find you.” (Tom Sternberg, Producer, “Under The Tuscan Sun”)

When San Francisco writer Frances Mayes (Diane Lane) suddenly finds herself divorced and feeling hopelessly lost, it is of all things a house that comes to her rescue.

More precisely, it is a fresh way of life that saves her. She decides to be spontaneous, even bold about things that frighten her. Very little else makes sense; an opportunity presents itself.

Why not buy a house in Tuscany?

Like a swashbuckler of the heart, Frances is called upon to be fearless – courageous in the face of thunder and lightning, steadfast before walls which topple in a roar, determined to fill an empty house – but with what? Harder still, she is called upon to embrace love again.

At first, she is challenged by the love of her friend Patti, who all but forces her to accept the gift of an Italian trip. Once in Tuscany, she is provoked by the angelic teases of a hedonist named Katherine (Lindsay Duncan), who urges her to, in the words of Fellini, “live spherically,” to grab life while it is passing within reach. As Frances tries, she is beguiled by Signor Martini (Vincent Riotta), the kindly, attractive realtor who helps her buy “Bramasole,” the rosy villa that has caught her eye. She is also both stirred and taunted by the half-comic, half-dire charade of young love being acted out by one of her handymen, Pawel (Pawel Szadja), together with Chiara (Giulia Steigerwalt), the daughter of a local landowner. Isn’t heartbreak hard enough without having to be embroiled in other people’s dramas?

When a jaw-droppingly handsome Italian named – what else? – Marcello (Raoul Bova) crosses

her path, Frances feels her whole being snap wide awake. Happiness beckons. But now she *really* has something to be frightened of.

Could she survive a second catastrophic heartbreak? Would Tuscany?

In November 1998, Tom Sternberg was producing “The Talented Mr. Ripley” in Italy. It was the penultimate week of the movie’s seventeen-week shooting schedule, and the crew was working in the Tuscan town of Pienza for one day. After finishing the shooting day, Sternberg adjourned to a nearby wine bar with director Anthony Minghella and actor Matt Damon. It was there that fate intervened, resulting in a sequence of events that reflect in many ways the threads of chance and coincidence that characterize Frances Mayes’s own story.

“I noticed a couple picking out wine glasses,” Sternberg recalls. “They were speaking English and we struck up a conversation, only to find out that it was Frances and Ed Mayes.” Sternberg had read – and enjoyed – Mayes’s bestselling memoir a year earlier, and was astounded to meet the author. An international success, Mayes’s Under the Tuscan Sun sold 2 million copies in the U.S. and spent 126 weeks on the *New York Times* Bestseller List. It has been translated into 15 different languages, with further translations planned, and also is a bestseller in the U.K., Australia, Italy, France, Spain, Israel and Holland. But while the film producer had enjoyed the engaging memoir of an American poet and literature professor who carved out a new life in the Tuscan hills, he had not considered it for film treatment.

“Under the Tuscan Sun is a memoir – the story of my life in Italy – and there was no big dramatic event in it,” says Frances Mayes. “So when people talked to me about making a film, they wanted there to be a murder in it or something like that. I didn’t want that to happen.”

Less than two years later, in March 2000, Sternberg met the Mayeses again in Los Angeles, where all three were guests of the Tuscan Film Commission. At that point Tom Sternberg reread the book and realized its potential as a film, one that would be a faithful adaptation of Mayes’s memoir.

Sternberg and executive producer Mark Gill gave the book to Audrey Wells (“The Truth About Cats and Dogs,” “Guinevere”) and asked to hear her take on how to adapt it for the screen. “Audrey came in and nailed it,” Sternberg recalls. “She invented a story whose characters, though wholly of her own imagination, dramatized both the heart and sensuality which were so much the appeal of the book. Her view was that ‘Under The Tuscan Sun’ should be a lush, classical romantic comedy whose point is that if you stop looking for love, love will find you.”

In June 2001 Wells signed up for “Under The Tuscan Sun” as writer/director and shortly afterwards traveled to Europe with her family. During that time she made a short side-trip to Cortona in Tuscany to meet the Mayeses at Bramasole. “Frances and Ed made us dinner, and I liked them enormously. I found them to have such generous spirits that it was inspiring just to know them.”

THE SCRIPT

“I wanted to make an ecstatic movie about heartbreak.” (Audrey Wells)

Early in 2002, Audrey Wells began drafting her script of “Under The Tuscan Sun.” From the start, she sought to fuse her own aims with those of Mayes’s book, pursuing, as she puts it, “a happy marriage of ideas.”

Wells appreciated that Mayes had written “a very dense and poetic autobiographical tale about buying a Tuscan villa with her husband, restoring it, and becoming immersed in Italian life. Her writing is full of wonderful detail, personal meditations and atmosphere. The only thing her book lacks is the dramatic storyline that works for film.”

Mayes agreed that a successful screen adaptation of her book would entail melding her work with Wells’s ideas, which, however inventive, were entirely at one with the book’s core themes of renewal, of making life an adventure. As it turns out, Mayes is an enthusiastic partisan of what Wells has wrought. “I was astonished to find,” says the author, “that Audrey created a storyline not present in my book, yet one in which I recognize my book, and

myself. The film is very harmonious with the underpinnings of what I wrote.”

Here again, a certain serendipity came into play. Recalls Wells: “When I first read the book, I was already in the process of working out an idea in my head for an entirely different script, one about a woman overcoming heartbreak. I realized, with some amazement, that my idea could combine elegantly with the world Frances described.”

One bold structural move Wells makes, as a storyteller, is to leave the blood and guts of the dreaded divorce entirely off screen. We never meet Frances’ husband. Our only glimpse of this man is as a ghostly blur in an old snapshot. What is clear in the photo is Frances’ lost happiness. *That* was no blur. For the rest of it, Wells develops this tale of her broken heroine with exuberant lightness and speed. What matters from end to end is *Frances*, and her new adventure. Everything that went before was another life.

A central experience in Wells’s own life as a movie lover was Federico Fellini’s 1957 Academy Award® winner for Best Foreign Language Film, “Nights of Cabiria.” “When I think of Giulietta Masina in that film, especially near the end – that is one of my favorite moments in all of movies. When she’s been duped by a lover *yet again*, and this time has lost everything. There she is – destroyed. You think. But then, she picks herself up, dusts herself off, and starts to walk, all alone, down that road through the forest, and *even then* she finds a way to reconnect with life. She remains open enough to be touched by the sweetness of the young lovers and strolling minstrels who weave by, on foot and on their little motor scooters. You can just see it on her face that she’s renewed, as she looks around, and even looks straight at us. She’s going to live again. She’s even going to *fail* again! And so what? That, to me, is absolutely transcendent.”

What Wells sees is a hidden harmony between what we suffer, and what we must become. “I think painful things are funny,” she says. “That which hurts is the richest mine for comedy – those things that horrify you most, that scare you most. The road back from personal catastrophe is full of peril. It can be inspiring, a little crazed, and like all painful things,

darkly funny. I wanted to look at this journey with attention and humor.

“What the character Frances realizes in her journey,” continues Wells, “is that you have to keep saying *yes*, despite the chance of failure. *Yes* to experience, *yes* to the unexpected, *yes* to the thing you dread. Frances is not a *Candide* living ‘in the best of all possible worlds,’ and neither are any of us. But she keeps going. The mere act of refusing to give up yields a tremendous good for her, in the shape of a new life.

“I am interested in the resiliency of the heart,” says Wells, “in how people find a way to recover from emotional disasters. When I wrote the screenplay, I gave every character in the story a broken heart. The worst off, of course, is Frances – whose marriage has collapsed and whose heart and spirit have been shattered. She barely has the courage to face the day. How can she face the rest of her life? That’s her challenge, and her effort to recreate her life and start again is the story of this film.”

CASTING

From the very beginning, writer-director-producer Wells had only one actress in mind to play Frances Mayes, someone she had admired for over 20 years. “Diane Lane was my first choice,” she declares, “and it’s one of those miracles that the person I wrote it for was available.” Lane was fresh from her back-to-back successes in “The Perfect Storm” and “Unfaithful” (for which she’d been nominated for an Academy Award®), but Wells had been a confirmed fan long before. “Diane has a vibrant, very modern presence,” she observes, “and a fiery intellect that ignites her eyes. Combined with her chiseled beauty, this makes her fascinating to watch.”

For Lane, it was a delightful meeting of the minds. “I’d been interested from the moment I read the screenplay,” she recalls, “but as I was sitting at dinner with Audrey, a light went off. It was so obvious to me that there was no way I could walk away from this offer.”

In particular Lane was attracted to, and intrigued by, the resolute risk-taking romantic that is Frances, and relished the challenge of charting her

dramatic rites-of-passage. “I was attracted to Frances’ pioneering spirit. Her friends warn her that she’s in peril of never getting over her terrible experiences – but it’s how she picks herself up by her bootstraps, as it were, that most appeals to me.”

The subtle, gentle comedy that drives “Under the Tuscan Sun” also resonated with Lane’s comic sensibility. “Growing up, I’d watch all the Jerry Lewis movies or ‘I Love Lucy’ late at night. And it’s so strange, because right before the script for ‘Under the Tuscan Sun’ came my way, I was literally asking myself if it would ever be possible to have that kind of humor shaped into a modern context, because Lucy was so completely ignorant and dependent on her husband. That prototype of 1940’s, 1950’s woman was the source of a type of humor that doesn’t exist any longer. And yet there is still that naiveté, that tremulous feminine lack of courage, which lends itself to comedy. I was really eager to tap into that, but didn’t know how. Then along came this movie.”

When casting, Audrey Wells was careful to choose actors that were, as Lane puts it, “emotionally equipped to play the part from their own personal experience.” She herself empathized with the film’s themes of fate, destiny and self-determination, and says: “It’s funny how life comes full circle at times. Some people are *meant* to be in your life. There’s a synchronicity at work where you know you’re on the right path because things start going your way. That doesn’t mean that you’re not going to meet obstacles. But by dealing with those obstacles you find out whether you’re on the right path, or not. Frances’ life in Tuscany is like that.”

Helping Frances find the right path is Katherine, an ethereal beauty Audrey Wells created for the story. For the role of Katherine, casting director Linda Lowy suggested Lindsay Duncan (“Mansfield Park,” “An Ideal Husband”). At that time – in mid-2002 – the Edinburgh-born actress was enjoying great critical success on Broadway for her performance in “Private Lives,” for which she was subsequently to win both Tony and Drama Desk awards. Says Wells: “I wanted to cast a woman in her fifties who could really work her sexuality. Lindsay was the toast of New York and getting stupendous reviews – the critics were extolling her wit and

sensuality. So we all thought: ‘Hmm, wonder if she wants to do a movie?’”

She did. Duncan was instantly impressed by the evocative power of Wells’s screenplay. “Some scripts are impossible to imagine,” says Duncan, “but with this one, just after a few pages, you are there in Tuscany. As soon as I read the script I ran out and rented myself a copy of ‘La Dolce Vita,’ because I hadn’t really seen the whole movie. I watched it and loved it, and subsequently my husband gave me a tape of the movie as a present.”

The exotic nature of the character appealed to Duncan’s ambitions. “Katherine is a glorious, extravagant creation. Certainly the hand of Fellini is in there, but a lot of Audrey’s own private take on life can be felt very directly in the film through Katherine. Audrey created someone highly unconventional, yet her own woman, ready to make her choices and, if need be, pay for them. I don’t think most of those choices are particularly easy, but that makes her all the more eccentric and colorful.”

Taken as a whole, says Lindsay Duncan, “Under the Tuscan Sun” is about “learning how to live life,” about making a positive stand that over time has become second nature to Katherine. She adds, “If you do go into the world wholeheartedly, an awful lot comes back to you.”

Diane Lane agrees that the mystery of Katherine’s personality is at the hub of “Under the Tuscan Sun.” “Frances may not know what to make of Katherine at first, but she is absolutely drawn to her life force from the moment she meets her. Katherine shows Frances there really is no one way to live a life. There are so many possibilities.”

In line with this idea, Sandra Oh – an award-winning actress and brilliant comedienne – was cast as Patti, Frances’ best friend in San Francisco, a woman in turmoil of her own who eventually follows Frances to Tuscany. The Canadian born Oh had previously worked with writer-director Audrey Wells on “Guinevere,” and the two became close friends. Wells invited Oh’s input when it came to bringing the indomitable Patti to flesh-and-blood life: “We wanted to take the character beyond the typical ‘best friend’ role,” recalls Oh. “Patti may seem self confident, but she is fighting her own demons and,

like Frances, undergoes a voyage of self-discovery. At the beginning, she's very forceful in her beliefs, very opinionated. But fairly soon, she realizes Frances is not the only one running scared. When she comes to Bramasole eight months pregnant and newly single, you realize she is also in trouble."

The one person who just might rehabilitate Frances and restore her love for life is Marcello – a free spirited Neapolitan she meets by chance one day in Rome.

Raoul Bova, an established star of Italian screen, was cast as this charming, archetypal figure of romance. "Raoul is a superstar in Italy," observes Audrey Wells. "Just walking down the street with him in Rome is a surreal experience. The public goes nuts at the mere sight of him. And yet," she adds, "despite his celebrity, he is nearly ego-less as an actor. He is a pure and instinctual performer, who exudes easy confidence and charisma. He was extremely well matched with Diane."

For the Roman-born actor, understanding Marcello was all about connecting to the character's simple philosophy of life. Says Bova: "Marcello is from Positano. He owns a beach restaurant. He likes to work sometimes but other times he likes to sit with his friends and family. In this way, he's a kind of classic Neapolitan man. He loves the people in Positano and they all love Marcello. And yes, he loves women and is looking for real love. So the first time he sees Francesca (Frances), he thinks, here we are, I have found it."

Working with Diane Lane came easily for Bova, given their happy chemistry. "At times, it didn't feel like I was acting," he says. "That's a wonderful feeling for an actor, to lose yourself like that. Audrey's script, which is so full of emotion and love, was also an incredible help. The character of Marcello transcends the stereotype of the 'Latin lover.' He is not only intelligent but light and funny, and also very naturally capable of deep feeling. I seldom have a chance to play comedy, so you can imagine how much I embraced this role, and the opportunities it offered."

The other man in Frances' life is the kindly Signor Martini, the realtor who negotiates the sale of Bramasole for her. The Anglo-Italian actor, Vincent

Riotta, plays Martini. "I love this character because of his pathos," Riotta says. "He quietly falls in love with Frances, but he's a married man, and a man of integrity. He struggles hard to stay on the right side of the line. There is a moment where it could go either way, where he almost falls off the edge. But he manages to transform his feelings into a different kind of love. That's the beauty of the part."

A key scene in the movie is the one in which Signor Martini tells Frances of a section of train track that was built in the Alps between Austria and Italy even though no locomotive existed that could negotiate the pass. If you only build the way for love, it will come, Martini implies. This, says Vincent Riotta, is his favorite scene. "Signor Martini talks about faith to Frances and faith for me is the center of the film. Martini gives Frances the hope to carry on, and she is pretty low at that point. The moral of the story is that you have to share your life with someone – otherwise it is incredibly lonely. Frances has built the house: now she just needs to fill it."

And she does, just as surely as Audrey Wells fills her film with unforgettable characters and scenes. "'Under the Tuscan Sun' is about staying youthful in your heart," says Diane Lane. "You have to stay open and flexible, stay interested in other people and new experiences – to be prepared to get involved in other people's lives. You have to move out of your own inner drama. That's the key."

HOME THOUGHTS FROM ABROAD

"I mean, who wouldn't want to buy a villa in Tuscany? But the way my life has been going, it would be a terrible idea." [But then the light goes on in her head:] *"A truly – terrible – idea."* (Frances, "Under The Tuscan Sun")

In Audrey Wells's screenplay – as in Frances Mayes's best-selling memoir – the central location is an iconic house in the Tuscan hills. But unlike in Mayes's book, this house was to play a pivotal role in the revitalization of a broken life. So when Wells traveled to Italy with her production team to scout locations for "Under The Tuscan Sun," 'Bramasole' – from the Italian *bramare*, to yearn for, and *sole*, sun

– was of essential importance, the very epicenter of Frances’ voyage.

“We started by looking at many books about Tuscany and Italy to imagine what Frances’ life was going to be like here,” says Wells. “From those references we looked for ways to visually manifest her inner and outer journey. We tried to make her discoveries of Italy, and Cortona in particular, evolve from the merely touristy to the nearly fantastic.”

Once the team was able to locate Bramasole in all its sad-sack ruin and dreamy potential, all other locations – including the town of Cortona, the city of Florence, the bustling metropolis of Rome and the seaside village of Positano – would spread out from it like a ripple in the water. Surprisingly, the first house they viewed was the one they eventually chose.

For Wells and production designer Stephen McCabe, Bramasole had to have the physical potential to accommodate and reflect the transformation of Frances over twelve months. In effect it is another major character in the story. “Bramasole represents Frances in many ways,” says Wells. “So we were looking primarily for a house that could take on that kind of change: a mysterious house with personality that could be physically transformed over the course of the movie. The house starts off in poor shape. It’s like Diane’s character. She arrives in a bad psychological state and then finds a new life for herself. So her transformation and the house’s work hand-in-hand.”

Apart from the house itself, the garden at Bramasole – which has to reflect the changing seasons and chart the passage of time – was another prerequisite in choosing the location. “One of the things that attracted me to the house was that there was an ancient garden there,” says McCabe. “It was very much in ruins but the bones of the garden were there. There were stone walls, overgrown plants, huge bushes of ivy and other very good visual features. So we had the bones of the garden and on top of that we had to strip that back and create, as it were, the abandoned garden: landscaping it in its old state. That also, like the house, had to develop and also simultaneously go through the seasons of the year.”

Stephen McCabe made a number of visits to the real Bramasole where Frances Mayes, and her

husband Ed, live. “It is quite a different kind of house from the one we picked,” he says. “It’s on a very steep hill quite high above the road and its garden is a terrace, but it would have been too difficult to reproduce that. It certainly wouldn’t have given us the flexibility that we needed for the shooting of the film. Again, most things were interpreted according to the script.”

Once Bramasole was chosen, Wells, McCabe and crew were free to explore. “We were then able to look at the local small towns that had beautiful piazzas or the space we needed for the flag-throwing festival,” says Stephen McCabe. This proved to be Montepulciano. “Not only was it a spectacular town but it gave us the high views from the surrounding buildings that were needed to look down into the square for the flag-throwing event.”

On other occasions, Stephen McCabe and his design team had to be more ingenious: if they couldn’t find it, they would build it. A great example is the elaborate Trevi-like fountain that serves as a fantastical backdrop for key scenes in the movie. “Audrey told me that she wanted a heroic fountain, a sort of mini Trevi fountain,” he says. “So we looked at existing fountains and thought about how they could be adapted or how we could add to them. But none panned out or gave Audrey the kind of sculpture she wanted, which would primarily serve as the background for Katherine’s very exotic and flamboyant character. So we decided to build it from scratch. I was very conscious of what our fountain would look like in comparison to what you would find in Italy – home to some of the most famous classical sculptures in the world. As it turned out, it was very successful. In fact tourists were checking their guide books to see which fountain it was.”

SEASONS IN THE SUN

“Under The Tuscan Sun” was shot over 16 weeks – from September 16 to December 10, 2002 – on location in Cortona, Positano, Rome and Florence. “Italian crews work much shorter hours than American crews,” says director Wells. “We were always under tremendous pressure. I started calling the movie ‘Under the Tuscan Gun.’”

“Location shooting is always a challenge, but usually very rewarding,” says Geoffrey Simpson, director of photography. “The villa, ‘Bramasole,’ was a central character in the story and the art department did a great job in showing its evolution. Both house and garden change from run-down to restored in about eight weeks, which was a huge endeavor. Adding to the scheduling challenge was the fact that the villa was so old that the second floor had to be supported by steel posts, so we could not shoot upstairs and downstairs on the same day!”

What’s more, the weather was not on their side. “The most difficult scenes were some of the exteriors in November and December,” says Simpson. “Europe had a fairly tough winter with heavy rain and flooding in many parts and though we were not on the front line of the weather we did cop our share of dodgy days. The market scenes in Cortona were tricky enough, because of the ever-changing shadows on such short days. But when it started snowing in the afternoon after a full sun in the morning, we had problems!”

“We had to compress all our seasons into three months shooting as the weather was getting worse with more rain and more cold,” says Stephen McCabe. “So there were difficulties: particularly in finding the collection of plants for the garden. The most difficult thing about the weather was that we had to create a winding country dirt road over what was a paved road. When we had all the gravel and grass and verges put in, there was torrential rain and everything got washed away – rivers and rivers of mud going down the hill.”

Then there was the shoot at Positano, the picture postcard village south of Naples. Geoffrey Simpson recalls shooting on the single lane exit road on the hill out of the town. “The views were stunning, but we paid a price! We could stop traffic between takes, but could not put lamps, silks or any film equipment on the road. So the camera, camera crew, actors and lights were crammed onto an area the size of the deck of a small ship. The sun was in and out of clouds all day. It was take after take to get consistent light.”

“The color palette that we used inside Bramasole was very important,” says Stephen

McCabe. “Costume designer Nicoletta Ercole and I worked very closely in terms of determining the various colors we were going to use. In the beginning those interiors could be interpreted as being mysterious and cool and rather odd in a way. But then as Frances refurbished the house we needed to be able to reinterpret the colors to warmer and more solid effect – so that while ‘Bramasole’ is recognizably the same house, the colors reinforce the feeling of transformation.”

Ercole agrees that her work, like McCabe’s, aimed very consciously to advance this theme of Frances’ ever-deepening, sensuous connection to the world around her. The Italian costume designer worked very closely with Audrey Wells. Perhaps Frances’ most significant item of clothing is the white dress she wears when she visits Marcello. To reflect the significance of this meeting, Ercole had to get Frances’ dress just right. “I suggested maybe 12 sketches of this dress, but the one I liked all along was the most simple one. My reference was Grace Kelly in the Alfred Hitchcock film ‘Rear Window.’ It was a very simple dress: all white with black sandals. We tried to make something very similar. If you think you are going to meet the man of your dreams and he suggests you wear a white dress, well then you are full of hope. But Frances also carries a black raincoat in case anything goes wrong.”

Dressing Marcello had a similar significance for the Italian designer. “Of course, I was thinking about Marcello Mastroianni. I made six movies with him and I knew him very well as a friend. Marcello has a great quality. He was so pure – and it so happens that Raoul Bova is as pure as Marcello was. And our ‘Marcello’ should be like an angel, a sort of conduit – he should project a sense that ‘through me you arrive at what you want in this life.’ So I thought the best thing would always be to dress him in light colors. He is the first man that we see in the movie in a light color, even in the wintertime. He wears the colors of simplicity, the colors of an angel.”