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# AMERICAN FILM

FILM, VIDEO AND TELEVISION ARTS

NAKED LUNCH'

DAVID CRONENBERG  
COOKS UP THE BEAT  
NOVEL BY BURROUGHS

AKIRA KUROSAWA

AN INTERLUDE WITH THE  
SENSEI OF THE CINEMA

PEDRO ALMODOVAR

TRIES ON 'HIGH HEELS'

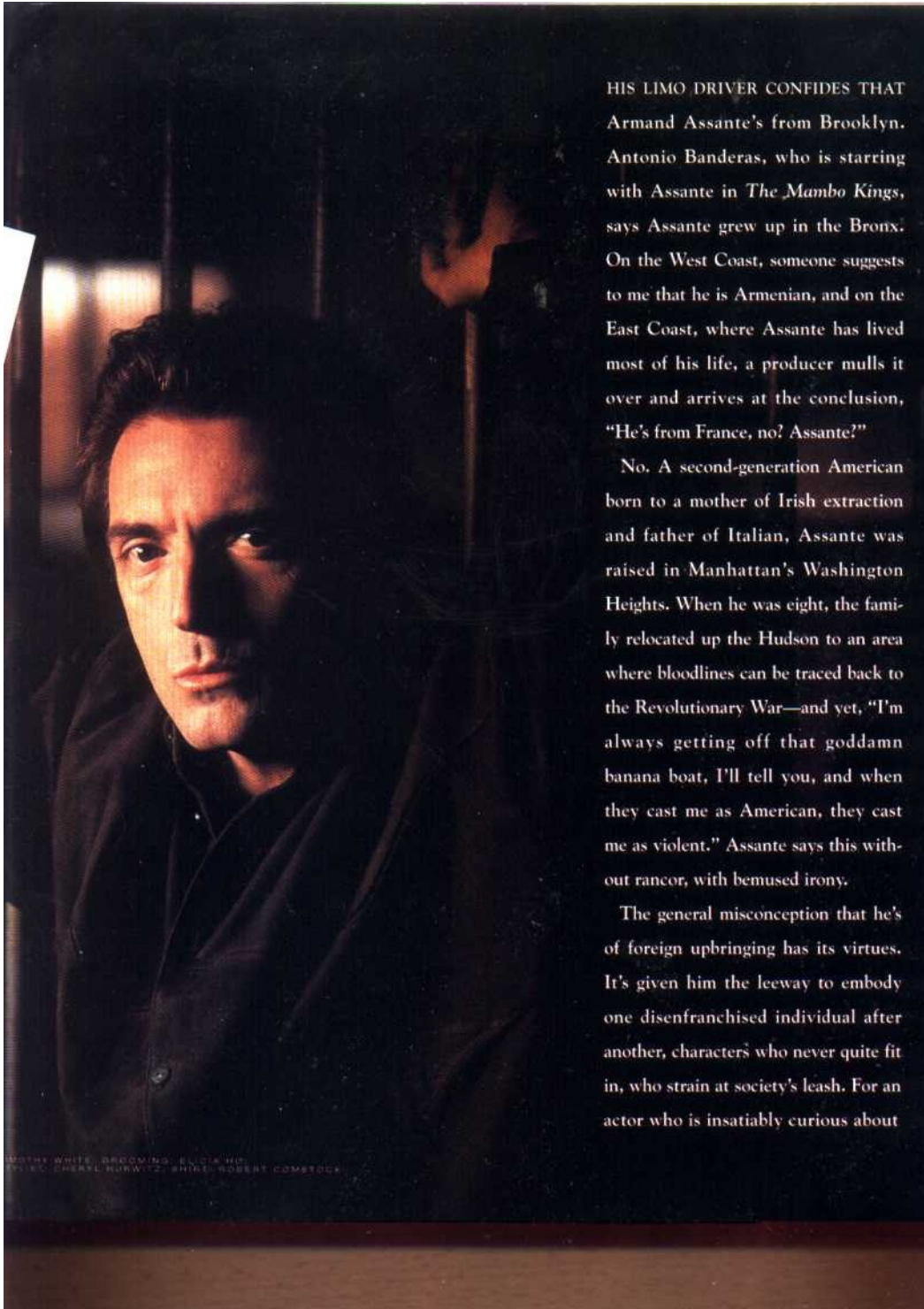
DIALOGUE ON FILM WITH  
DIRECTOR RANDA HAINES

FILM FESTIVAL GETAWAYS



ARMAND ASSANTE

THE MAN WHO WOULD BE 'MAMBO KING'



HIS LIMO DRIVER CONFIDES THAT Armand Assante's from Brooklyn. Antonio Banderas, who is starring with Assante in *The Mambo Kings*, says Assante grew up in the Bronx. On the West Coast, someone suggests to me that he is Armenian, and on the East Coast, where Assante has lived most of his life, a producer mulls it over and arrives at the conclusion, "He's from France, no? Assante?"

No. A second-generation American born to a mother of Irish extraction and father of Italian, Assante was raised in Manhattan's Washington Heights. When he was eight, the family relocated up the Hudson to an area where bloodlines can be traced back to the Revolutionary War—and yet, "I'm always getting off that goddamn banana boat, I'll tell you, and when they cast me as American, they cast me as violent." Assante says this without rancor, with bemused irony.

The general misconception that he's of foreign upbringing has its virtues. It's given him the leeway to embody one disenfranchised individual after another, characters who never quite fit in, who strain at society's leash. For an actor who is insatiably curious about

BOOTH WHITE, GROOMING: ELLIOT HOPKINS, CHEVY BURWITZ, HAIR: ROBERT COMSTOCK

artistic expression because he believes it illuminates the soul, his career has been liberating.

To the movie industry, it's been perplexing.

Those who have worked with him say that Assante's career has always been about choices, decisions that have led to phenomenal work in some small-budget, little-seen films, and to television miniseries that have financed his 215-acre upstate New York farm but stalled his momentum.

"He's at that point where he's a fair-haired boy of the independents," assesses Assante's manager, Michael McLean. But why has he become lodged at that particular spot, a way station of talent that includes Christopher Walken, Scott Glenn, Ray Liotta, Rutger

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Hauer, Peter Coyote and Joe Mantegna—but not the multimillion-dollar heavyweights? It's not for lack of ability. "He loves acting," appraises ICM's Lou Pitt, who represented Assante for six years and through many of his 14 features. "He loves the process of it, the involvement of it, the intelligence of it. He doesn't deal with it as a business, and it's a great conflict for him."

Triad's Arnold Rifkin and Gene Parseghian lured Assante away from Pitt in 1990 with an aggressive pitch that tackled that dichotomy straight-on. Insiders say Rifkin courted the actor with talk of more judicious film selection and greater financial stability, and gave assurances that Assante's representation would be a priority. (At ICM, Pitt is also responsible for

mega-stakes deal-making for Arnold Schwarzenegger. Then again, Rifkin simultaneously orchestrates the seesawing careers of Bruce Willis and Patrick Swayze.) So far, having secured Assante the lead in *Mambo Kings* over impressive competition—if not for his full going rate—Rifkin has made some progress, and he does check in with daily calls. "In the dealings we've had with Armand," he has found, "it seems to suit both our purposes better to reach for the artistic and worry about how it goes later." Which is precisely how his client sees it. "If you can get a good role, then act," Assante says. "If you can't, try not to act."

His dark, Continental appeal and indeterminate accent—the consonants sometimes flattened and the delivery often as rapid-fire as that of a New York street hood—have continually earmarked him for ethnic roles with a romantic bent, *Mambo Kings* included. He might have gotten an opportunity to shatter the mold if he'd had a substantial box-office hit, but only in a few pictures, such as *Private Benjamin* (playing French) and *Q & A* (Latino), has he even flirted with "bankability." And so a schism has emerged between that which attracts him and that which supports him. On the one hand, he has shown a capacity for brilliance in *Belizaire the Cajun*, *The Penitent* and *Q & A*; on the other, he has made a living from *Little Darlings*, *Animal Behavior* and *The Marrying Man*.

Assante's particular brand of brilliance stems from the way in which he develops a role, relentlessly exploring a character, testing its vibrations within his own highly sensitized and curious nature. Like Montgomery Clift, he imbues a character with layer upon layer of psychological subtext, adding his own brooding vulnerability. Like Robert De Niro, he devotes himself to the moment to the exclusion of every distraction, synthesizing machismo with humility.

He acknowledges a reliance on both Method technique and the script-driven analysis of acting guru Mira Rostova (who previously taught Clift). Precise and demanding, Rostova advises, "Rather than to think, When did I have the same experience?, I say, You never did. You weren't Napoleon. You weren't Joan of Arc... What really matters is what they now talk about and what they now want to say." Says Assante, "I never memorize lines. What I do is, I try to work out—discover—the behavior pattern that's necessary for that scene and the lines either work or they don't. Most of the time they connect because the lines are an indicator."

Assante's intensity was evident even in his feature debut 14 years ago. As Sylvester Stallone's crippled older brother in *Paradise Alley*, his quiet admission to Anne Archer, "It's not all right, I've had problems I can't deal with," holds more impact than an hour and a half of

Stallone's boasting and stomping.

Two years later, *Private Benjamin* was the film that established him as a romantic lead, but it wasn't until he made a million-dollar picture in the bayous of Louisiana in 1985, under conditions so adverse the entire crew quit; that Assante finally found a role which allowed him to show what he'd been holding in reserve. As the faith healer who risks his life for others in *Belizaire the Cajun*, his frisky disposition captivates an entire town, and when he begins his "it's gonna be giving me great sadness to be leavin' this earth now" speech from the gallows, an excruciating emptiness snakes through the crowd and out into the audience, unstoppable.

In the even lower-budget, equally absorbing *The Penitent*, in which he betrays Raul Julia and then hangs on a cross in his stead for atonement, Assante slices to the core of what a person will do for friendship and for lust. He worked on his scenes until he either perfected them or collapsed from exhaustion. "I'd get back to the set every day," remembers director Cliff Osmond. "I knew how things would be there: The costumes would be wrong for the next day, my beer would be waiting and Armand would be waiting to rehearse."

Sidney Lumet's *Q & A* saw Assante finally team with a world-class director with enough intelligence to showcase him and enough clout to get the picture widely distributed. As Puerto Rican drug lord Bobby Texador, bearded and mustached, long hair slicked back, Assante signed on for the third lead. When he was through with it, he had a sheaf of glowing reviews, a Golden Globe nomination for best-supporting actor and a per-picture price that had doubled from \$350,000 to \$750,000.

In his first scene, in five minutes in the interrogation room, he goes from quiet-spoken reticence, hands folded in his lap ("they're allowed questions, yes, but not snotty insinuations, right?") to a chest-to-chest, finger-pointing Latino swagger that leaves no doubt that he will be reckoned with. "He works differently from almost any actor I've ever seen," maintains Lumet, who had been waiting to direct Assante since he noticed him in the comedy *Unfaithfully Yours*. "He has a very strong image of what he wants to do, and he never lets up. During rehearsal, when I'm not working with him, he's off in a corner and he's working with himself. Over and over, he never lets it alone."

After *Q & A*, Assante was primed for a breakthrough.

WESTWARD BEACH IS A SECLUDED COVE tucked between Point Dume and Zuma Beach. In the shadow of the cliffs, a dozen trucks and honey wagons line the parking lot. Down on the beach, the gulls have been edged from their sandy turf by a film crew. In the southern corner of the cove, where white-capped waves

break against the rocks jutting from indigo water, the Pacific Ocean is doubling for the Atlantic, and Malibu for Cuba. Assante and I sit at a nearby picnic table. Cupped in his hand as gently as a small bird, a tape machine whirs away. This May morning we are between scenes of *The Mambo Kings*, the film that could push Assante to full-fledged stardom. It's a prospect he greets with equal amounts of anticipation and apprehension.

Based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning book by Oscar Hijuelos, *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*, the movie is about two brothers, Cesar and Nestor, who come to New York from Cuba in the 1950s, eager to secure their share of success and happiness. Musicians both, they form a mambo band that establishes itself on the New York club circuit. But when Cesar flaunts his disregard for an underworld promoter-manager, they both pay the price and their shared future is forever marred. Cynthia Cidre's vibrant screenplay compresses the book's life-long time frame and skirts much of its crudity, concentrating instead on the push and pull between two men in their prime, one charged with the fire of ambition, the other absorbed in his own creativity.

"It's about both the elusiveness and the fallaciousness of the American dream," says Assante, "and it's about two very gifted men who by faith are continually interrupted in whatever attempts they make in life. One is driven by ambition to achieve something in his life, and the other is living an idealized romance with his past." Assante's character, Cesar, is the opportunist. "He's like a man going up against a wave. He refuses to be buffered by the wave. Until it knocks him down." Metaphors like this, extensive story dissection and endless rereading of both book and script are crucial to Assante's process. "It's about two men who are irrevocably joined at the hip and both living through each other," he decides. "One cannot really succeed without the other. Cesar creatively could not succeed

without Nestor, and Nestor, from a sheer practical standpoint, does not have the abilities that Cesar has to act upon the opportunity."

*Mambo Kings* marks the directing debut of 53-year-old Arne Glimcher, the New York art lord who previously produced *Gonillas in the Mist* and *The Good Mother* and poured a million dollars of his own into this project before signing with Aron Milchan and Warner Bros. to produce it as a \$15-million negative pickup. Playing Nestor is Antonio Banderas, of *Almod-*

extraordinaire Michael Ballhaus (*GoodFellas*, *The Fabulous Baker Boys*) is at Glimcher's elbow, production designer Stuart Wurtzel (*Hannah and Her Sisters*) is overseeing the '50s look, and editor Claire Simpson (*Platoon*, *Wall Street*) is taking care of the footage.

Glimcher has made his choices carefully, and if—as rumor has it—he chose to sidestep interest from Jeremy Irons, Kevin Kline and Andy Garcia because he was intent upon Assante for his male lead, he seems ecstatic with the result,

coming over during a break between setups to joke about being Assante's biggest fan. "You have no other choice," interjects the actor with a chuckle.

Inquiring if anyone else wants a coffee refill, Assante heads off, leaving Glimcher to reflect, "I thought he would be more distant and removed, I guess because of the roles he's played. He comes off as a tough man's man, very macho. Then there's an enormous introspective side, self-analytic, willing to reveal himself."

The set's a relaxed one. The dozen dark-haired Mambo Kings direct casually inquisitive glances our way as they trail by. During an earlier set visit, I had heard them jamming on a number that sounded vaguely reminiscent of Santana's "Evil Ways." The film's Latin sound track, including songs sung by Linda Ronstadt and Los Lobos and an appearance by Tito Puente, is designed to

further the narrative. Set talk refers to such other musical dramas as *La Ramba*, *Cabaret* and *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*.

"I had an incredibly happy childhood." The hot sun is now directly overhead and Assante is finding the discussion more difficult. He is back in his earliest memories, in a childhood where he dwelled largely in his own imagination. As he talks, he closes the physical gap between us, looks me straight in the eye, then away, devoting himself to thought. "I was surrounded by color, words and music. I was inundated with it. And they still turn me on. Nothing turns me on but the same things. They are like the things



**A chameleon's face:** Assante as (clockwise from top left) an Italian-American mortician in *Paradise Alley*, an Arcadian faith healer in *Belizaire the Cajun*, a Newyorkan drug lord (with Jennifer Lumet) in *O & A*, a Corsican usurper in *Napoleon and Josephine: A Love Story*.

ovar and *Truth or Dare* fame. The man Madonna most wanted to meet, Banderas is appearing here in his first English-language movie, as is Dutch import and *Esquire* cover girl Maruschika Dermers, who portrays his wife. *Raging Bull*'s Cathy Moriarty is attempting a comeback with her role as the stanesque cigarette girl who is Cesar's love interest. Director of photography



Novelist Hijuelos says of Cesar, "He's the type of man who walks into a room and affects the mood." Top: Cesar (Assante), brother Nestor (Antonio Banderas) and a fellow Mambo King (J.T. Taylor). Below: The Castillo brothers.

you become addicted to. And I still look for those things. They mean the most to me and what I do."

His father was an advertising executive who painted on his own time; his mother, a pianist. She was stricken with polio two weeks after Assante was born, the only son between two sisters. "My father was very nurturing to her and us. It was a very close-knit family. I believe in family very strongly. I believe in bringing everything to the table, the way families used to. Because everything was discussed at the dinner table. I still believe in that. It's the way a child comes to look at the world."

Along with a "tremendous amount of support," his parents instilled an industrious habit in their middle child by example, his mother refusing to relinquish vitality even when paralyzed. Things fell into place smoothly for Assante. By the time he was a teenager, he was drumming for a local rock band, Phaeton IV. When he finished high school, he was immediately accepted at the American Academy of Dramatic Art, which led to professional theater work under the tutelage of director Joshua Logan and then to the screen role in Stallone's first directorial effort.

Then things fell apart. "I really thought in my late 20s I was going to be in control, total control, of my life, and I wasn't." Instead, his 20s found Assante living in Los Angeles and in Jungian analysis, in dream analysis, and in so much pain that he would arrive at his shrink's office with a lump in his throat. "In analysis, you learn how to identify your patterns of behavior that are destructive," he admits evenly. "I learned to distance myself from them so that I can see them clearly enough so that I don't repeat them. All relationships are patterns that we keep following."

As Assante remembers the spiritual vacuum of his 20s, post-*Paradise Alley*, marking time in West Hollywood, turning down episodic television because he wanted to be engulfed by theater and film, "I was involved in metaphysics, Buddhism, analysis. It was only because I was not focused or working enough in specific areas. Pursuing a life as an actor in Hollywood, for me as a person, is very, very dangerous. In '82 I gave up and said, I'm going back to New York and I don't give a goddamn what happens."

He took with him a bride, a brunette actress named Karen McArm. They bought the farm in upstate New York and Assante began devoting

himself to what mattered most, his relationships and an environment that could nurture him. "It has to do with the sensibilities of the people I want to be with," he says, "it's the caliber of intensity and intelligence. People who are passionately involved in what they are doing."

"WHEN ARMAND ASSANTE STARTS TO move outside that door, that's your cue," the first AD yells hoarsely into his megaphone. "It's a visual cue, you have to do it on your own.... Action!"

Assante steps jauntily out of 500 LaSalle Street, carrying a lamp. He pauses to embrace a heavy woman, then lifts a crate of geraniums off the curb and loads his armful into the trunk of a red Dodge, circa 1953. He's in character: He's got an easy swagger and a Cuban cigar in his mouth. Between rehearsals—and this scene goes way over the four or five takes that he finds ideal—Assante converses with the fleshy actress portraying his landlady. Immersed in discussion, he gives her a quick hug, his hands behind her waist. It's an affectionate gesture, one that he greeted me with when I arrived this morning. "There's this side of him," recalls Pitt, "it's endearing, almost an infectious way he has of thanking people for their involvement, their attention."

The scene now filming on this Burbank back lot consists mainly of physical business as the brothers bid farewell to their cousins who are moving from Harlem to the suburbs, but Assante tells me that he's still got some anxiety over it, over doing everything exactly right. Back and forth he walks, improvising street dialogue with his neighbors, up and down the steps, his beige slacks uncreased, his tropical print shirt bright in the sunlight. Assante asks Glimcher a question and the director shakes his head no. The department heads cluster. The first AD gathers his brood of extras into a larger huddle to explain, "Listen, what's happening is, we're just not getting what we want. This is 1950s New York, not 1990s California, not laid-back." Down at the corner, where we're headed next, some crew members are screwing a "LaSalle Street" sign onto the post by the Mercado Tropical, where there are indeed fresh onions, tomatoes and potatoes.

Perusing his monitor, cinematographer Ballhaus waits for his dolly shot. He will push in for a close-up on the brothers, then back out to let a car come through and capture a wider view of the street. The way Glimcher and Ballhaus have planned it, *Mambo Kings* will utilize frequent close-ups and tracking shots along with frame composition to underscore the love triangle between the two brothers and Nestor's wife.

"He reminds me of De Niro," Ballhaus says, watching Assante. "He has a similar approach to acting. Every take is a little different. De Niro never does two takes in the same way,

never hits a mark. Armand is better in that respect. He almost forgets there is a character, he's so into it, like De Niro. You can't talk to De Niro about marks or raising his voice a little, he just looks at you. He's so intense. You look at Armand's eyes and face—you can read his mind. It's wonderful how transparent his face is. You can read his soul."

This transparency is evident even in this scene, an inner sadness evoked as Assante mutters, "I'll see you in the park," and, head bent, strides off.

Over lunch, Assante loads up on the fish—runa, swordfish, vegetables, lemonade—and reveals, with some regret, that the intensity of the initial 18-hour days with Glimcher and Banderas is lessening. With filming due to wrap in a week's time, he points out that everyone is pulling back, reestablishing their own space. Disdaining sentimentality, he swiftly moves on to discuss the eclectic music mix he favors for relaxation (Creedence Clearwater Revival, the Allman Brothers, B.B. King, gypsy instrumentals, Schubert, Chopin), his preferred painters (Van Gogh, Goya, Picasso) and the writers on whom he thrives (D.H. Lawrence, Walker Percy, Thomas McGrath). "My habit is very literary when I'm not working," he notes. "I'm always looking for people who can articulate what I'm feeling."

Assante's trainer, Frank Moran, agrees that literature is a conversational mainstay during their six-mile runs: "His interests and mine are similar. Well, Baudelaire, he's got a stronger interest in that depressing stuff than I do. He has a great way of talking. He says to me, I urge you to buy this book. I say, No, no thanks. He says, I'll buy it. I go, OK, I'll buy it if you buy this Robert Burns book. So he'll buy that."


The final shot this day is under rain machines strung across a darkening sky. Assante hurries down the street, his hair becoming black and slick as he is pelted with water, the movie lamps catching the cleft in his chin and the cigarette he stops to ignite under the awning. Between takes, huddled against a faux brownstone, he inquires for the third time what movies I've liked lately. He mentions *The Field* as one that impressed him, and we both agree on *The Dead*. He says he'd very much like to make a film of a Joyce novel.


Before I leave, someone plays Assante's rendition of the movie's theme song, "Beautiful Maria of My Soul." Assante cringes, says he'll have to rerecord it, but its melancholy yearning stays with me.

WHEN KAREN McEARN PICKS ME UP at Lincoln Center in New York a few months later, it's a warm July day. She's driving her husband's 13-year-old black Porsche, and the backseat is stacked with Zabar's shopping bags, with gourmet salads and Terra chips and fresh flow-

ers. Jamming the sunroof back, she apologizes for not being able to get the windows down; the switches are broken. "Are you dreadfully hot? We can take showers when we get to the farm," she offers. Heading north on the Palisades Parkway, we discuss the Grape Nuts commercial that brought her into the city, her growing indifference to urban life, and how her husband looked very much like Napoleon—even short like him, although in reality Assante stands five-foot-10½—in the miniseries *Napoleon and Josephine*, which was just rerun.

Pulling up at the farm just over an hour later, we're greeted by a small girl who looks like a Raphael angel, with wheat-blond hair and her father's trusting eyes. She is flying up the hill,

  
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arms outstretched, running on pastureland that rolls forever. In the distance, the Shawangunk Mountains slope under a pale blue-gray sky. There are trees everywhere. "Crab apple, maple, oak, walnut, spruce, pine, hickory, and the bird feeder's on a pear tree," identifies Assante, who emerges from the barn, a structure of maroon wood and aluminum siding. Inside are his temperamental quarter horse Gauguin, his docile thoroughbred Star and a neighbor's palomino.

A half-dozen years ago, in his mid-30s, Assante returned here to Orange County, New York, a rural pocket of stone churches and narrow plank bridges, of ponds and croaking frogs, of ducks that honk and deer that disappear in the dense woods. In this valley of colonial homes and horse farms, barricaded behind his

books and Southwestern artifacts, surrounded by animals and his own family and the cycles of the earth, Assante says he lives for the connection of relationships, for intimacy.

Now 41, in black jeans and cowboy boots, a forest-green shirt, his brown hair long and falling in his eyes, Assante strides up the hill like a gentleman farmer, like D.H. Lawrence's Gerald Crich in *Women in Love*: "good looking, healthy, with a great reserve of energy ... erect and complete."

Come spend a week, Assante once told Moran, inviting the trainer for a visit. As Moran remembers it, "He talked me into it. He says, You need the rest, you'll relax, give it a break. I thought, You're right, I need a break. I took the break, and we worked from morning to night! He had me up at dawn, feeding me porridge, and then out running and then working

bookcase holds the scripts for *Presumed Innocent* and *Days of Wine and Roses*, a Hollywood Foreign Press Association citation and row upon row of books. Paul Gauguin's *Intimate Journals* and a Tarkovsky biography sit atop the desk. Upstairs, in the guest bedroom, more books—Thomas Berry's *The Dream of the Earth*, Rollo May's *The Cry for Myth*, Richard Ford paperbacks, an Artaud biography—and audiocassettes, a spectrum from Patsy Cline to Billy Idol to Janis Joplin. Somehow, I just know that they are all Assante's.

The phone rings constantly. The *Mambo Kings* publicist, looking for photo approvals. Assante's manager. His agent. His in-laws. To get Assante to commit to the dozen or so scripts he receives each month is difficult; when he wants one, though, as with Coppola's *Dracula*, he is more than willing to fly to the Napa Valley to read for it. (The part went to Gary Oldman.) "I don't want to work unless I have a founded relationship with someone, unless I've spent time with them, because the work is too complicated and exposing," he asserts. "I want to be involved with the most creative projects I can get my hands on and work with the most creative people. That's where I think I thrive, it's where I want to be. It's where I get to live most intensely. And I think that's the reason I act, because it is essentially being given permission to live intensely."

The day is spent horsback riding, visiting the barn down the road where Assante supplies the hay, stopping off at the Hall of Fame of the Trotter in Goshen. We drive by the neighborhood hospital where Assante lay wracked with hepatitis for months after shooting *The Penitent* in San Miguel Allende, Mexico, and then detour down the Sarah Wells Trail, named after a girl whose parents shipped her off to live with Indians. Assante relates the historical tale carefully, refining his pitch, suggesting it might make a film.

With the exception of Lumet and producer Edgar Scherick, Assante is close to few power players in the business. He has never made courting them a priority, and even his agent and manager have not visited here. "The very fact that I live where I do," he admits, "I tend to isolate. Even my wife tells me that. Tells me? She screams at me every day that I do, but I do... I like getting on my horse and riding for 20 miles when I want to go off into the wilderness, which I do. That's part of my life-style. It feeds me spiritually, and I live a lot closer to the earth. I live very close to the earth when I'm home. I like working with the elements. I like cutting wood, building roads, working in fields, doing fence work, working with animals, horses, riding, very tactile things."

Of himself, Assante says, "Certainly the roles that I've done, few people would know anything about me. Could even detect anything

about me," and, "I don't care what an actor thinks of himself or his image, he is society's child. And if he's not willing to be, then he's not an actor. He is the mirror for society, so he has to be the clown."


This July day marks the end of haying season and, as we sit on the porch having our coffees and banana bread, dusk just beginning to fall although it's already 8 PM, the scent is sweet in the air, like newly mown grass. By the barn, the just-wrapped bales, more than 2,000 of them, are dropping down a mechanical chute. Three-year-old Alesandra is clambering on her father's tractor, eight-year-old Anya is hosting some girlfriends at the tree swing, and a frog is croaking loudly. "If you weren't here, I'd be working with them," says Assante, motioning towards the hay workers. He's been a talkative host, and consistently generous, pressing a jar of homemade honey into my hands, telling me now that if I were staying longer, we could rewatch *The Bear* on the large-screen TV. Still, I sense that when I'm gone, when talk of the film business is over, he may be relieved. "I'm not the kind of guy who likes to get up and dominate a room," he pointed out early on, and this day has certainly exerted its pressures.

Looking ahead to the fall, he has a small amount of leaping to do on *Mambo Kings*, some publicity and then he will put the project behind him. "I go through life with basically no expectations anyway. I just try to do my work, you know, and see what comes of it." He shrugs. "I've never put that thing over my head: Well, if I didn't succeed by the time I was 35, I was going to drop out of the business. I mean, you eventually have to say, I love what I do and leave it at that."

By channeling his energies into his work until exhaustion depletes them, then accepting that the outcome will take its own course, Assante has finally found some of the control he sought so fruitlessly in his 20s.

"He's a passionate actor in a neurotic time," writer-director Osmond proposes a few days later. "When people are in a state of chaos, emotional chaos, they don't want to probe too deeply. They'd rather stay at the surface, which is neurosis. In a more ordered time, when there are constraints and values and rights and wrongs, when there are parameters of stability, people are willing to dive deeply into things and you'll get more passion in art and theater. Armand is fundamentally passionate. Even his neuroses are total, intense neuroses. Maybe the times will catch up with him when they realize that need for passion, that they don't have to be afraid or overwhelmed by what he serves up, that they will survive exposure to it."

*Wolf Schneider, who is the editor of American Film, says Assante's thoroughbred Star has the smoothest trot of any horse she's ever ridden.*



## 'I DON'T CARE WHAT AN ACTOR THINKS OF HIMSELF OR HIS IMAGE, HE IS SOCIETY'S CHILD.'



the wheat. He's one of the very few people I know who likes to work in the sun."

"I have an obligation to farm or they'll tax me off it," Assante tells me now, motioning to where the weeds had been 15 feet high, the sumac 12 feet, before he stripped through them with a tractor brush. "I'm tearing out hedges for hay so I can get an agricultural exemption."

He leads me into the dark wood farmhouse built in 1823. Renovated cathedral ceilings are two floors high, the motif is Southwestern, the furniture large and comfortable. There are American Indian throw rugs on the floor, a bleached cow skull and a carved wooden horse's head on the wall, Western saddlery on the staircase. In an alcove off the living room, a