

Iula

girl of my dreams

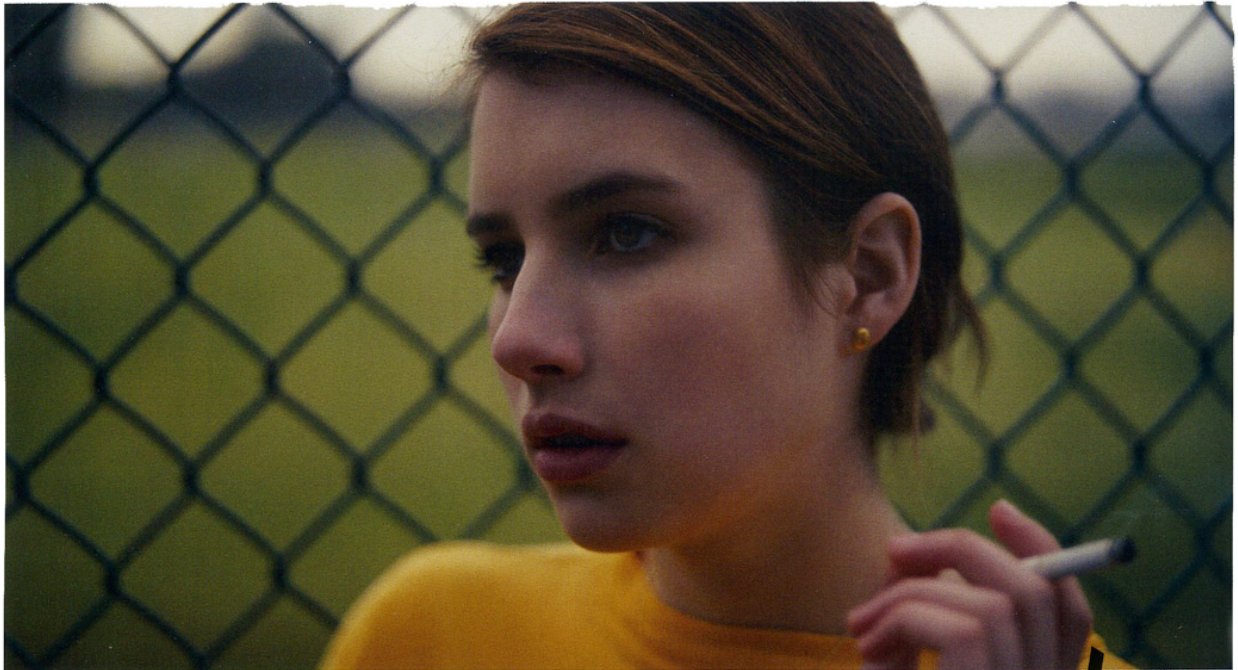


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FILM STILLS *courtesy of* RABBITBANDINI PRODUCTIONS
INTERVIEWS *by* MAXIMILLA LUKACS AND LEITH CLARK



Shooting Stars

Photographer and short film director, Gia Coppola brings her charisma and creative instinct to her debut feature film, Palo Alto. Asked by James Franco to make his book into a movie, Coppola enlisted the help of friend and cinematographer, Autumn Durald. For Lula, they share personal stories on first time fears, casting actors, and the crazy experience of feature film making.

GIA COPPOLA

How did you meet James? Had you already read his book? How did it come about that you would work together to make it a feature? – I met James at some event two years ago, he was looking for someone to direct his book into a movie and when I showed him my photos I guess he felt that I was a good fit for the project. I read the book and I loved it. I felt [that it was] a realistic and honest depiction of what goes on in high school, which I hadn't really seen anyone do right in a while.

Did you adapt the stories to a screenplay yourself or together? How much involvement did James have in the adaptation? – James really helped me step by step, so the process didn't feel intimidating. He was there when I needed him but also gave me the freedom to run with it creatively. Once I worked on a screenplay he had me make a test version of the film with my friends so I could sort of get my feet wet.

*Did you get any guidance or advice from your aunt or grandfather? How many of their film sets have you visited? Do you remember learning anything on their sets that helped you on your own? – I had worked in the wardrobe dept on Sofia's movie, *Some-where* and did behind the scenes on my grandpa's movie, *Twixt*. I learned a lot from being on their sets and being used to that environment when I was little, but with this project I really wanted it to feel like my own and use the experience to find my own voice. So I really relied on James as my mentor.*

What do you know now that you wish you knew before you started? – Making a first feature is such a crazy learning experience; I don't think there's any way you can prepare for it.

What part of Palo Alto are you most proud of? – I'm proud of all the performances and my crew. Everyone worked so hard on this, I'm very thankful.

Tell us about the casting process. – I had known Jack Kilmer since he was little. He's a cool, normal kid that had never acted before but I just knew that he was perfect for the role of Teddy. I always wanted James to play the coach. It's a really hard role to play and he's my favourite actor but I didn't know if it would be weird for him to be in a movie about the book he wrote. I finally mustered up the courage to ask him and he was super nice about it and agreed to play the part. I've known Emma [Roberts] in passing, she loved the book and the script and for some reason I kept running into

her during that time so I felt like fate was telling me to cast her- I'm very glad I did. I met Nat Wolff through Fred Roos [the film producer]. We met and had lunch and just talked about movies - I got along with him so well I trusted that he could take on the role of Fred even though he's nothing like his character in person!

What was the most magical part of making this film? – This was a small film and crew. Everyone really felt like a family.

This being your first feature, were there any times when you felt scared or overwhelmed? – I didn't really have much experience working with actors so I was really nervous about that.

When were you happiest? – Shooting is really hard, but so much fun!

GIA ON AUTUMN

*How did you meet? How many times have you worked together? What work of each other's had you seen (and liked) before your first project? – I met Autumn when I was working on the test version of *Palo Alto*. The DP I was using at the time couldn't help out that day so he recommended Autumn. I loved working with a girl DP. It's so calming and she's so unbelievably talented. I feel we can communicate without having to articulate much.*

*How did you decide to work together on a feature? How did a feature differ from the shorts you'd made together before? – I worked with Autumn on some of my smaller fashion commercials. It felt right to use someone I'm comfortable working with for *Palo Alto*. Autumn is tough but she's also very nurturing so I really appreciated that and I know the teenagers did too. It wasn't much different than working on our smaller projects. This film was still a tight budget but just more days.*

*What films if any did you use as a visual reference for what you wanted to do? If you didn't, looking back now on *Palo Alto* - what films could you have used as a reference? – I love *The Last Picture Show*, *Virgin Suicides*, *Rumble Fish*, *American Graffiti*, *Dazed and Confused* ...*

How closely did you both work with James? – James was working on another movie at the time of shooting but I was always sending him stills from set.

What was the most fun part about making the film? – Shooting and now getting to show the film and celebrate!

AUTUMN DURALD

*What features had you done before? How was this one different? – I'd shot two features prior to *Palo Alto*. My first feature was *Macho*, directed by Rafael Palacio Illingworth and shot on 35mm. It was purchased by IFC and won the best micro budget feature at the Raindance Film Festival. A group of friends and I from AFI made it the summer in between our 1st and 2nd year. It's an intimate look at a long distance relationship. My second feature was *Guadalupe The Virgin*, directed by Victoria Giordana. It was a great experience working with the leads Diana Garcia and Noah Segan. Diana is a very talented individual and we've become great friends since that experience. *Palo Alto* is very special to me. Gia is a dear friend and in the simplest terms, we just get each other. We have similar tastes in film and photography and I understand what she wants out of the visuals. There is definitely a trust in our filmmaking process and we collaborate very well. Our team has worked together for a while now on commercials and films. Gia cares a lot about her actors and creating an environment where they can do their best work. We all work well together and respect each other's opinions. To be able to hang out with friends, work with talented actors and create beautiful images at the same time is the best part of my job.*

What was the most magical part of making this film? – Working with such talented people with such great personalities made every part of the process magical. On top of that, watching great actors perform, working with friends, and bringing to life a great script made every day a pleasure to be on set.

What is your favourite shot? – I'm not sure I have one favorite shot. I'd like to think all of the shots in this film are harmonious. One of my favorite sequences of shots is probably the ending of our film. Gia and the editor did a beautiful job. The ending is very felt, and the acting, photography and editing come together to create a very powerful moment.

*Favourite lens? – Overall, a Panavision lens. It's hard to narrow down one favourite but I'm a big fan of the lenses I used on *Palo Alto* (Panavision Super Speeds) which I use quite often.*

*Favourite technical achievement? – Shooting *Palo Alto* and creating photography that tells the story and is emotionally affecting.*

When were you most excited? – Every day I showed up to set, and every time I saw an amazing performance in front of the lens, which was quite often on this film.

PHOTOGRAPHY *by* KALMAN MULLER



ABOVE: GIA AND AUTUMN ON SET





AUTUMN ON GIA

How did you meet? How many times have you worked together? What work of each other's had you seen (and liked) before your first project? – We met through a mutual friend that recommended me to Gia. Gia was shooting some test scenes for *Palo Alto* early on and I ended up shooting one of them. Funnily enough it was the soccer championship scene, which is one of my favourite scenes in our film. Gia and I have worked together on six projects including *Palo Alto*. I'd seen Gia's film for Zac Posen and her photography and loved her style.

How did you decide to work together on a feature? How did a feature differ from the shorts you'd made together before? – We worked together on a film for Opening Ceremony, which turned out great. That was the first time we'd worked together on a full project, besides the test. Till this day Opening Ceremony is one of my favourites. After that project I think we realised how much we had in common visually and overall we got along really well. That ended up being a great experience, working with her and her producer Sebastian, so they asked me to shoot *Palo Alto*, and since then we've done all of our film projects together.

Palo Alto is much different than all of our other short form projects. Making a feature film is another animal. Gia did an amazing job of adapting James's novel. I loved the script when I first read it and instantly re-

lated to all of the characters and situations. I immediately wanted to get to know these characters and could already imagine them on screen. It doesn't matter how old you are, you can always remember how you felt in high school, what boy or girl you liked, what sports you played, who your teachers were. This film takes you back in time and instantly makes you feel nostalgic for those days. I love stories that do that. There is something for everyone to relate to in all of our characters. Gia has an amazing eye for choosing actors, we had a large cast and a lot of great actors involved. I wanted our actors to have freedom on set and to not interfere with their process. We always tried to pre-rig our sets when possible and light the space so they could move around freely. We strove to create images and scenes that we would love to watch in the cinema. We very much know what we like to watch on screen and we would look for opportunities to bring that to life.

*What films, if any, did you use as a visual reference for what you wanted to do? If you didn't, looking back now on *Palo Alto* - what films could you have used as a reference?* – Some of our main references were *The Outsiders*, *American Graffiti*, *The Last Picture Show*, *Over The Edge*, and *Virgin Suicides*. We also drew a lot from the photography of Stephen Shore and William Eggleston. We always discuss our inspirational references in pre-pro and how they can apply to our world. Gia has great taste

in photography and more often than not our images coincide. We wanted the lighting in this film to feel authentic to growing up in a suburban neighborhood. It was important for it to feel nostalgic and motivated, especially in our urban landscapes. Gia and I decided early on that we did not want this film to be all handheld and gritty. We favoured a more sophisticated camera style, more subtle and quiet camera movements and locked off shots. There were times we employed handheld and those moments are very felt and intentional. I wanted the photography to feel authentic and real, not get in the way of the story, but still very beautiful and captivating. I always strive to create images that affect you emotionally and that help you relate to the characters.

How closely did you both work with James? What was that relationship like for both of you? – It was amazing to have James on set and he was very generous. He and Gia worked really well together. James's scenes were the last to shoot so by then we had shot most of our film and had a rhythm going. He was excited about the film and it was great to have him on the set. He's an amazing actor and his scenes with Emma are captivating.

What was the most fun part about making the film? – All of the filmmakers cast and crew. Everyone involved in this project was a pleasure to work with.