



The AFI DOCS Interview: NEW CHEFS ON THE BLOCK Director Dustin Harrison-Atlas

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

Opening a new restaurant is not for the faint of heart. Time, money, stress, repeat. Two DC-area chefs put everything on the line to open two very different establishments — Frank Linn’s Frankly! Pizza! and Aaron Silverman’s Rose’s Luxury (Bon Appetit’s “Best New Restaurant in America” in 2014). Directed by Dustin Harrison-Atlas, *NEW CHEFS ON THE BLOCK* will play at AFI DOCS as part of the Spotlight Screenings section. AFI spoke with the director about the film.

AFI: What led you to pursue documentary filmmaking?

DHA: I’ve always loved storytelling, particularly storytelling through photography. Adding sound and more frames per second was a natural progression.

AFI: What inspired you to tell this story?

DHA: I love stories about hard work paying off in the face of great odds, so when my brother-in-law Frank Linn decided that, after years of running a successful mobile pizza oven he was going to open a restaurant and build it by hand with the help of his mother, father and wife, I knew it would make an amazing documentary. Plus, the restaurant business is very visual and makes for exciting content to look at. The hard work, ensemble cast and small fortunes at stake made it a no-brainer.

AFI: How did you find the subjects in your film?

DHA: Frank Linn is my brother-in-law, so finding him was easy. I knew it would take him awhile to find a space, so I Googled “New chefs in DC opening their first restaurants” in search of another chef who was thinking big and doing something unusual. The first person who popped up was Aaron Silverman and his Kickstarter campaign for Rose’s Luxury. I guess you could say he was an easy find, too. Aaron invited me to one of his pop-up dinners at Hogo, where I met his crew and tasted their food. The rest is history.

AFI: What was a particular obstacle you faced while making the film?

DHA: The heat, tight kitchens, loud noises and challenging light were all very difficult obstacles to overcome. I shot, directed and did sound virtually on my own for almost three years of filming. It was tough. The stressed-out chefs were not always easy subjects to deal with either. Also, time. It's hard to make a long-term documentary and maintain the energy to keep going. My wife deserves credit for pushing me to see it through to the end.

AFI: What do you want audiences to walk away with after screening your film?

DHA: I hope they feel inspired to follow their dreams, even when the odds of failure are high. If you have passion and supporters, anything is possible.

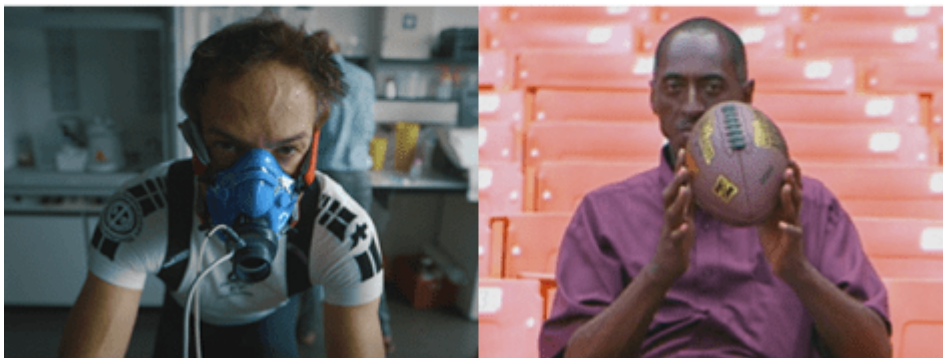
AFI: Why is Washington, DC, a valuable location to screening your film?

DHA: When I worked at Discovery Communications (right across from the AFI Silver Theatre), I dreamed of someday directing a feature documentary and screening it at AFI DOCS. Mission accomplished. Aside from being a dream come true, both chefs are based in the DC area, in Maryland and DC, respectively. Not only is AFI DOCS world-renowned it's also our local festival, so it couldn't be more perfect.

AFI: Why are documentary films important today?

DHA: Documentary films, both features and shorts, offer intimate access into the lives of intriguing people, beautiful places and amazing things we often never knew existed. Great narrative films often help us escape the real world, while brave documentary films help us dive in. To me, that's pretty cool.

(Source: blog.afi.com)



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Date Created

May 12, 2017

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