

# It's a Wonderful Town

Since the early days of filmmaking, New York has been the world's biggest back lot. Here's how some directors used the city to help them tell their story.



EAST SIDE, WEST SIDE: Co-directors Stanley Donen (center) and Gene Kelly (right) work on a routine for *On the Town* (1949) as Frank Sinatra waits. The film extended the experiment of location shooting to the musical genre. (opposite) Ted Wilde's (in knickers) silent comedy *Speedy*, starring Harold Lloyd as a cab driver, is a virtual travelogue of New York in 1928. Locations included this one at the foot of the Queensboro Bridge and, in another scene, Lloyd picks up Babe Ruth and takes him to Yankee Stadium.

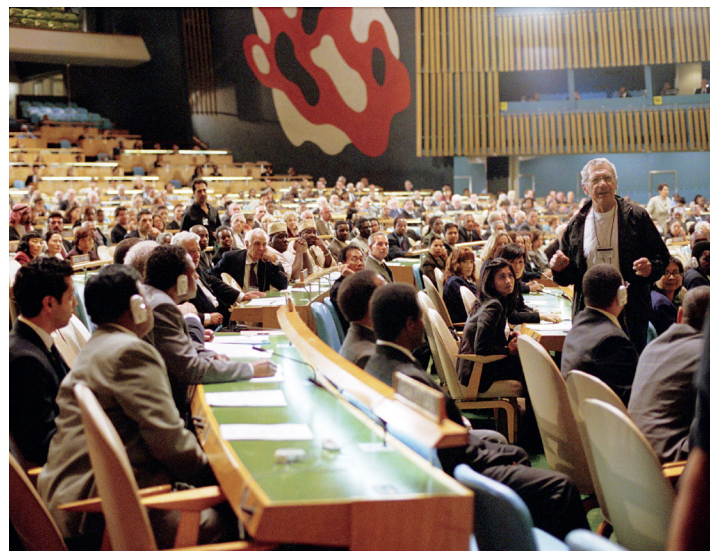




**OLD WORLD:** Francis Ford Coppola (in striped coat) redressed East Sixth Street near Avenue A to look like it did in 1917 for *The Godfather: Part II* (1974). "My heart was really in the Little Italy sequences, in the old streets of New York, the music, all that turn-of-the-century atmosphere," said Coppola.



**TAKE THE A TRAIN:** Director Joseph Sargent shot *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three* (1974) on a subway car rented from the Transit Authority. He also attached a lightweight Arriflex camera to the exterior of the car with an aluminum rig and heavy-duty suction cups to shoot the train as it pulled out of the station.



**WORLD PEACE:** Sydney Pollack persuaded the United Nations to allow him to shoot *The Interpreter* (2005) at its Manhattan headquarters, the first film ever to do so. Shooting only on weekends, Pollack filled the General Assembly with 600 extras, several of whom realistically fell asleep in their seats.



**TALKIN' TO ME:** Martin Scorsese prepares a scene for *Taxi Driver* (1976) with Robert De Niro at Columbus Circle. To shoot De Niro through the windshield of the cab as he moves through the city, Scorsese and cinematographer Michael Chapman mounted an Arriflex camera on a platform bolted to a Checker cab.

PHOTOS: (TOP) BISON ARCHIVES; (BOTTOM, LEFT) PHOTOFEST; (BOTTOM, RIGHT) MPTV



**DRAWING A CROWD:** When he was making *Sex and the City* (2008), Michael Patrick King had to add several outdoor scenes as a decoy for the ever-present paparazzi, and several exterior scenes had to be moved indoors because of media attention. But not the wedding scene, filmed outside the New York Public Library.



**DOWNTOWN:** Spike Lee, who has often used the city as a backdrop for his films, stages a scene with Denzel Washington for *Inside Man* (2006). Lee is sitting on a camera platform that is set up to dolly almost the entire length of William Street toward Wall Street at the end of the block.



**ON THE BOARDWALK:** Woody Allen used actual Coney Island locations in *Annie Hall* (1977) for the childhood flashbacks of his alter ego Alvy Singer, who grew up under the roller coaster. With careful framing and a few period details, Allen was able to suggest how the amusement park looked during the war years.



**UPTOWN:** Elaine May shot her first feature, *A New Leaf* (1971), in Manhattan and Queens. The original ending of the corrosive black comedy about two wealthy misfits (Walter Matthau and May) was too dark for the studio, and despite favorable reviews she was unhappy with the edited version.



**DOG DAYS:** Jules Dassin's *The Naked City* (1948), a movie shot almost entirely on location in New York, was a breakthrough for the film industry. Dassin (in white T-shirt) shot at 107 sites around town in the summer of 1947, climaxing with this final chase scene on the walkway of the Williamsburg Bridge.



**THE LUSH LIFE:** Ray Milland (right) portrayed an alcoholic in a downward spiral in Billy Wilder's *The Lost Weekend* (1945). Wilder (behind the camera) was one of the first filmmakers to return to New York after the war. He shot exteriors on a single Sunday, hiding his cameramen inside bakery trucks.



**STREET LIFE:** John Schlesinger (seated) directing Jon Voight and Dustin Hoffman in *Midnight Cowboy* (1969). Schlesinger said he actually made New York a character in the film. "It's the one city in the world that leaves me feeling that I can't believe my eyes. So it can't help being a character."



**CITY OF DREAMS:** Philip Seymour Hoffman (center), making his debut behind the camera in *Jack Goes Boating* (2010), called directing a "great gig," but in the future would prefer not to act and direct. Playing a limousine driver, Hoffman and his best friend sit in the car admiring the unattainable towers of Manhattan.



**RUSH HOUR:** William Friedkin (right) with Gene Hackman, at a subway station making *The French Connection* (1971). The great chase scene on the Stillwell Avenue elevated line in Brooklyn was shot in the dead of winter over a period of five weeks, but the production could only shoot from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

PHOTOS: (TOP) BISON ARCHIVES; (BOTTOM, LEFT) EVERETT; (BOTTOM, RIGHT) KOBAL



**TOP OF THE WORLD:** Alfred Hitchcock (center) built a model of the Statue of Liberty to scale on the Universal lot for *Saboteur* (1942). For the finale of the film, real footage shot from the top of the monument was superimposed onto a black background to make it appear that the villain had fallen down.

PHOTOS: (TOP) COURTESY OF UA/MGM; (BOTTOM, LEFT) PHOTOEST; (BOTTOM, LEFT) KOBAL



**TRUE GRIT:** The quintessential New York director, Sidney Lumet used 104 locations in every borough except Staten Island to shoot his police corruption film *Serpico* (1973). "When you shoot here, it's like sitting on a big lid ready to blow sky high. And this energy reaches the screen."