

*The Life
Fantastical*
with
*Wes
Anderson*

BY CHRISTINA BOHNSTENGEL

Wes Anderson, award-winning film director, screenwriter, and designer extraordinaire, possesses an innate aesthetic so distinctive, so visually intriguing, so storybook retro-chic, it's now popping up everywhere—from small-town tourism campaigns in Claremont, California, to the dimensional reality of an Anderson-designed, uber-quirky, Italian café.

That's right, fans of the fantastical, Wes Anderson has conjured up another visual fairyland, and this time he's brought it to life. Bar Luce opened in Spring 2015 in Milan inside Fondazione Prada, the luxury label's art and culture complex. (And yes, right again: not only is it an Anderson-design café, it's an Anderson-designed *Prada* café.)

Fashioned after one of his signature vintage sets, the film phenom transformed fantasy into reality, granting whimsical wishes to anyone who has ever daydreamed about stepping onto a real-life Anderson stage. Though it feels intentionally designed, he alludes to the contrary.

"There is no ideal angle for this space," he says. "It is for real life, and ought to have numerous good spots for eating, drinking, talking, reading, etc. While I do think it would make a pretty good movie set, I think it would be an even better place to write a movie. I tried to make it a bar I would want to spend my own non-fictional afternoons in."

Bar Luce proves something that Anderson aficionados have long known: the creative genius is a designer at heart. Bill Murray, who has been in eight consecutive Anderson features since *Rushmore* in 1998, including 2014's award-winning *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, reflected on the experience of working in an Anderson film, stating, "...you get to see the world, and see Wes live this wonderful, magical life, where his dreamscape comes true."



Exploring imaginary worlds and the design logistics of making them real is one of Anderson's many fortes. *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, though filmed in Germany, takes place on screen in the imagined country of Zubrowka, Anderson's version of twentieth-century central Europe. The film begins with mention of "a spa town of Nebelsbad, below the Alpine Sudetenvatz," near Lutz. Anderson described his fictional destinations to NPR's Terry Gross on her show *Fresh Air* as, "Budapest and Prague and Vienna rolled into one..." He goes on to name Prague as his inspirational city for the film, and travel as his means for coming to understand that.

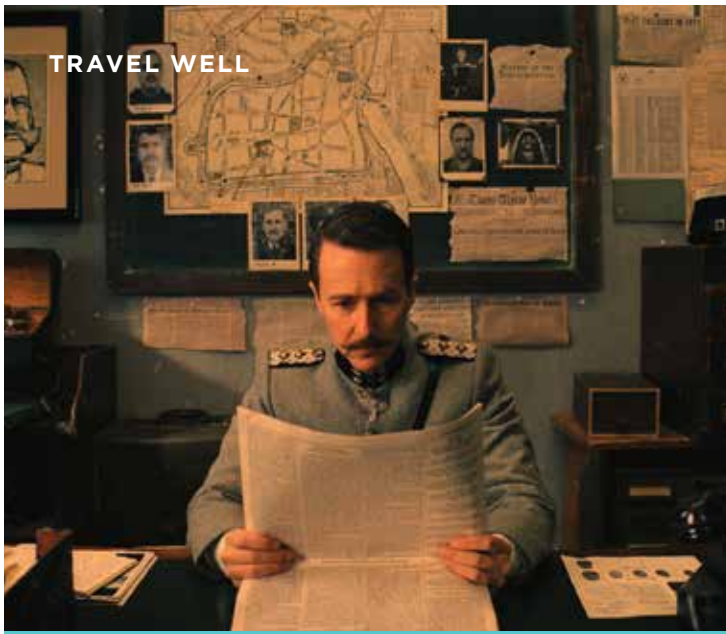
Spending half of his time in Europe for more than a decade, the Texas-born creative professes his aversion to working in the physical confines of a movie studio. He prefers to be on locations, which comes with its own challenges. "I thought we were going to find the perfect hotel and that we'd just do it there. We didn't," he told Gross, which is when the idea for miniatures started to build.

Another Anderson signature, his miniatures have also shown up in *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*, *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, and *Moonrise Kingdom*. "I like the charm of them," he told the *New*

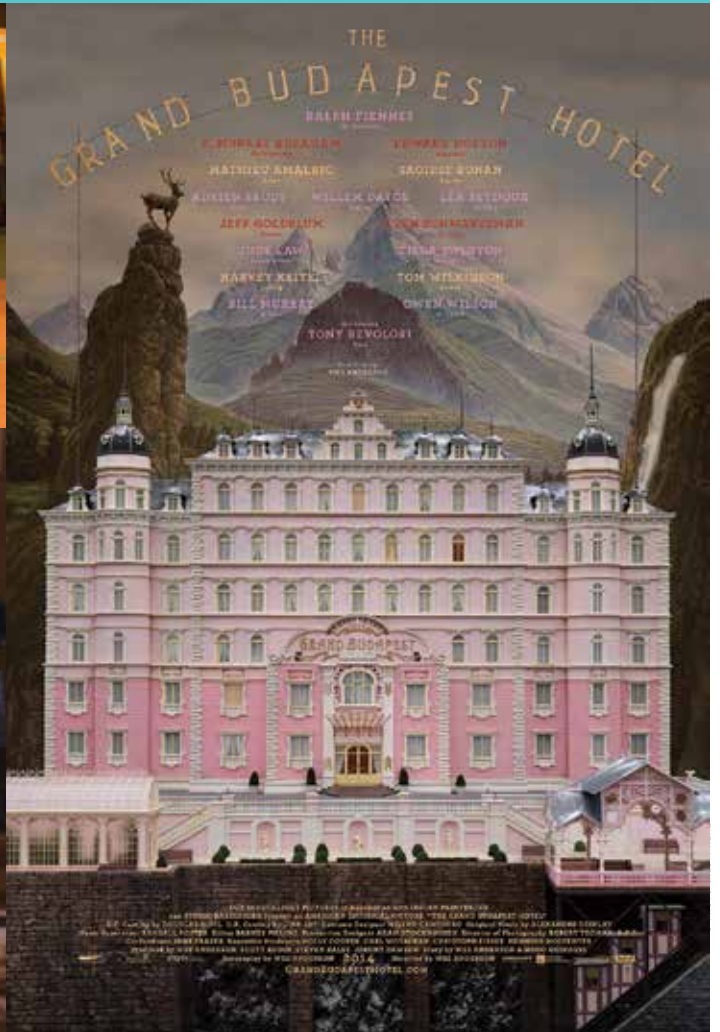


ANDERSON-DESIGNED PRADA CAFÉ

The original architecture of the building, a 1910s distillery, supported Anderson's vision of recreating a mid-century Milanese café. Think arches, vaulted ceilings, terrazzo floors, Formica furniture, vintage appliances, a retro palette, and veneered-wood wall panels—a *Royal Tenenbaum* estate trademark. There's a throwback jukebox and two pinball machines that have been called distinctly "Andersonian": one with *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* motif, the other depicting his 2013 critically acclaimed short *Castello Cavalcanti*.



THE GRAND BUDAPEST HOTEL, THOUGH FILMED IN GERMANY, TAKES PLACE ON SCREEN IN THE IMAGINED COUNTRY OF ZUBROWKA, ANDERSON'S VERSION OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY CENTRAL EUROPE.





Bill Murray and Wes Anderson arrive at the AFI FEST in 2009 for the opening night gala screening of *Fantastic Mr. Fox* at Grauman's Chinese Theatre.

York Times. Because he believes audiences already recognize the artificiality in filmmaking, he intentionally goes for a part-handmade-part-real-life effect. “The particular brand of artificiality that I like to use is an old-fashioned one.”

As he explained to Gross, “when you’re doing a miniature it means you can make the thing exactly the way you want. You have essentially no limitation. So we could put our hotel where we wanted it, we could make it look how we wanted it, and we could put things around it that we wanted.”

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And what Anderson and team want visually—that whimsical Old World aesthetic—clicks with audiences and critics alike. His repeat collaboration with production designer Adam Stockhausen earned Best Production Design, along with Best Costume Design, Best Original Score, and Best Makeup and Hairstyling for *The Grand Budapest Hotel* at the 2015 Academy Awards.

From the underwater world of *The Life Aquatic* to the Rhode Island charms of *Moonrise Kingdom*, the Old World splendor of Central Europe in *The Grand Budapest Hotel* to the real-life whimsy of Milan’s Bar Luce, Anderson’s imagination leaves his legions with a renewed desire to escape to exotic destinations, both real and imagined. Whether conceiving a set for actors and props, or translating the big screen into dimensional reality for real-life patrons, if it’s an Anderson-conceived world, we’re awed to be in it. **H**

THE ICONIC MINIATURES

Fantastic Mr. Fox, Anderson’s first animated movie, was nominated for an Academy Award and Golden Globe.

THE FILM USES ANDERSON’S signature miniatures. Puppets come to life on screen through the painstaking process of stop-motion photography. The figurines are photographed, moved slightly, then shot again. There were three sizes of animal puppets, from an inch tall for wide shots to over a foot tall for close-ups; the humans measured five inches tall. He conceived of over thirty small sets, such as the fox den, chicken coop, and town square. As with all Anderson films, the details are where the fun’s at, like the bristly texture of real fur on the puppets and Mr. Fox’s corduroy jacket, a tiny tailored replica of one of Anderson’s own.

