



PHOTO BY SCOTT GREEN

On the set of *Good Will Hunting*, which earned Van Sant his first Oscar nod



## His own private Portland

stayed on to work in the editing room. He describes Van Sant as a hard-working director: "Very much involved in editing, he was there every day, very hands on."

And all that obsessing paid off handsomely. The picture earned critical acclaim; good box office; an Oscar for the *It Boys* who wrote it, Ben Affleck and Matt Damon; a long-awaited statue for Williams; and Van Sant's first nomination for the golden guy.

Which begs the question: Why squander your newly minted bankable big-shot currency on a shot-for-shot remake of *Psycho*? It might have started as a whim or simply as an intellectual challenge.

From time to time, Van Sant was courted by various studio execs always on the remake trail, eager to get double or triple duty out of their properties. On one of those occasions he suggested the *Psycho* redo, and eventually his credibility rose high enough to get the proverbial green light.

Perhaps he never thought he would. But as Portland pal Snellman notes, "Gus won't shy away from a difficult challenge."

The award Van Sant won for his reslash of *Psycho* says it all: the dreaded Razzie for worst director of 1998.

Now, with his eighth feature film, *Finding Forrester*, Van Sant is of necessity back on the Oscar Trail. According to E! Online, in order to

gain studio approval to cast new-kid-on-any-set Robert Brown as his lead, the director "had to promise Columbia prez Amy Pascal he'd get an Oscar nomination for the 17-year-old."

Judging from the response at the admittedly partisan Portland premiere, it doesn't sound so farfetched. What's really impressive, though, is that Van Sant made that promise *before* he shot the movie.

His confidence was no doubt based on the superb script he had in his hand, coincidentally written by the aptly named Portlander Mike Rich. This local-guy-makes-very-good will only get much richer, for he has a finely tuned ear for dialogue, tremendous perception into human nature and a feel for telling a universally appealing story.

With *Forrester*, Van Sant returns to an ongoing theme in his films, begun with his very first, *Mala Noche*: the relationship between an older man and a much younger one just coming of age.

Although it has no gay angle, the intense friendship that develops between the two men could certainly be characterized as a loving relationship. And here's the real surprise: The movie is laugh-out-loud funny, peppered all the way through with humor that emanates from characterization.

In this age of flashy MTV-style editing, this film is a brave move on Van Sant's part. He



Van Sant and his *Psycho*-tic star Anne Heche

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Green characterizes Van Sant as a collaborative director. "Gus really gives actors a lot of freedom; actors love to work with him," he says.

Not a slave to the script, he allows some improvised takes. "If the actors want to do it again, he'll let them," Green discloses.

Van Sant described his attitude toward actors to Monk.com in 1998. "I want them to be able to make mistakes because then they're making a go for the good things."

According to Green, Van Sant's preparation includes "going off with the actors privately to run lines and do character development together." In fact, Green says Van Sant's greatest skill is "hiring the right people and then allowing them to do their jobs."

Which means when the shooting day is done, the director can unwind. "When Gus makes a movie he doesn't hang out much. He works, then he goes to his room and plays his guitar, which is his way of meditating," Green reveals.

After *Good Will Hunting* wrapped, Green

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