

# TAKING \$ STOCK

ON HIS FIFTH COLLABORATION WITH SCORSESE, LEONARDO DICAPRIO TALKS MARTY, CINEMATIC GHOSTS AND THE METHOD AND MADNESS OF **THE WOLF OF WALL STREET**

WORDS NEV PIERCE PHOTOGRAPHY BRIGITTE LACOMBE

"I THINK A LOT OF YOUNG ACTORS' vision was of this incredibly, I don't want to say 'hardcore' director, but a very intense man," says Leonardo DiCaprio, looking back on his early meetings with Martin Scorsese. "And don't get me wrong, he is incredibly intense when he's making a movie, but he's such a kind human being, such a warm person."

Public displays of affection are hardly rare in interviews, but the 39-year-old is almost palpably respectful when talking of "Marty". Their mutual admiration has invigorated both their careers, giving the star his most testing, interesting roles and

the director budgets and box office profile on a scale he'd never previously enjoyed. Their fifth film together, *The Wolf Of Wall Street* nearly happened in 2007, but the studio backed out and DiCaprio spoke with other directors about adapting Jordan Belfort's memoir of City swindling and excess. "But I just couldn't quite pull the trigger. I couldn't say 'yes', because I couldn't get Marty out of my mind for this."

Now its story of ambition, greed and corruption seems even more timely. Will they work together again? You can bank on it. >



**When did you first meet Scorsese?**

I remember being 18 years old — I think I'd just done *This Boy's Life* and [*What's Eating*] *Gilbert Grape* — and it was my first time in New York alone and I went to a restaurant and I saw him. Of course, as a young actor, I was incredibly excited but I kind of just walked by and he grabbed me and said, "Hey, kid, I've seen your work. You really did a great job in that movie, I wanted to tell you that." I was kind of speechless and he just walked away and said, you know, "Keep it up." I was so touched that he actually had seen my film, I think, even before it had come out. He was just on the cutting edge of every new movie. Everything around his life revolves around movies to some capacity.

**The Wolf Of Wall Street has been gestating for ages. What brought you back to Scorsese?**

It needed to have the right director's eye and the right director's attitude about it. When Marty talks about *GoodFellas* he mentions the people in his neighbourhood that he was familiar with, that he knew, and he looked at it as a comedy at first. Of course, a lot of people see *GoodFellas* right now and they say, "Jesus — that's a comedy?", but there are hilarious moments in there because of the humanity he brings out in the characters. And that was on the page but needed to blossom, so I re-approached him and got outside financing from these great guys at Red Granite, who stepped up to the plate and did what a lot of financiers and studios aren't doing and took a risk on a very adult, edgy product.

**It looks like you had a lot of fun...**

Yeah, man, we did have a lot of fun! It was the invitation to improvise that really gave all of us an opportunity to go places we never expected. Every day we'd have a scene written down, we'd have something specific to do, but then we got all these actors in and when you're working with great improvisers like Matthew (*McConaughey*) or Jonah (*Hill*) or Jean Dujardin or Margot (*Robbie*) — we just tore everything apart, you know? (*Laughs*) I think there are some great

moments as a result. I remembered Marty talking about one of the most iconic scenes in *GoodFellas*, where of course Joe Pesci is talking to Ray Liotta and says, "What am I, a clown? Am I here to amuse you?" I'm like, "How the hell did you get that moment?" He's like, "Well, that scene was a half a page and we get the guys together, the guys start talking, and then next thing I know we're there into the night and I'm just in hysterics at what they're doing. I can't stop rolling the camera. And then — BOOM! — that little moment came out of an entire day of improvising, it just happened." Like, wow. You need to have a director that has the nose for cinematic magic, you know? He wants to wait for that moment, he wants to see where it goes, and that's what we got to do.

**What qualities do the best directors share?**

Number one, I think, is an acute respect for cinema as an art form. When I hear them talk about cinema and about their respect for whoever their heroes are, or moments in cinema or films that have influenced them, I immediately think, "Okay, this person gets it!" The ghosts of cinema's past, they feel, are looking down on them to do something great! You know what I mean? Some directors are incredibly collaborative, some are less so, but they can both make great movies. To me it's about their respect and love for their art form and, you know, being cinephiles, being people that appreciate and love movies to an obsessive level.

**You've been acting now for nearly 25 years. How has your approach changed?**

Mmm. To tell you the truth, as far as the type of actor that I want to become, that, oddly enough, hasn't changed at all. I remember getting the opportunity to do *This Boy's Life* [and then] I sat down for, like, a year and just watched every movie I could and said, "Someday I want to do something as great as what these people have done in the past." That hasn't changed. As far as the type of actor that I am now... You know, we all want to say



# "MARTIN SCORSESE HAS A NOSE FOR A MAGIC MOMENT."

we're improving (*laughs*). But that's completely subject to the audience's opinion. I certainly feel, as an actor, more comfortable than ever. I've been trying to find characters that I have a real passion to play. I've been waiting for those. **So, in terms of material, do you look for a subject or a character?** It's definitely a combination of both. Look, you could be drawn to a certain subject matter, a certain time period, a certain type of character, but if it's not executed correctly, if the script is not there, if the director doesn't understand

what they're doing, then of course it's all a moot point. I never really question what I'm drawn towards. I obviously did a film (*Django Unchained*) about a slave-owner on a Southern plantation who was a greedy, lecherous bastard — treated human life as currency — and then all the way to the 1920s with *Gatsby*, who for the love of Daisy created himself into an oligarch of the underworld. And then here's this man in the '80s that is consumed with wealth. So there's this theme throughout the last three movies that only this year did I really realise, "Oh my God, there's obviously something thematic about this I'm drawn towards." But I just never question that.

**What do you enjoy most: the time on set, or the preparation, the chance to learn?** Watching guys like De Niro or Daniel (*Day-Lewis*) and the incredible amount of preparation that they take for the character they play, you can only hope to be as meticulous as they are. I understand the idea that so much of the character is formed before you even step onto the set and there's a transformation that has to occur within. That, to me, is so much a part of the fun of it. I love inhabiting different characters, I love going into different states

• Above: Martin Scorsese with his cast and crew on *The Wolf Of Wall Street*. Is he keeping you, Leo? Left: The director confers with DiCaprio and leading lady Margot Robbie.

of mind and trying to project how they would react in different scenarios. Plus, I do love the development process. I love seeing ways that I can get my two cents as far as the improvement of the story and the structure. We did that for four months on *Wolf Of Wall Street*. We restructured a lot of the movie and did lots of improvising, even before we stepped on set.

**And when you're on set with Scorsese, who is, for our generation, a real hero, do you still get moments when you can't quite believe what's happening?**

To tell you the truth: all the time! People probably see what I'm doing and see that I've done a number of movies with this gentleman and maybe think that I'm used to it. I'm never used to it. There's nobody who feels as lucky as I am to work with someone who I believe is the greatest living director in the world and somebody I can learn from. My eyes and ears are always open and I'm always honoured to be working in his presence — that's the truth. I never take it for granted. *Ever.* [nev@empiremagazine.com](http://nev.empiremagazine.com)

**THE WOLF OF WALL STREET IS OUT ON JANUARY 17 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 46.**

## LEO 4 MARTY

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DICAPRIO-SCORSESE CONNECTION



**GANGS OF NEW YORK (2002)**

→ A decades-old passion project that Scorsese only got to make because of DiCaprio's star power, but the Faustian pact pays off with the youngster's gauche performance matching his angsty character's battle in a rotten Big Apple.



**THE AVIATOR (2004)**

→ How fitting to follow *Gangs* with a film about a movie lover with compulsive tendencies who spends decades on a wildly ambitious folly. DiCaprio is perfect for Howard Hughes, capturing the curious blend of fastidiousness and killer charm.



**THE DEPARTED (2006)**

→ Scorsese's most purely entertaining movie since *GoodFellas*: a glorious pulp fiction given grist by his gift for detailing subcultures. DiCaprio is the straight guy to Jack Nicholson's gaudy godfather and Matt Damon's quietly malicious mole.



**SHUTTER ISLAND (2010)**

→ Perhaps the best match of star and director to character and material, with Scorsese riffing on Sam Fuller and Val Lewton for an operatic noir, while DiCaprio seems sweaty and uncomfortable in ways that become brilliantly appropriate.