

# Screen

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

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## *executive suite:* **Thelma Schoonmaker**

With an Academy Award for *Raging Bull* and nominations for *Woodstock* and *GoodFellas* to her credit, film editor Thelma Schoonmaker Powell could have her pick of films and directors to work with. Yet since 1980, she has collaborated exclusively with Martin Scorsese. "His films are always so interesting," says Schoonmaker. "When we finish one, I can hardly wait for the next to start."

While waiting for Scorsese's next film *Casino*, starring Robert DeNiro, to begin in March, Schoonmaker is helping edit the director's documentary about his vision of film history for the centenary of film in 1995.

The British Film Institute (BFI)/Channel 4 co-production is also providing Schoonmaker with her first opportunity to work on a random access video editing system. "It's working well because we can fade out and do wipes on the film clips. But before I decide on it for my next feature, I have to talk to some other editors who've used it," she says. "The major drawbacks that remain, other than losing the tactile thing, are the quality of the image and the difficulty conforming the video rough cut to film for periodic screenings. Being able to screen the film is critical for Scorsese and I."

Schoonmaker has time between working on Scorsese's films to continue archiving the work of her late husband, British director Michael Powell. Since Powell's death in 1990, she has edited his autobiography, *Million Dollar Movie*, and is preparing his personal papers to turn over to the BFI. She then hopes to publish extracts from his diaries.

Schoonmaker's years of working with Scorsese have also given her a singular vantage point to his artistic development.

"One of the most painful things is when you have to drop your favourite scenes. We had to do that in *After Hours*. But by now Scorsese has gotten so disciplined in the writing that we hardly ever drop scenes. The *GoodFellas* script was so tight, it almost became boring for Scorsese to go to the set.

But in the editing room I could make the pace go faster and faster and it only got stronger."

Unsurprisingly, *The Age Of Innocence* was an exercise in learning how to slow down the pace. "The trick was to show that the people were feeling one thing while saying another. I had to be careful to catch a flicker of feeling in an actor's face."

Despite Schoonmaker's proximity to two such great directors, she

has no desire to direct. "If I had something to say burning inside me, I would direct. But I don't. Both Scorsese and Powell never made a film unless they had that feeling."

Instead, she chooses to spend her energy when not editing, guarding Powell's legacy. "In a way, his leaving me this work was a wonderful gift because I still get to be with him."

**Jennine Lanouette**



### Mini-bar

Thelma Schoonmaker Powell, winner of the 1993 Channel 4 Lifetime Achievement Award, presented at the Carlton Women in Film and Television Awards, was born in Algeria, and grew up on the Caribbean island of Aruba. During a six-week film course at New York University she met Martin Scorsese and Michael Wadleigh, and went on to work on Scorsese's first feature *Who's That Knocking At My Door?* and Wadleigh's *Woodstock*. After working on documentaries and TV specials for 10 years, she edited Scorsese's *Raging Bull* for which she won an Academy Award. Scorsese introduced her to British film director Michael Powell, who she married in 1984.