



Independent SPIRITS

The early days of independent film

It was the need to break free from the monopoly on film production and distribution held by the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC), also known as the 'Edison Trust,' that caused disruptive innovation to occur within the film industry in America. When it was established in 1908, the Trust was made up of all the major film companies of that period, including Edison, Biograph, Vitagraph, Essanay, Selig, Lubin, Kalem, American Star, America Pathé, as well as George Kline (the leading distributor), and the country's biggest raw film supplier, Eastman Kodak.

For those filmmakers who declined to join the trust, or were refused entry into the trust, it was a challenging period. The Trust owned most of the major patents relating to film, including the patent for raw film, and they enforced their patents vigorously, often bringing lawsuits and receiving injunctions against those outside of the Trust, who became known as the Independents.

The inability to operate successfully without the constant threat of falling foul of the Trust, led a number of independent filmmakers to be creatively innovative when producing their films, like building their own cameras, and moving their operations to Hollywood, California. The city welcomed them and their potential to create jobs and boost the local economy, and it offered filmmakers a wide variety of locations and pleasant weather to shoot in, all year round. Most importantly, Hollywood was far away from Edison's New Jersey base on the East Coast, which made it more difficult for the MPPC to enforce its patents. With regards jurisdiction, it fell under the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals based in San Francisco, which was averse to enforcing patent claims.

There were many reasons for MPPC's downfall. In 1911, Eastman Kodak modified its exclusive contract with the Trust, which then allowed it to sell its raw film stock to the independent filmmakers, who at the time controlled one quarter, to one third of the domestic marketplace. More theatres also began to exhibit independent films - a market which grew by 33 percent in twelve months - and saw independent films shown in half the theatres across the United States. As more and more independent companies were established across the country, the Trust also found it difficult to efficiently enforce its patents through litigation.

World War I took its toll on the Trust as well, as it cut off most of the

European market which negatively affected the revenue and profits of the MPPC members. (The Independents, who were creating Westerns for the local market were largely unaffected by this.) However, the two most significant blows to the Trust's survival occurred in 1912, when the Supreme Court of the United States cancelled the patent on raw film and in 1915, when it ruled that the Trust's actions went "far beyond what was necessary to protect the use of patents or the monopoly which went with them". The Trust actions were deemed illegal restraint of trade under the Sherman Antitrust Act and all MPPC patents were cancelled, officially bringing an end to the Edison Trust.

This did not mean that it was not plain sailing for the Independents - the collapse of the Edison Trust brought about a new era in film - that of the studio system and a new dominating pack consisting of 20th Century Fox, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Paramount Pictures, RKO Pictures and Warner Brothers. Beneath this top tier were Columbia Pictures, United Artists (formed by Mary Pickford, Charles Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks and D.W. Griffiths) and Universal Studios. Fighting for their lean slice of the motion picture pie, were those smaller studios and Independents - known as a collective as 'Poverty Row'.

As the power of the studio system grew quickly, a number of filmmakers again felt the need to break away from dominant monopoly and established themselves as independents. In 1941, Mary Pickford, Charlie Chaplin, Walt Disney, Orson Welles, Samuel Goldwyn, David O. Selznick, Alexander Korda, and Walter Wanger—many of the same people who were members of United Artists—founded the Society of Independent Motion Picture Producers. Their aim was to preserve the rights of independent producers in the film industry, and they fought to end the monopoly of the five major Hollywood studios in order to open up the tightly controlled production, distribution and exhibition of films. Their 1942 antitrust suit against Paramount's United Detroit Theatres resulted in the United States Supreme Court Paramount Decision which ordered the Hollywood movie studios to sell their theatre chains and to cease anti-competitive practices. After achieving many of its goals, the Society of Independent Motion Picture Producers closed in 1958.

The Independents gain momentum

Both World Wars had an effect on the film industry in America. World War I stemmed the steady flow of revenue and profits for the MPPC



members. During World War II, the development of inexpensive portable cameras enabled the average America with an interest in making films to do so, without the help of any major film studio. This development had a major positive effect on the independent film industry and many highly influential works were released between the 1940s and early 1960s. These included Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks* (1947) and Morris Engel, Ruth Orkin and Ray Abrashkin's *Little Fugitive* (1953). The latter was the first independent film to be nominated for an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay.

In the 1950s and 1960s, independent filmmakers began to experiment with new ways of making and shooting films. They became risk-takers and explorers and embraced an anti-Hollywood approach to filmmaking. Mirroring movements such as *Nouvelle Vague* (France) and *Free Cinema* (Britain), the American independents aimed to produce and distribute ultra low-budget films outside the formal film industry structures.

The late 1960s and 1970s saw the rise of independent B-grade horror and science fiction such as George A Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, and Tobe Hooper's *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. The films attracted a cult following and set the tone for independent horror films for years to come. The 1970s however, also saw the realisation that the realistic depictions of sex and violence would need to be stylised and many of the American new wave filmmakers began developing their skills, influenced by the European art house directors. It was the time when Directors such as John Waters (*Pink Flamingos*, 1972) and David Lynch (*Eraserhead*, 1977) made a name for themselves for their bizarre and disturbing imagery for which they became legendary.

The 1980s saw independents rebel against the blockbuster films

being released by the major studios. They worked towards creating art, dealing with real issues, in a realistic manner. Their budgets were shoe-string, their aim was to challenge their viewers, and many were overtly political and critical of the events of the day. Many took on a documentary style and few boasted the happy endings of the Hollywood studio films.

The 2000s have opened many new doors for independent filmmakers, specifically through new digital distribution channels. Many of the major Hollywood distributors have seen the appeal of marketing to different 'niche' art house audiences and launched their own independent subsidiaries such as HBO Films, Castle Rock Entertainment, Fox Searchlight Pictures, Dream Works, and Warner Independent Pictures. With the critical and financial success of independent films like *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), *Clerks* (1994), *Before Sunrise* (1995), *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), *Lost in Translation* (2003), *Sideways* (2004), *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006), *Juno* (2007), *Precious* (2009), *Black Swan* (2010), *Midnight in Paris* (2011), *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2012) and *Fruitvale Station* (2013) one can see why they are keen to be involved.

While the lines may be blurred and the definition of independence somewhat diluted, there is definitely a consistent push to continue to provide viewers across a variety of niche markets with high quality (not necessarily big budget) films.

The Independent Spirit Awards

The Spirit Awards were established in 1984 to celebrate artist-driven filmmaking and to recognise the finest achievements of today's independent filmmakers. Originally known as the "Friends of

Independents" (FINDIE) Awards, this prestigious event, produced by the non-profit arts organisation, Film Independent (who also produces the Los Angeles Film Festival), is held annually in a tent on the beach in Santa Monica, California, bringing the entire film community together to celebrate the very best of independent film. The event is also the primary fundraiser for Film Independent's year-round programmes which are aimed at cultivating the careers of emerging filmmakers and promoting diversity within the film industry.

Awards are given in the following categories: Best Editing, Best Feature, Best First Feature, Best First Screenplay, Best Director, Best Screenplay, John Cassavetes Award (given to the best feature made for a budget under \$500,000), Best Male Lead, Best Female Lead, Best Supporting Male, Best Supporting Female, Best Cinematography, Best International Film and Best Documentary. The Filmmaker Grants include the 'Someone to Watch Award', the 'Stella Artois Truer Than Fiction Award', and the 'Piaget Producers Award.'

Over the past 29 years, artists such as Joel and Ethan Coen, Spike Lee, Oliver Stone, Ashley Judd, Robert Rodriguez, David O. Russell, Edward Burns, Aaron Eckhart, Neil LaBute, Darren Aronofsky, Spike Jonze, Charlie Kaufman, Hilary Swank, Marc Forster, Todd Field, Christopher Nolan, Zach Braff, Amy Adams, and Lena Dunham, amongst others have been honoured at the event.

The 2014 Independent Spirit Awards saw the major categories top honours go to '12 Years a Slave' (Best Feature, Best Director and Best Screenplay), 'Dallas Buyers Club' (Best Supporting Male and Best Male Lead), 'Blue Jasmine' (Best Female Lead), and 'Nebraska' (Best First Screenplay). 'Fruitvale Station' (Best First Feature), 'Blue is the Warmest Color', 'Short Term 12' (Best Editing), 'This is Martin Bonner' (the John Cassavetes Award) and '20 Feet from Stardom' (Best

Documentary) were also honoured on the day.

The 7th annual 'Robert Altman Award' was given to the director, casting director, and ensemble cast of *Mud*. Jeff Nichols (Director), Francine Maisler (Casting Director) and ensemble cast members, Joe Don Baker, Jacob Lofland, Matthew McConaughey, Ray McKinnon, Sarah Paulson, Michael Shannon, Sam Shepard, Tye Sheridan, Paul Sparks, Bonnie Sturdivant and Reese Witherspoon, were on hand to receive the award.

Perfect Partnerships

Piaget has been a Premier partner of the Film Independent Spirit Awards since 2008. "Piaget supports artists who display creativity and talent" says Chief Executive Officer Philippe Léopold-Metzger, who believes the company's commitment to the Awards is a natural fit. Each year the luxury Swiss watchmaker and jeweller presents the Piaget Producers Award in recognition of outstanding creative vision and achievement in independent film.

The role of producer on an independent film is not easily defined. Independent producers usually lack the resources of their studio counterparts and must assume legal, business and financial responsibilities for the film. They write, supervise writers or acquire the rights to the material they wish to produce, identify and engage with directors, producers and necessary cast members, and then present this package to potential investors to secure the funding required for each project.

Once the finance is secured, the production must be set up, from the hiring of employees to establishment of back-office functions such as accounting and payroll, and the scouting of locations for filming. The

producer is also a business manager, who must ensure all regulatory and statutory requirements are fully complied with, in order to close the deals they need to see the film made and distributed. Once the deals are secured the producer must deliver the film and all its physical elements including sound tracks, masters and stills, and paper elements including copyright registration, rights documentation, and insurance and talent agreements. The role is pivotal to the success of the film, and is a delicate balance of creativity, vision and innovative business acumen which hopefully combines at the end of the day into a beautiful and artistic film for all to enjoy.

Piaget made its name as a result of its many innovative watch

creations and it fosters the creative spirit of its in-house team of designers who are given free rein when conceiving new models. On average about a hundred new watch references are launched annually and the process involved in the development of a new watch can be likened to the production of a new film. Each new watch requires nearly a year's work, from the first designs, presented in gouache drawings, to the development of the three-dimensional model, and the production of the prototypes which then give a more precise idea of the technical and aesthetic factors involved. Throughout these stages the engineers and designers work in close collaboration to ensure the creative spirit of the original sketches can be transformed into a bold and exceptional watch creation.

Like the producers which they honour with the Piaget Producers Award, for Piaget, boldness means asserting its independence and handling extravagance with subtlety. Like the films produced by the Independents every year, it also means introducing models destined to make a mark on their own era and to stand the test of time.

In addition to sponsoring the Producers Award, Piaget also hosts an exclusive backstage VIP lounge, where the event's most celebrated artists can retreat to relax amidst a wonderful display of the company's newest high jewellery creations and exceptional timepieces.

Piaget's signature style

In 1874, Georges Édouard Piaget sketched the first strokes of what, decades later, was to become an inimitable signature in the world of luxury and fine watchmaking. His first workshop was on the family farm in La Côte-aux-Fées, a small village in the Swiss part of the Jura, and it was here that he devoted himself to making high-precision movements that he soon began supplying to the most prestigious brands. Piaget's seldom-equalled expertise soon became legendary and as the demand for his precise movements grew his workshop did as well. In 1911, Georges Édouard's son Timothée Piaget took over the business, displaying the same passion, demand for quality and success as his father.

In 1943, the company took the crucial step of registering the brand, and from that moment on, it produced watches signed by and sold under its own name, created with the same close attention to aesthetics and technical performance. This astute business decision made by the founder's grandsons Gérald and Valentin Piaget launched the brand's geographic expansion and increased its international recognition. In 1957, the Manufacture introduced the famous ultra-thin hand-wound Calibre 9P, which was only 2 mm thick and in 1960, launched the Calibre 12P, at the time, the world's thinnest self-winding movement. It measured just 2.3 mm thick. The ability to produce these infinitely small movements enabled the company's designers to stretch the boundaries of bold creativity and make their mark on contemporary watch making. From its world-first watches featuring dials made of hard stone to their cuff watches, creativity and the expression of difference became Piaget's style signature. The historic 9P and 12P movements were only replaced in the 1990s with the Calibres 430P and 500P movements. In 2010, Piaget set a double record for the world's thinnest self-winding movement and thinnest self-winding watch. Two years later the company presented the skeleton version of this same movement, exploring the art of open-working, again, impressing with its devotion to the elegance of its timepieces.



Photos: © by Austin Hargrave, courtesy of Piaget

PIAGET'S LIMELIGHT COLLECTION

The 1960s were known as a golden age pervaded by a resolutely fanciful spirit. As the leader of that legendary era, Piaget gave full play to its creative talent and adorned the elegant women of the time with dazzling jewellery watches. In 2013, the newly launched Piaget Limelight Gala collection draws a wealth of inspiration from this fascinating period and establishes itself as the new Piaget icon. Entirely in tune with its incomparable aesthetic, sensual curves and precious gem-setting, it reveals a distinctive personality imbued with a sense of glamorous chic. ■ Lindsay Grubb



Limelight Gala – 32 mm 18K white gold watch. Case set with 62 brilliant-cut diamonds (approximately 1.8 carats). Dial paved with 228 brilliant-cut diamonds (approximately 1 carat), white gold indexes. Black satin strap with ardillon buckle set with 15 brilliant-cut diamonds (approximately 0.1 carats). Piaget 690P quartz movement. Ref. GOA38162

Limelight Gala – 32 mm 18K white gold watch. Case set with 62 brilliant-cut diamonds (approximately 1.8 carats). Dial paved with 228 brilliant-cut diamonds (approximately 1 carat), white gold indexes. Bracelet and integrated clasp paved with 451 brilliant-cut diamonds (approximately 16.4 carats). Piaget 690P quartz movement. Ref. GOA38164

Limelight Gala – 32 mm 18K white gold watch. Case set with 62 brilliant-cut diamonds (approximately 1.8 carats). Silvered dial with black Roman numerals. Black satin strap with ardillon buckle set with 1 brilliant-cut diamond. Piaget 690P quartz movement. Ref. GOA38160

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