GLOW UP: A HISTORIC CHICKEN COOP BECOMES A MODERN MARVEL

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OWEN WILSON

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

"Thanks for all of the hospitality, Saratoga. You have a great town, and I'll definitely be back."

EXCLUSIVE THE HOLLYWOOD SUPERSTAR OPENS UP ABOUT HIS STAY IN THE SPA CITY WHILE FILMING PAINT—JUST IN TIME FOR THE MOVIE'S RELEASE. CUE THE OWEN MANIA. BY ABBY TEGNELIA

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cover story



PAINTING A PORTRAIT

TWO YEARS AFTER OWEN WILSON MANIA SWEPT THE SPA CITY DURING THE FILMING OF THE INDIE FILM *PAINT*, WE GO BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE NOTORIOUSLY LAID-BACK STAR TO TALK ABOUT THE MOVIE AHEAD OF ITS APRIL 7 RELEASE, HIS TIME IN SARATOGA AND—FOR ALL YOU WHAT'S GOING ON SARATOGA? FACEBOOK GROUP MEMBERS—HIS THOUGHTS ON CHICK-FIL-A.

By Abby Tegnelia

pipe dreams Owen Wilson leaned on Broadway's James & Sons Tobacconists to help his character look more authentic. "I smoke a pipe in the movie, and I've never smoked a pipe before, or even cigarettes," Wilson says. "So I hung around in there for a couple of days. The guy helped me out with some little pointers so it looked believable that I was someone familiar with a pipe."

COURTESY OF JAMES & SONS TOBACCONISTS

Late-April 2021, and the setting in Saratoga was all about perspective. If you were part of a certain film crew working with Hollywood heavyweight Owen Wilson, the Spa City was re-imagined as 1970s Vermont, the setting for a new movie, *Paint*, which was filmed exclusively in and around the Spa City. If you were a star-crazy Saratogian, locating said film crew and flooding the local Facebook group with photos of it was your new sport of choice. For all, it was mostly post-pandemic bliss. There was an indescribable electricity in the air after being cooped up for a year but at long last being able to work again (if you were part of the film crew), and not be scared of being in a crowd—if you were one of the die-hards with your face pressed up against a window trying to catch a glimpse of Wilson.

And then there's Wilson himself. Like the movie characters that have made him an international star, he took it all in stride, man.

"I had a great time," he says, calling in from Maui, where he was vacationing with his two sons for their winter break from school. "I really did. It's such a beautiful town, and I couldn't help but meet people. Everyone was very friendly and welcoming to us. I had never really spent time in upstate New York, and I loved it."

(The film's executive producer, Richard J. Bosner, was more effusive: "It was really wild!" he says of the local crowds, especially the end-shoot work, including barbershop scenes shot at Lucy's on Caroline Street before it was Lucy's. "We definitely felt it. The entire town was watching!")

That barbershop is pretty crucial to the indie comedy—Wilson's character, Carl Nargle, is based on the iconic TV painter Bob Ross, enormous perm and all. Across the street from Lucy's, the dive bar Desperate Annie's serves as the town water cooler in the film, familiar houses on Circular Street can be seen as he drives his retro van through town, and Olde Bryan Inn serves as the romantic setting for a date with an aggressive fan. Nargle's art studio is a barn in Greenfield Center, and his work shots take place—of course—at WMHT's television studios. Other local spots that appear in the movie include the Hidden Lake Girl Scout Camp, the intersection of Railroad Place and Division Street, the Lincoln Baths, and various residences around Saratoga.

"Carl's look was obviously inspired by Bob Ross, and his painting, of course," says Wilson. "[Director] Brit McAdams used that as a jumping off point to imagine this character who works at a PBS station in a small town. I'm the big fish in a small pond, and everyone caters to me. But then a new painter comes along and steals my thunder. I really enjoyed the story and the world that Brit created. This was genuinely my sense of humor—and there aren't many scripts that are my sense of humor!"

We'll be able to see this world for ourselves when *Paint*—and Saratoga—hits the big screen April 7.









to each his owen (ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) **Lucky local fans who met the star include Feathered Antler artist Gretchen Louise Tisch at the Saratoga Farmers' Market; Sean Shaughnessy at Saratoga National Historical Park; and Stephanie Marotta and Lisa Mitzen, also at the Farmers' Market; Wilson shooting a scene outside of Spot Coffee; (OPPOSITE) Wilson in a still from his latest film, *Paint*, in which he plays Carl Nargle, a TV painter based on PBS icon Bob Ross. "Bob Ross is a good person to be obsessed with," Wilson says of the current resurgence of interest in the late iconic TV star. "He does have a sort of cachet among hipsters and young people. Even here on Maui, I saw a lady wearing a Bob Ross T-shirt. So he really does have a following."**

(BOTTOM LEFT) ALYSSA SALERNO

IFC FILMS



"THIS WAS GENUINELY MY SENSE OF HUMOR—AND THERE AREN'T MANY SCRIPTS THAT ARE MY SENSE OF HUMOR!"

Wilson, who rose to stardom alongside brother Luke, hails from Dallas and was seemingly born to be an actor. The son of a renowned photographer, he credits his parents for opening the door for him to choose a creative field, a destiny that has brought him fame via movies such as *Rushmore*, *Zoolander*, *Night at the Museum* and *Wedding Crashers*. Early in his career, he co-wrote the screenplay for *The Royal Tenenbaums* with director (and close friend) Wes Anderson, earning him an Oscar nomination for Best Original Screenplay.

"I just kind of fell into it," he says. "I was an English major in college and became friends with Wes and then he and I were roommates. He was very focused on wanting to be a director, so we started writing together. And then he wanted me to act. Both of my parents were creative. My dad was the head of the PBS station in Dallas and did some books and things. My mom was a photographer who photographed Donald Judd before he passed away. I always loved looking at the pictures she did of [west Texas artist enclave] Marfa and the installations there. I enjoy being around creative people because that's how it was growing up—always around interesting and funny people. It's been a fun life. I consider myself fortunate."



owen the distance (LEFT) Wilson was just in London for six months working on the second season of the Disney+ series *Loki*, starring Tom Hiddleston as the title character. His next project doesn't begin until summer, leaving time to hang out with his two sons; (OPPOSITE) no stranger to the red carpet, Wilson has been a bona fide movie star since the late 1990s, when he burst onto the scene with brother Luke in Wes Anderson's *Bottle Rocket*.

His dad's running of a PBS station is but one of many full-circle moments for the star and his latest movie. His buddy Peter Brant, the world-renowned art collector and a producer on *Paint*, has a house in Saratoga. And then there's that tranquilizingly slow Bob Ross TV delivery that Wilson didn't really have to practice.

"Carl does have a very soothing, calm way of talking, much like Bob Ross," Wilson says. "I mean, I'm from Texas, so hopefully that's in my wheelhouse to speak in that way—if you're from Texas, you probably speak more slowly. I'm not great at doing voices and haven't done them that much in movies. I can only think of one movie where I really, kind of changed my voice, and that was a sort of fake southern thing in *The Life Aquatic [with Steve Zissou]*. I'm sure it had no bearing on an actual Kentucky accent, but it was something that Wes thought was good and funny for the character."

Executive producer Bosner and director McAdams loved the "unique vibe" that Saratoga was able to offer *Paint*. "Saratoga Springs has a timeless feel," Bosner says. "Brit loved that version of the world that we were trying to create for Carl."

Mother Nature even cooperated, delivering a cold spring—and late-April snowstorm.

"It snowed on our first day of filming," Wilson says. "I was actually really excited because we had wanted to film a little bit more in the winter originally, when there would be some snow. I took it as a very good omen." Then the southern boy paused before adding, "Yeah, it was pretty cold shooting in Saratoga in May."

"GROWING UP IN DALLAS, THERE'S NOT A LOT OF HISTORY. IF YOU HAVE A 7-ELEVEN THAT WAS THERE SINCE 1978, IT'S CONSIDERED A LANDMARK."

On a personal level, history nut Wilson loved Saratoga's vibe as well—and shout-out to "landscapers Andy and Bob" for showing him around. "Growing up in Dallas, there's not a lot of history," Wilson says. "If you have a 7-Eleven that was there since 1978, it's considered a landmark. So it was nice to be in Saratoga and have some genuine history. On my day off, I drove over to that great park [Saratoga National Historical Park] where you can see some sites regarding Benedict Arnold—you drive in and there are different places where you stop and look. One place is overlooking a valley, and it was a strategic place to set up cannons. And the place [Grant Cottage], where Ulysses Grant finished writing his memoirs! I'm interested in history, so that stuff was fun for me. And then, just the natural beauty of the area. We went for a hike up Buck Mountain. I even went swimming in Lake George. Now that was a cold swim." (No kidding.)

Wilson loved Saratoga so much that he's determined to come back sometime during track season. Bosner says that the crew still talks about the horse crossings that stop traffic, and Wilson was impressed after riding his bike over to the track to check things out. "It'd be fun to go see the horse races," he says. "I met one of the trainers and got to see the horses doing their morning runs. It's such an interesting, cool world."

Wilson seems to have a true affection for small towns and their quirks. So after two years of endless jokes connecting him with Chick-fil-A (confused? Search the What's Going On Saratoga? Facebook group), the man himself—most recently referred to on social media as both the owner of Chick-fil-A and "mayor of Saratoga, head of the Chick-fil-A party"—was finally asked what he orders when he pops into the popular fast food joint that has so far eluded Saratoga.

"I've never eaten at Chick-fil-A!" he says, laughing. "Why? Is it really good?" So I took one for the team and quickly ran through the memes and jokes that have flooded our local social media circles. "That's funny, because I do see them in Atlanta, and one just opened up in Maui," he says, admitting his sons must like those famous waffle fries because they wanted to go to the new Maui location. "I'm not a huge chicken eater or fast food eater. Is there one in Saratoga? Oh, they *want* one..."

The inexplicable running joke *is* confusing. But in the words of Wilson's character Carl Nargle, "It's hard not to feel a little lost...just take it all in." See you on the big screen, Owen.



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