

**Final Cut — July, 2000**  
**By Linda Marshall-Smith**

**Headline: Greg Reitman's Catalina Island, The Magic Isle**

Twenty-six miles across the sea. Santa Catalina is the isle for me. Santa Catalina, the island of romance! And now, the subject of a digital video documentary, produced, written and directed by first-time filmmaker Greg Reitman of Blue Water Entertainment, Inc.

For Reitman, an underwater photographer, documenting the beauty and serenity of this quaint island off the coast of southern California was a natural. I was in a dive shop in Malibu, recalls Reitman. There were photos of the Catalina kelp beds and I was mesmerized by their beauty. He then read an underwater photography book about the history of the underwater on Catalina, and decided to learn more about the island. Reitman hired researchers and their findings reinforced his desire to pursue a project about Catalina.

My background was in marketing, publishing and technology, said Reitman, but he attended UCLA Extension at night for two years, studying acting, directing and writing. I thought that a documentary would be a great way to demonstrate the visual medium from an author's perspective. I was looking for subject matter that inspired me, and Catalina offered that. Plus, documentary filmmaking encompasses many aspects of filming. We did aerial and underwater photography, interviews, many different lighting sequences. Documentary long form offered the best preparation tools for me as a filmmaker.

But Reitman had no budget to speak of for the project. That was the challenge, he said. I self-financed on credit cards and did back-end deferrals with all my crew. There are about 15 people who are involved who caught the magic of Catalina and have helped me do this work. We got about 30 companies to agree to in-kind donations and underwrite most of the production, from Modern Video Film on the post-production side, to Catalina Express providing the boats. Reitman and his team also worked deals with some of the hotels that offered accommodations and golf carts, the main mode of transportation on the island.

For possible distribution, Reitman took the project to NAPTE in New Orleans last year. They also pitched several networks: The Discovery Channel, The History Channel, and international distribution outlets.

Distribution is a struggle for a new filmmaker, Reitman admitted. Unless you have a track record, no one wants to touch you. Everyone saw our trailer and prospectus and liked it, yet were unsure about committing to the project.

Reitman found that difficult to comprehend. The island has such a rich history, from the Banning Brothers and the Wrigley family to the Hollywood elite who made it their playground, and is simply breathtaking in its beauty. There is a wealth of material.

We have a treasure-chest of celebrities participating in the project, said Reitman. Like Tony Dow, Jerry Goldsmith, Gregory Harrison, Academy Award-winning director, Nathan Juran, Jack LaLane, Peggy Moran, Kathleen Quinlan and Les Brown to name a few. We have Les Brown and the Band of Renown in the film going back to 1929. They used to play at the Casino. Fortunately, or unfortunately, the distributors all suggested our contacting them again during acquisition time. Catch-22esque as it may be, until you have a track record or an uncle in the business, which I don't, Reitman said with a laugh, you're in nowhere's land. But I just love Avalon and Catalina, and decided that this would be a fun project to do to get my name out there.

As of this writing, Blue Water Entertainment shot 60 hours of footage. Ninety percent was shot on digital video, with a sprinkling of 16mm photography, still to be shot.

It's beauty notwithstanding, Reitman noted several challenges regarding filming on an island. Catalina is very expensive. We made 20 trips over for location shooting with the talent. We had to bring in all the equipment. But the people, especially the islanders, couldn't have been more helpful and supportive of the project, he said.

According to Catalina Film Liaison, Shirley Davy, most production on the island is commercial work. Major features like *Apollo 13*, *Armistad*, *Broken Vows* and television projects like *Avalon: Secrets of the Abyss*, *DSRV Avalon*, MTV's *Road Rules* and Univision's *Vespierta America* film on Catalina by renting barges and shipping their equipment over on trucks. The trucks are then staged at the locations. There is a permit fee for bringing vehicles to the island and varies depending on size of the truck. Other productions fly equipment in. Permits are also required to film the interior portions of the island.

Reitman's advice to first-time filmmakers is get the money first. There is a creative level that we are all trying to seek, but there is a business to this as well, and if you forget that, it's going to be a hard road. Our crew is averaging 14-hour days. You've got to make sure the crew is happy and that everyone is in sync. If not, you are going to be a wreck. That's been my hardest struggle. Not having the resources to keep everyone together, it becomes difficult. Regardless, Reitman is getting his documentary completed, and the struggle is well worth the end results of showcasing the rich history of Santa Catalina.

*Catalina Island, the Magic Isle* is Episode 1 in Blue Water Entertainment's proposed documentary series, *Mysteries of the Islands* and wraps production June, 2000.

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