



FILM

# Pixel Perfect

*Training the next generation of postproduction prodigies*

BY JULIA CHEUNG  
PHOTOS BY BROOKE MCALLISTER

➔ MARK AND RIA BENARD both attended Vancouver Film School in the '90s but only crossed paths a few years ago. Each had found success in their shared profession. Mark did visual effects work for feature films and TV series (*Finding Neverland*, *Stargate SG-1*), then taught at their alma mater before launching his own school on Vancouver Island. Ria, with a background in film and animation, also headed a school there. Five years after they finally met, the two have left the competitive grind of postproduction work to run Gastown's Lost Boys Studios, an institution that swings the city's most impressive placement rate for grads. The principals pin that achievement on high student/teacher ratios—they take only a handful of pupils at a time—and their responsiveness to industry. "Our curriculum is malleable, which drives most other schools crazy" says Ria. "We are the only school that specializes in Visual Effects, so the public

schools and larger schools are jealous." John Gajdecki, a visual effects supervisor who's spoken at the school over the years, is one insider impressed by the Bénards. He says the school has always been proactive, attracting international students and helping them get immigration papers and job placements. That only became more relevant after the VFX wave hit Vancouver around 2008, as B.C. tax credits wooed Hollywood north. Whatever shifts might come next, he remains proud of the foundational role his GFVX studio had on the industry: "We were the first artist-driven company in Canada," he says, "and probably the world. I was the first guy who went to the bank and said, 'I need a million dollars.' They looked at me and said I was insane."



Clockwise from left: weathered objects inspire class projects; posters boast of alumni credits, including *Transformers*, *Ender's Game*, and *Iron Man 3*; Mark Bénard



Timeline



**1973**  
**I HEARD THE OWL CALL MY NAME**  
British star Tom Courtenay (*Doctor Zhivago*, *The Dresser*) is a young priest sent to minister north of Tofino in this Daryl Duke-directed made-for-TV Christmas special.



**1979**  
**A MAN, A WOMAN AND A BANK**  
Gross: \$700,000  
Heist comedy with a Gastown setting follows two unlikely robbers (Donald Sutherland, Paul Mazursky) juggling a computer and a local photographer hottie.

1980s



**1981**  
**PITFALL**  
1 season  
Former CBC newscaster Alex Trebek hosted this game show filmed in West Van studios. He's called the experience a tragedy: it was the only job that ever stiffed his salary.



**1984**  
**THE NEVERENDING STORY**  
Budget: \$27M  
A cult fave from Germany, filmed in Gastown, follows a troubled boy dropped into fantasy land; the film spawned an animated series and an early video game.



**1985**  
**ROCKY IV**  
Budget: \$30M  
After a Soviet superman (Dolph Lundgren) kills Apollo Creed, Rocky comes to Russia for 15 rounds of revenge. The Soviet fight actually took place at the PNE.



**1985-1992**  
**MACGYVER**  
139 episodes  
In Season 3, resourceful secret agent Angus MacGyver (Richard Dean Anderson) moved onto a houseboat in Coal Harbour, from which he solved crimes using duct tape.



**1987-1991**  
**21 JUMP STREET**  
102 episodes  
The launchpad for a young Johnny Depp was filmed around the Lower Mainland for the nascent Fox network. It evangelized Vancouver as a location for American television.

1990s



**1992-1998**  
**HIGHLANDER**  
119 episodes  
No, not the Christopher Lambert original, but he did appear in the pilot. Each episode was shot half here and half in Europe to satisfy coproduction requirements.



**1993-2000**  
**THE X-FILES**  
202 episodes  
After agents Scully (Gillian Anderson, who made a career out of it) and Mulder (David Duchovny) finished with us, the world understood: we are—may always be—a sci-fi town.



**1996**  
**HAPPY GILMORE**  
Budget: \$12M.  
Adam Sandler played a failed hockey player who takes to golf. Local courses looked beautiful but couldn't compete with outrageous scenes like his fistfight with Bob Barker.



**1998**  
**BLADE**  
Budget: \$45M  
Critics didn't love this Wesley Snipes vampire trilogy, but it grossed over \$200M, so Blade laughs last. Interiors were all shot here, with location work in Los Angeles.



**1999**  
**DOUBLE JEOPARDY**  
Budget: \$70M  
This is memorable in part for Ashley Judd's turn as a wronged wife (opposite Tommy Lee Jones). Too, scads of local actors and filming locations were featured throughout.