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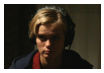

Last week, Fango spent a day on the set of Ti West’s THE INNKEEPERS—which, strictly speaking, wasn’t actually a set at all. The Dark Sky Films/Glass Eye Pix production is being lensed on a real location—and an apparently really haunted one too: The Yankee Pedlar Inn in Connecticut.

In fact, this writer has been invited to spend the night in one of its rooms prior to checking out a filming day, an offer no true Fangorian could resist. Upon entering, the Yankee Pedlar proves to be a charmingly old-fashioned place, one that has been in operation for over 100 years. My room is decorated with attractive Hitchcock furniture (no kidding—that’s what it’s called), such that the TV on the dresser almost seems like an anachronism. And when I settle in for the night and turn on the set to check out the latest episode of HAPPY TOWN, the picture is plagued by strange interference—which ends as soon as the spooky show is over and the news comes on. *G-g-g-ghosts?*

There are no visible signs of spectral presences, though, and I wake up the next morning with my sleep untroubled. I emerge into a building buzzing with activity, as the INNKEEPERS crew is already setting up to film in one of the rooms down the hall. Yes, film, and 35mm to boot, a rarity in a moviemaking age when most independent genre fare is going the hi-def route. West (pictured right in the Yankee Pedlar lobby) lensed his previous feature THE HOUSE OF THE DEVIL in 16mm in part for the mobility the smaller medium allowed, but says later, during a break in the INNKEEPERS shoot, that he’s not sacrificing this advantage by moving up.

“This is a brand new camera that’s pretty small; it’s about the same size as the HOUSE OF THE DEVIL camera,” he explains. “That was something to think about, but I really wanted to shoot

THE INNKEEPERS in 35, and in scope; I want it to look like a really big old-school, widescreen movie. Also, I shot HOUSE on 16 because it looks like an older film stock, which made it appear more ’80s, whereas THE INNKEEPERS doesn’t need that.”

Indeed, West’s script is set in the present day, and focuses on two clerks working at the Pedlar: Claire (THE LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT’s Sara Paxton) and Luke (Pat Healy; both pictured below). The hotel is about to close down, and before it does, the duo are determined to capture definitive proof that the building is indeed haunted. As strange events start suggesting that it is, a couple of mysterious guests check in, including an old man (George Riddle) determined to stay in one particular room, and former TV star turned psychic Leanne Rease-Jones (Kelly McGillis). The first scene being filmed this morning is Claire’s initial meeting with Leanne, which quickly becomes awkward as Claire begins gushing over how much she has long admired Leanne—whose reaction suggests that she has heard it all before, and couldn’t care less.

It’s a tense character moment in a film that, like HOUSE, aims for an inexorable build of suspense that will pay off in true horror in the final reels. No one’s saying exactly what the nature of the haunting is, though Derek Curl, who’s producing THE INNKEEPERS with West, Larry Fessenden and Peter Phok, reveals that it’s not based on any specific legends surrounding the Pedlar (which served as West and his crew’s lodgings during the HOUSE OF THE DEVIL shoot). “It’s all Ti’s own mythology,” Curl says. “It’s inspired by people’s ghost stories about staying here, but he just took his own slant on all of those. I believe he did use some of his own fears while he was staying here, because he had some very specific things happen to him that he kind of expounded upon.”

“Spending two months in a weird place, you just start getting ideas,” West adds. “I wrote THE INNKEEPERS very quickly since I just knew it all so well, and then we called to see if I could shoot here, because if they said no, I might as well just burn the script; there was no reason do it anywhere else. They said yes, so here we are.”

And in the couple of weeks they’ve been shooting as of this visit, the crew have experienced their share of odd occurrences. “I felt a ghost; I didn’t see a ghost,” Curl says. “But I’m also very sensitive to them. I was sitting in bed, and actually jumped off because I felt something push up against me. Ti had it, Sarah had it…your skin crawls for the next three hours. Things have been misplaced, doors have slammed, lights have gone on and off. I think the ghosts here really have a bathroom fetish, because they love screwing with people’s bathrooms, whether it’s the water coming on, the lights flickering, doors shutting…”

Nonetheless, THE INNKEEPERS’ progress has not been impeded. “We’re on day 10, and we’ve finished early every single day,” West says. “We’re actually ahead—so far, so good. It’s weird shooting and living in the same place; I’ve never done that before.”

Click here to see a couple more photos from THE INNKEEPERS, and stay tuned for more coverage at this site and in the pages of FANGORIA magazine!

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