

# SCANORAMA

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no. 06

♦ If you're going to do the Côte d'Azur you may as well do it in style. Heads are guaranteed to turn when you stop at its villages, beaches, and racetracks on a lipstick red Ducati.



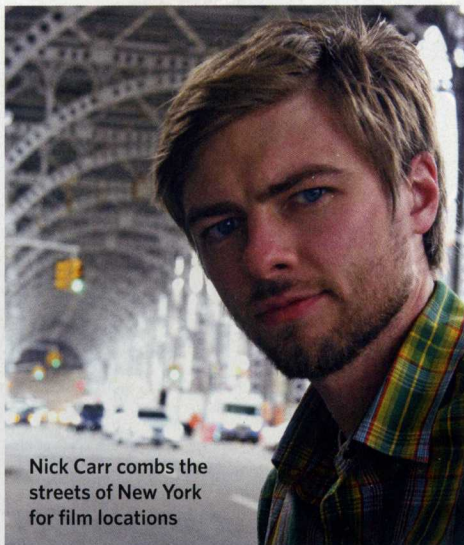
## Scout in the city

Film location scout **Nick Carr** knows New York inside out, from its subway tunnels – *The Taking of Pelham 1 2 3* – to its rooftops – *Spider-Man 3*

Ending up as a location scout was a random event – I had no idea that locations departments even existed on movies. My first job after graduating from Columbia was as a production assistant on Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* (2005), where my task was to hook up Tom Cruise's trailer with internet and phone lines. I spent a lot of time working with the locations department figuring out where his trailer would be parked, and when the job ended, I continued working in locations.

It's astonishing how much there is to see when your job is to stop and stare. Before I was a location scout, I would rush around the city without paying any attention to my surroundings, focusing on getting from point A to point B as quickly as possible, head down, iPod on, book in hand. I used to read New York architectural blogs and wonder how the writers found such interesting locations. Now I've realized it's less a talent and more a state of mind. My scouting has become unconscious. Whenever I walk down a city street, I find myself searching out any locale or sight that seems out of the ordinary. It's a habit, and I doubt I'll ever be able to turn it off.

My work constantly takes me to places I never knew existed. I simply love the idea that there's a world going on around New York's 10 million residents that most of them never notice. Walk past the corner of East 1st Street and First Avenue, and you'll see a Cape Cod-style beach house built on the roof of a five-story East Village apartment building. On Fifth Avenue, there's a building with a fountain in the lobby taking water up from a river flowing deep underground. On 34th Street, a pair of owls outside Macy's look like normal statuary – except that their eyes glow green at night. And when I was asked to find a castle to stand in for medieval Europe, I thought I was in for a tough scout. I mean, where are you going to find a castle near New York City? After a bit of research I learned that the Hudson River is actually dotted with crumbling castles built at the turn



Nick Carr combs the streets of New York for film locations

of the century by wealthy industrial types, only to be abandoned.

Not every workday goes by smoothly and effortlessly, though. Some days can be truly disastrous. A famous director chose a rooftop for a camera position for a particular scene. We spent a week getting the location ready, permitting, signing contracts, and so on. Then, on the day of the shoot, he went up to the roof, looked around, and announced he had made a mistake – he actually wanted the rooftop across the street. While I started going doorbell to doorbell to locate the building's owner for permission, the director sent the camera crew up to the new rooftop to begin setting up. Except, with the weight of the equipment, the elevator got stuck and the camera guys were trapped. Somehow, we managed to get an agreement signed, rescue the camera guys, and get the shot. Funny now; a nightmare then.

I can't pick an absolute favorite spot in New York, but I do love Pell Street, also known as "Bloody Angle" in Chinatown. I found the street on a casual stroll through Chinatown, and what made it immediately stand out was its shape – a rare L curve, while nearly every single street in Manhattan is straight. Fascinated, I did some research, and learned of its violent history: with its odd curves

perfectly suited to hiding, it was once the site of a number of Chinatown gang wars. I love finding out stuff like that, it makes this city even more exciting to live in. But unfortunately, along with the passion I feel for New York comes also a growing concern. In Manhattan, nearly all historical properties are protected by landmarking laws. But in Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island and the Bronx there are a lot of incredible buildings – especially in impoverished areas – that are being left to decay, or have been demolished in favor of modern developments, simply because they aren't under the same scrutiny as in Manhattan.

This really bothers me – the city needs to take better care of these historical structures. It's part of New York's legacy to the same extent as Manhattan.

Nick Carr was born in Salem, Massachusetts, and came to New York in 2000 to study film at Columbia University. For the past five years, he has worked as a film location scout. His blog, *ScoutingNY.com*, not only allows him to keep a record of his own research, but also invites his followers into a world largely ignored by thousands of passersby who don't have the time to look around them.

### 5 TOP FILM LOCATIONS

**Clinton Court**, an 18th-century courtyard hidden near Times Square at 420-22 West 46th Street.

**Alder Manor**, a vacant mansion built in 1912 by copper magnate William Boyce Thompson in Yonkers, NY.

**Castle Rock**, an abandoned castle on the Hudson River rumored to have been Frank Baum's inspiration for the castle in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.

**A Prohibition-era bowling alley** in a factory basement in Ridgewood, Queens.

**The skinniest building in Midtown**, a 12ft-wide, four-story oddity on 19 West 46th Street, Manhattan.