

Made in Mexico

By Luis I. Reyes

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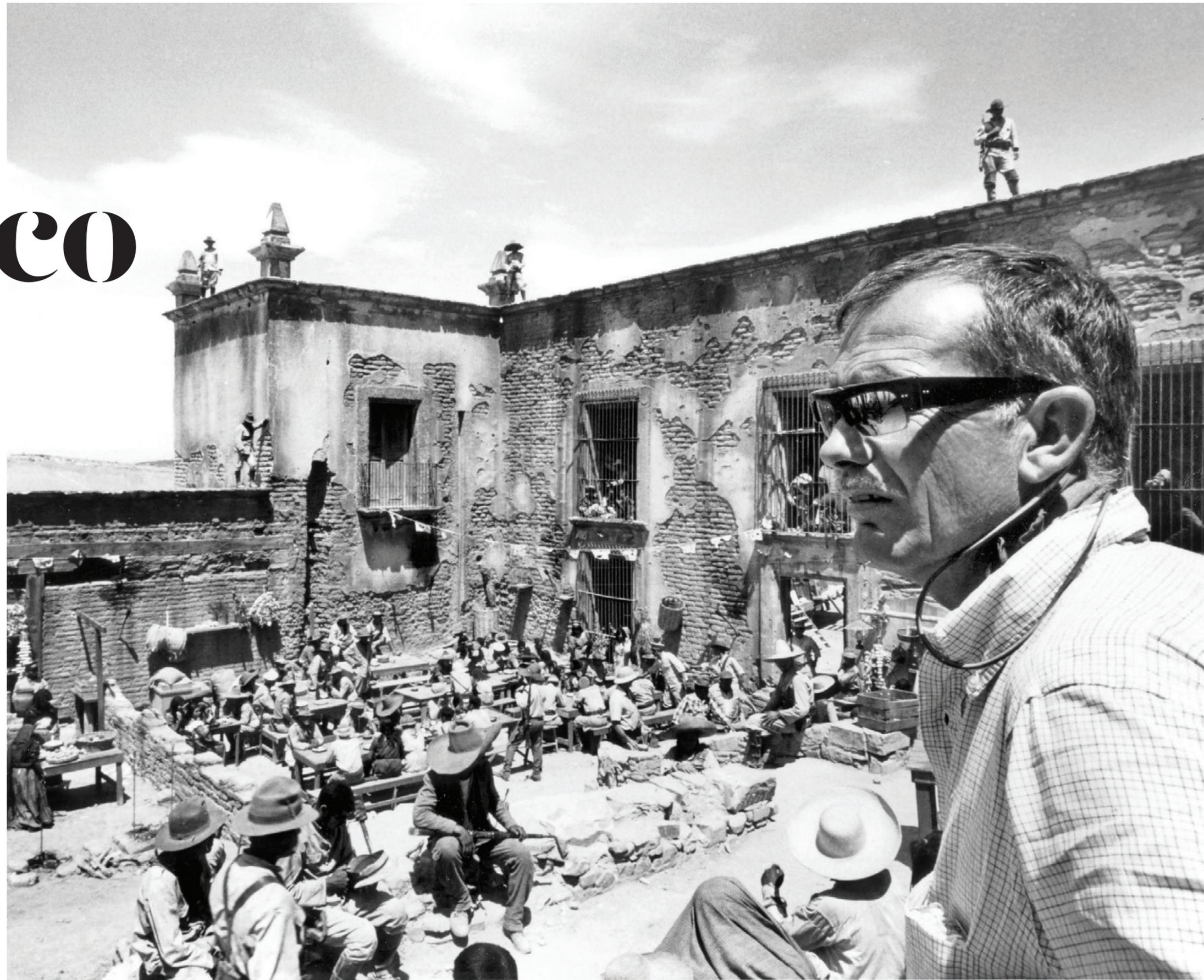
VER SINCE AMERICAN movie pioneer D.W. Griffith sent his young protégé Raoul Walsh (a pioneering director in his own right) to Mexico in 1914 to film a docu-drama on bandit-turned-revolutionary leader Pancho Villa, Hollywood directors from John Ford to James Cameron have shot more than 100 films of all genres south of the border. Historically, these filmmakers were lured by the authentic-

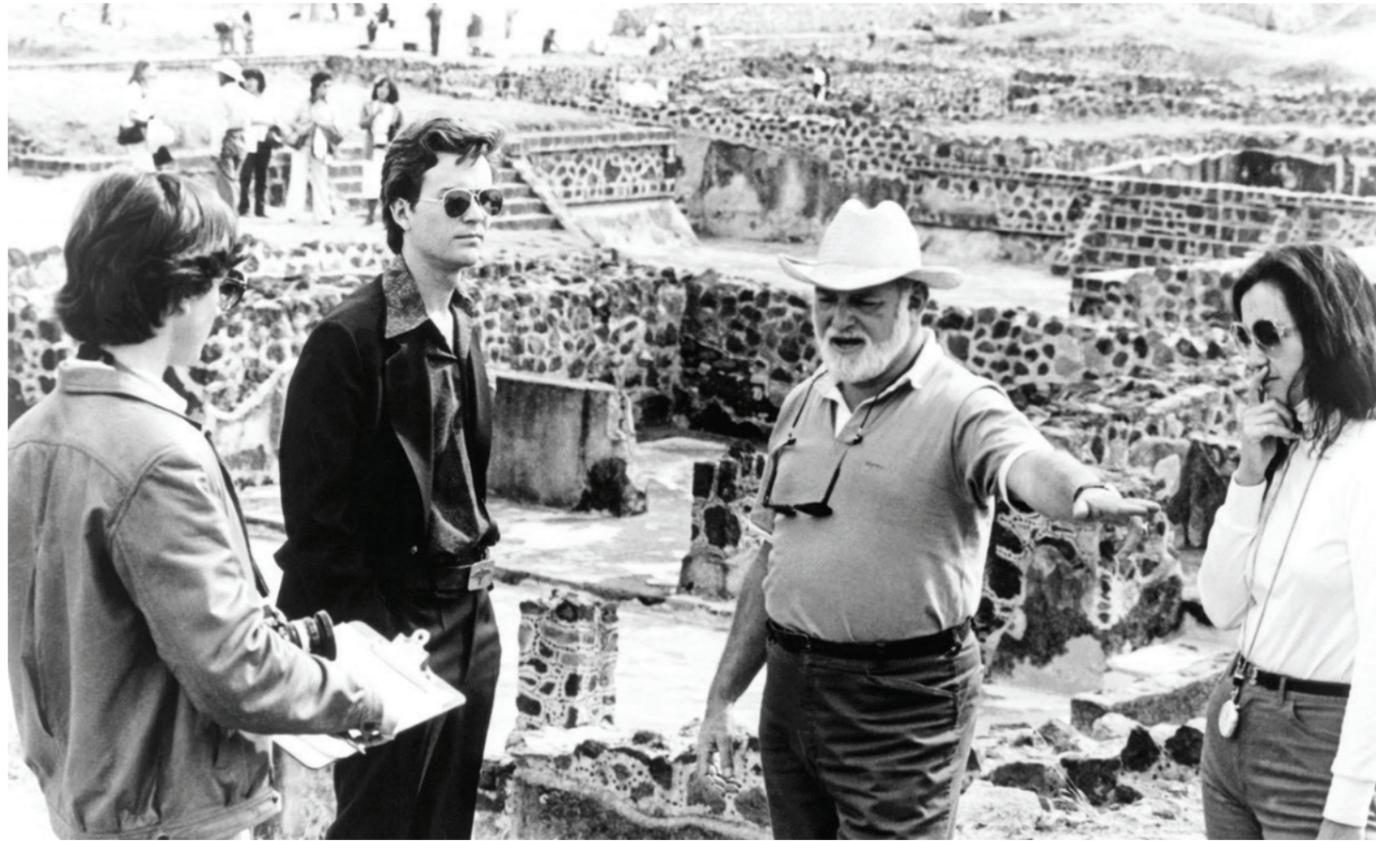
ity of the locations, as well as seasoned crews, state-of-the-art studios and lower production costs. And while such Mexican-born actors as Anthony Quinn, Dolores del Río and Cantinflas stood out in American productions over the second half of the 20th century, the new millennium has seen a new generation of behind-the-scenes Mexican talent bringing their own stories, experiences and gifts to light stateside, including DGA- and Oscar-winning directors Alfonso Cuarón, Guillermo del Toro and Alejandro González Iñárritu, as well as such world-class DPs as Emmanuel “Chivo” Lubezki, Rodrigo Prieto and Guillermo Navarro. Call it an extension of the Good Neighbor policy.

SAM PECKINPAH

THE WILD BUNCH 1969

► Peckinpah's groundbreaking Western masterpiece took full advantage of the Northern Mexican desert landscapes to heighten the authenticity of the film about American outlaws who have outlived their time. The outlaws' iconic march to their death near the end of the film was improvised on set by Peckinpah, as it had not been scripted. The climactic violent and unforgettable "Battle of Bloody Porch" sequence took 12 days to film at an abandoned hacienda winery, with Peckinpah employing up to six cameras, each running at different speeds, to achieve his kaleidoscopic vision. The director would return to Mexico for such films as *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973) and *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974).





JOHN SCHLESINGER
THE FALCON AND THE SNOWMAN 1985

► The Oscar-winning British director best known for *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), Schlesinger helmed this film of two dysfunctional young Californians portrayed by Sean Penn and Timothy Hutton, who engaged in espionage selling U.S. government secrets to the Russians at their embassy in Mexico. For budgetary reasons, the movie was produced and filmed at Churubusco Studios where U.S. and Mexico locations were duplicated.



JULIE TAYMOR
FRIDA 2002

► A Tony Award-winning director and designer with only one feature credit at the time, Taymor worked closely with star and producer Salma Hayek on this biopic of iconic Mexican surrealist painter Frida Kahlo. The movie was filmed entirely on location in Mexico City, Puebla and San Luis Potosi. Inspired by Kahlo's art and life, Taymor created a dramatic visual cultural tableau that combined elements of live action and animation. The Mexican capital's diverse architecture allowed Taymor to also simulate New York City and European locales.



MEL GIBSON
APOCALYPTO 2006

► Gibson's main challenges were finding expansive pristine jungle locations, casting unknown, physical actors and recreating the Mayan empire from scratch. "It wasn't like I could go to Western Costume and studio property departments and find what I needed," Gibson told this author. The director found filming sites near Veracruz, cast Native American and First Nations actors, and created a sumptuous visual Mayan world for the cameras with the invaluable contributions of Mexican film craftsmen and technicians.



ROBERT ALDRICH
VERA CRUZ 1954

► Aldrich's sprawling Western about American mercenaries in Mexico during the 1866 French Occupation was one of the first Hollywood films to be shot completely in Mexico. Since the real Veracruz, in the tropical lowlands, proved too inclement, shooting was concentrated in the dusty Cuernavaca area south of Mexico City instead. Aldrich's film, with its two mercenary anti-heroes played by Burt Lancaster and Gary Cooper, is said to have influenced everyone from Sam Peckinpah to Sergio Leone.

(TOP & BOTTOM RIGHT) EVERETT; (BOTTOM LEFT) PHOTOFEEST



ALEJANDRO GONZÁLEZ IÑÁRRITU
BABEL 2006

► Iñárritu, who hails from Mexico City, took cameraman Rodrigo Prieto and production designer Brigitte Broch, members of his team since *Amores Perros* (2000), to three locations: Morocco, Tokyo and the Mexican border town of Tijuana for *Babel*. In one of the story's connective strands, housekeeper Amelia shepherds the American children in her charge to a family wedding in Mexico. "I wanted to show the country [Mexico] through the eyes of children," said Iñárritu, "where there is an innocence and sense of discovery."

(TOP) PETER SOREL/MIRAMAX; (BOTTOM) EVERETT (2)



TONY SCOTT
MAN ON FIRE 2004

► It was a constant challenge for Scott, his actors and crew when they took on the seemingly impossible task of filming a modern action picture entirely on practical locations in the oldest, most congested and populated city in North America, Mexico City. "I wanted to make the city a major character," recalled the late Scott, "it has a rich cultural history and is full of visual contrasts."

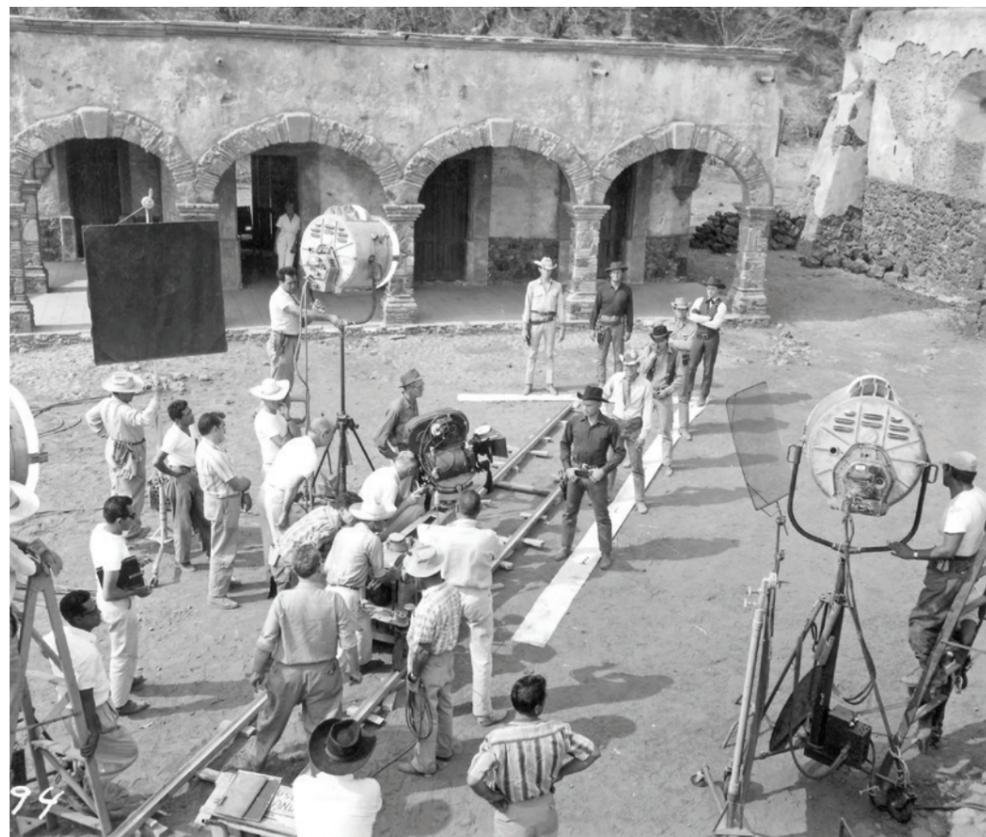


ALFONSO CUARÓN
ROMA 2018

► Recreating a 1970s-era Mexico City neighborhood that no longer exists for his Oscar- and DGA Award-winning cinematic memoir, Cuarón demanded that everything had to be as it was, down to the smallest detail. Since Cuarón let no one see a script until the day of shooting, he talked his crew through 10 months of preproduction that included taking a home slated for demolition and dressing it—essentially converting it—for use as a principal set. In his DGA acceptance speech, Cuarón called his family and Mexico “the real architects of *Roma*.”

JOHN STURGES
THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN 1960

► Known for rugged action and adeptly handling ensemble casts, Sturges directed this refashioning of Kurosawa’s Japanese classic *Seven Samurai* (1954) into a Western, in which American gunfighters are hired by Mexican peasants to fight off predatory bandits. A Mexican village and border railhead set was constructed near Cuernavaca with interiors filmed at Mexico City’s Churubusco Studios. 1st AD Robert Relyea and veteran AD-turned-UPM Francisco “Chico” Day served on the production.



(TOP) CARLOS SOMONTE; (BOTTOM) EVERETT



MIKE NICHOLS
CATCH-22 1970

► This adaptation of Joseph Heller’s satirical WWII-set novel was largely filmed in the Pacific coastal town of Guaymas, which doubled for the Mediterranean island of Pianosa. Hot off of *The Graduate* and *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, the 37-year-old Nichols recruited a formidable cast that included rising stars like Alan Arkin, who played the central role of Yossarian, as well as a living legend—Orson Welles—who gave unsolicited advice on everything from camera placement to line readings. But Nichols handled it all with equanimity. “If you know that much, what are you supposed to do with it,” he told then *New York Times* correspondent Nora Ephron during filming. “You can’t throw it out.”



(TOP) ROBERT WILLOUGHBY/PARAMOUNT PICTURES; (BOTTOM) EVERETT

HENRY KING
CAPTAIN FROM CASTILLE 1948

► A founding guild member, King was an aviator who piloted his own aircraft to scout locations. He discovered Morelia and used the colonial city and its landscapes as old Spain for the historical Technicolor epic starring Tyrone Power. The director headed an enormous production that included 200-plus crew members, actors and 2,000 indigenous extras. King would end up returning to Morelia for *The Sun Also Rises* (1957) and the Western *The Bravados* (1959).

JAMES CAMERON

TITANIC 1995

► For his DGA- and Academy Award-winning triumph, Cameron designed and built a \$10 million, 35-acre studio facility in Rosarito, Baja California, to accommodate the massive needs of the production. It consisted of five stages and four indoor/outdoor water tanks. Situated alongside the ocean, the largest tank benefited from an "infinity horizon" necessary for shipboard scenes. Most of the labor, production personnel and the 900 shipboard extras employed were Mexican. Because filming was so physically intense, Cameron would occasionally lighten the mood with a practical joke. "We brought in a mariachi band on my 1st AD's birthday, right into the middle of a scene while it was being shot, just for fun," Cameron told *DGA Quarterly*. "You have to have a sense of humor."



JOHN FORD

THE FUGITIVE 1947

► Based on the Graham Greene novel of a Catholic priest fleeing a totalitarian anti-clerical regime, *The Fugitive* was directed in Mexico by Ford. The transnational production boasted the best filmmaking talents of both nations that included actors Henry Fonda, Pedro Armendáriz, Dolores del Río, cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa, an apprentice of *Citizen Kane* cameraman Gregg Toland, and associate producer Emilio "El Indio" Fernández. The film represented the first postwar undertaking of Ford's independent production company, Argosy Pictures.



JOHN HUSTON

THE NIGHT OF THE IGUANA 1964

► Having already used the remote San Jose de Perua, Mexico, to shoot *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948), John Huston—whom producer Ray Stark proclaimed "Guru of Mexico"—returned with actors Richard Burton, Ava Gardner and Deborah Kerr to an isolated location, Puerto Vallarta (as well as nearby Mismaloya Village in Jalisco), to film *The Night of the Iguana*. The film effectively placed the seaside town on the map, turning it into a major tourist destination. The lack of paved roads, as well as spotty plumbing and electricity did not deter Huston, who likened the location to "an actor; it gives something to the picture, envelops it in an atmosphere."



PHOTOS: (TOP) PARAMOUNT PICTURES; (BOTTOM) PHOTOFEST (2)

PHOTO: EVERETT