

Outtakes

The Young and the Restless

Philly filmmaker Andrew Repasky McElhinney is determined to make it by eschewing indie cachet.

BY CARRIE TOBEY

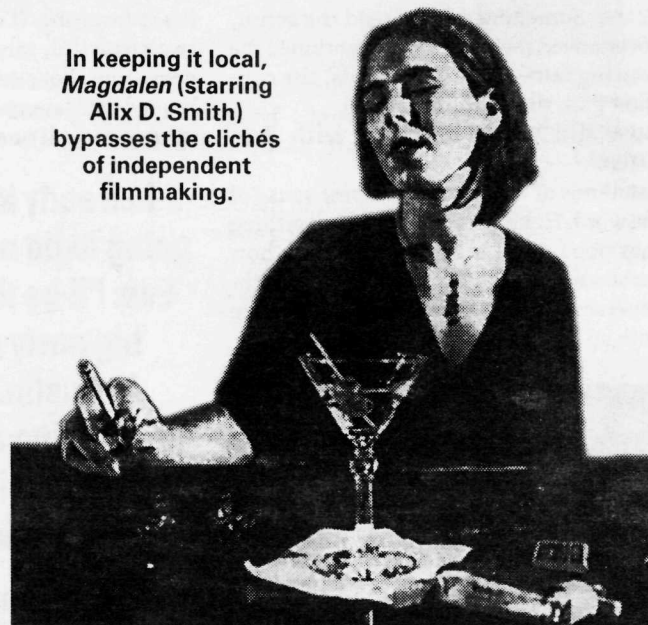
Whatever you do, *don't* call Andrew Repasky McElhinney an independent filmmaker. True, he does make films — and they aren't financed by a studio. But ask the 21-year-old Philadelphia native why he'd rather not be labeled a member of such a perceivably hip community, and he cites the repercussions felt by the mainstream success of films such as *Pulp Fiction* and *Reservoir Dogs*, resulting in a "Tarantino pastiche" of tired indie imitators. Given his choice, McElhinney prefers not to be associated with any splinter group.

"I don't want to be the poster boy for independent cinema," he says, adding half-seriously, "They don't deserve me." McElhinney is the writer and director of *Magdalen*, a remarkably accomplished debut feature shot in Philadelphia during the summer of 1996. After a year and a half of editing, the film premiered at the Chestnut Hill Library in August of this year. Currently, McElhinney is shopping the finished product to various festivals while commuting to New York City to attend film classes.

New York has long been considered a mecca for upstart movie moguls, but McElhinney prefers to conduct all business in Philadelphia. Not only is the film office here extremely helpful, he notes, but most Philadelphians still find the process of making a film a little glamorous and they welcome crews into their neighborhoods. McElhinney also prefers working with local actors, whom he has found to be "more giving" than their New York counterparts, who seem to

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In keeping it local, *Magdalen* (starring Alix D. Smith) bypasses the clichés of independent filmmaking.



be in it more for the paycheck than the art. Before shooting commenced, the actors in *Magdalen* prepared rigorously for their roles, taking part in five weeks of scene study and character development.

The preparation clearly paid off, especially in the case of Alix D. Smith, the actress who portrays the title character, *Magdalen*, a world-weary young woman who earns her living in a bar, telling stories to lonely people for money. Smith's presence on-screen is fascinating, unromantic and tough. The film itself unravels languidly, with stylish, moody black-and-white photography from local cinematographer Abe Holtz.

Where Orson Welles had Joseph Cotton, Agnes Moorehead and the rest of his Mercury Players, McElhinney has developed a repertoire of actors whom he plans to use exclusively for future projects. A pool of mostly local talent, all are longtime friends and colleagues. McElhinney plans to eventually set up a production office in Philadelphia for his company, ARM/Cinema 25 Pictures. The next project in the works: the theological drama *A Chronicle of Corpses*. The film, based on McElhinney's script, will commence shooting in mid-'99. ●