



*Ray's Living Room: "Ray's House is nicely furnished but monochromatic, lifeless, without a soul. His life has been empty since he lost his daughter," describes Set Decorator Marcia Calosio SDSA.*

Photo by Marcia Calosio

# trade

Set Decorator **Marcia Calosio SDSA**  
Production Designer **Bernt Capra**  
**LionsGate**

## **From hope to hopelessness...**

Set Decorator Marcia Calosio SDSA went from creating sets that housed the optimism of *THE ASTRONAUT FARMER* [See article page 72] to those portraying the stark reality of *TRADE*. Based on Peter Landesman's 2004 article in the *NEW YORK TIMES* magazine, "Sex Slaves on Main Street," the film *TRADE* reveals the hidden, horrifying crime network of child sex trafficking operating in the US, Mexico and Europe. Calosio shares notes on the film with *SET DECOR* and explains its impact.



### **Realism and authenticity were paramount.**

...The film traces the path of sex traffickers smuggling their victims from Europe to Mexico then into the US and transporting them to the East Coast. There the victims are held in "stash houses" until they are "purchased" by the highest bidders on the secret internet websites. So the film required a wide range of locales.

...All the *Mexico City* interiors and exteriors were shot in that city. With *APOCALYPTO* and *BABEL* shooting there at the same time, assembling a local ▶



Photo by Marco Nigali © 2007 Longgate Films

**Ray [Kevin Kline] searches for his daughter, a victim of child sex trafficking.**

crew was not an easy task. Mexico was chosen in part because of the inexpensive labor but mostly because of the very real look of the slums and the people who live there. In stark contrast to American counterparts, Latin American slums are visually very beautiful and look great on film. Even the poorest of people can afford paint and cheap fabric, which make their homes very photogenic.

...The interiors were shot in an area of Mexico City that was controlled so as not to draw too much attention, and the exteriors were shot in less dangerous areas. During filming actual sex trafficking was blatantly going on just a few streets away, overseen by menacing thugs. Even the Mexican crews were scared at times.

...There was a steady stream of daily email collaboration between Production Designer Bernt Capra, Eloisa Fernandez, the set decorator in Mexico, and myself about colors, textures, and other details for the current and upcoming sets.

...Albuquerque, New Mexico, has locations that can pass for any number of American regions, so it became *El Paso*, *Pennsylvania* and *New Jersey*. We also shot the *Juarez Motel* and the *Border Crossing* there. Having spent much of my time in the Southwest, I knew what dressing I had to acquire to make it “real”—as did my local crew whom I can not thank enough for their hard work and shared passion about the project.

...The *New Jersey* suburb *Stash House* was shot in an older Albuquerque neighborhood, as were the sets for *Pennsylvania*. The suburbs had to be specific in their vintage East Coast architecture but general in their anonymity. Lots of trees, well established neighborhoods. House exteriors are kept up in order to blend seamlessly with the surroundings and avoid curiosity and suspicion by the locals. While the entry to each

house seems “normal,” beyond the threshold it’s a completely different story. Most of the girls are kept prisoner in basements or in locked rooms in vile, unspeakable conditions.

...The sets were designed to convey reality, as well as the ever-present, foreboding mood of helplessness and terrifying uncertainty. My research was taken primarily from statements made by former sex slaves who were lucky enough to escape. Other sources included the San Diego sheriff’s department, which constantly battles the steady stream of girls across the border; the Senior Advisor on Human Trafficking for the US State Department; the author of the *NEW YORK TIMES* Magazine article that inspired national interest, including a segment on *OPRAH* and many more articles about the subject.

...The specifics I focused on were visually conveying the dangerous, filthy, threatening conditions that these kids face every day and the constant state of fear and hopelessness they live with. We accomplished this by juxtaposing the hidden, secret horror of their existence against the normal, everyday American life going on around them.

...In the beginning, the colors are saturated, vibrant and intense. They parallel the young girls’ lives, their hopes, dreams and anticipation of starting new lives in the US. But as they begin to realize their fate and the hard core reality of the sex slave trafficking sinks in, the color begins to withdraw into a monochromatic dullness.

...The enormity of global human sex trafficking is something that I never knew existed. As I researched that world, I became impassioned about its social relevance and getting the story out there, to bring to light this horrendous situation going on every single day around us. I’m hoping this film will accomplish that. ■