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Making documentary on Canadian stars a joy for Victoria filmmakers

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Filmmakers Les Bland, left, and Ian Ferguson, right, said former game show host Monty Hall had charm to spare when he was being interviewed at his home in Beverly Hills for *Gone South: How Canada Invented Hollywood*. Photograph by: Brian Beard

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Years after retiring as longtime host of *Let's Make a Deal*, Monty Hall still lives up to its title with charm to spare.

So says Ian Ferguson, recalling his visit with the creator of the iconic TV game show, and Marilyn, his wife of 66 years, at their palatial Beverly Hills home.

Hall, 92, made Ferguson and co-producer Les Bland an offer they couldn't refuse before they shot material for *Gone South: How Canada Invented Hollywood*, their light-hearted documentary about the influence Canadians have had on pop culture.

"First, you should have some coffee, muffins and fruit," said the Winnipeg-born showbiz veteran who wasn't the only legendary Canadian-born game show host the Less Bland Productions partners met while in Los Angeles.

They were also invited onto the *Jeopardy!* set by Sudbury, Ont.-born host Alex Trebek.

"He couldn't have been funnier and was genuinely nice," said Ferguson, whose crew rolled with Trebek after 5 p.m. It was at the end of a 14-hour day for the host who had just taped five shows consecutively.

Getting onto the Sony Pictures Studio lot was another story.

"It was only slightly less complicated and stressful than negotiating the Free Trade Agreement," quipped Ferguson, who also hammed it up with Oscar-winning director Arthur Hiller (*Love Story*), producer Ted Kotcheff (*Fun With Dick and Jane*, *Law & Order*), actress Neve Campbell (*Scream*), comedian Howie Mandel, Victoria musician David Foster and actor Beau Mirchoff.

Hall's hospitality was typical, he said.

"Everybody kept trying to feed us," laughed Ferguson, who worked so hard he didn't have time to hit the beach.

"I only got a tan on my toes because I forgot to put sunscreen on and I wore my sandals."

After giving an interview at his stunning West Coast contemporary home, a onetime hunting lodge atop Mulholland Drive, Kotchett, an Emmy Award-winning producer, insisted they stay for burgers and beer.

Hiller, after modestly resisting a suggestion they showcase his Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award Oscar, asked them to stay for drinks at his Beverly Hills home.

The legendary Edmonton-born filmmaker said, “Oh, that seems ostentatious,” recalled Ferguson.

Hiller also playfully provided advice on where director of photography Brian Beard might place the camera.

“He said, ‘If you shoot this way you’ll get nice depth-of-field,’ ” Ferguson recalled. “Are you kidding me? He was teasing.”

Ferguson said their objective was to get fun material, but to be unobtrusive and not take up too much time. “But everybody was just so welcoming,” said Ferguson, who got to improvise with Mandel.

“I made the mistake of saying, ‘If I don’t laugh, it’s for the sake of the sound guy,’ ” said Ferguson, recalling Mandel’s mischievous grin. “I think he took that as a challenge.”

Other memorable experiences included doing an amusing poolside sequence in which a shirtless, pampered Mirchoff talks about how much he misses the Canadian snow and rain, and filming Foster, who sang Victoria’s praises at his studio in Santa Monica’s Music City where the Grammy Award-winning producer and songwriter has been working with Bryan Adams.

“He couldn’t have been nicer,” said Ferguson, noting Foster also called Martin Short, urging him to get in on the action.

Doing an offbeat poolside interview with Guelph, Ont.-born Campbell was a highlight, he added.

“I want to adopt Neve Campbell,” Ferguson said, describing her as “incredibly sweet and humble and willing to do any gag.”

He returns next week to Los Angeles, where Bland is still holding the fort at the Safari, the classic Burbank hotel seen in films like True Romance and Apollo 13, before they fly to New York to shoot Michael J. Fox and others.

They expect to release the film next year.

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