

THIERRY de GANAY  
presents

JEAN-PIERRE MARIELLE HIPPOLYTE GIRARDOT  
and  
SANDRA MAJANI

# *Yvonne's perfume*

*(Le parfum d'Yvonne)*

a film by  
PATRICE LECONTE

based on  
"VILLA TRISTE"  
by  
PATRICK MODIANO

special appearance by RICHARD BOHRINGER

Screenplay: PATRICE LECONTE  
Original music: PASCAL ESTEVE

Coproduction  
LAMBART PRODUCTIONS  
ZOULOU FILMS  
CENTRE EUROPEEN CINEMATOGRAPHIQUE RHONE-ALPES  
M6 FILMS

in association with  
SOFICAS COFIMAGE 5 - INVESTIMAGE 4 - SOFIARP 2  
with the participation of CANAL +  
and the CENTRE NATIONAL DE LA CINEMATOGRAPHIE

# S Y N O P S I S

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In the early fifties, on the shores of a lake wedged between France and Switzerland, a handful of characters, seemingly suspended in time by the holiday atmosphere, meet, clash, fall into friendship and love.

Why is Victor Chmara hiding behind this unlikely identity, and what is he afraid of?  
Who is the Doctor Meinthe, nicknamed Queen Astrid?  
What does the luminous young Yvonne, always flanked by her German dog, live on?  
Why is it so important to her to win the Houligant Automobile Elegance Cup?

How to summarise a story woven from zones of shadow and blinding light, from elegant lies and charming naïvety?

It is above all a question of desire, made more intense by the shy outreach of the characters.

Which is why LE PARFUM D'YVONNE may well be a romantic film, but also a mysterious and sensual one.

Patrice Leconte

# INTERVIEW WITH PATRICE LECONTE

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**H**ow did the idea to adapt Patrick Modiano's *Villa Triste* come to you?

Olivier Barrot, a friend who works with books and screen adaptations, planted the notion in my mind one day "You should adapt something by Modiano, it's for you". I said, "It's true, I love that writer, I've read all his books, but I like his work too much to dare adapt it. Also, he is said to be unadaptable, which, for me was actually stimulating. Olivier who really knows how to spark enthusiasm managed to convince me.

Modiano is very close to my sensibility. As a reader I have always felt at ease with him. Which is that much more disturbing--any book you love is intimidating. You're afraid of betraying it, of mistranslating it. I re-read *Villa Triste*, little by little, haltingly, I saw the film I could make from this book, by being both faithful and at the same time unfaithful to the author. Things became more clear, not in the sense of bringing my own vision to it --I wouldn't be that pretentious-- but in the sense of expressing personal things through Modiano's universe.

**Wasn't part of the difficulty of confronting this novel to the famous Modiano vagueness?**

You're right, but this Modiano vagueness you are talking about is in the end an asset. When things are too well-defined, too sign-posted in a book, you're tempted to put images to it, like an illustrator drawing on the left-hand page what the text says on the right. Cinema is not there to vulgarise literary works, but to try to shed a different light on them. Wring the book's neck, the better to restore it. The Modiano vagueness is redeeming because it allowed me to make certain points, in my fashion, about what interests me. Vagueness can be delightful, a bit like being nearsighted. When I take off my glasses, I'm happy because things appear to me differently. It's almost restful and comfortable.

**All the author's favourite themes are in *Villa Triste*. Which ones relate to you most particularly?**

It's true, this book has all the themes that are Modiano's stock in trade: the search for the father, for an identity, etc. These themes relate to me as a reader, but the thing that clicked for me was this staggering sensuality that is between the lines in Modiano. It is never directly expressed, but it is always there, like an eternal fragrance of skin, of desire, of a glance -- women are dazzling in Modiano novels. Defined or ill-defined, they are terribly there.

**Are you also sensitive to his very specific way of imagining the past?**

What I find moving about Modiano is his way of holding onto infinitesimal details of the memory, even things without any importance: a name, a place, an object. He imagines the past that was his immediate surroundings, not in a broader historical sense of the term. In *Villa Triste*, he evokes the past in the most meticulous way imaginable like a sort of miniature, lingering over a movie theatre ticket, for example, a casino program, or memories taken directly from his own life, from days spent with a woman-- it's true, I'm not particularly oriented towards the future, but I am not fixated on the past either, though I like things from the past. My mindset is not particularly retro, but I like little bits and pieces from the past, they are part of my life, they are like marks I don't want to erase. Modiano has succeeded in achieving a subtle balance between the past and the present which is enormously touching to me. I am certainly not comparing myself to Modiano, but there is a sort of common ground between us.

It's true, I take great pleasure in making films which, without being dated belong more to the past, like *Mr Hire* or *The Hairdresser's Husband*.

**What are your memories of the sixties? Girls in gingham dresses? Holidays spent on a lake?**

Modiano and I are approximately of the same age --I am 46-- we were teenagers at the same time. I didn't spend my holidays on Lake Léman, but in Normandy, on the English Channel, so memories of provincial life, girls in gingham dresses, dawning feelings of love, are still very present. Some good, some bad, incidentally.

When Modiano talks about his teenage years, you get the feeling he was sort of ill at ease, someone who wasn't ideally settled into his life -- teenagers never are. I know all about that. But Modiano has a sort of elegance in the way he is ill at ease, a way of intellectualising it, of assuming it, perhaps because he's a writer. I never assumed that stuff so well. And I wouldn't necessarily want to re-live those years, even though they are associated in my mind with some awesome moments.

**Are you, like Modiano or like Victor, the book's narrator, fascinated and at the same time amused by the privileged youth who frequent this resort town? For example, Victor says, "As long as there are young, women dressed in white hitting tennis balls back and forth, nothing very serious can happen".**

Modiano is evidently fascinated with this fashionable elegance, the luxury life of chic hotels and casinos, where young people seem protected in some eternal immutable way. When I was a teenager, the boys who played tennis much better than I and who started going out with girls before me inspired awe in me as well. It's total illusion, but when you're a kid, it awes you.

**But for Victor, this carefree life is just a temporary refuge. He knows he can be sent to fight in Algeria, he's afraid.**

Victor is protecting himself. He is hiding behind a false identity in a rooming house on a lake near the Swiss border, constantly worrying about being found out. He's a kind of deserter. The profound unease of Modiano's characters is in part related to what's going on in the world. Through having read his books, I can say Modiano is very in touch with the world today. I must admit that I myself am someone not very well-informed about the world, who is perhaps avoiding information. As concerns the Algerian War, things are only alluded to. As a doctor, Meinthe has contact with undercover agents or people from the OAS, we don't really know, it all remains unclear. All the characters are avoiding the war in Algeria. This war is a precluder to things turning out right, a barrier to their carefree life. They are constantly trying to eliminate it from their activities, from their hotel rooms, from their embraces. The characters don't want to hear about it, so the film is very discreet about that event.

**What difficulties did you have in faithfully transposing the famous melancholic rhythm so integral to Patrick Modiano's style?**

In Modiano's novels, nothing really spectacular happens--tangibly. The goings on are infinitesimal, anecdotal, will o' the wisp. In *Villa Triste*, the characters take time to take time. They spend an entire night watching jets of water in a fountain. Try filming that! The difficulty was to cinematically imbue these non-moments with emotion and sensuality. Filming people not doing anything is the biggest headache there is. Nor could I reduce the novel to only the most anecdotal or amusing scenes, like the move from the Tilleuls rooming house or the Houligant Cup. I had to try and make those moments when nothing happens but the passage of time magic and captivating--and yet not make a languid film. Modiano talks about "the passing of slow hours". That expression enchants me.

**What liberties did you allow yourself to take with the novel?**

The most flagrant was changing the age of the characters. Curiously, I had formed a mental picture of a René Meinthe who was about fifty--from my first reading. Victor was thirty and

Yvonne twenty-two. I don't know why, but that's how I read the book. When I went back to the novel to adapt it, I retained this sort of intuition, this strong impression I had from the first reading.

To me, by adding years, the characters took on some weight. In the book, Victor is 18 years old. He hasn't really lived and his ardour to suddenly leave for America or marry Yvonne Jacquet spring from a mad and kind of silly adolescent zeal. On the other hand, a thirty year-old is no longer virginal -- emotionally in any case. So, the fact that Victor falls madly in love with Yvonne tells you something else. Because she is not the first woman to step into his life. The character of Meinthe also takes on another aspect with added years. He is even more shadowy and mysterious. I went into the writing with this liberty about the characters' ages, I said absolutely nothing about it to Modiano, who had tacitly given me total freedom in adapting the book. When I showed him the script, he said, "you're right, it's much better this way".

### **Why change the title?**

A good title is not generic. It is not necessarily a good title for everything--a book, a film, an opera, a puppet show, etc. A good title for a novel is not necessarily evocative as a film title. Based on my feelings and my approach to the novel and to the adaptation, I thought *Le Parfum d'Yvonne* more appropriately defined the film I had in mind.

### **The Modianesque style is also the art of suggesting emotions without defining them. There is a great modesty about physical relations, for example.**

As I've said, what I wanted to express was all the sensuality one feels between the lines. Desire, the scent of warm skin, caresses, glances--all these emotions were already sketched out in *Mr Hire* and especially *The Hairdresser's Husband*, but in a very restrained way. The idea was not to use *Villa Triste* to make a sensually unbridled film--I didn't want to slide into a blatantly erotic register, that would have been the most odious betrayal. On the other hand, it's true that while making *Le Parfum d'Yvonne*, I was aware that I could express a certain form of sensuality and go further than in my other films. The book allowed me to. But a person doesn't change: I am infinitely more affected by a gingham strap on a shoulder than by people going at it in the bushes. This could be perceived as a more feminine sensibility. I'd be delighted if women were touched by my film. It seems to me that women's erotic imagination is richer and more intense than men's. Which means men need to see in order to fantasise, whereas women can fantasise on just an erotic suggestion. Modiano--even though he is six feet tall-- has something quite feminine about his writing, in his modesty and his way of evoking sensuality.

### **Yvonne says, "I like to make the pleasure last".**

It's true that the loveliest thing in the world is to want to make the pleasure last I really enjoyed showing all the interaction of seduction freely consented to. That game of approaching, not at all in order to postpone the final moment, but simply because desire and pleasure are things one can make last, perhaps not indefinitely, but they can be stretched over time.

### **Tell us about the relationship of the trio Victor, Yvonne and Meinthe, three "vulnerable and disoriented" characters.**

Without really saying anything, without exchanging memories and confessions, they realise from first sight that they are part of the same world, a world of uprooted people. They have no ties, which is exactly what binds them together. One is in hiding, the other is strange and unpredictable, the other is living in a dream of stardom. They've found each other fortuitously and don't need to say anything more about it. Even when they go to lunch together at the Sporting Club, it's as though they have known each other for ten years. That is one of life's charming things--you meet people by chance, you feel as though you've always known them, you feel good when you're with them.

P A T R I C E L E C O N T E

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- 1975 LES VECES ETAIENT FERMES DE L'INTERIEUR  
With : Coluche, Jean Rochefort
- 1978 LES BRONZES  
With : Gérard Jugnot, Josiane Balasko, Marie-Anne Chazel, Michel Blanc, Christian Clavier,  
Thierry Lhermitte, Dominique Lavanant
- 1979 LES BRONZES FONT DU SKI  
With : Gérard Jugnot, Josiane Balasko, Marie-Anne Chazel, Michel Blanc, Christian Clavier,  
Thierry Lhermitte, Dominique Lavanant
- 1981 VIENS CHEZ MOI, J'HABITE CHEZ UNE COPINE  
With : Michel Blanc, Anémone, Bernard Giraudeau
- 1982 MA FEMME S'APPELLE REVIENS  
With : Michel Blanc, Anémone, Xavier Saint-Macary
- 1983 CIRCULEZ, Y A RIEN A VOIR  
With : Jane Birkin, Michel Blanc, Jacques Villeret
- 1985 LES SPECIALISTES  
With : Bernard Giraudeau, Gérard Lanvin
- 1986 TANDEM  
With : Jean Rochefort, Gérard Jugnot, Julie Jézéquel
- 1988 MONSIEUR HIRE  
With : Michel Blanc, Sandrine Bonnaire
- 1990 LE MARI DE LA COIFFEUSE  
With : Jean Rochefort, Anna Galiena
- 1993 TANGO  
With : Philippe Noiret, Richard Bohringer, Thierry Lhermitte, Carole Bouquet, Miou-Miou,  
Judith Godreche

# P A T R I C K M O D I A N O

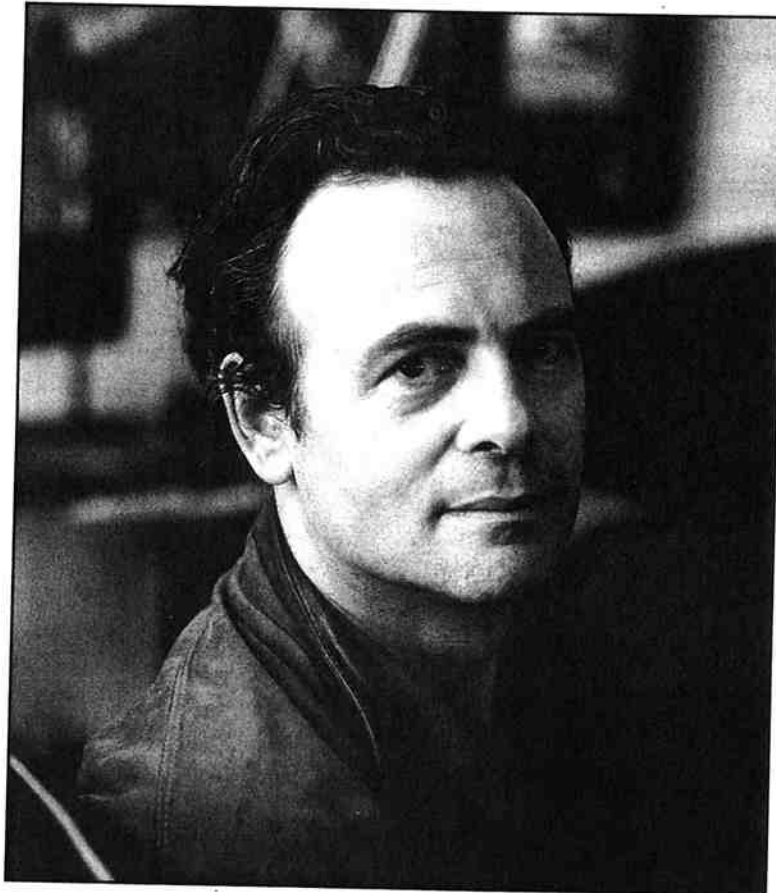


Photo : Luc Roux / Studio Magazine

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- 1968 LA PLACE DE L'ETOILE (Gallimard / Folio)
  - 1970 LA RONDE DE NUIT (Gallimard / Folio)
  - 1972 LES BOULEVARDS DE CEINTURE (Gallimard / Folio)
  - 1974 LACOMBE LUCIEN (Gallimard / Folio) - Screenplay with Louis Malle
  - 1975 VILLA TRISTE (Gallimard / Folio)
  - 1977 LIVRET DE FAMILLE (Gallimard / Folio)
  - 1978 RUE DES BOUTIQUES OBSCURES (Gallimard / Folio)
  - 1981 UNE JEUNESSE (Gallimard / Folio)
  - 1982 DE SI BRAVES GARÇONS (Gallimard / Folio)
  - 1983 MEMORY LANE (Seuil) - Illustrations by Pierre Le Tan
  - 1983 EMMANUEL BERL - INTERROGATOIRE (Gallimard)
  - 1984 QUARTIER PERDU (Gallimard / Folio)
  - 1985 POUPEE BLONDE (J'ai Lu) - Illustrations by Pierre Le Tan
  - 1986 UNE AVENTURE DE CHOURA (Gallimard)
  - 1986 DIMANCHES D'AOUT (Gallimard / Folio)
  - 1987 UNE FIANCEE POUR CHOURA (Gallimard)
  - 1987 REMISE DE PEINE (Seuil)
  - 1989 VESTIAIRE DE L'ENFANCE (Gallimard)
  - 1989 CATHERINE CERTITUDE (Gallimard) - Album Jeunesse with Sempé
  - 1990 VOYAGES DE NOCES (Gallimard)
  - 1991 FLEURS DE RUINE (Seuil)
  - 1992 UN CIRQUE PASSE (Gallimard)
  - 1993 CHIEN DE PRINTEMPS (Seuil)

# INTERVIEW WITH PATRICK MODIANO

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**Let's flash back to the seventies. So you remember the sources of your inspiration for *Villa Triste*? A word, an image, a feeling, an encounter, something in the newspaper?**

Chance, quite simply. I went back to the region of Haute Savoie (Annecy, Evian) which I hadn't returned to for ten years. I revisited places I'd lived as a teenager. It is always a shock to go back to places one has known before and see how the urban landscape, for example, has changed. The early sixties seemed so distant.

Objectively, obviously-- I must have been 27 at the time-- I had the feeling that one doesn't begin to have memories before that age. At 18, you don't see your life in retrospect, you think about the past as someone else's, apart from childhood memories. The first books I wrote at age 20 or 25-- I had no perspective. At 30, one discovers a sort of past. I felt for the first time enough distance with a certain period of my life.

**For the first time, you've let go of those fantasies about the Occupation that haunted your first three novels. This one is about your adolescence.**

It's a composite --lots of things that happened when I was 17 or 18, certain historical circumstances, which, ten years later, seemed like ancient history. For example, the climate around the time of the Algerian War seemed so far away.

I also condensed all the places around Lac Léman and the Lac d'Annecy. In the sixties, these places had a particular atmosphere because they were near the border. They were a sort of no-man's-land near Switzerland. During the Evian Accords, you could see some strange comings and goings. Geneva was a sort of pivotal point. But ten years later, this war already seemed so far away. In 1960, the Algerian War was a war that no one called by its name. You heard about the "troubles in Algeria". It was blurred. There were strange characters, para-police forces, the underground. The imagination works off these places, this climate. Far from these "troubles" a whole superficial world carried on its lakeside existence--concerts, cocktail parties, the Houligant Automotive Elegance Cup.

Hindsight always distorts our memories. Also, the younger you are, the more you are impressed by certain things, and that distorts them as well. An elegance contest like the Houligant Cup, all this external approach to life, was at its apogee in the thirties. The film is on target not because it is at all retro, but because it shows how derisory this type of event had already become by the sixties. It was an ersatz and very provincial notion of elegance compared to the thirties.

It's also about a certain type of youth, a world, a time when there was a chasm between ourselves and people just little older than us, people who were still young in their forties. In 1960, the moral upheaval of the sixties hadn't happened yet. Everything was still just as it was after the Second World War. One came of age at 21. There was a kind of immobilism. Youth and adolescence were very different from today. It was a period in your life when you weren't allowed to do anything, everything was closely watched, there were taboos. Until the age of 21, you led a sort of secret life. Sexuality, books, films, a whole world -- the adult world -- was closed to us. We constantly felt out of phase even with those a little older than us. We hadn't entered life yet, we were still in the wings, still a bit on the periphery of things. The only memories that made an impact are the moments when we were able to penetrate this adult world. Girls were always ahead of us, they always went around with people older than them. They entered the adult world quickly.

But, in 1970, when I returned to these places, the mores of those years seemed pretty far off in time.



**In most of your books, you venture into the mists of the past. What are you looking for?**

To write a novel, you need a sort of time lag, you need to stand back in order to feel time passing. It is hard to write a novel about the present because obviously the present writes itself as reportage. As soon as you speak in the past, there is a sort of mystery. You evoke people without knowing what happened to them later, we wonder about them, about places, environments, things that have disappeared, so there is the unknown, there is mystery, and this helps you to write.

**Were you trying, in a way, to recreate your youth through the character of Victor?**

I am not especially fond of adolescence. It is never a very happy time. The only interesting thing about that period is that certain things really strike you. Perhaps because you're generally uninitiated and therefore more sensitive to everything, more vulnerable. But, I had no nostalgia for that period in my life while writing *Villa Triste*, nor do I now.

It's more the question of the passage of time that interests me. To try to translate this sort of time flowing by, to find a fictional structure for the novel that brings back this time that has passed. I constructed the novel with a series of successive flashbacks to try to create the impression of the flow of time.

**Are the best memories the ones we invent?**

Yes, because in the end, writing is a sort of reverie. Of course, there are points of connexion with reality. I made a kind of amalgam of real thing and imagined things. A reverie on reality.

Obviously there is a difference between that and the cinema -- because of the images everything becomes more realistic. It's also true that my reveries have usually tended to be about cities like Paris. In *Villa Triste*, there is this idyllic, lakeside aspect.

**At that time, sensuality was expressed tacitly -- knee brushing knee, a skirt lifted by the breeze.**

The real break came between 1964 and 1966. In the very beginning of the sixties, 1960, 1962, sensuality was not very different from in the fifties. Neither was the way girls dressed. From about the age of 22 or 23, they had a certain "haute couture" look about them, it was almost matronly. That was before all the changes that came in 1966 with English fashion, the mini-skirt, etc. That is the superficial aspect of things. Sensuality was expressed differently from today. Girls did not take the Pill, there was an atmosphere of the forbidden, there was the hovering notion of corruption of minors since majority was attained at 21. Between the ages of 17 and 21 was a very strange period, like being expected to experience sexuality in secret and only with people your own age. That's why even in 1975, and more so today, all those things seem the very distant past. This creates a fictional aspect because obviously, as soon as things belong to a sort of lost era, that's very fictional.

**This fiction-like quality seems to affect a lot of today's youth.**

Yes, it is curious. In the past few years, young people have taken a retrospective approach, even in superficial things like fashion. Nowadays, 17 year-olds are dressing like the seventies. And really young people have this fascination with the late 60's early 70's which was not at all the case when we were young. It would never have entered our minds to dress in thirties style.

***Villa Triste* is written in the first person.**

I've always been uncomfortable writing in the third person like a Mauriac, for example -- novels in the third person, objective. Using the "I" allows you more flexibility in the way you tell a story, it's more subjective, more fluid. It creates a greater intimacy with the person reading the book. Perhaps it is also an easy out when you read a novel not written in the first person, you're always wondering, "whose point of view is it? Where are they? Are they hovering over the narrative like some kind of divinity?" The first person is more subjective. So it creates an aspect of mystery. Some elements can be ignored or forgotten because the point of view is not all-encompassing. Areas of shadow, unknowns, subsist and create a fictional quality.

**In what way do you feel close to Victor, the narrator?**

In the book, Victor is not a character, he's a sort of offscreen voice -- I was going to say an unidentified "I" a disembodied being. The reader participates, he imagines, he adapts him to his desires. Of course, there were certain indications about the character in the book. For example, he wore a monocle in reference to Raymond Radiguet at 18. In the film, a voice has to be embodied by an actor, it becomes a character with all its substance. Hippolyte Girardot was very good, because the difficulty of the role is that we don't know on first reading the book who Victor is. Hippolyte found a way of suggesting rather than of being, by playing shyness and presence at the same time. It must have been very hard to make that work.

**What were your impressions on seeing *Le Parfum d'Yvonne*, Patrice Leconte's film adaptation of your novel?**

A film and a novel are two such different substances. A film must be absolutely independent from the novel, or else the director is shooting an illustration of the book. Whence this liberty to change the title, which may also have its own autonomy. *Le Parfum d'Yvonne* is a pleasing title, it suits the film well. The book is a handicap for the film, almost a ball and chain, it creates imbalance in the film. Patrice Leconte made a coherent and totally autonomous film from the book. I'd almost say he cut the umbilical cord with the book. That is a great quality of the film. The nervous system of a reader is not called upon in the same way as a viewer watching a film. The reader can enjoy an infinitely vague impression. It's a bit like acupuncture -- he receives shots in specific nerve centres that diffuse out to the nervous system in a subtle way. A kind of impreciseness is permissible in literature; things can float, because the reader's imagination is at work. But these vague things can't be used in cinema, because images are precise and show a certain reality. In that respect, infidelities to the book are not really infidelities, they are necessary so the film can exist.

**In terms of the script, perhaps a better word is restructuring rather than infidelity.**

Yes, simplifications are useful, condensation of time as well. You could say that no novel is adaptable, not even detective novels, like Simenon or James Hadley Chase. Here, I'm speaking as a screenwriter, not as a novelist. For example, one has the impression that writing a script from a detective novel should not present a problem because the structure is very clear. I read the notes Raymond Chandler made on his adaptation of James Cain's novel *Death Insurance* for Billy Wilder's film version. Chandler thought that the dialogue in the novel, which was simple and direct, and seemed filmic, would be easily transposable to the screen. But in the script, it didn't work. Patrice Leconte, besides being a real writer-director, is also a "pro" screenwriter, with all that it implies in terms of talent and skill in solving certain problems of adaptation. Directors often need the help of a screenwriter. Patrice Leconte on the other hand, has found a way to do something that seemed impossible to do in film, he found a natural way of translating the flashback construction of a novel. The various periods overlap and flow impalpably, so that one doesn't feel the process at all. In the film, you feel the flow of time. Patrice tightened the narrative, but he also lets time express itself. Certain images moved me, scenes in which sensations, furtive impressions, pivotal instants, came back to me with intensity, even though they seemed to be from a lost time, like when the three characters get out of the car together. With the passing years, a sort of alchemy happens, some things seem much more enjoyable, though when they happened, they weren't necessarily that pleasant. Like the colours of a film can lend a sort of fiction-like charm to the images. Patrice Leconte used a very specific range of colours, and through these processes, he restored that dated charm to the film.

**In *Le Parfum d'Yvonne*, Patrice Leconte purposely changed the age of the character René Meinthe, who is 28 in the book. What do you think of Jean-Pierre Marielle's performance?**

Jean-Pierre Marielle infiltrated the character, who is homosexual, with great sobriety, which I like a lot. In a completely disinterested way, I never once thought about whether or not this was faithful to the book, because I found his character to be totally coherent with Patrice Leconte's adaptation.

**Did you see your trio of characters, the one you described earlier as "vulnerable and disoriented"?**

Yes, they are also in total coherence with the film. This strange trio is a form of a specific type of trio I've observed in my life. A trio of chance meeting that exudes a kind of precariousness. You can tell that once the season is over, these people will go their separate ways. In this case, it's an ad hoc trio -- one more often sees trios made up of husband, wife and lover, two women and a man, two men and a woman, but there is always something touching and mysterious in the relationships between the three people. The trio is a real subject for fiction. It's true we are sort of prisoners of our memories from the sixties, but we are also prisoners of what we read, of the books that stay with us. For me, there was Truman Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and the female character later played by Audrey Hepburn in the film. Her friend was the narrator, the "I" of the book. Unconsciously, perhaps -- in fact, it was Truman Capote himself.

**As a prologue to your book, you quote Dylan Thomas: "Who are you, you seer of shadows?"**

I'm not sure that's Dylan Thomas... Victor is an observer, always on the fringes of life, and this universe gives the impression that these people came from the shadows and will eventually return there.

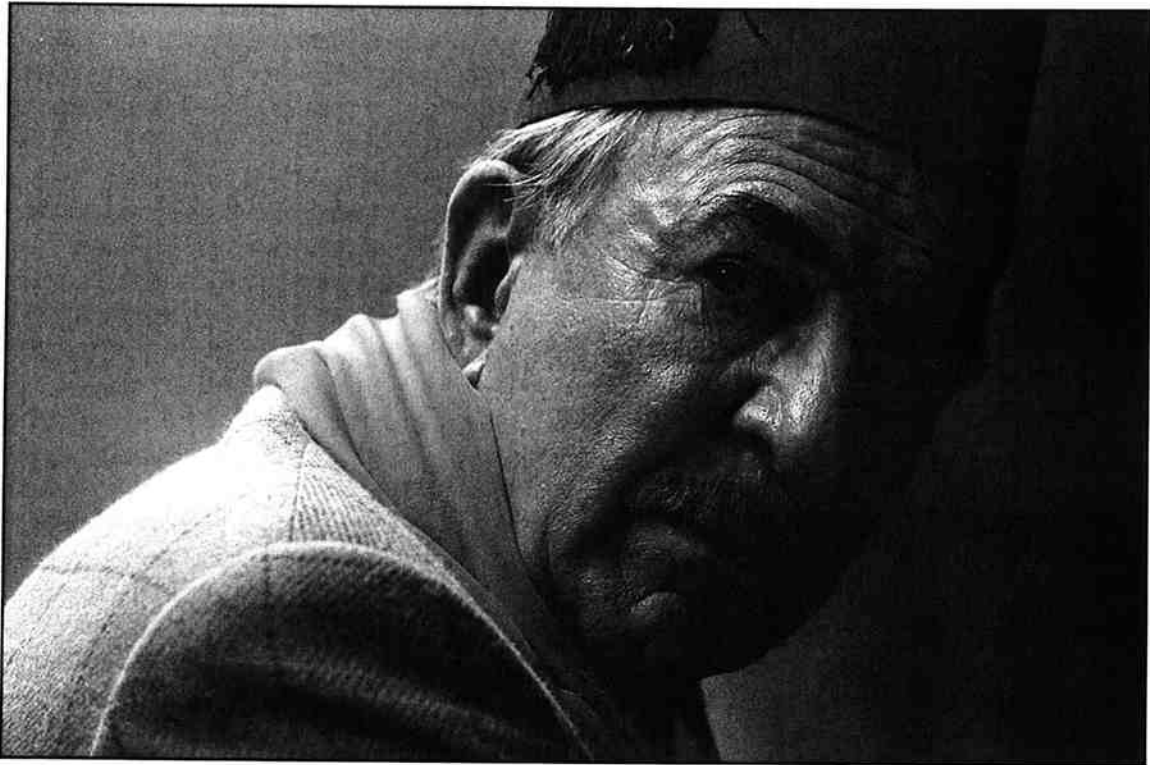
**It must be odd to see characters you imagined on the screen.**

When I watched the film, I didn't constantly refer mentally to the book. I saw disturbing things -- sometimes cinema comes closer to life (than memory). Details, incidents that one erased while writing the book come back in film, and take on a life because cinema is a more concrete art. While writing, one is inspired, fatally, by beings, by events that happen during your lifetime, and you destroy the evidence a bit. Because cinema needs realistic details, it recreates them.

For example, Dr Meinthe's suicide in the car is taken from a real event at the time. I took the character of René Meinthe from, among other people, a young man who drove very fast. But I didn't use this element for his death -- but the cinema succeeded in going back to the reality. It found the truth behind the fiction.

# J E A N - P I E R R E M A R I E L L E

- RENÉ MEINTHE -



© Lambert Productions - Photo : Pascalito

## **The character:**

Meinthe is undoubtedly the most lucid of the trio of characters. He is capricious, strange, capable of anything. He has never, at any moment in his life, been afraid of death. He is capable of causing a scene in a family rooming house, of throwing a glass in the face of someone bigger and stronger than him who is threatening him with a knife. He is afraid of nothing, not even the wildest gesture coming out of nowhere. Although he is a practising doctor from the provinces, he couldn't care less about appearances. He has a slightly suicidal taste for provocation. Jean-Pierre Marielle is riveting because he renders these two facets of the character perfectly, he is both weird and pathetic in his despair.

## **The actor:**

JEAN-PIERRE MARIELLE. I love this actor passionately. I have had a burning desire to work with him for a long, long time. He was a bit uneasy about playing this type of character, but I knew that Jean-Pierre would give this homosexual character, which is anything but a "queen" the dignity it required. With all the richness in his possession, Jean-Pierre brought a superb panache and uncommonness to this mad character. That's what makes him so endearing.

**Patrice Leconte**

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S elected screen credits

- 1981 L'INDISCRETION by Pierre Lary  
COUP DE TORCHON by Bertrand Tavernier  
1982 LA VIE CONTINUE by Dino Risi  
1983 LES CAPRICIEUX by Michel Deville  
SIGNES EXTERIEURS DE RICHESSE by Jacques Monnet  
1984 L'AMOUR EN DOUCE by Edouard Molinaro  
1985 HOLD UP by Alexandre Arcady  
1986 LES MOIS D'AVRIL SONT MEURTRIERS by Laurent Heynemann  
1987 QUELQUES JOURS AVEC MOI by Claude Sautet  
LES DEUX CROCODILES by Joël Seria  
1990 URANUS by Claude Berri  
1991 TOUS LES MATINS DU MONDE by Alain Corneau  
1992 MAX ET JEREMIE by Claire Devers  
1993 UN DEUX TROIS SOLEIL by Bertrand Blier  
1994 LE PARFUM D'YVONNE by Patrice Leconte

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S tage performance

- 1965 SE TROUVER by Luigi Pirandello  
LA PREUVE PAR QUATRE by Félicien Marceau  
1966 LA PROCHAINE FOIS JE VOUS LE CHANTERAI by James Saunders  
1967 ROZENKRANZ ET GILDENSTEIN SONT MORTS by Tom Shoppard  
L'ANNIVERSAIRE by Harold Pinter  
1968 LE CAFE SNEFFLE by Remo Forlani  
1969 LES POISSONS ROUGES by Jean Anouilh  
1972 UN PAPE A NEW YORK by John Guare  
1978 LA CULOTTE by Jean Anouilh  
1980 L'HABILLEUR by Ronald Harwood  
1983 L'ETRANGLEUR S'EXCITE by Erik Naggar  
1987 ONCLE VANIA by Anton Tchekhov  
1988 CLERAMBARD by Marcel Aymé  
1989 LA FEMME A CONTRE-JOUR by Erik Naggar  
1991 PARTAGE DE MIDI by Paul Claudel  
1994 LE RETOUR by Harold Pinter

# INTERVIEW WITH JEAN-PIERRE MARIELLE

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I am sensitive to the style and the universe of Patrick Modiano. I read his books as soon as they come out. As it is the case with many great authors, he always writes the same book. But, it is never the same book, you're always surprised. It's not a charming little tune going round and round. No, some of his books are incredibly bitter and painful. He also knows how to be fabulously funny.

When Patrice Leconte offered me the role of Meinthe, I was a bit perplexed, and I wondered about a lot of things. I remembered that in the book, Doctor Meinthe was a lot younger. And I had never played such a strange character.

When I read the script, the quality of the adaptation reassured me. Leconte had executed a work of intelligence, of finesse and insight. I said to myself, "I'm going to go for it". Little by little, I got inside the character, and he became familiar to me.

Meinthe's homosexuality, in any case, was not a problem for me, but I did have to search myself about playing such an extravagant character. There are confines that are very quickly established. You can easily fall into a *Cage Aux Folles* mentality.

What attracted me about Meinthe was his humanity, his pain and suffering, his goodness. Also, the ambiguity of his relationship with both the girl and the young man. He is a bit of a voyeur of the passion that develops between them. He shares it, but stays completely outside of it. This must be very hard for him, because it is obvious that he is attracted to Victor. At the same time, though in a different way, he is charmed by Yvonne.

René Meinthe is a man of extreme sensitivity, and who is perhaps not completely at ease with the fact of his homosexuality. He is a broken man, but he must have already been a broken young man -- he has always been one. And then, he takes the last turning of his life, the last straight line. "Bloody old age..." he says, "Future, what future!" There is that extremely touching scene where when he is listening to the Charles Aznavour song, "Her Youth". It's not so much his age that bothers him, it's more that existence seems to him less and less appealing. He's tired of burlesquing his life. And that is what makes him interesting, poignant -- much more so than being maudlin about passing time, that would be too banal. But René Meinthe is not a banal character. I think Meinthe is also a man burdened with regrets. He is surrounded by the suffocation of provincial life, the boredom of winter, the waiting for summer, a yearning for elsewhere, a constant desire to flee.

To approach the character, I did not especially try to use my own emotions, though there is always something intimate and personal that the actor brings to each role, his own nature, a moment in his life. It's not even necessarily conscious, you don't plan out the moment when you are going to sprinkle bits of your life and your sensibility over the character. It's the chemistry of the actor. This may sound capricious, but I think the actor has to, somehow put his life on the line when he performs, otherwise, he's not really being professional.

I also drew inspiration from some very dear friends who are homosexual, and who I've watched in their day-to-day lives, often with interest and this avidness for observing people that is part of our trade. Personages who are capable of great extravagances, and who are even a bit mad, and yet at the same time, who have a lot of restraint and a particular sort of austerity.

I took inspiration for this character from their elegant disillusion, their quick-mindedness, their strong sense of repartee and sharp humour.

Also with this role, there was the pleasure of composing the personality. I have been lucky enough not to be repeatedly given the same job, and to move from one type of person to another. It's always more interesting when you're not constantly rehashing the same guy, I liked the age make-up, the paunch. We thought about a whig, I imagined Meinthe with flowing hair. Then, we gaily tackled the costumes -- there are some real winners! We really did a job on the suit!

This film was for me a great encounter with Patrice Leconte, i put myself totally in his hands. I felt assisted to tenth degree. For an actor, this feeling of security is so important, but so rare.

# HIPPOLYTE GIRARDOT

- VICTOR CHMARA -



© Lambert Productions - Photo : Pascallito

## **The character:**

Victor is afraid of being sent to Algeria even though no one is looking for him; but his insecurity exaggerates his feeling of statelessness. Yvonne blows into his life just when he is the least and the most available emotionally. He is someone who undoubtedly leads the most normal of lives, but who would love to be more mysterious. So, he dreams, and besides he wants to be a writer.

## **The actor:**

HIPPOLYTE GIRARDOT truly has something Modianesque about him. Languid but not washed out, very sensual too. He has real eye contact quality -- I can easily imagine him doing nothing, letting the long hours pass. Hippolyte's image is very much the modern young man of our era, completely in step with our time. I wanted to offer him a different type of role, one where he is always in restraint. At first, he was a bit worried, but he succeeded in bringing a lot of intensity and emotion to Victor. I also needed to work with an actor who shared my point of view regarding the way sensuality is expressed in the film.

**Patrice Leconte**



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S elected screen credits

- 1973 LA FEMME DE JEAN by Yannick Bellon  
1982 LE DESTIN DE JULIETTE by Aline Isserman  
1983 PRENOM CARMEN by Jean-Luc Godard  
LE BON PLAISIR by Francis Girod  
1984 FORT SAGANNE by Alain Corneau  
1985 L'AMOUR OU PRESQUE by Patrice Gautier  
1986 MANON DES SOURCES by Claude Berri  
L'AMANT MAGNIFIQUE by Aline Isserman  
DESCENTE AUX ENFERS by Francis Girod  
1987 LES PYRAMIDES BLEUES by Arielle Dombasle  
1988 UN MONDE SANS PITIE by Eric Rochant  
1989 THE MAN INSIDE (L'AFFAIRE WALRAFF) by Bobby Roth  
1991 HORS LA VIE by Maroun Bagdadi  
1992 CONFESSIONS D'UN BARJO by Jérôme Boivin  
APRES L'AMOUR by Diane Kurys  
LA FILLE DE L'AIR by Maroun Bagdadi  
1993 TOXIC AFFAIR by Philomène Esposito  
1994 LES PATRIOTES by Eric Rochant  
QUAND J'AVAIS 5 ANS JE M'AI TUE by Jean-Claude Sussfeld  
LE PARFUM D'YVONNE by Patrice Leconte

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S hort films director from 1977 to 1982:

LA NUIT DES ENFANTS  
CHOCOLAT  
LE CŒUR SERRE  
L'IMPERMEABLE  
A PLUS  
SOUS LE SIGNE DE ROBINSON  
BLAISE

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T heatre :

DON JUAN

# INTERVIEW WITH HIPPOLYTE GIRARDOT

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Victor Chmara? When I finished *Villa Triste*, I didn't know much more about him than when I started it. The guy remained a total enigma. This name of his, Chmara, is it his real name? Is he really from Cairo? Is he really on the lamb? And what is he running away from? Is it possible to keep himself going by selling butterflies? He has the habits of a stay-at-home old bachelor, and yet he has his mail sent to him under another name, *poste restante*. He gets up and changes seats in the cinema when someone sits too close to him. He's the sort of character that you don't know whether he's there because he's hiding out, or whether he's making up this persecution in his head as an excuse to be there discretely observing this insignificant little world. He says proudly, "Nothing, I don't do anything". How do you make a character who doesn't do anything exist? How do you make a guy whose action is essentially internal, interesting? He seems to float through life like a cork on a river, completely subject to encounters and atmospheres.

To get to know him better, I wanted to meet his family, so I read all the "I" 's in Modiano's novels. Sure enough, they all resembled Victor. In general, they are in exile or in hiding, at the seashore or near a lake, they fall in love with mysterious and sensual women who disappear, they live in hotels and look at old photos, they don't like the hunt or after dinner drinks. They are shy, but sometimes a gesture or a phrase comes out that shows how much of it is actually restraint on their part.

For *Le Parfum d'Yvonne*, I imagined Victor on that basis, searching out the moments when he is sincere, when he is really being himself. I tried at all times to centre Chmara around his confrontation with himself, around what it was that he was hiding. For me, he lets his mask fall when in Sainte Rose he mutters, "lousy, shitty little village" to the assembled "red-faced, wine-tasting, bicycle-racing, senile gourmets". He is himself when he finds out that Yvonne has gone off with Hendrickx. He is himself when he cracks, when he suffers. The rest of the time, he is imagining emotions, feelings, a past. He is inventing a life for himself.

Today, I realise that I too have invented a Victor Chmara, just like he has done. He played the role of Chmara and I tried to give him some reality. Victor Chmara was discreet, nearly invisible? I preferred to make him a paranoid who would do anything to escape being noticed. I wanted there to always be a feeling of tension emanating from him. If he seems to put up with the girls playing tennis, it's not because he likes them, but because they distract him, at least to some extent, from the Algerian War -- which, unlike the others, has a certain reality to him. In the novel, Victor is still at an age free from care, an age of gingham dresses and surprise parties. In the film, this is no longer possible. He is not duped by his own story, but it is as though he is already living behind a screen. When René Meinthe and Yvonne burst into his routine, it is exactly what the paranoid Victor, the one hiding out near the border, dreaded most, and what Victor the pathological liar, the would-be writer was waiting for. The girl's dog is too big, the man talks too loud, the car is too flashy, the party is corny, but that fits perfectly into his made-up story. He thinks that the more eccentric the people he hangs out with, the more he is protected. Is he really in love with this star-struck country girl, or is he just enjoying being the hero of his own novel? I loved playing these scenes filled with ambiguity and they immediately find themselves "pulled" into this chintzy *dolce vita*. We are constantly sliding between a seduction and a crisis. The love scenes also are playful and light-hearted.

The three characters lie to one another, evade each other, and yet they like each other a lot. Each one has his reason for doing what he does. They found each other, and they stuck like glue to one another.

Getting back to Victor, I was always thinking while playing his scenes, "one day, he'll tell this story, he is living his life in order to talk about it later". Patrice Leconte encouraged me a lot by working particularly on Victor's approach to things. He's a director who listens a lot, who respects the actor's job and the difficulties they encounter, who tries always to be positive, to push you in the direction you are trying to go in. To me, Victor is not romantic, he is going to write novels. He's someone who imagines from reality, who fictionalises events. He is more attracted to Yvonne's carefree smile than to her beauty. Because she underliens the precariousness of love, which is the premise of many novels. He is more attracted by René's fits of anger than by his loquaciousness, because they are often futile, hence fiction-like. His wanting to leave for America to live out an impossible myth, is due to the fact he knows their relationship will one day end, it already has that sweet smell of nostalgia that he loves so much. I like a lot that Victor flips out after packing all his bags in one night.

That's why in the end, he comes back to the scene of his life. He's just lived through the last chapter. Here, Victor is himself, without his grey suit or elegant watch chain. He saves Meinthe, they run through the streets and decide to go to dinner at Pulli's. Yvonne isn't there any more and the fez has fallen into the coffee. Summer is far, very far away. This last scene defines the trio as a spontaneous and temporary fusion of solitary stars, each one on its own course, that will return to the night sky. At the edge of this ravine, Victor decides to tell their story, to become a writer. He is no longer shy, he is present in the world. Paradoxically, he is finally sufficiently in touch with reality to write a novel: *Villa Triste*.

# S A N D R A M A J A N I

- YVONNE -



© Lambert Productions - Photo : Pascalito

## **The character:**

Her charm consists in being someone "who can't live any other way but day to day" says René Meinthe. Yvonne has no ambition, there is nothing calculating about this woman, that's what makes her so fabulous. She reminds me of an algae oscillating among the currents and tides of the sea. She has a built-in shield of lightheartedness, the better to deflect anything that might worry her. She has real dreams of stardom, all that glitters obviously attracts her. But she's not as innocent as all that!

## **The actress:**

SANDRA MAJANI is Dutch. She has been a model, but has not made a career of it. Like Yvonne, she has a very pleasant way of taking life like a dilettante. Sandra has natural distinction without being a high-society elitist, but with a natural elegance of her body, her expressions, her voice. I expressly wanted an unknown in the role of Yvonne, for the same reason I did in *The Hairdresser's Husband*, so that the public would wonder, "Who is that girl?" Also, we directors all have a touch of the Pygmalion syndrome... I love working with well-known actors, but it is also a real pleasure to experience strange and intense intuitions and to discover a personality.

**Patrice Leconte**

# INTERVIEW WITH SANDRA MAJANI

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When I was a little girl, I already had a strong desire to be in movies. In my village of Delden in Holland, I took courses in theatre and I was in plays in school. I started dance classes at age three, but my parents didn't want me to leave home before finishing school. I went to the Conservatory of Classical Dance in Rotterdam at age 18. I did a few fashion shows and that's where an agent from Paris noticed my picture. He came to Rotterdam and three days later, I arrived in Paris. That was six years ago. I didn't speak a word of French. I met Patrice Leconte shooting a commercial. He kindly reassured me about my pronunciation: "Some well-known actresses have an accent and it's quite charming"; Later, when Patrice offered me the role of Yvonne, I had made progress in French. He told me, "I thought of you for this role, she's a sweet girl". I think he imagined that I was really like Yvonne. But after the shoot, Patrice admitted to me, "It's true that Yvonne is a role for you, but now that I know you better, I can say that Yvonne is not like you. You can play different characters".

I like Yvonne for her mysteriousness. We know very little about her past. She lives a luxurious life that is not really her, in reality, we sense that she is a modest kind of girl. It's the people around her who make much of her and encourage her in her fantasy.

I think Yvonne is very authentic, she has a good heart. I don't think she really did anything wrong like her uncle says she did. Perhaps she let herself be taken in one night by some not very savoury people, and ended up in the police station. Or else, maybe she was caught stealing a lipstick, or perfume or costume jewelry in a department store. When she lived with her uncle, she probably did not have much money for those things, and since she loves to have a certain aura of elegance, well...

Yvonne is certainly fragile. I don't think she is a loose woman. She lives in this little resort town where all the men think she's pretty and flirt with her, but she goes out with Victor simply because he's new, he comes from somewhere else. And also because he's supposedly a count. Without really having any plans of marriage, Yvonne could daydream about how it would feel to be Countess Yvonne Chmara. Actually, is Yvonne really in love with Victor? She never says she is. Yvonne is certainly egotistical. She is interested in her own pleasure first, and doesn't hide that from Victor. "I'm the one I drive crazy", she tells him.

Before the shoot, I was a bit panicked because I'd never learned to build a character. A coach helped me learn the dialogue by heart. In day-to-day situations, I'd ask myself, "how would Yvonne react?" I was under Yvonne's spell, and I loved acting during the shoot. That pleasure helped me a lot. Also, Patrice Leconte is very open, he lets you suggest different ways of playing a scene, and won't hesitate to do a number of takes. The shoot was very enjoyable, never an unkind word, never a fit of anger. I thank Patrice for causing my first encounter with cinema. This role will always be my most beautiful memory.

# RICHARD BOHRINGER

- YVONNE'S UNCLE -



© Lambart Productions - Photo : Pascalito

RICHARD BOHRINGER comes in at an important moment in the film. We have just left the elegant holiday atmosphere to come to the place where Yvonne spent her childhood -- here at her uncle's, with his veal cutlets, in short, a normal life. Suddenly, we're out of the champagne bubbles and in contact with a person whose feet are firmly on the ground. The uncle warns Victor, "Watch out, she's a charming girl, but don't hang your hopes on her, pal". For these lines to come off in all their sincerity it required an actor of Richard Bohringer's stature. Bohringer created Uncle Roland divinely, his personality, his eye, his voice, that magical timbre make all the power and all the realism of the situation work. Uncle Roland is the only carthling in the film.

**Patrice Leconte**

R I C H A R D      B O H R I N G E R

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elected screen credits from

- 1985 PERIL EN LA DEMEURE by Michel Deville  
SUBWAY by Luc Besson  
DIESEL by Robert Kramer  
LE PACTOLE by Jean-Pierre Mocky  
CENT FRANCS L'AMOUR by Jacques Richard  
L'INTRUSE by Bruno Gantillon
- 1986 KAMIKAZE by Didier Grousset  
LE PALTOQUET by Michel Deville  
UBAC by Jean-Pierre Grasset  
FLAG by Jacques Santi  
LE GRAND CHEMIN by Jean-Loup Hubert
- 1987 AGENT TROUBLE by Jean-Pierre Mocky  
LES SAISONS DU PLAISIR by Jean-Pierre Mocky
- 1988 ADA DANS LA JUNGLE by Gérard Zingg  
A GAUCHE EN SORTANT DE L'ASCENSEUR by Edouard Molinaro  
APRES LA GUERRE by Jean-Loup Hubert
- 1989 THE COOK THE THIEF HIS WIFE AND HER LOVER by Peter Greenaway  
STAN THE FLASHER by Serge Gainsbourg
- 1990 DAMES GALANTES by Jean-Charles Tacchella  
LA REINE BLANCHE by Jean-Loup Hubert  
VERRAZ by Xavier Castano  
UNE EPOQUE FORMIDABLE by Gérard Jugnot
- 1991 VILLE A VENDRE by Jean-Pierre Mocky
- 1992 CONFESSIONS D'UN BARJOT by Jérôme Boivin  
L'ACCOMPAGNATRICE by Claude Miller
- 1993 TANGO by Patrice Leconte
- 1994 LE PARFUM D'YVONNE by Patrice Leconte

# ARTISTIC CREDITS

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René Meinthe .....	JEAN-PIERRE MARIELLE
Victor .....	HIPPOLYTE GIRARDOT
Yvonne .....	SANDRA MAJANI
Yvonne's uncle .....	RICHARD BOHRINGER
Daniel Hendricks .....	PAUL GUERS
Mrs Buffaz .....	CORINNE MARCHAND
Pulli .....	PHILIPPE MAGNAN
Raoul Fossorié .....	CLAUDE DEREPE
Man with a spaniel face .....	CLAUDE AUFAURE
Tounette .....	ISABELLE TINARD
Jacky .....	LUC PALUN
Hermitage concierge .....	DIDIER LAFAYE
Singer .....	LOUIS-MARIE AUDUBERT
Barmaid of "L'Avenir" bar .....	MARIE COSNAY
Angry neighbour .....	JEAN-PAUL NICOLAI
Alpin soldier .....	MATTIAS NILSSON
Naked dancer .....	BRIGITTE PETIT
Daisy Marchi .....	JOSEPHINE SOURDEL
Clerk .....	BRENDA CLARK
Landlord of the "Cintra" bar .....	ARSENE JIROYAN
Barmaid of the "Cintra" bar .....	LAURENCE LEREL
O.A.S. ....	RAPHAEL SIMONET



# TECHNICAL CREDITS

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Director .....PATRICE LECONTE  
Producer .....THIERRY de GANAY  
Screenplay .....PATRICE LECONTE  
  based on "VILLA TRISTE"  
  by PATRICK MODIANO  
Line Producer .....MONIQUE GUERRIER  
Original Music .....PASCAL ESTEVE  
Production Designer .....IVAN MAUSSION  
Costumes .....ANNIE PÉRIER  
Production Manager.....HENRI BRICHETTI  
Assistant Director .....MICHEL FERRY  
Continuity .....MAGGIE PERLADO  
Unit manager.....DANIEL BASCHIERI  
Director of Photography .....EDUARDO SERRA A.F.C.  
Editor .....JOELLE HACHE  
Sound .....PAUL LAINÉ  
  YVES OSMU  
Mixing .....DOMINIQUE HENNEQUIN  
Production Photographer.....PASCALITO

Scope  
Filmed in Panavision

Incidental Music:

"SA JEUNESSE" performed by CHARLES AZNAVOUR  
"GOZA NEGRA" performed by CELIA CRUZ  
"PLEGARIA A LA ROYE" performed by CELIA CRUZ  
"CONTESTACION DEL MARINERO" performed by CELIA CRUZ  
"MELAO DE CANA" performed by CELIA CRUZ  
"CAO CAO MANI PICAIO" performed by CELIA CRUZ  
"TAMBORILERO" performed by CELIA CRUZ  
"MAMBO DEL AMOR" performed by CELIA CRUZ

Archives photographies and documents: PATHÉ TÉLÉVISION  
Extract of "HISTOIRE DE L'ANGLETERRE" by ANDRÉ MAUROIS

# LAMBERT PRODUCTIONS

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**F**ormed in 1990, Lambert has produced:

1990 THE HAIRDRESSER'S HUSBAND by Patrice Leconte.  
With Jean Rochefort and Anna Galiena  
- Prix Louis Delluc 1990  
- 7 César Nominations  
- Best Foreign Film nomination, BAFTA Awards, UK, 1991  
- Critics' Prize, Barcelona Festival 1990

1992 LE ZEBRE by Jean Poiret.  
Based on the novel by Alexandre Jardin.  
With Thierry Lhermitte and Caroline Cellier.

1994 LE PARFUM D'YVONNE by Patrice Leconte.  
Based on the novel "Villa Triste" by Patrick Modiano  
With Jean-Pierre Marielle, Hippolyte Girardot, Sandra Majani and Richard Bohringer.