

From P.A. to L.A.

**U of R alumus
and lifestyle
TV director
Nicholas Treeshin
sets his sights on
Hollywood.**

**By BD Miller
BA(Hons)'89, BJ'95**

Photos by David Stobbe.



University of Regina film school graduate Nicholas Treeshin BFA'00 has been making a name for himself the past few years in lifestyle television.

Based in Vancouver since 2001, Treeshin has been the primary director for the first two seasons of the popular HGTV real estate program *Urban Suburban*. Shot in various cities across Canada, including Saskatoon, the show features a brother-sister real estate duo that competes to sell a new home to couples with a limited budget. The brother, Philip DuMoulin, shows the couples houses in the city, while the sister, Sarah Daniels, tries to sell them a house in the suburbs.

"The show has been quite a hit for the network," Treeshin says. "By the end of each episode the couples have to decide which way they're going to go. In the city you get convenience, but in the suburbs you get so much more space and usually larger homes. And that's the battle that a lot of couples find themselves in when they're buying that new home."

Born in Yellowknife, Treeshin grew up in Prince Albert and spent his first year

after high school as a pre-law student at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. But going to law school had never been Treeshin's dream, and he ended up having a miserable time during his first year of university.

"That summer, I made a decision that I wasn't going to ever do anything that I don't feel passionate about," he says. Around that time, one of his best friends told him about the film and video production program at the U of R.

"From a really young age, I had this passion for film and TV," Treeshin says. "So that was it, I made the switch and went to the film school in Regina. And I just loved it so much, and that was the beginning of my confidence as a filmmaker."

He says two instructors at the U of R were especially influential – Gerald Saul BFA'93 and the late Bernard Lavigne, who passed away while Treeshin was still in university.

"When you're a student, all of your short films look pretty bad when you're first starting," Treeshin says. "But during my first couple of years, Bernard believed in me and really took me under his wing."

During Treeshin's third and fourth years in the film program, Saul took over as his source of mentoring and inspiration.

"It's very competitive in film school," Treeshin recalls. "Everyone's very cocky and thinks they're going to be the next Scorsese or Tarantino, and I just put my head down and did my work and Gerald was really supportive of me. To have a professor believe in you and help you was a really big deal. When you're young, confidence can be hard to come by, but he instilled it in me."

Saul was only in his first year as a film instructor at the U of R when he first met Treeshin, but he still remembers him distinctly. "Nick had this really inquisitive mind that was always searching," Saul says. "He was always the one with his hand up with a question or suggestion, or with examples of things he'd been reading and watching. Maybe once every five years you get a student with that sort of promise, that sort of shine. It was a delight to have him in the room."

After graduation, Treeshin didn't have his professors to encourage and

motivate him anymore. He says making that transition was one of the keys to establishing a career in film and TV. "The world of film can be very difficult. You have to make it yourself. It's fine to be creative and motivated when you're in school, but when you graduate that motivation has to continue. You really have to push yourself."

Part of Treeshin's postgraduation career strategy was a willingness to work in the industry in whatever capacity presented itself – including as an actor. In film school, the students often served as actors in each other's productions, which led to Treeshin's discovery by a local talent agent while he was still at the U of R. He ended up paying for part of film school by acting professionally and continued to support himself in the film and TV industry for about five years after graduation by doing voiceover work and commercials, and by acting in projects across the country – including a part in CBC's miniseries *Revenge of the Land* and guest roles in the science fiction TV series *Battlestar Galactica* and *Honey I Shrunk the Kids*.

"Being on the other side of the camera taught me about set etiquette and I really got a good feel for what it was like to be an actor," he says. "And it gave me the tools to communicate well with performers and hosts."

But Treeshin never lost sight of his longer-term goal of becoming a working director in film and TV. "Acting was fun and it came naturally to me, but I never stopped making short films."

To help pay the bills but also keep himself working in the film and TV industry, Treeshin branched into post-production, working as an assistant film editor. At about the same time, he started directing music videos for Vancouver-based artists such as Moka Only, a former member of the Canadian hip-hop group Swollen Members.

Treeshin's music videos eventually caught the eye of Heather Hawthorn-Doyle, a well-known producer of lifestyle and reality TV in Canada. Hawthorn-Doyle liked the look of Treeshin's videos so much that she called him in for an interview and subsequently hired him to direct for a succession of lifestyle programs, including the cooking show *Anna & Kristina's Grocery Bag* and the fashion show *Anna and Kristina's Beauty Call*, which both ran on the W Network. "That season of *Grocery Bag*, I directed 22 of 26 episodes – which is a ton of work, especially for a new director just cutting his teeth," Treeshin recalls. "But I sure learned a lot."

He admits his career path after graduating from the U of R has taken even himself by surprise. "The last thing I ever expected in film school was that I'd be directing lifestyle TV," he says. "But I've really learned to appreciate it. Really good lifestyle TV episodes are basically mini documentaries, and sometimes a documentary can be unbelievably moving in terms of the emotions you can feel and the way you can connect with people especially when they have dreams and passion and are dealing with difficult situations. These shows can really bring

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out such a great human side, and it's taught me so many skills as a director."

Although Treeshin will always be grateful for his work in lifestyle TV, directing and creating feature-length scripted drama has always been his ultimate career goal. And the doors may finally be opening in Hollywood that could see Treeshin fulfil his life's ambition.

He recently shot a pilot in Los Angeles for a music reality show that's currently being considered by executives with the

U.S. cable network VH1. While he was in L.A., Treeshin also shot a music video for Jasiri X, a Pittsburgh-based rapper. Best of all, a short scripted drama that Treeshin wrote and directed in Vancouver called *Leave Us Alone* attracted considerable attention among Los Angeles producers.

"The people we showed it to are very interested in exploring the idea of a feature length version or possibly a TV series," Treeshin says. "*Leave Us Alone* is the passion project I've been working on to springboard myself into the feature film world. And some of the contacts and people that we've worked with in Los Angeles have been really helpful and encouraging."

Treeshin may relocate to Los Angeles with his wife and daughter in the near future so he can better pursue the next chapter of his film career. He offers this advice for recent grads of the U of R's film school, and for anyone else just starting out in the film and TV industry: "Try everything. Don't close any doors. Keep all the doors open because you never know which one is going to be the one that gives you your break." ■

*Writer and playwright BD Miller is a two-time graduate of the U of R. His full-length musical drama *Swept Off Our Feet: Boris Karloff and the Regina Cyclone* premiered in July at the Regina Performing Arts Centre as a Regina Summer Stage production.*



Opposite page: Alumnus Nicholas Treeshin on the set of HGTV's *Urban Suburban* this past summer in Saskatoon. Above: After several years of building his reputation, Treeshin has his sights firmly set on Hollywood.