

The Eighties Trend Martial Arts Is Back & Kicking



Britta Ziegert



Patrick Kligel & Austin Moody on location in Los Angeles on Honor



Art Birzneck

Bushido Films LLC is one of the latest independent companies recently established to capitalize on the growing demand for niche independent product from buyers around the world. During a shoot in a downtown Los Angeles warehouse, The Business of Film visited the set of Honor and talked to the partners of the new entity and David Worth director.

Los Angeles, the movie manufacturing capital of the world, is brimming over with talented young entrepreneurs who are frustrated with the lack of ability to break into the film business and catch an opportunity to control their own destiny. Art Birzneck, stymied by the lack of decision making in the choice of projects that he knew international buyers wanted, established Birch Tree Entertainment in 2003.

Patrick Kligel and Austin Moody, who met in college, are partners in a Las Vegas based production house that provides production services

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and equipment through their companies Jibtek, Oog Oog Productions and Hologram Entertainment. They too were frustrated with their attempt to break into the feature film business with projects they passionately wanted to produce themselves.

A chance meeting at an ATM machine in Las Vegas resulted in the two entities forming a partnership with a fierce determination to do it their way. Art Birzneck says, "We called our company Bushido Films, which is a Japanese word that means 'way of the warrior.' It's a Samurai term, and we feel it's indicative of not only the martial arts films we are producing but also our philosophy.

Austin Moody continued: "Our plan for the present time is to focus purely on martial arts

films. Patrick and I have always had dreams of doing our own personal Citizen Kane like any other producer or director in this business. Art and we are based in Las Vegas where we ran into each other and became friends before entering into this relationship. Initially, when Patrick and I were trying to get our projects off the ground, we were making and contributing to film on spec, and we had a good group of friends and Las Vegas crew who worked with us for little to no money to chase that dream. Whenever we made phone calls to sales companies and buyers, over and over again we got the door slammed in our face. When we connected with Art, who already had those doors open, it was an easy fit for all of us to come together."

Patrick Kligel added: "It was actually a freak meeting. I was at the ATM, and I turned around and saw Art's wife who was wearing a Cannes Film Festival t-shirt. So I said, "Have you been there?" and it just took off from there. We started talking, and as a distributor Art knows what the market is looking for. So it worked for all of us. Austin and I solely produce and Art filled the distributing niche. It was a good fit."

On its individual independent level, Bushido would be high on any independent distributor's wish list to control and deliver production quality at the right financial ratio comprised of a well established production company with the right resources backed by production executives who have produced numerous commercials, shorts, music videos and a reality show with credits including production services to The Contender (NBC), MTV, Sports Illustrated, Snoop Dogg, ESPN, and the Ultimate Fighting Championship.

Bushido's first feature film production, Honor, is based on the classic Martial Arts and stars ten of the leading champions in the world. The sport has an international following as well as the genre's fans. Birzneck had no problem with pre sales to get the project going. Like most independent projects, it started out with a simple idea and a simple script, and built as the word of mouth got out on the project, not only among the World competing champions fighters themselves but

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also with 'talent' in the industry who were keen to work on a project of that kind. Birzneck's overseas connection brought on board Remy Bonjasky and presales, which enabled Austin Moody to find the rest of the budget. Moody said, "Three months ago, it was just an idea and our dream. Once we had the first three fighters, we brought our stunt coordinator, Peter Malota, onboard, and Peter went out and found us ten other fighters. When we looked up at our casting board, it was apparent that we've got ten to fifteen of the top fighters in the world." The company plans to lock down long term deals with Martial Arts Champions to ensure a steady flow of the product franchise to meet the buyers' needs. As the market catches up on the trend and the flow of Martial arts films looks to be in danger of flooding the market, Bushido will move on to other genre pictures such as horror, a genre that

also garners constant demand. The balance of financing for the film came via Moody's father who invented and patented a gaming slot machine and sold it to International Gaming Technologies (IGT). Austin Moody said: "As people saw who were coming onboard to be involved in Honor, we had people approaching us with the financing but they were always a week or a day away, and wanted to take as much as 50% of the project. Remy had a fight in Japan next month and we had to get it done. At that point Art was able to secure pre sales, and I felt confident that we could make the money back. My dad, who has his fingers in a lot of pies, basically said, 'Why mess around? I will back the movie.' Patrick and I have always done it on our own, and we were a little hesitant because we want to do things on our own and surpass our parents, but it just made sense. When I first met Patrick, we were sitting around talking about our delusions of grandeur and about how excited it

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would be to venture off into the film industry after college. We were just two young college students talking about getting into the movies and here we are." Patrick Kligel added, "Every day that I wake up and go to work, I still have those delusions of grandeur. But I feel as if my dreams are coming true, and aside from that, this is so much fun. Why would you call this work? Why would you want to do anything other than this?"

Bushido is the new kid on the block, full of independent energy and creativity, and they are approaching the business of producing and distributing feature films based their already established mandate of building a team. Austin Moody and Patrick Kligel and their production company have a core of writers, producers and editors that they work with constantly. David Worth a core of actors and below-the-line talent, Art Birzneck has a group of committed independent buyers worldwide who are waiting for delivery of a series of well-produced Martial arts films for eager fans in the international marketplace. They are aware that they are on the cutting edge of an independents revival such as that which was last seen in the 80s, and they are determined to take full advantage of the new wave.

The Business of Film spoke briefly to Honor director, David Worth between set-ups on the set in downtown L.A.

David Worth commented: "It's time for another wave of martial arts films, and I feel I have a new perspective. I feel that we can make something very edgy, very exciting, very extreme, and really quite a bold film for the new millennium. When Art approached me, he said, 'We want to do a series of these films. We would like to start a franchise.' And I said, 'If you look up 'franchise' in the dictionary, Art, my picture's there.' So I said, 'Definitely. I've done these films all over the world, and I would love to be associated with you. Let me come onboard.' It's a very small film, but it's not small in heart, it's not small in the people who are involved, and it's not small in creativity. We feel we can make a very bold statement with this project and that it will do well in the marketplace. It's the new extreme hardcore martial arts film of the new millennium. We have champions from Japan and Champions from Europe; we have the Gracie family from South America; we have

Through a series of circumstances, they meet up and, since they were very close friends years ago, the fellow who's the criminal wants his old pal to work for him, to fight for him, and the army fellow doesn't want to do it. The corrupt guy tries to draw the honest guy in by

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threatening his family, threatening his friends, beating up on a female police officer who is his friend, and tearing up the bar of Roddy Piper who is the army guy's friend. Finally, the army guy gets involved, and he kicks a lot of ass." JM/ET

THE BUSHIDO TEAM Art Birzneck

Executive Producer and President & CEO of Birch Tree Entertainment, Birzneck has overseen the acquisition, financing, production, and distribution of over twenty film projects including The Ultimate Fight and Frozen Land. He has extensive knowledge of the feature film industry as well as a diverse business background including import/export of consumer goods, software/hardware development, and a strong knowledge base of US public markets. Birzneck oversees all financing and distribution activities of Bushido Films, as well as the slate of films.

Patrick Kligel

Patrick Kligel has been involved in many aspects of the film, television and music video industry since 1996. Patrick brings his vast production knowledge and expertise to all of Bushido's productions. Kligel has worked as a Director of Photography and Camera Operator and has expanded into all aspects of production. Together with partner Austin Moody, he provides production services and equipment for numerous productions through their companies Jibtek, Oog Oog Productions and Hologram Entertainment. His client list includes American Idol (Fox), The Contender (NBC), MTV, Sports Illustrated, Snoop Dogg, ESPN, and the Ultimate Fighting Championship.

Austin Moody

Austin Moody has been involved in the film, television and music video industry since 1998. Austin brings this knowledge of managing businesses to all Bushido Films productions. Together with partner Patrick Kligel, he provides production services and equipment for numerous productions through their companies Jibtek, Oog Oog Productions and Hologram Entertainment. His client list includes American Idol (Fox), The Contender (NBC), MTV, Sports Illustrated, Snoop Dogg, ESPN, and the Ultimate Fighting Championship. Austin has also been involved in the development and financing of various projects in the gaming industry.

Britta Ziegert

Britta Ziegert has been active in the motion picture industry since 1995. Britta oversees all Development activities of Bushido Films. She was formerly CFO and CEO of five independent German film funds, which produced and co-produced such films as the three-Oscar-nominated drama Quills by Philip Kaufman and Undisputed by Walter Hill with Wesley Snipes. Britta joined Birch Tree Entertainment in 2003 and currently holds the position of Vice President of Development and Sales.