



The Neighborhood Buzz **Rivertowns**

Ardsey, Dobbs Ferry, Hastings-on-Hudson, Irvington, Sleepy Hollow, and Tarrytown

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Discovering RiverWalk

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Crew setup for filming *Billions* in Irvington. (Courtesy Village of Irvington.)

“Choosing location is integral to the film: in essence, another character.”

—Ridley Scott, director

Focus On

HOLLYWOOD

ON THE HUDSON

The Rise in Local Location Filming

By Henrietta Toth

The yellow signs posted on poles read “Set” in black, block letters. This could mean only one thing: another feature movie or television production is filming on location in the Rivertowns.

TO SET

In recent years, on-location filming has increased in the Rivertowns. Location managers, as well as producers and directors, have found that the area offers diverse locations to accommodate their scripts as well as their production crews and cast of actors. The proximity of these on-location filming sites to metro areas, such as New York City, is especially advantageous for utilizing available talent and crew hubs.

Production personnel have cited the Rivertowns as desirable shooting locations because the villages can appear on film to be anywhere in the United States. Anthony Costantini, who as village clerk for Hastings-on-Hudson processes film permits, explains, “Most productions look to film in our downtown, and many of the location managers and producers appreciate the ‘small-town charm’ that the village has. The storefronts make a great retro-era backdrop.”



Set sign in Irvington. (Courtesy of Henrietta Toth.)



Filming *Divorce* in Irvington. (Courtesy of Henrietta Toth.)



Filming *The Crowded Room* in Hastings. (Courtesy of Bianca Arau.)



A camera-car trailer shoot in Hastings. (Courtesy of Henrietta Toth.)

MOVIE MAKING IN THE HUDSON VALLEY

On-location filming and studio shoots are on the rise across the Hudson Valley. Brendan Fraser’s Oscar-winning performance in 2022’s *The Whale* was filmed at Umbra Soundstages in Newburgh as well as on location in New Paltz. Other recent shoots include *The Gilded Age* in Kingston and Troy and *The Green Veil* in Red Hook.

New soundstages include Upriver Studios in Saugerties, which opened in 2021. Co-founded by actress Mary Stuart Masterson, it is the largest women-owned production facility in the region with more than 100,000 square feet of space.

The Hudson Valley Film Commission states that “2022 was a record-breaking year” for projects locally filmed.

Whether shooting on Main or residential streets, productions might film all or a few scenes in the Rivertowns. The Rivertowns, however, provide the base locations that a production’s art and construction departments, as well as its set decorators, “dress” and turn it into the set required by the script.

The growth in location filming in the Rivertowns may be attributed in part to Westchester County Tourism & Film, which has promoted the region to filmmakers by stating on its website the availability of “an array of locations . . . within the NYC film zone . . . professional crews and suppliers, and state-of-the art soundstages and post-production facilities.” Credit also might be given to Westchester natives who return to the county to film their projects. Fred Berger, a Larchmont native and producer of 2016’s *La La Land*, also produced the 2018 film *I Think We’re Alone Now*, which shot scenes in downtown Hastings. Peter Callahan, a Hastings native, set his films, 2001’s *Last Ball* and 2022’s *Out and About*, entirely in his hometown.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

The phrase “location, location, location” was coined to pertain to property values but it could relate to film locations as well. The

location where a film is shot is important because it evokes a real-world setting.

In the heyday of Hollywood films, however, shooting on location was a rarity. Actress Bette Davis, who was under contract to Warner Brothers during the 1930s and 1940s, said, “Locations are all tough, all miserable. I never left the sound stage for 18 years at Warners. We never went outside the studio, not even for big scenes.” Those “big scenes,” which often depicted the outdoors, were shot on massive soundstages. As production capabilities evolved, however, productions increasingly turned to location settings for added realism.

An early use of a location in the Rivertowns occurred in Alfred Hitchcock’s 1959 film *North by Northwest*, in which Irvington’s then-industrial waterfront is seen through a train window. Also in Irvington, several scenes of the 1973 movie *Shamus* were filmed in and around Rochroane Castle and adjacent Halsey Pond.

Through the decades, Lyndhurst, in Tarrytown, has figured in several productions that called for a gothic mansion. *House of Dark Shadows* was filmed on the estate in 1970; more recently, the 2022–2023 series *The Gilded Age* made use of the mansion’s period rooms.



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The Ardsley-on-Hudson train station played a role in major features, such as *Falling in Love*, *Unfaithful*, and *The Girl on the Train*. The crew of the 2016 movie *The Girl on the Train* utilized several locations in the Rivertowns, most notably, the tunnel on Station Road as well as the reservoir and the woods in Irvington. The film's deputy location manager, Mara Alcala, told the *New York Post*, "I spent many an evening waiting for dusk on Station Road, sitting there with our mist machine" to create the creepy, hazy atmosphere.

Downtown Ardsley appears in director Martin Scorsese's 2013 *The Wolf of Wall Street*, in which the production crew transformed a vacant garage on Route 9A. Scorsese's team returned to Ardsley to reshape two other village locations—the former Cantina Restaurant off the Saw Mill River Parkway and Ardsley Acres Hotel Court—for the 2019 film *The Irishman*.

In 2019, an episode of *Modern Love* was filmed in Hastings at various businesses, such as Boro6 Wine Bar and Penny Lick Ice Cream Co., as well as at MacEachron Waterfront Park.


PROS AND CONS

Prior to an on-location shoot, a film permit (5 to 20 permits are requested yearly in each Rivertown) is submitted to the village clerk's office. "This kicks off internal meetings with key staff to review the application," explains Costantini. "That usually involves me, my assistant, and the police chief," adds Larry Schopfer, village administrator in Irvington, to discuss the logistics and feasibility of the shoot, such as "the availability of parking and impacts on traffic in the neighborhood."


Productions of all sizes—feature films,

“ I believe that locations should be and evoke the characters in a movie. ”

—Brad Furman
 director



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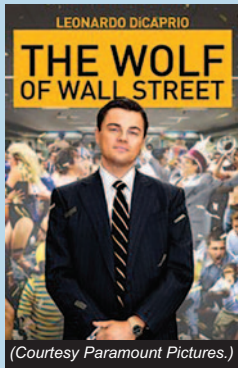
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PRODUCTIONS FILMED IN THE RIVERTOWNS

2023	<i>The Crowded Room Up Here</i>	Hastings-on-Hudson Tarrytown
2022–2023	<i>The Gilded Age</i>	Tarrytown
2017	<i>The Wilde Wedding</i>	Ardsley-on-Hudson
2016–2019	<i>Divorce</i>	Hastings-on-Hudson, Tarrytown
2016	<i>The Girl on the Train</i>	Ardsley-on-Hudson, Dobbs Ferry, Hastings-on-Hudson, Irvington
2014	<i>A Good Marriage Still Alice</i>	Sleepy Hollow Dobbs Ferry
	<i>Winter's Tale</i>	Tarrytown
2013–2023	<i>The Blacklist</i>	Tarrytown
	<i>The Wolf of Wall Street</i>	Ardsley
2009	<i>It's Complicated</i>	Hastings-on-Hudson
2004	<i>The Stepford Wives</i>	Dobbs Ferry
2003	<i>Mona Lisa Smile</i>	Tarrytown
2002	<i>Unfaithful</i>	Ardsley-on-Hudson, Dobbs Ferry, Irvington, Tarrytown
2002	<i>The Family Man</i>	Tarrytown
1996	<i>The Preacher's Wife</i>	Tarrytown
1995	<i>Mighty Aphrodite</i>	Sleepy Hollow
1993	<i>It Could Happen to You The Age of Innocence</i>	Dobbs Ferry Irvington
1984	<i>Falling in Love</i>	Ardsley-on-Hudson, Dobbs Ferry
1973	<i>Shamus</i>	Irvington
1970	<i>House of Dark Shadows</i>	Sleepy Hollow, Tarrytown
1965	<i>Ship of Fools</i>	Tarrytown
1961	<i>Splendor in the Grass</i>	Ardsley
1955	<i>The Scarlet Coat</i>	Sleepy Hollow

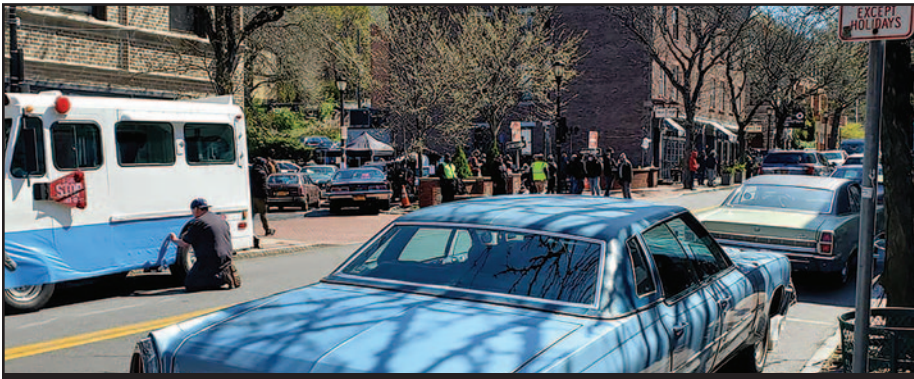
episodic television, shorts, documentaries, and commercials—are locally filmed. It is, however, feature films that bring big bucks to the Rivertowns as well as their large crews and numerous pieces of equipment. Considerable planning goes into accommodating the crew's needs for base camps as well as parking for trucks, trailers, and vans that carry cameras, grip and lighting equipment, props and wardrobe, and generators.

Movie shoots present pros and cons for the Rivertowns. An obvious benefit is the “economic activity,” says Schopfer. Permit fees cost several thousand dollars per shooting day, depending on the size of the production. “The fees we collect are reserved for improvements in the village,” notes Costantini. Tarrytown village clerk Kristine Gilligan adds, “Most film companies tend to utilize local businesses while filming . . . and rent out private parking lots or halls.” (Westchester County-wide, the film industry generated \$1.1 billion in economic activity in 2021, according to an analysis commissioned by the county.)

Another plus is “positive exposure for our village,” according to Gilligan. “Each time we see the village onscreen is another instance of sharing our village with a larger audience,” adds Costantini. This exposure can translate into tourism dollars for the Rivertowns.

When movie trucks roll into the Rivertowns, life can be disrupted and traffic rerouted or halted. In the fall of 2019, south Tarrytowners were alerted that a controlled explosion of a vehicle was scheduled during a night shoot of *The Blacklist* at the Belvedere estate. During filming of the series *Divorce* in Hastings, production trucks hugged the west side of Broadway requiring motorists to slow down on a road usually free from parked vehicles. Also in Hastings, shooting for *The Sinner* series prompted complaints to village police about blocked sidewalks detaining commuters. Such an occurrence is why Schopfer comments, “We often plead with the production companies ‘tell us what you want and then stick to it.’”

Despite the inconvenience posed by on-location shooting, however, most film buffs agree that it is exciting to see their town on the screen and interesting to see how a production crew can transform a location to fit the film's narrative needs.



Filming *The Crowded Room* on Main Street in Hastings. (Courtesy of Bianca Arau.)



The Wolf of Wall Street's Jonah Hill in Ardsley. (Courtesy of Alan Greenwald.)



Filming *Modern Love* in Hastings. (Courtesy of Ellen Sledge.)



Set for *The Irishman* in Ardsley. (Courtesy of Ardsley Historical Society.)

“ This was an old defunct restaurant/rest stop on the Sawmill Parkway. It had two buildings with a parking lot in the center. . . . The art department added an island for our gas pumps, and we turned the other smaller building into a gas station/auto body repair shop. ”

—Regina Graves, set decorator on *The Irishman*
Set Decor, December 12, 2019



Station Road tunnel, Irvington, filmed in *The Girl on the Train*.



STUDIO ZONE

On-location filming is often augmented with studio shoots, especially of interior scenes. In films shot in Hollywood, this area is defined in union agreements as the studio zone. That studio zone has moved closer to the Rivertowns as the number of full-service soundstages has increased in the metro area, making the villages more favorable to production crews. On March 30, 2023, *Deadline Hollywood* reported that, although Los Angeles remains the leader in soundstage space, with 6.2 million square feet, New York now has 2.8 million (and counting) square feet of studio space.

A few New York City soundstages have been around for decades. Kaufman Astoria Studios was established in 1920 and was home to Paramount Pictures, where more than 100 silent movies were made, until it moved to California in 1932. Since 1983, Silvercup Studios has occupied the former Silvercup bread factory. The Robert DeNiro-backed Wildflower Studios is nearing completion in Astoria, making the Queens borough a studio mecca. In Brooklyn, Steiner Studios has been at the Navy Yard since 2004.

Nearer the Rivertowns, Lionsgate Studios has opened at the one-million-square-foot and expanding Great Point Studios campus in downtown Yonkers. More recently, Atlanta-based Electric Owl Studios has proposed building an environmentally friendly production facility on the Graham Windham School campus in Hastings.

As studio space continues to increase beyond the filming capital of Los Angeles, the Rivertowns can bet on more on-location filming.

During the silent film era, Westchester County was a production hub where movies were shot until the industry decamped to California for more compatible weather. Studios existed in locations such as Yonkers and Irvington. Director D. W. Griffith established his studio in Mamaroneck, while the Thanouser Film Corporation churned out more than 1,000 features and shorts at its New Rochelle studio. Today, movie making has come full circle by returning to its roots in the region and bringing with it employment opportunities and revenue.

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