



Seeing RED

PAT MORAN IS ALL THE
RAGE IN FILM AND TV
AND HAS THE EMMYS
TO PROVE IT.

BY JOHN LEWIS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE MORGAN



A PAIR OF GOLD STATUES SITS PROMINENTLY ON PAT MORAN'S DESK IN HER CANTON OFFICE. AMIDST THE CLUTTER OF PAPERWORK AND STACKS OF DVDS, THE FIGURES OF A WINGED WOMAN HOLDING A GLOBE ALOFT ARE INSTANTLY RECOGNIZABLE AS EMMYS, THE TELEVISION INDUSTRY'S MOST PRESTIGIOUS AWARD. BUT LOOK CLOSELY AND YOU MIGHT NOTICE THAT ONE OF MORAN'S EMMYS—THE ONE SHE RECEIVED LAST YEAR FOR CASTING HBO'S *GAME CHANGE*—HAS A BUSTED WING WITH A BAND-AID AFFIXED TO IT. AND ITS GLOBE IS DENTED.

"It took a header on to the floor," says Moran, her voice rising with each word.

Until recently, the Emmys sat atop pedestals in the upstairs living room of her Mt. Vernon home. That is until a strong wind gusted across Park Avenue, dislodging a painted screen that toppled the Emmy and nearly gave its recipient a coronary. "I almost had a heart attack," says Moran. "But if it had happened 25 years ago, I would have flipped out and gone ballistic. I'm a lot better now than the lunatic I used to be."

The wounded Emmy is indicative of how Moran, a longtime presence in the local film community, has changed. Around town, she has long been known for her flame-red hair, sharp demeanor



CASTING CALL:
PAT MORAN IN HER
CANTON OFFICE BELOW
A PAINTING OF DIVINE.

that doesn't suffer fools, and keen eye for talent. She has, of late, risen to the pinnacle of her profession and, dare it be said, mellowed somewhat in the process. Moran's longtime friend and confidant John Waters, who's known her for almost 50 years, says that "her rage level has gone down, and she seems happier than ever."

Why shouldn't she be? She's cast nearly every film and television project that's come through town, including Waters's films, Barry Levinson's *Avalon* and *Liberty Heights*, NBC's *Homicide: Life on the Street*, *The Wire* (recently cited by *Entertainment Weekly* as the best TV show of all time), and the HBO comedy series, *Veep*, starring Julia Louis-Dreyfus (who's featured in this month's Best Of story). She's been nominated for seven Primetime Emmys, won twice, and earned respect throughout the industry.

David Rubin, casting director of blockbusters such as *Men in Black* and *The English Patient*, sponsored Moran for membership in the Casting Society of America. He marvels at her ability to "recognize talent on the fringes of the mainstream and under-

RIGHT: COURTESY OF GREER YEATON (2), THE BALTIMORE SUN.



stand the inner life of characters on a script's page."

Jane Love, associate executive director of the Screen Actors Guild's Washington-Mid Atlantic local, calls Moran "a treasure"; *The Wire* creator David Simon says she's "a mad genius"; and

Veep producer Stephanie Laing floats the L-word—"Pat Moran is a legend," she says.

But Moran will have none of it. "A legend is Cecil B. DeMille," she says. "That's what I think of as a legend, not me."

She tips her head back, sniffs the air, and adopts a tone of privilege. "Oh, could you pass me that?" she says to some imagined minion, and then smiles demurely, blinks her eyes, and points to herself. "Legend."

"Could I have that seat?" she asks, pointing to herself again. "Legend."

She quickly snaps out of it. "Are you kidding?" she asks. "My whole career has been one big accident. I'm just lucky to have gotten out of Catonsville."

MORAN GREW UP IN Catonsville, in a Civil War-era house at the corner of Beechfield and Frederick avenues. Her grandparents had emigrated from Ireland and lived nearby, over a grocery/liquor store run by her parents. Moran's father worked nights as a musician, leading the Johnny Moran Orchestra, a local big band known for playing midnight cruises on the *S.S. Tolchester*. The oldest of five children (she has four younger brothers), Pat learned to identify Benny Goodman songs but never learned to ride a bike; she knew of big band leader Si Zentner but didn't know how to swim, which was fine by her. "I never wanted to be a child," she says, "and I never cared about the things most kids did."

Moran preferred hanging out with her mother, Grace. She admired her smarts and keen instincts, which her mother attributed to being born on Friday the 13th with a "veil" over her face. The veil—actually, a portion of the birth membrane called a caul—was surgically removed and sold to a local seaman who, like supersti-

tious sailors for centuries, believed that possessing it would prevent his ship from sinking. "That always gave my mother a kind of spookiness," says Moran, "and she felt she had sort of a sixth sense because of it. Fifteen people could be in a room, and she could immediately tell you who was good and who was bad."

"I'm the same way," she continues, "if there's a situation, I go with my gut feeling. John [Waters] says I have 'a contempt prior to investigation,' but why investigate? It usually turns out to be exactly what I thought at the very beginning."

Moran graduated from Mount de Sales Academy, an all-girls Catholic school, "at a time when women weren't supposed to have opinions or any bits of creativity," she says. "If you could balance a teacup on your knee, that was great."

Though she received an excellent education and developed a cultured confidence that dovetailed with the manners she learned at home, "it was dullsville," says Moran, who longed to escape. She had read about beatniks and wanted to be one.

She happened to meet Barry Narlines while working as a clerk at the Social Security Administration in the early 1960s. He remembers it well. "Pat stood out, and she was a notch above everyone else," says Narlines, who was a supervisor at the time. "She was sophisticated, had the most amazing sense of

GAY MEN LIBERATED ME FROM MIDDLE AMERICA.

TOP: In Mt. Vernon, 1964; **LEFT TO RIGHT:** Moran in the mid-1970s; during the filming of *Hairspray* in 1987; with John Waters and Divine at the *Hairspray* premiere.



Seeing Red

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humor, and wasn't afraid to speak her mind. We just clicked."

Narlines was gay, lived in Mt. Vernon, and was interested in opera, theater, movies, music, fashion, art, and current events—"everything I loved," recalls Moran, who began hanging out with Narlines at Leon's, a gay bar on the corner of Park Avenue and Tyson Street.

Her mother was appalled she was going downtown, but approved of the friendship with Narlines because Pat felt safe and comfortable around him and his friends. "They introduced me to a whole new world of style and taste," says Moran. "Gay men liberated me from Middle America."

Moran eventually migrated to Martick's, Baltimore's premier bohemian hangout on W. Mulberry Street, where she befriended another tribe of colorful characters and, sometimes, worked as a cocktail waitress. One night, she ran into an aspiring filmmaker from Lutherville hanging out in the alley adjacent to the bar. In 1964, John Waters wasn't old enough to get into Martick's—in fact, he was still in high school—but some of the regulars snuck him drinks. Like Moran, he was a refugee from the county, and they became fast friends. "We had both ventured downtown and found the world we were looking for," Waters says. "Pat may have worked at Social Security by day, but she was a beatnik goddess at night."

They hitchhiked to New York together, discovered the underground films of Andy Warhol and Jonas Mekas, and hung out with similarly spirited misfits like Divine, David Lochary, and Mink Stole, who all contributed mightily to Waters's early career. But no one did more than Moran. "She was so professional and set a really good example," says Stole, before lauding Moran's resourcefulness, determination, and fierce loyalty.

"At first, it was just me and her," says Waters. "Pat did whatever was needed," which meant everything from finding actors and securing locations (Divine's steak-stealing scene in *Pink Flamingos* was shot inside her parents' store) to playing Dr. Coathanger's Secretary (in 1969's *Mondo Trasho*).

Moran also left Social Security for a series of jobs downtown: selling tickets at Center Stage, briefly operating a hot dog stand on Read Street, opening a vintage clothing shop called Divine Trash, and, later, running The Charles Theatre. She exhibited a savvy resourcefulness in those jobs, as well, and Waters recalls the time a candle accidentally set a customer's hair on fire at the shop. "Pat didn't even apologize," says Waters. "She just sold her a hat."

But as Waters's productions grew bigger, Moran focused exclusively on casting and found she had a knack for putting real, authentic-looking characters on screen.

MY WHOLE CAREER HAS BEEN ONE BIG ACCIDENT.

And as his reputation soared with films like *Hairspray* and *Cry-Baby*, her stock went up, too.

She accompanied Waters to film festivals—he calls her "the perfect fake wife"—and remembers walking the red carpet at Cannes, spotting heroes like actress Jean Moreau, and exchanging "Can you believe this?" looks.

At one point, Moran leaned into Waters and quipped, "It's a long way from Martick's, isn't it?"

Besides working with Waters, she worked on films like *Her Alibi* and *Clara's Heart*, and when NBC and Barry Levinson brought the TV series *Homicide* to town in the early-1990s, they tapped Moran for casting the extras. "I'd worked with Barry before, but the network didn't have any relationship with me," says Moran. "At that time, I was just a maniac known for working with a tribe of lunatics."

As the show progressed, Moran earned the network's trust and was given the additional responsibility of casting day players and other speaking roles. By the time *Homicide* wrapped in 1999, she'd won her first Emmy and had a career in show business.

"John Waters showed me how to make movies," says Moran, "and Barry Levinson legitimized me."

ON A WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON in June, Moran's office is packed with aspiring actors. She's auditioning roles for an indie docudrama about British spies during World War II. Moran's husband, Chuck Yeaton—they've been together since 1970 and have two grown children—summons them one-by-one to "the box." Named after the interrogation room in *Homicide*, its walls are lined with memorabilia, signs (including one reading "Moran's Wacko Ward"), and headshots of stars who've worked with her, including Johnny Depp, Ricki Lake, and Whoopi Goldberg.

A procession of actors sits in front of Moran and her assistant, Scott Goergens, who records each audition and reads dialogue as needed. Over the course of the two-hour session, Moran exhibits unflagging energy, giving the actors background information about the plot and offering spirited, no-nonsense direction about how a scene should be played. Her disarming suggestions seem to ease tension and calm actors' nerves.

Veep's Stephanie Laing, who's been in "the box" with Moran, notes how she "takes more of a lead than most casting directors. Her casting sessions are a show in itself, because she's so hands-on trying to bring out the best in an actor."

Moran intently watches each audition on a flat-screen TV, giving feedback on practice takes and offering advice.

"Keep in mind that you're not playing to the back row. The camera picks up everything."

"Try not to punch the last word." "Pump your volume up and don't make it so sinister."

"Never start a scene that big, unless it's one where you're getting murdered."

After the recorded take is complete, she's all business. "Okay, that's all we need," she says in a clear, clipped voice. "Thank you. Bye bye." There's no opening for conversation, as she makes notes on a clipboard in her lap.

Each audition lasts about five minutes.

Between actors, she whispers her impressions to Goergens, observations like "Great look, but I didn't believe a word he said," or "If we go wider [in our search], and I think we should, he gets a call back."

It's that confident, nearly instant, evaluation of talent (her mother would be proud) and ability to match someone with not only the role they'll play, but the space they'll occupy, that's become Moran's calling card. That's why Baltimoreans recognize themselves in *Homicide* and *The Wire*, arguably her two greatest accomplishments.

"It's not that she's merely a good judge of talent, it's that she's an exceptional judge of Baltimore," says David Simon. "There were times when people would walk into auditions with faces, bodies, demeanors, or accents that any other casting agent in America would say, 'How do I put this [peculiar] fella in front of a camera?' And Pat would think, 'Now, this is Baltimore.'"

"Invariably, she would be right. She's not interested in making the world prettier, shapelier, cleaner, or less idiosyncratic than it is. She's interested in replicating the world that we all know."

She understands, as fellow casting director David Rubin will tell you, that when a character with only one line has their moment in the center of a movie screen, 30 feet tall, *they* are the star of the film.

"When I read a script, I see people in those roles, all the roles," she says, during a break. "And when someone walks through that door, I want to give them a job. It makes my life easier."

With that, the break is over.

"Next!" Moran hollers, and another actor makes his way to "the box." **E**

JOHN LEWIS is *Baltimore's* arts and culture editor.

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John Waters Inc., June 2007

Profile of Moran's longtime friend and collaborator.

Charmed Life

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