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IN person



Talking with
Tim Girvin
Founder of Girvin Inc.

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Tim Girvin has become a Hollywood regular. After making a name for himself with hand-drawn lettering, calligraphy and logos, he was recruited by Hollywood directors and producers to come up with title designs for major motion pictures. His work can be seen in print ads and on-screen titles for “Mission: Impossible III” opening in local theaters May 5. Girvin, the founder of Seattle-based design and branding firm Girvin Inc., sat down in his Asian decorated downtown Seattle office for a conversation about working in Hollywood.

ON HOW HE WAS RECRUITED BY HOLLYWOOD: A design magazine had published a whole series of drawings I’d done with calligraphy and brush work. ... Francis Ford Coppola saw that work and said, let’s get that guy to work on “Apocalypse Now.”

ON HOW HE TYPICALLY FINDS WORK: I usually get a call from the studio, who acts as an agent for the director or producer — could be anyone from Tom Cruise to (producer) Doug Wick to Steven Spielberg to whoever may be tied into the project.

ON STAYING AWAY FROM THE HOLLYWOOD SCENE: I have a kind of a roving position as being an outsider. I don’t spend my time living in the Hollywood scene down there. There are people in Los Angeles who all they do, night and day, is motion picture production — theatrical advertising.

ON HOW SECRETIVE THE FILM INDUSTRY IS: Incredibly secretive. Generally speaking, I have to go and read the script on the lot. Most of the work I’ve done — for instance, “The Last Samurai” or “War of the Worlds,” with Cruise — are very

secret, because of the nature of the studio controlling production. There have been problems in the past with others releasing information about the film before it is released. So we have a very select team that works with me and keep the work tightly controlled. Even now we have a couple of projects we’re working on that are strictly confidential.

ON WORKING WITH TOM CRUISE: Tom is incredibly picky about what he wants. When we got involved in “Mission: Impossible III,” a lot of the conceptual work on that was

actually Tom. He came up with the concept of what he was interested in. The studio would say, here are some sketches that Tom did for you to see.

ON "THE MATRIX": I ended up coming into "The Matrix" a year and a half before they began. It was a \$70 million gamble by Warner Brothers on two brothers — the Wachowskis — who were perceived as novices. Their only previous film was "Bound." I got chosen by Joel Silver to come down and help them wrap a visualization around that film.

...The concept plays on conventional typography and typography beneath the surface. Part of the other responsibility we had was to look at creating an alternative alphabet. So there's a scrolling sort of sceno-Anglo font that's part of the digital world — the Matrix world — that you see.

ON HOW MUCH THE HOLLYWOOD WORK PAYS: Film design can be anywhere from \$25,000 for smaller productions to \$75,000 to \$125,000 for bigger productions. "The Matrix" was somewhere in the \$100,000 range. That includes working on meeting with directors and producers, going to the set, taking material and shooting it, beginning to deliver design language, and then illustrating that. My work goes on the posters, packaging, Web site, and the movie itself.

ON MEL GIBSON: He's also very picky. Usually a lot of clarity about the direction, look and style of the film. When we worked on "Braveheart," we dealt with this being a classic epic and powerful story, and how do you interpret that in a representation of him as a warrior figure and this strong, Celtic character.

ON HIS FAVORITE KIND OF DIRECTORS TO WORK WITH: ...the Wachowkis because they were so truly open and interested in what contribution we could make, as opposed to sometimes you are dealing with people who lead incredibly complicated lives, and their attention span is so fractional.

ON WORKING WITH JERRY BRUCKHEIMER: Jerry is a very experienced director and producer and has made a lot of films. I remember working with him in different projects and putting together a range of work that was incredibly detailed and thought through. He just whipped through it incredibly fast.

ON WORKING WITH CLINT EASTWOOD: The person who is incredibly careful and thoughtful about his analysis is Eastwood. Working with him,

he seemed to want to take the time to explain what his point of view is in terms of direction and character. When I worked with him on "Unforgiven," he was calling me from the shoot in British Columbia and saying, this is what I'm looking for, the real spirit of the film is this is the character.

ON WHAT KIND OF WORK HE WANTS TO DO NEXT: I'd be really interested in working on a television series. Another thing I'd really like to do is be more deeply involved with (director) Tim Burton or (producer and director) Quentin Tarantino. I think there is a character about some of the things they've done that honestly could be better.

—As told to HEIDI DIETRICH