

ROMA

Written and Directed by

Alfonso Cuarón

PRODUCTION DESIGN

Eugenio Caballero



HOUSE
 INSURGENTES AV.
 BAJA CALIFORNIA AV.
 NEZA
 HALCONAZO
 HOSPITAL
 HACIENDA
 METROPOLITAN CINEMA
 COLOR PALETTE & TEXTURES

THE DESIGN PROCESS STARTED WITH LONG CONVERSATIONS WITH ALFONSO ABOUT HIS FAMILY, AND HIS MEMORIES OF THE CITY AND ITS TRANSFORMATIONS AND AT THE SAME TIME, WE STARTED AN EXHAUSTIVE PERIOD RESEARCH. I WAS ALSO ABLE TO ADD IN MY OWN MEMORIES, AS MY FAMILY GREW UP IN THE SAME NEIGHBORHOOD, ROMA.

Everything departed from the tiniest details, sometimes certain sounds or aromas. From this point, we began to complete the images we wanted to show. Alfonso decided that instead of relying on the script and talking about specific actions, we would prioritize what we wanted to tell; the family, the contrasts in Mexico, political manipulation and the distinct worlds that coexist in the capital. We designed the sets based on those conversations. The script was shared with me two weeks prior to shooting, and at that time most of the larger sets were already built and dressed.

When we were certain how we wanted the film to look, we began the process of scouting for locations, and then designing and constructing those spaces.

Because many of the scenes come directly from Alfonso's memories, we wanted to shoot in the locations where the events took place as much as possible. This was not possible in all cases, but we managed to do so for several locations. One was the exterior of the family house. We recreated the original façade in another house and covered up nearby façades that were not accurate to the time period. Another example is the hospital, which

we recreated in an area that was abandoned after the 1985 earthquake. For the site of the student massacre, we used the same street, and we recovered a lot of the façades that had been changed in the passing years. We also were able to shoot some of the hacienda scene at the original location.

We found that Mexico City has changed a lot over the last 50 years, so there were many locations (like the big Insurgentes Avenue and Baja California Avenue) that we decided to build from scratch.

This was a very intimate process in the beginning. Later it grew in scale, as we had to manage a vast team for construction, set decoration, locations, picture cars, graphics and props.

An interesting aspect for me was how we carried out the historical research differently from in my previous films. In addition to the references that we always find in books or online, we dug into family photos. You find many details that don't make their way into published photographs, and that inspired us to add small, quotidian details to the house set decoration.



HOUSE

WE STARTED WITH THE DETAILS. WE HAD LONG CONVERSATIONS WITH ALFONSO ABOUT WHAT HIS HOUSE WAS LIKE. WE TALKED ABOUT WHAT WAS ON THE TABLE AT DINNER TIME, OR WHAT GAMES THEY PLAYED IN THE AFTERNOON. WE HAD SOME PHOTOS OF THE ORIGINAL HOUSE PATIO WITH ITS CHECKERED TILES, AND A FEW PHOTOS WITH DETAILS OF THE INTERIOR. THE REST CAME FROM ALFONSO'S VERBAL DESCRIPTIONS.

IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO SHOOT IN THE ORIGINAL HOUSE, BECAUSE IT HAS CHANGED A LOT OVER THE YEARS. WE ENDED UP USING THREE DIFFERENT LOCATIONS TO RECREATE THE WHOLE FAMILY HOUSE. AT ONE SITE, WE SHOT THE PATIO AND THE INTERIORS. AT THE SECOND, WE SHOT THE HOUSE'S EXTERIOR AND TEPEJI STREET. THE THIRD SITE WAS FOR THE ROOFTOP. AT ALL THESE LOCATIONS WE HAD TO DO MAJOR CHANGES.

Because we were shooting with non-professional actors, we wanted to avoid working in a studio. We needed the house to be very authentic. We wanted brick walls covered with plaster. We even did custom-made reproductions of the original tiles with an old artisan who uses techniques from 80 years ago. After an extensive scouting for the patio and interiors, we found a house that has a similar structure and was slated for demolition. That allowed us to modify a significant portion of the house.

We reinforced the structure and removed walls. We changed the doors, window frames, built the kitchen and the service buildings, and replaced all the flooring, handrails, ironwork and finishes on the walls.

We knew that we would spend long periods of time shooting in the house, so we implemented some techniques to help with shooting. These modifications

created optimal conditions for placing the camera and lighting the scenes. This also allowed Alfonso to have long continuous takes. For that purpose, we created some moveable walls. For example, the main walls of the second floor moved up and down like a guillotine, passing through a slot that we opened in the roof. Notions of lighting and practical light sources were also incorporated into the design. Much of the furniture came from the different houses of the Cuarón family.

We made faithful recreations of the furniture that doesn't exist anymore and restored other pieces. The house was ready and decorated for almost a year before we began shooting. That meant we had the difficult task to maintaining the house in that state for the first day of the shoot.

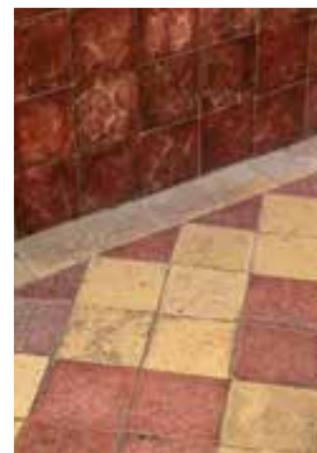


FILM STILL

GARAGE - ENTRANCE VIEW /



LOCATION / MITLA



HISTORICAL REFERENCES / HOUSE MEMORIES

PROCESS /

FILM STILL



MAID'S QUARTER /

PATIO /



LOCATION /



1ST. FLOOR HOUSE /



CONCEPT ART /

1ST. FLOOR HOUSE



FILM STILL

ENTRANCE /



LOCATION /



FILM STILL

DINING ROOM /



LOCATION /



FILM STILL

STAIRS /



LOCATION /



FILM STILL

LIVING ROOM /



LOCATION /



FILM STILL

KITCHEN /



CONCEPT ART /



STILL /



FILM STILL

TV ROOM /



LOCATION /

2ND. FLOOR HOUSE



PROCESS /



STILL / YOUNGER KID'S ROOM



STILL / OLDER KID'S ROOM



STILL / PARENT'S ROOM



STILL / GRANDMA'S ROOM



PROCESS /



FILM STILL

SKYLIGHT /



LAUNDRY AREA /



ROOFTOP



LOCATION /



PROCESS /



FACADE /



LOCATION /



PROCESS /

FACADE

INSURGENTES AV.

AFTER THOROUGH RESEARCH OF ARCHIVAL IMAGES OF INSURGENTES AVENUE NEAR CINE LAS AMÉRICAS AND VISITING THE LOCATION, WE DETERMINED THAT IT WOULD NOT BE VIABLE TO SHOOT THERE IN ITS CURRENT STATE.

INSURGENTES AVENUE REPRESENTED THE MODERN CITY IN THE EARLY 1970S, BURSTING WITH LIFE. WE HAD A VISUAL REFERENCE OF WHAT IT WAS LIKE AND ALFONSO SHARED MEMORIES OF THE SHOPS. THE REAL LOCATION HAS CHANGED A LOT, SO WE DECIDED IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO SHOOT THERE. WE LOOKED FOR ANOTHER AVENUE THAT WE COULD MODIFY TO LOOK LIKE IT, BUT WE DIDN'T FIND ANYTHING THAT GAVE US THE RIGHT BASE TO METICULOUSLY TRANSFORM AS WE HAD IMAGINED. WE DECIDED TO BUILD IT FROM SCRATCH.

We looked for a place where we could fit our 200 meters long set (2 entire blocks with cross streets). Locations like the parking lot of the Aztec Stadium were rejected because our set didn't fit. We found an abandoned lot and built everything there.

We had to renew the asphalt, build the sidewalks, two entire city blocks of stores (all fully decorated) facades, street lights, trees, drains, benches, rails for the tramway and urban furniture from the time period. We made billboards and light-up signs. The set was more than 200 meters wide by 5 meters tall. We also had more than 200 vehicles that we had carefully picked to have a rich variety of styles and colors. One of the highlights of the set was the entrance to the "Cine Las Américas," the state-of-the-art movie theatre of the time period.

We had a whole team of scenic painters and sculptors who did the aging of the buildings and the cracks in the sidewalks. On top of that, the art department designed eight full blocks, with all the buildings, architectural elements, windows, balconies and billboards. Alongside a full package of photographic images, we gave precise information to the CGI team of what we wanted the set to look like once it was completed.





FILM STILL

INSURGENTES AV. /



HISTORICAL REFERENCES / CINE LAS AMERICAS



HISTORICAL REFERENCES / BILLBOARDS & STREETS





CONCEPT ART /



SKETCHUP DESIGN /



LOCATION /



LOCATION /



PROCESS /



PROCESS /



STILL /



STILL /



STILL /



STILL /

WE TOOK ON THE TASK OF ACCURATELY RECREATING THE DESIGNS IMPLEMENTED IN THE MANY STORES ON SET. WE CREATED ALL THE GRAPHIC ELEMENTS THAT ARE SEEN ON SCREEN, MAINTAINING ABSOLUTE FIDELITY TO THE HISTORICAL PERIOD THROUGH POSTERS, SIGNAGE, URBAN ELEMENTS, POSTERS, BILLBOARDS AND ILLUMINATED ADVERTISEMENTS FOR BUSINESSES.

FACADES & COMMERCIAL BUSINESS



FACADE /



STILL /



PROCESS /



BAJA CALIFORNIA AV.

BAJA CALIFORNIA AVENUE REPRESENTS THE QUOTIDIAN LIFE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS OF THE TIME PERIOD. THIS WAS NOT A COMMERCIAL STREET LIKE INSURGENTES.

While we were researching, we noticed that both Insurgentes and Baja California had the same layout, the same number of lanes and more or less the same width. So, our plan was to modify our long "back lot" set. We had to modify the facades since both avenues had different uses and feelings. We needed Baja California to reflect a more residential feeling. This difference was also reflected in the selection of car styles, props, costume designs and extras' actions.





FILM STILL

BAJA CALIFORNIA AV. /



CONCEPT ART /



HISTORICAL REFERENCES /







STILL /



STILL /



STILL /



STILL /

VEHICLES WERE AN IMPORTANT DRESS ELEMENT FOR US. PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION, TRAMS, GARBAGE AND DELIVERY TRUCKS AND CARS HELP US COMPLETE THE PERIOD FEELING. THEY ALSO ADD REALISM TO THE RECREATION.

WE PICKED THE STYLE AND COLOR OF EVERY CAR SO THAT IT WOULD CONTRAST IN BLACK AND WHITE, BUT ALSO AS A REFLECTION OF THE DIFFERENT SOCIAL CLASSES THAT CO-EXIST IN MEXICO CITY. WE HAD VEHICLES FROM THREE DECADES AGO, AS IT WAS BACK IN THE DAY. IN MEXICO THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A PROP HOUSE OF A FILM VEHICLE LOT, SO THINGS LIKE THE DELIVERY TRUCKS OF THE POLICE ANTI-RIOT VEHICLES HAD TO BE MODIFIED AND CUSTOM-CREATED BASED ON THE HISTORICAL REFERENCES.



HISTORICAL REFERENCES /



STILL /

VEHICLES



NEZA

IN CONTRAST WITH INSURGENTES AND BAJA CALIFORNIA, WE FACED THE CHALLENGE OF SHOWING THE ENVIRONMENT OF ONE OF THE AREA'S POOREST NEIGHBORHOODS, AN IRREGULAR SETTLEMENT IN THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY.

We wanted to show the complexity of Mexico City by portraying the different worlds that collide and coexist in it. One of these worlds are the slums that surrounded the city back then. Ciudad Nezahualcoyotl is now a developed part of the city, but in the 1970s it was an underdeveloped area with no services. Huge numbers of people from the rural regions of Mexico settled there. Politicians always took advantage of these people. That's why we created a political rally in the background of the scene and painted the walls with propaganda.

We found a big empty lot in the middle of brick houses in which we build the chaos and life that we saw in the research.

We made canals of sewage water, dug puddles and constructed façades and bridges. We also included street vendors, an improvised funeral home and hundreds of wooden poles with electrical cables. We filled the frame with public transportation, food and market stands. A human cannon ball crosses the background as the spectator is submerged in the suburban world of Mexico City.



FILM STILL

NEZA /



LOCATION /



HISTORICAL REFERENCES /



HISTORICAL REFERENCES /



PROCESS /



PROCESS /



FILM STILL

HUMAN CANNONBALL /



PROCESS /



FILM STILL

SLUM STREETS /



PROCESS /

HALCONAZO

THE SO CALLED "HALCONAZO" WAS A VIOLENT MASSACRE AGAINST STUDENTS DURING A PROTEST IN 1971 AT THE HANDS OF PARAMILITARY GROUPS CALLED "LOS HALCONES".

We recreated this event in the same place where it occurred. It was a faithful copy of what we saw in the reference photographs. We recreated the cars, police units, façades and advertisements as well as uniforms, weapons and all the props for police officers and demonstrators. The street had changed a lot, so we had to eliminate elements that were not period accurate.

We designed the furniture store in a building that had windows looking out onto the street where the massacre took place. It was a gym that we emptied out and transformed into a furniture store from that period. We covered the walls with wooden panels and designed and painted signs in the windows in order to show the action through them.





FILM STILL

HALCONAZO MEXICO-TACUBA /



LOCATION /



HISTORICAL REFERENCES /



HISTORICAL REFERENCES /



PROCESS /



STILL /



FILM STILL

FURNITURE STORE /



LOCATION /



FILM STILL

LATERAL WINDOW /



CONCEPT ART /



HOSPITAL

THE ACTION TAKES PLACE IN A PUBLIC HEALTH HOSPITAL COMPLEX, CENTRO MÉDICO, IT WAS ALWAYS FULL OF PEOPLE AND DOCTORS TRYING TO PROVIDE THE BEST ATTENTION POSSIBLE UNDER DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES. THEY WERE MODERN HOSPITALS WITH FUNCTIONAL ARCHITECTURE CONCEIVED IN THE 1950S WITH OPEN SPACES AND SPECIFIC VISUAL ELEMENTS.

We wanted to shoot in the original location, but almost the whole hospital complex was demolished after the 1985 earthquake. Hidden in the middle of the complex, flanked by rebuilt buildings, we found a warehouse that was still standing. It had the structure of the old hospital towers but was in ruins after being abandoned and used as a dump for paper files for 30 years.

Many of the tiles and floor materials were destroyed. We had to recover materials from four floors. We then recycled and cleaned them to reinstall and complete the floor where we shot both scenes. We demolished some walls to have an open view of the waiting hall, stairs and corridors. We also created the nursery and the operating room from scratch. The set decoration team looked at many hospitals to find period accurate dressing.



HALL /



LOCATION /



HISTORICAL REFERENCES /



CONCEPT ART /



FILM STILL

NURSERY /



PROCESS /



HISTORICAL REFERENCES /



CONCEPT ART /



FILM STILL

OPERATING ROOM /



STILL /



HISTORICAL REFERENCES /



PROCESS /



FILM STILL

FACADE /



LOCATION /



HISTORICAL REFERENCES /



CONCEPT ART /

HACIENDA

FOR THE HACIENDA, WE USED SEVERAL LOCATIONS. THE EXTERIOR, HALLWAYS, THE ROOM WITH THE DOGS' HEADS AND THE INTERIOR WHERE THE NEW YEAR'S PARTY TAKES PLACE WERE ALL SHOT ON A HACIENDA ONE HOUR OUTSIDE MEXICO CITY. ALFONSO USED TO GO TO THIS HACIENDA AS A CHILD.

THE SERVICE AREA, STAIRS AND KITCHEN WERE FILMED AT ANOTHER LOCATION, WHERE WE CREATED THE ATMOSPHERE FOR THE WORKING-CLASS PARTY.

The main idea was to highlight the social contrasts between the party of the rich families and the party of those who work at the hacienda. For that we used noble furniture in the chimney room and decorated it with taxidermy. You can find this style in some of Mexico's haciendas because hunting is symbolic of high social class. The party-goers drink imported liquors in fine glassware and have a fake silver plastic tree, which was very hip at that time.

The area for the service workers is entirely different. They drink mezcal and pulque out of clay pots. Yet both parties are celebrating New Year's Eve.

The forest clearing and the fire was filmed at a third location. At that location we modified the levels of the terrain and designed ponds according to the needs of the shot. The exterior fields were shot in a fourth location after a rigorous selection process to find an idyllic location. We created furrows, mountains and haystacks to decorate the middle zone of the frame and then we digitally inserted the Iztaccíhuatl volcano.



FILM STILL

ASTRONAUTE /



LOCATION /



FILM STILL

SHOOTING PRACTICE /



LOCATION /



PROCESS /



PROCESS /



FILM STILL

STAFF PARTY /



LOCATION /



FILM STILL

BALCONY /



LOCATION /



PROCESS /



CONCEPT ART /

METROPOLITAN CINEMA

CINE METROPOLITAN WAS THE CINEMA FOR THE WORKING CLASS. JUST LIKE THE HISTORIC CENTER, IT WAS FULL OF THE BUSTLE AND LIFE OF THE CHANGING CITY. THIS IS WHERE WORKING CLASS PEOPLE SPENT THEIR WEEKLY DAY OFF. GOING TO THE CINEMA ON SUNDAY WAS A COMMON RITUAL WHERE THERE WAS A LOT OF LIFE AROUND THE THEATER.

The Metropolitan Cinema is now a theatre for special events and the cinematic DNA is long lost in the past decades. The set was the cinema main entrance, the interior of the hall and the streets.

We changed the marquee and placed informal stands with merchandise, that was custom-made with the fashionable films of that period. We also reproduced the posters of the films that were playing on those exact dates.

The neighboring businesses were recreated with products and publicity of the era. In the interior, we changed 200 seats and replaced the lighting and curtains.





FILM STILL

FACADE /



LOCATION /



HISTORICAL REFERENCES /



CONCEPT ART /

COLOR PALETTE & TEXTURES

WE LOOKED FOR A SPECIFIC BLACK AND WHITE. WE WANTED TO CONTROL THE CONTRAST BETWEEN GRAYS. THE IDEA WAS NOT TO APPEAL TO A NOSTALGIC LOOK WITH HIGH CONTRAST, INSTEAD WE WANTED A CONTEMPORARY BLACK AND WHITE. TO CREATE THIS, WE WANTED TO PLAY WITH THE DIFFERENT COLORS AND ITS TRANSLATION TO THE GRAY SCALE.

We did a lot of testing of the proposed pallet, and how the colors would turn out once we applied our specific black and white filter.

With the floor tiles of the vestibule of the house, for example, even if the original ones in the Cuarón family were a vivid yellow, we decided to turn it into a green to get the contrast that we wanted with the furniture and set dressing elements.

We also noticed that there were different colors that would translate to the same shade of gray we wanted. We then had to decide which exact colors we wanted to use for painting the sets, and for the costume design. Based on the fact that color affects the perception of a space, we made the decision to select colors that would help the actors feel what they were living. For example, in the house, instead of a blue or a green wall, we decided to use a dull beige that would provoke certain resonance in what the family lived and felt during that year.



ROMA