

With classic films like Michael Powell's technicolour fantasy, *The Thief of Baghdad*, or Sam Peckinpah's descent into savagery, *Straw Dogs*, Cornwall has burned itself onto our cinematic retina. Sadly, the far west peninsula's relationship with the big screen has not always extended to the quality of its Venues. Tired buildings; sticky carpets. Loos reminiscent of *Trainspotting*. But in Newlyn, a port more associated with haddock than Hitchcock, the unexpected has happened; a derelict fish warehouse has been transformed into a world class, state-of-the-art, luxury cinema.

Working alongside renowned cinema architect Stefanie Fischer, the Newlyn Filmhouse has drawn inspiration from its maritime setting. Entrance into the building is up a sweeping, steel-grid, illuminated gangway; a nod to the trawlers in the harbour. On the foyer wall, retained fishing industry relics: antique cold storage temperature gauges. In an understairs alcove, a set of Vintage Berkel weighing scales, once brimming with freshly caught pilchards, are now adorned with chrysanthemums.

The box office is a bland point-of-sale in most cinemas, but not at the Newlyn Filmhouse, where it has been given a vivid refresh with decorative CinemaScope movie lobby cards from the 1950s; and not a Slush Puppy machine or *Iron Man* cardboard cut-out in sight. Thoughtful details that serve a sumptuous two-screen environment to watch the best in World, American independent and critically acclaimed mainstream films, from the comfort of a velour-covered, premium

armchair, or cocoon two-seater, if you and your date prefer. Intelligent auditorium seat pitch means there are no views of the back of someone's head, either.

People will always want to be taken into dark rooms and told stories, but Newlyn Filmhouse co-owner Alastair Till explains: "For us, the inspiration wasn't just about putting on great films, but creating as full an experience as possible for our customers." At the top of the foyer steps, the Eathouse Cafe is the perfect antidote to the multiplex approach of throwing people out onto the streets while the credits are still rolling: "Our passion for cinema always extended to chatting with mates before or after the film," continues Alastair. "So we want people to take their time and enjoy themselves. Meet for a drink, have some food, a slice of cake, a glass of wine, and maybe not see a film." There are a few house rules: "We're not selling popcorn, nuts or crisps. The sound of munching in the screens is an obvious *bête noire* for most movie lovers." But can you take in a glass of wine? "Oh yes, we actively encourage that."

From lightbulb moment to grand opening, the Newlyn Filmhouse was a five-year project mainly taken up with trying to find the right venue. Nearly sites included a disused chapel in Long Rock, but when the current building came up, its size and scale felt like the perfect match. "Newlyn wasn't an obvious choice but that appealed to us because it's still technically a working village and not too second-homey, and a place where we could attract people from further west like St Just and St Buryan. The reaction so far from local people



has been extremely warm but also incredulous that it's happened here!"

During construction, the old building feel was preserved as much as possible; the tongue and groove timber walling; the 100-year-old ceiling joists that were still in impeccable condition. The old front door of the fish processing plant was moved to the ticket office. At Europe's top cinema trade show, CineEurope in Barcelona, seats were chosen for lumbar comfort and functional design. The armchair finally chosen was made by the same Paris-based manufacturer, Quinette, who refitted the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. In Screen One, its 80 seats are upholstered in plush-red pico fabric. In Screen Two, its 55 seats are covered in a contrasting 'hound's tooth' print. In both auditoriums, films are relayed via razor-sharp Barco DP2k8s digital projectors with punchy 7.1 Dolby Atmos sound systems.

The all-round quality and attention to detail invites comparisons to beautiful cinemas like the Curzon Mayfair or the bygone Minema in Knightsbridge, but this is by no means a London-transported operation. With the exception of Future Projections, who supplied and fitted the cinema equipment, everyone who worked on the project was local: "Our builder, Shaun Stevenson from Newlyn and his team, were integral to the success of the build," continues Alastair. "His gung-ho enthusiasm carried us through." The cinema's grand entrance ramp and handmade brass guide rails were made by Dave Tidwell Metalworks in Penzance. All fresh produce in the café comes from within a half hour radius. Local suppliers include: Newlyn Fish Company, Real Cornish Crab Company, Vicky's Bread, Bosavern Community Farm, McFaddens Butchers, Moomaid Ice Creams and Mounts Bay Dairy. An evolving selection of wines and spirits are sourced by wholesalers Scarlet Wines in Lelant.

The Newlyn Filmhouse's incongruous setting is a triumph of innovation over expectation. Across the street from the frothing Coombe River, the building cuts into a steep granite bank, whose exterior dimensions hardly seem capable of housing a tardis-like, two-screen cinema and spacious café, as well as stylish restrooms that conjure the Delbert Grady, ghostly butler scene from *The Shining*. Open to its natural environment, windows to the rear look out within touching distance to the wild flora growing on the blue elvin rock face.

Newlyn may seem an unlikely location for a filmhouse, but neighbouring jousting-themed restaurant The Meadowy was a cinema formerly known as The Gaiety. Built in 1905 during the silent era, its owner was the projectionist and his wife the piano player. It eventually closed in the late 1960s but one of Newlyn Filmhouse's early tag lines was: "Bringing the cinema back to Newlyn." There are a lot of people in Cornwall



who love movies but for some reason or other had drifted away from the cinema. "A local man came in and said he hadn't been to the cinema in 22 years. He's been here every other day. That's the best thing that's happened," says Alastair contentedly, "we got him back."

For its growing number of regulars, annual membership is £30, which includes two free tickets plus £1 off every subsequent ticket purchase and further discounts at the bar. With Newlyn Art Gallery within walking distance and The Exchange five minutes away in Penzance, people are starting to wake up to the cultural credentials of this often over-looked pocket of Cornwall. As well as the best in mainstream and alternative cinema, the Newlyn Filmhouse will be live streaming theatre, opera and ballet 'event performances'. Festival and film nights are also planned, including new Cornish films like *Bronco's House*, *Tin* and *Brown Willy*.

"Local schools are approaching us about special screenings" adds Alastair enthusiastically, "which indicates to me that we are a facility that can have another sort of purpose. We want people to come and see great films but we also want people to come in and just network; mothers meeting up for a coffee, a place to come and use your laptop. Cinemas should be meeting points at the heart of a community."

Sean Vaardal, *Manor Southwest Magazine*

