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Dreamworks via Italy

by GANZO on Jul 17, 2011 • 9:08 pm

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Italians at Dreamworks

An interview with: Alessandro Carloni (Head of Story and Head of Animation), Alessandro Ceglia (Layout Artist), Michele De Falco (Layout Artist), Valentina Ercolani (Rigging), Davide La Sala (Rigging), Alessandro Pepe (Visual Effects Artist), Marco Regina (Character Animator), Raffaello Vecchioni (Visual Development Modeler).



Kung Fu Panda. Credit: DreamWorks ©.

When I see its campus of manicured gardens and hotel-style bathrooms, then learn of its all-inclusive lunches, movie theater and gym, I begin to understand why Dreamworks is consistently rated one of the best companies to work for. Although I'd like to explore the campus, waiting for me at a table on the shady edge of the outdoor lunch area is the reason why I'm here: a group of eight creative Dreamworks talents, all Italians.

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An interview with a group this large can be awkward, but it's helped along by the fact that I quickly establish two basic ideas everyone agrees on:

1. Being Italian is not an automatic advantage or disadvantage when looking to be hired in this industry. However, the unique international perspective and knowledge gained from moving from a smaller market "10 years behind" to a hotspot of big-budget animation is. In fact, almost everyone has come to Dreamworks after passing through other foreign countries like England, Spain, France and Australia.
2. American life would be a lot more fun with an aperitivo!

How did you all meet each other?

Alessandro Carloni: it's a small enough business that we know when one of us gets hired. I've actually been on some reviews for hiring and I check out the candidate and go: Oh, I know that guy!

Do you all hang out together?

Davide La Sala: I think Italians tend to group together maybe because we miss our country a little bit...

What do you miss the most?

Marco Regina: Pizza and cheese – mozzarella...

Alessandro Pepe: But that's because you're from Matera in the south!

Alessandro Carloni: I think the huge problem is that in the states you have to work at having a social life. I'm from a pretty small town ... when you want to see friends you just go to the piazza and that's it, but here you have to plan and call, and check the map to find out where the restaurant is. If you don't work at it in a few years you will find yourself completely alone. It's depressing. The idea of a social life being a job, that's very heavy...

Valentina: That's what I miss...the social life.

What habit or thing did you bring with you from Italy that you cannot live without?

Alessandro Carloni: For me it's the aperitivo.

Everyone: Aperitivo!

Alessandro Carloni: ...the idea of drinking and eating and socializing before dinner and after work, it's a perfect little window that doesn't exist here.

Raffaello Vecchioni: Then the idea of having dinner at a decent time like eight.

Alessandro Carloni: When it's dark!

Have you guys brought something Italian to the departments you work in?

Alessandro Ceglia: I used to bring my electric Bialetti moka because they have horrible coffee everywhere ... unfortunately it's a six cup version so you have to find people to distribute it to.

As the conversation continues it begins to feel a little bit like an alcohol-free version of the aperitivo everyone misses. People come and go and shout to their friends across the lunch area. I'm not surprised to discover that the group, most of who live in the same area, is trying to start their own tradition of the Italian aperitivo in Los Feliz.

Just as in any good conversation the comments shorten and answers begin to overlap, so that I can no longer follow who is saying what. Everyone seems to pretty much agree on the importance of eating and drinking Italian-style, that is until we get to the bread...

Italian wine or Californian wine?

Everyone: Both.

At a restaurant water with ice or without ice?

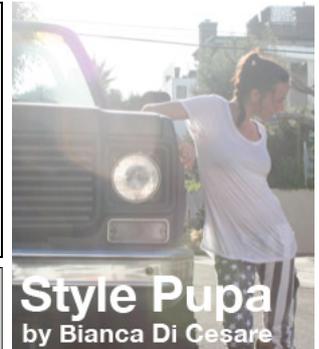
Everyone: Without.

If there's no bread on the table at a restaurant do you ask for it?

- Yes.
- Yes.
- Not all the time, but most of the time.
- I don't.
- I NEED bread
- I NEVER eat bread
- I could live without bread.

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In the end it seems that not all of the Dreamworks Italians agree on the requirements for a good meal, but they definitely agree that the best way to settle the argument would be to hit up a bar after work for a drink, maybe grab some snacks, and discuss their differences over an aperitivo (bread optional of course).

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