

CULTURE, *et cetera*

# L.A. area's porn factories keep churning out the smut

## VCR market's obscene profits fuel industry

By John Horn  
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**A**LOS ANGELES adult films have grown into a \$3-billion-a-year business, and it's not hard to find the boom if you know where to look — and listen. On any given day, hundreds of Southern Californians — from performers to shipping clerks to carpenters — punch the clock in a burgeoning world whose terrain is sex and axis is profit. More than 2,400 new titles are produced annually, turning parts of Southern California into full-tilt palaces of porn production.

Paul Little has transformed his leased Rubio Highlands mansion into one such venue. Set against the San Gabriel mountains above Pasadena in postcard-perfect suburbia, Mr. Little's showcase house would blend in beautifully with the orderly neighborhood — if it weren't for the unmistakable sounds of sex drifting down from the estate for everyone on the block to hear.

"We need a little bit more sound — louder!" orders the director of the adult film "Total Abandon," who calls himself Phil M. Noir.

Actors performing an explicit sex scene near an outdoor whirlpool tub readily comply, and their theatrical wails ratchet up a few more decibels.

Police, Mr. Little says, have visited the premises and deemed it in compliance with local ordinances. To keep it that way, posted house rules warn the steady stream of adult film performers: "If nude, remain away from front windows and balconies."



Theaters like this one on Los Angeles' Sunset Boulevard are disappearing as porn consumers get their fix via VCR in the privacy of their own home.

When videocassette recorders brought adult movies out of sleazy theaters and into the privacy of the sleazy bedroom in the 1980s, profits skyrocketed.

With annual sales and rentals climbing steadily every year, filmed and videotaped pornography has become one of Hollywood's fastest-growing exports.

From veteran actor-director Ron Jeremy ("Cheerleader Nurses," "The Maddams Family") to actress-stripper Tori Welles ("Where the Boys Aren't"), porn stars are recognized by fans wherever they go, yet the performers still chase dreams of fame in mainstream Hollywood.

"It's 24 hours of recess where the bell never goes off," says William Margold, a veteran porn producer and actor. "We sell our soul to be immortal — and we thrive on it."

Adult Video News says more than 2,400 new adult movies and compilations were released in 1993. Few people admit renting

them, but adult videos claim about 11 percent of all videotape rentals, AVN says, and the mail-order business is thriving.

Adult film companies are among the busiest developers of high-tech interactive programs, including CD-ROM games and pay-per-view adult cable channels.

Although filmmakers and performers almost always work under often-preposterous pseudonyms (Lynden Johnson, Leatha Weapons) and live in frequent fear of criminal obscenity prosecution, their business is quietly moving inside the law.

There's talk these days of health plans and retirement accounts. The industry has founded and funds a legal defense fund. One adult purveyor has resurrected the old-fashioned studio star system.

Aggressive, college-educated entrepreneurs have replaced organized crime figures, and the industry's top players earn six-figure salaries and drive Ferraris.



Marilyn Chambers starred in Ivory Snow ads before she became one of the biggest names in porn as an adult. Now 42, she says she worries about her 3-year-old daughter learning of her screen exploits.

You'll rarely see a condom on an adult movie set, but frequent, mandated AIDS tests are meant to prevent routinely unsafe sex practices from decimating the industry.

It's not without constant legal worries, though. Traci Lords and Alexandria Quinn are two of the best-known names in the adult film business. Each appeared in more than 100 hard-core sex films in the 1980s before they turned 18. The two women used faked documents to fool producers about their ages, and when their deception was discovered, thousands of tapes were destroyed or edited to delete their appearances.

The federal government has not singled out adult pornographic films for consistent prosecution, but "kiddie porn" violations — using minors in explicit sexual material — is pursued relentlessly.

Adult filmmakers have adopted detailed release forms and identification checks, where two photo identifications are required from all actors and actresses. "All doc-

uments must be current, and must be presented to the producer to be photocopied for our permanent records," reads the policy statement for the adult film company Filmwest Productions.

The U.S. Supreme Court is expected to rule soon on redefining the child pornography statute, which makes it a crime for anyone to "knowingly" transport or ship such merchandise. An appeals court in 1992 overturned the conviction of the owner of an adult video store who sold Lords tapes to an undercover policeman.

Attorney Jeffrey Douglas, who works for the industry's Free

Speech Coalition, says the problem with enforcing laws against obscenity is that its definition can vary from community to community. Filmmakers "know what they absolutely can't do" — kiddie porn and bestiality — but they have no idea what might be ruled obscene, Mr. Douglas says.

Both manufacturers and distributors can be targeted for obscenity and some companies face federal fines and forfeitures exceeding their own net worth.

"You're allowed to personally own obscene material, but you can't buy it," Mr. Douglas says.