



Big Screen Classics

Jaws

Jaws

Directed by: Steven Spielberg
©/Production Company: Universal Pictures
Production Company: Zanuck/Brown Company
Produced by: Richard D. Zanuck, David Brown
Production Executive: William S. Gilmore Jr
Unit Production Manager: Jim Fargo
1st Assistant Director: Tom Joyner
2nd Assistant Director: Barbara Bass
Script Supervisor: Charlesie Bryant
Location Casting: Shari Rhodes
Screenplay by: Peter Benchley, Carl Gottlieb
Based upon the novel by: Peter Benchley
Director of Photography: Bill Butler
Live Shark Footage Filmed by: Ron Taylor,
Valerie Taylor
Underwater Photography: Rexford Metz
Camera Operator: Michael Chapman
Special Effects: Robert A. Mattey
Film Editor: Verna Fields
Production Designer: Joseph Alves Jr
Set Decorations: John M. Dwyer
Cosmetics by: Cinematique
Titles and Optical Effects: Universal Title
Music by: John Williams
Sound: John R. Carter, Robert Hoyt
Technical Adviser: Manfred Zendar
uncredited
Production Assistants: Barbara Nevin,
Richard Fields
Casting Assistant: Janice Hull
Screenplay Contribution: Howard Sackler,
John Milius, Robert Shaw
Camera Assistant: James A. Contner
Stills: Louis Goldman
Artificial Shark Operator: Stan Mahoney
Assistant Editor: Jeff Gourson
Quint's Boat Design: Peter Eldridge
Costumes: Irvin W. Rose
Make-up: Del Armstrong
Sound Editor: Jim Troutman
Stunt Co-ordinator: Ted Grossman
Stuntman: Richard Warlock
Stunt Double for Richard Dreyfuss: Carl S. Rizzo
Shark Experts: Peter Gimbel, Charlie Blair
Cast:
Roy Scheider (*Chief Martin Brody*)
Robert Shaw (*Captain Quint*)
Richard Dreyfuss (*Matt Hooper*)
Lorraine Gary (*Ellen Brody*)
Murray Hamilton (*Mayor Larry Vaughn*)
Carl Gottlieb (*Ben Meadows, the editor*)
Jeffrey C. Kramer (*Lenny Hendricks*)
Susan Backlinie
(*Christine Watkins, 'Chrissie', first victim*)
Jonathan Filley (*Tom Cassidy*)
Ted Grossman (*estuary victim*)
Chris Rebello (*Michael Brody*)
Jay Mello (*Sean Brody*)
Lee Fierro (*Mrs Kintner*)
Jeffrey Voorhees (*Alex Kintner*)
Craig Kingsbury (*Ben Gardner*)
Dr Robert Nevin (*medical examiner*)
Peter Benchley (*TV interviewer*)
uncredited
Ed Chalmers, Bob Chalmers
(*fishermen attacked by shark*)
Al Wilde (*Keisel*)
Hershel West (*Quint's mate*)
Dwight Francis (*old man being trampled at beach*)
Frank Murray (*kiosk owner*)
Woodrow Wilson Sayre, John Alley, Stan Hart,

Steven Soderbergh on 'Jaws'

What I love about watching *Jaws* now is that for all the technology that exists, which didn't exist 50 years ago, there's nothing new that's been invented that makes moving that pneumatic shark on a sled any easier. It's still as hard today as it was then. It's all 'in camera', and to this day nobody has been able to really duplicate what was accomplished, even in the sequels.

The laws of nature and physics haven't changed, and to submerge a mechanical shark in the ocean and try to get it to move, you would face the same problems today as you did then, which is why nobody is doing it. You watch any of the many making-of documentaries, and Spielberg is the first to say it was something only a stupid young man would think to do, and so there's that part of it.

To me, the narrative of his navigation of that project [is fascinating], especially at the point around what was supposed to be 60 per cent of the way through shooting, when they realised there was an absolute possibility that what was required to be put on screen was impossible, literally impossible. They couldn't get this thing to work. There was at least a month, probably more like six weeks, where everybody had to take on this idea that they may have set this whole thing up on an impossible premise, and he just kept going.

I have all the daily production reports and the script supervisor's notes, and it is excruciating to read what he was going through during this period, before it became clear that they were going to get it to work enough to get some of what he wanted – not all of it, but most of it. The fortitude and the confidence to stay calm and just keep going is inspiring, and I think also instructional. Never panic, never give up.

You also have to remember, he's not Steven Spielberg yet. Yeah, *The Sugarland Express* [1974] has come out – a critical success, not a commercial success – but now he's in the middle of this absolute nightmare production that is one of the main talking points in Hollywood, how out of control this movie is. Universal had never been in a situation with a movie that had gone quadruple its budget and at least triple its schedule. Reading these notes, which extend through the shooting and post-production in California, after they left Martha's Vineyard [the Massachusetts island where most of the film was shot], his uncanny ability to understand what the movie needed and to just constantly be adjusting it, improving it, making it better, is really fascinating. He understood it at such a deep level, just on a pure movie storytelling level. For some reason, he just really knew what this movie needed to be.

If you're like me, the double helix of how to make a movie are all embedded in that film – not just in its production, but in the film itself. It's got everything in it: it's got short shots, it's got long shots, it's got humour, it's got drama, it's got action. It's kind of got all the food groups. If you were going to pick one thing to study, which I did at that point, it turned out to be the right thing for me to study. And I'm still studying it, I'm still inside of it, I'm still learning about it. I have so many questions that only Spielberg can answer because [the film's editor] Verna Fields is no longer with us. I've identified certain editorial changes that I'm dying to know whose idea it was, you know, to move this thing over

John Painter, Bill O'Gorman, Donald Poole,
Fanny Blair, Eleanor Harvey, William Blood,
Henry Carriero, Carol Feiner, Arthur Young, Stephen
Carey Luce, Carol Fligor, Maggie Moffett, William
Abbe, Arthur Nicol, Crosby Foster, George Silva,
Tom Joyner, Andy Stone (*people on the island*)
Steven Spielberg
(lifeguard with megaphone/voice on radio)

USA 1975©
124 mins
Digital 4K

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here and steal that shot and put it in this other sequence. Who came up with that idea and when, and what problem were you trying to solve?

I talk about this a lot with students, about what it wants, which sometimes is different than what you want. In the midst of this maelstrom, you have one person, who's kind of at the head of all of this, saying, 'No, I want to do this.' They didn't have a script that was locked that anybody was happy with, so they're kind of building the plane while it's in the air, which you're not supposed to do, and Spielberg has said, 'I've never walked on to a set ever again without a script that I felt was locked.' That's just not a recipe for success, generally speaking, but again, I think it all came down to his very basic understanding of the blocks of narrative that that movie needed and using that as his Rosetta Stone throughout.

Also, he had the perfect cast... [Richard Dreyfuss, Roy Scheider and Robert Shaw] are just a perfect trio, and I think that kept him believing in it. I know he's talked about it, how he knew no matter what was happening, the character work and the performances were good and maybe that would bring it into the end zone. But it's the sheer filmmaking at the end of the day that really makes the movie work. And one of the best scores of all time; it's unthinkable without that specific score. I'm not just talking about the theme that everybody remembers, I'm talking about all the supportive work that John Williams does throughout, which is just huge. So like I said, every time I look at it, it gets better and is even more of an achievement than when it came out.

And here's one last thing. There's also this added pressure that can either result in destruction or a supernova, and that is a hugely popular bestseller that everybody knows is going to be a movie coming out that summer. So you have a hundred per cent awareness and you have a hundred per cent 'want to see', and you have very, very high expectations, so when the movie comes out and turns out to be demonstrably better than the book and beats everybody's expectations, it detonates in the culture in a way that can only happen when you have that much of a pressure build-up. Then it turns into something that surprises everybody. That's a thing you can't conjure, you know?

I'm working on a book about *Jaws*. It's a book about directing, but it's a book about directing that film. It's an opportunity, as I walk you through the process of that film being made, to talk about the job of directing and what it entails, and as I parse that experience, I jump off at certain points to talk about other aspects of filmmaking that this movie reminds me to talk about. I've been working on it for a while, but in the last year or so, I've gotten a little more activated and have done more work on it, so now it's starting to be an actual thing instead of an idea.

Steven Soderbergh was talking to Philip Concannon, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 2025