



SECOND EDITION

CASTING REVEALED

A GUIDE FOR FILM DIRECTORS

HESTER SCHELL

A **Focal Press** Book

ROUTLEDGE



Casting Revealed

Casting is an essential component of any film or video project, but the core skill-set needed to cast effectively is little understood. *Casting Revealed: A Guide for Film Directors* is a straightforward manual on the art and craft of casting. Here, director Hester Schell offers her insider perspective on casting workflows, industry standards, finding actors, running auditions, what to look for in a performance, contracts, and making offers. This new edition has been updated with fresh interviews with casting directors, full color headshots, new information about online video submissions, and a companion website featuring interviews, forms, and links to numerous resources.

“I wish I had Hester’s book when I first started in Hollywood. It would have saved me a lot of heartache because it spells-out in clear and concise language the necessary tools for successful casting every filmmaker needs to know. Reading this book reminded me of how much the Academy needs to award an Oscar® for casting directors. Because casting is an art form, and Hester’s book is the best I’ve read on demystifying the process.”

—Jon James Miller, producer, Pooka Productions/
Gravity-Squared Entertainment

“While nothing can replace the benefits of hiring an experienced casting director, this book has some great insights for beginning filmmakers.”

—Lana Veenker CSA & Eryn Goodman CSA, Cast Iron Studios:
Wild, NBC/*Grimm*, *Twilight*

“Hester, I have to compliment you on taking on this mystery of a job and making it so enjoyably clear as to what we do as a process and how we take young people who are interested in filmmaking—who don’t understand the first thing about how the casting process is done—making it enjoyable to read and very informative of how this works and how they can use their time and their effort and money to the best of their ability . . . to get good talent.”

—Carolyn Pickman, CP Casting, Boston: *Mystic Pizza*, *Black Mass*, *Straight Outta Compton*, *Gone Baby Gone*

“For many filmmakers, casting is a nebulous, confusing process . . . yet thanks to Hester Schell, writers and directors now have an arsenal of easy-to-use tools with which to plan their casting sessions and to communicate to actors exactly what they’re looking for. Finding the right performers to bring your characters to life is no easy task. Thanks to *Casting Revealed*, it just got a bit easier.”

—Chad Gervich, writer/producer: *Wipeout*, *Speeders*, *Foody Call*, *Reality Binge*; author: *Small Screen*, *Big Picture: A Writer’s Guide to the TV Business*

“This new, direct, and friendly volume will demystify the casting process. Hester talks the talk because she has walked the walk. Casting is a mystery no more.”

—Michael Helmy, producer

“Actors need this book too! I have had the pleasure of working with Hester since the beginning of my career as an actor. Since then I have been on both sides of the camera, joined SAG and been cast in a major Hollywood film, commercials and industrials. The advice Hester has given me and watching her work has proved very valuable to me. Casting is a mysterious process to us actors. When we don’t get the role we’re often left wondering and when we do get it we rarely have the opportunity to ask why. What better way to understand the process than from a director’s point of view. Do your career a favor, read this book.”

—Rocky LaRochelle, actor, San Francisco, California

“With this follow up to her first edition, Hester continues to expand and share comprehensive and worthwhile knowledge. This is an easy to follow, succinct and engaging book on the casting process. A ‘must read’ for anyone in the industry, whether they are involved in the casting process or not.”

—Kari Wishingrad, producer and on camera actress (film, TV, commercials):
Most of the Time, *Ghost Boat*, *El Camino*, *Neon Sky*

“There can never be too much good information about the casting process! Read and learn!”

—Sarah Kliban, casting director, Diversity Casting, San Francisco: *Milk, All About Evil, San Andreas, Steve Jobs, Hemingway & Gellhorn*

“Buy this book! Your meticulously interwoven match-ups, brilliant roller-coaster dolly shots and pricey aerial long shots will not save your poorly cast film. For years, filmmaker, director, producer and casting director Hester Schell has shared her knowledge and expertise with clients, directors, friends, students and colleagues. At long last she has put her words on paper. I am so pleased to hold this book.”

—Candy Campbell, author and filmmaker: *How Low Can You Go?*

“This book can help both the person new to filmmaking and the person who has had a difficult time with past productions to avoid the pitfalls along the journey. I wish there had been a book like this out there when I directed my first feature. Of course I had the next best thing. I had Hester. My advice to directors is this: attitude and personality will always win out over talent and looks.”

—Robert Pickett, writer and director, Artistic Director, Half Moon Bay Shakespeare Company: *Sydney Town, The Musical*

“This book is a master class for actors and filmmakers. This will be required reading for all of my students, and if you are thinking about making a film or acting in a film, I recommend that you read *Casting Revealed* first. The entire process of filmmaking has so many layers and subtleties, any one of which can create incredible headaches and heartaches if the process is not followed with precision. The entire production is executed like a ballet, and without a clear understanding of the dance you are facing artistic and financial disaster.”

—Stephen Kopels, director, PBS producer, founder of San Francisco School of Digital Filmmaking

“Hester Schell has put together an excellent resource for directors, producers and new actors. The information contained in this book is smart, clear and concise; it steers the reader from some common pitfalls one might encounter when choosing and working with actors—be it union or non-union. Everything is well covered here, from casting breakdowns and ‘attracting the talent’ to the audition process and dealing with unions and contracts. It’s a must-have for anyone embarking on a new film or video. Bravo!”

—Nanci Gaglio, award-winning writer and director, co-creator/ executive producer: *Venus Rising*, BBC

“When constructing a project as huge and difficult as a feature film, you need to have your toolbelt filled with the equipment that will ensure that your project has the greatest chance of success, and the knowledge of the casting process is a tool no director can live without. Hester Schell’s book will help you turn your gibberish into positive and confident communication, and get you started on the right path to a successful and enjoyable casting experience. Don’t make a movie without reading this book. You’ll be happy you did, and so will your actors.”

—Paul Martin, DGA director

“This tool for our industry is a gift to anyone who spends Penny One on a production. We all benefit from Hester’s knowledge and candor, which emanates from the vast first-hand experience of a well-educated professional.”

—Kari Nevil, CEO of June Bug Films, director: *Planting Melvin*, *Your Guardian*

“Hester Schell knows the film production process inside and out, in front of and behind the camera. And she’s an accomplished acting teacher. Whether you’re a neophyte performer or have a mile-long resumé, you will improve your auditions using her vital information.”

—Don Schwartz, actor, contributing writer for *CineSource* magazine

“A much-needed book for independent filmmakers. There are so many books out there about directing and writing, etc., that it’s great to see a book cover this other crucial aspect of getting a film made—how to go about casting the right people. By giving both an overview of the casting process for those new to it, as well as information for those already involved, this will help you to avoid making mistakes and casting the wrong people.”

—Erin Corrado, onemoviefiveviews.com

“For independent directors looking for a guide to help in the casting process, Hester Schell provides one hell of an interesting little book that lays out all of the steps in bringing aboard the right actors for your project . . . allow[ing] the reader to cut through the crap and get down to the nitty gritty of the entire process. For anyone interested in a serious look into casting, check out this book.”

—Felix Vasquez Jr., *Cinema Crazed*

“When an actor walks into your audition, a director needs to find out three things immediately: Do they look the part? Do they have range? Can they take direction? Hester Schell has written an invaluable book on the casting process that answers those questions, plus she gives you the tools you need to run a proper casting session and tips on how to make the actors feel safe.”

—Peter D. Marshall, director, instructor at Vancouver Film School

“Selecting the right actors for a film is probably among the most critical things a filmmaker can do. Hester Schell puts the art and process of casting into a clear perspective. It’s a very useful guide for any producer or director and will help set a film in the right direction from the very start. This should be required reading for any first-time filmmaker, and even old pros will find this valuable.”

—Steve Michelson, executive producer at Lobitos Creek Ranch Productions:
Climb Against the Odds, Oil on Ice

Casting Revealed

A Guide for Film Directors

Second Edition

Hester Schell

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Dedication



Shakespeare's Hamlet, to the players,
Act III, Scene 2

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue: but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise: I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant; it out-herods Herod: pray you, avoid it.

O, there be players that I have seen play, and heard others praise, and that highly, not to speak it profanely, that . . . I have thought some of nature's journeymen had made men and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably.

This second edition is dedicated to all the players, and the quest for the perfect fit.



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And to you: the fans, friends and family, directors, actors and producers who supported the first edition. This was only possible because of you.

Hester's Perspective

By Candy Campbell

The casting process can be the belly of the beast . . . or the armor that protects it. The decisions you are about to make will decide the fate of your film and quite possibly your physical well-being for the next months and years. An insolent statement? Hear me out. Beware: if you think that filmmaking is more art than business, you're 50% wrong. The behemoth of filmmaking is simultaneously 100% art and 100% business.

Casting can be the causative agent for one of the longest-running migraines a filmmaker will ever endure. If you take the quick and easy way out, your migraine will surely become a constant affliction, and your film will suffer a paralyzing, convulsive, demise. Your meticulous interwoven match-ups, brilliant roller coaster dolly shots and pricey aerial long shots will not save your poorly cast film. Your film-child's remains will be flung on the dung heap of miserable, rotting plastic, with all the other miserable, rotting dreams of filmmaker-wannabes, littering the landfill. And you will be wishing the remains were more biodegradable.

"The Ghost Of Past Project Failed" will make you a pariah at producer networking and extended family events. How many years will it take until your one-time fans, who reached into their pockets to help you, can look you in the eye? You'll wish it were a dream, but it's more like the nightmare-leaking faucet that eventually causes the flood. But wait! There, at the end of the tunnel, a dim flicker. Is it a train? No! It is your way out of this hole. It is . . . this book! For years, my friend, film-maker, director, producer, and casting director Hester Schell has shared her knowledge and expertise with clients, director friends, students, and colleagues. She has, at long last, put her words on paper.

I am so pleased, at long last, to hold this book. Now, go forth. Create. And do the earth a favor. Lighten the landfills. Read and absorb the contents of this book. Did I forget something? Oh, yes. Buy this book!

Candy Campbell,
Concord, California

Candy Campbell, DNP, is an actress, comedienne, author, filmmaker and registered nurse who made her television debut on NBC's *Trauma*. Ms. Campbell produced and directed the award-winning documentary film *Micro-premature Babies: How Low Can You Go?* (candycampbell.com). Her books (*My Mom Is a Nurse, I Was a Premie*, and *Channeling Florence Nightingale: Integrity, Insight, Innovation*) are available at Amazon.com

Something about Her

By Robert Pickett

I first met Hester Schell working on *Entertaining Mr. Sloan* by Joe Orton. Hester brilliantly played my sister, and we had a blast. She came to the University of Utah for the graduate directing program in the theatre department in the late 1980s. We would embark on a lifelong friendship that would find us supporting, encouraging, auditioning, acting, directing, producing, teaching, touring, and, for a short time, living together, over the next 20 years.

We have worked together on many productions and have taught classes in the San Francisco Bay Area for film directors and actors. We have sorted headshots and resumés, sat through auditions and interviews, hired crews and scouted locations. Through it all, I have come to realize that Hester knows what she's talking about. She's been there through every phase of the creative process and has a keen understanding of what makes an idea turn into a film.

My advice to directors is this: when you cast your film or a play, think in terms of a camping trip. Would you want to go camping for an extended amount of time with this person? Because you need to be sure it's a "Yes." You will be spending a lot of time with this person and you want to know: would they help fetch water, clean the campsite, help start a fire, cook a meal, carry wood or sing as we sat around a campfire roasting marshmallows? Attitude and personality will always win out over talent and looks. Some of the greatest actors are the greatest people and no amount of talent can replace a great attitude or helpful disposition on a set. Trust your instincts. I can usually tell within the first 30 seconds of an audition, and sometimes even before an audition starts, if an actor is right for the role or the production. Always think in terms of the big picture and not what may seem at the time as an attractive quality or charming smile.

This book can help both the person new to filmmaking and the person who has had a difficult time with past productions to avoid the pitfalls along the journey.

The only other advice I would give you is to find a “Hester” and keep them close in your life; someone who will always tell you the truth, share your agonies and your ecstasies; someone who knows more than you do about the business.

Break a leg!

Robert Pickett, MFA

Half Moon Bay, California

Robert Pickett is a native Californian, teacher, director, performer, screenwriter, and playwright. He is the founder of Napa Valley Shakespeare Festival, and is currently the Founding Artistic Director of the Half Moon Bay Shakespeare Company, founded in 2012 (hmbshakespeare.org).

Introduction to the Second Edition

Welcome to the second edition of *Casting Revealed: A Guide for Film Directors*. This new up-dated, upgraded, and improved edition will help you cast your project with the best available talent.

Technology continues to change where we find new faces, how we cast, and how actors market themselves to directors and casting directors. Casting directors in New York can screen actors in Seattle, while Seattle-based actors can look for gigs in Chicago. Geography is no longer a barrier and you, the director, have no excuses for not finding the best talent available, regardless of your budget, student status, or union affiliation. To help you secure the perfect cast of characters for your project, you'll find more about the most active regional markets outside of New York and Los Angeles: Chicago, Seattle, Portland (OR), Boston, Austin, and Nashville/Atlanta. We've added activities, assignments, questions for discussion, and exercises to "go further," to expand the learning curve in the classroom, improve knowledge, and increase your skill-set.

Six years ago, the book tour for the first edition included trips to The Writers' Store in Burbank, Drama Books in New York City, and the British Film Institute in London. Many early career directors attended to learn "how to get it right" in the casting process. Seasoned directors also attended the events, along with up and coming casting directors and producers seeking more about DIY, "do-it-yourself," and save.

Casting Revealed also found an audience with actors seeking secrets about what goes on behind the scenes and how directors make their final decisions. Actors everywhere want more insight into "Why wasn't it me?" Okay, let me level with you. Actors we are begging you: don't take it personally. Please just do the audition and let it

go: you can't control the outcome, unless you are producing your own projects, which many actors do. With a great story to tell and proven box office, they can more easily attract investors. Naturally, there's a better shot at return on investment (ROI) with a known actor.

Directors, it's your turn for some leveling out: you may not get your ideal actor in the role. You may have to go with your second choice, and you'll have to wrestle your own demons on that front. But for Pete's sake: don't let anyone know it. But hold it! Stop the presses: you could wait for that actor. Get on their line-up of pictures. The biggest stars are booked years out. Because they are great actors, they work all the time. Sometimes you have to get in line until you can land the big fish you want.

You've heard it all your life: there is no trying, only doing. It's true. The world is full of folks who only try, artists who get it wrong every step of the way. You probably have worked for some of them. Maybe at one time you were one of those people. But you're smarter now. You picked up this book. So, let's get started.

This book is about the casting process, actors, and acting. This book will help you to spot new talent, weed out the "wannabes," and run professional casting sessions. This book will inform and guide you through the pre-production specifics necessary for finding the best actors for the characters in your movie. It will help you to run professional auditions and to navigate through such things as agents, contracts, and the performers' unions.

This is not a book about how to finalize your script, although I suggest you get a few second and third opinions from people who know story structure and character. This is not a book about film production, although many aspects of the production process will be discussed. This is not a book about great lighting, although I recommend that you know enough about what a gaffer does to know you need a really good one. This is not a book about makeup and wardrobe or art direction or production design. Although, you guessed it: I recommend that you know enough to hire artists who can help you make the best movie you can make, regardless of your budget. In a world where anyone thinks they can make a movie, this book has finally found its time.

To get the most out of this book, I will make a few assumptions:

- You know something about filmmaking's five stages:
 - Development (script)
 - Preproduction (casting and planning the shoot)

- Production (on-set shooting)
- Postproduction (editing)
- Distribution (film festivals, sales, marketing)
- You know you are embarking on a long-term project with a few inherent certainties, the very least of which is basic organizational and computer skills, and impeccable communication skills. I've seen many a project get off on the wrong foothold for lack of good phone and email etiquette, being disrespectful of people's time, and not staying on top of procedures.

And finally . . .

- No more assumptions. Never assume anyone has any idea what you're talking about. Never assume your staff see the same picture in their heads that you see in yours. So, go for the storyboards. Go for rehearsal. It's important to be ready to rock and . . . roll camera.

A director I've worked with who has made it to numerous festivals with her features wears a T-shirt on-set that says "Just Make The Movie." Another friend, a producer who has worn more hats and T-shirts than anyone I know says, "At the end of the day, or the end of your life, would you have rather made the movie or be sitting around wishing you'd made the movie?"

So here you are: with a script you like. Perhaps one you wrote. Or maybe a friend wrote it, and she's got a decent camera and you've agreed that you are going to make the movie. Another friend says he can do the lighting, and someone else shows up on sound. You have a skeleton crew, some resources, and someone took a film production class. Add it all up, and the universe is screaming at you: "Make The Movie!"

I'm telling you too: "Make The Movie!"—and make it great! At the end of the day, you'll be glad to sit in a darkened theater at a film festival, watching your story up there on the screen, taking the audience on your adventure. Give it all you've got. Do your very best to finish it. Do your very best to get it into the film festivals that count. Always, in everything you do, do your best to get it right.

Also new with this second edition is the companion website: www.routledge.com/cw/schell. Here you will find juicy interviews with casting professionals, producers and directors who share their