

MARTINIQUE STARS IN MGM'S "THE THOMAS CROWN AFFAIR"

An island is an island is an island, unless it's Martinique, the ultra-romantic tropical paradise featured in the MGM film, "The Thomas Crown Affair."

Chosen as the seductive hideaway to which billionaire Thomas Crown (Pierce Brosnan) flies off with the tempting female investigator Catherine Banning (Rene Russo), hired to secretly look into Crown's theft of a priceless Monet painting from a major museum in New York, Martinique is an intriguing little corner of France in the Caribbean, the perfect setting for engaging in a fabulous and sexy game of cat-and-mouse.

After visiting some half dozen islands in the Caribbean, John McTiernan, the director, selected Martinique as Thomas Crown's ideal island playground. Blessed with beautiful beaches, lovely landscapes and an idyllic climate, Martinique also exudes a unique cachet: it has a distinctly French sophistication, spiced with Creole *joie de vivre* and an endearing West Indian charm.

The island has been used in the past for French TV and movie productions, a strong selling point by the Martinique Tourist Office to the producers of "The Thomas Crown Affair" that the island was film-friendly. "Les Films du Dorlis", an island-based production company, assisted with the filming. Several hundred island people were employed, directly or indirectly, in the production, and the filming contributed substantially to the island's economy.

Most dialogue and love scenes in Martinique were shot at a beautiful Creole house in Vauclin on a hill in the South of the island. Other scenes were filmed on a deserted beach of the South Atlantic coast. Still other scenes were shot in Saint-Pierre, Martinique's most historic city, nestled under cloud-shrouded Mount Pelée volcano. Saint-Pierre was a cultivated capital of 30,000 until the morning of May 8, 1902, when Mount Pelée erupted in a terrifying avalanche of fire, gas and molten rock, making of what was the "little Paris of the West Indies" a New World Pompeii.

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- 2 -

"The Thomas Crown Affair", produced by Pierce Brosnan and Beau St.Clair, is directed by John McTiernan from a script by Leslie Dixon and Kurt Wimmer, based on Alan R. Trustman's story for the classic 1968 movie of the same title, which starred Steve McQueen and Faye Dunaway. Miss Dunaway appears in this new version as Crown's psychiatrist. The film also stars Denis Leary, Ben Gazzara and Esther Cañadas.

Although this new re-make of “The Thomas Crown Affair” is the first major American production with sequences actually filmed in Martinique, the island has been the setting for other films, notably Warner Bros’ “To Have and Have Not” based on the novel by Ernest Hemingway, directed by Howard Hawks and co-written by William Faulkner. Most importantly, this romantic adventure introduced Lauren Bacall to the world, Humphrey Bogart to Bacall, and the rest is history. The film used studio sets of Fort-de-France, the waterfront capital of Martinique, and was released in 1944.

“The Thomas Crown Affair” was released by MGM on August 6, 1999.

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