

O N T H E S E T

IN A REMOTE TOWN IN WASHINGTON, THE CAST AND

# of Moose

CREW OF 'NORTHERN EXPOSURE' TRY TO DO THEIR JOBS,

# and Men

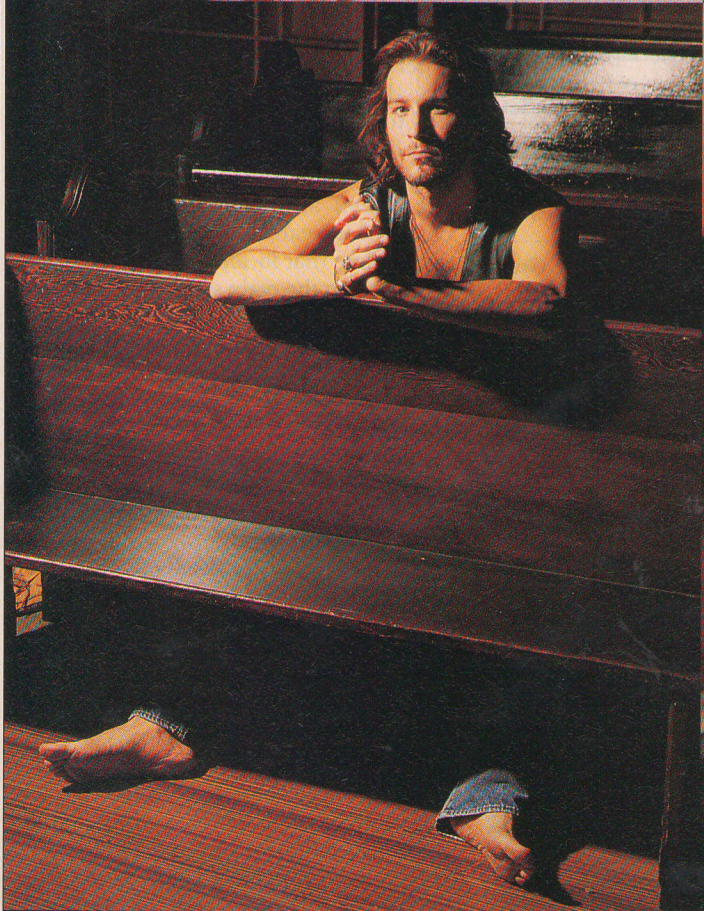
AS TOURISTS SNAP PHOTOS AND SEARCH FOR THAT MOOSE.

In what must certainly pass as a typical break in the action around here, *Northern Exposure*'s Janine Turner sits in the cool shade of an evergreen with her toothless and beloved toy poodle, Eclair, perched precariously on her lap. Rhapsodizing about the "perfumed air of Washington" for an *Evening Magazine* interviewer, she sighs; then she screams. ♣ "WHOOOP! WOOOO! WAAAAAH!" are the remotely human sounds emitted from the delicately curved lips of the twenty-nine-year-old model-turned-actress. Her hands flailing wildly at some errant yellow-jacket, Turner nearly pitches poor Eclair gums-first into the dirt. ♣ Regaining her poise so quickly it would make the folks at the Wilhelmina modeling agency die for ever

letting her go (which a source at the agency says is the case), Turner smiles graciously and is about to launch into a response to the now legendary "Were you really about to hock Alec Baldwin's engagement ring before you got this job?" question, when press-contemptuous costar Rob Morrow (who plays Dr. Joel Fleischman) barges through the interview as if it blocked the only path to the only full-length trailer on the set — his. ♣ "Not the ring story again! I'm so tired of the ring story!" clucks Morrow in pure Fleischmanese. ♣ Turner, very Maggie-like, counters, "She asked about the ring story." ♣ "I just asked if it was true," snaps the reporter, knowing she isn't getting any more than this from Morrow. Of the four press

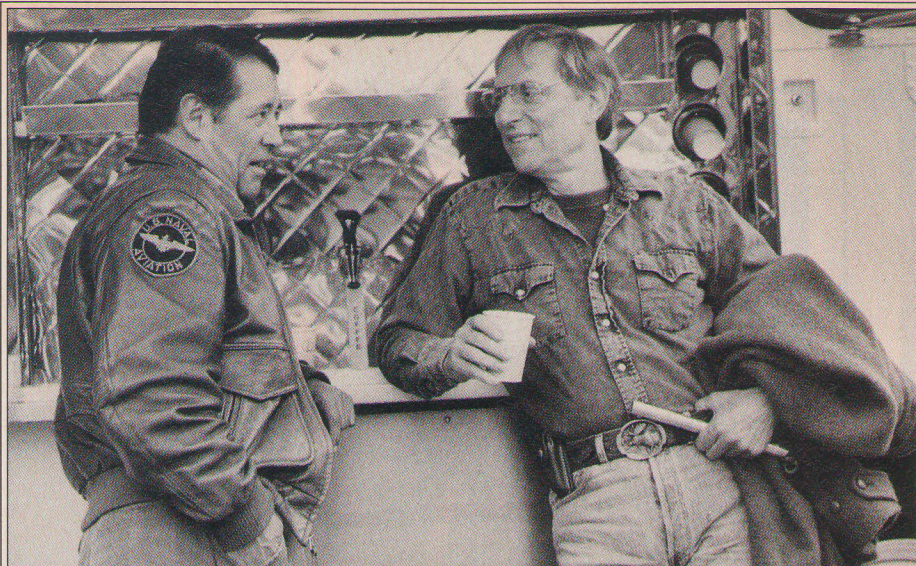
B Y T O M O' N E I L L





PHOTOGRAPHS BY RANDEE ST. NICHOLAS/VSAGES; HAIR: BRYN LEE/CH AND REBECCA LYNNE; MAKEUP: JONI MEERS





**Exposed: 'Northern Exposure'**

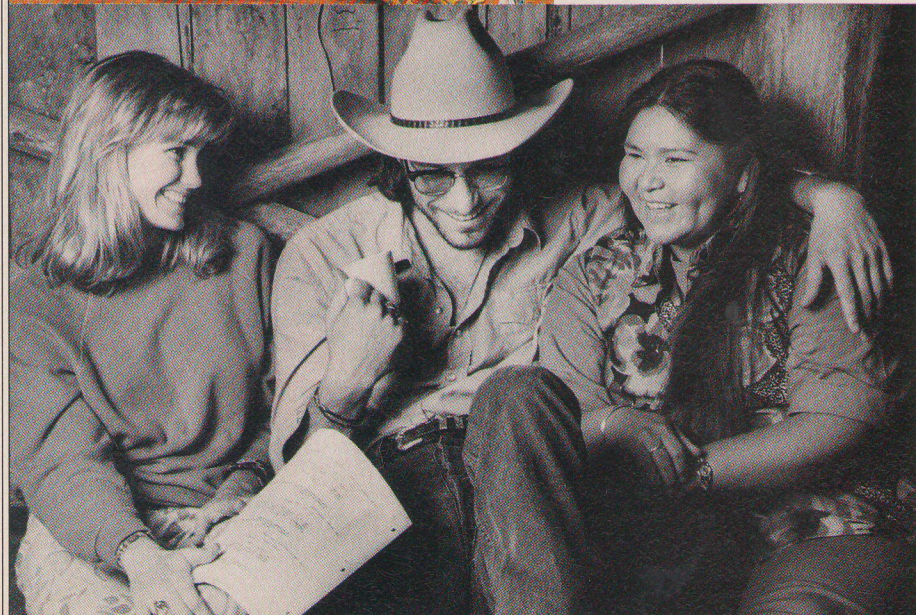
cast members (clockwise from top)

Barry Corbin and John Cullum;

Rob Morrow; (left to right)

Cynthia Geary, John Corbett and

Elaine Miles; Cullum and Geary



people permitted on the set today (including former *Exposure* costar, Grant Goodeve, now working for *Evening Magazine*), only one — from an airline magazine — has been granted an audience with the twenty-nine-year-old actor. "Oh my God!" continues Morrow, ascending into his trailer. "Alec calls every day, Baryshnikov calls every day, but *Jay!* Jay's the winner!"

Turner, who's done the tango with Misha, too, rolls her eyes and explains that Jay is the Texas cowboy she's seeing now — then screams again.

"WOO, WOO, WOO! There are bees everywhere!"

Among other predators.

When this reporter arrived at the converted warehouse in Redmond, Washington, where *Exposure*'s interiors are shot, producer Matthew Nodella half-jokingly asked, "How do we know you're not from *The Globe*?" Seems the Kennedy family's least favorite tabloid snooped around and published some unflattering stories; coincidence or not, Nodella soon hired a security guard. Things have "definitely changed," sighs Cynthia Geary, who plays Shelly the waitress.

And these days, due to an overwhelming number of requests, they've had to limit onset visits. This was hardly the case when *Northern Exposure* quietly debuted as a summer replacement in 1990. Operating on a third of the budget usually allocated to a series, the producers had to scrounge to get it off the ground. The former coal-mining town of Roslyn, Washington — where the exterior shots are filmed and where the signs were changed to read "Cicely, Alaska" — was so desolate that locals were paid to park their cars on the main street so it wouldn't look like a ghost town.

But by that summer's eighth, and final, episode, a loyal following of disenfranchised TV viewers, charmed by the show's subtle blend of whimsy and humor, rallied behind it.

When *Exposure* returned in the spring of 1991, it was part of CBS's powerful Monday night punch, following *Murphy Brown* and *Designing Women*. The gentle folk of Cicely, population 839 (and one lackadaisical moose), were discovered by the rest of the nation and coasted to the seventh spot in Nielsen's Top 10. Judging from the amount of fanfare accorded *Exposure*'s return last fall, it looks like Dr. Joel Fleischman's indentured servitude to the forty-ninth state is going to last a lot longer than the four years stipulated in his much-maligned contract.

Laughs Joshua Brand, part of the tag-



team duo responsible for *Exposure*, "We can work around that. When we did *St. Elsewhere*, we had the oldest residents in the world." In an era when hour-long dramas are an endangered species, to have two (and another in the works) is, Brand concedes, "an embarrassment of riches for my partner and me. The irony doesn't escape us."

In just ten years, forty-one-year-old whizzes Brand and John Falsey have gone four for four, with *St. Elsewhere* and *A Year in the Life* (both Emmy winners) preceding *Northern Exposure* and this year's critical hit *I'll Fly Away*. Brand acknowledges "trepidation" over the amount of fame accorded *Exposure*. "It's like somebody just turned over the horn of plenty and dumped it on the show."

About eighty miles east of Seattle, nestled in the gently sloping Cascade mountains, lies Roslyn. The sparsely populated hamlet has become the region's biggest tourist attraction. "Now we have to pay them to move their cars off main street," reports Sean Markland, *Exposure*'s property master. Recently, a crowd of 300 boisterous tourists toting camcorders and autograph books converged on the set.

"A poor man could make a business selling film," snorts the embattled mayor. Besides mediating between his pro- and con-*Exposure* constituents, the mayor has ordered his cops and city officials to stop talking to the press, because he's "pretty doggone sick of reading stuff that's written backwards."

Nonetheless, Brand notes the striking parallel between the town and his mostly neophyte cast. Except for the instantly recognizable (but-how-the-hell-do-I-know-them!) mugs of Barry Corbin (as former astronaut and Cicely patriarch Maurice Minnifield) and two-time Tony-winner John Cullum (as Holling Vincoeur, tavernkeeper and decades-older beau of Shelly), the *Exposure* ensemble comprises, as Brand puts it, "unknowns who were talented but, to the general public, unfamiliar faces." Not any more. At lunch on the set today, Turner is roundly applauded by the cast (except for Morrow, who's dining alone in his trailer) and crew for having her mug on the cover of *TV Guide*. With an embarrassed giggle, she takes a bow.

"There is something gratifying about finding something and bringing it to the public — and having them appreciate it the way you do," says Brand, reflecting on the show's success. "At the same time there's a part of you that goes, 'Uh-oh.'"

"I've become a lot more private," says Darren E. Burrows, who plays Ed, the

teen Indian with a passion for Buñuel and an IQ of 180. "The moments you have alone, that are really yours, are a lot less." Pushing the dyed black tresses out of his eyes in that practically patented Ed way, the formerly blond Burrows quickly adds, "It's not that I don't like all that other stuff, it's just an added facet."

That "added facet" ruined a recent trip home for John Corbett, the ex-steel worker who's found fame as Cicely's discursive deejay, Chris "In the Morning." Every time Corbett ventured out with his old buddies in Wheeling, West Virginia, they were mobbed. "So many people that we'd have to go home," he recalls, still amazed. "I guess everyone wants to return to their hometown and be kind of famous, but it's really not what it's cracked up to be."

WITH CORBETT, LIKE MANY OF HIS CASTMATES, IT'S HARD TO DISTINGUISH

where the character ends and the person begins — probably no accident on the producers' part. Putting a Chris-like spin on the subject of fame, the actor, sinking deeper into a production office couch, stares at the ceiling. "There's a front and a back to everything. Everything. Your brightest, brightest moment of the day has its darkest, darkest moment, at four in the morning or whenever . . . the bigger the show gets, the bigger the underside of whatever it is, is going to be."

But don't mistake Corbett's verbal meandering for erudition. "I'm uneducated, man," he admits. "People think I'm book-smart, and I can tell sometimes they're disappointed that I can't jump in and quote Shakespeare with them."

The fiercely self-reliant Turner, who left home at fifteen for the New York modeling world (with her mother in tow), has the more nuts 'n' bolts take on fame, befitting her character, bush pilot Maggie O'Connell. When asked if Washington winters aren't terrible to work in, Turner cracks, "Better than auditioning in them."

On the set of Holling's bar, with the camera rolling, Geary holds a stuffed dog to Turner's face and wiggles it just out of the frame, "Woof! Woof! Woof!"

Turner stumbles over her line, then sings out, "Sooooorry!" The ratty toy, dredged up by the prop department, is a stand-in for "Wolfie," a mixed Shepherd-and-Husky, on break because he's exhausted from repeated jumps onto a barstool. In this, the sixth episode of the new season, Maggie

believes Wolfie is the reincarnation of her most recently deceased boyfriend, Rick. This being Cicely, everyone accepts Maggie's notion without batting an eye — except Fleischman.

The other actors on the set seem, well, a lot like their characters. Geary, whose role grows with successive episodes ("the first four shows I was basically walking in and saying, 'Here's your tuna melt. Bye.'"), watches quietly, even a little wide-eyed, as if studying the methods of the older actors. Cullum engages a Native American extra in deep conversation and later, visibly moved, confides that he's been invited to witness the man's sister being crowned a princess on the nearby Tulalip Reservation. Burrows (himself, "a third to a half Indian, I'm not sure") paces off the set, chain-smoking and quietly repeating his lines.

And Morrow has a clutch of people moved from behind the camera — again. "You can't be in his eye-line," warns a crew member. "He gets really pissed off."

Pantomiming dialogue beneath the mounted elk, ram and moose heads of Holling's bar (if the species is endangered, the trophies are facsimiles, notes production designer Woody Crocker) are the Native Americans and crusty mountain men who make for the most distinctive-looking background on television. Recruited locally, the unemployed loggers, off-season fishermen and Indians from nearby reservations earn \$50 a day for what has become steady work for many. As extras coordinator John Vreeke explains, "We went for an uncoiffed, rugged, full-bearded, long-haired and no-fads look."

But the search for Native Americans wasn't easy. The first casting calls to the reservations went largely unheeded. "I think they were afraid we'd make fun of them," says Vreeke, citing Hollywood's history of celluloid genocide. "It took us eight episodes to prove ourselves."

"It's a good portrayal of our people," says Rita Matta, 40, an otherwise unemployed Tulalip resident who works every other week as an extra. "These people treat all of us equal and real well."

"Ruff! Ruff! Ruff!" Geary is wiggling the ratty toy in Turner's face again and Turner flubs her line — again — then announces she simply can't do the scene "to that."

Shooting recommences with a pocket of air where Wolfie should be — and "Maggie" breezes through the scene.

Later an incredulous Turner marvels, "This is one of the last, most imperative scenes, we come to my closeup and I'm like, 'Where's the dog?!' The dog had to



take a break!" An assistant director interrupts, "We're doing a shot of the dog and we need your hands now." Turner's mouth drops open.

"Will the dog be there for my closeup?"

A large part of *Northern Exposure*'s success can be attributed to some pretty outrageous flights of fancy taken in the scripts. Brand acknowledges that he's often told they've gone too far, but only in one instance does he concede they did — and it wasn't the infamous circumcision episode that had Geary and Cullum ringing their families in Mississippi and Tennessee (respectively) with dire warnings. (Cullum, whose character was to be circumcised at the insistence of Shelly, received a letter from his sister, a minister's wife, that said, "We love what you do in the show [but] we do wish the scripts were a little more Christian.")

Looking like he'd rather discuss plumbing problems in Serbia, Brand says both the network and studio fought the episode in which the characters spoke directly to the camera, but "we stuck to our guns." Sighing, the Columbia grad (master's in English literature) whose references in conversation range from Aristotle and Brecht to Woody Allen and the Fresh Prince, admits, "In hindsight, I wasn't sorry creatively, but I was sorry we did it because it caused such bad feeling . . . it wasn't worth it." Pausing, he adds, "If you're going to take chances, sometimes you're going to fail. We're not trying to be outrageous for the sake of being outrageous . . . We're just trying to find a path through a story that's not as familiar as perhaps other paths."

Back on the *Exposure* soundstage, some of the crew are distracted by the sight of a lasso floating through the air and landing around a grip stand. Two weathered hands appear, slowly coiling the rope, followed by the large frame of Barry Corbin, who, hearing his cue, pivots onto the set, and instantly becomes Maurice sidling up to Joel at Holling's bar.

"Barry Corbin could run for mayor of Roslyn and I'd vote for him," booms Jack Denning, the mayor of Roslyn, echoing the sentiments of the entire town, if not the state of Washington. The actor is quite simply everyone's favorite, from the kids in Roslyn, who he puts up on his horse, to the Native American extras, one of whom, Frieda "Kat" Beckman, remembers, "When he seen us come back for the second season, he just come up and hugged us and said, 'Oh, my family!'"

Of his blustery character, Maurice, Corbin drawls, "He's much more *kneerotic* than I am. Anything that Maurice

thinks, generally I think the opposite."

Corbin, who stables a horse with Turner and often rides with her after work, has appeared in nearly 100 films and television shows in just the past decade, including *The Best Little Whore House in Texas*, *Urban Cowboy* and *Lonesome Dove*. Not only did the West Texas native accept when the town of Roslyn asked him to be grand marshal of their annual Wing Ding parade last Labor Day, but according to Tom Blair, city council member and Roslyn restaurateur, "all he had to do was get in his car, do his thing, and go home." Instead, Corbin "arrived an hour early, talked to every kid there and ended up with the only three Indian boys in the town up in the car with him. He's a jewel."

**B**LAIR AND HIS WIFE, MARILYN, WERE LESS THAN IMPRESSED WITH CORBIN'S COSTAR, WHO

they'll only refer to as "the doctor."

"I was about to throw him outta here," grumbles Blair, recalling a day Rob Morrow spent filming in their restaurant. "All he had to do was walk out the door, say something to the disc jockey and walk down the street. Took him ten tries." While Tom and Marilyn Blair watched, their nine-year-old daughter, Jessie, shyly tried to get the actor's attention. "She would of done anything to get this man just to make eye contact," recalls her father. "To say 'Hi, little girl' would have made her day."

After her daughter gave up and left, Marilyn Blair finally spoke to "the doctor." The Roslyn woman, who's also a grandmother, chuckles about it now, "I said, 'It looks to me like it would be easier to go to medical school and just become a real doctor than to go through all this.'" Laughing louder, she says, "He never even acknowledged I'd spoken to him! Just looked right through me."

The town barber, Jerry Morris, who doesn't have an unkind word for anyone, when asked about Morrow, says, "Well, after you've been around a little while, you realize when you come up to these people out of the blue, without at least a little invite, you're disturbing them. Rob seems to be the most serious of all of them as far as how he conducts himself, his professionalism and all that."

This day, like most now, Roslyn is crawling with tourists. This is the third interview the barber has given and a fourth reporter waits outside. Around the corner, in front of Fleischman's office,

people wait their turn to pose for pictures. Across the street, the town's gift shop is doing a brisk business in *Northern Exposure* T-shirts and moose memorabilia. The proprietress greets the press with "I don't have time." Warming, she admits that "never in my wildest dreams did I think I'd carry moose things — it's a whole new financial adventure."

Chief among the misconceptions about Roslyn, perpetuated by viewers who confuse it with its fictional counterpart, is that moose roam the streets. Except for the day Morty (the moose) was imported for the opening sequence, no one remembers ever seeing a moose in these parts. The Roslyn Cafe waitresses, when asked what kind of moose is in their mural (actually a camel, it's seen in *Exposure*'s opening credits), answer, "A hump-backed moose."

Inside The Brick, the oldest continuously run tavern in Washington and the model for Holling's place, old-timer Wally studies the tourists. "Watch their behavior," says the retiree with the fascination of a sociologist discovering a lost tribe. "They look pleasant, they're meek." Indeed, dressed in bright colors, the "flatlanders" sit quietly at tables, sipping the locally brewed beer and closely watching the door. When asked if any of the fifty or so patrons are locals, Wally glances at a dozen folks with their backs to the room, "Them with their elbows up on the bar."

Between setups, Turner prowls the labyrinth of offices adjacent to the Redmond studio, slipping invitations under doors and leaving them on desks. The blue pieces of paper, written in her own hand, ask the cast and crew to "Come Celebrate the Miracle of Life" at her apartment on Sunday. Turner, who threw a party for the crew last Friday (with a steel drum band) is having a shower for five expectant mothers connected to the show. Her invitation promises "Harps, Harmony and Heaven-Sent Food."

In another corridor, Elaine Miles has arrived on her day off with a gift for one of the mothers-to-be. The thirty-two-year-old Cayuse-Nez Perce Indian is a walking Cinderella story: Her casting as Marilyn, Fleischman's zenlike nurse, has attained a mythical stature around here (she had never acted a day in her life), surpassing, say, Lana Turner's discovery at Schwab's. Miles's regal air is enhanced today by the plastic tiara she's been crowned with by a friend in wardrobe. Locating the assistant director's wife, Miles presents her with a papoose made by her mom, explaining that she still has to sew beads on. The woman is speechless with gratitude.

Miles has gifted the company with



moccasins, quilts and other crafts made by her tribe. When Morrow, who she says is "really nice," was scolded by friends for not knowing what kind of Indian she was, he "asked me a lot of questions and went around the set the whole day saying, 'Cayuse-Nez Perce, Cayuse-Nez Perce ...' He really impressed my mom." While her wish to take acting lessons (according to a source) was nixed by the *Exposure* brass, Miles's part has grown. This episode, she reveals with a giggle, instead of "three or four words, I have, like, complete sentences." In fact, she was so nervous during shooting yesterday, "I almost threw up my breakfast" — which did happen her first day of work.

In contrast to Miles's inexperience, there's Cullum, who, at sixty-one, is the eldest of the regulars and a thirty-five-year acting veteran. Soft-spoken and polite, Cullum says that while shooting on location is "inconvenient, the show works better because we are cut off here, away from home. In a sense, the show is our home and that has a melding, bonding effect on the cast."

Indeed, Corbett spends much of his free time riding motorcycles with Burrows and they live in the same apartment complex. (Says Corbett, an only child, "I really care for him, he's just like a little brother.") Geary takes tennis lessons from Cullum, and has gone country-and-western dancing with his onscreen rival for her affection, Barry Corbin — and his family. "I think we're very close because we are away," says Turner. "We do become like a family."

Brand recalls a famous athlete telling him a long time ago that "success only makes you more of what you were before."

"What happens to Roslyn and the cast now," says Brand, "is out of our control. I'm concerned that the town maintains its integrity, the show maintains its integrity and that the wonderful things that we were attracted to in all these people stays the same."

Whether she's forgotten or just not bothered to remove it, Elaine Miles sits wearing her tiara outside the *Northern Exposure* studio on her day off, completely absorbed in sewing beads onto a papoose. And in Roslyn, at The Brick, old-timer Wally leans across his beer. "The tourists always ask me, 'Where's the moose?' And I'll say, 'He's on the hill pasturing. He'll be down in about half an hour.'" With a wink, he whispers, "You don't want to take their beliefs away." ■

Tom O'Neill has written for 'Premiere' and 'The Village Voice.'



*Hurry up and wait: Cicely's outstanding citizens cool their heels between scenes (clockwise from top) John Corbett and Darren E.*

*Burrows share a laugh; Rob Morrow ponders; Janine Turner heads out of the makeup trailer; and Elaine Miles takes a rest.*

