

THE VENUE ISSUE

1,616 Spaces of Every Size, Shape, and Location

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The Hunter

A veteran film and TV location scout shares how he finds unusual spaces.



Event producers aren't the only ones scouring the city for the perfect place with a certain mood. Location scouts are also on the lookout for environments to communicate the proper feel for films, television shows, commercials, and photo shoots. We talked to location scout and manager **Steven Knee** of LocationNY, who specializes in commercial shoots and has worked for such clients as Toyota, DeBeers, The Office, MTV, and Saturday Night Live.

What kind of direction do you get from directors? Do they say, "Find me a '50s diner"?

They're very specific like that. The director and art director will give us a very detailed description of what they're looking for based on the concept of the project, and give us tearsheets or sample photos of things that they have in mind or a place they want to duplicate. A lot of things come into play with film production; when there are multiple locations involved, you can't always pick your ideal location for one look that you want, because it may be miles away from the other location you need to shoot for the same project. So part of our job is to try to find these things and put them together in a puzzle.

What have been some of your more challenging assignments?

The last one I worked on that took a lot of work was for MTV's [trash-talking reality show] *Yo Mama*. It starts off on very local locations—street corners, stoops, things like that—and for the finals they need a huge space where they congregate hundreds of people and have vehicles that drive in and all kinds of stuff—something that is really, really dramatic. We worked for weeks trying to find a place. We wound up at a pier in Brooklyn where the entire back wall rolled up like a garage door. They had this great space that was like an airplane hangar. With the back door opened up, it was just like a roof with side walls and you could look straight out and see the skyline.

What are some of your favorite spaces that capture a mood or period?

New York City is a treasure trove of Art Deco. One of my favorite buildings is the Fuller Building on 57th Street, and it's got a great Deco lobby. You can't always get into those kinds of places when you need them.

Do you have a strategy for getting people to let you shoot in locations?

Money—unless the project is going to make them want to do it. It's either one or the other. Or somebody who runs the space has an affiliation with you and will let you do it. Those are the three main ways of getting into a space.

Do you give your clients different choices?

We always give them a selection to pick from. Some clients are more picky; they'll look at things and say, "Keep looking. I want to see more." It depends on how much time they have and if they want to look for something that is really, really great. Or they want to find something that hasn't ever been used before. With '50s diners, they've all been used. We know all of them.

How long do you generally have to find a location?

A few days. They have a plan of when they're going to film the project, and it's usually coming up in the next couple of weeks, so they need it yesterday.

What is the hardest part of your job?

Finding what clients want when it's not there. Or finding what they want when it's not where they want it to be, or available for the location budget or the time constraints. —Mimi O'Connor