



Conversations with Wilder

By Cameron Crowe

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In **Conversations with Wilder**, Hollywood's legendary and famously elusive director Billy Wilder agrees for the first time to talk extensively about his life and work.

Here, in an extraordinary book with more than 650 black-and-white photographs -- including film posters, stills, grabs, and never-before-seen pictures from Wilder's own collection -- the ninety-three-year-old icon talks to Cameron Crowe, one of today's best-known writer-directors, about thirty years at the very heart of Hollywood, and about screenwriting and camera work, set design and stars, his peers and their movies, the studio system and films today. In his distinct voice we hear Wilder's inside view on his collaborations with such stars as Barbara Stanwyck, Gary Cooper, Marilyn Monroe, Jack Lemmon, Tony Curtis, William Holden, Audrey Hepburn, and Greta Garbo (he was a writer at MGM during the making of *Ninotchka*). Here are Wilder's sharp and funny behind-the-scenes stories about the making of *A Foreign Affair*, *Double Indemnity*, *Sunset Boulevard*, *Love in the Afternoon*, *Some Like It Hot*, *The Apartment*, and *Ace in the Hole*, among many others. Wilder is ever mysterious, but Crowe gets him to speak candidly on Stanwyck: "She knew the script, everybody's lines, never a fault, never a mistake"; on Cary Grant: "I had Cary Grant in mind for four of my pictures . . . slipped through my net every time"; on the "Lubitsch Touch": "It was the elegant use of the super-joke." Wilder also remembers his early years in Vienna, working as a journalist in Berlin, rooming with Peter Lorre at the Chateau Marmont -- always with the same dry wit, tough-minded romanticism, and elegance that are the hallmarks of Wilder's films. This book is a classic of Hollywood history and lore.

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Conversations with Wilder By Cameron Crowe Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #738697 in Books
- Published on: 1999-11-02
- Released on: 1999-11-02
- Ingredients: Example Ingredients
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 1.26" h x 8.36" w x 10.35" l,
- Binding: Hardcover
- 400 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Conversations with Wilder, an invaluable, photo-intensive volume, is a kind of remake of Truffaut's must-read interview book *Hitchcock*, with Cameron Crowe in the inquisitive Truffaut role and wily 93-year-old Billy Wilder as the crafty master director. Drawing on his experience interviewing the monsters of rock and his deep, shot-by-shot knowledge of Wilder's work, Crowe gently and cunningly coaxes answers from Wilder--arguably today's most influential living director--on what made his hits tick and his flops suck, along with glimpses of what might have been. Did you know Mae West and Mary Pickford spurned *Sunset Boulevard* and Wilder spurned Marilyn Monroe for *Irma la Douce*? That *The Apartment* was inspired by *Brief Encounter* and the look of *Double Indemnity* was based on *M*? The gossipy insights are great too. Bogart spat when he talked, so Wilder couldn't back-light him in *Sabrina*, and Audrey Hepburn's wardrobe woman had to towel her off after each take--discreetly! Wilder loathed Raymond Chandler (partly because Chandler disdained James M. Cain when adapting *Double Indemnity*) but gives him his due as a screenwriter: Chandler could do dialogue and descriptions, but he couldn't construct a scene. "He was a mess, but he could write a beautiful sentence," says Wilder. Agatha Christie was the opposite: "She had structure, but she lacked poetry."

Some critics scoff at Crowe (who cried while directing emotional scenes in *Jerry Maguire*) for taking on the cynic Wilder. But they're brothers under the skin. Both leaped from popular music journalism to directing. Both incorporate actual events in their films. Wilder keenly regrets not filming this scene in *The Spirit of St. Louis*, which he claims really happened: the night before his historic flight, Lindbergh's handlers talked a pretty waitress into having sex with him. They claimed he was a virgin, and likely to die on his voyage. In the hero's parade upon his return, she waves at him through the ticker-tape, but he doesn't see her. "Would have been a good scene," mourns Wilder. Without this book, we'd never have known about it. --Tim Appelo

Review

"A world-class director interviews the Master, and every line is fascinating. As with **Zen and the Art of Archery** and other texts about mastery, the shock of pleasure in reading this enlightened and affectionate conversation is the utter simplicity that comes with true mastery. There is laughter too, as with anything first-rate in this form. Wilder and Crowe don't waste time on theory or generalities, and the result -- as in their film work -- is truth, pure and simple." -- Mike Nichols

"It's always best to hear straight from the director about his own work. This book of interviews is just that: rich in information and autobiographical detail, filled with wonderful anecdotes and observations, often irreverent and hilarious, and sometimes surprisingly moving. Cameron Crowe's book is like Wilder's best films: sharply observed, absolutely succinct and precise, funny but always with a very strong, serious foundation. Billy Wilder is one of the few genuine masters we have left, from a period in film history that is now gone. Which makes **Conversations with Wilder** all the more precious and valuable." -- Martin Scorsese

From the Inside Flap

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Users Review

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