

SONOMA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SONOMA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL ADDS CULTURAL DIMENSION TO SPRING TRAVEL IN WINE COUNTRY

Sonoma, CA (December 20, 2011) – **The 15th annual Sonoma International Film Festival, April 11-15, 2012**, will offer travelers and film aficionados the most exciting food, wine and film menu in the festival's history. Staged in Sonoma, Northern California wine country's most scenic and historic community, this destination film festival is a unique and intimate feast for enthusiasts who come to enjoy the best in independent film, gourmet food and Sonoma's world-class wines.

For 14 years now, visitors have been captivated by lush green hillsides, a vibrant town square that was the birthplace of California's Bear Flag Republic, and irresistible lodging, dining and wine-tasting opportunities. All this within an easy stroll from the festival's eight venues on or near the plaza, making the complete experience one which few film festivals in the world can match.

HIGHLIGHTS

Fans of festival honoree **John Waters** will descend on Sonoma to attend a *divinely* delicious show on Saturday evening, April 14. The iconic American filmmaker, actor, stand-up comedian, writer, journalist, visual artist, and art collector will also be honored at an intimate candlelit dinner for a limited audience in a secluded, historic winery dining room prior to the show.

To celebrate the opening of **The Backlot Tent**, the Festival's hub, on Thursday, April 12, Bistro Boudin of San Francisco will present gourmet cuisine with premium Sonoma Valley wines. Adjacent to Sonoma City Hall in historic Sonoma Plaza, The Backlot Tent opening will set the stage for the multitude of surprises and indulgences to come.

Tributes, panels, parties and national music acts throughout the festival will bring together filmmakers, actors, film enthusiasts, chefs and winemakers, musicians, festival staff and volunteers in a swirl of conviviality and good times.

THE SETTING

One of the nation's top ten destination film festivals, Sonoma International Film Festival's feast of inspired independent films will be screened at eight venues on, around and within walking distance of historic Sonoma Plaza. Surrounded by historic buildings including the Sebastiani Theater, boutique hotels, restaurants, shops and wine tasting rooms, Sonoma's eight-acre Plaza provides a one-of-a-kind setting for a unique experience of film, food and wine.

"The intimacy of the festival is something we work hard to preserve," said Festival Director Kevin McNeely. "All of our film venues are in walking distance or an easy Sebastiani Winery trolley ride from the town square and The Backlot – our centrally located gourmet food and wine tent. The Backlot features the best of Sonoma Valley vintages and gourmet foods, as do the many renowned restaurants and tasting rooms on and near The Plaza."

Sonoma – the first city in The United States to receive the 'Cittaslow' designation – embodies the essence of gourmet living. As an international lifestyle movement, Cittaslow selects towns that prioritize good food and healthy eating, that exhibit excellence in hospitality and service and that support local traditions, culture and business. SIFF adds the distinctive element of world-class cinema to Sonoma's unique flavor.

THE FILMS

Stephen J. Wampler, recent winner of the coveted ***Sports Illustrated Gillette Sweat for Greatness Award of the Year*** for his epic climb of Yosemite's El Capitan, will attend the festival to present his film ***Wall: The Journey Up***. Wampler became the first person with cerebral palsy to climb and summit Yosemite's El Capitan. He conceived the awe-inspiring climb as a way to draw attention to The Wampler Foundation, an organization he founded to help young people with disabilities.

Two of the most exciting sports action full-length documentary films ever made – ***Mt. St. Elias*** (skiing) and ***The Art of Flight*** (snowboarding), both by Red Bull Productions – bring the rush of adventure and abandon to the festival mix as the Red Bull Team zips energy drinks from venue to venue via a Mini-Cooper fleet.

Veteran politician Pat Brown’s granddaughter, Sascha Rice, will present ***California State of Mind – The Legacy of Pat Brown***. Also among some 100 films to be presented: ***Girlfriend***, winner of the Gotham Award, and the acclaimed Israeli film, ***Dolphin Boy***. Other exciting films will be announced as the selection process continues in the weeks ahead.

La Quinceañera Film Fiesta, a “festival within a festival,” is a special offering in observance of SIFF’s 15th anniversary. Drawing from the tradition of the Latina girl’s coming-of-age celebration on her 15th birthday, La Quinceañera Film Fiesta will feature fifteen films from Mexico, Cuba, Argentina, Colombia, and other Spanish-language countries, as well as from Latino directors and filmmakers from the U.S. Taking place at the Boys & Girls Club of Sonoma Valley, La Quinceañera Film Fiesta will honor the contributions of Sonoma’s Latino population to Sonoma Valley life and culture.

STUDENT PROGRAMMING

The Student Film Premier will take place at historic Sebastiani Theater on Thursday morning, April 12, to a standing-room only audience. This traditional special event presents student works emerging over the past year from the SIFF-sponsored Sonoma Valley High School Media Arts Program. The film festival established the program eleven years ago and has since generated more than \$350,000 to fund it. Graduates have gone on to top colleges and some are now working in the film industry.

FESTIVAL BACKGROUND

Founded in 1997, Sonoma International Film Festival takes pride in showcasing emerging talent, providing a supportive environment for filmmakers, and creating a rich cultural asset for Northern California’s wine country.

As one of the nation's top ten destination film festivals, SIFF is uniquely positioned as a lively celebration of film, food, wine and music. An annual gathering for film industry insiders, filmmakers, critics, and cinema enthusiasts, SIFF takes place in one of the most scenic and epicurean places in the world to experience the art of film.

Passionate film viewers come to celebrate filmmakers and their unique offerings while enjoying Sonoma's exceptional hospitality, distinguished wines, cuisine, historic charm and bucolic agricultural environment.

Two hundred filmmakers presented 97 films from 14 countries in 2011, and The Festival honored actress Susan Sarandon with a lifetime achievement award. SIFF annually presents films for twenty thousand film viewers via The Festival and year round Sonoma Valley Film Society events.

SIFF has screened films that have gone on to major theatrical release including: *Bhutto*, *The Cove*, *Dressed*, *Bag-It*, *Humpday*, *Lemon Tree*, *Fat*, *Sick and Nearly Dead*, and *The 500 Days of Summer*. The festival's reputation has encouraged film luminaries including Susan Sarandon, John Lasseter, Bruce Willis, Michael Keaton, Robin Williams, Lauren Hutton, Danny Glover and Saul Zaentz to attend and actively participate in discussion panels and in interviews.

The festival success story has also been reflected in its growing recognition within film festival circles and the entertainment industry. Last June, SIFF won a Golden Trailer Award for Best Film Festival Trailer (*Tipsy*) and Best Film Festival Poster at the awards show held in Los Angeles.

Sonoma International Film Festival incorporates all that is glamorous, exotic, unusual and extraordinary about the film world and delivers it in one of the most beautiful destinations in the world.

SIFF is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

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