

Lee to make 'Herstory' tomorrow

CELEBRITY SECRET SPOTS Favorite Escapes

Life on the Edge

A popular beach brings filmmaker Edgy Lee closer to home

By DANIELLE LANEY

PHOTOGRAPH BY RIC NOBLE

After living on the mainland for 20 years, Hawaii's born-artist and filmmaker Edgy Lee decided to return to the Islands. "For years, I was anonymous, living in big cities: New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, in big cities. "But when I first got back to Hawaii," I went to the local drugstore and somebody tapped me on the shoulder and said, 'Aren't you so-and-so's granddaughter?' When that happened to me, I thought, 'This is really beautiful.'"

Edgy had a lost touch with Hawaii during her mainland stint, which included highlights such as cohosting a children's television series with Bill Cosby, producing music with reggae artists Jo Higgs and the Walters, and composing with jazz legend Wayne Shorter. "Never did I say my home was anywhere other than the Islands," she says. "And all those experiences were very beneficial to my finally deciding, unconsciously, to make films about the place where I grew up."

While conducting research for one of those films, Waikiki—In the Wake of Dreams, which debuted in Washington, D.C., in 2000, Edgy gained renewed appreciation for one of her favorite places in the Islands: Sans Souci Beach at the Diamond Head end of Waikiki—the idyllic stretch of sand that fronts the W Honolulu hotel, the Colony Surf condominiums (home to Michel's restaurant), and the New Otani Kaihana Beach Hotel.

"Sans Souci Beach is almost in one of the most beautiful places in the world," Edgy says.

"There's not a kid who grew up on O'ahu who doesn't have some connection here. When I come here, it reminds me of my childhood and my teenage years. It's a very romantic place, also very safe. I was a cocky baby, and my young parents could find no other way to stop me from crying but to take me down to Sans Souci Beach and rock me to sleep. Hence the name Edgy, from keeping them on edge."

Now that she's back in the Islands, Edgy captivates audiences with documentaries that explore Hawaii's history and character. In 1992, she began work on Papa'Ōkai—A Story of Hawaiian Land, produced by her then-L.A.-based partner, FilmWorks Pacific. She commuted between Honolulu and L.A. for four years, but by 1996 decided to move her company—and herself—to Honolulu. "I came home to make this film and decided to stay," she says. Since coming home, Edgy and her team have completed two more films about Hawaii: Paniolo O Hawai'i—Cowboys of the Far West and Waikiki—In the Wake of Dreams.

Waikiki, in fact, had its Hawaii'i premiere last March on Kūhō Beach, which is part of Sans Souci. The film played to some 5,000 people under a full moon, and it created such a buzz that now Honolulu hosts weekend film screenings on the beach.

"After researching for Waikiki, I know more about Sans Souci Beach historically, and I'm just amazed," Edgy says. "It's right in Waikiki, but this particular beach has such a deep, rich history."



Filmmaker Edgy Lee leaves camera behind when she visits Waikiki's Sans Souci Beach.

"I was here, for example, that Greek botanist George P. J. Couper opened the Sans Souci Hotel in 1893 and ran it until 1895, when he was jailed for attempting to restore Queen Lili'uokalani to the throne.

Sans Souci Beach, which translates in French to "without care," has provided inspiration for countless writers. "Robert Louis Stevenson stayed at Sans Souci when he first came to Hawaii," Edgy says. "Mark Twain was here. W. Somerset Maugham. Jack London. The list is endless. And there's not a single place, there's not any notoriety, no commercialization. It's just a place people know about."

"When asked to describe the sunset at Sans Souci, Edgy recalls one of the images in Waikiki. "It is a sky that is so vast, so expansive, like a Mark Rothko painting, with layers of vermilion, orange, lilac, purple—and then the horizon cuts across the Pacific Ocean as if

you're looking through a window into another dimension because it is so awe-inspiring, so beautiful and majestic," Edgy says. "Just when you think that it couldn't possibly be more beautiful, a catamaran floats into view and you sit silently, watching a moment in time that must truly be a glimpse of paradise on Earth."

With a good friend by her side and free beach parking to boot (something she definitely missed while on the mainland), Edgy muses that spending time at Sans Souci Beach means yes, you can go home again.

To get the most out of your visit to Sans Souci Beach, Edgy suggests having refreshments at the W Honolulu hotel or at the New Otani Kaihana Beach Hotel's Hau Tere Lānai, walking along the beach at sunset, and then dining at Michel's. "What an evening this would be," she says.

Noted Island film director will speak at women's event

By Paula Roth

She stood on the edge of the NBC stage of the "Tonight Show," representing the Island and championing the cause of women in the industry, trying to measure the courage to step onto the stage with Johnny Carson.

Suddenly she felt a firm hand on her back and she knew—producer Ward Cameron had stepped onto the stage moment or who—moment in her career. "Don't," she said. "I'm only 23 years old."

There was a clear understanding of her headlights, but it was so hard to let it go. She was so young, so naive, so full of hope, so full of dreams. She had just signed her first contract.

Learning on camera Lee left Hawaii to work for a major network in Los Angeles. She stayed in a small apartment, but she was not alone. She had a roomie who was a local girl, and she was not alone.

Lee's story is a true one. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry.

Edgy Lee

Edgy Lee is a film director who has worked on the set of the "Tonight Show."



After a successful career in front of the camera, Edgy Lee turned her talent to producing and directing award-winning films.

Lee's story is a true one. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry.

Lee's story is a true one. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry.

Lee's success before camera gives her an edge behind it

By Paula Roth

She stood on the edge of the NBC stage of the "Tonight Show," representing the Island and championing the cause of women in the industry, trying to measure the courage to step onto the stage with Johnny Carson.

Suddenly she felt a firm hand on her back and she knew—producer Ward Cameron had stepped onto the stage moment or who—moment in her career. "Don't," she said. "I'm only 23 years old."

There was a clear understanding of her headlights, but it was so hard to let it go. She was so young, so naive, so full of hope, so full of dreams. She had just signed her first contract.

Learning on camera Lee left Hawaii to work for a major network in Los Angeles. She stayed in a small apartment, but she was not alone. She had a roomie who was a local girl, and she was not alone.

Lee's story is a true one. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry.

Lee's success before camera gives her an edge behind it

By Paula Roth

She stood on the edge of the NBC stage of the "Tonight Show," representing the Island and championing the cause of women in the industry, trying to measure the courage to step onto the stage with Johnny Carson.

Suddenly she felt a firm hand on her back and she knew—producer Ward Cameron had stepped onto the stage moment or who—moment in her career. "Don't," she said. "I'm only 23 years old."

There was a clear understanding of her headlights, but it was so hard to let it go. She was so young, so naive, so full of hope, so full of dreams. She had just signed her first contract.

Learning on camera Lee left Hawaii to work for a major network in Los Angeles. She stayed in a small apartment, but she was not alone. She had a roomie who was a local girl, and she was not alone.

Lee: Filmmaker seeking stories unique to Hawai'i

When she first walked onto the set of "The Merv Griffin Show," Edgy Lee felt like she was in a foreign land. She was a young girl from Hawaii, and she was on a major television network.

Edgy Lee's story is a true one. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry.

Edgy Lee's story is a true one. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry.

Edgy Lee's story is a true one. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry.

Edgy Lee's story is a true one. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry.

Edgy Lee's story is a true one. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry.



Edgy Lee left Hawaii as a teenager to attend the San Francisco Art Institute. Her study of painting led her to photography, and her beauty quickly moved her front of the camera with modeling and acting jobs.

Edgy Lee's story is a true one. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry.

Edgy Lee's story is a true one. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry.

Edgy Lee's story is a true one. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry.

Edgy Lee's story is a true one. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry. She is a woman who has made it in the industry.

What can Business Leadership Hawaii do for your business?

"Receiving the FIN Business Leadership Hawaii award is the company of a very worthy and established nonprofit organization as an honor and has been a source of pride for everyone involved in our projects as well as recognition to potential partners who recognize the organization's efforts."

Business Leadership Hawaii 2004 Categories: Best in Business Division, Nonprofit Leadership Award, Community Commitment Award, Business Leader of the Year.

Business Leadership Hawaii 2004 Categories: Best in Business Division, Nonprofit Leadership Award, Community Commitment Award, Business Leader of the Year.

Business Leadership Hawaii 2004 Categories: Best in Business Division, Nonprofit Leadership Award, Community Commitment Award, Business Leader of the Year.

Business Leadership Hawaii 2004 Categories: Best in Business Division, Nonprofit Leadership Award, Community Commitment Award, Business Leader of the Year.

Business Leadership Hawaii 2004 Categories: Best in Business Division, Nonprofit Leadership Award, Community Commitment Award, Business Leader of the Year.

Pacific Business News Presents BLM 2004

Business Leadership Hawaii 2004 Categories: Best in Business Division, Nonprofit Leadership Award, Community Commitment Award, Business Leader of the Year.

Business Leadership Hawaii 2004 Categories: Best in Business Division, Nonprofit Leadership Award, Community Commitment Award, Business Leader of the Year.

Business Leadership Hawaii 2004 Categories: Best in Business Division, Nonprofit Leadership Award, Community Commitment Award, Business Leader of the Year.

Business Leadership Hawaii 2004 Categories: Best in Business Division, Nonprofit Leadership Award, Community Commitment Award, Business Leader of the Year.

Business Leadership Hawaii 2004 Categories: Best in Business Division, Nonprofit Leadership Award, Community Commitment Award, Business Leader of the Year.

Business Leadership Hawaii 2004 Categories: Best in Business Division, Nonprofit Leadership Award, Community Commitment Award, Business Leader of the Year.

Pacific Arts makes a difference through film

Nonprofit Leadership Winner. Pacific Arts Foundation's film 'Isle Keiki' is a powerful story of a child's journey from a remote island to a big city.

Nonprofit Leadership Winner. Pacific Arts Foundation's film 'Isle Keiki' is a powerful story of a child's journey from a remote island to a big city.

Nonprofit Leadership Winner. Pacific Arts Foundation's film 'Isle Keiki' is a powerful story of a child's journey from a remote island to a big city.

Nonprofit Leadership Winner. Pacific Arts Foundation's film 'Isle Keiki' is a powerful story of a child's journey from a remote island to a big city.

Nonprofit Leadership Winner. Pacific Arts Foundation's film 'Isle Keiki' is a powerful story of a child's journey from a remote island to a big city.

Nonprofit Leadership Winner. Pacific Arts Foundation's film 'Isle Keiki' is a powerful story of a child's journey from a remote island to a big city.

Spring New Products Show advertisement with logos for various brands.

Spring New Products Show advertisement with logos for various brands.

Spring New Products Show advertisement with logos for various brands.

Spring New Products Show advertisement with logos for various brands.

Documentary filmmaker

Edgy Lee

talks about the state's growing film and television industry, affirmation, inspiration and a different kind of gift.

By Lisa Beazley

Photography: Ric Noyle

An image on a movie or television screen is as close as many people ever get to Hawaii. As a maker of award-winning films that tell the real story of Paniolos, beach boys and Hawaiian Royalty, Hawaii-born Edgy Lee has made a career of educating audiences around the world with captivating and entertaining documentaries. Now, the nationally recognized documentary filmmaker is focusing her energies on Hawaii-specific projects. She wants to take Hawaii's film and television industry to a new level, and she has the experience, the drive and a plan to do it.

Hawaii's current role in major films and television shows is for the most part a supporting one—the beautiful backdrop. And although Lee thinks Hawaii can be more, she has to give some credit to the blockbuster films that use Hawaii as their backdrop. "When *Lilo and Stitch* is out of the theatres and kids stop buying those lunch pails, *Waikiki In The Wake of Dreams* (her 2001 documentary) will be in the library for the sixth grader who is going to learn about his or her heritage through film," she says. But Lee wants to create a climate where the people of Hawaii see their heritage reflected in television and film without going to the library to borrow documentaries. She believes it's healthy for children to see themselves reflected when they watch television or film. Her vision is clear, "I want local television to show original local programming that reflects local faces, thoughts, concerns, history and culture and is made solely by Hawaii talent. Not stories told from outside perspectives but rather stories told about us and by us." She has been working toward this goal with her independent film company, FilmWorks, Limited, since she moved back to Oahu from Los Angeles more than ten years ago.

Edgy (what her parents decided to call her as a baby when she literally "kept them on edge") left Hawaii after high school and studied fine art at the San Francisco Art Institute while working as a West Coast illustrator for the *National Observer*. While always drawn to the visual arts, she made an effort not to limit herself to just one career path. Lee modeled and worked as an actor, appearing as co-host of Bill Cosby's *Picture Pages* and on *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson, where overcoming an episode of stage fright revealed her tough spirit. She remembers standing behind the curtain she had grown up watching. "I was literally stuffed—falsies and all—into this little Chinese dress and was carrying this huge fake monkey. I was so nervous I was hyperventilating. I'm supposed to surprise Johnny Carson in the middle of his monologue and when I hear my cue, the stage guy takes off one of his headphones and says 'Are you nervous?' All I could do was look at him, pant and nod. So he says, 'Don't worry, honey, only two hundred million people are watching, and he pushes me out on stage. I come out in these high heels and this stuffed dress and somehow I do it. After that I knew I could do anything."

In the late 1980s, after years of modeling and acting, she moved from in front of the camera to pursue some less glamorous—but for Lee, much more rewarding—positions. She began to independently produce and write, making a name for herself as one of the few female in-studio record producers. She produced big names like Joe Higgs and *The Wailers*. A talented musician classically trained in piano and violin, Lee also composed music with jazz legend Wayne Shorter and composed film scores. She credits her musical training—for her success—as not just a composer, but in



Edgy Lee, her partner Jeffrey Mueller (with dog) and crew on location



every aspect of life. "In life, rhythm and timing are everything. How many times is it about being in the right place at the right time? That's rhythm."

When she decided to direct and produce her breakthrough, first full-length independent film, *Papakolea, A Story of Hawaiian Land*, it marked a turning point in her life and career. She commuted from her home in Los Angeles while making the film and started to wonder if she could make a living back in Hawaii. "When I first came back, the beauty here really struck me. I thought, if there's a way that I can live and work here and truly contribute to the television and film industry, then I'm going to do it." From her Makiki home and production studio, it is obvious that she has found her way to contribute and is at peace with her decision and her surroundings, "When I think about how I lived in L.A., was I crazy? Now I wake up in the morning, hear birds and look down at the skyline of Waikiki. I feel lucky."

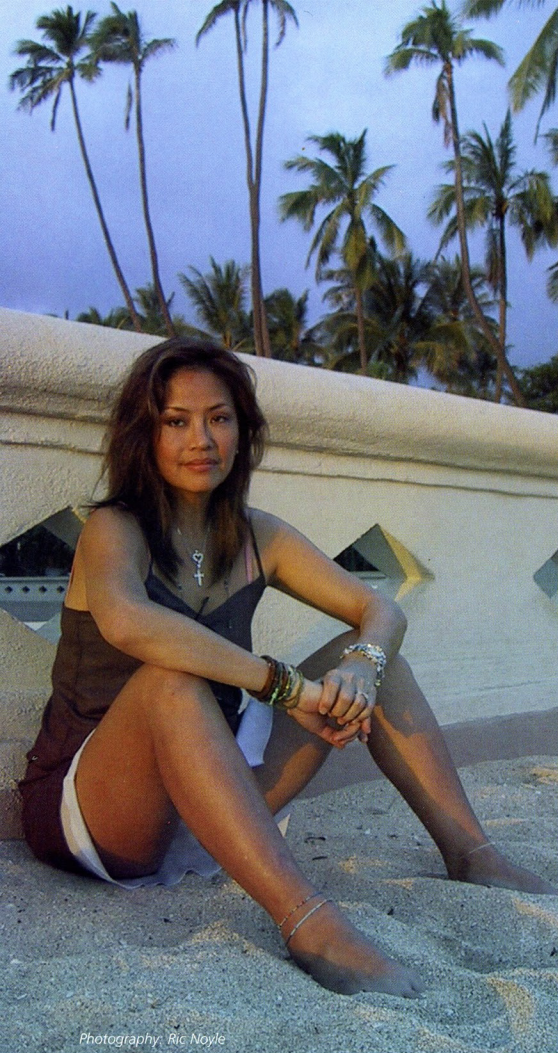
For someone who spent the formative part of her career holed up in dark studios editing and producing reggae music, Lee's inspiration comes from observing human interaction. It's the seemingly un-dramatic moments that most people may not even notice but from which Lee derives inspiration. When Lee talks about what inspires her, she describes moments where she is pulled out of her little world by a striking interaction between two people. An old man standing to let a woman sit down at a bus stop, for example, might strike her. "It's the kind of moment where you may not cry but something just hits you and you're almost brought to tears and you don't even know why. That's how I would describe inspiration." Negative moments, too, inspire her she says, recalling a frustrated mother at the supermarket. "I didn't have to know anything about her to see her whole story. It was written on her face and in

the way she dressed and her demeanor. She was so frustrated that she was about to backhand this screaming four-year-old little boy. You just wanted to hug her or grab her and stop what she was about to do. That's inspiring—it's those moments that make me want to document."

Though her long list of accolades includes Best Cinematography from the New York International Independent Film Festival and her documentaries have been translated into other languages for viewing around the world, Lee's real affirmation comes from the people she affects with her films. When three third grade boys came to interview her for a school project because they had watched *Papakolea* in school and shaking from nervousness they asked her what it was like to be from here and make television and films, it touched her deeply. "They told me they looked at their Hawaiian classmates differently after that film." One of the boys left an indelible mark on Lee. He was from Vietnam and had only been in the country two years, but he spoke perfect English. "When I asked him what he wanted to be when he grows up, he said that he wanted to go into politics. I thought you know what? This kid is going to remember the story he saw and maybe be a little bit more understanding of indigenous cul-



On the location set of *A Tribute to Hawaii's Firefighters*



Photography: Ric Novle

tures, no matter where he ends up. Maybe that little glimpse during his early childhood of another culture through film is going to make him kinder when it comes to approving a budget for the arts."

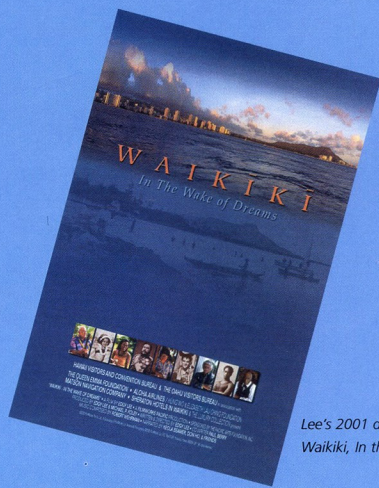
A similar reward comes when older people send letters or approach Lee with tears in their eyes and say thank you for telling their story or for preserving a part of their family history. "And I think, well I had nothing to do with it; I'm just passing through here."

Just passing through or not, Lee had something to do with it. And the success of Papakolea depended on her dedication to the truth and to telling a story with compassion and honesty. She struggled with the focus of the film, shifting from the disproportionate amount of men from the neighborhood who were in jail to the Jawaiian movement as different ways to frame the underlying story of indigenous struggle. She was concerned, though, about passing on a negative impression of Native Hawaiians. Then finally, after

months of research and soul searching, she came upon a positive story that would shape her film.

Someone told her that she should talk to a grandmother who was living in Papakolea when Franklin D. Roosevelt came to visit. "Who knew that FDR had come up to this neighborhood? What made me want to do the film is the fact that the people of my generation and younger didn't care. They don't even understand that they should care, so I had to do the film." The story didn't come easy, though. "I sat and talked for hours with these 80-and 90-year old women. Finally one of them said, 'Okay, we decided we're going to give you the story.' And I thought, what a beautiful, deep culture the Native Hawaiian culture is. Their story was the gift. And if you're not responsible and if you don't deserve this gift, you're not going to get it."

The self-sufficient film and television industry in Lee's vision may be getting closer to a reality, thanks to her untraditional method of creating this scene. Tired of talking about the limited market, Lee came together with competing filmmakers to produce a series of tribute films aimed to captivate local audiences. She directed the first in the series, A Tribute to Hawaii's Firefighters, which premiered on Kuhio Beach in September and aired on local television stations. Other local directors are lending their skills to the next films in the series, paying tribute to Lifeguards and Rescue Professionals, Hawaii baseball and others. She is also working on a primetime courtroom series scheduled to air early in 2003. These projects differ from Lee's previous films in that they are made solely for a Hawaii audience. "It has been really fun because we get to use local jargon and we don't have to use subtitles or explain ourselves," she says. The prospect of the people of Hawaii seeing their history and culture honestly depicted on a weekly television show is exciting to Lee. Time will tell if we are ready to forsake reruns of Friends in favor of a locally made television show. But until then Lee is committed to her mission and to her life here in Hawaii. ★



Lee's 2001 documentary film
Waikiki, In the Wake of Dream