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January 18, 2014 – 10:34 AM | 2 Comments  
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Submitted by **Laurie Hutzler** on January 27, 2013 – 1:33 PM No Comment

This is a guest post by good friends who run a wonderful writing retreat program. Here it is in their own words—



When first generation Italian-American Carlo Cavagna got his screenwriting certificate from UCLA's Professional Program he found balancing a day job and finding time to write a challenge.

He and his fellow writers lamented the chaos of LA with many a "wouldn't it be great if we could get away and focus on nothing but writing for a few weeks?"

One day over espresso Carlo and a former professor sat reminiscing about favorite times in Italy. They hit on all the usual points: the amazing food, the delicious yet affordable wine, the idyllic towns, the culture rich with history and art, the peace it's possible to find away from the American rat race. Suddenly it seemed startlingly obvious: they needed to put together a writing retreat in Italy.

From that seed, Michelangelo Screenwriting was born. Carlo would bring a vetted instructor to teach a group of enthusiastic writers from all over the world. Over two weeks, they'd get intensive one-on-one time with the instructor as well as daily group feedback and lecture sessions.

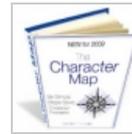
There would be a smattering of days off for sightseeing and fun but mostly the concept was to take time away from regular life to focus on bringing a new piece of writing into the world and polished for sale. The demand was instant.

The regular venue for the program is a remote, eight-hundred-year old stone farmhouse named Villa Michelangelo (hence the program name) that belongs to Carlo's father's best friend. It sits in a quiet valley east of Cortona on the Tuscan/Umbrian border.

This year the program is expanding its offerings to include sessions in the Orvieto convent that was a favorite travel stop of Carlo's late uncle. "Hollywood is all about who you know. That's even more true in Italy where family ties are paramount.

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Video of Laurie "Character is Action."



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These places have been so welcoming to me and my groups because of my family. The villa only sleeps ten. This year we've got a writing team teaching so we're offering sixteen student spots. The convent will be an amazing spot to let go and create," explains Carlo.

Though it started off as a retreat for UCLA-trained writers, over the years Michelangelo Screenwriting has expanded to welcome Irish university students, German adventurers and Aussie television executives.

Carlo begins lining up the next year's instructors in late summer/early fall. "We always go for people with a following. Writers that other writers will be really excited to work with," Carlo says.

This year's program brings the comedy writing team of Acker & Blacker (The Thrilling Adventure Hour, Supernatural) in to teach. For the first time, the business of launching a project and creating a brand will be a major feature of the program.

"It's not enough anymore just to write a great spec script," Carlo says. "You have to know how to market yourself." After an incredibly successful Kickstarter campaign to expand their monthly stage show to a graphic novel, web series and concert film, Acker & Blacker are the guys in the know.

"Their ability to foster and reach a devoted following is clear. Writers need to understand how to do this now. We can't just sit around hoping that an increasingly conservative major studio will risk millions on our idea."

Of course it helps that Acker & Blacker's regular players in the Thrilling Adventure Hour include comedian Paul F. Tompkins, and Paget Brewster (Criminal Minds), Autumn Reeser (Entourage, The Last Resort), and Busy Phillips (Cougar Town).

The show is also known for its guest stars, including frequent visits from such stars as Nathan Fillion (Castle, Firefly), Colin Hanks (The Guilt Trip, Dexter), John Hamm (Mad Men) and most recently John Krasinski (The Office), Emily Blunt (Looper) and Joseph Gordon Levitt (Looper). Available worldwide via podcast from Nerdist Industries, the show has been covered by NPR, the Los Angeles Times, and countless blogs.

Not only are Acker & Blacker gifted teachers but they are constantly working writers, having sold numerous pilots and sketches, and spent a stint on the writing staff of Supernatural. They're on the front lines daily and they know how to make it through the machine. Most valuably, they know how to take their work straight to audiences when Hollywood isn't taking notice.

That is invaluable knowledge for any writer to develop. In Hollywood it certainly is all about connections and if you can create a supportive and fun family along the way, you're on the right track. Michelangelo Screenwriting aims to help writers do just that while adding a little dolce vita in along the way.

MICHELANGELO SCREENWRITING • SUMMER 2013 • ORMETO, ITALY

Led by Ben Acker & Ben Blacker of the Thrilling Adventure Hour

Session 1: Sunday June 16 – Saturday June 29 Practical Screen and TV Writing

Session 2: Sunday June 30 – Saturday July 6 Intensive Screen and Television Writing

Twitter: @Michel\_write

Visit [www.MichelangeloScreenwriting.com](http://www.MichelangeloScreenwriting.com) for more info or to apply for one of the 16 spots.

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