

# Straight Out Of Brooklyn

By: Mike Caccioppoli

The following is a list of awards that the film I'm about to write about has won: Best Actor and Filmmaker's award (1998 Brooklyn Film Festival), Best Feature and Best Director (1998 Blue Sky International Film Festival, Las Vegas), Best New Director (1998 New York International Independent Film Festival), and Official Selection (1998 Bergamo Film Meeting, Italy, 1998 New Filmmakers Series, New York). Now if not for the "New Director" awards, you probably would have guessed that the director of such a film would have to be, oh let's say, Martin Scorsese or Quentin Tarantino? Well, the director of the new film "The Court" is none other than Paul Bracco. Who? They probably said the same thing about Scorsese after his first film "Who's That Knocking at My Door" (1968). Bracco is a Brooklyn filmmaker, and while that in itself may not mean much because many talented directors have come from Brooklyn, it's when you come to understand that Bracco raised \$50,000 on his own and shot the film in one month in the streets of Red Hook (many now call this area "Carroll Gardens", but the people who have lived there long enough still call it The Hook), that you can appreciate how his talents go far beyond that of a director.

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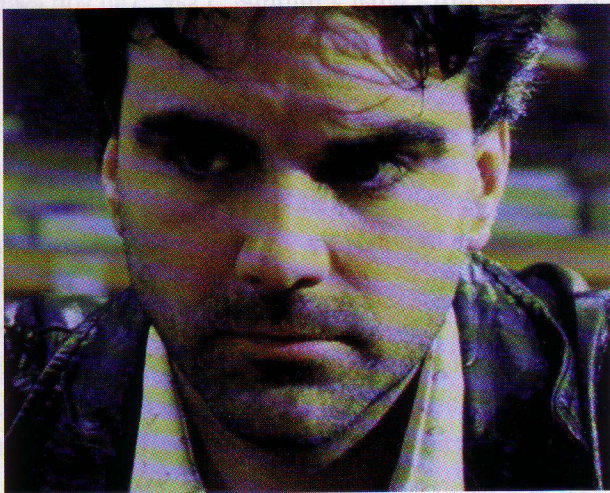
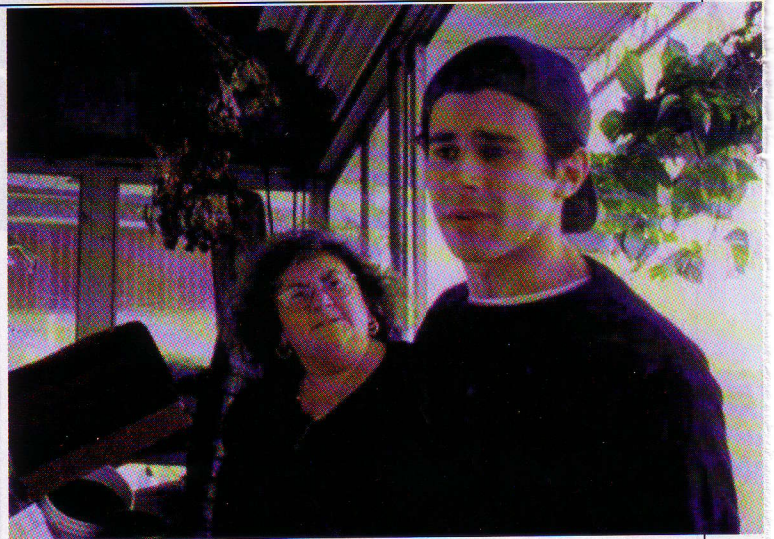
Named after Court Street in the neighborhood, and also for the notion of the series of games being played within the film, "The Court" centers on Paul, played by Bracco and his neighborhood friends. A down and out wise guy, Paul becomes involved with drugs, and



what ensues is a downward spiral in which Paul's buddies are also caught. I met up with Paul in a local Carroll..up, sorry, Red Hook watering hole and spoke to him about his filmmaking career. At twenty-six years old he has totally immersed himself in the business. Traveling from Las Vegas to Italy in order to see his film in various festivals. He talks in depth about how he used to work at the Tribeca Grill, owned by Robert DeNiro. "What a minute!" I say, "Did you ever meet him?" "Sure, we're good buddies," says Bracco, showing what a true actor he really is. He did in fact meet a lot of people while working as a bartender, he "networked" as we like to say in the biz, with some other actors who agreed to help him out in the future. Most importantly, he met Jeff Mackin, who was hired within a week of Paul; Jeff would go on to star in "The Court." One night, while working at a gathering of friends honoring the late Catherine Scorsese (mother of Martin), Paul met Vinny Vella, one of the stars of "Casino." Vinny agreed to play a role as a candy store owner in "The Court."



As we throw down a few brews (I have to admit no matter how tough I try to sound, in actuality, I had one light beer and a glass of water), I find myself really getting into the conversation. I mean Paul likes to watch the "Actors Studio" interviews on PBS also, and like myself, he appreciates the work of actors like Harvey Keitel and directors such as Abel Ferrara. For a young director, he can really appreciate the people who have come before him, and like many young filmmakers he proudly admits that Martin Scorsese has been a great influence on him. Like Scorsese, Paul feels that you have to write about what you know, and life in Red Hook is what he knows about. I asked Paul if both acting and directing in his first film was tough? "To tell you the truth I enjoyed it". Well ok, but are you going to just settle in behind the camera next time? "I don't know, I really enjoy acting too much." So Paul obviously wants to do it all, and who's to tell him he can't. As a kid from Red Hook he doesn't know the meaning of the word can't. In fact Paul has already started "Red Hook Films", a company that he hopes will not only produce his own films but others as well. We talk about how there are so many stories to be told about this neighborhood, and I see Paul's eyes light up. But aren't there so many stories about the hood that don't even scratch the surface,



that are made by people who don't really know the territory? "Sure", says Paul, "that's why I want to do right by the people I've known throughout my life." By his tone, one feels that Paul Bracco has a lot more to say, and he tells me that he's currently working on a couple of projects as we speak. As we walk down the street after leaving the bar, I notice that Paul walks as though this really is his court, and at least through his films, he certainly will do his neighborhood justice.