

The Door in the Floor

A Focus Features Release

Production Notes

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Synopsis

The Door in the Floor explores the complexities of love in its brightest, most mysterious, and darkest corners. **The Door in the Floor** is directed by Tod Williams, whose screenplay is adapted from John Irving's best-selling novel A Widow for One Year.

Set in the beach community of East Hampton, New York, the film chronicles one pivotal summer in the lives of famous children's books author Ted Cole (Jeff Bridges) and his beautiful wife Marion (Kim Basinger). Their once-great marriage has been strained by tragedy. The Coles lovingly parent their surviving child, bright 4-year-old Ruth (Elle Fanning), who takes everything in stride as perhaps only a child can. But Marion's equation of love with loss, coupled with Ted's infidelities, points towards a much-needed change in the relationship. That may come in the form of Eddie O'Hare (Jon Foster), the young man Ted hires to work as his summer assistant - and, Ted hopes, the catalyst to invigorate the Coles' bond of marriage.

Eddie idolizes Ted, but Ted's erratic work habits soon leave Eddie to his own devices. Marion becomes an object of desire for Eddie, rekindling in her some surprising emotions as a mother and as a woman. To Eddie's surprise and delight, his yearning is potently reciprocated.

As he becomes passionately entwined with the seemingly fragile yet increasingly bold Marion, Eddie comes to realize that, similarly, Ted's surface fecklessness hides something deeper within. As the summer draws to a close, Marion and Ted must make difficult decisions about the future of their family.

A Focus Features and Revere Pictures presentation of a This is that production. Jeff Bridges, Kim Basinger. **The Door in the Floor**. Jon Foster, Mimi Rogers, Elle Fanning, with Bijou Phillips. Composer, Marcelo Zarvos. Costume Designer, Eric Daman. Editor, Affonso Gonçalves. Production Designer, Thérèse DePrez. Director of Photography, Terry Stacey. Co-Producer, Marisa Polvino. Executive Producer, Amy J. Kaufman. Executive Producer, Roger Marino. Produced by Michael Corrente. Produced by Ted Hope, Anne Carey. Based the novel A Widow for One Year by John Irving. Screenplay by Tod Williams. Directed by Tod Williams.

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About the Production

The Door in the Floor tells a tale of love and sexuality, of richly layered characters who experience both revivifying liberation and humbling emotional reversals of fortune. For those who came together to make the film, their aesthetic ties to it reveal the material's very personal resonance.

Writer/director Tod Williams says, "It's about how love is defined by its shadow - loss."

Producer Ted Hope states that the film is about "the complexities of life."

Actor Jeff Bridges sees it as "a wonderful combination of tragedy and comedy."

Actress Kim Basinger sees the film as being "about people brought together for all the wrong reasons and being forced into the depths of truth."

Author John Irving comments, "I think one of the most interesting things in storytelling is to see how people get over things; how they recover, or don't recover, from what they lose."

The first part of Irving's best-selling novel A Widow for One Year has been brought to the screen through a unique creative alliance encompassing dedicated independent filmmakers, the celebrated author himself, and a committed troupe of actors. "It's extremely gratifying," states the author. "Tod Williams' screenplay is the most word-for-word faithful translation to film of any of the adaptations written from my novels. But he has also made his own film. This is excellent work."

The process by which A Widow for One Year became **The Door in the Floor** spanned several years. Casting director Ann Goulder first brought writer/director Tod Williams to the attention of producers Ted Hope and Anne Carey in 1998. At the time, Williams needed financial and logistical help to finish his debut feature, *The Adventures of Sebastian Cole*. His new acquaintances contributed an Avid editing system and space, and became friends and collaborators.

Williams also made time to read the [then-] new John Irving novel, A Widow for One Year. "I generally read his books as soon as they come out," Williams states. "His novels are always big, intense emotional experiences. As a writer, his narrative techniques, depth of character, and blend of humor and truth represent a mark of excellence to which I aspire."

"I felt a personal connection to all three characters, who are selfless and selfish at the same time. I remembered when I was like Eddie, but I had become more like Ted. I read the first 183 pages in one sitting. I was very moved - and struck at how well it would work as a movie."

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Making this movie was about exorcising Ted – who is less capable of the generosity that is necessary for love – from my psyche."

One day, Carey recalls, Williams "came in and gave me a copy of John Irving's book. He said, 'Would you read it and tell me if you think it's a movie.' I did, and I said, 'I only think the first part is a movie.' He felt the same way and we went and talked to Ted about it – "

" – And I said, 'You guys are out of your mind,'" laughs Hope.

Nonetheless, Hope and Carey contacted Irving's agent, Bob Bookman. Carey remembers Bookman being "very encouraging. He said, 'You know, it's not about money for John at this point. He just really wants to know who the people are who are interested in making movies out of his material.'"

Seizing the moment, Carey drafted letters from the producers and Williams (respectively) to send to Irving. Hope notes, "We worked on these letters quite a bit...probably almost as long as John spent writing the novel."

"For three weeks," Williams specifies. "An easy way to describe our intentions to John was to reference *The Ice Storm* [the 1997 film version of Rick Moody's novel, produced by Ted Hope and James Schamus with director Ang Lee].

Williams had already drawn a bead on what Irving's characters would experience on-screen. "In Eddie's case, it's a loss of innocence – sexual, emotional, and intellectual. For Marion, it's the loss of her sons and then herself – of all her emotions except grief. She tries to give what's left of herself to Eddie. And Ted has lost faith – in himself, his marriage, his talent."

Proving again that truth can be more surprising than fiction, Irving had been Hope's wrestling coach in high school "for about two weeks," says the producer. "Then a book he had written had a little bit of success. He taught me what a half-nelson was, and then three months later he was on the cover of Time." The book was The Hotel New Hampshire.

Serendipitously, in September 1999, Hope and Carey found themselves at the Toronto International Film Festival with their production of Ang Lee's *Ride With The Devil* while John Irving was also there with *The Cider House Rules* (which he had adapted from his novel and which was directed by Lasse Hallström). Both films starred Tobey Maguire. Hope asked the young actor for a re-introduction to Irving. When it came, Irving told Hope that he had read the letters sent to him and was intrigued by the filmmakers' intentions. He also asked to see *The Adventures of Sebastian Cole*, since the producers had also sent along a review of the film that called it "Irvingesque."

Carey says, "We got John a videotape of that film; he watched it the next day and called us and invited us to his house in Vermont for the weekend." Carey, nine months pregnant, could not make the trip, but

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Hope and Williams borrowed the latter's father's sports car and sped from New York City to Vermont.

At Irving's house, the filmmakers discussed the planned screenplay adaptation with the author. Hope says, "John very much liked that we weren't looking to adapt the whole novel, and that we were looking to be faithful to the tone, the greater feeling. By the time the weekend was over, John said, 'Let's do it. I want to give you the book.'

"He wanted to work out an arrangement where we were all in this together. Basically, he granted us a free option on the novel. It was a joint belief, as filmmakers and writers and artists, that we could find a common ground. He had tremendous faith in Tod, as we did."

"Being able to talk to John about all of the choices I made in the adaptation, casting, and editing has been an incredible luxury," states Williams.

The author did reserve the right to input and approval on several key components of the project: "The title, the actors, and script approval. But he launched us on our way," says Carey.

Hope adds, "John wanted to make sure that Tod got to direct the movie, that it wasn't going to be the situation where the writer does a script that everyone loves and, because he isn't a known director, is taken off the project." Irving's previous experiences with the film industry had exposed him to that all-too-familiar scenario.

"With that kind of support, we were ready for the long battle to get the film made – almost four years," says Hope.

"His confidence in me, however mysterious, is what allowed me to see this through," adds Williams.

It had taken over a dozen years for The Cider House Rules to get made into a movie. But John Irving, who won an Academy Award for adapting The Cider House Rules to the screen, muses that "it's a great treat for me, to be 62 and have what feels like a new career – in addition to my day job of being a novelist. That's where my heart is. But I get so much out of being involved in the occasional collaborative effort that it energizes me when I go back to writing novels."

Irving feels that A Widow For One Year lends itself to the "kind of abridgement" Tod Williams has made with The Door in the Floor. "With The Cider House Rules, from the moment I finished that novel, I saw how to do it as a film. But I didn't see a way to do A Widow for One Year as a film, because in the novel the feeling of the passage of time is as important as any major character. I had already rejected several proposals for a film. Tod's idea to tell only the first third of the novel as a film is a much more truthful focus on what the spirit of the novel really is. I liked Tod's idea immediately."

Michael Corrente adds, "There's not enough time to make a film of the whole book, to do it right as a movie. This adaptation has a wonderful beginning, middle, and end."

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Irving concurs, noting that "the novel is structured like a play in three acts. The first act has its own kind of closure. There's a very good precedent for making a film from a long novel in this way: *The Tin Drum*, which was resolved in much the same way that Tod has resolved A Widow for One Year. It's a far better idea than truncating or over-compressing a long novel, denuding it of all of its vital parts."

"Marion is a woman who cannot only not recover from the death of her two sons, but also cannot recover sufficiently to love the one child she has. There is a sadness, a fragility to her. Everything that happens in the story happens because Ted, in a kind of callous way, has been able to move on from the death of his children. He is sympathetic in spite of himself. He and Marion are on diverging tracks, sexually and within their ability to deal with grief. For Eddie, this story is a learning experience. I feel that, from his very first treatment, Tod understood all that. He fine-tuned and revised the screenplay; he did the necessary revisions.

"He altered the chronology of the telling slightly, focused the film on a single summer, and made little adjustments to my material or to my dialogue. He added some things that were entirely his own. I think Tod has been enormously faithful, but in an adaptation you have to come up with things of your own which compensate for the stuff you lose, moments that never happened in the book but which form a kind of bridge or transition. I was as impressed by the scenes he invented as I was by how faithful he was to those scenes of mine that he rendered as they were."

Besides, reasons Irving with a laugh, "If you make a good enough film of the first third of the novel, people will want to read it and find out what happens after the movie. **The Door in the Floor** is so faithful to where the novel is at that point that it's an invitation to the audience to find out what happens next in these people's lives."

Williams adds, "**The Door in the Floor** has its own rhythm. There is an adjustment period, as the audience gets used to a different dynamic of expectation and fulfillment. The movie asks people to listen, and even read. Storytelling is a central motif in **The Door in the Floor** as well as a thematic narrative strategy. All of the characters tell stories in one way or another, just as we all write our own histories in our memory. How the stories are told reveals character."

With each draft of the script, Irving would read it and then give Williams notes. The author adds, "Writing a novel is something I love more than writing a screenplay. But writing a novel is solitary; for four or five years, you are not just that novel's only writer, you are probably that novel's only reader. So it is a treat to have the occasional collaboration - which a movie necessarily is. On **The Door in the Floor**, this collaboration has been tangential; I've been strictly an advisor. It's been a pleasure for me to see Tod develop as a screenwriter, and to watch this film develop under his direction."

Williams says, "John was always generous with his time, even though he's a very busy man. In every case, I felt like he affirmed my better

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instincts and was always supportive yet amazingly willing to let the film take on a separate life from the book."

In the spring of 2002, Ted Hope and Anne Carey co-founded a new production company, This is that, and set about looking for financing that would get **The Door in the Floor** made. Michael Corrente had also recently formed a new company, Revere Pictures, and notes that "Ted knew we were gearing up, so he gave me two or three screenplays to read. I read this script and thought it was one of the most powerful pieces of material I'd read in a long time. I didn't do anything about it at the time because I had to work on the business end of Revere. Once word got out in L.A. that there was a company on the East Coast willing to finance pictures, we got every screenplay ever written. I'd read dozens and go back to **The Door in the Floor**. I'd read dozens more and go back to **The Door in the Floor**."

"I talked it over with my partner Roger Marino, and we called Ted and said 'We want to make this film with you.' Roger and I don't like to make typical movie fare. This project became one of the jewels in our crown."

Joining This is that, Revere came on board with financing even before the film secured distribution through Focus Features. "We didn't consider anyone else," says Corrente. "Focus, right from the beginning, had a passion for it."

The reason Corrente kept coming back to Williams' script, he says, is "when you read a screenplay and it's right, it's effortless to read. Sometimes a screenplay is so good, you have to go back and read it again. Because you can't believe it really sang from beginning to end, without any interruptions, without any hiccups. It's the honesty in the writing. It's a brave script. And it comes from a John Irving book."

The Rhode Island native knows the film's Hamptons setting well, and lives part-time in nearby Sag Harbor. He avers that the script "captures a Hamptons sensibility. There is Long Island - and there's the Hamptons. Just as there's Rhode Island - and there's Newport."

Once he had committed to the project, Corrente "worked as a producer to get us to the point where we were ready to turn the cameras on. I spent a considerable amount of time with Tod to get a sense of his passion. This movie was done on the kind of budget that Ted and Anne can handle quite nicely."

Williams comments, "One consistent through-line in Ted and Anne's films is that they believe in the audience's intelligence. Another is that they work with directors who make quality movies outside the mainstream. And Revere is the only film financier that I know of to be run by a writer/director, Michael. And James Schamus, one of the heads of Focus, is a writer/producer in his own right. A studio run by a filmmaker is different."

Finally, the story's plum roles could be cast. Carey comments, "It's always been a script that actors have responded to. There was a lot of

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interest for the part of Marion Cole." Academy Award-winning actress Kim Basinger was one of those evincing interest.

Hope says, "With Marion, you had to feel that her soul has transcended the bounds of her physical being. She's afraid to love, because she fears that if she loves and loses again, she would not be able to tolerate it."

Carey adds, "Kim Basinger has that translucent quality. It was important to cast somebody who wasn't only beautiful, but who has so much going on, even when she's in a nearly frozen state."

Irving sees the character of Marion as "an enigma. She's shut herself off, but she comes back to life - if only in this detached, yet sexual way - with this boy for this one summer." He praises the way Basinger used her voice to express the character, admitting, "I hadn't heard a voice with that kind of sorrow, that kind of grief in it."

Hope states, "Kim's performance is incredibly brave because she as an actress is doing what few dare to do: not asking to be liked."

Williams adds, "The entire point of the movie is a question, not an answer: can you accept what Marion does without judging her? I knew that only a brave actress would take on this role. Kim Basinger understood that Marion's strength comes, paradoxically, from her having nothing to lose."

Basinger says that she was most drawn to play Marion for two reasons: working with "Kip [Tod's nickname to the actors], and [by] Marion's 'aloneness.'"

Williams found the actress to be "a revelation. I needed somebody who made you know, even if you didn't know why she did what she did, that she was doing the best thing possible under her private inner circumstances. When I met Kim, I knew I had found Marion. She knew it, too; she told me she was looking for any excuse not to do the film, because she was afraid of the darkness of the part.

"But that's what courage is - a perverse reaction to fear. I think it was her fear of the part that slowly drew her in. Marion is so vulnerable, and Kim understands that. She and Marion share an admirable quality; they both do what they believe is right with no apologies or explanations."

To complement the leading lady, the role of Ted Cole called for an authoritative leading man who could be at once charming and roguish. Hope explains, "Tod always said you have to see the boy within the man. Ted is really just in love with everything around him, and can't help himself from indulging in the pleasures that surround him."

Williams notes, "Having lost faith, Ted has become a controller and a manipulator."

Carey adds, "You also have to believe that he is a successful writer of children's books but also a failed writer; irresistible to women; also

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a great dad. You also have to believe that at one point they had been so forceful together as a couple. We always knew that we wanted Jeff Bridges." **The Door in the Floor** reunited Bridges with Basinger, whom he had starred opposite 17 years prior, in Robert Benton's comedy *Nadine*.

Irving was also already an acquaintance of the actor's, having worked "with Jeff for some years on my adaptation of A Son Of the Circus; that screenplay is still a work in progress. He's always been my first choice to play the Missionary [in that adaptation]. I know the meticulousness and obsession with detail that he brings to a character, so it was no surprise to see Jeff throw himself into the part of Ted. He embraced him."

Bridges comments, "I'm a big fan of John Irving's, and the way he juggles the comedic and tragic aspects of life. His writing feels very real to me. The fact that John liked Tod's idea of only making the first third of the book was interesting to me. John put his stamp of approval on Tod, and, meeting Tod myself, I was very impressed with him and could see why John had faith that he could pull this off.

"To me, the story is basically about how people deal with tragedy in their lives. Each person deals with it in a different way. In this family, there's a lot of anger from the deaths of the children. In a way, each parent holds the other responsible. Marion resents Ted for being able to kind of metabolize this terrible tragedy and rise above it. Ted resents Marion because she seems to be able to feel the tragedy more - grieve more - and to feel superiorly human."

Having starred in movies for nearly four decades, Bridges has played all manner of men on-screen, earning four Academy Award nominations for playing everyone from a compassionate alien (in *Starman*) to a canny U.S. President (in *The Contender*). "He's the best actor working in movies today," states Williams. "Negative energy is like kryptonite to him. Everyone around him begins to think about the possibilities with excitement."

Although Bridges demurs, "I take it as it comes," he found himself strongly drawn to **The Door in the Floor**. He reports, "I usually gravitate to a movie I'd like to see - movies where the filmmakers stay ahead of the audience and where you don't quite know what to expect. A little off-center.

"And those are also the kind of characters that I'm attracted to. This one was unlike any I'd played before. One of the things that drew me to it was that Ted is an artist and an illustrator, so here was a chance to use some of that side of myself and do some of the drawings. I had done some drawings for *Fearless*, as well, that Peter Weir incorporated. This also reminded me of *The Fabulous Baker Boys*, when I was called upon to play piano; I love music and play a little bit. But Ted is more willful, more self-serving, and has followed his dream a lot more than Jack Baker."

Additionally, himself a husband and father, Bridges allows that his own family history "informs my performance, personalizes it a bit more."

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The third major role was of Eddie O'Hare, the teenager who Ted hires as his summer assistant. Hope says, "From the very beginning, we were excited about the idea of casting Eddie with someone who wasn't immediately recognizable." Carey adds, "Tod wanted somebody who was going to be a discovery."

Actor Ben Foster, who had worked with Hope and Carey on the HBO telefilm *The Laramie Project*, was one of many who read and liked the script for **The Door in the Floor**. Hope remembers, "Ben said he would love to do the movie – but was now too old for the part. He told us that we should meet his younger brother, Jon."

Jon Foster read for the part, and was cast soon after a screen test with Jeff Bridges. Carey notes, "We had a good feeling about him. With Jon, you get the sense that he's a good guy with a positive view of the world. He's not cynical, arrogant, or ironic. He very much takes the world as it comes to him."

"I immediately liked Jon's look," notes Williams. "He reminded me a little of Jeff in *The Last Picture Show*. Jon really had to earn this the hard way, but he did great."

In addition to being an actor, Foster is an amateur boxer. He shed 20 pounds to perfect Eddie's lanky look. Hope adds, "Jon has something that seasoned actors take years to achieve – he's able to be in the moment."

Williams remarks, "Jon does a terrific job of tracking Eddie's changes from cheerful and clueless to angry young man. He's our window; we understand only what he understands."

The young actor describes his character as "a 16-year-old prep student who attends Exeter, although he comes from more modest means. During this one summer, he has experiences which show him that there's much more to life than he's seen or experienced. He lands smack dab in the middle of a marriage, and there's twists you don't expect. This story is funny, sad, and sexy."

Bridges notes, "It's ambiguous what Ted's purpose is in bringing Eddie into the family's lives. Is it intentional – to get her to have an affair with the young man and then use that as ammunition to get custody of Ruth? Or is Ted genuinely trying to give her a gift?"

The intimate moments that Foster had to enact with Basinger were discussed before filming. He notes, "We sat down with Tod and spoke about what we wanted them to be; we didn't want typical movie sex scenes."

Bridges adds, "Usually when you see sex in the movies, it pulls you out of the story; one of the rare times it drew me in was in *Breaking the Waves*. Sex is such an important part of all of our lives that it warrants movies being made about it. I think Tod has handled it well."

Williams remarks, "The sexiest shot in the movie is a shot of a sweater on a bed. I wanted to shoot sexual situations that were neither prudish

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nor prurient. They are not there to titillate; the sex isn't voyeuristically presented, which is what we are all conditioned to watch.

Whether filming the more intimate or (seemingly) casual moments, Foster notes, "I learned so much, so many things from Jeff and Kim. I would see him working on his technique, or her adding up what she needs before doing her scene, and I'd take notes."

Williams comments, "I was very impressed; Jon was able to keep up with both Jeff and Kim, and they work with radically different methods. He was not only the glue of the narrative, but also the glue of the production."

"He's like a sponge," Bridges says of Foster. "He soaks it all up. He's very open to ideas, and wanted to find out all about filmmaking and learn as much as he could. Jon reminded me of when I was starting out. It was terrific working with him."

While Bridges' scenes with Foster revolve around a consistently shifting idol/acolyte dynamic, Basinger's scenes with the young actor chart a more dramatic progress from cordiality to intimacy. Of playing the latter explicit scenes they shared together, she comments, "I don't set guidelines. I simply go with my gut feelings."

"Jon was simply wonderful. I could not have asked for a more sensitive, beautiful, and respectful person to have shared the screen with, especially given the nature of the piece. Working with him will always be a great memory. He has a soul-to-soul honesty that took my breath away."

Foster was able to observe two mentors who were reunited for the first time in 17 years. Bridges appreciated being able to reteam with Basinger, noting that "it's a relatively small industry, so when that happens, I enjoy it; it feels like you're picking up where you left off. We had a very good working relationship when we were doing *Nadine*, and that carried on to **The Door in the Floor**."

"We work in different methods. But in movies, there's no one way to do it. It's fascinating when the two different kinds of methods can come together and do some good work. I like a lot of rehearsal, working on the part. Kim doesn't enjoy that part of the process. I don't want to speak for her, but between 'Action!' and 'Cut!' she's totally *there*. She gives it her all."

Basinger was delighted to finally be able to work with Bridges again. She states, "He is one of the best actors we have...period. Then and now. Jeff has a great eye and instinct for life. I love working with him. I hope he works forever as an actor and starts directing soon."

"[And] I could not and would not have been able to perform this particular role and all that it required me to do had it not been for Kip and his confidence in me. His sensitivity, understanding, honesty, and humility makes him an actor's dream as a director/writer."

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Bridges adds, "Tod is very inclusive, and encourages the actors to bring as much input as they can. Not that he would always just roll over and do whatever you said, but he encouraged you to participate."

Williams says, "Jeff showed me how making movies is actually fun. He's an endless source of warmth, creativity, and good humor."

"Kim works on instinct and raw emotion. As Marion, she created around herself an atmosphere of mysterious dread mixed with an incongruous but casual lightness – like a state of shock. When I would go visit in her dressing room, it was like walking into a raucous Southern beauty parlor. But when she came to the set to work, everyone whispered. She allowed us to look into her depths."

Casting director Ann Goulder oversaw the rounding out of the players with child actress Elle Fanning, as little Ruth Cole; Mimi Rogers as Evelyn Vaughn, the Coles' vulnerable yet volatile neighbor; Louis Arcella as Evelyn Vaughn's concerned gardener, Eduardo; and Bijou Phillips as Ruth's nanny, Alice.

Arcella pegs his character as "a quiet man – who doesn't approve of the situation with Mr. Cole coming to see Mrs. Vaughn."

The actor makes his American movie debut with **The Door in the Floor**. He recalls, "I got the call from my manager saying I would be auditioning for a movie. She faxed some lines to me and I liked them – but I was a little concerned that I didn't know what type of person Eduardo was. I mentioned this at the audition, asking, 'Where does he come from? What's he made of?' They told me that he was a gentleman. With some direction, I read the lines – and got a call a couple of days later that I had this part in a major movie."

Arcella found his new colleagues to be welcoming. "Jeff Bridges is very generous, he invited me to dinner. Mimi Rogers is very nice."

"I've always admired American actors. When I was a kid, I'd look at them and say, 'Some day I will work with them in a real movie.' I came to this country to act. I got some little jobs here and there, and on commercials. But I always looked forward to working in movies. This is an honor for me."

Bijou Phillips was also thrilled to be part of the project. She enthuses, "I couldn't put the script down; I read it in an hour. I'm always playing characters who are over the edge, so this is a big change for me. It's made me more confident as an actress."

She adds, "Alice has her issues, but she's a normal girl. Marion isn't able to be a mother to Ruth, so Alice basically gets to be Mom. The things that happen in this movie are real, they're intense, and they happen to people every day. Things don't always turn out the way you plan them to, and you have to adjust and make life work. But not everything can be fixed."

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"Ted Cole wants to be with his wife; he wants to make things work. But he wants to be with other women as well. He is torn, and I think that comes up in every relationship at some point or another."

Playing most of her scenes opposite Elle Fanning was a treat for Phillips. Of her petite costar, Phillips enthuses, "She is the cutest thing I've ever seen in my whole life. She's so together; she's like a little woman. So smart!"

Irving comments, "This little girl [Ruth] remains sunny, bright and clear while all these things are going on. That leaves a psychological mystery unsolved for the moviegoing audience. 'What will become of her?' I take two-thirds more of the novel to resolve that..."

Fanning turned five years old during filming. "I'm glad they picked me to be Ruth," she states. Her perception of the film's story comes from Marion's vantage point: "Her boys died, and she had me, and she doesn't want to love [Ruth] too much because she's afraid that something's going to happen to me."

Bridges says, "Working with little girls like Elle can be an acting lesson, because they're so free, and there's a part of acting that's very much like playing pretend when you were a kid. They're much closer to that, and they bring a lot of that into it. For an older guy like me, that's fun to tap into."

Williams clarifies, "I met a sea of four- and five-year-olds, and she was the only one who knew the difference between acting in a make-believe world and the real world. I could ask her to do difficult things, because she got the difference."

"When she first had to cry, she was in the room with Jeff, and we were all out in the hall. I said, 'Action!' and she let it rip. It was horrifying. In retrospect, it was funny to see Jeff looking so panicked. He completely bought her acting. She was so real, yelling and crying and hitting him. I think we all thought she was very, very upset. Then I said 'Cut,' and she laughed and ran out of the room to go back to whatever she was playing with between takes."

Fanning's on-screen mother Basinger enthuses, "Elle is needless to say magically gifted. She is the most beautiful definition of a child. I simply fell in love with her. It was very hard for me when the time came to say goodbye to her at the end of the movie and I've missed her ever since."

Fanning, herself already a movie veteran, took to her new colleagues: "Jon is cute and nice. Kim is so pretty and so fun to be with. She gave me a bracelet. Jeff is wonderful, he gave me a book for my birthday with blank pages so we could color in it..."

The Door In The Floor began seven weeks of principal photography on March 31st, 2003 in Manhattan at the Harrison Restaurant in TriBeCa. The production then moved out to various locations on Long Island, culminating in a three-week sojourn in the Hamptons.

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During filming, John Irving visited the set briefly. Jeff Bridges reports, "He only came I think one day. But he made himself available. I remember calling him a couple of times and asking his opinion on things. To which Tod said, 'By all means, go ahead, go to the source.'"

Kim Basinger well remembers meeting Irving during production: "One day, John Irving and his family came to the set to watch a scene being filmed, and it just happened to be one of mine. Right before we shot, I was sitting at the table on the porch to begin the scene when I looked up and saw him and his whole family glued to the monitor.

"I got so nervous that I was mortified and couldn't breathe. Knowing that they were watching me, I was afraid that no words would come out of my mouth. During each take of the scene, I was holding one of those cocktail umbrellas that come in tropical beverages. We filmed about four takes and when the scene was completed, there before me was a pile of shredded cocktail umbrellas..."

While their encounters with Irving varied, Bridges and Basinger share more comparable experiences with Williams. Bridges says, "I've had good luck with young directors; that was certainly the case with Tod. He's one of my favorites I've worked with. Because he's a writer, he has all of that to bring to the table. So if there's something that's not working in the middle of a scene, he can change it quickly. He gave all of the actors a lot of confidence and employed a sense of play and fun - even on the tragic scenes."

Basinger says, "Kip is incredibly bright and a truly free spirit. I consider working with him a rare gift."

Bridges adds, "This was a relatively low-budget picture. When you're making a big spectacle type of movie, like *Seabiscuit* - though that had some intimate things about it as well - it takes a lot of time in-between, to re-cock the shot, and so on. This was a different style of moviemaking. Seat-of-the-pants, and you've got to work close as a team. Time is of the essence, and everybody's got to be on their game and ready to shift to do what it takes to get the shot.

Bridges reports, "But I never felt rushed or that we didn't have enough time to do what we had to do. Tod always gave me enough time, supported me, and would come up with great ideas. Choosing the locations came from the people that he hired, of course, but they also went past his inspection."

Among the Hamptons shooting locales were the 216-acre Sands Point Preserve, where two impressive castles built by original owner Howard Gould (son of railroad tycoon Jay Gould) are open to the public for tours; Sagg Main Beach in Sagaponack; Gin Lane in Southampton; and an estate in the village of Muttontown, which served as the interior of the Coles' home.

The house used as the residence of Evelyn Vaughn, designed by renowned architect Norman Jaffe, is a stone/glass/wood residence that stands as the antithesis of the traditional shingle style of the Cole house.

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These worlds of external privilege and internal conflict are captured by director of photography Terry Stacey. The cinematographer has worked on four prior films for Hope and Carey, including *American Splendor* and *The Laramie Project*. He notes, "As a DP, when I get a script I read it first to see if I like it. I loved this one from the beginning; it's such a powerful, emotional story. One thing that came to mind straight away was the idea of shooting it in widescreen [Super 35; 2:35/1 aspect ratio], because so much of it is about how these characters do, or don't, relate to each other. With the wider frame there's amounts of space you can keep between people; you can keep them in the same frame but they're somehow not connected. It's a format people ordinarily think about for movies in terms of big landscapes."

However, landscapes did play a part in the widescreen decision. The very nature of the Hamptons, with their broad open spaces, beaches, and low skyline, added additional incentive to shoot the film in Super 35. For an independent feature film, this was not, as Ted Hope says, "a casual choice. Terry is a stylist - not a single one of his films for us has looked like the other ones - who finds the right approach that the material demands. On this film, the times that his camera moves are very conscious choices but it's much more often about the frame itself."

Williams remarks, "We wanted to contrast the dark content of the story with a visual and aural style that was lush and beautiful. The setting led us in this direction also; these people live in a world where all the ingredients for a happy life are present. The light in the Hamptons is unique, and Terry and I agreed that a low-contrast style would help communicate the softness of the air and light out there. We shot 2:35 [widescreen], which invites the audience to be as active as possible, letting them choose where to put their attention. The camera is still and composed, rather than directed, so they can create. It's a more classical visual approach than is generally used these days."

"I began to think of the movie as a tripod, supported by the three main characters. The camera is very poised up to a certain point; then it becomes unstable, when one of the legs kicks out..."

In Stacey's discussions with Williams, Marion was seen as closed-down emotionally yet surrounded by light. Ted was the inverse, "a hard one to pull off," notes Stacey. "But Jeff manages to create a sympathetic character; Ted is a great dad even though he's a complete cad and a womanizer. Sometimes we left half his face in shadow, more in silhouette."

"So many films you see today are so contrast-y, just like commercials, with a saturated look. It was very important to Tod, and I appreciated this, that we kept the look soft and low-contrast. The colors are more pastel and muted, so that we intentionally used other colors which would pop."

Also overseeing colors was production designer Thérèse DePrez, who had previously worked with Stacey on *American Splendor*. She says, "It was great having established that relationship prior to coming in on this, and having the amount of time we had in pre-production."

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Williams notes, "Terry, Thérèse, and I worked very hard on controlling the palette of the film. We wanted all the muted colors of the Hamptons – sand, sky, sea, sea-grass, piney green, the grey of weathered cedar shingles – to be occasionally punctuated with objects or articles of clothing in bright primary colors."

DePrez has known Hope for over a decade and worked with the producer on *Happiness* and *American Splendor*. Hope states, "One thing that I found exciting about this production was our opportunity to work again with a lot of the people that we've been able to mature with in our filmmaking – Terry, Thérèse, Ann Goulder, our AD, our still photographer, a lot of the electricians, the camera team...They could have gone off and made a lot more money, but they know that this is a project that we care a great deal about. It's great to have a family to work with."

The production designer read Irving's novel while also reading Williams' script. She says, "One beautiful thing in the book, which I think Tod did a good job with as well, was the description of this environment and the location being very much a character in this film. It helped me to understand Ted and Marion's characters and also where Eddie was coming from, in terms of the style of the house, the economics of this family and the Hamptons."

"I see Ted as a poseur, an artist-as-poseur. Tod and I worked on small details, especially in terms of props and Ted's drawings, in which that could come across. In Ted's workroom, the question is 'Does he actually use those art supplies?' So in terms of the set dressing it was a matter of how lived-in it was, how used the brushes were, and how the pencils were new rather than worn down to the nubs. There's also a little bit of money that shows through in that set, such as with the Bang & Olufsen stereo."

DePrez praises the director as having given her "quite a bit of freedom. I would constantly feed him references and get a sense from him of whether he liked things or thought them appropriate. Tod is great at understanding characters and where they came from. He knows the Hamptons and the people there. I would show him a chair, or a color, and he would remember something from his past, a family house he'd been to. He very much relates to things and people that have been in his own past, which was great for this movie."

Of the Norman Jaffe-designed house that became Evelyn Vaughn's less-than-happy home, DePrez notes that "the way it was laid out for our camera frame was great. It's a very flattened home but within our lens you see into so many rooms, through glass panels. It is also completely different than any other piece of architecture in the movie. It really sets Mrs. Vaughn apart. Her wardrobe is mostly black, and the house is very monotone and muted, with gray slate floors and a lot of glass."

Turning to the classic Hamptons shingle style, "there were about nine homes that we scouted for the Cole house, inside and outside," says DePrez. The exterior of the Coles' home was shot in Bridgehampton, on an exquisite site overlooking Sagaponack Lake, and, just beyond, the Atlantic Ocean. Originally built in the 1890s, the house has been in

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the same family since the mid-20th Century, and epitomizes Hamptons single-style architecture. "There were two adjoining buildings," says DePrez. "They became the squash/barn exterior and the workroom, and we had assumed those would be separate locations, so this was completely ideal. You can see the other two structures from each building." The building used for the workroom had sliding glass doors, and DePrez replaced them with accordion-fold barn doors that she designed to render the space indoor/outdoor. The windows of the barn building were plugged so that the interior of the squash/barn scenes could be filmed elsewhere (in the Westchester County town of Armonk).

The Muttontown estate which provided the desired interiors including bedrooms and adjoining hallways, was especially valued for its "essential great hallway for us to hang the Cole family's pictures of their boys," notes Carey.

Most of the locations used were real places, and so "the film turned out to be much more of a set decoration job than a construction job" says DePrez.

In several instances, locations did double or triple duty. The Sands Point Preserve supplied the Exeter school archway; then, rooms in one of the houses on the property were dressed for the scene of Ted's television interview as well as for a lecture hall. A bookstore in the village of Sea Cliff provided an exterior, while the upstairs was dressed as the interior of the rental apartment that the Coles (and/or Eddie) alternate stays in during their summer separation.

When it came to the scene where Eddie buys squid ink from a fishmonger for Ted's drawings, "there was no location," says DePrez. "So I looked at an empty auto repair garage space near the bookstore. No one believed I could make that into anything, but with plastic strip curtains and the right set dressing it became one of my favorite sets."

DePrez and Williams surveyed "a lot of books about the Hamptons. There was a very specific palette: very light greens, light blues, the colors you see in nature. We avoided pop colors. The only color that we used to pop was red, like Bijou Phillips in a red T-shirt."

For set dressing, DePrez and her team relied on Baccarat glass and Baker Furniture. With the interiors of the Cole home on the minimal side, the Baccarat appealed strongly to DePrez because of its simple and elegant lines, with the glass picking up light through the windows.

The Muttontown estate's rooms were painted and in some cases wallpapered. In what became Ruth Cole's room, "I wanted it to look as if Ted Cole had done a mural," says DePrez. Accordingly, scenic artists painted a mural, to which Jeff Bridges himself added three owls. DePrez had previously collaborated with the actor on *Arlington Road*. She notes, "It's always great working with Jeff because he is so immersed in his character. We even got him squid ink because he wanted everything to be what it would be in the film. He very much wanted to do the drawings for Ted Cole's children's books, and Tod agreed. So we worked it out together - I gave him deadlines and homework!"

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"The children's books turned out fantastically. All the artwork for them is Jeff's. He also did some of the figure work, but we ran out of time so one of our scenics had to finish it. It's the first time Jeff had ever used scratch board, which is a blackboard coated with material that you can scratch off. It's like playing with negative space. I loved how angry those drawings looked."

The actor confides, "I attempted the life drawings. But mine were either too grotesque or not exactly what we had in mind. So, a wonderful artist named Eva Davy [the film's scenic artist] executed those for us."

Bridges also came in on a day off to meet with DePrez on and about the workroom set. "With all the props in the workroom, I wanted him to be in his space, figure out his blocking, and make sure that whatever he was drawing with was there on-set for him."

Costume designer Eric Daman had seen an early script for *The Door In The Floor*, shortly after completing his and Tod Williams' debut feature, *The Adventures of Sebastian Cole*. Once their second film together finally got going, the duo studied numerous books on the Hamptons and Long Island locales, as well as photos of Williams' own family on vacation in the Hamptons. "We wanted very specific shapes, fabrics and colors with a bit of a vintage feel to them, so we had them constructed, which was a bit of an ordeal, but they turned out beautifully," reports Daman, who himself designed the swimsuits that were made for Kim Basinger to wear in the film.

Aside from the blue and white *galabeya* [North African-style caftan] that Ted Cole wears and the "typical teenager" garb for nanny Alice, "everything is pretty much muted solids," says Daman. Marion was dressed to "melt away into the background," even as Basinger's face expresses much of Marion's turmoil.

The actors had input into their characters' wardrobe. Daman says, "It was a fascinating process. Jeff Bridges had a lot of ideas." The actor also ended up raiding his own closet for a couple of items.

Also having ideas were designers who wanted to have Bridges and Basinger in their creations. English gunmakers and outfitters Holland & Holland supplied the oversized handmade straw hat Ted Cole sports in several scenes. The French fashion house Hermès is also represented.

Knitwear designer Pierrot (Pierre Carrilero), who has been Daman's partner for over ten years, and for whom Daman does creative direction, contributed most of the wardrobe for Bijou Phillips, the luscious pink cashmere hand-knit cardigan that over the course of the film becomes the signature Marion Cole clothing, and the black openwork silk crochet dress that Mimi Rogers wears as Evelyn Vaughn.

Eddie comes from more modest means, and is enrolled at Exeter Prep School because his father is on the faculty. Daman sought to costume Jon Foster to reflect "Eddie's intellectual tortured poet side as well as his naïve side." As the story progresses and Eddie becomes much

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more self-aware, "he grows up," says Daman. "When he leaves at summer's end, he looks great, a transition we reflect in the wardrobe."

All of the characters go through transitions over the course of the film. As Ted Hope notes, "Sometimes the best choices we make are the hardest ones to make. Marion's choice is one I wish on nobody, but it's the right one for her and her family."

Anne Carey adds, "Marion is doing what she thinks is best for her daughter. And I think that in bringing in Eddie, Ted feels that he's making a necessary choice. But I don't think any of them have a sense of what the ultimate result is going to be."

Jeff Bridges states, "Fans of John Irving will not be disappointed. They'll certainly go through a journey, but I don't want to tell them where they're going to end up."

The actor sees the film's title, taken from the children's story that Ted has written, as "the story in a nutshell. We all, I suppose, have a 'door in the floor.' These terrible and tragic things we don't want to go towards - are there, under the floor. We all want to keep the door shut, but in life you get called, and you've got to go down into it."

Kim Basinger hopes that the viewer experiences the movie as a "a beautifully sensitive and honestly crafted portrayal of an American family whose loves and losses draw you into a rare and raw emotional experience."

Having experienced rare and rewarding creative collaborations with an author, the actors, and the producers and crew on his second film as writer/director, Tod Williams says, "I hope the audience feels part of the creative process."