

# 10 OF THE *GREATEST FILMS* SHOT IN ONE LOCATION

And what we can learn  
from them...



*Embracing limitation can actually drive creativity. We need to first be limited in order to become limitless*

— Phil Hansen

What do *Buried*, *Locke*, *The Disappearance of Alice Creed*, *The Guilty* and *Searching* all have in common? They're 'contained' films, a limited cast and few locations that were produced on a low-budget. Producers crave stories like these because they pose limited financial risk and offer more potential to make a profit. They are by nature character driven stories so are appealing to actors and can attract a strong marketable cast.

A wise man once said do 'what you can, with what you have, where you are.' Words that apply so well to film making because one of the biggest drains on a production is location. Renting them can in itself be expensive as landlords want remuneration for their property. Also moving a crew takes time and time costs money. It dilutes thought and therefore the task at hand – getting quality.

So we recommend you choose your locations with great care and maximise their potential. Think of them as another character in your story. Pick locations that don't have to have much done to them in the way of Art Department. That are intrinsically interesting. Watch [Michael Mann](#) films for a master at work in this respect.

Think about creating a Studio. A location that can double as other things. A house that can easily be made to look like two locations. A park that looks very different at night than by day. A warehouse that can be used to build sets but also has spaces that can be a cell, doctor's waiting room or bedroom. And also provide dressing room, green rooms and equipment storage.

To get you thinking about the value of a good location in your own 'contained' films we've compiled a non-definitive, bound to argue over, (we did in the team) list of the ten best films shot in one place. See what you think and please, feel free to disagree and email us.

Stay safe.

The Film Production Team, 2020

# 12 ANGRY MEN

1957 - Director: [Sidney Lumet](#) - Screenwriter: Reginald Rose



**CAST:** Henry Fonda, Martin Balsam, John Fiedler, Lee J. Cobb, E.G. Marshall, Jack Klugman, Edward Binns, Jack Warden

**REASONING:** Twelve jurors must arrive at a unanimous verdict for a homicide trial. An initial vote determines that eleven of the men believe the defendant is guilty, but stubbornly principled Juror No. 8, Henry Fonda at his peak, won't let them ruin a kid's life over some impatience and discomfort. With an audience legally obligated to remain captive he mounts his valiant argument not for the boy's innocence but for the unsureness of his guilt.

Perhaps the most famous example of a film set in one location, *12 Angry Men* takes place almost entirely inside the jury room of a New York courthouse. Adapted from a stage play it nevertheless made a startling and enduring piece of cinema.

Only two of the jurors are given names, but all emerge as believably drawn, distinct characters. As they talk, tensions rise, personal prejudices are revealed, doubt seeps in and seemingly concrete evidence is called into question. Facts, one juror suggests, can be twisted in any way you like – which is surely a pertinent point for the current era.

**WATCH** on **amazon** : <https://amzn.to/2Wa1EDs>

# LOCKE

2013 – Director & Screenwriter: [Steven Knight](#)



**CAST:** Tom Hardy, Olivia Colman

**REASONING:** A lone man driving through the night and during that night his life will unravel. On the night before construction foreman Ivan Locke is to oversee the largest concrete pour in European history he chooses to drive from Birmingham to London to be present at the birth of his illegitimate child.

The film could be a radio play it has so much dialogue as Ivan makes and takes phone call after phone call, bouncing back and forth between his wife and his work colleagues. There is an inherent theatricality to the piece, cadence, inflection, pauses, all these things take on immense power in this contained and high pressure environment.

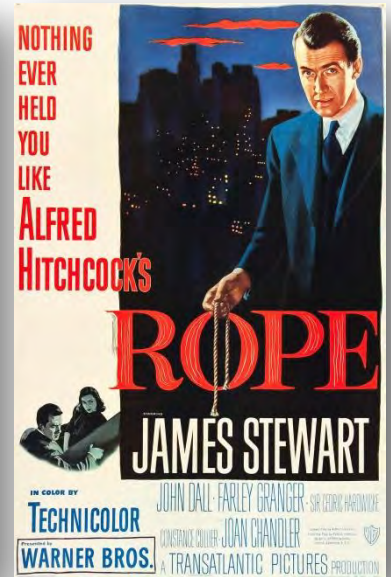
But there are also compelling visuals. The repetitive, hypnotic, shallow focus images are highly evocative of the monotony of the road at night. It seems to play out in the real time a drive of this distance takes giving it a sense of immediacy and urgency. Coupled with Hardy's commanding performance this film builds a convincing psychological portrait of a calm, collected and exacting man with a determination to do the right thing.

**WATCH** on [amazon](#): <http://tiny.cc/egieoz>



# ROPE

1948 – Director: [Alfred Hitchcock](#) - Screenwriter: Arthur Laurents



**CAST:** James Stewart, John Dall, Farley Granger

**REASONING:** Adapted from Patrick Hamilton's 1929 stage play the film confines itself to the apartment of two young men. Based on the real life case of Leopold and Loeb, university students who believed in Nietzsche's Übermensch theory of murder as the ultimate act of intellectual superiority. They strangle a former classmate and hide the body in their living-room chest. Believing that their superior intelligence will keep their secret safe, the murderers then host a party for the deceased's friends and family using the very same chest as a table on which to serve the food...

In addition to the single location Hitchcock plays the film in more or less real time and presents the film as one uninterrupted take thanks to some clever editing. This is a wickedly fun cat-and-mouse game that raises the stakes by keeping all the players on screen all the time. Dall in particular is a standout as Brandon, a bundle of giddy joy combined with a perverse sense of accomplishment while Granger holds his own as the nervous and guilt-ridden Phillip. Stewart plays the suspicious teacher. The verbal sparring is delicious and the streak of homo-eroticism running through the film is remarkable for its time. Not many of the single setting films on this list attempt as much as Hitchcock juggles here.

We could equally have had Hitch's [Lifeboat](#) or [Dial M For Murder](#) on this list too, the man was a master storyteller.

**WATCH** on [amazon](#) : <http://tiny.cc/3kjeoz>

# RIGHT AT YOUR DOOR

2006 – Writer/Director: [Chris Gorak](#)



**CAST:** Mary McCormack, Rory Cochrane, Tony Perez

**REASONING:** After multiple dirty bombs are detonated, spreading deadly toxic ash across Los Angeles, Brad inadvertently quarantines his wife, Lexi, outside their home while safely sealing himself inside. With the city under siege and Martial Law in effect Brad and Lexi struggle to survive with few supplies, less time and no information, all the while separated by thin doors and thinner sheets of plastic. When help finally arrives, it's anything but.

*Right At Your Door* is a film of its time; a true-life horror that plays to America's post-9/11 anxieties, but its social distancing vibe suddenly makes it super relevant again. The film still stands as a tense and effective morality tale; a vivid portrait of a town in crisis. It also wrings the maximum mileage from a meagre budget in the best microcosm/macrocasm way. A dwindling supply of safe bottled water and a suburban garden wreathed in suspicious white ash. The authorities, meanwhile, are represented by a handful of visiting goons and a disembodied voice spouting misinformation on the radio.

Chris Gorak's debut feature with its portrait of stranded citizens and an absent, unreliable government now has a resonance he could never have imagined. The end is heart-breaking, I warn you.

**WATCH** on **You Tube** : <https://bit.ly/2WHZIRZ>



# ALL IS LOST

2013 – Director & Screenwriter: [J. C. Chandor](#)



**CAST:** Robert Redford

**REASONING:** Taking place on the open sea, *All Is Lost* is at once expansive and contained. A lone man, played by a believably weathered Robert Redford, is sailing in a damaged boat when he encounters a storm and must battle the elements for his survival. Though the story is simple the film is remarkable for its focus on minutiae, crafting a gripping narrative from the smallest of details.

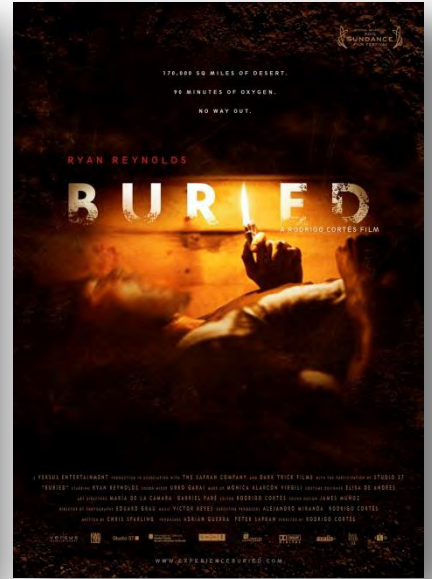
Even more impressively it resists conventional characterisation. Chandor decided that the audience should learn very little about the backstory of Redford's character. He is identified in the movie's credits only as Our Man, and the film offers no explanation about why he is sailing alone in the Indian Ocean. Chandor says he didn't even discuss the character's origins with Redford. The goal was to bring the viewer as close to what the character is experiencing as possible.

Its practically a silent film with dialogue reduced to an opening voice over prologue and speech amounting to little more than a few cries for help, it's a perfect example of how to show and not tell. Indeed instead of working from a script Chandor broke the film down into five hundred storyboard images. It was then filmed as a silent movie with Chandor giving Redford directions aloud as they moved through each shot. It rightfully takes its place among the best of what is almost a sub-genre of yacht movies, including *Adrift*, *The Boat*, *Styx*, *Dead Calm* and *Open Water* to name a few.

**WATCH** on [amazon](#): <https://amzn.to/3djjuCT>

# BURIED

2013 – Director: [Rodrigo Cortés](#) - Screenwriter: Chris Sparling



**CAST:** Ryan Reynolds, José Luis García Pérez, Robert Paterson

**REASONING:** This extraordinary high-concept, high-anxiety, low-budget nightmare from Spanish director Rodrigo Cortés is guaranteed to give you claustrophobia. Ryan Reynolds is Paul Conroy, an ordinary guy who wakes up buried alive in a wooden coffin and that is where he, and we, stay for the entire film, in an eight-by-eight wooden box.

All Paul has to light the darkness is a Zippo and the screen of a mobile phone, which his abductors have provided for him. He must use this phone to communicate both with his sadistic jailers and with possible rescuers. But his oxygen and his phone battery are gradually running very low; Paul must not panic as hyper-ventilation will burn up the air quicker and he is already on medication for stress.

What becomes clear in the opening few minutes is that Paul is a civilian contractor in Iraq, a fact which solves some mysteries, but opens the way for many more. The way Cortés and writer Chris Sparling control the twists and turns is tremendously assured, and the suspense is unbearable right to the very end. Paul's phone calls to his family are heartrending and his lengthy conversation with his employer is a black-comic set piece of pure horror. It might all sound like a radio play, but the stark, ghostly image of Ryan Reynolds's anguished face is sheer, asphyxiating, chest-crushing terror.

**WATCH** on [amazon](#): <https://amzn.to/2L23GPL>



# SLEUTH

1972 – Director: [Joseph L. Mankiewicz](#) - Screenwriter: Anthony Shaffer



**CAST:** Laurence Olivier & Michael Caine

**REASONING:** Andrew Wyke is a famous and successful author of detective novels. Milo Tindle comes to him with a strange request, that Mr Wyke divorce his wife so that Tindle can marry her. Mr Wyke is not particularly perturbed by this as he and his wife have drifted apart and he is having an affair with another woman anyway, but he uses the meeting and Mr Tindle's request as a chance to play a game, a game with potentially deadly consequences. The screenplay by playwright Anthony Shaffer was based on his 1970 Tony Award-winning play. Both Olivier and Caine were nominated for Academy Awards for their performances.

The production team intended to reveal as little about the movie as possible so as to make the conclusion a complete surprise to the audience. For this reason there is a false cast list at the beginning of the film which lists fictional actors playing roles that do not exist. Much of the story revolves around the theme of crime fiction, as written by John Dickson Carr and Agatha Christie, and how it relates to real-life criminal investigations. Class conflict is also raised between Wyke, who has the trappings of an English country gentleman, compared to Tindle, the son of an immigrant from a poor area of London.

Presented as an exaggerated mind-game, this is a duel of intellects that reveals many unexpected twists and turns. Described as a fastidious, acrobatically cunning and invigoratingly well-acted thriller. [Rian Johnson](#) cites it as a big influence on him and especially his last film *Knives Out*.

**WATCH** on DVD from [amazon](#): <https://amzn.to/2yAYa43>

# EXAM

2009 – Writer/Director: [Stuart Hazeldine](#)



**CAST:** Adar Beck, Gemma Chan, Nathalie Cox, John Lloyd Fillingham, Chukwudi Iwuji & Colin Salmon

**REASONING:** Low budget British film making and a pandemic movie to boot! Shown into a windowless examination room, eight candidates have reached the final stage of selection for a prestigious job at a mysterious corporation. There is one question before them and one answer is required. If they try to speak to the armed guard by the door they will be disqualified. If they leave the room for any reason they will be disqualified. If they spoil their papers they will be disqualified. As the clock ticks down, they must figure out what the company expects of them, and how far they are prepared to go to secure the ultimate job.

A claustrophobic, futuristic drama with an intriguing premise. This is not an exam, but a chilling, Stanford-type experiment in mental torture. There are interesting ideas and scenes and an ending that divided audiences. It plays with stereotypes but most importantly keeps you guessing right up to the end.

It shares a lot with other low budget confined location films like [Cube](#) and [Devil](#) in that it uses its limitations well. A strong cast, a location that is challenging and claustrophobic, there is no easy way out and character is explored and tested. Films like these need lots of ideas visually but what makes them work is digging deep into character and that's what makes them fun too.

**WATCH** on [amazon](#): <https://amzn.to/3dlYySD>

# PHONE BOOTH

2002 – Director: [Joel Schumacher](#) – Screenwriter: Larry Cohen



**CAST:** Colin Farrell, Kiefer Sutherland, Forest Whitaker

**REASONING:** A mysterious sniper calls a phone booth and when a young publicist answers the phone he quickly finds his life is at risk. This is a testament to the endurance of the high concept idea in Hollywood, screenwriter Larry Cohen originally pitched the concept to Alfred Hitchcock in the '60s. Hitchcock liked the idea but was unable to figure out a sufficient plot reason for keeping the film confined to a booth. It was only in the '90s that Cohen had the idea of the sniper.

The film was briefly considered by Steven Spielberg for Tom Cruise but ended up in development with Joel Schumacher, best known for killing the Batman franchise in the '90s. But here Schumacher teases a compelling performance from a then untested Colin Farrell. Farrell sweats, screams and tears at the glass compartment he is enclosed in under the pitiless eye of Kiefer Sutherland's sniper. When your whole film is a set-piece, there's only so much gas you can burn before things slow but *Phone Booth* manages to keep ratcheting up the tension turning a boilerplate thriller with a gimmick into a film that is compelling. Set in real time and utilising split screens it wrings out every ounce of potential in its limited location.

Principal photography took just ten days with an additional two days of establishing shots and pickups. *Liberty Stands Still*, also a 2002 film, starring Wesley Snipes and Linda Fiorentino, shares a similar plot and theme, and *Knock Out*, 2010, is an unauthorized Bollywood remake.

**WATCH** on [amazon](#): <https://amzn.to/2YK0joC>



# MISS JULIE

2002 – Writer/Director: [Liv Ullman](#) – Play: August Strindberg



**CAST:** Samantha Morton, Jessica Chastain, Colin Farrell

**REASONING:** About time there was a female director on this list! Written and directed by Liv Ullmann, based on the play by August Strindberg. Set in 1890 in County Fermanagh, during the course of a single Midsummer Night, Miss Julie, the daughter of an Anglo-Irish landlord, attempts to seduce her father's valet, John. The affair, overshadowed by power and class, quickly goes to dark places.

Strindberg's naturalistic tragedy confined itself entirely to the kitchen but in adapting it Ullmann softened the misogyny, relocated the action to Ireland and opened the text out to include the grounds and servant quarters of the manor. A simple three-hander more interested in character than plot with performances that are intense throughout. Visually it is a feast with stunning images influenced by the Danish painter Vilhelm Hammershøi, an expert in interior space and light.

Criminally neglected upon release, the film did gain some critical plaudits. Sheila O'Malley writing for RogerEbert.com described it thus, "*The claustrophobia of the kitchen is overwhelming and the shots of Miss Julie wandering through the manor by herself, her posture broken and stiff, her dress falling off her shoulder, give us a welcome, yet rivetingly disturbing, change of scene.*" She continued, "*The film has undeniable power and assures that if one is interested in raw and intense acting at its finest, this film is incredible.*"

**WATCH** on  [amazon: https://amzn.to/2We9Xym](https://amzn.to/2We9Xym)

# Honourable Mentions

## **My Dinner With Andre (1981)**

Director: Louis Malle

Two old friends meet for dinner; as one tells anecdotes detailing his experiences, the other notices their differing worldviews. The critic Roger Ebert called it *'a movie that was entirely devoid of clichés.'*

## **Saw (2004)**

Director: James Wan

In 2003 while at film school Wan and Whannell made a short film to help pitch a feature film concept. The cheapest idea they could think of. Their pitch was successful and in 2004 the first instalment debuted at Sundance. Nine films later...

## **127 Hours (2010)**

Director: Danny Boyle

True story of how mountaineer Aron Ralston had to cut off his own arm. A gruelling shoot but ultimately Ralston said the film was *so factually accurate it is as close to a documentary as you can get and still be a drama.*

## **Free Fire (2016)**

Director: Ben Wheatley

An action comedy about a gun sale gone wrong that unfolds almost entirely within an abandoned factory.

## **Rear Window (1954)**

Director: Alfred Hitchcock

Stuck in a wheelchair with a broken leg, photographer James Stewart watches the goings-on of his neighbours only to see what looks an awful lot like a murder.

## **Wait Until Dark (1967)**

Director: Terence Young

A recently blinded Audrey Hepburn is terrorised by a trio of thugs while they search for a heroin-stuffed doll they believe is in her apartment.

## **The Breakfast Club (1985)**

Director: John Hughes

Physical incarceration as an emotional metaphor for the angst all teenagers feel. Not as claustrophobic as some but the film is set entirely within a high school.

## **Die Hard (1988)**

Director: John McTiernan

Oh come on! It practically all takes place in a vent at Nakatomi Plaza. Look I wrote the list I'm having it.

Anything set on a plane or train or boat – *Non Stop, Flightplan, Source Code, Snowpiercer, Unstoppable...* Oh and *Moon* and *Green Room* and...There are so many. For fun have a go at your own list, we'd love to see them.



If you enjoyed these films or indeed enjoyed disagreeing with us, and you want to make films, then Worcester University is the place for you.

Key features of the course are that you will...

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**Study in our purpose-built Digital Arts Centre, which includes a video studio, sound studio, individual edit suites and high-spec computer labs with the latest image manipulation, editing and sound post-production software.**

**Benefit from regular visits, guest lectures, video lectures and feedback from top industry experts.**

**Tailor your learning to your interests by studying your degree in combination with a second subject, such as Film Studies, Screenwriting or Creative Writing.**

If you'd like to talk about the course then contact any one of us...

Dr Paul Elliott,  
Head of the Department of Film and Media Production,  
[p.elliott@worc.ac.uk](mailto:p.elliott@worc.ac.uk)

John Bradburn  
Head of Course  
[j.bradburn@worc.ac.uk](mailto:j.bradburn@worc.ac.uk)

Reuben Irving  
Admissions Officer  
[r.irving@worc.ac.uk](mailto:r.irving@worc.ac.uk)

Simon Bovey  
[s.bovey@worc.ac.uk](mailto:s.bovey@worc.ac.uk)

