

Marianne Borgo, a lifetime’s legacy in Cannes

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CANNES, France — Marianne Borgo is a French actress who has been walking the Cannes red carpet for 49 years, and never once had a film in official selection. That contradiction tells you something about her. Born into a family that helped found the festival itself, winner of multiple BAFTA awards for her BBC work, and the woman Dino Risi once dreamed of casting, Borgo has built a long, working life in European cinema entirely on her own terms. Italy Now met her at the World Women Foundation, Cannes Film Festival, May 2026.

Source: https://italynow.co.uk/marianne-borgo-a-lifetimes-legacy-in-cannes/



Marianne Borgo (*Credits: Marianne Borgo*)

Q. You have a remarkable family connection to Cannes itself. Tell us that story.

“My father was a film producer of Italian origin, an Italian count named Pier Chicherio. His sister, my aunt Roger Veylorac, was Jewish and headed the Institut technique du cinéma français. She was also involved with the CNC. After attending the Venice film festival, she and three friends, all Jewish, all watching what was happening with Mussolini, decided on the train home that France needed its own festival, one that would be apolitical. My uncle had a house in Cannes and said: let’s do it here, better weather. And so they did.”

Q. And yet Cannes is often described as 79 years old.

“It is 80 years old. There was an edition just before the war. It is never mentioned, but you can verify it. The war stopped everything, and then they started again afterwards. My uncle was central to the festival for the rest of his life. He and my aunt had a suite at the Majestic. When I was a little girl I was running around looking at all these actresses. I grew up here.”

Q. Italy is the other part of your story. How present has it been in your life?

“Italy is the other part of my heart. My Italian grandfather fell in love with a young singer at La Scala

in Milan. At that time you did not marry dancers or singers, so he left Italy with almost nothing to follow her. He started his life in France. And I have always missed Italy because of him , it is deep in my heart. As soon as I put a foot there, I am alive again."

Q. You worked in Italian cinema in the late 1960s and again in the 1990s. What do you remember most?

"The beauty of the women. Even now, the most elegant women in the world are Italian. You have been brought up since the Romans with elegance, always looking for the detail. On set, every single detail was attended to: the hair, the makeup, the jewels. It was beautiful. It still is. A donna is a donna."

Q. You came close to a major Italian career. What happened?

"I had a wonderful agent called Lia Alimena. One day she told me that Dino Risi had seen me on stage in Paris and wanted to meet me for a part in *Profumo di donna*. He really wanted me. But I arrived to the meeting wearing a beautiful Saint Laurent shirt in purple. Instantly it was as if I were the devil. He was shivering. Purple brings bad luck to Italian actors because of its association with the Catholic clergy: the cardinals wear purple, and they are associated with prohibition. And the week before, someone in his family had been in a motorbike accident wearing a purple shirt. So he looked at me and thought: this is a sign. He sent me the most beautiful letter an actress could ever receive. But the part was gone."

Q. You have attended Cannes 49 times and never had a film in official selection. How do you carry that?

"Next year will be my 50th time. I should get a Palme d'Or just for that. Every year my heart is beating and I say: next year, I'll be there. But I was told something at the Conservatoire National Dramatique in Paris by a teacher named Fernand Ledoux. He said: there are very few stars, but an actor is one who has been able to survive and live from their art. If you can earn your life as an actor, you are an actor. No one knows me really, but I have been working all my life. I am 79 years old and I am still working."

Q. For a young actress wondering whether to chase Hollywood or stay in Europe, what would you tell her?

"Stay yourself. Stay authentic. America can make you a star, but you may lose what you are. You will have to make compromises. What matters for an actor is to become what you are. It takes a lifetime to be ourselves."

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