



ABBIE CORNISH

SAM WORTHINGTON

a film by  
CATE SHORTLAND

# Somersault

NEW 4K RESTORATION

2004 | Australia | 106 minutes | 1.78:1 Widescreen  
English Language | 5.1 Surround Sound / 2.0 Stereo



## SYNOPSIS

Following a reckless encounter with her mother's boyfriend, teenager Heidi is forced to flee home and restart her life, finding refuge at a motel in the icy sky town of Jindabyne. There, she lands a job at a petrol station, befriends her warm co-worker Bianca, and meets Joe, a young man grappling with his own emotional baggage. As Heidi and Joe pursue a shaky relationship and search for normalcy against a bleak winter backdrop, they must confront their vices, feelings of isolation, and need for love and belonging.

Cate Shortland's stunning feature debut is a "frank and visceral film that at the same time exudes an unexpected innocence" (*Los Angeles Times*). Featuring early performances from Abbie Cornish and Sam Worthington, *Somersault* sheds light on the complexity of growing up and the quiet ache of loneliness.

SOMERSAULT has been restored in 4K by Piccolo Films from the original 35mm master negative and final mix master audio components. Restoration by Ray Argall in consultation with Anthony Anderson, Robert Humphreys, Sam Patty and Cate Shortland.

## CAST

Heidi	ABBIE CORNISH
Joe	SAM WORTHINGTON
Irene	LYNETTE CURRAN
Richard	ERIK THOMSON
Stuart	NATHANIEL DEAN
Bianca	HOLLIE ANDREW
Diane	LEAH PURCELL
Nicole	OLIVIA PIGEOT
Adam	DAMIAN de MONTEMAS
Pat	JOHN SHEERIN
Martha	ANNE LOUISE LAMBERT
Roy	PAUL GLEESON
Karl	BLAKE PITTMAN
Guy	JUSTIN MARTIN
Sean	BEN TATE
Josh	JOSHUA PHILLIPS
John	TOBY SCHMITZ
Nick	HENRY NIXON
Sally	DIANA GLENN
Rachel	ERICA ENGLERT
Clare	STEPHANIE OVERS
Brian the Barman	ALEX BABIC
Bus Ticket Vendor	ELIZABETH MUNTAR
Waitress Chinese Restaurant	CAROLINE LOWE



## *CREW*

Writer/Director	Cate Shortland
Producer	Anthony Anderson
Executive Producer	Jan Chapman
DOP/Camera Operator	Robert Humphreys, A.C.S.
2 <sup>nd</sup> Unit DOP/Camera Operator	Carolyn Constantine
Sound Designer	Sam Petty
Production Designer	Melinda Doring
Art Director	Janie Parker
Costume Designer	Emily Seresin
Make-up/Hair Supervisor	Angela Conte
Production Manager	Libby Sharpe
Production Co-ordinator	Sophie Dick
Producer's Assistant	Leigh Brezler
Director's Attachment	Heng Tang
1st Assistant Director	John Martin
2nd Assistant Director	Eddie Raymond
3rd Assistant Director	Kate North Ash
Script Supervisor	Paul Kiely
Location Manager	Annelies Norland
Sound Recordist	Mark Blackwell
SFX Supervisor	Peter Stubbs
Post Production Supervisor	Naomi Wenck
Editor	Scott Gray
1st Assistant Editor	Rodrigo Balart
Music Supervisor	Norman Parkhill
Music By	Decoder Ring
Dialogue Editor	Yulia Akerholt
FX/Atmos Editor	Mark Franken
Casting Agent	Nikki Barrett
	Alison Barrett Casting
Dialogue Coach	Victoria Mielewska
Choreographer	Kate Champion
Unit Publicist	Fiona Nix
Stills Photographers	Matt Nettheim
	Elise Lockwood

## *THE PRODUCTION*

### SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT

The script for the film that was to become *Somersault* was commenced seven years before filming. The writer/director Cate Shortland was travelling regularly between Sydney and Canberra and was inspired by the haunting beauty of Lake George, and decided that she wanted to make a film around a lake. At the time Cate was also working with emotionally disturbed children. There was one particular girl of whom she was fond and was to be the inspiration of the main character, Heidi.

Shortland: "It was a combination of landscape and disturbed children that was the inspiration. That's still there in the film."

Shortland approached Anthony Anderson in 1996 to produce the ideas that she was working on and they struck a deal that as Anderson explains: "Cate said let's not shoot this film until both of us are happy with every scene in it. That was a fantastic invitation to me because my passion for script and story was going to be taken on board in a collaborative way. I thought that it was a much stronger story than for a short film so encouraged Cate to expand it and develop it."

Shortland: "We have known each other for 10 years and creatively we challenge each other. He wants things to be more emotional and I want them to be more restrained. We can be like oil and water. We often have different opinions but that usually helps the work."

The script was developed over various rounds of funding whilst Shortland and Anderson made the short films *Pentuphouse* and *Flowergirl* in '98 and '99 respectively. The shorts were successful internationally, which made seeking funding for a feature that much easier for the team.

Shortland: "I don't really think of myself as a writer, so Anthony had to drag me kicking and screaming through the whole process. He kept getting us funding so I could write another draft and then he'd have to talk me into writing another draft. I became addicted to the writing. Once you get into it and start thinking like the characters, you can start to create a world. But starting to think like the characters is really hard. You have to cut yourself off from everything around you and be those people in a way."

Shortland and Anderson applied for the Aurora script development scheme, which is funded by the New South Wales Film & Television Office. Under the scheme, over a six-month period mentors provide feedback at the beginning and again at the end, after a workshop with actors. Cate and Anthony were successful and joined the inaugural scheme and were mentored by renowned filmmakers

including Alison Tilson (*Japanese Story*), Rob Festinger (*In the Bedroom*), Jane Campion (*The Piano*), and Chris Noonan (*Babe*). As a result the script took a great leap forward. Shortland: "The script probably changed the most through Aurora. Heidi used to be quite passive and it was suggested that I make her more active in her own destruction. That made Heidi go out and seek what was to destroy her. So Aurora was quite phenomenal with how much it shifted everything."

Jan Chapman was also a mentor on the inaugural Aurora scheme and was familiar with their short films, and already felt that Shortland had "an extraordinarily strong visual confidence."

Chapman: "I thought their script for *Somersault* was incredibly insightful about a young girl testing the boundaries, who she was, in terms of sex and love and friendship. I thought it was particularly truthful. We've seen coming-of-age films before, but really this time I thought we were in the mind of an adolescent girl. It was a different approach. It was much more intimate in a very picturesque setting in the mountains of NSW."

When they were encouraged to add an experienced EP to their team, Chapman was more than willing to take the role.. "I thought that if adding my name would help I was certainly prepared to do so and I felt that it would be an enjoyable process. It is only worth doing if you can have the relationship with the producer and the director and my sense was correct: they were very inclusive. So it felt very much like a trio a lot of the time. With Anthony in particular, with the production I was able to mentor him and I found that I really enjoyed passing on some of the things I had learnt about producing to someone who was very open and very knowledgeable."

## FINANCING

As a result of the script improvements and production advice there was strong support for the script. Anderson: "Instead of it taking years to actually raise the finance, it took years to develop the script. Once we actually put the script out there to the world the money came together incredibly quickly. We approached a local distributor, Hopscotch: because of Troy Lum's previous interest in our short films he came on board immediately. Then we had local broadcaster SBS come on board two days later."

The main investors were the Film Finance Corporation Australia; the New South Wales Film and Television Office, and Showtime followed and in February 2003 Cate and Anthony procured Fortissimo as the international sales agent. By March everything was in place for approval by the FFC for the whole film.

*Somersault* was to become a small budget feature that had raised four million dollars. Anderson: "One of the blessings was that what we lacked in funds we really gained in passion from all the people who came on board the project. We've

had such amazing support from the cast, the crew and post-production people.. You cannot make a beautiful film on your own, and our approach has always been to invite all these other people on as collaborators. But, most amazing has been having Jan Chapman as Executive Producer to mentor us through the process.”

Renowned as one of Australia’s erudite producers, *Somersault* was Chapman’s first feature film in the role of executive producer. Chapman: “It was interesting to work with a younger team. As they had all worked together before on their shorts, there was a kind of freedom in the way they worked. It is a hand held film: Cate and Robert Humphreys, the director of photography, worked very easily together with this style. The designer Melinda Doring found locations and changed them with the most minuscule budgets. I was very impressed with the enthusiasm and the youthful energy.”

The challenges on a low budget were quite specific. Chapman: “We had a shoot that was completely on location in a mountainous area. There were weather conditions we wanted for the film. We wanted it to be snowing some of the time, to be cold. The weather was an important part of the film, the way it affected the look of the film was really important. So that was kind of difficult.

Chapman believed that by adding her name to the production team indicated that she thought that Shortland had a distinct and original vision. “What makes a good director is someone who has direction and I think Cate always knew very clearly how she wanted this film to look, and she had references to other films and photographers that she talked a lot about in the preparation.”

## THE STORY

Anderson: “*Somersault* is about forgiveness; for Heidi to get to a point of self-forgiveness for her to move on. Underlying her behaviour is a level of guilt as well as fear and the need to survive. The falling out that she’s had with her mother, she sees as irredeemable and it’s really her relationship with Irene, and learning that Irene can still love her own son who has done something much more heinous than Heidi, and to hear from Irene that no matter what you’ve done your mother will want to see you. For her, that’s her path to redemption and self-forgiveness. It’s also a story about the experiences that we have with love that may not be about an ongoing relationship. They are often about understanding a bit more about another person and certainly understanding a bit more about ourselves. For Heidi and Joe, that interaction and the time they spend together is important for both of them in that sense.”

The key to *Somersault* is the connections people make in life and how they are changed by them. Shortland: “This film is inhabited by scared people, who all want to be loved; I wanted the viewer to be intimate with them. Sometimes the film is quite dark but then I think of Heidi and she is surrounded by light. She is a survivor, resilient and tough skinned. She expects to be hurt so nothing can harm

her. In that way she is incredibly calm and serene. She is a lazy, dreamy adolescent tripping up the back steps and into a sequence of bad decisions that propel her out of the family home and into the wider world.”

### Casting & Character

Before shooting there was a fortnight dedicated to rehearsal. The importance of the rehearsal period was that it provided the opportunity for director and actors to find the necessary character definition.

Shortland: “If there is an awkwardness on set then hopefully it’s an awkwardness that the characters are feeling. It doesn’t matter what happens because they are going to play it as Joe and Heidi. That was the rationale in rehearsals that every scene that they play there is some kind of truth rather than having to act it. Rehearsals were really about finding the characters and then we made choices about how we were going to play the scene. It was exciting because nothing was locked down. I think that shows on the screen because there is such a freshness to the performances”

### **HEIDI - Abbie Cornish**

The casting of the main role of Heidi was surprisingly straightforward, as the first person to audition was Abbie Cornish.

Shortland: “She thoroughly embodies the essence of Heidi, especially the fragility and toughness of her. She allows the audience to experience her beauty and pain. Abbie really nailed the character as soon as she walked in the door. During rehearsal it was about getting the confidence. Heidi is such an interior character, so Abbie had to really feel who Heidi was.

Anderson: “Abbie had that ability to convey the inner life of an emotionally articulate girl. We needed someone who could portray youth and innocence, but also the complexity that the role requires, particularly around sexuality and her survival instincts. And we needed someone that audiences would care for, to go on a journey with.”

The character of Heidi is a character outside of the normal realm of what you'd expect a 16-year-old girl to be. For this reason, Abbie Cornish found that Heidi was potentially a difficult character to play.

Cornish: “I think every character needs to be workshopped, needs to be explored, but her even more so because you can't just put her on the outside, you can't just try and act her from face value. So much of Heidi comes from right deep inside her gut, so you've got to find her from right deep inside your gut and then you act from that place. Heidi doesn't make normal choices. If someone yells at her she's

not the sort of girl that will instantly yell back or that will instantly cry or that will instantly run away, she's the sort of girl to extremely internalise and maybe even become happy in order to deal with things."

The background that both Cate and Abbie developed for Heidi was that her mother was possibly involved in drugs and her father left when Heidi was very young. Cornish: "Because her mother was young as well, Heidi was pulled along through all those things and so she probably saw a lot of things that kids really shouldn't see, or most of the time don't see. I think that's the first thing that sets her outside from a lot of other kids."

At first Cornish believed that she might make simple choices with Heidi, portray her as unknowing or draw her as damaged or closed off from the world. "The more I rehearsed, the more she became a part of the world and the more she was a happy girl; it's just that she had really bad things happen to her. What I found most beautiful about Heidi is that she doesn't sit and dwell on anything, she just powers on, she just keeps charging on and she has this really beautiful, happy outer shell."

Cornish: "I think *Somersault* is a journey of self discovery within a strange girl's world. I think it's like a bridge, it's Heidi getting from one side of the bridge to the other side without even knowing how to get there or why she's started walking across the bridge anyway. It's just a fluke that she gets to the other side and all this stuff is probably going to influence her life in a really amazing way."

### **JOE - Sam Worthington**

Casting Joe was much harder. On paper, the role of Joe seemed less complicated than Heidi. Anderson: "In the end the chemistry between Sam Worthington and Abbie Cornish was what sealed it for us. But we were also very cautious because we had not seen Sam Worthington give on screen the complexity and the depth of emotion he does in this film. It was a real punt and Cate had a strong instinct that Sam would be right for Joe. As it turned out, Sam Worthington has given us a Joe that is much more complex and is much more interesting than what was on the page."

Shortland: "Sam made Joe his own character, he embodied him beautifully and with such venom. There is a real passion about the character. He was quite intimidating to Abbie, which was really good. I remember when he left the room after they had done their final casting together Abbie was quite emotional, she looked at me and said "That's Joe" Sam was closed off and had a darkness to him that was quite scary, and that was exactly what I was looking for. Sam came in a few times because he hasn't really played emotionally vulnerable people before. We had to be sure that he was willing to expose his emotions. And he has; he's done such an amazing job."

In the film Joe works on his parents' farming property. Worthington: "His family is very wealthy, he's essentially a character who's neither good nor bad. He has many faults, but essentially he uses charm to disarm people until he falls in love with Heidi. What you discover is that even though this guy is perceived to have everything, when Heidi comes into play, he realises just how lost he really is. She opens up questions about where his life is going."

Worthington: "Joe doesn't really know where he fits in this world and it's just through the love of someone else he realises his responsibilities and this gives him a direction, hopefully. It's just like the script; it offers no answers, just like life. Here was a chance to play a character who didn't have all the answers and wasn't in control. It opened up some things in me, so hopefully I've done it some justice."

The character of Joe was developed more strongly through the rehearsal process. "Cate threw curve balls in rehearsals to keep it fresh and alive. It worked; I believe in rehearsing all the way even up to when you roll on film. I discovered Joe day by day. There's deepness and darkness in my character that we were trying to bring out and counterbalance with unbelievable charm and a likeable roguishness. We explored it thoroughly, as it's something quite different to me; it's a more emotional part than I've ever played before."

In the rehearsal period Worthington spent some time at a homestead near Jindabyne to experience this world where people like his character dwell. Worthington: "For these guys their lives are already mapped out; the farm will go to them when their family passes on, but to hang out with them you realise that they want more. Because they have so much responsibility, they tend to party really hard, to try and find something. I'm not even sure they know what they're really looking for."

Another aspect of rehearsal was the use of a choreographer. Worthington: "Abbie and I had to get used to each others bodies by just rolling around. It not only gives you a sense of self but it makes you relax with the other person, you have fun with them. So when you're on set it's never awkward, even if you don't have your clothes on."

Worthington: "The reason I signed on was because of Cate. She wrote a beautiful script that was not overly written, which is normally the case. It had a lot of beautiful images and really she's made a poem. It's a different Australian movie where we're not necessarily saying these are your Australian archetypes as you follow us on this journey. It's about humanity, about love and about sacrifice and the responsibility that love gives to every character, not just Heidi and Joe."

## **IRENE - Lynette Curran**

A key role in the film is that of Irene, the owner of the local motel in Jindabyne, who cautiously provides accommodation to Heidi when she leaves home. The highly regarded Lynette Curran plays Irene.

When Curran read the script she saw intensity in it. "I think it's beautiful because I've never seen anything like it. When I read it I saw this whole thing about boundaries: Heidi is like this crustacean without a shell; she's so vulnerable. She really doesn't have boundaries, she has such a love of life and it's so genuine and so individual, I just find her a really remarkable character. Heidi's problem with her mother, where she wonders if she'll ever be forgiven is a parallel with Irene's relationship with her son. Things like that really happen in real life: can Irene ever forgive her son when she's still grieving for her husband. All the things Heidi is going through affect Irene. In shooting the scene, one of the directions Cate gave for a line really swung it around to the parallel: "your mother knows you", meaning she will forgive you. It meant how could I not forgive my son, even though it's still raw and it hurt me, how could I not forgive him, he's still my son."

## **NICOLE - Olivia Pigeot**

Olivia Pigeot plays Heidi's mother, Nicole. Pigeot: "Nicole has had a pretty colourful life, which is not seen on screen, but when you meet her she's trying to have a normal life. She has a new boyfriend she's in love with and I think this time in her life is really important because she's trying to make everything work. She's looking forward, trying to live the great Australian dream. Heidi's at an age where she's a woman but Nicole thinks she's very naive still, so she's very protective of her, trying to shield her. But in the course of the film Nicole's heart is broken by Heidi, so when she comes to Heidi at the end, I think she's been to hell and back. Nicole wouldn't have known if Heidi was dead or alive, and just to find out that Heidi's still alive and that she's okay is the most important thing to her, that she has her little daughter back."

Pigeot: "It's a horrendous thing to walk in on your daughter and boyfriend getting it on, just to even play that is unbelievable. Nicole had so many high hopes for the little family she's created, so it's completely devastating, which is of course the reason Heidi leaves: Nicole basically kicks her out."

## **STUART - Nathaniel Dean**

Nathaniel Dean plays Joe's best friend, Stuart, who has known Joe since they were children. Stuart's background is less "well to do" than Joe's and he has been more a jack-of-all-trades.

Shortland and Dean developed the character of Stuart in the context of the relationship with Joe as a best friend.

As Joe tries to move forward into an uncharted emotional realm, Stuart remains stultified. The relationship between Joe and Stuart is a typical one of young men where one undergoes change and experiences life differently to the other. The role of Stuart is a counterpoint to that of Joe, where Stuart remains locked in to his ways, in stark contrast to the changes in Joe's life. Dean: "In the last scene, with Stuart outside the chalet, he's spent three days taking cocaine, pills, pot and booze and hung around with some pretty boring people in the lodge up at the top of the hill. Not really knowing anyone and being the clown of the group: he's pretty much lost his way. In the scene before, Joe's quite heavily told him to "fuck off" because he's being such an arsehole to him, so I think that scene outside the chalet is the hard realisation of being lost. Stuart's reaction is to Joe in the light of "Why is he being so high and mighty?" Stuart quite rightly pushes Joe to question himself and I think that's where they're left. Dean: "Lot of best friends who really need the support of the other one develop a kind of love. We played around with some things and decided he was having questions about all sorts of feelings that he was having towards Joe."

### **RICHARD - Erik Thomson**

Richard, played by Erik Thomson, is an ex-Jindabyne local who has spent ten years in France and has now settled in Sydney. His mother died a few years ago and his father has just passed away, so he is back in Jindabyne to finalise the family estate. Thomson: "He's a gay man but he didn't really fully experience that until he left the country, so this is the first time up here by himself in his old family house and going through his family history. We meet Richard when he seeks assistance at Joe's family house because his tractor's stuck in the mud and he needs a bit of help. There is somewhat of a sexual attraction to Joe, being a young, good-looking guy, but secondly Richard sees quite a lot of himself at that age or the guys he knew then, with their bigotry and lifestyle typified by knockabout camaraderie they have with each other.

"Joe turns up late one night, drunk, having had a fight with his mate. He comes around for some unknown reason but it's more the case of sharing his innermost secrets with a relative stranger. There's a supposition that Richard will be more sensitive, more available, in whatever capacity. In Richard, I think Joe sees an opportunity to get a lot of stuff out because there's no one else to turn to without being judged. And Richard, being a gay man, being judged most of his life, understands that aspect of it and I think is willing to lend an ear without necessarily taking on any of the emotional baggage."

Anderson: "Richard is probably the most together character in the film. Joe relies on that when unburdening himself. Yet he misjudges intimacy for sexual interest, which is a bit of a theme for several of the characters."

Shortland: "I think in your 20's sexual experimentation is part of many people's lives. During the film Joe opens up in many ways and he is confused. What he longs for most is intimacy, which is true of everyone.

### **BIANCA - Hollie Andrew**

Bianca works in the petrol station in Jindabyne, where Heidi seeks work. Hollie Andrew plays Bianca.

The relationship between Heidi and Bianca is central to the film, as it is a matter of trust between two young women. Andrew: "Heidi is a ball of intrigue and Bianca finds it hard to let people in; Heidi gets under her skin and Bianca doesn't know why, but it's enough to her keep her going at work. Then, of course, at the end of the film it is all the more tragic because after they finally find each other, it falls apart."

### **DIANE - Leah Purcell**

Leah Purcell plays Diane, Bianca's mother, a woman in her late thirties, who had Bianca when she was quite young. Diane also has a young son with Asperger's Syndrome, a form of autism.

There is a subtle parallel in the lives of Heidi and Bianca. Purcell: "Bianca is a child affected by divorce, not really knowing the story behind the break down in the family unit, and she is seeking some sort of stability. She wants her independence and my character, her mother, is still a little bit protective at a time when Heidi comes into Bianca's life. They're similar in the sense that they're loners, but Bianca looks at Heidi as if she's from another planet. All the same Bianca would like to connect with Heidi, somehow, because there is something that draws them together."

### **ROY - Paul Gleeson**

Paul Gleeson plays Diane's new partner, Roy, who runs a ski shop. He meets young Heidi for the first time when she comes into the shop looking for work and in a very brief moment, there is an incident between them. Ultimately, this incident causes problems for Heidi and Bianca. In driving Heidi home one night Roy takes a detour to the lake that submerged the old town. Gleeson: "Heidi is not exactly sure what Roy's intentions are, especially since previously there's been this little physical thing between them. So it's a moment that can go either way for someone watching the film and could go either way for her, as well. Roy warns Heidi away from his step-daughter, mainly because of the preceding scenes where he's had this little involvement with her, and I think he's sort of covering his tracks."

But there is doubt raised in Bianca's mind and hence there is a breaking of the bond between her and Heidi.

### **ADAM - Damian de Montemas**

Damian de Montemas plays the role of Adam, the boyfriend of Heidi's mum, Nicole. The discovery of Heidi kissing Adam is the catalyst that sees Heidi fleeing from her mother's judgment. De Montemas: "I think he really wanted to do well by Nicole and was well meaning with Heidi. His world crumbles in a moment of indiscretion that really wasn't of his doing; he should have been stronger, but wasn't. It was a real moment of weakness for him but the whole impact of that propels Heidi on her journey."

### **PAT - John Sheerin**

Joe's father is played by John Sheerin. His family has had their land holding for generations. Sheerin: "His relationship with his son is remote, but he understands his son and believes he's just going through a rite-of-passage, pretty wild and loose and I think he's been there himself, in the past. His wife has more trouble with it because she hasn't developed a closeness with her son perhaps because he's been away at boarding school through his formative years."

### **MARTHA - Anne Louise Lambert**

Anne Louise Lambert plays Joe's mother. Martha feels cut off from her son as there is not an easy communication between them. "She has all the usual concerns people have about their kids in the country, that it will be boring, that there won't be anything for them to do except drink and drive their cars too fast and have car accidents, and all of those are real concerns for country parents."

Lambert: "Perhaps Joe's parents are being careful with him lest they push him into making a decision and that decision might be "I'm out of here". I think they're careful with him on that account. It's unimaginable for my character and that's the thing looming for families in this situation, is that it will all come to an end with them, that their children won't want to carry on."

### *Setting & Production Design*

Shortland's original choice of location, Lake George near Canberra, had dried up due to drought, so an alternative in Lake Jindabyne was decided on. This choice took the film closer to the snowfields and this provided further filmic opportunities.

Shortland: "I always wanted the film to be shot in winter. I had these images of people's breath, floating on the air. And it's that fragility and the sharp clearness of the environment that you feel when you are in a cold climate. Also we wanted to have the lake: the other character in the film is the lake. When the location changed to Lake Jindabyne it became a snow film.

This change of setting had immediate effect on the lead character of Heidi. Cornish: "I think the beauty of Heidi is that her character takes note of all those things and through her eyes you get to appreciate the beauty of the land. I don't think people allow nature to have as much effect on them as it should, whereas in this film you can't deny it, it's around you. Heidi stands in the snow and lets it fall on her, unable to deny it."

In the starkness of the snow and cold the choice of colour was crucial. Shortland: "*Somersault* has a really restrained colour palette, we pulled all the colours out of the costumes and the interiors. We restricted the colour palette to grays, browns and blacks, so all the characters wear dark or neutral colours and then we added red. We went through the script and we put a map up on the wall of when red was going to appear in the film. We had to make sure that red was going to appear in the film every 10-15 scenes: the taillights of his car or her red gloves. That was the rationale, pulling back the colour palette and having these dashes of brilliant red. Red is like blood or passion and we knew it would have impact against the cold environment.

Shortland: "I was inspired by the films of the German filmmaker Rainer Fassbinder, particularly *Fear Eats the Soul* where even the sets on location look like studios. That was the look of the film. A weird mix of Germany 1972 and Jindabyne in 2003. We looked at lots of photos of Eastern Europe in the 70's, of railway stations and suburban streets. We also looked at photos by an American, Todd Hido, who portrays desolate mid west landscapes at night with lots of snow in them and different coloured lighting. German folk stories and romantic poetry influenced the design of the film. Abbie Cornish is fair and we dyed her eyelashes, eyebrows and hair really pale and we made Sam the dark hunter. So the look of the characters in their setting was from a gothic fairytale world."

In creating the atmosphere of *Somersault* by acquiring a sense of place, Shortland worked very closely with Melinda Doring, the production designer and Bob Humphreys, the director of photography. Anderson: "When Cate works with these people it's about reaching out beyond influences of domestic filming and even beyond contemporary filming. They have an incredibly painterly approach to this film and when you look at the framing, there is such attention to detail in all areas - the lighting, the strong use of contrast and darkness to highlight the areas of luminosity ... the elements of set dressing, wardrobe, placement within the frame. The creative principals were all working very much on the same vision, inspired by Cate and I believe that comes across. They were also very aware of the emotional components of the landscape, especially the lake, and the coldness of the winter climate we were filming in."

Shortland gave Melinda Doring, the production designer, a range of photographs that evoked the feeling that she wants to create in *Somersault*. In response

Doring presented images that she thought appropriate, and in the process of swapping imagery in light of the script the design of the film took shape.

Doring: "Cate always wanted to create an Australian film that would be, she hoped and as did we, different to everything that had been done before. Cate wanted to have a very cold feeling and wanted to create a fairytale quality to the film: it is the journey of a young girl in this kind of scary but beautiful landscape. To create that we wanted to give it a very cold feeling, particularly on the exteriors, and Cate wanted it to have that beautiful, fairytale snowy quality. On a very low budget, it was quite a challenge. But we also wanted it to feel quite believable, so it should be very subtle and subliminal."

Heidi's scrapbook features in the film. Doring: "The scrapbook shows the childlike qualities of Heidi. It reflects her innocence and the way she responds to the world and that she really does have a slightly different slant on things to most people. It's probably not what a normal teenage girl would have, so it gives you another inkling as to her character and the fact that she's going through a lot of emotional stuff and using the book to reframe her world.

In Jindabyne there is a German Alpine sense to the interiors, wood grains, which are quite unusual for Australia. Doring: "It's a very European thing and we really wanted to use those natural elements that were already there, but use them more, put them into locations that they weren't in, to create a mood. I guess we created a heightened naturalism."

Contrast is evident between all of the locations as a particular palette was planned for each of the major locations. Doring: "We made Heidi's mum's house very oppressive with a dark colour palette. Joe's family house, and Richard's family house, are completely the opposite end of the spectrum, obviously wealthy, very lush interiors, actually more colour and vibrancy in those interiors to contrast Heidi's own environment. A lot of her environments are quite sterile or dirty, she works in a petrol station and she's living in a fairly run-down flat behind Irene's motel, so all the environments that Heidi inhabits are quite oppressive. The lake, in contrast, is expansive, but grey and cold."

In general, the interiors have warmth to highlight each characters return from the cold blue exteriors. This was used to underline the film's themes of intimacy and isolation.

### *Costume Design*

As with production design there were great opportunities for costuming in the use of colour. Emily Seresin, the costume designer, considered the spectrum of colour in the Jindabyne landscape spectacular. Seresin: "Aesthetically Jindabyne is a whole different side of Australia and it would have been hard to imagine it without

actually going there. Just the motifs and the way people wear their clothing is different, obviously because of the cold but also the cultural background of the place. Then there are the actual colours in the landscape, it's quite a barren but beautiful place but without the snow it's quite harsh. That reflects Heidi's character, in a sense, that rawness alongside incredible beauty. And Joe, too, in a different way."

Seresin: "In pre-production I went to Jindabyne to take photos of the landscape. I also took fabric samples with me to get an overall picture so we could work out Heidi within that. In costuming Abbie Cornish, there were a couple of big things about her character to be considered, firstly capturing the cusp of girl-woman, reflecting that in the clothes, and trying to capture her kind of oddness. Colour played an important role.

Seresin's specific costuming distinctions were based on the characters' relations to their environment. Seresin: "I think the environment is important in the way it presented Abbie and Sam particularly, in the sense of connection and disconnection. Heidi's character was someone floating out of the mainstream; there was a crack that opened up and she fell in and so I portrayed her in that way."

Seresin: "Heidi's red gloves were something that had begun with Cate, from the script stage, but the idea of using red grew as we went along. We looked at some other references, as well, and just thought it would be a great tie, to tie things together in a rhythmic way. Like Joe had a red thermal that he removed, stripping off one of his layers. Melinda used it in the set design also, so it had this way of coming and going throughout the film."

### Direction & Cinematography

Shortland sees *Somersault* as a film that is about intimacy and how we deal with intimacy. To bring this to the foreground the film was shot in a hand-held manner. Shortland: "The way our camera works is reactive. The camera is continually moving and reacting to the actors so the camera is a part of the scene rather than just sitting back and observing it. The film is not an action/drama; it is experiential. We chose the hand held approach, to create an intimacy with the characters and to keep the images fresh and alive rather than composed."

Shortland: "In making *Somersault*, I wanted to make something of beauty, where people are as vulnerable as they are in the real world. I also wanted to create a visually haunting space for the characters to exist in. These characters live in a winter wonderland. Their breath connects them, hanging in the freezing air and disappearing into each other's skin.

Robert Humphreys, the director of photography, had worked with Shortland on her

shorts *Flowergirl* and *Joy* and was also eager to shoot *Somersault* hand held. Humphreys: "I find shooting hand held, especially for a film like this, just adds a kind of energy and vibrancy to the story, which you can lose if the camera's locked down on a tripod or a dolly. With a hand held camera you can react to the actors. What tends to happen is the actors don't feel so locked into what they do, where they walk and where they sit, when they stand. They don't have to hit marks so precisely and they're much freer to go with whatever their character dictates.

It is a demanding approach to filmmaking as it is physically exhausting as well technically difficult. Humphreys: "The camera weighed thirty kilos and we used predominantly long lenses. As we often had available lighting only, we used wide-open lenses with very shallow depths of field, so the focus puller's job is an absolute nightmare. As the camera operator, if I lurched, the focus would change because the focus is only two inches deep at times."

The exteriors were shot in cold and monochromatic tones, blue and pale, bordering on cold. The interiors were the opposite, very rich, very warm and saturated in colour. Humphreys: "Whenever the characters are outside, during the daytime, they're living in a pretty monochromatic, cold world. We've tried to counterpoint that with little flashes of colour, like Heidi's red gloves which feature a lot, and frames have a little flash of red or a little flash of yellow in them, rich colours which play beautifully against the monochromatic world."

Shortland saw Heidi as "an angel with dirty wings" and so she had to look quite different to the other characters. Humphreys: "The other interesting thing about the colour is that for Abbie Cornish, who's 21 playing the 16 year old Heidi, we did lots of tests on her and found that to depict her as a young girl it was much better if she was quite bluey pale, translucent. So you'll find through the film she's often lit with blue lights and everyone else is lit with warm lights to provide the contrast in age."

Humphreys: "In using the indoor locations to their best potential, we often used reflection, the textures in surfaces or the colours that we've found on locations. It worked very well for Heidi's character, being a very reflective character, who lives in her own little world. That separated her from everyone else around her. I think Cate's exceptionally good at getting the most out of her locations as well as her actors. My favourite scene is Richard's house, where we used every inch of it. Cate literally walked the character through almost every room in the house. The house opened up, every room, with either French doors or sliding doors. We lit it, using warm practical colour in some rooms, cold daylight in other rooms, so that you could see right through the house in different coloured layers."

For the direction of the actors, there were some scenes that required sheer audacity. Towards the end of the film Heidi is stepping on dangerous terrain: Shortland: "The most difficult scene was when Heidi picks up two guys in a bar, played by Toby Schmitz and Henry Nixon, and they return to her flat. There's a fair

bit of nudity and it's a really sad scene because she's drunk and really vulnerable. There are two guys who are going to take advantage of her in every way they can. It was quite scary because we were all really worried about how it was going to be emotionally for Abbie. After the shoot, Abbie Cornish said it was one of the most amazing experiences, because the actors were so connected to each other and could really trust each other. It was great for me as a director because they took it as far as they could. When Sam Worthington came through the door he couldn't believe how confronting it was."

### Editing

Scott Gray, the editor, had already worked with Shortland on *Flowergirl* and *Pentuphouse*. Gray: "I knew it was a simple story but I expected great things and when I saw the footage, straight away I knew it was going to be exciting, especially as it was my first feature film edit. The editing style of *Somersault* is a natural flow; it's a really intuitive, gut feeling. We tried to find the rhythm, experimenting with different things and eventually it just came. Once we found it, it was a great feeling because we knew we were on the right path. "

Gray: "I think shooting off the shoulder, jump cutting, we're quite comfortable with abrupt cuts and there's quite a lot of that happening in the movie. That style establishes itself early on and then I think people become used to it and it becomes the accepted way of telling the story."





## **PRESS CONTACT**

Michael Krause | Foundry Communications  
(212) 586-7967 | [mkrause@foundrycomm.com](mailto:mkrause@foundrycomm.com)

## **FILM MOVEMENT BOOKING CONTACT**

Erin Farrell | Theatrical & Festival  
(212) 941-7744 x206 | [erin@filmmovement.com](mailto:erin@filmmovement.com)

