SAM PILLSBURY

Sam Pillsbury has directed, sometimes produced and written, 32 Series TV Dramas, Network TV Movies, Cable Movies and Feature Films.

Since 2001 he has completed the New Zealand feature CROOKED EARTH, a Runner-up in Competition at the American Film Institute Film Festival (shot in New Zealand for the French Company, Pandora), and a remake of the American Classic WHERE THE RED FERN GROWS with Dave Matthews and Kris Kristofferson (Crystal Heart Award, Heartland Film Festival, 2003), released by Disney in 2005, the CBS hit THE WEDDING DRESS with Tyne Daly, Neil Patrick Harris and Margaret Colin, FIFTEEN AND PREGNANT with Kirsten Dunst for Lifetime (highest rated cable movie in the US that year) and TAKING BACK OUR TOWN with Laura Innes and Ruby Dee for Lifetime, for which he just received a Christopher Award and an EMA Award. He made 2 films for the Hallmark Channel, including THE KING AND QUEEN OF MOONLIGHT BAY with Kristen Bell, her first movie role.

Sam was born in the US but grew up in New Zealand. He graduated MA with 1st Class Honors (Summa Cum Laude) in English Literature (he majored in 19th and 20th Century American Literature) and spent 5 years making documentaries and cinema shorts for the NZ Government. He started his own production company in 1975, making documentaries and commercials and feature films, breaking new ground and winning many awards, including the equivalent of Academy Awards in NZ and Australia.

He made 3 features in New Zealand before he moved to the USA, THE SCARECROW (Director's Fortnight, Cannes, 1982), which he wrote and directed, the first NZ Feature to get invited to Cannes, in 1984 wrote and produced the cult Sci-Fi movie THE QUIET EARTH (Best Picture, Best Screenplay, NZ Film awards), reviewed by the Los Angeles Daily News as ‘Quite simply the Best Science Fiction Film of the ‘80s’, one of Astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson’s 10 favorite Sci Fi Movies (up there with 2001 and Planet of the Apes) and STARLIGHT HOTEL, which he directed in 1987, “It sneaks up on you and steals your heart” (LA Times).

He has done every job you can do on a film. He has been a 1st AD, a production manager, a producer, he cut his own films for 10 years, recorded his own sound, owned his own editing and sound post-production facility in NZ until recently. He still operates camera when the situation is tricky or dangerous. He did his own budgets, and knows how to handle them, and really knows his way around a lab and the digital effects domain.

He has designed and built houses in NZ, LA and Phoenix, including the one he owns in Pacific Palisades, Los Angeles, and put himself through college as a landscape and building contractor (he landscaped the Hotel California in Santa Monica). He is a sailor, a windsurfer, a scuba diver and a skilled horseback rider. He has played the drums in a rock and roll band, is a mechanic (he used to build his own cars, literally from scratch). He is a graduate of the Bondurant Grand Prix Road Racing School in Phoenix Arizona, and holds a competition license.

He has written screenplays (THE SCARECROW, THE QUIET EARTH, WHERE THE RED FERN GROWS, THE KING AND QUEEN OF MOONLIGHT BAY, HOUSE OF TEA, ENDLESS BUMMER) published film reviews, short stories, been on the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council (NZ) and was a Government Appointee to the board of the New Zealand Film Commission.

He taught Shakespeare at Victoria University, Wellington, and ran the Film School at the Dept. of Extension there. He was Chairman of the NZ Motion Picture Academy for 4 years, collects art and in 2006 sold his own Vineyard and Winery, Dos Cabezas WineWorks, producing wine which has been poured twice at State Dinners at the White House, and earned rave reviews from Robert Parker, The Wine Spectator, and Forbes Magazine. He recently wrote several articles on wine for Chow Bella, the food blog in Phoenix New Times. He now takes a riverboat load of 160 passengers up European rivers every year on wine tours for AMA Waterways. So far he has hosted one on the Rhone, the Danube, the Rhine, and Portugal, the Douru, the Bordeaux, and the Moselle.

He has a 100 acre sustainable Vineyard where he grows 14,000 vines and makes a range of 20 100% Cochise County Arizona wines under his Pillsbury Wine Company label, mostly Rhone blends. He has won gold medals and some of the highest scores for any Arizona wines, currently named Best Local Winemaker by Phoenix Magazine, voted Best Arizona Winery by Arizona Foothills Magazine, and named ‘one of the rising stars of the Southwest’ by Wine Spectator Magazine. Jancis Robinson in her Seminal 2013 book ‘American Wine’ wrote: he makes ‘some of the finest wines in Arizona’, and Hugh Johnson in his 2019 Wine Guide: ‘Pillsbury Wine Company. Filmmaker Sam Pillsbury producing excellent dessert wine. Symphony Sweet Lies, Petit Syrah Special reserve, v good Chenin Blanc. Double Gold winning Grenache and Guns and Kisses Shiraz.’ We just got Best State Winery out of over 100 Bonded AZ Wineries by MSN.com/food and wine, AND Arizona Culinary Institute Hall of Fame 2017 ‘Winemaker of the Year.’

Pillsbury Wines recent awards include a Best of Class, 5 Double Golds and 5 Gold Medals at the San Francisco Chronicle American Wine Competition, with 14 medals for every wine entered, an exact repeat of the 2018 and 2019 Competitions, 42 medals out of 42 entries. We beat out most Napa Wineries!!

Sam is married, is guest chef at a number of top Phoenix Restaurants, has 2 grown sons and a teenaged son, 2 grandchildren, and spends his time in New Zealand, Los Angeles, and lives and works in Arizona.