

Having a reputation as a perfectionist with a strong eye for detail, Claudio Borrelli has climbed to the top of the Brazilian creative tree. Yet it took him some time to find his footing,

he tells
Ed White

It's rare that you meet a true force of nature, but Julia Tavares, producer for director Claudio Borrelli and co-founder of production company Killers, really is one. "If she had been in TV series 24," jokes Borrelli, as we all sit down to chat at the pair's offices over a cheeseburger and a beer, "it would have been called 12."

Tavares is a whirlwind of excitement and zeal, the engine, catalyst and dynamo behind their production company. Borrelli, by contrast, is relaxed, with a seriously mercurial streak and a boyish enthusiasm that shines through as he talks about his directing heroes: Usher, Budgen, Buckley...

claudio borrelli director brazil

As we sit in the beautiful renovated house that is their office in the outskirts of Sao Paulo, Borrelli and Tavares tell me that they like to work by Kinka Usher's maxim: "Don't shoot for the money, shoot for the idea." Tavares emphasises the point: "We want to do the best scripts - irrespective of size, we invest in film. There's nothing else: we never advertise, never send presents to anyone. We are not about perfumery, what is important is the film," she says. Testament to this is that they are open 24 hours a day and are keen to expand worldwide. "I have no problem with approaching the head producer at Fallon in England, and saying: 'Give me a script - no strings attached, give me a try, give me a chance.' Because I can do the casting over there, and shoot it over here and it will be cheaper. And it will be good." 🍷

The pair attribute the relatively weak current state of TV spots in Brazil to the twin factors of short lead times from script to spot delivery and the perennial problem of poor relations between agency and client. "Right now, everybody's looking inside the market and wondering what's going on. Sure, you can go to Cannes and see films by Frank Budgen, Traktor... and think, oh, but that cost \$4 million, we don't have that sort of money. But then you can take a look at Argentina: it's our neighbour and the creativity is much better there, and that's a little bit worrying," muses Borrelli.

Borrelli's relaxed attitude shows as we get into the nitty-gritty of his path into directing - it's one marked by a happy-go-lucky, wild spontaneity. Initially destined for a career in medicine, he failed the entrance exams because of the twin distractions that Brazil offers in abundance: girls and beaches. Now 40, he mooched around until he was 24, when tragedy struck. In one terrible year he lost three close friends to accidents. It was a catalyst to focus, he says, and on a whim he left Brazil to try his hand at directing in the US. While at UCLA's famed film school in Los Angeles, he stumbled across a crew filming on Venice

who are difficult to work with, because we shoot so many hours," says Borrelli. "They say that Claudio is very demanding," adds Tavares, shaking her head. "Demanding! Because we spend a lot of hours shooting, because

we are very detailed. But they like us precisely because we do those details," she says. Indeed, was the details that got Borrelli his crucial break. "Find the agency that you like and bug them but then bug them," he explains. "So I bugged F/ Nazca Saatchi & Saatchi and I got my break."

This led to award-winning spots working for two of Brazil's top creatives - Fabio Fernandes at F/ Nazca Saatchi & Saatchi and Marcello Serpa at Almap BBDO in his first year, and a place on the Saatchi & Saatchi New Directors Showcase in Cannes in 2004. He quickly gained a name as one of Brazil's top directors, notching up more awards for Volkswagen, Rainha, Brahma and Fiat among others.

Eighteen months ago, however, frustrated at differences with the owner of Cia De Cinema,

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Beach and ended up working as a PA on two B movies for cult veteran director Roger Gorman. Just as suddenly as he had come over, Borrelli decided to pack it in and return to Brazil, shooting his first ever commercial, getting married, opening his own production company and having a baby in the space of a year. His company, Talk Films, whose USP was shooting film rather than video, was a big success, and, after another abortive directing stint in the US - more of a break from it all, he says - he moved to Sao Paulo totally broke, signing to production company Cia De Cinema. The jumping around that seems so abundant in Borrelli's career is not reflected in his work. He is a perfectionist, given to shooting for longer, and making sure every detail is exactly right.

Ironically, that obsession with detail and quality is what agencies grumble about - a complaint that, he says, he and two other top directors in Brazil, Carlos Manga Jr and Pedro Becker, uncoincidentally share: "We're considered here the three guys

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it was all change again as the pair decided to go it alone, setting up Killers. As chance would have it, Hungry Man executive producer Steve Orent was looking to expand in Brazil, a dream come true for Borrelli. "I sent off Claudio's reel and they invited us to New York. It was great," says Tavares. "In the end, it was a difficult decision for us. We said we didn't care about our name, Killers, because no one had heard of it, whereas everyone knows who Claudio and Julia are. Our problem was more to do with retaining our independence. In the end, we agreed not to get married, but to date. We said we'd use the name Hungry Man, work under the name Hungry Man, and see how it went." Initially, things went well, with Borrelli shooting 22 spots in 15 months, but the frenetic pace and Hungry Man way of doing things caught up with the pair, who reluctantly decided to part company with them. Although they're now happier, the move sums up their resolutely individual way of doing things, it was difficult nonetheless. As I say my goodbyes and get into a cab, Borrelli leaves me with a parting comment: "Splitting from Hungry Man was like turning down sex with Paris Hilton." A difficult decision, but definitely the right one.