

twin piques

Naomi Watts
and Laura Elena
Harring arouse
curiosity, among
other things, in
David Lynch's
Mulholland Drive.
By Anna David

WITH *MULHOLLAND DRIVE*, DAVID LYNCH HAS LEFT THE STRAIGHT STORIES AND lawnmowers behind, and embraced those symbols that his fans would surely tell him are truly Lynchian: twisted dreams, midgets, and stunning performances by gorgeous girls you probably haven't heard of until now. In this case, those girls are Naomi Watts, a British-born, Aussie-bred sprite whose father was the tour manager for Pink Floyd; and Laura Elena Harring, a Mexican-born former countess and Miss USA who originally wanted to be a gemologist.

But don't give Lynch too much credit for discovering women with such quirky backgrounds. "David casts by a picture," says Harring, who was involved in a car accident (just like the character she ended up playing) on her way to meet the famed director. For Watts, the initial "audition" process consisted of a half-hour chat with Lynch, during which he cheerfully revealed he'd never seen any of her 20-odd projects.

Once the two women—as well as the iconic queen of tap, Ann Miller; Robert Forster; and a slew of eclectic others—were in place, Lynch spent roughly six weeks shooting an \$8 million, two-hour pilot for ABC about a guileless young girl (Watts) who comes to Hollywood to become an actress. ABC executives viewed the footage and decided against airing the show. But Harring, who credits a summer spent in India with helping her read the omens in life, always knew that *Mulholland* still had wheels. "I would see my character's name, Rita, in magazines, in movies—everywhere," Harring says, explaining that she was certain the project would come back together when she randomly met Sheryl Lee—the actress who played Laura Palmer on *Twin Peaks*—at a spa.

Spa sighting or not, Canal+ ended up buying the rights from ABC for \$7 million and gave Lynch two additional weeks of shooting. It was then that Lynch informed his leading ladies that they would be filming a love scene—with each other. "On the day [of shooting], we were definitely getting lost in the moment," Watts reveals, explaining that there were nevertheless plenty of embarrassed giggles between takes. Harring says, smiling, "When we were done, I was like, 'I wish I had a boyfriend.' I mean, my face was flushed."

Audiences at Cannes (where Lynch shared best director honors with Joel Coen) were aroused on all levels. Harring recalls, "Journalists were like, 'Does the lady represent the ego? And is the box the mind? And does *silencio* mean silencing the mind?'" Lynch's explanation that the film was simply "a love story in the city of dreams" didn't help clarify. But audiences weren't the only ones flummoxed. "David absolutely wouldn't tell us what any of it means," says Watts, who admits that she even tried to bluff him at times by pretending she had it all figured out. "He'd just sit back and delight in our frustration." ■