

9 details for the sharper movie fan...

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The Investigation

Stellar street

With 2,500-odd golden stars on the pavements of Tinseltown, Agenda goes behind the scenes to find out how the Walk Of Fame is surviving in modern Hollywood...

Forget the Oscars and Golden Globes – if you're looking for Tinseltown's biggest accolade you need only look to the pavement. If an A-lister puts in at least five years of notable work and shares their good fortune with worthy causes, they can claim themselves a genuine piece of immortality – a marble slab on the Hollywood Walk Of Fame.

That is, if 'Star Girl' Ana Martinez approves. As producer of the Walk Of Fame ceremonies for over a quarter of a century, Martinez is the person who signs off on nominations for enshrinement in entertainment history and decides where the star will spend eternity – whether that be with Hollywood royalty outside Grauman's Chinese Theatre, or in front of a tattoo parlour.

Many myths surround the acquirement of a square of sidewalk; is it an exercise in cynical self-congratulation or an honour bestowed only on true VIPs? The truth is somewhere in between. Anyone can nominate a celebrity for a star in one

of five categories: motion pictures, music or audio recording, television, theatre or live performance and radio. That's *anyone*, including the celebrity's husband or wife, manager, or even a fan – to date, no one has ever been self-nominated.

When the nomination's accepted by the celeb, it's then considered by the Hollywood Chamber Of Commerce board, alongside the other 200 names received every year; they prioritise those that have done charitable and philanthropic work. With the final list set, translating to around 20 ceremonies a year, Martinez steps in to seal the deal.

A grand total of \$30,000 needs to be raised by the nominating party to pay for the creation of the personalized star, the cost of the ceremony and the upkeep of the 300lb, terrazzo marble-and-brass monument for the years to come. (The 'stars' have been created by generations of the same Italian-American family for over 50 years). In the past, fans have even raised the fee, through cake sales and movie screenings.

"I like to put my British celebrities in front of British-themed pub the Pig 'N Whistle," laughs Martinez, when *Agenda* quizzes her on the logic behind star placement. "Emma Thompson drank a pint as they unveiled her star!" Other inspired decisions include putting *Charlie's Angels* actress Farrah Fawcett in front of a hair salon, Sandra Bullock alongside her *Speed* co-star Keanu Reeves and Javier Bardem next to wife Penélope Cruz. This year, Jennifer Lopez – who received the 2,500th star – was given a spacious spot outside the W Hotel to accommodate the throngs of press and fans that came to see her sob throughout the ceremony, with her five-year-old twins at her side.

Paving the way

In the mid-'50s it was decided 1,558 stars would be placed on Hollywood Boulevard and Vine Street to memorialise the entertainment industry, with the final star of that set laid in 1961. After this initial enthusiasm, construction waned until honorary

EMPICS/GETTY



Marble arts: (main) Scarlett Johansson and (above) James Franco receive their stars; (inset) Ana Martinez oversees all the nominees.



No matter what happens, I made my mark'

mayor of Hollywood and TV producer Johnny Grant re-instigated the project in 1968, developing the Walk into a tourist attraction. Ceremonies to commemorate the award of a star didn't actually happen before the '70s and it wasn't until a decade later that they could attract stars and their fans.

"Hollywood was very run-down prior to that time," admits Jeff Briggs of the Hollywood Historic Trust, the charity that maintains the Walk Of Fame. "We've seen a rejuvenation of the area since then but at that time it was home mostly to drug dealers and unsavoury types." Today, ceremonies are typically tied to a new release and can appear to be publicity stunts, just another part of the marketing machine. Martinez insists that she gets to see what an impact the honour can have on the recipients, despite their previous achievements.

"If they cry, I cry, and I end up liking them all the more," she says. "I don't think they sometimes realise how big a deal it is to get a star until they're there at the ceremony. They see the fans who wait from 4am to see them. It can be a shocker. It's the only award a celebrity shares with their fans - it's not like an Oscar that sits on the mantelpiece at home. It's then that they realise the star is forever."

Stars in their eyes

With Hollywood legends like Humphrey Bogart, Clark Gable and Alec Guinness immortalised underfoot, the Walk is a tradition that's not lost on young A-listers of today. "When I got to L.A, I'd come here and see the stars. It seemed like something that was part of the city and you would never crack that, it was part of Hollywood history," gushed *Oz The Great And Powerful* star James Franco at his recent ceremony. "It's still baffling that my name will be there."

Likewise Scarlett Johansson who, days after *Avengers Assemble* opened to glowing reviews and staggering box-office, remarked at her own ceremony: "When I was told I was getting this star, I thought to myself, 'Man, I really made it to the big time'. You know, no matter what happens from here on out, I made my mark, I'm here to stay, and my family for generations to come will be able to visit me right here. always."

For today's thespis, in our reality-TV culture, the Walk still represents a coveted ideal: legacy. Martinez has seen some honourees get extremely attached to their stars, instructing staff to keep a watchful eye out for damage, graffiti or gum marring their marble. She's even found herself having to send concerned celebrities photos to show that such problems have been addressed, while the Hollywood Historic Trust is currently renovating the entirety of the Walk after the toll of being trodden on by 10 million visitors a year.

That said, there are still some celebrities who remain distinctly disinterested in receiving the public honour and becoming what Martinez affectionately calls a 'Walk Of Famer'. "One person that I've been trying to get for years is Clint Eastwood. He has been approved, but he's not interested," she sighs. "I have one spot left in front of Grauman's Chinese Theatre that I've been holding for him but I'm beginning to lose hope! Julia Roberts is another one who is just not interested. I have no idea why. Then there are others we are waiting on who keep putting it off, like George Clooney..."

Martinez, meanwhile, got a star of her own a few years back, on the request of her partner - but she keeps the souvenir in her living room. "My boss said if anyone should have a star, it's Ana!" she laughs - a Walk Of Famer at last. **HGS**

Star power

The Hollywood Walk Of Fame by numbers...

4 Walk of Fame stars awarded to the same person. (The first was given to James Stewart for *Vertigo*. (Per No. was never recovered))

15 Number of blocks the Walk spans on Hollywood Boulevard - that's 1.3 miles.

20 Rough number of new stars added each year.

47 Percentage of stars awarded to people in the film industry.

134 Number of actors who played munchkins in *The Wizard Of Oz* but were awarded a single star between them all.

300 Weight of each star in pounds.

7007 Address on Hollywood Boulevard of Roger Moore's star, in honour of his seven Bond films.

30,000 Cost in dollars of the production and upkeep of a new star.

10,000,000 Average number of visitors the Walk receives every year.