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Alpe d'Huez film festival 2013



# The Gilded Cage

A comedy by RUBEN ALVES

RITA  
BLANCO

JOAQUIM  
DE ALMEIDA

ROLAND  
GIRAUD

CHANTAL  
LAUBY

BARBARA  
CABRITA

LANNICK  
GAUTRY

NICOLE  
CROISILLE

ZAZI FILMS et PATHÉ PRÉSENTENT «LA CAGE D'OR» UN FILM DE RUBEN ALVES SCÉNARIO RUBEN ALVES JEAN ANDRÉ VERLES avec HUGO CÉLIN avec RITA BLANCO JOAQUIM DE ALMEIDA ROLAND GIRAUD CHANTAL LAUBY BARBARA CABRITA LANNICK GAUTRY NICOLE CROISILLE MARIA VIEIRA JACQUELINE CORADO DA SILVA JEAN PIERRE MARTINS ALEX ALVES PEREIRA ALICE ISRAËL avec ANDRÉ SZANKOWSKI MONTAGE NASSIM GORJAI TEHRANI ACCORDS MUSIQUES EN SCÈNE MATTHIEU DE LA MORTIÈRE SCÉNARIO NINA RIVES ALCOSES MAHAR EGA CHEKHI avec THOMAS LASCAR OLIVIER WALCZAK VINCENT COSSON COSTUMES ISABELLE MATHEU MANIPULATION VALÉRIE THÉRY HAMEL COIFFURE DIANE DONDIC

CASTING PIERRE JACQUES BENCHOU LAURENT COUBAUD avec GAËL DELÉCROIX MONTAGE PRODUCTION RODRIGO LEAO SUPERVISION DE LA POST-PRODUCTION ABRAHAM COLOBLAT DIRECTEUR DE PRODUCTION PASCAL RALITE UNE COPRODUCTION ZAZI FILMS PATHÉ TFI FILMS PRODUCTION avec LA PARTICIPATION de CANAL + CINE + TF1 en ASSOCIATION avec CINÉMAGE 7  
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## Synopsis

In an upscale Paris neighborhood, Maria and José Ribeiro have lived for nearly 30 years in the cozy little concière's apartment on the ground floor of a handsome 19th century building.

This Portuguese émigré couple are universally liked: Maria is a diligent housekeeper, and José is a skilled handyman. Over the years, they've become an indispensable part of the daily lives of those around them. They are so highly appreciated and well integrated, that when they have a chance to fulfill their dream to return to Portugal and live a comfortable life, nobody wants to see the Ribeiros leave.

Just how far will their family, their neighbors and their employers go to hold them back? And deep down, do Maria and José really want to quit France and flee their gilded cage?



## **A conversation with Ruben Alves, writer and director of *The Gilded Cage***

***This is your first feature film. How did you get to direct it?***

I've always acted and written. Twelve years ago, when I was twenty, I'd already directed my first short. I never lost that desire to tell stories. After the short I wrote a script about French ex-pats in Lisbon. Already I was pretty close to the idea! Hugo Gélin, my friend since boyhood with whom I'd already worked, and Leticia Galitzene, my two producers, urged me to stop beating around the bush and write about what was closest to me. Around then I saw a story on the news about a Portuguese concierge in a posh Paris neighborhood. She talked about her life, what she'd done. And for his last question, the journalist asked her if, after thirty-five years, she planned one day to return to her home country. She answered that yes, she did think about going back to Portugal, but she felt just as well in her little gilded cage.

Her answer crystallized everything I wanted to say. It wasn't about me making an autobiographical film but to write about something that I knew up close, because I was born in France to Portuguese parents. At the age of eighteen, my parents came to France, fleeing Portugal's poverty and fascism. My father was a casual laborer, always on building sites, and my mother was a concierge.

***So you were carrying inside of you the material for your story?***

At thirty-two I'd achieved enough distance from my family. I could tell this story. And a part of me was saying I had to do it. I'm quite attached to Portugal. In the writing, without necessarily borrowing friends' anecdotes, I leaned heavily on experiences, observations and feelings. Above all, I wanted to avoid tumbling into clichés, but all the same there are traits, be they Portuguese or French, that are worth pointing out to have some gentle fun with.

At first I was writing alone, and then Jean-André Yerlès joined me. Hugo Gélin came in to complete the script-writing trio. He knows me well enough to see what I had to give even when I wasn't daring enough to do so.

### ***How do you see the Portuguese community in France?***

The Portuguese are a humble people, and most often no one wants to draw any attention. I'm shocked by the number of Portuguese occupying important positions in France and whose origins we're unaware of. We recognize their name, sometimes changed a bit... It's the third largest immigrant community in France with about 4 million Portuguese and Portuguese descendants, meaning my generation and the following one. There's a strong tie between France and Portugal, a quasi emotional tie, each side expressing it in their own way.

### ***How did you construct the plot?***

For me, the heart of the story had to be the family, the couple and their children. Without trying to compose a catalogue of typologies, I chose my characters with regard to what I could experience around me, sometimes even from non-Portuguese immigrants. The film is also about coming to terms with one's social status and life. That goes beyond the simple case of just one country. I'm just relating to what I know best, what touches me. But the example can be symbolic. In France when you say you're Portuguese, people often think you're a worker, discreet, and they ask if maybe you know someone to do a bit of plumbing, painting, or with a van... That's as far as it goes. Right into the stereotype. The whole country is caricaturized, often very simplistically. No one escapes it, not even the French. Telling this story was a chance for me to have a warm and joyful perspective in talking about a family.



***Your film is about a family who, through each of its members, has to realize what it really is.***

Exactly. Everyone, at whatever age, whatever they've gone through, has to take whatever place is really theirs. There's a line in the film that's very important to me, "too good for your own good." You only give what you want to give, obviously, but equally you're only used if you want to be. In that way, I wanted to have fun with these different perspectives, these labels that we stick on others and get stuck on us.

***You cast comprises great Portuguese and French actors. How did you put them together?***

From the beginning I insisted that Portuguese play the Portuguese. It was a matter of honesty and authenticity for my producers and me, and we were lucky that our partners, Pathé and TF1, went along with the idea, which is rare these days. So I went off to Portugal to find the best. For the French, obviously, that doesn't mean very much, because nobody knows them!

Thanks to a mutual friend, I met Joaquim de Almeida first. He has an international career, and lives in the United States. He invests a charisma into his roles that works wonders. I met him in Cannes three years ago, while I was still writing the script. We were at a party with Hugo and were introduced. The first thing he says to me is that he can't find anything to eat! I found his remark so typically Portuguese that I started laughing. And just like that, I said to myself that maybe I'd just found someone to play the role of José. So right away I started telling him about what I was writing. He asked me to send him the script as soon as I finished it. And that's how it happened. I finished the script, sent it to him, he read it, liked it a lot, and he said yes.

Joachim lends real density to the role. He plays characters ever so elegant, ever so dangerous, so I liked the idea of having him play a simple construction foreman, with humility, which doesn't correspond at all with how he's typecast these days. As a result, he brings a force, a nobility, that associated with what the script rouses from his origins, offers a loveable character. Because the father of a Portuguese family—even if it's the mother who runs the show and always has the last word—is still the patriarch. There's still that Latin macho side, and Joachim has that charisma in life as well as on the screen. At first he was a little uncomfortable about how I wanted to treat the Portuguese comically. Above all, he didn't want to play a buffoon. We agreed on that



point. I wanted to have fun with the clichés, but by no means get trapped in them. He trusted me. We did preliminary readings of the script in Portugal and he was satisfied.

In the film he radiates that father-of-the-family quality, but what I most prefer from him are those moments when he becomes touching. I love it when this rock of a guy all of a sudden seems fragile or overwhelmed. Joaquim embodies that humanity to perfection. José doesn't know the rules his bosses live by, he doesn't know how to behave in front of a Porsche. But even if he's out of his league, he follows his logic, his own code of honor, and that demands respect.



***For the role of Maria you chose another Portuguese star.***

Maria's is the central role of the film and I wondered who could portray it. In the film the women have an important place, and I pay a lot of attention to it. In actual fact, I asked around, in Portugal, who would be the best actress capable of bringing to life all the facets of the role. The name Rita Blanco came up almost all the time. Rita has something quite unique. People love her because she can't be labeled. I tried to contact her by every possible means, through her agent, her friends... And she wound up receiving me at her home in Lisbon. She confided that she really wanted to meet me because four different people had talked about me! She also told me that I was right to be

persistent because she had a ton of projects and she might not have read mine. She immediately grasped the feeling I wanted to instill. She found the role very authentic. She told me that details were very important for her. I've got the same approach. We got on together right away.

In real life, Rita isn't at all like her character, because she's not at all reserved. She's full of humor, with quite a personality. And it was important to her to play this role. She wanted to meet my mother even if I didn't want to mix things together. Maria is not my mother, but it's true that there's a lot that comes from her. In the end they met each other, and I know that Rita studied my mother. So she absorbed a lot of things that helped her define that acceptance of things, that devotion, that work ethic... For Rita as for Joachim, these are real character roles, because they're playing characters who correspond to the image we have of ourselves but don't reflect how we're perceived by others.

### ***How did you decide on Roland Giraud?***

His role in the couple he was part of was as important as his role as boss because we see him in the private sphere of his character also. As is the case for everyone in the film, I didn't want actors that we're used to seeing all the time in the same roles. Roland Giraud is rarely in film. He doesn't do more than one a year because he does a lot of theatre. I wanted a departure from that more or less proper, somewhat stiff image he's usually given. I wanted to give him something a bit more eccentric. Sometimes his character dresses strangely. That essential likeability that Roland benefits from also allowed me to get past those difficult aspects of his character without us condemning him. In total innocence his character sometimes appears to be arrogant, offhanded or condescending. It's something I've often been witness to in real life. It demanded someone with the talent to take that on, while giving his character his chance. Roland can play in any register without ever losing his humanity. Even when he plays something with a hard edge, we feel the human behind it.

Roland read the script and found it very touching. And then he swore to me that his concierge was called Maria, her husband José, and that they've been friends for thirty years. He feels a great deal for them and I'm certain and I'm sure he doesn't behave like his character with them!



***Chantal Lauby plays his wife.***

No sooner than the script was finished Chantal was obvious. For me, she embodies exactly what I wanted for the character, which is to say a woman completely removed from the world, for whom nothing is serious, and at the same time, endearing. Chantal plays it perfectly. She can say the most outrageous things that make you smile. She has the gift. I knew she'd make an extraordinary Solange. She improvised a lot and we had a hard time keeping a straight face on the set. She's a very sensitive person, and we're very much alike in terms of feeling. Reading the script, she cried because she was so touched by the Ribeiro couple's humanity.

***Nicole Croisille is surprising in the role of one of the apartment owners in the building.***

I was looking for someone who be instantly impressive, who had a real presence. When I met Nicole, she asked me, in effect, if Madame Reichert was a bitch! I laughed and said yes, but she was more than just that! Because, all the same, she's got a great deal of affection for Maria. They've got a true relationship, which, by the way, has its store of surprises. Nicole was perfect for the role. First of all, because she's acting against type, she who's so warm, so generous. During our first meeting she arrived in her tinted glasses, with



that aristocratic side I wanted for the character. Madame Reichert isn't a bad woman. She's more a victim of her condition than her mentality. For me, Madame Reichert is above all a lonely woman. Without Maria she wouldn't have anyone. I had a lot of fun with Nicole, as she's really quite funny off the set. She dove into the project right away.

***Maria Vieira plays the bosses' maid, quite a colorful character...***

Maria Vieira is a little bit of a Portuguese Jacqueline Mailan. She started out doing broadcasts of sketches, vaudeville. She's extremely popular in Portugal. The role is largely inspired by Hugo's nanny. I know her quite well, because when my mother arrived in France she lived in that woman's home. So Rosa, the couple's cleaning lady, is a little bit Hugo's nanny. I saw Maria right away in the role. A little woman with an incredible, overflowing energy, who doesn't give in. But there was a language problem, because she doesn't speak French. I phoned her in Brazil, where she'd just finished a very big series. I spoke to her about the very human and authentic side of the characters. She was seduced by the script and immediately started working hard on her lines in French! So she came to the project very committed with that energy so typical of her.

Her character is an homage to all those people who share the daily lives of the families who employ them, who are practically members, but all the same maintain a certain distance. They feed, they wash, they listen. In the film, the son of Rosa's bosses is a bit like her own. And it's this intimacy that allows her to stand up and say things as they are when everyone else is at a loss.

***Maria and José have a daughter, Paula, essential to the story...***

In effect, Paula helps everyone reconsider their position, because she dares speak about her four truths to her parents and because she loves someone who isn't from her background. She makes everyone take a close look at themselves, and not just from within their own family. She's the one who makes sure everything goes well. She's a young lawyer quite dynamic in her job, and yet she's not so at ease with her "background" as the daughter of immigrants. Her arc in the story is all the more poignant. I hope it will connect with a lot of people.

Barbara Cabrita plays Paula. We worked together for a long time on a series for M6 and I remembered that she had Portuguese origins. Her ancestry

wasn't enough to get her the role. Barbara really had the allure and the ideal personality for the character. For our first meeting she drives up on a huge motorcycle. She pulls off her helmet, her hair comes tumbling down and there is this young attractive woman, full of character. Like Paula. Barbara glows with a freshness and a smile that are very communicative. She confided to me that the role touched a nerve deep in her, with regard to her own roots. Barbara often visits her grandmother in Portugal, and she told me that when she's there, she's someone else. She feels things that she doesn't feel in France, memories of her childhood... I was thrilled that she so invested herself in the film.



***Paula's in love with Charles, the son of her father's boss.***

For Charles, everything's okay. He's got nothing to prove. He's going to take over his father's business. He's practically a dilettante. He doesn't have any problem with people's roots. For him, everything is quite clear. To play him, I wanted a guy who was cool, modern, to contrast with Paula's personality. I knew Lannick Gautry through a project with Hugo. He's got an interesting force in him that I needed. To deal with Paula, he had to have substance and self-assuredness. He's calm right up to the moment when he has to react. Lannick is an actor whose virility goes well with Barbara's sensuality. He's an actor I like a lot and who we don't see enough of.



***Jean-Pierre Martins plays Carlos.***

His character is like some of my uncles! He's got the energy, florid vocabulary, bearing, and even some of their quips. When he gets angry at his son and says that given the boy's results in math, he better practice his soccer because that's where his future is...that comes right out of real life. I witnessed that scene in Portugal, myself! You had to have the strength to play that role. I sent the script to Jean-Pierre Martins with a note. He's Portuguese, but nobody knows that. Jean-Pierre loves sitting around the table with family and friends, eating and drinking. He's a bon vivant, and I really wanted that for the character, with that joyous grandiloquent side and the twinkle in his eye.

Carlos is Maria's brother-in-law and Lourdes' husband. They were either born in France or arrived here very young. So they know all the codes. But it doesn't make them French. They've got Portuguese roots, but you better not take them for fools. Jean-Pierre is really of that generation. After reading the script he said yes because he had been especially touched by it. I was thrilled because he embodies just what I wanted in Carlos' character. When he tells his son to stop studying and go play soccer, you believe it.



***How did you choose Jacqueline Corado, who plays Lourdes, Maria's younger sister?***

She's an actress who I adore. She does theatre as well. She's Portuguese and is deeply involved in the community. She even had a radio show in Portuguese. A number of people mentioned her to me for the role. I called her while she was on vacation and, after reading the script she took the first plane back. It happened from one day to the next. It's through her character that I wanted to show those women who you see in Portugal who go way over the top, who we call "fishmongers" over there. They open the window and hurl out, and everyone knows all about everything. They're tragediennes! That's the really Latin side that's expressed through these colorful characters. Jacqueline embodies it very well. She really wanted to play in this film.

***And for the youngest in the family?***

For José and Maria's adolescent son Pedro, I was lucky to find Alex Alves Pereira through the auditions. What made me decide was his look. He's got what I call the Portuguese look, a little sad, somber. Alice Isaaz plays his girlfriend in the film, Cassiopée. On the screen she's got a great beauty and an absolute lack of self-consciousness. She's got something unique. I think she's going to have a great career.

***How did the shoot go?***

We filmed for nine and a half weeks, from May 14 to July 19, mostly in the 16<sup>th</sup> arrondissement in Paris. The building we used for the film is on the Avenue d'Iéna. It's next-door to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, which houses a collection of Portuguese artwork. I felt that was a good sign. We used a studio for interiors and to finish the film we had the pleasure to shoot in Portugal, in the north of the country in the wine region called Douro, near Porto. Unesco classifies the whole valley as a world heritage site. The hills are arranged in espaliers to grow the grapes for Porto wines. I wanted to show something that we're not used to seeing, and this place is quite unique. Filming there was also something of a gift to the crew, because the weather was glorious, almost too hot, a hundred degrees in the shade.

***How did you manage all these actors coming from such different horizons?***

By instinct, feeling. Ever since I've been in the profession I've watched my director friends, and some of them have advised me on how to do this or that. Of course the rules and techniques are important, but there always comes a time when you've got to get beyond all that. Because every time I wanted to do it the way you had to in terms of technique, I wasn't satisfied. I'm instinctive. I don't say that I'm a director. For me, it's instinct. I direct, of course, but it's really that that dominates my direction. What counts is the feeling you have with the person. My goal isn't to practice this or that profession, it's to bring out emotions as strong as the ones I feel in my life.

***Were you especially keen about certain scenes? Did you worry about others?***

I was apprehensive about the meals, the scenes with lots of people. The lunch scene in the garden, when we first see Uncle Carlos, was technically difficult. There were some rough moments, when I asked myself what was I thinking when I wrote this! A table with a dozen people, a dog, kids, lines flying from every direction, the weather...the whole works! But despite everything, it came out really quite well.

The scene I was anticipating, the sequence to be precise, was the one with the fado, that typically Portuguese song, during which Paula's character realizes who she really is. During the song, the editing alternates across many characters and the story leaps forward. I didn't want to subtitle the lyrics, even if they are quite beautiful. The music and the voice speak for themselves. You just get the feeling. The fado is something very particular and very powerful, culturally. The fado, for the Portuguese, is fate. It's the missing of someone, but with the pleasure in the pain. That moment in the film is the highlight, when everything comes together and everything falls apart. It was very important to have the fado in the film. Even if it's a comedy, there had to be that touch of nostalgia.

She's a very good actress friend of mine, Catarina Wallenstein, a young Portuguese star, who sings. When we first met, all those years ago, I asked her if she knew how to sing the fado, because in my story about the French ex-pats in Lisbon, I already wanted to put it in. She told me no. Three months later I was in Lisbon and she phoned me, asking me to come by. So I get there and right in front of me she starts singing a fado, and I just stood there with my

mouth hanging open. It's something really special... Even if the first film didn't get made, she's singing now in this one!

In the film, there are certain scenes that really touch me, like the one in which Maria and José are arguing in front of the workbench in the cellar. José says, "All we've ever done is work, now we're going to enjoy ourselves!" And his wife replies, "Yes, well maybe that's because it's also what we like." They're the key lines to the film. They sum up everything. You have to accept what you are. Work can be a pleasure. What others define as pleasure—traveling or going to a restaurant—doesn't necessarily correspond to them. Accept what you are, accept what you believe, without worrying about what others think. That's one of the things the film says and it means a lot to me.

***What was it like for you, shooting your first feature film?***

Strangely, I was very calm. I wanted to tell this story. I started with the first scene of the film, when Rita Blanco and Nicole Croisille are trimming the roses in the building's courtyard. Everything is communicated by their energy and warmth. I'm very eager to make a second film. There might not be one sole Portuguese in it but I hope to put the same energy and humanity into it, and speak with the same lightness about what touches all of us.





## THE CAST

MARIA..Rita BLANCO  
JOSÉ .....Joaquim DE ALMEIDA  
FRANCIS CAILLAUX..... Roland GIRAUD  
SOLANGE CAILLAUX..... Chantal LAUBY  
PAULA .....Barbara CABRITA  
CHARLES .....Lannick GAUTRY  
ROSA .....Maria VIEIRA  
LOURDES .....Jacqueline CORADO  
CARLOS..... Jean-Pierre MARTINS  
PEDRO..... Alex ALVES PEREIRA  
MANUEL..... Sergio DA SILVA  
MADAME REICHERT..... Nicole CROISILLE  
MONSIEUR BERTRAND .....Bertrand COMBE  
MADAME BERTRAND .....Ludivine DE CHASTENET  
MILO..... Alexandre RUSCHER  
MALO..... Paul RUSCHER  
CAMILLE .....Alice ISAAZ  
MIGUEL..... Ruben ALVES  
THE MAILMAN..... Oliver ROSEMBERG  
MONSIEUR ZU .....Yann ROUSSEL

## CREDITS

Director..... Ruben ALVES  
Script..... Ruben ALVES, Jean-André YERLÈS Hugo GÉLIN  
Photography..... André SZANKOWSKI  
Assistant Director.... Matthieu DE LA MORTIÈRE  
Casting, Paris .....Pierre-Jacques BENICHO  
Casting, Lisbon .....Patricia VASCONCELOS  
Sets .....Maamar ECH-CHEIKH  
Makeup .....Valérie THERY-HAMEL  
Hairstyling .....Diane DUROC  
Continuity .....Nina RIVES  
Sound .....Thomas LASCAR Olivier WALCZAK Vincent COSSON  
Editing .....Nassim GORDJI TEHRANI  
Original Music .....Rodrigo LEAO  
Production Director .....Pascal RALITE  
Post-Production Director .....Abraham GOLDBLAT  
Producers .....Hugo GÉLIN Laëtizia GALITZINE Danièle DELORME  
Co-producer .....Romain LE GRAND  
Associate Producer .....Jonathan BLUMENTAL  
Production .....ZAZI FILMS  
Co-produced .....with PATHÉ  
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