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## CLASSIC HOLLYWOOD

### **Kurt Russell's life as an actor plays out by his own rules**

**Classic Hollywood: Kurt Russell's zigzag career has been propelled by his choice to pursue his dreams outside Hollywood.**

By Susan King

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Someone once told Kurt Russell that his acting career "looks like it was handled by a drunk driver." advertisement

And Russell's reply?

"I said I can't deny that," he said, laughing.

But the boyishly handsome 63-year-old Russell, whom most baby boomers first saw as Jungle Boy on a 1965 episode of "Gilligan's Island," may be selling himself a bit short. His choices might not fit the straight and narrow, but many of his parts over the years have been memorable.

#### PHOTOS: Behind-the-scenes Classic Hollywood

He was a heartthrob star at Disney more than 40 years ago in such films as 1969's "The Computer Wore Tennis Shoes." A decade later, Russell earned an Emmy nomination for his uncanny performance as Elvis Presley in "Elvis," a TV movie that marked the first of many collaborations with director John Carpenter. And four years later, he received a Golden Globe nomination for Mike Nichols' "Silkwood."

Russell achieved cult status as the caustic, one-eyed antihero Snake Plissken, the special forces warrior turned criminal in Carpenter's 1981's "Escape From New York" and 1996's "Escape From L.A." And he proved to be a first-rate comedic actor in Robert Zemeckis' 1980 "Used Cars" and 1987's "Overboard," in which he appeared with Goldie Hawn, whom he had been with since they met on 1984's "Swing Shift."

But he's played by his own rules. When he was at Disney, Russell decided to pursue his dream of playing minor league baseball and act in the off-season. He played second base for a few minor league teams, including one owned by his father, actor Bing Russell's Portland Mavericks, until an injury ended his career in 1973.

After the cancellation of his 1976 NBC western series, "The Quest," Russell bought property outside of Aspen, and he looks back at that as a pivotal decision.

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"I said I am either going to live the lifestyle that I want to live or I am going to talk about it," said Russell recently at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Despite a bad cold, Russell was all laid-back charm and good humor. "It was a very important lesson for me because it informed the rest of my life.

"I knew at the time I could guide hunting or teach skiing or raise Appaloosas, and whatever acting jobs I got would be gravy," said Russell, who still has a home with Hawn in the Colorado resort town. "After that, 'Elvis' came along and redirected my life. But I didn't let the love of doing movies get in the way of trying new things."

And Russell has stuck to his convictions. "I will work as long as I am excited about it and as long as I want to," Russell said. "If something else has come along and takes my attention, I will let it take my attention. It keeps life interesting and keeps you interested in life and what it is you want to do next."

Since making the Quentin Tarantino "Death Proof" segment of "Grind House" in 2007, Russell has turned much of his attention to making wine. "I have loved wine all my life, especially pinot noir and chardonnay, and I have always thought about making it," he said.

In his quest to make "great" pinot, he teamed Ampelos Cellars in the Santa Rita Hills in Santa Barbara country. His Gogi brand — Gogi is Russell's nickname — of high-end pinots and chardonnays sells at the Wine Saloon at the 1880 Union Hotel in the Central Coast town of Los Alamos. His stepdaughter, Kate Hudson, and her fiance, Muse lead singer Matt Bellamy, also sell their rosé wine there.

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But Russell has been stepping away of late from the vineyards to make a few movies, including "The Art of the Steal," which also stars Matt Dillon. The con caper comedy is on VOD and opens in theaters on March 14 .

"Art of the Steal" writer-director Jonathan Sobol always had Russell at the "top of the list" of actors to play Crunch Calhoun, a world-weary attraction at third-rate motorcycle daredevil shows. Though he despises his slick brother (Dillon), who made him the fall guy on a heist gone wrong in Poland, Crunch is forced to join him and the old gang of thieves when they hear of a rare manuscript printed by Johannes Gutenberg.

"He just seemed like the perfect fit for the role and embodied a lot of the same characteristics I had envisioned for Crunch Calhoun," Sobol said. "I think there is a certain swagger and bravado that the character has I always found Kurt hit in a lot of his roles. There's a certain sly, winking sensibility that Kurt has brought to some roles in the past I thought would work really well."

So did Russell. "I looked [at the script] and said, 'This is a reason to get out of the vineyard and go to work. It looks like he is putting together a pretty cool crew,' and he did. It was a fun thing to do."

Russell is also prominently featured in "The Battered Bastards of Baseball," a documentary about his father's colorful baseball team directed by his nephews Chapman and Maclain Way, which received good reviews at Sundance in January.

And he also has a part in the "Fast and the Furious 7" as a "guy who maybe is CIA or maybe not," Russell said. The film is scheduled to return to production after it shut down last November when

Paul Walker died in a fatal car crash. Walker, said Russell, "lived a life incredibly like mine. We enjoyed a lot of the same things — family, outdoor life. He was a nice man."

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