

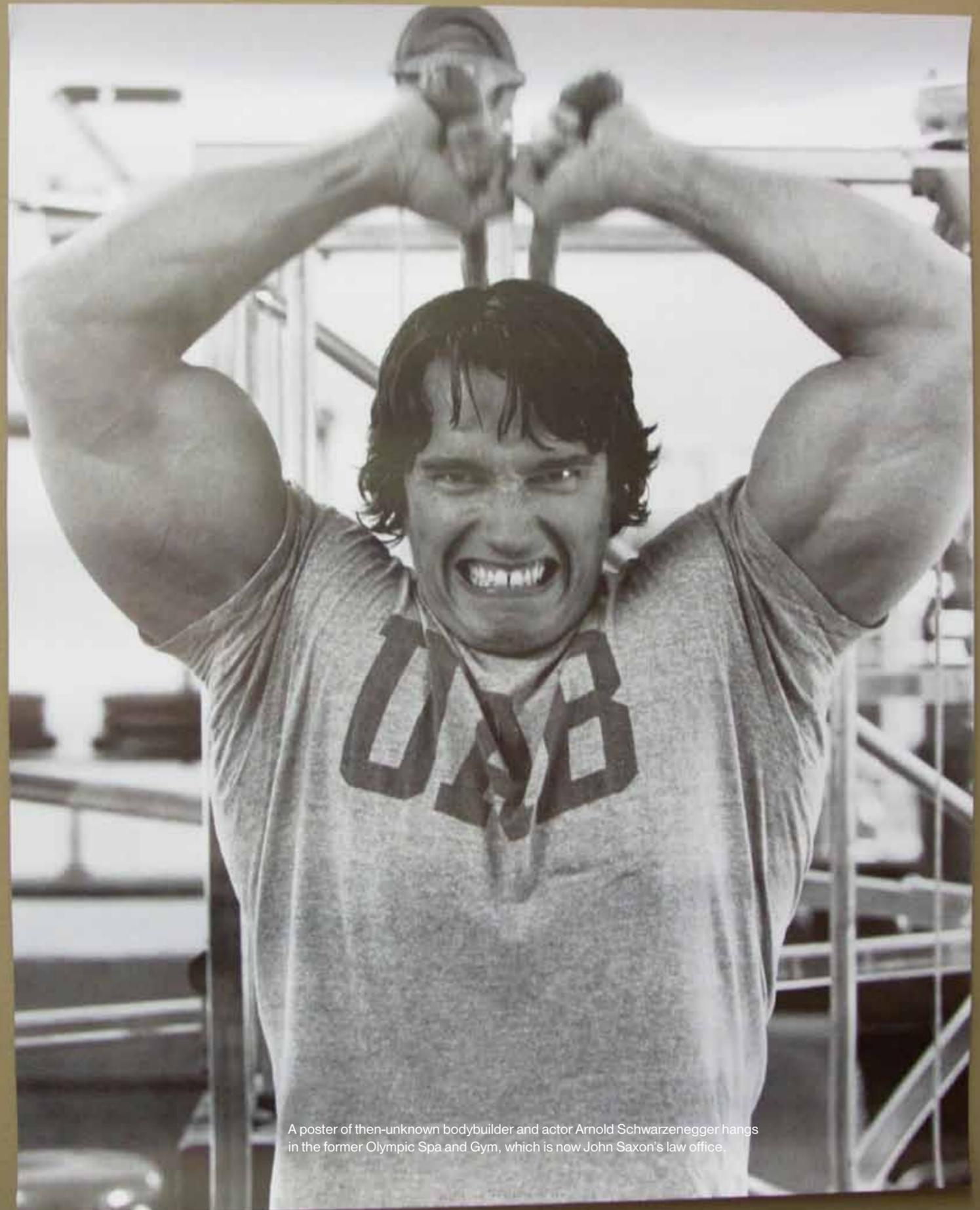


STAY HUNGRY

BIRMINGHAM IS THE BACKDROP
OF THE ICONIC 70S FILM WITH
SALLY FIELD AND
ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER.



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PHOTOGRAPHY BY ELIZABETH DERAMUS



A poster of then-unknown bodybuilder and actor Arnold Schwarzenegger hangs in the former Olympic Spa and Gym, which is now John Saxon's law office.



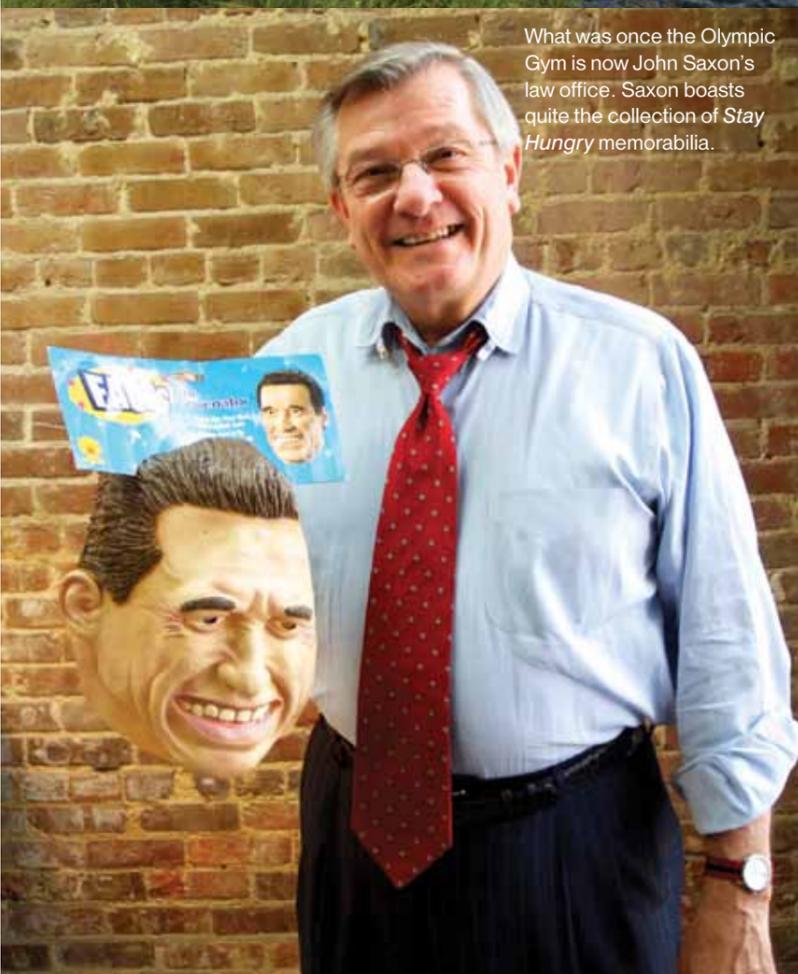
The Mountain Brook home where much of *Stay Hungry* was filmed



Stay Hungry Author Charles Gaines. Photo by Tom Montgomery.



Artist Barbara Evans served as the local casting director for *Stay Hungry*.



What was once the Olympic Gym is now John Saxon's law office. Saxon boasts quite the collection of *Stay Hungry* memorabilia.



Artist Karen Graffeo was Sally Field's stunt double for all of *Stay Hungry*'s skiing scenes.

Charles Gaines was only 30 years old when his first novel, *Stay Hungry*, was published in 1972. Six months after publication, Bob Rafelson, the director of the 1970 hit *Five Easy Pieces*, starring Jack Nicholson, called the young writer. He wanted to adapt *Stay Hungry* to the big screen. Rafelson, who'd recently lost his daughter in a tragic accident, had little interest in filming a serious dramatic piece. But *Stay Hungry*, the story of Craig Blake, a wealthy Birmingham boy who finds himself adrift after his parents' death, is a serious novel.

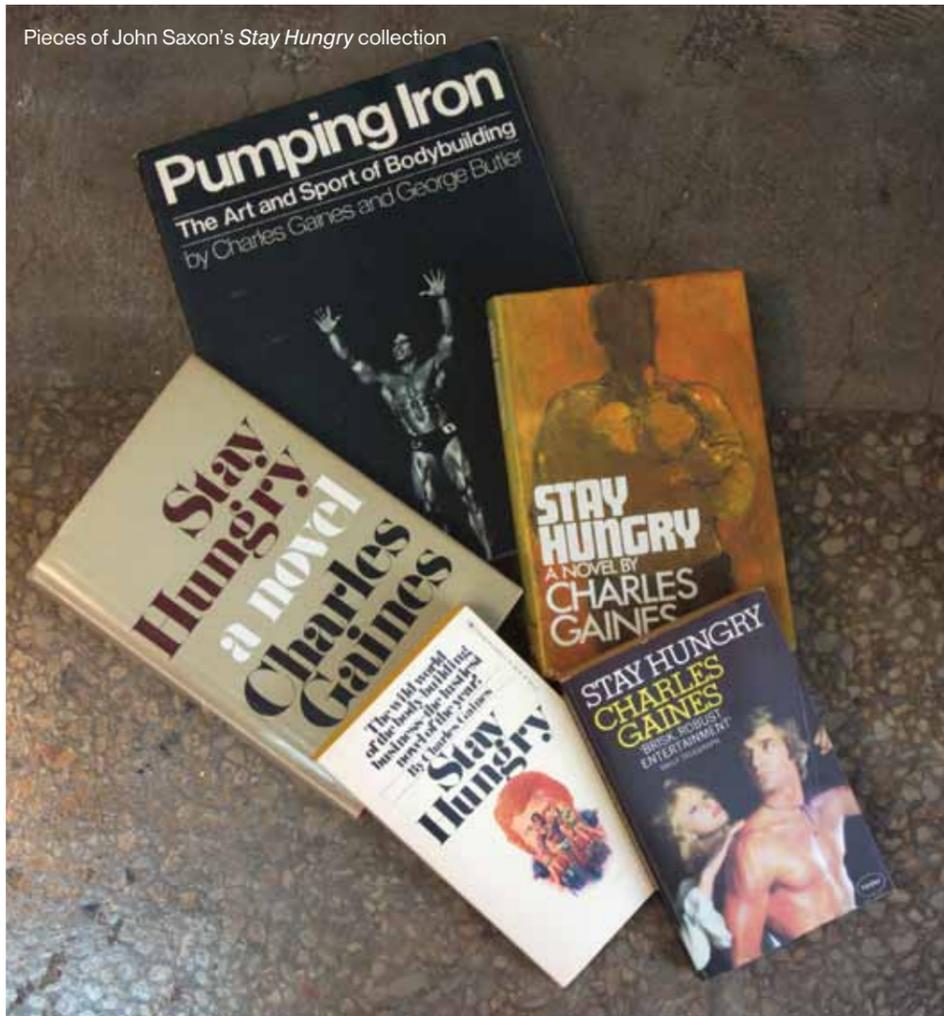
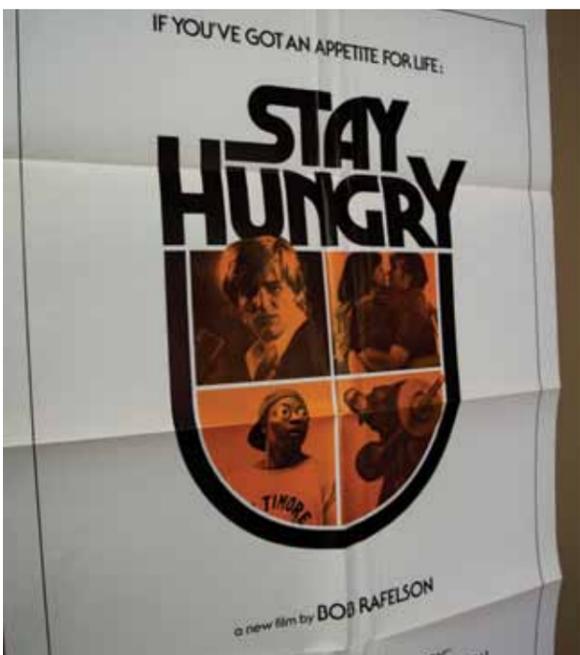
In the beginning of the story, Blake meets love interest Mary Tate Farnsworth, a girl from Bessemer played by Sally Field, while negotiating a deal with some sketchy real estate developers. When he's scoping out the prospective property, a gym in downtown Birmingham, Blake meets Joe Santo, an aspiring body builder vying for the Mr.

Universe title, played by an unknown Austrian bodybuilder and actor named Arnold Schwarzenegger. At the end of the novel, Blake's reckless behavior causes Farnsworth's death; it was a plot too dark for Rafelson to shoot so soon after his own personal loss.

After agreeing to collaborate on the screenplay, Gaines moved from New Hampshire, where he lived with his wife, Patricia, an artist, and their three children, to Los Angeles. A couple of months later, he finished the final draft. "It wasn't exactly what I had in mind, but I could live with it," Gaines says. The movie, a dramatic comedy, shies away from the heart of the novel—Blake's irresponsibility and its deleterious effects on others, a carelessness reminiscent of the Fitzgerald characters Daisy and Tom Buchanan who discard people effortlessly, Gaines says. Even so, Gaines was willing to write the script the way Rafelson envisioned. "I did it

for the money and the experience and have no regrets," he says.

In the spring of 1974, Gaines moved with his family to meet the cast and crew in Birmingham, where the entire movie was filmed. Familiar locations include the Bank for Savings Building, the "Blake Manor" on Mountain Brook Parkway, The Olympic Gym (now attorney John Saxon's law office), The Birmingham Country Club, Birmingham-Southern Theater, and the Lyric Theater. Working closely with producer Harold Schneider, artist Barbara Evans served as the local casting director. She did a little bit of everything, scouting locations for the fiddling contest at Buck's Cove, scouring honkytonks for the barroom brawl, recommending a caterer and doctor for the cast and crew, and rounding up hundreds of locals to act as extras. "Anything that needed to be done, they called me," Evans says. While



Sam Tenebaum, "The Great Kaiser," also has fond memories associated with the filming. He met Schwarzenegger working out at the downtown YMCA.

fun and exciting, landing just the right spot at the last minute for a famous and exacting Hollywood director could be demanding, and there was always an element of surprise to each day's work.

One rainy day, Evans loaded up 30 or so bodybuilders on a bus to shoot a scene at the Lyric Theater, which was a porno house at the time. "They were all greased up, slipping and sliding on the seats in their speedos," Evans remembers, laughing. When they arrived, the porn film was still playing, so the entire group traipsed inside to watch the end of the movie before shooting the scene, Evans says.

When the production company called Karen Graffeo, looking for Field's stunt double, she thought it was a joke. Then a competitive skier and a freshman at Jacksonville State University, Graffeo spent two weeks filming and teaching Jeff Bridges and Schwarzenegger to trick ski on the Black Warrior River. Every day at lunch, Graffeo, who lost weight and wore a wig to look like Fields,

ate lunch with Scatman Crothers. "He would get me at lunch and say 'Let's eat and watch Arnold flirt,'" she says. After all, it was the mid-70s; lust, booze, and drugs flowed freely. The water-skiing scene happens to be one of Gaines's favorites. Bridges's portrayal of Blake's reaction to new people, places, and experiences—his discomfort, vulnerability, and lust—reflects the tone and texture of the book, Gaines says.

Sam Tenebaum, who calls himself a "dinosaur of Birmingham weightlifting," also has fond memories associated with the filming. He met Schwarzenegger working out at the YMCA downtown. At that point, Tenebaum, also an accomplished opera singer, had started his wrestling career and was known as "The Kaiser." One day, as he, his wrestling manager, Dr. Johnny Peoples III, and Schwarzenegger were hanging out around the motel pool with the cast and crew, Schwarzenegger gave him some advice: "You know, a big guy like you needs to call attention to himself. You need to put a mask

on and call yourself 'The Great Kaiser.'" Tenebaum's been known as "The Great Kaiser" both inside and outside the ring ever since.

At the time the movie was filmed, attorney John Saxon was a student in law school. But two years ago, when chatting with a client, he discovered the building he bought in 1999, where he currently practices law, was the set for the Olympic Spa and Gym. Inspired by this chapter of Birmingham's filmmaking history, Saxon started collecting every kind of moviemaking memorabilia and minutiae imaginable related to *Stay Hungry* and the stars involved—production notes, a poster of Arnold posing in a UAB T-shirt, postage stamps of Field and Bridges from Somalia and Turkmenistan, Bridges's high school yearbook, Schwarzenegger action figures and mask—You name it, Saxon has it. In the future, Saxon hopes to create a museum showcasing his extensive and eclectic collection. "It may be a quirky, local film, but this pays tribute to these actors' body of work fol-

lowing the film," Saxon says, and he's right.

Stay Hungry won a Golden Globe for best comedy, but is notable for a variety of reasons: playing the role of Farnsworth, Field broke out of her "Flying Nun" good girl image, and Schwarzenegger went on to become arguably the best body builder of all time, a box office sensation, and the governor of California. The movie, according to Gaines, remains one of Bridges's favorite roles, and Robert Englund, Santo's goofy trainer, became the infamous Freddie Kreuger.

Not to mention the film featured local talents Fannie Flagg, RG Armstrong (the nasty gym owner), and countless Birmingham extras. Who can forget Martin Hames, the beloved, quixotic, complicated headmaster of The Altamont School, in all 300 pounds

of his glory, breaking up the barroom brawl? Today, *Stay Hungry* remains a cult classic, and Gaines hears from fans frequently. Almost 40 years ago, he had no idea how the filming of *Stay Hungry* would define the arc of his career as a successful journalist and nonfiction author. At the time, he believed he wanted to continue to write screenplays and work in Hollywood. He later realized he wasn't cut out for the movie business or living in Los Angeles, a place he found debilitating with all its decadence, self-promotion, and politics.

In his memoir, *A Family Place*, published in 1994, he reflects about this time of his life when, as a star-struck young man, he was caught up in the Hollywood lifestyle. The three months filming opened up a "Pan-

dora's Box" for him and Patricia that would take years to close. "I went from a one-Pop-Tart-a-day dad whose biggest weekend kick was a canoe float with my kids on the Contoocook River to a high-handed, big-appetite experience chaser—a caricature of the country boy gone Hollywood," he says.

Looking back, Gaines says filming *Stay Hungry* almost cost him his family and those parts of his life most valuable to him. However, unlike his character Blake, Gaines realized what his damaging sense of entitlement could cost him, and in the end, chose to change course, living his life and practicing his craft in a house he built by hand in Nova Scotia, far away from the glitter and temptations of Hollywood and his southern roots in Birmingham.

Author's Note: *Stay Hungry* was my first brush with Hollywood. The scene was cut, but I'll never forget riding to Bessemer in the back of a van, sitting behind Sally Field and Jeff Bridges. I also snuck into the scene at the Birmingham Country Club with my friends. We're the rowdy children jumping in the pool in the background. My brother, John Scott, is standing in his overalls with the crowd at the hoedown, clapping his hands to the music, and my mother loves to tell the story about the time she was riding in the car sitting next to Schwarzenegger. She says that all of a sudden she felt his hand creeping up her leg. When I asked her what she thought, she says, "I just remember thinking that I wished I had shaved my legs that day." ●