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MAINE HARDWARE
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Gunnar Hansen’s life might have been forever changed in 1973 when, just out of graduate school at the University of Texas in Austin, he was signed to play the killer in a horror movie being filmed nearby. When it was released in 1974, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* became a runaway success, an instant cult classic, thoroughly controversial, critically decried for its terrifying horror, and of course box-office gold. Hansen’s character Leatherface and *Chain Saw* pioneered what are now familiar and gruesome conventions of the horror genre: the use of power tools as murder weapons, skin masks, and what Hansen calls “friends in a van going somewhere with one annoying fifth-wheel guy who always gets killed first.”

Instead of going Hollywood, though, Hansen moved to Mt. Desert Island to pursue his plan to be a writer. Although he grew up mostly in Texas, his family had lived in Maine when he was age 5 to 11, and he’d returned in the summers during college to work at restaurants and a boatyard. He’d learned to sail.

The island seemed a bit quiet in 1975 after college life in Austin and a hit movie. “I told myself I’d just make a trip to Boston every month or six weeks so I wouldn’t feel so isolated.”

*The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*’s legendary Leatherface sails among us.
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And? “I never did it,” he laughs. “I didn’t need to.”
Initially, he wrote free-lance for periodicals, among them the Maine Times, woodenboat, Maine Sunday Telegram, Yankee, and Texas Monthly. In 1986, he moved south to fill in as a temporary managing editor at The Yacht, a now-defunct magazine in Newport, Rhode Island. “After five or six months, I told them ‘I’m done,’ and I left and came back here. My interest was freelance writing.”
The free-lancing has included documentary and feature film scripts and books.

Hansen’s latest book, Chain Saw Confidential: How We Made America’s Most Notorious Horror Movie, will be published this year by Chronicle Books. “It’s not just for Chain Saw fans or horror fans—it’s about the history and place of horror in film.”

In the decades since Chain Saw, Hansen has regularly made appearances with fellow stars at horror conventions all over the country, conventions called things like Monster Mania Reunion and The Days of the Dead. He is featured in a cameo role in the new 3D Texas Chainsaw, which was released nationwide in January. But in the beginning, he

Most of the documentary work was done in Maine. “Some were travel/tourism-type films. Chummy Rich: Maine Boatbuilder was one of the films I’ve done with Jeff Dobbs. Portrait of an Island was about Little Cranberry, which I’d visited a lot already so I knew people there. Invisible was about the history of the native tribes in Maine. It’s shown in public schools. The most recent documentary (2011) was another project with Jeff Dobbs, sponsored by the Mt. Desert Historical Society for the 250th anniversary of the colonial settlement of the island, called Dancing at the Mill. The historical society is an amazing resource. Tim [Garrity, the society’s executive director] was great—he gave me a desk and left me to research.”
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wood you heat yourself twice,’ because of all the work. I also learned how really dangerous chain saws are. If I’d’ve known, I’d never have done some of the things I had to do with the chain saw in the film. I have an oil furnace now—I just flick the switch.”

Hansen seems never to have wavered from his devotion to the writer’s life, and his life in Maine is a disciplined one of research and writing. “I used to always think a writer’s life was a few hours in the morning at the desk, then long walks in the woods. But mostly, I’m just in my office working. Things have changed over the years, though. Thirty years ago, it was a big deal for people around here to drive 20 miles to Ellsworth. Now it’s nothing. And now I get away to the conventions three or four times a year. I try to get to Iceland every year or two. The scale has changed.”

What are horror conventions like? “They’re fun. Most people just want to talk about Chain Saw. You have to get up and talk to the audience for a few minutes at these things. After doing the first few, I asked the promoters if I could talk about something besides Chain Saw, and they said, you can talk about anything you want. So at the next one, I started talking about what I was working on then. In less than three minutes, I lost 800 people. So I said, ‘…and that reminds me of something in Chain Saw...’ and I heard 800 heads snap back.”

Where do a horror film star and his sweetheart go to see a movie on Mt. Desert? “Bar Harbor has a movie house where you can have pizza for dinner while you watch, but the selection is limited with just two screens. We see most movies and horror films on Netflix. We’ve got The Devil’s Rejects tomorrow night—the sequel to House of 1,000 Corpses. I have to watch some of this stuff just to keep up! Horror almost never reaches Bar Harbor.”

The 3D Texas Chainsaw had yet to come to town, so Hansen hadn’t seen it. “I may go up to Bangor, at some point, if it’s there, if I have time…Right now, I’m working on a rewrite of a script I already sold. They’re talking about maybe shooting in the spring. It’s called Death House.”

Do people there know you are a horror movie legend—say, when they bump into you in the meat section at the local IGA? “Oh, yeah, everybody’s known for years.” He lets the silence tickle the air. “Nobody’s impressed.”