

FURTHER REVIEW



By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Creating a big-screen version of Peter Benchley's suspense+horror novel of a small seaside community besieged by a series of shark attacks turned into a horror of its own.

The weather around Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, in the spring of 1974 was cold and wet, which slowed down production. The mechanical sharks broke down. Boats that were built to look like they were sinking actually sank.

A scheduled 65-day shooting schedule ballooned to 159 days. Once summer rolled in, island locals wanted the cast and crew to move along to make room for tourists.

Despite everything, Stephen Spielberg's second feature film, "Jaws" opened in theaters a half-century ago, on June 20, 1975.

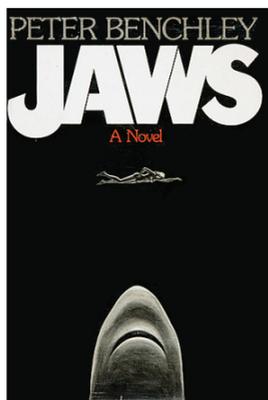
A BEST-SELLING NOVEL BECOMES A HOT PROPERTY

Peter Benchley spent much of his youth saltwater fishing. He later graduated from Harvard, wrote for Newsweek and the Washington Post and worked as a speechwriter for President Lyndon B. Johnson.

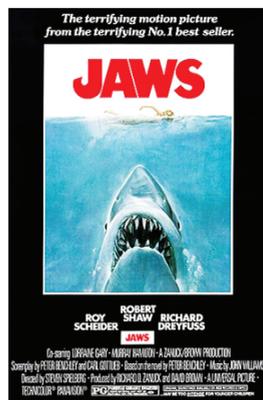
In 1965, Benchley read about a shark caught off Montauk, Long Island. Six years later, he pitched a novel about an enormous shark that disrupts life

in a quiet New England community. Doubleday paid Benchley a handsome advance for his book.

Benchley considered titles such as "Silence in the Water," "The Summer of the Shark" and "The Jaws of the Leviathan" before settling on just "Jaws." He was adamant to not use the word "shark" in the title for fear his novel would wind up on bookstore nature shelves.



The dust jacket for the 1974 hardback novel ...



... and the movie poster a year later

The book was published in February 1974 and became a huge success, spending 44 weeks on the bestseller list. The paperback release sold nine million copies in less than a year.

Helen Gurley Brown, editor of Cosmo magazine, read galley proofs of "Jaws" before it was published and recommended the book to her husband, movie producer David Brown. Brown and his Hollywood partner,

Richard Zanuck, bought the film rights for \$175,000 and then hired Benchley to write a screenplay.

They also hired director Dick Richards to helm the project but then grew upset when, in a production meeting, Richards kept referring to a "whale." They replaced him with 28-year-old Steven Spielberg, who had directed TV episodes and a TV movie but only one feature film: "The Sugarland Express."

THE MAKING OF 'JAWS'

Spielberg read the novel and found the human characters so unlikeable, he said, that he found himself rooting for the shark. He discarded the two screenplay attempts by Benchley — and a number of subplots — and hired sitcom writer Carl Gottlieb to finish the job. Spielberg then cast Benchley as a TV reporter (at right) and Gottlieb as the town newspaper editor.



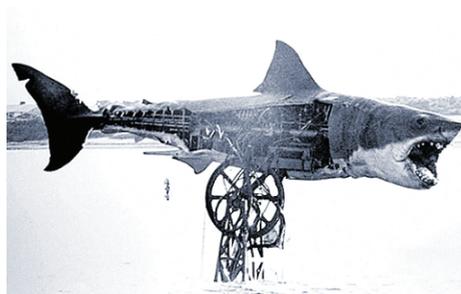
Charlton Heston lobbied hard for the role of Police Chief Martin Brody. Spielberg felt Heston's presence would send a signal to the audience that the shark doesn't have a chance. He also considered Robert Duvall and Gene Hackman. Roy Scheider overheard Spielberg, at a party, talking about the movie and asked if he could be in the film.



Lee Marvin was offered the role of Quint, the crusty fishing boat owner. Marvin said he'd rather go fishing than appear in "Jaws." Sterling Hayden was offered the role but turned it down because of tax issues. English actor Robert Shaw took the role but also had tax issues, which caused him to fly to Canada or Bermuda every time he was given a day off.



Spielberg offered the role of the brash young oceanographer, Hooper, to Jeff Bridges, Timothy Bottoms, Kevin Kline, John Voight and Jan-Michael Vincent. George Lucas recommended Richard Dreyfuss, who had appeared in "American Graffiti." Dreyfuss turned down the role twice before finally signing on just before filming began.



Three mechanical sharks were made in a Hollywood workshop, tested in a pool and shipped to Martha's Vineyard. Each was 25 feet long and weighed 1.2 tons. Once submerged in salt water, however, the sharks broke down, which led to weeks of delays. Spielberg began calling the shark "Bruce" after his — and Clint Eastwood's — lawyer, Bruce Ramer.



Residents of Martha's Vineyard — 400 of them — were paid \$64 a day to scream and run in and out of the water. This was in late June, when the water temperature there was still quite cold. After hours of rehearsals, cameras finally began rolling for live takes. That's when the rain started. Filming on the July 4th scenes were completed days later.



Once filming moved to the open water off Martha's Vineyard — where the support vessels proved way too small for all the equipment — the crew developed a running gag, repeating "We're gonna need a bigger boat." Scheider ad-libbed it in the scene after he first sees the enormous shark. Spielberg loved it and found a way to keep it in the movie.



"I thought my career as a filmmaker was over, Spielberg said. "I heard rumors I'd never work again because no one had ever taken a film 100 days over schedule." But once the film was released the next summer, "Jaws" grossed \$21 million in its first 10 days and became the all-time highest-grossing film in just 78 days. It kept that title until the release of "Star Wars."

May 23, 1984	E.T. the Extraterrestrial	\$439.5m
Nov. 9, 2012	Jurassic Park	\$415.4m
May 24, 1989	Jaws	\$273.7m
July 24, 1998	War of the Worlds	\$234.3m
June 12, 1981	The Lost World: Jurassic Park	\$229.1m
May 22, 1997	Raiders of the Lost Ark	\$225.7m
June 29, 2005	Saving Private Ryan	\$216.3m
June 20, 1975	Indiana Jones and the Lost Crusade	\$197.2m
June 11, 1993	Lincoln	\$182.2m
June 11, 1982	Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom	\$179.9m

STEVEN SPIELBERG'S TOP 10 GROSSING MOVIES

Spielberg went on to become the highest-grossing movie director of all time, compiling \$4.64 billion in domestic box office grosses for the 37 films he's made over the past half-century. His next project is a science fiction film that is currently filming. It is scheduled for release in 2026 and will star Emily Blunt and Colin Firth. The project doesn't yet have a title.