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## Citadel's DePietro Uses Hedge-Fund Skills to Direct First Movie

Interview by Rick Warren - Feb 18, 2010

Feb. 18 (Bloomberg) -- After graduating from Harvard University in 1993, Julio DePietro got a job with Citadel Investment Group, then a small, obscure financial firm in Chicago. He planned to stay just long enough to pay off his student loans.

By the time DePietro left 10 years later, he was a partner at one of the world's largest hedge funds.

"When I started at Citadel, I didn't know anything about finance," he said in an interview last week at New York's Tribeca Grand Hotel. "I studied political philosophy at Harvard; I didn't take a single economics course. I'd never even seen a financial statement or quarterly report."

Now the 38-year-old New Yorker is making another unlikely transition -- to film writing and directing. His first feature, "The Good Guy," a romantic comedy with a Wall Street backdrop, opens tomorrow in New York and Los Angeles after premiering at last year's Tribeca Film Festival.

After leaving Citadel, DePietro spent 15 months backpacking around the world. When he returned to the U.S., he moved to New York and took a three-month crash course in filmmaking at New York University's School of Continuing and Professional Studies.

Nigeria to Michigan

Then DePietro worked as an unpaid intern on a straight-to-DVD movie called "Wedding Daze."

"It was a great learning experience," said DePietro, who was born in Nigeria and lived in Mexico City before his parents, who met in the Peace Corps, settled in Ann Arbor, Michigan. "My first day I woke up at 4 in the morning and drove a van to Staten Island in the rain. I quickly found out that filmmaking isn't so glamorous."

DePietro learned more about the business when he served as executive producer of two films -- "Manda Bala," a documentary about violence and corruption in Brazil that won a major prize at the 2007

Sundance Film Festival, and “Disgrace,” starring John Malkovich as a troubled former professor in post-apartheid South Africa.

Instead of trying to sell his script for “The Good Guy” to a major studio -- a long shot for a movie novice -- DePietro took the indie route with Belladonna Productions, whose credits include “Transamerica” and the English-language version of “Funny Games.” DePietro declined to reveal exactly how much the movie cost, preferring to say “under \$10 million.”

“Let’s put it this way: We were able to make it look like a big-budget studio movie without spending a fortune,” DePietro, wearing jeans and an open-collar shirt, said as he sat on a sofa in the hotel lounge.

### Wall Street Realism

“The Good Guy” centers on a romantic triangle involving smart, sexy Beth (Alexis Bledel of TV’s “Gilmore Girls) and two Wall Street traders -- macho hotshot Tommy (Scott Porter) and his sensitive, book-loving co-worker Daniel (Bryan Greenberg). It mixes a complex love story with the fast-paced, high-pressure world of Wall Street, making it what one critic called a hybrid of “The Notebook” and “Boiler Room.”

“I feel it’s the first and only movie that accurately depicts the culture of Wall Street,” DePietro said.

What about Oliver Stone’s “Wall Street” and his sequel, “Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps,” whose trailer includes shots of Shia LaBeouf on a motorcycle and in a helicopter? (“Money Never Sleeps” comes out on April 23.)

“My movie isn’t a glamorized Hollywood version with Shia LaBeouf racing a motorcycle through the streets of Manhattan or flying around in a helicopter,” DePietro said, dismissively.

### Rain at Cloisters

While they may seem unrelated, the skills DePietro learned at Citadel came in handy when he was behind the camera.

“I’m used to dealing with incredibly stressful situations and making quick decisions,” he said. “When you’re a director, you have to keep a level head and make sure everyone is motivated and productive. That’s very similar to working in the financial world.”

The film was shot at numerous locations in New York including the Cloisters, a medieval-art museum overlooking the Hudson River in northern Manhattan.

“That was about a quarter of our entire locations budget, and it was almost a disaster because it rained off and on the whole night,” DePietro said.

Another striking scene features a twisted version of musical chairs, where the last player to buzz in with a joystick when the music stops gets an electric shock. DePietro said he heard the game was so popular on Wall Street that it once shut down the trading floor at Lehman Brothers for an afternoon.

To make it more realistic, the four actors playing the game asked for an actual shock during their close-ups.

“The performances look real because they are,” DePietro said. “They’re in real pain.”

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