

# FASTTRACK

**CV** waiter > English tutor > Latin and Classical Greek tutor > functions photographer > high-school teacher > audio/visual operator > filmmaker



Photo: Quentin Jones

## **BEN FERRIS, 30, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF SYDNEY FILM SCHOOL**

### **How did you get into filmmaking?**

Through theatre. I was a terrible amateur actor, but was attracted to drama and that kind of evolved onto the screen.

### **What kind of films do you make?**

I have a film production company and make shorts by necessity really – writing and directing my own work. As for themes, I'm interested in the connection or lack of between an individual and society. I've noticed I have a recurrent female lead – the film is always about an isolated female. What that means, I'd probably need a psychotherapist to tell me.

### **What qualities do you need to make a feature-length film?**

Passion and commitment. You've got to be obsessive which isn't a problem for me – but you need cash as well. So you need to market it to the right people to attract that cash; get people excited about your idea.

### **Any advice for aspiring filmmakers?**

Get out there and do it. Don't just sit on the idea and write 20 successive drafts. It's in the doing that you learn. I'd also recommend not being precious about showing your work around and getting feedback from people you respect. Never lose your core vision or reason for making the film.

### **What films do you enjoy watching?**

Art-house films like Tarkovsky's *Nostalgia* and *La Dolce Vita*. There's another Italian film that's about to come out: *Consequences Of Love*. I tend to go a lot to the foreign film festivals.

### **What are your responsibilities at the Sydney Film School?**

Quite a lot of things. Implementing objectives [of the school's board], communicating from board to management. And teaching each week as well – I run a class called the Thesis Film Project. I enjoy having a say in the school's direction.

### **So you're creative and practical?**

I'd describe myself as having that kind of schizophrenic personality. It's quite a challenge at times because the business objectives are not always consistent with the creative aims. Where they [are], that's where it gets exciting.

### **How do you rate the state of the Australian film industry?**

Everyone speaks very harshly about it – and there's probably some reason given the box office statistics. However, I guess ... at the grassroots level, I'm very optimistic and excited because I see all this new energy coming in – all these bright, passionate people. That could bode well for the future.

### **Fast facts**

**+ School stats:** "We have a total of 20 teaching staff [including] and 75 students. We offer a very broad introduction to film."

**+ Hours:** "Sixty to 80 per week."

**+ Pay:** "Higher than if I was a freelance short filmmaker. That's not hard, though."

Alan Mascarenhas