

## Document Citation

Title	<b>'Psycho' analysis: Van Sant's remake slavish but sluggish</b>
Author(s)	Godfrey Cheshire
Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	1998 Dec 7
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	53, 57
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Psycho, Van Sant, Gus, 1998



# FILM REVIEW

## 'PSYCHO' ANALYSIS: VAN SANT'S REMAKE SLAVISH BUT SLUGGISH

### PSYCHO

(THRILLER)

A Universal release of an Imagine Entertainment production. Produced by Brian Grazer, Gus Van Sant. Executive producer, Dany Wolf.

Directed by Gus Van Sant. Screenplay by Joseph Stefano, based on the novel by Robert Bloch. Camera (Deluxe color), Christopher Doyle; editor, Amy Duddleston; music, Bernard Herrmann; music adaptor and producer, Danny Elfman; production designer, Tom Foden; art director, Carlos Barbosa; costume designer, Beatrix Aruna Pasztor; sound (Dolby digital, DTS, SDDS), Ron Judkins; associate producer, James Whitaker; assistant director, Bruce Franklin. Reviewed at the Sony 19th Street East, New York, Dec. 4, 1998. MPAA rating: R. Running time: 109 MIN.

Norman Bates .....	Vince Vaughn
Marion Crane .....	Anne Heche
Lila Crane .....	Julianne Moore
Sam Loomis .....	Viggo Mortensen
Milton Arbogast .....	William H. Macy
Dr. Simon .....	Robert Forster
Sheriff Chambers .....	Philip Baker Hall
Mrs. Chambers .....	Anne Haney
Tom Cassidy .....	Chad Everett
Mr. Lowery .....	Rance Howard
Caroline .....	Rita Wilson
Patrolman .....	James Remar
Car Dealer .....	James LeGros

By GODFREY CHESHIRE

**I**mitation, in the case of Gus Van Sant's "Psycho," may be the sincerest form of flattery, but it's hardly the most scintillating. A faithful-unto-slavish remake of the 1960 Hitchcock classic, pic contains nothing to outrage or offend partisans of the original, yet neither does it stand to add much to their appreciation. And as for introducing a new generation to the granddaddy of all slasher films, forget about it: To the "Scream" kids, sincerity is out anyway, and the thrills here are strictly old hat. With its natural audience limited mainly to Hitch fans and first-weekend curiosity seekers, pic hardly stands to reduce the body count at beleaguered Universal.

Van Sant's publicized intention not just to restage "Psycho" but to duplicate it in scrupulous, exacting detail was a nervy gambit, one that brought an air of pop-art intellectualism and experimentation to what might have otherwise seemed redundantly mercenary. And in some senses, the gambit will earn a justified place in the history books: Not only is it the first such duplication outside the ranks of experimental filmmakers, it also reps a fascinating effort on the part of one important filmmaker to crawl inside the stylistic skin of another — which, if



**SOAP OPERA:** The remake is more "scene-by-scene" than "shot-by-shot" but Anne Heche adds nuances to her "Psycho" role.

you think of it, is eerily appropriate to Sir Alf.

The reason the conceit backfires, basically, is that the original depended on narrative surprises that can't possibly be surprising now; on genre conventions that were superseded decades ago; and on material considered daring in 1960 that's long since lost its power even to raise an eyebrow (recall that Hitch's single most shocking move was to show a toilet flushing, which had never been done in a major studio film).

Oddly, while Hitchcock's "Psycho" today still seems fresh, bold and ahead of its time, Van Sant's updated tribute makes the same thing seem quaint and old-fashioned, the product of a bygone era.

In effect, though, Van Sant's exercise might have been more compelling if he had taken his advertised passion for exact duplication to fastidious, fetishistic extremes. It turns out that this "Psycho" is



**STRANGE TAIL:** Vince Vaughn subs giggles for stammers as Norman Bates.

not, after all, a "shot by shot" recreation of the original. The very first sequence announces that. Where Hitchcock used three panning and zooming shots to cross the Phoenix skyline and enter an illicit hotel window, Van Sant uses a helicopter and various trickery to accomplish the same in one shot.

It's more accurate to say that this is a largely faithful "scene by scene" restaging in which many shots of the original, especially the most famous and striking, are copied. But the differences don't end there. This "Psycho" is in color (ably shot by ace Aussie lensman Chris Doyle), which reduces the dreamlike mood as well as the schematic visual rigor of Hitchcock's design. And though Van Sant shot on the same Universal lot and kept to the original's brisk six-week schedule, the result feels looser and more prone to fresh air, minus the original's dark, pressured, claustrophobic atmosphere.

The story, taken from Joseph Stefano's skillful adaptation of Robert Bloch's novel is, of course, still the same. Marion Crane (Anne Heche), who's having an affair with commitment-shy Sam Loomis (Viggo Mortensen), steals a load of cash — \$400,000, adjusted upwards tenfold from 1960's haul — and hits the road.

Taking refuge in the motel owned by conflicted mama's boy Norman Bates (Vince Vaughn), she's murdered during a nocturnal shower. Her disappearance prompts inquiries by a private eye named Arbogast (William H. Macy) as well as Sam and Marion's sister Lila (Julianne Moore), who discover the morbid bond linking Norman to his mysterious mom.

The film's most famous scene, *Turn to page 57*



# PSYCHO

*Continued from page 53*

the shower knife-murder, Van Sant restages with slightly more nudity and realism and at what seems like a slightly protracted length. Here and in the murder of Arbogast, he also departs from the original by inserting dreamy cutaway shots, including fast-motion views of clouds that recall similar shots in "My Own Private Idaho."

Acting, however, is the one area where the execution of this "Psycho" falls consistently and markedly below the original. Vaughn was a bad casting choice whose awkwardness as Norman only proves, by contrast, the extraordinary skill and subtlety of Anthony Perkins' work for Hitchcock. Heche tries to paint Marion as flighty, but ends up making her a pale, vapid, slightly vulgar shadow of Janet Leigh's brilliant, hard-edged original.

Mortensen's making Sam a hick and Moore doing Lila as a Walkman-wearing music-store chick are similarly uninspired and broadly drawn.

The two bright spots in the cast are Macy, whose Arbogast has presence, dimension and believable quirkiness, and Robert Forster, who does a surprisingly good job in the thankless role of the psychiatrist, whose explanatory final-reel speech Van Sant has mercifully abbreviated somewhat.

Pic's other tech contributions, including Tom Foden's thoughtful production design and Danny Elfman's new rendition of Bernard Herrmann's legendary score, are all first rate.