



# Cutting Colin

As *A Home at the End of the World* hits the screen, the filmmakers talk about slimming down the novel—and axing Colin Farrell's nude scene **BY MICHAEL GILTZ**

**M**ichael Mayer knew he wanted to make Pulitzer Prize-winner Michael Cunningham's 1990 novel *A Home at the End of the World* his film-directing debut. So he turned to an old acquaintance he knew would be perfect to adapt it: Michael Cunningham.

"We'd never really spent any time together, just the two of us; it had always been a dinner party or a group," says Mayer, an out theater director who won the Tony for *Thoroughly Modern Millie* and is now working on a Broadway revival of Arthur Miller's *After the Fall*. After months of working together on *Home*, the two were so well-matched that they were finishing each other's sentences, Mayer adds. Not that that made it any easier to adapt Cunningham's decades-spanning novel about Jonathan, a lonely gay man; his eager-to-please but sexually ambiguous pal, Bobby; and Clare, their wacky New York friend.

"How do you get five dozen eggs into a shoebox?" says Cunningham about the challenges they faced. "What can be cut away? Once I understood how much was going to be cut, I was fine. If anything, I started to get into an ecstasy of cutting and cut too much." Among the deletions:

The boyfriend Jonathan winds up with in the book.

The cast certainly helped Cunningham and Mayer focus. Dallas Roberts, who plays Jonathan, just "got better and better and better [during auditions]," says Mayer, "and by the time of his last audition, I literally couldn't imagine anyone else doing his role." And as Clare, Robin Wright Penn "has a kind of amazing sobriety," he says. "When you're dealing with her as a person, she can be absolutely delightful, but you always feel she's a straight shooter. You get the real thing. Despite her remarkable beauty, you can see a life lived on her face."

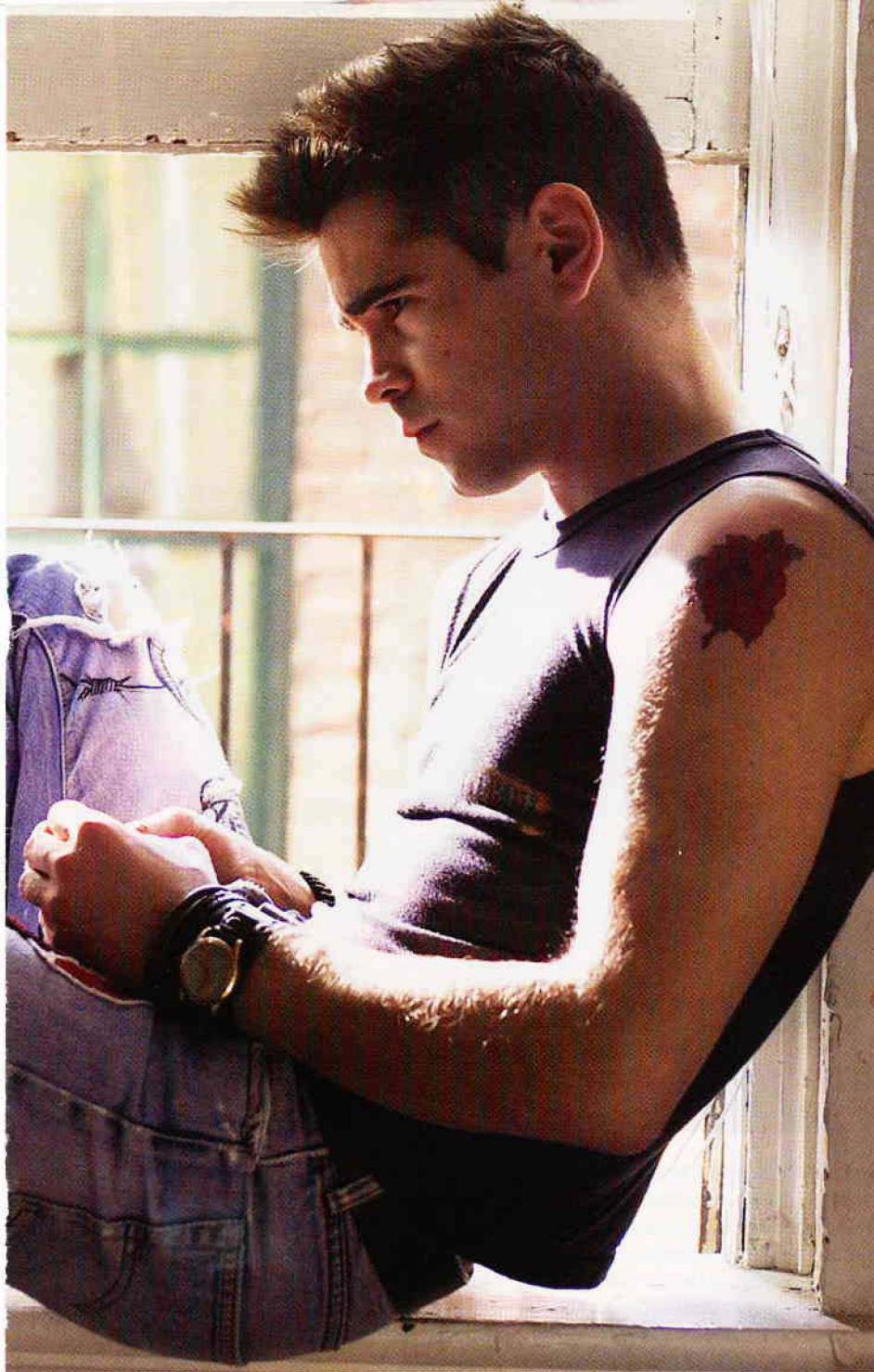
Then there's Colin Farrell, as Bobby. "Colin has a depth of soul—if that's something he's acting, it's an extraordinary bit of acting," says Cunningham, speaking from the tower in Italy's Tuscany region, where he's finishing his next novel. "I think he's a wonderful actor, but there's just something about Colin [as a person]. There's a moment when he looks at Dallas when they're sitting out on the porch and Jonathan is really aware he has HIV and Colin is insisting that he doesn't, and you can just see how much he wants it not to be true and how deeply he knows that it is true. What



happens on his face and in his eyes is not just beautiful but exactly what I imagined for Bobby."

What Cunningham and Mayer didn't imagine was that having a hot Hollywood property like Farrell—next appearing in Oliver Stone's blockbuster about bisexual conqueror Alexander the Great—would make every element of their film so controversial. Which explains why a casual moment in which Farrell is seen nude was axed after initial press screenings. "This is exactly why we changed it," says Mayer. (And no, he adds, don't look for it





"Colin Farrell has a depth of soul" in the role of sexually ambiguous Bobby, says novelist Michael Cunningham.

on the DVD.) "It seemed way too interesting to people who should be concentrating on the characters and the story. It became distracting. It took away from the work, and Colin felt really uncomfortable. He was getting more questions about his dick than his performance. We came to a mutual agreement."

Cunningham, who has been in a relationship for 17 years and out his entire career, adds, "You know how Hollywood

is. The same people who described Colin as 'that guy who does action movies' are just as likely to start talking about him as 'that guy who plays bisexuals.' This, of course, is their problem, not Colin's. But it would be silly to deny that it's something for him to deal with." ■

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