

Cannes judge Isherwood makes ad fest memorable

PLAYER PROFILE

Saatchi executive has been known to lose his head

By Laurel Wentz

Cannes jury presidents are largely known through their professional reputations. But this year's president, Bob Isherwood, is known by festivalgoers for rather different reasons: Last year he had his head "cut off" onstage at the International Advertising Festival and two years ago he presided over a mock funeral for U.K. director Tony Kaye, carried onstage in a coffin.

For the past decade, the worldwide creative director of Publicis Groupe's Saatchi & Saatchi has hosted one of the festival's most popular events, the Saatchi-produced New Directors Showcase. Last year, his showcase had to be moved to Cannes' biggest auditorium, where performers from warm-up act Cirque du Soleil appeared to slice Mr. Isherwood's head from his body so he could introduce himself as Saatchi's creative head.

A soft-spoken Australian with spiky silver hair, Mr. Isherwood, 60, faces a challenging festival. With two Lions abruptly returned last year by Interpublic Group of Cos.' Lowe Lintas Worldwide & Partners, Sydney, because the winning ads never ran (AA, June 11) this year's jury is under scrutiny to detect scam ads as well as reward the best work.



Scam buster: Saatchi's Isherwood.

Mr. Isherwood brings to the task his creative experience on three continents, including two stints each at agencies in London and Australia, where he was a founder of creative hotshop Campaign Palace's Sydney office. When Bates Worldwide, then owned by Saatchi, bought Campaign Palace in 1986, Mr. Isherwood joined Saatchi. He moved to New York last year from London when Saatchi relocated its worldwide headquarters to the U.S.

In one bold shake-up, he dispatched David Droga, then a 29-year-old Australian, to take the creative helm two years ago in London, long the network's creative flagship but mired in a badly structured department. "There were six creative directors," Mr. Isherwood said. "But no one was doing the job."

The vision he drafted for Saatchi after being named worldwide creative director in 1996—"to be

revered as a hothouse for world-changing creative ideas"—appealed to Kevin Roberts when he joined four years ago as CEO. "I'm in love with him," Mr. Roberts said. "He's the best creative director I ever worked with. He's the single biggest reason I joined Saatchi & Saatchi."

The two live within a block of each other in New York's TriBeCa neighborhood and work in side-by-side offices. Unusually, the creative work all resides on Mr. Roberts' walls, the product of his own internal creative awards called "The Kevvies." Mr. Isherwood's own awards are the BFIs, or "Bob's Favorite Ideas." Like the Delta Air Lines billboard in Times Square with a real airplane fuselage attached, filled with live performance-art passengers. Or shifting the positioning of Procter & Gamble Co.'s Tide from a laundry cleaner to a product that speaks to the heart of the family. "Ideas like that don't get up at Cannes, but they're really transformational to clients' business," he said.

Both are deeply involved with Saatchi's two biggest clients, Toyota Motor Corp. and P&G. Several months ago, Mr. Roberts proposed to P&G's Global Marketing Officer Bob Wehling: "Give us 200 of your best and brightest marketing people for three hours and we'll answer the question 'Where does great advertising come from, Daddy?'"

He gave Mr. Isherwood the same one-sentence brief, then, sunnily confident in the creative director's talent, watched the three-hour presentation for the first time a month later with the 200 P&G executives. □