

# Rear Window

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*This article is about the 1954 Hitchcock film. For other uses, see [Rear Window \(disambiguation\)](#).*

**Rear Window** is a 1954 American mystery thriller film directed by Alfred Hitchcock and written by John Michael Hayes based on Cornell Woolrich's 1942 short story *It Had to Be Murder*. Originally released by Paramount Pictures, the film stars James Stewart, Grace Kelly, Wendell Corey, Thelma Ritter, and Raymond Burr. It was screened at the 1954 Venice Film Festival.

*Rear Window* is considered by many filmgoers, critics, and scholars to be one of Hitchcock's best,<sup>[4]</sup> as well as one of the greatest films ever made. It received four Academy Award nominations, and was ranked number 42 on AFI's 100 Years...100 Movies list and number 48 on the 10th-anniversary edition, and in 1997 was added to the United States National Film Registry in the Library of Congress as being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant."<sup>[5][6]</sup>

The film was made with a budget of \$1 million (\$11,675,427.51 in 2024 inflation), and grossed \$37 million (\$431,990,817.84 in 2024 inflation) at the box office.<sup>[7]</sup>

## Plot [\[edit\]](#)

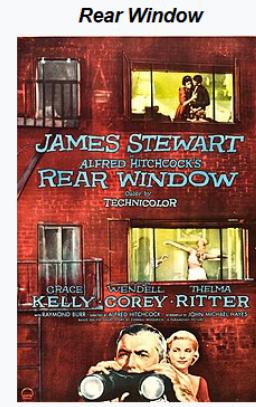
Photojournalist and professional photographer L.B. "Jeff" Jeffries is recuperating from serious injuries, including a broken leg, from flying crash debris — his mounted photograph of the accident of the motorcar disintegrating in the crash is seen — restricted to a wheelchair in his infrequently used, small and basically equipped apartment in Greenwich Village, Manhattan. His mid-floor rear window overlooks out onto a courtyard with small garden plots and other apartments in the surrounding blocks. Jeff is regularly visited by his idealistic young socialite girlfriend Lisa Fremont and Stella, a middle-aged cynical, tough as boots medical insurance nurse.



James Stewart as L. B. Jeffries

During an intense heat wave and chafing at his restrictions, Jeff watches his various diverse neighbours of the all and sundry population, who keep their windows open to stay cool, noting their differing habits and lifestyles, including a professional dancer, coined "Miss Torso", a songwriter with writer's block, and notably a large traveling salesman of costume-jewelry, Lars Thorwald, hen-pecked by his bedridden wife. One night, Jeff, alone, hears a woman scream followed by the sound of breaking glass. Later that night, during a thunderstorm, he observes Thorwald making repeated excursions carrying a suitcase. Later, after Jeff dozes off, Thorwald leaves his apartment along with a woman. The next morning, Jeff notices Thorwald's wife is gone, and sees him cleaning a large knife and handsaw. Thorwald also has moving-men haul away a large trunk. Jeff becomes convinced that Thorwald has murdered his wife, and tells Lisa and Stella, who believe him when they notice that Thorwald's wife is no longer in bed. Jeff calls his friend and war buddy Tom Doyle, a New York City Police detective, and requests him to investigate Thorwald. A sceptical Doyle finds nothing suspicious. Soon after, a pet toy dog is found dead in the courtyard. Its alarmed owner yells, drawing the attention of everyone, except Thorwald, who sits silently in his dark apartment. The following night, pretending to be a blackmail, Jeff telephones and lures Thorwald away from his apartment to allow Lisa and Stella to investigate Thorwald's flower bed where the dog was digging. Nothing is found, but Lisa climbs through Thorwald's window and searches further for evidence.

Below Thorwald's apartment, Jeff and Stella are distracted watching a lower ground floor neighbor — coined "Miss Lonely-Hearts" — contemplating overdose and call the police. As they wait, Thorwald unexpectedly returns early and catches Lisa in his property. The police intervene as the pair scuffle. During their questioning, Lisa signals to Jeff that she is wearing Mrs Thorwald's wedding ring. Thorwald sees this and realizes Jeff is surveying his apartment. Jeff phones Doyle and leaves an urgent message while Stella goes to bail Lisa out of jail. Thorwald locates and attacks Jeff in his darkened apartment, his only defense being camera flash bulbs. While grappling, Doyle and other officers storm the courtyard and arrest Thorwald just as he drops Jeff out the window. Thorwald confesses to his wife's



Theatrical release poster

Directed by	Alfred Hitchcock
Screenplay by	John Michael Hayes
Based on	"It Had to Be Murder" 1942 story in <i>Dime Detective</i> by Cornell Woolrich
Produced by	Alfred Hitchcock
Starring	James Stewart Grace Kelly Wendell Corey Thelma Ritter Raymond Burr
Cinematography	Robert Burks
Edited by	George Tomasini
Music by	Franz Waxman
Production company	Patron Inc.
Distributed by	Paramount Pictures <sup>[N 1]</sup>
Release dates	August 4, 1954 (New York City) September 1, 1954 (United States)
Running time	111 minutes
Country	United States
Language	English
Budget	\$1 million
Box office	\$37 million <sup>[3]</sup>

murder.

A few days later, life in the apartment complex has returned to normal. Jeff has broken his other leg in the fall and so now has both legs up in casts. Lisa is seen next to him, wearing a more casual outfit and reading a travel book. After noticing Jeff asleep, she puts down the book and instead reads the fashion magazine *Harper's Bazaar*.

## Cast [edit]

- [James Stewart](#) as photojournalist L.B. "Jeff" Jeffries
- [Grace Kelly](#) as model Lisa Fremont
- [Wendell Corey](#) as NYPD Det. Lt. Thomas "Tom" J. Doyle
- [Thelma Ritter](#) as nurse Stella
- [Raymond Burr](#) as Lars Thorwald
- [Judith Evelyn](#) as Miss Lonely-Hearts
- [Ross Bagdasarian](#) as the songwriter
- [Georgine Darcy](#) as dancer Miss Torso
- [Sara Berner](#) and [Frank Cady](#) as the couple living above the Thorwalds, with their dog
- [Jesslyn Fax](#) as "Miss Hearing Aid"<sup>[8]</sup>
- Rand Harper and Havis Davenport as the newlyweds<sup>[8]</sup>
- Irene Winston as Mrs Anna Thorwald<sup>[8]</sup>



James Stewart and Grace Kelly

## Uncredited

- [Harry Landers](#) as young man guest of Miss Lonely-Hearts<sup>[8]</sup>
- Ralph Smiles as Carl, the waiter<sup>[8]</sup>
- [Fred Graham](#) as detective<sup>[8]</sup>
- [Eddie Parker](#) as detective<sup>[8]</sup>
- [Anthony Warde](#) as detective<sup>[8]</sup>
- [Kathryn Grant](#) as Girl at Songwriter's Party<sup>[8]</sup>
- [Marla English](#) as Girl at Songwriter's Party<sup>[8]</sup>
- [Bess Flowers](#) as Woman at Songwriter's Party with Poodle<sup>[8]</sup>
- [Benny Bartlett](#) as Stanley, Miss Torso's returning boyfriend<sup>[8]</sup>
- [Dick Simmons](#) as Man with Miss Torso<sup>[8]</sup>

## Cast notes

- Director [Alfred Hitchcock](#) makes his traditional cameo appearance in the songwriter's apartment, where he is seen winding a clock.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Themes [edit]

### Analysis [edit]

The filming perspective was done almost entirely in Jeff's apartment and from his near static point-of-view at his window. In [Laura Mulvey](#)'s essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," she identifies what she sees as *voyeurism* and *scopophilia* in Hitchcock's movies, with *Rear Window* used as a prime example of how she sees cinema as incorporating the *patriarchy* into the way that pleasure is constructed and signaled to the audience. Additionally, she sees the "*male gaze*" as especially evident in *Rear Window* in characters such as the dancer "Miss Torso;" she is both a spectacle for Jeff to enjoy, as well as for the audience (through his substitution).<sup>[9]</sup>

In his 1954 review of the film, [François Truffaut](#) suggested "this parable: The courtyard is the world, the reporter/photographer is the filmmaker, the binoculars stand for the camera and its lenses."<sup>[10]</sup>

### Voyeurism [edit]

John Fawell notes in Dennis Perry's book *Hitchcock and Poe: The Legacy of Delight and Terror* that Hitchcock "recognized that the darkest aspect of voyeurism ... is our desire for awful things to happen to people ... to make ourselves feel better, and to relieve ourselves of the burden of examining our own lives."<sup>[11]</sup> Hitchcock challenges the audience, forcing them to peer through his rear window and become exposed to, as Donald Spoto calls it in his 1976 book *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock: Fifty Years of His Motion Pictures*, the "social contagion" of acting as voyeur.<sup>[12]</sup>

In his book *Alfred Hitchcock's "Rear Window"*, John Belton further addresses the underlying issues of voyeurism which he asserts are evident in the film. He says "*Rear Window*'s story is 'about' spectacle; it explores the fascination with looking and the attraction of that which is being looked at."<sup>[13]</sup>

In an explicit example of a condemnation of voyeurism, Stella expresses her outrage at Jeffries' voyeuristic habits, saying, "In the old days, they'd put your eyes out with a red hot poker" and "What people ought to do is get outside and look in for a change."

With further analysis, Jeff's positive evolution understandably would be impossible without voyeurism—or as Robin Wood puts it in his 1989 book *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, "the indulging of morbid curiosity and the consequences of that indulgence."<sup>[14]</sup>

## Production [edit]

## Writing [edit]

The screenplay, which was written by John Michael Hayes, was based on Cornell Woolrich's 1942 short story *It Had to Be Murder*. However, in 1990 the question as to who owned the film rights of Woolrich's original story went before the Supreme Court of the United States in *Stewart v. Abend*.<sup>[15]</sup>

Although the film was copyrighted in 1954 by Patron Inc. by a production company set up by Hitchcock and Stewart, a subsequent rights holder refused to acknowledge previous rights agreements. As a result, Stewart and Hitchcock's estate became involved in the Supreme Court case. Its outcome led to the litigant, Sheldon Abend, becoming credited as a producer of the 1998 remake of *Rear Window*.



Stewart, Kelly, and Hitchcock on set

## Filming [edit]

The film was shot entirely at Paramount Studios, which included an enormous indoor set to replicate a Greenwich Village courtyard. Set designers Hal Pereira and Joseph MacMillan Johnson spent six weeks building the extremely detailed and complex set, which ended up being the largest of its kind at Paramount. One of the unique features of the set was its massive drainage system, constructed to accommodate the rain sequence in the film. They also built the set around a highly nuanced lighting system which was able to create natural-looking lighting effects for both the day and night scenes. Though the address given in the film is 125 W. Ninth Street in New York's Greenwich Village, the set was actually based on a real courtyard located at 125 Christopher Street.<sup>[16]</sup>

In addition to the meticulous care and detail put into the set, careful attention was also given to sound, including the use of natural sounds and music that would drift across the courtyard and into Jefferies' apartment. At one point, the voice of Bing Crosby can be heard singing "To See You Is to Love You," originally from the 1952 Paramount film *Road to Bali*. Also heard on the soundtrack are versions of songs popularized earlier in the decade by Nat King Cole ("Mona Lisa", 1950) and Dean Martin ("That's Amore", 1952), along with segments from Leonard Bernstein's score for Jerome Robbins' ballet *Fancy Free* (1944), Richard Rodgers's song "Lover" (1932), and "M'appari tutt'amor" from Friedrich von Flotow's opera *Martha* (1844), most borrowed from Paramount's music publisher, Famous Music.

Hitchcock used costume designer Edith Head on all of his Paramount films.

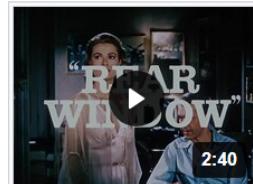
## Soundtrack [edit]

Although veteran Hollywood composer Franz Waxman is credited with the score for the film, his contributions were limited to the opening and closing titles and the piano tune ("Lisa"). This was Waxman's final score for Hitchcock. The director used primarily "diegetic" sounds—sounds arising from the normal life of the characters—throughout the film.<sup>[17]</sup>

## Release [edit]

On August 4, 1954, a "benefit world premiere" was held for the film, with United Nations officials and "prominent members of the social and entertainment worlds" at the Rivoli Theatre in New York City,<sup>[18]</sup> with proceeds going to the American–Korean Foundation (an aid organization founded soon after the end of the Korean War and headed by Milton S. Eisenhower, brother of President Eisenhower).<sup>[19]</sup>

During its initial theatrical run, *Rear Window* earned \$5.3 million in North American box office rentals.<sup>[20]</sup>

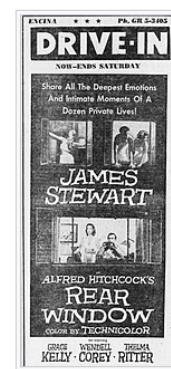


Original trailer for the 1968 re-release of *Rear Window* (1954)

## Reception [edit]

Bosley Crowther of *The New York Times* called the film a "tense and exciting exercise" and deemed Hitchcock as a director whose work has a "maximum of build-up to the punch, a maximum of carefully tricked deception and incidents to divert and amuse." Crowther also noted that "Mr. Hitchcock's film is not 'significant.' What it has to say about people and human nature is superficial and glib, but it does expose many facets of the loneliness of city life, and it tacitly demonstrates the impulse of morbid curiosity. The purpose of it is sensation, and that it generally provides in the colorfulness of its detail and in the flood of menace toward the end."<sup>[18]</sup> *Variety* called the film "one of Alfred Hitchcock's better thrillers" which "combines technical and artistic skills in a manner that makes this an unusually good piece of murder mystery entertainment."<sup>[21]</sup> The film ranked fifth on *Cahiers du Cinéma's* Top 10 Films of the Year List in 1955.<sup>[22]</sup>

*Time* called it "just possibly the second-most entertaining picture (after *The 39 Steps*) ever made by Alfred Hitchcock" and a film in which there is "never an instant ... when Director Hitchcock is not in minute and masterly control of his material." The reviewer also noted the "occasional studied lapses of taste and, more important, the eerie sense a Hitchcock audience has of reacting in a manner so carefully foreseen as to seem practically foreordained."<sup>[23]</sup> *Harrison's Reports* named the film as a "first-rate thriller" that is "strictly an adult entertainment, but it should prove to be a popular one." They further added. "What helps to make the story highly entertaining is the fact



Drive-in  
advertisement from  
1954

that it is enhanced by clever dialogue and by delightful touches of comedy and romance that relieve the tension."<sup>[24]</sup>

Nearly 30 years after the film's initial release, Roger Ebert reviewed the re-release by Universal Pictures in October 1983, after Hitchcock's estate was settled. He said the film "develops such a clean, uncluttered line from beginning to end that we're drawn through it (and into it) effortlessly. The experience is not so much like watching a movie, as like ... well, like spying on your neighbors. Hitchcock traps us right from the first ... And because Hitchcock makes us accomplices in Stewart's voyeurism, we're along for the ride. When an enraged man comes bursting through the door to kill Stewart, we can't detach ourselves, because we looked too, and so we share the guilt and in a way we deserve what's coming to him."<sup>[25]</sup> In 1983, reviewing the film Vincent Canby wrote "Its appeal, which goes beyond that of other, equally masterly Hitchcock works, remains undiminished."<sup>[26]</sup>

The review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes reports an approval rating of 98% based on 130 reviews, with an average rating of 9.30/10. The critics' consensus states that "Hitchcock exerted full potential of suspense in this masterpiece."<sup>[4]</sup> At Metacritic, the film has a weighted average score of a very rare perfect 100 out of 100 based on 18 critics, indicating "universal acclaim".<sup>[27]</sup> In his 2012 review of the film, Killian Fox of The Guardian wrote: "Hitchcock made a career out of indulging our voyeuristic tendencies, and he never excited them more skilfully, or with more gleeful self-awareness, than in *Rear Window*".<sup>[28]</sup>

## Awards and nominations [ edit ]

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient	Result
Venice Film Festival	August 22 to September 7, 1954	Golden Lion	Alfred Hitchcock	Nominated
National Board of Review Awards	December 20, 1954	Best Actress	Grace Kelly	Won
NYFCC Awards	January 1955	Best Actress	Grace Kelly	Won
		Best Director	Alfred Hitchcock	2nd place
DGA Award	February 13, 1955	Outstanding Achievement in Feature Film	Alfred Hitchcock	Nominated
Writers Guild of America Awards	February 28, 1955	Best Written American Drama	John Michael Hayes	Nominated
BAFTA Award	March 10, 1955	Best Film	<i>Rear Window</i>	Nominated
Academy Awards	March 30, 1955	Best Director	Alfred Hitchcock	Nominated
		Best Adapted Screenplay	John Michael Hayes	Nominated
		Best Cinematography – Color	Robert Burks	Nominated
		Best Sound – Recording	Loren L. Ryder	Nominated
Edgar Allan Poe Awards	April 21, 1955	Best Motion Picture Screenplay	John Michael Hayes	Won
National Film Preservation Board	November 18, 1997	National Film Registry	<i>Rear Window</i>	Won
Online Film & Television Association Award	2002	OFTA Film Hall of Fame – Motion Picture	<i>Rear Window</i>	Won

## Legacy [ edit ]

In 1997, *Rear Window* was selected for preservation in the United States National Film Registry by the Library of Congress as being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant". By this time, the film interested other directors with its theme of voyeurism, and other reworkings of the film soon followed, which included Brian De Palma's 1984 film *Body Double* and Phillip Noyce's 1993 film *Sliver*. In 1998 *Time Out* magazine conducted a poll and *Rear Window* was voted the 21st greatest film of all time.<sup>[29]</sup> In the British Film Institute's 2012 *Sight & Sound* polls of the greatest films ever made, *Rear Window* was ranked 53rd among critics<sup>[30]</sup> and 48th among directors.<sup>[31]</sup> In the 2022 edition of the magazine's *Greatest films of all time* list the film ranked 38th in the critics poll.<sup>[32]</sup> In 2017 *Empire* magazine's readers' poll ranked *Rear Window* at No. 72 on its list of *The 100 Greatest Movies*.<sup>[33]</sup> In 2022, *Time Out* magazine ranked the film at No. 26 on their list of "The 100 best thriller films of all time".<sup>[34]</sup>

*Rear Window* was restored by the team of Robert A. Harris and James C. Katz for its 1999 limited theatrical re-release (using Technicolor dye-transfer prints for the first time in this title's history) and the Collector's Edition DVD release in 2000.<sup>[citation needed][35]</sup>

American Film Institute included the film as number 42 in AFI's 100 Years...100 Movies,<sup>[36]</sup> number 14 in AFI's 100 Years...100 Thrills,<sup>[37]</sup> number 48 in AFI's 100 Years...100 Movies (10th Anniversary Edition)<sup>[38]</sup> and number three in AFI's 10 Top 10 (Mysteries).<sup>[39]</sup>

*Rear Window* was remade as a TV movie of the same name in 1998, with an updated storyline in which the lead

character is paralyzed and lives in a high-tech home filled with assistive technology. Actor [Christopher Reeve](#), himself paralyzed as a result of a 1995 horse-riding accident, was cast in the lead role. The telefilm also starred [Daryl Hannah](#), [Robert Forster](#), [Ruben Santiago-Hudson](#), and [Anne Twomey](#).

*Rear Window* has directly influenced plot elements and themes of numerous [Brian De Palma](#) films, particularly *Hi, Mom!* (1970), *Sisters* (1972), *Dressed to Kill* (1980), and *Body Double* (1984).<sup>[40][41][42]</sup>

*Disturbia* (2007) is a modern-day retelling, with the protagonist ([Shia LaBeouf](#)) under house arrest instead of laid up with a broken leg, and who believes that his neighbor is a serial killer rather than having committed a single murder. On September 5, 2008, the Sheldon Abend Trust sued [Steven Spielberg](#), [DreamWorks](#), [Viacom](#), and [Universal Studios](#), alleging that the producers of *Disturbia* violated the copyright to the original Woolrich story owned by Abend.<sup>[43][44]</sup> On September 21, 2010, the U.S. District Court in *Abend v. Spielberg*, 748 F.Supp.2d 200 (S.D.N.Y. 2010), ruled that *Disturbia* did not infringe the original Woolrich story.<sup>[45]</sup>

*Rear Window* has been homaged and spoofed in numerous episodes of television, including the *Pretty Little Liars* episode "How the 'A' Stole Christmas", season four episode seven of *9-1-1* and "Night Terrors", the second episode of season 2 of the British crime drama *Whitstable Pearl*.

In February 2008, the film was referenced as a part of [Variety's The 2008 Hollywood Portfolio: Hitchcock Classics](#) spread, with [Scarlett Johansson](#) and [Javier Bardem](#) as Lisa and Jeff, respectively.<sup>[46]</sup>

*Rear Window* has been referenced multiple times by [Taylor Swift](#). In the music video for her single "Mel", Swift wears a dress similar to one of [Edith Head](#)'s designs worn by [Grace Kelly](#).<sup>[47]</sup> Swift has also stated that the voyeuristic elements of the film inspired the storytelling of her album *Folklore*.<sup>[48]</sup>

## Home media [edit]

On September 25, 2012, [Universal Studios Home Entertainment](#) released *Rear Window* for the first time on [Blu-ray](#) as part of the "Alfred Hitchcock: The Masterpiece Collection". This edition included numerous supplemental features such as an [audio commentary](#) from John Fawell, excerpts from Hitchcock's interview with [François Truffaut](#), two theatrical trailers, and an interview with the film's screenwriter [John Michael Hayes](#).<sup>[49]</sup>

On May 6, 2014, Universal Pictures Home Entertainment re-released *Rear Window* on [Blu-ray](#) with the same supplemental features.<sup>[50]</sup>

## See also [edit]

- [List of films featuring surveillance](#)

## References [edit]

### Informational notes

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## Further reading

- Orpen, Valerie (2003). "Continuity Editing in Hollywood" [✉](#). *Film Editing: The Art of the Expressive*. Wallflower Press. pp. 18–43. ISBN 978-1-903364-53-6. OCLC 51068299 [✉](#).
  - Orpen treats Hitchcock's and Tomasini's editing of *Rear Window* at length in a chapter of her monograph.

## External links

- John Belton (ndg) "Rear Window" [✉](#) at National Film Registry
- Rear Window* [✉](#) at the AFI Catalog of Feature Films
- Rear Window* [✉](#) at IMDB
- Rear Window* [✉](#) at TCM Movie Database
- Rear Window* [✉](#) at AllMovie
- Rear Window* [✉](#) at Rotten Tomatoes
- Rear Window* [✉](#) at Box Office Mojo
- Detailed review [✉](#) at Filmsite.org
- Rear Window* [✉](#) essay by Daniel Eagan in America's Film Legacy: The Authoritative Guide to the Landmark Movies in the National Film Registry, A&C Black, 2010 ISBN 0826429777, pages 490-491

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