

LABORS OF LOVE

change of art

Corbin Bernsen is probably best known to audiences as morally inept Arnie Becker on the '80s drama *L.A. Law*, but these days he looks back on that role as just an education. The current phase of his career — appearing on USA's *Psych* and working as a director — is the reward.

"There was so much I didn't know about acting back on *L.A. Law*," says Bernsen, who was twice nominated for a Primetime Emmy during the run of the show. "Arnie Becker clearly struck a nerve with audiences, but the challenge was showing subtle changes in the character."

On *Psych*, it's more about revealing relationships as his retired cop character, Henry Spencer, tries to get closer to his son, played by James Roday.

"I have four sons of my own," says the actor, who's been married for more than twenty years to actress Amanda Pays. "It's always a fine line between ruling with an iron fist and making a connection. My character doesn't really believe in how his son goes about his life, but at a certain point he has to find a way to love him."

Bernsen finds one of the major improvements to his acting is allowing his life to infuse his work. "Actors have this idea that their character always has to be the same, but that's ridiculous. People get colds; they get in bad moods. Why shouldn't that be brought to a performance?"

He's bringing that theory to directing, having made a deal with the small Canadian town of Kipling to create and direct films budgeted between \$250,000 and \$500,000 that will be shot in the town.

"I've been casting unknowns, and I find they can be better than high-profile actors because they allow the scene to take shape without having to overtake everything," he says. "The economy's tough right now, and to be a part of a town developing a film industry is a great feeling."

Despite being less than thrilled with his *L.A. Law* character, Bernsen says he's actually up for another go at the role. "I'd like to bring Arnie back, a little older and a little wiser," he says. "It's time for him to see that being superficial gets boring and that maybe he can help other people learn the same lesson."

—Eric Butterman