

My Trip to Skywalker Ranch

By Daniel La Grou

Skywalker Ranch was built by George Lucas. Construction for the ranch started in 1980. They completed construction in 1987. When the ranch was built they also planted a vineyard. The vineyard has three different kinds of grapes: Merlot, Chardonnay and Cabernet. The ranch is located on Lucas Valley Road in Marin County. Contrary to what you may be thinking, the road was actually named after a rancher in the 1800's. When George bought the ranch he acquired 2700 acres. Today, the ranch has grown to 4700 acres.

George Lucas is famous mostly for the Star Wars movies. He started the original Star Wars with a company called Industrial Light and Magic. Industrial Light and Magic is a company that specializes in special effects. After making the Star Wars Trilogy, there was a long period of silence. Then from 1999-2005 Star Wars returned.

George Lucas was born in 1944 In Modesto. In 1962 George was involved in a near fatal car accident. In 1967 he decided to join the Air Force as an officer but was turned down because of numerous speeding tickets. A short time later he married Marcia Griffin. He was then drafted by the Army but tests showed he had diabetes, the disease that killed his paternal grandfather. He went to college at U.S.C. and studied film making. His first major film was THX 1130. Then he went on to make Star Wars and build Skywalker Ranch. He has recently announced a T.V. show that takes place between episode three and four called A Galaxy Far Away.

Skywalker Ranch has a beautiful 155,000 sq. ft. Tech Building. The staff in the Tech Building are energetic about their work. The people I interviewed during my visit were: Dann Thompson (staff recording engineer) and Leslie Ann Jones (directs the

scoring and dubbing stages). The Tech Building includes the most impressive scoring stage in the west.

“Scoring” is the process of recording music for a movie. A score is the main music in the movie. Scoring can be done using a large orchestra, a small ensemble or music samples. Film directors usually try to avoid samples because it can sound artificial. Some movies use popular hit music for their score. Popular music can be hard to use because it doesn’t always relate with the movie. Skywalker Ranch has scored several feature films, including the recent smash hit Cars. They also scored Star Wars Episode Three which had equal if not more popularity. Other films they’ve scored include Hoodwinked, Batman Begins, and Polar Express IMAX. Skywalker uses my dad’s recording equipment.

The Tech Building has six mixing rooms. According to Wikipedia, mixing “is used for sound recording, audio editing and sound systems to balance the relative volume and frequency content of a number of sound sources. Typically, these sound sources are the different musical instruments in a band or vocalists, the sections of an orchestra and so on.” Sometimes mixing is done in a studio, which is related to multi-track recording, and used often on movies. Other times, mixing is done live by a D.J. or live sound mixer.

The Tech Building also has ADR and Foley stages. Foley artists are in charge of creating sounds. They add sounds like thumping watermelons or cracking bamboo to imitate the realism of a fight or just about anything! They also make real sounds louder such as a face slap or footsteps. Jack Foley is the creator of Foley sound effects. Foley was started in 1929 around the birth of talking pictures.

Skywalker’s premier dubbing stage is called the Akira Kurosawa room. According to Wikipedia, dubbing is “replacing dialogue, either with a foreign language or replacing audio that is poor due to noise or other factors present in the original recording.” ADR is a type of dubbing. ADR is short for “Automated Dialogue Replacement.” Sometimes in a movie the actor will flub a line or is poorly recorded. If

that happens they take the actor to an ADR studio and have him watch himself on screen and say the lines over. ADR is used in most movies. In fact the majority of dialogue in many movies has been replaced.

The Ranch is a place of plentiful wildlife and there's beauty behind every tree. The garden at Skywalker Ranch is unbelievably huge. It contains hundreds of different flowers arranged in such a way that makes it immensely beautiful. In fact the Ranch has plenty of bobcats to go around. The last time my dad was there, he saw a bobcat. There are so many trees at Skywalker Ranch they're really hard to count. I wouldn't spend my time counting trees, but someone else did and counted about 4,500 mature trees.

After the Tech Building tour, Leslie led us outside where we were seized by a squad of storm troopers led by Lord Vader. We saw Vader hand Leslie some credits, then he led us to holding cells. When he returned he brought the table of doom with him and choose one person for questioning: me! He kept asking me about stolen data tapes. Then he led me out and brought in the other two one at a time. When they were done, Jin Millard was the only one who looked hurt. Vader then brought us back to our cells. Then three hours later...

Vader came back to show us the light sabers of the Jedi he killed. He knew not that we were trained in the ways of the force. The sabers were enclosed behind glass. We used the force and three light sabers shot from the glass! Our light sabers ignited instantly! Vader's came out in a flash and fifty storm troopers came rushing in. Immediately Dad-I-Wan and I charged Vader while Jin Millard was left to deal with the troopers. His light saber blaring, Jin Millard defeated the troopers and came to our aide. With Jin Millard at our side, we stuck down Vader.

Of course, all this really did happen, **IN MY IMAGINATION!** It was hard to walk around Skywalker Ranch without imagining this sort of thing.

When George bought Skywalker Ranch he built a huge house on the land. It was a two story Victorian-craftsman era masterpiece. When we got to the house it was lunch time. When we walked in, the chef came out and said that if there was nothing we wanted on the menu, just ask and she'd make us something special. There was a big buffet of gourmet food made fresh from their own garden. We had lunch with the Turtle Island String Quartet, a jazz band who records for Telarc. David (violin), Mads(viola), Mark(cello) and Evan(violin) are some of the best at Jazz crossover. They have really nice personalities and we enjoyed talking with them. Then Leslie showed us around George's house. The Parlor is the place where George keeps props from some of the movies he's made. There were two models of Vader's & Kenobi's light saber and original Indiana Jones' whip and hat. George's luxurious and spacious office is located up stairs. We were not allowed up because Leslie thought it wasn't a good idea to bother George.

Our last stop was a small mysterious room near Lake Ewok. Inside this room we found expensive models of real light sabers. I picked up one with a strange purple glow. My dad took pictures but sadly I had to leave it. From there we walked back to our car and drove towards the guard house. On the way out we saw the fire department, the large organic garden, the baseball field and a lodge where George's guests stay. Then we drove home all the while thinking about beautiful Skywalker Ranch.

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