

Ang Lee loves Calgary area

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TORONTO — These days Taiwanese director Ang Lee is the toast of Venice and Toronto.

His film *Brokeback Mountain* won The Golden Lion at this year's Venice Film Festival and played to enthusiastic applause and turn-away crowds at the Toronto Film Festival, where it received its North American premiere.

When we sat down to chat the day after he returned to Toronto from Venice, the only city Lee wanted to talk about was Calgary.

Lee shot *Brokeback Mountain* here last year.

"I had the best time of my life in Calgary. I have never been so happy in my career as when I was shooting in Calgary," said Lee, pointing out he "has filmed nine movies all over the world and, without question, my Calgary crew was the best I've worked with."

It was not Lee's idea to shoot *Brokeback* in Alberta.

"I have always insisted on shooting my films where they are set and *Brokeback Mountain* is set in Wyoming and Texas so that's where I wanted to shoot."

It was Lee's producer Jim Shamus and the film's screenwriter Diana Ossana who asked Lee to look at Alberta.

Ossana, who writes with Larry McMurtry, had seen their *Johnson County Wars* filmed in Alberta.

"They told me I couldn't find landscapes anywhere in the world better than Alberta offers, so I went to check it out for myself."

It was love at first sight.

"Not only were the landscapes in Alberta more grand than I'd imagined but there were all these little western towns that looked straight out of the 1960s, '70s and '80s."

The best was yet to come.

"People at the Alberta Film Commission went out of their way to accommodate us.

"We got tax breaks. They worked to get us every location we asked for and they gave us access to their best film crews even though ours was a small budget film."

After working with the local film crew, Lee says "these were the best people for the movie I was making.

"They know everything about the western down to the smallest detail and they were eager to share their knowledge with me. They treated me like one of their own."



COWBOYS ... Heath Ledger, left, and Jake Gyllenhaal, right, star in the Calgary-filmed *Brokeback Mountain* by Ang Lee, centre.