

SCHEDULE

Pulp Fiction ▶ Feb 15 & 20 ● Ruth Sokolof
Dir. Quentin Tarantino — 1994 — USA — 154 min — R
✕ Special introductions on Feb 15 & 20 by Weitz Fellow Adam Wiener

Miller's Crossing ▶ Feb 22 & 25 ● Ruth Sokolof
Dir. Joel & Ethan Coen — 1990 — USA — 115 min — R

The Last Seduction ▶ Feb 23 & 26 ● Ruth Sokolof
Dir. John Dahl — 1994 — USA — 110 min — R
✕ Special introduction on Feb 23 by Weitz Fellow Adam Wiener

Seven ▶ Feb 29 & March 3 ● Ruth Sokolof
Dir. David Fincher — 1995 — USA — 127 min — R — 35mm

Hard Eight ▶ March 1 & 5 ● Ruth Sokolof
Dir. Paul Thomas Anderson — 1996 — USA — 102 min — R

Jackie Brown ▶ March 7 & 12 ● Ruth Sokolof
Dir. Quentin Tarantino — 1997 — USA — 154 min — R

One False Move ▶ March 9 & 11 ● Ruth Sokolof
Dir. Carl Franklin — 1992 — USA — 106 min — R

Wild Things ▶ March 14 & 17 ● Ruth Sokolof
Dir. John McNaughton — 1998 — USA — 108 min — R
✕ Special introduction on March 14 by Weitz Fellow Adam Wiener

Cruel Intentions ▶ March 15 & 19 ● Ruth Sokolof
Dir. Roger Kumble — 1999 — USA — 97 min — R

Bad Influence ▶ March 21 & 25 ● Ruth Sokolof
Dir. Curtis Hanson — 1990 — USA — 99 min — R
✕ Special introduction on March 21 by Weitz Fellow Adam Wiener

Bound ▶ March 22 & 26 ● Ruth Sokolof
Dir. Lana & Lilly Wachowski — 1996 — USA — 109 min — R
✕ Special introduction on March 22 by UNO Professor Tam-mie Kennedy

Lost Highway ▶ March 28 & April 1 ● Dundee
Dir. David Lynch — 1997 — USA — 134 min — R

Strange Days ▶ March 29 & 31 ● Ruth Sokolof
Dir. Kathryn Bigelow — 1995 — USA — 145 min — R — 35mm



'90s Noir Discussion Questions

- Who is the hardboiled detective? What is he chasing after?
- Who is the femme fatale? Is she portrayed sympathetically
- Does the motif of shadows appear? Do any characters have a "double"?
- Where is the film set? How is this space depicted?
- Is this a mystery noir or a conspiracy noir?
- What type of danger does the hardboiled detective face? How does the femme fatale contribute to this danger?
- Is the ending cynical or optimistic? Does the hardboiled detective get what he wants?
- What does the film say about human nature? About relations between the sexes?
- Does the film play with our sense of time? What is the relationship between the past and the present?
- How does the film subvert the film noir formula? HINT: if you've had trouble answering any of the above questions, this is probably why.

SOURCES

Conard, Mark T. *The Philosophy of Neo-Noir*. University Press of Kentucky, 2009.

Hirsch, Foster. *Detours and Lost Highways: A Map of Neo-Noir*. Limelight, 1999.

Telotte, Jay Paul. *Voices in the Dark: The Narrative Patterns of Film Noir*. University of Illinois Press, 1989.

Williams, Linda R. *The Erotic Thriller in Contemporary Cinema*. Edinburgh University Press, 2005.

'90s NOIR
Winter Repertory Series Guide

- ▶ February 15 - April 1
- Ruth Sokolof & Dundee Theaters



Curated by Adam Wiener
Supported by Sam Walker & Omaha Steaks



What is Film Noir?

Some call film noir a “movement.” Others call it a “mood.” For the purposes of this series, we call it a genre — a cinematic storytelling tradition with nearly 80 years of history. Like all genres, film noir has a look and feel all its own. Here are some of its most essential elements.



NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Film noirs typically follow one of two narrative structures. In mystery noirs, a crime is committed by an unknown assailant and the hardboiled detective is compelled to investigate. In conspiracy noirs, the hardboiled detective is an assailant and must evade investigation. In both narrative structures, the hardboiled detective is seduced and manipulated by the femme fatale. Her scheme leads to his humiliation or death.



KEY THEMES

- Trust no one: People are inherently deceitful and self-centered. Social alienation is a cornerstone of society.
- Men want pleasure, women want power: Men and women do not see eye-to-eye. Men view women as sexual objects; women view men as manipulable pawns.
- Fate is inevitable: Nothing can prevent men from falling victim to their desires. Redemption is impossible. Chance is nonexistent.
- Time is messy: The past and present are forever intertwined. History repeats itself. Memory is unreliable.

CHARACTERS

Hardboiled Detective: A tough-talking sleazeball with a wandering eye. Sometimes he is employed as a detective or police officer, but more often he detects in an unofficial capacity. He searches for people, answers, and things to satisfy his sordid desires.

Femme Fatale: A licentious, irresistible source of danger. She seduces and manipulates men to her advantage, wielding her body as a sexual weapon. She refuses the role of the passive housewife; she tends to be employed as a sex worker or in a male-dominated field.



SETTING

Noirs depict the underbelly of society. Cities are presented as havens of vice and corruption. Suburbs are too, but more discreet. The most immoral activities tend to occur at night.

KEY MOTIF

Shadows: Present both physically and metaphorically, they remind us that everything has a distorted second nature. Silhouettes are cast on street corners and city buildings; reflections are seen in mirrors and screens. Characters have “doubles” — othered versions of themselves with similar goals and destinies.

Classic Noir v. Neo-Noir

The classic noir period occurred between 1941 and 1958. It encompassed hundreds of films, including *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Double Indemnity* (1944), *The Third Man* (1949), and *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955). Classic noirs were adapted from pulp novels and used the distinctive visual style of German Expressionism. They typically featured black-and-white photography, low-key lighting, canted angles, voiceovers, and flashbacks. They were censored for violent and sexual content under the Hays Code.

Film noirs produced after 1958 are called neo-noirs. They vary widely in content and style, from *Chinatown* (1974) to *Blade Runner* (1982) to *Gone Girl* (2014). Neo-noirs subvert or modernize film noir elements in ways that obscure their genre identity. Often a cynical conclusion becomes an optimistic one, or characters’ genders are flipped, or settings are replaced. Neo-noirs commonly recreate classic noir scenes as a form of homage or criticism. They tend to contain more violent and sexual content than classic noirs, since they are not subject to codes of censorship.



The 1990s: A Neo-Noir Renaissance

The 1990s were marked by an explosion in the film noir genre on par with the classic noir period. Rarely is this renaissance recognized however due to the wide variety of films involved. ‘90s noirs ranged from big-budget blockbusters to micro-budget indies. They covered nearly every tone, style, and setting imaginable. If there is one thing ‘90s noirs had in common, it was their challenge to the genre’s limits. Some filmmakers expanded noir by incorporating elements of other genres, including science fiction and teen film. Others altered the genre formula by foregrounding traditionally marginalized groups, including queer people and people of color. Many filmmakers pushed noir to its graphic extreme, depicting violence and sex more explicitly than ever before.

One of the most prominent kinds of ‘90s noirs was the auteur-driven art house noir. Films from the likes of Quentin Tarantino, the Coen Brothers, David Lynch, and Paul Thomas Anderson were showcases of personal filmmaking styles within the film noir tradition. Art house noirs blurred the lines between independent cinema and the studio system. They were typically made on low budgets with big stars; they played at artistically-driven festivals but received commercial distribution. They were notable for their excessive displays of violence, often for comedic purposes, and their self-conscious references to film history. They were widely praised by critics and developed cult-like followings.

Another prominent kind of ‘90s noir was the erotic thriller. Controversial, exploitative, and unapologetically trashy, erotic thrillers combined elements of film noir and softcore pornography. They were produced on a mass scale — more than 300 over the course of the decade — in a highly efficient industry. Some were major box office successes, including *Basic Instinct* (1992) and *Cruel Intentions* (1999). Most went direct-to-video and received little fanfare. Erotic thrillers offered some of the most sexist, objectifying portrayals of women in the 1990s. Occasionally, however, they subverted the male gaze and presented a radical sexual politics.

