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DELIVERING NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTIONS

MUSEUM HOSTS “COLUMBO GOES TO NEWPORT BEACH”

Tales from two episodes shot here draw sellout crowd

BY PETE WEITZNER – BALBOA ISLAND RESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, “THE GOLDEN AGE OF NEWPORT HARBOR”
PHOTOS BY DAVID KOENIG AND SCOTT WILLIAMSON



Book signing with the author



The book author talks with the crowd.

David Koenig writes about Hollywood, six books on **Walt Disney Company**, including 2012's *Mouse Tales: A Behind-the-Ears Look at Disneyland*. Sold over 100,000 copies.

When he decided to write about America's favorite rumpiled Detective, Columbo, Koenig knew he was interested. He didn't know if anyone else was.

An evening of clips and behind-the-scenes stories at the Balboa Island Museum Newport Beach allayed the author's fears.

"Could've had twice as many people...easy," **Scott Williamson** said.

Lifelong Balboa Island resident Scott Williamson, a.k.a. Mr. Hollywood, help put together the Museum's Hollywood exhibit and promoted the Koenig event.

Koenig wrote *Shooting Columbo: The Lives and Deaths of TV's Rumpiled Detective*, in fall 2021. The book is about the entire series, 69 episodes made over 35 years— with the museum crowd he focused on two noteworthy episodes shot in Newport Harbor.

The third episode was largely shot on tiny Collins Island. "Dead Weight" starred **Suzanne Pleshette**, just before she launched to sitcom stardom on *The Bob Newhart Show*; and **Eddie Albert**, fresh off a six-year-run on *Green Acres*. Albert's character was the killer, as the unique television mystery established its storytelling device of showing the crime and murderer at the start.

The only thing more unique was the detective who solved the crime – replete with rumpiled raincoat, cigar, bumbling manner, and a signature line: "Just one more thing..."

And then there was the actor who played Columbo, **Peter Falk**.

"My other fear," Koenig said. "Columbo and Peter Falk are so loved, they're interchangeable. But he had this reputation of being very difficult."

So prickly was Falk that the Hollywood honchos only reluctantly hired the acclaimed stage and film actor for the role. **Bing Crosby** and **Lee J. Cobb** were among preferred picks.

"Falk wanted to be a movie star. He wanted shows to be perfect," Koenig said. "The only people he hated were the people who signed his checks. To everyone else who worked with him, he was wonderful. He took care of the little guy."

NBC had but two hit shows in those days, *Little House on the Prairie*, and *Columbo*. Lots of leverage for Falk, known for demanding big paychecks and many takes to satisfy his perfectionist, unrehearsed acting style.

All this served Newport restaurateurs well when Universal Studios shot episode #36, "Last Salute to the Commodore," in early 1976. The episode was shot all over Newport Harbor, mostly on Lido Isle – and thanks to Falk, a 10–14-day shoot, took five weeks.

It was supposed to be Falk's last.

"Falk famously said, 'You want the raincoat back? I'm done,'" Koenig said, "but he had so much fun doing it." He'd end up doing another 33 "Columbos," almost into his 80s.

That last Newport episode gave every indication it would be Falk's last. He even tries to give up cigars. The final scene is TV lore, as Columbo paddles into Newport Bay, with trench coat and cigar.

"Thought you were gonna quit (cigars)?"

"Not yet (paddles offshore)."

"Where you going?"

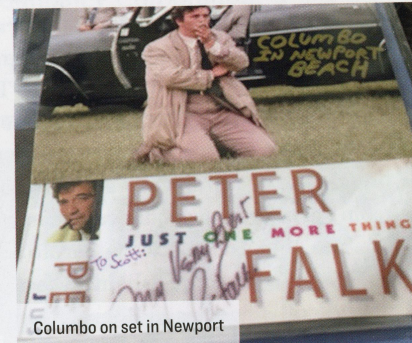
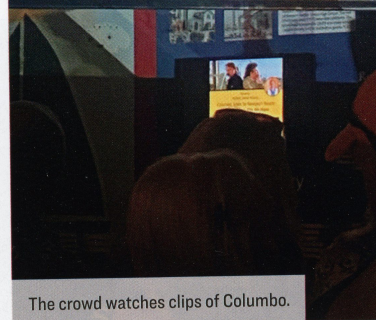
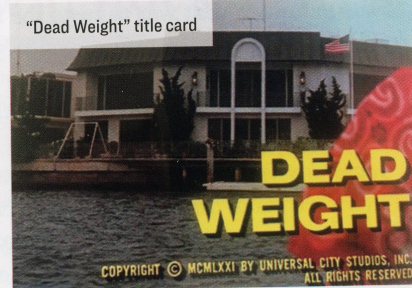
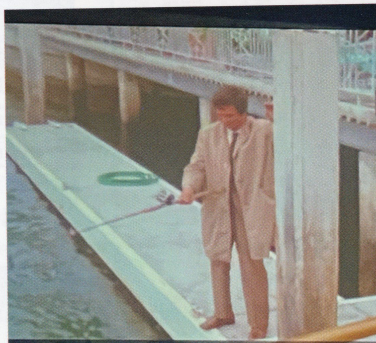
"Making my way ... to the yacht club."

TV production was hardly a killing for Newport, restaurateurs, and cocktail lounges aside – NBPD got \$50/day, NBFD \$75. Location fee for the Collins Island home was a whopping \$100.

Bronx-born Peter Falk died in 2011 in Beverly Hills at 83.

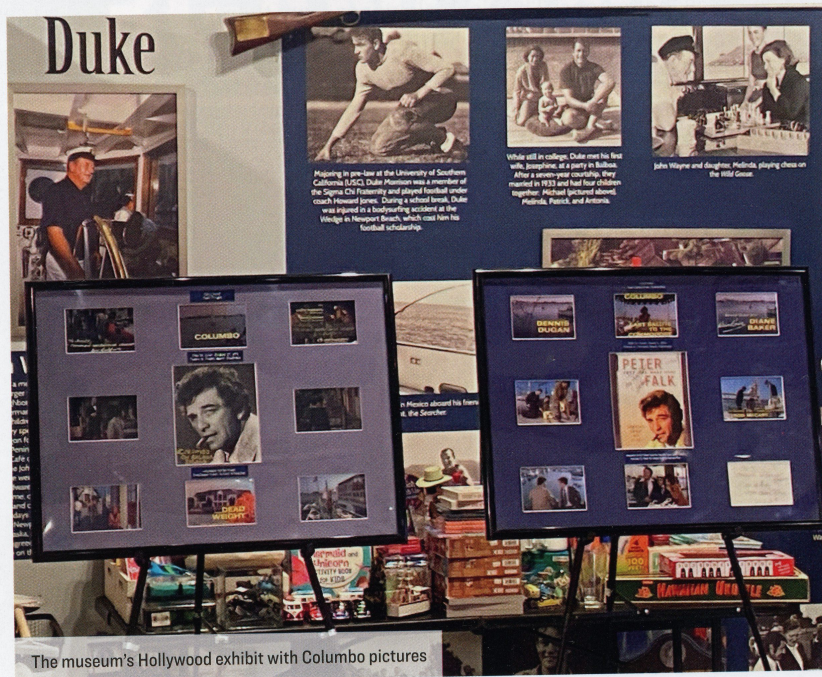
Oh, one more thing...*Shooting Columbo* is on sale at the Balboa Island Museum Newport Beach.

Visit Balboa Island Museum Newport Beach. We're open daily. Free general admission. Become a member. balboaislandmuseum.org/become-a-member



The crowd watches clips of Columbo.

Columbo on set in Newport



The museum's Hollywood exhibit with Columbo pictures

