



Simon's suite goes sour

by donald moulton

Neil Simon's newest screenplay, *California Suite*, while grossing as much money as his others, has neither the continuous storyline nor the satiric wit typical of his former productions.

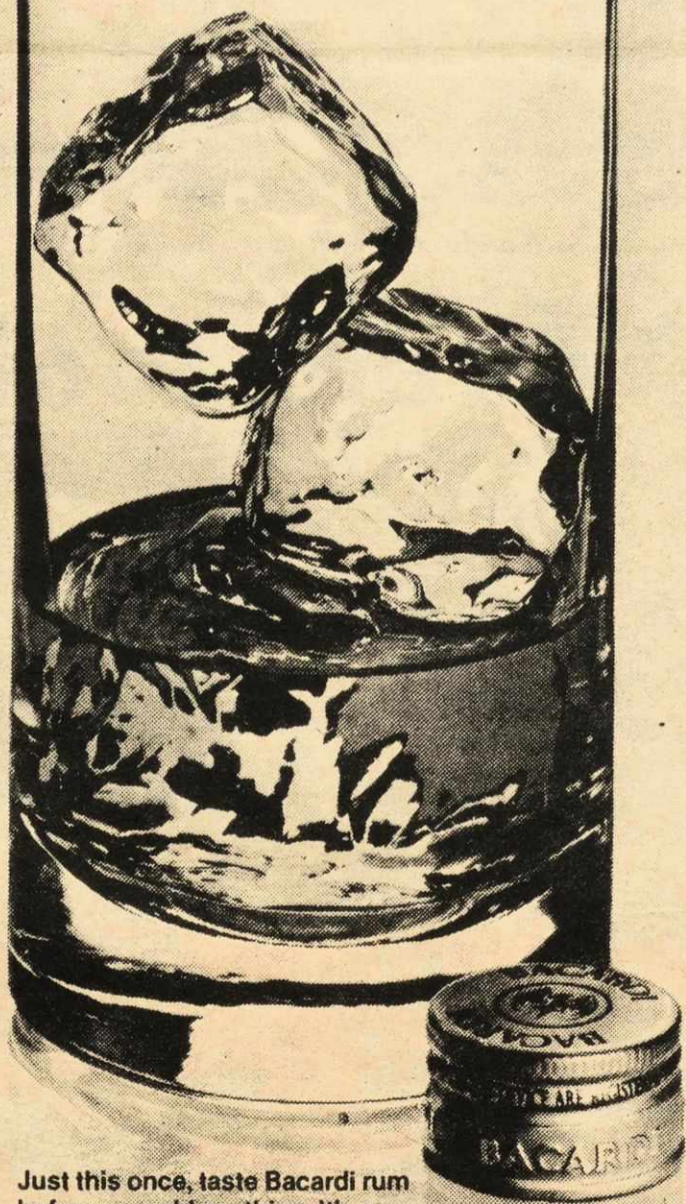
California Suite is a collection of disjointed scenes featuring "the day in the lives" of a variety of people, like Maggie Smith who plays an Oscar nominated British actress (and is ironically, nominated for this part), married to a bisexual antique dealer. The other characters include a superficially hardened career woman, two black doctors on vacation, and a Jewish family man led unfortunately into sin. But the audience never knows the characters, Simon has not had time to develop them. They are dismissed as unrealistic and one-dimensional. They are exaggerated into stereo-

typed personalities, particularly the Fonda and Klugman roles.

For someone as adept at characterization as Simon, *California Suite* is a letdown. It appears thrown together; it lacks the tightness and continuity of Simon's other screenplays. Another major fault was the weakness of Simon's satire. (There is somewhere, at few times, a reminiscence of *Hotel*, but oh so faint!) While there is comedy (and surprising non-comedy), it is undirected and borders on slapstick. Too many personality plots have been attempted—but they are not portrayed with any depth because there isn't enough screen time or play time.

Simon fans will enjoy *California Suite* (one play does not a man ruin). Non-fans will finally have something to smile about—it really isn't that good.

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