

How come actor Don Johnson needs two bodyguards to fend off groupies when he goes out to eat in Miami? Johnson and fellow actor Philip Michael Thomas regularly receive hundreds of letters from female fans asking for more than just an autographed picture. Some of them send nude samples of themselves. The nuttier ones send samples of their pubic hair. What causes this kind of reaction? How has this show overcome its inauspicious start (it languished in the bottom half of the Nielsen ratings in the first ten months when it ran head to head with Falcon Crest on Friday nights) to achieve perennial top-ten finishes, 15 Emmy nominations (four of which went to Johnson) and a highest percentage of male viewers age 18-54 of any show on the air except Monday Night Football? How has this program, in the words of NBC President Brandon Tartikoff, "redefined the cop-show genre"? What is the allure of Miami Vice?

According to Dr. Peter Klovan of the U of A's Film Studies Program, there are four reasons why Miami Vice is changing the way television looks and sounds. These reasons are: a reworking of the conventions of the hard-boiled detective genre, a rock synthesizer music score, quick, rock video-like editing, and an (art deco) expressionist mise-en-scene.

"In literature," said Klovan, "there exists two kinds of detectives: the classical detective and the hard-boiled detective. The former category includes such vaunted sleuths as Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot. In classical detective stories, society is essentially good with crime being an abnormality committed for purely criminal

motives. The classical detectives use reason and logic to defeat evil and the stories are marked by little or no violence. The problems of life are brought down to a simple clash of good and evil with good always triumphing.

"The hard-boiled detective genre includes Sam Spade, Philip Marlowe, Mike Hammer and now the Miami vice cops, Sonny Crockett (Don Johnson), Ricardo Tubbs (Philip Michael Thomas), and Lt. Castillo (Edward James Olmos).

"In the hard-boiled genre, evil is believed to be intrinsic to the society. Evil, although it must be fought, will always exist; it can never be controlled. This genre is fraught with cynicism and violence.

"Beneath all the glitter and glamour of Miami is the definitive setting for the hard-boiled story. On a weekly basis Crockett and Tubbs do battle with scumbags, degenerates, cocaine cowboys, smut peddlars, crazed youth gangs and even zombies from Haiti. Also, one favourite Miami Vice theme is the good cop turned bad.

"Miami Vice is part of the hard-boiled detective genre, but it takes it one step further. The cops don't just perform their job, they are their work. Crockett, Tubbs, Castillo, and the other four detectives on the squad (Switek, Zito, Gina Callabrese, and Tandy Joplin) must adopt criminal methods to survive and to succeed, but they are in no danger of becoming criminals themselves because they strictly adhere to an unwritten moral code. This moral code is based on four values: friendship, loyalty, duty, and honour. In every show, if they're not acting on these values, they're discussing them. By following this code, the detectives are able to salvage their dignity."

Klovan also believes the show transcends the boundaries of the hard-boiled genre because the detectives are very close and loyal to one another. "The hard-boiled detective is essentially a loner," he said, "but Miami Vice has seven hard-boiled detectives in a sort of surrogate family with Castillo as the head. They all will go to extraordinary lengths to help each other and to help other human beings. They're knights in shining armor. Crockett is even dressed in white."

Klovan believes that the code these detectives follow is akin to Bushido. Bushido was the name given to the code of honour followed by Japan's Samurai warriors. "Bushido — in its strictest interpretation — means 'code of knighthood,'" said Klovan. "The Samurai lived and died by Bushido. They were indifferent to pain or death, loyal only to the overlord. This is quite similar to the kind of dedication practiced by the seven detectives in Miami Vice. In every show, there is always some mystical reference to Vietnam, Cambodia or Southeast Asia. Crockett was with the 1st Air Cavalry in Vietnam and Castillo worked for 'The Company' (probably CIA) in Thailand, Cambodia and Laos."

"Castillo provides a good Bushido is. In one show 'Bushido', Castillo finds his has turned outlaw. the friend, 'It's my di kind of dedication c

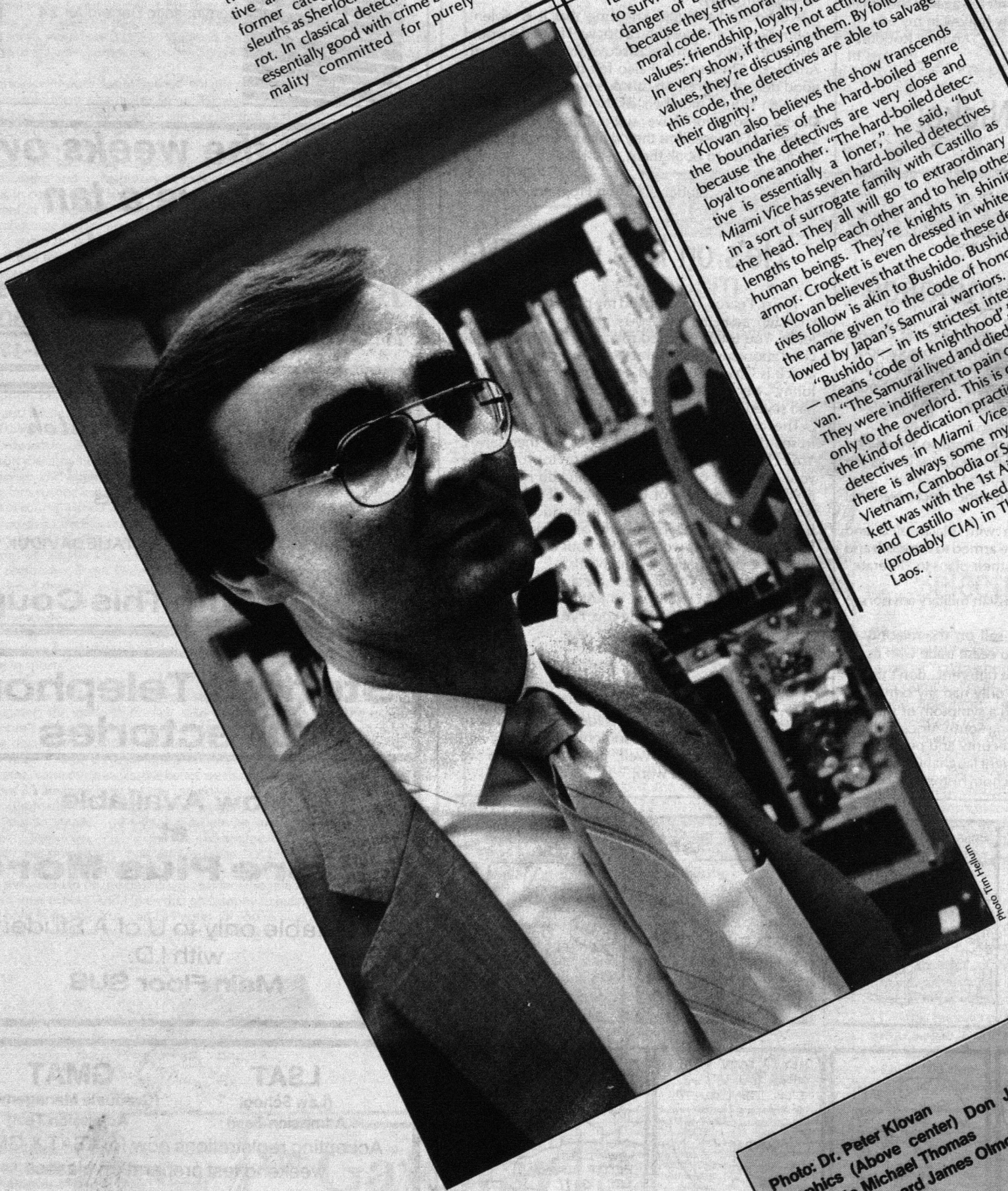


Photo: Dr. Peter Klovan Graphics (Above center) Don Johnson and Philip Michael Thomas (Far right) Edward James Olmos

