



Steve Pross photo by David Friedman

"When I first went to work, I looked like a waitress," said Robert Mitchum.

Mitchum: Scene stealer but he's never gangster

Continued from Page G-1

"He was laughing, chuckling, his medals clanging. I knew right away the guy was domestic," Mitchum said.

In another international conversation, Shimon Peres told Mitchum his views of the internal problems of Israel.

"He said the most difficult thing about his country was the unification of the Israelis," Mitchum said. "The aristocracy sets down the laws, and they only represent five percent of the people — it's schematic."

The film industry, too, has been a world Mitchum has well explored and observed.

Mitchum, who is known for showing up on time, being prepared, and being helpful on the set, said any emphasis on becoming a "movie star" is at the expense of doing one's job. Speaking of the late William Holden, he said, "We separated ourselves from having to be movie stars. We're both professional actors."

The new actors, he said, are "very difficult to tell apart."

He spoke of John Wayne.

"I'll tell you what he did," Mitchum said. "He invented a character called John Wayne and patented it. Wayne was 6 foot 1, but wore three-inch lifts so he'd be 6 foot 8 — a giant. He probably wore them in his socks, he didn't give a . . ."

Mitchum recalled the time he met Richard Burton.

"I was working at 20th Century Fox, and one of the dressing rooms down the hall was being redecorated and repainted for an important actor — a British actor," he

said. "The studio spent \$40,000 to \$45,000 redoing this dressing room. Burton walked in, looked at it and spit. He said, 'You expect me to work in this sty?'"

Mitchum said he was so embarrassed by Burton's behavior that he "walked out."

Later, when he was working in London, Mitchum observed dressing rooms that were "hardly elaborate."

"They had broken-down sets, a single light bulb hanging from the ceiling, and one sink all the actors peed in," he said.

Mitchum and Burton got to be "great friends," acted together (in a World War II sequel to "Cross of Iron"), and Burton needed the scene in the 20th Century Fox dressing room.

He told Mitchum that before he came to the U.S., he'd been instructed to believe in an intimidating manner once he got here.

Reflecting on Burton's abilities as an actor, Mitchum said it was Burton's "voice and articulation" that made him great.

As for classical roles, Mitchum said he said he has no interest in them. Charles Laughton once wanted him to do Macbeth, but he turned down the idea.

"My mother said you don't buy diamonds at the five-and-ten," he said.

He said he isn't interested, either, in public relation stunts. His pending fishing trip to New Zealand was at the behest of the New Zealand tourist board, which had arranged a guided tour to the remote rivers of the country — "because of this

debacle (the International Film Festival) in Santa Barbara."

His idea of good living is to work so that he can get time off to relax. For him, the best relaxing is at home, with wife, Dorothy.

Since his marriage has survived 46 years of Hollywood and other roller coasters, Mitchum has often been asked how this miracle has come to be.

To Barbara Walters, he said he and Dorothy were still married "because of a lack of imagination," but also, that he'd hate to wake up and find some "stranger in his bed."

Mitchum's ultra-careful approach to life was given a knock-knapping by Henry Miller, whom Mitchum visited at the latter's home in Pacific Palisades, near Los Angeles.

"He saw me as walking through," Mitchum recalled. "He said I should be involved — having what I have. He said I make it look so easy."

Mitchum has written poetry, prose and articles that are deeper than he might admit.

After insisting that the only writing he ever did was "on the back of a check," he admitted that he had written "special material" in his youth.

"I think my sister has it all in a drawer somewhere — stuff I wrote years ago," he said.

He remembered something he had written that had been published, and got up to find it in his den.

"I came across something," he said. "I think it was for Father's Day. I just found it, here in the house."

See Page G-8, Col. 1