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TIFN Roadshow: 'Now, Forager'

By [Jordan Gass-Poore](#) on March 4, 2013 - 3:00pm in [Austin Film Society](#) | [Local Cast and Crew](#)



Austinites and University of Texas alums [Jason Cortlund](#) and [Julia Halperin](#) will hit the road with the [Texas Independent Film Network](#) for a month-long, statewide promotional tour of their film *Now, Forager*. They're starting here in town with a screening on Tuesday night at Violet Crown Cinema. (Tickets [are available](#) via the Violet Crown website.)

The drama follows Lucian (Cortlund) and Regina (Tiffany Esteb), a married couple who by trade gather wild mushrooms in New Jersey's woodlands and sell them to New York restaurants. As the seasons change, so does their relationship, which is put to the test by the couple's individual hungers. Cortlund wrote *Now, Forager*, which previously played locally at Fusebox Festival 2012, and also is credited with crafting additional close-ups of fungi for the movie.

Much like filmmaking, foraging is a risky business, for both the supplier and the consumer: Lucian's narration details how eating certain mycological specimens can result in "vomiting, cramps, bloody diarrhea, liver and kidney failure, (even) death." The film's end credits contain a disclaimer that gathering mushrooms should only be done with expert assistance, like that of Cortlund or co-director/producer/editor Halperin, who are real-life foragers.

I spoke with the Texas Filmmakers' Production Fund recipients about *Now, Forager*, which was filmed for about a year between the spring of 2010 and 2011 to capture the different seasons accurately.

"You can't pretend that the northeast spring is really the northeast fall: the light is different, the foliage is different," said Halperin. "There just isn't any way to do it if you don't respect kind of what actually is happening in the natural world."

Even though the filmmaking duo lived in Brooklyn before-and-during shooting for *Now, Forager*, Cortlund said they brought "everything but the breakfast tacos" with them on their shoot, including some Austin-based crew.

Slackerwood: I couldn't help but notice that you two may not be native Texans.

Julia Halperin: I've lived in Austin mostly since the mid-'90s. I don't consider myself a native Texan, but a longtime Austin person. Jason's from the Northwest and has similarly been here for a pretty good stretch of time now.

Jason Cortlund: I wasn't born here, but I've probably lived here longer than I've lived anywhere else. It's one of my many homes.

How did the two of you find your way to Austin?

Cortlund: We came here as grad students in the film department. We worked on Cinematexas for a number of years, programmed that festival and served on the board. It was one of the things that kept us in Austin after grad school. The fact is that [Austin's] such a supportive community; it's one of the few towns and states that has resources for independent filmmakers.

Halperin: We definitely brought a scrappy Austin sensibility with us to this production, even though we shot in New York. We had a very can-do attitude that Austin films always have. We had a lot of passion for the project. Austin films are made with a ton of passion, it's not people going through the motions.

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Was the film always going to be set on the East Coast?

Cortlund: The first draft of the film was set on the West Coast. We went to New York to do development and to raise money for another project. We ended up re-setting it there because it's more of a mushroom-friendly culture up there. There are mushrooms here, but they're really kind of limited: limited varieties in limited times of the year. We're very interested in regional filmmaking and it makes more sense to kind of put that type of a story in that landscape. When the winter happens up there, it really does shut down that particular location, which is something that drives part of our story. Winter here is great.

When did the two of you come up with the idea for *Now, Forager* and why?

Cortlund: [Foraging], it's a new-old thing, and I think that's really where our interests started in some ways. We had been talking around 2005 about why there were so few food movies that we liked. Both Julia and I have worked in restaurants; we're both pretty avid home cooks. I've been a hunter and a fisherman and a forager since I was a little kid.

We felt like the difference between food movies was that they were very romantic and metaphorical, and the cooking wasn't accurate; the cooking was kind of glossed over, it was secondary. It was more about eating than it was about cooking. We thought, "Gosh, that's something we'd like to see as a film that was kind of more focused on the realistic treatment of ingredients and labor and the process of doing things."

Generally, audiences are more interested in food than ever before. People are gardening and they're canning and they're pickling, and they're doing things that their grandparents did because I think our generation is worried that some of this information's gonna get lost if we don't pick it up. It's exciting -- you're taking control of your own ability to feed yourself and there's a certain pleasure that comes out of that.

What was the most difficult part of filming *Now, Forager*?

Halperin: Shooting in restaurant locations was difficult. New York restaurants, particularly Manhattan restaurants, make so much money in a day that anything that's gonna slow them down for an hour, it's not worth it to let us in. They're not closed any day of the week. They don't wanna let us in, unless we can pay them what the Food Network would pay. A couple of former Longhorn Po-Boys chefs, who are now nationally top-top New York chefs, helped us find connections to get into some kitchens. New York restaurants are long past just thinking it's be cool to be in a movie.

Jason, were you always set to star (as Lucian) in *Now, Forager*?

Cortlund: No, it wasn't planned for me to star in the film. Both Julia and I came into film as actors. We had auditions and a couple of days we were short male leads. So, I would read with the potential Reginas. While we were reviewing the tapes, we liked how that worked better than anybody else. There was also the question of the technical parts of the story: butchering fish and how it is to be in the woods, the attention and focus that needs to be applied. Lucian's a really tough character, he's uncompromising. Other actors wanted him to be more likeable.

I'm not building a career as a leading man in indie film.

What's next for the two of you?

Halperin: We have two projects in development: a local one about the son of a singer-songwriter who meets his half-sister after the death of their father; another called *Lumber Junkies*, set in a Northwest decrepit logging town.