

Golden Bear, he was hooked.

He has kept his investments modest, not spending more than \$10 million on a project as a rule. He prefers to invest in films budgeted at \$2 million to \$3 million, where he can recover his investment at a reasonable pace as the pic travels through a gamut of distribution platforms from theatrical to DVD, television and online streaming services such as Netflix.

Garcia is readying construction on a studio in Medellin, Colombia, in the next few months, after last year's launch production shingles Itaca Colombia and Itaca Brazil, which joined Itaca Mexico, Costa in Argentina, 11:11 in Colombia and L.A.-based boutique shingle BN under the AG Studios banner. BN was co-founded in 2012 with Argentinean Lucas Akoskin, who produces shorts anthology "The Heartbeat of the World" with Garcia and Guillermo Arriaga.

Upcoming projects from Itaca Mexico include Alfonso Pineda's "The Jesuit," scripted by Paul Schrader; Gael Garcia Bernal starrer "El Desierto," helmed by "Gravity" co-writer Jonas Cuarón; and Demian Bichir's directorial debut "El Refugio," with Eva Longoria.

Garcia's expertise may be in the business end of companies, but he sees himself as a creative exec. "My financing background has helped me to raise money, but I find it tedious," Garcia says. "I enjoy the production process — being on set." His favorite projects include "Elite Squad," which grossed \$14 million worldwide and cemented the bona fides of helmer Padilha; Mexican box office hits "Top Cat" (\$15 million worldwide) and "Km 31" (\$10 million in Mexico); and "The Snitch Cartel" (El Cartel de los sapos), the Colombian entry to 2012's foreign language Oscar race.

Ultimately all the films Garcia backs conform to one overriding financial formula. "One should recoup 80% of one's investment or at least 30% by the first three years," the exec explains.

His plans seem to be working. "I've always recouped my investments," he says.

### Merry Garcia

Top pics from Alex Garcia's production shingles



› "Top Cat" (2011)

**\$15m**  
worldwide



› "Elite Squad" (2007)

**\$14m**  
worldwide



› "Km 31" (2006)

**\$10m**  
in Mexico

### FESTIVAL CROWD

Alex Garcia, below left, is a producer who likes to be in on the action, here on the set of Alfonso Pineda Ulloa's "Restos," which played at the 2012 Morelia Film Fest.



**LOVE OFFERING** The low-budget "Amore Oggi" was a hit with Sky Italia viewers.

## For Sky Italia, All Shows Are Not Equal

Top Italo paybox creates two-tiered development model, one for shows that travel, the other for locals only

NICK VIVARELLI

Rupert Murdoch's Sky Italia paybox is fixing up its Italo-scripted biz with a dual-content pipeline — one for series like the \$22 million mob-themed "Gomorra," which is geared to a global audience; the other for spunky local romantic comedies like "Amore Oggi" (Love Today), shot by two YouTube-bred helmers for \$500,000.

"Gomorra," based on the same best-selling book as Matteo Garrone's like-named film, has been sold by Beta Film to more than 30 countries, including the U.S., where a deal is being finalized to make it the first Italo skein ever beamed into U.S. homes by an Italian channel.

"Amore," on the other hand, was shot in Brazil, Paris and Italy using a digital SLR camera.

"Gomorra" will air on Sky Italia's new Sky Atlantic channel, dedicated to premium-quality series from around the world. The channel launches April 9 with Netflix original "House of Cards."

"The challenge with 'Gomorra' was to prove that we had the capabilities and the creative talent to do something for the international market," says Andrea Scrosati, programming topper for Sky Italia, which with 4.8 million subscribers is Italy's top pay TV service. "But obviously the issue there is that even though we are recouping a lot through our international rights, it's still a pretty big investment."

Sky Italia's 2013 budget for all local productions was \$221 million (Sky Italia doesn't reveal current financials).

Still, there are more big-budget projects in the works. In February, the company teamed up with Sky Deutschland and Blighty's BSKyB to co-produce "Diabolik," an adaptation of a popular Italian comic-book about a master thief who takes on different identities and steals from other criminals. It marks the first joint project



**Sky Italia** is an Italian digital satellite television platform. Founded by Rupert Murdoch in 2003, it is now headquartered in Milan.

for 21st Century Fox's Euro payboxes, and is clearly intended for global distribution, although Sky Italia was mum on the budget.

Scrosati is more than willing to discuss the reasons the company is pursuing its diametrically different production approaches. "One is to create top-level inter-

national product," he says, "and the other is to try and experiment with incredibly low-budget product that won't travel, but can reap results at home."

"Amore" has certainly done the latter. Airing on Sky Italia's Cinema 1 on Valentine's Day, it averaged 395,000 viewers, similar to the latest "Twilight" installment on the same channel. And thanks to its smallscreen success, "Amore Oggi" will be getting a theatrical release in Italy via Fox some time before summer, marking the exceedingly rare instance in Italy of a movie produced for and aired on television being distributed in movie houses.

Scrosati says the company has fast-track plans for two more low-budget movies and a possible TV series.

