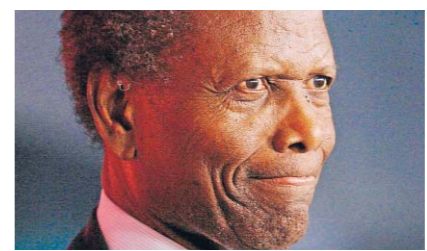


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Oscar time



Oscar organisers last week warned nominees for the world's top film awards to keep on their toes during a more than three-hour ceremony later this month that will break with tradition.

OSCAR producers "are going to take some risks, many risks, some bold," Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences president Sid Ganis said at the annual luncheon given by the academy for Oscar nominees.

Producers Laurence Mark and Bill Condon are organising their first Academy Awards telecast, set to take place on February 22 from the Kodak Theatre in Hollywood.

But Mark and Condon have never produced the show before. They are best known for making musicals such as 2006 film *Dreamgirls*.

Instead of hiring a comedian to host the Oscars, as has been typical of Oscars past, they brought in Australian actor and song-and-dance man Hugh Jackman, and they have axed the famous opening monologue hoping for more spontaneity.

In December when Jackman was announced as host, Mark said he and Condon want the telecast "to be more of a party and a celebration," but he declined to disclose details.

On Monday, Ganis was no less coy at the luncheon for more than 100 nominees, including stars such as Sean Penn and Penelope Cruz who are nominated for best actor and supporting actress in *Milk* and *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* respectively.

Ganis would not tell them what to say or do if they were one of the lucky winners.

He advised that acceptance speeches "be brief, be personal and, of course, be heartfelt."

And he added this final warning when explaining Condon and Mark had a few tricks up their sleeve: "stay alert."

Reuters

Oscar: A finished statuette, which are made of a metal Britanniapewter alloy and are plated with copper, nickel, silver and 24-carat gold. The 81st Academy Awards are scheduled to take place in Hollywood on February 22.

Continued, Page D3

We can never conquer nature

MATE
 MARK WILSON



IT'S easy to think that man has conquered nature. We have risen from subsistence nomads to a mass of billions, settled for the most part in cities of glass, steel and air-conditioned bliss.

We have crossed oceans, bridged them and even hold them back around us as they threaten to drown our homes.

Not only have we inhabited a planet we once only precariously clung to, but we have even left it for terra-firma far off in space.

It's easy to think we can do whatever we please and that man and his many inventions can conquer all.

I'm not going to sit here and pad the egos of the green movement and say we are doomed to vaporise our own existence through our ignorant and wasteful ways or delve into the doom that apparently awaits us just around the corner. What I will do, however, is to say that every now and then we are reminded that we are very small specks on the very big porch.

A few years back as the oceans streamed relentlessly inland across Asia, washing away hundreds of years of development and many of the individuals responsible for it, we all lamented the force of nature and our powerlessness to stop her in full flight. Then we watched in shock and awe as Hurricane Katrina pounded New Orleans, a proud city in the most powerful nation of Earth. Despite spending hundreds of billions of dollars on a state-of-the-art military and millions more on flood protection, early warning systems and civil defence infrastructure, man was comprehensively defeated.

Each disaster has a human face and we all felt a great deal of sympathy and sorrow for those involved. But as we watch Australia burning away at the hands of horrific, albeit potentially human-ignited bush fires, I can't help but think we are slow learners and that the evolutionary adaption that has taken us to the top of the food chain has somehow stalled. We stand determined not to adapt to our surroundings or adapt our lifestyles by moving to places more suited to our fragile physical existence.

We know where hurricanes, tornadoes strike, fires burn, we know Australia has been dryer than Michael Cullen's sense of humour for decades and that those dry forests burn faster than a Black Cap's middle order batting collapse, yet we stay on defiant in nature's boxing ring and when disaster strikes again we go through the whole terrible process of losing loved ones, property and years of work trying to conquer her.

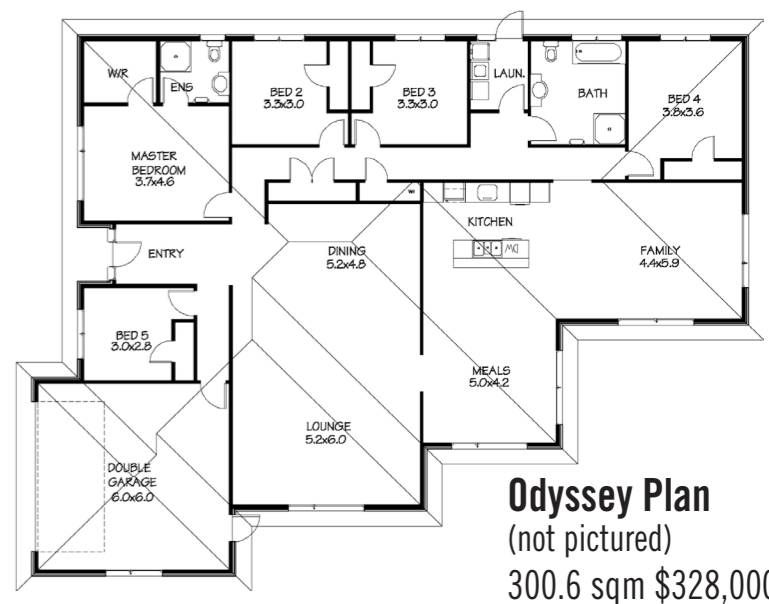
It may be in bad taste at this time to say it's time we learnt a valuable lesson - nature always wins and we must adapt and if that means moving our towns away from these focal points of nature's wrath then, as hard as it is, we probably should.

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