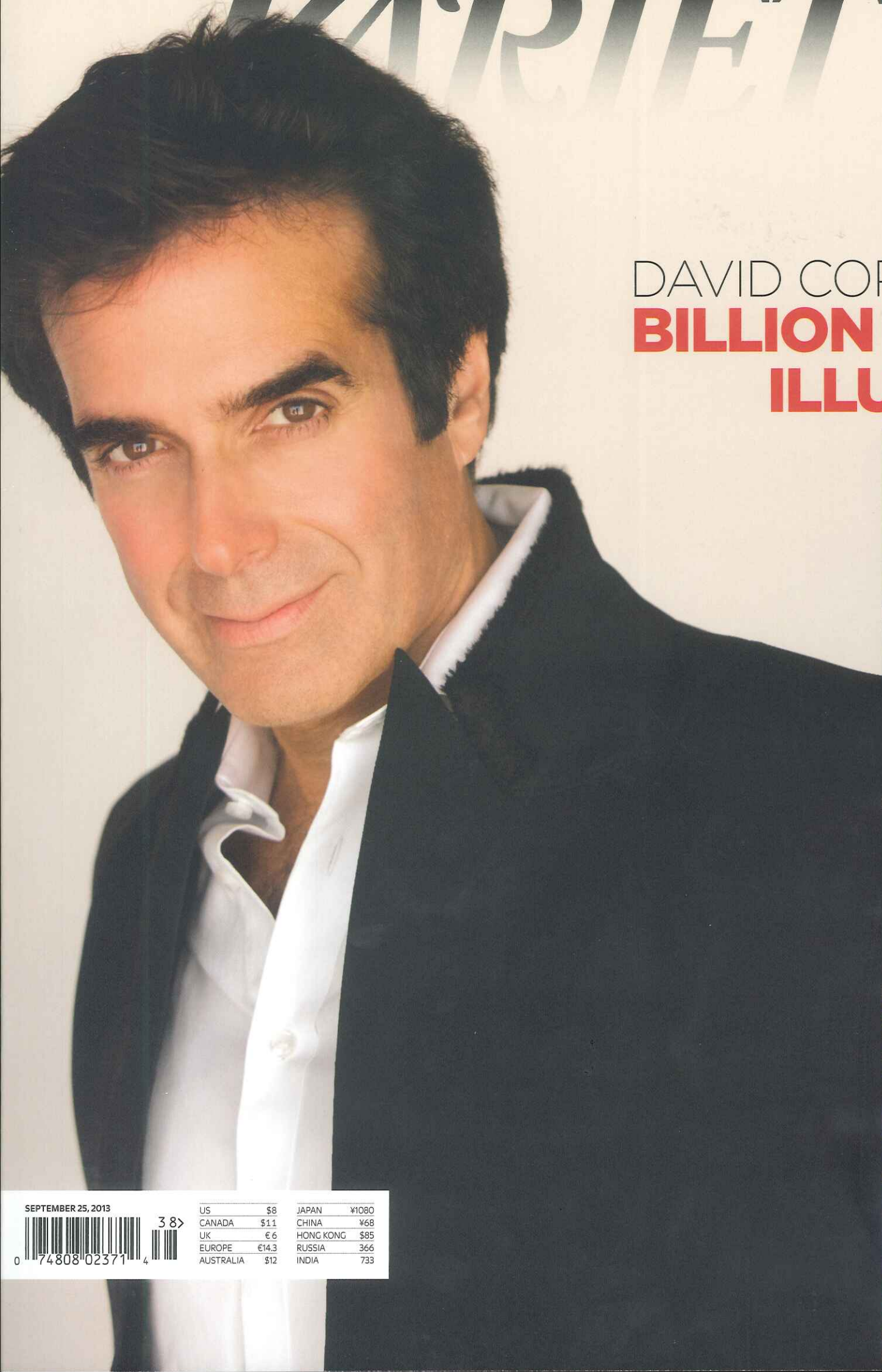


# VARIETY



## DAVID COPPERFIELD **BILLION DOLLAR ILLUSIONIST**



SEPTEMBER 25, 2013



US	\$8	JAPAN	¥1080
CANADA	\$11	CHINA	¥68
UK	€ 6	HONG KONG	\$85
EUROPE	€14.3	RUSSIA	366
AUSTRALIA	\$12	INDIA	733



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**Festival Chief Likes Surprises**

Kent Jones sprinkles some sugar among the roughage at the NYFF



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PLENTY UP HIS SLEEVE

# Copperfield Conjures Own Prod'n Shingle

Illusionist's Red Safe looks to collaborate on raft of projects, expanding his Hollywood cred

DAVE McNARY

@variety\_dmcnary

**T**HE MOST COMMERCIALY successful magician of the modern era now wants to conjure his own movie, television and theater projects. David Copperfield, who has won 21 Emmys for his TV specials and generated more than \$4 billion in ticket sales for his live shows, has launched a new production shingle called Red Safe in his hometown of Las Vegas that both formalizes his ongoing consulting relationship with Hollywood producers and sets him on a path to team with them on creative ideas that he generates inhouse.



## Truths, Not Tricks

Variety profiles Billion Dollar Illusionist David Copperfield, p.61

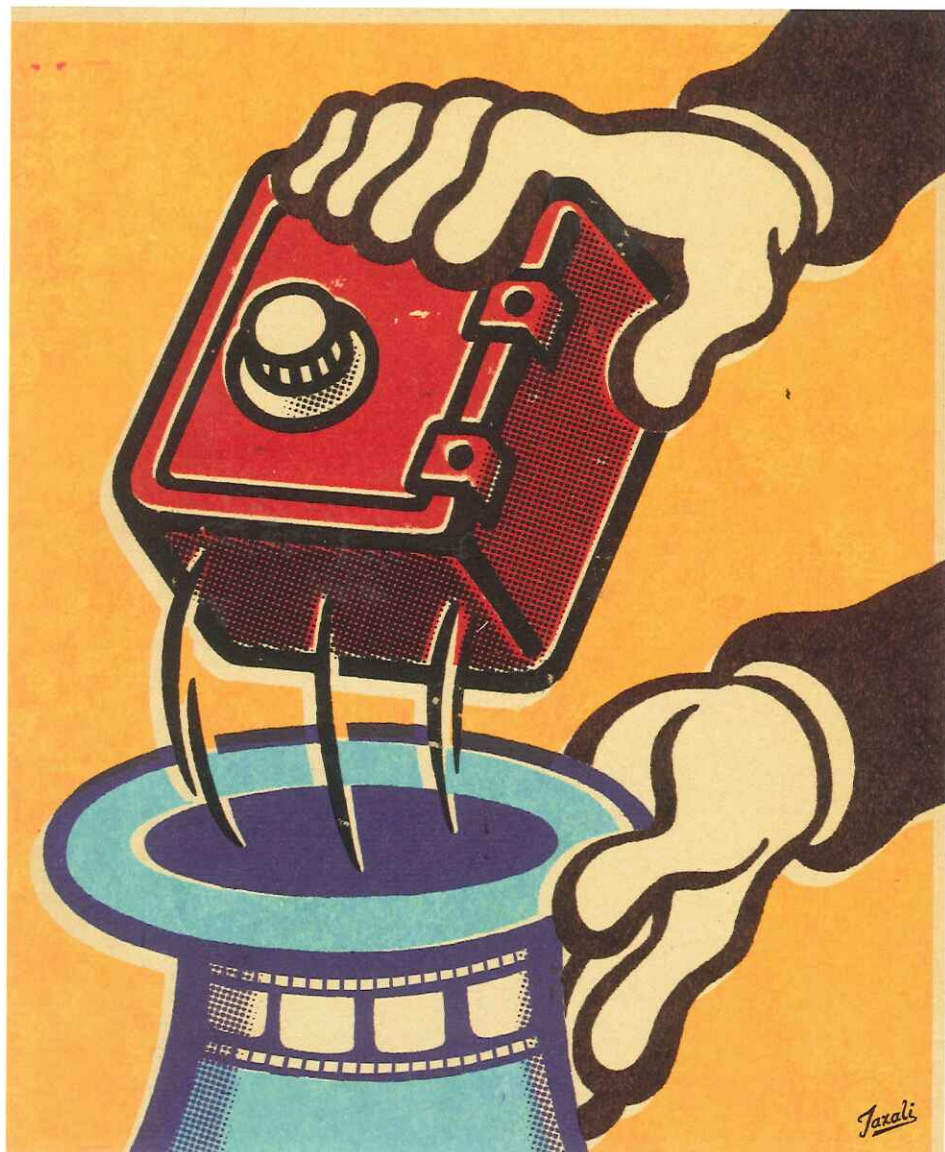
"This is not about tricks and illusions — it's all about the story," Copperfield said in an interview with *Variety* to announce his new banner. "I admire, love and respect those who get the story and special effects to look seamless, because you have to work so hard to make it seem effortless."

The illusionist, who last week celebrated his 57th birthday, has consulted on a number of films including those in the "Harry Potter" and "Paranormal Activity" franchises and most recently on this summer's sleeper hit "Now You See Me," which has grossed \$321 million worldwide to date. Copperfield's Portal illusion, in which he transports himself and a member of the audience to a pre-selected location (such as Hawaii or the Hoover Dam) before reappearing onstage, inspired the opening scene in "Now You See Me," where four Las Vegas magicians enlist someone from the audience to rob a bank in Paris.

It took Copperfield half a dozen years to develop the Portal, which the film's screenwriter, Edward Ricourt, happened to see one night in Las Vegas.

"I think the great thing about 'Now You See Me' is that it made magicians look cool," Copperfield noted. "The story was current and the action kept flowing. In magic, if you keep standing still, it really stops the action."

"Now You See Me" director Louis Leterrier has become a fan: "David Cop-



### Pick a Number

**\$55m**

Cost of the first private island Copperfield purchased in the Bahamas

**\$4b**

Career ticket sales

**80k**

Artifacts in his museum, which houses the world's largest collection of magic memorabilia

perfield is the most passionate of cinephiles, and I know that if he wasn't the greatest magician alive, he would be a revolutionary filmmaker," he said.

Copperfield, who along with his longtime associates Chris Kenner and Homer Liwag received a "special thanks" in "Now You See Me's" screen credits, was also pleased that the picture eschewed the conventions of the traditional presentation of magic and illusion.

"Harry Houdini was dressed in a tux when he performed, because that's how men dressed at the time," said Copperfield, who appeared as himself — sans tux — in "The Incredible Burt Wonderstone" earlier this year. "But when that became a tradition, wearing a tux began to look a little dated."

Red Safe derives its name from the special vault Copperfield keeps at his complex in Las Vegas to store his most prized, and rarest artifacts, including Houdini's water torture cabinet and his metamorphosis trunk. Copperfield said his personal favorites in the vault are the journals and inventions of 19th century French magician Robert Houdin, and writings and props of French filmmaker and special effects innovator Georges Méliès (who shot the 1902 sci-fi classic "A Trip to the Moon").

Only a few select Hollywood filmmak-

ers — Christopher Nolan, Guillermo del Toro, Francis Ford Coppola among them — have been allowed access to Copperfield's treasure trove of 80,000 books, illusions, posters and memorabilia that cover the entire history of magic.

"A lot of what I've collected is irreplaceable," Copperfield said. "The museum contains thousands of real stories of mystery and magic."

Copperfield isn't saying yet which projects Red Safe will develop, but he indicated the company will likely take on established production partners on those that get to the shooting stage.

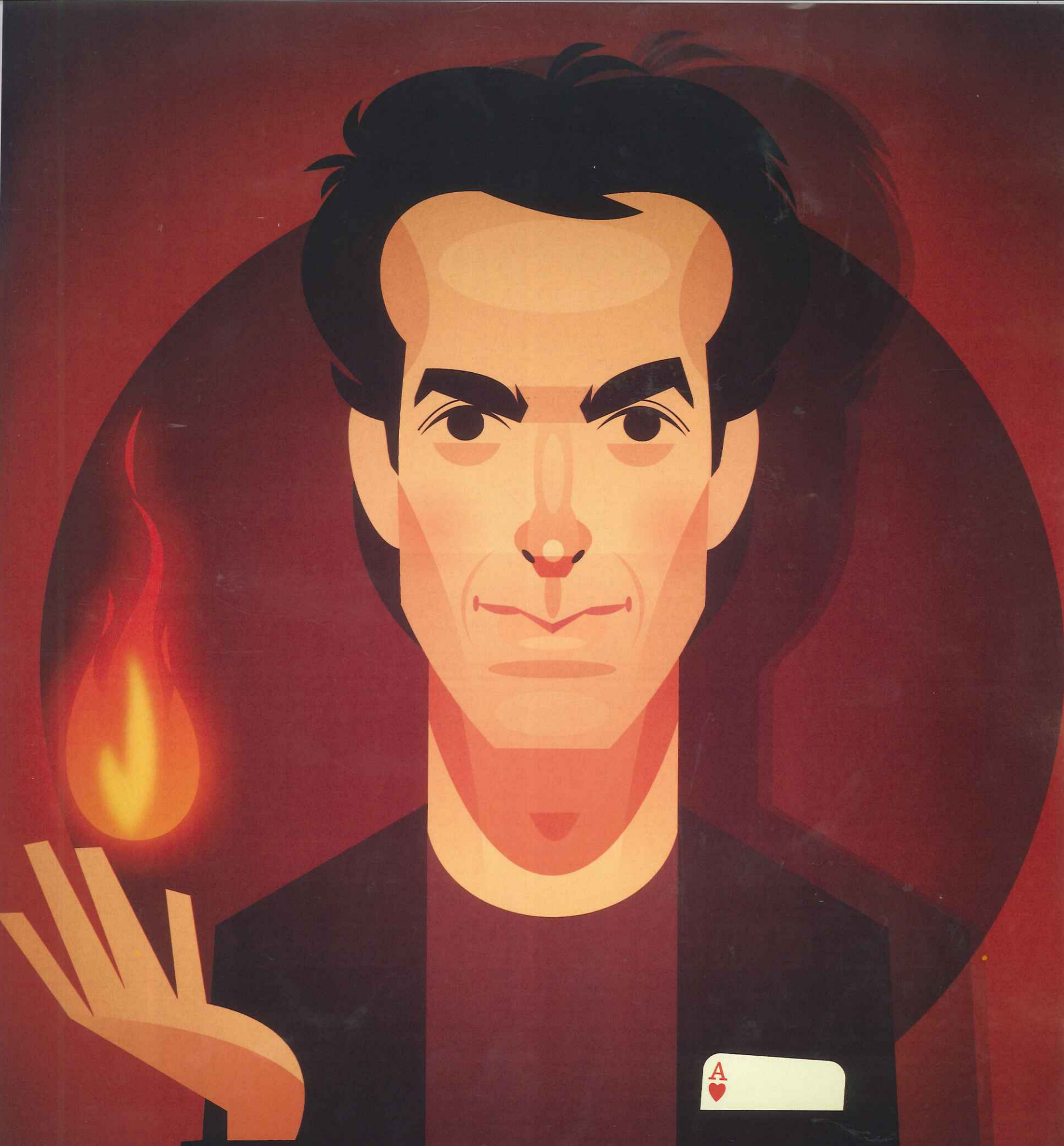
"We love collaboration, and we will take the time to get it right," he said. "Serendipity can lead to great things."

Copperfield admitted that the increasing sophistication of vfx in films and TV has challenged him to push boundaries to keep his act fresh. "The improved use of effects has forced me to improve my game, story-wise and effects-wise," said the magician, who owns 11 islands in the Bahamas (dubbed the Islands of Copperfield Bay), which he's magically transformed into a \$35 million private resort.

And there's also no illusion as to who's ultimately in charge of Red Safe: It's David Copperfield.

"I really am playing the Walt Disney role here," he noted.





**DAVID COPPERFIELD**  
BILLION DOLLAR ILLUSIONIST

# TRUTHS NOT TRICKS

David Copperfield has no illusions about movie biz

Story by Steven Gaydos Illustration by Stanley Chow



## DAVID COPPERFIELD

BILLION DOLLAR ILLUSIONIST

**S**itting in his very own multimillion-dollar Las Vegas museum of magic, *Variety*'s Billion Dollar Illusionist David Copperfield seems remarkably relaxed for a guy who has to make an automobile disappear in front of a paying crowd at the MGM Grand later in the evening.

Maybe it's the time he's spent at the top of the illusionist game, or the \$4 billion he's grossed along the way, or the fact that the famously no b.s. fellow magician Penn Jillette calls him "certainly, indisputably the greatest magician alive."

Though he's just turned 57 this month, consider how long he has been making magic:

The source of Las Vegas' Cirque du Soleil "Love" show, the Beatles, were working on "The White Album" and fellow Las Vegas illusionist David Blaine was five years away from making his first appearance on earth when Copperfield became the youngest person ever admitted to the Society of American Magicians.

He was 12.

At 16 he was teaching magic at NYU.

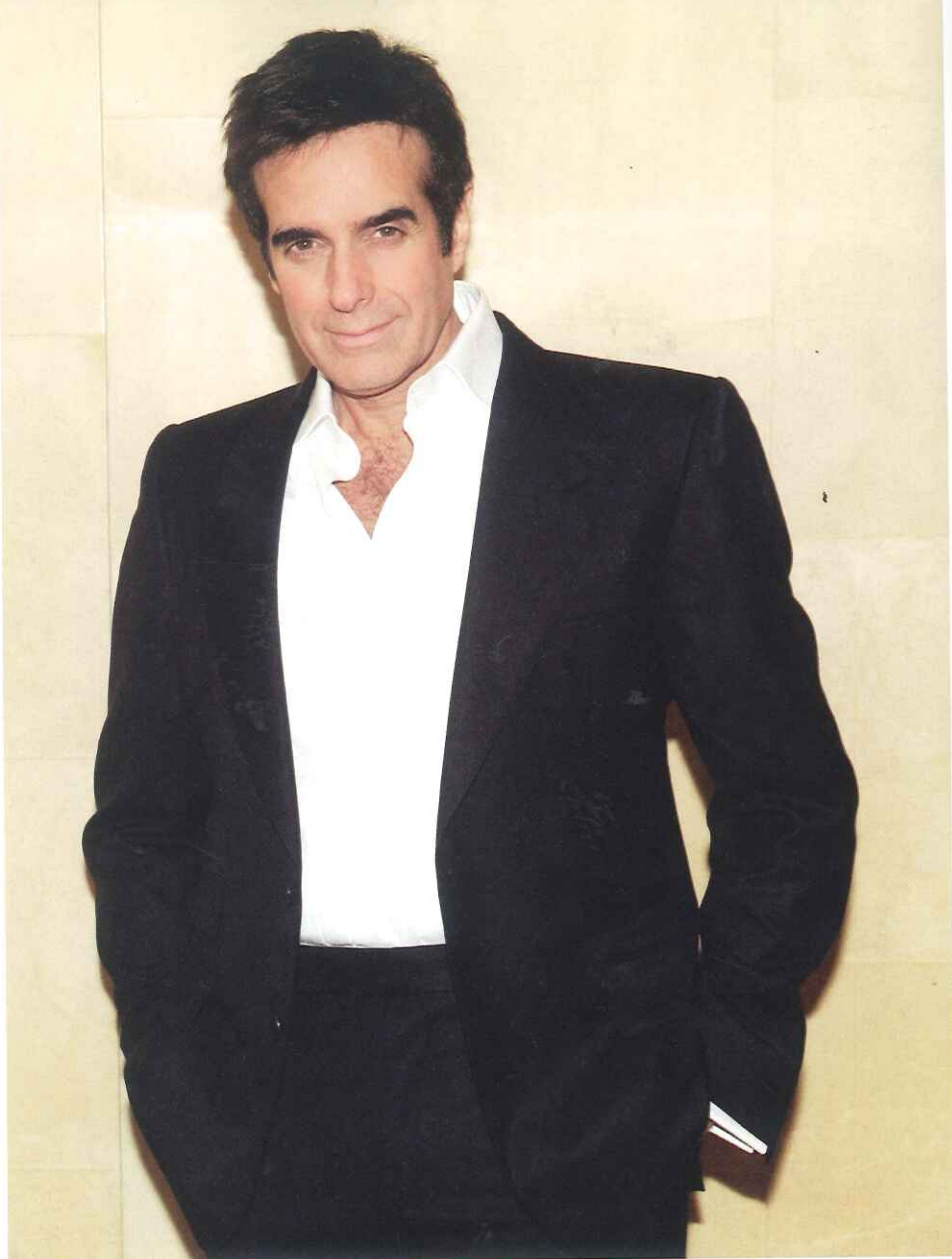
At 21 he began a string of national TV specials that ran for decades and racked up nearly two dozen Emmys.

According to those who've worked with him, even back in those early days, Copperfield's always been focused, calm and the master of his own domain.

Writer-director Norman Gerard remembers working with Copperfield on commercials for Burger King when the magician was still in his early 20s and describes him as "all business all the time and completely in control of every detail of his act and his business."

Today Copperfield essentially four-walls his MGM Grand show. "I control my business. It's my money." Virtually everyone you talk to in Vegas confirms that assessment.

MGM Grand president Scott Sibella seems to have no problem with Copperfield's deal. Obviously happy to have him drawing hotel guests and casino patrons for the past decade, Sibella extolls him as "the preeminent magician in entertain-



### Honors

- › Knighted by the French government
- › Declared a Living Legend by the Library of Congress
- › Dubbed the King of Magic by the Society of American Magicians
- › Named Magician of the Year, Magician of the Century, and Magician of the Millennium

SOURCE: DCOPPERFIELD.COM, EMMYSTV/AWARDS.COM, FORBES, WIKIPEDIA

ment today" and "part of our extended family."

Still packing in crowds most weeks two shows a night to the tune of an estimated \$30 million a year, a less-driven entertainer might figure it's time to retire and rest on his laurels. For Copperfield, his partner Chloe Gosselin and their infant daughter Sky, the option would appear simple: the Bahamian islands Copperfield purchased many years ago.

But look into his eyes: they say, "ain't gonna happen."

Instead, Copperfield has set his sights on a major career shift and this week announced the formation of his own film production company, Red Safe.

In Copperfield's view, making movies is not a transition but something akin to realizing a childhood dream and a parallel

BLUMHOUSE PRODUCTIONS CONGRATULATES

DAVID COPPERFIELD

A TRUE LEGEND

BLUMHOUSE  
PRODUCTIONS



**DAVID COPPERFIELD**  
BILLION DOLLAR ILLUSIONIST

form of magicmaking. "Cinema is a magic effect," says Copperfield, whose study of the histories of both film and magic led to the creation of his museum. "The movies started as a trick. It was a trip to the moon, a journey to Hades. The illusion of the cinema became the medium. That's why we are here talking."

Just as he might tell an audience he's going to walk through the Great Wall of China (which he's done), Copperfield explains how he plans to make movies that rank with Hollywood's greatest filmmakers.

"My real love as a kid was sitting in a darkened theater and watching films by Victor Fleming, Orson Welles, Frank Capra, Walt Disney," Copperfield says. "So in a way, where I am today is where I have always been. I was good at magic but when I saw those movies I said, 'I want that.'"

"That" in Copperfield's view, is the emotional connection that is at the heart of all great storytelling, on stage or on film. That vintage automobile appearance/disappearance that is a classic showstopper is also a heart-tugger as it serves to tell the story of the former David Kotkin's father and grandfather and its message of "pursue your dreams" resonates long after the stunt is over.

"Emotionally, where the audience is going is what the camera is doing," he says. "On screen, it's always about the story. 'Raging Bull' is not about the punches, it's about the story."

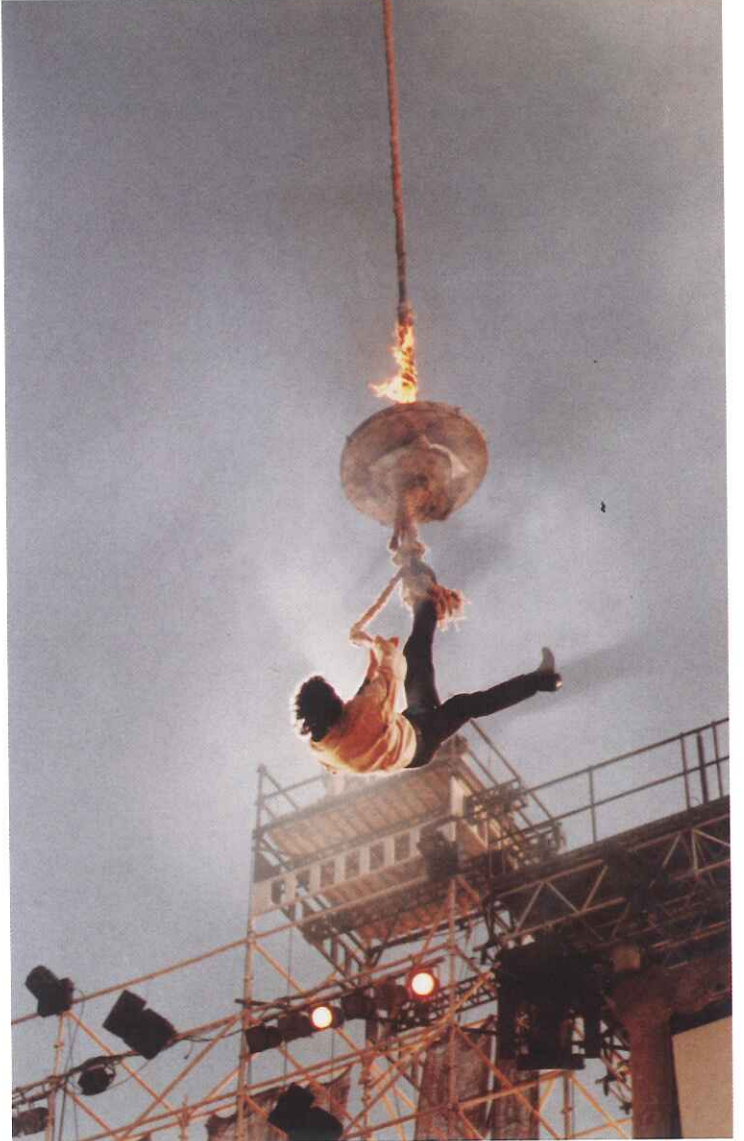
While the magic biz is still booming for Copperfield, he clearly has a desire to achieve more. You can hear it in his voice when he recites his greatest hits.

"I vanished an airplane and the fast food of it worked. So I

**Milestones**

- › **First:** Living magician to receive a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame
- › **Most:** Broadway tickets sold in a week (more than "Cats," "The Lion King" and "The Producers")
- › **Most:** Awards received by a magician (Magician of the Year, Magician of the Century and Magician of the Millennium)
- › **Highest:** Grossing solo entertainer in history (more than Madonna, Frank Sinatra, Michael Jackson and Elvis Presley)

**HEAT IS ON**  
*Copperfield escapes from a straitjacket hanging from burning ropes 10 stories over flaming spikes.*



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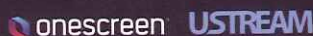
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# DAVID COPPERFIELD

BILLION DOLLAR ILLUSIONIST

said, 'Next?' And I vanished the Statue of Liberty. Maybe people will only remember it as a stunt, but I want everything I do to have more depth, to resonate as metaphor. I have always wanted everything I do to have some gravitas. The story should have substance and not just be a stunt."

Like many of Copperfield's famed misdirection ploys, it appears that while such Hollywood hits as Paramount's "Paranormal Activity" and Summit's "Now You See Me" haven't trumpeted his involvement, his consulting work for those films and others has earned respect from the filmmakers, including Paramount film group president Adam Goodman, who calls Copperfield's assistance on "Paranormal" invaluable.

"Paranormal" producer Jason Blum echoes that sentiment, crediting Copperfield with "a unique take on movies and the filmmaking process" and notes their continuing partnership on "a variety of other projects we have been working on together, like our upcoming Halloween live event 'The Purge: Fear the Night.'"

But creativity and passion aside, it is called the movie business and Copperfield has no illusions about the challenges he faces and the lack of autonomy he'll have to confront.

"I've spent years watching others go through the challenges of production and distribution," says Copperfield, observing that he "had to see the whole picture" before making the plunge into the deep financial waters of modern filmmaking. The reported negative cost on "Now You See Me" was \$75 million and marketing costs could easily double that number, which isn't bad when measured against the pic's \$320 million global B.O. take.

But then there's "The Incredible Burt Wonderstone," another film Copperfield consulted on and in which he appeared in a cameo, which cost \$30 million and but only earned \$22 million domestic. In other words, there can be a big upside but there's also no faster way to make money vanish into thin air than making movies.

Still, Copperfield has been tackling big projects all his life and seems to especially relish the small details that make up the creative side of filmmaking. "I love to get the call to help on story points," says Copperfield, recalling that on "Now You See Me," "I told Louis (Leterrier, the director), 'Tell me the entire story, scene by scene.' My process on creating magic parallels the process of making movies. Besides, the way I see it, I'm in the movie business when I'm on stage."

Judging by friends and fans in high places, Copperfield's Red Safe will find a small army of eager and willing partners, including Goodman, who calls Copperfield "a born storyteller. My hope is that we can figure out a movie to do together."

## By the Numbers

6

Countries that have postage stamps branded with his face

11

Guinness World Records

13

Years performing at MGM Grand

15

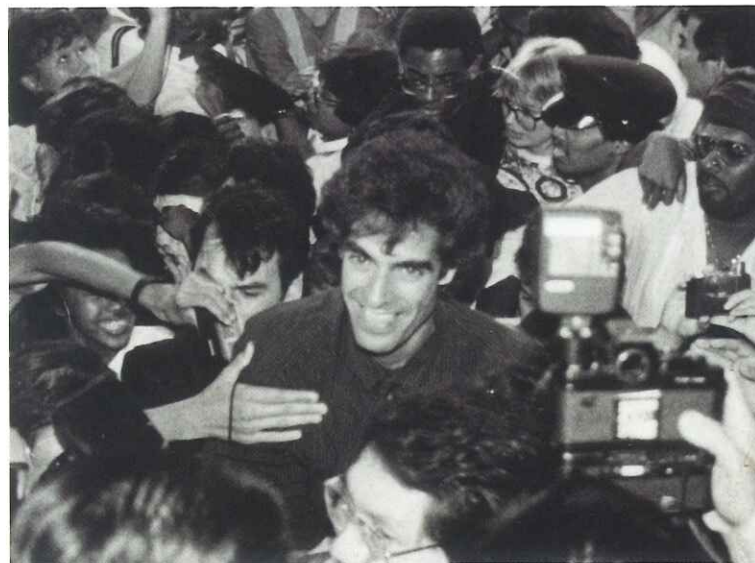
Shows per week

20

TV specials

21

Emmy Awards and 38 noms



**FEARLESS** From top, Copperfield orchestrates the explosive disappearance of audience members in the so-called Barclay House illusion; is mobbed by fans in Asia; survives the Death Saw.

## Now You See Him ...

1968

At age 12, becomes the youngest person admitted to the Society of American Magicians.

1977

Begins TV career with first special, "The Magic of ABC."

1983

Makes the Statue of Liberty "disappear" on TV special "The Magic of David Copperfield V."

1991

Makes first major purchase of his magic collection, the 15,000-volume Mulholland Library containing world's largest Houdini collection.

1994

Knighted by the French government.

1995

Receives star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

2000

Named Living Legend by the Library of Congress.

2006

Bought the first of 11 private islands in the Bahamas. The rebranded Islands of Copperfield Bay attracts such visitors as Bill Gates, Oprah Winfrey and John Travolta.

1972

Teaches a course on magic at NYU at age 16.

1982

Founds charity Project Magic, which teaches magic as a rehabilitation tool.

1986

"Walks through" the Great Wall of China on TV special "The Magic of David Copperfield VIII."

1992

Founds the Intl. Museum and Library of the Conjuring Arts, now the world's largest magic history collection.

1996

B'way show "Dreams & Nightmares" breaks one-week ticket records.

2001

"Cut in half" during his final TV special "Copperfield: Tornado of Fire."

2013

Acquires estates of illusionist and filmmaker Georges Méliès and the "Father of Modern Magic" Jean Eugene Robert-Houdin.

COMPILED BY MAANE KHATCHATOURIAN