

# NERO WOLFE CONSULTATION

Anthony Spiesman

When I get stuck on a difficult case, I ask myself how Wolfe would handle it. Mentally, I phone Saul Panzer and ask him to set up an appointment. I don't know why I go through Saul, I just do. Anyway, in my mind, Saul picks up the phone and gets Archie and explains I have this problem and could he see if Wolfe will talk to me. Archie makes a few choice wisecracks, but since I'm a friend of Saul's he makes me first appointment after orchid hours.

I imagine myself going up the seven steps of Wolfe's brownstone and ringing the bell. Fritz invites me in and escorts me past the famous front room and into the office. He offers me a drink. I tell him I would appreciate a tall, cold glass of milk with two fingers of Scotch. I don't worry about Wolfe's liquor supply or about the quality of the booze, but I make a mental note to send him a case of a new imported Dutch beer called Grolsch which comes in fancy liter bottles and which, for my money, is the best stuff around. I'm a little troubled, though, because the tops are permanently attached rubber plugs that you have to pop open with two thumbs, and I worry about Wolfe's liking to coast bottle caps and putting them away in his top drawer.

While I wait for Wolfe to come help me, I rubberneck the room. The thing that hits me — and to me this is kind of a surprise — is the layout, the use of space. By this I specifically mean the bookshelves and the file cabinet on the second level. Completely avoids floor clutter. The high ceilings add to the space, of course, and the outstanding collection of furni-

ture and artifacts makes the place first-class. I start to relax. Any man smart enough to live like this is definitely smart enough to help me out of a jam.

Then I walk over to Archie's desk and take a gander at the picture on the wall above it. I know who it's supposed to be, and I have to admit there's a striking similarity. The neatness of it all impresses me, makes me start getting my thinking under control again.

Next I take an imaginary walk over to the Gouillard globe. Having read about it so many times, I have no trouble picturing it. Thirty-two and three-eighths inches in diameter is a lot of globe. Really big. But it's not the size so much that gets to me — it's the overall beauty, the craftsmanship. There's something about being in a room with perfect objects that is conducive to clear thinking. Don't ask me why. (Sometimes, at this point in my fantasy, I take time out for a trip to the lobby of the Daily News building on East 42nd Street. That's my favorite globe anywhere, and I can spend hours



*I should play Nero Wolfe.  
We seem to have the same figure.*

ROBERT MORLEY



MARTY MORRIS

Wolfe's office. Archie's desk is in the foreground. His chair can be swiveled to face the mirror so he can see what's happening in the hallway on the other side of the room.

standing there staring at it and taking great sea journeys around the world.)

I return to Wolfe's office and decide that my favorite thing in it is the superb mostly yellow Shivan rug. Comforting while I'm pacing. But being somewhat of an amateur cook myself I do take a few minutes to appreciate the engraving of Brillat-Savarin. I also find Wolfe's most cookbook on his shelf and haul it down for a quick look. Same contents as my copy, I'm glad to say. Still at the bookshelf, I can't resist pulling out Wolfe's copy of Lawrence's *Seven Years of Hudson*. I once tried to get through it, couldn't. But I'm convinced if Wolfe can, he's the man to analyze my case.

I stand in front of Wolfe's cherry desk and decide not to pick up any of his blunt instru-

ments, but I do take notice of his brown leather Brazilian desk chair. Gigantic! I've never seen anything quite like it anywhere, probably never will. But it definitely looks like it can hold a seventh of a ton just by itself. The chair would take up two-thirds of my office space, I can't help but notice the worn spots on the arms, where countless circles have been made by Wolfe's fingers. I see his fingers circle and his lips go in and out, in and out, like an obese goldfish, and I am reassured he will solve my problems.

I think about sitting in that chair, but I don't have the nerve. Not even in my imagination. I do, however, sit in that infamous red chair—the one Archie says only Inspector Cramer looks like he belongs in. It's a bit un-



A photograph of Theodore (taken with a telephoto lens) at work in the work room. Wolfe is just out of the picture to the left (with large shades on the foreground).

comfortable to my taste, but I well know the advantages of a chair like this for interrogation purposes. It dwarfs you, makes you feel insecure, and the lies don't come out quite so smooth when you're in it. At this point, I get a little edgy, so I huck over to Archie's desk again. I take a quick peek in the red box to see if he really does keep stamps in it. He does. I think about opening the drawers — it's occupational with me — but I don't. I also don't pry inside the liquor cabinet, count Wolfe's bottle caps or try to get into the secret alcove and see what Archie sees when Wolfe has him staked out in there.

Then I imagine Wolfe entering the room. I see him as Orson Welles. Nobody else. I imagine him getting straight to the problem, no social nonsense. I can never make up my mind if he shakes my hand or not. I know he doesn't like to shake hands, but I have this urgency to feel that he's really flesh and blood. Usually, I wind up with a strong, quick grip, quickly released. I talk. Archie pretends to take notes. Wolfe intones. Wolfe speaks. The voice is midway between American English and English English. No Montenegrin inflection. Orson Welles in Citizen Kane, I think. A young voice in a not-young man. Full, but not bombastic.

I never know exactly what it is that Wolfe

says, but suddenly, after one or two "plait," no more problem.

We get up to leave. That is, I get up to leave, preceded by Archie. Fritz comes to the door to see me out. Just as I prepare to go, Wolfe pokes his head out the office door and asks if I'd like to join him in dinner at Rusterma's. (Listen, this is my fantasy. I'll have him say whatever I like.) We agree to meet as soon as I turn in my report on the case.

At this point I get up and walk into my kitchen and start making a mess out of it. I chop, I slice, I mix, I pound, I debone, I decant, I thoroughly fiddle around. And it seems to help. Like Wolfe, I don't talk business when I eat, but there's something about preparing a meal that untangles things for me. So when I start to eat I raise a toast to my imaginary slimmer partner, Nero Wolfe, and thank him for his guidance.

I never met a private investigator like him. But I sure would like to.

*Anthony Spierman is a licensed private investigator living in New York. He has spent hours trying to track down Wolfe on West 35th Street, with little success.*

## WOLFE AT HIS BEST

*And Be a Villain  
Champagne for One  
Death of a Dooey  
Some Buried Coasts  
Too Many Cooks*

## MOST OVERRATED WOLFE

*The Doorbell Rang*

## ALPHA AND OMEGA

*Fes-de-Lance  
A Family Affair*