

SNEAK PEEK

# Wild Thing

A brilliant misfit from L.A.'s past may get to the big screen

*Oscar was one of God's own prototypes—a high-powered mutant of some kind who was never even considered for mass production.*

*He was too weird to live and too rare to die. —HUNTER S. THOMPSON*

**"OSCAR" WAS OSCAR ZETA ACOSTA**—attorney and writer, rabble-rouser and carouser, folk hero to some, a tragic waste to others. He played all these roles as a pivotal figure in L.A.'s turbulent Chicano political scene in the late 1960s and early '70s, until he mysteriously disappeared in Mexico in 1974. Now the rights to Acosta's novel *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* belong to L.A. filmmaker Phillip Rodriguez, who is hoping to turn the story into a feature film. *Cockroach People*, published in 1973, is a thinly veiled account of Acosta's involvement with the Chicano movement in L.A.

"Even though I was an adolescent when Acosta was here, those events became meaningful in my adult life as I became culturally and politically aware," says Rodriguez, director of the acclaimed documentary *Los Angeles Now* and one of 50 fellows recently honored in the inaugural year of the United States Artists fund. "Oscar was so complex—self-annihilating yet self-affirming, intelligent, and poetic."

Acosta came to national attention in 1971 when Thompson's story "Strange Rumbblings in Aztlan" was published in *Rolling Stone*. Thompson had come to L.A. to write about the Chicano movement while Acosta was representing various local activists who had run afoul of the law. Acosta was further immortalized as the Samoan attorney, Dr. Gonzo, in Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.

Acosta also wrote *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1972), which recounts his cultural rebirth as a Chicano during the period when many Mexican-Americans embraced a new identity. "I'm interested in visiting that era through someone who seemed ambivalent about identity politics," Rodriguez says. "Someone who wanted to affirm his Chicano-ness, but who had the desire to be something well beyond." —OSCAR GARZA



**ODD COUPLE**  
Oscar Zeta Acosta, right, and a wigged Hunter S. Thompson in Colorado in 1970, from the book *Gonzo*.



TACO TOWN

## Keep on Truckin'

**TACO TRUCKS**, L.A.'s ubiquitous purveyors of meals-on-wheels, have drawn the attention of Ted Kane, a local architect who has a photo essay of them on his website, [www.polarinertia.com](http://www.polarinertia.com). As he conducted his fieldwork, Kane says, "I didn't realize there were so many." Neither did we. Among his findings:

- ▶ On any given day, there are more than 3,000 legal mobile restaurants on the streets of Los Angeles. (*iCaramba!*)
- ▶ The L.A. County Department of Health Services oversees the trucks, which are officially called Mobile Food Preparation Units. ("We have a grease spill involving an MFPU at Pico and Union. All units, please respond.")
- ▶ Each truck is required to stop daily at one of more than 30 commissaries spread across the county. For about \$25 a day, the commissaries provide water hookups, drains, and a market for purchasing supplies and propane. (No hippie vans or campers allowed.)
- ▶ The trucks are inspected once a year by the health department and are subject to random inspections. (Uh-huh.)
- ▶ On an average day, there are about 1,000 illegal food trucks roaming the region. (Double *icaramba!*)

How can you tell if a truck is legal? Well, you can ask the vendor to see his or her health permit or check the back of the truck, where a county certification sticker should be displayed. *iProvecho!*