

Movie escapes Thorndon blaze

By Bruce Watson

ACCLAIMED film-maker Vincent Ward's latest movie escaped incineration by pure chance in a spectacular fire at his Thorndon home early this morning.

Mr Ward, 24, who made the film "State of Siege", which received critical acclaim overseas, left the print of his latest work in his car last night.

If he had not done so, the film, "In Spring One Plants Alone," would have been de-

stroyed in the 3am blaze at 6 Burnell Avenue. Mr Ward and two friends escaped with their lives and nothing else.

Tens of thousands of dollars of photographic equipment was destroyed in the blaze, which ripped through the old two-storeyed

house next door to the Thai Embassy.

Mr Ward, his flatmate Mr Miles Hargest, 24, and a visiting friend, Mr Stuart Page, 22, were asleep in bedrooms on the first floor.

Mr Ward and Mr Hargest, a newspaper photographer, escaped through the flames down the stairwell. Mr Page jumped out of a first-floor window into trees below.

Today the three were recuperating at a neighbour's home, wearing borrowed clothes.

The Wellington Fire Brigade was called at 3.25am and took 15 minutes to bring the fire under control. The fire was confined to the upper floor. The bottom floor, where a couple live in a separate flat, was unscathed, apart from some water damage.

The only fatality was a budgie belonging to the couple.

Mr Ward said he escaped through the flames down the stairs after a dream alerted him.

"I had this dream about people running around and yelling. Then it started getting a bit more real. Flames started entering the dream," he said.

"I thought I had better get up and investigate."

He spotted a great sheet of flame and took off.

He said he had lost all the publicity stills from "In Spring One Plants Alone." However, the print of the film was safe in his car.

Mr Hargest said the fire started in his room, the central bedroom on the top floor and the one worst affected by the blaze.

"I woke up to see a sea of flames above me on the ceiling," he said. "I got out of bed, made an attempt to contain it with buckets of water then made it down the stairs."

He lost everything, apart from some clothes which were on the line.

Mr Page could not get down the stairs because of the flames.

"I just went straight out the window," he said.

Two other flatmates, television editor John McWilliams and "Evening Post" designer Roger Guise, were not in the flat, as they are in Auckland.

The three men said neighbours had been a terrific help with accommodation and clothing.



The three occupants of the Burnell Avenue flat, Stuart Page (left) Vincent Ward, and Miles Hargest (foreground), who are now staying at a neighbouring flat.