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Exclusive!
MARTHA MITCHELL
BARES ALL:
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NIXON'S FEUD
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HENRY KISSINGER!

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Makeup for Every Occasion

B



Gaslit

CREATING WASHINGTON IN THE WATERGATE ERA

BY DANIEL NOVOTNY, PRODUCTION DESIGNER

When I first heard about *Gaslit*, I wasn't sure what to expect. Given our current political climate, the infamous Watergate scandal of 1972 seemed like minor news. However, after reading all eight episodes of the limited series—almost five hundred pages of script—I could see an interesting new perspective on the infamous Watergate conspiracy. *Gaslit* features multiple stories—all based around the same event—and each story was compelling and filled with unique characters.

Gaslit focuses on an array of lesser known people involved with Nixon's downfall and the many

personal relationships it affected in the process. It was a story that attracted Julia Roberts to not only star as Martha Mitchell, but to also executive produce the series. Soon after coming on board, she asked her longtime friend, Sean Penn, to join the project to play her husband, John.

John Mitchell was the Attorney General for Richard Nixon, and a trusted advisor and close friend to the President. In contrast, Martha was famous for her presence in the media. She guested on talk shows and was a regular fixture on radio programs and in magazines. A staunch Republican raised in the

A. THE MITCHELLS' WATERGATE APARTMENT. BUILT ON STAGE 43 AT UNIVERSAL. SET PHOTO.

B. LADIES' HOME JOURNAL COVER. GRAPHIC LAYOUT BY DREW WEININGER.

South, she was so vocal she became known as the infamous “Mouth of the South.”

Given her husband’s position in the government, Martha had a private security detail at all times. Frank McCord was a private bodyguard for Martha and her family. You can imagine her shock when Frank was arrested for burglarizing the Democratic National Committee. The connection between the Watergate burglary, Richard Nixon, and her husband was obvious. Martha couldn’t keep quiet. Despite her allegiance to Nixon and the Republican Party, she was the first person to publicly speak out about Nixon’s involvement in the Watergate scandal. Ultimately, this forced John Mitchell to choose between his wife and

the President. There was an immediate smear campaign to gaslight Martha Mitchell and discredit her voice. The Watergate incident truly ruined her life and that mudslinging is a major reason why most people have never heard of Martha Mitchell today.

Gaslit creator and show runner, Robbie Pickering, has been a self-proclaimed Nixon aficionado for many years. He was intrigued by the culture surrounding Richard Nixon and the Republican Party of that era. Robbie wrote the series based on the podcast *Slow Burn: Watergate*, which offered a new approach to a familiar story.

Matt Ross directed all eight episodes of *Gaslit* and from the beginning, he wanted the show to be historically authentic. He felt that *Gaslit* should look and feel grounded. While always finding the most cinematic approach, Matt never sought to over-dramatize or embellish the sets more than they needed to be.

I collaborated closely with Matt and director of photography Larkin Seiple, who brings an interesting lens to any show. Since Larkin was shooting on set every day, we developed our own communication style while shooting. We collaborated often to ensure that we stayed on the same page as I prepped ahead while Larkin and Matt were shooting on set each day.

One of my favorite aspects of this production was the fact that there was one director, one director of photography and one first assistant director shooting all eight episodes. This system allowed us to move past the formalities early, build a shorthand and collaborate more efficiently on the creative process. *Gaslit* was unique in that it had a 108-day shooting schedule, working five days a week for about seven months. Since we had all eight scripts upfront, it felt like shooting an 8-hour movie. Our initial breakdowns had a set count of over one hundred fifty different environments or sets.

Like most projects these days, *Gaslit* was a demanding show and at a time when Los Angeles was bustling with production, building a team was a challenge of its own. I worked closely with line producer Caroline James and unit production

manager Stacey Murphy Gold (whom I’ve known for almost twenty years) to find the talented ensemble that would become the Art Department of *Gaslit*. Once we got past the formalities, reality sunk in. We had a long road ahead and needed to get started.

With a talented team on board, the Art Department could all focus on the actual job at hand. I wanted to keep the set designs grounded and historically correct as much as possible. *Gaslit* is a story centered on the world of conservative, white Republicans in Washington D.C. in the 1970s. John Mitchell was born in 1913 and Martha in 1918. This meant that John was a man who had been through the Great Depression. His teenage years took place in the ’20s and ’30s, so he wasn’t a cutting-edge type of guy, but rather his taste was very conservative and felt more reflective of

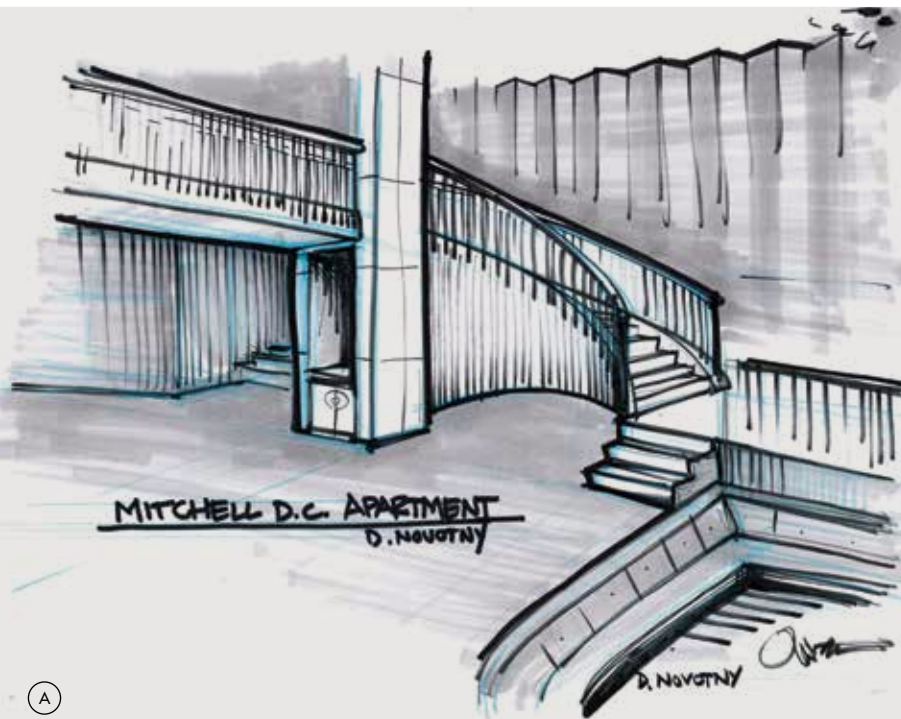
the ’50s. Martha’s formative years took place in the 1930s in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. These ages and places were important to the design given that we were creating the home of these characters.

With the exception of a few establishing shots in Washington D.C., the entirety of *Gaslit* production was filmed in Los Angeles. Most of the show was shot on Universal Studios sound stages or backlot with the remaining sets being modified. In addition to Universal, the production shot on location all over Los Angeles from Malibu to Koreatown, Pasadena and Downtown LA.

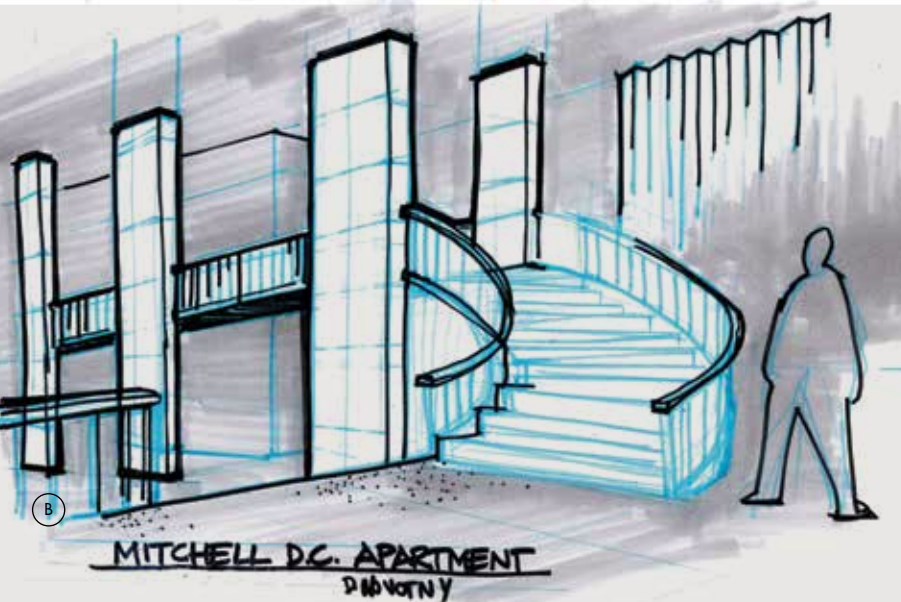
The Mitchells’ Watergate Apartment

In the early 1970s, the Watergate complex was considered one of Washington’s most desirable living spaces, popular with members of Congress and political appointees of the Executive Branch.

A. & B. THE MITCHELLS’ WATERGATE APARTMENT. SKETCHES BY DANIEL NOVOTNY.

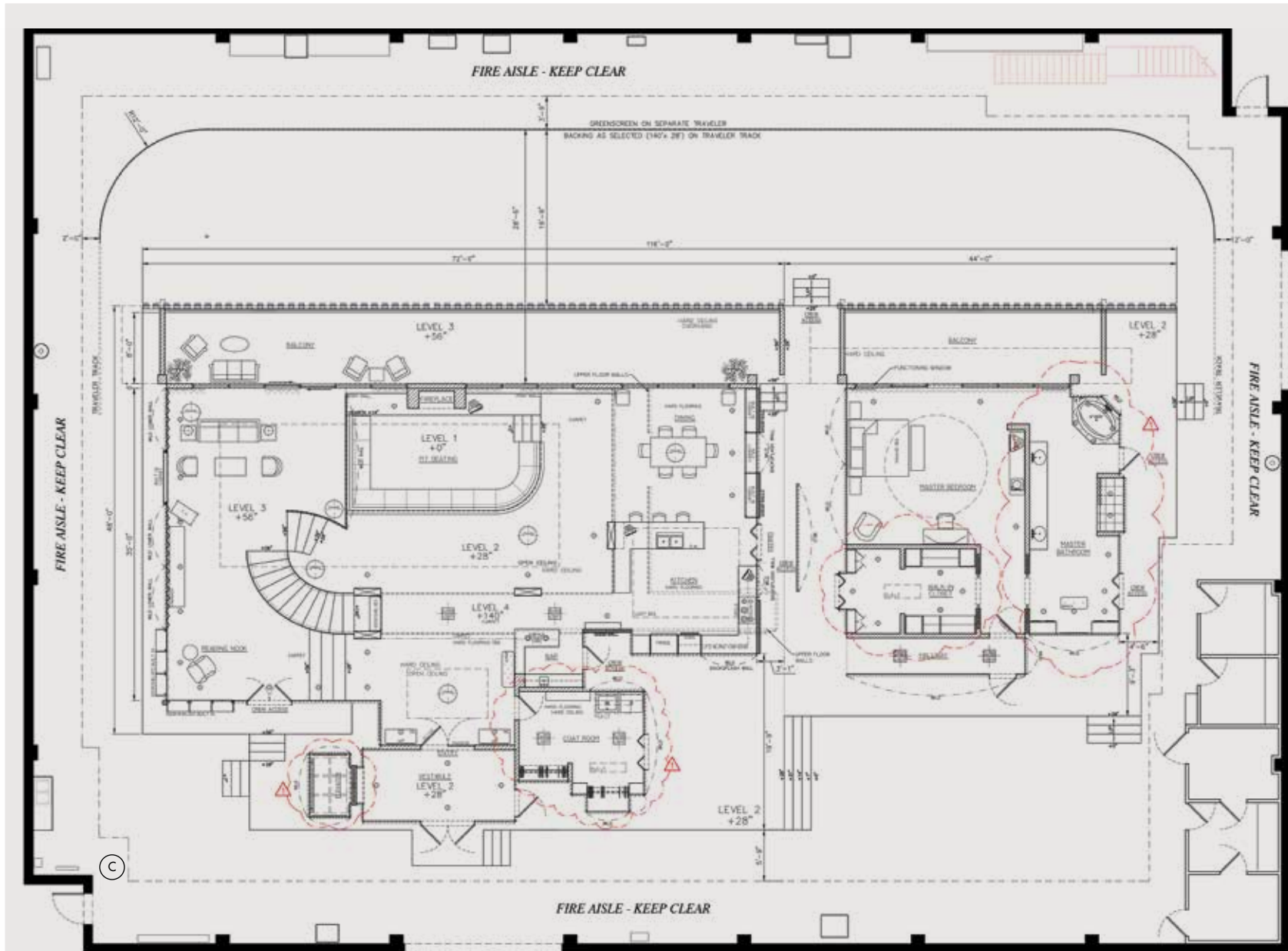


A



B

C. THE MITCHELLS’ WATERGATE APARTMENT PLAN. STAGE 43 AT UNIVERSAL STUDIOS. DRAWN BY D. TRACY SMITH.



C



A & B. THE MITCHELLS' WATERGATE APARTMENT. SKETCHES BY DANIEL NOVOTNY.

C

D



E



F

The Mitchells owned an apartment in this prestigious complex, which became a major setting in the story. While the production's overall mission was authenticity, this was one set where we decided to take some creative license, as the real Mitchell apartment was generally considered too bland. The Mitchells' real apartment was very basic with low ceilings, gray-blue walls and beige carpet. We wanted an interesting space that felt authentic and had an elegance that was missing from the real home, so we upgraded the apartment to give it more cinematic appeal.

There were inherent challenges in designing a hero set like this because production would be filming on this set for about a month. I tried to give the camera interesting places to frame different scenes, so we incorporated multiple levels such as the sunken living room, the staircase and the balcony. When watching the series, I think it's clear that the show's director, Matt, really took advantage of those interesting angles.

Personally, my process starts by collecting reference images. This was a show about a historical event, so we needed to gather pictures to get an understanding of what these environments looked like. Before drawing any walls, I try to pinpoint the

rooms and spaces that are actually needed to tell the story—a living room, a dining room, a kitchen, the number of bedrooms—so that I can determine the size and shape of each room. I try to stay mindful of how much stage space we have outside each window, so the DP has enough space to create realistic sunlight.

Outside the massive windows of the Mitchell apartment, the set needed a photo backing of the 1972 skyline of Washington D.C. The production hired Phil Greenstreet of Rosco Backings to create our hero photographic backing. Phil stayed on the seventh floor of The Watergate to shoot the view from the balcony during the day and to get a matching image for the night version of the backing. Then he went across the street to what used to be the Howard Johnson Hotel and shot images from the seventh floor, looking back toward The Watergate complex. This view would be used as a photo backing outside the windows of a set of the Howard Johnson Hotel that was built a few months later.

The Howard Johnson Hotel

In 1972, the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee was on the sixth floor of the Watergate office building. Their offices had windows facing the Howard Johnson Hotel directly across the street. The burglars in *Gaslit* booked room 723 in the Howard Johnson Hotel which had a direct view into the DNC Headquarters. From this vantage, the burglars could watch over the break-in and communicate via walkie-talkie. The Art Department matched historical photos of the view from the hotel balcony. The view from the real hotel almost appears fake because the Watergate office building is so massive and directly across the street.

The Caucus Room

One of the most iconic environments in the Watergate scandal was the Kennedy Caucus Room where the Watergate Senate Committee held a trial to investigate the people involved. It's a historically significant space that is the most recognizable room in the Watergate trials. For this room, it was important to build an exact match based on historical photos. The biggest challenge

was the overall scale of this room with floor-to-ceiling marble. Like any project, there were budget limitations, so the production chose to build half the room, and only up to twenty feet high. Anything the camera saw above this height would need to be created digitally. For the marble walls, we hired Astek, a well-known, large-format printing company to print our custom marble pattern on Sintra plastic panels. We then applied each panel to the walls built by the construction department. We matched the tables, news cameras, chairs, drapery, etc.—everything possible to keep it historically accurate. One detail we had a hard time recreating was the giant wooden headboard-like piece that was prominent at the front of the room. Eventually, we found a rental piece that was a reasonable match and added the wooden eagles to the top.

A. & B. THE MITCHELLS' WATERGATE APARTMENT. UNRENDERED SKETCHUP MODEL BY D. TRACY SMITH.

C. & D. THE MITCHELLS' WATERGATE APARTMENT. MODEL RENDER BY JAIME SALAZAR IN UNREAL.

E. & F. THE MITCHELLS' WATERGATE APARTMENT. SET PHOTOS.

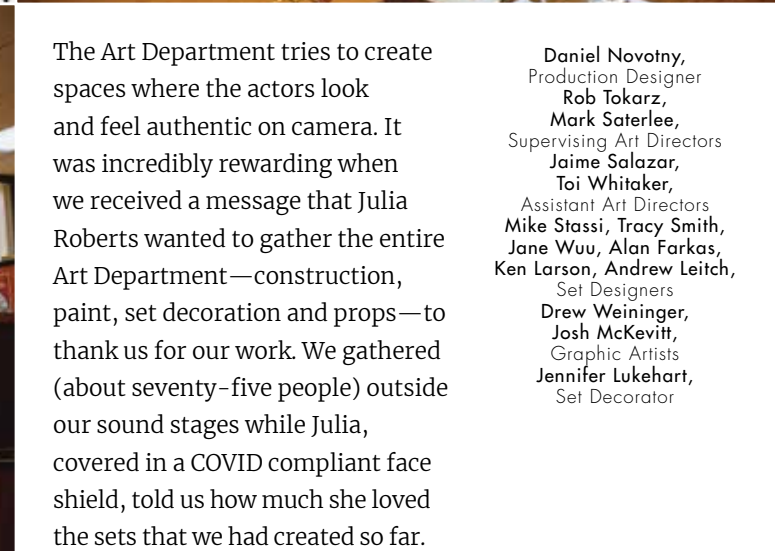
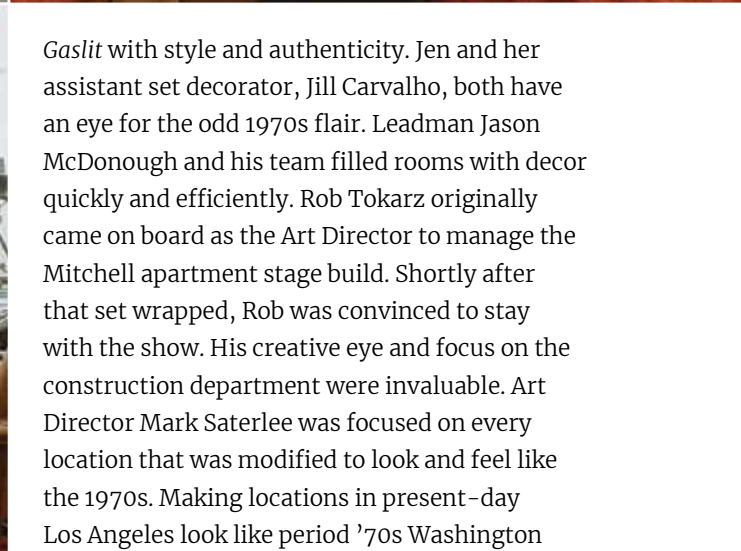
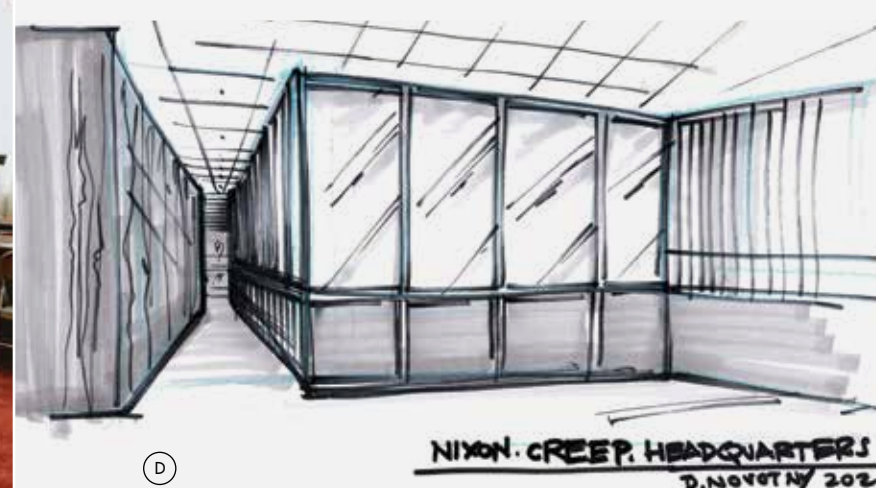
G. & H. HOWARD JOHNSON HOTEL ROOM. BUILT ON A 6-FOOT PLATFORM ON STAGE 43, UNIVERSAL STUDIOS. SET PHOTO.



G



H



Gaslit with style and authenticity. Jen and her assistant set decorator, Jill Carvalho, both have an eye for the odd 1970s flair. Leadman Jason McDonough and his team filled rooms with decor quickly and efficiently. Rob Tokarz originally came on board as the Art Director to manage the Mitchell apartment stage build. Shortly after that set wrapped, Rob was convinced to stay with the show. His creative eye and focus on the construction department were invaluable. Art Director Mark Saterlee was focused on every location that was modified to look and feel like the 1970s. Making locations in present-day Los Angeles look like period '70s Washington D.C. requires focused effort from multiple departments, and Mark was instrumental in each transformation.

The show had fantastic Set Designers, including Mike Stassi, Tracy Smith, Jane Wu, Alan Farkas, Ken Larson and Andrew Leitch, with each Set Designer focused on different projects throughout the season. Two Graphic Artists—Drew Weininger and Josh McKeivitt—along with graphics coordinator Jill Salavar, were responsible for designing and implementing every detail that needed a Graphic Designer's touch; Assistant Art Director Toi Whitaker was an invaluable part of our department who worked tirelessly to keep us all on the same page. Assistant Art Director Jaime Salazar was focused on previs work of various spaces.

This was my third show with a Art Department coordinator Aaron Nadler who, as always, was unflappable. Construction coordinator Will Thayer led a team of more than fifty builders and painters to bring my designs to life. Will delivered

CREEP Headquarters

For the 1972 presidential election, Richard Nixon formed the Committee for the Re-election of the President (unofficially known as CREEP). This was a national organization, but the headquarters were in Washington D.C. CREEP was one of my favorite sets. The D.C. headquarters office was recreated based on historical photographs of Richard Nixon taking a tour of the office space. I liked how bland and simple the space was compared to the other environments on the show.

Viewers may notice in the series that the walls of CREEP are covered with Nixon propaganda posters. I wanted to match this design exactly and so the Art Department duplicated authentic Nixon propaganda for the walls and flyers. After some legal back-and-forth, we were eventually cleared to use the official Nixon font from the 1972 election.

I was lucky to have a talented set decorator on board before I started. Jennifer Lukehart decorated

every set on time with the highest quality one could ask for. Prop master James Kroning and his team were instrumental in finding or creating interesting, authentic 1970s period props; and we were fortunate to have a full-time Art Department researcher Lauren Baker, who was resourceful in finding historical images. Last but not least, I can't say enough about our talented team of Art Department assistants, Caroline Gharis, Harper Olma, Jade Martinez and Denise Acosta as each brought their own skill set to the *Gaslit* Art Department.

her penthouse apartment set. She told us that she adored the space and the way the camera was taking in all of the details of the rooms. It meant a lot to hear that compliment from an actor of her caliber.

Gaslit was a rewarding challenge. I'm proud to have been part of this Art Department and thankfully, we had the resources to execute our vision. We were fortunate to be a part of an ambitious project like this, and I have enjoyed watching the episodes unfold every week. *Gaslit* is available on STARZ and Hulu. I highly recommend watching it! **ADG**

G. HISTORICALLY ACCURATE, 1970S GRAPHIC DESIGN PROJECTS TO BE PRINTED AND USED ON CAMERA. ANY CORPORATE LOGOS WERE RESEARCHED TO BE HISTORICALLY ACCURATE, RECREATED AND LEGALLY CLEARED FOR USE ON *GASLIT*. GRAPHIC ARTISTS DREW WEININGER AND JOSH MCKEVITT.

A. SENATE HEARING ROOM. IN PROGRESS.

B. & C. SENATE HEARING ROOM. BUILT ON STAGE40 AT UNIVERSAL STUDIOS. SET PHOTOS.

D. CREEP HEADQUARTERS. SKETCH BY DANIEL NOVOTNY.

E. & F. CREEP HEADQUARTERS BUILT ON STAGE 43 AT UNIVERSAL STUDIOS. SET PHOTOS.

