

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

LOFTY IDEALS

Text by Julie Miller | October 30, 2014

The centerpiece of Fox's sitcom *New Girl* is the Los Angeles loft that Zooey Deschanel's character, Jess Day, discovered on Craigslist back in the very first episode of the series. The stunning exposed-brick accommodations came with a catch, though: Jess has to share the apartment, set in a converted factory building in L.A.'s Arts District, with three male 30-something roommates, Nick (Jake Johnson), Schmidt (Max Greenfield), and Winston (Lamorne Morris). *New Girl* production designer Michael Whetstone and set decorator Jane Shirkes created a home atmosphere that is realistic for its occupants and reflects the aesthetic hodgepodge of four characters with different backgrounds, interests, and income levels. The result: a set that fuses the inhabitants' youthful belongings—an indoor basketball hoop, duct-taped board games, Chicago concert artifacts—with the industrial, early-20th-century architecture of their fictional factory turned loft.



"The architecture of the set is really driven by economic factors," Whetstone says. "We figured out what [the characters] could afford and what part of town they would live in first. Our characters live in the Arts District in downtown Los Angeles in a converted factory building from the early 1900s, so you see that detail in the bathroom, in the raw beams, exposed brick, and the type of flooring in the loft. It still has some of its industrial heritage."

PHOTO: RAY MICKSHAW/FOX



LIVING ROOM

Whetstone and Shirkes joined *New Girl* after the sitcom's pilot had been filmed. The duo decided, with series creator Liz Meriwether, to keep the bones and the spirit of the loft, while adding a bit more character to areas like the kitchen. There was one exception to this rule, however: "We decided that the one piece of furniture that would be exactly the same was the leather L-shaped couch," Whetstone says.

PHOTO: RAY MICKSHAW/FOX



NEW GIRL CHARACTERS

An important element of the set's realism quotient is its clutter and evidence of everyday life—courtesy of the prop department—like this Chinese takeout tableau that appears appropriately disheveled for Coach (Damon Wayans, Jr.), Jess, and especially Nick, whose bedroom reflects that, as Whetstone puts it, “he’s a slob from Chicago.”

PHOTO: GREG GAYNE AND © 2013 FOX BROADCASTING CO.



KITCHEN

One of the most drastic set-design changes post-pilot involved the kitchen. "If you watch the pilot and then the second episode, you see that the kitchen magically changes," Whetstone says. He and his team painted the kitchen blue, replaced some of its cabinetry with open shelving, and purchased an industrial counter and metallic chairs from an antiques store in Santa Barbara.

PHOTO: RAY MICKSHAW/FOX



BAR

Shirkes scoured antiques stores, eBay, Etsy, and countless other sources to dress the set eclectically. These characters “have a few nice things and other things that they found on the street,” she tells us. “So [the loft] doesn’t look like it was designed. It looks like three guys and a 30-year-old woman live here.”

PHOTO: RAY MICKSHAW/FOX



DINING ROOM

Even the mismatched chairs around the kitchen table were carefully planned. "I remember the day that we rolled that office chair up to the dining table," Whetstone recalls, "and we were like, 'Awesome! That's exactly what you would do if you were Nick or one of the guys.' You would find a chair on the street and bring it up to your loft."

PHOTO: RAY MICKSHAW/FOX



DRINKING

The gang prepares to play True American, the U.S. history drinking game they invented, around the dining table.

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DINING ROOM

"Some of our characters have money, and some of them don't," Whetstone says of the loft's scattered decor. "Just because you don't have money doesn't mean that you won't add things to the mix." To make the loft seem appropriately old, Whetstone reveals that he also "aged" the windows and paint by applying a formula similar to a tinted polyurethane to windows and walls. Pictured here is an awkward dinner with Jess, her father (Rob Reiner), and his new girlfriend (Kaitlin Olson).

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BEDROOM

Even four seasons into the series, Whetstone and Shirkes say they "don't put new things in the loft without running them by Liz first. She is very involved with the characters." Seen here is Schmidt's bedroom.

PHOTO: RAY MICKSHAW/FOX



BOOKCASE

Shirkes stocked the roommates' shelves with books purchased at inexpensive places like used bookstores and Goodwill. The set-design team spent more time handpicking board games that the characters might have held on to through several moves.

PHOTO: RAY MICKSHAW/FOX



BEDROOM

"Liz was very particular about Jess's bedroom and what that would look like," Shirkes says. "Since [Jess] taught science, we came up with the idea that she would collect sea pods. We also made it so it was filled with kind of crafty handmade things that either she had created or somebody else might have." Deschanel chimed in to request that her character also have shadow boxes in her bedroom.

PHOTO: RAY MICKSHAW/FOX



BEDROOM

Jess's bedding was a group project. Shirkes says she made Jess's bedspread with the top side featuring flowers against a black backdrop and the bottom side from a vintage fabric—both approved by Meriwether. Deschanel requested that Jess's sheets be swapped out for a more neutral color, leading to the ivory sheets currently on the bed. And Shirkes designed the pillow shams with ticking around the edges herself.