

# CONTRIBUTORS



## MARK RICKER

grew up in Colorado and North Carolina, where he began designing community theater and college productions. He discovered the Art Department in between handing out hot dogs to ballfield extras in *Bull Durham* while studying English at

UNC-Chapel Hill. In due order, Mark was interning for set decorator Jan Pascale and designer Tom Walsh on the original film version of *The Handmaid's Tale* in 1989. Production Designer David Gropman hired him to hold the other end of a tape measure, which led to further propping and set dressing gigs on *Once Around*, *Passion Fish* and *The Last of the Mohicans*. During a truce on a blackened mountaintop battlefield, Mark began application to NYU-Tisch and received an MFA in scenic design in 1995.

As a Set Designer and Art Director, Mark again worked for David Gropman, as well as Mark Friedberg and Jess Goncher on *The Shipping News*, *Kate & Leopold* and *Far From Heaven*. Ricker has since designed over 35 projects for film and television—including *Rustin*, *Bombshell*, *Snatched*, *Get on Up*, *The Judge*, *The Way Way Back*, *The Nanny Diaries*, *The Hoax*, *Prime*, *Sunshine State* and *The Ballad of Jack & Rose*.

He has received five nominations by the Art Directors Guild—for period projects *Julie & Julia*, *The Help*, *Trumbo*, *Halston* and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*—and three Emmy nominations for *Halston*, *You Don't Know Jack* and Ben Stiller's acclaimed limited series *Escape at Dannemora*.

He received an Academy Award nomination for *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* in 2021.

Mark's latest project is *Capote vs. The Swans*, the second season of *Feud* for Ryan Murphy Productions—directed by Gus Van Sant. He lives in New York City.



## SHAE SHATZ

Shae is a Senior Illustrator in the Art Directors Guild, Local 800. He resides in the Los Angeles area and has been a professional designer since 2007.

Shae graduated from Art Center College in Pasadena, California. He

received a bachelor of science in product design with distinction. After some time in automotive studios, he

relocated to Seattle to pursue his passion for making video games, working internally at 343 Industries. He enjoys developing stories that move audiences for film and games. When he is not in the office, Shae enjoys traveling, teaching and spending time with his family.

Clients:

Marvel Studios, Disney, Netflix, Sony, Lionsgate, 20th Century Fox, Columbia Pictures, 343 Industries, Monolith Productions, Honda R&D Americas, Audi Design Center, WB Interactive, Pubg and Midway Videogames.



## RYAN WARREN SMITH

is a Production Designer who grew up enamored by movies. When he was 7-years-old, he got a VHS copy of *Stand By Me* for Christmas and played it over and over. He grew up in Tempe, AZ, where he loved laughing with friends, skateboarding

and making amateur movies. He went to one semester of film school at a local Arizona community college before deciding to travel instead. He spend the next few years traveling and working odd jobs along the way before landing in Los Angeles, where he lived in

a tent in his brother's backyard while working as a production assistant.

Things changed when he became a personal assistant to music video director Wayne Isham, who pushed him to jump into the Art Department. Ryan then started as an art PA, before working his way up, working as a on-set dresser, propmaster, scenic, art coordinator, and Art Director before moving up to Production Design. Ryan moved to Oregon to get married and two years later, landed his first Production Design job on a film, *Wendy and Lucy*. From there he worked other small films until *Green Room* opened up his career to bigger budget projects. He lives happily with his wife, Kate, and two kids, Sunny and Jade, in Portland, Oregon.



## Finding Common Ground *THE HOLDOVERS*

BY RYAN WARREN SMITH, PRODUCTION DESIGNER



I grew up a huge Alexander Payne fan. I went and saw each of his movies over the years in the theater and always loved how he towed the line between heart and humor. My dad, who passed away a few years back, was a big fan of his movies as well. They were always something we could connect over, even when we didn't see eye-to-eye on other things. So, when I first interviewed with Alexander years ago, I was both excited and terrified to meet a hero, but within minutes, all that fell away and we were laughing like old friends. Our friendship was instant.

*The Holdovers* is one of those scripts that comes along once in a lifetime. Alexander and I met a few years before when prepping on a potential film to shoot. We got all the way through scouting when the plug got pulled on the film just three days before we were supposed to start shooting. We were heartbroken, to say the least. So, when Alexander sent me *The Holdovers* script a year later, I was so excited at the possibility of making something together. When I read the script, I laughed and teared up. I was deeply moved by the characters and by the strained relationship between Angus and his own father, which hit me on a personal level. David Hemingson's script was a thing of beauty, so layered with sentiment and laughter.

Alexander had yet to do a period film, and with period experience I had on season three of *True Detective*, I was very eager to put to work what I had learned. Alexander and I share the same thoughts on period films, that a lot feel exaggerated and cartoonish, so we very much wanted to do the opposite here and make the sets feel authentic and real above all else. Our main goal became to create a film that not only takes place in 1970, but to look like it had been made in 1970. So, Alexander, our incredible director of photography, Eigil Bryld, and I set out to only embrace techniques that were being used in 1970 and before. We also dove into watching our favorite films from the era and would often watch certain films over and over, especially the Hal Ashby films: *The Landlord* and *The Last*



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*Detail.* These films became our main resource for the look, feel and technical aspirations of the time. I quickly dove into research of Massachusetts boarding schools in the 1960s and '70s. I was then able to pull together a look book which we used as our guide before heading out on an initial week-long director's scout in Massachusetts to make sure we felt good about shooting there. Alexander is very much from the school of wanting to shoot in real places. He doesn't want to be on a sound stage. He thrives in real environments with real people, often casting real non-actor people in his films. A local location manager, Kai Quinlan, came on a few weeks before we headed out and put together some schools for us to look at. She did such a great job and we all had so much fun together driving around and visiting the schools.

We had a great week of scouting and decided it would be best to shoot the film in the state where it had been written for. The film's main obstacle was going to be COVID and the majority of the schools not wanting us to shoot while students were there. We would have to find what we needed and shoot it all within the school's winter break. We couldn't find one school that would fit all of our needs for our 1970 world, so we ended up shooting in five different schools/locations to complete our one school's look (Deerfield Academy, Groton, Northfield Mount Hermon, Saint Marks School and Fairhaven High School, respectively).

**A.** DOWNTOWN SHELburnE FALLS, MA STOREFRONT. SET PHOTO.

**B.** BILLBOARD DESIGNED BY NATE CARLSON, WHEATPASTE ON WOOD. SET PHOTO.

**C.** WINNING TICKET EXTERIOR. DOUBLE-SIDED LIT-UP SIGN DESIGNED BY NATE CARLSON. BUILT OF METAL AND PLEXIGLASS. SET PHOTO.

**D. & E.** WINNING TICKET INTERIOR SHOT ON LOCATION. SET PHOTOS.

**F.** RESEARCH IMAGES FROM LOOK BOOK.



Our budget was never big enough for what we were setting out to do, so I would need to fall back on tricks I had learned when I was making smaller films when I was first starting out. I would also need to hire crew with the understanding that we were going to be budgetarily challenged. I started with the trusty set decorator I've been working with since *True Detective* season three, Markus Wittmann. He is an incredible artist and human. One of the funniest, kindest and talented people I have ever met. There is nothing we can't do together. Next, I hired an Art Director I had worked with before, Jeremy Woolsey, who is so funny and bendable. We then hired a prop master Jeremy had just worked with, Peter Dancy, who also did picture cars, and has tons of period experience in both. We also had on Alexander's old friend and collaborator, Nate Carlson, to do graphics. Nate and Alexander have worked together for over twenty years and have a shorthand that proved to be invaluable. We rounded out the crew with local construction coordinator Peter Wilcox, charge scenic Julia Garrison and Set Designer Anthony Raymond. I've learned I work best in an

atmosphere that is based in encouragement and laughter, allowing each artist to have a voice, and feel free to add to the look. With a great crew in place, Alexander, Kai and I set out to build our world around Massachusetts. Alexander and I share the same filmmaking philosophy of creating with feeling and instinct and allowing ourselves to be open to change as needed and leading everything we do with kindness. It was very important to Alexander and I to spend a lot of time in the locations we chose, and absorb the spaces, and the people within them, this would inform what we would do in each.

### Set Dressing

I came up as a set dresser and on-set dresser and learned a tremendous amount in these positions. I've always loved the creative world building of characters in their environments. It's always been very important to me to have the right things around, and also interests of the past, in piles, as people do. Our set dressing team, led by set decorator Markus Wittmann and leadman Vinnie Leblanc, had their hands full on this one. We three

**A.** BARTON ACADEMY CREST. GRAPHIC LAYOUT BY NATE CARLSON.

**B.** HEADMASTER'S OFFICE. SHOT ON LOCATION AT SAINT MARK'S SCHOOL. SET PHOTO.

**C. & D.** PAUL'S CLASSROOM. SHOT ON LOCATION AT DEERFIELD ACADEMY, BOOKSHELF BUILT TO HIDE MODERN DOORS AND WHITEBOARD. SET PHOTOS.





had worked together before, so we proceeded as always: pre-dress everything and then clear the set for Markus and I to sit in each set. Often, we will just sit and talk for an hour, live in the room, laugh. We then get to it, moving things around together, take stuff away, holding things up for each other. It's a very hands-on approach, where we get to essentially feel in each room. That's where we lead with feeling and instinct—if it doesn't feel true to the character and story, then we will stay there all night until it does. The schedule often felt like a house of cards, as we were so stretched between multiple locations across the state, it felt like it could all fall apart at any moment. In the end, we were able to laugh our way through and juggle all the needs, and pour our hearts into each set, hoping that the audience would feel what we felt, all while hoping our work would stay somewhat invisible and non-obvious. It's very important to me that we never feel like we are within a set and never distracting from the story.

### Art Department

The creative world of the Art Department is such a happy place for me. Working with Art Directors, Set Designers, the hardworking coordinators and clearance coordinators. The film was very graphics-heavy. Nate had his hands full and was able to pull off his magic so well. He's really one of those guys who just gets the period and we had very few notes for him. His work is so strong and I'm so grateful that he helped me pull off the look of the film. The builds on this one were minimal. We didn't have any complete stage sets. Like I said before, Alexander wants to shoot in real places and also



wanted to stay true to the 1970s way of mostly location-based films. So, each of these places had some non-period element to hide or expand upon. For example, so many locations had updated vinyl windows that would need to be hidden with wood. Small things like that can be a dead giveaway so we were always on our toes making sure things were accurate to the time. Jeremy Woolsey and Peter Wilcox were so great at helping me stay on top of these details. Julia, and her incredible crew of scenics, were critical to getting the right colors and tones of the film and were key in making the multiple school locations feel like one school. What

**E. & F.** PAUL'S HOME OFFICE. SHOT ON LOCATION. KITCHEN AREA BUILD INTO EXISTING SUNROOM. SET PHOTO.

**G.** KITCHEN. SET PHOTO.

**H.** PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL. SET PHOTO.





we were able to do with paint was so perfect, and a good place to put the money, so we could get the look we wanted to achieve within the budget.

### Props and Picture Cars

Props and picture cars were so important for us to pull this off. Both Alexander and I were very vocal with our vision that we didn't want new

shiny-looking cars. We wanted to see wear and tear. Paul's car was very important as it's the only environment we see of his that is outside his apartment and classroom. It needed to feel used, but hopeful, as it eventually provides his escape from being stuck. Props needed to feel like the right item for the character, not the coolest-looking retro item. Pete Dancy and his team did a

**A.** ACADEMY PAYPHONE  
GRAPHICS BY NATE  
CARLSON.

**B.** STOREFRONT GRAPHIC  
LAYOUT BY NATE CARLSON.

**C.** MARY'S HOUSE, LIVING  
ROOM. SET PHOTO.

**D.** MARY'S HOUSE,  
BEDROOM. SET PHOTO.

**E.** BOWLING ALLEY. BAR  
BUILT INTO EXISTING  
LOCATION. SET PHOTO.





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great job finding the right 1960s props and cars. Pete and his team had a great eye for things that weren't too flashy, and cars that didn't feel too new or clean.

One of the funniest last-minute requests was for the period appropriate tube of Preparation H, which was a last-minute addition, but one that

sticks out and says a lot in the scene in which it is used.

By the end of the film, we got in such a groove. It felt like most of the crew was exhausted, but our hearts felt full. We all could sense we were making something special, and that we could all be proud of. In a time where there is so much division and darkness in our world, it's great to make

a film that highlights the importance of finding common ground. We need movies like this right now to remind us that we aren't alone, even when we feel like we are, and that's something I imagine my dad would agree with and be proud of seeing. Thank you to everyone who helped me pull this off, I am forever grateful and proud of what we accomplished. **ADG**

Ryan Warren Smith,  
Production Designer  
Jeremy Woolsey,  
Art Director  
Anthony Raymond,  
Set Designer  
Nate Carlson,  
Graphic Artist  
Markus Wittmann,  
Set Decorator

**F.** MRS. CRANE'S LIVING ROOM. SET PHOTO.

**G.** STREET WITH PICTURE CARS. STOREFRONT AND GARAGE PLUGS BUILT TO HIDE EMPTY MODERN GLASS STOREFRONTS. SET PHOTO.

**H.** MOTEL ROOM. SET PHOTO.

**I.** CHRISTMAS TREE LOT. SET PHOTO.



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