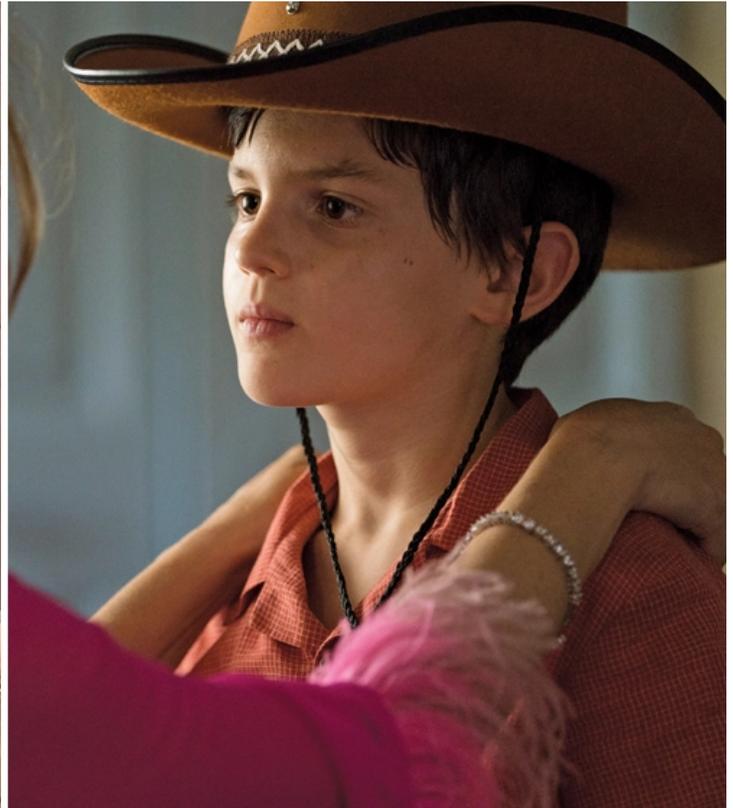
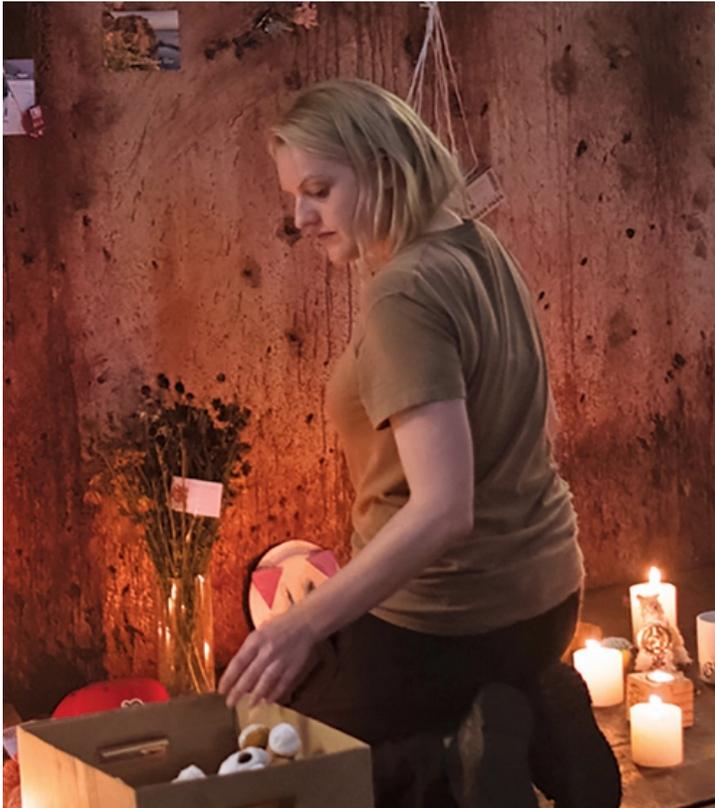


# Emmys: Artisans Up Their Game for High-Def Scrutiny

By [RANDEE DAWN](#)



CREDIT: COURTESY OF HULU/SHOWTIME

[Edward Berger](#) had been so careful. The Emmy-nominated director of all five episodes of Showtime limited series “Patrick Melrose” had taken a chance by casting a brown-eyed boy as the younger Melrose, who is played as an adult by blue-eyed Benedict Cumberbatch.

“We had a boy with blue eyes, but [Sebastian Maltz] felt like a stronger choice,” says Berger. So in post, Berger and his team tweaked his eye color to keep things consistent, and that should have been that. In the old days, nobody would have been the wiser.

That wasn’t enough, however. “Two people picked up on the change, and were very triumphant that they’d found an eye color mistake,” sighs Berger. “There are millions of people watching and some will stop at every frame to make sure they find something that doesn’t work so they can post about it online.”

They say the devil is in the details, and there are few places where that is more true than in the construction of modern TV series, with shifting financial, technological and social media landscapes leading to much more scrutinized television.

“In a TV series, or any production, you’re trying to create a world,” says [Richard Toyon](#), the Emmy-winning production designer of “Silicon Valley,” who’s also nominated this year. “You have sophisticated audiences who are watching, and if you don’t get it right, it blows up the scene, the comedy, the world.”

High-definition means visuals are now shown in sharper resolution, and 4K/6K has increased that exponentially.

“You can’t get away with a sloppy, half-assed version of a scenic finish, or a fabric that looks too new,” says Emmy-nominated [Todd Fjelsted](#), production designer on Netflix’s “GLOW.” He points to boxing posters used on the show. “Ten or 15 years ago, we’d have printed them in house.

Now we have to print photos on photo paper and posters on poster paper. Resolution has affected that, thanks to the higher-end cameras we’re working with now.”

For some, advances in digital technology have been a creative boon: “The ability to see exactly what you are photographing onscreen as you are shooting it has enabled many cinematographers to achieve a degree of subtlety and finesse in their work that was previously only achievable by the very best practitioners,” Emmy-nominated P.J. Dillon, DP on TNT’s “The Alienist,” says via email.

Sound departments also have to be aware of the wide range of speakers that audiences, who are already paying closer attention, might be listening through. Kenny Clark, Emmy-nominated supervising sound editor on Netflix’s “Black Mirror’s” “USS Callister” episode, notes that multichannel sound in both traditional and home theaters has required some changes.

“You have to up your game with how you use sound and how you place it and how much is available,” he says. “You sometimes wonder if people are going to appreciate the amount of effort you’re putting in.”

Meanwhile, Wylie Stateman and Eric Hoehn, Emmy-nominated co-supervising sound editors for the Netflix’s original limited series “Godless,” say they also take into account that audiences will listen in less-than-optimum conditions. “Some people are watching this content in bed at night,” says Hoehn.

“On an iPhone,” quips Stateman. “We know with VOD that we’re living in an environment where the volume isn’t going to be the same as a theater, or auditorium.”

But if there’s one development that resonates with artisans the most, it’s audience expectations. TV’s ongoing golden age has meant a whole generation has grown up with the equivalent of small-screen movies, the technology to parse them closely, and platforms on which to communally pull it apart at the seams.

“You’re seeing very fine detail,” says [Kari Skogland](#), Emmy-nominated for her directing on Hulu’s “The Handmaid’s Tale.” “We’re making little movies because audience expectations have come up. So we’re pressured to make sure we deliver.”

“Everyone’s a critic, and I think people are harsher critics nowadays,” says Emmy-nominated [Selina MacArthur](#), editor on “USS Callister.” “People are more aware of pace than they used to be — so you have to keep things moving without crunching the story too hard.”

But not all artisans shy away from public examination of their efforts; “Silicon Valley’s” Toyon “religiously” reads the sub-Reddit devoted to his show to find out “what mistakes I’ve made or what they’re thinking about.”

Despite knowing millions of eyes are on him, “GLOW’s” Fjelsted says he resists changing what he does to please specific viewers. “But I get leery about having too much input from people who aren’t aware of what’s going on in the story,” he says. “I want to stay as focused on character as a designer. I try to stay in the world of what writers and directors are doing.”

With the bar for success, or failure, so high these days, it’s as if below-the-liners have millions of individual bosses, all looking for that one missed blue-eyed moment. That means it’s up to the artisans themselves to find a way to balance on that narrow, elevated tightrope.

“We, as creators of this craft, are obligated to push ourselves to improve this content and adjust our methods in order to comply,” says Emmy-nominated “Alienist” production designer [Mara LePere-Schloop](#) via email. “We are artists, but we are also providing a product — and we have to be responsive to the desires of our clientele.”

### Tipsheet

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When: Sept. 8 and 9

Where: Microsoft Theater, Los Angeles

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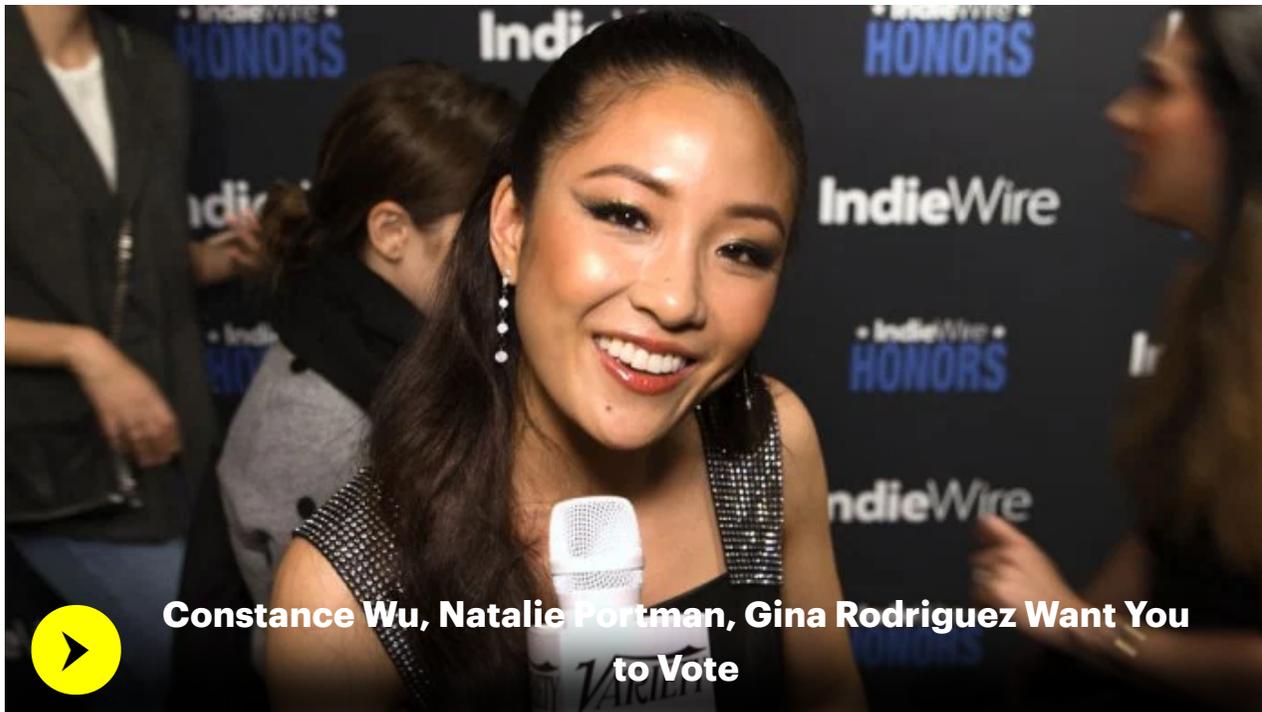
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