

The Secret References to Insane Asylums and Old Hollywood in Netflix's 'Ratched'

The design of the new Netflix series includes some carefully placed Easter eggs.

BY ADAM RATHE

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SAIEED ADYANI/NETFLIX

When production designer Judy Becker began working on *Ratched*, the Netflix series about the origins of the twisted nurse made famous in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, she knew where the character had ended

up, but had to determine where she started.

“Of course, I had seen [the 1975 film version of] *Cuckoo’s Nest* before and I watched it again, but I knew nothing about the direction Ryan [Murphy, the series producer] wanted to go in when I first started the job,” she says. “I did a lot of research on what asylums looked like in the time period, so I felt very prepared in that way, and I was thinking along the lines of the film’s gritty realism. But at our first meeting, Ryan said forget about *Cuckoo’s Nest*, I don’t want it to look anything like that.”

Instead, the series creates a stylish 1940s world in Northern California that nods to the glamour of Old Hollywood as well as classic horror and noir. While Becker says she didn’t hide any homages to the *Cuckoo’s Nest* film in *Ratched*—“I wish that I had, but it would have been hard because *Cuckoo’s Nest* is very realistic”—there are plenty of Easter eggs that eagle-eyed fans might spot. What are they and what do they mean?

Location, Location, Location



Lucia State Hospital in the Netflix series *Ratched* was inspired in part by the stately Arrowhead Springs Hotel in San Bernardino, California.

SAEED ADYANI/NETFLIX

The series' Lucia State Hospital was meant to evoke a kind of Golden Age opulence, despite the horror taking place inside. "Ryan wanted the psychiatric hospital to look like a hotel that had been turned into a hospital," Becker says. "I got this idea that this hospital wasn't a gritty, depressing asylum but instead something unique with a bit of glamour; the patients would seem almost like hotel guests."

After looking at what Becker says was "the entire state of California," the production homed in on the Arrowhead Springs Hotel in San Bernardino, a stately old resort built by Paul Williams and decorated by Dorothy Draper. "It was so awe-inspiring and impressive," Becker says, "that even before we got up there, I thought, this has got to be it." Unfortunately, the location wasn't available, but *Ratched* did the next best thing. "We ended up building the set on a stage," Becker says. "It was the biggest set I've ever built; it was huge. As great as the original location was, we could custom tailor this to all the needs of the story and also control it. Finding that location was so inspiring for the look of the series."

A History of Horror



The green curtains, seen here on *Ratched*, were inspired by those in Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*.

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While the realism of the 1975 *Cuckoo's Nest* film helps convey the terror of its story, *Ratched* exists in a universe slightly less rooted in reality. With that in mind, Becker looked to some of the show's most frightening forebears for inspiration.

"There are secret Hitchcock references all over," she says. "One is the curtains in Nurse Ratched's motel room. They're a kind of fluorescent green, and that was something I saw in *Vertigo* when Kim Novak is in her character's crummy apartment and the curtains are green from the neon light outside. It was such an amazing shade and gave such an eerie look to the room. Ryan loved it, so we got tons of sheer green samples and we had a whole test process of stringing them up and lighting them from the back to see which glowed most like the green in *Vertigo*."

Coast to Coast



Some of the hospital rooms in *Ratched* are named for cabins near Provincetown, MA—a subtle nod from the production designer to producer Ryan Murphy's fondness for the town.

While *Ratched* takes place in Northern California, small moments in the series also pay tribute to a destination clear across the country: Cape Cod. Knowing Murphy’s fondness for Provincetown, MA, and with her own history in the area, Becker worked sly references to the area into the series. “Ryan has a house in Provincetown, and I’ve been coming to Truro my whole life,” she explains. “On the road to Provincetown, there’s a group of cottages called the Days Flower Cottages, and each cottage has a name—Zinnia, Larkspur, Begonia, Poppy. We took those names of the cottages and used them for a lot of the rooms in the hospital. That was an homage to Ryan.

Checking In!



Scenes at the motel where characters on *Ratched* live were shot at the Lucia Lodge in Big Sur, California.

While the story *Ratched* tells takes place in Northern California, at least one of the series' locations was actually in Los Angeles. Dawnridge, the former home of designer Tony Duquette, played home to Lenore Osgood, the character played by Sharon Stone—and the house was no stranger to the actress. Not only did *T&C* shoot Stone at Dawnridge for **the cover of our October issue**, but the actress also happens to be a neighbor and was a friend of the late Duquette, even posing for a *T&C* story with him back in 1999.

“I was there the first day of shooting there when Sharon walked on set and it was just magic,” Becker says. “She fit into that environment so well. The way it was originally scripted, it was a different kind of fancy house. But when the ability to shoot there came up, it was a no brainer.”

Ratched and the Chocolate Factory



The Lucia State Hospital's subterranean prison was actually filmed on location in Los Angeles at a defunct chocolate factory.

SAEED ADYANI/NETFLIX

When it came time to build a jail cell for the basement of *Ratched*'s hospital, the team working on the series decided to get creative. “We thought since this hospital used to be a hotel and has been repurposed,” Becker says, “so perhaps an auditorium became an operating theater, or a wine cellar became a prison. And that got put into a script.”

Scenes at the motel where characters on *Ratched* live were shot at the Lucia Lodge in Big Sur, California.

SAEED ADYANI/NETFLIX

While the set for Lucia State Hospital ended up being built on a soundstage, one real-life inspiration for the series did make it on screen. “One of my favorite sets is the motel in Lucia, where Nurse Ratched stays,” Becker says. “The exterior is a real place just south of Big Sur. It’s called the Lucia Lodge and it’s on a cliff over the ocean. It’s amazing looking and when we saw it, I thought about *Psycho* when she drives to the creepy motel in the middle of nowhere—I just knew we had to shoot there.

A New Dawn



Sharon Stone's character on *Ratched* lives at Dawnridge, the L.A. home of designer Tony Duquette. In real life, Stone's a neighbor of the legendary property—and shot her October 2020 *T&C* cover there.

SAEED ADYANI/NETFLIX

The production didn't have to build a wine cellar prison from scratch but happened upon a former chocolate factory in Downtown L.A. where they built jail cells and installed a wall of old wine racks. Another floor in the building helped with inspiration as well.






“On the third floor of the building the chocolate factory was in, there was an old doctor's office,” Becker explains. “This doctor had practiced hydrotherapy,” an alternative medical therapy used as torture in *Ratched*, “so we went up there and there were still booths with the tubs in them. It was pretty creepy—and how bizarre to be in the same building we were shooting in.”

The series didn't end up shooting hydrotherapy scenes there, but the location did inspire the set its team built. “It was inspiring in that it confirmed a lot of what I had seen in research, but what we built was much grander,” Becker says. “But some of the tile and detail work was influenced by what I saw. That set does for baths what *Psycho* did for showers.”

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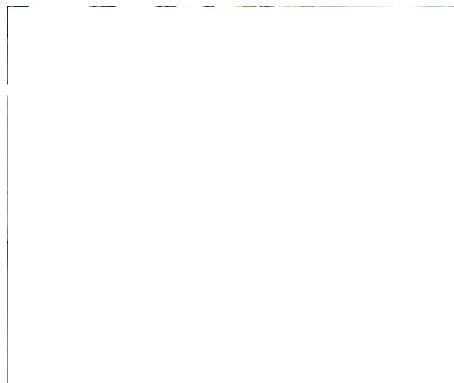


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