Korey Michael Washington of Culver City, California has designed environments and scenery for award shows, special events, theatre, film and tours over 19 years. Mr. Washington has presented his design work in over 50 venues, arenas and theatres around the country including the Nokia theatre, The Kennedy Center, Los Angeles Theatre Center, The Alliance Theatre, The Robert Ferst Center, Seven Stages, Madison Square Garden, The Fox Theatre, The Kodak Theatre, The Dallas Theatre Center and the Universal Amphitheater to name a few. As a Production Designer for many popular and successful productions including Kevin Hart: Laugh at My Pain, Shaquille O'Neal's All Star Comedy Jam, MTV's Teen Wolf, The Kings of Comedy and The House of Payne for TPS Studios. Mr. Washington has also served as the Art Director for Drop Dead Diva on Lifetime and Blue Collar TV on the WB. Mr. Washington's film credits include: Get Low, Stomp the Yard 2, Sister Act 2, The Original Kings of Comedy, Trois 2 Pandora's Box and Motives. Mr. Washington has received his B.A. from Morehouse College and the MFA from the University of Georgia in Scenic Design Technology. Mr. Washington is also the proud instructor and technical director of design for Tri-Cities High School. Mr. Washington is the owner of Production Strategies and Design Group, a full service production design firm. Mr. Washington is pleased and honored to be married to Tracey for 22 years and the father to Clark, Jason and Andrew the inspiration in his life.

Interview: Korey Washington, Production & Scenic Designer, Belle's

Q: What is your title?

A: I am a production designer for television and film. I am responsible for everything that is seen on the screen, with the exception of the performer's wardrobe and special effects that are edited in later. Every chair, prop, picture on a wall, plant, basically anything you see is something that the production designer's team has chosen or designed. My team also includes art directors and set designers. Our job is to visually meet the vision of the producers and director and to choose design that

helps to bring value to the scene or to authenticate the set. And it all must be deigned and chosen to meet the production budget.

Q: What path (education and experience) led you to your current job?

A: I have always loved design. I did set design on the plays and productions at my high school. My mother wanted me to go to a historically black college so I chose Moorehouse College in Atlanta where I received a degree in mass communications, with a minor in drama. While I was there, I began to work in a regional theatre as a stagehand. A lot of top designers were coming through the theatre and I started doing a lot of design production. My first television experience was designing the set for an HBO special for the comedian Sinbad. I really caught the bug. I started out as a set designer for theatre. Then I moved to art direction for film. Then to production design for film. Then to art direction for television. Finally, I became and still am a production designer for both television and film.
I knew I wanted to be able to teach at the college level in addition to my own work so I received a Masters Degree in Fine Arts from the University of Georgia. I was actually the first African American to be part of the University of Georgia's Masters program.

Q: Can you speak specifically about some of the design challenges you had with *Belle's*?

A: The executive producer wanted to shoot *Belle's* at a working restaurant rather than building the restaurant on a set. Using a real restaurant was great from an authenticity perspective, but it presented some significant design challenges. My team spent four weeks looking at the set from an engineering perspective. We had to make significant changes to the building to turn a Mediterranean restaurant into a soul food restaurant, while creating space for camera equipment, lighting adjustments, and background space. And we couldn't mess with any existing code violations.

The restaurant really had to be re-engineered to accommodate shooting. We started out by drawing out the entire restaurant to scale by hand. Then, we redesigned the layout of the space deciding which walls had to be removed or altered to accommodate the camera equipment movement. For example, a standard camera dolly is 32' wide by 56" long. There were some spaces in the restaurant that had to be recreated in the banquet hall as a swing set (temporary set) because we couldn't fit the camera in the room. One example is Bill's office. This involved digital image duplication and scenic measurements to the exact detail for authenticity.

I really wanted everything in *Belle's* to look authentic. I had a soul food chef cook all the food to make sure that everything looked authentic and to ensure that everything she would need was there in the kitchen. This is called "food styling." She

had to double everything she made since they often replace the food as they film a new take. The props in each take need to look exactly the same so it all looks like one scene when edited together.

Another tricky thing about *Belles'* is that it's filmed in California, but it's supposed to take place in Atlanta, Georgia. So we had to make all the exteriors of the restaurant and surrounding streets in San Pedro, California look like they were in Georgia. The first approach is to gather research that shows the exterior images of Atlanta. The most crucial continuity issue is foliage. Palm trees throughout San Pedro had to be avoided by the angle that the scene was shot or we had to digitally edit the offending trees from the shot.

Scheduling for *Belle's* is also tricky because we are working with a child actor who can only work for four hours a day. So I must build and have the sets and lighting ready at four in the morning if she starts work at 7. When this happens, we have to pay overtime to some of the team so that impacts the budget.

Q: What advice would you give students who want to pursue a career in set design?

A: Set design is all about creating environments. Every commercial and show have been designed. My first advice is to keep drawing. I am not what you would call a fine artist, but I used to sit in church and try to duplicate what I saw. Copying something ultimately became the basis for the way I think about design. Sometimes I still need to put things on paper to be able to see them. I am a more technical designer, like a sketcher that uses measurements. I also encourage students to think about how things are built by breaking down something as simple as a remote control or a lamp or a television to see how the design comes together. Look in your world and pick it apart. Create environments in art class or computer class. I started out as a hand designer but now I do a lot of CAD (computer assisted design) because that's what my clients want. Make sure you take art classes, design classes, computer classes, and accounting!

Q: What is the best part of your job and the biggest challenge?

A: My job is to take a production to where it's supposed to be and give the sense that everything you see on camera is real, so the best part of my job is when no one notices what I do. They think it is all real! The biggest challenge is making the art that I do match the budget that I am given.