

SETA

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DIANA CHAN

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DESIGNS ON THE SETS

*Architect **Argya Sadan** reinvented herself to become a rising production designer in Hollywood*

BINDU GOPAL RAO

What is common to “Ms. Marvel,” HBO Max series “Winning Time: The Rise of The Lakers Dynasty,” “Don’t Worry Darling,” “Daisy Jones and The Six” and “The Killer”? Well, Argya Sadan. The production designer for all these shows recalls how she, a woman of color, found fame in Hollywood.

DOWN MEMORY LANE

Sadan recalls that she always had

a strong interest in designing spaces. As a young girl, when her father asked her what they could do with a plot of land they had in Bangalore, her mind came alive.

“I jumped at the opportunity to help design the house we would move into,” Sadan said. “From then on, I knew I wanted to focus my career on designing spaces.” That led her to a bachelor’s in architecture from Ramaiah School of Architecture in Bangalore.

“I interned at architecture firms and



PHOTO CREDIT: MARVEL

A Pakistani setting from Ms Marvel

enjoyed the work, but, honestly, felt somewhat stifled in my creativity,” she said. “Designing homes and office buildings became a bit of a rote routine, and I longed for the opportunity to create worlds that might be more fantastical or set in a different time or place.”

The sets of the iconic film “Pride and Prejudice,” set in Victorian England, had always piqued her curiosity. With some research, she found out some fascinating details about production design. She applied to production design programs in the U.S. and was admitted to the American Film Institute, one of the top schools in the U.S.

HOLLYWOOD CALLING

As a relatively young woman of color, Sadan had to do more to prove her professional design opinion was worth heeding, to and to do work that everyone was satisfied with.

“It has been a journey and I’m still learning new things in film every day as every project I take on is so unique,.” she said. As production designers, every element needs to convey to the audience who the characters are, their backgrounds and intentions, all the while not distracting from the narrative. The colors and textures of the space, and the decor the

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A motel room from the sets of Winning Time

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INDIA INSPIRED

Since Sadan grew up as an Indian in Singapore and spent much of her youth traveling across Asia, she was always informed by diverse traditions.

“I have always had a curiosity for other cultures and a desire to tell stories of people from different backgrounds,” she said. “I always jump at opportunities to design sets that tell global stories, including the upcoming “Ms. Marvel” about Kamala Khan, Marvel’s first Muslim woman superhero. For that project, I was fortunate enough to design some sets inspired by locations in South Asia. It felt great to be connected to the show that way – bringing to life scenes I grew up seeing in India. It also feels wonderful being a part of an historic project featuring Marvel’s first South Asian, Muslim woman superhero.” Sadaan does much research to understand the authentic feel of a time and place and usually goes on location and speaks to people

who have been in that specific world.

PROJECT PROFILE

One of her latest projects was the HBO Max series “Winning Time: The Rise Of The Lakers Dynasty.” It tells the story of the Los Angeles Lakers basketball team led by Magic Johnson and paints a picture of America in the 1970s and 80s and reimagines the National Basketball Association as it was then.

“I had a great time designing the forum, the legendary arena where the Lakers played,” Sadan said. “It was a remarkable and rewarding challenge recreating a space that sat 17,000 people on a tiny stage in downtown Los Angeles. One of the most challenging components was bringing in the energy of intense games and the excitement of rabid basketball fans even though we had limited stage space and could only fit 500 background actors.”

Sadan is working on the soon to be released Olivia Wilde’s psychological thriller, “Don’t Worry Darling,” “The Rock ‘N’ Roll Miniseries,” “Daisy Jones and The Six (based on Taylor Jenkins Reid’s bestselling novel) and David Fincher’s “The Killer” (adapted from Alexis Nolent’s graphic novel series of the same name.”

“These projects have been an eclectic mix. Each project has its own set of challenges, most of which are fun and involve creative problem solving,” Sadan said. “We are tasked with trying to achieve certain artistic goals but must do so within a limited budget and timeline. That said, I believe a good design comes through the rules and restrictions placed on it, constraints force creativity.”

THE FUTURE NATURALLY LOOKS EXCITING.

“I have always been very careful not to get stuck in one genre,” Sadan said. “I am excited to continue stretching into a wider variety of genres, working with people who inspire me and who I look up to and, most importantly, to do a project in Bollywood in the next few years.”



Stills from Ms Marvel

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