

2024 **ADG** AWARDS CONSIDERATION

the TOAST



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DYLAN KAHN
PRODUCTION DESIGNER

Earlier this year, I had the pleasure of designing spots for the NBA Finals, collaborating with Director Dave Laden and my friend, 2nd Unit Director Christopher Gruse.

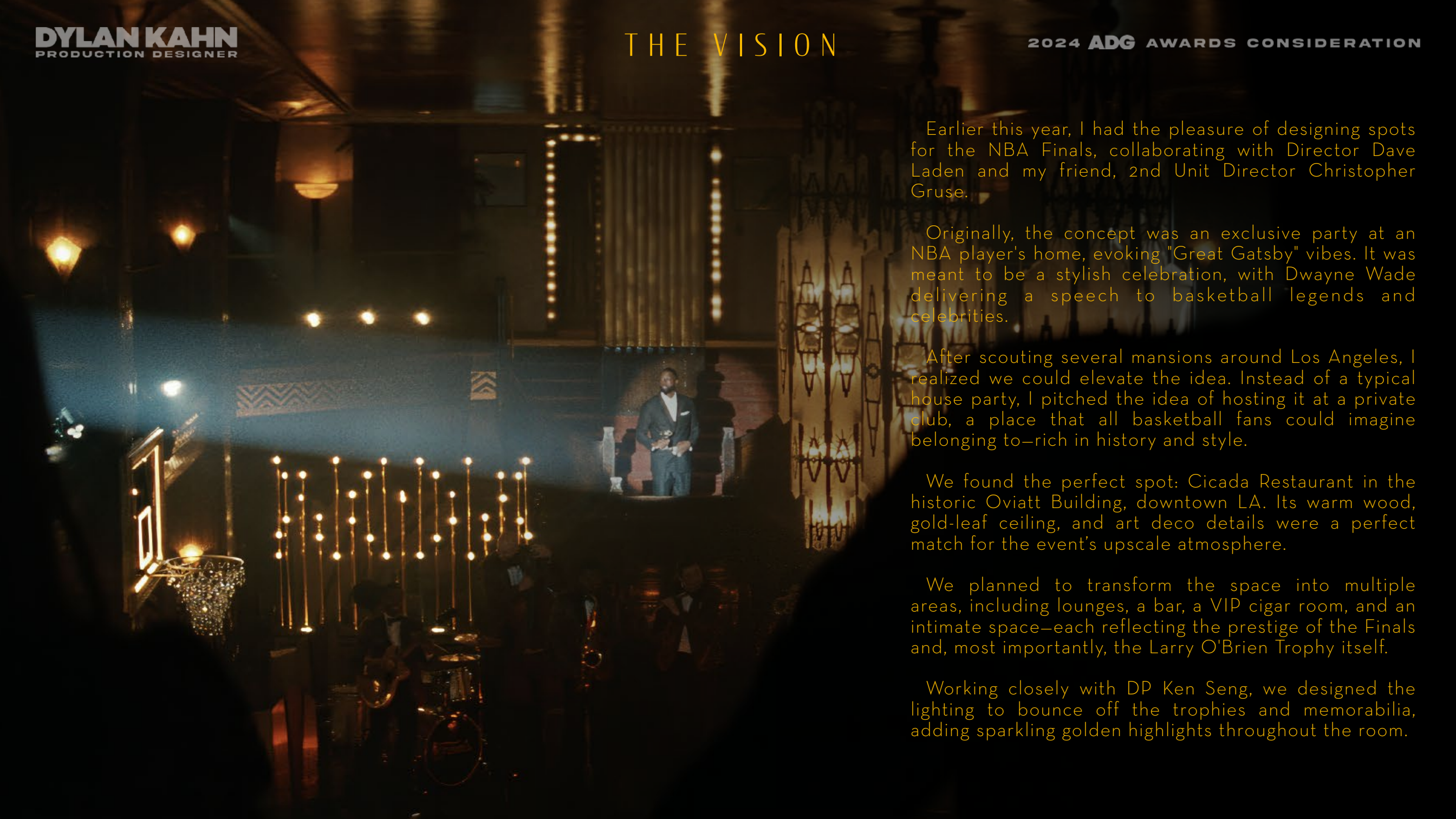
Originally, the concept was an exclusive party at an NBA player's home, evoking "Great Gatsby" vibes. It was meant to be a stylish celebration, with Dwayne Wade delivering a speech to basketball legends and celebrities.

After scouting several mansions around Los Angeles, I realized we could elevate the idea. Instead of a typical house party, I pitched the idea of hosting it at a private club, a place that all basketball fans could imagine belonging to—rich in history and style.

We found the perfect spot: Cicada Restaurant in the historic Oviatt Building, downtown LA. Its warm wood, gold-leaf ceiling, and art deco details were a perfect match for the event's upscale atmosphere.

We planned to transform the space into multiple areas, including lounges, a bar, a VIP cigar room, and an intimate space—each reflecting the prestige of the Finals and, most importantly, the Larry O'Brien Trophy itself.

Working closely with DP Ken Seng, we designed the lighting to bounce off the trophies and memorabilia, adding sparkling golden highlights throughout the room.





Given the very compressed schedule and the limited availability of talent, we adopted a production approach that involved three camera units, along with a stills and social media unit, all working simultaneously.

We utilized both the Cicada space and the historic Oviatt residence for their beauty and scale. To transform these locations, decorator Gail Otter and I removed all the existing furniture, giving us a blank canvas to create our own spaces.

Gail and her team dressed both floors of the 15,000-square-foot restaurant and completely redecorated the historic residence. With six trucks full of furniture, she framed dozens of iconic basketball photographs and sourced more trophies than I knew existed.

Together, we created a bandstand, three distinct lounges, and even an apartment within the space—each featuring a unique blend of contemporary, traditional, and deco styles to elevate the overall look. While gold was our dominant tone, we balanced it by complementing the wood paneling with a warm palette of browns, oranges, and reds.



To create a place for the crowd to toast our speaker, we transformed the space below the stairs and in front of the bandstand into a dance floor. This also gave us a great opportunity to incorporate a basketball element—we designed a small court in the space, adding gold lines and a subtle NBA logo to the parquet flooring.

We carefully attached two deco-themed, illuminated backboards with crystal nets to the existing 24-inch carved mahogany beams. The backboards were designed to complement the original 1920s gold-leaf motif soffits, blending seamlessly with the architecture of the room.

To make the gold-plated hoop and crystal nets stand out, I chose black for the backboards. They were made by routing V-grooves into stacked layers of flame-polished black plexiglass, which were glued together to create a dimensional pattern. Above the hoop, we designed a recessed channel with integrated LED lights to give the crystal nets maximum sparkle.

The backboards were then framed in custom gold baroque frames. Assistant Art Director Lisa Mastroianni oversaw the creation of the crystal nets, each made with hundreds of hand-strung crystals. The connection strings were crafted from handmade, bejeweled necklaces. These hoops flanked the stage like iconic, sparkling bookends.





To enhance the warmth and sparkle throughout the space, we added lamps and gold fixtures wherever possible, creating a cohesive and radiant atmosphere.

Gold-painted towers were constructed to hold trophies and display historical and collector basketballs. We also fabricated additional elements in gold, including paneling with a dazzle pattern and the bandstand itself.



The Larry O'Brien Trophy is not only an iconic symbol of the Finals but also served as a central theme for our spots. We aimed to incorporate its shapes and the multiple layers of gold throughout the design, from wallpaper to napkins to set dressing.

To elevate the experience, we fabricated an ice bar and a Larry O'Brien-themed sculpture using ice and acrylic, along with basketball-shaped ice bowls and balls-shaped ice cubes.

During the shoot, the Finals logo on the bar was chipped off, as the client was uncertain whether the league would approve it. To address this, we built two bars and two sculptures to replace the sections as they melted. The bar itself measured 7' wide, 40" tall, and 6" thick, all crafted from ice and installed during the shoot.







Our director conceived the idea of creating something more textural and artistic. What we created was a projection gallery, where we could not only highlight some of the most memorable moments in the finals' history, but also project them over the party attendees as a metaphor that these moments are part of all of us.

Rather than going for a crisp image, I aimed for something more dreamlike, as memories often are...

Using two long and two short-throw projectors, we were able to project this loop onto textured green velvet curtains to add more texture and desaturate the image.

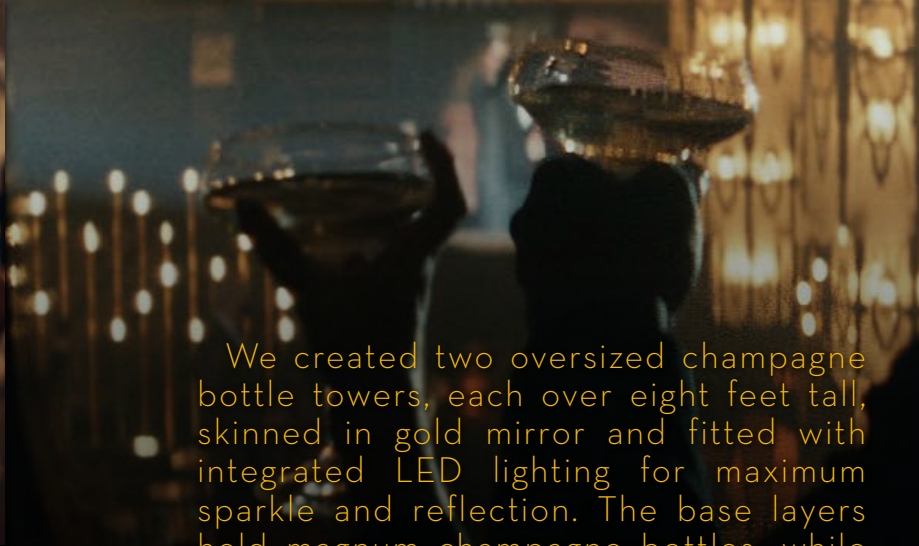


We created so many subtle cues and Easter eggs that were a fun challenge. As often happens, many didn't make the cut, but I'm so happy this one did.

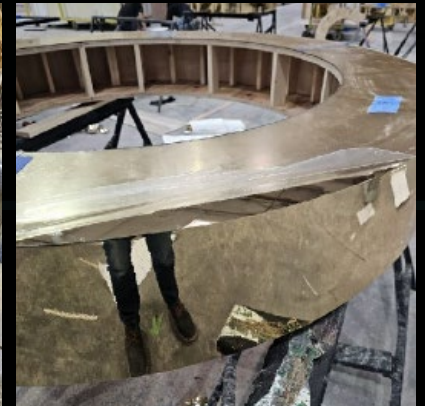
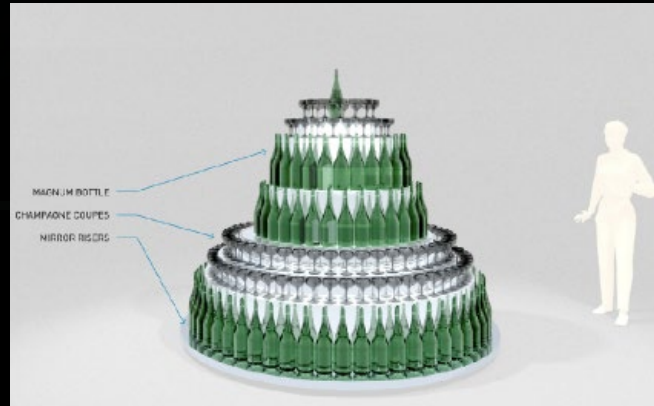
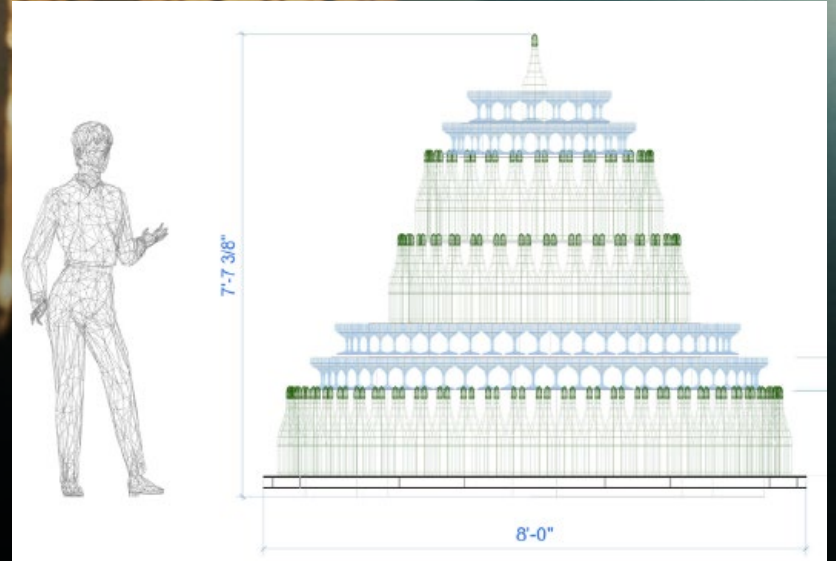
It was my favorite piece: the door knocker used by Mr. Ken Jeong, produced by the talented John Merritt of the Merritt Studio.

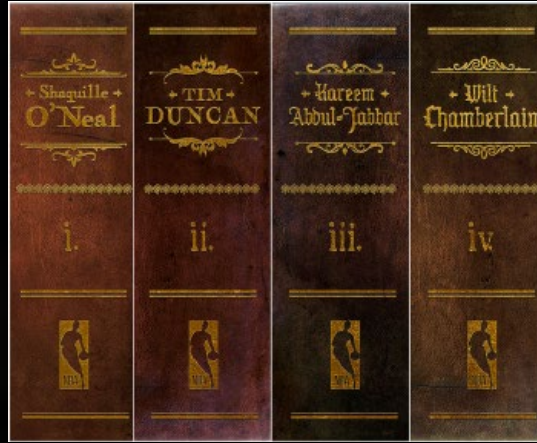
This piece was part hand-sculpted and part 3D-printed, then sanded to a perfect finish, gold-plated, reassembled, and mounted to a panel to become a functional knocker—with a basketball on the knocker itself.





We created two oversized champagne bottle towers, each over eight feet tall, skinned in gold mirror and fitted with integrated LED lighting for maximum sparkle and reflection. The base layers held magnum champagne bottles, while the upper levels supported several hundred crystal champagne coupes.





As mentioned before, there were many hidden easter eggs—some visible, some more discreet. Graphic designer Lori West created custom leather-bound books, each volume celebrating the skills of legendary players in the league's storied history. These books were displayed on a custom wood cabinet crafted specifically for that shot.



Additionally, a step-and-repeat entryway and a custom carpet were designed, though they didn't make it into the final cut.

This project was challenging but incredibly rewarding, made possible by assembling an extraordinary team—a team I've been fortunate to collaborate with for many years.

While I've never been a sports fan, I truly admire the discipline, hard work, and focus that professional sports demand. Much like basketball, our work is also a team sport—it's all about teamwork. Thanks to the dedication of our team, this one was a slam dunk!

I hope you enjoy this as much as I do. So, I'd like to raise a glass and toast all of us and our teams in the Art Department!

Thank you for looking and for your consideration!



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CHRISTOPHER GRUSE - 2ND UNIT DIRECTOR

KEN SENG - DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

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GAIL OTTER - SET DECORATOR

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ART DIRECTORS GUILD