

“A NOIR FOR OUR ERA...”

THE NEW YORKER

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BY SARAH E. JENSEN
Metro Writer

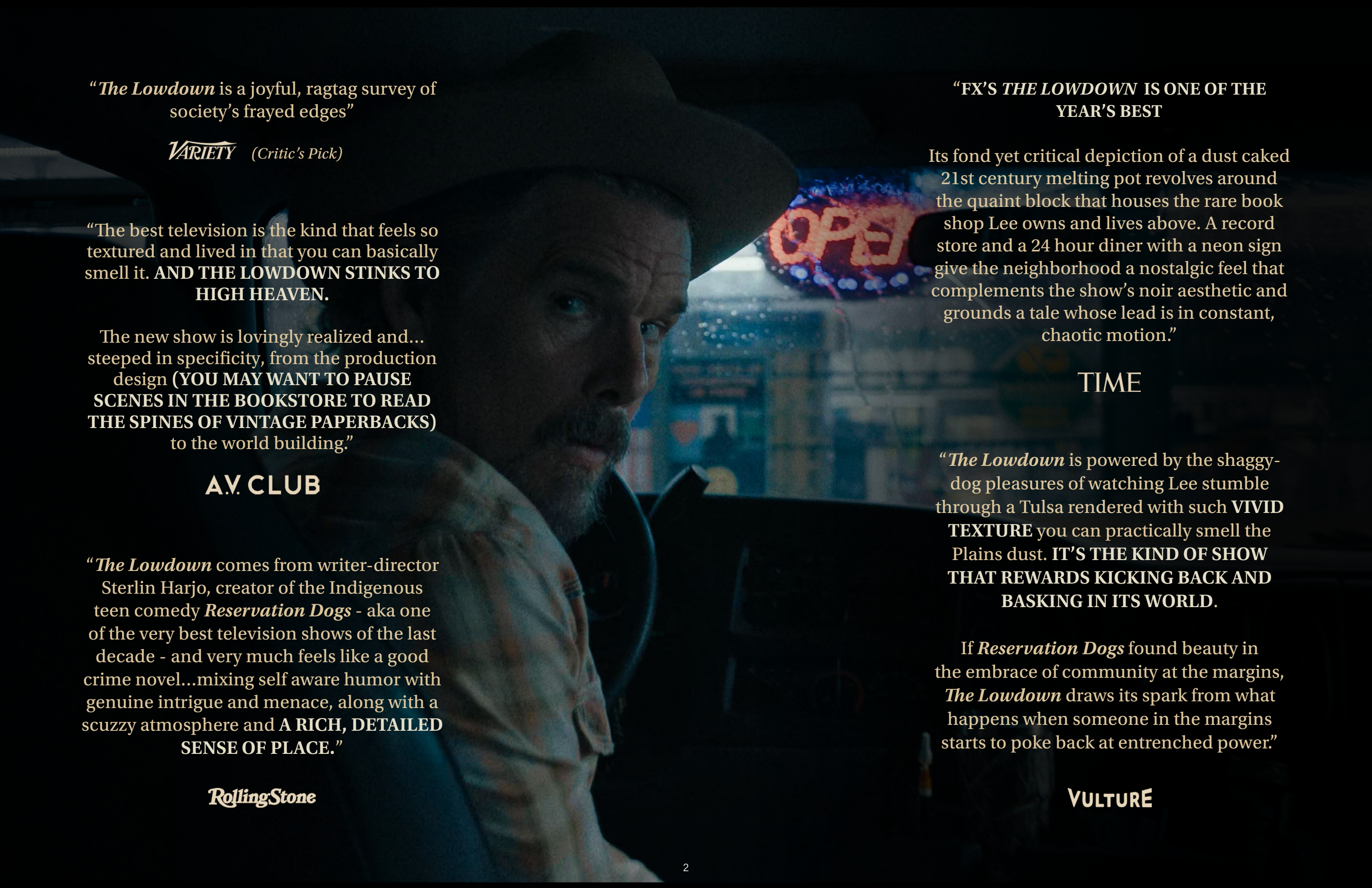
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Washberg, an eccentric
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THE LOWDOWN

PRODUCTION DESIGNER BRANDON TONNER-CONNOLLY
ART DIRECTOR ANDY EKLUND
SET DECORATOR TAFV SAMPSON
ASSISTANT ART DIRECTORS BRYNNA NORVELL, MARLEENA "MARS" FEEHERY
GRAPHIC DESIGNERS JESSICA SANCHEZ, SARAH JENSEN, MEGAN GREYDANUS
ILLUSTRATOR MARY HAYES
SET DESIGNER SHANA BURNS
CONCEPT ARTIST KATSUYA IMAI

OSAGE
HILLS

A man with a beard and a cowboy hat is looking out of a window. In the background, a neon sign with the word "OPEN" in red and blue letters is visible. The scene is dimly lit, suggesting a nighttime setting.

"The Lowdown is a joyful, ragtag survey of society's frayed edges"

VARIETY (Critic's Pick)

"The best television is the kind that feels so textured and lived in that you can basically smell it. **AND THE LOWDOWN STINKS TO HIGH HEAVEN.**

The new show is lovingly realized and... steeped in specificity, from the production design (**YOU MAY WANT TO PAUSE SCENES IN THE BOOKSTORE TO READ THE SPINES OF VINTAGE PAPERBACKS**) to the world building."

A.V. CLUB

"The Lowdown comes from writer-director Sterlin Harjo, creator of the Indigenous teen comedy *Reservation Dogs* - aka one of the very best television shows of the last decade - and very much feels like a good crime novel...mixing self aware humor with genuine intrigue and menace, along with a scuzzy atmosphere and **A RICH, DETAILED SENSE OF PLACE.**"

RollingStone

"FX'S THE LOWDOWN IS ONE OF THE YEAR'S BEST

Its fond yet critical depiction of a dust caked 21st century melting pot revolves around the quaint block that houses the rare book shop Lee owns and lives above. A record store and a 24 hour diner with a neon sign give the neighborhood a nostalgic feel that complements the show's noir aesthetic and grounds a tale whose lead is in constant, chaotic motion."

TIME

"The Lowdown is powered by the shaggy-dog pleasures of watching Lee stumble through a Tulsa rendered with such **VIVID TEXTURE** you can practically smell the Plains dust. **IT'S THE KIND OF SHOW THAT REWARDS KICKING BACK AND BASKING IN ITS WORLD.**

If *Reservation Dogs* found beauty in the embrace of community at the margins, *The Lowdown* draws its spark from what happens when someone in the margins starts to poke back at entrenched power."

VULTURE



The Lowdown is the story of Lee Raybon (Ethan Hawke), a used bookstore owner and self-described “Truthstorian”, committed to digging up and reporting on the hidden workings of power, often to his own detriment. Lee’s character is inspired by a real friend of Director Sterlin Harjo, Lee Roy Chapman, a part-time journalist and Tulsa legend. Lee Roy’s crowning achievement was meticulously researching and writing a story that forced the city to reevaluate the legacy of one of its modern founding fathers, Tate Brady. He proved that Brady played an active role in the Tulsa Race Massacre, prompting the city to remove his name from the Tate Brady district, the Brady theater, and reckon with its own concealed history. Lee Roy unfortunately passed away in 2015.

For us, telling Lee’s story meant grounding the visual world of the show in the truth of Tulsa, creating a very specific, strong sense of place. We always have a philosophy, which we honed on *Reservation Dogs*, that we care just as much about the experience of the people who are going to be in the space (the director, the actors, the emotionally invested crew, the community members who are going to drop by) as we do about what ends up on camera. As on *Reservation Dogs*, we felt like we were being trusted by a community to tell their story and so if we could include one small detail that would matter to one person who was going to step onto that set, we had to make it happen. It helps us remember to keep everything as specific to our show as possible and to create a seamless world for the director and actors and crew to get lost in and make art.

We love making our jobs harder by sourcing locally because it ultimately gets the interesting pieces, textures, and ideas that create our world. It also puts money back into the community, which is a major priority.

COLOR PALLETTE



“The Lowdown has a brown toned palette that nods to the New Hollywood era and helps collapse the past and the present.”

THE NEW YORKER

Tulsa, at the intersection of the American south and mid-west, is hot as hell during the summer and freezing cold during the winter. **We wanted the color palette to reflect months of never-ending direct sunlight tempered by months of ice storms with a focus on browns, yellows, and deep reds that showed off the texture and wear of our Dust Bowl noir world.**

The timelessness of the color palette, always feeling slightly out of date but on the cusp of contemporary, was also inspired by the shaggy dog, New Hollywood era movies Sterlin was referencing when writing the show. But instead of a loose, dreamy noir journey through LA or NY, this would examine the complex history and landscape of Tulsa.



EXT. 6TH STREET BUSINESSES

*“The Lowdown has an actual geography
- a world you can walk down.”*

VULTURE

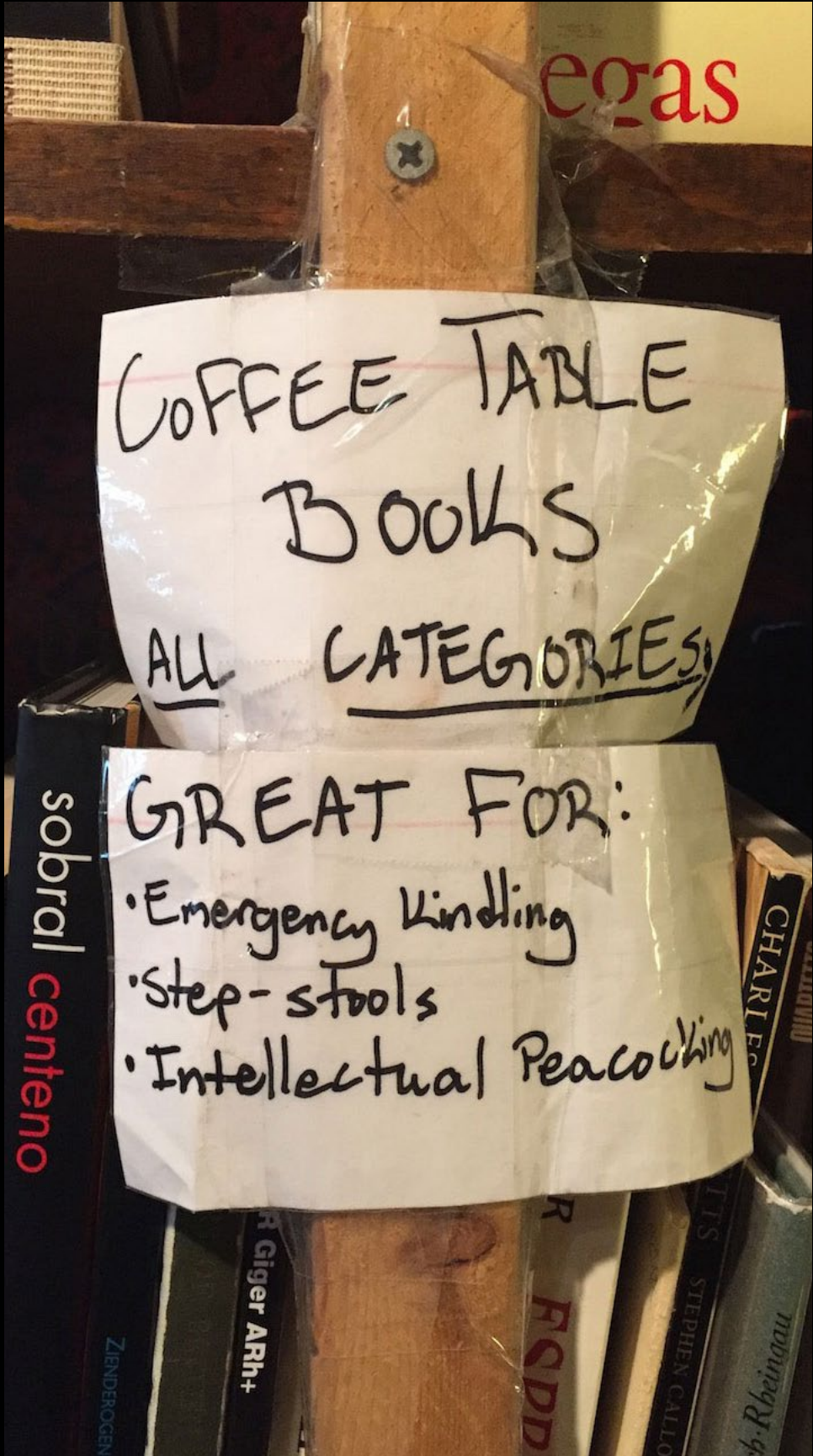


After extensive scouting, we found a block of empty, unfinished (read: decrepit) storefronts with an amazing view of downtown Tulsa and space on the second floor we could turn into Lee's Apt. It was a challenge since none of the buildings had working power, water, or much internal structure, but **we knew building our mini backlot on Tulsa's North 6th Street would help tell the story the right way, creating an uninterrupted interior/exterior world for Sterlin and the cast to get lost in.** Later, we found out that Lee Roy Chapman had lived on the second floor of one of the buildings we chose, very close to where we put Lee's Apartment.

INT. HOOT OWL BOOKS



REFERENCE



CONCEPT



Described as part barely functioning bookstore, part Lee's mad laboratory, Hoot Owl is Lee's kingdom and the heart of the show. After creating the concept art and building the set in the space, **we handpicked 5,000 books from a local independent bookstore called Gardiner's to make sure the shelves all looked right and every book belonged.** We wanted anyone to be able to walk down the aisle, pull a book out, and feel it added to the set and the story. Plus, we're a bunch of nerds who love books.

CONCEPT



We decided to make the section by the counter a rare titles section where we could highlight some favorites by Oklahoma authors that spoke to the local cultural landscape. **The space behind the register became a wall of honor for Tulsa artists, including some of Lee Roy Chapman's own screen-printing work, Larry Clark's photos, and an original Chito Harjo block print.** We could tell we did a good job because people kept wandering by and coming in to start browsing, thinking a new bookstore had opened in town. That and Ethan kept finding books he liked on the shelves and taking them home with him (aka stealing them).

BEFORE









INT. LEE'S APARTMENT

CONCEPT ART

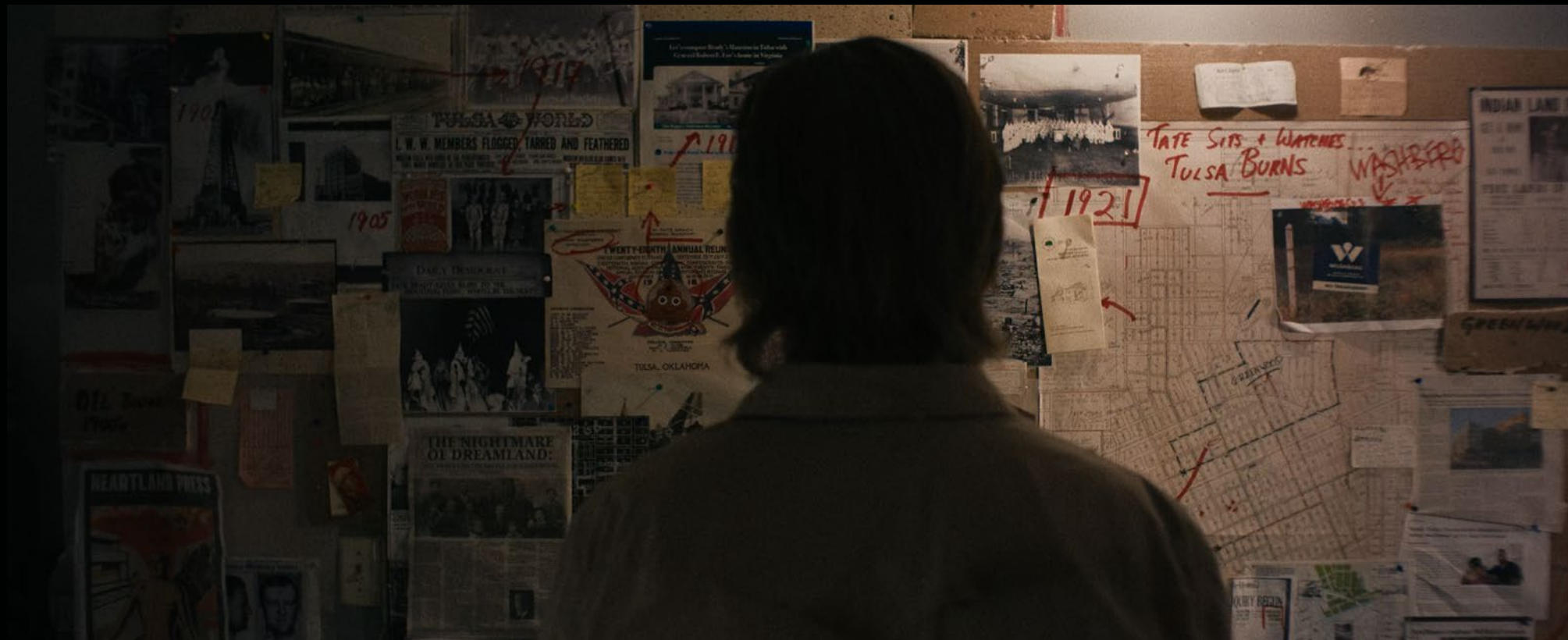


"Lee's bedroom wall is papered with articles about local historical cruelties."









We decorated the space with objects that would tell the story while resonating with the cast and crew, including pieces Lee Roy Chapman's family loaned us. A Christmas stocking on the wall next to Lee's bed is actually one Lee Roy Chapman's young son (around the same age as Lee's daughter in the show) made for him. The dead plant in the window is one Lee Roy's sister had been saving since his death ten years earlier. Unable to throw it away, she loaned it to us to help flesh out the world.

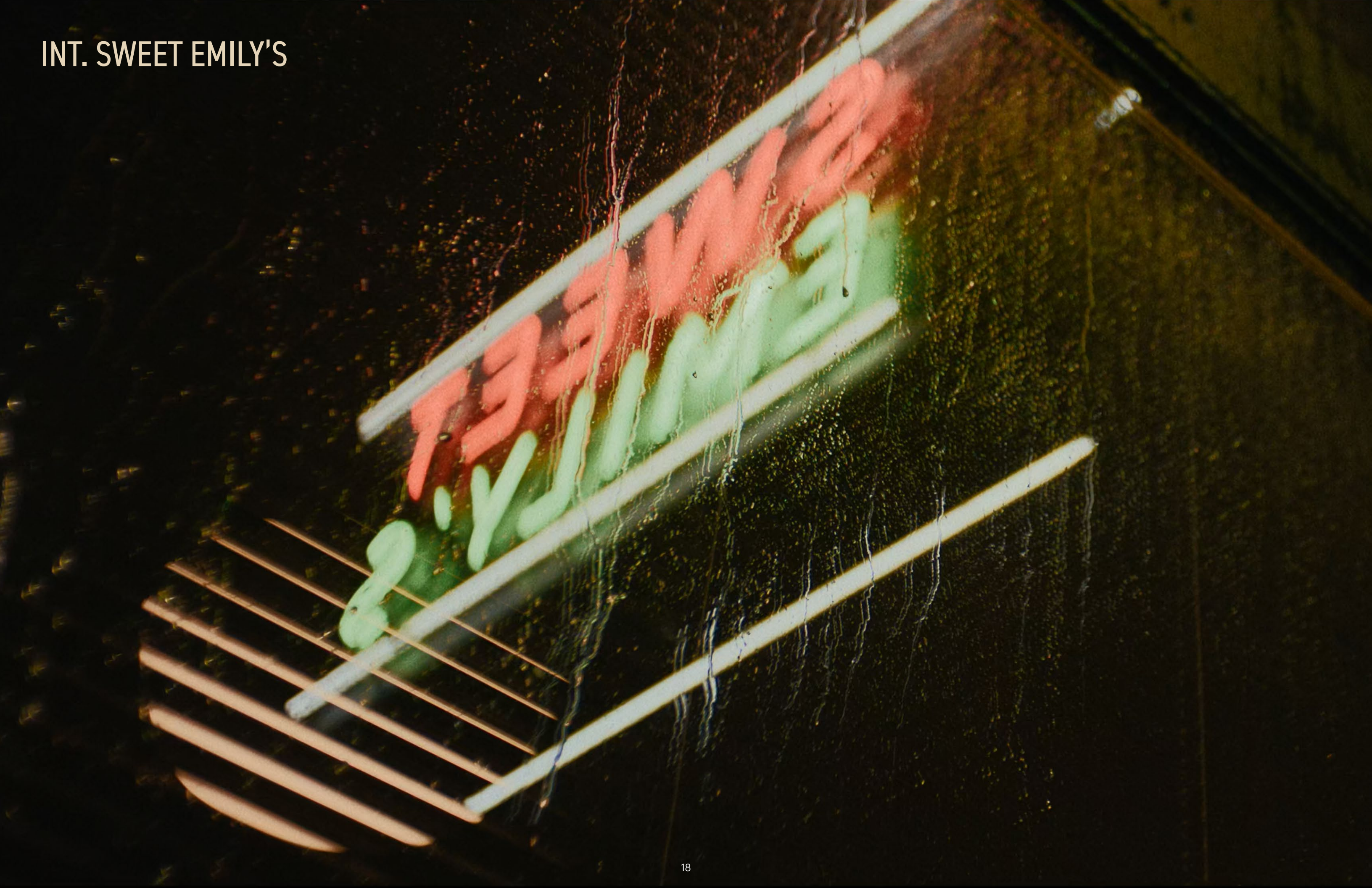
The focal point of the apartment was the conspiracy collage. We approached it as the space where Lee methodically builds the evidence for his different articles investigating Tulsa's underbelly, a collection of ideas and research that eventually led to completed pieces of journalism.



We worked around the clock to flesh out the concept for each of the stories on the wall and then selected archival images and created documents. Elohim City, the white supremacist community in rural Oklahoma that has ties to the Oklahoma City Bombing. The Osage Hills Murders that are partially chronicled in Killers of the Flower Moon. **Pieces of history that were once buried deep went up on the wall for all to see, blended seamlessly with story specific points from our script about the conspiracy Lee would uncover during the season.**

The center piece was the case against Tate Brady, which also allowed us to put a spotlight on the Tulsa Race Massacre, bringing the work back full circle to our initial inspiration in Lee Roy Chapman's search for the truth.

INT. SWEET EMILY'S



CONCEPT



CONCEPT







Sweet Emily's is the neon lit, greasy spoon diner where Lee eats most of his meals and does his writing.

We went to work building our own red Formica diner counter, bringing in our custom-built booths, and laying our flooring - checker tile near the counter for the color and low pile carpet for the adjoining dining room to really show the age of the place with food stains.

For the walls, we wanted a combination of wallpaper and wood paneling to give the space a warm, aged texture. **We wanted a wallpaper with pastoral scenes, the kind of thing that could easily fade into the background but could also amuse you for a minute when you were sitting alone having a cup of coffee and a cigarette at 2am. We brought in an illustrator to hand draw a pattern using characters and moments from *Reservation Dogs* as a very subtle easter egg.** Sticking to our ethos, we had it printed locally by a vendor who was excited to nail the specific texture we wanted.

Cast and crew that worked on *Rez Dogs* were in tears once we revealed the subtle detail and Sterlin asked us for a few rolls so he could have a room in his house with the wallpaper.

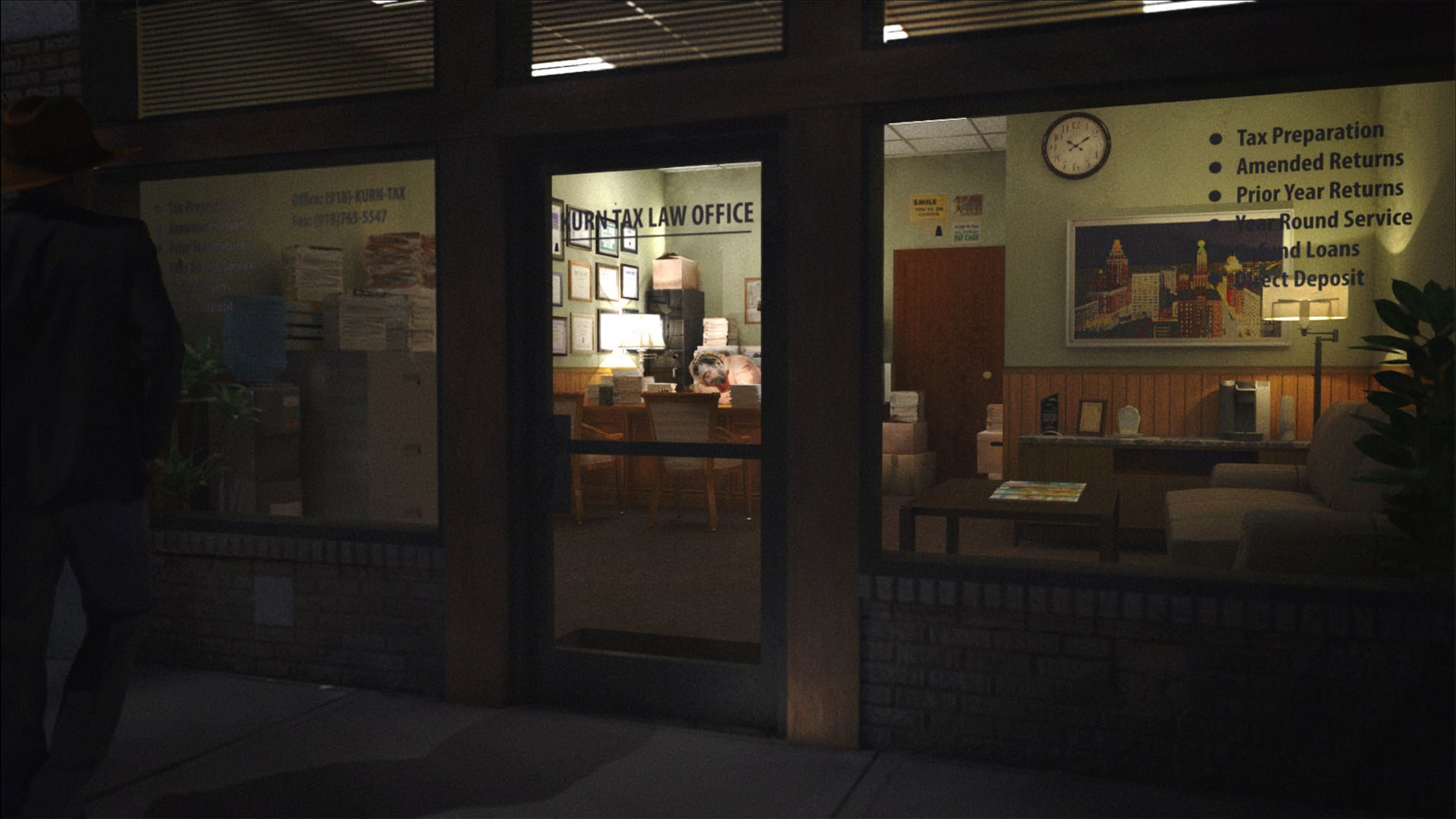








CONCEPT









The Tulsa Beat is an independent newspaper that focuses on local crime and corruption (and bikini clad women). It was inspired by a real publication started by a man whose best friend was killed in a robbery and who wanted to do something to help public safety (while at the same time holding police and city officials responsible for their actions).



We built out the space with aged wood paneling, tile flooring, and the perfect aged wallpaper we found in the basement of an out of business home store.

We collaborated with Alexander Tamahn, a local artist, to paint a custom mural on the wall depicting the history of Tulsa's Greenwood neighborhood, site of the Tulsa Race Massacre, and recent historical figures in the Tulsa Black community.

We also used the space to pay homage to Tulsa's music history, including posters from important artists like The Gap Band.



INT. WASHBERG RANCH





I/E HEARTLAND PRESS





I/E THE ANTIQUARY





“Lee Raybon was inspired by Lee Roy Chapman, a writer and activist Harjo worked with at the magazine who was instrumental in raising awareness of some of the city’s darkest chapters. These included the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921, a coordinated attack by white citizens that resulted in the destruction of Greenwood, a prosperous Black neighborhood, and killed up to 300 people. Chapman also revealed that

one of the city’s founders, W. Tate Brady, had been a member of the Ku Klux Klan and was involved in the massacre, prompting the relabeling of local sites named for him. *‘Tulsa has a long pattern of sidestepping its history, and Lee Roy was directly confronting it at a time when most people would have preferred to move on,’* said Michael Mason, the founder of *This Land Press* and Chapman’s editor.”

The New York Times





“Watching someone struggle to find the truth is something that I think we all kind of need and could take inspiration from in this moment...”

*-Sterlin Harjo
Showrunner / Director*