

The Doors Open to “666 PARK AVENUE”

Written by Abbie Bernstein

Friday, 28 September 2012 10:48



If you reflect the address of 999 Park Avenue in just the right way, you get 666 Park Avenue. That second number explains a lot about the high-class, mysterious apartment building, where wishes are granted, souls are lost and tenants sometimes get sucked into the walls or come back from the dead.

Welcome to ABC’s new series 666 PARK AVENUE, which premieres this Sunday, Sept. 30 at 10 p.m. (9 Central). Terry O’Quinn (of LOST and THE STEPFATHER) and Vanessa Williams star as Gavin and Olivia Duran, the devilishly upscale duo who run the Drake, as the venerable building is known. Rachael Taylor and Dave Annable play, respectively, Jane Van Veen and Henry Martin, a young unmarried couple who get way more than they bargained for when they sign on as apartment managers in exchange for free rent.

666 PARK AVENUE is based very loosely on the first novel in a series by Gabriella Pierce; the show and the book share a title and the realm of the supernatural, but little else. Executive producer David Wilcox developed the series for ABC and serves as showrunner; his previous credits include gigs as co-executive producer on FRINGE and LIFE ON MARS and multiple writing credits on the alien-invasion series FIRST WAVE. Wilcox took some time at a party thrown by the network for the Television Critics Association to talk to Fango about bringing unholy pacts to onscreen TV (behind the scenes, of course, such things are customary...).



“Warner Bros. owned the property, the book by Gabriella Pierce that it was based on,” he begins. “I would just say that I was encouraged to depart from the book and come up with my own take with Warners, and we thought ABC would be a great place to have the show—and fortunately, they agreed.”

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Inspiration for Wilcox’s vision of 666 PARK AVENUE came from—among other classic horrors—ROSEMARY’S BABY. Roman Polanski’s film of Ira Levin’s novel is set at a very distinctive New York location, the Dakota building, and Wilcox says the production team sought a site that would be similar, yet not the same. “We shot at the Ansonia [also in Manhattan]. Somehow, it’s a twin to the Dakota, but in many ways it’s a very different kind of energy. And obviously, the Dakota is so iconic, so we were really looking for a different kind of flavor and a distinct approach to this. We looked a long time to find the right building.”

Wilcox elaborates on what made the Ansonia right for 666 PARK AVENUE: “Obviously, it had to be historic and...it’s hard to explain. It’s something about the energy of a place, where you walk in and you just kind of know, OK, it’s kind of scaring me a little bit. We shot in the lobby of the Ansonia, which has these incredible lines, and it was just sort of ready-made. When we got in there and started filming, we found out that the Ansonia has this incredible history, and some say it’s haunted. So I feel like we were really drawing from some of those vibes.”

After the pilot, Wilcox continues, the production company moved over to New York soundstages. “For the series, obviously, it’s not practical to shoot in someone’s building—they have families living there at the Ansonia and everything, and we had inconvenienced them enough. They were great, but we really needed to figure out a new way of doing the show. We built the lobby on our soundstages, and we’ve actually built quite a lot there, and most of our visual effects were done there as well. We also shot all over New York—many different apartments, many different buildings—to bring it to life.”

The prospect of New Yorkers pointing out that there is no Drake building on Park Avenue in reality doesn’t unduly worry Wilcox. “New Yorkers are often very critical about when people don’t get the city right,” he acknowledges, “but that said, as much of the show [as possible] is grounded and real, and we strive to have a high degree of verisimilitude in our writing. There’s always a little bit of license that you take in playing to the wish-fulfillment of what the show is. So I think that’s one little piece of license that people will get over if they like this show.”

666 PARK AVENUE does contain some general parallels to contemporary discussions of the rich and poor, the one percent and the 99 percent, but Wilcox says these don’t overwhelm the storytelling. “This show is incredibly topical, because this is a world of the 99 percent looking at how the one percent lives, and that’s at the heart and soul of this series: the young couple who get an opportunity to see how not only the other half, but that tiny fraction live. It was important for us to capture that, and additionally, the driving concept of the show is that we all have

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needs, wishes, desires, ambitions, and what do we do to make those happen? And I believe that, more than anything right now, is so relevant. I think people, as much as they watch television and look for that kind of escapism, also seek a sense of aspiration as well, and ‘Be careful what you wish for’ is a theme that can really resonate.”



However, the supernatural bargains struck at the Drake won't be ripped from the headlines, Wilcox notes. “If we make any kind of a statement or anything like that, it'll be very oblique. In the deals we're exploring, we're really looking for universal themes—not just specific to the period, but ideas that are emotional and truly resonant with as many people as possible.”

It's clear from the outset that Gavin and Olivia are no mere mortals, and Wilcox promises that they won't be the only supernatural elements. “The Drake is a character in and of itself,” he notes. “The building has a lot of secrets, many supernatural elements, and comparing it to the Dakota, you can expect secret passageways and all that kind of stuff. The building is this crazy puzzlebox that Jane will explore. This is a world of ghosts and spirits and people coming back from the dead and so on. It's not just going to be based on deals. The building itself has a presence, a spirit, a character.”

Asked if Henry and Jane will be changed by the end of the first season—it seems unlikely they can remain as innocent as they begin over the course of 22 episodes—Wilcox just laughs enigmatically and says, “Yes.” On the other hand, this doesn't mean that two new innocents will be brought in at the start of season two; Wilcox laughs again and says, “No,” before explaining that the temptation of both Jane and Henry is very much at the forefront of the series from the start. “It's always about seduction and temptation,” he says, “and Henry really is driven by his ambition, and Gavin clearly has a plan for Henry—but as we'll come to find, has a plan for Jane as well.”

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As for what he believes people will get out of watching 666 PARK AVENUE, Wilcox concludes, “More than anything else, I hope they have a hell of a ride. I hope they dig into the show. It will go very deep into this world, into a mythology, and for real fans of horror, it’s going to be a fun treat. I’m drawing on the films I grew up watching, from Hammer to THE OMEN to THE SHINING and ROSEMARY’S BABY—real strong psychological horror. These were the movies I spent my Saturday afternoons watching, and they left a very deep mark on me, and I hope people will get the same enjoyment when they watch this show.”