

HOUSE

M.D.

THE OFFICIAL GUIDE
TO THE HIT MEDICAL DRAMA

IAN JACKMAN
WITH A FOREWORD BY
HUGH LAURIE

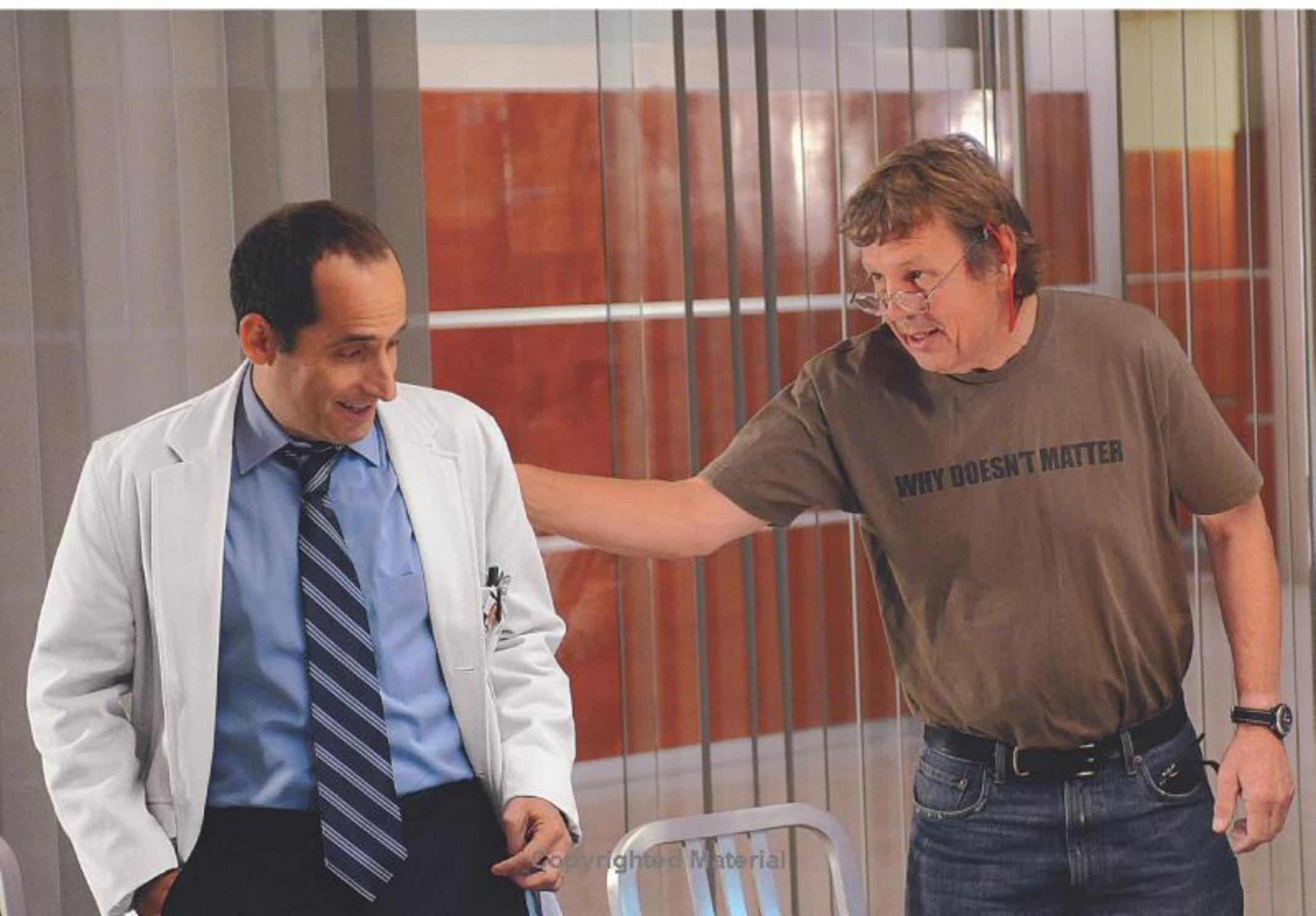


Hugh Laurie reading the day's sides on the set.



ABOVE: Front row (from left): the DP, the director, and the script supervisor working in front of the monitors at video village.

BELOW: Peter Jacobson and director of photography Gale Tattersall.

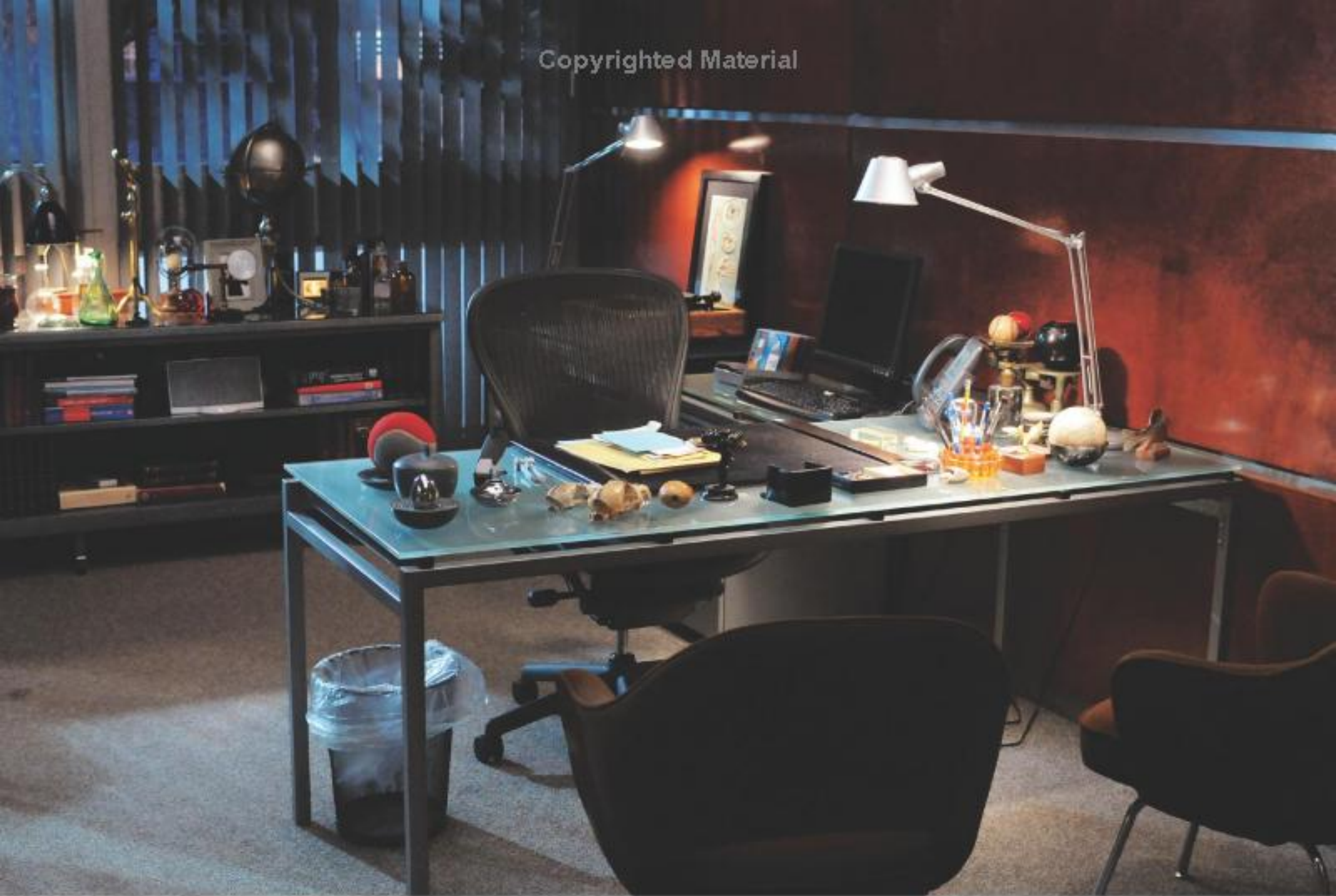




ABOVE: The season six diagnostic team (*from left*): Chase (Jesse Spencer), Taub (Peter Jacobson), Foreman (Omar Epps), and Thirteen (Olivia Wilde).

BELOW: Omar Epps, director Greg Yaitanes, and Olivia Wilde.





ABOVE: House's desk.

BELOW: House's desk up close: the large tennis ball and House's mail.





ABOVE: Gale Tattersall—the “rare breed” of DP.

BELOW: Setting up a shot with Omar Epps.

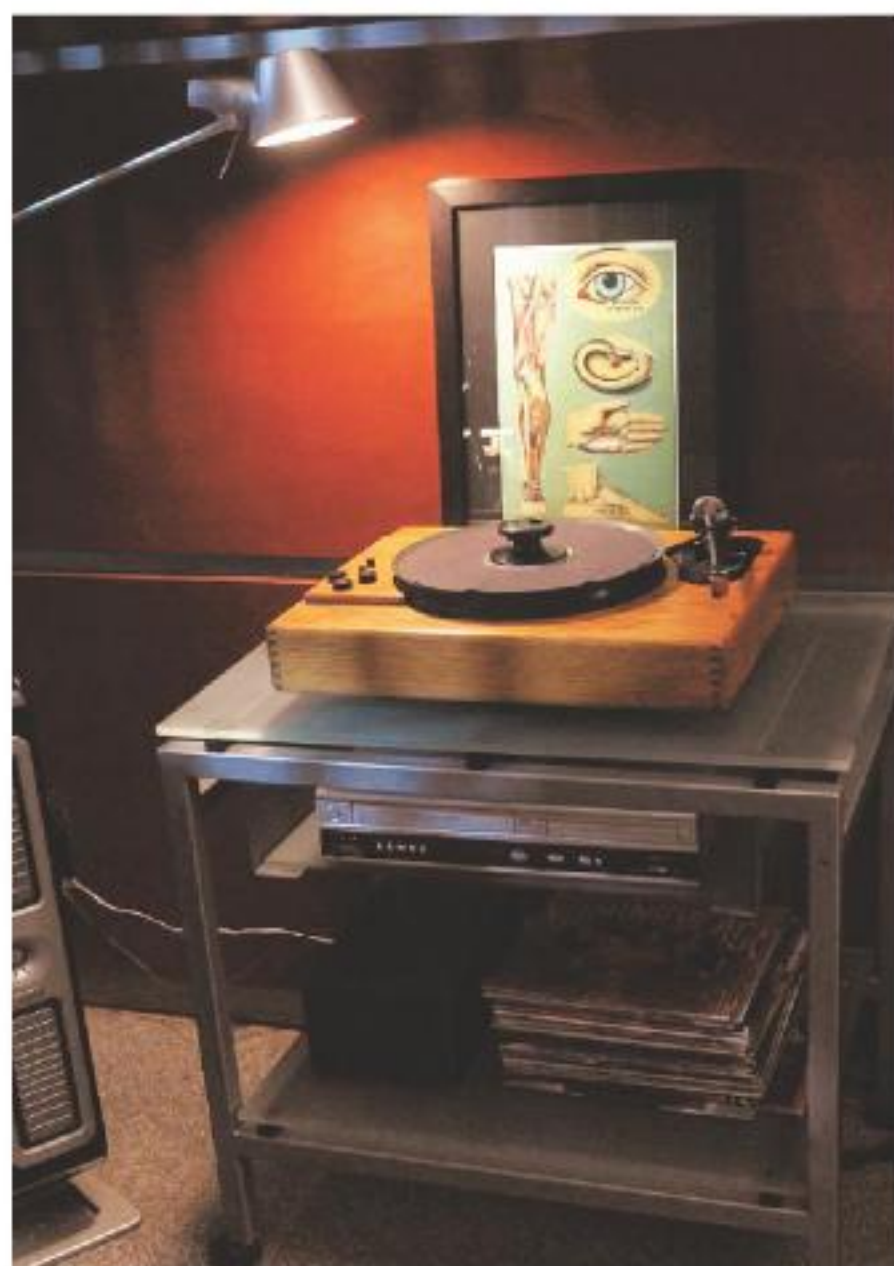




Red light means keep out.



Still-life with House's cricket ball, baseball, and bowls ball.



House likes his music old-school: vinyl and a turntable.



The PPTH directory—note the old oncology department location on the fourth floor.



ABOVE: Hugh Laurie flanked by *House* creator David Shore (*left*) and writer David Hoselton (*right*).

BELOW: Katie Jacobs and Jeremy Cassells with layouts for the Wilson/House condo.





Jennifer Morrison (Allison Cameron).



Lisa Edelstein (Lisa Cuddy).



ABOVE: Thirteen hears a word to the wise.

BELOW: Medical adviser Bobbin Bergstrom helps Jesse Spencer with the medical details.





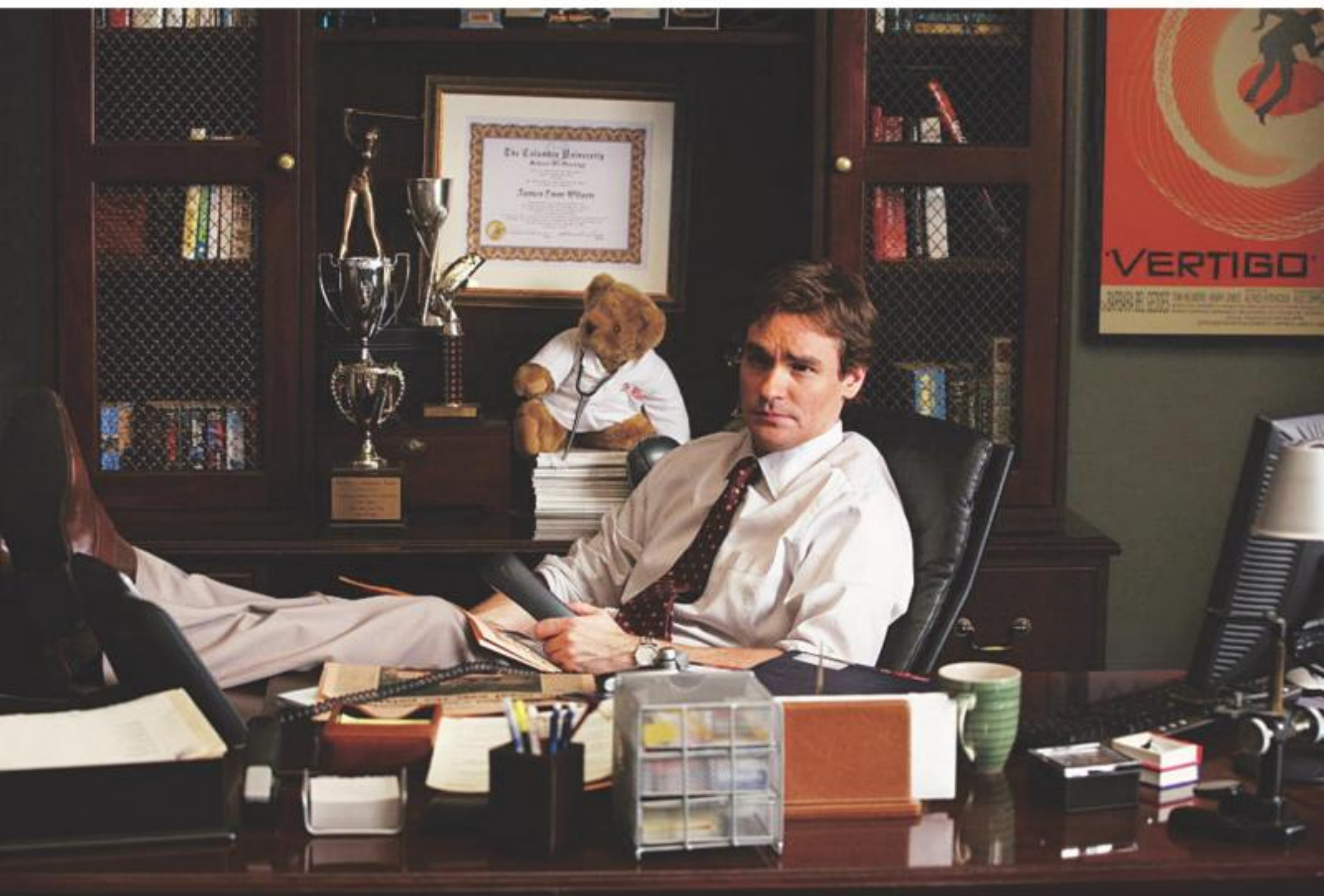
Chase takes down House . . .



Jesse Spencer and costume designer Cathy Crandall.



House with Kutner, the unsolvable puzzle.



Wilson in his office.



... who finds a soft landing.



Dalia Dokter applies makeup for House's eye damaged by Chase.

Greg Yaitanes working out a scene with
Hugh Laurie and Robert Sean Leonard.





ABOVE: House relaxes on the beach, if only in locked-in Lee's imagination.

BELOW: House and Cuddy at an eighties party—Cuddy is Jane Fonda; House has the wrong eighties.





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

IAN JACKMAN is the coauthor of *The West Wing: The Official Companion*. He is the author of *The Artist's Mentor: Inspiration from the World's Most Creative Minds*, and *Eat This!: 1,001 Things to Eat Before You Diet*, among other books.



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FOREWORD

This is not only a foreword to a book but also an afterword to a large chunk of my life.

As I write, in 2010, it's more than a tenth: for Jennifer Morrison and Jesse Spencer, bless their creamy complexions, it's a fifth. I think it's time for an explanation, and one of these old ink-and-paper type deals seems a good spot for it.

I was in a Starbucks once and overheard a woman say to her companion: "I had a very interesting blueberry muffin yesterday." At the time, I was struck by her descriptor, "interesting." It interested me. There were, and still are, plenty of adjectives available to describe a blueberry muffin—"good," "bad," "stale," "crumbly," "kosher," "laced with LSD," or "shaped like Richard Nixon," among others—but "interesting"? It mystified me. Now, looking back, I think I know what she meant.

Before sunrise on most mornings of the last six years—let's say a thousand mornings, give or take—I have presented myself at the Fox Studio Lot in Los Angeles, a tiny principality on Pico Boulevard with its own police force, fire department, courtiers, peasants, stalwarts, and thieves. It has no established religion, but there is a giant bust of Rupert Murdoch in the central square, about two hundred feet tall, made from the bones of fallen enemies. (I might have imagined this.) Here, on stages 10, 11, 14, and 15, I have immersed myself in a fictional character, in a fictional place, in a fictional world, with an hour for lunch. My experience has been so weirdly shrink-wrapped that I couldn't even tell you

what happens on stages 12 and 13, much less the outside world. Come to think of it, I don't even know where 12 and 13 are. Like hotel floors, maybe there is no 13? I know little of Californian weather, or which party is in power, or what the chances are that this hip-hop thing will catch on. I've used metal cutlery about a dozen times since I got here.

It's been interesting, all right, but not in the way you might expect. The interest has come not from the breadth of the experience but the narrowness; the exclusion of all thought outside the immediate word, blink, breath, moment—a moment that has far exceeded its normal duties, eventually stretching to a full six years and thereby risking the loss of its Momentary credentials.

But look, I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's go back (if you ever catch me using the word "rewind" to mean anything other than "rewind," I want you to shoot me, dead) to see how all this works.

.....

An Englishman is summoned to Los Angeles. On the strength of a scratchy piece of video tape, he has apparently put himself in contention for a major television role. To advance to the finals, he must jump through hoops, kiss rings, and swear oaths—all of which he does, and gladly. He is chosen. He travels to Vancouver, city of . . . I don't know . . . buildings, and there he makes a one hour show, which he lays at the feet of the Gods. The Gods show it to a focus group. It scores highly enough to earn thirteen episodes. The Englishman packs a few shirts, kisses his family good-bye, and flies to Los Angeles. (He emphatically does not "jet into" Los Angeles as the British tabloids would have it, as if everyone else travels in steam-powered Dakotas . . . but wait, if I start on the tabloids, we'll never get out of these parentheticals.)

His expectations at this point are low. He knows that American television is a fiercely competitive arena, and that one hour dramas follow the same actuarial arc as spermatozoa—gushing toward the giant Nielsen ovum in a spasm of excitement, a few

moments of frantic wriggling, then oblivion. And yet, miraculously, the show survives those first weeks, grows stronger, gathers momentum, until it's careering, tumbling downhill, and the Englishman's suspenders are trapped in the door and his little legs are scrambling to keep up. Time disobeys its own nature—speeds up, slows down, bends, goes sideways—the days become windowless and weird, filming stories that aren't real mixed up with photo shoots, red carpets, and talk shows that are even less so. The result, inevitably, is madness. Late one night the Englishman is found wandering the Pacific Coast Highway, naked, carrying a .45, and reciting the Psalm 23.

His name was Ronald Pettigrew and the show was, of course, *Wethy Flows the Mississippi*. It ran for two seasons on the Trump Network.

Although I haven't taken it quite as hard as the Pettigrewster, there have certainly been times when I've found it intense. Has it been as intense as fighting in Afghanistan or stealing a base against the Yankees (whatever that means and whoever they are) or running a successful brothel? I've no way of knowing. Some of you may be thinking "come on, it's only a television show" and that's true—in the sense that you can attach the word "only" to any human event, as long as you're calibrated correctly. Nuclear Armageddon will "only" lead to the end of the human race, a geologist or astrophysicist might say.

But here's the paradox: If those of us who work on *House* had ever behaved as if it were "only" a television show, then it wouldn't be a television show. It would be a canceled television show. An ex-television show. Like most people in the entertainment business, we are professionally disproportionate. Intensity exists in the mind, as Marcus Aurelius might have said if you translated him badly, and when disproportionate people decide that a thing is intense, and devote all their physical and mental energies to it, then it becomes so. Well, that is what we did with *House*, for better or worse. It may seem comical to some; but I hope the Some don't live in glass houses, because those things are ridiculous. The heating bills alone.

.....

But hard work, on its own, doesn't explain why *House* has become the most watched TV show on the planet. (This is not my claim: I read it in a trade journal recently, and have no idea how the writer arrived at his conclusion. I don't plan on finding out, either.) There has to be something else. Of course, one could say that the show is more than the sum of its parts, but that's true of almost everything outside the field of pure mathematics. Try driving to work in the pile of parts that make up a Honda Civic. One could say that House's aversion to the genteel, the euphemistic, gives an older audience some relief from the mealy-mouthed political correctness of our time; you could also say that he appeals to a younger crowd because he is anti-authoritarian, which is how young people like to think of themselves, but very rarely are. On top of that, House is a healer, a fixer of problems, a savior—not usually an unattractive quality. All of these things may have contributed in some way to the show's survival into baggy middle age. But, for my money, it's the jokes.

I think House is enormously funny. I become vexed when people describe him as grumpy or sour or a jerk because I feel those people are missing the good bits of both the show and the character. I find House playful, quick-witted, and thoroughly good company. I like spending time with him. But more than that, I believe his funniness is intrinsic to his character and profession. Let me explain.

(Of course you don't have to let me explain at all. You can, if you want, just slam this book shut and move on to the DIY section of the store. Or you can skip to the pictures of Olivia Wilde, that's fine, too.)

There are few things more tedious than a discourse on the nature of humor or why a joke is funny, but let's quickly get a rough definition under our belts so we can move on. Most jokes depend, in essence, on the yoking together of two apparently dissimilar things. The sudden recognition of a previously hidden similarity is the laugh. (Ugh. I feel unclean describing the delicate beauty of

humor in such crude, mechanical terms. But there it is. The butterfly is pinned.) The joke, then, comes from the metaphorical area of the brain that produces and deciphers similes, analogies, and the rest. It is House's habit, from time to time, to describe a medical condition in metaphorical terms. This performs the convenient function of explaining to a lay audience (within the show, it's typically the patient, while outside, it's, well, the lay audience) the technicalities of what's going on. But underneath that function, House's metaphorical skill is also what makes him exceptional at what he does. His facility for dismantling problems with metaphorical tools (I used one, while describing one—this is what we call a high-protein sentence) allows him to see things more clearly, more analytically, than his peers. The funny part of House's brain is the same as the diagnostic part, which is also the part that expresses his attitude to death.

House is an atheist. (I don't have paperwork from David Shore authorizing me to say this, but I will take a chance and declare it anyway. If House finds God in season 9, I'll rewrite this bit.) And what does an atheist choose when faced with the cold, empty cosmos? He can jump in a river; he can pursue happiness, as someone memorably put it; or he can make jokes. For House, the atheist, I believe the joke is actually rather sacred. It is the defining essence of his humanity. The alleviation of suffering, the doing of the Right Thing, these are the rules by which House is forced to play; but he does so grudgingly, uncertainly, suspecting that the game is worthless, and that all is vanity. The joke, on the other hand, that's a cry of joy, a spark of the divine, a way of poking the encroaching cosmos in the eye. House, basically, laughs at death. Which is an option, kids.

.....

Now, the more practical, tire-rotating, removing-leaves-from-gutters, readers among you may be wondering what any of this has to do with the workings of a typical American hospital. Do real doctors metaphorize, make jokes, carry on in any way like House, Cuddy, or Wilson? And if they do, is it worth remarking on?

Well, first of all, anyone who thinks Princeton-Plainsboro is a typical hospital must have spent most of their life in rude good health. It isn't typical or realistic, and wasn't ever meant to be. To me, Princeton-Plainsboro has always been an enchanted forest, where patients come to be cured of allegorical complaints. The treatments are metaphorical, the dialogue is dialectic. Of course, any drama must obey the laws of its own universe—the characters can't fly or travel through time—and the show achieves as much verisimilitude as it can afford with the time and money available (with the obvious exception that, in the world of *House*, there's no TV show called *House*). But still, the characters and events are not real. More than that, it's imperative that they aren't. Because real is random, and stories are not. Stories are how we impose structure, morality, and meaning on the blank universe. Beauty, too. The English landscape artist Joseph Turner was once upbraided by a critic who pointed to one of Turner's paintings and sniffily remarked that he, the critic, had never seen a sunset like that, to which Turner replied: "But don't you wish you had?" Well played, by the artist.

There is a prop on the set of *House*'s inner office, a piece of stage dressing. It's a granite square—a coaster, I suppose—on which are engraved the words "A MERE COPIER OF NATURE CAN NEVER PRODUCE ANYTHING GREAT." I've never liked it much, too pompous, too snobbish, and why engrave it? What's wrong with a Post-it note? But I still think the statement is true.

And if the reproduction of reality on-screen is undesirable, it also happens to be impossible. At least, it's never been done, as far as I know. Movie cops don't look or behave like real cops, movie lawyers like real lawyers, or movie starship captains like real starship captains. Strangest of all, the film business can't even accurately represent the film business. Every time you see a movie within a movie—and I mean every time—a director will rip off his headset and angrily scream "CUT!"—causing a harassed assistant to flap his hands and call "TAKE 5 EVERYONE!" In thirty years of acting, I have never seen this happen.

Now it sounds as if I'm defending the show against criticism, and perhaps I am. (The chance to settle a few scores was one of the attractions of this assignment. Well, come on, wouldn't you?) I'm not going to name names—apart from rumpygirl518, may she be unreasonably detained in a foreign customs hall without access to a lawyer or a working lavatory—but I do want to defend, if not the show, then the people who make it. They are an extraordinary bunch, and their talent and dedication is a marvel to behold. I wish you could see them in action, really I do.

They would take your breath away. The mistakes we make on *House*—and, of course, we make them all the time because that's the nature of the thing—are never the result of carelessness or a lack of pride; they are the sort of mistakes you make when trying to do your taxes while falling down stairs. That's how it feels sometimes. Decisions come down on the crew like hailstones, and yet they march on, hour after hour, month after month, with skill, guile, muscle, and good humor—the sort of blend of qualities you can imagine taking Normandy. They are, in short, a fine outfit.

So there, I've said it. Score settled. Rumpygirl, you may have your phone call now. No, I don't have any damn coins.

.....

It's been suggested that I provide some detail, some texture, so let me take you through a typical Monday.

6:00 A.M.

I pull in at the studio, repeating to myself the phrase “I really don't understand,” over and over. This is my American accent warm-up. If the word “really,” containing adjacent r and l sounds, doesn't come out right in the car, it's going to be a bad day. The slight diphthong on “stand” is also a good exercise.

At the gate, I am greeted by Lawrence, a blue-uniformed Cerberus who informs me that the power is within and that I must strive to find grace on this very special Monday. Sometimes, he reads me some of his poetry. Other times, it's just a long, slow smile, as if

it's all so obvious, it doesn't need to be said. We finish with an exchange of fist and elbow bumps—whose significance I will never understand though I live a thousand years. Lawrence carries a gun.

I go to my trailer, which has increased in length every season, like an old man's ears. This year, I rented out the back half to a very nice Korean family. I eat a pint of chewy espresso coffee and skim through the "call sheet," a menu of the day's work and its ingredients. As with a menu, I can't help glancing down at the price—in this case, the total page count for the day. If it's more than seven pages, it's going to be hard. If it's more than nine, it's going to be a brain-scrambler. That may sound like a minuscule amount—maybe five minutes of screen time per day—but keep in mind that in the sumptuous world of feature films, two pages is about as much as the poor dears can handle before their feet start hurting.

Yep, that espresso sure is bitter.

6:10 A.M.

I'm sitting in the hair chair, where the talented Lori Rozman conceals my incipient baldness with her own special mixture of fiberboard and acrylic paint. I've always believed that cinema is 50 percent hair. And I don't mean cool hair; I mean good hair. Good hair means a good character, the way a good drummer means a good band.

6:30 A.M.

Crew call. Onto the set to rehearse the first scene. This can be a simple mechanical business—I'll stand here, you stand there—or a complicated physical and psychological puzzle: how best to express the information of the scene and the underlying music between characters. But simple or complicated, we have to keep moving. Like a shark, if we stop, we asphyxiate. (The production resembles a shark in no other way.) When the scene is staged to everyone's satisfaction, the technicians are summoned for a final rehearsal, where the actors' movements are marked on the floor with colored tape. I'm green.

7:00-ISH

Back into the makeup chair, where Marianna Elias, the Greek goddess, shellacks my wrinkled visage. Considering I'll be eighty-one in June, she does a pretty fine job.

Meanwhile, on the set, the cinematographer Gale Tattersall is weaving his own cat's cradle of light, bouncing it off sheets of muslin, white card, and copies of *Auto Trader*. The camera operators, Tony Gaudioz and Rob Carlson, are perfecting their framing; the dolly grip, Gary Williams (seven feet tall, moves like a ninja, hasn't made a mistake in the four years he's been here) times the dolly to the pace of the stand-ins; Ken Strain the boom operator is working out how the heck he can record dialogue without the mike booms being reflected in the fifty panes of glass that make up the hospital rooms, and so on.

Or they may all sit around playing gin rummy until I get back. I can't be sure.

Visitors on the set, any set, often observe that there seem to be a lot of people "just milling around." That is certainly how it appears. But then it's also how an ant colony appears until you've watched it for long enough to understand the ebb and flow of work. Film sets are baffling to the outsider because there are no uniforms. Everyone wears jeans and sneakers, and no one's trade is signified by their clothes, apart from grips and electric who need gloves to handle red-hot lights and the actors who wear white coats to handle red-hot dialogue. (Of which that was conspicuously not an example.)

The above process is repeated for six hours, until lunch—which isn't lunch at all, but the only time in a fifteen-hour day that crew members can call their bank, their plumber, their children's teacher, or their divorce attorney. They pace the lot with cell phones clamped to their ears, pleading, cajoling, threatening, or being threatened. You can usually tell straight after lunch whose calls have gone well and whose have gone badly.

For the actors, lunch might involve a table-read of a new script or a looping session, where lines have to be re-recorded because of a dog barking, airplane noise, or a bad performance—or it might

be spent doing an interview with a journalist who's come to write about how people on a film set seem to be just milling around. If it's none of these, then it's sleep—which I do standing up, like a horse, to save on a hair rebuild in the afternoon.

And that's basically it. Repeat until mad. Or until the audience finds something shinier somewhere else. Six years in, it's hard to believe that our efforts are still being received, and received well, here and overseas. I was screamed at in Italy and chased in Spain. Chased, I tell you. I think they might have chased me in France, too, if it hadn't risked spoiling the crease in their trousers. The foreign response is particularly surprising, given the show's densely verbal, idiomatic texture. I can understand the global appeal of cop shows, where a lengthy line of dialogue might be "get in the car"—but what on earth does a Turkish translator do with "I promise you, the next knitting injury that comes in here, we're on it like stink on cheese"? I suppose I will never know. One of our regular directors, Juan Campanella (Academy Award this year—oh yes, we run with the right people) told me that he'd seen a translated film in his native Argentina, where the word "chip" (as in "chip on his shoulder") was rendered as "microchip." I mean, What?

Ah well. I have probably detained you long enough. The amuse-bouche is over. If you're still standing in the bookstore, trying to decide whether this book is worth the cover price, I think you now have more than enough information. I say, go for it. It's not much more than a bag of blueberry muffins, and you never know—you might find it interesting.

HUGH LAURIE

New Rochelle, New York

April 2010

INTRODUCTION

One Out of One-Three-One

Everybody lies. Go back and watch the first few minutes of the pilot of *House*, which aired on November 16, 2004, and see how quickly this basic tenet of Dr. Gregory House's universe is established. In the teaser, the scene setter that comes before the first credit, a young woman teacher, Rebecca (Robin Tunney), rushes into school as the bell rings for class. She runs into a colleague who teasingly implies Rebecca is late because she was with a guy the night before. No, I didn't sleep with him, says Rebecca. You're lying, the friend says, lightheartedly. "I wouldn't lie to you," says Rebecca. Now, with six seasons of *House* under its belt, the audience knows better. Suddenly, as she chats to her kindergarten class, Rebecca loses control of her speech and collapses. The first mysterious ailment presents.

Soon we're walking the halls of Princeton-Plainsboro Teaching Hospital (PPTH). Wilson says he wants House to look into Rebecca's brain cancer diagnosis because she's his cousin. We find out later that Wilson and Rebecca are not related. That makes one verifiable untruth and one probable fib in the show's first three minutes, a rate of lying that will be hard to maintain. But people will try their best. As House tells Wilson why he doesn't want to take the case, he pops a pill. An innocent viewer might wonder if House has a headache. You've got three overqualified doctors on your team getting bored, says Wilson, so why not use them? And soon we are traveling up Rebecca's delicately formed nostril and into her brain as if we're in *Fantastic Voyage*.

.....

House is House and House is Hugh Laurie. For 131 episodes through season six we've watched open-mouthed as House elephants his way through the conventions of a doctor-patient relationship—in fact, any human relationship. In House's orbit is a group of characters, brilliantly drawn and marvelously inhabited by the standout cast. At Princeton-Plainsboro, they all have demanding jobs as members of House's diagnostic team, supervising the oncology department, or running the whole hospital. But their main occupation, their true purpose, is to interact with House. Working with this guy they deserve hardship pay. House is a misanthrope, the doctor who doesn't like patients, the relationship-averse addict with a bad leg, the man who has to solve the puzzle and get to the truth even if it means steamrolling people's feelings and lying, stealing, and cheating along the way—whatever it takes to get to the answer.

Shrinking violets don't last five minutes around House and none of the principals is that. His diagnostic team: the original three—the caring woman who is the moral center of the group; her (ex-)husband, the Aussie who isn't as much like House as he thinks he is; and the man of ambition who is much more like House than he admits, right down to the soles of his sneakers. House's second team: the philandering plastic surgeon; the beauty with a time bomb in her body; the man who set House the ultimate puzzle he can never solve. And the two people closest to House: his boss, his wrangler, redeemer, savior, friend, and off-on love interest, the person who gets to tell House what to do. Finally, House's best (and only) friend, the on-off roomie, the thrice-married (and counting) Man Who Loves Too Much, who in this misfit universe often stands by default as the voice of reason. To these people a great deal has happened in six years.

When the pilot aired, all that lay ahead of them. Resolving the case, Foreman exposes Wilson's lie that Rebecca is Wilson's cousin, which he deduced when he was illegally searching Rebecca's apartment. How did Foreman know? Because of the ham in

Rebecca's fridge. (Wilson is Jewish. If Rebecca were Wilson's cousin she wouldn't eat ham.) The ham springs a Eureka! from House—she has a tapeworm in her brain. It takes a save from Dr. Chase to prove to Rebecca the team is finally right, persuading her to accept treatment that is nothing more than a couple of pills taken daily for a month. The happy outcome seems neither here nor there to House. As far as he's concerned, his responsibility ended when he solved the case.

Rebecca's tapeworm is apprehended like the bad guy at the end of a police procedural. Week after week, *House's* ultimate on-set authorities, creator, and show runner David Shore and co-runner Katie Jacobs provide a medical whodunit, a strange and elusive disease that House must track down. But it was clear from the pilot that there would be far more to *House* than that. We keep watching because we want to know what the writers are going to do with these great characters. At the end of the pilot, as House and Wilson watch a medical soap together, Wilson admits he lied about being related to Rebecca so House would take the case.

WILSON: "You've never lied to me?"

HOUSE: "I never lie."

WILSON: "Oh. Right."

House is joking. Everybody lies. Why do we lie? We lie because it's useful. Wilson's lie persuaded House to treat Rebecca. But the lie had another, unintended, consequence. If Wilson had brow-beaten House into taking the case or bribed him rather than lying about being related to the patient, Foreman would never have thought the ham in Rebecca's fridge was out of place. Without the lie (and Foreman's breaking and entering), the patient would have died. It demonstrates the significance of something House off-handedly says to Foreman during a differential diagnosis session in episode one, something Foreman says doesn't mean anything. "Truth begins in lies," says House. "Think about it."



HOUSE

M.D.

THE START LINE

Creating the Show

“It’s very easy to sit down at a typewriter and write completely contradictory character traits but it’s another thing for an actor to come in and actually live them.”

—DAVID SHORE

David Shore, the creator of *House*, is the first to acknowledge it takes a lot of people to develop a new show for television. In 2003, Katie Jacobs and Paul Attanasio, who together form Heel and Toe Films, approached Shore about starting a series with them for Universal Network Television, with whom they had a development deal. “I was a fan of his,” says Katie Jacobs. “He said, ‘Okay, I’ll write a pilot for you and we’ll figure out later what the idea is.’”

Shore had years of experience as executive producer and show runner on other people’s series but he was more than ready to do his own thing. While Shore consulted on *Century City*, a series Jacobs and Attanasio’s company was producing for Universal, he worked on creating the new show. The three would meet and discuss how they wanted to put together their pilot—the showcase episode producers make in the hope of securing a network deal. First essentials: What’s the show going to be about?

Scripted dramas gravitate toward places where people find themselves in states of unresolved jeopardy—police stations, courtrooms, operating theaters. Here, either something very good can happen, or something very bad, and drama is implicit. With his own background in the law and years of work on similar shows, David Shore was certain he didn't want to work on anything with a legal setting. Paul Attanasio alighted on an idea inspired by the "Diagnosis" column written by Lisa Sanders in the *New York Times Magazine*. In the column doctors work their way through a patient's strange symptoms and come to a diagnosis. Paul and Katie knew from talking to the networks that they were looking for a procedural show, something like a traditional cop drama. This notion was like a cop show except that it was set in a hospital.

Shore didn't know. "I have to confess I was less convinced at the time," he says. "I had other ideas I would rather have done." But he went along with the medical theme. "I had grave doubts about it but the networks seemed very excited and I wasn't an idiot and I kept my grave doubts to myself." As Shore started working ("banging my head against a wall") a particular character took shape in his mind over the course of the next few months. As he put together an outline, Shore was concerned about the direction in which he was headed.

"I was very worried that it was much more of a character piece than a procedural piece. I was worried we had pulled a bait and switch on the network, we had sold a procedural and delivering a character thing."

—DAVID SHORE

There was a solution to the problem of what the network was going to think. "I will be forever grateful to Paul for the notion that we just don't show the network the outline," says Shore. "He says it's going to be a really good script, let's just not show them the outline, and we didn't." Having convinced the network that they were better off waiting to see the script, Shore then had to deliver on the promise.

Writing the pilot script took David Shore five months of hemming and hawing. After Paul and Katie and the studio weighed in with their few notes, the script was delivered, on a Friday right after New Year's of 2004. At ten o'clock Monday the network called to say they wanted to make the pilot.

To direct the pilot, Bryan Singer, experienced director of major movies like *The Usual Suspects* and the X-Men series, was hired. Singer remains an executive producer.

“There weren’t a lot of changes to that pilot script, I am proud to say. I originally set it in Boston because it is a very academic place. One of the few notes Bryan Singer had when he signed on to direct was to ask to move it to Princeton, which was where he grew up. He liked the notion that it reeks of academia but is not a big urban center. . . . And it is something we hadn’t seen before on TV, which is cool. Things like that do make a difference.”

—DAVID SHORE

House’s nods to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s unorthodox detective Sherlock Holmes and his sidekick Dr. Watson are well-known. “House and Wilson very loosely are based on Holmes and Watson, inspired by them more than based on them,” says David Shore. Holmes and Watson; House and Wilson. House’s first patient is Rebecca Adler, a surname used by Doyle. House is shot by a man named Moriarty—Holmes was killed by Moriarty (and resurrected by Doyle). Holmes and Watson take rooms at 221B Baker Street; House’s street address was 221B. Holmes takes cocaine, plays the violin, likes “sensational literature,” and is a puzzle guy, like House. But of the original couple, it’s Watson who had the bad leg.

Holmes can tell a lot from a quick glance. The first time Holmes meets Watson he deduces from his appearance that Watson has seen service with the British army in Afghanistan, then as now a military quagmire. He lives for the puzzle. In *The Sign of Four*, Holmes says, “A client is to me a mere unit, a factor in a problem.”

“My mind rebels at stagnation. Give me problems, give me work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram, or the most intricate analysis,

and I am in my own proper atmosphere. I can dispel then with artificial stimulants. But I abhor the dull routine of existence. I crave for mental exaltation. That is why I have chosen my own particular professions, or rather created it, for I am the only one in the world."

—SHERLOCK HOLMES

Remind you of anyone?

For his Holmes, Doyle was inspired by Dr. Joseph Bell, under whom he studied at Edinburgh Hospital. (In the episode "Joy to the World," House receives a copy of Bell's *Manuals of the Operations of Surgery* as a Christmas gift. He throws it away.) Bell was Holmes in a hospital. He was a showman, fond of picking up on diagnostic and character clues from someone's appearance: where and when they had served in the army, what their complaint was. "Occasionally the results were very dramatic," said Doyle in his *Memories and Adventures*, "though there were times when he blundered."

David Shore describes where he thinks the character of House came from:

House a little bit is based on something going on in my own head, an aspect of my personality. I can't claim to be as smart as him nor as funny as him nor as anything as him but there was an inspiration there. Usually his attitudes are my attitudes. Little experiences I had.

One of those experiences was especially formative. Shore hurt his hip and made an appointment at the hospital for three weeks hence. By the time the appointment rolled around the hip was fine but Shore went anyway.

I went in and told the doctor where I used to have symptoms. That may be the inspiration for the clinic stories. This was a teaching hospital, so a whole series of doctors were examining me for nothing and I remember thinking these people are being incredibly polite to me and incredibly respectful and they shouldn't be—I am wasting their time. I

knew that as soon as they left the room they were bitching about me. I may have been wrong but in my mind. And frankly they should have been—I was wasting their time. And it occurred to me it would be interesting to see a character who didn't wait till they left the room. A guy who doesn't suffer fools gladly.

QUESTION: “House says stuff doctors usually say when the patient is out of the room.”

ROBERT SEAN LEONARD: “I’ve had doctors say they love that, that’s one reason they love watching it. I’ve had some say they are offended. I don’t care.”

After FOX green-lit the script for the pilot and Bryan Singer was hired, the casting process could get under way. More decisions are made; more people are involved. Great ideas don’t always turn into great scripts into great pilots into great shows. “You have to find the right director and it’s very hard to make the right call,” says Katie Jacobs. “It’s very hard to make the right calls with the cast. It’s very hard to make all the right calls.”

Creating *House* took David Shore many months but its long-term success hinged on some moments of serendipity in finding the right actor for the leading role. The *House* casting team is casting directors Amy Lippens and Stephanie Laffin and casting associate Janelle Scuderi. All three worked on *Century City* and went on some interviews for jobs after it closed, all the while hoping *House* would get the go-ahead. They joined as a unit as soon as it did. The casting team is charged with finding suitable actors, who go through a selection process involving *House* producers and directors and in some cases, studio and network executives. Casting is like every other part of the process: The first time you do it is the most crucial. The right actor can bring a character unforgettably to life; a great group of actors means a pilot has a better chance of becoming a series.

Katie Jacobs has played a key role in casting decisions since the beginning. In television, casting proceeds in a very different manner from the movies, where Katie worked before changing



House co-show runner Katie Jacobs (right) on the set with Olivia Wilde

media. “It sounds crazy to say but it’s true—Wilson was cast before *House*,” says Jacobs. “It seems backwards but in the frenzy of casting pilot season you have to make your decision. Making a movie you would cast your lead first and then everything falls around [that]. You have to be so competitive when you are casting in pilot season, which is like hunting season. And Wilson was the first person we cast.”

Robert Sean Leonard read for his role on the first day of the search for Wilson. Lisa Edelstein went into the studio right after him. Jennifer Morrison read the first day, too. Because she had other test options, Morrison was rushed for a network test even as other actors were reading for the role of Cameron in the office. Finding House himself took longer and Hugh Laurie wasn’t cast until two weeks before shooting started on the pilot. What made the job more difficult was the fact that a lot of studios were looking for the same guy.

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The hot seat

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THE AUTHORIZED GUIDE TO THE TELEVISION PHENOMENON **H**OUSE M.D.

For the last six years *House, M.D.* has been one of the most popular and captivating shows on television. Following the stories of a misanthropic genius doctor named Gregory House and his team of specialists, the show each week confronts medical mysteries that have baffled the best minds in medicine. Centered around one of the most compelling characters on television—brilliantly portrayed by actor Hugh Laurie—the Emmy Award-winning TV drama has been keeping millions of viewers intrigued and enthralled since it began, always offering an entertaining mixture of drama and humor.

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IAN JACKMAN is the author of numerous books, including *The West Wing: The Official Companion* and *Eat This!: 1,001 Things to Eat Before You Diet*.



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